

## Chapter 5

# GERMAN CONGREGATIONALISM

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CONGREGATIONALISM WAS IDEALLY suited to the frontier, and Missionary Superintendent Julius Reed, one of Iowa Congregationalism's "sacred seven," thought it could provide German immigrants with a well-anchored religious life. According to George Eisenach, premier historian of the German movement, Reed "secured a number of German ministers and missionaries from Germany and Switzerland and from denominations in this country which had German preaching." He also petitioned the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS) for financial support.(1)

The AHMS, organized by four denominations in 1826 but funded and directed mainly by Congregationalists and Presbyterians, supported a variety of German pastors and churches, including Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian, and Evangelical, in addition to Congregationalists. For example, no fewer than twenty-one pastors of the *Kirchenverein des Westen* (later the German Evangelical Synod of North America) received half their salaries from the AHMS between 1841 and 1862.(2)

Members of the AHMS had grown uneasy about aiding pastors and churches with lax membership standards. They abhorred the custom of admitting to full communion anyone who had a confirmation certificate, although this was a common practice in Germany.

That the membership of the German churches, in many instances, is made up without what appears to American Christians sufficient evidence of regeneration by the Spirit of God, there is no longer reason to doubt. . . . To aid in building up churches on such a foundation.., would lower the standard of godliness, encourage formality, and prepare the way for a religion of external display, and thus produce the very state of things which our pious fathers crossed the ocean to escape.(3)

Congregationalism among the Germans, as championed by Reed, offered a form of church organization that was ideally suited to frontier communities. It also emphasized vital personal religion growing out of an experience of conversion. Yet the preaching of repentance and conversion was almost unknown to those who were raised in the German *Landeskirche* (State Church). Congregationalism's first missionary to the Germans, Peter Fleury, recruited by Reed in 1846, was told by one, "In our country, thieves, murderers, and such people, have to do repentance, but we are Christians, by birth, baptism, and confirmation."(4)

Not simply a polity, Congregationalism spoke a religious language as foreign to most Germans as English was. Although pastors labored with zeal, the numbers remained small. In 1883 there were twenty-seven churches, with a total of 1,006 members.(5) They were “unaided, alone, divided among themselves, the prey of religious tramps from other churches.”(6)

Viewed suspiciously by those who were affiliated with traditional German churches, German Congregational pastors were culled from many sources. The *Missionshauses* of Germany and Switzerland supplied a number of them, particularly St. Chrischona in Basel. Even though these missionaries had an ecumenical outlook, they failed to dispel the popular fear that being Congregational meant deserting the faith of one’s ancestors. Peter Fleury told of a man who wanted to join a Congregational church being pulled from the room by his wife, who said, “You must not forsake the Lutheran faith.” Another man, who, when asked if he liked Fleury’s sermon, said, “Very much, it is all very good if it were but Lutheran.”(7)

## GERMANS IN RUSSIA

If it were not for the influx of large numbers of German-speaking natives of Russia into the United States and Canada in the decades before and after 1900, the history of German Congregationalism could be presented in these few paragraphs, highlighting a small band of *Reiseprediger* (traveling preachers) and the congregations they gathered in the Middle West.(8) The immigration of these Germans from South Russia and the Volga region, beginning in 1872—73, brought a new urgency to the German work. Although foreign to most native Germans, Congregationalism appealed to Protestant *Russlanddeutschen* (Russia Germans), particularly those from Lutheran parishes. They had been raised in a milder Lutheranism than was often encountered in the United States, and some had actually experienced revival and regeneration in Russia. Mid-nineteenth century American Congregationalism offered a style of church life that was seemingly designed for them—a fact made clear when one looks at their unique social and religious development.

” This old Russian saying was a tribute to the industriousness of the thousands of Germans who immigrated to Russia beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, first to the north, or Volga region, around the city of Saratov, and later to the Ukraine and to Bessarabia, in the south.(9) The Russia Germans had transformed barren steppes into rich farmland, creating tidy communities that preserved their German heritage in unique ways.

