

MARTINI LUTHERAN CHURCH IN BALTIMORE

By E. F. ENGELBERT

Any interest that attaches to the history of Martini Lutheran Church of Baltimore is awakened by its conformity to the ordinary, rather than by anything startling or extraordinary.

In the course of the war, somebody in the Office of War Information conceived the idea that the people of Europe could be made acquainted with American life by furnishing them with the description of a typical American town and its people. After some search the choice fell on a small town in Indiana. Few Americans had ever heard of it, because there is nothing in it that differentiates it from other American towns, and because its people are like the people of a thousand similar communities in this country. For that very reason it was chosen.

If the history of Martini Church is worth looking into, it is because the experiences and the development of the Congregation is so typical of thousands of other congregations whose services were originally conducted in a language other than English.

So far as its separate corporate existence is concerned, the history of Martini Church began on May 18, 1867; but in reality it began much earlier. With but a few exceptions all of its people had been members of the Old Congregation—the Second Evangelical Lutheran Congregation—which was organized by Pastor John Haesbert, November 1, 1835. Its church building stood on the corner of Saratoga and Holliday Streets. While its members could walk to church (there were no street cars in those days), the distance was too great for their children to attend the parochial school, so the parish was later divided into three school districts, the Northern, the Northwestern, and the Southern. This was done under the leadership of Pastor Friedrich Konrad Dietrich Wyneken, who came to Baltimore after Pastor John Haesbert

suddenly left the Congregation to go to South America in 1844.

Pastor Wyneken left after a short pastorate to minister to scattered German Lutherans in Ohio and Indiana, in which states many Lutheran congregations flourish as the fruit of the many wearisome hours spent in the saddle by Wyneken as he rode from hamlet to hamlet and from farm to farm. He is known as the missionary organizer of the Missouri Synod, which body he also served for a time as its president.

On September 18, 1865, the Congregation resolved to sell the old church building and a committee was appointed to select sites for new churches. That even a Hitler would have been satisfied by the purity of the German blood that coursed through the Congregation is evidenced by the names of the committee: Kleppisch, Spilman, Katenkamp, Einwaechter, Muhly, Aichele, Carstens, Draeger and Bauer.

During all this time there was no talk of dividing the Congregation, but only of building and worshipping in separate churches. The thought of a possible division seems to have originated with the Northwestern district and when it was first broached it created a situation which the good old Congregational secretary naively described in his minutes by writing, "Hierüber wurde zwei Stunden gesprochen."

They were to talk many more hours before the matter was finally adjusted. However, after a peaceful settlement the division was made, and as a result Martini was organized on May 18, 1867. It promptly laid the cornerstone for what in those days was an imposing house of worship, and on February 16, 1868, elected and called Pastor C. H. F. Frincke to be its pastor. He was installed on the same day the new church was dedicated, May 10, 1868.

One must indeed admire the courage

of those early members of Martini. The congregation was organized and the church was built soon after the conclusion of the Civil War. Of the Baltimore of those days, Hamilton Owens writes in his *Baltimore on the Chesapeake*, "The situation was difficult. Baltimore in those days immediately following the war was emotionally as riven as Madrid after the triumph of Franco. The people in the North had the catharsis which comes from overwhelming victory. Those of the South had at least the consolation that they had devoted themselves wholeheartedly and heroically to a cause which they believed noble. Baltimore, as a community, had no such compensations. It had survived, and that was all. Both sides were suspicious of it; both doubted its good faith. It had no sure faith of its own."

In those days men, and skilled men at that, were earning six dollars a week. It required courage and faith to undertake the erection of a church which was to cost \$26,000. Today its replacement value is nearer \$200,000. Two years after the completion of the church at Sharp and Henrietta Streets, a new school was built to the rear of the church. About the same time bells were installed, and an organ was purchased which is still one of the finest in the city. The largest contribution toward all of these expenses was a gift of \$1,000. The church was literally paid for with nickels and dimes.

Despite the fact that a service was conducted in the English language on the evening of the dedication of the church, it is doubtful that any member entertained the thought that a language other than German would ever regularly be used in the church which was called the German Evangelical Lutheran Martini Church. A large part of the city's population had always been of German extraction. This was emphasized in the years following the Civil War, when the North German-Lloyd kept two first-class passenger and freight vessels on the Baltimore run. Baltimore became a main immigration port. While the majority of the immigrants were swallowed up by the interior, each year saw a goodly number remaining in Baltimore,

and becoming a part of its social and business life. Under these conditions it seemed but natural to think that any German congregation would not only remain strong but that it would be strengthened by the infiltration of new arrivals seeking a church home.

