



# THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW

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## The New Mercersburg Review 58

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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

Gabriel Fackre has died. Sadly, I have taken his name off the list of Contributing Editors. Gabe was probably the most important person in the founding, the growth and the depth of The Mercersburg Society. He was a kindly father and mentor to many of us. We rejoice in Question # 49 of the Heidelberg Catechism which speaks of “...a sure pledge that he (Christ), as the head, will also take us, his members, up to himself.” (Barrett translation) I would hope that after the grief subsides someone would submit an article that summarizes some of the many ways Gabe made this Society what it is today.

The first article in the NMR was a 2016 Roth Prize Winner. If anyone had any doubts about the importance of this scholarship fund I would hope that this essay changes their minds. We are so thankful for the excellent essay but we must not forget those who have given to this fund. It encourages new scholars to explore the riches of Mercersburg Theology. Matthew Wright wrote this as part of his Ph.D. studies at Calvin College.

Thomas D. Busted has given a very interesting perspective on the debate that exists in the church on the Baptismal Formula. In a sense it gives us pause to pull back and be somewhat more understanding of those with whom we may disagree.

This issue includes two sermons. The first is by our own W. Scott Axford and should be of help for those planning to preach on Ascension Day, May 10, 2018. The second sermon is a sermon on the Introduction to The Ten Commandments that I preached at the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Heidelberg UCC in York. PA.

In our one book review, Joseph Heddon, Jr. encourages us to read George Hunsinger’s *The Eucharist and Ecumenism*. Enjoy.

# SEEDS OF THE WORD IN THE EARLY THEOLOGY OF JOHN WILLIAMSON NEVIN

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*2016 Roth Prize Winner*

*April 28, 2016.*

## **I. State of the Question**

In his own time, John Williamson Nevin faced criticism that his theological and liturgical attempts to recover a stronger and more authentically Reformed understanding of the church and its sacraments neglected the place of the word, read and preached, in worship.<sup>1</sup> As scholarly interest in Nevin and Mercersburg Theology has increased in the past few decades, many contemporary commentators have followed suit. Three major intellectual biographies of Nevin have appeared in the past half-century,<sup>2</sup> and each writer laments to some degree the overshadowing of the word by sacrament in Nevin's theology. For example, D. G. Hart frames neglect of the word as "the chief weakness in Nevin's theology,"<sup>3</sup> and later notes that Nevin "neglected preaching in his conception of the Christian ministry."<sup>4</sup> Writers on theology and worship in the Reformed tradition more generally often level the same critique.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John H. A. Bomberger, *The Revised Liturgy: A History and Criticism of the Ritualistic Movement in the German Reformed Church* (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Rodgers, 1867); *Reformed, Not Ritualistic, Apostolic, Not Patristic: A Reply to Dr. Nevin's Vindication* (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Rodgers, 1867).

<sup>2</sup> James Hastings Nichols, *Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Richard E. Wentz, *John Williamson Nevin: American Theologian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); D. G. Hart, *John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Hart, *High Church Calvinist*, 236.

<sup>4</sup> Hart, *High Church Calvinist*, 214.

<sup>5</sup> Howard G. Hageman, *Pulpit and Table: Some Chapters in the History of Worship in the Reformed Churches* (1962; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock,

This view is also reflected by the silence with regard to the word of more specialized contemporary works on Nevin. The table of contents of one important collection of essays, *Reformed Confessionalism in Nineteenth-Century America: Essays on the Thought of John Williamson Nevin*,<sup>6</sup> is revealing. Chapters addressing theological issues cover Nevin on the church, the Lord's Supper, baptism, regeneration, holistic supernaturalism, and Methodism. Though there is a chapter on Nevin on the pastoral office, it ranges far beyond the place of the word to focus on pastoral authority and function more broadly. Many recent monographs also reflect increasing interest in Nevin and Mercersburg, but most target other aspects of Mercersburg Theology than the place of the word in worship.<sup>7</sup> But could a Reformed pastor and theologian, raised in Old School Presbyterianism, and educated at Princeton Seminary under Charles Hodge,<sup>8</sup> really neglect such a central aspect of the faith he had received?

Not all contemporary readings of Nevin are uniformly critical of the place of the read and preached word in his theology. One work that focuses primarily on Nevin and scripture is *The Interior Sense of Scripture: The Sacred Hermeneutics of John W.*

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2004), 97; B. A. Gerrish, *Tradition and the Modern World: Reformed Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 61-63.

<sup>6</sup> Sam Hamstra, Jr., and Arie J. Griffioen, *Reformed Confessionalism in Nineteenth-Century America: Essays on the Thought of John Williamson Nevin*, ATLA Monograph Series (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan G. Bonomo, *Incarnation and Sacrament: The Eucharistic Controversy Between Charles Hodge and John Williamson Nevin* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010); Linden J. DeBie, *Speculative Theology and Common-Sense Religion: Mercersburg and the Conservative Roots of American Religion* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008); Adam S. Borneman, *Church, Sacrament, and American Democracy: The Social and Political Dimensions of John Williamson Nevin's Theology of Incarnation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); W. Bradford Littlejohn, *The Mercersburg Theology and the Quest for Reformed Catholicity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> See Hart, *High Church Calvinist*, 35-60, and Nichols, *Romanticism*, 5-36, for details of his early life and education.

*Nevin*.<sup>9</sup> DiPuccio's concern is primarily for the philosophical foundations of Nevin's hermeneutics and his theology as a whole. However, he does not ignore the place of word in worship. He validates the prevailing concern: "There is more than a kernel of truth to the charge that in his early attempts to articulate the meaning of the Lord's Supper, Nevin neglected to consider the sacramental power of the word in Reformed theology."<sup>10</sup> However, he also argues that Nevin's "later theology (beginning around 1870) was devoted almost entirely to expounding the sacramental presence of Christ in His word."<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to most modern studies, this essay will show that even in his earlier writings, the positive place of the word in his thought was obscured by the occasional and polemical nature of Nevin's work. We will specifically demonstrate the importance of the word in Nevin's understanding of Christian worship. To use an organic metaphor that Nevin's German idealism may have led him to appreciate, though they may not have fully bloomed until his later writings, nascent seeds of the consequential place of the word are present in his earlier writings.

While a comprehensive examination of all of Nevin's work lies beyond the scope of this paper, we will survey three major writings from the 1840s, a time in which Nevin found himself as the primary theologian in the seminary of the German Reformed Church in Mercersburg, PA. The first two books deal with "the church question," a broad controversy over the nature of the church and individuals' roles within it,<sup>12</sup> and we will conclude by examining a short series of Nevin's classroom lectures from the same era on pastoral theology.

## II. Nevin and the Church Question

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<sup>9</sup> William DiPuccio, *The Interior Sense of Scripture: The Sacred Hermeneutics of John W. Nevin* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> DiPuccio, *Interior Sense of Scripture*, 82.

<sup>11</sup> DiPuccio, *Interior Sense of Scripture*, 82.

<sup>12</sup> John D. Payne, "Schaff and Nevin, Colleagues at Mercersburg: The Church Question," *Church History* 61, no. 2 (June 1992): 169-190.

By the mid-1830s, decades of revivalism had changed the nature of the American church.<sup>13</sup> The church of John Williamson Nevin's youth and his Christian formation, the Presbyterian Church, would split in 1837, causing him great distress.<sup>14</sup> Around this same time, he accepted an opportunity to teach theology at the seminary of the German Reformed Church in Mercersburg, PA, and joined that denomination. His increased personal study of church history sparked several writing projects over the next decade that address the nature of the church and its worship. The *Anxious Bench* in 1843 was a critical analysis of the "New Measures" for revival promulgated by figures such as Charles Finney.<sup>15</sup> In 1846, Nevin addressed the place and meaning of the Lord's Supper in *The Mystical Presence*, a treatise that sought to recover the robust sacramental views of sixteenth century Reformers such as Calvin over against the thin memorialism held by most American confessional Reformed theologians such as Charles Hodge.<sup>16</sup> Through these and other works, Nevin sought to explore the various implications of his incarnational understanding of the church and to pinpoint the deficiencies he saw within various sectors of the American church, including his newly adopted German Reformed Church.

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<sup>13</sup> James D. Bratt, "The Reorientation of American Protestantism, 1835-1845," *Church History* 67, no. 1 (March 1998): 52-82; Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in the New World: The History of North American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 95-96.

<sup>14</sup> Linden J. DeBie, "Biographical Essay" in John Williamson Nevin and Charles Hodge, *Coena Mystica: Debating Reformed Eucharistic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), xxvii. Though the split did involve conflict over some of the concerns Nevin shared regarding revivalism, Nevin was not a primary antagonist in this fight.

<sup>15</sup> John Williamson Nevin, *The Anxious Bench*, 2nd ed. (Chambersburg: Publication Office of the German Reformed Church, 1844).

<sup>16</sup> John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1846), reprinted in *The Mystical Presence And The Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper*, ed. Linden J. DeBie (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012).



