

**MERGING THE STREAMS:  
PIETISM AND TRANSATLANTIC REVIVAL  
IN THE COLONIAL ERA AND  
THE BIRTH OF THE EVANGELICAL ASSOCIATION AND  
THE UNITED BRETHREN IN CHRIST**

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The title of this paper was inspired by a discussion I opened in *A Companion to German Pietism, 1660–1800* (Brill Academic, 2014).<sup>1</sup> It was a chapter on the early theological roots of German American revivalism during the colonial era. These roots also represent the foundation for the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) tradition. Speaking personally, I was among the last to be ordained into its ministry, the year before its history ended in 1968 and completed my doctoral studies at Drew on the theology of the Otterbeins in that same decade. Much of my reading and research over the next fifty years has been focused on exploring the roots of a denomination which disappeared under my feet, shortly after my ordination into it. The continued influence in The United Methodist Church (UMC) is here affirmed, and it is my aim in acquainting you with some of its important rootage from these earlier centuries, where it got its steam to make a 201 year run on the track of history, up to the union year of 1968. It became apparent that such a prologue needs to return to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe to discover the roots of this community of faith which, when it began to organize in North America, was known in some quarters as the earliest indigenous denomination of European rootage formed in American history.

Our goal is to connect the EUB, and by extension, United Methodists today, to their Pietist and German revivalist heritage. To speak of what it was then, before the present time to which we are connected, takes us to another level of research. I am raising serious questions in this paper: We have been labeled as a revivalist denomination but we have not considered the deeper meaning of this label. It raises an interesting and important question: What is the deeper meaning of “revival” in the economy of God? To probe this question is to get close to a discovery of the theological roots of the EUB. The joining of the Evangelicals with the United Brethren in Christ (UBC) in 1946, which created the EUB church for its twenty-one-year existence, was an interface of “breadth” and “depth” which we will explain in the next section. It suffices to say here that the Evangelicals and United Brethren (UB) streams had a pre-EUB history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in

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<sup>1</sup> See J. Steven O'Malley, “Pietism and Trans-Atlantic Revivals,” in *A Companion to German Pietism, 1660–1800*, ed. Douglas Shantz (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2014), 256–289.

European Protestantism. Our first task is to uncover these two, and, in so doing, probe the features of each until we can see how the merger of these two streams provided the distinctive identity of a denomination which historians once called the first American-born church.<sup>2</sup>

We begin with Philip William Otterbein, the chief spiritual mentor in America to the young Francis Asbury and was one of two men (along with Thomas Coke) who ordained and consecrated Asbury as first superintendent (later bishop) of the Methodist Episcopal Church at the founding Christmas Conference of 1784 in Baltimore, Maryland. Through Otterbein, the later EUB is distinguished by its Confession of Faith (he was its originator, circa 1785), which is now one of two foundational belief statements in the UMC *Book of Discipline*, alongside the Methodist Articles of Religion. This Confession contains main theological themes which can be traced back to Otterbein, especially those articles concerning soteriology and ecclesiology, as well as its social principles. These documents reflect a legacy of German Pietist theology, which was preceded by two centuries of German federal and mystical theology dating back to the seventeenth century, over a century before Otterbein's birth. While German Reformed Otterbein was superintending the rise of the UBC in tandem with Martin Boehm, his Mennonite colleague, the founder of a second branch of the EUB, Jacob Albright, was beginning his ministry among Lutherans in rural Pennsylvania.

### **The Breadth and Depth Dimensions in German Pietism**

My thesis for this paper is that the EUB prehistory represents a confluence of two theological dimensions, namely, breadth and depth. To use a baseball simile, the depth dimension in our walk with God is like hitting a home run based on what was initiated from the pitcher's mound; but unless the batter runs all three bases and reaches home base—that is, unless depth is complemented by breadth—all that hitting the ball amounts to is simply hype with no substance. EUB theology is a confluence of these two different dimensions in German theology and spiritual formation. In other words, there was a coming together of two threads of piety or worship before there was a merger of the two denominations.

First, the thread of German Pietism which I call the “breadth” dimension was originally called “federalism,” or the federal theme, in theology. The root for the word is the Latin *foedus*, which means “covenant” in English. Federalism, originally a movement in German and Dutch Reformed theology dating to the seventeenth century, saw salvation in relation to God making a covenant with humans, which is, of course, a biblical theme. It was the way early Reformed Pietism challenged the sterility of Protestant orthodoxy

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<sup>2</sup> A “denominational” study described their beginning with these words: “The Church of the United Brethren in Christ was the first new (e.g., indigenous) denomination founded in the United States. The Church had its spiritual ‘birthday’ in a great meeting, held on Pentecost Sunday, about 1767” (U. P. Hovermale, *The Church of the United Brethren in Christ: Origin, Purpose, and Program* [Dayton, OH: The Home Mission and Church Erection Society, 1942], 2).

which placed exclusive emphasis on Aristotelian deductive logic (based on the syllogism) as the definition of what it means to be rational about what you believe. For Federalists the source of knowledge in faith is not deductive human logic as orthodox Protestants had taught; rather, Federalism believed that the knowledge provided by God's revelation of Himself in His holy covenant, made with those God invites for a redemptive relationship with Him. This way of thinking focuses not on the depth dimension in the soul, as with the mystics, but the historical dimension of how God has acted through the revelation of Himself in history in covenant formation. In other words, Federalism's concern is "breadth" over depth. Here, human salvation means entering into God's narrative of salvation history, which is the witness of the Bible.

