THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE OTTERBEINS

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It has recently been recognized that the Evangelical United Brethren heritage within The United Methodist Church is not to be categorized as merely the German variety of Methodism. Rather, it represents a nexus of distinctive emphases in theology and polity. Jeffrey Mickle has broken fresh ground in examining the doctrine of the ministry in Philip William Otterbein (1726-1813), the chief figure in the formation of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.\(^1\) Much work remains to be done to gain a proper understanding of Otterbein's theological heritage.\(^2\) A key problem in this task is that of examining the nature and function of hermeneutics in his thought and work.

I

This task cannot properly be completed unless we view Otterbein in relation to his brothers who remained pastors within the Reformed Church in Germany. A historical prologue is in order. Of special importance is Georg Gottfried Otterbein (1728-1800), pastor at Duisburg and author of numerous volumes of homilies and commentaries upon Scripture as interpreted by the Heidelberg Catechism, which had come to be the chief confessional symbol among the adherents of the German Reformed faith. Philip William Otterbein was a member of a distinguished family of clergymen. His father (Johann Daniel, d. 1742) and four brothers were pastors within that tradition. After his father's unexpected death, his mother Wilhelmina was resolved that all her sons would graduate from the Reformed Academy at Herborn, in the imperial province of Nassau, and this they did. Otterbein served for three years as a perceptor in the Academy and as pastor at Ockersdorf when he responded to the call of the Reverend Michael Schlatter, the representative of the synodal office in Amsterdam, to become one of six missionary recruits from Herborn to America. His mother had told him, "This place is too narrow for you—you are so open and prophet-like."\(^3\) He had unsettled his indifferent

\(^2\) The author is currently undertaking a translation of George Gottfried Otterbein's extensive Predigten über den Heidelbischen Katechismus, 2 Volumes, (Duisburg: Helwing, 1800).
parishioners by introducing pietistic conventicles—a practice he was to continue in his several pastorates in the Middle Colonies from 1752 until his death in 1813.

In America, Otterbein served numerous German Reformed parishes in Pennsylvania and Maryland.4 He experienced a decisive spiritual awakening at Lancaster.5 One result was the inauguration of a policy of personal pastoral visitations preceding the Lord’s Supper.6 He wanted to know whether his parishioners were manifesting visible signs of grace. He was also seeking to bring them into a relationship of accountability amid the irregular living conditions of the American frontier. As another result of his personal spiritual awakening, he began to combine the role of pastor with that of an itinerating evangelist in an effort to make contact with the unevangelized German immigrants. He developed a distinctive model of the pastor-evangelist with a congregational base that contrasts with the itinerant plan of the Methodist preachers. Two consequences of his style of ministry were the subsequent provision in the Discipline of the United Brethren in Christ that preachers shall hold membership in their local charge as well as in the annual conference, and the provision that local preachers shall have voting rights in annual conferences.7

Another consequence of Otterbein’s awakening was his launching of what has been called the first stated prayer meetings in America (at Tulpehocken, PA, in 1758).8 In addition, he attended a “great meeting” (grosse Versammlung—a forerunner of the nineteenth-century camp meeting) at the Isaac Long barn in Lancaster County on Pentecost, 1767. Moved by the testimony of the new birth given by a Mennonite farmer-preacher named Martin Boehm, Otterbein embraced Boehm with the declaration “we are brethren” (wir sind Brüder). This forged a fellowship, deeply influenced by German Pietism, between the immigrant heirs of Anabaptism and the magisterial Reformation. It was in part a renewal of Zinzendorf’s abortive vision of the unitive Congregation of God in the Spirit. The later United Brethren Confession of Faith, presumably prepared by Otterbein,9 manifests a distinctive blending of these two polarized ecclesial traditions.

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4He served Lancaster, PA (1752-1758), Tulpehocken, PA (1758-1760), Frederick, MD (1760-1765), York, PA (1765-1774), Baltimore, MD (1774-1813). In 1770 he made one return trip to visit his brothers in Germany.

5When Asbury once asked Otterbein when he was converted, the latter replied, “By degrees was I brought to the knowledge of the truth, while I was at Lancaster.” Cited in A. W. Drury, Life of Otterbein (Dayton: UB Publishing House, 1998), p. 49.


