

THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW  
Journal of the Mercersburg Society

R. Howard Paine, Editor

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# **THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW**

**Journal of the Mercersburg Society**

Number Six

Autumn 1989

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### CONTENTS

#### Editorial Introduction

1 R. Howard Paine

#### Articles

3 A Cormorant's Credulity: The  
Triumph of Heavenly Utilitarianism

Richard E. Wentz

11 Saving Evangelical Catholicism  
for Today

Linden J. DeBie

22 More than a Book: The Remedy Today

Harry G. Royer

37 God's Truth or 'Drop Kick Me  
Jesus': A Sermon

Linda S. Gruber

41 Heirs through Hope: A Sermon

R. Howard Paine

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

One of the principal reasons for the establishment of The New Mercersburg Review has been to provide an organ for the publication of the excellent papers that are presented at the annual convocation of the Mercersburg Society. Hence this present issue comes to you in fulfillment of that purpose.

The Spring 1989 Convocation held on the campus of Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pennsylvania, had as its theme Mercersburg and the New Revivalism. During the two days of May 22 and 23 in which about sixty were in attendance the articles of this issue of The New Review led to quite a few hours of lively discussion. As you read them here it is our hope that the discussion will resume and continue for some time to come.

You will have to read through several pages of Richard Wentz's paper before you discover the source of his interesting and enigmatic title. It's right out of Nevin, and Dr. Wentz has done well by the theme. He had his origin in our midst and served several parishes in Pennsylvania before migrating to big sky country where he is pursuing every opportunity to tell the message of Mercersburg. Of even greater interest to us is his appointment recently as editor of the Anglican Theological Review.

Linden De Bie is one of the founders of the Mercersburg Society and presently serves as a member of the Executive Committee. A minister of the Reformed Church in America he has distinguished himself in Mercersburg studies at New Brunswick Seminary and at McGill University where he presented as his doctoral dissertation "German Idealism in Protestant Orthodoxy with reference to the theology of John W. Nevin."

Harry Royer is another one of the founding spirits of the Society and a member of its Executive Committee. He is also one of the founders and presently the Prior of the Order of Corpus Christi, a group within the United Church of Christ which fosters a disciplined spirituality and has been informed by the principles of Mercersburg. Several years ago Pastor Royer was the recipient of the Allan S. Meck Award for excellence in pastoral ministry at which time it was acknowledged that the strength of his work in St. John's United Church of Christ, Reading, Pennsylvania, was rooted and grounded in a sacramental ministry growing out of his adherence to the teachings of Mercersburg Theology.

Linda Gruber is one of the strong pastoral leaders of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ of which she is presently vice moderator. In her sermon delivered at the celebration of the Eucharist in Wismer Hall the first evening of the Convocation she was able to demonstrate some of the tenets of Mercersburg with a decidedly contemporary twist.

The other sermon was delivered by the editor at the closing Eucharist of the 1985 Convocation of the Society in St. John's United Church of Christ, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Jeff Roth, Executive Vice President of the Society is being installed as co-pastor of St. John's Church this October 8.

I am grateful for the cooperation of so many people in seeing to it that I receive appropriate copy for The New Review. It has been especially heartening to see the response to my appeal for articles for the Spring, 1990 issue.

R. Howard Paine  
Editor



A CORMORANT'S CREDULITY  
THE TRIUMPH OF HEAVENLY UTILITARIANISM

Richard E. Wentz  
Professor of Religious Studies  
Arizona State University

One day Levi-Yitzhak of Berdichev heard a preacher delivering a very violent sermon, calling down fire and brimstone upon the community and all of its terrible sins, real and imagined. After the preacher finished, Levi-Yitzhak prayed: "Do not listen to this fellow, Lord. What he said, he had to say. Don't you see? It's his job, the job he's assigned himself. He earns his living with this kind of preaching. Yes, he has a family to feed, three daughters to marry. Give him the money he needs and let him stop slandering your children."

Much of American religion has been a form of slander, serving the wishes and agendas of self-styled preachers, whose words are spent in usurpation of the judgment of God and in sanctification of the greed (spiritual greed) of their auditors. It is the thesis of this essay that a form of piety emerged in nineteenth century America that may be termed variously heavenly utilitarianism, transcendental egoism, or simply salvationism. This piety may be observed today in its more extreme and exotic forms in what has been called televangelism, but its characteristics have become almost synonymous with Christianity in the minds of many.

John Williamson Nevin's onset of "dizziness," which Professor Nichols called attention to in chapter eight of his Romanticism in American Theology, was caused by more than his confrontation with Roman Catholicism. It was brought on by his gradual discovery that the Christian faith was something quite different from the salvationism so profoundly identified with American Christianity. His "dizziness" was brought on by an *Aufklärung*, a Christocentric enlightenment. Several years before he had recognized the slanderous character of much of revivalistic Christianity. In the Anxious Bench there was already substantial suggestion that a new religious sensibility was in formation. As he wrestled with the sect system and early Christianity, then worked his way through the issues raised by Anglo-Catholicism and the Oxford Movement, Nevin encountered the reality of a Catholic experience found in writers like Cyprian. His understanding of salvation itself was substantially altered. Therein lay the cause of his "dizziness."

Isaac Bashevis Singer has a short story "A Nest Egg for Paradise".<sup>2</sup> In it there were two brothers who owned a fabric shop. Reb Mendel was more of a scholar than a business man, so he left most of the work in the shop to his brother Joel. Reb Mendel's wife, Basha-Meitzl, was a pious woman who had borne three girls and a boy. Lisa-Hadas, her sister-in-law, had borne Joel no children. Although Jewish law required a divorce after ten years of childless marriage, Joel refused. It was Joel's custom to send Mendel his portion of the week's profits on Friday.

One day while Reb Mendel was studying Talmud and Hasidic books at the studyhouse in Lublin, the door was pushed open a crack. There stood Lisa-Hadas, his sister-in-law. Something is wrong with your brother Joel. Come home with me, and I will tell you about it. When they got to his brother's house, Lisa-Hadas told Reb Mendel that his brother had become a goy, with a Gentile mistress. Joel was in Cracow and Lisa-Hadas didn't know when he would return. She told

Reb Mendel that Joel had never shared the forty percent of profits from the shop that Mendel was due. Reb Mendel had received less than twenty percent. Then she told Reb Mendel that she had always been faithful to Joel and that an obstetrician had told her that she could have had a dozen children if she had married a man instead of barren tree. Then she seduced Reb Mendel, he should live so long. "I've lost the world to come," a voice within him murmured. Days and nights passed. He couldn't sleep. He told Basha-Meitzl about Joel, but he couldn't tell her the most terrible thing of his incest.

Finally he stopped going to pray with the minyan. He stopped going to the bathhouse. How could he undress himself and bare to other Jews that organ, the sign of God's covenant, which had broken the injunction against incest? Finally one day he traveled to the large Hasidic studyhouse in Przysucha. He started to confess to the rabbi, he had forfeited his share in the world to come. The rabbi laughed and said, "When a Jew forfeits his share in the world to come, he can serve the Almighty for His own sake, expecting nothing in return." A fit of sobbing shook Mendel's body, and at the same time he was overcome by joy. The Almighty knew, and the rabbi also knew. He was sure to roast in the fires of all seven hells, but Hell at least is for humans, not dogs. As long as there was a God and as long as there were Jews, what was the difference where one lived. A sinful Jew was still a Jew. "Days went by. Once again Reb Mendel was able to pray with fervor. It struck him that in all Eighteen Benedictions the prayers were written not for the individual Jew but for the Jewish people as a whole. The plural form was used throughout. How could he, Mendel, pray for himself alone, for his own body, his own lost soul? But to pray for all the Jews - that even the most wicked man on earth could do."

Something like Reb Mendel's discovery was at work in the life of John Williamson Nevin. He was learning with Cyprian that the real prayer is the prayer of the Church. The Gospel was not theory or a formula of salvation for individual souls, but "an actual economy of redemption brought to pass through the mystery of the Incarnation."<sup>3</sup> It was a "constitution" (one of Nevin's favorite words, which acknowledges the organic theory of humanity by thinkers like De Maistre) - a constitution of grace and truth that eliminates the regard for one's own salvation. The church is the bodhisatva to which we all belong by virtue of baptism - it is that constitution in which live those who serve the Lord for his own sake (like Reb Mendel), expecting nothing in return. "It is not such a union as results from the voluntary agreement of a number of persons, who happen to be of the same mind."<sup>4</sup> True individual piety is doing what one has to do, in prayer and study in the life of the church, living with the truth and grace that are part of that constitution.

The mature Catholic becomes "dizzy" when he realizes that the personal struggle to make the Gospel serve private religious needs is an immature stage of folk piety in the Christian pilgrimage. Whatever level of spiritual, intellectual, or social sophistication we may achieve, we are always also just folks, and folks have desires. They have spiritual desires. "Folks" everywhere in the world have as one of their requirements that someone or something must assure them of their personal worth and possible vindication. Christian "folks" require assurance that they are "saved," that their lives (often called 'souls') are made whole and in some way immortal. But even among Christian folks that is folk piety. Jesus of Nazareth called the Christ was not especially interested in it. Because people demanded those assurances, he said, "Okay! You all already know what is expected of you. So why're you asking me? You are too attached to the means and the end. Let go! Your faith has made you whole. It always does. But stop clinging to your sickness. Stop clinging to your

healing! Let go! Get on with it! The Kingdom of God is getting on with it in the eternal coinherence of all things."

The point is this: folk piety is inevitable; it is universal. Folk piety is a stage in the human religious quest, constantly part of the internixtum. It must be taken seriously, not denied or its devotees rejected. But it is not Gospel. The Gospel is the incarnation within human existence of liberation from attachment to the self and its salvation. And let me tell you, that is a vertiginous discovery indeed. And when the realization of it finally reaches into all of a fellow's insides (as Huck Finn spoke of conscience), it prepares the mind for the kind of thinking it ought to be doing.

Most of us here know the story. The year was approximately 1840. A thirty-seven year old, raised a classical Presbyterian, but weighed down by its moralism and the equally oppressive moralistic individualism of the new American religiosity, found a glimmer of Christianity that was something self, almost entirely. The glimmer had all of the portent of that vision, which is necessary in order that "we may not perish." He began to work feverishly, somewhat anxiously. He read from those scholars in Germany who had begun a romantic re-investigation of Church history. And there were philosophers and theologians in Germany whose insights and critical sensibilities deconstructed the simplistic assumptions of American folk piety. The faint glimmer increased in luminescence as the professor began to challenge those assumptions by critical historical and theological methods. No wonder he stood transfixed and dizzy among institutions and within a society and culture that represented an immature settlement of the human condition. How could Christians actually accept the common assumption of American Christianity that in the beginning Christianity was some kind of a pure evangelicalism, comprised of a collectivity of individuals who possessed Bibles and a private judgment about truth and grace which God then vindicated by privatistic infusions of salvationistic assurance? In this American view, said John Williamson Nevin, the church had become "the synagogue of Satan" by the third century even though the New Testament evidence is "utterly at war" with the notion of "a quickly apostatizing and totally failing church."<sup>5</sup>

Original pure evangelicalism was without heresy, papacy, episocopy, priesthood, liturgy, or sacraments, said its proponents. Then came the fearful captivity that lasted until the sixteenth century, except for a "succession of hidden and scattered witnesses." Such a theorizing taxes our faith and our reason, said John Nevin. That a church which in its primordial moment understood itself as founded upon a rock - that it should "Peter out," fail very soon after its founding...that it should be more than a millennium "the most horrible spiritual darkness and desolation...the enemy of all truth and righteousness, seeking only to pull down and destroy what Christ...[had still struggled] to build here and there, by such people as the Paulicians and Albigenses: all this, taken together," wrote Nevin, "...requires such a cormorant's credulity for its full reception, that the most careless minds, when brought to think only a little for themselves, are very likely to start back aghast from the scheme, and may well be excused for gently asking, "By what authority and right does it pretend so to lord it over our faith?"<sup>6</sup> Dear Father Nevin, this Puritan and evangelical theorizing has triumphed! It has transformed much of American Christianity, including its more Catholic prototypes; and it has become the regulum of the secular order as well.

A cormorant's credulity! What a metaphorical choice! I have seen the credulity of those birds. I spent several hours by lantern light on the Nagara River in

Gifu Prefecture, north of Nagoya, Japan. I watched the faithful creatures, true to their nature, plunge their long necks into the darkened waters of the River. I have seen them, neckful of fish, but unable to swallow because the fishermen had constricted the bases of their necks, tied their gullets to prevent ingestion. Each day they scoop the fish from the waters in the hope of satisfying their hunger! What credulity! The gulp that never swallows. Possessed of an instinct that drives one relentlessly to take in whatever he can in the hope that it will satisfy!

