

THE MISSION ZEAL OF PRESIDENT JOHN BRENNER

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Pastor John Brenner was president of the Wisconsin Synod from 1933 - 1953. He is remembered as a good leader and administrator, a confessionally solid and forceful president. All of these things are true, as history shows. But he is also labeled as lacking in mission zeal, not having passion for missions and as a result, it is said, that during his years as the synod president, our synod wasn't mission minded and that no evangelism was done. It is always easy to look back and say what should have been done and to label the past. But it is our responsibility as the historians of our own synod's history to make sure that these labels are correct and that our history is presented accurately.

When we look at the life of John Brenner and we study what he wrote, there can be no doubt that the Lord gave him a passion for missions. This will be the thesis of this paper: President John Brenner had true mission zeal.

How long, do you think, could Peter live next door to a person or associate with him without telling him the wonders of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and exhorting him to accept the Savior in faith . . . How would Peter vote on the appropriations for our institutions and missions? Would he favor retrenching on account of lack of funds, he, a man who will not be silenced even by the threat of death? Indeed, he would not. 'We cannot but speak,' he would declare, every obstacle simply must be overcome and every sacrifice made in order that the preaching of the Gospel may not be curtailed. 'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.' Lord, grant us this spirit, for Jesus sake.

These words of Pastor Brenner appeared in the Northwestern Lutheran

¹The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 14, #14 (July 10, 1927), p. 212-213.

and are a good example of his attitude toward missions. Brenner was one of the pioneers of the English language in our synod. So logically he was one of the original editors of the synod's English church paper. During his years as one of the contributing editors of the Northwestern Lutheran, we can see in his articles his enthusiasm for missions. In fact, Brenner's mission zeal could be shown simply by listing the articles he wrote about missions without any additional comment. In his articles, Pastor Brenner not only wrote articles showing the reason for missions, he also made use of the articles in other church papers of that time. He often quoted them and then showed where they were wrong. But he also gave them credit when they deserved it, as in this quote on missions from the Lutheran Standard. "The call for increased activity in winning people for Christ is good and in place. that's the great work of the Church, to evangelize the nations. The Lutheran church will need to put forth greater efforts . . . going out into the highways and byways of the world."² Brenner said that he had nothing to add.

Pastor Brenner understood that the Reformation brought the blessing of the pure Gospel. He also realized the duty that comes with knowing the Gospel. Commenting on the upcoming Jubilee offering, part of which would go to the Church Extension Fund, Brenner said,

To contribute to the Church Extension Fund means to bring to others the blessings of the Reformation and to keep them under its influence. As great as our heritage, is also the responsibility that rests upon us. We have what others have not. We can do for our fellow men what others are not able to do . . . We must carry on missionary work among the heathen at home and abroad. We must follow our members who remove from the

²The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 4, #3 (Feb. 7, 1917), p. 17

vicinity of their church to places in which Lutheran preaching is not yet heard. We must reach out for the unchurched.

The Lutheran Church, Brenner believed, could not keep quiet. It had to preach the Gospel as the Bible proclaimed and the Lutheran Church taught.

According to our conception of our ministry, we are not called to set ourselves right with the general public. We are witnesses of Christ. The Gospel we preach is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. To all others it is a stumbling block and foolishness. When we preach we want to turn men from unbelief to faith, from error to the truth. In this sense we consider all our preaching evangelistic preaching. And, as we with our whole heart believe that our Lutheran church confesses God's pure Truth where other churches err, it might, rightly understood, be said that we preach to make all men Lutherans.

