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THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW

Journal of the Mercersburg Society

Number Ten

Autumn 1991

THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW
Journal of the Mercersburg Society

R. Howard Paine, Editor

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CONTENTS

Editorial Introduction 1

- Articles 3 Ecumenical Efforts at Liturgical
Reconciliation: Word and Sacrament
Horace T. Allen, Jr.
- 11 The Formative Character of Liturgy:
An Anglican Perspective for the Oecumene
David R. Holeton
- 23 With All the Saints: Ecumenical Liturgics
and Mercersburg Theology
Deborah Rahn Clemens
- 39 Mercersburg and Old First
Robert A. Schneider
- 51 This May Sound Mystical, But... A Sermon
Linden J. De Bie
- 57 Holding and Folding: A Sermon
Wayne L. Smith

EIGHTH ANNUAL CONVOCATION
THE MERCERSBURG SOCIETY

June 1 and 2, 1992

Lutheran Theological Seminary
7301 Germantown Avenue
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Theme: Mercersburg and Lutheranism

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Some years ago my wife and I attended worship in a Presbyterian Church in Ottawa. It was a celebration of the Eucharist, and the liturgy was a textbook perfect example of catholic worship. After the service I commended the pastor on the service and inquired concerning his background. He informed me that he had studied worship at the seminary of the Christian Church Christ (Disciples) in Louisville, Kentucky, under Paul Crow who later became Executive Secretary of the Consultation on Church Union and is now ecumenical officer for the Disciples. I mention all of this because the paper by Horace Allen which is his inaugural address as new president of the Society makes frequent reference to COCU in witness of the fact that the ecumenical work of men like Schaff has continued in unbroken line down to this present moment, and the liturgy is one of the chief bonding agents in all of this.

Recalling our Ottawa experience also fits into the mention that should be made of what our Society could speak of as its "Canadian Connection." In this issue of The Review we have the excellent paper by Canon Holeyton of Trinity College, Toronto, and last year we published the perceptive paper on J.H.A. Bomberger by Dr. Alan Sell of the University of Calgary. Also it is worth noting that Dr. De Bie whose sermon appears in this issue and who has been a previous contributor to The Review holds a doctorate from McGill University.

All of this may seem like the stuff of which Trivial Pursuit is made, but I thought the various connections were of more than passing interest. Along the same line, we may go one step further to point out that there was another Anglican beside Canon Holeyton on our Philadelphia program: Father Wayne Smith, who preached the sermon for Morning Prayer in historic Christ Church. Father Smith is a graduate of Lancaster Seminary where he enjoyed ample exposure to Mercersburg in classes in liturgics which were taught by yours truly.

Deborah Rahn Clemens, who is distinguishing herself as a Mercersburg scholar even as she treads the path to a doctorate at Drew, is again one of our contributors as we print her paper which was delivered in the Arch Street Meeting House of the Society of Friends.

The above information offers some clue concerning the very interesting itinerary to a number of historic churches in Old Philadelphia Town which was arranged for our June, 1991, Convocation by Jeff Roth, our energetic and resourceful Executive Vice President. He relied heavily, of course, on the assistance of people of the host church, Old First Reformed Church of Philadelphia.

The paper by Robert Schneider tells about the three "B's" of Old First: Berg, Bomberger, and Butz. The first two were not exactly friends of Mercersburg as we all know. But we would like to believe that the present vitality of Old First owes considerable to Geneva Butz, a true Mercersburger and present pastor of the congregation.

Needless to say, a great time was experienced by all in Philadelphia this past June of 1991, and we present this Fall, 1991, issue of The Review in the fond hope that it will be a fitting memento of that auspicious time in the history of our Society.

R. Howard Paine
Editor

ECUMENICAL EFFORTS AT LITURGICAL RECONCILIATION:
WORD AND SACRAMENT

Horace T. Allen, Jr.
Assistant Professor of Worship
Boston University School of Theology

Presidential Address at the 1991 Mercersburg Society
Convocation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

My dear sisters and brothers of the Mercersburg Society: You have paid me a very great compliment in electing me to your Presidency, especially as I follow an esteemed colleague and contributor to liturgical education and reform in North America, the Rev. Dr. Howard Hageman.

My announced topic for this Presidential address is "Ecumenical Efforts at Liturgical Reconciliation: Word and Sacrament." Tomorrow, my friend, David Holeyton, of Toronto and a member of the Anglican Communion, will speak of "The Ecumenical Functionality of Liturgy from an Anglican Perspective." Our common undertaking is to place the historic Mercersburg Movement in a contemporary context both to suggest, again, its prophetic character, and also to propose how it is that those who understand its dynamic might exercise their own liturgical and ecumenical ministry in our own time. And I am happy to cite as my authority for making this kind of statement, James Hastings Nichols, from his book, Romanticism in American Theology:

The new sense of the corporate character of the faith and of its depth in history was related to a responsibility for the whole of the Christian community of a sort scarcely sensed by the typical evangelical. Nevin and Schaff considered the church itself to be the most momentous religious question of their day. Their wrestling with this problem constitutes probably the most significant treatment given it by any American theologians of the nineteenth century. It also establishes them¹ as major prophets of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement.

And again, in commenting on the Liturgy of 1857 Nichols observes that

Nevin's conception anticipated that of the twentieth century Roman Catholic liturgical movement. As in early Christianity, he urged, liturgical worship must mean a real sacrificial obligation, Christ's passion presented to God by his people.²

Finally, says Nichols,

The agenda of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement...read like the heads of the Mercersburg controversy. Christ and the church, tradition and traditions, ministry and sacraments, ways of worship, the nature of church unity - on all these contemporary themes of ecumenical³ study, Nevin and Schaff speak with startling actuality...

One only need note the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order paper #111, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, and the responses from churches and

international confessional bodies to realize the truth and wisdom of that word.

Thus, the intent of my Presidential address is not to tell you yet more of Mercersburg lore - there are others in this room who could do that far better - but to suggest to you how it is that our Movement and its formative fathers were in fact anticipating an unprecedented moment to which the churches of the West have now come, including the Roman Church and indeed in part because of the Roman Church. That is to say, we are living in an ecclesial time which they could never, in their wildest imaginings, have anticipated - a time in which precisely the Roman Church would take up - their program! Nor is this said in any patronizing spirit of "We told you so." The Mercersburg fathers themselves lived with an important respect for the way in which the Roman Church remained faithful to its liturgical tradition, its ecclesial discipline and its theological enterprise.

The immediate intent of this Presidential address is to spell out as clearly and concisely as possible in the time allotted some of the dimensions and directions of liturgical reform which now characterize much of ecclesial Christianity as we know it, by reason of certain continuing conversations and consultations both in North America and internationally, which discussions are now more widely inclusive than much of the history of our Movement has ever been able to envisage. That inclusiveness now means Roman Catholic, Reformed (of many varieties), Lutheran, Free, Methodist, Anglican, and even occasional whispers from Uniates and Old Catholics, though as yet Eastern Orthodoxy has yet to make itself felt in the ecumenical, liturgical conversation. (Perhaps that moment awaits large-scale use of English in places like North America, which is in fact beginning with some seriousness.)

My overall thesis concerning the dimensions and directions of this ecumenical, liturgical development is to propose that since a measure of consensus is beginning to appear, and much of it is at the initiative of the Church of Rome, especially in the English-speaking world, the meaning of this consensus is that the visible unity of the Church Catholic is now appearing at that most critical place: the common worship of the people of God gathered around pulpit and altar in a shared sort of ministerial order and with a commitment there and always to offer the praise of the body of Christ as it mystically and assuredly assembles in a regular and ordered way to celebrate the Paschal mysteries and to anticipate the cosmic Parousia. Or to put it a bit more simply: given a certain developing ecumenical consensus concerning the structure, meaning and style of Christian worship, what more could a Mercersburg Movement hope or pray for? Indeed, Massey Shepard, late of the Episcopal Church, in response to an award from the North American Academy of Liturgy, asked the very serious question, "When are the theologians and canon lawyers going to catch up to the liturgists?"

Let me move therefore to a kind of documentation of my thesis with reference to a number of developments, some of which Prof. Holeyton and I, as well as some other persons in this Society, have been privileged to encourage.

The first, perhaps in importance, is the current commitment on the part of all parties to these conversations, to full, conscious and active participation on the part of the whole people of God, as assembly and as orders of ministry. This preoccupation of the Mercersburg divines was a daring and essential counter-proposal to the participatory excesses of revivalism, to say nothing of the minister- or priest-centered rites of their contemporary Protestant and

Roman neighbors. They knew full well that such a participatory style required a revival of catechetical, musical and publishing efforts. However well it worked then, or didn't, we are now across the ecumenical table well into that same sort of enterprise, except that Word Processing and its related communications' phenomena may now be overtaking the publishing side of it.

Further, full, conscious and active participation in our visually-oriented world probably does mean a much richer use of symbol, gesture, color, and ordered movement. And the visual character of communications in our world is not an un-alloyed blessing, if only because so much of it is so passive rather than active. (It is so passive that it is now possible with a perfectly good conscience for Christians to enjoy a mighty war going on from the comfort of their living room sofas.) In this regard I often hear myself reminding my students of liturgy that weekly assemblies for worship, in our culture may well be "the last live act in town." Those assemblies are still (at least partially) "unscripted," (at least partially) intergenerational, and sometimes even inter-racial. They are the sort of events where surprises just might happen and where you might meet someone you don't know - the biblical "stranger within thy gates."

Full, conscious and active participation for Roman Catholics now includes receiving the cup as well as the bread, and often from the hands of laity; it means lay readers and Protestant hymns. It means cantors and responsorial psalms. Incredibly, and perhaps a bit fearfully it now can mean "Communion Services" in the absence of a priest (though the use of reserved hosts provides that church with an option the Disciples of Christ didn't have...for good or ill so they turned to lay celebration.)

Full and active participation for us of the Reformed traditions means recovering sung psalmody, and greater regularity of reception of Communion; amongst us too it means lay readers and cantors. It means (however excessively perhaps) the sharing of joys and concerns, and children's rites of sorts (however foolishly done). It might mean corporate study of the lectionary texts during the week preceding their liturgical use. It might mean redesigning the spaces we worship in, and enriching the musical fabric of praise.

Full, conscious and active participation is now a significant, and perhaps even painful goal, for most of us, if not yet an achievement. But that is surely part of our Mercersburg business. Not simply because "participation" in itself is such a good thing but because of the nature of that assembly as a living, breathing social organism with a history, a universality and a hope. "Participation" is grounded in "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" as definiens of that assembly. That is why Karl Barth can say, "the community that does not sing is not the community." Participation is ecclesiology.

The second bit of evidence I would like to bring before you today I needn't, since David Holeyton probably will do so tomorrow: a report on developing directions in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, together with its much controverted "flip side," Confirmation. Suffice it to say here that once again, significant initiative has now been taken by the Roman Catholic Church with the publication of its Rite for the Initiation of Christian Adults, together with a vast array of catechetical and liturgical guides. To re-introduce the catechumenate into an historically infant-baptizing church must be in the wise words of "The New Yorker," "the neatest trick of the week"...if not the millennium. But here too is one of those incredible

historical points at which Mercersburg, with its necessary affirmation of the validity of baptismal grace in the face of a totally different "initiator" process, and, at the same time, its appreciation of the patterns and disciplines of the early church, needs to be taken into account.

Another aspect of this new/old Roman pattern is to reinforce one of those other initiatory patterns for what it is, the annual Paschal cycle. Just as the reintroduction of the great festivals became one of our preoccupations, howbeit in the face of rampant misunderstanding and hostility from anti-Catholic Americans, now we have a new context in which to pursue this agenda: the calendar as a necessarily repeated initiatory ritual.

But I defer to Holeyton in these matters, only noting at a certain professorial, footnoting level, that in addition to the Roman Rite, both the Consultation on Church Union and the (North American) Consultation On Common Texts have produced admirable and exemplary ecumenical rites, complete with commentaries.

In turning to the other Gospel sacrament I think I can be just as brief, if only because our Society has often discussed this rite, and also because the World Council's document #111 has so well spelled out a kind of ecumenical agreement both in terms of liturgical structure and theological significance. There remains of course a vast theological "re-construction" at the twin points of the sense in which the Eucharist may be thought of as "sacrifice" and the sense in which the Eucharist may be thought of as "sacrifice" and the sense in which the bread and wine may be said to be "changed." And if one wishes to raise the "prior question" altogether then one may turn to Vol. IV/4 of Barth's Church Dogmatics for a most extraordinary ("Zwinglian" if you will) discussion of the very concept, "sacrament."

Perhaps however I should report to you from the North American and the International Ecumenical Consultations, concerning the vast effort now being undertaken on the Roman side to revise the Roman Missal of 1969 in terms of the structure and language of the Canon of the Mass, the Eucharistic Prayer. If I may editorialize on the basis of attendance at a recent series of meetings, it would appear that some new and widely ecumenical efforts are now bearing fruit to provide some texts which would return to eucharistic themes which predate much of the 16th century's dogmatic necessities (on both sides) and also work with a form of the English language which will be more poetic and more dramatic than most of what we have heretofore seen in official, denominational revisions and publications.

Now to the Word, that is, the Liturgy of the Word. Here again, the news is dramatic if not also a bit disquieting. Here, it would seem, the Reformed Tradition is on its home turf and least in need of ecumenical instruction. But we too have had our serious debates and debacles at just this point in the liturgy. For instance: what is the role, if any of lectionaries? which lectionary principle is truly Reformed, selecta or continua? what about the collects and hymns in this regard? and what is the proper structure of Sunday's normative Liturgy of the Word: the Daily Office or Ante-communion? And in that case, where do the prayers go, and how do they relate to the scripture/sermon? (And of course, all of this hasn't even touched those formidable architectural questions lurking behind the placing of Altar and Pulpit and/or Lectern.)

Here too however I wish to refer to the singular contribution to so many of these questions which has been made by the Roman Church, particularly in its 1969 revision of the Roman Missal and Lectionary. With that document, and in particular, Ordo Lectionum Missae, an extraordinary ecumenical optic has opened up, to everyone's surprise. This was of course a direct result of the decisions of Vatican II as included in the document Sacrosanctum Concilium of 1963, the Council's first and possibly finest production. In that "Constitution" there was enunciated the liturgical principle of the "two tables of Word and Eucharist." The Constitution insisted that the people of God were to be fed more "lavishly" and fully at both tables! What that meant for the Liturgy of the Word was then spelled out in the Roman Lectionary of 1969 with its provision for a three-year cycle of readings for Sunday Mass, to include each week three readings: Old Testament (with Psalm), Epistle and Gospel. At the same time the organizational principles included the selecta or thematic tradition for Advent-1st Epiphany and Lent-Pentecost/Trinity, and the continua tradition for all the rest of the year's Sundays (some 33 or 34) designated as "Ordinary Time" (in Latin, Dominica per Annum), although there too the Old Testament was chosen typologically rather than continuously.

In the decade after this publication (1969-79) an extraordinary ecumenical acceptance of this system took place in North America such that by the end of the decade this system of bible reading (and preaching of course) was being used, in various forms, by Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Reformed, Methodist, Disciples and Congregational churches. COCU published a version in 1974, and a whole publishing industry grew up to provide commentaries and homiletical helps.

