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The Missouri Synod and English Work

By H. B. HEMMETER

(Written at the Request of Synod's Centennial Committee)

The Missouri Synod, which is about to celebrate its centennial in 1947, has been known in the past largely as a German-speaking body. Its interest and its activity in Lutheran church work in the English language are not so generally known or understood. The fact is that both the Saxon and the Franconian founders from the very beginning were interested in, and anxious to do, service in the language of their new homeland. Already before the organization of Synod in 1847 the Saxons in 1838 established their Concordia Academy in Altenburg, Missouri, enrolling at the very start one who was preparing to preach the Gospel in the English language and another to preach to the Indians. The Franconian fathers almost simultaneously with their German work began their mission among the Indians. Moreover, one of the very founders of Synod, Pastor Brohm, is known to have preached in English to the English-speaking people in Perry County, Missouri, in Synod's earliest days.

The question then arises as to how it came about that the Missouri Synod during the first fifty years of its existence engaged so predominantly in German work. The answer, of course, lies clearly on the surface for all those who are conversant with the conditions which confronted the Synod at that time. During those years the energies of the body were

pre-empted by the great need for German preaching among the German settlers in the East and West, especially among those who were coming to this country during that time and who settled in the Middle West, the Northwest, and in Canada in continuously growing numbers. It was a matter of doing the work which lay closest at their door and for which the Synod was best fitted.

Their preoccupation and self-exhausting work among the Germans during these first fifty years of Synod's existence did not, however, change Synod's attitude toward English missionary work. There may have been individuals who by reason of local experience or interests, or for other reasons, lacked adequate vision in this matter, just as is generally the case in larger bodies of men on matters of policy. But whatever may have been the reaction of one or the other here and there, Synod as such and its leaders furnish no justification for a claim of lack of interest in the English cause. This fact is evident in Synod's official attitude during the first fifty years of its history toward the then largely English Tennessee Synod. That synod by that time had gone through its transition from German to English and had preserved its conservative confessional character. In spite of Missouri's absorbing work, often quite exhausting, meeting the demands of German people demanding spiritual attention, Dr. C. F. W. Walther, Missouri's great leader, and others with him found time to show their good will and to lend their influence to those staunch contenders for the faith in the great Southeast. Note the following records gleaned from the minutes of the Tennessee Synod as contained in Henkel's *History* of that body. In its 28th session in 1848 that Synod resolved:

"That we rejoice to learn that some of our German Lutheran brethren in the West have formed themselves into a synod, called 'The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States,' and that they are publishing a German paper, styled *Der Lutheraner*, which is devoted to the promulgation and defense of the primitive doctrines and usages of the Lutheran Church; to which paper we would call the attention of our German brethren." (Henkel's *History*, etc., pp. 119—120.)

In 1853, only a few years after the organization of The Missouri Synod, official relations between Tennessee and Mis-

souri had been established. According to Henkel's *History*, page 137, the records of Tennessee read:

"No. 10 is a letter from Rev. A. Biewend, a member of the Missouri Synod, in which he informs us that he was appointed a delegate to this body, but that, owing to intervening circumstances, he was prevented from attending. He also expresses the hope and desire that a more intimate acquaintance may be formed between these two bodies."

"Your committee would recommend the following for adoption: —

"Resolved, 1. That we duly appreciate the kind regard of the Missouri Synod and that we also desire a more intimate acquaintance with them and that we appoint Rev. J. R. Moser a delegate to the next session of that Synod."

Letters from the Revs. Theo. Brohm and A. Hoyer, both of the Missouri Synod, were received and printed in full in the minutes. Compare Henkel, pp. 139—140.

In 1854 the Tennessee Synod minutes record:

"The Rev. Theodore Brohm of the Missouri Synod being present, the following preamble and resolutions were unanimously adopted: —

"WHEREAS, The Rev. Theodore Brohm of the city of New York, delegate of the Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, has appeared amongst us and we are assured from personal interviews with him as well as from other sources of information that the synod which he represents adheres strictly to the doctrines of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as exhibited in her confessional standards and are zealously and actively engaged in promoting the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom; be it therefore

"Resolved, 1. That we are highly gratified to see Brother Brohm in our midst.

"Resolved, 2. That we fully and cheerfully reciprocate the kind and fraternal feelings expressed and manifested towards us by the Missouri Synod.

