

**Johann Bading:**  
**Leader from Confessional Confession**  
**to Confession Practice**

**Nathanael Bourman**

**Dean Brenner**

**Church History 3031**

**15 December 2003**

On this jubilee day<sup>1</sup> we remember the following matters. Twenty-five years ago three men came together with the intent to found a church body. The Lutheran confessions should be the uniting tie in this body. What they founded, is the Evangelical Lutheran Synod from Wisconsin and other States. In a small and insignificant way this work began and survived difficult and dangerous times. Yet, it still exists to the present day. The founders of this work are no longer among us. The one, Pastor Wrede, went back to his homeland in the middle of his fifth year. Another, Pastor Weinmann, found his death in September 1858 in the surging of the *Austria* at sea. The third, Pastor Muehlhaeuser, went in September 1867 to the joy of the Lord. Nevertheless, their work, our Synod, has remained. We rejoice about it, and do so properly, for if a work can last to its 25<sup>th</sup> year in our restless, drifting, fleeting time and in our rashly lived land, then that is nothing so small, that we should not be joyful about it, since our synod has lived to a length of 25 years....

On the other hand it is that way with that church, who like humble Magdeline sits at the feet of the Lord, who lets stand the Word of God as it runs and speaks both against reason and natural experience: It stands written. One such church among all visible church communities on earth is our valued Lutheran church. Through God's grace we belong to it, and we subscribe to the confessional writings, which our fathers laid down and confessed the contents of Scripture at one time with all simplemindedness and unreservedness. Accordingly, with that same correctness, with which the orthodox Lutheran church ought to boast, that they have God's Word rightly and entirely, we proclaim before all other churches that we are an orthodox Lutheran synod. If one has the desire because of this to heap up on us the old rebuke against the self-aggrandizement of the Lutherans, let him do so. If other church communities want to bring their great works, their high holiness to the plain, grumble about us as spiritually dead, loveless or fossilized symbolicists, then even that remains to them unbecoming. We speak with jubilee and with praise: God has made his name glorious over all through his Word....

However, we must also explain after this, that it is by all means an enticing statement contrary to that position, when the *Zeitgeist* in the church says: Let the separating walls fall, let the people gather simply around the Bible, so that there may be, as Christ said, one shepherd and one herd and that we may dazzle Satan and his hosts. And we will want to acknowledge it now, that the same thoughts also pervaded our flesh. Do not the years in our past history testify to that to a greater or lesser degree? Have not we, pastors and congregations, brought to a great extent this kind of spirit with us out of the old homeland? Was not our action often times in that manner, so that others could agree with the expression: In Wisconsin one endures it, that one connects an entirely different sense in an expression of God's Word, that one places love higher than faith, that one

---

<sup>1</sup> The jubilee day referred to is the celebration of the Wisconsin Synod's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. What follows is taken from President Johann Bading's sermon on that day. The sermon is translated in full in Addendum #1. (Synodical Proceedings 1875).

tolerates next to the truth also such tendencies which do not harmonize with truth? Even the previously mentioned romanizing tendency was not to us entirely foreign. But God be praised! All of this belongs to the past time of our synodical life. We ought to rejoice and praise: The old is gone, everything has become new. Through what has it become new? Not through our work, but through God's goodness and faithfulness; we have only the Lord to whom to owe it. He has urged us and pressed us through difficult inner strife, until the perverse spirit in us was annihilated, the false chains broken and the true unity of the Spirit was produced, namely the unity, which stands in the true Word and in the true confession, as the Lutheran church has possessed it and because of which our fathers have shed blood and tears. This is the unity, which the Lord wants, while he has never at all wanted the unity, which instigates unionism. This is the unity for which we are available only through the Lord's goodness and faithfulness. For this reason we have renounced all unionism, we have made a front against lodges, we have quashed every chancel and Lord's Supper fellowship with other faiths, and call now in word and writing to all those who desire unity: Throw away what separates you from the Lutheran confession, receive the saving doctrine of the Lutheran church. There is the unity, which is God pleasing and rightly binds hearts. If one wants to complain about it, to slander us as a quarrelsome, loveless, and heartless people; if one wants to apply to us what one so often hears: the Lutherans are arrogant; when all want unity, they are always arrogant since they stop every God-blessed work of unity for their hairsplitting doctrinal distinction and stand with tenacity on the dot of the iota, so that one must get riled up: we hold contrary to them: Paper walls of human thought you can let fall everywhere without loss and a burdening of conscience. With us it is otherwise. Here stand discernable doctrines founded on the word 'it stands recorded,' which God himself has established as iron walls; over this one can not go away without severely sinning against God's Word. Over this we don't even want to go, and the fact that we don't even want that is, to say it again, because of the great goodness and faithfulness of our God. Let this be then on our jubilee festival today and all of our future praised and proclaimed by us highly and loudly. Yes, praise the Lord, o my soul, and forget not, what good he has done for you. The kindness of the Lord is the only reason we are not entirely lost; his mercy has no end, it is new every morning and his faithfulness is great. Therefore, I want to sing to the Lord and praise his holy name as long as I live. Amen.

As one reads this sermon of Johann Bading's, or even just the excerpts above, it can hardly escape their notice that the focus of the sermon is not Johann Bading. The focus of the sermon is not John Muehlhaeuser. It is not Adolph Hoenecke. The focus of the sermon is God's grace, and rightly so, for the building up of the Synod was not due to Muehlhaeuser, Bading, or Hoenecke. Rather, the focus of the sermon is entirely on the guiding and ruling hand of God,

which led the Wisconsin Synod from a confessional confession to confessional action. This transformation from a confessional confession did not take place over night. Instruction had to take place. The Holy Spirit had to work in the hearts of members of the Synod. The Spirit had to work in the hearts of the Synod's leaders to give them a firm backbone with which they could stand firmly on the Word of God.

This is certainly the case with Johann Bading. As will be shown, Bading began his ministry with a confession based on the Lutheran Symbols. He was ordained and pledged his obedience to the Word of God and to the Confessions, yet his actions were not always in line with his confession. At times the voice of his confession was loud and clear, and at other times it seems that his voice could have been louder. As president of the Synod, he certainly would have had the influence to lead the Synod to a confessional practice.

One of the main hindrances to his active confession was his own and the Synod's involvement with the unionistic mission societies in Germany. These societies provided the Synod with men to serve as pastors; these societies provided books and money to carry out the work of preaching and the training of pastors. Perhaps it was a debt of gratitude that kept the Synod from a clear confession in regard to unionism. Perhaps it was the desire to grow the church because the funds were lacked at home to get the work done. Whatever the reason for the apparently slow confession, the facts remain; until the Synod made a clear confession in regard to the unionism of the mission societies, it lacked a clear confession because it had not put its confession into practice. When the Synod made this clear confession and broke with the societies, their practice quickly fell more and more in line with their confession and so they were

able to establish fellowship with the Missouri Synod, the Minnesota Synod, and as the years rolled by other synods as well.

Bading was the president of the Wisconsin Synod during this pivotal period of our Synod's history. He is the leader of the Synod from a confessional confession to confessional practice. This paper will look especially at the first decade of his presidency to see how Bading led the Synod in this direction. Yet as this period is studied, one will recognize that Bading's faithful leadership is due only to the grace of God. Thanks be to God for giving his Spirit to Johann Bading and for enabling him to put his confession into practice. Therefore, with thankful hearts "remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this leader is also remembered, for God gave him and helped him to lead the Synod from a confessional confession to a confessional practice. Thanks be to you, O God!

#### I. The state of affairs in the 1850's

As one studies the first decade of the Synod, it can hardly escape ~~their~~<sup>his</sup> notice that the Wisconsin Synod has been called Muehlhaeuser's Synod.<sup>3</sup> Why is this? Koehler makes this same observation in view of the relationships that others, especially the Eastern Synods and the mission societies, had with Muehlhaeuser. It seems that "he conducted all the young body's correspondence, received and rejected applications, attended to the welfare of the brethren, by means of the gifts from Pennsylvania sent to him personally."<sup>4</sup> In many ways, John

---

<sup>2</sup> NIV – Hebrews 13:7

<sup>3</sup> J.P.Koehler makes this statement in regard to the changing of the constitution and the signatures affixed to the same: The Synod, as well as his Gnaden Gemeinde in Milwaukee, was known as Muehlhaeuser's" (45). The History of the Wisconsin Synod. Sentinel Printing, Sauk Rapids, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

Muehlhaeuser was the hub and center of all the work and founding of the Wisconsin Synod. This was recognized by outsiders, and it was also recognized by those within the Synod, even when later in its history the Synod recognized that it had failed to make a good and clear confession in its early years. The Synod was and is always thankful for the start God gave it through Muehlhaeuser.

Yet, the question begs to be asked, what kind of synod did he found? As one looks at Muehlhaeuser's early ministry in America, he was imbued with a spirit against Old-Lutheranism.<sup>5</sup> This spirit was partially learned in his student days in Germany. There he was trained at Barmen. The mission society that trained him was the Langerberger Verein, whose specific goal was to send workers to America to minister to the Germans who were living there without spiritual care.<sup>6</sup> The workers sent by them were to serve not only Lutherans but also the Reformed without distinction. When Muehlhaeuser landed in New York he had trouble picking up English, and this continued to be a problem for him. So instead of being sent out as a pastor for Germans who wanted their children to learn English, he was sent by the New York Ministerium to Rochester, New York where he served as a pastor for ten years. It should be noted that the New York Ministerium was distinctively not Old Lutheran. In fact, in 1797 they had promoted union with Episcopalians as they attempted to discover what it meant to be a Lutheran in America. The main goal for the New York Ministerium, as well as for many of the mission societies was not to draw dark lines between correct, echt Lutheran doctrine and the

---

<sup>5</sup> The term "Old Lutherans" originated after the 1817 Prussian Union, in which Lutherans were commanded to worship with the Reformed in the Union church. "Old Lutherans" refused to go along with such an order, and some came to America and founded most notably the Missouri Synod, as well as the lesser known Buffalo Synod. "New Lutherans" on the other hand were more willing to extend their hand over the ecclesiastical fence and worship with the Reformed. Many of these stayed under the Prussian Union.

<sup>6</sup> This and other societies provided many of the Synod's early pastors, and later on provided money for the college and also annually for the Reisprediger. They also provided the Synod with a substantial library when it began to talk about founding a college and seminary to train its own pastors. The Synod has a debt of gratitude for the help these Societies gave.

doctrine of the Reformed. Rather the goal was to work together and reach as many souls as possible and so grow the kingdom of God.

This is the mindset with which Muehlhaeuser set out from Rochester, New York in 1848. He resigned from the congregation there in May 1848, and entered the service of the American Tract Society to work as a colporteur. Muehlhaeuser had a strong desire to carry out mission work. He describes his early work:

I served the Evangelical Lutheran Church at Rochester ten years. Since the congregation was well established and capable of providing for a pastor adequately and I was feeling healthy and strong, yes, especially prompted by Pastor Weinmann, I resolved to move with my family to Wisconsin so that I could carry out mission work for some years.<sup>7</sup>

He had heard from Weinmann about the large groups of Germans in Wisconsin and fueled by the desire to spread the Gospel, decided to join him in Milwaukee.

There, in Milwaukee on December 8, 1849, Muehlhaeuser, Weinmann, Wrede, and Meiss met at Grace Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to discuss the matter of founding a Lutheran synod in Wisconsin. They agreed on a name, "The First German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin," and after electing officials for two year terms, John Muehlhaeuser as president, they directed Muehlhaeuser to prepare a constitution for their consideration at their first synodical meeting in 1850. And so, on Trinity Sunday, 26 May, 1850, the organization of the synod was completed when they officially met as a synod for the first time. At this meeting there were five pastors: Muehlhaeuser, Weinmann, Wrede, Pluess, Meiss.