## *The Anxious Bench*

Nevin's first salvo in his attempts to counter the vapid emotionalism represented by Finney's brand of revivalism was *The Anxious Bench*. In it, Nevin provides a theological critique of the "New Measures" that sought to use emotion to make people aware of their need for a savior.<sup>17</sup> After identifying flaws of the "system of the anxious bench," Nevin closes with a description of "the system of the catechism." In his critique, Nevin demonstrates how these revivalist measures "obstruct rather than promote the progress of true godliness,"<sup>18</sup> and that this warrants rejection by the church. Nevin's concern is the shallow foundation for the system the revivalists often used, and its subjectivity. It relied primarily on listeners' emotional response to the gospel and neglected the objective grace of the gospel itself. It was thus "ultimately the product of a sinner's own will," and Nevin rejected it as Pelagian.<sup>19</sup>

Part of his critique of this system is the effect it has on ministers and how they approach ministry. This system that relies on emotionalism "leads ministers to undervalue and neglect the cultivation of that true inward strength, without which no measures can be at last of much account."<sup>20</sup> He contrasts in a long paragraph over three pages the ease of employing mere revivalist technique with the true work of ministry, which includes "holding fast the faithful word, in such sort 'that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers.'" A minister ought to be "apt to teach," "a scribe well instructed in the law," "able to

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen Cox, *American Christianity: The Continuing Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 76. "Finney outlined all the appropriate means of revival, from ideas that should be emphasized in sermons to well-ventilated meetinghouses and pulpits kept free from preachers' tobacco juice. But the most important thing was to remember that the Church, the real Church, cannot exist unless enthusiasm is continually provoked." See also Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835), 9. "Almost all the religion in the world has been produced by revivals. God has found it necessary to take advantage of the excitability there is in mankind, to produce powerful excitements among them, before he can lead them to obey."

<sup>18</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 123.

<sup>20</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 57.

bring forth from the treasury of God's word things new and old, as they may be wanted; to preach week after week, so as to instruct and edify the souls of men."<sup>21</sup>

We begin to see that he understands the true nexus of power in the preached word to be something more profound than that which merely excites people emotionally. He admits that one who is adept at the new measures "may be mighty in the use of the new measures, preaching every day if need be for three weeks to crowded congregations, excited all the time..."<sup>22</sup> However, an attentive observer will soon realize that "A man may so distinguish himself, and yet have no power to study, think or teach." Later, he argues that "preaching will become shallow..."<sup>23</sup> because "[s]tudy, and the retired cultivation of personal holiness, will seem to their zeal an irksome restraint."<sup>24</sup> Later, Nevin concludes his assessment of the impact of the "system of the bench" with a timeless critique of preaching geared only to emotion that neglects a grounding in true knowledge of the word and actually draws attention away from God and to the preacher:

It gives rise to a style of preaching, which is often rude and coarse, as well as uncommonly vapid; and creates an appetite for such false aliment, with a corresponding want of taste for true and solid instruction. All is made to tell upon the one single object of effect. The pulpit is transformed, more or less, into a stage. Divine things are so popularized, as to be at last shorn of their dignity as well as their mystery. Anecdotes and stories are plentifully retailed, often in low, familiar, flippant style. Roughness is substituted for strength, and paradox for point. The preacher feels himself, and is bent on making himself felt also by the congregation; but God is not felt in the same proportion.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 58.

<sup>22</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 59.

<sup>23</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 62.

<sup>24</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 63.

<sup>25</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 108-109.

These critiques indirectly show Nevin's concern for the word and its rightful place in Christian worship. However, it becomes even clearer in the chapter describing "the system of the catechism" in which Nevin urges the church to return to the practices of the church that marked his upbringing in Old School Presbyterianism. In describing the system of the catechism, Nevin writes positively of the ordinary means of grace that undergird it:

The regular administration of the *word and sacraments*, forms of course an essential part of the same system. The ordinances of the sanctuary, being of divine institution, are regarded as channels of a higher power than themselves; and are administered accordingly with such earnestness and diligence as bespeak a proper confidence in their virtue, under this view.<sup>26</sup>

We see evidence that Nevin recognizes that there is a narrative component to this system, grounded in the word, when he writes, "The object in all these efforts, is not simply to bring sinners in the first instance to repentance and faith, but to build them up through the knowledge of the truth, in all righteousness, unto everlasting life."<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, just as the system of the bench led to shallow preaching and lack of preparation by ministers, the system of the catechism would spur a desire for richer preaching. "The call for preaching will be increased. Protracted meetings, as they are styled, may be required....Sermons and exhortations may be expected to become more earnest and pungent." This is not a dry intellectualism taking precedence over a Spirit-led revival, though:

All this is a simple extension of the processes, by which the ordinary life of the Church is to be maintained, made necessary by the special outpouring of God's Spirit, and fairly comprehended, from first to last, in the system of the Catechism as distinguished from the system of the Bench.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 133. Emphasis added.

<sup>27</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 134.

<sup>28</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 141.

Nevin concludes the work by pointing to the example of Puritan pastor Richard Baxter (1615-1691) at Kidderminster in the seventeenth century. This in itself is notable, as Nevin's positive use of a famous seventeenth-century Puritan demonstrates some level of continuity with word-centered aspects of the earlier Reformed tradition. As we have seen earlier in *The Anxious Bench*, Nevin again recognizes the place of proper preaching over against the emotional pleas of the revivalists. When Baxter arrived at Kidderminster in 1641, the parish "would seem to have been one, precisely of the sort, which those who glorify 'New Measures' in our day, are accustomed to consider specially in need of being wrought upon in this way."<sup>29</sup> Baxter set about to seek revival, but by patiently grounding the parish in the truth rather than adopting what would later become known by Nevin as the "system of the bench." "Besides his sabbath work, and occasional sermons at other times, he preached once every Thursday."<sup>30</sup> Other weekly events included meeting with youth for prayer, and Saturday evening gatherings at people's houses "to repeat the sermon of the preceding sabbath and to prepare themselves for prayer the following day." Nevin's recounting of the success of Baxter's ministry also directly includes the importance of the word, relaying that families on the street might be heard "singing psalms and repeating sermons, as you passed through them."<sup>31</sup>

Nevin's primary concern in *The Anxious Bench* is to critique the emotional revivalism that relied on individuals' subjective responses and then to counter it by lifting up the more objective system of the catechism. As such, his purpose is not to articulate the place of the word in contrast to other aspects of worship. Nonetheless, his concern for the word is evident when his critique of the system of the bench clearly identifies the ways in which this subjectivism harms good preaching. In addition, his constructive portrayal of the system of the catechism as an alternative highlights the ways that the preaching of the word is elevated when the church

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<sup>29</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 145.

<sup>30</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 146.

<sup>31</sup> Nevin, *Anxious Bench*, 148.

is recognized to have an objective nature that transcends the merely emotional responses of individuals.

### *Mystical Presence*

In 1846, Nevin turned his attention to a different front in the debate, a front represented by the rationalism of Charles Hodge and Princeton Seminary. Where *The Anxious Bench* addressed the rampant revivalism that centered the faith within the individual through the use of emotion, *The Mystical Presence* sought to address deficient views of the sacraments that Nevin believed also led to a subjective turn that diminished the sense of the catholicity of the church.

*The Mystical Presence* would seem to provide few quotable excerpts for those seeking evidence of Nevin's love for the read and preached word. It is primarily an attempt to recover a more catholic and more historically Reformed understanding of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper than the memorialist practice that was predominant among the Reformed in America.<sup>32</sup> As such he does not address worship as a whole, and thus has little opportunity to frame the sacrament in its relationship to the word. While it is true that *The Mystical Presence* certainly focuses more on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper than on the word, Nevin does not frame the discussion as one of sacrament *versus* word, nor does he exhibit hostility to the place of the word in worship.

This in itself is notable. At other times and places in Protestant history when the relationship between word and sacrament has been at issue, those seeking to elevate the sacraments have often done so at the expense of word. For instance, in the early seventeenth century Laudian controversy in the Church of England, we find writers and preachers explicitly attacking preaching and the role of sermons because they detract from the place of the

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<sup>32</sup> Laurence Hull Stookey, *Eucharist: Christ's Feast With the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 61. "But eventually, even among Lutherans and Calvinists, as among Anglicans (who were influenced by both), it was a form of Zwinglianism that won the day—despite the fact that the doctrinal statements of all these bodies insisted the Supper is a sacrament and not an ordinance only."

sacrament. Peter Lake argues that Lancelot Andrewes saw the Puritans' focus on the word and sermon effectively reducing Christianity to the "transfer and assimilation of information" and that the "cult of the sermon" led to "pharisaical outward godliness."<sup>33</sup> He also demonstrates how Laudian churchmen such as John Swan and John Browning repeatedly argued that preaching detracted from the significance of the Church as a house of prayer.<sup>34</sup> In *The Mystical Presence* we find no complaints about the quantity or role of (proper) preaching in American churches, nor do we find Nevin diminishing the need for preaching in order to make his case for the sacrament. However, we may go further than this argument from silence. We must also recognize that Nevin's purpose is not to elevate the Lord's Supper at the expense of the preached word, but rather to guard against the subjectivism engendered by the reduction of the Supper to rationalistic categories.