Religion was at the center of their lives. A pledge of “unhindered freedom of worship” by Catherine the Great, in 1763, helped lure the Volga Germans from their homeland. Yet the colonists brought their own religious backgrounds. Of the 104 colonies established on the Volga from 1764 to 1768, for example, 29 were Catholic. Of the remaining colonies, three fourths were Lutheran and the rest, Reformed.(10)

A chronic shortage of clergy existed from the beginning. Priests sometimes ministered to Protestants, and theological differences between Lutherans and adherents of the Reformed faith were often minimized.(11) Although Russia German Lutherans embraced the *Konkordienbuch*

(Book of Concord), as did Lutherans everywhere, one observer nonetheless noted: "The confessional status of the colonies is unclear." (12) Provincial in many ways, Russia German Protestants heard good sermons. Sometimes, however, the sermons were read by the local schoolteacher from a *predigtbuch*, or book of sermons, because the large parishes and scarcity of pastors made it impossible for all places to have a minister to officiate each Sunday.

Russian pastors were well trained, even by German standards. Many pastors, however, did affect one Russian Orthodox decoration. A number of pastors' pictures show them wearing the traditional pulpit gown and linen tabs, with a large crucifix suspended from a chain around the neck. (13)

A theological seminary had been founded at the University of Dorpat, in 1833, to train pastors for the Protestant colonies. (14) Some of Germany's best theologians taught there, including Luther scholar Theodosius von Harnack, who himself had attended Dorpat and whose son Adolf, one of Protestantism's most famous scholars, also studied there. The elder Harnack and church historian Moritz von Englehardt, who made a lasting impression on young Adolf, grappled with modern theology's weightiest themes. A strict Lutheran, Theodosius Harnack had even written a book condemning Herrnhut (Moravian) influence on the Lutheran church in Livonia, and Englehardt, teaching textual and source criticism almost radically, had reportedly known Herrnhut Pietism in his youth. Without doubt, Dorpat's seminary offered a theological spectrum as broad as any found in Germany. (15)

Pastors of Russia German churches, like all who deal in practical theology, spoke to concerns and temptations of everyday life: Aware that most parishioners owned only three books — the Bible, either Luther's catechism or the *Heidelberg Catechism*, depending on whether one was Lutheran or Reformed, and a *gesangbuch* (hymnal)— pastors illustrated sermons biblically and exhorted people to live their faith. They preached in irenic terms, appealing to the Bible rather than the symbolic books of the Reformation.

People wishing to scoff at us call us "Lutherans." Now, we are not ashamed of Luther's name. But when people mean our Lutheran church was built by Luther, so we say with Luther himself: That is untrue. Not Luther but Christ is the ground and cornerstone of our faith. (16)

Pastor C. Blum, of Krasnojarsk on the Volga, author of the sermon from which the above excerpt was taken, included it in *Gnade um Gnade* (Grace upon Grace), a *predigtbuch* (book of sermons) intended for church use in the pastor's absence. This book offered a sermon for each Sunday of the church year and for special days, opening and closing with a hymn selected from the *Wolga Gesangbuch*. Each sermon was built around a biblical text, which was quoted. The emphasis in the *predigtbuch* is uniform. Blum urged his hearers to live holy lives. On Reformation Sunday he sounded his theme plainly enough: "We Evangelical Christians are clever enough at debate, but are lazy at a holy way of Life." (17)

Despite strong faith in many homes, enough people turned their backs on the church to be noticed.

If the pastor's exceptionally sensitive  
Singing and drinking arouse his anger.  
He thunders and he threatens;  
Has done so many years;  
But in our village  
It's like it's always been.(18)

Heinrich Peter Ehlers, a Volga villager, liked to amuse his friends by imitating clergy. However, he was eventually brought to his knees and conversion. Ehlers became a leader of the Brotherhood, a lay movement outside the church proper that introduced prayer meetings in many villages, effecting the kind of regeneration the AHMS looked for in frontier German-American churches. About the same time a similar movement began in South Russia, but more pastors took part there than in villages along the Volga.(19)

The Brotherhood gained special prominence during the Great Revival of 1872 (which continued until the early 1890s). It owed its origin to a number of influences, including various Anabaptist and millenarian neighbors: Moravians, Mennonites, and Stundists. Prayer meetings held in private homes by itinerant members of such groups, coupled with the irenic Pietism already prevailing in the village churches, quickly spread a new personal religion. In lay meetings, always attended by church members — sometimes without the pastor's blessing — people sang, read scripture and offered testimonials that spoke of fellowship with God in Jesus Christ.(20)

## LIFE IN AMERICA

Although confirmation remained important for Russia Germans who joined Congregational churches in the United States — a catechism was written for that purpose — prayer meetings stayed at the center of their religious lives. They honored the German tradition of religious education while maintaining the prayer meetings of Russia, which had brought them closer to God than they had imagined possible.

