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German Language Use at Pennsylvanian Lutheran Seminaries

The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (LTSG) was founded in 1826 by Samuel Simon Schmucker, making it the oldest Lutheran Seminary in North America. Sitting atop a hill called Seminary Ridge, the seminary found itself in the middle of the Civil War when in July 1863 the opposing armies descended upon Gettysburg, and the campus was used as a key defensive point. The original seminary building was used as a lookout, and later as a field hospital for both Union and Confederate soldiers.

Schmucker was a controversial figure within the Lutheran Church because of his radical theological positions, in particular his views on the Augsburg Confession. He was also a noted abolitionist. For 38 years he served as chairman of the faculty and professor of didactic theology. However, his pietist and puritan leanings caused controversies within the Church, giving rise to a conflict between Schmucker's "American Lutheranism" and the traditional theology of his colleagues. His opponents favored doctrinally based theology rooted in the Augsburg Confession, a summary of Christian faith following the Reformation that serves as the basis for Lutheranism.

Still in the midst of the Civil War, Charles Porterfield Krauth, formerly a professor at Gettysburg, founded the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (LTSP) in 1864. The new seminary sought to preserve a particular Lutheran identity and focus on instruction in German. At the time of its founding, the leaders of the new seminary—several of whom were trained by S.S. Schmucker at Gettysburg—took a leading role in promoting a specific type of confessionally-oriented Lutheranism. Debates about the authority and textual integrity of the Lutheran Confession, paired with societal issues rising

from the continued settlement of the United States and later the Civil War, prompted church-dividing theological and political disputes. Because of the geographical proximity of LTSG and LTSP, there were continual attempts from the 1920s-1990s to merge the two institutions, and the two seminaries even shared a president in the 1960s. Finally in July 2017, the merger was completed, and the new institution was named United Lutheran Seminary (ULS). The seminary is one of seven theological seminaries associated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the largest Lutheran denomination in the US.

This paper examines the use of German language in classes and administration at the two seminaries, and the extent to which language and culture influenced theological leanings at Gettysburg and led to the founding of the rival seminary at Philadelphia.

German Lutheranism in Nineteenth Century America

German immigrants began to pour into Pennsylvania and surrounding colonies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A large proportion of these immigrants were Lutherans, though Reformed, Moravians, Mennonites, and Amish also settled the area. Unlike the Palatine Germans, who came over in large groups guided by pastors, this new wave of immigrants came independently or in small groups but congregated into ethnic German settlements once they got to America.[1] The settlers formed churches and elected men to be pastors, but there was a lack of regular pastoral and institutional church leadership in Pennsylvania. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, the so-called father of Lutheranism in America, suggested the answer to this disorganization was to have churches organize themselves into synods. However, amongst the colonial Germans there were "significant differences within their communities about Lutheran worship, theology, organization, and the practice of ministry… Many territories had their own distinct Lutheran worship book, liturgy, and patterns of worship life."[2]

What united the settlers most was the importance of their heritage. Opposing American assimilation, many German-speaking ministers and editors of German-language periodicals had vested interests in the preservation of German and attempted to unite the Pennsylvania Germans under the banner of German language and culture.[3] In an 1813 essay, J.H.C. Helmuth, a mentor of S.S. Schmucker and leading Lutheran minister in Philadelphia, imagines:

> What would Philadelphia be in forty years if the Germans there were to remain German, and retain their language and customs? It would not be forty years until Philadelphia would be a German city. . . What would be the result throughout Pennsylvania and Northern Maryland

> in forty or fifty years? An entirely German State, where, as formerly in Germantown, the beautiful German language would be used in the legislative halls and the courts of justice.[4]

To those who held this point of view, the preservation of the German language was more important than retaining their Lutheran beliefs: "They urged Reformed and Lutherans to stand together against all attempts to introduce the English."[5] Indeed, "the German language was regarded as being of greater import than faithful adherence to the Lutheran Confessions" and "a refuge against the inroads of Rationalism and the English language was sought in a union with the German Reformed and the German Moravians." [6] Some believed that an English speaking church was necessarily an Episcopal or puritan one, that "[t]he English language is too poor to furnish an adequate translation of the German prayers and hymns and books of devotion,"[7] and that Germanness and Lutheranness were inseparable.

