

**GERMAN-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE
ONGOING SEARCH FOR AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM,
WITH REFERENCE TO THE RADICAL UNITED BRETHREN
SECESSION OF 1889**

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This paper will explore the division that occurred within the United Brethren in Christ (UB) in 1889, including some comparisons with the parallel split within the Evangelical Association (EA) in 1891, with a view to understanding its significance for the larger discussion of the nature of American evangelicalism.

It is commendable that the prevailing one-sided tendency to read American church history from the perspective of the New England Puritans has recently been challenged by a call for due recognition of the dominant (in influence and numbers) role of Methodism in nineteenth century America.¹ Perhaps this redirection will also allow due recognition to be given to those impulses of Christian renewal commonly known as continental Pietism, that both antedated Methodism and exercised formative influence upon it.² The leaven of Pietism not only impacted the major continental confessional bodies, the Lutherans and the Reformed Churches, that were transplanted to North America. It also contributed directly to the formation of new, indigenous German-American Church bodies that blended the older Pietist ethos with elements of Wesleyan doctrine and church structure. The major institutional results of this interaction were the Otterbein-Boehm movement, which gave rise to the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, and the Evangelical Association (after 1921, the Evangelical Church of North America), founded by Jacob Albright.³

These denominations, along with several smaller bodies that have shared

¹ See Nathan O. Hatch, "The Puzzle of American Methodism," *Church History* (June 1994): 175-189.

² Despite the important interpretive work of F. E. Stoeffler, Peter Erb, K. James Stein and others, the bulk of Pietist source material has not yet received English translation from the German. A recent contribution to this field is the author's *Early German-American Evangelicalism: Influential Pietist Sources on Discipleship and Sanctification* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1995).

³ See Bruce Behney and Paul Eller, *History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979).

a common ethos,⁴ have typically been given slight notice by recent students of American evangelicalism, including those who have called for a recognition of Methodism and the holiness movement.⁵ On the other hand, they are usually passed over by continental Pietist scholars, since they are viewed as American groups and as variants of Methodistic *Freikirchen*.⁶ As a consequence, they are bypassed by scholars of evangelicalism on both sides of the Atlantic, even though they represented the major revival movement among America's largest ethnic group in the nineteenth century.⁷ The Evangelical United Brethren—the new denomination that resulted from the union of the Evangelical Church with the United Brethren in 1946—by themselves approached 800,000 members by the time of their union, and as a strong regional denomination, they were among the six largest denominations in two Northeastern states.⁸ Their neglect is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that the UB was the first indigenous denomination organized within the United States, and the EA was the first church body to adapt the term “Evangelical” as its denominational name.⁹ As used by this body, the term had a different meaning than the confessional, *landeskirchlich* usage of the Lutherans, whereby the term is equated with “Protestant.” It also predates the recent descriptive use of the term to refer to nineteenth century “main-line” Protestantism,¹⁰ which Dayton has called “classical evangelicalism,” as well as the post-fundamentalist designation “neo-evangelical.”¹¹ As used by

⁴ Those bodies include the United Brethren in Christ (Old Constitution), the Evangelical Congregational Church, the Brethren in Christ, the Missionary Church, The Church of God (Winebrennarian), the United Christian Church, the Evangelical Church of North America, the Evangelical Covenant Church, the Church of the Brethren, and segments of the Mennonites (General Conference).

⁵ Melvin Dieter gives brief attention to the impact of the holiness movement upon Evangelicals and U.B. in his *Holiness Movement of the Nineteenth-Century* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1974).

⁶ An exception is the British Methodist scholar, W. Reginald Ward, who has identified Otterbein in his recent study of the continental evangelical revival as the pioneer of an “undenominational revival” that fulfilled the hopes of old world revivalists, had worked among Mennonite groups in Switzerland and Holland. See W. Reginald Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 247.

⁷ Nearly seven million German immigrants arrived in the United States between 1820 and 1969. See Sidney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale, 1973), 750.

⁸ These states were Pennsylvania (with 202,000 members) and West Virginia; they were also the leading denomination in parts of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and the Plains states. See *Yearbook EUB* (Dayton, 1965), 56-57. In addition, they had almost reached parity with Methodism in their work on the European continent. See Karl Steckel, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche* (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1982), 149-212.

⁹ While UB trace their origin to 1767, (the Pentecostal “Long’s Barn Meeting” of Otterbein and Boehm, where Otterbein declared “*Wir sind Bruder!*”), formal organization took place in 1800.

¹⁰ Such as Ahlstrom’s “American Evangelical Protestantism,” cf. Sidney Ahlstrom, *The Religious History of the American People*, 403-454.

¹¹ See Donald W. Dayton, “The Search for the Historical Evangelicalism”: George Marsden’s History of Fuller Seminary as a Case Study,” symposium, *Christian Scholar’s Review* 23 (September 1993): 13. Germans have developed the word “*Evangelikal*” to denote the latter.

the Albright brethren of 1803, “*Evangelisch*” denoted a distinctive pietistic-revivalist usage that might succinctly be translated as “awakened.”