8A. W. Drury, p. 492.
A final consequence of Otterbein’s awakening was his well-known association with Francis Asbury at Baltimore, where Otterbein served from 1774 to 1813 as pastor of the semi-independent Evangelical Reformed Church, that is now known as the Old Otterbein United Methodist Church. By then he had emerged as the de facto head of the Pietist (or “awakened”) wing of the German Reformed Coetus in America. He proceeded to establish a dual relationship with the emerging United Brethren movement, which was largely modeled after his Baltimore Church Order of 1785. In 1800 he and Boehm were each elected to be superintendents of the new movement. However, his allegiance to his mother church remained, and he regarded his participation in the United Brethren as an expression of his quest for a higher unity in Christ that might transcend traditional ecclesial barriers.

As pastor-evangelist in the New World, there is evidence that Otterbein continued to make use of the Heidelberg Catechism. The Catechism had been prepared in 1563 by two young Reformed theologians, Casper Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus, under the mandate of the Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate, who had been accused by the Lutherans of “Crypto-Calvanism.” It is irenic in tenor and broadly evangelical in context, embracing a Reformed view of law and gospel and of church and sacraments. Its focus is personal and existential, which is indicated by Question I, “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” The answer, “That I belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ,” is explicated in terms of man’s misery, his redemption in Christ, and his subsequent life in Christ as an expression of gratitude.

Although the Catechism was successfully defended by the Elector, who convinced the imperial diet that it was faithful to the consensus of the Augsburg Confession, subsequent persecution of its adherents in the Palatinate resulted in the founding of the Academy at Herborn as a citadel of irenic (and later Pietistic) Reformed orthodoxy. Here Olevianus became the first professor of systematic theology. From Herborn, John A. Comenius went forth to become the leader of the persecuted Czech

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9This confession has been examined in J. Steven O'Malley, “A Distinctive German-American Credo: The United Brethren Confession of Faith,” (unpublished paper presented at the 1975 annual meeting of the A.A.R. in St. Louis. The text of this Confession is included in the Appendix.

10His name appears in the list of distributors of his brother George G. Otterbein’s Predigten über den Heidelbgischen Katechismus, (supra); further, in Otterbein’s “Baltimore Church Order” (1785), he directed that “[The preacher] should catechize them [the youth] once a week . . .” Core, p. 112.

11See O'Malley, p. 4f.


13The principle of territorialism (Cuius regio euus religio (in the Holy Roman Empire was established by the Peace of Augsburg (1555); the Augsburg Confession was the recognized norm for the Protestant princes.
brethren, who became known as the *Unitas Fratrem*. It was here that the first treatises of Reformed Pietism were published in Germany, 14 as well as numerous Anabaptist spiritual treatises that were banned elsewhere in Europe. 15

The chief theological textbook in use there in the Otterbeins' day was the compendium of Friedrich A. Lampe (1683-1729) and Campegius Vitringa (1659-1722). Influenced by the convenantal theology of Cocceius, 16 Lampe developed an order of salvation (*Heilsordnung*) to be appropriated by the sincere inquirer in stepwise fashion, which he coordinated with the tripartite progression of the *Catechism*. 17 Vitringa, a biblical exegete, developed a symbolic-prophetic mode of exegesis, based upon typology, that led to a renewed interest in eschatology (including chiliasm), that finds its influence in the Otterbeins. 18

**II.**

Given this historical context, how shall we identify the distinctive factors in the hermeneutics of the Otterbeins?

First, their understanding of Scripture and *Catechism* is shaped by the *Ramist concept of dialectical thinking*.

As a Huguenot, the French logician Peter Ramus (d. 1572) helped to illumine the meaning of the Reformed tenet that the Spirit is the inward witness in the believer, who attests to him that the Scripture is the Word of God. 19 He also helps to illumine the meaning of Calvin's metaphor that the Bible serves as spectacles for the believer in the world, enabling him to perceive not only *that* God exists but also *who* He is, so that He can be properly worshipped. 20

Ramists, like the Pietists who were indebted to them, were more interested in how the Bible inspired its readers than in how the text of the Bible itself is inspired. In the "Forward" to his *Predigten* on the *Catechism*, Georg Otterbein wrote, "The Bible is the source, and the *Catechism* points

