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# THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW Journal of the Mercersburg Society

**Number Eight** 

Autumn 1990

# THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW Journal of the Mercersburg Society

R. Howard Paine, Editor

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

#### Editorial Office

The New Mercersburg Review 762 Tamarack Trail Reading, Pennsylvania 19607

215/777-0679

#### THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW

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> SEVENTH ANNUAL CONVOCATION THE MERCERSBURG SOCIETY

> > June 3 and 4, 1991

Old First Reformed Church Fourth and Race Streets Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Theme: The Ecumenical Witness of Liturgies, Catholic and Reformed

#### EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

From its inception The New Mercersburg Review was intended to be an organ for the publication of the excellent papers that are presented at the annual convocation of the Society. Each time that we have gathered for this annual intellectual feast the wisdom of this intention becomes more apparent as we plan to publish the subsequent Fall issue of our journal.

The papers and sermons appearing herewith represent the excellent offerings which characterized the entire Spring, 1990 event which was held very fittingly on the campus of Mercersburg Academy June 4 & 5.

Dr. Alan Sell's paper on the Christology of J.H.A. Bomberger provided some fresh insights as well as increased appreciation for a man who was so disturbed by Mercersburg that he founded a new college and seminary to make good his protests in the German Reformed Church. David Layman's presentation not only served as a reply, drawing upon the life and writings of John Williamson Nevin but also offered a statement on Nevin which did not require any contrasting material for its worth in its own right.

Gabriel Fackre can always be counted upon to defend Mercersburg against the criticism that it is an antiquarian interest which is of little interest to the contemporary theological scene. His address at Mercersburg this past June fulfilled our best expectations once again in this respect.

The variety of backgrounds among our panel of speakers once again offered strong witness to the evangelical/catholic breadth of our society. Dr. Sell is a member of the United Church of Canada teaching at a university of his adopted land. David Layman is a Mennonite layperson who became deeply immersed in the life and theology of John Nevin while a student at Lancaster Theological Seminary under the tutelage of John Payne. So strong has been his interest that he continues his graduate studies at Temple University as a candidate for the Ph.D. degree in Mercersburg studies.

Gabriel Fackre, as the saying goes, needs no introduction, since he has been among the charter members of the society and has carried the message of Mercersburg deep into "Puritan" territory. We are pleased as well to be able to include in this issue a review of Gabe's latest book, The Christian Story, Volume 2.

The sermon by Lyle Weible was preached at the Monday evening Eucharist celebrated in the awesomely beautiful chapel of Mercersburg Academy. His presence with us for this event was symbolic as his words were challenging since the Convocation was held within the boundaries of the United Church of Christ conference which he heads. Carol Kipe offered her message in Trinity Church, Mercersburg, at the service of Morning Prayer. Her parish is situated within the bounds of the Mercersburg Association of the United Church of Christ, a judicatory which perpetuates the memory of our movement by virtue of its name.

R. Howard Paine Editor

# J.H.A. BOMBERGER (1817-1890) VERSUS J.W. NEVIN: A CENTENARY REAPPRAISAL

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The former English poet laureate, John Betjeman, declared that "History must not be written with bias, and both sides must be given, even if there is only one side." Where Mercersburg is concerned we shall do well not to take my whimsical fellow-countryman too seriously. There is more than one side to the Mercersburg story, and both parties to the historic debate had points in their attempt to demonstrate this by reference to the favour. shall not-always-elevated and sometimes-quite-boring dispute between J.W. Nevin and J.H.A. Bomberger, the centenary of whose death falls this year. Generously ignoring their common abuse of the noble term "Puritan," I shall attempt an impartial reappraisal of the issues at stake. My motives are more than commemorative, more than antiquarian. I shall suggest that for all the blessings flowing down from Mercersburg (and I shall specify these), Bomberger rightly utters cautionary words in relation to three major doctrines. I shall further suggest that the Bomberger-Nevin debate throws into relief the crucial issue of authority. This question, which was not fully discussed at the time, remains before all the churches, and not least before the Reformed, to this day. There is thus much more to the Bomberger-Nevin episode than fuddy-duddy reaction on the one hand and liturgical fuss-pottery on the other. The very polarities of the debate challenge us to distinguish between irreconcilable contradictions, and those paradoxes of faith to which we must cling with all the tenacity we can muster.

I

John Henry Augustus Bomberger was born at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on 13 January 1817, to George H. and Mary Hoffmeier Bomberger. Following schooling in York and Mercersburg, Bomberger became the first graduate of Marshall College (to which status Mercersburg School had been elevated in 1836) in 1837. During his year at Mercersburg Seminary (1837-8) Bomberger studied under Frederick A. Rauch, the Professor of Biblical Literature who, on the resignation of Lewis Meyer, had inherited the entire syllabus and had charge of the only student. With such a staff-student ratio it is just as well that Bomberger "ever held in grateful memory the instruction of this Christian scholar, and counted him the first real teacher whose tuition he had enjoyed." In 1854 (prior to the dispute which will concern us) Franklin and Marshall College honoured Bomberger with its Doctorate of Divinity.

The Synod of Lancaster licensed Bomberger in October 1838; he accepted a call to Lewistown (a three-point charge) and removed there the following month. He was ordained on 27 December 1838. He preached three or four times each Sunday in English and German, and augmented his stipend, which was only about half the sum he had been led to expect, by assuming responsibility for the classical school in the town. He proceeded to Waynesboro with its four congregations in July 1840. Whilst there he promoted "protracted meetings" of the revivalist kind - this, be it noted, during the period of his support for Nevin, and Nevin's publication of The Anxious Bench (1843), that pungent attack upon the "new measures" which were widely, if not altogether accurately, supposed to have originated with C.G. Finney. There followed seven years at Easton, from April

1845, and then in August 1852 Bomberger began his ministry at Race Street Church, Philadelphia.

The church at Race Street had passed through troubled times, and numbers were depleted. Bomberger's predecessor, Joseph F. Berg, a determined opponent of Nevin, Schaff and the Mercersburg Theology, had just transferred his allegiance to the Dutch Reformed Church and assumed a teaching post at Rutgers College. Under Bomberger's leadership the tide was turned, and eventually three branch churches were formed, of which one survived for only three or four years. In Philadelphia, writes Hinkle, Bomberger

was thrust into the bustling, spirited atmosphere of America's great voluntary society movement. In short order he was an officer at the local, state, and national levels in the American Bible Society and the American Sunday School Union, as well as a spokesman for abolition, temperance, and several other causes. Ministerial associates in Philadelphia also schooled Bomberger in the typical anti-catholic bias of evangalical Protestantism, a bias which in Bomberger's case nurtured his growing suspicions that the Mercersburg theologians were less Protestant than the denomination might wish them to be.

Slowly, but unceasingly, his heart was won over to largely non-credal, non-liturgical, and ultra-activistic concerns of this order. Yet at the same time Nevin and his associates at Mercersburg were becoming increasingly critical of such evangelical interests.

It would seem that Hinkle here overstates the case, and two important caveats must be entered. First, Bomberger and his people did not lend their voices to the loud-mouthed anti-Romanism which was then in vogue in some circles. On the contrary, he writes, "Because we would not join in the violent anti-popery tirades of the day, we were accused of cherishing a latent affection for Rome." Secondly, Bomberger's participation in evangelistic enterprises was, like everything he did, considered. Thus, he wrote to Edwin M. Long concerning the latter's tent meetings in Philadelphia:

so far as my observation went, the operations of the Tent in this city were conducted in a manner which seemed carefully to avoid all collision with the ordinary means of grace employed by the various churches in its neighbourhood. Indeed, it was not until after I had fully understood that all occasions of evil in this respect would be scrupulously guarded against, that I consented to participate in the movement. It was a rule carefully observed, I believe, always to consult pastors and churches in whose vicinity the Tent was pitched, in regard to the time of its services.

Again, eight years later the now staunch opponent of Mercersburg could nevertheless note with regret that from the early decades of the nineteenth century

great and in some respects radical changes were introduced [into the worship of the German Reformed Church]. By a combination of causes which it is unnecessary to enumerate, excepting that the so-called 'New Measures' were among the most prominent and active of them, some of her most distinctive principles and usages were set aside, and made wholly to disappear from portions of the Church. To some degree the

tone of fundamental doctrines was lowered. In many congregations the leading Festivals were neglected or despised. For the earnest catechetical instruction of youth, and such as sought admission to full communicant membership, other means were substituted - strange and uncongenial. In a word, whilst she still retained the ancient name, the Church had, in districts where these innovations prevailed, lost well nigh all resemblance of form and features, as well as of inner life, to that founded by our fathers.

These are not the words of one innocent of liturgical and credal concerns.

In 1870 Bomberger became the first President of Ursinus College and its Theological Department. He served concurrently as pastor of St. Luke's, Trappe, until 1883. The College was supported by, and identified with, the so-called "low Church" party. It was scarcely necessary to read between the lines of Bomberger's inaugural Presidential address: "Here, then, we stand today solemnly committed to the momentous task of educating young men and youth, truly and thoroughly, intellectually, morally, religiously (and are not these essentially one), and all in harmony with the pure principles of Evangelical Christianity." In offering theological instruction Bomberger had the support of the Philadelphia Classis, but he had not been officially appointed as a theological teacher by the Church. Such churchly sanction was required by a Synod decision of 1820, and this resolution was duly invoked against Ursinus College at the Martinsburg, West Virginia, Synod of October 1872. Matters were finally resolved in Bomberger's favour at the General Synod of Fort Wayne (1875).

Bomberger was active in numerous other ways. Prior to launching Ursinus College he had published two volumes of a condensed translation of Herzog's Realencyclopadie (1856-60); a revised translation of Kurtz's Text-Book of Church History (1860); and a number of pamphlets which will directly concern us. In 1868 he founded The Reformed Church Monthly, the principal anti-Mercersburg organ within the German Reformed Church; it continued until 1877. The following year, under the presidency of Bomberger, the Synod at Easton endorsed the idea of a Peace Commission to heal the division over liturgical matters within the Church. Bomberger ardently served the cause of peace, and two generations of churchly strife ended without a major permanent secession's having taken place (an unusual Reformed circumstance indeed!) For many years Bomberger presided over the Board of Home Missions; and his wider influence was felt in the fledgling World Presbyterian Alliance, (1875), whose Second General Council he addressed on "Regeneration" in 1880. At the Fifth General Council the now deceased Bomberger was recalled as "an early friend of the Alliance, and an earnest worker for Bohemia."

Bomberger's first wife, Marion Elizabeth Huston of Mercersburg, died circa 1855. His second wife, Julia Aymer Wright, whom he married in 1863, died in 1888. Bomberger himself died, leaving eight children, on 19 August 1890. He was buried in the graveyard of Trinity Reformed Church, Collegeville, Pennsylvania. Characteristically, "It was the earnest desire of our lamented President, expressed in his last will, that the details of his funeral should be decently simple, in harmony with the devout and plain usages of the Reformed Church of his fathers."

II

One of the most painful positions in which it is possible for a man to

be placed, is to find himself arrayed in open and decided antagonism against those in whose fellowship he once found sincere pleasure, and with whose real or supposed views he once thought himself in happy agreement.

Bomberger's words, written in 1867 in the heat of the liturgical controversy, precisely describe his predicament. He <u>had</u> been a staunch supporter of Nevin in earlier years. Thus, when Berg, through the Philadelphia Classis, pressed for a heresy trial of the Mercersburg professors, Bomberger rose in their defence at the Synod of 1845, which marked the beginning of a period of controversy within the German Reformed Church which was to last for more than thirty years. The flames were fanned by the liturgical question which occupied seventeen years from the appointment of a liturgical committee by the Hagerstown Synod of 1848.

It is not necessary here to chronicle the liturgical controversy. This has been exhaustively done by Jack Martin Maxwell. Our purpose will be served if we note Bomberger's enthusiastic support of Nevin during the early years of the liturgical committee's life, and if we specify the causes of the breach which followed.

In his article of 1853 entitled, "Dr. Nevin and His Antagonists," Bomberger declared of Nevin that "Few men, occupying a similar position, have encountered so much misrepresentation in the prosecution of their work. And we know of no one, whose words and warnings, from the first utterance of his latest reprehension of Leaheyitical, anti-popery harangues, have been so diligently caught up and improved, and who has yet at the same time been so unsparingly denounced for uttering those words and warnings."

More specifically, Bomberger set out to undermine the position of Berg and his supporters:

If Dr. Nevin has indeed revived Eutychianism, charged our Lord Jesus Christ with being a sinner, denied the divine authority of the Scriptures, rejected the Reformed doctrine of the atonement and justification, plead for purgatory, and prayers for and to the dead, advocated the worship of the Virgin Mary, taught the crassest transubstantiation, reviled Protestantism, and made common cause with Popery as far as this could be done by him in the existing premises, then the German Reformed Church, which has all the while not only looked calmly on, but refused to listen to the alarm-cry raised by two or three watchmen within her walls, and repeated with magnified force by thrice as many more without, must either be most irretrievably astute, or most perversely set upon ruining herself, and doing mischief to others. And this precisely is what some of those professedly concerned for her peace and prosperity fear and prophesy. For ourselves we feel assured that their fears are gratuitous, and that their dire prognostications will prove most happily delusive.

In the second part of his article Bomberger trundles out his tu quoque: Nevin's "real proton pseudos, the actual 'head and front of his offending,' we suspect rather to be this, that he has forced out incontrovertible evidence of the defection of many of the self-constituted leaders of modern Protestantism, from the doctrines of the very standards by which they hoped to condemn him..."

Nevin's opponents have succumbed to the rationalism and laxity of what Bomberger (like Nevin) brands New England "Puritanism." Certainly, "Dr. Nevin cannot be convicted of treachery to the true Church, nor the German Reformed Church of infidelity to her history, her character, and her profession,

Consistently with this, Bomberger had already made it clear, in his 1850 article on "The Old Palatinate Liturgy," that he was not opposed to liturgical usage and revision as such. On the contrary, he answered the objections of those who were against liturgies. He was a tireless worker on the liturgical committee from the outset. But from 1861 he became increasingly uneasy with the Mercersburg stance as a whole. By 1866 his words in his oration at Samuel Helfenstein's funeral could have been spoken of himself: "Differing both from those who at first violently and unqualifiedly opposed the [Mercersburg] system, and from those who, regarding it as an honest and legitimate effort to revive a sense for the true doctrines of the Church, and her traditional usages, for a time favored it, [Helfenstein] seemed to discern, amidst all the good it might contain, dangerous elements of evil and of mischief." By 1867 Bomberger had come to believe that "the German Reformed Church has been solicited to sanction and introduce what amounts to a complete repudiation of many of her most distinctive customs and fundamental doctrines, and to substitute in their place usages and dogmas obviously at variance with her traditions and her creeds. Considered in its relative bearings, this movement involves a liturgical and doctrinal revolution, the influence and effects of whose success cannot be measured or described."21 In the following year Bomberger launched The Reformed Church Monthly, and among his "First Words" to his readers were the following:

The conflicts of the sixteenth century seem about to be renewed. Errors, so like those then exposed and routed that they can scarcely be distinguished from them, are rearing their heads again, and with greater boldness than ever. Ridicule, sarcasm, reproaches, similar to those heaped upon the principles of the Reformation, - upon the cardinal doctrines of justification by faith and the Holy Scriptures as the only final rule of faith and practice, - are hurled at those blessed principles and doctrines now. Indeed, the parallel between the leading points in controversy, and the kind of weapons used by the foes of the holy cause, is most striking and instructive. This is done, too, by men professing the faith of the Church whose principles they thus assail, and whose foundations they seem to be laboring to undermine. Nay, in some instances, like the case of Dr. Pusey and his leading disciples in England, they cling to high positions in the communion they seek to subvert, and use the influence of their positions for the more successful prosecution of their schemes.

Here we have the spirit and the techniques of those who set out to guard the ark: the invocation of (selected) saints of old; the foretelling in violent language of dire assaults about to fall upon the saints of today; the invocation of the bogeyman - in this case, Pusey: and this despite Nevin's opposition to Anglo-Catholicism on the ground that its understanding of history was deficient. In subsequent articles Bomberger accused the Mercersburg theologians of seeking to refashion the Reformed Church according to their own lights because they are dissatisfied with "her doctrinal standard, her constitutional order, and her traditional usages." By 1873 he was agreeing with G. Dering Wolff, a Roman Catholic writer in The Catholic Standard, that "what he says of the inward and outward Romish affinities of Nevinism is true." This last remark was made in connection with the defection of the Rev. Edward O. Forney to Rome; but Bomberger was equally willing to invoke the departure of two "rather prominent" Mercersburg ministers to the Presbyterian Church. From the fact that they went over to a less liturgical church than the German Reformed, he drew the inference that they thought that Mercersburg was getting out of hand. What was written

by Bomberger of Ursinus College's stance well encapsulates the position to which he was led:

Whoever prefer that young men or youth should be trained under influences which tend Rome-ward, or which are calculated to awaken doubts and dislikes of Evangelical Protestantism, had better not send them or advise them to come to Ursinus College. The whole spirit, life and teaching of the College, are strongly set against all sorts of Popery, Puseyism, and deadening Ritualism; and the more so because they are positively, and by the deepest convictions, thrown in favor and support of that primitive Apostolic Christianity which never did, and never can coexist with Romanism, Ritualism, or any of their deceptive imitations 32 With any such things Ursinus College has no sympathy or affinity.

In 1867 Bomberger published his pamphlet, <u>Reformed Not Ritualistic</u>, in reply to Nevin's <u>Vindication</u> of the Revised Liturgy of the same year. Also in 1867 there appeared <u>Prayers and Hymns for Sunday Schools</u>. The Prefatory Note, written by Bomberger, begins with a sentence most notable for its negative implication: "The Prayers and Hymns herewith offered for use in Sunday-Schools, were prepared, selected and arranged with special reference to what are believed to be the wants and desires of Reformed Churches." Next, Bomberger enlisted the aid of the German theological heavyweight, I.A. Dorner, whose articles in <u>The Reformed Church Monthly</u> were reprinted under the title, <u>The Liturgical Conflict in the Reformed Church of North America</u> (1868). Nevin took ample space for his reply in <u>The Mercersburg Review</u>, and his response was also published in pamphlet form: Answer to Professor Dorner (1868).