By the mid-nineteenth century, these bodies were breaking out of their ethnic identity and were becoming participants in the Protestant evangelical currents. Hence, Evangelicals¹² were second only to the Methodists in the number of their clergy present for the Vineland (NJ) and Manheim (PA) national holiness camp meetings.¹³ They also contributed leaders to the wider evangelical movements, such as the Wesleyan holiness theologian H. Orton Wiley, who moved to the Nazarenes, and Daniel Poling, editor of the *Christian Herald*.¹⁴ Moving quickly into the ecumenical scene, Evangelicals also contributed one president of the Federal Council of Churches and one president of its successor, the National Council of Churches in the postwar era.¹⁵ The UB, who assimilated to the Anglo-American culture earlier than Evangelicals due to their adoption of the English language, made relatively larger contributions to the wider public life of the nation. As examples, Francis Scott Key was a UB song leader in Baltimore when he composed the song that became the American national anthem; the Dwight Eisenhowers were married in a Kansas UB congregation—Mamie’s home church; and, more significantly, the Wright brothers were actively involved in UB Church controversies in support of their father, Bishop Milton Wright.¹⁶

However, our concern here is not to document the larger contributions of these bodies to their culture, but rather it is to examine the extent to which they exemplify aspects of the recent discussion¹⁷ concerning how American evangelicalism is to be understood, as well as the ways in which that evangelicalism has been nourished by them. Our focus upon the division that occurred in the UB in 1889 (including comparisons with the EA split of 1891) will attempt to examine this data afresh. Previous interpreters¹⁸ have attempted to read these events against the conservative/liberal grid, with re-

¹² When this term is capitalized in this paper, we refer to the Evangelical Association (EA).

¹³ The National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness was organized at Vineland, New Jersey in 1867 under the leadership of Methodist John Inskip.

¹⁴ Stan Ingersoll, archivist for the Church of the Nazarene, reported to the EUB Heritage Center: “Among the Prominent Nazarenes who were raised in the EUB tradition are systematic theologian W. Orton Wiley; . . . Theodore and Minnie Ludwig, popular evangelists; and their son S. T. Ludwig, who became general secretary of the denomination in 1948; C. W. Ruta, a key figure in the mergers that created the Church of the Nazarene; and B. Edgar Johnson, general secretary from 1964 to 1990. From *The Telescope Messenger* 4 (summer 1994): 5; and Raymond W. Albright, *History of the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Evangelical Press, 1942), 384.

¹⁵ Bishop John S. Stamm served as president of the FCC in the 1940s and Bishop Reuben H. Mueller served as president of the NCC in the 1960s.

¹⁶ For discussions of these events, see Bruce Behney and Paul Eller, *History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979).

¹⁷ See Donald W. Dayton, “‘The Search for the Historical Evangelicalism’: George Marsden’s History of Fuller Seminary as a Case Study,” symposium, *Christian Scholar’s Review* 23 (September 1993): 12-33.

¹⁸ See especially the voluminous study of William Naumann, “Theology and German-American Evangelicalism; The Role of Theology in the Evangelical United Brethren Church” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1966).

gard to the positions taken on such classical doctrinal issues as the authority of Scripture and attitudes toward new theological tendencies. Such analysis is informative but it is somehow deficient in providing an explanation for those divisions. It will be argued here that the grid proposed by Dayton is more adequate, in that these splits highlight the polarity between bourgeois-liberal, and radical-sectarian tendencies in each group. At the same time, the presence of Pietist motifs offers a different context for distinguishing these splits from similar occurrences in Anglo-based traditions.

The Constitutional Crisis of the United Brethren in Christ (1889)

Any attempt to read the UB split of 1889 as a harbinger of the later modernist fundamentalist controversies of the 1920s¹⁹ must immediately come to terms with the fact that the parties to this conflict described themselves by the labels “liberal,” on the one side, and “radical,” on the other. While the latter, minority party, became influenced by fundamentalist and, more recently, by neo-evangelical polemics, these twentieth-century movements also made their inroads into the descendants of the liberal majority of 1889.²⁰

What distinguished the “radical” UB of the 1880s from their “liberal” colleagues was their appeal to the primitive “root” (the base meaning of radical) of their church tradition, as represented in the original Confession of Faith that originated with Otterbein’s Baltimore ministry in 1889, and the original church constitution of 1841. On the other hand, the liberals coalesced at the General Conference of 1885 to prepare and promote the adoption of a revised Confession of Faith and Constitution that would make room for the growing “bourgeoisification” of the denomination, especially at the point of dropping the older prohibition against membership in secret societies. This proposal was forthcoming in view of the fact that Freemasonry was growing in its appeal among the post-Civil War generations of UB laity and clergy.²¹

Opposition to secret societies was also prevalent among holiness bodies that were separating from Methodism in the nineteenth-century.²² However, the radical UB were at least implicitly motivated by the radical Pietist ecclesiological legacy that was clearly reflected in the minutes of the early pro-

¹⁹ Naumann (214) hints in this direction with his reference to “progressivist” elements on the liberal side, which leaves the impression that their opponents argued the converse side; see also Behney and Eller, 228.

²⁰ E.g., I. L. Kephart, “What Should Preachers Do with the Higher Criticism?” *Religious Telescope*, 7 March 1894, 145; and E. F. Burr, “Concerning ‘the Destructive Higher Criticism,’” *Religious Telescope*, 22 May 1907, 5.

²¹ Between 1850 and 1880 this reorganized Masonry grew from 66,000 to 550,000 members, and it inspired a host of imitators, such as the Old Fellows, Red Men, Knights of Pythias, and many others. See Daryl M. Elliott, “Bishop Milton Wright and the Quest for a Christian America” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1992), 168.

