

"FOREIGN" MISSION BEGINNINGS IN THE WELS AND THE LCMS

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Today, there are quite a number of foreign mission fields that have received the gospel message. Even among the Lutheran Church there is a concentrated effort to reach out among the heathen nations. But it wasn't always this way. What did it take to get the first "foreign" missions going? Specifically, what did it take to get missions started among the two prominent members of the Synodical Conference - Wisconsin and Missouri? How did these missions get started? Who were the leading pioneers in this outreach ministry? What were the early sentiments regarding such outreach? The purpose of this paper is to briefly outline some important facts about the beginnings of "foreign" mission work by the Missouri and the Wisconsin synods and to point out similarities and comparable differences that might be of service to future "foreign" mission work.

The reason I have chosen to put the word foreign in quotation marks is because the word foreign as it is used today in connection with present mission work, at least in our synod, denotes such work done overseas, while the beginnings of mission work to a "foreign" group of people started right here in the United States. Both of the biggies in the Synodical Conference at first it seems considered any work done outside of the white race a "foreign" field and was met with some reserve. And in keeping with the character and the racial mind set of the times this appears to those of us looking in hindsight justifiable.

At the outset such "foreign" mission work had its leaders and go-getters. By the late 1800's mission work among the Apaches had already ^{been} begun by the Wisconsin Synod. During the presidency of Grant the federal government itself had adopted a much kindlier policy towards the Indians by striving to educate them and make farmers among them, which would make Christian mission work among them the next logical step.1 The idea of mission work among the Indians also seemed

appealing to the Wisconsin Synod. J.P. Koehler writes, "The fathers of Synod from the German mission houses, who had been wont to send their mission offerings back to their home societies, in the later years mainly to Hermannsburg, now began to feel that the Indians have a closer call on us, and at the earliest opportunity took action.² The year 1876 is a big year in this regard because it is the year that this mission project was undertaken. It is also quite interesting that on this same date the Missouri Synod undertook their work among the Negroes, although it was a joint venture of the Synodical Conference.

It was in 1876 that Pastor Drewes, a former mission inspector at Hermannsburg, came to America to work among the Indians. He was a four-year veteran of Indian missions for the Iowa Synod.³ J.P. Koehler tells the story, "It was decided to subsidize Drewes with \$500 annually, so he could acquaint himself with the Indian situation along the pacific railroad and incidentally do mission work among the scattered Germans. The customary contribution to Hermannsburg, which was financially well-provided, was now to go to this American mission.⁴ When news reached Wisconsin that Drewes had reached California to do mission work there, the Apache mission was temporarily dropped in 1877.

It was not long after this that the desire and the impetus for mission work among the Apache Indians was again formally addressed by the Wisconsin Synod. Again we quote Koehler, "The efforts in behalf of Indian mission were revived in 1883, with the appointment by Bading upon synodical resolution of a committee of five (Pastors Brenner, Ph. Koehler, J. Brockmann, Dowidat, and Dammann) 'that was to look over the existing mission societies for one of the true faith and successfully operating and lend it our support.' This commission reported the following year that none of the Indian missions were in

full unity of faith and doctrine with Synod."5 This committee was then instructed to look for men who were willing to devote themselves to this mission work and to be trained for such mission work.

By 1889 Wisconsin had already enlisted three men to devote themselves to this work among the Apaches. The three were J. Flocher, G. Adascheck, and P. Mayerhoff, a junior at the college who volunteered for the work. When the Michigan and Minnesota Synods united with the Wisconsin Synod in 1892, one of the tasks assigned to the federation was missions. "The 1892 constitution stipulated: 'All missions are under the direction and supervision of the federation which is to elect for this purpose a superintendant and which is to allocate men and monies available for this purpose. Home missions is at the present the assignment of the district synods. World missions on the other hand should be the province of the federation.'"6