The second is what I call the "depth" dimension, the line of mystical theology with its deep and abiding sense of God's redemptive presence in Jesus Christ within the depths of the human soul. Its focus upon Christ being formed in the hearts of God's children is a movement of depth. Reflecting Eckhart's anthropology,<sup>3</sup> the depth dimension envisioned the soul as comprising a higher cognitive capacity, but also a lower or depth capacity, known as the *Seelengrund*. Within this framework, to become converted meant primarily not that which happens at the level of cognition or affections, but in the depth of our being, the ground of the *imago Dei*, where, given human depravity, there is a God-void until Christ fills that space. As such, the Pietist hymn by Gerhard Tersteegen, loved by the early EUB, "*Gott ist Gegenwärtig*" (which John Wesley translated, "Lo, God is Here"), declared:

God Himself is with us:  
 Let us now adore Him,  
 And with awe appear before Him.  
 God is in His temple,  
 All within keep silence,  
 And before Him bow with reverence.

### ***Kinderbeten: The First European Awakening***

When we focus on these European streams of spirituality which fed our EUB roots, we do so within the context of the spontaneous rise of revival, then known as awakenings, which began at the outset of the eighteenth century, several decades before the rise of Methodism in England. To grasp their significance, we could use a clarification of the term revival, as then understood. It is an English term preceded by the German word "Erweckung," from which we derive "Awakening," the term also used to describe the first powerful demonstration of the religious life in colonial North America, the Great Awakening of 1734–1735. It is to be distinguished from

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<sup>3</sup> See Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, Herausgegeben im Auftrage der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft. 13 vols. (Stuttgart and Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1936). (Authentic treatises and sermons).

“renewal” which refers to the strengthening of the life of existing parishes in Christendom.

If we follow the lead of the definitive research of the late British Methodist historian W. Reginald Ward in his monumental *Protestant Evangelical Awakening*.<sup>4</sup> We learn that the first eruption of revival in the annals of European Christendom was the awakening among young children in Silesia which ran for over eight months from 1707–1708 in a war devastating several eastern European Lutheran states which were caught up in the throes of a brutal Catholic Counter-Reformation. There, Lutheran lands had been forcibly reclaimed by the Roman Habsburg emperors in the aftermath of the Reformation. Protestant preaching had been relegated to clandestine meetings in the mountainous Silesian bush country.

In that desperate situation, the sole remaining public expressions of Protestant worship were the orderly and fervent prayer meetings and choral singing which spontaneously arose among the young (five-years-old and older) orphaned children of that wilderness. Soon hundreds and then thousands of children, from the remains of devastated Lutheran parishes, were spontaneously awakened to a winsome prayer and song movement known as *Kinderbeten* (praying children) that swept over the land without parental or clerical promptings. This was the first such occurrence in the annals of Protestant history; this event occurred in a land where an organized Protestant Christendom had been obliterated by the enmity of rival religious confessional powers.<sup>5</sup> The awakening spread after the *Kinderbeten* when, in apparent response to the children’s intercession for someone to help their beleaguered land, a well-armed Swedish force intervened in Silesia to push back the forced recatholicization.

Ecclesial conflict soon developed over how to interpret the children’s revival. The Orthodox (or old school) Lutheran reading was that these were deluded children in need of correction by church authorities; Catholics viewed it as a Protestant ploy to resist Hapsburg attempts to recatholicize the defeated Protestant forces. However, there was also a third and positive reading of the events of the children’s revival, by a Pietist representative, Johann Wilhelm Peterson, who viewed the prophecies of the children, having accurately declared a coming act of deliverance from their desperate oppression, as the completion of the apostolic event of Pentecost in the early church, signifying that the promise of the Spirit would come to your children “and all who “afar off” (Acts 2:39). Formerly a liturgical date on the church calendar, this was the first use of the theme of Pentecost in the context of revival (or awakenings), which would become its primary use in modern Christianity.

Peterson’s early response to the revival was presented in his book, *Die Macht der Kinder (The Power of the Children)*, in which he read this Pentecost event as signifying the imminent restoration through the Holy

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<sup>4</sup> W. Reginald Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> The definitive study is Eric Swensson, *Kinderbeten: The Silesian Children’s Prayer and Prophecy Revival* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010).

Spirit of all humanity through the redemption brought by Christ's work on the cross.<sup>6</sup> It was an interpretation derived from Peterson's intent to find here empirical evidence to refute the prominent mystical theologian, Jacob Boehme, who had insisted that life in this world was nothing other than an ongoing conflict between forces of light and darkness in nature and history with no resolution in sight. In brief, here was a dispute over how best to interpret history, based on an appeal to breadth on the one side (in Boehme's appeal to an ongoing historical struggle between good and evil) or by an appeal to depth on the other—Peterson's view that God is here acting to end and overcome that struggle through an event of Pentecost that takes us out of history and into God's eternal bliss immediately.<sup>7</sup>

However, there was another line of interpreting this awakening. The fruit of the children's revival was the formation of mega refugee congregations among those Lutheran Protestants dislocated by the war, and done under the terms of the peace treaty between the opposing sides. One of these refugee congregations was gathered at Teschen where an emergency worship center was erected in the form of a huge barn, which had 40,000 German-speaking and 30,000 Polish refugees as its adherents.<sup>8</sup> Its lead preacher, a Lutheran named Steinmetz, delivered in that makeshift setting perhaps the first Pentecost addresses ever given within the context of revival probably in all of Protestant history. In a recent discovery and study of Steinmetz's revival sermons from that occasion, the present author has found that Steinmetz's strategy in interpreting Pentecost lay in linking the theme of the cross (central to Lutheran preaching) with Pentecost (as the locus of one's personal sealing with the Holy Spirit of the salvation through Christ's blood shed at Calvary). Here was the origin of the two-phase approach to salvation we find developed in later Wesleyan and EUB theology. The revival guided by this Pentecost theology peaked in Silesia in the decade of the 1720s, until it was abruptly shut down in 1730 by a reinvigorated Habsburg military apparatus.

