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A COMPARISON OF THE APOSTOLIC WITH OUR LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS IN REGARD TO THE LANGUAGE QUESTION.

(By request.)

A practical question of the greatest importance that confronts our Lutheran congregations to-day is the so-called language question. Every one of our German congregations must sooner or later answer the question: "Shall we introduce the English language into our pulpit and school"? Congregations that have already answered this part of the question in the affirmative will soon find it necessary to determine how much English it is expedient to introduce. These questions are more easily asked than answered to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. The experience of centuries teaches that there always will be some who declare themselves most emphatically against any introduction of a new language, who look upon such an innovation as a falling off from the faith of the fathers, as a pandering to syncretism and heresy, and as the ruination of our parochial schools. And if we pastors and teachers, and the members of our congregations do not know what ground and position to occupy when we are confronted by this question, much harm and havoc is likely to result which might have been avoided, if the question had been properly dealt with.

In studying the language question, we find that the first apostolic congregations experienced a transition of language somewhat like the one we are constrained to deal with. If experience is the best teacher, then, most undoubtedly, can we

learn some very important lessons on this question from the experience of the primitive apostolic congregations. Let us, therefore, institute *a comparison of the first apostolic churches with our Lutheran congregations in regard to the language question.*

I.

In the countries and times of the first Christian congregations three languages were spoken. St. Luke, in describing Christ's crucifixion, says: "A superscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, This is the King of the Jews." ¹⁾ In the residences of the Roman procurators and government officials the Latin language undoubtedly was used to some extent. As we will see later, the language that was universally understood and spoken was the Greek. Among the majority of the Jews in Palestine and Asia Minor, however, by the people who afterwards were the organizers and charter members of the first Christian congregations, the Hebrew language was given the preference.

Hebrew had been the language of Palestine during all the ages that had rolled by ever since Jehovah had given His people possession of the promised land. Even now, when the scepter had departed from Judah, and when Shiloh had come to redeem His people, Hebrew, although somewhat varied in form, was still the vernacular of the faithful Israelites. Hebrew was the language that was spoken in the renowned school at Tiberias, in the school of a celebrated Gamaliel, at whose feet a Saulus was taught. The scribes and Pharisees, and the venerated religionists that constituted the Sanhedrin, conducted their meetings in the language of the fathers. Hebrew was the language that Jesus first lisped in Nazareth, and that He heard from the lips of His mother Mary, that He spoke to His disciples and friends and relatives and when attending divine services in the temple. And it was Hebrew that rang from Calvary's cross: "Eli, Eli! lama sabachthani." In the synagogues throughout the Holy Land Moses and the Prophets were

1) Luke 23, 38.

read in the original and explained in Aramaic, and the people recited the psalms in the old Hebrew tongue. Even after the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, when the faithful followers would meet behind locked doors for their edification and consolation, the same language was used; for when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place, when suddenly the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Ghost took place, with the result that the apostles "began to speak with *other* tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."²⁾

We must not imagine, however, that from this day of Pentecost on the disciples of Jerusalem forgot their language, or that they spoke in those other tongues only. No, for nearly thirty years later, when Paul was in Jerusalem and the Jews of Palestine and Asia had instituted a great tumult against him, in order to impress his audience favorably, he "spake in the Hebrew tongue, saying, Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense which I make now unto you. And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence."³⁾ From this example we learn that these "men, brethren, and fathers" did not only understand Hebrew, but that they rather heard it than Greek, which was otherwise spoken.

From the Acts of the Apostles it also appears that the apostles, during the first years of their missionary work, directed their endeavors preeminently upon their fellow Israelites and addressed them in their vernacular. A striking instance of this kind occurred in Antioch of Syria, ca. A. D. 41, of which we read: "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution of Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the Word to *none but the Jews only.*"⁴⁾ Preaching to none but the Jews only, it is evident that they preached in the language of the Jews. This becomes more apparent from the following verse, where we are told: "And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when

2) Acts 2, 4.

3) Acts 21, 40; 22, 2.

4) Acts 11, 19.

they were come unto Antioch, spake unto the *Grecians*, preaching the Lord Jesus."

Thus we see that the Jews throughout Palestine, and to some extent, in Asia, the people who composed the stock of the primitive Church, employed the Hebrew language, and that it was the church-language in the early days of the first Christian congregations.