Were it not for the Brotherhood, Russia Germans would not have joined Congregational churches after their immigration to the United States. Participation in the Brotherhood required membership in a church, and Congregationalism's emphasis on the autonomy of the local church and the priesthood of all believers appealed to them. Because so many members of the Brotherhood belonged to Congregational churches, in some towns the church was called "*die Bruder Kirche*."(21)

Unlike in Russia, where there was only one church in a village, many denominations wooed the Russia Germans in the United States, confusing them with competing claims. Among the denominations that organized congregations made up of Russia Germans were the Missouri Synod, American Lutheran Church, Reformed Church in the United States (German Reformed Church), German Evangelical Synod of North America, German Methodists, German Baptists, and Adventists. Roughly 45 percent of those from Protestant churches in Russia remained Lutheran, 20 percent were divided among Methodists and Baptists, and 5 percent joined the

Reformed Church. Yet 30 percent of the Russia German Protestants in the United States by the 1930s had joined Congregational churches.(22)

The immigration of Russia Germans to the United States resulted from several causes. The most significant was Czar Alexander II's revocation, in 1871, of one of the guarantees made to the first Volga colonists by Catherine the Great: freedom from military service. In 1892 Alexander III curtailed land acquisition by non-Orthodox citizens in the west. To land-starved colonists who had established many new colonies and who doubtless had plans to start more, such a policy seemed to aim at their freedom of religion, which Catherine had also guaranteed.

Many families did send sons off to the army and navy. Even today pictures of young Germans in Russian uniforms are found in the homes of their American offspring. An anti-German wind was blowing across the steppes, however, and the colonists felt it. They had lost faith in the manifesto that brought their ancestors to Russia. Consequently, many sought new homes, some going to the United States and Canada and others journeying to South America.

Beginning with a few scouts who located cheap land in the early 1870s, Russia German immigration eventually reached massive proportions. By 1920, 303,532 first- and second-generation Russia Germans resided in the United States.(23) They constituted the third and final great wave of German immigration; the first arrived in colonial times and the second, in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Russia Germans were different from earlier German immigrants. Their speech was laced with Russianisms, and German-Americans considered it archaic. Along with their English-speaking neighbors, German-Americans referred to them as "Russians" and to their settlements as "Russiatown."(24) They were at the bottom of the social ladder and did jobs that others avoided. Women were domestics; men worked on railroad construction or farmed. All who encountered them, however, admired their ability to work.(25)

The prejudice felt by most Russia Germans made Congregationalism even more attractive. The Congregational Church — which came out "congraese" when they tried to pronounce it — was made up of people just like them. Eventually, the church was being served by Russian-born pastors or by pastors whose parents were Russian-born.

The first Russia German ordained to the Congregational ministry was Emmanuel Jose, who founded many churches in Nebraska and the Dakotas. Jose traveled widely, establishing and maintaining contact with little groups, because there were few resident pastors. A pastor who accompanied Jose on one such trip described a visit with a group of Russia Germans living in a remote part of Nebraska.

Isolated, these people live in their sod-houses, scattered all over the prairie. Here they pray and sing praises to the Lord. Brother Jose, who resided in Sutton, served these people once in about three months. They are as sheep, having no fold and no shepherd. Not a church of any kind did I see in that whole region of country.

After supper we had prayer meeting. . . to which all the German railroad hands working there were invited. The house was filled, and we had a blessed time. The next evening a number of the brethren and sisters gathered for another prayer meeting. . . . The people were not satisfied with an hour and a half; they remained until about 11 o'clock that night, singing their accustomed German-Russian melodies, intermingled occasionally with prayer.

