ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION AND THE CHURCH OF THE UNITED BRETHREN IN CHRIST TO 1860

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INTRODUCTION

"Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth. Do it, Lord Jesus, for the sake of thy suffering and death. Amen."¹ So opens the minutes of the first Annual Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. The fact that the secretary of the Conference, George Adam Geeting, chose these particular words, provides insight into the importance the early United Brethren Church placed on the doctrine of sanctification. This article will survey the position which sanctification, or more specifically Wesleyan entire sanctification, played in the United Brethren Church from its founding to the year 1860. While this aspect of the denomination's history is sometimes neglected today, it will be shown that the doctrine had a profound affect on the denomination's ultimate character.

The Church of the United Brethren in Christ was born out of a series of evangelical revivals among German-speaking settlers in Maryland and Pennsylvania during the last quarter of the 18th century. Philip William Otterbein, a German Reformed pastor, and Martin Boehm, a Mennonite, were prominent leaders of this awakening. For many years the revival movement was loosely organized, but by 1800 the ministers of the awakening saw the need for a more formal and permanent organization. At a conference held that year, the Church of the United Brethren in Christ was organized, with Otterbein and Boehm elected its first bishops.²

The ministers who formed the United Brethren Church had had contact with Methodist evangelists for many years. Included was exposure to the Methodists' distinctive doctrine of entire sanctification. The Methodists believed that after an individual's conversion there remained elements of the carnal nature within. They felt that this diseased condition could be healed "... entirely in the second crisis of Christian experience called 'perfect love.'"³ It seemed natural that close relationships

which developed between Methodists and the German evangelists would cause some of the Germans to accept this new doctrine. An attempt will be made to show just what affect this influence from American Methodism had on the United Brethren Church.

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION DURING UNITED BRETHREN BEGINNINGS

The Doctrine is Present and Taught

There is evidence to suggest that among the early United Brethren ministers the message and doctrine of entire sanctification was taught. The early fathers of the United Brethren Church believed in the doctrine of sanctification and preached the possibility of a present and full salvation. While the essential truth being taught was Wesleyan entire sanctification, sometimes the doctrine was not explained in traditional Wesleyan language. But, according to a later United Brethren minister, David Edwards, the essence of the doctrine was preached: the “entire deliverance from sin and perfect resignation to the will of God, in every dispensation of his providence.”

The United Brethren ministers, except for native tongue, were nearly indistinguishable from their Methodist counterparts. In fact, the United Brethren were often referred to by others as the “German Methodists” since their characteristics were so similar. Henry Boehm, the son of Martin Boehm and an itinerant in the Methodist Episcopal Church, was in an excellent position to be familiar with both groups. According to Henry Boehm in his autobiography, United Brethren “... doctrines were the same as the Methodists. ...”

This similarity nearly led to a union of the two churches between 1808 and 1813. Conferences of the United Brethren and Methodists corresponded with each other during these years concerning a merger. Several letters reveal the Wesleyan character of the United Brethren theology, including acceptance of the doctrine of entire sanctification. A letter sent to the Methodists in 1809 and signed by Martin Boehm, George Geeting, and Christian Newcomer, in behalf of the Annual Conference, said “it did appear [that] the fundamental Christian doctrines of the two societies [were] the same.” The only differences were considered to be some “external church regulations.”

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6Drury, Minutes, 48.
In response to a letter sent by the Methodist Episcopal Baltimore Conference of 1813, the United Brethren Conference sent a reply stating that:

We firmly believe with you, brethren, that pure doctrinal truth and gospel discipline dispel darkness from the mind, and correct the errors of the heart and life, and through the efficacy of the Spirit perfect us [italics mine] in the love of God.\(^7\)

Since the term Christian perfection was often used interchangeably with entire sanctification, the above letter demonstrates that the United Brethren Conference accepted the essential Wesleyan teaching concerning sanctification. Being perfected by the Holy Spirit in the love of God was believed to occur when an individual was sanctified and cleansed from all sin.

The early Confessions of Faith of the United Brethren give further evidence that the doctrine of sanctification was understood in the Wesleyan light. For example, the first Confession of Faith which was in existence and use by the church prior to 1814, had a very clear reference to entire sanctification. Article 3 of this first Confession of Faith dealt with the Holy Spirit and read:

> We believe in the Holy Ghost; that he proceeds from the Father and Son; that we through him must be sanctified and receive faith, thereby being cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.\(^8\)

The idea of being "cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh" was a typical Wesleyan theme.\(^9\) Since this first creed was an official statement of the church's doctrine, little disagreement must have been voiced to it by the majority of those early ministers.

