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THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW

Journal of the Mercersburg Society

Number Three

Spring 1987

THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW
Journal of the Mercersburg Society

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

This issue of the New Review represents a new venture for this publication. The newly authorized spring edition will contain essays volunteered or solicited. The fall edition will continue to be devoted to the lectures presented at the Society's annual convocation.

The influence of Mercersburg in the life of the Church continues. John C. Shetler in his article describes the impact of Mercersburg in the liturgical and theological life of the United Church of Christ and in one of that Church's predecessor denominations. Shetler is a founder of the Mercersburg Society.

Linden DeBie walks us through a process followed in a congregation of the Reformed Church in America which introduced Mercersburg principles into corporate worship. DeBie belongs to the rising generation of Mercersburg scholars.

John Williamson Nevin is well-known for his searing critique of sectarianism. Matthew Cox reviews Nevin's criticisms and offers an analysis of the Mercersburg understanding of the Church. Cox is one of a growing number of doctoral students writing in the Mercersburg field.

Many consider the publication of the new Reformed Church in America hymnal, Rejoice in the Lord, a major event in contemporary American hymnody. In his article United Church of Christ musician Gene Paul Strayer presents a fascinating review of the new hymnal. In addition to being a church organist of the first rank, Strayer holds graduate degrees in both theology and sacred music.

In the spirit of the original Mercersburg Review, we encourage critical responses to articles which appear in these pages. All writers are expected to follow the manuscript guidelines which appear on the inside, back cover of the New Review.

Allow me a personal note. As of July 1, 1987, my address and that of the New Mercersburg Review changed to United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, 3000 Fifth Street Northwest, New Brighton, Minnesota 55112, where I am that seminary's president.

Benjamin Griffin
Editor

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

This issue of the *New England Quarterly* presents a new feature for this publication. The newly authorized edition of the essays will contain essays volunteered or solicited. The fall edition will continue to be devoted to the lectures presented at the Society's annual convention.

The influence of Massachusetts in the life of the Church continues. John C. Shaler in his article discusses the life of Massachusetts in the theological and theological sense of the United States of Christ and in the sense of that Church's present-day development. Shaler is a founder of the Massachusetts Society.

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THE INFLUENCE OF MERCERSBURG ON THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

John C. Shetler
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The term, United Church of Christ, conjures many different pictures and symbols in the minds of members and leaders of other communions. Among the catholic communions it appears to be non-catholic, liberal, activist, non-liturgical and perhaps unorthodox. Evangelicals may think of it as liberal, humanistic, watered-down and not biblical in its faith and practice. Others may think of it as not having any identifiable beliefs and tending toward a secularist faith wherein pragmatic action becomes the primary identifying mark.

None of these descriptions are accurate for the United Church of Christ. Probably all variations of theology exist somewhere in the United Church of Christ from humanism and unitarianism to anglo-catholicism and from separatistic churches that make no visible contribution to the denomination to those who would like to establish connectionalism.

The diversity of the United Church of Christ is both a blessing and a curse. In this diversity is there any expression of theology or ecclesiology that will enable these other denominations to understand the United Church of Christ and see it in a different light? How have orthodox faith, doctrine and ecclesiology been manifest within the United Church of Christ? Is any of those faith traditions that characterized the preceding church bodies who united to form this twentieth century American church evident in the United Church of Christ after a quarter of a century?

Despite all that has been said about the denomination, there are in the United Church of Christ recognizable marks of the church catholic, apostolic, reformed and evangelical. Various groups within the denomination may claim to exhibit such marks, but certainly no tradition has made a stronger contribution in this respect than that of Mercersburg.

The theology of Mercersburg knows the church to be incarnational as the Body of Christ, organic, developmental, sacramental, connectional and continues in its life to the church of the apostles. The church is catholic, apostolic, evangelical and reformed and persons incorporated into it are nourished by the Eucharist, receive grace unto eternal life and participate in Christ's redeeming work in the world. Whenever the theology of Mercersburg rises to the surface the United Church of Christ is seen to be in the mainstream of Christendom.

The Mercersburg contributions to the United Church of Christ have been documentary through liturgies, theological and historical writing and literature of devotion, and personal through men and women who teach, preach, write and administer.

The Doctrine of the Church

The church is the Body of Christ. The continuing exposition of this doctrine is one of the chief marks of Mercersburg theology. The embodiment

of this doctrine is the abiding influence of the congregations and persons in every part of the United Church of Christ who subscribe to the Mercersburg theology.

While the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ do not describe the church as the Body of Christ but rather speak of it as an organized fellowship of congregations,¹ the door has always been held open for the influence of the former constituent churches and their "respective continuities and traditions."² Therefore, those who hold the Mercersburg tradition define and describe the church as the Body of Christ. There are many documents from our historic life which bear witness to this doctrine.

The Order for the Holy Communion of the Reformed Church in the U. S. is the central document which so beautifully expresses this fact in the post communion prayer -- "assuring us thereby, that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son."³ In the service for the ordination of ministers the candidates are instructed that "They are appointed to wait upon and serve the Church...his body mystical."⁴ The Constitution of the Reformed Church describes this doctrine in a juridical sense -- "A charter shall not be approved that does not bind the congregation to be an organic member of the Reformed Church in the United States, and to be governed by its constitution and laws."⁵ Of course, this is an expression of the fact that the Body of Christ is organic in nature as the body and its parts are described by St. Paul in I Corinthians 12.

The autonomy paragraph⁶ within the Constitution of the United Church of Christ, contrary to the organic concept of a body knit together as in Ephesians 4:16, describes the church as an organization unconnected and autonomous in all its parts. As indicated above the parts are described as being in fellowship with each other. Philip Schaff during his professorship at Mercersburg saw the problem of autonomy and congregationalism as being a serious flaw in the doctrine of the church. He used the words "atomistic" and "sectarian" to describe the autonomous congregational definition of puritan protestantism. Part of the problem is one of authority. One generation tends to reject the authority of the preceding generation and assuming superiority now for the first time since the apostles establish a pure congregation. Thus, historic continuity through the organic body of the church is non-existent. While this extreme condition may not exist today, it is at this point that the catholic and connectional communions in the ecumenical scene have difficulty in relating to the United Church of Christ. It is at this point of the doctrine of the church and the ministry as the Body of Christ connected, continuous and organic that the denomination will find it difficult to enter into the covenant with the Consultation on Church Union.

It is also at this point that the denomination can claim its heritage in the Reformed Church and Mercersburg in particular. On the basis of the definition given at the beginning of this article and its claimed heritage it can prepare to enter into covenant with the COCU communions.

In the United Church there are horizontal and vertical concepts of the presence of the Word of God. There are those who see the church as a fellowship of believers who organize themselves to call a minister to preach the Bible as the word of God. There are others who see the scriptures as a resource to be read along with sacred writings of other religions. At times

the world not only writes the church's agenda but also defines the meaning of the scriptures. This is to say that in a diverse church which is sometimes called a pluralistic church there are many influences at work.

In the midst of the drift that sometimes occurs when the autonomous principle is functioning for the determination of congregational worship the group may take on the marks of humanism, unitarianism or the philosophical society. One pastor has said to me, "You do not have to believe in Jesus to join our fellowship." The diagram for the explanation of worship becomes the horizontal line. The scripture is what men and women thought about God. In these groups, which one would hope are few in number, rationalism and subjectivism are descriptive for the understanding of the scriptures and the church. In the kind of a system where all shades of understanding and belief may obtain, the Mercersburg movement rises up out of the morass as a rock on which the church is built. That living rock is the Evangel, the Word of God, Christ himself, the Word made flesh.

One of the aspects of being evangelical and catholic is to know that Christ is present in Christ's church. The Word of God in the church is not only presence of the printed page of the Scripture but it is also the presence of the living risen Word incarnate in that mystical body. The church, then, is both divine and human. It is human as there is incorporated into it the people called out of the world by God. It is divine in as much as it is by Christ's spirit that this mystical body, the church, is animated. The church is the mystical union of the human and the divine as the people through grace are incorporated into Christ. It is imperfect as humans are incorporated into it. As the human being is incorporated into Christ the church participates in Christ's perfection. As the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ the incarnate Word those incorporated into it are nourished by Christ through Word and Sacrament (Eucharist).

Considering all this the meaning and power of the post communion prayer becomes more intense.

"Almighty and everlasting God, we give Thee most hearty thanks for the great goodness Thou hast shown toward us at this time, in vouchsafing to feed us, through these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of thy Son, our saviour Jesus Christ; assuring us thereby, that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, and heirs through hope of thine everlasting kingdom, by the merits of his most blessed death and passion...."

