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The Process of Americanization

EDITORIAL NOTE: The following article consists of excerpts from one chapter in a new Concordia Publishing House release, *Moving Frontiers*, edited by Carl S. Meyer. We feel that the book is of sufficient importance to warrant our calling it to the attention of our readers. At the same time, the excerpts represented in this article make a contribution to the continuing discussion of the relationship between church and culture and to the question of the process of acculturation which has taken place in The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. These few examples resemble perhaps only a faded image of a beloved parent. One can recognize the face, but one feels that there is also something missing. Other chapters in the volume provide the needed balance.

INTRODUCTION

In addition to a fervent zeal for home missions,¹ the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from the end of the Civil War to the end of World War I was marked by two dominant characteristics. The first was a vigorous theological conservatism which led it to resist any compromise in the historic Lutheran confessional position. The second characteristic, shared with other ethnic groups, was a continued isolation from American linguistic, economic, and social patterns. These characteristics were intensified because the majority of the Synod's membership was rural.² During the same period most of the other American churches were moving in the opposite direction.

Although World War I forced much greater use of the English language, the theological characteristics of the Synod underwent little modification in this period. The will to be conservative mani-

fested itself in every area of the Synod's life. Thus its members were cautioned against many common American economic practices, such as the charging of interest and the purchase of life insurance. They were also told to keep themselves separate from many of the social customs of the period. Its membership was characterized by a reluctance to take part in the American political life.

The development of synodical characteristics began to be affected in this period by a change in the nature of the German immigration. World War I, of course, terminated regular reinfusion of German cultural strength and vitality. At the same time the Sunday school and the beginning of trends toward industrialization and urbanization introduced certain problems in the use of the English language which were destined to have far-reaching consequences after World War I.

Much time and energy were absorbed by the question of whether the English language could be introduced without serious, deleterious consequences for the theological position. The issue was settled willy-nilly by the coming of World War I.

Widespread use of the German language during its earlier history made it relatively easy for the Synod to maintain a cultural isolation. The linguistic wall also enabled the Synod to maintain an attitude of religious separation over against almost every other religious group or movement. This attitude remained essentially unchanged throughout the period.

The leaders of the Synod placed great emphasis on the development of an extensive parochial school system. Generally

¹ See pp. 296, 297.

² Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), p. 223.

speaking, the parochial school was a German school and became an important agency for preserving many cultural and theological characteristics of the body. The parochial school system had to struggle for its existence, both against the indifference of many members of the Synod and against the determined efforts of many state legislators to destroy the private German schools.

Essentially, the Synod in 1920 was the Synod of 1865. New yeast had been introduced into the lump; the fermenting was destined to take place after 1920.

A. ECONOMIC ISSUES

Pastoral leaders of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod took active interest in the economic concerns and problems of their members, but their general advice was to remain aloof from the American economic pattern. To charge interest on money loaned was described as usury and was labeled unscriptural. The purchase of life insurance was opposed; Scriptural arguments were cited in defense of such opposition. The Synod manifested a concern for the well-being of its retired workers and of orphans and widows of such workers but preferred to handle this problem through individual charitable support rather than through an organized pension system.

Synodical leaders did not purchase fire insurance and preferred to meet fire losses of synodical property out of its own collective treasury as the need arose. Synod conformed regularly to the American pattern of legal incorporation for itself and its institutions. Members were cautioned against the stock market as an invitation to irresponsible gambling. Leaders con-

cerned themselves with the labor question but refused to align themselves with either labor or management.

1. Usury — Interest

The Synod's fight against usury was led by C. F. W. Walther. The discussion began in 1864 and was a chief topic at seven congregational meetings of Trinity Congregation, St. Louis, in January and February of that year. J. H. Bergman, a businessman, challenged Walther's view and at his own expense issued a pamphlet on the question. The same question also disturbed the Iowa Synod.³ A number of synodical resolutions were passed which urged the people to remain faithful to the Word of God in this area of their lives. Walther took his stand on his interpretation of Luther and Scripture and proceeded from there.