*The Mystical Presence* begins with a translated essay by Christian Ullmann, an early nineteenth century German theologian, called "The Distinctive Character of Christianity."<sup>35</sup> Nevin then articulates the Reformed understanding of communion, positioning it in between the Zwinglian, memorialist understanding held by Hodge, and the Roman Catholic and Lutheran views of transubstantiation and consubstantiation.<sup>36</sup> He does this in order to insist on the sacrament as an "objective force," and the "substantial

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Lake, "Lancelot Andrewes, John Buckeridge, and Avant-Garde Conformity at the Court of James I," in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 115-116.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Lake, "The Laudian Style: Order, Uniformity and the Pursuit of the Beauty of Holiness in the 1630s," in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642*, ed. Kenneth Fincham (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 169. "Thus, for many Laudians, once the Church had been established, the main task for preaching was to provide each generation with the basic information necessary to pray properly and thereafter to perform intermittent topping-up operations, designed to protect the Church and commonwealth from lay immorality, heresy and schism."

<sup>35</sup> Linden J. DeBie, "Editor's Introduction," *Mystical Presence*, xxviii. DeBie suggests that Nevin includes the article to summarize the "German philosophical commitments that now undergirded his theological paradigm."

<sup>36</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 44-50.

life of the Saviour himself particularly in his human nature.”<sup>37</sup> Nevin concludes the first chapter tracing the articulation of this doctrine through many Reformed theologians, confessions, and catechisms.<sup>38</sup> Of course, each expression of the doctrine is slightly different. But on the whole it serves as a litany of many, many Reformed theologians and documents insisting on the real presence of Christ in the celebration of the sacrament. One document in particular even noted the role of the word in making Christ present: “whereas faith, resting on the divine word, makes what it perceives to be present; and we by this faith receive truly and efficaciously the true and natural body and blood of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost...”<sup>39</sup> Nevin’s historical research demonstrates well the breadth and depth of statements of the objective nature of the sacrament pervasive in the early Reformed tradition.

In the second chapter we begin to see Nevin’s objections to the “modern Puritan theory.”<sup>40</sup> Though Nevin laments the deterioration of orthodox Eucharistic doctrine among many Protestant traditions in America, he zeroes in on the Reformed churchmen who had neglected the real presence of Christ in the Supper. Editors of the recent edition note that Nevin considered these elements of American Protestantism “fatally rationalistic, subjective and lacking a real sense of the church catholic.”<sup>41</sup> His argument presents in their own words “modern Puritan” writers from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who diverged from

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<sup>37</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 51-52.

<sup>38</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 55-91. Theologians and documents covered include the early Helvetic Church, Calvin, Farel and Theodore Beza, Beza and Peter Martyr Vermigli, the Gallic Confession, the Old Scotch, Belgic, and Second Helvetic Confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism, Ursinus, Hospinian, the Synod of Dort, the Westminster Confession, and Hooker and Owen.

<sup>39</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 68. The 1561 Colloquy of Poissy between several Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians including Beza and Peter Martyr. Nevin reports that this is language to which the Roman Catholic representatives agreed before being overruled by the Sorbonne.

<sup>40</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 92n1. ed. note: “Nevin believed that Protestant America was dominated by a system of theology he called the ‘Modern Puritan System.’”

<sup>41</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 92n1. ed. note.

the earlier understanding of Christ's real presence at the Supper. For instance, the body and blood are "metaphorical expressions;"<sup>42</sup> the sacramental elements represent Christ "as a proxy;"<sup>43</sup> and "the bread and wine were no more than a representation of the body and blood of Christ; or in other words, the signs appointed to denote the benefits that were conferred upon mankind in consequence of the death of Christ."<sup>44</sup> In this thread of his argument, we can see that Nevin's concerns were specific to the particular topic of the sacrament and the church. Thus, it should be read alongside his more positive regard for certain aspects of Puritan thought, as we saw in his comments on Baxter, above. Put another way, Nevin's criticism of the Puritans regarding the Lord's Supper does not entail a wholesale lack of appreciation for other aspects of their theology, nor a demotion of the word.

Nevin then teases out the contrasts between these views of the modern Puritans and those of the old orthodox Reformed. In the first place, the old Reformed understanding was "*specific* in its nature, and *different* from all that has place in the common exercises of worship."<sup>45</sup> But Nevin is sure to avoid severing sacrament from word:

The sacrament, not the elements of course separately considered, but the ordinances as the union of element and word, is held to be such an exhibition of saving grace, as is presented to the faith of the Church under no other form. It is not simply the word brought to mind in its ordinary force.<sup>46</sup>

Later in the same section he quotes John Owen as saying that the Lord's Supper is a way of receiving Christ "that is not in

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<sup>42</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 97, citing Thomas Ridgely, *Body of Divinity*, vol 4 (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1815), 163, 165.

<sup>43</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 97, citing Jonathan Edwards, *On Full Communion. Works*, vol 1 (New York, 1844), 145, 146.

<sup>44</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 100, citing John Dick, *Lectures on Theology by the Late Rev. John Dick* (Philadelphia: Wardle, 1844), Lectures XCI, XCII.

<sup>45</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 104.

<sup>46</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 104.



prayer, that is not in the hearing of the word, nor in any other part of divine worship whatever.”<sup>47</sup> Still, it is apparent that Nevin’s main concern is not sacrament *over* word, but the objective nature of the catholic faith as opposed to the inward turning subjectivism necessarily encouraged by the rationalistic positioning of the word.

Continuing his argument, Nevin teases out additional contrasts between the “old Reformed” and the “modern Puritans.” Where the proper Reformed view recognizes the mystery and even miracle of the sacrament, the modern Puritans merely offer respect, “as a common Fourth of July celebration.”<sup>48</sup> Where the old Reformed find actual union with Christ and real participation in his person, the modern Puritans meet only moral union, where the ends of the supper are “the enlargement and rectification of our *views*.”<sup>49</sup> Nevin also reaches back to the faith of the early church to validate this objective nature of the sacraments. He recognizes some differences between the proper Reformed view and that of the primitive church, but insists that even in the early church “the elements were more than memorials simply and signs. They were made to bear the designation of the Lord’s body and blood in the way of common liturgical expression[.]”<sup>50</sup> Nevin closes the chapter with a short section on “rationalism and the sects” pointing out and lamenting the “low estimate of the sacraments” that leave them “without any objective value or force in their own nature.”<sup>51</sup> For Nevin, it is not surprising that this leads to the fracturing of the church into sects.

The final two chapters of *The Mystical Presence* seek to trace additional philosophical and biblical foundations of the proper Reformed view of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Though the

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<sup>47</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 104, citing John Owen, *Twenty-Five Discourses Suitable to the Lord’s Supper*, (1760; repr., *Works*, vol. 17, London: Richard Baynes, 1826), 268.

<sup>48</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 105.

<sup>49</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 109, citing Timothy Dwight, *Theology Explained and Defended in a Series of Sermons*, (Middletown, CT: Clark and Lyman, 1819). Emphasis added.

<sup>50</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 113.

<sup>51</sup> Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 132.

final chapter (“Biblical Argument”) in particular does demonstrate the importance of the written word in Nevin’s theological method, neither directly addresses worship and thus must lie beyond the scope of this paper.

Perhaps because *The Mystical Presence* is Nevin’s best known work, and because of the stark contrast between its Eucharistic theology and the common understandings of the Lord Supper among nineteenth century Reformed Americans, Nevin has drawn criticism for disregarding the place of the preached word. However, throughout the book, we see that his primary concern is not the prioritization of the sacrament over the word, but rather, the recognition and even elevation of the objective, real presence of Christ in worship through the sacrament.

### III. Pastoral Theology Lectures

During the 1840s Nevin’s teaching responsibilities at Mercersburg included a course on pastoral theology. The six extant lectures align well with the concerns that we have seen Nevin exhibit in *The Anxious Bench* and *The Mystical Presence*.<sup>52</sup> Hamstra notes that “they affirm Nevin’s view of the church as the body of Christ containing ‘objective grace in the institutions of the gospel.’”<sup>53</sup>

Though not uniformly, Nevin often uses “preaching” as a shorthand phrase to refer generally to multiple aspects of the pastoral office. Some of these instances are quotes of scripture (“How shall they preach except they be sent?”<sup>54</sup>), and others incorporate such quotes (“We preach in vain, if we cannot say, ‘I believe and therefore speak’”<sup>55</sup>). But others are scriptural allusions

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<sup>52</sup> John Williamson Nevin, *The Reformed Pastor: Lectures on Pastoral Theology*, ed. Sam Hamstra, Jr. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006). The lectures are based on sets of classroom notes captured by four students across multiple years during the latter half of the 1840s.

<sup>53</sup> Sam Hamstra, Jr., “Introduction,” in *The Reformed Pastor: Lectures on Pastoral Theology* by John Williamson Nevin (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), xi.

<sup>54</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 9.

