Similarities and Differences
Between The Methodist Church
and The Evangelical United Brethren Church

By Charles E. Kachel

Similairties

The similarities between The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church are largely due to the fact that both have a common spiritual heritage. This kinship has been ably presented by Charles C. Parlin, and I will draw heavily on his pamphlet in this portion of my paper.¹

Six names stand out in the early history of the Methodists and the Evangelical United Brethren: John Wesley (1703-1791), Martin Boehm (1725-1812), William Otterbein (1726-1813), Francis Asbury (1745-1816), Christian Newcomer (1749-1830), and Jacob Albright (1759-1808).

These six men were contemporaries and they influenced each other. All of them were pietists—they believed the Christian faith required a personal commitment to Christ. Each of them rebelled against the formalism of the established church in which he began—Wesley and Asbury against the Church of England, Boehm and Newcomer against the Mennonites, Otterbein against the Old World Reformed Church, and Albright against the Old World Lutheran Church. All of them except Wesley lived and served in America.²

That Wesley was influenced by the German pietistic movement is clear. Three of the major events in his religious experience were directly related to German pietism—the poise and the buoyant faith of the Moravians in a storm at sea while he was en route to Georgia, his conversations with Peter Bohler who had been ordained by Count Zinzendorf, and his heart-warming experience in Aldersgate Street, London, May 24, 1738, while one was reading from Luther’s Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. Wesley spent the summer of 1738 in the Moravian settlement at Herrnhut, Germany, and said that it strengthened his faith. In view of these factors in Wesley’s

¹ Paper read before the Western North Carolina Annual Conference of The Methodist Church during the Conference Historical Society Hour, June 3, 1964. Dr. Kachel is Superintendent of the Central District, The Evangelical United Brethren Church, Reading, Pennsylvania.
² Charles C. Parlin, “Our Common Heritage,” an Address delivered before

the General Conference of The Evangelical United Brethren Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, October 25, 1962. [Name of publisher, date, and place of publication not given.]
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

religious experience, it has been said that Methodism is German pietism translated into English.

William Otterbein came to America in 1752 at the age of 27 to work among the Germans in Pennsylvania. Educated in the best Calvinist schools of Germany, he had been ordained by the Reformed Church. Dissatisfied with the formalities of his church in the New World, he found a congregation in Baltimore that was of the same mind. The congregation circumvented church authority and called Otterbein to be its pastor. Otterbein consulted among others Francis Asbury who was then 29 and had been in America three years. In 1774, Otterbein took the separatist congregation under the name of “The German Evangelical Reformed Church.”

Martin Boehm came from a Mennonite family in Pennsylvania. Chosen by lot to be pastor of a church, he was overwhelmed with a feeling of his spiritual inadequacy. But out of his agony came an awakening to new life and faith, and then he wanted to preach. His evangelistic fervor brought him into touch with the lay preachers of the Methodist societies, but it did not endear him to his own church. In 1780 the Mennonites expelled Boehm.

Thus Otterbein and Boehm were out of their respective denominations and on their own in the revival movement in America, while Asbury though engrossed in the revival work was still technically within the framework of the Church of England.

Jacob Albright was born of German Lutheran stock in Pennsylvania. He had little formal education. He was religiously awakened in 1790 when two of his children died; the sermon at their funeral moved him deeply. After an agonizing inner struggle he was converted to the Methodist faith. In 1796 he was licensed as an “exhorter.” Albright became concerned about his fellow Germans who were largely without pastoral care, preaching to them with enthusiasm. He called men to repentance, conversion, and entire sanctification. In spite of opposition, Albright won some converts. Since they spoke only German there was no church in which they could find a congenial home. Therefore in 1800 Albright formed three classes, each with a leader, to nurture the spiritual life of his converts. Two years later there were forty members. In 1803 a council from the classes ordained Albright a minister. In 1807 an Annual Conference was held; it adopted the name “The Newly Formed Methodist Conference,” and Albright was elected as the bishop. The new church was Methodist in doctrine and polity, but it was not recognized by the Methodists. In 1816 the name of the denomination was changed to “The Evangelical Association.”

Christian Newcomer was born in Pennsylvania of Mennonite stock. He was converted at 17, and sometime afterward felt called to preach but resisted it for several years. In 1777, when 28 years old, he entered the ministry. He withdrew from the Mennonite faith
and joined the movement headed by Otterbein. Of Otterbein and his associates, Newcomer said, "These men preached the same doctrine which I had experienced. . . . I therefore associated with them and joined their society." He early saw the necessity of organization, and it was his genius in this field which gathered up, conserved, and gave continuity to the movement started by Otterbein and Boehm. Newcomer took a leading part in the founding of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. In 1813 he became the third bishop in that church.