By then, however, thousands of refugee worshipers had been soundly converted to a lively evangelical and Pentecost infused faith, and lay preachers had fanned out from Teschen all over eastern Europe and beyond. Once the work was shut down by the Hapsburgs, their beloved preacher, Steinmetz, spent the remainder of his life as an exile in Germany, busily networking with the many localities across Europe where the spirit of that awakening had spread. In many instances, as in the Moravian community of Herrnhut, awakening had been kindled by revival among praying children, as in Silesia. This was the first awakening or revival which would also provide a model for the worship of revival denominations which would come later

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<sup>6</sup> This is called the doctrine of the "restoration of all things," or the "Wiederbringung aller Dinge."

<sup>7</sup> The background to this tension of breadth and depth in German intellectual thought is best explained in a German research article, which this author has translated in a forthcoming volume. That article was by Walter Nordmann, "Im Widerstreit von Mystik und Föderalismus, in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 50 (1931): 146–185.

<sup>8</sup> Swensson, part 1.

in the new world, including the EUB and the Methodists. As I have shown in other studies,<sup>9</sup> this twofold soteriology based on Pentecost was conveyed directly to John Wesley via his encounters with Christian David, a Moravian product of the Silesian revival, during Wesley's stay at Herrnhut in Augusts 1738, as well as to Albright via his Methodist contacts in Pennsylvania, to embody the new understanding of a theology of depth, in terms of the sealing and blessed abiding of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer.

### **Breadth and Depth Interpreters of the *Kinderbeten* and their Legacies to the EUB**

This first European awakening in the early eighteenth century occurred within a spiritual void that was countered by a powerful body of mystical writings which had gained prominence in the Christian underworld of the preceding two centuries. Much of it impetus was from the German cobbler, Jacob Boehme, whose dualist and voluntarist type of mysticism sought to counter the unitive, speculative mysticism Peterson's restorationism sought to actualize. It was within the contention between Orthodox Lutherans and Hapsburg Catholics that new interpreters of this mystical legacy began to clarify and connect its insights to the new phenomenon of revival. They were timed to nourish the famished souls of the downtrodden Christians of that age. They were building upon the greatest outpouring of Christian mystical literature in the entire history of Christendom to find redemptive meaning for this awakening. The pastors and their laity who drank from these forbidden spiritual forces were the Pietists. From their number the patriarchs of the early United Brethren and Evangelicals went forth to the new world.

Among the ranks of these new spiritual writers there were also authors of breadth, to balance those of mystical depth, who gave voice to a new way of thinking which would affirm revival as a valid component of the mission of God in history. The uses of breadth and depth in spirituality are altered in this context of the awakening. As for breadth, the Holy Spirit was spontaneously touching souls in new locales, like the wilderness children of Silesia, as a prophetic force of witness to the supernatural saving power of God in an age of spiritual decadence and ecclesial confusion. The leading early voice to this move toward breadth was Johannes Cocceius, the German turned Dutch "federal" theologian, who, according to Jürgen Moltmann, first developed and popularized the idea that the Christian faith is to be grasped through a series of covenants (*foedus*), beginning with God's call to Abraham all the way down to our being summoned to enter into the mystery of the covenant of grace which Jesus offers us in His blood, and through the witness of the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> J. Steven O'Malley, "The Theology of the Cross and its Reconfiguration in the Pietist and Wesleyan Awakenings," a chapter in a forthcoming volume edited by Douglas Matthews, *Cross and Kingdom*, to be published after December, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 1996), chapter 2.

To speak of revival as being brought into the realm of the mystery of God's mission among humans in history, then called the covenant of grace (*Das Geheimnis des Gnadenbundes*), was the great theme of a book by that title written by the German Reformed theologian F. A. Lampe (d. 1729), whose work became the textbook read in conjunction with the Heidelberg Catechism at the Herborn Academy in the German Rhineland district.<sup>11</sup> There the young Philip William Otterbein (1726–1813) received his education as a minister. He was selected to be in the first class of missionaries of his church to the Germans of Pennsylvania and Maryland.

Shortly after arrival in 1752, the gifted and pietist-minded pastor preached a remarkable sermon that reflects the influence of Cocceius and Lampe entitled *Die Heilbringende Menschwerdung und der heiliger Sieg Jesu Christi über den Teufel und Tod*.<sup>12</sup> Here was an invitation for his hearers, recent German immigrants who had arrived in America as indentured servants, to allow Christ to live not only for them as their advocate but also to live in them through the Holy Spirit to bear His fruit of holiness in their lives. Six years after this sermon was preached, Otterbein, then a pastor in the German Reformed congregation at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, received word that an awakening was stirring among a large crowd at the Isaac Long's barn near Lancaster. There the educated German Reformed pastor goes to a bush meeting where the Mennonite Martin Boehm (1725–1812) was preaching the message of the new birth. It happened to be Pentecost Sunday, 1767, the birthdate of the UBC.

The early UBC would continue to remember this as a summon for a new Pentecost to complete the one begun in apostolic times. When Otterbein was called as pastor in Baltimore, a young ministry student arrived at his church from Germany and remained for six months to be mentored by Otterbein. Christian Stahlschmidt had learned about Otterbein while studying in a Pietist fellowship group in Mülheim, Germany, under the leadership of Gerhard Tersteegen (1697–1769), the most renowned leader of German Pietism, who had recently preached a Pentecost address of his own to a large crowd on the street in Amsterdam.<sup>13</sup> The breadth dimension of the godly life, expressed in the federalist or covenant tradition of German Reformed theology, the Heidelberg Catechism, and in the peaching of Tersteegen, was the foundation for the preaching of Otterbein in the new world.<sup>14</sup> It would also lead him into an event of reconciliation with an Anabaptist which resulted in a union which produced the first indigenous denomination in America, the UBC.

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<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Adolf Lampe, *Das Geheimnis des Gnadenbundes*, 6 vols. (Bremen: Verlegung Nathaniel Saurmanns, 1737).

