

## UNITY OF HEART AND HEAD: CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION IN THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH

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In 1971, when Bishop Reuben Mueller addressed the Commission on Archives and History of The United Methodist Church, he told how his father had been catechized as a youth in a German state church and then, after emigration to Minnesota, experienced conversion and joined the Evangelical Church. He recounted: "My father often told how he valued both his conversion and his catechetical training. The first had involved his emotion and will to live for Christ. The second taught him what it meant, even before it happened. For him, people needed to be addressed with the Christian gospel in heart and in mind."

This affirmation, in addition to the author's personal formation in the Evangelical Church, occasioned the following thesis: that the Evangelical Church, a small, pietistic, American-born denomination, while emphasizing the new birth, also employed the catechetical method alongside the Sunday School to help its young people know the faith into which they had been born. New birth and nurture, unity of heart and head, from the beginning, was the pattern by which young people were given spiritual nurture. Exploration of this thesis offers a number of interesting conclusions.

### Catechisms Published

The Evangelical Church in its separate history produced a number of catechisms for the purpose of religious instruction. The first of these appeared in 1809 and, following the *Book of Discipline*, was the second book provided by the early denominational fathers. Actually, eighteen-year-old John Dreisbach had translated a small English-language catechism into German, and the Conference of 1809 asked him to have it printed for use in the church. This he did that same year, probably at his own expense.<sup>1</sup>

Dreisbach's catechism contained 72 pages and went through three editions. No copy of it seems to have been preserved.<sup>2</sup>

The second major catechism of the Evangelical Church was prepared by W. W. Orwig and published in 1847. His work was titled in English

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond W. Albright and Roy B. Leedy, *A Century's Progress: A Story of Religious Education in the Evangelical Church 1832-1932* (Cleveland, OH: The Board of Religious Education of the Evangelical Church, n.d.), 12.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

*Catechism of the Principal Doctrines of the Christian Religion*. Following 162 pages of brief questions and answers with suggested scripture verses for memorization, another 24 pages of children's resolutions, prayers, and hymns appear. Reprinted in German in 1860, its English version appeared in 1864.<sup>3</sup>

The third official catechism of the Evangelical Church was drawn up by Bishop J. J. Esher, a strong advocate of catechetical instruction. Esher's 181-page catechism contained 537 questions and answers. It was modeled after the German catechisms of William Nast of the Methodist Episcopal Church and Philip Schaff of the German Reformed Church in the United States.<sup>4</sup> This catechism, commissioned by the General Conference, appeared in German in 1882 and in English translation the next year.<sup>5</sup> Esher's biographer conceded that while this catechism was comprehensive in doctrine, its questions were too difficult and the answers too profound for the catechumens.<sup>6</sup>

With the tragic division of 1891, which led the smaller faction to organize the United Evangelical Church, it was necessary for that body to create its own catechism. In 1901 the Reverend Jacob Hartzler published two catechisms for United Evangelicals, one for children under twelve years of age and the other for youth over twelve.<sup>7</sup>

Bishop Esher died before he was able to revise his catechism. In 1905 the Evangelical Association published *The Revised Catechism of the Evangelical Church*, a simplified version of Esher's catechism written by his episcopal colleague, Thomas Bowman. Its series of 305 questions and answers covered 125 pages. Interestingly, its first question was borrowed from the Presbyterian *Westminster Catechism*:

Q.: What is the chief end of man?

A.: The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>W. W. Orwig, *Catechism of the Principal Doctrines of the Christian Religion* (Cleveland: Published by W. F. Schneider, 1847). Riebel claimed that as early as 1852 Orwig's catechism was translated into English. E. D. Riebel, "A Study of Religious Education in the Evangelical Denomination" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1931), 143.

<sup>4</sup>J. J. Escher, *Katechismus der Evangelischen Gemeinschaft* (Cleveland, OH: Verlagshaus der Evangelischen Gemeinschaft, 1882).

<sup>5</sup>Raymond W. Albright, *A History of the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg, PA: The Evangelical Press, 1942), 216.

<sup>6</sup>W. Horn, *Leben und Wirken von Bischof Joh. Jakob Escher* (Cleveland, OH: Verlagshaus der Evangelischen Gemeinschaft, 1907), 313.

<sup>7</sup>Albright, *A History of the Evangelical Church*, 216; Albright and Leedy, *A Century's Progress*, 74.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas Bowman, *The Revised Catechism of the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg, PA: The Publishing House of the Evangelical Church, 1905), 11.