This situation, i.e. the Consultation on Common Texts to produce a harmonization of several versions of the Roman Lectionary was published in 1983 as Common Lectionary. This system respected virtually all of the foundational principles of the Roman table and its Episcopal, Lutheran and Protestant variants. Its only major shift was to apply the continuous principle to the Old Testament pericopes after continuous principle to the Old Testament pericopes after Pentecost on a broader typological scheme by pairing Matthew (Yr. A) with the Pentateuchal and Mosaic narratives, and of pairing Mark (Yr. B) with Davidic narrative, and of pairing Luke (Yr. C) with Elija/Elisha and the XII. Otherwise the Roman Ordo was followed.

With the publication of the Common Lectionary in 1983 a further decade (almost) of ecumenical adoption set in, with its use spreading to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, by Protestants and Anglicans. Locally there appeared weekly homily-planning groups, including, because of the Roman origin of Common Lectionary, Roman priests. Mixed-marriage couples who attended their respective churches on a weekly basis began to notice that the lessons were the same (however much the preaching might have varied in quality and interest). Suddenly it appeared that these churches had already achieved a kind of "intercommunion at the table of the Word." And for us Reformed divines, I would take it as axiomatic that that is not an insignificant achievement.

The excitement one might feel at such a development, however, must be qualified by at least two, if not three, ecumenical problems. I cite them for you both because they are matters of immediate discussion and concern and also because the collective liturgical wisdom and experience which this Society represents might well be brought to bear on some solutions.

The first problem is, in a way, international. You perhaps noticed that in listing the English-speaking countries where Common Lectionary is now being used, I did not mention Great Britain. That is a serious exception. Of course, the Roman Catholic churches in Great Britain are using the original 1969 Roman Lectionary. Anglican and Protestant churches on the other hand are using a two-year, entirely thematic and typological system which was produced by the Joint Liturgical Group of Great Britain in 1967. More recently a proposal has surfaced to expand this to a four-year cycle. Unhappily, these developments have blocked even trial use of Common Lectionary there. As now Common Lectionary has been undergoing a process of revision; British representatives have participated in the hope of finding access to British churches, especially as this would provide greater commonality for those churches with their Roman neighbors.

The second problem is more North American, though there are interconnections with the international situation. This problem, baldly stated, is that as Common Lectionary itself has been subjected to some revision and is just about to be published (1992, I would judge), the Lutheran and Episcopal churches of the United States (not Canada, I should emphasize), are evidencing some unwillingness to make use of this work, preferring their own printed versions of 1978 (Lutheran Book of Worship) and 1979 (Book of Common Prayer). This reluctance to go further with Common Lectionary is related to the fact that thus far no Conference of Catholic Bishops in the English-speaking world has received permission to make any use of Common Lectionary, in spite of the fact that several years ago the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops overwhelmingly voted to ask the Sacred Congregation of Divine Worship in Rome for just such permission, but this was denied. Happily, through the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (RC), conversations to this end are opening again, in which I am taking a direct part.

The worry at this point is that just as Common Lectionary is being published in a revised edition, it might lose that "commonality" if the Roman, Lutheran and Episcopalian churches back away. This third point of difficulty has further ramifications in that having achieved this intercommunion at the Table of the Word, one wonders how long (as President Bush was worrying some months back about another matter) "the coalition will last?" The process of revising Common Lectionary has taken several years, and increasingly, the constituencies which are using it (and have least experience with lectionaries) are bringing various other agendas to the table having to do with anti-Semitism, feminism, and questions about the structure of a eucharistic lectionary itself.

Thus, at this most vital point of ecumenical reconciliation, it is necessary to utter most urgent words of warning. And the irony is that the leadership the Roman church took at this point two decades ago might well be lost, precisely as her Protestant and Anglican partners themselves fail to be able to respond in a united and encouraging way.

I turn finally to another area of ecumenical activity (however hidden from your eyes) which was a considerable concern to our patriarchs, and is shortly, at least in the United States, to boil over again, particularly in our Reformed churches: the Covenanting Proposal of the Consultation on Church Union, which is now working its way to consideration by 9 churches' highest judicatories. I turn to this area since it involves in a very serious way the classic questions of ordained ministry and historic orders.

Within the next few years The Consultation's unique plan for a "communion of Communion" will be before us. I call it unique since its goals are quite different from almost any ecumenical scheme which we have yet seen. Covenanting does not envisage organic union on the part of the 9 churches; they and their polities would remain in place for an indefinite time. The effect of the plan would be entirely at the points of ministry and mission.

To accept "Covenanting," would entail prior recognition by all 9 churches of the eight others, as presently constituted! Nevertheless the Covenant would commit them to enter into liturgical services of reconciliation where the local judicatories were ready. The effect of these services would be to put in place in each of the 9 churches the historic three-fold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon (the latter being entirely local and lay), but without requiring any of the churches to change their present polity altogether). Rather, it would be up to those churches to work these three offices into their polities, recognizing as a matter of fact that we all exercise them in one way or another.

The liturgies for this reconciliation of ordained ministries as developed by COCU's Worship Commission, would express the Mutual Recognition of Churches, engage in an act of Penitence and Reconciliation, and after the Ministry of the Word, engage (for the "bishops"-designate) in a mutual laying-on-of-hands (in silence) after prayer has been offered. For presbyters this same sort of rite would be administered by those newly-reconciled bishops. For deacons, because of the diversity of definition by these 9 churches, there would simply be a local welcoming rite. Upon reconciliation of ordained ministries (the 9 churches already recognize the membership of their partners, fully), Convenanting Councils will be set up in locally-defined regions, to include bishops, presbyters, deacons and laity of all participating denominations, which will begin to coordinate those churches' mission and arrange for all future ordinations on a mutual basis.

I apologize for this foreshortened account of Covenanting and assure that you can get from the COCU office in Princeton, NJ fuller commentary, particularly on the rites which I have produced. I lead you into this morass, however, both to alert you as to the uniqueness of this plan and also to say again how prophetic our Mercersburg tradition has been at the point of searching for suitable forms and theologies of ordained ministry which respected historic ordering, universal assent and the need for the church from time to time to re-form and re-order itself.

Thus far my over-long Presidential Address: "Ecumenical Efforts at Liturgical Reconciliation: Word and Sacrament." I hope I have fulfilled its promise, if not necessarily your expectations. I will not do it to you again, but will rather look forward to that "mutual encouragement in the Lord" which for the Apostle Paul was so important in his evangelical experience and apostolic activity, and which for us is certainly an important part of our meeting, fellowship and even publishing activity.

Footnotes

1. J. H. Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology (4).
2. Ibid., 303.
3. Ibid., 310.

THE FORMATIVE CHARACTER OF LITURGY:
AN ANGLICAN PERSPECTIVE FOR THE OECUMENE

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Introduction:

In an age in which it is becoming increasingly difficult to have an ecumenical vision of the Church, where there are increasing signs of a neo-denominationalism (Schaff would have called it neo-sectarianism) in which there is a romantic longing to return to the halcyon days before the liturgical ecumenical convergence had emerged, we need to pose the question 'how do we best maintain and nurture the vision of a renewed Church that calls each of us beyond the confines of our particular traditions but plants us firmly in a Church that is both Catholic and Reformed?' I would like to treat this subject from the aspect of the formative character of the liturgy itself. That the perspective is Anglican you may have to take on trust, that its implications are ecumenical will, I believe, become apparent.

Liturgy as formative:

As Christians of the liturgical churches, we have been formed and nurtured by our liturgical texts. As an Anglican, this is true of my own tradition to a degree greater than perhaps most other communions in the western church. For over four hundred years Anglicans have prayed and re-prayed the legally imposed liturgical texts in a language we have claimed to be the vernacular. During these centuries the Book of Common Prayer has been the architect that has drawn the parameters within which we have been able to name God, to define our own Christian communities, and to construct a paradigm within which we are able to engage the world.

It is hardly new to suggest that the liturgy is a primary locus theologicus or that the maxim lex orandi lex credendi, derived from Prosper of Aquitaine, remains primary to the liturgical life of the churches. What may be less well accepted is the extent to which the relationship expressed in Prosper's dictum legem credendi statuatur lex supplicandi is seen as dialectical. I would suggest that, in that dialectic, the prayer of the faithful informs the systematic development of the faith of the Church and that faith, in turn, corrects the lex orandi. The relationship is dynamic and not static. As such, the Christian community assembled in prayer is engaged in 'doing theology.' What, and how, they pray is a primary theological and liturgical catechesis that provides the structure through which they come to know God, themselves, their community and the world in which they live. As such, the liturgy provides the basic resources to enable Christians to engage life in an integrated manner. The liturgical tools with which they work (both sign and text) have the potential either to open up the imagination and draw the individual and community beyond themselves or to provide such a monochromatic diet of signs and images that the cumulative effect is to starve the imagination and to drive individuals and communities inward. Good liturgy does the former. It is 'developmental and connective,' integrating individuals into the Body of Christ in its most catholic sense and equipping them for their work of mission and ministry in the world. An impoverished

liturgy, because of its propensity to fetter the human spirit, barely deserves the name liturgy at all. It is a phenomenon, however, with which many of us are probably only too well acquainted. It serves to isolate the individual from any sense of the catholicity of the Church, providing, as it does, a place for withdrawal from the world in which liturgical activity becomes a backdrop in which individuals engage in their own private acts of meditation.

In part, this dialectical relationship between the lex orandi and the lex credendi must be understood in an historical context. The authors of our liturgical texts were, just as are we, products of the world view which dominated their age. This world view, quite naturally, was often incorporated unquestioningly into the texts which they created. Now, I am not for a moment prepared to say this puts all liturgical texts in question. You are better judges of your own traditions than am I. At the very least, however, I would suggest that many of the texts we have inherited transcend the temporal and were written with a world-view inspired by a vision of God's reign which overcomes the world-view of any particular age. These texts are those which open up the imagination and draw individuals and communities beyond themselves. Others are so deeply rooted in the world-view of their own age that, when used cumulatively, they risk imposing the vision of their own time and culture rather than the liberating vision of a world transformed and caught up in God's reign. It is this latter type of liturgical text which starves the imagination and drives individuals and communities inward.

The Anglican liturgical tradition, in its narrow sense, is a product of mid-XVIc. England. As the reformers of the liturgy set out to do their work, they did so in the context of an absolute monarchy which was recovering from a civil war; they lived in a country in which there was little social mobility and in which movements of social protest had been ruthlessly crushed (measures that were to be used again to suppress protests against the imposition of their own liturgical work). Each of these was to have its effect on the creation of the first Prayer Books. The political order was perceived as static and those in positions of power were assumed to be there as an act of the manifest will of God. (It was not until a century later, and after another civil war, that the divine right of kings was laid to rest.) Each individual was expected to observe the duties of state concomitant with his or her social status. The language with which God is addressed in the Prayer Book confirms and re-enforces this world view.

Imaging God

A quick look at the inherited Prayer Books or at any Prayer Book concordance reveals the language used of God to be extremely limited and monochromatically hierarchical and patriarchal. When compared to the language used of God in Scripture and the Fathers only a small fraction of the available metaphors are used. In short, when compared with the tradition of Scripture and the patristic church, the Prayer Book language used for God is extremely limited and is selected in such a fashion (either consciously or unconsciously) that it re-enforces a Tudor world-view with all its limitations.

Demand for a reform of the way in which we address God ought not to come only from those interested in liberation theology or feminism but from all those who wish to be faithful to the tradition as a whole. The effect of addressing God language seriously can be stunning. It is both liberating and transforming. Like gazing at a ray of light as it passes through a crystal, the beholders are breathtaken, not so much because they see something new, but

because they see something that has always been there but now see it for the first time. In this category would fall God language that evokes images of covenant, grace, justice, partnership in creation or the feminine among others.

Two examples from our present Book of Alternative Services [BAS] illustrate this point:

God of the oppressed, we pray for all those who suffer injustice at the hands of indifferent or cruel rulers, especially for the innocent victims of war. Give them strength and patience, and hasten the day when the kingdoms of this world will own the perfect law of love, made known in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Strength of the weak, Defender of the needs, Rescuer of the poor, deliver us from the power² of wickedness that we may rejoice in your justice now and for ever.

The language used is certainly not unfamiliar, in that it is drawn directly from Scripture, but it is new to Anglicans in the context of liturgical prayer. God becomes involved in human affairs in a way to which we are unaccustomed and the relationship between liturgy and life is strengthened. When prayers that make this relationship explicit are a regular part of liturgical life, the irrevocable union between prayer and activity in God's world becomes ingrained in the life of Christians.

Here, I believe, there is an important link between Anglicanism and Mercersburg: the centrality of the Incarnation as a principal theological referent in each tradition. God, in Christ, has united the divine and human natures and is thus irrevocably committed to human affairs. God has 'wonderfully created and yet more wonderfully restored our human nature.'³ When this theme is upheld in our liturgical prayer, particularly in the eucharistic prayer, we avoid the one-sided emphasis on the passion and death of Christ as a reality separated from the entirety of his life - a phenomenon all too common in North American religion. This corrective to the prevailing piety⁴ which prevailed in North America was of considerable importance to Nevin.

While the authors of the first Prayer Books rejected the medieval understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice, they were unable to divest themselves of the primarily passion-centred eucharistic piety which was its devotional expression in the liturgy. The passion, rather than the incarnation, was the theme that dominated the Prayer Book eucharistic prayer to the exclusion of all others for four centuries. It ought not to be surprising, then, that for many Anglicans, the eucharist was a memorial of the passion alone and not a eucharistia for the mighty acts of God let alone a celebration of the paschal mystery. Coupled with the heavily penitential nature of the rite, many were left feeling unable to accept the priest's assurance of God's forgiveness and the uncertainty that they had, in fact, been incorporated into the Body of Christ in baptism and that they were a part of redeemed humanity.

As the lex credendi reforms the lex orandi it is my observation that phrases like:

In the fulness of time, you sent your Son Jesus Christ, to share our human nature, to live and⁵ die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

or

By the power of the Holy Spirit he took flesh of the Virgin Mary and shared our human nature. He lived and died⁶ as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

have begun to form quite different attitudes towards the relationship between God and the creation. The image of God in the traditional texts, remote from creation, often gazing on passively, not deigning to real involvement in human affairs like a Tudor monarch from his throne, are changed into images of the self-communicating God who we come to know in the flesh. The consequences of this shift of image are not inconsiderable. They are perhaps most obvious in the place given to the social order.

Social Order

The images used in the Prayer Book texts concerning the social order bear the ponderous marks of an absolute monarchy in which there is little question of challenging the rightness of the established order of things. The relationship between the believer and the established authorities is a passive one, and there is no thought of challenging these authorities. A typical example is the phrase from the universal prayer at the eucharist:

We beseech thee also to save and defend all Christian Kings, Princes and Governors; and especially N. our King; that under him we may be godly and quietly governed.

In the Prayer Book Catechism, used until recently as a liturgical text, children were made to recite this text as part of the answer to the question "What is thy duty towards thy Neighbour?":

My duty towards my Neighbour, is to love him as myself, and to do to all men as I would they should do unto me...To honour and obey the King, and all that are put in authority under him: To submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters: To order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters...and to do my duty⁸ in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me.

A more blatant application of this principle was the injunction given to the Anglican clergy serving in India during the Raj. Here, the relationship between liturgical text and political order was clearly understood. The clergy were enjoined not to use the Magnificat at Evensong with native congregations because the verse "He hath put down the mighty from their seat: and hath exalted the humble and meek" was likely to create political unrest!

If, as I have suggested, liturgical texts play a formative role in our engagement of the social order, it is not difficult to see how the burden created by the traditional texts would become intolerable to those with a clearly formed sense of social justice. Here the dialectical relationship between the lex orandi and the lex credendi comes into play and the latter reforms the former. A striking contrast to this is found in the prayers

proper to the feast of the Holy innocents. The traditional collect reads:

O Almighty God, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings has ordained strength, and madest infants to glorify thee by their deaths: Mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by thy grace, that by the innocence of our lives, and constancy of our faith, even unto death, we may glorify thy holy Name; through....