²² This anti-secrecy society tendency was evident among the Wesleyan and Free Methodists (1840s and 1860, respectively), and among new “come outer” bodies to be formed in the 1890s or thereafter—including the Nazarenes, Pilgrims, and others. See Melvin Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth-Century*.

toloc of the UB, as well as in their constitutional name. When they adopted the title “The United Brotherhood in Christ Jesus” at the organizational conference of 1800, the minutes reiterate the point that, unlike the confessional state church traditions of Europe, they were to be an open or unpartisan (*unparteiische*) fellowship, “untrammled by sect or opinion.”²³

This “unpartisan” ecclesial theme was first explicated by the radical Pietist church historian, Gottfried Arnold, in his seminal work, *Die Unparteiische Kirche und Ketzer Historie* (1699).²⁴ Arnold had here contended that the authentic witnesses to apostolic Christian faith had always been found among the repressed and persecuted minorities, including the Montanists, Donatists, Cathari, Waldensians, spiritual Franciscans, Lollards and Husites, Anabaptists, and radical Pietists. He had proposed that church history be rewritten from their perspective, rather than that of the dominating confessional parties, which to him represented a perverse collusion of throne and altar. Writing in the aftermath of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), that perversity had appeared all the more malignant to him. In one sense, this was an updating and enlargement of the Anabaptist two-world theodicy, that now reflected the travail of the seventeenth-century and the emerging *Aufklärung*. For Arnold, the key to identifying the authentic witness to the gospel was not to be found in the sectarian protocol and baptismal ritual of the older Anabaptists. Instead, it was to be the witness of the Spirit in the re-born, who were being identified and called out in the midst of all competing confessional “parties,” in anticipation of the hastening day of the Lord.

In the early eighteenth-century, major aspects of this outlook were being covertly integrated into the “church” piety of leading German Reformed Pietists, particularly the practical dogmatician Friedrich Adolph Lampe (1683-1729) and, to a lesser extent, the celebrated hymnist and devotional writer, Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769). The major German Reformed confessional standard, the Heidelberg Catechism (the most ironic of all Reformation symbols), appropriately was susceptible of being interpreted in Arnold-like fashion. The Catechism spoke of the church as that community which God was gathering unto Himself from all generations (and locales!) into a living relationship with the reigning Christ, and in anticipation of His final eschatological victory.²⁵

The connecting point for our discussion of the radical UB is that Lampe’s

²³ “Protocol of the United Brethren in Christ,” (September 23, 1801); in Arthur Core, *Philip William Otterbein; Pastor, Ecumenist* (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1968), 121. (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1980), 204-295.

²⁴ See Peter Erb, *Pietists, Protestants and Mysticism; The Use of Late Medieval Spiritual Texts in the Work of Gottfried Arnold* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1989).

²⁵ *The Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), (Philadelphia: United Church edition, 1963), Questions 52-54. This eschatological focus in the Catechism was fueled by the fact that the German Reformed were in a precarious political situation, being lodged between dominating Lutheran and Roman Catholic power centers in the Empire, and so their hope was nourished by a transcendent perspective of divine intervention. I have developed this position in my *Pilgrims of Faith; The Legacy of the Otterbeins* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1973), 2-43.

work²⁶ was the principal textbook under which Otterbein was educated. He and his colleagues²⁷ were also conversant with the work of Tersteegen and Arnold. Otterbein fashioned the confessional statement and protocol for the early UB in the context of his service as a German Reformed missionary to Baltimore and its environs (1784-1813), where his ministry broke out of its parochial boundaries to impact the “awakened” among other German traditions (especially the Mennonites of Martin Boehm’s permission). There was also linkage between the emerging “unpartisan” church of the reborn and his implicit eschatological focus. In a letter written to a colleague, Otterbein embraced the postmillennial outlook of his mentor (Lampe), anticipating that there is to be “a more glorious state of the church on earth.”²⁸

It was not the effect of the later holiness movement, but rather it was this radical Pietist ecclesial outlook of the early UB, with its ecumenical and eschatological foci, that helped to position them early to oppose disparities of race and gender within their ranks. As early as 1821, they forbade slave ownership among their members—many of whom lived in Maryland and Virginia—and the institution of slavery was condemned in the *Discipline* as being inconsistent with the reign of Christ on earth. In addition, women were admitted to the ranks of the UB clergy long before this practice was accepted in Episcopal Methodism.²⁹ These “unpartisan” ethical standards were also viewed as an expression or fruit of the holiness that is grounded in the indwelling Christ within the lives of the reborn.³⁰

By the 1880s, the UB had long abandoned Otterbein’s vision of an informal, interconfessional brotherhood of the reborn in Christ in favor of a strongly denominational self-consciousness.³¹ UB polity included a single, rather than a twofold ordination (elders only); superintendents, elected by members of the annual conference, represented the interests of the preachers

²⁶ F. A. Lampe, *Geheimnis des Gnadenbundes* (Bremen, 1712-1721).

²⁷ Otterbein was visited in his parish at York, Pennsylvania, by a student of Tersteegen, Johann Christian Stahlschmidt, who recorded his visit in a journal entitled, *A Pilgrimage by Sea and Land* (tr. by Samuel Jackson) (London, 1837), 242-246.

²⁸ P. W. Otterbein, “Letter Concerning the Millennium,” in Core, *Philip William Otterbein; Pastor, Ecumenist*, 102-103.

²⁹ The UB ordained Ella Niswanger on September 13, 1889; earlier, Charity Orpheral was licensed by the White River Conference in the 1850s. See Jonathan Cooney, “Maintaining the Tradition: Women Elders and the Ordination of Women in the Evangelical United Brethren Church,” *Methodist History* 28 (October 1988): 25-35.

³⁰ Otterbein wrote, “We must be renewed by Him in such a way that He gains an importance in us, which alone can bring us the rest, peace, salvation, and happiness from and in God,” in “The Salvation-Bringing Incarnation and Glorious Victory of Jesus Christ over the Devil and Death,” Core, 87.

