THE LANGUAGE PROBLEM IN THE EVANGELICAL ASSOCIATION

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Jacob Albright, the founder of the Evangelical Association, set out to share his religious experience with his German-speaking neighbors. By his own admission, he felt inadequate for the task because of his lack of formal education and his natural reticence. In the brief biography written in an autobiographical style by George Miller in 1811, the struggle of Albright and his final submission to God's call is developed:

At that time I had no knowledge of any class of Christian believers who seemed to be more active and excelled in this life, and whose order and doctrine pleased me more than the Methodists. Therefore, I held myself to them, and received from them much opportunity for usefulness. Though much was inexplicable, due to the fact that all their services were held in the English language, and since I had not mastered the same, I earnestly exerted myself so that I could decipher and become acquainted with their Articles of Religion and the Discipline of the Methodist Church, in the study of which I had great satisfaction.

After I had lived some years in this state of grace—through this love which the peace of God had poured into my heart, I began to realize how much the Christian religion had fallen to disrepute among the German settlers in America. This disturbed me greatly—I saw them as my brothers and sisters, and I desired that they should be happy as I was. I often fell on my knees and prayed that God would lead by German brothers into knowledge of the truth of God, that He would give them good teachers, men who would preach the gospel with power—. It came to me that if God has shown me the need, He is also calling me to carry on this mission. In the possession of this grace, the gift of God equipped me with the power—. I began my travels in October, 1786, in order to be obedient to the call of God to preach to my brethren—. After I had preached four years, I organized the first classes in 1800.1

This was the motivation of Jacob Albright to initiate a ministry to the German-speaking element in eastern and central Pennsylvania, as well as Maryland and northern Virginia. He and his immediate followers for several decades concentrated their ministry on this segment of the population in the early period of American history. There were several other reasons for this exclusive ministry.

As William Penn opened his colony of Pennsylvania to European immigration in the eighteenth century, thousands of German settlers made this fertile agricultural area (which was so similar to their homeland) their home in the new land. This immigration continued through the early decades of the nineteenth century, so that the German-speaking popula-

tion in Pennsylvania was its largest non-English segment. Estimates are that of the total Pennsylvania population of 300,000, approximately 100,000 were of German immigration.\(^2\) There were several strands — Schwenkfelders, Moravians, Mennonites and Dunkers — but by far the largest contingent were Lutheran and Reformed. While the former groups were self-contained and separate, it was among the Reformed and Lutherans that the Evangelicals saw the greatest need for their ministry. Complicating the fact that the demands of settling in a new land led to a neglect of the religious life was the dearth of churches and pastors, especially in the rural areas. In fact the historian William Warren Sweet in *The Story of Religion in America*, quotes an Episcopal Bishop as saying that the church was too far gone to be revived! It is estimated that during this period fewer than 5% of German settlers were identified with any church.

It was not only the lack of German churches and pastors that disturbed Albright and the founders of the United Brethren Church, but also the lax moral and spiritual condition of these churches and pastors. This is seen in the testimony of Albright and his followers as noted above, but receives even more credibility when we see that it was substantiated by sensitive Lutheran and Reformed pastors.

W. W. Orwig, in his *History of the Evangelical Association*, states that when he was a pastor in York, Pennsylvania in 1844, a Lutheran minister, The Rev. J. G. Schmucker, told him that on a visit to Lebanon, Pennsylvania, for a synod meeting he once heard Albright preach; and among other things, he remarked that the state of things in the German churches wore a gloomy aspect, and that only a small number of the ministers composing the synod to which Schmucker belonged were, in his view, converted men. In a biography of Dr. Schmucker which was published in the *Lutheran Observer*, Dr. B. Kurtz said that when Schmucker took charge of several congregations in the Hagerstown, Maryland, area about 1794, he found the state of Christianity in a deplorable condition. He continued:

Sunday Schools, Bible classes, prayer meetings — had not yet been introduced. Night meetings were regarded as tending to fanaticism; though for dancing, card-playing, etc. they were thought to be appropriate. Conversion was a strange word, and revivals were unknown. Methodists indeed, and they alone, talked about conversion. On the whole, darkness covered the land, and gross darkness the people.\(^3\)

Orwig continued by saying that this description of the congregations in Hagerstown and vicinity was a true picture of most congregations of the German churches in this country in those days. Such was the state


of things from a spiritual point of view when the Evangelical Association was born. It is not surprising that Albright and his followers met with opposition and persecution.

