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**Bettina Goldberg
"Our Fathers' Faith, our Children's Language" Cultural
Change in Milwaukee's German Evangelical Lutheran
Parishes of the Missouri Synod, 1850-1930**

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"Our Fathers' Faith, our Children's Language"
Cultural Change in Milwaukee's German Evangelical Lutheran
Parishes of the Missouri Synod, 1850-1930

by

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This report on cultural change in Milwaukee's German Lutheran parishes of the Missouri Synod focuses on the most evident appearance of that cultural change, i.e., the shift from German to English. It is connected with my dissertation that investigates the assimilation process of German immigrants in Milwaukee between 1850 and 1930. Language transition is obviously a central feature of that process. Especially for German immigrants, who were divided along economic, political, and religious lines, ethnic identity has basically to be defined in cultural terms. The vernacular, however, was the most prominent cultural bond and thus of crucial importance for the very existence of the ethnic group.¹ The dissertation focuses on language transfer in Milwaukee's schools, churches, and societies. It discusses the gradual displacement of German as both indicator and catalyst of the assimilation process.

The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States was founded in Chicago in 1847. Its charter members were Old Lutheran immigrants mainly from Saxony who had not been willing to accept the merger of the Lutheran and Reformed churches in the German States and thus had been faced with persecution there. During the second half of the 19th century, due to heavy immigration especially from the Protestant Northern and Eastern parts of Germany, the Missouri Synod gained much in size. Expanding from the Midwest to both coasts, it developed into the largest Lutheran immigrant denomination while retaining an almost exclusively German-American constituency. It became well known not only for its staunch conservatism in doctrinal matters but also for its distinctly German character, which both were to be perpetuated by a self-contained system of German Lutheran parochial schools and pastoral as well as teacher training institutions.²

By the turn of the century, the Synod's reputation as "one of the strongest bulwarks of ... *Deutschtum*" was so marked that the German-American liberal, Karl Knortz, though a strong

¹ See Kathleen Neils Conzen, "The Paradox of German-American Assimilation," *Yearbook of German American Studies* I (1982), pp. 153-60, and "German-Americans and the Invention of Ethnicity," in *America and the Germans. An Assessment of a Three-Hundred Year History*, eds. Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh (Philadelphia, 1985), vol. I, pp. 131-47; David Gerber, "Language Maintenance, Ethnic Group Formation, and Public Schools: Changing Patterns of German Concern, Buffalo, 1837-1874," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 4:1 (Fall 1984), pp. 31-61.

² See Wilhelm Iwan, *Die altlutherische Auswanderung um die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols. (Ludwigsburg, 1943); Ralph Dornfeld Owen, "The Old Lutherans Come," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 20:1 (April, 1947), pp. 3-56; Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri, 1839-1841* (St. Louis, 1953); Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace. A History of the Missouri Synod 1847-1947* (St. Louis, 1947); *100 Years of Christian Education*, ed. Arthur C. Repp (River Forest, IL, 1947).

opponent of fundamentalist Lutheranism, emphasized the Synod's merits for the maintenance of German language and culture, while, at the same time, Ernest Bruncken criticized it for being "one of the most important means of preventing rapid Americanization of the German ... element".³

The Missouri Synod has retained its fundamentalist-literalist theological outlook well into our present times. Today it is one of the most conservative Lutheran denominations in the United States. It has been transformed, however, into an English-speaking, American church body. It cast off the German language and most other German assets which once had been held prerequisites for doctrinal purity.⁴

This cultural and particularly linguistic assimilation of the Missouri Synod has often been interpreted as a result of the anti-German hysteria in the United States during World War I. According to Alan Graebner, whose argumentation can be considered typical, "the Missouri Synod had not changed greatly from the mid-nineteenth century" by the eve of the War. Although the "time to move quickly to English had come," he argues, "there was little in the Synod's heritage which promised a graceful and speedy acceptance of the inevitable. In 1914 the most informed prediction would have been of a debilitating, embittering struggle which would continue for decades." The heavy attack on everything German during World War I, Graebner concludes, "was precisely what was needed. Drastic intensification of the linguistic problem helped solve it. ... Instead of lasting a generation or more, the worst of the language battle was over within a decade after the war."⁵

³ Karl Knortz, *Das Deutschthum der Vereinigten Staaten* (Hamburg, 1898), p. 69; Ernest Bruncken, "How Germans Become Americans," *Wisconsin Historical Society Proceedings* (Madison, 1898), pp. 108-109. By stating that the English language had gained only very little influence within the Missouri Synod at the close of the 19th century, historian Frederick C. Luebke gave a similar, though less emotional characterization almost seventy years later (Frederick C. Luebke, "The Immigrant Condition as A Factor Contributing to the Conservatism of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 38:1 (April, 1965), p. 23).