<sup>55</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 28.

and Nevin's own words: "How shall we stand it to preach Christ and his cross continually to a stupid and gainsaying world, if he dwell not deeply in our hearts by faith and love!"<sup>56</sup> Similarly, "Show me a proud, passionate, self-willed student, and I see in him one that will preach himself more than Christ, and spread difficulty and trouble around him in the church."<sup>57</sup> When he characterizes the importance of looking upon oneself as acting under a divine commission, he asserts, "It is easy to see, however, how important and necessary this inward habit is for the man who is called to preach the Gospel, and how diligently it ought to be cultivated by all who aspire to this work."<sup>58</sup> This happens frequently enough that the lectures convey that the pastor is primarily (but not solely) a preacher. Though these instances do not explicitly describe the place of the word in worship, they do show a recognition on Nevin's part of the central role that word and preaching plays in the ministerial office.

The role of the pastor is the concern of the first lecture, entitled, "The Highest Office." The purpose of the ministry is "the edification of the church," and "[t]his may be said to comprehend in a certain sense all that is important in the history of the world."<sup>59</sup> What is most important is salvation history, and Nevin gives an overview of the story of God's work in the world.<sup>60</sup> As in his earlier writings we see that there is a significant narrative aspect to this reality that ministers are to convey through word: "[m]inisters are appointed to teach the divine will—to dispense the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven—to labor for the salvation of the *soul*."<sup>61</sup> He also highlights the power of the ministry in relation to cultural and social institutions, such as the press and government. The word is a central component of that influence: "Legislation does not reach us so far as the pulpit."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 24.

<sup>57</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 33.

<sup>58</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 45.

<sup>59</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 5.

<sup>60</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 5-6.

<sup>61</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 5.

The second lecture describes the call to ministry, and the qualifications Nevin outlines recognize the importance of the word. “Aptness to teach” is paired with piety as the two most important pastoral characteristics, and “eloquence or ability to speak” is a key factor in the intellectual competencies.<sup>63</sup> Other lectures cover the call to ministry, personal holiness, evangelical motives, fields of labor, and the manner of preaching. In one way or another, each of these alludes to the preaching aspect of the ministry, either explicitly or implicitly.

The final two lectures go into more detail about the content (Lecture five, “Fields of Labor”) and the craft (Lecture six, “Manner of Preaching”) of preaching. Similar to descriptions of right preaching in *The Anxious Bench*, Nevin recognizes the importance of scripture over emotion: “Not opinions and fancies of men; it is fearful to trifle with divine things.” And, “[t]he Bible is the ground of all right preaching. It should be studied and much of it committed to memory, so as to have facility in quoting scripture.”<sup>64</sup> Biblical truths “are to be preached in their proper relations and proportions.” He also points to the Bible as the proper source for most illustrations.

He spends much more time on the manner of preaching than on content; however, even in the lecture on the craft of preaching, he insists on the connection between the preached word and the written word: “*It ought to be scriptural.*”<sup>65</sup> He explains the importance of and need for this directive: “Expository preaching, rightly conducted, is the most profitable, but at the same time is the most difficult. The reason why this kind of preaching is so little attended to is that it is so difficult.”<sup>66</sup>

To be sure, a historian seeking a full-blown theology of the word in these lectures will find many lamentable holes and weaknesses. Hamstra recognizes that “Nevin does not offer the classical Reformed perspective of the sermon as the Word of

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<sup>63</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 13-14.

<sup>64</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 55.

<sup>65</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 58.

<sup>66</sup> Nevin, *Pastoral Theology*, 58.

God.”<sup>67</sup> However, we must recognize that at the time that he was teaching this course, Nevin was engaged in theological controversy regarding the church question and his insistence on the place of the sacraments. Nonetheless, the word, especially in the form of preaching, is never far from Nevin’s thinking regarding the role of the Reformed pastor. In fact, Hamstra goes so far as to say that “For Nevin, the pastor is, first and foremost, a servant of the Word!”<sup>68</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

A church controversy in which Nevin participated a few decades later powerfully illustrates how the practices of his nineteenth century German Reformed Church must inform our understanding of the context of his writing. Though contemporary writers criticize Nevin for neglecting the word in his efforts to restore a more classically Reformed understanding of the sacrament, it is easy for us to forget how infrequently congregations then celebrated the Lord’s Supper. The opening rubric of an order of worship produced by a liturgical committee in which Nevin participated puts it starkly: “The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper shall be administered publicly in the Church, in every Congregation, at least twice a year, *and if possible oftener.*”<sup>69</sup> How could he be convicted of an imbalance of sacrament over against word if the prevailing practice in the churches for whom Nevin wrote was to have a service only of the word for fifty out of fifty-two Sundays a year?

As the end of his life neared, Nevin’s writings frequently explicitly addressed the word and its proper place in Christian worship. In 1879, several decades after the works we have examined, Nevin preached (and later published) a communion

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<sup>67</sup> Hamstra, Jr., “Introduction,” xi.

<sup>68</sup> Hamstra, Jr., “Introduction,” xxii.

<sup>69</sup> *A Liturgy, or Order of Worship for the Reformed Church* (Cincinnati: T. P. Bucher, 1869), quoted in Jack Martin Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology: The Liturgical Lessons of Mercersburg* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1979), 388. Emphasis added by Maxwell.

sermon entitled, “The Bread of Life.”<sup>70</sup> A note in the published version of the sermon contains Nevin’s own recognition of earlier emphases that may have diverted significant attention away from the word:

In our past controversies with regard to the Lord’s Supper, we may not have done justice always to what must be considered in this way the true and real pre-eminence of the Word above all sacraments. In contending for the faith delivered to the saints in regard to the sacraments, we may have failed to intone properly what the presence of the Lord in his WORD means, without which there is no room to conceive of his presence among men in any other form. Should this have been so, let us trust that it may be so no longer.<sup>71</sup>

“Failed to intone properly” is correct. Certainly, a more direct focus on the word may have allowed Nevin to expand his argument and attract agreement from a wider swath of the nineteenth century Reformed church. However, even in his earlier writings what we find is quite different from an intentional elevation of the sacraments at the expense of the word. What we find is more a matter of emphasis than a matter of ignorance or neglect. As we have seen, Nevin’s earlier works contain seeds that would bloom into a more explicit recognition in later writings of the high place of the word read and preached in Reformed worship.

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<sup>70</sup> John Williamson Nevin, “The Bread of Life: A Communion Sermon,” *Reformed Quarterly Review* 26 (1879): 14-47.

<sup>71</sup> Nevin, “The Bread of Life,” 28n. DiPuccio, *Interior Sense of Scripture*, 82n6, quotes this in full.

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# Baptismal Language and Myers-Briggs Types

*By Thomas D. Busted*

*“I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, One God, Mother of us all.”*

-Baptismal Formula of Riverside Church, NYC

In one church I attended, congregational meetings had devolved into fierce debates on how to spend money, the authority of ministers, the content and quality of sermons, the style of worship, whether or not to evangelize and if yes then how, and lastly how to excommunicate someone. In the midst of this conflict, one woman in the congregation, with quite a bit of clarity, observed: “our debates are not theological; rather, we have different Myers-Briggs types at war with one another.” Much of the debate over baptismal language evidences the different concerns of the four major temperaments of the total sixteen types: SP, SJ, NF, and NT.<sup>72</sup> I suspect the major polarity in our current debate is between SP and SJ, with NF and NT attempting to mediate between these two temperaments.

SP temperaments strive to make the church relevant to its current context.<sup>73</sup> Worship, language, programming, etc. ought to serve the church here and now in its particular local context. Language for God needs to be sensitive to the current context. If that language can be perceived as contributing to current systems of injustice and oppression, the church has a pastoral and moral

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<sup>72</sup> The discussion of the sixteen Myers-Briggs types and the four major temperaments is based on *Personality Type and Religious Leadership* by Roy M. Oswald and Otto Kroeger (The Alban Institute, 1988). The discussion on the four temperaments begins on p. 57 and is discussed throughout the book in relation to the pastoral role (Chapter VI), prayer (Chapter VII), heresy and sexual impropriety (Chapter IX), and temperaments as they relate to congregations’ program, process, context, and identity (Appendix).

<sup>73</sup> Oswald and Kroeger, p. 168.

obligation to reform its language. If traditional masculine imagery for God contributes to an oppressive patriarchal society, legitimizing subordination of women and children, the imagery must be discarded.<sup>74</sup> SP is willing to lay aside beloved but rigid tradition for the sake of ministering to the here and now.<sup>75</sup>

The SJ temperament sees the church's current identity tied primarily to the past.<sup>76</sup> Thus "the church is a bastion of strength against evil, corruption, and transience [...] an island of stability and continuity in a changing world [...] a place where religious history is rehearsed and celebrated."<sup>77</sup> For an SJ, changing language for God is to break with the past and threaten the continuity of the tradition revealed and passed down through the ages despite ever-changing contexts. SJ's seek to reclaim and clarify past teaching for the present.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> "Frequent use of paternal imagery for God may encourage violence against children, and it may be a barrier to effective Christian witness and faith response. [...] Use of paternal imagery for God in the [baptismal] formula—especially in the absence of and feminine imagery for God—cannot be ethically justified. Masculine and paternal imagery has been so predominant in Christian worship and feminine imagery has been so lacking that masculine language has become literalized and idolatrous. So long as society is structured according to patriarchal patterning, 'God the Father' will not be free from association with powerful and sometimes abusive patriarchs in home and society. Ruth C. Duck, *Gender and the Name of God: The Trinitarian Baptismal Formula* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1991), p. 181.

