

The Legacy of Philip Schaff on Race, Slavery, and Culture: Bane or Blessing?

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Philip Schaff, a Swiss / German immigrant who lived from 1819 to 1893, and who taught at Mercersburg Seminary (the ancestor of LTS) from 1843 to 1863, is a controversial figure these days. According to his champions, he was an admirable and significant precursor of an expansive spiritual pluralism and a generous multi-culturalism, while to his critics he was a propagator of culturalism imperialism and even racism. We will try to sort out the reasons for these almost diametrically opposed assessments. My purpose is neither to defend nor to condemn Schaff, but simply to point out some features of his life and his context, and leave you to draw your own conclusions. Mark Anthony says in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, "I come here to bury Caesar; not to praise him." Well, I'm not here to praise Schaff, but nor am I intending to bury him.

Before we get to the controversial stuff, first, we must consider a prior question: Why, for generations, have we made such a big deal about Schaff at Lancaster Theological Seminary? The answer is simple: Schaff was a primary exponent of one of the most significant theological movements in American history. According to the historian James Hastings Nichols, for a decade in the early nineteenth century the obscure village of Mercersburg Pennsylvania was the epicenter of a seismic shift in Protestant thought and piety, a shift away from America's Puritan and revivalistic roots, away from the rhetoric of fire and brimstone. A fundamental difference in spiritual worlds separated Schaff and his fellow Mercersburg theologians from their multitudinous theological foes; that chasm was nothing less than a basic disagreement about the nature and purpose of the Christian life. The Mercersburg theologians characterized the basic

problem of humanity differently than did most of the American churches, and therefore they proclaimed the Good News of Christianity in very different cadences.

We have to pause here and reflect: What were Schaff and his colleagues reacting against? Why were they perceived as being so radical? According to most other Protestants in the nineteenth century, the Christian story was governed by the plot line of paradise lost and paradise regained. For most Protestants in those days the goal of human life was perfect conformity to the will of the righteous God, a transcendent God who should be adored and obeyed. For the non-Mercersburg folks, God was primarily characterized as sovereign power, awesome majesty, universal control, ordering will, and judicial rectitude. God was first and foremost the monarch and the judge who creates and governs the universe, forges order out of chaos, enacts the divine purposes in nature and history, and commands human beings to follow God's directives. The God/human relationship was like that of a dutiful child to an awe-inspiring parent. But tragically, in this view, sin, the damnable violation of God's laws, has thwarted humanity's movement toward this goal. For the majority of American Protestants, the issues of guilt and moral/spiritual debility were humanity's most tormenting worries. Individuals needed to recover the right legal relationship with God that Adam had forfeited. For them, Jesus was primarily construed as God's atoning act, who changes the objective legal relation of God and humanity by satisfying the requirements of retributive justice. In nineteenth century evangelical America, the Christian story was a tale of reprieve and the restoration of the ability to become an obedient servant of the Lord.

But for Schaff and his colleague John Nevin, the basic plot line of the Christian story was very different. For them the Christian metanarrative was the story of humanity's growth in godlikeness, stretching from creation to the eschaton. Schaff and Nevin insisted that the entire

creation, encapsulated in humanity, is directed toward the goal of participation in the divine life of love. Schaff and Nevin foregrounded God's love and relationality rather than God's sovereign will and power. God should be imaged not as a solitary individual in control of the universe, but rather as the perfect life of unity-in-difference, manifesting itself externally in the creation and consummation of the universe. The basic problem is not sin, but is rather the unfinished nature and incompleteness of original humanity. We begin life as ego-centric individuals and must evolve toward a life of loving communion with God and neighbor. The good news is that God is at work in the church, human history, and individual lives to nurture this cosmic unity-in-difference, a process that will be consummated beyond time. Salvation is not the restoration of an original right relation with God, but is rather a transformation of human nature into something far more lofty than the pre-Fall state of Adam and Eve. For Schaff and Nevin, the Incarnation was not simply the prelude to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Rather, Jesus was the injection of new divine life into humanity, an empowerment that far surpassed the capabilities of Adam's created nature. In Christ human nature in its totality was united to the personhood of God, and was sustained and perfected by the divine nature. Just as human nature as a corporate reality fell in Adam, so also human nature as a corporate reality has been sanctified in Christ. Faith is receptivity to the character of Christ; the individual, participating in the life of the church, internalizes the hopes, loves, and joys that characterize Christ's personhood. The situation from which Christ saves us is not so much retributive justice as it is isolation from God and neighbor, and obsession with private well-being. We move from painful isolation to a sense of belonging to a cosmic community. Through Christ, we are joyfully reincorporated into Christ's family. Jesus is God's enactment of solidarity and intimacy with humanity that heals the wound of purely

