

CHAPTER FIFTEEN THE NEW AMERICANS

Thirty-seven million immigrants arrived in the United States between 1840 and 1920. For the Evangelical Synod and the Reformed Church, ministering to the new German immigrants, many of whom already identified with their denominations, resembled the “home-mission” work of Congregationalists with English-speakers. However other immigrants came, who had some resemblance by doctrine, polity or piety, with Congregationalists or the Reformed. Some of these immigrant groups, each with their distinctive heritage from the “old country,” responded to these American denominations and became part of their life as a group.¹

PART A: GERMANS FROM RUSSIA²

The Brotherhood in Russia

Wilhelm Staerkel, born in Russia, converted in revival, and educated at Basel, became pastor of the Reformed Church in Norka, in the Volga region. In 1871 he organized the scattered pietist prayer groups among Germans in Russia into the *Brüderschaff* (Brotherhood). The local brotherhoods were organized into conferences which met annually, not for business, but for worship. Johannes Albert organized the Brotherhood in the Ukraine.

The organization of the Brotherhood accomplished two ends. First, it promoted experiential religion. Second, it established boundaries, keeping the movement in the church and avoiding excesses. In Russian revivals persons were moved to tears and repentance, but the emotional excesses of American revivals were avoided. Singing occupied about half the time of a prayer meeting.

¹In addition to the groups described below, Congregationalists engaged in ministry to other ethnic groups, including a Norwegian-Danish Department at Chicago Theological Seminary, and a Slavic Mission directed by Henry A. Schaffler (b. 1837) in Cleveland. Surviving ethnic Congregational Churches in the UCC include Finnish congregations and an Assyrian Church. The Reformed Church began Bohemian (Czech) congregations in Illinois and Iowa.

²For earlier information on Germans in Russia go to Chapter 7, Part B, Germans in Russia.

Immigration

The German colonies lost the privileges they were originally granted by the Russian government. In 1866 the German colonies lost control of their schools. In 1871 German men were made subject to the military draft. In 1890 Russian teachers were placed in German schools. By decree in 1897 the language of instruction became Russian. Many Germans decided it was time to move again.

In 1872 the first group of immigrants traveled from Odessa, in south Russia (now the Ukraine) to southern Dakota Territory. More followed until war ended immigration in 1914. By 1900 over 300,000 Germans from Russia and their children lived in the United States, the largest numbers in North Dakota, Kansas, South Dakota, Nebraska and Colorado. Others went to Canada, Argentina and Brazil.

German Russians in the German Reformed Church

The Reformed Church in the United States made contact with the German Russians in 1875. Jakob Orth (1837-83) had been converted in a revival, graduated from a teachers' seminary, taught school in Worms, south Russia, was active in the Brotherhood, and settled in Sutton, Nebraska, in 1873. He was ordained by the Reformed Church after an intensive course of a few weeks at Mission House. The Brotherhood was active in most German Russian Reformed churches in America. German Russians constituted most of the Reformed Churches in the Dakotas and Nebraska, and many of the churches in the neighboring states and provinces.

Many of these German Russian Reformed people were reluctant to surrender any authority to the Synod or General Synod, remembering the difficulties they had with the predominantly Lutheran consistory in Russia. Unwilling to accept financial aid from the Synod, they had difficulty keeping pastors. About 5% of the German Russians in America affiliated with the Reformed Church.

German Congregationalists

In addition to supporting Kirchenverein pastors, the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS) also supported German pastors who organized German Congregational churches. Many of these pastors came from the Pilgrim Mission of Saint Chrischona (*Die Pilgermission zu St. Chrischona*). Founded in 1840 in Basel by the same people who founded Basel Mission, Saint Chrischona Mission placed greater emphasis on evangelism. The AHMS found these missionaries more compatible with the AHMS requirement of regenerate membership in churches.

The AHMS organized the first German Congregational Church in Dubuque, Iowa, in 1847.³ This small movement grew using revivals. In 1862 they organized the German Association of Iowa. In 1875, after almost thirty years of labor, German Congregationalists could count only 23 congregations and 841 members, half in Iowa.