One may ask, and rightly so, why a synod was founded in Milwaukee when the Missouri Synod already had such a strong presence there. The reason is rather simple. The Missouri

---

<sup>7</sup> Fredrich, Edward C. The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, 1992, p 7.

Synod was distinctively Old Lutheran, while the make-up of the men from Langenberg was admittedly New Lutheran. Yet, despite this background, at their founding at least two of the men pushed for a solid Lutheran confession for the synod. So already there was a conflict between Old Lutherans and New Lutherans. The constitution is solidly Lutheran. It states in section 5, paragraph 3 about ordained preachers that “everything should be in keeping with the true Word of the Bible and the confessions of our Evangelical-Lutheran church.”<sup>8</sup> And later it also states the following about the ordination of pastors:

At ordination every candidate is pledged to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the rest of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church’s confessions, upon submission of the following questions: 1. Do you believe that the fundamental doctrines of Holy Writ are essentially and correctly contained in the Articles of Faith of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the rest of the Evangelical-Lutheran Confessions? 2. Are you firmly resolved to use these as the doctrinal norm in your high office and always to teach accordingly?<sup>9</sup>

Yet this clear testimony was crossed out and changed in the original copy of the constitution, which Weinmann, the secretary made. “In the original manuscript of this Wisconsin Synod constitution those terms [terms referring to the confessional stand of the Synod] are in each instance crossed out and “reines Bibelchristentum” or “reines Bibelwort” inserted, whereas in the questions to the candidates for ordination the fundamental doctrines of Holy Writ and the Articles of Faith of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession are left undisturbed.”<sup>10</sup> These changes were made in a hand other than Weinmann’s. It is thought that Muehlhaeuser made the changes since he had access to the constitution. Bading later was strongly suspicious that it was Muehlhaeuser who had crossed out the postscripts which Conrad, Bading and Weitbrecht had recorded when they signed the constitution. Bading related to Koehler that his postscript placed

---

<sup>8</sup> Koehler, 41.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*



an emphasis on the Lutheran confessions.<sup>11</sup> Thus, it seems that there was a battle already at the Synod's founding between Old-Lutherans and New-Lutherans.

This battle continued throughout the first decade of the Synod's existence. There are examples of both solid Lutheran as well as of unionistic tendencies within the Synod. For instance, already in 1852 at convention the Synod took a firm stance in regard to Methodists: "They seek to bring about conversion,' it was stated, 'by artificial pressure and thus do not really appreciate true repentance and faith and likewise the means of grace. The right way is to leave it to the Word of God to work on the hearts and to that end preach Law and Gospel properly.'"<sup>12</sup> And again in 1856 they refused to join the General Synod because of the *Definite Platform*. S.S. Schmucker wrote *Definite Platform* as a document meant to open up the ecclesiastical fence and to allow more liberal views, and in doing so he robbed the confessions of their Lutheran character. The synod in convention spoke against "the newly fabricated so-called *Definite Platform*, because Synod has come to the conclusion 1) that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is founded in the Word of God, 2) that the adoption of the so-called *Definite Platform* constitutes nothing else but the determined suicide of the Lutheran church."<sup>13</sup> Later, when the Synod in 1858 saw the need and considered founding its own college and seminary in order to train its own pastors to provide their congregations with pastors, they looked into the possibility of sending their students to the Illinois <sup>§</sup>synod§ for training. But this school too was becoming filled with the spirit of American Lutheranism which flowed out of Schmucker's *Definite Platform*. As a result, the 1860 convention resolved "in view of the confessional sentiments in the two

---

<sup>11</sup> "Bading felt certain that Muehlhaeuser had tampered with the signatures. For as praeses he had to sign the minutes of the secretary and had access to the book. The striking of the postscripts is in line with the changing of the constitution's paragraphs regarding the confessions; ink and pen-strokes are the same in both cases. And both acts are in keeping with the patriarchal relationship enjoyed by Muehlhaeuser among the synodicals" (Koehler, 41).

<sup>12</sup> Koehler, 43.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, 50.

Illinois synods [Illinois and Northern Illinois] and at said university, further negotiations be abandoned.”<sup>14</sup>

So, on the one hand the Synod as a whole made good decisions and resolutions in line with their Lutheran confessions, but their practice did not always line up with this. There were many examples of situations where a pastor of the Wisconsin Synod served a Reformed congregation. This was noted to the chagrin of the Missouri Synod, which often lashed out in condemnation of these practices. One such ~~of~~ example occurred in 1854. There was a complaint from the Slinger congregation about their pastor, J. Sauer, namely that he was causing strife in the congregation by certain of his practices. Fredrich records the incident:

Condidate Sauer explained that he was happy to abide by the Synod’s decision. Pastor J. Conrad, especially informed about the circumstances, was requested to express his opinion on the issue. He explained in particular that the congregation had turned to the synod with the proviso that the latter would only send it such men as were known to be evangelical<sup>15</sup>....Moved and seconded that two delegates, namely Bading and Conrad, should be sent to the Slinger congregation and be instructed to suggest to the congregation that in communion distribution bread should be used and that the Lutheran party should omit the other ceremonies. Secondly, they should, if peace absolutely required it, make the congregation the proposal that wafers and bread be used in Holy Communion.<sup>16</sup>

Two things are evident from this exchange. First, the Synod was willing to send evangelical, or Reformed minded men to serve a congregation. This shows that there were such men who were members of the synod despite previous resolutions to do so. Secondly, the Synod failed to make a clear confession concerning Holy Communion when they, albeit as a last resort, allowed the

---

<sup>14</sup> Fredrich, 15.

<sup>15</sup> This is a term which came into use after the Prussian Union. It was used to describe a church which was both Lutheran and Reformed. In asking for an ‘evangelical’ man, the congregation was asking for someone who would be willing to serve both Lutheran and Reformed, and thus was a ‘union’ man.

<sup>16</sup> Fredrich, 29.

Reformed and the Lutheran to receive the Lord's Supper in bread and wafer. They were thus allowing separate confessions, contrary to what was stated in their constitution.

Another incident, which sheds much light on Wisconsin's practice, is Gotthilf Weitbrecht's exchange with Muehlhaeuser. Weitbrecht began his ministry as a pastor of a Wisconsin Synod church in Sheboygan, but soon joined the Methodists. When he was rebuked by Muehlhaeuser for leaving the Synod the following correspondence followed: Weitbrecht said he "could not honestly belong to it [synod] because 'because your practice is neither strictly Lutheran nor strictly Evangelical, and yet you aim to be both.'"<sup>17</sup> To this Muehlhaeuser replied in November of 1853:

'Just because I am not strictly (Lutheran) or Old-Lutheran, I am in a position to offer every child of God and servant of Christ the hand of fellowship over the ecclesiastical fence. Have quite often been together with English preachers of the various denominations in ministerial conference, and we respected and loved each other as brethren and deliberated on the general welfare of the church. So I am not, dear Methodist brother, withdrawing the hand of brotherhood from you if you are Methodist in the spirit of the Methodist church's founder...I am wondering how you a theologian, pledged to the confessional books, could take the step without struggle. You won't expect me to believe that the teaching of the Methodist church, especially regarding the Sacraments, yes, even pertaining to justification and sanctification, is Lutheran? But probably in your search for truth you have discovered the errors of the Lutheran church and, on the other hand, have been convinced in the Methodist church that it has a truer conception of the doctrines than Luther, Arndt, Spener, Bengel, etc. Well, if that is the case I don't propose to argue with you, for that is a matter of conscience which a man has to settle with God and His Word.'<sup>18</sup>

This is the very same attitude the entire synod took into its dealings with other Reformed churches. Their main goal was to spread the Gospel, while doctrine and confession were downplayed.

---

<sup>17</sup> Koehler, 43.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* 43-44.

This goal became more of a problem when the Synod began its dealing with the mission societies in 1859. Until this time, all contact with the societies was limited to their sending of pastors to serve in the Synod, and the men they sent often had varying degrees of confessionalism. But in order to build a library for their eventual seminary and to provide for a traveling missionary, the 1859 Synod convention requested money from the mission societies. The Societies did both. A library was filled with approximately 500 classified volumes, while the Berlin and Langenberg Missionary Societies together provided \$200 for the salary of Edward Moldehnke, the Reiseprediger. However, the resolution evoked the protest of Philip Koehler:

With the contents and form of the memorial I agree barring one point. Namely, concerning the missionary-at-large, the writing reads: "The Reiseprediger were in the employ of the Berliner and Langenberger Verein and worked in agreement with and supported by the preachers and congregations of our Synod." For one, I do not believe that a missionary employed by a *unionistic* society can work in agreement with a *Lutheran* synod. And then I hold that the missionary-at-large must be in the employ of our Synod. Otherwise harm to our Lutheran synod might easily grow out of it.<sup>19</sup>

The issue for Koehler was not the monetary support of the mission societies, but it the question for him was in who controlled the doctrine of these missionaries. If the societies were responsible, the Synod could not guarantee their adherence to the Confessions, but if the missionaries were responsible to the Synod, confessionalism could much more easily be controlled.

In fact, the confessionalism of the Wisconsin Synod became a problem for the societies in 1860 when they wrote to Muehlhaeuser at the start of Bading's presidency. They were concerned that the Synod would now become overly confessional, and would not serve

---

<sup>19</sup> Koehler, 63.

Reformed churches any longer.<sup>20</sup> This issue finally guided the confessional practice of Synod and prevented a firm and clear Lutheran confession.

It should also be noted here that throughout his presidency Muehlhaeuser continued his relationships with the synods in the East. In fact, after the inaugural meeting of the Synod in 1850, Muehlhaeuser went East to solicit funds for the congregations there.<sup>21</sup> The synods there supported the Synod's work with money, and even men from time to time. The relationships with these synods did not create the same confessional problems that itwe had the German missionary societies, but the confession of the men they sent did from time to time cause problems.

However, there were voices within the Synod which noted the problems of unionism and worked to correct them. Among these voices were the men of the Northwest Conference. The Northwest Conference at that time was considered the strongest voice of confessional Lutheranism in the Synod. For this very reason candidates for the ministry were sent to them for examination and training prior to ordination and assignment to a church. This Conference cared about the confessions of their brothers and worked to correct them when wrong. In 1857 they wrote to Muehlhaeuser concerning one such incident:

In this letter you say, 'The Union I can not as yet give up because I love it, since I know Jesus, from my heart and am happy in this spirit.' We can't understand that as a member of a Lutheran synod you can still think and speak thus, aye, go before a Lutheran synod with such words. We consider it honest and right that a preacher who is heartily devoted to the Union belongs to a unionistic synod. Do you believe that the Kirchenverein des Westens and the Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin stand on the same platform in regard to the confession or creed and that one whose heart is devoted to the Union can also be a member of the

---

<sup>20</sup> To Muehlhaeuser: "to warn and help against the dangers of a too strongly emphasized confessionalism, let alone exclusive Lutheranism, every endangered or already affected brother of the dear fellow workers of the Wisconsin Synod – this cherished bosom child of our evangelical society -...against vagaries and extremes in this matter where the enemy of the holy cause of His Kingdom is endeavoring to sow many a hidden seed of strife, of suspicion, of misjudgment, and of separation." And again: "Lutheranism is being fostered too strongly, as we fear." Koehler, 77.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* 42.

Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin? We don't think so. The Kirchenverein des Westens, as it is, is unionistic, and the Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin is Lutheran and intends to become ever more so. That is our earnest endeavor, ever to become more like that which our name implies and which we wish to be; we want to continue from the iniquity of appearing as something which we in truth are not. We consider the Lutheran confession and the Lutheran doctrine the purest and most correct, and for that reason we are members of a Lutheran synod. If you consider the confession of the Union the best and are happy in that spirit, why aren't you a member of a unionistic synod?<sup>22</sup>....Do not, therefore, attribute it to an individual of our conference but to all of us. But you may believe that we all mean well with you and not in the least bear you any malice<sup>23</sup>.

