

Friedrich August Crämer: Faithful Servant in Christ's Church

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"If something is wrong, and something always is, then it is natural to try and find a cause."¹ This captures well, in part, what an historian does: looks for the causes of the problems in the world. The church historian's contribution to the life of the church is sometimes viewed in this way as well: "Tell us where we went wrong, so that we won't go wrong again in the future." More than one hearer has accused an historian of cynicism for the critical, at times unflattering, picture he has painted of the church. That, however, captures only a portion of what the church historian does. While the canons of historical inquiry require that the bad be told, they also leave opportunity for the good to be held up for examination as well. One of the joys of the historical endeavor is to tell the story that has a happy ending. The greatest joy, however, is to be able to engage in the examination of the faithful response of an individual to the call of Christ to work in the harvest field. That is exactly what emerges when one considers the life and work of Friedrich August Crämer: faithful servant in Christ's church.²

Crämer's obituary, which appeared in the *Lutheran Witness* of May 7, 1891, captures the triumphant hope of Christian

¹Gavin White, *How the Churches Got to Be the Way They Are* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 61.

²One of the more perplexing issues for the narrator of Crämer's story is how to name him. He is variously referred to as Friedrich August and August Friedrich. His diplomas, ordination certificate, and marriage certificate, all of which are preserved in the collection of Concordia Historical Institute, offer conflicting evidence. This paper will use the form advanced by "seinem ältesten Freunde," Lochner, and use Friedrich August. In the end, Crämer was simply referred to as "August."

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certitude, as well as the collective grief of the synod over the passing of one of its founding fathers. It read:

Rev. Prof. A. Crämer now sleeps the sweet sleep of the Righteous. It is our sad duty to chronicle the bereavement of our synod and the Springfield Seminary by the demise of Rev. Prof. A. Crämer, late senior professor of our synod and president of our Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Ills. At this late date, May 3d, we can only state, that he had been suffering from a sever attack of the grippe, and fell asleep in Jesus on the 3d of May at 3.50 A.M. His funeral took place on Ascension day, May 7th.

This paper narrates the remarkable story of Friedrich August Crämer's life, and the vigor with which he pursued the calling of the ministry of service. His life divides itself readily into two triads: (1) his youth and early trials; (2) the wandering time; and (3) the confessional leader of Concordia Theological Seminary. Within this last section the second triad emerges: (1) Fort Wayne; (2) Saint Louis; and, finally, (3) Springfield. From this brief consideration of his life, a picture true to this paper's title emerges.³

³The most accessible biography is Ludwig Fuerbringer, "The 'Iron Man' of the Franconian Fathers of our Church: Augustus Friedrich Crämer," in *Persons and Events: Reminiscences of Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 1-31. The best biography is by Crämer's close friend, Friedrich Lochner, which was published as "Ehrengedächtnis des seligen herrn Friedrich August Crämer, Professors der Theologie und Directors des practisch-theologischen Seminars zu Springfield, Ill." It appeared in series in *Der Lutheraner* from September 1891 to April 1892. An edited translation of this biography, without attribution, is in the collection of the Concordia Historical Institute. Other helpful pieces include William G. Polack, "Frederick August Craemer (1812-1891)," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 7 (September 1938): 704-709; "Prof. A. Craemer," *Lutheran Witness* (May 21, 1891); M. Luecke, "Brief Sketch of the Rev. Prof. A. Craemer," *Lutheran Witness* (May 7, 1897); Theodore Graebner, *Church Bells in the Forest: A Story of Lutheran Pioneer Work on the Michigan Frontier 1840-1850* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944); Theodore Gräbner, *Lutherische Pioniere II. Die frankenkolonien des Saginawtales* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919). The biographical data in this essay are drawn from these sources.

Youth and Early Life

Crämer was born on May 26, 1812 in Kleinlangheim, Lower Franconia, Bavaria, near to Würzburg, the eldest son of a merchant father. His home was typically German and featured strict discipline. His mother devoted herself to his education in the fundamentals of the Christian faith as taught in Luther's Small Catechism, and encouraged him, sometimes forcibly, to attend divine service diligently. His earliest schooling was from a neighboring pastor, a good friend of his father's, who instructed him in the rudiments of Latin. Later, August entered the gymnasium at Würzburg, where he distinguished himself as a student, and passed with a "vorzüglich würdig" for university work. In 1830 he entered into his university studies at Erlangen, where he mainly studied theology and philosophy.⁴

It was at Erlangen that the first important turn of his life occurred. Crämer came under the influence of the so-called *Burschenschaft Germania*, and eventually moved up in its ranks to significant positions of leadership. The *Germania* had a notable history dedicated to the reunification of Germany. Following the Napoleonic invasions of the early part of the century, the German Empire was dissolved in 1806 and divided into a number of individual states. "This political situation gave much concern to many, particularly to students, who considered themselves called upon to open the way for the political unity of Germany and to help create anew the old (Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.)"⁵ They were of the opinion that Germany would be lost without Christianity. Over the years a number of *Burschenschaften*, or student associations, were organized in order to keep this idea alive, and, it was hoped, eventually to bring about German reunification. The government, however, was less than enthusiastic about this type of activity, and suppressed the movement. Still, during the years immediately prior to Crämer's arrival at Erlangen, one of these societies, the *Germania* previously mentioned, had again

⁴Other subjects included logic, metaphysics, physics, psychology, and history.