Emmanuel Jose (b. 1840), of Odessa, was educated in a teachers' seminary, active in the Brotherhood, and emigrated to Sutton, Nebraska in 1874. He joined the German Congregational Church, was licensed to preach in 1875 and ordained in 1876. Jose soon organized several congregations in Dakota Territory. German Congregationalism spread rapidly among German Russians *through* the Brotherhood. The Congregational emphasis on regenerate membership appealed to the Brotherhood. They also valued autonomy in the Congregational Church. It was not the autonomy of the local congregation, but the autonomy of the German Associations within the denomination that they admired. The local congregations, like the local brotherhoods in Russia, were closely related. The Association grouped the congregations into pastoral charges. The Apostles Creed was the standard of doctrine. The rite of Confirmation, usually following an intensive short-term period of instruction, was preserved, but was not equated with church membership. German Congregationalism flourished among Germans from Russia, who soon overwhelmed the other Germans in the movement. They willingly accepted aid from the AHMS. About 30% of the Germans from Russia affiliated with the German Congregational Church (See *LTH* 6:17).

German Congregationalists organized the General Conference of the German Congregational Churches (*Die Allgemeine Evangelische Kirchenversammlung der Deutschen Kongregationalisten*) in 1883. German Congregationalists organized state associations, each was nominally affiliated with the Congregational State Conference, but in practice was an integral part of the German General Conference.

The CHMS appointed a general superintendent for German work, nominated by the General Conference, who directed the work of the General Conference. Moritz Ernst Eversz (1842-1922) superintended the General Conference through its period of greatest growth, 1888-1920.

The German General Conference wanted a German-language theological

³This congregation affiliated with the Presbyterians in 1853, however other churches had been organized.

institution in America to prepare pastoral leadership for its churches. Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS) established a German Department for that purpose in 1882. In 1902 it became the German Institute, under the control of the General Conference. The German Conference conducted a proseminary to prepare students for the CTS program. The proseminary was moved several times, eventually closing in 1932. The German Institute, after a couple of moves, in 1932 became the Yankton School of Theology.

German Congregationalists connected with each other through a parish paper, *Der Kirchenbote*, established in 1882. This expanded into a publishing concern.⁴ In addition to *Der Kirchenbote*, the press published a hymnal (beginning in 1899), a Manual for German Congregational Churches (1902, 1922), a Catechism (1904, translated 1928), and Sunday School materials (beginning 1906). Most congregations adopted the Manual (*Handbuch*) as the basis of their local church government. The Catechism, solidly Biblical, incorporated the essential doctrines of the Lutheran and Heidelberg Catechisms. The General Conference by 1936 numbered 215 congregations with over 23,000 members.

PART B: THE CHINESE IN AMERICA

Chinese emigration to America began with the California gold rush of 1848. About 95% of the immigrants were men, who intended to earn money and return to China. First Congregational Church of Oakland, California, began a Sunday School for the Chinese in 1868. In 1870 three men from that school were baptized and received into membership in the church.

The American Missionary Association (AMA) resourced Congregational work with the Chinese in America, in cooperation with a California Chinese Mission, founded in 1876. William C. Pond (1830-1925), pastor of Third Congregational Church, San Francisco, began to superintend this AMA work in 1873, assisted by Jee Gam. The AMA work with the Chinese took three forms:

1. Schools—The AMA began Sunday Schools and night schools to teach English to Chinese immigrants.
2. Churches—At first Chinese converts were encouraged to join the

⁴The publishing concern passed through several locations, as German Congregational Publishing Society (Michigan City, In, 1895-1905), German Pilgrim Press (Chicago, 1905-23), Redfield College Press (Redfield, SD, 1923-32), and Pioneer Press (Yankton, SD, 1932-68).

English-speaking Congregational churches. The Chinese were marginal in these churches and encountered prejudice. Pond then advocated the development of “branch churches” – Chinese fellowships related to White churches. A few became self-supporting congregations.