<sup>12</sup> Philip William Otterbein, "Die Heilbringende Menschwerdung und Herrliche Sieg Jesu Christi über den Teufel und Tod," in J. Steven O'Malley, *Early German American Evangelicalism; Pietist Sources on Discipleship and Sanctification* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1995), 19–43.

<sup>13</sup> Christian Stahlschmidt, "The Man of God's Pilgerreise," in O'Malley, *Early German American Evangelicalism*, 107–142.

<sup>14</sup> J. Steven O'Malley, *Pilgrimage of Faith, the Legacy of the Otterbeins* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1973), part 1.

Other interpreters of the first European awakening, the *Kinderbeten*, appealed more to a depth than a breadth approach to Pentecostal encounter with the Holy Spirit. In fact, the first advocate of the *Kinderbeten* was a former Lutheran-turned radical Pietist, Johann Wilhelm Petersen (1649–1727), who observed the *Kinderbeten* first hand and wrote a compelling study of its importance, called *Die Macht der Kinder*.<sup>15</sup> Petersen may be commended for perceiving the authenticity of the spiritual experience of the children in the face of orthodox Protestant and Catholic ridicule, but his restorationist interpretation of that event did not lead to an ongoing revival. He saw the *Kinderbeten* as opening a door not to Christian globalization but rather to the fulfillment of an eschatological hope which he called the *Wiederbringung aller Dinge*, the restoration of all things. In short, with this view, all salvation history halts when Pentecost occurs.

Petersen came to his restorationist view through the influence of a seventeenth-century British spiritual movement of English Behmenists launched by Jane Leade (1624–1724).<sup>16</sup> They soon called themselves the Philadelphians, and their movement spread into Germany, and from there, arrived in colonial Pennsylvania, where their followers perceived that the new heavenly city of Philadelphia, envisioned in Revelation 3 as a community of brotherly love, would at last be manifest on earth and from there the restoration of all things would take place. There we find the radical Pietist influence behind the founding of the city of Philadelphia. This was not a call to world mission in the name of Christ, but to identifying and gathering other seekers of the coming final restoration, who would meet in stillness in anticipation of that coming day of blessedness for the true church on earth.

It was also this Philadelphian spirit which had inspired the pioneer church historian Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714) to project his view that the true children of God in history had always been those persecuted by the state church religion, and who sought to live out a peaceful life of unpartisan love for the children of God amid a world torn by brutality. He laid out the plan for tracing the thread of this unpartisan community which has always existed in hiddenness, known only to the Holy Spirit and to those quiet ones who are apart from this world. The title of his study was the *Unparteiische Kirche und Ketzer Historie* that first appeared in that apocalyptic year 1699.<sup>17</sup>

Arnold had been an Orthodox Lutheran university professor who was won over to the radical Pietist cause, thanks to influence from Leade's Philadelphians. He searched the church fathers and came up with the idea to write a new history of the church that would do something unique. All existing accounts of Christianity at that time were polemical, each version was a defense of a particular church tradition, either the Catholic or a Protestant version, and each thought it was right. Arnold concluded none of those ac-

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<sup>15</sup> Johann Wilhelm Petersen, *Die Macht der Kinder* (Frankfurt, 1709).

<sup>16</sup> Jane Leade, in Preface to John Pordage, *Theologia Mystica* (London, 1681).

<sup>17</sup> Gottfried Arnold, *Unparteiische Kirche und Ketzer Historie, von Anfange des neuen Testament bis aus das Jahr Christi 1688* (Frankfurt am Mayn: Thomas Fritsch, 1699).



counts were right because they were all done from the viewpoint of this denomination or that. Instead, the apostles were, Arnold believed, were more known for how they lived than for their systems of theology, which came much later. To humbly allow the Holy Spirit to live through individuals, and enable them to find fellowship with other believers, regardless of their denomination, is the true model to follow from the early church, thought Arnold. He then went so far as to write a new history of Christianity that he called an “unpartisan” history of heretics and churches, noting that the true line of its development is found in those witnesses who inwardly embodied the kingdom of Christ, not those who belonged to a denomination.

Otterbein liked the inclusiveness of the *unparteiisch* theme, which contributed to his breadth concern for extending God’s mission globally.<sup>18</sup> The *unparteiisch* concept drew him to go outside his original denomination and look for true witnesses to the indwelling Christ wherever they might be found. He reached out even among those whom Christendom called heretics or schismatics; for example, the Anabaptists whose love for Christ over the fallen church of their day led them to renounce the baptism they had received from that state church and seek out others like themselves who were seeking this higher loyalty. With this view, Otterbein was adapting the unpartisan outlook to his concern for extending God’s mission to all peoples, which called him as a missionary of the German Reformed Church to come to colonial America.

That picture also describes the early United Brethren under Otterbein and Boehm. He found truer fellowship in Christ with a despised Anabaptist than he could with those in his own Reformed Church who were in the business of excluding themselves from associating with those who were outwardly different from themselves. Hence, the UBC tendency for men to acknowledge women called to preach, or slaves called to live lives of freedmen, or, on the other shoe, not to have fellowship with those who had taken “secret vows” in support of other religious beliefs than that of the unpartisan brothers and sisters. This reference to secret vows denotes the Freemasons who were excluded from the UBC membership in the nineteenth century, resulting in a schism in the denomination in 1889 in Dayton, Ohio.

There was a center established in Wittgenstein-Berleburg in Germany in the early eighteenth century for the writing of a new concordance of the Bible based on these Philadelphian hopes called the *Berleburger Bibel*. Otterbein had a full set of these volumes in his Baltimore parsonage,<sup>19</sup> and he quoted from them in his sermon of 1760, the single sermon which survived the reported burning of his papers before his death. He brought this Philadelphian hope to his meetings with the reborn Mennonite, Boehm, along with his col-

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<sup>18</sup> Unlike the depth emphasis of the restorationists like Peterson, Otterbein did not seek a quick resolution to the dilemma of human depravity by divine fiat but took the slow and sure missional approach to go and preach to all in the Name who orders all things in His time.