In comparing the congregations of our synod with the first apostolic Church, we do not find that their founders preferred Hebrew above any other language, but that their vernacular was the German language. German was spoken in their homes. Not only did the parents speak German together and to their children, but the children would use the same language at play and in addressing their parents. German was used in the schools in arithmetic and geography as well as in catechism and Bible history. And they intended that in their homes, and schools, and churches no other language should ever be employed. Their churches were "*Die erste deutsche evangelisch-lutherische Kirche,*" and in many of the constitutions of our congregations we find, on the same line with the paragraph on doctrine, the paragraph that only the German language should be used as unalterable. It is not necessary, however, to enlarge upon this well-known fact, that the vernacular of the founders of our congregations was the German language.

Therefore, in comparing the first apostolic churches with our Lutheran congregations in regard to the language question, the first point of similarity is this, that *the founders of the primitive apostolic churches were mostly Jews, whose vernacular was the Hebrew language, whereas the founders of our congregations were Germans speaking the German tongue.*

II.

Having reminded ourselves that among the faithful Jews the Hebrew language enjoyed the preference, let us now consider what language was *universally* spoken in the countries and times of the first Christian churches.

We know that Palestine and other parts of Asia had been under Greek rule since the days of Alexander the Great until the Roman ascendancy. The Greek language in these countries, as nearly in the entire civilized world, was so universally spoken that most people, even under the Roman rule, continued to speak Greek. Not only in the eastern provinces, but in capital Rome itself, where we would naturally expect to hear Latin, Greek was spoken and read even by the children of the better classes before they studied their mother tongue. Quintilian, born ca. 35 A. D., educated at Rome, where he gained the highest reputation as a teacher of eloquence, writes: "A Graeco sermone puerum incipere malo. . . . Non tamen hoc adeo superstitiose velim fieri, ut diu tantum loquatur Graece aut discat, *sicut plerisque moris est.*"⁵⁾ Cicero complains: "Graeca leguntur in omnibus fere gentibus; Latina suis finibus, exiguis sane, continentur."⁶⁾ Julius Caesar attests the prevalence of the Greek language in Gaul.⁷⁾ If Greek, however, was so prevalent in Latin Rome and Gaul, we can reasonably expect a more general use of it in the provinces nearer Greece.

From Josephus we learn that many cities of Palestine were inhabited preeminently by Greeks. Doris, a city of Galilee, is an example. Emperor Claudius had given the Jews of Doris equal rights of citizenship with the Greeks. "But after a very little while the young men of Doris, preferring a rash attempt to piety, and being naturally bold and insolent, carried a statue of Caesar into a synagogue of the Jews, and erected it there. This procedure greatly provoked Agrippa,"⁸⁾ who immediately wrote a letter "in an angry strain," demanding that the centurion bring those men to him for their just deserts for being so insolent to do this thing contrary to Augustus's edict, which gave "the Jews leave to make use of their customs, as also gives order that they enjoy equally the rights of citizen-

5) *Institutio Oratoria* 1, 1.

6) *Orat. pro Archia Poeta*, c. 10.

7) *De Bell. Gall.*, lib. I, c. 29, VI, c. 14.

8) Josephus, *Ant. Jud.*, lib. XIX, c. 6, § 3.

ship with the Greeks themselves.”⁹⁾ “For as to Gaza, Gadara, and Hippas, they were Grecian cities (*Ἑλληνίδες εἰσὶ πόλεις*).”¹⁰⁾ Caesarea had a majority of Greek inhabitants. “The Jews pretended that the city was theirs, and said that he who built it was a Jew.”¹¹⁾ The Greeks maintained, “That the city was a Grecian city; for that he who set up statues and temples in it could not design it for Jews.”¹²⁾ Later the Grecians “obtained of Nero the government of the city,”¹³⁾ and expelled the Jews. These were not isolated cities, however, where Greek was spoken, but throughout Palestine, in the civil and commercial life, Greek was exclusively used. Even the Jews who could not read Hebrew read Moses and the Prophets in the Septuagint version. “We do not perceive any vestige of the official use of Latin language by the procurators. We do not find a single instance, either in the books of the New Testament or in Josephus, in which Roman governors made use of interpreters.”¹⁴⁾ These conditions existed in the time when the Christian era broke upon the course of time.