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14This work was W. Dieterici, *Der Wahre inwendige und auszwendige Christ* (Herborn, 1680), cited in James Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism in the Middle Colonies* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), p. 18n.
16Cocceius' teachers in the federal tradition, Crocius and Martinus, had also taught at Herborn. See O'Malley, *Pilgrimage of Faith*, p. 48.
18See Philip William Otterbein, "Letter Concerning the Millenium," in Core, op. cit., pp. 102F.
20Ibid., Book I, Chapter 6.
out the order which is derived from this source." Herein lies the *modus operandi* of the Holy Spirit. This statement presupposes the teaching method in vogue at Herborn since the days of Johannes Alsted (1588-1638), an advocate of Ramus. Unlike the formal, deductive (Aristotelian) method of reasoning that prevailed in most centers of learning, Catholic and Protestant alike, the Ramists wanted to avoid reasoning from formal (universal) categories that might be irrelevant to the life situation of the learner/seeker. Instead, dialectic is to resolve problems put in the form of questions that are constructed from real-life situations. For example, George Otterbein asked his readers, in expositing Question 1 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, "What is *your* only comfort in life and in death?" He asks his reader to search his motives for living and then asks him "What kind of hope and anticipation does he have for the time when he dies? After searching his own life, the inquirer is led to search the places in Scripture that provide the vital link between "your" and "comfort," two components of the question at hand. The testimony of Scripture and *Catechism* is that "Nowhere is there comfort, help, and rest, except by God in Christ." After the inquirer has made his personal, existential search, under the guidance of the pastor-counselor, Scripture and *Catechism*, provide the connecting links or "arguments" for one's questions about relationship to God.

The question remains, is Christ *my* only comfort in life and in death? (Q. 1) and hence "Do *I* have tranquility of soul?" Georg Otterbein asks,

> What good will it do if you mouth these words of the *Catechism* without understanding and conscious awareness? Not merely your memory but also your understanding and whole heart need to share in this. 'Struggle after it!'—is the call of our Lord to us."

According to the Ramist syllogism that the Otterbeins learned at Herborn, the "light" (that corresponded to Aristotle's major premise) is "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). The "witness" (the minor premise) says "I belong to Christ," and the crisis or judgment (the conclusion) is that "I am tranquil in soul, at peace with God." The Otterbeins placed great emphasis on the witness (the second

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., p. 82.
26 Ibid., p. 83.
step, that affirms "I belong to Christ"). If there is no surety in the witness, then the judgment or conclusion is without force. The task of the pastor is to explore the witness and produce the strength of assurance. "The inquirer wants to know what emotions the responder has about this matter which causes him to pause and ponder. What kind of hope and anticipation does he have for the time when he dies?" The main divisions of the Catechism are viewed as guidelines for helping the inquirer achieve surety in the witness:

The certainty of this comfort must be living, and it must be occupied with these three things:

1. The greatness of our sin and our misery,
2. The value and power of the redemption (in Christ) from sin and misery, (and)
3. The thankfulness which is due God for this.

The more grounded and alive this knowledge is, the greater is the certainty, and the firmer the comfort which we thereby hold."

Here is dialectic thinking adapted to the spiritual condition or conscience of the seeker who was proceeding in the light of biblical arguments to discover answers to questions that were immediately pressing. The argument provided the connecting link between the essential components of the question, as in the case of Question 1 of the Catechism. As such, an argument was not a polemical tool for use in controversy, as it was in the annals of scholastic theology, Protestant and Catholic. Instead, it is the true connection between the parts of an existentially urgent question, and as such, the argument is rational.

Alsted produced the first modern encyclopedias at Herborn in the century before the Otterbeins, as "a kind of ultimate elaboration of topics or places wherein the connecting terms or arguments could be discovered. With a question in mind, one examines the topics and arrives at the proper link between the parts of the question that issues from a situation in life [such as "can I know God?"] Hence, encyclopedias were not references for general information, as they are now generally viewed. Instead, they provided the source of topics for the discovery of arguments (or linking terms) that enhances the "rational" art of "living unto God." Alsted's topics also included references to non-theological subjects, including natural and political science, that could illumine the questions of the inquirer. Here was an inductive approach to the classification of knowledge, that is to be contrasted with the formal-deductive classification in Thomistic scholasticism.

29Ibid., p. 80.
30Ibid., p. 95.
31See Scharlemann, op. cit., ch. 1.
33This was the proper goal of logical thinking for Ramus.
For the Otterbeins, such dialectic is mainly limited to the clarification of theological issues that were the concerns of pastor-evangelists. Nevertheless, the dialectic developed for the spiritual seeker placed him in a stream of new knowledge that the Otterbeins believed was a fulfilling of Jesus' prophecy that "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth..." (John 16:13a).