Why did Bomberger's attitude towards Mercersburg change? We may well set our consideration of this question within the wider context of the churchly debate within the German Reformed Church. J.M. Maxwell specifies ten causes of the liturgical controversy:

- 1. The denomination wrongly supposed that liturgical unity entailed liturgical uniformity.
- 2-6. Synodical procedural difficulties (which need not here detain us).
- 7. Poor communications between the Western and Eastern branches of the Church.
- 8. External especially Dutch Reformed criticisms of Mercersburg.
- 9. Unresolved personal conflicts.
- 10. The failure of the Mercersburg leaders to give Bomberger a hearing following his initial questioning of the Provisional Liturgy in 1861.

Maxwell considers that the two final reasons are the decisive ones.

It seems to me that Maxwell has accurately enumerated what, in Aristoleian terms, might be called the proximate causes of strife. In Bomberger's case, however, as it eventually turned out, the remote cause was theological. If he changed his stance vis a vis Mercersburg - and he did - it was because he finally became convinced that on vital doctrinal matters Nevin had first changed. The liturgy was the occasion of the controversy, but the deepest cause came to be theological. (The words just underlined indicate an enigma on which

I shall comment shortly.) It is not difficult to extract from Bomberger's writings examples of his dissatisfaction with some of the content of the proposed new liturgy. But he became convinced that the content was doctrinally inspired - by the notion of baptismal regeneration, for example. Again, he objected to the proposed responses in the interest of free worship - and it must be admitted that Nevin had been needlessly provocative concerning the alleged deficiencies of free prayer. Bomberger further felt that the minister was being interposed between the believers and God where both prayers and sacraments were concerned. Moreover, he feared the "rigid enforcement" of liturgical practice, which would contradict the past position of the German Reformed Church.

It is important that we underline the fact that Bomberger was no free-wheeler where liturgy was concerned, and he strongly upheld the place of catechetics. Indeed, it was his conviction of the educative power of liturgies as such which inspired his protest on particular points: "With such proofs before us of the educational power of liturgies, it would not be easy to overrate the doctrinal significance of the ritualistic movement, into which the desire and effort of our Church to provide herself with an order of worship suitable to her historical character and spiritual wants, have been turned." Far more important to Bomberger than what believers were being asked to do in the proposed liturgy, was what they were being encouraged to believe. Mixing eulogy, sentiment and fact, one of the Bomberger memorial writers gets to the point thus:

On its surface, the conflict concerned the nature and extent of fixed forms and ceremonies in religious worship; inwardly, this battle of intellect was one in which many of the distinctive historical customs and vital doctrines and beliefs of the German Reformed Church were skillfully attacked and valiantly defended. The irritating source from which the controversy sprang was the question of the formation and adoption by the denomination in general of a new and improved Liturgy or order of worship...But the deep and controlling cause...is found in the well-defined efforts made throughout the period...by a number of master minds under a distinguished leader, to infuse into the entire church certain theological ideas with which they themselves had become strongly and sincerely identified, but which were earnestly held by our departed President and others to be totally at variance with the true principles of the German Reformed government and belief. Here is found the influence which stirred so profoundly our beloved chief and moved him to strive through many trying years so persistently and well. His motives in the struggle were the impulses of a heart to which the unsullied faith of the fathers was dearer far than life; and if in the course of events he occasionally went to extremes, he erred alone from an over-weening love for this blessed heritage to which he had consecrated his all.

Howard Hageman has written that the remarkable thing about the Mercersburg liturgy was that "it was the first liturgy in the reformed Church to articulate a theology." As far as Bomberger was concerned this was precisely the trouble: the theology articulated was bad theology.

Before turning to the theological crux of the matter I ought to justify the view expressed above that Bomberger's change of opinion concerning Mercersburg followed Nevin's general doctrinal shift. James I. Good wrote, "It must be acknowledged that Dr. Bomberger changed his views between 1853 and 1860, but

this only directs attention to the far more remarkable changes of theological position on the part of his principal antagonist, Dr. Nevin. The latter was first a Presbyterian, then he inclined to Catholicism, and toward the end of his life he leaned to Swedenborgianism." Few were more adept than Bomberger at quoting his opponents against themselves. Thus, on the question of theological foundations Bomberger places side by side some utterances of Nevin which are separated by twenty years. In the period 1840-47 Nevin had written, "The more we can be brought to commune familiarly and freely with the spirit of the Reformation...the better it is likely to be with us in all respects, at the present time...Let us have progress, by all means; but let it be progress upwards, within the sphere of the original life of the Church itself...not progress outwards, by which the life of the past, together with its form, is renounced." In 1862-3 he writes, "The Provisional Liturgy has not professed at all to be of one order, simply with the Liturgical practice of the German Reformed Church in the 16th century...it was constructed throughout on another theory altogether...it makes common cause with the liturgies of the ancient Church...It is a question of very material change in our church practice, if not in our church life."40

Again, ever ready to wield a <u>tu quoque</u>, Bomberger relates Nevin's <u>The Anxious</u> Bench to the alleged liturgical legalism of Mercersburg in these terms: "Is the hard yoke of the bondage of formalism which...is being prepared for our necks, less to be deprecated and denounced, than the fetters of fanaticism? Was it right to warn against the fiery furnace, and shall it be wrong to warn against the lion's den?"

When noting Maxwell's accurately-enumerated proximate causes of the Bomberger-Nevin dispute, I suggested that the underlying cause, as it eventually turned out, came to be theological. These careful words signal a puzzle which it is by no means easy to solve. The question which has been posed to me by Dr. John B. Payne is, "Why did Bomberger delay so long in opposing Nevin's theology?" It is undoubtedly the case that by the time Bomberger defended Nevin in 1853, Nevin had already articulated his "catholic" views: his very words of the 1840s, which Bomberger used against him, indicate this. Yet thirteen years later Bomberger was earnestly defending Nevin. Bomberger's change of view regarding Mercersburg did follow Nevin's doctrinal change, but why was Bomberger still defending Nevin so long after the latter's terminus had been reached? Far from aiding us at this point, Good does not even advert to the difficulty. The simplest explanation is that Bomberger only gradually became aware of the (to him) adverse implications of Nevin's position. This would seem to be borne out by his expression of the pain he felt on making the discovery. A more cynical suggestion would be that Bomberger, fuelled by personal animosity, dressed his ire in theological clothes so that it would appear more "respectable." But this would entail that his expression of pain was insincere, and I find no evidence of this. May it not also be that, for the sake of peace in the church, Bomberger delayed his opposition for as long as he could in the hope that mutual consultation would remedy matters? As Maxwell explains, there was no such consultation.

III

The Bomberger of 1853 had written, "Whatever else might give offence or excite suspicion, no cause, assuredly, could be found for taking exception to the Christology of the Mercersburg school." By 1867, however, we find him saying of the Mercersburg theology that

Its distinctive peculiarity may be discovered in the almost exclusive prominence which it gives to the <u>incarnation</u> of the Lord Jesus Christ...the great purpose of the incarnation of the Son of God, was to furnish a substantial basis of a new organic order of life; so that our human nature, which is corrupt and depraved by virtue of its relation to the first Adam, may have a vivifying portion of the real personal life of Christ infused into it, and thus be regenerated, justified and saved...All else pertaining to Him, - His humiliation, passion, death, burial, is but incidental and accessory. By virtue of this "mysterious constitution of His person," - not by virtue of His atoning passion and death, He penetrates the Church with His own real, substantial personal life, so that it is but the continual reproduction and perpetual remanifestation of His incarnation....

What is supremely at risk, according to Bomberger, is the doctrine of the atonement. He never ceased to point out that Paul gloried in the Cross, not in the incarnation. Not, indeed, that he undervalued the birth, life and ministry of Christ, but he staunchly held that our mystical union with Christ was not our automatic birthright, but the gift of God's atoning grace through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit; and hence that the Church is the community of the redeemed, not in some immanentist sense the continuation or extension of the Incarnation.

The development of Nevin's ideas was not, of course, simply a perverse reaction against older German Reformed positions. Both he and Bomberger were responding, in opposite ways, to a climate of thought customarily labelled "Romantic," and Nevin's response was fertilised by his deep appreciation of the incarnational emphasis of the Eastern Fathers. As we might expect, the Romantic thrust was multi-directional. In general Romanticism stood for the inward drive; human experience - even emotion - came to the fore over against the cerebralism of rationalism and necessarianism. This finds subtle expression in Goethe, Schleiermacher and Coleridge, and reaches bowdlerised form in Henley's poem, "Invictus," that Victorian gem which includes the immoral (no misprint) lines:

I am the captain of my fate I am the master of my soul,

which Robert Mackintosh once sardonically described as "a truly elegant expression of paganism," 45

In the same general direction there flowed down from Hegel and his heirs a strongly immanentist thrust which finally drove bankrupt deism from the stage. Where deism (which was, however, no one thing) had tended to remove God from the created order and the human soul, immanentism restored him to both. Again, it is not without significance for Mercersburg theology that Philip Schaff met F.D. Maurice in England, and became attached to his brand of Romantic theology.

The greatest risks which Romantic theology in all its forms runs are those of losing its moorings in the historic Christ event, of idealising Christ off the stage of history, and of succumbing to pantheising tendencies. Not surprisingly, Howard Hageman wrote of the Mercersburg theology that "the historical and the theological began to mean less and less as the demands of the psychological and the aesthetic loomed larger."

The immanentist thrust, together with the revival of classics and thence of patristics at Oxford under Benjamin Jowett in the middle of the nineteenth

century, gave impetus to an incarnationalism that was in part a reaction against soteriology gone legalistic and externally transactional. As the same Jowett complained, "God is represented as angry with us for what we never did; He is ready to inflict disproportionate punishment on us for what we are; He is satisfied by the sufferings of His Son in our stead." Like Maurice in England, Nevin was in justifiable reaction against such crudity; and just as Maurice found himself accused of having gone too far by the Scottish theologian R.S. Candlish, so Bomberger rose up against Nevin. Needless to say, both Candlish and Bomberger denied that they were guilty of soteriological crudity.

Against this background we may now view the christological, pneumatological and ecclesiological points of friction as between Bomberger and Nevin. Though three, they are one, for all are facets of Nevin's incarnationalism. These themes are not randomly selected; they are roughly those which Nevin himself identified when characterising the Mercersburg theology: "In the first place, it is Christological, or more properly perhaps Christocentric; in the second place, it moves in the bosom of the Apostles' Creed; on the third place, it is Objective and Historical, involving thus the idea of the Church as a perennial article of faith."

Bomberger sets out what he calls "The Great Contrast" thus:

### The Nature of the Incarnation

Reformed theology teaches...that the Eternal Son...voluntarily and graciously took into union with His divine nature a perfect individual human nature...whilst the union between these two natures was mysteriously close...there was no fusion of the two....

Mercersburg teaches that the Incarnation was an "organic conjunction" of the Godhead with the <a href="https://www.numan.nature">human race</a>; that in this conjunction it took human nature into such union with itself, as to form a third nature or life, which Mercersburg calls theanthropic...Hence, the Mercersburg theory confuses the two natures of Christ, and involves itself in a pantheistic view of God and humanity.

# The Purpose of the Incarnation

Reformed theology teaches, that the Word became flesh in order to redeem lost man from the punishment of sin, by Christ enduring that punishment, in His Human nature, in man's stead; and to restore man to the favor of God, and to newness of life, through the Holy Spirit.

Mercersburg maintains the Word became flesh, <u>not</u> so much to make atonement for the sin of the world, by offering Himself as an expiatory sacrifice, <u>but</u> that by joining Himself to the race, He might infuse into mankind the very substance of His own divine-human or theanthropic life...It is <u>not</u> by being the Lamb of God, sacrificially offered to take away the sin of the world, that He saves men, but by entering organically into the life of the race, and perpetuating the Incarnation literally, and, in substance, in the Church....

## The Church

According to Reformed theology, the Church is so far the body of Christ as it is made up of all, in all ages, who are gathered,

defended and preserved by Christ, through the Spirit, out of the whole human race, and who, by the Spirit, agree in regard to all things essential to the true faith.

Mercersburg affirms, that the Church visible is literally and substantially Christ - the perpetuation of His very theanthropic life....

Such is Bomberger's account of his own theology in relation to that which he is convinced underlies the liturgical controversy - with all that that entails concerning the theology of the sacraments and of the ministry. In brief, the substance of the theanthropic life is sacramentally conveyed, and ministers receive "some special character" in ordination which permits them to administer sacraments and declare absolution.

It may be that in opposing Mercersburg to the Reformed theology in the way he does, Bomberger is unduly disjunctive. Perhaps we do not have two monolithic blocs with no blurred edges, as he implies. It is certainly the case that he overstates his case. Nevin, for example, denied that we enjoy an hypostatic union with God:

There is but one Incarnation (one Mediator between God and man, the Man, Christ Jesus), but he is of such constitution, carrying our universal nature in his person, that all men may be joined with God also through him, by receiving into themselves the power of his life. This implies in their case no hypostatical union with Deity, no new theanthropy in the sense of Christ's person, but just the reverse; since the only medium of union with the Godhead is Christ's manhood, as something that must necessarily intervene between the Divine Word and all other men.

Bomberger might still object, however, that atonement is not said to be necessary to any of this.

Nevin is, however, right (and Calvinistic, to boot) in wishing not to focus exclusively upon the atonement, but rather "to embrace at once the whole Christ and all His benefits." Bomberger concurs. But there is no smoke without fire, and it is not difficult to draw from Nevin's writings passages which provoke the kind of charges leveled by Bomberger (and Bomberger was skilled in the art of selection). Thus, for example: "The mediation of Christ, we say, holds primarily and fundamentally in the constitution of his person. His Incarnation is not to be regarded as a device in order to his mediation, the needful preliminary and condition of this merely as an independent and separate work; it is itself the Mediatorial Fact, in all its height and depth, and length and breadth..."54 If this mode of expression appears to minimise the once-for-all atoning act in the historic Cross, it is not difficult to find passages in Nevin's writings which clearly affirm that act. Thus, of the Mecersburg theology he writes, "No theology has insisted more earnestly on the great cardinal truths of the Trinity, the Eternal Generation, the Divinity of the Son, the Incarnation, the Mediatorial Work and Reign of Christ [but note the absence of reference to the Spirit's regenerating work]."55 Again, he declares that "The historical character of the Gospel, objectively considered, meets us, first of all, in the Person and Work of Christ Himself, as they are exhibited to us in the Creed." On the other hand, in a private letter to Henry Harbaugh - that is, in a non-polemical context in which he could express himself non-defensively - Nevin writes: "Christ saves the world, not ultimately by what

he teaches or by what he does, but by what he <u>is</u> in the constitution of his own person."

This would seem once again to minimise the historic atoning act. Yet two pages later Nevin says, "The distinguishing character of the Mercersburg Theology...is its Christological interest, its way of looking at all things through the Person of the <u>crucified and risen</u> Saviour."

Finally, in his closing sentence Nevin omits the atoning act from his list of truths emphasized by Mercersburg: "all stress is laid on the Person of Christ, on his resurrection from the dead, on the sending of the Holy Ghost, and on his presence and working through all time in the Church which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all."

At the very least we may say that there is an oscillation here sufficient to justify the concern of Nevin's critics.

While Nevin strongly denied that his christocentrism left no room for the believer's faith, it does appear that on occasion he played down the Holy Spirit's regenerating work (except in connection with baptism, where Bomberger held him to err ), conversion, and the resulting union with Christ. For Nevin,

The atonement as a foreign work, could not be made to reach us in the way of a true salvation. Only as it may be considered <u>immanent</u> in our nature itself, can it be imputed to us as ours, and so become available in us for its own ends. And this is its character in truth. It holds in humanity, as a work wrought out by it in Christ. When Christ died and rose, humanity died and rose at the same time in his person; not figuratively, but truly; just as it had fallen in the person of Adam.

It would seem that at this point Nevin fails adequately to guard his position against an interpretation which he would not have wished to endorse. His words suggest what we might call an immanentist-automaticism concerning salvation: because of Christ's incarnation, life and victory the whole of humanity is saved. This would exclude the human response of faith; and since the latter has correctly been understood as <a href="enabled">enabled</a>, the Spirit's work in what used to be called "the application of redemption" would be redundant. It is not without significance that when Bomberger addressed the World Presbyterian Alliance he should have taken "Regeneration" as his theme and thundered: "Christ is not our life in any pantheistic sense. Nay, the mystical union established between the regenerated soul and him is not even a hypostatical union of their two natures [and, as we saw, Nevin denied that it was this]. Man is not deified by regeneration. In it men become Christians, but are not made Christs." The associated peril is that the Church comes to be regarded as the continuation or extension of the Incarnation, rather than as the result of the Spirit's regenerating work.

In justice to Bomberger we should note that Nevin could be quite as disjunctive as he. Thus he writes:

Where the idea of the Church has come to make itself felt...as involving the conjunction of the supernatural and the natural continuously in one and the same abiding economy of grace, its sacraments cannot possibly be regarded as outward signs only of what they represent. They become, for faith, seals also of the actual realities themselves, which they exhibit; mysteries, in which the visible and the invisible are bound together by the power of the Holy Chost (not physically or locally, as vain talkers will forever have it), in such sort, that the presence of the one is, in truth, the presence of the other.

But it was quite open to Bomberger and others to query the ecclesiology here without landing in a memorialist view of the sacraments.

As for overstatement of the case, here too Bomberger was not alone. He at least had given Nevin no cause to give vent to the following invective:

The Gospel of the Creed is, throughout, Christological, concentrates itself in Christ, throws itself, in full, upon the Incarnation, and sees in the objective movement of this Mystery of Godliness...the whole process of grace and salvation on to the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting; while this other scheme, which we now call, for distinction's sake, the Gospel of Puritanism, substitutes for all this a construction of Christianity that is purely subjective, centering in the human mind, and that gives us then notions for facts....

One way of putting the Bomberger/Nevin contrast was expressed by a memorial writer thus: "[Bomberger's] religious thinking may be said to have approached, more or less closely, to the rationalistic type, in a good sense, characteristic of the English and American Puritan divines, rather than to have partook of the mystical character so common in the Evangelical theologians of Germany of the last forty or fifty years. His doctrinal system was intensely Pauline, and he had little sympathy with that type of theological dogma and life which may be denominated Johannean." The same writer was able to imagine Bomberger, Nevin and others singing these words in their "high station in glory."

Here, hand in hand, firm-linked at last, And, heart to heart, enfolded all, We smile upon the trouble past And wonder why we strove at all.

Let us hope so!