The prayer begins with an assertion that, in our age, borders on blasphemy ('madest infants to glorify thee by their deaths') and then proceeds to spiritualize the event ('Mortify and kill within us'); involving a clever word-play ('the innocence of our lives'), we ask that we too may glorify God. Gone is the horrific reality of the slaughter of babies or any appeal to God's righteous justice. It should not be surprising to find that Christians living in a post-holocaust world and contemporary with the famines of Ethiopia and the Sudan would have difficulty in praying this prayer. We can no longer imagine God being glorified in innocent death nor can we allow such events to pass without yearning for the intervention of the God of justice who we believe calls us to stand in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized.

It is not surprising, then, that the original prayer has given way to prayers of this type:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
whose children suffered at the hands of Herod,
receive, we pray, all innocent victims
into the arms of your mercy.
By your great might frustrate all evil designs₁₀ and establish your
reign of justice, love and peace, through....

Merciful God,
accept all we offer you this day.
Preserve your people from cruelty
and indifference to violence,
that the weak may always be defended
from the tyranny₁₁ of the strong.
We ask this....

Similar themes emerge in other new texts:

God of truth, protector of your people, come to the aid of all who
are poor and oppressed. By the power of your life-giving word lead
us in the ways of peace and integrity₁₂, and give us the help we long
for in Jesus Christ our Saviour.

O God, bring our nation and all nations to a sense of justice and
equity, that poverty, oppression and violence₁₃ may vanish and all may
know peace and plenty. We ask this....

While it might be argued that these prayers are used only occasionally, they serve to underscore a more general awareness of a world being transformed and renewed, which is a theme of many of the new eucharistic prayers. Those who are familiar with the general eschatological vision of the eucharistic prayers, cannot but be affected by the particularity of the other prayers:

Pour out your Spirit upon the whole earth
and make it your new creation.
Gather your Church together
from the ends of the earth into your kingdom,
where peace and justice are revealed,
that we, with all your people,
of every language, race and nation,
may share the banquet you have promised;¹⁴

In the fulness of time,
reconcile all things in Christ,
and make them new,
and bring us to that city of light
where you dwell with all your sons and daughters;¹⁵

The long-term effect of these prayers is not inconsiderable. Just as the Prayer Books formed a paradigm in which the social reality was a positive given, the new texts cast serious doubt upon the ultimate goodness of any given social order (particularly one marked by social injustice or entrenched separation based on gender, race, class or education) and look towards God's fulfillment of all things in the reign of Jesus Christ.

In my own church, I have seen parishes' social consciousness transformed through hearing liturgical texts that summon the faithful to participate in their baptismal vocation to be the agents of that kingdom in which the values of this world are overthrown. That transformation has been not only attitudinal but has also found itself being worked out in concrete ways, both social and political. The power of liturgical texts to elicit our active and intentional participation in the reign of the coming God cannot be underestimated. And it is of that reign that we sing:

Blessed are you, gracious God,
creator of heaven and earth;
we give you thanks and praise
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
You exalted him as Lord of all creation
that he might present to you
an eternal and universal kingdom;
a kingdom of truth and life,
a kingdom of holiness and grace,
a kingdom of justice, love, and peace.
Therefore at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow¹⁶
as heaven and earth proclaim the glory of your name.

If, as I have suggested, the liturgical text does have the power to draw the parameters within which we are able to name God, to define our own Christian communities, and to construct a paradigm within which we are able to engage the world, then we must be ever aware of the power of the texts we pray to uphold 'the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ, Evangelical, Reformed, Catholic, Apostolic, organic, developmental and connectional.'

Posture and Gesture:

I would like, now, to turn from the formative character of our texts and look at two further dimensions of worship which I have come to believe play a critical formative role. These are the postures we assume during our worship

and the gestures we make, as well as the liturgical spaces in which we worship.

The Latin liturgy inherited by our reformers had fallen into a sorry state. As liturgy it was highly clericalized and reflected the general attitude that ministry was solely the possession of the clergy. All the great acts or signs that had played such an important role in the liturgical life of the early church had either become so clericalized or so vestigial that any sign value they once had had either vanished or become irreparably obscured. It is not surprising that the authors of our Second Prayer Book abolished the few remaining gestures and produced the most clericalized book to figure in our tradition. The loss of those signs and the radical clericalization of the liturgy has done considerable damage to the way in which we, as Anglicans, have come to understand our relationship to one another in community as well as the way in which we perceive ministry. The restoration of at least some of those traditional sign-acts and the renewed seriousness with which we take ourselves as embodied beings are producing profound consequences in these two areas.

By the time the Prayer Book reformers received the Latin rite, kneeling rather than standing had become the normative liturgical posture for the laity. While this was in itself an innovation, it supported a reformation piety that was heavily penitential and in which the laity were passive spectators, kneeling while the minister didactically declaimed the liturgical text. The passion-centered prayer of consecration did nothing to suggest that any of this was inappropriate. In the light of this there is very little wonder that, until the past couple of decades, ministry has been equated with the clergy and liturgical ministry was reserved either for the ordained or for a select number of lay people who dressed as if they were ordained when exercising any liturgical function. It is not surprising that many lay people balked at the idea of the ministry of the whole people of God. Liturgical posture and the restrictive character of liturgical ministry put the lie to any renewed theology of ministry. The increasing tendency to encourage the whole community to stand in solidarity with the presider not only makes intelligible the line from the eucharistic prayer '... giving thanks that you have made us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you', but also says clearly that 'the celebration of the eucharist is the work of the whole People of God'¹⁸ and not an activity of the clergy done on behalf of a passive laity. As one of my students commented: 'Kneeling is simply an inappropriate posture for a joyful act of thanksgiving. The body language is just all wrong.'

The rediscovery of the orans posture for prayer has had a similar effect. Through the rediscovery of a gesture that was once the common possession of all Christians, but which over time fell into the exclusive hands of the clergy and charismatics, many are finding a palpable sense of openness to God while offering the acceptable sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Perhaps the most dramatic sign to have been recovered is the sign of peace. This gesture, more than any other, has taken Anglicans out of the isolationism that has so often characterized our worship. It has made it quite impossible for any of us to say that we can love God but not love (let alone acknowledge) our neighbour. Where the gesture has been taken seriously, it has become not only a means of reconciliation between members of our own communities but has also helped us to learn the difficult lesson of what it means to make peace with those from whom we might choose to remain estranged and, through the

imperative of making a gesture of reconciliation, glimpse, if only fleetingly, what it is to be a member of the peaceable kingdom.

It is at the level of gesture and sign-act that we experience most deeply what it is to play at being citizens in God's kingdom. Having had the foretaste we cannot wait until we have it in its fullness. Yet in playing, we are slowly transformed into what we play at, being like children who learn what it is to assume particular adult roles by playing at them over and over again. What at first seems to be 'mere play' slowly becomes reality.

In the light of this, it would seem to me that an avowed fidelity to Schaff and Nevin's vision of a renewed liturgy would entail a new assessment of posture and gesture in worship. For here we have a particular confluence of the tradition as it belongs to the whole Church and one of the consequences of the incarnation: we cannot worship 'in spirit and truth' if we continue to allow our worship to be an activity limited to the cerebrum while ignoring the rest of our selves as embodied beings.

Liturgical Space:

The reform of liturgical texts, gestures and posture will not, however, assure the renewal of the liturgical life of our communities. In many places the liturgical piety assumed by the renewed liturgy sits like a very thin veneer on a great plank of unexamined piety which is that of the late middle ages - a piety which defeated some of the best efforts of the reformers of the XVIc. and is doing its best to defeat the efforts of our contemporaries who are devoting themselves to the renewal of the liturgy and life of our parishes.

As a consequence, most parishes today have experienced liturgical reform. That is, either through some sort of parochial consensus or the heavy-handed imposition of an ecclesiastic, they regularly use a reformed liturgical text published in the last twenty years. Yet, as I travel about and visit parishes, it is often difficult to say that they have even begun to experience liturgical renewal. The new liturgical text is used in a style and setting indistinguishable from the old. The medieval piety which our reformers sought to instill with new life in the XVIc. remains predominant and, in most parishes, completely unexamined. In recent years I have come to realize that this is often the result of the one feature of our worship which is least examined - the very spaces within which our liturgical celebrations take place.

I would not want to suggest that all Gothic buildings are antithetical to liturgical renewal (although I might be pushed into so doing), but I would like to reflect on two phenomena inherent in Gothic architecture as found on this continent which can pose severe problems in our efforts to renew liturgical life. The first is the effect of the pointed arch which is to draw the eye upward. A building well executed in this style can be breathtaking aesthetically. It can remind us that there is a quality to our encounter with God which always takes us beyond ourselves - a not unhelpful corrective in an age in which we err too often towards an encounter with the holy which is incapable of transcending the folksy. You need only reflect on your visit to Chartres, Yorkminster or Koln to be aware of this.

Yet, in a genuine Gothic building, there is a massiveness which always keeps our feet firmly planted on the ground. It reminds us that while one aspect of God takes us beyond ourselves, we are truly in ecclesia. The sense of the

transcendent is healthily balanced with a sense of the immanent. The sheer massiveness of the walls and columns reminded us that we were part of the Body here and now. This was highlighted even more in those buildings in which the architect designed the choir just off-centre so that the nave and choir represented Christ crucified, his head tilted sideways in suffering. Here there was no escape from the ever-present sense that it is we who, through baptism, are united as members of one Body with all those present as well as with those who have gone before us and with the Lord who is both present yet risen, ascended and glorified.

Something, however, went wildly wrong when the Cambridge Camden Society won its way and 'pointed' architecture became the dominant, if not the only, style in colonial church building where I live in Upper Canada and throughout most of the British Empire. The 'Gothic box' became ubiquitous. But instead of building churches that were of architectural consequence, financial considerations generally forced the architects and builders to undertake the erection of buildings that came within the highly restrictive budgets of local communities and which, consequently, became 'scale models' of churches 'back home.'

I first became aware of this as a teen-ager. Then, like now, I was a pious bunny. As a Boy Scout I did a lot of hiking and camping up the Fraser Valley and on the West Coast. On a hike it was not uncommon to encounter one of the many tiny wooden Gothic churches which dot the west coast. They invariably were the object of a visit - sometimes out of the interest of a junior ecclesiologist, more often to escape the constant rain.

Often the churches were locked and, before seeking out the key from some local, our first impression of the building had to be gained through the large keyhole in the west door. There we would see the whole building laid out before us, as impressive a view we thought as the tourist's perspective of S. Peter's from the keyhole in the Piazza dei Cavalieri di Malta on the Aventine. Everything would appear in perfect proportions as one looked down the aisle towards the small chancel-altar with the then-obligatory cross, candles, riddle posts and dossal. There might even have been a piece of stained glass to give it a finishing touch.

When we tracked down the key and let ourselves in, the view from the narthex was much like that through the keyhole. Everything looked like a carefully crafted scale model of one of our city parishes. But, suddenly, it would all come undone. One of my patrol would make his way down the aisle into the chancel. The perspective which seemed so perfect in proportion when viewed through the keyhole or from the narthex proved to be all sham - a tromp d'oeil. The chancel and altar, which seemed an integral whole when the building was empty, suddenly appeared as the scale models they truly were once the building was 'peopled.' Even then I wondered what it meant to build churches which became aesthetically dissonant once they were asked to fulfill their primary purpose - accommodate the People of God for worship.

I said earlier that the genuine Gothic style balanced the sense of the transcendent and the immanent. The pastiche with which we live is generally incapable of balancing those two dynamics. We have the pointed arch to take us beyond, but rarely the architectural mass to ground us. The consequence is to leave us only with a sense of the transcendent: God is always above us, not among us. Because the proportions are wrong we are given the message (at least subliminally) that we do not belong. The building is at best neutral,

but far more often hostile, to the gathering of the People of God. There should be little wonder that in many of our parishes there is a strong sense of tension between the sense of gathered community presumed by our reformed liturgical texts and the desire of many to use the liturgy as a backdrop for their own devotions.

But it is more than our theology of church which is affected by the inherited Gothic space. Our theology of eucharist is also at risk. The Gothic building with the altar at the east end was a perfect spatial response to a medieval understanding of the eucharist which might be summarized in the words of Isidore of Seville: as 'the moment when the priest calls God down from heaven onto the altar.' The sense of mystery is re-enforced by an altar well removed from the faithful in an area normally inhabited only by the clergy or pseudo-clergy into which the laity might make occasional forays to receive communion, thus fulfilling their Easter duty. Moving the altar two and-a-half feet west so the the presider may stand behind the table and face the people often does little other than create a sense of aesthetic dissonance and usually fails to create the sense of a community gathered around the Lord's Table which is the proposed end of such a move. In the end, what is often an act of clerical cowardice - 'people will not complain too much if I just move the altar a few feet'--fails to account for either the aesthetics of the building or the theological intention of changing the liturgical space.

That forces us to raise the question of the relationship between the aesthetic and the theological. I would suggest that bad art is bad theology because it substitutes something false for something that is true. Buildings that are 'pseudo' or 'quasi' or 'neo' fail to remind us that we are called to offer God something that is real rather than something that is fake - be it architectural style, a musical instrument or the bread which we consecrate.

In reflecting on the relationship between liturgical space and Christian formation, it is important to remember that there is nothing inherently Christian about Gothic architecture or any bus-like architectural structure. Having inherited such buildings, however, it is important to reflect on the power they have to undermine any attempt we might make to build a sense of gathered community, to make known a God who is not just 'beyond' or to create a sense of diversity of ministry within the one Body that is shared and cooperative rather than hieratic and uni-directional.

As I am asked to enter into dialogue with communities who have come to realize that their inherited liturgical space is no longer an adequate expression of who they see themselves to be, there are three areas of self-discovery which seem to surface repeatedly in our discussions. While these are articulated in different ways, they could be reduced to three principles. First, the Body of Christ is a community and not a collection of individuals. Second, the eucharist is the central and constitutive act of Christian worship on the Lord's Day. And, third, the diversity of ministry which is the church must be reflected in the church's liturgical assemblies.

These three areas of self-discovery have serious consequences for the space in which we worship. First, the font must be of a size and character that can bear the richness of the biblical images we experience in baptism and not an ecclesiastical bird bath that cannot fulfill its dual function of both tomb and womb - even for infants. Second, the altar must be sufficiently table-like to remind us that its purpose is the place around which we, as the baptized, gather each week to share the eschatological meal. Finally, the

arrangement of our liturgical space must acknowledge that the liturgy is not a clerical preserve but, rather, the place in which we gather together and celebrate the ministries each of us exercise by virtue of our baptism and that ministries exercised in the liturgical assembly by those who are not ordained - be they reading, leading the prayers of the faithful, distributing communion or whatever - are not being exercised by violating what the building dictates to be clerical space. To leave the question of liturgical space unaddressed is to risk putting the lie to all our other liturgical reforms. The text will constantly be eviscerated.

Conclusion:

The plan and principles for liturgical reform which were set before the Synod of Baltimore in 1852 were, I believe, sensitive to the many of the issues I have been addressing. Schaff's transference of the primary referent of liturgical reform from the reformation liturgies of the XVIc. to those of the patristic church acknowledged that our liturgical prayer is to be informed by the experience of the whole church and not just by the heavily didactic texts of an age in which liturgies were often drafted to act as stern schoolmasters, excoriating perceived theological abuse rather than becoming acts of corporate praise. The very act of liturgical prayer, then, is ecumenical in that engaging in it is to stand in solidarity with the twenty centuries of men, women and children who have gone before us and who have prayed and re-prayed the liturgical texts, each generation making their own particular contribution to that rich heritage.

