

NORTHWESTERN PUBLISHING HOUSE'S
Contribution to the Shaping of the
Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod
in the Twentieth Century

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11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin

Church History
Prof. E. Fredrich
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Michael C. Bater

When our Lord gave the command to His disciples to "teach all nations" it was implied that they would use whatever means possible. Not only traveling from town to town preaching the wonderful gospel message but also by the written word. Thus when the apostle Paul could not be in many places at one time, he sought to preach and instruct by means of the written Word. So it has been the desire from ^{each} generation to pass on the teachings of God's Word not only by word of mouth but also through the printed word.

Martin Luther himself realized the value of the printed message. Not long after Luther penned his 95 theses the translators were busy translating them into the language of the people, and the printing presses were busy making copies for every man on the street. "If the pen was to be considered mightyer than the sword, the printing press was even mightier."¹

When the people left Europe to come to the new Americas they left many of the luxurys they had grown to depend on. One of these was the availability of the printing press. There were presses in the new country but they were not used for religious purposes. "Since foreign languages were involved, the church bodies at times made efforts to have certain books reprinted in Europe. Ultimately, such factors as long delays in filling orders and the increasing accessibilty and development of local presses led to ecclesiastically controlled printing programs."²

But the need finally out grew the lack of material and something had to be done. Church bodies then sought to gather

themselves together for the sake of publishing material. In 1806 the Henkel Press was established at New Market, Virginia and in time became one of the aggressive publishers of English Lutheran confessional literature.³ The remainder of the 1800's found Lutherans of all Synods venturing out and establishing printing operations of their own. From the Missouri Synod's "synodical printers" of the 1850's was the birth of Concordia Publishing House in 1869. From the Hasselquist home press in 1855 would finally come the Swedish Lutheran Publication Society, which when after stock was sold in the company was to become the Augustana Book Concern in 1889.

But how did the Wisconsin Synod answer this need for the printed word? As we shall see in detail the establishment of our Synod's publishing house was begun in a different light and primarily for a different reason.

Communication is one of the most important assets of any large group or corporation of people. So it was with the young Wisconsin Synod. It became very important to keep the members of the Synod informed at all times. Today we take such communication for granted, but in the 1850's things were quite different. In an effort to keep the members of the Synod informed, the "Synodalberichte" was printed and distributed. Some fifteen years later at the request of Professor Mohldenke an official Synodical periodical the "Gemeindeblatt" was published also, with Professor Mohldneke as editor-in-chief and Pastors John Bading and A. Hoenecke as co-editors. "It

seems that the Synodical Report and the Gemeindeblatt were first printed by the Watertown Weltbuerger and the "Herold Publishing Company" of Milwaukee. Later most of our printing was done by George Brumder of Milwaukee."⁴

These were just some of the early attempts at mass communication in our Synod. But the birth of Northwestern Publishing House was to come from an entirely different angle. At the Synod convention of 1876, Pastor Reinholdt Adelberg stood to address the delegates to the 26th annual convention of the "German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and other States". As the treasurer of the Board of Control of Northwestern College, he had the cheerless task of reporting that the Synod's school was deep in debt. But what could be done? The people of the midwest were still trying to recover from the Great Depression of 1873. To get more money from the people would be a difficult task indeed.

However the Synod tried. Various fund-raising pleas and suggestions were tried, but to no avail for nothing could be agreed upon. Then according to the official "Proceedings", Pastor Adelberg suggested:

that we consider unlocking additional sources of income to provide a financial cushion during hard times and years of depression. He recalled in particular how other synods accumulated significant funds for the work of God's kingdom through the sale and publication of books. He stated that this might be a favorable point in time for us to begin a similar activity.⁵

The Synod therefore welcomed this suggestion and appointed

a committee to further investigate the possibility of establishing such a bookstore if feasible, and also permitted an expenditure of up to one thousand dollars for the equipment of such a store. Those named to the committee were Pastors R. Adelberg and John Bading, teachers Warnecke and Behrens, and Mr. Geiger.

Finding an outlet or a place for the bookstore seemed to present no problem for the committee. For later that same year the services of Mr. F. Werner, who for a nominal fee agreed to operate the Synodical Bookstore out of his picture-framing shop on Broadway in Milwaukee. The committee then set out to stock the bookstore. It seems there are conflicting accounts as to how much was spent. One source says \$1,200.00 was spent as a total expenditure,⁶ while another says that the \$1,200.00 was only spent on books.⁷ At any rate the committee purchased the theological and devotional books of an Oshkosh bookstore owned by Huhn and Heidenreich.

As we think back to Pastor Adelberg's report to the Synod convention we remember that he addressed the Synod on the problem of raising money for NWC. Out of which problem grew the Synodical Bookstore, a bookstore that was to produce funds for the running of our Synod's school of higher learning. But how did the bookstore fare? Did it fulfill its intended purpose? We find, "It took twelve years before this store was able to produce revenue for the Synod. In 1888 and 1889 a profit of one thousand dollars each year was realized. In 1890 the store produced five hundred dollars, and in 1891 twelve hundred dollars."⁸

If we look closely we see that the Synod never obtained its original investment in the first twelve years the store was in operation. Thus at such a point some might have been in favor of closing the store as soon as it reached level ground again. But nowhere is there recorded such a desecending voice. For the Lord had greater things in store for this venture, for greater goals and achievements than just supporting a college were in its future.

