

WHY JOHANNES BADING RESIGNED AS SYNOD PRESIDENT IN 1889:

Church History
Term Paper Opportunity
Prof. E. Frederich
Submitted March 17, 1975

by

David H. Miller

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11331 N. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin

WHY JOHANNES BADING RESIGNED AS SYNOD PRESIDENT IN 1889

Johannes Bading was born on Nov 24, 1824 in Rixdorf, Germany (near Berlin). He studied for three years under Ludwig Harms in Hermannsburg (1848), in preparation for mission work in Africa. After a falling out with Harms Bading finished his preparatory work in the mission school at Barmen. The two men became reconciled again (the disagreement had been over some practical matter, nothing doctrinal), and in 1853 the Langenberg Society sent Bading to Wisconsin.

This strongly confessional-minded man served his first congregation at Calumet. Soon he was stationed near Theresa where he served St. Jacobi congregation, and also a church in Lomira. In 1860, at the 10th annual synod convention, Bading succeeded Muehlhaeuser as Synod President. In this same year Bading also accepted a call to Watertown, where he served for approximately nine years. By 1869 Pastor Bading had moved again, this time to Milwaukee, where he served St. John's congregation until 1908. At that time he resigned his pastorate, but remained on as assistant pastor till his death in 1913.

Johannes Bading's training and abilities enabled him to serve in the Lord's vineyard in a number of various capacities. In addition to shepherding various flocks, he was Synod President from 1860-1889 (except for the years of his trip to Germany: 1864-67), president of the Synodical Conference from 1882-1912, and president of the Board of Trustees of NWC from 1865-1912.

On June 20, 1889, the pastors, teachers, and delegates of the Wisconsin met in convention at St. Peter's Luth. Church,

Milwaukee. The convention opened at 10:00 am; Herr Pastor Bading delivered a sermon based on Gal 5:1, in which he urged the assembly to stand in the freedom with which Christ has freed us, and not to again be caught by the slavish yoke. The parts of his sermon were:

- 1) What kind of a freedom this is, and
- 2) How we can stand in this same (freedom) ¹

The Synod's first session began at 3:00 pm that same day. After the roll call, Pres. Bading presented his Jahresbericht des Praesidenten. Here is a translation of the Gemeinde Blatt as it reported the close of his report:

"At the close of his report the President noted that since the term of office of the present officer was lapsed (completed), he gave his official position back into the hands of the Synod. With great regret the assembly heard as Pres. Bading added to this announcement the explanation that he wasn't in condition to administer the presidency any longer, and he uttered this urgent request to the Synod--wanting (people) to look away from his person during the approaching presidential election--since, in connection with increasing age after 26 years administering the presidential office, he was in need of rest (der Ruhe beduerfe); he wished to be able to devote the strength remaining to him exclusively to his congregation, which not only is very large, but also stands right before the completion of a difficult undertaking--namely, a church-building."²

The question we wish to discuss is why Pres. Bading resigned. According to the words we've just read, there was a double cause. First, Pres. Bading said that he wasn't in condition any longer to administer the office; this he attributed to increasing age. He needed a rest. His second reason revolved around his work as Pastor of St. John's in Milwaukee.

¹Berichte der Wisconsin Synode, Vol. 39, 1889. P. 1.

²Gemeinde Blatt, Vol 24, No. 21; July 1, 1889. P. 164.

A new church building was under construction, and he wished to devote his energies in that direction.

Was one the more pressing reason than the other? Did he merely wish to have more time to devote to the building project, or had his strength truly been taxed so that the major reason for resigning was for a rest? The latter choice fits in best with the evidence.

To help us decide, let us look into the Synod Proceedings for 1889 for Pres. Bading's actual words to the assembly (again by way of my translation):

This time the "close" constitutes the close of my official effectiveness as President of the Synod. On the one hand the term of office of Synod officials has reached its end with this year, so that a new election is to be undertaken; on the other hand I must ask the Synod during the election to no longer take me into consideration. After I have served the Synod for 26 years in the official position of President, as a young, powerful man, one who sees his (whole) life before him, I have become an old man, whose thread of life will soon be wound up. According as the members of Synod through past years have become adequately aware that I have a congregation to oversee, in which there is much weary-some toil, and also in which there is for quite a long time (now) a very difficult church building (project) to be carried out, by which the strength of the pastor likewise--in no small measure--will be engrossed, thus I do well in daring to present this request, my service as President no longer desiring, or wanting to claim.³
(my underlining)

Also included is this pertinent part of the German text:

Nachdem ich der Synode 26 Jahre im Praesidialamte gedient habe, aus einem jungen, kraeftigen, das Leben vor sich sehenden Mann ein Greis geworden bin, dessen Lebensfaden bald abgewickelt sein wird; nachdem es den Gliedern der Synode durch Jahre hindurch hinlaenglich bekannt geworden ist, dass ich einer Gemeinde vorzustehen habe, inder es viele aufreibende Arbeit giebt, in der auch fuer laengere Zeit ein schwerer Kirchbau durchzufuehren ist, wobei die Kraefte des Pastors gleichfalls in nicht geringem

³Berichte der Wisconsin Synode, Vol 39, 1889. p. 17-18.

Masse in Anspruch genommen werden, so darf ich wohl die Bitte aussprechen, meine Dienste als Praeses nicht mehr weiter wuenschen und beanspruchen zu wollen.

These words show more forcefully than the report of them in the Gemeinde Blatt Pres. Bading's own emphasis on his lack of physical strength. When he had begun his "Amt" 26 years prior, he had been a young, powerful man; now, he has become old. How literally should we take these words? Was he speaking tongue in cheek, or seriously feeling the effects of 36 years of strenuous labor in the public ministry?

Pres. Bading's obituary in the June 15, 1913 Gemeinde Blatt stated: "Bis in sein hohes Alter war Praeses Bading koerperlich und geistig fast jugendlich ruestig." Even into his old age President Bading was vigorous (in body and spirit) in an almost youthful way.⁴ Does this belie the words of Bading himself? Let's remember that in 1889 Pres. Bading was 64 years old—not a young man. No doubt the rest that Pres. Bading got through declining re-election helped restore him to his vigorous state.

I feel that Pres. Bading's strength was depleted, also because of the church building that was almost completed (not as though there remained much hard work ahead, though certainly some.). Remember, the Gemeinde Blatt's report stated that Bading stood before the completion of a difficult project. In this connection we come to the underlined words of Bading's report to the convention (my underlining): "in der auch fuer laengere Zeit ein schwerer Kirchbau durchzufuehren ist." When I translated, I supplied a word in parenthesis to help

⁴Gemeinde Blatt, Vol 48, No. 12; June 15, 1913. P. 185.

explain my way of understanding the sentence; "for quite a long time (now)". I understand this in the sense that its been going on a long time in the past, not expected to continue for a long time into the future.

Do the German words themselves slant the meaning in this direction? I have no native feeling for the language, so I'm in no position to judge. One expert consulted⁵ was also unable to say. Outside information was necessary, and was sought.

St. John's "new" building was dedicated on July 13, 1890.

"...am Sonntag, den 13. Juli, die ev.-luth. St. Johannes-Gemeinde in Milwaukee die grosse Guete und Freundlichkeit unseres Gottes ruehmen, denn an diesem Tage wurde ihre neue, schoene und grosse Kirche mit Gottes Wort und mit Gebet ihrer Bestimmung feierlich uebergeben und geweiht." ⁶

Pres. Bading addressed the convention on June 20, 1889. There was still approximately one year's labor necessary when Bading resigned. But are buildings of this type built in only a year? No. A telephone call to Pastor Alfred Schewe (present pastor of St. John's) on the evening of March 10, 1975 secured the following information, that lots were purchased for the building sight in 1886, and the corner stone was laid in 1889 (the exact day not known). But by this corner stone laying, the basement and foundation at least^{must} have been laid. This, together with the interpretive statement of the Vol 24, No 21 (1889) Gemeinde Blatt about Bading being right before the

⁵Lloyd Lemke

⁶Gemeinde Blatt, Vol 25, No. 23; August 1, 1890. P. 184.

completion of his building (the reporter here being closer to the scene than we are), points us in the direction of saying that Bading genuinely felt weary because of his duties, and labor already expended in the building project. He might not, probably did not, know for sure how much longer the building would take. But he did know how he felt, like "ein Greis," and he could use a little rest. Pastor Schewe also stated that the records of that era showed Pastor Bading's baptisms and number of children confirmed to be almost 200 per year! He certainly was a busy man. Perhaps being released from some of the extra burdens as Synod President was just the prescription needed to restore his "fast jugendlich ruestig(keit)."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berichte der Wisconsin Synode. Vol. 39, 1889. pp. 1 and 17-18.

Gemeinde Blatt. Milwaukee: NPH. Vol. 24, No. 21
Vol. 25, No. 23
Vol. 48, No. 12