Founded in 1748, the Pennsylvania Ministerium was the first organized Lutheran church body in the US. It was not shy about its German origins, officially calling itself the "German Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of North America." In an 1805 resolution the group announced "that the present Lutheran Ministerium in Pennsylvania and the Adjacent States must remain a German speaking Ministerium, and that no regulation can be adopted which would necessitate the use of another language besides the German in its synodical meetings and other business."[8] Similar synods sprang up across the mid-Atlantic states with varying degrees of adhesion to the German language and the Augsburg Confession.

The Evangelical Lutheran General Synod of the United States of North America (henceforth General Synod), formed in 1820, was the first national Lutheran body composed of smaller regional synods, including initially the Pennsylvania Ministerium, the New York Synod, and the Maryland-Virginia Synod. The General Synod attempted to be a framework for uniting all church bodies in the Lutheran tradition, but still the language problem hindered the unification of Lutherans in America: "one great obstacle in the formation of the General Synod was the unyielding adherence of the early Lutherans to the German language, while the synods and congregations composing the General Synod were predominantly English."[9]

The multiplication of Lutheran synods accelerated after 1820. Dozens of new synods were formed between 1820 and 1855, partially over graphical expansion, and partially due to "differences over confessional and theological positions, language and worship, ethnicity, memberships in the General Synod, and positions regarding social issues, including the abolition of slavery."[10] The regional synods' membership in the General Synod was constantly in flux from

its founding through the end of the nineteenth century. The Pennsylvania Ministerium severed ties in 1823, only to rejoin in 1853. Within the General Synod the process of anglicizing proceeded with greater rapidity, and it was feeling increasing influence from other denominations. The establishment of a seminary was foremost on the agenda of the newly formed Synod. Gettysburg was chosen as the location because it was the "most centrally located for the synods then in the General Synod" with "fair prospects for growth," and the Synod elected S.S. Schmucker as the first professor.[11] LTSG was founded with a distinctly Lutheran pledge: "In this seminary shall be taught, in the German and English Languages, the fundamental doctrines of the sacred Scriptures as contained in the Augsburg Confession." [12]

S.S. Schmucker

Simon Samuel Schmucker was born in 1799, the son of a German immigrant pastor. He attended the University of Pennsylvania at age 16, and then Princeton Seminary, being ordained as a pastor in 1820. He had been strongly in support of the General Synod and was well- respected by his colleagues despite his young age.

Finding that those entering the Seminary were ill-prepared for theological study, Schmucker created a preparatory school to solve the problem. First established in the *Gymnasium* tradition, as the school grew, Schmucker proposed that it reestablish itself as a college "for the education of youth in the learned languages, the arts, sciences, and useful literature."[13] Pennsylvania College[14] was founded officially on July 4, 1832 and was closely tied to the Seminary in its early days.

Schmucker was a radical man. He was a pietist and severe moralist, objecting to recreations like checkers and cards, doubting the propriety of the theatre and opera, and refraining totally from alcohol and tobacco.[15] In addition, "[h] e was a puritanical observer of what he called the Sabbath."[16] At the same time, however, Schmucker was vocal about his liberal theological and political views.

He was so recognized for his anti-slavery views that he was warned to leave Gettysburg before the battle, when confederate troops approached Gettysburg on July 1, 1863. His house on the LTSG campus was ransacked, and books thrown around the field. A confederate soldier found his bible in the dirt and inscribed inside: "J. G. Bearden of the rebel army...this is the Holy Bible I pick up out of the...and has [sic] placed on the case again."[17] The bible had Schmucker's marginalia and underlining of passages referring to slavery.

In addition to pietism and revivalism, Schmucker was interested in a new American Lutheranism that would fit into the greater culture of American Protestantism. His puritan leanings caused conflict with the more conservative

Lutherans, who considered his views to be anti-Lutheran and anti-German. Schmucker combined conversionist Pietist sensibilities with a broader evangelical agenda. In his opinion, Lutheranism was not restricted to German sensibilities or the adherence to every word of the Augsburg Confession; rather, Lutherans had a duty to serve the new nation by promoting the tenets of Lutheranism and general Reformation principles such as biblicism (*sola scriptura*) and spiritual self-determination, which in turn would lead to a spread of Christianity and increased national moralism. [18] Schmucker was keen to impose changes that he believed would benefit both Lutherans and other Protestants in the United States. He believed that the characteristics of American Protestantism could be combined with those of the European tradition, so that the German American Lutheran church could promote its ideals within the broader culture of the American church.