Note that pastor Brenner says "rightly understood." He would not want to be understood as saying that we are out to do mission work to enlarge our church membership. He did not like that kind of thinking and he often spoke against it as he did in an article in the February 8, 1925 issue of The Northwestern Lutheran. "There is a vast difference between a burning zeal for souls and the enthusiastic desire for Church expansion."⁵

Although Pastor Brenner did not think that the right reason for mission work was to increase the membership of the Lutheran Church, he knew the benefits of being a Lutheran and also tried to make others realize the blessings that their church had for others. He also wanted people

³The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 4, #20 (Oct. 21, 1917), p. 153

⁴IBID, Vol. 12, #20 (Oct. 4, 1925), p. 309

⁵IBID, Vol 12, #3 (Feb. 8, 1925), p. 37

to tell others about their church. Rev. Brenner used this illustration to show Wisconsin Synod Lutherans that they should speak to others about their church. He said that there was a woman who saw a poor man on crutches. She gave him a pamphlet telling him about her church, a church that specialized in physical healing. "Her theology was bad," Brenner wrote, "But her example was good. Here was a woman whose mind was trained to see the needs of her fellowmen; who had full confidence in the ability of her church to help him, and who made it her business to offer this help to a sufferer who was a total stranger to her. The spiritually lame, blind, deaf and dumb are ever with us. Let us follow the example of this woman and ever be alert about our Father's business"⁶ No opportunity should be lost in spreading the Gospel as Brenner says again in an article on Ephesians 5:16 entitled "Redeeming the Time." "Nothing should be permitted to distract our attention or to weaken us in our labors. Every opportunity for our spiritual growth and for the saving of others should be quickly discerned and eagerly made use of. There should be no hesitation and no neglect."⁷

These excerpts from Brenner's articles in The Northwestern Lutheran do not show a man who doesn't care about spreading the Gospel. They do show a man who understands the Gospel and the importance and power of the Gospel both at home and abroad.

John Brenner brought this mission mindedness with him to the synod presidency. Two quotes from the President's Address at the synod conventions will show this same concern.

⁶The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 3. #14 (July 21, 1916), p. 107.

⁷IBID, Vol. 8. #24 (Nov. 24, 1921), p. 369.

If we ourselves employ our time in hearing and teaching the word at home, we can not be neglectful of the souls of others. This is still time of grace for the entire world and 'God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.'⁸

They (redeemed sinners) are the fruitage of His bitter sufferings and death, His very own, bought with the price of His blood. They are precious to Him and it is His burning desire that every one of them be brought to him in a living faith to find life in Him. And it is for this work of gathering the harvest that the Lord sends His believers out into the world.⁹

The synod expanded its missions during the presidency of John Brenner. The mission fields of Arizona and Colorado were expanded even further with results that can be seen in these states today. In 1943 the Mission Board report to the synod was again encouraging. "If we two years ago were able to say, 'Our Synod has expanded to an extent probably not equaled in our Synod within a like period of time: 27 new missions were begun,' we may use the same words again this year but replacing the 27 with 44.¹⁰ Another evidence of the growth of mission concern of our Synod during those years is found in the synodical budgets. The percentage of the budget spent on missions when Brenner took office was 42%. During the twenty years that followed, the budget for missions never dropped below 42%, in fact, it averaged 48% with a high of 56%. This compares favorably with the percentage of the total budget today that goes for mission, 41.5%

When we study what Pastor John Brenner says about missions, we

⁹ Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, August 3-9, 1949, p.12.

¹⁰ Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, August 4-11, 1943, p. 11.

¹¹ Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, August 4-11, 1943, p. 16.

not only see that he was mission minded and that he urged others to be interested in missions, we also find his ideas of how to carry out mission work.

The most effective way of spreading the Gospel is the church work familiar to everyone of us; public preaching, missionary work by pastor and people, faithful pastoral work (Seelsorge), brotherly admonition, Christian Day School, Christian colleges, seminaries and high schools, missions home and foreign, church papers etc.¹¹

Brenner felt that by preaching the Gospel effectively, by thoroughly teaching people the Word of God, simply by the pastor working hard in his calling, the people would then take care of mission work as a fruit of their faith. He brings this out clearly in his address to the 1947 convention of the synod.