⁴ See Luebke, "Immigrant Condition," p.27.

⁵ Alan N. Graebner, "The Acculturation of an Immigrant Lutheran Church: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1917-1929," Diss. Columbia Univ., 1965, pp. 13, 103-104; for a similar argumentation, see, e.g., L. G. Bickel, "The Period of Integration 1914-1947. From World War I to the Present," in *100 Years*, p. 196-198; Frederick Nohl, "The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Reacts to United States Anti-Germanism During World War I," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 35:2 (July, 1962), pp. 52 and 59; La Vern J. Rippley, *The German-Americans* (Boston, 1976), p. 99.

For those who share the widely accepted assumption that the pre-war Missouri Synod was a rather monolithic German-speaking religious denomination, this interpretation seems quite plausible. But is the assumption valid? I submit that the German Lutheran parishes affiliated with the Missouri Synod during the pre-war period, though united in religious doctrine, showed a remarkable degree of variation with respect to language. While for many of the rural parishes the First World War may indeed have constituted a decisive cultural and linguistic turning point, in the case of Missouri Synod's urban parishes this was rather unlikely.⁶

In Milwaukee the German immigrants found themselves in a position of strength from the very beginning; therefore they faced less pressure to assimilate than their compatriots in other urban centers.⁷ This favorable condition notwithstanding, Milwaukee's Missouri Synod parishes did not possess, as Graebner argues, "a sufficient reservoir of German culture to continue Old World ways into the second and ... third generation."⁸ Quite to the contrary, even in Milwaukee the English language soon began to threaten the initial dominance of German. Since it was in the "hotbeds" of the parishes, in their schools,⁹ that the English language gained ground first, and since the shift to English in other spheres of parish life was partly due to the effects of parochial education, a discussion of the development within the Lutheran schools will be at the center of the paper.

It will be demonstrated, that although German as medium and subject of instruction was given up in most of the schools during the First World War or shortly thereafter, the war had functioned only as a catalyst, not as a cause for abandoning German. The crisis of German language instruction had already made itself felt before the turn of the century. It was neither caused by attacks from the outside, nor was it brought about by a clergy eager to enforce the

⁶ Many of the articles and monographs that focus on the assimilation process of the Missouri Synod suffer from one or the other of the following shortcomings: 1. they attach too much importance to official synodical statements; 2. they overemphasize the language of religious services as indicator for the state of the assimilation process while neglecting other aspects of parochial life (e.g., schools and societies); 3. they investigate the synod at large or, at best, one of their state districts and do not differentiate between urban and rural surroundings.

⁷ See Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee 1836-1860. Accommodation and Community in a Frontier City* (Cambridge, MA, 1976); Bayrd Still, *Milwaukee. The History of a City* (Madison, 1965).

⁸ Graebner, "Acculturation," pp. 13-14.

⁹ The metaphor "hotbed" (*Pflanzstätte*) is often used in Synodical publications to emphasize the lively meaning of parochial education for the future of the churches; see, e.g., *Kirchenordnung der Ev. Luth. Bethanien-Gemeinde zu Milwaukee, Wisconsin / Constitution of Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Milwaukee, Wisconsin* (n.p., n.d.), § 4.

Americanization of the schools and parishes. It resulted, rather, from social and mental changes that had been taking place within the German-American community for several decades.

I will now first briefly characterize Milwaukee's Missouri Synod parishes and schools, then focus on the use of German in these schools, describing a process of displacement that led to the marginalization of this once dominant language. And finally, I will discuss the causes of language transition in the schools and its effects on other parts of parish life.

The sources that have been evaluated include parish records, school board proceedings, and local German-American newspapers, synodical reports and statistics as well as educational pamphlets and journals that were published by the Missouri Synod during the 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁰

I

During the second half of the 19th century, Milwaukee developed from a relatively small city of 20,000 people into an urban center with approximately 300,000 inhabitants by 1900. This population growth was mainly due to European, particularly German immigration. In 1850, German immigrants constituted more than a third of the city's population, while the Irish, the second largest group, only made up 14 per cent. In 1900, 19 per cent of Milwaukee's inhabitants were German-born, and if their American-born children are added, half of Milwaukee's population was of German descent by that time.¹¹

¹⁰ Research was done in the following institutions and archives: Milwaukee County Historical Society; Milwaukee Public Library; Legislative Reference Library of Milwaukee; Milwaukee Area Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison; Concordia College, Mequon, WI (Archives of Concordia College, formerly Milwaukee, and of the South Wisconsin District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod); Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis; Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library and Archives (WELS), Mequon, WI (Archives of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod).