The cormorant's credulity of which John Nevin wrote, is the inclination to satisfy the individual religious desire, an inclination that leads us to try to swallow a great deal, with the expectation that our desire will be vindicated. It is this cormorant's credulity which ran like wildfire across the "burnt-over" district of New York and became the rule of American life. We have witnessed the triumph of heavenly utilitarianism in American religion. This is what Nicolas Berdyaev called transcendental egoism and what I sometimes refer to as salvationism. Salvationism is concern for one's salvation, an anxious desire to be "saved" and to be sure of it. It is what possessed Reb Mendel in Isaac Singer's story. It possessed him until his sin was so great in his own mind that he began "to serve the almighty for his own sake, expecting nothing in return." It is an affair of spiritual self-gratification, the hope for an "experience" which accrues to our personal wealth.

Robert Bellah called our attention to the presence of a utilitarian individualism in our national life, stimulated largely by the heritage of Thomas Hobbes and to some extent by John Locke. This utilitarian individualism, according to Bellah, has existed alongside the biblical tradition as a spiritual force among us. The biblical tradition, says Bellah, promoted the notion that national life is sustained by a community with charity for all, supported by public and private virtue. Hobbes' utilitarianism, on the other hand, believed in a neutral state in which individuals pursued maximum self-interest. The motivation of the individual in the utilitarian tradition is self-interest.

According to Bellah it was the nurture of the biblical tradition which kept American public life honest and integrated. However, there was present from the start a religious impulse that linked itself sympathetically to utilitarian individualism. He sees it in those "private pietisms ... emphasizing only individual rewards, that grew up in the nineteenth century and took many forms in the twentieth, from Norman Vincent Peale to Reverend Ike." This represented a corruption of biblical religion and a "maximization of self-interest with no effective link to virtue, charity, or community."

What Bellah fails to point out is that this "maximization of self-interest" is present not only in those private pietisms of positive thinking and Cornwellian "acres of diamonds," but in the very revivalistic evangelicalism which Bellah assumed was the Chandler of biblical religion. Although John Nevin had exercised some restraint in his criticism of revivalistic evangelicalism, at first preferring to attack only its extreme devices and techniques, he recognized that a new religion was in the making. When he wrote disapprovingly of what he called "Puritan theory," he may have abused somewhat the Puritan heritage. Yet he was largely on target. Present within American Puritanism were the seeds of salvationism, of a heavenly utilitarianism which tended to maximize spiritual self-interest. As Professor Edmund Morgan has demonstrated, Massachusetts Puritanism developed a test of saving faith. It required a narrative testimony that provided evidence of inner saving faith, not merely the willingness of an individual to profess commitment to the faith of the covenant

community. During the Great Awakening the direction of American spirituality began parting company with the more churchly congregationalism of Jonathan Edwards and made common cause with Gilbert Tennent, who urged the abandonment of churches pastored by what he called "unconverted" ministers. Tennent assumed the ability to discern the spiritual state of another because he was committed to the experiential possession of salvific knowledge by the private person and his own judgment. Self-righteous consciousness accompanied the highly individualized form in which the gospel was reduced to a whirlwind palliative with superficial but always impressive quantitative results. As Nevin put it, the new religious system had narrow views of the nature of sin and considered salvation to be in proportion to the will of the individual sinner.

The new salvationism represented the grace of God as "something that stands in the individual separately taken, the property of a particular self, rather than a more general power in which every such particular self is required to lose itself." Nevin was discovering that an American folk Christianity was in the making, spawned by the aberrations of the Protestant Reformation and the democratizing leveling of the American experiment. The heavenly utilitarianism of the new religion was in complete contrast to the mediating grace of Catholic Christianity. The deeper the venture into Catholicism, the dizzier one got in the presence of the heavenly utilitarianism which was becoming the dominant mode of American Christianity. Like Reb Mendel, who learned to seek nothing in return, Nevin wrote that "conviction of sin is never deep and thorough till it comes to a clear consciousness with the sinner that his sinful life is rooted in a sinful nature, older and broader than himself, which he has no power to renovate or control."<sup>10</sup>

The cormorant assumes he will be satisfying his desires when he plunges his long neck into the waters. The salvationist is equally credulous. His insatiable desire for the assurance of salvation, separately taken, leads him to reduce the Gospel to a formula of salvation. It leads him to project this pure evangelicalism into the New Testament and to assume that it was left to the guardianship of scattered witnesses from the third century until the sixteenth (possibly the seventeenth or the nineteenth).

That heavenly utilitarianism has triumphed in America is quite evident when we observe the extraordinary popularity of the televangelists. Whether we are discussing the charismatic or pentecostal evangelists, such as Jimmy Swaggart and Pat Robertson, or the fundamentalists like Jerry Falwell, the message is an appeal to consume, to serve the individual self interest. And, of course, the positive and possibility thinkers, whether Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller or the more crass of these religionists such as "Reverend Ike," are obvious purveyors of a Christianity that would have left John Williamson Nevin mortally wounded and comatose. "Evangelical quacks," he called them, of which Simon Magus is "prince and prototype."<sup>11</sup> Schuller is the most sophisticated theologian of the purveyors of success and self-esteem. He has certainly thought most carefully about what his "gospel" means in relation to the historical development of Christianity. Still the "Hour of Power" is a bourgeois folk religion directed toward individual self-fulfillment - the consumption of spiritual power for personal gain that is unredeemed magic - honorable on its own level as an indication of human desire, but desperately in need of transformation into the Christ-nature of the Gospel. Preaching the sanctification of greed in the name of the Evangel is never acceptable, even if it is spiritual greed. Greed is never sanctified in itself, but must be raised to holiness by crucifixion and resurrection. Greed must become compassion. The secular and academic worlds of our day do not escape the cutting edge of

prophecy on this point. These are worlds in which technical reason and rationalistic functionalism have reduced the individual to a consumer who is unaware of his bondage. They condone the manipulation of the mysterious world to the satisfaction of human desire individually considered. This is magic - unredeemed magic, served by our applied science, which is also largely unredeemed magic.

Nicholas Berdyaev has a most effective way of calling attention to the triumph of the heavenly utilitarianism that has become the measure of American Christianity. "People managed," he wrote,

to deduce from Christianity the most disgusting morality that has ever been known - the morality of transcendental egoism. "The good" are so anxious to get to the Kingdom of Heaven that in the crush at the entrance to it they are ready to trample on a great number of their neighbours and push them to hell, to eternal damnation ... This is the worst defeat that Christianity has suffered in human hearts, a most terrible distortion and perversion of it. The idea of transcendental egoism, of the exclusive concern for the salvation of one's own soul, which some people deduce from ascetic literature, is a satanic idea, a satanic caricature of Christianity. In truth only he saves his soul who is ready to lose it ... in the name of Christ's love. We must not think about our own salvation; this is a wrong state of mind ... In other words we must think of God and not of ourselves. And no one should dare to regard himself as righteous and others as sinners.<sup>12</sup>

Early in John Nevin's theological career he seemed to have inherited some of the moralistic evangelicalism that forced him to retain a measure of what Berdyaev called transcendental egoism. However, the essence of his later opposition to conversionism is already present in The Anxious Bench. He had discovered that Christian salvation in the "force of a spiritual constitution," completed in the resurrection; it is not a change of will or act of renovation "in the individual separately taken." The life of God in the soul is a state of coinherence in which the individual exists, not a transient excitement renewed from time to time by imaginative stimulants. We remember how he deplored the notion of "getting religion" that was at the heart of revivalistic evangelicalism.

The heavenly utilitarian view of the Bible has fashioned an oracular manual which the individual may consult as he would tarot cards or tea leaves. The book is thought to be a source of answers to every question or crisis facing the individual. This view of the Bible is simply a product of the reduction of Christianity to a formula of salvationism for the individual in his spiritual self-interest. It is a version of "The voice of the people is the voice of God" - an assumption demonstrably more harmful to the people than it is to God. For John Nevin the Bible was not a system of divinity or a confession of faith.<sup>13</sup> "Of a Bible, out of which every man was to fetch the doctrine and practice or religion as he best could with the bucket of his own common sense, these early Christians had not so much as the most remote imagination."<sup>14</sup> The Bible was the word of God in the bosom of the church and in organic union with the system of revelation that was its pillar and ground.

Much of contemporary Christianity, typified in the religiosity of the televangelists, is a religion of the utilitarian and sectarian mind which is amenable to one sect today, takes leave of it tomorrow, and in which the church has no necessary existence, but is simply the institutional product of those who

belong. "Religion degenerates ... into a trade, in which [people] come to terms with God on the subject of their own salvation, and lay away their spiritual acquisitions as a sort of outward property for convenient use."<sup>15</sup>

We are familiar with Nevin's frequent castigation of the "rationalistic habit of mind." By this he meant to point out the self-interest of technical reason in its quest for those things which will satisfy individual desire - or desire as the collective demand of a group. Sects are the result of a rationalism that insists upon the self-justifying consistency of its ideas. Nevin's objection to this kind of sectarianism would probably extend in our own time to those groups which insist upon the righteousness of their ideas. That is to say, revolutionary movements are sectarian movements. They function by demanding changes that represent the logical consistency of their own interests and desires. They have little respect for the organic character of change in which there is a recognition of the coinherence, the co-dependent origination, of all things. As Professor Nathan Scott points out in his study of The Poetry of Civic Virtue, coinherence views change as a dialectic of substitution, sacrifice, and exchange. This notion corresponds with Nevin's view of "Catholicism" as "wholeness" rather than "allness." All the trees in a forest, he said, is a term of secondary significance to the actual individual number. "All" is a mechanical unity, an abstraction, inasmuch as it really refers to the collectivity of things individually conceived. The catholicity referred to in Christianity is an organic wholeness that appropriates "every order to itself, by so mastering its inmost sense as to set it in full harmony with the deeper and broader law of its own presence."<sup>16</sup> This would mean that the catholicity of Christianity does not imply the salvation of all humans individually collected. The wholeness of Christ is a new order, a coinherence that is more than the natural life reveals. For example, certain claims to universality such as philanthropy, liberalism, humanism are of one measure with the natural life of humanity. But the church is the presence of a concrete reality with "the capacity and mission to raise natural life to higher order."<sup>17</sup> Salvation is a wholeness, coinherence, in which we may live having no concern for our utilitarian self-interest. "As hundreds of blossoms may fall and perish from a tree, without impairing the true idea of its whole life as this is reached finally in the fruit towards which all tends from the beginning, so may we conceive also of multitudes of [people] born into the world, the natural posterity of Adam, and coming short of the proper sense of their own nature as this is completed in Christ, without any diminution whatever of its true universalness under such form."<sup>18</sup> This is indeed a dizzying discovery, so much beyond the cormorant's credulity of heavenly utilitarianism, transcendental egoism, and American salvationism. But it is a liberating discovery, as it was to Reb Mendel that he could "serve the Almighty for his own sake, expecting nothing in return." It is as Nevin puts it in the essay on "Catholicism:" "Why may not thousands fail to be born permanently into this higher power of our universal nature, just as thousands fail of a full birth also into its first natural power, without any excluding limitation in the character of the power itself? ... To be thus out of Christ is for the subjects of such failure indeed an exclusion from the true and full idea of humanity, the glorious orb of man's life in its last and only absolute and eternally perfect form; but for this life itself, it involves no limitation or defect. The orb is at all points round and full."<sup>19</sup> Why not, indeed?

## Notes

1. James Hastings Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).
2. Isaac Bashevis Singer, "A Nest Egg for Paradise," in The Image and Other Stories (New York: Farran Straus Giroux, 1985), pp. 176-203.
3. John Williamson Nevin, "Cyprian," in Mercersburg Review, IV, IV (July, 1852), p. 358.
4. Ibid.
5. Nevin, "Early Christianity," Mercersburg Review, III, IV (November 1851), p. 521.
6. Ibid., p. 524.
7. Robert N. Bellah, Phillip E. Hammond, Varieties of Civil Religion (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 170.
8. Edmund S. Morgan, Visible Saints (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963, 1987).
9. John Williamson Nevin, The Anxious Bench (Chambersburg, PA: Publication Office of the German Reformed Church, 1844), in Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. and George H. Bricker, Catholic and Reformed (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978), p. 105.
10. Nevin, Anxious Bench, p. 109.
11. Ibid., p. 47.
12. Nicholas Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948), p. 114.
13. Nevin, "Early Christianity," MR (Nov. 1851), p. 550.
14. Ibid., p. 551.
15. Nevin, "The Sect System," Mercersburg Review, I, IV (November 1849), p. 535.
16. Nevin, "Catholicism," Mercersburg Review, III, I (January 1851), p. 12.
17. Ibid., p. 26.
18. Ibid., p. 18.
19. Ibid.

