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THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW

Journal of the Mercersburg Society

Number Seven

Spring 1990

THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW
Journal of the Mercersburg Society

R. Howard Paine, Editor

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

In this issue of The New Review we are able to demonstrate the breadth as well as the depth of interest in the concerns which energize our Society.

The first article is most appropriately the Inaugural Address delivered by John Payne on November 2, 1989, as he officially became the first occupant of the Paul and Minnie Diefenderfer Chair in Mercersburg and Ecumenical Theology at Lancaster Theological Seminary. We are honored to be publishing this piece in our journal as yet another way of marking this celebration which has such great importance for the Society, Lancaster Seminary, the Diefenderfers and the Church at large.

Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. is one of the proteges of George Bricker of sainted memory who followed the Mercersburg interest through to his doctoral work at Temple University where he wrote his doctoral dissertation on the contributions of Emanuel V. Gerhart. His article represents his continuation of this interest as he returned to Lancaster Seminary for this address given in March of 1982. Dr. Yrigoyen is a United Methodist clergyman who serves as a member of the Executive Committee of the Society. Before assuming his present position with the archives of the United Methodist Church he was Chaplain and Professor of Religion at Albright College, Reading, Pennsylvania.

Thomas Dipko's article speaks for and about Mercersburg without even uttering the magic words. Among his notable accomplishments in the field of worship has been his service as the writer for the Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ (1986). He is also one of the distinguished ecumenists of the Church who has come to his present position from out of an outstanding career in pastorates of local churches.

Although Richard Schellhase has been the Director of Development for the Buddhist Churches of America Endowment Foundation since 1983, he would want to be known most definitely as a minister of the United Church of Christ with strong Mercersburg roots. He writes that he knows of only one other person who went only to these Evangelical and Reformed schools - Mercersburg Academy, 1938-42; Ursinus College, 1942-45; and Lancaster Theological Seminary, 1945-47 - and that he knows of no other individual who has this record who was a student at Mercersburg for all four of his high school years. Prior to 1983 Schellhase was on the staff of Ursinus College, Lancaster Seminary, and the Pacific School of Religion, and served for several years as the pastor of a local church and a chaplain in the United States Navy. His article is a paper which was presented at the annual meeting of the Northern California Conference of the United Church of Christ held in May of 1989.

As we publish this seventh issue of The New Review and distribute it to our subscribers, we do so with a quote from the waitress that we had in a restaurant the other evening - "Enjoy!"

R. Howard Paine
Editor

In this issue of the Journal we are able to reproduce the material as well as the depth of interest in the concrete which characterizes our research.

The first article in this special issue is by Professor J. H. Brown, who has been a member of the staff of the University of Chicago since 1933. He is currently serving as the first vice-president of the American Psychological Association. His research interests are in the field of experimental psychology, and he has published many papers in this field. The second article is by Professor J. H. Brown, who has been a member of the staff of the University of Chicago since 1933. He is currently serving as the first vice-president of the American Psychological Association. His research interests are in the field of experimental psychology, and he has published many papers in this field.

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Editorial Board

MERCERSBURG AND ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY: WHAT'S THE CONNECTION?

John B. Payne

The Paul and Minnie Diefenderfer Professor in
Mercersburg and Ecumenical Theology and
Professor of Church History
Lancaster Theological Seminary
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

First of all, I wish to express publicly to Paul and Minnie Diefenderfer, my own deep appreciation for making the celebration this evening possible. We are celebrating tonight the realization of a dream which many persons here have had for a long time, namely, the creation of this chair of Mercersburg and Ecumenical Theology, so that this tradition, which has been so much a part of this seminary's history and so much a part of the life of the churches in eastern Pennsylvania, may have a greater visibility not only within the seminary but within the church at large. For the actualization of this ideal, if I may use a Mercersburg expression drawn from the philosopher, Hegel, we are all sincerely grateful to you.

I wish also to express my sincere gratitude to the Administration, Faculty, and Board of Trustees for conferring upon me this honor and to the Mercersburg Society, especially John Shetler for their long labors in seeking to bring this dream to fruition. I want in addition to mention my indebtedness to George Bricker whose love of the Mercersburg tradition made such an impression upon me. My own research in the past several years has confirmed for me what, for some time, I had known to a large extent through George Bricker's testimony, that the Mercersburg Theology was not only a most important movement for the reform of the church in its time, but that it is still a vibrant tradition pertinent to the life of the United Church of Christ and the Ecumenical Church today.

To the uninitiated, a chair in Mercersburg and Ecumenical Theology may appear as strange as did the name of Schaff's first chair at Union Theological Seminary to his friend, S. I. Prime, the editor of the New York Observer. Schaff was called there "Professor of Theological Encyclopedia and Christian Symbolics." "Theological Encyclopedia and Christian Symbolics," Prime exclaimed, "as for symbolics, I have never heard of that in all my life, and as for encyclopedia, if you are a professor of that, the seminary needs no other!" I'm sure it is unfortunately no exaggeration and no surprise to report that there are many persons even in our United Church of Christ who have never heard of Mercersburg Theology, and others, who may have heard of it, but who wonder what it has to do with ecumenics. "Mercersburg Theology" may suggest to them what is arcane and archaic, or narrowminded and provincial, not what is universal, broadminded, forward-looking and relevant to the whole church, such as is implied in the term, "ecumenical."

Thus, I have elected this evening to address the theme of the name of this chair itself and to seek to show the connection between Mercersburg and Ecumenical Theology. I wish to emphasize two aspects of this connection: first, that in their own time of great divisiveness and rampant sectarianism in American Christianity in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Mercersburgers, both Schaff and Nevin, were strong advocates of Christian unity; and second, that Mercersburg theological themes are still relevant to the ecumenical scene, indeed have in a large measure been unconsciously incorporated into ecumenical thinking today.

That Nevin and Schaff were fervent proponents of Christian unity is known to everyone who is at all familiar with Mercersburg Theology. Indeed, their very first addresses, after they became colleagues in 1844, dealt with that theme, Nevin's sermon, "Catholic Unity," which he preached before the Joint Convention of the German Reformed Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Harrisburg August 8, 1844 and Schaff's inaugural address, "The Principle of Protestantism," which he presented two and half months later before the German Reformed Synod in Reading. In his sermon Nevin sets forth in brief all the characteristic features of his ecumenical ecclesiology which he will expand upon in future essays: the Christological ground of the Church, the mystical union not just with the divinity but with the humanity of Christ especially in the Eucharist which is the source of life in the Church, and for this view, he draws already on Calvin and the Heidelberg Catechism; the emphasis upon the Pauline metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ which is filled with the life of Christ that is the ground of the Church's unity; the Church not as an aggregate of individuals, but as an organic whole which precedes the individual; the distinction between the inward life and the outward form of the Church, which are necessarily bound up with one another like soul and body as well as the Hegelian contrast between the ideal and the actual, the potency of the life of Christ which is in process of realizing itself and the actualization of that potency in the Church. Nevin deplores the fact that the actual Church is radically divided, but opposes two different attitudes to this division, the one which accepts it as inevitable and places all hope only in an invisible rather than a visible union; the other which develops the stratagem of "a non-sect party" rejecting all denominational labels in an effort to bring about Christian unity. He does not make clear who he has in mind here, but from what he says elsewhere it is evident he intends such groups as John Winebrenner's "Church of God" and Alexander Campbell's "Disciples of Christ."² Christian unity must be visible as well as invisible, but it rests primarily upon a power which precedes all human contrivance and machination though human beings should cooperate with the divine process when the opportunity presents itself.³ Later, I shall be saying more about the pertinence of Mercersburg theology to current ecumenical thinking, but I might point out here that it is now common in ecumenical discussions to stress first God's gift of Church unity before setting forth the human task of striving for unity.

Bristling with the latest German theological scholarship and eager to share it, Schaff contributed to the Mercersburg understanding of the Church and of Christian unity a sure historical foundation. Drawing on the romantic and idealist views of such German thinkers as Schleiermacher, Neander, Hegel, Baur and Schelling, Schaff set forth in his Principle of Protestantism his conception of the church as an organic development. As Klaus Penzel has pointed out, Schaff combines the romantic idea of history as an inner organic process with the Hegelian idealist notion, learned chiefly from Ferdinand Christian Baur, of church history as a dialectically unfolding progress according to the scheme of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

Schaff's view of the Reformation is based upon both theories of development which he holds together in an uneasy tension: the romantic, organic and the idealist, dialectical. According to the first, the Reformation is understood as standing in continuity with the Catholic Middle Ages; according to the second, the Reformation is viewed as standing over against medieval Catholicism, especially the papacy. In the Principle of Protestantism the first theory is shown in Schaff's emphasis that even the material principle of justification by faith alone has medieval anticipations and that the formal principle of Scripture alone does not really negate the authority of tradition which is

consonant with Scripture. He also describes the Reformers as not in the first place revolutionaries against the authority of the papacy nor as opposed to all authority or rule or discipline. He suggests the second interpretation when he refers to the dominant spirit of the Catholic Middle Ages, like that of the Old Testament, as legal, yet as yearning for "evangelical emancipation" and when he speaks of "the Protestant principle of progress," a theme that is present in both Schleiermacher and Hegel.⁵

But Protestantism, which has brought progress has also brought the diseases of rationalism and sectarianism which are extreme developments of the principle of subjectivity and liberty. He regards the "worldly papacy of the subjective understanding," that is, the rationalistic unbelief of Bruno Bauer, David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach as more dangerous than "the hierarchic papacy of the Vatican."⁶ He is also harshly critical of sectarianism so widespread in mid-nineteenth century America and which, like Nevin, he links with a Puritan tendency toward subjective spiritualism, private interpretation of Scripture, a disregard for tradition, the church as the body of Christ and the sacraments. Yet Schaff, charitable, tolerant and optimistic in judgment as he was nearly always inclined to be, perceived that under the providence of God there was value in both rationalism and sectarianism. In contrast with Nevin, who was almost universally negative concerning the sect plague, Schaff took a kinder and more positive point of view. His historical sense, he says, will not permit him "to look upon them (rationalism and sectarism) as the work of Satan only." They have a certain historical justification just as the medieval papacy had. But agreeing with Schleiermacher, he argues that sects, having performed their service, should reunite with the main body since their particular truths cannot truly stand except as they are connected organically with the indivisible whole.⁷ Later, Schaff, as he becomes better acquainted with the rich variety of American Christianity, will make a distinction between sectarianism and denominationalism. The first, he will say, is a curse; the second, a blessing. Sects, though a sign of life within the church, should, once they have fulfilled their mission, cease to exist, whereas the historic denominations "are permanent forces and represent various aspects of the Christian religion which supplement each other."⁸ Nevin had made a somewhat similar distinction in his Antichrist or the Spirit of Sect and Schism (1848), but he shows that he is stronger in his criticism of both sects and denominations than was Schaff. Whereas in the sermon, "The Church" (1846), he had spoken of sects as an "interimistic abomination," in The Antichrist he describes them as "always evil" and denominations as only "relatively necessary, in the great historical process, by which the church is carried forward to its appointed end."⁹

Not despairing at the present divisions within the church, Schaff shows in the Principle of Protestantism, as in his later writings, that he looks forward to a new development in the history of the church, a union of both Catholicism and Protestantism in a higher synthesis. He closes his essay by referring to Schelling's apostolic typology for the great periods of church history; Peter, the representative of law and authority, is a type of the medieval church culminating in the papacy; Paul, the representative "of movement and of the free justifying power of faith, is the type of Protestantism;" and John, the apostle of love, is the type of that "higher and more glorious state" in which law and freedom shall be perfected!¹⁰ Thus Schaff, and Nevin was of the same opinion, was not content to project a vision of a union of Protestants only, but rather a truly catholic unity must include Roman Catholics as well. Ecumenism must have as its goal, according to both the Mercersburgers, a synthesis of dialectical opposites, what they called "evangelical catholicism." Schaff would

increasingly think of America as the land of the future in which this reconciliation would especially take place.

Understandably, in an era of fanatical anti-Catholicism, their addresses sparked sharp reaction within the German Reformed Church and beyond. Dr. J.F. Berg of the Race Street Church in Philadelphia and editor of the Protestant Banner assailed the professors of Mercersburg as Romanizers and brought charges against them which issued in the debate concerning their orthodoxy before the Synod at York in October 1845 that ended in their acquittal. But it did not end the controversy concerning the Mercersburg Theology, much of which had to do with its ecumenical views, especially its friendliness toward the Roman Catholic Church which was coupled with a sharp critique, emphatically on Nevin's part, of sectarian Protestantism as individualistic, hyperspiritualistic, endlessly divisive, and fundamentally heretical, since in these respects it resembled ancient Gnosticism.¹²

But in spite of the unpopularity of their views in many quarters, the Mercersburg theologians persisted in their attacks upon the current divisive nature of Protestantism and in their hope for a more catholic unity in the future.

Undergirding this call for Christian unity is a theology which Nevin later describes in his "Theological Vindication of the New Liturgy" as 1. Christocentric; 2. creedal;¹³ 3. objective and historical; 4. churchly, and 5. sacramental and liturgical. I must be quite brief here in the explication of these themes.

First, Mercersburg Theology is Christocentric to the core. It is grounded in what Nevin called the fact of the Incarnation which was the union of the divine and the human, or the supernatural and natural, not in a mechanical, but in an organic manner. Like Irenaeus of old and like the then recent German theologian, Schleiermacher, Nevin was fond of the Pauline metaphors of Christ as the new Adam, who fulfilled all the potentialities of the old Adam and the New Creation who has completed the old creation. Through Christ a new principle of life has been introduced into the world. Nevin categorically rejected the charge that the Mercersburg Theology subordinated Christ to the Church. To be sure, it has laid great stress upon the doctrine of the church, but only as a consequence of the doctrine of Christ, just as is the case in the Apostle's Creed.¹⁴

Second, it is thus clear that the Mercersburg Theology is also creedal. While at first stressing the Reformation symbols, especially the Heidelberg Catechism, Nevin increasingly placed great stock in the ancient creeds, particularly the Apostles' Creed, which he was well aware was not truly composed by the apostles, but rather developed at Rome over a period of time, not reaching its final form until about the sixth century.¹⁵ He points out that all the major branches of Christianity have received it as authoritative, including Reformation Protestantism, in contrast with many nineteenth century American Protestants. To Nevin the acknowledgment of the authority of the Apostles' Creed and its use in catechism and liturgy was important because its appropriation signified the sense of continuity with the ancient church. To be sure, there can have been progress since Christian antiquity, but the church cannot have changed into something entirely different and still claim to be the catholic church, and such he feared had happened in much of nineteenth century American Protestantism, a point that Nevin makes early in his career at Mercersburg which will eventually lead to near despair concerning contemporary Protestantism.¹⁶

In the third place, this theology, Nevin thought, is objective and historical; that is, it does not arise out of the vagaries of the human mind or subjective piety, but out of the fact of the incarnation itself perceived by faith as the manifestation of the Divine in the history of the world.

Fourth, a theology which is objective and historical, not purely subjective or spiritual, is necessarily churchly, for it is in the church that the order of grace flowing from Christ takes its historical form as is implied in the creed itself with the article, "holy catholic church." The creed calls for faith not only in God the Father and in Jesus Christ his Son, but also in the holy catholic church as the objective, historical means by which Christ's grace reaches his people.

Fifth, Christ's grace is communicated to his people especially through the sacraments, which are not simply outward signs of what they represent, but are, and here Nevin agrees with Calvin, seals of the actual realities they present to us. Thus, this theology must be sacramental and as sacramental, it is necessarily also liturgical.

Schaff is in substantial agreement with Nevin's interpretation of Mercersburg Theology though there were some differences of emphasis. With Nevin he stresses the centrality of Christ, the one in whom the ideal of humanity has been actualized, the focal point of history, the new creation by which a new principle of divine life has been communicated to humanity itself. Christ carries on his divine-human life in the church. The study of church history is thus of great importance, he thinks, for in it we discover the evolution of God's plan of salvation. As he says in his preface to What is Church History?, "History is, and must ever continue to be, next to God's Word, the richest fountain of wisdom, and the surest guide to all successful practical activity."¹⁸ Like Nevin, Schaff is quite critical of the lack of a historical sense on the part of much of contemporary American Protestantism which thought of itself as springing immediately from the New Testament. Schaff's interest in the creeds is shown by his eventual publication of a monumental three volume study which is still a standard work on the subject.¹⁹ His recognition of the need for updating the language of creeds from time to time is evident, however, in his work on creed revision within the Presbyterian Churches²⁰ later when he was at Union Theological Seminary. That Schaff agreed with Nevin on the importance of the liturgy can be seen in his chairmanship for many years of the committee in the German Reformed Church for the revision of the liturgy. In this capacity he championed, along with Nevin, the renewal of corporate worship to make it²¹ less privatized, more objective, more communal, and more sacramental.