It should be pointed out that the established churches had the same attitude toward all evangelical activity — including the work of the Methodist Episcopal Church — but since the latter ministered almost exclusively in the English language, the opposition and persecution were directed more persistently toward the German movements, such as the Evangelical Association and the United Brethren. One more comment from William W. Sweet's *Religion in Colonial America* will focus upon this situation. In his summary of German churches in early America he stated:

> There were many German communities without religious leadership of any kind, and among all the elements in the colonies, the Germans very probably contained the smallest proportion of church members.4

Another factor in the exclusive German ministry of the Evangelical Association has to do with its relationship to the early Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Jacob Albright, in his spiritual struggle, received assistance from a nearby Methodist lay preacher, Isaac Davies, and became a member of the class in his home. Albright was enamored of Methodist doctrine and polity and was given an exhorter's license. However, as he began to itinerate, his inability to maintain relationship with the local class caused his affiliation with the Methodist Episcopal Church to cease. In spite of this, Albright's developing organization used virtually a German translation of the Methodist Articles of Religion and Discipline. According to Henry Boehm an earlier translation was made by Dr. Romer in 1807.5 Jacob Albright had been asked to do this, but his death delayed the project until it was completed by George Miller in 1811.6 The new movement was variously named “The Albright People” and “The German Methodists,” although Evangelical historians are unanimous in the assertion that this designation was not meant to imply any organic relationship to the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The attitude of the Methodist Episcopal Church and its acknowledged leader, Bishop Francis Asbury, toward German work and specifically toward the Albright movement, shows conflicting evidence. In Boehm's *Reminiscences*, referred to earlier, there are repeated statements of Asbury's concern for the German-speaking segment of the population.7 Frequently Asbury preached in English, followed by Boehm's sermon in German. With regard to German work, and at that time the so-called

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6Stapleton, 165ff.
7Wakeley, 173-179, 318.
“Albrights,” the most significant event was the reported meeting of Asbury, Boehm, and Dreisbach (the Presiding Elder of the Evangelical movement) in August, 1810. This event is reported in almost identical language in the three histories of the Evangelical Association from the journal of John Dreisbach. It took place along the Susquehanna River near Halifax, Pennsylvania. After a free discussion, Asbury sought to persuade Dreisbach to leave the Evangelical movement and to join the Methodists. Dreisbach could go to Baltimore for orientation and to increase his fluency in the English language. Then he would be able to preach in both German and English, thus making him more useful. However, Dreisbach made a counter proposal as follows:

I told the Bishop that we considered ourselves called of God to labor principally among the German population, and thus far our labors have not been in vain. To this he replied that the German language could not exist much longer in this country. I rejoined that if this should ever be the case, it would then be time enough to discontinue preaching in German, and gave as my opinion that this would not occur very soon, at least as long as German immigration continues. I then gave him my views, in which I expected my brethren to concur, and made him the following offer: ‘If you will give us German circuits, districts and conferences, we will be able to make your church ours, be one people with you, and have the same government.’ ‘This cannot be — it would not be expedient’ was the Bishop's reply.

Despite these apparently irreconcilable differences which were evident in this interchange, the historians report that Asbury and Dreisbach parted with friendly words. The comment is made that even though some may have wished at this time — and since — that the results of the meeting would have been more constructive, for others there would have been much opposition and such a plan would have done more harm than good.

Unfortunately, this event was not recorded in the journal of Bishop Asbury (although he was in the area at this time). Nor is it found in The Reminiscences of Rev. Henry Boehm. We must, therefore, accept at its face value this report contained in Evangelical history. Because of the apparently cordial spirit in which the meeting was concluded, it is hard to understand Asbury’s derogatory remark in one of his letters:

I say 200,000 Germans and their descendants on the east side of the Ohio, including Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia, have not one gospel minister among them; perhaps 100 settlements and congregations vacant. What are the Lutherans, what are the Reformed, the Friends, what are the Albrights, but deceitful apes and opposers of Methodists? What are the United Brethren? But you make a circuit, or let it alone; you make a class, or let it alone. Should my life be spared in return, which is doubtful, one more attempt for a German missionary, a kind of presbytery, preaching at least half their time in German.