This brings us to a second distinctive in the epistemology of the Otterbeins; namely, the symbolic-prophetic exegetical method of Reformed Pietism. This led the Otterbeins to interpret Scripture and Catechism as an ascending "order of salvation (Heilsordnung) that serves as the "ladder to heaven" (Himmelsleiter). There is a correlation between this personal growth in the stages of salvation and the growth in "godly wisdom" in history ("Heilsgeschichte"). The Reformed Pietist F. A. Lampe (1683-1729), the major systematic theologian that the Otterbeins read at Herborn, had asked in his Geheimnes des Gnadenbundes,

*Where will the depth of the wisdom of God be more fully opened than when the various ways whereby God has ruled in His Church are investigated and compared with one another? — How orderly one step follows the other? — How the delightful arrangement plays (or sparkles), not in a great disparity, since the antecedent is always a step of the future and that which follows is always a new and developing image of the past.*

He maintains a close relation between Word, nature, and history that anticipates the theme of secular progress in the ethos of the Enlightenment:

Since new discoveries in nature are made daily (through field glasses), what is it to wonder that new discoveries also take place through the increasing diligence in the examination of the godly Word and the promised growth in the knowledge of the last times (Dan. 12:4, Jn. 47:4) is ever further enhanced toward fulfillment?

The model which was provided rational theology by the new science had its counterpart in Reformed Pietistic theology as the symbolic-prophetic exegetical method.

Cocceius, Lampe's teacher, pioneered this method within Protestantism by positing an exegesis, noted in his scheme of covenants, that made way for the new and prophetic: "The new grows as an organic development (Weiterbildung) from the foundation." Scripture is not seen primari-

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34 O'Malley, p. 98.
35 The Otterbeins studied the theological compendium of the writing of Lampe and Vitringa; O'Malley, pp. 62-77.
37 Ibid.
ly as the proof text for creedal statements, as it tended to be for the scholastic teachers; instead, Scripture makes clear that God has appointed times for the church to apprehend new truth. Unlike those rational theologians who tried to minimize doctrinal articles in the interest of tolerance, Scripture for Cocceius and Lampe does not provide a neat, rational pattern. Instead, it induces one’s trustful adherence to the prophetic message of Scripture, that leads to the positive appraisal of new knowledge in the light of tradition, for the symbolic-prophetic teaching of Scripture is the work of many generations and is built upon the heritage of the past. Philip William Otterbein, in an undated letter concerning the millennium, wrote that “the prophecies will be fulfilled, and they are fulfilling from day to day, and you may live to see great things.”

Alongside Lampe, the Otterbeins’ reading of the exegetical work of another Dutch scholar, Campegius Vitringa (1659-1722), introduced them to one who brought the symbolic-mopbetic exegesis to its definitive state in Reformed Pietism. He tried to identify the fulfillment of the figures and prophesies contained in Scripture, especially in the miracles of Christ, in the history of the church. The exegetical work of Joachim de Fiore was definitely a factor influencing Vitringa. Underlying his exegetical meditations, Vitringa assumed that prophecy and history correspond with one another, and that a particular event has implications for the entire course of events and must find its significance in a visible, concrete fulfillment. The will of God is known in the agreement between prophecy and historical fulfillment. For example, Philip William Otterbein anticipated the resettlement of Jews in Palestine as a sign of the end time. The theme of prophecy is the history of Christ and His Kingdom, that was extended to include world history as well as the history of the church. Vitringa’s view that God reveals Himself in a temporal “economy” of salvation, according to the times, contravened the premise of Reformed scholasticism that the movement of God’s Spirit in temporal events is chiefly a mechanical expression of the decreta Dei.

Like Lampe and Vitringa, Georg Otterbein found that nature and history harmonize with the prophetic witness of Scripture in the confident expectation of the reborn believer. He observes that:

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40The chief scholastic adversary of Cocceius was Gisbert Voetius. See O’Malley, p. 46.  
41Philip William Otterbein, “Letter Concerning the Millenium, op. cit., p. 103. The context for this statement is Otterbein’s comment upon Rev. 20.  
43I have elsewhere traced this influence in O’Malley, p. 51.  
44Core, p. 103.  
46See especially the canon of the Synod of Dort that affirms unconditional predistination.
This beautiful order of the things of this world, the course of the sun, the moon, and stars, the succession of the years, the ordering of every creature according to his nature, . . . the harmonious union between cause and effect, ends and means, . . . [attest] that He leads all things by His powerful Word . . . Everything waits upon God, and He nourishes each thing according to its appointed time . . . accordingly, the prophecies and their fulfillment also emanate from the truth and certainty of the Providence of God.47

The key to a proper symbolic-prophetic exegesis of Scripture is the tenet that it can only be practiced by the *regenerate* seeker. Not the clarity of scholastic terminology—that had been undercut at Herborn by the Ramist insistence on catechetical exposition “without bondage to the words and form”48—but the clarity of the testimony of the Spirit in the reborn believer was the proper criterion for coping with the unclarity of Scripture and *Catechism*. This contrasts with those “Reformed Cartesians” who taught at Herborn for a season,49 for whom the proper model for understanding the unclarity of Scripture and *Catechism* was the clarity and distinctness of the book of nature, whose truth they sought to demonstrate mathematically.