The Sabbath was a glorious and blessed day. The house was packed full. Brother Jose preached with great effect. . . At 2 p.m. the house was overfilled again, and with much joy and freedom of heart I delivered the Lord's message, which was gladly received.... After the people were dismissed they requested us to have another meeting at night, to which we gladly agreed.(26)

Large groups of Russia Germans settled in Nebraska, the Dakotas, Kansas, Colorado, Washington, and California. They responded eagerly to the ministrations of Congregational *Reiseprediger*, who gathered them into small congregations, but the shortage of pastors presented a major stumbling block. The pastors supplied by the *Missionshauses* were not Russia German and sometimes had difficulty ministering to the people. Occasionally, however, particularly able Russia Germans were brought into the ministry. For example, Johannes Koch, an evangelist in Russia, was examined for ordination by several English-speaking Congregational ministers through an interpreter and went on to found a number of Pacific Northwest churches.(27) And in South Dakota, John Lich, a country schoolmaster, was ordained in 1885 and served many years in Lincoln, Nebraska.(28)

## ORGANIZING A DENOMINATION

On October 3, 1883 a small group of German pastors met in Crete, Nebraska, and organized *Die Allgemeine Evangelische Kirchenversammlung der Deutschen Kongregationalisten* (The General Evangelical Church Assembly of German Congregationalists). The new organization dealt with four items of business. One centered around theological education, another discussed the appointment of a general superintendent for the work, and the other two dealt with the publication of a newspaper and church manual.

George E. Albrecht, a native German who graduated from Oberlin College and served an English-speaking congregation in Ohio, was appointed superintendent in 1883, just after completing a stint with the AHMS in Davenport, Iowa, where he directed the Sunday school efforts. Albrecht himself was a product of regeneration.

I was working in a machine shop in Ohio, as far from God and Christ as the East is from the West, as much lost in sinful pleasures as any of my shopmates. A young Englishman, member of a Congregational church, who worked near me and heard my godless speech, began to pray for me, and with kind words induced me to go to church, afterwards to Sunday School. After a few weeks I was in his pastor's study on my knees beseeching God to have

mercy on me, and since then the Lord has led me on with marvelous love.

He provided a solid organizational base on which the German movement could grow. "God seemed to have called the Congregational church to a new work, and the voice was obeyed," he wrote in a report.

Old and erroneous ideas pertaining to various methods by which the Germans should be approached were cast aside, and the pastors simply went to the Germans with the plain Gospel. It was this method that bore the most fruit.(29)

By 1885 German Congregational churches had been established in nine states. The churches were no longer only in rural areas. Although the going was tougher in cities, persistence paid off, as one pastor demonstrated.

When I began to call upon the people to invite them to gospel services I often had the pleasure (?) to see the door shut on me, instead of inviting me to come in and call again. I generally left my card of invitation behind me, telling the hours of service and Sunday School, and also a tract or two. In a week I went again to the same places, taking my wife with me. I hoped they would not shut the door on her; but found only a few who did not. Some braced themselves in the door and listened to the inviting words; then remarked: "If we find time, we may come once." The next time I went I took my wife and daughter. I went every two or three weeks. Now, thank God, there is a great change. The doors are open to us, and we can have a Christian conversation, and sometimes even reading the Word of God and prayer. I opened the Sunday School in a fire engine hall, which I fixed up with a stand, seats, chairs, stove, etc., also books for the service at my own expense. I began with three children and six teachers. The teachers were my wife, three sons and two daughters, the youngest being fifteen years old. In a short time we had twenty-seven scholars and three visitors, and from that time continual growth. We now have sixty-eight scholars and the same six teachers.(30)

In 1886 Albrecht explained that the work now had "a good start," but the dangerous shortage of pastors hampered its growth. "We need money," he wrote, "in order to get men; not to buy men, nor to coax them, but to pay them living salaries, and above all to train them for lasting work." Albrecht held a special conference with Prof. Samuel Ives Curtiss, who was on the faculty at the Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS); several American ministers; and representatives of some German churches. Sometime later Albrecht wrote:

Nothing is more trying and discouraging to a home missionary than to see the doors swinging wide open in scores of places, and to call and write in vain for men to enter them. Golden opportunities are lost. Important fields pass into the hands of others, or, what is worse, remain wholly uncared for. The whole work is dragging heavily for want of workers.(31)

Albrecht resigned as general superintendent in 1887 to become a foreign missionary.(32) He was succeeded the following year by Civil War veteran Moritz E. Eversz, also a native German and Oberlin College graduate. Eversz had been converted while serving in the 20th Wisconsin Volunteers and throughout the war had participated in a small prayer group. During his superintendency “centers of influence” began to be identified, and “people who longed for more spiritual life and for freedom from arbitrary domination of stricter denominations” discovered Congregationalism.(33)

