

PROF. ADAM MARTIN (1835-1921)

His years in the Wisconsin Synod

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Outline

Introduction: Characteristics of pioneer years

- I. Martin's background years
- II. Auspicious beginnings with Wisconsin Synod
- III. The conflict over the goals of Northwestern
- IV. The conflict over the Synod's stand on unionism
- V. The conflict over leaving - different accounts

Conclusion: His notable contribution

A Chronology of Martin's Years in the Wisconsin Synod

1865

March - applies to the board for position of president

June - called during last days of synod convention

July 17 - accepts call

September - arrives in Watertown and speaks on opening day

1866

Spring - takes part in friendly discussions with Iowa men
presents scholarship plan to Iowa

June 7-13 - presents scholarship plan to synod convention

December - represents synod at Reading, Pa., in preparation
for founding of General Council

1867

June 20-29 - synod convention designates him to represent it
at Ft. Wayne and founding of General Council

November - Martin represents synod at Ft. Wayne, synod be-
comes charter member of General Council, Martin
elected temporary secretary

1868

June 11-17 - Martin votes against resolution rejecting union-
ism, threatens to leave synod

Summer - he is relieved of teaching the classics in German

November - problems at Northwestern, Bading reports that
he has "conditionally discharged" Martin

1869

April - Bading dismisses Martin again, effective immediately

May - Martin released from synod

June - called to Pennsylvania College in Gettysberg

The pioneer years of the First German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin is probably one of the most exciting periods in the history of the synod. During the years 1850 to 1869 the pioneer pastors and congregations were living on the eastern edge of America's great frontier. The years were marked by rapid expansion, sudden change, and violent conflict.

The same characteristics were also evident on America's religious frontier. American Lutheranism was spreading with the people and was at the same time emerged in the great struggle to determine its confessional identity. Within American Lutheranism the newly born Wisconsin Synod was also growing and engaged in the same struggle. In such times and in such an atmosphere there will inevitably be conflicts of all kinds. The life of Adam Martin within the Wisconsin Synod is the study of just such a conflict in such times.

Martin was one of the pioneer pastors of the Synod during the last years of this period. He came to the Synod in 1865 and left four years later, in 1869. The burden of this paper is to examine his relations with the Synod during these years and the reasons for his leaving.

I. HIS BACKGROUND YEARS.

Adam Martin was born in Biedershausen, near Zweibruecken

in the Palitinate, in Bavaria, Germany. I could not determine the exact date of his birth, but since Koehler says that he was in his early thirties when he came to Watertown it must have been somewhere between 1832 and 1835.¹ The years prior to his association with the Wisconsin Synod are probably best summarized in the brief biography of his life in The Pennsylvania College Book:

In his early boyhood he came to this country to live with an uncle at Utica, N.Y. After a little over a year's experience in the land of his adoption, he went to Hartwick Seminary, N.Y., to prepare for college. He was graduated at Hamilton College, in the state of New York, in 1858. After studying theology at Hartwick Seminary, he was called to the pastorate of St. Mark's Lutheran Church of Middleburgh, Schorarie Co., N.Y., and in September, 1861, was ordained by the New York Ministerium of the Lutheran Church, at its meeting in Rochester, N.Y.²

His association with the Wisconsin Synod began four years later, with his call to Northwestern.

II. AUSPICIOUS BEGINNINGS

Perhaps "call" is the wrong word to use in discussing Martin's coming to Northwestern University and the Wisconsin Synod. Koehler says that he applied to the Board for the position of president in March of 1865 and was then "called" during the last days of the Synod's convention in June.³ Apparently he had been recommended by Pastor Wetzel in Attica, N.Y. (Brenner's father-in-law) and Dr. Moldehnke, who had

¹John P. Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod (St. Cloud, Minn.: Sentinel Publishing Co., 1970), p 121.

²Edward Breidenbraugh, ed., The Pennsylvania College Book (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1882), p 173. Possibly an autobiography, since no author is listed as in others.

³Koehler, op.cit., p 121.