Georg Otterbein’s statement that “everything waits upon God,” which He nourishes “according to its appointed time,”50 recalls the mystics’ theme of *Gelassenheit* (yieldedness), that he considers the proper posture for the acquiring of “godly knowledge.”51 The key to *Gelassenheit*, as seen by the Reformed Pietists, was submission to God in the penitential struggle (*Busskampf*) and rebirth (*Wiedergeburt*), that is a lifelong process characterized by an eschatological dynamism. In Lampe’s hymn, *Lob des Herrn Jesu*, he penned the words,

I yielded my heart to you, so impure as it was; will You consume it? . . . so that You can finally erect Your sanctuary within . . . I search for You day and night, until I in glory may behold You closely; Your beauty has so charmed me on earth.52

Georg Otterbein identifies the reborn person having “true saving faith” as one who “trusts firmly God’s promises, . . . and remains in quiet resigna-

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50*Supra.*
51This term was distinctive of South German Anabaptism. Hans Denck (c. 1500-1527) had preached “yieldedness” to God’s will in self-surrender as the basis for the imitation Christi. *Gelassenheit* leads to progressive “divinization and inner lordship over all that is creaturely.” Denck, *Whether God is the Cause of Evil* (1526), 91; quoted in George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*. (New York, 1962), p. 157. There was considerable interchange between Anabaptism and Pietism in the Reformed sectors of Germany during the eighteenth century; O’Malley, p. 117.
tion (*Gelassenheit*) in all God's ways." This he contrasted with a historical faith (*assensus*), a temporal faith, and a miraculous faith, given to demonstrations of miracles.

The reborn believer's personal growth in the stages of salvation (*Heilsordnung*) forms a kind of microcosm of the larger transformation of nature and history in the coming of God's Kingdom — and both of these foci can only properly be understood by the symbolic-prophetic reading of Scripture. Lampe had formally structured seven stages in this *Heilsordnung* — the powerful appeal or effectual call, faith (the entry into the covenant of grace), regeneration (the work of grace within the sphere of this covenant), justification (the assurance of imputed pardon), sanctification (growth in imparted grace leading to fullness of obedience in Christ) sealing (the gift of perseverance in the covenant), and heavenly glorification. This list represents the substance of that which is gleaned from a personal application of the symbolic-prophetic reading of Scripture and *Catechism*. Georg Otterbein alludes to this *Heilsordnung* when he exultantly declared, "How beautiful it is to know the order itself, ... what we originally were, what we have become through the fall, and what we shall again become through the fully gracious design of God."55

In our only extant sermon from Philip William Otterbein, he establishes the line between Christ's outward redemptive work in history and his inward work in the salvation of the individual believer. When Hebrews speaks of Christ destroying "him who has the power of death" (Hebrews 2:14f.), he notes that

> Christ has through that which He accomplished outside of ourselves merely laid the groundwork for our salvation ... But at the same time He gave us a picture of that which He must do in us, that He must destroy the kingdom of Satan in us just as he has destroyed this kingdom outside of us."56 To read Scripture and *Catechism* without the new birth is "to build our salvation on a Christ outside of ourselves."57

III.

If the Ramist pedagogy and the Pietistic treatment of the symbolic-prophetic exegesis shaped the Otterbein's hermeneutics within the Reformed tradition, what were some of the *implications* for their perception of the *church and its ministry*?