⁵Fuerbringer, "Iron Man," 4-5.

emerged. Carl Manthey-Zorn described the intense character of the student's experience in the *Burschenschaft Germania*:

In the first year of his membership in the Germania, the Student was called a *Fuchs*, fox, and after that he was a *Bursch*. Dueling held the chief attention and was carried on according to strict rules. The weapon most commonly used was a rapier, a straight sword which was kept very sharp at the lower twelve inches or so. Each fighter's eyes, throat, right arm, and the lower part of his body was wrapped for some protection. The duel lasted a prescribed time or until one of the two was incapacitated. There was an umpire, a neutral. Each fighter brought his physician and a second. Never a word or sign of fear or of pain! The *Burschenschaft Germania* was known to be especially wild and forceful in its actions. Its dueling went to some very great lengths.⁶

The determination of this group attracted the serious young student and he quickly distinguished himself as its president. The times were ripe for action, when in July 1832, legislation was passed that compromised the *Burschenschaften's* freedom. The *Germania* joined together with *Burschenschaften* from all over Germany, who sent their leaders to Frankfort am Main to take over strategic political and social targets, hoping to start a revolution. The date was set for April 3, 1833. The authorities, however, received word of the "putsch" and subdued the revolutionaries within the hour. Crämer was taken prisoner, charged with treason, and jailed while he awaited trial. He waited for three years before his case was heard. His punishment was another three years imprisonment, which may have lasted longer had Frederick Thiersch not intervened. Thiersch, a professor of philology at Munich, managed to secure Crämer's release in June 1839 on the condition that Crämer prove worthy of his probation.

⁶"The Early Years of Carl Manthey-Zorn," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 31 (October 1958): 87.

The Wandering Years

This proved to be another turning point in Crämer's life. He assumed that, having been convicted of political activities against the state, he would now never receive a ministerial position in the state church. Further, having spent a significant portion of his short life in prison, he was determined to move quickly forward in his newly chosen field in the hope that he might eventually achieve a satisfactory position and perhaps even a professorship. As a result, he turned to the study of philology, and pursued that field with the same vigor that previously characterized his political aspirations. In early 1840 he entered Thiersch's philological institute at Munich. There he studied ancient Greek, modern Greek, old and middle High German, French, and English.

The change in career was also marked by a change in his spiritual life. Though trained by his mother in the catechism, and later a student of theology at Erlangen, it appears from Crämer's own words that he was mainly interested in theology as an intellectual pursuit. It was only when a devastating illness came upon him that he turned to religion as a means of comfort in distress. As he contemplated what seemed to be certain death, he broke down. "The lightning of Sinai struck me and made a deep impression in my mind. My sins were like mountains before me and the waters of God's wrath encompassed me, the terrors of death and hell." In the midst of his deepest despair, though, the words of the catechism, taught to him so many years before by his mother, proved his only source of comfort. "Jesus Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil." He learned to make this deduction: "If Christ has redeemed lost and condemned sinners, then He has redeemed me also; because everything in me and in my life is lost, I am damned on account of my sins into the abyss of hell; therefore Christ's blood, which He has shed for me, Christ's death, which He suffered for me, also applies to

me.”⁷ Ludwig Fuerbringer summarized this break-through experience as follows:

In this way Crämer became a Christian, a Lutheran Christian, through the Biblical Lutheran doctrine of reconciliation and justification, and he remained such a Christian throughout his long life; he penetrated deeper and deeper into this central doctrine of Christianity, gradually attained greater insight, and testified and battled for this doctrine, confessed it from the pulpit and in lecture halls, confirmed it in life and conduct, and finally sealed it with his death.⁸

His life, however, was still in transition. By December 1841 he finished his course of study, and, with the recommendation of Thiersch, was engaged as a tutor in the court of the Saxon Duke of Einsiedel. His task was to prepare the Duke’s son for the university. In the company of this family, Crämer was further exposed to the confessional reawakening among German Lutherans. Duke Carl von Einsiedel attended the services of Saint John Church, Dresden, where Martin Stephan had been the pastor before leading the Saxon immigration to Saint Louis and Perry County, Missouri. A Christian spirit is said to have permeated the family and the household. During the next two years Crämer was often with the family, traveling to their estate in Bohemia, and even to Italy. But he seemed unsatisfied. In 1843 he informed the Duke of his desire to move on to something new. The Duke’s high estimation for Crämer appears in the following statement:

It is hereby witnessed of Mr. August Crämer of Kleinlangheim, candidate of philology, that he has from July 1, 1841 till now taken care of the rearing and education of my son. Mr. Crämer, who has a thorough knowledge of the usual fields of instruction, as also of the classical, of French and English, “Zeichnen,” and gymnastic drills, combines this with the ability to impart his knowledge

⁷Fuerbringer, “Iron Man,” 7; one may also see Polack, “Craemer,” 705.