Our Lord Jesus, therefore, when speaking to His disciples and to the Jews, undoubtedly availed Himself of Hebrew. But when He was speaking to large audiences that were composed of people of different nationalities, and especially when He was conversing with Greeks, He evidently spoke the language that was understood by those whom He was addressing. Is it not unnatural to imagine that Jesus, who was desirous of winning all who came into contact with Him, used the Hebrew language when He dealt with the Gadarenes, or with the inhabitants of Decapolis, or with them of the borders of Tyre and Sidon, or with the Syrophenician woman, who is expressly termed a Greek, *ἡ γυνὴ Ἑλληνίς*,¹⁵⁾ or with the Greeks, *Ἕλληνες*, who came to Jerusalem “to worship at the feast, and desired Him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus”?¹⁶⁾ And, since Greek was

9) 1. c.

11) 1. c., *Bell. Jud.*, lib. II, c. 13, § 7.

13) 1. c., c. 14, § 4.

15) Mark 7, 26.

10) 1. c., lib. XVII, c. 11, § 4.

12) 1. c.

14) Horne, *Introd.*, vol. II, p. 17.

16) John 12, 20.

spoken before the procurators and governors and in the courts of Palestine, Jesus, when questioned by Pilate and Herod concerning His doctrine and conduct, evidently rendered His short and terse answers in Greek. Even the scribes and elders and Pharisees, while accusing the Nazarene before Pilate, gave vent to their vituperations in Greek; and the rabble before the judgment hall howled its *ἄρον, ἄρον, σταύρωσον αὐτόν* in the same language. For the same reason St. Paul, in defending himself before Agrippa and Festus and Felix, made his defense in the language of those courts. People were surprised when any one in public discourse addressed his audience in another language. When Paul, therefore, was made a prisoner in Jerusalem after the great tumult, and rescued by the chief captain of the band, and carried into the castle, he said to the chief captain: "May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? Art not thou that Egyptian," etc.?¹⁷⁾ This captain, mistaking Paul for an Egyptian, was surprised that Paul spoke Greek, the language commonly used in Jerusalem. And when, a little later, Paul, by permission of the captain, addressed the people in the Hebrew tongue, "they kept the more silence,"¹⁸⁾ thus showing surprise at hearing him in Hebrew and not in the predominating Greek. Therefore, "Greek was the English of antiquity in more ways than one, especially in its later form of the *κοινή διάλεκτος*. It was . . . spoken and read throughout the civilized world."¹⁹⁾

In comparing our country and time with those that we have just examined, we find similar conditions to prevail. The language of America is English. English is spoken in the streets, in the factories, in the shops, and in the courts everywhere, not only by the English, but generally also by the German-Americans. Our German-American homes as a rule are no exception. Most of the young people and many parents commonly speak English. Especially where their environments favor the case, most parents are not even as conscientious about

17) Acts 21, 37 f.

18) Acts 22, 2.

19) THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY, vol. I, p. 149.

their vernacular as Quintilian was, and would have the boy not only begin with the English language, but would have this observed so scrupulously as to make him for a long time speak or learn English only, as is mostly the custom. If we, therefore, compare the country and time of the first apostolic congregations with our country and time, we find, *that the language which was universally spoken in the former was not the Hebrew, but the Greek tongue, whereas the language that is universally used to-day in our surroundings is not the German, but the English tongue.*

III.

We have seen in the first part of this treatise that the majority of the founders of the first apostolic congregations were people whose mother tongue was Hebrew, and that the apostles set out on their mission, "preaching the Word to none but the Jews only."²⁰ Hebrew, however, was not to be the church-language of the new dispensation. "When the fullness of time was come, when the promised Savior of mankind Himself had publicly proclaimed, 'It is finished!' and when the story of the world's redemption and the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ crucified and the risen Lord was now to be disseminated through the world and handed downward through the ages and to the end of time, when God contemplated the addition of a New Testament to the Old, the language of the new Canon was not to be that of the Jewish people, but that language which was then more than any other the language of the civilized world."²¹ And that was the κοινή διάλεκτος of the Greek tongue. This was to be the church-language of the first apostolic congregations, as well as that of the New Testament Canon.

That the first apostolic congregations did not use the language of the Hellenists exclusively from the very start, we have already indicated. The membership of these churches was, as a rule, composed of Hebrews and Hellenists. The Hebrews

20) Acts 11, 19.

21) THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY, vol. I, p. 21.

preferred their vernacular, the Hellenistic Jews and Gentiles spoke Greek. Congregations of this kind existed, *e. g.*, in Jerusalem, where a murmuring arose of the Grecians against the Hebrews.²²⁾ Another congregation of this kind existed in Antioch,²³⁾ where those that were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen at first preached the Word to none but the Jews only. A little later, however, others came and spoke to the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus, with the result that a large congregation of Hebrews and Grecians was organized. Similar conditions existed in Antioch of Pisidia,²⁴⁾ in Corinth,²⁵⁾ and in Rome.²⁶⁾ When the apostles and evangelists entered upon their ministration in these congregations, they undoubtedly carried on the work of the Lord in both languages, for a while at least, until the transition of language, which was steadily going on, terminated in the exclusive use of the Greek language in the public worship. This we may safely conclude from the fact, that later, when the apostles wrote their Gospels and Epistles, all these sacred Scriptures were committed to the churches and published to the world in the language that was universally spoken. Even such Scriptures as the Gospel according to St. Matthew and the Epistle to the Hebrews, which were directed chiefly to the Jewish believers, to establish them in the faith that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah prophesied by the prophets of old, were, as all evidence indicates, written in the Greek tongue. The early church fathers, as well as their antagonists, likewise defended and antagonized the Christian faith in the language that was read "in fere omnibus gentibus." Thus it is evident that a change of church-language was practically consummated at the end of the apostolic times.

It is as interesting as it is instructive to note the contentions and strifes between the Hebrews and Hellenists that were engendered during the time of transition. In Jerusalem a mur-

22) Acts 6, 1.

23) Acts 11.

24) Acts 13, 42 ff.

25) Acts 18, 4. 1 Cor. 12, 2.

26) Cf. Rom. 2, 17 with 11, 13 ff.

muring of the Grecians arose against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations,²⁷⁾ so that the apostles had to interfere. They settled the difficulty, not by calling upon the Grecians to go out from among the Hebrews and to organize separate congregations, but by advising the brethren to look out seven men of good report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom they would appoint over this business. The brethren readily acted upon this advice and elected seven deacons, who, as their names indicate, were all Grecians. Thus the bonds of love and unity and fellowship were drawn the tighter by giving these newer and probably weaker members an office in the household of faith. Other congregations, *e. g.*, in Rome and Galatia, experienced similar troubles, and the apostles, in writing their epistles to them, found it necessary to admonish especially the Jews to live peaceably with the Grecians, and to establish themselves in knowledge and doctrine rather than to foster divisions and strifes. In studying the congregations of the apostolic times, therefore, we learn that a transition of language from Hebrew to Greek was in the course of progress soon after their organization, which continued gradually but irresistibly, with many concomitant strifes and contentions, until Greek became the language that was universally used in the churches of the New Covenant.

Nor is the primitive Church the only one that experienced such a transition. The history of Lutheranism in America is replete with similar examples. The very first Lutheran settlement in America teaches the same lesson.

The earliest Lutheran settlement in America was Christina in New Sweden. The beginning of this community was, especially in its religious aspect, intensely Swedish. The colonists were Swedes, and the members of the congregations were the same Swedes. The home government was Swedish, the colonial and local government was also Swedish. The pastor was a Swede. The language spoken in the church, the homes, the councils of peace and war, was Swedish. Customs and manners and ceremonies were Swedish. The lifeless

27) Acts 6, 1.

landmarks, the posts marking the boundaries of New Sweden, bore the Swedish coat of arms. And it was intended and ordained that all this should endure. Especially were the colonists charged to guard the doctrine of the church against all Calvinistic leaven, to adhere to the customs and manners of the mother country, and to preserve the Swedish mother tongue in all its purity. To this effect even the proper names, the names of rivers and towns, were to be, not "outlandish," but Swedish.²⁸⁾

How well did these Swedes under such favorable conditions succeed in carrying out their firm intentions? Did they to the present day preserve the Swedish mother tongue in all its purity, or did they by force of circumstances become assimilated to their "outlandish" surroundings? In answer we will quote from the same author:

At the end of the first half century of Swedish Lutheranism in America, the spokesman of nearly a thousand petitioners could say, "we all of us understand Swedish." After another half century the fact that "Swedish was in our American churches in a great degree forgotten and neglected" caused a candidate for a pastorate in these churches to fear that "for the first year," until he should have acquired sufficient familiarity with the English language, he "could do little or no service in all the work necessary to be done in the various charges committed to him." The time was even then close at hand when the official language of the "Rector" and the vestrymen of the Swedish congregations was no longer Swedish, but English, and long before another half century had expired, it was officially stated that "*the Sweed Tongue ceaseth*," that "the Swedish language is almost extinct," and a little later, that "the knowledge of the Swedish language amongst the members of said church hath become extinct."²⁹⁾

This transition, however, was not consummated without a so-called "Sturm- und Drangperiode." There were Swedes whose bitter feelings were aroused and also emphatically given vent to when English preaching from their pulpits was only mentioned. And later, when the English language had been introduced, and when the membership was composed of Swedes and also of such as were accessible only in English, the troubled pastor who desired to remain impartial and to minister to the

28) THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY, vol. V, p. 165.