³¹ A major denominational history had been published in 1869 by John Lawrence that had, in Arnold fashion, identified the UB as the rightful heirs of the old believers’ church tradition, rooted in the *Unitas Natem* of the Czech Brethren. It is noteworthy that their seventeenth-century leader, Jan Comenius, had been a graduate of the Herborn academy, from which P.W. Otterbein, that organizer of the United Brethren in North America, also graduated in the eighteenth-century. See John Lawrence, *History of the United Brethren in Christ* (Dayton: William Shuey, 1868), 2 vols.

before the presiding bishop; bishops were elected to four-year terms; and local as well as traveling preachers had full voting privileges in the annual conferences. Although they had grown to more than 200,000 members, they were still the most rural of all major American denominations.³² However, the UB was increasingly marked by growing bourgeois tendencies that included the acceptance of secret society membership among an increasing number of their members. This cultural accommodation was viewed as “progressivism” by the liberals. Their rationale is typified by the argument of one preacher, who declared that

Otterbein had pronounced anti-secrecy opinions, and as a result for three quarters of a century members of secret orders were not admitted into the fellowship of this Church. This, with the lack of organization and the transition from the German to the English, retarded our progress so that many other denominations have outgrown us. Frequently our ministers have gone into new communities and held great revival meetings with large numbers of converts, nearly all of whom would become members of other churches. The converts were members of secret orders and could not unite with us. In this we followed Otterbein too long.³³

The criterion this author values is denominational success, with no attention given to the theological basis that had supported the anti-secrecy position. In the perception of the liberals, adhering to that position meant that “our churches everywhere in the cities and towns almost perished, being sustained only by a sacrificial ministry and . . . a few poor lay members.” From this perspective, the new constitution was perceived to be the key to UB survival. “At York, Pennsylvania, in 1889, on the very ground where Otterbein proclaimed these opinions, the General Conference declared that old law repealed;” consequently, “Since that time we are prospering generally in the cities and towns, and few religious bodies are growing so rapidly.” From the liberal perspective, not only were UB now able to “string the fish we catch;” there was now the prospect that they would experience less difficulty in “getting the world to understand who we are.” The preeminence of “the brother idea” derived from Otterbein would now be more effectively promulgated without the restrictions that had been imposed by the anti-secrecy code.³⁴

If the liberals opted for bourgeois success and adopted the less restrictive policy to meet that end, the radicals held out for integrity and non-accommodation of the original, unaltered constitution and Confession of Faith. Continued opposition toward secret societies became the rallying point. Significantly, each side was following a course that it thought would best facilitate the commonly-held ideal of promoting a “Christian America.”³⁵

³² Robert Todd, *How Churches Pioneer in American Communities* (White Pigeon, Mich.: Swihart, 1857), 80-87.

³³ E. W. Curtis, “Philip William Otterbein,” *The United Brethren Quarterly Review*, III (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1892): 249-250.

³⁴ Curtis, 250.

³⁵ The radicals’ adherence to this ideal, under the leadership of Bishop Wright, is explicated by Elliott, 48-107.

For his part, the radical UB leader, Bishop Milton Wright pursued a course that was designed to guard American society as well as the UB denomination against what he perceived to be the encroachment of deistic heresy clothed in the moralistic hues of Freemasonry. The main point is that Wright did not rise to his leadership role in this crisis as a fundamentalist, but rather with the postmillennial outlook that was characteristic of nineteenth-century American evangelicalism,³⁶ and with the encouragement of friends such as Jonathan Blanchard, the holiness-reformer president of Wheaton College.³⁷ America, believed Wright, was to be at the vanguard of the millennium on earth, an event that cannot come to pass until the church first cleanses itself to overcome the persisting enemies of God.³⁸ What was at stake in freemasonry was the secularization of Christianity in the name of “enlightened liberality,” and Wright believed that a minister who denied the threat from this source should be “branded as a traitor to the truth.”³⁹ Like Blanchard, Wright’s anti-secrecy zeal was seen as a continuation of the ante-bellum antislavery crusade, in that both evils were tolerated by clergy to retain the wealth of the affluent for the church.⁴⁰

In 1867, Blanchard had called for a conference of anti-secrecy evangelicals to meet in Aurora, Illinois, which led to the formation of the National Christian Association. Due to heavy UB participation, the first president elected to lead the Association was UB Bishop David Edwards.⁴¹ Wright became a contributor to Blanchard’s *Christian Cynosure*, and was elected the CSA vice-president in 1876.⁴² Here was a joining of the holiness movement agenda with the older radical Pietist ethos of the UB. Methodist Episcopal and Evangelical participation were notably absent from the CSA movement.

Wright had also served as editor of the official UB periodical *The Religious Telescope* from 1870 to 1877, which he had increasingly turned into an

³⁶ Wright personally owned the Otterbein letter that explains the founder’s postmillennial position. See Elliott, 127.

³⁷ For an analysis of Blanchard’s relationship to Wright, see 182-207.

³⁸ In overcoming these vestiges of evil, Wright, according to Elliott, contends for the regal rights of blacks, a continuation of Reconstruction politics in the South, humane treatment of native Americans in the course of extending Christian civilization on the Western frontier, advocacy of women’s voting rights in church and state, the need to convert immigrants to Protestant Christianity, fear of Roman Catholic encroachment into national life, Sabbatarianism, temperance, and the responsible uses of wealth. See Elliott, 137-166.

³⁹ Milton Wright, “The Church and Secret Societies,” *Religious Telescope*, 11 December 1878, 2; Elliott, 172.

⁴⁰ Elliott, 173, 181-182. Wright called Blanchard a “Champion of reform.” See Milton Wright, “The Anniversary at Pittsburgh,” *Religious Telescope*, 16 June 1875, 25.

⁴¹ “The National Anti-Secret Society Convention,” *Religious Telescope*, 13 May 1868, 284; Elliott, 183. Other participants included Reformed Presbyterians, United Presbyterians, Free Methodists, German Baptists, Swedish Lutherans, Evangelical Lutherans, and Wesleyan Methodists. See *A Brief History of the National Christian Associations* (Chicago: Ezra Cook and Company, 1875), 28.

