

Martin J. Naumann
A Lutheran Ambassador to European Churches

By Lucas Moldenhauer

Senior Church History

American Lutheranism

Section B

May 14, 2003

Professor John M. Brenner

Martin J. Naumann led a most energetic and exciting life. From his birth in Glenwood, Wisconsin, on August 21, 1901 until his graduation from Concordia St. Louis and his ordination on December 7, 1924 – he had already been a world traveler, following his missionary family to India until 1916. But these were just the beginnings of his multiple years abroad. His years in Germany before World War II would prove a fascinating study. But we'll leave that for another paper, on another day. This paper will focus on his years of helping the German churches develop after the war. He would do this during his years as a professor at the seminary at Springfield. His ministry gives us many insights into the struggles of the confessional churches, both in America and Europe. At first he goes to a spiritually darkened Europe as a beacon of light, but in time he must struggle with the darkness within his own church-body.

Martin Naumann was the oldest of seven sons for Georg Naumann. In 1902, Georg took a call to be a missionary in India until 1916. Beier and Holmer mention that the sons were prepared from an early age for the ministry, and the effects of that are clear since all of Martin's six brothers became pastors.¹ At such a young age – he would have no idea that his first call would take him back to his family's origin in Saxony.²

The year 1924 would prove to be a big one for Martin. On October 12, 1924, he was married to Therese Wilhelmine Frare. Then soon after that he received a call to a congregation in Chemnitz, in the region of Saxony, Germany. Before going to Germany for his call, he was ordained by his father in the town of Spring, Texas, on December 7, 1924. His new home would be in Chemnitz and he served a dual parish. Besides the church in Chemnitz, he also helped with the Emmausgemeinde, a new mission in the nearby Schönfeld-Annaberg. Starting this mission

¹ Gunnar Beier and Markus Holmer, *Blickwinkel Ein gemein(d)schaftliches Lesebuch der Dreieinigkeitsgemeinde Hamburg Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherisch Kirche 1896-1996* (Gross Oesingen: Druckhaus Harms, 1996.) p. 64

and building a new church in what was a terrible depression under the Weimar Republic would certainly be an interesting study. To this day, these congregations are pillars in the Evangelisch Lutherische Freikirche (ELFK). His installation there was on January 25, 1925.³ Shortly after that, it is interesting to note that he translated Bente's historical introduction to the Concordia Triglotta from the original English into German.⁴

August 10, 1930, Martin Naumann was installed in his new parish, the Dreieinigkeits-gemeinde in Hamburg (northern Germany), where he served from 1930 until 1940. Kirsten writes that until the time of his death, on March 30th, 1972, he was still fondly remembered there for his ten years as a *Seelsorger*.⁵

His love for the German people was quite evident. Instead of leaving the country at the actual outbreak of the war in September 1939, the Naumann family finally left in May of 1940. The congregation was sad to see him go, but didn't want to stand in the way.⁶ Though we see this period of history through the eyes of the American victory, he left fully confident that Germany would win. Naumann wrote to his Hamburg congregation that he was looking forward to returning to Germany and celebrating the final victory over France.⁷

There are a few anecdotes that illustrate his affection for the Germans, anecdotes that would catch our attention. While sailing back to America on the ship called the "Manhattan," he wrote down some of the things he already missed about Germany, one of those being the

² Georg Naumann's father, Heinrich, was a publisher in Dresden and a charter member of the ELFK church in Dresden: Beier and Holmer. p. 64.

³ G. Döhler, "Festschrift zum 75-jährigen Gemeindejubiläum der Emmausgemeinde Schönfeld – Annaberg." Schönfeld, June of 1999

⁴ Beier and Holmer. p. 64.

⁵ Hans Kirsten. "Lutherische Kirche" 1972, No. 5

⁶ Beier and Holmer. p. 76 as they quote the Protokollbuch III, p. 179.

⁷ Beier and Holmer. P. 77

“Hakenkreuz” or swastika flags.⁸ The end of that month of May brought Hitler to the high point of his campaign, as his 21- day *Blitz* through France was complete, and England now also faced defeat. In response to this news, Naumann wrote from New York, “The Propaganda is terribly against the Axis. England’s influence is large, and Jews here are like the sand at the sea. You can barely spit without hitting a Jew.”⁹

After his time in Germany, he was a pastor at Emmanuel in Altamont. This small town had three different LC-MS churches and was apparently a hot bed for the synod dating back to the days of the Saxon immigrants. It is located in the Central Illinois district of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS). Naumann served here until accepting a call to teach Pedagogy and Old Testament at the Springfield seminary in 1948. As a professor he was well loved and remembered. While researching Martin Naumann, the current Central Illinois District President Buelmann remembered how professor Naumann was so energetic and brilliant that writing with only one hand on the chalkboard would have been too slow – “so he would write with both hands at the same time.” He would be a professor until his death on March 30th, 1972.