In 1815 the first General Conference of the United Brethren Church was convened near Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania. The mantle of leadership which had rested on Otterbein and Boehm, passed upon their deaths to Christian Newcomer. Newcomer believed it was important that a new Discipline and Confession of Faith be prepared by this Conference. A new Confession of Faith was adopted, and although it was substantially the same as that used previously, there were some significant changes. One change occurred in Article 3 which dealt with the Holy Spirit and sanctification. The 1815 Confession reads:

> We believe in the Holy Ghost; that he is equal in being with the Father and Son; that he proceeds from both; that we are through him enlightened; through faith justified and sanctified.\(^10\)

At the General Conference held two years later in 1817, Article 3 was again modified to read:

\(^7\)Ibid., 62.
\(^10\)Berger, History, 227.
We believe in the Holy Ghost, that he is equal in being with the Father and Son, and that he comforts the faithful, and guides them into all truth.\textsuperscript{11}

Thus, the formal statement of the church concerning the doctrine of sanctification changed quite dramatically over a period of just a few years. The Confession evolved from a position on sanctification which was essentially Wesleyan to not even mentioning the doctrine in 1817. Since no record of the discussions in those early Conferences have been preserved, it is very difficult to determine the reason for an apparent shift of doctrinal emphasis in the church. It is possible to speculate, however.

The period between Otterbein’s death in 1813 and the first and second General Conferences of 1815 and 1817 was one of dramatic change in the denomination. The first generation of leaders consisting of Otterbein, Boehm, and Geeting had passed from the scene. Because of Otterbein’s hesitancy in actually forming a totally new denomination, organizationally the church was weak. Although Christian Newcomer himself was a strong believer in entire sanctification, it is possible that, as a whole, the new generation which was moving into positions of leadership with Newcomer did not consider the doctrine as important as he did. From the scanty written record available from this period, we see that sanctification was almost never mentioned after 1820, apparently having lost some of the luster it once had among the United Brethren.

\textbf{Philip William Otterbein}

We have already referred to some of the early leaders of the United Brethren Church. Probably the most important of these men was Philip William Otterbein, through whose energies the Church of the United Brethren in Christ was formed. As will be shown, Otterbein held a doctrine of sanctification which was for all practical purposes, the same as the Methodists.

Otterbein, who was born June 3, 1726 in Dillenburg, Germany, arrived in America in 1752 as a German Reformed missionary. Throughout his early years in America he served pastorates in various Pennsylvania and Maryland communities. During these years he rose to a leadership position in the revival movement among the Germans. In 1774 Otterbein accepted the pastorate of the Evangelical German Reformed Church in Baltimore, Maryland, where he was to serve until his death in 1813. It was during his Baltimore pastorate that Otterbein made close contacts with the Methodist leadership.

One Methodist leader with whom Otterbein formed a close friendship was Francis Asbury. Asbury was a frequent dinner guest at Otterbein’s Baltimore parsonage and on one occasion he wrote in his diary con-\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 662.
cerning the closeness he felt with Otterbein. He said, “There are very few with whom I can find so much unity and freedom in conversation, as with him.”

12 It is almost inconceivable that during these occasions, Asbury would not have shared with Otterbein the doctrine of entire sanctification. We know from Otterbein’s own words that he was familiar with the writings of John Wesley and thought highly of them. In any event, as will be seen, by the end of Otterbein’s life he had come to embrace in essence the Wesleyan doctrine.

Otterbein fully believed that God had the power to save an individual “unto the uttermost.” Indeed he believed God’s ultimate purpose in redemption was to make perfection possible in a believer’s life. In this thinking, Otterbein would have been influenced by his background in Reformed Pietism. His brothers, George and Johann, were German Reformed theologians, whose writings were promoted in America by Philip. It may be assumed that Philip was in general agreement with what his brothers wrote.

George Otterbein believed that the goal of this life is Christian perfection. He said, “if we follow Christ’s leading we will more and more be renewed in the image of God.” 14 Johann Otterbein wrote that in our “first conversion we have only been purified from the external, repulsive manifestations of sin and dead works.” The first conversion enables one “to follow this progressive grace in the purification of the heart, by continual repentance and by searching after holiness throughout the entire period of our lives.”