¹¹ Polish immigrants constituted 6 per cent and Irish immigrants less than 1 per cent of Milwaukee's population in 1900; see *12th United States Census on Population, Part 1* (Washington, 1901), pp. 800-803, 876, 884, and 900; Still, *Milwaukee*, pp. 570-71, 574-75; Gwen Schultz, "Evolution of the Areal Patterns of German and Polish Settlement in Milwaukee," *Erdkunde. Archiv für Wissenschaftliche Geographie* (Bonn), X (1956), p. 138.

The German predominance had its impact on the city's churches. Milwaukee was a center of both German-American Catholicism and Lutheranism. From the outset, the Roman Catholic Church constituted the largest single religious body; it drew its members mainly from the Irish-, German-, and, later on, also the Polish-American community. On the Protestant side, there existed a whole variety of different groups and churches; none of those, however, reached the numerical strength of the Lutheran denominations which since the 1860s held the second rank.¹²

Though there were a few Scandinavian and, after 1889, also English Lutheran churches, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, Milwaukee's Lutheranism bore a distinctly German-American imprint. German immigrants and their descendants founded the overwhelming majority of the parishes, and most of these became affiliated with either the Missouri or the Wisconsin Synod. These two synods, though they were both ethnically homogeneous and confessionally conservative church bodies, had to overcome a whole series of doctrinal differences, until in 1872, they eventually formed the Synodical Conference which turned out to be a rather solid basis for cooperation.¹³

Milwaukee's first Old Lutheran immigrants came from Pomerania and Silesia in 1839. In 1841, they organized St. Paul's parish, and since they had emigrated under the leadership of Pastor Johann Grabau, meanwhile the head of the Buffalo Synod, they voted to join that Synod. Only a few years later, however, the hierarchical structure and authoritarian spirit of the Buffalo Synod caused a split within the parish. After consultations with the Saxon Lutheran immigrants in Missouri, who were known for their outspoken congregationalism, the dissenting members founded Milwaukee's German Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Church,

¹² Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee*, pp. 159 and 275; Still, *Milwaukee*, pp. 419-20, 472; for a more detailed account of the Roman Catholic Church in Milwaukee, see Johann Haug, *Geschichte der Katholischen Kirche in Wisconsin* (Milwaukee, 1899), pp. 241-304; Coleman Barry, *The Catholic Church and German Americans* (Milwaukee, 1953).

¹³ See *Memoirs of Milwaukee County*, ed. Jerome A. Watrous (Madison, 1909), vol. I., pp. 348-353; Roy A. Suelflow, *Walking with Wise Men. A History of the South Wisconsin District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (Milwaukee, 1967); Carl S. Meyer, "Intersynodical Unity Fostered Through Co-operation in Education (1859-1874)," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 29:2 (Summer, 1956), pp. 50-66; David Schmiel, "State Synods and Geographic Parishes: The Abortive Movement of the 1870's," *ibid.*, 38:4 (Jan., 1966), pp. 191-96; for a history of the Wisconsin Synod, see John Philipp Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* (St. Cloud, MN, 1970).

which, in 1847, belonged to the twelve original charter congregations of the Missouri Synod.¹⁴

Trinity Church in downtown Milwaukee initially served the whole city. In the early 1850s, mission work was begun on Milwaukee's South Side. Religious services and a parochial school were started in a rented building in 1853, and only shortly thereafter, Trinity Church peacefully released some of its members, who formed the nucleus of a second parish, St. Stephen, formally organized in 1854. This pattern was to prevail also in the following decades when, in order to keep pace with Milwaukee's population growth and areal expansion, the founding of more parishes became necessary.¹⁵

In 1917, sixteen or slightly over 40 per cent of Milwaukee's German Lutheran parishes were affiliated with the Missouri Synod. Half of those had been founded in the last two decades of the 19th century, i.e., either during or shortly after the third wave of German immigration. More than two thirds of the parishes were located on Milwaukee's Northwest Side, where inhabitants of German descent made up between 60 and 80 per cent of the population.¹⁶

Almost all parishes maintained schools. It was a condition for membership in the Missouri Synod from the beginning that each parish provide a Christian education for the children of its parishioners. In rural areas, many churches lacked funds to offer more than part-time instruction in catechism and biblical history, but in Milwaukee as well as in other urban centers,

¹⁴ See Friedrich Lochner, *Geschichte der Evang.-Luth. Dreieinigkeits-Gemeinde U.A.C. zu Milwaukee, Wis. Im Auftrag der Gemeinde zur Feier ihres fünfzigjährigen Jubiläums den 17. Oktober 1897* (Milwaukee, 1897), pp. 2-11; Ronald Tabbert, "Milwaukee's Trinity Designated a 'Landmark'," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 41:4 (November, 1968), p. 154; Suelflow, *Walking*, pp. 18-43; for a critical discussion of Missouri Synod's congregationalism in theory and practice, see Alan Graebner, "Thinking About the Laity in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 45:2 (May, 1972), pp. 125-39.