In Ezekiel 18 God says not only that he "who does not practice usury" shall live; not only does He there include usury among the grossest sins, such as theft, robbery, adultery, and idolatry; not only does He call it an abomination; but at the end He most emphatically asks the question: "Shall he who hath given forth upon usury, shall he live?" And then He answers: "He shall not live, but because he hath done all these abominations, he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him." . . . God Himself here denies eternal salvation to him who practices usury!⁴

³ G. Fritschel, *Die Zinsfrage: Zwölf Thesen über das Ausleihen von Geld auf Interessen* (Allentown, Pa.: Verlag von Pastor S. K. Brobst, 1869).

⁴ *Die Wucherfrage: Protokoll der Verhandlungen der deutschen evang. luth. Gemeinde U. A. C. zu St. Louis, Mo., über diese Frage nebst einigen Auszügen aus den Schriften von*

The argument is frequently raised: Money is a commodity, therefore one may charge interest. In other words, lending is considered a sale. The remarkable thing about this transaction is that one gets the commodity back, for the creditor demands his money back. A strange bargain indeed! Is there anyone who cannot see that it is absurd to speak of a purchase when the commodity in question must be returned!? It is clear that lending on interest is not to be classified as a purchasing contract.⁵

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Whether you understand this or not, the fact remains: whoever charges interest is a usurer, and usury is a damnable sin.⁶

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Finally the question was raised, whether a Christian might also be a stockholder in a bank. Answer: This question is completely unnecessary. After all, the banks are nothing but institutions of usury. But, institutions of usury are most certainly an abomination before God. Nevertheless, as honorable purchasing and exchange agreements, banking transactions seem to have nothing dubious about them.⁷

* * * * *

Resolved, That the editorial staff of our periodicals be instructed that as in all doctrine so also in the doctrine on usury they are to be guided by the Word of God and are to continue as in the past.⁸

Theologen vor und nach der Reformation und anderen dieselbe betreffenden Documenten (St. Louis, Mo.: Aug. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1869), p. 32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁸ *Mo. Synod, Proceedings*, 1869, p. 106.

2. Life Insurance

Strong voices within the Missouri Synod were likewise raised against the purchase of life insurance. Three arguments were frequently advanced. In the first place, it was argued, life insurance turned death, the Biblical wages of sin, into a matter for profitable speculation. In the second place, the business was founded wholly on selfish principles, not on genuine charity, for it advocated doing good only for the healthy rather than those most in need of aid. In the third place, life insurance was based entirely on usurious practices.⁹

A careful study of life insurance was provided by Rev. Ludwig Schulze in a pamphlet printed sometime after June 1908. The pamphlet contains both a historical review of Missouri's position and an indication of a broader approach on the author's part.

There has until now not been nor is there at present any unanimity of opinion among us in our Synod on this subject. Our Synod as such has never taken a definite stand in the matter. There is no known speech or article from our blessed Dr. [C. F. W.] Walther, who for so many years was our leader. Individuals have spoken and written about the matter; conferences also have dealt with it. Various essays have appeared in print, contending that by its very nature life insurance is sinful in every form; that therefore a

⁹ [Carl Adolf] F[rank], review of the dialog tract *Kann sich ein Christ an den sogenannten Lebensversicherungen beteiligen?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1833 [1883]), in *The Lutheran Witness*, II (21 June 1883), 24.

See also O. L. H., "Lebensversicherung im Lichte der heiligen Schrift," *Lehre und Wehre*, XLV (Sept. and Oct. 1899), esp. 268—270.

Christian can never with a clear conscience participate in it; that life insurance is nothing but swindlery and gambling. Some of us have constantly objected to this point of view, but these objections were never raised publicly in our periodicals. For this reason people generally assume that our Synod as such categorically denounces life insurance as being sinful and godless. Enemies of our Synod also occasionally warn people against us with the statement that we hold that no one who carries life insurance can become a member of our church. Insured people, they say, are put under discipline and the ban by Missourians.