⁸Fuerbringer, “Iron Man,” 8.

easily to his students. His very good deportment, Christian life, great ambition, and unwavering loyalty make him very fit for the profession which he has chosen, namely that of a pedagogue. I have not only had the above mentioned qualifications to observe, but have actually seen his mettle tested on various occasions during two years. But since now Mr. Crämer, to my honest regret, wants to give up the position in my household for reasons which I will not oppose but can only honor and respect, I consider myself obligated to prepare for him this true certificate with the hope that it may be of use to him in this future endeavors. Franzensbad near Eger, June 24, 1843.⁹

Duke Carl suggested that Crämer travel to England, and used his influence to secure a position for Crämer with the house of Lord Lovelace in Devonshire, England, who had been seeking a German-trained tutor for his children. But the atmosphere of the household was entirely different from that of the Einsiedel's. Lady Lovelace, the only child of Lord Byron, was a serious student of philosophy and theology. Unfortunately, her reading had led to a denial of the doctrine of the Trinity, and to acceptance of a functional Unitarianism. Her seriousness on the matter had helped to convince her husband of the reasonableness of this position. Now they pressured Crämer to adopt this perspective too. Crämer refused. And his stay with the Lovelace's ended.¹⁰

Crämer intended to return to Germany as soon as possible. However, he had a letter of introduction to Sir Henry Drummond, a prominent member of the House of Commons. In the interim, Crämer decided to visit Drummond in Albury Park castle, near London.¹¹ Drummond was also distinguished by his peculiar religious views. He was a member of the Irvingite sect. Edward Irving had been excommunicated by the London Presbytery in 1830 for his tract on *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature*, in which he asserted that

⁹Lochner, "Craemer," 2.

¹⁰"Prof. W. Craemer," *Lutheran Witness* (May 21, 1891).

¹¹Polack, "Craemer," 706.

Christ's human nature was sinful.¹² In that same year a number of his followers claimed to have received apostolic gifts, such as speaking in tongues, the gift of prophecy, and divine healing. On July 14, 1835, twelve men who claimed to have been appointed as apostles were commissioned to inaugurate the real apostolic mission to the gentiles. Among these "apostles" was Henry Drummond.¹³

Drummond pressed Crämer to join their group. Crämer again resisted. Still, Drummond believed that, should Crämer remain in the sphere of his influence, perhaps Crämer could be turned. Drummond steered Crämer toward Oxford and suggested that he establish himself first as a private instructor of German. Later he should apply for the soon to be established chair of modern literature. And so, in 1843, Crämer came to Oxford; it seemed that he might realize his dream of gaining a significant position there.

Oxford in 1843, however, was in the midst of an upheaval. Beginning in 1833 John Henry Newman had begun to issue *Tracts for the Times* in which he and his fellow "Tractarians" (as they came to be called), Edward Pusey and John Keble, sought to reinterpret the place of the Anglican church in relation to Roman Catholicism and the Reformation. Only two years prior to Crämer's arrival Newman had issued "Tract 90"—"Remarks on Certain Passages in the Thirty-Nine Articles." In a nutshell,

¹²(London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1830).

¹³One may see Edward Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism*, 2 volumes (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878); P. E. Shaw, *The Catholic Apostolic Church* (Morningside Heights: King's Crown Press, 1946); The Irvingites introduced certain romanizing trends into the cultus (elaborate vestments), in doctrine (the Lord's Supper a sacrifice, transubstantiation), and in church polity (a hierarchy). Later this sect took the title the Catholic Apostolic Church. In America, the Irvingite liturgy heavily influenced the German Reformed Church and the liturgical work of Philip Schaff, John Nevin, and Henry Harbaugh. One may see Jack Martin Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology: The Liturgical Lessons of Mercersburg*, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series number 10 (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1976), 201-206; 435-466. *Der Lutheraner* (December 1897) noted the passing of the last Irvingite "apostle," and provided a brief, helpful synopsis of Irvingite belief.

the “Tractarians,” or the Oxford Movement as it later came to be called, sought to redefine the Anglican communion by, among other things, reintroducing high liturgical worship, apostolic succession, and a friendlier attitude toward Rome.¹⁴ Specifically in “Tract 90,” Newman reinterpreted the understanding of the *via media* of Anglicanism. Where earlier interpreters saw the Church of England as the middle way between the Lutheran and Reformed branches of the Reformation, now the Oxford Movement sought to define Anglicanism as the middle way, in line with the patristic tradition, between (then) modern Roman Catholicism and the Reformation. However, to many it seemed that Newman reinterpreted the Thirty-nine Articles in a manner more congruent with the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent than with traditional Protestantism. Suspicions of “romanizing tendencies” were only confirmed when John Henry Newman resigned his position in the Church of England (September 18, 1843) for Roman Catholicism, into which he was received on October 9, 1845.¹⁵

Obviously, Crämer was in the thick of the controversy. He was pressured to deny Lutheranism, oppose the Reformation, and turn to the Church of England—his future at the university depended on it. Crämer resisted yet again, arguing that Confessional Lutheranism was the proper expression of orthodox Christianity. He was especially vexed by the disparaging way the Tractarians spoke of Luther’s reforms.¹⁶

¹⁴Peter B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Paul Vaiss, *From Oxford to the People: Reconsidering Newman and the Oxford Movement* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1996); S. L. Ollard, *A Short History of the Oxford Movement* (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co.; Milwaukee: The Morehouse Publishing Co., 1933).