Lutheran in name only, some Russia Germans found the kind of spirituality they had known in Russia in the small Congregational churches. By 1890 the pastors who were trained in CTS’s German department had begun serving in local churches. Russia Germans, they understood the people and their ways. Revivals broke out in many places. New churches were founded. In 1895 there were 110 churches with a combined membership of 4,728. Fifteen years later the numbers had grown to 202 churches with 11,435 members.(34)

The growth of German Congregationalism spawned associations and state conferences in areas where churches were concentrated. The first German association was organized in Iowa, in 1862, and the first state conference, in Nebraska, in 1879.(35) Although German Congregational associations and conferences were separate from their English-speaking counterparts, they did maintain relations with them, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on local leadership.

A similar relationship existed between the General Conference of German Congregational Churches of the United States and the National Council of Congregational Churches of the United States. Superintendent Albrecht attended the sixth session of the National Council, which met in Chicago in 1886,(36) but it was not until 1927 that the Council officially recognized the General Conference of German Congregational Churches as having “parity” with state conferences.(37) This move was undoubtedly influenced by the 1925 “recognition” of the Evangelical Protestant Conference, a group of twenty-two “union” churches (Lutheran and Reformed), some dating back to the colonial period. Interestingly, some of those churches were served by German Congregational pastors.(38)

After Superintendent Eversz retired, in 1920, Herman Obenhaus became superintendent, serving until 1936, when Russian-born Jacob Hirning was appointed. Hirning was the first Russia German to head the German work. In the first year of his superintendency the state conferences numbered six and the state associations, three, representing 197 churches with a total membership of 22,166.(39) By this time many churches no longer functioned only in German. Native-born young people rapidly became Americanized. At the end of World War II most worship services were in English — a trend reflected by the publication in 1952 of an English-language hymnal. Only the Brotherhood clung to German, their prayer meetings offering a window into an increasingly distant past.

## **EDUCATION**

In 1878 a seminary was founded in Crete in conjunction with Doane College. Too few students

and a lack of money kept it from taking hold. In 1882, however, it began serving as a feeder school, or proseminar, for the newly organized German department of CTS. This department flourished because of the efforts of Professor Curtiss.

Curtiss, who had earned a Ph.D. in Germany, was a gifted scholar and pastor. He started several Chicago mission churches and the Chicago Congregational City Missionary Society.

“Throughout his career at the seminary,” Arthur Cushman McGiffert Jr. wrote, “Curtiss did the work of three men.” One of the three took a particular interest in the German work, seeing to it that two German faculty members were appointed. His influence and that of colleague Hugh Macdonald Scott helped CTS become a “polyglot seminary,” whose foreign department trained not only Germans but also Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes.(40) As German-trained church historian Scott put it:

With immigrants landing in this country at the rate of 750,000 a year, ignorant of American life, strange in speech, not a few opposed to our civilization and our Christianity, the eyes of the most obtuse have at last been opened to the need of thorough Gospel work among this part of our population. Until very recently our Congregational churches paid no attention to this field.(41)

Growth led to more stable educational institutions. In 1894 the Crete proseminar was moved to Wilton, Iowa, and reconstituted the Wilton German English College. The poorly financed, two-building college merged with Redfield College, in Redfield, South Dakota, in 1904, forming “a Christian institution of learning under the general supervision of the German Congregational churches of the United States of America,” with the mandate “specifically to provide an academic and college course for all German young men looking toward a German Congregational ministry.”

Redfield was a good location, because most of Wilton’s students had been Russia Germans from the Dakotas. Although finances remained a problem, Redfield College survived, and in 1916 the German Institute at CTS moved there, becoming the Redfield College Seminary. The depression signaled an end to Redfield, but the School of Theology moved to Yankton College in 1932 (42)and later became one of the institutions that formed the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

At the founding of the general conference, in 1883, two of the four items of business centered around publication. *Zionsfreund*, an eight-page newspaper founded by Prof. Theo. Falk of Crete Seminary in 1880, had a two-year run before folding. *Der Kirchenbote* (Church Messenger), which followed *Zionsfreund*, was published by Henry Hess until 1888, when the Congregational Publishing Society, at the instigation of Prof. Curtiss, purchased it and placed it under the editorship of Gustav Zimmermann, who taught in CTS’s German department. A semimonthly until 1897, when it became a weekly, *Der Kirchenbote* was avidly read by most German Congregational families. It contained devotional articles as well as denominational news and

along with the *Illustrierter-Kirchenbote-Kalender* — a daily devotional with scripture lessons, a brief message and prayer, and sometimes a hymn — was standard reading.