* Dates behind name in biography verify 1835, died 1921.

come to know him while he was in Middleburgh.⁴

Exactly how long Martin had been in Middleburgh is difficult to determine. In his letter of acceptance to the Northwestern Board, which was dated July 17, he indicated that he would not arrive before September because he was tied down at Hartwick College until August 24. Prof. Koehler says that he was teaching at that college when he got the call, so I would guess that he couldn't have been at Middleburgh for much more than three years, and probably at Hartwick for one year or so. No matter what the time period was at each place the fact remains that in less than four years he had accepted three different calls, the last one of which he applied for.

However he came to Northwestern, there is no doubt that the founding president of the new university hit it off very well with his new synod and its representatives. For example, they were all apparently agreed on the primary function of the new school, to offer a general higher education to anyone who desired it. Excerpts from an opening announcement printed in the Watertown Democrat, which was apparently drawn up by Martin,⁵ approved by the Board of Trustees, and signed by President Bading, indicate this common agreement:

The aim of the Board of Trustees is to qualify the pupils who are entrusted to them for any (emphasis mine) higher position in life through the most complete and thorough instruction. It is for their interest to conduct and manage the Institution so that it can be ranked with the best institutions in the country. ... Although it is under the jurisdiction of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin, there is no endeavor of persuasion to this or that confession.⁶

⁴Erwin Kowalke, Centennial Story (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1965), p. 3.

⁵Koehler, op.cit., p 121.

⁶Kowalke, op.cit., p 33.

The article on the new college which appeared in the Gemeindeblatt, the Synod's official publication, revealed this same agreement on the main purpose for the college. The word ALL was printed in heavy black type and the appeal for support was made squarely to the citizens of the state since the college was meant for them.⁷

Since there was agreement on the chief goal of the college it comes as no surprise that there was also initial agreement on such things as the curriculum, administration, and methods of establishment and support. For example, Martin's enterprising plan for financing the new college and its faculty by the sale of four-year and life-time scholarships was enthusiastically endorsed by both the Board of Trustees and the 1866 Synod.⁸

In connection with the scholarship program it might be of interest to note the subtle change in emphasis on the goals of the college which Martin makes when he presents his plan to the Synod. As opposed to his announcement in the Watertown Democrat and the first article in the Gemeindeblatt, there is a sudden change in emphasis, from general education for everyone to another goal of preparing pastors. Among other things in his speech before the convention he says, "the highest and holiest interest of our church in the possession of a college is the need of servants of the Gospel."⁹

⁷Ibid., p 35

⁸Koehler, op.cit., p 122 and Kowalke, op.cit., chapter VII.

⁹Koehler, op.cit., p 122.

In analyzing the overall content of this speech it becomes obvious that Martin had ^{not} discarded his first goal, but had merely added a second goal. He now had in mind a double goal for the new university, to prepare men for the ministry and to provide all Germans especially, with a better education. Prof. Kowalke says:

He agreed that our church's chief interest in its college should be that it produce servants of the Godpel. But, he added, how many of our best, our ablest, most talented spirits have suffered bitterly under the feeling that they were but strangers in a strange land. That denomination, he went on to say, will be best known and will have the strongest influence on the cultural life of the people that does the most for the education of the eminent men in the nation. The college should produce men who can without shame or embarrassment take their place alongside the best in the land. He felt it keenly that Germans in this country were being treated as inferiors, and he assumed it as his mission in this country to place them in the position in the community that their talents and abilities deserved.¹⁰

It was this new two-fold goal of the college which actually marked the beginning of the end of Martin's good relations with the Synod over Northwestern University.

III. THE CONFLICT OVER THE GOALS OF NORTHWESTERN.

The Synod had always had this second goal in mind for its school. In fact, that was the original purpose in founding Northwestern and the Seminary. Martin had side-tracked them or confused the issue temporarily, but they soon returned to the original idea. The Synod recognized that if it wanted its pastors and its congregations to support the college it must be obvious that the college was their school and that it was to serve as the training institution for their future pas-

¹⁰Kowalke, op.cit., p 47.

tors. The result was that it began to slowly fade out what Martin himself actually considered to be the most important function of the school, namely, to improve the position of the German people in America's society by giving them a higher education. It began instead to emphasize only the second goal of preparing pastors. The conflict was of course a disagreement over what should be the primary function of the Church, preaching the spiritual Gospel or preaching the social gospel.