But there were also some differences with Nevin. Already in his period at Mercersburg Schaff showed that he did not agree with his older colleague's rejection of the Reformation distinction between the invisible and visible church. Nevin preferred to draw a contrast between the ideal and the actual church which is identical with the difference between potency and actuality, what the church as grounded in the fact of the New Creation in Christ is intended to be and is in process of becoming, versus what it has actually become. In his sermon, "The Church," he applies this distinction to its three main characteristics, unity, catholicity and holiness. They exist as the ideal in process of actualization. He strongly repudiates the notion that the church is invisible. "An invisible state, or invisible family, or invisible man, is not as great an absurdity and contradiction as an absolutely invisible church."²²

Schaff, on the other hand, in his What is Church History? published in the same year as Nevin's sermon, "The Church" was preached (1846), held on to the distinction between the invisible and visible church: "The visible church is made up of different confessions, which in part hold a perfectly hostile relation to each other, as Catholics, Greeks, Protestants, etc. The invisible or true Church, on the other hand, is always one only,²³ although her members are scattered in different sections of the visible church."

This conception of one invisible community of believers among the various visible churches helped to inspire a major ecumenical effort in the nineteenth century, the Evangelical Alliance, concerning the value of which Schaff and Nevin would eventually disagree. While at Mercersburg, Schaff joined Nevin in criticism of this organization, which was founded in London in 1846, because he thought it was too focused on union with Protestants only and because it appeared to him as primarily a means to do battle with Roman Catholicism.²⁴ Nevin himself had attacked the Alliance for being unchurchly as was evident to him in its neglect of the Apostles' Creed and for being composed of "the most violently unhistorical and sectarian" Protestant groups.²⁵ But after his removal to New York, Schaff took a different view from his former colleague. He was instrumental in the revival of the Alliance in 1866 and would be extremely active, as its American Corresponding Secretary, in bringing about its largest conference so far in New York in 1873. To be sure, he recognized that the aims of the Alliance did not encompass the union of churches, but rather the union of individuals from various communions who practiced a kind of "detached attachment" which included a primary loyalty to their own denominations along with appreciation for other communions. Schaff thought that such a "detached attachment" was an essential preliminary to church union.²⁶

In addition, as I have already pointed out, Schaff had from the beginning a greater tolerance for sects than Nevin did, and this broadmindedness would eventually include an openness even toward non-creedal, non-sacramental and non-liturgical churches.²⁷ He would come almost to exult in the great variety of Christian piety, and in this respect he shows, I think, the original foundation of his thought in romanticism which delighted in the rich diversity in nature and history. His attitude is summed up in the Latin saying which he adopted as his motto: Christianus sum, Christiani nihil a me puto ("I am a Christian, I think nothing Christian is foreign to me"), which was an adaptation of the words of Terence, Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto ("I am human, I think nothing human is foreign to me").

Finally, another important difference between them, and one which will affect their ecumenical views, is one I pointed out in my paper at the American Society of Church History meeting held here last year.²⁸ That has to do with their respective views of the Germanic theory of historical development. Both subscribed to this theory of development. Both acknowledged continuity and discontinuity in the theory, but whereas Nevin, in his insistence on organic connection with the early church, stressed the pole of continuity, Schaff with his attitude of looking forward rather than backward, emphasized more the pole of progress in the romantic-idealist development theory. Thus, Schaff's greater willingness to be accepting of Christian groups whose order, liturgy and life have moved a considerable distance away from the order, liturgy and life of the early church.

I move now to the connection of Mercersburg Theology to the current ecumenical scene. In the first place, the aim in present ecumenical discussions is, as it was for the Mercersburgers, especially for Nevin, not a mere invisible, but a

visible unity. The first purpose of the World Council of Churches is to move "to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ...in order that the world may believe." That goal informs the work of the entire program of the Council, but especially of its Faith and Order Commission in the projects, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" and "Confessing the Apostolic Faith Today." In addition, that goal shapes the many other multilateral and bilateral discussions that are presently taking place. It is not clear, however, as to what "visible unity" precisely means. Does it mean "organic unity?" Apparently not. A report entitled Living Today Towards Visible Unity concerning the Fifth International Consultation of the United and Uniting Churches held in Potsdam, July, 1987, makes it clear that organic unity is not necessarily the goal. In fact in one of the papers in this report Paul Crow, the President of the Disciples Council on Christian Unity, speaks of the organic model "as an endangered species." The alternative would seem to be a conciliar fellowship united around a common creed and Eucharist and goal of mission, but²⁹ where the separate denominations would continue to have some kind of existence.

In keeping also with the hope of Nevin and Schaff for an "Evangelical Catholicism," which was so much in contrast with American Protestant expectations in the mid-nineteenth century, is the inclusion of Roman Catholics in the Faith and Order process. In at least one respect, the present progress has even moved beyond their dream, for the current ecumenical convergence includes also the Orthodox. Nevin³⁰ and Schaff both thought Orthodoxy was moribund and gave it little thought.

Secondly, this goal of visible unity includes as part of its meaning a "sacramental union," as the statement concerning one Eucharistic fellowship in the WCC purpose and the BEM project make clear. As Max Thurian correctly states, "The ecclesiology presupposed by the Lima document and thought of as that of the New Testament... is definitely a 'sacramental ecclesiology.' The church is the sign of God's presence and the instrument of God's work in the world; it is the body of Christ which unites believers by the word and the sacraments."³¹ With such a goal of a sacramental unity the Mercersburgers would no doubt be very pleased.

Thirdly, again as the WCC purpose suggests with the phrase, "visible unity in one faith" and as the Faith and Order project, "Confessing the Apostolic Faith Today" demonstrates, this visible unity is to be grounded in the common recognition, common explication and common confession of the apostolic faith as summarized in the Nicene Creed. Though Nevin had some preference for the Apostles' Creed, he would no doubt be favorably impressed by this venture to acknowledge a common Trinitarian faith which rests upon the work of the greatest of the early ecumenical councils and which has been used in liturgy throughout the ages. Just as the Mercersburgers were aware that the ancient faith required translation into current language and thought forms, which in their case was chiefly that of nineteenth century German romantic and idealist philosophy, so the Faith and Order Commission recognizes the need to translate the creed into contemporary idioms, taking into account current issues that face the church and the world, in order for contemporary women and men of all Christian traditions and cultures to be able to appropriate it for themselves.

Presupposed in both the BEM and the Apostolic Faith studies, is that the faith of the church is not merely subjective and private, but objective and historical. It is grounded not only in the Scriptures but in the tradition. The language of BEM is both Biblical and patristic, arising out of the writings

of the ancient Fathers and liturgies of the church. The Nicene Creed, though it is thought to summarize the Biblical faith, is recognized as not doing so in an exhaustive manner. Likewise, its language, making use of Greek philosophical terms and thus going beyond that of Scripture, is clearly timebound. Yet, its agreement with the testimony of the apostles concerning God's revelation in Christ and its general³² acceptance in all ages and places makes it authoritative for Christians today.

In other words, in both of these projects, it is clearly recognized that it is not Scripture alone that rules, but rather Scripture as interpreted by tradition, especially the early tradition. Setting the stage for the achievements of BEM and the Apostolic Faith studies was the conclusion of the Fourth Faith and Order Conference at Montreal in 1963 on the subject of Scripture and tradition which stated: "The Tradition of the Gospel (the paradosis of the kerygma)" by which "we exist as Christians" is testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is "actualized in the preaching of the word, in the administration of the sacraments and worship, in Christian teaching and theology, and in mission and witness to Christ by the lives of the members of the Church."³³ This decision at Montreal was a milestone in the history of the ecumenical movement especially for Protestants who had been accustomed since the Reformation to emphasize sola Scriptura. Protestants were for the first time agreeing with the Orthodox that the living tradition cannot truly be in conflict with Scripture.³⁴ The proximity in substance of the Montreal declaration to the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of the same year, 1963, no doubt encouraged the participation, since 1968, of Roman Catholic theologians in the Faith and Order process.

In a manner similar to the Montreal statement Nevin and Schaff stressed the legitimacy of tradition at a time when American Protestants in general were strongly emphasizing the principle of sola Scriptura over against Romanism and High Anglicanism, to the extent even of rejecting all creeds. Nevin in particular insisted, as had the Reformers, Luther and Calvin, that the real authority for the faith and life of the Church is the incarnate Christ to whom the Scripture bears witness and who is by the power³⁵ of the Holy Spirit present in the Church, its creeds and sacraments and life. With Montreal Nevin would agree that there can be no opposition between the living Tradition of the Gospel and Scripture and that Scripture itself requires interpretation not by the private individual, shouting sola Scriptura, but rather by the whole church.

As with Mercersburg Theology, so with the current ecumenical theology which has lifted up the importance of Scripture and tradition, the effort is not to permit this reverence for the past to deteriorate into dead traditionalism. BEM, while it uses classical Biblical and patristic language, also adopts the contemporary idiom of liberation and peace and justice in connection with its description of baptism and Eucharist. And as I have already mentioned, the Apostolic Faith study is concerned to translate the Nicene Creed into the language of today and to apply it to the current social and cultural context. One of the greatest needs in both the BEM and the Apostolic Faith studies is to take into account, more than either study has done so far, the concerns of women for their greater inclusion in the work of both projects, for greater attention to the issue of women in ordained ministry in the BEM project, and for sensitivity to the issue of the interpretation of Scripture and tradition in the light of feminist concerns in Apostolic Faith study.³⁶ As a working group of Faith and Order stated it a few years ago, the movement is in two directions, "towards unity in faith with the early Church, and towards unity in mission with the Church of the

future."³⁷ And in this latter direction, Faith and Order is engaged in another important project, "The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community." Thus, while maintaining the need for continuity in the faith, it also stresses the importance of making that faith relevant to the future exigencies of humankind. This desire to be faithful to the living tradition of Christ as received in the Church and to be open to future adaptations of this tradition in the interest of the Church's mission is in keeping with the tension in the understanding of historical development as set forth by Nevin and Schaff.

The Mercersburg and current ecumenical emphasis upon the church as catholic, that is more than the local congregation or region, and as historical, that is apostolic and creedal, poses a challenge to the United Church of Christ, which has tended in many of its parts to stress more the particular than the universal, more the local congregation than the church as a whole, and more the contemporary than the historical.

But the need for us in the United Church of Christ to move beyond the particular to the universal and from undue preoccupation with the present -- however much we all are pleased with and proud of the UCC commitment to the cause of peace and justice -- to an appreciation of the historical, is clear, for the question has often been raised about our common identity. What binds us together as members of the same church? What is the common tradition among the several particular traditions of our church? I just learned at our Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society meeting in Wisconsin a couple of weeks ago that a consultation on ecclesiology will probably take place soon in the denomination, a keenly felt need in many parts of the church today.

Also, what connects us who are members of the United Church of Christ with other Christians? What common tradition do we share? In support of the need in the United Church of Christ for a recovery of its own tradition, but also the tradition of the church universal, I should like to quote Susan Thistlethwaite: "Part of the vision of the next twenty-five years of the United Church of Christ," she writes, "must be reclamation of Memory...an acknowledgment of the claim posed on the contemporary Church both by its past and by the whole communion of the Church."³⁸

That such a move may be in the offing is suggested by a couple of recent happenings in our church: 1. The decision by the Executive Council to hire a full-time UCC Archivist beginning in January 1990; and 2. the prospective development of a multi-volume book series entitled, The Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ under the joint sponsorship of the Board for Homeland Ministries and the Office for Church Life and Leadership. Though the volumes will focus upon the theological history of the United Church of Christ in its various strands, present plans call for the inclusion of at least one volume on the early and medieval Church -- both Greek and Latin.

By giving attention to our own common memory, of which the Mercersburg Theology is an integral part, but also to the common memory of the whole Church, we shall become more truly a "united and uniting" church, more sure of our own identity, better able to take part in dialogue with our ecumenical partners and better prepared to move with other Christians "to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ...that the world may believe."

NOTES

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4. Klaus Penzel, "Church History and the Ecumenical Quest: A Study of the German Background and Thought of Philip Schaff," (Th. D. Diss., Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1962), pp. 150 ff. See also Klaus Penzel, "Church History in Context," in Our Common History as Christians: Essays in Honor of Albert Outler, ed. John Deschner et al. (New York, 1975), p. 234; and James H. Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology (Chicago, 1961), pp. 115 ff.
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7. Ibid., pp. 134, 168, 171-72. Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith (Edinburgh, 1956), pp. 685-87.
8. Philip Schaff, The Reunion of Christendom (New York, 1893)
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16. See John W. Nevin, "Pseudo-Protestantism," Weekly Messenger 10:52 (Sept. 10, 1845), Cf. "Heidelberg Catechism," WM 6:12 (Dec., 1840).
17. Philip Schaff, What is Church History? A Vindication of the Idea of Historical Development (Philadelphia, 1846) pp. 32-37.
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20. Philip Schaff, Creed Revision in the Presbyterian Churches (New York, 1890).
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24. Ibid., pp. 122 ff.
25. Nevin, "The Church," p. 57.
26. Shriver, p. 53 f.
27. Philip Schaff, The Reunion of Christendom (New York, 1893), pp. 41-45.
28. "Nevin and Schaff, Colleagues at Mercersburg: The Church Question," a paper presented at the meeting of the American Society of Church History, Lancaster, Pa., April 16, 1989.
29. Living Today Towards Visible Unity, ed. Thomas F. Best, Faith and Order Paper No 142 (Geneva, 1988), p. 32. See the review by Lesslie Newbigin in Mid-Stream, Vol. 28, No. 1 (January, 1989), 144-147.
30. For Schaff, see Nichols, p. 136; but for a positive estimate of the Greek Church, see Reunion of Christendom (pp. 41 ff.) in which he gives a largely affirmative assessment of several different denominations.
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32. See my article, "Tradition in Ecumenical Perspective," Prism, a theological forum for the United Church of Christ, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring, 1989), 9.
33. The Fourth Conference on Faith and Order 1963, ed. P. C. Rodger and Lukas Vischer (New York, 1964), p. 52.
34. See "Tradition in Ecumenical Perspective."
35. John W. Nevin, "The Apostles' Creed," Mercersburg Review vol. 1 (1849), 320. See Nichols, pp. 184 ff.
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EMANUEL V. GERHART: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIAN
OF THE MERCERSBURG THEOLOGY

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Emanuel Vogel Gerhart was deeply rooted in the German Reformed Church. From the day of his birth, June 13, 1817, the church's influence permeated his life. His father, Isaac, was one of the highly respected ministers of the denomination. Isaac was pastor of eight congregations in what is now Snyder County, Pennsylvania, when Emanuel was born. In 1819 the Gerhart family moved to the Lykens Valley in Pennsylvania where Isaac was a pastor until 1843. The Gerharts possessed a deep love for the German Reformed Church and its heritage.

The educational institutions of the German Reformed Church played an important role in Emanuel V. Gerhart's formal education. When he was sixteen he enrolled in the Classical School of the German Reformed Church which was located in York, Pennsylvania. The Classical School had been opened in 1831 as an adjunct of the church's theological seminary, located in York since 1829. A major function of the Classical School was to prepare young men for their theological training. Gerhart was still a member of the school's student body when it moved from York to Mercersburg, a small town in south central Pennsylvania, in 1835. One year later the school was incorporated as Marshall College, named for John Marshall, the late Chief Justice of the United States.²

Gerhart was a very disciplined student. One of his notebooks contains a set of rules which he adopted as his guide to a successful scholastic career. Whether created by him or simply copied from another source the list is characteristic of his earnestness.

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- 2nd Make it a point to rise early
- 3rd Accustom your thoughts to concentration in the particular subject of study
- 4th Let it be a rule to employ at least 12 hours of each day in close study.
- 5th Observe system in everything
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- 7th Let your conduct always be dignified
- 8th Above all beware -- yes, beware of the ladies
- 9th To conclude -- let the acquirement of useful knowledge -- and that only -- be the prime object -- be the sole object, of the student

Gerhart graduated from Marshall in 1838. He had impressed his teachers in both the Classical School and Marshall College with his academic competence and intellectual⁴ promise. He also drank deeply from the wells of their knowledge and wisdom.

Emanuel made a decision to enter the ministry of the German Reformed Church under circumstances which remain obscure. He enrolled in the Theological Seminary of the German Reformed Church which had moved to Mercersburg in 1837. There he studied with the two principal members of the faculty, Frederick

Augustus Rauch and Lewis Mayer. Gerhart had little respect for Mayer, but his esteem for Rauch was boundless. Rauch was a native of Germany who had migrated to America in 1831. After a brief period of teaching at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, he had become affiliated with the educational institutions of the German Reformed Church at York and later at Mercersburg. He was Principal of the Classical School, professor in the Theological Seminary, and the first President of Marshall College.

