

The Illinois Synod, 1867-1872

Am. Ch. Hist. 373

R. Kugler

1972

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library

11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W

Mequon, Wisconsin

The first Lutheran synod which included Illinois in its boundaries was the Synod of the West formed in 1835. In 1846 this synod was divided into three separate bodies: The Synod of the West, made up of three congregations in Indiana and points eastward; The Synod of the Southwest, made up of congregations in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri; and the Synod of Illinois, composed of fifteen congregations in Illinois with seven pastors and 685 communicants.

"The Synod of Illinois held its first session at Hillsboro, Oct. 15, 1846. It is composed of 7 ministers, having under their care 18 (?) congregations. They report Baptisms: 42, Confirmations: 31, Communicants: 685. These brethren appear to be actively engaged in the work of the Master. This Synod, in connection with the Synod of the West, have recently established a Literary and Theological Institute at Hillsboro, Illinois. We trust that this attempt to advance the Redeemer's kingdom may be abundantly successful."¹

Because of difficulty in travel the Synod of Illinois was divided into two synods in 1851. Also, the increase of population in the northern part of the state, where Chicago was fast emerging as the metropolis, led the pastors in northern Illinois to withdraw from this body and to form the Synod of Northern Illinois in 1851. Boundary lines were established along an East-West line near Peoria. The new Northern Illinois Synod listed congregations in Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and one in Pennsylvania. Both of these synods joined the General Synod. However, in the northern Illinois Synod were men who had been associated with the Franckean Synod in New York. This group had a distinct liberal leaning and it was no surprise when dissensions arose and resulted in a split in 1867, with one group withdrawing and joining the General Council.

Prior to this division there were attempts to keep the Illinois

Synod together. They all cooperated in establishing and maintaining training schools. Both supported Hillsboro College, begun in 1846. The school was moved to Springfield in 1852, and the name was changed to Illinois State University. This later became Carthage College, moved to Carthage, Illinois. (And to Kenosha, Wisc. in 1964) The school at Springfield was purchased by the Mo. Synod for its seminary after it went under due to financial troubles in 1874.

All of these early synods were affiliated with the General Synod, including the Southern Illinois Synod, formed at Jonesboro in 1856. The Scandinavians had dropped out in 1860 and had formed the Augustana Synod. They were disappointed with aberrations in doctrine and practice. There were efforts to maintain confessionalism in the group, however. President Francis Springer recommended to the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Illinois: "an explicit and formal avowal of the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism of Luther as being, jointly, a sufficiently accurate and faithful exponent of the doctrinal views of our churches and pastors"² in 1854 already. But there were those who didn't adopt these views as we shall see shortly in the ensuing relations with the Missouri Synod.

A division took place in 1867 when the Synod of Illinois decided to withdraw from the General Synod and join the General Council. The Synod was dissolved at Mt. Pulaski, Ill. on Aug. 24, 1867. The group joining the General Council adopted the name "Synod of Illinois and Adjacent States," and those staying with the General Synod took the name "Synod of Central Illinois". Rev. Ephraim Miller was its first president. In 1876 the Germans (about half of the group) withdrew and formed the Wartburg Synod. These men wanted to keep the German language and had as their president J. D. Severinghaus who organized

a school at Chicago.

Shortly after the division of the old Illinois Synod the group called "the Synod of Illinois and Adjacent States" withdrew from the General Council when the Council would take no definite stand on the Four Points. This is the group we are specifically interested in, because that group helped to form the Synodical Conference in 1872 and later became part of the Missouri Synod. The other groups eventually linked up with the U.L.C., now the L.C.A.

Records of negotiations with Missouri in 1869 indicate that the Illinois Synod stood with Missouri on the doctrine of Church and Ministry. They stated their disagreement with the General Council and discussed doctrine and practice. Finally they issued this statement:

"Da unsere Synode durch solche ihrer Glieder, welche mit Gliedern der Synode von Illinois in hohem Berührung gekommen sind, in Erfahrung brachte, dass innerhalb der letztern noch bis diese Stunde die bedenklichsten, sowohl Lehre wie Praxis betreffenden, Zustände sich finden, so erachtete sie für den allein richtigen Weg zur Herstellung eines rechten Verhältnisses und vollen Zutrauens beider Synoden zu einander die fernere Abhaltung sowohl freier, wie offizieller Conferenzen durch Glieder beider Synoden, sowie gegenseitigen Besuch unserer Synodalversammlungen."³

While this sounded pretty good to Illinois, Missouri still wanted to continue discussions. C.J. Herrmann Fick was one of the leaders in the negotiations between the two bodies. Reluctance to join closer relations with the Illinois Synod was expressed by some of the members of the Mo. Synod situated in Illinois.⁴ Shortly thereafter, Illinois withdrew from the General Council in 1870 at a convention in Lancaster, Ohio because of laxity on the Council's part over the Four Points.

