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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.

From the Editor

In keeping with the usually measured tone of the Mercersburg Society's deliberations, we begin this edition of the *New Mercersburg Review* with a solid, historically meticulous paper by Theodore Trost. We hope this will help balance the more controversial material that follows. Dr. Trost can be relied on to inform the society about its history. Here he brings us fresh research about the creation of the Evangelical and Reformed Church. He sifts through the spirited debates to show us what was truly at stake in the minds of both advocates and detractors of the union. The names of the participants are familiar including Reihold Neibuhr, James Good and George Richards. He ably ties in the Mercersburg movement as a leading informant to both the supporters and opponents of union.

Likewise we can count on Gabriel Fackre on the same score. Dr. Fackre has played a vital role in the concluding century and now in this new century's ecumenical dialogues. We have the pleasure of having him as one of the society's own. As such he has added his theological expertise and ecumenical insights to many a convocation's discussions. Here he brings us a paper on perhaps the central theological paradigms informing the Reformed and Lutherans, at least in terms of their theological history and where that history has caused misgivings. Undoubtedly Dr. Schaff would have admired the edifying dialectic Gabriel creates for those of us who are Reformed as we measure the degree to which our identity as Reformed is informed by our doctrines of sovereignty and sanctification. Like Schaff, Fackre recognizes that the virtue and praxis afforded by a biblically supported theological tenet can, when overplayed, lead to an imbalance and the potential for error. This is vintage Mercersburg! In creative dialectical tension with ourselves and with the Lutheran critique of our doctrinal impulses, Fackre allows us to know ourselves better and he provides the opportunity to reevaluate our position given the added critical light shed by our dialoguing partner.

Our third offering may take us "where no one has gone before", at least we of the Mercersburg Society. One of our own, a tried and true member of the society, Richard Schellhause, has written a self-admittedly controversial paper. He seeks to radicalize Mercersburg according to the latest discoveries of science. Of course, that includes

a significant departure from a number of classically held doctrines, including God's independent and unique status in the universe. Still, one cannot read Reverend Schellhause's paper without noticing the passion he brings to the subject. He raises many provocative questions and he is quite right that people throughout the Western world are asking similar questions, fed by the incredible scientific discoveries of the last several decades. However, given some of his conclusions, we felt it necessary to include a reply, presenting an alternative view.

Our reply is not meant to be contentious, but rather presented in the same spirit that Reverend Schellhause issued the challenge in the first place, i.e. in the pursuit of theological truth and progress. Is Richard right that the recent claims of science must be taken into account when doing theology in the spirit of Mercersburg? Most certainly! Yet the Mercersburg professors would not have been convinced to abandon the traditional orthodoxy they embraced by the admittedly astonishing recent discoveries of science. Quite the contrary, the latest and most interesting facts of science lead us away from any idea that God is to be identified with Creation and instead the newer and most profound current theories of science point us toward novel expressions of seemingly random order midst an often violently chaotic universe where laws are not so much intractable as governed by probability. Perhaps within these higher levels of organization, where once again we get a real sense of nature's mystery, we might discover fresh ways of observing the hand of the Creator.

Finally, we've opened ourselves to include book reviews and our first submission is thanks to Kenneth Aldrich. Hopefully our readers will be encouraged by this enough to not only submit a review, but offer a paper of your own befitting the subject matter of *The New Mercersburg Review*.

An Inevitable and Unique Compatibility: Some Factors Leading to the Creation of the Evangelical and Reformed Church

Theodore Louis Trost

On June 26, 1934, a venture in trust began. Representatives of the Evangelical Synod of North America and the Reformed Church in the United States met in Cleveland, Ohio, to celebrate the end of their separate lives and the beginning of their new life together as the Evangelical and Reformed Church. This was an unusual marriage in the history of church unions. Very few theological issues or matters of church organization had been worked out in advance. Instead, a "unity in spirit" was affirmed as a "sufficient basis" for the merger or, as the members of the newly-formed church preferred to call it, the "organic union."[1] This unity in spirit carried the new church forward during the ensuing years as differences in confessional standards, ecclesiology, liturgy, and hymnody were overcome and the antecedent church organizations, publications, and seminaries were consolidated.[2] Although a constitution for the Evangelical and Reformed Church was not officially inaugurated until 1940, this procedure was by then a mere formality: for the two bodies had long since become one flesh.