individuated existence. The God/human relationship is more like that of perfect lovers than it is like a parent and a wayward child.

Schaff added an historical dimension to this vision of the triumph of love. At the level of world history, God has been active, coaxing and propelling humanity as a whole toward this community of love. God is still speaking, and acting, through the church. Therefore past eras of Christian history contain seeds that are still struggling to come to fruition. Christianity will reach its consummation when all these seeds, rooted in different centuries and different cultures, contribute their wisdom to the church universal. This conviction inspired Schaff to evaluate the Patristic period and Catholic Middle Ages sympathetically, and even to see some good in his evangelical opponents. It fueled his enthusiasm for a pluralistic, ecumenical cross-fertilization. It is because of this that he has been dubbed the parent of the modern study of church history in America, and has been hailed as a harbinger of radical ecumenism and progressive multiculturalism.

So much for the reasons why the seminary has often valorized Philip Schaff. But there is a more problematic side of him. In his classic *The Righteous Empire* Martin Marty singled out Schaff as a poster child for North European cultural imperialism, giving the impression that Schaff was somehow unique in this regard.¹ Ever since Marty's book appeared troubling questions have been raised about Schaff's attitudes toward slavery, race, and culture. Basing their construals on Marty's brief remarks, some interpreters have portrayed Schaff as a premier contributor to the spread of white supremacist sensibilities, a view obviously at variance with the portrayal of him as a proto-multiculturalist. The divergence of interpretations is understandable, for Schaff said different things, and sometimes seemingly conflicting things, in different

contexts. Moreover, this Swiss-German immigrant's opinions about almost everything pertaining to American culture evolved dramatically.

To sort out the different strands in Schaff's thought, we must keep in mind that Schaff distinguished the question of slavery from the question of race, and both of those issues from the question of culture. For most white Americans caught up in the slavery debate, particularly clergy in the South, these distinctions were difficult to draw.² But Schaff recognized that not all forms of slavery were based on the social construction of race, and that not all forms of racism involved slavery. He also realized that various forms of culture were not tied to specific races or ethnicities. Concerning all three issues Schaff's attitude was dialectical, complex, and slowly evolved. That evolution is most complicated concerning race, for on that topic he imbibed two rather different themes.

First, Schaff's critique of slavery must be considered. His fundamental opposition to the "evil institution" and the "abomination" (two of his favorite terms for slavery) was consistent throughout his career. His earliest sustained discussion of slavery appeared in 1854, after he had been teaching at Mercersburg Seminary and Marshall College in Pennsylvania for about a decade.³ He denounced the "obnoxious and inhumane laws in the slave states." He condemned the fact that three million enslaved persons could be sold like property as an unmitigated evil, a cancer, for it contradicted the American principle, corroborated by human reason, that all persons are created equal. Tranquility in the ideologically divided United States, he opined, would come about only through the elimination of the evil itself. These were not isolated sentiments. About the same time, in his *History of the Apostolic Church*, Schaff warned that human beings, created by God to be self-determining moral agents, should never be treated as property.

But in the 1850's Schaff did not favor the immediate emancipation of the enslaved persons in the American South. He vigorously critiqued the advocates of immediate emancipation, castigating them for being infidel radicals. In 1857 in "Christianity in America," Schaff argued for gradual, organic emancipation.⁴ The eventual demise of the abominable institution, he proposed, would come about through the silent work of the progress of Christianity in the spirits of the slaves and their masters, and not through revolutionary violence. He insisted that genuine social change requires time. The sudden emancipation of the enslaved population without previous education would not ultimately improve their situation, he feared. According to Schaff, the most hopeful development in the struggle over slavery was the work of American Colonization Society and the creation of the Republic of Liberia.