In this booklet we are maintaining a different attitude over against life insurance. We certainly are not advocating the business of life insurance, especially as it is being carried on today; on the contrary, we are advising the children of God most earnestly to stay away from it. However, we do admit and point out that life insurance as such, when it is practiced as it should be, is not sinful.¹⁰

B. SOCIAL ISOLATION

The Missouri Synod practiced an attitude of general aloofness in many aspects of social relations. This attitude was fostered and sustained by several factors, such as Germanic clannishness, widespread use of the German language, and theological conservatism. The leaders of the Synod branded the dance and the theater as tools

of the devil which every true Christian should avoid. There was no concerted attempt at any kind of public relations. The Synod made very little effort to explain its position and views to the American people. Seemingly the leaders felt that their only responsibility was to preach the Law in its severity and the Gospel in its sweetness and to let this program serve as the only necessary justification for its existence. In the realm of politics the Missouri Synod people made no impact on American life. In this period, however, two trends began to manifest themselves which would later affect profoundly the general social attitude of the Synod. In the first place, the character of the German immigration began to change noticeably with serious effects particularly on the educational program of Synod. In the second place, the increasingly rapid industrialization and urbanization of the United States following the Civil War presented new challenges which forced the Synod to rethink its basic position on social questions.

1. Dancing Renounced

The clergy of the Missouri Synod carried on constant warfare against the "pleasures" of the dance and theater going. That these subjects recur regularly in District convention proceedings, church periodicals, and other literature would seem to indicate that the lay members continued to engage in both activities.

You ask: Why? I answer: It isn't fitting for you if you wish to be a Christian, for (1) you thereby conform yourself to the world, Rom. 12:2; (2) you are to deny worldly lusts, to which belongs also the desire to dance, Titus 2:11, 12; (3) you cannot do such worldly dancing

¹⁰ Ludwig Schulze, *Lebensversicherung* (n.p., n.d.), p. 30. The pamphlet was originally delivered as a conference paper. It was prompted by a series of 37 theses presented for discussion at pastoral conferences by G. Friedrich Bente and published as "Sätze über Lebensversicherung," *Lehre und Wehre*, LIV (June 1908), 241—247.

in the name of Jesus, Col. 3:17; nor to the glory of God, 1 Cor. 10:31; (4) you thereby give offense, for one thing to the believers, especially the youth, for another also to people of this world who are outside [the church], Matt. 18:6 ff.; (5) dancing has already brought great physical harm, spiritual loss, and the loss of a good name to innumerable people; (6) as the result of the dance of a frivolous girl John the Baptist was killed and his bloody head brought to her on a platter as a dance prize, Matt. 14:6. It seems to me that whoever thinks this over seriously must thereby lose his desire to dance; but if a person still goes on dancing, then this will be a sign that he is frivolous and doesn't take God's Word seriously. However, any person who in one or several instances puts out of sight God's Word and the fear of the Lord will soon regress in his Christianity all around, become ever more secular, and ultimately lose the Word and faith. Therefore I say: Quit dancing so that you may retain a sensitive and clear conscience, not become an offense to anyone, and by your action prove your obedience to the Word of God.¹¹

2. The Theater Decried

*Christians were told not to go to the theater because it was not high art, did not contain any real literature, did not recreate but only excited the baser emotions, and was an institution of evil by definition.*¹²

¹¹ "Lasz das Tanzen!" *Amerikanischer Kalendar für deutsche Lutheraner auf das Jahr 1880* (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1880), p. 34.

¹² Editor [William Dallmann], "The Theater," *The Lutheran Witness* XIII (21 Sept. 1894), 59, 61, 62; *ibid.*, XIII (7 Oct. 1894), 69, 70; *ibid.*, XIII (21 Oct. 1894), 77, 78.

"As a contribution to the debate concerning the production of the opera 'Salome', in New York, Mr. Richard Strauss, the composer, has given his view of the relation of art to morals. He announces that there is no such relation. In so doing he only repeats the senseless and immoral plea that has been made by the defenders of impure art from time immemorial. His language is, 'In art there is never the moral nor immoral. . . . Is an artist's work good art or is it bad art? Those are the legitimate questions. The artist declines to answer the question, is his art moral?' . . . All of which goes far toward making clear the fundamental error of the artist who imagines that there can be anything morally colorless. This is the weighty charge to be made against much 'art', that it is based on immorality. It cannot be without moral character. And because the moral is in so many cases bad, the Christian world has been compelled to part company with much of it. And this is the thing which it is well to have stated so clearly by the great artist, that the Christian public may understand."¹³

6. The New Immigration

The general characteristics of the Missouri Synod were noticeably affected by a change in the character of German immigration after the Franco-Prussian War. The influence of this new immigration made itself felt especially in the educational program of the Synod, according to an appraisal made in 1947. This appraisal is substantiated by a private letter

¹³ Quoted from *The Presbyterian* in [George A.] R[omoser], "Art," *ibid.*, XXVI (4 April 1907), 52. Finding support from non-Lutheran sources, Romoser was clearly trying to state his case as strongly as he thought possible.

written by C. F. W. Walther on the caliber of preachers coming from Germany in this period.