IV

Much has been written and, no doubt, much remains to be written, in praise of Mercersburg theology. As I seek to adjust myself to it I find that I am grateful for Mercersburg's re-emphasis, in face of sectarianisms of all kinds, upon the catholicity of the Church; and for its reminder to the Reformed that the heritage of the Christian ages is theirs, and that it is foolish to hop from the New Testament to the Reformation as if nothing of importance had happened in between. The Mercersburg witness to the inescapability of the Church for believers, and on the Church's nature as an organism (provided that slippery term be carefully construed), is entirely appropriate. I welcome Mercersburg's concern that the sacraments be given their rightful place in worship, though I wish that the Mercersburg theologians had had more to say on the relation of Word and sacrament. Above all, I endorse the implication that the first word of the Gospel is grace, not sin, and the concomitant refusal to endorse any doctrinal caricatures which would suggest that the wrathful Father punishes the innocent Son.

On the other hand, some of the points which Bomberger made stand as warning beacons. Before summarising these let me remind you that I have been attempting to evaluate a dispute, and that the literature with which I have been principally concerned has been of the polemical sort. Polemicists frequently

emphasise the alleged errors, and play down the strengths, of their opponents. Thus, if we recall that the agreed text underlying the theology of both Nevin and Bomberger is the Heidelberg Catechism, and in relation to some of the words we have quoted from Nevin, we cannot say that he had no place for the Cross and the Spirit. But in the polemical literature, and when underlining what he thinks has been overlooked by the Reformed, or when haranguing the more gruesome understanding of the atonement and of conversion which sectaries all around him were peddling, he does say things which warrant the checks and balances proposed by Bomberger.

Thus on christology: of course Nevin was right when he said that "The Saviour must come into the world before He could die in the world." That is a truism. Furthermore, Christ can only do what he does because he is who he is - that is another truism. But, against some of Nevin's unguarded assertions, which might appear (against his actual beliefs) to endorse immanentist-automaticism in the matter of salvation, and against theosophies whether old-time or New Age, we must maintain the centrality of the once-for-all, historic, Cross-Resurrection event, and agree with James Denney that "the rationale of the Incarnation is in the atonement." If we forget this we are on the way to a reduced, idealized christology.

On the Holy Spirit, our Reformed ecclesiology, whether Reformed, Presbyterian or Congregational, has, however ambivalently at times, understood that there is a distinction of eternal significance between those who are in Christ and those who are not. By opposing in the name of the Spirit's work a Christ-mysticism which entails the union in the Incarnation of Christ with the whole of humanity, Bomberger challenges us at a fundamental point in our ecclesiology. If much Reformed theology has had too little regard to the old creation, may not Mercersburg play down the novelty of the new? As to the Mercersburg conviction that the Church is an extension of the Incarnation - again in the interests of the Spirit's work - I side with P.T. Forsyth, who declared, "That which owes itself to a rebirth cannot be the prolongation of the ever sinless." This is not at all to deny that the risen Christ is with his people, that they abide in him, that they are called to be about his business in the world. But is to recognise that the empirical Church is an earthen vessel.

So much for the major doctrinal cruces on which other anthropological and sacramental points turn. For all the "sound and fury" (and both terms are in order) of the Bomberger versus Nevin debate, there is one vital matter which was not treated in sufficient depth. The point at issue continues to perplex theologians to this day - or, if it does not, it ought to.

At one level the question is "What are the criteria for evaluating doctrinal change?" It is perhaps surprising that this issue was not more directly faced though no doubt matters liturgical and constitutional were sufficiently exhausting. Even so, the nineteenth-century was the century during which evolutionary thought came to the fore, and the evolutionary theme was invoked not only in the interests of incarnationalism, but also with reference to the development of doctrine (does not this year also mark the centenary of Newman's death?) The question of the Church's development through history did occupy Nevin greatly, so much so that Bomberger chided the Mercersburg theologians with "developing the faith of the Reformed church out of its proper house and home." But the second-order question concerning the criteria for evaluating doctrinal change was not discussed in detail by Bomberger and Nevin, though each independently and in his own way adverted to Scripture and tradition. In mitigation it must be said that Reformed theology as a whole had not produced,

and still has not produced, a clearly articulated doctrine of the development of doctrine. Perhaps prior to the rise of modern biblical criticism it did not need to. I am certainly not advocating the introduction into our thought at this late date of the slippery term "development." "Development" is sometimes taken as entailing the evaluation, for which there is no justification, that in doctrinal matters later statements are necessarily preferable to earlier ones. I should rather speak of doctrinal change (which can be and is multi-directional) and then seek criteria by which to assess it.

Bomberger thought that Nevin was wrong in being guided so much by the early Church and not (as he thought) by the Bible. Nevin thought that his opponents were bogged down in the Reformation. Nevin's criterion for doctrinal propriety was the Apostles' Creed: "As there is but one method of the objective movement of the Gospel in Christ Himself, so there can be only one method for the apprehension of it on the part of believers. That method we have in the Apostles' Creed..."

To which Bomberger responded, "We most cordially accept of Dr. Nevin's rule...The spirits must be tried. Only he and we differ as to the standard. He says, the fourth century; we say, the first. He says, by patristic authority; we say, by Apostolic authority. He says, by the Creed in the third and fourth century sense; we say, by the Creed as explained in our Heidelberg Catechism, which gives, in all essentials, the true Gospel sense."

We should not infer from this that Bomberger has no place for creeds and confessions; but they must be judged against Scripture as the "ultimate and supreme rule of faith," and this not least because they "may be mixed with human infirmities, and are open to formal development and exhibition..."

Here is the point at which, rising above the liturgical question as such, the issue might more deeply have been joined. For creeds and confessions are called forth by historical circumstances. They are in the first instance acts of confessing on the part of those who devise them. Thus, the Apostles' Creed, countering Docetism as it does, emphasises the key historical moments of Jesus's life. But it does not specify the work of the Holy Spirit and, as Forsyth said, "The doctrine of Redemption is signally absent from the creeds, yet, the Church has a more direct connection with Redemption than with Incarnation."

But if creeds and confessions are to a degree occasional, and if they require human evaluations for their construction and subsequent interpretation, have we not nowadays come to perceive that exactly the same may be said of the Scriptures, which are already tradition? Does this mean that neither of the time-honoured loci of authority, Scripture and Tradition, are trustworthy? No, it simply means that these witnesses to the Gospel have to be judged in the light of that Gospel which is brought home to believers in every generation by the Holy Spirit. Upheld by the same Spirit, though able to resist him, believers live more or less faithfully and interpret more or less accurately. This Gospel of the Father's grace finds its fullest expression in the Son's Cross-Resurrection victory, the import of which is made alive in each successive generation in the lives of those who are called by the Spirit through the Word to be the Church. Discerning that Spirit is ever the task of the Church. It is a corporate task in which all believers should share, and if polity forbids this polity must be reformed. In undertaking this task the Church listens for the Spirit and to the witness of the Christian ages, viewing all in the light of the primary witness, the Bible. Such discerning is both our praise and our response to God the Holy Trinity.

If the Bomberger-Nevin episode challenges us as to how our churches can be Gospel-grounded centres of discernment of the Spirit it will have served us well, and we shall be on the way - not to infallible pronouncements - but to faithful witness in our time.

#### NOTES

- 1. John Betjeman, First and Last Loves, (1952), London: Century 1987, 5.
- 2. For Bomberger see The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1956, II, 220; Bomberger Memorial Discourse, Delivered in Trinity Reformed Church of Waynesboro', Franklin Co., Pa., by the Pastor, Rev. F.F. Bahner, A.M., on Sunday, September 14, 1890. Various authors, The Rev. J.H.A. Bomberger, Doctor of Divinity, Doctor of Laws 1817-1890, Philadelphia: Publication and Sunday School Board of the Reformed Church in the United States, 1917; Ursinus College Bulletin, VII, Memorial Number 1890, no. 1; Ursinus College Commencement Herald, 25 June 1891, 53-6; J.H.A. Bomberger, Five Years' Ministry in Race Street... Philadelphia...[with] An Ecclesiastical Appendix, Philadelphia, 1860; Grant E. Harrity, The Events Leading to the Foundation of Ursinus College, unpublished B.D. thesis, Evangelical and Reformed Theological Seminary, PA, 1949; [Typescript] Extracts from the Diary of Rev. Albert R. Thompson, Student [at Ursinus College] from 1874 to 1879, prepared by Rev. Arthur P. Thompson (son), Saxton, PA, 1954; Gerald H. Hinkle, The Theology of the Ursinus Movement: Its Origin and Influence on the German Reformed Church, unpublished doctoral thesis, Yale University, 1964; id., "Professor with portfolio, "Ursinus College Bulletin, Nov. 1964, 5-8; Calvin D. Yost, Ursinus College, A History of its First Hundred Years, Collegeville, PA: Ursinus College, 1985. I am grateful to Mrs. Florence M. Bricker, the former archivist of the Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society and of the United Church of Christ at Lancaster Theological Seminary, for her assistance; and to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding a research trip to Lancaster. Thanks are due to Dr. John B. Payne of Lancaster Theological Seminary, for some stimulating observations upon the first version of this paper. I dedicate this work to President Richard P. Richter of Ursinus College, as an expression of friendship and esteem, and in appreciation of my having been awarded the College's Honorary D.D. on Sunday 15 May 1988.
- See George Warren Richards, <u>History of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church at Lancaster</u>, <u>Pennsylvania</u>, <u>Lancaster</u>: Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church 1952, 198.
- 4. Anon., Ursinus College Bulletin Vii, 1890, no. 1, 21.
- 5. See further Charles Yrigoyen Jr., "John Williamson Nevin's The Anxious Bench and Evangelical Piety," The New Mercersburg Review I, Autumn 1985, 3-19. See also Keith J. Hardman's admirable work, Charles Grandison Finney 1792-1875, Revivalist and Reformer, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 1987; reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1990.
- 6. Among other Mercersburg opponents who defected were John Craig Guldin, who went to New York under Dutch Reformed and Presbyterian auspices as a missioner to German immigrants; and Jacob Helfenstein, who became a New School Presbyterian. See G.H. Hinkle, The Theology of the Ursinus Movement, 71-76.
- 7. G. H. Hinkle, "Professor without portfolio," 7.
- 8. J.H.A. Bomberger, Five Years' Ministry, 14.

- 9. Id., "Introductory Remarks" to Edwin M. Long, The Union Tabernacle; or, Movable Tent-Church, Philadelphia 1859, 23.
- 10. J.H.A. Bomberger, The Revised Liturgy. A History and Criticism of the Ritualistic Movement in the German Reformed Church, Philadelphia, 1867, 15-16.
- 11. Quoted by C.D. Yost, Ursinus College, 13.
- 12. In 1868 Bomberger had withdrawn his name from the list of those under consideration for appointment at Mercersburg Seminary as Professor of Didactic and Practical Theology in succession to the late Henry Harbaugh. See G.W. Richards, History of the Theological Seminary, 351.
- 13. See H.M.J. Klein, The History of the Eastern Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, Lancaster: Eastern Synod, 1943, 260-61; cf. C.D. Yost, Ursinus College, 24-5.
- 14. See H.M.J. Klein, op. cit., 267.
- 15. See Proceedings of the Second General Council of the Presbyterian Alliance, Philadelphia 1880, 543-53.
- 16. Proceedings of the Fifth General Council, London 1892, 27.
- 17. Ursinus College Bulletin VII, 1890, no. 1,2.
- 18. J.H.A. Bomberger, Reformed Not Ritualistic: A Reply to Dr. Nevin's "Vindication," 1867, 5.
- See G.W. Richards, <u>History of the Theological Seminary</u>, 255; H.M.J. Klein, <u>History of the Eastern Synod</u>, 205.
- 20. See J.M. Maxwell, Worship and Reformed Theology. The Liturgical Lessons of Mercersburg, Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press 1976. For the Mercersburg movement at large see J.H. Nichols, The Mercersburg Theology, New York: OUP 1966.
- J.H.A. Bomberger, "Dr. Nevin and his antagonists," <u>The Mercersburg Review</u>,
   V, January 1853, 91.
- 22. Ib., 96.
- 23. Ib., April 1853, 145.
- 24. Ib., 180, italics original.
- 25. See J.H.A. Bomberger, "The Old Palatinate Liturgy of 1563," The Mercersburg Review, II, 1850, 81-96, 265-87.
- 26. Id., A Funeral Discourse, delivered in St. Peter's German Reformed Church, North Wales, PA, October 22d, 1866, on the occasion of the death of the Rev Samuel Helfenstein, D.D., Philadelphia, 1866, 21.
- 27. Id., The Revised Liturgy. A History and Criticism of the Ritualistic Movement in the German Reformed Church, Philadelphia, 1867, 6-7.

- 28. Id., The Reformed Church Monthly, I no. 1, January 1868, 3.
- 29. Id., "The liturgical controversy," ib., I, 1868, 60-61.
- 30. Id., "Nevinism a feeder for Rome," id., IV, 1873, 409.
- 31. Id., "Mercersburg transitions," ib., VIII, 1875, 527-30. The defectors were J.S. Foulk and Joshua Riale.
- 32. Id., "A historical sketch," ib., V, 1872, 30.
- 33. See J.M. Maxwell, Worship and Reformed Theology, 345-351.
- 34. See J.W. Nevin, The Liturgical Question, Philadelphia, 1862, 1-11.
- 35. See e.g. J.H.A. Bomberger, <u>Reformed Not Ritualistic</u>, 95-115, for Bomberger's adverse points.
- 36. Ib., 64. Nevin also was persuaded of the educational power of liturgies; see, for example, his <u>The Liturgical Question</u>, 11 ff.
- 37. Ursinus College Bulletin, VII, no. 1, 1890, 24-5.
- 38. Howard G. Hageman, Pulpit and Table, Richmond: John Knox Press 1962, 92.
- 39. James I. Good in <u>The Rev. J.H.A. Bomberger</u>, 259; cf. C.D. Yost, <u>Ursinus College</u>, 2. While discussing Bomberger's in some detail, G.H. Hinkle does not allow sufficiently for Nevin's doctrinal change. See his <u>The Theology of the Ursinus Movement</u>, 207.
- 40. J.H.A. Bomberger, Reformed Not Ritualistic, 27.
- 41. Id., The Revised Liturgy, 1867, 8; cf. id., Reformed Not Ritualistic, 145.
- 42. Id., "Dr. Nevin and his antagonists," 164.
- 43. Id., Reformed Not Ritualistic, 127.
- 44. G.H. Hinkle is thus almost correct in saying of Bomberger that "at no time did he endorse a strictly atonement-centred Christology." It would be more accurate to say that Bomberger's christology was centred in the atonement, but not exclusively concerned with the atonement. See G.H. Hinkle, The Theology of the Ursinus Movement, 216.
- 45. See Alan P.F. Sell, Robert Mackintosh, Theologian of Integrity, Bern: Peter Lang 1977, 34.
- 46. See further, Alan P.F. Sell, Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1986, ch. I.
- 47. H.G. Hageman, Pulpit and Table, 81. We should not, however, forget Nevin's opposition to the purely emotional, which he trenchantly denounced when rebuking Finneyism. See further, James H. Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961.

- 48. B. Jowett, "On atonement and satisfaction," quoted by B.M.G. Reardon, Religious Thought in the Victorian Age London: Longmans 1971, 332.
- 49. See further, Alan P.F. Sell, Aspects of Christian Integrity. Calgary: The University of Calgary Press, and Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1990, ch. II.
- 50. J.W. Nevin, Vindication of the Revised Liturgy, 1867, in Catholic and Reformed. Selected Theological Writings of John Williamson Nevin, eds. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., and George H. Bricker, Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press 1978, 365.
- 51. J.H.A. Bomberger, "The great contrast," The Reformed Church Monthly, IV, 1871, 367-69; cf. id., ib., VIII 1875, 126-135 on "Mercersburg errors."
- 52. J.W. Nevin, "Wilberforce on the Incarnation," The Mercersburg Review, II 1850, quoted by J.H. Nichols in The Mercersburg Theology, 87.
- 53. Id., Answer to Professor Dorner, 41.
- 54. Id., "Wilberforce on the Incarnation," in J.H. Nichols, op. cit., 79.

  At this point, and in passing, it is interesting to recall another of of this year's centenaries: that of the death of John Henry Newman. His incarnational theology was described by the Unitarian James Martineau thus:

  "The one grand gift of the Gospel to the human mind is that, by the Incarnation, it has determined the personality of God, and His relations of character and affection towards man. This, and not what is called the doctrine of the Cross, is the specialty and living kernel of the Gospel."

  See his Essays, Philosophical and Theological, 1866, 360. What a trick Bomberger missed here a Roman Catholic and a Unitarian who might have been used to trump Nevin!
- 55. J.W. Nevin, Theological Vindication of the New Liturgy, in Catholic and Reformed, 370.
- 56. Ib., 377.
- 57. J.W. Nevin, "Letter to Dr. Henry Harbaugh," in Catholic and Reformed, 408. We have italicised the quoted phrase.
- 58. Ib., 410; our italics.
- 59. Ib., 411.
- 60. J.W. Nevin, Answer to Professor Dorner, 37.
- 61. Though Nevin has his answer to this. He holds that the grace communicated by baptism is not saving grace, but that it becomes such when it meets with the recipient's faith. See further, John B. Payne, "Nevin and the sacrament of baptism," The New Mercersburg Review, II, Autumn 1986, 35.
- 62. Id., <u>The Mystical Presence</u>, 163. Bomberger described this work as "a queer sort of mystico-metaphysical nondescript (at least so far as the latter half of it is concerned)...a book which may have been expected to revolutionize the theological world, but which, after a few revolutions

- on its own axis, seems to have rolled into oblivion." See "Mercersburg transitions," The Reformed Church Monthly, VIII 1875, 528-29.
- 63. See Proceedings of the Second General Council, II, 1880, 552. It is interesting to compare his remarks here with those in his earlier tract, Infant Salvation in its relation to Infant Depravity, Infant Regeneration and Infant Baptism, Philadelphia, 1859, especially 30-39, where he maintains the necessity of infant regeneration, as distinct from infant conversion, as necessary to the salvation of infants.
- 64. J.W. Nevin, Theological Vindication of the New Liturgy, 380-81.
- 65. Ib., 386.
- 66. F.F. Bahner, Bomberger Memorial Discourse, 2-3. While we should not overlook Nevin's indebtedness to Paul's "Christ-mysticism," the line from John to the Eastern Fathers is especially clear.
- 67. Ib., 7.
- 68. J.W. Nevin, Answer to Professor Dorner, 69.
- 69. James Denney, <u>The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation</u>, London: Hodder & Stoughton 1917, 65. See further Alan P.F. Sell, <u>Aspects of Christian Integrity</u>, ch. II, where the authors of <u>The Myth of God Incarnate</u> (1977) are gently rebuked from this point of view. For an account of Denney's main thrust see Alan P.F. Sell, <u>Defending and Declaring the Faith: Some Scottish Examples</u> 1860-1920, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, and Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1987, ch. IX.
- 70. Calvin was not the least among the ambivalent on this matter. He oscillated between a "both-and" and an "either-or" ecclesiology. See Iain G. Nicol, "Church and state in the Reformed tradition," in <a href="Baptism">Baptism</a>, Peace and the State in the Reformed and Mennonite Traditions, eds. Ross T. Bender and Alan P.F. Sell, forthcoming.
- 71. P.T. Forsyth, The Church and the Sacraments [1917], London: Independent Press 1947, 83.
- 72. For the evolutionary motif see Alan P.F. Sell, Theology in Turmoil, ch. III.
- 73. See e.g. his article on "Early Christianity" reprinted in Catholic and Reformed.
- 74. J.H.A. Bomberger, "What they mean by development," The Reformed Church Monthly, VI, 1873, 524.
- 75. J.W. Nevin, "Theological vindication of the new liturgy," in <u>Catholic and</u> Reformed, 372.
- 76. J.H.A. Bomberger, Reformed Not Ritualistic, 94.
- 77. Id., "Mercersburg and Reformed theology contrasted," The Reformed Church Monthly, VI, 1871, 182.