"Resolved, 3. That we will endeavor to cultivate a more intimate acquaintance and a closer union with the Missouri Synod.

"Resolved, 4. That for this purpose Rev. Socrates Henkel be appointed a delegate from this body to the Eastern division

[District] of the Missouri Synod to be held in Baltimore and that Rev. J. R. Moser be appointed our delegate to the Western division [District] of said synod at its next session." (Henkel's *History*, etc., p. 141.)

The close connection of this fraternal exchange of members of the two synods culminated in the forming of the English Conference of Missouri, in 1872, at which the Revs. Polycarp C. Henkel and Jonathan R. Moser, both Tennessean pastors, were present, joining in with Dr. C. F. W. Walther and the Rev. Ch. S. Kleppisch of Missouri. This Conference in 1889 became the English Synod of Missouri.

Connected with and in harmony with this official relation between Missouri and Tennessee, many printed items in Missouri publications might be recorded. Outstanding among them we find an essay of the Rev. F. W. Foehlinger, printed by resolution of Synod in *Lehre und Wehre* (Vol. XI, No. 8, pp. 236 ff.) in the August number of 1865, *by resolution of Synod*. We may therefore consider this essay as a statement of synodical position. This essay advocates vigorous provision of English preaching within our own circles for the purpose of conserving the spiritual interests of the Anglicizing youth of our Church. The essay treats the matter very extensively, meeting all arguments to the contrary, and so breathes the spirit of the missionary founders of our Synod, following also the principles, laid down by Synod in 1857, to be observed when English congregations are to be organized out of German congregations. Here are parts of the essay reproduced:

THE ESTABLISHING OF EV. LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS AMONG OUR ENGLISH-SPEAKING DESCENDANTS

I

"Since, if we reason on the basis of former experience, it is very possible that our German descendants will pass over to the English language, therefore it is undoubtedly the sacred duty of the Lutheran Church to give care to this end that the pure doctrine of the Ev. Lutheran Church be preserved in the English language for our descendants."

In this essay reference is made to the experience of the past century, during which thousands of Germans came to this

country, whose descendants became English and so were lost to the pure Word and the Sacraments of the Lutheran Church. So it was with the Swedes in New Jersey. Even those immigrants who came to this country on account of their faith, like the Salzburgers, who under their leaders, learned and faithful preachers, settled in Georgia, were in their descendants estranged from the Lutheran Church because they found no church which had the pure doctrine in the English language. So it will be also with our descendants; and it will be found a vain effort to keep them with the German language.

The argument that the Gospel cannot be preached as powerfully and as fruitfully in the English as in the German language, it is stated, cannot be meant seriously, since the Gospel in the beginning was not preached in the German language. Since, moreover, the Apostles on the first Pentecost proclaimed the wonderful works of God in divers tongues, which they had not before learned in the ordinary human ways, thereby the Lord has indicated that He would gather to Himself His Church by means of the Holy Ghost, who Himself has created also the languages and given utterance, out of all tongues and nations by means of the Gospel, as also the commission of the Lord to His disciples in Matt. 28:19 states. Moreover, if this claim were true, then one might also draw the conclusion that since the Holy Ghost on the first Pentecost did not preach in the German language, consequently also the Gospel could not be preached as well in the German language as, for instance, in the Greek language. However, this conclusion does not hold.

Then the essayist cites quotations from Luther, which are ever worthy of repeating. From Walch, X, 270: "I do not at all hold with those who devote themselves completely to one language and look down upon all others. For I would like to raise such youth and people who also in foreign lands might be useful to Christ and converse with the people; so that it may not be with us as it was with the Waldensians in Bohemia, who have bound their faith so much into their own language. The Holy Spirit did not do thus in the beginning, He did not wait until all the world should come to Jerusalem and had learnt to know Hebrew, but He gave all tongues to the office of preaching, so that the Apostles were able to speak

wherever they went. This example I will rather follow, that one exercise the youth in many tongues: who knows how God in time may use them. For this purpose also the schools are established."

Again: in Luther's commentary on Genesis, W., I 1042:

"When we therefore look through the history of all nations and times, then we find that from this dissimilarity and variety of languages many kinds of revolutions, wars, and changes in the customs and in religion have risen, and in addition thereto manifold ideas and notions. Therefore God by means of a new miracle desired to turn aside and to do away with such great plague and calamity."