3. Advocacy–Chinese faced prejudice and discriminatory laws in America. The Oriental Exclusion Act of 1882 terminated Chinese immigration; Chinese communities in America dwindled. The AMA in its publications and its meetings condemned exclusion and called for its repeal.

Chinese Congregationalists in California organized the Chinese Congregational Missionary Society, which in 1887 sent Chui Get to Canton, China, to minister with Chinese who had encountered Christianity in America.

PART C: CONGREGATIONALISTS AND MISSION COVENANT

A vigorous pietist movement persisted within the Lutheran state Church of Sweden, rooted in German pietism and invigorated by early Nineteenth Century contact with British Methodism. Carl Olaf Rosenius (1816-68) was succeeded by Paul Peter Waldenström (1838-1917) as leader of the movement. Known as “Mission Friends” these pietists met in small groups, listened to lay preachers, and continued to participate in the Lutheran Church. Waldenström organized the Mission Friends as the Swedish Mission Covenant in 1878, still a movement within the state church.

From 1851 to 1930 over a million Swedes came to America. A state without a state church presented a new situation to Swedish pietists. Mission Friends organized within the Augustana Lutheran Church, which was organized in 1860. Mission Friends also gathered where there was no Lutheran Church; some organized independent congregations.

George Wiberg, a Mission Friend, organized a Swedish Congregational Church in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1880,⁵ encouraged others to so affiliate, and was sent by the AHMS to Minnesota. Wiberg inspired Marcus W. Montgomery (1840-94), AHMS superintendent for Minnesota, to promote Swedish work by the AHMS, and in 1884 Montgomery was appointed superintendent for Swedish work. That same year he traveled to Norway and

⁵This congregation is now affiliated with the Evangelical Covenant Church.

Sweden and met with Waldenström and other leaders. Wiberg, Montgomery and Waldenström were all convinced that American Congregationalists were the equivalent of Swedish Mission Friends, and that the latter should affiliate with the former.

Some Mission Friends in America organized the Evangelical Free Church in 1884. Others organized the Evangelical Covenant Church in 1885. At that 1885 meeting Congregational representatives offered to create a Swedish Department at Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS), to train their pastors. The Evangelical Covenant accepted the offer. The Swedish Department of CTS opened in 1885, became an "Institute" with partial control from Swedish Congregational churches in 1903, and closed in 1916. The Department's first professor, Fridolf Risberg (1848-1921), nominated by Waldenström, later became a Congregationalist and encouraged the Mission Friends to affiliate.

The National Council of Congregational Churches in 1889 proposed that the Evangelical Covenant Church affiliate with the National Council as an autonomous ethnic conference. Representatives of the two groups met in Chicago, 5-6 February 1890, to discuss the proposal. The Swedish group rejected the proposal, considering the Congregationalists too "worldly."

The Mission Friends were divided into several groups: Evangelical Covenant, Evangelical Free, Congregational, independent, and Augustana Lutheran. A theological divide soon cut across these organizational divisions. Fundamentalism, expressed in pre-millennial eschatology, opposition to church organization, and condemnation of amusements, appealed to many. The majority saw Fundamentalism as an extra-biblical doctrinal standard and opposed its official adoption, but it was unofficially pervasive. By 1906, 106 Mission Friend congregations were Congregational. In succeeding years most of these congregations joined the Evangelical Covenant.

Congregationalists and Mission Friends were not as similar as some leaders believed. Congregationalists, influenced by liberal theology, were moving away from regenerate membership. Mission Friends were increasingly influenced by Fundamentalism. Many leaders were not far apart, and were moved by a genuine catholic impulse. However, the issues of assimilation versus preservation of ethnic identity, and denominational pride on both sides, were probably more significant factors than theology in preventing union.

PART D:
MAGYAR REFORMED IN HUNGARY AND AMERICA⁶

Survival and Renewal in Hungary

About one fourth of the Magyars (Hungarians) of Hungary were Reformed, and had survived two centuries of persecution. The failure of revolution in 1848 brought renewed repression. After a brief reprieve, the government issued a Patent in 1859 revoking all Protestant rights. The state would supervise all church meetings, review session minutes, approve the appointment of pastors, and authorize text books for parochial schools. Emeric Revesz (1826-81) led the Reformed people in non-violent resistance. The Reformed Church simply conducted its affairs as if the government did not exist. Some meetings were broken up; some ministers were arrested. The government propagandized and harassed the people. But they persevered. In 1860 the Emperor revoked the Patent.

