

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: DENOMINATIONAL FORMATION

The development of more “business-like” denominational organization paralleled the rise of big business. In the period between the Civil War and the First World War, the four groups that would form the United Church of Christ developed national organizational structures. Along with a unified national body came the organization of church related agencies and bureaucracy. The German Reformed Church created a General Synod in 1863. The German Evangelical *Kirchenverein* became a synod in 1866, the same year in which the Christian denomination reorganized. Congregationalists created a National Council in 1871. Each of these events marked the acknowledgment of a denominational identity. Recognizing, sometimes reluctantly, that they were denominations, these four groups intensified their quest for Christian unity. The establishment of business-like organization and the quest for unity, complemented each other in the story of denominational formation in this period. Meanwhile, women slowly gained a greater role in the organizational lives of the denominations.

PART A: NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Reformed General Synod

The German Reformed Church chose to celebrate the three hundredth anniversary of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, by uniting its two synods, Eastern and Ohio, under a General Synod, which convened for the first time on 18 November 1863. The new General Synod organized its work under four boards – a fifth was added later: (1) Sunday School, (2) Foreign Mission, (3) Home Mission. (4) Orphans Home, and (5) Ministerial Relief. In 1896 several publications were placed under the jurisdiction of the Sunday School Board and it became the Sunday School and Publications Board. It built a seven-story building at 1505 Race Street, Philadelphia, which became denominational headquarters. Responsible for pensions for ministers and their widows, the board of Ministerial Relief was an Eastern Synod project until turned over to General Synod in 1905. The work of the Reformed Church for four decades presented a puzzling pattern of projects conducted by classes, synods, and General Synod, without any apparent design. Most of the General Synod boards at first did nothing; only with the passage of time, as trust developed, and the boards received full-time leadership, did these “paper boards” evolve into effective coordinators of

denominational program.

General Synod met every three years. In 1869 they dropped the word “German” from the title, becoming the Reformed Church in the United States. General Synod appointed a Temperance Commission in 1911 and a Commission on Social Service in 1917.

Christian Connection

In 1866 the Christian general convention reorganized, taking the name American Christian Convention, and organizing its work into five departments: (1) missions, (2) education, (3) publishing, (4) Sabbath School, and (5) treasury. Each department was directed by a Secretary, and the five secretaries constituted the Executive Board of the Convention. In 1890 Christians rejoiced in the reunion of Southern Christians with the national Convention (*LTH* 4:33). In 1894 a Department of Christian Endeavor was added for youth work. The Convention devoted much of its energy to the development of educational institutions and the publishing concern. The Christian Publishing Association purchased property in Dayton, Ohio, in 1872, giving the Christian denomination a headquarters. A movement steadfastly opposed to denominationalism had accepted the necessity of denominational organization in order to do its work.

Evangelical Synod

In 1866 the *Kirchenverein* reorganized as the German Evangelical Synod of the West. The name change recognized that the loose pastoral association had evolved into a strong church body. With the name change came two organizational changes. First, the General Conference meeting became a delegated meeting with limited representation from each of several districts. Second, the office of President became a full-time position with indefinite tenure.

The Evangelical Synod debated the merits of the position of President for several decades. The President could veto any district decision, and had to approve every ordination. Some complained about having a “bishop.” However, the persons who held the office did not exercise power arbitrarily. The position was made part-time, to be filled by a local church pastor, 1880-89, and again 1898-1909. In 1872 the term of office was limited to the interval between General Conference meetings, which lengthened from two to three, then four years (See *LTH* 4:58).

In 1872 the German Evangelical Synods of the Northwest and the East united with the German Evangelical Synod of the West, which in 1877 changed its name to the German Evangelical Synod of North America. With the addition

of the Chicago-based and Buffalo-based synods, the Evangelical Synod became national in scope. In 1872 the three synods brought to the union the following:

Synod	Pastors	Congregations served
West	194	219
Northwest	56	82
East	33	36
Total	283	337

The Synod gradually accumulated denominational boards, and by 1890 had the following: (1) Seminary, (2) Publishing House, (3) Home Missions, (4) Foreign Missions, (5) Christian Education, (6) Benevolent Institutions, (7) Church Building Fund, (8) Budget and Finance. Later a Pensions and Relief Board was added. The synod also had a “supreme judiciary,” to act on complaints against officers or on constitutional questions, but it was seldom used. The Publishing House, located at 1718 Chouteau Avenue, Saint Louis, became the denomination’s headquarters.

National Council of Congregational Churches

When Congregationalists from across the United States met in Albany to revoke the Plan of Union in 1852, they adjourned with no provision for any future national meeting. One interstate Congregational body that met regularly was the “triennial convention” of pastors and delegates from seven mid-western states¹ to oversee the work of the Congregational seminary in Chicago. The third triennial convention, in 1864, called for another national meeting to address the needs of the West and South. This 1865 meeting in Boston adopted the *Burial Hill Declaration*, encouraged the support of specific voluntary societies which it identified as Congregational, and adjourned without making provision for another meeting. Resolutions and correspondence among state organizations resulted in a national meeting at Oberlin, Ohio, 15 November 1871.² The meeting adopted a constitution for a National Council of Congregational Churches.