¹⁵ See B. Sievers, *Kurzgefaßte Geschichte der Ev.-Luth. St. Stephanus-Gemeinde zu Milwaukee, Wis., zur Feier ihres 50-jährigen Jubiläums 1854-1904* (Milwaukee, 1904), p. 7; for the organization of further parishes, see, e.g., Otto Hattstädt, *Kurzgefaßte Geschichte der Ev.-Luth. Immanuelsgemeinde zu Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Zur Erinnerung an ihr 50-jähriges Jubiläum. 1866-1916* (Milwaukee, n.d.); *1884-1909. 25jähriges Jubiläum der Ev.-Luth. St. Martini-Gemeinde zu Milwaukee, Wisconsin* (Milwaukee, 1909).

¹⁶ These figures were computed from parish records, Milwaukee's Directories, and an ethnically mixed sample of 1090 Milwaukee households (based on the manuscript schedules of the U.S. Census on Population for 1910). Evidence will be presented in my forthcoming dissertation.

the parishes of the Missouri Synod were quite successful in establishing full-time elementary schools which were meant to be an alternative to the secular public school system.¹⁷

German-American Lutheran clergymen, in contrast to their Catholic competitors, did neither question the right of the public schools to exist, nor did they fight for a share of the public school fund, which, they feared, would involve the same kind of state interference they had suffered from in Germany. They insisted on the principle, however, that Lutheran children be educated in Lutheran schools, where they received proper religious instruction and where the secular subjects were taught from a Lutheran perspective as well.¹⁸

Milwaukee's Lutheran school system reached its peak by the end of the 19th century when more than 3000 children attended the parochial schools of the Missouri Synod and about 2500 attended those of the Wisconsin Synod. After the turn of the century, enrollment began to decline, and one parish after another felt the need to also open a Sunday school in order to provide religious instruction for the growing number of Lutheran public school children. The establishment of Sunday schools did not mean, however, the end of the day school system. Although some parishes had to consolidate their schools, at least until 1930, no parish was forced to close down its school totally.¹⁹

German Lutheran immigrants founded parochial schools not only for religious reasons but also for retaining their language and culture. Ethnic and religious needs were linked in the

¹⁷ See *Moving Frontiers. Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, ed. Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis, 1964), p. 150; Walter F. Wolbrecht, "The Period of Expansion 1864-1894. From the Opening of the Addison Teachers' Seminary to the Founding of the Seward Teachers' Seminary," in *100 Years*, pp. 74-76, 79; Christ. Körner, *The Bennett Law and the German Protestant Parochial Schools of Wisconsin* (Milwaukee, 1890), pp. 11 and 23.

¹⁸ See, e.g., H. F. Sprengeler, *Schulpredigt gehalten am Ersten Sonntag nach Epiphania in der Ev.=Luth. Dreieinigkeits=Kirche zu Milwaukee, Wisconsin* (Milwaukee, 1897), pp. 10-12; Körner, *Bennett Law*; for the school policy of the Catholic Church, see Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience. A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, N.Y., 1985), pp. 262-93; Timothy George Walch, "Catholic Education in Chicago and Milwaukee, 1840-1880," Diss. Northwestern Univ., 1975.

¹⁹ See, e.g., "Milwaukee, Wis.," *Evang.=Luth. Schulblatt* 33 (1898), p. 29; "Schulnachrichten," *Evangelisch=Lutherisches Gemeinde=Blatt* (Wisconsin Synod) 58 (1923), p. 262; Heinrich Sprengeler, *Geschichte der Evang.-Luth. Dreieinigkeits-Gemeinde U.A.C. zu Milwaukee, Wis. vom Jahre 1897 bis zum Jahre 1922. Zum fünfundsiebzigsten Jubiläum der Gemeinde* (Milwaukee, 1922), p. 7 and 17; *Ev-Luth. Bethanien-Gemeinde, Jahrbuch* III (1912), pp. 4-6; for the Synod's position on Sunday schools, see also John F. Stach, "The Period of Assimilation 1894-1914. From the Opening of the Seward Teachers' Seminary to World War I," in *100 Years*, p. 163.

conviction that the German language and true Lutheranism be inseparably bound together and that the loss of the one would necessarily result in the loss of the other and thus threaten the very existence of the church. The coming generations had to grow up with the language and culture of their German home country, it was held, if they were not to become alienated from the Lutheran church and faith.²⁰ Despite this conviction, the school became, as we shall see, the first public sphere in parochial life where the English language gained ground.