Rauch's thought was greatly influenced by Hegelian philosophy. His Hegelianism led to his criticism by those who found Christianity and Hegel incompatible. The depth of Gerhart's loyalty to Rauch is witnessed by the vigor with which he defended his mentor and by his later editing of Rauch's sermons and addresses after Rauch's untimely death in 1841.

Gerhart was not unhappy when Lewis Mayer resigned his post at the Theological Seminary in 1839. The vacancy created by Mayer's departure was filled by John Williamson Nevin in 1840. Nevin, a Presbyterian, brought to Mercersburg a profound interest in German thought and a high regard for the German Reformed Church. Since Gerhart did not complete his theological studies until the fall of 1841 he was one of Nevin's students during the first year of his teaching. During that period a friendship began between the two which matured over the years despite the fact that they were not always in agreement. Shortly after Nevin's death Gerhart wrote:

The secret of Dr. Nevin's notable history was his godliness. Great as he was in the different spheres of thought, he was still greater in the sphere of positive Christian faith. He has rendered manifold valuable services to the church into which he was transplanted, and his influence in the line of Christological Theology will tell upon generations yet unborn; but our chief cause for gratitude to God is this: -- that in the course of His Providence He led into the fold of the Reformed Church a man of genuine spirituality, of godly simplicity, of moral heroism and of thoroughly upright character -- a man along the pathway of whose life bloomed on either side the fragrant flowers of genuine goodness.

Gerhart was ordained into the ministry of the German Reformed Church in August, 1842. He became a pastor in rural Franklin County and later in Gettysburg. In 1849 he received an appointment from the Domestic Mission Board of the German Reformed Church to become a missionary agent in Cincinnati, Ohio. This was terminated in 1851 when the Ohio Synod elected him President of Heidelberg College and Professor of Theology in the newly constituted Theological Seminary at Tiffin, Ohio. Under his administration both the college and the seminary were successful. He taught courses in dogmatics, homiletics, church history, apologetics, Old Testament and New Testament in the seminary, and logic, ethics, psychology, natural philosophy, and German in the college.

As the institutions in Tiffin prospered under Gerhart's leadership two developments were taking place in the eastern sector of the church which would change his life. The first was the controversy over the theological views of the Mercersburg professors, John Williamson Nevin and Philip Schaff. Schaff had begun to teach at Mercersburg in 1844. Many were displeased with the Mercersburg teachers' anti-revivalism and their liturgical views.

As I have attempted to show elsewhere Gerhart was later an apologist for the Mercersburg Theology. In fact he was its foremost systematizer. At almost

every juncture his theology was solidly akin to the views of Nevin and Schaff.¹² He wrote glowingly of the influence of the Mercersburg Theology which he claimed had correctly diagnosed the theological faults of American Protestantism in general and the German Reformed Church in particular. Furthermore, the Mercersburg movement had prescribed the correctives needed. It had revitalized the denomination and recalled it to its biblical and historical foundations.

The second significant development in the east was the union of Marshall College with Franklin College in 1853 and their location in the latter's city, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. When Nevin and Schaff were unable to accept invitations to become President of Franklin and Marshall College, the trustees elected Emanuel V. Gerhart.¹³ With some reluctance he accepted and moved his family to Lancaster in 1855. The college advanced with Gerhart at the helm. The heavy demand of administrative duties did not prevent him from maintaining a regular teaching schedule as the college's Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy and publishing two books and a number of articles. In 1866 the college was in sound financial condition, but there had been a decline in the number of students. When the trustees decided to reorganize the college because of the smaller enrollments Gerhart stepped aside and John Williamson Nevin became the college's¹⁴ President. Gerhart was content to remain a faculty member for two more years.

When Henry Harbaugh, Professor of Didactic and Practical Theology, died in 1867, a vacancy was created on the faculty of the Theological Seminary in Mercersburg. At a special session of the Eastern Synod in 1868 Gerhart was chosen to occupy this professorship. He was inaugurated on October 26, 1868.¹⁵ In his inaugural address titled, "The Historical Element in Theology," he stressed the responsibility of each new generation of Christians to bring about "a purer and fuller development, and a better articulation of the revealed truth taught and believed in all previous periods of church history."¹⁶ This theme would be a continuing keynote of Gerhart's thought.

Gerhart was elected President of the seminary faculty shortly after assuming his duties at Mercersburg. He occupied that role until his death in 1904. He was an influential voice in the decision to move the Theological Seminary from Mercersburg to Lancaster in 1871. In addition to his rigorous teaching and administrative schedule Gerhart served as President of the General Synod of the German Reformed Church in 1869 and contributed his leadership to various denominational committees and activities.¹⁷

As might be expected, E. V. Gerhart's death filled the German Reformed Church with sadness. It mourned the loss of one of its finest leaders and theologians, one who had loved it as a son.¹⁸

II

Emanuel V. Gerhart was a theologian. From the earliest days of his seminary training he possessed the talents which made him a capable scholar, teacher and author. Theodore F. Herman said of him:

If his teachings excited less attention than those of Nevin and Schaff, it was because he wrought and taught in the constructive, and not the controversial, age of the Mercersburg movement; and in the quiet of closet and classroom rather than in the heat of public debate. But no man can overestimate the deep and lasting impression which Dr. Gerhart made on the life and thought of the Reformed Church

as the teacher of twelve generations of her ministers. Yes, his influence extended far beyond the border of his church into other denominations.

Herman's statement may be somewhat misleading. While it is true that Gerhart was not involved in the intense controversies in which Nevin and Schaff participated, there were occasions upon which his theological views were publicly questioned. Attacks on his theology did not go unanswered. Furthermore, he rarely failed to question ideas or practices with which he did not agree. He did not relish argument, but he could not be satisfied with imprecision or error. Gerhart's theology was not constructed entirely "in the quiet of closet and classroom." It was also composed and refined in the arena of challenge and dispute. He tested and revised his ideas in committee meetings, on the floor of synod, and in the pages of periodicals.

There are five major primary sources from which we are able to sift and interpret the principal theological views to which Gerhart held. As a whole these sources comprise an adequate corpus of his writings from which we may determine his theological interests and methodology. These sources are: (1) books and printed pamphlets, including his massive 1600 page Institutes of the Christian Religion (first volume published in 1891, second volume in 1894; (2) articles printed in periodicals (more than 30 in The Mercersburg Review and its successors and nearly 100 in the Reformed Church Messenger, in addition to other journals); (3) personal documents including diaries, letters and records; (4) sermons of which 94 manuscripts are extant; and (5) classroom notes used by Gerhart for his lectures or transcribed by his students from his lectures.

III

According to Gerhart the task of theology was to present the truth of Christianity to each new generation in light of its changing needs and intellectual capacities. This meant for him the formulation of a theology which was suited to the needs of the nineteenth century.

Gerhart acknowledged two important disciplines in accomplishing the theological task. One of them was biblical theology which had achieved "definite recognition as a distinct branch of scientific study" during his lifetime. Its main function was to illuminate the historical basis of the faith located in scripture. The Bible is the base upon which Christian theology was to be constructed. The second discipline was dogmatic theology. Its function was to relate the past and present epochs of the Christian faith. This included more than simply translating biblical truth into contemporary terms. It meant that the theologian had to be a student of the historical development of Christian theology during the past eighteen centuries as well. A theologian needed to understand the intellectual needs of the day. He had to be equipped with the exegetical tools necessary to work with the Bible. But he also had to be aware of the historical development of Christian thought. A thoroughly sound theology recognized its debt to, and dependence upon, the work of Christian theologians over the whole course of the history of the church.

Gerhart could not accept the position that the doctrinal statements of any past age could be made the final expressions of Christian truth. He was particularly unhappy with the Protestant theologians of his day who acted as though the theological propositions of Luther and Calvin were the last word. There was a

legitimate and necessary place for further theological formulations including his own. He wrote:

The scientific labors of all Christian thinkers from Clement and Origen onward through the middle ages I appreciate and honor, especially the great ideas of Augustine, which as reproduced and matured by John Calvin, mark a mighty epoch of progress in evangelical theology and practical religion. But the Reformation did not propose to break the bondage of Romanism in order to replace it by a Calvinistic yoke. It laid claim to freedom of thought no less than freedom of faith, a freedom which has been fruitful of progress in spiritual culture and divine science. Set amid new religious and civil conditions, an emancipated Church has during three centuries²³ been unfolding the deeper meaning of the Christian Creed.

There seems to be little doubt that Gerhart was much influenced by his friend Philip Schaff, who wrote the introduction to the first volume of Gerhart's Institutes. Schaff's The Principle of Protestantism, published in 1845, and his other writings of the Mercersburg period of his life underscored the importance of the theologian's understanding and appreciation of historical development and the responsibility of creating a theology pertinent to every new era.

The continuing task of theology established, Gerhart believed that the theologian needed a proper source of knowledge concerning the faith. From such a source it must be decided what is essential to Christianity. Only by such a determination would the theologian be in a position to present the truth to his day.

Historically, Gerhart claimed, there were three main branches of the church which had offered opinions concerning the proper source of knowledge. One of these was Roman Catholicism. It held that the source was really twofold: the Bible (including the Apocrypha) and tradition. Tradition, however, had become the more important element. It ultimately governed the interpretation and application of biblical truth. Scripture had been subordinated to it. Gerhart found that unacceptable. Tradition, he said, was valuable and important,²⁴ but not as a supplement to the Bible or as the sole guide to its interpretation.

The second main branch of the church is the evangelical. It had originally declared the source of theological knowledge to be the Bible and its illumination by the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, there had been modifications of this view. In some quarters the role of the Holy Spirit had been minimized and the written word had been exalted almost to the point of its edification. This was perversion. Furthermore, when critical methods of scriptural interpretation were employed, human reason became accepted as a valid source of theological knowledge along with the Bible. The result was an increasingly arrogant rationalism which pretended to be the final arbiter of the truth. Scripture was subordinated to reason. Reason, of course, has a legitimate function in determining theological knowledge. It is the organ of such knowledge. It receives and interprets what is given in revelation, but reason itself cannot be considered the proper source of theological knowledge.²⁵

A third branch, mysticism, is likewise suspect. Gerhart complained that, "It either denies or at least fails to affirm, that the written word teaches divine truth in its essential wholeness."²⁶

What is the proper source? Is it the Bible? Gerhart believed that the Bible is an integral part of divine revelation. It could even be considered a valid source of theological knowledge. If so, however, it is a derived source. What is the primary and original source? There is only one acceptable answer to that question: "Jesus, the Christ of God, is Himself the source of the true and final knowledge of God."²⁷

The substance of Gerhart's argument is summed up in the following words:

. . . there is only one objective source of theological knowledge, not two or more sources; and that one source is the central and all-embracing fact or principle of Christianity, Jesus, the Christ of God, glorified in heaven, who is related to reason and theological science, in a twofold way, namely:

1. By the permanent gift of the Holy Spirit, who dwells both in Christ and in individual members of His Church, and in the vital bond of the mystical communion between them. Thereby Christ communicates of His fullness perennially and uninterruptedly to them, as being members of the Church and members of Himself. Thereby also they are able to receive from Him and appropriate to themselves new life and new light from day to day.

2. Christ is revealed to faith and reason through the medium of inspired books written by representative men of the pre-Christian and Christian economies, in which books, (the mirror of the Personal Truth in human speech,) Christ speaks with heavenly force concerning Himself and His²⁸ kingdom to those who live with Him in the fellowship of the Spirit.

Gerhart was persuaded of the legitimacy and necessity of the theological task. He was satisfied that he had discovered the one indispensable source of theological knowledge. He wrote:

. . . though the revealed truth taught by the Bible is unchangeable, the theology of no age, inasmuch as theology is human science, is final. As the theology of the Reformation, rich and scriptural though it be, was capable of modification and progress, a fact which is now almost universally conceded, so the theology of our age is capable of progress. If it be a legitimate outgrowth of the Reformation, if faithful to the formal principle (the Bible illuminated by the Holy Spirit) then declared and introduced, and if moulded and enriched by continuous thorough study of the written word, theology cannot stand still. A living Church cannot but grow intensively and extensively; and a living theology cannot but grow in clearness, consistency and wealth of divine knowledge. But the genuine progress of theology will always include reciprocal action of two factors, the objective force of the written word and the scientific capacities of the Church. The glorified Christ speaking in²⁹ His written word must discipline, ennoble and enrich theology

Convinced that the person of Christ is the focal point and source of the Christian faith, Gerhart believed that there was a need for a theology which was thoroughly Christocentric. He sensed an urgency for this type of system in his own time. Something extraordinary had been occurring in the nineteenth century. The Holy Spirit had been turning the attention of the church and the world to Jesus Christ in a new fashion.³⁰

European theologians such as J. A. Neander and Isaak A. Dorner had taken the lead in formulating systems of theology which utilized a Christocentric method. Some theologians in America and Great Britain had even produced theological monographs, biblical commentaries, studies of the life of Jesus, and works on church history which employed a Christocentric principle. Among the theologians of whom he spoke, though unnamed, were Nevin and Schaff. But, Gerhart asserted, "thus far no system of theology, developed from the Christ-idea as³¹ its standpoint of American or English authorship, had greeted the Church." He felt a genuine need to supply such a system. The outcome of his labors were the two volumes of the Institutes.

Referring to the aim of these volumes Gerhart said:

Whilst it does not undervalue the decided progress in several branches of theology achieved by the heroes of the Reformation, this work is in sympathy with the Christological trend of the Christian sentiment and scholarship of our age. It is an earnest effort to make answer to the call for a doctrinal system in which Jesus Christ stands as the central truth; not only as the instrument³² of salvation, but also as the beginning and the end of revelation.

Although the Institutes were not completed until the later years of Gerhart's life, his basic commitment to a Christocentric theology was decided during the earlier years of his theological scholarship. More than thirty years before the Institutes appeared he wrote that Christ

. . . gives relative position, character and force to every doctrine of the Gospel, every ordinance of the Church, and to the peculiar methods by which the Gospel is taught and propagated. Thus the whole system of Christian truth, and in consequence also the ordinances in which it is exhibited, and the language in which it is taught, derive their significance from Him -- from His person and work -- as their fundamental principle. To know the Gospel either in its parts or as a whole, it is necessary therefore, first of all, to know Christ; and to know Him it is necessary to receive Him from the heart in true faith, and obey Him in childlike simplicity.³³

On several occasions Gerhart had stated that, "a correct Theology depends upon a Christology."³⁴

The Christological focus of Gerhart's theology was a relic of the theological thought of both Nevin and Schaff. James H. Nichols suggests that Nevin and Schaff,

. . . characterized their distinctive orientation as Christocentric or Christological. As such it contrasted sharply with the two major theological camps of the day in America -- the scholastic Confessionalism of Princeton and the old-school Presbyterians, and the New England theology in its various nuances at Andover, Yale and Union. The characteristic themes of these rival schools -- human depravity and inability, election, reprobation, imputation, the atonement, regeneration³⁵ -- had become stale and worn out, at least as conventionally treated.

Gerhart found the organizing principles of non-Christocentric theologies deficient. He singled out two of the traditional Protestant systems for special

criticism. The first of these was the system based on God's decrees. It held that human salvation was unconditionally dependent on election by divine decree. While this system was an improvement over the theology of the pre-Reformation period,³⁶ it relegated the human being to a state of existence unworthy of his creation in the image of God. In addition the decretal system, "assigns false predominance to the sovereignty of God's will, and overlooks the intrinsic necessities of man's ethical life."³⁷ Human freedom is abridged under the decretal system.

The second system was Arminianism. Instead of making God's decree the starting and focal point of theological thought, it had made human will the organizing factor. Arminianism recognized and asserted the "necessity of man's ethical life," but it did not give proper place to God's majesty. "In Arminianism the divine is falsely subordinated to the human will."³⁸

Parenthetically, Gerhart mentioned another system. It was the Federal Theology worked out by the Reformed theologians, Olevianus, Coccejus, Burmann, Heidanus, and Witsius. The Federal Theology attempted to hold God and man together in a covenant in which God's love is offered to man, and man's capacity to respond is assumed. While this avoided the extreme pitfalls of the decretal and Arminian systems, the relationship between man and God was not "vital."³⁹ Gerhart said,

Against both forms of theological one-sidedness, the false exaltation of God above man, and the false subordination of God's majesty and sovereignty to man's freedom, a strong reaction has set in toward a different principle of theology, the concrete union of the two essential factors. Reasoning in the light of a more scriptural conception of Christianity, it has come to be seen that neither God alone nor man alone, neither divine sovereignty nor human freedom, is the true point of departure. Both require full recognition, God in His paternal relation to man, and man in his filial relationship to God. These conditions of a theology, at once more scriptural and more Christian, are met by the Christ-idea -- the idea concerning the divine-human personality of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God.⁴⁰

The Christological method was scriptural according to Gerhart. He advocated a Christological reading of the Old Testament. The books of the Old Testament derived their genius from their presentation of a messianic hope fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Making its appearance in the primeval setting of the protevangel (Genesis 3:5), the idea of the Messiah was developed throughout the historical, prophetic, and wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The New Testament records the fulfillment of Israel's hope. "Here not types and prophecies of the Messiah address us, but the actual personal history of Jesus, the Son of Man, who is the consummation of the unity which underlies and governs pre-Christian history."⁴¹ In summary, "The person and work of Christ constitute the basis or centre of all Bible truth."⁴²

Gerhart was convinced that there were valid biblical and theological reasons for utilizing a Christological method in the construction of a system of Christian theology.