The National Council had no authority over local congregations, existed for

¹Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri.

²This is the meeting at which the Jubilee Singers sang on their first tour.

consultation only, and established no bureaucracy to carry on its work between triennial meetings. The provisional committee, appointed to make arrangements for the next meeting, became by default the voice of the Council between sessions, a role recognized in 1913 when it became the Executive Committee. The Moderator had no official responsibilities beyond the actual meeting of the Council. However, beginning in 1901, Moderators traveled and spoke widely as unofficial spokespersons of the denomination. The Secretary had the responsibility between meetings of collecting and reporting statistics. In 1913 this position was changed to full-time General Secretary, responsible for coordinating the work of the denomination.

Congregational organization was unique. Other denominations created a national organization first, and then created Board, Departments, and Commissions to carry out its work. Congregationalists, by contrast, had established several strong voluntary societies to carry out their work, long before the formation of the National Council. The National Council frequently discussed the relationship of the Council to the Societies, the Societies to each other, and the Societies to the churches. However, the Council had no power to impose its will on the autonomous Societies. The National Council recognized the following Societies:

- American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM)
- American Home Missionary Society (AHMS) (name changed to Congregational Home Missionary Society (CHMS) in 1893)
- American Missionary Association (AMA)
- American College and Education Society was a merger in 1874 of the American Education Society (AES) and the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education in the West (1843). This agency provided scholarships for theological education and subsidized colleges and seminaries.
- Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Society, a merger in 1868 of the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society (MSSS) and the Doctrinal Tract and Book Society (1829).
- American Congregational Union (later called the Congregational Church Building Society), founded in 1853 to gather funds for the erection of church buildings.
- American Congregational Association, founded in 1853, built a mission house at 14 Beacon Street, Boston, to house any interested Congregational agencies and a library.
- Congregational Board of Ministerial Relief, established in 1907 to provide pensions and other benefits to clergy.

The National Council proposed a reorganization in 1874 – that the ABCFM transfer all its work with American Indians to the AMA, and the AMA transfer its foreign work to the ABCFM. This would clarify their fields of service as foreign (ABCFM) and domestic (AMA). After further negotiations and discussion the change was effected in 1883.

After the Andover controversy, agitation increased to make the Societies in some way accountable to the churches. The ABCFM and CHMS responded to the pressure by receiving some representatives of the churches into membership. After thorough consultation with the societies, the National Council adopted a new constitution at Kansas City in 1913. Besides strengthening the Executive Committee and creating the office of General Secretary, the new constitution created a Commission on Mission to coordinate the work of the various societies and their fund raising. The new constitution also made delegates to the National Council delegates to all of the societies (each society also had other delegates), assuring accountability to the churches.

Synods, Districts and Conferences

Each denomination developed its own pattern of intermediate organizations for fellowship, inspiration, counsel and action, between the local church and the national church. Generally these groups consisted of clergy and lay delegates from the churches. The Reformed Church required lay delegates to be ordained Elders. Evangelical districts tended to be clergy dominated because many congregations served by Evangelical pastors did not join the Synod. Among some ethnic groups, such as the Welsh and the Dakota, district meetings were attended by a large proportion of the church membership, and were inspirational occasions.

These intermediate units often had responsibility for ordaining ministers and for home mission work within their borders. Some sponsored educational and benevolent enterprises. Among Evangelicals, the Reformed, and Christians in the South, an intermediate organization could appoint pastors to their charge. However, as a practical matter, placement took place only with the consent of the pastor and charge.

The Evangelical Synod organized itself into districts, which by 1924 had multiplied to nineteen, and generally followed state lines. Each district had a District President, who was also pastor of a church, and who often saw his role in the district as pastoral.

In 1914 the Reformed Church in the United States was organized in 61

classes, grouped together in eight synods. The original Eastern and Ohio Synods were subdivided to create new synods, and new German-speaking synods were created for congregations of recent German immigrants.

By 1900 Christians had gathered over 160 local Conferences³ for fellowship and inspiration. Christians organized three multi-state regional bodies, the New England Christian Convention (1845), Southern Christian Convention (1847), and Afro Christian Convention (1892). These regional conventions published journals, established educational and benevolent institutions, and conducted home and foreign missions. In the mid-Atlantic and mid-west regions state conferences undertook similar objectives.

Tracing the development of Congregational intermediate bodies is confusing because Congregationalists in different regions gave different definitions to the same terms. Congregationalists in Maine organized what they called a "Conference" in 1826, with lay and clergy delegates from district conferences (consociations). Ohio adopted this Conference plan when it organized in 1852. The "Conference" system predominated in Congregationalism by the end of the century. In 1907 the National Council urged a standardization of terms: district consociations to be called Associations; state consociations to be called Conferences. The National Council also encouraged the Associations to take direct responsibility for ordinations, and to phase out vicinage councils.