German in Gettysburg

The first Lutheran Church in Gettysburg, St. James Lutheran Church, was German speaking. This congregation was a union church, where the Lutherans and the German Reformed congregation shared one building. A second church, Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, was founded in 1836 to accommodate the Lutheran residents of Gettysburg who preferred to have their worship services conducted entirely in English. Many of the early pastors and worshippers at Christ Lutheran were faculty members and students at the local seminary and the college, including S.S. Schmucker, and it quickly became known as the "College Church."[19]

After severing ties with the General Synod in 1823, the Pennsylvania Ministerium discussed the desirability of establishing its own seminary or officially co-operating in one of those already established. As early as 1842 it had endorsed the seminary at Columbus, Ohio, which provided more German classes and more distinctive Lutheran confessionalism than Gettysburg, and there was talk about beginning a new seminary, which was abandoned in 1846.[20] In 1853 the Ministerium reunited with the General Synod. Although there was "fear of the doctrinal position of the Gettysburg professor of theology," the conservative factions of the General Synod were gaining strength, and a number of changes seemed to suggest a reunion with LTSG.[21] First, the Ministerium elected five men as directors of the seminary.[22] The *Evangelical Review*, a magazine with confessional-based Lutheran views, was established; Charles Philip Krauth, a confessional conservative, was elected to be a full professor; and Dr. Henry Baugher, also a staunch conservative, was elected to the presidency of Pennsylvania College. There was still doubt that proper attention was not being given to the German language, which the

administration assuaged by "emphasizing constantly the German instruction in the institution, and by pointing to the large proportion of its graduates who preached German."[23] It was proposed that "[i]f the Pennsylvania Ministerium could have a man of its own, that is, a man of pronounced conservative views, to teach theology at Gettysburg in the German language, it was thought that a change in the atmosphere of that institution would be assured."[24] It was thought that a professorship sponsored by the Ministerium and filled by a conservative in whom they had confidence could reunite the Ministerium with the General Synod and the Gettysburg Seminary.

In 1855, Dr. Charles Frederick Schaeffer of the Ministerium was nominated to the "German Theological Professorship."[25] The main goal of the professorship was "to train up young men for the office of ministry that they might become German Lutheran preachers."[26] Schaeffer (a brother-in-law of S.S. Schmucker) was tasked with teaching German language at the College and Theology (in German) at the Seminary,[27] with the goal, as he saw it, to prepare "orthodox Lutheran preachers" who were "enabled freely to use the German language."[28] Initially, seminary students attended the lectures in their vernacular, with English students attending all English lectures and Germans attending the German lectures. However, Schaeffer was only one of the professors, and the only one teaching in German, and his small number of lectures did not cover all aspects of theology and preaching required by the Seminary. After his 1856 report to the Synod that he could not adequately perform his duties at both the College and the Seminary, the Ministerium wanted Schaeffer to be relieved of his duties at the College to teach full time at the Seminary.[29] Instead, the Seminary board resolved that each student attend all lectures, regardless of language, and that language difficulties could be made up with a textbook in the correct language.[30] As a result of this policy, many students who could speak only German withdrew from the Seminary.[31]

Schmucker's Definite Synodical Platform

Around the same time that language became an issue at the Seminary, Schmucker's writings and teachings were provoking the theological community. Schmucker's interests had moved beyond narrow definitions of traditional Lutheran faith and practice. He supported revivalism and sought to strengthen the Lutheran and greater Protestant Church by increasing its unity. He favored the development of interdenominational organizations, such as the Sunday School movement and the Evangelical Alliance, to spread Christianity in the United States and to improve national morality.

In 1855, he proposed his *Definite Synodical Platform*. The Platform proposed revisions to the Augsburg Confession to make it more acceptable to

American sensibilities, namely Calvinist and American Evangelical theology, a development that was termed "American Lutheranism." The Platform specifically sought to eliminate references to baptismal regeneration and the real presence of Christ in Holy Communion.[32] For orthodox Lutherans, this was the final straw.

Due to the tensions and his old age, Schmucker resigned as president and professor at the Seminary in 1864. Charles Porterfield Krauth, the son of Charles Philip Krauth, was an alumnus of the Seminary and editor of *The Lutheran*, a conservative Lutheran periodical. When Schmucker resigned, Krauth was considered as the new president, but the board of directors, still populated mostly by liberal pastors from the General Synod, did not want a conservative professor as President.

