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# **THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW**

**Journal of the Mercersburg Society**

Number Nine

Spring 1991

THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW  
Journal of the Mercersburg Society

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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

Papers and sermons delivered at the June, 1987 Mercersburg Convocation held in the First Reformed Church, Albany, New York, were published in the Fall issue of The New Review of that year. With one exception! There was an excellent paper presented by the pastor of First Church, Dr. James W. Van Hoeven, which did not arrive at our editorial offices in time for our deadline. As a matter of fact that paper didn't arrive by mail until several months ago even though it bore the postmark "Albany, N.Y., October 1, 1987." So with all appropriate deference to the tribulations of the United States Postal Service, and grateful for small blessings, we count it a privilege to be able to include Dr. Van Hoeven's belated article in this issue of The New Review. You will notice in the identification line appearing with his name that Dr. Van Hoeven has since gone to Geneva, where he works with the staff of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Russell Mitman served United Church of Christ congregations in Pennsylvania and was a lecturer in worship at Lancaster Theological Seminary before his recent move to Colorado. His book, Worship Vessels, published by Harpers, has been well received in the church as an anthology of original contemporary forms for Christian worship and is experiencing wide use among local pastors. The article by Mr. Mitman which appears in this issue was prepared while he was engaged in graduate study at Princeton, and was later elaborated into his Master of Theology dissertation, John Williamson Nevin, Ecumenist.

Deborah Rahn Clemens is a regular contributor to The New Review who has presented a number of Convocation papers. Her article in this issue displays her jaunty style which stimulates renewed interest in subjects related to Mercersburg. Also appearing under her by-line is an exhaustive listing of articles appearing in nineteenth century periodicals contemporary to Nevin and Schaff and taking notice of their work. This material should prove to be an invaluable tool for others who are doing research in this field. Mrs. Clemens is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ who served as Pastor of Boehm's Church, Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, until she matriculated for full-time graduate work in liturgical studies at Drew University.

R. Howard Paine  
Editor



## MERCERSBURG UNDERGROUND IN THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

James W. Van Hoeven  
Coordinator, Office of Justice, Peace,  
and the Integrity of Creation  
World Alliance of Reformed Churches  
Geneva, Switzerland

Theodore Appel, who succeeded John Nevin as professor of theology at Mercersburg, provides a warmly written study of Nevin's career in this book, The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin. One of the chapters deals with the failed merger between the German and Dutch Reformed Churches in the early 1850s. That perhaps is putting the matter too politely. Things got so bad between the two denominations that the principals on both sides unloaded their heaviest verbal arsenals at each other. The attacks were personal, vituperative, exaggerated -- and, for ecclesiastical cousins, quite unseemly. Appel, who was writing in 1889, some 40 years after the events, spoke of the failure as a "terrible disaster," and put much of the blame for this on the leadership of the Dutch Church who, he said, "were not persons to represent the dignity and learning of the old Dutch Church, nor its orthodoxy and churchliness."<sup>2</sup> Then, almost as an aside, Appel concluded his chapter with this comment: "Professor Tayler Lewis, one of the Dutch Church's brightest ornaments, or some of the Van Dyks would have been better qualified to lead the Dutch Church in the merger discussions."<sup>3</sup>

That rather obscure passage from an admittedly biased reporter, provides the basis for this paper. I propose to do three things: first, I want to give a brief overview of theological developments in the Dutch Church up to its engagement with Mercersburg theology; second, I want to narrate a little of the storm that Mercersburg created between the Dutch and German Churches in the 1850s; and third, I want to introduce Tayler Lewis, a fast friend of both John Nevin and Philip Schaff, who deserves much more study than he has received thus far. More significantly I want to suggest his significance as a leader of an underground movement in the Dutch Church during the 1850s and beyond, which succeeded finally in reopening conversation between the Dutch and German churches and enabled Mercersburg to finally reappear in the Dutch Church and influence its theological shape.

The Dutch Church entered the nineteenth century as a relatively small denomination, recently organized as a self-governing body, its nearly one hundred predominantly Dutch speaking congregations scattered here and there in northern New Jersey and along stretches of the Hudson River in New York State. The church bore battle scars, however, the most serious resulting from the long and difficult process by which it finally freed itself from the church in the Netherlands to form an independent denomination. By 1800 that process was completed: the Dutch Church approved its new constitution in 1792 and established the institutional mechanisms for it to move into the new century on a fixed course.

The church's theological course, however, was less fixed as it entered the nineteenth century, even though it formally affirmed three classical Reformed confessions, namely, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. By the turn of the century, however, the church's confessional clarity, as determined by these three documents, was already seriously challenged. Part of this challenge came from within the Dutch Church's tradition itself; specifically, it came from the persistent tension



between those who favored the warm personal tone and theological content of the Heidelberg Catechism on the one hand, and those who adhered to the more formal orthodox statements of the Canons of Dort on the other.

The more insistent challenge, however, came from the outside, specifically from the evangelical crusades that dominated the religious life in North America during the nineteenth century. At the center of this movement were the revivals, the most pervasive force of religion in America from 1800 to 1860. In fact writes Perry Miller, "The dominant theme in America from 1800 to 1860 is the invincible persistence of the revival technique."<sup>4</sup> Inevitably, this profoundly influenced the theological course of the Dutch Church. Indeed, the church's major theological task during the first half of the nineteenth century was to find a way to hold to its standards while at the same time adjusting itself to the new religious and intellectual realities in North America.

John H. Livingston (1746-1825) was the person most responsible for helping the Dutch Church find its way theologically during the first half of the nineteenth century. Livingston, a son of a prominent New York family, received his doctorate from the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, and in 1784 the General Synod of the Dutch Church appointed him professor of theology at New Brunswick Seminary. Subsequently, in 1810, he also became president of Queens College, now Rutgers University, in New Brunswick.

Livingston's contribution to the theology of the Dutch Church can be summarized in three general areas. First, his emphasis on the experience of faith put the Dutch Church on the path of evangelical Christianity, which was the same path the majority of American protestants traveled during the first part of the nineteenth century. One consequence of this emphasis on the experience of faith was that the Dutch church began distancing itself from the orthodox formulations of Dort, especially the doctrines of election and limited atonement. Some few members of the denomination strongly objected to this, and subsequently left the church to form their own.

Livingston's second contribution to Dutch theology was his emphasis on mission and millennialism. His third, which proved to be most decisive, concerned the doctrine of the church. Both the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort had presupposed an established state-church arrangement, a position invalidated by the disestablishment amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Livingston chaired a committee to revise the standards at this point, enabling the Dutch Church to adapt itself to the American puritan principle of voluntary church membership. This change becomes important for this study because it allowed for more freedom and diversity in theological debate than formerly and, therefore, also introduced tensions within classical Reformed theology. As things turned out, the doctrines of election and limited atonement, as well as church and sacraments and the nature of ministry, all became topics for heated debate as a result of this revision.

Thus led by Livingston, the Dutch Church began moving down the path of American evangelicalism as it entered the nineteenth century. Livingston's emphasis on the experience of faith, mission and millennialism, and also his Puritan or Anabaptist adaptation into the doctrine of the church, significantly influenced the shape and tone of Reformed theology and liturgy during the next half century, and initiated the process by which the Dutch Church made the transition from classical Reformed orthodoxy to American style evangelicalism.



Predictably, however, there were some who were unhappy with this process and urged the church to recover its orthodox roots, especially as these were planted in the rich soil of the Canons of Dort. Consequently, numerous and intense skirmishes resulted, and during the next several decades no classis escaped a heresy trial of one kind or another, over one issue or another -- for example, the charge of Hopkinsianism, the issue of election vs. free will, the atonement, the sacraments, the nature of the church, or the nature of mission, etc.

As the century moved into the 1830s and '40s, on most of these issues the Dutch church split almost along sectional lines, north and south, the Synod of Albany pitted against the southern based Synod comprising the churches in New York City and Northern New Jersey around New Brunswick Seminary.

Differences were debated at General Synod meetings and in the church's journals, The Magazine of the Reformed Dutch Church and the Christian Intelligencer. The journals often spoke of the controversy as the conflict between the "extreme liberals" in the north and the "high ultras" in the south.<sup>5</sup> The fundamental question throughout was this one: How can the Dutch Reformed Church innovate while at the same time hold firmly to its standards? Resting on this question, however, were the more practical issues of mission policy, ecumenicity, liturgy, the sacraments, hymnody, and power.

The tension between the sections became especially obvious in 1828, when the Dutch church revised its mission program and appointed John F. Schermerhorn, an Albany based clergyman, as its first missionary agent. Shortly after his appointment, the sectional conflict focused on him. "Has the march of error been checked since Schermerhorn's appointment?" a southern based cleric asked rhetorically in 1830. He continued, "Have the changes in doctrine been limited to the extent of the atonement; or to the propriety of distinguishing man's inability into natural or moral? Has Schermerhorn attempted under the mark of religious zeal, to subvert the well established doctrine of original sin and of imputed righteousness?"<sup>6</sup>

Responding to these questions, a northern clergyman and friend of Schermerhorn, defended Schermerhorn's orthodoxy, and called the attacks on him "Indian warfare -- assaults in the dark by the straightest sect in the church," and asked if the southern based synod "resolved to go the whole length of South Carolinian nullification" on the issue, and secede. Little wonder, then, that in his state of religion address to the General Synod in 1831, the President of Synod referred to this controversy as a "Civil War" and called for an end to the conflict.

It is surprising the Dutch church made it through this period of controversy without a major schism. This is especially so when one considers the Dutch church must have kept one eye on the Presbyterian church, where brewed a similar controversy that did lead to a schism. For whatever reason -- perhaps it was size, or a few well placed deaths, or exhaustion, or the Heidelberg piety, or Dutch stubbornness, or the church's ability to tolerate a degree of theological diversity -- it survived the conflict without a major split. This did not mean, however, there was theological unanimity within the church. Hardly. Here and there, as the synod minutes as well as journal editorials and articles suggest, the resolution to the controversy was simply an uneasy and unspoken truce.



That is the context for the appearance in the 1840s of the Mercersburg theology of the German Reformed Church, which challenged the Dutch Church at the point of its Reformation heritage. There were, of course, solid historical and theological reasons for the Dutch and German Reformed Churches to court each other, and even to look forward to union, the most solid of which was their common roots nurtured in the soil of Heidelberg. Indeed, when the German congregations of the Reformed faith began in Pennsylvania, they appealed to the Synod of South Holland in the Netherlands to assist them with financial resources and supervision, which it did. John Philip Boehm, one of the principal early leaders of the German Church, was ordained in 1729 by Dutch ministers in New York, with approval of the Classis of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. From that time until 1793 the German Reformed Church in Pennsylvania remained under the supervision of the Reformed Church in Holland.

Subsequently, beginning in 1794, there were several attempts to unite the two churches on this continent. Livingston, for example, in 1794, chaired a committee to pursue that goal. The plans here as later were frustrated, however, for a variety of reasons, but primarily the English language issue; the Germans it seems wished to worship in their own language.

But the point holds. There were solid historical reasons in the 1840s for the Dutch and German Churches to begin once more to explore the possibility of union. In August, 1844, a triennial convention, prepared and supported by both denominations, met in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. John Nevin addressed that assembly with the keynote sermon entitled, "Catholic Unity," which challenged the two churches to make visible the Holy Catholic Church created by God. That convention appointed a committee, chaired by Nevin, to increase cooperation between the churches and make their unity visible.

But several factors made the union impossible at that time. One was the writing of Nevin himself. Some in the Dutch Church thought his Anxious Bench, which was a welcomed critique of the revivals then sweeping the east coast, went too far -- or more accurately, ran too close to Rome -- particularly, in his discussion of the sacraments. Similarly, some of the Dutch believed his Mystical Presence came too close to Rome in describing the institutional church as the mystical body of Christ. Equally important, his organic and developmental interpretation of Christian doctrine seriously angered and upset the more orthodox theologians at New Brunswick and in New York City.

Philip Schaff, the other half of the Mercersburg tandem, merely added insult to injury as far as the Dutch were concerned with his inaugural address, "The Principle of Protestantism," which set forth his own developmental view of the Church and Christian doctrine. His later writings further alienated the Dutch, producing cries of, "He's a Romanizer," from Dutch pulpits, seminary classrooms and journals, and all hope was lost for unity between the two churches.

Nevin and Schaff's alleged flirtation with Rome could not have come at a worse time. It was the beginning of a massive Roman Catholic immigration in America, and the Dutch Church, which had struggled so long and hard in the sixteenth century to free itself from Roman domination in the Netherlands, stood in the vanguard of those in North America who worked to maintain this nation as a Protestant fortress against "popery."

Through its editor, Elbert S. Porter, the Dutch Church's journal, The Christian Intelligencer led the assault against the Mercersburg men, stating



that they held views of apostolic succession which would move the church toward Rome and away from historic Calvinism.<sup>9</sup> Porter also charged that they placed an emphasis on the church and its sacraments in preference to personal conversion and individual piety. Joining Porter and the Intelligencer in this battle were members of the faculty at New Brunswick Seminary, Charles Proudfit, a Dutch Church layman and professor at Rutgers College, and Joseph Berg, of whom we will have more to say later. Significantly, the leadership of the Dutch Church's attacks against Mercersburg resided in New York City and northern New Jersey, which was the "southern establishment" section of the church. Moreover, the most outspoken of the protagonists were Puritans in background, and several of them had come into the Dutch Church from other denominations.

Nevin wrote a stinging response to these attacks, referring to them as the "Dutch Crusade." He severely criticized the Intelligencer, arguing that it had

... granted the free use of its columns to any disaffected minister, or layman, of the German Reformed Church who would be induced to make them the channel of his spleen or pride; besides encouraging every scribbler at home to write what trash he pleased in the same vein and for the same general purpose.

Nevin further charged that the Dutch Church was losing its churchly and sacramental roots; liturgically, he said, "[your] church is becoming a sect, the product of private judgment and private will."<sup>11</sup> In any case, the heated battle between the two churches ended in 1852, when the Dutch General Synod formally condemned the Mercersburg theology, thus ending its relationship with the German Church.

The result of this episode proved decisive for the Dutch Church, at least in the short run. Shucking the Mercersburg men, it rekindled a love affair with the men from Princeton, namely Charles Hodge and the "Old School" theologians of the Presbyterian Church. These "Old School" men rejected the historical-developmental approach to theology of Mercersburg. They conceived of Christian doctrine as a fixed and unalterable system; orthodoxy was stable, a system of divinely revealed truth which could be mined from scripture. Thus, a theologian who was sufficiently trained would discern in the Bible God's perfect truth, complete and admitting of no development or improvement.

Joseph Berg was the person who championed this "Old School" theology in the Dutch Church during this period. Berg had been a colleague of Schaff and Nevin at Mercersburg, but in 1852 he left the German Church for theological reasons and became a minister in the Dutch Church. Subsequently he served as a professor of theology at New Brunswick Seminary and became an outspoken critic of the Mercersburg theology. Berg interpreted the doctrines of Dort through the lenses of the Princeton "Old School" theology and tried to influence the Dutch Church toward a narrow orthodoxy. Although he did not succeed in this, he was an eloquent spokesman for the orthodox position and gained a following in the southern region of the church. Philip Schaff had Berg and his followers in mind when he claimed that the Dutch Church was "almost more narrowly Calvinistic than the old school Presbyterians, and that in general it was the most rigid and unmovable of the churches in America that had their origin in the period of the Reformation."<sup>12</sup>

Schaff's characterization, however, did not accurately reflect the general



theological situation in the Dutch Church. At the local level, the evidence suggests that Reformed theology was not "rigidly and unmovably" orthodox but diversely evangelical, even sectarian at places -- here singing the gospel hymns of revival theology, and there stubbornly Dutch and singing psalms; or here tilting toward "Hopkinsianism," and there holding solidly to Heidelberg; or here using the church's prescribed order in its worship, and there "doing what seemed right in their own eyes" with the liturgy. Indeed, the following description might be more representative of Dutch Church theology during the 1840s and 1850s than the rigid "Old School" orthodoxy:

Though the Divinity of Christ was firmly held, the wide-ranging significance of the incarnation was little apprehended; and though the facts of His resurrection and Ascension were articles of faith, their bearing upon His priesthood and upon His future kingship were only dimly seen... The great doctrinal topic of the pulpit was the way in which his death was related to forgiveness of sin... The great channel of His operations was the preached word, not ordinances or sacraments. The sermon was therefore the center of interest, and the other parts of the service were regarded as introductory and subordinate...

It was generally held that at the Lord's table the communicants ate and drank as a mere commemorative<sup>13</sup> act -- a vivid way of bringing the Lord and His work to remembrance.

This brings us to where we began the paper, and Professor Theodore Appel's reflections on the Dutch and German Reformed controversy. He called the whole unhappy affair "a terrible disaster," caused primarily by Dutch clergy and theologians "who did not represent the dignity and learning of the Dutch Church, nor its orthodoxy and churchliness." Then, he added, "Professor Tayler Lewis, one of the Dutch Church's brightest ornaments, or some one of the Van Dycks, would have been better qualified to lead the Dutch in that period." There is evidence to suggest Appel was correct in his analysis of the conflict. More to the point, there is evidence to suggest these Dutch churchmen named by Appel led a significant underground movement in the Dutch Church and in some significant ways finally won the day.

There were five Van Dycks serving the Dutch Church during this period. Of these, Cornelius V. served as a medical missionary in the Middle East, Leonard B. transferred to the Presbyterian Church, and Hamilton served congregations in both the Dutch and German churches before his untimely death at an early age. Two other Van Dycks, Lawrence and Cornelius, served significant Dutch congregations in the northern, Albany Synod, were active in ecumenical work, were leaders in their respective classes, and strongly supported union with the German church.<sup>14</sup>

Tayler Lewis is another story, and is undoubtedly one of the most important theologians in Dutch Church history. Born in 1802, in Northumberland, just north of Albany, he was baptized in the First Church in Albany the same year. His mother was a niece of John Tayler, the Lt. Governor of New York, and Tayler Lewis was named after him. He graduated from Union College in 1820, in a class that included both William Seward, and his close friend John Nevin. He apprenticed as a lawyer and then practiced law for a few years, but finally quit that to enter his first love, which was the study of oriental languages. In 1838 Tayler Lewis became professor of Greek and Latin Languages at the University, City of New York, and then in 1849 he became chair of Oriental



Languages at Union College, where he served almost until his death in 1877. While at Union he taught courses in Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac, Ancient Philosophy, Greek Poetry, and Biblical Studies. He was a prolific writer, publishing more than 15 books and hundreds of articles, and he lectured widely in churches, seminaries, and colleges through the east coast. He was an active member of the First Reformed Church in Schenectady. Philip Schaff, who wrote the preface to Lewis' edited translation of Langes commentary on Genesis, stated that "Lewis was one of the ablest and most learned classical and biblical scholars of America."<sup>15</sup>

Lewis' most important work was The Six Days of Creation. In it he suggests that the Genesis creation stories allow that God worked through natural evolutionary means to create humankind, thus presenting what must be the first instance of theistic evolutionary theology in Reformed Church history. Significantly, he wrote The Six Days of Creation in 1855, four years before the publication of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species in North America! Lewis was vilified by both the evangelical and "Old School" press for this publication. Later, however, many of these critics, some of them within the Dutch Church, called Lewis a "prophet" and thanked him for providing a biblical response to the new science.<sup>16</sup>

Lewis also wrote books and articles on current social issues. Two of these, "Negrophobia," and "Slavery," which appeared in The Christian Intelligencer, were stinging critiques of the Dutch Church's attitudes toward the slavery issue. He opposed those who argued that "states rights" political theories were more important than the moral laws of God, and supported strong action, including military action, against the South's "evil institution."<sup>17</sup>

Lewis was also an active participant in the theological issues of his age. He opposed revivalistic sectarianism, while at the same time championing the gospel preached by those same revivalists. He also challenged the liberal wing of New England theology which, Lewis claimed, substituted a refined morality for solid Reformation doctrine. Addressing this issue, Lewis declared:

Our [New England] moralists are, in general, professed enemies of cant, but how often have we heard their canting whine: 'Ah, yes, men may talk about believing, but that is the religion for me; give me James rather than Paul. Away with that hard dogma of justification by faith, ... that gloomy Calvinism so subversive of pure morality.' . . . There is a strange blindness which leads men to credit to themselves as a virtue what they may some day think of doing. Salvation by faith demands the whole heart; it is the giving up by the bankrupt of all his poor assets; it is the entire surrender of the whole man into the hands of the Redeemer, with the earnest cry, 'be merciful to me, the sinner.' Salvation by works is too apt to content itself with 'good intentions.'<sup>18</sup>