The key to Gerhart's Christocentric theology was the incarnation. He wrote, "All departments of Christian Dogmatics, theology, Christology, anthropology, pneumatology, soteriology, eschatology, are to be viewed in the light of the incarnation, the Word made flesh"⁴³

E. V. Gerhart refused to make the ethical teachings of Jesus or His vicarious

death the central focus of Christian theology. To make either of these the central tenet was just as erroneous as to make it the unconditional decrees of God. The fundamental truth of Christianity, "is not in what Christ says or in what He does, but in what He is."⁴⁴ Christ was the person in whom God had become man and man had become one with God.⁴⁵ The incarnation is the basic truth of the Christian faith.

For Gerhart a vital union of man and God was at the heart of true religion. The incarnation made such a union a reality. It satisfied man's religious expectations and needs and thus fulfilled his manhood. "If human nature were not assumed into organic union with God, the original idea of manhood would fail of final actualization."⁴⁶ The union would perfect God's original creative purpose, i.e., a living union with man which had been interrupted by the Fall.⁴⁷ The incarnation was the realization of the union of God and man. In the person of the incarnate Christ the human and the divine had come together.

Gerhart summarized the Christocentric and incarnational nature of his theology in his description of Christ as the Revealer and Redeemer. Throughout the Institutes, and in some of his earlier writings, he used these titles to disclose the significance of Jesus' divine-human person.

As Revealer, Jesus' mission was twofold since, "True religion being the ideal communion between God and man. . . . implies a satisfying knowledge of both."⁴⁸ Christ is the revelation of God and man.

While it is true that God has revealed Himself in nature, in humanity, and in the universe, none of these modes of revelation is comparable to His manifestation in Christ. They are inferior because they are only partial. Christ, by his personal history, however, brings the wholeness of God into the field of human perception.

That God is the only absolute Spirit; that absolute Spirit lives His triune life of love in light; and accordingly that self-existent triune being is the only true and eternal God; this fundamental truth⁴⁹ confronts the faith of men in the person . . . of the incarnate Son.

The incarnate Christ has revealed the essence of God to be love, love which is omnipotent, omniscient and immutable. It is God as love who creates man for communion with Himself. It is God as love who continually seeks the fulfillment of His creative purpose even when man becomes estranged. God as love became one with man in Christ as the distinctive, absolute and final disclosure of Himself prepared for reunion with His creatures.

The incarnate Christ is also the revelation of true manhood. The anthropological views of the pagan religions and philosophies fail to make known man's origin and destiny. But the personal history of Jesus unveils the fact that human existence is originally and perpetually grounded in God. Christ reveals man's capacity for vital communion with God without which man remains incomplete. His glorified humanity is a disclosure of the ideal goal of human life.

The revelations of God and man in Christ are inseparably linked.

The essential nature of God shines forth in His union with true manhood. Man is the most congenial organ for God's presence and manifestation. On the other hand, the essential nature of man shines

forth in personal union with God. This vital and ethical union is the condition of a human manifestation answerable to the otherwise hidden and undeveloped dignity and teleology of man. The two revelations are not two, but one. God is manifest in man; man is manifest in God. The truth of the first proposition conditions the second. Reciprocally, the truth of the second proposition conditions the first.⁵⁰

Christ is also the Redeemer. He lived His life organically connected with the human race in which sin has reigned, corrupting and falsifying human nature since the time of the Adamic Fall. Yet He kept Himself free from error, wrong and impurity. He did not sin. The divine image in which original man was created became a final reality in His person. For this reason, "The birth of Jesus (was) the new birth of the race in Him. He (became) the principle of regeneration for all members of fallen mankind."⁵¹ Completely obedient and fulfilling the divine law of love, Jesus became the Mediator, conquering Satan and taking upon Himself the penal consequences of man's sin. He has perfectly united human nature with God.

Human nature purified in Him, redeemed, victorious, glorified, is at one with God, at one essentially and ethically; essentially, for the life of man having in Christ transcended the fallen world is active in complete union and communion with the life of God, the love of God to man being absolutely satisfied and the aptitude of man for God being fulfilled; at one with God ethically, for having forever expiated the guilt of sin the Son of Man has no conscience of conflict with evil or deficiency of holy character, He being at peace with God by the free activity of His will. The unity of essence⁵² is complete in the character of ethical or self-determined harmony.

The salvation of the fallen race takes place as it becomes one with God through Christ. It is "engrafted" into Christ. Grafted into Christ, men become members of a new race of which He is the Head. Since the relation between the members and the Head is organic, the members share His life. The process of "engrafting" involves two elements: (1) the activity of the Holy Spirit who communicates Christ and His benefits, and who also awakens man's response by destroying the bond of sin's dominion; (2) man's faith, the direct apprehension and appropriation of Christ by an act of the will. The two elements work together in order that engrafting may occur.

Whilst the Spirit on the one hand conditions the fellowship of faith, on the other hand faith conditions the actualization of the fellowship of the Spirit. Faith is for all persons an indispensable necessity. If there be no faith, the work of the Spirit does not issue in fruition. Only when the work of the Spirit is complemented by the work of faith does the mystical union between believers and Christ exist according to its⁵³ idea. Then the communion issues in personal and eternal salvation.

Christ's function as Revealer and Redeemer does not imply that these activities can be separated from each other. They are interdependent.

. . . the Revealer accomplishes the reconciliation by the manifestation of God in man, by the manifestation of man in union with God; . . . the Redeemer reveals God in man, man in God, by His work of reconciliation.⁵⁴

The core of Gerhart's theology, his Christological emphasis on the incarnation, was the central feature of the Mercersburg Theology as presented in the thought of John Williamson Nevin and Philip Schaff. Nevin's theology, for example, was unquestionably organized around the incarnation. He wrote, "It is the key that unlocks the sense of all God's works and brings to light the true meaning of the universe."⁵⁵ An extended comparison of Nevin and Gerhart would show how similar they were in their conviction that a sound systematic theology had to be grounded in Christology. Gerhart's views, of course, were more systematically presented, at least in the Institutes.

For both Nevin and Gerhart Christology belonged at the heart of Christian thought. Both were agreed that the proper focus of a Christological theology was not a doctrine about Christ, the teachings of Christ, His example, or His vicarious death. It was Christ Himself, the incarnate gift of God's infinite love, who was the decisive center of Christian life and reflection. The incarnation provided the only logical answer to the problem of human incompleteness and the fulfillment of God's creative purpose of communion with His creatures. In the incarnate Christ, creation, revelation and redemption were completed.

For both men, therefore, Christianity was not a set of doctrines, beliefs or morals. Christianity was not simply the sacrificial death of Christ. It was a mystical union between God and the human being which God had established in Christ through the mystery of the incarnation. Salvation occurs as the person is "inserted" (Nevin) or "engrafted" (Gerhart) into⁵⁶ the life of the divine-human Christ by the Holy Spirit and the believer's faith.

Virtually every other part of Gerhart's theology was influenced by his Christology. It provided both the foundation and the framework for his thought. For clarity and systematic arrangement there was no better exponent of the Christology of the Mercersburg movement and probably no finer systematician of the movement as a whole.⁵⁷

In the latter part of the nineteenth century new interests captured the theological spotlight in America. Darwinism, biblical criticism, the Social Gospel, psychology of religion, religious education, the history of religions made their presence felt, but were relatively inconspicuous in Gerhart's writings. He was convinced, even at the end of the century, that the major emphases of the theology originally developed by Nevin and Schaff were still valid and necessary. He was as qualified as anyone to set down its major principles. During the last third of the nineteenth century he was its apologist and perhaps the foremost systematic theologian of the German Reformed tradition in America.

NOTES

1. See Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., "Emanuel V. Gerhart and the Mercersburg Theology" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1972), 6-7.
2. H. M. J. Klein, A Century of Education at Mercersburg (Lancaster: Lancaster Press, Inc., 1936), 25-39.
3. Gerhart, unpublished student notebook #2 located in the Historical Society and Archives, Philip Schaff Library, Lancaster Theological Seminary, Lancaster, PA.
4. G. W. Willard, "Student Life of Dr. Gerhart," Reformed Church Messenger, June 10, 1897, 2-3.
5. Howard J. B. Ziegler, Frederick Augustus Rauch: American Hegelian (Manheim: Sentinel Printing House, 1953), 1-34.
6. The Inner Life of the Christian (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1856). See Rauch's comments on Gerhart in Klein, 106.
7. Luther J. Binkley, The Mercersburg Theology (Manheim: Sentinel Printing House, 1953), 13-17.
8. Gerhart, "John Williamson Nevin: His Godliness," The Reformed Quarterly Review, January, 1887, 19.
9. Gerhart, unpublished diary, April 16, 1849. The diaries are located in the Historical Society and Archives, Philip Schaff Library, Lancaster Theological Seminary, Lancaster, PA.
10. A. S. Zerbe, "The First Seventy-Five Years, 1824-1899," Souvenir Booklet -- Centennial, One Hundred Years of Reformed Church History in Ohio and Adjacent States (no publisher, 1923), 29-45.
11. James I. Good, History of the Reformed Church in the U.S. in the Nineteenth Century (New York: The Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1911), 322-403. See Gerhart's own description of the controversy in "The German Reformed Church," Bibliotheca Sacra and Biblical Repository, XX, January, 1863, 61-64.
12. Yrigoyen, 163-172.
13. Gerhart, unpublished diary, September 14, 1854.
14. H. M. J. Klein, History of Franklin and Marshall College, 1787-1948 (Lancaster: Intelligencer Printing Company, 1952), 93-96.
15. H. M. J. Klein, History of the Eastern Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (Lancaster: Rudisill and Smith Company, 1943), 253-254.
16. Gerhart, "The Historical Element in Theology," The Mercersburg Review, XVI, January, 1869, 146.
17. Yrigoyen, 47-52.

39. Gerhart, Institutes, I, 112-114.
40. Gerhart, Institutes, I, 115.
41. Gerhart, Institutes, I, 126.
42. Gerhart, "The Vital Principle of College Education," The Mercersburg Review, VII, October, 1855, 580.
43. Gerhart, "The Creed and Dogmatic Theology," The Mercersburg Review, XVIII, April, 1871, 220-221.
44. Gerhart, Christ the Source of Salvation (Lancaster: Inquirer Printing and Publishing Co., 1875), 10.
45. Gerhart, Institutes, I, 154.
46. Gerhart, Institutes, I, 158.
47. Gerhart, Institutes, I, 158.
48. Gerhart, Institutes, I, 179.
49. Gerhart, Institutes, I, 541.
50. Gerhart, Institutes, I, 182.
51. Gerhart, Institutes, II, 215.
52. Gerhart, Institutes, II, 426.
53. Gerhart, Institutes, II, 670-671.
54. Gerhart, Institutes, I, 186.
55. John Williamson Nevin, The Mystical Presence and Other Writings on the Eucharist, edited by Bard Thompson and George H. Bricker (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1966), 201.
56. See Yrigoyen, 92-97.
57. For more on Gerhart's views on ecclesiology, the sacraments, and his assessment of the Mercersburg Theology, see Yrigoyen, especially chapter 4.

THE ROOTS OF UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST WORSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

We are living in an age of remarkable liturgical reformation. In the last twenty-five years every major denomination in our nation and the western world has published revised orders of worship. The print is hardly dry before someone demands further reformation that appears in "supplemental" or "trial" texts. All this effort seems to be asking, among other things, the fundamental question, "How does God best communicate with humankind?" Chester Pennington, with his eye particularly on the sermon, gets to the heart of the matter by suggesting rather forthrightly: "God has a communication problem (and) there is evidence that we are it." If we believe that worship as we currently experience it is in a state of fixed perfection and corresponds fully with its foundations in scripture, then Pennington is quite right and this could be a very brief forum indeed!

Although I sincerely hope that you recognize the humor intended by that remark, I am confident that many of you have been "burned" by your noble attempts to labor for "change" in the worship life of United Church of Christ congregations. We say that we are not a church of "fixed forms" and "rigid rites," but just try to move the placement of the offering and "sacred sequence" suddenly summons certain of the saints to their "jihad" battle stations.

More often than we realize, we invest what we have inherited from a generation or two ago with the force and normativity of antiquity. Doug Adams is quite right in his assessment of our current liturgical situation. He writes:

"The origins of American free church worship are unknown to nearly all Protestant and Catholic clergy as well as laity. In the absence of such knowledge, many American Protestants are bound to a pulpit dominated pattern of worship that dates back no further than the nineteenth century when the scope of worship and preaching was at its narrowest in terms of personal lay participation, minimal preaching on major social issues, and infrequent communion. The irony is that most free church worship is defined by nineteenth century forms when free church worship was least free."²

When we combine this liturgical amnesia with a predominant characteristic of our autonomous church polity, namely the responsibility of each local church and its clergy to shepherd the congregation's worship life, we risk certain hazards. Lesslie Newbigin once expressed it this way: "it is one of the tragedies of the situation that churches which have given their ministers the maximum liberty of liturgical improvisation have given them the minimum training in liturgical principles."³

Lest anyone think that this combination of historical misinformation and a contemporary deficit in liturgical principles is solely a Protestant problem, allow me to draw the circle of criticism more inclusively. A Roman Catholic scholar, J. D. Crichton, has revisited the popular notion that the so-called Tridentine Mass that was approved by Pope Pius V in 1570 was really an

anti-reformation liturgy tailor-made to rebuff Luther and Calvin. That view has predominated in most seminary textbooks, Protestant and Roman Catholic, for four hundred years. It has caused Protestants to be very hard on that liturgy on the ground that it was polemically aimed against the truth championed by the reformation. It has caused some Roman Catholics, especially the conservative followers of Archbishop Lefebvre, to champion that 16th century mass against the current mass of Paul VI on the ground that it heroically protected their church against the heresies of Augsburg and Geneva for four centuries.

Crichton, however, demonstrates convincingly that both points of view are in error. He cautions: "Sometimes it is useful to carry out a little historical investigation when charges like these are made ... (because) the first printed missal of 1474, nearly a hundred years before the Council of Trent, differs hardly at all from the missal of Pius V. ... It is difficult to see how a heresy could be refuted before it existed."⁴

Next to lethargy, there is likely no enemy more dangerous to authentic liturgical reform than the polemical heart! If we refuse to make the sign of the cross only because "Catholics" do that, or if Roman Catholics refuse to sing hymns because "Protestants" do that, or predominantly white congregations refuse to clap because African-American congregations do that, the Holy Spirit will have to resort to "sighs too deep for words (Rom. 8:26)" precisely because we render God's voice within us speechless.

Reinhold Niebuhr lamented our capacity to distort history and indulge in liturgical warfare almost 40 years ago. Although we tend to think of him first as a social ethicist, he was in fact a sensitive liturgical scholar as well. Listen to his counsel to those of us who share the United Church of Christ roots that he also cherished:

...the trouble with American Protestantism is that its protest against the various forms and disciplines (of worship) led to their destruction. It may be possible to have a brief period of religious spontaneity in which the absence of such disciplines does not matter. The evangelism of the American frontier may have been such a period. But this spontaneity does not last forever. When it is gone a church without adequate conduits of traditional liturgy⁵ and theological learning and tradition is without the waters of life.

The United Church of Christ is a reformation church, a Protestant church, but it is not a church of destructive protest. Our roots do not define us simply by what we are against. Our roots are not merely as shallow as the 19th century! Or only as deep as the 16th Century! Our roots are grounded in the church catholic to which scripture gives substance and the creeds give testimony and of which Jesus Christ is the sole head. This may define "roots" for you in a new way, but it is the trustworthy way that finds its true north not in any reformer or confession or polity or catechism but in the one who is the way, the truth and the life. What does it mean to understand our roots in this ecumenical frame of reference?

1. It means, first of all, that we are not leap-frog Christians who believe that nothing of consequence happened in church history between the death of the 12 apostles and the birth of the 16th century reformation or the witness of John Robinson! Yet, when some of us speak of our "reformation" roots, unlike our reformation forebears, we lock in on the European reformation era as though God were silent in the church prior to that time. This spirit is alien to Calvin

and Luther who frequently cited the witness of Tertullian, Augustine and other eminent church leaders from pre-reformation times.