The humanistic group, the philosophical society, the unitarian movement and the sociological fellowship all will shrivel and die for the want of nourishment on the Bread of Life. Because people are thirsty and hungry they will be drawn to the one who is that living bread and that living water of life. Those areas of the church know that they are the Body of Christ and offer the strong nourishment of Word and sacrament to all people regardless of class, condition, nationality, gender or ethnic background. In this sense the liturgy becomes a unifying power and mark of identity as people move from place to place, as they are tempted by false teachers and secular influence. By the same token the liturgy becomes one of the identifying marks of the ecumenical church. The shape of the liturgy is traced through the Reformation to the apostolic church.

The Doctrine of the Eucharist

As the doctrine of the church was and is stimulating and refreshing in the age of revivalism so the doctrine of the eucharist was and is life giving and exhilarating in a time of spiritual emptiness on one hand and a day of sentimental familiarity on the other. John W. Nevin's Mystical Presence, published in 1846, gave a modern interpretation of Calvin's doctrine of the presence of Christ in the eucharist but went further to express that presence in such a manner that the average church member once having understood the words and actions of the liturgy, nourished and fed by the Word and sacrament incarnate in the presence of Christ would never again be satisfied with any lesser manifestation of the mystical presence.¹⁰

Nevin interpreted the presence in the eucharist as real, spiritual and mystical. He avoided the concerns of rationalism on the one hand and transubstantiation on the other. Communion with Christ is of objective force and by divine appointment and not simply a good exercise of the mind, a solemn recollection, a devotional feeling or pious resolution. It definitely is not an empty sign. The union with Christ is not a legal one wherein the person has certain rights. "We are made partecipate, not merely in the advantages secured by his mediatorial work -- the rewards of his obedience, the fruits of his bitter passion, the virtue of his atonement, and the power of his priestly intercession -- but also in his true and proper life itself. We partake of his merits and benefits only so far as we partake of his substance."¹¹ "It is by the Spirit indeed that we are united to Christ. Our new life is comprehended in the Spirit as its element and medium. But it is always bound in this element to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ himself....As such it is a real communion with the Word made flesh; not simply with the divinity of Christ, but with his humanity also....In the Lord's Supper, the believer communicates...with Christ himself in his whole living person."¹²

While there may be some evidence of United Church of Christ persons holding a subjective or purely memorialistic view of the eucharist; those who are sons and daughters of Mercersburg teach and preach the doctrine of the real spiritual mystical presence of Christ. The underlying theology of the 1866 liturgy to the 1966 UCC Service of Word and Sacrament has been that of the mystical presence. This then is the norm of the innermost sanctuary of the whole Christian worship for the United Church of Christ.

The Eiclesis

The liturgy for the eucharist carries one of the chief contributions of the Mercersburg school to the whole Reformed family. At the heart of the eucharist prayer is eiclesis or prayer for God through the Holy Spirit at the re-presentation of the gifts of bread and wine to commune the faithful with Christ in Christ's whole living person. This use of the eiclesis in the Provisional Liturgy of 1857 and the Order of Worship of 1866 was the first use of it by a Reformation church outside of the Book of Common Prayer.¹³ Only in the last generation has there been any major effort to reinstate the eiclesis. Generally those who do not use a liturgy will make use of the words of institution at the time of the consecration. A notable proponent of liturgical renewal, Max Thurain of Taize, writes from the Reformed point of view: "The rediscovery of the eiclesis, or invitation of

the Holy Spirit, upon the Eucharist, gives once more to all the churches a much deeper sense of the real presence of Christ. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ."¹⁴

The epiclesis as used in the eucharistic prayer of the Service of Word and Sacrament I of the United Church of Christ, published for the Commission on Worship of the United Church of Christ in 1966, is the direct line of succession of the 1857 and 1866 liturgies for which Nevin and Schaff were the chief writers more than a hundred years ago.

The distinctive element in this Mercersburg epiclesis is that through the action of the Holy Spirit "the bread which we break may be to us the communion of the Body of Christ, and the cup of blessing which we bless, the communion of the blood of Christ."¹⁵ In the act of communication the faithful commune of Christ's living person. Thus by the inclusion of the epiclesis is eliminated the possibility of some persons thinking the miracle of the presence occurs by pronouncement at the narrative of institution, as if by magic. It is eminently clear that through the prayer "Send the Holy Spirit" the miracle of the presence is the medium of and the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting to contrast the 1947 Evangelical and Reformed epiclesis in the paragraph above with that of the 1948 A Book of Worship for Free Churches of the Congregational Christian Churches which says "We humbly beseech Thee to grant thy Holy Spirit and to sanctify this bread and wine that they become to us symbols of the body...." The emphasis is on the Spirit making the bread and wine symbols or signs of the body and blood without reference to the real presence of Christ. The fact that the work of the Holy Spirit is to make the elements symbols seems to indicate that the purpose is to aid the communicant to intellectually remember Christ's sacrifice. This, then, is not an epiclesis which involves the miracle of the presence of Christ in the communion.

The writer has been present in United Church of Christ services of Holy Communion where no liturgy was used. At the time when normally the consecration takes place a Gospel passage of the Last Supper was read, a word of thanks for the sacrifice for Jesus for humanity's salvation was said and the elements were distributed. All too frequently in some areas of the church the Holy Communion is but a memorial day service to Jesus' Last Supper.

These last two examples were given to emphasize the importance of the influence of Mercersburg theology and liturgy in a diverse church. The liturgy not only conveys the norm that is faithful to the catholic apostolic eucharist but also in the essential elements of the anaphora.

The Liturgy as Witness to the Church Catholic

The eucharistic liturgy also at other points witnesses to the catholic concept of the church and thus provides the facilitating factor for the denomination to participate fully in the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) and to take the steps of convergence to the one church including the communions who have participated in the writing of the World Council of Churches' document, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry."

The worshippers confess their faith through the use of the Apostles' or the Nicene Creed which are the catholic creeds of Christendom. The Service of Word and Sacrament I includes the text of both creeds in the service. The Book of Worship published in 1987 by the Office of Church Life and Leadership does not include the text of the creeds in the eucharistic service and only by rubric acknowledges the possible use of them. This is a step backward as the denomination seeks to participate in the ecumenical dialogues of the century and is a serious mistake. The 1987 book is described as a worship resource and thus is not an official liturgy of the church. The Services of the Church and by virtue of paragraph II the 1947 Evangelical and Reformed Book of Worship are official liturgies of the church. Thus in these latter two services the Mercersburg influence will continue.

The 1866 eucharistic service, and in an edited form the 1947 liturgy, contain a magnificent rehearsal of the salvation story within the eucharistic prayer which summarizes the creedal faith and is offered as an act of thanksgiving. A vestige of this continues in the Service of Word and Sacrament I: "With patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs; with the holy Church throughout all the world; with the heavenly Jerusalem, the joyful assembly and congregation of the first born on high; with the innumerable company of angels round about thy throne, the heaven of heavens, and all the powers therein; we worship and adore thy glorious name, joining in the song of the Cherubim and Seraphim."¹⁶ With these soaring words of faith we are joined with the whole catholic and apostolic church.

In a diverse church that honors all types of orders or no order in worship under the name of free worship the structure of a reformed and catholic liturgy serves as a norm and facilitates the movement toward stability and faithfulness to Biblical concepts and essential elements of worship. The distinctive shape of the norm, common to reformed and catholic worship, can be seen in the parts of the eucharistic service in the line of descent from 1857 to 1966.

Solemn Declaration
Sentences of Scripture
Exhortation
Confession of Sin
Kyrie
Absolution
Versicle and Response
Gloria in Excelsis
Collect
Old Testament
Epistle
Gospel
Sermon
Confession of Faith
Versicle and Response
Prayers
Prayer of Communion of Saints
Offertory
Sursum Corda
Preface

Seraphic Hymn
 Narrative of Institution
 Anamnesis
 Epiclesis
 Oblation
 Lord's Prayer
 Fraction
 Libation
 The Pax
 Invitation
 Communication
 Blessing (Table Dismissal)
 Prayer of Thanksgiving (Post Communion Prayer)
 Commission
 Benediction¹⁷

This shape of the liturgy, which may vary slightly from one service to the other in the line of succession, may be compared to the "Lima Liturgy" in the "Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry" (BEM) document or the COCU eucharistic liturgy. While there have been changes in these ecumenical liturgies, the similarity of this century old liturgy to these contemporary services quickly will be seen. Despite the rationale time may show that some of these changes may need to be reconsidered. An example of this confusion of change is the pax (peace).