The confession of the Synod at this time was firm, but it was not always carried out like the above example shows. There were times when they went against their confession to serve Reformed members, and even became entangled in the affairs of other synods, most notably the Missouri Synod, when they would sometimes take in and serve members who were excommunicated from that synod. In these cases and others Missouri responded angrily, while there was at least some correctness in their evaluation of Wisconsin practice. Missouri condemned the practice of Wisconsin as unionistic, and even unbrotherly.<sup>24</sup> This continued until 1868 when the Synod broke its association with the mission societies for good.

What can one say about this first decade of the Synod's history? Could our confession have been made more clearly by consistent practice in line with that confession? Yes, there is no question that the Synod could have made a clearer confession through its practice. Accusations from the outside certainly had it right when they noticed and pointed out unionist tendencies within the Synod. These actions fall right in line with Muehlhaeuser's leadership of our Synod.

---

<sup>22</sup> The above section of the letter contained a copy of the letter sent to the fallen brothers. What follows are concluding remarks to Muehlhaeuser.

<sup>23</sup> Koehler, 51.

<sup>24</sup> Concerning one such instance in a Lebanon church, when a group seceded from the Missouri Synod because of confessional reasons, Missouri made the following statement: "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, as though this testimony were to be classed with the charges of the Buffaloes against the Missourians....it is clear to everyone that right is on our side over against the Buffalo Synod as well as in the case of the Wisconsin Synod!" Koehler, 58.

He leaned away from a solid confession and toward a looser practice in order to share the Gospel with as many people as possible. For this we commend the Synod. One cannot say that the Synod did not desire to do mission work. And the Lord blessed their work. The Synod grew in these early years. God blessed their work, and in the coming decade led them to a solid confessional practice during the presidency of the Johann Bading, who had a solid Lutheran confession from the very start. God also blessed the Synod through the leadership of Muehlhaeuser despite his “New Lutheran” tendencies. Koehler said it right:

By and large, it must be said that Muehlhaeuser’s influence was not along the lines of confessional development which the growth of a Lutheran synod among the Germans of the Midwest called for. His aim was directed toward the gathering of souls. Still, he did not oppose the endeavors of pastors who were more intent on precise Lutheranism in the government of the body, he did not reject their advice and offers of help, but appreciated their work even when it meant his taking a second seat. And after he resigned from the presidency, he continued with his ready and unselfish support and in practical matters very often proved the better adviser, as the future revealed. So Muehlhaeuser was not the founder of the Wisconsin Synod’s confessionalism, nor did he organize it as it developed. But what he represented was no less great, a personal living faith, child-like trust in his Savior, and a burning zeal to build His Kingdom and spend himself in the work.<sup>25</sup>

God blessed the leadership of Muehlhaeuser no matter what his tendencies were. Muehlhaeuser allowed confessionalism to grow and stand firmly in the Synod. This becomes even more evident when he steps down from the presidency, and Bading is elected in his place. In the next decade Bading led the Synod from its original confessional confession to its eventual practice in line with its confession.

#### I. The 1860’s and early 70’s

When Muehlhaeuser stepped down in 1860, Bading was elected the next president. He had proven himself as a solid Lutheran ever since his ordination. He had proven himself as a

---

<sup>25</sup> Koehler, 72.

capable leader and teacher in the Northwest Conference and in countless other areas. Bading himself and his leadership will be discussed later. What is to be noted here is the succession of events which led to the break with the mission societies in 1868, and the subsequent fellowships that were established. There are three major things to which one ought pay attention: the establishment of a synodical periodical, the *Gemeindeblatt*; the establishment of a college and seminary; and finally the continued relationship with the mission societies. These are three areas which helped the synod become more confessional in its practice. As will be shown, the continued support of the mission societies and the lack of a clear confession to them was finally what kept the Synod from a clear confessional practice, for when it finally did make a clear confession to them and put its practice toward them in line with that confession, the Synod could only break with the societies.

The first thing to be considered which led to better outward relationships with other church bodies and also helped to clarify the Synod's position in regard to unionism and other practices was the establishment of the *Gemeindeblatt*. Although founded late in the Synod's history, in 1865, this was an important time for this paper. "Synod now had an organ that, for one, served to put an end to irresponsible polemics by Wisconsin men elsewhere, and on the other hand...in the hands of Hoenecke as editor afforded competent criticism, before the larger forum of the church, of the outside attacks on Synod."<sup>26</sup> Before this time, men were writing pamphlets and other public documents which often did not line up with the teaching of the Synod, nor were they always completely clear or truthful. Now, the Synod could respond to accusations. ~~Now,~~ <sup>The</sup> Synod could clearly proclaim the truth that had been publicized until that time only in the synodical reports and constitution. One of the benefits became evident early on in the periodical's history. Koehler records the positive impact of Hoenecke's sound and

---

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* 114.



scriptural response to unscriptural and unloving resolutions of the Northern District of the Missouri Synod. It led Walther to write positively about Hoenecke and the Wisconsin Synod in some 1868 issues of *Lehre und Wehre*, the official paper of the Missouri Synod:<sup>27</sup> “This earnestness of the Southern Conference regarding the purity of doctrine is gratifying. That is the right way too to pave the way for true unity.”<sup>28</sup> And so, from 1865 on the Wisconsin Synod had an official paper with which they could answer accusations for the Synod as a whole. It also served as the vehicle through which notices and information could be generated for the whole Synod. Information could be transmitted clearly and officially. Pastors in the Synod could be sure where their Synod stood in regard to this or that issue, and could place their practice in line with it. The *Gemeindeblatt* was a very important development in the Synod’s move to confessional practice.

Another, perhaps more momentous, resolution which helped in the move toward confessional practice was the founding and establishment of a college and seminary. The movement for said college had already begun in 1859 with a request for books to the Langenberg Missionary Society. In 1861 Bading laid this goal for the synod, namely that they make clear their position on the timing of its own seminary. Again, in 1862 he pointed out the need for pastors for orphaned congregations. Thus, it happened at that same convention that it was resolved: “that our Synod incorporate as ‘The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and Adjoining States’ and authorize its present officers and their successors to buy in its name...and that the present officers are instructed to have this approved by the legislature of the state.”<sup>29</sup> Finally, in 1863 after Bading had pushed for the seminary for the third time, urging the

---

<sup>27</sup> It should be noted, that about the same time as this article the Wisconsin Synod was breaking officially with the mission societies. This will be discussed further below.

<sup>28</sup> Koehler, 117.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* 84.

Synod to act in line with faith and to place themselves in the hands of their Savior, the Synod resolved to build the Seminary. After much debate over the location for the school, it was finally decided to locate the school in Watertown, the home of President Bading.<sup>30</sup> That very fall school began with Edward Moldenhke, also the Reiseprediger, as the lone teacher. He taught the lone student, but in the years that followed the school quickly grew. President Streissguth, the fourth president of the Synod from 1865-1867, described the purpose of the school this way:

If the increase in the number of workers previously was confined to outside help, it now should henceforth grow from within....The frequent charge against us that we are not sincere as to the confession of our church was not justified, even though we gladly admit our shortcomings. A permanent cure for many a one of these shortcomings will be found in this that most of our new recruits will be trained in our own Seminary, whereby the harmony and unity in Synod will be greatly advanced, a benefit that alone warrants the establishment of a separate seminary.<sup>31</sup>

Although this never seems to be put forward as the primary reason for founding the Seminary<sup>32</sup>, Streissguth hit the nail right on the head when he described the result that this founding would bring, “recruits trained in our own Seminary.” Since all future pastors would be trained in the same way, the uniformity of the doctrine and practice would naturally be a fruit of their education. What the teachers teach the students has a great effect on their future actions, and in this case their ministries. What the Synod had founded in their seminary was an institution whereby correct doctrine could be passed on to coming generations.

---

<sup>30</sup> The fact that the two choices for the seminary were Watertown, the home of Bading, and Milwaukee, the home of Muehlhaeuser, show the influence that these two presidents, one past and one present, had. As president, Bading was able to exert a considerable amount of influence of the Synod as a whole. Thus, he was more or less able to lead the Synod in the direction he wanted.

<sup>31</sup> Koehler, 120.

<sup>32</sup> When the school was established, and the college in place, the college was often advertised as a place for all kinds of students to get a solid education. They did not restrict enrollment to those studying to be pastors in the Wisconsin ministerium. Part of the reason for this was the need for money to support the school. In fact a plan was hatched whereby scholarships could be purchased to support the school, and thus all family members could attend the school free, or at least free at the time they attended. This plan became a disaster. But Koehler says this about the school: “It may be in place now to say, by way of concluding this chapter, that it was always understood, before and after the reorganization, that Northwestern, even with its appeal to the general public, was a Christian school with the avowed purpose of serving the Christian faith and the study of theology and the ministry made that a foregone conclusion” (Koehler, 139).

An immediate result of the resolution to found a seminary in 1863 was the resolution to send Bading to Europe to collect money for this school. Later that summer, Bading and his family left for Europe where he spent approximately one year traveling Europe and Russia gathering money for the support of the Wisconsin Seminary. This brought Bading into close contact with the mission societies and their representatives, and also gave the Synod opportunity to make a clear confession. What follows are excerpts from letters and memorandums as presented by Koehler. These will serve to show how the Synod responded to the requests from the mission societies in regard to the union.

P. Koehler immediately spoke strongly against soliciting the societies for money in his July of 1863 letter to acting-President Reim:

A further reason for my dejection is the so often and not unjustly censured association of our Synod with unionistic societies in Germany and with the General Synod....I hardly believe that such associations can be maintained if these societies are dealt with straightforwardly; and still they are maintained....What would these societies say if we were to tell them, as we owe it to them: Your confessional stand, your doctrine, and your confession is wrong – they would sever their connection with us. But we choose to keep quiet, when we should speak up, in order that these associations may not tumble down.<sup>33</sup>

That same year Eichler, an official in the Berlin Missionary Society, wrote to the Synod requesting their official position in regard to the union. They had read the resolution from the 1863 Wisconsin Synod convention which condemned that practice, and wished further clarification:

That the Evang. Oberkirchen-Rat will be glad to grant the general church offering, as requested; but that it – as it cannot do otherwise – makes this agreement contingent on an official declaration of the Synod: that it will not prevent its individual clergymen from supplying with the Word and Sacrament individual union congregations, in emergencies and temporarily, when it is requested by such congregations as well as such clergymen, you have already heard from Pastor Bading. The quicker you can transmit to us a certified declaration to this

---

<sup>33</sup> Koehler, 93.

effect, the sooner this matter can be brought to a definite, with the help of God desired [sic] close.<sup>34</sup>

The Synod had to respond, and on 15 December, 1863 they did:

But while the Reformed church, which is here dominant, is decidedly aggressive against us, we have continually supplied union congregations with the Word and Sacrament, as soon as they signified their willingness to suffer Lutheran doctrine and practice, and we shall in the future, for Christ's sake and the sake of the brethren's need, observe this policy. Now, concerning the two cases mentioned, we have not forbidden Pastor Sauer, nor Pastor Huber, to serve union congregations alongside of the Lutheran, but only this that they teach Lutheran doctrine in the Lutheran congregations, Reformed doctrine, however in the others, for instance, the instruction of the youth in the Lutheran congregations according to Luther's Catechism, but in the others according to the local (essentially Reformed) catechism.... Surely we can't demand of a union congregation that it immediately turn Lutheran, but properly this, that it abide by Lutheran doctrine and practice, in case it wants to be served by us, and surely, it's our duty to see that no pastor of our Synod teaches varying doctrine, but simply Lutheran, wherever he officiates.<sup>35</sup>

But, when this letter, or a draft thereof, was presented to the Synod in convention there was much dissention. In fact, the Synod's secretary, P. Koehler, refused to sign the document and said he would resign if it came to that. He wrote to Reim:

Now then, act according to your insight and your conscience. If you are bound to steer Synod's little ship into the Union's roomy harbor for Mammon's sake, then the men at the helm must assume the responsibility, I'll rather jump overboard and keep my conscience clean. I have already informed Brother Bading of the matter.<sup>36</sup>

Already in 1864 Koehler moved to sever our relationship with the Berlin society "because our Lutheran confession is menaced by continuing association."<sup>37</sup>

In the same way that Berlin had requested clarification, even so the Langenberg Missionary Society also asked for a clarification of the matter:

---

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*, 94.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, 95.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, 96.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, 99.

