

August Craemer
and
Mission Efforts at Frankenmuth

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The appeal made by Friedrich Wyneken in 1841 to his fellow Lutherans in Germany did not fall on deaf ears. The conditions among the Lutherans in America at that time were begging for support. Many immigrants from Germany had come seeking to begin a new life. Whether because of the dissatisfactory religious, social, or economic conditions in Germany or because of the lure of American freedom, cheap land, demand for workers or religious toleration in this new land, German immigrants poured into American harbors in the 19th century. Many settled west of the Appalachians in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Missouri and other midwestern states. But unfortunately, many of the small groups of German settlers seeking to maintain their language and culture in America were left without spiritual leaders. Lutheran pastors were too few to administer to these scattered families and groups on a regular basis. Wyneken described the situation in one of his many "Notruf":

It happens that after some years a traveling pastor arrives in one of these settlements. Then the children are brought and I myself have baptized a dozen or more of children at one time, children of various ages, up to ten and twelve years; but who instructs the baptized?...Who will confirm the children, who distribute to them, later, the Lord's Supper? ¹

Wilhelm Loehe's response to Wyneken's appeal was immediate and proved to be, through his continued efforts, genuine. Loehe echoed Wyneken's appeal to aid their fellow Lutherans in America. "Shall our brethren no longer worship in the church of their fathers, filled with the breath of the Lord and instead recline at the miserable shacks of sectarianism?" ² The result was that Adam Ernst, a young journeyman shoemaker, and George Burger, a journeyman coat weaver, were trained by Loehe in a crash course at Neuen-dettelsau and within a year were sent to America. These men were only 2 of many others who were yet to follow. From this meager beginning until the

time of Loehe's death on January 2, 1872, more than 180 Neuendettelsau-trained pastors and teachers came to minister to the Lutherans in America.³

Loehe, however, was interested not only in ministering to the scattered Lutherans across the sea, but he was also concerned about evangelizing those who had not yet come to know Christ. These were especially the Indians in the dense forests of Michigan. Loehe had a plan to combine these two objectives. He would send an entire colony together with its pastor who would minister to them and also would seek to win others for Christ. This, of course, was the colony soon to be known as Frankenmuth along the Cass River. To the lay members of the colony Loehe said, "You are my letter to the heathen. From your Christian way of life and your piety the heathen are to recognize how pleasant it is to have fellowship with Jesus."⁴

In view of Loehe's primary objective to establish a missionary colony which would live side by side with the American Indian and serve as a leaven to them and to their neighbors in nearby settlements, it is our purpose to examine the mission efforts of this early colony and take note of their successes and failures in that plan. Was Loehe's plan realistic? Did the mission effort among the Indians produce results? What were Craemer's contributions to this objective?

The small group that arrived in Michigan during the summer of 1845 consisted of 4 couples recently married on board ship after the departure from Germany, a father and mother together with their 2 year old daughter, one single man, and their pastor, August Craemer, together with his wife. Craemer had been well-educated at the University of Erlangen and became an accomplished linguist, which would serve him well in his efforts to master the difficult Chippewa language. He also served for a time at Oxford University as a tutor where he became fluent in English. But when the Tractarian Movement led by Pusey and Newman gained support in England, Craemer returned

to Germany. It was at this time that he read Wyneken's appeal and responded by offering his services to Loehe, willing to go to the wilderness of Michigan.

Upon their arrival, Craemer, as well as the other colonists, was completely unaccustomed to the habits, culture, and language of the Indians, among whom they were to spread the light of the Gospel. Their first acquaintance with the Chippewa occurred in Saginaw as they awaited the move to Frankenmuth some 15 miles away. Craemer describes his first impressions to Loehe in a letter he wrote July 25:

Saginaw is a central trading place for the Indians. They come to the city daily in their canoes, often in the most unusual garb, with painted faces, feathers in their hats or in their hair, large earrings and other trinkets on their bodies. Their body is draped in a colorful blanket; their red trousers go only to their knees and these are tied tightly with ribbons to which dozens of small bells are attached. For the greater part they are harmless creatures whose spiritual and physical needs gnaw at a person's soul. Often, however, they are drunkards who intoxicate themselves with whisky and then are worse than the beasts. They already know where we are living, all of us, together with Auch and his wife, and so they often call to get something to eat. Usually they say only 'hungry', and then we hand them some buttered bread.

Recently one of their chiefs by the name of Thous visited us. He was a sober and intelligent man who had one of his men with him who acted as interpreter. This man had attended a mission school, a station of the Methodists, at Fort Gratiot (Port Huron), where he had learned English. He had breakfast with us and spoke to us about the mission school which we intend to establish, where the Indian children are to be instructed by means of the English language and an interpreter. He told us that he was seriously considering sending the children of his band to the school. He shook hands and said that in view of the fact that he had given us his hand and his heart he was hopeful that we would visit him, which we also intend to do.