Philip Otterbein echoed his brothers’ views in his only complete extant sermon. In this sermon printed in 1763, Otterbein asked the question:

But is it possible for a man to come to a complete victory over sin through Jesus Christ? (Answer:) Who is mightier, Christ or the devil? In the gospel we are given all kinds of divine strength for life and godliness (Titus 2:11-12). Notice this in the example of Paul (Romans 8:2). Hence he can say in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ . . .” Thus it is obvious error to imagine one cannot in their earthly life be freed from sin. It is true that one cannot attain to this in one week or in one’s sleep. If anything does cost, then certainly this does, in terms of determination and effort. That is why we only seldom meet such men in Christ in our time. Yet if we on this account consider it impossible, we would be denying Christ and speaking in favor of the kingdom of darkness. 16

15 Ibid., 153.
16 Core, Philip, 86.
In one of his few remaining letters, which is undated, Otterbein responds to a questioner’s query about the doctrine of sanctification. Otterbein says:

The word of God speaks, however, plainly enough, making a difference between justification and sanctification. And this difference accords also with reason for, is it not one thing when Pharaoh takes Joseph from a prison, and another when he enrobes him in kingly apparel and sets him a prince over the whole land of Egypt.\(^17\)

He went on to say:

He that denies the possibility of living without sin, denies God, and deserves no other answer than the one the saviour gave the Sadducees—“Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matthew xxii, 29).\(^18\)

We see from Philip’s writings that he believed in the possibility of a believer’s being “freed from sin” in this life. We do not know whether Otterbein ever used the Methodist terminology of “entire sanctification” or “perfect love,” but his intent seems to be the same. It is no wonder that Otterbein could feel so much in agreement with the Methodists and became such a close friend of Asbury. Otterbein’s ultimate goal, apparently, was for each believer to live a life of holiness, free from the hindrance and contamination of sin.

Upon Otterbein’s death on November 17, 1813, the United Brethren Church lost one of its prominent spokesmen for the doctrine of entire sanctification. While others would continue to believe and preach the doctrine, the new generation of leaders never seemed to grasp it with the same fervency as their founder.

**Christian Newcomer**

One of those ministers who did continue to preach the doctrine of entire sanctification after Otterbein’s death was Christian Newcomer. Newcomer was responsible for helping to expand the borders of the United Brethren Church during an evangelistic ministry which spanned the years from 1780 until his death in 1830. Throughout his lifetime, Newcomer was an advocate and witness to the doctrine of entire sanctification or Christian perfection.

Christian Newcomer was originally a Mennonite, but having had an evangelical conversion, he soon became associated with the revival movement among the Germans being led by Otterbein. Newcomer sensed a call to preach and about the time of the American Revolution began the ministry of a circuit-riding preacher. He soon rose to a position of leadership in the new United Brethren society, becoming a very close friend of Otterbein. Upon Otterbein’s death, the logical choice for his successor was

\(^{17}\)Ibid., 100-101.
\(^{18}\)Ibid., 101.
Christian Newcomer, and at the Annual Conference of 1813 he was elected bishop. He remained in that office for the rest of his life.

Although the ministers of the United Brethren who came from the Mennonite tradition were generally less enthusiastic in accepting and preaching Christian perfection, Newcomer was a notable exception. In his autobiography, Newcomer wrote that for a long period in his Christian life he was faced with many “trials and manifold tribulations” which affected his consistency as a Christian. He thought it was God’s will that he should face such a continual battle with sin. He says his opinion changed when he read:

“The kingdom of God is not meat or drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit...” I concluded with the poet: Why should the children of a king go mourning all their days? So I determined by grace divine, to obtain that perfect love which casteth out fear and is able to rejoice even in tribulation. 19

To the Wesleyans, the goal of entire sanctification was for “perfect love” to be shed abroad in their hearts toward God and man.

In his journal, Newcomer recorded many of his personal prayers to God through which we receive insight into his concern for his own Christian life. We also see reflected his acceptance of the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification. In his entry for February 15, 1809, Newcomer prayed:

O! that the time may speedily come when my Jesus shall be all in all; when I shall be delivered from the least and last remains of sin, and experience that perfect love which casteth out fear. 20

On another occasion he wrote, “O Lord! — sanctify me wholly and cleanse me from all sin, for Jesus’ sake.” 21 There appears to be no doubt that in his Christian experience, Newcomer accepted and sought Wesleyan entire sanctification. The terminology used in his prayers was identical with what the Methodist evangelists of his day were using. His many known contacts with Methodist preachers in all probability helped lead to his acceptance of the doctrine.

But did Newcomer actively preach and advocate the doctrine for others? There is adequate evidence to suggest that he did. On one occasion, when a United Brethren camp meeting was about to commence in Rockingham County, Virginia, Newcomer prayed:

... may the Lord grant his blessings, for Jesus’ sake, that sinners may be awakened and converted, believers have their spiritual strength renewed, to enable them to press forward on the way of glory: may a still deeper work of grace be wrought in their hearts, even the perfect love of God and the sanctification of their souls. 22

20 Ibid., 171.
21 Ibid., 70-71.
22 Ibid., 276.
Another incident recorded in his journal shows Newcomer's belief that it was possible to live the present life free from sin. Concerning a conversation with a Mr. Edinger, Newcomer wrote:

We had a long conversation on the subject of experimental religion, but we were not altogether of one mind. Among other things, he was of opinion that no person could be made free from sin until death; that sin and grace are necessary to preserve believers in humility. This I could not admit...23

Clearly Christian Newcomer was a believer and teacher of the doctrine of sanctification and from his prayers we see that it was a Wesleyan understanding. His journal contains many references to the sanctifying work he wished God to perform in his own life and in the lives of others. Probably even more so than Otterbein, Newcomer preached that it was the believer's privilege to be wholly sanctified, freed from the sinful nature, and filled with perfect love.