Behind the whole work of our Synod stands the faith and love of the Christians of our congregations. When their faith and love are strong, the work of the Lord will prosper, when they grow weak it languishes. . . As the individual member grows up into Christ, the head, the Church progresses and gains strength for her labors and her battles, for His gracious power works mightily in the heart of each believer, confirming him in the faith, enriching him with the gifts of the Spirit and making him fruitful in good works. Our Synod will be able to meet its call to preach the Gospel to all men and to overcome all opposition to its work according to the measure in which our members are being built up in Christ. Let us not slight this part of our work. No one will deny that it is sorely needed. And it requires no additional man power, no new scientific methods and means. Simple sound preaching and teaching of the Word, faithful pastoral work, and the mutual brother-service for which the Spirit equips every¹² Christian, will achieve the gracious purpose of our God.

Brenner advocated simply that faithful instruction in the Word makes

¹¹The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 17, #22 (Oct. 26, 1930), p. 339.

¹²Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, August 6-12, 1947, p. 10, 11.

people mission minded.

J. P. Koehler in his history of the Wisconsin Synod, said that the mission of our church was to do intensive rather than extensive work, to be satisfied with the mission of maintaining our new schools for a while. This is viewed as being anti-mission and President Brenner has been associated with Koehler's idea. I do not know what Koehler's view on mission work was, however, John Brenner's idea of intensive work was not anti-mission but pro-mission. He believed intensive work would produce the zeal for missions as he says in 1925.

(The work of the church) is spiritual work that can not be forced by human enthusiasm. It is inward work whose growth can never be truly gauged by external evidences. Our duty calls for concentrative and intensive work rather than for efforts at expansion. And the faithful and prayerful performance of our immediate duties in our churches, schools, synods and missions will, under the blessing of God, effect the true inward growth of the church and also the expansion of our work.¹³

Later on in the same year, Pastor Brenner expanded on this thought. on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the synod, he looks to the future and talks about the results of concentrated and intensive work.

. . . first inward growth and consecrated service in the 'little things' that are so frequently slighted. In this manner God prepares us for greater service, giving us ears alert to his call, eyes keen to see new opportunities to serve him, wisdom that holds fast to His purposes and that employs the right means, hearts filled with devotion to him and love toward the brethren, hands ready to labor and open to give. Then if the Lord will grant another awakening in our day and a great ingathering of souls into His kingdom, He will graciously employ our synod in this service; if not, He will preserve His kingdom among us.¹⁴

¹³The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 12 #3 (Feb. 8, 1925), p. 38.

¹⁴IBID, Vol 12 #23, (Nov. 15, 1925), p. 358.

Now 55 years later, we see that through the intensive study of God's Word that our synod has enjoyed, God has truly 'preserved His kingdom among us' in spite of the struggle with our former sister synod of Missouri. God has also seen fit to use our synod to gather a great number of souls. This is the result of buliding on a firm foundation. That is why Pastor Brenner writes as he does when explaining Luke 8:39. There is a proper order in which things are done, "To preach the Gospel away from home is right, to neglect to preach it at home is wrong . . . our first duty is toward those in our homes and in our surroundings. Let us be witnesses at home. He who shows his own house how great things God has done unto him will not fail to persist in spreading the good tidings abroad.¹⁵

Because Brenner felt strongly about this, he opposed some of the modern methods of evangelism which placed less emphasis on the power of the Gospel and more emphasis on men and methods. In the first year that the Northwestern Lutheran was published, Brenner wrote about one kind of evangelism then being used, the revival.