This growing difference in philosophies soon appeared in concrete form as a conflict over the curriculum. Since Martin was interested in building an American college and university he had set up a curriculum designed to accommodate the great majority of students who wanted a general education. It was a curriculum designed to carry out Martin's chief goal of improving the position of the German people in America's society. The medium of instruction was almost exclusively English.¹¹

As the Synod slowly reached a new clarity on the primary purpose of its school, it began to suggest revisions in the curriculum through its representatives, the Board of Trustees. One of the first major requests that the Board made was that the language of the classroom be the same language that the graduates would one day use in the pulpits of the Synod's churches, the German language.¹²

President Martin resisted this change. He had been

¹¹Ibid., p 171.

¹²Ibid., p 172.

teaching the classics and he objected to the Board's decision that the ancient languages should be translated into German.¹³ So in the summer of 1868 the Board relieved him of the teaching of the classics and placed this responsibility into the hands of Prof. Meumann. When Martin warned the Board that the use of German as the medium of instruction conflicted with the scholarship obligations, the Board gave him the responsibility of teaching the classics to those who did not know German.¹⁴ As stated previously this all took place in the summer.

Another conflict erupted after school opened. The exact nature and origin of it is hard to determine. Koehler describes it as "a triangular trouble, involving Martin, Easterday, and the students, . . . the nature of which remains obscure. The question seems to have been regarding Martin's fitness as a teacher, and Hoenecke and Meumann together with Praeses Bading sided with the students."¹⁵ The outcome was that at the November (1868) meeting of the Board, President Bading reported that he had "conditionally discharged President Martin."¹⁶ What Bading meant by "conditionally discharged" is a bit confusing and is probably best described by Prof. Kowalke who had access to the Board minutes:

Martin then tendered his resignation but asked that he

¹³Ibid., p 57.

¹⁴Koehler, op.cit., p 123.

¹⁵Ibid., p 123.

¹⁶Kowalk, op.cit. p 58.

might remain until September 1, 1869. On his assurance that he would faithfully serve the school and do his best to restore proper order among the students as long as he remained in the service of the school, the resignation was accepted on his terms. In the April meeting in 1869 Bading again reported on President Martin. He said that it had become more and more clear that Martin did not possess the necessary qualifications for his position, that especially in recent periods he had not carried out his office with proper faithfulness, and that the institution had in consequence suffered severely. For these reasons he had been dismissed. Bading also reported that Martin had accepted this decision and had only asked that his salary be paid till the end of the term. His connection with the college ceased at Easter, 1869, and his release from the Synod was given him in May of that year.¹⁷

In order to get a clear picture of all the factors in Martin's rather sudden dismissal from Northwestern and subsequent release from the Synod it is necessary to understand that he was at the same time engaged in another conflict with the Synod, ^{only} at a different level.

IV. THE CONFLICT OVER THE SYNOD'S STAND ON UNIONISM.

It was only natural that his duties at Northwestern would involve him with synodical affairs. This involvement began shortly after his arrival, when in the spring of 1866 he and Bading presented themselves at a general conference of Iowa synod professors and pastors in the interests of the scholarship sale for Northwestern.¹⁸ This conference had been called for the purpose of discussing five theses on the subject of "Open Questions." Martin and Bading were apparently invited to come either in response to their own request or by virtue of Iowa's interest in an association with the Wisconsin Synod.

¹⁷ Ibid., p 58.

¹⁸ Kowalke, op.cit., p 108.

A couple months later, at the sixteenth synodical assembly held in Fon du Lac (June 7-13, 1866), Martin was again active in synod affairs. A large portion of the minutes contain his previously mentioned speech on the college and the scholarship plan. As stated before, it was only natural that as the president of the Synod's new college he would become involved with the Synod in other matters also.