In the Committee Report in which Schaff and his colleagues proposed that the liturgy¹⁹ would be 'the common property and manual of every member of the Church' and not merely a clerical book, there was an implicit acknowledgment that the liturgical text is a primary instrument of formation in the Christian community. This formation becomes an explicitly ecumenical act when its sources are the liturgical texts of our common past. It is perhaps an even more intentional ecumenical act when that formation is in the context of a liturgy whose shape and texts have been informed by the liturgical scholarship of the recent past which has led to the present ecumenical convergence in liturgy and helped each church to re-discover our common inheritance as well as our denominational distinctiveness. The ecumenical intentionality of the liturgical celebration is, perhaps, crowned when it takes place in spaces which do not transmit messages that only eviscerate the intention of the liturgical texts themselves but also violate the ecumenical consensus on baptism, eucharist and ministry which finds itself expressed in documents such as the WOC Faith and Order 'Lima' Document, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.

There is no doubt in my mind that the celebration of the liturgy is formative in that it is the architect that has set the parameters within which we have been able to name God, to define our own Christian communities, and construct a paradigm within which we are able to engage the world. The character of that formation is an ongoing concern for the church if the liturgy is to provide adequate tools for the faithful in their daily vocation to ministry and mission. One of those tools today is to work quite clearly under the banner of a church that is truly ecumenical: the Body of Christ that is Evangelical, Reformed, Catholic, Apostolic, organic, developmental and connectional. Our liturgical celebrations have the power to help forge that sense of the oecumene; they also have the power to rend it asunder. The fruits are largely of our choosing.

FOOTNOTES

1. Psalm Prayer 53, The Book of Alternative Service of the Anglican Church of Canada [BAS] (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985) p. 772.
2. Psalm Prayer 82, BAS p. 816.
3. Collect for Christmas Day, BAS p. 275.
4. John Payne, "The Essence of Mercersburg Theology" (nd [1991?]) p. 1.
5. Eucharistic Prayer 1, BAS p. 194.
6. Eucharistic Prayer 2, BAS p. 196.
7. "Prayer for the whole state of Christ's Church," Book of Common Prayer [BCP] (1662).
8. BCP (1662). The BCP rubrics order that "the Curate of every Parish shall diligently upon Sundays and Holy-days, after the second Lesson at Evening Prayer, openly in the Church instruct and examine" the children of the parish in some part of the Catechism.
9. Holy Innocents, Collect, BCP. This was the collect for the feast in all editions of the BCP for four hundred years - until the revisions of the last two decades.
10. Holy Innocents, Collect, BAS p. 398.
11. Holy Innocents, Prayer Over the Gifts, BAS p. 398.
12. Psalm Prayer 12, BAS p. 717.
13. Psalm Prayer 72, BAS p. 798.
14. Eucharistic Prayer 4, BAS p. 213.
15. Eucharistic Prayer 3, BAS p. 200.
16. Preface for the Last Sunday After Pentecost: The Reign of Christ, BAS p. 223.
17. Eucharistic Prayer 2, BAS p. 197.
18. Opening Rubrics, Holy Eucharist, BAS p. 183.
19. Schaff, "The New Liturgy" in James Hastings Nichols, Romanticism In American Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) p. 297.

WITH ALL THE SAINTS
ECUMENICAL LITURGICS AND MERCERSBURG THEOLOGY

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Distinguished simply by the title: A Layman, the writer of a 1859 article in the Mercersburg Review wrestled with the ever-gnawing question of Church reunification. Few people would ever doubt the validity of this fundamental Christian calling. Less would ever second-guess the seriousness of our Lord's petition: "That they all may be One." None would dare to justify the Church's scandalous sects and divisions (not in the Mercersburg tradition)! But to actually consider how to go about reversing the cancerous trend! That in itself was another monumental problem.

The "layman" surrounded himself with recently published articles on Church unity. He then attempted to analyze all the proposed solutions contained in them. The answer, he concluded, is not in the proliferation of benevolent societies who cut across denominational lines for the sake of meeting contemporary social needs. Such groups are usually uni-focused. They have neither the breadth nor the base nor the authority to take this kind of lead. The answer is not in a narrow view of Sola Scriptura at the expense of historic doctrines and Creeds. "Bible only" churches splinter the most rapidly for they have no sense of tradition and no common hermeneutic. The answer is not in high-brow scholarly conferences bent on finding compromise theologies. Such mechanical manipulation will never succeed, for the faith of the Church is not mechanical. It is living.²

Then there are those who develop recognized partnerships between denominations in hopes eventually merging, where

the delegate makes his appearance and is admitted to a seat on the floor of the Presbytery or Synod, acts as a quiet observer for a few days and then, in a parting speech, presents the good wishes of his denomination and expresses the great pleasure the visit has given him; while the presiding officer, not to be outdone in fraternal courtesy, fully reciprocates every kind thing that has been said and officially begs that the warmest expression of interest, in the welfare of the sister Church, may be communicated by its representative.³

Such are no more than a string of empty compliments.

Many have looked to the episcopacy as the logical ultimate solution. But the layman believed that the episcopal churches were not especially interested in cooperating. And, the non-episcopal churches would be expected to admit the error of their ways. And, would not all their members need to be re-confirmed if all the clergy were to be re-ordained?

Despite the roadblocks, the layman was still convinced that the broken body of Christ was actually on the mend. Church unity is being manifested, he observed, most efficiently in the current liturgical trends. Barriers break down, hatreds cease, misunderstandings are clarified, and warring factions are brought to peace best when faithful Christians lift up their hearts in

worship. The phenomenon is spontaneous like unto the Pentecost Spirit. Men and women everywhere are yearning to be connected. They are weary of being subjected to an individual pastor's harangues. They are searching for a common form in which they too can express their devotion. They crave a form historically Christian, focused on God's objective power in the Sacrament, exposing the Creed, and yet at the same time specifically adapted for their needs.

To be sure, this is exactly what appeared to be happening in the German Reformed community. It had been two years since the denomination's Provisional Liturgy⁵ had been released. Interest was at an all time high. The sleepy congregations were waking. Shortcomings associated with free worship were surfacing. Debates about the Church's use of prayers were picking up great speed.

Contrary to popular opinion, the Mercersburg theological movement did not initiate the Reformed Church in The United State's interest in liturgy. No one really questioned the fact that the people were heirs to a long and fertile liturgical heritage. It was well known that Bucer, Calvin, Knox, Melancthon, Cranmer, Latimer, A Lasco, and Ridley as well as Ursinus all used fixed forms for worship.⁶ It was also known that the Reformers did not abolish all traditions of the past but rather purified, simplified, and adapted the Mass to suit their specific needs. Even the Puritans originally utilized written forms for worship.⁷ The Reformed Church in the United States also knew that their "Old World" siblings used liturgical forms consistently. The German churches, however, never practiced liturgical uniformity. Each canton was likely to use a different rite.

Circumstances, not choice, therefore, caused these German immigrants to lose their standard Palatinate liturgy. The lack of constitutional independence and funding for nearly half a century precluded a general printing. By the time the coetus was organized, the language issue was already looming and American style free worship was already booming. Church leaders found the lack of an indigenous rite frustrating and the variety of forms in use, confusing. Thus, the synod tried to rectify the situation as early as the 1820s. But, action was delayed until the new church could first establish its seminary.

It is also inaccurate to assume that during this time American churches had abandoned liturgical worship unilaterally. Many had of course, especially in their services of the Word on the average Sunday mornings. But for the rites and the sacraments, most followed something. As late as the 1850s a handful of Pennsylvania clergy still were reportedly using manuscript copies of the old Palatinate rite. Some used the English version of the Dutch translation of the same published in this country. Some followed the forms used by the contemporary Swiss and Germans. Some even adapted the Book of Common Prayer. And, some used the then denominationally approved Mayer liturgy.⁸

Therefore, we can clearly note that the Professors Nevin and Schaff never imposed the idea of liturgical worship onto anybody. In fact, John Williamson Nevin himself had to be coaxed to continue to serve on the Provisional Liturgy committee! What the Mercersburg movement did do, however, (as rightly assessed by Howard Hageman) is articulate a theology of Reformed liturgics. Behind the specific liturgical text, (as beautiful as it is) is an enriched theology of worship. That is the lasting gift. Now our task is to attempt to decipher what that liturgical theology is.

Those who know anything about the Mercersburg movement know that it is in the doctrine of the Incarnation that all theology begins. This is that "economy of grace flowing" into the world "from the historic fact of Christ's birth, death, and glorification."² Directly stemming from that is the doctrine of the Church. For the Church is believed to be the divinely sanctioned continuation of the Incarnation since the time of the Ascension.

In the Church Christ carries forward his divine human life, heals the sick, wakes the dead, takes the young into his arms by baptism, gives believers his atoning flesh and blood to partake of in the Lord's Supper, speaks his word and ministers comfort, peace, and blessing to all that seek his grace, is crucified anew by the hostile world in the persecutions of his people, but still repeats his glorious resurrection and ascension and continues to visit his flock assembled with one accord for prayer with the fullness of light and life by his Holy Spirit.³

Therefore, according to the Nicene Creed, the Church is One Holy Catholic and Apostolic and indeed an article in which we must believe. Directly stemming from this is the doctrine of the Eucharist. Since the Church is the channel of God's grace, it truly mediates Christ's Presence in the sacramental action. It is from the Eucharistic⁴ theology that Hageman believes the Mercersburg theology of worship stems. This is blatantly evident in the Mercersburg tradition. Schaff insists that the Eucharist is "the inmost sanctuary of the whole Christian worship." All of the services of the Church, therefore, sacramental or otherwise, anticipate the mystical transaction.⁵ Let me suggest, however, that in order to understand the liturgical emphasis in the Mercersburg way of worship we must move one more link in the theological progression. The doctrine of the Mystical Presence leads logically to the doctrine of the Mystical Union or to the Creedal article of the communion of saints. It is on this article of faith, I propose that the Mercersburg theology of liturgical worship most directly depends.

What then do we mean by saints in communion? First, (according to the Heidelberg Catechism) that all members of the community of faith share in Christ and in all Christ's gifts. Second, that we are all⁶ responsible to use these benefits so that others may be served and enriched. Basically, then, we are reminded that we are bound together by a common life-giving source. We are all born into Christ. We are all promised eternal bliss. Therefore we already are one in essence. Christians are an organic whole and are not just diverse parts linked together by mutual faith, work, or interest. No one, therefore can isolate oneself in his or her relationship with the divine or from ministerial service.

The Pentecost Spirit which united the first century Christians and sent them forth in mission, is the same Spirit that pours out God's grace to us in the Eucharist. In every generation it generates the same effect. The Mercersburg minds, therefore, could not fathom making any division between members regardless of whether they are living or whether they are dead. T. G. Apple said:

The communion of saints, however, does not only extend in space; it not only overflows the barriers, which national life, spirit, custom, language, and literature have set up to 'make enemies of nations,' and binds together distant nations, people, and tongues

into one family of love; it extends itself also as it regards time. The communion of the Christian is not satisfied with the noisy present, however refreshing and invigorating the living, acting Christianity around him may be. There is a Christian past, that is equally as refreshing to the devout spirit, and hence it seeks communion and fellowship with it.

If we truly believe in the Resurrection, then we must believe that the faithful fathers and mothers who have gone before have never ceased to exist. They still live as members of the family of God. They still draw their strength and comfort from the living Lord, and, they still are employed in the Master's service.¹⁸ They haven't changed their lives. They have merely changed their residence.

How is it possible to think that the martyrs of the past have no interest in the trials of the present? How can it make sense to believe that those who stand around the Throne of the Lamb wouldn't advocate and intercede for us with Him? Who would suggest that those who see God face to face would ever fail to worship? The visible and invisible worlds were unified by Christ in the Incarnation. What reason would we have for trying to arbitrarily separate them?¹⁹

Imagine then how the Mercersburg interpretation of the Communion of Saints and their interpretation of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church might intersect. These two great articles of the Creed are distinct, yet closely related. Held in tandem, Calvin's view of the visible and invisible Church cannot be tolerated. Christ does not have two bodies; one in this world and one in the next! Even Luther's Ecclesiology whereby he claimed that the physical, visible Church is not necessarily related to the invisible, caused Moses Kieffer to moan, "O that such learned men had thought more and written less!"²⁰ The relationship between the spheres is organic. The fact that there are sinners in the earthly community does not deny its purpose any more than criminal behavior²¹ repudiates the role of the State or bad children render family units obsolete.

As the Sacrament is the visible sign and seal of the invisible grace of Christ's Presence, in a similar fashion the liturgy is a visible manifestation of the Communion of Saints. Through the liturgy then, the earthly community sings the songs of the New Jerusalem. It transfers the supernatural praises of the heavenly hosts into a natural setting. It embodies the faith of the past in the form of contemporary adoration.

It is in liturgical worship that the universal Church gives expression to her penitence, her faith, her prayers, and her praises, and through which the individual worshiper feels himself united with the visible and invisible members of the Church of Christ, and with them approaches the throne of God in humility and sorrow to confess his sins; to present to the Lord his prayers and intercessions, his thanks and his praises, and to seek his grace and protection.²²

Liturgical worship, then, has a fourfold dimension. It is first and foremost communication with the Godhead. Therefore it must be Eucharistic. It is also corporate. Therefore it must be ecumenical and responsive. Additionally it is the objective link between Christians both dead and living. Therefore, it must be catholic and historic. And finally it is subjective. Yes, there is a

respect for the individual's subjective spiritual needs in the Mercersburg scheme. But unlike the Anxious Bench methodology, this is not all-encompassing. Better yet, the liturgy most effectively speaks to our individual spiritual needs when we become aware of our place in the sainted community, and when our hopes, fears, joys, and sufferings are brought before the Holy, the Divine, the Objective as an offering.²³

See the richness. The Mercersburg renaissance was destined to find its culmination in a liturgical form of worship. But it did not adopt a liturgy just for the sake of establishing good order either in the parish or in the denomination (as would be the Calvinistic conception). And, they did not propose a standardized form as a kind of anti-heretical protection (as may be found in the Roman tradition). And, they did not merely care about nostalgia or aesthetic appeal (as Nichols may have suggested in his book on Romanticism). And, they did not even seek a liturgical order to be but a tool for the advancement of the cause of Church union (Mr. Layman). While all of these motives may have indeed provided bonus benefits, none of them were the prime Mercersburg focus. When assessing the difference between Mercersburg and the objectives of the past Philip Schaff concluded that Mercersburg gave the liturgical movement a

new impulse and direction and carried it to a practical result that differed very widely from what was originally contemplated. It called attention to the liturgies of the age of the Reformation and of the primitive Catholic Church which had been almost entirely lost sight of in this country, and recommended them as the general basis on which the new work should be constructed. It placed, moreover, the defense of the liturgical service on different grounds. It viewed it not simply in light of convenience, decency, and propriety, but as a sacred bond of union between the different ages of Christ's church, as a guarantee against excesses of arbitrary freedom, as a conservative power in doctrine and discipline, as the organ for the exercise of the general priesthood and as the artistic form which will characterize even the worship of the redeemed in²⁴ heaven as a complete harmony of united thanksgiving and praise.