<sup>19</sup> See A. W. Drury, *Life of Otterbein, Founder of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ* (Dayton, OH: United Brethren Publishing House, 1884), 353.

leagues in an informal movement known as the United ministers among the German Reformed in Pennsylvania and Maryland in the 1760s. Here was the harbinger of the emerging formation of the United Brotherhood in Christ Jesus he formed with Boehm in 1800. They even called themselves an “*un-parteischen Brüderschaft*,” following the spiritual ecclesiology of Arnold, in their protocol of 1800 which has survived to the present day.

There is also a Methodist and, consequently, an Evangelical Association (EA) connection to this breadth dimension of reconciliation among competing religious societies. Concurrent with the Pentecost awakening happening under Steinmetz in Silesia, in the wake of the *Kinderbeten*, a new missionary movement was opening in nearby Saxony, through a group called the Moravians, under its presiding leader, Count Zinzendorf, at his retreat center called Herrnhut. These persons too were refugees from the hostilities of the Counter-Reformation, in Moravia and Bohemia. The Count had a vision for the world to be reached for the gospel, from his place, but the refugees there had not yet been empowered for such a mission. One of their spokesmen, a young carpenter named Christian David, began seeking for the empowerment of grace and was sent by Zinzendorf to visit the revival in Silesia then underway there. He went, and found the peace with God through the shed blood of Christ through the Pentecost sealing of the Holy Spirit, under the preaching of Steinmetz. Ecstatic, and now with a sense of urgency, David returns to Herrnhut to share this message with the people there.

A young man named John Wesley, fresh from his conversion at a Moravian meeting at Aldersgate in London, arrived on the scene. He now hears and eagerly receives the twofold message of salvation relayed to him by David, which David had received from his encounter with the revival under Steinmetz in Silesia, the home of the *Kinderbeten*. After his stay at Herrnhut,<sup>20</sup> Wesley returned to England, and within months, the revival began at Bristol in 1739 under Wesley’s colleague, George Whitefield, and he is joined by Wesley there, whose preaching at Bristol marks the birth of Methodism. In time, Wesley sent his lay preachers to America—which included Francis Asbury—to reach those stray Methodists who had emigrated there in the 1760s. Traveling in the area surrounding Baltimore, into Maryland and Pennsylvania, these Methodist preachers began sharing this same message concerning Calvary and Pentecost that Wesley had learned from David.

Then, in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, Jacob Albright (1759–1808), a young German-American and Lutheran catechized war veteran of the colonial cause, a family man and farmer, experienced the joy of the new birth in Christ after a severe period of spiritual trials.<sup>21</sup> It occurred under

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<sup>20</sup> See Wesley’s account of his encounters with Christian David as recorded in *Journals and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, vol. 18 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 274.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Behney and Paul Eller, *History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 69.

the ministry of one of Otterbein's United Brethren preachers, Adam Riegel. Albright was a young German American war veteran of the Revolutionary cause, of Lutheran background, and with a family and small homestead to farm. He was reared a nominal Lutheran but now found accountability by joining a nearby Methodist class where he became confirmed in his new birth. However, Albright found himself struggling with the English spoken at this Methodist class meeting. All the while his heart ached for his lost family and German neighbors because there was no one to bring this message of two-fold salvation to them in their own tongue. He prayed and fasted for weeks on end, until finally he heard the voice of Christ directing him to leave his family, and go himself to his neighbors, bringing them the vital message of the new birth through the blood of Jesus' cross and with the Pentecost sealing of that blessedness through the Holy Spirit. The rest is history.

Such impulse can be traced back to the first revival in Europe, under the preaching of Steinmetz at Teschen in the 1720s. Its global impact came through the extension of that revival through Europe, to America, in the 1730s and 1740s, and thereafter through global Methodism. Among the subsequent awakenings ignited by this impetus, as traced in the anthology by Steinmetz, were those under Tersteegen in the Rhineland and Holland in the 1750s. His input was decisive for the early Albright people, the EA. Their first literary figure, George Miller, used the terminology found in Tersteegen in his German rendition of the Wesleyan oriented two-state approach to salvation in the Articles of Faith. The Evangelicals' first printing press at New Berlin, Pennsylvania, published hymns modeled after the Tersteegen hymnody, as well as his edited translation of *The Imitation of Christ*, and their periodical, *Die Christliche Botschafter*, featured regular reprinted selections from Tersteegen hymns and addresses in its issues through the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> This journal became the longest continuous German religious publication in American history, running from 1834 to 1946.

Through these channels and through the strong Evangelical participation in the later camp meetings of the National Holiness Association this holiness depth dimension of the faith emanates. Also, the first constitutional bishop of the EA, John Seybert (1791–1860), was a reader of Tersteegen, as his personal library attests. He reflects Tersteegen's doctrinal themes in his extensive journal covering a ministry of over 250,000 miles, as he extended the mission of the Albright people to the Midwest and Canada, resulting in a tenfold increase in its membership by the time of the Civil War. He, along with Joseph Long, also took the initiative to launch the successful Germany mission of the EA, in 1850, which grew to become one of the largest free church bodies in German-speaking Europe in the early twentieth century. Its seminary in Reutlingen, Germany, founded in 1877, remains the sole theological school for the United Methodist Church in German-speaking Europe today and has a significant archival collection of the history of the EA in

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<sup>22</sup> See list of these titles in Raymond Albright, *History of the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg: Evangelical Press, 1956), 363–486.