The German Congregational publishing operation was located in Chicago from 1888 until 1895, when it was moved to Michigan City, Indiana. In 1905 it was moved back to Chicago. The German Congregational Publishing Society — as it was officially known — printed works bearing an illustration of a Pilgrim and the name “The German Pilgrim Press.”(43)

The first *gesangbuch* was authorized by the General Conference that met in Chicago in 1896 and was in use by 1898. Both the first and second editions were *ohne Noten* — without music — requiring someone to lead the singing who had memorized all the melodies.(44) The third and final edition contained the music and all the words. This edition was the preferred hymnal of most church members, who proudly carried the books to worship services and prayer meetings.

Two supplementary hymnbooks were used in prayer meetings. Social Gospel theologian Walter Rauschenbusch and Ira Sankey, who had accompanied Dwight L. Moody on so many of his tours, produced a collection of American gospel songs in German translation - *Evangeliums-Sänger* — that was popular. *Der Köstliche Schatz* was prepared for Brotherhood use by a Russia German Evangelical Synod pastor in Portland, Oregon, Elias Hergert, who had been an Eden Seminary classmate of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. It contained some Brotherhood songs from Russia as well as recent compositions by Hergert and others, a few of which were in English.(45)

A Catechism for the German Congregational churches first appeared in 1904. Attempting to include the basic teachings contained in Luther’s Small Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism, it had 150 questions and answers and 50 questions to be answered by confirmands during a final oral examination before the entire congregation. The Catechism was divided into five sections: the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Uses of the Law, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Sacraments.

Unlike Luther’s catechism or the Heidelberg Catechism, the German Congregational *Katechismus* began by asserting the centrality of scripture.

*How can one discern that Holy Scripture is God’s Word?*

- a) The divine strength of so many souls in life and death has proven it already;
- b) because it has been confirmed through divine prophecy and miracles, and
- c) because it was written by holy men of God at the impulse of the Holy Spirit(46)

Rather than beginning with the Law or humanity’s need, as Luther’s catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism do, the *Katechismus* started by establishing the place of the Bible in people’s lives.

After World War II, English-language materials became widely available. In 1947 the General Conference of German Congregational Churches, meeting in Lodi, California, elected a hymnal

committee to select songs and hymns that “could be used with both our own German Hymnal and the *Wolga Gesangbuch*.”(47) The resulting *Pioneer Hymnal*, which came out in 1952, included many familiar American hymns as well as translations of some better-known German hymns.

The Pioneer Press of Yankton, South Dakota, publishers of the new hymnal, succeeded the Redfield College Press, which had taken over The German Pilgrim Press in 1923. The Pioneer Press remained in operation until 1968, publishing hymnals, catechisms, and church and Sunday school materials in both English and German.(48)

The *Katechismus* was first translated into English in 1928 and was revised and reissued in 1955. Instead of 150 questions, as in the original version, there were 119 questions plus an appendix of 14 questions and answers on “The Congregational Fellowship.” One question asked: “What institutions and projects do our churches especially sponsor through the General Conference?” The answer: “The Yankton College School of Theology, the Pioneer Press and our South American Mission.”(49)

## **MISSION WORK**

The mission to Argentina was the second foreign field tended by German Congregationalists. (In Canada, the first foreign field, thirty-one churches that had been affiliated with the General Conference became part of the United Church of Canada when that denomination came into being, in 1925.)(50)

The work in South America began in 1921, when four Argentinean churches urgently requested that denominational recognition be given George Geier, who was serving them. The Illinois Conference licensed Geier, who worked among Russia Germans who were alike in every way to those in the United States and in Canada. In 1924 general missionary John Hoelzer, in Argentina for a brief visit, organized six churches.

The South American Germans from Russia had learned about Congregationalism in letters from relatives in the United States. Despite attacks from the Missouri Lutheran La Plata Synod, the Congregational mission grew. By 1937 thirty-six churches had been established with a total of 3,015 members — all served by five ministers.(51) The need for a trained ministry was acute, and eventually a theological school was founded. Even today, the South American churches are in contact with the United Church Board for World Ministries, although they, like their American cousins, have adapted to the surrounding culture.

