

WHY LUTHERAN ?

(A look at the factors which influenced the
founding and founder of St. Paul's
Evangelical Lutheran Church, Prescott, Wisconsin)

Written for
Professor E. C. Fredrich

by
David D. Rosenow

April 28, 1980

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin

There are many things which could be said at the outset of this essay. First of all, my interest in Pastor Jacob Schadegg goes back quite a number of years. The reason for this interest is that my parent's home was the Schadegg parsonage until his death in 1915. I still remember being asked, as a young boy in Prescott, to explain where I lived. The response was easy - I lived in the "old Schadegg house" - and no further explanation was necessary. The house was practically a historical landmark, and the man himself held a certain mystique in my mind.

The second thing which could be mentioned is the interesting way in which I gathered information concerning Pastor Schadegg. I wrote home to find out just how much material there was written by him or about him in our congregation's church records. Much to my dismay, I was informed that a fire had destroyed all the early church records. So, I asked my father if he would check at the office of our local weekly newspaper, The Prescott Journal. I thought that certainly the founding of a new congregation, and the calling of their first pastor would have been front page news for a small town publication. However, I was informed that the Journal archives had also been hit by a fire, and nearly all the papers before 1900 had been destroyed.

At that point everything looked pretty hopeless for my essay, but I still had a couple more sources to check out. In 1969 a book was published for the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Minnesota District of our Wisconsin Synod, giving a brief history of the congregations located in that district. In the article on St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Prescott, Wisconsin, the names of pastors who had served the Germans in Prescott from a distance, were listed along with their parishes. I wrote to the current pastors of those parishes, and asked if their church records contained any information about pastoral services which had been provided in the Prescott area. What I did not know at that time was that information on those early pastors would probably have been more useful to me. The pastors whom I contacted in this respect included Andrew R. Backus, Stillwater, MN; Stephen J. Lawrenz, Shakopee, MN; Paul Otto, Frontenac, MN; and Mark K. Toepel, Newport, MN. In addition, since Pastor Schadegg had done some work in Cannon Falls and Hastings, Minnesota, in the hope of receiving some information about Pastor Schadegg himself I wrote to Pastors Glenway P. Backus, Hastings; and Richard P. Stevens, Cannon Falls.

I also wrote to the author of the article on St. Paul's congregation referred to above, Pastor Stephen P. Valleskey, currently serving Cross of Glory Evangelical

Lutheran Church, Washington, Michigan. Pastor Valleskey supplied me with a wealth of material, some of which was gleaned during the years of his ministry at Prescott, and others (the majority) which he acquired during a visit in 1974 at the Pilgermission, St. Chrischona, Basel, Switzerland. Without the information which he so graciously supplied, it would have been virtually impossible to write this essay. I am deeply indebted to him, not only for his assistance at this time, but also for encouraging me to enter the pastoral ministry by his words, and especially by his example.

Pastor Valleskey was quick to inform me that the early congregational records at Prescott had not been destroyed by fire, at least not the pastoral records. He had personally read those records during his years at Prescott, and made some interesting observations concerning them. In a letter dated March 15, 1980, he wrote,

Schadegg, as a matter of fact, kept a meticulous record, all in his elegant hand (I assume it was his). He wrote a beautiful script, but he wrote in the old German script (freely interchanging Latin characters) which must be mastered before you can read him. So complete is his pastoral record from the years he served Prescott (1868-1915), that the obituaries of the old people who had come over from the old country often run to a full page in his ledger book record. When his wife died in 1881 (?), he wrote out two full pages of obituary on her.

Valleskey also suggested that the fire which St. Paul's members had spoken of may have destroyed some of the

congregational minutes. The only gap in the pastoral records is found during the pastorate of A. C. Baumann. These may have been destroyed by fire, but it is just as possible that Pastor Baumann did not keep any records.

In my search for information concerning the founding of St. Paul's congregation, I wrote to the Area Research Center located on the campus of the University of Wisconsin - River Falls. They sent me photocopies of several pages from a variety of books (authors unidentified). In one of these, A History of Pierce County, the statement is made that the Rev. C. Hayer (sic) laid the foundation for establishing a Lutheran church in Prescott in the year 1865. It also states that he labored there for three years, until October 1868, when the Rev. J. Schadegg succeeded him. I would assume that C. Hayer is none other than "Father" J. C. F. Heyer, who played such a prominent role in the founding of the Minnesota Synod. This is a definite possibility. Because of his advanced age (69), Heyer had wanted to retire from the ministry in 1862, when Fachtmann succeeded him at Trinity in St. Paul. But the congregation at Red Wing, Minnesota, was in need of a pastor, and they succeeded in persuading him to serve them. After appearing in Milwaukee at the 1863 Synod convention, the following October Heyer moved back to Pennsylvania. However, he did return to Minnesota again, and remained there until November 1867. This

would be the approximate period of time during which he could have worked among the people of Prescott.