II

Milwaukee's first parochial schools of the Missouri Synod, founded in the 1840s and 1850s, started out as all-German institutions. By 1870, at the latest, they were forced to introduce English language instruction. Gradually, German was displaced, both, as medium of instruction and as subject.

At Trinity school, e.g., which had been opened in 1847, English language instruction was introduced during the 1860's. By 1869, English reading, writing, and grammar had become an integral part of the curriculum. Except for these language lessons, however, all instruction was still given in German. Twenty years later, the situation had drastically changed. In 1889, fifteen hours or almost half of the weekly classes were taught in English. The curriculum did not only contain lessons in English reading, writing, grammar, and penmanship, but beyond that, English had also replaced German as the medium of instruction in arithmetic, geography, American history, the sciences, and drawing.²¹

The development within the other parochial schools had been similar. With the exception of "world history," which was mainly a synonym for German history up to the time of the Reformation, all secular branches were taught in English. While in 1889, in most of the

²⁰ See, e.g., G. A. Witte, "Bemerkungen über den Gebrauch zweier Sprachen in unsern Schulen," *Evang.=Luth. Schulblatt* 3 (1867/68), pp. 149-51; "Wie wahren wir den deutschen Charakter unserer evang.=lutherischen Gemeindeschulen?" *ibid.*, 24 (1889), p. 292; see also Arthur C. Repp, "The Lutheran Church in America a Century Ago," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 20:3 (Oct., 1947), p. 155.

²¹ See *Goldene Jubelfeier abgehalten in der Ev. Luth. Dreieinigkeitskirche am Sonntag, den 5. Januar 1919, zur Erinnerung an die Einweihung der Dreieinigkeitschule am Sonntag, den 3. Januar 1869* (Milwaukee, 1919), p. 7; Körner, *Bennett Law*, p. 23; "Lehrplan für die Gemeindeschulen der evang.=lutherischen Missouri-Synode zu Milwaukee, Wis. (Von der Milwaukee Lehrer-Konferenz)," *Evang.=Luth. Schulblatt* 25 (1890), pp. 97-128.

schools most students spoke both, German and English, at Immanuel school English already prevailed as the students' vernacular.²²

Despite these changes, however, by 1890, instruction in German still played a prominent role within Milwaukee's Lutheran parochial schools of the Missouri Synod. This was not due to German language lessons which took up no more time than their English counterpart, but was due to religious instruction, which comprised almost a third of the school week and was entirely given in German.²³

German lessons and German religious instruction did, of course, continue after the turn of the century. But their character changed. What once had been instruction in the vernacular, turned into foreign language instruction. As early as 1901, the synodical *School Journal* warned the parishes that if they were not going to introduce English religious instruction into their parochial schools, they would risk losing their young people for whom English rather than German was becoming the mother tongue. Every parish, it was argued, would, though sooner or later, be confronted with the language transition; therefore every parish should be prepared for that situation. Even in parishes, where all religious services were still being held in German, at least a bilingual approach to religious instruction should be adopted.²⁴

In 1911, in Milwaukee, a revised curriculum for the parochial schools was presented by the city's Teachers' Conference of the Missouri Synod. The curriculum did not provide for English as the medium of instruction for the religious branches.²⁵ This, however, did not reflect the situation in the schools any longer. It is true, there were only very few parochial schools which officially introduced religious instruction in English before America's entry into the First World War. But even in the majority of the schools, where German was abando-

²² See "Lehrplan" 1890; "Über die lutherischen Gemeindeschulen Milwaukee's," *Evang.=Luth. Schulblatt* 30 (1895), pp. 119-20; Körner, *Bennett Law*, p. 23; for Milwaukee's parochial schools of the Wisconsin Synod, which had undergone a similar process, see "Statistik der Gemeindeschulen der Synode von Wisconsin im Synodaljahr 1891-92," *Schul-Zeitung* [Wisconsin Synod] 18 (1893), p. 12.

²³ See "Lehrplan" 1890.

²⁴ "Englischer Religionsunterricht in unseren Gemeindeschulen," *Evang.=Luth. Schulblatt* 36 (1901), pp. 161-70; for a more detailed account of the method of bilingual religious instruction, see "Sollte in unsern Schulen Religionsunterricht in englischer Sprache erteilt werden; und wenn, wie sollte er erteilt werden?" *ibid.*, 46 (1911), pp. 133-39.