⁴² Milton Wright to J. Blanchard, 19 January 1875, printed in “Sound Sense,” *Christian Cynosure*, 28 January 1875; cited in Elliott, 184.

ardent anti-secrecy organ. He resigned this post after his election as bishop in 1877 with support from his anti-secrecy constituency. Elliott refers to this group as “conservatives,” in view of their opposition to the growing pro-freemasonry “liberal” faction.⁴³ This description obscures the radical, pro-reform outlook of Wright’s group, especially in view of Wright’s praise of Blanchard as a fellow “reform” leader.⁴⁴ Further, the Wright group did not stand opposed to the liberals’ advocacy of pro-rata representation and lay delegation in church conferences, but only to the liberals’ linkage of those issues to their goal of rescinding the anti-secrecy prohibition in the church constitution. The liberals had hoped that the laity and the more populous eastern conferences would increase the representation at General Conference in favor of rescinding the secrecy rule.⁴⁵

Wright’s opponents were relieved when he was assigned to the Western Episcopal area in 1877, where he would be distant from the centers of controversy. Liberal, pro-secrecy forces gained strength at the 1881 General Conference, and their position was secured by the passage of pro-rata representation.⁴⁶ Further, when Wright was defeated for re-election as bishop, Blanchard blamed that defeat on the failure of radicals to support Wright fully, believing that Wright had “softened” his anti-secrecy campaign.⁴⁷ As a matter of fact, Wright’s denominational loyalty was now being called into question in view of his collaboration with Blanchard in an abortive proposal to organize a new association of anti-secrecy churches, to be called the “United Churches of Christ.”⁴⁸ Elliott reports that Wright persuaded Blanchard to drop the term “United,” to avoid the appearance of forming a new sect, other than an association of Churches.⁴⁹ To that extent, Wright’s churchmanship had prevailed over his reform agenda.

Liberal and radical forces polarized further in the decade of the 1880s, leading to the split of 1889. Divested of the office of bishop, Wright moved to Richmond, Indiana, where he edited an anti-secrecy organ, *The Richmond Star*, from 1882 to 1885, under the masthead “First Pure; then peaceable.”⁵⁰ Blanchard needled Wright for remaining in a denomination of “lodgedevils,” and the latter irritably objected to Blanchard’s interference in UB af-

⁴³ Elliott, 199.

⁴⁴ Wright, “The Anniversary at Pittsburgh,” *Religious Telescope*, 16 June 1875, 300.

⁴⁵ Elliott, 145, cites biblical arguments used in favor of the liberal position by William McKee, in “Notices,” in the *United Brethren Observer*, 21 May 1877, 2; for Wright’s counter position, that argued that each issue should be handled separately, see Milton Wright, “Constitutional Amendment,” *Religious Telescope*, 5 May 1875, 252; cited in Elliott, 195.

⁴⁶ *Proceedings of the Eighteenth General Conference of the United Brethren in Christ, Held in Lisbon, Iowa, from the 12th to the 26th of May, 1881, Inclusive* (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1881), 167; cited in Elliott, 207-208.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Blanchard, “Sirs, Ye Are Brethren,” Acts 7:26, *Christian Cynosure*, 21 December 1882, 8; Elliott, 208.

⁴⁸ “The United Churches of Christ,” *Christian Cynosure*, 16 July 1874, 8; Elliott, 205.

⁴⁹ Elliott, 205-206.

⁵⁰ Elliott, 212.

fairs.⁵¹ Wright opposed Blanchard's summons to "loyal" UB to follow him in forming a new denomination—a call issued in the pages of his *Christian Cynosure*.⁵²

The last phase of the debate was launched by the 1885 General Conference when it named a church commission which was charged with preparing the new Confession of Faith and constitution that would totally alter the anti-secrecy rule.⁵³ Ironically, Wright was reelected bishop for this quadrennium, but he was "safely" dispatched to the Pacific Northwest, far from the center of controversy. The liberals were now proposing a revised secrecy statement that left the impression that membership in secret societies could be accepted so long as they did not produce harmful effects on "Christian character."⁵⁴ Wright felt this was a covert attempt to abolish anti-secrecy without officially eliminating the restrictive rule which forbade actual abolition of the provisions of the constitution of 1841. In addition, the fact that the commission was appointed by General Conference and not directly elected by the total church membership was, to Wright's group, an unconstitutional act.⁵⁵

The constitutional issue at stake concerned the interpretation of an ambiguous provision in the 1841 UB Constitution that asserted, "There shall be no alteration of the foregoing constitution, unless by request of two-thirds of the whole society."⁵⁶ It was unclear whether "by request" meant "by vote" (as the term *Stimmzahl* in the German edition of the *Discipline* suggested),⁵⁷ and also whether "society" meant all members or only General Church delegates. After extensive and lively discussion throughout the denomination between 1885 and 1888, the proposals of the church commission were presented in a ballot to the entire membership. The General Conference of 1889 received a vote tally of 50,685 for the new constitution, with 3,659 opposed; 48,825 for lay representation, with 5,634 against; 51,070 for the new Confession of Faith, with 3,310 against; and 46,994 for the revised section on secret combinations, with 7,298 against.⁵⁸

When the report of the commission, as ratified by the general member-

⁵¹ Wright, *Diary*, 15 July 1881; cited in Elliott, 216.

⁵² Jonathan Blanchard, "Ichabod," *Christian Cynosure*, 9 June 1881, 8; cited in Elliott, 216.

⁵³ The text of this 1885 statement on secret societies is found in the 1885 *Discipline* (UB), 82-83.

⁵⁴ 1841 *Discipline* (UB), Article IX, Section 2, "There shall be no connection with secret combinations."

⁵⁵ *Proceedings of the Nineteenth General Conference of the United Brethren in Christ, Held in Fostoria, Ohio, from the 14th to the 27th of May, 1885, Inclusive* (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1885), 207; cited in Elliott, 220.