29) l. c., p. 185 f.

spiritual wants of both parties alike, satisfied none. "To some he was too Swedish; to others he was too English."

At the end of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century a similar change was transpiring in the old German Lutheran parish at Philadelphia. The origin of the first English Lutheran congregation of that city is related by the ministers of the old "Michaelis-Zions" congregation in the following connection:

Wir denken noch mit Schauder an 1793 und 1794. In dem ersteren Jahre verlor die Gemeinde nur allein in drey Monaten 625 Glieder an dem sogenannten gelben Fieber, und in dem darauffolgenden Jahre brannte am zweyten Christtag-Abend unser praechtiges Zion mit der neuen Orgel ab. Und dies war der Zeitpunkt, in welchem sich viele Glieder von der Gemeinde verliehen, weil in der alten Kirche bei weitem nicht Raum genug war und unterschiedliche von der innigen Liebe der Deutsch-Reformirten Gemeinde, die uns ihre Kirche alle Sonntage auf halbe Tage einraeumte, keinen Gebrauch machten, sondern entweder daheim blieben, oder die englischen Kirchen besuchten. . . . Im November 1796 wurde das wieder aufgebaute Zion bezogen, und die Gemeinde fing an, sich wieder zu sammeln, *als eine andere, noch groessere Not* dieselbe anwandelte; es wurde naemlich von mehreren Gliedern verlangt, dass auch Englisch in unsern Kirchen moechte geprediget werden, wogegen aber die Mehrheit der Glieder ihre Stimmen eingaben.³⁰⁾

Again and again did the advocates of English, however, attempt to gain their point, but without success, until in the year 1805 they seceded from the German and organized an English congregation, the St. John's church.

The quietude, however, that now prevailed in the German congregation, was of very short duration. The fire of animosity had been quenched to a certain extent, but still there were embers glowing under smoldering ashes. Soon another English party raised its head within the German parish and demanded English services. The German part, on the other hand, was not idle, but called and conducted a meeting of protest, in which quiet words and nicest German were not scrupulously selected.

30) Graebner's *Gesch. d. Luth. Kirche in Amerika*, p. 539 f.

They decided that blood should flow rather than to permit the introduction of English. They had, according to their own statements, firmly united before God and among themselves, to defend the German services with body and life against any and every attack, and to resist with all their power the introduction of a foreign language. This statement, however, proved very disastrous for the German party. Their opponents instituted litigation against them, accusing them that they had formed an unlawful and unrighteous pact against peaceful citizens. The grand jury found 59 of the German members guilty, who escaped punishment only through the pardon of Gov. Snyder. — In 1816 another case was brought to court. In their January meeting, at the election of church officers, violent debates were conducted that eclipsed those of the hottest political campaigns. The Germans won the election. But the English members were not satisfied with the results and once more sought refuge in court. Another decision was rendered against the German. The final result of this strife was the organization of another English congregation, St. Matthew's.

History repeats itself. What has happened to the apostolic, to the Swedish and German and Dutch congregations years ago is, as far as the language question is concerned, in the course of progress throughout our congregations, although, on account of our parochial schools and other local circumstances, it will not make the same progress everywhere. Twenty-five years ago English preaching within our synod was, indeed, not the rule. To-day scores of the city congregations, especially in the East and South, and numbers of country congregations, already have introduced, and others are introducing, English into their churches and schools as a means of promulgating the saving Gospel. In the families, twenty-five years ago, more German was spoken than there is now. Most children that enter our schools show as much, if not more, familiarity with English than with German. English is, in many homes, the language of the hearth, and what is the language of the hearth is the language of the heart. And viewing the different transitions

of languages in the course of their progress as they are written on the pages of history, and there learning that such changes make very slow progress in the beginning of transition, but, when once set in, progress with increased rapidity, we must conclude that the day when English will be the predominating language in our churches is not very distant.