As Naumann stepped off the “Manhattan” to return to his homeland – he would be coming home just in time to witness many incredible changes. Remember where our two synods, the WELS and the LC-MS, had been. Missouri’s *Brief Statement* of 1932 brought great support from Wisconsin. Fredrich says, “in 1938 Missouri was viewed as the champion of the Synodical Conference’s Lutheran Orthodoxy.”¹⁰ Later that year, Missouri’s overtures to the American Lutheran Church became an initial instance of forfeiting that championship. By the

⁸ Beier and Holmer. p. 77 quote from *Der Lutherische Zeuge*, August 1940

⁹ Beier and Holmer. p. 78 quote from *Der Lutherische Zeuge*, October 1940

¹⁰ Edward C. Fredrich *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans - A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* Northwestern Publishing House, 2000. page 199

time Naumann returned home in 1940, Missouri's blowing winds of change were becoming very evident.

Before the war was over – at Saginaw in the year 1944, Missouri moved closer to forfeiting that orthodoxy. Military chaplaincy, fellowship and scouting were three main areas of contention that year between Missouri and Wisconsin. But the real issue was larger than that. Most importantly, Missouri was independently seeking to expand its fellowship horizons.¹¹ In the years following the war, it almost seemed like Missouri couldn't resist the brave new world – she must join herself to more and more Lutheran churches – throwing caution to the wind.

That is how we get ourselves back to the other side of the pond. A major source of contact between Missouri and the European Lutheran churches came at the Bad Boll Free Conferences in Germany. Mayer writes about these in 1949 and praises the Missouri accomplishments, emphasizing the new and improved impression that Missouri left upon the European churches.¹² Before these free conferences, the European churches had looked down upon the anti-ecumenical Missourians. Ecumenical Europe couldn't tolerate this Missourian characteristic as we see from Mayer quoting a German superintendent,

Probably the deepest cleft is the division in Lutheranism caused in part by the refusal of the Missouri Synod to unite with all the other Lutherans and particularly in displaying an attitude as though they were the only custodians of the truth. They (Missouri) seemed to believe that German Lutheranism had virtually sacrificed its Lutheran heritage. He then continues: 'In view of this we were surprised that 400 German Lutherans were invited to participate in theological discussions with professors of the Missouri Synod... From the very beginning a spirit of fraternity and candor prevailed.'¹³

Mayer quotes another official church paper: "All that was known of the Missouri Synod in Germany until three years ago was very insignificant: confessional narrowness, traditionalism,

¹¹ This was an action that the rest of the Synodical Conference, the WELS and ELS, did not go along with

¹² F.E. Mayer. *The Story of Bad Boll, Building Theological Bridges*. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Concordia Publishing House, 1949. p. 58.

and antiquated theology...Beginning with 1945 we were privileged to see the Missouri Synod from a new angle...¹⁴

Since these were free conferences – Missouri was certainly free to participate with other Lutheran churches. But the impression is easily given that Missouri was out searching for bigger fish than the fellowship of the Synodical Conference. The European churches had always heard that Missouri was so badly stuck in the 17th Century, (Mayer 57-58) and Bad Boll surprised them – probably because Missouri had begun to deny those 17th Century roots. Ecumenism is what the mainline European churches always stressed, and now finally Missouri was starting to play the game according to European rules.

In the year 1950, Naumann ^{was} is asked to help produce more of these kinds of Bad Boll free conferences.¹⁵ President Behnken wrote a letter to Naumann that the National Lutheran Council (NLC) would no longer be participating. (The NLC was ~~the~~ an early step toward the Lutheran World Federation.) The NLC wanted fewer doctrines and more practical issues to be discussed. Missouri wouldn't miss them at the 1950 free conferences for they wanted to discuss doctrine – and so we see that Missouri still ^{had} has lofty goals of teaching the bigger fish something new about Lutheran doctrine. Behnken's letter says that the European churches were so willing to listen that the free conferences would not only be at the city of Bad Boll, but also in Berlin, in Neuendettelsau and possibly Hermannsburg or Braunschweig. Behnken cites in that letter Naumann's previous experience in Europe as a good reason for Naumann to continue as a liaison between the two continents.

Naumann's experience with Bad Boll also got him landed on a committee to evaluate the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The 42nd Regular Convention of the LC-MS, Houston,

¹³ Mayer. p. 58

¹⁴ Mayer. p. 59

Texas, 1953 saw the appointment to this committee of Martin H. Franzmann, Lawrence B. Meyer, and Martin J. Naumann. They were to study the LWF, compare it to Scripture, recommend actions concerning the invitation to join the LWF and then to make a report by 1956.

Here the committee actually referred back to the confessional standard of 1932, the Brief Statement. Though the LC-MS was accustomed to flirting and actually joining with liberals both in America and in Europe, this committee decided that the best way to protest such outspoken liberalism is not from within a fellowship. Naumann's committee realized that the "federation" acted less like a federation and more like a church. Instead of allowing individual synods to remain individual, it "presupposes a confessionally-unanimous constituency, which in the case of the LWF admittedly does not exist."¹⁶ Since one of the main purposes of the LWF was "to bear united witness before the world to the Gospel of Jesus as the power of God for salvation," and in this "church work" the LWF was "giving equal room and scope to orthodox and heterodox churches and their proclamation,"¹⁷ the committee recommended that membership on the part of a confessionally conscientious and courageous church is made impossible. The committee also saw through the attempts of the LWF to be ecumenical. Naumann's committee wanted to be *truly* ecumenical, "that is, of a genuine love and concern for the whole Body of Christ" instead of "merely or predominantly a part of the present-day tendency toward mass-church formation on the basis of the least common confessional denominator."¹⁸