Now in a very real sense the two denominations, the Methodists and the Evangelical United Brethren, were born out of the Revolutionary War. The colonies were settled primarily by Englishmen who brought the Church of England with them. The Methodist missionaries sent over by Wesley, beginning in 1769, had their greatest successes in the middle and southern colonies where the Anglican Church was dominant. By the time the war was over the Methodist societies, with a membership of nearly 15,000, were ready to become an independent church in an independent nation.

At the beginning of the Revolution there were some 250,000 Germans in the colonies, and the records of the war are replete with German as well as English names. The Germans had come to America because the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) following the Thirty Years' War recognized only three churches—Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed. All others came to be designated as sects and as such they were handicapped and life for them under bigoted rulers was often intolerable. So in 1683, thirteen families, fifty people in all, mostly Mennonites and Quakers, left their homes in Krefeld, Germany to settle near Philadelphia. They were the advance guard of what was to become a flood of Teutonic migration from Switzerland, Wurttemberg, and the lower Rhine. They along with emigrants from other sections were Protestants fleeing from Roman Catholic oppression and other forms of persecution. It is understandable that these Germans in coming to America where they helped to found a new nation were interested in churches which would be free from the domination and tyranny which they had known in Europe.

Thus it turned out that when the Revolutionary War was over, the five religious leaders cited above—Boehm, Otterbein, Asbury, Newcomer, and Albright—were in a real sense closely related in a great revival movement. However, at that time, 1783, there was as yet no official ecclesiastical organization.

The first group to organize was the Methodists under Asbury. When peace was declared between England and the United States,
it was obvious to Wesley and others that the Methodist societies in America could not continue even technically as members of the Anglican Church. Most of the clergymen of that church in America, loyal to England, had left during the war. The American Methodist preachers were unordained and the people therefore were without the sacraments. Wesley appealed to the Bishop of London to ordain some ministers and send them to America, but the bishop declined. Wesley, always practical, then took matters into his own hands. Convinced from his study that as a priest in the Church of England, he was also a presbyter with power to ordain, he ordained Thomas Coke, a clergyman of the Church of England who had cast his lot with the British Methodists, as a General Superintendent or bishop and sent him to America with instructions to ordain Francis Asbury as a General Superintendent and organize a church. Asbury announced that he would not accept ordination unless unanimously elected by the Methodist preachers. A conference of the preachers was then called in Baltimore at Christmastime 1784. The conference unanimously elected Asbury, and then on successive days he was ordained deacon, elder, and General Superintendent. The group voted to continue the episcopal form of church government and called the new denomination which they organized the Methodist Episcopal Church.

It is not without significance that when Asbury was to be ordained General Superintendent or Bishop he requested William Otterbein, his friend of many years, to have a part in the service. Otterbein was present and joined with Thomas Coke in the laying on of hands. Thus one of the founders of the Evangelical United Brethren Church shared in the ordination of Francis Asbury who was with Thomas Coke the first bishop of The Methodist Church.

The Church of the United Brethren in Christ was organized in 1800 at a conference in Frederick County, Maryland. It is significant that an episcopal form of church government was adopted with Otterbein and Boehm being elected bishops. Definitely this was due to Methodist influence because neither Otterbein’s Reformed Church nor Boehm’s Mennonites had any such form of ecclesiastical organization.

Albright’s group was the last to organize. As already indicated, with his Methodist license as an exhorter, Albright continued to preach to his fellow Germans. Since his relationship to the Methodists was close, the transition to a separate denomination was gradual. As shown above, the process was complete in 1816 when the name “Evangelical Association” was adopted.

During the early years there are some references to Asbury’s group as “English Methodists” and to the Otterbein-Boehm-Albright followers as “German Methodists.” These religious leaders represented a revival movement at the time, not ecclesiastical organiza-
tions as we know them today. They attended each other's meetings and at times traveled and preached together. Asbury's group took in the English speaking and the others gathered in the German language converts. The participation of Otterbein in Asbury's ordination has been noted. When Otterbein was an old man with less than two months to live, at his request William Ryland, a Methodist, joined him in ordaining Christian Newcomer to be his successor. What a heritage the two denominations share today: Wesley, Boehm, Asbury, Otterbein, Newcomer, Albright!