Two things vitiated against the hopes of those who stubbornly clung to the slogan, "In dieser Kirche wird nur Deutsch gepredigt," namely the dwindling of immigration, and the fact that their own children spoke English everywhere except perhaps at table in their own homes, where papa could still insist, "Am Tisch wird Deutsch gesprochen."

Twenty-seven years after the dedication of Martini, in the year 1895, the demand for English services had become so strong that it could no longer be ignored even by those who did not welcome the introduction. The new order was accompanied by the discussion and experimentation which were inevitable in the German churches of fifty years ago, but Martini solved the problem, including a necessary change of its constitution, with less than the usual friction. As a first step, Pastor Carl Gaennsle was called as assistant to Pastor Frincke, with the understanding that he was to conduct English services on Sunday evenings. This arrangement was terminated six months later when Pastor Gaennsle accepted a call to Corning, Missouri.

In April of the year 1897, immediately after the departure of Pastor Gaennsle, twelve voting members, including six members of the Church Council, petitioned the congregation for permission to organize a separate English congregation, to be known as the English Evangelical Lutheran Martini Congregation. The members of the English congregation were to be under the pastorate of their own shepherd, who was to be chosen. The two congregations were to have a common treasury from which the salaries of both pastors and the expenses of both congregations were to be paid. The petition was granted and the new arrangement was consummated by the calling

of Pastor E. F. Haertel, who was installed on July 4, 1897.

The separation was shortlived, lasting only five months. In November of the same year, an agreement was effected whereby the members of the English Martini Congregation were again received into the German Martini Congregation. It was furthermore agreed that the reunited Congregation should call Pastor Haertel as associate pastor, that all members who had been under his pastorate during the separation should remain so, that in the future only such members should come under his pastorate who received permission to transfer their adherence from the German to the English, and that new members were to be given free choice in the matter. It was also resolved that in all business meetings of the congregation both languages could be spoken, and that the minutes were to be kept bilingually.

It goes without saying that there were many heated arguments. The German members clearly foresaw that the day was not far off when the English members would outnumber them. Before the above resolutions were passed, they therefore insisted that the following paragraph be written into the Constitution as an unalterable rule: "In the building of the Congregation set apart for public worship, services must be conducted in the German language on the forenoon of every Sunday and Festival as long as four voting members shall demand that this be done." To the credit of all, let it be said that the validity of this agreement was never questioned.

For several years the Congregation continued under the dual pastorate. However, soon after Pastor Haertel had accepted a call to Chicago, and Pastor D. H. Steffens had accepted the call as the English associate, Pastor Frincke asked to be retired on account of advanced years and ill health, whereupon Pastor Steffens was called as pastor of the entire Congregation.

Pastor Steffens remained at Martini for eighteen years. Under his pastorate German services were held in the forenoon of every Sunday and festival,

Sunday School in the afternoon, and English services in the evening. For a time the Sunday School was conducted in both languages, but soon there was only a handful of children whose parents insisted that they be taught in German. Once the fountain dries up, there will not long be a stream.

When the present pastor was called in 1918, the German members had already willingly surrendered one Sunday morning. To the credit of the remaining old members it must be said that they realized it was an unhealthy condition when their children could not attend the services in the morning. Soon they surrendered another morning each month. Thereafter German services were held only twice a month. When a few years later the German members were told that the pastor was willing to preach in both languages on the two remaining Sundays to enable the entire Congregation to worship every Sabbath, they replied that they did not feel justified to impose this burden upon him, and surrendered the remaining two Sundays, requesting only that German be preached on four Sundays of the year so that they might attend the Communion Table in the language to which they had so long been accustomed. After a few years even this last arrangement came to an end.

What has now come to pass in Martini can be read on the Honor Roll on which are written the names of the members who are in the armed services of the country. There one finds such names as Geisendaffer, Wagner, Goetze, Fickenscher, and Engelbert among such names as Dunn, Petridge, Johnston, Underwood, Jording, Hawkins and Albany.

When the final chapter of the Americanization of the people of this country is written it will be disclosed how vital a part the church played in the moulding of the nation. Give a church the opportunity to preach the story of the Saviour's love to all who enter its doors, and by and by its membership list will proclaim: There is neither German, nor Briton, nor Pole, nor Dane, for all are one.