. . . the broad scheme of "general education" of the founding fathers was the product of their university background in Germany . . . the loss of the broad vision of education of the first decades must be understood partly in the light of the new type of immigrant which came in during the 70s and increasingly so in the next three decades, immigrants who for the most part did not come from the upper middle classes, but from the peasantry educated in the German Volksschule and imbued with a strong nationalistic spirit, an objective of this type of training. This in effect changed both the need and the vision for secondary education. It also tended to shift the emphasis from Lutheran schools to German schools, the effects of which have only recently been stemmed. The present interest in secondary education under the direction of the Church does not stem from our founding fathers, who certainly shared it, but came by way of the American trend. For this reason, too, it is long overdue, for the member of the Missouri Synod has for more than two decades joined the ranks of the American high school and college population.¹⁴

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Just between you and me the large number of so-called "practical" preachers in our Synod has always been our weak side, since more and more of these have been added, who, before they entered the

¹⁴ Arthur C. Repp, "Summary," *100 Years of Christian Education*, ed. Arthur C. Repp, Fourth Yearbook (River Forest, Ill.: Lutheran Education Association, 1947), pp. 219, 220.

theological seminary, were not only devoid of practically all mental development but also weak in both ability and character. They are in danger of becoming our Achilles' heel. In their ignorance they often see heresies where nothing of the sort exists. I merely plead with you, have patience with the dullards, but so far as the unclean (*Unlauteren*) ones are concerned, when it becomes evident that they are such, make short shrift of them.¹⁵

7. *Beginnings of Urban Influences*

A trend toward urbanization accelerated the use of English in some congregations and also resulted in a more favorable attitude toward the Sunday school. Foreign-language work, too, was undertaken among the Letts and Estonians by Rev. Hans Rebane, among the Poles and Slovaks in New York and New Jersey, and among the Italians when an Italian congregation of 56 members joined the Synod.¹⁶

The German pastors of our Synod in Detroit long ago saw and felt the necessity of preaching also in English. Some of their young members had discarded or lost the use of their mother tongue; some had well-nigh forgotten the German language because in their business transactions they had no opportunity to hear or speak anything but English; others were divorced from the German church by marrying Americans.¹⁷

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Unfortunately, it seems to have become a necessity to establish a so-called Sunday

¹⁵ C. F. W. Walther to C. M. Zorn, Saint Louis, 23 Nov. 1876, in Walther Papers, C. H. I.

¹⁶ Mo. Synod, Eastern District, *Proceedings*, 1900, p. 76.

¹⁷ *The Vindicator*, I (July 1890), [3].

school in many of our synodical congregations, at least in many city parishes. Unfortunately, there are parents who do not send their children to Christian day schools and thereby neglect a most important Christian duty; they save their consciences by saying: "My child can learn enough religion in the Sunday school."¹⁸

C. THE LINGUISTIC LAG

One of the most significant factors in the gradual disappearance of Missouri Synod isolation was the shift from the German to the English language. Opposition to the use of English was firm and determined. Some felt that the use of English would result in theological deterioration, others that its introduction would speed the decline of the German culture among them.

There were others who saw clearly that the English language had to be adopted to assure any future for the Lutheran Church in the United States. Mission work among non-Germans was an important factor in the introduction of English. A group of pioneer workers sought to affiliate themselves with the Synod as an English district. When this effort failed, they formed the General English Lutheran Synod. Gradually and irresistibly the pendulum swung toward more general adoption of English as the language of the Synod. It is interesting to note in this connection, however, that as late as the 1938 convention of the Synod the official minutes were still read in German.

Opposition was especially strenuous at the parochial school level. Some viewed the parochial school as primarily an agency

for the preservation of German culture. Introduction of the English language, it seemed to them, would destroy the parochial school's reason for existing.