A Rival Seminary is Founded

Seeing the failure to elect Krauth to the presidency at Gettysburg as a defeat, conservative factions of the General Synod, namely the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, decided to form their own seminary. The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia was founded in 1864 with Charles Porterfield Krauth as president. Eventually, the Ministerium of Pennsylvania withdrew yet again from the General Synod as a direct reaction against the Americanized Lutheranism of Schmucker and LTSG, and was joined by 13 other church bodies in 1867 to form the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (henceforth General Council).

The General Council oversaw the Philadelphia seminary, where the aim was to focus on instruction in German and return to confessionally-based orthodox Lutheran teachings. In a speech at the opening of the new seminary, Beale M. Schmucker [33] wrote that the goal of the new seminary is "to provide for the wants of the German portion of our Church, especially in the East."[34] At its beginning, "[t]he Seminary undertook to provide two parallel courses in theology, one in each language."[35]

With one seminary under the direction of the General Synod and the other under the direction of the General Council, one theologically conservative and one liberal, and one rural and one urban, "Gettysburg and Philadelphia were rivals and antagonists."[36]

Conclusion and Wider Social Implications

Shortly after his election as President of LTSP, Charles Porterfield Krauth explained why the new seminary was necessary: "It is needed for the sake of pure doctrine. There is no theological seminary in the United States in which are

fully taught, in the English language, the doctrines of the Reformation."[37] He suggested that the language problem was what caused the theological problems. Krauth was also worried that what the English-speaking students were taught differed from what German-speaking students were taught, even at the same institution: "[i]t is most unnatural and dangerous that in the same communion, and under the same roof [that is, at Gettysburg], one set of students should be taught to regard as Romish abominations and dangerous errors what others are taught to consider as the very truth of God." LTSP then, sought not only to be a seminary where German preachers could be educated, but also to be the first American Lutheran seminary to teach Lutheran orthodoxy in English.

S.S. Schmucker, and LTSG by extension, however, was less concerned with preserving Lutheranism than with evangelism, spreading Christian morals, and unifying the Church in the United States. He was not anti-German. He frequently defended himself on the matter, writing that he grew up speaking the language, and that no one had more respect for German history, literature, and Lutheranism's European ties than he did.[38] He did not seek to eradicate German in the seminary and the churches its graduates served, but rather focused on promoting his ideals to a greater community, necessitating interaction with other ethnic groups and Christian denominations, and in turn using more English.

Schmucker and other American Lutherans pushed for assimilation to help to fit the Lutheran tradition more neatly within the extant culture of the American Protestant Church and political framework, but opponents of americanized Lutheranism hoped to secure and maintain the German culture and influence on Pennsylvanian society and politics. In the mid-nineteenth century, some of the Germans still believed that their language might be made the language of the country, or at least the state of Pennsylvania, and they were unwilling to give up an important aspect of their culture: "it was natural that the Germans should be reluctant to give up the language to which they had been accustomed from infancy, and which they sincerely thought would be perpetuated in this land of their adoption."[39] However, others argued that the adherence to the German language was detrimental to the strength of the Church. Martin Luther Stoever, editor of the *Evangelical Quarterly Review*, writes that the reluctance to switch to English "was a mistaken policy…[that] resulted in serious injury to the Church, and almost caused its total ruin."[40] Henry Eyster Jacobs, associated with both LSTP and LTSG, writes: "I had been surprised how little knowledge even intelligent pastors had of Lutheran doctrine, and how restricted were their sources of information. There was really no accessible handbook in the English language."[41] There was a desire for the languages to work "in sisterly harmony," but that was prevented by doctrinal differences.[42]

Eventually German instruction ceased at Philadelphia as well, as more and more churches were calling for English-speaking pastors. As German began

to be replaced by English and more theological works by English-speaking American Lutherans appeared, the theological differences between the factions began to even out. With the formation of the United Lutheran Church in America in 1918, which combined three major synods with German heritage, the General Council and General Synod were once again merged.[43] This placed LTSG and LTSP under the same denomination, paving the way for increased communication and cooperation about Lutheran and ecumenical issues. In 2017, the year of the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, the two seminaries merged to create United Lutheran Seminary, one seminary with two campuses.

United Lutheran Seminary
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Notes

[1] Mark Granquist, *Lutherans in America*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015): 67.

[2] Ibid, 54.