In each state Congregationalists established voluntary societies which met at the same time as the state Conference. The most important of these was a Home Missionary Society, auxiliary to the AHMS. The state Home Missionary Society started churches and subsidized pastors salaries. The AHMS appointed a superintendent to supervise the home missionary work in the state. The superintendent became the pastor to subsidized pastors and churches and the effective head of Congregational work in the state. Other state voluntary societies were auxiliary to national societies and had staff, which was on occasion assigned to more than one state. It was not unusual for a superintendent of Sunday School work, superintendent of women's work, and an agent of the ABCFM who promoted stewardship, to work with the Home Mission superintendent as the "staff" of the state conference. In the first half of the twentieth century the CHMS promoted the development of Conference staffs, selected by the Conferences, and supported by Conference funds. Conferences retained some mission giving instead of sending it all to the societies, and worked for the goal of self-support. Christian conferences also had parallel voluntary

³There are probably many duplicates in this list due to mergers, divisions, and changes of name.

societies, and the Reformed Board of Home Missions occasionally appointed superintendents for the work of a synod.

Educational Institutions⁴

Congregationalists approached the founding of educational and benevolent institutions in a different way from Reformed, Evangelical and Christian. Congregationalists saw themselves as participating in the building of a new “empire for Christ.” As each new territory was organized, and then received into statehood, Congregationalists worked to establish the institutions of Christian civilization. Motivated by their faith, Congregationalists founded academies and colleges to provide leaders for this new empire. General Associations received contributions from churches to establish colleges. There was often no effort to ensure a church connection with such schools. Some became part of state college systems, others became independent private colleges. Some had a “historical connection” with Congregationalism that became irrelevant with the second generation of administrators. In only a few instances, where denominational identity and denominational needs were strong, did any formal connection persist.

This loose relationship to educational institutions contrasted sharply to the strong organizational ties that Reformed, Evangelicals and Christians had with their schools and benevolent institutions. For these groups the educational institutions were essential to the welfare of the church, to provide pastors, parochial school teachers, deaconesses and a well educated lay leadership. The schools were of, by, and for the denominations.

The Reformed Church seminary, which had been located at Carlisle, York and Mercersburg, moved in 1871 to Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The faculty were considered officers of the church, elected by synod. To prepare students for theological education, the seminary began a “classical department,” which became Marshall College in 1836, and in 1850 was moved to Lancaster, united with another school, and became Franklin and Marshall College.

The Christian denomination struggled for years to establish schools for

⁴Reference has already been made to Harvard, Yale (Chapter 3, Part B, The Polity, Cambridge Platform), Dartmouth (Chapter 5, Part C, Parties within Congregationalism), Andover Seminary (Chapter 6, Part B, The Trinitarian Strategy), Mercersburg Seminary (Chapter 11, Part A (note)), Oberlin College and Seminary (Chapter 5, Part F, Charles Grandison Finney), Illinois College (Chapter 9, Part A, American Home Missionary Society), Avery Institute, Fisk, Hampton, Howard, Straight, Talladega, Tougaloo, LeMoyne, and Tillitson (Chapter 10, Part C, Higher Education), and Ursinus College (Chapter 11, Part A, Liturgical Controversy).

theological training. Some Christians and Unitarians had founded Meadville Theological School in Meadville, Pennsylvania in 1843. Christians were teachers and students, but the school had no formal connection with the denomination. The Christian denomination founded Antioch College at Yellow Springs, Ohio, in 1853, open to all without regard to race or gender. The college developed serious financial trouble, was bailed out by the Unitarian Church in 1858, and turned over to a Board of Trustees where the Unitarians held a majority.

The *Kirchenverein* established a school to train pastors at Marthasville, Missouri, in 1850. Patterned after Basel and the other mission schools of Europe, Marthasville had strict discipline with an interest in both the spiritual and intellectual development of the students (*LTH* 4:43). The school was moved to Wellston in 1883, near the “Eden” stop of the train, from which the school acquired the name Eden Seminary. In 1924 Eden Seminary relocated to Webster Groves, Missouri.

The Evangelical Synod had two other educational needs: (1) to prepare students for seminary, and (2) to train teachers for parochial schools. The Synod founded a “proseminary,” patterned after the *proseminar* of Germany, to prepare students for theological education with a liberal arts curriculum. It soon absorbed a teachers’ seminary. As part of the merger agreement of 1871 with the Synod of the Northwest, the proseminary/teacher’s seminary moved to Elmhurst, Illinois, and developed into Elmhurst College.

The Ohio Synod of the Reformed Church founded Heidelberg College and Seminary at Tiffin, Ohio, in 1850.⁵ The North Carolina Classis of the Reformed Church founded Catawba College in 1851 which received financial support from the whole church after 1923.

After the rejection of the Plan of Union, Congregationalists in the Midwest were eager to establish a Congregational seminary to promote Congregationalism across the region. To make the school accountable to the churches, they organized the “triennial convention,” a meeting of clergy and lay delegates from Congregational Churches in a seven state region to do the official business of the seminary. The first triennial convention met, and Chicago Theological Seminary opened for classes, in 1858.

The German Reformed colony from Lippe that settled in Town Herman,

⁵In 1907 the theological departments of Ursinus and Heidelberg united as Central Theological Seminary, which located in Dayton, Ohio, in 1908. In 1934 Central was merged into Eden Seminary.

