

CHAPTER NINE: CONQUERING THE VALLEY AND BEYOND (1790-1870)

Only 110,000 people lived in the states and territories west of the Appalachians in 1790, about 3% of the total population of the United States. Eighty years later almost twenty-one million lived there; 54% of the nation's population. Territories west of the Mississippi River became part of the United States in 1803 with the Louisiana Purchase, but counted less than 400,000 people in 1830, or 3% of the nation. By 1870 almost seven million people, almost 18% of the nation, lived west of the Mississippi.

The challenge to Christianize and civilize "The Valley" – the valley of the Mississippi River that stretched from the Appalachians to the Rocky Mountains – excited church leaders. All denominations expended funds and exerted effort to establish churches and civil society in "The Valley." In 1846 and 1848 with the annexation of territories beyond The Valley – Oregon Territory and the Mexican Cession – churches extended their work.

Congregational, Reformed and Evangelical Churches organized in the west in a variety of ways:

1. Colonies from the East or from Europe migrated as a unit to a new location in the West, bringing the church with them.
2. In the new settlements people worshiped together and requested their denomination or missionary society back East or in Europe to send a minister to organize them into a church.
3. Denominations and missionary societies sent preachers to the new settlements to preach wherever they could gather listeners, and to organize churches wherever they found sufficient interest.
4. Occasionally an ordained minister settled in the West, farmed, and gathered a congregation.
5. Organized churches with pastors reached out to establish new "preaching points" in their vicinity. Some grew into churches.
6. In later years the Sunday School missionary became the pioneer, helping new communities organize Sunday Schools. The home missionary followed to establish a church.

Most denominational strategies centered on funding the home missionary

(#3 above). However all of these patterns contributed to the churches' conquest of The Valley and beyond.

PART A: CONGREGATIONAL/PRESBYTERIAN EXPANSION

Plans of Union and Accommodation

In 1801 the Presbyterian General Assembly and the General Association of Connecticut entered into a Plan of Union to avoid competition in the frontier settlements. The Plan provided guidelines for when minister and congregation were of different denominations, and also provided for mixed congregations (*LTH* 4:71).

The request of the Congregational Middle Association of New York to the Presbyterian Albany Synod to establish a more intimate relationship, resulted in the Accommodation Plan of 1808. Under this plan Congregational churches joined presbyteries while retaining their name, their form of internal government, and representation at presbytery by delegates (rather than by ordained elders). The Middle Association then joined the Synod with the same standing as a presbytery.

To better understand this history, it is helpful to think in terms of four branches of the English-speaking Reformed tradition in America. New England Congregationalism functioned under two distinct forms of church government, the Cambridge Platform, in Massachusetts, and the Saybrook Platform in Connecticut. The Presbyterian Church divided into the New Side and the Old Side from 1741 to 1758. United at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, Presbyterian tension between Old School and New School intensified until the church divided in 1837, and remained divided until 1869. In both schisms, New Englanders of Congregational background were the major element in the New Side/School.

Saybrook Platform Congregationalists and New School Presbyterians both favored interdenominational missionary societies like the ABCFM, were more concerned about a pastor's piety than doctrine, and accepted anti-slavery agitation as an expression of Christian faith. New School Presbyterians approached doctrinal statements and regional bodies more casually than Old Schoolers. They seldom called for heresy trials. Saybrook Platform Congregationalists and New School Presbyterians believed in the millennium, which was coming soon, where there would be no separate denominations, mixed easily and saw themselves as one people with two names.

FIGURE 1
FOUR BRANCHES OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING REFORMED TRADITION IN NORTH AMERICA, 1800-1850

	Old School Presbyterian	New School Presbyterian	Saybrook Platform Congregational	Cambridge Platform Congregational
Doctrine	Westminster Confession define church's doctrine	Westminster Confession express church's faith	Savoy Version of Westminster Confession expresses church's faith	Westminster Catechism expresses church's faith
Polity	standing Presbyteries, etc., govern church	standing Presbyteries, etc., for consultation, also have authority	standing Associations for consultation, also have limited authority	vicinage counsels for consultation only
Local Church Highest Authority	session of ordained elders and pastor	session of ordained elders and pastor*	congregation	congregation
Lay Representation at Regional Bodies	ordained elders	ordained elders*	delegates elected by congregation	delegates elected by congregation
Heresy Trials	frequent; may appeal to Synod and General Assembly	seldom; may appeal to Synod and General Assembly	seldom; may appeal to Association	seldom; may call vicinage counsel (non-binding)
Ethnicity	predominantly Scotch-Irish	predominantly New Englanders	New Englanders	New Englanders
Missionary Societies	denominational	interdenominational	interdenominational	interdenominational
First Qualification of Clergy	Doctrine	Piety	Piety	Piety
Slavery	for, against, or neutral	against or neutral	against or neutral	against or neutral