Thus, the fact that the 1857 Provisional Order and the Order of 1866 used the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, the Catholic Apostolic Liturgy as influenced from the East, as well as the Reformed Palatinate Liturgy as its primary source material is entirely fitting. The committee was ever careful, however, not to just cut and paste. A true liturgy is not a compilation of prayers like the Puritan Directory. A true liturgy shares in the organic principle of the Church. It must be whole, harmonious, and breathe. So, ever so skillfully, Schaff adapted the texts to speak in one consistent contemporary language.

Where do we find this liturgical theology exhibited in the actual texts? In truth it is impossible to escape it. We will not here examine its Eucharistic emphasis. Much work has already been done in this area,²⁵ and the topic is simply too mammoth. Let us assume, if you will, the centrality of the Sacrament and remember its force as the great source of unity and reconciliation. We have also already mentioned the deliberateness with which the worship committees consulted and drew²⁶ from ancient and ecumenical services. This was fundamental to the process.

Opening the book itself, the first thing that might strike us is the high number of corporate responses (especially for this period). To be sure this was one of the issues on which the denomination's thirty year liturgical controversy would pivot. J.H.A. Bomberger called the number of corporate responses excessive. He seems to object merely to the number at first. But when Nevin and Schaff insisted that if one is allowed two, three, a hundred more make little difference, Bomberger then protested against allowing any responses (except for the constitutional questions in Baptism, Confirmation, and Ordination).

The notion of the priesthood of all believers was used on both sides of the argument. The opposition party said that responsive worship must deny the principle of the priesthood of all believers because the Reformers did not practice it. The liturgical committee argued that our common priesthood is here uplifted because through responses all people become active participants. The alternative is worship dominated by professional preaching and music. That's nothing more, than a pulpit show, Nevin said, where the people are dumb spectators at best.²⁷ Liturgy is by its very nature transactional. If people can't take part the action is stifled.²⁸ Since in the liturgy the visible and invisible are held intact, it answers our innate need to be responsive. Earth was intended to be responsive to heaven. The finite was meant to respond to the infinite. Humans can never rest until their hearts throb themselves back into God's bosom: with all the saints.²⁹ The reason no specific Continental Reformation liturgies were able to engraft themselves onto the hearts of their congregations as the Book of Common Prayer did³⁰ in England, Schaff suggests, is precisely because of their lack of responses.

Written prayers are our next piece of evidence. The 1857 Provisional Liturgy uses predominately churchly prayers to be read in the service but makes some room for free prayers as an option. The 1866 Order dropped any provision for free prayer after the controversy got rolling. What happened? In the interim Bomberger and his friends repeated the classic Puritan position that read prayers are not from the heart and block the Holy Spirit's inspiration. Others replied that "Let us Pray" should not mean "I will pray and you will listen."³¹ Printed prayers allow for the people to join in. Repetition need not be boring. Instead, the more familiar the people are with the text, the better prepared they are to worship. Churchly prayers avoid the problem of subjecting defenseless laity to ministerial rantings. And, even our Lord resorted to the forms of the past when he faced his bitter end. Would anyone doubt³² that when he said, "My God, My God..." (Psalm 22) his heart was not in it?

We all know, (and some of us even admit), that read prayers can strike us as the most deadly, dry, and dullest portions of a worship service. This happens, T.G. Apple claimed, when the people are denied access to the texts. Directories of worship which bunch churchly prayers in the back of a book somewhere from which the pastor randomly picks are responsible for this. That is like putting "a liturgical patch in an unliturgical garment." The logic doesn't fit.³³ But, when the prayers are integral to the life of a service, when members recognize their deepest thoughts articulated in classic expression, when we begin to sense ourselves as a part of the universal wave of adoration, when we learn the changeless character of the grace of God and of the misery of the human condition, then we know the glory of corporate prayer. We pray with all the saints.

The restoration of the lectionary and the Church Year is also another Mercersburg contribution. The calendar finally chosen was Charles Shield's Book of Common Prayer lections adapted for the Presbyterian communion, (a book the Presbyterians were not interested in using).³⁴ The Anglican-based readings followed the lectio selecta system instead of the old lectio continua method most prevalent in the Reformed churches.³⁵ This again indicated a trend back to the more catholic traditions.

The necessity of following the churchly cycle was a given for people like Schaff, Higbee, and Nevin. It not only had long historical precedent. It not only unified the churches.³⁶ It not only helped to protect against personalized agenda sermons.³⁷ It not only acted as a "compass or star" in the midst of the storm of doctrinal fads.³⁸ The process centers us on the objective mysteries of grace instead of on our own impulsive seasons of thanksgivings and fasts.³⁹ And, the Church year is even more than a memorial of the story of the Saviour's redemptive acts. By living through the seasons, we are brought into the "proper union that subsists between Christ and his people."³⁹ In the Church year we too experience what all the saints had experienced.

One more word about the Church year in the Mercersburg tradition. Not only did they return the chief festival days and seasons to their fellow Germans, they introduced a modified Sanctoral cycle to them. The Provisional Liturgy includes St. Stephen's Day, St. John's Day and a day for the Holy Innocents as well as the observance of the Lord's circumcision. The cloud of witnesses would not be forgotten.

References to the Communion of Saints can be found specifically in the Mercersburg funeral liturgy, the service for the Consecration of Burial grounds, the intercession for the dead at the end of the Eucharistic prayer, and in the revival of catholic chanting. Also, we should not forget the influence this movement had on congregational singing.

For the past several decades the people were losing their ability to read the mother tongue. Therefore the singing of traditional German hymns became increasing problematic. The first English hymnal, published in 1834, was little more than an imitation of the most popular hymns on the American scene. A few years after the Provisional Liturgy was published, however, we see a surging interest in hymnology.⁴⁰ The best of the German hymns were preserved and songs of praise from all traditions of the faith including the Latin and the Greek were brought together in one place. Schaff, thrilled with the progress his church had made said:

The 23rd, 51st, and 103rd Psalms of David, the hymn of the Virgin Mary, and the Te Deum of the ancient church cannot be read and sung today, without bringing home to us the communion of numberless saints, whom they had edified in past ages and who from the heights of heaven sympathize in the worship of the militant church as she sings and prays.⁴¹

But perhaps the clearest expression of the Mercersburg liturgical emphasis is preserved for us in that part of the Eucharistic prayer which carries us from the Sursum Corda to the Sanctus. This is almost totally an original creation of Philip Schaff. It reads:

It is very meet right and our bounden duty that we should praise thee, sing hymns unto thee, and give thanks unto Thee, the Father

everlasting, Almighty maker of heaven and earth, and unto Jesus Christ the Son of God, Redeemer of the world, and unto the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the spirit of truth and holiness. To thee the heaven and the heaven of heavens sing praise; the sun, the moon, and the stars; the earth and the sea and all that is therein; Jerusalem the heavenly assembly, the Church of the first-born written in heaven; the spirits of just men made perfect; the patriarchs and prophets; the martyrs and apostles; angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers; and the many-eyed cherubim and seraphim before Thy throne, singing with a loud voice the triumphal hymn of Thine exalted glory....

If that doesn't lift you off your feet as you open your mouth to sing "Holy, Holy, Holy..." check your pulse! Make sure you still have a heart beat!

The Mercersburg liturgy could not help but be ecumenical. But, had Nevin and Schaff worried about finding a liturgical form to suit the majority of denominations of the times they would have mimicked Charles Finney. And, had they meant to even unify the German Reformed denomination they would not have removed the 1857 alternative service and free prayer option. First, and foremost they wanted to reverse the trend of using worship for manipulation. Then, they wished to enable us to be aware of the faith's great historic momentum. Finally, they hoped to have us apprehend a bit of the glories of singing God's praise in heaven. Is this not, after all the place true unity begins?

But there was one major monkey wrench in the process. If the Mercersburg fathers meant what they said about the great cloud of witnesses, how could they slight the Palatinate rite (if indeed they did)? How could they ignore the liturgical life of the Reformation (if this is indeed what happened)? Surely Schaff based his entire career on the idea of historic progressivism. Nevin unflinchingly believed that the church is a living organism. While each generation must shape the faith and cultus to make it uniquely their own, it is always based on the past, and can never be inconsistent with the great tradition.

The 1849 synodical decree which got this entire liturgical movement running stated very clearly that the committee "thoroughly examine the various liturgies of the Reformed Churches and other works published on this subject in later times" and to base their work on these.⁴² Never mind the fact that Nevin and Schaff stretched the guidelines beyond their original limits to include the liturgies of the third and fourth centuries. The question still has to be: Was the Mercersburg liturgy inconsistent with those of the saints of its very own Reformed liturgical heritage?

Bomberger obviously thought it was. As early as 1857 he began to object on the grounds that the Provisional services are not in line with the liturgical principles, usages, and devotional genius of the German Reformed Church. This service, he added, repudiates the principles of its past cultus.⁴³ In 1866 he became even more emphatic "I hate this book because it seeks to subvert and sap our foundations," he said.⁴⁴ Jeremiah Good agreed completely with this assessment. When the 1866 liturgy came out he listed fifteen reasons why the synod should withhold endorsement. They all boiled down to the fact that the new liturgy and the Palatinate and other Reformed services didn't match.⁴⁵

Even Nevin and Schaff seem to hedge the question. They were rarely known for backing off from an argument. But, with this specific issue, they seem to lose their confidence. The sixteenth century liturgies can not be the norm for the modern church, Nevin believed, because the times were just not conducive. Neither should the Reformation era be controlling. The 1857 Order is not modeled on the sixteenth century pattern, he admits. Rather it aims to be an improvement.⁴⁶ Overall, Nevin chose to appeal to the catholic tradition for his liturgical justification rather than to cope with Bomberger's criticism.

That approach, however, is still troublesome. For, if the Mercersburg school truly practiced what it preached, then it could not ignore the worship life of Germany. If the Mercersburg school broke with its own tradition so drastically, it weakens its rich theological scheme.

I would like to suggest that the Mercersburg movement was much more in line with the German Reformed way of worship than perhaps even they believed. I will also suggest that Nevin and Schaff, not Bomberger, were the more faithful to the Ursinus heritage. Most of the documentation I have to present was already circulating in the midst of the liturgical controversy. It is especially great because it comes via a Lutheran scholar, (an outsider so to speak), whom we would assume would tend to be more objective. Why it did not yield more influence in the debate, however, I find baffling. Perhaps this is because by 1869, when the paper was published the battle was so actively raging that both sides lost interest in sound reasoning.

It is commonly known that the Palatinate faith was an ecumenical faith from its very beginnings. The Heidelberg Catechism is generally described as a synthesis of Lutheran and Reformed doctrine. The liturgy itself shows traces of Luther, Bucer, Zwingli, A Lasco, even Cranmer, and Calvin. The German Reformed Church had the advantage of coming late to the process of reforming. Therefore Ursinus and committee had the opportunity of learning from all the classic protestant beliefs.

The debate about the heritage actually had little to do with basic theology. Although Bomberger did attempt to suggest that the Palatinate liturgy taught a sacramental memorialism akin to Zwingli, not many persons took that seriously. Nevin asserted that the same theology of the mystical real presence which was present in the catechism was present in the liturgy.

The issue revolved mostly around responsive worship. Bomberger insisted that there were no congregational responses in the Palatinate tradition. Nevin and Schaff said nothing. Dr. C.P. Krauth, however, questioned Bomberger's accuracy. He proposed that the people actually prayed the Lord's Prayer and the Confession, and also spoke the Creed. Krauth chose to take the command, "Say with me" literally. And he felt the instruction to state the faith "with mouth and heart" could mean no other thing.⁴⁷ Congregational responses are also clearly evident in the Preparatory liturgy. Just because congregations were mute in other parts of Germany, Krauth believed, did not mean that the Palatines were not responsive.

There is also absolutely no provision for free prayer in the Palatinate rites. The lack of free prayer in the 1866 liturgy was another of Bomberger's gripes. And, the fact that the tradition followed the Church year cannot be denied because prayers for eight catholic feast days are prescribed.

One of the very few places that the Mercersburg liturgies preserved the Palatinate wording was in the words of Absolution following the confession of sins. This is especially amusing because it was in the Absolution that they were accused of being too priestly and too Roman. The words of the Palatinate rite, however, are stronger in comparison. It reads:

Harken now to the undoubted comfort of the grace of God which he doth promise in His Gospel to all that believe. Thus saith the Lord in the third chapter of John.... Now, as many there be of you, who despair of themselves and their sins, and trust that their debts are completely forgiven...⁴⁸ I proclaim at God's command that they are released in heaven....

All of these points are interesting and merit more investigation. The most intriguing of C.P. Krauth's contributions to the discussion, however, is his reminder of the place of the hymnal in the old German Reformed community. It is a well documented fact that, next to the Bible, the hymnal was cherished.⁴⁹ The hymnal was hardly just a collection of songs for corporate singing. It contained the essential core of the people's faith and devotions. Krauth acknowledges the fact that the Palatinate was a pulpit liturgy (in the sense that the members did not need to have their own copies of the text in order to join in the worship). But, he claims, the hymnal is the complementary text for the laity. Look at what is found in the Marburg printing.⁵⁰

The hymns are arranged according to the church year
The Psalter is printed separately
A table lists the proper Psalm for each Sunday
Psalms are translated literally
The Latin names like Jubilate and Cantate are retained
(this leads Krauth to suggest that they may have been
used as Introits or Graduals in the liturgy)⁵¹
The first hymn is Komm Heiliger Geist (or Veni Sancte
Spiritus) used at the opening of the mass
Other chants include the Gloria in Excelsis, the collect for
peace, Gregory the Great's sequence, the Apostle's and
Nicene Creeds, the German Sanctus, the Agnus Dei, three
versions of the Magnificat, and the Nunc Dimittis
The Te Deum is printed for responsive singing
The Decalogue is included with responsive Kyries
No. 481 is a fully responsive litany

Krauth points out that if the Te Deum or the Litany are used in a service on a Sunday the Old German Reformed would have more place for participation than in the controversial Mercersburg liturgy.⁵² All of these forms would not have existed in the hymnbooks if they were not utilized in worship!

The thought is exhilarating! But my research is just beginning. I do not know how far back these forms can be traced (certainly not to the 1560s). However, Krauth did claim that the lectionary was used in the 1580s. The Lectionary in the Marburg hymnal is stunningly similar to the Book of Common Prayer table adopted by the Mercersburg committee! Lectio Selecta. It includes the Latin Incipits for the Sundays in the lenten season, and observes all eleven Apostolic days, the conversion of Paul, the Purification and Annunciation of the Virgin, the Visitation of Elizabeth, and Michael the Archangel's day. Readings from the deuterocanonical books can also be seen.

The German Reformed tradition appears to be consistently ecumenical, liturgical and catholic. Krauth concludes that the 1866 liturgy is genuinely the German Reformed Book of worship, (even if they were in the tradition inadvertently). Either way, there is an awesome power in knowing that when we sing the Sanctus, we sing with the Cherubim, and Seraphim, we sing with apostles and martyrs, we sing with Hilda and Leo, we sing with Ursinus and the Reformers. When we sing that Holy anthem, we commune with Nevin and Schaff and countless men and women of the church of today and of every age. When we sing, we sing the Lord's praise, with all the saints.