Wisconsin, founded Mission House in 1860 to train German-speaking pastors. A project of Sheboygan Classis, Mission House came under the jurisdiction of the Synod of the Northwest in 1867, and received support from the other German synods as they were organized. Like Eden, Mission House was patterned after the mission schools of Europe. The proseminary courses evolved into a college, which in 1957 took the name Lakeland College.

The Christian Bible Institute, established by the Christian denomination in 1869, offered courses for persons going into the ministry and also encouraged persons already in ministry, who had not received formal education, to come for a year. Austin Craig directed the institute from its inception until his death in 1881. Originally located in the Town of Starkey, on the western shore of Seneca Lake in New York, in 1872 it relocated to Stanfordville, Dutchess County, New York.⁶

Religious Journalism

Religious periodicals have kept people connected and promoted a free exchange of ideas. Religious journals have come in a variety of forms and styles. There have been quarterlies, monthlies, biweeklies and weeklies. They have been owned and operated by individuals, corporations, and church bodies. Papers have often changed hands, merged, and changed editorial position.

General denominational magazines, sometimes called “parish papers,” addressed to pastors and lay people of a denomination, circulated information and discussed issues. Elias Smith, Christian, began *The Christian’s Magazine, Reviewer and Religious Intelligencer* in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 1805, and renamed it *Herald of Gospel Liberty* in 1808⁷ (LTH 4:14-16). It became the official paper of the Christian denomination in 1862.⁸ Congregationalists founded

⁶Other schools founded by Congregationalists include Olivet College, Olivet, Mi (1844), Pacific University, Forest Grove, Or (1848), Yankton College, Yankton, SD (1862), Doane College, Crete, Ne (1872), Drury College, Springfield, Mo (1873), Northland College, Ashland, Wi (1892), Bangor Seminary in Bangor, Me, in 1816, for men of limited means, and Pacific School of Theology, Berkeley, Ca, initiated in 1869. The Southern Christian Convention established Elon College in 1889. The Defiance College, Defiance, Oh, affiliated with the Christian Church in 1903.

⁷called *Christian Herald* 1818-35, *Christian Journal* 1835-39, *Christian Herald and Journal* 1839-41, and *Christian Herald* 1841-50.

⁸The *Christian Palladium* (1832-62), based in New York state, became the official paper of the Christian denomination in 1834, having absorbed the *Gospel Luminary* (1825-33). The *Herald of Gospel Liberty* absorbed the *Christian Palladium* in 1862, and the *Gospel Herald* (1843-68), an Ohio paper, in 1868. The Southern Christian Convention’s *Christian Sun*, founded in 1830, remained separate.

the *Boston Recorder* in 1816. The *Congregationalist* presented itself as a more progressive alternative in 1849.⁹ The *Advance*, a Chicago based Congregational paper, was established in 1867.¹⁰ The German Reformed Church's paper, the *Messenger*, began publication in 1829.¹¹ The Ohio Synod published *Christian World* beginning in 1854.¹² The Evangelical Synod began publishing an English language paper in 1902. First called *Messenger of Peace* (LTH 4:52), in 1913 it became *Evangelical Herald*. These papers were merged when their denominations merged, and in 1958 became the *United Church Herald*.¹³ From 1972-83 it became a joint venture with the Presbyterians called *A. D.* After the demise of *A. D.*, *United Church News* began publishing in 1985.

Missionary Societies published periodicals to promote their work beginning with the Missionary Society of Connecticut's *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*¹⁴ in 1800. The *Massachusetts Missionary Magazine*, founded in 1803, promoted the Massachusetts Missionary Society. In 1808 this magazine merged with the *Panoplist*, founded in 1805, which became the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions' journal, *Missionary Herald* in 1821. The American Home Missionary Society began *Home Missionary* in 1828, and the American Missionary Association began *American Missionary* in 1846.¹⁵ The Reformed Church's *Outlook of Missions* was published 1909-42.

Seminaries published scholarly journals for their alumni and scholars,

⁹The two came together in 1867 as the *Congregationalist*.

¹⁰absorbed by the *Congregationalist* in 1917.

¹¹called *German Reformed Church Magazine* 1829-31, then *Messenger of the German Reformed Church*, then *Messenger*, later *Reformed Church Messenger*.

¹²called *Western Missionary* 1854-67.

¹³The *Congregationalist* and *Herald of Gospel Liberty* were merged in 1930, and after several years of unclarity took the name *Advance*. The *Messenger*, *Christian World*, and *Evangelical Herald* were united in 1936 as *Messenger*. In 1958 *Advance* and *Messenger* became *United Church Herald*.

¹⁴called *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine* 1800-07, *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencer* 1808-15, and *Religious Intelligencer* 1816-37.

¹⁵In 1909 the *Home Missionary* was absorbed by *American Missionary*, which in turn was taken into *Missionary Herald* in 1934, which united with *Advance* in 1951.

beginning with the Reformed Church's *Mercersburg Review*¹⁶ in 1848.¹⁷ *Prism*, begun in 1985, continues to publish scholarly articles.