In 1892 the Wisconsin Synod was ready to send out missionaries to this "foreign" field. The two men that were sent out were Th. Hartwig of Helenville and O. Koch of Columbus. They were fortunate enough to run across a veteran missionary in Apacheland by the name of Pastor Cook. He had devoted himself to the spiritual needs of the Apache. He gave the Wisconsin Synod the necessary information and lent the two synodical scouts a helping hand with regards to the lay of the land, and he also saw to it that the Presbyterians of whom he had allied would put no obstacles in the way of Wisconsin Synod's work.7

Adascheck and Flocher went to Arizona in October of 1893 and arrived at Peridot near the San Carlos river. Not long after arriving there a house and school were set up. When Mayerhoff was called, he began his work in the government school on the north fork of the White River but made his camp at East Fork, where the government had reserved some land for the mission. Because of Flocher's failing health he was replaced in 1899 by Carl Guenther who had to leave the

seminary at Wauwatosa early to do this. Soon after this, Teacher Rudolph Jens joined him to teach in the mission and agency schools. Three years later he too was replaced by Teacher Kutz who left after only a year because of health problems. At this time a new government school was opened which had a major impact on the mission school enrollment and subsequently shut it down.

In 1904 on the Fort Apache reservation at East Fork, the second mission station was begun, a seminary graduate by the name of Henry Hasse replaced Mayerhoff who requested a release of duty to return to the parish ministry. Also at this time, when the Fort Apache school had closed because of dwindling enrollment, Teacher Schoenberg was examined by the seminary faculty and as a result was commissioned as a missionary to the Apaches. As was true with Mayerhoff he had acquired a mastery of the Apache language which enabled him to stay there until 1914.

A prominent historical figure in Wisconsin Synod history also joined the ranks in Arizona. His name was Gustave Harders, a pastor of the Jerusalem congregation in Milwaukee. In 1905 Harders moved to Arizona because of health problems. Although he tried to return to Milwaukee, he remained in Peridot. He then took a call to serve in Globe as the overseer of the whole mission effort in Apacheland. Koehler writes, "Then when the small Indian farms in the San Carlos desert were ruined by flood conditions and the Apaches started to move to Globe and look for work in the copper mines and the government irrigation works, Harders followed them. And so, when medical advice ruled out his permanent return to Wisconsin and he moved to Arizona with his family in 1906, accompanied by the St. Louis student Emil Recknagel, also interested in the mission, Globe became their new home and mission headquarters."⁸ Also attached to Harder's name are three novels Jaalann, La Paloma and Dohaschtida.

But probably the most significant name in Apacheland mission work is Edgar Guenther. He arrived in Arizona in 1911 right out of Wauwatosa seminary. In 1918 he succeeded Harders as superintendant of the mission field. He has been highly praised for half century of work in Apacheland. "E. Edgar Guenther was granted the very high privilege of adoption into the Apache brotherhood. This came at the time of his silver anniversary in the field in 1936. He was given the Apache name Inashood N'daesn, roughly translated as 'The Tall One Among Those Who Walk With Trailing Shirts.' At his burial service an Apache expressed the general sentiment when he said to Minnie (his wife), 'Today I am the lonliest man on the earth.' In the annals of Christian mission that stretches back nineteen centuries write the name of E. Edgar Guenther and write it large."9

Other names such as A. Zuberbier, who succeeded Schoenberg, Henry Rosin and Alfred Uplegger, all of whom came directly from the seminary, are just some of the more prominent names that make up the history of Wisconsin's mission work among the Apaches. Alfred's father Francis Uplegger is also worth noting because of his work with the Apache language. He also took over Edgar Guenther's job of superintendant and served until 1963. Finally it should be noted that M. Wehausen who was given to Guenther as an assistant from the seminary in 1918 started the orphanage at East Fork by taking Indian orphans into his home. Over the years it has grown to include the East Fork Lutheran High School.