Lewis was equally critical of "Old School" orthodoxy, and rejected the notion, for example that revelation was simply a catalog of infallible propositions. For Lewis, Revelation was essentially Jesus Christ. He writes: "What, then, it may be asked, does the Bible most truly reveal? We answer, Jesus Christ and Him crucified, as the great fact, which gives its highest meaning to every other fact and doctrine. It was not the knowledge of sin, or wrath, or the need of expiation. It was not the atonement as a doctrine, nor the redemption, nor the moral law, nor the resurrection, nor the life to come. It



was the person and life of the incarnate Redeemer, Jesus, the Redeemer."<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, in his book The Divine Human in the Scriptures, Lewis writes, again against the orthodox, "It was not to reveal primarily propositional truths on which the necessity of the office of Mediator is based; but to make known the person and act of the Mediator -- to reveal that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ."<sup>20</sup>

Or again, Lewis was equally critical of Reformed Orthodoxy in regard to the doctrine of the mystical union of Christ. Here, as James Nichols suggests in his book, Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg, Nevin's views on the doctrine of the mystical union, the presence of Christ in the Lord's supper, and the nature of the church, were supported by Tayler Lewis. Nichols suggests that perhaps something in the approach of Nevin appealed to the Platonic idealism of Lewis.<sup>21</sup> At any rate, against Berg, Hodge, and other "Old School" theologians, Lewis wrote:

It is, however, a matter of great surprise that those who rigidly . . . hold to a real union with the first man, a real imputation of his guilt and on real psychological grounds . . . should break the Apostle's analogy, should make a mere figure or, at most, a moral influence of that regeneration by which the believer is really transferred to a new life, and engrafted into the humanity of the Second Adam -- the Lord from heaven.<sup>22</sup>

In short, while Berg, Hodge, and other orthodox theologians had argued that union with Christ was the result of God's justification, Lewis stated that it was the ground. Correspondingly, Lewis criticized orthodoxy's doctrine of the church, and for the same reason; he claimed that orthodox theologians failed to take seriously the mystical presence of Christ in the sacraments, liturgy, and the nature of the church itself, which he believed was present in Reformation theology.<sup>23</sup>

Now, it would be inaccurate to argue from all of this that Lewis and the Van Dycks represented a major influence on Reformed theology during the 1850s. We do know, however, that Reformed theology was in flux during this period, and the Van Dycks may have been leaders of a significant "underground movement" in the church, which rejected both revivalist sectarianism and "Old School" Presbyterianism and which also was displeased that the proposed merger between the German and Dutch Churches had failed. This "movement" was solidly Reformed and evangelical, but preferred the warmer accents of the Heidelberg Catechism to the narrower orthodox formulations, accepted the historical -- developmental approach to theology, raised its voice here and there against social wrongs, promoted mission and ecumenicity at home and abroad, and embraced the new American culture while at the same time pressing the church toward more Reformed positions in both faith and worship. If this suggestion be accurate, it can be argued that in the long run the theological perspectives of this "underground movement" prevailed in the Reformed Church.

Various developments in the church beginning in the 1850s support this view. For example, in 1857, and again in 1873, the Dutch Church approved revisions in its liturgy, following almost precisely the pattern developed in the German Reformed Church.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in 1867 it voted to drop the word Dutch from its official title.<sup>25</sup> It also reopened merger discussions with the German Church in 1886. There were similar developments in the twentieth century, and most significantly in recent years, led by Howard Hageman and a few others in the



Dutch Church. Today nearly all of the emphases of Lewis, the Van Dycks, and the "underground movement" of the 1840s and 1850s have become accepted in one form or another as standard Reformed theology in the sacraments, liturgy, church office, hymnody, and the doctrines of the church.

Undoubtedly Mercersburg Theology is alive in the Dutch Church in the 1980s, and the impetus for this began about a century and a half ago, most significantly through the person and writing of Tayler Lewis.



1. Lancaster: The New Era Printing House, 1889.
2. Ibid., p. 409.
3. Ibid.
4. Perry Miller, Life of the Mind in America (New York: Harcourt, Bruce & World, 1965), p. 7.
5. The Christian Intelligencer, II (Sept. 17, 1831), pp. 26-27.
6. Ibid., II (Sept. 24, 1831), p. 31.
7. Ibid., p. 17.
8. Minutes, General Synod of the Reformed Dutch Church, III (June, 1831) p. 16.
9. See The Christian Intelligencer, IV (Aug. 7, 1845), p. 14, (Aug. 28, 1845), p. 26, and passim.
10. John W. Nevin, "The Dutch Crusade," Mercersburg Review, VI (1854), p. 74.
11. Ibid., pp. 92-93.
12. N.H. Dosker, De Hollandsche Gereformeerde Kerk in Amerika (Nijkerk: C.C. Callenbach, 1893), p. 168.
13. Howard G. Hageman, Pulpit and Table: Some Chapters in the History of Worship in the Reformed Churches (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 85.
14. See Edward Tanjore Corwin, A Manual of the Reformed Church in America, 1628 - 1878 (New York: Board of Publications of the Reformed Church in America, 1879), p. 507.
15. Philip Schaff, "Preface of the General Editor," in Johann Peter Lange, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures (New York: Charles Scribner, 1868), p. vi. For a good account of Lewis' life and work see Eliphalet Nott Potter, Discourses Commemorative of Professor Tayler Lewis, Delivered at Commencement, 1877 (Albany: J. Munsell, 1878).
16. Franklin D. Steen, "Tayler Lewis on Scripture: A Defense of Revelation and Creation in Nineteenth Century America," unpublished Th.D. dissertation submitted to the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1971, pp. 115 ff. See also Tayler Lewis, The Six Days of Creation: or the Scriptural Cosmology, with the Ancient Idea of a Plurality of Time-Worlds, in Distinction from Worlds in Space (Schenectady: G.Y. Van Deogert. London: John Chapman, 1853).
17. The Christian Intelligencer, XXXIV (July 17, 1862), p. 2, XXXII (April 18, 1861), p. 2.



18. Franklin D. Steen, op. cit., p. 93.
19. Ibid., p. 117.
20. Ibid., p. 162.
21. James Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 119.
22. Franklin D. Steen, op. cit., p. 94.
23. Ibid.
24. Gregg Alan Mast, "The Eucharistic Service of the Catholic Apostolic Church and its Influence on Reformed Liturgical Renewals of the Nineteenth Century." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the graduate school of Drew University, 1985. See especially pages 175-205.
25. See Gerald F. DeJong, "The Controversy over Dropping the Word Dutch from the Name of the Reformed Church," The Reformed Review, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Spring, 1981), pp. 158-170.



THE IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY IN  
THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN WILLIAMSON NEVIN

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In our own day when "ecumenical" has become part of the vocabulary of the man on the street, in retrospect the nineteenth century appears to be the era of unbounded ecclesiastical fragmentation. In America, especially, the sectarian spirit was symptomatic of the growing pains of an adolescent nation striking out on its own and learning to enjoy its new-found freedom and opportunity. Yet, amid the multiplicity of divisions, nineteenth century America also brought forth a whole series of noble attempts at Christian unity ranging from Campbell and Winebrenner to Transcendentalism and Brownson. Romanticism, that blossoming intellectual movement which began on the Continent and spread to England and America in the first half of the nineteenth century, had as its main tenet the quest for a unifying philosophical principle. In the life of the Church, the Romantic principle issued forth in the various proposals toward Christian unity. But to a large degree most of these attempts either became so inarticulate that they easily evaporated in philosophical abstraction or produced yet another ecclesiastical organization. The great merit of John Williamson Nevin and his colleague Philip Schaff,<sup>2</sup> who together began the "Mercersburg Theology," was that they "de-mythologized" the Romantic principle<sup>3</sup> by historicizing it and by applying it to the concrete life of the Church.<sup>3</sup> In this discussion<sup>4</sup> we aim to investigate Nevin's unique attempt in the area of Christian unity.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps "attempt" is the wrong word, for Nevin, as we shall see later, was thoroughly convinced that Christian unity can never be realized through mere outward attempts at contracts, or federations. Rather, we shall view the problem from another direction and ask: What implications for Christian unity arise out of Nevin's theology? In so doing we hope to do justice to his fundamental premise that ecumenism is foremost religious and theological and that consequently all theology can do toward Christian unity is to point the way so that Christ who is one may be realized in one body - His Church.

John Williamson Nevin (1803-1886), like his German colleague Schaff, was not a product of the German Reformed Church in the United States in which the Mercersburg movement arose. Born and reared in the strict Presbyterianism of the Cumberland Valley of Pennsylvania, educated at Union College and Princeton Theological Seminary, Nevin spent the first two decades of his career under the banner of the American "Puritanism" which in his later years he began to detest more and more.<sup>5</sup> When he was called from a position at Western Theological Seminary in Allegheny to the struggling seminary of the German Reformed Church in Mercersburg in 1840, he remarked that the synod he was entering consisted simply of "German Presbyterians," just as the one he was leaving might be called the "Scotch Reformed." The platform on which he began to teach at Mercersburg was that on which he had stood at Pittsburgh: old-school Calvinistic orthodoxy.<sup>6</sup> Already in Allegheny he had vehemently refused to go along with revivalistic "new measures;" and, after a trip through the German Reformed territory of eastern Pennsylvania, Nevin was horrified by the lack of educated clergy and the infiltration of "new-measure" Schwärmerei into not only the German Reformed Church, but also Presbyterianism and Lutheranism. He saw a place for true revival in the Church; however it was the use of revival machinery designed for outward exhibitionism that aroused his ire. This prompted a series of articles in the Weekly Messenger, the official organ



of the German Reformed Church, and his first Mercersburg publication, The Anxious Bench (1843):

If Finneyism and Winebrennerism, the anxious bench, revival machinery, solemn tricks for effect, decision displays at the bidding of the preacher, genuflections and prostrations in the aisle or around the altar, noise and disorder, extravagance and rant, mechanical conversions, justification by feeling rather than faith, and encouragement ministered to all fanatical impressions; if these things, and things in the same line indefinitely, have no connection in fact with true serious religion and the cause of revivals, but tend only to bring them into discredit, let the fact be openly proclaimed. Only in this way, may it be hoped that the reproach put upon revivals and other evangelical interests by some under cover of their pretended connection with this system of New Measures in the true sense, will be in due time fairly rolled away.

His abhorrence of the "new measures" was nothing new. This had been a plank in the platform of the Old-School Presbyterians for some years. The tract was reviewed favorably in various Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed Journals. Nichols is quite right when he says that this could have<sup>8</sup> been written a decade earlier against the Presbyterian revivals in Pittsburgh.

There was indeed nothing new in this protest against revival techniques; nevertheless The Anxious Bench and the other writings on the same theme were the points of contact from which Nevin launched his theological program and moved forward a truly ecumenical theology. The "New Measures" were not only a disease which had infected classic Protestantism, but the very churches who adopted such devices were at the core maligned for even sympathizing with the whole philosophy underlying them, and the churches were maligned because their classic Reformation heritage had been forgotten. "The natural fruit of the system is a sickly Christianity, that is sure to be defective or one-sided, both in doctrine and practice. It proceeds upon a wrong conception of religion from the start, and error and heresy, in the nature of the case, are wrought plentifully into the very texture of all that is reached by its operations."<sup>9</sup> The first edition of the tract sold out rapidly, and in the following year a second edition appeared, considerably enlarged and with an additional chapter in which the "system of the Bench" was set over against the "system of the Catechism."<sup>10</sup> Although he never used the terms, we have here what Nevin would later call the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity. The methods of the Bench were pure subjectivity: individual conversion, protracted preaching, individual interpretation of scripture. The system of the Catechism was objective Christianity: Churchly, sacramental, corporate, historical. In short what we find in this final chapter is the embryo of Nevin's whole theological programme culminating two years later in his most systematic work, The Mystical Presence; A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist.<sup>11</sup>

It is indeed instructive for our discussion to follow the direction of Nevin's thought. He began on the typical Old-School Calvinist position against revivalistic techniques. This led him not only to question the "new Measures" but the very nature of the churches who adopted such a system. From here he contrasted the contemporary situation of Protestantism with its Reformation heritage and initiated a theological programme which was itself a critique of the Old-School Calvinism with which he began. Thus, within a few short years, his whole outlook had changed drastically, and the very journals which



originally lauded his endeavors were now filled with violent denunciations of The Mystical Presence and other writings of the same tenor. In fact, even the German Reformed Church's Weekly Messenger refused to publish anything from his pen. In response in 1849 he founded and became the editor of and chief contributor to The Mercersburg Review in order to promulgate the new theology.<sup>12</sup> And it is in this journal that we find Nevin's theology most fully developed and set forth against what he termed the "Puritanism" of his own past and those around him in the theological world. Just as in the last chapter of the second edition of The Anxious Bench he set the "system of the Catechism" over against the "system of the Bench," he stressed the importance of liturgy and the sacraments over against an over-emphasized service of preached and read word; he recovered the place of tradition over against a wooden interpretation of scriptures; he saw the Reformation more as a re-definition than a revolution in Christendom; he viewed the Church as a corporate community rather than a simple aggregation of individuals.<sup>13</sup> However, his programme resulted not simply in an Anglo-Catholic protest against the prevailing state of American Protestantism, but it became a positive formulation and thus a via media. In essence, it was truly an expression of evangelical catholicity.

After the initial heat of the controversy had somewhat subsided, Nevin reflected on these issues. In an important article he concluded: "There is, accordingly, on all sides, a sort of intuitional sense of such ultimate unity or oneness reaching through the various questions that are agitated in regard to the Church, which may be said to go much beyond what is generally clear for the understanding. All these questions are felt to resolve themselves finally into one, which is the Church Question, in the full and proper sense of the term."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it was the Church question which had occupied his thinking from the very beginning and lay at the base of the question of "new measures." And, in the same manner in which he had set the "system of the Catechism" over against the "system of the bench," so also all distinctions finally boiled down to the ultimate cleavage between the Church and the sects. The reigning watchwords of subjectivity, individualism, private interpretation of scripture, Bible not creeds, freedom in faith and practice -- all could lead to only one result: the multiplication of sects and thus the destruction of the sense of One Holy Catholic Church. Nevin saw the impossibility of repristination in any form. Regarding the attempt of Campbell and others he maintained: "However plausible it may be in theory, to magnify in such style the unbounded use solely of the Bible for the adjustment of Christian faith and practice, the simple truth is, that the operation of it in fact is, not to unite the church into one, but to divide it always more and more into sects."<sup>15</sup> To begin in a new direction -- a direction which was to lead Nevin to his idea of evangelical catholicity -- the Church must be seen, as in the Creed, not simply as a mechanical aggregate of individuals, but as an object of faith in historical development. "As such," Nevin affirmed, "It is a divine supernatural fact, a concrete reality, an actual objective power in the world, which men have no ability whatever to make or unmake at their own pleasure. In this form it defines itself to be one, holy, catholic and apostolical ... Only where such a sense of the Church prevails, can the danger and guilt of schism be felt at all, or any hindrance be raised at all to the easy multiplication of sects."<sup>16</sup> Essentially, therefore, ecumenism is not a program to reduce the number of sects or denominations but is the very nature of the Church Herself. The very affirmation: "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church" is by definition ecumenical.

In this section, then, we have seen the development of Nevin's theology,



beginning as a protest against revival techniques, re-defining itself, and moving toward the central question regarding the Church and thus toward a truly ecumenical theology. However, before we move on, we must retrace our steps and ask: What influenced Nevin in this direction?

## II

At times Nevin appears simply to be a kind of translation and transplant of German theology onto the American scene. Indeed, Nevin was strongly influenced by his reading of German theology, and by his colleague Schaff, who was fresh from the University of Berlin. But, on the other hand simply drawing parallels between Nevin and German theological thinking obscures the real contribution which he himself made. In this section our aim is two-fold: to point to the influences of German philosophy and theology toward Nevin's conception of evangelical catholicity and to show Nevin's re-definition of this influence and, consequently, his own theological formulation.

Later in life Nevin said in retrospect that the most important influence in his early thinking was the German Church historian, Neander. He wrote, "How much I owe to him in the way of excitement, impulse, suggestion, knowledge, both literary and religious, reaching onward into all my later life, is more than I can pretend to explain, for it is in truth more that I have power to understand."<sup>17</sup> Although Nevin sympathized with the general idealistic spirit of Neander's works, it was primarily his idea of historical development which deeply impressed the young theologian even before he came to Mercersburg. At Allegheny he learned German primarily in order to read Neander's Tertullian, and he subsequently read the volumes of the General Church History as they were published. Nevin learned that history was not simply a collection of facts as he had learned at Princeton but rather a dynamic process running through all of life. "It is the revelation of an idea, or spiritual fact, in time."<sup>18</sup> Orthodoxy had rewritten church history to suit its own tastes. The period between the early Church and the Reformation was "the great apostacy," and any continuity between the two was not through Rome but via certain splinter groups such as the Waldenses who had retained pristine Christianity. Neander awakened Nevin's "dogmatic slumber" to the realization that if history is a dynamic process, then indeed the history of Protestantism cannot by-pass a thousand years but must be seen in continuity with medieval Roman Catholicism.<sup>19</sup> Further, if Church history is essentially dynamic, then doctrines too partake of the same dynamic principle. Orthodoxy had viewed the Apostles' Creed as a static dogma written by the Roman Church after it had lost the purity of the early Christianity. Nevin, however, learned that the Creed had reached its present form only through a long process of development reflecting the inner development of the Church itself. History, then, is basically teleological, the teleological movement of an idea in time toward an appointed end. Yet, Nevin remarked "History moves not as a continuously equitable stream toward its appointed end. Its progress rather, is by vast cycloids or stages, each fulfilling a certain problem within itself, and accomplishing its course under a regular given form, only to open the way finally for the general process to go forward again in a new way under some similar form." Such a conception of history is at the very heart of the nature of the Church and since the Church is by definition catholic, the natural telos of the dynamic process is the unity of "One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church."

Soon after Nevin arrived at Mercersburg, Friedrich Augustus Rauch, professor of anthropology, ethics and aesthetics, died, and the task of teaching these



courses fell upon Nevin's shoulders. Rauch introduced the idealism of Hegel at Mercersburg and wrote his Psychology, the first American treatment of Hegel's philosophy of mind. When he brought out a second edition shortly before his death, Nevin wrote the foreword. Rauch also had worked up his moral philosophy, but the publication was interrupted by his death. Nichols maintains that "although Nevin apparently was unable to edit this manuscript for Rauch, he probably taught from Rauch's Hegelian outlines when he inherited the president's course in ethics for the seniors in 1841. What could have been more congenial to a Platonist with a developing historical consciousness!"<sup>21</sup> In the lecture notes Nevin used for his course in ethics in 1847-48, we find statements such as these "Creation starts in the form of Nature. This is a vast whole struggling through all its parts to centralization and unity in the way of self production ... as reaching toward a unity nature is a continual process of organization its lower forms of existence ever looking toward those that are higher and finding in them their proper end."<sup>22</sup> The sense of thesis-antithesis-synthesis reflected in this passage from the ethics is also the essence of the Church Catholic. The inherent struggle in history of the ideal Church (invisible) for realization as the visible Church leads ultimately to a synthesis, and this synthesis of ideal-invisible and real-visible is "One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church." Nevin told his students, "The ideal Church is the spiritual power of Christianity as it flows from the person of Christ, struggling to realize itself in the world. The actual Church is even the point to which the ideal Church has reached in the process of realization."<sup>23</sup> Hegelian overtones are indeed perceptible in this idea of struggle, but more research in the whole area of the relationship between Nevin and Hegel is needed.