The peace is given at the close of the eucharistic prayer in the liturgies of 1857, 1866, 1947 and the Lima liturgy. The 1966 liturgy and the COCU liturgy place it following the offertory and before the sursum corda. The 1987 UCC liturgy places it in the service of the word and calls it the "peace of God" which distinguishes it from the peace of Christ. It follows the congregation's confession and the assurance of pardon and is "a sign of their reconciliation with God and each other. All may greet those around them with an embrace or a handshake, accompanied by such words as: 'The peace of God be with you'."¹⁸ This rationale and position promote conversation and the horizontal line of fellowship with the probable difficulty of immediate recovery of the sense of the mystical in worship. The Mercersburg position for the peace after the consecration, the epiclesis, the oblation and the fraction clearly expresses the fact that as Christ is mystically present at this highest moment of worship, feeds the worshiper on himself as the Bread of Life and further incorporates the person into his mystical body, then the peace of Christ is known, given and experienced. When this has occurred then also it can be shared among the faithful. This truly then is a foretaste of heaven. This contribution of Mercersburg needs to be recovered.

The Doctrine of Ministry

The doctrine of the ministry as expressed in BEM and COCU is stimulating discussion in the United Church of Christ. In particular the idea of the bishop may cause difficulty for the denomination as it prepares to enter into the COCU covenanting process. It will be helpful at this point to understand the stance of Mercersburg. This can be seen to some extent in the service for ordination of ministers (1866).

Ordination questions -

"Do you believe in one holy catholic Church, in which is given one true Baptism for the remission of sins?"

"Do you receive the confessional system of the Heidelberg Catechism as being in harmony with the Bible, and the ancient Christian creeds?"

"Do you acknowledge the rightful authority of this Church, from which you are now to receive ordination, as being a true part in the succession of the Church Catholic; and do you promise to exercise your ministry in the same with faithful diligence, showing all proper regard for its laws and ordinances, and all suitable obedience to its lawful government in the Lord?"¹⁹

To understand the authority and accountability questions of ministry one needs to see that ministry in relation to the church structure. A look at church structure also reveals the doctrine that underlies it. Nevin and Schaff saw the concept of the Body of Christ working itself out in the structures and documents relating to polity. We shall use one term not familiar to some persons today. The intermediate judicatory between the congregation and the regional synod in the Reformed Church in the U. S. was the classis. This term still is used today by the Reformed Church in America.

The four parts, the congregations, classes, synods and General Synod, were the church knit together in one body organic in nature. This is evidenced by the constitution which described the manner in which delegates were elected to compose the respective judicatories. The reader will recall from an earlier paragraph that the constitution defined the congregation as bound through its charter to be an organic member of the Reformed Church. This corporate nature further is seen in the fact that the lay persons had their membership in the congregation and the pastors had their membership in the classis and not in the congregation. The judicatory beyond the congregation was composed of pastors and elders from the congregations. (In the Evangelical and Reformed Church the pastor's membership was in the synod.) The discipline of lay members belonged to the spiritual council (elders) of the congregation. The examination, licensure, ordination and discipline of pastors belonged to the classis. Certain authority and powers were vested in each judicatory including the General Synod. Any decision in a lower judicatory beginning with the congregation could be appealed to the next higher judicatory until it reached the General Synod. While there was a certain uniformity in doctrine, government and practice throughout all parts of the body and a sense of obedience in the Lord, there also obtained a sense of freedom that one has when one knows that knit into the structure one has the support of the whole body and therefore free from the worry that one would have if separated from that body, still be alive and would have to be fully responsible for all the functions that normally would be carried on by the whole body.

The whole church acts as a body. This was the concept of the Mercersburg fathers. This is seen in the fact that as the whole church accepted the constitution all its parts accepted it as the norm for its life

and practice. By such an act of acceptance the Heidelberg Catechism and the liturgy were also accepted as the official instruments for teaching and worship.²⁰ The principle reason for the whole church acting as one body lies not just in the fact of the acceptance of the constitutional statements but rather in the fact that we eat of one bread and drink of one cup. Question 76 of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, "What does it mean to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink of his shed blood?" Answer:

"It is not only to embrace with a trusting heart the whole passion and death of Christ, and by it to receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. In addition, it is to be so united more and more to his blessed body by the Holy Spirit dwelling both in Christ and in us that, although he is in heaven and we are on earth, we are nevertheless flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, always living and being governed by one Spirit, as the members of our bodies are governed by one soul."

One of the scriptural verses the catechism quotes in support of this answer is Ephesians 4:15, "We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ..." Because we know and accept Christ not only to be the savior but also to be the head of all things, especially his body, the church acts as one body knowing that in him it is so. Reflecting back to the statement about the divine human nature of the church we add that when we do not act as one body, the imperfectness of our humanity is pervading the church.

The Office of Bishop

As the questions and concerns of the contemporary church and the world confront the denomination, the people of Mercersburg approach the contemporary decisions with a reference to their heritage. One of the most problematic questions rises out of the COCU conversations in relation to polity and doctrine. The office of the bishop described in In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting is a collegial office representative of the whole people of God. Ordination takes place with the laying on of hands by the bishop and presbyters (pastors). The bishop in office is symbolic of the wholeness and the continuity of the church. The fact that while the bishop is in office there is an aura of authority related to the person troubles some persons in the denomination. If this does seem to be true in the minds of some observers, it may be that such persons do not realize the aura emanating from them as pastors or influential lay persons among the Christian with whom they walk. The barnacles of past history seem to cause some to see only the prelacy of past days which can not now be attributed to COCU. In the COCU model confirmation is administered by the pastor by virtue of ordination by the bishop in the collegial assembly of the judicatory. The office of the bishop is pastoral as well as episcopal. This conveys the catholicity and continuity of the church.

The Mercersburg movement welcomes the office of the bishop as a doctrine and a sign of the universal church. It is clear to us that one of Mercersburg's gifts to the United Church of Christ is the ecclesiological concept of the corporate bishop. The judicatory exercising the pastoral and episcopal authority of the church examines, ordains, installs and disciplines. All pastors as presbyters and having membership or standing in the judicatory participate in this power of ordination, but can not exercise

this authority except in the judicatory assembled or at work in committees. Lay members join in the examining by appointment of the judicatory, are witnesses to the vows and are auditory participants in the prayer of blessing in ordination. These are reserved powers for the middle judicatory.

The pastor by virtue of standing in the middle judicatory exercises the episcopal power of confirmation in the congregation. In fact all powers of the pastor of the congregation are bestowed by the ordination at the hands of the middle judicatory. The 1866 liturgy for installation recognizes this sharing of the episcopal office of bishop by the pastor in the prayer of installation by speaking of the "office of Bishop and Pastor." A further surprise to the denomination is the fact that the 1866 liturgy of installation like the liturgy of ordination in the question quoted earlier expresses the doctrine of apostolic succession: "O Holy Jesus, who...hast promised to be with the ministers of apostolic succession to the end of the world...."

It is clear that this authority of bishop obtains for the pastor only in relationship to the congregation and all authority with regard to other pastors is reserved for the middle judicatory. Many pastors are willing to claim the authority of bishop for themselves but at this point are flawed by their humanity and have difficulty to acknowledge the authority of the judicatory over their ministry. The remembrance of the fact that the whole church is the body of Christ makes it easier to overcome this human weakness and in obedience to the Lord accept the discipline of their standing in the judicatory.

The Association in the United Church of Christ is the middle judicatory and has these same powers. The Association Minister (officer) or the Conference Minister who staffs that Association by virtue of election by the members of the Association who are members of the Conference carry the delegated and symbolic authority of the corporate bishop.

A study of the Mercersburg documents on baptism which includes the Heidelberg Catechism reveals that this tradition expresses the doctrines not only of the Reformed family but also of the apostolic and catholic concepts of the whole church. With the Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic and Orthodox communions which probably embraces 90% of Christendom, the Mercersburg movement strongly holds to the principle of infant baptism and the acceptance by God of infants into the mystical body of Christ. This, of course, today speaks to the conversations the denomination is having with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who practice infant dedication and generally in their congregations reject the baptism of infants. This practice is seen as a serious problem in the understanding of the objective grace of God through Jesus Christ.

While we have not in this brief article been able to give fully and complete treatment to the documents, it is clear that Mercersburg stands in the midst of the ecumenical movement, participates in the process of convergence and looks forward to the reunion of the parts of the Body of Christ. It is important, however, that it is also clearly seen that Mercersburg sees this reunion, not on the lowest common denominator, but rather through convergence on the highest common denominator of the church truly catholic, apostolic, reformed and evangelical.

Mercersburg and the Ecumenical Movement

As we have seen earlier in this article this orientation sets us precisely in the middle of the great ecumenical ferment that surrounds the World Council document, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry." It is perhaps the strongest influence in the church for the acceptance and implementation of the covenanting with the Consultation of Church Union.