## SAVING EVANGELICAL CATHOLICISM FOR TODAY

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### DEFINING CATHOLICISM

I begin by explaining what I mean with my title.

The terms "catholic" and "catholicism" cause confusion for some in the common use made of them in reference to the Roman Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic faith. Such use is inappropriate, leading to the bias which reduces the Church to its Roman Catholic branch. It would suggest that other denominations do not own the same original integrity as that of the Roman Catholic Church. It is a common mistake which can be corrected by insisting on the original Latin meaning of the term "catholic" as universal (catholicus).

However, while that broadens the use of the terms "catholic" and "catholicism" to include the many denominations of the Church, it does not satisfy common parlance. Very early on, the term "catholic" referred to the Western Church which ironically was considered orthodox by the West, but not called "Orthodox." The term "orthodox" in the Western Church refers to the Roman, Greek, and Anglo Catholic branches of the Church.

But even before the emergence of the designation "Western Church," the term "catholic" was also an adjective describing what was universally shared. These were beliefs and practices which had been given normative significance. As a result the term "catholic" came to be identified with tradition and practice.

With the advent of the Reformation and the founding of Protestant branches of the Church, "catholic" became a loose designation of religious practices. As Protestant branches matured and developed their own traditions and practices, "catholic" came to signify the branches which stressed the Sacraments, the liturgy, and those which kept a watchful ecclesiastical eye on the issue of the episcopacy in terms of apostolic succession and the centralized and vertical direction of authority.

More recently a concern for the unity of the Church among Protestants led to a further adaptation of the term "catholic." Protestants addressed themselves to the question of the "essence" of the term "catholic." This question led to inquiries into the relationship of tradition and Scripture and the relationship of preaching and Sacraments. And in terms of ecclesiology, Protestants began to identify the "necessary" unity of the Church with its "invisible quality:" the Church's unity is its invisible universal and ideal form. Which brings us to Mercersburg.

Mercersburg figures significantly in the evolution of the term "catholic" in America. This is certainly the case for their inquiries into the relationship of tradition and Scripture. However, when it came to the question of the relationship of preaching and Sacraments, we discover in Mercersburg a reaction to the centrality of preaching in Protestant worship which added to the fear that the Sacraments were themselves in danger of losing all integrity in the tide of revivalist worship.

Mercersburg was intent on rejuvenating the force of a catholic, sacramental

perspective in order that they might recover for Protestants the traditional, universal quality of the Christian faith. Their project was to remind Protestants that catholicism is a historical fact, whereby the Church conceives of itself as a divine society organized, operated and unified in the world. The universal quality engendered by the term "catholic" is of a power or force within the Church able to pervade and encompass all of creation and so redeem it.

Unlike a majority of Protestant theologians in America, Mercersburg rebelled against the common use made of the term by Protestant intellectuals who conceived of the unity of the Church by adapting the term "catholic" to signify the invisible quality of the Church. Mercersburg meant for catholicity to signify that the Church is an historical fact as well as an article of faith, whose organization is around the ministry and the Sacraments. Nevin wrote in his reply to Dorner:

To believe now in such an organic power of redemption, the actual presence in the world of a constitution of grace no less real than the constitution of man's fallen life on the outside of it; to believe in this as the result of Christ's victory over sin and death, the fruit of His resurrection, and the form of His presence and working in the world through the Spirit to the end of time; to believe in all this, I say, is to believe that is, substantially the article of the Holy Catholic Church in the Creed.

#### DEFINING EVANGELICAL

The definition of the term "evangelical" is more problematic. Most recently it has become virtually synonymous with the term "fundamentalist" in religious terminology. Likewise, it is commonly an antonym to the term "catholic."

More traditionally, however, the term "evangelical" would simply stress basic Protestant values including the central importance of Scripture and the role of faith in salvation (along with the consequential deemphasis of works).

The confusion lies in the radical departure the term has been made to take from its original meaning. Among the Reformed, this evolution begins with Calvin. Calvin includes a prefatory address to King Francis I with his Institutes of the Christian Religion. There in the section "Plea for the Persecuted Evangelicals," we discover Calvin's use of the term included those who shared his confession. Protestants were evangelicals.

In nineteenth-century America the Reformed meaning of the term "evangelical" was adapted to include the changes brought about by the proliferation of the Protestant Branches of the Church. Now a Calvinist's "confession" must consider the groups whose views are not opposed to the confession, but who do differ from the Reformed in various ways. So the "Evangelical" branches are distinguished from the Reformed, receiving their name not so much for their disagreement with the Reformed, but for their similarity. At the same time these exceptions to the common confession begin to identify evangelical branches. In America these included Congregationalists or Independents (who summarized in popular fashion the Westminster Confession in 1883), the Arminians (who differ on the question of predestination and the extent of the Atonement), the Moravians (who do accept consensus of the Lutheran and Reformed Confessions), Wesleyan (whose Articles derive from the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England but include the five Arminian articles), the Regular Baptists (who differ on the question of

infant baptism and immersion), the free-will Baptists (who include the Arminian principles), and the Quakers (who have abandoned an Augustinian view of the nature of human beings and traditional views of ministry and the Sacraments, but who stress the importance of Scripture and the centrality of faith).

Before 1850 the various American splinter groups were neither Reformed nor were they evangelical. They included those who were opposed to a creed and who preferred complete freedom of biblical interpretation and personal judgment in matters concerning faith. Many of these groups were a direct result of revivals. However, one of the most important groups of non-confessional Christians, the Evangelical Association, muddied the water by taking the name "Evangelical" which had previously referred to confessional groups outside of the reformed family. These groups became enormously successful in promoting widespread Protestant cooperative ventures.

Soon after the Civil War, the Evangelical Alliance further solidified the growing tendency to use the term "evangelical" to designate non-confessing, loosely allied Protestants involved in cooperative missionary and social ventures.

After 1950 the Young Men's Christian Association spearheaded a nation-wide drive to promote lay organizations which tended to deemphasize confessional identity and stress cooperation and social action. The theological strand that held them together was the insistence on "a personal commitment to Jesus Christ." And whatever there was of a catholic commitment, it was to the temporary unity necessary to bring about social change. Thus, their use of the term "catholic" was virtually synonymous with the term "ecumenical."

One of the primary concerns of these groups was evangelism. And the natural conclusion was that evangelicals do evangelism. This also contributed to the result which is that the term "evangelical" now popularly refers to a conservative free-church tradition.

Most recently one of this country's foremost intellectual representatives of the evangelical groups, Mark Noll, an editor of The Reformed Journal, wrote two articles trying to identify the practical difference between the Reformed and evangelicals.

While Noll's first encounter with the Reformed left him skeptical because of their apparent worldliness, he was attracted to the Reformed confession which provided the source of his ongoing interest. His investigation of the Reformed led to the articles previously mentioned in which he suggests three ways evangelicals might help the Reformed be more successful in America.

Noll recommends techniques of voluntarism, individualism, and adaptability (or conformity). Truly evangelicals have mastered these principles of religious cooperation in order to achieve their ends and demonstrate numerical growth. They are the first to remind Protestants of the intensely national character of many Americans and of America's strong sense of individualism. Evangelicals have been effective in using individualism to their advantage, and it is pronounced in their principle of a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Their brilliant adaptation to the American climate has enabled them to market their product with the skill of a successful business agent. And their dropping any ethnic identity has opened the door of easy access to their churches.

Noll makes no apologies for evangelical churches which grow at the expense of

Reformed churches, but instead offers techniques which would help the Reformed get on the band wagon. Furthermore, he suggests in these articles that the Reformed overcome the impasse which must be attributed to Reformed leaders who have continued to manifest the same "contempt for evangelical philosophy" which he reads in the likes of John W. Nevin and Philip Schaff. Nevin and Schaff, says Noll, are characteristic of the Reformed bias which denigrates the common-sense realism at the very heart of evangelical thinking.

In light of this, it is ironic that Mercersburg thought of themselves as evangelicals. Of course their use of the term is more ancient. Their most basic understanding of evangelical theology was that it is organized around the principles of justification by faith and the centrality of Scripture. Yet they would hasten to add that it includes Christians organized around a common confession.

Mercersburg would have identified Noll's "evangelicals" as a movement heavily influenced by revival methods, whose historic link with the Christian faith is decidedly Puritan New England. Mercersburg's conclusion is drawn from the fact that the early revivals had their source in Puritan New England. But for Mercersburg the designation "Puritan," for virtually all denominations or segments of denominations who subscribe to revival practices and methods (and incidentally, the so-called common-sense philosophy spoken of by Noll), came in Mercersburg's response to assaults upon their churchly and sacramental position by writers of the Puritan Recorder who claimed to speak for all the faithful in New England and indeed America. "The faithful" included congregations within their own German Reformed denomination, such as the Race Street Church in Philadelphia, which openly applied revival methods and went so far as to call New England's Finney to be their pastor.

These revival factions, or as Mercersburg refers to them, "Puritans" (granting them the name they themselves prefer) were openly Pelagian in theology. Their recent theological roots were in the methods of Dwight, Taylor and Finney. And the important connection we see with these nineteenth-century groups and the evangelicals of Noll's tradition is their rendering of justification as essentially a feeling, rather than as we have it in the Heidelberg Catechism an actual fact of churchly, religious life. They openly preferred an individual decision, perhaps brought about during a stay on an "Anxious Bench," to the laborious process of nurture as conceived in the Heidelberg Catechism. In revivalist theology God does not encounter the individual. Instead the individual "finds" God. And so religion is primarily a matter of personal experience.

#### THE THREAT TO EVANGELICAL CATHOLICISM

By stating that evangelical catholicism needs saving today, I have suggested that it is in danger. Is evangelical catholicism in danger? Well, Noll's articles imply as much. Indeed, if he feels compelled to give advice how the Reformed might be more successful in America, he must believe that they are not doing nearly so well as the evangelicals. And if mainline Protestants include evangelical catholics, the statistics bear him out. But these facts are only observable in terms of statistics. Beyond the statistics I think it still safe to say, evangelical catholics are on the defensive and represent a small voice in America's religious life.

Still, I believe reformed theological integrity is essentially unshaken, and Reformed presence in serious dialogue continues to be significant if small. But

we have had little success in terms of congregational expansion. And many of our pastors, elders and deacons feel the pressure of evangelical methods to improve techniques of outreach.

Mercersburg felt that evangelical catholicism was in danger too. And yet they truly believed that evangelical catholicism would eventually triumph in America. However, they thought it possible, and as they grew weary from the struggle, likely that puritanism would be able to subvert the Church's progress and heavenly ascent and delay her necessary reconciliation, restoration and unity. And so Mercersburg's project was to save evangelical catholicism and thus Christianity from spreading sectism and its disunifying theme of material individualism. Indeed, Mercersburg would recover for Protestants the forgotten third principle of Protestantism, the ecclesiastical principle.

#### THE PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFERENCE

Now I want to say something about what Mercersburg claimed was the important difference between Puritan philosophy and the philosophical method of Mercersburg, why it is that the philosophy which informs evangelical catholicism has come under fire, and why we must resist accepting the philosophical approach of evangelicals and modern pragmatists.

The philosophy which informed revivalism was the common-sense realism popular during the nineteenth century. It was a philosophy which came out of a Lockean perspective, developed by Reid and Stewart, adapted for America by Witherspoon, and promoted in its modified form by Hodge at Princeton. (It was a Lockean philosophy which had so great an influence on the revivalist, Jonathan Edwards.) Its star had effectively faded in Europe by the time Mercersburg appeared on the scene. Many conservative theologians in this country feared the fading influence of common-sense realism in Europe. They imagined a link between the new thinking in England, Germany, and France and recent upheavals, blaming the troubles on the emerging philosophies. Especially with Hodge at Princeton, a campaign to preserve the "old faith" and its philosophical foundations in the common-sense realism of Scotland, sought to resist any intrusion of new ideas from Europe. In addition, the highly successful, Baconian influenced inductive science harmonized nicely with a traditional dualistic philosophical understanding of the world.

