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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

## Miscellany.

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The state of religious knowledge and intelligence of young people who are being admitted to communion in the churches is causing anxious thought in our country and perhaps still more in Germany. Under the heading, "Admission to Full Communion," *The Presbyterian* on March 18th said editorially:

If the overture from the General Assembly upon "Admission to Full Communion of Persons Baptized in Infancy" shall be adopted by the Presbyteries, the phrase "Admission to sealing ordinances" will disappear from the Directory of Worship. That phrase has ceased to have very much meaning to the present generation, to whom the words "joining the church" cover nearly everything involved in a confession of faith and assumption of the privileges and duties of Christian life. And yet "joining the church" is hardly an accurate phrase to express the coming to the Lord's Table and the confession of faith of those who, having been members of the church by birthright, have been baptized in infancy and claim their privilege upon coming to years of discretion. The title of the amended chapter in the Directory is better.

But whatever change may be made in the phraseology of the Directory, there will be no change in the requirement that those who are admitted to full communion shall be examined by the session as to their knowledge and piety. How much knowledge a candidate must possess is not specified. The discretion of the session is to be exercised in determining whether any one person is sufficiently acquainted with the fundamentals of the faith. There is room, therefore, for a wide difference in opinion and practice with regard to the admission of any person to the Lord's Supper. It is probable that a considerable difference in practice does exist. Some sessions are disposed to be extremely careful concerning the supposable knowledge of those who apply for admission to full communion. Others are quite satisfied with a confession of faith on Jesus Christ and the announcement of a purpose to follow Him.

The degree of knowledge required is giving some trouble to brethren of the Methodist Church. One writes to the *Christian Advocate* that he feels it absurd to ask a young girl of twelve, upon admitting her to full communion, whether she "believes in the Doctrines of the Holy Scripture as set forth in the Articles of Religion

of the Methodist Episcopal Church," and declares further that it is unreasonable to ask the average adult this question. He wishes the next General Conference to amend their Discipline at that point, and substitute a simpler question. We should have much sympathy with his desire. It is hardly reasonable to require a candidate for admission to full communion, in any branch of the Church, to declare his understanding and belief of the distinctive theological views of that communion. It would be quite absurd for a Presbyterian session to examine a young candidate as to his knowledge of the Westminster Confession. The most that can rightly be required of any one who wishes to confess his faith is a simple knowledge of the way of salvation in Christ and a credible profession of his acceptance of the same, with a determination to follow Christ in life and service.

We cannot but feel, however, that persons not sufficiently instructed in the fundamentals of the Gospel are sometimes admitted to full communion in our churches. There is possibility of mistake, on the part of sessions, in the direction of too hasty admission of candidates to full communion, as well as in the opposite way. The requirement of examination in knowledge, as well as piety, is wise and should be heeded. It is no favor, but the contrary, to any young person to admit him to full communion in the church before he has a reasonably clear understanding of what church membership means, with its responsibilities as well as its privileges. Not a few young people who are persuaded to a confession of Christ in the Sabbath schools come from families in which there is little or no religious instruction. They need to be taught. It is wiser for the session to take proper measures to secure their instruction than to admit them too hastily to the Lord's Table. No small portion of the loss in church membership appearing in our annual reports may be traced to the falling out of the membership of the church of those who were received into it without adequate instruction, and therefore without adequate knowledge. In a number of churches, the pastor is endeavoring to give the proper instruction to the youth of his congregation, by means of catechetical classes. Such plans are most commendable. They are a wise attempt to meet an important need. For those who desire help along this line, we can recommend a small pamphlet by the late Rev. E. B. Hodge, D. D., as an excellent treatise on catechetical instruction.

The Church ought surely to be wide open for the entrance of every sincere disciple of the Lord Jesus, young or old. It has no right to impose terms of communion other than those of Christ and

the apostles. But it will surely be acknowledged that the condition, "If thou believest with all thine heart," implies a sufficient knowledge of what it is that is believed. Confessedly, that knowledge need not include the theological statements of the Church's creed. But those responsible for the spiritual welfare of the Church should surely see that the confessor understands the essential truths, not only of personal faith on Jesus, but of the life of the Church in Christ.

These words convey a timely warning. Membership in the church is a privilege of faith. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." "How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" Rom. 10, 17. 14. It is no gain to the Church as a whole nor to the local congregation to admit persons as members who are flagrantly deficient in the knowledge of those truths and principles which the Church must champion in a world of ignorance. Such a course rather tends to weaken the influence of the Church, because it exposes her to just ridicule and scorn when it can be shown that her own members do not know why they are what they are. Unless the Church wants to bring back the days when the people were dying for lack of knowledge, the days of the fides implicita, of the collier's faith, when ignorance was sanctioned by the rulers of the Church, the Church must educate her members, vigorously and incessantly. She must begin this work soon, in the days of childhood; she must carefully grade her instruction, furnishing milk to babes and strong meat to them that are of full age, Hebr. 6, 12 ff.; and she must continue her enlightening and educating efforts by sound expository preaching until her members pass from faith to sight. It is an immoral demand to ask a person to assume the badge of church membership when that badge means no more to him than a holy charm, an amulet, a fetich means to a barbarian.

From *Evangelisch-lutherische Hermannsbürger Freikirche* of August 1, 1908, we learn that even sadder conditions prevail in Germany. Under the caption "Religious Training in a Metropolis" the editor says:

An exceedingly distressing representation is made by the *Ev. Kirchl. Anzeiger* of the religious knowledge which children in a metropolis bring with them when they report for confirmation. We are told: Catechetical instruction prior to confirmation has for its aim to enable children, on the threshold of the age of discretion, to affirm with a personal resolve their allegiance to Christ and His congregation. The time allotted for this work cannot possibly be consumed by efforts to instill the rudiments of religious knowledge. Catechetical instruction of applicants for confirmation, if it is to be at all fruitful, presupposes that the children are acquainted with the fundamental facts and truths of the faith of the Christian congregation within whose pale they were brought to baptism and educated. About seventy lessons are available for the instruction of catechumens. Even in a case where the catechist can proceed at once with his instruction basing on a previous knowledge of the simplest fundamentals which he assumes in his pupils, it is by no means an easy matter to advance them to a point when their knowledge and mind are such that they have at least the beginning of a personal conviction and of the assurance of faith. Men may differ as to the mode of religious instruction which ought to be adopted in the schools, but it will not be questioned that, unless the relation of the school to the religious life is to be completely turned around, the school must equip the children for life by giving them a summary of the history of salvation, hence, chiefly of the person and life of Jesus; and by inculcating the elements of the Christian doctrine of salvation, hence, chiefly a knowledge of the Catechism.

Now, as regards this point, about fifty per cent. of the applicants for confirmation which come from our parish school (the German Elementarschule—a state institute like the church) are quite insufficiently prepared. For not quite one third of all the applicants come from the first class of the parish school, about one third are in the second class at the time of their confirmation, and the remainder is from lower grades. According to the plan of instruction that is in force in the public schools of Berlin the text of the Creed is learned in the fourth class, and Luther's explanation of the Creed is expounded and learned not until the second semester in the second class. Hence, only those children who have been one semester in the second class at the time when they enter the confirmation class, are learning the Creed, this invaluable treasure for which there is no substitute, at school while studying their regular confirmation lessons with the pastor. Compared with this defect it seems a small

disadvantage that at school only the words of institution of the sacraments, not the entire Fourth and Fifth Parts, are memorized.

The report continues by giving further details as to the state of affairs in regard to the religious instruction of children. Question: Where would the churches of the Synodical Conference be to-day, if they had been without their parochial school system?

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