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# **THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW**

**Journal of the Mercersburg Society**

Number Five

Spring 1989

THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW  
Journal of the Mercersburg Society

R. Howard Paine, Editor

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The new Mercersburg Review is published semi-annually by  
the Mercersburg Society.

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762 Tamarack Trail  
Reading, Pennsylvania 19607

215/777-0679



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## CONTENTS

Editorial Introduction	1	R. Howard Paine
Articles	3	Extra Mile Leads to New Chair Paul R. Hetrich
	7	And the Word Became Word Bard Thompson
	19	Nature and the Supernatural: The Christology of John W. Nevin Bruce M. Stephens
	29	The Concept of Bishop with Reference to the Consultation on Church Union John C. Shetler
	36	Incarnational Worship Carl P. Mitchell, Jr.



## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to be able to offer this Spring, 1989 issue of the New Review since we felt under compact to do so after the lapses of a year ago. The Fall, 1988 issue was so well received and has encouraged so much interest even beyond the membership of the Society that it is now apparent that our enterprise is well established and filling an important place among respected theological journals.

In the schedule that has been established it is our intention to devote the Autumn issues of the New Review to the publication of papers and sermons delivered at the annual Spring Convocation of the Society. The Spring issues will seek to utilize a wider contributorship since there is such a vast amount of study going on currently in areas of scholarship which have a direct relationship to concerns that are being fostered by the Mercersburg Society.

One of the most gratifying things to have happened within the past year has been the establishment of the Paul and Minnie Diefenderfer Chair in Mercersburg and Ecumenical Theology at Lancaster Theological Seminary. In providing the endowment for this chair the Diefenderfers have contributed the largest single gift to Lancaster Seminary in all of its history and have assured the perpetuation of a tradition which has given to Lancaster a distinguished place among the theological schools of America. It is appropriate that we honor the Diefenderfers at this time by presenting a brief biographical sketch of their outstanding careers and accomplishments. We have invited the Rev. Paul R. Hetrich who has been like a son to the Diefenderfers to write the article.

We are indebted to Bertha Thompson, widow of Bard Thompson, for supplying us with one of the last scholarly papers which her husband prepared. The paper was presented to the Aquinas Program Faculty Seminar at Drew University in 1986. The Aquinas Seminar was established by Bard in 1969 for faculty in the Graduate School at Drew to share their scholarly work, by meeting and reading papers on a regular basis. The Mercersburg Society was attempting to schedule Dr. Thompson for its next convocation when it learned of his untimely death on August 12, 1987. No group has mourned his passing more than our Society because of the great contribution he had continued to make to the field of Mercersburg scholarship through all of the years of his professional career.

The article by Bruce M. Stephens is noteworthy because it has come to the Review as an unsolicited piece of work. Professor Stephens has not been active in the work of the Society, but his interests coalesce with those that we seek to promote. It is hoped that this article will be the first of many which come to us in this way and that we shall be able to use them.

Dr. John C. Shetler is widely known as a conference minister of the United Church of Christ who has brought strong theological concerns into the pursuit of his work. He has been a delegate to the Plenary Sessions of the Consultation on Church Union where he has been able to offer a strong advocacy for the Reformed tradition in the church catholic. He is presently giving considerable time and energy to the responsibilities of Executive Vice President of the Mercersburg Society. His article on Episcopacy which appears in this issue of the Review was presented as a paper at a meeting of the Order of Corpus Christi of which he is a founding member.



The article by Carl Mitchell has been in the files of the Editor for several years. It was first written as a chapter for Handbook on Worship which was published by the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ in 1981. At that time the chapter was not used because the book was limited to some of the more practical aspects of worship and it was the intention of the editors to produce a second piece which would be more involved with the theoretical. Ever since it became apparent that the second book would never see the light of day, your Editor has been bothered by the concern that this very fine article by Pastor Mitchell would be lost. It gives me great satisfaction to be able to prevent this from happening by including the article in this issue of the Review.

A year from now the Review will be looking for a number of good articles for inclusion in the Spring, 1990 issue. Truth is, we should be receiving material right now so that we can plan ahead. We urge anyone who has been doing scholarly work in the areas related to Mercersburg to submit articles for consideration. Too, you may be aware of others who have material that we should consider using. Please be prompt about answering the call, because time flies faster than you would ever imagine for the busy editor.

R. Howard Paine  
Editor



## EXTRA MILE LEADS TO NEW CHAIR

Paul R. Hetrich  
Pastor, St. Paul's United Church of Christ  
Fleetwood, Pennsylvania

For more than fifteen years, Paul and Minnie Diefenderfer have been traveling ambassadors for the Lord Jesus Christ. They have been (and continue to be) a vital link between the churches of the United States and mission fields all over the world. This "extra mile" experience, as Dr. Diefenderfer calls it, began in the early 1970's with conversations which this extraordinary couple had with the Reverend David Rapp, who was then a corporate member of the United Church Board for World Ministries. On September 2, 1973, in the Rosedale United Church in Laureldale, Pennsylvania Minnie and Paul were commissioned as mission interpreters for the U.C.B.W.M., and ever since, have traveled as part of their own christian stewardship to mission locations related to the United Church of Christ and other denominations in every part of the globe.

Time and time again, the Diefenderfers have helped our church members to see through their "eyes" the miracles of God's care which unfold every day throughout the world because disciples still take seriously the empowerment and command of the Lord which is recorded in Acts 1:6 - "...when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Today's English Version)

Once the Lord's "second mile" or "extra mile" attitude begins to direct one's life, one is completely open to the Lord's leading. One no longer counts what is happening as sacrifice - miles put in, hardships endured - but as opportunity to serve the Lord.

Just such an additional opportunity was offered to the Diefenderfers a year ago in connection with Lancaster Theological Seminary. A new chair was being created at the seminary and awaited funding. The chair was in Mercersburg and Ecumenical Theology and the Mercersburg Studies Program.

This new "extra mile" for Paul and Minnie is most exciting and has profound biblical and theological significance for them, and for all of us as well, because it brings to full cycle what life in mission is all about. The purpose of the church is mission, but mission grows out of the church's worship and sacramental life. We derive our sustenance and strength to carry out the mission through the sacrament and worship. In summary, this is what Philip Schaff and John Williamson Nevin were writing about in the mid-nineteenth century and what became known as "Mercersburg Theology" - the renewal of the church, its sacraments and its mission, based upon a richer understanding of their relationship and the history of the church.

Mercersburg Theology fashioned a much broader catholic understanding of the church which turned out to be vital to the nineteenth century and of equal importance to each generation. But of particular concern to our own time when personality egocentrism and myopic sectarianism have corrupted parts of the church and its mission. Also in our new evangelical enthusiasm, we must acknowledge that we should not be driven as competitors, but as partners.



In a report to the executive committee of the Board of Trustees of Lancaster Theological Seminary related to the creation of the Mercersburg chair, President Peter Schmiechen stated: "This action will reaffirm the seminary's historic interest in worship, the theology of the church and sacraments, and thereby contribute to a sense of identity with our past. At the same time, it will provide a means to engage in the contemporary ecumenical discussions that are in the forefront of meetings of christians throughout the world."

Mercersburg Theology was not always alive and well in the minds and hearts of the leaders of our churches. As a matter of fact, there are some persons who consider this growing interest in a nineteenth century movement as an "invasion of dust." These cultured despisers are confined to a minority who have heard of the movement but have chosen, for one reason or another, to ignore it. Fortunately, because of the inspiration of the late Dr. Charles E. Schaeffer, an alumnus of Lancaster Theological Seminary and influential patriarch of the Reformed church in the twentieth century, and the dedicated pursuit and study of a group of eastern Pennsylvania pastors over the past four decades, the continuing significance of the teachings of Schaff, Nevin, Harbaugh and others have come to light.

Through the urging of this group of pastors and the work of the worship committee of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, Dr. John C. Shetler, then Conference Minister, requested, in March of 1983, the Seminary Board of Trustees that a task force be charged with the responsibility of exploring the establishing of a Mercersburg chair in ecumenics and liturgy, looking forward to the completion of this task by 1988, when the seminary would be celebrating the centennial of Philip Schaff's founding of the American Society of Church History. The Lancaster Theological Seminary faculty approved this plan and each of the four United Church of Christ conferences in Pennsylvania were asked to back the proposal, and each, in turn, did so.

At the same time, as work on the chair was developing, the Mercersburg Society got under way with its purpose to seek to preserve and continue the essential components of Mercersburg theology. The society is ecumenical in its participating membership and also reflects various parts of the country in its composition.

By November of 1983, the special task force had not only completed its assignment to explore, but was ready to recommend the calling of an adjunct faculty person to teach a three-hour course in Liturgies and Mercersburg Theology. While the fall of 1984 had been targeted for the beginning time for the lecture course, an additional period of time was needed to get under way.

It was in the spring of 1985, when Dr. R. Howard Paine who was pastor of St. Thomas Reformed Church, U.C.C., in Reading, Pennsylvania, and a student of Mercersburg theology during his entire pastoral years, was invited to come to the Lancaster campus for the first lectureship. Dr. Paine's course, "Liturgy and Life: Traditional and Timely Worship," lifted up one of the important aspects of the ecumenical movement, the recovery of a catholic understanding of christian worship which also acknowledges that the church is first a fellowship of Christ's people gathered around a font, lectern, and table, before it is deployed on mission.

The "extra mile" for Paul and Minnie Diefenderfer was not a christian attitude of recent vintage, but a gift of the Spirit from early childhood.



Through the christian life style of their families, they were well grounded in the life of their congregations, and as children, they gained a vision of the whole church through font, lectern and table.

A letter to President Herbert Hoover, written by the Superintendent of the Steinhart Aquarium of San Francisco, dated June 25, 1929, reflects the kind of vision which already had developed in the life of the young man, Paul Diefenderfer:

"I found the best informed man on native affairs in the (Samoan) Islands was the Director of Education, Mr. Paul Diefenderfer, a native son of Pennsylvania, who graduated in anthropology at Chicago University and joined the staff of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. That institution sent him to American Samoa two years ago and Governor Graham at once made him Director of Education for American Samoa. He is a young man, is respected by everyone, and has great influence with the natives. Any information from him regarding the islands would be reliable."

President Hoover was informed about Paul in order to secure his help in transferring the islands from military rule to a democratic government which the Samoans themselves deeply desired. Paul not only was helpful in the transition, but was called upon by the Samoans to assist in the writing of the new constitution.

To know Paul Diefenderfer is to gain wonderful insights into God's vast and complex world of people, places, ideas and things. He is the most ubiquitous person I have ever known. His knowledge is so vast and inexhaustible that he literally takes your breath away. The Diefenderfer home is virtually a storehouse of artifacts, archives and memorabilia. I know, because I've helped to cart boxes of material to appropriate centers and museums as Paul and Minnie prepared to leave their home and move into a retirement community here in Berks County. Museums which already have received and displayed some of the Diefenderfer artifacts are: the Reading Public Museum in Reading, Pennsylvania, the Samoan Museum in Pago Pago, Samoa, and the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu.

Minnie Ulrich Diefenderfer throughout her career was a "student's teacher" - meaning that she expected great results from her pupils and motivated and inspired them to achieve it. A couple of generations of public school students were profoundly influenced by this dedicated professional. Minnie is gifted with a "steel trap" mind. She remembers the names of her former students and their family connections as well. Later in life, as she and Paul visited missionaries (and there have been hundreds) she could tick-off their names, locations and incidents at the drop of a hat. She is a walking directory and dictionary of persons, places and experiences.

Paul and Minnie were married in 1968. Paul's first wife, Anna, and Minnie were sisters. After a difficult battle with cancer, Anna died in 1967. Divine Providence fashioned the first marriage, and in like manner, God led Paul and Minnie together as husband and wife and prepared them for their special calling.



It was within a year of their marriage that Minnie retired from the Muhlenberg School District in Berks County, and Paul brought to a conclusion an exciting and rewarding career as a manager, estate planner and certified life underwriter with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. God was preparing them for a special role in the world mission of our churches and this was happening at a time when they were in their seventies, well past the active years for most people.

Since 1973, the Diefenderfers' "extra mile" literally has turned into over 1,500,000 miles of travel for the purpose of sharing with mission personnel and fellow christians in fifty-three nations. They have often been in sensitive situations in South Africa, Central America and the Middle East. At times they were in troubled places such as Mosambique, where machine guns were thrust in their faces during a revolution.

After each missionary journey, Paul and Minnie returned to interpret their experiences and the mission work to our congregations throughout the Middle Atlantic region. This ministry has drawn us closer to our brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world. Just as the Apostle Paul and Titus raised the awareness of the need for the relationship and support between the new churches springing up around the Mediterranean Sea and the christians in Judea.

It fits so nicely into the "extra mile" concept that this couple who now are approaching their late eighties was presented with another challenge, the financial undergirding of the chair at Lancaster Theological Seminary. This they accomplished in April of 1988.

As a result of the Diefenderfer gift, Dr. John B. Payne, professor of church history at the seminary, has been called to the newly created PAUL AND MINNIE DIEFENDERFER CHAIR IN MERCERSBURG AND ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY.

It truly is amazing what going the "extra mile" is able to accomplish through the strength which the Lord provides!





**Paul and Minnie Diefenderfer**  
**Benefactors of Lancaster Theological Seminary**  
**Endowing the**  
**Chair in Mercersburg and Ecumenical Theology**



AND THE WORD BECAME WORD  
AN ESSAY ON THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE RENAISSANCE  
AND THE REFORMATION\*

Bard Thompson  
Late Dean Emeritus of the Graduate School  
Drew University  
Madison, New Jersey

Zurich. June of 1524. A crew of workmen sent by the town council entered the three parish churches. Having locked the doors behind them, they proceeded to strip the naves and sanctuaries of images, utensils, vestments, and liturgical books. They whitewashed the walls, removed all relics to the bone house, nailed the organs shut.

The following year the Reformer of Zurich, Ulrich Zwingli, introduced new forms of Sunday worship. He had come to the conclusion that the Mass could not legitimately be described as a vehicle of present grace; it was only a commemoration of Christ's death on Calvary, and, therefore, a reminder of a grace Christians had already received. As such, it was no longer suitable as the centerpiece of Sunday observance. In fact it might even suffer by overuse, according to the axiom, familiarity breeds contempt. Better, thought Zwingli, to redesign Sunday worship around the sermon which does convey grace. So Zwingli put an end to the Mass, put an end to a liturgical structure of Word and sacrament that had endured in the West since the second century. The focus of Sunday worship in Zurich was henceforth on preaching; Zurichers stopped saying, "going to Mass," but said, "going to sermon."