It is also contrary to the spirit of John Robinson who, though he was critical of the Church of England and some of its liturgical heritage, affirmed that church's place within the one body of Christ. Listen to his testimony following his move from "separatism" to "puritanism" under the guidance of Henry Jacob:

To conclude, For my selfe, this I beleeeve with my heart before God, and profess with my tongue, and haue (hold) before the world, that I haue (hold) one and the same faith, hope, spirit, baptism, and Lord which I had in the Church of England and none other; that I esteem so many in that church, of what state, or order soever, as are truly partakers of that faith (as I account many thousand to be) for my Christian brethren; and myselfe a fellow-member with them of that one misticall body of Christ....

John Williamson Nevin, in a similar way, explains the "catholic" view affirmed by the Reformed Church in 1852 as our German forbears sought to produce a new book of worship. Nevin describes a report made by Philip Schaff to the Baltimore Synod that year:

In this report, the ground is taken distinctly, that the new Liturgy ought not to be shaped simply after modern models, reaching back no farther than the Reformation; that among these later schemes of worship, "special reference ought to be had to the Old Palatinate and other Reformed Liturgies of the sixteenth century;" but that the general basis of the work should be "the liturgical worship of the Primitive Church, the oldest ecclesiastical writers, and the Liturgies of the Greek and Latin Churches of the third and fourth centuries."

It is abundantly clear from the writings of these persons that although great care was exercised to be true to the witness of the New Testament in all matters relating to worship, there was a simultaneous caution about presuming that the New Testament could be read accurately only through "reformation" eyes. In brief, the roots of every church that grew out of the sixteenth century reformation are deeper than the sixteenth century, or that church is not rooted in that reformation at all!

2. This understanding of our roots does not mean, however, that our Protestant Reformation foundations are to be held in contempt -- or worse, that we should rest content to be unaware of them. It troubles me profoundly that the vast majority of our clergy and laity simply do not "know" our United Church of Christ history. Some time ago I was chastised by one of our New England members of the congregationalist tradition for the role of General Synod in the life of our denomination. The implications were quite clear in the complaint that "synods" must be an evil invention from that "other side" of our denomination, because no self-respecting congregationalist would tolerate such ecclesiastical big-business.

With considerable diplomatic reserve, I reminded the complainer that "synod" is a Bible word (Luke 2:43-44 in the Greek text), and that it belongs as much to New England congregationalism as to the Evangelical and Reformed or Hungarian Reformed part of our family. The Cambridge Platform, from the New England Synod by that same name (1646-48), has this remarkable paragraph concerning synods:

Synods orderly assembled, and rightly proceeding according to the pattern (of) Acts 15, we acknowledge as the ordinance of Christ...Elders and other Messengers ... are the matter of a Synod ... It belongeth unto Synods and councils, to debate and determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience ... The Synod's directions and determinations, so far as consonant to the word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission.

I have faced similar challenges on the issue of the frequency of celebrating Holy Communion, the place of formal "forms" for worship, the appropriateness of vestments and many other issues. In each instance, the assumption is that weekly Holy Communion, the use of stated "orders" and the wearing of certain vestments are simply foreign to the United Church of Christ heritage. However, on the question of the frequency of Holy Communion, Calvin clearly makes a case for its observance every Lord's day, as did John Robinson at Leyden and Samuel Sewall in Boston and John Williamson Nevins among the Pennsylvania Germans.⁹ And surely we know the position on that subject taken by Thomas Campbell and Barton Stone on the "Christian" side of our story. How can it be that such consensus in favor of weekly Holy Communion has been translated into behavior that suggests that anything more than a monthly or quarterly celebration of the sacrament is "Roman?"

On the subject of forms of worship and vestments we need not belabor the point. In the Book of Worship itself, I cite the following quotation from Henry Martyn Dexter, concerning the New England situation from colonial days to 1880:

Any Congregationalist church, whose taste and sense of expediency may so incline it, is at perfect liberty to order its worship by the liturgy of the Church of England, or the Protestant or Reformed Episcopal Church of the United States, or by a liturgy of its own. So long as it does nothing which shall give reasonable ground of offense to the other churches with which it is in fellowship, it may order its churches with which it is in fellowship, it may order its prayers, its praise, and all the methods of its worship, to its own entire content; and its pastor, remaining true to our fundamentals of doctrine and polity, though enrobed and endowed...with "chasuble, albe, amice, stole, maniple and zone, with two blessed towels, and all their appendages," would remain, in good faith and entirely, a Congregationalist minister still.¹⁰

In large measure, the move toward the intellectualization of our worship and the ascendancy of preaching almost to the exclusion of the sacrament of Holy Communion have compromised our sense of the mystery of God. John Dillenberger laments this almost "total victory" of wordy worship and comments, "the senses of touch, sight and hearing" are suppressed and our words have lost their "pointing and recognizing function," leaving them power only to draw attention to themselves.

As far back as 1948, in his book The Protestant Era, Paul Tillich warned against what he called "the death of the sacraments. ... A complete disappearance of the sacramental element," (not the same thing as particular sacraments), he said, would "lead to the disappearance of the cultus, and, finally, to the dissolution of the visible church itself."¹² The danger that he describes is not the doing of our reformation history. On the contrary, it is the consequence of our "throwing out the baby with the bath water" in our helter skelter treatment of worship for almost two centuries. We need to know our reformation

story...really know it, and not merely project back upon it the evolution of free church worship since 1800.

3. However, important as our reformation heritage is, it is not itself the object of our worship. Where God has, indeed, "brought forth more light and truth from God's holy word" since the sixteenth century, we need to welcome further reformation that corrects the limitations of our own past. Reformation of this order is far more demanding than many of us wish to contemplate. Helmut Thielike sees much of our liturgical "busyness" as a "flight into liturgism" but not a renewal of liturgy. He remarks, "How horrible that one should think one has done something for the kingdom of God by introducing liturgical vestments! As I said once before, it often looks as if the Word of God has emigrated from the text into textiles."³ Authentic reformation is costly. It requires the pain of change and a willingness to explore uncharted seas. It requires that we never allow a wall of separation to rise between worship as liturgy and worship as enacted ethics! It may even demand of us that we admit that we are "wrong" about matters that matter!

For example, our denomination, for centuries, has based its practice of excluding children from Holy Communion on Calvin's understanding of I Corinthians 11:29 ("For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself."). His reasoning is quite simple. First, he draws an analogy between the Passover Feast and the Lord's Supper and erroneously insists that Jewish children were barred from their holy meal until the age of reason. Again, erroneously, he comments that children, in some places, in the ancient church, were admitted to the Lord's Supper, "but the custom has deservedly fallen into disuse (ICR, p. 1352)." His remark shows no awareness of the then continuing practice of all the Orthodox Churches in which infants and children, once baptized, customarily receive the bread and wine. Then, misreading I Corinthians 11:29 to refer to the eucharistic elements rather than to the "body" of Christ, i.e., the assembled church, he concludes: "if only those who know how to distinguish rightly the holiness of Christ's body are able to participate worthily, why should we offer poison instead of life-giving food to our tender children (ICR p. 1353)."

My purpose is not to chastise Calvin but to criticize his followers who now have information that makes his position untenable but who suppress or ignore that information. For new light on this question, I urge you to consult⁴ the Report of the Bad Segeberg Consultation, titled ...And Do Not Hinder Them. This does not preclude the possibility of arguing against holy communion for children on some other ground. However, it does press us by the demands of honesty not to repeat Calvin's argument as though it were the last word.

On the other hand, there are times when we are unfair to the reformers precisely because we misrepresent their position on specific issues. Calvin, for example, is often depicted as the arch enemy of the arts. Listen to what he has to say, in spite of the excesses of some of his followers:

I am not gripped by the superstition of thinking absolutely no images (are) permissible. But because sculpture and painting are gifts of God, I seek a pure and legitimate use of each, lest those things which the Lord has conferred upon us for his glory and our good be not only polluted by perverse misuse but also turned into our destruction. We believe it wrong that God should be represented by a visible appearance -- because it cannot be done without some defacing of (God's) glory. -- Therefore it remains that only those things are to

be sculptured or painted which the eyes are capable of seeing: let not God's majesty, which is far above the perception of the eyes, be debased through unseemly representations (ICR I.XI.12)."

Needless to say, the reformers, giants of faith that they were, made enough mistakes on their own. They do not need the distortion of words put on their lips by zealots who claim to be their spiritual descendants.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to share a concern and a hope about the very title of this article: The Roots of United Church of Christ Worship. To the minds of some, the very wording of the title invites a narrow perspective on the boundaries of our heritage. In brief, it reinforces a denominationalism that dates itself only from the particular roots that lie under the topsoil of the reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On the other hand, if we minimize those roots or deny them, our historical identity itself is confused and compromised.

The resolution of our dilemma is more obvious than we may suspect. And this brings me to my hope. We dare not make an either-or out of a both-and. Yes, indeed, our particular heritage matters! But it is a sacred trust that we hold not for ourselves alone but for the entire church of Jesus Christ. Likewise, the rich gifts cherished by other denominations need not be seen as their exclusive "possession." It is my faith that authentic reformation in our worship life is not possible on the part of denominations living in isolation. For example, the challenge before us today is not to perpetuate the Protestant centrality of the preaching of the Word over the Roman Catholic centrality of the celebration of the sacrament! Our challenge is to realize that each camp, by virtue of its selective overemphasis, has only half a liturgy and God wills that we should share the full loaf.

In our United Church of Christ official Response to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, our General Synod called all the churches of Christendom to "a stronger affirmation of the particular heritage of each church and of the capacity of each church, without compromising the integrity of its own historical witness, to be enriched by opening its life to the heritage of other churches."¹⁵

For a "united and a uniting church," that openness to the gifts held in trust by other churches is now part of our "roots." Our Book of Worship cites, without embarrassment, its borrowing from the Church of the Brethren and the Episcopal Church and the Orthodox Churches and many others. In some matters, like inclusive language, we have dared to pioneer in ways that will undoubtedly be useful to other denominations as they seek to be faithful to authentic reformation in the language of worship.

What makes me hopeful about all of this is the fact that it is happening! The complementarity and interconnectedness of the liturgical reformation in our time is a sign of God's grace. It has caused Massey Shepherd to celebrate the impossibility of segregating the denominational strands of this movement and to shock many with his observation that worship is no longer a stumbling block to unity in the one church of Jesus Christ.¹⁶

And finally, a word of admonition! The liturgical reformation can be happening all around us and even within our own denominational house, but that does not

guarantee that it will reach your heart or mine, or transform the worship life of our local congregations. James Goughan, writing in the Christian Century, describes the problem in relation to restoring the unity of word and sacrament in our Sunday worship. He cautions:

There is a major obstacle blocking this reunion of word and sacrament in American Protestant worship. It is, as (James) White himself observes, the ignorance and indifference of a discouragingly large number of the clergy. Just as (Roman) Catholic liturgical reform succeeded or failed in specific places depending on whether the clergy there were knowledgeable about the nature of worship and educated their congregations accordingly, so the ecumenical success of Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry will depend on its reception by the ordained clergy.

Although I would make a case that musicians and other lay leaders share in this responsibility in the United Church of Christ to a larger degree than in many other denominations, Goughan still needs to be heard. Listen to his appeal:

Thus, while theologians across the theological spectrum agree more and more with Jurgen Moltmann that sacramental reform is indispensable to the renewal of the church, Richard Hudnut, a Presbyterian researcher on church renewal, confirms the (Roman) Catholic experience that the renewal of a particular parish almost universally begins with the renewal of its pastor.

If the Roots of United Church of Christ worship are to nourish us and the ecumenical church in our time, we must experience that conversion of heart that puts us truly in touch with those roots. And when we tap into those roots, amazing grace, we will find that they do not dead-end in Plymouth Colony or Calvin's Geneva or Budapest or the Evangelical Catechism. They will link us with the root system of the universal church that traces the ground of its being to Jesus Christ, who has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against his body, the church.

NOTES

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SPECIAL NOTE

"The Roots of United Church of Christ Worship" by the Rev. Thomas Dipko was a presentation given at the "Sunday Morning: A Convocation on Worship and Music" held at the Glenview United Church of Christ, Glenview, Illinois, June 22-24, 1989. This convocation was sponsored by the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries; Division of Evangelism and Local Church Development, The Chicago Theological Seminary, The Office for Church Life and Leadership of the United Church of Christ, and the six United Church of Christ Conferences of the Great Lakes Region.

For an audiocassette of the presentation, write to: Growingplans, UCBHM-DELCD, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY, 10115.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE EVANGELICAL AND REFORMED CHURCH TO THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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The merger of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church in June 1957 at Cleveland, Ohio, to which I was a witness, was a unique event in christendom. For the first time in the long history of the Christian Church, two separated branches, with almost diametrically opposed views concerning Sunday worship, the sacraments; liturgy, creeds, ecclesiology, and polity; one of whose roots were in England while the other's source was the Continent; for the first time in Christian history two such unlikely mates became married.

One of my vivid memories of June 1957 in Cleveland is the address made by Truman Douglass, then the chief executive officer of the Board for Homeland Ministries. Over and over again he repeated the phrase, "Not more of the same, but a new creation." "Not more of the same, but a new creation." "Not more of the same, but a new creation." Hoping against hope, he was pleading for "No more Es, no more Rs, no more Cs, but only UCCs." It was a stirring vision of what could be. That vision, that hope, still stirs me!

Introduction

This paper deals with the history, traditions and contributions of the Evangelical and Reformed (E & R) Church to the United Church of Christ.

Since history can be illuminated and clarified in part through studying the beliefs, writings and actions of specific persons, I shall devote the main substance of this essay to a retrospect of five key individuals: John Williamson Nevins and Philip Schaff, 19th century German Reformed theologians; H. Richard Niebuhr and his more famous brother, Reinhold Niebuhr, 20th century "E" theologians; and finally Paul Tillich, a minister of the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union, who was dismissed as a professor of theology at Frankfurt University by the Nazi government, immigrated to the United States and began teaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1933, and who, with the Niebuhr brothers, was also a member of the E & R Church.

The Traditions Contrasted

But before concentrating on these men, whom I will treat as representative and representatives of the Evangelical and Reformed (E & R) gifts to the UCC, I shall make some general statements and list other specific facts that flow through E & R channels into the UCC basin.

1. The E & R tradition is continental, in contrast to the Congregational background, which was English. They had far different experiences and thus differing world views.

For example, England was a nation hundreds of years before Germany became a unified country in 1871 under Bismarck. In fact, when the Es and Rs were in the old country there were more than 300 political units, each independent and separately administrated.

2. A second point of contrast is the way in which the Reformation was experienced. The Es and Rs knew first-hand the major Reformers: Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Melancthon, Bucer, et al. In England, the Reformation was initiated by decree of Henry VIII in 1534, and some historians view the subsequent 200 years of British ecclesiastical history (and its political history as well) as a protracted period, both within and without the Established Church, of coping with Henry's revolutionary decision. While Europe experienced a Reformation, England had a revolution, with Cromwell as a fact and symbol of it.

When the Puritans settled on these shores, their worship and general religious attitude, and subsequent political behavior, were more reminiscent of a revolution than a reformation. In contrast, the E & Rs who came to America were more inclined to accept "the powers that be." They had no difficulty, even though German, in swearing allegiance to the King of England. And during the American Revolution, while they sided with the colonies and fought with them, they did so reluctantly. They had no enthusiasm for war. They came to America to escape war.

3. The reasons for immigrating also point up the differing histories of the E & Rs, as compared to the Congregationalists. The English Puritans came "largely for the purpose of trying an experiment in Christian living," Samuel Eliot Morison, an authority on Puritanism, wrote in The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England. "A new City of God was their aim." And when they came, they were intolerant and uncompromising both in their beliefs and behavior. The dissenters permitted no dissent. According to the noted Congregationalist, Douglas Horton, former Dean of the Harvard Divinity School, the complete dissolution of the connection between church and state in Massachusetts did not occur until 1834, a full 200 years after the arrival of the Pilgrims. To say that Congregationalism was entrenched in New England is a gross understatement.

The Reformed Church in the United States

Now look at the Es and Rs. As we indicated, the German Reformed people started coming to America early in the 18th century to escape the wars and devastation of their lands which they had experienced for the previous hundred years. They came in poverty, some as indentured servants, simply to survive. They spoke a strange language and chose to settle primarily, in their earliest years, in Penn's Woods and Maryland because there they were free to practice their religion.

Perhaps we should pause here to consider a few more facts about the Es and Rs and their early years in America.

First, chronologically, come the Rs, who after several name changes, became the German Reformed Church in the United States, dropping the word "German" in 1867. They came from the Palatinate, which encompasses roughly both sides of the Upper Rhine, with Heidelberg as its center and capital.

It is estimated that there were 20,000 Germans in Pennsylvania in 1720 and 90,000 in 1776. In all 13 colonies at the time of the Revolution the Germans numbered about 225,000, a rather significant percentage of the total population of about 3,000,000. (Among whom, you will recall, 750,000 were African Americans.)