That his participation in other business besides that of the college was valued is evidenced by the fact that he and Streissguth were appointed to represent the Synod at the famous Reading, Pennsylvania, meeting, which looked forward to the founding of a new general body of confessional Lutherans. In June of 1867 this confidence was displayed again when the Milwaukee convention chose him to represent the Synod, along with Bading and Hoenecke, at the actual founding meeting of the General Council which was to take place in November at Ft. Wayne.¹⁹ At this meeting he served as temporary secretary until the election of regular officials.²⁰ All in all, it appeared as if he was going to be a respected man in both the Wisconsin Synod and the General Council.

But the proceedings of the eighteenth assembly of the synod in Racine (June 11-17, 1868) record a sudden demise in Martin's standing. On Friday of the first week's sessions, the assembly by a rising vote condemned "together with the whole orthodox Lutheran church, every form of altar and pul-

¹⁹Ibid., pp 109-110.

²⁰Henry Jacobs, Memoirs, p ?. (Forgot to mark page and I couldn't find it again later.)

pit fellowship with unorthodox and heterodox believers as contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Lutheran Church."²¹ Martin and three other pastors voted against the resolution. The general opinion of the Synod was that these four men be dealt with privately. But the very nature of the resolution and the certainty of their own beliefs led two of these men, Kittel and Vorberg, to realize that they conscientiously could not remain in fellowship with the Synod. The result was that before adjournment on that Friday they asked for their releases. On the following Saturday morning these were reluctantly given. The third man, Lukas, remained with the Synod, was dealt with privately, and one year later changed his vote. That left only Martin to be dealt with.

Koehler's narration suggests that he obtained a release along with Kittel and Vorberg.²² A careful examination of the proceedings however, indicates that he and several other pastors excused themselves from the convention Saturday morning until Monday.²³ I assume that they had obligations to meet over the week-end such as preaching engagements. I could find no indication in the minutes that Martin asked for a release. Prof. Kowalke notes that during the later discussion on withdrawal from the General Council he said that he would resign on the day the Synod followed through

²¹Koehler, op.cit., p 117.

²²Ibid., p 117-118.

²³1868 Synodical Proceedings, 5th session, p 17 of photostatic copy in library.

with its new policy.²⁴

Martin had indicated his feelings about the new state of affairs earlier in a speech he gave on Friday before the vote:

He declared that he believed that pulpit and altar fellowship with other denominations was necessary in a new country where church relations were still unsettled and that this kind of fellowship was a necessary part of mission work. He considered himself to be not only a teacher but also a preacher, and he believed that he must preach fellowship wherever there was general agreement, in order thus to further the work of the Kingdom. As he taught persons in the classroom who were members of various denominations, so he believed he should also preach to them from the pulpit and join them at the altar.²⁵

He was now reminded more than ever of a statement of Dr. Hall's to the effect: He had observed that when a good enterprise got under way so the devil couldn't stop it any more, he always tried to get into the coachman's box in order to drive the horses to death.²⁶

From what he says in this speech it is apparent that Martin disagreed with the Synod over the method or Scriptural guidelines to be followed by the Church in preaching the Gospel. It was a conflict over unionism. In analyzing this conflict we would have to say it was an inevitable outcome of the first disagreement on the primary function of the Church. While the Wisconsin Synod over the years came to an ever clearer picture of what Scriptures taught concerning these two doctrines, and changed its position and practice accordingly, Adam Martin remained the same. It should also be noted that his beliefs and principles allowed him to remain

²⁴Kowalke, op.cit., p 57.

²⁵Ibid., p 57.

²⁶Koehler, op.cit., p 117.

vided the department, rejected Jacobs entirely, and on June thirtieth²⁸ elected Martin Professor of German.²⁹ He accepted the call and entered his new position in September of that same year. He taught there until 1898.³⁰ It was while he was here that he apparently came into conflict with the Wisconsin Synod ~~ane~~ last time. This time it wasn't a direct confrontation as previously, but rather a differing account over the reasons and manner of his departure.