In view of this background it is not surprising that the Methodist and the Evangelical United Brethren churches today have almost identical forms of government. The Discipline worked out with Wesley's help for the Asbury group was translated into German and became the basis for the United Brethren and the Evangelical Association. The ministerial dress which Asbury brought with him from England—knee breeches and leggings—was adopted by Boehm, Albright, and others.

The question may be asked why these three religious groups so closely associated in origin and so similar in doctrine and in polity did not unite soon after the Revolution instead of going forward as three ecclesiastical organizations. There were conversations regarding union in the early days. Newcomer urged it and regretted that he did not press harder for it. In 1810 John Dreisback, a preacher in the Evangelical Association, proposed to Bishop Asbury, "If you will give us German circuits, districts, and conferences, we are willing to make your church ours, and be one people with you, and have one and the same church government." Asbury replied, "This cannot be—it would not be expedient."

Charles Parlin says his own research led him to believe that the failure to achieve union in the early days was the fault of Asbury. Bishop Asbury did not speak German and unlike Wesley he did not have a background of German experience and influence. Asbury believed that Methodism had enough work and organizational problems among the English speaking people, and he felt that the work among the German language Americans could be done separately. He said the German language in America would soon disappear anyway. But Asbury did not foresee the massive migrations to come, nor did he comprehend the tenacity of the mother tongue among German immigrants.

Within twenty years after Asbury's death the Methodist Episcopal Church felt constrained to begin work on its own among German speaking Americans, and it soon had German language annual con-

---

ferences which did not merge with the English speaking annual conferences until 1925, some 109 years after Asbury's death.

In general, the Lutheran groups in America tended to maintain their ties with the Fatherland. But this was not the case with our three churches. Why should they? They were born of the American Revolution and were part of the founding of a new nation.

Our three groups emphasized piety. They were opposed to the Gemütlichkeit of the beerhall and the gambling table. They not only did not fear emotionalism in religion, they encouraged it. The German people took to the camp meeting with enthusiasm. They set up tents, covered the floors with straw, gathered wood for fuel, and cooked outside their tents on old-fashioned stoves. Over a period of years in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere, the work of our three churches ran parallel, with considerable interchange of preachers and exhorters.

Our three churches were similar in that all sent missionaries to Germany. The reason in each instance was the same—Germans in America found joy in the spiritual revival and wrote enthusiastic letters back home. These messages prompted the relatives in Germany to ask that preachers be sent over to them.

Now of course the impact of World Wars I and II was devastating in relation to the continued use of the German language in churches in the United States. Feeling ran high; outrages were perpetrated against loyal citizens because they spoke German, even though their sons might be serving in the armed forces of the nation. The study of the German language was discontinued in many school systems.

As mentioned above, the German language annual conferences in the Methodist Episcopal Church disappeared in 1925. The Evangelical Association and the Church of the United Brethren in Christ merged in 1946 without the loss of a single congregation in either body. All of the work in the Evangelical United Brethren Church today is in English. So our churches which remained separate after the Revolution because of the language barrier no longer face this hurdle as they consider the possibility of union.

**Differences**

In view of the similarities in origin, beliefs, spirit and purpose between the Methodist and the Evangelical United Brethren churches outlined above, it would seem that there are not many differences to be discussed. There are no differences in doctrine, no differences in our stands or emphases on social issues, and no substantial differences in our forms of government.

However, during the century and three-quarters that we have gone our separate ways differences in procedures have developed. In its organization, for example, Methodism seems to have followed rather closely the Federal system of government, maintaining dis-
distinct administrative, legislative, and judicial branches. The Evangelical United Brethren Church has also followed this pattern of government, but at points it has deviated from a strict separation of the powers and prerogatives of each branch.

I cannot fully explain the reasons for the Evangelical United Brethren form of church government, but apparently one determining factor was the influence exerted by later German immigrants who were received into the parent branches of our denomination. We know that a large group of German people emigrated from southern Germany to America between 1683 and 1755. These people were here long before the Revolution. They objected to authoritarian rule; they fought for American independence. Their descendants, the Pennsylvania Germans, were inclined to be strongly democratic in their church organization. Then as time passed more German emigrants came and some of them joined the German language churches in America. These new immigrants had been used to authoritarianism in church and state in Europe; they did not fully comprehend or appreciate the democracy in our American church organizations. The result was conflict, the older settlers standing for democracy in church government and the late-comers emphasizing the need for authority. A division that took place in the Evangelical Association, the predecessor of the Evangelical Church, was undoubtedly due in part to the love of freedom on the part of the Pennsylvania Germans who objected to the authoritarianism of bishops elected from among late-comers from Germany. It may be fair to say then that the Evangelical United Brethren church polity was hammered out as the newer German immigrants and the descendants of the older group accommodated their views and procedures in local congregations and at the denominational level.