¹⁵Avery Dulles, “Newman: The Anatomy of a Conversion,” in *Newman and Conversion*, edited by Ian Ker (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 21-36.

¹⁶Interestingly, it appears that Crämer did not disparage the liturgical practices of the Oxford Movement (his liturgical practice seems to have mirrored that of Friedrich Lochner). His main criticism was reserved for its departure from the principle of salvation by grace through faith.

Not surprisingly, the planned professorship did not materialize. Crämer was again left without a definite course.

While he was still defending the Lutheran confession at Oxford, two matters came together to turn Crämer on a new path. First, he learned of a recent book that described the spiritual destitution of the Lutheran Church in the United States. A friend publicized Friedrich Wyneken's *The Distress of the German Lutherans in North America*, and Crämer's attention was fastened on the need for faithful, confessional Lutheran pastors in the United States.¹⁷ Second, his brother told him of the work of Pastor Wilhelm Löhe in helping meet these needs. Löhe had sent the first graduates of his training school, Adam Ernst and J. G. Burger, to the United States in 1842, but more men were needed. What Löhe needed above all was a capable and energetic man to act as a leader for his *sendlinge* in the United States. Prof. Carl von Raumer and others encouraged Crämer to offer his services, and, in the fall of 1844, he made his way to Löhe at Neuendettelsau.¹⁸

Löhe was interested in doing mission work among native Americans. His plan was to establish Lutheran colonies among the various tribes and have the pastor of the congregation branch out into the Indian country. When Löhe met Crämer, he believed that he had found the ideal man for the work of leading this endeavor. Now all he needed was colonists. The call went out for laymen willing to tear up their roots in Germany and leave for the forests of America. Most of those who responded came from Löhe's own charge. Lochner described them as follows:

¹⁷Friedrich Wyneken, *Die Noth der deutschen Lutheraner in Nord Amerika* (Pittsburgh; Druckerei der luterischen Kirchenzeitung, 1844); *The Distress of the German Lutherans in North America*, translated by S. Edgar Schmidt and edited by R. F. Rehmer (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1986).

¹⁸Two weeks later Friedrich Lochner would arrive, and the two would become fast friends for the remainder of their lives. "Friedrich Johann Carl Lochner: An Autobiography," translated by William Lochner, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 6 (January 1934): 110-111.

There were simple Christian citizens from middle Franconia, partly from the region of Fürth and Nürnberg, partly from Altmühlgrund, mostly spiritual children of Löhe. No manner of physical need aroused in them the decision to emigrate; for at home they had sufficient, sometimes an abundant existence, and just as little were they moved by the desire to increase their possessions.¹⁹

Because not all of the volunteers could leave immediately (the group from Altmühlgrund had difficulty in liquidating their possessions), a small group was organized to blaze the trail. During the fall of 1844 and the winter of 1845 this group met to discuss the business of emigration. Central to their considerations was the calling of Crämer as their pastor, which they did on February 15, 1845. They subscribed to a document called, "General Instructions for Our Friends in America." A significant part of their life together would be formed by their common faith, the basis of which they outlined as follows:

They subscribe to all the parts of the Lutheran Book of Concord, without any coercion, of their own free will, and without mental reservation. They confess that according to the extent of their knowledge they find the pure doctrine of the Word of God in the Book of Concord, that they have found nothing, either great or small, that is a contradiction to the Word of the Lord. In case it should happen—may God prevent it—that they should at some time be of a different conviction, they are to exert all efforts to get onto the foundation of the truth again. If they cannot reestablish agreement between their own opinion and the Book of Concord, after they have attempted it unsuccessfully, they are to leave the ministry of the Lutheran Church. In this case also they are not to retain any teaching position.²⁰

¹⁹Lochner, "Craemer," 3. "General Instructions for Our Friends in America," were handwritten documents prepared by Löhe for his colonists. For another example, one may see Carl S. Meyer, editor, *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 98-101.

²⁰Lochner, "Craemer," 3-4.