For some time various documents at hand and utterances in the correspondence of the Wisconsin Synod have prompted us to fear that it would more and more abandon its former milder practice over against the Reformed and the United, in order to maintain an exclusively Lutheran stand, which would also necessitate a change in the relation to our United society.<sup>38</sup>

Hoenecke responded to the Langenberg memorandum:

But we must here go on record that we on our part cannot accept as satisfactory to have concessions like the above made us, astonishment, however, registered and at once the term Lutheran exclusivism applied, when the confession of the Synod actually asserts itself as a potent and governing factor in its organism, as a norm of its life and dealing at home and abroad. For no other way can we or do we wish to conceive of the confessions of our church. We consider them, and that because of their same great clearness and simplicity they are a precise expression of all Bible truth, an authority to which we bow willingly and with faith, an authority that will not be gainsaid in its claim to direct and determine the actions of the Synod, so that it cannot be readily pushed aside for any considerations whatever. No less do we always keep in mind, in our very loyalty to our confessions, that just because they are Bible truth they can have [only] the one great aim, the one actual result to build the church of Christ. Thus our confessional stand is clearly enough defined....So then, we have on the one hand never refused in emergencies to take earnest care of a non-Lutheran congregation for Christ's sake with the same love with which we served our Synodical congregations, on the other hand we cannot agree to teach in such a congregation according to a United or a Reformed catechism or perform our office in any but the Lutheran way. Love will constrain us to serve with all our strength all that are within our reach, but it must not prevail on us to surrender our identity.<sup>39</sup>

P.Koehler responded to the same memorandum:

Most certainly the main thing is that we save souls for the Lord Jesus, as you remarked in your communication with eminent truth and correctness....Because we yearn to do that, and because in this sacred and momentous undertaking we should not want to render our work unnecessarily difficult and hinder it by various self-made obstruction, we would like to yield of our Lutheran confession not a hairbreadth and want to serve the Lutheran church alone....We love the Reformed fellow believers, but we hate their errors. We do not deny their chance of salvation, but we cannot enter into church fellowship with them. We will gladly be of service to the Reformed and the United, where there is need and we have a call, but not otherwise than with Lutheran teaching and practice...and because above all things they stand in need of this, to return to the right attitude

---

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, 100. Note the threat to break with the Synod if it continued "to maintain an exclusively Lutheran stand."

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*, 102-103.

toward the Word of God, in order to receive Christ and be able to partake of Him.<sup>40</sup>

It seems that the Langenberg Society reacted negatively to Koehler's letter, and so Hoenecke wrote again:

By all means to avoid everything that might be construed by the dear brethren at Langenberg as a desire to break with them.... We do not want to and really do not wish to be looked at as such who are filled with hatred for Reformed doctrine, nor as such who question the Reformed confession as a way of salvation or who in conciliatoriness toward the Reformed church see the blessing of the Lutheran menaced; not such an inner attitude prompted the previous letter of reply, the elucidations and decisions of which, after the present explanations, need so much less qualification the more we feel warranted in believing now to have made possible a just and not vexing weighing and judging of the matter.... So if with us measures too have come to pass which are distressing our dear brethren at Langenberg, we heartily wish that such an impression be not aggravated by inferred hostile and hateful tendencies, but rather be dissolved by a just and equitable analysis that takes account of the demands of the local church life.<sup>41</sup>

What is most remarkable about these exchanges is that the mission societies seemed to make their confession more clear than the Wisconsin Synod did. The societies were ready to make a break if Wisconsin did not agree with them in regard to the union.

On the other hand, Wisconsin made no clear statement about their stand on the union. They side stepped the question, and perhaps even made statements which were not entirely within the bounds of their confession, or for that matter their statements were perhaps even against the wishes of the Synod as a whole. Were the answers they gave inaccurate? Or were the answers in line with their confession at that time? Missouri would answer with a resounding, "no."<sup>42</sup> But, this is a very difficult question to answer. In any church body there will be

---

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, 105.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, 106.

<sup>42</sup> *Der Lutheraner* reported: "But we cannot recognize the same as a genuine Lutheran synod. It is rather a synod to which, in spite of all its pluming itself with the Lutheran confessions, we must very firmly proclaim that significant saying of Luther's: you have another spirit than we... [a synod] that more and more, sometimes under cover, sometimes openly exercises its syncretistic (uniting different creeds), hence unionist nature.... Now then, since we decidedly cannot recognize the Synod of Wisconsin as a genuine Lutheran synod but, in spite of its appeal to the Symbolical Books, must look upon it as an un-Lutheran, syncretistic synod, faithful neither to God nor man, we could in conscience not do otherwise, in view of the previously described circumstances of the separated members

deviations from the confession of the synod, no matter how diligently the synod carries out discipline. However in this case, the confession made to the union societies and the confession made in the Synod's constitution and repeatedly in their history did not line up.

But, in 1867 the Synod convention cleared up any previous misunderstandings and made some very clear statements in regard to the union.<sup>43</sup> Part of this may be due to the reelection of Bading as president. His address in 1868 certainly makes it clear that he had at least by that time come to the conclusion that the Synod had vacillated in regard to the Union. It may be that his leadership at this convention already was marked with this attitude. Whether this is or is not the case is not known by the writer. But, at this convention clear statements were made in regard to the Union. The majority report which was not adopted condemned the Union.<sup>44</sup> Even the minority report which was accepted decidedly condemned the union. "The discussion showed that all were of one mind in condemning a man made-union as wrong."<sup>45</sup> But, some in the body felt that as long as the societies were not demanding the Synod to become unionistic it was allowable to take with thanks their money. However, it was also pointed out by the members of

---

of the Racine congregation, than to accept these people" (Koehler, 86). In 1864, *Lehre und Wehre* also reported the same: "The 'Lutheran' Wisconsin Synod is a unionistic communion; for it accepts, among other things, preachers from the United Ober-Kirchenrath in Prussia and has these preachers ordained by the United Prussian consistory before they are called by congregations, contrary to all sound Biblical, Lutheran doctrine and practice. These Prussian-Union ordained preachers then serve the Lutheran congregations of the Wisconsin Synod "five or six years" and thereupon return to their United home church, to function further as Royal Prussian United preachers. That's the way the poor Lutheran congregations of the Wisconsin Synod are humbugged by their synod" (Koehler, 108).

<sup>43</sup> It is amazing that the synod in this year decided to broach the question of their relationship with the union. "From Streissguth's executive report it appeared that the Langenberg Society had not been heard from since the year before, neither by word nor by deed, but just why at this particular time a committee was appointed and resolutions adopted concerning the Union does not appear" (Koehler, 110).

<sup>44</sup> The majority reported in part 3: "The negative statement, rather, must also follow that we condemn the Union. 4. The reasons are: a. truthfulness and honesty, because many call themselves Lutherans who are not that; b. regard for the example of our church; c. even the Reformed church has testified against the Union, which usually is partial to the former; must that not put us to shame? d. the true Lutherans in the state church firmly opposed the Union; are we not sacredly obliged to strengthen these brethren" (Koehler, 110)?

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*, 111.

the majority report that they too were thankful for the help of the societies, but that they also wanted to be true to their convictions. The minority report amended and adopted is as follows:

Since our Synod, because of its association with various societies in Germany, especially the one at Berlin, for years has been accused of secret unionism by various Lutheran synods of this country; since, however, fifteen Lutheran synods of the land jointly with us are going to organize a new general synod, and thus an accusation against one member would reflect on the whole body; we make the following statement: Our Berlin friends long since have known that we condemn all doctrinal union, that we, moreover, over against the governmental union obtaining in several German lands, are aligned with those Lutherans within and without those state churches who would like to see the compulsory union with the Reformed, established by the Union, annulled because it is prejudicial to the right of complete independence, to which the Lutheran church is well entitled, and hindrance to the full effect of the Lutheran confession in worship and constitution, and hence the consciences bound by the Lutheran confession must feel oppressed by it [the Union].

As long, however, as there are still Lutherans in the respective Union state churches who have the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments and as long as they protest against the union foisted on them as a wrong committed and continued against the Lutheran church, we can no more than thankfully accept the loving offices of the United societies as the agency through which workers come to us, to serve in the Lutheran church here, from those Lutherans who remain members of the state church but ever keep alive their protest.<sup>46</sup>

This report, although in softer language than the majority report, condemned unionism, but stated that the Synod would still accept their money as long as the Societies understood their position on the Union.

The Societies in Germany responded, some of them more quickly than others, with disgust. They felt betrayed. Above all, because of the Synod's stand on the Union, they could no longer send money or missionaries. Schuermann wrote in December 1867:

If then your Synod maintains its protest against the Union (which is called "wrong and sinful"), what *must* and *will* be the outcome, dear brother? Surely, simply *this* that *our* Society, *can not and dare not* send its missionaries any longer...I ask only *one* thing: Write us some information as soon as possible; also in respect to *your personal* stand regarding that resolution.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, 113.



The Prussian State Church responded in 1869 also breaking their relationship with the Synod, and in the process taking away the money which had been set aside from Bading's collecting trip in 1865.<sup>48</sup> The latter was perhaps the hardest for Bading to swallow, since he worked so hard to procure that money for their school.<sup>49</sup> As hard as this break was to make, it had to be made. Wisconsin need to make a firm confession in regard to the Union, and they did. Quickly thereafter it became evident that their practice was becoming more and more in line with their confession.

Historians often say that the 1868 Synod convention was the biggest up to that time. Three momentous resolutions were passed. First, they officially broke with the mission societies. Previously they had laid their cards on the table, and now they decided to break with them. They did break with the mission societies, but they also thanked the societies sincerely for all the help they had given to our growing synod throughout its 18 year history to that point.<sup>50</sup>

Secondly, the Synod resolved to break with the General Council unless their stance on the Four Points changed. Founded in 1867 the Four Points quickly became an issue for the General Council. The Four Points were: 1. Concerning Chiliasm; 2. Concerning altar fellowship; 3. Concerning pulpit fellowship; 4. Concerning secret societies. Having just struggled with the

---

<sup>48</sup> Prussian Supreme Church Council (March 27, 1869): "Having gathered from the proceedings of the 18<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the German Evangelical [?] Synod of Wisconsin that the Synod has taken a decidedly antagonistic stand against the Union established in the Prussian State Church, and that thus the premises no longer exist upon which the appropriation and collection in the year 1865 of a statewide offering for the projected preachers' and teachers' seminary was predicated....Informing the praesidium thus, we yet cannot repress the wish that the return of the Synod to a sounder and sober confessional stand might render possible the resumption of our former relations to it in a short space of time" (Koehler, 114).

<sup>49</sup> At the 1869 convention the Synod gave up all claims to the Prussian church collection. Concerning that Bading later told J.P.Koehler (1899): "If you'd know how I felt when that main credit of my difficult and often disagreeable canvass vanished in thin air that way [durch die Lappen gegangen], you'd understand why I made another attempt," this in reference to other attempts he had made even as late as as the 1890's (Koehler, 131).

