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Mercersburg Theology: Heir of Liberalism or Precursor of Neo-Orthodoxy? Or Both?

Lee C. Barrett

Singing Around Word, Font, & Table: A Reformed Case Study

Paul Westermeyer

BOOK & MOVIE REVIEWS

Harry Potter by *Thomas D. Busted*

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The Mercersburg Society has been formed to uphold the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ, Evangelical, Reformed, Catholic, Apostolic, organic, developmental, and connectional. It affirms the ecumenical Creeds as witnesses to its faith and the Eucharist as the liturgical act from which all other acts of worship and service emanate.

The Society pursues contemporary theology in the Church and the world within the context of Mercersburg Theology. In effecting its purpose the Society provides opportunities for fellowship and study for persons interested in Mercersburg Theology, sponsors an annual convocation, engages in the publication of articles and books, and stimulates research and correspondence among scholars on topics of theology, liturgy, the Sacraments, and ecumenism.

The **New Mercersburg Review** is designed to publish the proceedings of the annual convocation as well as other articles on the subjects pertinent to the aims and interests of the Society.

From the Editor

F. Christopher Anderson

One way to view The Mercersburg Society is to say there are members who emphasize theology and that there are members who emphasize liturgics. If this, in any way, reflects reality, this issue should satisfy everyone! It contains two articles of the highest quality on both of these areas. The first, by Lee Barrett, the Mary B. & Henry P. Stager Chair in Theology and Professor of Systematic Theology, takes us into the area of Mercersburg Theology. The second, by Paul Westermeyer, Professor Emeritus of Church Music Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, reminds us of the beauty and importance of Mercersburg Liturgy.

Dr. Barrett's article points to the historic importance of the Mediating Theologians and to the importance of love and the doctrine of the Trinity. For many this would be enough, but Barrett connects this to preaching and teaching in our present world situation. He writes: *"Because that is who God is: the power of unity-in-difference. The power of reconciliation created the universe in the first place, sustains it now, and will see it to completion. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, love does make the world go 'round, and love will win."*

I tend to be one who is more interested in the theology of the Mercersburg Movement than the liturgics, yet I have been overwhelmed by Westermeyer's article. For many who have been raised in this tradition the article might not be as powerful since it is intended more for those who are unaware of the Mercersburg liturgics. I told Dr. Westermeyer that as a pastor I was sometimes lost in worship when we used the Seraphic Hymn for Holy Communion.

A special treat is the review of Harry Potter! Thank you Thomas D Busted!

Mercersburg Theology: Heir of Liberalism or Precursor of Neo-Orthodoxy? Or Both?

Lee C. Barrett

I have a deep, dark confession to make here. I, Lee Barrett, am theologically promiscuous. By day I am a devoted Kierkegaard scholar. But by night I close my Danish books, gently put them aside, and sneak off to a clandestine tryst with John Nevin. Yes, my theological infidelity weighs on my heart. To make matters worse, this Nevin with whom I dally was, in part, the spiritual descendent of my beloved Kierkegaard's great nemesis, G. W. F. Hegel. My theological transgression is like sleeping with the enemy. But I remain hopelessly torn between my two loves. Many of my friends are dyed-in-the-wool Kierkegaard zealots, but many of my other friends are stalwart champions of the Mercersburg tradition. That is like saying that some of my friends "feel the burn" of Bernie Sanders, while others are ready to put Donald Trump's visage on Mount Rushmore. In the popular imagination, Kierkegaard and John Nevin are about as different as Sanders and Trump, or, perhaps more accurately, Pope Francis and Trump.

The reasons for this perception are obvious. Kierkegaard has been hailed as the father of radical individualism, while Nevin has been lauded as the arch-defender of ecclesial community. Kierkegaard refused to be ordained, while Nevin regarded ordination as at least quasi-sacramental. Kierkegaard died in his hospital room shortly after rejecting the offer of a clergyman to serve him communion, while Nevin made the Eucharistic celebration, independent of the virtues or vices of the officiant, central to his piety.

But I have been profoundly shaped by both of them. What can this mean? Perhaps I simply suffer from multiple personality disorder. (Many of my former students will favor this interpretation.) Or, maybe, just maybe, below the glaring surface

disjunctions there lurks a strange, elusive commonality between the two thinkers. And let us expand the playing field beyond the contrast of Nevin and Kierkegaard. Maybe the hidden similarities that I detect are not just the shared property of those two authors, but perhaps they represent a more widespread shift in Christian life, and feeling, and thought that was occurring in countless places in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Perhaps the Mercersburg movement was one expression of a much more sweeping Copernican revolution in theology. It is this possibility that I hope to explore here. In this endeavor I am enormously indebted to the work of Annette Aubert, for she has demonstrated that there was indeed an intensive interchange between Mercersburg and Heidelberg and Halle and Berlin, a truly trans-Atlantic interaction.¹ That conversation even ranged from central Pennsylvania to Copenhagen, for I discovered a copy of Friedrich Rauch's (the first of the Mercersburg theologians) small volume on Faust in Kierkegaard's library, along with copious notes. Yet another illustrative transatlantic connection was that Philip Schaff and Kierkegaard both attended the philosopher Schelling's lectures in Berlin in 1841-1843 at various times (as did the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin and the future communist Friedrich Engels; I wonder what the conversations at the breaks were like).² Another improbable connection is that Kierkegaard's arch-enemy, Bishop Hans Lassen Martensen, the primate of Denmark, was not only a close correspondent with the German theologian Isaac Dörner, but was also read avidly by the Mercersburg people. Aubert has pointed out that Emanuel Gerhart, the Mercersburg systematician, cited Martensen the Dane repeatedly and enthusiastically.³ Following Aubert's lead, and extending her trajectory, I hope to show how the Mercersburg movement was part of a broader shift in Christian consciousness, a shift that included such odd bedfellows as Kierkegaard and his adversary Martensen, and to show how that

¹ Annette G. Aubert, *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

² Klaus Penzel, *The German Education of Christian Scholar Philip Schaff: The Formative Years, 1819-1844* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2004) 117.

³ Aubert, 115, 130, 144, 160.

shift remains critical to the health of the church in the twenty-first century. In so doing, I will concentrate on the writings of Nevin as being exemplary of this sea-change in theology.

In doing this I will make reference to something called the “mediating theology” of the nineteenth century, in which I locate the Mercersburg theology. This movement has largely been forgotten, and, when it is remembered at all, it has acquired a very bad reputation. This negative impression is largely due to the influence of Karl Barth and other neo-orthodox theologians, who dismissed mediating theology as the last gasp of the Protestant liberalism that they blamed for all the ills of the church.⁴ The basic neo-orthodox complaint with liberalism was that it glorified the believer’s religious experience rather than glorifying God. The liberals, or so it was claimed, based their understanding of Christianity on an analysis of the depth structures of human longings and yearnings and thereby opened the door to reconceiving the gospel so that it would be subservient to felt human needs. Liberalism was, in the eyes of its critics, an invitation to indulge in a convenient religion of personal self-gratification and cultural self-congratulation. In the words of Barth, theology was reduced to anthropology, and talk about God really became talking about humanity in a loud voice. (In graduate school I had a Barthian professor who showed me a short animated cartoon that began with the face of Schleiermacher, which then morphed into the face of Feuerbach, which then morphed into the face of Freud, and which finally dissolved into the face of Satan.) I will argue that Barth was unfair to this movement and that the work of the neo-orthodox theologians themselves, and most exciting recent theology, would be unthinkable without the mediating thinkers. The Mercersburg folks, the German and Danish mediators, Kierkegaard, and later the neo-orthodox theologians were all part of the same seismic shift in theology. To be sure, there were differences among them, but those differences were all of the nature of family quarrels. But, as we all know, family quarrels can be some of the most bitter.

⁴ See Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Brian Cozens and John Bowden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

So, what was so significant about the mediating theologians and their American expression in Mercersburg? And, more importantly, why should we care? Why dredge up the names of John Nevin, Isaac Dorner, F. A. G. Tholuck, Hans Lassen Martensen, Carl Ullmann, and Julius Müller? The reason is simple: these now obscure mediating theologians helped transform the church's basic understanding of what the most urgent, pressing human spiritual problem is, and, correlatively, what Christian redemption is really all about. They changed the dominant understanding of what we need redemption from, and what we need redemption for.

Now, before we get going, I must warn you that the mediating theologians were by no means a monolithic bunch. They were not a one-size-fits-all movement. There were myriad parties, factions, and schools, which often bickered endlessly with one another. Some were more indebted to Hegel, some to Schelling, some to Schleiermacher, some to Romanticism, and some to the "Awakening" movement of the early nineteenth century. But all of them shared more theological substance with one another than they did with their adversaries, who were the rationalists on the left and the strict confessionalists on the right. So I am going to focus on the similarities among the mediators and paint them with a broad brush, or perhaps even a paint roller. (This is odd for me, for when I interpret Kierkegaard I work with a precise fine point pencil; but now I get to shift from painting like Vermeer to painting like Jackson Pollock.)

During the late Middle Ages and Reformation periods, the basic human problem, according to most forms of Western Christianity, was identified as sin, understood as the violation of God's law, a transgression which brought with it guilt and condemnation. Sin could be imaged differently, as a failure to cultivate the virtues of faith, hope, and love, as straying from the narrow path, as willful disobedience to divine commands, as a disruption of shalom, as ingratitude, as disbelief, or as lack of trust. But in all these instances sin was regarded as something culpable, contrary to God's purposes, and therefore liable to punishment. Consequently, the good news of the gospel was most fundamentally God's promise to either forgive sin, or to heal it, or both. Christians might quarrel

about how the forgiveness was related to the healing (in other words, how justification was related to sanctification), but in general they were wrestling with the same issue. They were part of the same conversation.

I like to pay attention to the root metaphors and basic images that theologians (or even entire eras) favor. The rhetorical flourishes in their sermons and devotional literature, or even in their lectures, often display what they really mean more than their more abstract theological formulae. So, it is crucial that in this conversation during the Reformation era God was imaged primarily as a parent, as the righteous and just head of the cosmic household whose will must be obeyed. The understanding of salvation, the blessed life, revolved around the hope that this parent would not reject the disobedient child, but would accept and protect it. In some instances the hope included the expectation that God would not only forgive the prodigal, but would also heal its waywardness, so that the child could rest secure in the thought that its behavior was pleasing to the parent; the parent, it was hoped, would look at the child and declare it to be good. The child would never fully understand the parent (remember that Luther spoke of the “*Deus absconditus*” (the hidden God) and Calvin insisted that the finite can never contain or grasp the infinite. (Similarly, when I was a child my father was largely inscrutable to me; all I knew was that he disappeared during weekdays for eight hours, but I had no idea what he did. I simply trusted that he would come back with money, food, and toys, and that he would care for me, protect me, and sometimes discipline me. It was by no means a symmetrical relationship. And so it is here, with God. Think of the imagery in “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.”)