Then the essay continues:

II

"For the accomplishing of this aim, the preservation of the pure doctrine for the future, it is first of all necessary that the English language be fostered at our theological institutions, with especial diligence under one professor, and that the graduating students become capable to preach in the English language with the necessary facility, and to establish and to defend the pure doctrine of the Lutheran Church over against the numberless heterodox churches and so-called Lutherans of all kinds by means of word and script.

III

"In preparation of this purpose it is certainly proper for the present that those younger preachers who are already conversant with the English language master the language as much as possible, in order to preach according to need to the now oncoming English youth, to give catechetical instruction and so in this way to build them up, so to say, alongside of the mother church, into a pure English Lutheran congregation.

IV

"Of indisputable necessity for the future, then, there is the translation of pure Lutheran literature, the dogmatic and catechetical as well as the recreational, besides Lutheran Church hymns.

V

"Desirable also is the founding of an Ev. Lutheran Church paper in the English language."

The foregoing shows that our fathers were awake to the needs of English preaching. Dr. C. F. W. Walther, at the time the editor of *Lehre und Wehre*, especially was awake by word and deed to further this cause.

Neither were efforts to take care of the need for English preaching within the bounds of the Synod itself lacking during these fifty years. An instance in point only a few years after the organization of Synod, and one that shows additional difficulties to those already named in the foregoing, which attended the forming and maintenance of English work, is on record in the following history of the First Missouri Synod English congregation in Baltimore. "Mrs. S., who understood no German, desired to join her husband's church, Old Saint Paul's, at Baltimore. Pastor Wyneken proceeded to instruct her in English, providing her with a New Testament, the Book of Concord, New Market Edition, and a translation of Meurer's *Life of Luther*, which had just been published in New York. But Wyneken left Baltimore before he could confirm the lady, and so Pastor Gottlieb Schaller, vicar during the vacancy, finished the instruction and confirmed her. Pastor Keyl, *busy with the increasing German work*, was not inclined to further the English. But on April 28, 1854, three members of St. Paul's, Dr. A. F. Haynel, Francis Buehler, and Daniel Dobler, addressed a communication to the congregation, asking whether the time to establish an English Lutheran church had not come and soliciting the co-operation of the German congregation in such an organization. As reasons for their action they urged the loss of many young people to the sects soon after their confirmation. The church council, after three months, in a document dated July 27, 1854, replied negatively. Two other communications to the congregation followed, the latter dated August 1, 1855, signed by the petitioners named above in behalf of the "Society for the Furtherance of English Lutheran Services, U. A. C.," this society having been organized May 16, 1855, at the residence of Dr. Haynel. Besides the persons named, men of such known Lutheran character as Thiemeyer, Einwaechter, Schumacher, and others had become members of this society. The memorials they addressed to Old St. Paul's were voluminous. They addressed also Praeses Wyneken and the Eastern District of the Missouri Synod. They were determined men, and when

they had failed to gain the support of Old St. Paul's, in their last communication to the congregation they had said: "Brethren, if you cannot be of one mind with us, pray grant us the liberty of conscience, and give us your blessing upon our undertaking. We only desire that the precious Gospel of Jesus Christ be preached to our children and their descendants as purely and sincerely as we have received it from our pious church fathers." They also stated: "If you refuse our just prayer, you will have to answer for it to God; we will not recede, for we cannot act against God's Word and our conscience; we will go forward, and our banner is: 'Jehovah Nissi,' Exodus 17: 15."

This last communication was dated August 1, and in November, 1856, three members of Old St. Paul's, Dr. A. F. Haynel, Francis Buehler, and Daniel Dobler, together with John Dobler, who was not a member of Key's, organized "Old St. Peter's," and J. Clement Miller, former member of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, but who had taken a special course under Walther at St. Louis, became the pastor. A controversy which arose because of the withdrawal of the organizers from Old St. Paul's was carried on until it *was finally adjusted* November, 1857, by Dr. Walther and Pastor Schwan, who were *appointed by Synod* and who came to Baltimore for that purpose.

A parish school was established by this English congregation, January, 1858, and Teacher C. W. Miller, then at Philadelphia, took charge of the same. He came to Baltimore in April; but the life of the school was short, for the scattered membership of the congregation, which was small, the want of a church edifice and other suitable buildings, as well as the lack of support from the German church, which at that time counted over 300 voting members, spelled its disaster. Teacher Miller, after three months' hard work, withdrew and accepted a call to St. Charles, Mo.