*Congregational churches belonging to Presbytery were governed by congregation, and sent to Presbytery delegates elected by congregation, not elders

As a result of the Plan of Union and Accommodation Plan: (1) Congregational home missionaries founded hundreds of Presbyterian churches; (2) New England Congregationalists entered the Presbyterian Church; (3) the development of distinctly Congregational regional bodies west of New England was postponed; and (4) about half the membership of the Presbyterian Church came from a Congregational background.

Missionary Society of Connecticut

The Missionary Society of Connecticut (MSC) described the missionary labors of Seth Williston (1770-1851) in central New York in 1800:

From the first of March to the middle of December, he spent 36 weeks in the service of the society; during which time he preached almost every day, and attended conference¹ as opportunity presented. He visited from house to house; catechized and instructed children in public and private; attended² funerals, and visited the sick. He formed one church . . . admitted 17 persons into churches already formed . . . administered the Lord's Supper 6 times; and baptized 3 adults and 52 children.

Williston traveled constantly, talked religion with everyone he met, and stayed in the homes of any who showed him hospitality (although he had difficulty sleeping in some beds, "being disturbed by creatures much smaller than myself"). He was always on the lookout for spiritually alive persons with whom to organize a church. The adventures of Seth Williston were repeated by over a thousand other home missionaries, Congregational, Reformed, Evangelical and Christian, who followed the frontier west.

The General Association of Connecticut began sending missionaries to the "new settlements" of northern New England and upstate New York in 1780. At first the Association recruited experienced settled pastors to itinerate (travel) through the new settlements for four month periods. The Association paid their travel expenses and pulpit supply in their absence; their congregation continued to pay their salary. However these short term tours did not have lasting effects.

¹a "conference" could be any church meeting, and frequently meant a meeting to examine candidates for membership in a congregation.

²when attending funerals he usually preached.

The General Association settled on a new plan: to send licensed ministers³ to the new settlements full-time to preach and gather churches.

Seth Williston was licensed by the North Association of Hartford in 1794, and sent to the “Chenango country”⁴ by the General Association in 1796. Williston could not offer the sacraments or organize churches, so he requested ordination. On 7 June 1797 the North Association of Hartford made Williston Congregationalism’s first ordained evangelist, and first person ordained without a call to a church.

Inspired by the formation of the London Missionary Society in 1795, the General Association of Connecticut organized the Missionary Society of Connecticut in 1798 for the purpose of sending missionaries to the new settlements. Most were newly ordained evangelists like Seth Williston.

Missionaries from the newly organized Berkshire and Columbia Missionary Society (1798),⁵ Massachusetts Missionary Society (1799) and Hampshire Missionary Society (1802),⁶ joined missionaries of the MSC, and organized churches on the Plan of Union. By 1816 at least 200 Congregational churches had been gathered in New York. The Congregational associations of New York were absorbed into the Presbyterian Church through the Accommodation Plan.

Connecticut’s claim to a strip of land “from ocean to ocean” based on a royal charter, was settled by allowing Connecticut to reserve for its use the land in a region called “New Connecticut” or the “Western Reserve” in northeast Ohio.⁷

The MSC sent Joseph Badger (1757-1846) to New Connecticut in 1800, where he organized Congregational churches. Badger enjoyed cooperation with

³a licensed minister (licentiate) was a person who had completed studies for the ministry and had been approved by an Association to preach in churches, with the understanding that he was an acceptable candidate for ordination.

⁴he worked in what are now the counties of Broome, Delaware, Chenango, Cortland, Tompkins, Tioga and southern Cayuga, New York.

⁵from Berkshire County, Massachusetts and Columbia County, New York.

⁶from Hampshire county, Massachusetts.

⁷The Western Reserve included the modern counties of Ashtabula, Lake, Geauga, Portage, Cuyahoga, Lorain, Medina, Erie, Huron, most of Summit and Mahoning and parts of Ashland and Ottawa.