However, common-sense realism had come under attack in Europe for its inability to harmonize reason and faith. To a great extent, American theologians simply refused to participate in the Western philosophical debate over the breach of faith and reason which occupied the minds of the greatest thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This theological isolationism created a huge chasm between evangelical religion and modern culture in America, one which today is evident in the refusal of evangelicals to participate in addressing the philosophical problems facing modern society. It has led to their entrenchment in a protectionist theology which simply asserts the validity of the literal claims of Scripture. In effect, while Mercersburg sought to work through the nineteenth-century problem of the breach between faith and reason from an evangelical perspective, their opponents did not.

At the center of Mercersburg's struggle to give contemporary meaning to the "old" evangelical faith was their insistence that a philosophical dualism which allows faith to exist as a system of doctrine unable to affect peoples' lives could not be useful in bringing the world to Christ. A god who exists in doctrine but not in the world is not the incarnate God of the Christian faith.

Only as God has life in the world, is Christianity authenticated for modern people.

The practical implications of Mercersburg's strong emphasis on the Incarnation is naturally a theology utterly preoccupied with the question of the Church as the body of Christ in the world.

The common-sense approach of evangelical philosophy supported the view in which the union with Christ is essentially a matter of feeling on the part of the believing individual - mediated by a disembodied spirit - and supported by quasi-scientific arguments, called "natural proofs," all backed by Scriptural evidence, called "divine revelation." The result has been Puritanism: a religion unsupported by reason.

Mercersburg's approach included information obtained from German mediating theology, which was a conservative movement out of the idealist school of thought. In Germany the mediating school thought of itself as having taken the best of idealist thinking and adjusted it according to traditional, orthodox Christianity. This included Catholic thinkers in Germany as well as Protestants. And the list of names associated with this school reveals the high caliber of minds dedicated to working through the dilemma of rampant defections on the part of many modern Christians from the traditional faith. They too believed evangelical catholicism needed saving.

Their most potent discovery was the metaphor which depicted God's involvement in human affairs as an organic relationship established by Christ in history and sustained by his Spirit in the Church. The result was a religion in which faith and reason were not opposed. Organic union with Christ provided evidence of the rational connection between the natural world and the supernatural world. Reason supports such a connection. And the union provides for belief and participation in an invisible world beyond the senses.

Hodge and Princeton's brand of common-sense philosophy preferred an empirical approach which began with sensible evidences for religious experience when dealing with the world. Common-sense realism understood human experience in terms of the operation of mental faculties which although capable of using evidence to deduce a creator's hand in creation, neither sought nor expected rapport with that creator in religious experience. Ironically, the revivalistic reaction to this approach allowed immediate religious experience in a temporary, subjective and emotional reaction to "the spirit's prompting." Schaff and Nevin allowed that this might be a good first start for waking men and women from their religious slumbers, but they concluded that unless the relationship is objective, that is, established in the religious community's common experience, it simply lacks lasting historical validity and is merely self-serving.

History had led Mercersburg to conclude that the issue is the Church's common experience. Their research maintained that Protestantism developed directly out of Roman Catholicism. Rome had established itself with the character of St. Peter, firm and authoritarian - given to eliciting obedience through force. The natural and inevitable reaction was Protestantism, taking for itself the character of St. Paul - given to defending the freedom of individuals. However, Mercersburg observed how in America this freedom had led to extreme license. And with equal certainty, as surely as history has a course, the reaction to Protestant license would be the Church of St. John - a church given to balancing freedom with authority.

When revivalists became aware of the results of Mercersburg's historical research, they were horrified. Many of them had long held to an utterly spurious account of history in which Protestantism was preserved when Polycarp and a band of refugees fled persecution in about 177 AD and settled in the Alps. Eventually Protestantism reemerged among the medieval Waldensians and eventually gained enough support to begin the Reformation.

Unable to contend with Mercersburg's vastly superior knowledge of history and the texts, evangelicals of both the anti-revivalist and the revivalist camps sought to discredit Mercersburg by identifying them with Roman Catholicism. This would prove a deadly stroke as much hatred existed among Protestants for Roman Catholics in nineteenth-century America. In addition, anti-Mercersburg forces raised the specter of European pantheism by identifying Mercersburg too closely with the thinking of Hegel and Schleiermacher.

The intellectual battle became one of acceptance of the claims of mediating thought over the claims of common-sense realism. But Mercersburg's critics were unwilling to honestly investigate the findings of German theological science. At Princeton J.A. Alexander ridiculed German philosophy for its lack of "common sense" and the "refuse" it had deposited on this continent. He wrote:

If all the teeming German minds now striving, like the wise men of Laputa, to extract sunbeams out of cucumbers, could be engaged by some great impulse in historical researches, we should gain a treasure of imperishable <sup>4</sup>knowledge, and lose what? The next stage of Hegelianism.

He concluded by suggesting that Mercersburg's concept of organic union is incomprehensible to the Anglo-mind.

But the most damaging attacks were Hodge's. Hodge's reviews called German Idealism "worthless," and he despaired that so many gifted Germans would waste their time "earning immortality by efforts to discover what is non-existent and to do what is impossible."<sup>5</sup>

#### MERCERSBURG'S CRITICAL RESPONSE

Mercersburg rose to the challenge. Nevin called evangelical philosophy no philosophy at all, but a pseudo-philosophy made to look like it stands on the solid footing of common human experience. Unwilling to wrestle with the issues facing Protestant orthodoxy, evangelicals had removed themselves from the mainstream of cultural development. They were content with a philosophical position which supported Protestant religious claims based on evidence derived from experience. However, the experience they cited was that which fit the Procrustean scheme of evangelical theology. Nor did they endeavor to address the serious criticisms leveled at the common-sense philosophy by European thinkers, the most central of which was that a philosophy unable to bring culture into an awareness of its own historical development, is doomed to repeat history's errors.

In evangelicals' emphasis of biblical fundamentals, Mercersburg detected the tendency to reduce Christianity to a set of accepted doctrines, rather than a life of faith. In terms of christology Nevin observed that this tendency led individuals to make of Christ whatever they want, which again suggests that Christ is really a matter of individual perception. Nevin said that this growing tendency would "emasculate" Christ's real presence and resolve it "into

a spiritualistic presence, seated in the Holy Ghost, and made to reach into the minds of men directly from heaven, in no organic conjunction whatever with the Incarnation."<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, in Puritanism's modification of Augustine's doctrine of the visible and invisible Church, evangelicals altered the meaning of catholicity by teaching that the true invisible Church is the abstraction of all Christians past and present and future from the actual world. The result of such a concept can be seen in modern Protestant America. It is the effective neutralization of the Church's catholicity in that it makes the Church's eventual unity an always unrealized future state, the utterly ethereal Civitas Dei.

In terms of sacramental practice, Mercersburg observed the wholesale defection of Protestant America to Puritanism. Rejection of the Church's catholicity is similarly a rejection of the supernatural character of the Church as a divine institution operating in the world. The practical result has been a general rejection of the Sacraments as "divine acts" which work effectively toward salvation.

In the ensuing debate with Mercersburg, "Puritan" opponents first offered the "memorialist" theory of the Sacraments as being the authentic doctrine of the Reformed and Lutheran branches. After Mercersburg's historical revelations dispelled this argument, many of the opponents simply appealed to Zwingli as the true father of Reformed sacramental teaching. This included large segments of all branches of American Protestantism: Baptists, Lutherans, Reformed, Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregational, and many but not all Episcopalians. And the sectarian spirit so elevated the individual as the model of the latter day prophet that Schaff wrote that Protestant America had become,

...a variegated sampler of all conceivable religious chimeras and dreams, in connection with more sober systems of sectarian faith! Every theological vagabond and peddler may drive here his bungling trade, without passport of license, and sell his false ware at pleasure.

As for evangelicals' far-reaching social gospel goals, Mercersburg suspected the reoccurrence of the Jewish Messianic "error." Nevin argued that the entrance of the Church into the world is not a natural phenomenon as some would have it. Christianity did not spring up from society. Social gospel speaks as if the Kingdom of Heaven is simply the continuation and fulfillment of the proper nature of the world. It is the idea that what this world was meant to be is seeking to express itself through increasing acts of charity and good works. And while the final utopia is far off, steps should be taken to set the course that will eventually issue in the Kingdom of God. And so, Christianity must identify itself with these philanthropic ideals. Nevin writes,

Such is the humanitarian evangel, which in one form or another has come to prevail so widely especially in our time, thrusting itself into the place of the true gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

#### CHARLES HODGE

Mercersburg took special aim at Charles Hodge. Noll recognizes Hodge as a founder of evangelical religion. Hodge was also the most gifted and popular of Mercersburg's opponents. James Hastings Nichols has observed that in the

debates between Hodge and Nevin we have the best of American theological science to the nineteenth century. In Hodge's reaction to Mercersburg we have the outline of American evangelical theology in the nineteenth century. I submit it remains the basic outline of modern or new revivalism. Furthermore, today it remains the antagonist of evangelical catholicism.

In opposition to Mercersburg Hodge maintained that religion needs to be kept separate from life. And although he eventually came to allow that Christianity is a life and not simply doctrine, he never accepted the idea of organic union as the union with the person of Jesus Christ, mediated by the Church, in which an individual participates in a unique order of existence. For Hodge, life remains quite terrestrial, and religion affects life like the rain affects nature. It comes down to support life. But it all remains a natural phenomenon.

For Hodge life casts humanity in a cosmic moral and religious drama, acted out in each generation, before the heavenly tribunal. Humanity itself does not evolve either physically or religiously. Rather religious life can be reduced to the sum of "living units who have been placed on the same theatre . . . for moral trial."<sup>10</sup> History is the long parade of pilgrims' progress.

Nor does theological doctrine evolve. For Hodge the system of doctrine was supernaturally revealed and recorded in the Bible. Likewise, doctrine does not mature in the experience of believers or in their work in the Church. Rather doctrine is static and individuals mature into its understanding. Neither is the Church evolving into higher stages of its own development. The true Church, is an invisible assembly of the "saved," unified in the faith of individual Christians who share a similar perspective. And finally, Christ's ongoing life is not mediated to the believer through the successive ages of the Church's life, but grace comes down directly from heaven by means of the Holy Spirit.

#### CONCLUSION

With my suggestion that in Hodge we have the basic outline of New Revivalism, I conclude that this outline continues as a philosophical and theological blueprint for modern evangelicals. It is the theological core of New Revivalism. Likewise, this model continues as the antagonist of churchly evangelical catholicism.

Therefore, I maintain that if we would "save" evangelical catholicism, we must remain allies of the so-called "enemies" of common-sense realism, i.e. Nevin and Schaff, and disciples of their Protestant principles, even though for the time being, evangelical catholic popularity and success cannot equal the popularity and success of New Revivalism. We are aremnant in this regard.

My reasons for such a stand essentially issue from the reasoning of Mercersburg. With Mercersburg I would argue that evangelical philosophy is no philosophy at all - any more than religious fundamentalism anywhere in the world emerges in dialogue with philosophy, but rather appears full-blown as a justification for an iron dogma which holds people as much by ignorance as by faith. Evangelical philosophy continues to be isolationist, nationalistic, almost escapist in its basic composition, and it continues to ignore the lessons of history. By their militant refusal to enter the cultural mainstream and give critical consideration to the relationship between faith and reason, evangelicals nullify any contribution they might make to the progress of Christianity. Indeed, the prognosis is very dark, for they openly prefer the concept of a static religious

reality. And the enormous numeric success of the techniques they employ, while satisfying the tastes of individuals who are in justifiable dread of the worst in modern culture, are techniques incapable of affecting lasting change. The techniques serve only to polarize evangelicals all the more, and create the illusion that they have freed themselves from social ills. In fact, the techniques themselves are the pragmatic justification of their theology, the very mirror of the faith they share: intensely individual, directed at the heart and not the head, whose strength is measured according to secular marketing principles. In effect, evangelicals satisfy themselves with just enough god in life, to give life purpose and meaning.

But what shall evangelical catholics do in the meantime? I suggest we continue to affirm our position in the face of opposition. If we employ the same pluralistic methods as Noll suggests as a means to numerical success and greater bargaining power, we shall lose the catholic force of our argument: that progress is made through greater awareness of what we already share in the Apostles' Creed as the true source of Christian unity. We can never allow that conformity to the will of the people replace conformity to the will of God.

And how might we say we speak for God? In the same manner as Nicaea: in open and creative dialogue with all the voices of Christ's Church willing to work for peace and unity, not for our sake - but for the sake of the Kingdom of God. There lies the reconciliation dreamed of by Mercersburg.