In the period between 1905 and 1946, when the Evangelicals joined the United Brethren in Christ, still other denominational catechisms were published. J. Pfost produced a still shorter version of Esher's *Catechism* than Bowman's, entitled *The Condensed Catechism*.<sup>9</sup> In 1922 the earlier division between the Evangelical Association and the United Evangelical Church was overcome when the vast majority of both bodies united to create the Evangelical Church. In the euphoria of reunion, far-reaching plans called for better educational materials for Sunday School and catechetical instruction. Three catechetical pieces emerged in the ensuing decade. The first, *The Junior Catechism for Children*, was Christian Staebler's contribution for children between ages 9 and 12.<sup>10</sup> The second was E. W. Praetorius's *The Handbook of Religion for Youth*, offering a broader range of curriculum materials. Bishop S. P. Spreng's *What Evangelicals Believe* appeared in 1930. A book of basic doctrines for more mature readers, it covered a broad range of theological topics from epistemology through eschatology.<sup>11</sup>

A fourth little book, which appeared in 1932, was W. E. Peffley's *Seeking Admission*, which was designed for use in pastors' classes with preparatory members or in teaching the essentials of the faith, history, polity, and life of the Evangelical Church. Its concluding pages, entitled "What Evangelicals Should Know," contained both the General Rules and also a summary of the Articles of Faith of the Evangelical Church.<sup>12</sup> In 1942 the General Conference authorized publication of *My Church and What It Believes*, written by W. C. F. Hayes.

This brief outline of repeated publications, translations, and revision of catechisms, while perhaps not unusual in Protestant denominations at that time, suggests the concern of the church's leadership that the children and youth of the denomination, as well as adult converts, be well schooled in its teachings.

### Promotion of Catechetical Instruction

The Evangelical Church in its separate history voiced persistently the need for a strong catechetical program. One sees this in the fervent support that came from the pens of denominational leaders. George Miller's *Practical Christianity (Thätiges Christenthum)*, published in 1814 and widely read, called for piety in family life. Miller challenged fathers to be patterns of godliness for their families. While living example was most

<sup>9</sup>Albright and Leedy, *A Century's Progress*, 74; Riebel, 144.

<sup>10</sup>Albright, *A History of the Evangelical Church*, 394-395; Albright and Leedy, *A Century of Progress*, 74.

<sup>11</sup>Samuel P. Spreng, *What Evangelicals Believe* (Cleveland, OH, and Harrisburg, PA: The Evangelical Publishing House, 1929).

<sup>12</sup>W. E. Peffley, *Seeking Admission: A Manual of Instruction for Preparatory Classes and Private Study* (Harrisburg, PA: The Evangelical Publishing House, 1932).

important, fathers must use the Bible and the Evangelical catechism in instructing their children.<sup>13</sup>

W. W. Orwig, in the preface to his catechism, insisted on religious instruction of "the rising generation" by all suitable means.

Next to the preaching of the Gospel, whereby men generally are invited to Christ and the enjoyment of his benefits, catechisation is probably one of the best means to promote such instruction.<sup>14</sup>

Several years later Orwig reported that many early Evangelical ministers used Dreisbach's catechism to instruct children and that he himself had used it with good results for twenty-five years.<sup>15</sup>

An impassioned appeal for Evangelical clergy to catechize the children of their charges came from Bishop Joseph Long in 1858. Long admitted that catechism instruction may not have been so necessary at the denomination's origin because most of the first members had been raised in other churches where they had training in the main Christian doctrines. Now, however, the Evangelical Association had become a church with children born within its bosom. They needed to be given religious instruction. Long informed the preachers that it was their "unavoidable duty" to instruct the children and youth in the way to salvation.

Nor did parents escape the bishop's call to action. Countering their argument that they lacked the time to catechize their children, he reminded them of the long winter evenings and the proper use of the Lord's Day, threatening them with Christ's judgment if they were to neglect this responsibility and appealing to the joy they would have in knowing that in this way they had contributed to their children's salvation. The bishop likewise testified that he would not give up for the whole world the instruction he had had in his youth.<sup>16</sup>

A more doctrinal tone was uttered by Bishop J. J. Esher in the preface to his 1882 catechism. For him the catechism was the *Bekennnisschrift*, the confessional book of the church. The catechism of the Evangelical Association served as the confession of faith and life of the denomination. Since the education of people for the Kingdom of God is the task of the family, the school, and the church (the threefold educational institutions appointed by God and including all ages and classes of people), the catechism is said to be regarded as the textbook (*Lehrbuch*) of the church. Esher further called the catechism a book of dogmatics.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Quoted from J. Steven O'Malley, *Touched by Godliness: Bishop John Seybert and the Evangelical Heritage* (Granite Publications, 1984), 234.