The mediating theologians, including our Mercersburg forebears, shifted the focus and changed the theological conversation. No longer was the violation of righteousness the main concern (although sin remained a seriously complicating factor, deserving of much attention). Now the most fundamental problem was alienation, the sense of being cut off, isolated, trapped within the confines of one’s own limited existence. For example, Nevin preached, “Whether men are conscious of it or not, the great

problem of humanity has always been the bridging over of this deep, dark, and awful chasm of separation...”⁵ Nevin explained that this alienation “has its foundation in our nature, not simply because of the sense of sin, but in view of the sense of deficiency separately considered.”⁶ The types of alienation that the theologians wrestled with were multiple: the alienation of humanity from God (that is the basic one),⁷ of the individual from the community, of human being from the natural world,⁸ of secular culture from the church, of reason and science from revelation, of nationalities from other nationalities, of ethnic groups from other ethnic groups, of perceiving subject from perceived object,⁹ and of the heart from the head. The problem they concentrated on is that people do not feel unified, or feel integrated into some social or cosmic whole, but rather that they feel fragmented, being pulled in different directions. As Dante had earlier imaged it, we feel like we are lost in a wood, or, to shift metaphors, we feel like strangers in a strange land, aliens, homeless drifters. This world is not our home, Nevin frequently reminded his audiences, and “it would be so even if man had not fallen.”¹⁰ The resolution to this dilemma, according to Nevin, was to discern the “complete harmony of nature and spirit” and “the one system” that pervades all things.¹¹ The veil that obscures the harmony of nature and grace must be removed.¹² Most importantly, the chasm between the infinite and the finite, between God and humanity, had to be bridged.

I am no historian, so I do not know why the problem of alienation was elevated to the rank of the most vexing issue facing humanity

⁵ John Nevin, *College Chapel Sermons*, ed. by Henry M. Kieffer (Philadelphia: Reformed Church Publication House,

1891) 70.

⁶ John Nevin, *Dr. Nevin's Theology: Based on Manuscript Class-Room Lectures*, compiled by Rev. William Erb (Reading: I. M. Beaver, 1913) 229.

⁷ Nevin, *Sermons*, 159.

⁸ Nevin, *Sermons*, p. 70.

⁹ Nevin, *Sermons*, 79.

¹⁰ Nevin, *Sermons*, 89.

¹¹ Nevin, *Sermons*, 52.

¹² Nevin, *Sermons*, 54.

in the nineteenth century. But I can make some irresponsible guesses. The shift probably had something to do with the Industrial Revolution and the progressive subversion of humanity's ties to nature. It probably had something to do with urbanization and the erosion of the sense of being part of an organic local community. It probably had something to do with the rise of the nation state and the smashing of any sense of a cohesive Christendom. It probably had something to do with the growing power of the entrepreneurial class and the resultant alienation of labor from capital. It probably had something to do with the increasing differentiation of the economic, political, and ecclesial spheres and increasing questions about the role of religion in cultural life. It probably had something to do with the chaos caused by the Napoleonic wars and the breakdown of traditional ways of life.

For whatever reason, the dialectic of alienation and reconciliation became the governing motif in the mediating theologies. They articulated a wide-spread longing for the restoration of a sense of belonging, of rootedness, and of connectedness. Consequently, Christianity was construed by them as a religion in which the triumph of relationality was heralded. The individual needed to feel connected to God, connected to fellow human beings, and connected to nature. Accordingly, "love" became the central virtue and the central attribute of God. Religion, Nevin claimed, begins in "the form of affection and love,"¹³ for that is what God most essentially is. Love upstaged other divine attributes like glory, the Rudolf Otto-style sense of the numinous, power, righteousness, and mystery. This was a different understanding of the divine nature, for God's sheer awesomeness and holy righteousness had been foundational divine attributes for Luther and even more so for Calvin, and for just about all the major theologians and preachers of the Reformation period. But now love was thrust into the limelight. Christians had always talked about love, of course, but by these mediating theologians love was given a strong nuance of interpersonal intimacy. For example, Nevin asserted, "Man was originally formed for love and union with

¹³ Nevin, *Sermons*, 134.

God.”¹⁴ Similarly, he described the mystical union with Christ as a “oneness of life” rather than as a coincidence of wills or a legal arrangement.¹⁵ Nevin insisted that a genuine relationship with God is not a negotiated settlement of differences or a harmony of wills but is a “living union.”¹⁶ Making the interpersonal nature of Christianity even more clear, Nevin explained that faith is an “actual apprehension of the person of Christ”; it is not primarily cognitive assent to doctrinal propositions.¹⁷ This love, both divine and human, was described by most mediating theologians as a self-transcending openness to the other, a reciprocal delight in the sheer existence of the other, and active care for the well-being of the other. As Nevin wrote, “The goodness of God is that principle of His nature disposing Him to make His creatures happy.”¹⁸ This new emphasis of divine love is evident in shifts in Nevin’s theological vocabulary while he taught at Western Seminary and transitioned to Mercersburg, and in Kierkegaard’s working lexicon as he finished his Master’s program and launched into his writing career. Either coincidentally or providentially, that shift occurred for both them at the same time, in the late 1830’s. By the time of his lectures on theology in 1851, Nevin overtly proclaimed that it is “love which is the only foundation of all other aspects of His [God’s] character. Out of love He created the world...”¹⁹

Given the new way that God’s love was construed, God’s very nature was reimagined. No longer was God seen primarily as a disciplinary, judgmental parent, but rather as an empathic, supportive parent, or even as a beloved friend or spouse. Some sort of experienced sense of tender intimacy with God, analogous to that of lovers, was desired. Faith, Nevin claimed, necessarily involves an encounter with the immediate, self-authenticating “presence” of Christ.²⁰ An authentic relationship with God is really nothing less

¹⁴ Nevin, *Dr. Nevin’s Theology*, 125.

¹⁵ Nevin, *Dr. Nevin’s Theology*, 291.

¹⁶ Nevin, *Dr. Nevin’s Theology*, 243.

¹⁷ Nevin, *Sermons*, 60-61.

¹⁸ Nevin, *Dr. Nevin’s Theology*, 88.

¹⁹ Nevin, *Dr. Nevin’s Theology*, 94.

²⁰ Nevin, *Sermons*, 46, 50.

than “a common life and fellowship of existence.”²¹ Talk of union with God abounded in the pages of all the mediating theologians. For example, Nevin proclaimed, “The whole world, in its deepest sense, is striving after a union with God. Nothing less than a union with its divine creator can satisfy the soul.”²² This became a metaphysical principle for him, for he concluded that “There was certainly a necessity in the constitution of the world for a union of humanity with the Godhead.”²³

A caveat must be injected here. It must be emphasized that this “union” was not some sort of ontological identity of creaturely being with divinity. The soul was not to be lost in God, with all sense of individuation dissolved, as if a drop of water had returned to the ocean and dispersed its molecules. No, even eschatologically the individual would still be the self-same discrete individual, and God would still be God. Love does not entail the merging of all interpersonal boundaries but rather suggests the apotheosis of mutuality and reciprocity. One person can only love another if that person remains in some relevant sense different. And so it is with the individual’s relationship with God. Accordingly, against all pantheisms and monisms Nevin warns, “God, in uniting humanity to Himself, did not destroy human personality.”²⁴

Although the merging of the individual and God was neither imagined nor desired, growth in God-likeness was nevertheless essential for the mediating theologians. To participate in a relationship of reciprocal affirmation and mutual understanding, the individual would need in some respects to resemble God, or “image” God. The soul and God would not be united in being, but they would be perfectly united in feeling and in will. The individual would value the same things that God values, want the same things that God wants, rejoice in the same things that God rejoices in, and will the same things that God wills. There had to be a mutual understanding between God and the human, a mutual admiration

²¹ Nevin, *Sermons*, 144.

²² Nevin, *Sermons*, 131.

²³ Nevin, *Sermons*, 132.

²⁴ Nevin, *Sermons*, 133.

and delight in one another's excellences. The mediating theologians, often without admitting or even recognizing it, implicitly revived the old medieval dictum that "only like can know like," and its corollary that "only like can truly love like." Along these lines, Nevin advised that the only way to know is God to attain a "full harmony" of God's will and the individual's will.²⁵ A godly "fixed habit of soul" and the "consent of the whole man" with God is necessary for a perception of divine light.²⁶ For Nevin and his theological fellow travelers it was axiomatic that we must be fellowship with God in order to know God.²⁷

To be fair, this theme of love as a mutuality of affect and volition was not entirely new in Christianity. It was screamingly present in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, and it became the common coin of the Rhineland mystics. Later it played a major role in Carmelite spirituality and permeated the hymns and devotional literature of the Pietists. It is even inscribed all over the pages of Jonathan Edwards (juxtaposed very discordantly to his other theme of "sinners in the hands of an angry God," a ferocious parental image if ever there was one). The distant roots of the interpersonal love theme can be found in Augustine in the West and the Cappadocians in the East. But, in the nineteenth century this minority report became the foundational principle for systematic theologies, seminary pedagogy, and denominational platforms.

Of course the images of God as an evaluating parent and righteous judge were never abandoned by the mediating theologians, and certainly not by the Mercersburg people. Nevin talks about God as a disciplinary father all the time. But, especially in Nevin's chapel sermons, this language is dramatically upstaged by the rhetoric of companionship and intimacy with God. In the same way, sin continued to be emphasized, but now sin was viewed more essentially as an egocentric turning away from God and

²⁵ Nevin, *Sermons*, 86.

²⁶ Nevin, *Sermons*, 138.

²⁷ Nevin, *Sermons*, 144.

neighbor to “the service of self,” rather than as a flouting of the divine rules.²⁸

This shift toward the centrality of “love” manifested itself in every doctrinal topic that the mediating theologians dealt with. Let us begin with the most core of core beliefs, the doctrine of the Trinity. In the early nineteenth century the doctrine of the Trinity had fallen on hard times. The rationalists either jettisoned it, as did the Unitarians, or banished it to the category of highly speculative and esoteric doctrines that do not really matter much in ordinary life. Even the influential Friedrich Schleiermacher did not quite know what to do with it, so he relegated it to the end of his exposition of the Christian faith, on the grounds that the one-in-three business did not directly follow from any description of Christian experience. But almost all of the mediating theologians were fascinated with the Trinity, and restored it to a position of primacy. For them, the doctrine of the Trinity became the expression of the basic reality that in God’s own self God is love. They conceptualized the Trinity differently, some favoring the social model in which God is the perichoretic dance of three persons whose oneness is their reciprocal delight in one another, while others favored a more psychological model in which God is the lover, the beloved, and the love that flows back and forth between them. But however they sought to conceive the Trinity, the consensus was that in some ineffable way, God’s inner life is the eternal dialectic of unity (the Father), differentiation (the Son), and the synthesis of unity and difference (the Holy Spirit). In other words, God is the joyous, glorious, eternal dance of unity-in-difference.²⁹ God is not undifferentiated, static unity, like a solitary old man with a white beard seated on a throne. If no man is an island, then God is not one either. In some incomprehensible way, the one God is the power of community, the drama of differentiation and reconciliation. Unity-in-difference is the heart beat at the core of the universe; love does indeed make the world go ‘round.