- 78. Albert R. Thompson, "The Lectures of Dr. John H.A. Bomberger," II, 9; Lancaster Theological Seminary Archives.
- 79. P.T. Forsyth, The Church and the Sacraments, 83.

# HISTORICITY AND UNITY IN NEVIN'S CHRISTOLOGY

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#### Introduction

For academicians such as myself, there are several overarching problems which impel and delimit reflection, whether it is done within a religious tradition, or for its own scholarly sake. One such problem is pluralism. Christian pluralism is compounded because it is no longer clear that the answers to the spiritual problems of the West are purely and simply Christian. Some thinkers look to Judaism and Christianity's relationship to it. After the inundating horror of the Holocaust, it is not clear that the answers can even be Christian.

If contemporary Christianity is to find its center-of-gravity, the point beyond which it cannot move without ceasing to be Christian, then it must look to its doctrine of the person and work of Christ. I believe that the clues necessary to the contemporary formulation of this doctrine are to be found in Nevin's Christology. Underlying every other issue and motif in Nevin is the all-consuming passion of a particular vision of the person and character of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church. What needs to be examined is (1) how this vision developed in and was expressed through Nevin's life and work; and (2) the underlying unity of this vision in the midst of its historical development.

## The Religious Vision Underlying Nevin's Christology

Since there is no reason to rehash at length what others have said so well, I merely remind us all of what the Rev. Joseph Bassett said at the first convocation five years ago: the one word which encompasses everything Nevin understands by "Christianity," and therefore of the person and work of Christ, is "life." This is not only the motif which energizes The Mystical Presence, it is one of several motifs which predominate in all of Nevin's work, before, during, and after Mercersburg.

On Christmas Day of 1834, Nevin begins a series of articles in <u>The Friend</u> entitled: "Religion a Life." Here, Christianity is the opposite of a "theory," a notionally abstract presentation of dogmatic claims. Rather, it is the "representation of facts the development of which is going forward in the moral history of men."

From this single sentence one could almost extrapolate the whole of Nevin's intellectual and Christian development: Firstly, religion must be a living reality which brings about real moral transformation, not a set of notions. The word "notion" connotes not only doctrines bereft of real religious power, but the "notions" of religious feelings and experiences, which too often substitute for real moral change. Here, he anticipates his later objections to the dichotomization of Christian experience into, on one hand, abstract doctrine, and, on the other, religious emotionalism.

Secondly, Nevin already possesses the awareness that Christian experience must be developmental. Thirdly, this development is not some individual experience, but is perceived in "the moral history" of the human race. Christianity is "a great system of historical realities,...felt by its own living presence."

Before we consider how Nevin gets from here to his Mercersburgian formulations, I want to establish the unity of the theme of "life" in Nevin. In his very last essay, he says the "mystery of the new creation in Christ" is found "in His glorified person as LIFE." This just-quoted essay, published in 1883, culminates a series of six essays, which begin in 1877, and which can be described as Nevin's "hermeneutical" essays. Nevin not only challenges the supernaturalistic rationalism which holds the field in evangelicalism at the end of the nineteenth century, he also anticipates the themes of late twentieth-century hermeneutics, whether that be the liberal-Christian use of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, or the conservative evangelical "battle for the Bible."

On one hand, he rejects the emergent rationalist claim that the Scriptures can be interpreted by the same criteria as any other text. This he denominates "realism." But with equal vigor he critiques what he calls "verbalism," i.e., the claim that the natural text of the Scriptures has been supernaturally protected from error, in a manner which Nevin in other contexts dismisses as "magical." The premise of these two seemingly opposed, but equally false, views of Scripture is the belief that divine revelation "must be in a form intelligible to men; which is taken at once to mean in the form of common human thought in common human speech."

Nevin's response to this premise is one with his statements in <u>The Friend</u>, as well as his argument in <u>The Mystical Presence</u>. If God indeed reveals himself, it is not on the natural human level. Rather, God reveals himself as incarnate, yet transcendent and therefore transforming divine presence, in a word, as a life. The revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ introjects the existential power of this life into human history, into the existence of the race.

...the central meaning of the Gospel...(is) the disclosure of a new world of powers in the living Christ, transcending supernaturally the universal constitution of nature, and carrying in itself both the promise and the possibility of victory for our fallen humanity over all the evils under which it is found groaning so hopelessly through the ages, in every other view.

Here again, Nevin unites the three themes already together in The Friend: real moral and religious power; transformative power as development; and development as a social or communal reality.

# Change And Continuity in Nevin's Christology

Nevin formulates this last mentioned motif as the idea of "organic" development - the development of a concretely existing living being. The weight one accords this motif will in part depend on one's interpretation of the place of the Mercersburg period in Nevin's overall career. James Hastings Nichols claims that Nevin experienced a "radical reorientation" from evangelical Puritanism, which took place "at the beginning of his forty-second year." Nichols also says that Nevin "experienced a 'churchly' conversion...within the same year" as Orestes Brownson.

The former reference would point to sometime in 1845 (Nevin was born in 1803); but Brownson converted to Roman Catholicism in the fall of 1844. But the terminology of both phrases is ambiguous: "forty-second year" may be meant in the same sense that "the twentieth century" refers to the nineteen hundreds;

"within the same year" may mean something like "within the span of a year's time." The most we can say is that Nichols thinks Nevin became "high-church" sometime in 1844 or 1845.

But the timing of the transition is not as important as its character. My understanding of Nevin is that no "radical reorientation" took place. To be sure, his early views underwent philosophical reformulation, but, as I have tried to show above, and will continue to argue, the inner religious content of those views possess an on-going continuity. Nevin's sermon on "Catholic Unity," given at the joint convention of the German and Dutch Reformed Churches at Harrisburg in the summer of 1844, is representative of his early Mercersburg period.

Here, Nevin argues that true catholicity is not found in, for example, some grand evangelical union, such as was being promoted in his day. Simply put, catholicity is not extensive but intensive. It is properly located in the "mystical union" of Christ with believers. Catholicity is present wherever Christ's life and that of the church is one, not where sectarian division is overcome in some external or arbitrary manner.

The crucial concept here - that which grounds this intensive catholicity -- is precisely that of an <u>organic</u> unity. The Church is an "organic whole" which is found in unity with the <u>life</u> of Christ. This life must be the spiritual basis - the transcendental ground - of any organizational unity, for he "compris(es) in His person the new creation, or humanity recovered and redeemed as a whole." Furthermore, the renewal of humanity as the organic externalization of Christ's life <u>develops</u>:

The whole humanity of Christ, soul and body, is carried by the process of the Christian salvation into the person of the believer; so that in the end his glorified body, no less than his glorified soul, will appear as the natural and necessary product of the life in which he is thus made to participate.

Note again the three prevailing themes of 18 Nevin's religious vision: Christianity as union with the life of Christ, that life as a developing process, and development as an organic unity. Nevin's use of "organic," whatever we may think of it, shows that by 1844 he has already arrived at a characteristically Mercersburgian understanding of Christ and the Church.

This analysis also largely applies to <u>The Anxious Bench</u> as revised in 1844. 20 His central objection to new measures revivalism, is the negative argument he has set forth at least since 1835 (in <u>The Friend</u>): the anxious bench as a religious system replaces real moral and spiritual transformation with momentary, artificially created, religious enthusiasm.

His positive argument appears identical with that in "Catholic Unity:" while sinful humanity is organically bound to Adam, regenerate humanity is organically bound to Christ. "The sinner is saved then by an inward living union with Christ..... It constitutes a new life, the ground of which is...in Christ, the organic root of the Church."

The place of The Anxious Bench in Nevin's development is obscured by its fundamentally evangelical Puritan character. Nevin is clearly concerned with affirming authentic revival, and at the end sets forth Richard Baxter as a positive example. The ecclesiological arrangement Nevin has in mind when he

sets the "system of the catechism" against the "system of the bench" is clearly that of "old-school" Presbyterianism.

The transitional character of The Anxious Bench is for me convincing evidence that no "radical reorientation" of Nevin took place. To be sure, Nevin's My Own Life can be read as suggesting some such thing. Nichols quite properly warns against taking this series of autobiographical essays (first published in the Weekly Messenger) at face historical value. But he seems to ignore Nevin's own groping awareness that his evangelical Puritan piety contained the seeds of his mature evangelical catholic faith.

Those "seeds" are the tripartite themes which are present throughout Nevin's thought. The force which brings those seeds to fruition appears to be the category of "organic." Where does Nevin get this from? The likeliest candidate is his earlier colleague Frederick A. Rauch. His only significant English work, is a psychology which is most charitably described as an amalgamation of then-current German philosophy, generally denominated as "romantic idealism."

His decisive impact on Nevin's thought can be illustrated as follows: in discussing the relationship of body and soul, he points out that the material particles of an animal body are constantly changing. Thus the body cannot consist merely of the conglomeration of all these particles. Rather, it must be found in an "organical identity...which remains the same in the never-ceasing stream of matter." "That which is permanent in these changes, and combines the elements in this manner, is <a href="life">life</a>." Rauch further interprets this concept of "life" as an "organic identity" in developmental terms.

Whatever develops itself, changes, yet it does not become any thing else than it was when undeveloped. For while it takes different forms, it remains the same in all of them...(and) all (of its various forms) develop themselves from within. ... The idea of development contains, therefore, the idea of a transition from the invisible to the visible, from the dark and unknown to the manifest and revealed.

Nevin, I have argued, already understands Christianity as <a href="life">life</a>; he also recognizes that this life is a self-developing power. Coming to the German Reformed Church, Nevin is a middle-aged biblical scholar, schooled in the best evangelical Puritan thought of his time, but beginning to read in the latest German theology. At Mercersburg, he works with a younger, philosophically minded, German scholar. It is only natural that he should adopt the philosophical framework which seems tailor-made for his underlying religiosity.

# Existential Power as the Fundament of Nevin's Christology

The above argument has tried to sustain two basic theses. Firstly, Nevin's doctrine, even in its most rudimentary forms, is that Christianity is a "life." Secondly, upon his exposure to Rauch in his first years at Mercersburg, he seizes upon the latter's concept of "organic" as a means of developing a philosophically and theologically systematic formulation of this doctrine.

As incorporated into his doctrine of incarnation, organicism means that it is "objective and historical;" that is, it is a <u>fact</u> whose action and dynamism can be discerned in and described by objective reality. This objectivity implies historicity. This objective pattern of events is to be discerned in time and

space, and not in some gnostic spiritualism detached from the givenness of objective history.

But objectivity and historicity are (for Nevin) dynamic, not static, realities. A reality is objectively present when it is present for us. It is historic, not in the modern scholarly sense that it is a past and done for empirically verifiable datum, but in the sense that it becomes a part of the flux of historicity, and is present as a discernible unity throughout time's ebb and flow. Given these premises, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is "objective" in the sense that "it has entered permanently into the stream of the world's life, not just as the memory of a past wonder, but as the continued working of the power it carried with it in the beginning."

Nevin's use of "organic" attempts to answer the root question of philosophy since the Pre-socratics: is there an underlying unity in the midst of flux, change, coming-into-being and passing-away? Nevin's formulation affirms the reality of transformation in the flux of history, even while it affirms the presence of an underlying energy or power which continues in the midst of this flux, which maintains a self-evident identity.

But this energy is not philosophically discerned or experienced. Nevin's impulse and warrants for the use of "organic" are fundamentally religious, not philosophical. The mystical presence is an objective which nonetheless must be affirmed and appropriated in faith. Nevin's implicit argument is one with such other defenders of catholicity as G. K. Chesterton: if you affirm the mystery, the transcendental core, at the heart of reality, then everything else becomes rational.

Consequently, it is not enough to affirm the incarnation as a "metaphysical theory," an affirmation of "subjective notions...in the way of abstract thought." The incarnation, the deity of Christ, Christ as the revelation of the person and character of God must be a radically contemporary reality, and only secondarily and derivatively a dogma or concept. The incarnation must itself become incarnate in lived human experience. It is the "living power of (Christ's) true Human Life," and "a new order of existence." In other words, the incarnate Christ is a transformative power which creates a new realm of being, a new reality, a new orientation towards human existence. Christ reveals God because he manifests himself as a transcendent and transforming presence in the ever-eternal present.

But this power is also a <u>life</u>. I would tend to say that it is <u>existential</u>. On one hand, both terms refer to the contemporaneous character of this power. But they also indicate that this power is <u>concrete</u>. It is not simply power, simply considered, it is a <u>particular</u>, individual power. It is not simply life, it is the life of a <u>person</u>. "Life" in the abstract is not truly "living." "Life" can only be found in a concretely existing person; the life of the incarnate Christ is therefore identical with the person Jesus Christ. But again, this person is not simply the historical personage - like the historically retrievable identity of George Washington - but is the <u>person-qua-power</u>.

Nevin's Christology, in this interpretation, runs directly counter to a prevalent contemporary understanding of "incarnation," which holds that Jesus is immediately revelatory in his historically retrieved humanity. This notion can even be found in catholic Christianity. At the Mercersburg Convocation of 1986, Geoffrey Wainwright defended "Trinitarian Worship." But his premises are, in my judgment, flawed and certainly unNevinian. "...the trinitarian name of God

is given to us with Jesus' address to 'Abba, Father,' his self-understanding and career as 'the Son,' and his promise of the Holy Spirit."

To this, I have no doubt that Nevin would reply: the battle for evangelical catholicity is as good as lost. If revelation comes to us simply in some past empirical historical event - even such an event as the human self-understanding of Jesus - then Christian revelation is either magic, or else (as Nevin says in response to "Campbellism") nothing more than an "outward statute-book of things to be believed and things to be done."

To the contrary, revelation properly consists in the "continued working of the power" of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. The totality of incarnation is not enclosed in any combination of the historical person, message, character, self-understanding, or even fate, of Jesus. Rather, incarnation means approximately the following: the whole structure of the "person and fate of Jesus" is a contemporary, divine, presence-and-power. As already stated, the incarnation is only a living reality insofar as it becomes incarnate in contemporary human existence.

Put another way, to say that Jesus Christ is God incarnate is not to affirm that the person and message of Jesus reveal God to us, but that this Jesus is the beginning point of an existential (i.e., living) process in which God is revealed. What I call "existential process" is meant to correspond to what Nevin calls "development." This theme is already apparent in The Friend, as well as in the following, a sermon of 1838, on "The Seal of the Spirit:"

The true "everlasting gospel" is that which reveals the Son of God, the eternal Word, <u>subjectively</u> (sic) in the believer's own life; and incorporates as it were into his personal experience the entire history of the Savior, as comprehending both his sufferings and his glory, from the manger to the cross, and onwards to that day when "he ascended up on high, leading captivity captive."

This is the concept of "development" - as an existential recapitulation of the whole reality of the incarnate Christ - which Nevin brings to Mercersburg.

Before observing the continuity, note the crucial <u>difference</u> between this formulation and Nevin's later one. In <u>The Mystical Presence</u>, the incarnation "is the supernatural linking itself to the onward flow of the world's life, and becoming thenceforward itself the ground and principle of the entire organism," and is therefore a "WORLD-FACT."

In other words, for the Nevin before Mercersburg, the existential participation in the Incarnation is a <u>subjective</u> reality; at Mercersburg, Nevin comes to view it - apparently as a result of Rauch's organicism - as an <u>objective</u> reality. The inversion is captured explicitly in the "Theological Vindication of the New Liturgy:" the "objectivity (of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ) itself implies that it has entered permanently into the stream of the world's life;" as such an objective power within the world, it is now

an economy of grace, 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), in broad distinction from the economy of nature....

As already pointed out, when Nevin uses "historical" here, he does not mean that this incarnational process happened 2000 years ago, and is now complete. Such an event becomes "magical" - what religious (and anti-religious) liberals dismiss as "supernatural." "Supernaturalism" in the usually understood sense of the word is magical because it is based on an external, voluntaristic relationship between a believer and the belief. One chooses to believe in Christian world-view because one wishes to do so, or because one is persuaded by it, just as one can choose to believe in astrology, or a conspiracy theory of the assassination of John Kennedy.

Nevin's profound insight is that Christianity can only be true if the warrant for faith is contemporary, existential power. Faith is more than voluntaristic acceptance of a creed or moral code. Faith is the affirmation of a pre-existing immersion in a <u>life</u>: a concrete, yet transcendent person. Faith is true because the believer experiences it as true. There is an all-embracing reality, which ontically precedes faith, and which creates and elicits faith. If supernaturalism is not grounded in such a reality, it will rapidly self-destruct into simple rationalism, a corrupt plant which had already flowered in Nevin's lifetime, and whose evil fruits this century has reaped.

But authentic Christian supernaturalism points to another world of transcendent and transforming power in the midst of this natural world. "Historical" means for Nevin that the incarnation is an existential force, which is found within the structure of natural reality, even while it transforms that reality. This relationship of "transformative while within" is, of course, precisely an incarnate relationship, and is of the essence of Nevin's Christology. The incarnate Christ is found within and throughout the on-going processes of history and nature, so that these mundane processes can be taken up into and transformed by the redemptive process of the incarnation.