## **IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Most German Congregational churches became affiliated with the United Church of Christ (UCC), which came into being in 1957 with the merger of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Itself a merged denomination, the Evangelical and Reformed Church represented the 1934 union of the Reformed Church in the

United States and the Evangelical Synod of North America — two groups that had labored among Russia German immigrants. Since then a number of former German Congregational churches have withdrawn and many more are served by pastors of other denominations.

The descendants of the Russia Germans who embraced Congregationalism are often troubled by the UCC's emphasis on social action. To them, the UCC seems too political and not grounded enough in scripture. This reaction is characteristic. The unique heritage of the Russia Germans laid great stress on the Bible, religious experience, and sanctified living. It was an individual gospel, expressed in prayer meetings, worship, and performing kind deeds among one's neighbors.<sup>(52)</sup> Although prayer meetings have almost disappeared and revivals are no longer a feature of church life, such piety remains powerfully latent. German Congregationalism has made a unique contribution to the United Church of Christ. Even though its outward form is changed, the inner spirit continues to radiate.

### Notes

1. George J. Eisenach, *A History of the German Congregational Churches in the United States* (Yankton, SD, 1937), p. 3.
2. Carl E. Schneider, "The Home Mission Zeal of an Immigrant Church," in *Missionary Trails: The Story of Missions in the Evangelical Synod of North America as told by missionaries and friends of missions* (St. Louis, 1934), p. 5.
3. *Home Missionary*, January 1851. Reprinted in Carl E. Schneider, *The German Church on the American Frontier* (St. Louis, 1939], p. 494.
4. Eisenach, op. cit., p. 7.
5. Ibid., p. 51.
6. In Arthur Cushman McGiffert Jr., *No Ivory Tower: The Story of The Chicago Theological Seminary* (Chicago, 1965), p. 60.
7. Eisenach, op. cit., p. 7
8. The oldest congregation still in existence is Sherrill United Church of Christ in Sherrill, Iowa, which was organized by Peter Fleury in 1849.
9. The saying is quoted in Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918—1956, V—VII* (New York, 1979), p. 400.
10. George J. Eisenach, *Pietism and the Russian Germans in the United States* (Berne, IN, 1948), p. 31, and Adam Giesinger, *From Catherine to Khrushchev: The Story of Russia's Germans* (Battleford, Saskatchewan, 1974), p. 156. Giesinger places the Lutheran and Reformed mix at 80%-20%.
11. Eisenach, *Pietism*, op. cit., p. 31, quotes Catholic priest Gottlieb

Beratz, *Die deutschen Kolonien an der Unteren Wolga in ihrer Entstehung and ersten Entwicklung* (Saratov, 1915), p. 230, regarding the clergy shortage.

12. “Russland” in *Real-Encyklopadie fur protestantische Theologie und Kirche, zweiter Auflage, Dreizhenter Band* (Ritschl bis Scotus) (Leipzig, 1884), p. 126.

13. Photos of pastors wearing crucifixes may be found in *80th Anniversary of The Free Evangelical Lutheran Cross Church, 1892— 1972* (Fresno, CA, 1972], pp. 14, 16, and Karl Stumpp, “Verzeichnis der ev. Pastoren in den einzelnen deutschen und gemischten Kirchenspielen in Russland bzw. der Sowjetunion, ohne Baltikum und Polen” in Joseph Schnurr, ed., *Die Kirchen und das Religiöse Leben der Russlanddeutschen*, Evangelischer Tell (Stuttgart, 1978), pp. 120—82.

14. See Harry Anderson, “Die Universitätsgemeinde in Dorpat und ihre Kirche” in Schnurr, op. cit., pp. 310-15.

15. See G. Wayne Glick, *The Reality of Christianity: A Study of Adolf von Harnack as Historian and Theologian* (New York, 1967), pp. 23—34, for a glimpse of Dorpat and its influence on Adolf.

16. C. Blum, *Gnade urn Gnade. Evangelien-Predigten für dos ganze Kirchenjahr* (Jurjew [Dorpat], 1901), p. 613. Stumpp, op. cit., p. 198, lists Blum as “Johannes Nikolaus Blum.”