The results of the discussions of Fick with Missouri were evident at the 1872 convention. Even though there were some aberrations in Illinois they promised to clean them up. Illinois agreed to allow

Missouri doctrine and practice to come into their churches. The minutes of that convention state:

"Es seien noch Uebelstände da in Lehre und Praxis; es habe selbst Klage geführt, aber es sei, so weit es sehen könne, nichts geschehen. Die die Pastoren Schaller, Köstering, Fick, und die Professoren Crämer und Brauer, welche theils als Delegaten bei den Versammlungen jener Synode zugegen gewesen, theils sonst im Berkehr mit Gliedern der Illinois-Synode gestanden, gaben Zeugnisz, dasz sie immer bei allen Synodalen die grösztesten Willigkeit gefunden und stets hätten merken können, dasz sich die Synode bestrebe, alles in ihrem Kreise nach rein lutherischer Lehre und Praxis einzurichten. Glieder der Illinois-Synode erinnerten den Klageführenden daran, dasz seine Anklagen doch gehört und in St. Louis untersucht und beigelegt worden seien. Es sei damals eine Versöhnung zu Stand gebracht, aber hernach leider nicht gehalten worden. Die Illinois-Synode als solche, resp. ihre Beamten, seien jedesmal, sobald eine Klage an sie gebracht worden, eingeschritten. Da auch angeführt worden war, dasz in manchen Gemeinden noch unlutherische Katechismen im Gebrauch seien, so bezeugten die anwesenden Prediger der Ehrw. Illinois-Synode, dasz eine Anzahl von ihnen den Dietrich'schen, andere den alten pennsylvanischen, noch andere den von Krotel und Mann herausgegebenen Katechismus gebrauchten. Unsere früheren Delegaten bei der Illinois-Synode bezeugten, dasz damals schon die Synode sich dahin erklärt habe, auf Abschaffung aller falschen und Anschaffung rechtlgläubiger Bücher zu dringen. Durch alles bei dieser Gelegenheit Gesagte überzeuge sich die Synode, dasz die Ehrw. Illinois-Synode als Synode, trotz aller noch in deren Gemeinden und auch bei einzelnen Predigern sich findenden Schwächen und Mängel, nicht nur die reine Lehre bekenne, sondern auch mit der That sie treibe und eine der reine Lehre gemäszte Praxis durchzuführen strebe. Auf geschenehen Antrag stimmte dann die Synode für die Annahme und Geltung der getroffenen Vereinbarung."⁵

All the while these negotiations were going on, from 1869 to 1872 the two synods had some connections already in the school system of Missouri.

"Two students at St. Louis in 1870-71 hailed from congregations of the Illinois Synod. One of them was among the 37 graduates in June, 1871. In the following school year (1871-72) there were 4 students at Concordia from the Illinois Synod, one in the practical division and 3 in the preseminary department. the closer bonds between the two synods were evident in the increased attendance at Concordia in years following."⁶

The Illinois Synod consolidated with the Illinois District of the Missouri Synod in 1879 as it had been organized in 1875. This became official on May 24, 1880 at Quincy, ILL. The pastors and congregations in geographical Illinois joined the Illinois district, and those in

Missouri joined its Western District. We mention Missouri first in Illinois' dealings with the Synodical Conference because today the largest number of Lutherans in Illinois are in the Missouri Synod.⁷

Our own Wisconsin Synod is also quite well represented. The first dealings our infant body had were with the old Synod of Northern Illinois.

"The Synod of Northern Illinois was not able to satisfy the urgent calls coming from rapidly growing German communities in Illinois and Iowa. Through its president, C.B. Thuemmel, it broached the question of joint work with the German Wisconsin Synod. Wisconsin was not disinclined, but no definite steps were taken on either side. At the time of the Scandinavian secession from the Northern Illinois Synod in 1860, Wisconsin's negotiations were also permitted to cease."⁸

Perhaps fortunately for the Wisconsin Synod this offer was not taken up. It was struggling doctrinally itself at this time and a union with the Synod of Northern Illinois here would have pulled it along into "broad" American Lutheranism and eventually into the bigger mergers of the 1920's and 1960's.