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## MORE THAN A BOOK: THE REMEDY TODAY

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In a letter to George Geisler dated November 5, 1984, Bard Thompson asked that a paper he would deliver on the subject, "Mercersburg Speaks to Our Time," be postponed to a future Convocation of the Mercersburg Society. Commenting on the topic, Thompson wrote:

The subject suits me; but I may shock some of you by the approach I may take. It seems to me that one of the most important things Nevin did was to uncover Calvin's central teaching on the mystical union that must subsist between Christ and the believer if the believer is to enjoy any of the benefits of either justification or sanctification; and I further believe that it was Nevin's interest in the mystical union that prompted his strong inclination toward Holy Communion and liturgical worship.

Unless Bard Thompson left his paper behind, we may have to wait until the eschaton to discover what he was going to say. Then, of course, the paper will be unnecessary since we already will be enjoying the mystical union in its fullest expression!

I begin with this reference to Bard Thompson, out of respect for our beloved professor, friend, and churchman and because I think Thompson is right!

The Incarnation, the mystical union, and the historical development of this new creation through the Church are foundational to Mercersburg's understanding of true Christianity. The Incarnation is the controlling principle, or, as Nevin puts it, the fact of Christianity. All else arises from this fact! Herein lies the response to revivalism.

Central also to Mercersburg is the union or balance of the ideal and actual, the general and particular, the internal and external; the former growing and struggling through the latter within history to become actual. When the new creation God brought forth through the Incarnation is apprehended, actualized, and realized in the proper relationship and balance through what Nevin called the "system of the catechism," a true revival of Christianity will result. When misapprehended or in a state of unbalance, a false Christianity will prevail! This state of unbalance or "quackery,"<sup>2</sup> Nevin complained, was precisely the error of revivalism under what he termed the "system of the bench."

The foundational principles of Mercersburg, by necessity, will be addressed in this paper. It is, however, my hope that the Mercersburg Society will give primary attention to the Incarnation and the mystical union at a Convocation in the near future. The state of the Church and the nature of our times require it!

This paper will look at (1) the context; (2) Nevin's remedy; (3) the remedy today; and (4) a call to action.

## THE CONTEXT

"Are the Churches Dying?"

One Pastor reports:

God "has not utterly forsaken us, yet the state of religion in our bounds is...extremely low. There is much ignorance and irreligion with which we have to contend, and an awful deadness in spiritual matters....Perhaps no religious community in our country needs the special mercies of heaven...more than ours."<sup>3</sup>

Arising in different periods of history, both voices indicate that the Church is and was in trouble?

The question of the death of the churches was raised in 1972 by Dean Kelley in his book, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing. In 1827, Pastor John Smaltz presented his report at the Synod of the German Reformed Church meeting in York.

Kelley directed our attention to the fact that "in the latter years of the 1960s something remarkable happened in the United States: for the first time in the nation's history most of the major church groups stopped growing and began to shrink."<sup>4</sup> The reports continue to hit hard. Kelley's announcement is updated and popularized in Kenneth Woodward's December 22, 1986 Newsweek article, "From Mainline to Sideline," and Richard N. Ostling's May 22, 1989 Time article, "Those Mainline Blues." Wade Roof and William McKinney's 1987 study, American Mainline Religion, focused upon this decline and sought "to understand how and why the religious scene is changing and its likely future."<sup>5</sup> Reports continue to come from all directions. The headquarters of the mainline denominations cry out for new vigor in evangelism and church growth with articles and photographs of "success stories!"

The present decline of the mainline churches is taking place at the same time the conservative churches are growing and pluralism and theological ferment are being celebrated. Our society has and is undergoing radical social change from integrated to fragmented frames of reference for living and believing. For a large percentage of our population, the presence of God no longer is a "given." The Lord's Day has become "just another day!" Pastors burn out from "workaholicism" while congregations and budgets decline.

Many seek a remedy!

Jerry Falwell and friends tell us that America is ripe for revival. The electronic evangelists tell us to get on our knees, put our hands on the television, and ask Jesus to come into our hearts. We have been told we need to, and 60% of the American people claim to have been, "born again." Presbyterian John Leith in the Reformed Imperative calls for a recovery of the "theological integrity and competence of the church's witness," with particular emphasis upon "preaching, teaching and pastoral care."<sup>7</sup>

Compare the above with the conditions of the German Reformed Church which made her ripe for revivalism in the period between 1820 and 1850.<sup>8</sup> The Church was engaged in the process of Americanization at the same time she jealously guarded her German language and culture. She was sorely in need of pastors, barely able to establish and support a seminary, dimly aware of her identity, and fearful due to the cries arising on the floor of Synod that the congregations were "held

fast bound by the icy hands of spiritual death."<sup>9</sup> Nevin himself wrote in his second year at Mercersburg:

True serious piety...was often treated with open and marked scorn...The idea of a new birth was considered a pietistic whimsy...Prayer meetings were held to be a spiritual abomination. Family worship was a species of saintly affection, barely tolerable in the case of ministers...but absolutely disgraceful for common Christians.<sup>10</sup>...To call upon God in daily prayer was to incur certain reproach.

The Church in that day also needed a remedy!

But which one?

One of the many options was that of "new measures" and revivalism. The German churches, Lutheran and Reformed were beginning to embrace this new spirit!<sup>11</sup> As we all know, Nevin himself experienced the "system of the bench" in 1842 under the hand of the Rev. Mr. Ramsey who was candidating at the Reformed congregation in Mercersburg.

I do not claim that the conditions then and now are exactly the same, but I do believe there are similarities. As we review that history and listen to the voice of Mercersburg, I think we will discover that "Mercersburg Speaks To Our Time."

#### NEVIN'S REMEDY

Nevin responded!

The publication of the Anxious Bench in the fall of 1843 and an enlarged second edition in 1844 was more than an attack upon the theatrics and noise of the revivals. It denounced the anxious bench and its "system."<sup>12</sup> The antidote, Nevin wrote, is the "system of the catechism." Nevin's message was clear: The "system of the bench" is false Christianity!

In 1975, I wrote that "Nevin's rejection of the Bench and her system was doctrinal." I still believe that to be true, but it is more than that. It is, I believe, **ontological!**

How are we saved?

The old revivalist answered: conversion through the bench! Today's revivalist cries: Accept Jesus in your heart and be born again!

Nevin was not deceived! While the system claims to offer new birth and the grace of God, it is rooted in the self and grows out of the mechanical manipulations of the self. Nevin's attack on revivalism is based upon the fact that revivalism is a house of cards. It can not deliver what it offers, since it looks to itself for the gift.<sup>13</sup>

The "system of the bench" remains horizontal! Nevin wrote, "A low, shallow pelagianizing theory of religion, runs through it from beginning to end....The ground of the sinner's salvation is made to lie at last in his own separate person....Hence, all stress is laid upon the energy of the individual will, (the self-will of the flesh), for the accomplishment of the great change in which

regeneration is supposed to consist."<sup>14</sup>

The "system of the bench" deceives itself, falls into unbalance, and becomes shallow words and empty forms. So much excitement arises within the revival and the individual that the Bench, the external form, becomes the central fact! Coming to the Bench and the decision to do so replace the far deeper nature of redemption which takes place in the organic union between Christ and the believer. So much is made of the Bench that the system promotes "the delusion that the very use of it serves some purpose in the regeneration of the soul."<sup>15</sup> In the end, all you do is sit on a bench!

Nevin paraded a long list of errors which result wherever this system is employed.<sup>16</sup> The ordained ministry becomes corrupt, poorly educated, spiritually weak, ill-equipped, and open to scandal so as to bring the ministry into contempt.

As a result, the Church loses its doctrinal identity, adopting pluralism in its worse form which results in no common faith and the loss of sanctity and piety<sup>18</sup> - and eventually its life!

How are you saved?

Nevin responded in what he knew to be a summary of the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism. Our salvation comes through Christ, through the Church, through a mystical union and actual participation in Christ.<sup>19</sup>

The root of this salvation is the Incarnation, "the Word became flesh!" This is the central principle, the fact of Christianity. This remedy is not doctrinal! It is ontological!

In the Anxious Bench, Nevin argues that in order for the restoration (salvation) "to be real, (it) must begin beyond the individual...Humanity, fallen in Adam, is made to undergo a resurrection in Christ...The sinner is saved by an inward union with Christ, as real as the bond by which he has been joined in the first instance to Adam. The union is reached and maintained, through the medium of the Church, by the power of the Holy Ghost. It constitutes a new life, the ground of which is...in Christ...The particular subject lives, not...in the acts of his own will...but in the power of a vast generic life, that lies wholly beyond his will.... Thus salvation begins, and thus it is carried forth, till it becomes complete in the resurrection of the great day."<sup>20</sup> "This spiritual constitution is brought to bear upon us" in the Church, by means of institutions and agencies which God has appointed, and clothed with power, expressly for this end....in this view, the Church is truly mother of all her children. They do not impart life to her, she imparts life to them....individual Christianity is the product, always and entirely, of the Church....Christ lives in the Church, and through the Church in its members."<sup>21</sup> In embryonic form this is the Mercersburg Theology!

It is important to place the proper emphasis! The Incarnation, according to Nevin, is a new creation! It is "the introduction of a new power entirely, which was to form from that time onward the central force in the progress of the world's history."<sup>22</sup> Nevin rejects the idea that the new creation is the product of the genetic development of the old creation, for the old order "had no power to rise" to the new.<sup>23</sup> Christ "took our nature upon him; but in so doing, he raised it into a higher sphere, by uniting it with the nature of God, and became thus the root of a new life for the race....The Word became flesh; not a single

man only, as one among many, but flesh, or humanity in its universal conception."<sup>24</sup>

The Incarnation is not a theophany nor speculative theology. More than a doctrine, event, new spiritual relationship or new system of divine help, the Incarnation is life! It is a new life which Christ actualizes through the Church through history. The gate of entry to this new life for us is through union with Christ begun in Baptism.<sup>26</sup> In Christ, divinity enters into a personal union with our humanity and "lodges itself...in the inmost core of our personality. Here it becomes the principle or seed of our sanctification; which is simply the gradual transformation of the same exalted spiritual quality...through our whole persons"<sup>27</sup> which terminates in the resurrection.

For Nevin, Christ is more than the medium of salvation; he is all that the idea claims!<sup>28</sup> When we come into a living union with Christ, a new birth commences! It "involves a substantial change in the center of our being."<sup>29</sup> The union is deeper than thought, feeling or exercise of will. It is not merely a quality or relation. Nevin describes the union as a relation like "that of the iron to the magnet; but one that carries into the center of the subject a form of being which was not there before. Christ communicates his own life substantially to the soul on which he acts, causing it to grow into his very nature. This is the mystical union - the basis of our whole salvation."<sup>30</sup>

The Church originates in the Incarnation and is the historical continuation of the life of Jesus Christ. It is through the Church that the "new creation which revealed itself originally in (Christ's) person is here made a constant among (us), with all its resources, as a real historical process, reaching forward to the end of time."<sup>31</sup> In the seventh chapter of the second edition of the Anxious Bench, Nevin describes the ministry and church life the "system of the catechism demands." Recognizing the root of salvation to be in Christ and not in the self, the believers will give due respect to the Church, the Body of Christ, our mother. Special care will be given to the spiritual formation of children and infants. A partnership will exist between the Church and families, with the Church assisting families in the nurturing process. Catechetical instruction will begin in the home and continue in the Church. Children will be expected to share in worship. Word and Sacrament will be essential and they will be viewed as means of grace. The Pastoral ministry will be faithful in preaching, visiting, and care to the extent of pouring out its life in continual labors of love. Prayer will abound in church and in the homes.<sup>32</sup> The careful edification of the Church and her members through nurture, worship, and pastoral care will bring forth the fruits desired of evangelism - not through mechanical devices like the Bench but by the "extension of (the) organic life from within."<sup>33</sup>

This process of growth or actualization through the Church nurtured by Word and Sacrament and a strong pastoral ministry is spiritual formation. Nevin speaks of growth - sanctification - in the terms of St. Paul. "Individual Christians, and each congregation of believers as a whole, are to be established, strengthened, and carried forward, with regular and symmetrical growth, to the 'measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.'"<sup>34</sup>

The burden of the responsibility rests upon the pastoral ministry. It is essential for ministers to be faithful in the development of their own spiritual life. Dead churches and dead ministers are examples of persons who claim the system without making account of its internal spirit. Here the problem of unbalance surfaces again! Dead ministers are guilty of cold formalism and the Church being in "the icy hands of spiritual death." They use the catechism as

an empty form and have no regard for personal piety. To avoid such temptation and to minister according to this system, takes great strength. Nevin writes, "It is the greatest and most difficult work in the world, to be a faithful minister of Jesus Christ."<sup>35</sup>

I think we can agree that ontological implications are involved in this understanding of the Christian life and ministry. The mystical union between Christ and his people involves living and growing in this relationship - Christ's presence with and in us - struggling to be the new creation. The necessity of grace to fulfill this calling accounts in part for the 1857 Liturgy speaking of ordination in terms of an "actual investiture," "the sacramental seal," and "the symbolical assurance from on high that ... consecration to the service of Christ is accepted, and that the Holy Ghost will most certainly be with (the minister) in the faithful discharge of (the pastor's) official duties."<sup>36</sup>

The German Reformed Fathers generally did come to approve the remedy Nevin presented. Some did not understand the implications of the remedy until it began to actualize itself in the life of the Church. For example, James Isaac Good reports that "Dr. Berg, who was looked upon as a leader in revival movements, said that with the exception of unimportant particulars, he could subscribe to all in the book."<sup>37</sup>

The Reports to Synod, however are revealing. "Wildfire" revivals decreased and recovery of the Church's living tradition began. In 1851 the Synod was told, "Most of the classes manifest a tendency to return to the landmarks which were set by the Church of the Fatherland."<sup>38</sup> In 1851, Theodore Appel reported, there "is a great revival of catholic faith. Catechization is unanimously accepted as the idea of educational religion."<sup>39</sup> In 1863 the Church celebrated the 300th anniversary of the catechism and the reports to Synod in the years that followed speak of faith in the catechetical method, increases in members and churches, and a growing affection for Word and Sacrament.<sup>40</sup>

It appeared the remedy worked!