<sup>50</sup> "To dispose of the German question the resolution was passed: 'That the praeses, because of various points in the Parting Letter, should address a detailed answer to the Societies. Furthermore, that in recognition of the fact that the break of unionistic Societies with the Synod of Wisconsin was quite justified in view of their own stand, Synod should once more extend its hearty thanks for all the help rendered it up to the severing of relations with it' (Koehler, 118).

issues of fellowship and God-pleasing unions it became an easy decision to declare that they could not be a part of the General Council unless it came to the proper, biblical understanding concerning these Four Points. They did not, and so in 1869 the Synod in convention broke with the General Council stating already in 1868, that they “with the whole orthodox Lutheran Church rejects each and every altar and pulpit fellowship with those that believe falsely or otherwise as contradictory to the doctrine and practice of the Lutheran Church.”<sup>51</sup> Fredrich mentions just some of the majorities arguments here: “The question of altar and pulpit fellowship is the ABCs of the ecclesiastical practice of a Lutheran synod.” “As to the earlier stand of the synod, one ought to thank God that it was been overthrown and the synod has come to greater clarity.”<sup>52</sup> The Synod had indeed come to greater clarity; their practice had now been placed in line with their confession.

Finally, the Synod resolved to work for fellowship with especially the Missouri Synod<sup>53</sup>. This happened immediately. For as soon as the 1868 convention of the Synod was over, Bading rushed to the district meeting of the Northern ~~Conference~~ <sup>District</sup> of the Missouri Synod. President Walther was there, and Walther authorized the Northern ~~Conference~~ <sup>District</sup> to see whether there was doctrinal agreement between Missouri and Wisconsin or not. In October 1868, when the two groups met, they discovered that between them there was total doctrinal agreement. Thus, at both synod conventions the following year, the two synods resolved to join in fellowship one with the other. The 1869 Synod report declares the doctrinal unity with Missouri:

---

<sup>51</sup> Fredrich, 43. At the 1869 Synod convention “the resolution was passed that the membership of our Synod in the Council be terminated” (Koehler, 130).

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Missouri was already well aware of the Synod’s new relationship with the Societies and wrote in the June 1868 issue of *Lehre und Wehre*: We have just now read in the *Christlicher Botschafter*, organ of the Evangelicals, of April 29, how violently the *Neue Ev. Kirchenzeitung* in Berlin is assailing the Wisconsin Synod, because it is most earnestly trying extricate itself from the embrace of the Prussian state church and live up to the name of a Lutheran synod, which it bears. We feel it incumbent on us to publish this information here, inasmuch as we previously have often voiced our misgivings regarding the stand of this synod to the confession. The reproach which it will now have to suffer will be its highest honor” (Koehler, 117).

In all these doctrines all those present rejoiced to find such agreement that on its basis the following points were adopted as a token of the doctrinal unity of both synods and as the principles for the future mutual relation in the field of practical work...8) If in either synod false teaching rears its head, each synod is bound to put down such an error with all means at its command, and as long as this is done, the orthodoxy of one or the other synods shall not be questioned.<sup>54</sup>

Wisconsin's practice had been put in line with their confession. Walther was overjoyed and declared, "Brethren, if we had known all this before we might have been united ten years ago already."<sup>55</sup> Very quickly this fellowship grew into cooperation in other areas. At the 1869 convention, Bading noted that there were discussions underway concerning joint schools; our seminary would move to St. Louis and their college students would move to Watertown.<sup>56</sup>

Wisconsin was also working toward fellowship with Minnesota at this time. At the 1869 Minnesota convention, Bading and Hoenecke were present in order to discover if there was complete doctrinal agreement. It was reported on both sides that there was agreement. However, the 1870 convention did not approve fellowship at this time; it seems that because Minnesota was still a member of the General Council some questioned their orthodox practice and confession. But as soon as Minnesota broke with the General Council in 1871 fellowship was a foregone conclusion and was reached at the next conventions.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Koehler, 129.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*, 130.

<sup>56</sup> Bading said: "Thru the accord with the Synod of Missouri plans of a far-reaching nature in regard to our institution have cropped up. In order by joint effort to achieve something great and effective for the cause of the Lord and our church, if such be His will, the question has been broached whether it might not be well to merge our Seminary with that of the Synod of Missouri at St. Louis for the purpose of establishing together with them, the Norwegians, and possibly others that the Lord our God may add to the ranks, a seminary after the pattern of a German university's divinity school and secure for our students a larger number of professors, and of making our College at Watertown, on the other hand, a flourishing and influential gymnasium by the appointment of teachers and sending of students on the part of the Missouri Synod" (Koehler, 130).

<sup>57</sup> Koehler: "So Wisconsin now publicly acknowledged its recognition of Minnesota's orthodoxy and sent Streissguth and Koehler as delegates to the sister synod's meeting close at hand. Bading lost no time and, together with the president of the College, formulated an agreement which placed Minnesota on the same footing at Watertown as the Missouri Synod (free tuition and rent plus reduced board charges for aspirants to the ministry, in return for the furnishing of a teacher) and, a closer link, made the *Gemeindeblatt* Minnesota's official paper also, that synod share in the profit in proportion to the number of its subscribers and furnish a representative on the editorial staff" (133).

Shortly thereafter in 1872 the Synodical Council was formed with Wisconsin, Missouri, Minnesota, Ohio, Illinois, and the Norwegian Synod as its charter members. At the opening service for the first meeting of the Synodical Council at St. John's in Milwaukee, Walther preached: "O gesegneter, seliger Tag." It certainly is a joyous and blessed occasion when true God-pleasing unity can be achieved. However, Wisconsin never would have ~~never~~ been invited to join, nor would they have been able to join such a group had they not come to a firm confessional practice, which was finally brought about by their break from the Union. God be praised. He led the Synod from their early confessional confession to confessional practice.

## II. Johann Bading, the leader

The series of events that led to the solid confessional practice of the Wisconsin have been shown. It was Johann Bading who led the Wisconsin Synod to this firm confessional practice. Bading was born on 24 November, 1824<sup>58</sup> in Rixdorf, a suburb of Berlin, Germany. He was baptized on 28 November when he was named after his father, Johann Friedrich. Bading remembers with fondness his godly mother, Anna Catherine, who died when Bading was still young. His father quickly remarried, but his new wife was not as spiritually minded as the first. Nevertheless, Bading was still confirmed on 24 April, 1840. Thereafter, he tried his hand on the family farm, but this did not suit him much to the chagrin of his father. But, his father found for him an apprenticeship to a carriage maker. While working there Bading nearly lost his leg because of a serious accident with an axe. When he returned to work he quickly picked up and learned the trade.

This accident proved to be a blessing for Bading. When he was unable to work, the master craftsman had to find another worker; Schauseil filled Bading's spot and continued to

---

<sup>58</sup> All biographical information unless otherwise noted is taken from *Erinnerungen aus meinem persönlichen, amtlichen und synodal Leben* by Johann Bading, and copied by Ralph Gehrke on June 8, 1953.

work there after Bading returned. Through Schauseil Bading was reacquainted with Christianity, which he seems to have left for a time. Bading remembers:

It was as if a voice in my soul loudly and admonishingly cried: You must therefore become another man, you must be turned to your Savior from whom you have just now heard or else you will be lost. Then my sins struck my soul as a heavy burden. It was now impossible to sleep. Filled with angst and dread, I got up in the morning from my bed and began to work. Repeatedly however, I left my work, sought out my bed room and fell to my knees and cried out for grace and mercy. So passed more weeks all the time under angst and dread. One day, when I had again sought out my bed and sighing stood there and wished that my blessed mother would appear to me and tell me how I could have peace (naturally she did not appear), my glance fell on a New Testament lying on a small table. I went to it, and threw the little book open and as if by accident my eyes glanced the words: Whatever you ask in my name, that you will experience from my Father in heaven. That was a beam of light which fell in my <sup>59</sup> and troubled soul. The words of the New Testament which I now further read, as if they were all together living before my eyes and it was in my heart as if I had heard a voice: Just believe, and you have the forgiveness of sins and peace. And behold, I believed and could believe. The angst had left my heart and joy, praise and thanks filled my soul.<sup>60</sup>

This was a major turning point in Bading's life. After this time he returned to church and there was instructed by the pastor and received encouragement and comfort that he was God's child. And so his motto became: "I believe, therefore I speak."

Another major turning point in Bading's life was his decision to enter the ministry. One day as he was walking down a street he customarily traveled, he saw the Berlin Mission Seminary and saw this on the door: "Go into all the world and teach all peoples." He felt as if this was a special command from the Lord. However, he was not so sure he could leave behind his homeland and family to become a missionary. For about a year he struggled with this. Finally he approached the Mission Inspector, who encouraged him to take more time to consider this and even told him to take a trip outside of Berlin, "and if you still have the wish to be a

---

<sup>59</sup> Word missing.

<sup>60</sup> Bading, 2.

missionary, then seek me out again.”<sup>61</sup> And so he did, and he did return. In fact, the desire in him to become a missionary grew stronger.

At the mission school he writes that the studies were easy. So after a year, he left the Berlin Society and went to study at the Hermannsburg Missionary Society. When the Hermannsburg Missionary Society would not send him out because of internal differences<sup>62</sup>, Bading was sent out by the Langenberg Missionary Society in May 1853. Bading writes about why he was not sent out by the Hermannsburg Society after studying there for three years:

How it happened that the band which bound me to the Hermannsburg Mission was broken after more than three years and I became a agent of the Langenberg Society, there have been false reports about that in the world. In one, the biography of Louis Harms, if I am not mistaken, written by Pastor C. Merthens in Kentucky, says in one place without naming my name, that I had come from Hermannsburg because I was too strongly unionistic, because the Lutheran had not spoken to me especially. What this first says, I must note as totally untrue. The reason for which I turned from the Hermannsburg Mission was for another reason. And what was that? It was in the Hermannsburg Mission’s practice that in the education of the students to be missionaries no Latin or Greek should be taught. I had already at the Berlin Mission made a good start in both languages, and now had the yearning to be taught further in both languages. My repeated wish was not fulfilled; that disappointed me greatly and yet I reconciled myself with patience. A second practice was that the pupils should carry out every day two hours field and garden work. It was designated as relaxation from heavy study. If only the spring and summer work was to be expected, then this work was extended not in the daily two hours, but it often demanded more time and often from the students nothing resulted, because their bodies had become tired. This filled me with great unrest. Then, after more than three years, when I embarrassed myself on my vacation home, I took the opportunity of a mission festival with some pastors and directors of the Berlin Mission, whom I knew previously and very well. After a long conversation, they requested me to return again to the Berlin Mission. I explained to them, that I had contemplated it. After the vacation I returned again to Hermannsburg, and shared my experience with my fellow student, Ludwig, who was in the same position as I, in unrest. What was concluded was done. It didn’t take long, so we received the encouragement

---

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* 3.

<sup>62</sup> The Hermannsburg Missionsblatt in January of 1854 also writes about the incident – “After a four-year training there left in the Mission House eight of the twelve enrolled. Two the Lord had taken away by death, two others became unfaithful.” – “because the earthly work became too much for them” (Fredrich, 30). This was the underlying cause for Bading’s dismissal from the Society, but as Bading recounts the issue, unbrotherly actions are what actually caused the dismissal.

from the mission inspector in Berlin to share with Pastor L. Harms our decision. We did it one day, and the effect was this, that Harms was very troubled about it, for he understood our action as a betrayal of the Mission and left us out of grace. We considered our action and confessed that we should not have acted behind his back and we asked for forgiveness. He forgave us, but the relationship with the Mission was destroyed and lost.<sup>63</sup>

What does this show about the future president Bading? It shows first his desire to study more thoroughly the biblical languages. But more importantly it shows his God given ability to recognize his sin and to receive forgiveness for it.<sup>64</sup> This temperament places Bading in a good position when it comes to the Wisconsin's later involvement with the Societies and the repentance that had to follow.