Now we shift gears to the Missouri Synod and the beginnings of their "foreign" mission work among the blacks. Mission work among blacks by Lutherans actually began with the North Carolina Synod. At its 12th Convention (1815) the following was adopted, "'Resolved, that it is our duty to preach the gospel to Negroes, and, after proper instruction, to admit them to all the means of grace of the church,

and for this purpose to make room for them in our churches. It was further declared, that 'masters are, in love, to grant liberty to their slaves for this purpose, and herewith it is placed on record that it is the duty of masters to have them instructed in Christianity.'"10 More and more slaves were baptized, received into membership and worshiped with their masters.

After the Civil War there was a mass exodus of slaves from the churches of their former masters. But again the Lutheran Church reached out. Four synods deserve mention. The Synod of Georgia continued to receive black membership as late as 1870. The Synod of South Carolina produced the first educated Black Lutheran pastor in the United States, a man by the name of Daniel Payne. The Tennessee Synod produced the first licensed Black Lutheran preacher in the country, a man by the name of Thomas Frye. And the North Carolina Synod was probably the most effective synod in serving its black members even though they introduced segregated worship and church structures.

A major step in the Lutherans' dealings with the blacks came in 1889. At this time there were four black pastors in the North Carolina Synod. They petitioned the synod as follows, "We, your committee appointed to organize the Colored Evangelical Lutheran Synod, met in the council room of St John's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, Cabarrus County, North Carolina, on Wednesday, May 8, 1889, at 11:30 A.M. The Reverend W.G. Cambell, Chairman, called the committee to order. Reverend George H. Cox was elected secretary. After prayer by Reverend R.W.E. Peschau, the colored members present organized and constituted under the name and title of 'The Alpha Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Freedmen in America.'"11

This was the first and only Black Lutheran Synod to operate in the United States. It struggled from the beginning in 1889, and it

finally passed from the scene in 1891. It only consisted of the four pastors and five small congregations with a total of only 180 baptized souls. Only three of the five congregations had church buildings of their own.

Prior to its dissolution following the death of one of its pastors this little synod turned to other synods for help. Because the North Carolina Synod was unable to give much financial support, the Alpha Synod turned to the Evangelical Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States. "The request for assistance came in the form of a letter from the Reverend W. Philo Phifer. Dr. Henry Schwan, president of the Missouri Synod, forwarded the letter to the Missionary Board of the Lutheran Synodical Conference, in St. Louis. The letter had been written in January 1891. It showed a willingness on the part of these three pastors to come over to the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod."¹²

Back in time, interestingly enough, it was Dr. C.F.W. Walther, one of the greatest theologians of his time, who talks about this matter of mission work among the blacks. In a letter to Reverend F. Sievers he is quoted as saying, "It will be difficult to begin mission work among the colored people so long as we have not more men who are conversant with the English language."¹³ When the Synodical Conference came together, Ferdinand Sievers made an editorial appeal for missions work among the heathen. He specified not only American Indians, but also Chinese living in the United States, India, and the American Negro. Of whom he said, "who though freed from outward slavery is still in the service of sin and threatens to go down in destruction."¹⁴

At the meeting of the Synodical Conference in Fort Wayne, Indiana, July 18th through July 24th, 1877, a committee brought attention to an overture submitted by the retiring president of the Norwegian Synod. Reverend H.A. Preus asked, "Whether the time had not

come for the Synodical Conference to direct its attention to the mission work among the heathen and to start missions, perhaps among the Negroes and the Indians of this country."15 A month prior to the Fort Wayne meeting Walther had commended the mission zeal of a circuit preacher by the name of John Frederick Doescher. He worked among the Lutherans in the Dakota Territory. He worked faithfully surviving starvation and physical hardship. Because of Walther's approval Doescher was the choice of the mission board as the first missionary to the Negroes. He was installed in 1877 as part of the closing ceremonies of the Western District Convention of the Missouri Synod in Altenburg, of historic Perry County.