<sup>14</sup>Orwig, 3.

<sup>15</sup>*Christliche Botschafter*, 1852, 197.

<sup>16</sup>"An die Prediger und Glieder der Evangelischen Gemeinschaft," *Christliche Botschafter*, April 10, 1858, 499.

<sup>17</sup>Escher, 3.

Supporting these four representative nineteenth-century pro-catechism utterances were repeated similar statements made by successive General Conferences. Even before this, the Evangelical clergy in annual conference session declared the importance of the catechism. The conference of 1811 adopted Dreisbach's catechism and directed that preachers conduct catechetical classes on their circuits.<sup>18</sup> The first General Conference commanded all preachers "to instruct the children properly in our churches." The General Conference of 1855 repeated this directive.<sup>19</sup>

In the minutes of each General Conference of the Evangelical Association from 1859 to 1919, reference was made to the value and desirability of holding catechism classes. A statistical table contained a column recording the number of catechetical classes and catechumens in each annual conference. Listed below are the catechetical statistics for the General Conference years 1859-1919 in the Evangelical Association and in the years 1922-1930 in the reunited Evangelical Church. The peak year was 1926, when the denomination counted 13,088 catechumens in 1,246 classes.

Even in the tumultuous year 1891, when the denomination was breaking apart, the General Conference nevertheless passed legislation declaring it to be the duty of every preacher to hold catechetical instruction at least six months of the conference year in each society in his charge, to cover the entire Evangelical Association *Smaller Catechism* in one year (or, if necessary, in two), and to appoint suitable persons to provide this instruction under his supervision if he could not personally do this.<sup>20</sup> Catechetical instruction was to begin with ten-year-old children.<sup>21</sup>

One of the expectations regarding catechism was that there would be considerable memory work, a partial carryover from the extensive memorization of Bible verses in Sunday School. E. D. Riebel reported that the apex of this Bible memorization emphasis was between 1850 and 1870. He cited as evidence the Clark's Valley Sunday School in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, where 56 "scholars" memorized 9,569 Bible verses, 35,032 scriptural quotations, and 1,882 hymns in 1848!<sup>22</sup> In the writer's youth in a North Dakota Evangelical church, memorization of scripture was stressed in Sunday School.

Nor was memorization limited to Sunday School. Bishop Long averred that children should memorize the catechism so they could recite for the preacher when he visited and gain a good knowledge in their youth that would

<sup>18</sup>Albright and Leedy, *A Century's Progress*, 101.

<sup>19</sup>J. C. Hornberger, "Why is Catechetical Instruction so Largely Neglected in our Church?" *Evangelical Messenger* (September 3, 1902), 562.

<sup>20</sup>*Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical Association (Twentieth Session)* (Cleveland, OH: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1891), 126.

<sup>21</sup>Hornberger, *op. cit.*; *What is Religious Education?* (Cleveland, OH: The Board of Religious Education of the Evangelical Church, n.d.), 5.

<sup>22</sup>*Evangelical Messenger*, December 8, 1848, 90; Riebel, 153-155.

APPENDIX  
STATISTICS BY QUANDRENNIUMS<sup>24</sup>

	Sunday Schools			Catechism	
	No. of Schools	Officers and Teachers	Pupils	Classes	Membership
1850	168	1354	6513	...	...
1859	423	4452	18473	102	1291
1863	584	6026	26483	187	1687
1867	808	8304	41395	283	2772
1871	1165	13080	68648	497	5186
1875	1510	16875	90090	509	6186
1879	1919	20553	118640	646	8455
1883	2131	22646	139595	641	8233
1887	2348	27210	162837	708	9462
1891	2535	28613	177639	716	9514

	SUNDAY SCHOOLS						Y. P. A.		K. L. C. E.		CATECHISM			
	EVAN. ASS'N			UNITED EVAN.			EVAN. ASS'N		UNITED EVAN.		EVAN. ASS'N		UNITED EVAN.	
	No. of S. S.	Officers and Teachers	Pupils	No. of S. S.	Officers and Teachers	Pupils	Alliances	Membership	Leagues	Membership	Classes	Membership	Classes	Membership
1894	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	
1895	2067	20962	126318	...	...	...	745	20162	...	...	751	8037	...	...
1898	...	...	...	784	10602	74651	...	...	536	17837	...	...	...	...
1899	2178	23641	148867	...	...	...	987	34960	...	...	911	10735	...	...
1902	...	...	...	887	11349	83381	...	...	588	14758	...	...	...	...
1903	2212	24171	154184	...	...	...	1085	35671	...	...	801	10516	...	...
1906	...	...	...	911	12379	106934	...	...	638	15304	...	...	...	...
1907	2232	23827	165025	...	...	...	1218	40201	...	...	1004	10361	...	...
1910	...	...	...	923	12992	123289	...	...	...	15225	...	...	...	...
1911	2286	24209	187888	...	...	...	1218	42694	...	...	928	9234	...	...
1914	...	...	...	928	13211	131082	...	...	638	15435	...	...	26	678
1915	...	24399	206050	...	...	...	1499	51185	...	...	909	9009	...	...
1918	...	...	...	947	13707	145153	...	...	601	16794	...	...	89	1558
1919	2226	24358	198435	...	...	...	1148	39718	...	...	771	7501	...	...
1922	2177	24075	217636	924	13700	147487	1635	54689	700	25773	860	9370	150	2624