His biography in The Pennsylvania College Book, which as mentioned earlier might be an autobiography, presents the following account:

In less than three years this young college (Northwestern) was in good organization, having buildings to accommodate over one hundred students, and a very eligible location, besides secured subscriptions of an endowment of over seventy thousand dollars, while the field had not been half canvassed. But by the determination of Synod to change the character of the institution, Prof. Martin felt constrained to resign (emphasis mine) his position, and in the spring of 1869 he was nominated by the Ministerium of Pennsylvania to the Professorship of the German Language and Literature in Pennsylvania College. The Board of Trustees confirming this nomination, he accepted the call, and in September of the same year entered on his duties in that position, in which he continues to the present time.³¹

Henry Jacobs, who later ^{did} become a colleague of Martin's at Gettysberg, offers this interesting angle to Martin's situation and personality:

Prof. Martin also thought and acted like an utter stranger. He was always on the outside. A graduate of Hamilton College, he had been President of North Western Uni-

²⁸Breidenbraugh, op.cit. p 25.

²⁹Jacobs, op.cit., Vol.I, p 130.

³⁰Ibid., Vol. II, Endnotes page 49, No. 6.

³¹Breidenbraugh, op.cit., p 173.

versity at Watertown, Wis., where his experience with the Missouri element had taught him a severe lesson. Part of the endowment he had collected had been restored to the donors because of scruples concerning loaning out funds at interest. He had lived in constant conflict with the extremists on one side, only to come to Gettysberg and be associated with those on the other. He excelled in social gifts. He was a most entertaining conversationalist and agreeable companion; but not a close or progressive student. He was critical, censorious, and pessimistic. If he had put himself down to systematic, thorough work, he might have stood very high in the judgment of the church. (But he became discouraged and devoted himself to the care of his wife and only child; and after a time, of the large fortune of his father-in-law.)³²

I could find no reference in either Koehler or Kowalke to the returning of scholarship funds because of scruples about lending. In fact everything they say indicates just the opposite, that the Board did everything in its power to hold on to the funds. The procedure of buying back scholarships and returning money did not begin until some time later when the whole scholarship plan was discarded because of the refusal of the holders to redeem their pledges. Perhaps Jacobs has reference to one case in particular of which Martin or someone else informed him. There is no way of knowing unless one has access to the minutes and records of the Board.

In regard to the other viewpoint of Martin's leaving, I would say it is probably due to Martin's own misrepresentation of the facts. I cannot conceive of Bading dismissing him only because of his views on unionism and German in the classrooms. The neglect of duties and the discipline problems and the complaints must have been there. The other two factors probably contributed to the willingness to make

³²Jacobs, op.cit., Vol. II, p 142.

the decision to dismiss Martin, but I don't think they were the immediate cause. There were others in the Synod and at Northwestern, such as Easterday and several others, who held similar views but were not dismissed. The Synod had just come to clarity on this position itself. It had not taken action yet with the German mission societies or the General Council, and had determined to deal with individuals privately. Martin could probably have kept his job a while longer if he had been faithful. Even Jacobs seems to hint that he was the type who didn't always apply himself to the tasks he was called to.

The Synod's changed position on the function of the school and unionism may have contributed to Martin's apathy and loss of enthusiasm for his job, and it may have influenced Bading's willingness to dismiss him, but in these respects it is only a secondary cause. Ultimately they probably would have led to his dismissal, but not at that time yet. In the final analysis, the immediate cause of Martin's leaving Northwestern College and the Wisconsin Synod was his own ineptitude and faithlessness in the performance of his duties, which forced Bading to dismiss him (demand his resignation). As to the inference that Martin resigned of his own free will because of these factors, I would discount it.

On a concluding note, it is rather ironic that while Martin objected to the use of German at Northwestern he ended up teaching it for 29 years at Gettysberg. He made his living teaching German. It is also ironic that his facility in German led to what I consider ^{to be} his major contribution to

American Lutheranism and the Wisconsin Synod. For while he was at Gettysberg, he collaborated with Dr. Jacobs in the translation of the Book of Concord, by translating the Large Catechism. Thus it is actually Adam Martin's work which is the chief basis for the English translation of Luther's Large Catechism which we read in our own Concordia Triglotta.

This last point should serve as a warning to Senior Church History students who complain and resist assignments requiring work in the German language. History has been known to repeat itself, and who knows, perhaps this work in German and these resulting papers may turn out to be our own most notable contributions to American Lutheranism and the Wisconsin Synod.

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