The historical consciousness kindled by Neander, Hegel, and many others whose influence cannot be discussed here led Nevin into confrontation with still another movement -- the Oxford Tractarians. As we saw before, the dynamic conception of the church led Nevin to consider the Reformation-early Church problem. Already in Allegheny Nevin read with interest the whole Tractarian debate centering on "whether the original Catholic doctrine concerning the Church, as it stood in universal authority through all ages before the Reformation, is to be received and held still as a necessary part of the Christian faith, or deliberately rejected and refused as an error dangerous to men's souls and at war with the Bible?"<sup>24</sup>

Although he was promoted into a dynamic view of history through Neander in the years before Mercersburg, he still distrusted tradition as a guide to interpreting the Scriptures and regarded the whole scheme of the Tractarians as "Newmania." According to Nichols, "Neander's pietistic view of Christian history was little suited to develop in Nevin a sense of the meaning of the visible Church. Such a conception Nevin first discovered in the Oxford Tracts ..."<sup>25</sup> In any event he later agreed with the Oxford movement on the subject of the continuity with the early Church but criticized them as well for resorting to repristination and a static episcopacy.<sup>26</sup> Living faith in the Holy Catholic Church - "This idea," Nevin wrote, "goes vastly beyond the notion of episcopacy, Presbyterianism, or any other ... ecclesiastical polity of this sort ... and lays hold first and foremost of the mystical being of the Church, as no mechanism of dead statute, but the actual presence of an ever living revelation of grace."<sup>27</sup> The Tractarians may have focused his attention on the visible Church, but he combined this with what he had learned from the Germans regarding the dynamic process of history. Catholicity is and must be visible and organic, but in being organic it is ever changing, ever in teleological movement toward full realization. Repristination whether Campbellite or



Puseyite is impossible. Although present forms of Christianity are organically related to the primitive Church, nevertheless the dynamic process of on-going history has brought about changes which cannot be reversed or ignored.<sup>28</sup>

These then are several of the main influences on Nevin's theological thinking regarding the Church question. (Since Schaff's relation to Nevin will be touched upon later, he was purposely omitted in the present discussion.) All pushed him to the recognition that the very essence of the Church is its historicity, not statically conceived, but dynamically, as the teleological movement of an idea in time.

Later in life Nevin recognized his debt to German scholarship on the question of history. But he broke with the whole post-Schleiermacher movement at a crucial point:

With all this high opinion, however, of the German mind and learning, we belong to no German school, and have never pretended to follow strictly any German system or scheme of thought ... Theory and speculation have been with us subordinate always to the idea of positive Christianity as an object of faith exhibited to us in the Bible and the history of the actual Church. The Christological principle has been for us immeasurably more than the requirements of any school of philosophy; its practical consequences have weighed more with us than the logical necessities of any metaphysical system.<sup>29</sup>

To him, the Church question and its historicity was not simply speculative. Rather, all that he learned from German scholarship pointed him in the direction of the actual and concrete. Although this re-direction may have been prompted by the Oxford Movement, nevertheless it made of Nevin a thorough-going Church theologian, for he was much more interested in the concrete manifestations of Christianity in the history of the actual Church than in a speculative system. Hence, when he sought justification for his views on the Eucharist he turned rarely to his German contemporaries, but rather to the Reformers and to the early Church fathers. The long excurses in The Mystical Presence are rooted deeply in Calvin, Luther, and both Reformed and Lutheran Confessions. The numerous articles which appeared in the Mercersburg Review centered on Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius. And, because he was so interested in the concrete life and history of the Church, his idea of Christian unity, too, was actual and real. Faith in the Church as embodied in the Creed means faith in the visible, concrete, reality of the Church in history. Since the Church is thus a concrete reality, and since she is catholic by definition, catholicity, too, is actual, concrete, real. In fact, Nevin criticized Puritanism on the same point as he did his German counterparts: both really ended up in philosophical speculation. "In Puritanism," he said, "the Church is acknowledged to be divine, as having been founded originally by Christ, and as standing still in some way under the superintendence of his Spirit. But this supernatural character, in the end, resolves itself very much into an unhistorical abstraction. The Church is not conceived of as a real outward as well as inward constitution, having in such view of its own organism as a single whole, and keeping up a true identity with itself in space and time."<sup>30</sup> The real must correspond concretely with the ideal. Catholicity is not only an idea, but an idea which seeks concrete realization in history.



In the previous section we have seen the philosophical and theological influences which prompted Nevin's own formulation of the Church question. We have seen, too, how he moved out in his own direction, correcting German idealism and the Oxford Movement where they appeared inadequate. By the time Philip Schaff accepted the chair of theology at Mercersburg in October of 1844, Nevin already had come to the conclusions regarding the Church set forth above. Schaff met Nevin for the first time at the triennial convention in Harrisburg in the Summer of 1844 where Nevin delivered his sermon "Catholic Unity." Schaff later remarked in his journal, "I think I could not have a better colleague than Dr. Nevin. I feared I might not find any sympathy in him for my views of the church; but I discover that he occupies essentially the same ground that I do and confirms me in my position. He is filled with the ideas of German theology."<sup>31</sup> Schaff's inaugural address in October became the basis of his famous Principle of Protestantism, a book which Nevin translated into English<sup>32</sup> and reviewed concurringly in the first volume of the Mercersburg Review.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, here was a meeting of like minds, so much so, that when the Principle of Protestantism was finally published it included Nevin's sermon on "Catholic Unity" as an appendix. Schaff, like Nevin, was convinced that Neander's idea of historical development was integral to the very nature of the Church and a necessary corrective to the situation of Protestantism in America.

Although there was so much similarity in the positions of both of these men, Nevin's point of orientation was basically different from that of Schaff. In typically Calvinistic fashion, Schaff presented<sup>34</sup> the formal principle of Protestantism as the divinely inspired Scriptures. Nevin, on the other hand was much more Christological in perspective: the Scriptures are inspired because they contain Christ; faith in Christ is not dependent on whether the Scriptures are inspired. There is "a living revelation in the Bible which must authenticate it and unfold its true sense ...."<sup>35</sup> This "living revelation" is the presence of Christ in the Church ever moving toward realization in history. Nevin, like Schaff, never produced a systematic treatment of Christology. However, if, then, Christology was the peculiar orientation of his theology, and if it was the center on which everything else pivoted, it would seem that it could be fairly easily reconstructed by comparing William Erb's compilation of Nevin's classroom notes<sup>36</sup> with Dick's textbook which was the outline for his courses at Mercersburg. But, both Dick and Nevin organized their lectures on Christology around the three central themes of Christ as prophet, priest, and king, and the differences between the two are so slight that no distinct contributions by Nevin can be isolated. If, on the other hand, we make a comparison with regard to the sections dealing with the doctrines of the Eucharist and the Church, Nevin leaves Dick far behind. It seems apparent, then, that the point of departure in understanding Nevin's Christology lies not in his treatment of Christology per se, but in his ideas of the Church and the Sacraments. Indeed, such a formulation is congruent with his constant stress that all loci pivot on the same central axis. Christ, his presence in the Church through the Sacraments, the process of realization of Christ in history, One Holy Catholic Church --all are essentially the same question and must be treated together. If we try to analyze the one, we are automatically driven to the others. Yet, in it all, Christology becomes the organizing principle because all other loci are by very nature Christological. Thus Nevin could write to Harbaugh, "How clear it is to my mind that the whole sense and power of Christianity turn at last on the fact of the Incarnation, as embodied with perennial life in the



consciousness of the Church. Apart from this all doctrine is cold and all practice dead."<sup>38</sup> Such a radically Christological perspective was quite alien to nineteenth-century America. If only Nevin had been able to systematize his thinking in this regard, perhaps we would have the real key to his whole theology. Instead, we must piece it together from numerous independent sources which were always directed toward the solution of a certain problem.

Within a total Christological perspective, it is the Incarnation specifically which provides the point of contact from which Nevin set forth his views on the Church. Orthodoxy saw the Incarnation as a logical necessity in order that Christ could make a propitiation for the sins of Adam. But Nevin reversed the procedure:

The incarnation is the key that unlocks the sense of all God's revelations. It is the key that unlocks the sense of all God's works, and brings to light the true meaning of the universe. The world, and especially Man, who may be said to gather into his person at last all lower forms of existence, himself the summit of the vast organic pyramid, is a mystery that is solved and interpreted finally only in this fact. Nature and Revelation, the world and Christianity, as springing from the same divine Mind, are not two different systems joined together in a merely outward way. They form a single whole, harmonious with itself in all its parts. The sense of the one then is necessarily included and comprehended in the sense of the other. The mystery of the new creation, must involve in the end the mystery of the old; and the key that serves to unlock the meaning of the first, must serve to unlock at the same time the inmost secret of the last. The incarnation forms thus the great central FACT of the world.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout this section in the Mystical Presence Nevin repeats again and again: "The Word made flesh!" for it is the real point of contact between the ideal and the real, between creation and redemption, between God and the world, between the invisible and the visible, between the old man and the new, between beginning and end, alpha and omega. The Incarnation, then, is the pivot of history. All before it was a prophecy of the Incarnation; all history since it is an unfolding, a dynamic unfolding, of the Word made flesh. "All nature and all history flow towards it, as their true and proper end, or spring from it as their principle and ground. The incarnation, by which divinity and humanity are joined together, and made one, in a real, inward and abiding way, is found to be the scope of all God's counsels and dispensations in the world. The mystery of the universe is interpreted in the person of Jesus Christ."<sup>40</sup>

It is this very understanding of the Incarnation and the person of Christ which Nevin used in the first part of his sermon on "Catholic Unity," and we can now understand what he means when he says there that "whatever the Church becomes in the way of development, it can never be more in fact than it was in him from the beginning."<sup>41</sup> Catholicity, as the very essence of the Church, is nothing more than the unity of Christ's person. Catholicity is not a quality or state to be achieved as something distinct from the essence of the Church. Rather, it is the form of Christ seeking to be realized concretely. It is of extreme importance to understand that all we said up to this point is focused on the one fact of the Incarnation. Historical development, the nature of the Church (both outward manifestations and inner constitution), the sacraments, Christian unity -- all are not individual loci to a greater or lesser degree



independent. Rather, they participate in one another and ultimately are unified in the Incarnation of Christ. Thus, when we speak of historical development, we are by definition speaking of the Incarnation. Likewise, when we speak of the Incarnation we are really speaking of historical development. And, when we discuss One Holy Catholic Church we are speaking of the development of the Incarnation. The reverse is precisely true also. If, as we have done in this discussion, we take take up the subject of Christian unity, we are necessarily talking about the Incarnation in historical development in the Church, and vice versa. Not only do all these points converge on the Incarnation as spokes in a wheel, but also, they integrally lead from one to another, as we have seen, as points on the rim of that wheel. We can begin to comprehend, then, what radical dimensions are involved in the statement that "the mystery of the universe is interpreted in the person of Jesus Christ." If Nevin had ever put his Christology together in systematic fashion, it would have resulted, in our opinion, in a thorough-going idealistic monism. Throughout this discussion we have attempted to point out the implications for Christian unity in each of the different areas. But when we finally penetrate to the core of his theology, the Incarnation, we can only speak of one implication, and this is that unity is the idea of the universe and seeks fulfillment. Of course Nevin phrased it in theological and Biblical categories, but at the heart of it all lies the essential monistic conception. And what is this but the Romantic idea of the one integrative principle running throughout the universe. Nevin abhorred philosophical speculation, and therein lay his positive contribution to theology. But if he had put his house in order, it appears that the underlying principle would have been more clearly revealed.

With such an understanding we are finally prepared to deal with the Mercersburg concept of evangelical catholicity as set forth in Nevin's sermon on "Catholic Unity." Among the 112 theses which Schaff appended to his Principle of Protestantism we find this one: "The true standpoint, all necessary for the wants of the time, is that of Protestant Catholicism, or genuine historical progress."<sup>42</sup> Nevin's sermon which climaxes the volume appears to be his own statement of that principle. The very occasion for the sermon was the triennial convention in Harrisburg, an ecumenical meeting of two Reformed bodies -- German and Dutch. The text was Ephesians 4: 4-6, and although both groups had come there in an ecumenical spirit, when they left after hearing Nevin's sermon, there was indeed no "one body and one spirit!" Nevin began on a theme which is by now not unfamiliar to us:

We are to consider the Nature of Catholic Unity, as comprehended constitutionally in the idea of the Christian Church. Unity does not exclude the idea of difference and multiplicity. Indeed it is only by means of these, that it can ever appear under an actual, concrete form. Where the one does not carry in itself the possibility of separation and distinction, it can never be more than a sheer abstraction, and absolute nullity. The idea of oneness, however, does require, that the different and the manifold as comprehended in it, should be in principle the same, and that all should be held together by the force of this principle actively felt at every point. Such is the unity of the Christian Church. It is composed of a vast number of individual members; but these are all actuated by the power of a common life, and the whole of this life gathers itself up ultimately or fundamentally in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the principle or root of the Church; and the Church through



all ages, is one, simply because it stands, in the presence and power of this root, universally and forever. ... The union by which it is held together, through all ages, is strictly organic. The Church is not a mere aggregation or collection of different individuals, drawn together by similarity of interests and wants. ... The Church does not rest upon its members, but the members rest upon the Church. ... The life of Christ in the Church, is in the first place inward and invisible. But to be real, it must also become outward. ... It belongs to the proper conception of it, that the unity of the Holy Catholic Church should appear in an outward and visible way; and it can never be regarded as complete, where such development of its inward power is still wanting.<sup>43</sup>

Despite this formal principle, Nevin could admit that the failure of the ideal to be realized does not call in question the existence of One Holy Catholic Church. The historical realization and the correspondence of the real with the ideal is always a gradual process. Although the fragmentation in Protestantism remains a "distorted image of its inward life, ... the life of the Church, with all its proper attributes, is still actively at work in every evangelical communion.... Joined together in the common life of Christ, in the possession of one faith, one hope, and one baptism, the various divisions of the Christian world, are still organically the same Church."<sup>44</sup> There is a dynamic tension at this point: the various divisions are still organically the same Church, but ultimately these distinctions must be resolved by the inner necessity of the idea of the Church. Although for the time being these denominations are the body of Christ, yet ultimately Christ's body is one and cannot be divided. The double emphasis appears to push in two directions. On the one hand Nevin wants to affirm that the present state of the Church is one and catholic so that unity might not become purely an apocalyptic dream. And, on the other hand, he wants to continue to maintain that unity is ultimately Christ's body seeking realization so that ultimate unity cannot be grasped by individuals or groups in federation, union, or contract. From one aspect the tension appears to result from the natural Gegensatz in the philosophical monism we described above. Yet, viewed more positively, Nevin wants to point to the fact that Christians have a real responsibility within the tension. In so doing he saves the whole system from ending in mere speculation.

Thus in the second part of the sermon he sets forth several ways in which Christians must regard catholic unity. Historical development, he says, "is not blind of course and necessary, as in the sphere of mere nature, but moral, involving intelligence and will. The Church is required to seek and maintain her own unity; and this obligation falls back necessarily in the end upon Christians ... as<sup>46</sup> the most important interest in the world."<sup>45</sup> Nevin offered three proposals. First and foremost the Church must recognize the sin of her division. No sect or denomination can justify its separate existence as necessary to maintain purity of doctrine and to prod another into good works. The idea of the Church seeks visible unity not simply through a recognition that walls which divide must be broken down. Unity can in no way be sought after until the vast divisions are recognized as the spirit of Antichrist. Secondly, it must be understood that true unity cannot ensue merely through strategies either to bring together existing denominations or to transcend them all by renouncing allegiance to particular denominations. Confederation or independence -- both are alien to the way in which unity is to be established. "To be valid, it must be free, the spontaneous product of Christian knowledge and Christian love."<sup>47</sup> Finally, the Church must seek out and utilize all opportunities to advance in a visible way the interest of



catholic unity. We cannot "run<sup>48</sup> before the Lord, presumptuously taking the whole work into our own hands," but we must at the same time be willing to follow where he leads. Visible unity is not cataclysmic, but only the end of a long process. But we must further every opportunity along the way to respond to the Lord's direction. (In our own day, the catchword is "dialogue.") Nevin reminded the convention that the simple fact of their being together was just such an opportunity. No outward union was in the foreground, yet their meeting was a step toward visible unity.

Contrasted, the two parts of the sermon are quite different in tenor. The first is a kind of summary of the whole Christological-historical-ecclesiological premise with which we have been dealing throughout this discussion. The second, on the other hand, is much more a homiletic exhortation. We see it all as a foreshadowing of what a century later Bonhoeffer would call the tension between the ultimate and the penultimate. Ultimately the very idea of the Church, catholic by definition, as a revelation of God seeks to be realized visibly in time. Yet, penultimately Christians have a certain definite responsibility in relation to the ultimate. This sermon appears, then, to be the most mature and sober statement of Nevin's positive contribution to ecumenical theology. It brings together the various strands of his theological thinking and yet it focuses in on them in such a way that it opens a path for concrete ecumenical activity. Unfortunately Nevin never developed the second half more extensively.

The delegates to the convention, both German and Dutch, returned home horrified by Nevin's proposals only to be doubly shocked several months later by Schaff's inaugural address expressing the same general outlook. Published together in one volume both set forth the theological programme which was to be later dubbed in derision as "Mercersburg theology." We have seen how in so many points it ran counter to the general state of Protestantism in America, and the general state quickly responded. Time and space will not permit an enumeration of the counter voices,<sup>48</sup> but all, both within the German Reformed Church and without, viewed evangelical catholicity as the great threat to Protestantism in this country. Static orthodoxy was called into question by the idea of historical development. Denominationalism was threatened by an exhortation to catholic unity. Inspiration of the Scriptures was supposedly contested by a revelation behind the written word. And all of it eventually revolved around the supposed consequences of evangelical catholicity. If Protestantism is to seek catholic unity within her ranks, then what is the next logical step? If the Reformation is in dynamic relationship with primitive Christianity via Rome, then are we not headed for organic unity with a papal head? Nevin, as we have seen, recognized that organic unity was not to be realized in the foreseeable future, and he avoided saying anything about Protestant-Catholic relations other than that both will progress to<sup>49</sup> different forms than those in which they presently find themselves. But the opposition drew the apparently logical consequences and branded Nevin and Schaff as disguised papal emissaries.

For us in a day when Protestant observers were invited to attend Vatican II and when "ecumenical dialogue" has become common language, it is difficult to fathom why the opposition to evangelical catholicity was so vehement. Why, we say, could respectable Reformed theologians be so naive as to denounce a program which in so many ways was a recovery of Calvin and the Continental Reformed heritage? We must realize, however, that evangelical catholicity hit America at a time when American Protestantism saw Rome moving in on every side. The spiraling immigration from the South and East of Europe was



invading an almost predominantly Protestant culture. Coupled with this was the movement within Roman Catholicism culminating in the decision on papal infallibility in 1870 and the pope's declaration that Catholicism was opposed to the basic principles of civil and political liberty. And Newman made the move to Rome in the very year the Mercersburg movement began.<sup>50</sup> Thus, orthodoxy in all sincerity rallied its troops against the forthcoming clash, and although Nevin and Schaff opposed the abuses of Rome with all the Protestant gusto they could muster up, they were men out of step with the times, a century's step ahead!

To Nevin this general state of affairs in Protestantism was so deplorable, and the hope for evangelical catholicity became so dim that for a while he seriously considered becoming another Newman. James I. Good, one of his later opponents, called the period "Nevin's Dizziness." It was only the work on the new liturgy that brought Nevin back into the theological arena,<sup>51</sup> and it was in the liturgical expressions of the German Reformed Church (Now part of the United Church of Christ) that the Mercersburg theology survived the nineteenth century. Mercersburg created a school -- Harbaugh, Gerhart, Appel, and others -- but none of these were the creative thinkers Nevin and Schaff were. Harbaugh spent the latter part of his life writing pietistic hymns and speculating about eternal life. Gerhart, although he produced the only systematic theology of the Mercersburg movement,<sup>52</sup> like Harbaugh lost the historical consciousness which motivated Nevin and Schaff. Or could it be that the general idealistic historicism was destined to pass away through the in-roads of competing philosophical postures? But the Church, too, had to face other issues -- Biblical criticism, Darwin, and the social gospel -- all of which obscured the Mercersburg theology for a century.

#### IV

In our own day, however, Nevin and Schaff are being re-discovered. The most important writings of Nevin and Schaff have been re-published. Mercersburg theology is again playing an important role in the whole ecumenical movement. We want to see, then, what directions Nevin can give to present attempts at Christian unity.

As we have said before, Nevin was first and foremost a Church theologian. Thus all questions of unity are essentially theological and therefore must be seen within the framework of the Church. Such a posture immediately rules out the possibility of any sort of pan-denominational society acting as a unifying agent through work in any of the numerous social concerns. Catholic unity to be valid at all must proceed from the very life of the Church, not in terms of strategies or contracts, but in faith in the Church as the body of Christ. Christian unity, therefore, is not something the Church does, rather it is the Church. Moreover, Christian unity is not an imitatio Christi, rather it is Christ actively working in the Church. American theology has yet to realize the radical nature of such an affirmation.