EVANGELICAL CHURCH

	SUNDAY SCHOOL			E. L. C. E.		CATECHISM	
	No. of S. S.	Officers and Teachers	Pupils	Leagues	Membership	Classes	Membership
1922	3101	37775	365123	2335	80461	1010	11994
1926	2920	35664	388826	2483	75737	1246	13088
1930	2803	34789	361219	2476	66203	1092	8634

be useful to them in later life.<sup>23</sup> Almost fifty years later, J. C. Hornberger considered catechism a way "of storing the memories of our children and young people with scriptural knowledge."<sup>25</sup>

While accomplishments of children and youth in this regard would, no doubt, have varied from pastor to pastor (and child to child), the expectation was that much scripture and some of the answers to catechism questions would be committed to memory.

<sup>23</sup>Long.

<sup>24</sup>Albright and Leedy, *A Century's Progress*, 101.

<sup>25</sup>Hornberger.

Another reason for memorization was the public examination of the catechumens. The General Conference of 1911 heard its Education Committee report on the value

of a public examination before the congregation at the completion of the course of instruction. Although this examination has no connection with the reception of members into our church, it will nevertheless be a benefit to the scholar who prepares for it and expects to pass it; besides the congregation will have an opportunity to hear what the children learn by attending the catechetical school.<sup>26</sup>

In later years it was suggested that this examination "shall embrace a review of the principal portions of the catechism and shall consist of from fifty to sixty questions."<sup>27</sup> J. C. Hornberger suggested that this examination be accompanied by the singing of suitable hymns, prayer, and an appropriate address by the pastor. He warned against requiring the children to take any vows upon themselves or to receive the laying on of hands.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the concluding event for the child or youth in catechetical instruction was not confirmation. One received a certificate indicating that he or she had completed the course of instruction, had learned the rudiments of the Christian faith, and fortified by these, was all the more prepared to live the Christian life. Nor did the successful completion of catechetical instruction constitute automatic reception into church membership. Both the provisions regarding this in the *Discipline* and the writer's personal experience concur in recalling that the latter was done in a separate ritual.<sup>29</sup>

Catechetical instruction preceded the Sunday School in the Evangelical Church. The first Sunday School in the Evangelical Association was founded in 1832 in Lebanon, Pennsylvania.<sup>30</sup> With the dearth of Sunday School literature available, the catechism was a ready curriculum resource, alongside the Bible and hymnal.<sup>31</sup> Even when denominational Sunday School literature first appeared, the catechism was promoted as a Sunday School textbook. In 1853, W. W. Orwig suggested that an hour should be given to the Sunday School lesson each Sunday, then fifteen minutes in singing practice of new tunes and, finally, "fifteen minutes shall be given to the questions and answers on the catechism."<sup>32</sup> That same year the

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<sup>26</sup>*Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth General Conference of the Evangelical Association* (Cleveland, OH: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1911), 171.

<sup>27</sup>*Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical Church* (Cleveland, OH, and Harrisburg, PA: Evangelical Publishing House, 1923), 60; *What Is Religious Education?* 5.

<sup>28</sup>Hornberger.

<sup>29</sup>*Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg, PA: Evangelical Publishing House, 1943), ¶¶137-138, 78.

<sup>30</sup>Albright and Leedy, *A Century's Progress*, 21.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>32</sup>*Christliche Botschafter*, June 15, 1853, 100; Riebel, 150.