We don't know how many of these Germans were Reformed, but perhaps 45,000 in 1776. At the outset, the left wing ("sect") Germans, namely, the Mennonites, Amish, Moravian, and others, out-numbered the so-called "church" folk, the Lutherans and Reformeds.

When people run into the term "Reformed," the first question to arise in their mind is, "Reformed what?" The answer, and a very revealing one, is, "the Catholic Church Reformed." Let us remember, the Reformers by their very appellation, looked upon themselves and were looked upon, as continuing the Roman Catholic Church, Reformed. The title also was used to distinguish them from the Lutherans.

The chief problem of the Reformed Church in the colonial period was the lack of ministers. In fact, the denomination dates its founding to the first celebration of the Holy Communion on October 15, 1725, at Falkner Swamp (40 miles north of Philadelphia) by a school teacher, John Philip Boehm, who had been importuned by pious parents of his students to become their pastor, and who was later ordained.

The Holland Dutch had become the chief theological leaders of the Reformed tradition in the 16th century, and they maintained that position during the 17th and 18th centuries. It was natural and appropriate that they should send money and ministers to their German sisters and brothers in the colonies. From 1746 to 1793, they sent 37 ministers to the German Reformed Church in response to the appeal of the people. Foremost among these men was Michael Schlatter, who arrived in 1746 and the next year visited 46 congregations, consolidating them into the first Coetus or Synod.

When the German Reformed Church became fully free and no longer dependent upon the Holland Dutch (1793), the Synod consisted of 178 congregations with 15,000 communicant members, 40,000 adherents, and 24 pastors. In addition there were other congregations and ministers who had not by that time voted to join the Synod.

The Evangelical Synod of North America

Let us now turn to the early history of the Es, who, while also German, were different from their R brothers and sisters, having immigrated primarily to Missouri and southern Illinois early in the 19th century. They bore the scars of the Napoleonic Wars and were also motivated by their resentment of ecclesiastical paternalism and capricious nature of the German provincial governments. Each of these scores of political units had its own church administration (much like our state school systems). The clergy were regarded as state officials, and each province exerted strict control over the rites of baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial. A prime example of the state's control of religion is the action in Prussia of King Frederick William III (1797-1840) who in 1817 forced a marriage between the Lutherans and Reformeds which was known as the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union. The title "Evangelical" is the continental term for Protestant, in contrast to Roman Catholic. "Protestant," while originally and etymologically an affirmative term, meaning "to bear witness or to testify to" (from the Latin protestari), later and unfortunately was perceived as a negative term, implying that it was anti or against something. "Evangelical" is a Biblical term, from the Greek word evangelion for the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. Even the year of the forced union, 1817, was contrived, although appropriate. It was the 300th anniversary of the beginning of the reformation by Luther.

The Es, who settled in America's Midwest, were products of this Union, and they poured in with the new waves of German immigrants. From 1830 to 1845 the average annual immigration from Germany was about 40,000; a total of 600,000 during that 15-year period. St. Louis, for example, increased in population from 16,000 in 1840 to 78,000 in 1850, of which 22,000 had been born in Germany. When they came, they were on the whole, better educated than the Germans who had come over a hundred years before. Not a few of them knew Latin and Greek. What they lacked, like the early Reformeds, were ministers. The state church they left in Germany had no missionary outreach, no facilities for working outside its own provincial borders. Early E ministers came, primarily, from voluntary missionary associations set up in Germany and Switzerland. Three should be mentioned: Basel, Barmen and Bremen. Basel sent 288 ministers to America, of whom 158 served in E churches and 18 served R churches. Friedrich Schmid was the first, and he came in 1833.

Since many of the congregations were served by ministers from the missionary societies, and many of the lay persons were from the Prussian Union (the Lutheran and Reformed amalgamation), both ministers and lay persons felt that joining with an already established denomination in America was difficult, if not inappropriate. But the pressure for some kind of association was irresistible, and in 1840 the German Evangelical Church Society of the West, forerunner of the Evangelical Synod of North America, was born. By 1850 there were 25 ministers and 27 main congregations and various other "preaching points." Their primary doctrinal guides were the Augsburg Confession, Luther's Catechism, and the Heidelberg Catechism, the irenic guide shared also by the German Reformed Church.

Specific E and R Gifts

With this summary of the arrival of the Es and Rs, and a few general remarks, let me list some very specific gifts they brought into the United Church of Christ.

First and foremost, a Book of Worship, which embodies a high respect for the liturgical, theological, aesthetic and artistic sense in worship, and which at the same time demonstrates continuity and connection with the church universal, throughout all ages. This book links us through the Reformation and the Roman Church to the Patristic and Apostolic periods. The E & Rs bring to the UCC nothing more valuable than their Book of Worship.

Let me emphasize my main point here by repeating it: Accompanying this deep appreciation for liturgy is a strong sense of continuity with the past and a feeling of connection with all Christians everywhere and at all times. A symbol of this unity is the use of creeds which, unhappily, has been the source of so much disunity and misunderstanding in Christendom generally and in the UCC in particular.

What we intend to mean when we repeat the creed (usually the Apostles' or the Nicene) is implied in this definition of a creed suggested by my professor of theology at Lancaster Theological Seminary 45 years ago. Dr. Theodore Herman, who himself came from Germany, said to us, "Boys," (By the way, that was the last year he could say "Boys," because in the class after ours was Beatrice Weaver, who in 1948 became the first woman to be ordained into the E & R Church.) "Boys, please remember: A creed is not an individual test of belief, but a collective testimony of faith."

Second, on my list and in importance of E & R gifts to the UCC is one I've already outlined: a different culture, a different language, a different perspective: the Continental (or Germanic) look, which while theologically liberal and open, takes theology and Biblical scholarship very seriously.

A third gift from the E & Rs is a powerful Christology. By that I mean a strong sense of the incarnation and the atonement. Flowing from this Christology is a high ecclesiology, a sense of the church as the Body of Christ and not simply an aggregation of individuals. This implies a belief in the Oneness of the Body, the Church, and therefore provides the motive for ecumenical concern, which resulted in the merger between the Es and the Rs and now the UCC.

Let me illustrate how this Christological urgency, among the Rs at least, has not abated. Gabriel Fackre, once professor of theology at Lancaster Theological Seminary and a direct descendant of the Mercersburg divines, whom we will soon look at more closely, now holds the Abbott Chair of Theology at Andover Newton Theological Seminary, the oldest endowed professorship in theology in the country. He himself is one of the E & R gifts to the UCC. Several years ago he gave the Earl Lectures at Pacific School of Religion. At lunch between lectures, I asked Gabe what he was working on just now. Immediately, and not unexpectedly he replied, "My Christology."

One of the legacies of the Mercersburg Theology is to help us see that we must forever be working on our Christology, especially now in this pluralistic, global village with a plethora of religious commitments and communities which requires us to be in daily dialogue because we are in constant contact with each other as neighbors.

"How does our evolving Christology fit us for this new age of religious pluralism? Are the heirs of Mercersburg now called to a much broader vision of ecumenism?" These are questions we may legitimately raise but which obviously we do not have space to pursue within the limits of this paper.

A fourth gift to the UCC is the E & R commitment to education and a highly-educated ministry. We brought to the UCC merger 13 educational institutions.

Two preparatory schools

Massanutten in Virginia, and Mercersburg Academy in Pennsylvania.

I know Mercersburg best because I was a student there for four years. The most famous living alumnus is Jimmy Stewart, who went to Princeton after attending Mercersburg. The campus has a beautiful setting at the foot-hills of the Tuscarora Mountains, and on its highest crest is a handsome Gothic cathedral (or chapel). A good Congregationalist, President Calvin Coolidge, attended ground-breaking ceremonies for the chapel, and Mrs. Coolidge served on the Board of Trustees. Both their sons were students there; in fact, one died on the campus from an infected blister incurred while playing tennis.

Eight colleges

Catawba, Cedar Crest, Franklin and Marshall, Heidelberg, Hood, Lakeland, and Ursinus (all R); and Elmhurst (E).

Three theological schools

Lancaster (R; in Pennsylvania); Eden (E; near St. Louis); and Mission House (R), which united with Yankton (C) in 1960 to become United, of the Twin Cities.

Elmhurst was founded by the Es primarily to prepare teachers for their parochial schools, of which they had 266 with over 12,000 students by 1883. In addition, both Es and Rs usually had Sunday Schools in each church, with instruction virtually from birth to death. It was not unusual, roughly from 1860 to 1960, for Sunday School enrollment to exceed the membership of the sponsoring congregation.

Christian education before confirmation was and still is taken very seriously, and up to a few years ago it was customary to conduct "catechetical classes" for two years for 7th and 8th grade youngsters before they were confirmed.

This brings us to another gift, archaic, but still instructive, namely The Heidelberg Catechism, which bears the name of the capital city of the German state in which it was written by Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83), a professor of theology at the university, and Caspar Olevianus (1536-85), a Biblical scholar and gifted preacher at the court of Frederick III, the Pious (1515-76). Both men were in their mid-twenties at the time it was written, in 1563.

The Heidelberg Catechism has been called "the most irenic and ecumenical of all the confessions of Protestantism." We can understand why this is so by briefly describing the events surrounding its birth and its authors.

The Reformation was introduced into the Palatinate in 1546, the year Luther died, and the region entertained (and was confused by) a variety of evangelical views, especially the Lutheran and Reformed. Frederick III, Elector of the Palatinate, called upon a native of the principality, Philip Melanchthon, for advice.

Melanchthon, a lay theologian, was Luther's chief disciple and interpreter. He also personally knew Zwingli and Calvin. He had taught Ursinus at Wittenberg, was responsible for the re-organization of the University at Heidelberg, and had recommended Ursinus for a teaching position there, where his brother and his brother-in-law taught.

Melanchthon counseled Biblical simplicity and moderation, warning against extremist views. It was probably he who recommended Ursinus, perhaps also Olevianus, as persons who could write a moderate theological guide for confessional and educational purposes. (As an historical aside, we should note that Olevianus, as a young man, saved Frederick's son from drowning, which may have enhanced his status in the elector's court.)

A sign of the importance of the Heidelberg Catechism to the Rs can be seen in the fact that one of its colleges is named "Heidelberg" and another is named "Ursinus."

To indicate that the Catechism is still a solid guide to serious Christians, consider the answer to Question 21. The question is, "What is true faith?" The answer is: "True faith is not only a certain knowledge whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to me in God's Holy Word, but also a wholehearted trust which the Holy Spirit creates in me through the Gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, God has given the forgiveness of sins, everlasting

righteousness, and salvation, out of sheer grace solely for the sake of Christ's saving work."²

A distinctive contribution of the Es has been at least a dozen hospitals still in operation and often called "Deaconess" hospitals, in reference to the special role of women who were trained to operate them. These women also managed children's homes, homes for the aged and similar institutions.

Both the Es and Rs had Home Mission Boards as well as Foreign Mission Boards. Gustav Niebuhr, the father of Reinhold, H. Richard and Hulda, was a "home missionary" of the Es and founded St. John's UCC in San Francisco, where the Northern California Conference offices are now located.

Gustav's family lived in a Reformed part of Germany, and the Heidelberg Catechism was his chief source of religious education. He left Germany in 1881, when he was 18, settled in the Midwest and prepared for the ministry at Eden Seminary. After graduation he was assigned to assist Edward Jacob Hosto, the first E missionary to the far West.

Niebuhr came to San Francisco, married Lydia, one of Hosto's twelve children, and established St. John's in June 1886. They lived at 520 Greenwich Street, where Hulda was born.

To turn to foreign missions, the Es were active in India and Honduras, while the Rs had mission stations in Japan, China and Iraq.

It is of interest to note that the Rs formed their first missionary society in 1826, and between 1838 and 1866 they channeled their money through and worked jointly with their Congregational counterpart, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, established in 1810.

Five Giants of the Church

I turn now to look at five men who illustrate and epitomize the E & R theological contributions to the UCC. Each of these men was an eminent theologian, and what they offer the UCC is a tradition of sound and scholarly theology.

First, the 19th century R personages: John Williamson Nevin and Philip Schaff, both professors at the Theological Seminary of the German Reformed Church at Mercersburg, predecessor of Lancaster Seminary.

The Mercersburg Theology, largely the product of Nevin and Schaff, is by far the greatest contribution made to the American religious scene by the German Reformed Church, and therefore by extension and absorption to the United Church of Christ. The Book of Worship, which I mentioned earlier, is a direct product of the Mercersburg men. It is their theology liturgicalized, made practical for corporate worship.

By common agreement among church historians, the New England theology, which dominated American theological thought in the 17th and 18th centuries, had lost its energy by the middle of the 19th century. Jonathan Edwards, called by his biographer Perry Miller, "the most profound philosophical intellect that has yet appeared in America," had died in 1758, and there were no disciples capable of sustaining his thought.

By the mid-19th century German Biblical, theological and historical scholars had taken center stage, and the first thing Schaff and Nevin did was to introduce these German luminaries to America. Mercersburg was a bridge between European and American theological scholarship. Then Schaff and Nevin went beyond their teachers to carve out a creative movement whose ideas and influence are still felt.

John Williamson Nevin (1803-86)

Nevin was born and reared in a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian family about 40 miles from Mercersburg. He was graduated from Union College, near Schenectady, New York, and received his divinity degree at Princeton Seminary in 1826, where he studied under one of the early Presbyterian theological giants, Charles Hodge. When Hodge left to study in Europe for two years, he invited his star pupil, Nevin, to teach his biblical courses.

Later, in 1828, Nevin taught at the more liberal Presbyterian school, Western Theological Seminary, near Pittsburgh, from which he was invited to Mercersburg in 1840. Until Schaff arrived in 1844, Nevin was almost solely responsible for teaching all the courses at the fledgling seminary of the German Reformed Church. Nevin left Mercersburg in 1851, although he remained active in the church, especially in helping to prepare a liturgy, the successor of which is the Book of Worship to which I earlier alluded.

In 1861 Nevin became a professor at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, serving as President of F. & M. from 1866 to 1876. (Incidentally, the first President of F. & M.'s Board of Trustees was James Buchanan, to date the only President of the U.S. from Pennsylvania, who had been born at Mercersburg, now lived at his home, Wheatland, near the college campus, and whose funeral was conducted by Nevin.) It is ironic that Nevin and his writings were better known in Europe than in America.

Philip Schaff (1819-93)

The second, and more famous partner at Mercersburg, was Philip Schaff, the preeminent American church historian of the 19th century.

Three of Schaff's works are still used as solid reference works: The three-volume Creeds of Christendom, the eight-volume History of the Christian Church, and the 15-volume Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge. In addition, he was author of 26 other major works and editor of a dozen others, often multi-volumed, such as the 28-volume Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Lange's 25-volume Bibelwerk, and the American Church History Series of 13 volumes. Schaff was at Mercersburg from 1844 to 1863. In 1870 he became professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where he served the wider Christian community until his death in 1893.

Not only did Schaff with his colleague Nevin fill up the pages of both the German and English Reformed Church periodicals, but they also founded the Mercersburg Review, which published literally thousands of additional pages of their theological convictions.

Schaff was always proud to say that he was "Swiss by birth, German by education, and American by choice." Born in Chur, Switzerland, he was early sent to some pre-university schools in Germany, after which he attended the Universities at Tübingen, Halle and Berlin. A superior student already marked for a career

within academia, Schaff was recommended by his professors to a visiting committee from the German Reformed Church who had travelled to Germany charged with finding a professor. (It is interesting to note that Schaff was baptized in a Swiss Reformed Church, confirmed in a German (Lutheran) Church of the Prussian Evangelical Union, and ordained in a Reformed Church of the same Evangelical Union.)

Schaff, although only 25 years old, was chosen. He accepted and set sail, arriving in the United States on August 12, 1844. He delivered his inaugural address in Reading, Pennsylvania, on October 25, 1844, on the subject, The Principle of Protestantism, which was expanded to over 200 pages and published the next year.

Douglas Horton, the late Dean of Harvard Divinity School, and from 1938 to 1955 the minister and executive secretary of the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches, wrote of Schaff's move to Mercersburg:

This election was one of the greatest gifts ever made by any part of the American church to the church as a whole, for Schaff brought to this country the magnificent achievements of German religious thought. He not only introduced to American theological classrooms what is known as the historical method, now accepted in every leading institution of learning, but with Nevin he also helped the whole church to see the importance of time-honored and meaningful ordinances of worship. ... To the Mercersburg Theology, as the thought of the two men came³ to be called, the United Church of Christ owes its own special debt.

The Anxious Bench

Nevin initiated the Mercersburg Movement in 1843 with a pamphlet entitled "The Anxious Bench," which he expanded into a book the following year. It was a soundly reasoned and impassioned treatise against the gross expressions of excitement prompted by the revivals that were disturbing Christians all through the states.