²⁸ Nevin, *Dr. Nevin’s Theology*, 224.

²⁹ For example, see Hans Lassen Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. by William Urwick (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1866) 108-109.

The theme of unifying love also accounts for the mediating theologians' shift of christological attention away from the atonement toward the sheer fact of the Incarnation, a shift from Good Friday to Christmas. In fact, it was this shift, glaring in the work of Nevin, which largely motivated the classis of North Carolina to sever ties with rest of the German Reformed Church. According to the North Carolinians, the Mercersburg heretics were talking too much about the person of Christ, and not enough about the atoning work of Christ. In spite of the over-heated polemics, they actually had spotted something important in the structure of Nevin's thought. For Nevin, and for most mediating theologians on both sides of the Atlantic, Jesus Christ was first and foremost the enactment and the actualization of the loving union of God and humanity. Jesus is both the human who loved God perfectly and also the God who loved humanity so much that God graciously became human. In the life of Jesus the loving reciprocity of God and humanity is made real, not just ideal. The mediating theologians loved to refer to Jesus as the "*theanthropos*," the God-man. This emphasis accounts for their universal tendency to highlight Jesus as the Second Adam. Jesus loved God with all his heart, mind, and strength, as Adam and Eve should have done but had failed so miserably to do. In the unfolding of his life, Jesus redoes properly what had gotten marred in Adam and Eve. Human nature is perfected in Jesus and finally becomes that which God had always intended it to be. Most of the mediating theologians, including Nevin, at least flirted with the idea that there would have been an incarnation, even if Adam and Eve had not fallen.³⁰ The Incarnation was not a band-aid operation in response to human sin; rather, the Incarnation had always been God's primary purpose in creation.

The theme of the Incarnation as the actualization of divine-human love is also evident in the fascination with kenoticism (the view that God "emptied" God's self of divine attributes in order to be in solidarity with lowly, fragile, and broken human beings), which is evident in many of the mediating theologians, particularly those with Lutheran roots. God wanted to be in a relationship of

³⁰ Martensen, 237-246.

mutuality and genuine intimacy with human beings so badly that God was willing to descend from heavenly security and enter this messy world of tragedy and sin simply in order to share our experience. More Reformed mediating theologians, given their commitment to Calvin's principle that "the finite cannot contain the infinite," balked at endorsing full-blown kenoticism but invented somewhat convoluted ways to say the same thing: God has become one of us by assuming sinful human nature. Nevin himself argued elliptically that somehow the human properties of Christ are communicated to the divine nature, without compromising the divine perfection.³¹ Using different conceptual strategies, most mediating theologians, including Nevin, read John 1 in the light of Philippians 2: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, in the form of a servant, in the mode of self-humbling lowliness, just in order to be in fellowship with lowly, broken creatures like us.³² Typical of this trend, Nevin proclaims that the Logos emptied himself for a time,³³ and that therefore the spirit of Christ is the spirit of "self-denial and self-renunciation."³⁴

The love theme also influenced the way that the mediating theologians thought of salvation. One way or another, all of them agreed that salvation was most basically the internalization of the life of Christ, so that we ourselves could love God and neighbor in the extravagant, unstinting way that Christ does. We believers come to participate in the glorified humanity of Christ, so that his love for God and neighbor becomes our own animating principle. In Paul's language, we put on the mind that was in Christ. Or, in the language of Bernard of Clairvaux, John Calvin, and John Nevin, we share in a mystical union with Christ. Or, according to the evocative lyrics of Henry Harbaugh, Christ lives in us, and we live in Christ.

This love focus also has enormous implications for the way that justification and sanctification are conceived. Christ's righteousness is not just imputed to us, as if Christ's fulfillment of the law and his

³¹ Nevin, *Dr. Nevin's Theology*, 245.

³² Nevin, *Sermons*, 101-107.

³³ Nevin, *Dr. Nevin's Theology*, 265.

³⁴ Nevin, *Sermons*, 159.

acceptance of the punishment for sin were chalked up to our account on the credit side of our spiritual ledger. That would make justification a merely economic or forensic transaction.³⁵ But Christ's love for God and neighbor does not remain "extra nos" (outside us); rather, it gets inside us and transforms us. Our hearts are drawn to the beauty and sublimity of Christ's love, and Christ gets inside us. We participate in Christ's very personhood, in the way that lovers participate in one another, and therefore we participate in Christ's righteousness. Because we are in Christ, and Christ is in us, God declares us to be righteous, no longer sees our sins, and accepts us as God's beloved covenant partners. Of course we will then manifest our love affair with Christ by spontaneously performing Christ-like acts of self-giving love for our neighbors. This emphasis explains why most of the mediating theologians wanted to synthesize James and Paul (love and faith), and resisted Luther's dismissal of James as an epistle of straw. It also explains why John, widely celebrated as the gospel of love, quickly emerged as their favorite gospel.

Even faith was reconceptualized in accordance with the love motif by the mediating theologians. Faith is not cognitive assent to doctrinal propositions (head stuff), nor is it the mere efflorescence of religious emotions (heart stuff), nor is it resolute obedience to divine imperatives (hand stuff). It is not thinking the right thoughts (orthodoxy), or feeling the right emotions (orthopathos), or performing the right actions (orthopraxis). Faith is a much more mysterious phenomenon, for it is more basic and subterranean than thinking, feeling, or doing. Faith is born in a level of the self, much deeper than those more superficial functions. Faith has to do with a new life principle, a new spiritual energy, which affects everything that a person thinks, feels, and does. It is more foundational than the dissolution of human existence into cognition, affection, and volition. That is why all the mediating theologians insisted that Christianity is primarily a "life," a primal force. It is a life, not a doctrine, not a spiritual high, and not an ethic, not even a socio-

³⁵ See William Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology* (Colorado Springs: Pater Noster, 2008).

political ethic. Doctrines and spirituality and social ethics are important, but they are not the roots of faith; they are the fruits of faith. Faith is a new life, as both Nevin and Kierkegaard repeated *ad nauseum*. It is not a new way of life, for that would be too behavioral. Christian faith is a new energy, a new orientation, a new directionality, and a new set of motivations. In this sense, love is the necessary fruit of faith; in fact, the distinction of love and faith is conceptual, for life must manifest itself in action.³⁶

To recapitulate, all of these theological emphases in one way or another addressed a specific type of problematic experience: the unsettling sense of alienation and fragmentation. The renewed focus on the Trinity as God's eternal movement of self-giving and self-receiving, and on the Incarnation as the reunion of God and humanity in perfect fellowship, were good news to people who hungered for connection, for belonging, and for reconciliation. This version of the good news stirred the hearts of several generations of Christians so powerfully that it survived the pessimism of the early twentieth century and would resurface in modified form in the thought of such disparate theologians as Paul Tillich and Karl Barth (in spite of their protestations that they were doing something radically novel). Tillich's whole theology was fueled by a yearning for the New Being, which was the experience of the underlying unity of all life. (By the way, Tillich wrote his dissertation on Schelling, one of the inspirations of the mediating theology, and he never wandered far from Schelling's orbit.) Barth famously made "reconciliation" the controlling motif of volume four of his epic *Church Dogmatics*. By doing so, all Barth did was change the theological method of the mediating theologians while retaining much of their substance, so that it looked like he was deriving all his doctrinal conclusions from narrative patterns that were objectively in Scripture, instead of mucking about in the messy stuff of human experience. But, even so, he ended up with many of the same doctrinal conclusions that people like Martensen and Dorner did, and he knew it. So maybe neo-orthodoxy was not so "neo" after all.

³⁶ Nevin, *Dr. Nevin's Theology*, 306-308.

So we finally come to the big question: Why should we care about any of this? I hope that the answer is obvious. Our world and the world of the early nineteenth century are not so very different. Maybe post-modernity is just the nineteenth century on steroids. Most people are still suffering from acute forms of alienation. They feel cut off from one another, and desperately seek largely illusory communities through the social media. They feel cut off from their local and global neighbors and devolve into fearful xenophobes who build gated communities and fantasize about walled borders to protect them from the “other.” They feel cut off from any sense of a higher purpose or meaning to their lives, other than self-gratification and maybe the protection of their immediate families. They feel cut off from real human intimacy and from authentic mutuality. And, most basically, they feel cut off from fellowship with God. With the symptoms of alienation all around us, perhaps the mediating theologians’ message of God’s unifying and reconciling love might just fall on receptive ears.

It must be admitted that the good news as articulated by the Mercersburg people and the other mediators sounds counter-intuitive and even preposterous. For the news is this: in spite of all the empirical evidence that racism is resurgent, that hyper-nationalism is on the ascendant, that economic disparities are becoming more acute, that families are dissolving, that friendships are being betrayed, that violence is proliferating, and that psyches are deteriorating, in spite of all that, alienation and brokenness will not have the last word. And we do not believe that they will not have the last word because we see convincing signs of human progress or objective indicators that a golden age is immanent. No, we can believe that reconciliation will be triumphant simply because God will have it so. Because that is who God is: the power of unity-in-difference. The power of reconciliation created the universe in the first place, sustains it now, and will see it to completion. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, love does make the world go ‘round, and love will win. That message is incredible, fantastic. But, to people who are at the end of their ropes, trapped in the plastic casings of their own Ipads, it may be the only hope available.

Singing Around Word, Font, & Table: A Reformed Case Study

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My assignment is a perspectival and historical one driven by a musical question. It is to figure out what we can learn about the song of the church by studying the Mercersburg movement in the nineteenth-century German Reformed Church. I'll suggest several things we can learn at the end of these reflections, but here's one now: we are not the first generation to squabble about worship and music. Such squabbles are complicated. They involve at the very least theology, worship, and music. These inter-disciplinary complications need to be explored. My apologies for regaling you with lots of historical detail, but that is what the assignment requires. My apologies also for telling you things that many of you already know. I hope that laying them out together so we can see and explore them as a whole will be helpful.