[3] Frank Tommler, Joseph McVeigh, eds. *America and the German, Volume 1: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred Year History--Immigration, Language, Ethnicity*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 2016): 50.

[4] Henry Eyster Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912).

[5] Ibid, 330.

[6] Frederick Bente, *American Lutheranism*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1919): 100.

[7] Jacobs, 330.

[8] Evangelical Lutheran Church, *Documentary history of the Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States: proceedings of the annual conventions from 1748 to 1821, compiled and translated from records in the archives and from the written protocols.*(Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1898).

[9] Peter Anstadt, *Life and Times of Rev. S.S. Schmucker*. (York, PA: P. Anstadt and Sons, 1896): 143.

[10] Granquist, 149.

[11] Abdel Ross Wentz, *History of the Gettysburg Seminary*. (Philadelphia, PA: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1926): 96.

[12] Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, *Constitution of the Theological Seminary of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States: located at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania together with the States of the General Synod on which it is Founded.* (Philadelphia: William Brown, 1826): 3.

[13] Gettysburg College, *Gettysburg College Charter,* 2015. Retrieved from https://www.gettysburg.edu/offices/president/board-of-trustees/charter-bylaws on July 18, 2023.

[14] The College changed its name to Gettysburg College in 1921, which it remains today.

[15] Anstadt, 43-44.

[16] Ibid, 45.

[17] Schmucker Bible, n.d., Schmucker, Samuel Simon Collection. Seminary Archives, A.R. Wentz Memorial Library, United Lutheran Seminary.

[18] Stephen M. Nolt, "The Quest for American Kinship: Liberty, Ethnicity, and Ecumenism among Pennsylvania German Lutherans, 1817-1842, *Journal of American Ethnic History,* 19, no 2. (Winter 2000): 73.

[19] Henry E. Horn, ed., *Memoirs of Henry Eyster Jacobs: Notes on a Life of a Churchman*, vol. 1. (Huntingdon, PA: Church Management Service, 1938): 9.

[20] Wentz, 172.

[21] Ibid, 172.

[22] Ibid, 173.

[23] Ibid, 172

[24] Ibid, 172.

[25] German Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and the Adjacent States, *Minutes of the 108th Annual Session of the German Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and the Adjacent States*. (Sumnytown: Enos Benner, 1855): 24.

[26] German Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and the Adjacent States, *Minutes of the 109th Annual Session of the German Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and the Adjacent States*. (Sumnytown: Enos Benner, 1856): 25.

[27] Schaeffer's official title was Professor of the German Language and Literature in Pennsylvania College and Professor of Theology in the Seminary at Gettysburg.

[28] Ministerium, *109th*, 25.

[29] Dale A. Johnson. Lutheran Dissension and Schism at Gettysburg Seminary, 1864, *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 33, no. 1 (January, 1966): 14.

[30] German Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and the Adjacent States, *Minutes of the 112th Annual Session of the German Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and the Adjacent States*. (Lancaster: John Baer's Sons, 1859): 24.

[31] G.F. Krotel, "The Beginnings of the Seminary." Lutheran Church Review, XVII (1898): 296.

[32] Samuel Simon Schmucker. *Definite platform, doctrinal and disciplinarian, for Evangelical Lutheran district synods, construed in accordance with the principles of the General Synod.* (Philadelphia, PA: Miller & Burlock, 1855).

[33] Interestingly Beale Schmucker is the son of Samuel Simon, but he held more conservative views than did his father.

[34] Beale M. Schmucker, "Address delivered at the installation of the Professors to the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Philadelphia, October 4th, 1864." *Evangelical Quarterly Review*, 16, no. 63 (1865): 426-434.

[35] Ibid, 243.

[36] Theodore Tappert, *History of the Philadelphia Seminary*. (Philadelphia, PA: Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1964.)

[37] Charles Porterfield Krauth, *Lutheran and Missionary*, III (1864): 166.

[38] Schmucker, Collection, Folder 3760.0002

[39] Martin Luther Stoever, "The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America" in *The Evangelical Quarterly Review*, 20 (1869): 120.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Henry E. Horn, ed., *Memoirs of Henry Eyster Jacobs: Notes on a Life of a Churchman*, vol. 1 (Huntingdon, PA: Church Management Service, 1938): 110.

[42] Krauth, 166.

[43] The ULCA initially combined the General Synod, General Council, and the United Synod of the South. More synods joined later.

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