Secondly, Nevin discovered the centrality of Christology in theology and thus in the Church question. We have attempted to expose what we discern are certain dangerous directions in our reconstruction of Nevin's theology above. Yet in ecumenical discussion in our own day Christology must become the starting point from which to view the Church and thus Christian unity. It involves a working out of the implications of the thesis that Christ's body is one. Certainly in reviewing Nevin's gift to the modern Church, we must re-interpret his Christology by de-mythologizing the philosophic intrusion as



he himself appears to hint at in the sermon on "Catholic Unity." As we have stated above, perhaps one of the reasons for the demise of Mercersburg theology is that the idealism which lay at the core ran dry. If Nevin is to be profitable to contemporary ecumenical discussion, more work needs to be done in exposing this intrusion and in moving out from the more positive directions in his Christology. The philosophical intrusion resides so strongly in the doctrine of the Incarnation. Nevin spoke of the Incarnation almost to the exclusion of the Cross and Resurrection, perhaps because it fit well into his general philosophical framework. With regard to Christian unity, a theology solely of the Incarnation at points misses the judgment and "nevertheless" of the cross and resurrection on the present state of the Church.

But despite these problems, the plan outlined in the second part of the sermon on "Catholic Unity" can well be taken directly into our present ecumenical discussions. The primary duty to recognize the sin of division in the body of Christ became the touchstone of the World Council's Faith and Order Section and must be the prolegomena to any ecumenical approach. Some Church mergers in our own day are proving that Nevin's second point must be taken seriously: "The union of the Church in any case, is not to be established by strategem or force."<sup>53</sup> And Nevin's third point that it is the duty of the Church to respond to all opportunities to advance the cause of catholic unity lay at the heart of Vatican II. It is interesting to note, in conclusion, how the very three proposals which Nevin made over a hundred years ago are in some sense being fulfilled a century and a half later!



# FOOTNOTES

1. Especially illuminating in this area is: Donald Herbert Yoder, "Christian Unity in Nineteenth Century America," A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948, ed. Ruth Ronse and Stephen Charles Neill, Philadelphia, 1954, pp. 219-289.
2. He later changed the spelling to Schaff.
3. James Hastings Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology (Chicago, 1961) hints at the affinity of Mercersburg and Romanticism in the very title of the book. However, he fails to develop this thesis at all. More research is needed in this area.
4. In much of the secondary literature Nevin and Schaff are treated together. Although from one aspect the Mercersburg movement should be seen as a whole, on the other hand, such a procedure seems to obliterate the unique contributions of each one. Nichol's book, Ibid., is one of the best present-day discussions of the movement, but he views Nevin along with Schaff, Henry Harbaugh, and E. V. Gerhart as a unity. Kenneth M. Plummer, "The Theology of John Williamson Nevin in the Mercersburg Period, 1840-1852." (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation), University of Chicago Library, 1958, is an attempt to analyze Nevin's contribution, but it is not complete.
5. Nichols treats this segment of Nevin's life quite extensively in the first chapter, Ibid., pp. 5-46. See also: Theodore Appel, The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin (Philadelphia, 1889), pp. 25-76. This work also lists his publications in this period.
6. Nichols, p. 36.
7. John W. Nevin, The Anxious Bench, 2nd. ed. (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, 1844), pp. 28-9.
8. Nichols, p. 57.
9. The Anxious Bench, pp. 113-14.
10. Ibid., pp. 122 ff.
11. Philadelphia, 1846.
12. In the preliminary statement at the beginning of the first volume, Nevin proposed the following to be the platform of the new journal: "The Review is expected ... to bear a distinctive and peculiar character. As the mere echo of what already exists in this way, it would have no right to challenge any regard. Its peculiarity is denoted by its title. It proposes to represent in philosophy and religion, the system of thinking which has come to be identified extensively, in this country, with the institutions at Mercersburg, though of far wider and higher force in fact, on both sides of the Atlantic. ... In Religion, the publication will be made to rest throughout on the basis of the Apostles' Creed, taken in its own proper and original sense. Its motto, here, will be that of the profoundly philosophical Anselm of Canterbury: 'Non quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam.' The last



evidence of all truth will be acknowledged to hold only in the person of Jesus Christ, out of which with irresistible necessity, all other articles of this wonderful symbol flow ... Room will be made ... for the idea of theology as a living process in the life of the Church, and not a tradition simply in its outward keeping. It will be taken for granted, that theology is not yet complete; just as little as the same can be said of the new creation in Christ Jesus, in any other view. Science, so rooted in the realities of Faith can accomplish its growth only as it remains perpetually bound, in the midst of all progress, to the authority of the past. Christianity involves necessarily, as in the creed, the idea of one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The proposed Review will be decidedly historical and churchly, then, in its character and may be expected to lay emphasis on all that truly and properly appertains to religion on this side. It will be Protestant, of course, in opposition to the corruptions of Rome; but Catholic, at the same time, in striving to honor and save the glorious and sublime truths -- Mercersburg Review I: 1 (January, 1849), pp. 7-8.

13. It is virtually impossible to document each of these emphases individually not only because of the wide perspective involved, but also because these themes re-appear in most of the important articles. Nevin rarely spoke of them independently, for they all revolve around the same general focus. Consult the bibliography.
14. "Thoughts on the Church," Mercersburg Review X;2 (April, 1858), p. 172 (hereafter cited as M R)
15. "The Sect System," M R I:5 (September, 1849), p. 492. This is only one of the many articles in this volume dealing with the subject of the sects.
16. Ibid., pp. 500-501.
17. Quoted in Nichols, p. 42.
18. "Historical Development," M R I:5 (September, 1849), p. 513.
19. See: "Catholicism," M R III:1 (January, 1851), pp. 1-26 and "Catholic Unity," in Philip Schaff, Principle of Protestantism, trans. J. W. Nevin (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, 1845), pp. 193-215.
20. "The Year 1848," M R I:1 (January, 1849), p. 12.
21. Nichols, p. 47.
22. "Lectures on Moral Philosophy" (1847-48), copied by A. B. Dundor, 1861 (Unpublished lecture notes) the personal library of Dr. George A. Creitz, Easton, Pennsylvania. To the best of our knowledge these appear to be copied directly from another manuscript, presumably Nevin's own. If, as Nichols maintains, Nevin used Rauch's unpublished outlines, fruitful results might appear by comparing these with Nevin's notes. It would be interesting to see where and how far Nevin corrected Rauch and, therefore indirectly, Hegel.



23. Rev. B. Bausman, "Lectures on Theology," (Unpublished classroom notes) The Library of the Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, p. 584.
24. "The Anglican Crisis," M R III:4 (July, 1851), p. 369.
25. Nichols, p. 45.
26. "The Anglican Crisis," pp. 359-398.
27. Ibid., pp. 377-8.
28. "Historical Development," pp. 513-14.
29. "Our Relations to Germany," M R XIV:4 (October, 1867), p. 631.
30. "Early Christianity," M R III:6 (November, 1851), p. 538.
31. quoted by Nichols, p. 64.
32. (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, 1845).
33. "True and False Protestantism," M R I:1 (January, 1849), pp. 83-104.
34. Principle of Protestantism, pp. 70ff.
35. "The Sect System," p. 504.
36. William H. Erb, Dr. Nevin's Theology, (Reading, Pennsylvania, 1913).
37. John Dick, Lectures on Theology, 2 vols. (New York, 1851).
38. quoted by Nichols, p. 144.
39. The Mystical Presence (Philadelphia, 1846), p. 199.
40. Ibid., p. 204.
41. "Catholic Unity," in Philip Schaff, Principle of Protestantism, trans. John W. Nevin (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, 1845), p. 200.
42. Ibid., p. 187.
43. Ibid., pp. 195-200.
44. Ibid., p. 202.
45. Ibid., p. 203.
46. Ibid., pp. 204ff.
47. Ibid., p. 207.
48. See: the third division of the bibliography and David Dunn, et. al. A History of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, (Philadelphia, 1961)



and H. M. J. Klein, History of the Eastern Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, (Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1943).

49. See: "True and False Protestantism," pp. 99-100.
50. Nichols analyzes the situation well on pp. 169ff.
51. See especially "The Liturgical Movement," M R I:5 (October, 1849) and "Theology of the New Liturgy," M R XIV:1 (January, 1867), pp. 23-66.
52. E. V. Gerhart, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 2 vols. (New York, 1891).
53. "Catholic Unity," p. 207.



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PRINCIPLES OF ANTAGONISM  
OR  
THE MYSTICAL NUISANCE

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There was nothing especially distinctive about the likes of John Nevin. He was not particularly well traveled, aristocratic, strong, or a good looking man. He was born on a modest Pennsylvania farm and endowed with the necessary skills for tilling the land. The only notable in his genealogy was Dr. Williamson, a physician in the Revolution. His heritage was "Old School" Scottish Presbyterian which was perceived to be a stiff, arid, and unimaginative religion. He was educated in the provincial schools of Union College and Princeton. He was disposed to poor health and depression. He taught in a tiny rural seminary which was always on the verge of bankruptcy. Who was he to set himself up as the judge and jury of American Christianity?

One can't help wondering what motivated young Philip Schaff to accept a call to Mercersburg seminary. Did he lose a bet? Was he running away from a soured love affair, brokenhearted? Was he in a drunken stupor when he signed the contract? In Germany Schaff moved in the sphere of the world's most renowned theologians. He studied at Tubingen, Halle, and Berlin. He sat at the feet of Baur, Dorner, Tholuck, Neander, and Hengstenberg as a student. He rubbed elbows with Kierkegaard and Engels while hearing lectures by Schelling. In this world of super intellects he was gaining some respect. After arriving on American soil Schaff found himself imprisoned in the middle of nowhere in the midst of intellectual hicks. Two years hence he would be brought up on trial as a heretic. How dare he criticize American churches? Was he not, after all, just a German immigrant?

Isolated together in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, John Nevin and Philip Schaff formed an unlikely partnership. The sole faculty of the German Reformed seminary, they found they had no difficulty in doing this. After a very short time the two men discovered that they were indeed kindred spirits. Intellectually they were on the same superior wave length. Theologically, they agreed on the teachings of the Heidelberg catechism. Philosophically, they shared similar views on the Hegelian notion of historical progress. Their ideas about the church, the sacraments, and the ministry seemed to mesh. And, when assessing present Protestant conditions they came up with the same diagnosis. Thus this Pennsylvania farmer and this German immigrant set about their work of educating not only a handful of seminary students, not only the denomination with which they were affiliated, but the entire American public.

When Nevin and Schaff looked at the Church they discovered a Life within it. This was not the collective lives of the individuals associated with it. It was not the somewhat artificial fluff which the revivalists tried to infuse through the emotionalism of the anxious bench. It was not the life of an institution ruled by hierarchy and doctrine. It was not the spirit of the New Testament community perpetually mimicked. The Life they discovered was none other than the Life of Christ Incarnate.

Nevin and Schaff worked from the theological premise that the Incarnation of Christ is the central doctrine from which all others derive meaning. Christ became human not only to compensate for our sin. If this were the only



motive, sin would be the strangely virtuous prerequisite for our salvation. Nor did Christ become human so that God could experience limitations. This would imply that until that time something in God was missing. Christ became human (according to the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Colossians) so that the whole universe might be brought into reconciliation. From the very beginning it was part of the eternal plan.

All humanity shares in the life of Adam. We have an organic connection; not so much through flesh and blood but in our very essence we are one and the same with him. We share the same life. We share the same nature. We share in the same propensity to sin. In the Incarnation Christ became the second Adam. This means that there is also an essential nature communicated to all who follow Him. This is the nature of grace, redemption, and reconciliation.

The Grace bestowed upon the world through Jesus Christ is continued in the Church through the sacramental system. The sacraments are not, therefore, primarily ordinances for our remembrance. They do not only establish a moral union between Christ and the recipient. The sacraments convey objective Grace. The sacrament of Baptism implies regeneration. The sacrament of the Eucharist draws us up into union with the Maker of salvation. All the benefits of Christ are offered to those who have the faith to receive Him.

The Mercersburg men changed the focus, therefore, from the oppressive introspection of the predominantly moralistic American religion to a wondrous contemplation of the object of the faith, Christ alone, whose redemptive love is freely given. They steered away from the popular obsession with the need for conversion to an apprehension of the Holy One who brings the world into reconciliation.

The Church is the body of Christ and therefore the contemporary continuation of the Incarnation. Therefore, in its ideal form the Church is the contemporary channel of grace. It nurtures us like a mother nurtures a child at her bosom. It too is an object of our faith and adoration. It is in essence One Holy Catholic, and Apostolic. Therefore in the present it should be unified, revered, sacramental, and historic.

Mercersburg theology has been rightly assessed as a churchly system. The church, the sacraments, the centrality of worship, the language of the liturgy, the unifying faith of the Creed, the place of the ordained ministry, all were discussed in their own periodical, The Mercersburg Review, extensively. Many times their idea of the "churchly" was contrasted sharply with what Nevin and Schaff termed the sectarian or Puritan heritage.

The sectarian system was so dangerous, they believed, because it was infecting even the most orthodox of Protestant bodies. American Protestantism was perilously close to losing its original identity. The Reformation theology, a vital corrective to the Roman apostasy was virtually extinct. Its traditions might pass unnoticed by the general public who ignorantly believed that Puritanism, Protestantism, and the Church of the First Century were one and the same thing.

Sectarianism promotes a contempt for the church, for the sacraments, for the Creed which were essentials in which the Reformed Father strongly believed. Sectarianism either favors a system of individual, subjective, sometimes fanatical and unsteady piety, or, it leads to individualistic, subjective often humanistic rationalistic tendencies. In The Principle of Protestantism,



Schaff assessed the damage:

The most dangerous enemy with which we are threatened on theoretic ground is not the Catholicism of Rome, but the foe within our own borders; not the hierarchic papacy of the Vatican, but the worldly papacy of the subjective understanding and Protestant infidelity; not the Council of Trent, but the theology of unbelief...

In this famed inaugural speech Schaff proclaimed boldly that if Luther and Calvin were alive they would have used their energies to fight the sects who by nature are sinful and selfish. Unlike their pioneers of the 16th Century Christians, they had no reason for splintering into more and more independent bodies. There was no reason to separate because the orthodox Protestant Church did not forbid the rightful celebration of the sacraments or the opportunity to preach.<sup>2</sup>

Although the word "Puritan" at times is defined narrowly to mean the ancestors of the New England congregational churches exclusively, Nevin and Schaff used the term when referring to Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Low Church Anglicans, all of whom had devalued the catechetical system of nurturing the the sacramental way of worshiping for biblical literalism and revivalistic frenzies. In other words Nevin and Schaff did not simply attack one denominational group. Over the years they were sure to insult just about everybody!

The purpose of this paper is not to rehash the Mercersburg critique of the American religious scene. This has already been done adequately.<sup>3</sup> One should keep in mind, however, that the Mercersburg men's motive was not to be destructive but to foster unity. Nevin and Schaff chided American Protestants to be faithful to their own theology. It is also conceivable that the rather brash attacks were needed in order to get the attention of the general public in an age dominated by the likes of Charles Grandison Finney.

It is also not within the scope of this paper to analyze the conflict which existed within the German Reformed family. Although it might be worthwhile to note that many of the issues were the same, some of the intra-denominational tension was caused by personality rubs and lack of adequate funding. What is remarkable is that the German Reformed denomination for the most part supported the judgment of Nevin and Schaff whole heartedly.

The purpose of this study is to get a sense of the American churches' reaction to the Mercersburg theology. Did the other denominations care about what the Mercersburg professors thought about their credibility? Did contemporary theologians rise to the challenge of debate? Who were some of the people who reacted positively to the Mercersburg writings? Why did some react so negatively? Perhaps the most important question to be asked is did the nuisance created by Dr. Nevin and the antagonism of Dr. Schaff have any lasting relevance. Did they in some way alter the American Church's face?

I will attempt to answer these questions by reviewing articles pertaining to the Mercersburg movement which were written in the nineteenth century. By looking at Mercersburg from Congregational, Roman Catholic, Reformed, and other Protestant perspectives we will hopefully be able to draw a clearer picture of the impact that Nevin and Schaff made.



DENOMINATIONAL CRITIQUES  
CONGREGATIONALISM

As was noted above, Nevin and Schaff were not afraid to point fingers and name names when describing the Church in its ideal and less than ideal state. The Puritans took the bulk of ribbing. Therefore, one might expect there to be a rash of angry responses from the New England congregationalists. This never really happened.

When searching Trinitarian Congregational journals of this period it is surprising to discover that the New England divines seem to be unconcerned about the attacks of their German Reformed brothers. In fact, one of the earliest known responses from the Congregational world was thoroughly positive. The subject at hand was the Eucharist. All the way up in Hartford Connecticut one W. W. Andrews read an article in a Dutch Reformed publication which was wrestling to understand the Mercersburg theory of the mystical union. Andrews submitted a marvelous explanation which was found to be incredibly in line with the thought of Schaff and Nevin. The Weekly Messenger gladly published four articles by him. This, it should be noted, occurred before Nevin published The Mystical Presence.

The New Englander ran a literary note when the Mystical Presence was published. But its review amounted to only one paragraph. A few years later Nevin's Apostles' Creed was noticed. In both cases questions are raised; but the books are recommended.

In the middle of the 1850s The New Englander took enough of an interest in the Mercersburg school to publish two articles about it. Both articles highlight the differences perceived on the church question but give an accurate account of the Mercersburg position. The first, which may have been written by the Congregational historian L. W. Bacon seems to have studied Dr. Schaff with a certain amount of fascination. He is impressed with the courage Schaff displayed in his inaugural address on the Principle of Protestantism. He is amused by the controversy this caused in the German Reformed denomination. Schaff's blunt account of the American church may have been palatable to the New World tastes had it been published in Berlin first, or by a journal in New England. It is a pity, in Bacon's estimation, that the likes of Schaff came under the stern control of the likes of John Williamson Nevin. This Scotch expatriate seems to thrive on discord. As a result the German Reformed Church is less unified, less catholic, and more isolated and sectarian. It is Nevin's constant harangue of the Puritan demonic force that seems to have offended Bacon. He states:

Thus 'Puritanism' used as the common designation of all English-language Churches not Episcopal, began to be a convenient term of disparagement, implying we know not what of 'onesidedness' and 'subjectivity;' and Princeton itself, when put in comparison with Mercersburg, was found to be erroneous, a fountain of blundering and harmful opinions, completely Puritan in its standpoint, and not much better than Andover or New Haven.

Nevin is believed to be the cause, therefore, of any and all of Schaff's supposed theological indiscretions. Bacon concludes his article by reviewing the History of the Apostolic Church objecting mostly to Schaff's claim that Baptism was the mode of entrance into the Church instead of preaching.



The second article, which appeared in 1857 comments on Schaff's recent lectures in Berlin when he did finally go back and report on the difference between American and European religion. Schaff found much positive to say about the church of his adopted homeland. He believed the Protestant principle was greatly strengthened by church and state separation. He even saw a place for congregationalism. He said:

It can hardly be denied that the Protestant idea of the general priesthood of believers, if true at all, must lead to a certain degree of congregational independence or self government, and to an active cooperation of the laity with the ministry. The American experience proves, beyond contradiction, that such kind of congregationalism, (I take it here in its theological, not in its technical denominational sense) instead of injuring the interests of the Church and religion and<sup>8</sup> undermining the influence of the ministry greatly promotes them.

The New England community was happy to accept Schaff's compliment. The author of The New Englander review seizes the opportunity to take Schaff's affirmation to the outer limit. He doubts that it would ever be possible for the church to realize Schaff's notion of organic union. He suggests that organic unity, (centralization anyway) was never the Lord's intention. Instead, the "ultimate destiny" of Protestantism is New England style independence. When hierarchical systems finally remove all restraints, independent<sup>9</sup> churches will voluntarily unite out of sheer love for their fellow Christians.

By the 1860s Schaff, who was now no longer under the wing of Dr. Nevin, had gained wide approval as a church historian. Literary notes are commonly found on Schaff's prolific historical writings such as The Boston Review's note on Schaff's newly published catechism.<sup>10</sup> Schaff's talents could not be ignored. The Congregationalists were enamored with him. But the war between the states absorbed most of the pages of these theological periodicals now noted for their social activism.