3. A Bit of Encouragement for English

In the minds of some leaders there were solid theological reasons for opposing the introduction of the English language. The use of this language, they felt, would result in the corruption of the doctrine of the church. Apparently there were instances where the introduction of the English language in some areas had resulted also in the introduction of a spirit which the leaders labeled as free, American, and undesirable from the Synod's point of view. They could point to a number of synodical resolutions which had provided that German should forever be the official tongue.

This [report that seven subsidized English congregations are prospering] would go far in removing the disfavor with which this work met here and there till now. In days gone by there was cause for that distrust which lay in the way of English Home Mission. All attempts at this work in former days had come to naught. The congregations looked for were either never organized or they stood not their grounds and were drawn into the ranks of our English opponents. In many cases the cry for English work was only a pretext for getting rid of old-Lutheran preaching, discipline and order, and for introducing new measurism. In other instances the hope of drawing Americans to Lutheran doctrine and worship [was] never realized or realized only on the smallest scale. No wonder, then, that consequently thoughts were entertained which placed the fault of all these failures in the English language.

¹⁸ *Evang.-Luth. Schulblatt*, XXXIII (April 1898), 117.

This, of course, is a mistake. . . . It is not the English language in itself which contains the danger. The danger rests in something . . . very apt . . . to appear in the train of the English language. It is the American spirit, the now prevailing American sentiment, that shallow, slick, indifferent, business-tainted spirit in which also spiritual matters are handled in this country; that sentiment which has no knowledge of the real essence of Christianity and therefore deems the maintenance of pure doctrine ridiculous, holds the fight for the one faith to be sheer blasphemy, but seeks the salvation in sweet sensations and in a much busied workery of all kinds.¹⁹

4. In Support of English-Language Work

The arguments against the more general introduction of English were answered by a handful of men who felt that the future of the Synod depended on the use of the English tongue. Already in 1857 the Synod had encouraged congregations to engage in English work when this became absolutely unavoidable. Many writers assured the Germanic element that they had no intention of trying to eliminate German or of competing with the German congregations. Concern was repeatedly voiced over the growing number of defections on the part of young adults. Others pointed to the fate of the Swedish Lutheran Church in America and to the consequences which followed from the exclusive use of Latin in the Roman Catholic Church. It was likewise pointed out that doctrinal laxity

¹⁹ From President Heinrich C. Schwan's report at the synodical convention in Milwaukee, 1890, as reported in *The Lutheran Witness*, IX (7 July 1890), 21. For the original German see Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1890, pp. 25, 26.

in previous English-speaking congregations stemmed from their complete isolation from their German-speaking brothers.

Furthermore, Synod recognized that in such a case it would be the duty of the mother congregation not only to consent to the formation of an English daughter congregation, but it would also be her duty to assist by word and deed, and especially also to release to her such older and experienced members as probably would not need the English for their own sakes but for the sake of their families. The purpose of this would be in part to prevent separation of family members into different congregations, and partly also to strengthen the young congregation by means of such older and more experienced members, and finally, that in such a case Christian parents might not be hindered from fulfilling their parental duty by the necessity of severing their relations with the old congregation.²⁰

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I. Since it is highly probable, judging from previous experience, that our German descendants will fall to the English language, therefore beyond all doubt the Lutheran Church has the sacred duty to see to it that the pure doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is preserved in the English language for our descendants.

That our German descendants in all probability will fall to the English language is so convincingly evidenced by the experience of the previous century that any further statement seems to be almost superfluous. Thousands upon thousands of Germans have come to this country,

²⁰ Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1857, pp. 51, 52.

and their descendants have become English and have been lost to the Lutheran Church of the pure Word and sacrament. This also has happened to the Swedes in regard to their language in New Jersey. Even such emigrants as came here because of their faith, such as the Salzburgers who settled in Georgia under the leadership of their two learned and true preachers [John Martin] Boltzius and [Israel] Gronau, in their descendants have become estranged from the Lutheran Church because they found no church which had the pure doctrine in the English language. This also will happen to our descendants, and the attempt to keep them with the German language will prove futile.