An evangelism which attempts to build the church by periodic revivals . . . is not the product of sound teaching and sober Christianity. Religion is not hysterics. We can not persuade, humor, cajole, or hypnotize a man into faith in Christ. Though God does indeed make use of the various gifts with which He has endowed men for the good of the church, the power to convert a soul to Christ is God's alone . . . We hold that this work of planting and watering can be done more effectively by the pastor who is in touch with the members of his congregation than by a stranger. Let such evangelism end, but give us more real evangelism: change the lecture platforms into pulpits from which the Law and Gospel are regularly preached in their purity; let their be more parochial schools, in which the Gospel holds sway;

¹⁵The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 8 #21 (Oct. 16, 1921), p. 322.

let the work of preparing children for confirmation be done with care; let the pastor visit the members of his flock and apply the words to the needs of the individual. There should be more evangelism in the home and more evangelistic work by all church members. We have them from the various walks of life and their influence extends to men whom the pastor can not reach. Let them be alive to their duty to tell others of the Savior . . . The masses will be reached and Christ's work will be done quietly and effectively.¹⁶

On somewhat the same subject, Brenner cites an article in which a Presbyterian minister spoke against commercial evangelism in his church body. This Presbyterian abhorred the highly organized business procedure used in a big revival where the preacher is left in the background. Pastor Brenner adds these comments.

Here is where the trouble lies. Let the church be the house of God all the year round, the place where the pure food and the refreshing water of the Gospel are offered to the starving souls of men. Let every preacher recognize and be faithful to his mission (2 Cor. 5:20,21) where the pure Gospel is preached from the pulpit; where it is constantly applied to the spiritual needs of the members; there will be life constantly growing life. Away with all 'secularism' in the church, let the life giving and life sustaining Gospel come to the front and remain there - and we will need no revivals, or rather, there will be daily revivals by His power.¹⁷

When less stress is placed on the power of the Gospel and more is placed on methods, people are no longer satisfied with the simple preaching of the Gospel and letting God give the increase. They are overly concerned with results. This attitude and its consequences, Brenner believed, are not in the best interest of the Gospel. He spoke about some of the ill effects of this attitude.

There is much talk of doing big things and accomplishing great and tangible results not only in matters of church

¹⁶The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 1 #8 (April 21, 1914), p. 57, 58.

¹⁷IBID, Vol. 3, #23 (Dec. 7, 1916), p. 183.

apparatus, but also in increasing the membership of the church. We have heard the slogan, so and so many new members in this year, or so many years. This spirit may show itself in the work of the mission boards when they plan strategically rather than according to the evident needs of souls. Yes, church and Sunday School attendance, and even the study of the Bible may be driven in the same way. Forced growth. Then high pressure methods become necessary. 'Go-getters; live wires'; movements planned on a large scale; more salaried executives; attempts to gain concerted action; inspirational meetings, perhaps with a 'sing'; the overurging of prospects; attractions and innovations of all sorts, a hectic activity; the overstressing of publicity work; undue attention to the individual that flatters his vanity, and so forth.¹⁸

By saying that Pastor Brenner didn't like some of the new evangelism methods, the impression might be given that he wasn't mission minded. But as has already been shown, Brenner did have enthusiasm for missions. And he practiced what he preached. While serving his own church, Pastor Brenner also for a time served the Slovaks in south Milwaukee. In order to serve them well, Brenner learned the Slovak language. Another example of Brenner's mission zeal can be seen in the fact that at the age of 84 he was still canvassing the neighborhood. Just because he didn't approve of some methods does not reflect an anti-mission attitude. It actually proves just the opposite. He was so concerned about these new methods of evangelism actually hurting the mission of the church that he spoke out. Pastor Brenner can defend himself better than I can defend him against charges that his opposition to some methods show an anti-mission spirit. I quote an article at length that Brenner wrote in order that he might show how opposition to new methods in no way indicates a lack of concern for missions. An article in the Lutheran Herald chided those who don't use the modern methods. Here is Brenner's reply.

¹⁸The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 12, # 13 (Feb. 8, 1925), p. 37.