Koehler describes the relations of the Illinois Synod from the Wisconsin point of view on the brink of the Synodical Conference formation:

"At this November (1871) meeting the Illinois Synod apparently was represented for the first time; at any rate, when Bading at the next Wisconsin Synod (Oshkosh, May 30-June 4, 1872) announced the first convention of the Synodical Conference, to take place at his church in Milwaukee in July (10th-16th), the very first committee asked that the delegates to be appointed (Bading-Hoenecke-Ernst, Nagel-Kusel-Geiger) assure themselves as to the confessional soundness of the Illinois Synod. The matter was thoroughly discussed, and is assigned in the report; a plausible explanation is that the 1859-60 dealings with the heterogeneous Illinois bodies regarding the Illinois State University were recalled, and that the original sponsors of straight confessionalism in the Wisconsin Synod stood behind the recommendation; Koehler-Gausewitz-Goldammer, Geog. Gamm-C. Christgau were the committee to offer it. The Illinois Synod (the original body in that state, 1846, growing out of the defunct Synod of the West) was thoroughly Lutheran as may be gathered from the fact that it very soon (after 1879) merged with Missouri. It had broken away

from the General Synod to unite with The General Council in 1867, but like Wisconsin had severed its connection with the Council also, on account of the Four Points."⁹

In closing, it is interesting (not necessarily prophetic) to note that the tide has turned almost in an opposite direction when we view the rift in the Missouri Synod today. One hundred years ago Missouri was trying to urge Illinois into line and finally assimilated it as a district, and as a member of the Synodical Conference. In recent years, Illinois has always ^{been} recognized (with the exception of a few radicals at River Forest and Wayne Saffen at the University of Chicago) as the hotbed of conservatism in the Missouri Synod. The Seminary at Springfield, which had its origins in the old Illinois Synods is considered doctrinally conservative when contrasted with the Seminary at St. Louis. Perhaps we're standing too close to history to intelligently analyze but we can point to the statement its faculty made in response to the Preus (formerly president of Springfield) "Statement" on April 14, 1972:

"RESOLVED, that the Faculty of Concordia Theological Sem^{ary} assure the President of the Synod of our prayers on his behalf, and be it further

RESOLVED, that we commend him for the issuance of the "Statement" for study in the church of those issues which have been a source of concern for over a decade."¹⁰

Only time will tell (if there's enough left) if this will make any difference in the struggle. If it is true that Church History events of major importance occur in hundred-year increments, can we expect to see a reversal of the roles Missouri and the old Illinois Synod had at the formation of the Synodical Conference a century ago? Will there be a de facto Synodical separation in Illinois again like that of a century ago?

New Orleans, 1973 may give us some answers.

REFERENCES

1. Carl S. Meyer, ed. "Minutes of N. Y. Ministerium", quoted in article by Lewis W. Spitz in Moving Frontiers. Concordia Publ. House. St. Louis: 1964, p. 36.
2. Ibid., pp. 39-40.
3. "Vereinbarung mit der Synode von Illinois u. a. Staaten", in Deutschen Ev. Lutheran Synode von Mo. usw. Synodal-Berichten. 1869. Concordia Vereindrückerei, St. Louis., p.96.
4. Article in Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Walter D. Uhlig, author. Vol. XXXVI, No. 4, 1964.
5. Synodal-Bericht, 1872, "Die Illinois Synode Betreffend", p.96.
6. Carl S. Meyer in Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Vol. XXIX, No.1, 1956, pp. 63-64.
7. Benjamin H. Pershing in The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church, Vol. II, Augsburg Publ. House, Minneapolis, MN., p. 1116.
8. J. L. Neve, History of the Lutheran Church in America, The Lutheran Literary Board, Burlington, Iowa, 1934, p.228.
9. J. P. Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, Sentinel Publ. Co., St. Cloud, MN., 1970, p.142.
10. H. Otten, ed. "Christian News", Publ. by Lutheran News, Inc., New Haven, MO. May 1, 1972, p.9.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to those sources listed in the endnotes the following were consulted:

Lutheran Cyclopedia. ed. Lueker, Erwin L. Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis: 1954.

The Lutheran Cyclopedia. ed. Jacobs, Hy. Eyster and Haas, J. Chas. Scribner's Sons. New York: 1899.

Polack, W.G. The Building of a Great Church. Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis: 1941.

Wentz, Abdel Ross. A Basic History of Lutheranism in America. Fortress Press. Philadelphia: 1964.

Those following could have been helpful, but they were deemed inaccessible by this writer: (listed in Lutheran Cyclopedia above)

Proceedings of the Illinois Synod(1852-80) in Pritzlaff Library, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO.

Proceedings of the Illinois Synod(1846-1867) in Carthage Library, Carthage College, Kenosha, Wisc.

Proceedings of the Synod of the Southwest, also in Carthage Library.