²⁵ See "Revidierter Lehrplan für die Gemeindeschulen der Ev.=Luth. Missourisynode zu Milwaukee, Wis. (Von der Milwaukee=Lehrerkonferenz)," *Evang.=Luth. Schulblatt* 46 (1911), pp. 193-224.

ned either during or shortly after the war years, the English language had already become very important for the teaching of the religious subjects. The development at Bethany school can be considered typical. There a bilingual approach had been adopted around 1910. It soon became obvious that the children's knowledge of German was so limited that English had to be employed to teach catechism and biblical history. Thus, in 1918, when the medium of instruction was officially changed to English, this did not make much of a difference: for quite a number of years religious instruction had been German in name only.²⁶

III

The shift from German to English in Milwaukee's Lutheran parochial schools of the Missouri Synod took place in three stages: 1. the transition to bilingual education, 2. the gradual displacement of the German language, and 3. its final abandonment.

In Milwaukee, the first step toward bilingual schooling took place in the late 1860's. As in other cities, it was brought about by pressure from the parents. German Lutherans wanted to retain the language and culture of their home country, but at the same time they recognized that knowledge of English was a prerequisite for their children's social and economic mobility in the new world. Since the public schools had just started to offer an optional German lesson daily in addition to their otherwise English-speaking curriculum, many Lutherans were attracted to these schools despite the repeated warnings from the clergy. By introducing English language instruction the German Lutheran parochial schools, thus, tried to keep up with their public competitors.²⁷

²⁶ See "Eine wichtige Frage," *Bethanien. Gemeindeblatt der Ev.=Luth. Bethanien=Gemeinde* 1:5,6 (Mai/Juni, 1918), pp. 1-2; *Ev.-Luth. Bethanien-Gemeinde, Jahrbuch* 8 (1917), p. 11, and 9 (1918), p. 8; for a similar development in other parochial schools, see, e.g., Sprengeler, *Geschichte*, p. 25; W. F. Laesch, *History of the Ev. Luth. Zion Congregation at Milwaukee, Wisconsin Commemorating Its Fiftieth Anniversary ... 1883-1933* (n.p., n.d.), p. 49; *Bethlehem Kirchenbote* 2:9,10 (Sept./Okt., 1919), p. 4.

²⁷ See "Die Wichtigkeit der englischen Sprache als Unterrichtsgegenstand in unseren Gemeindeschulen," *Evang.=Luth. Schulblatt* 1 (1865/66), p. 207; "Ueber den Gebrauch zweier Sprachen in unsern Schulen," *ibid.*, 3 (1867/68), p. 230; for German language instruction in Milwaukee's public schools and its effect on parochial schools, see Milwaukee Board of School Commissioners, *Annual Report* (1876/77), p. 87; Bettina Goldberg, "Die Achtundvierziger und das Schulwesen in Amerika: Zur Theorie und Praxis ihrer Reformbestrebungen," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 32:4 (1987), p. 490, esp. footnote no. 38.

The displacement of German during the following decades has often been interpreted as a result of the Bennett School Law of 1889. This law placed parochial and other private schools under the control of the state and prescribed English as the sole language of instruction for the elementary subjects. The immigrant churches attacked the law vehemently.²⁸ Though it cannot be denied that the law had an influence on the political climate and that especially in some rural areas it played an important part in raising the standards of parochial education, its role has clearly been overestimated.²⁹ The law was on the books less than a single year, and, unlike its counterpart in Illinois, it was never enforced.³⁰

Furthermore, at least in Milwaukee it did not take the prescriptions of a state law to ensure that English rather than German was the medium of instruction for all secular branches in the Lutheran parochial schools. A change to that effect had already been recommended by the Northwestern Teachers' Conference of the Missouri Synod at its meeting in Milwaukee in 1877. "*Die englische Sprache ist die Sprache des Heimathlandes unserer Kinder,*" German-born Johann Wegner, teacher at Trinity school, pointed out at that conference, "*dieselben haben späterhin auch an ihren Mitbürgern englischer Zunge kirchliche Missionsaufgaben, und neben ihren Berufspflichten auch Bürgerpflichten zu erfüllen. ... In Erwägung dieser Umstände,*" Wegner continued, "*erscheint es ungenügend, wenn man die englische Sprache in unseren Schulen nur als Unterrichtsfach treiben wollte.*" Instead, he recommended, all subjects to be taught in English with the exception of religious instruction and German language lessons. This plan was unanimously adopted by the Teachers' Conference and put into practice by the schools.³¹

²⁸ See, e.g., Körner, *Bennett Law*, which also includes the text of the law; for more recent accounts on the issue, see Roger E. Wyman, "Wisconsin Ethnic Groups and the Election of 1890," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 51 (1968), pp. 269-93; Robert James Ulrich, *The Bennett Law of 1889. Education and Politics in Wisconsin* (New York, 1980).

²⁹ See, e.g., Stach, "Period of Assimilation," pp. 137-141; Heinz Kloss, "Die deutschamerikanische Schule," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 7 (1962), pp. 154, 173, and "German-American Language Maintenance Efforts," in *Language Loyalty in the United States. The Maintenance and Perpetuation of Non-English Mother Tongues by American Ethnic and Religious Groups*, ed. Joshua Fishman (London, 1966), p. 236.

