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The Trauma of Acculturation

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THE AMERICANIZATION of the immigrant begins from the moment that he set foot on the soil of his new homeland. It begins imperceptibly, despite his reluctance, or perhaps even outright resistance, to the process. After two hundred years on American soil, descendants of the German Lutherans of the colonial period had largely absorbed, or had been absorbed by, the culture of the new world, despite the valiant efforts of their great spiritual father, Heinrich Melchior Muhlenberg, who in his latter years lamented, "As God is my witness, I worked against the English as long as I could." [cited in Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration, 1607-1860*, p. 75]

Many of the German Lutherans who came in with the tide of the middle nineteenth century immigration, were a different lot. Fresh from the Fatherland, imbued with the spirit of the Lutheran confessional revival, they rejected "American" Lutheranism, and were determined at all costs to foster Lutheran orthodoxy and German culture especially the mother tongue. It was felt that the substance of the former could not long endure without the framework of the latter. Even so astute a churchman and ecclesiastical architect as C. F. W. Walther, father of the Missouri Synod, had earlier persuaded his congregation in St. Louis to adopt a constitutional provision which forbade the use of any other language but German in the public services. This language paragraph was then declared to be "unalterable." Some members may have scrupled at this, for in the next meeting an escape clause was added, stating that the unalterability and irrevocability should not be regarded as a divine command." [Mudinger, *Gov't. in the Mo. Syn.* p. 205, n. 13] Within a few years, however, the Synod definitely affirmed its responsibility to work also in the English language. The acculturation of the seminary, understandably, was interlaced with that of the Synod, and for the most part reflected the progress in Synod generally.

In the 1880's there were two parties among the students—one German and the other American. The former had come from the old country; they were a bit older, some of them were married (although their families were not with them), and they had received more academic training. The Americans were those who had been born in this country, and were usually younger, from 17 to 25

† On September 27, 1971, during the regular faculty meeting of Concordia Theological Seminary, Dr. Erich H. Heintzen, professor of historical theology and the senior member of that department passed away. At the time of death, he was delivering an essay from material prepared for a book dealing with the history of the seminary. Last spring Dr. Heintzen had also designated some of the same material for this article. It is a graphical portrayal of some of the human difficulties which a seminary and church body experience and it is dedicated to those students who lived through those days in the first decades of this century. Past difficulties some times become humorous with the passing of time. They can also become marks of God's grace.

years of age. It was quite evident that the former enjoyed Craemer's sympathy over the "young Americans." Tension between both groups came to a head over a celebration of Kaiser Wilhelm's birthday, when the Germans, in honor of this occasion, were excused from classes, while the Americans were obligated to attend. The aggrieved American faction then voted to strike, and there was a confrontation with Craemer in the *aula*. The spokesman for the "Americans" was an older student, one Heinrich by name, who stood up to the mounting wrath of Craemer. Craemer's defense for excusing the Germans from class was, of course, that the Kaiser's birthday was a German high feast and was of no concern to the Americans; hence, classes as usual for them. Then, why, countered the Americans, were they not given a free day on the birthday of George Washington, the father of *their* country? Why this discrimination? "Onkel," he it said to his credit, knew when he was nailed, and graciously capitulated. . . . Henceforth, Washington's birthday was fittingly observed by cessation of classes for all. The cause of this tempest may have been the prospect of a free day; however, the element of an ideological struggle cannot be wholly discounted. [*Kaffee Muchle*, pp. 62-79].

Nothing perhaps is more distinctively American than the automobile. Invented before World War I, it was not until after the war that Henry Ford's "model T" was massed produced to put America on wheels. [Brauer, *Prot. in Am.* p. 257]. It was, however, not an unmixed blessing, and it was inevitable that the Springfield seminary should sooner or later be troubled by the "machine" and its attendant problems. Inevitably, too, the question would arise, should the seminary get involved with this sort of thing. In 1928, a professor, after weighing the alternatives, declared against the purchase of a truck for the seminary because he could "see no advantages and only great dangers," and should the school purchase a truck, he formally disclaimed responsibility for any accidents which might occur. [Fac. Min., May 21, 1928].