9Orwig, 58.
10Frederick A. Norwood, Sourcebook of American Methodism (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982), 120, 121.
It is ironic to note that Asbury stated that the German language could not exist much longer in this country. Within three decades the Methodist Episcopal Church, under the leadership of William Nast, did begin separate German work which through the years assumed significant status.

A reference to the Evangelical Association and the language problem is found in *The Story of German Methodism* by Paul F. Douglass. After mentioning the debt which John Wesley owed to German evangelical Pietism and the presence of such German persons as Philip Embury and Barbara Heck in the early Methodist classes, Douglass wrote:

The Methodists lost a great opportunity at this time because their imagination was not capable of conceiving of a language mission. True, the Methodist circuit rider influenced such men as Henry Boehm, and they experienced salvation. Boehm recounts occasions in which both English and German preaching was carried out. Despite Asbury's travels through German settlements in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia—no German congregations were founded. If Asbury and other leaders had a better understanding of the needs of the future of Germans in America, movements which sprang from the roots of Methodism, "The United Brethren in Christ" and "The Evangelical Association" might both have developed as organic parts of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

As Douglass described the pressure to form German Methodist Conferences in the 1860's, he quoted a memorandum presented to the Methodist Episcopal General Conference which cited the manner in which Jacob Albright found it necessary to form a separate German organization when Asbury refused to sanction preaching in German.

What can be said with some certainty is that until several decades after these original overtures, though there was co-existence, there was no cooperation between Methodists and Evangelicals. In fact, Asbury expressed doubts as to the effectiveness of the United Brethren and Evangelicals. In addition, it is clear that despite the relationship to a Methodist class which Albright had at the very beginning and the early borrowing and patterning of the "Albrights" (later, "Evangelical Association") of the Methodist Articles of Religion and Discipline, there never was any organic connection between the two denominations as they developed their separate ministries. Therefore, to state that the union of 1968 was a family re-union is at best a very loose judgement. Finally, it is clear that the separate existence of the Evangelical Association was based more on language than any other factor.

**INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS**

It is with the internal development of the Evangelical Association that we come to the heart of the "language problem." As stated before, for

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several early decades the work was conducted almost exclusively in the German language. All of the early publications were in the German language. Their first periodical was Der Christliche Botschafter first published in 1836 and continued until its demise in 1947 — the oldest Protestant German-language periodical in the United States with an unbroken record of publication. Its influence upon the church during its development was unrivaled.

As Sunday Schools were introduced in 1832 and authorized by the General Conference in 1835, it was specifically indicated that “German Sabbath Schools be established in every congregation.” The leading spirit in advocating this exclusive designation was John Seybert — one of the denomination’s strongest leaders and the Evangelical counterpart to Francis Asbury of the Methodists and Christian Newcomer of the United Brethren. Seybert was also the strongest proponent of maintaining the German work of the church. He was described as,

German by birth, by training and by practice. He could speak, read and write in English, but in a very broken manner. No one who knew him would for a moment suppose that he would undertake to preach in English. But he would attempt anything to have a soul. He once undertook to preach in English to a predominantly English congregation. It is reported that the power of God came upon him, and is effort was blessed as it was imperfect.

Seybert’s biographer reinforced the Bishop’s German bias with the following report:

In recording actions of the General Conference of 1835, the chief matter to be chronicled here is the discussion as to whether (Sunday Schools) should be exclusively German, or whether English be introduced. In the debate, John Seybert strongly favored exclusively German Sunday Schools on the grounds that ‘The English people are already amply provided for by other churches. The Germans are in special need. Our church is among them and for their benefit. If the Evangelical Association does not help the Germans in the United States, nobody else will. God has commissioned the Evangelical Association for the purpose of bringing the gospel with its light and life to the neglected German population of this country.