³⁰ See "Der Schulsuperintendent der städtischen Freischulen von Milwaukee," *Schul-Zeitung* 14 (1889), pp. 92-93; "Im Staate Illinois," *ibid.*, p. 137; "Folgen des Schulzwangsgesetzes im Staate Illinois," *ibid.*, 15 (1890), p. 30; "Die Wahl am 4. November," *ibid.*, p. 139.

³¹ "Die 'Nordwestliche Lehrerconferenz'," *Evang.=Luth. Schulblatt* 12 (1877), pp. 271, 275-77 ("The English language is the language of the home country of our children, later on, our children have to do mission work also among their English-speaking fellow Americans, and, besides their professional obligations, they have to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens. ... In view of these circumstances it does not seem to be sufficient to teach English only as a subject in our schools."). Johann Wegner, born in Altona, Germany, emigrated with his

Once again, the conference proceedings reveal, it was competition with the public school system that had brought about the change. If the parochial school teacher does not offer his students at least the same advantages that are said to be offered in the public grade schools, it was argued, many parents will feel justified to send their children to the public schools and, as a result, these children will become alienated from our parochial life.³²

By the time of the enactment of the Bennett Law, Milwaukee's Lutheran parochial schools of the Missouri Synod had already made far-reaching adjustments in the direction of the public school curriculum. They had even introduced many of the textbooks that were used by their public competitors. English had been widely adopted as the medium of instruction and, except for the religious subjects, the German language did not take up more time in the Lutheran schools than it did in the city's secular schools.³³ This was what the parents wanted. They were ready to see the German lessons reduced; they were not willing to accept an education for their children that did not meet the standards of the public school system.

After the turn of the century, German language instruction was not felt to be a real need any longer by Milwaukee's German-American Lutherans. Immigration from Germany was declining, and by 1910, the majority of parishioners was either born in the United States or had already lived there for twenty years and more.³⁴ Many of them still subscribed to German newspapers or were members of German-speaking societies, and most of them at-

parents to Illinois when he was five years old. He graduated from the synodical teachers' seminary in Fort Wayne in 1864. From 1867 until his retirement in 1911, he taught at Milwaukee's Lutheran Trinity school (Lochner, *Geschichte*, p. 74; *Goldene Jubelfeier*, pp. 7-8).

³² "Nordwestliche Lehrerconferenz," p. 275. "Die Befürchtung, durch ausgedehnten englischen Unterricht 'americanisire' man die Kinder," it was added, "ist dabei eine unbegründete. Nicht der englische Unterricht, sondern der Einfluß falsch= und ungläubiger Lehrer und Mitschüler erzeugt die gefürchteten Übel" (ibid., pp. 275-76).

³³ cf. footnote 22. After the turn of the century, this tendency of the Lutheran schools to adjust their secular curriculum to that of the city's public schools became even more marked. To counteract a decline in enrollment, Lutheran schools were anxious to become accredited by the city's Board of School Commissioners, i.e., to get official recognition of their diplomas and thus of their equivalency with the public schools. See, e.g., *100th Anniversary 1847-1947. Trinity Lutheran Church Milwaukee, Wisconsin* (n.p., n.d.), p. 21; Hattstädt, *Kurzgefaßte Geschichte*; "Revidierter Lehrplan" 1910.

³⁴ Computed from an ethnically mixed sample of 1090 Milwaukee households, based on the manuscript schedules of the U.S. Census on Population for 1910. Evidence will be presented in my forthcoming dissertation.

tended religious services held in the German language, but they did so for reasons of habit and tradition. They were not monolingual any longer and, therefore, did not depend on their children's knowledge of German to communicate with them. On the contrary, numerous complaints of clergymen, educators, and journalists suggest that English rather than German was the language spoken in most homes most of the time.³⁵

This caused difficulties for the schools, and teachers found themselves in a dilemma. They were supposed to give their students a keen understanding of the Lutheran faith and church, and they were expected to do so in German. German still was the language of most religious services, but no longer their students' vernacular and, thus, had to be taught as a foreign language. New, bilingual teaching methods were introduced, but even those could not restore what had been vanishing for some time: the sense of a genuine need and vital necessity for German language instruction.