This letter reveals several of the factors that caused Craemer much of the difficulty and opposition he faced in evangelizing the Chippewas. These factors included the inability of many of the Indians to use liquor moderately; the inability of Craemer without the aid of an interpreter to communicate with the Indians; the menacing presence of the Methodists; and the haphazard scattering of the Indians through the area. These served as barriers to the efforts of Craemer and the colonists at Frankenmuth to remove the abject

darkness among the Indians and bring them the light of Grace. In a letter dated February 2, 1846 Craemer wrote to Loehe:

Discouraged, I thought to myself that if the Lord does not work a miracle then all our labors on behalf of this devilish race will be in vain. But, then, the Lord does perform miracles in His holy church, and every missionary must be patient so that he may learn that it is not he who performs the works of God.⁶

After his first contacts with the Indians, it was evident to Craemer that his first order of business was to locate an interpreter. In order to begin the mission school he would need someone who could mediate between himself and the Indian Children. But that was not an easy task since the Chippewa language was not commonly understood or spoken among the settlers of that area. Finally, after a lengthy search a French-Catholic named Tromble was located who arrived in Frankenmuth in April of 1846. Craemer was displeased that Tromble was the only man he could find and wrote to Loehe that it was like biting into a sour apple to employ this Catholic interpreter, but, under the circumstances, it was the best he could do. Tromble later earned the epithet of "Taugenichts" from Craemer.

Together with Tromble, Craemer proceeded to seek out prospects for his mission school among the Indians. They travelled along the Cass, Shiawasee, Belle, Tittibawasee, Pine, and other rivers calling upon the Indians living near these main arteries. It was slow work, travelling by foot, recruiting children for the school. But by early June, Craemer was ready to open his mission school in Frankenmuth. The Indian children who attended the school lived with the Craemers in the log cabin parsonage-school the inhabitants of the colony had erected for their pastor. Attendance was voluntary without compulsion from the parents and some attended, even though their parents did not want them to attend.

Craemer reported to Der Lutheraner in a letter dated June 25, 1846 that there were at that time 17 children being taught and boarded at the mission school. In a later article written for Der Lutheraner Craemer pointed

out the wholesome effect the mission school was having upon these Indian children. Not only were they gaining an education, but they were also learning Luther's Catechism in their mother tongue and voluntarily attended worship services in German as well as services conducted in their own language.

Wahrlich, wer jemals Gelegenheit gehabt hat, dergleichen kleine Wildlinge in ihren Wäldern zu beobachten, wie sie mit Schmutz bedeckt um die Hütten der Alten herumkriechen, mit durchdringendem Lärm die Luft erfüllen und beim Anblick eines Weiszen wie scheue Rehe in das Dickicht flüchten, und sände hier ihrer 20, die sauber gewaschen und gekammt, ihre Blosze hinreichend bedeckt, des Morgens mit frühlichen gesunden Angesichtern zum Frühstück kofien und trotz jugendlicher Eszlust doch nicht eher zu Tische sitzen, als bis der Morgen segen und das Tischgebet gesprochen ist - wer sie dann mit ihren Lese- und Schiefertafeln zuerst in unsre deutsche Schule eilen sähe und hörte wie sie mit lauter Kehle in die deutschen Morgenlieder und das Gebet mit einfallen, wie sie dann deutsch Buchstabiren, Lesen, Schreiben, Zählen lernen, hernach aber in den Religions- und englischen Unterricht kommen, da sie den kleinen lutherischen Katechismus in ihrer Muttersprache aufbeten, und zwei- und dreiselbige englische Worte mit ziemlicher Geläusigkeit buchstabiren - wer sie bei ihrer einfachen Mittagstafel so freudestrahlend sitzen sähe, und beobachtete sie Nachmittags in den Freistunden, wenn die Knaben mit Bogen und Pfeil auf die Vogeljagd gehen, oder in die Wälder eilen, Beeren zu suchen, oder während die Mädchen mit Nähen und Stricken beschäftigt sind, hin und wieder spielend angehalten werden, im Garten und auf dem Felde zu arbeiten; - wer des Abends ihr treuherziges "gute Nacht" mit anhörte, wenn sie beim Bettegehen einem jeden, auch Fremden, die etwa anwesend sind, die Hand reichen; - wer einen Sonntag hier erlebte und sähe, wie die meisten von freien Stücken zuerst unsern deutschen Gottesdiensten bei-wohnen und gar andächtig das Vaterunser und den Glauben mit uns beten; - dann aber alleinsgesamt bei ihren eigenen Gottesdiensten Lieder in Indianischer Sprache singen, laut und anständig mitbeten und die Lektionen aus dem 1. Buch Moses und aus den Evangelien aufmerksam anhören - wer dies alles mit wohlwollenden Augen ansähe, der müszte sich wohl mit uns von Herzen darüber freuen und würde Gott danken, dasz ER uns gewürdig hat, Werkzeuge Seiner Barmherzigkeit an diesen armen Kindern zu sein.?