53O'Malley, pp. 70-74.
54Georg Otterbein, *Predigten*, I, 40 fl. Lampe gave little attention to reprobation in this order. Philip William Otterbein later overtly broke with the doctrine, in disagreement with the Canons of Dort, saying "No preacher shall stay among us who teaches the doctrine of predestination ..."—The Constitution and Ordinances of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Baltimore, MD, 1785," cited in Core, p. 113.
55Philip William Otterbein, "Die Heilbringerde Menschwerdung," in Core, p. 84.
56Ibid., p. 87. For P. W. Otterbein, the Spirit is not as explicitly tied to the rationale of the *Catechism* in bringing home to the believer the truth of Scripture.
57Ibid., p. 121.
In the protocol of 1800, the "United Brotherhood in Christ Jesus" identified itself as an assembly of "unsectarian" (Unparteiische) preachers, under the leading of Philip William Otterbein and the Mennonite Martin Boehm, who shall "counsel how they may conduct their office more and more according to the will of God... that the church of God may be built up, and sinners converted, so that God in Christ may be honored." They avoid the term Kirche, that smacked of the coerciveness of the state church systems whom many German immigrants to America had fled. They shared in a "higher unity" in Christ that transcended their traditional ecclesial identities, although they sought to remain accountable to those structures.

It is probable that the frequent reference to "unparteiische" among the early United Brethren was influenced by the radical pietist Gottfried Arnold's Unparteiische Kirchen und Ketzer Historie (1699), that was known to Otterbein, although he does not reflect its sectarian and elitist tendencies. There is also the influence from the Unitas Fratrem of John A. Comenius, who received his education at Herborn before he worked to reorganize the Czech Brethren. A more decisive influence upon the ecclesiology of the Otterbein-Boehm movement was the hermeneutic of the Otterbeins, which prepared Philip William to expect a "more glorious state of the church than ever has been, ... the millennium," that would appear in the last days. With the advent of the spiritual awakening among the German-Americans that he was guiding, the new world appeared as the place for this fulfilled prophecy. Unlike the Puritans of New England, Otterbein does not mix piety and patriotism. The coming age of the spiritual church, the company of those "following after Jesus Christ," according to Otterbein's Glaubens-Bekenntniss for the Brotherhood, is a community that will issue from but will also supersede the present age of the church and society. The Otterbeins nowhere tried to calculate the date of the parousia, for "that is the best thing we can do—make our calling and election sure." Whether the goal being considered was the coming millennial church after the fall of antichrist, the last judgment, or personal immortality, the focus was ever upon the present moment for response. "The Bible," declared the Glaubens-Bekenntniss, contains the

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58 Otterbein continued to hold a dual relationship with the Reformed Coetus and with the United Brethren, who elected him as superintendent in 1800. However, his participation in U. B. Conferences decreased in his last years. Boehm was ejected from the Mennonite Church in his latter years (d. 1812).
59 Core, p. 102.
61 Core, op cit., p. 103.
62 Drury, loc. cit.
true way to our blessedness, so that each true Christian should take it as
his sole and only guide, with the influences of the Spirit of God . . .”63

In conclusion, Philip William Otterbein’s reading of Scripture and
Catechism prepared the way for a perception of church and ministry that
complements and markedly enriches the Anglo-American heritage of
Wesley.64 As Mickle has recently demonstrated,65 Otterbein’s doctrine of
the ministry, rooted in Reformed exegesis and practice, was far more than
a more linguistic variation of Asbury’s episcopal Methodism. Otterbein’s
reticence to comply with Asbury’s request that the United Brethren adopt
Methodist discipline was surely not an expression of sloth or stubborn­
ness.66 It was a reflection of his different view of church and ministry that
was based upon the distinctive hermeneutic learned in the school of
Reformed Pietism at Herborn.

63Wesley adopted the Anglican “parish” definition of the church in his Article of Religion:
“The visible Church of Christ is the congregation of faithful men, in which the Word of
God is preached and the sacraments are duly administered, according to Christ’s own ordi­
nance.”—The Book of Discipline of the UMC. (Nashville, UM Bd. of Publication, 1980),
p. 58. In the EUB Confession of Faith, Article 5, the church is defined in terms of the general
communion of saints: “We believe the church is the community of all true believers under
the Lordship of Christ,” a fellowship that was being extended worldwide, and across ec­
clesial barriers, by “the discipline of the Holy Spirit,” Ibid., p. 64.
64Mickle, op. cit., p. 205.
65In distinguishing ecclesial differences between Asbury and Otterbein, the former advocated
episcopal polity, dual ordination (deacon and elder), the annual conference as the locus of
ministerial identity, no voting rights for local preachers, a presiding elder appointed by the
bishop, a bishop who is central to the appointment process, and a centralized, disciplined
structure; the latter advocated presbyterial polity, single ordination (elder), the local con­
gregation as base for ministerial identity, local preachers with voting rights, a presiding elder
elected by the brethren, appointments that were not regularized (often made after corporate 
prayer and fasting), and an “unpartisan fellowship” over disciplined structures.
66Mickel, op. cit., pp. 197 and 201.