Presbyterian ministers and people coming from Pennsylvania. Congregational churches of the Western Reserve gathered in 1814 to organize an Association, but one Presbyterian minister, Thomas Barr, pleaded that this action would exclude him. Instead, the churches organized the Presbytery of Grand River. All clergy belonged to presbytery, while the congregations in their local affairs functioned as Congregational churches. Proclaiming a common faith, Congregationalists and Presbyterians worked in harmony in the Presbyterian Synod, organizing churches that internally resembled New England Congregational churches. Other MSC missionaries traveled as far as Missouri, organizing Presbyterian churches.

American Home Missionary Society

In 1825 several Andover students began to advocate for a national home mission society. They envisioned a society with, “no sectional interests, – no local prejudices, – no party animosities, – no sectarian views.” They also advocated a new system. This new society would settle educated clergy in every community and subsidize local pastors’ salaries until the local church could assume full responsibility.

These student appeals led to the formation of the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS) in 1826. The predominantly Presbyterian United Domestic Missionary Society (UDMS), joined immediately and in effect became the AHMS. Most of the New England societies affiliated in 1828. The MSC became auxiliary in 1832. As a matter of policy, the AHMS organized Presbyterian churches, believing this to be the most effective basis for unified work.

Theron Baldwin (1801-70), a student at Yale Divinity School, talked to his fellow students about going to the frontier as a group, serving churches, and together founding a seminary. In 1829 seven students signed a solemn pledge with this intent. This Illinois Association met regularly at Yale, sharing their prayers and their preparations for this venture. Eventually this “Yale band” included eleven home missionaries in the service of the AHMS, who settled in Illinois beginning in 1829, and founded Illinois College in Jacksonville. Through the remainder of the Nineteenth Century, several other “bands” of seminary students, who had studied together, settled in proximity to each other, to develop church and civilization on the newly opened frontier.

Collapse of the Plan of Union

For a decade, each annual meeting of the Presbyterian General Assembly experienced intensified polarization. In the eyes of the Old School, the Plan of

Union was corrupt. Local churches that belonged to presbyteries were not organized in a Presbyterian way, and lay persons who were not ordained elders sat, spoke, and voted at presbytery, synod and general assembly. They blamed the AHMS and believed that missionary societies should be under the direct control of the church. In 1837 with an Old School majority, the General Assembly excinded (ejected) three synods in upstate New York and the Western Reserve Synod in Ohio, called on other synods to correct alleged abuses, revoked the Plan of Union, and directed the AHMS to stay out of its presbyteries. After a year of chaos, the excinded synods, with churches from other synods, reorganized as the (new school) Presbyterian Church. New School Presbyterians continued to work with Congregationalists, the Plan of Union, and the AHMS.

Meanwhile Congregational discontent with the Plan of Union had been growing. It was an unequal union. Congregational churches belonging to presbyteries faced steady pressure to conform to the Presbyterian pattern. As the conflict within the Presbyterian Church intensified, some Congregational churches decided to leave presbyteries and organize associations. For a few congregations the reluctance of the Presbyterian Church to take a stand against slavery was a reason to withdraw.

In 1846, at the invitation of the General Association of Michigan, Midwestern Congregationalists met in Michigan City, Indiana, and called for more support for Congregational churches in the West and an end to the Plan of Union. In 1852 the first national gathering of Congregationalists, the Albany Convention, unanimously renounced the Plan of Union (*LTH* 4:71). As one delegate explained it, “they have milked our Congregational cow but they have made nothing but Presbyterian butter and cheese.” The Convention also established a fund for the erection of church buildings in the West. Congregationalists continued to work with the AHMS for church planting, but became more insistent that Congregational churches be established. New School Presbyterian support for the AHMS declined, and in 1861 the New School withdrew from the AHMS, leaving it a Congregational agency.

Congregational Home Missions

After the Albany Convention, Congregationalism grew in the West from three sources: (1) Congregational churches withdrawing from presbyteries; (2) independent Congregational churches that had never joined presbyteries; and (3) new churches organized by the AHMS. Regional associations and state organizations were established. Wherever Congregationalists established statewide organizations, the churches gained strength and the fellowship grew.

Welsh Congregationalists

Welsh Protestants migrated to America throughout the Nineteenth Century, to the coal regions of Pennsylvania and farming areas of Ohio, New York, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa and other states. In 1900 over 267,000 persons who were either born in Wales or their children were living in the United States.

The Puritan movement of the Seventeenth Century and the Evangelical movement of the Eighteenth Century deeply effected Wales. Three Protestant denominations developed: Union of Welsh Independents (Congregational), Calvinistic Methodists (Presbyterian), and Baptists.