For occasional Sundays, Zwingli invented a new Mass, a puny thing which Bishop Brilioth once called a masterpiece of dogmatic expression. Indeed it was! People sat in august silence, never stirring from their places, gripped in contemplation of the mystery of Calvary, as bread and wine - only reminders, never vehicles of grace - were passed from hand-to-hand in plain wooden ware, lest pomp come back again.

Behind Zwingli's acts were two assumptions. First, believers cannot partake of the substance of Christ's body - seven hundred years of Catholic Eucharistic piety notwithstanding. Second, even if they could, it would not matter. St. John is reported to have said, "The flesh profiteth nothing." Zwingli endorsed that statement exuberantly. It is the second of these assumptions that arrests our attention. Zwingli could not conceive of the possibility that physical objects could participate in the holy or carry spiritual benefit. There was a chasm in his brain that divided matter and spirit: how could physical things carry spiritual benefits when they belonged to two such discontinuous aspects of existence? Luther, a contentious fellow anyway, reserved his uttermost contempt for Zwingli, who would, he feared, tear down the whole sacramental structure of the Middle Ages. Indeed when we consider how many physical things, how many sacraments and sacramentals were used by the Latin Church to draw people out of themselves into the presence of the holy, who can gainsay Luther's terrible judgment?

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\*with gratitude to Evelyn S. Meyer. Heather Elkins suggested the title.



But was Luther any better? In the year of the Ninety-five Theses, 1517, Luther told his Wittenberg students that "the ears alone are the organs of the Christian." It must have come as a bolt to young Catholics who had been raised to think that the smell of incense, or the feel of water in a font, or the sight of the Elevation at Mass were to one's religious advantage. The old Catholic tradition that grace could be communicated through a variety of means corresponding to all five senses suddenly stood reduced to a single channel: hearing. Luther took the familiar axiom attributed to St. Paul, fides ex auditu, "faith comes by hearing," and made it the regulator of the Protestant cultus.

The rest of St. Paul's statement is, auditus autem per verbum Christi, "and hearing comes from the preaching of Christ." Luther took that two ways. The first catches our fancy by its exuberance, its almost rollicking characteristic. The gospel, he said, is "a good story." "A good hearing," echoed Tyndale, his English alter ego. It is a tale of salvation, told by the apostles, to be retold in the church - nay, to be "shouted" in the church - nay, to be shouted in the mundhaus, the "mouth-house" which is the church. To be in the apostolic succession does not require the credentials of a Catholic bishop; it only requires one to tell the tale with apostolic candor. All that is really wanted of a community of religious people is that, like Mary, they sit at Jesus' feet daily, listening to his Word.

The second moves us by its religious immediacy. The Word, said Luther, is a personal word. The whole redeeming activity of God on behalf of sinful people is made immediate to us through the patently human apparatus of speaking and hearing, through the patently human agents called preachers. By such means, yet impossible without the grace of the Holy Ghost, the "speaking God" - deus loquens - has resolved with himself to enter our time and space, and, finding us in our loneliness and despair, to speak as a loving and forgiving Father directly to us. "And faith comes by hearing."

Luther attached two peculiar responsibilities to this new mode of religious communication. Let no one suppose, he said, that he or she can ever leave off hearing, receiving, accepting, pondering the Word of God as if it were disposable. Let no one think that receiving the Word is a once-for-all transaction - one overwhelming sermon by Over Preacher good for all time. One giant-sized infusion of faith. One reading of the Bible guaranteed effective for life. Not at all! The Word of God is inexhaustible, requiring lifelong discipleship to its riches and mysteries. Back to it must we go throughout life, using every sort of homiletical, pedagogical, and liturgical means at our disposal.

To a limited degree at least, all Christians must actually be communicators of grace through the extension of the normal definition of priesthood - the priesthood of all believers. Faith unites us to Christ in whose justice we stand; therefore we are justified by faith. The same faith, the same union, also attaches us to Christ the priest; therefore his priestly activity devolves upon us all. A priest is not some constitutional officer of the Holy Catholic Church, as you thought, but that fellow next door who sells snake oil. Furthermore the likes of us are supposed to be "Christs" to one another - preaching, praying, exhorting, scolding, forgiving, exercising ethical judgment. It cannot be done out of ignorance. It cannot be done out of wooly-headed piety. It can only be done out of a lifetime of attention to religious texts, the Bible in particular. Read the preface to Luther's



Larger Catechism: those who fail to attend seriously to the inexhaustible Word deserve to be cashiered from the common priesthood.

Let me admit that Luther was far more Catholic than I have made him out to be. He retained the shape of the Roman Mass, affirmed the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, abandoned Latin as the liturgical language only at length and with misgivings, preserved the Elevation of the Host, permitted the continuation of many Medieval ceremonies as a comfort to those weak in faith, and, in general, dealt respectfully with the Medieval cultus.

How much did Calvin contribute to this wordy revolution? He was no less determined than his Protestant predecessors had been to see religious truth delivered through direct mediums of communication, but he exceeded them in one important particular: he made an all-out attack against secondary means of communication - images, ceremonies, and such. They weren't needed any longer. They belonged to the old dispensation. They were types of Christ. But now that God is with us in Christ, ceremonies are simply a nuisance to communication. "God is now pleased," wrote Calvin, "to instruct his church in a different manner." Christians should be willing to live in the plainness of the Incarnation.

While the modern problem may be that symbols convey nothing, Calvin was suspicious that symbols convey something. By keeping Medieval furniture, ceremonies, and signs, we run the risk of communicating untruth, superstition, or at least ambiguity to unsuspecting worshippers. Better to scrap everything from the Middle Ages, saving only a few simple things that are likely to convey the truth of the gospel with utmost simplicity and clarity. When the issue was symbolism, Calvin stood on the side of simplicity. Neither inventiveness nor imagination had much charm for him. Both sniffed of idolatry. Neither was likely to be conscientious of the warranty of the Bible.

Calvin greatly exalted the Protestant "teller." A minister, he said, holds an "angelic office" in an age when revelations by angels are no longer commonplace. In other words, when the minister puts the Scripture back into oral form by the act of preaching, the minister becomes the agent of the God who speaks. Through the medium of preaching, the "speaking God," deus loquens, intervenes in these times and extends forgiveness to the wayward and unworthy. Luther thought of the ordained ministry as simply a functional extension of the priesthood of all believers. Calvin was simply appalled by such egalitarianism. A minister is no hayfield lout, fixed up for preaching, but a genuine officer of the Holy Catholic Church - sophisticated, eloquent, learned, and set apart constitutionally to deliver the Word. Calvin's writings do not bulge with encomiums about the priesthood of all believers.

Faith, said Calvin, reiterating a theme out of Luther, does not rest in ignorance, but in knowledge. Well, of course, it doesn't! Isn't it a commonplace that Christianity is not a mystery religion but refers to a set of historical and textual bases called "the gospel" which must be attended to. But Calvin meant more than that. Anyone so pusillanimous that he or she refuses to exercise head, as well as heart, in the history of salvation is unfit for a Calvinist congregation. While he accepted Cyprian's description of the Church as "Mother," Calvin was swift to add the collateral title, "Teacher." Given the inexhaustible nature of God's Word - an idea that fell as easily from Calvin's lips as from Luther's Christians must remain in that Teacher's schoolroom as long as they live, exercising themselves in



curriculums Protestant. Such was the intellectually tough, even dogmatic character of Calvinism. Because it took the law of God to be "the granite-foundation of the spiritual world," and the gospel to be the lifelong attraction of the mind as well as the heart, Calvinism was a religion as conspicuously pedagogical and catechetical as it was hortatory.

As I did with Luther, I hasten to redress what I have said about Calvin with a more Catholic consideration. The one great religious sentiment in the thought of John Calvin is what Calvin himself calls "the mystical union." On the one side stands the individual, destitute of spiritual resources and damned. On the other side stands Christ, the "Blessed Possessor," who possesses everything of spiritual value - justification, holiness, eternal life. The bond between the parties is the mystical union, forged by faith, but constantly renewed by the sacrament of Holy Communion. In that sacred occurrence, Christ is spiritually present to believers, imparting the animating power of his life to their souls. There is no genuine Calvinism without the Eucharist.

What have our findings been? In the first half of the sixteenth century, a significant change occurred in the character of Christian worship. I have argued the matter sharply, perhaps too sharply, because the vapors that arise from Ecumenism sometimes obscure what actually happened to the Christian cultus in the age of the Reformation. Latin yielded to the vernacular. Silent recital gave way to "the shouted Word." The appeal to the five-sensed individual got funneled down to the individual with big ears. Thus the esoteric yielded to the modern; empathy, to listening; a universal language, to particular languages; the objective, to the subjective. The Mass became Lord's Supper, its doctrine of sacrifice everywhere repudiated. The sermon became the sine qua non of Protestant worship. Liturgies became expressions of Scriptural warranty, more or less strictly applied. The Protestant cultus, in other words, was reorganized around the direct communication of religious benefit through a process of speaking and hearing, teaching and learning, reading and understanding. With that reorganization went some depreciation of secondary means of communicating grace, especially in the regimes of Zwingli and Calvin.

Even more provocative is this: the very Protestant tradition that expressed so much skepticism over the nature of human beings thrust upon those same human beings a stack of communicative responsibilities - preaching and listening, teaching and learning - unheard of in the church since the Acts of the Apostles. Didn't the Saxon pachyderm (Luther) swat Erasmus the fly precisely over the assumption that human beings have some freedom, some reason, some power? And when natural reason, alias Frau Hulda, presumed to teach about heavenly things, wasn't it Luther who called her a whore? And wasn't it Luther who once tried to make an audience believe that while he and his friend Philip were drinking beer in a Wittenberg saloon, the Word and the Holy Ghost were outside somewhere, smiting the Pope of Rome and the Holy Roman Emperor and bringing the Reformation to bear all by themselves? Luther, we don't believe you! There is too much preaching, too much teaching, too much listening, too much learning in the Reformation agenda to make your story credible. We know, of course, that faith is not borne out of reason, nor is it in any respect whatsoever the result of human exertion, whether preacher's or listener's. But you, Luther, were the very one who taught us that "God does not give the [Holy] Spirit without the Word, but through the Word," and that the Word is normally communicated by preaching.



How shall we explain such findings? I am like you are: I enjoy seeing the Ockhamists go by. And the precursors - Wyclif and Hus and the boys from Mt. Tabor. And the mystics led by Meister Eckhart, looking inward. Saints and conciliarists. Popes, good and bad. A late Medieval procession on the way to Wittenberg. But those people, worthy as they are, do not contribute to the questions that have been raised. I will make bold to offer you another agenda, but not without great misgivings on my part, because many of the self-evident truths I will propose really lie hidden in prestatistical mists. If you will take these proposals of mine, less as piers that support a structure, more as pieces of a patchwork quilt, you may the easier see what I am driving at.

First, homesickness. While the Reformation appropriated some things from the immediate past, taking advantage of certain cultural gains made by the Renaissance, it also inherited from the Renaissance a deep longing for the distant past, a homesickness (as Huizinga called it) for a golden age of civilization in which the norms of culture were established. For the Renaissance, that homesickness was directed toward a classicism in all of its manifestations - the rebirth of art, a refined Latinity, a more perfect poetry, the well governed society of Cato or Scipio. For the Reformation, it was directed toward ancient Christianity. On the grave of Leonardo Bruni, the Florentines inscribed, "History is in mourning," imagining that the ancient world was dead. "The Renaissance stood weeping at its grave," wrote the modern historian Erwin Panofsky, "and tried to resurrect its soul." Colorful, but inaccurate. Bereavement was not a sentiment in which either Renaissance or Reformation indulged. Rebirth and reform were. Humanists and Reformers shared a common passion to renew the times by the recovery of its literary remains, called "sources." Not vacuous things, but springs, fountains, healing waters. Some of Luther's idea of the inexhaustible Word may lie hidden in their meaning. "Why may we not aspire," wrote the Christian Humanist Jacques Lefevre, "to see our age restored to the likeness of the primitive church?" Charmed by the same sentiment, Calvin inscribed his new Sunday service for Geneva with the words, "according to the custom of the ancient church." Humanists and Reformers also shared a contempt for the ages intervening, which Petrarca, the father of Renaissance Humanism, compared to the darkness of night. "O Barbarism," exclaimed Ulrich von Hutten, "prepare for [thy] extinction...."

Second, literacy. In the Schulordnung of Mecklenburg (1552), Melanchthon wrote, "Reading is the beginning of Christian doctrine." What an auspicious statement! Not much of the Protestant program would have worked without some literacy on a broad social scale - not access to the Scriptures, not proficiency in the Scriptures, not the priesthood of believers, not even much comprehension of sermons.

Yet reading was not an indelible characteristic of Western society. At the beginning of the Middle Ages, at the disintegration of the Roman Empire, illiteracy was common among layfolk. Gregory the Great, first of the Medieval popes, referred to "images as the books of the uneducated." As the chief civilizing agency in the West, the church enjoyed a virtual monopoly on learning; its ministers were called clericis, scholars. The molders of Western monasticism, Benedict and Cassiodorus, were among the principal educators of the age. Reading and writing, school and library, the copying of books and preservation of manuscripts became part of monastic discipline.

Medieval history could be written, I suppose, around successive gains in



literacy, with chapters on obvious topics - scholasticism, the universities, the rise of towns and guilds, Humanism, printing, and, eventually, what Spengler called "our book and reading culture." In the early Tudor Renaissance, Thomas More lamented the fact that "not more than three-fifths of the English people could read" - which is to say, more than half could read as the English Reformation began. Only in Utopia was every child taught to read and every adult encouraged to cultivate the mind. Yet More's adversary, William Tyndale, assumed an almost universal literacy when he wrote, by way of commending his English New Testament, "I wish that the farmer might sing parts [of the Scriptures] at his plough, and the weaver at his shuttle, and that the traveler might beguile the weariness of his way with their narration." Scholars believe that about half of the population of Western Europe was literate at the end of the sixteenth century. Of more importance, perhaps, is how the Protestant establishment exploited the possibility of literacy. When asked how he could treat an illiterate constituent, Calvin replied (with Pope Gregory clearly in mind): not by giving the person an image, but by teaching the person to read. "Reason," said Calvin, "is proper to our nature." All of us have therefore a "common energy" toward intellectual life, a "human acuteness" which may be directed toward the liberal arts or the mastery of a trade, but, in either case, evokes literacy.

Third, silent reading and the unsilent sermon. Those who could read in the early Middle Ages probably could not do so with our facility. Although Cicero, Quintilian, and Jerome all had recommended the physical act of writing, many Greek and Roman authors, including Fathers of the Church, composed by dictation, intending their work to be read aloud, by scholars in a classroom or monks in community; and even when it was read by a solitary reader, it was read in the manner of a muttering child, the lips in locomotion.