There are differences in the episcopacy in our two churches. The Evangelical United Brethren Church elects bishops for a four-year term, and all bishops and all general church officers are up for reconsideration and re-election at each General Conference. We believe this policy keeps our bishops more amenable and more responsive to the will of the church. However, in the history of our church only one bishop eligible for re-election has ever failed to make it.

In The Methodist Church you elect bishops for life, although there is, I believe, no paragraph in the Methodist Discipline to this effect. The Methodist practice of electing bishops for life has stirred up much discussion in our church; some object to it on the ground that it could make for autocratic leadership. However, bishops in the Evangelical United Brethren Church may have more actual power than Methodist bishops, as the following comparisons of privileges, prerogatives, powers, and the like will show.

1. Both churches have a committee on episcopacy. In The Meth-
odist Church this committee is made up of one minister and one layman from each annual conference delegation chosen by the delegation itself, while in the Evangelical United Brethren Church the bishops appoint the members of this committee! The Evangelical United Brethren committee determines the boundaries of episcopal areas, recommends the number of bishops to be elected, and also recommends the stationing of the bishops in the episcopal areas.

The Methodist committee on episcopacy has greater power and broader authority in reviewing written quadrennial reports from each bishop and in appraising the administrative work and the decisions of each bishop during the quadrennium. The Methodist committee has the responsibility for reviewing the work and the character of each bishop, and it recommends whether he is to be reassigned to the same area, moved, or discontinued as an assigned bishop whether or not he has reached the age for retirement. This method of control goes far beyond any provision in the Evangelical United Brethren Church. It could be more effective in controlling both autocracy and inefficiency than the Evangelical United Brethren term election of bishops. Thus we have come to feel that the checks and balances in the Methodist system are stronger than our own. Our bishops make no individual reports of their stewardship, they have no committee to review their work or their decisions, and the Board of Bishops interprets our church law. Under the Methodist system the bishops must be approved by conference vote for continuation in office, and this in effect is the same as our episcopal elections every four years.

2. A Methodist bishop has no conference membership. Evangelical United Brethren bishops retain all rights and privileges of conference membership.

3. Methodist bishops are not and cannot be members of the General Conference. Evangelical United Brethren bishops have full membership and voting rights in the General Conference.

4. Methodist bishops cannot speak on the floor of the General Conference unless a delegate requests and the body grants the privilege to an individual bishop. Evangelical United Brethren bishops have full speaking rights at all times.

5. Official decisions of Methodist bishops must be submitted to the Judicial Council for review. Evangelical United Brethren bishops review their own decisions and interpret church law, and the interpretations are binding unless and until the General Conference changes them.

6. Methodist bishops submit individual reports on their work to the committee on episcopacy for review. Evangelical United Brethren bishops present one general or composite report to the General Conference.

7. Methodist bishops are limited to a twelve-year term of service.
in one area. There is no such limitation on the service of Evangelical United Brethren bishops.

8. All Evangelical United Brethren bishops are voting members on all denominational boards, including the boards of trustees of our seminaries. This is not the case for Methodist bishops.

Thus the fears of the Evangelical United Brethren Church in regard to the possible autocracy or tyranny in the episcopacy of The Methodist Church have been largely allayed.

The “district superintendent” in The Methodist Church is called a “conference superintendent” in the Evangelical United Brethren Church. In the one church the superintendent is appointed by the bishop, in the other he is elected by the conference. In the one he is regarded as an extension of the administrative arm of the bishop; in the other while he is amenable to and shares with the bishop the administrative work of the conference, he is also amenable to the ministers and laymen of the conference who elected him and before whom he must stand for reelection at the end of his four-year term. In the Evangelical United Brethren Church the conference feels that the superintendent is its representative and leader elevated to office by its choice. He is primarily responsible for his own district, and his opinion as to what should be done there receives careful consideration by the bishop and the other superintendents, but at the same time he is a superintendent of the whole conference. The bishop and the superintendents are a team to do the work of the whole conference, with the bishop and all the superintendents sharing in all the decisions.