Although Heyer retained the title of President of the Minnesota Synod until 1868, actually, Fachtmann served as acting praeses in his absence. It was during those years (1862-1867), that Fachtmann led the Minnesota Synod even farther away from confessionalism. During Heyer's presidency they had been somewhat unionistic, but in 1864 Minnesota joined the General Synod. Lehninger states,

Handwritten note: Heyer was not President in 1864

Unionism, fellowship with adherents of false doctrine, was the order of the day and remained unrebuked. And the leading unionist was the leader, Fachtmann. Under his benign rule, ironclad fist in velvet glove as the rule of the unionist always is, doctrinal discipline was impossible.¹

However, by 1866 things were getting better. Fachtmann resigned, and was eventually placed under discipline. In 1870 he was placed under suspension and excommunicated.

It was also during the late 1860's that St. Paul's congregation in Prescott was beginning to take shape. The Lutherans who had settled in the Prescott area were primarily from Württemberg, Germany. As such, they probably tended to be more Reformed (Evangelical) than Lutheran. In either case they would have been strongly Pietistic. The words of Pastor Friedrich Schmid (a

¹Lehninger, M., et. al. Continuing In His Word. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), p. 103.

Württembergers who studied at the Baseler Missionsgesellschaft), aptly describe the attitudes found within the Württemberg church.

For nearly eighteen years I have served numerous congregations here with the Holy Word and Sacrament, in which there are Lutheran and Reformed from the homeland, yet I have never had to experience the slightest criticism on the part of the Reformed because of teachings and creed. As far as church practice is concerned, I maintain everything according to our Württemberg church, except that we from early times did not have communion wafers. If the godly truth is proclaimed in a godly and powerful manner and the pastor lives in the strength of the gospel, then the truth-loving and the truth-seeking people of both confessions can get together through the strength of the Word; and this will occur too without any attempt to force a union. For that reason there are, I think, many in the congregation here whose parents were Reformed, but I am not certain, I do not inquire about it, for they are united and happy with and through the proclaimed Word of the Cross and the Holy Sacraments. Firmness in the teachings and in the creed is required here, and if this exists, then the spirit of the Lord will be with his Word; yes, He will see to it that the Sectaries, of which there are many here, can do no harm. The Word has slain them. As far as the rigid Old-Lutherans are concerned, with whom I have come in contact without learning to know them, I respect their sound teachings, but these people are mostly lacking in living faith, and for that reason there is so little love and so much harshness toward others. Their rigid ceremony and their strong condemnation of others are terrible things to me. I find no good fruit here, and despite the fact that a great deal is said about church, church-life and church-activity suffer.²

²Hutzel, Emerson. The Schmid Letters (St. Louis: Emerson E. Hutzel, 1953), p. 77-78.

Nevertheless, the congregation did incorporate as a Lutheran congregation in 1874. Why? Prior to the calling of Pastor Schadegg, the Lutherans in Prescott had been served from a distance by a variety of different pastors. Adam Blumer was one of the first. He performed the first recorded baptism(s) at Prescott in 1860(61?). About this same time he was instrumental in organizing the Minnesota Synod, along with Pastors C. F. Heyer, A. Brandt, W. Wier, W. Thomson, and W. Mallinson. While this may seem to show that Blumer was a fairly conservative Lutheran, actually the opposite was true. The Minnesota Synod started out as a very lax group concerning doctrinal matters. The History of St. John's Lutheran Church, Shakopee, Minnesota (now ALC) states,

Blumer, Thomson and Mallinson were at best nominal Lutherans and gradually dropped out of the synod. Blumer seems from all indications to have been Reformed. As the Minnesota Synod became more specifically Lutheran Blumer was excluded. By 1864 Blumer was considered only an honorary member, and after that no mention of Blumer is made as attending synodical meetings or belonging to the Synod.

The people of Prescott would hardly have picked up any Lutheran tendencies from him.

Another of the early pastors to serve the Lutherans of Prescott was Dr. C. H. Bleeken (also found as Blecken). Bleeken was hardly what we would call a confessional Lutheran. Although in 1864 he was asked to be a member of a three man committee (along with Fachtmann and F.