The marginalization of the German language within the school environment did, of course, affect other parochial activities as well. At first, it made itself felt within the so-called *Christenlehre*, a German catechism examination, obligatory for all young parish members up to the age of eighteen, which was held every Sunday afternoon. At the eve of World War I, due to dwindling attendance at the *Christenlehre* and a growing number of Lutheran public school children, most parishes had established bilingual or all-English Sunday schools which can be regarded as suitable means to compensate for the lack of regular English services on Sunday mornings. In addition, at least some of the parishes had already started English besides their German confirmation classes.³⁶

With the adults the transition to English proceeded at a slower pace. It was not until the 1930's that the process found its completion.³⁷ This should not disguise, however, that Eng-

³⁵ See, e.g., Knortz, *Deutschthum*, p. 67-68; "Die Deutschen und die deutsche Sprache," *Germania und Abendpost* (Milwaukee), 13 June 1900; "Englischer Religionsunterricht in unseren Gemeindeschulen," *Evang=Luth. Schulblatt* 36 (1901), p. 163; "English in Our Parochial Schools," *ibid.*, 43 (1908), p. 313; Louis Zobel, "Die Erhaltung der deutschen Sprache," *ibid.*, 49 (1914), pp. 97-104.

³⁶ See, e.g., *Kirchen=Ordnung der Gemeinde der Deutschen Evangelisch=Lutherischen Immanuel-Kirche Ungeänderter Augsburgischer Confession zu Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Revidirt 1884* (Milwaukee, 1884), § 11; Ev. Luth. Ebenezer Gemeinde, *Jahrbuch X* (1914), p. 16; 1888-1938. *Golden Jubilee. Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Milwaukee, 1938), pp. 6 and 10; *Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Sunday School. Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church* (n.p., n.d. [1939]), p. 5.

³⁷ See, e.g., *Ninetieth Anniversary, 1847-1937, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church Milwaukee Wisconsin* (n.p., n.d.), p. 7; *Bethany 1893-1983* (n.p., n.d.), p. 3; *A Brief History of*

lish had made inroads already after the turn of the century. As early as 1902, when St. Stephen parish celebrated the consecration of its new church and when, just for this occasion, an additional English service was held in the evening, this service, the parish records indicate, did attract so many people, that the church was crowded beyond standing capacity and hundreds could not be let in.³⁸ Nine years later, in 1911, Milwaukee already had three German Lutheran churches of the Missouri Synod that offered English evening services on a regular basis.³⁹ By that time, even those parishes which had not yet started English services were well aware of the fact that the language transition was going to come soon and that it was inevitable for the very existence of the church. The revised constitution of Immanuel parish, e.g., which was adopted in 1913, still prescribed the use of the German language for the religious services and voters' meetings, but in contrast to earlier constitutions, the prescription was not unchangeable any longer. "*Diese Bestimmung bleibt so lange in Kraft,*" it was added, "*als die Gemeinde vermittelt der deutschen Sprache ihrer Missionspflicht ihren Gliedern gegenüber nachkommen kann.*"⁴⁰

Thus, we may conclude, within Milwaukee's German-American Lutheran community the German language was on decline long before and independently of World War I. As I have demonstrated in a different paper, this was similarly true for Milwaukee's German-American Catholic community.⁴¹ Both, German Lutheran and German Catholic parishes underwent a process of change that eventually transformed them into English-speaking, American institutions. This process was accelerated by the experience of the First World War, but it was rooted in and carried forward by the changing aspirations of Americans of German descent who formed the parishes' membership.

Luther Memorial Chapel on Its 25th Anniversary (n.p., n.d. [1941]); see also Graebner, "Acculturation," pp. 160-61.

³⁸ Sievers, *Kurzgefaßte Geschichte*, p. 28.

³⁹ See Martin W. Strasen, *Golden Jubilee 1894-1944. Ebenezer Lutheran Church. Milwaukee, Wisconsin* (n.p., n.d.); Ev. Luth. Ebenezer Gemeinde, *Jahrbuch X* (1914), pp. 15-16; *1888-1938. Golden Jubilee. Bethlehem*, p. 6; *Evangelisch-Lutherische Bethlehems-Kirche 1:3* (Sept., 1911); Ev. Luth. Bethanien-Gemeinde, *Jahrbuch II* (1911).

⁴⁰ *Revidierte Kirchenordnung der Deutschen Evang.=Luth. Immanuels=Gemeinde zu Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 1913* (Milwaukee, 1913), § 4 ("This directive remains effective as long as the parish is able to meet its missionary responsibilities in the service of its members by means of the German language"); cf. *Kirchen=Ordnung der Gemeinde der Deutschen Evangelisch=Lutherischen Immanuels-Kirche Ungeänderter Augsburgischer Confession zu Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 1869* (Milwaukee, 1869), §§ 9 and 20; *Revidirt. 1884*, § 9.

⁴¹ See Bettina Goldberg, "The German Language in Milwaukee's Grade Schools, 1850-1920: The Case of the Catholic Schools," John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien. Freie Universität Berlin, *Working Paper* No. 17/1989.

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