The Sixteenth Century

- Martin Luther viewed music as a gift of God which proclaims the Word of God and is worthy of careful crafting. Lutherans kept a Western Mass without works righteousness, but with a rich supply of music around Word, Font, and Table. They developed the Western church's congregational and choral singing, welcoming the organ and other instruments.
- Ulrich Zwingli disagreed with Luther, regarded music as external clamor, not internal spirit and truth. He obliterated the Mass with its shape and removed all music from worship in favor of a holy silence. Zwinglians nonetheless by the end of the sixteenth century adopted the Reformed practice of Psalm singing.
- John Calvin did not follow the Western Mass either, but he kept its Word and Table sequence with Psalm singing which he regarded as a form of prayer. Choirs, instruments, and

polyphony were excluded. The congregation alone sang the Psalms and a few other texts in unison and *a cappella*. This singing surrounded Word and Table in Strasburg and in Geneva. It also characterized Reformed churches generally as their orders of worship and psalters suggest.³⁷

Baptism

With the whole church catholic Lutheran and Reformed Christians assume that baptisms are communal and part of the community's worship around Word and Table. If baptisms are separated from the worshipping assembly like private masses—which has happened in both Reformed and Lutheran practice -- they lose their connection to the church and to its song.

The Church's Song

While Luther emphasized sung proclamation and Calvin emphasized sung prayer, those themes include one another and other themes as well. The Psalms, which are the womb of the church's music, and the practice of the church catholic include singing the whole story of life before God in all of its proclamation, prayer, praise, and lament. Calvinists eventually joined Lutherans by making hymns, choirs, part-singing, organs, and other instruments part of this mix.

Zwingli's position, though never official, has chipped away at both Lutherans and Calvinists. Though Zwinglians eventually followed Calvinists musically, on the sacramental question of real presence Zwingli's position often became the salient though unofficial one among many Protestants. Celebrating the Lord's Supper only four times a year was Zwingli's practice. That practice or less was followed in much of Protestantism and influenced what Protestants sang.

The Nineteenth Century

³⁷ It is there in John Knox's *The Form of Prayers* (1556), the *Middleburg Liturgy* of the English Puritans (1586), the *Westminster Directory* (1644)—though somewhat diminished, and in Richard Baxter's *Savoy Liturgy* (1661). See Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1961).

By the nineteenth century, Zwingli plus pietism, rationalism, and revivalism had made inroads on worship in both the Reformed and Lutheran streams. Weekly communion—Lutherans’ practice, Calvin’s desire, and some Calvinist’s practice—was not present. Lutherans and Calvinists had moved from their liturgical roots to a “free” format for worship. It was not proclamation in a Reformation understanding, and on most Sundays it was not communion either. A lecture or sermon was surrounded by prayers, lessons, and hymns, between an “invocation” and a benediction. A confession of sins and the Lord’s Prayer, if present, were said by the minister alone. Congregational participation, if it happened, was restricted to hymns, but hymn singing itself had become a “lost art.”³⁸

James Hastings Nichols says that the overriding concern of the Reformed churches in this country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to bring people to a crisis of conversion. The “unconverted” majority in a congregation had sermons preached to them to convert them. Prayers were offered for them. Hymns were devised for their benefit and addressed to them. Christian worship ceased to include elements of homage to God and became devices to impress the irreligious. Puritan worship was transferred to a week-day prayer and lecture. There serious Christians sought communion with God.³⁹

Much of our life in the American church today can be traced to this perspective. It had the same result then as it does now. Nichols says, “One consequence of the use of elements of worship primarily for purposes of persuasion was to silence the congregation in sung praise,”⁴⁰ even though that countered the Lutheran and Calvinist heritage.

The heritage of the two groups was also blurred. The Lutherans and German Reformed in Pennsylvania shared sixteenth

³⁸ See Paul Westermeyer, “What Shall We Singing in a Foreign Land?” (University of Chicago Ph.D Dissertation, 1978), p. 13.

³⁹ James Hastings Nichols, *Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 283.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

century Reformation roots, often used the same buildings in “union churches,” and both came from the Palatinate. By the nineteenth century the German Reformed had adopted the Lutheran practice of singing hymns as well as psalms. The worship of the two church bodies looked the same. The only distinction the people knew was that the Reformed began the Lord’s Prayer “Unser Vater” while the Lutherans said “Vater unser.”⁴¹ They each had their own hymnals, but also shared *Das Gemeinschaftliche Gesangbuch*. Though published in 1817, the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, it was a commercial product which did not promote congregational singing nor reflect the Reformation. Phillip Schaff (1819-1893), the best Reformed hymnologist in this country before Louis Benson (Schaff will enter our story shortly), called it “beneath all criticism.”⁴²

New Measures

Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) ran out the implications of the persuasive perspective in his “New Measures.” New Measures seated people on an “anxious bench” in front of the assembly, addressed them about their sins, and intended to convert them. New Measures inundated both the German Reformed and the Lutherans. Some churches were supportive. Samuel Helffenstein, Sr. (1775-1866), pastor of First Church on Race Street in Philadelphia, which was the largest German Reformed congregation, opened his church to Finney’s campaign in 1828. For the next decade such revivals in the German Reformed Church were regularly reported in *The Messenger*, the denominational paper.

Confessional Reaction

In 1840, when John Williamson Nevin (1803-1886) joined the faculty of the German Reformed Seminary in Mercersburg, a confessional consciousness was emerging in both German Reformed and Lutheran churches. Nevin was among the first to give it expression. He concluded that the faith of the church and its worship, especially as understood by churches in the Reformation

⁴¹ See Westermeyer, p. 12.

⁴² Philip Schaff, “German Hymnology,” trans. T. C. Porter, *Mercersburg Review*, XII, no. 2 (April, 1860): 241.

streams, posed serious problems for New Measures. Two years after he came to the Seminary, the German Reformed church in the seminary town of Mercersburg heard a trial sermon by William Ramsey. Nevin knew Ramsey from Princeton Seminary, where Nevin had studied and had taught in place of Charles Hodge (1797-1878). Ramsey's sermon was attended by revivalistic activities and an altar call. When it was Nevin's turn to speak, he told the people that, "While they had got some good exercise they should not presume to have progressed in piety."⁴³ Ramsey was offended and declined the call. That spawned a crisis in the congregation. It was felt in Mercersburg Seminary, where some students were embracing New Measures. In the words of Bard Thompson, "Nevin resolved to disinfect Mercersburg of this contagion by publishing in the fall of 1843, a decisive little tract called *The Anxious Bench*."⁴⁴

Nevin's concern was not what he called true revivals. They came from "the system of the catechism which includes sound preaching, faithful instruction, pastoral visitation, discipline."⁴⁵ Nevin's concern was the Montanist "Phrygian dance" of New Measures. It was something quite different.⁴⁶ He saw it as quackery, justification by feeling, solemn tricks for effect—a symbol of a false Pelagian system in which conversion was the product of the sinner's own will.⁴⁷

Not everyone agreed with Nevin. One of the most strident advocates of New Measures was a Lutheran, Benjamin Kurtz, the editor of *The Lutheran Observer*. He changed the paper from a biweekly to a weekly and increased its readership from seven

⁴³ Bard Thompson, "The Catechism and the Mercersburg Theology," *Essays on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1963), p. 60. See also Westermeyer, pp. 52ff.

⁴⁴ Thompson, p. 61. The first edition sold out, and a second revised and enlarged edition was published the next year: John W. Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (Chambersburg: Publication Board of the German Ref. Church, 1844).

⁴⁵ Thompson, p. 61.

⁴⁶ Nevin, *The Anxious Bench*, pp. 27-29.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 114f.

hundred to thousands.⁴⁸ He championed revivalism, as did his readers. One correspondent called the anxious bench “the lever of Archimedes, which by the blessing of God can raise our German Churches to that degree of respectability and prosperity in the religious world which they ought to enjoy.”⁴⁹

In 1844, when the second edition of *The Anxious Bench* was published, Philip Schaff came from Germany and joined the faculty at Mercersburg Seminary. He was there for the next two decades. (In 1863 he moved to New York City, in 1870 became a Professor at Union Theological Seminary, and in 1888 founded the American Society of Church History.)

Schaff grew up in the Reformed Church in Switzerland, at the age of fifteen was rescued from an orphanage by a Lutheran pastor, and moved to Germany. There he was educated and confirmed in the Lutheran church in Württemberg under the influence of Pietism. After graduating from the *Gymnasium* in Stuttgart, he studied at Tübingen, Halle, and Berlin. He taught with the church historian J. A. W. Neander (1789-1850), and he began a lifelong friendship with Wilhelm Julius Mann (1819-1892). Mann came to this country, was ordained in the German Reformed Church in 1844 (the year Schaff came), and entered the Lutheran Church in 1853.⁵⁰

In an anti-Catholic climate, the German Reformed church heard that it was untainted by Rome in an unchanged doctrinal monolith that reached via the twelfth century Waldensians to Polycarp, second century bishop in Smyrna. Joseph Berg preached about this at the Allentown Synod of 1844. Schaff’s inaugural address, “The Principle of Protestantism,” was a shock therefore.

⁴⁸ William Julius Mann said that there were 10,000 subscribers and perhaps as many as 50,000 actual readers. See William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America: An Essay on the Present Condition of the Lutheran Church in the United States* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1857), p. 33.

⁴⁹ See Nevin, *The Anxious Bench*, p. 18, which quotes the *Observer* of November 17, 1843.

⁵⁰ See Westermeyer, p. 59.

Schaff said that the Reformation was “the legitimate offspring and greatest act of the Catholic Church” and that Protestantism in its true conception is Catholic.⁵¹ The problem, he said, was that the Protestant concern for freedom had been turned into the subjective diseases of self-will and private judgment, infected by rationalism, sectarianism, and the secularization of culture. The solution was a new ecumenism in which the truths of the Protestant and Roman Catholic tendencies would be fused into an evangelical catholic life stream. Let us, he said, give this evangelical catholicity a beginning among us.

Worship

In the next two years the discussion gravitated to worship and the Eucharist. Nevin wrote *The Mystical Presence* about the Calvinist understanding of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.⁵² A Mercersburg “theology” developed—a Calvinist, ecumenical, “evangelical catholic” position—with Nevin the theologian and Schaff the church historian.

In 1849, after considerable debate about free prayer, prayers from books, related matters, and the inadequacy of current liturgical forms,⁵³ the Synod appointed a liturgical committee with Nevin the chair. Foreshadowing the conflict of the next thirty years, Nevin by now thought a liturgy “was theoretically right” but may not be “expedient” in a church that had fallen away from its Reformation liturgical heritage. He never called a meeting and resigned as chair in 1851. He remained on the committee with Schaff now the chair.

⁵¹ Phillip Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism*, trans. John W. Nevin, ed Bard Thompson and George H. Bricker (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1964, first published, 1845), pp. 73ff.

⁵² John W. Nevin, *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1846), republished by editors Bard Thompson and George Bricker in Volume 4 of the Lancaster Series on the Mercersburg Theology (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1966).

⁵³ The Mayer Liturgy and the Palatinate Liturgy. See Westermeyer, p. 57.