Welsh communities in America organized union churches on a Congregational pattern. When their numbers became sufficient, Baptists and Presbyterians organized separate churches, leaving the original church Congregational. Smaller communities maintained union churches which organized with the Congregationalists. By 1872 the Welsh had organized 154 Congregational churches in the United States.

Welsh Protestants brought with them a love of music, a repertoire of Welsh hymns, and the ability to sing congregational hymns in four part harmony. They brought strong Sunday Schools, for both children and adults, and a high level of Biblical literacy. Most Welsh pastors were self educated and bi-vocational, thoroughly examined by representatives of the churches before ordination. Preachers, choirs and members from the Welsh churches in an area gathered annually for several days of preaching and music, called a *gymanva*.

Welsh immigrants arrived at Philadelphia on the *Maria* in 1795 and settled in Ebensburg, Pennsylvania, where they organized a Congregational Church in 1796. Some of this group continued west, reaching Cincinnati, Ohio. Another early colony developed around Utica, New York (1801). Welsh Congregationalists organized their own Associations, or *gymanvas* in several states. Welsh churches both received and gave aid to the AHMS, and participated in state Congregational bodies.

PART B: REFORMED CHURCH EXPANSION

German Reformed people from Pennsylvania migrated south along the eastern slope of the Appalachians to Virginia and North Carolina, and westward across the mountains into the Valley of the Mississippi. Larger numbers of Reformed people migrated directly from Germany and Switzerland to The Valley.

The Pennsylvania Germans and the new Germans shared the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the German language, but little else. In America for a century, the Pennsylvania Germans had begun a process of accommodation:

- To become bilingual and increasingly English-speaking.
- To separation of church and state, and the consequences of that policy for church financing.
- To revivals, in some cases with “new measures.”
- To voluntary societies, including Sunday Schools.

The new German immigrants knew none of this. The Reformed Church in the United States, by including both communities, became more diverse.

Ohio Synod

German Reformed pastors followed settlers from Pennsylvania into Ohio. Jacob Christman (ca. 1745-1810), ordained at the request of six North Carolina congregations in 1798, began preaching on the Western Reserve, on January 29, 1804, at Springboro. He organized a congregation and celebrated communion there on May 29, 1804. In 1809 he moved to Ohio where he died the following year. Other pastors soon followed.

In 1820 the five Reformed pastors and fifty congregations in Ohio organized the Ohio Classis. Pastors in Ohio Classis began privately educating persons for ministry. The annual journey across the mountains to attend synod for examination and ordination was a hardship for pastors and elders. However synod would not delegate to Ohio Classis the authority to ordain.

In 1824 the Ohio Classis reorganized as a synod. This was understood to be a geographic separation only. The earlier synod, now called the Eastern Synod, and the new Ohio Synod, held the same faith and communicated and cooperated with each other.

In 1842 the two synods agreed to each send two delegates to the other synod to promote cooperation. The Ohio Synod established a Board of Mission in 1845, which depended on its eastern counterpart for financial support. The Ohio Synod continued to plant new churches in Ohio and in 1840 followed German migrants into Indiana.

Eastern Synod

The German Reformed Synod in 1812 asked all congregations to take a missionary collection, and proposed sending licensed seminary graduates on

missionary tours of two to three months. The following year Synod resolved that *all* licensed graduates go on a missionary tour before taking a charge.

George Leidy (1793-1879) offered himself to the synod to do missionary work in 1819. As a result, the synod elected a Missionary Committee which examined, ordained and commissioned Leidy to be missionary to Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. Leidy quickly visited thirty congregations, but found that southern heat destroyed his health. He served struggling charges in northern Virginia, western Maryland and western Pennsylvania for the rest of his ministry.

The German Reformed Synod made several attempts at organizing its Home Mission work. However it could not agree on how the work should be done. In 1821 several members of the Synod participated with Presbyterians and Dutch Reformed in organizing the United Domestic Missionary Society, which later became the AHMS. In 1826 the Eastern Synod, hoping to stimulate interest among the laity, created a Missionary Society, a voluntary association with dues of one dollar. In 1832 the Synod reversed itself, electing its own Board of Missions, directly accountable to Synod.

In 1834 the Synod's Board of Missions established an auxiliary relationship with the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS). By 1837 the AHMS was supporting thirteen Reformed ministers. However that year the cooperation ended.⁸ The classes kept their funds, supporting neither the AHMS nor the Synod Board of Missions.