After the War, Schaff severed himself completely from the Mercersburg mystique when he accepted a call to be Professor at Union Seminary. This is not to say that he ever compromised his theology. Schaff continued to speak with a high sacramental regard and for ecumenicity. In the Evangelical Alliance Schaff, Horace Bushnell and Henry Ward Beecher became rather friendly. Beecher would later comment to Schaff's son in a letter dated September 1883:

I did not know that Dr. Schaff had a son in the Christian ministry. To wish that you might be half as useful to the cause of Christ as your father has been, would be wishing a<sup>11</sup> far greater measure of usefulness than usually falls to ministers.

In light of the fact that Beecher was noted for his role in the nineteenth century movement to minimize the status of clergy we might understand why Schaff might comment privately;

Tonight I am going to hear Dr. Parker's eulogy on Henry Ward Beecher in Brooklyn. His mother consecrated him to mission work among the heathens. But God had<sup>12</sup> mercy on the heathens abroad and sent him to the heathens at home.



As L. Bacon predicted in the 1850s, Schaff's ideas were graciously received once he started speaking in Puritan territory. New Englanders even welcomed exposure to specific Mercersburg topics. In a spirit of openness the Bibliotheca Sacra published Mercersburg's E. V. Gerhart's articles on the German Reformed Church and the Heidelberg Catechism and Schaff's articles on the Heidelberg Catechism and the History of the Christian Church.<sup>13</sup> The Andover Review reprinted a series of articles by Gerhart on "Reformation Theology" in 1885. In 1892 it ran an article by Schaff on "The Calvinistic System in Light of Reason and Scripture." But undoubtedly the most amazing item appeared in July of 1891 when The Andover Review printed an exclusive memorial tribute to none other than John Williamson Nevin. This twenty page article was run when its Presbyterian author suggested that the Andover Liberals ought to know more about him.<sup>14</sup>

Thus it seems fair to conclude that Congregationalism rarely allowed Mercersburg to get under its skin. This may be because they considered the word "Puritan" to be a generic term which was not directly applied to them. It may be because the majority of the Congregationalists who were attacked personally were deceased and thought not necessary to defend.<sup>15</sup> It may also be because Schaff had so impressed them, or because there was no congregational theologian who could be an intellectual equal to take on Mr. Nevin, or because they chose not be drawn into a fight, or the issues just did not concern them. Whatever the reasons, the men of New England's tempered reaction to the Mercersburg challenge was utterly amazing.

#### ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Nevin and Schaff were most often accused of harboring Roman affections. These criticisms came both within and outside their own denomination. Nevin's emphasis on Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, in the rite of ordination, and in baptismal regeneration was viewed with grave suspicion. Schaff's historic defence of the See of Rome and the Apostolic succession turned many a Protestant against him. The Mercersburg appreciation for liturgical form and churchly tradition churned up enormous questions. Were these pillars of the Reformed Church about to defect to Rome as was the growing trend?<sup>16</sup> Would these seminary professors brainwash a whole generation of German Reformed clergymen? Indeed there was some reason for such apprehension. Schaff expressed the hope in his Principle of Protestantism that the church would be moving into an age of evangelical catholicism. Such would be the age when both Catholics and Protestants put aside their differences and blend their distinctive traditions.<sup>17</sup> For a certain period of his life Nevin expressed more and more frustration with the modern Protestant subjectivism. In 1852 he resigned from his seminary position in order to decide which church (Protestant or Catholic) he wished to die in. One might guess that the Catholic Church might have had a field day with such information and may have tried to exploit the situation.

In the 1840s Nevin developed an acquaintance with Orestes A. Brownson. Mr. Brownson was born, raised, and ordained, a New England Unitarian who in 1844 converted to Roman Catholicism. Brownson displayed all the zeal of a convert that one could imagine. He became known as American catholicism's spokesman and independently published a journal to vent his ultramontanist opinions. Protestantism, in Brownson's view was only a sham. Luther and Calvin were evil men. The Pope and the church at Rome are infallible in all decisions and are the only possible bestowers of salvation.<sup>18</sup> We might guess that Brownson incurred the wrath of many a Christian.



In the 1850 Mercersburg Review Nevin reacted. Although he greatly admired the man, and respected his commitment and intelligence, Nevin believed Brownson portrayed a one-sided Romanism. Brownson had found his way to the other extreme of Unitarianism. He denied the historic development of the church. He favored law over freedom.

Brownson then ran a series of articles in response to him. He appreciated Nevin's insight but warned that he like all Protestants lingered dangerously close to Pantheism. As the interchange drifted more, and more in the metaphysical direction Nevin lost interest in continuing.<sup>19</sup>

Nevin's courtship with the Catholic faith, however, reactivated their communication. Brownson began to actively pursue this Pennsylvanian theologian. Also, two other Roman Catholic publications, The Freeman's Journal and The Catholic Herald, began a prayer campaign for Nevin's conversion. In a letter to Brownson who apparently wanted Nevin to share his struggles with the public, Nevin said

My Protestantism, you will see thus, is of the poorest sort. I am no longer fit for the defence of its interest in any vigorous style. For this reason any controversy of a public sort in its behalf, either with yourself or any other champion of Romanism, ought to be in other hands. I find so much truth and right on your side, and so much falsehood and wrong on ours as usually held, that I have no heart for any controversy of the sort...<sup>20</sup>

By 1855, it is believed, Nevin made a decision to remain forever in the Protestant tradition. Perhaps by stepping back and separating himself from the troubles of the denomination, Nevin was able to better see its benefits. It was at this time that he began to actively participate in the life of the German Reformed communion once again.

The Mercersburg movement continued to attract some interest in the Catholic publications. Shortly after this period (known as Nevin's dizziness), George D. Wolff researched Mercersburg thought for The American Catholic Quarterly Review. He subtitled the article "An Attempt to Find Ground on Which Protestantism and Catholicity Might Unite." He compared Mercersburg with the Tractarians. He reviewed Nevin's answer to the church question. He concluded that all Protestantism is equally guilty of the sin of sectarianism. The Mercersburg men are much like the Jews who witnessed the crucifixion. They had the Way, the Truth, the Life in their very midst but still they did not recognize it.<sup>21</sup> I suppose Wolff was implying that Nevin had done the same with the Roman Catholic religion.

A decade later Catholic World printed an article by Leonard Bacon (the congregational historian) about conversions to Catholicism. In the article Nevin was said to be moving in that direction. As a result, some anonymous person submitted an article in an attempt to explain Mercersburg to his Catholic brethren. Authorship is credited to "we who are its (Mercersburg's) prophets and adherents."<sup>22</sup> The article would meet the twentieth century affinity for journalistic sensationalism. By nineteenth century standards the words may very well have been seen as scathing. The following quotations give an example of the content.

The Reformation has proved a failure except as a preparation to a



higher form of Christianity.... It seems to us what men call Romanism may not be such a bad thing after all.... We thank the Roman Catholic church for the Christian Year, the symbols of the faith the traditions of battle and conquest, for early martyrology, and for its unceasing and undying purpose...

And then it says the Episcopalians and Presbyterians:

condemned us and opened wide their doors for our disorganizers, who were crying out against innovation when we were seeking to make our church a place for the display of fine clothing and false curls.

The Methodists:

are living the false lie of a sickly sentimentality

The Lutherans:

degraded from Luther are absorbed in childish schemes and efforts at Reform by revivals

The Congregationalists:

Mercersburg philosophy is the antagonism in thought and in its social aspects of new England transcendentalism and Plymouth Rock conventionalism.

Who might have written such an abrasive piece? Who would value the dogma of the Immaculate conception and reverence of the Virgin Mary? Who might be likely to see union with Rome as a viable possibility? Obviously, as late as 1867 someone in Rome and someone in Mercersburg was still flirting.

Catholic World would publish two more Mercersburg articles in the 1870s. Both displayed a reserved approval of the Mercersburg mode of thinking. The first praised its incarnational ecclesiology as it reviewed Henry Harbaugh's article entitled "Union with the Church through Solemn Duty and Blessed Privilege of all who would be Saved." The second complimented Nevin on his churchly biblical hermeneutic. In both cases, however, the Mercersburg view is finally tossed away. In the final analysis, no view could be acceptable, except the Roman perspective.

Roman Catholicism, of course, would never comment on Mercersburg's "evangelical catholicity" officially. The evidence shows, however, that their interest was strong so long as they believed conversion was a possibility. When it became apparent that catholicity not Romanism was the Mercersburg ideal, the Romans turned their attention to other things.

#### LUTHERANS

Ever since the Marburg Colloquy, the Lutherans and the Reformed people have been living together as friendly enemies. Both denominations have their roots in Germany. Since the days of Martin Bucer, some Lutherans and Reformed have struggled to find a commonality. The Heidelberg Confession, the doctrinal standard of the Reformed church of Germany was intended to unite both bodies. This Catechism had profound effect in molding both Dr. Schaff and Dr. Nevin's theology. Also, especially in Pennsylvania, Lutheran and Reformed people were likely to live in the same ethnic communities. They often shared the same church building, and even pastors. Many intermarried. Therefore Nevin and Schaff were especially sensitive to the trends in American Lutheranism. What happened in one often directly affected the other denomination.

This is why Nevin was so critical of the Lutherans when he perceived them to be moving full speed ahead into the direction of the Puritans. In his two most famous works, The Anxious Bench and the Mystical Presence Nevin seems to



purposefully attack them. He said of the contemporary Lutheran view of the sacraments:

We cannot say simply that it has been led to moderate the old sacramental doctrine of the church as exhibited in the Form of Concord; it has abandoned the doctrine altogether. Not only is the true Lutheran position, as occupied so violently against the Calvinists in the sixteenth century, openly and fully renounced; but the Calvinistic ground itself, then shunned with so much horror as the very threshold of infidelity, has come to be considered as also in unsafe contiguity with Rome. With no denomination do we find the anti-mystical tendency, usually charged upon the Reformed Church, more decidedly developed.<sup>24</sup>

Nevin was too close to home to allow his criticisms to pass unnoticed. The Lutheran Observer began to run a series of articles in defense of Lutheran theology and revivalism. They said of Nevin:

whatever Professor Nevin may have written in the abstraction of his study, I am nevertheless strongly convinced, as a pastor, that the so-called Anxious Bench is the lever of Archimedes, which, by the blessing of God, can raise our German churches to that degree of respectability in the religious world which they ought to enjoy.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, an ongoing debate via The Weekly Messenger and The Lutheran Observer began. Of course, this was not the only voice of Lutheranism. And, The Observer's was not the only Lutheran position. As with the German Reformed church and many other contemporary denominations, there was both a high and low church faction operating in nineteenth century Lutheranism. Nevin and Schaff had no quarrel with the denomination itself. In fact they saw it as the complementary system to their own Reformed confession and looked forward to the day when they might actualize a synthetic union with them.

The Lutheran Standard voiced approval of their fellow Germans. In 1847 it published this review of Nevin's catechism:

Sound views and a proper church spirit pervade this interesting volume, and its influence must be the most salutary upon the German Reformed Church. Whatever may be said against its distinguished author, from a certain direction, we cheerfully confess, we sympathize with him to a far greater extent, in reference to the system of the Catechism and the Sacraments, than with his opponents, even though they may be found within our own Church. Our own sister Church has great cause to be thankful for having obtained the valuable, distinguished services of their eminent professors, Drs. Nevin and Schaff.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise The Gettysburg Evangelical Review was praised to the height by Nevin. He saw in it a promise<sup>27</sup> of restoring the church to the fundamental faith of Luther's Reformation. The powerful Lutheran theologian and historian, Charles P. Krauth, was also of the same spirit. He held deep appreciation for the insight from the Mercersburg men. He felt that his church ought to be particularly grateful<sup>28</sup> that Nevin would work so hard to renew an ecumenical dialogue with them.



Yet unity would be the last thing that The Lutheran Quarterly Review would have wanted. In 1874, after reading Mercersburg defector B. S. Schneck's comments about baptismal regeneration, it warned that the same contemptuous ritualism may threaten evangelical Lutheranism. Schneck's assessment of Mercersburg and the sacraments was, however, inaccurate. When E. V. Gerhart protested a few months later the Quarterly was ethical enough to print a retraction.<sup>29</sup>

The Lutheran church became embroiled in the Mercersburg controversy for two reasons. First, because the two denominations were so closely related the Lutherans couldn't help but be drawn in. More importantly, they became involved because the issues Mercersburg raised forced the Lutherans to question the validity of their own existence. If the current church were to continue to ignore the faith of Luther and Melancthon, why carry the distinction? Schaff would insist that we are meant to carry the heritage of our past as we evolve into a more perfect union. If we deny our past we are doomed to no better than groundless sectarianism.

### EPISCOPALIANS

Like the Lutheran church, the Episcopal communion was comprised of both high and low church factions. And, in the nineteenth century even the Episcopal church was becoming very Puritan. The Tractarian movement was a conservative reaction against this trend. Nevin was fascinated by the Oxford Tractarian movement and read these Anglican materials with great interest. Although he did not agree with every position, Nevin recognized much truth within. The Oxford movement helped to fine-tune his ecclesiastical thinking. He was negatively influenced by the Anglicanism when, in 1851, he observed their crisis concerning the church's control over the right use of the sacraments. In England, the civil court could overrule the bishops. Was it possible that the only guarantee for sacramental purity was not in an episcopal system but only in the See of Rome?<sup>30</sup> After working through the Protestant question, Nevin and Schaff both became very involved with the Episcopal church and seriously discussed organic union. Perhaps the strongest indicator of Episcopal influence is in the fact that Dr. Nevin's own son and several of the Mercersburg seminary students chose to seek ordination in the Episcopal ranks. What, then was the Episcopal perspective?

The periodical entitled True Catholic devoted a series of three articles to its review of the Mystical Presence when recently published. The tone changes from negative to more positive with each article in the series. At first the author suggests that Nevin may be a pantheist. Next he shows some disfavor for Nevin's interpretation of the Episcopal view of the sacraments. Finally, in article three he cites this work as "among the best expositions of the doctrine of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper" seen.<sup>31</sup> This may indicate that the more the reviewer became familiar with Nevin's work, the more he appreciated his genius. The review of the "Antichrist" also agrees with Nevin generally. It does raise the question that Mercersburg never could answer fully: What is the difference between a sect and a denomination, ultimately?

The Church Review represents the low church side of the Episcopal fellowship. In 1851 it reveals some suspicion of the Mercersburg German connection. In 1852 the journal responds to Nevin's controversial work entitled "Cyprian." Here Nevin questions whether an episcopal form is adequate without the Papal element. The Review, of course, believes that it is. It concludes the article by asking "In what does the unity of the Church exist?"<sup>32</sup> This



question would be echoed time and time again in the ecumenical movement.

By 1854 Dr. Schaff was noticed. As indicated before, we detect an underlying prejudice against the German heritage. The Review describes Schaff's History of the Apostolic Church with mixed sentiments. While praising Schaff's competent scholarship, it declares that he possessed a faulty doctrine of the church principle. Curiously, it will not elaborate on why it accused him of this.

The Episcopal Church was one of the few to review the German Reformed Liturgical movement. The American Quarterly Review found the 1857 Provisional Liturgy remarkable and studied it thoroughly. It was pleased to see that such a catholic form would be created in a Protestant body. It wondered, however, why the time-tested Book of Common Prayer could not have been used just as easily. By 1859 the American Quarterly was concluding that

Schaff, Nevin, Gerhart, Harbaugh, in certain respects are more orthodox, more Catholic, more Scriptural, and clearer in their teaching of Scripture and of the primitive Church than most of the popular divines of our own branch.<sup>33</sup>

The affection of these two church bodies grew to the point that organic unity seemed to be more and more a possibility. The only reservation on the Anglican end surrounded the previously mentioned church question. Finally in 1859, The American Quarterly explains:

the great fault of Dr. Schaff is that he has no clear, distinct conception, no strong, well-defined statement of the fundamental principles by which the history of the Apostolic Church must be interpreted.<sup>34</sup>

The principle to which they are referring, of course, is the principle of Apostolic succession (not in any spiritual sense) but only through the actual rite of the laying on of hands. In lieu of this, the article complains, Schaff substitutes the progressive church philosophy of the Germans.<sup>35</sup>

The two denominations continued talking. In 1874 Nevin and an Episcopal clergyman debated, not so much the question of unity, but the method by which church union should be accomplished. These articles found in The Mercersburg Review discover that Christians must find their commonality in the Faith first before discussing polity.<sup>36</sup>

In a series of three articles in The Churchman of 1885, organic union is still a viable subject. Rev. W. G. Andrews gives his readers a history lesson about the Mercersburg movement and then suggests that the Mercersburg goals can still be accomplished if the German Reformed Church agrees to become Episcopalian. How easily said by them! There is some question as to whether the third article in their series was written by Andrews or by Rev. R. J. Nevin. Obviously John Nevin's own son would have prayed very hard for such a union. Maybe he joined the Episcopal community anticipating that this would happen.

There is little doubt that the greatest affirmation of Mercersburg theology came from the Episcopalians. Yet, nothing materialized. This could simply be because of ethnic prejudice on both sides. As much as the English were suspicious of the crude manner of the Germans, Schaff believed the Germans had



a far superior theological mind. The relationship may have diminished because the Episcopal branch never seemed quite willing to compromise its own identity. Instead they would have welcomed the German Reformed people to assimilate into their body. Nothing materialized. But the dream of Christian oneness in the body of Christ remained very much alive. Maybe that very same dream of Nevin and Schaff, and these Nineteenth Century conversations was also Bishop Pike's dream when he proposed the formation of the twentieth century innovation called the Consultation on Church Union.

### PRESBYTERIANS

The Presbyterian Church was a cousin to the German Reformed community. The Presbyterians had a similar governmental structure. They shared the Calvinistic churchly theology. Both were members of the Reformed family and drew from common confessions of the sixteenth century. The Presbyterian Church was the church that nurtured John Nevin in Christianity. This was the denomination responsible for his theological training. This was the communion into which he was ordained and for which he started teaching.

This was also the denomination that reacted the most consistently to the issues Mercersburg raised. Princeton was probably better equipped than other seminary to take Nevin and Schaff on in a reputable and scholarly debate. They were familiar with Nevin's language. The "Old School--New School" struggle had been going on in Presbyterian circles for decades.

Mercersburg's most vocal critic outside of the German Reformed community was Dr. Charles Hodge. Hodge was Nevin's professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature at Princeton seminary. Hodge was the very man Nevin replaced during his sabbatical after graduating. The two men would follow each other's careers with interest.

It was Philip Schaff, not Nevin that originally started Hodge writing. He took him to task after the Principle of Protestantism was made public. Hodge claimed that the piece was too difficult to understand. He read it twice, supposedly, but the content made little sense to him. Even Nevin's introduction was strangely alien. The words were English, he could recognize them. But the thought was profoundly German. What Hodge did decipher out of all this was Schaff's attack on sectarianism. In Hodge's opinion the sects were not nearly as much of a threat as were the Romans.<sup>37</sup>

This set the stage for years of debate between Charles Hodge and the Mercersburg men. Hodge, of course was not ignorant. He skillfully analyzed the work of this German immigrant and of his former student. After The Mystical Presence was published it took Dr. Hodge a few years to get around to reading it. But after he did he proceeded to give one of the most substantial reviews ever printed. He tried to present a historical rebuttal to Nevin's proposition that the Reformation and the Early Church Fathers believed in the mystical real Presence of the human Christ in the Eucharist. He tried to show how Nevin deviated from the theology of John Calvin. He wished to prove that: "According to the Reformed Church, Christ is present in the sacrament in no other sense than he is present in the word."<sup>38</sup>

Since Hodge was a former professor, Nevin was even more sensitive to his criticisms than usual. (And Nevin was usually hyper-sensitive.) Therefore, he worked diligently to refute him and to vindicate his own reputation. The scholarly task was really not that hard. Nevin was certainly the superior



historian. Nevin's biggest problem was finding a means to convey his defense. The German Reformed in-house newspaper The Weekly Messenger was the only publication available to him. He ran twelve very lengthy articles arguing his position. Unfortunately few outside of his own denomination had access to them. Therefore, The Mercersburg Review was founded to allow for such scholarly expression.

Thus, electricity flowed in the air between Mercersburg and Princeton decades before the first utility pole was positioned. Articles were printed in Princeton on the following topics:

- The History of the Reformed Church
- The theologies of Mayer, Rauch, and Koeppen
- The Christology of Hegel
- The Ministry
- Christian Union
- The Reformed Church of Geneva, France and Scotland
- Schaff's Histories of the Apostolic Church, Augustine,  
The Monophysites, Anglo Germanisms, and Developmental  
theories

The Mercersburg Review responded with equal number of entries.