Doescher arrived in Memphis and preached to the blacks there. He then went to Little Rock, Arkansas arriving on November 7th, 1877. He held services there, and at the people's request he opened a Sunday school which quickly grew to 40 students. He was advised by the Mission Board to stay in Little Rock for the time being. In January he traveled through Mississippi to New Orleans, Louisiana. He also traveled throughout Alabama, Florida, Georgia and Tennessee. During these tours he attempted to organize mission committees in local German Lutheran congregations to maintain interest until pastors could be sent. He then returned home to report to the Synodical Conference which met in Fort Wayne, July 18th through July 24th, 1878. After recovering from an illness he needed some time to rest. And so his report with its recommendations marks the end of the beginning of the Synodical Conference's mission outreach to the blacks.

Skipping briskly over the years we turn to 1938 when the General Conference of workers in Negro Missions, organized in 1920, in a meeting on August 25-28 drafted and approved a constitution for a Black Lutheran Synod. ("Until the 1920's, no black congregation established as an out-growth of the Synodical Conference mission work

among the blacks had any organic affiliation with the church body responsible for its existence")16 The Synodical Conference was not totally for such a proposal especially Article IX which would unite the Negro Synod with the Synodical Conference, so upon revision they returned it to the General Conference. The General Conference on the other hand recognized the fact that they were being isolated from orthodox Lutheranism even though surrounded by its churches. In their response to the Synodical Conference they stated, "We, therefore, humbly petition our mission board to make these facts known to the Synodical Conference, to the end that August body make arrangements whereby our churches and missions, either as a body, or as individual congregations, or both, be given opportunity for organic affiliation, either with Synodical Conference, or with individual Synods or Districts of Synod."17

On May 16th, 1944, the Synodical Conference survey committee, appointed to propose a constitution for the black churches, met with Pastors M. Carter and A. Schulze of the General Conference. At this meeting three forms of organization were developed. They were 1) integration of individual black congregations and pastors with the synods of the Synodical Conference, 2) organization of black "self-supporting congregations into an autonomous body" as recommended by the general conference, 3) organization of all black pastors and congregations as a district which would become affiliated with the Missouri Synod, 4) organization of the black mission as a synodical body, which would become a constituent synod of the Synodical Conference.18

When the Synodical Conference met in 1946 they decided to begin the process of allowing blacks to be integrated into the Synodical Conference, which ultimately led to their integration into the ministry of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. The resolution

stated that the congregations, pastors and teachers in good standing could apply for membership with any of the constituent synods, or their respective districts. In 1947 the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod at their convention made the suggestion which came from the Synodical Conference a matter of mission policy.

There were further adjustments as to how this new mission would be handled. Reverend W.C. Birkner of the Central District, Missouri Synod, wrote, "The close association between the Missionary Board of the Synodical Conference and the Central District Mission Board dates back to December 19, 1946, when Pastor Karl Kurth, Executive Secretary of the Missionary Board, appeared before the Central District Mission Board to carry out the resolution of the 1946 Convention of the Synodical Conference, namely to request that the District Home Mission Board 'guide, direct, and supervise all Negro missions of the respective District, encourage pastors and congregations to greater zeal and closer cooperation, and study mission opportunities within the District.'"¹⁹ The Central District Convention of 1948 approved the request.

The Southeastern District was the first district south of the Mason-Dixon line to integrate black pastors and their congregations. This included congregations in North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and Georgia. The Southern District was the last of the districts to accept responsibility for black missions in their geographical area. In a convention assembled in Mobile, Alabama, August 29th through September 1st, 1961, the necessary resolutions were passed that enabled the Southern District to comply with the resolutions of the Synod. "All of the work in Negro missions was in some way affiliated with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. All of the workers, with one lone exception, the Reverend Henry W. Grisby, became members of the Missouri Synod. Reverend Grisby is a member of the Wisconsin

Synod. Structural integration was complete."20

This is but a brief history of the struggles and the accomplishments of the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods to reach out for the first time to "foreign" lands with "foreign" tongues. As we look at the accomplishments we cannot help but also look at the difficulties involved. And as we look at both mission dawnings, we notice a number of similarities. There were difficulties for both missions as far as getting off the ground, including opposition from those within, and difficulties in overcoming certain barriers that if not for the Lord's gracious hand would seem to be insurmountable. We should also spend some time comparing certain similarities in organization within the missions themselves. Then finally we will look at some things that may give us insight or at least something we can learn for future outreach in "foreign" lands.