Like a piece of music, a written text became intelligible only when it was sounded, either to oneself or to another. Augustine was struck by how odd Ambrose was: he read without moving his lips. John Cassian, an early monastic figure, distinguished between meditation and reading, the one silent, the other not; and St. Benedict warned monks who wanted to read after the noon repast not to disturb others - an admonition that assumes the habit of reading aloud. As late as the twelfth century, illuminations show authors dictating their works and God whispering the Scriptures to prophets and evangelists. People were shown reading in groups. Carrells did more than shelter people from drafty libraries, but enabled their occupants to mutter or to dictate.

Antonello da Messina's "St. Jerome in His Study," painted just at the advent of printing, shows us a different critter. It is a picture of a silent reader, a modern scholar. Jerome is alone. His lips are closed. Around him is an array of books and documents, suggesting that he may be checking sources and comparing precedents.

Silent reading meant swift reading and independent reading; it must have emboldened the reader, put curiosity under the reader's personal control, allowed the reader's skepticism to flourish without detection, and buttressed the individualism already characteristic of Renaissance culture. When it came into vogue, and why, are matters of conjecture. McLuhan tried to connect the transition entirely to the beginning of printing. Silent reading seems to have begun, however, as early as the eighth century, and to have



progressed slowly through the Middle Ages, only to be accelerated by the intellectual demands of scholasticism and of university life, and brought to completion by the new technology of printing. In the fourteenth century, Nicholas of Lyra addressed himself purposefully to "readers." In the fifteenth century, a new sort of spiritual literature appeared - the Imitation of Christ, for example - designed to be read alone, with meditation and prayer.

We must be careful not to say that silent reading invariably diminished oral communication. What else did the Protestant sermon mean except that the Word must be sounded. Silent reading, while it may have contributed significantly to Protestant intellectualism, did not produce the "shouted Word." In that respect, the Reformers bucked the trend of Renaissance culture. By insisting that the most powerful word is a spoken word, they took their constituents back to a more ancient habit, a more classical, patristical, biblical habit. Where did the Protestant sermon come from? From the general history of preaching? There was no precedent for the sermon in Renaissance culture - except perhaps the orations by Humanists and the sermons delivered by those Christian Humanists, such as Johann Ulrich Surgant of Basel, who sensed that reverence for the sources, when given liturgical expression, was bound to come out as preaching. How far off the mark was Surgant? The Protestant sermon was rather precisely an effort to put the one Source of forgiveness into oral form, making it peculiarly powerful. In an era accustomed to the recovery of the sources, the sermon was by no means an unseemly means of communication.

Fourth, printing. Luther described printing as "God's highest and extremest act of grace, whereby the business of the gospel is driven forward." An extraordinary statement! And one which may say as much about Luther's positive attitude toward culture and about the legitimacy of reason as an agent of culture, as it does about printing. I will use printing here as a euphemism to describe a cluster of technological achievements - movable metal type, oil-based ink, the wooden handpress, paper - associated, at least poetically, with a print shop operated in or near Mainz by one Gutenberg at the middle of the fifteenth century. Within fifty years of Gutenberg, the age of the scribes had yielded to that of the printers. "He prints more in one day than could be copied in a year," said an Italian Humanist of a German printer who had just opened a shop in Italy. By 1500 there were presses operating in 260 European towns. Venice alone supported 150 such establishments, more than any other city in the world. A person born in 1453, the year Constantinople fell, lived by the age of fifty in a world of eight million printed books - more than all of the scribes of Europe had managed to copy since Constantine founded the city in 330 A.D.

Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa called printing "this holy art risen in Germany" and urged its use by the Church of Rome. Gutenberg's first major work was a handsome 42-line Bible. Between 1457 and 1500 more than 100 editions of the Scriptures were published, many in the vernacular. As the cost of their publication plummeted, Bibles became cheap enough for common purchase. From the vantage point of the catholic world, what a mixed blessing printing was! All one needs to do to assess its mischief is to examine the doctrinally deviant words used by Tyndale as translator of Holy Writ. Although the Church of Rome never turned its back on Nicholas of Cusa's "holy art," it began a battle with publishers and authors over unauthorized printing as early as the Fifth Lateran Council. Protestant wags, such as the Puritan controversialist John Foxe, took the occasion to observe that either the pope



must abolish printing or it would do likewise to him.

More apt as a description of printing may have been the sixteenth-century aphorism: the printing press is "the poor man's friend." Indeed, it was a major asset to the dissemination of Lutheranism. Between 1517 and 1520, as the Reformation got underway, Luther sent thirty pamphlets and broadsides to the printer. They sold 300,000 copies. Beatus Rhenanus informed Zwingli that "sold" was the wrong word; they were snatched from the hands of booksellers. In 1517 Luther had written out some propositions in academic Latin; but scholars stayed away from the proposed debate in droves. Suddenly, however, through the power of the press, the Ninety-five Theses were being discussed in the marketplaces of Germany. The Reformation was the first movement, religious or otherwise, to move forward under the impetus of printing.

What did printing mean to Protestant piety? Luther's German New Testament (1522) was intended to be read at home by all sorts and conditions of people. Along with two catechisms and other standards of faith, it was designed to assist their lifelong incursions into the inexhaustible Word. The Geneva Bible, used in England, carried an admonition to heads of households to preach to their families from the English Bible, "that from the highest to the lowest they may obey the will of God." On the title page of Acts and Monuments, edited by John Foxe, we are shown two congregations at worship - Catholics with their rosaries, Protestants with books on their laps.

God conducted the Reformation, said Foxe, not by the sword, but by "printing, writing, and reading." For Foxe, printing was an instrument of discernment. It enabled people to distinguish truth from error. It stirred up their "good wits."

Fifth, books, libraries, and the book-tradition. Libraries in the Middle Ages were maintained principally by monastic communities - an achievement to which the universities and the friars eventually contributed. But the Renaissance library was a new creation, borne of a new spirit which J.A. Symonds described as "the age of passionate desire." It was borne of an exuberance to recover as much as possible of classical antiquity through the gathering, preserving, and eventually printing of its literary remains.

Far and away the most prodigious of the manuscript collectors was a papal agent, Poggio Bracciolini, who rummaged through the cathedrals and abbeys of Europe, searching for classical remains. Armed with the pope's excommunication against all who might prove to be tight-fisted, and completely unencumbered by scruples, Poggio was a conspicuous success. Back to Rome he came, laden with precious manuscripts, including a complete text of Quintilian's On the Education of an Orator, discovered in a Swiss convent.

Such feverish collecting led to the creation of new libraries - not in monasteries any longer, and seldom in cathedrals, but by private persons - scholars and princes. Petrarca, the father of Renaissance Humanism, reveled in his own working library, just as Cicero, his intellectual hero, had done before him. Boccaccio, Petrarca's immediate successor, gave evidence of a substantial collection of his own, by willing 200 volumes to his confessor. Among the first princes to make libraries were the d'Este of Ferrara, the Gonzaga of Mantua, and that ardent bibliophile of Urbino, Federigo da Montefeltro. To the Medici of Florence, however, we owe a most remarkable achievement - the first civic library in the West since Roman



times. Cosimo de' Medici opened such an institution in the convent of San Marco in 1441, and by such means extended the riches of the Renaissance book-tradition to all literate Florentines. The second such library was given to Venice in 1468 by Cardinal Bessarion. "For public benefit," read the deed of endowment, by means of which Bessarion conveyed to the Venetian Republic 264 manuscripts in Latin, 482 in Greek, a collection rich in Greek materials, befitting Bessarion's eastern origins.

The most important figure in the history of the Renaissance library was a pope. As a young humanist, he had written the definitive bibliographic canon, by which all of the great collectors built their libraries. As Pope Nicholas V (1447-55), he founded the Vatican Library - a public library, mind you - which housed 4,000 volumes before the Sack of Rome (1527) and was the largest collection in the West. Both Poggio, the collector, and Lorenzo Valla, the eminent critic, were in the employ of that pope.

In 1490, the Venetian printer and humanist, Aldus Manutius, wrote:

I have resolved to devote my life to the cause of scholarship. In place of a life of ease, I have chosen an anxious and toilsome career. Cato compared human existence to iron. When nothing is done with it, it rusts. It is only through constant activity that polish is secured.

Thus, thirty years before Luther, another scholar had talked about a lifelong discipleship to an inexhaustible word. The Renaissance book and the Renaissance library may have had something to do with that. As Jean Gerson said, while oral discourse is ephemeral the book is of permanent, inherent, enduring value, something to be exploited endlessly for new ideas and criticism. Libraries, where books are collected, where scholars and teachers gather to search the riches of books, became in the Renaissance places of cultural regeneration. It is hard to imagine Lorenzo Valla's critical scholarship - the refutation of the Donation of Constantine, for example - apart from the existence of such institutions. Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola attended the Medici Library in Florence, just as Luther and Melanchthon later worked in the university library at Wittenberg.

His trust in the Vulgate having been shaken by Lorenzo Valla's Annotations, Luther decided that he must enter the very text of the Scriptures, using the original languages, and found himself utterly dependent on the lexicons, commentaries, and critical editions prepared by the Humanists and held by the Wittenberg library - Reuchlin's Hebrew grammar and lexicon, Lefevre's text of the Psalms, and the Epistles of Paul, Reuchlin's text of the penitential Psalms, Erasmus' Greek New Testament, and Melanchthon's Greek grammar. The languages, said Luther, are "the sheath in which the sword of the Spirit is encased, the casket in which this jewel is carried, the vessel which contains this wine, the cupboard in which this food is stored." The interesting thing about Luther's resources is that they were all printed books; they came from the publishing emporiums of Paris, Basel, and the towns of Germany; they contained standard, more-or-less reliable texts, free from the foibles of scribes; and they were as easily accessible in Cambridge, Einsiedeln, Strassburg, or Geneva, as they were in Wittenberg, and were used in all of those places of scholarly activity.

Sixth, humanistic education. In Genealogy of the Gods, Boccaccio expressed the educational perspective of Renaissance Humanism. Learning, he said, "turns natural man into civil man, remarkable for morals, knowledge, and



virtue." "Nature," he continued, "produces man, learning then forms him anew." If Boccaccio is right, our dignity is not a natural endowment, but comes from that sort of learning that makes us truly human. Humanitas, from which we get our expression, "the humanities," is descriptive of that excellence of mind and spirit, that full humanity which can only be achieved by study and reflection. The "forming anew," of which Boccaccio spoke is the function of the liberal arts - grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, philosophy - a curriculum that has the normative stamp of antiquity on it and is thought likely to achieve full humanity in us. "We call those studies liberal," explained Pietro Paolo Vergerio, "which are worthy of a free man...." He meant, which divert us from baser inclinations so that we can attain and practice wisdom and virtue. The outcome of education was citizenship, broadly conceived. "To understand and to act" - such was Giannozzo Manetti's prospectus for life. Most Humanists agreed. Between 1400 and 1600, princes and magistrates, Reformers and Jesuits, merchants and teachers were all persuaded that this combination of learning and active participation in society was good for both public and personal life. At the same time there came a chorus of complaint, from Petrarca to Luther, that the "cold, barren intellectuality" of scholasticism had neither the right agenda nor the right audience to make people better.

The Protestant Reformers were prominent in their advocacy of public schools and public libraries. Melancthon's school plan for Saxony, enacted in 1528, is said to have been the first system of public education since Roman antiquity. In de Regno Christi, Martin Bucer advised King Edward VI to establish public education throughout England as part of a scheme to build a "Christian commonwealth." The Reformers' main interest in education was, of course, to prepare people for religious responsibility. But it is remarkable that in no one of the Protestant appeals do the ideas of citizenship or cultural sophistication disappear. Boccaccio's "civil man" survived as an ideal of education, even among the Reformers.

The wiseacres said, "Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched." To which Erasmus replied somewhat sourly, "Luther managed to hatch a strange bird." What was the bond that held Humanist and Reformer together? What was the estrangement that drove them apart? What drew the two parties together was a common homesickness for the ancient past - of which we have already spoken - as well as similar intellectual procedures for the retrieval of the ancient past, and a common disparagement of the Middle Ages. In Luther's opinion, however, Erasmus had no sense of the gospel at all. "He damaged the gospel," said Luther, "in proportion as he advanced grammar." Humanism, in the judgment of Protestants, simply ran out into moralism, supported by a frivolous assessment of human nature, with Christ as nothing more than a philosopher of virtue.

### Epilogue

In a letter of 1524, Luther encouraged the magistrates of German towns to make haste to construct systems of public education, using church revenues heretofore directed to pious endowments. The curriculum would be based on classical precedent, Roman in particular: it would include ancient languages, history, the other liberal arts, as well as instruction in the Bible. Luther offered the magistrates four advantages to such a system: it would give everyone access to the Scriptures; it would provide good citizens, relieving Germany of rule by "clods and boors;" it would afford Germans a commercial advantage; it would deliver Germany from a widely perceived



cultural backwardness. Luther also proposed that the larger cities maintain public libraries, their collections to include the classics and the liberal arts.

In the same letter, Luther declared the Renaissance to be a work of God, illustrative of God's providential care. Without the revival of the languages and the liberal arts, the gospel could not have been recovered. It was none other than God himself who consigned Constantinople into the hands of the Turks, in order to shower the West with Greek scholars and texts. A year earlier, in a letter to Eoban Hess, Luther had said that the Humanists were forerunners of the gospel, just as John the Baptist had been a forerunner of Christ. By such a comparison, he drew the periods together - Renaissance and Reformation - yet carefully distinguished them. For a forerunner is not the thing itself.

Have I squandered the grace-onlyness of the Reformation? Or the doctrine of Election? Or the role for the Holy Spirit? I don't think so. What I have tried to express is that, in the Reformation, the grace of God was brought into our time and space and addressed to our circumstances, no longer exclusively by structures customary to the Middle Ages, but by a combination of old means and new means, and that the new means are hard to understand apart from the Renaissance.

#### Addenda

1. "Reformed" is used by Calvin in two ways: first, to indicate an improvement of the religious person by obedience to the will of God as it is expressed in his law; second, to indicate an improvement of the religious institution, the church, through conformity to God's own design as expressed in the Scriptures.

2. The Reformed tradition had two sources. It came into being first in the German-speaking sections of Switzerland, under the leadership of Ulrich Zwingli, who began an evangelical ministry at the Grossmünster of Zurich on January 1, 1519. Zwingli was the first theologian of the Reformed tradition; and Jaques Couvoisier, in his book, Zwingli: A Reformed Theologian, argues that Zwingli was authentic to the tradition. The preeminent Reformed theologian was, of course, John Calvin, who began a ministry in Geneva, in French-speaking Switzerland, in July, 1536, the same year in which his Institutes of the Christian Religion first appeared. The only other possible founder of the Reformed tradition was Martin Bucer, the Reformer of Strassburg, who appears in the writings of Wilhelm Pauck as the originator of Calvinist thought. Bucer made Calvin a Calvinist, said Pauck. It is true that Calvin was greatly indebted to Bucer, a debt that increased during Calvin's sojourn in Strassburg, 1538-1541, although it may also be the case that Pauck overestimated the importance of Bucer in the formation of Calvin.

3. Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin - all three - entered the Reformation from the intellectual tradition of Renaissance humanism. All three had received, in one form or another, an education in the classics. All three had enormous respect for the sources - the classics, the Scriptures, the Fathers - as living springs of knowledge. All three dealt with the sources with a fierce sense of intellectual integrity and a scholar's care for languages. All three saw value in schools which afforded people literacy and liberal learning and therefore increased their participation in the Scriptures, in theological discourse, and in common worship. All three used to good



advantage the resources of the Renaissance book tradition, including the new technologies associated with printing. The radicalism of the Reformed tradition may stem in part from its deep-seated association with humanistic criticism, in which all things are open to challenge on the anvil of the intellect. The intellectualism of the Reformed tradition, on which Calvin especially insisted so strongly, may also have participated in the proper intellectualism of Renaissance humanism. But the Renaissance humanism in which Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin were raised, did not survive intact into their maturity: each one rejected in varying degrees of ferocity the very premise of humanism - human freedom and human power.

4. The first great characteristic of the Reformed tradition is cultic simplicity. In 1524, at Zwingli's request, workmen entered the three parish churches of Zurich and stripped them bare of ornamentation. Calvin was scarcely less severe in his demand for simplicity. Simplicity in the reformed tradition has two theological bases and a third basis which can be arrived at through deduction. First, the Christian Church must be ordered and appointed in strict conformity to the Bible; cultic improvements and inventions by human beings, however clever or aesthetically impressive, amount to nothing more or less than idolatry. Second, since the Incarnation of God's Word in Christ, Christians have no reason to hunt for meaning in symbols, the Latin language, or any other secondary means of communication. It has all been expressed plainly in Jesus; Christians should live in that plainness. Third, the Reformed tradition takes symbolism more seriously than other ecclesiastical tradition. If a symbol does not express the gospel with simplicity, clarity, and power, then it is corrupt and ought to be scrapped; otherwise, it is bound to lead the church into either ambiguity or idolatry.

5. The Reformed cultus is based on hearing and learning. In Zurich, Zwingli made the ominous decision to disconnect the two traditional parts of the Mass - Word and sacrament - which had been inseparable since the time of Justin Martyr. The Eucharist, which, in Zwingli's opinion, could not convey grace, was observed in Zurich only four times a year. On other Sundays the sermon, which could convey grace, was the main liturgical event. Zurichers gave up the expression, "going to Mass" in favor of "going to sermon."\* Calvin, for very different reasons, preferred to observe the Lord's Supper as often as possible and therefore retained the historic shape of the Western Catholic rite, including, of course, both Word and sacrament. But Calvin, no less than Zwingli, assumed a direct communication from God to man in worship through (a) a vernacular liturgy, (b) the sermon as a God-speaking event, (c) the church as schoolmaster, and (d) the Christian as lifelong hearer and pupil. Luther once identified the ear as the principal organ of a Christian. Calvin uses precisely the same reference. God speaks to us. We hear him and faith begins. Sermons are the main thing. Liturgies must be in the vernacular. Long liturgical exhortations teach as precisely as catechisms do in the auditorium which is the church. A reputable church is a mundhaus ("mouth-house").

\*Frequently, Calvin also refers to worship as "sermon."



NATURE AND THE SUPERNATURAL  
THE CHRISTOLOGY OF JOHN W. NEVIN

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The publication of Horace Bushnell's Nature and the Supernatural in 1858 elicited a prompt and for the most part favorable review from John W. Nevin in the pages of The Mercersburg Review. Nevin had some rather critical reservations about Bushnell's understanding of the place and nature of creeds in Christendom, and about his lack of an adequately developed conception of the church. From Nevin's vantage point Bushnell simply lacked an "ecclesiastical feeling," he possessed an "unchurchly spirit" in no small part because he was the victim of "the stereotyped Puritanic way of thinking in regard to the historical church of past ages, by which it is made to be from the beginning, a systematic falling away from the proper sense of the Gospel..."<sup>1</sup> Bushnell's lack of a proper sense of the Catholic church and his rather distorted sense of church history represent serious flaws in what is otherwise a truly commendable Christocentric treatise on the natural and the supernatural. We shall use as the point of departure for a discussion of Nevin's Christology, his review of Bushnell's efforts to do theology from a Christocentric vantage point.

Nevin was particularly impressed with the "distinguished author's" efforts to stem the tide of rationalism and its transformation of the gospel into myth and poetry, and with Bushnell's attempts to return the supernatural to its rightful place within the scheme of things. Bushnell's plan is made particularly impressive because his "argument for the supernatural is made to rest centrally upon the person of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> Bushnell is to be credited, along with Schleiermacher, with breaking "the melancholy reign of Rationalism" by restoring the person of Christ to the center of theology. Bushnell deserves particular credit for recognizing in Christ "the presence of a new supernatural life in the world, an order of existence which was not in it before..."<sup>3</sup>

In language not dissimilar to Edwards's Images and Shadows of Divine Things, Nevin insists that "the physical must show itself everywhere the mirror of the spiritual and heavenly, as these come out fully at last only in the form of Christianity."<sup>4</sup> Bushnell is to be credited with perceiving that the advent of Christ is the fulfillment of the ever upward reaching of nature toward "the unity of some common end." Nevin applauds Bushnell's recognition that in the mystery of the incarnation is to be found the center of both nature and history, the unifying principle of the natural and the supernatural "as together constituting the one system of God."

Nevin rejoiced to find in Bushnell a fellow traveler who correctly recognized in Christ

"an advent answerable to the glorious mystery of his person; such as shall bring with it the full presence of a new creation, and yet serve to set him really and truly in the bosom of the old creation. He must have a mission commensurate with his nature. He must be at once perfectly human and yet no less perfectly divine, in all



his teachings and doings. He must be in the world, as being all the time above it, and as comprising in himself the power of a life destined to triumph over it at last through all ages."<sup>5</sup>

Nevin for the most part liked what he read in Bushnell; we need now to examine why this was the case.

## II

A graduate of Union College, which according to Nevin "had at this time a better reputation than it deserved," and of Princeton Theological Seminary, "the theological Athens of the Presbyterian Church," the young Nevin remained at Princeton for an additional two years in the post temporarily vacated by his teacher Charles Hodge who was on a sojourn to Europe. At age twenty-seven, Nevin went as Professor of Biblical Literature to the Western Theological Seminary in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, where he took up his duties in this struggling outpost of theological education designed primarily for training young Presbyterian ministers for pulpits in the West. In My Own Life: The Early Years, Nevin casts a critical eye back upon his own theological development and what "I consider now to have been a defect, an immaturity, or shortcoming on the part of my earlier culture," including what "was an utter want of proper historical culture in all my thinking at this time."<sup>6</sup> He complains without reproach of his training under Samuel Miller at Princeton, his reading of "the pietistically feeble Joseph Milner," "the dreary sense of reading Mosheim," and the general view of history as "a system only of dread outward facts;" he determines that he is not going to subject his students to the same indignities. Church history at Princeton was transformed into a lifeless exercise of scoring points for a denomination or a sect rather than being understood and studied as "the onward moving presence of the Christian life itself, reaching age after age toward its appropriate end."<sup>7</sup>

Nevin was rescued from his historical slumbers by the works of August Neander and Isaac Dorner, and eventually especially by his friend and colleague Philip Schaff. Nevin exulted over being freed from a view of church history which posited the golden age of the church with the apostles, followed by a lengthy and dreary course of decline into "a sort of devil's millennium" which was finally checked by the Reformation - but which finds no hope in the present for the church apart from "the eschatological dreams of Christ's second coming." His awakening from this historical parochialism by which he had been shackled came with the discovery "that Christianity is a new living creation in itself that can be enlarged properly speaking only from within, and not at all from without. Not by mechanical accumulation or accretion can it be said to grow, but only by the way of organic development."<sup>8</sup>

If the church has an organic history of development and growth, an inward life, so too does revelation, where again Nevin had to change his views from a mechanical to an organic understanding of the relation between the natural and the supernatural. Revelation is historical and "must house itself in the actual life of humanity itself, and not float over it only in an apparitional magical manner."<sup>9</sup> In the incarnation, the divine has become incorporated in a living way into the actual human life of the world - "this, of itself, does away with the common error of seeing in revelation a system of thoughts and words only, committed to writing in the Bible; and cause it to be apprehended as being, what it is in truth, a system of supernatural facts, a series of



actual doings or deeds on the part of God, by which He has entered always more and more deeply, since the fall, into the onward movement of the world's religious life."<sup>10</sup> This lack of the historical sense of revelation was especially troublesome in properly understanding the relation between the Old and the New Testaments, and his previously held ahistorical mechanical view made it impossible to see the organic relation between the two Testaments.

In his keynote sermon, entitled "Catholic Unity," preached before the joint convention of Reformed Dutch and German churches in Harrisburg in August of 1844, Nevin stressed the importance of seeing that who Christ is and what he does is not an outward forensic matter. Rather, an organic new nature is imparted to the believer "by an actual communication of the Savior's life over into his person. In his regeneration, he is inwardly united to Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost..."<sup>11</sup> Consequently "a divine seed is implanted in him, the germ of a new existence, which is destined gradually to grow and gather strength, till the whole man shall be at last fully transformed into his image."<sup>12</sup>

This transformation is not a matter of just copying the excellencies of Christ, but "the very life of the Lord Jesus is found reaching over into his person, and gradually transforming it with its own heavenly force."<sup>13</sup> This "mystical union" with Christ "is not simply moral, the harmony of purpose, thought and feeling, but substantial and real, involving oneness of nature." And by this "inward union," as it turns out, "the whole humanity of Christ, soul and body, is carried over by the process of Christian salvation into the person of the believer..."<sup>14</sup> It is this real presence which joins the church into an organic union and not a mere aggregation or collection of different individuals drawn together by similarity of interests and wants, and not an abstraction simply, "by which the common in the midst of such multifarious distinction is separated and put together under a single general term."<sup>15</sup> Just as Adam was not a man but the man "who comprehended in himself all that has since appeared in other men," so too Christ, as the second Adam, is not merely a man, "but the man, emphatically, the Son of Man, comprising in his person the new creation or humanity recovered and redeemed as a whole."<sup>16</sup>

In 1846, Nevin wrote what was to become his most famous and enduring contribution to theology in America, The Mystical Presence. The work grew out of a controversy within the German Reformed Church on the subject of the Lord's Supper, which according to Nevin "must condition and rule in the end our view of Christ's person and the conception we form of the church. It must influence, at the same time, very materially, our whole system of theology, as well as our ideas of ecclesiastical history."<sup>17</sup> Generally distressed with sacramental developments on the American scene, Nevin addressed himself in The Mystical Presence to these wider issues of theology, including the person of Christ and the nature of the church.

The root of his dissatisfaction is with the overly rationalistic and ahistorical thinking of his time, which had seized the church and theology and eroded the very foundations of Christianity. Regarding Christianity, Nevin assured his readers that "no higher wrong can be done to it than to call in question its true historical character; for this is in fact to turn it into a phantasm, and to overthrow the solid factual basis on which its foundations eternally rest."<sup>18</sup> The historicity of Christianity is visible and tangible in the forms of the church, and will remain so to the end because "a religion without externals must ever be fantastic and false."<sup>19</sup> Nevin was surrounded by what he perceived to be "fantastic and false"



religion, stemming in no small measure from an anti-sacramental bias. But forms are constituent to Christianity, and a purely invisible church is an anachronism - "the outward and inward in the church can never be divorced, without peril to all that is most precious in the Christian faith." It should then come as no real surprise that "the incarnation of the Son of God, as it is the principle, forms also the measure and rest of all sound Christianity..."<sup>20</sup> A Christianity which does not make itself tangible is no Christianity at all. Christianity is Christocentric.

The incarnation therefore, is the evidence that "nature and revelation, the world and Christianity, as springing from the same Divine Mind, are not two different systems joined together in a merely outward<sub>21</sub> way. They form a single whole, harmonious with itself in all its parts." Here accordingly is "the great central fact of the world" - Christ as the center of nature, of history and of humanity. Just as nature strives and bends upward toward a fuller realization of itself which reaches its apex in human consciousness, so too history is a process carrying forward within itself the ideal of union with the divine nature, even as humanity struggles toward the realization of its perfection which comes in a true union with God which has in fact transpired in the person of Christ. "The incarnation, then is the proper completion of humanity. Christ is the true ideal Man."<sup>22</sup> In Christ we awake to the full sense of nature, history and humanity, for Christ is the mid-point of each. Paganism and Judaism both served as preludes, playing their appropriate parts in the progressive movement toward union with God, but each in turn gave way to the fuller realization introduced by the incarnation.

Nevin clarified further his thinking on the incarnation in a remarkable article in The Mercersburg Review entitled "Wilberforce on the Incarnation." Here he issued a sharp attack upon both Orthodox and Unitarian views of Christ, which he found to be too fixed upon the work of Christ in the atonement rather than upon the person of Christ. Christ may be viewed as "a mere prophet in the Unitarian sense, who saves by his excellent doctrine and holy example; or he may be allowed to be far more than this, a Savior possessed of truly divine powers, according to the orthodox faith by the mystery of the Incarnation, who takes away sin by suffering the penalty of it in his own person; but still, in either case, the thing done has its proper seat and substance in the relation of the parties concerned by itself considered, while Christ as the doer of it stands always, as it were, on the outside of the transaction, in the character comparatively of an instrument or servant to his own glorious work."<sup>23</sup> In effect, Nevin is crying a plague upon the Christological houses of Trinitarians and Unitarians alike, because in the end each lacks a genuinely incarnational theology. The work of Christ has been allowed to displace almost in entirety the person of Christ, resulting in a faulty Christology which skewers the remainder of theology. In fact just the opposite should be the case, for "the mediation of Christ, we say, holds primarily and fundamentally in the constitution of his person. His Incarnation is not to be regarded as a device in order to his mediation, the needful preliminary and condition of this merely as an independent and separate work; it is itself the Mediatorial Fact, in all its height and depth, and length and breadth..."<sup>24</sup> Nevin placed the "Mediatorial Fact" of the person of Christ at the center of his thought and never let go of it, making it clear throughout that Christ was not an instrument inserted into the world to serve as a convenient arrangement whereby divine justice could be satisfied. Rather Christianity is the incarnation, the word made flesh, the living union of God and humankind within the sphere of history.