The 1847 Synod reorganized its missions, appointing Samuel Miller (1815-73) its first Missionary Superintendent. Miller toured the West that year on behalf of both Eastern and Ohio Synods. Slowly the Board received support, and by 1857 seventeen missionaries in the Midwest were receiving aid from the Board.

The Reformed Church's Southern Frontier

German Reformed settlers in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and western North Carolina had throughout the Eighteenth Century received only an occasional missionary tour from members of the coetus in Pennsylvania.

Johannes Braun (a.k.a. John Brown; 1771-1850) born in Oldenburg, came

⁸It is not known if the support of Reformed ministers ended because of the financial panic of 1837, because of financial problems caused by the withdrawal of the Old School, or because of opposition from within the German Reformed Church.

to America in 1797 and affiliated with Otterbein's congregation in Baltimore. Braun studied with Reformed pastors, was licensed in 1800, ordained in 1803, then served Reformed Churches scattered over six counties in the Shenandoah Valley. For thirty-five years he was the only settled Reformed pastor in Virginia.

North Carolina Reformed churches survived with only occasional pastors. The North Carolina classis organized in 1831 with sixteen congregations and five ministers.

Western Expansion

Three colonies of Reformed settlers from Europe established strong Reformed centers in the Midwest. Reformed people from Ladbergen, Westphalia, came to America in 1830, settled at New Knoxville, Ohio, and organized a church in 1838.⁹ People from the Swiss canton of Glarus began to settle in New Glarus, Wisconsin, in 1845.¹⁰ A company of immigrants from the German principality of Lippe came to America on the *Agnes von Bremen* in 1847, and settled in the Town of Herman, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin. They joined the Reformed Church in the United States in 1854, and developed a theological school called Mission House (See Chapter 13, Part A, Educational Institutions).

From these scattered colonies and other settlements of Reformed people from Pennsylvania, Germany and Switzerland, the Reformed Church expanded across the Midwest. German Reformed home missions struggled, not always successfully, to keep up with the migration of its people (See *LTH* 4:99).

PART C: THE EVANGELICAL UNIONISTS

The Evangelical Church of the Union

On 27 September 1817, King Friedrich Wilhelm III (1770-1840; ruled 1797-1840) of Prussia called on the Lutheran and Reformed to unite in a common communion service on the 300th anniversary of the Reformation, 31 October 1817 (*LTH* 4:36), thus forming one united church. This movement of church union quickly spread to other principalities until about half the Protestants of Germany were affiliated with union *Landeskirchen*. The King acted out of a desire to establish order after the chaos of the Napoleonic Wars. In the face of the ferment

⁹ The New Knoxville congregation joined the Reformed Church in the U. S. in 1874.

¹⁰This church became independent of the Reformed Church in Switzerland and self-supporting in 1859. In 1918 it affiliated with the Reformed Church in the U. S.

of ideas in that period, and the challenge of rationalism, the differences between Lutheran and Reformed appeared trivial.

Most people embraced with joy the actions of the monarchs. According to one observer of the unifying communion service,

After the close of the service, members of the till now separated churches embraced each other with brotherly affection, and walked hand in hand towards their dwellings. Especially did the married of different confessions, who in the greatest numbers presented themselves at the table of the Lord, testify their joy and gratitude to God, that they in future could solemnize this feast of love with their partners and children.¹¹

Basel and related missionary societies greeted with joy this affirmation of the catholic principle on which they were founded.

A Missionary Strategy for America

Following the Napoleonic Wars, Germans began coming to America in increasing numbers. The early immigrants were poor peasants, fleeing from famine and depression. Following the defeat of revolutions in 1830 and 1848, large numbers of educated Germans with rationalist views came to America looking for political freedom. But most immigrants were farmers of modest means. Some Germans settled in cities, but most moved west, seeking farmland. The area around Saint Louis soon became the largest of several centers of German settlement. Religious Germans appealed to Basel and the other societies for pastors.

Frederick A. Rauch (1806-41), who was affiliated with the unionist Evangelical Church in Germany before he came to America, taught at the German Reformed seminary. He advocated a new strategy in missions to Germans in America. Others believed that the Pennsylvania German churches should work with the new immigrants. Rauch argued in a series of articles in the AHMS's *Home Missionary* in 1835-36 that German missionary societies should be invited to send missionaries to organize unionist churches among the Germans in the west. He reasoned that

- The German spoken by Pennsylvanians was inferior to the German spoken by the new immigrants.

¹¹Frederick A. Rauch, "German Characteristics," *Home Missionary* 8 (1836):194.