Orwig states, however, that the establishment of exclusively German Sunday Schools was soon found to be impractical, since many members

14Ibid., 52-54.
15Ibid., 218.
16Raymond W. Albright and Roy B. Leedy, A Century of Progress: The Story of Religious Education in the Evangelical Church (Cleveland, OH: Board of Religious Education of the Evangelical Church, 1932), 49.
17Orwig, 177.
18Yeakel, Vol I, 238.
20Ibid., 151.
were in favor of putting English on an equal footing, and in some places a sufficient number of German teachers could not be secured. The English language was then introduced and in some places was on the ascendancy. Yet in the maritime cities, where the congregations consisted almost entirely of German members, the Sunday Schools were still exclusively German. 21

It was inevitable, however, that the English ("American") language would be introduced. For one thing, the immigration of Germans began to taper off. For a time the dominant German leadership of the church tried to counteract the trend to English. It is reported that during the 1820's several men had been received into the itinerant ministry who preached only in English, and hence could travel on only a few circuits, the others being nearly all German. As fears were entertained that English might prevail, the General Conference of 1830 took a decisive action that, "The itinerant ministry in general confine their labors to the German portion of the population and that no more preachers be received into the body who had not at least some knowledge of the German language." 22 Orwig reports that this resolution vexed and discouraged the English brethren a great deal. Its consequence was that the English work suffered and languished until it died out temporarily. Thus, many parts of the country were, and remained, closed against the Association, since most of the states were almost exclusively English-speaking. Here the Evangelical Association fared like most German churches in this country, and learned a lesson by sad experience. In many places they lost a considerable number of their sons and daughters. This was later regretted by many of its leaders. By the resolution of a later General Conference — in 1843 — this restriction was not only repealed, but the Conference also determined that, "Our Association shall henceforth labor both the English and the German portions of our population." 23

Before leaving this period, we must consider a most important confrontation. Church historians report that John Hamilton, who was admitted into the ministry in 1825, and was a leader in promoting English work in the Maryland-Virginia area, was discredited because he sought to create a division of the Association under the pretense of re-establishing "The Old Foundation of Jacob Albright," by founding a 'scriptural Association.' He published a pamphlet to this effect, and for this was dismissed from the ministry at the 1831 session of the Eastern Annual Conference. He then established a Conference and expected that twelve to eighteen English preachers would attend, but when the time came, he was left alone. While it appeared at first that some of the English brethren would side with Hamilton, at last all of them left him. He was in other

21 Orwig, 177.
22Ibid., 153, 177.
respects a talented and popular preacher and through him the transition from German to English ministry might have been made if he had not sought to divide the Association. After he had been deposed, he formulated a Constitution for the “Association” which he would set up which would have become a true Association, since he affirmed the Evangelical Association had become a “sect.”

Finding that his ambitions would not be accomplished, he later joined the Lutheran Church. According to Orwig and Yeakel:

Hamilton was creating a sect himself, just as he claimed the Association was doing. The Articles of Faith and Discipline of the Association, being firmly based on Scripture, made such an effort unnecessary and without justification.

As a result of the controversy precipitated by Hamilton, the Association became more cautious, resulting in stricter examination of the doctrinal position and closer supervision of the conduct of the ministers. In the Eastern Conference alone, ten ministers were deposed from office. But even such a conservative as Orwig admits that many of these men might have been saved for the church by more patience, forbearance and kindness. Being treated with too much severity, they were lost to the society.

The immediate result of this episode was that during the following decade (1831-1843), the work of the Association was almost limited to the German language. In the midst of this distinctive emphasis, however, there was growth in the English work. By 1843 the Association was convinced that it could no longer afford to throttle the natural growth in the English-speaking people. A resolution was adopted:

that more attention be paid to the English portion of our population, endeavoring to preach the gospel to them, and to labor for their spiritual interests; and recognizing that some churches and preachers were using English, provided for the organization of English Conferences, where ten or more English-speaking preachers were serving churches.

Actually, no English conferences were formed; in the end, it was separate German-speaking conferences which were organized. Included in the resolution quoted above was provision for the publication of an English Discipline and hymnals, and the authorization of an English periodical. As a result, the Evangelical Messenger was introduced in 1848.