This misfortune was followed by another. Pastor Miller contracted throat trouble, was compelled to resign, and died at Lebanon, Pa., January 5, 1859, of consumption. The faculty at St. Louis now supplied a vicar for the congregation, Student Jacob Buehler, a Baltimore boy, later pioneer Missouri pastor on the Pacific Coast, at San Francisco, and, later still, President for many years of the California District. The

vacancy continuing for some time, Pastor S. Kleppisch followed Student Buehler, until Rev. Henry Wetzel of Mount Solon, Va., was secured for the pastorate for a short while. After vainly calling a number of men, the congregation finally secured Pastor F. A. Schmidt, then of Olean, N. Y., in 1860, under whose leadership the congregation began to grow. The Civil War, however, came with fury, and on April 21, 1861, the congregation was dispossessed of its meeting place, the soldiers requisitioning it for barracks. For a while the congregation worshiped in two different schoolhouses of Old St. Paul's. But the members suffered much from the war, war prices prevailed, and it soon became difficult to maintain the pastorate. Pastor Schmidt, receiving a call at this time, 1861, to the College at Decorah, accepted it. In 1865 the congregation disbanded.

On the basis of records like the foregoing it is our opinion that Missouri followed a course which was most natural and which was dictated by the conditions surrounding it. The founders of Synod were German, had come to this country on account of their Old Lutheran faith. They preached it first to the Germans. And the demands coming to them from their own countrymen taxed their ability, the crying need for German missionary work among Lutheran settlers, thousands of them very recent immigrants, well nigh exhausted their supplies. The need for English missionary work was not ignored by them. They, especially through their leaders, kept their interest in that work alive, though there always were difficulties in the way, and discouraging experiences, such as in the case of the Baltimore congregation, were not wanting.

Dr. W. Dallmann in his "The English Work of the Missouri Synod" published in *Ebenezer*, page 44, is in substantial agreement with this résumé when he says:

"The German Synod from the earliest days saw the need of English work, and Professor Biewend taught the language at the St. Louis Seminary.

"As early as 1852 Synod at Fort Wayne voted the proceeds of lots at Dayton, Ohio, donated by Mr. Buehler, to the institution at Fort Wayne in order to raise the educational standard also in respect to the English language.

"Prominent English citizens having voiced a desire for

an English college at Fort Wayne, Pastor Husmann and Mr. Piepenbrink were appointed a committee to look into the matter. Next year Synod at Cleveland authorized the committee to proceed, since there was no need of proofs that such an institution was needed for our Synod and the Lutheran Church at large. Experience proves that our children will become English in spite of all efforts to keep them German and that English people can remain true Lutherans. The next year Synod at St. Louis thought the matter so important that, if necessary, even a small capital might be borrowed for the purpose; a general collection was also to be taken.

"The collections did not amount to much. The congregations of the Fort Wayne Conference pledged \$7,000 for a new building to house both the seminary and the academy. The dedication of the same on October 26 was the worthy and inspiring close of the synodical sessions of 1857. Mr. A. Sutermeister, formerly a teacher at an English mathematical institution at Boston, was the first professor at the English Academy at Fort Wayne, which was opened on November 16. Dissension between St. Paul's, Baltimore, and some former members at Baltimore, raised the question: 'What measure is Synod to take when the need for an English church becomes apparent?' Professor Biewend read a paper on the subject, and in the same year Synod declared:

"We account it our sacred duty to found English churches as soon as it has become manifest that for the organization of a congregation there is a sufficient number of such as understand English better than German. . . . Synod acknowledged it in this case the duty of the mother church not only to consent to the organizing of an English church, but also to aid therein with counsel and deed. Especially also willingly dismiss such older and experienced members as indeed do not need it for their own person, but for their family's sake, partly that the members of families might not be divided between different churches, partly that by such older members the young congregation might be strengthened.'" (*Minutes*, 1857, pp. 51—52. See also *Synodical Conference Minutes*, 1872, p. 18, and 1874, p. 33.)

Again, when in 1872 the Synodical Conference was organized, Dr. C. F. W. Walther preaching the opening sermon in St. John's Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Professor Loy

of the Ohio Synod presented the following theses under the heading: "What Is Our Duty Toward the English-speaking Population of Our Country?":

"Thesis 5. Wherever it is possible by this means either to retain as members of the church such people as would otherwise be in danger of joining some other denomination, or to obtain others who would but for this cause be lost to our Church altogether, our ministers ought to preach the Gospel in the English language, until these English-speaking people are able to support a minister of their own; and we ought to make it a point in the education of the students of our seminaries that these, when they are ministers, be able also to preach in the English language.