It will be well to ponder these truths in our days. The change of language is not only impending, but is in actual and even accelerated progress at the present time throughout the German and Scandinavian Lutheran bodies in America. Already English has taken the place of German and Norwegian and Danish and Swedish in families and schools and churches to such an extent that the change can no longer be winked at. As English becomes the language of the hearth, it also becomes the language of the heart, the language of husband and wife, father and mother and child, of infant prattle and dying accents. Where it has come to that, English should also be the language of the best friend of the household, the faithful pastor, in his pastoral visits and personal intercourse with those to whose hearts English has become the familiar way. Let such people learn that the Gospel is just as true and its comforts are just as sweet in English as in any other tongue.³¹⁾

And we, who are experiencing the relentless progress that English is making in our midst must expect the attendant undesirable conditions, the strifes and contentions, etc., to arise in our congregations. The careful consideration of past experience might, in many incidents, help us to guard against sad mistakes, and serve to avoid irreparable loss. And wherever the Grecians in a congregation are murmuring against the Hebrews, or the English against the Germans, as many of our congregations are experiencing to-day, this murmuring is a certain indication that a change of language is in the course of progress.

This, then, is the third point of similarity between the apostolic and our congregations, *viz., that in the former a transition of language from Hebrew to Greek took place, while in the latter a change from German to English is in the course of progress.*

31) THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY, vol. V, p. 236 f.

IV.

Contemplating this transition, the question will invariably rise in our minds, *Why did the apostles and the members of the first Christian congregations permit such a change to occur?* Why did they discontinue Hebrew and introduce Greek as the church-language? The answer to this question will explain why English is being introduced into our churches.

We must remember that Hebrew was the sacred language in the Old Covenant. When God wrote His holy will on those two tables of stone, when Moses, the man of God, committed his inspired thoughts to paper, and when Isaiah and Jeremiah and Joel and the other prophets brought down Jehovah's condemnation upon the transgressors of His Law, or when they, in prophetic vision, described the deliverance and salvation of the coming Messiah, it was done in the Hebrew language. Hebrew had been the vernacular of the holy patriarchs and of the chosen generation throughout the ages of the former dispensation. And even in the apostolic times the old faithful Hebrews clung to their mother tongue. Does it, then, not seem very inconsiderate, yea, verging on sacrilege, on the part of the first Christians and apostles to discontinue the use of this sacred language in the Church of the new dispensation? Does it not appear as if these writers of the New Testament were very indifferent to the holy religion of the Old Testament in discontinuing its language and in accommodating themselves to the Greek tongue that was spoken by the ungodly hosts of heathen idolaters and unbelievers? What prompted the apostles to do this?

In the first place, Christ Himself taught His disciples that their missionary endeavors were not to be confined to the Hebrew people, nor to their language. After His glorious resurrection Christ frequently directed the attention of His disciples to their future evangelistic work, and gave them important advice and instruction how to carry it out. One of His directions was: "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in

His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”³²⁾ His Gospel should be preached to the Jews first, and then to every creature. And to remind them that this preaching should not be confined to the Hebrew tongue, but that they were to evangelize in the languages of the nations, He adds: “They (the evangelists) shall speak with *new tongues*.”³³⁾ Therefore He assures them: “Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you. But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”³⁴⁾ The disciples did as they were told. But when the promise of the Father was sent upon them, and when they were endued with the power from on high on the day of Pentecost, then the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in their own language, for the apostles were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Thus God Himself taught the apostles and first Christians that the everlasting Gospel was to be preached to those that dwell on the earth, and every nation, and kindred, and *tongue*, and people. This evidently was the reason why the primitive Church did not cling to the Hebrew tongue.

And the reason that prompted them to use the Greek language can be discovered very easily. We have seen in the second part of this treatise that almost every creature and nation in those days spoke the Greek tongue. It would have been folly, had the apostles set out to teach these nations first Hebrew and then the Gospel in that language. No, they went out and preached Jesus Christ crucified in the language that everybody understood. For this same reason they used the Greek language in their churches, and again for this very reason God’s Holy Spirit had the entire New Testament Canon written in the language that was spoken everywhere. And the Word of God proved to be exactly as powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword in the Greek than it had been in the Hebrew tongue.

32) Luke 24, 47.

33) Mark 16, 17.

34) Luke 24, 49.