The specific incident which triggered Nevin was the "trial sermon" of a young man from Princeton who was a candidate for pastor of the Mercersburg congregation. At the evening service, the young parson, William Ramsey, brought out the anxious bench, an ordinary bench set up near the altar or communion table when sinners were called to come if they were "anxious" about their salvation. Such "altar calls" in one form or another have been part of every revivalist's bag of tricks. Sinners are admonished to confess their sins and sometimes the excitement gets out of hand.

In this case, at Mercersburg, as the congregation quieted down, Dr. Nevin was asked to say a few words. He is reported to have said something to the effect that just because the congregation had gotten some good exercise, they shouldn't assume that they had progressed at all in their piety.

In his book, The Anxious Bench, Nevin pointed out the dangers of emotionalism as revealed in revivalism. He contrasted what he called the "system of catechism" with the "system of the bench."

Especially pernicious, in his view, was the subjectivism and individualism of the bench, which in turn led to sects, the division of the Body of Christ.

Listen a bit to Nevin, in The Anxious Bench.

No conversions⁴ are more precarious and insecure than those of the Anxious Bench.

Coming to the Anxious Bench is not coming to Christ.⁵

Vows and pledges that spring from excitement rather than reflection are to be considered fanatical, and as such neither rational nor free.⁶

Loud groaning, crying, shouting, clapping of hands, jumping, falling down...The truth is that no satisfactory stopping place can be found in the system of New Measures (the Bench).⁷

A dozen perhaps are heard praying at once in all unseemly postures and with the most violent gestures. The atmosphere of such a meeting may be exciting, intoxicating, bewildering; but it has no power whatever to dispose the mind to devotion.⁸

Fanaticism has no power to make God's presence felt. It is wild, presumptuous and profane where it affects to partake more largely of the power of heaven. It is likely to be narrow, intolerant, sinister, and rabidly sectarian.⁹

At the Bench justification is by feeling, not by faith.¹⁰ It is wholly subjective, and therefore visionary and false.

The spirit¹¹ of the Anxious Bench is at war with the spirit of the Catechism.

In the Bench, a person gets religion, and so stands over it and above it as the owner of property. In opposition to this, the true theory of religion carries us continually beyond the individual to the view of a far deeper and more general form of existence in which his particular life is represented to stand. Thus sin is not simply the offspring of a particular will, putting itself forth in the form of actual transgressions, but a wrong habit of humanity itself, a general and universal force which includes and rules the entire existence of the individual person from the very start.¹²

As you can deduce from these passages, in the minds of the Mercersburg men religious education (the catechism) was superior to the expression of raw emotion (the Bench) for a person's growth in the Faith.

The Mercersburg Theology

Before offering some further words of Schaff and Nevin, I'd like to try to epitomize their theological positions.

They clearly believed that something significant, the most significant thing in history, happened in the Christ-event. This was an objective, salvific event, independent of humanity's subjective perception. The force or energy of this event created the Church and is carried by the Church, which Scripture call the "Body of Christ." The sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, incorporate

believers into this Body and provide them with the means of participation and growth in the Christian way and its blessings.

The Church is the Mother of all her children. She brings them to birth, nourishes them and leads them to salvation. Individuals do not get together and form a church. Rather the Church gets the people of God together and makes them Christians.

Despite its diseases, defects and defections, the Church carries Christ's energy and performs its role in the Apostolic period, in the Patristic period and during the Middle Ages. Like any organism, the church grows and develops, warts and all.

The Reformation, therefore, evolved out of the Roman Catholic Church and is the fruit of its finest inclinations.

Schaff and Nevin, if I have interpreted them properly, came to three conclusions:

First, it is naive, improper and un-historical for any Christian or Christian group to think that they can hop, skip and jump back over the Roman Church to the so-called "Primitive Church."

Mercersburg says: This can't be done. The Event created the Church, and suffused it with energy that has been with it since Pentecost. To leap-frog over the Roman Church is to jump out of the river and therefore never to be in a position where one can connect with the flow of energy that brings salvation.

The second conclusion Schaff and Nevin reached was that since both the Roman Church and the Reformation Churches were legitimate channels of grace, there was hope of a reunion, a re-uniting, of these branches into what they called an "Evangelical Catholic Church."

Their final conclusion was this: nothing was more diseased in Christendom, nothing more dangerous and deleterious, especially in Protestantism, than "the sect mentality," the tendency to split off from the main trunk of the Christian tree because of polity or theology or inconsequential practices.

In short, the Mercersburg theologians through their influence on the German Reformed Church contributed to the UCC a high Christology, a high liturgy and a high ecclesiology, all products of high scholarship and deep faith. They really believed something eventful happened in Bethlehehem and Nazareth and Jerusalem two thousand years ago. That series of events, God-induced, placed in motion the means of salvation through the church available by faith.

Let us now hear how Nevin and Schaff spoke of these objective realities. First, Nevin:

"This objective fact (the Incarnation) is itself the gospel...The power that saves us is not in our experience or faith; it is wholly in the object with which our faith is concerned. The objective reality from which Christianity springs, the new order of existence, which was constituted for the world by the great fact of the Incarnation, must be allowed also to be historical."¹³

Now Schaff. In a book written primarily for the laity, he made a personal confession upon which his life as a professor of historical theology was based.

He wrote, "The person of Christ is the great central miracle of history¹⁴...He is the center of the unity of mankind, the recapitulation of humanity¹⁵...the impersonation of the gospel¹⁶...The person of Christ is to me the surest as well as the most sacred of all facts, as certain as my own personal existence; yea, even more¹⁷ so: for Christ lives in me, and he is the only valuable part of my existence¹⁸...The life and character of Jesus Christ is the holy of holies in the history of the world."

The fact of the Christ-event led Nevin and Schaff directly to the fact of the church. "A theology which is truly Christocentric must follow the creed, must be objective, must be historical; with this, must be churchly; and, with this again, must be sacramental and liturgical."¹⁹

"The Church is the depository and continuation of the earthly human life of Jesus Christ in the world."²⁰

"The theology we are speaking of, then, is churchly. It believes in a sphere of supernatural powers and forces flowing from the historical fact of Christ's birth, death, and glorification, which are themselves present in the world historically (not magically)."²¹

"Christianity can never transcend itself. It can never become absolutely more than it has been from the beginning, in the person of Christ and in the truth of the Gospel. It belongs to its very nature, however, that it should not remain in the person of Christ or the letter of the Gospel, but pass over in to the life of the church. This implies development. In its very constitution the church involves a process...."²²

The Principal of Protestantism

That was Nevin. Now let us turn again to Schaff, primarily from the Principle of Protestantism.

After establishing the incarnation and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as the pivotal events for Christian theology, Schaff presents the life principle of the Reformation (the Principle of Protestantism) as "the doctrine of justification of the sinner before God by the merit of Christ alone through faith."²³ This doctrine, he suggests, is "the polar star and center" of the Reformation and of the Christian life.

Faith becomes saving or justifying faith only as it apprehends the objective power of God as saving act and fact in Jesus Christ. Sin he views as not simply a "debilitation of moral powers...but as a real corruption of these powers"²⁴ so that persons are unable to produce from themselves anything that is good.

We should pause here to remark that Nevin and Schaff think so much alike on these subjects that they seem almost to quote each other. After all, Nevin was Schaff's translator in their early years together and might be expected to have put some of his thoughts and words into Schaff's mind and mouth. Since both rail vehemently against subjectivism, sectarianism and the unhistorical attitude of "the Puritans" in particular, it may be helpful to intersperse some of Nevin's views as we look at Schaff.

As if to reinforce his colleague's view of justification, Nevin writes: "(If) what is called justifying faith is no longer tied to the objective Gospel (without which, however, it cannot be faith at all), but hugs simply the Gospel

of this subjective assurance a man may have of God's mercy in his own mind, (it becomes), in fact, justification by fancy or feeling."²⁵

It should be noted that many of the Nevin-Schaff themes and concerns reappear in the three final theologians we shall consider, namely, the Niebuhr brothers and Tillich.

For example: the emphasis on the objective and historical; the sect mentality and divisiveness of the Church, as further exposed in H. Richard Niebuhr's The Social Sources of Denominationalism; the depth and power of sin (see Reinhold Niebuhr's Nature and Destiny of Man); and "the Principle of Protestantism" and Christological concerns further extended and delineated by Paul Tillich's "Protestant Principle" and "The New Being."

Schaff points out the two most virulent diseases of Protestantism (rationalism, which he calls "theoretic sectarianism;" and sectarianism, which, he suggests, is "practical rationalism"). And he indicts Puritan Protestantism, "the main basis of our North American church" with an "unhistorical and unchurchly character."²⁶

Puritanism, he writes, "falls far behind the German Reformation by its revolutionary, unhistorical, and consequently unchurchly character, and carries in itself no protection whatever against an indefinite subdivision of the church into separate atomistic sects. For having no conception at all of a historical development of Christianity, and with its negative attitude of blind irrational zeal toward its own past, it may be said to have armed its children with the same right and the same tendency, too, to treat its own authority with equal independence and contempt."²⁷

Perhaps the greatest contribution of Schaff and Nevin to American theology is their understanding of the church as organic, the developing Body of Christ. The church grows to become what God in Christ intended it to be. "The life of Christ in the church includes in itself potentially, from the first, all that it can ever become in the end."²⁸ The church is in history and therefore, in part, subject to the historical process. "History is the bearer of the Church."²⁹

There is no other way to return to the historical Jesus, in their view, except through the Church of the Middle Ages and the Patristic and Apostolic periods. One can imagine the gasps in First Church, Reading, when Schaff affirmed that "the spiritual wealth of the Middle Ages...belongs to us of right as fully at least as it does to the Church of Rome"³⁰ and that "the entire Catholic Church as such, so far as it might be considered the legitimate bearer of the Christian faith and life, pressed with inward necessary impulse toward Protestantism."³¹

He continued, "The Reformation is the legitimate offspring, the greatest act of the Catholic Church...whereas the Church of Rome...has parted with the character of catholicity in exchange for that of particularity."³²

Notice how closely Nevin parallels Schaff:

"The Middle Ages form, properly speaking, no retrogression for Christianity. They are to be regarded rather as the womb in which was formed the life of the Reformation itself."³³

If Protestantism be not derived by true and legitimate succession from the church life of the Middle Ages, it will be found perfectly vain to

think of connecting it genealogically with the life of the church at any earlier point.³⁴

The life of the church in the fifth, fourth, and third centuries, looks indeed toward the age of Luther; but not immediately or directly. It looks toward it only through the Middle Period that was to come between.³⁵

...Protestantism...did not spring in the way of direct historical continuation from the fourth century, or the third, or the second: but strictly and fully from the more advanced life of the Middle Ages....³⁶

One final contribution of Schaff and Nevin is their conviction concerning the unity of the Church, the Body of Christ, which expressed itself in a broad and deep ecumenism. They believed in the reunion of the churches, even a day when the Roman and Reformation churches would be one.

"Protestantism cannot be consummated without Catholicism...."³⁷

Before that millenium, however, Schaff sees a union of the German and English churches and therefore foresees the United Church of Christ. At the close of The Principle of Protestantism we read these prescient words, anticipating (as it were) the United Church of Christ.

The two leading nationalities, which are continually coming into contact in this country, and flowing into one another with reciprocal action, are the English and the German. The further advancement of the American church, consequently, must proceed mainly from a special combination of German depth and Gemuethlichkeit with the force of character and³⁸ active practical talent, for which the English are distinguished.

The time has now come, when our churches should again rise out of the ashes of the old German Adam,³⁹ enriched and refined with the advantages of the English nationality.

What we most need now is, theoretically, a thorough, intellectual theology, scientifically free as well as decidedly believing, together with a genuine sense for history; and practically, a determination to hold fast the patrimony of our fathers and to go forward joyfully at the same time in the way in which God's Spirit by providential signs may lead, with a proper humble subordination of all we do for our own denomination to the general interest of the one universal church.⁴⁰

Nevin, while not as specific, nonetheless lay the broad theological foundation for the unity of the church in his sermon entitled "Catholic Unity," preached at the joint Convention of the Reformed Dutch and the German Reformed Churches on August 8, 1844, at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

This sermon was printed with the English translation of Schaff's The Principle of Protestantism in June 1845.

Using Ephesians 4:4-6 as his text, Nevin said:

He (Paul) does not say 'Let there be one body and one Spirit,' simply

urging Christians to seek such agreement among themselves as might justify this view of their state; but the fact is assumed as already in existence, and is made the ground of the exhortation that goes before. There is one body and Spirit, and therefore are ye bound to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The unity of the Church is not something which results first from the thought and purpose of the vast membership of which it is composed, but, on the contrary, it is the ground out of which this membership itself springs, and in which perpetually it stands, and from which it must derive evermore all its harmony, and stability, and activity, and strength.

The Brothers Niebuhr

It is time to turn to two representative 20th century theologians, the Niebuhr brothers (Reinhold and Richard), whose father, you will recall, emigrated from Germany; there was reared within the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union, and here became an "E," was graduated from Eden Seminary and was an early missionary to the West, founding St. John's Church in San Francisco.

While it is not a straight line from Schaff and Nevin to Reinhold and Richard, the theologies of the brothers are clearly grounded in, related to and out-growths of similar concerns voiced at Mercersburg.

Richard even borrowed an appellation from Schaff at one point, referring to himself as a "Protestant Catholic."

We should state at the outset that these two men, by the force of their personalities, their teaching and their writing contributed not only to the UCC but to the whole church.

There is some truth to the remark that "Reinie" worked to reform the culture while Richard's work was to reform the church. As symbols of this crisp distinction, we might note Reinhold's Moral Man and Immoral Society and Richard's The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry, the latter published in 1954 after a year's study of theological education initiated by the American Association of Theological Schools and probably the most influential book on that subject in this century. You may recall the most frequently quoted statement from this work: "The goal of the Church is the increase among men and women of the love of God and neighbor."⁴²

A few bare biographical notes on the brothers must suffice. They grew up learning German in the home and the church, and English in the schools and streets. Their father had actually left Germany to get away from his father; and their mother, Lydia Hosto, was the daughter of the first missionary from the Es to California. Walter, the oldest of the Niebuhr sons became a businessman, and Hulda, the eldest child, became a professor of Christian Education at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago.

Rather revealing of Reinhold and Richard's life-long personality differences is the fact that as children, given the choice of musical instruments, Reinhold chose the trombone while Richard took the flute.

Although the younger, Richard is the brother I'd like to introduce first, primarily because of some similarities he shares with the Mercersburg men.

H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962)

Helmut Richard Niebuhr was born in Missouri and enrolled in the E college, Elmhurst, at age 14. After four years, he entered Eden Theological Seminary, from which he was graduated in 1915. In 1916 he was ordained and served an E church in St. Louis. In 1919 he returned to Eden as a professor, leaving in 1922 to study at Yale, where he received the B.D. and Ph.D. degrees in 1924. He was recycled to Elmhurst as President and then moved back to Eden in 1927 as Dean.

While at Eden he was also chair of the Es' "Committee on Relations With Other Churches," which drew up the Plan of Union for the merger in 1934 of the Es and Rs, to which, incidentally, my father was a delegate.

In 1931 he moved to Yale Divinity School where he was a faculty member until his death in 1962.

During his early years, trying to make up for what he thought were deficiencies in his education, he enrolled in a score of different colleges and universities, which gave Reinhold an opportunity to say that Richard was in "academic vagabondage."

Perhaps no other major contemporary theologian combined so well devout piety and solid reasoning. One of his most scathing criticisms was reserved for liberals who had moved too far from the Biblical and classical traditions of the church. Of their preaching and witness he wrote: "A God without wrath brought humanity without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."⁴³

Two footnotes to Richard's life: He helped Paul Tillich resettle in the United States in 1933 after the Nazis removed him from his teaching post, and he translated Tillich's The Religious Situation in 1932.

In our consideration of Richard's contribution to the UCC, and, indeed, to all Christendom, we shall look only at two of his books: The Social Sources of Denominationalism, written when he was Dean at Eden, and still widely read and quoted, and Christ and Culture, perhaps his best known work, published in 1951.

The Social Sources of Denominationalism reveals affinity to Schaff and Nevin in its aversion to division in the church, its broad ecumenical vision and its high hope for reunion. In this study, he exposes the historical, sociological and ethical roots of denominationalism. He speaks of the churches of the disinherited (the poor); churches of the middle class; churches and nationalism; churches of the immigrants; regional churches in America; and churches divided by color.

Here are a few nuggets found in this study, published in 1929:

Denominationalism in the Christian church is an unacknowledged hypocrisy.⁴⁴

Denominations represent the accommodation of religion to the caste system. They are emblems of the victory of the world over the church, of the secularization of Christianity, of the church's sanction of that divisiveness which the church's gospel

condemns...Denominationalism thus represents the moral failure of Christianity."⁴⁵

The character of a religious movement is probably more decisively determined by its definition of the sin from which salvation is to be sought than by its view of that saving process itself.⁴⁶

Many an immigrant church became more⁴⁷ a racial and cultural than a religious institution in the New World.