I wish it were that simple!

#### THE REMEDY TODAY

It is very possible for us to agree with Nevin and to think that we are followers of the system of the catechism, only to discover that we have accepted the external form and not the spirit itself. The danger of unbalance is ongoing! The remedy is more than a book! As George Richards put it, "It is one thing to have the book in hand, another thing to have its spirit pulsate in the soul, and control thought, word and deed."<sup>41</sup> Nevin, himself, complained of the "cold formalism" of those who claimed the book but not the spirit!

Balance is not easy to maintain. We are continually struggling with docetic and ebionite tendencies. In our day, we have grown weary of those who push for social action at the expense of spirituality and visa versa.

The situation is more complex. The lines which separate the two systems are not clear! The error is not outside the camp solely; it also is within - within our tradition, our congregations and ourselves. Most of us do not install anxious benches or offer "altar calls" but we always are in danger of placing our emphasis upon the externals and repeating the errors of the bench! It is

difficult to maintain the relationship or balance. To live in the proper relationship and balance requires the continual reception of God's grace.

It is important to listen to Nevin again as he speaks about Creed and doctrine. Nichols captures the point in these words:

Most of Nevin's opponents...held a view of revelation as a body of "truth received on testimony" - propositions whose authority was external...For Nevin this contention was a form of rationalism...For him the content of revelation was no body of proposition, but God, his "being, and presence, and glory." A revelation demonstrated by rational arguments was not revelation. "Jesus Christ authenticates himself." Faith was less an assent to propositions and arguments than it was recognition, analogous to sense experience, of the divine reality."<sup>43</sup>

I think Thompson is right. The Incarnation and Mystical Union are central to Nevin because they bring us into the presence of and union with the very "treasure we carry in earthen vessels." (2 Corinthians 4:7) The emphasis is never to be upon the vessel, the form, the outer sign, but upon the treasure, the substance, the gift or presence "these signs re-present!"<sup>44</sup> Do we really understand this point?

"Does your church teach salvation?"

"Are you born again?"

"Do you have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ?"

"Is your worship Spirit-filled?"

The words jump out of our television sets and they are presented to us by those who still seek out the Church! They also arise from within various parts of our denominations.

What is the answer?

Without hesitation today's revivalist answers: "You bet! Praise the Lord!"

How do we respond?

Is there an embarrassed silence? A machine gun firing of theological words? An apology which says "that is not our style or our kind of Christianity?" An offering of the book? A referral to the Anxious Bench and a comment to the extent that we rejected all that long ago?

Sometimes the questions are not voiced. The seeker waits, watches, experiences and finds the answer in who we are and what we do through our ministry, our worship, our strategies for evangelism.

Do our words and actions celebrate Christ's presence and witness to the power of his life working in us and through us?

Some of us do answer the questions with a confident, "YES, INDEED!" We have been nurtured, molded, shaped and formed by the "system of the catechism." The new life and living union with Christ is not an abstraction, but a reality we continue to experience!

This accounts in part for our confusion when some Charismatics imply that the

Holy Spirit is lacking in most congregations today. Regularly, yes, every Lord's Day, some of us pray the epiclesis, "send thy Holy Spirit upon us!"<sup>45</sup>

It is no wonder that Nichols pointed to the Liturgy as a point of reference for a continuing Mercersburg Tradition within the life of the Church.<sup>46</sup>

The liturgy bears the tradition! It continues even in the new Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ. George Bricker wrote of reading George Richards' essay on Mercersburg, "A Forgotten Theology" and on Sunday celebrating that theology through Liturgy:

Theologians may write, debate, find new meanings, and promulgate new concepts. That is their task, but the theology of a church exists in the manner in which it worships and how it celebrates the sacraments. And so I have a sneaking suspicion, yes, it is more than a mere suspicion, that some of the basic concepts of the Mercersburg Theology are alive and well in the worship of our church, in the liturgy, and that word really means "the work of the people." And that is what the Mercersburg fathers wanted, for they saw the church as process in history, the life-bearing power of the person of Christ, his glorified humanity actualizing itself in an organic<sup>47</sup> and developmental way in the actual institutional church in history.

While we celebrate and are proof of Bricker's point, we also know that the Church needs sound teaching, preaching and pastoral care!

Let me give you an example in regards to eucharistic and liturgical life. We all know that one of the worst mistakes a Pastor makes upon coming to a new congregation is that of tampering or tinkering with the worship life. We all know war stories of what happens when a Pastor wants to impose liturgical change. I have always been perplexed by the fact that the "Mercersburg" congregations I know continue the faith and practice, but the Eucharist continues to be celebrated "on occasion." I was perplexed by the fact that some of the "bright lights" of the clergy seemed so timid in helping congregations grow in eucharistic faith and practice. When I was ordained at the age of twenty-four, I was young and naive enough to believe I should give it a try. I did and it worked! The methodology was and is: begin **doing** what we preach and teach. The doing has to begin in non-threatening ways. In the two congregations I have served, weekly celebrations became the practice. I worked with the Spiritual Council and I asked to institute an early service which would require nothing of anyone except myself. If people presented themselves, we would celebrate. If not, there would be no service. The happy result is that people did come and we had opportunity to experience what was being taught and proclaimed in sermons, in publications, in parish nurturing programs.

Another colleague felt that an additional service on a Sunday morning might be divisive and threatening. He chose to begin offering the Eucharist when small groups gathered for prayer or study and when parish organizations asked for worship opportunities.

In both cases the practice arose within a nurturing context. The emphasis is upon the presence of Christ, the gift Christ offers us is in Word and Sacrament, and the new life being formed for mission in the world.

This model is presently seen in an order of laity and clergy within the United Church of Christ who believe they have been called to a common discipline of

prayer, contemplation and action in the Church and the world as leaven within the loaf. The Foundation Document of this order states:

At the heart of (the Order of) Corpus Christi one encounters the living Christ in Word and Sacrament in the community of the Church. Prayer, silence, contemplation, regular nurture by Word and eucharist and a common discipline inform the life....

The practices in which the members and communities...engage are intended to express commonality in faith, worship, and service. In the midst of diversity there is commonality in Christ!

The common practices of the Order serve as a witness and a sign. They witness to our oneness in Christ and they are a sign of our communion with Christ and others in Christ through our one Baptism, the one Bread, and the call to discipleship.

These common practices and those God will make known in the days and years to come are means through which the members and communities of the Order of Corpus Christi respond to God's call heard and seen so clearly in the celebration of the Eucharist: "Be who you are - the Body of Christ!"<sup>48</sup>

While we strive to be in "word and deed," we are in continual search for adequate nurturing tools. Pluralism, secularism with a common belief in the absence of God, the hopelessness evidenced in homelessness, drug addiction, chronic poverty, and the radical change from an integrated to a fragmented society confound our nurturing efforts.

We are often told our catechesis and praxis are contradictory or at least unclear. I experienced an example of this in a recent Holiday Tour of center city churches in Reading, Pennsylvania. A Roman Catholic laywoman quizzed the pastor of the United Church of Christ congregation we were touring, "Pastor, I notice a baptismal font in your chancel. Does that mean your church believes in 'original sin?'" The Pastor responded with a brief explanation of the freedom of belief in the United Church of Christ and his personal emphasis on God's creation, rather than sin. I think the Roman Catholic laywoman left wondering, "What did that mean? Does he or doesn't he?"

Another example is found in our proclaiming of the presence of Christ and our practice of the absence. Listen to the tenses we use in sermons, instruction, and prayers. Too often the action remains in the past tense. I think you will be surprised at the number of times you hear phrases such as "When Jesus was here." "When Jesus lived." There appears to be a gap of two centuries between Jesus and us.

Nevin attacked the extreme expressions of "Zwinglianism," but admitted it was the prevailing view in Protestantism in the 19th Century. Douglas Walrath refers us to Hillis Miller's The Disappearance of God, which offers an analysis of five nineteenth century writers: Thomas DeQuincey, Robert Browning, Emily Bronte, Matthew Arnold, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Miller concludes that the radical Zwinglian view of the sacrament at the time of the 16th century Reformation shifted our focus from the Incarnation and presence of God to the absence of God. Walrath comments:

(Miller) is not proceeding theologically, that is describing what

people should believe because it is theologically sound for them to believe it....Miller is concerned to describe what people do experience, not what they should believe. He suggests that God in common experience may now be perceived more<sup>49</sup> often as a memory or a symbol than as an actual, available presence.

The change from an integrated to a fragmented society contributes to the perception of the absence of God. Since the activities of daily life are divided among various places or spaces, we no longer live under the presence of the steeple or in the presence of clergy. We perceive on the basis of daily experience that God is absent.

Walrath suggests: "Because we no longer expect to perceive God in many, if not most, of the contexts in which we live, we do not even look for evidence of God's presence in these contexts. Such evidence may be there, but we have lost, or have not developed our capacity to see it."<sup>50</sup>

Persons coming to church with this perception need more than words to help them change their perception. Hence, Walrath, John Leith, and others suggest the need for ministry which provides for spiritual direction, formation and growth in sanctification.

Until recently, I did not hear many of our congregations or Pastors speaking in these terms. I did, however, hear revivalists, charismatics, and independent churches offering classes or opportunities for growth in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Sometimes these offerings are called "Life In The Spirit Seminars." Sometimes they are called "Focus Renewal Ministries" or a variety of other names. The perception is: The revivalists share the treasure, while the evangelical catholics have nothing to offer!

John Leith writes:

Few congregations in actual practice hold forth the full possibilities of becoming a new person in Christ.

The important factor is that sanctification is the Christian calling and the Christian hope. When the church loses this hope that life can be transformed, the heart has gone out of faith....Yet it is just this hope that human life...can be transformed and moved from<sup>51</sup> darkness to light that is the consistent message of the New Testament.

We have cause to be hopeful!

The quest for "A Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith" by The Faith and Order Commission of the World and National Council of churches is enabling denominations to seek commonality in the midst of pluralism and to penetrate beneath the letter to the spirit of the faith!

The reception of the BEM document by the major denominations and the growing acceptance of the OCCU Consensus are additional steps toward a commonality of faith.

Hope springs alive in the new emphasis upon spiritual formation and faith development. James Fowler, John Westerhoff and others are helping us relate the realities we celebrate in worship to human and faith development.

Hope arises from the efforts of John Westerhoff, William Willimon, and others who help us relate liturgy and learning, formation and worship.

Hope is found in the present emphasis upon spirituality and spiritual formation. Within the context of the Church, her faith and worship, spiritual formation is an intentional way of nurturing growth in the new life in Christ. In this context it is not a return to individualistic pietism.

This emphasis is essential for pastors and lay leaders who attempt to incarnate the faith in our rapidly changing culture. It directs attention to the center and not to an ever expanding series of demands and needs which produces the false practice of "justification by work" which at its best produce burn-out and a denial of God's grace.

McLuhan told us "the medium is the message." I think John Nevin said the same thing! Gabriel Fackre speaks about getting the story straight, telling it, doing it, and I add being it! History moves forward. As the context for ministry changes so must the forms. The substance, however, remains the same!