- Pennsylvania's Lutheran and Reformed churches did not have enough pastors to care for themselves.
- The new immigrants preferred united churches, and old divisions should not be reintroduced.

Initial Outreach of the Missionary Societies

The Basel Mission and its offspring were primarily interested in missions to non-Christians. Appeals for pastors from the German diaspora were met only after the needs of other fields were met. Missionaries to America were often persons who were not as well qualified as others who went to foreign fields. The societies also expected the churches in America to support the missionaries once they arrived. However, the missionaries were expected to continue to correspond with Basel, to cooperate with other missionaries sent from Basel, and to consult with the Basel Mission on important questions.

Friedrich Schmid (1807-83), of Basel Mission, arrived in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on 20 August 1833. He soon organized and gave pastoral leadership to Zion Church in Ann Arbor, and frequently visited Protestant German communities across Michigan.

Basel soon sent more missionaries to America in response to requests from Germans in the Saint Louis area. Two missionaries who arrived in 1834 settled with German communities in Ohio. The following year Basel sent Johann Jakob Riess (1811-55), who finally reached Centerville, Illinois, in the Saint Louis area.

The Barmen mission sent Philipp Jakob Heyer (b. 1807) to Borneo in 1834. Heyer became ill, and when it became evident that he was unfit for tropical service, the Board sent him to America. His first assignment was to go to the American Indians of Oregon, and secondly, if that was not practical, to the Germans in America. Heyer reached Missouri in 1836 and accepted a call to a German church. The following year Barmen Mission sent Louis Eduard Nollau (1810-69) for the Indian mission. The Barmen Board finally gave up on American Indian missions, and allowed Nollau to remain in Missouri.

In December, 1835, the Basel directors received a letter from some Connecticut Congregationalists, requesting missionaries to the Germans of the west. The New Englanders represented a secret society called "Looking Upward, Pressing Onward Society" (LUPOS). Concerned about Catholic efforts to evangelize the west, LUPOS requested Protestant German missionaries to evangelize Catholic Germans in the Mississippi Valley. LUPOS offered to fund

the missionaries.

Basel sent Georg W. Wall (1811-67) and Joseph A. Rieger (1811-69), who arrived in New York City 31 May 1836. After consulting with their sponsors in Hartford, (See *LTH* 4:38) Wall and Rieger went west. The financial panic of 1837 sunk LUPOS, which gave no more financial support. Wall became pastor in Saint Louis, Rieger in Alton, Illinois.

In America there were no *Landeskirchen* for the missionaries to join, only a complex pattern of competing Lutheran synods. A few joined Lutheran synods, but most preferred to operate in a unionist spirit.

Irenic Pietism

The theological divisions and ecclesial unions of Germany shaped the development of German churches in America in the Nineteenth Century. German religious thought consisted of three competing factions.

1. *Pietists* persisted in their prayer meetings, family prayers and missionary societies, emphasizing the inner relationship with God.
2. *Rationalists* rejected the divine origin of the Bible, the divinity of Christ, the possibility of revelation, and miracles. They ridiculed all religion as superstition.
3. *Confessionalists* clung to the Reformation confessions, emphasizing right doctrine, rejecting church union and avoiding contact with other communions.

Within each group were varying degrees of belief:

1. Separatists judged and condemned the lack of piety in others, while more irenic pietists respected and sought to cooperate with all.
2. Some rationalists scoffed at all talk of God and religion. Others continued to believe in God and to value the church, but through the use of reason selectively questioned certain doctrines and practices. These moderate rationalists often called their churches "Protestant."
3. Old Lutherans restricted communion to their own synod. Other Lutherans, just as firmly attached to the Reformation confessions, recognized a broader fellowship.

In America the boundary between the irenic pietists and Protestants was not firm. They participated in each other's ordinations, and local congregations often changed their affiliation.

The Kirchenverein Des Westen

Louis Nollau of Gravois Settlement, and George Wall of Saint Louis, invited other United Evangelical pastors to meet at Nollau's parsonage on 14 October 1840. The reason was, "the need of fellowship and fraternal cooperation." The meeting was also a defensive action, to keep from being swallowed up by the eastern Lutherans and the "Ultra Lutherans" who became the Missouri Synod.

Nollau and Wall were joined by three other pastors; two more were unable to attend but later signed the minutes. Of the seven, two were sent by Barmen Mission, three by Basel, one by the Ohio Synod of the Reformed Church, and the last was a farmer, called by a church, who returned to Germany, passed his examinations, was ordained, then came back to his church in Missouri.