Europe, including areas of eastern Europe and Russia now under other national governments.<sup>23</sup>

We had laid out the breadth (federal) and depth (mystical) dimensions of theology which influenced the interpretation of religious awakenings when they first emerged in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. We have also observed several points of contact between these revival interpreters and the patriarchs of the new bush meeting revival movements in colonial Pennsylvania, the UB, and EA, forerunners of the EUB. Let us examine additional highlights in the two German revival denominations to trace how these two dimensions played out in their midst.

### **Moment of Discovery that Became the United Brethren in Christ**

The event of reconciliation which took place between Otterbein and Boehm on Pentecost Sunday 1767 was the defining moment of the breadth dimension which ignited what was first known as the Otterbein-Boehm movement. It happened in the context of revival when Boehm traveled to Virginia to attend a Whitefield revival meeting. He wanted to sample what was going on regarding awakening among the English-speaking colonists. Returning from that encounter, Boehm was eager to share with his fellow German-speaking brothers and sisters his discovery of the joy of the new birth in Jesus Christ. Otterbein, the leading German Reformed missionary pastor in the colonies, then serving in Lancaster, had come to that location because he heard revival was afoot. Otterbein had experienced the new birth in Jesus Christ in the line of his Pietist background in Germany. It happened when he was serving the church in Lancaster. Now he was eager to see this important work of grace occur in the new world.

Also, why do we call this moment of discovery a moment of reconciliation? Because here was the first recorded instance when a representative of the official state church system in Europe walked across the barrier and embraced a person from the ranks of those despised as rebaptizers: heretics who had defied the authority of the official church system in place there. Now a man sent from authorities governing European Christendom, the seat of that persecuting church, became so bold as not to rebuke this Anabaptist when he saw him preaching. Instead he stepped forward and, embraced with a warm hug this Mennonite farmer-preacher named Boehm (who was in that line of Anabaptists), and Otterbein did so with the joyful declaration, “*wir sind Brüder!*” The hug went down in history as the defining moment of the birth of the EUB movement.<sup>24</sup> It occurred there, in that barn, two decades before Methodists organized themselves in America.

Most Protestant denominations are traced to a split; but here, the first indigenous denomination in America is born in a moment of reconciliation of former enemies in a barn meeting. Does this somewhat remind us of

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<sup>23</sup> See Karl Steckl und C. Ernst Sommer, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche* (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1982), 229–230.

<sup>24</sup> See Behney and Eller, 39.

another time a new faith was born in a barn encounter? I am thinking of the shepherds and the magi who came from afar to the manger in Bethlehem. The formal organization, of course, came later, and this was because there was no intention on the part of Otterbein and Boehm to launch *de novo* a new church in the British colonies of Maryland and Pennsylvania which had not been done.

### Implementing Breadth in the Protocol of the United Brethren in Christ

For the early Otterbein-Boehm movement, the joining of breadth and depth is first placed in a normative declaration in 1800 at their meeting with the “awakened preachers” in Frederick, Maryland. It is the “Protocol of the United Brethren in Christ,” prepared by Otterbein and Boehm, who now are declared by the brotherhood as their superintendents (later, called bishops). In this important document, the first to give formation to the movement that had begun in the Pentecost gathering, Otterbein introduces a definitive term that describes the character of their fellowship: they were to be an “*unparteiische Brüderschaft in Christo Jesu*” or an “unpartisan brotherhood in Christ Jesus.” He further explained this meant they were joined together in one brotherhood “not divided by party, sect, or opinion” but “keeping the bond of love in peace” through their reconciliation in Jesus, as celebrated in the initial faith bonding of Otterbein with Boehm.<sup>25</sup> Such understanding became the key to Otterbein’s distinctive approach to ecclesiology. The word “church” was intentionally omitted, given its painful connotations of memories of oppressive state churches which dominated European Christendom.

By contrast, Methodism linked outwardly with the Episcopal tradition in England, adopting the title Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784. For their part, United Brethren aligned with an inward or spiritual concept of community in Christ, signified by that term *unparteiisch*, which has visible marks in preaching, sacramental ordinances, and foot washing—the latter drawing from the Mennonite heritage. As for baptism, any of the three modes was acceptable, understood as signifying the need for the baptized to be prepared for an encounter with the centrality of the new birth in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This outlook is consistent with the Pentecost context of the founding meeting of Otterbein and Boehm at the Long Barn. Furthermore, early worship gatherings of United Brethren in their first decade regularly were called “Pentecost meetings.”

Through this semi-ecclesial arrangement, United Brethren adopted an affirmative position on women in ministry, with woman preachers licensed by the 1840s and ordained from the 1880s.<sup>26</sup> They were also at the forefront in forbidding members from holding slaves and in working for their manumission. Position statements opposing slavery were included in the UBC *Book of Discipline*. The theological basis for this was not an Enlightenment

<sup>25</sup> Protocol of the UBC, in Arthur Core, ed., *Philip William Otterbein: Pastor, Ecumenist* (Dayton, OH: E. U. B. Board of Publications, 1968), 120–127.

<sup>26</sup> Behney and Eller, 159–168.

doctrine of human rights, as found in public civil rights statutes in the United States; instead, their position on these issues reflected their commitment to preventing the entrance of any forms of human bondage into their “unpartisan” society, devoted to uncompromising loyalty to Jesus above all contractual agreements which would enslave or subordinate members of the human race.