The objection that the Gospel cannot be preached as effectively and wholesomely in the English language as in the German cannot be meant seriously. Because, after all, in the beginning of the church of the New Testament the preaching was not done in the German language. . . .

If a person seriously wanted to maintain that the Gospel could not be preached as clearly and as purely or as effectively and wholesomely in the English language as in the German, then to a certain extent he would be denying English-speaking people a share in the saving Gospel and consequently would not be able to make them as certain as the German-speaking people of the universal gracious will of God and of the merit of Christ and therefore of their salvation. This is contrary to God's Word. Compare Rom. 10:13-18, where it is said that faith comes by the preaching of the Gospel.²¹

²¹ F. W. Föhlinger, "Referat: Bildung evang. luth. Gemeinden unter unsern englisch redenden Nachkommen," *Lehre und Webre*, XI (Aug. 1865), 236—242.

5. Fear of Leakage

The fear of defections and the fear of the loss of genuine Lutheranism were powerful motives in the opposition to the English language as the following excerpts show.

Some will fear the danger that English Lutheran congregations will swerve from the standard of true Lutheranism. If this hitherto has sometimes happened, it is not to be wondered at, for they were exposed more than German congregations to the influence of the sects around them, whilst they had but few truly Lutheran books and papers. But this ought not to discourage us, but rather act as an incentive to vigorous exertions in order that we may make the writings of the fathers of our church accessible to English speaking people. And when that has once been accomplished, doubt not that there will be as good English Lutheranism as there ever was in any other language.

The work may not be exactly such as we would choose were a choice left open. But it is thrust upon us, and seeing that it is, as all admit, either an English Lutheran Church or no Lutheran Church at all in this country, shall we any longer rest content with weak, half-hearted, tentative efforts? Will we continue to allow ourselves to be pushed and forced by dire necessity and by the force of circumstances?²²

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Half of the confirmands of German Lutheran congregations were lost to them, and joined the General Synod or the Ohio Synod, and became converts to the Presbyterian or Episcopal church, for want of

²² *The Vindicator*, I (July 1890), [1].

sufficient attention to their desire to hear the gospel preached in English.²³

6. *Why Need There Be a Clash?*

Now, if this is the true spirit which should actuate us [namely, the determination to spread the Gospel in every tongue], as it assuredly is, why should there be a clashing of the German and English tongues in the Lutheran Church? Why should the interests of the German or English language become a source of contention in synods, churches, or missions?

It will therefore, we hope, not be deemed out of season if our *Witness* sets the rightful claims of the English language in the Lutheran Church in their proper light. . . . We shall first set forth that it is not only our duty to spread the gospel but also to hold what we have. If therefore the use of the English language and our endeavors to missionate among Americans meant that we should compromise the Lutheran doctrine because Americans would not bear the strictness of sound apostolic principles, as this has been affirmed in some quarters, then certainly we could not advocate any attempt at work by means of the English language. Secondly: If our efforts in the English field aim at making our German churches English and neglecting our German work, we loudly disapprove of such work and add, it will prove abortive. Thirdly: If our English work neither involves a relaxation of principle nor a neglect of our German work, then our privilege and duty of missionating and holding what we have by means of the English language is plainly manifest.²⁴

²³ Report on the 1890 synodical convention, *The Lutheran Witness*, IX (7 July 1890), 22.

²⁴ "The Rightful Claims of the English Language in the Lutheran Church," *ibid.*, V (21 Nov. 1886), 100.

It was Satan's work when the Church of Rome made Latin the holy language, to exclude the vernacular tongue from divine services. And the old bitter foe of the Gospel is using the same deep guile in trying to make us Lutherans of America believe that the everlasting Gospel of Luther, which we have, is wedded to a certain language or nationality, and that we ought to hold to language instead of Gospel.²⁵

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. . . We do not want to belong among the Germans who do not take the trouble to learn English. We know that the English language is the predominant language in this country and that also in this language many excellent works have been written. However, here our students are to learn English well chiefly for the practical reason that they may then be able to speak without difficulty to 150 million people about the one thing needful.²⁶

10. *Language and the Parochial Schools*

The language battle was waged with greatest vigor at the parochial school level. With genuine reluctance, congregations permitted the use of more English in instruction. Some leaders warned against making the school primarily an instrument to preserve the German language and thus also the German culture, although it was recognized that this could be a valid secondary purpose.