<sup>75</sup> "Viable alternatives to the [baptismal] formula are available. In my opinion, most if not all of these alternatives are preferable to present practice." Duck, p. 181.

<sup>76</sup> "They want to belong to a church that's built on a solid, time-tested tradition. [...] Thus preserving that which has lasting value becomes the SJ clergy's first priority in ministry." Oswald and Kroeger, p. 175.

<sup>77</sup> Oswald and Kroeger, p. 176.

<sup>78</sup> I suspect Martha L. Moore-Keish's article to be an SJ dominant response. She appeals to "common scriptural and early church roots" (p. 82) such as liturgical history (p. 81), church Fathers (p.82), and the father of Reformed theology, Calvin (p.88). She stresses the importance of *reinterpreting* and *reclaiming* the *tradition* of baptism as new birth (p. 90) as it pertains to the baptized person's historically based identity as a child of the covenant (p.89) and disciple (pp. 87 and 93). "Creation and New Creation in Baptism," in *Theology in Service of the*

The NT temperament is not tied to the past, but wants to use the best of the past to inform the present and future.<sup>79</sup> NT is just as reluctant to discard the wisdom of the past as they are to follow tradition slavishly and without critical inquiry and scholarly research. NT will consider new possibilities for language,<sup>80</sup> but judge them critically based on the body of wisdom from the past, often seeking to discern what is in agreement with the past wisdom (orthodox) and what contradicts past wisdom (heresy).<sup>81</sup> NT's remedy for the 'problem' of language is education, namely catechesis.<sup>82</sup>

NF tries to reveal unspoken motivations and tensions, presenting them side by side without resolving the issue one way or another.<sup>83</sup> Riverside's baptismal formula is a perfect example of an NF solution. It attempts to mediate SJ's need for historical continuity with SP's need for contextual relevance. Problematically though, neither SP nor SJ are entirely satisfied with the compromise as the tension is articulated side-by-side rather than neatly resolved.<sup>84</sup>

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*Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph D. Small, III.* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

<sup>79</sup> Oswald and Kroeger, p. 174.

<sup>80</sup> Kathryn E. Greene-McCreight gives serious and thoughtful consideration to every proposed alternative for baptismal formula (pp. 298-307), especially the Riverside formula (p. 306-307). "When I Say God, I Mean Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: On Ecumenical Baptism Formula," in *Pro Ecclesia* 6.3 (Summer 1997): pp. 289-308.

<sup>81</sup> See especially Greene-McCreight's footnotes: "logical error" (n. 3, p. 289); "Eunomians" (n. 6, p. 291); and "modalism" (n. 30, p. 299).

<sup>82</sup> See Greene-McCreight: p. 294; n. 34, p. 301; and p. 307.

<sup>83</sup> Note this writer's presentation in this reflection paper. Also note that Natilie Wigg-Stevenson does not attempt to change the baptismal formula for her daughter, Georgia's, baptism, but instead holds in unresolved tension various themes throughout her article, as even the title itself suggests: "The Agony and Ecstasy of Baptism," published on Sojourners (<https://sojo.net>).

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Duck (likely an SP) pp. 165-166 beginning: "Unfortunately, however, the Riverside formula is relatively *inadequate* in naming God. [etc.]" (italics are mine, for emphasis). Also, a rigid SJ would probably resist *any* addition to the traditional formula.

It should be stated what the four temperaments have in common in this present debate. All four take baptism seriously. All four take the language used in worship and baptism seriously. All take seriously the imagery evoked during worship and baptism. Therefore, one should be careful not to immediately dismiss the other's argument as simply unconcerned about the future of the church--the evidence suggests otherwise. All are motivated in some way out of concern for the good of the church, even when their well-intentioned concerns threaten to divide rather than unify.

# SERMONS

## Ascension Day Sermon: “*We are all going, too.*”<sup>85</sup>

*The Reverend W. Scott Axford, M.Div.*

*Editor’s Note:* This was the 2017 Annual Convention Sermon for the Massachusetts Convention of Congregational Ministers (founded in 1692), delivered on Ascension Day, Thursday morning 25th May, at the South Congregational United Church of Christ, Springfield, Massachusetts, prior to a program about William Pyncheon, the Town’s 1641 Founder. The Lessons were Psalms 93 & 47, Luke 24:49-53, and Acts 1:1-11.

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*[Epiclesis:]* Grant, Almighty God, by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that Your Word may be spoken, and heard; for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Risen and Ascended Lord.<sup>86</sup> *Amen.*

Meeting in this City to discuss a learned work about the theological problems of its Founder,<sup>87</sup> we could hardly have chosen a more apt occasion. By keeping the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ on this Fortieth Day of Eastertide— a central part of the Church Year which our Congregational patch of the vineyard are starting to recover—

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<sup>85</sup> © 2017, The Reverend Master Warren Scott Axford.

<sup>86</sup> *Prayer source:* the preacher.

<sup>87</sup> The Honourable William Pynchon, Gentleman and Magistrate. Born 1590, Writtle, Springfield, Essex, England. Founder (1636-1641) of the Town of Springfield in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, named for his birthplace in England. Died 29 October 1662, Wraybury, Tyne, England.

we hear a reminder not only of what the Incarnation accomplished for Christ, but also of its great human consequence for *us*, too.

Saint Luke reports that after the Ascending Lord blessed the Disciples, they returned to the City “with great joy”.<sup>88</sup> Mrs. Noel’s seminal hymn<sup>89</sup> gives us the scene: Jesus faithfully bore *it* up (*creaturely* ranks, “*human light*”)— “bore *it* up triumphant”, “brought *it* back victorious”, and “filled *it* with ... glory”. As Thomas Torrance taught us, at Newton’s Eliot Church in 1991,<sup>90</sup> Christ’s Ascension completes Christ’s Incarnation. “The Word made flesh” and “dwell[ing] among us”<sup>91</sup>— the Triune God’s very Being, after “overflowing” into ours,<sup>92</sup> goes back again “to the central height” of “the Father’s breast”.<sup>93</sup> Truly, here is the fulfillment of Jesus’ last words from the Cross: “It is finished.”<sup>94</sup>

This is why Horace Allen,<sup>95</sup> when speaking of the Reformer who buttresses the beams and spires of our Meetinghouses, taught us that on Ascension Day, John Calvin,<sup>96</sup> had he ever been

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<sup>88</sup> Luke 24:51-53, from the Gospel Lesson for Ascension Day. 1992 *Revised Common Lectionary* (Years A, B, & C).

<sup>89</sup> Caroline Maria Noel, “At the Name of Jesus”, 1870; verses 3 & 4 (*emphasis added*), No. 197 in *The Pilgrim Hymnal*. (The Pilgrim Press: Boston, 1958), based on Philippians 2:9-10; for Ascension Day. It followed the Sermon.

<sup>90</sup> 22 October 1991, Eliot Church United Church of Christ, Newton Corner, Massachusetts. The Rev. Dr. Herbert C. Davis, Pastor [now *Emeritus*].

<sup>91</sup> John 1:14.

<sup>92</sup> The Right Rev. Professor Dr. Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, time and resurrection*. (The Hansdel Press: Edinburgh, 1976), p. 131 (“overflowing”), & p. 112 (gathered up, in a breakthrough to Heaven).

<sup>93</sup> Noel, *loc. cit.* (above), verse 4.

<sup>94</sup> John 19:30.

<sup>95</sup> The Rev. Professor Dr. Horace T. Allen, Jr. (A.B., Princeton; S.T.B., Princeton Theological Seminary; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)), Faculty at the Boston University School of Theology; Visiting Faculty at the Harvard Divinity School.

<sup>96</sup> The premier theologian and leader of the Reformed [Protestant] Church and its tradition, from his native Noyon, France (born 10 July 1509), Geneva, Switzerland (died 28 May 1564), and beyond. The Rev. Master Jean Calvin’s *Institutio Religionis Christianae*, “Institutes of the Christian Religion” (1536; final revision, 1559), is one of the very major theological works of the Church’s



so inclined, could really have let himself go: a victory won which the world can never undo; a conquering Christ<sup>97</sup> whom the principalities and powers can never crucify again; a “great joy” which is truly finished, once and for all. Just imagine a Geneva gown topped with streamers and a party hat.

And yet, for those whom Jesus blessed and commissioned—and then left behind— there is an ambivalence to it all, a poignancy reflected in our prayers, especially as revised by a Universalist Church<sup>98</sup> which for over a century featured this holiday on its short-list for the Christian Year (instead of tapering off for the summer, after Easter). Having lost the Lord for Three Days in defeat and death, the Church gets Him back; but now, a mere Forty Days later, He’s gone again— and this time, until the end of time. Thus might the People of God still be— had we not Jesus’ assurance that where He is going, He will “prepare a place” for us.<sup>99</sup>

Jesus is going— but *for Christ’s sake, remember*— we are all going, *too*. As Saint Paul taught us, “Where once in Adam we were all to die, so now in Christ we are all to be made alive.”<sup>100</sup>

Yo, Bucko— that means *you*, too.