The Evangelical and Reformed Church represented the organic union of two traditions that had been forced together by kingly fiat in Germany in 1817.[3] Practically speaking and despite the noble efforts of Friedrich Schleiermacher, among others, the Church of the Prussian Union remained an administrative union for the most part; theologically, Lutheran and Reformed parties within the Church continued their separate existences. A significant collection of Reformed-leaning churches prevailed in the Rhineland and Westphalia, for example; other regions of the Church were predominantly Lutheran. Thus the democratic embrace of both Reformed and Lutheran traditions one hundred twenty years later, in America, was an ecumenical breakthrough; it served as a source of optimism for the leaders of the new church as they, in conversation with other leaders of the burgeoning ecumenical movement, espoused church union ideals. At the same time, although the confessional

innovation was unusual, certain historical realities drew these two German denominations together in the aftermath of the First World War and the foreshadow, as it were, of the Second. Thus the union was both ecclesiologically unique, viewed from a global perspective and inevitable, viewed culturally and with particular emphasis on the status of German ethnic communities during the first third of the twentieth century in America.

This then is a story of uniqueness and inevitability. It includes the historical connections of both churches to the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union; the strikingly parallel conflicts over the matter of church union as represented in the debates between Reinhold Niebuhr and W. F. Henninger, among others, in the Evangelical Synod and George Richards and James Good in the Reformed Church; the mutual disdain for "denominationalism" in an era of disunity; and the problem of "Americanization" as it presented itself differently to the German Reformed Church and the Evangelical Synod after World War I.

The German Background

The German Evangelical Synod of North America began as a *Kirchenverein*, a loose association of pastors who had banded together for mutual support in the early 1840s. Some of these pastors had been sent to minister to the far-flung German community by the mission societies in places like Basel and Bremen; others were immigrants themselves who had left the tumultuous situation in Germany behind and ventured into the wilderness of the American Midwest Familiar religious battles that had originated in Germany continued to be waged on the American frontier. Thus, the Evangelical Association found itself positioned between the strict confessionalism of her conservative Lutheran neighbors (the "Missouri Synod"), on the one hand, and the anti-church freethinking of the similarly near-by rationalists.[4] The members of the *Kirchenverein* assumed a theological position akin to that of the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union. Personal piety was prized above orthodoxy and liberality with respect to confessional standards was encouraged. The creeds of the Prussian Union Church became the acceptable symbols among the pastors of the Association: the *Augsburg Confession* and *Luther's Small Catechism* from the Lutheran tradition and the *Heidelberg Catechism* from the Reformed Church in Germany. The watchwords of Peter Meiderlin announced

the guiding principles of the emerging denomination: "in essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity."[5]

What began as an association of ministers developed quickly into a denomination: the *Deutsche Evangelische Synode von Nord Amerika.* The Synod did not view itself apart from the Church in Prussia; significantly, it never even called itself a "Church" (in contrast to, for example, the Dutch Reformed Church). Its relationship was spelled out quite clearly in the name: the orientation was to Germany and the churches were branches of the larger "Church" over there. There were, of course, numerous contacts with other German communities in the United States. Among those who maintained an interest in the development of the Evangelical Synod was the German Reformed Church, located principally in Pennsylvania with significant representation in Wisconsin and Ohio.[6]

The German Reformed Church traced its beginnings in America to colonial times. At first the Germans were dependent upon the *Coetus* of the Dutch Reformed Church for ministers and organization. Eventually, however, they established themselves as a separate *Classis*. Historically this Church had its origin in the Reformed Churches of the German Palatinate and in Switzerland. Her confessional symbol was the *Heidelberg Catechism*—although the importance of the *Catechism* seemed to wane in the early nineteenth century as the revivals and the evangelical leanings of the neighboring denominations began to influence religious life in the German Reformed Church. Ironically, a Presbyterian began the process of returning the German Reformed Church to its roots. In 1839, John Nevin became professor of theology in the denominational seminary at Mercersburg. His first provocative act was to write a book against the Finneyite "new measures" that were being used in the revivals and incorporated into the liturgical practices and worship strategies of many German Reformed churches.[7]