The *unparteiisch* theme also shows itself in the UB approaches to world mission. In most overseas fields where they were at work, UB were the first mission group to have the priority of establishing indigenous, native ruled ministries where no distinction can be made between important and unimportant persons, though there is a distinction was made between resourcing and advising while relinquishing administrative control from the home church. They would then invite other denominations to join with them in creating union churches led by nationals, and resourced by supporting denominations.<sup>27</sup>

The theme was Pentecost-driven: it was prayer and discernment of the Holy Spirit which would guide the mission to implement these objectives. Lay leadership on the field was often intended to take precedence over the maintenance of central control of mission program by the mother church, as in Methodism. With these emphases on behalf of the laity, the motivation for mission and per capita giving was consistently higher among EUB than in other denominations down to union with Methodism. Conference superintendents were chosen by popular vote in the annual conferences, rather than being episcopally appointed, as in Methodism, and there were four-year term limits on EUB bishops, intended to keep them rotating into local ministry and not becoming permanently entrenched in their offices.<sup>28</sup>

The *unparteiisch* theme also makes its appearance in the United Brethren-launched plan for empowering laity at the local church level through a broad-based council of administration, an initiative which carried over into the new council on ministries in the UMC polity formed after the union with Methodists in 1968.<sup>29</sup>

### Implementing Depth in the Theological Roots of the Evangelical Association

Here we also need to introduce the second half of the EUB roots, the Evangelicals, who formed the “E” in EUB, and who joined with the UB in 1946 to form the EUB. While Otterbein, a German Reformed pastor, was beginning his “United Brotherhood” project with the Mennonite Boehm, toward the closing Revolutionary War there was a young soldier being dis-

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<sup>27</sup> Examples of these union churches initiated by United Brethren included the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, United Church of Christ in Japan, the United Church of South China, and the United Evangelical Church of Puerto Rico. See J. Steven O’Malley, *“On the Journey Home”: History of Mission of the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of these mission initiatives of the EUB, see O’Malley, *On the Journey Home*.

<sup>29</sup> “The Local Church Council of Administration” in *The Discipline of the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (Board of Publication, 1959), ¶ 71.

charged from the Revolutionary Army who had served in the Pennsylvania German division of that army. Albright returned to the family farm and tile making shop in Lancaster County, where he experienced a spiritual crisis of faith. Not only the shock of war but also the loss of several children during plagues of diphtheria and other illnesses in that frontier setting threw this nominal Lutheran into despair. There followed a season of nearly broke his father's heart, and propelled him into intense prayer for salvation, based on his reading of the promises of the gospel, and after much wrestling with his sinful condition, he broke through into the wondrous joy of the new birth. He was not at peace yet, for he longed for this experience of grace to reach his struggling German neighbors. He turned to prolonged intercession, pleading with God to send someone to his bring the gospel to his dark world, someone with language skills who would be like the Spirit-anointed Methodist preachers whose class meeting he had visited for a season among the English settlements.

After a period of protracted prayer and fasting, and saturated with the reading of Scripture, Albright decided if God chose to send no one else, perhaps he was now calling him to do so. After much fasting, prayer, and saturation in Scripture, he traveled near and far, leaving his wife and children to tend the farm in his absence. Having no formal education beyond primary grades, he had basic knowledge of Scripture from his early Lutheran catechesis, which he regarded as a providential turn of events. Albright became a close observer of Methodism, and he adopted some of its connectional features to enable him to function as a preacher among others to spread his remarkable encounter with the gospel in all its freshness. After extended intercessory prayer, Albright had the distinct sense the Holy Spirit wanted him to go forth as the voice of mission into the darkness of the postwar disarray in American religious history. His first attempt to preach, in a small market town in his home county, was met with surprising results. Scoffers threw rocks, but others were cut to the heart by his heartfelt message of salvation, spoken in love: "You Lutherans think, I have my catechism, that is all I need, you Mennonites, you think your peculiar style of dress and demeanor is all you need, don't you know you will be lost without the new birth?"

Word of his earnest and grace-filled preaching in marketplaces and roadside stations throughout central Pennsylvania gained such a reputation, that people, hungry for the preaching of the new birth and the deeper work of the Holy Spirit, began seeking him out—some would fall down, crying out for salvation, when he appeared in their midst. A humble yet fervent prophet of the gospel, Albright was obedient to his calling with meager resources at his disposal and his family and friends joined in prayer for his travels. After one service, a few men he had led to Christ called him aside, and with the unction of the Holy One, they laid hands on him to receive the gift of ordination as a "truly evangelical preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ." He was given a letter of ordination, which all signed. Soon afterward, while on the preaching trail, he stopped at a farm home overnight, where he died. The year was 1808, and one might think little would come from such an un-

promising and aborted beginning. In his brief ministry, Albright had planted well the seed of the gospel in the hearts of a small group of people who met the next year in their first “Pentecost meeting,” a conference which adopted the name “The newly formed Methodist conference (German).” However, there seemed to be more who opposed to this work than accepted it. Many Lutheran and Reformed preachers strictly warned their congregations not to hear these Albright preachers.

For two decades after Albright’s death, while he was held in hallowed memory among his followers, the licensing of the Evangelical preachers where not recognized as lawful clergy by neither the “church Deutsch” (meaning the Lutherans, Reformed, and Catholics) nor the “plain Deutsch” (meaning the Mennonites, Dunkers, Amish, and other Anabaptist groups). A new label was invented: they were the “bush meeting Deutsch” because no church meeting houses were open to their preachers. They met where they could, which was in the bush or the wilderness of the frontier of that day. But those who visited them found themselves entering the “*grosse Versammlungen*” or “great meetings” for revival preaching.”

During this formative period, the first general conference of these Albright preachers convened in 1816. Here it first became evident that Albright had touched the lives of persons gifted for ministry, and there was a powerful synergism. They were all either farmers or craftsmen, who could relate to their culture in a way no one coming from the outside could do, including Methodist preachers, who were limited to English. Johann Walter wrote hymns and published a small volume as the first hymnal of the Albright brethren in 1811. John Dreisbach (1789–1871) was a gifted administrator who also wrote revival hymns and served as the superintendent of the conference before any bishops were elected, which did not happen for three decades.