There are some who suggest that the early United Brethren never taught the doctrine of entire sanctification with quite the same fervency of their Methodist brothers. Alexander Owen, a later United Brethren, claimed that while the “spirit of entire consecration to God” was present in the church, it was “not generally admitted among them as a distinct theme.”24

There appears to be some truth to the above assertion, and it is true that entire sanctification was probably taught with varying degrees of intensity depending upon the individual United Brethren minister’s earlier religious background. But it would be wrong to assert that the doctrine had little influence on the young denomination. The documentation that remains in this early period supports the view that it was the generally accepted doctrinal position of the church. It is true, however, that second generation United Brethren did neglect entire sanctification. After Newcomer’s death there was a period of fifteen years in which the doctrine almost fell from the scene. But this must not detract from the position the doctrine held during the foundational years of the United Brethren in Christ.

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION’S DECLINE AND RESURGENCE IN THE HOLINESS REVIVAL OF 1844-1860

The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification in 1844

As has just been observed, by 1830 the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification was receiving little emphasis in the United Brethren Church.

23Ibid., 160.
For instance, David Edwards observed that as the years progressed, this doctrine was insisted upon less.²⁵ No longer was “the doctrine of complete deliverance from ‘indwelling sin’. . . held up in a clear, definite form, as something to be obtained by faith subsequent to conversion.”²⁶ Apparently some United Brethren ministers even considered the doctrine a great error and denounced it from the pulpit. Certainly by 1844 an apathy to the doctrine of entire sanctification and holiness had spread throughout a large portion of the church.

A few ministers, however, prayed to be sanctified, but they prayed for the work to be done gradually, perhaps just before death. William Hanby, an eventual leader of the holiness revival, wrote that, while all prayed for cleansing of their hearts, they did not have a “definate [sic] faith to believe, that God was just as ready to give them the great blessing now, as at any future period.”²⁷ While some ministers contended for the doctrine and prayed for the blessing, it was not until 1844 that a minister publicly professed personal entire sanctification.

**David Edwards**

The United Brethren minister who would come to be thought of as the main proponent and authority on the doctrine of entire sanctification was David Edwards. According to church historian John Lawrence, Edwards “. . . was the principal instrument employed in carrying forward this work. . .”²⁸

David Edwards was born May 5, 1816 in Wales. When he was just a boy his family emigrated to the United States and eventually resided in Ohio. Converted in a United Brethren revival meeting, Edwards was licensed to preach in the denomination less than a year later, and in 1835 was appointed to his first circuit. According to Edwards, shortly after his conversion in 1834, he felt a need for a “more thorough renovation of spirit.”²⁹ He soon began reading the works and biographies of the early Wesleyan ministers such as Wesley, Fletcher, and Watson. In Edwards’ own words these Wesleyan writings “were a great blessing” to him.³⁰

By all outward criteria David Edwards had a successful ministry. Every charge he served showed remarkable growth. Nevertheless, he believed there was still something lacking in his Christian life.

In 1843 Edwards was assigned, along with Jesse Wilson, to a circuit in Ohio’s Scioto Conference. Jesse Wilson, who had originally served in

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²⁶Owen, “Historical Sketch,” 58.
²⁸Ibid., 338.
²⁹Ibid., 339.
³⁰Ibid., 339.
another denomination, was a believer in the doctrine of entire sanctification and had once claimed its blessing. For some reason, however, Wilson now thought he had "lost" it. Both Edwards and Wilson sought the blessing throughout that year. They also preached the doctrine, although never claiming to enjoy it themselves. The doctrine they preached was that "entire sanctification is by faith in Christ and attainable before death."31 Even though neither Wilson nor Edwards had yet received the blessing, their preaching of the doctrine was not without results. A sizable number of the members of the circuit did profess sanctification.

On Christmas Day 1844, just a few weeks before his death, Jesse Wilson experienced what he had long sought. With friends, including Edwards, standing beside his sickbed, Wilson prayed to God to be fully sanctified. "With every sentence uttered, his confidence seemed to increase, until he was able to claim the promise." He cried out, "I have got it! O Lord, I will praise thee, — I will confess thee!"32

Jesse Wilson did not live long, but for the remainder of his life he preached about holiness to all who visited him. Many during those few weeks were convinced by him of the truthfulness of the doctrine and claimed the blessing of entire sanctification. In historical perspective it can be seen that Jesse Wilson's sanctification marked the beginning of a holiness revival in the United Brethren Church. Without doubt the person on whom Jesse's testimony would have the greatest influence was his old colleague, David Edwards.