Although this authorization encouraged English work, which increased rapidly, the General Conference still considered its major mission was to be directed to the German element. It was still the firm conviction that the Evangelical Association was called of God to take care

26Orwig, 153.
28Orwig, 153.
of the Germans in this country because they were so grossly neglected by other churches. 29

Into this continued emphasis on German language work, and probably because the Methodist Episcopal Church under the leadership of William Nast had recently (1838) begun separate work in the German language, Nast made the first overtures to the 1843 General Conference looking toward cooperation with the Evangelical Association since the meeting in 1810 between Francis Asbury and John Dreisbach. The report by Orwig is as follows:

A delegation of the Methodist Episcopal Church that had been appointed by the General Conference of that denomination in 1840, waited on this Conference and made proposals tending to the establishment of closer friendship between these two bodies, so that they might be able to lend each other mutual aid, fight with greater success against the enemies of the cross, and labor for the temporal and spiritual welfare of the neglected Germans of this country. Said delegation was headed by William Nast, who delivered addresses on the subject of their mission, and also presented a statement of their object in writing, praying that a reply in writing would be given them. 30

An analysis of the proposal of the delegation from the Methodist Episcopal Church and the response of the Evangelical Association indicates that while there were cordial reciprocal expressions and hope that some cooperation might be initiated, any thought of possible organic union was not mentioned on either side. At the very least, it was hoped that conflicts in local areas would be minimized and that reciprocal reception of members would be accomplished without impugning the motives of either group. It was later charged that in at least one instance there was controversy over “sheep stealing.” 31

In the meantime, the transition from German to English continued at a more rapid pace than before, although German still was dominant in the leadership of the denomination. An indication of the need for provision for the English-speaking people was the action of 1847 General Conference that an English periodical be published and named The Evangelical Messenger. It met a great need and it was reported that even the German leaders read, supported, and contributed to it. As the use of the German language declined after the Civil War, subscriptions to German periodicals declined while English increased. 32 Another significant indication of the transition from German to English is the report that the year 1850 in the Central Pennsylvania Conference and deliberations and transactions, which up to that point had been conducted entirely in German, began to be divided equally between both languages. 33

29Orwig, 374, 375; Yeakel, Vol I, 361, 365.
30Yeakel, Vol I, 208.
31Ibid., 387, 388.
32Spreng, 260.
33Yeakel, Vol II, 16, 17.
In a summary statement at the close of Volume I of his History of the Evangelical Association, Yeakel, recognizing the German origins and work of the church in the early decades, sought to emphasize that German and English were co-existing and neither had an advantage in providing leadership in the Association. It was his sanguine hope that the Association would be led by Providence to assume a more cosmopolitan character in accordance with the great commission given by the Lord of all. Unfortunately, these hopes were not realized during the ensuing decades. The new influx of Germans from Europe, who settled largely in the midwest, was not willing to become Americanized. The German element used the shibboleth: "Duetsch wir sind, und Deutsch wirden wir bleiben." ("Germans we are, and German we will continue.") They perpetuated the use of the language long after the Association surrendered its opposition to the English language. German continued to be the language of worship in many places until the anti-German hysteria of World War I compelled its gradual dismissal. In addition, the majority of the church and its episcopal leadership were emphatically pro-German in the language controversy, sometimes contrasting the zeal and activity of German and English sections of the church to the former's advantage. In this matter other resolutions of the "language problem" had to be employed and there is evidence that the division in the church in the 1890's was in part a result of this controversy.

PROPOSED UNION WITH THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

It is during the period 1859 to 1875 that the issue of union with the Methodist Episcopal Church and the language issue came before each session of the General Conference of the Association. In 1859 William Nast made overtures for close cooperation without actually proposing union. The issue was gaining momentum. There was no Methodist representation to the 1863 Conference, probably because the Civil War was at its height. The negotiations had proceeded in the interim so that when Nast appeared in 1867 there was a plan proposed by which the German work would be placed under the control of the Evangelical Association and English work under the Methodist Episcopal Church. Nast pointed out the mutual advantages for both groups, but the Evangelicals were not ready for this step, and reciprocated by stressing only "unity in spirit." Like Nast, some Evangelicals thought that it would solve the "language problem."

34Yeakel, Vol I, 454, 455.  
36Yeakel, Vol II, 84; Albright, 282.  
37Yeakel, Vol II, 154, 155; Albright, 282ff.
Bishop Rudolph Dubs stated before the Methodist Episcopal General Conference in 1872: "If it be the Lord’s will, we may confidently expect its accomplishment." 38

In addition to negotiations with the Methodist Episcopal Church, the matter of the "language problem" received attention in the 1867 General Conference in a report on "The State of the Church." 39 Reviewing the origins of the Association in the German language, the report asked for tolerance and forbearance in the transition period.