In order for the Indian children to learn religion, Craemer had to teach them by way of the English language through an interpreter. And yet, he was always striving to master the Chippewa tongue. He wanted to provide them with reading materials in their native language. But the process was very slow due to the necessity of translating the German into English and then into Chippewa. While he taught, however, Craemer would read a section of

the Gospels to the children in German and then struggle to explain it to them in Chippewa. One Indian often commented, "Das ist gut Indianisch!"

At a time in 1846 when Craemer was without an interpreter, after releasing Tromble because of incompetence, the fanatic Methodist revivalists who worked among the Indians caused trouble for the Lutheran efforts in Frankenthum. Craemer reported to Der Lutheraner that the Methodists accused the Lutherans of serpent worship, which caused the Indians to suspect the small group of colonists. However, the Chippewas soon realized, "Germans are good, English are not good." Craemer writes,

Im vorigen Sommer besuchte ein methodistischer Indianerknabe von Cacallin auf kurze Zeit unsere Schule. Das eiserne Crucifix, das für unsern Altar bestimmt, damals noch in meinem Hause stand, zog seine Aufmerksamkeit auf sich, neugierig betrachtete er den Totenkopf und die Schlange am Fusz des Kreuzes, und fragte, was das alles bedeute. Da gaben wir ihm denn guten Bescheid, sagten ihm, wie das Crucifix den HERRN JESUM Christum darstelle, der für unsere Sunden am Stamm des heiligen Kreuzes gestorben sei, und erklärten ihm jene Symbole des Todes und der Sünde (letzteres genau nach 1 Mosi 3.), die am Fusz des Kreuzes, als zu den Fluszen des Siegers über Sünd, Tod, Höll und Teufel lägen. Damit dachten wir dem unwissenden Knaben einen Dienst gethan zu haben, und nun höre man und staune, zu welch schändlicher Lüge sie diese schriftgemäße Unterweisung benützten. Weil wir den anbeten, der der Schlange den Kopf zertreten hat, und auf Ihn allein unsere ganze Zuversicht setzen, nicht auf eigene Heiligkeit, eigene Zubereitung, Buszkrampf, Bet- oder vielmehr Heuleifer u., wie die Methodisten thun: müssen wir Schlangernanbeter sein. In der That ein ebenbürtiges Seitenstück zu der Weilischen Lüge, dasz wir die heilige Jungfrau Maria, viel wir nämlich zu dem schreien, der Mariens Sohn ist nach dem Fleisch. Was wirds euch aber helfen, ihr heiligen Methodisten, durch solche unheilige, schändliche Mittel euern Namen ausbreiten zu wollen? Auch die Heiden werden euere Betrügereien ausfinden und euch verabscheuen. Leider, dasz dadurch zugleich der Name des HERRN bei ihnen verlästert wird. 8

Although the damage had been done, Craemer later realized the Chippewas' dislike for the Methodist revivalists who were working among their people, when one of their chiefs told him, "They howl early and late and move hands and legs as if they would jump into heaven." 9 As Loehe had warned each of his trainees before departing for America that Methodists would offer

competition in their parishes, so Craemer experienced this competition in the Indian mission field.

In spite of the hardships and difficulties, however, Pastor Craemer was able to view some results of his labors. In December of 1846 the firstfruits of the mission endeavor among the Chippewas became apparent. In a lengthy letter to Loehe dated January 18, 1847 Craemer relates the story:

When therefore the time came for the baptism of the German baby, and I asked Abuiquam (he was about 17 years old) if he too might not want to be baptized, he asked me about the significance of baptism. I told him in the words of the Third Article - forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. He thought about this very seriously, and after I explained the matter to him a number of more times, he told me that on Christmas, which was 10 days off, he wanted to be baptized. I replied that he should present himself for baptism on Christmas Day in our new church, and explained to him the meaning of Christmas. He was very happy over this, and his two older and more reticent sisters (the younger one had become a Methodist at home with her parents) also expressed the desire to be baptized. ... (finally) on the third Christmas Day... we questioned the children, they confessed their faith, solemnly vowed to renounce the devil, and thereupon declared, the girls amid tears, that they wanted to receive Christian baptism. This took place in the parsonage and mission school.