In a lecture that Schaff gave in April, 1861 (although it had been written earlier, perhaps in 1858), and subsequently published as the pamphlet "The Bible and Slavery," his devotion to gradual emancipation was still evident.⁵ It was inevitable, he proposed, that slavery would die out. But, he continued, the Africans needed to be prepared for political freedom by being raised to a "higher moral condition." He argued that the New Testament did not abolish slavery through political action, but rather initiated a new moral creation that would eventually "eliminate perpetual and involuntary servitude from the face of the earth."⁶ Christianity works like leaven from within, healing first the spirit, and then the body.⁷ He insisted that the spiritual liberation would steadily and irresistibly lead to legal emancipation. Therefore, the North should not intrusively interfere with the organic political processes of the South. The issue of emancipation should be taken out of federal politics and left to the individual states. Meanwhile, the church could facilitate the process of emancipation by providing for the moral and religious training of

the enslaved population. He concluded that he eagerly looked forward to the emancipation of “the whole race of Ham.”⁸

But by September of 1861 a new and different note had begun to appear in his discourses. Once the war started, he enthusiastically supported it. His new attitude toward the timing of emancipation was evident as early as 1860, even before the outbreak of hostilities, when he toured New England, and visited Calvin Ellis Stowe, the husband of Harriet Beecher Stowe and, like his wife, a fiery immediate abolitionist.⁹ Shortly after this Schaff began to claim that God’s providence was working out a mysterious purpose through the tragedy of civil war. He wrote that the extermination of slavery was one of the secret purposes of providence, even though the Lincoln administration claimed that its only war goal was to preserve the Union. In November, he proposed that, at the very least, the war was God’s chastising rod to “humble national vanity and pride,” and to “shake to the very foundation” all our national idols, “including mammon, cotton, and slavery.”¹⁰ By 1862 he was even more vociferously ascribing the probable emancipation of the slaves to God’s mysterious and inscrutable wisdom.¹¹

Schaff’s growing appreciation of immediate emancipation was encouraged by the incursions of the Confederacy into Pennsylvania from 1862 to 1864. Mercersburg, where the seminary was located, was a major stop on the underground railroad’s route through Blair’s Valley.¹² Traffic on the route to freedom accelerated significantly in 1850 after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. Some of the escapees settled in communities called “Little Africa” and “Cove Gap,” and began to work at the seminary and the fledgling Marshall College. The region’s implication with the underground railroad was well known to the Confederates, as were the anti-slavery leanings of the Mercersburg faculty and students.

In October 1862 the Confederate cavalry under General J.E.B. Stuart raided the Mercersburg area while Schaff happened to be away. Schaff later recalled that he had feared that he would be have been taken prisoner for his fervently Unionist speeches and his anti-slavery stance.¹³ Schaff's fears were not altogether fanciful, for in 1853 the German Reformed Classis of North Carolina had declared its independence from the German Reformed Synod, Schaff's denomination, citing the heresies of the Mercersburg faculty as the reason for its ecclesial secession.¹⁴ While historians have often claimed that the precipitating offenses were purely doctrinal and had nothing to do with slavery, the underlying reality was more complex. A primary issue for the North Carolinian was that the Mercersburg theologians stressed the communication of Christ's perfected life through the church to humanity as a corporate whole. That implied that all the members of Christ's body shared the same sanctified life, regardless of racial differences. Moreover, Schaff's equally offensive theme of the organic historical development of humanity implied that this spiritual unity in Christ would be eventually be given a more political manifestation, for spiritual realities always seek material instantiations.

Stuart did capture one of Schaff's former students and current friend, P. A. Rice, who had become the editor of the local journal, along with some other prominent citizens, and dispatched them to be incarcerated in Libby Prison in Richmond, where Rice died.¹⁵ After the war Schaff visited Libby Prison and mused that his own life could have ended within its walls.