The first fourteen years of the bookstore can easily be considered difficult. Money was tight, people needed necessities of life before luxuries such as books. But this did not in any way discourage the Synocidal leaders for at the Synod convention in 1890 a proposal was made to add a printing shop to the bookstore. The big question on everyone's mind was whether or not such a printing shop would be to our advantage or not. It seems there was some question in the minds of a number of delegates as the question was discussed long enough that a committee was appointed to look into the matter. Their answer was, "that the establishment of a print shop in connection with our bookstore would not be disadvantageous to the Synod provided a proper manager would be found."⁹ They realized that the success of such a venture relied heavily on the person who was chosen to manage it. On June 23, 1891, the Synod resolved to establish such a combined bookstore and print shop, and elected another committee with authority to carry out the resolution. The committee was made up of Pastor B. Nommensen,

Mr. F. Kieckhefer, Mr. A.J. Schroeder, Mr. E. Kuechle, Pastor August Pieper, Professor E. Notz, and Teacher J. Mohr.

On August 28, 1891, printer Mr. Leo Benson, established the business in a rented building at 310 Third Street, in Milwaukee. With the purchase of a press and other materials the final cost of equipping the printshop was \$3,677.00.

On October 8, 1891, the business was incorporated as "Northwestern Publishing House". The "Articles of Organization of the Northwestern Publishing House" state the purpose of its formation:

...for the purpose of carrying on and conducting a general bookselling, publishing and printing business, and particularly the printing, publication and dissemination of all such books, periodicals and literature as may be by its members considered beneficial to the Evangelical Lutheran faith or principles, and all matters incidental thereto and also for the purpose of delivering and paying over to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and other States, a corporation heretofore organized and now existing under the laws of the State of Wisconsin, all net profits which may be realized from the business of the said corporation hereby created.¹⁰

Over the next 90 years many managers would come and go as the printshop moved some three times. After only a few months of operation teacher H. Gruel was appointed the new manager. Because he was a teacher, he spent many long hours after school and many Saturdays at the shop supervising the work. At this time many large printing jobs were undertaken, such as a series of sermons by Professor A. Hoenecke and also a five hundred copy edition of the small German Agenda.

April, 1892, found Mr. Oscar Semmann taking over as manager as Mr. Gruel accepted a call to St. Marcus school in Milwaukee. Mr. Seemann was well qualified for such a position, but failing health forced his resignation near the close of 1893.

The Synod next looked to St. Louis where they engaged the services of Mr. Adalbert Schaller who began work on February 10, 1894. He had previously been one of the editors of the "Abend-schule", a man who was familiar with the printing business and well versed in designing covers for books and periodicals. The years ahead found the printing of the large German Agenda as well as Hoenecke's Dogmatik in 1897.

The year 1897 also found the Publishing Hase moving to its second location at 329 Third Street. The first and second floors of the building were used by our Publishing House, while the third floor was rented to a bookbinder, William Bechstein who did the binding for our Publishing House. Mr. Schaller then resigned on February 22, 1898.

It was the opinion of the founding fathers that if the venture of a publishing house was to be advantageous to the Synod it needed the services of a good manager. Up until this time the job of manager had been passed among four men. Two of these men resigned for valid reasons while it is not known why the other two left the position. But in 1898 the Synod found such an able person in Mr. Julius Luening who guided the progress of NPH for the next forty-seven years, until December 1945. Julius Luening became the man that many pastors and

teachers could identify with the Publishing House. He would lead the operations as NPH moved to its third and fourth homes.

In 1902 NPH moved to its third location at 347 Third Street, into a three story building. The business now had grown somewhat as is evidenced by the number of full time employes and also extensive new ventures in publications. The personnel now consisted of twelve people. The old Babcock press had seen its better days and was replaced by a new Miehle press in 1902, the exchange involving \$2,725.00. Hardly enough today to buy two good typewriters.