The Reformed Church's German language parish paper, *Die Kirchenzeitung*, was absorbed by the Evangelical *Die Friedensbote* (founded 1850) in 1936, and continued in publication to 1958. Papers in other languages, such as Magyar and Dakota, have at certain periods served their constituencies. To these could be added papers promoting the views of a particular party within a church, and papers addressed to particular constituencies, such as youth, and Sunday School teachers. Through myriad mergers and name changes, the denominations have used journalism to connect with their constituencies.

PART B: REACHING OUT FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

A yearning for a fuller expression of Christian unity grew along side the development of denominational organization. In 1865 and 1871 Congregationalists felt compelled to explain that the creation of a denomination was not a rejection of catholicity. All four groups found inspiration in their denominational unity to seek greater unity.¹⁸

Lutheran-Reformed

Lutheran and Reformed came to America from Germany on the same ships, settled in the same rural neighborhoods in Pennsylvania, built churches together, established common parochial schools, and married each other. From the beginning, Lutheran and Reformed congregations shared buildings, each congregation with its own pastor leading worship on alternate Sundays. As population increased many congregations each established their own building,

¹⁶called *Reformed Quarterly Review* 1879-96, then *Reformed Church Review* 1896-1926.

¹⁷The *Bulletin of the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church* began in 1930. The Evangelical Synod published *Theologische Zeitschrift/Theological Magazine* 1873-1933. The name was translated in 1898, but articles continued to be published in both languages for several years. The Evangelical and Reformed seminaries published *Theology in Life*, 1958-66. The *Andover Review* was published 1884-93, and the *Chicago Theological Seminary Register* since 1908.

¹⁸Already discussed have been: Moravian attempt at union (Chapter 5, Part B), Congregational-Presbyterian Plan of Union (Chapter 9, Part A), partial union of Christians with Disciples (Chapter 6, Part A, Christians and Disciples), union of three German Evangelical synods (Chapter 13, Part A, Evangelical Synod), reunion of Eastern and Ohio Reformed Synods (Chapter 13, Part A, Reformed General Synod), and the North Carolina Classis (Chapter 11, Part A, Reformed Church in the South on Its Own), and the reunion of Christians north and south (Chapter 13, Part A, Christian Connection).

but new union churches continued to be built in rural areas, as follows,

Years	new union congs. organized
1800-1850	67
1850-1900	53
1900-1910	3

No new union churches were organized after 1910. Through consolidation, separation, and closure, the 273 union churches reported in 1914 were reduced to 236 in 1953.

Union churches often maintained common Sunday Schools and Cemeteries. The two denominations were seasoned by the same German pietism, influenced by the same American revivalism, and struggled alike over the issue of language. Lutheran and Reformed denominations endorsed the same German language magazines and hymnals for use in union churches.

Lutheran and Reformed joined together in founding Franklin College in Lancaster in 1787. When both denominations desired a theological seminary, in 1818, they created a joint committee to add a seminary department to Franklin College. However the discussions collapsed in 1820, and each denomination created their own seminary.

In 1822 the Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania resolved unanimously to appoint a committee to study the possibility of a general Lutheran-Reformed union. The following year the Reformed classis in Ohio passed a similar resolution. In 1828 two Pennsylvania classes petitioned Synod in favor of union. In 1832 the Ohio Reformed Synod again proposed union. In 1836 the Lutheran delegates to the Eastern Reformed Synod again proposed either union or federation, and the synod responded warmly.

Nothing came of all these resolutions and warm feelings. No plan was developed, no decisive action taken. The opportune time passed away. Each denomination diverted its attention to union with other geographic synods of its own denomination. A confessional movement in Lutheranism, parallel to the Reformed Mercersburg Movement, emphasized the doctrinal differences. Each denomination produced their own hymnals. The Reformed Church bought out the Lutheran interest in Franklin College. In 1872 the Lutheran Church rejected

pulpit and altar fellowship with non-Lutherans.

German Reformed and Dutch Reformed

The Dutch Reformed of New York and the German Reformed of Pennsylvania both related to the Reformed Church in the Netherlands in the colonial period. They had a common doctrinal base and organization. When the Dutch Reformed established an independent synod in 1792 they retained the *Heidelberg Catechism*, *Belgic Confession*, and *Canons of Dort* as their doctrinal standards. The German Reformed, organizing a synod the following year, retained only the *Heidelberg Catechism*.

The two Reformed synods sent delegates to each other's meetings 1813 to 1853, and transferred ministerial standing when requested. When the Dutch Reformed proposed a joint seminary, the German Reformed rejected the idea in favor of working with the Lutherans.¹⁹ In 1844 the Dutch Reformed Synod and the two German Reformed Synods (Eastern and Ohio) held the first Triennial Convention, for consultation and cooperation.²⁰ Only two conventions were held. The Dutch Reformed withdrew, and by 1855 had cut off all correspondence with the German Reformed Church because they considered the Mercersburg theology heretical.

From 1870 to 1872 the two Reformed Churches again discussed union. But it was not consummated because of the different doctrinal standards.