So, on May 17, 1853, Bading set out for America, being sent by neither the Berlin Society, nor by the Hermannsburg Mission, but the Langenberg Society. After six weeks at sea on the boat *Helene* he finally arrived in America. Then, after spending some time in New York he came to Milwaukee and stayed as the guest of Pastor Muehlhaeuser. It was there that on the 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, 1853 Bading preached his first sermon in America. He expressed to Muehlhaeuser his desire to preach and was told to take a journey throughout Wisconsin to see what he could find. He first went towards Manitowoc, where he met Pastor Goldammer, then secretary of the Synod. There he again was welcomed in and preached on Sunday. Finally, his journeys took him to the area of Calumet. When he was not far from Calumet he met a farmer who took him in and fed him on a very hot day. It happened that in the discussion with this farmer, Bading was asked to preach for the congregation to which the farmer belonged. It seems that this was a Missouri Synod congregation without a pastor, for it was said that "it was a shame that I didn't belong to the Missouri Synod." Nevertheless, this congregation called Bading and

---

<sup>63</sup> Bading, 3-4.

<sup>64</sup> Later in 1857 Harms wrote to Bading asking him to return to the Mission Society and to go as a missionary to Africa. Bading's congregation wouldn't let him go, saying: "There are enough heathens here," they said, "you don't need to travel to Africa for their sake" (Bading, 4).

since he didn't have another congregation to serve, he accepted. His pay was to be \$80.00 for the year. He was promised that he wouldn't go hungry. In addition, a member, Caspar Tuerwaechter, said that he would take Bading in as his guest as long as he himself remained unmarried.

Bading went back to Milwaukee again to tell Muehlhaeuser the news, and to arrange for his installation and ordination. As they discussed his ordination it became clear that they both viewed subscription to the Confessions differently. Muehlhaeuser felt that it was not necessary, but Bading did. So for a quarter year, Bading returned and served Calumet. After a third trip to Milwaukee he met Pastor Lochner of the Missouri Synod, who told him after learning about Bading's struggle with Muehlhaeuser, that the Missouri Synod was going to have a conference soon and after that he felt sure that Bading could be ordained and installed by Missouri. Through Pastor Conrad, the brother-in-law of Muehlhaeuser, Muehlhaeuser learned of Bading's discussions with Missouri and the three of them came to an understanding. Muehlhaeuser finally gave in to Bading and said: "Brother Bading, we can't lose you; what the Missourians can do, I can also do." So, because Muehlhaeuser was a good man and because he had treated Bading so kindly as his guest, Muehlhaeuser ordained Bading the next Sunday in Calumet.<sup>65</sup> Koehler too records this incident saying that "Bading demanded to be pledged to the Lutheran confessions, which Muehlhaeuser termed 'paper fences.' But he finally acceded to Bading's wish, and the latter, in his installation sermon, preached on the importance of the confessions."<sup>66</sup>

In this confrontation with Muehlhaeuser, as in the ones to come, Bading took a firm stand when it came to the Lutheran confessions and even attached that postscript to his signature to the Synod constitution. Throughout his ministry Bading maintained this strong confessional stand.

---

<sup>65</sup> Thus, the autobiography of Bading ends with his ordination in Calumet.

<sup>66</sup> Koehler, 45.



It was noted already at the 1854 Synod convention which would have been Bading's first. There it notes that "the Hon. Bading asked if a preacher could perform official acts in a Methodist Church. Postponed for later discussion."<sup>67</sup> It seems that this issue was not dealt with, but this shows his desire to speak out in matters of conscience. At the 1855 convention, the Northwest Conference, of which Bading was a part along with Conrad, Sauer, and P. Koehler, was designated for the educational work of the candidates. Bading's membership in this conference underscores his confessionalism, but also surely must have strengthened it. One need only remember the strong voice which Koehler sounded on various issues, most notably in regard to the Union. Later, in 1856 Bading was elected secretary of the Synod.

But, it seems that not everything was in line with Bading's confessionalism. Perhaps part of his discontentedness with the Synod was a result of his bad experience with the congregation in Calumet. But another part of it can't be denied. The confessional practice of the Synod was perhaps not what it should have been in every case. Eventually Bading had seen enough, and having seen the confessional actions of the Missouri Synod previously and in those early years with his continued experience, "he applied to Pastor Fuerbringer of Freistadt, who just had been elected praeses of the newly organized northern district of the Missouri Synod, for membership. But Fuerbringer advised him to stick with Wisconsin and lend his influence for raising the standard of doctrine and practice."<sup>68</sup> Where would the Synod be if Bading had left at this time?

So Bading remained member of the Wisconsin Synod and at the 1860 convention was elected president. From the outside of the Synod voices noted the strong confession that Bading kept and maintained and in his presidential addresses of 1861<sup>18</sup>, 62, and 1863 Bading strongly urged the same stand. In 1861 he said: "We have in our Evangelical Lutheran Church his pure

---

<sup>67</sup> WELS Historical Institute Journal (WHIJ), vol 10, #2, p 4.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

and unadulterated word. Therefore, let us hold fast to it in life and death as did our fathers... Yes – presenting properly the article of justification of the sinner by faith actually means to preach the gospel. Isn't this doctrine the jewel, the heart, the sanctuary, and the foundation of all Christian doctrine?"<sup>69</sup> One beneficial thing that was instituted and carried out in 1861 was the reading of essays for the body. In 1861 Pastor Reim read a paper titled *Confessional Position of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin*. Early in his presidency Bading was concerned about the confessional status of the Synod. In that vein he also urged the Synod to seriously think about founding their own seminary to fill the numerous vacancies throughout the Synod. In the following year, Bading correctly pointed out the distinction between having the true doctrine and believing it:

But isn't it one thing to have the correct, true and unadulterated doctrine on paper and another thing to accept it with a clear personal knowledge and with a personal childlike faith? What I would like to urge you to do, revered and beloved brothers, is to set your mind on a greater study of doctrine, to plunge deeper and more diligently into the depths which our gifted and pious forefathers have dug for us, to be more desirous to learn from the old teachers of our church, at whose feet we truly would not be ashamed to sit, since they lead us deeper into Holy Scripture, offer us purer gold out of the rich sources and establish us more firmly in our faith which is not the case in general with today's theology.... We then will become more firmly grounded in the foundation of truth and will uncover treasures which because of our myopic glances remain hidden from us.<sup>70</sup>

And about the seminary he declared:

I believe that since the beginning of the synod the praesidium of synod has not felt the lack of preachers as they did this past synodical year. Old synodical congregations have been standing orphaned for many months, are struggling with the sects and schismatics to keep themselves alive. On their repeated cries for help no other comfort could be given than: wait with hope for the eventual help from the Lord. Requests for preachers coming from new congregations who had not as yet joined the synod could not be granted even a hearing. How can we find an answer if we do not earnestly think about establishing our own seminary and putting our hands more seriously and with greater faith to the task.... All of these [other synod's and society's schools] had an unimposing and insignificant start,

---

<sup>69</sup> WHIJ vol 13, #2, pg. 5,6.

<sup>70</sup> WHIJ vol 16, #1, pg. 5,6.

and look, they have not only established a life, but by the grace of God have become flourishing institutions. Let us walk in their footsteps and for once, with faith in the Lord's help, make a small beginning... Well, then, dear brothers and friends, let us at this synodical convention draw up a plan for the establishment of an educational institution.<sup>71</sup>

In 1863 Bading again deplored the lack of pastors and again pointed back to the founding of the Seminary:

Although thankful for such help which the German societies and associations send us, we nevertheless in the face of our synod and congregations must always return to the matter of erecting our own theological seminary. The desire for it has long been expressed, the plan of founding it was pretty well thoroughly discussed at the last synod convention, now the time has come that it be vigorously implemented. One must indeed thoroughly discuss the costs ahead of time if one wants to build a tower, but, with costs alone nothing is done, that discourages more in going ahead with the founding of a seminary. We have to place our trust for the costs in the almighty Savior, who desires to strengthen the weak and bless that of small value, indeed approach him above, and then confidently with meager means and strength which are at our command begin small and humbly. If we begin something for the glorification of our Savior and for the welfare of immortal souls, we must not fear by trusting in the almighty strength and grace of our Lord and that our work will come to ruin. Therefore being confident that this year's synod convention will move ahead with the founding of an educational institution, let us remember that the Lord will provide and will lead the work already begun to a magnificent goal.<sup>72</sup>

It is evident from these three addresses that Bading had two major things on his mind: firm confessionalism and the founding of the seminary to provide their own pastors. Streissguth rightly pointed out the benefit, uniformity of doctrine among the ministerium.

It was at the 1863 convention that Bading was sent to Germany to fund raise for the new seminary to be started that fall. One remembers the controversy that ensued when it came to the confessional position over against the Union. Bading was right in the middle of it all, often personally representing the Synod to the Societies. P.Koehler was concerned about Bading's confessional stance changing because of his collecting trip, for he writes to Reim:

---

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>72</sup> WHIJ vol 16, #2, pg. 44.

Maybe, the presidency of Brother Bading has made the Synod firmer, as you write, but he himself, it seems to me, has lost a good deal of his firmness in the process. From year to year I have found the dear brother different, and I won't withhold from you that I am seriously worrying his trip to Germany will lead him astray still more. May the good Lord graciously prevent it and confound my fears; but that my misgivings are not without reason, I could prove to you from his own letters. The good brother has adopted a manner as praeses, by which he has sorely offended several brethren.<sup>73</sup>

Koehler's fears may have been well founded when one considers some of the statements Bading makes while on his collecting trip. In 1864 Bading wrote to acting President Reim with words of guidance before that year's convention:

Albeit, it behooves us on our part to be truthful and wise [concerning outside accusations against us], so we don't furnish our enemies with ammunition in our proceedings and public reports and give our friends cause for righteous offense. Since, this year's synod very likely will discuss questions pertaining to our doctrine and practice, I ask you, dear brethren to let truth and love prevail. The Holy Spirit guide you into all truth and govern you in your deliberations thru love, and make all your endeavors redound to His glory and the welfare of our congregations.<sup>74</sup>

If one were to read between the lines, it may seem that although encouraging Reim to make a good confession to the outside, Bading may be allowing for actions that even though they may contradict their confession, would serve the "welfare of our congregations." In fact, that 1864 convention did have to deal with the issue of the Union. They did deal with it although against the wishes of Koehler who moved that the Synod break with the Societies.<sup>75</sup> Bading, likewise gave a less than clear answer when he related to Reim a statement he made to the Oberkirchenrat at Berlin: "In the statement to the Oberkirchenrat at Berlin I conceded that we could supply

---

<sup>73</sup> Koehler, 93.

<sup>74</sup> Koehler, 98.

<sup>75</sup> 1864 convention: "Br. Koehler made the motion to cut loose from the Berlin society, because our Lutheran confession is menaced by continuing association." (Koehler, 99)

needy union congregations, but according to Lutheran doctrine and Lutheran usage with the Lutheran catechism.”<sup>76</sup>

Yes, Bading did make some statement which would seem to contradict his confession. Even in the following confession which he made about the General Synod, he weakened his and the Synod’s stand in his answer. When asked by the Berlin Society why the Wisconsin Synod does not join the General Synod, Bading responded:

We also gratefully acknowledge the answer to our question in regard to joining the General Synod, though we – to be frank – do not fully agree the procedure observed by the Synod in the matter. True, the General Synod as a matter of fact has no confession; but it does demand of a synod testimonies or institutions that are contrary to the confessions, and it offers, on the other hand, manifold practical help in the building and promotion of the kingdom of God that one probably not to surrender just because of the opposition of principles. This is our – of course, not conclusive – view of the matter.<sup>77</sup>

This is a good solid answer, that is until the last statement, “this is our –of course, not conclusive – view of the matter.” One may ask why Bading weakened his confession so. One ought keep in mind that at this time Bading was raising money for the seminary and any clear confession to the Berlin Society may have compromised the ability to gather money at all. As one looks at these statements Bading made during his collecting trip, it would seem that Bading had compromised his confession, exactly as Koehler had worried that he would do. Yet in the years that follow Bading’s return to America, Bading came to a firm and solid confession.

As noted previously Bading was reelected president of the Synod in 1867, and it is possible that he is the reason that the Synod broached the topic of the Union yet again with seemingly little or no reason from the Societies to do so. But in 1868 when Bading presented his first presidential address as the reelected president he confessed to the Synod his sin of vacillation and urged them to sound a loud trumpet:

— ?  
the Synod's

---

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, 85.