Nevin was soon joined by Philip Schaff, an accomplished young theobgian from Germany. Significantly, Schaff had been ordained in the Prussian Union Church. Even in his youth, he was an impressive personality—maintaining wide contacts in the United States and in Europe. In 1849, when his colleague Nevin launched the polemical journal *The Mercersburg Review*, Schaff began to edit the irenic journal *Der deutsche Kirchenfreund*. The *Kirchenfreund* was meant to

be a forum for the German community in America. The journal bore Peter Meiderlin's watchwords as its own (though, curiously, these were attributed to Augustine during the years of the *Kirchenfreund*'s publication). Numerous articles emphasizing the importance of German theological scholarship were published in the journal and directed toward an audience of Lutheran and Reformed folk, Unionists and Moravians. In this way, the German-American community was kept aware of contemporary trends in German scholarship and among the various German-American denominations in America. Schaff established many connections through his journal including one with the *Kirchenverein*. Indeed, in 1855, when he went back to Germany to deliver a series of lectures (subsequently published as the book *America*), Schaff personally placed before the Prussian King a request for books for the library of the Evangelical Association's newly-established seminary at Marthasville. The King's response was generous.[8]

This early contact between the German Evangelical Synod and the German Reformed Church is significant. Particularly through Schaff and the Mercersburg tradition, an irenic spirit was maintained in the Reformed Church—a spirit that anticipated (long before the word "ecumenical" meant anything other than a council convened by the Pope) the unification of all Christendom.

The Union Debate in the German Evangelical Synod

"Where Shall We Go?" appeared in the March 1919 issue of the *Magazin für Evangelische Theologie und Kirche*, the theological journal of the German Evangelical Synod. The article was written by one of the Synod's most esteemed ministers, Reinhold Niebuhr. After receiving his divinity training at the denomination's Eden Theological Seminary, Niebuhr had ventured to the east for further study. He was awarded both the Bachelor of Divinity and the Master of Arts degrees from Yale Divinity School and then went on to become the pastor of the Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit. Niebuhr wrote "Where Shall We Go?" during the fourth year of his ministry in Detroit, shortly after receiving a modicum of national attention through two articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* that addressed the perplexing problem of German-American identity during a period of heightened anti-German sentiment in the United States.[9] As it stands in the March 1919 issue of the *Magazin*, one simple fact about Niebuhr's writing is telling: "Where Shall We Go?" is one of only three articles that appear in English.[10]

In "Where Shall We Go?" Niebuhr argued that the German Evangelical Synod ought to become part of the movement to unite the Protestant churches in America. This urgency arose in the aftermath of two recent conferences. One was the merger conference of the United Lutheran Church in America, which brought together "three of the more liberal Lutheran synods" and which someday may, Niebuhr speculated, "present a united Lutheranism in America." The other conference, initiated by the Presbyterian General Assembly, brought together representatives from numerous denominations throughout America to discuss the prospect of "uniting American protestantism into an 'organic union.'" Numerous papers were delivered at the Philadelphia conference. Even though no concrete proposals resulted from the conference, Niebuhr suggested that one specific development did merit great attention, namely: "the new attempt to unite all Calvinistic churches in America even before a general union is undertaken." This movement toward union left the German Evangelical Synod, according to Niebuhr, trapped somewhere between a united Lutherdom and a united Calvinism, facing extinction. The quintessential question for Niebuhr thus became: to what family does the Evangelical Synod belong? As his title put it: "Where Shall We Go?"[11]

Niebuhr conceded that some within the denomination would object to the implications of the question. After all, the German Evangelical Synod had a distinctive religious identity that would inevitably suffer through merger. True, the ministers of the Synod had "served our Lord faithfully and have labored in the part of the Kingdom entrusted to [them]," but the Synod nevertheless "failed to make any distinctive contribution to American life." To continue in isolation, to hide from the larger world, was ultimately "unchristian," according to Niebuhr. Meanwhile, he rejected the suggestion that, since the German Evangelical Synod was historically a union church, other denominations should come to the Synod and seek to be absorbed into it. First of all, the Protestants who most closely resembled the German Evangelical Synod—the Lutherans—showed no interest whatsoever in uniting with unionists. Niebuhr went on to suggest that the Synod was not really a united church anyhow: it remained "far more Lutheran than Reformed in polity and tradition." The time had come, therefore, for the German Evangelical Synod to reach beyond

its own, basically Lutheran position, and seek to "accommodate [itself] to the positions of other denominations than those with which our tradition is connected." Survival was the issue, as far as Niebuhr was concerned; significantly, he advocated abandoning what he conceded to be the denomination's traditional Lutheran orientation in an embrace of the Reformed.[12]