If this central truth has sometimes slipped from prominence in our gathered limb of the Body of Christ, it is quite understandable. Three-and-a-half centuries ago, in 1658, our Congregational forbears took their covenants and Cromwellian<sup>101</sup> structures with them out of the spacious Hall of

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Second Millennium, which, with his extensive Scripture commentaries, were and remain a primary influence on the Founders of New England, and generally.

<sup>97</sup> Revelation 17:14: the Logo (over the Cross upon the Holy Bible) of the Universalist Church of America, “Christ Will Conquer.”

<sup>98</sup> *Book of Prayer*. (Universalist Publishing House: Boston, 1864): The Christian Year. for Ascension Day, and for Sunday after Ascension. In some subsequent editions [1872, 1894, 1913], the prayerbooks were published as *The Gloria Patri*.

<sup>99</sup> John 14:3.

<sup>100</sup> I Corinthians 15:22: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. [King James Version]” It is a core citation in the Universalist *Book of Prayer* liturgy for Eastertide.

<sup>101</sup> The Honourable Oliver Cromwell, M.P., Born 1599, Huntingdon, Yorkshire, England. Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England (1655 -1658) and

Westminster,<sup>102</sup> where they did not have the votes, and into the more intimate Palace of Savoy,<sup>103</sup> where they did. In Chapter VI of the Savoy Declaration, the Puritans modified the Presbyterians (so to speak) by adding two Covenants to the Westminster Profession: the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. Then, in Chapter VIII, they added a third Covenant, about Christ the Mediator. This is the Office which so concerned our local Founder: Christ's "Mediatoriall Obedience" and "Sacrifice". It was enough to send William Pyncheon on his own errand into the wilderness:<sup>104</sup> one of heresy and exile.<sup>105</sup>

Said they at Savoy: "It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to chuse and ordain the Lord Jesus his onely begotten Son, **according to a Covenant made between them both** [*that's the addition*: "according to a Covenant made between them both"], to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Saviour of his Church...."<sup>106</sup> This means that, at some point in time, the Father and the Son *decided*

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Commander of the (Parliamentarian) New Model Army. Died 3 September 1658; his reported last words were "Will no one here praise God?"

<sup>102</sup> The Westminster Assembly, 1643-1647 (London), resulting in the Westminster Confession (and Catechisms) approved by the Church of Scotland in 1647, by the English Parliament at Westminster in 1648, and by the Synod at Cambridge, Massachusetts Bay in 1648, as part of the Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline. Of interest about the latter: see No. 473, *The Pilgrim Hymnal*. (The Pilgrim Press: Boston, 1958)— "The Song of Moses and the Lamb", based on Revelation 15:3-4, originally in the *Bay Psalm Book* (1647), and sung at the Synod's conclusion, "O Lord, almighty God, thy works Both great and wondrous be!"

<sup>103</sup> The Congregational conference at the Chapel of the Savoy in London, 1658, which issued the Savoy Declaration and Platform of Discipline.

<sup>104</sup> The reference is to Harvard Professor Dr. Perry Miller, *Errand Into The Wilderness* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1956). The title piece was a 16 May 1952 lecture at the John Carter Brown Library (Brown University), Providence, Rhode Island; it paralleled the same-titled 11 May 1670 Election Sermon given by the Rev. Master Samuel Danforth (born 1626; A.B., 1643, Harvard College; Pastor at Roxbury, Massachusetts, 1650-74; died 1674).

<sup>105</sup> See note below: Powers, p. 104 (quote). He moved back to his native England; he never recanted and he never returned.

<sup>106</sup> Quoted, with boldface, in Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*. (The Pilgrim Press: Boston, 1960), p. 375.

that the Son would become Mediator. They *willed* this gracious redemption. They *agreed* to effect this consequential atonement.

But here's the problem: They didn't *have to*— and They *could have not have*. Dare I put it this way: There was a time when this third Covenant was *not*.<sup>107</sup>

The Father calls the Son into the Throne Room, and says, “Look, Son, Adam and Eve have screwed it all up, and I want you to go down there and fix it.” And, in Mediatorial Obedience, with all the suffering and sacrifice that would be involved, Jesus said, “OK, Dad, I'll go take care of it. See you later, when I'm done.” Uh-oh. Governor Winthrop,<sup>108</sup> please call your office.

You see the rub—and it is a big one: the Incarnation of Jesus Christ becomes a late-in-time<sup>109</sup> response to a *problem*. (Springfield Founder Pyncheon, a Magistrate concerned with justice, wrestled with this; *his* problem was that he did it in *ink*). How can a truly Divine, pre-existent, Christ the Son— what our Reverend Convention Speaker calls a “timeless and protected and pristine” Christ<sup>110</sup>— *really* bear our sins by imputation and *really* suffer in a truly *human* way, given *Who* He was and *where* He was— that is, existing up there with the Father from the beginning of all time, on until the angels sang on Christmas Eve? After all, as the Latin Church taught us, what is not Assumed is

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<sup>107</sup> The reference is to the Fourth Century slogan of the Arians: “There was a time when the Son was not.”

<sup>108</sup> The Honourable Mr. John Winthrop. Born 22 January 1588, Edwardstone, Suffolk, England. M.A., Cambridge, c. 1613; first Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1629-34; 1637-40; 1642-44; 1646-49. Died, Boston, Suffolk, New England, 26 March 1649.

<sup>109</sup> “Christ, the everlasting Lord! Late in time behold him come, Offspring of the Virgin's womb.” The Rev. Fr. Charles Wesley, “Hark! The herald angels sing”, 1739; from verse 2, No. 120 in *The Pilgrim Hymnal*. (The Pilgrim Press: Boston, 1958).

<sup>110</sup> The Rev. Master David Milton Powers, *Damnable Heresy*. (Wipf & Stock: Eugene, Oregon, 2015), p. 112 (quote); see also pp. 104ff., 113, & 117. MCCM 2017 Annual Convention Speaker (A.B., Carleton College; S.T.B., 1967, the Harvard Divinity School; United Church of Christ Pastor).

not Redeemed. No wonder the Great and General Court<sup>111</sup> reacted so strongly. The stakes could hardly have been higher—and not just back then, and not just for our cities on a hill<sup>112</sup> today. It is the result of prioritizing Divine *Will* over Divine *Nature*, and of privileging God’s *Benevolence* over God’s *Being*.

Horace Allen also taught us: You know, the people who *really* understand all of this are the *Greeks*— if only we can get them to explain it to us. So let us shed a millennium, and travel from the Seventeenth Century in the West, to the Seventh Century in the East (well before the Eleventh Century’s Saint Anselm!<sup>113</sup>). There we find Saint Maximos the Confessor: the theologian-Abbot of Chrysopolis in Eastern Greece and the scourge of the monophyites.

Saint Maximos, along with the Greek Orthodox today, start theologically not with the *Will* or *Acts* of God; they start with the *Being* of God, the God Whose very *Nature*<sup>114</sup> is a Communion of Persons. The Divine Being is three Persons in relation— related by *Nature*, not by *Will* or *Choice*. This Divine Communion, in

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<sup>111</sup> The official name for the Massachusetts Bay colonial legislature; it remains so in today’s Commonwealth and Bay State.

<sup>112</sup> Master John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charitie”, sermon at Southampton, England, prior to embarkation for New England on 29 March 1630 aboard the *Arbella*; citing Matthew 5:14 from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>113</sup> Eleventh Century Doctor of the Church and Archbishop of Canterbury who was sent from Rome as missionary to the Anglo-Saxons and developed the doctrine of the Substitutionary Atonement of Christ, whereby the Saviour on Good Friday pays the debt and satisfies the demands of Divine Justice on behalf of a guilty humanity. He developed this in order to work Christian theology (as missionaries do) through the categories of the local Anglo-Saxon legal and feudal chivalric codes. It is a continuing teaching from the Church’s early Second Millennium, and a primary accent today of Evangelical Christianity; it is *not* the *only* way to understand the Lord’s Passion and Resurrection! His Feast Day in the West is 21 April (ironically, the same day on which in 1852 the Universalist Church founded Tufts College on Walnut Hill in Medford, Massachusetts).