Many members of the Evangelical United Brethren Church have expressed genuine concern over the Methodist polity whereby the bishop appoints the district superintendents, and they strongly favor their own plan of permitting the conference to elect them. But closer examination of all the factors involved has once again led to sober second thoughts. It has become apparent that what works well in a small conference may be impractical if not impossible in a large one. We have had to tell ourselves that we do not know how our plan would work in a conference with hundreds of pastoral charges, if three to six superintendents could not be chosen until the conference convened and held an election, and if the bishop and the superintendents then had to proceed to make the appointments at once without the new superintendents having the time or the opportunity for consultations with both churches and ministers regarding proposed and necessary changes in the pastorates.

There is still a reluctance in the Evangelical United Brethren Church to give up the right of the annual conference to a voice in the selection of its leaders, but at the same time there is a growing understanding of the difficulty in making our plan work in a vastly larger denomination with big annual conferences. No one sees how
the assignment of several hundred pastors can be properly and satisfactorily made if the process has to wait until the conference meets and elects several superintendents. A satisfactory answer to this problem in terms of our elective system for superintendents has not been found.

The Methodist Church has jurisdictional conferences, while the Evangelical United Brethren Church has only a General Conference above the annual conferences. However, jurisdictional conferences have created no problem in our thinking. We have area meetings of our ministers, but a denomination our size has no need for jurisdictional conferences. We perceive that the jurisdictional conferences in The Methodist Church guarantee regional and minority rights and that they probably make for more representative government. The jurisdictional conferences are closer to the people than a huge General Conference vested with all the prerogatives, powers, and duties now lodged in the jurisdictional conferences.

In the Evangelical United Brethren Church the laymen and the clergy voting together elect all lay and clerical delegates to the General Conference, while in The Methodist Church the clergy alone vote for clerical delegates and the laymen alone vote for lay delegates to the General and jurisdictional conferences. This difference in procedure seems to be due in part at least to the difference in the size of the two denominations. In the Evangelical United Brethren Church the laymen generally know the preachers and vice versa, while in the larger Methodist Church this is hardly possible. This difference has not thus far caused much concern, though some say that since laymen tend to be more conservative than ministers they might when allowed to vote for clerical delegates prevent the election of liberal clergymen whom the ministers voting alone would send to General Conference. Both denominations provide for an equal number of ministerial and lay delegates in the conferences.

The Evangelical United Brethren Church has “administrative councils” which provide authoritative coordinating administrative groups on the annual conference and general church levels. While The Methodist Church has a coordinating council on the general church level and inter-board councils in the annual conferences, it is my understanding that the authority exercised by the Evangelical United Brethren administrative councils is, in The Methodist Church, largely in the hands of the council of bishops, the colleges of bishops, and the bishops’ cabinets.

The final and most obvious difference between our two denominations is size. Your membership of 10,500,000 contrasts dramatically with our 800,000 members. This difference is due in part to the fact that in many parts of our church our people held onto the German language as long as possible, and in some areas today
German is still lovingly called the "mother tongue." This practice severely limited our possibility for growth.

The problem of how to unite agreeably and meaningfully two church bodies so markedly different in size is indeed formidable. But since this paper deals not with the union but rather with the similarities and differences between our two churches, I will only say here that the Methodist committee on church union has won the deep respect and appreciation of the Evangelical United Brethren Church by its manifestly sincere efforts to make the merger, if it is finally consummated, a union of the two bodies and not the absorption of one by the other. The courtesies and consideration shown the representatives of the Evangelical United Brethren Church have profoundly impressed our people.

In our day the grouping of family churches is realistic and discernible. If our two denominations unite, the resulting ecclesiastical fellowship will then embody the history of the following American churches or religious groups which in origin, name, doctrine, and tradition have been Methodist: Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church South, Methodist Protestant Church, Methodist Church (began when the Methodist Protestant Church divided in 1858 and merged again with the Methodist Protestant Church in 1877), United Brethren in Christ, Evangelical Association, United Evangelical Church, The Evangelical Church, German Methodists, Swedish Methodists, The Methodist Church, and The Evangelical United Brethren Church.

In closing may I express my thanks and the gratitude of my church for the honor you have conferred upon me and my denomination in asking me to address you on the opening night of the Western North Carolina Conference at Lake Junaluska, one of the beautiful assembly grounds of The Methodist Church.