⁵⁶ 1841 *Discipline* (UB), Article IV; A.W. Drury, *Disciplines of the United Brethren in Christ, 1814-1841* (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1895), 207. All other regulations could be altered simply by a majority of the General Conference.

⁵⁷ *Ursprung, Lehre, Constitution und Zuchtordnung der Vereinigten Bruder in Christo* (Baltimore, 1841), in Drury, *Disciplines*, Part II, 81.

⁵⁸ *Proceedings of the Twentieth General Conference of the United Brethren in Christ, Held in York, Pennsylvania, May 9-22, 1889* (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1889), 173.

ship, was presented to the General Conference of 1889 in York, Pennsylvania, it was accepted by a vote of 110 to 20. The Conference then convened under the new constitution, which led Bishop Wright and fifteen fellow “radical” delegates to withdraw.⁵⁹ They were then denounced and evicted by the new liberal UB Conference, and they proceeded to reconvene at another site in York, where they declared themselves to be the true United Brethren in Christ, under the original constitution of 1841.

Like Wright, the liberals, led by Bishops Glossbrenner, Weaver, Castle, and Mills, had also been ardent opponents of slavery, and they often took progressive stands in social issues. However, the “secret combination” section of the old constitution had proved to be the fault line that allowed the emergence of two opposing attitudes toward the bourgeoisification of the denomination. The other radical bishop, John Dickson, now came over to the liberal side.⁶⁰ Wright’s radicals had been as shocked by the liberals’ use of political manipulation to advance their agenda as by their accommodationist position itself. Whereas the official periodical, *The Religious Telescope*, applauded the “mandate” for change that the one-sided vote represented,⁶¹ the radicals’ new organ, *The Christian Conservator*, read the outcome in a quite different light. It charged that, by dubious methods, including the “suppression of facts,” 46,947 votes had been secured against secret combinations, out of a membership of more than 200,000. By the radicals’ reckoning, the vote should have been two-thirds of the total membership, or at least 132,000 votes.⁶² Elliott reports that this radical perspective was also upheld by Orville and Wilbur Wright, who wrote an article in their newspaper, *The Dayton West Side News*, asserting that the liberals were the real schismatics.⁶³

In retrospect, the triumph of sectarian tendencies is evident among the radicals and these were later exacerbated by further internal splits within the Old Constitution group that also involved Wright. The liberals adopted a new Confession of Faith that more fully explicated the doctrines of classical orthodoxy than did the original, terse Confession from Otterbein.⁶⁴ It also adopted the more formalized “Article” format, resembling more the Anglican and the Methodist Articles of Religion, than the simple, narrative style of the old Confession. The liberals thereby were representing a more conserva-

⁵⁹ *UB General Conference Minutes* (1889), 196; also, Behney and Eller, 186. Wright had even gone so far as to declare his willingness to abide by a change in the secrecy rule, if it would be done in a constitutional way. *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Twentieth General Conference of the United Brethren in Christ, convened at York, PA, May 9-19, 1889* (Dayton: Milton Wright, 1889), 24; Elliott 247.

⁶⁰ The “radicals” organized as the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (Old Constitution), with only ca. 20,000 members, and a college and headquarters at Huntington, Indiana.

⁶¹ “Vote of the Commission,” *Religious Telescope*, 23 January 1889, 53; cited in Elliott, 240.

⁶² “The Vote,” *Christian Conservator*, 14 February 1889, 4; cited in Elliott, 242.

⁶³ “United Brethren General Conference,” *Dayton West Side News*, 11 May 1889, I; cited by Elliott, 244.

⁶⁴ See J. S. O’Malley, “A Distinctive German-American Credo; The United Brethren Confession of Faith,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 42 (spring 1987): 51-64.

tive, traditional outlook and the radicals a more primitive, countercultural outlook.

However, from another angle, this split resulted in the heightening of a conservative/liberal polarity (with the radicals as the conservatives and the liberals as the liberals), since Wright's radicals tended to view the pro-secrecy liberals as accommodationists to an increasingly secularized culture.⁶⁵ From the base line of that critique, Wright had also objected to other aspects of *Kultur-protestantismus* in America, including those that he saw in the liberal theology of the "fashionable" Brooklyn Presbyterian pulpiteer, Henry Ward Beecher in the 1870s.⁶⁶ Wright's critique of Beecher's flirtation with biblical higher criticism and Darwinism is solidly couched in his disdain for Beecher's New York cosmopolitanism. Wright's context was his agrarian Midwestern revivalism, for which the new birth, that he found missing in Beecher, was normative as the measure of orthodoxy.⁶⁷ However, this was not a critique directed against liberal UB, most of whom would share Wright's culture-based critique of Beecher.

Even after the split, as Naumann has established,⁶⁸ theological liberalism was a distinct minority among the main (e.g. liberal) UB body, being represented mainly by Bishop William Bell's advocacy of the social gospel agenda.⁶⁹ Despite the UB liberals' "bourgeoisifying" tendency, as seen in the secret society controversy, they too continued to reflect in large measure a theological and social conservatism based on their rural, Midwestern, and even populist ethos.⁷⁰ One symbolic indication of the UB conservative populist tendency is the fact that the featured speaker at three successive (liberal) UB General Conferences was the populist presidential aspirant, William Jennings Bryan.⁷¹ In response to Bryan's 1921 UB address, Bishop M. W. Weekley introduced a General Conference resolution, signed by a Bonebrake Seminary professor, thanking God that the blight of "materialistic unbelief . . . for the most part has failed to find advocates in our church," and "that this

⁶⁵ See Elliott, 252-318.

⁶⁶ Marsden argues that Beecher modified his doctrinal views to accommodate his more urbane congregation. See George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 22-25.