In our day, not many of our people are to be found with the Heidelberg Catechism in hand. It became for many persons an external form - dry and awkward. To speak of "the system of the catechism" as a remedy to the present crisis of declining denominations and spiritual hunger seems to some to be a call to pull out the relics!

The remedy, however, is more than a book! The remedy is more than a relic! It involves actualizing the life God creates through the Incarnation. At the heart of the system is the living union with Christ. What we have already received in Christ is growing and developing through history. Each generation plays a role in the actualizing process.

Ours is a living<sup>52</sup> tradition. George Richards said it involves "restoration and...completion."<sup>52</sup> Bard Thompson said it involves a "twofold procedure: recovery and progress."<sup>53</sup>

Nevin speaks to this process in which we are engaged when he reflected upon his improvement upon Calvin's understanding of the mystical union:

We hold fast to the substance, while, for the very sake of doing so, we endeavor to place it in a better form....We cling to the old; in its life, however, rather than by slavish adhesion to its letter. So it must be indeed in the case of all religious truth, dogmatically considered. It cannot hold in the form of dead tradition. But neither can it be disjoined from the life of the past. Its true form is that of history, in which the past, though left behind in one view, is always in another taken up by the<sup>54</sup> present, and borne along with it as the central power of its own life.

#### CALL TO ACTION

Nevin's description of the process in which we are engaged is a call to action! The living tradition moves forward. If our interest is to be more than intellectual, there is much to be done.

I have already suggested that this society engage in a deeper consideration of the Incarnation and mystical union at a Convocation in the near future. I would

hope that we would consider the implications of both principles in regards to faith development and liturgy.

It remains the task for those of us on the front lines of the Altar, pew and street to put into practice that which we believe.

I also think George Bricker and Bard Thompson are right! At the heart of Nevin's remedy and the Mercersburg Theology is worship - the Eucharist - Word Sacrament - Christ with us! The risen Christ unites us to himself, calling us to live in communion with himself and his people and the people of this planet earth.

Nevin's remedy is a call to life, a life in Christ. This involves dying and rising. It is painful and joyful. It is a process of struggle and celebration. The image of childbirth is appropriate. Birth involves, in most cases, work, pain, and suffering. All of this is endured because the process culminates in the joyful celebration of a whole new being!

The remedy is more than a book! It is Christ's life in us - our new life in Christ - which seeks to come to maturity! Ours is the calling to be clear about who we are and the gift we carry to the world, to celebrate, teach, and live so that the gift - union with Christ - may be offered, shared, and nurtured!

1. John Williamson Nevin, Antichrist, or the Spirit of Sect and Schism (New York, 1848), 25
2. See John Williamson Nevin, The Anxious Bench, edited by Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. and George H. Bricker, in Catholic and Reformed: Selected Theological Writings of John Williamson Nevin (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1978), 4648. Nevin wrote, "Quackery consists in pretension to an inward virtue or power, which is not possessed in fact, on the ground of a mere show of the strength which such power or virtue is supposed to include." (p. 46) Quackery does not maintain the balance of the inward and the outward. Rather, it claims power for the outward without maintaining the balance. "Religion must have forms, as well as an inward living force. But these can have no value, no proper reality, except as they spring perpetually from the presence of that living force itself. The inward must be the bearer of the outward. Quackery, however, reverses the case. The outward is made to bear the inward. The shrine, consecrated with the proper ceremonies, must become a shechinah. Forms have a virtue in them to bind and rule the force of things. Such forms may be exhibited in a ritual, or in a creed, or in a scheme of a religious experience mechanically apprehended; but in the end the case is substantially the same. It is quackery in the garb of religion without its inward life and power. (pp. 47-48)
3. Bard Thompson, "The Catechism and the Mercersburg Theology," Essays on the Heidelberg Catechism, Bard Thompson, et al. (Philadelphia, 1963), 53.
4. Dean Kelley, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 1.
5. Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape And Future (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), xiii.
6. See Douglas Alan Walrath, Frameworks: Patterns For Living And Believing Today (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1987).
7. John H. Leith, The Reformed Imperative: What The Church Has To Say That No One Else Can Say (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 13.
8. See unpublished paper by Dr. John Frantz, The Bench Versus The Book: The History of Revivalism in the Reformed Church, 1820-1850, presented at the Historical Symposium/Colloquy on the Mercersburg Theology, Lancaster Theological Seminary, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, February 3, 1975. Copy is in the Schaff Library, Lancaster, PA.
9. Acts and Proceedings of the Synod of the German Reformed Church at Greencastle, PA, October, 1840 (Chambersburg, PA, 1940), 28.
10. Quoted in George Warren Richards, History Of The Theological Seminary Of The Reformed Church in The United States (Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1952), 279.
11. For review of this period see David Dunn, et al., A History Of The Evangelical and Reformed Church (Philadelphia: The Christian Education Press, 1961) 53-75.

12. Nevin saw the anxious bench and the Heidelberg catechism to be representatives of vastly different "systems" of Christianity and salvation. See The Anxious Bench, 17-18, 97, 105-107.
13. Ibid., 98-99.
14. Ibid., 98.
15. Ibid., 68.
16. See, Ibid., 99, 105-106.
17. Ibid., 56.
18. Ibid., 57.
19. John Williamson Nevin, Catholic Unity, published with Philip Schaff's Principle of Protestantism (Chambersburg: Publication Office of the German Reformed Church, 1845) 200-201.
20. Nevin, The Anxious Bench, 107-108.
21. Ibid., 110-111.
22. John Williamson Nevin, The Mystical Presence and other writings on the eucharist (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1966), 209.
23. Ibid., 209.
24. Ibid., 213.
25. Ibid., 163.
26. See John Williamson Nevin, "Noel On Baptism," Mercersburg Review, 2 (1850), 231-265. See also Emanuel V. Gerhart, "The Doctrine Of Baptism As Taught in the Heidelberg Catechism," Mercersburg Review, 20 (1873), 537-72.
27. Nevin, The Mystical Presence, 164-165.
28. Ibid., 218.
29. Ibid., 165.
30. Ibid., 165.
31. John Williamson Nevin, "The Church," The Mercersburg Theology, James Hastings Nichols, editor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 65-66.
32. Nevin, The Anxious Bench, 111-115.
33. Ibid., 115.
34. Ibid., 114-115.
35. Ibid., 117.

36. A Liturgy: or Order of Christian Worship (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1861), 242-243.
37. James Isaac Good, History of the Reformed Church in the United States In The Nineteenth Century (New York: The Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1911), 148.
38. Minutes of the Eastern Synod, 1851, 24.
39. Ibid., 1857, 21.
40. Ibid., 1872, 18; 1878, 16-17; 1880, 15.
41. Richards, op. cit., 276.
42. See Nevin's three articles on "The Apostles' Creed," Mercersburg Review, I (1849), 105-127; 201-221; 313-347. See also Deborah Rahn Clemens, "Towards A Common Expression Of The Apostolic Faith: Nevin's Recognition," The New Mercersburg Review, I (Autumn, 1985), 40-46.
43. James Hastings Nichols, ed., The Mercersburg Theology, 308-309.
44. See "The Order For Holy Communion," Book of Worship: Approved by the General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church (St. Louis, Missouri: Eden Publishing House, 1947), 65.
45. Ibid., p. 72.
46. Nichols, op. cit., 10.
47. George H. Bricker, "A Brief History Of The Mercersburg Movement," An Occasional Paper (Lancaster Theological Seminary: February, 1982), 10-11.
48. The Foundation Document, (Published by the Order of Corpus Christi, Ephrata, PA, September, 1987), 1-2.
49. Douglas Alan Walrath, Options: How to Develop and Share Christian Faith Today (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1988) 26-27.
50. Ibid., 29.
51. Leith, op. cit., 95-96.
52. Richards, op. cit., 504.
53. Thompson, op. cit., 74.
54. Nevin, The Mystical Presence, 158-159.

GOD'S TRUTH OR 'DROP KICK ME JESUS'  
A SERMON

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You recall the play or perhaps the movie version - "No Time for Sergeants?" The part of the new, fresh-from-the-southern-hill-country-recruit private was played by Andy Griffith. And as the story unfolded, it became clear to the tough, no-nonsense sergeant that this unsophisticated young man was not military material. What was portrayed was a company sergeant becoming a pop, practical psychologist. This sergeant tells the young green recruit that the recruit is to be made the 'Chief Latrine Officer' ... an honor! And Andy naively accepts the assignment as though he was receiving a Congressional Medal of Honor ... constantly, constantly thanking the sergeant for appointing him to this important post.

Well, we all know that one of the foundations of practical psychology is the realization that most persons in this world are buried in the great human mass with a feeling of personal obscurity and individual unimportance. Most of us yearn to be recognized as someone special or as someone who has something that others don't have. Something that will allow us to stand out from the rest. It's part of the human condition to want to 'be somebody.' And, of course, at its best, this hunger to 'be somebody' is good and constructive. But at its worst, this need seems to reduce itself to naked pride or a self-aggrandizement.

Tragically, at its worst, within the Church we have seen this negative need manifesting itself in some of the saddest sectarianisms and the most damaging divisions within the Body of Christ. Sect-ism. And there is the opposite, too: (birthed because of similar distortions) grounded in human secularism. We'll just call that secularism.

Those kinds of distortions corrupt faith, damage lives, confuse thinking, reduce spiritual practice to anemic nothing and establish a false sense of God's truth. This negative need twists the Word of God into shapes designed to make the Holy Church Universal palatable to whomever the audience is to be marketed. Sect-ism or secularism ... It doesn't matter. It's the 'Drop Kick Me Jesus' mentality.

There was/is a song on the radio waves that sets the tone for this kind of thought. I'll just give you the refrain: "Drop kick me Jesus through the goal posts of life; end over end, neither left nor the right. Straight through the heart of them righteous uprights. Drop kick me Jesus through the goal posts of life."

If it works or sells ... use it. Never mind theological content, proper piety, never mind the global Church, never mind the truth of God. Whatever causes me to win ... Jesus, just do it for me. I'll pray to You, I'll sing, and I won't offend anybody ... just do it for me, Jesus. I make the rules. In a strange paradox, the sect-minded and the secularist are in the same camp. Twisted truth.

John Nevin wrote, "What we need to start with is the sense of catholicity itself, faith in the mystery of one universal, historical Church, and the felt power of old catholic ideas as we find them reigning in the ancient Christian world." (page 119, Nichols)

Mystery? Yes, truth revealed in mystery. The Holy Catholic Church a mystery ... Christ's truth revealed in the mystery of the Church.

Not a 'drop-kick me' sect-ism. Nor a 'drop kick' secularism. God's truth mysteriously revealed within the Church Catholic.

And what shape does that take? Well, yesterday most of us I'm sure read the Gospel of John in the 16th Chapter ... three verses in which Jesus is promising that the Spirit of Truth will lead the disciples (us) into all truth.

Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will lead followers into all the Truth; prays that we may be "sanctified" in the truth and, as we heard in the Gospel reading for tonight (John 17:17), Christians are to be 'insiders' when it comes to truth.

Through the Church, as the author of 2 Timothy says "... guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us." (2 Timothy 1:4) But truth has many dimensions: truth in geology, truth in history, truth in medicine, truth in music, poetry, art. Truth in sports and truth of theology. The truth is that any "truth" within those forms is a discovery only made possible by God.

For truth exposes what is false or fractured or fatal. Truth fosters what is right, whole and vital. It exposes what is evil and hateful and nourishes what is good and loving.

As we have been reading and talking of the 'anxious bench group', we reminded ourselves that the Mercersburg 'men' had less problem with particular sects; rather what was most troubling was the 'sect mind' or 'sect feeling.' Not to feel the ecumenical passion for them was an indicator of the 'sect mind.' "Our sects as such do not love each other and are not inwardly bound together," wrote Nevin. (page 95, Nichols) He labeled such groups as tyrannical, irrational, unreasonable, narrow, having a rationalistic tendency to be a 'mere particular corporation.' (pages 95-113, Nichols)

In our time and place, we find the use of that word/phrase 'born again' coming into play with some sect-minded folk. With its use there tends to be a 'check' list of beliefs (not historically grounded or living expressions of vitality). Rather check lists to establish adherence to self-appointed interpreters. And for the secularist in religious clothing, even check lists identifying no standard of belief - both claiming discovery of the truth.