The ministers who met in Nollau's parsonage in 1840 agreed to organize *Der Deutsche Evangelische Kirchenverein des Westens*. They called it a *verein*, rather than a synod, because *verein*, translated "union" "association" or "conference" implied local church autonomy and a smaller scale organization than a synod. The *verein* was to be composed of pastors and churches. However throughout its history few churches joined and it was principally a pastors' association. The *verein* examined candidates for ministry and accepted candidates and ministers arriving from Europe on probation for a year before ordaining or receiving them. The 1840 meeting also named a committee to prepare a catechism and another committee to prepare a book of worship. The *verein* affirmed the confessional statements of "our Evangelical mother church in Germany" (*LTH* 4:45) although there was no formal connection. The *verein* was formally constituted at its next meeting, 3 May 1841.

The rationalist press viciously attacked the new *verein* (*LTH* 4:46). The result was a libel suit, the removal of one pastor from office, and the division of another church. The Lutheran Synod of the West also criticized the *verein* as one more sect in a land with too many denominations. But the AHMS, which only supported ministers with standing in an evangelical denomination, was grateful that the *verein* now provided that authorization. The new *verein* struggled for several years with a handful of pastors, carefully examining its new arrivals from Germany. The AHMS from 1841 to 1861 subsidized twenty-one *verein* pastors and sent boxes of clothes.

Verein pastors generally served a church, and preached at numerous other locations, many of which developed into churches. *Verein* pastors promoted biblical knowledge, and cultivated a personal relationship with God. A few pastors, generally those subsidized by the AHMS, reported revivals and counted

conversions, but most verein pastors made no such claims.

Many congregations held prayer meetings (*stunden*) at which any person could speak and pray. The churches of the verein observed the church year, and Lent was a season of intense spirituality – sometimes with daily services – calling for repentance and conversion.

Membership requirements varied greatly. In Germany persons at age fourteen who could recite the catechism were confirmed. German congregations in America that leaned toward rationalism received anyone who paid dues. But the AHMS insisted that it would only aid churches that required “evidence of a new heart, of having been born again by the spirit of God,” for membership. The verein defended the rite of Confirmation but added to the confirmation process a personal interview of candidates for membership concerning their spiritual life.

Louis Nollau wrote the *Evangelical Catechism*, published in 1847. Andreas Irion (1823-70) revised it in 1862 by simplifying language to facilitate memorization (*LTH* 4:53). Although intended for instruction, the Catechism came to be viewed as a doctrinal statement.

Worship in the verein followed different German liturgies, greatly simplified by frontier circumstances. Further deliberation led to the *Evangelische Agende* (Book of Worship) published by the verein in 1857. Although the verein maintained the right of free prayer, it was unpopular because of its abuse by rationalists. Singing was complicated by the variety of hymn books brought from Germany until the verein published the *Evangelische Gesangbuch* (Hymnal) in 1861 (See *LTH* 4:56).

Three documents, the *Evangelical Catechism*, *Evangelical Book of Worship*, and *Evangelical Hymnal* created denominational identity and unified churches of the verein.

Every congregation with sufficient resources conducted a parochial school. Many churches also established Sunday Schools, which covered the same material as the day schools, and were viewed as a mission activity of the church.

The Kirchenverein grew rapidly. By 1865 the verein had 122 pastors in nine states. But the great majority of churches served by Kirchenverein pastors never joined the verein.¹² More congregations requested pastors than the verein

¹²In Missouri only 22% of the churches served joined the Kirchenverein. The percentage in other states was: Indiana 26%, Illinois 10%, Ohio 50%—Carl E. Schneider, *The German Church on the*

could provide. However, the verein believed it had a missionary responsibility to reach out to unchurched communities with the gospel.

In 1854 the verein appointed its first *reisprediger* (itinerant preacher), Theodore H. Dresel. Provided by the verein with a horse and saddle bags, Dresel traveled from his base in Burlington, Iowa, across Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin. The verein gave instructions to its second reisprediger, Karl Hoffmeister (1819-97), in 1855, to not intrude on other denominations, and to avoid all appearance of proselytism. Hoffmeister also traveled throughout Iowa. The reisprediger was dropped in 1857 for lack of funds.

The United Evangelical Synod

The Kirchenverein was not the only group of German unionists in America. The German United Evangelical Synod of North America organized in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1844. In 1854 the Synod organized two districts, centered around Buffalo and Chicago.