W. H. & M.
In preparing for this study of Martin Naumann, a beloved ELFK rector, Dr. Gottfried Herrmann, mentioned ^{to me} that he once met Naumann. At the time, Naumann was expressing frustration with the direction of his own Missouri Synod. After LC-MS established pulpit and

¹⁵ letter from President Behnken, March 27, 1950

¹⁶ Preliminary Report on Lutheran World Federation (signed by Martin H. Franzmann, Lawrence B. Meyer, and Martin J. Naumann). p. 4

¹⁷ Preliminary Report on Lutheran World Federation. p. 4

altar fellowship with the ALC in 1969, there were a number of cases of “triangular fellowship.” Many free churches in Germany were still in fellowship with the WELS and the LC-MS. Now their fellowship with LC-MS also put them in fellowship with the liberal ALC. In 1970, the ELFK (still extant in West Germany) declared that fellowship could be maintained with LC-MS only in a state of protest.¹⁹ The ELFK met from October 7 to 10, 1971, in Wittingen, near Hannover, Germany, to vote on merging with the old Lutheran church of Breslau, the Bekenntnis church and the Selbstständige (independent) Free Church (old SELK). As they voted to merge, thus ending the ELFK in West Germany, Naumann asked them not to end their fellowship with LC-MS.

I pleaded with the Synod of the Free Church not to break off with us, nor to do anything to disturb us in this time of stress and battle for the truth and for the confessions... I told them that Missouri Synod is not by a long shot ready to despair. I begged that in this critical time, those who had been our friends and our fellows in faith should not fall away from us; should not, so to speak, stab us in the back. I said it would be more useful for them to help us and to stand by us until things were cleared.²⁰

Unfortunately, as the newly formed and larger SELK of West Germany came into fellowship to “support” the LC-MS, they moved further and further away from their old fellowship of the ELFK still located behind the iron curtain.

It was months after this meeting that he died, on March 30, 1972. Hans Kirsten has summed up his many years of service to Germany.

Martin Naumann always remained closely tied to the German Lutheran Free Churches. He was always an energetic representative of our issues (those of the Free Churches) to the Missouri Synod and of the Missouri Synod to us. He was often in Germany, many times on multiple trips per year... Therefore he had

¹⁸ Preliminary Report on Lutheran World Federation. p. 5

¹⁹ Dr. Gottfried Herrmann. “The Path of the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche into the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) and the Doctrine of Church and Ministry.” Translated by Mike Seifert. 2000. p. 2.

²⁰ Martin Naumann. *Meeting of Synod of the Lutheran Evangelical Free Church from October 7 to 10, 1971 in Wittingen near Hannover, Germany*. Springfield Ill, October 26, 1971. p. 5

many good friends in our church and for us he was certainly the most well known person from the Missouri Synod.²¹

Today we live in the world that Naumann's generation left us. There certainly has been much to learn from his experiences in the large synods of Europe, and even the little free churches. He certainly left his mark on them; they remember him well. We only wish that his own LC-MS wouldn't have gone astray, and taken the West German ELFK with them. The story of fellowship will always be a complicated one, and yet a fascinating one. Fascinating, because ecumenical temptations can be so great. As hard as Naumann tried to keep the LC-MS free from heterodox associations in Europe, the Missouri Synod was bound to fall with their desire for exciting and new fellowship ties.

²¹ Dr. Hans Kirsten. *Lutherische Kirche* 1972, vol. 5

Bibliography

Beier, Gunnar. and Holmer, Markus. *Blickwinkel Ein gemein(d)schaftliches Lesebuch der Dreieinigkeitsgemeinde Hamburg Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherisch Kirche 1896-1996* (Gross Oesingen: Druckhaus Harms, 1996.)

Behnken, President. *letter from President Behnken*, March 27, 1950

Döhler, G. "Festschrift zum 75-jährigen Gemeindejubiläum der Emmausgemeinde Schönfeld – Annaberg." Schönfeld, June of 1999

Fredrich, Edward C. *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans - A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* Northwestern Publishing House, 2000.

Herrmann, Dr. Gottfried. "The Path of the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche into the Confessioal Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) and the Doctrine of Church and Ministry." Translated by Mike Seifert. 2000.

Kirsten, Dr. Hans. *Lutherische Kirche* 1972, vol. 5

Mayer, F.E. *The Story of Bad Boll, Building Theological Bridges*. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Concordia Publishing House, 1949.

Naumann, Martin J. *Meeting of Synod of the Lutheran Evangelical Free Church from October 7 to 10, 1971 in Wittingen near Hannover, Germany*. Springfield Ill, October 26, 1971.

Nelson, E. Clifford *The Lutherans In North America*. Fortress Press, 1980

Preliminary Report on Lutheran World Federation (signed by Martin H. Franzmann, Lawrence B. Meyer, and Martin J. Naumann.