We observe in these remarks a note of impatience with, and disparagement of, the preachers and congregations who are slow to adopt new methods and who, therefore, refuse to take part in an organized movement of this kind. There is a faint insinuation that such pastors and congregations lack the true missionary spirit and that their spiritual life is in a state of stagnation. We consider this poor judgement. Shallow waters are easily stirred into a semblance of vigorous life, while quiet denotes depth and effective, though hidden, power at least as often as it indicates stagnancy. The ripples on the shallow pond soon subside, but the mighty stream goes on quietly and almost unnoticeably applying its hidden power to the service of humanity. There is, we readily admit, an element of truth in the remarks of the writers quoted above. We are to preach the Gospel to every creature. It is, indeed, not sufficient that we supply those within our churches with the Word of Life. Nor can we content ourselves with saying, our doors are open; let them come in. We are to go out after the unchurched. True, also, we all must plead guilty of a deplorable lack of missionary zeal. But can we truthfully say that this zeal is patently lacking to a special degree where a pastor and his people do not employ the so-called modern methods, bulletin boards with striking sentence sermons, sermonettes in the public press, store window Lenten displays, billboard posters, and the like, while it is evidently present where these means and methods are used to the fullest extent? That there should be a revival of the missionary spirit among us and a more intensive activity in soul-saving - on this we are agreed. Nor is there any dispute as to the means by which we are to make living witnesses and by which we are to save the lost; we all acknowledge the Gospel the only means of salvation and of spiritual upbuilding. As to the methods of preaching the Gospel, however, two honest, serious-minded Christians may disagree. There are those who are willing to go to the extremes in applying all the modern methods available. And they are very forceful and active, yes, aggressive, almost to the point of impatience with those who do not follow. And then there are the conservatives among us who deny the necessity of employing such methods. Who doubt their efficacy and, perhaps, also their expediency for the church. They ask: Will an organized high-pressure campaign of this kind really create in our people a zeal for missions, or even stimulate in a wholesome manner the zeal that already exists in their hearts? Will such a campaign actually accomplish what is expected of it in bringing the stranger to our doors as an inquirer who is ready to learn the truth from our lips? Is there not always a danger that in such a strained effort the element of agitation will creep in to weaken the spirit of true witnesship? No, let the advocates of these new methods not grow impatient with those who are slow to follow or may even refuse to follow at all. Their minds and their hearts are not necessarily stagnant. They may be thinking and thinking deeply and prayerfully.¹⁹

¹⁹The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 14, #4 (Feb. 20, 1927), p. 52, 53.

Throughout the years, Pastor John Brenner continually showed a deep concern for missions. His writings on the subject always had as their main concern the effective proclamation of the Gospel. The words of Pastor Brenner on this subject, some of which I have quoted, easily prove his devotion to the pure Gospel and his eagerness to permeate the world with that Gospel.

The question arises now that if John Brenner was as mission minded as his writings show, why is he said to have lacked mission zeal? There are basically three areas of criticism. The first is that he didn't integrate the local blacks into his congregation. Although this is true, you have to remember the time at which he lived. None of the Wisconsin Synod or Missouri Synod churches in Milwaukee at that time were integrated. The churches needed to do some growing, along with society in this area. The thinking in our synod at the time was to have a church for the blacks, St. Philip was that church. Pastor Brenner kept the parochial school going during his years of service at his congregation and trained the area blacks in the Lutheran faith who then joined St. Philip.

The second area of criticism is aimed at the lack of expansion to different areas of the country. Again this doesn't show a lack of mission zeal on the part of Pastor Brenner or the synod. The synod did expand as has already been shown. We didn't go into many parts of the country because of our gentleman's agreement with our Synodical Conference sister, the Missouri Synod. Where they had churches there was no need for us to go. The important thing was that the pure Gospel was being preached in an area and not which of the churches in our fellowship did the work. This is the point Brenner makes in an article which

answers the question why didn't we start churches in some of the areas where there were already Synodical Conference churches.