<sup>114</sup> So does the Universalist Church’s bedrock 22 September 1803 Winchester [N.H.] Profession of Faith (Article II.): “We believe there is one *God*, whose *nature* is Love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of Grace, who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness.” (*emphasis added*)

turn, inevitably creates us in Their image,<sup>115</sup> by *Nature*, and relates to, dwells with, and restores all these persons— that is, restores all this humanity.<sup>116</sup> As Saint Maximos taught us, it is the Incarnation of the Son of God which is the Purpose of *History*— the Purpose of *Being*, done to accomplish the *theosis* of humanity as a whole: “*theosis*” meaning divinization of us human persons: the restoration of our Divine Likeness and Image.<sup>117</sup> As Charles Wesley taught us in his beloved hymn: “Finish, then, ... thy great salvation Perfectly restored in thee; Changed from glory into glory Till in heaven we take our place, ... Lost in wonder, love, and praise.”<sup>118</sup> — or, as Saint Luke reported, “with great joy.”<sup>119</sup>

As my National Council of Churches Faith & Order colleague, Greek Orthodox theologian Dr. Despina Prassas, taught us about Saint Maximos<sup>120</sup> in a lecture at Brown, as several jaws *dropped*: humanity’s Fall— the sin of Adam and Eve— was *NOT* the triggering event of the Incarnation! Jesus Christ’s Incarnation was not a response to a *problem*. It did not require a special Covenant. It did not result from a particular Divine Decision. It was not an act of Divine Will. *NO*: it was an outpouring, what Thomas Torrance called an *overflow* of the

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<sup>115</sup> Genesis 1:27.

<sup>116</sup> Like so many insights on Trinitarian theology, this one comes from the late Notre Dame Professor Dr. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us*. (Harper: San Francisco, 1991), especially p. 66 (on the nature of persons). She in turn stood on the shoulders of Professor Dr. John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*. (Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press: Crestwood, N.Y., 1993).

<sup>117</sup> The Rev. Professor Dr. F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. “Saint Maximos” (Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 895. His Feast Day in the West is 13 August.

<sup>118</sup> The Rev. Father Charles Wesley, “Love divine, all loves excelling,” 1747; verse 4, No. 228 in *The Pilgrim Hymnal*. (The Pilgrim Press: Boston, 1958). Based on II Corinthians 3:18.

<sup>119</sup> Luke 24:52b.

<sup>120</sup> Professor of Theology, Providence College. Her lecture was on Thursday 6 March 2008, for the Orthodox Christian Fellowship of Brown University, on the occasion of their Second Annual Lecture for the Feast Day of [Fourth Century Bishop] Saint Gregory Nyssa (in the West, 9 March): “God pursues us every day: The theology of St. Maximos the Confessor”.

very *Being* of our Triune God. Closer to home here in the Connecticut River Valley, you will find it in Pastor Jonathan Edwards's<sup>121</sup> 1755 "Dissertation concerning the end for which God created the world": overflowing love; Persons relating to persons; Being's affirmation of Being.

It is all in the deepest *Nature* of things.

It is all in the *Nature* of the deepest reality that there is.

It is all in the *Nature* of Almighty God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Universalist tradition which I have served for over twenty-five years has taught me that Ascension Day is central to Gospel faith. It has taught me that the Christian message of Salvation is seriously impoverished if it is not first and always Trinitarian: God's Being as a Communion of Persons. And it has taught me that when we proclaim "the Lord gone up with a shout",<sup>122</sup> we gain a certain *confident hope*,<sup>123</sup> and, as Saint Luke reported, we return with a "great joy."<sup>124</sup> And, this is all *because*, "like as we do believe the Lord to have ascended into the heavens,"<sup>125</sup> we also know, that *WE* are all going, *too*.

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<sup>121</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1834; 1987 reprint), Vol. I, pp. 94-121. The Rev. Master Edwards was born 5 October 1703, East Windsor, Connecticut; A.M., Yale, 1722; Pastor at Northampton, Massachusetts, 1726-50; at Stockbridge, 1751-57; President of Princeton, 1757-58; died 22 March 1758, Princeton, New Jersey. America's greatest theologian.

<sup>122</sup> Psalm 47:5, from the Psalm for Ascension Day.

<sup>123</sup> From the Rev. Master Duke T. Gray (B.D., 1965, Meadville-Lombard Theological School, Chicago), Pastor Emeritus of the First Parish in Malden, Massachusetts (Universalist), "What Does Scripture Say About Universal Salvation?", *The Unitarian Universalist Christian*, Vol. LX (2005), p. 79: "universal salvation as the essence of Christian hope".

<sup>124</sup> Luke 24: 52b, from the Gospel for Ascension Day.

<sup>125</sup> *Book of Prayer*. (Universalist Publishing House: Boston, 1864): **The Christian Year**. Ascension Day (excerpt).

**ADDENDUM:** The underlined text, below, indicates the Universalist Church of America's additions to the [1842 Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.] *Book of Common Prayer*; found in the *Book of Prayer* (Universalist Publishing House: Boston, 1864, 1894, 1917, 1941, 1957): **The Christian Year.**

**Ascension Day:** “Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God that like as we do believe thy best-beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens; so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with him continually dwell in thy glorious presence, world without end. *Amen.*”

**Sunday after Ascension:** “O God, the King of glory, who hast exalted thy Son Jesus Christ with great triumph into thy kingdom in heaven; we beseech thee, leave us not comfortless; but send to us thy Holy Spirit to comfort us; and exalt us into the same place whither he has gone before, even into thy own blessed and glorious presence, there to dwell in fullness of joy forever and ever. *Amen.*”

**The Order of the Administration of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion.** *Proper Prefaces* [one of four listed, with Christmas, Easter, & Pentecost]. Upon Ascension Day: “Through thy most dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who, after his most glorious resurrection, manifestly appeared to all his apostles, and in their sight ascended up into heaven to prepare a place for us— ; that where he is thither we might also ascend, and reign with him in glory.”

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**The Rev. Mr. Axford**, Member and Ordinand of The First Church. [Plymouth], is since 1992 the Nineteenth Pastor of the First Universalist Church in Providence, and, 2002, President of the Universalist Church of Rhode Island. Baptized in Plymouth's Church of the Pilgrimage (Congregational, now United Church Christ) two weeks before the UCC merger, graduate of Dartmouth (1978) and the Harvard Divinity School (1988), he holds UUA (Unitarian Universalist) and NACCC (Congregational Christian Churches) Ministerial Fellowship. He

serves, since 2005, on the National Council of Churches Faith & Order Commission, and is a Life Member and former Vice President of the Mercersberg Society.



# **“To Whom It Does Concern: The Gift of the Ten Commandments”**

*A Recreation of a Sermon Given to Celebrate  
The 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Heidelberg UCC, York, PA  
Sunday, October 8, 2017, 10:45 AM  
Exodus 20:2*

**“I am the LORD your God, who brought you  
out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”**

*Rev. Dr. F. Christopher Anderson*

This morning we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Heidelberg UCC. It is wonderful to slow down, pause, and reflect on and rejoice in the grace of God.

The Old Testament text for today is Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20. I will be preaching on one verse within this text. Exodus 20:2 states **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”**

The truth is that if humans were totally logical and rational we would not need a sermon. That is, if we were computers or possibly robots, I could stop right now and everyone would automatically apply this verse logically to their thinking, and no sermon would be required. But the reality is that we are not 100% rational beings. We believe things for many **“...various and sundry...”** reasons that often do not include logic. (By the way, this is true for both liberals and conservatives!)

In the Christian church there are two complete misunderstandings of the Ten Commandments. These two errors would be rejected if we really understood the importance of this preface to the Ten Commandments. One of the problems with our teaching of the Ten Commandments is that we all too often merely enumerate the 10 laws and do not even read or speak about this basic introduction.

## **THE FIRST ERROR**

The first misunderstanding of the Ten Commandments is simple. Somehow people, including many Christians, believe that the Ten Commandments are a test, which if passed in life would bring us salvation. People tend to view the Ten Commandments as the college course BIO 101. They believe that the Ten Commandments are a test for everyone.

When I was a freshman at SUNY Albany in the fall of 1969 I had two friends who wanted to be doctors. One was intensely driven by this desire, the other was quite interested but not driven. The first passed the first semester of BIO 101 and went on to become a doctor. The other did not. He had a talk with the professor at the end of the first semester and was given credit for another course and did not become a doctor.

One must understand the goal the university had in providing BIO 101. There was a Pre-Med program that was basically the only way to get into Med School. The problem for the university was that there were around four times as many students who wanted to be in this program than the university had room to include.

Therefore BIO 101 was created. BIO 101 was not like SOC 101, PSY 101, or ENG LIT 101. These others were for students testing out what major they might be interested in. They were normally not hard to pass. The professor's job was to help each student discover if this was a major they were interested in and help them pass the course whether they chose this as a major or not. On the other hand, BIO 101 was designed as a gateway to the Pre-Med program. The professor's job was not to encourage or to help everyone to succeed. The professor's job was to get rid of 75% of the students!

This is how many people view the Ten Commandments. They see the Commandments as a way to earn their salvation. They view the Ten Commandments as a way to earn their redemption, their salvation, their ticket to heaven. As a result they often tended to see themselves as superior to those who are not so moral!

This is the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the beginning of what we have come to call "The Reformation." The above is exactly what

Luther preached, taught, and wrote against. Salvation is not by works but by faith!

Yet even after all these years of teaching Justification by Faith our whole culture still sees salvation as something one earns by being moral. The best way to see this is by thinking of the genre of jokes that have someone standing before St. Peter's Gate and asking to get into heaven. They all stress that moralism gets one into heaven.