Trinitarians and Unitarians alike have failed to see of Christ that "the primary force of his character in this view, the power which belongs to him to make reconciliation and atonement, lies in the fact that the parties between whom he mediates are in truth united first of all in the constitution of his own life."<sup>25</sup> Theology begins and ends with the person of Christ, as reflected clearly in the Apostle's Creed and in the life and thought of the early church. Indeed, let those who pretend to plant themselves on the authority of the Bible rant and rave as they will; unless guided by the creed and the mind of the early church the true sense and meaning of the Bible is soon lost. "To say otherwise is to subordinate the Bible to that which is not original Christianity... However grating it may sound to some ears, the truth needs to be loudly and constantly repeated: the Bible is not the principle of Christianity, neither its origin, nor its fountain, nor its foundation."<sup>26</sup> As Nevin saw it the problem with so much American theology was that "Bibliolatry" had displaced Christology as the guiding principle. Rather, the incarnate Christ is the principle of Christianity, and this Christological fact simply cannot be overlooked. It is important to acknowledge and understand that Christ is no mere theophany, but the entrance of new life into the world "in strict organic and historical continuity and unity with the life of the human world as a whole."<sup>27</sup> Between Ebionitism which loses Christ's divinity and Gnosticism which loses his humanity a genuinely incarnational theology preserves both by not allowing Christ to be cut off as an organic inwardly historical connection with the world. The incarnation is the ground of our whole human life in its true form; to miss this is to miss everything.

Nevin was not less discomforted by views which posited a too severe disjuncture between Christianity and the world which in effect turns the incarnation into a fantasy by disallowing any genuine union between the Divine nature and human nature. In accomplishing this union Christianity in truth "forms no violent rupture, either with nature or history. It fulfills, and in doing so interprets, the inmost sense of both."<sup>28</sup> The opposite error of course is to see in Christ "only a continuation of the old Creation," which in effect reduces Christ to a mere man. Again, between the Gnostic error of losing the humanity and the Ebionite error of losing the divinity of Christ stands "the new creation," in which the supernatural appears not above or beyond but truly incorporated within both nature and history. The effect of this new creation is not simply to provide "a new order of thought and character" - that kind of moralism is both too simplistic and also unbiblical. Properly understood, Christ as the new creation introduces "a new divine force" into the heart of history as its meaning and into the world of nature as its actualization. The truths and the errors of both paganism and Judaism are focused and finally sorted out in Christ, who is "the revelation of God in man and not simply to him." As such, Christ "forms the full reality of religion" so that now to<sup>29</sup> Christianity may be ascribed "the character of absolute reality and truth."

In another remarkable piece from The Mercersburg Review in January of 1850, entitled "The New Creation in Christ," Nevin responded to the charge that his views smacked of transcendentalism because of the organic union between Christ and believer so important to his thought. In his defense, Nevin replied that he was only reading St. John and St. Paul, not through the lens of rationalism or moralism but simply as they were meant to be read. In each instance, the image of Christ that is formed in the hearts of believers is not of some wooden outward resemblance; to the contrary, the image of Christ born into his people is "the power of his own life continuing itself over



organically into their persons. He is the beginning of the new creation, the first born from the dead; not as the outward cause of it simply, or its outward model; but as its principle and fontal spring; the whole flows forth really from his person."<sup>30</sup>

If this is transcendentalism then so be it, and Nevin will number himself as a transcendentalist gladly. But he is utterly persuaded that his is a faithful reading of the New Testament and that the charge against him simply will not stick. The simple New Testament truth is that the life of Christ "repeats itself in believers; then salvation is carried forward by a mystical reproduction in them of the grand facts of his history: he is born in them, suffers in them, dies in them, rises in them from the dead, and ascends with them to the right hand of God in heaven."<sup>31</sup> This then is "the mystical presence," and there are many doctrines with far less Biblical and historical warrant that are accepted without question - why the fuss over this one? Needless to say, Nevin's mystical presence hardly sounds like Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the attempt to paint Nevin with the brush of transcendentalism was rather ill-informed.

With the charge of transcendentalism dispelled, Nevin proceeds to build his case that Christ is no theophany or avatar but "the form in which the sense of all previous history came finally to its magnificent outlet... Christ is the sense of all previous history, the grand terminus towards which it was urged from the beginning."<sup>32</sup> As the new creation, Christ is the living union with the concrete history of the world who introduces a higher life into it. To remove Christ from the process of history is to lose him and to destroy Christianity - it is in short to end up in rationalism and Unitarianism, the preludes to the arrival of transcendentalism. In truth, rationalism, Unitarianism, and Transcendentalism in America had few more trenchant critics than John Williamson Nevin.

Nevin was a great respecter of doctrine and labored to define and defend right doctrine against all opposition; this was perhaps nowhere more true than in his holding to the two natures in one person of Christ. Nevin had read widely in the history of doctrine and his thought reflects a unique acquaintance with the Princeton theology in which he was trained, the New England theology of which he was ever critical, German theology with which he became increasingly familiar through his affiliation with Philip Schaff, and the theology of Horace Bushnell whose work Nevin admired but not uncritically. In a way, Nevin stands as a solitary figure through whom these several theological streams flow into a confluence which produces something unique.

Yet for all his interest in doctrine, Nevin did not allow that to displace his understanding of Christianity as life. He feared and opposed rationalism in whatever guise, and sought to offer Christ not as a truth for the intellect only, or as merely a holy example for piety - but as a new creation offered to both the mind and the heart. He was convinced that "men are brought to God, not by doctrine, but only by being made to participate in the Divine Nature itself; and this participation is made possible to us only through the person of Christ..."<sup>33</sup>

As his sermon on "The Knowledge of God through Christ Alone," preached in September of 1869 notes, self-consciousness is complemented by a God-consciousness which is universal to all persons. But this universal consciousness needs an exemplification or manifestation in some outward form,



which of course is answered to in Christ. Thus the knowledge of God is through Christ alone, and "the revelation spoken of here is not one of doctrine merely. It is deeper than anything purely intellectual. It involves a common life and fellowship of existence."<sup>34</sup> This life and fellowship has transpired in Christ, in union and communion with whom the knowledge of God is possible. Christianity is not doctrine but life, made abundantly clear in the incarnation through which "humanity itself has become the Shekinah of glory." And life in Christ takes place as the power of a new creation in the church, and it is precisely at this point that Nevin separates himself from and is most critical of the mainstream of evangelical Protestantism in America, especially its New England form.

Something of Nevin's critical powers surface in a review of Ernest Sartorius on The Person and Work of Christ, which was published in the Reformed Quarterly Review for March, 1849. Nevin was perfectly ruthless in his criticism of Rev. Oakman S. Stearns' translation of Sartorius, describing it as "neither elegant, nor intelligent, nor edifying" - noting it was "a most lame, clumsy performance throughout," on top of which it is "a miserable travesty," and "a<sup>35</sup> bungling attempt which had the effect of leaving the original in ruins." The Rev. Mr. Stearns' incompetences as a translator are compounded by his Baptist Christological biases which prevent him from ever understanding correctly what the Lutheran Sartorius is saying. Stearns's problem is that he shares in the general New England mindset in which Christ becomes an outward instrument in the machinery of atonement according to which "the work which was required to take away sin, needed indeed a conjunction of divinity with humanity in Christ, to qualify him for the execution; but once executed it carries with it an independent and separate value in the divine mind, and may be set to the account of men as a mere abstraction in this way, apart from Christ's life altogether."<sup>36</sup> The work of Christ has eclipsed the person of Christ to such a degree that what is left is hardly recognizable as a genuine incarnation. The mainstream of Protestant evangelical theology has abandoned the hypostatical union of the two natures in Christ, and consequently "the deep, rich overwhelming sense of the living fact, is not understood or felt."<sup>37</sup> As a result the place of the sacraments in the life of the church is almost entirely neglected and the doctrine of the church is sadly lacking. Regretfully, Stearns is but one example, according to Nevin, of "the general Puritan and Methodistic tendency" away from the sacraments, away from a genuinely orthodox Protestant understanding of the church, and finally and most regrettably away from the true doctrine of the person of Christ.

But to add insult to injury it has taken a German Reformed theologian to rescue Luther from his American torturers. With something more than a tinge of sarcasm Nevin notes that "the Lutheran Observer, which represents at present the reigning mind and life of that church, actually took notice of this mutilation of Sartorius, not long since, with a chuckle of delight, as a broad sign of the entire antiquation which was happily overtaken, here in evangelical America, the whole sacramental dream of the sixteenth century. The sympathies of this organ of Lutheranism fit it for making love ecclesiastically to the Cumberland Presbyterians, and other such sects, much more than for coming up to the help of its own proper faith in the hour of distress and danger. Could there well be however, a more grinning irony on our existing sect system, than is presented to us in such a spectacle - the creed of Luther, the faith of the Augsburg Confession, thus mortally wounded, in favor of the Baptists, and in the house of its own professed friends?"<sup>37</sup>



In a remarkable Concio ad Clerum preached in Pittsburgh in November of 1863, Nevin reminded his fellow clerics that Christologies which make Christ into "a man only, or some higher created intelligence in human form, empowered and enabled to make known the divine will"<sup>38</sup> are simply inadequate. In Christ are conjoined as they have never been before or will be again both nature and the supernatural. The incarnation incorporates the power of God's own life into the world, and thus Christ becomes the center and principle within it of a new creation, at once natural and supernatural - human and yet infinitely more than human. Consequently, the mystery of the incarnation is the center from which all else goes forth, and Christology is the key to Christian life and thought. Doctrines "torn from their living, organic union with this divine constitution become no better than hollow abstractions, and acquire in truth a positively false and anti-Christian character."<sup>39</sup> Life and doctrine flow together in this Christological mid-point, and the quest for a doctrinal orthodoxy which substitutes a dry theory of religious life for real piety is misguided. "If the life and practice of Christianity are felt by any to be something independent of its doctrine, in their necessarily Christological order and connection, we may be very sure that it is because they have not yet learned at all what the Christian life means, and that their practical Christianity therefore is no proper Christianity at all, but only a bastard imitation of it, made to stand in its place."<sup>40</sup> In both doctrine and practice Christianity must be rooted and grounded in Christology, and no theologian in America in the nineteenth century labored longer or harder to make this happen. Or as Nevin himself expressed it, the Mercersburg Theology "makes more of the Incarnation, more of the person of Christ, more of the objective, supernatural movement of the Christian salvation - and in so doing comes into more active sympathy with the faith of apostolical and primitive times, than any other theology known at present in the American Protestant Church."<sup>41</sup>

Late in his career Nevin surveyed the course of theology in America over the previous fifty years and noted with some satisfaction that whereas once "the very terms Christological and Christocentric, as applied to theology, were viewed by many with grave apprehension and distrust," now "the era of Christological theology has set in with a force which may be said, so far at least as profession goes, to carry all before it."<sup>42</sup> Over against this development stands the "life of Jesus" movement "devoted to the object of reducing the history of Jesus Christ to the plane of other history for the common understanding of men," but ending up only showing in effect its powerlessness to reduce the mystery of the incarnation to the common place and revealing itself as a "flat miscarriage in literature as well as theology." Perhaps Nevin was a bit too sanguine about the place of Christocentric theology on the American scene, but his own attempt to do theology from a Christological center takes its place alongside that of Horace Bushnell as an enduring contribution to American religious life and thought.



# ENDNOTES

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THE CONCEPT OF BISHOP  
WITH REFERENCE TO THE CONSULTATION ON CHURCH UNION

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The office of bishop is central to the unity of the church. At the time when nine denominations are voting on the document IN QUEST OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST UNITING it is appropriate that we look at the office of bishop. Of these nine denominations five have bishops - African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, Episcopal, and United Methodist. Four do not have bishops - Community Churches, Disciples of Christ, United Presbyterian Church in U.S.A. and the United Church of Christ (except for Calvin Conference).

While an extensive consideration of the office of bishop is not possible in a brief paper, we shall look at it from several aspects - ecclesiological, theological, pastoral and liturgical. We shall also see it in the light of Mercersburg theology. The documents that are the bases for the discussion are IN QUEST OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST UNITING and CHURCHES IN COVENANT COMMUNION, both of which are the published reports of the Consultation on Church Union.

To consider the office of bishop one must consider the ecclesiological nature of the church. The unity of the church is inherent in its organic nature as the Body of Christ. St. Paul's figure of the body and its connected parts governed by the head is the basis for unity. St. John's use of the vine and the branches is a description to the same end. Mercersburg's holding to this view sets our understanding of ecumenism and church unity in the organic developmental concept of the church. Therefore, that unity is inherent within the organic nature is an ecclesiological tenet. This sets the understanding of Jesus' prayer in John 17:21 - "That they may all be one" in a different light from the way it is sometimes interpreted in non-connectional or congregational groups.

Sometimes this text is interpreted to mean that in response to Jesus's will the church seeks to gather the parts which are thought to be autonomous into groups or covenantal bodies so that Jesus' mission can be accomplished more effectively and efficiently. Because the parts are autonomous it is necessary for them to covenant together in a recognized external sociological grouping to get the work done. This kind of external sociological grouping requires an executive head to manage the disparate parts. This arithmetical quantitative unity tends to adopt the procedures and nomenclature of the business community as one might expect in a conglomerate structure in industry with a chief executive officer or manager.

The seeking of unity as understood by the Consultation on Church Union (COCU), on the other hand, is a natural action within the body, intrinsic to the body. It may be likened to the struggle for wholeness of the arm with an injured hand connected by a damaged tendon, broken bone, torn muscle and lacerated nerve wherein the two parts seek to heal the wound with the knitting bone structure, developing muscle and growing nerves. It is the body



within itself seeking to be whole and abhorring the separation of its parts all under the direction of the head.

Jesus' prayer for oneness in John 17 is not for a sociological grouping of disparate parts but is directly related to the concept of the vine and the branches of chapter 15. The unity discussed in the next phrases of verses 21-23 is of an organic nature "even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us...I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one." The reason for this unity with the apostles then and now was that the world (the people) may believe the incarnation to their own salvation. This concept of mission is not merely a matter of teaching and preaching by disparate groups of disciples, but basically and organically a matter of being. The body being the Body of Christ himself in the midst of the world is the witness. Here is the concept of the church as being the mystical embodiment of the Incarnate Word. The same concept is expressed by St. Paul in the body and its parts as in the earlier reference.

Unity then is inherent in the nature of the Body of Christ. At this point then COCU and Mercersburg stand firmly together. The head of the Body is Christ. In this ecclesiology the earthly head is the representative of Christ, the undershepherd, the overseeing pastor, the bishop and not the chief executive manager of disparate units or congregations.

The theology of Christ the incarnate word of God becomes the basis for the ecclesiology or doctrine of the church.