Footnotes

1. Layman, "Christian Union and the Liturgical Tendencies of the Time" (The Mercersburg Review, 1859) p. 510.
2. Ibid. p. 515.
3. Ibid. p. 517.
4. Ibid. p. 533.
5. A Liturgy: or. Order of Christian Worship Prepared and published by the direction and for the use of the German Reformed Church in the United States of America. (Lindsay and Blakiston, Phila. 1858).
6. Schaff, Philip "The New Liturgy" (The Mercersburg Review 1858, p. 202).
7. It was only when the Lauds tried to push the Book of Common Prayer down their throats, that they began to react against all forms so vehemently. Schaff p. 211. For liturgical forms, see the Middleburg or Waldegrave Liturgies (1586), the Savoy Liturgy (1661) and the Westminster Directory (1644).
8. Ibid. p. 205.
9. Ibid. p. 214.
10. Howard Hageman, Pulpit and Table (John Knox Press, Richmond, 1962) p. 92.
11. An Order of Worship for the Reformed Church (S.R. Fisher and Co. Phila. 1867).
12. John Williamson Nevin, "Theology of the New Liturgy" (The Mercersburg Review) 1867, p. 43.
13. Nathan D. Mitchell Church Eucharist and Liturgical Reform at Mercersburg 1843-1857 (A Dissertation, Department of Theology, Notre Dame 1978) p. 166.
14. Hageman, p. 93.
15. Scott, Francis Brenner "Philip Schaff the Liturgist" (Christendom Autumn 1946) p. 456.
16. Heidelberg Catechism, Question # 55.
17. T.G. Apple, "The Communion of Saints" (The Mercersburg Review, 1853) p. 335.
18. Ibid. p. 339-340.
19. Ibid. p. 340.

20. Moses Kieffer, "The True Idea of the Christian Ritual" (The Mercersburg Review 1872) p. 399.
 21. Ibid. p. 407.
 22. John S. Kessler "Liturgical Worship" (The Mercersburg Review 1861) p. 403.
 23. Kieffer, p. 406.
 24. Schaff, "The New Liturgy" p. 208.
 25. See the works of Jack Maxwell, Nathan Mitchell, and the article "Philip Schaff the Liturgist" by Scott Brenner, for instance.
 26. Schaff reported that his committee "Sat many a day praying, writing, consulting together, criticizing, examining, and pondering over Bibles, concordances, Liturgies old and new, from the Clementine down to the Irvingite, and 'over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore.' "The New Liturgy," p. 222.
- Maxwell lists the texts consulted as the liturgies of St. James, Mark, Gelasian, Leonine, English Occasional Service, Ebrard, Luther, 1785 Kirchen Buch - Evangelical Kirchen, Daniel's Codex Liturgica, Renaudot's Liturgica Oriental, Bunsen, Ex libro Thomas Hughes, Liturgy of Neuschatel, Leo Jud, Swiss, Hessian, Prussian, Schaufhausen, Bern St. Gall, Biel, Basel, Geneva, Zurich, Palatinate, Book of Common Prayer, Liturgy of the Catholic Apostolic Church - Maxwell, p. 200.
27. Luther, Binkley, The Mercersburg Theology (Sentinel Printing House, Manheim, PA 1953) p. 103.
 28. Mitchell, p. 536.
 29. John I. Swander, The Mercersburg Theology (Reformed Church Publication House, Phila. 1909) p. 266.
 30. Schaff, "The New Liturgy" p. 204.
 31. Layman, "Christian Union" p. 534.
 32. Kessler, p. 411.
 33. T.G. Apple "The Western Liturgy" (The Mercersburg Review 1871) p. 99.
 34. Charles W. Shields, The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church as Amended by the Presbyterian Divines in the Royal Commission of 1661 and in Agreement with the Directory for Public Worship of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Charles Schribner and Sons, New York, 1864).
 35. Maxwell, p. 397.
 36. Kessler, p. 414.

37. Layman, "The Calendar, Civil and Ecclesiastical" (The Mercersburg Review, 1858) p. 264.
38. E.E. Higbee, "The Pericopes, or Selections of Gospels and Epistles for the Church Year II" (The Mercersburg Review 1870) p. 278.
39. Mitchell P. 535.
40. See Steiner and Schwing, Cantate Domino 1859, Schaff's Deutsches Gesangbuch, 1859, Harbaugh's Hymns and Chants, 1861, Services for Church Festivals 1871, and Higbee's Hymns for the Reformed Church, 1874 for the hymnals with the Mercersburg influence.
41. Schaff "German Hymnology" (The Mercersburg Review 1860) p. 230.
42. Mitchell p. 404.
43. Maxwell, p. 279.
44. Ibid. p. 302.
45. Ibid. p. 300.
46. Maxwell, p. 275.
47. C.P. Krauth, "The Liturgical Movement in the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches" (The Mercersburg Review 1869), p. 621.
48. See Bard Thompson, "The Palatinate Liturgy" (Theology and Life Spring 1963), p. 51.
49. Schaff, "German Hymnology" p. 231.
50. A Copy of the Marburg Hymnal for the Reformed Church in Germany can be found at the Mennonite Historical Society archives in Harleysville, Pennsylvania. It is entitled Neu-Vermeehrt und Vollsnadiges Gesangbuch (Marburg 1752). This was the most popular of hymnals brought from the old world into this country. Printer Christopher Saur reprinted it for use in America. It was used almost exclusively until 1797. The Agenda section, however, was deleted.
51. Krauth, p. 619.
52. Krauth, p. 622.

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MERCERSBURG AND OLD FIRST

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Those of you here just for the Convocation are no doubt aware of the symbolic importance of your presence; those of us from Old First have been informed by our pastor of the significance of the occasion. As I pondered that significance I was amused to read the description of Old First on the flyer announcing this convocation: it mentions the arrival of the German founders in 1727, their organization into a congregation by George Michael Weiss, and the heroic pastorate of Casper Weyberg during the War for Independence. It then jumps from the 1770s to the 1960s, when the congregation returned from its sojourns in North and West Philadelphia and restored the third meeting house of 1837 as you see it now. I know, of course, that you simply borrowed this information from a local historical guidebook, and these are major events in Old First's history, so I'm absolutely certain that it's just a coincidence that the middle period of our history, overlooked in this description, just happens to be the period during which this congregation was a center of opposition to the ideas of professors Nevin and Schaff. Not only did the pastors and people of Old First not jump on the Mercersburg bandwagon, but they did everything they could to detain and even dismantle that wagon, punishing its devious and disloyal passengers and--with any luck--driving them out of town altogether (so to speak). This failure to mention the period during which your host congregation consisted of such misguided and inhospitable folk is, no doubt, simply a coincidence. Or perhaps you're just very polite.

In any case, if this congregation still trod the "old paths" of pastor Joseph Berg, if the "Old Reformed" spirit of pastor John Bomberger still reigned here, perhaps you would not be so welcomed. (Although even John Nevin was here, as late as 1863, for the tercentenary celebration of the Heidelberg catechism, and stayed with Bomberger, who had not yet quite lost the Mercersburg spirit.) But it has been a long while since Berg moved on to the Dutch Reformed Church, and Bomberger to Ursinus College. Even their later successor David Van Horne has been gone for over a century. Van Horne became pastor of Old First in 1875, published a history of the congregation in 1876, and was the "low church" president of the General Synod at Lancaster in 1878--the General Synod that removed the cross from the altar while it met, sponsored the first prayer meetings during a synod, and produced the peace commission designed to heal the liturgical schism. Van Horne also² oversaw the move of Old First from Race Street to North Philadelphia in 1882. In 1888 he left Philadelphia to teach systematic theology at Heidelberg Theological Seminary in Tiffin, Ohio, and became the first president of the new Central Seminary in Dayton, created³ by the merger of Heidelberg and--surprise!--the Ursinus Theological School. All three of these Mercersburg opponents are now, one hopes, in that state of eternal grace in which they have been enabled to finally appreciate "accurately" Mercersburg and its theologians. Be that as it may, their spirits must now fend for themselves; they are an integral part of our past but do not constrain our present attitudes. You met at Ursinus two years ago, and we are more than willing to help you lay some more ghosts to rest here.

So let me add to the welcome you have already received, the greeting of Old First's History Committee. This Committee is at present in a rather peculiar position. Though our first church was built on this spot in 1747, we have moved about a bit since then, and our archives are in the same condition as the collected mementos of a family that moves from house to house too often to ever quite get around to unpacking and shifting through "all that stuff" in the attic or cellar. And like that family, we have been quite good at dragging the "stuff" around with us, and guarding it, but not so good at properly caring for or using it. So here we have a two-hundred-and-sixty-four-year-old congregation with at least two hundred years' worth of accumulated paper and knickknacks, and a year-old committee of amateur archivists not quite sure what to do with it all.

We have started wading in, we hope with appropriate care and caution, and with the expert advice of UCC Archivist Kay Schellhase. On the one hand, we have begun sorting and preserving our valuable records. On the other, we have also already had to begin using them: to provide information on our church building at 50th and Locust Street to the black Baptist congregation now occupying it, and to determine the historical value of the burial vaults built next to this church in 1837, later used as storage when the building became a paint factory, and now in desperate need of repair.

In the course of the vault project, the volunteer historians of our committee have become acquainted with both the drudgery and the higher pleasures of delving into manuscript sources. In the middle of the minutes of seemingly endless nineteenth-century Board of Corporation meetings—at least as boring as modern ones—they came upon intriguing or moving stories: an angry mob protesting the removal of bodies from our old burial ground once we lost it to the city to become Franklin Square; police searches for the sexton who mysteriously disappeared one day in 1830s; the investigation into the moral character of the young female domestic servant, a member of the congregation, accused by her employer of pocketing silverware; the causes of death of church members buried in the church's grounds and vaults, ranging from a frightening number of childhood ailments, to the sad case of the seventeen-year-old boy who died "from the passing of a wagon wheel over the head," to the venerable pillar of the church removed from this life by "a visitation of God" (an unknown cause that entitled him to free interment in the congregational vault). And then there was the historic occasion the History Committee jokes about reenacting: the emptying of those vaults in 1881, when church members gathered to try to identify unclaimed remains and, upon deciding that they'd done their best, pack up the rest to be reinterred in West Laurel Hill Cemetery.

Among our edifying discoveries were episodes involving congregational leaders' conflicts with Pastor Berg, as well as bold proclamations by the congregation of its support for its pastor and its unrepentant anti-Mercersburg stance. I have also since scanned the records of Bomberger's pastorate. In the time remaining let me say a bit about the way in which the arch-nemeses of Mercersburg, Old First pastors Berg and Bomberger, appear, not from a Mercersburg perspective, but from the perspective of the Christian congregation they served in this place.

Actually, you have come here a year or two too early. As yet we have uncovered no hidden trove of treasures for either man, no secret personal papers or previously unknown manuscripts. In fact, even relatively few of

their published works--copies of which they must have donated to the church--remain in our possession, and more of Berg's than Bomberger's (unless we haven't opened that box yet; we were given a copy of the Synod Liturgy Committee's new liturgy, in thanks for letting them meet here in 1857, but we can't seem to put our hands on it right now.⁴ Our material from the colonial period has that antiquarian aura, of course, that the nineteenth-century material lacks for most normal people. More needs to be done on Berg, but from my quick and impressionistic survey it seems that Bomberger's followers and biographers made competent use of what we have. That may be because they got at the material while it was still relatively organized and accessible. By way of contrast, Charles Finney's impact on Old First--an important piece of the background to our opposition to Mercersburg--was ignored by his early biographers, leaving it to Keith Hardman--professor at (coincidence!) Ursinus College--to point out in his recent biography of Finney. Last summer, while doing further research in our archives, Professor Hardman both helped us begin sorting our material, and made us aware of the connection between Finney's preaching at Old First for much of 1828 and changes in our congregation. Finney saw the church as one of the largest auditoriums in Philadelphia (this was the second meeting house of 1774, dismantled in 1837 and some of the materials used to build the church in which you now sit, further back from Race Street than the old one to escape the noise of carriage wheels on cobblestones). Jacob Helffenstein (son of the pastor at the time, later pastor in Germantown, then a New School Presbyterian, and one of Finney's co-workers in New York City), attributed Finney's use of the building to the desire of some church members for services in the English language.⁵ In fact, within two years of Finney's activities here Old First moved from mixed German and English services to the exclusive use of English, and Samuel Helffenstein resigned after thirty years as pastor, his son attributing congregational dissatisfaction with him to "the contrast between the preaching of the powerful revivalist, and the plain presentation of Gospel truth, by his father, who was then far advanced in years" (Helffenstein was fifty-three and Finney thirty-six in 1828).⁶ The next full-time pastor was, significantly, a Presbyterian who preached only in English (William T. Sprole, 1832-7). Clearly evident by 1830, these developments--openness to revivalistic evangelicalism and the Americanization that led to the abandonment of German--help explain Old First's subsequent willingness to call and support pastors hostile to the viewpoints of Professors Nevin and Schaff.

What memorabilia related to Berg and Bomberger we do have, and some key publications borrowed from various libraries, are on display out in the narthex.

What impressions do we get of pastors Berg and Bomberger from the "stuff" in--both literally and figuratively--Old First's basement?

When the Presbyterian, William T. Sprole, resigned as pastor in 1837, Old First called to its pulpit Joseph Frederick Berg. Berg, the son of Moravian missionaries on Antigua and theologically trained in the Moravian tradition, had been a chemistry professor in Nazareth, was ordained in 1836 to take the Reformed parish in Harrisburg but remained only briefly, and was teaching classical languages at Marshall College in Mercersburg when Old First called him. He had found his niche.

Berg's "warm-hearted"--as in "evangelical"--preaching soon had new members flocking to the attractive new church building. In 1839, while the Eastern Synod of the German Reformed Church was meeting here, Berg preached (and then

published in a book entitled Christian Landmarks) a sermon on "The Ancient Land-Mark." In a bit of creative reading of the data, Berg claimed that when the Lutherans left a house jointly used for worship with the Reformed congregation in 1739, Old First had its first "church building"--making 1839 the centenary anniversary of the "organization" of the Race Street Church. He moved through a discourse on Old First's history to quote Proverbs 22:28, "remove not the ancient land-mark, which thy fathers have set," and to express the "landmark" approach to Christian and Protestant history that would be so prominent in his quarrel with Mercersburg.

"As a denomination we have our landmarks, and there is one old standard, which is pre-eminently 'the ancient land-mark, which our fathers have set.' I mean the compend of Christian doctrine, known familiarly as the Heidelberg Catechism. Remove not that ancient land-mark. This is an age of religious speculation. It is a time when good men and old men and wise men need to be on their guard, as well as the less experienced and more youthful stewards of the mysteries of God. There is scarcely one among the cardinal doctrines of the Christian religion which has not undergone, or is not now undergoing a process of smelting and refining, which has in very many instances resulted prejudicially to the cause of truth and righteousness--for some luckless alchemists have refined away the gold, and kept nothing but the dross in their crucible."⁸

The "alchemists" condemned in the rest of the sermon are mainly various strains of religious liberals (Unitarians, free-thinkers, and the like) who deny human depravity or the need for propitiation for sin, but include as well anyone who waters down the traditionally high Reformed standards for admission to church membership--a complaint both reminiscent of traditional evangelical attacks on "unconverted" clergy and Christians, and indicative of the imminent assault on the more inclusive, communal, and nurture-oriented ecclesiology of Mercersburg. The evangelical tone of Berg's preaching is epitomized in the dedication of his sermon: "To the congregation worshiping in the Reformed Church on Race Street, these pages are affectionately inscribed, with the heart's desire and prayer of the author for them all, that they may be saved" [my emphasis].

In the early 1840s Berg made himself, and his church, well-known in Philadelphia and among contemporary Protestants and later historians as a strident nativist enemy of Roman Catholicism.⁹ No references to his numerous published assaults on "popery" or his anti-Catholic periodical, The Protestant Banner, appear in official church records, but we can safely assume that most of his parishioners shared his sentiments and approved of his efforts.