The first thing we might mention in regard to barriers that our missionaries had to overcome is the language barrier. Earlier it was mentioned that in the Wisconsin Synod certain men were trained already in college for work among the Apaches. Unfortunately this training didn't amount to much. Through college and the seminary their sacrifice and dedication to such work was considered much of the training in and of itself. "The only difference between the prospective missionaries and other students at the synodical schools seems to have been that the former did not have to pay the customary fees."21 The few who learned the language well, like Mayerhoff, did much to serve the Apaches. "At the same time it revealed the missionary's difficulty in communicating the visitor's thought to the Indians, to translate the spiritual concepts of the gospel. It was necessary to rethink the thought from the Indian's background and accordingly to reconstruct the language.22

Even in the Missouri Synod's outreach to the blacks there seems

to have been a lax attitude as far as training men for this work. Members of the established congregations responsible for the establishment of the black missions did not, for the most part, speak English and were also far removed from the mission congregations.²³ Racial segregation played a key role in the extent of Missouri's work among the blacks. While for Wisconsin those types of barriers at the time of outreach were for the most part appeased especially when Geronimo was captured in 1886 during the second stage of outreach to the Apaches.

This leads us into another aspect concerning the barriers that our missionaries encountered which was culture and maybe a feeling of hostility toward the white race. The Indian is of course a different breed compared to the white man. They have their own perceptions of religion and their own way to deal with the world around them. Not knowing all that much about their way of thinking it seems as if they are more primitive and lack the ability to deal with abstractions which is important in religious training.

We know the racial tensions that still exist today between the Indian and the white man, but even closer to home we have experienced the racial tension between the black man and the white man. What makes this mission work even more difficult is the white supremacist who criticized those who worked among blacks. At the time when Missouri missionaries ventured into "foreign" lands the racial tensions ran high. Compounding this fact was that while most of the Synodical Conference lived north of the Mason-Dixon line, 90% of the black people lived in the South. The Klu Klux Klan movement was in full bloom. In these circumstances anyone who was identified as a Northern "Yankee", who worked among the black people, easily became suspect and was often kept under close surveillance.²⁴ The barriers were steep.

While we cannot look into the hearts and minds of our esteemed forefathers and it is not our place to judge them, we do and must recognize that such mission endeavors were at times met with some reserve. While many were concerned about home mission work and the possible infringement on such work, there were others, and it is assumed the majority, that supported "foreign" mission work. In the Wisconsin Synod where some have stated that the work to the Apaches was "little" and "late", the misgivings about outreach to this foreign post is apparent. Koehler mentions a "lukewarm attitude" toward this mission endeavor by the Synodical leadership which was seen as a dreaded addition to the budget. But even today we approach all our work in the synod with careful and concerned deliberation.

Again with due respect to the believers and leaders of the Missouri Synod we see evidences of racial injustice as more and more congregations and pastors were integrated into the synod. Dickenson speaks of the "white flight" which so many of the congregation experienced being brought to the attention of the synod. Here we might mention a group called the Human Relations Association of America, which was a voluntary group of pastors and laymen, who challenged the synod to make a serious effort to eliminate segregation and discrimination in their work as a synod. A resolution entitled "Race Relations as Such" was brought to the convention in 1956 one part which read, "That we confess our sins where we in the past acted contrary to the principles hereinbefore set forth and that we call upon all our members, both pastors and people, to confess and repent of those sins which they in the past have committed contrary to the principles hereinbefore set forth."²⁵ What we may see here as a total lack of Christian concern and open bigotry can only be seen in the eyes of those who lived under these circumstances and whose attitudes were shaped differently than our own.