The piety of the Magyar church had declined through centuries of persecution. Renewal came in two forms:

1. A synod of 1881 reorganized the church, requiring congregations and the county and district organizations to meet regularly and fulfill their responsibilities.
2. Pietism developed, inspired by Germany's *Innere-Mission* and a Scottish Mission to the Jews. Aladar Szabo, ordained in 1886, conducted evangelistic services, promoted Sunday Schools, Bible classes, and instruction in the Catechism. The Susanna Lorantfy Home Missionary Association, founded in 1892, promoted lay ministry and founded a Deaconess Home in 1905.

In America

Economic depression led to massive emigration from Hungary to America for fifty years beginning in 1870. Magyars approached German Reformed congregations asking for communion. In 1890 the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) requested the church in Hungary to send pastors. Gustáv Jurányi arrived in Cleveland in 1890, and John Kovács arrived in Pittsburgh in 1891, to organize churches among the Magyars in cooperation with the RCUS (*LTH* 6:41). By 1900 nine congregations had been organized. In that year the Presbyterian Church also began organizing Magyar congregations. In 1903 the

⁶For earlier material on the Hungarian Reformed Church go to Chapter 2, Part A, Reformation in Hungary.

RCUS contacted the church in Hungary to see if they could help bring an end to the separation of Magyar churches in two denominations. As a result, a delegation arrived from Hungary in 1904 and began organizing churches to form a classis within the Reformed Church of Hungary. There were now three small groups of Magyar Reformed churches.

The government of Austria-Hungary tried to use its ties to the Magyar Reformed groups for its own political purposes. During World War I, when the United States was at war with Austria-Hungary, Magyar Reformed churches were suspected of disloyalty and several pastors were investigated by the United States government. Following the war, the churches affiliated with the Church in Hungary decided to affiliate with an American group, to end any suspicion of disloyalty. The Hungarian government believed a connection with the Presbyterians would be more beneficial, but the churches in America preferred a connection with the RCUS. A series of negotiations resulted in the Tiffin Agreement of 7 October 1921. By this agreement the Magyar churches joined the RCUS, were allowed to continue the use of their language, and to stay together in non-geographic classes. A few congregations did not go along with the agreement, and organized the Hungarian Reformed Church in America. The RCUS soon had three growing Magyar classes.⁷

PART E: ARMENIANS IN TURKEY AND AMERICA⁸

The small Armenian Protestant community suffered the same fate as other Armenians in Turkey. Suspected of disloyalty, the government allowed Kurds to plunder them in 1880. Perhaps 100,000 Armenians were massacred by the Turks, and many made homeless, 1894-97. Armenians in Cilicia were massacred in 1909. In the early years of World War I, 1914-15, about a half million Armenians died in massacres and were driven into deserts without provisions (See Chapter 16, Part A, Near East Relief). All these atrocities drove survivors into exile.

The first Armenian church in America, Armenian Church of the Martyrs, was organized in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1891. Others soon followed. Congregational and Presbyterian Armenian churches had fellowship through the Armenian Evangelical Union, and engaged in benevolent and missionary work

⁷For further information on the Magyar reformed go to Chapter 18, Part C, Calvin Synod.

⁸For earlier information on the Armenian churches go to Chapter 7, Part B, Western Asia.

with Armenians around the world through the Armenian Missionary Association of America.

PART F:
THE JAPANESE IN JAPAN AND IN AMERICA

Mission to Japan

Japan was closed to the rest of the world until forced open by an American fleet in 1853. Then followed a period of restricted contacts with the West; Christianity continued to be an illegal religion until 1873.