The Apostles for whom Christ was praying in John 17 after witnessing the risen Christ became his representatives on earth. They soon laid their hands upon others who were to follow and with prayer they became the representatives of the risen Christ. With all the struggles of the human flesh the Scriptures recount their continual effort to manifest the unity of Christ. The New Testament speaks of the deacon, the elder (presbyter) and the overseeing elder or bishop. "The bishop was the leader of the community, was ordained and installed to proclaim the Word and preside over the celebration of the Eucharist. The bishop was surrounded by a college of presbyters and by deacons who assisted in his tasks. In this context, the bishop's ministry was a focus of unity within the whole community."<sup>2</sup>

From apostolic times and the first century church the bishop was the overseeing pastor serving several congregations. Like the apostles the bishop became the sign of unity to these congregations. He represented the tradition as received from the apostles. He brought apostolic light to misunderstanding and apostolic order to conflict over diverse procedures. After the manner of St. Peter and St. Paul he embodied for them the apostolic Gospel.

Under the COCU plan what does the bishop do? This is often the first question most people ask. The IN QUEST document sets forth eight specific functions.

#### Bishops

- A. Have responsibility for maintaining the apostolicity and unity of the worship and sacramental life.
- B. Are teachers of apostolic faith.
- C. Are pastoral overseers, shepherds, administrators of church discipline.



- D. Are leaders in mission. They take initiative and further mission.
- E. Are representative ministers for ordination. They participate in responsibility for ordinands and preside at the ordination.
- F. Are responsible for the church's organized work.
- G. Are servants of unity. Call to goal of visible unity.
- H. Participate in governance.

"Does not the bishop have a great deal of power?" is often the second question. It is at this point that we need to make an observation about the manner in which many pastors and members approach the idea of bishop. People hear what they want to hear and see what they want to see. This had been evidenced by the discussions in which I have participated since the COCU CONSENSUS has been published. This is particularly true with the office of bishop.

What we want to hear and see is influenced by what we understand of our own heritage and that of other communions. My experience with United Church of Christ persons is that some and perhaps many interpret the office as they think it was in the Roman Church of reformation times or at the Council of Trent.

It is important, then, to consider the office of bishop from the COCU documents and not to interpret it from other sources. It is clear that episcopate needs to be understood apart from old prejudices, superstitions and false information. To understand how the COCU concept affects us as pastors and members one can look at the doctrine and practice against the doctrines and practices of the participating communions and the history of the doctrine of episcopate. But we must be faithful to the printed records of COCU!

Time does not permit us to do an in-depth study, but we shall look at several primary areas that describe some essentials and at the same time speak to the fears that people address to us.

Perhaps the best point at which to begin is the question of authority and power. When one puts aside the 19th century stereotypes and carefully studies the documents one has no grounds for fear and distrust. The COCU bishop does not have any greater personal power which can be wielded or thrust upon the pastor and the congregation than does the Conference Minister of the United Church of Christ where, because of the lack of canon law and constitutional connectional accountability, he/she by design may build up considerable personal power. Even though the office carries the biblical word minister, in some respects it exemplifies more of the weight of chief executive manager of autonomous disparate bodies. There may be more to fear in the United Church of Christ system than in that of COCU.

How is the power posited and controlled in the COCU system?

"The ministry of bishops will be personal, collegial and communal and set within an appropriate constitutional or canonical framework."<sup>4</sup> The concepts of personal, collegial and communal apply to all offices and forms of ministry - episcopate, presbyterial and diaconal. They apply to all baptized and confirmed members, but the form and functions are described with some difference according to the particular office. Each concept impinges on the other, limits as well as broadens the other. All, are offered in relation to one another.



To say the ministry of the bishop is personal is to identify it with the ministry of all members baptized into Christ. They are received and blessed as persons - "James, Mary, I baptize you in the name..." There is no vocation to ministry to and through James and Mary in any other way than as persons. In the ordination of the pastor to the ministry the formula includes the first name of the ordinand, and it is so also in the consecration of the bishop.

The Holy Spirit is the agent for the bestowal of authority and power and blessing on the person who has been called or appointed to be the representative before God. It is at this point of personal power that some have expressed concern or fear. The fear is not so much with the power of the office as it is with the power of the person who is in that office. It is a fear that the power of the person will be exercised unjustly, antagonistically or retributively. It also reflects a 19th century understanding.

One needs to see that the COCU bishop can only exercise that personal power in administration or policy action in accordance with the definition of the office. For example the authority and the power of placement in the case of a COCU pastor rests with the office and not the person. "The authority of the ordained ministry is not to be understood as the possession of the ordained person, but as a gift (which can be removed) for the continuing edification of the body."<sup>5</sup> The collegiality of the office is seen at work in the fact that the bishop acts under the canons or laws of the communion with specific presbyters, deacons and/or lay persons in the calling or placing of pastors. In other words a Presbyterian pastor is called under Presbyterian rules and a United Church pastor is called under United Church of Christ rules. In understanding collegiality the word with is not to be interpreted as a delegation of authority or powers, but the practice with other officers which by canon also have certain authority and power. In other words the bishop does not pass on certain powers by monarchical authority which can be given or withdrawn at will. The COCU system is not monarchical in nature. It is representative with the bishop being elected by representatives of all the people of God. It is recognized that constitutionally other officers also have authority to participate in the act of placement as also in the act of approval for ordination. This collegiality not only recognizes the representative aspect of ministry among the whole people of God<sup>6</sup> but also serves<sup>7</sup> to protect the church from mistakes made by fallible persons in office.

Thus on a theological and ecclesiological basis checks and balances of personal and administrative power are built into the system. "No individual's ministry can be regarded as representative of the church unless it is constitutional or canonical and remains in communion with and accountable to other ministers in ordered assemblies in which all ministries are represented."<sup>8</sup>

To say the ministry of the bishop is communal is to indicate the intimate relationship between the different ministries and the whole Christian community. This is expressed in the exercise of ministry that is "rooted in the life of the worshiping and witnessing congregation and requires the local church's<sup>9</sup> participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit.



Thus the oversight which has been a part of the bishop's ministry since New Testament days is performed in relation to the worship of God through the liturgy which is centered in and flows from the Eucharist. The bishop who every Lord's Day officiates in worship with a congregation and at other times in the other sacraments and rites of the church does so in that triangular relationship of the triune God, the other members of ministry and the office and person of the bishop. This liturgical relationship which includes confession, absolution and instruction shapes and forms the decisions made by the bishop in constitutional collegiality with other representative ministers.

If there be dissatisfaction with any office and incumbent officer the question is raised in the appropriate ecclesiastical assembly (synod, conference, diocese) under the prescription of the constitution or canon. This question may result in new understanding, change of procedure or policy, change of constitution or canon or change in the incumbent officer. All persons, including the bishop who is elected by an assembly representing all the people of God, are accountable to the representative assembly under the constitution and canons.

Another area of concern, against the background of present day events in the Roman Catholic Church, is the teaching function of the bishop. Again we define it from the COCU documents and not from the practices of any other catholic communions.

The bishop is an authentic teacher - that is the authority is derived from Christ<sup>10</sup> through the apostles and passed through the historic continuity of the church as it posits that authority in bishops, councils and synods or judicatories. Further the bishop is the authentic teacher in-as-much-as the body of teaching is the authentic Gospel. In this sense the bishop is also the protector of the authentic faith. Here the collegiality of bishops provides a means of assuring that authenticity for the Gospel and its teaching receives the assent of the body. The individual bishop interprets in the light of the common agreement of the body that the Gospel has been faithfully transmitted and interpreted. Thus the possibility of incorrect individual interpretation is reduced. New light can still break through from the Gospel by action of the Holy Spirit but this new light is observed and tested by the collegial body to determine whether it is new light or the reflection of an individual's imagination.

This doctrine of the bishop as authentic teacher does not deny the pastor or member from also being an authentic teacher as some opponents of episcopate have attempted to prove. The pastor gains that authoritative right through the act of ordination after examination by the church and has the right as long as it is practiced collegially with the bishops, pastors, deacons and members. So the pastor too is both guardian of the faith and also guarded from error by the sacred community. Collegiality<sup>12</sup> knows no individualistic or autonomous authority for the pastor or the member. As COCU uses the term presbyter for pastor the concept of collegiality and corporateness is inherent in the meaning of the word. One can not be a presbyter in the true sense without the presbytery. When one sees a pastor acting independently and autonomously then he or she is not a true presbyter or not really collegial.

A similar authority for teaching belongs to the member by the right of baptism and confirmation within the collegiality of the whole body of



believers. Again as a member of the corporate body the member does not act independently and autonomously. When one sees a member acting independently or autonomously that person is not a true part of the body. It is like a hand acting as though it has no relationship to the brain.

In the United Church of Christ, for example, one at times hears the comment that every pastor is a bishop and we do not need other bishops. Such statements result from the misunderstanding of the whole concept of bishops and usually reflect the desire of the pastor to do his/her "own thing." Such statement also reflects a non collegial attitude. A quick look at the reserved functions of the bishop in the traditional form shows us that only the bishop confirms and ordains in the Episcopal system. The United Church pastor confirms but does this only as long as that pastor is in good standing in the Association and by virtue of ordination by the Association. The authority to confirm derives from the Association which in this case is the corporate bishop. The pastor does not confirm by his/her own personal authority. The other reserved function of ordination does not belong to the pastor in the United Church of Christ. Ordination is the reserved function of the Association. The pastor participates only as a member of the Association or as one invited by the Association on knowledge of his/her standing in another Association of the church. The Conference Minister participates as a pastor with standing in the Association or as a staff person or officer of the Conference in which the Association has standing. This concept of the corporate bishop is traced back through the Reformed Communion, its synods and classes, <sup>13</sup> to the first synod held in Zurich on Easter Sunday 1528 by priests who were ordained by the Roman Bishop, but now assembled as a Reformed Synod with Elders present with the clergy. Thus the apostolic continuity of the bishop has been maintained in this corporate manner.

In the COCU concept the bishop's position as presiding officer at ordination for presbyters (pastors) can best be understood by looking at the Council of Oversight as described in the early edition of the IN QUEST document. In the recent publication of CHURCHES IN COVENANT COMMUNION the term has been changed to Covenanting Councils and in future editions of IN QUEST will be so editorially changed. While there is to be a Covenanting Council for every judicatory (national, regional and local) we shall confine the examination of it to the Presbytery, Conference, Region, Diocese or Association.

The Covenanting Council of the several communions includes the bishop, general presbyter, conference minister, president or such presiding officer. Also included are representative clergy and lay persons from each corresponding judicatory involved. Such a council receives from the particular communion's judicatory the names of persons who have been properly educated, examined and verified by that judicatory's own canons or rules. The covenanting council then examines the credentials relative to the rules or canons of COCU approved in collegial manner as previously described and verifies the candidates. The approval for COCU ordination is given. The ordinand is ordained under the authority of the particular communion's rules but also with the authorized presence of the Bishop(s), presbyter(s), deacon(s) and lay representative(s). Thus the ordained pastor is then in the reconciled ministry of the COCU communions. At such an ordination the bishop or person in the particular communion who holds that type office presides. Since there previously were services by which all such bishops and bishop types were recognized and reconciled, those newly ordained pastors are in the reconciled ministry and may serve in any of the communions under the rules or



canons of the particular communion. The presiding bishop is the symbol of the unity of the reconciled communions. Each presbyter, deacon and member also in a particular way participates collegially in this unity now embodied in the reconciled communions. The bishop as the minister of unity in all these proceedings has guarded, protected and administered the apostolic faith.

The Consultation on Church Union holds great potential for the reconciling of the parts of Christ's Body by bringing together the personal and corporate nature of the office of bishop. A careful study of the recent documents of COCU shows the bishop to be the symbol and expression of unity in an inclusive church that maintains its high standards as evangelical, reformed, apostolic and catholic. God bless the Body of Christ.

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End Notes

THE COCU CONSENSUS, in Quest of A Church of Christ Uniting, Edited by Gerald F. Moede, approved and commended to the churches by the Sixteenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union, November 30, 1984, Baltimore, Maryland.

CHURCHES IN COVENANT COMMUNION, The Church of Christ Uniting, approved and recommended to the churches by the Seventeenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union, December 9, 1988, New Orleans, Louisiana.

The particular reference notes are from THE COCU CONSENSUS.

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|---------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Section I paragraph 4. | 7. VII 36   |
| 2. VII 40                 | 8. VII 23   |
| 3. VII 51                 | 9. VII 22c  |
| 4. VII 51                 | 10. VII 46  |
| 5. VII 32                 | 11. VII 51b |
| 6. VII 30                 | 12. VII 22b |

13. This understanding of the corporate bishop with collegial participation of the pastor in the classis where the authority of bishop was vested may be seen in a study of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in the United States, Philadelphia 1908 and the Liturgy of the Reformed Church, 1866. In the liturgy the service for installation in the prayer acknowledges "send down, we beseech Thee, the Holy Ghost upon Thy servant, whom Thou has been pleased to set over this people in the office of Bishop and Pastor." This use of the term bishop as applied to the pastor must be understood against the context of one of the ordination questions asked by the presiding minister of the classis of the ordinand. "Do you acknowledge the rightful authority of this Church (the Reformed Church in the U.S.) from which you are 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?" This liturgical reference to bishop in the installation service is further clarified by the ecclesiology of Mercersburg and by the Constitution, Sec. 4 Art. 85 where examination, ordination and discipline are reserved to the classis. That the pastor's authority for confirmation is derived from the classis along with the other functions of his office are seen in the questions asked at the annual meeting of the classis one of which asks the pastor whether he has catechized the children according to the Constitution of the denomination. The lay Elder who is the delegate is also asked the same question with regard to the pastor. (Sect. 4 Article 84, 86)



## INCARNATIONAL WORSHIP

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The simplest, most obvious definition of worship is that it is one aspect of human behavior. While it is a peculiarly human activity, it is but one of many human activities. If it is to be fully human, worship must take our whole selves seriously; it must deal honestly with our humanity. Worship dare not appeal only to our intellects; we are not disembodied spirits; we are physical bodies too. Worship must involve our whole selves: soul, mind, body. The bodiliness of creation is good (Genesis 1:31). God in Christ came to us, not as a dream, a spirit, but in flesh and blood. He walked, taught, healed, forgave, touched, lived, and died. The Word became flesh, not disembodied spirit. Incarnational worship, then, seeks to proclaim this Word using the whole self. We will sit, stand, kneel, read, sing, walk, embrace, shake hands, dance, speak, listen, think, eat, drink, bathe, and even smell the perfume of Easter lilies or incense. Our whole bodies will be involved in incarnational worship, not just our intellects. Because this takes our whole selves so seriously, we cannot remain spectators at worship. We must become totally involved in the act of worship. Indeed, if worship 'in church' has degenerated to but another spectator activity, it becomes only too easy for us to "worship" using a far more efficient mode of spectator activity than any church: television. Garbed in a talk-show format, spectator-religion superbly meets the needs many people have for minimal commitment and good feelings too.