The Army of Northern Virginia returned to Mercersburg in June, 1863, as part of the campaign that would culminate at Gettysburg. After the regular troops had passed through town, a band of Confederate guerillas conducted a hunt for all African Americans, on the grounds that they might be escaped slaves. Schaff described the June 25 incident as the "worst spectacle" that he had ever seen, and as "a most pitiable sight, sufficient to settle the slavery question for every

humane mind.”¹⁶ Schaff risked his own safety, for he enabled his own African American cook, Eliza, to escape capture by hiding in the grain fields by day, and coming back to Schaff’s residence at night. Tragically, Eliza’s daughter Jane was captured by the marauders.

Such events reinforced Schaff’s embrace of immediate emancipation. He reiterated this theme during a lecture tour of Germany in 1865, rejoicing that through the mystery of providence, slavery had ended immediately and the nation’s overweening pride had been humbled.¹⁷ These things had been necessary, he declared, because God had needed to purge the nation of its sin of slavery and prepare the Union for its special role in history, which was nothing less than to be God’s instrument in the reunification of the church universal.

Schaff’s evolution from gradual emancipation to immediate emancipation had been slow and unsteady. However, the shock of the outbreak of hostilities in 1861 had jolted him out of the organic developmentalism prized by the German academic culture from which he sprang. The tragic spectacle of the Confederate kidnapping of African Americans confirmed his new immediatism. These events inspired him to draw upon a recessive theme in his philosophical heritage, that historical progress is often achieved through the violent clash of a thesis and its antithesis. Throughout his subsequent career he would never retract his conviction that the war had been God’s instrument to bring about the immediate end of slavery.

Now let’s shift from the question of slavery to the question of race. In general, Schaff was torn between one theme, which I will call “essentialism,” which ascribed permanent characteristics to different races and invited their arrangement in a hierarchy of value, with North Europeans at the top of the chart, and another theme, which I will call “environmental contextualism,” which regarded all races as sharing the same potentialities, but added the

significant qualification that these universal human capacities could only flourish under the appropriate climatic and societal circumstances. As we shall see, the “environmental contextualism” strand in his thinking gradually became dominant. This eventually enabled Schaff to affirm the essential equality of all races, although it did not inspire him to transcend his continuing belief in the superiority of North European Protestant culture. That failure should not be surprising, for almost all white Protestants in the nineteenth century United States embraced the notion that “Anglo-Saxon” culture was the crowning achievement of world history.¹⁸

Let us trace Schaff’s evolution on this issue. Early in his career Schaff realized that the issue of race was not coterminous with the issue of slavery. At the end of his 1861 lectures and pamphlet on the Bible and slavery, Schaff observed that “the negro question lies far deeper than the slavery question,”¹⁹ and that the issue of race would not be solved simply by emancipation. But having identified the issue of race as an independent variable, in his early career Schaff proceeded to waffle between essentialism and environmental contextualism.

The environmental contextualism trajectory was rooted in Schaff’s indebtedness to the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, whose influence upon him and most Northern Europeans of his generation was pervasive and enduring. To understand Schaff’s context, Hegel’s writings on race must be considered.

According to Hegel, the evolution of the human spirit is driven by the progressive differentiation of spirit from nature.²⁰ The specific qualities of the nature from which spirit differentiates itself leave their imprint upon spirit’s development. Hegel opined that the differences in climate and terrain generate the differences among the cultures of different geographic regions.²¹ In frigid and torrid zones the natural environments are too hostile and

recalcitrant for sophisticated cultures to develop. But mild coastal regions, like northern Europe, promote commerce, exploration, innovation, and expansive, in fact infinite, horizons. Therefore, temperate coastal Europe, and by extension coastal North America, are ideally suited to be the main vehicles for the evolution of the human Spirit.

This focus on climate explains Hegel's understanding of African ethnicities.²² He notes that the interior of Africa suffers from heat, intrusive vegetation, predatory beasts, and poisonous snakes. Given this inhospitable environment, he claimed that the pressure of sheer survival inhibited the development of the higher dimensions of human culture. Instead of the rule of law, despotic power dominated political arrangements. Instead of an awareness of a universal divine spirit, religious life was animated by the attempt to command nature through magic and fetishism. Hegel endorsed the standard racial stereotypes of his own culture, claiming that inland Africans suffer from excitable passions, lack of self-control, and fanaticism. So far, these themes would seem to point to a pernicious view of intrinsic and permanent North European racial superiority.