Curiously, The Princeton Review printed two articles in 1852 which were highly inflammatory. Although the articles were not written by a Presbyterian but by a member of the Dutch Reformed communion the journal saw fit to run them. The Presbyterians may have been willing to cooperate with this "indiscretion" because this was the period in which Nevin was courting the Romans. For a while they may have feared that Nevin was indeed defecting.

The article on the baptism of infants which was run in April 1858, indicates that normalcy was restored again. As he did with The Mystical Presence, Hodge tries to give a detailed account of why the Mercersburg notion of baptismal grace (Gerhart's in this instance) is not at all Calvinistic. He then explains that all Reformed confessions equated baptism with circumcision. How could Dr. Gerhart be so mistaken in his thinking? Because he and his colleagues "have been so long conversant with Lutheranism and with the speculative theology of modern Germany, that they have forgotten the a, b, c's, of their theology."<sup>39</sup>

The Presbyterians were not only concerned with Mercersburg's view of the sacraments and their interpretation of history but acted as a watch dog for many subjects. In an article printed in 1860 entitled "What is Christianity?" for instance, Hodge questions Nevin's theory of an organic unity of humanity and suggests that his is a pantheistic theology.

Although Dr. Hodge was Mercersburg's most consistent critic he was not their enemy. The differences were not personal but academic. Hodge visited Mercersburg and was hosted in the Nevin household graciously. Between the old professor and his former student there was a lasting affinity. Upon Nevin's death Hodge's son Dr. A. A. Hodge, representing Princeton Theological Seminary came to the funeral as an honored guest to deliver a eulogy. Presbyterian minister William F. Faber wrote one of the most accurate and objective, yet touching memorials saying:

From this time on, the reader of the biography before us will see



Dr. Nevin drawn into frequent controversies with leading theologians outside his church; ....and through them all Dr. Nevin occupying essentially the same position. The Revivalism of the Anxious Bench, the mechanical Orthodoxy of Princeton, the modern Puritan Evangelicalism, the Anglicanism of jure divino Episcopacy, the Romanism of Brownson, -- he combats each in turn, from the same central stronghold: not as a mere polemic, intent only on victory, but with an ever-deepening enthusiasm for the unity of the<sup>40</sup> church and the real enthronement of Christ as Head over all things.

The Presbyterians and the German Reformed churches would remain separate but neighborly.

#### DUTCH REFORMED

Even more so than the Presbyterians, the Dutch Reformed Church was allied closely. They were more like siblings than cousins theologically. This was the only other denomination to revere the ever-important Heidelberg Catechism as the standard of beliefs. The Dutch had ordained the first German Reformed pastor in America, John Philip Boehm. Although they differed somewhat in their traditions liturgically, most churchmen perceived that the only real difference between the two was in their ethnic heritage. As the generations passed, fewer and fewer cared about those European boundaries. Therefore unity between the Dutch and the German Reformed churches seemed logical. Most thought it was guaranteed.

Understandably then, any radical change in the German Reformed branch would in turn affect the Dutch Christians directly. It is no wonder that this is the denomination which would react to the Mercersburg school most passionately. There was no middle ground. One either loved the developments coming from the little Pennsylvania town, or one hated it unequivocally.

The Christian Intelligencer first became involved in Mercersburg topics because it served as an overflow vat for The Weekly Messenger when the volume of original theological material simply got too heavy. This might have been a very helpful thing. If the Dutch Reformed people had been exposed to much the same information as was received in the German congregations they may have turned out enthusiastically supportive. What appears to have happened, however, is that The Messenger editors became increasingly selective in what they chose to print themselves and what they would send to New Brunswick. They kept articles which were crisp, brilliant, and supportive. They passed on the ones which were less exciting, more dull, and more negative.<sup>41</sup> Before long the two papers became polemic. The people of the Holland Church were given a skewed picture of the new reality.

Not all the Dutch were soured, however, from the very beginning. Professor Tayler Lewis, a layman and a lawyer was perhaps the most consistent advocate of Mercersburg theology outside of its own denomination. Lewis was a schoolmate of John Nevin (one class ahead) when they attended Union College. Therefore he most likely read Nevin and Schaff's work with personal interest. He wrote a sixty page review of the Principle of Protestantism in 1846. The Church Question is The Question for our time, Lewis agreed. We must explore: "what and where it is? What constitutes the succession, or rather continuity of its life? In what consists its unity and catholicity?"<sup>42</sup> Dr. Schaff may not have been totally fair when he accused the Congregationalists of having a lesser church feeling, Lewis writes. But his



assessment of the evils of rationalism and sectarianism is absolutely right. Let there be no confusion, Nevin and Schaff are not Romans:

They may be mistaken in some, even in many points, and in their chief positions; but of this one thing we have no doubt, they are honest Protestants, as sincere as any of those who would charge them with such Puseyite tendencies, and perhaps, it may appear, more consistent than some who assume to be the great champions of the cause of the Reformation.

Nothing can be more truly evangelical than the manner in which Prof. Schaff sets forth that great article of Justification...<sup>43</sup>

There can be only one answer to the great Church Question. That is experience of the Mystical Union. This is the hope for our broken and distracted Zion, that as we are drawn ever closer to the human nature of Christ we are bound together as one people, sharing one life in communion.<sup>44</sup>

Lewis would publish other articles about the Mercersburg movement in an attempt to explain to the world why it was so important. He did not overlook its faults. He knew the difficulty of the cumbersome style, the contemptuous tone, the hazy definition of denomination and sect; yet, Lewis also knew that Nevin and Schaff were practically unmatched in their pertinent churchly scholarship.<sup>45</sup>

There was another Dutch Reformed student at Union College who would become Mercersburg's most bitter opponent. His name was John Proudfit. One can only speculate about what made Proudfit's criticisms seem so wicked. His were not the cool and steady criticisms of Dr. Hodge. His was not the fanatical chauvinism of Brownson. His was not the defensiveness of the Lutherans. Proudfit sounded like he had a personal vendetta against the Mercersburg men. His critiques are biting.

Now, knowing the nature of John Williamson Nevin, we might imagine that there was a long time rift which developed in college between them. But this would not explain why Proudfit did not discriminate between Nevin and Philip Schaff. He was equally brutal towards both men.

Nevin's high regard for the Apostle's Creed evoked a steamy reaction. Proudfit accused him of, "the highest point of Papal orthodoxy" and a "philosophical catholicism" which would best be served by "shaven monks, begging friars, and lying Jesuits."<sup>46</sup> He blames the translator of Zacharias Ursinus' Commentary on the Catechism with committing the unforgivable crime of asking Nevin to write the book's Introduction. To this Nevin quipped: "The sophomorical scraps of Latin prove nothing (Proudfit was a Latin Professor at Rutgers); and what affects to be a smashing argument resolves itself, on near inspection, into empty smoke or something worse."<sup>47</sup>

Proudfit then sets his fangs on Dr. Schaff. The New Brunswick Review, (which was created as a megaphone for Dr. Proudfit) commented on the work of this historian by saying:

That such a work should have proceeded from the bosom of the Protestant church, and from a chair of ecclesiastical history in a church especially renowned of old for its learned and powerful champions of reformed Christianity, is a portentous fact. It is, to say the least, not less so, that it has somehow gained the strongest



testimonials from several of the most respectable journals. The papacy has never won a victory but by stealing a march. Her tactics have fairly been successful this time. This book is circulating through the Protestant church with an imprimatur from authorities which no American Protestant has been questioning. One of them goes so far as to recommend that Dr. Schaff's book be translated and introduced as a text-book into our theological seminaries. It would be well, as a preparatory measure, in case that were done, to apply to the 'General Order of Jesus' to send us over professors to teach it. Our Protestant professors would betray some awkwardness...

By the end of the year The New Brunswick Review was out of business.

Proudfit was not the only Dutch Reformed person who was filled with hostility. J. J. Janeway published a book entitled Antidote to the Poison of Popery in the Publications of Professor Schaff in an effort to have Schaff banished from the country.<sup>49</sup> It didn't accomplish this. Schaff's position at Mercersburg by this time was firmly fixed. Proudfit and Janeway's sinister attacks were probably responsible for the termination of all conversations between the Dutch and German Reformed synods. The hope of uniting was a thing of the past.

What went wrong with the Dutch Reformed connection? A number of things may be included. The Intelligencer's one sided reporting, Nevin and Proudfit's possible personality conflict, and Dr. Berg's infiltration into the Dutch Reformed ranks all may have had real influence. Family fights are always the most intense. Here forgiveness is the hardest. Taylor Lewis's loyalties could not undo the damage. The parting of the ways of these two Reformed bodies was indeed a sorry outcome of the Mercersburg ecumenical movement.

#### CONCLUSION

The Mercersburg men also dialogued with other denominations coexisting in the United States. They elicited the attention of the Baptists, the Methodists, some Independents, and the Unitarians. Most of these groups (the Methodists excepted) reacted to specific attacks launched by Drs. Nevin and Schaff or to theological issues which specifically applied to them. The Baptists recoiled at Schaff's high view of the efficacy of the Church and of course to the thought of infant baptism.<sup>50</sup> Unitarians quibbled with their offensive Trinitarianism.<sup>51</sup> The Methodists were stung by Mercersburg's equation of revivalism with anti-churchliness and anti-sacramentarianism. The Methodist Quarterly Review took an unusual interest in the subject. They also often felt Nevin and Schaff misunderstood the Wesleyen tradition.<sup>52</sup> The independent, amateurish theologian, David Nevins Lord, published two articles about Mercersburg in his Theological and Literary Journal which labors to prove Nevin is rightly accused of fostering the heresy of pantheism.<sup>53</sup> The Mercersburg mystique, of course, did not seem to influence these bodies of Christians nearly as much as it did the aforementioned denominations. But the Mercersburg mystique had an impact nevertheless.

Thus our study of the nineteenth century dialogue with a handful of Reformed Germans has come to an end. An article by article review of these discussions is contained in the appendix. The bulk of material found is impressive. Certainly there is more to be added to the list. But what is much more impressive than the numbers of responses in themselves is the liturgical renewal of the 1970s and the ecumenical movement of the present day which



stand as testimonies to the legacy. The Congregational Churches, the Lutheran Church, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Methodists, and even the Roman Catholics have been involved in these twentieth century phenomena to a great extent.

As early as 1891 William Faber observed that:

the present forward movement in theology in the Congregational communion is especially marked in the new emphasis laid upon the Historic, Christocentric, and Positive aspects of Christian truth. The Apostle's Creed is coming to rule once more.<sup>54</sup>

Faber gave Nevin the credit for this amazing progress.

Why didn't these men make even more of a difference? There are several possible reasons. The German Reformed church was small, provincial, and not very prestigious. Other judicatorial heads were not in the habit of trembling at the German quips. Also, some of the blame has to be put on Dr. Nevin's explosive temperament. His short fuse and biting critiques alienated some who, with a little patience, might have been won as friends. (Thank God for Dr. Schaff, who especially in the Congregational tradition neutralized much of this.) And finally, the revivalists fad was so strong that Christ Himself probably could not have competed with all the glitz.

Until the PTL scandal of the 1980s there appeared to be no end to the popularity of American sectarianism. Ecclesiastical fragmentation has flourished in epidemic proportions. It is true that the twentieth century is still fighting the battle of the Anxious Bench. Therefore, let Schaff's Principle of Protestantism continue as a Principle of Antagonism. Let Nevin's Mystical Presence be a Mystical Nuisance, until the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is actualized and we are drawn up into the Body of Christ in the final consummation.

There was nothing very distinctive about the likes of John Williamson Nevin. There was no reason for America to listen to the opinions of Philip Schaff the German; except, together they had a piece of the truth and their truth would not be silenced.



# ENDNOTES

1. Philip Schaff, The Principle of Protestantism as Related to the Present State of the Church (1845) (United Church Press, Phila., 1964) p. 134
2. Ibid., p. 153
3. Primary sources such as Nevin's Antichrist: or the Spirit of Sect and Schism, The Anxious Bench, The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Eucharist, and Schaff's Principle of Protestantism, and America, are especially enlightening. See also: Martin Cox Jr.'s article entitled "To Be the Church: Nevin's Critique of Sectarianism" in The New Mercersburg Review (Spring 1987)
4. Theodore Appel D.D. The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin D.D., LL.D. (Reformed Church Publication House, Phila. 1889) p. 261 (Andrews eventually parted with the Congregational association because of his theological differences with them. He joined the Catholic Apostolic church popularly known as the Irvingites.)
5. See The New Englander (1846, p. 592) (1849, p. 487)
6. L. Bacon, "Professor Schaff's Church History!" The New Englander (New Haven, 1854) p. 244
7. Ibid., pp. 245-254
8. Philip Schaff, "Christianity in America" Reformed and Catholic: Selected Historical and Historical and Theological Writings of Philip Schaff Charles Yrigoyen Jr. and George M. Bricker, Editors (Pickwick Press, Pittsburgh, 1979) p. 381
9. "Protestantism in America" The New Englander (1857) p. 550
10. See The Boston Review (1863) p. 111, (1865) p. 515
11. Henry Ward Beecher to David Schaff, September 14, 1883. Schaff correspondence found in the Archives of the Evangelical and Reformed Church at the Philip Schaff Library, Lancaster, Penna.
12. Schaff to Dr. Mann. October 4, 1887 From the Evangelical and Reformed Church archive collection of correspondence.
13. See The Bibliotheca Sacra 1863, 1864, 1867
14. See William F. Faber, "John Williamson Nevin" The Andover Review July 1891 pp. 11-31
15. In The Mystical Presence Nevin cites the mistaken theology of Puritan divines Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Hopkins, Joseph Bellamy, Timothy Dwight. All of these persons were already deceased at the time.
16. The Tractarian movement in the Anglican church greatly influenced Nevin. Most notorious of the converts to the Roman church was John Henry Newman. Nichols, p. 78



17. George Shriver, Philip Schaff: Christian Scholar and Ecumenical Prophet (Mercer University Press, Macon Georgia, 1987) p. 22
18. Appel, 323-324
19. Ibid., p. 326
20. Nichols, p. 212
21. George D. Wolff, "The Mercersburg Movement: An Attempt to Find Ground on Which Protestantism and Catholicity Might Unite" The American Catholic Quarterly Review (Volume III) p. 176
22. "Mercersburg Philosophy" Catholic World 1867) p. 254
23. Ibid., pp. 254-257
24. Nevin, The Mystical Presence, p. 105-106
25. Appel, p. 163 as quoted from Lutheran Observer (November 17, 1843)
26. Appel, p. 155 From The Lutheran Standard (1847)
27. Appel, p. 308
28. Charles P. Krauth, The Conservative Reformation and its Theology (General Council Publishing Board, Phila. 1871) p. 158
29. The Lutheran Quarterly Review (April and July 1874)
30. Nichols, p. 195
31. "Mystical Presence" True Catholic (Baltimore, 1847) p. 160
32. The Church Review (October 1852) p. 460
33. The American Quarterly Review (October 1859) pp. 369-370
34. Ibid., (October 1859) p. 379
35. Ibid., p. 382
36. See "The Basis of Union" and "Reply to 'An Anglican Catholic'" in The Mercersburg Review (July 1874) pp. 374-429
37. Appel, p. 251
38. Charles Hodge, "The Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper" The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review (1848 Volume XX) p. 275
39. "The Church Membership of Infants," The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review (April 1858) p. 374
40. William F. Faber, "John Williamson Nevin" The Andover Review (July 1891) p. 19



41. Appel, p. 260-261 (This information is more implied than explicitly stated.)
42. Taylor Lewis, "The Church Question" The Biblical Repository (January 1846) p. 83
43. Ibid., p. 81-82
44. Ibid., p. 133
45. See The Literary World (1849) p. 311, p. 331
46. "John Proudfit, The Apostles' Creed" The Princeton Review (October 1852) p. 623-626
47. Appel, p. 407
48. John Proudfit, "Dr. Schaff's Works on Church History" The New Brunswick Review (May 1854) p. 61
49. Shriver, p. 28
50. See The Christian Review (1855)
51. See The Christian Examiner (1845 and 1854)
52. For a detailed summary see Charles Yrigoyen Jr. "Mercersburg's Quarrel with Methodism" Methodist History 1983, pp. 3-19
53. See The Theological and Literary Journal (April, 1853) p. 636ff (July, 1853) p. 146ff
54. The Andover Review (July 1981) p. 29



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The Anxious Bench German Reformed Church Press, Chambersburg, 1844  
The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist J. B. Lippincott & Co. Phila. 1846
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NINETEENTH CENTURY PERIODICALS  
DEALING WITH THE MERCERSBURG THEOLOGY

Deborah Rahn Clemens

The American Catholic Quarterly Review

Published: Phila

Date: Volume III

Title: "The Mercersburg Movement; An Attempt to Find Ground on Which Protestantism and Catholicity Might Unite"

Pages: 151-176

Author - George D. Wolff

Reviewing: Nevin: "Introduction to Principle of Protestantism"

Nevin: "Antichrist"

Mercersburg Review 1849-56

Denomination: Roman Catholic

Tone: Skeptical

Synopsis: All Protestantism, Mercersburg included, is guilty of sectarianism because it has broken away from the true catholic church.

The American Presbyterian Review

Published: New York

Date: 1854 Volume II

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 663

Reviewing: Nevin: Mystical Presence

The American Presbyterian Review

Date: 1857 Volume VI

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 171

Reviewing: Harbaugh: Life of Michael Schlatter

The American Presbyterian Review

Date: 1857 Volume V

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 696

Reviewing: Harbaugh: Union with the Church

The American Presbyterian Review

Date: 1857 Volume V

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 520

Reviewing: Rauch: Inner Life of the Christian

The American Presbyterian Review

Date: 1859 Volume VII

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 157

Reviewing: Harbaugh: True Glory of Woman



The American Quarterly Church Review (also known as The Church Review)

Published: New Haven  
Date: October 1848  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 456  
Reviewing: Nevin: Antichrist  
Denomination: Episcopalian

The American Quarterly Church Review

Date: April 1850  
Title: Literary Notice  
Pages: 137-138  
Reviewing: Schaff: What is Church History

The American Quarterly Church Review

Date: July 1851  
Title: The Mercersburg Review  
Page: 303  
Synopsis: States "while much of the tone of the Mercersburg School is churchly and promising; there is all the while an undercurrent of German philosophy and speculation which is equally foreboding."

The American Quarterly Church Review

Date: October 1852  
Title: The Mercersburg Review  
Page: 460  
Reviewing: Nevin: "Cyprian"  
Tone: Skeptical  
Synopsis: Claims that Nevin ignores the early church's condemnation of the pretensions of papal supremacy

The American Quarterly Church Review

Date: January 1854 Volume VI  
Title: Literary Notice  
Pages: 607-608  
Reviewing: Schaff: History of the Apostolic Church  
Synopsis: The notice contains a "devout hope" that Schaff may help restore church (Reformed and Episcopalian) unity.

The American Quarterly Church Review

Date: April 1854  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 134  
Reviewing: Schaff: Life and Labors of St. Augustine

The American Quarterly Church Review

Date: January 1855 Volume VII  
Title: Literary Notice  
Pages: 620-621  
Reviewing: Keoppen: The World in the Middle Ages

The American Quarterly Church Review

Date: April 1858 Volume XI  
Title: "Proposed Liturgy of the German Reformed Church:  
Pages: 48-62  
Reviewing: the 1857 Liturgy



Tone: Impressed

Synopsis: The Liturgy marks remarkable progress in liturgical expression. Many specific items are mentioned. The Book of Common Prayer is still unmatched in their consideration.

The American Quarterly Church Review

Date: April 1858 Volume XI

Title: Literary Notice

Pages: 162-163

Reviewing: Harbaugh: Heaven and Heavenly Recognition

The American Quarterly Church Review

Date: April 1858

Title: Literary Notice

Pages: 163-164

Reviewing: Gerhart: Introduction to the Study of Philosophy

The American Quarterly Church Review

Date: July 1859 Volume XXI

Title: Literary Notice

Pages: 495

Reviewing: Bomberger: "Infant Salvation"

The American Quarterly Church Review

Date: October 1859

Title: "Schaff's History and Mercersburg Theology"

Pages: 369-386

Reviewing: Mercersburg Review 1857, 1858

Schaff: History of the Christian Church From the Birth of Christ to the Reign of Constantine

Tone: Mixed

Synopsis: The Mercersburg school shares so much of the fundamentals in theology of worship, the church, and the sacraments; why don't they merge with us? Schaff's defense of Apostolicity is, however, inadequate. Mercersburg movement may be just a flash in the pan because of it.