It was at this time that the Synod's contract with George Brumder concerning the printing of the Wisconsin Synod German Hymnbook ran out. It was felt that such an important book should now be taken over by the Synod's own Publishing House. Also early in 1904 the "Quartalschrift" made its first appearance under the editorship of the Seminary faculty. In the next few years the "Northwestern Lutheran" as well as the English "Church Hymnal" were printed also. Another point is also interesting to note at this time: "Each year the Northwestern Publishing House turned over to the Synod a sizable sum of money as revenue from the business."¹¹

It had been in the works for quite some time to obtain enough funds to acquire a building that would be owned solely by the Publishing House. Money had been laid aside and the Board finally acquired a lot on Fourth Street between State and Cedar for the sum of \$9,425.09. In 1913 building operations were started on a structure 25 feet by 150 feet, at a cost of \$34,214.70. This building would now house a bindery which would

be owned and operated by the Publishing House. In 1916 another Miehle cylinder press was acquired to handle the additional printing load of the "Junior Northwestern" and an all time high subscription rate of the "Gemeindeblatt". New books were printed as fast as the presses could print them. The Publishing House now employed twenty-six people in order to handle such a large work load. Business was indeed flourishing, and the Publishing House was able to turn over to the Synod a substantial amount of revenue.¹² It seems that now the venture had begun to fulfill its intended purpose plus at the same time serve the members of the Synod in an ever increasing manner. The Publishing House was helping to shape the Wisconsin Synod by making communication much easier.

Just when it seemed that things had finally reached their desired potential the Board received some sad news. Mr. Luening informed the Board that he was going to retire as of December 31, 1945. His resignation was reluctantly accepted. A man who had so faithfully served his Lord and his Synod for a period of forty-seven years would indeed be missed. Julius Luening had led the Publishing House through some very difficult years in our countries history. The Board again had the task of finding and securing the services of another manager. After receiving a number of applications, Mr. Herbert Schaefer was hired. He took over on January 1, 1946.

But 1946 was to be another shocking year for the Publishing House. Toward the end of the year the city of Milwaukee sent

word that they had in mind to acquire the entire block for a Sports Areana. The news might not have been so bad if the economic conditions of our society had not been in such a tight situation. Costs were high, building operations were highly restricted, and acceptable vacant buildings were almost impossible to find. Most buildings were inadequate and the sights undesirable, and prices ranged from \$65,000.00 to \$300,000.00.

Finally a suitable building was found. It was a two-story structure, 80 by 125 feet, located on West North Ave. and Thirty-seventh street. The price was \$120,000.00, which included the real estate and two adjacent lots. But because the leases of the tenants did not expire until May 1, 1948, the building could not be taken over until then. In the meantime the Board had to deal with the Real Estate Board of the City of Milwaukee to agree on a price for the building on Fourth Street. The first offer of the City was ridiculously low. Finally a compromise price of \$67,500.00 was agreed upon.

But there were more problems ahead. Because of an accelerated interest in the Sports Areana the Publishing House was to vacate the premises by October 31, 1948. They were able to get a thirty day extension but still had to move into a building which was far from completion. But it seems all was worth it for, "National recognition was given to this building for the efficient way in which it was remodeled and adapted to the work of printing books and periodicals."¹³ The Publishing House is now housed in a fine building, not only from the working standpoint but

also for bookstore facilities and shipping purposes. The final cost was \$425,000.00, quite larger than the original \$1,000.00 allotted for the first bookstore.

The Northwestern Publishing House is the property of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod. The Synod controls it through a Board of Directors consisting of seven men elected for a term of six years. Three pastors, one professor of the Theological Seminary in Mequon, one parochial school teacher, and two layman. The Constitution of the Synod in Section 7.01 states that:

(a) For the purpose of carrying on and conducting a general bookselling, publishing, and printing business, and particularly the printing, publication, and dissemination of all such books, periodicals, and literature as may be considered by its members beneficial to the Evangelical Lutheran faith and principles, the Synod shall maintain a publishing house and book concern under the name Northwestern Publishing House.

(b) The Northwestern Publishing House shall be governed by a Board of Directors elected by the Synod composed of three pastors, one professor from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, one teacher, and three laymen. The term of office shall be six years. At each regular convention of the Synod two, respectively three, members shall retire after their successors shall have been elected and shall have qualified. A member may succeed himself. The slate of candidates shall be prepared by the Nominating Committee of the Synod.

(c) The Board of Directors shall have complete and sole authority over the financial and business affairs of the corporation, except the power of dissolution.

(d) The Board of Directors shall act as supervisor for all publications recommended and offered for sale by the Northwestern Publishing House.

(e) The Board of Directors shall convey to the treasurer of the Synod such portion of the net profit of the NPH which shall not, in its judgment, be required for reinvestment.

(f) The Board of Directors shall submit the balance sheet and statement of earnings together with a written report to the regular Synod conventions. A written report shall also be presented to the regular district conventions.¹⁴

As we review the history of our Synod in the Twentieth century there are many things which helped to shape and strengthen our church body. The many differences with the Missouri Synod, our merging with sister Synods, and even our own internal conflicts at times were problems which led to the shaping and stabilizing of our Synod and its position. But through all of this many times we overlook the documents, books, papers, sermons, etc. which made vital communications possible through all of these difficult times. We fail to see how what was once started as a small bookstore to raise money for our Synod schools, has grown into a very powerful means of spreading the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. The printed word is a must in the twentieth century for any church body who wants to preserve the true Word of God and also lead others to that truth. It is all of us who own this Publishing House, and if it can promote the message of Christ's salvation, deepen our worship, and elevate Christian living, it will have served its purpose well.