Television shows, though they meet the needs of many of our people, are at best worship only for those in the studio. They will always have their appeal; however, because they do not involve the whole self, they deny our humanity, and will ultimately satisfy only the needs of those on the fringe. If I cannot shake hands with you; if I am not physically close enough to you to embrace you, I cannot worship with you. We must be at least as involved in love with each other as we are with Christ, in order to worship Him as a congregation. While it may seem a good idea to use mass communications to spread the Gospel, it does seem contradictory to advocate a "personal God," or a "personal faith," through such impersonal means. By contrast, incarnational worship takes seriously our bodiliness in its several forms: our bodily presence to one another, the presence of the bodiliness of all creation, the presence of the risen Lord, and the needs and graces each impose on us. Bodiliness, therefore, necessitates congregation, the gathered community to whom and for whom the Word is proclaimed and the sacraments are celebrated, not the scattered, faceless individuals of a television or radio audience.

### The Church as the Gathered Body of Christ

It may be argued that the church is but another of the mass, impersonal institutions dominating our age. Bodiliness cannot count for much in our age. True, the church is enormous; it is not humanly possible for each Christian to have a personal interest in each and every other Christian now, let alone be concerned about the myriad who have preceded us in the faith. However, the bodiliness of the Incarnation meets our bodiliness as we are gathered in congregation; having met us, it blesses us, transforms our mere human bodies into the Body of Christ, alive to accomplish His will in our



world. Our bodiliness decrees that only in congregation can we meet face-to-face, relate to each other as whole persons in the faith community, and in love and concern, celebrate our bonds of salvation in Word and Sacrament.

### Proclamation of the Word

Word is proclaimed to named, intensively personal individuals. The Lord of all creation is Person, not idea. He deals with us as persons, unique bodies each, each worthy of His attention. The proclaimed Word draws us out of the faceless mass, gives us each a name, a body, a unique identity before God. We are granted bodies in order to participate in the Body of Christ. We cannot participate in that Body only with kind thoughts or good intentions; we must give that Body our body in order to participate actively in the proclamation of its Word-become-Body for us.

The proclaimed Word has called us out of the faceless mass. It has created us; it has recreated us. And the joy of the first creation is as nothing compared to the joy of the second creation. The proclaimed Word therefore is not a spectator medium; it is challenging, demanding of response. Nor will a polite nod of assent suffice. It demands of us all we have, all we are, and more. It demands our bodies. Too often, we would rather remain seated, thank you. But no; the hounds of heaven are baying at our comfort. Our cool comfort tugs vainly against our new-found identity in the Body of Christ. The joy of that second creation engulfs us; we are as ecstatic as puppies. The angels of our better natures have won. We have met the hounds of heaven, and they are us.

### Celebration of the Sacraments

However, the proclaimed Word does more than call us to joy. It bathes us.<sup>2</sup> In baptism it recreates us, initiates us into that new creation. It presents us with a cosmic forgiveness which sets us upon a new relationship with God and ourselves. New possibilities arise; relatedness based upon infinite Love opens before us.

If infinite Love is indeed open before us, the only appropriate response we can have is thanksgiving. The Greek word "eucharist" means "thanksgiving." "Holy Eucharist" simply means "Holy Thanksgiving." In Christ the Word which calls us, gives us bodies, identity, joy, and initiation, also feeds us. Following Calvin's Institutes, "Services of Word and Sacrament I and II"<sup>3</sup> anticipate that both the sermon (the proclaimed Word) and communion will be celebrated as normative. Sadly, the spirituality of most of our congregations prevents this. In specifying the act of eating as His Memorial, Christ involved us bodily in His act of salvation, the victory of the last day. Is the rapture coming? Indeed, the rapture is here, every time we receive communion.

But communion is an intimately physical, bodily act. It is impossible to eat at long distance. Though words can be communicated by mass means, the Holy Eucharist can never be. We must be here, bodily present to each other, to celebrate its mysteries.

### Prayer

Our age doubts the worth of contemplation.<sup>4</sup> It has become fashionable to



look upon prayer as a poor substitute for effective action. It makes no sense to pray for relief of this or that injustice unless we are willing to work for justice. Thus, for many of us, prayer has become a truly sometime thing. In our energetic work for justice, we implicitly reject prayer as superficial, unnecessary. In the heat of a picket-line confrontation, in the monotony of assembly-line labor, in the daily round of living, it is difficult for us to remember who we are before God, who He calls us to be. In prayer we are recalled, reminded of our bodiliness, our humanity, our mortality. Prayer recalls us, in quietness and peace, to our true bodiliness before God, and to that humility which gives us perspective and insight into God and each other. At its best, prayer is a window looking out upon God's will. In human, bodily terms, it is utter silence, filled to overflowing by God Himself. Our best good works are ambiguous; our loftiest praise is tainted. Prayer reminds us of this.

However, prayer has other functions. In the bodily presence of others in the congregation, we are assured of Christ's presence. When I pray to Him alone, I pray to Him there; when we pray to Him together, we pray to Him here. His Word evokes our bodily presence; our bodily presence evokes His spiritual presence. Thus, when we remember in prayer before God the needs of our people, our state, our church, our nation, our world, we are speaking in His very presence in the worshiping community, the congregation. That is a solemn responsibility. Our good feelings have not called Him; our faith has not called Him; our righteousness has not called Him. Our corporate, bodily presence as a congregation, as a gathered community, has called Him.

When prayer is private, "closeted," it has still other effects. And here we Protestants have many problems. We are rightly wary of endlessly repeated formulas, of elaborate wordiness intended to manipulate God. For us, prayer that does not come from the heart is not authentic. Such prayer is a sham. However, we are still sinners; our hearts are no guarantee of authentic prayer. If God must wait for us to pray from the heart, He must wait a long time indeed. Private prayer, then, is a discipline. It helps us fulfill our function as Christian in the same sense as learning our multiplication tables in the elementary grades helps us function as mature persons in the secular world, even though, our sinfulness makes both seem a waste of time. If we pray even when sin prevents our hearts from joining our wills, even when we are distracted beyond recall, we are still fulfilling a function necessary to our calling as Christians. Even if prayer is routine, a mere exercise, it is important for us to pray; because, failure to pray has its own, negative, rewards: we forget how to pray. The less we pray, the less we pray. The less we pray, the less are we open to the will of God. The less we pray, the less are we open to that humility which comes only through prayer. God does not need our prayer; our neighbor in need does not need our prayer. We need our prayer; we need to pray for our neighbor in need, that from the context of disciplined prayer, our sacrifice of works of justice may be acceptable to God. And prayer reminds us of the terrible ambiguity of our works of justice: even these, the very best we have to offer, are shot through and through with sin; they need to be cleansed, forgiven, to become acceptable to God. If we have not maintained a disciplined prayer life; if we have prayed only when we felt like praying; if we have thought that social action were superior to prayer, then both our faith and our works of justice have become impoverished. If prayer continues to draw ever-decreasing amounts of our attention, we will cease relating social action to it. Eventually, we will cease praying altogether, and our faith will become an excuse for self-righteousness, rather than the context from which works of righteousness



flower.

### Ethical Implications of Liturgy

Prayer, therefore, has profound implications for Christian morality. It is one element of the context from which Christian moral behavior arises. However, not all moral behavior is Christian, nor are all liturgies even "religious," though all prayer and liturgy have profound ethical implications.

Throughout history, humanity have felt the need to gather together to affirm allegiance, to celebrate victory or defeat, to remember heroic sacrifice, to confer power or deprive of power, or simply to reaffirm identity.<sup>5</sup> Memorial Day parades, Weimar Nazi rallies, suburban shopping mall crowds, political conventions, football game crowds, KKK rallies, family picnics, and Christian liturgy all have ethical functions. All of them have hierarchies of value which are proclaimed and reaffirmed by the people who attend. The ethic may be negative, even reprehensible, as in the gathering of a KKK rally, or a Nazi parade. Or it may be mixed, debatable, as the entertainment value of a pro-football game, or a pro-hockey game. The value may be political, as at a party convention. The value may be economic, as at a shopping center or a corporate board meeting. Each purposeful human gathering, and quite a few that seem to be purely accidental, proclaims an ethic, a hierarchy of value.

And each human gathering has its formally organized, votive behaviors, its liturgy.<sup>6</sup> Each gathering has its color, its human movement, its pageantry. Each gathering is more or less highly ritualized, repetitive. Often, the more predictable, the repetitive the liturgy is, the more we are affected. Less structured liturgies, less predictable environments, engage our attention less. The psychologists who help plan shopping malls and the store displays in them are acutely aware of the utility of what we call liturgy. Each of these liturgies carries enormous ethical content.

When the gathering is the Christian Church, its liturgy the product of thousands of years of human faith, and its God the Holy Trinity, the moral, ethical value of its liturgy is profound indeed. Rooted in creation, saved in the flood and again in the Exodus, guided by revelation through Sinai and the Ten Commandments, recalled to its selfhood by the prophets, given definitive meaning and salvation by Jesus Christ, led through a long and tumultuous history by the Holy Spirit, the liturgical gatherings of the church and its many forbears have carried enormous ethical weight. And all of that weight is brought to bear in Christian congregational liturgy. The infinite value of all of the lives of faith lived in the past is proclaimed in our liturgy, in the gathered community. The infinite value of all of God's mighty works in creation is proclaimed in our liturgy. The infinite value of God's definitive action in Christ is proclaimed in our worship. All of these are ethical proclamations. The mere fact of our gathering as Christians proclaims these deepest of all values. We are not proclaiming, "the American way of life," "the victory of the proletarian revolution," or, "free private enterprise capitalism," whatever their merits. Our liturgies proclaim Christ crucified for the sins of all creation, and His victory over those sins.

Because we are bodily, human, we too have ritual, formalized behaviors which arouse us in our liturgical assemblies. "Christ died for us." "God so loved the world..." "Take and eat..." "In the beginning..." "I am the way."



"Lord, have mercy upon us." "You must be born again." And many more. These are powerful, evocative words; they call up myriad associations in our liturgical assemblies. They are code words, terms which would be meaningless to a total stranger. As code words, they are a kind of short-hand, enabling us to convey complicated ideas in an instant. Because our liturgy is bodily, incarnational, we use more than words in it. We have colorful banners; we parade. We have our special symbols: the Book, the cross, the font. We sing; we dance (on rare occasions); we laugh (not as often as we'd like to), and maybe we feel mixed envy and conscience-stricken pleasure at the formal pageantry of much secular liturgy. We eagerly march behind a flag or in a color-guard; we rebel at marching behind a cross. Sin thus prevents full congruence between our liturgical actions and the values those actions proclaim. But the values remain. Christ died for our sins; we are the sinners for whom Christ died, even if marching behind His cross embarrasses us. Our liturgy has located us, imprecisely, in a moral universe whose Creator is its Lord and Savior. It is not the moral universe of the suburban shopping mall, the political convention, the corporate board room, or a Nazi rally. It is the specifically Christian ethical universe, proclaimed in and through its gathered, liturgical community. It stands in opposition to all other ethical universes. The Moral Absolute which governs that liturgical community is none other than God Himself. The mere fact of our bodily presence in the gathered, Christian, liturgical community is testimony to His Lordship. Our bodily absence from that community is rather more ambiguous

### Bodilyness and the Christian Community

It is not enough for me to say I like you; to stop at that risks taking you for granted. Rather, I must extend my hand; you dare not refuse, because to refuse is to declare a kind of personal war. When I say, "Hello," I am merely greeting you; when I offer you my hand, I am offering you my whole self. We cannot remain on the level of lip-service acquaintance if I have given you that much commitment. If you have my hand, you literally have my body; I have no more to give. So it is with liturgy. We are amused, or repelled, by the actions of some of our Christian brothers and sisters, when they cross themselves, bend one knee towards the altar, swing incense pots to and fro, and parade around carrying statues. However, all these are ways of involving our bodies, our whole selves, in the act of worship. When these actions hinder true commitment, we are right to condemn them. When they stimulate involvement of our whole selves, wisdom counsels silence. I must kneel to extend my hand to God.

### The Bodilyness of Selfhood

In our daily lives, we are bodily beings. We take our bodies very, very seriously. We spend enormous sums of money on medical treatment, health spas, clothing and cosmetics, all for our bodies. The complex issues of brain-death, medical research, and abortion focus sharply on the bodilyness of our selfhood. We are not disembodied intellects; we are body, mind, and spirit together. Therefore the Word of God cannot be from one mind to another. If it were, radio and television would suffice. On a secular level, even after electronic communications have obviated the need for gathered legislatures and political conventions, we will still have them, because our bodilyness demands that our elected representatives be bodily present in the act of governance. If bodily presence were unimportant, the telephone would be as good as being there, and superhighways would be for trucks only. My personhood resides in the amalgam of my body with my brain



and spirit.

I must be a bodily being in my worship too, or my worship stands in danger of becoming divorced from my selfhood. If the way I experience my Christian selfhood is radically divorced from the way I experience all of the rest of my selfhood, or if the way I experience my Christian selfhood is contradicted by the whole rest of my experience, I am in a quandary. Such a faith, distrustful of the body I cherish, my body, retreats into my brain. Faith becomes intellectual assent; worship becomes three-hour sermons, and, divorced from my body and thus from my life, faith at last becomes hypocritical.

### The Bodiliness of Human Communication

Human<sup>8</sup> communication has devolved from our bodies; it is the extension of them. Our awareness of person, group, and institution depends upon an elaborate collection of bodily imagery and metaphor. The person in charge of an organization is its head; lawyers or public-relations experts are mouth-pieces; issues or feelings are gut-level. Those who agree with us are high-minded, or maybe just broad-minded; others are narrow-minded. An army marches on its stomach. Petty annoyances are a pain in the neck, or elsewhere. The uses of bodily imagery, not all printable, could be multiplied endlessly. How we organize and express reality thus determines that reality for us. What we cannot express cannot exist for us. The reality we express, the reality we create, is thus largely the projection of our bodies upon our experience.

Even when our worship practices deny our bodiliness, bodily imagery nevertheless pervades our symbols, sacraments, and terms. We are bathed in baptism, which makes us part of the Body of Christ. Holy Eucharist involves us in the Body and Blood of Christ. Can the eye resent the feet, and rid itself of them? Must we love the Lord our God with good thoughts only, or must we love Him with our mind, heart, and body? Even at its gnostic worst, our religion has retained bodily imagery, because it is inescapable, not because we have not tried to eliminate it.