Sunday School constitution for the denomination specified that there be a closing fifteen-minute period each session devoted to questions and answers from the catechism.<sup>33</sup> In the twentieth century both Sunday School and catechism were placed organizationally under the Conference Board of Religious Education, where they appeared to be separate and supplemental to one another.<sup>34</sup>

### Resistance to Catechetical Instruction

There was also resistance to catechetical instruction in the Evangelical Church. The denomination as a whole did not adopt catechetical instruction of the young. In 1877 the *Evangelical Messenger* lamented:

It is admitted that catechetical instruction has not been generally successful in our church. It appears that wherever the subject comes fairly before the conferences for consideration and action, a painful sense of remissness and neglect and consequent failure is realized and refuge is taken in good strong resolutions.<sup>35</sup>

The bishops of the Evangelical Association in their episcopal address to the General Conference of 1895 regretted that

Catechetical or regular religious instruction in our church in general is still much neglected. . . . Improvement in this part of the work of the church is greatly needed if we would be true to our duty to our children and younger members, and to the future of our church.<sup>36</sup>

Despite repeated appeals for catechetical instruction on into the 1940s, it was conceded: "this concern for catechetical materials was neither unanimous nor uniform."<sup>37</sup>

The reasons for the resistance to catechetical instruction are several. Probably most important is the fact that the early Evangelicals, stressing conversion and a new life in Christ, looked back with disfavor upon the abuses of the catechism training and confirmation in other denominations, which had not brought them to the vitality of Christian life they personally found in the Evangelical Association. Surely many Evangelicals would have agreed with Reuben Yeakel's description of their church founder, before his conversion:

It was with Albright, as it was with the majority of church-members, who after baptism, catechetical instruction, confirmation, Lord's Supper and reception as members

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<sup>33</sup>Albright, *A History of the Evangelical Church*, 216.

<sup>34</sup>Riebel, 127-128.

<sup>35</sup>*Evangelical Messenger*, 1877, 228; Albright and Leedy, *A Century's Progress*, 13.

<sup>36</sup>*Proceedings of the Twenty-First General Conference of the Evangelical Association* (Cleveland, OH: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1895), 29.

<sup>37</sup>J. Bruce Behney and Paul H. Eller, *The History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church*, Kenneth W. Krueger, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 344.

in the church regarded themselves licensed from that time forth to live in sin and instead of reforming, continually became worse.<sup>38</sup>

The abuse the Evangelicals believed they had left behind was the practice of trying to bring children and young people into the Christian life by educational means only and, thereby, neglecting the life-changing experience provided by the new birth. Many of them argued that if one had had the new birth, what further need of catechetical training might there be?

Another objection to catechetical instruction was that of formalism.<sup>39</sup> This was a fear that people would less directly experience the breaking in of the Holy Spirit into their lives if an educative approach to the Christian faith and life were made, or if the Evangelical Association (which did not fully call itself a church until 1922) aped the “Church Dutch”—the Lutherans and Reformed—in worship and architecture.

Formalism meant confessionalism that involved head, but not heart. John Seybert remembered a pastor who told his catechetical students, “This is how *we* believe and you are acceptable *if* you conform.” Seybert found no hint in this pastor that there was a God who loved him as a person.<sup>40</sup> Nor was this only a nineteenth-century theme among many Evangelicals. A retired seminary professor recently acknowledged that he had not been catechized by his preacher father because “catechism was too formal for us in the Pacific Northwest Conference.”<sup>41</sup>

Other contributing factors to neglect of catechism instruction in the Evangelical Association were polity considerations (in the early years) and parental neglect. The itinerant system that required preachers to ride a circuit with many classes to meet and preaching appointments to keep did not lend itself well to working catechetical classes into a busy schedule. The lack of time to teach their children the catechism was likewise an excuse used by many parents. These could have been valid excuses, or they might reflect indifference to catechetical instruction for the reasons cited above.

Thus, catechetical instruction was not spread evenly across the church. According to the 1899 General Conference statistics, of 2,258 organized congregations only 903 or 40% claimed to have catechism classes.<sup>42</sup> The statistics reported at the 1946 General Conference reveal that among 1,939 organized congregations there were 808 catechetical classes involving 8,149

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<sup>38</sup>Reuben Yeakel, *Jacob Albright and His Co-Laborers* (Cleveland, OH: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1877), 21.

<sup>39</sup>Riebel, 141.

<sup>40</sup>O'Malley, 136.

<sup>41</sup>Personal conversation with Dr. Paul Rademacher, professor emeritus of systematic theology, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary; January 5, 1990.

<sup>42</sup>Hornberger.

children or youth. Just over 41% of the congregations reported having such instruction.<sup>43</sup> For almost five decades in the twentieth century the percentage of Evangelical congregations that had catechism classes remained constant.

### Conclusion

In the Evangelical Association and its successor, the Evangelical Church, there was a considerable catechism emphasis. A number of catechisms were produced; leading bishops and the General Conference for many quadrennia pleaded with the church to take this educational task seriously, alongside the Sunday School and young people's organizations. Despite the acknowledged resistance, one can still insist that for a denomination so given to stressing the new birth in revival and camp meeting, to have catechism classes in even 40% of its congregations is a notable achievement.