The key words -- "evangelical, reformed, catholic and apostolic" -- are not new with COCU. In fact they were not even new with Schaff and Nevin. Zacharias Ursinus as early as 1563 incorporated them in his lectures on the Heidelberg Catechism. Schaff and Nevin brought them to prominence in the American scene and the mercersburg school has continued their development.

As the denomination is subject to the winds of diversity and the power of pressure groups the influence of Mercersburg will remain strong. Four strategic acts will continue to thrust us toward the center of the church catholic and apostolic with a positive and developmental force.

First is the ecumenical formation of the Mercersburg Society for the study and incorporation into the life of the ecumenical church the vital concepts of Mercersburg. The general membership and the executive committee are at present from seven denominations. A strong number are from the United Church of Christ. A particular effort is made to enlist young women and men, ordained pastors and lay people from all communions. In the first issue of the New Mercersburg Review two of the articles were written by young United Church of Christ pastors, the Rev. Deborah R. Clemmens, pastor of Boehm's Church, Blue Bell, PA and the Rev. Harry G. Royer, pastor of St., John's Church, Reading, PA.

Second, pastors and lay members have taken the initiative in establishing an endowment fund at Lancaster Seminary for the teaching of Mercersburg theology. While this began with the Committee on Worship of the Division of Church and Ministry of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference and the writer who was then Conference Minister, it immediately had the support of other people. An effort is being made to increase the endowment to the total necessary to provide for a Chair of Mercersburg Theology. The President of the Lancaster Seminary, Dr. Peter M. Schmiechen, has been supportive in this effort.

Third, members of the Mercersburg movement have purposefully participated in the "Biblical, Theological and Liturgical Convocation" of the United Church of Christ. Here is the meeting place for the like minded persons from the former Evangelical Synod of North America and the Congregational Christian Churches. Here Calvinists meet Lutherans. Here is a healthy study and dialogue regarding historic and contemporary theologies and liturgies in relationship to our vocation which is lived out in the world. Through this convocation persons are introduced to Mercersburg and some find membership in the Society.

Fourth, to provide nurture, supportive fellowship and corporate embodiment of Mercersburg theology the Order of Corpus Christi is being developed for pastors and members of the United Church of Christ. The members of the order will practice a daily discipline, pursue regular study, be purposefully involved in the United Church of Christ, use a liturgy that

upholds the principles of Mercersburg, participate in the development of the church as reformed, evangelical, catholic and apostolic and support the convergence movement toward the reunion of the catholic apostolic church. The Order of Corpus Christi will have its first public information meeting in September.

The future is before us. Our hope then is to be the Body of Christ in the world that the hungers of the human family may be fed on the bread of life, that peace may abound, that justice may be done and that heaven may be known on earth. The hope is in God who in Jesus Christ is reconciling the world to Godself.

NOTES

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TRUCE IN THE DUTCH CRUSADE:
Introducing a Congregation to Mercersburg Ideals

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You have to have kept up your Mercersburg history to remember "The Dutch Crusade." It was an article written by Nevin (1854) condemning the Reformed Church in America (RCA) for their hasty interference in the theological disputes in the old German Reformed Church (GRC). Few remember the feud set off by Schaff's Principle of Protestantism and encouraged by an angry Joseph Berg. Even fewer carry any lingering hostility. Yet until recently, most notably in the work of Howard Hageman of the Dutch Reformed, the RCA never took the Mercersburg agenda to heart. The early fear and suspicion which led to a severance of all ties with the GRC is long forgotten. Only recently have the Dutch Reformed in this country fully understood and in some cases embraced the Mercersburg ideal.

Thanks to Dr. Hageman and those in the United Church of Christ who still honor Mercersburg's contribution to Christ's Church, I am one of those Dutchmen. I am also an RCA pastor who with modest success has led a worship committee to revise our order of worship according to the lessons of Mercersburg.

The truce of which I speak really only meant live and let live. In fact Nevin's "The Dutch Crusade" appeared after many of the Dutch Reformed wished they had not involved themselves in the Mercersburg controversy. Truce allowed each denomination to go its separate way. Unfortunately for the Dutch this left them without the brilliant legacy which culminated in the 1866 Order of Worship. No attempt seems to have been made by the Dutch in America to seriously consider the issues raised by Mercersburg. That had to wait until the second half of the twentieth century.

A Dutch Underground

Led by Hageman, an historical underground was developed whereby pastors, historians and students would have access to the nineteenth century's most significant American liturgical development. Even where there was no "official" recognition of the Mercersburg contribution among the Dutch, Hageman's imprint and consequently the imprint of Mercersburg appear ever so subtly on the RCA 1968 worship book Liturgy and Psalms. Because of Hageman and thanks to the sensitivity and flexibility of our constitutional liturgy, Mercersburg has a place in RCA worship. This paper describes my efforts at introducing my congregation to the liturgical ideals of Mercersburg. I might add, by introducing Third Reformed Church to Mercersburg, I helped them recover a true sense of Reformed worship.

It helped that Third Reformed had spent "forty years" in a liturgical desert. It also helped that they were open to change. I suspect that no matter how bad the liturgy, there can be no "work of the people" (laos ergon) if the congregation is not ready to change their form of worship. Fortunately (or unfortunately) there exists in many Reformed congregations a liturgical void and formlessness. The opportunity to fill these vacuums with something authentically Reformed, rather than, as I have often observed where a fad interest in liturgy has been cultivated, the wholesale application of liturgical elements for the sake of variety.

Another essential ingredient is a sympathetic and qualified organist. Music and musical settings are critical, but spirit and timing are even more important. Today "selling" a new liturgy involves proper promotion and packaging. The organist's enthusiasm and willingness to rethink old patterns is vital in making the new order "feel" right.

Finally, I discovered the hard way that the most important piece of liturgical groundwork is the leaders' well conceived idea of what they hope for. This I think is vintage Mercersburg. Unlike other expressions of worship, Reformed corporate worship does not develop spontaneously from worship itself, but rather in reflection of our worship and our shared theological and historical experience of God. Our prayers must reflect the historical Reformed experience as well as the experience of the worshiping congregation. This I found most difficult.

Pastoral and Educational Issues

The problem developed from my first inclination which was simply to insist on the changes I would make gradually. I soon realized that without the congregation's ownership of the order of worship they would see it as my order and they would drop it when I left. I discovered that on a very small scale I would have to repeat the experience of Mercersburg, which meant beginning with a fairly well developed idea of modern Reformed worship, and, just as important, a well articulated criticism of the modern impediments to that worship. Ironically I discovered that the impediments which haunted Mercersburg are still very much in place today.

Thus the group selected to revise our order of worship began with the study of Protestant and Reformed principles. Education of the "idea" of Reformed worship became the focus of study for the Worship Committee. You can imagine how impossible the process seemed when I considered liturgical changes in terms of fundamental changes in the way our congregational leaders view worship. Yet that was Nevin and Schaff's ambition for the GRC. They felt that unless change was organic and from within, such that the change constituted an entirely new perspective and, indeed, "life," the changes would only be cosmetic and temporary. This was the very Protestant quality which was maintained in an otherwise very catholic liturgical experiment. Mercersburg would not allow the liturgy to be merely the external vehicle of grace. It needed to be believed by faith by the people in order for it to convey salvation.

Initially the Worship Committee's work had these two sides. First, was the repristination of Reformed principles. Second was the uncovering of the very un-Reformed ideas which dominate modern Protestant worship. Needless to say, the second was the most painful.

The spirit of individual expression so important in American Protestant worship in 1850 was every bit alive in 1985. Puritan ideas of worship were still erroneously perceived to be directly descended from Calvin. My committee was alarmed to hear Holy Communion described as a festal celebration. They were more used to a funeral tone encouraged by the dominant Protestant concept of memorial. They balked at the idea of set prayer, believing it shackled the Holy Ghost. The idea of coming forward to celebrate somehow suggested to them a lack of respect (again, people should

should not be moving about during a funeral).

Getting them to think Reformed was by far the most difficult task. I confess to only limited success. I settled for their acknowledgment of my greater knowledge of Reformed history. (Again, a significant tool used by Mercersburg in their struggle.) This acknowledgment allowed us to move forward. Having removed doubt as to what is and is not Reformed, their only remaining serious doubt was congregational acceptance. Acceptance can be achieved through a patient but aggressive program of promotion (the one modern evil with which we must come to terms).

Developing an Order of Worship

Having established the principles of Reformed worship, describing them as fundamentally catholic and evangelical, we began to discuss which liturgical elements would be appropriate for our worship. Each element was considered for its historical relevance and symbolic power, its progressive continuity with the old order (so that our members still felt at home), and for its ability to speak against existing liturgical expressions which robbed our worship of its integrity and promoted a foreign style of worship.