While not the theme of this essay, it is important to note that the embodiment the incarnation - of this redemptive process is the body of Christ, the church.
The following quotation from the closing arguments of The Mystical Presence
summarizes Nevin's convictions, not only on this point, but on the
interpretation I have been defending:

We are too prone, to restrict the idea of supernatural interposition... to the single historical person of Jesus Christ himself.... ... We must not sunder the supernatural in Christ, from the life of his body which is the Church. Christianity is strictly and truly a new creation in Christ Jesus; a supernatural order of life, revealed and made constant and abiding, in the midst of the course of nature as it stood before. ... The supernatural has become itself natural... by falling into the regular process of the world's history, so as to form to the end of time indeed its true central stream.

# The Risen Lord and the Crucified Christ: Nevin's Christology for Today

With this central insight, Nevin avoids a host of false alternatives. On one hand, he avoids the sterile dogmatism of contemporary defenders of "orthodoxy," who ignore the rootedness of Christological dogma in the transforming <a href="Life">Life</a> of Christ, as a radically contemporary power. On the other hand, he avoids the merry-go-round of contemporary neology, driven by the restless pursuit of the ever-relevant, as the all-too-trivial substitute for the missing power of that <a href="Life">Life</a>.

But can we appropriate Nevin's romantic idealism in this empirical age? If my analysis is correct, what is central for Nevin is not his philosophical commitment, but the conviction, consistently expressed and amplified, that Christian faith and experience is "in Christ," it is only coherent as a "union" with Christ, a participation in the incarnate Christ.

This theme is particularly significant in light of a seminal work of contemporary New Testament scholarship, which undertakes a historico-hermeneutical comparison, of Rabbinic Judaism and the Paulinian "pattern" of religion and faith. This analysis shows that for rabbinic Judaism, one is in the covenant "by grace," and one stays in the covenant by keeping Torah. For Paul, the issues of "getting in" or "staying in" the covenant are simply irrelevant. Rather, the essential pattern of Christian religious experience is "participating" in the crucified and risen Lord as a prolepsis of eschatological resurrection. In my judgment, Christian faith as grounded in "participation" with both the crucified Christ and the risen Lord resolves any number of conundrums and conflicts.

Consider first the interreligious problem of two millenia of Christian anti-Judaism. If the incarnation is a participatory reality, then one does not have to expropriate the Jewish covenant in order to describe the Christian relationship with God. The Jewish relationship with God is experienced through covenant and through Torah; the Christian relationship is one of "participation." Participationism not only maintains the integrity of Christian faith, it also permits an authentically Christian reaffirmation of the separate integrity of Jewish faith.

But a consistent participationism is not only a solution to Christian anti-Judaism, it can also resolve persistent puzzles within the Christian tradition. For example, in the doctrine of atonement, Nevin overcomes the dichotomy between forensic and essential righteousness. The atonement is effective for the believer, not merely as "a fiction in the divine mind," nor as "a mere declaration or form of thought," but as a "real life-union with Christ," as "the only basis, on which there can be any true imputation to us of his atoning work on the cross.

Nevin reiterates this theme in his last work, where he criticizes the "solifidianism" which makes righteousness "something that must come to us wholly and only in an ab extra way, from the merit of Christ credited to our account in the chancery of heaven." In other words, justification is not simply the judicial pronouncement of a status before God, it is the participation in the righteousness of Christ, as the existential state which makes the pronouncement of the status real. Here again, Nevin avoids two false alternatives: Christian righteousness as a "supernatural-legal" fiction, or legalistic obedience to a set of external moral norms.

If I were to reformulate Nevin at any point, I would make it explicit that, in spite of the understandable criticisms of Berg, Bomberger, and Good, the implicit center of Nevin's incarnationalism remains the cross. The body of Christ participates in the whole structure of incarnation. "Union" with Christ, as implied in Nevin's statement that in the eucharist we "participate actually and truly in his life, as it was made an offering for sin." But the dialectical unity of the risen Lord with the crucified Christ is most clearly implied in Nevin's own personal cruciform praxis.

Nevin has a life-long preoccupation with mortality, <sup>68</sup> is convinced at more than one juncture of his life that his own death is imminent, <sup>9</sup> and is in constant ill-health. There is a consistent pattern to Nevin's life, displayed after his graduation from college, (to a lesser extent) after seminary, and towards the end of his Mercersburg period:<sup>73</sup> intense creativity leading to physical and psychic breakdown, followed by retirement and convalescence leading to renewed health and creativity. It is no accident that the central motif of Nevin's work is <u>life</u>. For that, above all, seems to be what he felt in need of.

This psycho-historical reading of Nevin's creativity in no way questions its validity. To the contrary, it verifies it, since it demonstrates that Nevin's faith gave him the strength to endure crises of enormous power, and then to reestablish his faith at a more integrated level. This reading also returns us to historicity and unity. "Historicity" of course means empirical changes in the meaning of one or another motif in Nevin's thought. "Unity" means an underlying hermeneutical unity, such as can be established by objective scholarship.

But both "historicity" and "unity" have a more profound and existential meaning: historicity and unity as such for Christian believers, as exemplified in Nevin's own experience. Historicity is cruciform with its contradictions, paradoxes, scandals, and innumerable horrors and holocausts. It is this existential character of history which calls upon contemporary Christian believers to participate anew in their crucified and risen Lord. In other words, any faith that is authentically "objective and historical" will also be cruciform; for Christians, that cruciform character is experienced in the mystical union with their Lord.

Nevin exemplifies this commitment in his own immersion in, and attachment to, the contradictions, the ironies, the cruciform character, of his own historicity. He does not evade his historicity. Rather, like a sailor standing tall at the wheel of a ship in a raging storm, he goes through it. The faith which sustains Nevin in the midst of this storm is the existential unity of his being, grounded in the concrete presence of Jesus Christ in his body, the church, as incarnate in its eucharistic life.

That is why for Nevin, historicity means that the incarnation of Christ binds us to the body of Christ, the church. Faith in the church, as the concrete expression of faith in the crucified and risen Lord, binds us to historicity itself. Truth is not found in some super-spiritual gnosticism, but in concrete human experience. The mystical presence is not an abstract notion or a sentiment of maudlin memorialism. The presence of our Lord is the concrete body of believers, engaged in the most concrete, existentially fundamental, act of all: breaking bread together.

The mystical presence always binds the body of Christ to the totality of Christ: most certainly as risen Lord, but also as crucified Christ. The bread remains bread - unless and until it is broken. The wine remains wine - unless and until it is poured out. Those of us who have rediscovered in Nevin and Mercersburg the vision of the incarnate Christ embodied in the church, must also rediscover the existential cost Nevin paid for that vision. For his life exemplified afresh the truth of Luther's dictum: "For a man becomes a theologian by living by dying, and by being dammed, not by understanding, reading, or speculating." A theology of glory always points back to a theology of the cross - even as the Ghost of Christmas Future silently but incorrigibly compels Ebenezer Scrooge to gaze upon his own tombstone.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" is a favorite text of my own forebears. "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." The rhetoric may be Anabaptist-Mennonite, but the content is one with two millenia of Christian catholicity: if one is to live, one must first die.

This cross stands in the way of every sort of easy religious fanaticism, whether of the religious right or left. This cross contradicts every gnosticism. This cross demands that revelation be concrete and existential. This cross binds the body of Christ to the Christ of historicity - the crucified Christ - so that it may experience anew the risen Lord of faith. In this cross, the body of Christ descends with its Lord into hell, so that it can know again the power of God who raises the dead to life. That life is the unity and the wholeness of the incarnate Christ which sustains the body of Christ in its present cruciform historicity.

#### NOTES

- Joseph Bassett, "Eucharist/Liturgical Renewal or John Williamson Nevin on BEM #15," The New Mercersburg Review, Number 1 (Autumn 1985):25.
- 2. The Friend II (December 1834, January 1835) [nos. 25, 28-30].
- 3. Nevin, "Religion A Life," The Friend II (January 1835):222.
- 4. Nevin, "The Grand Heresy," The Friend II (February 1835):247.
- 5. Nevin, "Religion A Life," p. 230.
- 6. Nevin, "The Internal Sense of Holy Scripture," The Reformed Quarterly Review XXX (1883):16.
- 7. I deal with Nevin's use of "magical" below, notes 44 and 53.
- 8. Nevin, "Christ the Inspiration of His Own Word," The Reformed Quarterly Review XXIX (1882):39.
- 9. Nevin's understanding of the <u>interpretation of Scripture</u> in <u>The Friend</u> differs from that in his last essays; but the underlying religious vision is what is continuous.
- 10. Nevin, "The Internal Sense of Holy Scripture," p. 10.
- 11. For general comments on the centrality and character of this motif, see James Hastings Nichols, ed., <u>The Mercersburg Theology</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 12, 34, 56.
- James Hastings Nichols, <u>Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg</u> (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 37.
- 13. Nichols, The Mercersburg Theology, p. 318.
- 14. Dictionary of American Religious Biography, s. v. "Brownson, Orestes Augustus;" Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Orestues A. Brownson: A Pilgrim's Progress (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1963), pp. 170-184, esp. p. 182.
- 15. Nichols, <u>The Mercersburg Theology</u>, pp. 37-55; also in Theodore Appel, <u>The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin</u> (Philadelphia: Reformed Church <u>Publication House</u>, 1889), pp. 218-225.
- 16. Nichols, The Mercersburg Theology, pp. 40, 41; Appel, p. 220 (Appel reads "renewed" for "recovered").
- 17. Nichols, The Mercersburg Theology, p. 39; Appel, p. 218, emphasis added.
- 18. I am here eliding an important distinction: in <u>The Friend</u>, it is "religion" which is "a life," not "Christ." But the fundamental continuity remains.
- 19. On the whole, Nichols appears to agree with this judgment: The Mercersburg Theology, p. 34, but cf. pp. 56-7.

- 20. John Williamson Nevin, The Anxious Bench, in Catholic and Reformed:
  Selected Theological Writings of John Williamson Nevin, ed. Charles
  Yrigoyen, Jr. and George H. Bricker (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: The Pickwick
  Press, 1978), pp. 9-126.
- 21. E.g., Ibid., pp. 96ff.
- 22. Ibid., p. 107.
- 23. Ibid., pp. 121ff.
- 24. Ibid., pp. 105ff. James I. Good, <u>History of the Reformed Church in the U.S. in the Nineteenth Century</u> (New York: The Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1911), pp. 107-8, makes much of the continuity of <u>The Anxious Bench</u> with Nevin's earlier "pietism" and "Calvinism." See also pp. 113-7, on Nevin's early Calvinism.

While his analysis is correct as far as it goes, both his lack of historical perspective, and his anti-Mercersburg stance, blinds him to the continuities of Nevin's religious perspective in his evangelical Puritan period with that of his evangelical catholic period. While Nichols is basically pro-Mercersburg, he seems to accept much of Good's argument, specifically with respect to the dating of a "high-churchly" conversion sometime in 1844 or 1845. See Good, pp. 116-7, 210-14, on the relative influences of Rauch and Schaff on Nevin's development, and the implication that the distinctively Mercersburgian formulations developed after the arrival of Schaff (i.e., sometime in late in 1844, or 1845). It would appear from Good's distinctions that he thinks the major "corrupting" influences were, via Nevin, Schelling (pp. 236n., 237, 312-3) and via Schaff, Puseyism (pp. 117, 209, 233, but cf. 312 on the Puseyism of Nevin). Good also cricicizes Schaff's Hegelianism, pp. 233-4.

- 25. John W. Nevin, My Own Life: The Earlier Years (Lancaster, Pa.: Papers of the Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, No. 1, 1964), e.g., p. 40.
- 26. Nichols, Romanticism In American Theology, p. 37, see the citation of the original publication at note 1.
- 27. Nevin, My Own Life, pp. 119-120. I concur with Nichols' judgment that the chapter added to the second edition of The Anxious Bench ("Chapter VII, System of the Catechism...") probably "signalizes" the crucial transitions in Nevin's thought. (The Mercersburg Theology, p. 8.) But the "Introduction" to the Second Edition is dated "January, 1844," (Catholic and Reformed, p. 15) which suggests that these transitions had already taken place by the end of 1843.

The irony is that, in spite of his own caution, Nichols seems to take Nevin's autobiographical evaluation at face value on one point - that of Nevin's own radical disjunction between his evangelical Puritanism and his evangelical catholicity. But certainly one would suspect precisely this disjunction on psychological grounds, as reflecting the intense turmoil between these poles in Nevin's religious orientation. Furthermore, is it not odd that someone who was so radically anti-conversionistic, who had such a clear sense of historical development, should have experienced - a conversion?!

- 28. On this I agree with Good, pp. 116-7, 210.
- 29. Rauch not only gives credit for his formulation to such worthies of recent German philosophy as Kant and Hegel, he also attributes influence to the central figures of Common-Sense Philosophy, such as Locke, Stewart and Reid: Frederick A. Rauch, Psychology; or, A View of the Human Soul, 4th ed., rev. and imp., (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1846), p. vi. Howard J. B. Ziegler argues that Rauch is purely Hegelian in his Frederick Augustus Rauch: American Hegelian (Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Franklin and Marshall College, 1953). Richard C. Schiedt defends a significant Schelling influence on Rauch, largely on the basis of an "almost entirely faded" German manuscript by Rauch in "Rauch's Dogmatic Theology - From the Standpoint of Schelling," Bulletin of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in the United States XVI (July 1945). The reference to the manuscript is on p. 115. Not only does Schiedt work on a faded manuscript, but his description is removed from his reading of the manuscript by "[a] good many years." (Ibid.) Therefore, there are no quotations or citations from the original; the reader must take Schiedt's claims at his word. Ziegler's work is better scholarship but still not wholly convincing. When I say Rauch is "an amalgamation," I intend to say that he sets forth and interprets a Weltanschauung which broadly expresses the temper of the German philosophy of his era, without dogmatically endorsing any particular school. For a recent interpretation of Mercersburg in light of "romantic idealism," see Linden Jay DeBie's "German Idealism in Protestant Orthodoxy: The Mercersburg Movement, 1840-1860, " Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1987.
- 30. Rauch, 1st ed. (1840), p. 171; 4th ed., p. 182.
- 31. Ibid., 1st ed., p. 171; 4th ed., p. 183.
- 32. Ibid., 1st ed., pp. 182-3; 4th ed., p. 195.
- 33. Nevin, "Theological Vindication of the New Liturgy," in <u>Catholic and Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist</u> (Philadelphia, 1846; reprinted Philadelphia: S. R. Fisher & Co., 1867), p. 166-7; Nevin, "The Internal Sense of Holy Scripture," p. 23: "In all positive actuality, however, ends become concrete only in causes; and both together only through subsidence into their effects; there to <u>be</u> and abide, not transiently, but with enduring real existence."
- 34. Nevin, "Theological Vindication of the New Liturgy," p. 377.
- 35. Nevin, The Mystical Presence, p. 176; Nevin, "Theological Vindication of the New Liturgy," pp. 376-7, 380-1.
- 36. Gilbert K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy (New York: John Lane Company, 1911; London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1911; also in paperback edition by Image Books), pp. 48-51 [end of Ch. II, "The Maniac"]. Nevin addresses this issue tangentially in his hermeneutical essays; see, e.g., "The Spirit of Prophecy," The Mercersburg Review XXIV (1877): 182-3.
- 37. Nevin, "Theological Vindication of the New Liturgy," p. 376; see also Nevin, "Wilberforce on the Incarnation," <u>The Mercersburg Review II</u> (1850), in Nichols, ed., The Mercersburg Theology, pp. 79-81.

- 38. Nevin, "Wilberforce on the Incarnation," p. 89.
- 39. Nevin, "Theological Vindication of the New Liturgy," p. 377.
- 40. Nevin, The Mystical Presence, pp. 168, 172, 182-3, 216-7.
- 41. For the exegetical basis of this claim, see Luke Johnson, The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 101-110.
- 42. Nevin's own formulation of the argument up to this point can be found in "The Testimony of Jesus," The Mercersburg Review XXIV (1877):8.
- 43. The New Mercersburg Review 2 (Autumn 1986):3-11.
- 44. Nevin, "Theological Vindication of the New Liturgy," pp. 376-9; Nevin, The Mystical Presence, pp. 167, 168, 184. "Magic," for Nevin, is a revelation which is contra naturam: it abruptly breaks into, and has no continuity with, the continuum of reality. Nevin rejects "magic" for the same reason he rejects Campbellism: it can be accepted only out of human caprice and arbitrary whim, or at the behest of external religious authority. Twentieth-century conservative evangelicalism picks up the Princeton emphasis that miracles are contra naturam (see John H. Gerstner, "Warfield's Case for Biblical Inerrancy," in God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture, John Warwick Montogomery, ed., [Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974], p. 130).

One can make a case that Barthian neo-orthodoxy is "magical" in the sense that it repudiates continuity between the natural and the supernatural, between "religion" and "faith." Both Barth and Nevin affirm the radical priority of revelation; but from a Nevinian perspective, Barth's "revelation" is never "incarnate," i.e., it is always abstract in proclamation which might become revelation, but never takes settled, embodied form. Even the sacraments are reduced to an act of proclamation, which become revelatory through God's free (arbitrary?) grace. No doubt Barth would reply that Nevin's incarnationalism is always in peril of domesticating "revelation" and thereby transforming it into idolatrous religion. The similarities and differences between Nevin and Barth deserve close analysis, and just might be profoundly illuminating as a way of placing (replacing?) Nevin within the larger Reformed tradition.

- 45. Nevin, "The Sect System," in Catholic and Reformed, p. 153.
- 46. Quoted at note 34.
- 47. I suggest the best label for the view being rejected is "pseudo-Chalcedonianism." Pseudo-Chalcedonians hold to the <u>letter</u> of an incarnational Christology, while denying its <u>spirit</u>, its inner character, its <u>life</u>. There are any number of ostensibly "orthodox" Christologies, where the incarnation is exactly what Nevin denies: a "metaphysical theory," a set of ideas about divine revelation held as a substitute for the actual presence and power of revelation.