Since no serious injury has been suffered in this respect, it is asked that in order to be all things to all men, it is necessary that our preachers, the younger of them especially, study both languages earnestly and practically, so that we will be able to preserve and nourish the genuine old Evangelical spirit of devotion to the salvation of souls. 40

By the 1871 General Conference the matter had come to a head and a decision had to be made. The proposal was the same as that made by John Dreisbach in 1810 which was turned down by Bishop Asbury. Nast brought the matter to a climax:

If that is your decision, so tell us frankly, after the manner of the Germans. The time for a decision of this question has come. If the union is impractical now, then it will be more so at a later date, for the difficulties will increase. Therefore, if a union cannot now be accomplished, we should forever dismiss the question, but nevertheless love each other fraternally and each party use the talent entrusted to them. From the bottom of my heart I wish you God's richest blessing. 41

Although the goal had much favorable support, there was also much opposition. When the vote was taken, it was almost even — 38 in favor and 37 opposed. Since a two-thirds majority was required for adoption, the matter had been disposed of negatively. That the union was not accomplished was disappointing to Nast and many Evangelicals. Since this decision was so crucial, it was printed in the General Conference Journal twice. The following is a summary:

Whereas, it was decided that it would not be advisable to recommend said union, notwithstanding that such union under other circumstances might be desirable... if it could be accomplished with the general consent of our ministry and membership, but that does not seem possible for the present, therefore, RESOLVED that we respectfully respond to the friendly greetings and fraternal recognition of the Methodist Episcopal Church... and cherish the most hearty wish that we may labor in union of spirit and peace, without hindering or discouraging each other, and unitedly as far as possible, and with the best success of the glorious cause of our common Lord and Master. 42

38 Albright, 282ff.
40 Ibid., 154, 155.
42 Ibid., 1871, 53ff.
It must be said that the action of the 1871 General Conference essentially concluded negotiations with the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the immediate future. It also indicated that the language issue was still dominant. Although there was expressions of harmony between German and English elements, beneath the surface there was a distrust of motivations, since the opposition to the proposed union came from predominantly German delegates and conferences. During the ensuing quadrennium, as English missions were being established (according to annual conference records), the concept of perpetuating German work through the organization of German conferences evolved. This became the focus at the next General Conference.

FORMULATION OF GERMAN CONFERENCES
AND CHURCH DIVISION

The General Conference of 1875 was in many ways one of the most important. After thirty years of agitation, it was finally decided to inaugurate a “heathen mission,” and Japan was selected as the site. The base of episcopal leadership was broadening by electing four bishops, incidentally widening the differences which eventually led to the division of the 1890’s. Almost as a sidelight, there was a fraternal visit from the Methodist Episcopal Church by none other than Bishop Matthew Simpson. However, the matter of the church union was not discussed. From the standpoint of the German situation, the most important proposal was for the formation of three German conferences in several areas of concentration: in the cities of the east coast — the Atlantic Conference; in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio — the Erie Conference; and the German churches in Iowa, retaining the state name. The debate on this proposal took two days and included all the old arguments pro and con. A study of the debate on this matter indicates the importance it had in resolving the “language problem.” On the one hand, it was stated that within twenty-five years there would be no more German preachers. (Actually, German worship continued into the first quarter of the 20th century in a number of areas.) It was argued that the German churches were usually smaller, and hence dependent of English churches. Furthermore, it was thought by some that a better resolution of the “language problem” could be achieved by combining German and English work within annual conferences. However, the consensus seemed to be that German churches would thrive better in their own environment. Especially in areas where there was still large German population, separation into German conferences would be advisable. So when the vote was taken, it was adopted 76-14.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., 1871, 34, 44.
As a consequence, in 1876, three German conferences were organized. But the solution to the "language problem" by establishing German conferences proved to be merely a holding action. It required a much more lengthy process, and German was so firmly entrenched in certain areas that in the end, attrition brought about the final solution.