This last condition made some liturgical innovation necessary. We knew for example that the Apostles' Creed was traditional and that it normally comes after the sermon. However, the trend we needed to oppose was one in which denominational loyalty is a private matter for Christians. Free worship is the offspring of this dangerous tendency. It fuels the fire which would destroy a corporate experience. In order to resist this tendency and to deal directly with the issue of establishing ourselves firmly in the ancient apostolic Church of Jesus Christ, we, with Mercersburg, felt that the community needs to speak the faith in the Creed at the outset. We felt that today this issue remains central. Even confession of sin is impossible unless our unity with the one Church is established. We believe that forgiveness comes through the Church. So following the Votum, Sentences and Salutation and our opening hymn, we recite one of the Ecumenical Creeds, making a point of reciting the Nicene Creed when we celebrate Eucharist to further confirm our continuity with the whole Church.

The Absolution

Another challenge, and again one which has met with only limited success, was the Absolution. The doctrine of the priestly function of the minister in RCA is in very real danger of being lost. Often ministers do not see themselves as the mediators of God's presence. Their ordination is not to leadership in the Old Testament sense. The office does not carry with it the power to represent God, to bring the congregation to God's throne, and to intercede for the congregation and forgive their sins, but only to speak God's Word in the sense of a prophet.

Thus, it was necessary to pronounce forgiveness in a priestly way. We were mindful of the truth of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, but the Minister of the Word is a priest in a special sense. It is the Minister of the Word who declares the congregation forgiven in the name of Christ.

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Still, as an example of how threatening this is to some RCA ministers, one of our visiting preachers could not find it in himself to speak our Absolution. The final line "Your sins are forgiven for His sake" somehow left him feeling "above" the congregation. Again the modern tendency is to see the ministry as a teaching and administrative office. There is no special priestly power. Our visitor felt he could only go so far as to say "Our sins are forgiven for His sake."

Certainly the minister needs his sins forgiven as much as anyone, but the Reformed ordination grants the authority to forgive sins. Without that priestly authority the people languish unforgiven, with only teachers, prophets and administrators to share with them their guilt.

The Calendar and the Lectionary

As for the seasons, a Collect reflects the time of the year for us. This battle over the Calendar was an important one for Mercersburg. Many Reformed churches take little notice of the Church's Calendar. Except for Christmas and Easter the Holy Days are often seen as a Roman invention.

The committee investigated the disappearance of the Calendar and discovered that not only was it late, but that its disappearance was the work of unchurchly influence. The Church's Calendar suffered at the hands of Protestant religious leaders who believed that to mark a day special was to lessen the importance of other days. While there is merit in this, they failed to see that most people need to organize their lives around special events. They also failed to realize that without a special Calendar to mark the Church's year, Protestant Christians would be forced to adopt the calendar provided by secular authority. Today we find that Church members organize their year around the state's calendar, which makes economics its priority.

With the Calendar comes the lectionary. This is another source of Christian unity. The lectionary created another battle. Opposition arose for the alleged "shackling of the spirit," but statistics were provided which indicated that in fact ministers who preach randomly from Scripture rarely have the breadth provided by a year's selection of lectionary readings. It was pointed out that the lectionary guards against ministers who tend to preach on favorite passages, and that the lectionary covers more of the Bible. (Once again, progress was made at two levels. First, by presenting the Reformed principles of churchly Christianity. Second, by opposing the principles which resist liturgical worship.)

Having adopted the lectionary we became open to hearing all four lessons. The Psalm is sung as response to the Old Testament lesson. The Epistle is followed by an Anthem. However, standing for the reading of the Gospel proved too much for Calvinists who winced at the elevation of one part of the Canon over another, but they had no objection to reading the Gospel from the pulpit. The sermon followed directly after a hymn as response to the Gospel.

Except for the Gospel, lay people read the lessons. At every level lay involvement in worship develops the Reformed and catholic idea of corporate worship. This idea addresses the popular idea of worship as entertainment

or pure instruction. Once again individualism would have the worship displayed as on a picture screen for examination. At this safe distance the elements of worship can be silently challenged and accepted or ignored. Once the entertainment is over or the instruction complete, the individual is free to go home to privately consider his or her level of commitment. Involvement presumes commitment. It makes confession a doing of the Word, and not just a hearing.

After the Sermon and Ascription of Praise, the worship leader moves into the center aisle among the congregation to communicate the weekly information. There the leader concludes with the sharing of the Peace. On all Holy Days the leader then proceeds to the Table to prepare to celebrate Holy Communion. The gifts are received and brought forward at this time.

Holy Communion

Reforming Third's communion practice was the greatest struggle. The funeral mood and memorial theology were deeply ingrained in the Puritan spirit of this congregation. An almost Quaker like silence was preferred to all prayers and lessons from Scripture. Clearly the idea to be confronted was that Eucharist is a private communion with the Almighty which is somehow facilitated by stale little squares of bread and a name brand grape juice. Service was a la carte and your meal delivered directly to your pew. All ate together as a sign of solidarity. (This meant no one was greater than another.) The accompanying hymns were dirge like and saccharine.

The antidote seemed to be losing the idea of memorial as much as possible. In place of memorial the committee came to see the truth of real presence. The shock waves of this revelation continue to be felt.

After all, this is what Mercersburg believed it was all about. What has been accomplished when the service is beautiful, the liturgy perfect and the music exquisite, if what is being celebrated is merely a memorial, or as some perceptive critic described it, the celebration of the "real absence?" Naturally the members of the committee wanted to know in what way Christ was present. Today Protestants still fear the superstition of Rome's substantiation of Christ in the elements.

We resolved that nothing magical happens to the bread or wine. And we simply allowed that when we eat and drink the bread and wine we eat and drink Christ. Christ's being present and being taken in as spiritual nourishment became the single most important idea of the Eucharist. It conditions our entire celebration and even the tone of the sermon.

Having Christ present meant that a funeral was impossible. It also made pew service seem disrespectful. So with hearts lifted up we come forward to the Table to receive the bread and, alas, the juice from individual cups. AIDS remains enough of a threat to make recovery of the common cup impossible at Third (except on special occasions when both individual and common cup are offered). Unfortunately some modern issues will continue to divide us no matter how great our efforts. Even to offer the choice between cups encourages the divisive spirit which we seek to eliminate.

The RCA remains a liturgical church. It requires its ministers to read the sacramental liturgies at every occasion of celebration, but the

Eucharistic liturgy allows for expansion and development. As I said, the Reformed underground was at work in the preparation of these forms to see to it that our catholicity was preserved.

We begin our Eucharistic celebration with words of Instruction from the '68 liturgy which are as beautiful an expression of the catholic and Reformed faith as there could be. The words stimulate our memory of Christ that we might experience his promises to us as they become real in the communion of his presence which we are about to receive. Instruction gives way to the Communion Prayer where the petition is made that the promise of eternal life comes true in the gifts of bread and wine. The joy of Christ's presence is expressed in the Sursum Corda where we celebrate being lifted into communion with God. Thanksgiving is expressed and the Sanctus and the petitions and intercessions conclude with the Lord's Prayer. Each prepares us to receive and be received by the sacrificed and risen Lamb of God.

The committee, with some prompting, decided that if indeed we celebrate the mystery of the presence of God in the glorified elements, and if it is deadening memorial that we hoped to eradicate, then an Epiclesis was essential. There is perhaps no more beautiful and appropriate prayer over the elements than the one included in the 1866 Order of Worship. I believe this is the crowning gem of our communion celebration at Third. Here a proper sense of the mystery is restored. Here the line is clearly drawn between memorial and the real presence. Here the catholic tradition breathes with the freshness of an evangelical spirit.

It is this incarnational idea of the celebration of God's presence in our midst that has remade our worship. In a very real sense this new form is only half owned by the members of Third Reformed. Its departure from the unpriestly, rationalistic ethical memorialism of the past is sharp enough to leave some uncomfortable, especially those for whom religion simply means "comfortable." But the children will own this liturgy. While most of them will never hear of the truce between Mercersburg and the RCA, the fruit of that truce and our reconciliation will become the means for their experience of God among them.

TO BE THE CHURCH:
John Williamson Nevin's Critique of Sectarianism

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"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is the one true Church, apostolic and universal..."¹ Such words might serve as a fitting introduction to a modern creedal statement while at the same time offer an appropriate description of the sectarian atmosphere moving in the first half of nineteenth century America. Revivalism, and Finney's "New Measures," and the appearance of many different Christian sects were repugnant to John Williamson Nevin. Revivalism, and "New Measures," were a serious assault upon the church.