Hoffmann) to draft a constitution for the Minnesota Synod, he withdrew from the synod in 1866 after being accused of Freemasonry. The golden legend above his pulpit in Red Wing read,

Come, Jew, Christian, Mohammedan, come,
Catholic and Protestant, join hands in loving
fellowship; away with persecution, mania, and
scorn, we all believe in the same God.³

So much for his influence!

Perhaps the first conservative influence the Prescott Germans were exposed to was that of Albert Kuhn, who later succeeded Sieker as president of the Minnesota Synod (1876-1883). Koehler characterizes him as "a man of clear judgment in the conditions in which he found himself and (who) expressed his convictions with simple frankness."⁴ It is interesting to note that Kuhn was a classmate of Pastor Schadeegg at the Pilgermission (1865).

Jacob Schadeegg was born December 1, 1841, in the village Amriswill, Krain (Krahen?), Canton Thurgau, Switzerland. By birth and upbringing he was Swiss Reformed. Before deciding to enter the ministry, Schadeegg was a shoemaker, but he entered the Pilgermission at St. Chri-schona on October 1, 1863, and completed his studies September 25, 1865. Upon graduation he was sent to serve somewhere in Chicago, probably as an assistant. After less

³Koehler, J. P. The History of the Wisconsin Synod (St. Cloud: Sentinel Publishing Co., 1970), p. 128.

⁴Ibid., p. 173.

than a year, he moved on to Monee, Illinois, where he served a congregation for two years.

Schadegg's next call took him to Trinity congregation in Oak Grove Township, Wisconsin, where he served until 1874. At that time there was a big controversy within the congregation. Perhaps we will never know exactly what happened in the Oak Grove congregation. Pastor Valleskey wrote,

The only person, if anyone, who might have known what actually took place at Oak Grove, and what Schadegg's mind actually was, was his daughter Louise Trulson, who ended up in the Methodist Church and who died at about aged 100. Since I knew she was up in River Falls, and that her mind remained sharp up to her death, I always regretted that I never got around to seeing her to ask her questions.

At any rate, the result of the controversy was that Schadegg left the Oak Grove church "with the church doors locked to him," as was often related by the old-timers in Prescott. Schadegg then went to Prescott, and shortly thereafter St. Paul's was incorporated as a congregation.

The Oak Grove congregation reorganized the same year (1874), and in the original constitution of the reorganized congregation there is a single statement which was underlined, obviously for emphasis. Again, in the words of Pastor Valleskey,

The statement reads exactly, to my memory: 'Diese Gemeinde soll nicht 'glt-lutherische' sein!' This would certainly seem to indicate that when Schadegg left the Oak Grove congre-

gation, 'old-lutheranism' was something of an issue. It may have been, however, that the 'evangelical' pastor who succeeded Schadegg at Oak Grove had the line written into the new constitution, and that 'old-lutheranism' had nothing to do with Schadegg's departure from Oak Grove.

I would prefer to think that "old-lutheranism" of a sort was a issue. Allow me to attempt to explain why.

It all began at the Pilgermission ("pilgrim mission") of the St. Chrischona. The Pilgermission was one of two major mission undertakings (the other being the Baseler Missionsgesellschaft) founded by Christian Friedrich Spittler (1782-1867).

In theological questions Spittler was extremely tolerant, he didn't care much about principles, but lived in the Gospel, the living individuals he loved, and for his person he drew faith in God from Holy Writ and in the face of all reverses maintained his enthusiasm for the work through prayer and continued study of his catechism to his old age.⁵

His philosophy in mission work was to take young artisans, give them an intensive and practical theological training with mission emphasis, and then encourage them to share their faith as they continued to work in their trades. In the words of Spittler himself, "Endeavor, by faithful work in your trade, to penetrate into the dark spots of Christendom and do what you can to revive people. Report off and on as to this work of yours in the Lord."⁶

⁵Ibid., p. 21.

⁶Ibid., p. 22.

The mission school itself was a chapel, high above Basel on the last spur of the Schwarzwald along the Rhine. Tradition has it that the chapel was founded by three Christian virgins. Spittler leased the building in 1840, and lived there with his adopted daughter. Soon students started coming, but there was no formal instruction until Pfarrer Gottlieb Schlatter arrived in 1841. Financial backing for the project came from four wealthy English Quakers.