From Edwards' reading, he had become convinced that it was possible to have a more complete salvation than is generally attained. For a period of ten years he had made entire sanctification a matter of his prayers. In his quest, Edwards consulted his fellow ministers in the denomination but apparently they were either of little help or actually tried to discourage him. He became more and more convinced after studying the scriptures, however, that it was his duty and privilege to attain such a state, even though few of his associates sympathized with him.

During the months immediately preceding Jesse Wilson's experience of sanctification, Edwards increased his efforts to receive "the blessing." Edwards appointed special meetings in the Circleville church devoted to seeking after holiness. These meetings were well attended. But it was his friend Jesse Wilson's profession of sanctification on Christmas Day 1844 which made Edwards realize that he actually could be entirely sanctified.

Just eight days later on January 2, 1845, Edwards finally received what he had long been seeking, the entire sanctification of his heart and life to God. Edwards said that he came to realize that the blessing of en-

tire sanctification could only be obtained by faith in God's provision. He prayed to God, "Lord, I do receive—I am thine and thou art mine!" He claimed his heart was filled with the love of God and that he knew he had received the blessing. 33

This experience was a great turning point in the life and ministry of David Edwards. He later claimed that he "experienced from that hour a depth of peace, a constancy of faith, and a clearness of views of Divine Providence never before enjoyed." Edwards was convinced that what happened to him that day was a "real and scriptural experience," 34 The United Brethren Church would henceforth never be the same. For with David Edwards' experience of sanctification the church acquired an articulate and zealous advocate of the doctrine who would prove to have a profound influence on the entire denomination.

Edwards would soon become a prolific writer on the doctrine of entire sanctification and from these sources his understanding of the subject can be gleaned. First of all, Edwards believed that "no doctrine of the Bible [had] been the subject of controversy, misrepresentation, and misunderstanding more than the doctrine of Christian perfection." 35 For himself, Edwards was convinced that entire sanctification could be obtained in an instant crisis experience but he did not deny the possibility that it could be obtained in a different way. He maintained, however, that the most common way was an instantaneous crisis.

According to Edwards, when individuals are converted they receive initial sanctification in their hearts. But people at conversion are not yet ready to know the need of a greater inward purity and strength. For this reason, in almost every Christian's life there is a crisis when "by the Spirit of God or providence of God, he is led to see his privilege and duty to become a perfect Christian and to walk in the highway of holiness." 36 At this critical moment a Christian is free to reach for and receive the blessing or free to reject it.

But what did Edwards really mean by "the blessing?" What was this "holiness" he was advocating? In response to the question, "What is holiness?", Edwards responded:

It is not a mere emotion or passion, neither does it exist in any external act or ceremonies; but it is a moral state and habit—a condition of purity and rectitude. It is not a grace, but the assemblage of all the graces necessary to form the Christian character. It is, in a word, the moral image of God, who is said to be glorious in holiness; and whose nature is love. The heart that is full of love is full of holiness. Yet it abhors sin as the "abominable thing that God hates." . . . In sin there is no

33Ibid., 342.
34Ibid., 343.
order, but everything by it is deranged. Whenever holiness is permitted to enter, it is like a neat housekeeper,—first cleansing the house from all pollution, and then placing everything in its proper place. It places the world under foot, and brings the whole man into complete subjection to God. This is order. This is true beauty. This is the beauty of holiness. 37

David Edwards never taught that once Christians experienced entire sanctification they need no longer seek holiness. On the contrary, according to Edwards, “He who attains to eminent degrees of holiness must strive with a holy violence that knows no defeat.” The reason is that, after the blessing of entire sanctification, there will be a period of strong emotions in which the individual will know that the Spirit possesses him. But eventually a Christian could expect these feeling to decline and it is then that one must rest on an absolute trust in God for his sanctification. 38 Edwards’ position is essentially Wesley’s, who also believed that growth in Christian character would occur after entire sanctification.