Let this system [New Measures] prevail and rule with permanent sway, and the result of the religious movement which is now in progress will be something widely different from what it would have been under other auspices. The old regular organizations, if they continue to exist at all, will not be the same Churches. Their entire complexion and history in time to come will be shaped by the things with regard to this point. In this view the march of New Measures at the present time may well challenge our anxious and solemn regard. It is an interest of no common magnitude, portentous in its aspect, and pregnant with consequences of vast account. The system is moving forward in full strength, and putting² forth its pretensions in the boldest styles on all sides.

He spoke no less urgently about sects when he wrote, "The Sect system...is continually at war with the true being of the church, and tends always towards dissolution."³ Revivalism and sects were not a novelty he felt would fade into history; rather, they are nothing less than an attempt to destroy the true nature of the church.

It is the intent of this paper to look primarily at two of Nevin's works, The Sect System (1849), and Early Christianity (1852), and draw from these works first some of the objections he held towards sects and attempt to also see what he would offer as a better understanding of the church. The Sect System was aimed directly at the sects in which he lists several objections. Early Christianity takes issue with many of the prevailing protestant and "Puritan" [New England theologians of his day] attitudes and concepts of the nature of the church. Taken together they offer both criticism of the church and vision to the church.

1. Criticism of Sectarianism

One of the sects born in the first half of the nineteenth century was the Disciples of Christ. This faith community had as its founders Thomas Campbell, a Scottish imigrant who settled in western Pennsylvania, and his son Alexander Campbell. They left the Presbyterian ministry in 1809 to form their own fellowship along Presbyterian and Baptist lines. Alexander Campbell set down the basic tenents of their movement when he protested against:

...all human creeds as bonds of union, and professing subjection to the Bible alone...They [Disciples of Christ] regard

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all sects and parties of the Christian world as having, in greater or lesser degrees, departed from the simplicity of faith and manners of the first Christians, and as forming what the apostle Paul calls 'the apostacy.' This defection they attribute to the varieties of speculation and metaphysical dogmatism of the countless creeds, formularies, liturgies, and books of discipline adopted and included as bonds of union and platforms of communion in all parties which sprung from the Lutheran Reformation....To remedy and obviate these aberrations, they propose to ascertain from the holy Scriptures, according to the commonly-received and well-established rules of interpretation, and ideas attached to the lead terms and sentences found in the holy Scriptures, and then to use the words of the Holy Spirit in apostolic acceptance of them.... They look for unity of spirit and the bonds of peace in the practical acknowledgment of one faith, one Lord, one immersion, one hope, one body, one Spirit, one God and Father of all; not in unity of opinions, nor in unity of forms, ceremonies or modes of worship⁴

The Disciples of Christ, or Campbellites as Nevin called them, serve as a model for many protestant bodies which came into being at this time. They shared in common (1) some form of a "Bible alone" society, (2) a shunning of creedal formulas, and (3) a witness to the true faith.

The Sect's Use of the Bible

One of Nevin's first criticisms of sectarianism in his day was of their belief that they were seeking a society based on the "Bible alone." "It sounds well, to lay so much stress on the authority of the Bible, as the only text-book and guide of Christianity. But what are we to think of it, when we find such a motley mass of protesting systems, all laying claim so vigorously to one and the same watchword."⁵ Should not the credibility of the sect movement be called into account when so many different sects claim a "Bible alone" foundation for their actions? But this observation leads Nevin to show a concern for the sect's use of the Bible as the only foundation for its faith community.

Nevin had difficulty with the manner in which much of the "Puritanism" and the sects used the Bible. The extremely subjective manner in which scripture was approached and the fact that scripture itself was never to be used as a manual for church formation led Nevin to some critical observations.

It is a primary maxim with Puritanism, that the Bible alone is the rule and ground of all religion, of all that men are required to believe or do in the service of God....If it be asked, how the Bible is to be interpreted and made available as a rule of faith, the answer is that every man must interpret it as he best can for his own use, under the guidance of God's Spirit, and with such helps as he may happen to have at his command. In other words, the ultimate tribunal for the exposition of God's word is private judgment.⁶

Subjectivism, a continual criticism aimed at both sects and

"Puritanism," has no foundation other than one's personal point of view. What objective criterion is one to use in a sect's community of faith? The sect responded with the assertion that they are based upon the Bible alone. But what is the criterion used to interpret the scriptures? He rightly points out that, "Every sect has its tradition, its system of opinions and habits, handed forward by education, just as much as the Catholic church itself, through which medium the written word is studied and understood at every point." To claim the Bible alone as the foundation of one's faith community is to fall victim to subjectivism while thinking that one is being faithful to the word. In fact, all one is faithful to is one's prejudices.

In addition to the subjectivism of the "Bible alone" tradition of sects, he also reminds the reader that the Bible was not written to give birth to sects. The Bible:

...never speaks of itself as being either a system or divinity or a confession of faith. It has no such form, but it shows as clearly as possible an altogether different construction and design...it is perfectly certain from the New Testament itself, that Christianity was not made to rest on any such foundation in the beginning, but on a living authority, which started in Christ and passed over from him to the ministry of the church.

The use of the "Bible alone" in the emerging new sects was at best self-serving.

The "Un-historical" Nature of Sects

A second serious criticism of the sects was that they were basically "un-historical" in both the understanding and practice of being the church. At this point Nevin introduces one of the most important themes of the Mercersburg School: the progressive unfolding of history. This is usually associated with Philip Schaff, but Nevin too propounded this view of history. He felt that the sectarian movement tore from the fabric of the church any historic understanding which the church possessed. The sect either suspended history or totally disregarded it as having nothing to contribute to the life of the church in its day. Such an attitude allowed for no continuity from the ancient church to the present. "The idea of a historical continuity in the life of the Church, carries with it no weight whatever for the sect consciousness. It is felt to be as easy to start a new Church, as it is to get up a new moral or political association under any other name."¹⁰

Nevin returns to the issue of subjectivism when noting a sect's seeming disavowal of any historic continuity. The independence of sects and their reduction of Christianity to private judgment and the Bible involve:

...a protest against the authority of all previous history, except so far as it may seem to agree with what is found to be true; in which case, of course, the only real measure of truth is taken to be, not this authority of history at all, but the mind, simply, of the particular sect itself. The idea of anything like a divine substance in the life of Christianity, through past ages, which may be expected of right to pass forward into the constitution of Christianity as it now

stands, is one that finds no room whatever in this system.¹¹

It should be noted again that this criticism of sects was also directed at basic protestant thought of his day. "Puritanism is absolutely unhistorical by principle and profession; but Protestantism, if it have any right to exist at all, is the true historical continuation of the ancient church."¹² For Nevin this "absolutely unhistorical principle" found in sects and the prevailing theology of his day went contrary to the nature of the church which is historic and living since Christ sent forth the disciples to evangelize the furthest most part of the world. It is with a degree of sarcasm that he sums up the un-historic problem by stating, "If the past be with them [sects], here and there, it is all very well; but if not, it can only be, of course, because they are right, and the universal past wrong; for they follow (multifariously) the Bible, which is the only infallible rule of faith and practice."¹³

Sectarianism is Non-Catholic

A third criticism Nevin offers of sectarianism was that it was non-catholic. What Nevin saw in sects and again in "Puritanism" was that the un-historical element destroyed any type of continuity with either tradition or historic development. With continuity broken so, too, would unity; unity with the past or catholicity in the present. He notes that, "The sect wills itself above the church, calls itself modestly a church, as one of many; but then goes on, almost in the same breath, to play itself off as the church virtually sinking all other catholicity into a fiction as opposed to such high usurptation."¹⁴

He continued his argument by using the sect's adage of "Bible alone" to demonstrate their non-catholic attitude.