However, Hegel did insist that the liabilities of African culture were not due to any ontological difference between the spiritual, moral, or intellectual capacities of Africans and North Europeans. All people, he asserted, are structured to value freedom, practice self-consciousness, and appreciate the unity of the human spirit and the goals of human history.²³ With more than a touch of paternalism, Hegel noted that many Africans, once they have moved to more temperate climates, have become successful doctors and clergymen.²⁴ But although Hegel affirmed the ontological equality and equal potential of all races, he added the caveat that the spiritual capacities of Africans for responsible freedom had to be cultivated in the appropriately conducive environment.²⁵

Hegel's racial attitudes were reinforced for Schaff by the writings of his deceased predecessor at Mercersburg, Frederick Rauch, another German émigré, who had specialized in philosophical psychology (which then included what we might now call cultural anthropology). The fact that Rauch's somewhat eclectic thought had been influenced not only by Hegel, but also by the more Romantic German philosopher Friedrich Schelling, would have important (and unfortunate) consequences for Schaff.

The influence of Rauch upon Schaff was significant, although usually unrecognized. Most importantly, Schaff was thoroughly familiar with Rauch's magnum opus, *Psychology*, for he used it as the basis for his own lectures in psychology when he picked up the deceased Rauch's courses. Rauch's psychology followed that of Hegel in many respects.²⁶ Like Hegel he insisted that human nature is everywhere the same, asserting that "All men, wherever they live, to whatever race they belong, have reason; they feel, they think, they will."²⁷ Such physiological differences as skin color do not undermine the basic reality that humanity is one species. Consequently, individuals in all races can develop spiritual self-consciousness. This was a contested view in nineteenth century Western culture, for the influential zoologist and botanist Carl Linneaus, who in the eighteenth century had invented the classification of humans according to pigmentation, had proposed that the various sub-species of *homo sapiens* had different innate capabilities.

Again following Hegel, Rauch affirmed that modifications of the human mind and culture can be produced by the natural environment.²⁸ Still echoing Hegel, he believed that hot climates impede the development of reason and will. The intense heat relaxes the nervous system too much, just as intense cold can contract it too much.²⁹ Like Hegel, he repeated racial stereotypes, claiming that, because of climatic conditions the religiosity of "savages" does not rise above

animism and magic.³⁰ He concluded that although many of their intellectual capacities are slumbering, they still can be historically activated, if the power of the natural environment can be broken.

However, Rauch went beyond Hegel in stressing the environmental determinants that shape racial and ethnic characteristics. Rauch fine-tuned his climatic determinism, arguing that different nationalities, and not just different races, were characterized by different psychological characteristics.³¹ By taking variations in regional diets and other environmental factors into account, Rauch attempted to make more precise discriminations. More specifically, diet, climate, and seasonal changes make the French excitable and vivacious, but also superficial and not fully individuated.³² Italians, on the other hand, are artistic and imaginative, but greedy and selfish. The English are practical, honorable, manly, and stolid, but also exclusive. The Germans are orderly, meditative, intellectual, and warm, and seem to have no corresponding liabilities.

Somewhat inconsistently, the influence of Schelling led Rauch to sometimes imply that differences in climate did produce permanent differences in spiritual capacities.³³ Schelling, like many Romantics, had a deeper sense of human psycho-somatic unity (mind-body interaction) than did Hegel. Schelling was fascinated with the growing study of the evolution of nature, and its impact upon human biology. Therefore, Schelling concluded, variations in the physical environment could produce fundamental modifications of the structure of the human spirit. Rauch, like Schelling and the Romantics, sometimes wrote as if each people had a unique and indelible national character, because the physical environment could produce enduring genetic differences among the psyches of the various races and ethnicities. This more essentialist trajectory could point in the direction of a full-blown racist ideology.