As usual, the students had other ideas, and began to acquire automobiles. In May of 1929 the faculty was forced to discuss regulations regarding the use and the oversight of automobiles owned by students. Professor Kretzmann was asked to inquire how the matter was being handled by the seminary in St. Louis. [Fac. Min., May 6, 1929]. Just what he learned is not recorded. However, by September the faculty had reached its decision. Director Klein should inform the students that within two weeks from the next Monday, every automobile owner would have to sell or in some way dispose of his car. After that time, no student would be permitted to use automobiles except for an emergency; in that case he should quickly rent one. [Fac. Min. Sept. 3, 1929]. The following year the faculty found it necessary to broaden the rule prohibiting the ownership and use of cars to include motorcycles. [Fac. Min., Mar. 17, 1930]. Once again, however, the forces of acculturation prevailed. By 1941, it was sufficient that students register their cars with the director, but they were

definitely "not to be used to cart girls around." [Fac. Min. Aut. 19, 1941].

More troublesome, however, than the automobile was the telephone. The seminary already possessed not just one, but two of such instruments, one located in the director's office and the other in the commissary. This caused no problem, except for the question out of which fund each should be paid for. [BC Min., Jan. 29, 1915]. It was only when the students arbitrarily insisted on having a telephone, that a veritable Pandora's box was opened which led to the great telephone controversy of the 1920s, in which the telephone appeared as a very instrument of the devil. To begin at the beginning, the students maintained a free telephone in building No. 1, supported by the students. This telephone was removed by seminary authorities on the grounds that it served no good purpose and that students used it from time to time for "flirten." [Fac. Min., Aug. 30, 1926]. The phoneless students then requested the installation of a pay phone. Authorities felt that this would not eliminate the chief evil, namely, the "everlasting ringing of the phone caused by outsiders, particularly girls." Further, a pay phone would not hinder the "Don Juans (*Maedchenjaeger*) from chatting with the girls to their heart's content." The faculty answered "*Quod non*," which is an impressive Latin word for No! [Fac. Min., Nov. 1, 1926].

On the morning of March 1, the silence of the tomb reigned in empty class rooms, while the professors were huddled in extraordinary session. The occasion for this was the failure of the two upper classes to submit an apology by the appointed hour of 8:30 for arbitrarily having had a telephone re-installed during the director's absence. The evening before, noisy demonstrations had taken place after chapel, and the *Primus* (president of the first seminary class) announced that the two upper classes would no longer cooperate with the director in handling matters of discipline and order. The faculty then demanded an apology from them by 10: o'clock. Instead of the expected apology, a committee appeared desiring a parley. This was rejected because the committee brought no apology. The professors then refused to teach the two upper classes until the latter agreed to apologize, but agreed to teach the remaining classes at the usual time. But members of these classes then informed the director that they would not attend until the faculty agreed to hear the committee from the upper classes. It looked like a stand off.

That evening, the faculty took the matter to the board of control. It was clear to all that the offenders must be brought to humble repentance ("Zu Kreuze kriechen muessten," literally, "to creep to the cross") because open rebellion lay at hand. As an excuse for their conduct the students had explained that before the director left for Baltimore, he had given them a rather free hand to look after the welfare of the institution during his absence, and that they felt the installation of a telephone would be to the welfare of the seminary. This logic did not impress the board. It was finally decided that the faculty should appear before the whole student body and, on the

basis of the Word of God, show them their sin, and request their apology and assurance of repentance. This was done; and the Word once again proved itself sharper than a two-edged sword. Those responsible for the installation of the detestable telephone admitted their wrong, then also moved that the whole student body apologize to the faculty. It was done. Afterward members of the faculty remarked that no one had voted *against* the motion, but that it was questionable whether everyone had voted *for* it. Nevertheless, an apology can only be received in the spirit of Christian love, and the matter should be dropped—unless of course the students should start something. Classes were resumed the next morning. But the matter did not quite end there.

In the fall of 1927, Director Klein appeared before the board, this time wearing a different hat. He now asked permission to have the telephone re-installed. The board demurred, citing the injury done to the director's dignity and authority by the perversity of the students during the great telephone controversy. But the director, be it said to his credit, stood firm, maintaining that a telephone for the students was now "a necessity." The board left the matter in his hands. Not long afterward, the telephone was re-installed, but "under strict supervision." [BC Min., Oct. 17, 1927].

The truth is that for many years the telephone continued to be a scarce item around the seminary. As late as 1954, Wessel Hall, a modern edifice of glass and aluminum was erected, but no telephones were installed. It was not until the '60's, that these modern conveniences were placed in professors' offices.