Fifty years ago there were congregations

²⁵ C[arl F. W.] Gausewitz, "Why we Undertake and should Undertake this English Work," *ibid.*, VII (7 Dec. 1888), 99.

²⁶ F[riedrich] Pf[otenhauer], "Rede, gehalten bei der Einführung des Herrn Prof. Th. Büniger am Concordia College zu St. Paul, Minn., am 13. September 1893," *Lehre und Wehre*, XXXIX (Oct. 1893), 296.

in which it was simply forbidden by an unalterable clause in their constitution to teach in English in the school, even though in most congregations, especially in the cities, the reading and writing of English was included in the curriculum from the first. According to time and circumstances the school accommodated itself to the needs. The demand "More English!" became ever louder and more insistent, so that doubtless now in practically all the parochial schools not only reading and writing but also arithmetic and geography are being taught by means of the English language. . . .²⁷

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The parochial school, also in Lutheran circles, is frequently regarded only as an institution for the cultivation and preservation of the German language. It is that also in German congregations, and it ought to be that, but not first and foremost, only incidentally. The proper function of the parochial school is to instruct the children entrusted to it daily in the Word of God and to train them according to God's Word throughout the school day. The parochial school is neither a *German* nor an *English* institution but an *ecclesiastical* institution which belongs to the welfare of a Christian congregation regardless of the congregation's language. This we should and will bear in mind particularly in those places where the English language prevails, so that we make the proper preparations to change the parochial school, when the right time has come, from the German into the English.²⁸

²⁷ "Englischer Religionsunterricht in unseren Gemeinde-Schulen," *Evang.-Luth. Schulblatt*, XXXVI (June 1901), 163.

²⁸ I[udwig] F[übringer], "Zur kirchlichen Chronik," *Der Lutheraner*, LXII (25 Sept. 1906), 327.

D. RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES

Although interchurch relations are treated in detail elsewhere in this volume,²⁹ the attitudes connected with these relationships must be explored, for so much of the Missouri Synod's isolation had deeply theological overtones. The statements in this area reflect the true depth of the Synod's willingness to remain isolated so long as its theological convictions demanded this. Church leaders carried on a many-sided campaign in defense of confessional Lutheranism. The Ohio Synod and the General Synod were frequently criticized for doctrinal confusion in the one case and rank liberalism in the other. Any suggestion of church union or cooperation in mission efforts was rejected. The Young Men's Christian Association was frequently and vigorously criticized. Some other religious bodies and associations were pilloried. New trends in theology, especially so-called higher criticism of the Bible, were mercilessly ridiculed. It is quite obvious that this determination to maintain pure doctrine was an important part of Missouri's mind. He who would understand "the mind of Missouri" must see into her heart clearly.

1. Confessional Position

The Missouri Synod was governed by the conviction that it must always remain loyal to the historic confessions of the Lutheran Church. The Synod was willing to make any sacrifice in the interest of this concern. There is also noticeable in the writings of some of the leaders the conviction that the Missouri Synod was the true Lutheran Church.

We are set for the defense of the truth. We are enjoined to "contend earnestly for

²⁹ See pp. 406—413.

the faith." We are to resist all onsets upon it. We would be false to God, to our vows and obligations, and to our generation if we did not oppose all inroads upon Scriptural doctrine and practice, and warn against all concessions which would weaken the force of Bible teaching, either in respect to what we are to believe, or what we are to practice. We have but one infallible rule of faith and practice. Whatsoever conflicts with it must be exposed and avoided. Those especially whom God has appointed as guardians of his Church and the instructors of His people and the trainers of the young in the home and in the school, must not be afraid of controversy.³⁰

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And what Church should be more ready to bear her witness than our Evangelical Lutheran Church, to whom God has graciously granted the possession of the full and pure truth of His Word? A church can bear witness unto the truth only as far as she possesses the truth, and certainly that Church which possesses the whole truth of the Gospel is to be most ready to confess and to proclaim it. . . . The angel with the everlasting Gospel is none other than Martin Luther and the church called by his name.³¹

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Teaching and confessing that there is yet a church among sectarians, that they have the ministry of Christ and that she has no right to proselyte in their churches,

³⁰ An article from *The Presbyterian* cited at length with full approval of its language in *The Lutheran Witness*, XXIV (9 Feb. 1905), 19, 20. Articles of this type can be found in almost every issue of the church papers.