Are we unwilling to learn the important lessons that the history of these first churches inculcates? Has not the change of language in the times of the apostles and their adoption of the world's language the sanction, yea, the encouragement and prompting of God Himself? Are we not thereby urged to adapt ourselves similarly under like conditions? But are not similar conditions confronting us to-day? Should we deny to-day that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a power of God unto salvation, and claim that it is not quick and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword when spoken in English? Has the commission of the Master, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," no application with us? Do we not care to make practical use of the inscription on our *Lutheraner*: "Having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and *tongue*, and people"? Indeed, we cannot step outside of our homes and churches, our children cannot leave their school-doors without coming into contact with English-speaking people. We have sacred duties to perform towards these our neighbors. We should be a light unto them. We should be the salt of the earth. We should preach the Gospel to them. "Let your speech be alway with grace," admonishes St. Paul, "seasoned with salt, *that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.*"³⁵⁾ "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you."³⁶⁾ But how can our congregation members and our schoolchildren perform this important duty, if they are unable to use the English church-language? That we are upholding a very un-Lutheran practice when we confine our churches to one language only, we are told by Luther himself. He says:

Ich halte es gar nicht mit denen, die nur auf eine Sprache sich so gar geben und alle andern verachten. Denn ich wollte gerne solche Jugend und Leute aufziehen, die auch in fremden Landen koennten Christo nuetze sein und mit den Leuten reden, dass es nicht uns ginge wie den Waldensern in Boehmen, die ihren Glauben

35) Col. 4, 6.

36) 1 Pet. 3, 15.

in ihre eigene Sprache so gefangen haben, dass sie mit niemand koennen verstaendlich reden, *er lerne denn zuvor ihre Sprache*. So tat der Heilige Geist nicht im Anfange; er harrete nicht, bis alle Welt gen Jerusalem kaeme und lernte Ebracisch, sondern gab allerlei Zungen zum Predigtamte, dass die Apostel reden konnten, wo sie hinkamen. Diesem Exempel will ich lieber folgen, und ist auch billig, dass man die Jugend in vielen Sprachen uebe; wer weiss, wie Gott ihr mit der Zeit brauchen wird? Dazu sind die Schulen gestift.³⁷⁾

And if the apostles and their congregations welcomed the use of the Greek language for the reason that it was the world's language, why should we, who are living in a country where the English language is so universally spoken, be so imprudent as to banish it from the altars of our homes and schools and churches?

V.

The primitive Church, however, although it experienced a change of language, did not change its practice and creed. This is a final important lesson which we must ever bear in mind. *Let us be on our guard, while we are changing our church-language, lest we suffer a change of doctrine and practice.* For such a change does not only offer an enlarged scope of opportunities, but also grave dangers that deserve careful attention. "Language being the garb of thought and sentiment, the acquisition and use of a language disposes men toward thinking and feeling like those whose language they assume."³⁸⁾

There were many temptations from within and without that beset the first Christians to change or modify their religion, or to introduce practices and doctrines that they had not learned. Greek learning, Greek mythology and idolatry, Greek science and philosophy, crowded the schools and homes and hearts and minds and mouths of the entire civilized world. The Grecians of the circumcision and uncircumcision were converted and added to the churches by the Gospel of Christ. When these congregations, therefore, that consisted partly of those who had been unconverted Grecians and partly of those who were adapting

37) St. L. ed. X, 228.

38) THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY, vol. V, p. 236.

themselves to the κοινή διάλεκτος, continued to use the Greek language, the danger was imminent, that they, as a whole or in part, would assimilate themselves in a measure to their un-Christian surroundings. But we find that neither persecution nor temptation could induce these exemplary Christians to deviate one jot or tittle from the doctrine and practice that was committed to them by the Master and His disciples. The apostolic congregations, after the transition, were as truly Christian and orthodox as the one at Jerusalem shortly after Pentecost.

This, however, cannot be said of all those Lutheran church bodies that have already experienced the change. The Swedish congregations in the Delaware Valley, for instance, underwent a twofold change. "In the beginning these congregations were Swedish and Lutheran; at the end, they were neither Swedish nor Lutheran, but English and Episcopal." The same is true of the first Germans of New York, who sank into rationalism, and also of the German Lutherans of Pennsylvania and the South, who opened their church-doors to indifference and syncretism of the crassest kind. And the Eastern Lutheran synods in our country, which are such vociferous declaimants of Missouri's hostility and indifference to, and sterility in, English work, have small cause to pride themselves on their solution of the language question when they compare their doctrine and practice with that of the apostolic Church.