Our position, it is true, was for a long time a vacillating one. On the one hand we openly accepted all the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, a fact which the synod pronounced virtually every year, yet on the other hand we considered the relationship with the societies which are incorporated with the United Church and the Union to be something proper. On the one hand, I dare say it, love to our dear church and its Symbolics, while on the other hand the feeling of thankfulness to our friends who helped us in times of need, also through sending of forces, making us what we are, made the synod appear in a light that neither friend nor foe could understand. Indeed the feeling of gratitude restrained the synod from letting its long existing inner confessional decision come openly to a full expression, and from repelling the accusations of a friendly feeling towards the Union with a candid statement against all Union doctrine and regulations. The vacillations, Hon. Pastoral-brothers and fellow-believers, must have an end. The Letter to the Hebrews states: It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace. The church tendencies of the present time press us forward to a decision; the honor of the synod, the importance of the situation, the truth and honesty with unequivocal strength demand we, the church of God, tell our friends and foes, what position we have in mind to take in regard to the movements of the present time, to the heated battle between the Union and Lutheranism, and to the efforts of uniting the synods in this land....

The Synod of Wisconsin is also obliged in such time of great and common danger to draw the sword from the sheath, to produce a clear tone with the trumpet, to break the earlier respectful silence, to declare to the utmost that we lament the introduction of the Union, which disregards all differences, as well as the annihilation of our dear church and cry out to God, that he would ward off such a heavy judgment on us and would not because of our great unfaithfulness and indifference, deal with us as we deserve to be dealt with. May no one accuse us of unthankfulness, we cannot do differently and we believe that thankfulness and love will be in partnership with our profession of the truth and the testimony against the wrongdoing.<sup>78</sup>

In 1869 Bading again pointed out the reason for the break with the Societies, namely a firm confession based on the Word of God:

This conviction was also the cause, which drove the Synod last year, to free itself from the outside in from all such ties and fellowships, which have denied Lutheran doctrine openly or in secret, which looks at the Union church as the true evangelical church of Christ and mark it as the church of the future in Germany.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> WHIJ vol 21, #1, pg. 6-7.

<sup>79</sup> Synodical Proceedings, 1869, 5.

In 1870 Bading again pointed out the dangers of not only the Union, and the papacy, but also the threat that materialism posed in America. Then he pointed them to the sure comfort Christians have in their God:

In the face of such dangers and enemies, many times the children of God can become frightened for the sake of Zion. But what does Paul say? We are afraid, but we do not despair...For this reason, we look comforted into the future and sing with our psalm: God is our confidence and strength, a helper in need, who has met us. Outside dangers, as with inner struggles, or whatever the Lord sends in addition for affliction, must happen to the Zion of God according to the all-knowing gracious will of the Lord for salvation. For the Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our protector.<sup>80</sup>

One can not help but notice, as he reads these words of Bading, the pastoral and the godly heart which Bading displays. God had worked in Johann Bading a heart which held firmly to the Word of God and made a confession, and was led to practice in line with that confession.<sup>81</sup>

### III. Evaluation

Wisconsin Synod historians often point to the 1868 Synod Convention as the turning point in the Synod's history, as it turned from its confessional confession to confessional practice. They say this with good reason, for it is at this convention that the Synod officially broke its ties with the Societies, decided to pursue fellowship with Missouri, and also declared that if the General Council did not change its stance in regard to the Four Points that they would leave. This writer contends that the 1867 convention was even more momentous for this reason: unless the Synod had been led to firm confessional practice, and this chiefly concerning their relationship with the Union, the other two resolutions, especially concerning fellowship with Missouri, would have not been possible or at least would have been unlikely.

---

<sup>80</sup> Synodical Proceedings, 1870, 6.

<sup>81</sup> There are many more examples of the teaching and comfort that Bading gave to the Synod in his address. For instance, in 1871 Bading pointed out yet again that their teaching is not their own, but rather it is God's. In 1872 he pointed out the privilege to preach, yet it is still God who does the work....

To <sup>flesh</sup> flush this out a little more – was the continued relationship with the Union sinful? In and of itself, no.<sup>82</sup> While the Societies were happy to give us monetary and other support for the growth of our Synod with no strings attached there was no problem. They were not asking for a confession. A similar situation is present today when Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is happy to support congregations with matching funds and otherwise. If they were to make certain demands on a congregation concerning the money, or if they seek to become an arm of the church then a clear confession will be required. The same was the case in the continued relationship with the Union. When the Union churches required a clear confession, the Synod needed to give it to them. They needed to point out the Union's error. If they truly wanted to support the true Lutherans in the Union, they would have done the greatest help by pointing out the error of the Union clearly and boldly. When the Wisconsin Synod skirted around the issue in 1864 and in the following years, it erred by failing to give a clear confession.

The reason they did not give a clear confession is less clear. Perhaps they were blinded by the desire to build their own school. Perhaps they needed a thorough study of the matter to understand their own error. Either way it is by God's grace that in 1867 the Synod saw their error and rightly condemned the error of the Union.

For this very reason the 1867 convention is so important. If the Synod had not come to a clear confession concerning the Union, the probably would not have made such a clear statement about the General Council. That union would not have been a problem, if the Synod did not

---

<sup>82</sup> Bading shared the view of the minority, "that there was nothing wrong about accepting support from confessional Lutherans in the Prussian state church", that is, as long as we make a clear confession (the writer's own addition). Koehler's view: "And that proper self-respect of the Christian will show itself especially in financial matters and cause him to shun the many financial measures employed in the church whereby he loses character as a king and a priest before God, and whereby the free grace of God, which alone can build the church, also receives lip-service only. It shows poor Christian tact and taste to ask other people for money to build the church, and so it certainly is not Lutheran" (Koehler, 131). In this case Koehler overstates the case. While it is true that Christians will want to and will support the church, and therefore the church should seek the support of its members first. Nevertheless, it is not sinful to seek support elsewhere.



correctly understand what constitutes a God-pleasing union, as they showed they did in the majority report.<sup>83</sup> For that matter, even if in 1868 the Synod had pursued fellowship with the Missouri Synod without having first spoken clearly against the Societies, the Missouri Synod would have hardly given us a hearing and rightly so. The Synod needed to make a clear confession to the Union out of love for the brethren there. They needed to make a clear confession out of love for people here. Everyone, on all sides, needed to know that man-made union is wrong and sinful. The Synod stated this already in 1867, even though they officially broke with the Union in 1868.

What was the role of President Bading in this? Some may say not much. Judging by his writings and actions as Synod president as well as on his collecting journey, it might seem that he was at least partially to blame. But, as was evident in 1863 when the Synod decided to found its seminary in Watertown, the president of the Synod held enormous influence. One Synod historian has stated that this was a power play on the part of Bading.<sup>84</sup> That may very well be. The influence of the Synod's president is great. So, just as Bading's actions may have led the Synod to a less confessional practice because of his influence when soliciting funds from the Societies, even so also when Bading realized his error and pointed the error out to the brethren, he led the Synod to confessional practice.

Was Bading the only leader in this change? Of course not. It has been noted that P.Koehler was a strong and clear confessional voice against the Union. One name that has not been oft mentioned in this paper is Adolph Hoenecke. He was at that time the premier theologian of the Synod. He was professor at the seminary. From this position he molded the

---

<sup>83</sup> Although the majority report at the 1867 convention was not accepted, the fact that it still was listed in the minutes of the convention show the importance that it held in the eyes of many. In fact, it may be concluded that the majority of the Synod agreed with that report, but wanted it noted, as it was in the minority report, that the Synod was grateful to the Societies.

<sup>84</sup> Classroom lectures of Dean Brenner, 2003.

future pastors of the Synod, giving them a firm confessional stand. Hoenecke also exerted considerable influence in his editorship of the *Gemeindeblatt*. He was given an official voice in the Synod and so proclaimed clearly what the truth was. Walther recognized Hoenecke's theological prowess and clear confessionalism especially in the years surrounding the break with the Union. In many ways Hoenecke was the theological equal if not superior of Walther. There were other men as well who helped lead the Synod to a clear confessional practice.

But, this writer would be remiss, if he failed to mention what Bading so clearly did in his sermon for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Synod in 1875 – God led the Synod to this conclusion. It is God the Holy Spirit who works wisdom and insight in the hearts of men. He did so in the heart of Johann Bading. He guided Bading in all wisdom and gave Bading the firm backbone he needed to break with the mission societies. Thanks be to God! And so, with Bading let it be said: It is

because of the great goodness and faithfulness of our God. Let this be then on our jubilee festival today and in all of our future praised and proclaimed by us highly and loudly. Yes, praise the Lord, o my soul, and forget not, what good he has done for you. The kindness of the Lord is the only reason we are not entirely lost; his mercy has no end, it is new every morning and his faithfulness is great. Therefore, I want to sing to the Lord and praise his holy name as long as I live.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Synod Proceedings, 1875, 11.

## Bibliography

Bading, Johann. *Erinnerung aus meinem persönlich, amtlichen und synodal Leben.* copied by Ralph Gehrke on June 8, 1953.

Fredrich, Edward C. The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, 1992.

Koehler, John Philip. The History of the Wisconsin Synod. Sentinel Printing Company, Sauk Rapids, 1981.

WELS Historical Institute Journal: vol 10, #2; vol 13, #2; vol 16, #1,2

Synodical Reports of the Wisconsin Synod – 1869-1875

## **Festival Sermon**

**Of the honored President Bading for the 25<sup>th</sup> year anniversary celebration of the**

**Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and other States**

**(Synodical Proceedings, 1875)**

Dear listeners! We read in Psalm 108: “My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing and make music with all my soul. Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples” (NIV). These are the praise words of King David: they express his desire to be able to praise the Lord as soon as possible for his grace and truth among the peoples. I can be sure, beloved, that these words are also spoken by us from our hearts. And why is this? Because our Synod today celebrates a jubilee, a day, about which we especially want to say: This is the day, which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be joyful in it.

On this jubilee day we remember the following matters. Twenty-five years ago three men came together with the intent to found a church body. The Lutheran confession should be the uniting tie in this body. What they founded, is the Evangelical Lutheran Synod from Wisconsin and other States. In a small and insignificant way this work began and survived difficult and dangerous times. Yet, it still exists to the present day. The founders of this work are no longer among us. The one, Pastor Wrede, went back to his homeland in the middle of his fifth year. Another, Pastor Weinmann, found his death in September 1858 in the surging of the *Austria* at sea. The third, Pastor Muelhaeuser, went in September 1867 to the joy of the Lord. Nevertheless, their work, our Synod, has remained. We rejoice about it, and do so properly, for if a work can last to its 25<sup>th</sup> year in our restless, drifting, fleeting time and in our rashly lived

land, then that is nothing so small, that we should not be joyful about it, when our synod has lived through a length of 25 years.

Yet, if we would have nothing further to say, than that our Synod is 25 years old, then, in this bare fact, we would scarcely have a valid reason for a jubilee, and much less would we have a reason to say: This is the day, which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be joyful in it. But, there is something, which especially strikes our souls. And that something is what the Lord has done for us and what we with thanks and praise must and ought recognize. What that is will become clear to us when consider this by following our text:

The basis of today's jubilee is this, namely that God's name is glorified by us. We see through this: 1) How we ought to rejoice in this with confident praise and 2) How we must rejoice in this with exclusive thanks to God.

If I first of all intend to show that we ought to proclaim with confident praise, "God's name is glorified by us," then it is not a good idea to point our eyes to outward, glossy, and passing facts. Yes, our Synod includes a gratifying number of pastors and congregations. But there is a Lutheran church body, which towers far over our synod in its greatness. We also can't say that what our Synod gave up in outward greatness and significance was replaced richly in inner content and spiritual significance. We are neither a gathering, which boasts in its praised name, nor has light illumined of theological scholarship, which our name has made to shine still further.