If a church of the fellowship is founded in a city or territory whose spiritual wants are already being supplied and can be efficiently supplied by the church already at work there, it immediately becomes a case of competition and not of cooperation and consecration . . . the Church would lose rather than gain. There would be a waste of man power and of funds.²⁰

Another reason for the expansion of the synod being less than some people today think it should have been was that there was a lack of funds. Brenner was elected president of the synod in hopes of pulling the synod out of the financial hole it found itself. The synodical debt when Brenner took office was about \$700,000.00. This may not seem to be a staggering debt for today, but at that time the debt amounted to the total budget of the Wisconsin Synod for four years. The reason the synod was in debt was not, as some think, because of the cost of the building of the new seminary in 1928 at Thiensville. All of the money for the new seminary had been collected by contributions outside of the budget of the Synod, before the seminary was built. The reason for the synod debt was just a matter of spending more than we took in.

Pastor Brenner was elected president in 1933, during the depression, which, of course, was a difficult time to try to crawl out of debt. Brenner didn't feel it was good stewardship to go into debt except in an emergency. He was determined to use only the amount of money that the Gospel moved people to give. The synod was paying for the lack of stewardship from the years before and he didn't want to saddle future generations with a debt that wasn't theirs. He makes this clear in

²⁰The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 14, #12 (June 12, 1927), p.181.

a Presidential Address to the synod.

The Church Extension Fund is depleted and commitments have been made that exceed the income by far . . . the budgetary contributions are not flowing in as freely as they did in the past years. We must not let this situation discourage us . . . to borrow money in a real emergency, for instance, to replace a needed building that has been destroyed by fire, is an act of vision and of faith; but to permit a shortage in the current treasury to build up a debt that increases from year to year, is nothing but poor stewardship which the Lord does not approve. We know the deadening effect of such a debt from our experience in the past, and we surely do not want to see those who come after us compelled to bear the costs of the work the Lord expects us to do.²¹

Even though he wouldn't spend more than the synod had, Brenner always tried to get people to give more money to missions. He felt that we hadn't done all that we could in this. He says,

We of the Wisconsin Synod know that our Board of Missions has been warned to proceed very slowly in the founding of new missions. Why? Not because there are no fields; not because the enemy employs force to prevent us from preaching the Gospel and silences the witnesses by killing them; no, simply for the reason that we Christians do not contribute enough money to make the energetic prosecution of our work possible. Others die for the cause, and we hesitate to make a real financial sacrifice for it.²²

Brenner supported missions. He also knew that we must have the money. If we go into debt we just cripple the mission work of those that come later.

The third reason Brenner is criticized is because he wasn't in favor of starting an African mission. It is true that Brenner didn't want to start an African mission but the reason was not that Brenner wasn't interested in missions. He was opposed to the project for practical reasons.

One concern that Brenner had we have already mentioned, Had the members of the synod been moved to give enough money for the project?

²¹ Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1949, p. 15,16.

²² The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 17, #23 (Nov. 9, 1930), p. 355.

The budget answered "No." So at the 1949 convention Brenner said, "Wisdom demands that we do not spread our work so far that it necessarily grows thin and cracks in spots. We must concentrate on that which lies within our limitations and use our man-power and finances as effectively as possible."²³ Again, this doesn't mean Brenner was against missions. In the Presidents Address from the preceding convention in 1947 President Brenner encouraged continued effort in the area of missions.

We try to help our missions and institutions solve their many problems and endeavor to reach as many souls as possible with the man power and the means that are available to us. That there is a crying need for this work, particularly also in our days, does not even have to be stated. So many fields open to us, so many souls in dire spiritual want, and the Lord has entrusted them to our care. Surely this is not the time to grow²⁴ indifferent, weary or discouraged; we dare not relax our efforts.

Pastor Brenner also realized that the inner city was changing and that some of our larger churches were finding it harder to raise money. He also felt that we should never send only one missionary into a field but at least two. This view is still held today but it adds to the over all cost of the mission. Brenner also believed that when we send these missionaries out, they are our responsibility and we better be sure that we can support them.