An amazing thing was happening. Crämer the pedagogue was becoming Crämer the pastor! But before he could go to America, he had some business to attend to. First, the little company, comprised of one married couple and their child, four engaged couples, and two single men, needed financial assistance. Crämer, along with Lochner, visited Dr. Petri and Carl von Maltzan, who had promised to support two Löhe missionaries, and they received that support. Second, Crämer needed to be ordained. Baron von Maltzen petitioned Grand Duke Friedrich Franz II for permission for Crämer's ordination, and he gave it. On April 4, 1845, Crämer was ordained in the "Dom zu Schwerin" by Dr. Theodor Kliefoth.²¹

After some further travels, Crämer was installed as pastor of the colonists on April 19, 1845 as they prepared to leave for America. They sailed the following day on the ship *Caroline* from the port of Bremen. As far as ocean travel goes in the nineteenth century, this was a fairly typical trip. The crossing took fifty-one days, the colonists arriving in New York on June 8. The trip had been an eventful one. They had to sail around Scotland due to contrary winds. They ran into several severe storms, dodged iceburgs, and even collided with another ship one night. But there was good to report as well. There were four marriages on the day that the voyage began. But surely the highlight of the voyage for Crämer was meeting his future wife.

Dorothea Benthien from Achim near Bremen, then twenty-seven years old, was among a group of Lutherans who were destined for Fort Wayne, Indiana. She came to the attention of the Franconians when, during an outbreak of fever on the ship, she cared selflessly for the sick. It was suggested to Pastor Crämer that she would make a good wife. But he determined to put her to the test first. He challenged her as to whether she would be willing to join the colonists as a missionary helper to the Indians. When she replied unequivocally, Crämer decided on the spot that she was the woman for him. They were married

²¹Graebner, *Church Bells*, 33. His ordination text was Isaiah 58:7-14. His ordination certificate is in the collection of Concordia Historical Institute, Saint Louis.

on June 10, 1845 in Saint Matthew Church, New York City.²² But the adventure was not yet over for the little band. From New York City they moved up the Hudson Valley to Albany, and then west to Buffalo by train. On the westward journey, their train collided head on with another. The immigrants were spared, having taken seats in the last car.²³

Löhe had instructed Crämer to affiliate with the Michigan Synod, and so the congregation made its way to Monroe, Michigan. From there they moved on to Ann Arbor, Detroit, and finally, by boat, arrived in Saginaw about July 10.²⁴ There the women stayed while Pastor and the men moved inland, up the Cass River, to clear the land for their colony, Frankenmuth. Over the next several months they built a log house, which served as both a parsonage and as a church. On Christmas day 1845, the service was held in it. They used a desk for a pulpit and a large box for an altar. Initially Crämer held daily matins and vespers services, but as the congregation grew and the demands of the mission work pulled him away for significant time, this was changed to a single midweek service. However, Crämer was careful to observe all the significant festivals of the church year, Saint John's day, Purification, Annunciation, and Visitation of Mary, Saint Michael's Day, Epiphany and Ascension were all observed on week days.²⁵

Crämer turned to the missionary work quickly, too. Shortly after his arrival he began to make contacts with the natives, and engaged an interpreter to help in the work. In the spring of 1846 he visited the Indian village on the Cass River twenty miles

²²James Ware, "Dorothea Benthien Craemer," *Lutheran Witness* (August 1988):5. A copy of the marriage certificate is in the collection of Concordia Historical Institute, Saint Louis.

²³There is some confusion in the sources about where the accident occurred. Poluck claims it was outside of Buffalo ("Craemer," 207, note 12), but Lochner states that it was "a mile out of Albany" ("Craemer," 5).

²⁴Graebner, *Church Bells*, 35-39.

²⁵A description of the Michigan colonies is available as *Etwas über die deutsch-lutherischen Niederlassungen in der Grasschaft Saginaw, Staat Michigan* (Erlangen: Gedruck bei Paul Adolph Junge & Sohn, 1849); One may also see "Something about the German Lutheran Colonies in Saginaw County, Mich.," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 4 (April 1931): 16-20.

from Frankenmuth. His method was simple. Preach and teach the word.²⁶ Remembering clearly his own experience, he spoke of human sin and God's grace. As time went on he settled into the pattern of visiting three of the villages once a month. Normally he was forced to travel on foot sometimes as far as seventy miles one way.

Methodist missionaries (*schwärmenden Methodisten*) also visited these Indian settlements. They maligned Crämer and his preaching, and held revivals instead, trying to convert Indians. They also spread the rumor that any native who was baptized a Lutheran would be sent into slavery in England! Crämer's method of combat was to open his home to the Indian children and encourage them to be present at the mission school where he taught them the Lutheran Confession.²⁷ By Pentecost 1846 there were just over thirty native children in school. As many young Indians as that were in the Crämer's home, Mrs. Crämer tending to their needs. Her care for the children earned her the nickname that later seminarians would also ascribe to her, "Mother."²⁸

By Pentecost 1846 the colony had grown in its German representation as well. Ten couples from Bremen, nine other families, and several single individuals added to the population. A significant community was developing. More land was cleared and a new church was built, dedicated on Christmas

²⁶Crämer also translated Luther's Small Catechism into the Chippewa language. One may see Ralph Owen, "The Old Lutherans Come," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 20 (April 1947): 33; Polack, "Craemer," 708.