Probably the last recorded action on the language question, at least from the standpoint of Association records, was made in the 1879 General Conference. Raymond Albright reports that through these years the question of German vs. English was a major problem. The younger generation preferred the English and the older generation wanted to continue German. The bishops in their Episcopal Address gave attention to this problem:

The most prudent discretion, and impartial procedures, are necessary to prevent friction in our congregations where both languages are spoken. Equal attention needs to be given to the rightful claims of the older — and on the other hand, to the younger. Each has need of the other and must serve the other. The practicality of the plan at the last General Conference (i.e., 1875 — establishing German Conferences) cannot yet be tested because of the short time, yet on the whole it has been advantageous. In as much as there are still differences, and will be until one language surrenders the field to the other, final adjustments are not yet possible. We must, therefore, adopt ways and means best calculated to promote harmony, and apply these measures impartially. In all cases both languages have equal rights. Mutual patience and forbearance must be exercised. Our greatest concern is for the glory of God and the salvation of the world.44

Ness,45 in the chapter dealing with publishing in the Evangelical Association, narrates the way in which during the last decade before the division of the church in the 1890's the periodicals were used to foster the divisive spirit. The Botschafter published articles which were favorable to the German majority and refused space to the minority group. On the other hand, the editor of the Messenger, who, until he was removed by the General Conference of 1887 was favorable to the minority. In this respect the language issue had an impact on the division. But all historians agree that neither the language issue nor doctrinal matters were primary factors in the division. The main issue was the personal rivalries between the two main episcopal leaders — Esher for the "majority" and Dubs for the "minority." Bowman, who sided with the "majority," had a less conspicuous role. When the lines of division were finally drawn, the "majority" consisted of the predominantly German conferences: Atlantic, California, Canada, Dakota, East Pennsylvania (which was a divided conference), Erie, Illinois (also divided), Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New England, New York, Ohio (also divided), Oregon, Pittsburgh (also divided), Texas, Washington, Wisconsin. It can be said that the leadership in these conferences, being German, followed the leader-

44General Conference Journal, 1879, 25.
45Ness, 145-162.
ship of more authoritarian episcopal methods of Esher. Hence they were called "Esherites." On the other hand, the minority was concentrated in the larger Eastern conferences who were under the leadership of Dubs, and advocated a more restrained episcopal leadership: East Pennsylvania (a divided situation), Central Pennsylvania (who were ahead of other conferences in transition to English), Pittsburgh (a divided conference), Illinois (also divided), Ohio (also divided), Des Moines (the English conference formed in 1876), Northwestern (some of the churches in Wisconsin and Minnesota).

**FINAL RESOLUTION OF THE LANGUAGE PROBLEM**

In reading histories of a number of the mid-western conferences where German continued into the 20th century, it is evident that the transition was difficult and slow. The ministry and membership, which were predominantly German, were unwilling to change. Pastors schooled in the German language were slow to learn English well enough to conduct services and preach in English. As a consequence, the young people of the churches drifted into English-speaking churches, thereby retarding Evangelical growth. Gradually it became necessary to establish the English-speaking congregations and to admit English-speaking preachers into the ministry. The publications of the denomination, which were first published in German, were translated into English. Gradually, conferences began to conduct some, then all, of their business in English; German and English secretaries produced minutes in both languages. Into the early decades of the 20th century the transition was made in many areas by conducting both German and English services, the former for the benefit of the older generation and the latter for the younger people. The author of this paper lived through this stage during his boyhood as his father preached in both languages. Organizational life in the local churches made the transition in a similar fashion with German and English Women's Societies, Choirs, and other groups.

One of the factors which accelerated the transition from German to English in the Association was the anti-German hysteria during and after World War I. In areas where there were concentrations of Germans, hatred and harassment were intense. German individuals and towns changed their names to hide their identity. (An outstanding example of this in a center of Association work in Canada was the city of Berlin, which changed its name to Kitchener.) The houses and barns of Germans were vandalized.

The author has been in correspondence with retired pastors who served during this period, and their comments support the previous observations. In the area of the Minnesota Conference, there was a large influx of German immigrants. They had been members of the state church in Germany. Their religion was nominal, not vital. When they came to the United States,
they came under the influence of the spiritual teaching and preaching of the Association. They could communicate only in the German language and found a congenial atmosphere in our churches. It took time to accept a language they were not accustomed to using in their religious life. The transition was a slow process, but by the 1920’s the pressure for English from their children brought about bi-lingual churches, which gradually became completely English. Bishop Hermann W. Kaebnick, who began his ministry in the old Erie Conference (formed in 1876 to separate the German churches in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio), in correspondence with the author summarizes the transition in terms of the pressure for English in the face of German resistance. He states that the reunion of 1922 brought an end to separate churches based on language. The Atlantic Conference is a special case. It was formed in 1876 to separate German churches along the eastern seaboard. Because of a large influx of German immigrants who settled in the large cities in this area, these churches probably maintained German work longer than any other Conference.