It [the sect] is loud for the Bible, an open Bible, the Bible alone; but only as read through the medium of its own theological habit, and so to the sight who may presume to read it any other way. So throughout. The very things it protests and fights against in the Church of Rome, it is read the next moment to assert in its own favor, under some altered form; only with this difference that the old catholic truth which in every case underlies the Roman abuse, is with sects generally treated as part of that abuse itself, so that the new exercise of power brings no such sacred sanction along with it for the pious heart.¹⁵

At the core of the sect system was the attitude of separation. There could only be a common bonding if a person or a community were willing to meet the sect on the sect's assumptions. Note that one could not find fellowship with the Campbellites unless one was willing to accept their "search" for a "...unity of spirit and the bonds of peace in the practical acknowledgment of one faith, one Lord, one immersion...." The very refusal of a sect to properly render scripture, for the sake of one's personal theological bias should lead one to appreciate Nevin's argument that such an attitude runs contrary to any concept of catholicity or common witness to the faith. "The sect, then attempts to act as the whole when it is in fact, only a part of the whole Church. The sect is based on subjective elements and tries to revolve the world around its own little life. It is not concerned with the

objective as a whole, the Holy Catholic Church."¹⁶

II. Nevin's Vision of the Church

What, for Nevin, were some of the critical elements that made up the church? Much of this can be seen from the criticism he made of sects and "Puritanism." First it can be said that he sought a "living church." The foundation of the church was Jesus Christ, not the Bible. In Early Christianity the New Testament passage most quoted by him was St. Matthew 28:20b, "...lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The church is the Body of Christ. Thus the passage from St. Matthew's gospel is true when seen in the light of the ongoing and living church. Christ today is the church. He made this Christ-based image of the church clear when he wrote:

The church was considered a mystery, an object of faith, in the world, not based at all on the will of men, but in the commission of Christ, the force of which was regarded accordingly as having its origin and authority, not from the people, but from God. The idea of democratic or simply popular constitution in the case finds no countenance in the New Testament; this proceeds throughout on the assumption rather that the powers both of doctrine and government, for the church, starts from above and not from below...¹⁷

Nevin held before his reader an incarnational view of the church. The living Christ is present in the church. The presence of Christ in the church was proof that the incarnation was an ongoing reality, and is the starting point to understand the true nature of the church.¹⁸ "Christianity is no such outward statue-book of things to be believed and things to be done. It is 'the law of the life of Christ Jesus.' It is a new constitution of grace and truth starting in Christ's person, and perpetuating itself in this form, as a most real historical fact, by the church."¹⁹ The true nature of the church must always be understood in relation to the incarnation.

The Church as Part of History

A second vision Nevin had for the church was that it was part of the progressive flow of history. There was, according to Nevin, the thinking among both sects and established protestant denominations that their respective movements were a repristinization of the primitive church. This prevailing attitude that protestantism had somehow leaped from the primitive church to the Reformation, thus rendering both Reformers and their faith communities as the "true church" was absurd.

Shall we cut the whole matter short, by casting off entirely the authority of the post-apostolic church from the second century down to the sixteenth and by throwing ourselves exclusively on the New Testament, as a sufficient warrant for the modern system, not only without antiquity, but against it also, to any extent that the case may require? This is the ground taken by Puritanism. Its theory is, that Protestantism stands in no organic historical connection with the life of the Catholic church as we find it before the Reformation; that the re-

lation between the two was one of simple contradiction; that the old church was an entire apostacy from the Christianity of the New Testament; and that this was reproduced in the sixteenth century, as an absolutely new creation, directly from its own original fountain and source. The assumption is, that the church at an early period fell away from its primitive purity, and came under the power of a strange and dreadful apostacy, which completed itself finally in the Papacy and the abominations usually charged upon the church of Rome. The theory involves the idea of a steadily growing corruption, a continual progress from bad to worse.²⁰

Such a view would be un-historical. It did not allow for any historic growth, but it also meant, or at least implied, that the church was a "living church." A "living church," founded upon Jesus Christ, would have been dynamic. This is not to set forth the idea that the church did not need reform, Nevin knew well the power of evil, but to affirm a historic and "living church" was to see that the witness of Christ, in the church, had been a constant through all time.

Nevin saw the need for the church to be historic so that it could be linked with the church of all ages. The church was always moving forward while at the same time bonded to that which had gone before. The modern church must be united with the ancient church if the modern church is "...to have any valid claim to its [the ancient churches] prerogatives and powers; but this can be only in the way of historical growth. Give that up and all is gone."²¹ Thus the need for the church to be rooted in history is that it testifies to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the church being the Body of Christ, and it was the only legitimate claim one can make to the power of the ancient church.

The Church Catholic

A third vision Nevin held for the church was that it must be truly catholic. By catholic Nevin meant that which can hold together the historic diversity and the dynamic nature of the church. It is universal in its ability to stand in the midst of its historic flow and live with the change that will come. Nichols notes, regarding Nevin's concept of the church, that "...the church has various attributes which must characterize the Body of Christ because of its nature. It must be one and universal and cannot fail throughout history. It must be holy and apostolic....None are perfectly realized within history, but they are essential to the entelechy struggling to birth in history."²²

A catholic church is able to live with the change all living organisms encounter. When the issue of the need for reform in the church comes to the surface Nevin notes that "Growth implies unity in the midst of change."²³ He does not dismiss the Reformation; rather he puts it in the perspective that it, too, was a growing experience of the catholic church. He saw that, "Protestantism, as it now stands, was not the end of the Refomation."²⁴ A truly catholic church, which is the living Body of Christ, would expect to always be in growth and change.

Almost by definition, a catholic church must view the whole and not the particular. Nevin was certain that a truly catholic church looked for

broader horizons than sects could ever envision. Binkley writes:

Nevin did not believe that the Church was simply the sum of the individuals which composed it, rather it was an organic whole. Christianity alone forms the proper and true wholeness of mankind within which its individual manifestations can become complete. Christianity is catholic in the sense that it bears within itself the capacity and power to make²⁵ possession of all the world, both extensively and intensively.

It was a catholic church Nevin sought. A church that can live with growth, but has a vision that was not shaded by individualism and subjectivism. He sought an organic, and a "living church."

Even though the times that surrounded John W. Nevin may have been littered with sectarian outbursts, he stood as one faithfully placing before the church a vision of what the church had been called to be in the world. His criticism of sectarianism was (1) that it possessed a questionable and subjective foundation, the "Bible alone;" (2) they were un-historical; and (3) they were non-catholic.

What he offered as the corrective to these maladies was (1) the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ, thus making the church a living and organic whole, "lo, I am with you always."; (2) a historical continuity with the primitive church to the present church, thus giving the church the power and the vision of the ancient church and the on-going vitality of the church; and (3) a truly catholic church, thus permitting the church to be diverse, yet whole, reformed yet always in reformation. His vision of the church can be seen as he wrote that the church is "...one, holy and catholic; the idea of an actual continuation of Christ's presence and power in the church, according to the terms of the original apostolic commission; the idea of sacramental grace, the power of absolution, the working of miracles to the end of time, and the real communion of saints extending to the departed dead as well as to those still living on the earth."²⁶ What he offered a sectarian age was an ideal of a church which was "truly catholic and truly reformed."

NOTES

1. The Book of Worship, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House) p. 180
2. John W. Nevin, "The Anxious Bench." Catholic and Reformed, Selected Writings of John Williamson Nevin, (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, p. 23
3. John W. Nevin, "Early Christianity," Catholic and Reformed, Selected Writings of John Williamson Nevin, (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978) p. 304
4. Alexander Campbell, The Disciples of Christ, (Lexington: Bosworth Memorial Library, College of the Bible, 1951), pp. 6-8
5. John W. Nevin, "The Sect System," Catholic and Reformed, Selected Writings of John Williamson Nevin, (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978), pp. 6-8
6. Early Christianity, p. 243
7. Ibid, p. 243
8. Ibid, p. 244
9. Ibid, p. 295f, also Philip Schaff, Reformed and Catholic, Selected Historical and Theological Writings of Philip Schaff, (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1979) pp. 4-5
10. The Sect System, p. 146
11. Ibid, p. 145
12. Early Christianity, p. 281
13. The Sect System, p. 145
14. Ibid, p. 164
15. Ibid, p. 165
16. Luther Binkley, The Mercersburg Theology, (Lancaster: Franklin and Marshall, 1951), p. 79
17. Early Christianity, pp. 233-234
18. Binkley, p. 52
19. The Sect System, p. 153
20. Early Christianity, pp. 278-279
21. Ibid, p. 291

22. James H. Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, (Chicago: Universtiy of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 271
23. Early Christianity, p. 289
24. Ibid, p. 304
25. Binkley, p. 78
26. Early Christianity, p. 202

REJOICE IN THE LORD: A HYMN COMPANION TO THE SCRIPTURES
A Review Article

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In the Eastern Orthodox tradition theology is not primarily an intellectual pursuit but a liturgical act. The theologian is above all one who prays--and sings--in an attitude of adoration. As Archimandrite Vasileios writes,

Theology is born from the Church and returns to it. It flows from spiritual life and guides us to the fulness of the Kingdom. By its nature theology, as a mystery, remains outside any 'specialization.' It concerns the whole people. The Fathers are 'those who have sung the harmonious hymn of theology in the midst of the Church.' It is sung and cultivated in the ground of the living community of the Church, where it brings forth fruit a hundredfold. Each of the faithful is called to become a 'theologian soul.'¹

For Orthodoxy theology is whatever hymns the Triune God, so that even the icons "praise the goodness of God, in that thrice-illuminated melody of theology."²

Although the Reformed tradition may seem remote from the Orthodox, Rejoice in the Lord, the new hymnal for the Reformed Church in America, is clearly shaped by a conception of theology as the hymn of the Church. Erik Routley--theologian, musician and one of the greatest hymnologists of the twentieth century--served as editor of the hymnal and both here and in his many writings shared a great deal of the Orthodox vision of the "melody of theology." Comparing Rejoice in the Lord to John Wesley's hymnbook of 1780, Routley in his introduction reflects on the intended function of the new hymnal.