Several further conclusions can be drawn as to why this happened. The first seems to be a lingering Lutheran influence that remained within the denomination. Although its theology and polity were definitely Wesleyan, a soft Lutheran influence stemming from Jacob Albright himself was present in the denomination's beginnings. Albright, George Miller, and John Seybert had all been catechized in the Lutheran Church. Albright consulted the Bible, hymnal, and Luther's catechism in preparing his sermons.<sup>44</sup> It must have been natural for the early leaders to think catechism as they began their ministries. Luther's catechism had figured prominently in their early Christian formation.

Moreover, it is noticeable from the General Conference statistics that the strongest concentration of catechism classes was in annual conferences in areas where a strong Lutheran presence prevailed. In 1859 the Ohio and Illinois conferences led all others in the number of catechism classes in the denomination; in 1863 it was the New York and Wisconsin conferences; in 1867 and in 1871 it was the Wisconsin and Canada conferences. In 1875, Wisconsin led all others with 163 catechism classes, followed by Illinois with 82. After 1879 the General Conference reports for a number of quadrennia revealed the Wisconsin and Minnesota annual conferences to be the leaders in the establishment of catechetical classes. The denomination in those states seemed to reflect the predominantly Lutheran milieu in which it found itself.<sup>45</sup> Raymond Albright indicated that traces of Lutheran

<sup>43</sup>*Reports, Memorials, Quadrennial Reports to the General Conference of the Evangelical Church* (The Thirty-Fourth Session, Johnstown, PA, November 11-15, 1946), 46-47.

<sup>44</sup>Yeakel, *Jacob Albright and His Co-Laborers*, 19.

<sup>45</sup>The General Conference Journals of 1879, 1883, 1887, 1891, 1895, 1899, 1903, and 1907, where statistics were reported by annual conferences, reveal that first Wisconsin and then Minnesota, of all the annual conferences in North America, were in that order the leaders in the number of catechetical classes being held.

influence appeared later in the new church which his ancestor, Jacob Albright, founded.<sup>46</sup> Catechism instruction would have to be one of these.

A second factor contributing to the concern for catechetical instruction in the Evangelical Church was the ethnic one. Throughout much of its existence the denomination saw itself as a Pennsylvania Dutch and German community. Even though World War I and the anti-German sentiment in the United States and Canada had accelerated the eventual move to English-language worship and periodicals, the ethos of the denomination right up to 1946 was strongly Germanic.

Thousands of the persons from other denominations who received the gospel in a special way and united with the Evangelical Church in the United States and Canada were German immigrants who brought the expectations of catechism instruction with them into the church of their choice. It is not surprising that the Episcopal Address at the 1903 General Conference highly commended the Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Atlantic annual conferences for teaching the catechism and lamented the fact that, while the German conferences were keeping up the standard well, the English conferences, as a rule, "seem very lax in the use of this efficient means of importing Biblical instruction."<sup>47</sup>

A hint of this was already present in the Episcopal Address at the 1875 General Conference, which stated that the future of the church lay in the instruction of youth for the kingdom of God and wished this were happening in the older branches of the church.<sup>48</sup> Quite obviously there was a growing disparity between the older eastern annual conferences and those in the midwest. The latter and the newer Atlantic Conference, constantly fueled with new members from recent German immigration, seemed to perpetuate a greater loyalty to traditional catechetical instruction.

A third factor in support of the denomination's official stress on catechetical instruction was the influence upon it of German Pietism. Pietism emerged in the seventeenth century in Germany and Holland in the Lutheran and Reformed state churches as a reaction against "Protestant Scholasticism," which viewed the Christian life as consisting of creedal

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<sup>46</sup>*A History of the Evangelical Church*, 30. Not all the influence for catechetical instruction in the Evangelical Church would stem from Lutheranism. It should be remembered that John Dreisbach, whose translation provided the first catechism for the young denomination, was Reformed in background. Albright, *A History of the Evangelical Church*, 75.

<sup>47</sup>*Proceedings of the Twenty-Third General Conference of the Evangelical Association* (Cleveland, OH: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1903), 37.