S. P. Spreng, in his *History of the Evangelical Association*, offered a good summary of the “language problem.” After pointing out the original need for denomination such as the Evangelical Association to minister to needy German-speaking people in the history of our nation, Spreng described the way in which the transition was made. He was of German background and was in a position of leadership both through the division of the 1880’s and the reunion of 1922. So his words were both analytic and prophetic:

> Today the Evangelical Association is being rapidly forced into English in this country; in fact, many of our young people can no longer understand any language but English sufficiently to be able to worship intelligently and to their edification. Today, furthermore, our church feels the world-wide call; she claims the divinely accorded right and feels the duty to preach in many languages the unsearchable riches of Christ, and make known among all nations the glory and grace of God. She has been faithful in one tongue; God is giving her rulership in many tongues. And better is it a thousand-fold to preach the gospel in a hundred tongues than only in one.  

**CONCLUSION**

This paper has sought to trace the steps by which the “language problem” developed and was resolved in the Evangelical Association. It has been pointed out that the movement which was founded by Jacob Albright and which developed in the early years of the nineteenth century, was a mission to German-speaking people. This group was in need of an evangelical ministry because the German churches of that day did not meet

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their spiritual needs. Jacob Albright and the early leaders who followed him patterned their doctrine and discipline on the Methodist format, so much so that for a time they were called “German Methodists.” It is quite possible that the Evangelical Association would have become a part of the Methodist Episcopal Church if Bishop Asbury had been willing to organize German work. However, this did not materialize even though Asbury was interested in the Germans and their spiritual welfare. As a consequence, for three decades the work of the Evangelical Association was carried on almost exclusively in the German language. As English preachers took up the work and English congregations began, the fact that John Hamilton, the leader of this movement, advocated unorthodox doctrine and polity which brought about his dismissal, delayed the stronger development of English work. Furthermore, the leaders of the church still considered it their primary mission to minister to the German element. This resulted in a loss of preachers and members who wished a faster transition to English. For a time German immigration slackened also hindering the work. However, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, German immigration increased, and basically, these settlers migrated to the midwest, providing the power base of German work in the Evangelical Association, although in the east the denomination had moved to the English language by this time. This led to animosity within the Association in which the majority of the leadership felt it necessary to continue German work. During this period, William Nast, leader of the German work in the Methodist Episcopal Church, made several proposals for union of the two denominations, on the basis that German work would have been under the supervision of the Evangelical Association, and English work under the Methodist Episcopal Church. But in the final attempt, in 1871, the General Conference of the Evangelical Association was evenly divided, and it was felt that acceptance of the proposal would divide the church. One attempt at a solution was the formation of three German Conferences in 1875. However, the majority were still slow to make the transition to English, and it was not until the early decades of the twentieth century that the transition was made, accentuated by the anti-German sentiment during World War I. Gradually, the feasibility of continuing German work was seen to be impractical as a younger generation came on the scene who were schooled in English and did not know German. That the German mission of the Evangelical Association met a real need in the early decades is self-evident. But its exclusive nature in later decades caused the loss of many persons who preferred English. The continuation of German in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, and the maintenance of a majority position in decision-making was certainly one factor in the division of the church in the 1890's but it must be seen in the light of the intense personal rivalries of the two dominant figures of this period. The resolution of the issue was possible only when new
leadership came on the scene, persons who were not bound to the old antagonisms. That reunion took place only thirty years after the division attests to this fact. In this setting, the "language problem" was overcome, not without difficulties, but in the nature of the Americanization of the church.

The author of this paper must close on a personal note, to show that the German ministry of the Evangelical Association met a real need. His father immigrated to the United States in 1890 as a boy and was soon on his own, which led to a wandering, aimless life. As a youth, he came under the influence of a German congregation of the Evangelical Association in the Englewood section of Chicago. By his own testimony in the autobiography written as he made application for a license to preach, he gave credit to the congregation and its German pastor for leading him to salvation in Christ, giving him opportunities for service in the local church, introducing him to the family in which he found his wife, and encouraging him in his call to the Christian ministry. In this respect, the German mission of the Evangelical Association had a profound influence on the author's life, for which he will be eternally grateful.