### Bodiliness as the Basis of all Human Relationships

Human relationship depends upon the subtle, profound interrelationships of mind and body. The proffered handshake, the smile of a loved one or the frown of a colleague; the grimace of a child or an infant's first giggle; the embrace of a spouse or the rejection of an adolescent, each present us with human, bodily communication. We can live in an electronic cocoon coolly insulated from the challenge of this bodily environment. And, to an increasing extent, that is indeed how we are living. However, our faith must always decry such mere spectator involvement, because it is not true living. It brutalizes us while it dehumanizes those whose sins or suffering have become our entertainment. Mass communications have yielded enormous increases of knowledge, and have made us eyewitnesses to our history. Vast numbers of people are daily informed of issues and problems which in former times were the concern of exclusive groups. But they have exacted their toll: instead of bread and circuses, we have food stamps and "Hawaii Five-O." Our bodies have been effectively removed from the moral action, though often our real, personal stake in this or that bit of news, such as the latest rise in the cost of food, gives us impotent anxiety for the future. Our bodies, insulated in their electronic cocoons, refuse to be



ignored: we develop all sorts of functional, anxiety-induced illnesses. Our bodies will not be denied; they assert themselves one way or another.

### The Sacrificial Aspects of Liturgy

The concept of sacrifice as part of Christian worship and liturgy gives many Protestants pause. We tend to conjure up the worst excesses opposed by Calvin and Luther, wondering how these can have emerged here, now. Yet, sacrifice is essential to all of Christian liturgy.

To begin with, God is complete, perfect, whole. Nothing, nobody else is, "I AM WHO I AM."<sup>9</sup> All else is derivative, conditional, dispensable. There was a time when I was not; a time shall come when I shall not be. He need not have created me, or you, or indeed creation at all. But He did, and though creation is good, it is imperfect, ambiguous, fallen. Thus the sacrificial love of God begins in creation. God created us in His image, and we have cracked His mirror. For God, therefore, loving His creation, eternally suffering through His Son in its fallenness and the pain it inflicts upon itself for failure to relate to Him, creation is a deep and continuing sacrifice, His sacrifice. We witness the suffering of good parents whose child has gone bad, and empathize with their sacrifice, their love. How much more must God sacrifice?

### The Sacrifice of Christ

Just as God sacrificed in the act of creation, Jesus sacrificed in assuming our flesh. To say He lived is to say that He suffered. He who feeds with the food of eternal life hungered. He who is perfect accepted baptism for the forgiveness of sins. He from Whom flow streams of living water experienced thirst. He, Lord of all creation, washed His disciples' feet. He who knew no sin consorted with prostitutes, traitors, and even pharisees. He who raised Lazarus from the dead, bearing the guilt of all creation, was terrified in the face of His own death. In Christ the Holy Trinity experienced deeply the absence of God, and in that experience, accepted every consequence for fallen creation. Love incarnate became sin incarnate for us. Death did not loose its sting; yet He endured, and conquered.

In the human attempt to grasp the cosmic import of Christ's Passion, whole libraries have been written; lives have been offered, and still we have but marred its surface meaning. Because each generation must appropriate this saving mystery for itself, the only certainty is that, one day, the last scholar will be working on the last book, at the moment of the second coming. So too this present, modest essay.

On another level, Jesus Christ, the perfect, all-holy, did what we could never do for ourselves. While our sacrifices are real and necessary, they will never save us. His sacrifice is not ambiguous; it is not in any way sinful; it is perfect. In His Passion, Christ offered, once, for all, enough to satisfy every human sacrificial need. In Christ our God is a servant, not a conquering military hero, nor an imperious statesman. His sacrifice is cut from the same piece of fabric as His life. It is gentle, modest, appealing less in its grandeur than its dirt-poor peasant trappings.

### Christ's Sacrifice in His Church

If God the Father sacrificed in creation, God the Son sacrificed in similar



measure in His Body, the church. Christian history is full to overflowing with thoughts, actions, and institutions which were more sinful than saved. Mercy, holiness, righteousness and sanctification, have too often been far, far away. Akin to the ancient Jews, we have as often as not, persecuted those who have called us to repentance, those whose personal or corporate holiness threatened us. Where Christ was servant, we have marched with guns. Where He ate with sinners, we keep them at arm's length. In view of this checkered history, it would perhaps be better for us to fear salvation more than damnation. The roll of those really called up yonder is sure to astonish all of us, including the righteous denizens of choirs, consistories, and ladies' aids. Indeed, purgatory could pass Protestant muster, if it is viewed as a kind of period of heavenly adjustment to salvation: the time it will certainly take us to get used to all of those we looked down upon, actually being there, with us. Not to mention the gradually dawning realization of every one who is missing.... If creation is saved by His Passion, doubtless, many of His sanctimonious followers will be saved by His celestial sense of humor.

### The Church Sacrifice

For Reformed and Congregational Christians, the idea of sacrifice is integral to Christian liturgy.<sup>10</sup> Unlike our Lutheran friends, who deny any sacrificial aspect of worship, and our Roman Catholic friends, who assert that the Eucharistic Sacrifice is the Sacrifice of the Cross, repeated at each Liturgy, the followers of Zwingli and Calvin have looked upon sacrifice as something we the church do. Not that what we do as a church is enough to save us, or that it is even good; often it is downright bad. It is what we do, not what Christ does. What He does needs nothing from us; what we do in response is something else. What we do as a result of our faith: our praise, our expressions of thanksgiving, our works of justice, our kindnesses, foul and ambiguous as they all are, are what we offer to God, in the certain knowledge that these are united with the perfect sacrifice of Christ, and thus made acceptable before God. And this happens, not through the medium of our good thoughts, or even our words, but through the Holy Eucharist.

And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee: humbly beseeching thee, that all we, who are partakers of this Holy Communion, may be filled with Thy grace and heavenly benediction.

or,

And be pleased now, O most merciful Father, graciously to receive this memorial of the blessed sacrifice of thy Son which we here offer unto thee, in union with the sacrifice of our thanksgiving and praise, consecrating ourselves in soul and body, property and life, to thy most blessed service and praise.<sup>12</sup>

or,

Here we offer ourselves in obedience to you, through the perfect offering of your Son Jesus Christ, giving you



thanks that you have called us to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, your own people; and to you, O Father, as to the Son and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed blessing and honor and glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

or,

Gracious God, accept with favor this our sacrifice of praise, which we now present with these holy gifts. We offer to you ourselves, giving you thanks for the perfect offering of the only one begotten by you, Jesus Christ our Savior:

By whom and with whom and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor<sup>4</sup> and glory be to you, eternal God, now and forever. Amen

What are we the church giving? We are giving, "our souls and bodies," 'the consecration of' "our selves in soul and body, property and life," or, 'the offer of' "ourselves in obedience to you, through the perfect offering of your Son." We return what we can to God: our souls, our bodies, our life. We do not give Him our faith, our good thoughts, our good intentions; we give Him our all: our bodies. This we give in and through the Holy Eucharist. Our bodies are our offering, our sacrifice, made acceptable through the sacrifice of Christ in His Passion. Therefore, the Holy Eucharist cannot be merely our good thoughts about the Last Supper, or the cross. The Eucharistic Memorial is His Sacrifice, made real and present among us. If it is not, then we have no Mediator, no High Priest interceding for us before God. Our faith retreats to become no more than good thoughts about Jesus, wafted this way and that by the latest psychic breeze.

We cannot withhold our bodies and still have anything left to offer, to sacrifice. So Christianity does indeed have human sacrifice at its center. The sacrifice is ours, made perfect by His. Our bodies do things. We eat, drink, laugh, cry, play, work, rest, love, hate, do good, do evil, and normally, mix it all together beyond separation. But we have a sense of justice, of grace sorely misused in our world. Giant corporations, spanning continents, seem unresponsive, corrupting governments and endangering the lives of workers and consumers around our planet. Evil ideologies spread death and destruction in the name of proletarian revolution. Greed wears both capitalist and communist faces. If we offer our bodies, what can it mean, against such a sinful backdrop? We offer our bodies, ourselves in property and life, to Christ's service. The little good that we do, offering an unexpected kindness here, boycotting an especially reprehensible corporation there, sending relief supplies, medical and dental aid abroad, starting rural clinics and self-help aid projects, teaching, praying, visiting, loving, demanding of the powers and principalities of our age that they pause to consider the moral ramifications of their selfish behavior; all these and countless more, are our sacrifice, the offering of our bodies, ambiguous and imperfect, but ours. We cannot withhold our bodies and still have anything left to offer, to sacrifice.

Our sacrifice, made perfect and acceptable by His sacrifice, should stimulate us to whole-hearted, whole-bodied praise and thanksgiving. If the Holy Eucharist is the sacrament through which we offer our bodies to Christ, it is because this sacrament stimulates us to live lives of thanks and praise. The



little, ambiguous, good that we do earns us nothing. We are too poor, too sinful even to identify it accurately. But it is real, nonetheless. It derives, not from our sense of guilt, or self-righteousness, but from our need to thank and praise the source of our salvation. The bodily need to revel in His love. The continuing celebration of our Lord's Memorial, of His death and His victory over death, is our opportunity to offer our thanks and praise. There we consecrate ourselves anew, derive hope, joy, and peace in the knowledge of His conquest. We are part of that world which He has overcome. Holy Eucharist proclaims His victory. The Holy Eucharist, therefore, creates an "eucharistic church," ready to thank, praise, and sacrifice itself for its Lord and His Gospel, knowing that it has been saved: everything it does is sacrificial, and will be united with Christ's sacrifice. Such a church can indeed do all things through God, who strengthens it. The sacrificial doing of all things is offered in and through the Holy Eucharist.

The sacrificial doing of all things is the church's bodiliness. The church is not limited to good thoughts about the needs of others. The church is not a spectator of the injustices of our age. It is not insulated from pain and suffering in an electronic cocoon, nor even in a comfortable pew. It is struggling on the cutting edge of the moral issues of its age, every age. Its deep awareness of the ambiguity of every moral action does not paralyze it. Ambiguity causes humility, not paralysis. It must act; inaction denies its body. Inaction is a hand withdrawn from God. Inaction is anomie, distance, from itself and from Him in whom sacrificial life is made acceptable to God. The Body of Christ can do all things through its Savior, whose Passion has made all of the things the church does acceptable.<sup>16</sup> God gave creation its bodiliness; Christ gave the church His Bodiliness. The sacrificial, thankful, generous acts of righteousness and justice which the church does are therefore the actualization of its true Bodiliness as the Body of Christ.

#### Worship and the End of Creation

Scientists have a fair understanding of the life-span of stars, from their birth, their collections of slowly cooling planets, their multi-billion year maturity, and their demise. If our universe extended from Boston to New Orleans, <sup>17</sup>our solar system would be a ping-pong ball somewhere near Cleveland. And our universe is but one of billions like it in space. Just as there was a time when I did not exist, so there was a time when our solar system did not exist. As there shall be a time when I shall have ceased to exist, so shall there be a time when our solar system shall have ceased to exist. God alone is eternal; all of creation is mortal. It too shall pass away. Bodiliness has bodily limitations.

For all of its fallenness, for all of its ambiguity, creation is good. It is loved by its creator. Alone in creation, the Body of Christ perceives, celebrates that. It is not mechanistic, mindless, bodyless. It is cosmically personal. And, in the Holy Eucharist, the church celebrates victory over its spotted history, victory over ambiguity,<sup>18</sup> the final reign of that justice for which all creation waits in anguish. This is a moral victory, not in the sense of rationalized defeat, but in the sense of the victory of morality.

Where will you be in the rapture? What a selfish question. I shall die. Christ alone shall live. When all the wheeling worlds have done, He shall



Be. I AM WHO I AM will. To acknowledge that fact, to participate in it through the Holy Eucharist, to revel thankfully in the ethical challenges it presents daily in our age, for our church, is more than enough. The rapture is here; thanksgiving is now, in the Holy Eucharist.



1. The discussion of bodiliness, here and throughout the chapter is dependent upon the following three books: Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols, Random House, NY: 1973, Edward T. Hall, The Hidden Dimension, Doubleday, Garden City: 1969, and Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1942. Needless to say, their arguments and insights have been condensed here.
2. The literature on baptism is voluminous. For the idea of baptism as a re-creation, see G.R. Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids: 1962. See also Alexander Schmemmann, Of Water and the Spirit, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press: 1974. (NY?), p. 93, for a discussion of new creation as kingship.
3. Book of Worship, United Church of Christ, United Church of Christ Office for Church Life and Leadership, New York: 1986.
4. The discussion of prayer is condensed from the far superior treatment by Bro. Pierre-Yves Emery, Prayer at the Heart of Life, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY: 1971. The list of books about prayer is again enormous. I have found the three volume set by Kadloubovsky and Palmer, Writings from the Philokalia, Early Fathers from the Philokalia, and The Art of Prayer, all Faber & Faber, London, most useful.
5. The discussion of secular rituals derives from Ernest B. Koenker. Secular Salvations, Fortress Press, Philadelphia: 1965. One could also cite the less convincing treatment by Vance Packard, The Hidden Persuaders.
6. Douglas, pp. 143-146.
7. Edward T. Hall, The Hidden Dimension, Doubleday, pp. 119f.
8. Ibid.
9. Exodus 3:14, RSV.
10. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, book 4, chapters 17 and 18. Also Max Thurian, The Eucharistic Memorial, parts i and ii. John Knox Press, Knoxville: 1960, and...The One Bread, Sheed & Ward, NY: 1969.
11. Book of Public Worship, Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1948, p. 42. This is a Congregational document.
12. Evangelical and Reformed Hymnal, Eden Publishing House, Saint Louis: 1941, p. 26.
13. United Church of Christ Hymnal, United Church Press, Philadelphia: 1968, p. 21.
14. Book of Worship, United Church of Christ, United Church of Christ Office for Church Life and Leadership, New York: 1986, p. 48.



15. Gregory Dix, O.S.B., Shape of the Liturgy, Dacre Press, London: 1945, pp. 744-746, for an excellent discussion of how the Holy Eucharist produces a 'eucharistic' church.

16. Phil. 4:13, RSV.

17. Though the inspiration for the ping-pong ball image of our solar system resides with Carl Sagan, Dragons of Eden, p. 153, the details are purely mine. My feeling was to try to convey the enormity of creation. If that succeeded, I hope Dr. Sagan will forgive.

18. Rm. 8: 22, RSV.



The Inauguration of the  
Reverend Prof. John B. Payne, Ph.D.  
to the  
Paul and Minnie Diefenderfer Chair  
in Mercersburg and Ecumenical Theology  
in Santee Chapel  
Lancaster Theological Seminary  
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Thursday, November 2, 1989

The Rev. James E. Gold  
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A. Edward Miller, Editor  
The New Mercersburg Review  
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Reading, PA 19607

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