In his early years in the United States, Schaff echoed most of Rauch's themes, including Rauch's waffling between Hegel and Schelling. Examples of Schaff's youthful essentialism abound, complete with ethnic caricatures. In 1846 Schaff remarked that the English and Scots were inherently avaricious, but also generous. In his diary he observed that the Anglo-Saxons were blessed with a steady character, but sadly lacked the speculative proclivities of the Germans.³⁴ The Irish exhibited a commendable familial loyalty, but were unusually prone to brawling and melancholy.

In the 1850's Schaff voiced doubts that, while the differences between diverse European ethnicities, like the Slavs and Iberians, could be transcended, the differences between Europeans, Native Americans, Chinese, and Africans were immutable and militated against full mutuality. In 1854 he opined that it was not clear that the African race could "stand side by side" with the Caucasian in full equality, amalgamate with it, and enter fully into the destiny of Northern Europeans.³⁵ He observed that even in the free states an impassable gulf existed between whites and blacks, and that the white immediate abolitionists themselves publicly endorsed that divide.³⁶ Schaff concluded that the Africans, the Native Americans, and the Chinese could not be easily assimilated to American culture.

But at the same that Schaff was mouthing this Schelling-like racial essentialism, he also (inconsistently) was articulating the anti-essentialist theme rooted in Hegel. In an article in the *Mercersburg Review* of 1853 he claimed that enslaved African persons only needed some pedagogy in "moral and religious culture" and "the rational use of freedom" to be equipped to take their rightful place in a free society.³⁷ The moral education that he recommended would, he believed, initiate a change within the inner spirit that would eventually have outward consequences and would lead to political freedom and equality. Concerning political

emancipation, he proclaimed that “the spirit and genius of Christianity” would not rest “till personal and eternal dignity of man shall be universally acknowledged, and the idea of evangelical freedom and fraternal fellowship perfectly realized.”³⁸ The church and the state should provide for gradual emancipation by training enslaved persons in the rational use of freedom, which they were indeed, he asserted, predisposed to learn. Schaff vehemently critiqued the “heathens” like the Hindus, Aristotle, and the Germanic tribes, as well as the Israelites, for justifying slavery by ascribing essential differences to different categories of people.³⁹ This, he argued, was contrary to the unity and equality of all people in Christ. Schaff’s expressed anti-essentialist leanings would have negative consequences for his academic career. In 1868 the German theologian and religious leader Ernst Hengstenburg opposed Schaff’s appointment to a faculty position in the University of Berlin because he objected to Schaff’s publicly declared conviction that the African race had the same spiritual potentialities as the whites. Hengstenburg opined that “the negro was not very improvable, was a slave by nature, and that the Lord intended him to be controlled by a good master . . .,” a position that Schaff publically rejected.⁴⁰ Schaff was certainly paternalistic and condescending toward African-descended people, but even that paternalism was enough to place him outside the mainstream of white, Western culture.

By 1876 Schaff had abandoned most vestiges of racial essentialism. When he delivered a commencement address at the Hampton Normal Agricultural Institute, Virginia, he reported being impressed with the abilities of the African American students, and affirmed that the commencement exercises were equal to those of many a white college.⁴¹ At Fortress Monroe, also in Virginia, he declared black education to be a complete success.⁴² By 1879 Schaff was proclaiming that African descended people would take their full place in American society. In a similar way Schaff, who had earlier disparaged the alleged opium-occluded and dissolute

behavior of the Chinese people, asserted that they were actually quite intelligent and industrious and opposed any bill to prohibit their immigration.⁴³ At about the same time he also jettisoned his suspicions that Native Americans lacked the capacity to be assimilated into the new American polyglot culture and began to affirm their spiritual potential.⁴⁴ By articulating these themes in the 1870's, Schaff demonstrated that he had abandoned the Schelling-like and Romantic essentialist strand in his earlier writings.