<sup>48</sup>*Verhandlungen der General-Conferenz der Evangelische Gemeinschaft* (Cleveland, OH: Gedrukt im Verlagshaus der Evangelische Gemeinschaft, 1875), 14-15. That year, for example, the Wisconsin Conference reported 163 catechism classes, while the three Pennsylvania conferences together claimed only a total of seventeen classes and the Ohio Conference had only seventeen. Cf. Terry M. Heisey, "Immigration as a Factor in the Division of the Evangelical Association," *Methodist History*, Vol. XIX (October 1980), 41-57.

adherence, sacramental observance, and respectable deportment. The Pietists insisted that the Christian life depended upon the new birth, constant renewal by the Holy Spirit of individuals and church communities, and practical Christian living by lay men and women as well as by clergy. Interestingly, it was Philipp Jakob Spener, the Lutheran Pietist leader in the seventeenth century, who revived both catechetical instruction and confirmation in his own church in Germany. His successor, August Hermann Francke, institutionalized many of Pietism's educational and social reforms at Halle University.<sup>49</sup> Pietism's influence on the American scene came about through its publications and also its adherents within the German immigration to the New World both inside and beyond the Lutheran and Reformed churches.

How Pietism affected the Evangelical Church cannot be treated here. Book-length treatments of this subject are available.<sup>50</sup> It is well known that Pietism through the Moravians exercised considerable impact upon John and Charles Wesley. It is safe to say that it likewise affected the early Evangelical Church.

It is noteworthy that the first book published by the new denominational press written by a non-Evangelical leader was August Hermann Francke's *Menschen Furcht (Fear of Man)*, which was reissued in 1818. John Dreisbach called it "a pure teaching of true Christianity."<sup>51</sup>

One of classical Pietism's chief influences upon the Evangelical Church in the nineteenth century came through the preaching and teaching of Bishop John Seybert (1791–1860). Not only did Seybert disseminate hundreds of books to his itinerant preachers, but his considerable library, still housed at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, contains the works of such mystical and Pietist authors as Jacob Boehme, Gerhard Tersteegen, Johann Tauler, Thomas à Kempis, Gottfried Arnold, Johann Jacob Rambach, and Caspar von Schwenkfeld.

What Seybert read and said in his preaching and *Journal* supports J. Steven O'Malley's appropriate reference to his theology as "broadly Wesleyan in outline, yet tinged with strong overtones of German mysticism that formed a distinctive style of spirituality in the Evangelical Association."<sup>52</sup> Though mysticism and Pietism differ, they share the concern that people have affective as well as cognitive awareness of God and that the life in the Holy Spirit calls forth a sense of religious awareness and immediacy which depends upon and yet transcends the ordinary means of grace—the word and sacraments. In the life of John Seybert and others

<sup>49</sup>For Spener's contribution to catechism training and confirmation, see K. James Stein, *Philipp Jakob Spener: Pietist Patriarch* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1986), 79–85.

<sup>50</sup>See James O. Bemserderfer, *Pietism and Its Influence Upon the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (Annville, PA: 1966)

<sup>51</sup>Albright, *A History of the Evangelical Church*, 132.

<sup>52</sup>O'Malley, 98.

who depended upon the Pietist and mythical authors, considerable stress was laid upon *Gelassenheit* (resignation to the will of God, by which one received inner peace and awareness of God in his or her life). The life of humility and self-denial that followed, however, was one of active resignation.<sup>53</sup> Motivated by inner peace, one could be active in doing the Lord's work.

Strong evidence is lacking that would support the contention that a direct connection exists between Spener's catechism and that used by any other Pietist and the early Evangelicals. It seems quite apparent, however, that their spirituality was shaped in good measure by Pietist and mystical writers being read by their denominational leaders.

Perhaps the Pietism influence can be seen in a fourth dimension of Evangelical catechism practices, that these be undertaken not as ends in themselves but as aids to evangelism. The bishops of the church at times sought to minimize the competition in people's minds between conversion and catechism. Bishop Long agreed that children needed to be converted if they were to be saved, but then asked if catechetical instruction would be harmful rather than helpful in their conversion.<sup>54</sup> Bishop John S. Stamm in 1930 left no doubt about the relationship between conversion and catechism when he wrote, "Christian religious education has for its objective the bringing of those taught into the experience of saving fellowship with God through Jesus Christ."<sup>55</sup>

In 1932, at the centennial of the first Sunday School in the Evangelical Church, Bishop Emeritus S. P. Spreng contended:

We do not advocate the idea advanced in some influential circles of 'salvation by education'. We still believe in conversion that is equivalent to regeneration by the power of the Holy Spirit. Nothing can take the place of this. But we believe that the work of evangelism can and is being enriched by the aid of religious education. Evangelism without instruction and awakened intelligence will be shallow and will lack stability and thoroughness. Education without evangelism will tend to superficiality, formalism, and want of genuineness. The two must cooperate and work in harmony. They must supplement and complement one another if we are to maintain our traditional thoroughness of religious experience and yet increase the intelligence with which our people grasp the vital elements of a Christian experience and life.<sup>56</sup>

Repeatedly, the pleas were made on behalf of catechism as a complement to conversion. The General Conferences of 1915 and 1919 heard

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<sup>53</sup>O'Malley, 135-146.