This was a time of great social change in Japan. After a period of civil war, the Meiji Emperor ruled a strong central government that strove to learn from the West in order to make Japan more powerful. With industrialization and the establishment of a conscript army, the samurai, or warrior class, had no place. Many early Christian leaders came from the samurai class. Consequently Japanese Protestantism early acquired a unique Japanese character. The samurai marked their church with a fierce sense of loyalty to their new Lord and to each other, a strong sense of patriotism, and a commitment to independence from foreign powers.

A young samurai, Shimeta Niishima (1843-90),⁹ desiring to learn more about the West, snuck aboard an American ship, came to America, attended Amherst College and Andover Seminary, became a Christian, was ordained, and in 1875 went to Japan as a missionary of the ABCFM. Niishima founded Doshisha University in Kyoto in 1875, a Japanese educational institution that was also a Christian college (*LTH* 5:45). The American Board had also sent a missionary to Kobe, Japan, in 1869.

Meanwhile, in 1871 a local lord in Kumamoto had hired a West Point graduate, Capt. Leroy Lansing Janes, to conduct a school of western learning. Janes' military discipline appealed to his samurai students. His Christian faith was evident in his life, although he obeyed the law and did not preach. At dawn, one morning in 1876, thirty-five of Janes' students climbed the hill of Hanoaka and took an oath of fealty to their new Lord, Jesus Christ, and for the emancipation of their nation. When Janes had to leave, he advised the members of this "Kumamoto Band" to go to Niisima at Doshisha, which they did. Upon graduation many were ordained and dispersed across Japan preaching Christ and organizing Congregational churches.

⁹in America called Joseph Hardy Neesima.

These Congregational Churches organized a Home Missionary Society and a national organization of “Associated Churches” (*Kumi-ai*). In 1895 the Kumiai resolved that all evangelistic work be supervised by it, but the Mission did not comply. The Kumiai was a young church, but energetic, nationalistic, and self-confident. The Kumiai, under Congregational mission boards, sent missionaries to Japanese immigrants in Hawaii and the United States.

The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) sent its first missionaries to Japan in 1879. The RCUS work soon centered in the northern city of Sendai, where two Japanese ministers had already started evangelistic work. The RCUS united its work with several other Presbyterian and Reformed mission boards from the United States; together they initiated and supported the Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan).¹⁰ The Christian denomination began its first foreign mission in 1887 in the northern city of Ishinomaki.

Japanese in America

In 1872 four Japanese students began meeting at Third Congregational Church, San Francisco. A woman of the church, Mrs. Wilson, offered to hold a Bible class and an English class for them, but the church was not open to “orientals.” She offered her classes at a Methodist Chinese mission. In 1877 Japanese students organized a Japanese Gospel Society.

Japanese population grew; a few students were followed by larger numbers employed in farming and other occupations. William C. Pond supervised the work of organizing Congregational churches among the Japanese, beginning in 1899. By 1926, fifteen congregations had been organized.

Shanjiro Okubo, a graduate of Doshisha University in Japan, urged the formation of a strong independent Japanese church in America, no longer dependent on missionary support. Under his leadership the congregation in Oakland, California, became fully self-supporting and self-governing in 1906. Other congregations soon followed. Practicing sacrificial giving, these poor immigrant churches called pastors from Japan and Hawaii. The Reformed Church in the United States began work with Japanese on the Pacific coast in 1910.

Summary

Immigrant groups joined African Americans and American Indians to

¹⁰for proposed union of Churches of Christ in Japan with Kumiai see *LTH* 6:48.

constitute significant subcultures in the Congregational, Reformed and Christian denominations. Some constituted ethnic classes or associations; others had less formal ties. Each immigrant group maintained ties with the mother country and with congregations of the same ethnic group in different denominations in America. Many were strongly influenced by a piety developed before coming to America, often an outgrowth of the missionary movement.

The ethnic congregation was a transitional institution, a bridge between two cultures for the first generation. Each ethnic congregation would face a crisis over the language of worship, often in the third generation. Most ethnic congregations would eventually die. Yet many persons, nurtured in these congregations, would later affiliate with more “generic” congregations of the same denomination. Each of these ethnic groups has contributed to the United Church of Christ, and their influence has been far greater than their number of surviving congregations might suggest.