C. F. Soldan organizer the Buffalo section of the United Evangelical Synod, founded Trinity Evangelical Church in Rochester, New York, in 1842, and became pastor of Saint Paul's Church, Buffalo, in 1845.

Karl Siebenpfeiffer (1832-82) became the next leader of the Buffalo area unionists. Born in Wachenheim, Bavarian Rheinpfalz, he graduated from Heidelberg in 1856. As there was an abundance of pastors in Germany, he came to America, served several churches in the Buffalo area, and went to Trinity Church, Rochester, in 1862. Siebenpfeiffer emerged as the leader of a group of ten pastors who in 1858 withdrew from the United Evangelical Synod and organized what later became the German United Evangelical Synod of the East.¹³ This Buffalo group included two pastors from Cleveland, Ohio, and one from Evansville, Indiana. They withdrew from the United Evangelical Synod because they were offended by the domineering personalities of two Synod officers, Josef Fischer and Joseph Hartman.

The first German church in Chicago, Saint Pauls, organized in 1843. Although most of the congregation was unionist, their first pastor was Old Lutheran. The Missouri Synod Lutheran Church organized at Saint Pauls on 26

American Frontier: A Study in the Rise of religion among the Germans of the West (Saint Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1939), 440.

¹³At first, and until 1866, called the German United Evangelical Protestant Synod in America.

April 1847. The congregation refused to join that synod, and fired the Old Lutheran pastor. Josef Fischer served the church from 1848 to 1851. Then Joseph Hartman (1824-86) had a long pastorate, 1851 to 1885.

Born in Bornheim, Rheinpfalz, 18 September 1824, Hartman was educated at Bonn and Utrecht, and came to America in 1849. After two years of ministry in New York State, Hartman went to Chicago. He immediately joined Fischer as a leader of the United Evangelical Synod.

In May, 1859, twelve pastors met at Saint Paul's church, withdrew from what was left of the United Evangelical Synod, and organized the German United Evangelical Synod of the Northwest, with Hartman as President and Fischer Vice-President. They withdrew because they believed rationalism was too strong in the United Evangelical Synod, which soon disappeared.

These two synods, centered in Buffalo and Chicago. both had warm relations with the Kirchenverein, and made use of their worship book, song book, and catechism.

Evangelical Protestants

Many of the independent unionist churches identified with the rationalist Evangelical Protestant movement. The Evangelical Protestants affirmed the *Augsburg Confession* and *Heidelberg Catechism* as "norms for its faith," but were less dogmatic than other churches. This group embraced new theological currents from Germany, and was more affirming of amusements and Sabbath recreation than other churches.

Evangelical Protestants in America identified with the unionist churches in Germany, but predated them. A Lutheran-Reformed union church in Pittsburgh, organized in 1782, reorganized in 1812 as one united congregation.¹⁴ This first German Evangelical Protestant Church in America organized several other congregations in the Pittsburgh area. Holy Ghost Church in Saint Louis (1836) also had fellowship with this group. In 1862 August Kroell (1806-74) and Gustav William Eisenlohr (1811-81), Evangelical Protestant pastors in Cincinnati, organized the Protestant Union of Free Christian Congregations of North America. Because each congregation fiercely guarded its independence, this Protestant Union never grew.¹⁵

¹⁴now called Smithfield UCC, Pittsburgh, Pa.

¹⁵For more on the Evangelical Protestant Church see Chapter 18, Part A, Evangelical Protestants.

Reflection on Chapters 5 through 9

Pietism, a particular movement of piety, grew through two Great Awakenings, created a new denominational family, divided another, and gave birth to the missionary movement. The missionary movement called on the pious to put into action the prayer *thy kingdom come*. The missionary-minded Christian prayed and gave money for that kingdom. The mission could be the proclamation of the gospel on the other side of the earth, founding churches on the frontier, printing tracts, Bibles or religious newspapers, education of ministers, women, the deaf and dumb, or the children of one's own neighborhood, or the advancement of world peace. Catholicity was another characteristic of the coming kingdom embraced by the missionary societies and churches. In the face of the multiplicity of denominations, the formation of the Christian Connection, the Congregational-Presbyterian Plan of Union, the Lutheran-Reformed union churches, and the Kirchenverein were all attempts to affirm unity in Christ. Pietism expressed a liberal concern for the spiritual and material well being of all persons of any color or gender. Where piety was rated more highly than orthodoxy, greater variety of doctrine was accepted. One other mission, most controversial of all, remains to be examined: the movement to abolish of the institution of slavery.