²⁷Crämer writes: ("Frankenmut, am Flusse Cass, Michigan," *Der Lutheraner* [February 23, 1847]): "hier gebiert die Kirche Kinder aus fremdem Zungen, nich durch die Mittel menschlicher Treiberei, wie die Secten Christen machen wollen, sondern durch die einzeigen Gnadenmittel des Worts und Sacraments." One may also see Walter P. Schoenfuhs, "Eduard Raimund Baierlein: Lutheran Missionary to the Indians in America and Asia," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 27 (October 1954): 137.

²⁸Walter P. Schoenfuhs, "'O Tebeningeion'—'O Dearest Jesus,'" *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 37 (October 1964): 98-103; P. E. Kretzmann, "Documents Pertaining to the Lutheran Missions among the Indians in Michigan, 1844-1869," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 2 (January 1930): 100-102.

day, 1846. In that service three Indians were baptized, a boy of eighteen (Abraham), along with his sisters, Magdalena and Anna.²⁹ Over the course of time Crämer would baptize thirty-one Indian children.

But things were not going as well with the Michigan Synod. Löhe had been assured that the synod was thoroughly orthodox.³⁰ The synod, however, had accepted a man from the Basel Mission school, named Dumser, whose ordination vow included no reference to the Confessions. It was also discovered that there were congregations in the synod that were mixed—German Reformed and Lutheran. At the meeting of the Michigan Synod in 1846, Crämer demanded that Dumser be disciplined and the mixed congregations be corrected. The synod took no action. On June 25, 1846, Crämer and his colleagues tendered their resignations to the synod. In August of that same year, Crämer set out for Fort Wayne, where a preliminary meeting to discuss a constitution for a new synod was being held. On April 26, 1847, that synod would be formed as *die Deutsche Evangelische Lutherische Synode von Missouri, Ohio, und Andern Staaten*—the Missouri Synod. Crämer was there from the beginning.

Seminary Professor and President

We now enter the third phase of Crämer's life. He served the Frankenmuth community and its congregation, Saint Lorenz, until 1850, when the Missouri Synod called him to a new field of labor, the "practical seminary" at Fort Wayne. He would serve the seminary from 1850 until his death in 1891.

On October 2, 1850 the synod met at Saint Louis. One agenda item was the election of a new professor for the Fort Wayne seminary, since Professor Wolter had died of cholera in 1849. Professor Biewend had taken over temporarily, but then had been called to Saint Louis. The gap remained, and Crämer was

²⁹ *Der Lutheraner*, February 23, 1847; Schoenfuhs, "Baierlein," 146.

³⁰ Schoenfuhs, "Baierlein," 139; Roy Suelflow, "The Planting of Lutheranism in Detroit," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 39 (July 1966): 79.

the unanimous choice. Crämer was considered indispensable to the congregation at Frankenmuth, which sent a delegate to the synod to plead that they not call away their pastor. In the middle of November 1850, Crämer prepared for the move. He delivered his farewell sermon and arrived in Fort Wayne on November 24, 1850.

Upon his arrival Crämer found twenty students under his charge. He was determined to succeed in producing disciplined, thoughtful, and thoroughly Lutheran pastors. He worked with the president of the seminary, Wilhelm Sihler.³¹ Sihler taught pastoral theology, Old and New Testament, symbolics, and catechetics. Crämer taught the remainder (though there was obviously overlap). They worked well together for the eleven years the seminary remained in Fort Wayne after Crämer's arrival. But there was a difference in temperament between the two. Crämer believed that as long as a man had the earnest desire to serve, he could be adequately prepared for the office, even though his intellectual gifts might not be particularly strong. Sihler, on the other hand, preferred not to admit marginal students, stressing the need for a learned clergy. Crämer, though, was no push over. He demanded discipline and was very strict with the students. He, however, argued that for one who would occupy the Holy Office, it was most necessary that they be sufficiently disciplined in life for the demands that would be placed upon them. In this we see Crämer's personality come to the fore very clearly.

In 1857, because the student body had grown so significantly, the seminary erected a new building. Sihler collected \$3000 from Saint Paul congregation in Fort Wayne, and Crämer collected \$4000 from the other local congregations. In October of the same year the new Teachers' Seminary, which had been founded in Milwaukee, was moved to Fort Wayne.

These were minor changes compared to what was to come. In 1861 the synod resolved to move the seminary department from

³¹Lewis Spitz Jr., *Life in Two Worlds: A Biography of William Sihler* (Saint Louis and London: Concordia Publishing House, 1968)

Fort Wayne to Saint Louis (and the academy in Saint Louis to Fort Wayne). Synod believed that ample room existed in the buildings of the Saint Louis seminary for both the practical and the theoretical departments. Crämer received a call to Saint Louis, and accepted it. There he worked with C. F. W. Walther. Together they taught church history, symbolics, pastoral theology, homiletics, and catechetics to the combined classes of the two seminaries, and the other courses Walther and Crämer taught in their respective institutions. They *were* the faculty until 1863 when C. A. Brauer arrived.³²

Crämer continued to be active in the pastoral ministry and missionary activity. In Fort Wayne he served a congregation in the Cedar Creek area. In Saint Louis he helped organize a congregation out of Irish and German immigrants in the section of town called “Minerstown.” Since his salary was paid by synod, Crämer refused any remuneration.³³ But, again, his faithful work was rewarded. After twenty-five years, the congregation numbered 335 communicants and eighty-six voting members.