Truth? God's truth? I submit that the 'check list' groups are ignoring the Law of Christ. She or he is expressing self-pride. He or she is boasting like the false evangelists in the Church at Corinth who came there in the absence of Paul and convinced people that they alone had the authority of God - about whom Paul writes especially in his second letter: "We are not being so bold as to rank ourselves, or invite comparison with certain people who write their own reference. Measuring themselves against themselves and comparing themselves to themselves, they are simply foolish. We, on the other hand, are not going to boast without a standard to measure against: taking for our measure the yardstick which God gave us to measure with, which is long enough to reach you." (2 Corinthians 10:12, 13)

It is incredible to assume a divinely appointed power in person ... a

self-proclaimed prerogative to which one is really not entitled and, therefore, playing with the basic sin of playing God!

Those who are sect-minded may be asked rightly how God handled things for centuries without their wisdom and advice as to who belongs and who doesn't, suggestions on how God's truth can be altered to fit time and place and who should have the truth? I wonder how secularists in religious clothing dare to wrestle with God's truth. The agnostic may dare wrestle more than the secularist.

No, you see it is God's search for humankind ... God's breakthrough into our human awareness through the person of Christ Jesus; God's glorious mystery of the Resurrection and God's constant infusion into human lives the ever-presence of the Spirit! Truth, molding, shaping, forming, confronting, challenging, comforting, sustaining humankind - enabling us then to do the deeds of love, compassion, peace, justice and wholeness.

Kagawa, the famous Japanese Christian, as his biographers tell it, went out to preach in the streets of Kobe about the love of God - dismal streets with rain falling and tough guys laughing. They chided him: "You little man with your funny talk about God. What do you know about Him (God)? Does anybody know whether God loves or even exists?"

Kagawa was poor, crippled in health. They laughed at him and chided him again: "If God is love, why doesn't God do something for you. A small wind would blow you over." But the little man lifted his arms and wiped blood from his mouth and went on with the Story and gradually the cruel street with mocking voices became stilled ... by Kagawa's witness of the incarnate Christ. The truth of God's love for all humanity was revealed on those streets. No slushy sentimental verbage or an invitation to plug into corporate structure ... God's truth revealed in love through the Body of Christ.

About four years ago, a pastor met a young man - his age was 11. The young man was diagnosed as having Burkett's Syndrome which is a form of Hodgkin's Disease ... a fast spreading, most always fatal form of cancer. Back and forth from home to Children's Hospital or Philadelphia - many many times during the course of the year and a half illness. Special visits, special confirmation instruction set for him at age 12, talking, praying, sharing. He asked for prayer, for anointing. He asked the questions of life and he asked the questions of death.

One Monday night, the Bears were playing the Giants - football. It was around 10 p.m. The pastor and the young man were watching the game, eating kielbasa - a small bite for the fella ... larger and more frequent bites for the pastor ... forgetting who they were and where they were, on one play their arms went up in the air, cheers rang out and then eye-to-eye, laughter to laughter. A change. Both were changed. Both understood a deepening realization of what it means to be the Church, the Body of Christ ... sharing a moment, a mystery moment in which God's truth was revealed ... surrounded by the sights and sounds of potential healing, reality of death, hopeful possibility ... there at that one place a transcendence of faith experience surrounded and sustained by the Spirit of Truth. That very human encounter would never have happened outside the Holy Catholic Church ... not to that dimension, not for that reason. Christ's truth as the way, the truth and the life was so very real. So very personal; so very global.

"With such objective, historical being in the world as this faith implies," writes Nevin, "the church, of course, is no abstraction. Its existence is concrete, and its attributes are determined by its constitution. Still its revelation is a process, in the course of which wide room is found for the actual and the ideal to fall asunder ... it is from this alone that all catholic ideas must flow, and in virtue of it only can they ever be brought to take form in actual life." (page 118, Nevin)

God's truth finds expression as we who are called respond to all that God has done for creation, humanity - God's truth manifests itself through the ever-flowing, ever-living Spirit-filled Church. No 'drop kick me's' floundering, attacking, sensationalizing, corporatizing, flaunting.

God's truth: in worship, Sacrament, rite of ordinance, praise, prayer, mission, ministry, study, nurture - the Body of Christ.

Drop Kick Me? Or God's Truth? "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. As you did send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth." (John 17:17-19)

## HEIRS THROUGH HOPE: A SERMON

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Text - II Thessalonians 2:15 - "Stand firm, then, brothers, and hold fast to the traditions which you have learned from us by word or by letter."

For centuries one of Rembrandt's celebrated paintings was known under the title of "Night Watch." As it turned out, when it came time for the restorers to apply their skills to this masterpiece, the romantic shadows which had been the reason for the name were discovered to have been centuries of encrusted dirt and romantic misinterpretation. When the painting was cleaned as part of the painstaking process of restoration, the canvas was transformed. It was no night watch at all, but a day watch, bathed in fresh light and vigorous color. In the New York Times article where this exciting transformation was reported, the further comment was made: "Strangely enough, some art lovers were saddened or even offended by the cleaning, for what it revealed did not fit their idea of Rembrandt."

In the account of that experience and the ensuing comment, one finds an apt illustration of the way things happen in the world of faith and order as we reflect on what Mercersburg has to offer when we take a look ahead. Even as the church can fall in love with the distortions and the dark accretions, so can Mercersburg continue to provide some of the correctives to these tendencies. That was true in the mid-nineteenth century; it is still the case. The pertinence of our illustration begins to fail when we acknowledge that although once cleaned the Rembrandt remained bright and clear, a permanently restored daytime scene, in the case of our theological province, nothing can ever be taken for granted as finally settled.

So that is why we are here, and that is why we shall have to expect to go forth from this place as part of an apostolate. More is called for than what is suggested in our text - "Stand firm, then, brothers, and hold fast to the traditions which you have learned from us by word or by letter." We shall be obliged to be active, aggressive, and authentic.

A study of the current literature in the areas of sacramental theology, ecclesiology, Christology and ecumenics, reveals that to a vast degree, the Mercersburg divines anticipated a century and a quarter of theological inquiry and discussion. What is even more remarkable is the fact that we still have a way to go before we make full use in our contemporary discussion of what Mercersburg has already had to say. Some of us are still struggling in churches which have a very deficient understanding of the concept of memorial in the Eucharist. We still deal with colleagues who gag on the word "sacrifice" in the communion liturgy. Many are confusing ecumenism with a willingness to settle for the least common denominator, even less being informed in matters of their own tradition which could bring richness and body to the tapestry being woven.

In the United Church of Christ we are in peril of squandering an adequate doctrine of the ministry if we do not acknowledge that the ecumenical statements in this area are retelling a part of our own story via the work of Mercersburg.

The full flowering and fruit of Mercersburg became manifest through its work in

the Liturgy. The recovery of sacramental worship which they accomplished was, for its time, a remarkable advance toward a cultus which was truly evangelical, truly reformed and truly catholic. When we gather for our contemporary celebrations of Word and Sacrament we are fully aware of a legacy which can be traced in broad lines back to the orders of 1857 and 1866, the labors of Nevin and Schaff and Harbaugh principally, as well as those others who worked with them. As we look ahead, then, we do not contemplate Word and Sacrament as a prize that is yet to be captured in our common worship life. It is ours to cherish and nourish as we develop new forms in the idiom of our day.

But let us be clear - it shall be Word and Sacrament that continues as our norm. And let us be wary of incursions that threaten in guises different, perhaps, than those in which they appeared in the early 1800's, but undesirables just the same in the late 1900s.

I. Let us be wary, if you please, of the siren voices of Word and Sentiment. The heirs of pietism are still very much with us offering their allurements. People are still wont to say, "I felt so good after that service in Pastor Undink's church." The hordes that tax the capacity of our 24 inch screens still pour forth to the strains of "Just As I Am." People who should know better are still saying, "If it feels good, do it! If it multiplies, the Holy Spirit must be somewhere in the picture." We still have our Anxious Bench equivalents. Perhaps we are too much more polite than Nevin in voicing our outrage.

II. More difficult for us to deal with are the tracts on Word and Nutriment. We are so close to those who write those learned attempts to make as real as life itself the Body and the Blood focusing full attention on the material of the sacrament. Today we are not fighting quite the same battles in quite the same proportions as was Nevin when he wrote the "Mystical Presence." We are not dealing with quite the same degree of infatuation with spatially defined categories. Because Nevin felt that he had to deal with the matter of "Presence" in these terms he made it very difficult for himself to say exactly what is meant by the word "mystical," and even more difficult to define the word "spiritual," although he was at pains to point out that by spiritual he did not mean nebulous or partial.

Today's emphasis on anamnesis is a much more satisfying and satisfactory point of focus. The elements are still included in the total array of considerations, but they become points of meeting, opportunities for rendezvous. The central role of the epiclesis in the Eucharistic liturgy which was restored through the work of Schaff and Nevin, has guaranteed, of course that by the work of the Spirit the anamnesis is realized, the rendezvous is experienced.

III. How often have we had to fashion in the spirit of Mercersburg a whole new set of imprecatory psalms when called upon to deal with those for whom the last best attempts are exercises in World and Instrument or Word and Entertainment. If we allow our sanctuaries to become no more than concert halls or stages for the performing arts, we have none other than ourselves to blame for it. Mercersburg should be able to provide us with the arsenal by which we can defend the people of God against such abominations.

IV. And, ah yes, we have still to deal with those who believe that they are an adornment to our movement because they believe that we bear the high church tag. They are devotees of Word and Parament and of Word and Habillement. May their tribe not increase, for the affair which they carry on with the adiaphora of worship can do no more than give all of us a bad name.

We have other bed-fellows for whom we make protest against the inclinations of history to assign them to us for more than just a passing glance. Because Mercersburg remains a vital movement which shall refuse to get bogged down in arid antiquarianism we shall avoid the trap of Word and Document, by which we become wedded to anachronistic texts. We are attempting to fight free of the ever-prevalent tendency toward Word and Supplement by our strong emphasis on restoring weekly gathering around the Table as well as lectern and pulpit. And gatherings such as this encourage me to declare that we shall continue to rise to the top in the life of our beloved Zion, vanquishing all efforts to relegate us to a plight of Word and Sediment.

If what I have been saying has tended to sound like a warrior's boast, I beg your indulgence. I should like to offer as my paradigm the Lamb of God bearing aloft his banner rather than the Apostle brandishing a sword. Because we believe so profoundly in the church as the body of Christ and because we feel called to be functioning members of that body energized by convictions that belong to a churchly tradition, and because we know the Christ in us to be the Lord of the church with whom we stand in direct encounter every time that he offers us His broken body and His shed blood, we offer ourselves as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God for the edification of all of the saints.

"Tradition," Arturo Toscanini once declared "is the last bad performance." Our eschatology doesn't allow us the luxury of a bad performance. "Stand fast to the traditions which you have learned!" Be sure that what we pass on is at least as good as what we claim as our birthright through Mercersburg. This is how we shall be "heirs through hope."

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 - 8:00 P.M.

Address - "Mercersburg and Ecumenical Theology. What's the Connection?"

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1990 Convocation

Monday, June 4 and Tuesday, June 5, 1990

Mercersburg Academy

Mercersburg, Pennsylvania

Lodging will be available at the nearby Quality Inn

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Life memberships in the Society are available on payment of \$200.00. For a fee of \$50.00 per year a congregational membership can be established and maintained. Contact the Secretary, the Rev. John C. Miller, 1321 Marie Avenue, Ephrata, PA 17522.

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Copies of two important books that are out of print may still be obtained from the Secretary, John Miller:

Catholic and Reformed and Reformed and Catholic  
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Available for \$8.00 each, or \$15.00 for the two, plus  
\$1.00 for postage and handling.

## THE MERCERSBURG SOCIETY

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

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

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

Membership in the Society is sustained by \$12.00 per annum for general membership, \$15.00 per annum for members of the Corporate Board, and \$5.00 per annum for students, payable to the Treasurer:

The Rev. James H. Gold  
P.O. Box 207  
Ickesburg, PA 17037

## MANUSCRIPTS AND BOOKS FOR REVIEW

Manuscripts submitted for publication and books for possible review should be sent to:

R. Howard Paine, Editor  
The New Mercersburg Review  
762 Tamarack Trail  
Reading, PA 19607

Manuscripts should be typewritten and double-spaced. Three copies of each manuscript are required, along with a self-addressed and stamped envelope for their return if found unacceptable. The first page of the manuscript should carry the proposed title and the author's name. Under the name should appear the "identification line," giving the title or position, the institution, and the location.

Superior numerals in the text should indicate the placement of footnotes. The footnotes themselves should be typed separately at the end of the manuscript. Examples of style for references may be found in a past issue of The New Mercersburg Review.