The two Reformed churches entered discussions again in 1887, and proposed a federal union with common boards and separate synods (See *LTH* 6:43.45). The proposal received the approval of the German Reformed classes by 1890. However, a vocal minority in the Dutch Reformed Church, fearing schism from some of their conservative western churches, prevented the adoption of the plan.

Free Will Baptists, Christians, and Congregationalists

Since Free Will Baptists had ordained Abner Jones to be the first Christian minister, the two groups had frequent cooperation and conversations. The obstacle to union was Free Will Baptist insistence on believer's baptism by immersion.

¹⁹The Dutch Reformed Church located its seminary in New Brunswick, N.J. in the hope that it could serve both Reformed groups.

²⁰This was the occasion of John Nevin's sermon on *Catholic Unity*.

In 1885 Christian and Free Will Baptist ministers of New England and New York developed a basis of union. Endorsed by several regional bodies of both denominations in 1886 and by the American Christian Convention, it was rejected by the Free Will Baptists who feared insufficient doctrinal harmony.

In that same year, 1886, the National Council of Congregational Churches received an invitation from Free Will Baptists to enter into discussions. Although acknowledging much similarity, the next National Council, in 1889, noted that the discussions had not born fruit.

Christians and Christian Union

James F. Given (1825-67) left the Methodist ministry and organized the Christian Union at Columbus, Ohio, in 1864. This new denomination was a coalition of mostly ex-Methodists who opposed the Methodist Church's abolitionism and support of the Union in the Civil War. Christian Union adopted an organization that closely resembled the Christian denomination. Christian Union's "Seven Cardinal Principles," which included the Christian Church's principles, added, "no politics in the pulpit." A cluster of Christian congregations in Missouri, far removed from their roots in North Carolina, affiliated with the Christian Union.

In 1873 Christians and Christian Union in Iowa united in one state conference, but after several years they each went their own way. In 1886 Christian Union presented a proposal for union to the Christian denomination (See *LTH* 6:24). The Christians agreed, and the two denominations cooperated, but no actual union took place.

Congregational and Episcopal

Episcopal appeals for Christian unity were carefully studied by Congregationalists, who remembered that the first Congregationalists "were not willing separatists," but continued to think of themselves as part of the Church of England. Congregationalists studied and discussed the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (*LTH* 6:5) – what Anglicans considered the four essentials any union must have – first proposed in 1886. The National Council concluded in 1895 that Episcopal insistence on re-ordination of other ministers by bishops in apostolic succession made further discussion impractical (See *LTH* 6:6).

Congregationalists and Episcopalians continued discussions to 1923 (See *LTH* 6:7-10) to see if pastors of one denomination could serve members of the other in communities where the other did not have a congregation. The Congregational side agreed to re-ordination by an Episcopal bishop of the

Congregational ministers involved. However the Episcopal Church was unwilling to ordain under those conditions.

Congregational Methodists

On May 8, 1852, several local preachers and other lay persons of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, met in Monroe County, Georgia, and organized a new denomination, the Congregational Methodist Church. Congregational Methodists were Methodists who opposed what they considered the undemocratic, clergy-dominated organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. This new denomination, centered in Georgia and eastern Alabama, spread across the South before the Civil War.

In 1887 AHMS superintendent for Florida and Georgia, Sullivan Gale discovered the Congregational Methodists and concluded they could live harmoniously in the Congregational denomination. That year the Georgia Conference of Congregational Methodists united with the much smaller organization of white Congregationalists in Georgia. Over the next several years Gale recruited several other Congregational Methodist Conferences into the Congregational Church. About one third of the Congregational Methodists joined the Congregationalists.

The Congregational Methodists gave the Congregationalists an instant white constituency in the South – and controversy over segregation.²¹ Many of these predominantly small rural churches died out, others have fallen away from the denomination, some returned to the continuing Congregational Methodist denomination.

Congregational and Christian

At the instigation of the New Jersey Christian Association, the Christian Convention in 1894 initiated discussions with the Congregational Church. In 1897 representatives of the two groups met and developed what became known as the Craigville Proposal (*LTH* 6:18; see also *LTH* 6:36). It was a proposal for mutual recognition that would not disturb existing institutions. In 1898 the proposal was rejected by the Christian Convention due to opposition from Southern and Western parts of the church. Some Christians opposed union with any group bearing any name other than Christian.

Congregational, Methodist Protestant, United Brethren, and Christian

Congregationalists began discussions in 1898 with Methodist Protestants –

²¹See Chapter 14, Part C, Color Line Debate - Part 2.

a Methodist group that did not have bishops. United Brethren in Christ and Christians joined the discussions in 1903 (See *LTH* 6:3). Because the other three groups insisted on creeds, the Christians dropped out. In 1907 an “Act of Union” (*LTH* 6:4) was presented to the churches. Congregationalists in 1910 asked the other groups to reconsider the Congregational concern to guarantee autonomy to local congregations, which they were unwilling to do, and the proposal died.