In 1874 the synod again met with seminary matters on its collective mind. This time it had to decide what to do about the overcrowding in Saint Louis. The squeeze demanded either a new building or a separation of the two departments. It so happened that the Pennsylvania Ministerium had come into possession of property in Springfield, Illinois, which had formerly been the Illinois State University. But the transfer documents contained a clause to the effect that the buildings be used only for educational purposes. The Pennsylvania Synod

³²At this time Crämer, always looking for a new learning experience, began to study Norwegian. A number of Norwegian students matriculated at the seminary, and Crämer determined to instruct them in their own language. One may see C. S. Meyer, “Intersynodical Unity Fostered through Co-operation in Education (1859-1874),” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 29 (Summer 1956): 56.

³³For an example of his preaching, one may see A. Crämer, *Zwei Predigten, bei seinem Abschied und bei der Einführung seines Nachfolgers zu Minerstown, Mo.* (Saint Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1877).

could not fulfill this stipulation, and so they offered it to the Missouri Synod for \$6000. Pastor Büniger and several other Saint Louis pastors investigated the property and convinced Trinity Congregation to purchase it. They hoped to open a female seminary there. That project fell through, but the down payment had been made, and conditions in Saint Louis were not improving. Therefore the practical department was moved to Springfield.³⁴

Crämer advised against moving the whole practical department to Springfield. Other options seemed more attractive, including Lochner's suggestion that the seminary relocate to Milwaukee. But that also failed to materialize. Synod resolved that by September 1, 1875, the seminary should have been moved to Springfield. Even though age was creeping up on him, the synod called Crämer, arguing that he alone could handle the challenge of moving the seminary yet again. Still, synod did resolve that another professor be called (and Henry Wyneken later filled the position). Toward the end of August, Crämer moved to Springfield. It would be his last move. At that time there were twenty-seven students in the "proseminar," 114 students in all, of which eighty-one were Missouri Synod, four Wisconsin Synod, three Illinois Synod, and twenty-one Norwegian Synod.

Crämer brought his usual vigor to the new situation. He taught dogmatics according to Conrad Dietrich, symbolics according to Guericke, and pastoral theology according to Walther.³⁵ Besides that he taught homiletics, with a study of Luther's *Kirchepostille*, and the Apology and Formula of Concord in Latin. Crämer always prepared joyfully and carefully for his classes. What seemed to frustrate him more than anything was inactivity. During the summer he would

³⁴Erich Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets: The Anatomy of a Seminary 1846-1976* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 65-88.

³⁵For the a comparison of the curricula of Saint Louis and what later became Springfield, one may see *Katalog der Professoren und Studenten des deutschen evangelisch-lutherischen Prediger-Seminars (Concorida-College) zu St. Louis, Mo., für das Studienjahr 1873-74* (Saint Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missrouri, Ohio, u. a. St., 1874), 9.

select some of the students for an accelerated course, enabling them to complete their training and enter the parish sooner. His students would later recount how it was almost impossible not to learn from Crämer. He was an excellent teacher. But he also knew how to build character in his students. His word was law.³⁶ Yet, the older Crämer grew, the more mild and fatherly he became in his dealing with his students. Crämer was not in favor of lightly incurring debts. Many a time he would help out needy students from his own pocket.

The times in Springfield were difficult for the Crämers. Up to 1881 only one death occurred in the family, the death of a young daughter in Frankenmuth. But in 1881, inside of two months, three of his grown children and two grandchildren died. Crämer bore the shock as best he could, but Mrs. Crämer was devastated. First, the only daughter of the family, Maria, died with her two children. Then the second youngest son, Friedrich, died on September 19. The eldest son Heinrich passed away. All of this was too much for Mrs. Crämer, and she started to decline. She passed away on November 11, 1884, aged sixty-seven. Crämer himself found his dear wife kneeling at her bedside.³⁷

Tragedy continued to test Crämer. In 1888 a typhoid epidemic broke out at the seminary. On April 23 the seminary was forced

³⁶J. F. Boerger later recounted the circumstances surrounding his engagement and marriage, which involved Crämer ("Autobiography of Pastor J. F. Boerger, Sr.," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 30 [Spring 1957]: 34): "During my vicarage year (1888-1889) at Fall Creek, Wisconsin, I learned to know my future wife, Theodora Clara Friedrich, who was then a sweet sixteen. We fell in love about Christmas 1888 and had a secret agreement when I left August 7, 1889. Professor Crämer . . . used to say to the vicars: "Ihr könnt euch ja umsehen, aber Briefwechsel ist strengstens verboten" ("You may look around, but all correspondence is strictly forbidden"). So I lived up to that rule and never wrote a line to Theodora while I was a student at Springfield, nor did I receive a letter from her."