- 48. Nevin, "The Seal of the Spirit: A Sermon, The Substance of Which was Preached in the Presbyterian Church at Uniontown, Pa.," January 21, 1838 (Pittsburgh: Printed by William Allinder, 1838), p. 15.
- 49. Nevin, The Mystical Presence, p. 167.
- 50. Good recognizes this shift, which in his view is apparently Nevin's central mistake: pp. 116, 211, 253, 466-7.
- 51. Nevin, "Theological Vindication of the New Liturgy," p. 377.
- 52. Ibid., pp. 379-380.
- "false theories" of revelation as a: (1) "system of ethical rules" and "motives to virtue...in the character and example of Christ;" (2) supernatural revelation, which one must nonetheless "turn to saving account" by human effort; (3) system of "doctrine and precept," to which the believer has "the relation of mere knowledge," and the "moral suasion" of that knowledge as a "stimulus thus imparted to my will." See also "Christ the Inspiration of His Own Word," pp. 10-1; and "The Spirit of Prophecy," p. 207, where Nevin says that when "the miraculous" is not "the bearer of the Divine in its own bosom, the sacramental presence in truth of the very spiritual itself," it is "only diabolism and magic." In other words, the alleged supernaturalism of much of conservative Christian piety is "magic" because it is separated from living spiritual power.
- 54. Nevin, The Mystical Presence, p. 168; Nevin, "The Supreme Epiphany; God's Voice Out of the Cloud," Mercersburg Review XXV (1878):219; Nevin, "Christ the Inspiration of His Own Word," p. 14.
- 55. Nevin, The Mystical Presence, p. 176.
- 56. Ibid., pp. 206-7: "The everlasting Word...descends into the actual process of human history, and becomes within it the principle and law of a second creation...;" Nevin, "Christ the Inspiration of His Own Word," p. 13; Nevin, "The Testimony of Jesus," p. 14.
- 57. Nevin, The Mystical Presence, p. 246, emphasis added; a few sentences later he says that the "supernatural" is "made permanent and historical in the Church."
- 58. For examples of Nevin's use of this term, see Ibid., pp. 185, 240; and "Wilberforce on the Incarnation," in The Mercersburg Theology, p. 91.
- 59. E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism: a Comparison of Patterns of Religion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).
- 60. See the summary in Ibid., p. 514.
- 61. As over against Paul van Buren, A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality, 3 vols. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980-88), who seems to be able to surmount Christian anti-Judaism only by abolishing Christianity.
- 62. Nevin, The Mystical Presence, p. 166.

- 63. Ibid., p. 180.
- 64. Nevin, "The Spirit of Prophecy," The Mercersburg Review XXIV (1877):202-203.
- 65. See further Nevin, The Mystical Presence, pp. 192, 211-2, 219, 228.
- 66. Good is probably justified in claiming that Nevin's view is different from "the old Reformed view of justification." (Good, p. 241) See further, Good, pp. 242, 393, 590-1. On Berg's view, see Good, pp. 287 and 289; for Bomberger, see p. 476.
- 67. Nevin, The Mystical Presence, p. 240.
- 68. Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, p. 39.
- 69. Ibid., p. 4; Appel, p. 439.
- 70. Appel, p. 47.
- 71. Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, p. 14.
- 72. Nichols says only that "Western Seminary was not yet ready for his services;" (Ibid., p. 18) but Nevin himself admits that "my own health seemed to require building up." (quoted in Appel, p. 56).
- 73. Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology, pp. 192-4.
- 74. In generalizing "Holocaust," I am fully conscious of, and in no way intend to impugn, the Jewish claim that Shoah, the Holocaust, is a unique event. I am simply reminding us that the putative uniqueness of Shoah is a profound and unmistakable sign of the Holocaust-like character of history itself.
- 75. D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritsche Gesammtausgabe, ed. J. K. F. Knaake, G. Kawerau, E. Thiele, et al. (Weimar: H. Bohlau, 18830), vol. 5, p. 163, lines 28f., quoted and translated in William A. Clebsch, England's Earliest Protestants: 1520-1535 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 153.

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76. Matthew 16: 24, 25 (NIV).

# EVANGELICAL CATHOLICITY TODAY

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"Evangelical catholicity!" Those are fighting words today in some parts of the Church. Hear this from Gerhard Forde protesting its advocacy among today's Lutherans:

One comes away reading...one dominant message: If we want to be saved from going under with mainline American Protestantism we had better become something called "evangelical catholics."...What is going on here?...Why is it that the lines seem to be drawn in terms of certain loaded adjectives one can bandy about indiscriminately? What means this attempt to fix up or damn historical movements by adjective—mongering? "Catholic" is suddenly gussied up enough to meet with general approval by adding the adjective "evangelical?"

Jeffrey Gross, Roman Catholic theologian who serves as director of the Faith And Order Commission of the National Council of Churches is also interested in evangelical catholicity. Here is what he has to say in a review of George Shriver's book on Philip Schaff:

The discussion of "evangelical catholicism rose to prominence around the founding of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1988) and its selection of its name. For many this discussion was new. This volume chronicles the life of a man who gave currency to the term a century and a half ago, Philip Schaff....Indeed, his dream of an ecumenically united Christianity has begun to take shape in the United Church of Church in the US, a Church which is heir to his German Reformed, Pennsylvania denomination among others."

Ironies abound here. Lutherans who want to distance themselves from mainline Churches discover a new <a href="Kampfbegriff">Kampfbegriff</a>, "evangelical catholicity." Yet the words and concept come from a tradition and history these critics of the mainline are eager to repudiate. Indeed, the United Church of Christ, shaped by the evangelical catholic heritage, is viewed as a prime example of acculturated Protestantism. And to top it off, an important Roman Catholic theologian reminds the Lutherans of the roots of evangelical catholicity in the Reformed ancestors of the United Church of Christ!

Actually, the ELCA "catholic" caucus may be wiser in its intuitions than in its formulations. There is a more radical—root—critique in the Mercersburg understanding of evangelical catholicity than is understood by some of its new recruits. It has to do with an ecumenical legacy more encompassing than the Lutheran—Roman Catholic dialogue focal to their particular interests. It goes beyond the challenge to denominationalism, as important as that is. I am speaking about fundamental theological method and content.

To give attention to this aspect of the Mercersburg theology I am going to draw heavily on The Principle of Protestantism. Philip Schaff's inaugural address is the manifesto of evangelical catholicity. And, interestingly, a second inaugural address, that of John Payne on the occasion of his installation last year in the new Lancaster Seminary chair of Mercersburg and Ecumenical Theology,

takes up the key theme of catholic unity articulated by his predecessor. My remarks are an interpretation of theses found in each, as they touch on the state of theology in the churches today. And I shall try to connect with issues identified in Linden De Bie's paper, "Saving Evangelical Catholicism For Today."

Some of the persons who bore faithful witness to evangelical catholicity have been on my mind as these thoughts took form, sainted dead of recent memory: George Geisler, Theodore Trost, Sr., Bard Thompson, George Bricker. Over the past 30 years, I've worked with one or another of these faithful pastors and teachers for the Good Cause. They now know in the communion of saints the catholicity to which we on earth can only point in hope. I dedicate this paper to them.

### The Sect and the Tribe

The spread of the "sect principle," the "sect system," yes, the "sect plague," was the occasion for the Mercersburg theologians" exposition of evangelical catholicity. Is there equivalent environment today? Yes. Yesterday's sectarianism is today's tribalism.

A "tribe," by definition, is an aggregation of people of common stock, united by a community of customs and traditions. Tribalism is a state of affairs in which fundamental identity is established by participation in one or another separate community of common stock. Theological tribalism happens in the Christian community when fundamental Christian identity is associated with loyalty to the sub-community of common stock with its attendant customs and traditions. Evangelical catholicity today struggles against the tribe system, as evangelical catholicity yesterday stood against the sect system.

Tribal sectarianism today comes in two varieties, although there are also hybrid forms. Each is related to powerful cultural currents, secularization and pluralization, with their related modern and post-modern orthodoxies. I'm going to label the first imperial tribalism and the second confessional tribalism.

#### Imperial Tribes

Imperial tribalism reflects both the premise and the focus of a secular modernity. Truth comes by right knowledge of the world of time and space, and make that world livable. Today's historically conscious exists to secularity is well aware that "knowledge" is inseparable from historical circumstance and vested interest. That means understanding of what is the case, and what makes life livable is not so easily accessible as pre-critical confidences assumed. But there is a way. The door to the truth is unlocked by engagement. Kierkegaard and Marx long ago turned Hegel upside-down and shook the key from his pocket. To be in touch with the dynamisms of the Really Real is to be there in the midst of the movement, not alienated from it by thought or power. That means history is on the side of actor (not the thinker) and the oppressed (not the oppressor). And the same is so of knowledge, hence "the epistemological privilege" of the actor against oppression. Truth can be known, injustice can be overcome, the one world in which we dwell can be made livable. How it happens depends on the mobilization of the powerless, and solidarity with their cause.

Where these familiar themes of modernity connect with our issue of tribalism is at the "who" point. Who is the actor? As the measure of real injustice has

been taken in recent decades—in this country, from the civil rights struggles of the 60s on—the number of "whos" has multiplied. Callous is the Christian who has not done serious soul—searching as each marginalized constituency has made its case.

Significant epistemological claims are made in association with the demands of justice. Modern advocacy groups are, in this respect the children of Kierkegaard and Marx: what is to be known can only be known in a commensurate mode. More simply put, "the doer is the knower." Thus oppression, experienced and acted against, is the revelatory locus. To know God, encounter Christ, discern Scripture's meaning, require participation in this communal place of "epistemological privilege." Truth is tribal.

The tribalism so far discussed is one active in both theological academia and the mainline churches. But there is a variation of it also found in a country far distant from the shores of the AAR and the NCC. In this "evangelical empire" a strikingly similar claim of epistemological privilege is made. But the experience is worlds away from the political and social barricades of the change agent. This time the oppressor is the devil, and deliverance is from the thralldom of sin and guilt. Here the tribal rite is the "born again" experience. And the armies of conversion march with imperial design.

As truth is accessible in all tribalism only to those of common stock, relationships with outsiders can only be polemical or calls to conversion. No conversation is conceivable, for that would undercut the assumption of privileged loci. Where imperial tribalism reigns, the theological forum, or the church, begins to look like an armed camp. The city of Beirut replaces the City of God. Beirutization is the end.

#### Confessional Tribes

Postmodern protagonists smile at the warfare of epistemological empires. Truth found here or there? But "there is no there, there"—only illusory claims and interest—laden agendas ripe for deconstruction. We cannot know states of affairs, human or divine. We can never find "the truth." Be content with what we do have, not things truthful but things meaningful. Or, if you please, the meaningful is the truthful, what "works," maximally, for us, or minimally, for you.

Confessional tribalism comes down on the "for us." Influenced, consciously or otherwise, by developments in cultural anthropology and linguistics, and grounded in a Kantian agnosticism about knowledge of ultimate reality, the confessionalist fixes upon the features and boundaries of tribal self-definition. This land, these graves, these heroes, this lore, this language, these totems are who we are. We cannot step out of our skin, and we choose not to do so. Let us learn our language, love our lore, and live by our codes.

There is no tribal warfare here, only border patrol. Don't tread on me! Don't claim you are in when you are out. You have your turf and we have ours. There is plenty of room for all in this capacious country. The horizons are limitless. Our tribe will not claim sovereignty. We live and let live. We confess who we are, and you can do the same. No imperialism here. But neither is there warrant for conversation and cross-pollination. Pluralism baptizes the status quo.

An important version of confessional tribalism appears to move toward the imperial view by its more strident self-definition: those of common stock who are not faithful to the boundaries risk contamination by alien tribes. There is no desire to take "the others" by storm in the fashion of imperial modes, but rather to assure the loyalty of one's own to one's own. Something of a "fortress mentality" obtains, the "sect-type" in Troeltsch's famous schematization. The self-identified tradition, denomination, or "confession" become the principle of inclusion and exclusion.

Like the imperial, so the confessional view makes telling points. We are creatures of our history, community and heritage; the fact of pluralization forces us to acknowledge and live with the reality of many and varied worldviews; the recovery of our forgotten lore is fundamental to faith today. The question is, however: what is the definitive history, community and heritage for Christian believers? What alternatives? And what lore gives us our fundamental identity?

Clues to our answer to tribalism today are to be found in the Mercersburg theologian's struggle with sectarianism yesterday.

### Corinthian Catholicity

According to Schaff, sect pollution had been unleashed upon the land: "Poisonous weeds shoot up thus wild and luxuriant in our Protestant garden." What is this disease?

Anyone who has, or fancies he has, some inward experience and a ready tongue may persuade himself that he is called to be a reformer; and so proceeds in his spiritual vanity and pride in a revolutionary rupture with the historical life of the church, to which he holds himself immeasurably superior...the deceived multitude, having no power to discern spirits, is converted not to Christ and his truth, but to the arbitrary fancies and baseless opinions of an individual who is only of yesterday...a variegated sampler of all conceivable chimeras and dreams..."

"evangelical catholicism" and "evangelical catholicity." To define this alternative Schaff drew from the storehouse of current European philosophy, romanticist and idealist—the Schlegels, Novalis, Schelling, Hegel and their theological appropriators, Schleiermacher, Neander, Dorner, Hengstenberg. Even in the title of the key Chapter 5, these cultural debts are clear: "The True Standpoint: Protestant Catholicism or Historical Progress." So all the catchwords of the age found their way into the Mercersburg theology: organism, growth, progress, history, diversity.

Mercersburg can be explored against the background of its culture but it cannot be explained in reductionist fashion by the social or philosophical currents of its time. It borrowed, somewhat eclectically, categories from the intellectual atmosphere of the day to defend and interpret the faith as it understood it. (John Payne gives evidence of this eclecticism when he notes that Schaff uses in The Principle of Protestantism two theories of development "which he holds together in uneasy tension: the romantic, organic and the idealist, dialectical," one stressing continuities and the other oppositions. If the foes were the individualism, rationalism and subjectivism of the hour, then any weapon at hand that one could use responsibly was hefted into position. But the weapon must not be mistaken for the vision and the passion.

One does not have to look far to find the latter in the text. To the one who

has any right idea of the church, as the communion of saints, this state of things must be the source of deep distress. The loss of all earthly possessions, the death of his dearest friend, however severely felt would be as nothing to him, compared to the grief he felt for such division and distraction of the church of God, the Body of Jesus Christ. Not for the price of the whole world with all its treasures, could he be induced to appear as the founder of a new sect... Not a solitary passage of the Bible is on their side... The Lord is come to make of twain one; to gather the dispersed children of God throughout the whole world into one fold, under one Shepherd. His last commission to his disciples was that they should love one another, and serve one another... His last prayer before his bitter passion was that his followers might be made perfect in one, as he was in the Father and the Father in him...Paul exhorts the Corinthians in the name of Jesus Christ that they should all speak the same thing and that there should be no division among them, but that they should be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. They must not call themselves after Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or Christ in the way of party or sect. For Christ is not divided .... "

Schaff pursues Paul's Corinthian image in some interesting ways, indeed using a Hegelian walking stick on the path. As in Corinth, so on the Pennsylvania frontier, to name the party spirit was not to deny the partisans' gift.

The divine significance of sects, then, their value in the history of the church, consists in this, that they are a disciplinary scourge, a voice of awakening and admonition by which the church is urged to new life and a more conscientious discharge of her duties. The system has a favorable operation further, as it tends to spread religious interest and stimulate Christian zeal. In this country, perhaps, if there were no sects, we should have half as many congregations and houses of worship as we have now, and many blessings of the Gospel altogether."

Schaff's irenicism includes, specifically, a good word for the so-called "Puritans:"

The deep moral earnestness, the stern self-discipline, the unbending force of character must fill the unprejudiced historian with admiration. There are reasons for its war against false forms...We may never ungratefully forget that it was this generation of godly Pilgrims which once and for all stamped upon our country that charter of deep moral earnestness...that peculiar zeal for the Sabbath and the Bible that have raised it so high a place in the history of the Christian Church, and enabled it to compare so favorably with the countries of the Old World. For our German emigration in particular it must be counted a high privilege that it is here brought into contact with the practical piety of the English community, and by degrees also imbued more or less with its power; though with the loss, to be regretted on the other side of many German peculiarities. Thousands of souls that might have died in vanity and unbelief in their native land, have thus been rescued, we may trust, from eternal perdition."

With all these good things, why rage against the "sect plague?" The answer is its violation of Corinthian catholicity. The sect takes the good gift given to it by the Holy Spirit and makes it the be-all and end-all of Christ's Church. To the sectarian must come the Word: "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you,...If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?" (I Cor. 12:21, 17).

Said in the incarnational and ecclesial language of Mercersburg: the divine-human Person of Christ lives now among us as the Body of Christ on earth, giving it unity, apostolicity, sanctity and catholicity. To draw apart from the living Body, to set oneself up in arrogance outside of it, and more, to claim one's little sect to be the true Church is to be cut off from the Life of the Body. Sects can only be born to die in their insularity.

The alternative? Honor the continuities. Refuse to overleap the centuries in a vain attempt to repristinate beginnings. Specifically, recognize the gifts brought to the Church by patristic and medieval Christianity. Celebrate the Reformation advances. But do not abort a growth that looks beyond these to yet greater things to come. Learn from Neander's (cum Hegel) about the church of Peter—thesis, the church of Paul—antithesis, the church of John—synthesis.

### Evangelical Norms

For Mercersburg, authentic catholicity is evangelical. Schaff spends 61 pages expounding the "advance" in historical development represented by the Reformation. At its heart are the affirmation of justification by grace through faith alone and the final authority of Scripture, the "material: and "formal" principles that are, in fact, "two different sides...of one and the same principle,"--the Protestant principle.

#### Sola Fide

Schaff calls justification—the material principle—the "article of life," the article by which the church stands or falls. He describes it in this manner:

This all-sufficient satisfaction of Christ takes hold upon the individual subjectively in justification. This is a judicial, declarative act on the part of God, by which he first pronounces the sin-crushed, contrite sinner free from guilt as it regards the past, for the sake of the only-begotten Son and then...makes over to him in boundless mercy the full righteousness of the same, to be counted and to be in fact his own. It is in this way (1) negatively, remissio peccatorum...and (2) positively, imputatio justitiae and adoptio in filios Dei...Man by justification steps into the place of Christ, as Christ had previously stepped into the place of man. In this way, all Pelagian and semi-Pelagian self-righteousness is torn up by the roots...While the merit of Christ is thus viewed as the only ground, the only means of appropriation...is presented to us in faith. This is...the free gift of God, which is offered and imparted to (us) through the word of sacraments.

In an otherwise standard-brand statement of Reformation soteriology Schaff's "to be in fact his own" and "imparted to us" reflect his second Adam Christology and his attempt to respond to Roman Catholic charges that the Reformers endorsed an abstract view of the Work of Christ and a loveless faith. Further, this

Christology presupposes a sweeping Reformed vision of God's covenantal history:

God, before whom the dimensions of time all give way in the same vast eternity, looks upon men in their inmost nature as rooted in Christ, with whom they are brought into living union by faith. For the relation of Christ to humanity is not outward but inward and essential. He is the second Adam, the spiritual head of the race...The justifying act becomes itself the occasion, by which the principle is actualized in its subject, having creative force, quickening the dead...and thus lodges in his person a life germ altogether new, in which is comprehended from the start the entire growth of holiness.