Reformed and Presbyterian

The German Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church shared the Reformed faith and Presbyterian polity; proposals for union arose consistently. The Reformed Church in the Netherlands corresponded with the German Reformed, Dutch Reformed and Presbyterian churches in America in the period 1741-53, to see if the two Reformed churches could be included in the Presbyterian Church. John Philip Boehm absolutely rejected the proposal. (1) He did not understand English. (2) He was unwilling to give up the *Heidelberg Catechism*. (3) Neither would he give up the Reformed liturgy for special occasions.

In 1823 the German Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church agreed to correspond and to send delegates to each other’s meetings. After 1838 the Reformed corresponded with both Old School and New School Presbyterians. The Old School closed correspondence in 1854 out of dissatisfaction with Mercersburg theology, but correspondence with the New School and after 1869 with the reunited Assembly, continued.

From 1903 to 1906 the two denominations discussed union, and in 1911 presented to the churches a Plan of Union. The Reformed classes rejected what to them looked like absorption, and the project was dropped (*LTH* 6:47).

Local Cooperation and Federation

Small communities that could not support several denominational congregations searched for new forms of cooperation. The denominations in Maine began in 1890 a pattern of closing all but one congregation in small communities, each denomination getting their share. Beginning about 1895 major denominations – including Congregationalists and Christians – began forming Federated Churches. In these churches separate denominational organizations, each with their own membership rolls and benevolences, shared ministerial leadership. By 1920 about 300 Federated Churches had been formed across the country. These community churches, both denominational and federated, of necessity allowed right of private judgment and tolerance of doctrinal diversity.

Interchurch cooperation had been promoted by Josiah Strong for the social gospel, and by Dwight Moody for evangelism. State and city councils of churches arose, beginning with the Interdenominational Commission of Maine (1894) and the Greater New York Federation of Churches and Christian Workers (1895). The movement for a national federation began in 1900. Congregationalist Elias B. Sanford (1843-1932) gathered representatives of denominations in 1905, to create a constitution for a Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America (FCC)²² (*LTH* 6:51). By 1908 thirty-two denominations had ratified the constitution and the Council began to function. Social Gospel advocates provided the core of the FCC, but its activities included evangelism and education.

PART C: WOMEN IN THE CHURCHES

A movement for equality of voice and office for women in the church paralleled the movement for women's suffrage in civil society. Women organized and carried out missionary work, while a handful of women entered the ministry.

Formation of Women's Mission Boards

Local women's groups in Congregational churches had been supporting missions since the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was founded. The first Women's Missionary Society in the Reformed Church organized in Frederick, Maryland, in 1826.

In 1834 David Abeel, a Dutch Reformed missionary of the ABCFM, proposed that women organize societies to support women in mission to women. The churches of England responded to his proposal. In America, Dutch Reformed philanthropist Sarah Doremus planned the organization of a women's board, but ABCFM secretary Rufus Anderson discouraged her. The project was dropped until after Anderson's retirement.

In 1868 Mrs. Bowker organized the Woman's Board of Missions, a network of local women's organizations to promote missions, and to send out women missionaries under the direction of the ABCFM, to minister to women. A Woman's Board of Missions of the Interior, in Chicago (1869), Woman's Board of Missions for the Pacific Islands, in Honolulu (1871) and Woman's Board of Missions for the Pacific, in California (1873) completed the network. This movement created a woman's organization in almost every congregation,

²²name later changed to National Council of Churches of Christ.

affiliated with state and national organizations. They provided the ABCFM with over 20% of its receipts and a steady supply of single female missionaries. In 1920, of 73 persons commissioned as missionaries by the ABCFM, 56 were women.

Elvira S. Yockey established a similar movement in the Reformed Church in the United States. She organized the Woman's Missionary Society of the First Reformed Church, Xenia, Ohio, in 1877. Similar societies sprang up in other congregations. In 1887 they organized the Woman's Missionary Society of the General Synod, with Elvira Yockey as President (*LTH* 4:103, see also *LTH* 5:8).

The Christian Church organized the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions in 1886, and a Woman's Board for Home Missions in 1890.

The National Evangelical Union of Women organized in 1921, but Evangelical Synod women actively supported benevolent institutions before then.

Elimination of Women's Mission Boards

In the first three decades of the Twentieth Century, denominational leaders promoted more efficient denominational administration and unified fund raising, and came to look upon denominational women's missionary societies, parallel to the (men's) denominational boards as inefficient. In Congregational churches advocates of efficiency called for the consolidation of the women's boards with the ABCFM. With some misgivings, the women's boards united with the ABCFM in 1927, the women being assured that at least one-third of the ABCFM corporate membership and Prudential Committee would be female. As a result of this integration of mission work, women no longer held key leadership positions, and financial support declined. The local Women's Missionary Society became a Women's Fellowship with a less focused definition of purpose. The women's missionary organizations of the other denominations that made up the UCC lost their distinctive missionary function in the first round of church mergers.

Lay Officers

Henry Dexter reported in *A Handbook of Congregationalism* in 1880 that Congregational churches in the old days restricted the voting privilege at congregational meetings to adult male members. "Modern notions have led many of them to adopt a different policy. It is, however, believed that a majority still hold to the earlier practice."