³⁷*Lebenslauf der Frau Professoren Craemer*, in the collection of *Concordia Historical Institute*, recounts: "But the heavy burden of her cross became almost too great to bear; . . . in the short period of two months, three grown children, among whom were her only dearly-beloved daughter and two grandchildren, died in rapid succession."

to close doors because of the epidemic. Several students died at the seminary; several who had left and gone home also died of the disease. Crämer would not be stopped. In the midst of the epidemic, he went around from bed to bed on visits. On July 30 the surviving seminarians were able finally to meet for their final exams. In the Spring of 1889 the epidemic broke out again. Seventeen seminarians contracted the disease. All but two recovered.

Crämer's strength was now starting to ebb. But several projects remained that he was determined to see through to guarantee the future of the Seminary. First, in 1890 he helped convince the synod to build a new building at Springfield. Second, with his encouragement they called a second theological professor. Reinhold Pieper of Manitowac, Wisconsin, brother of Franz Pieper, accepted the call extended to him. He arrived in Springfield with his family on April 2, 1891.³⁸ Crämer, despite ill health and rainy weather, insisted on meeting Pieper at the train depot. His condition deteriorated steadily over the month of April. Yet, he maintained his regular weekly duties. The weekend found him at the baptismal font, serving in place of an ill brother pastor. He gave his lectures on the following Monday and Tuesday, and then delivered the installation sermon for Reinhold Pieper on Wednesday. This proved to be too much. Towards the end of the service he collapsed. As his strength gradually waned, Crämer refused to be cowed by his illness. On hearing the class bell, several times he dressed in order to lecture.³⁹ He insisted on being allowed to preach. These activities being disallowed, he queried the students who were serving him with probing doctrinal questions, and demanded immediate, clear answers. Finally, on Sunday morning, May 3, he passed away, and God gathered his faithful servant to himself at age seventy-eight.

On Tuesday, May 5, a brief service was held at his house. He was buried May 7th, Ascension Day. Professors Pieper,

³⁸Heintzen, *Prarie School*, 96-97.

³⁹Luecke notes ("Brief Sketch") that Crämer "often expressed the wish of dying 'in the harness.'"

Stoeckhardt, and Graebner of the Saint Louis seminary attended, as did District Presidents and representatives from Fort Wayne, Milwaukee, and Addison (now River Forest). Reinhold Pieper preached the sermon on Revelation 2:10. It was a large procession, with more than seventy pastors present, 300 students from Saint Louis and Springfield, the total number of participants being estimated at 2000. Excluding Lincoln's funeral, this was the largest funeral procession up to that time in Springfield. He was buried in Oak Ridge cemetery.⁴⁰

On May 31, just three and a half weeks after his funeral, the new building was dedicated at Springfield. Crämer's seminary, better yet, Christ's seminary, would survive.

Assessment

The breadth of Crämer's experience, the determination that he brought to any project he undertook, but above all, his dedication to the gospel set August Crämer apart as a faithful servant in Christ's church. Several things stand out as we consider the big picture of Crämer's life. First, He put himself fully into any work that he started, seeking excellence, and, most of the time, realizing great success. On his desk in his office he is said to have had the following Bible verse: "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently" (Jeremiah 48:10).

He was dedicated to sharing the message of justification by grace with sinners who were separated from Christ. And yet, as he did so, he never compromised on the full confession of the gospel. Doctrinal concession was not a possibility he would consider. He never gave up his mission work. Even when he was saddled with the responsibilities of his professorship, he made every possible effort to continue to feed hungry souls with word and sacrament. In Fort Wayne, Saint Louis, and Springfield, he offered himself in any way to serve the church. As a professor he influenced a generation of pastors. He is reported to have given, at times, twenty-three lectures per week.

⁴⁰"Rev. Prof. Craemer," *Lutheran Witness* (May 21, 1891).

But the effort was well rewarded. In Fort Wayne (1850-1861) he prepared eighty candidates for the ministry; in Saint Louis (1861-1875), 225. Finally, in Springfield (1874-1891), 330 candidates for the ministry received the bulk of their training from him—635 total.

In short, Crämer firmly believed that Christ had spent Himself for him. Now he would spend his life for Christ by spending it for others. The Missouri Synod and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne would be much different and much lesser institutions were it not for August Crämer. At the very least his life provides an interesting picture of nineteenth-century church work. But I believe there is more to be said than that of him. Crämer's life and work offers us an archetype, a model of faithful service in Christ's church.

A bronze tablet featuring a profile of August Crämer that formerly graced Crämer Hall in Springfield now rests in Concordia Theological Seminary's archives. We would do well to find a way to display it, for its inscription captures perfectly what we as a seminary hope to achieve in the work entrusted to us by our synod—the formation of confessional pastors with a passion for missions.

Crämer Hall, dedicated in the memory of August Crämer, May 26, 1812—May 3, 1891. Lutheran scholar, pioneer missionary among the Indians, pastor, professor and president of this institution for 41 years—a man of God, who by his rugged faith, his burning zeal in the performance of his duties, his labor and his self-denial gave evidence of the love of Christ that was in him, and whom we greatly honor as the father of the Seminary.