Having cast his lot in favor of the "Calvinists," Niebuhr discounted the various objections he imagined that some in the Synod might have had toward them. He argued that, contrary to the bellicose Luther and his defenders (war and anti-war rhetoric were pervasive in the aftermath of the hitherto most destructive war in the history of humanity), the Reformed were irenic. Zwingli (Swiss) had offered the hand of fellowship to Luther, Niebuhr insisted; and Luther was the one who refused to take Calvin's (French) hand in a gesture of reconciliation. Niebuhr considered the historical difference between the Lutheran and the Reformed on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper to be "non-essential" (referring to the foundational distinctions elucidated by Peter Meiderlin). This was after all, the official doctrinal position of the German Evangelical Synod—as it maintained allegiance to both the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Besides, Niebuhr suggested, most laypeople and the younger members of the clergy held to a Zwinglian position concerning the sacrament in any case, not a Lutheran one. As far as the doctrine of grace was concerned, Niebuhr argued that the Methodists were guilty of overemphasizing a personal effort in the quest for salvation, not the Calvinists. Calvinism, meanwhile, led to moral action in the social sphere; Lutheranism, on the other hand, tended toward quietism and the removal of the religious community from the social and political problems of the day. Polity differences between the two churches were inconsequential, as far as Niebuhr was concerned; therefore, for the sake of Christian unity, certain human traditions had to be sacrificed. What was urgently needed, Niebuhr concluded, was a denominational policy in favor of church union, a policy directed specifically toward the Reformed family.

The very next issue of the *Magazin* carried the article "Why Go At All?"—a systematic refutation of Niebuhr's article, written by W. F. Henninger. Henninger, a scientist and layperson in the German Evangelical Synod, began by claiming an analogy for pluralism as it functioned in the political realm. Just as it was necessary from an American point of view to assert the importance of independence for

"Esths, Letts, Finns, Lithuanians… etc.," so too must one support the independence of the small denominations: "[t]o contradict this would mean to be disloyal, unjust, un-American." Besides, Henninger argued, simply because a denomination was small did not mean that it lacked quality. The presence of "modest Brother Niebuhr" (who was already establishing for himself a national reputation) in the denomination suggested that the Synod may be sufficiently significant to make "a distinctive contribution to American religious life." Perhaps the "problem" was not smallness or distinctiveness at all, Henninger speculated. After all, whose terms was Niebuhr adopting here? The German Evangelical Synod originated in the Middle West instead of the East. Because of this, anything the Synod might accomplish would appear insignificant—at least from a regional point of view. "Everybody knows," Henninger insisted, "that the East claims, often with very poor proof, to be superior in all things, all the way from theology down to the pigeon-fanciers' association."[13]

Henninger went on to dispute the various theological points Niebuhr put forward. Henninger insisted that the Synod did in fact represent a true union of Lutheranism and Calvinism. Niebuhr's suggestion about the irenic nature of Calvinism was refuted sarcastically with a rhetorical catalogue of crimes:

> Was it irenic when Calvin had seventy-six men banished and fifty-eight executed out of a population of 20,000 at Geneva? Was it irenic when the Scotch Presbyterians murdered the archbishop of St. Andrews? Was it irenic when Cromwell slaughtered thousands of Catholics in Ireland? Was it irenicwhen the New England Puritans drove out Roger Williams?[14]

There were indeed significant differences between Lutherans and Calvinists, according to Henninger, and in the end, "only where you have the bond of love and peace, as in the [German Evangelical] Synod, can these great differences be bridged over, softened, and brought to a happy union." Henninger finally wrote off the whole union movement as nothing more than "a grand and united effort to get into the limelight." Of Reinhold Niebuhr, Henninger said (with reference to Hosea 4.17): "Ephraim hath turned to idols, let him alone." And to the question "Where Shall We Go?" he replied with the counter-question "Why Go At All?"[15]