Race discrimination is so respectable an attitude in America that it could be accepted by the church without subterfuge of any sort.⁴⁸

Turning to Richard's Christ and Culture, we again see his relationship (perhaps unconscious and unrecognized) to the Mercersburg theologians, especially in his statements which echo Nevin and Schaff's criticism of individualistic, subjective and unhistorical Christianity.

Niebuhr writes about the decisions Christians make in the freedom of faith. Although titled Christ and Culture, the book is really wrestling with what Niebuhr calls "the enduring problem," the relationship of the church and the world. His chapter titles indicate the possibilities: "Christ against Culture;" "Christ of Culture;" "Christ above Culture;" "Christ and Culture in Paradox;" and "Christ the Transformer of Culture."

Most of the quotations I offer are from his final chapter, entitled a "Concluding Unscientific Postscript" (Kierkegaard's phrase).

"The decisions we make in the freedom of faith...are made, it appears, on the basis of relative insight and faith, but they are not relativistic. They are individual decisions, but not individualistic. They are made in freedom, but not in independence; they are made in the moment, but are not nonhistorical."⁴⁹

Our individual Christian decisions are not individualistic,...because they cannot be made in solitariness on the basis of a truth that is 'true for me.' We do not confront an isolated Christ known to us apart from a company of witnesses who surround him, point to him, interpret this and that feature of his presence, explain to us the meaning of his words, direct our attention to his relations with God and the Spirit. Without direct confrontation there is no truth for me in all such testimony; but without companions, collaborators, teachers, corroborating witnesses, I am at the mercy of my imaginations.⁵⁰

...We make our individual decisions with freedom and⁵¹ in faith; but we do not make them in independence and without reason.

To make our decisions in faith is to make them in view of the fact that no single person or group or historical time is the church; but that there is a church of faith in which we do our partial, relative work and on which we count. It is to make them in view of the fact that Christ is risen from the dead, and is not only the head of the church but the redeemer of the world. It is to make them in view of the fact that the world of culture--the achievement⁵² of humanity--exists within the world of grace--God's Kingdom.

To say the least about these powerful statements, we detect in Niebuhr (as in Mercersburg before him) a high Christology and a high ecclesiology. For both, the incarnation of Christ and the church as the Body of Christ are the pillars of faith.

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

Now we come to the older Niebuhr brother, Karl Paul Reinhold, who was born at Wright, Missouri, grew up in Missouri and Illinois, and was led into the ministry because he felt his father was "the most interesting man in town." After graduating from E schools, Elmhurst and Eden, he received the B.D. and M.A., degrees from Yale and moved to Detroit to become pastor of Bethel Evangelical Church in 1915, which he served until 1928.

He was called to Union Theological Seminary in 1928, where he stayed until his retirement in 1960 to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he died in 1971.

If you know nothing of Niebuhr, perhaps you've heard of his famous prayer, written in 1934 and later adopted as the official prayer of Alcoholics Anonymous. (Even Hallmark paid to use it on their cards!) It reads:

O God, give us the serenity to accept what cannot be changed, courage to change what should be changed, and wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

His most famous book, usually in two volumes, is his Gifford Lectures, The Nature and Destiny of Man, the first part of which was concluded, literally, as Nazi bombs rained upon Edinburgh in 1939.

Niebuhr is best known for his analysis of and preoccupation with sin. John Bennett, for many years a colleague of Niebuhr's at Union, said that a number of observers claim that Niebuhr had only one sermon to preach: on sin and grace! And he preached in literally (and actually) hundreds of colleges and universities across the country, usually averaging 40 a year for 25 years. And you who have heard him can testify, I believe, that he pointed to the depths of sin in order, perhaps, to make clear the heights of grace. With energy and passion, but most of all with great intellectual power, he exposed the ways in which sin corrupted, corroded and distorted every level of personal, social and institutional existence.

One time, in an aside, Niebuhr remarked that he regretted the title he gave to one of his most famous books, Moral Man and Immoral Society. He said he should have entitled the book Immoral Man and More Immoral Society. Sin, Niebuhr suggests, is not necessary but inevitable. Sin does not reside in our essence but in our existence. It is not compelled by being-as-such but impelled by our will and pride and egocentricity, what he called in later years our "self-regard."

Freedom, Niebuhr felt, creates the possibility of actions which are contrary to the essential nature of human-kind. He suggests that the root of the problem of sin is humanity's self-transcendence and freedom, which are marks of the imago dei but which give persons the opportunity to go astray. He sometimes referred to original sin as "universal estrangement."

Niebuhr's "Christian Realism" made him especially suspicious of people in power and of those whose optimistic illusions failed to recognize the power,

persuasiveness and pervasiveness of sin. Too often he saw "love," "the impossible possibility," expressed naively, paternalistically or sentimentally, and thereby converted into an evil because of sin. He saw the ambiguity in all personal and historical situations, and in the eyes of one biographer, Gabriel Fackre, "He defended the paradox when others could see only the orthodox; he moved in fresh and unforeseen ways beyond rigid polarities."⁵³

After the famous prayer I already cited, perhaps his most oft quoted sentence comes from The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, where he wrote,

Humanity's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but humanity's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.⁵⁴

And less well known but just as Niebuhrian is a sentence from The Nature and Destiny of Man: "It is the highest achievement of democratic societies that they embody the principle of resistance to government within the principle of government itself."⁵⁵

One of his early books he dedicated to his father ("the most interesting person in town") who, he said, taught him that "the critical faculty (reason) can be united with a reverent spirit." One commentator on Niebuhr confirmed that he had learned that lesson well, for "his intellectual explorations were always at the service and under the direction of his deep faith."⁵⁶

John Bennett in an essay on Niebuhr reports that he had a great liturgical sense," and regretted that his liturgical writings had not been published.

It is a bit ironic that a political scientist and philosopher, Hans J. Morgenthau, in a speech in 1961, should have hailed Niebuhr, a theologian, as "the greatest living political philosopher" in America. Niebuhr himself eschewed the title "theologian," rather referring to himself as "a teacher of social ethics."

For Niebuhr, there was no ultimate fulfillment, no Utopia, in the political realm (we don't build the Kingdom or bring in the Eschaton); but life has no meaning, no joy, no salvation (no saving grace) without commitment, decision and action in an attempt to expand justice, extend harmony and express love in all the complex relationships of living.

The E & R Church is proud to offer the gift of this modern Amos to the UCC. Surely Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr was one of the more compulsive and constructive Christian critics and commentators on contemporary events in this century.

Niebuhr, like many preachers before him, reveals more of himself and his theology in his prayers than in his sermons.

I close with this excerpt from a prayer he offered after having preached at St. George's Episcopal Church in New York City, in January, 1960:

Eternal God,...give us grace to apprehend by faith the power and wisdom which lie beyond our understanding; and in worship to feel that which we do not know, and to praise even what we do not understand; so that in the presence of your glory we may be humble, and in the knowledge of your judgment we may repent; and so in the assurance of your mercy we may rejoice and be glad. AMEN⁵⁷

The final gift of the E & R Church to the UCC that I shall cite is Paul Tillich, who reported in a speech that after Hitler removed him from his teaching post at Frankfurt, he was at rest near the Baltic Sea when he received a telephone call from Reinhold Niebuhr in July 1933 inviting him to come to Union Theological Seminary, which he did in November of that year, remaining at Union until 1955. Can you imagine the conversations these two giants of the 20th century had on their frequent walks together along the Hudson River down Riverside Drive? An interesting but little known fact is that Union had little spare cash in 1933, during the Depression, and that Tillich was elected to the faculty only because all the other faculty members annually donated 5% of their salaries to pay his!

Who was this Paul Tillich? A minister of the UCC, but before that a minister of the Evangelical and Reformed Church since 1940, and before that a product of the same Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union that brought Philip Schaff and Gustav Niebuhr into their Christian maturity before they came to America.

Born in 1886 into a clergy family, Tillich attended the universities of Tübingen and Halle before earning his Ph.D. degree in 1910 from the University of Berlin. He held two pastorates briefly before serving as an Army chaplain from 1914 to 1918, after which he taught at several German universities, going to Frankfurt in 1929 until his dismissal by the Nazis in 1933.

After his retirement from Union, he was University Professor at Harvard from 1955 to 1962; then he went to the University of Chicago, where he taught until his death in 1965.

You will observe that the E & R contributions to the UCC have now, with Tillich, come full circle. From Schaff, the Swiss born and German educated immigrant, to Tillich, the German born and educated immigrant. From Schaff, the greatest American historical theologian of the 19th century to Tillich, the greatest American philosophical theologian of the 20th century!

And they both spoke of "the Protestant Principle," each enunciating it differently in their differing times.

Both agreed (as Schaff put it) that the "polar star," or life principle of Protestantism was "justification by grace alone, through the merits of Jesus Christ, by means of living faith." Both agreed that the Reformation was a continuing process, indispensable to the life of the church, and that it was at the same time both "positively evangelical and negatively protestant." In their minds, the continuing and continuous Reformation roots out error and confronts idolatry while moving forward to a new level of purity and unity.

Schaff in the 19th century, addressed himself to the church, believers, while Tillich in the 20th century, addressed the "cultured despisers," or those who hoped to believe.

Schaff, convinced of the reconciling power of the Gospel, envisioned the reunion of the churches as the Body of Christ. With a broader ecumenical perspective, Tillich foresaw the Protestant principle forging "a new form of Christianity, yet to be named."

The Protestant principle is not the Protestant reality...But the end of the Protestant era is, according to the basic distinction between the Protestant principle and the Protestant reality, not the end of Protestantism....

The end of the Protestant era is not the return to the Catholic era and not even, although much more so, the return to early Christianity; nor is it the step to a new form of secularism. It is something beyond all these forms, a new form of Christianity, to be expected and prepared for, but not yet to be named...For Christianity is final only in so far as it has the power of criticizing and transforming each of its historical manifestations; and just this power is the Protestant principle.⁵⁸

How similar this sounds to Nevin's comment, written 100 years earlier, "The present state of Protestantism is only interimistic. It can save itself only by passing beyond itself."⁵⁹

Like the Mercersburg men, Tillich based his Christology on the incarnation. "Kairos," he wrote, is "the fullness of time...and describes the moment in which the eternal breaks into the temporal, and the temporal is prepared to receive it. What happened in the one unique kairos (was) the appearance of Jesus as the Christ, i.e., as the center of history."⁶⁰

Tillich lived and thought and preached and wrote during an age that was plagued with meaninglessness. He and his contemporaries lived through World War I, the Depression, World War II, the Holocaust and the Bomb and he spoke to persons who had either cast off religion as a burden or an anachronism, or who had distorted Christianity as "cheap grace" and appropriated it primarily for their own personal benefit.

In an essay by which he introduced himself to the American public, Tillich described himself and his work as "on the boundary." This was his context, his own personal existential setting; as he put it, his "Kata Kairos." He was on the boundary between philosophy and theology, church and society, faith and reason, Protestantism and Catholicism, the German and English languages, the German and American cultures, the sacred and the profane, the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, the religious, the artistic and the political spheres.

From this precarious perch, with one foot here and the other foot there, (more properly referred to as a dialectical perspective) he translated traditional Christian doctrines into the language of modern society, using the terms of depth psychology and existentialism. This "apostle to the Gentiles" introduced a whole new vocabulary into the Christian language. Religion is being ultimately concerned. God is the Ground of Being, the Depth Dimension in all of life. Faith is accepting the reality that you are accepted, despite your unacceptability; it is the state of accepting that you are grasped by the power of Being itself. Sin is separation. Original sin, the fall, is the universal transition from Essence to Existence. Therefore, existence is separation, alienation and estrangement.

It is noteworthy that Tillich, especially in his earlier writing, developed a full-blown account of what he called "The Protestant Principle." (You will recall that Schaff's inaugural address had that title, as did his subsequent book, from which we quoted extensively.)

That Schaff and Tillich should emphasize this theological point is not surprising since they were each educated at the identical schools (Tubingen, Halle and Berlin) and both were members of the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union before immigrating to the United States.

Times had changed, radically, from Schaff's days, and that led Tillich to move beyond the 19th century symbols into 20th century categories, although he started from the same watch word, "justification by grace through faith."

"The Protestant principle," said Tillich, "took form in Luther's fight for justification by grace and through faith alone. 'Justification' in this sense is the paradox that man, the sinner is justified; that man the unrighteous is righteous; that man the unholy is holy, namely in the judgment of God, which is not based on any human achievements, but only on the divine, self-surrendering grace. Man does not have to deceive himself about himself, because he is accepted as he is, in the total perversion of his existence. But being accepted by God means also being transformed by God."⁶¹

For Tillich, the Protestant principle implies a judgment about the human situation. It says, "humanity is basically distorted."

(The Protestant principle) is the theological expression of the true relation between the unconditional and the conditional or, religiously speaking, between God and man. It is concerned with what theology calls 'faith,' namely the state of mind in which we are grasped by the power of something unconditional which manifests itself to us as the ground and judge of our existence. The power grasping us in the state of faith is...a quality of all beings and objects, the quality of pointing beyond themselves and their finite existence to the infinite, inexhaustible, and unapproachable depth of their being and meaning.⁶²

In short, the Protestant principle is creative as well as critical. It is a protest against any absolute claim made for a cultural or religious and, therefore, relative reality. It is forever pointing to the Ground and Source of Meaning. For Tillich, "Christianity is final only in so far as it has the power of criticizing and transforming each of its historical manifestations."⁶³

Protestantism is understood as a special embodiment of a universally significant principle. This principle is effective in all periods of history. It was established as the sole foundation of the churches of the Reformation. Protestantism as a principle is eternal and a permanent criterion of everything temporal...the ultimate criterion of all religious and all spiritual experiences.⁶⁴

By the power of what reality does the Protestant principle exercise its criticism? Tillich's answer: "In the power of the New Being that is manifest in Jesus as the Christ...Here is the bedrock on which it stands. Here is the sacramental foundation of Protestantism, of the Protestant principle and of the Protestant reality."⁶⁵

In these passages we see both the continuity with and the advance beyond Schaff and the Mercersburg theology. Schaff wrote for those who believed they were living in a "Christian" nation in a "Christian" era. Tillich addressed the "cultured despisers" and "Christian doubters" in our contemporary secular society.

There can be little doubt that Tillich's New Being, here introduced as the reality that supplies the energy, standard and force behind, within and beneath the Protestant principle, is the Christological counterpart to Mercersburg's Christ-centered theology and represents the central category and symbol of his philosophical theology.

In his book, The New Being, and in a sermon by that title, Tillich writes,

If I were asked to sum up the Christian message for our time in two words, I would say with Paul: It is the message of a 'New Creation.' Christianity is the message of the New Creation, the New Being, the New Reality which has appeared with the appearance of Jesus, who for this reason, and just for this reason, is called the Christ.⁶⁶

What is this New Being?...Not something that takes the place of the Old Being, but a renewal of the Old which has been corrupted, distorted, split and almost destroyed. Salvation does not destroy creation; but it transforms the Old Creation into a New one. Therefore we can speak of the New in terms of a re-newal:⁶⁷ The threefold "re," namely, re-conciliation, re-union, re-surrection.

The message of Christianity is not Christianity, but a New Reality. A New state of things has appeared, it still happens; it is hidden and visible, it⁶⁸ is there and it is here. Accept it, enter into it, let it grasp you.

With Nevin and Schaff, and with the brothers Niebuhr, Tillich speaks for them and for himself to us all when he writes:

"I want to tell you that something has happened that matters, something that judges you and me. A New Creation has occurred, a New Being has appeared; and we are all asked to participate in it."⁶⁹ AMEN.

Conclusion

This paper has sought, in the main, to suggest that among the chief contributions of the Evangelical and Reformed Church to the United Church of Christ have been the persons and pens of Nevin, Schaff, the Niebuhr brothers and Tillich.

It can be argued (and I believe persuasively and with few dissenters) that Philip Schaff was the most influential and the most widely respected scholar in America in the field of historical theology in the 19th century, that Reinhold Niebuhr was the greatest theological analyst and constructive critic of the political scene in the 20th century, and that Paul Tillich was the greatest theological philosopher in the 20th century.

What I am saying may appear outrageous, but I'm suggesting that in the 19th and 20th centuries in America, Schaff, Niebuhr and Tillich had no peers in their respective fields and that their influence went far beyond the E & R Church and the UCC Church. And all three of these men were ministers of the E & R Church.

* * * * *

"Let us never forget that fidelity to her inherited patrimony, on the part of the church, is indispensable to her further prosperity."⁷⁰

And with that admonition, Schaff bids us farewell.

NOTES

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