The Andover Review

Published: Boston

Date: July 1891

Title: "John Williamson Nevin"

Pages: 11-30

Author: William F. Faber (Presbyterian)

Reviewing: The Life and Impact of Nevin

Denomination: Congregational

Tone: Laudatory

Synopsis: Eulogizes Nevin as a great theologian of the nineteenth century. Summarizes conflicts and criticisms. Reviews theology.

The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review

Published: Princeton

Date: 1848 Volume XX

Title: "The Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper"

Pages: 227-278

Author: Charles Hodge



Reviewing: Nevin: Mystical Presence

Denomination: Presbyterian

Tone: Disappointed

Synopsis: Nevin deviates from the true Reformed doctrine on the Lord's supper in many ways. Discusses: organic union, Calvin, atonement, justification, sacramental grace and presence, pantheism, Sabellianism, and the German connection.

The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review

Date: April 1858

Title: "The Church Membership of Infants"

Pages: 347-387

Author: Charles Hodge

Reviewing: Mercersburg Review January 1858, "The Efficacy of Baptism"

Tone: Negative

Synopsis: Infant baptism is not a means of Grace. The Mercersburg theology is not in line with Calvin who, like all Reformed fathers, equated baptism and circumcision.

The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review

Date: January 1860, Volume XXXII

Title: "What is Christianity?"

Pages: 141 ff

Author: Charles Hodge

Reviewing: Mercersburg Review March 1850

Tone: Concerned

Synopsis: This article does not condemn, but it clearly comes to the conclusion that Nevin has developed a theology which is best described as Christian Pantheism. Nevin's article was in response to an article printed in the Bibliotheca Sacra.

The Biblical Repository and Classical Review

Published By: Leavitt, Trow and Co., New York

Date: January 1846

Title: "The Church Question"

Pages: 79-138

Author: Professor Tayler Lewis, LL.D (Dutch Reformed)

Reviewing: Schaff: Principle of Protestantism

Nevin: Introduction

Denomination: Congregational

Tone: Favorable

Synopsis: The church question is the grand question of the day. There are abuses in both the Roman and the Protestant ecclesiology. Christians should have a visible unity. Mercersburg school fails to appreciate the genuine churchly piety of some evangelical Christians. The term "Antichrist" is unfairly given. Mercersburg sees correctly that the mystical union should be the basis of all church doctrine.

Bibliotheca Sacra

Published: W. F. Draper, Andover Mass.

Date: August 1847 Volume IV

Title: "German Literature in America"

Pages: 503-521

Author: Schaff

Denomination: Congregational



Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: August 1849 Volume VI  
Title: "General Introduction to Church History"  
Pages: 404, 409-441  
Author: Schaff

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: January 1850 Volume VII  
Title: "The Progress of Church History as a Science"  
Pages: 54-91  
Author: Schaff

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: 1851 Volume VIII  
Title: "Theological Schools in the United States, Enrollment"  
Pages: April: 458, July 666

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: January 1852 Volume IX  
Title: Literary Note  
Pages: 223-224  
Reviewing: Schaff: "Kirchenheschichte"

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: April 1853 Volume X  
Title: Literary Note  
Page: 418  
Reviewing: Williard: Translation of Ursinus' Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: January 1856 Volume XIII  
Title: Literary Note  
Page: 217-218  
Reviewing: Schaff: "America"

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: January 1857 Volume XIV  
Title: "John Calvin"  
Pages: 125-146  
Author: Schaff  
Reviewing: Bonnett: "Letters of J. Calvin"

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: October 1858 Volume XV  
Title: "The Conflict of Trinitarianism and Unitarianism in the Anti-Nicene Age"  
Pages: 726-744  
Author: Schaff

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: April 1859 Volume XVI  
Title: Literary Note  
Pages: 454-456  
Reviewing: Schaff: Church History



Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: January 1860 Volume XVII

Title: Notes

Page: 233-234

Reviewing: Schaff: Hymnbook 1859

Denomination: Congregational

Tone: Complimentary

Synopsis: States that the only substantial difference between German and American or English hymns is the length of them. Some of Schaff's hymns have 40, 72, even 100 verses!

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: January 1863 Volume XX

Publication of Gerhart's: The German Reformed Church

Includes no editorial comments

Pages: 1-78

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: July 1863 Volume XX

Publication of Schaff's The Tercentenary Jubilee of the Heidelberg Catechism

Includes a list of current essays written for the occasion.

Pages: 670-675

Bibliography: 675-675

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: October 1863

Title: "Constantine the Great and the Downfall of Paganism in the Roman Empire"

Pages: 778-798

Author: Schaff

Reviewing: Burkhardt's work

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: 1864

Republication of Gerhart's article on the Heidelberg Catechism

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: April 1864

Title: "Rise and Progress of Manasticism"

Pages: 384-424

Author: Schaff

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: 1866

Title: "The Catholic Apostolic Church"

Author: Andrews, Wethersfield, Conn.  
(formerly Congregational, now an Irvingite)

Bibliotheca Sacra

Date: 1867 Volume XXIV

Title: "Schaff's History of the Christian Church"

Pages: 397-398

Reviewing: Schaff's History of the Christian Church



#### The Boston Review

Published by: John M. Whittemore & Co., Boston

Date: January 1863

Title: "Literary Note"

Pages: 111-112

Reviewing: Schaff: A Catechism for Sunday School and Families

Denomination: Congregational

Tone: Reservedly Positive

Synopsis: Schaff's catechism, based on the venerable Heidelberg Catechism is an admirable creation. Its devotional rather than dogmatic tone is appreciated. Distinctions between Schaff's views of regeneration and conversion are noted. Adds a light-hearted note that Schaff, on request for a copy of this publication hoped that it "be found to suit the latitude of New England Christianity." Comment: "New England Christianity might suffer many a worse evil" than exposure to Dr. Schaff's theology.

#### The Boston Review

Date: September 1865, Volume V

Title: "Literary Note"

Page: 525

Reviewing: Schaff: The Person of Christ: The Miracle of History

Tone: Cautious

Synopsis: Valuable information here but the editorial commentary is bulky.

#### Brownson's Quarterly Review

Published: Boston

Date: 1850 Volume VII

Title: The Mercersburg Review

Page: 191

Author: Orestes A. Brownson

Reviewing: The Mercersburg Review

Denomination: Roman Catholic

Tone: Ultramontane

#### Brownson's Quarterly Review

Date: 1850 Volume VII

Title: "Mercersburg Theology"

Page: 353

Author: Orestes A. Brownson

Reviewing: Mercersburg

#### Brownson's Quarterly Review

Date: 1854 Volume XI

Title: "The Mercersburg Hypothesis"

Page: 253

Author: Orestes A. Brownson

#### Brownson's Quarterly Review

Date: 1858

Title: "The Church an Organism"

Pages: 102-127

Author: Orestes A. Brownson

Synopsis: See page 112



Catholic World

Published: Catholic Publication House, New York  
Date: 1863 Volume V  
Title: "Mercersburg Philosophy"  
Page: 253  
Denomination: Roman Catholic

Catholic World

Date: 1866 Volume VIII  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 417  
Reviewing: Schaff: Church History

Catholic World

Date: 1867 Volume IX  
Title: "Dr. Bacon on Conversions to the Catholic Church"  
Pages: 104 ff  
Reviewing: Dr. Bacon of Yale's "Conversions to the Catholic World"  
New Englander January 1867  
Tone: Pleased  
Synopsis: Of interest to the study of Mercersburg is a quote on page 114-115 stating: "In our own country among the German Reformed Presbyterians, Dr. Nevin and others have advanced to a position whose logical direction is straight into the Catholic church."

Catholic World

Date:  
Title: "Mercersburg Philosophy"  
Pages: 154 ff  
Author: A Mercersburg "prophet" (German Reformed)  
Reviewing: An allusion made in the article on 1867 on Dr. Bacon about the "German Presbyterians."  
Tone: Conciliatory  
Synopsis: The article tries to describe Mercersburg theology to the Roman Catholics. It purposefully highlights the similarities between them. It criticizes the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Lutherans. And even goes so far as to suggest Mercersburg may include the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and the reverence of the Virgin! Could this article have been written by John Nevin?

Catholic World

Date: October 1870 Volume XII No.  
Title: "Union with the Church"  
Pages: 1-14  
Reviewing: Harbaugh: "Union with the Church the Solemn Duty and Blessed Privilege of All Who Would Be Saved."  
Tone: Conditionally complimentary  
Synopsis: This article praises the Mercersburg school for its catholic ecclesiology. It states that The Mercersburg Review is "the most interesting theological publication received at this office. The writers are members of the (German) Reformed Church and occupy in relation to their own denomination about the same position that the Puseyites, Anglo-Catholics, or Rituals do in relation to theirs though they are profounder theologians."



In the end it asserts, however, that logically all Protestants are sectarians.

Catholic World

Date: November 1876, Volume XXIV

Title: "What is Dr. Nevin's Position?"

Pages: 459-468

Reviewing: Nevin: "The Spiritual World" Mercersburg Review  
(October 1876)

Tone: Superiority

Synopsis: This is an interesting article on the subject of Biblical authority from a Roman perspective. It clearly establishes the primacy of the church to interpret the Biblical narratives. It even goes so far as to suggest that the church would have existed and accomplished its mission even if the scriptures had never been written. Without the saintly tradition, Nevin's spirituality is lacking.

Catholic World

Date: 1878 Volume XXVI

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 284

Reviewing: Schaff: Creeds of Christendom

The Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany

Published: J. S. Cushing, Boston

Date: 1845

Title: Literary Note

Pages: 220-225

Author: J. W.

Reviewing: Schaff: Principle of Protestantism  
Nevin: Introduction

Denomination: Unitarian

Tone: Friendly

Synopsis: Refers to Mercersburg divines as "our orthodox friends." Finds Principle of Protestantism to be bulky, but on the whole worth reading. Describes Schaff's assessment of Rationalism and Sectarianism with special interest in the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Because (as Schaff is interpreted to have said) the highest principle of the sectarian is reason, the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation are held to be nonsense. Note: for an article of related interest see "Harvard College - Sectarianism" in this issue.

The Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany

Date: 1845

Title: "German Transcendentalism"

Pages: 223-224

Author: Schaff

The Christian Examiner

Date: May 1848

Title: Notice of Recent Publications

Pages: 467-469

Author: B--P.

Reviewing: Schaff: Der Deutsche Kirchenfreund



Tone: Amused

Synopsis: Reviews Schaff's commentary on German philosophy. Recounts Schaff's attack on the Unitarian/Rationalistic conspiracy.

Replies: "we cherish no such bloodthirsty, ferocious dispositions....The Unitarians are a very quiet, inoffensive people, intent, not on destroying, but on building up Christianity on a surer and more lasting foundation." Welcomes Schaff's aspiration of a more perfect theology evolving.

#### The Christian Examiner

Date: November 1851

Title: "The German in America"

Pages: 350-359

Author: S. O.

Reviewing: Bogen: The German in America

Schaff: "Der Deutsche Kirchenfreund"

Tone: Prejudicial

Synopsis: Germans are inferior in language, business, and social graces. Still, "some of the most refined and charming people we have ever known are Germans." Mercersburg theology is seen as similar to Puseyism which combats the unchurchly and un-historical German Epicureanism prevalent in the popular German press.

#### The Christian Examiner

Date: 1854

Title: Literary Notice

Pages: 155-156

Reviewing: Schaff: History of the Apostolic Church

Tone: Accepting of Differences

Synopsis: The writer places Schaff correctly in the school of the German historian, Neander but notes that Schaff is more dogmatic "in a hard and sharp form" than is his teacher. Schaff is credited for his academic excellence but is critiqued for his propensity for "unnecessary obstruction of Calvinistic formulas and the catch phrases of Trinitarianism. With the exception of this offensive element, the volume is fondly recommended.

#### The Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany

Date: 1854

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 461

Reviewing: Schaff: Life and Labors of Augustine

#### The Christian Examiner

Date: May 1859

Title: Review of Current Literature

Pages: 438-441

Reviewing: Schaff: History of the Christian Church From the Birth of Christ to the Reign of Constantine, A.D. 1-311

Tone: Scathing

Synopsis: Extremely critical of Schaff's historical method. Is especially upset with his conclusion about the Creed, Christology as it relates to Christ's divinity and equality with the Father, and the doctrine of the Trinity. Accused Schaff of being superficial, prejudiced, inconsistent, narrow, unsatisfactory,



and totally out of place with respectable history. On a positive note it does say Schaff's style reads easily.

#### The Christian Review

Published: Boston

Date: January 1855

Title: "Schaff's Apostolic History"

Pages: 1-23

Reviewing: Schaff: History of the Apostolic Church

Hagenbach: Die Christliche Kirche der drei ersten Jahrhunderte

Denomination: Baptist

Tone: Defensive

Synopsis: A rather thorough summary of the points of Schaff's history is given. This Baptist publication reviews Schaff's positive view of catholicity, his position on the efficacy of rites, the five periods of Protestant history. It is especially sensitive to Schaff's assessment of Baptist ecclesiastical theology of his insistence that outside the church there is no salvation, his critique of the sects, of baptismal regeneration, and most poignantly of infant baptism. With these exceptions, the work on the whole gets a good commendation.

#### The Christian Review

Date: 1855

Title: A Search for the Church"

Pages: 422-450

Reviewing: Nevin: Church Member's Manual

Tone: Argumentative

Synopsis: Nevin is portrayed as a Romanist who's ecclesiology is in direct contrast to the Baptist and Puritan camps.

Mercersburg, the writer asserts, has confused the "spirit" with the "form" of religion. It's major fault, however, is in its Biblical abuse, neglect, or misinterpretation. The author then engages in a lengthy exegesis of the word "Ekklesia" in an attempt to prove that the Biblical model for the church is one that was not organically united, but a local, voluntary organization, in other words, precisely like the Baptist tradition.

#### The Churchman

Published: New Haven

Date: August 15, 1855

Title: "The Mercersburg Movement and Church Unity"

Pages: 170-171

Author: Rev. W. G. Andrews

Reviewing: Mercersburg and unity

Denomination: Episcopalian

Tone: Scholarly

Synopsis: A brief overview of Mercersburg and the German Reformed theology is given. It makes very clear that its doctrinal standard is the Heidelberg Catechism which is "a legitimate development of the more churchly teaching of Calvin and Melancthon." Noting the passion between the Dutch Reformed and German Reformed communions. It attributes the failure to unite on the fact the Germans would not accept the Belgic



confession and the Canons of Dort, and the Dutch would not part with them.

The Churchman

Date: August 29, 1885

Title: "The Mercersburg Movement and Church Unity" II

Pages:

Author: Wm. G. Andrews

Reviewing: The Mercersburg Liturgy

Tone: Scholarly

Synopsis: This is a very concise and clear review of the Mercersburg liturgical developments and controversy. It credits Mercersburg with influencing the whole church through its innovations in liturgy. And congratulates the German Reformed church for avoiding a schism as it adopted something so revolutionary. It notes a similar controversy affecting the Episcopalians and hope that they will also be able to preserve their denominational unity and liturgical integrity.

The Churchman

Date: September 12, 1885

Title: "The Mercersburg Movement and Church Unity" III

Author: Wm. G. Andrews (Credited in the article)

Rev. R. J. Nevin DD (Credited on Title Page)

Reviewing: Proposed Reformed Church Constitution

Tone: Conciliatory

Synopsis: The Proposed constitution for the Reformed Church in the United States (formally the German Reformed) moves them closer to Presbyterianism in polity, but closer to the Episcopal school in its affirmation of Liturgy, the Church Year, and the Apostles' Creed. In light of their zeal for unity, the article extends a gracious invitation to the fulfillment of its goal of ecumenism by assimilating into the Episcopal denomination. (Note: R. J. Nevin, J. W. Nevin's son, joined the Episcopal church some years before.)

Congregational Quarterly

Published: Boston

Date: April 1860 Volume II

Title: "Ecclesiastical Statistics"

Page: 222

Synopsis: Includes the German Reformed Church

Congregational Review

Published: Boston

Date: July 1867 Volume VII

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 468

Reviewing: Schaff: Church History Vol. I and III

Eclectic Magazine

Published: Utica

Date: 1887 Volume LXXXVII

Title: Philip Schaff

Page: 504

Synopsis: Includes a picture



### Evangelical Quarterly Review

Date: Volume II

Title: The Church Question

Page: 58

### The Literary World

Date: 1849 Volume IV

Title: "The Mercersburg School of Theology and Philosophy"

Pages: 311-313

Author: Taylor Lewis (Dutch Reformed)

Reviewing: The Mercersburg Review (January and March 1849)

Tone: Encouraging

Synopsis: This is the first of a two part article. Lewis introduces Schaff and the major thesis behind The Principle of Protestantism and Nevin and his theology in the Mystical Presence. Lewis is baffled as to why these works have received so little scholarly attention. He accuses the modern scholarly world of entertaining only frivolous interests. Lewis basically agrees with the Mercersburg critique of ultra-protestantism and the sects but questions whether Nevin can satisfactorily describe the difference between a sect and a denomination.

### The Literary World

Date: 1849 Volume IV

Title: "The Mercersburg School of Theology and Philosophy"

Pages: 331-333

Author: Taylor Lewis (Dutch Reformed)

Reviewing: The Mercersburg Review (January and March 1849)

Tone: Objective

Synopsis: Lewis, a long term friend and colleague of Nevin, as well as a credible Presbyterian theologian and professor at Union, attempts to give an honest assessment of the Mercersburg movement. He praises the Mercersburg innovation, respects the German philosophical tradition, and reviews the theology based on the Incarnation. If Nevin would allow himself to be open to the similar views of Horace Bushnell, Lewis feels, both camps might be strengthened. Unfortunately, Nevin is often difficult to understand and hurts himself most with his contemptuous tone against his opponents.

### Littell's Living Age

Date: Volume XXX

Title: "Schaff's Recollections of Neander"

Pages: 163-169

Reviewing: Schaff's: Kirchenfreund

### The Lutheran Quarterly Review

Published: Gettysburg

Date: April 1874

Title: "Mercersburg Theology"

Pages: 251-257

Author: J. A. Brown

Reviewing: Schneck: Mercersburg Theology Inconsistent with Protestant Reformed Doctrine

Denomination: Lutheran

Tone: Warning



Synopsis: Although they are not of the habit to get involved with other denominations' internal controversies; (Schneck was the Editor of the Reformed Publication, The Weekly Messenger who broke with Mercersburg after reading "The Anglican Crisis and Early Christianity") this article warns that the Lutheran church, if it is not careful may be infected with the same spirit. Mercersburg is not in line with the Reformed heritage in its new Liturgy, theology of Baptism, ministry, and the sacraments, and in its ritualism. Instead it is in affinity to the Romans. Beware Lutherans, there are signs that some here too are communicating this "contempt for modern Protestantism!"

#### The Lutheran Quarterly Review

Date: July 1874

Title: "Mercersburg Theology: An Explanation"

Pages: 443-447

Author: J. A. Brown

Reviewing: Gerhart's objection to Schneck's portrayal of his Baptismal theology.

Tone: Apologetic

Synopsis: The article acknowledges that Gerhart was misrepresented in his theology of Baptism and apologizes for not first verifying the validity of Schneck's writing. Gerhart never denied the place of faith in receiving the sacramental benefits. The article then proceeds to reprint direct quotations of Gerhart on the subject from "Tract No. 3, The Sacrament of Holy Baptism" and from The Mercersburg Review October 1873 issue. Commenting on Gerhart's theology is not the writer's intent. His sole purpose was to provide the reader with quotes that are accurate. He does conclude by saying, however, "if there is anything in the Romish doctrine of Baptism that goes beyond these quotations, we frankly confess our ignorance of what it is."

#### The Mercersburg Review

Published: Chambersburg, Phila. Pa.

Dates: 1849-1893

Denomination: German Reformed

#### The Methodist Quarterly Review

Published: Carlton & Porter, New York

Date: April 1848

Title: "Neander's Life of Christ"

Pages: 248-268

Author: Schaff

#### The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: October 1848 Volume VIII

Title: Book Review

Page: 638

Reviewing: Nevin: Antichrist: or the Spirit of Sect and Schism

Tone: Surprisingly complementary

Synopsis: The review is very brief, promising to at some later time review the book more thoroughly. Although it states that they disagree with Nevin totally on the church question, they are highly impressed with Nevin as a scholar and a man.