The same temptations and dangers that these Lutheran church bodies have succumbed to confront our congregations at the present time. The pastors, in order to prepare themselves better for their English work, will familiarize themselves with the way the neighboring and other congregations and denominations carry on their work. They will read the sermons of the best English pulpit orators, get acquainted and familiar with the construction, style, and contents of their sermons, and if they are not on their guard, since error usually clothes itself in the choicest diction, they might get too much of such discourses into their pulpits. The teachers of our schools are not

exempt from the influence of our sectarian surroundings. For the school and chair and organ such instruction and hymns and melodies and compositions are liable to force themselves on the professors' attention that they find themselves much inclined to make use of what does not sound very Lutheran. And some members of our congregations will become more lenient with, and indifferent to, sectarianism and unionism; they will see no wrong in raising money as the other churches, by bazaars and the like; they will be very willing to accept any one and every one as a voting and communicant member; and since German is not advocated as much and deemed as necessary as in former years, many will not see the necessity of maintaining a parochial school at such a great expense, when they have such an up-to-date public school so close at hand. These and other dangers seem to be especially threatening where people have considered German and Lutheran and orthodox as identical and everything English as sectarian and heterodox. When people of this sentiment once lose confidence in their German as a saving power, they are apt to drift into English and sectarianism.

In order to successfully meet the impending dangers that are so imminent during a transition of a church-language, we must conscientiously adhere to the biblical practice that our congregations have observed in the past. The practice of our congregations has always been to adhere to the letter of the inspired Word of God in all questions pertaining to doctrine and conduct, to "believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and standard according to which at once all dogmas and teachers should be esteemed and judged are nothing else than the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament."³⁹) In conformity with this position our Church has always avoided unionism and syncretism of every kind, and, consequently, has proved itself a strong barrier against the flood of approaching heresies, a shining light in the spiritual darkness of these last times, and a blessing whose beneficent in-

39) *Formula of Concord, Epitome I.*

fluence has reached beyond our limits. Should we become lenient with the heresies of the English-speaking sects whose language we are obliged to introduce into our churches and schools, and succumb to the same sad mistake that has brought ruin to so many Lutheran church bodies in America? If not, then let us, by all means, adhere to this, of all the most important practice, and continue in the things which we have learned and been assured of, and let us mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrines which we have learned, and avoid them, and heed the warning of the Master: "Beware of false prophets!"

Our congregations have always established and maintained parochial schools, in order to give their children a thorough Christian training. Is this a custom we can afford to dispense with? No, we need them more now than ever before. As long as we have German services in our churches which our children should attend with benefit, and as long as German thought continues to dominate the learned part of mankind, we ought to teach our children that important language. And especially, as long as our German- and English-speaking children are the children of wrath by nature even as others, and, therefore, in need of the saving influence of the Christian religion, we must impress upon our German and English members the necessity of maintaining these indispensable institutions of our Church. It is the sacred duty of every congregation to teach them to observe all things whatsoever the Savior has commanded us, to bring its youth up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, that the generation to come might know the appointed law and established testimony, so that from a child they might know the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make them wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Such indoctrinating cannot be effectually achieved unless a congregation has a parochial school.

It has furthermore been the practice of our congregations to do energetic missionary work among those who were not spiritually provided for. Let us follow their example and keep

up and, if necessary, enlarge our colleges and seminaries, and send out our missionaries at home and abroad, so that the banner of the genuine Gospel might be unfurled everywhere. At the same time, such English Lutheran synods as regard and treat our German parishes as legitimate mission territory for themselves can serve us as warning examples not to be busybodies in other men's matters.

And as our congregations are known to have been on the alert against all worldliness, so let us have our English, as well as our German members understand that we will in no wise tolerate fraternization with the world, be it in the Christless lodge halls or in the unwholesome theaters and ball-rooms, or be it where it may be. And whenever our Christians have been led astray, they must be urged, now as much as in the past, not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, and to come out from among them, and not to touch the unclean thing.

If we will thus be on our guard and continue to compare favorably with the first apostolic congregations during the transition of language, and not suffer a change in doctrine and practice, but, rather, avail ourselves of the larger scope of opportunities that are extended us, then will we throw the light of the pure Gospel of the crucified and risen Lord and of a sound Lutheranism into our un-Lutheran surroundings; then will we be a salt that does not only savor a German, but also an English community; then ours will still be the Word which the Spirit wrote to the church at Philadelphia: "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my Word, and has not denied my name. Because thou hast kept the Word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."⁴⁰⁾

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