Schaff put the committee to work in 1852.⁵⁴ After 1740 hours, the equivalent of about seventy-two and a half twenty-four hour days of meetings,⁵⁵ plus countless hours by subcommittees and individuals, *A [Provisional] Liturgy: or, Order of Christian Worship* was presented to the Synod in 1857.⁵⁶

Though 4000 copies were sold by 1862 and sparked much interest, Nevin said that the Provisional *Liturgy* did not come into general use.⁵⁷ Jack Martin Maxwell found that perhaps six churches introduced it in full, and fifteen churches introduced individual services in a denomination of 700 churches with 133,000 people.⁵⁸ In 1861 the Eastern Synod generally approved the *Liturgy*, but requested revision. In 1863 the General Synod told the East to proceed with revision and the West to proceed with the preparation of a liturgy, both books to be presented to the General Synod in 1866. The East complied. It reappointed the same committee with other Mercersburg supporters. The revision was published in 1866 as *An Order of Worship for the Reformed Church*.⁵⁹ No major changes were made. If anything the *Order* was more “liturgical.” Alternate forms were omitted, responses were retained, there was no place for free prayer, and the centrality of the Eucharist was more apparent.

The Eastern Synod authorized the revised *Order* for optional use and referred it to the General Synod meeting in 1866 on

⁵⁴ See Westermeyer, pp. 59-61.

⁵⁵ See Jack Martin Maxwell, “The Liturgical Lessons of Mercersburg” (Th.D. Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1969), p. 153. This dissertation was published as *Worship and Reformed Theology: The Liturgical Lessons of Mercersburg* (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1976).

⁵⁶ *A Liturgy: Or, Order of Christian Worship. Prepared and published by the direction and for the use of the German Reformed Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1857).

⁵⁷ See Westermeyer, p. 65.

⁵⁸ Maxwell, p. 247f. See Westermeyer, pp. 64-65.

⁵⁹ *An Order of Worship for the Reformed Church* (Philadelphia: Rodgers, 1866).

Western terrain in Dayton, Ohio. The West was generally opposed but had no alternative. It sought to kill the *Order*. It had elected delegates for that purpose while some Eastern delegates could not get there. Nonetheless, after two and a half days of debate, the majority report of the Eastern Synod passed, 64 to 57.

Maxwell now discovered about twenty churches who used the occasional services and about fifteen where complete introductions took place.⁶⁰ Though there were more complete introductions than before, Nevin reported that the “hue and cry . . . had had its effect” and that a “general introduction” was “out of the question.”⁶¹

Nevin was not quite accurate. I have found many well-thumbed volumes of the *Order*, there were at least twenty printings up to 1944, the book was published in complete and partial editions with subsequent hymnals, and it was cast into German in 1873.⁶² The “hue and cry” Nevin referred to was part of a heated war of printed and verbal word, to be sure, and a “western” *Liturgy* was published in Cincinnati in 1869⁶³ as a pastor’s manual without responsive parts. It was never given to the people and had a hard time finding its way even into the pulpits of the ministers.⁶⁴ The *Order*, however, entered the life stream of a substantial part of the denomination.

The “hue and cry” developed into battle lines and heated warfare. This divisive circumstance led Pastor Clement Zwingli Weiser (1830-1898) to warn the General Synod of 1878 against “ecclesiastical suicide.”⁶⁵ He proposed a Peace Commission. It was

⁶⁰ See Westermeyer, pp. 69-70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶² *Eine Gottesdienst-Ordnung der Reformierten Kirche* (Philadelphia: Publications Behörde der Reformierten Kirche, 1873.)

⁶³ *A Liturgy or Order of Worship for the Reformed Church* (Cincinnati: T. P. Bucher, 1869). See Westermeyer, pp. 76-77.

⁶⁴ See Westermeyer, pp. 77-78.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

formed and prepared a “Directory of Worship”⁶⁶ which was published in 1884. It looked like the *Order* even with its omissions and alterations, but it obliterated the responsive character of the *Order*. Congregational participation was excluded except for hymns, the Lord’s Prayer, permissive Amens, and permissive use of the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the “Seraphic Hymn,” and the *Te Deum*. For example, the *Sursum corda* is not in the *Directory*. The Preface begins with the Minister saying, “Let us give thanks unto the Lord” with no response even to that bid.

To an outside observer the *Order* and *Directory* could look quite similar. (See Appendix 1.) They and the *Liturgy* on which the *Order* was based could all be perceived to provide liturgical materials with singing for the church across its days, weeks, seasons, and years. The logic of Mercersburg’s position was not always followed. That logic would have led to weekly Communion, as would these lines in all three Preparatory services.

. . . the celebration of the Holy Eucharist has ever been regarded by the Church as the inmost sanctuary of the whole Christian worship. We have to do here, not with outward signs only, but with the heavenly realities themselves which these signs represent.”⁶⁷

Neither the *Order* nor the *Directory* presumed weekly communion. The practice of the time was followed. Both books said communion was to be “at least twice a year.” (The *Liturgy* is silent about this, which may suggest something else was in its framers’ minds.)

The difference between the books, however, is substantial. The “liturgy” and “order of worship” are whole cloth, owned by the whole church as a responsive community in and beyond a local congregation, with built-in protections against individual private

⁶⁶ *The Directory of Worship for the Reformed Church in the United States* (Reading; Daniel Miller, 1884).

⁶⁷ This is the exact wording from the *Order* of 1866. In the *Directory* of 1884 “Eucharist” becomes “Lord’s Supper” and “only” becomes “merely,” significant and telling changes, to be sure, but the substance remains unchanged, and only an insider would understand the differences.

opinion. The “directory,” on the other hand, provides a pastor’s book that gives pieces from which individual pastors choose what they wish to let the congregation use.

Hymnody and Music

Explicitly the *Liturgy* called for the singing of psalms and hymns. It gave the option of singing parts of the Ordinary like the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the Nicene Creed, the *Te Deum*, and the *Sanctus*. The Lord’s Day Service began with an anthem by the choir. Implicitly the *Liturgy* presumed congregational song. It was responsive which implies a rhythmic and melodic interplay. A cosmic music of the spheres with choirs of angels⁶⁸ characterized Nevin’s vision and the *Liturgy*. Furthermore, as far back as 1852 there were calls from the church for music.

The shapers of the “Provisional” *Liturgy* included a small hymnal, but the committee spent so much time on the liturgy itself that hymns were chosen at the last minute. Thomas C. Porter (1822-1901)—a pastor, scientist, college professor, literary critic, and hymn translator—prepared a list of two hundred hymns. He could not be there when the hymns were chosen. Only 104 were included. Porter said the list’s “fair proportions were sadly marred.”⁶⁹ The list is lost. The hymns that were included paralleled those in the German Reformed hymnal that was in use,⁷⁰ with an even larger number from Isaac Watts.⁷¹

Lewis H. Steiner (1827-1892)—a medical doctor, chemistry professor, Maryland state senator, a founder and first librarian of Baltimore’s Enoch Pratt Free Library, and a member of the committee that revised the Provisional *Liturgy*—sensed the musical need. He enlisted the help of a Baltimore musician named Henry Schwing (1825-1907), who had been trained in Germany, ran a music school in Baltimore, served as organist at Mount Vernon Place Methodist Church in Baltimore, and was a respected musician

⁶⁸ See Westermeyer, p. 103.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁷⁰ *Psalms and Hymns for the Use of the German Reformed Church in the United States* (Chambersburg, 1834).

⁷¹ For detail, see Westermeyer, pp. 82-83.

whose model was Beethoven. In 1859 Steiner and Schwing published *Cantata Domino*⁷² to go with the Provisional *Liturgy*.

Cantate Domino provided for the requirements of the *Liturgy* with two opening anthems, homophonic settings of the Ordinary, and Anglican chant. The second half of the book was a hymnal. Two things militated against this book's use, however. First, the anthems were rendered obsolete in 1866 when the revised *Order* omitted the anthem at the beginning of the Lord's Day service. Second, traditional hymn tunes were altered, even though they were named for figures in Reformed church history. *Cantata Domino* received little use, with one notable exception, a setting of the "Seraphic Hymn" (Appendix 2) to which we will return.

In the same year that *Cantata Domino* (1859) was published, Schaff published his *Deutsches Gesangbuch*⁷³ in response to the denomination's request for a German hymnal. Mercersburg's hymnic breadth now found expression. Schaff had thought this out.⁷⁴ He envisioned hymns from across the church's history, a kind of *Heilsgeschichte* from Israel through the Apostolic, Catholic, and Reformation periods to the present, folded into a church year/creedal arrangement, and adapted to the American environment. Schaff's criteria for hymns included being biblical, churchly, edifying, and singable, with propriety, simplicity, and intelligibility. Trifling hymns with subjective arbitrariness, mediocrity, dry doctrinal tone, sickly sentimentalism, artificial phraseology, and undo length were excluded. The *Deutsches Gesangbuch* Schaff prepared was a German chorale book of 540 hymns and ten Doxologies. Ambrose, Bonaventura, Thomas von

⁷² Lewis H. Steiner and Henry Schwing, *Cantate Domino: A Collection of Chants, Hymns and Tunes, adapted toe Church Service* (Boston: Oliver Ditson & Co., 1859).

⁷³ Philipp Schaff (ed.), *Deutsches Gesangbuch. Ein Auswahl geistlicher Lieder aus allen Zeiten der christlichen Kirche für öffentlichen und häuslichen Gebrauch* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1859).

⁷⁴ See Westermeyer, p. 81ff.

Celano, Cowper, Newton, Heber, and Charlotte Elliott were there. Though not in great numbers, they were there.

Schaff turned to his friend, W. J. Mann, now a Lutheran pastor, for musical help. Mann was serving the St. Michael and Zion Lutheran congregations in Philadelphia. G. F. Landenberger taught there and was the organist at the St. Paul mission where Mann often preached. Landenberger prepared a *Choral-Buch für Orgel*⁷⁵ for both Schaff's book and for the Lutheran "Wollenweber" hymnal which had the same title.⁷⁶ Published in 1861, Landenberger then provided four voice settings for an edition of Schaff's book, which was published in 1874. The tunes were isorhythmic, not rhythmic, and Lutheran *Kernlieder* were not privileged, so this was not a confessional Lutheran book. It was confessional in the sense of drawing together a wide ecumenical spectrum of materials in a creedal, church year, and liturgical way.

For those who used English at worship, in 1861 Henry Harbaugh (1817-1867)—a pastor, Mercersburg partisan, poet, and "Mr. Pennsylvania Dutchman"—published *Hymns and Chants*.⁷⁷ It was prepared for his Sunday School in Lebanon and other weekday schools, including colleges and seminaries. Harbaugh's preface followed Schaff's vision, though the book's contents were more controlled by the English Evangelical tradition than one might have anticipated. The clue to the book is its subtitle, "with Offices of Devotion." This little hymnal was not conceived for worship on Sunday, though its hymns could be used then. It was a book for daily prayer offices around the Sunday gathering. It assumed participation by the assembly, was organized according to the

⁷⁵ *Choral-Buch für Orgel* (Philadelphia: The Kohler Publishing Company, 1861).