Schaff is making several moves here. One of them, in typical Reformed fashion, stretches "back" into the eternal covenant between the first and second Persons, and thence to the plan that unfolds from Adam through the fall to Incarnation and Atonement. And another move is forward through the Church's Word and sacraments to the "application of the benefits" of Christ's Person and Work. The article by which the church stands or falls is the evangelical Word to the sinner: sola fide. But it cannot be torn from a sentence that includes sola gratia in its full covenantal range and solus Christus in its historical particularity. Justification is God's gracious work from beginning to end, as well as in its personal application to the contrite sinner. For Mercersburg, catholicity applies to the Protestant principle itself: its very definition resists reductionism. Thus the full sweep of the Story is taken into the meaning of the evangel in "evangelical"—the Good News of God from Covenant to creation to Christ to consummation.

### Sola Scriptura

Scripture alone is the final authority for evangelical faith.

To the material or life principle of the Reformation accordingly is joined as its necessary complement the formal or knowledge principle, which consist in this, that the word of God, as it has been handed down to us in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments is the pure and proper source as well as the only certain measure of all saving truth.

What is the "word of God?"

If there is any unerring fountain of truth...it can be found only in the word of God, who is himself the truth; and this becomes consequently the highest norm and rule by which we measure all human truth, all ecclesiastical tradition and all symodical decrees...Infallibility belongs to Christ and his word alone.

As <u>sola fide</u> is inseparable from its companions in Mercersburg's catholicity, so too is <u>sola Scriptura</u>. Scripture is read through the lens of Christ. As Christ is the eternal Word of God, we are taken once again to the gracious Word that was in the beginning, the Word that brought creation to be, the Word that is enfleshed in Christ that will come again in triumph. <u>Solus Christus</u> and <u>sola gratia</u> join <u>sola Scriptura</u>.

Catholicity leaves its mark again on the relation of Scripture to tradition. Evangelical faith recognizes the historical necessity of tradition, the Spirit's

gift of illumination given to the church in ritual, historical and dogmatic forms. But it rejects any claim to parity with Scripture, or worse, regency over it. Tradition is always measured by the biblical source and norm.

The highest form of tradition is its dogmatic form as found in the ecumenical creeds and the Reformation confessions.

Tradition in this sense is absolutely indispensable. By its means we come first to the contents of the Bible...This tradition therefore is not a part of the divine word separately from that which is written, but the contents of Scripture itself as apprehended and settled by the church against heresies past and always new appearing....

So the "church of Paul" makes its witness to the Church catholic. Without the evangelical principle in both its expressions there is no <u>faithful</u> and <u>scriptural</u> Christianity. Catholicity means, as well, that the two need each other:

The material element without the objective basis of the formal becomes swarming inwardism, and in the end sheer subjectivity. The formal element without the material, however, conducts to stiff, lifeless and soulless externalism, the idolatry of the letter....

So evangelical catholicity entails a catholic evangel at its reformation center, determinedly Pauline, but set within a Johannine circumference.

### Evangelical Catholicity Today

There is a Corinthian Word to be spoken to our times of tribalism. It needs to be heard in two ways.

The first has to do with the mode of discourse necessary in the Christian community. The Corinthian church was the body of those baptized in Christ. Paul soon enough discovered that this included all manner of folk who conceived of membership exclusively in terms meaningful to their particular charisms—prophecy, tongues, helping, healing, administration...I Corinthian 12 affirms the legitimacy of the diversity, but excoriates the drive to hegemony. I Corinthians 13 takes it a step further pressing beyond mutual recognition to mutual coinherence, the Agape that God is in the inner-trinitarian Life Together reflected in the agape/koinonia of Corinthian life together.

For Schaff this "church of love" as he called it, was to be traced to the perichoretic unity of the Father and the Son (John 17:6). It meant a sharp No! to loveless fissiparation in any form, the "sect plague." And that required an upsetting openness of the Reformation Churches to each other, to their predecessors, and to development toward a larger unity beyond each and all. For us it means a sharp No! to tribalism. "No" to imperial claims that this or that modern charism is the sum and substance of the Gospel, the place of epistemological privilege to which all must come to know Christ and be the Body. "No" also to confessional tribalism satisfied with its location and lore, needing no other charism, content and complete in what it is and has. If ecclesial sin comes twined, then the former is arrogance and the latter apathy, or in the language of the tradition, superbia and accedia.

The beginning of openness is the readiness to colloquy. Luther spoke of the "mutual conversation and consolation" of the sisters and brother in the

congregation as a veritable means of grace. Catholicity of this sort means the rebirth of theological conversation in the church. It means a household of common talk. All retreat into our comfortable rooms is over, for the bell calls to the common table. It is time for tabletalk in the family of God.

correction. In the midst of colloquy the Spirit can work a change of heart and mind. When the Mercersburg theologians came out of their solitary confinement to the Protestant room and walked the hallways with medieval and patristic housemates, they had to leave behind ultra-Protestant ideology. Just so, one can recognize the diseases of confinement: individualism, uncritical private judgment, subjectivism, biblicism.

Can catholicity today make for comparable vulnerability and self-criticism? To be open to correction and complementarity means that the charisms of the most strident advocacy groups are welcomed by others. The hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of partisanship do have a Word from the places of suffering and oppression: to know and serve the Christ of the hungry and hopeless is to keep company with them there, to learn to look at the Gospel in new ways as Good News for the poor and the captive. But the road to Corinth is a two-way street. The Gospel is Good News for the sinner as well as the sufferer, and an evangel that proclaims triumph over death as well as oppression. The fullness of the Gospel proclaimed in the church will be in direct proportion to the mutual correction and completion of our tribal monologues. Let the imperialist who raids and the confessionalist who patrols dismantle their juggernauts and take down their barricades. Open borders and welcomed strangers bring strength and growth.

The mutual correction that comes from open conversation brings with it, therefore, a far richer grasp of the content of faith. Tribalism produces doctrinal fragmentation—heresy; a catholic life together nurtures a full-orbed faith.

Standing alone, "catholicity" could be a worse alternative than the tribalism it purports to challenge—a new normless tribe with no self—critical principle, a process ideology that asserts interaction for its own sake. Mercersburg faced the same option in the romanticism and idealism of its own day and chose the better part: the "Protestant principle," evangelical catholicity. Entry into the Johannine "church of love" was by the Pauline corridor: the justifying work of God in Christ according to the testimony of Scripture. For us the same standard must be obtained. Both the mode and content of catholicity live under the evangelical norm. The claims of each tribe, what they give to and receive from other charisms must pass muster before the Scripture as read in the light of full Gospel and according to its center, Jesus Christ. We have noted that the material principle of Gospel justification brings complementarity of content to those captive to today's inwardisms and pietisms, on the one hand, and social reductionisms and utopianisms, on the other. Let us attend to the impact of the evangelical Scripture principle at this point.

In both imperial and confessional tribalism, "human experience" is normative: the epistemological privilege of the engaged in the former—the actor in the drama of liberation; the non-epistemological act of loyalty to the warp and woof of group experience in the latter. Truth is or truth as the company of the committed. Scripture is the creature of the community, the Word of the tribe.

The Word of God, Jesus Christ, as he is attested to in Scripture, is captive to no one and no thing. Human experience, whether it be the experience of the oppressed, the experience of the Christian community, or the "evangelical" experience of being born again, is not the final Word we have "to trust and obey." That sovereign Word can be spoken against all these experiences, and always must be understood as spoken to them, not from them. This is the evangelical Scripture principle to which all our tribalisms are accountable.

Faithfulness to a <u>catholic</u> evangelical principle means that the gifts brought by experiential charisms to the Body of Christ cannot be scorned. The Word is sovereign enough not to be bound by its freedom from us. It can be <u>free</u> for us and in <u>us</u>, even free enough to use our experience in, or outside of the church, social or personal. Indeed, the promise of the covenant with Noah is that we have a right to look for signs in our human experience of truth, and thus in the experience of the most imperial of tribes. But as this "common grace" is that of the eternal Word, Jesus Christ, our instrument of discernment is always the Christ known in and disclosed by Scripture. Further, a solemn promise has been made at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit will never desert the Body of Christ. So the most restrictive of confessional tribes may have gifts to bring. The Self-authenticating Word spoken to us in Scripture is, again, our principle of discernment and interpretation of all tribal claims.

#### Conclusion

Evangelical catholicity has telling significance for our tribal times. Let those who believe that share the gift given to them in the church struggles of our day. Not as one more sect claiming to have the definitive Word! That would be the ultimate irony. Rather, let this charism do a catalytic work wherever it finds itself. In the communities of faith in which we live, let us bear witness to the Corinthian vision as illumined by the evangelical Word.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1. Gerhard Forde, "Lutheran for the Time Being" Dialog Vol. 27, No. 3 (Summer 1988), 164-165.
- Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC, review of George Shriver, Philip Schaff: Christian Scholar and Ecumenical Prophet. Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1987. Mimeograph, 1988.
- Philip Schaff, The Principle of Protestantism. Translated by John W. Nevin, Edited by Bard Thompson and George Bricker. Lancaster Series on the Mercersburg Theology, Vol. I (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1964).
- John B. Payne, "Mercersburg and Ecumenical Theology: What's the Connection?" The New Mercersburg Review, No. 7 (Spring, 1990), 3-13.
- Linden J. De Bie, "Saving Evangelical Catholicism Today," <u>The New Mercersburg Review</u>, No. 6 (Autumn, 1989), 11-21.
- 6. Schaff, op. cit., 150.
- 7. Ibid., 149-50.
- 8. Ibid., 165.
- 9. Payne, op. cit., 4.
- 10. Schaff, op. cit., 151-152.
- 11. Ibid., 171-172.
- 12. Ibid., 147. On the roots of Schaff's irenicism see Shriver, op. cit., 8-10.
- 13. Schaff, op. cit., 99.
- 14. Ibid., 87-88.
- 15. Ibid., 94-95.
- 16. Ibid., 98.
- 17. Ibid., 106.
- 18. Ibid., 116.
- 19. Ibid., 123.
- 20. "Colloquy" and "Tabletalk" have been important features of the writer's involvement with Mercersburg's contemporary witness: Craigville Colloquy's I to VII, 1984-90, which have sought to bring together the diversity of perspectives in the United Church of Christ in the quest for a larger unity; "Theological Tabletalk" at Lancaster Theological Seminary, 1962-1970, and at Andover Newton Theological School, 1971 to the present, weekly gatherings of clergy, theological students and teachers to discuss current theological works.

### UNIQUELY BASIC: A SERMON

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Isaiah 42:5-9; I Corinthians 3:10-23; Luke 22:24-30

I find it to be a kind of rule that precisely at those times when one is feeling overextended, time limited, pushed from all sides, people -- and especially co-workers and those close to us place demands and expectations upon us. We need time, we need distance, we need understanding and support and instead we get "I am sorry to bother you but I must have a couple of minutes;" "I know this is not a good time, but could you take care of this soon;" "I need your help, can I interrupt you?" Psychodynamically, people need the security of being in touch, being reassured that all is well, being convinced that the one in charge is in charge even, and especially, at crisis times.

As I read the scriptures, that phenomenon happened to Jesus all the time. People crowded upon him, besought him, clawed at him, demanded him to give...give...give. There seemed, at times, to be precious lack of sensitivity. That was especially true of the disciples, those who, of all people, should have known better and understood more. They should have been part of the solution. Yet, more often than not, they were a part of the problem.

This evening's Gospel (Luke 22:24-30) is a case in point. The passage is set within the context of the Upper Room events, and is part of the farewell discourse of Jesus. The future had become increasingly clear to Jesus. For Him, the end was nearing. Directly ahead lay suffering and temptation, rejection and death. His need was for comfort and encouragement and support and cooperation. Instead he got drawn into the continuing debate among the disciples about who was most important and, quite possibly, heard again the request, "Teacher grant us to sit one on your right hand and one on your left when you come in your glory." Another demand, another expectation, another distraction from the truly critical realities which lay at hand.

Underneath the need for reassurance, security, reinforcement was another phenomenon, a phenomenon that pervades humanity, including the disciples of Jesus, including you and me and the members of the Mercersburg Society. I want to identify it for us, but more, I want us to grapple with Jesus' response to it and with the implications of that response for us today and into the future. I want to do that with three propositions.

The first is this: We have a basic desire to be unique. That is to say, each of us has a fundamental drive, an urge, a need to be different, to be special, to be unique, to be noticed and appreciated as the one and only.

Some of that urge is a consequence of pride. We want to stand out from others. We want to be singularly appreciated. We want to be recognized as special.

Some of that urge is a result of our concentration upon marketing techniques. Certainly we see and hear such emphasis every day in many ways: "Try new and improved Super Clean;" "We are the only gasoline with X-D6;" "Excel is alone in its class;" "Create your own scent with Aroma-you."

We look for the special, the singular, the unique in our own persons and

positions and situations. Last week I was talking with one of our finest pastors in Penn Central Conference. He was sharing some of the joys and frustrations of his pastoral ministry. At one point, referring to a conversation with his Church Council, he said, "I asked them to think about what is unique in our church. What makes our congregation different from others in our community? Why would people choose to come to our church? I ask myself that all of the time," he said, "because that's the key to church growth and development."

I sense that urge to be unique is also present in the Mercersburg Society based on the theology for which it is named and dedicated. There is a desire not only for the society to be known as special and different, but also to lift up the content of Mercersburg Theology as something very unusual. Some might like nothing better than for Jesus to say, "And you, Mercersburg Theologians, keepers of the true faith, first among your colleagues, special among my disciples, come, sit at my right hand."

It is basic — to our personality, to our position, to our perspective — to desire to be unique. That's what the disciples in the Lukan passage were disputing, that is what we continue to dispute, individually and collectively, though we may not be as obvious about it.

My second proposition is: We are not unique, we are basic. Jesus' response to the disciples makes that abundantly clear. "The Gentiles -- those who do not know me and are not a part of our movement -- strive to be special, to have positions of authority and prominence, to be unique among their colleagues. It shall not be so for you. Whoever would be first shall be as the last. Whoever would be greatest shall be as the youngest, whoever would lead shall follow."

We are not called to be unique Christians. We are called to be basic Christians.

That is true for our theology as well. That is inherent in Mercersburg Theology. I am no Mercersburg scholar, but I have read enough and studied enough to be able to say that Mercersburg Theology is not unique, it is basic. I believe it is not a unique expression of recent Christianity as much as it is a basic expression of foundational Christianity. The core dimensions are elemental: The church is the body of Christ, a living organism with each state inextricably developing from a previous one and developing into a future one — In the church we are members, one of another, with Christ as our Head, our center, the principle of Christianity incarnate — Worship and liturgy and spiritual development, grounded in history and reason and order, are basic conveyors of the faith as well as expressions of the faithful. My friends, that is basic Christianity.

That is not an offshoot, that is not a new development, that is bedrock, that is taproot. Mercersburg Theology is not unique, it is basic.

This evening's epistle (I Corinthians 3:10-23) dealt with divisions in the church, with those who said they were Paul's or Apollos' or Cephas' or Presbyterians, or Methodists, or Episcopalians, or United Church of Christ. Paul concluded his consideration by reminding them of who they really were as Christians, "So let no one make a human boast. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's." (Lectionary for the Christian People, RSV amended)

So then, it is basic to be unique, but we are not unique we are basic.

My third proposition is: Because we are basic, we are unique. The conclusion to the Lukan passage is striking. Having just emphasized the basic servanthood and commonality of those who would be his disciples, Jesus now bestows upon the disciples a very special and unique status and function. "You shall sit at my table. You shall commune with me. I shall assign you authority, as I have been assigned authority."

Robert Greenleaf responded to a professor's challenge to enter the corporate world of big business and be a force for good. He did that by developing a sense of leadership through service. In his book, Servant Leadership, he wrote:

The idea of servant as leader came out of reading Herman Hesse's Journey to the East. In this story we see a band of men on a mythical journey, probably Hesse's own journey. The central figure of the story is Leo who accompanies the party as the servant who does their menial chores, but also sustains them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence. All goes well until Leo disappears. Then the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. They cannot make it without the servant Leo. The narrator, one of the party, after some years of wandering finds Leo and is taken into the Order that had sponsored the journey. There he discovers that Leo, whom he had first known as servant, was in fact the titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble leader...this story clearly says that the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness.

Greenleaf's conclusions are sound. But he didn't have to wait for Hesse to discover the truth of true leaders being, first and foremost, servants. Our Head both taught and incarnated that truth. "I am among you as one who serves," Jesus said. Again, "...not to be served but to serve." And he added, "If any one serves me, that one must follow me." We have a base status as Christ's servants; we have a special status as Christ's disciples.

The special role of the servant in the Isaiah passage (42:5-9) is our role. So is the special claim of God upon us, through Christ. "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations...." (RSV)

We are unique and we are special. But we are that because of God's claim upon our lives. The important matter is not what we have and not who we are and not whether we do great deeds for God. The important matter is what God has done, and continues to do, for us in Jesus Christ whom we follow and serve. The important matter is that we be true to the claim and the call of God.

That same reality is true for Mercersburg Theology. What makes it special is not some new, creative, different, innovative insight. What makes it special and unique is precisely its basic and common encoding of Christian truth. It is God's basic Word contained within the human word that makes the theology unique and special. To the extent that we allow and enable God's truth to be known in and through that theology, to that extent we help it be special.

In that regard I want to challenge the Mercersburg Society this evening. I want to challenge you to not make yourselves -- even more to not make the theology

which gives you your name and sustains your life -- separate and distant from the larger church around you. We don't need you to be more apart. We need you to be more approachable. We don't need Mercersburg Theology to be more isolated. We need Mercersburg Theology to be more integral to our life and worship and witness. We don't need only technical explication, we also need practical application, if Mercersburg Theology's uniquely basic expression of Christianity is to impact the church as it should.

For the sake of the church I'd love to see the Society engage in the development of a simple, sound, liturgy for our day. For the sake of the church I'd rejoice at having a carefully crafted catechetical expression of Christianity, brief, usable, contemporary, to mold the faith of our young and to be crucible in which mature Christians integrate faith and practice. For the sake of the church I'd be helped by having some prayers for special reasons — anniversaries and ordinations and dedications — which contain and convey that basic concept of the one holy catholic and apostolic church uniquely written for our day. The Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ "...affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make (the) faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression and in purity of heart before God." That's the challenge I put before you: help the Church to incorporate the theology you love enough to devote serious time and study and money toward presenting it in ways which are both immediately helpful and far reaching. Serve the Lord, serve the Church, as Nevin and Schaff did.