"Thesis 6. As so very much reading is done in our time and in our country, we should certainly be guilty of infidelity to the Church would we not do everything in our power to *familiarize the English-speaking people*, through periodicals and books, *with the treasures of our Church*, and therefore the achievement of this aim must always be considered as our main duty."

During the time of the union of Missouri with Ohio the English work was carried on with the aid of ministers coming chiefly from Ohio, and congregations were established in Missouri congregation areas, which, however, later followed their Ohio pastors into the Ohio Synod. The latter experience accounts for some of the lagging interest on the part of some in subsequent efforts to establish English Missions. Nevertheless the dawn of the second half of the first century of Missouri's history was marked by a determined effort in a number of Missouri's centers, chiefly in the larger cities such as Baltimore, Washington, New York City, Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Louis, Milwaukee, St. Paul, Akron, Cleveland, and others.

We think it must be admitted on the basis of the record that Missouri synodically had the vision regarding the importance of English work and that it was largely preoccupation which stood in the way of a larger engagement in the English work itself. No one will venture to claim that this vision was of equal intensity in all or even that there was no lack of proper vision on the part of some who were either purblind or influenced by local conditions or experiences. It was largely due to the latter fact that Dr. Walther, who

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himself had so clearly manifested his convictions and his interest, both in theory and in practice, in English work, could say: "God has brought us into this country and without our merit has given us the pure doctrine also for the purpose that we should spread it in the language of our country. But, alas, we did not do what we should have done, and I fear that God will punish us for our negligence and take away from us Germans the great blessings which he bestowed upon us, because we did not do in the English language what we should have done." *Ebenezer*, p. 34.

The second half of the Synod's first century was marked and influenced in 1889 by the organizing of the English Synod of Missouri under the fostering care of the German body. German Missouri at that time was yet very predominantly German, and it was thought best to have the English work kept organically separate from the German, the German body creating a committee to act in an advisory and supporting capacity in connection with the English body. The trend toward the use of the English in our German body then set in apace, so that by the year 1911 sentiment in Synod had developed to such an extent that the English Synod was welcomed into the German body as a District, and Synod then struck the term German from its official title, so that henceforth it has been officially known as the Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. Since that time the trend toward English has continued until now English is preached in practically all our churches and is also the official language of Synod in its business meetings.

In summing up, then, we distinguish three periods of Missouri's attitude and activity in English. The first followed immediately upon its organization in 1847 and consisted in its activity through its leaders and its Districts, associating itself with the old Tennessee Synod, exchanging delegates and fraternal greetings. During this period Synod already officially, through its official organs, advocated the establishing of English congregations to provide spiritual care for the Anglicizing youth of its congregations. This period found its issue in the organization of the English Conference of Missouri in 1872. The second period is marked by Synod's affiliation in 1872 with the Synod of Ohio, at that time largely English. During this period English congregations were formed in Mis-

souri areas and supplied by pastors from the Ohio Synod Seminary. This period terminated with the defection of Ohio, taking most of the English congregations together with their pastors into the Ohio Synod, with attending discouragement as to English work in the areas thus affected. The third period began with the organizing of the English Synod of Missouri in 1889. During this third, more recent, period, the congregations of the English District have been organized, and most of the German congregations have taken up English preaching either alongside of the German or exclusively. For all practical purposes the Synod of Missouri is now an English-speaking body.

Pittsburgh, Pa. —————

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By W. ARNDT

This publication comes to us with the legend on the publisher's jacket: "The most important publication in 1946." At first one may be taken aback by such a strong and apparently daring claim, 1946 having only begun; but a little reflection will lead one to say that here we are not dealing with an exaggeration, such as publishing houses are fond of voicing, but with a truly objective evaluation. A new and at that somewhat official translation of the New Testament—what more important work can there appear in this year of grace?

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* The New Covenant Commonly Called the New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Revised Standard Version. Translated from the Greek, Being the Version Set Forth A.D. 1611, Revised A.D. 1881 and A.D. 1901. Compared with the most ancient authorities and revised A.D. 1946. Thomas Nelson & Sons, New York. 553 pages 5x7½. Price, \$2.00.