Now let's shift gears again and consider Schaff's views on human cultures. By liberating himself from the essentialist pole of his racial theories, Schaff was able to divorce the issue of race from the issue of culture. Any particular culture, including the progressive Protestant culture of Northern Europe, was not tied to the characteristics of any particular race. Different races, no matter what their geographic origin, could share in the benefits and responsibilities of the same culture. Schaff came to regard the ethnic cultural pluralism of American society as a precious and singular national asset, fostering a fecund unity-in-diversity that would facilitate America's mission to Christianize the world.⁴⁵

But Schaff's appreciation of the diversity of cultures evolved very slowly, and never became so robust as to allow him to transcend the Eurocentrism which he extended to include the United States. When he arrived in Pennsylvania, Schaff was fully convinced of the superiority of German culture. Germany, in Schaff's eyes and in those of all his compatriots, was the fabled land of Luther, Goethe, Schiller, Mozart, and Kant. Germany had given birth to the Protestant Reformation and the valorization of inward faith, the Enlightenment and the celebration of rationality, and Romanticism and the lionization of passionate subjectivity. The newly founded University of Berlin had quickly become the epitome of the research university and the pursuit of science. After the defeat of Napoleon the Prussian army had become the envy of the world.

Flushed with this cultural pride, upon arriving in Pennsylvania Schaff immediately set about trying to preserve the distinctiveness of German culture in the midst of a predominantly British-descended nation,⁴⁶ and initially insisted on preaching and lecturing exclusively in German.

However, Schaff quickly came to appreciate the possibility of a potent cross-fertilization of the Anglo-Saxon and German cultures. Schaff, like all his fellow North European descended people, assumed that those two national characters had advanced the most spiritually.⁴⁷ The Germans were proficient in speculative and theoretic pursuits, while the English and Scots were gifted in practical application. Together those two complementary sensibilities could produce a cultural dynamo that would transform the entire world. By the early 1850's Schaff was resisting the efforts of some of his compatriots to insulate the German community from its Anglo-Saxon environment. After 1851 all his public speaking was conducted only in English.

Schaff gradually broadened his vision of a polyglot American culture to include non-Anglo-German Europeans, and finally to include even non-European descended people. His relatively positive assessment of pre-Council of Trent Catholicism enabled him to discern some beneficial attributes in southern and eastern European cultures.⁴⁸ According to Schaff's mature opinion, each ethnic culture should maintain its own distinctiveness, but should also interact with all the other cultures that constituted the United States, enriching those other cultures and being admonished by them.⁴⁹ It was for this reason that he ascribed a special role to America in the history of the church universal and global civilization in general.

In spite of his rejection of essentialism, Schaff never managed to appreciate African American culture or its contributions to American religious life. This is especially lamentable because he was not unfamiliar with African American worship. While at Mercersburg, Schaff

led the faculty and students in attending the funerals of African-Americans who worked at the seminary and college. At Hampton he expressed appreciation for the fervor of the worship services.⁵⁰ However, African American spirituality received no treatment in his histories of the Christian church. Unlike Catholicism, it did not factor in his dialectical account of the evolution of Christianity. The most he could say about it was that the exuberance of Methodism suited the African temperament.

Schaff was a child of his era and his intellectual culture. He was influenced by the Romantic developmentalism that privileged gradual organic change over disjunctive revolutions, but also by the Hegelian appreciation of the “cunning of history” that could bring positive results, like emancipation, out of tragic circumstances, like a civil war. He also imbibed the prevalent Romantic notion of innate ethnic and racial differences, but also the Hegelian theme of the universality of the spiritual potential of all people. In Schaff’s career the strand of Hegelian environmental contextualism eventually triumphed over the Romantic essentialist strand. Moreover, his attachment to the universal belief of North European descended people in Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic cultural superiority was gradually leavened by a nascent appreciation of the contributions of other cultures to the polyglot future of the United States. He remained a cultural imperialist, but his imperialism was gradually detached from the issue of race. His mature view was that any race could participate in the glorious future of progressive Protestant culture. Most surprisingly for his era, he began to suggest that the deficiencies in Protestant European culture could be corrected and supplemented by contributions from non-Western cultures, and he became cautiously sensitive to the assets and contributions of the “other.”