Although Reinhold Niebuhr was allowed the favor of a response in the next edition of the *Magazin*[16] his position regarding church union was not a generally popular one at the time. A number of things happened during the 1920s, however, to bring the German Evangelical Synod closer to Niebuhr's position. A few of them are worth brief mention. It should be noted, for example, that the first full professorship specifically designated for instruction in English was not even established at Eden Seminary until 1908. The holder of that position, Samuel D. Press, went on to become the president of the seminary in 1919. It was not until 1921 that English translations of all resolutions of the General Conference were published in addition to the German originals; moreover, it was not until 1927 that Conference minutes were published exclusively in English.[17] Also in 1927, the Periodical Board decided to give first place to the English language in the *Magazin für Evangelische Theologie und Kirche*, which, therefore, underwent a name change to become *The Theological Magazine*.[18] Actually, its full name became *The Theological Magazine of the Evangelical Synod of North America*, for in a special meeting of the General Conference at Saint Pauls Church in Chicago 1927, the word "German" was officially dropped from the name of the Evangelical Synod.[19] Finally in 1928, a committee was established to study the possibility of church union with other denominations. Helmut (Richard) Niebuhr, dean of Eden Theological Seminary, was the chair. The committee produced a report that was "formally presented to the church with a vigorous urging toward union."[20]

And so in 1928, in an editorial by Hugo Kamphausen, the follow-up question to Niebuhr's "Where Shall We Go?" was posed: "Will It Be Luther or Calvin?" Three inter-related points favored Calvin in Kamphausen's article. First, echoing Niebuhr's complaint of a decade ago, Kamphausen noted that the Evangelical Synod had become an American denomination, but as such it had "made no appreciable contribution to American Protestantism." The kind of quietism that prevailed in the Evangelical Synod was supposedly a result of its Lutheran orientation. This observation led to the second point: Calvinism was pragmatic. It emphasized "life rather than doctrines; work more than faith . . . and the influence of the church on public life." The Church had wasted time for too long, Kamphausen argued, "on metaphysics"; now the Church needed "to show what she can do to give fullness of life to the individual and to realize the Kingdom of

God in this world." Decay into isolation or engagement with the culture: these were the alternatives open to the Evangelical Synod. Kamphausen's third point was that the kindred body of the Reformed Church seemed willing to enter into negotiations with the Evangelical Synod. He vigorously recommended those negotiations.[21]

Again there was a reaction against the union impulse. This time around, however, the opposition was led by an obscure individual with the curious *nom-de-plume* of "Peter the Hermit." The name was assumed, according to its bearer, "so that the reader may forget the author but remember his message." Peter's message was more-or-less summed up in the title of his article: "Why Go, Why Not Stay?" The problem with the Evangelical Synod, according to Peter, was not that it was somehow *insufficient* in and of itself; it was merely *insignificant*. The key to the future success of the denomination, therefore, was to "stay and do a bit of constructive work of [our] own for the Christ and His Kingdom." A merger, meanwhile, would require the relinquishing of qualities that were key to the denomination's identity, namely:

> First—the principles and reasons for our organization as a separate church body; Second—the very ideal of "unity" between two great discordant church bodies, and, becoming a part of one of these two discordant bodies, will need to promote discord instead of unity; Third—the very principle of the "Evangel" or Gospel of Jesus Christ by emphasizing the dictum of some leader.[22]

In subsequent issues of the *Theological Magazine*, the objections of "Peter the Hermit" were countered and a church union ideology emerged. The Evangelical Synod would not surrender the principle of "unity" between competing confessions: it would seek an "organic union" of traditions. The Synod would maintain its loyalty to Christ as the head of the Church—not to a particular Reformer (for example, Luther or Calvin). Union would not weaken the churches of the Synod; rather, it would lead to a "gaining in power and prestige, in efficiency and effectiveness for the Kingdom."[23] The argument for union was an argument for ending competition among denominations "in service of the Kingdom." Finally, and perhaps most importantly, union offered the opportunity for the Synod to make that much-touted "significant contribution" to church life in America—through the

abandonment of Lutheran quietism and an engagement with Calvinistic activism.

