



concordia historical institute

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RETRIEVE + RECORD + REFLECT + RECALL

“What should we consider when translating records into English?”

For many in Missouri Synod circles, the immigrant languages are forgotten tongues. A great difficulty exists for those who wish to do research in the history of the Church, as it is impossible to gain access to the primary sources due to the language barrier. This makes it important to have these early records translated into English today while we still have those available who can do the work.

Here are a few basic considerations which should be kept in mind in insure that the translation will be of lasting value.

Idioms

The translation should be as close to the original sense as possible. This means that a mere word-for-word translation is not adequate. Idiomatic expressions should be brought to life in the corresponding English idiom. Where there is doubt as to the meaning, the original word or phrase should be reproduced in the English text in parentheses. Those using the translation can then use their own judgment in ascertaining the original sense.

Variant Meanings

In the case where a single foreign word has several meanings, when doubt exists as to which fits the situation, the second and third senses should be given in parentheses. When a word or phrase seems to be a colloquialism, translate the word/phrase and include the original word in parentheses, e.g., extreme fear (*Angst*).

Standardizations

It might prove helpful for the translator to prepare a glossary of the foreign terms used most frequently together with their English equivalents so that when they recur, it will be simple to refer to the translated term used earlier in the text.

Documentation

Translate line by line (double space) and use the same pagination to make it easier for a researcher later who has no access to the original text.

Illegibility

From time to time, there will be sections difficult to decipher, owing to the defects in ink or penmanship or even to the deterioration of the paper. It is best to indicate this in the text, including in parentheses the variant readings, spellings and even presumptions which come to mind. If the phrase or sentence cannot be deci-

phered at all, it is best to try to trace the original as far as possible and then omit the indecipherable part.

Completeness

It is desirable that the complete text be reproduced rather than selections. Selection implies editing, which makes future use of the documents extremely difficult and even hazardous as authentic recordings.

Continuity in Translation

For the sake of having a uniform translation, have only one person do the work. In this way the individual gets to know the feel of the text and is also consistent in the use of English equivalents.

Editing

The closer the translator is to the original text, the less likely the translation will be in good idiomatic English. As a result, it is advisable to have a separate committee of not more than three people go over the translation with a view of improving its readability, as well as to check the faithfulness to the original.

Index

For the sake of quick reference, it might prove helpful to compile a short index, listing alphabetically the more important names, items, and events contained in the translation, together with the page reference.

Finished Translation

The final draft of the translation should be printed on white 8.5" x 11," cotton bond / acid-free paper. A printed copy of the translation and a copy of the original document should be filed at Concordia Historical Institute. Please also include a PDF/A file of the translation and JPG/TIFF file of the original document for the CHI archive.

Note: Each text to be translated will provide difficulties peculiar to itself. Consequently, not all points have been adequately referred to in the above to meet every exception. Should particular problems arise, we would encourage you to write or email Concordia Historical Institute for assistance.

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