We should be sensitive to the dangers of using contemporary categories to evaluate people from past centuries. But still, we must make judgments about the basic dynamics of their

world-views and their legacies. So, did Schaff's life and thought most basically reinforce

Western (and white) cultural imperialism, or did they presage multi-culturalism? You decide.

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- ¹ Martin Marty, *The Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970), 17.
- ² See Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). See also Harry Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Penguin, 2007). See also E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).
- ³ Philip Schaff, "America, The General Character of the Political, Social, and Religious Circumstances of the United States," *Mercersburg Review* 6 (October, 1854), 600-624, and 7 (January, 1855), 45-67.
- ⁴ Philip Schaff, "Christianity in America," *Mercersburg Review* 9 (October, 1857), 493-539.
- ⁵ Philip Schaff, *Slavery and the Bible* (Chambersburg: M. Kieffer and Co., 1861).
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.
- ⁹ Philip Schaff, Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society, Collection 163, Box 1.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, Box 4.
- ¹² See "Glimpses of Events in the Mercersburg Area during the Civil War," 10 essays, Mercersburg Historical Society, <http://mhs.mercersburg.org>; William Switaka, *The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Press, 2008).
- ¹³ Philip Schaff, notebooks, Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society, Collection 163, Box 1. See also "The Gettysburg Week," *Scribner's Magazine* 16 (July-December 1894) 21-54. See also Gary K. Pranger, *Philip Schaff (1819-1893): Portrait of an Immigrant Theologian* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 129-167.
- ¹⁴ "Minutes, Classis of North Carolina, 1853," in *The Living Heritage of the United Church of Christ*, vol. 3, ed. by Charles Hambrick-Stowe (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1997), 651.
- ¹⁵ Schaff, "The Gettysburg Week," 21-23.
- ¹⁶ Schaff, "The Gettysburg Week," 23-24.
- ¹⁷ Philip Schaff, *Der Bürgerkrieg und das christliche Leben in Nord Amerika* (Berlin: Wiegandt and Grieben, 1866, 8, 28).
- ¹⁸ See Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).
- ¹⁹ Schaff, *Slavery and the Bible*, 31.
- ²⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 79-102.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 88-99.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 91-99.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 72-79.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.
- ²⁶ Frederick Rauch, *Psychology* (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1841).
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 55-66.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 70-71.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 73-77.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 73-77.
- ³³ See Friederich Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, trans. by Mason Richey (New York: SUNY Press, 2007). See also George S. Williamson, "Theogony as Ethnography," in *Ideas of "Race" in the History of the Humanities*, ed. by A. Morris-Reich (London: Palgrave, 2017) 159-193.
- ³⁴ Philip Schaff, autobiographical reminiscences, Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society, Ms. Coll. 163, box 1.
- ³⁵ Philip Schaff, *America*, 50-51.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

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- ³⁷ Philip Schaff, "The Influence of Christianity upon the Family," *The Mercersburg Quarterly Review*, vol. 5, 1853, 489-491.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 491.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 486-487.
- ⁴⁰ Rev. J. F. Hurst, "A Visit to Hengstenberg," *The Reformed Messenger*, April 16, 1868. See also Pranger, *Philip Schaff*, 158.
- ⁴¹ Schaff, "A Visit to Virginia," *New York Evangel*, May, 1876. See also Stephen Graham, *Cosmos in the Chaos: Philip Schaff's Interpretation of Nineteenth-Century American Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 193.
- ⁴² Schaff, "A Visit to Virginia."
- ⁴³ Graham, *Cosmos in the Chaos*, 193-194.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 191-192.
- ⁴⁵ Philip Schaff, "The Progress of Christianity in the United States," *The Princeton Review* 55, September, 1879, 209-252.
- ⁴⁶ Philip Schaff, "Conclusion of Dr. Schaff's Address," *Weekly Messenger* 10, April 23, 1845.
- ⁴⁷ Schaff, *America*, 56-60, 267-291.
- ⁴⁸ Philip Schaff, *American Nationality* (Chambersburg: M. Kieffer, 1856), 16.
- ⁴⁹ See Graham, *The Cosmos in the Chaos*, 177-190.
- ⁵⁰ Schaff, "A Visit to Virginia."