The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: July 1849 (Pages: 429-447) Vol XXXII

October 1849 (Pages: 542-552)

Publication of Schaff: "The Preparation For Christianity in the History of the World, A Proof of Divine Origin."

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: July 1851

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 50

Reviewing: Mayer: History of the Reformed Church

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: July 1851 (Pages: 429-445) Vol. XXXIII

October 1851 (Pages: 574-600)

Publication of Schaff: "The Government and Discipline of the Apostolic Church"

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: July 1851

Title: Literary Notice

Pages: 490-491

Reviewing: Schaff: "Geschichte der Chrislichen Kirche"

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: January 1852

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 154

Reviewing: Harbaugh: Heavenly Recognition

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: 1853

Title: Literary Notice

Pages: 429, 574

Reviewing: Schaff: "The Government and Discipline of the Apostolic Church"

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: July 1854

Title: Literary Notice

Pages: 477-478

Reviewing: Schaff: History of the Apostolic Church

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: April 1855

Title: Literary Notice

Pages: 320-321

Reviewing: Koeppen: The World in the Middle Ages

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: January 1856 Volume XVI

Title: "Schaff on America"

Pages: 122-144

Author: B. H. Nadal

Reviewing: Schaff: America

Denomination: Methodist



Tone: Caustic

Synopsis: Nadal is highly offended with Schaff's assessment of the current state of Methodism. He combats Schaff on issues such as: Schaff's suggestion that Methodism is a religion for the lower classes, that it was anti-intellectual and experimental, that it favored the revivalistic system over the sacramental. He bemoans: "Now we very much doubt whether our readers could find anywhere else, in the same space, as much flippant abuse and self-complacent slander as we have here." He portrays the German Reformed pastors as being hopelessly lost under the Mercersburg despotism.

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: April 1856

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 270

Reviewing: Schaff: "English University Life and University Reform"

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: April 1856

Pages: 291-292

Reference to: Schaff: History of the Apostolic Church

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: January 1857, Volume XVII

Title: Letter from John McClintock

Pages: 125-126

Author: John McClintock

Reviewing: Nadal: "Schaff on America"

Tone: Scolding

Synopsis: Nadal either over reacted or did not understand Schaff's critique of Methodism. Schaff was merely reporting what he saw to be the present state of American Methodism and not the essence of the denomination.

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: April 1857 Volume XVII

Title: Letter from B. H. Nadal

Pages: 296-298

Author: B. H. Nadal

Reviewing: McClintock's Letter

Tone: Defensive

Synopsis: Nadal would not back down on his original assertion that Schaff was purposefully trying to bring disrepute to Methodism.

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: April 1857

Title: "Synopsis of the Quarterlies"

Page: 299

Reviewing: Mercersburg Review Position

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: July 1857 Volume XVII

Title: "Dr. Schaff on Methodism"

Pages: 428-436

Author: William Nast



Reviewing: Schaff: Der Deutsche Kirchenfreund

Tone: Angry

Synopsis: Like Nadal, Nast is considerably upset by Schaff's attacks on Methodism. He refers mostly to Schaff's comments in "Kirchenfreund," his German publication in which he accuses the Methodist of substituting "justification by faith with justification by feeling," and of denying sin and Grace through adherence to a doctrine of Christian perfection. Nast is also reacting, most likely to Schaff's direct maligning of his own ethics and taste as Editor of Der Christliche Apologete. He advises Schaff to do his homework before passing judgements.

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: April 1858

Title: "Synopsis of the Quarterlies"

Page: 306

Reviewing: Brownson's Quarterly Review January 1858 concerning Nevin's position on the Church question.

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: April 1858

Title: "Literary Notice

Pages: 329-330

Reviewing: Gerhart: Introduction to the Study of Philosophy

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: July 1858

Title: "Synopsis of the Quarterlies"

Page: 478

Reviewing: Mercersburg's use of 'Churchly'

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: July 1858

Title: Literary Notice

Pages: 503-504

Reviewing: Schaff: "Germany"

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: July, October 1858

Title: "The Berlin Conference of 1857"

Pages: (July) 427, (October) 538

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: October 1858 Volume XL

Titles: "The Oldest Opposition to Christianity and its Defence."

Pages: 605-624

Author: Schaff

Reviewing: W. J. Bolton: Evidences of Christianity

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: January 1859

Title: Literary Notice

Pages: 160-161

Reviewing: Schaff: History of the Christian Church



The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: April 1861

Title: "The Lives and Writings of the Fathers and Founders of the Reformed Church"

Page: 329

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: 1864

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 29

Reviewing: Schaff: "Saints of the Desert, St. Anthony of Egypt and Symeon the Stylite"

The Methodist Quarterly Review

Date: October 1864

Title: Literary Review

Page: 574

Reviewing: Schaff: "Leo the Great and the Papacy of the 5th and 6th Centuries"

The New Brunswick Review

Published: Office of the New Brunswick Review, New York

Date: May 1854

Title: "Schaff's Works on Church History"

Pages: 1-63

Author: J. W. Proudfit

Reviewing: Schaff: The History of the Apostolic Church

Denomination: Dutch Reformed

Tone: Indignant

Synopsis: Dr. Schaff writes his history of the church with a bias. Especially in the later English translation Dr. Schaff leans more and more in the direction of Romanism. This is perceived mostly in Schaff's Romanism. This is perceived mostly in Schaff's recording of the Papal tradition. It is highly critical and reviews over and over again Schaff's discussion of the role of Peter in the foundation of the church. It says: "Dr. Schaff has, then, fully chosen to found himself and his apostolic church on Peter. He has fully cast in his lot with the desperate fortunes of the papacy. He has determined, too, to write a history of the Christian church on this system." The writer laments its effect on theological education.

The New Brunswick Review

Date: August 1854 Volume I

Title: "Dr. Schaff as a Church Historian"

Pages: 278-325

Author: J. W. Proudfit

Reviewing: Schaff: History of the Apostolic Church

Tone: Defensive

Synopsis: This article was written in response to criticism that the assessment of Schaff's history in the May issue may have been an exaggeration. It reiterates that all written history is necessarily slanted. The question is whether the New Brunswick Review legitimately accused Schaff of betraying his Protestant heritage in for the sake of advancing the cause of the Papists? It suggests that the church of Rome is not only



a vital threat to Protestantism but is also a threat to our American freedom. The Dutch Reformed church has recently suspended all relations with its German Reformed cousins because of this dangerous trend.

The New Englander

Published: Carrington, New Haven  
Date: 1846 Volume IV  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 592  
Reviewing: Nevin: The Mystical Presence  
Denomination: Congregational  
Tone: Neutral

Synopsis: This is a very brief review and admits that the Mystical Presence deserves a more extended notice. Describes Nevin as "the rear guard of Protestantism." It notes that Nevin fully rejects the Puritan theology of the sacrament and that he substantiates his claim based on Calvin. The advice given is to study Calvin independently of Nevin. Then, the book is worth reading.

The New Englander

Date: August 1849 Volume VII  
Title: Literary Notices  
Page: 487  
Reviewing: Nevin: "The Apostles' Creed: Its Origin, Constitution and Plan."

Tone: Accepting

Synopsis: The author says a great deal in this one page review of Nevin. He is fully aware of the Mercersburg ruthless attacks on Puritanism but seems to imply that the more they try to denounce them the more they will make an impression. (Could this be why we don't see more reaction coming from New England?) Although the author sees some erroneous thought in Nevin's position, he believes the "Apostles' Creed" is so far the easiest work of Nevin to read and ought to be candidly and thoroughly studied in New England.

The New Englander

Published: Northrop, New Haven  
Date: May 1854 Volume XII  
Title: "Prof. Schaff's Church History"  
Pages: 176, 237-254  
Author: L. Bacon  
Reviewing: Schaff: History of the Apostolic Church

Synopsis: This work provides the reader with a comprehensive review of both Dr. Nevin and Dr. Schaff and their relationship to the American religious scene. Dr. Bacon (if he indeed is responsible for this history) is particularly impressed with Schaff's bold independent opinions given at his Inauguration in The Principle of Protestantism. Also, Bacon gives an interesting analysis of Nevin's use of the term "Puritan" as all English speaking churches that are not Episcopal. Of Schaff's history, Bacon commends it as a great book but objects strongly to his view of baptism as entrance to the church. Bacon would rather credit preaching as the avenue of salvation and is troubled by Schaff's



sacramental system which would necessarily exclude, for instance, the righteous Quaker persons.

The New Englander

Date: 1857 Volume XV  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 574  
Reviewing: Schaff: Germany  
Author: Noah Porter Jr.

The New Englander

Published: Kingsley New Haven  
Date: November 1857 Volume XV  
Title: "Protestantism in America"  
Pages: 537-552  
Author: J. M. Sturtevant  
Reviewing: Schaff: "A Sketch of the Political, Social and Religious Character of the United States of North America, in two lectures delivered at Berlin, with a report read before the German Church Diet at Frankfort-on-the-Main, Sept., 1854"  
Tone: Spirited  
Synopsis: The author approached Schaff's work with an enthusiastic curiosity about how this young German immigrant would describe American Congregationalism to the people of his homeland. He summarizes Schaff's perspective on the church in a democratic society, the problems of slavery, and Schaff's predictions for the American Protestant destiny. He then describes how Schaff sees the necessity of organic union in ecclesiology and the problems with congregational theology. Was the Reformation a mistake according to Dr. Schaff's thinking? Is he suggesting a return to Romanism? It is the Bible, not the church at Rome which properly defines the church and its mission. The sectarian spirit is denied in congregationalism. The superiority of New England education, piety, and mission is cited as a defense of the system. The solution is not in catholic structure but in local independence. This is the ideal of the Reformation.

The New Englander

Date: 1858 Volume XVI  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 186  
Reviewing: Schaff: Church History

The New Englander

Date: 1858 Volume XVI  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 209  
Reviewing: Gerhart: An Introduction to the Study of Philosophy

The New Englander

Date: 1859 Volume XVII  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 263  
Reviewing: Schaff: History of the Christian Church



The New Englander

Date: 1861 Volume XIX

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 519

Reviewing: Schaff: The Moral Character of Christ

The New Englander

Date: 1863 Volume XXII

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 654

Reviewing: Schaff: "Ecumenical Councils"

The New Englander

Date: 1864 Volume XXIII

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 179

Reviewing: Harbaugh: Heaven, Heavenly Recognition and Heavenly Home

The New Englander

Date: 1865 Volume XXIV

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 197

Reviewing: Schaff: Lange's Commentary on Scriptures

Page: 793

Reviewing: Schaff: "The Person of Christ"

The New Englander

Date: 1866 Volume XXV

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 567

Reviewing: Schaff: "The Person of Christ"

The New Englander

Date: 1867 Volume XXVI

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 358

Reviewing: Schaff: Church History

The New Englander

Date: 1867 Volume XXVI

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 355

Reviewing: Schaff: Lange's Commentary on Acts

Page: 764

Reviewing: Schaff: Lange's Commentary on James, Peter, John, and Jude

The New Englander

Date: 1870 Volume XXIX

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 141

Reviewing: Schaff: Lange's Commentary on Romans

The Princeton Review (see also the Biblical Repertory and..)

Published: Princeton

Date: 1840 Volume XII

Title: "Inaugural Address at Mercersburg"



Page: 459  
Denomination: Presbyterian  
Reviewing: Nevin: Inaugural Address

The Princeton Review

Date: 1841 Volume XIII  
Title: Eulogy of F. A. Rauch  
Page: 463  
Author: Nevin

The Princeton Review

Date: 1843 Volume XIV  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 631  
Reviewing: Nevin: "Ambassador of God, or the True Spirit of the Christian Ministry."

The Princeton Review

Date: 1844 Volume XVI  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 137  
Reviewing: Nevin: The Anxious Bench  
Title: History of the German Reformed Church  
Page: 603  
Synopsis: Also contains a sermon by Rev. W. Wilson Bonnel on the covenant

The Princeton Review

Date: 1845 Volume XVII  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 626  
Reviewing: Schaff: Principle of Protestantism

The Princeton Review

Date: 1846 Volume XVIII  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 462  
Reviewing: Schaff: "Anglo-Germanisms"

The Princeton Review

Date: 1847 Volume XIX  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 91  
Reviewing: Schaff: What is Church History  
Title: "Development Theory of Christianity"  
Page: 109  
Reviewing: Schaff and Newman  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 301  
Reviewing: Nevin: "Discourse on the Church"

The Princeton Review

Date: 1848 Volume XX  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 627  
Reviewing: Nevin: Antichrist



The Princeton Review

Date: 1851 Volume XXIII

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 649

Reviewing: Schaff: Church History

The Princeton Review

Date: 1852 Volume XXIV

Subject: Mercersburg

Page: 132

Reviewing: Mercersburg and Roman Theology

The Princeton Review

Date: October 1852 Volume XXIV

Title: "The Apostles' Creed"

Pages: 602-677

Author: Dr. John Proudfit (Dutch Reformed)

Reviewing: Nevin: "The Apostles' Creed"

Denomination: Presbyterian

Tone: Mocking

Synopsis: Nevin's supposedly "New Creed theory" is described in Princeton as "philosophical catholicism" and the "highest form of Papal orthodoxy." Most objectionable is Nevin's theory of the organic development of the Creed, not from the Bible but from the very fact of Christianity. In other words, the Creed is not a production of thought but is revelatory. If we were to accept Nevin's position of Creedal primacy, the article continues, we would have to shave our heads and become monks or Jesuits. Instead of thinking, we would merely profess our allegiance to a document. Instead of the Evangelical Alliance, we would reinstate the Inquisition. A totally different gospel would be professed.

The Princeton Review

Date: 1852 Volume XXIV

Title: "The Heidelberg Catechism"

Pages: 91-134

Author: Dr. John Proudfit (Dutch Reformed)

Reviewing: Willard: Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism

Nevin: Introduction

Tone: Incensed

Synopsis: Mr. Willard should be commended for bringing before the American people the venerable Heidelberg Catechism. The Catechism itself is praised for its Reformed theology and influence. Willard, however, was not careful enough in his work in translation and in publishing. Willard's unforgivable sin, however, is in inviting John Williamson Nevin to write the introduction. Nevin celebrates the catechism by contrasting it to rigid and unfriendly Calvinism. It avoids the "thorny, dialectic subtleties of predestination" in favor of a "rich vein of mysticism." Nevin, therefore, is accused of being a traitor to his Presbyterian heritage and a convert to Catholicism. Nevin's denial of the originality of the 80th question (deliberately anti-Roman) puts the final nail in the coffin. However, the author hopes, "long after the crotchets of Dr.



Nevin have passed into oblivion future generations will call Willard blessed." (Willard who?)

The Princeton Review

Date: 1853 Volume XXV  
Subject: Baptism  
Page: 367  
Synopsis: Gives the so-called Reformed view of the Sacrament

The Princeton Review

Date: January 1854 Volume XXVI  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 148  
Reviewing: Schaff: History of the Apostolic Church  
Tone: Mixed  
Synopsis: The article reviews Schaff's style of history. It finds in it both pantheistic and Roman tendencies. Yet, the reviewer graciously admits his certainty of Schaff's Christian Spirit and his service as a historian.  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 437  
Reviewing: Schaff: "Life and Labors of St. Augustine"

The Princeton Review

Date: 1855 Volume XXVII  
Title: Literary Notice  
Page: 62  
Reviewing: Koeppen: The World in the Middle Ages

The Princeton Review

Date: 1858 Volume XXX  
Subject: Mercersburg  
Page: 374  
Reviewing: Mercersburg and the efficacy of Baptism

The Princeton Review

Date: 1861 Volume XXXII  
Title: Baptism  
Page: 687  
Synopsis: A continuation of Hodge's discussion of infant baptism. This article details the most common and plausible view of the sacrament.

The Princeton Review

Date: 1863 Volume XXXV  
Title: Baptism  
Page: 632  
Synopsis: The idea of a oneness of child and parent is disputed.  
Title: "The Reformed Church of Geneva, France, Scotland, and other Countries."  
Page: 688  
Synopsis: Discusses the relation of Church and State.

The Princeton Review

Date: 1866 Volume XXXVII  
Title: Literary Notice



Page: 567

Reviewing: Schaff: "The Monophysite Church of the East"

The Princeton Review

Date: 1867 Volume XXXIX

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 392

Reviewing: Schaff" History of the Christian Church Vols. II and III

The Princeton Review

Date: 1868 Volume XL

Title: "The Age Question, a Plea for Christian Union"

Page: 655

Reviewing: Nevin

The Protestant Quarterly Review

Published: American Protestant Association

Date: 1846

Author: Dr. Joseph Berg

Denomination: Independent

Synopsis: This Journal is full of hostile attacks on the Mercersburg men. Dr. Berg, once the pastor of the Race Street Church in Philadelphia, left the denomination after an unsuccessful attempt to convict Dr. Schaff of heresy for his Principle of Protestantism.

The Reformed Church Monthly

Date: 1868 Volume I to 1876 Volume IX

Denomination: German Reformed (Ursinus School)

Synopsis: This journal was published to be a voice of opposition to the Mercersburg liturgical renewal. Many articles were printed against the majority opinion in the German Reformed denomination.

The Theological and Literary Journal

Published: New York

Date: April 1853 Volume V

Title: "The Doctrines of Dr. Nevin and his Party in the German Reformed Church."

Pages: 636-688

Author: David N. Lord

Reviewing: Nevin "Baccalaureate Address" 1850

Denomination: Independent

Tone: Pedantic

Synopsis: Lord tries to assess whether Nevin is rightly accused of being a Romanist. His purpose is to warn others of the heretical views he finds in Nevin. Nevin is judged to be a pantheist of the school of Schleiermacher and Schelling. (Bushnell is also accused of such pantheism). Nevin is said to be blasphemous, seeing God in nature, and not a Trinitarian. Lord believes he has proven that Nevin leads a faction which "has risen in the German Reformed church, who favor the doctrines of Romanism, exalt the authority of tradition above the Scriptures, look to sacraments for the atonement of sin and the regeneration of the heart, and rely on the intercession of saints for other spiritual and temporal blessings."



The Theological and Literary Journal

Date: July 1853

Title: "Dr. Nevin's Pantheistic and Development Theories"

Pages: 146-166

Author: David N. Lord

Reviewing: Nevin

Tone: Confusing

Synopsis: The article is a continuation of the April review of Nevinism. Lord is now much more bold in his accusation of Pantheism. He describes the theology as full of "error and absurdity" and makes the following points: it is destitute of sound philosophy; it is antagonistic to Scripture; it is opposed to common sense; it is incompatible with moral government; it denies redemption, it misrepresents the work of God. Therefore, Lord again insists that the Mercersburg theology of historical development is pantheistic, senseless, and revolting.

The Theological and Literary Journal

Date: 1859-1860 Volume XI

Title: "The Principle of O.A. Brownson's Successive Theological Opinions."

Page: 1ff

The Theological and Literary Journal

Date: 1859-1860 Volume XII

Title: "Dr. Berg's False View of the Second Advent"

The True Catholic

Published: New York

Date: 1846 Volume IV

Denomination: Episcopal

Title: Literary Notice

Page: 89

Reviewing: Nevin: Mystical Presence

Title: "The Mystical Presence"

Page: 106

Synopsis: Reviews the Historical argument.

Title: "The Mystical Presence"

Page: 154

Reviewing: The Puritan Theory

Tone: Very Complimentary

The True Catholic

Date: 1847 Volume V

Title: "The Comparative View of the Theological Dogmas of the Principle Christian Systems."

Page: 494

The True Catholic

Date: 1848 Volume VI

Title: "The Antichrist"

Pages: 272-280

Reviewing: Nevin: The Antichrist

Tone: Good

Synopsis: The book is recommended but with reservation. Nevin's



critique of the sects is applauded. The author disagrees with Nevin's position on the elements in the sacrament and progressive church history.

#### NEWSPAPERS

"The Christian Intelligencer" (New York) Dutch Reformed

"Freeman's Journal" (New York) Roman Catholic

"The Lutheran Observer" (Baltimore)

"Puritan Recorder" Congregational

"The Weekly Messenger" (Chambersburg) German Reformed



## THE MERCERSBURG SOCIETY

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

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

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

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

The Rev. James H. Gold  
P. O. Box 207  
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## MANUSCRIPTS AND BOOKS FOR REVIEW

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

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

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

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