⁶⁷ For Wright's critique of Beecher's urbane modernism see his "How are the Mighty Fallen," *Religious Telescope*, 31 July 1872, 380; and his "Orthodox Support of Heterodoxy," *Religious Telescope*, 21 July 1875, 340; cited in Elliott, 333.

⁶⁸ Naumann, 266-300.

⁶⁹ William Bell, *The Social Message of our Lord* (Dayton: Otterbein Press, 1909).

⁷⁰ Naumann has observed a heavy reliance by UB and Evangelicals upon the common sense realist philosophy of Joseph Cook which they adapted as an apologetic for their brand of evangelical orthodoxy. See Naumann, 152-196. Although some liberal titles appeared in the UB course of study for preachers, UB liberals—as well as the radicals—rather consistently held to a position of biblical literalism. For example, before J.W. Hott was elected as a liberal bishop in 1889, he wrote an editorial condemning the abandonment of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and warned against subjecting biblical interpretation to conform to schools of modern philosophy. J. W. Gott, "Dangers of Modern Tendencies in Christianity," *Religious Telescope*, 27 February 1889, 129.

⁷¹ Naumann, 347.

conference send out its word of warning to our clergy, membership, church boards, and school faculties, that they be on their guard constantly against the subtle encroachment of these dangerous tendencies or our age."⁷²

An important indicator in evaluating the character of evangelicalism in the two branches of the UB is their respective positions on eschatological, and especially millennial interpretation. If the UB split is read from the perspective of the later modernist/fundamentalist controversy, one would expect the liberals to be the postmillennialists and the radicals the premillennialists. It is true that the social gospel movement, with its postmillennial orientation, gained a hearing among the liberals, especially through the writing of Bishop William Bell. Further, the liberal UB became participants in the ecumenical movement, including the Federal and National Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches, whereas the radicals gravitated toward the NAE. However, Bishop Wright was an ardent postmillennialist and it was his vision of a Christian America as the vanguard of the millennium on earth that energized his opposition to freemasonry as one of the final enemies of the Kingdom that must be eradicated from a purified church.⁷³

By contrast, the liberal UB displayed an ambivalence toward the millennial issue that was in large measure a function of a denomination moving toward "mainline" status, which also reflected the polarity of the larger debate in American evangelical Protestantism. On the one hand, some liberal UB leaders, such as Bishop J. S. Mills, detected in the growing cooperation among American denominations signs of the dawning millennium.⁷⁴ Another Bishop, Jonathan Weaver, stated that this trend toward unity announced the approaching time "when the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and when we shall all be united in spirit, and move against the powers of darkness" (which, to Weaver, certainly did not include the Freemasons!)⁷⁵ The bishops' quadrennial address in 1893 carried this theme further with the words, "The early dawn of the age of all ages is upon the sky, . . . Living, walking, practical, working Christianity is superseding mere dogma, and the cry of the world is for the universal reign of Jesus, the Christ. . . ."⁷⁶ I. L. Kephart, *Religious Telescope* editor from 1889 to 1908, saw millennial implications in the rapid growth of his denomination in the decade following the split (from 199,000 after the radical secession to 241,000 in 1900).⁷⁷

On the other hand, Kephart's successor as *Religious Telescope* editor, J. M. Phillippi, who occupied that office during the eruption of the modernist/fundamentalist conflict, was an ardent premillennialist. The postmillen-

⁷² *United Brethren in Christ General Conference Journal* (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1921), 559; signed by Professor J.P. Landis; cited in Naumann, 347.

⁷³ See Milton Wright, "The Millennium's Approach," *Christian Conservator*, 1 December 1887, 1; cited in Elliott, 128; see also Elliott, 124-131.

⁷⁴ Naumann, 387.

⁷⁵ *General Conference Journal of the Church of the United Brethren Christ* (1893) (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1893), 328.

⁷⁶ *General Conference Journal* (1893), 14.

⁷⁷ I. L. Kephart, "The Coming of His Kingdom," *Religious Telescope*, 3 June 1908, 3.

nial position was barred from being voiced in that journal throughout the duration of his tenure, until 1926.⁷⁸ Phillippi was seeking to position the liberal UB on the fundamentalist side of that debate, whereas his successor reversed that stance once again in favor of postmillennialism.⁷⁹

In brief, the postmillennialist vision of a Christian America could at various times flourish either among radicals or liberals, with the secret society issue appearing to cause no consistent divergence on the question of the millennium. What was seen as cultural accommodation, and even diabolic apostasy, to the one, was viewed by the other side as a higher, end time manifestation of Christian brotherhood. Each side in the split argued their position by appealing to Otterbein and the “unpartisan” (*unparteiisch*) Pietist tradition of the early UB—the radicals appealed to Otterbein’s exclusion of secret combinations as being antithetical to the openness of that brotherhood; the liberals appealed to the inclusiveness inherent in the brotherhood motif, although their position contradicted the practice of Otterbein and his colleagues. In their mind, they were appealing to the spirit but not the letter of their predecessors.

With Parallel Steps: The Evangelical Association Split (1891-1894)

Although a further paper is needed to explicate the split in the EA during the same era, it is instructive for our study of the UB split to notice the major points of comparison between the two, since a number of related historical and theological factors are present here as well.

Like the UB, the early EA was deeply imprinted by German Pietism, but the EA environment for its transmission differed in two respects. First, the early “Albright brethren,” as they were called, were consciously patterned along the lines of Episcopal Methodism, which means that the Pietist motifs that have previously been identified were interacting here with a more classical Wesleyan polity and doctrinal base. For example, the extended essay on entire sanctification in the EA *Disciplines* from 1809 to 1959 is far more complete than any discussion of that doctrine in the Methodist *Disciplines*,⁸⁰ and the EA is the first American denomination to set forth this doctrine in an official declaration. This fact alone should entitle the EA to more attention in current Wesleyan holiness research.⁸¹ Second, the EA persisted in the use

⁷⁸ Naumann, 398.