Well-known to students of Mercersburg is the fact that as retiring president of the Eastern Synod in 1844, Berg delivered a sermon to the Synod in Allentown on "The Old Paths; or, A Sketch of the Order and Discipline of the Reformed Church, Before the Reformation," in which he read Catholicism out of Christian history and traced "true" (Protestant) Christianity straight back from the Reformation, through minority movements like the Waldensians, to the early church. And, of course, a week later the adjourned synod heard the newly arrived Philip Schaff express an "organic" view of Christian history appreciative of the Catholic tradition and radically at odds with Berg's vision of "static orthodoxy."¹⁰

Berg dedicated the expanded published version of Old Paths to the elders, deacons, and members of Old First, "as a token of respect and gratitude for

their devotion to Protestant truth," and his congregation did not disappoint him. When the opening battle of the Mercersburg controversy--the 1845 attempt of the Philadelphia classis, led by Berg, to discipline Schaff--ended with Schaff exonerated, the classis censured, and Berg frustrated, a special congregational meeting in January of 1846 passed resolutions supportive of the pastor. Later revised and recorded by the Corporation, these resolutions bemoaned the "alarming innovations" agitating the Reformed Church and impairing its peace, harmony, and purity; denounced Schaff's Principle of Protestantism and the Synod's approval of it; and rejected the "theory" of the spiritual real presence and the value of "tradition" as a guide to truth. The congregation declared their determination to continue walking in "the old paths," guided by the scriptural "landmarks" of their fathers, and resisting the encroachments of "modern theology." After speaking in Berg's vocabulary they also spoke of him: "Resolved, that we highly approve, and commend, the decided stand taken by our esteemed Pastor... in resisting the encroachments of error; believing his course to have been dictated by a conscientious regard to the purity of our faith, and a desire to maintain, inviolate, the standards of the Church; and that we will sustain and uphold him in all similar efforts referred to...."¹²

Despite this support, all was not always harmonious on the home front. We know from Mercersburg history that Berg was an aggressive individual with strongly-held beliefs, and the Corporation Minutes reveal that leaders of his own congregation occasionally found him hard to live with.

In January of 1845, as Berg prepared to challenge Schaff, he explained to the Corporation of his parish his two reasons for objecting to installing Charles Nagle as a deacon. One reason was Nagle's apparent slander of church members involved in the 1839 centenary celebrations, but Berg gave no details and it's not yet clear to me what that was about. The other reason was that Nagle "has for some time been engaged in a course of calumny and detraction aimed principally at me as the pastor of the church with which he has been officially connected."¹³ Berg recited the assorted nasty things Nagle had said about him, including the assertion that the pastor had lied to avoiding spending time with him (Berg claimed he could not visit with Nagle because his horse was too restless to wait, but then the horse is seen waiting quite patiently, all afternoon, outside of someone else's home).

That this conflict was not trivial, but was related to Berg's personality, his understanding of the role and authority of the Reformed pastor, and his evangelical moralism, is evident from the other complaints Nagle was alleged to have made: First, in Berg's words, "that whilst preaching against the violation of the Lord's day, I am in the habit of desecrating the Sabbath myself." Second, "the declaration that I am a hireling, and that had he been present when I preached a certain sermon in the course of which I ventured to affirm that I was not a hireling, he would have risen up in his place to contradict me." Third, "the assertion that his labors as Secretary of the Corporation were more arduous and laborious than mine are as pastor of the church, etc., in short implying indolence and gross unfaithfulness on my part." And, finally, "his tacit uniting with David Weidner [another deacon and Corporation member] in asserting that the jurisdiction of the classis of Philadelphia is not binding on our church in as much as said Classis is made up of horse thieves."

The Board heard the sworn testimony of the witnesses from whom Berg had heard these things, only to find it rather confused and the evidence against Nagle

mostly circumstantial, although one witness did add the detail of Nagle muttering that Berg preached old sermons, and might fool others about that but not Charlie Nagle. The Board ultimately decided that Nagle was not guilty of any malicious intention to injure Mr. Berg, yet had been "imprudent in some of his expressions," and they recommended that he express his regret to Berg. Nagle meekly accepted the reprimand and seems to have had no further conflicts with the pastor.

There is an interesting footnote to this story, however. Two months later, David Weidner, the deacon implicated in Nagle's libel about the classis being a bunch of horse thieves, was before the Board himself, on charges of "threatening to inflict personal violence on George Nagle with a cow-hide," "employing abusive language against John Alburger" (another pillar of the church), and "circulating a false report respecting our Choir to the manifest injury of the Church." It seems that Weidner had been spreading rumors that the church choir was the subject of local scandalous gossip, and when warned by Nagle "that he had better be careful how he circulates such reports if even they were true, for they would injure the Choir; he answered that Nagle was making mischief and that he would whip the little Devil." Reproved by Pastor Berg for threatening to cowhide his colleague, the deacon replied "that he thought that the shortest way to settle with such fellows." Weidner had earlier refused to abstain from voting on Nagle's case, even though he himself was implicated in it, and had allegedly said, when warned he would be held accountable for the rumors about the choir, that "he did not care for the Board, that they could do nothing, and that if he were brought before them, he would have some fun." Nagle had gotten in trouble for appearing to be amused by and agreeing with things Weidner said about the pastor and the classis, and getting caught may have motivated him to make sure that Weidner was punished as well. Weidner was suspended as deacon and denied communion for six months, but he remained unrepentant and was finally removed from the Board of Corporation as well as the diaconate.¹⁴

Entertaining reading this--pious and proper German-American burghers bad-mouthing their pastor and each other behind their backs and then exchanging threats of physical violence, embarrassing exposure, and righteous punishment. Yet we also learn some things about Joseph Berg: He believed in publicly and formally defending himself by accusing church members of misdoings; some members thought--and were willing to tell others--he was not giving his church the attention it deserved, in terms of effort and new sermons, perhaps--might we guess?--because he was so involved in pushing the "horse thieves" of the classis to go after Schaff. But Berg was also able to deal successfully with this challenge to him as pastor--Nagle was brought into line, the troublesome Weidner removed from positions of authority, and the congregation and corporation stood behind him throughout the coming struggle.

Little indication of the congregation's feelings when Berg gave up the struggle--in the German Reformed Church--and left for the pastorate of the resuscitated Second Dutch Reformed Church of Philadelphia in 1852, appear in the official records. Berg publicized his reasons by printing his farewell sermon, and the reaction of the Philadelphia classis is described at length by Reformed historians.¹⁵ There is evidence in Old First records of the problems created by the sudden decline in membership following the departure of Berg's closest supporters (Bomberger later stated that "only a small number of members remained in the church and they were stunned, paralyzed and tempted to despair."¹⁶ In nominating a new pastor the Board referred to the congregation's loyalty to the Heidelberg Catechism, its status as the first

German Reformed church in America (an honor claimed by numerous congregations in eastern Pennsylvania), and the desirability of having a pastor who had been at all times associated with the German Reformed Church.¹⁷ "Having," as the Board said, "successfully surmounted all trials and difficulties that has marked events in her history," Old First would muddle through once again.

The leaders of the congregation obviously intended for Old First to retain its role as a "flagship" parish of the German Reformed Church, because they approached--unsuccessfully--the prominent pastors Elias Heiner of Baltimore and then John Bomberger of Easton. Samuel Reid served briefly, and was praised, when he resigned because of ill health in 1854, for helping the church recover from difficult times and grow in size.¹⁸ This time Bomberger agreed to come, and Old First's era of frequent controversy and schism--just its first 127 years--seems to have come to an end.

When he came to Philadelphia Bomberger was on good terms with the professors at Mercersburg, where he had studied before they arrived. In the 1840s he had defended them against, ironically, the criticisms of Joseph Berg. But then in the early 1860s his growing reservations about the direction liturgical reform was taking led him to question its proponents and expose himself to their censure. Perhaps it was, as some loudly claimed, merely frustrated personal ambition that led Bomberger to help create Ursinus College and seminary as an institutional base,¹⁹ after a Mercersburg post he felt he deserved went to Henry Harbaugh instead. Be that as it may, John Bomberger was good for Old First.

Pastor Bomberger talked to the Board about his goals for the church in a way none of the earlier pastors seemed to have. He organized a canvass of the neighborhood and supervised a steady influx of new members. He revitalized the consistory as a spiritual council, separate from the Board of Corporation and presided over by the pastor, and in its minutes, in contrast to the previously dry and legalistic church records we now find comments such as "a general conversation was... had concerning the great work of saving souls. May God bless us."²⁰ Personally involved in numerous outreach, reform, and evangelical ecumenical movements, Bomberger implemented at Old First a "systematic benevolence" program to encourage contributions to charitable causes.²¹ He engineered the celebration of the tercentenary anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism, held at Old First in 1863, and exploited its publicity to attract some of the donations and endowments that gave the church--for one of the few times in its history--a reputation as "the gold mine of the Reformed Church" (no longer the case).²² Old First also became the "mother church" of new Reformed congregations in the city not, for a change, as a result of unpleasant schisms, but because Bomberger pursued an active program of church extension through Sunday schools, satellite congregations, and support for what we would call new church starts. In fact, in Bomberger's ministry one can see a concern for evangelism, personal piety, church growth, and community outreach and service--and a self-conscious interaction with the church's local urban environment--which seems strangely familiar to those who have been part of Old First since the 1960s. If we had known our history better, we might have said of pastors Dahler Hayes and Geneva Butz when they arrived, "ah, here are the Bombergers of our day!"

In short, John Bomberger apparently gave the congregation no reason to complain that he was neglecting them. While participating in denominational committees, publishing extensively--in debate with Nevin--on the liturgy, and engaging in such projects as the anathematized Meyerstown Convention of 1867, he also had time to give the people of Old First the pastoring they needed and

appreciated. His departure for the "broader fields of labor" at Ursinus in 1870 was graciously--and proudly--accepted by the congregation as necessary and appropriate.

Bomberger is known in the context of the Mercersburg controversy as a liturgical theologian. Let me conclude with two incidents that demonstrate that he dealt with liturgical issues as a pastor as well as a theologian and denominational politician. The first is recorded in the minutes of the consistory meeting of March 20, 1855, in Bomberger's first year as pastor. As usual, he presided over the meeting, and asked for "mutual consultation and advice with reference to matters connected with the public worship and spiritual interests of the congregation." Three elders "expressed their strong disapprobation of the modern fashionable practice of sitting during prayer, as a position unbecoming and irreverent." But do not assume, if you are accustomed to thinking in Mercersburg terms, that they had kneeling in mind as an alternative. The Board resolved to request the pastor "to make an early opportunity of directing attention to this matter and urging the propriety of general compliance with the prevailing custom of our church of Standing in Prayer."²³

The second, and my final, story strikes this historian--if not you students of liturgy--as saying a great deal about the way in which important liturgical changes are really made.

In a centenary volume dedicated to Bomberger and published by Ursinus College in 1917, Edgar Appenzellar, then pastor here, describes Bomberger's ministry at Old First. In the process, we are told of the church's long-standing anxiety to keep congregational involvement in the worship service to a minimum, lest "high church" tendencies creep in without warning.²⁴ The Consistory minutes give us an example: In May of 1861, as he was moving away from Mercersburg on the liturgy, the pastor asked the consistory for opinions on a "responsorial liturgical service," and was told quite clearly that the majority of the congregation did not favor such a service at that time.²⁵

Appenzellar suggests that the "Old Reformed" desire to hold to the "ancient landmarks"--and stay away from the chancel area--affected the Lord's Supper as well. "For more than a century the congregation adhered to the old custom, brought over from the home of the Reformation by the church fathers, of partaking of the Holy Communion while seated about tables prepared for that purpose. Long tables were placed in the spacious aisles of the church, the members sitting upon benches placed along the tables, and all partaking of the Lord's Supper at the same time. This custom was changed under Dr. Bomberger. The people expressed their preference of coming forward in groups to the chancel rails."²⁶

Why this sudden change, we ask? Evangelical preference for "hitting the sawdust trail" as an individual act of commitment? "High-church" desire to approach the altar? We look to the archives, and find that in August of 1862 the Board of Corporation, "after a free interchange of opinion as to the propriety of changing our present mode of celebrating the Lord's Supper," tossed the sticky issue to the consistory. This body, "after a mutual exchange of views, and the due consideration of the subject," resolved that "in view of the great inconvenience of the present mode of celebrating the Lord's Supper by the communicants sitting at tables in the aisles, and of the propriety and desirableness of conforming to the prevailing practice of our Church, in our way of taking the Lord's Supper, we recommend the restoration

of the old custom of coming out and receiving the communion by standing around the altar or Communion table."²⁷ "Conforming to the prevailing practice of the church" sounds conciliatory enough, until we realize that sitting at tables was one of the "prevailing" ways of taking communion, so this "reason" doesn't really tell us much. Likewise, the orthodox sounding "restoration of the old custom" is simply a smokescreen, conjuring with the magic words "restoration" and "old custom." We might never be able to guess what was really going on here, had not that wonderful carrier of history, oral tradition, provided us with at least one possible explanation. "It is said," the Reverend Mr. Appenzellar reports portentously, and I leave you with what "was said"--an image of John H. Bomberger the liturgical theologian at work, an image of the interaction of religion and culture, theology and fashion, gospel and gender ideology, liturgy and life. "It is said," we are told, "that the worthy dominie was led to press for a change of this time-honored custom because of the importunities of the female members of the congregation who contended that they were greatly hampered for room in moving about with ease and grace from their narrow pew to their places at the tables. We can only imagine what a difficult task confronted the aforesaid ladies, who were required, if they would conform to the dictates of Dame Fashion, to come to the house of God arrayed in hoop skirts that usually measured four yards around the bottom."²⁸ So much for either Scripture or venerable church traditions, for the "old paths" or Mercersburg.

May your time together in Philadelphia be enjoyable and beneficial--and your theologizing a little more profound than that--and may your visit here be a blessing to us all.

Footnotes

1. Edgar R. Appenzellar, "The Pastorate in Philadelphia," John H. A. Bomberger: Centenary Volume (Ursinus College, 1917), 90.
2. James I. Good, History of the Reformed Church in the United States (New York: The Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1911), 578-580.
3. 1947 Old First History, [6]; Charles Schaeffer, History of the Classis of Philadelphia (Published by the Classis, 1944), 98.
4. Minutes of the Board of Corporation of Old First Reformed Church, Nov. 30, 1857, 383. Philip Schaff provided a positive description of the process of the Liturgy Committee meeting in various churches, including Old First, in the Mercersburg Review, 1858, 222.
5. David Van Horne, A History of the Reformed Church in Philadelphia (Phila.: Reformed Church Publication Board, 1876), 71-2. On Jacob Helffenstein and Finney. See Keith J. Hardman, Charles Grandison Finney 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer (Syracuse University Press, 1987), 259.
6. Van Horne, Old First, 71. See also Hardman, Finney, 169-70.
7. Joseph F. Berg, "The Ancient Land-Mark," in Christian Landmarks (Phila. 1840), 7.
8. Ibid., 25-6.
9. See Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860 (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964), 170, 255, 291-2, 352.
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THIS MAY SOUND MYSTICAL, BUT ... : A SERMON

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Tests - Zachariah 8:1-8, 16-17; Psalm 68:15-20;
Ephesians 4:4-6; John 10:11-16

The letter of St. Paul to the church in Ephesus, the fourth chapter, the fourth to the sixth verse, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all."