⁷⁶ *Deutsches Gesangbuch für die Evangelisches-Lutherische Kirche in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Philadelphia: L. A. Wollenweber, 1849).

⁷⁷ Henry Harbaugh, *Hymns and Chants: with Offices of Devotion for use in Sunday-Schools, Parochial and Weekday Schools, Seminaries and Colleges arranged according to the Church Year* (Philadelphia: Reformed Church Publication Board, 1861).

Church Year, and included metrical settings of canticles with thirty-four pointed chants. Harbaugh gave the church a nimbus of prayer around the Sunday gathering and also breathed his Pennsylvania Dutch piety into the liturgical renewal. Sales of the book were brisk, and it was still in use at least as late as 1901.

J. H. A. Bomberger (1817-1890)—a pastor and anti-Mercersburg partisan—viewed Harbaugh’s *Hymns and Chants* with alarm. He responded in 1867 with *Prayers and Hymns for Sunday Schools*.⁷⁸ His book had many hymns in common with Harbaugh’s. The two books could seem similar until one looks at hymns with refrains. Bomberger included 12% of such hymns. Harbaugh had 0%. That bow to revivalism, less concern for literary quality, and a non-responsive order of worship give the tenor of Bomberger’s book, which received little use and was soon out of print. It was advertised in *The Messenger* for only two years, while Harbaugh’s was still advertised in 1879, eighteen years after its publication.

In 1874 *Hymns for the Reformed Church*⁷⁹ appeared. It was for Sunday use. It was carefully edited by Elnashan Elisha Higbee (1838-1889)—a math teacher, Congregational and then German Reformed pastor who became President of Mercersburg College and then Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Pennsylvania. This hymnal was stimulated in 1866 when the Clarion Classis asked for an English hymnal that would conform to the Provisional *Liturgy*. With permission from the General Synod, the hymnal was compiled and the result pronounced “admirable”⁸⁰ by the Eastern Synod. Though the hegemony of Watts remained unshaken, this hymnal was an evangelical catholic compendium of the church’s hymnody from across the centuries similar to *Hymns Ancient and Modern* in England from a few years earlier. It was printed with the *Order of Worship* in 1878, 1884, and 1886.

⁷⁸ J. H. A. Bomberger, *Prayers and Hymns for Sunday Schools* (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Rodgers, 1867).

⁷⁹ *Hymns for the Reformed Church* (Philadelphia: Reformed Church Publication Board, 1874).

⁸⁰ See Westermeyer, p. 97.

Hymns for the Reformed Church of the Eastern Synod stimulated the Ohio or Western Synod to publish *The Reformed Church Hymnal*⁸¹ in 1878. Jeremiah H. Good (1822-1888) was the editor. A faculty member at Heidelberg College in Tiffin, Ohio, he joined Bomberger and others in a secretly solicited anti-Mercersburg meeting in 1867 at Myerstown which led to the founding of Ursinus College and *The Reformed Church Monthly*. The hymnal was organized by subjects, not the church year, and, though not a revivalist's collection, it moved in that direction. How much use these two books generated is hard to judge, but the western book seems to have received considerably less usage than the more liturgical eastern one.

In 1881 the Peace Commission recommended a new hymnal be published. Benjamin Bausman (1824-1909), a good friend of Harbaugh, and Lewis Steiner, who had helped to prepare *Cantata Domino*, were appointed to the committee as Mercersburg advocates. Bomberger and Good were their opponents. This committee could make no progress and asked to be dismissed. A new committee was appointed with James I. Good (1850-1924), who wrote an anti-Mercersburg summation⁸² and was Jeremiah Good's nephew, among its members. *The Hymnal of the Reformed Church*⁸³ appeared in 1890. Popularly called *The Reformed Church Hymnal* because of the title on the spine, it made an attempt to please everyone. As churches continued to follow their inclinations toward the *Order* or *Directory*, it gave a Mercersburg nod by the inclusion of some texts in the line of John Mason Neale and to the "Old Reformed"⁸⁴ by some of Fanny Crosby. For the rest the

⁸¹ *The Reformed Church Hymnal with Tunes* (Cleveland: A. Becker, 1878).

⁸² James I. Good, *History of the Reformed Church in the U. S. in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Publication Board of the Reformed Church in America, 1911).

⁸³ *The Hymnal of the Reformed Church in the United States* (Cleveland: Central Publishing House of the Reformed Church, 1890).

⁸⁴ This term for the Reformed is the opposite of the way the Lutherans used "Old." For them "Old Lutherans," with whom

normal nineteenth century Watts-Wesley core was used. This book, like the “Western” Hymnal, included music which matched the texts: a few Anglican chants at one extreme, the Moody-Sankey style of Philip B. Bliss at the other, and a Lowell Mason center. It did include the “Seraphic Hymn,” however (at # 763).⁸⁵

The Hymnal of 1890 was superseded in 1920 by *The Hymnal of the Reformed Church*,⁸⁶ a joint publication of the German Reformed and the Reformed Church in America (which was not pleased with Mercersburg). James I. Good headed the German Reformed (now the Reformed Church in the United States) Committee. It stood in the mold of the book of 1890. Like that hymnal, it too included the “Seraphic Hymn” (# 673).

The Long Trajectory

Though there still are Mercersburg clergy and churches as well as a Mercersburg Society, Mercersburg was resisted. The *Directory* and its perspective carried the day, as the Evangelical and Reformed successor church body indicates a century later. Only three orders of worship were given in *The [E & R] Hymnal* of 1941: The Morning Service, The Evening Service, and A Brief Order of Worship (a Word service). The Eucharist and other services were not put in the congregation’s hands. The pastor, as a “directory” implies, was the arbiter of what the people would see or if they would see it or have access to it at all. Though the Eucharist had congregational responses, they were buried in the pastor’s *Book of Worship*. The Eucharist, now suggested at least four times a year, meant the Sunday service was still usually Word only.

Mercersburg’s logic implied not only weekly communion, but a flourishing musical culture. That did not happen either. The responsive character of the service never took its intrinsic musical

Mercersburg had considerable affinities, was used to distinguish them from the “American Lutherans” with whom the anti-Mercersburg forces had considerable affinities.

⁸⁵ For more detail see Westermeyer, pp. 171-182.

⁸⁶ *The Hymnal of the Reformed Church* (Philadelphia: Publication and Sunday School Board of the Reformed Church in the United States, 1920).

form. The church's resources and push in every generation for congregational, choral, organ, and other musical expressions were not explored or fostered. Music was not tied to the church's worship life or developed as it might have been. If present, it tended to be more ancillary than intrinsic.

However, music was not stopped, and the lines about the Eucharist as the innermost sanctuary of worship were still there too, now in the Communion service itself, though only in the pastor's *Book of Worship*. The Verba, anamnesis, and epiclesis were also still there in the Eucharistic prayer. And the "Seraphic Hymn" was still there too as it was in the *Liturgy, Order, and Directory* a century earlier.

The "Seraphic Hymn"—"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabbaoth"—is what the church usually calls the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus*. It sings of God's holiness and blesses the one who comes in the name of the Lord with Hosannas on this side of the cross, no longer on the Palm side, but Palm Sunday now understood as the Sunday of the Passion. It stretches back to Isaiah 6 and has been an important part of the church's Eucharistic liturgy at least from the fourth century. The reference to it by Clement of Rome in the first century may refer to its place in the Eucharist already then.⁸⁷ Mercersburg placed it where the church has normally sung it, following the *Sursum corda* and the Preface.

This part of the Ordinary became quite "ordinary" in the German Reformed Church. As I noted earlier, a setting of the "Seraphic Hymn" was included in *Cantata Domino* of 1859. This setting was by Alonzo P. Howard (1838-1902), a composer in Boston. It continued to be sung with vigor in the German Reformed Church generally, not only in Mercersburg churches. I grew up in a German Reformed church (Evangelical and Reformed by the time I was born) in Cincinnati. I never ever recall any mention of Mercersburg, Nevin, Schaff, or Calvin, nor any discussions about worship except with my father and uncle. There was mention of Luther and of Zwingli. If we heard anything about communion, it

⁸⁷ See James McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.18.

was that Zwingli apparently thought Christ was not present there. But the pastor used the words in the *Book of Worship* at communion services (four times a year), and we always sang the “Seraphic Hymn” with spirit on those occasions. It was included in the hymnals of the successor denominations for the next century and a half, the Evangelical and Reformed *Hymnal* of 1941⁸⁸ (at # 521) and *The New Century Hymnal* of 1995⁸⁹ (at # 795). It still is sung today in the United Church of Christ.

Observations

As with all study of particular episodes in the life of the church, Mercersburg teaches us many things. Jack Martin Maxwell devoted a whole dissertation to this topic in “The Liturgical Lessons of Mercersburg.” (See above, FN 19.) Here are three shorter suggestions.

1. The Big Picture

i. This study makes it clear that there is a significant difference between the church as a participatory people who sing and the church defined as the clergy. In the first of these definitions the people have worship books in their hands. In the second worship books are the pastor’s property. In the first the people are assumed to be a participatory community. Worship books with checks and balances from sisters and brothers across the church are cue cards for their memory bank with vernacular updates. In the second definition congregational participation is under the pastor’s control. That leads to denying the people their parts should pastors so choose. It also leads to stealing the people’s parts as pastors or other leaders say or sing them (often loudly, out of the communal voice and rhythm) instead of allowing the people to take their responsive role on their own and at their own initiative.

ii. The big picture also brings into view the church as a whole. It locates Mercersburg as an American Reformed movement alongside the Anglican Oxford-Cambridge one in England and its counterpart in this country, the Roman Catholic Solesmes in France and the Caecilians in Germany, the Lutheran confessional and

⁸⁸ *The Hymnal* (St. Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1941).

⁸⁹ *The New Century Hymnal* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1995).

liturgical renewal in Germany and in this country, Roman Catholic Vatican II, Eastern Orthodox writers like Alexander Schmemmann, and the ecumenical movement.

These movements tell us two things. First, once again, the church is the baptized people of God. The church is not the clergy. The church *includes* the clergy, who are very important. They preach the Word and preside at the sacraments, but they are not the whole church nor a sectarian control in it.

Second, these movements tell us that the church is not a chapel of any country. It is not captive to any group, culture, organization, thought pattern, or ethnicity. It makes its way in the world by families and local groups, disciplined by the law; but it is not defined by them, by walls, or by sectarian divisions of any kind. It is a catholic whole, not a support for any group no matter how right or wrong it may be. As the Letter to Diognetus says,⁹⁰ the church loves the country where it finds itself, adopts its customs, follows its laws, and serves it well; but it is always a sojourner which is in but not of the world. Its liturgy expresses the grace of God that resists idolatry and resist sectarian walls that emphasize parts of the whole at the expense of the whole. It resists the state's attempt to co-opt it for ceremonial or other control, and it resists private opinion. The liturgy shows forth Christ crucified with all of its communal discipline and with the paradoxical splendor of new life, justice, peace, beauty, integrity, wholeness, joy, sorrow, health, and song, lived out in the world.