The Union Debate in the Reformed Church

In his article, "Where Do We Go?" Reinhold Niebuhr alluded to the "Conference on Organic Union," which occurred in Philadelphia on December 4 and 5, 1918. One of the speakers at that conference was George W. Richards, Professor of Church History in the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in the United States. In his address, "The Historical Significance of Denominationalism," Richards put forward his cure for the ills of denominationalism in America. The solution to the problem of a disunited Protestantism, he argued, was not to be found in the restoration of Catholicism or the retreat to some other historical form as a basis of church union; rather, Richards recommended a change in consciousness, giving way to

> a new interdenominationalism, akin to the new internationalism, recognizing both the unity of the spirit of Christianity and the diversity of its forms . . . engendering cooperation in the place of competition between the churches and the subordination of denominational welfare to the achievement of the Kingdom of Christ upon earth.

The opportunity that organic union posed, according to Richards, was to enter into a *process*, specifically, an "organic process." Richards argued that "[a] new organism must evolve, taking into itself the essential Christian elements of the old denominations and eliminating their ephemeral historical forms."[24] This process could only take place once there was a unity of purpose among the many denominations—a unity of purpose, it may be assumed, that would result from gatherings such as the "Conference on Organic Union." Then, "united with the spirit of God in hope, and faith, and love," Richards concluded, "we shall declare ourselves before the world what we are in fact, the united Church of Christ."[25]

Not surprisingly, Richards' language about "organic process" reflected the longstanding concern of the Mercersburg theologians for the "organic development" of the Church.[26] After all, George Richards held the chair in Church History that was initially occupied by Philip Schaff. Richards' scholarly endeavors, meanwhile, reflected a concern to carry into the 20th century the ecumenical interests of the Mercersburg period along with Mercersburg's understanding of the

particular nature of the German Reformed Church. In an article in the *Reformed Church Review* entitled "Calvinism in the Reformed Churches of Germany," for example, Richards retraced the distinctive development of the Reformed Church in the Palatinate along lines that had been established by the German theologian, Heinrich Heppe, in an 1853 article in the *Mercersburg Review*. The Heppe article was subsequently used by John Nevin to undergird his doctrine of the "mystical presence" in the Lord's Supper, and to recommend the irenic qualities of the *Heidelberg Catechism* as a unique product of German Reformed Calvinism.[27] Central to Heppe's point and crucial to subsequent developments in the German Reformed Church was the notion that Philipp Melanchthon, Martin Luther's trusted friend and colleague, was, in some sense, the true father of the German Reformed Church. The thesis was developed this way: Melanchthon influenced his pupil, Zacharias Ursinus, and Ursinus, through the composition of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, put a distinctive stamp on the German Reformed Church. This was quintessential Mercersburg wisdom; it was the wisdom that Richards passed on in his teaching at Lancaster Theological Seminary and his writing.

An alternative perspective on the whole Mercersburg inheritance existed, however; this perspective was best represented by James Good. Good was a proponent of the so-called "Ursinus School" within the Reformed Church communion. Disagreeing with the "high church" and "altar liturgy" orientation of the Mercersburg theologians, the Ursinus Movement's position, as articulated in the April 21, 1861, issue of the *Reformed Church Messenger*, opposed "the use of congregational responses, the inclusion of a priestly absolution of sin, and the incorporation of spiritual regeneration at baptism in the [recently recommended] liturgy."[28] In his history of the Reformed Church, Good condemned the Mercersburg period as a time when alien unionist and Lutheran positions were introduced into the German Reformed Church. Far from viewing the Mercersburg theology as "ecumenical," Good blamed the Mercersburg theologians for the failure of the planned merger between the German Reformed Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in 1845.[29]

Good's Ursinus perspective did cherish a number of values in common with Mercersburg. It held that the irenic and ecumenical spirit of the *Heidelberg Catechism* was indeed a part of the German Reformed tradition. In disagreement with Mercersburg, however, the Ursinus School denied any Melanchthonian influences upon the

tradition; rather, it was argued that the *Heidelberg Catechism* was purely a Reformed and therefore Calvinistic, document with affinities to the *Scots Confession* and the *Westminster Confession*. When it came to church union discussions, therefore, Good held that the Reformed Church should look to fellow-Calvinists first and foremost.