Then we went to the church, where the congregation was still assembled, and the boy expressed his joy that now he was to be washed clean of his sins. We sang a song in Chippewa, that is, Flessa, I, and the children. Then I delivered an address in German to the congregation, prayed the Lord's Prayer (in Chippewa) with the children, made the sign of the holy cross over them, read a selection from St. Matthew's Gospel, had them assent individually to the questions of abrenunciation, recited the Creed with them and asked them solemnly to confirm it, and then baptized them; prayed the Lord's Prayer while my hands were raised over them, read a Collect, and pronounced the blessing. Since that time the children have been much more trustworthy and well-behaved in their deportment than before.

Suddenly, on the Friday after Epiphany, the older sister, who together with the other children had for a long time had the whooping cough, suffered spells of strangulation. On the following morning the brother sent for an Indian doctor, but he was unable to help. On Sunday morning, about the same hour on which she had been baptized 14 days previously, she passed away. The boy often prayed fervently with me at her bedside and was present for the funeral service and the committal, which had to be in German since I lacked a Chippewa-language burial rite. Only at the committal did we sing several Indian-language hymns and speak several prayers.

Albuiquam listened reverently, and when I explained to him how happy his sister now was in heaven and how wonderful it was that she had come to the Lord Christ before her departure, he was deeply touched and comforted. 10

The letter also significantly points out that already at this time the Indians were moving their settlements farther away from the whites in search of better hunting grounds. With the ever-widening distance between the Indian settlements and the mission school at Frankenmuth, it was becoming less and less suitable for Craemer to seek out the lost among the Indians and attend to the duties in his own congregation of St. Lorenz and the mission school at the same time. Assistance was badly needed to aid him in visiting the tribes on a regular basis. This assistance finally came when Eduard Baierlein arrive in June of 1847 with the group that was to found the second Loehe colony of Frankentrost. Craemer was then able to attend to his members in Frankenmuth whereas Baierlein assumed the duties of calling upon the tribes. But from the moment of Baierlein's arrival the mission school at Frankenmuth began to decline. This was due to the establishment of the mission at Bethany, 80 miles from Frankenmuth, and Craemer's encouragement to the children that they transfer to Bethany where they would be closer to their families but still under the supervision of Missionary Baierlein. However, there were still a few Indian children, 4 or 5, who attended the German school at Frankenmuth.

In 1850, however, when August Craemer accepted a call to the practical seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, which had been founded by Loehe in 1846 to alleviate the shortage of pastors in America, the Indian mission at Frankenmuth was left without a leader. The man, who with such untiring zeal had served to bring the Gospel to the Chippewa in the face of so much opposition, left to prepare others, hopefully, for like-minded dedication and service. But the unique missionary plan envisioned by Loehe and executed with such

determination and dedication by the Bavarian colonists had to be abandoned.

The reasons why the missionary plan failed in the settlement for which Loehe had so many hopes are several and varied. The difficulty which the language barrier presented was not easy for a singly man to overcome. Also, Craemer was not able to fully devote himself to missionizing the Indians because of his responsibilities toward his own congregation. The fanaticism of the Methodist revivalists together with their slanderous reports of the Lutherans served to tear down what Craemer had built up. The whiskey peddlers added to the difficulties by polluting the Indians with their "firewater". But above all, the movement of the Chippewas away from the small settlement along the Cass prohibited Craemer from continuing to reach out to the Indians and still serve his own flock. A missionary would have to be as nomadic as the Indian in order to continue to reach them with the Gospel message.

Although the mission school at Frankenmuth no longer operated after 1850, it cannot be said that the unique plan of Loehe's was a failure. For the church records of St. Lorenz at Frankenmuth state that Craemer had baptized 31 children among the Indians in his 5 years on the mission. That is by no means a "failure." Nor can it be said that the mission endeavor was a "failure" in the eyes of the members of St. Lorenz. For that congregation, which is so vitally aware of the necessity of missions, has in its history sent over 200 men and women into the service of the church as pastors and teachers. The work begun by August Craemer is far from finished. The words of Loehe after he assisted in the growth of American Lutheranism for 25 years might serve as a fitting conclusion: "Nothing has gone as we wanted it to go. But everything has gone in such a way that success and blessing has attended our work."

END NOTES

- 1 Wyneken, F. Die Noth der deutschen Lutheraner, quoted in Th. Graebner, "Bavarian Settlements of the Saginaw Valley", p. 6.
- 2 Zehnder, H. Teach My People the Truth, p. 14
- 3 Heintzen, E. Love Leaves Home p. 18
- 4 Zehnder, H. op. cit. p. 11
- 5 Ibid., p. 69
- 6 Ibid., p. 70
- 7 Der Lutheraner, vol. V, Sept. 12, 1848, p. 3
- 8 Ibid., vol. IV, Sept 20, 1847, p. 14
- 9 Zehnder, H. op. cit., p. 78
- 10 Ibid., p. 75-77

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