The men of St. Chrischona were especially well equipped for the travelling missionary work which was carried out in outlying regions. Therefore, many of Chrischona's graduates were sent to Texas and Minnesota. It was not unusual for these men to preach three times on a given Sunday, travelling forty to fifty miles on foot! Pastor Schadegg had it easy. When he began holding services in Hastings, Minnesota, while he was still serving Prescott, he also made the journey on foot, but it was only a distance of about ten miles, round trip. The younger pastors who later came into established fields did not realize the extremely hard work and sacrifices of these pioneers. Many preachers with families had to get by on an income of \$300, partly because times were bad. But even when the financial status of the congregation increased, often the pastor's salary remained minimal. "Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with

his instructor" (Gal. 6:6) was seldom followed.⁷

Some of the names of the graduates who worked in Minnesota include A. Blumer, L. Emmel, F. W. Reitz, L. Ebert, A. Kuhn, W. Hoffmann, Deuber, L. F. Frey, J. Schadegg, Seifert, C. J. Albrecht, H. Braun, Bechtel, J. J. Hunziker, Siegrist, and W. Vomhof.⁸ The great majority of these men graduated from St. Chrischona in the mid 1860's. The reason I mention this is that I believe these St. Chrischona graduates formed the conservative nucleus for the Minnesota Synod in the years following 1868.

There are several things which led me to this conclusion. Notice that both A. Kuhn and C. J. Albrecht became conservative presidents of the Minnesota Synod. Also, in 1869, Kuhn, Emmel, and Reitz (along with President Sieker) made up Minnesota's doctrinal committee to see if the Wisconsin Synod was in agreement with them. They were, except for the fact that Minnesota was still a part of the General Council.⁹

I also feel it is significant that out of the three instructors whose names I encountered for the Pilgermission, only one of them was considered Lutheran. The first was

⁷Haase, G. C., et. al. Geschichte der Minnesota-Synode und ihrer einzelnen Gemeinden (St. Louis: Louis Lang Publishing Co., 1909), p. 5-6.

⁸Ibid., p. 4.

⁹Koehler, p. 132.

Gottlieb Schlatter. He followed the philosophy of the school's founder, C. F. Spittler, which basically meant very little theology. The second was Kaplan Schlintz (Schlienz?), whom F. Schmid had contacted (1859) in order to secure preachers for Michigan. Since Schmid was anti "old-lutheran," he would obviously be looking for preachers who had been trained along those lines. But the third instructor was Kaplan Schliweg. Concerning him Koehler writes,

Chrischona, whose first American missionaries had founded the Texas Synod, in the course of time had supplied Minnesota also with twenty men, whose main teacher was Kaplan Schliweg, a faithful Lutheran according to the testimony of his students.¹⁰

Although I tried to find more information concerning these instructors, I came up empty. Nevertheless, it seems obvious to me that Schliweg is one of the keys to the conservatism of this group of men, including Jacob Schadeegg.

Just how accurate that statement is I am unable to judge, but it does make a lot of sense. I believe that the seeds of Lutheranism were sown by Schliweg, and that they quickly took root in men like Emmel and Reitz. But for Jacob Schadeegg it took a little longer. That is why his first congregations (Monee, IL; Oak Grove, WI; and Ellsworth, WI) all ended up Reformed.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 173.

But something effected a change in Schadegg. Considering his Reformed background, it is very likely that he would never have become an "old-lutheran" in the true sense of the word, but he was a Lutheran. I believe it was the initial influence of Schliweg, along with the continuing influence of his conservative friends and classmates, which changed Schadegg. He obviously valued the friendships which he had made at St. Chrischona. He had even asked several of those men to serve as sponsors for his children. I believe that through such close contact with those men, the conservative seeds which had been planted also sprouted in Jacob Schadegg, convincing him that Lutheranism was the right way to go. Concerning what was written about "old-lutheranism" in Oak Grove's constitution, the liberal Reformed people there could easily have overreacted to Schadegg's Lutheranism, thus causing his departure from their midst, and bringing about the formation of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Prescott, Wisconsin, and also St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Hastings, Minnesota.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

- Fredrich, E. C. The Minnesota District's First Fifty Years. 1968 District Convention Essay.
- Haase, G. C., et. al. Geschichte der Minnesota-Synode und ihrer einzelnen Gemeinden. St. Louis: Louis Lang Publishing Co., 1909.
- Hanke, P. R., et. al. Golden Jubilee History of the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Its Member Congregations 1918-1968. Minneapolis: Ad Art Advertising Co., 1969.
- Hutzel, Emerson. The Schmid Letters. St. Louis: Emerson E. Hutzel, 1953.
- Koehler, J. P. The History of the Wisconsin Synod. St. Cloud: Sentinel Publishing Co., 1970.
- Lehninger, M., et. al. Continuing In His Word. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951.
- Oldfield, J. H. God Gives The Increase. 1977 Senior Church History Essay.