It is basic to be unique. We are not unique, we are basic. Because we are basic we are unique.

In a few moments we will be partaking of the Eucharist. We come to that table not because we deserve it, but because we desire it. We come not because we have any claim upon it but because God has claimed us and provided the meal for our sustenance. We come not because we have made ourselves special but because God has made us servants.

The elements on the table are basic elements of life, like us. The elements on that table are also unique, like us, not because of some essential content but because of the context in which they have been reclaimed and for which they have been set aside.

The Eucharist is special and unique. So are you. So am I. So is the theology we know and love called Mercersburg. We are all "uniquely basic." Praise be to God. Amen.

## HOW FAR TO MERCERSBURG? A SERMON

Pastor, Lemasters-Upton Charge United Church of Christ Lemasters, Pennsylvania

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Philippians 4:4-8; John 8:31-36

When people who are not familiar with this area ask me where my churches are located, I begin by saying, "St. Stephen's is located in Upton and St. Paul's is located in Lemasters." Since many people have never heard of these small villages, I usually end up by saying, "My churches are not far from Mercersburg." That's when they come to realize the approximate location.

When we calculate distance, we do so in terms of measurements. We use inches, feet, yards, miles, or even the metric system. But we can also calculate distance in terms of feeling levels, attitudes or philosophies. At this moment I could say that I am standing approximately 10 feet from the nearest person in the pew. But I hope that I could calculate, both philosophically and emotionally, that we are more closely related to one another because of our faith in Jesus Christ. If my assumption is not correct then I'm in trouble.

In yet another way, we are removed by 473 years from the date in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed to the door of the church in Wittenberg his protest statements against the authorities of Rome. But in the living out of our faith, we are very close to the feeling level of Martin Luther, and we are greatly indebted to him for his courage in expressing his beliefs which changed the shape of the church forever.

Today, we are in Mercersburg, a beautiful little village, with the campus of the Academy and Trinity church, the place we gather for worship. Most of us have had to travel some distance to get here. Perhaps you needed directions to get here. We are removed by 150 years from the date of the arrival of Professor John Williamson Nevin who joined the faculty at the seminary which was located in Mercersburg. He came to Mercersburg from Pittsburgh where he taught in Western Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church. It did not take long for Nevin to make his influence felt in all the Reformed church, and we are not far removed from that influence which has come to be known as Mercersburg Theology.

Church life in America in the early 1800s had a lot of similarities to that of today. There were many varieties of liturgies, denominations and preachers. A major movement sweeping the country was the revival movement which stressed a public display of repenting of one's sins. The "anxious bench" or the "altar call" became the means for accepting Christ in a moment of emotional soul-searching.

There was a lot of debate, then as now, over the use of this method that used showmanship tactics for converting souls to Christ. The debate today is not only over the "altar call" but also includes the "electronic church" which requires nothing more than sitting at home, watching TV, and sending money to keep the popular preachers in business.

But that's not the way it happened in Mercersburg. The back of your bulletin gives you some of the details about what took place here at Trinity Church so

I'll let you read that. Suffice it to say the conflict that occurred here at Trinity was a result of the Revivalists who place a great deal of emphasis on an emotional appeal to spiritual commitment. But the Mercersburg Movement places emphasis on learning, on searching for truth, on living truth as revealed in the study and learning process.

The late Professor George Bricker once wrote that John Nevin and Philip Schaff saw the church, not as a gathering of converted individuals, but as a "holy mother" who imparts the new life of Christ to all her children. Professor Bricker said, "Salvation comes through this divine institution whose spiritual and sacramental resources mediate the new life of Christ." Christ lives in the church and the members receive Christ through her.

St. John in his Gospel says, "The Son of Man makes you free." The Mercersburg people taught this truth of Christianity. From what I can gather, Mercersburg was the first theological school in America to teach the Christocentric idea of Christianity; Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God is head of the human race. He is the second Adam, and we who are born in him by the Holy Spirit are his members. Christ is glorified in heaven while we, still in the flesh on earth, together constitute one mystical body. That is our understanding of the church and that church is Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.

The church is also the gathering of the faithful who come to Christ in the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist. Paul wrote to the Philippians saying, "The Lord is at hand." Our nearness to Mercersburg assures us of God's nearness to the sacraments, the signs and seals of God's covenant, which are our means of grace through faith.

Mercersburg Theology also emphasized the setting in which the teaching would be done, the prayers would be said, the Gospel would be preached and the hymns would be sung. An order of service compatible with Mercersburg Theology was developed in 1866. It has been modified since that time, but the basic elements are still a part of this service today.

The Cristocentric aspect of our worship calls us together in faith. We follow the cross of Christ and hold it before us through the service. We petition God for forgiveness, for personal and corporate sins, that we might receive his mercy. We hear the words of absolution, from the scripture and from our understanding of the reconciling love of God poured out for us in the death and resurrection of Christ. We stand for the reading of the Gospel and join together in praying and singing. We open our minds to understanding the spoken word and we receive the blessing of heaven as we go forth to put the word into practice. In this service, as in this theology, we come to know who we are as people of God.

During the Mercersburg Convocation, we will celebrate the faith of our ancestors, we will celebrate this Mercersburg movement. I, for one, am optimistic about this movement, for not only has it captured the attention of those in the Reformed tradition, but it has captured the attention of the world. There are many elements of its truth revealed in mainline protestant denominations. Many elements of its truth are captured in the COCU documents. I think it will continue to grow and be important to people as they search for the truth of Jesus Christ.

God gave Jeremiah a covenant to give to the people and his promise to be with them. From such a passage of hope like this Nevin and Schaff developed their

faith upon which the structure of the Mercersburg Theology was built. From the awareness that we are not far from Mercersburg, even as we leave this historical setting and travel back home, we can go with the assurance that the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.

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# FUTURE THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

A Review Article

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THE CHRISTIAN STORY: A PASTORAL SYSTEMATICS
Volume 2: Authority: Scripture in the Church for the World
By Gabriel Fackre. Eerdmans (1987), 366 pp.

How does a plodding, interim, parish minister of the Gospel critique the writing of a seasoned, systematic theologian of the Church, with a clarity of thought, and a depth of faith worthy of thoughtful readers of The New Mercersburg Review? To do so requires the gut of intellectual pursuit and a fearless faith.

The Introduction notes a particular reference to the rumor that there are few who read theological tomes. How many read a daily newspaper today? Does the parish minister read/study in an across-the-board view of contemporary existence in the techno-space age? It is an imperative to know, to believe, to counteract the powers and principalities of our time.

It is assumed that there is theological ferment in the United Church of Christ. Ralph Martin in the decade of the eighties wrote of the Crisis Of Truth in the Roman Catholic Church. He referred to a UCC missionary in the Philippines who spoke to a Catholic gathering of bishops. The missionary was a consultant to the World Council and the National Council of Churches. Christian Moslem dialogue should focus on mutual understanding of social change. The effort to bring Muslims to Christ is obsolete. He said, "The times of converting are over." Does not such thinking betray the mission of the Gospel? The faith-crisis goes on in the UCC.

### SYSTEMATIC EXEGESIS

A quick, incisive statement for reading Vol. 2, The Christian Story is crystalized as follows: To read the Sources requires a theological perspective --historical, doctrinal, exegetical and eschatological. There is in the Pastoral Systematics a broad scope of various theological positions that must weave a consistent pattern of thought--it is not "tittle tattle"--a Heidegger comment on human chitchat. One gathers structure for sermonizing, and substance for dialogue with other questing spirits in the Christian faith.

First of all, Dr. Fackre in his Introduction refers to the many individuals and groups in dialogue over the years who have contributed to his deeper understanding of mission, Christology, Scripture and ecclesiology. He states clearly from the outset that the "central truth claim of the Christian faith is Jesus Christ. The one source is the Scripture, and the inclusive Church the Resource.

Secondly, he refers to the Craigville Pilgrimage as a "small theological drama" involving clergy and laity in the Decade of the Eighties. The drama has accented certain theological concerns oft-times ignored in the more works minded UCC. They are: ultimate source of authority in "the holy God," "basic interpretation principal of Scripture is Jesus Christ," and a restating of the role of tradition via the Church—not a source but a resource that cannot be ignored.

In exploring the meaning of authority one pursues the following order: Chapter I, Authority and Revelation; Chapter II, Options in Authority; Chapter III, Text of Authority; Chapter IV, Context of Authority; Chapter V, Authority and Exegesis and Chapter VI, Authority and Systematics.

A few insights from each chapter are in order.

In Chapter I, Revelation as doctrine undergirds authority. The Scriptural view is grounded in God's revelation. And the revelation is not a disclosure of something but of <a href="Someone">Someone</a>. The Biblical story of prophet and apostle is redemption/revelation as the guideposts of authority.

In Chapter II, the variety of viewpoints as options in authority are dealt with in depth. Fackre sets forth major types in which there are multiple subtypes. These are the major types: Bible, Church and world.

The Biblical options are: Oracular View, Inerrancy View, Combinationist View and Sola Scriptura. In the Sola Scriptura view there are five subtypes. The fifth one is Contextual. It relates to the hermeneutical debate on feminism in the contemporary Church, seeking to emerge from a "male-dominated culture." The Church must make room "for a women church and its witness, in new critic-in-residence" in order to affirm a wholeness of the Gospel to the world. The reader must critique these views according to one's fundamental Christian perspective.

In Chapter III the focus turns to the Pastor as he or she prepares the sermon for the first day of the New Week. With text in mind, it means dealing with "four senses" of Scripture: common, critical, canonical, and contextual. In the Introduction the author affirmed the importance of Jesus the Christ. Christ is the center! Why? The heart of the Deus Revelatus is Jesus the Christ as the saving grace who, via the cross, "delivers us from sin, evil and death and discloses the truth to us."

Chapter IV relates the emphasis on the Context of Authority. As the Pastor prepares the sermon there are some ever-present questions. Will the congregation hear the Word? How does it impact the daily life of the worshiper? In 1984 Sherry Turkle wrote about the computer impact in the book entitled, The Second Self. She claimed that in the last quarter of this century the debate of existence will center on the machine and one's existence. How does this impact preaching of the Gospel? An open question.

There is a difference between contextualization as "truth for us/me," and textualization that is "truth for all." There evolves, as a result, a division between internal and external hermeneutics. One must follow the discussion carefully with an awareness of a catholicity of faith, in reference to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry and The COCU Consensus.

In Chapter V one perceives the greater text of the Pastor's concept of scriptural authority. How does he or she deal with the Lord's Day text? The critical interpretation is of John 14:6. What are the tools necessary in dealing critically with the text? They are: knowledge of the text in its original language, word study, its authorship and the background of the origin of the text. The priority in ministry today is not only "authentic preaching" but the Lord's Day celebration of the Eucharist—it must be in a proper spiritual focus—not one without the other.

Finally, in Chapter VI there is a weaving together of previous thought in relation to the text into a Systematics which achieves order. Systematic theology seeks to relate doctrine to historical context and to state it in accord with the biblical text. The Pastor's task is to uphold that goal giving order and direction to the church in mission.

The perspective of the Christian faith is grounded in the "Person and work of Jesus Christ" who liberates life from sin and death. The believer lives in the new age, in Christ. Within the context of the apostolic community are the seers who bear witness to it via the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Finally, it is empowered by the Holy Spirit. (See Portrayal p. 348.)

### Postscript

Dr. Fackre embodies in this writing some cardinal principles grounded in an ecumenical spirit. They are: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. These marks are essential to the continuing dialogue between Protestantism, Roman Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church. As one reads Vol. II, one's journey in the faith travels with the signs pointing the way. The faith perspective becomes broader and deeper in overcoming the isms of our time.

It is quite clear, "a genuine ecumenical theology arises only out of a fully catholic faith," or existence. It is further enhanced by the statement of Hans King in the Theology for the Third Millennium as follows:

An ecumenical (not a denominational) theology, that sees in every other theology not an opponent but a partner, is bent on understanding instead of separation, and this in two directions: inwards for the realm of the inter-church and internal church ecumene, and outwards, for the domain of the extra-ecclesiastical, non-Christian-world ecumene with its different regions, religions, ideologies and sciences... For there can be no ecumenical Church without an ecumenical theology. (p. 162)

P. S. A glossary of terms in the Introduction would be an aid to an easier understanding and interpretation of the volume.

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# JUSTIFICATION AND JUSTICE: GOOD NEWS AND GOOD WORKS

Craigville VII Theological Colloquy Craigville Conference Center Craigville (Cape Cod), Massachusetts

A WITNESS TO OUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

#### Preface

"For I the Lord love justice," Isaiah 61:8a (NRSV)

"Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord

Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which

we stand; "Romans 5:1-2a (NRSV)

Laity and clergy, gathered in community, for the Seventh Annual Theological Colloquy at Craigville, Massachusetts, July 16-20, 1990, address this statement to all our sisters and brothers in Christ and to members of the United Church of Christ in particular. We welcome this occasion to share our thoughts and prayers in response to God's Word. We urge that each congregation diligently search the scripture and teach the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church as expressed in the ecumenical creeds and evangelical confessions. In so doing, it is our prayer that all people may realize the gift of justifying grace and live freely and joyfully in the struggle for justice and peace. We urge the United Church of Christ to actively participate in dialogue with Christian communions throughout the nation and the world for the advancement of church unity.

I

Gratefully and joyfully, we celebrate God's relationship to the whole creation as expressed in the biblical language of covenant. The covenant with Noah provides for the future of humanity and every living creature. The covenant with Abraham and Sarah calls forth a people of promise. The covenant with Moses establishes responsibility for a just social order. The new covenant through Jesus' atoning death and resurrection frees us for faithful witness and joyous service in Christ's name and sets our hearts to singing and longing for the "...universal restoration of which God has spoken through (the) holy prophets from the beginning." (Acts 3:21 REB)

II

Notwithstanding the goodness of creation and God's love for humanity, we confess our failure to keep covenant with God and our betrayal of the divine love. This betrayal is the essence of sin, which mars the image of God in us. Our disobedience and failure to trust God bind us to a world of sin, evil, and death, and we cannot extricate ourselves. Behaving as though we ourselves were God and denying the image of God in which we were created, we ruin every relationship with God, neighbor, self, and nature. "Wretched creature(s) that (we are), who is there to rescue (us) from this state of death? Who but God?" (Romans 7:24, 25 REB)

III

Accordingly, we acknowledge and accept God's reconciling grace in the life,

ministry, passion, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, which defeats sin, evil, and death, freeing us from our own works to do God's work in the world. By this grace alone we are justified. As we say in the prayers of our Church, "...we give you thanks for the gift of Jesus, our only Savior, who is the way, the truth, and the life. In the fullness of time, you came to us and received our nature in the person of Jesus who, in obedience to you, by suffering on the cross, and being raised from the dead, delivered us from the way of sin and death." (U.C.C. Book of Worship pp. 45-46)

In the act of justification, God welcomes us as forgiven sinners returned to right relationship with God. Repenting, there is nothing we can offer; nothing we can claim. The broken relationship with God is mended by God. Anxiety for our salvation and the salvation of the world is overwhelmed by the announcement that God now accounts us righteous by the righteousness of Christ. Unable to achieve our own justification before God, we are justified only by grace through faith. Even that faith is not our work, but a gift of God, restoring our trust in God and enabling us wholeheartedly to acknowledge who God is, what God has done, and what God intends. God's grace is available to all who receive it in faith. Our grateful response to the gift of justification is "to glorify and enjoy God forever." (Westminster Shorter Catechism)

IV

We rejoice that God through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit gives us new life in Christ. The chains of sin, evil, and death are broken in "...a new creation...a new order..." (II Corinthians 5:17 REB), and we are called into the church "...to accept the cost and joy of discipleship," (U.C.C. Statement of Faith). As the body of Christ in the world, we pray for "...the harvest of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22, 23a REB)

Therefore, we seek to be guided by the Spirit in following Jesus who proclaimed, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me; he has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let the broken victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18, 19 REB)

V

We testify that we belong to the Church, the community of praise in word and life, in sacrament and service. Scripture bears witness to Christ, the living Word, whose presence at life's center calls the church to justice and peace both in its worship and common life and in its witness and service in the world. With the faithful of every generation the church confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Work for justice flows from this faith. Through the Church God calls us to new life in a world riven with injustice, but, in our time justification has become privatized and justice, secularized. Faith is often a matter of personal salvation, and good works are limited to public concerns. Unlike Christ's work, our works are flawed; we are judged as well as justified, and all that we do is under the judgement of God. Although God's good news has reached and redeemed us, we are still tempted to imagine that the good works of justice are beyond our reach. In the atonement Christ made our sins and sufferings his own, opening a new understanding of justice for us which includes even our enemies. It shames our timidity and fires us to find those places where God wants us to do

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justice. As our Lord made our sufferings his own, we set our minds to discern where we are, to repent, to mend our ways, and to harken to the cries for justice.

In accordance with our baptismal vows to resist the powers of evil, we renounce our involvement in structures of oppression: the arrogance of race, the misuse of power, the scandal of hunger and homelessness, the neglect of children, the abuse of gender, the love of money, and the fabrication of idols. Since our confidence is in Christ, we testify to the joy of a life lived responsibly, to the gladness of community service, and to the achievements of prophetic vision in society. We have benefited from the courageous faith of others. We recognize the challenge and gratification that is found in serving God's people through education and the arts, through industry and agriculture, through commerce and government, through the helping and healing vocations, and through all other ministries. We have received much, and we have much to give. In our labor and leisure, through our families and friendships, we seek to glorify God in everything. The one who has mercy upon us calls us to the work of justice and peace in the power and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

VI

We confess that the disunity of the Church in the world and in our communities impedes our doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God. Trusting in Christ who prayed that the Church be one, we look forward to the day when Christ's whole Church will be united in witness and mission across the entire earth, "...that the world may believe..." (John 17:21 REB)

Claiming no righteousness of our own, we know the Church to be a community of mutual care, a company of Christ resounding with delight and praise, and a colony of heaven which lives in hope.

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Holy, Holy, God of love and majesty! The whole universe speaks of your glory, O God Most High. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God! (Seraphic Hymn)

(This statement was unanimously voted as "A Witness To Our Sisters And Brothers In the United Church of Christ" by Craigville VII Theological Colloquy participants at the final plenary, July 20, 1990.)