Just as God willed all to be saved, Edwards believed that it was God’s will for all to be cleansed from their inbred sinful nature by entire sanctification. He felt that God implants in every believer’s soul a desire after holiness. In fact, this desire for holiness was, for Edwards, an “unerring test of religious character,” since those who do not desire holiness were undoubtedly in a backslidden state. Edwards did not believe one could remain indifferent to the subject of holiness since, according to him, a lack of desire for holiness is itself a sinful state. 39

Because Edwards believed that striving after holiness was essential if one was to be in obedience to God, he urged his fellow ministers to stress the doctrine of entire sanctification. He said, “It is necessary to make the subject of holiness a distinct and definite theme, in order to lead the church forward to its attainment.” 40 For Edwards, it was no less important to teach complete holiness as the duty and privilege of all believers than it was to preach repentance and faith. He criticized those fellow ministers who believed the doctrine, yet refrained from teaching it to avoid giving offense. 41

Although for David Edwards holiness was a theme which caused his heart to pant, he never seems to have allowed his enthusiasm to become fanatical, as others were known to have done. In fact, he felt it was impossible to become fanatical as long as “perfect love” reigns in the heart.” According to Edwards this would keep a person from being too occupied with one doctrinal emphasis to the neglect of others. 42

37 Davis, Life of Edwards, 94-95.
38 David Edwards, “Crisis Periods,” The Unity Magazine, April, 1855, 184.
41 Ibid., 71.
Edwards never did drift into fanaticism but always seemed to know when to temper his views, understanding the necessity of finding a common agreement on the phases of Christian experience. For this reason he was opposed to arguing with others about entire sanctification. Instead, Edwards’ influence was “always exerted in directing the minds of his people to the contemplation of higher and purer ideals of Christian character, and in inspiring them each to redoubled efforts for the realization of that ideal in their own lives.”\(^43\) With such a goal, even those ministers who might disagree with Edwards over means, could not fault him for his ultimate goal, which was a more holy and spiritual church.

**Holiness Spreads Throughout the Church**

The experience of entire sanctification claimed by Jesse Wilson, and a few days later by David Edwards, can be pointed to as the beginning of a “holiness” revival in the United Brethren Church. From 1845 to 1860, the revival would spread throughout the entire church, being led by the ardent efforts of David Edwards and others.

Many of the most talented and influential ministers of the denomination became witnesses to the experience of sanctification. By 1847, about thirty ministers in the Scioto Conference, where the revival began, professed the blessing of perfect love.\(^44\) Some of the ministers had longed for such a blessing before the revival began and now they were able to experience it.

Among the most prominent ministers who followed Edwards were Henry Spayth, the church’s first historian; John Lawrence, an editor of the *Religious Telescope*; William Hanby, a bishop; Jacob Erb, a former bishop; William Shuey, the future publishing agent; and Lewis Davis, who was the father of higher education in the denomination. Clearly the holiness movement was not one consisting of unreasoning fanatics, but instead of the best minds in the church. Soon after the ministers experienced sanctification, they began preaching the doctrine to their congregations. Before long many laypersons also professed the blessing.

The effects of the revival were not limited geographically. Concerning the 1846 session of Ohio’s Muskingum Annual Conference, it was reported that “Almost to a man, entire consecration is either enjoyed or sought after.”\(^45\) Similarly, at the Indiana Annual Conference of that year “The doctrine of entire consecration ... found many friends ...”\(^46\) The zeal of those who had freshly experienced sanctification led them to relate their experience to others throughout the denomination.

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\(^{44}\) Owen, “Historical Sketch,” 59.
The main form of communication throughout the entire church was the *Religious Telescope*, the denomination's periodical. At the commencement of the revival in 1844, William Hanby was the editor. Like many others in the denomination, he was initially opposed to the doctrine of entire sanctification. In the fall of 1844, however, Hanby experienced sanctification and within a few months the paper published its first article on sanctification.\(^{47}\)

Hanby's term as editor was about to end, however. At the General Conference which met in May of 1845, William Hanby was elected bishop. Certainly unknowingly, by electing the twenty-nine year old David Edwards as Hanby's successor, the General Conference helped promote the holiness revival throughout the United Brethren Church. For it was largely through the columns of the *Religious Telescope* that Edwards had his greatest influence in spreading the revival of holiness into other Conferences.

In his position as editor of the *Religious Telescope*, Edwards was to have the ear of the entire denomination. He used this opportunity to advocate the doctrine of sanctification. He spoke of it with "all the ardor which a firm faith, and a fresh experience can give."\(^{48}\) As Edwards' biographer, Lewis Davis would later write:

> He made the *Telescope* ring with this subject as it never did before nor has since. It inspired his best editorials, and governed very largely the selections made . . . In a word, everything was made to bend to this one all absorbing theme.\(^ {49}\)

In David Edwards' first editorial, he wrote of the priorities he was going to bring to the paper. He said:

> First of all, we will aim at promoting the glorious scriptural doctrine of entire holiness of heart and life among believers. This, we believe, is the great work to which the church is now called. If there ever has been a time since the great reformation, that called for peculiar effort on this point, now is the time.\(^ {50}\)

Immediately upon the start of Edwards' tenure as editor, the pages of the *Religious Telescope* were filled with articles concerning holiness. Even a casual observer of the day would have seen this marked new emphasis. He began to print quite regularly articles from the well known holiness periodicals. Also, the *Religious Telescope* became a forum where United Brethren ministers could air their views and experiences of sanctification.