<sup>54</sup>Long.

<sup>55</sup>*Evangelism and Christian Experience* (Cleveland, OH: Board of Publication, Evangelical Church, 1930), 209-210.

<sup>56</sup>"Hitherto," *Sunday School Centennial, 1832-1932* (Cleveland, OH: The Board of Religious Education of the Evangelical Church, 1932), 67.

the bishops urge the church toward "catechetical evangelism."<sup>57</sup> It was fully expected that pastors would use catechism classes as evangelistic opportunities. Conversion, not confirmation, was to be the end result.

A fifth involvement in this catechetical training was the opportunity it afforded to save people from heresy. Although the Evangelical Church was not strictly a confessional church, one finds repeated references to the need to teach catechism so as to keep children and youth from doctrinal error. W. W. Orwig introduced his catechism with this very premise.<sup>58</sup> J. C. Hornberger pleaded for catechism instruction because all kinds of errors aimed at the essential doctrines of Christianity were stalking through the land, "like so many bold and defiant giants."<sup>59</sup> The Education Committee at one General Conference, in commenting on catechetical instruction, called for the transmission of "an intelligent grasp of true faith" to prevent our people "from becoming ensnared by false belief" and said that pastors in seminary ought, for this reason, to be trained theoretically and practically in catechetical instruction and teacher training.<sup>60</sup> The conservative denomination felt assailed by both modern threats to the old faith and by twentieth-century Protestant liberalism. Catechetical training offered a reliable line of defense.

A last factor involved in promotion of catechetical training was the denomination's future. J. C. Hornberger extolled catechism because it surpassed the pulpit and the Sunday School as far as instruction in the doctrines of the church was concerned. Wishing to avoid a narrow sectarianism, he nevertheless counseled the fostering of a strong denominationalism.<sup>61</sup> United Evangelical Bishop W. M. Stanford in 1914 addressed education and youth work in general by insisting, "Take proper care of the child, and that same child, in its turn, will later take care of the church."<sup>62</sup> The Christian Education Committee report at the 1936 North Dakota Annual Conference said that catechetical instruction "affords the pastor a large opportunity not only to instruct the youth in the way of salvation, but to build them into loyal Evangelical Christians."<sup>63</sup> These and other references make it clear that a reason for teaching catechism was that it was a very effective tool for indoctrinating children and youth with the teachings of their own church. If this small and not-well-known

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<sup>57</sup>*Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference of the Evangelical Association* (Cleveland, OH: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1915), 37; *Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh General Conference of the Evangelical Association* (Cleveland, OH: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1919), 59.

<sup>58</sup>Orwig, 3.

<sup>59</sup>Hornberger.

<sup>60</sup>*Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference of the Evangelical Association*, 233.

<sup>61</sup>Hornberger.

<sup>62</sup>Quoted in Albright, *A History of the Evangelical Church*, 356.

<sup>63</sup>*Journal of the Seventeenth Annual Session of the North Dakota Conference, Evangelical Church* (Published by the Order of the Conference, 1936), 27.

denomination were to continue its ministry in North America and other parts of the world, it would need to inculcate in its young what it meant to be an Evangelical in the legacy of Jacob Albright.

What do we deduce from this survey? We certainly must conclude that Albright's successors deserve mixed reviews with regard to catechetical instruction. They were not of a common mind regarding it. Quite likely, even among the 40% of the pastors who were faithful to this denominational educational expectation, there would have been uneven results in performance.

Still, positive claims can be made for a solid catechetical approach to Christian education. Surely here is a marvelous opportunity for children and youth to be given the gospel message in its elemental form, an opportunity for raising questions about it in an optimum learning setting, encouragement of scripture and catechism memorization, the metamessage that they are worth their pastor's and other persons' time and careful preparation, enjoyment in retreat and field trip fashion of the conviviality of a group of Christian disciples, and supportive reception as a class of learners in a special service of worship by the entire congregation—all because the gospel of God's love for them in Jesus Christ is *the* most important news they will ever hear in their lives—and their church will do all it can to help them know it personally. In fact, United Methodism today might well apply the dictum spoken in an episcopal message much earlier in this century, that “the church, to be truly evangelical, must be educational.”<sup>64</sup>

Let the church call people to the new birth; let the church instruct them in what this means; let the church be about the primary business of ministering to people's hearts and heads, even before it calls for the work of their hands.

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<sup>64</sup>*Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference of the Evangelical Association*, 52.