⁷⁹ Within three months of editor Phillippi’s death, his successor had announced that “I believe that the main object Jesus Christ had in view was to set up the Kingdom of God upon this earth,” in “My Creed,” *Religious Telescope*, 11 December 1926, 3.

⁸⁰ This essay was the work of George Miller, who, after Jacob Albright’s death in 1808, was commissioned to draft a *Discipline* and Articles of Faith based on a German translation of the Methodist Articles of Religion. However, the essay on sanctification was Miller’s addition to these articles, as well as his article on eschatology. See Behney and Eller, 78-79.

⁸¹ The statement by Dieter that the Wesleyan Methodists were the first body to identify with an official holiness statement at its founding, thereby stands in need of correction. See Melvin Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1974), 125.

of German for a longer time and more pervasively than did the UB,⁸² which meant that its members maintained a greater use of Pietist sources, and these sources carried an even greater significance for the EA.

The EA experienced considerable internal agitation from debates on Christian holiness that began in 1859 and continued for two decades.⁸³ By 1891, the lines that had been drawn over this debate had become complicated by the intrusion of several other factors. These included a personal dispute between two groups of bishops and church editors (the foremost factor); differences concerning church polity, Episcopal authority and lay representation; regional identity (West vs. East); and a controversy over the rise of German vs. English in church functions.⁸⁴ The secret society issue was not an issue at stake here, and there were members of both sides of this split who were participants in freemasonry. To a larger extent than the UB, EA membership included German craftsmen and shop owners in small towns and cities who were excluded from the religious and social network of fellow German Lutherans and Catholics due to their nonconformist, revivalist religion. Hence, the lodge provided an important web of social and economic contacts and *Gemeinschaft* for them that helped them assimilate into the larger American culture.

The EA split was precipitated in 1891 when two rival General Conferences were held. The majority group, meeting in Indianapolis and representing three-fifths of the membership of some 150,000, retained the original denominational name, the EA, whereas the minority group met in Philadelphia. In 1894, the latter became the United Evangelical Church (UEC), after a series of divisive legal struggles in church and civil courts. The majority group (the EA) represented the following features: an uncompromising defense of the holiness doctrine, a higher view of Episcopal authority, continued denial of lay representation, adherence to the original "trust clause" concerning property ownership, continued reliance on German in church functions, and a greater concentration in the West (e.g., Midwest and Canada), where more recent German immigration was concentrated. The EA also maintained control of the rapidly expanding free church mission of the denomination in German-speaking sections of Europe.

By contrast, the UEC represented the following features: a revision of the Articles of Faith and of the section on entire sanctification in the *Discipline* by adopting major quotations from the theology of the Garrett Methodist

⁸² This influence finally was shattered in the era of World War I, although the German denominational organ, *Der Christliche Botschafter*, continued until 1947, making it the longest running German Protestant religious periodical in American history. See Behney and Eller, 347.

⁸³ See Ralph K. Schwab, *History of the Doctrine of Holiness in the Evangelical Association* (Menasha, Wis.: Banta, 1922).

⁸⁴ See Terry Heisey, "Immigration as a Factor in the Division of the Evangelical Association," *Methodist History* 9 (October 1980): 41-57.

Episcopal theologian Milton S. Terry;⁸⁵ adoption of a more limited view of Episcopal authority, lay representation in church conferences; greater congregational control of church property; a swifter transition to English in church functions; and a concentration of membership in the older, Eastern sectors of the church, where greater assimilation to American culture had occurred.

It is evident in this split where the conservative/liberal tendencies lay, although the issues that define the later fundamentalist/modernist conflict really are not yet present in the EA/UEC discussion. There were also post-and pre-millennial voices in both groups. The embourgeoisment process, at work in both groups, was operating against an ethnic religio-cultural conservatism. At the same time, the persistence of the older Pietist motifs of *Wiedergeburt*, *Absondeung*, and *Erneuerung* (new birth, separation from the world, and personal renewal), interwoven with the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification (*Heiligung*), provided a basis for Christian witness and community life that resisted the secularizing aspects of their bourgeoisfying tendencies.⁸⁶

These issues ceased to be divisive for most Evangelicals in 1921-1922, when the two groups reunited to form the Evangelical Church. How the issues were resolved is beyond the scope of our study. A minority group continues, known as the Evangelical Congregational Church, that still adheres to the more radical (congregational) aspects of UEC polity, although it (like the UB Old Constitution Church) is now usually regarded as the more conservative body.

Conclusion

This study has sought to show how American “evangelicalism” needs to be broadened to include the contribution of German-American Pietist influences. The groups that mediated those influences in a revivalist mode, especially the UB and EA, became active participants in the wider Wesleyan-holiness movement and in the struggle to define and secure a Christian America. Dayton’s criteria for evaluating American evangelicalism have been helpful in reevaluating this material. The division of the UB in 1889 and the parallel split within the EA has become a focal point for assessing the relative impact of a set of theological and cultural factors that were transforming German-American evangelicalism as it had been practiced since the eighteenth-century. These tensions were also positioning these churches to enter into larger streams of American society in the twentieth century.

⁸⁵ This use of Terry has been carefully documented by Harold Scanlin in his article “The Origin of the Articles of Faith of the United Evangelical Church,” *Methodist History* 18 (July 1980): 219-238.

⁸⁶ New light on the EA/UEC split is shed in an unpublished chapter by the late Raymond Albright that had been rejected by the denominational publishers when he submitted his manuscript that became the authoritative history of the denomination. See Raymond Albright, *History of the Evangelical Church* (Cleveland & Harrisburg: Evangelical Press, 1942).