Almost immediately, the advocacy of entire sanctification in the *Religious Telescope* began showing fruit in the church. It is probably true that without such a means of communication to large numbers in wide


\(^{48}\)Lawrence, *History of United Brethren*, 334.

\(^{49}\)Davis, *Life of Edwards*, 79.

\(^{50}\)Edwards, "Our Readers," 196.
geographical regions, the revival could not have spread so rapidly. The ministers of the church who wanted to promote this revival recognized the periodical's importance. Robert Levering, a United Brethren minister, wrote in August of 1845 that "If the articles on Sanctification appearing in the Religious Telescope are properly read and appreciated, revivals will be more frequent in our Church."51

Because of David Edwards' unrestrained promotion of holiness in the Religious Telescope, some ministers who opposed his views were critical. In an editorial dated April 8, 1946, Edwards acknowledged that some people had criticized him for becoming "controversial" over the doctrine of Christian perfection. He admitted that he published more articles advocating entire sanctification than those opposed, but he made no apologies. He believed he was correct in his views. Contentiousness was not his purpose for writing, but instead it was to lead people into the practical experience of holiness.

At the conclusion of David Edwards' four year term as editor he was reelected by the General Conference of 1849. Edwards chose not to accept the position, however, and to his surprise he was then elected a bishop of the church. Edwards served in that capacity until his death in 1876. Although the office of bishop gave Edwards many opportunities to advocate holiness, never again would he have quite the influence that he had as editor of the Religious Telescope.

Daniel Berger, a church historian, would later write that Edwards' four years as editor had a very marked influence on the denomination.52 Another wrote that, because of Edwards, "... the idea of immediate and entire consecration to God" became fixed in the phraseology of the church.53 William Hanby followed Edwards as editor, but even though Hanby was an avowed proponent of holiness, the paper never took on quite the same character as it had under Edwards.

David Edwards was also engaged in promoting holiness by other means besides the Religious Telescope. In 1846 Edwards wrote and published a book entitled, The Perfect Christian; or, a Condensed View of Bible Holiness as Taught in the Scriptures. Edwards compiled the book from the writings of various holiness authors and the small book had quite an extensive sale. The book became widely circulated in many United Brethren homes and had an extensive influence on the denomination.

The literary interest of those in the church who promoted holiness led them to consider publishing a magazine which would have the promotion of holiness as a primary goal. They were able to persuade the General Conference of 1853 to publish the magazine for the entire

52Berger, History, 301.
53Lawrence, History of United Brethren, 345.
denomination. Edwards agreed to serve as editor of the magazine along with his other duties as bishop, and in November of 1853 the first issue of *Unity With God and Magazine of Sacred Literature* was published.

Once again Edwards found himself with pen in hand. He made clear that one of the magazine’s purposes was to advocate “entire regeneration and sanctification of heart and life, exemplified in all the holy and living forms of an experimental and practical Christianity.”

Edwards was editor of the magazine until 1857 when he was succeeded by Alexander Owen. The magazine never became a financial success, however, failing to garner enough subscribers for adequate support. It was eventually discontinued in 1859.

Lest the impression be given that there was complete unanimity of opinion regarding sanctification during this period, it must be made clear that there always was opposition to its promotion. In fact, in some parts of the church opposition was quite considerable. Edwards and the other holiness adherents never succeeded in influencing the entire denomination to adopt their views. In most instances these opponents sincerely believed they were opposing real error. Many of these individuals thought that the new birth effects a complete purification of the heart with only growth needed afterward. Others felt entire sanctification was a gradual work and was seldom, if ever, completed until shortly before death. Still others, while they agreed entire sanctification might be possible, nevertheless looked upon its profession with disfavor.

The fact that the promoters of holiness were sometimes indiscreet in their advocacy of the doctrine probably helped to antagonize some needlessly. One activity which was commonly used and often became controversial was the holding of separate meetings for the friends of the doctrine. The autobiography of the Rev. D. K. Flickinger describes one of these meetings which occurred in Dayton, Ohio, in 1853. The leaders of this meeting sought all present to go forward to the altar and seek the blessing of holiness. Flickinger was one of three ministers who did not go forward but remained at their pews and prayed. Flickinger could not accept the doctrine of Christian perfection. He felt that the most “enthusiastic sanctificationists” were often found to be no better than other professors of religion.