Just so little are we able to claim that in the past our Synod has had at the development of the church any distinguishable growth, or that we can offer up now in the visible life of the church a voice, which, even if not distinguished, is still received with high regard on all sides.

And even about the great, astounding works, which God has done at home or away, we still have nothing about which to boast. It is good that we have educational institutions, whose expansion, development, and achievement fill us with thanks and joy. However, we still here say with resignation that this is a work, which gives us a heavy and weighty importance before the church and the world.

If all this is not what has made God's name glorious with us, than what gives us the right to celebrate a jubilee day today? What is it? It is that, which David testified about in our text: God has made his name glorious over all through his Word. Now, that is something exceedingly great and majestic. God's greatness, glory and majesty indeed shine forth into the world through many things. The Scriptures say: the heavens praise his eternal honor. Sun, moon and stars in their vast array are purely speaking testimonies about the power and majesty of our God. The lightning, which flashes through the clouds, the thunder, which rolls over our heads, and the surging waves, which roar in the sea, point us all to the words of the psalmist: the voice of the Lord cuts as with flames of fire; the voice of the Lord goes over the waters, the God of glory thunders. But all of that doesn't measure up to the majesty, which beams forth from his Word. Look and see how the lightning shines, how the thunder rolls when he speaks in the word of his Law: I am the Lord your God; and when the same is said in conclusion: Cursed is anyone, who does not fulfill all the words of this law, and continues to do them. How frightful it is in the bones of the sinner, when God pronounces about all, who are from Adam's race, the judgment to damnation. Truly, that is majesty, before which all the world must be silent, before which everyone else is constrained to say: Lord, before you, no one is pure. If you reckoned sin, who could stand; yet you remain high, great, and holy, even if the entire world fell into just and eternal punishment.

Yet, all the more glorious and exceedingly comforting for us poor sinners is this, that God has sent his name into the world through the word of his Gospel, through the word, which there gives testimony about his divine love and mercy. This is the Bible passage that Dr. Luther considered so highly that he called it a Bible in a nutshell, his most dear *Cordial* and the best nourishment for his heart: For God has loved the world, so that he gave his only born Son, so that all, who believe in him, will not be lost, but have eternal life. Certainly comforted he has paraphrased the content of this verse in the beautiful song: *Nun freut euch liebe Christengemein'*.

Where this is now, where his law and gospel are preached, there God has made his name glorious, and has indeed made it glorious over all. There he is enthroned in his great majesty; there shines forth his damning holiness as much as his saving love; there he stands in his glory, as the God who is to be feared above everything, and also as the God who is to be longed for and desired above everything. He himself says: What is it, that smashes rock as a hammer, that penetrates the innards of man as a sword? What is it, that throws down man quivering in fear and horror before God and teaches the rebellious sinner's heart to recognize and to acknowledge the horrifying majesty of the holiness and righteousness of God? Is not that the word of his Law? And again, what is it, that makes the sinner's heart to such a one whose longing and desire is God, so that it speaks with David: After you, Lord, I long? What is it, that makes the hearts to such, which know outside of God no good and no joy, so that they cry out in the words of Asaph: Lord, if I only have you, then I ask nothing in heaven and earth; even if body and soul languish, yet you remain, God, at all times the comfort of my heart and my portion? And finally, what is it, which gives them a sense, in which they carry, deny and give up everything for his sake; in which they also go to death and set their confidence on him? Is it not the word of his Gospel? Rightly, yes indeed, rightly my dear ones we unanimously proclaim in the words of our text: God

has made his name glorious over all through his Word. And since we have this Word, and it is with us and among us, we speak it confidently and with joyful hearts: indeed with us God has made his name glorious over all. Since we are small and meaningless, and our greatness, power and our influence does not even attract any attention, we have in the possession of the Word of our God a glory, about which we can not rejoice enough, and about which we can not sing songs of joy often enough.

But, someone might say, does not all of Christendom have his Word? Does it not lay visibly before all eyes on each chancel and every altar; is not each sermon text taken from it, and do not all preachers base the sermon's proofs on it and not on his own expressions? Why should it be then only with us on this jubilee festival such a special reason for joy and jubilation? Now it is true, when these things are considered that all of Christendom has this Word, and yet, there is a powerful distinction between possessing and having the Word of God. When one glances at the contents, at the core, at the thoughts of God in his Word, can one properly say about a church, that they actually have the Word of God, when they deny that natural man is worthy of condemnation, and throw the only justifying truth under the carpet and teach righteousness by works?

Or can one give to the church the testimony that they have the entire Word of God in their possession, when they let reason be the master of Scripture, and set up against the clear Word that God wants that all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, a false and unhealthy doctrine of election and tear from the head of the Savior of the world the crown of the glory of his all encompassing love?



Or can one confess to a church that they have God's Word, when they, instead of letting God's Word have value as a power of God to salvation, denote the same as a dead letter, point the soul to their own fictional little finding and set confidence on human doctrine?

Such churches are never in undiminished possession of the Word of God, even if the Bible is in their mouth.

On the other hand it is that with that church, who like humble Magdeline sits at the feet of the Lord, who lets stand the Word of God as it runs and speaks both against reason and natural experience: It stands written. One such church among all visible church communities on earth is our valued Lutheran church. Through God's grace we belong to it, and we subscribe to the confessional writings, which our fathers laid down and confessed the contents of Scripture at one time with all simplemindedness and unreservedness. Accordingly, with that same correctness, with which the orthodox Lutheran church ought to boast, that they have God's Word rightly and entirely, we proclaim before all other churches that we are an orthodox Lutheran synod. If one has the desire because of this to heap up on us the old rebuke against the self-aggrandizement of the Lutherans, let him do so. If other church communities want to bring their great works, their high holiness to the plain, grumble about us as spiritually dead, loveless or fossilized symbolicists, then even that remains to them unbecoming. We speak with jubilee and with praise: God has made his name glorious over all through his Word.

Yes, and there is still more when we see how other church communities of our name, who perhaps are even older than we, grope about as much on this side as on that side yet in all kinds of fog and lack the precious Christian treasure, the pure doctrine from God's Word. Then we must call it out with a loud voice, that the Word, "tell them to come in," applies to us in

varying relationships, since the faithful God has urged us with much pressure and pushing in earnestness and in love and has brought us in to stand unreservedly on the basis of the pure Lutheran confession. For this reason, the highest good of every true Christian is for us today a right and proper jubilee, and not only the joy in it, but also the praise and the jubilee about it is for us a jubilee joy.

However, with that we come now to the second part of our observance, namely, that we must praise and rejoice with exclusive thanks to God, that his name is also with us glorious over all. Our text says further: "I will pray to your holy temple and thank your name for your goodness and faithfulness." So beloved, must we also say, for from where does it come to it, that God's name is glorious with us? Is it something acquired by us? No, it is something given to us by God. God has made his name over all glorious.

How it stands with us and how little the honor is due to us, is made clear when we take a look out into the church of our time, on the whole and a look in particular.

What kind of pressure is there, which day to day goes throughout the church? It is the pressure to unify and to merge together. The task of our times is, so one says, that everything, which is called Christian, merge together, so that Christendom may stand as one overwhelming power against the hosts of unbelievers. One should forget, if one calls out to us, the unimportant differences, which separated us from one another; one does not withhold the hand of brotherhood to him who deviates from us even a little in unimportant doctrines; one should let Christianity be what it should be, a great kingdom of love, a great big house of the family, in which brother and sister live harmoniously with one another, indeed formed individually, but yet derived from one

seed. If all this happens, then one will see into what kind of awe-inspiring power the church of Christ will grow.

Or just look at the intimate circle of that church, which calls itself Lutheran. What kind of pressure is there, which blows against us at least in part out of this circle? It is a pressure, whose direction pulls many to Rome. One glances with sighs at the outward, so stately structure of the Roman Church. One desires a church composition with a firm and strong regiment, with a priesthood, which walks in its divine dignity, in its holy right, and in its all-dependant importance into the foreground. This should help many to the thought, namely this, that the certified means of salvation, recorded in the Word of God and by the confession must be to the shame of the Lutheran church, because the true doctrine of the Scripture and of our confession must be the true ruin of the proper position of our church and of the precipitous way, which leads to the domination of the human masses, to the despising of true worthiness of the preaching office and to the eventual dissolution of the church. What do we have to say, beloved, in view of these two directions?

First of all we must confess that it is above all things to be lamented, that it could be successful for the devil to produce a so unsalutary spook in the church of Christ. A man of God erupts in hindsight at the deformity and the inner strife of the church in the lament: Where is now your beauty, you lovely bride of the Lord? How deeply you have fallen, you city of our God! How devastated you stand there, you valued Zion! Love weeps and mourns for you! It is as if the psalmist foresaw already 1000 years ago the shameful situation of the church, when he writes about the vineyard of God: Why have you then smashed your fence, so that everything tears at it that goes past it? The wild boars have rumbled it and the wild beasts have ruined it. The watchers themselves have gone over in part into this unhealthy work and the congregations

have followed after in the works of desolation. It is no wonder, when the church in its brokenness has become a sneer before the unbelieving world.

However, we must also explain after this, that it is by all means an enticing statement contrary to that position, when the Zeitgeist in the church says: Let the separating walls fall, let the people gather simply around the Bible, so that there may be, as Christ said, one shepherd and one heard and dazzle Satan and his hosts. And we will want to acknowledge it now, that the same thoughts also pervaded our flesh. Do not the years in our past history testify to that to a greater or lesser degree? Have not we, pastors and congregations, bring to a great extent this kind of spirit with us out of the old homeland? Was not our action often times in that manner, that others agreed with the expression: In Wisconsin one endures it, that one connects an entirely different sense in an expression of God's Word, that one places love higher than faith, that one tolerates next to the truth also such tendencies which do not harmonize with truth? Even the previously mentioned romanizing tendency was not to us entirely foreign. But God be praised! All of this belongs to the past time of our synodical life. We out boast and praise: The old is gone, everything has become new. Through what has it become new? Not through our work, but through God's goodness and faithfulness; we have only the Lord to whom to owe it. He has urged us and pressed us through difficult inner strife, until the perverse spirit in us was annihilated, the false chains broken and the true unity of the Spirit was produced, namely the unity, which stands in the true Word and in the true confession, as the Lutheran church has possessed it and because of which our fathers have shed blood and tears. This is the unity, which the Lord wants, while he has never at all wanted the unity, which instigates unionism. This is the unity for which we are available only through the Lord's goodness and faithfulness. For this reason we have renounced all unionism, we have made a front against lodges, we have quashed

every chancel and Lord's Supper fellowship with other faiths, and call now in word and writing to all those who desire unity: Throw away what separates you from the Lutheran confession, receive the saving doctrine of the Lutheran church. There is the unity, which is God pleasing and rightly binds hearts. If one wants to complain about it, to slander us as a quarrelsome, loveless, and heartless people; if one wants to apply to us what one so often hears: the Lutherans are arrogant; when all want unity, they are always arrogant since they stop every God-blessed work of unity for their hairsplitting doctrinal distinction and stand with tenacity on the dot on the iota, so that one must get riled up: we hold contrary to them: Paper walls of human thought you can let fall everywhere without loss and a burdening of conscience. With us it is otherwise. Here stand discernable doctrines founded on the word 'it stands recorded,' which God himself has established as iron walls; over this one can not go away without severely sinning against God's Word. Over this we don't even want to go, and the fact that we don't even want that is, to say it again, because of the great goodness and faithfulness of our God. Let this be then on our jubilee festival today and all of our future praised and proclaimed by us highly and loudly. Yes, praise the Lord, o my soul, and forget not, what good he has done for you. The kindness of the Lord is the only reason we are not entirely lost; his mercy has no end, it is new every morning and his faithfulness is great. Therefore, I want to sing to the Lord and praise his holy name as long as I live. Amen.