I love the one where Peter and Paul are discussing the entrance of one man into heaven and they are trying to find one good moral deed that he had done that could get him into heaven. Peter finally finds on the computer that he did do one good thing. In 1951 he gave a dollar to a homeless man on a bridge in Philadelphia. Peter looks at Paul and asks "What do we do?" Paul answers "Give him his dollar and tell him to go to hell."

Now all of this misunderstanding concerning the Ten Commandments and moralism should logically be discarded merely by understanding Exodus 20:2. **"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."** It is addressed to people who are already redeemed.

I am a married man. I have a wonderful wife, Wendy. Today she is in North Carolina with her sister and her cousins. Throughout our marriage Wendy and I have gotten mail. Sometimes it is addressed to me, sometimes to Wendy and sometimes to both of us. When it is address to me I open it. When it is addressed to both of us I open it and then pass it on to Wendy. When it is addressed to Wendy alone I do not open it. The reason is simple. It was not addressed to me. So unless Wendy wants to share the information that is in the sealed envelope with me, it is none of my business.

Let us take another look at Exodus 20:2. **"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."**

You will notice that the Ten Commandments are addressed to certain people. Just like when a letter is addressed to Wendy and not to me. God is not addressing this letter to everyone. Let us examine the address of this letter. Whom does God address and who does God not address?

- It is not addressed to people who do not confess the God of Israel as their God.
- It is not addressed to people who have not been redeemed **“...out of the house of slavery.”**
- It is addressed to people who confess the God of Israel as their God.
- It is addressed to people who have been redeemed **“out of the house of slavery.”**

Now I hope this is becoming clearer. The Ten Commandments are not a test given to everyone like BIO 101 to see if they can earn their salvation or their redemption. Instead they are addressed to people who have been given salvation and redemption as a gift to help guide them in their lives of gratitude for this salvation. Therefore Jews and Christians see that these commandments are given to them to help them live their life of gratitude for God’s grace in redeeming them.

## THE SECOND ERROR

Some might object that in teaching about the second misunderstanding of the Ten Commandments I am entering politics. The truth is that I am teaching theology. I am seeking to apply Exodus 20:2. **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”**

There is a politician who is called “The Ten Commandment Judge.” He has gone against the Federal government and sought to have the Ten Commandments have a place of honor in the Court House he presided over. I am not arguing Federal law at all. I am teaching theology. I am applying Exodus 20:2. This judge was wrong theologically. The Ten Commandments should not be forced upon people to whom they are not addressed. Just as I should not be forced to read a letter addressed to my wife alone we should not make people subject to the Ten Commandments who do not confess the God of Israel or see themselves as redeemed.

At first this idea of honoring the Ten Commandments sounds wonderfully Christian and Jewish. Christians and Jews find

the Ten Commandments basic to our faiths. Therefore many Christians and Jews applaud the stance of this politician.

Again I want to remind us of our text in Exodus 20:2. **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”** I also want to remind you that this preface is addressed to only certain people.

Now let us think this through.

- Do all the people who enter any US Court House confess that the God of Israel is their God?
- Do all of the people who enter any US Court House claim to be redeemed by the God of Israel?

The answer to these questions is obviously no. So if God is not addressing them in this letter why do we assume that God is talking to them by placing this personally addressed letter to people God was not writing to?

Aside from this basic question of who does God address in the Ten Commandments we can ask these other questions.

- Are all Americans required by USA law to believe that the God of Israel is the only God?
- Are all Americans required by USA law to not make idols?
- Are all Americans required by USA law to honor the name of a God they do not confess?
- Are all Americans required by USA law to go to church or synagogue once a week?
- Lastly, how in the world is the USA government able to enforce laws against things that are only thoughts and never actions such as **“Thou shall not covet?”**

## **THE CORRECT VIEW OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

We have seen that there are two views of the Ten Commandments held by many Christians and non-Christians that are clearly wrong. One sees the Ten Commandments as a way to earn one’s salvation. This negates the doctrine of Justification by Faith. The other see the Ten Commandments as the law of the land

for everyone whether they are Christians or Jews or atheists or whatever. This teaches the error of theocracy.

Let us again look at this one simple verse: **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”**

This is the preface to the Ten Commandments. Here we see that The Ten Commandments are a gift from God to those who are redeemed to help guide them to live a life of gratitude for the salvation they already have been given. Deuteronomy 6:24 states that the laws of God are **“...for our good always.”**

Many view the Ten Commandments as burdensome and limiting. They see them as taking away our freedom. Yet I John 5:3b states **“And his commandments are not burdensome.”** I do not have the time to quote the many other texts that go against this negative view of the Ten Commandments. But I do have one illustration.

My father was, at one point in his life, a High School Driver’s Education Instructor. Every time I got into the car I got a free lesson. One of the main things he emphasized was the importance of the line that divides roads.

In the USA we drive on the right side. Was this law made because the government wanted to take away our freedom to drive on the left hand side of the road? Does this law harm us by never allowing us to enjoy driving on the left side of the road? Should we start a movement to ban this terrible robbery of our right to self-expression?

The answer is no. It is a law made **“....for our good always.”** It means that, on the whole, we can be sure that the oncoming traffic is on the other side of the road. Therefore this wonderful law allows us to go 55 MPH knowing that no one will be driving directly into you if you and they are obeying the law. We should therefore celebrate not only Heidelberg’s 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary but celebrate these wonderful gifts to us, the Ten Commandments. They keep us safe on the right hand side of the road.

In conclusion I want to quote from a book by the third pastor of Heidelberg United Church of Christ. Rev. Dr. James Good wrote

a book entitled AID TO THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM. The name of this church comes from this catechism that taught three basic items of the Christian faith; The Apostles Creed, The Ten Commandments and The Lord's Prayer.

In this book Rev. Good includes Question # 114 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

*Q. Can those who are converted to God keep all these commandments perfectly?*

*A. No: for even the holiest of men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience, yet with earnest purpose they do begin to live according to all the commandments of God. (113)*

This is a word of comfort to us who confess the God of Israel as our God. This is a word of joy to those of us who see ourselves as redeemed “**...out of the house of slavery.**”

We do not need to be perfect. As Luther taught, we are both saints and sinners at the same time.

We live by faith. We walk by faith. We serve by faith. We rejoice in the faith. We are so glad that we do not have to earn our salvation. We exalt in the faith that we are not called to force others to be Christians. We are exhilarated knowing that God is in charge and we are not. We are so happy that Jesus is the judge and that judging is beyond our pay grade. We are so grateful that our God has given us light for our journey in the Ten Commandments.

**“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”**

# BOOK REVIEW

A Review of George Hunsinger, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

By the Rev. Joseph Hedden, Jr., Pastor, Emmanuel Reformed United Church of Christ, Export, PA

Oftentimes it seems like theological works are written as if the practical concerns of the ecumenical church don't exist. And ecumenically minded texts can appear thin on the theological side of things. That's why George Hunsinger's *The Eucharist and Ecumenism* is so refreshing. I can think of few major works in the last 30 years that wrestle in depth with *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* **and** Christian Social Ethics, current Reformed/Roman Catholic dialogue **and** the Eucharistic understandings of Calvin, Bucer, Vermigli, Warfield, and Luther.

Hunsinger addresses this unique perspective from the outset. In the introduction he labels his perspective ecumenical theology, which acknowledges "...every tradition in the church has something valuable to contribute even if we cannot yet discern what it is" (p. 2). This ecumenical viewpoint gives the book a very broad purview indeed, and Hunsinger draws deeply from many sources not commonly found together. For example, Hunsinger devotes a whole chapter to integrating H. Richard Niebuhr's Christ and Culture (a book absent major sacramental reflections) with Eucharistic practice. One of the strengths of the book is this ecumenical outlook; diverse faith traditions are often highlighted and the author finds ways to emphasize their positive contributions. In this way, the reader learns a great deal about obscure or hard to find doctrines.

The major thesis of the book is that Eucharistic doctrines, though diverse, need not be church dividing. To pursue this point, Hunsinger uses the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of transelementation as a key to unlock ecumenical understandings of the Eucharist.



Transelementation affirms Christ present (which is a non-negotiable for Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theology) but also may satisfy Protestant theology because there is no essential change to the bread and wine, only addition of the Presence of Christ. Hunsinger believes that further work on transelementation may fruitfully address many of the concerns of the Roman Catholic/Protestant divide. The metaphysical argumentation is dense here and this reviewer found irony in Hunsinger's somewhat lengthy statement about what transelementation "simply" shows (pp. 77-78).

The breadth of the book is surely its strength. Hunsinger is an able and deft interpreter of knotty doctrines. He seems equally sure wading in the metaphysical streams of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century or pointing to the theological perspective of his own mentor, Thomas Torrance. One is left to wonder, though, if the argument is ultimately persuasive to interlocutors who do not share the author's desire for ecumenical dialogue. The author seems to over-emphasize the goodwill and openness of denominational officials, clergy, and the rank and file. The book's argumentation may have been strengthened by a thoroughgoing analysis of the sociological and ecclesiastical forces that stand in the way of ecumenical dialogue. In any event, anyone who seeks the unity of the church and is looking for theological challenge will surely benefit from this fine work.

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