Wesley called his hymnal a 'little body of experimental [that is 'experiential'] and practical divinity,' and we are convinced that a believer, or a seeker, who reads through this book from one end to the other, using it as a companion to the Scriptures, will find that it is just that: theology for people who are not theological specialists, poetry for those who claim not to be literary, and a lyric illumination of the Christian way.³

The unusual suggestion that a hymnal be read through from one end to the other ought to alert us to the fact that Rejoice in the Lord is intended not simply as a collection of texts and tunes but as an organized body of experiential theology. That the organization is so theologically creative and the experience musically and poetically so outstanding is what makes Rejoice in the Lord such an exciting new hymnal--and worthy of adoption not only by the Reformed Church in America but by all churches in the Reformed tradition.

Theologically, the hymnal is organized in terms of Trinitarian and eschatological principles. The first three headings are concerned with the Persons of the Trinity: "The God of Abraham Praise," "Behold the Lamb of God" and "Spirit of Truth, Spirit of Power." Each of the sections under these headings is in turn divided into three subheadings (producing thereby

a trinity of trinities such as appears so often in Medieval art, architecture and music.) Thus, God the Father is celebrated as the God of beginnings, the Lord worthy of praise, and the One whose glory shall be revealed; God the Son is hailed as the Word that became flesh, the One who died and rose, and the triumphant Lamb; and God the Holy Spirit is hymned as the promised Paraclete, the One whose fellowship the church enjoys, and the creator of the children of the Spirit within Church and society. Since the order of hymns contained in these first three sections is correlated to the order of the Scripture, in effect the Persons of the Trinity are treated (in somewhat Sabellian fashion) as consecutive participants in the drama of salvation-history.

The eschatology implicit in salvation-history becomes explicit in the fourth and most striking section of all: "The Hope of Glory." Here, fully 127 of the book's 624 hymns are located under such evocative subheadings as "There Remains a Sabbath" (which interprets the Church at worship and prayer as a proleptic realization of the endless sabbath in the Kingdom of God), "Tokens of Eternity" (which construes the Sacraments as prefigurations of life in the Kingdom, "Everlasting Fellowship," "Lord of Lords" and "Fullness of God." Thus does Rejoice in the Lord take seriously the Theology of Hope as a dominant theme of late twentieth century Christian thought.

Another temporary concern taken seriously in the hymnal is the growing desire for "inclusive language." In nearly all cases where "man" is used for "humanity" and "brother" for "other people" appropriate and felicitous changes have been made; in the remaining four or five cases a printed "dagger" warns the singer of potentially troublesome expressions. At the same time, however, no attempt has been made at systematic neutering of God-language. As Routley puts it, "for better or for worse, we have gone as far in this matter as our times and good sense would allow. We leave this struggle to those who will edit the hymnbooks of succeeding decades."⁴

The Scriptural orientation of the hymnal is reflected also in the comprehensive Index of Scriptural Allusions. In the Old Testament all but Leviticus, Judges and four of the Minor Prophets are represented; in the New Testament, all but II Thessalonians and six of the Pastoral Epistles. The book is especially rich in Psalm-related hymns. Complementing the Scriptural index are a topical index (including a large and unusual section for Biblical characters), an index of authors, translators, and sources of hymns, an index of composers, arrangers and sources of tunes, a list of arrangements by Erik Routley (numbering 128), alphabetical and metrical indexes of tunes, and an index of first lines. Although the topical index covers the Christian year under the heading of "Jesus Christ" and is sometimes misleading in its classifications, if hymns are chosen to fit the Lectionary, the Scriptural index will prove of greater value than a topical one in any case.

As one reviewer has noted, Rejoice in the Lord is the most ecumenical hymnal available.⁵ Texts and tunes from all times and places are present in profusion. Recent authors are well represented, but so are older ones--both the well known and the largely forgotten. A comparison with the Hymnbook 1965, the Worshipbook 1970 and the Hymnal U.C.C. 1974 is instructive:

	<u>Rejoice</u>	<u>Hymnbook</u>	<u>Worshipbook</u>	<u>Hymnal</u>
Luther	7	2	6	4
Watts	39	20	10	10
Charles Wesley	29	15	10	10
Christopher Wordsworth	7	2	0	4

Next to Watts and Wesley the authors appearing most frequently are John Mason Neale (22) and F. Pratt Green (16). Also important, both intrinsically and ecumenically, are 29 hymns from Patristic and Medieval sources and 13 newly translated or arranged texts from the Lutheran Book of Worship. Invaluable, too, is the large collection of metrical psalms (hymn numbers 81-143) -- especially welcome in a day when more and more churches are reviving congregational Psalm-singing. There are 12 hymns for or about children (including "Jesus Loves Me!"), 12 on themes of social justice (including Albert Bayley's "What Does the Lord Require," set to Routley's own superb tune, Sharpthorne), 5 for baptism and 29 for Communion (an excellent resource for churches that sing during the distribution).

Especially noteworthy is the legacy of fourteen hymns with music composed wholly by Routley himself. Seven of these are previously unpublished:

- 11 Augustine: "Let All the World" (George Herbert)
- 30 Maiden Way: "Thank you, God, for Water, Soil, and Air"
(Brian Wren)
- 41 Chalfont Park: "Eternal Light! Eternal Light!" (Thomas Binney)
- 46 Woodbury: "Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown" (Charles Wesley)
- 260 Carcant: "Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit" (Norman Elliott)
- 374 Whitsun Carol: "On the Day of Pentecost"
(Thomas C. Hunter-Clare)
- 472 Kingstanding: "Give Me, O Christ, the Strength That Is in Thee"
(Henry Child Carter)

All fourteen are stylistically akin to Ralph Vaughan Williams and the best of modern British hymnody, with tuneful, well-shaped melodies (sometimes inclining to the pentatonic), engaging harmonies (generally diatonic, but often a surprising but convincing blend of modalism and chromaticism), sturdy bass lines, and a sprinkling of mixed meters. Modal harmonies create an evocative sense of mystical transcendence in Augustine -- musically confirming Herbert's poetic transports of joy. Similar harmonic devices are used with haunting effect in the setting of Wesley's "Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown" -- a marvelous meditation on and internalization of the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel. And the simplicity of Carcant is a most welcome setting for the Beatitudes -- which have been unaccountably neglected in the most modern hymnals.

Although perhaps only a third of all the hymns in Rejoice in the Lord would be familiar to most congregations, many of the others are easily singable, and still others (such as Dieu, nous avons vu ta gloire, by Jean Langlais, and East Acklam, by Francis Jackson) are worth having even if they

are sung only by the choir. Whoever knows Routley's musical and theological criticism of hymns such as "Amazing Grace," "He Leadeth Me," and "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" will be startled to find these and similar hymns in the book. Moreover, as David A. Weadon observes,

...at times, we find the editor working in the context of a committee and including such tunes as Hymn to Joy, taken from Beethoven, and other musical giants' melodies, such as Haydn, Bortniansky, Schumann, and so on. Dr. Routley used to tell his hymnology classes that 'stealing a melody from a great composer did not make that melody a good hymn tune,' after which he would list examples such as those noted above.⁶

Nonetheless, both texts and tunes exhibit an exceptionally high quality throughout the hymnal, and it is doubtful that the inclusion of hymns such as the few that Routley himself may have questioned has marred the book in any serious way.

Indeed the theological organization, ecumenicity and exceptionally rich variety of this book make it far and wide the most exciting new hymnal available to churches in the Reformed tradition. It is a tribute, not only to Erik Routley but to the committee, chaired by Howard G. Hageman, that such a creative resource for worship is now before us.

NOTES

1. Archimandrite Vasileios, Hymn of Entry (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), p. 23.
2. Jaroslav Pelikan, The Spirit of Easter Christendom (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 133.
3. Erik Routley, editor, Rejoice in the Lord: A Hymn Companion to the Scriptures (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), p. 8.
4. Ibid., p. 9.
5. David A. Weadon, "Rejoice in the Lord," The American Organist, Vol. 19, No. 12 (December 1985), p. 83.
6. Ibid., p. 82.

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