17. Blum, op. cit., p. 615.

18. Quoted in Eisenach, *Pietism*, op. cit., p. 64.

19. Ibid., p. 81.

20. Some pastors forbade such meetings in their parishes; in other places meetings were broken up and Elders were punished. See Eisenach, *Pietism*, op. cit., pp. 174—76.

21. The church in Endicott, Washington, was one. See Anna B. Weitz, *A Century of Christian Fellowship: Evangelical Congregational Church, Endicott, Washington, 1883—1983* (Colfax, WA, 1983], p.6.

22. Richard Sallet, *Russian-German Settlements in the United States*, trans. Lavern J. Rippley and Armand Bauer (Fargo, ND, 1974), p. 90.

23. Ibid., p. 17.

24. See S. Joachim, *Toward an Understanding of the Russia Germans* (Moorhead, MN, 1939), for a contemporary attempt to explain faulty impressions of the Germans from Russia.

25. Roland Bainton, in his biography of his father, Herbert Bainton, who served the Congregational Church in Colfax, Washington, noted that the only domestic help available to his mother “were some German-speaking immigrants lately come from Russia

whose women would come sometimes for half a day.” See Roland Bainton, *Pilgrim Parson: The Life of James Herbert Bainton, 1867—1942* (New York, 1958), p. 74.

26. Eisenach, *History*, op. cit., pp. 45—48.

27. Koch was a moderator of the Brotherhood conference in Russia, working with Ehlers. Gottfried Graedel, in an undated newspaper article entitled “German Congregational Churches in the State of Washington,” in the possession of Richard Scheuermann, states:

mans. He used to be an evangelist in the old country. The three former ministers informed themselves about the condition of things and found it advisable to ordain Mr. Koch. As Mr. Koch before that had organized two churches, Ritzville and Endicott, the two were accepted into Congregational fellowship with their pastor, and so the Pacific German Congregational church was established.”

28. Eisenach, *History*, op. cit., p. 60.

29. Ibid. pp. 49, 57—58.

30. Ibid., p. 59.

31. Ibid., pp. 64, 70.

32. William E. Strong, *The Story of the American Board* (Boston, 1910), p. 362, reveals that Albrecht served in Tokyo, Japan, where he helped translate many works into Japanese.

33. Eisenach, *History*, op. cit., p. 75.

34. Ibid., p. 123.

35. See Henry Vieth, “A History of German Congregationalism in Nebraska” in *A History of the Churches and of the Present Conference, Nebraska Conference, United Church of Christ*, vol. 1, 1976, pp. 114-42.

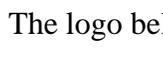
36. E. Lyman Hood, *The National Council of Congregational Churches of the United States* (Boston, n.d.), p. 125, lists Albrecht as being from “the Nebraska phalanx.” This session of the Council commended the attempt to create a German Academy at Crete, Nebraska. See Eisenach, *History*, op. cit., p. 172.

37. Louis H. Gunnemann, *The Shaping of the United Church of Christ* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1977), p. 161.

38. Eisenach, *History*, op. cit., p. 145.

39. Ibid., p. 161.

40. McGiffert, op. cit., pp. 54-64.

41. Eisenach, *History*, op. cit., p. 175.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 183—202.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-7. The logo below appeared on the title page:  

44. Family tradition recalls the author's grandmother was a song leader.
45. Walter Rauschenbusch and Ira D. Sankey, eds., *Evangeliums-Sänger* (Kassel, n.d.), and Elias Hergert, ed., *Der Köstliche Schatz* (Portland, OR, N.D.). Both books went through many editions.
46. *Katechismus der biblischen Heilswahrheiten für die evangelischen Kongregational-Gemeinden von Nord-Amerika* (Chicago, 1919), p. 10. English editions omit this question.
47. “Preface,” *The Pioneer Hymnal* (Yankton, 1952), p. 3.
48. Walter Kranzler, “German Congregationalism.” in Edward C. Ehrensperger, ed., *History of the United Church of Christ in South Dakota, 1869-1976* (Freeman, SD, 1977), pp. 199-200.
49. Congregational Catechism of Religious Instruction (Yankton, 1955), p. 46.
50. Eisenach, *History*, op. cit., p. 213.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
52. An exception to this pattern was the massive relief effort to Volga Germans in the post-Revolutionary War period, bankrolled by Russia Germans in the United States. See Emma D. Schwabenland, *A History of the Volga Relief Society* (Portland, OR, 1941).