Another practical reason for oppositon to the African mission was that the Synodical Conference already had a mission in Nigeria. This mission was supported by the Wisconsin Synod. We provided about 15% of the budget for the Nigerian mission. This in itself doesn't seem like too compelling of a reason not to start a mission in northern

²³ Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, Aug. 3-9, 1949, p.16.

²⁴ IBID, Aug 6-12, 1947, p. 10.

Rhodesia. Just remember that this is the time when we are having serious difficulties with the Missouri Synod. A break with Missouri was a possibility. If our synod would itself split over the severance of relations with Missouri, would we have enough people left to support a mission in Africa. If our synod remained intact after a split with Missouri the possibility was there that we might well inherit the Synodical Conference Nigerian mission. After all, Rev. Schweppe of the Wisconsin Synod was the president of the seminary there. If that happened we would be required to take on the full responsibility of financing that mission. This would make another mission even harder to take care of.

A third practical reason for opposition to the African mission was that there had not been enough preliminary work done. President Brenner was a man who would not support any project whether it was a new mission, school or anything else unless every aspect had been thoroughly studied. In the case of the African mission this involved investigating other possible sights for a mission. The synod had given instructions to study not only Africa, but also two places in the Orient and a certain island in the South Pacific. These areas were not studied as thoroughly. Finally Brenner felt that we should have given Japan priority. After the Committee on Northern Rhodesia called Pastor Habben from the Nebraska District to be our missionary in Africa, President Brenner wrote a letter to the President of the Nebraska District, I. P. Frey, in which this feeling about Japan comes out.

(The Committee on Northern Rhodesia) has seen fit to carry out at least part of its commission by the Synod, notwithstanding the fact that I begged them to postpone calling till the convention would have the opportunity to decide between Rhodesia and Japan, where we are, that is my view, already committed.²⁵

²⁵Letter to I. P. Frey, Denver, Colorado, March 19, 1953, Synod Archives.

The synod went ahead with the African mission and when they did President Brenner supported that mission. Professor Carl Lawrenz remembers that at a Synodical Council meeting he attended, the African mission was discussed. It seems that it needed more money because their vehicle had broken down. Most of the men felt that the mission was now costing us too much money and we should get out. A motion was made to that effect and seconded. It would have been easy for President Brenner to agree, but, according to Professor Lawrenz, President Brenner stood up and said something to this effect, 'We are not disorderly. The Synod voted, although it was against my will, to go into Africa. We can not pull out now,' That ended the discussion and money was sent to the African mission.

The life and words of Pastor John Brenner show a man who was a good leader and administrator, a confessionally solid and forceful president and a man who had true mission zeal.

As historians of the Wisconsin Synod who know the enthusiasm for missions that Pastor John Brenner had, we can better understand our synod and its recent past. As members of the Wisconsin Synod we don't have to be ashamed of our past and can thank God for leaders concerned about the Gospel and its spread. As pastors of the Wisconsin Synod we can renew our efforts to intensely preach the Gospel to our people and increase everyones zeal for missions encouraged by the life and words of Pastor John Brenner, who still reminds us today to be interested in missions.

Are we interested in missions? We should be. We are if we are not basely ungrateful, for we are the products of missionary work and are today enjoying its' blessings in our church and school. . . Are we interested in missions? We rejoice in being saved from

the devil; we hate this foe of God and foe of man. His work on earth is an abomination to us. Can we remain then uninterested when we see him devouring day after day untold numbers of victims? Must we not, impelled by the hatred of the evil one and of evil, take up battle with him and fight unceasingly to save man from his power. That is what we are doing when we carry on missions. Do our missions seem to cost too much, do we complain of the 'burdens' we are compelled to bear? Are we afraid we might impoverish ourselves by too liberal giving? . . . If we are not interested in missions, if we grumble and murmur whenever our God again appeals to us for His kingdom, are we really serving God? The alternative is, let there be no doubt about it, serving mammon.²⁸

²⁶The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 15, #20 (Sept. 30, 1928), p. 309.

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