Hugo Kamphausen, of the Evangelical Synod, writing in 1924 recalled that "say 25 years ago—many good old German men vigorously opposed the new

trend,” of woman’s suffrage in congregational meetings. He identified this trend with the Americanization process, often accompanying the adoption of English in worship. He observed, “thus far we have not heard of women serving on church councils nor have they served as delegates to church conferences,” but there was no constitutional provision against it, and in time it would come.

For the Reformed Church the election of women to consistories was a more complex matter. Elders and Deacons were ordained, and only Elders could represent the congregation at classis and synod; a change in church constitution was required.

The *Reformed Church Messenger* in 1922 asked its readers to respond to the question, “Should women be eligible for office in the church and for membership in our Church judicatories?” To the surprise of the editors, every essay received in response to this inquiry was in the affirmative.

The 1923 General Synod received an overture from Eastern Synod calling for a constitutional amendment granting to women, “the same rights, privileges and prerogatives of representation of holding office in congregations, Classes, District Synods and General Synod, which now belong to men.” After thorough discussion throughout the church, the General Synod in 1929 adopted an amendment giving women “the same constitutional rights as men.” The amendment was referred to the classes for their action. As this amendment fell two classes short of the two-thirds needed for adoption, it was rewritten to exclude the ordained ministry and resubmitting to the classes. General Synod in 1934 received a report of approval of the rewritten amendment by the classes. Women received the right to serve on consistories and denominational board at the Synod meeting at which the Reformed Church united with Evangelical Synod and began the process of going out of existence.

In the Evangelical Synod women had served on Church Councils and District and General Conferences by then. The constitution of the Evangelical and Reformed Church made no distinction between men and women, clearly implying and interpreted to mean that women could serve in any position.

Gradually women assumed new roles in the life of the congregation, but the key lay leadership roles continued to be filled almost exclusively by men.

Ordained Women²³

Mary A. Bevier of Colorado wrote in the *Home Missionary* in 1902 of her experience four years before:

Few of the people where I lived went to church, and there was no church within eighteen miles. Children were growing up to know nothing about God, and how were they ever to believe the Gospel that they never heard? This seemed to be my call to preach.

Typical of the handful of ordained women of her day, Bevier felt called by necessity, and served in a remote location for a salary most men would not consider.

One woman, Antoinette Brown, had been ordained in 1853. However, her ordination did not have the sanction of her Association, and she remained in the Congregational ministry for only ten months.

The next woman to be ordained was in the Christian Connection, Melissa Garrett²⁴ (1834-after 1921), at Ebenezer Church, Clark County, Ohio, March 7, 1867. When the Deer Creek Conference of the Christian Church met the following September they voted:

Resolved:—That while we do not approve of the ordination of women to the Eldership of the church, as a general rule, yet as sister Melissa Timmons has been set forward to that position at the request of the church of which she is now a member, therefore,

Resolved:--That we send her credential letters of an ordained minister of good standing in this Conference.

Melissa Garrett Timmons Terrell pastored in Christian churches in Ohio, Iowa and Missouri.

By 1871 the Eastern Virginia Christian Conference had licensed Talitha Briggs to preach to “the colored.” When the Virginia Christian Colored Conference organized 11 December 1873, with six churches and eight ministers, Briggs was on the list of ministers.

²³For earlier information on the ordination of women go to Chapter 8, Part D, Women Praying and Preaching.

²⁴through marriages she became Melissa Garrett Timmons Terrell.

The Congregational Yearbook first mentioned a woman licensed minister in 1883, and ordained women in 1889.²⁵ The National Council of Congregational Churches first took note of ordained women in 1919, when it appointed a commission to study the situation. The commission reported in 1921 that 1.2% of Congregational clergy were women. These 67 women were employed as follows:

Pastors of Churches	18
Joint Pastorate	14
Religious Education or Church Assistant	14
Not Indicated	21

All the women pastors of churches were serving very small congregations. Virtually all of the joint pastorates were clergy couples. Most of the “not indicated” group were married, several to pastors. The Commission concluded there was no need for the National Council to make any ruling on the ordination of women other than gratefully acknowledging their existence. “We can neither challenge the validity of their ordination nor deny the fact of their evident usefulness.”²⁶

In 1930 the Congregational denomination reported 131 women ministers, 2.2% of the total, and the Christian denomination reported 55 ordained women, 4.6% of the total. Women made little progress in the ministry in the middle third of the Twentieth Century; in 1970 only 2.5% of the ordained ministers of the United Church of Christ were women.²⁷

²⁵Emma Newman (1838-1922) appears to be the first woman licensed by a Congregational Association, at Dial, Kansas, in 1883. She had been serving churches since 1873 but was never ordained. Mary Moreland, of McLean, Illinois, and Annis B. Ford Eastman of Tompkins County, New York, were ordained in 1889.

²⁶National Council of Congregational Churches, *Minutes* 1921: 41.

²⁷Beatrice Weaver (Later Beatrice Weaver McConnell) graduated from Lancaster Seminary and was ordained a minister of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in 1948, a first on both counts, without controversy.