While unanimity regarding sanctification was never attained, everyone agreed that conversion was only the beginning of the Christian life. They also agreed that it was possible for very high attainments of holiness in this life. Therefore, even though some disagreed about some points of

54Fetters, *Trials*, 188.
the doctrine being advocated, they were all excited about discussions of a higher life. Alexander Owen would write that:

Even those ministers who did not receive the doctrine gave greater prominence to the idea of consecration in their sermons, and some by this means drove their people into greener pastures whither they could not lead them. ⁵⁷

**Results of the Holiness Revival**

The revival of holiness in the United Brethren Church which began in 1844 had a widespread influence upon the religious life of the denomination. The influence of holiness was important because it was during this period that views on vital questions of doctrine were becoming crystalized as "law." Daniel Berger felt that as a result of this holiness revival, "the spiritual life of the Church was greatly quickened, both in the pulpit and the pews . . ." ⁵⁸ As has already been noted, through the promotion of entire sanctification by the ministers, many of the laity sought the blessing and obtained it.

The emphasis on holiness also rejuvenated the denomination evangelistically. Revivals occurred all over the church. According to David Edwards, the revivals almost universally followed those who were presenting and advocating entire sanctification. The leaders of the holiness movement were convinced that, "There must be a waking up to the subject of holiness in the churches, among ministers and members," if revival was to be seen. ⁵⁹ Such revivals did come.

At a Quarterly Conference of the Richland Circuit in Ohio, a revival occurred which was typical of many around the denomination. The following was recorded in the December 10, 1845 *Religious Telescope*:

During Conf Br. G. Hiskey spoke of the necessity of a deeper work of Grace in the officiary of the church, and also, that each Quarterly and Annual Con. should spend some time in investigating that holy subject, Sanctification. After considerable talk by different brethren on the subject, the Presiding Elder requested all to rise on their feet that desired this blessing. All rose. Glory to God! I never saw a more visible display of the grace of God among so many Brethren - about 30. Br. Hiskey requested all kneel and have a few moments of silent prayer - God still continued to pour out his Spirit. When we rose from our knees no one was able to speak for some time in consequence of weeping. Each heart appeared to say, Glory to God for a full salvation! ⁶⁰

John Lawrence, in his history of the denomination, felt that this revival of personal holiness came at an opportune time, when the church was about to enter a period of tremendous growth. ⁶¹ Indeed, many would contend that it was the revival in holiness which made possible this growth.

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⁵⁷ Owen, "Historical Sketch," 59.
⁵⁸ Berger, *History*, 301.
As William Shuey wrote during the revival, it is the practical holiness of the church which draws the world to it. He maintained that, for the church to transmit and spread the message of God's holiness, it must be holy itself. 62

The revival of holiness seemed to arouse a general spirit of enterprise throughout the denomination. During this period, the church began its first educational work with the opening of Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio. The period also saw the formation of a missionary society for the church and the first mission work begun. All of those involved in promoting holiness felt that the doctrines new emphasis in the denomination helped spur these advancements. 63 The facts do reveal that this was the period of the most rapid and sustained growth in the history of the United Brethren Church. During the fifteen year period from 1845 to 1860, the membership of the church increased from 36,000 to 94,500, nearly tripling. 64 The number of Annual Conferences also tripled during this period, increasing from 9 to 27. 65 United Brethren ministers were motivated to follow the large migration into the exploding Western frontier.

Unfortunately for the denomination, the concern among the people regarding the higher life began to decline around 1860. The reason was the impending Civil War. With talk of war, secession, and politics becoming so prevalent, the seeking after holiness suffered. 66 During the four long years of the war itself, the life of the church as well as the nation, was shaken, and all energies were focused towards its speedy conclusion. During this quadrennium the church's membership actually declined for the first time in its history.

While entire sanctification was by now a generally accepted doctrine, and would remain so, it was never again to capture the imagination of so many as it had during the fifteen years preceding the War. After the Civil War, the United Brethren Church was distracted more and more over the issues of secret societies and constitutional changes. This weakened to a considerable extent the urgency of "holiness" revival.

Conclusion

The Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification played a significant role in the life and thought of the United Brethren Church during the first

61 Lawrence, History of United Brethren, 345.
63 Owen, "Historical Sketch," 60.
65 Drury, History of the Church, 423, 449-450.
66 Matthews, A Century, 32.
seventy-five years of its existence. From the founders, Otterbein and Newcomer, to later leaders such as Edwards, the doctrine was clearly expounded in the church. While never being universally accepted, by 1860 the doctrine was generally accepted in all Conferences of the denomination.

Today many are concerned with church growth and renewal, attempting to find ways of reinvigorating our churches. Perhaps we should learn a lesson from our heritage. When churches stressed true personal holiness in life and character the result seemed to be revival. Perhaps we would all benefit by a greater emphasis on personal holiness, whatever our particular distinctions concerning the doctrine.