On to a more positive aspect of the beginnings of "foreign" mission work done by the two biggies in the Synodical Conference. We now turn to some similarities in organization. How do you get a mission started in 1877? From what we can glean in these two instances of outreach we are directed to the schools. Taking Wisconsin first we see schools popping up all over the reservation and its vicinity. It seemed natural to approach the children first. "The missionaries at that time were thrown into the work without such distinctive pastoral training, especially of that pedagogical part concerning the approach to children which is very applicable to the teaching of the Indian. These principles, of course, apply to all preaching and teaching of the gospel, but the young pastor in the home church ... can finally get along by carrying on as he has seen and heard it from his youth."²⁶ This outreach to the children including the schools and the nursery are probably the most vivid evidences of the benefits reaped.

The situation in the Missouri Synod with regard to the schools organized for blacks has a checkered sort of history. In the beginning it was met with great success as schools flourished throughout the South. Speaking of the Christian Day Schools Dickenson states, "No other program in the Lutheran churches was more highly praised. No other program was more staunchly supported by both members and nonmembers, by both friends and foes, by both young and old."²⁷ The problems that ensued, though, led to the closing of most of these schools. The problem was that most of the children who attended the schools were members of the Baptist Church and attended the Baptist Sunday schools, which the Synodical Conference frowned upon. When the Missouri Synod accepted responsibility for the congregations in 1947 the plan was to combine congregations and schools. This meant that the consolidated schools were now too great

a distance from where the local school had been and resulted in the closing of almost all the the day schools. Although it has a sad ending, the blessings that these schools enjoyed are inexpressible.

Likewise inexpressible are the future joys and blessings we can expect from future outreach in "foreign" mission lands. What can we draw from the beginnings of mission work among people that are foreign to us? We realize that no mission work is going to be easy for us as inept servants. And it's probably a good thing that God doesn't make it so easy. We know that there will be countless obstacles not only with regard to the natural barriers of language, culture and the like but also from circumstances beyond our control (like the civil wars in Africa and the drug wars of Columbia that cause us great concern). There will always be barriers that might seem unrealistic to overcome. But that should not stop us from taking the necessary steps to establish some sort of outreach.

Another conclusion we can draw from this discussion is that we will always have "foreign" mission work to do right here in the United States. With the influx of refugees that pour into Florida and Texas from Cuba we have right in our own backyard a people that desperately need the gospel message. What is more our Savior's Great Commission reminds us that in this "melting pot" we call home, the opportunities for such world-wide work can be partly achieved right here and now. Maybe at this time certain options have failed or will fail but this does not exclude the ongoing prayers and attempts to reach out to "foreigners".

Finally the success of our mission work is not always in the sheer numbers of perceived souls. Who knows what seemingly little mission work we do reaches back to homelands around the world. Right now we can look at the number of black pastors in our synod and especially in the Missouri Synod and say that we haven't really come

all that far. We can look at the Apache mission and conclude that over the long haul it doesn't seem to have been worth such an effort. But God knows, and we praise him for the opportunities he has given us to work among the nations of the world and that he continue to bless our mission efforts both at home and abroad.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 J. P. Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod. (Sauk Rapids: Sentinel, 1981), p. 198.
- 2 Koehler p. 198.
- 3 F. C. Fredrich, "The WELS Mission Enterprise Among the Apaches" (essay delivered at the Lutheran Historical Conference, San Francisco, Nov. 6-9, 1986, p. 3).
- 4 Koehler, p. 198.
- 5 Koehler, p. 198.
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- 7 Koehler, p. 198.
- 8 Koehler, p. 202.
- 9 Fredrich, p. 16.
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- 11 Dickenson, p. 27.
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- 13 Dickenson, p. 38.
- 14 Dickenson, p. 39.
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- 16 Lawrence B. Meyer, Missouri in Motion. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1969), p. 33.
- 17 Dickenson, p. 108.
- 18 Dickenson, p. 109.
- 19 Dickenson, p. 112.
- 20 Dickenson, p. 117.
- 21 Fredrich, p. 9.
- 22 Koehler, p. 201.
- 23 Meyer, p. 32.
- 24 Meyer, p. 32.
- 25 Dickenson, p. 120.
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- 27 Dickenson, p. 136.