2. Word and Sacraments as Subversively Constructive and Prophetic

The church's resistance to idolatry and to divisive sectarian forces may be blunted for a time. This happens especially when the church succumbs to the temptation for material success and to the spiritual bankruptcy⁹¹ that goes with that temptation. Over time,

⁹⁰ See "Letter to Diognetus," *Early Christian Fathers*, trans. Cyril Richardson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 11953), pp. 205-224.

⁹¹ Cf. Saul D. Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 200.

however, the subversively constructive and prophetic character of Word and Sacraments does its work.

- Movements like Mercersburg continually recur as do societies like this one and all the little-publicized oases throughout the whole church catholic where pastors, musicians, and people sing around Word, Font, and Table as the whole people of God and then live out the new life they receive.
- Lines like the ones about the Eucharist as the innermost sanctuary of Christian worship and musical forms like the “Seraphic Hymn” say and sing their way into our life together, even when we blow it.
- Nicholas Wolterstorff finds a liturgical convergence among Orthodox, Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Reformed bodies,⁹² with a resistance to alternatives that strip out depth, richness, and beauty,⁹³ to which I would add the stripping out of justice that doxology drives.
- An “Invitation to Christ—Extended”⁹⁴ is not only written by groups like this one. Such invitations happen continually, not only in words, but in deeds “like grain that sleeps unseen” and “wheat arising green.”⁹⁵

⁹² Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), p. 3. One can add other bodies to this list, even ones that regard themselves as not liturgical. Every church that worships, like every group that meets together with some regularity and repetition, is “liturgical” in that it follows an order, even if it tries to deny that order. Habit and variation (which in the historic liturgies yield the Ordinary and Propers) cannot be avoided. Even the sectarian groups in the church that seek to avoid any kind of liturgy, gradually gravitate to the church’s historic liturgy or they disappear or become a group in the world apart from the church.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁹⁴ *Invitation to Christ—Extended* (Association for Reformed & Liturgical Worship, 2012).

⁹⁵ From the hymn, “Now the Green Blade Rises.”

- And the words and deeds lead to care for the neighbor, calls for systemic justice and peace, and protest songs and marches against the principalities and powers.

3. The Song as the Church's Birthright

Singing is the church's birthright. Zwingli's silence and Calvin's restrictions impart to the Reformed tradition a reserve or even nervousness about music, but Reformed people have also sung with vigor around Word, Font, and Table. The song is a central part of the subversively constructive character of the church's sacramental and word-drenched being, a witness against our unfaithfulness and disobedience.⁹⁶ Our seminaries, sometimes with a misguided Reformed influence, often teach us otherwise by omitting worship and music from their curricula. That omission is joined by a system of actions as much as of words which teaches ministers that they are the church and that the rest of the people are customers who don't deserve responsive communal worship materials because they are not really a participatory worshipping community. Their importance is determined by numbers—how many can be persuaded to buy the product called Christianity. Music is the means to sell the product.

Church musicians know otherwise. They are no better or perceptive than other people, but their vocation leads them to several inescapable conclusions:

- that they help a participatory people of God sing,
- that the song they lead around Word, Font, and Table is about all of life before God, expressed through prayer, proclamation, lament, praise, and story, not sales techniques,
- that there is a long history of this song for congregations and choirs,
- and that musical colleagues, past and present, across the whole church, help us figure out what we are called to sing and how to sing it.

Not surprisingly therefore, church musicians continually consult one another across denominational and other barriers, work

⁹⁶ See Deuteronomy 31:21 and the surrounding verses, 19-22.

together, learn from one another, and lead the church's song. They help the church sing:

- “[The Lord be] also with you,”
- “Amen,”
- “Lord, have mercy,” . . .
- “Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace,” . . .
- “Alleluia,”
- “We believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,”
- “We lift [our hearts] to the Lord,”
- “It is right to give God thanks and praise,”
- “Holy, holy holy, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord . . .,”
- “. . . grant us peace,”
- and a huge array of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for various times and places in connection with all of that—which leads to, “Go in peace; serve the Lord.”

This is the song of the church around its proclamation, bath, sustenance, and procession into the world, for the life of the world.⁹⁷ Obstacles continually block it—internal and external ones, strong and weak ones, subtle and obvious ones. They can be more or less successful for a time. But the song will not be silenced as the Holy Spirit breathes it through us. So, as Francis, the bishop of Rome, says, “Let us sing as we go.”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973).

⁹⁸ Francis, Bishop of Rome, *Laudato Si*, 244.

BOOK & MOVIE REVIEW

The Christological Inferences of

J.K. Rowling's Fictional Book and Movie Series: *Harry Potter*⁹⁹

By Thomas D. Busted

Introduction

One of the most influential book/movie series of my youth and young adult life has been J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. This series has captured the imagination of an entire generation with its magical world of Hogwarts (a wizarding school), a powerful evil villain named Lord Voldemort who threatens to rule the world, and a young hero, Harry Potter, with his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger (and others). The series is rich with Christological imagery, with Harry Potter serving as the main Christ figure, but many other characters also give their lives in self-sacrifice for the sake of good and defeating the various incarnations of Lord Voldemort, the embodiment of evil.

Harry Potter, Christus Victor

Focusing on Harry Potter as the main Christ figure, he portrays clearest a Christus Victor image of Jesus. The entire series climaxes in one final battle at Hogwarts between Lord Voldemort and Harry Potter in which Harry must die in order to defeat Lord Voldemort. Harry is very much like the triumph-crucifix portrayal of Jesus in that Harry is "...at once the Sufferer and the Victor who gains His triumph by the sacrifice of Himself."¹⁰⁰ The prophecy given in the movie version of *Harry Potter: and the Order of Phoenix* states clearly in relation to how Harry will defeat Lord Voldemort that, "Neither one can live while the other one survives." Voldemort is

⁹⁹ Written in May 2013 as a final paper for a course in Christology taught by Dr. Lee C. Barrett at Lancaster Theological Seminary.

¹⁰⁰ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1931), p. 99.

ultimately killed when his killing curse aimed towards Harry backfires and kills him instead.

There is also a slight note of Harry Potter as the Divine Stranger.¹⁰¹ Because he did not grow up in the magic world, he is often a bit of an outsider to the culture of the magic world. He is a part of a world he did not grow up in. But Harry becomes a part of the magic world, experiences it, and participates in it. Harry enters the magic world to enter into relationship with the wizarding community. The relational piece is the strongest comparison to the Divine Stranger Christology, though a bit weak. The Christus Victor model still speaks the loudest through the series.

Initial Reactions

I remember very early on liking Harry Potter as a fictional character. I found his life relatable to the isolation I felt in school that was later remedied by the friendships that were created. I have always admired Harry's sense of courage in the face of evil and his steadfast loyalty to his friends. Harry was a bit of an outsider; he was a bit awkward too. These traits made Harry's existence near and dear to my own. My Hogwarts was Lebanon Valley College and my magic was music. Perhaps I identify with Harry too much! Regardless, I have felt comforted and encouraged by the Harry Potter series. I may never have a battle with an evil Lord Voldemort (unless I count certain past experiences as 'Voldemort's' needing to be conquered); still the story of Harry Potter encourages me to cling to the love I feel in my life and trust that such love transcends the imminence of death.

The Human Problem: Death

All throughout the series, the main human problem, including the problem that evil Lord Voldemort is trying to conquer, is death. The series begins with baby Harry surviving death, because the death of his loving parents protected him from Lord Voldemort's killing curse. In almost every single book/movie in the series, there is

¹⁰¹ See William C. Placher *Jesus the Savior: the Meaning of Jesus Christ for Christian Faith* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). The name "Divine Stranger" is the wording we used in class (see note no. 1) to describe this image of Jesus.

death. As the series progresses, more and more characters die, including many major characters.

Even the folktale of the “Deathly Hallows” in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* focuses on the character of personified Death. Death gave three ‘prizes’ to three clever brothers who outsmarted Death: an Elder Wand, a Resurrection Stone, and an Invisibility Cloak. The brother with the Elder Wand, the most powerful wand in the world, was killed by those who wanted to steal it for its power, thus Death was triumphant in the end. The second brother used the Resurrection Stone to resurrect his long lost beloved, but she was never quite the same, and this drove him into depression and madness, and so he killed himself: thus Death was triumphant in the end. The third brother hid from Death many years and Death could not find him. In the end, the brother removed the Invisibility Cloak and passed it on to his son, and then he welcomed Death to take him. Though Death in the end took the brother, the brother met Death on his own terms.

Even Lord Voldemort is preoccupied by trying to defeat death. Lord Voldemort, in an effort to rule the world forever, divides his own soul into several pieces, storing them in protective ‘Horcruxes.’ Death is the limit of his tyrannical reign, because he knows that even he will die. In an effort to secure his own immortality, he shatters his soul by murdering people, because murder is one way to divide one’s own soul. Then Lord Voldemort hides the Horcruxes in various places and objects. Because Lord Voldemort’s soul is divided, meaning his essence is divided in different locations, he cannot be killed. However, Lord Voldemort lives a rather un-human existence because of his shattered soul and in most movies takes on the appearance of a snake-like human figure. Only when his soul is restored can he then be killed. Harry Potter succeeds in destroying the Horcruxes and then sacrifices himself because he, himself, is a Horcrux.

In a surreal scene following the death of Harry Potter, Harry finds himself in a bright train station with his old dead friend Professor Dumbledore. In the train station under a lonely bench is a crying baby who is Lord Voldemort. No one can touch or help the baby. The reason for this is never quite explicit. It is almost as though,

even as a baby, Lord Voldemort never learned to trust in the love of others and thus his soul never matured. In death, Harry was reunited with his friend, but Lord Voldmort in death remained an abandoned and isolated baby.

A final interesting note on the theme of death in *Harry Potter* is that when Harry visits his parents' grave in Godric's Hollow, the tombstone's inscription is "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26). This focus on the finitude of death throughout the *Harry Potter* series fits well the Christus Victor model.

The Solution: Acceptance of Death & Love

The solution to the problem of death is subtle, I think, though clear throughout the series. On the surface the solution seems to be to defeat the evil Lord Voldemort through an act of self-sacrifice followed by turning Lord's Voldemort's killing curse upon his own self. Harry does not kill Lord Voldemort by using his own killing curse but rather uses his own magic to deflect Lord Voldemort's magic and turn it back against him. It seems interesting that Harry does not fight evil with evil but rather fights in self-sacrifice and then in self-defense. Harry even seems to show mercy toward Lord Voldemort. We see this mercy as early as the ending battle scene between Professor Dumbledore and Lord Voldemort in *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix*. Lord Voldemort attempts to possess Harry's body to kill Dumbledore. Harry succeeds in resisting evil and says: "You're the weak one. You will never know love or friendship and I feel sorry for you." To which Lord Voldemort responds, "You're a fool, Harry Potter, and you will lose everything." Lord Voldemort is completely cut off from the experience of love, and so views death as something to be conquered through denial. Through his denial of death, he does worse and worse evils to build his own immortal security, only further cutting himself off from love. In the end, Lord Voldemort is killed by his own rejection of Harry's mercy and so he casts his own death curse, intended to kill Harry, but it backfires.