George Miller was an able writer with a keen theological mind who read the Methodist articles and sermons. He prepared a German book of discipline with Articles of Faith and an extended section on “Christian Perfection and Entire Sanctification” which remains as the most explicit theological exposition of that theme of spiritual depth in Christ found in any official *Discipline* in United Methodist history.<sup>30</sup> Of all the believers who trace their lineage to the Wesleys, it was the EA that produced the strongest and most explicit affirmation of *die völlige Heiligung* or entire sanctification as the goal of the Christian’s life, and a program of catechesis for persons to be formed in that life of blessed holiness in Jesus as the deepest expression of their lives as Christians.

The conference of 1816 also adopted the permanent name for their movement, the same name used in Albright’s ordination by his lay followers: “*Die Evangelische Gemeinschaft*” (later translated into English as The

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<sup>30</sup> The German Evangelical leader Gottlieb Fülle spoke of entire sanctification as a mark of depth—reflecting Tersteegen’s concept of the Seelengrund—whereas Methodist holiness folk more often referenced this as an appeal to the higher life.



Evangelical Association). 105 years later, the spiritual descendants of these early Evangelicals, after a season of temporary schism within their society,<sup>31</sup> adopted the more ecclesial name, The Evangelical Church of North America.

The Evangelicals made their distinctive contribution in the depth dimension: their strong statement on Christian perfection and entire sanctification.<sup>32</sup> In translating Methodist documents on that subject into German, their theologian George Miller drew from a wealth of mystical themes conveyed through the radical Pietists, the most influential being Gerhard Tersteegen (1697–1769).<sup>33</sup> In brief, with the Albright people, there is a depth understanding of this key doctrine of their soteriology not addressed in the literature of the United Brethren. To that end, nineteenth-century Evangelicals were also leaders in the large holiness camp meetings of the Methodist-based National Holiness Association. They became prolific in producing literature and a new journal to supplement their *Christliche Botschafter*, devoted to the promotion of holiness and Christian perfection.

Evangelicals were at the forefront in producing theologians,<sup>34</sup> hymn writers,<sup>35</sup> and ecumenical church leaders, both in the U.S. (including the first president of the World Council of Churches) and in their theological seminary in Reutlingen, Germany. A product of American EA missionaries founded in 1877, the school houses an extensive library of theologians and mystical writers who were products of their European conferences, which flourished in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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<sup>31</sup> The schism was complex, mainly featuring the division between those who favored the continued exclusive use of German and those who advocated English (the Eastern conferences); there was also differences on the role of bishops, the East favored a more collegial approach, and became the United Evangelical Church; the West favored a higher episcopal approach; and also a difference in emphasis on the doctrine of Christian perfection (a conflict between the leading western bishop, John J. Esher and his Pennsylvania counterpart, Rudolf Dubs).

<sup>32</sup> Degree of emphasis upon Christian perfection was also a factor, alongside language and polity issues, in the division within the EA which occurred from 1891 through 1922, when reunion occurred.

<sup>33</sup> For the influence of Tersteegen upon the EA, see J. Steven O'Malley, "German Pietism in Nineteenth-Century America via a Missionary Periodical," in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 34.1 (Spring 1999): 126–150.

<sup>34</sup> For example, two important systematic theologians, Solomon J. Gamertsfelder and John J. Esher, authors of the most extensive theological studies of the doctrine of Christian perfection and entire sanctification to be produced in American history. The leading theologian of the early Church of the Nazarene was H. Orton Wiley, whose background and training was in the EA. The author of the first major history of the American Episcopal Church, as well as the history of the Evangelical Church, was Raymond Albright, a descendant of Jacob Albright.

<sup>35</sup> Johann Walter, author of the first hymnal of the EA; Johann Dreisbach; and Elisha Albright Hoffmann. On these, see Don Yoder, *Pennsylvania Spirituals* (Lancaster, PA: Pennsylvania German Folklife Society, 1961). The leading hymn writer of the European holiness movement in the nineteenth century was superintendent of the Germany conference of the EA and editor of the *Evangelische Botschafter*, Gottlieb Fülle. On the latter, see J. Steven O'Malley and Thomas Lessmann, *Gesungenes Heil: Untersuchungen zum Einfluß der Heilungsbewegung auf das methodistische Liedgut des 19. Jahrhunderts am Beispiel von Gottlieb Fülle und Ernst Gebhardt* (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1994).

## **Conclusion**

The relevance of these observations relative to the breadth and depth of commitment to basic streams of grace influential in the EUB tradition and its predecessor bodies can be summarized as follows. These two dimensions—breadth and depth—are located in movements of spirituality from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in German federal and mystical theology, motifs which co-mingled in Pietism. We noted Ward’s observation that the nineteenth century demonstrated a global explosion of the impact of evangelical Protestant communities of faith worldwide (including Methodism and the EUB) but that it often occurred more along the lines of empiricism—that is, its success was evaluated based on factual observations and demographics, including the growth of churches and conferences. However, with the horizontal or global expansion, there also occurred a corresponding reduction of awareness or commitment to the depth dimension of the saving acts of God in Christ on the cross, to which the Spirit bears witness, which was the concern of the federal and mystical dimensions of the faith. It is those dimensions which are in need of recovery if the church today is to be empowered to retrieve and fulfill its original mission which John Wesley once described in his sermon, “The General Spread of the Gospel.” In other words, there has been a loss of memory or historical awareness and dynamic commitment to the springs of grace from which revival and attending expressions of evangelicalism can develop and flourish. The outcome is form without content.

Hence, if this is a valid assessment of the trajectory noted in light of the streams of EUB prehistory in European Pietism and revivalism, it will follow that a recovery of the springs of that legacy of faith at this crossroads moment in its life is advised. This is not a matter of whether the larger UMC footprint will survive, at least in the European and North American contexts. It is a question of whether we humans, who constitute its present life on earth, have learned from the roots of our faith what it means for us to submit ourselves to the mind of Christ through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as revealed to us in the witness of our history, even as we are summoned anew by the promise: “Behold, I have set before you life and death, choose this whom you will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15).