It is an honor and a privilege to be here. I'll go so far as to say inspiring. To think, I'm in the company of people like Chuck Yriogen, Howard Paine, Lyle Weible, and a marvelous lady preacher named Linda Gruber, whose sermon "Drop Kick Me Jesus Through the Goal Post of Life" still delights my memory of Mercersburg meetings. I shall not soon forget that particular conference as it continues to inform my critique of New Revivalism. A double pleasure because my father was able to attend with me.

We have consistently heard profound and inspired words here.

As I considered this star-studded cast, I was at once humbled and impressed by how many of these Mercersburg sermons I could recall, and how much they've influenced my experience of our catholic faith.

In fact, they seem in stark contrast to a bit of homiletic wisdom from one I've seldom found wrong in these matters. Dr. Howard Hageman is another esteemed Mercersburg preacher. (I would add that special prayers should be said on his behalf tonight, as he's not recovering at all well from surgery.) But each year, Dr. Hageman would tell his seminary preaching class that he couldn't remember a good sermon. Likewise, he couldn't forget a bad one.

Well, if that's the case, here's hoping that come tomorrow morning all your memories of this evening will be vague. But perhaps two things might remain: A text, and a reference.

The text is Ephesians 4:4-6. The reference is to a sermon preached on August 8, 1844, by one John W. Nevin, at the Triennial Convention of the combined Dutch and German Reformed Churches. The place was Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Nor is it by coincidence that that historic event was an ecumenical gathering similar to our own this evening. They too were convoked to consider the things that make for Christian unity.

Later on, the sermon appeared in print along with Schaff's Principle of Protestantism. And, tonight Nevin's sermon forms the basis of my own remarks - in that, I want to ask whether Nevin's sermon has anything to say to us today?

I think it a worthy question. Not just because this is the Mercersburg Convocation. But for the same reason Dr. Hageman said he couldn't remember a good sermon.

I think he said that because a really good sermon doesn't necessarily dazzle or draw attention to itself. It doesn't have to make a spectacle. And if it is creative or innovative, it is so within the confines of the text. Because the text holds sway over it. The text allows the sermon only so much. Only that it might be the distillation of the more ancient and unchanging Word. And yet, rightly done, the text will speak fresh, in terms able to give our faith confidence, courage and, hopefully, momentum.

Oddly enough, and if Dr. Hageman is right, it's a tribute to "Catholic Unity" that it was basically ignored when it was first preached. Only later, in association with the ideas of Schaff, did Nevin's sermon become a source of controversy. And yet, in so many ways, "Catholic Unity" is the manifesto of the Mercersburg Movement.

Now perhaps some of its obscurity resulted from its length. For example, if I were to preach "Catholic Unity" this evening, it would take me about an hour.

Now don't bolt for the doors, I have no intention of doing that. I value your friendship too much.

But more than sheer length, the number of terms borrowed from nineteenth-century Hegelian science is enough to make the modern listener's head spin. Not to mention frequent appeals to the letter of the law, by way of Calvin, long exegetical diversions into Scripture, and, God forbid, uncomfortable epithets like, "popish and semi-popish errors."

Obviously, these are the things that date it. But is there anything lasting here? That's the question to be raised. Is there a word of lasting, helpful application between the seemingly endless paragraphs of nineteenth-century theology?

Years ago, I sat before a tribunal of inquisitors at the oral defense of my dissertation on the Mercersburg Movement. Dr. McClelland, my advisor, and the rest of the committee peered at me across the narrow room with intense, penetrating eyes.

One of them said, "Now that you have produced this overly long treatise, one which, I might add, could have ended after the second chapter, a tome in which you investigated the degree of influence of German Idealism on Mercersburg, what have you to say for yourself? Were the Mercersburg men German Idealists or not?" To which I replied, "Well, that is the question, is it not?"

I was surprised and relieved to find all the heads of Academe around the room nodding their approval. Apparently I had answered correctly.

You see, you can get away with that at University. Obscurity is expected. But a sermon is different. Here we anticipate some word from God, some clear and convicting insight, about how we might live.

Is there any of that in Nevin's sermon?

Well, if sermons are still to be exegetical, there certainly is something true and abiding. For Nevin, Ephesians 4:4-6 is a snapshot out of history. It's a "Polaroid" of what the Catholic and Apostolic Church looks like according to St. Paul.

The snapshot, says Nevin, pictures a Church, universal and undivided, sharing unity in its multiple diversity, sharing one life, in its various ministries. That's the real church! says Nevin.

And when Nevin says "real church" he means it. He means that the Church of Ephesians 4 is not just an ideal. It's not some far-off, hoped for goal. Or a "pie in the sky" reality. But the Church. The Church as it is meant to be. And as it is in its present life, which is forever trying to realize itself, even to this day, in the visible, active, ordinary membership of its people.

Having revealed that rather astonishing bit of news, as if he's aware that he has just shocked his Dutch and German audience, Nevin pauses, as if to apologize. He stops mid-explanation, and he says, "This may sound mystical; but . . ."

And what an extraordinary "but" it is: This may sound mystical, delegates, but after all, there is only one Church, and this is it. It's struggling to be everything to everybody - without sacrificing its integrity. It's on the move, to be the very embodiment of Christ, by serving everybody - without collapsing in schizophrenia. It's the marvelous bush, where roost a thousand different birds, struggling to keep its trunk firm - without sacrificing its flexibility. So while this may sound mystical, this is the Church. This is Christ with us.

All of Nevin's efforts are to bring home the single point: all that Christ is for the world, all that he was and will be, lives and breathes and has its life here, in a physical reality, which is infused throughout with an invisible, spiritual dimension. And that body is you and me. It's the Church.

Now, at this point it would be terribly interesting to me to take a poll. Because I'd really like to know how many of us find Nevin's ideas strange? It's one of the reasons I go to things like this. I'm utterly captivated by the variety of human experience. And a day doesn't go by that I don't marvel at some new twist of human expression. I've learned to be wary of taking things for granted.

I suppose, at the Mercersburg Convocation, one might assume Nevin's language would be well received. And yet, perhaps that's not the case.

Because, generally speaking, at least in places that I've visited, Nevin's insistence on physical unity is unwelcomed. And so, tonight, in spite of its antiquity, I'm inclined to treat it as a new and controversial idea.

You see, usually, the idea of the Church that I hear, as it is taken from Ephesians 4, is in deliberate contrast to the one I'm suggesting this evening.

Many Christians I meet treat Ephesians 4 as if it were an oracle: a sort of New Testament prophecy: a vision of some far-off, hoped-for future state. For them Ephesians 4 is a dream of what might be. Of what the Church will look like when everybody begins to behave. It's what the Church will look

like when the Golden Age dawns. And yet, what this popular view of Ephesians 4 really boils down to, is often what the Church reduces to, to accommodate special interests and personal agendas.

I hear so many say, Ephesians 4 will come to pass when the Church stops catering to gays and women. Ephesians 4 will come to pass when the Church takes justice seriously and provides for its minorities. Ephesians 4 will come to pass when the Eucharist is paramount. Ephesians 4 will come to pass when revivals bring the remnant to the millennium. Ephesians 4 will come to pass when the Church makes liturgy its priority.

In other words, Ephesians 4 will come to be, for me, when the Church lives up to my expectation of her.

Now, I intentionally single out no particular perspective, for we are all, each of us, capable of making the Church in our image.

In March I was a delegate to my particular Synod, which for you UOC folks is your Conference, where the meeting concluded in dramatic style, all a result of a "divine oversight."

It seems the Synod had adopted a paper on abortion the previous year, thinking that it had merely "received it."

Now, those of us who go to these things regularly know the difference. But for those of you spared this experience, let me say that, for example, a minority paper might be presented, and, in spite of its being highly controversial, it can still be received. That way nobody gets into trouble. But now, to "adopt!" Aha, that means that's our position and our policy. We take responsibility for it.

Well, the pro-life folks squared off with the pro-choice folks. The battle raged, and the language was of murder and freedom and broken covenant.

When the dust settled, and the body count was taken after the vote, the Synod chose to "adopt" the paper which, incidentally, concluded that "abortion cannot be illegal."

But oh, my Lord, the hue and cry of the pro-lifers. It was sorrowful. But what frightened me most, was the bitterness and the division which resulted.

You see, the delegates read Ephesians 4 as if it were an oracle. And for some, when the vote went the wrong way, the Church made a giant leap backward. The dream of Ephesians 4 became a nightmare. And the hope became more elusive than ever.

So it will be, for any and all who make their cause "the cause" of the Church. So it will be, for any and all, who wait for their cause to validate Ephesians 4.

So, what is the cause of the Church? Well, if Nevin was on the right track with "Catholic Unity," and if St. Paul's snapshot of the Church is not some yet-to-be realized dream, the cause of the Church is the struggle to be fair - and yet righteous and moral. To protect the unborn - and yet respect women in their struggle to be free. And while this may sound mystical, the impossible cause of the Church is to welcome the stranger - and yet celebrate our past.

It is to live in the tension of where God, in spite of our ceaseless wandering off, is still taking the Church.

This year I concluded my term as president of the Classis of Paramus.

Now in the Dutch Reformed Church, the Classis is Bishop. It is a body made up of ministers and elders who have been ordained to be God's authority among her regional churches.

Well, my last and chief responsibility as Classis president was to give the State of the Classis address. The sum of that address was a question, which asked the members if they loved the Classis?

You see, I implied that while many of us love our causes, none of us loves the Classis. But for the Dutch Reformed, Classis is Jerusalem, and no other.

It was the first time a President sat down to thunderous silence. I guess I had the audacity to present Ephesians 4 as a demand to believe that we are the Church.

Afterwards, I asked the wisest and most aged of the assembly, a denominational legend, what he thought of my remarks.

He said, "Frankly, I don't think anyone knew what you were talking about." He said, "I don't think any one of us has ever considered loving the Classis. And certainly we've never thought of it as the Church."

"Well," I inquired, "Then where is the Church? Do they think it is the local churches?"

"No, not exactly. That's too parochial."

"Oh, OK, how about the Synod? Is the General Synod the Church?"

"Are you kidding?" he said, "That's too Catholic."

"Well, how about all the people? All Christian people? Would that do?"

"No, that's not quite right either. There must be structure."

Then he said, "You know, there's nothing specific you can point to."

"Well, then," I said, "How shall I love nothing specific?"

What must have alarmed my colleagues at Classis was my novelty in suggesting that we are the Church: the human body of Jesus Christ in the world.

What must have shocked my colleagues was my exegesis of Ephesians 4, because I suggested the state of the Classis awaits realization in what we do out of love for this very body. Because there is no other Church.

But perhaps what sounded most unwelcomed, was that I said that what is really needed for a healthy state of the Classis, was for us to begin by loving the Classis first, and loving the causes which make up our business second.

Beloved, this may sound mystical, but there's something to be said for the ancient idea that the Church is more than the sum of her parts. More than the sum of our individual dreams for her.

It seems to me, it would be well to keep that in mind as we represent the many causes which need our support. If we rally to the cause of feminism, as need certainly exists - still, we must love the Church more. If gays and minorities need our defense and support - still, we must love the Church more. If causes command our devotion, and compassion and duty require they must - still, the Church is our first love; the Jerusalem we adore. And this may sound mystical, but Jerusalem still shines, amidst the struggle. Because within her walls Christ himself abides. He's there beyond all lots and limits, and yet fully part of the pain and competition which seem to divide us; amidst our personal triumphs and our personal tragedies; amidst all the tensions and the turmoil of our struggle to be, at once, the world's sanctuary and the world's temple.

That, and no other, is the Church, as depicted in this photograph of St. Paul. And while it may sound mystical, "there is one body and one Spirit, just as we were called to the one hope that belongs to our call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all." Amen.

Now unto the most high God, who "has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" be ascribed all power, dominion and majesty, from this day forth, to the end of time. Amen.

HOLDING AND FOLDING: A SERMON

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Texts - Deuteronomy 11:13-19; Psalm 45;
II Corinthians 5:11-6:2; Luke 17:1-10

As I drive through the suburban wilderness of South Jersey from time to time I honor some of my rural Lancaster County roots by tuning in to a country and western music station and by the grace of God on occasion I hear that simplistic and sad song that sees a poker game as a grand metaphor for life. The song's refrain is highly theological:

'you have to know when to hold and when to fold.'

Possibly the Mercersburg Society might well suggest to our seminaries a practicum, at least for parish clergy types, on the art and science of learning when to hold and when to fold, when to hang tough and when to graciously let go!

For all of its simple and rustic charm, nevertheless, there is something here truly of the gospel and of the liturgy! We may not use the words, hold and fold, but we have their most profound equivalents:

remembering and forgetting.

At the heart of the experience of the Christian faith is a wonderful paradox, a left hand-right hand, a tension, a both-and, a mystery of holding and folding:

We are called to remember and to forget!

We are called to be a people of sacred memory; a people constructed and shaped by a corporate memory and a recalled history. At the heart of our worship we hear the dominical words: 'Do this for the remembrance of me.' The Apostle Paul speaks of passing on and sharing the sacred memory of the community (the tradition) and of holding fast to the faith.

Church historian John E. Booty writes:

'Remembering is the chief activity of Christians, for remembering involves action guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Remembering is a mode of worship which impels the worshiper to represent Christ in the world as the agent for justice and peace.'

Remembering is also our mode of being human. It characterizes the way we are human. We remember: a birthday, a loved one, a journey, a place, a time, a grace! We know this wonderful but commonplace truth most powerfully in contrast to its opposite: loss of memory, injury, brain damage, amnesia, the terror of Alzheimers Disease. The tragedy of not knowing myself!

Salvation at some levels is always the struggle between amnesia and anamnesis. Forgetting and remembering, holding and folding. This struggle is both an

individual conflict, but also the most critical for the church. Woe that church that forgets its tradition, its sacred memory, and wanders memoryless, rootless, and storm-tossed. Deep in the purpose of the Mercersburg Society is just this concern for the sacred memory and its ongoing vitality!

We are a people of sacred memory; the liturgy itself is always a redemptive recital of the sacred memory. It is replaying of the 'tapes' in a present and future key! Memory becoming real!

And....forgetting: To be human is to have the power to let go, to forgive, to forget, to be forgiven, to press forward, and not to be bound by the past....to fold!

The Old Testament lesson from Deuteronomy spoke eloquently of the necessity and power of remembering the sacred tradition... commandments, promise, covenant, the people of God.

The epistle speaks an equally powerful message:

'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold the new has come.' (II Cor. 5:17)

It is not all remembering. I think it was Marshall McLuan who wrote something to the effect that we drive through life looking through the rear view mirror. But, we live and drive forward!

We let go of the past; it folds away behind us. We are called to the new life of the Spirit. Divine forgiveness is in fact God's forgetting.

The new creation arises from the old, the dead bury the dead, the new day, and God's grace are sufficient to the day! We fold, we let go of yesterday and all its pains and hurts, failures and defeats, and triumphs too; memories are healed. The manna feeds us anew each day and there are no left-overs! Henri Nouwen has written eloquently of the 'healing of memories' wherein the past is not truly forgotten, but rather let go of in the manner of forgiveness and healing.

holding and folding
remembering and forgetting.

In the Book of Genesis there is a marvelous moment that for me symbolizes the tension and the power of the mystery of remembering and forgetting. The patriarch Isaac is dwelling among the Philistines in the land of Gerar. Listen:

'And Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of Abraham his father.' (Gen. 26:18)

In both remembering and forgetting we are engaged in digging again the wells of living water of the living God. To dig deep and rediscover the tradition that nourished our forebears is vital for our spiritual health. It is the task of each generation to rediscover and remember!

In word and sacrament, in remembering and forgetting, in holding and folding, we dig back (we remember); we clear away the debris and we are invited to drink of the water that gives eternal life.

Amen!

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.

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