Harry, on the other hand, 'defeats' death by embracing it. Harry had many opportunities to bring his parents back from the dead, but to do so would have put power into Lord Voldemort's hands. And so,

Harry is constantly comforted and protected by the love and memory of those who have died before him. The end of the series seems to imply that Harry will also one day die, but it seems to be implied that Harry will embrace his death, knowing that he will rejoin those he loved and who loved him, and that together they will make a cloud of witnesses to guide and protect those who live after them. This is, after all, how the dead had protected and supported him in his various battles against Lord Voldemort. Thus death is defeated by welcoming it and trusting in the power of love to overcome the barrier of death.

It is a paradoxical solution to the problem of death, in that all are still subject to die. Pursuit of immortality is thus the unrighteous path. Pursuit of living a full life until its natural closure is seen as the better path. Though, death does not cease to exist. Yet, to those who trust in the power of love, death is not an unconquerable barrier.

The theme of death in connection to self-sacrifice is ubiquitous throughout the series. Harry dies to defeat Lord Voldemort and thus save the world. Dobby dies protecting Harry and his friends. Professor Dumbledore dies to protect Harry. Professor Snape dies to protect Harry. The list of characters who die in order to protect or save others is impressive. But love is what motivates the self-sacrifice. Love is what motivates the characters to face peril and willingly risk their lives. Love is the bottom-line factor throughout the entire series. Love is the power that conquers death. Harry saves others through agential acts of love, mercy, and faithfulness. Harry submits his will to love. Love is the connecting and life-giving force that unites all the characters in life and in death, except the characters who do not put their trust in the power of love to conquer death.

Biblical Parallels

Most immediately what comes to mind are the writings of Paul, in terms of Biblical parallels, within the series of Harry Potter, primarily Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15. Throughout the Harry Potter series, the power of love is to be trusted over the power of building our own security. To those who work to ensure their own immortality, they believe faith in the

power of love to be weak and foolish, as Lord Voldemort did. Indeed, even St. Paul points to the weakness and foolishness of faith:

If there's no resurrection of the dead, then Christ hasn't been raised either. If Christ hasn't been raised, then our preaching is useless and your faith is useless. We are found to be false witnesses about God, because we testified against God that he raised Christ, when he didn't raise him if it's the case that the dead aren't raised. If the dead aren't raised, then Christ hasn't been raised either. If Christ hasn't been raised, then your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins, and what's more, those who have died in Christ are gone forever. If we have a hope in Christ only in this life, then we deserve to be pitied more than anyone else. (1 Corinthians 15:13-19 CEB)

But Harry Potter stands firm in love and trusts love. This love protects him and gives him access to the love and protection of his dead parents and friends, just as St. Paul trusts that Christ is truly raised and because Christ is truly raised, so are we (1 Corinthians 15:20-22). In a similar way, "belief in Jesus' resurrection implied that Jesus was God's last word."¹⁰² And Paul's final words in 1 Corinthians are: "A curse on anyone who doesn't love the Lord. Come, Lord! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love is with all of you in Christ Jesus" (16:22-24 CEB). The Harry Potter series 'last word' is love. If God is love (1 John 4:16) then the message is quite similar. God/love conquers death. Love is the last word.

This eternal life through love, as portrayed in Harry Potter, seems a bit weightier than the "opportunities for immortality" presented by Monica Coleman. For Coleman, we live on in "a kind of eternal life within God."¹⁰³ We can access this immortality in our present world through *remembering* the past and becoming aware of how our actions influence other parts of the world and human history.¹⁰⁴ In

¹⁰² William C. Placher *Jesus the Savior: the Meaning of Jesus Christ for Christian Faith* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 165.

¹⁰³ Monica A. Coleman *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2008), p. 76.

¹⁰⁴ Coleman, p. 76.

Harry Potter's world, the dead are more than a memory, and they frequently show up in ghostly appearances to help protect Harry Potter. Love is the connection over the barrier of death, but it is not just a calling to mind or remembrance. The dead truly live on.

Another significant parallel is the way in which many of the characters lay their own lives down to protect and honor Harry. Though, in terms of the biblical narrative, Jesus's disciples are not martyred until after his death, in Harry Potter, this laying down one's life for the sake of Jesus/Harry happens prior to Harry's death and resurrection within the context of the final battle with Lord Voldemort. In Harry Potter, it is as though the bodily death and resurrection occur within the context of the final battle of Revelation (or at least within very close proximity).

Doctrine of Incarnation

The proper doctrine of the incarnation is dependent upon how we understand Harry's uniqueness in relation to the magical and the Muggle (non-magical) worlds.

For example, if we consider there to be no real difference between the two worlds and that the magical world actually represents our real world, the doctrine seems pretty Ebionitic. Any human could have done what Harry did in standing up to a force of evil, dying for the cause, and trusting in the power of love. Yet, an Ebionitic interpretation is probably not the best interpretation, given the presence of two worlds in the series, and our world being represented by the Muggle world.

Harry Potter is half wizard blood and half Muggle blood, in a sense at least. The lineage gets a bit confusing and complicated since both of his parents were wizards. His father came from a long line of pure blood wizards, whereas his mother's side of the family was mixed. Harry is not unique in his half wizard, half Muggle status. If wizard blood is considered divinity and Muggle blood is considered humanity, Harry Potter is by birth human and divine. Yet, I stress, for the sake of confusion, that Harry is not unique in this composition.

However, what does make him unique from all others is his lightning bolt scar, a scar that appeared as the result of Lord Voldemort attempting to use the killing curse on him as a baby. The

love of his mother's self-sacrificial act of dying to protect him, made him impenetrable to Lord Voldemort's killing curse, the rebound of which weakened Lord Voldemort for several years. But, this instant also imbeds a piece of Lord Voldemort's soul within him, thus Harry becomes a living Horcrux. What makes Harry unique is that evil Lord Voldemort has chosen Harry to be his foe. This idea of incarnation is a bit foreign since Harry's uniqueness is in the piece of evil he carries within himself, inflicted by Lord Voldemort. We encountered this once before in class¹⁰⁵ when we viewed the movie: *The Last Temptation of Christ*. In the movie, the Jesus figure had to be purified, as snakes left his body. This movie, we decided, portrayed an Antiochene doctrine of the incarnation because the main character seemed to be anguished by a conflict of humanity and having special access of knowledge of God's will. Let's assume then that Harry Potter also presents an Antiochene doctrine of the incarnation, but with a special twist: in Harry Potter, it seems the human side is the good side and the side from which love comes, but the evil of Lord Voldemort threatens at times to manipulate his will through magical means. Harry Potter's struggle is to listen more to the human will of love within himself and use the magic against itself to defeat it. This is not always easy for Harry. At times Harry becomes vengeful and pushes away those whom he loves. But Harry's love wins.

Model of Incarnation

Harry Potter again presents us with a complicated model of incarnation. Harry seems to present both an ontological and agential model. Harry is savior by the very nature of the fact that he is himself a Horcrux, and yet he is also savior in his acts of love. Ontologically, he was similar to his enemy, Lord Voldemort and it was because of this unique ontology that he was the only one who could defeat him. However, the thing that made Harry different from Lord Voldemort was the loving decisions he made. Harry resisted the evil within himself and relied on the power of love. This is an interesting model in that it suggests that in our actions, we can become very much like Harry Potter by deciding to choose

¹⁰⁵ See note no. 1

love in our actions and in trusting that this love is also what conquers death. However, Harry is the only one chosen by the evil Lord Voldemort to be his foe. We cannot defeat Lord Voldemort, but Harry can because of the mark given by Lord Voldemort's curse ricocheting off of his mother's self-sacrificial love.

Conclusion

The Christology of Harry Potter is quite complex. He most clearly exhibits the Christus Victor model of Christology in his battle against Lord Voldemort, but he is also a bit of Divine Stranger in the wizarding world. The image is a comforting and encouraging one to a generation that experiences social isolation. The problem is Lord Voldemort, but an even more basic human problem is death. Harry Potter solves this problem by accepting death and sacrificing himself to make Voldemort vulnerable to his own destructive powers. Death is transcended by love. The theme of death being conquered in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians serves as the biblical parallel on which the series is most closely associated. A modified Antiochene doctrine of incarnation best reflects Harry's struggle with his humanity and the evil will that tries to control him, the love of the humanity in this case being more desirable than the evil magic of Lord Voldemort. A complex ontological and agential model of the incarnation best explains how Harry saves the world through loving choices while ontologically sharing the evil of Lord Voldemort, thus setting him apart to become the hero who vanquishes Lord Voldemort.

This complex Christological figure has inspired an entire generation to think of love and death in new and fascinating ways. Harry Potter also causes us to look into the roots of sin and evil in new ways, a way that evokes sympathy and mercy for those are just as much victims of death as the rest of us. The way of creating our own immortality leads to destruction and the rejection of love and relationship; but the way of accepting death as a part of life is a way of peace and loving relationship. The faith in love's power to overcome death is true eternal life.

BOOK REVIEWS

1) Church Fathers, 2) Church Fathers and Teachers & 3) The Doctors of the Church

Pope Benedict XVI

By F. Christopher Anderson

How does a busy pastor develop her or his evangelical-catholic theology? Obviously there are many answers for this but one simple answer is to read from authorities who come from differing Christian traditions. If you are Protestant and you want to explore Roman Catholicism, then Pope Benedict XVI would easily fill the bill.

Since we have welcomed Pope Francis many have forgotten the former Joseph Ratzinger. There are many in our Society who wish he could be completely forgotten. I can sympathize with these negative views, but I believe that they would be missing out on some worthwhile material. I have no problem saying Francis is a better Pope. This is because he is a better pastor. But Ratzinger is an excellent teacher. This is true whether you agree with him or not.

I have read the first two books that I have listed. I assume that the third one fits the same format and includes Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila and Therese of Lisieux. The beauty of the first two books is that they contain brief lectures on important theologians in the history of the church. The lectures are about 5-6 pages each and there are 36 in the first book and 35 in the second book. Most get one lecture, though Augustine gets five.

I will note only one interesting fact that I did not know before reading this series. In the lecture on Saints Cyril and Methodius in the second book Benedict writes: "*Thus he (the Pope) did not hesitate to approve the mission of the two brothers in Great Moravia, accepting and approving the use of the Slavic language in the liturgy.*" (124) Luther would have found this interesting.

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