³¹ F. Kuegele, "The Evangelical Lutheran Church the true Visible Church of God upon Earth," *ibid.*, XV (7 July 1896), 17.

the Lutheran Church can nevertheless not acknowledge them as standing on an equality with her.³²

2. *Attitude Toward Other Lutheran Bodies*

The confessional position of the Synod showed itself even in its attitude toward other Lutheran bodies in the United States. The periodicals abound with frequent, vigorous, and often sarcastic attacks on the doctrine and practices of the General Synod, the Ohio Synod, and other bodies. This attitude did not prevent the Missouri Synod from seeking ways and means to establish unity,³³ but it led the Synod to insist on full doctrinal unity as an absolute prerequisite for any union action. The free conferences in 1904, 1905, and 1906 were without visible success for the cause of Lutheran union.

The *Lutheran Methodist*, commonly called the *Lutheran Evangelist*, is in a peck of trouble. That paper is one of the various organs of the General Synod; yes, General Synod, called "General" because it is general. It is a good thing to find that in one thing, at least, that body is consistent, and that one thing is its name. For no matter what one believes, he may be at home in it if he choose. . . .³⁴

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One of the meanest phases of the election controversy of recent years, to our mind, is the habit of "Ohioan" leaders to attribute ignorance or a mild form of insincerity to many of "Missouri's" adherents. . . . Honestly, if ignorance of doc-

³² *Ibid.*, XV (21 Sept. 1896), 58.

³³ Cf. the invitation to an intersynodical conference in Detroit, Mich., *ibid.*, XXIII (10 March 1904), 48.

³⁴ L[ouis] M. Wagner, "A Glance at the General Synod," *ibid.*, XI (21 July 1892), 25.

trines be a menace to a body . . . we anticipate no cry for quarter on the part of "Missouri."

But "Ohio's" explanations seldom explain.³⁵

7. An Unmoving Theology

Quite obviously there were shifts in the thinking of both Missouri Synod leaders and followers, if not so much on central teachings, then at least on peripheral matters and on balance through subsequent restatements on controverted issues. The readings selected for this chapter themselves reveal that not even the leaders succeeded in anchoring themselves as securely against the waves of cultural change as they might have wished, even though an "unmoving theology" remained a theological ideal. There was a pattern of statement of conservative position, prudent silence when the position proved too difficult to maintain, and then accommodating restatement.

The theological leaders of the Missouri Synod maintained that since neither man nor sin nor grace had changed since the days of Adam, there was no reason for the Synod to concern itself with the question of a revised theology or of the use of the new insights of psychology and so forth. Complete subscription to the truths of the Bible was the only proper attitude for a Christian, in the opinion of its leaders.

A writer in a Church paper outlines the difficulties before the Church of today as

follows: "The theology of the twentieth century must speak in terms of a new psychology, in recognition of the modern social questions, and in the face of problems unknown in the past". All of which will be more or less unintelligible to the simple Bible Christian. The only problem before the Church now, as in ages past, is the question of sin and how to overcome it, how to win sinners to Christ. Will the new psychology — if anyone is perfectly clear in his mind just what the term means — help us to turn men from the evil of their ways? Will the modern social agitation attain this object? We have no reason to hope so. But we do know of one remedy that goes to the root of our difficulties, namely the Word of God.

The question resolves itself into this. There is no change in man. He is a sinner, as were all his forebears. By nature he is just as helpless in his sins as they were. There is no change in the Means of Grace. We have the same Savior who was proclaimed to Adam and Eve, the same Gospel which tells us of Him. There is all theology in a nut shell, and it cannot change. It was good and sufficient hundreds of years ago, it is good and sufficient now. It is something that everyone can understand, and the many high-sounding substitutes which men propose are merely so many designs to drag us away from our safe anchorage.³⁶

³⁶ "No Change" (unsigned editorial), *ibid.*, XXX (28 Sept. 1911), 153.

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³⁵ Editorial, *ibid.*, XXIII (14 July 1904), 114.