As part of his own ecumenical mission, therefore, James Good set out to prove the compatibility of the German Reformed Church with her Calvinist neighbors. He did this from his position as Professor of Church History, first at the Ursinus School of Theology (which had been set up at the Ursinus College in Philadelphia as an alternative to the prevailing Mercersburg spirit at Lancaster), , and later as a member of the Central Theological Seminary faculty in Dayton, Ohio.[30] In 1901, in an article in the *Presbyterian Review* entitled "The First Attempt at Church Union in America," Good refuted the notion that Calvinism was divisive. "It has been the glory of Calvinism that its motto has been 'there must be no compromise with evil,'" Good wrote; but he continued: the tendency of Calvinism was not toward division but toward union.[31] (Interestingly, debates among the Reformed Church leaders about the divisive nature of various communions mirror the debates about the irenic qualities of different confessional systems in the Evangelical Synod.)

To prove his point, Good told the story of early efforts to unite the Dutch Reformed, German Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Pennsylvania during the years of 1743 to 1752. Ultimately these efforts failed. They failed from the Presbyterian point of view because the conservatives in their own communion had expelled the Whitfieldians—and this was understood to offend the Dutch Reformed. They failed from the Dutch point of view because the Dutch were afraid to be associated with a church that had, or even *had* had "Whitfield men" in it. It failed from the German point of view because of language incompatibility at first, and because, later on in the process, the Germans had separated themselves from Dutch control and set up their own *Coetus*.

Good put this example forward to prove, on the one hand, that there was a union impulse within Calvinism: efforts at union in fact had been made; indeed, the very first union efforts in America were made by Calvinists. On the other hand, this example demonstrated the tragedy of miscommunication—an error he hoped to avoid in the new era. "The time has now come," Good argued, "when Church Union

should be lifted out of the mists and confusion that has surrounded it, and be elevated into a science." The new discovery that had been made since the early attempts at church union (before the founding of the nation) was the "idea of federation." With this most-American principle, Good concluded, the unions of the future will be consummated.[32]

Professor James Good went on to become an advocate of church union in the Reformed Church—union, that is, with the Presbyterians. In 1926, a pamphlet was circulated "by members of the Reformed Church in the interests of the extension of Christ's Kingdom in the world." Most of the signatories to the pamphlet were pastors and professors from Ohio. Among the many articles contained within was one by Good entitled "An Organic Union of a Federal Type: A New Milestone of Progress." Good recommended continuing discussions with an eye toward merger with the Presbyterians. His reasons were many. First, he argued that the confessional standards of the two churches were equivalent: the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Westminster Confession* promoted the same system of faith. Second, he commended the organic/federal mode of church government that was under discussion. According to this model, the national body—the Synod or General Assembly—would be "organically" united; and the local bodies (the presbyteries) would remain autonomous and enter into a federation. Third, he suggested that the union would bring great economic advantages. Where two relatively weak congregations functioned poorly in the same area, one united and stronger congregation could be established. Finally, through its incorporation into a denomination whose membership was nation-wide, the Reformed Church would gain influence and prestige. In sum, as Good saw it, "the proposed union would lift the [German Reformed] Church into a new plane of being, into a larger sphere of activity, [and] into a higher impulse of life."[33]

Throughout Good's article, George Richards was held up as a straw figure. Richards' public objections to the Presbyterians were enumerated and countered.[34] As Good presented the conflict, Richards defended a classic Mercersburg position against a latter-day Ursinus critique. Two points were of particular significance. First, Richards was characterized as objecting to the *Westminster Confession* because it was allegedly incompatible with the *Heidelberg Catechism*. In particular, the doctrine of predestination bothered Richards. Good argued that the 1903 revision of the *Confession*,

which eliminated the most offensive aspects of this doctrine, rendered Richards' objection irrelevant. Second, Richards claimed that the proposed federal/organic model of church union was a "mere merger." The German Reformed Church would be absorbed and disappear; worse, organic development would not occur: no advance in the history of the church would be made. Good discounted this objection by pointing out that the national governing body would indeed be the product of an organic union, and that the federation was a new principle that should be tried before it was condemned.

But Richards' objections to the Presbyterians perhaps went deeper than Good suggested. The Mercersburg tradition had had a curious relationship with the Presbyterians. True, after he left Mercersburg, Philip Schaff became a Presbyterian. Still, during the heyday of the Mercersburg theology, the Princeton theologian Charles Hodge represented the "intolerant"—though worthy—Presbyterian opposition to the works of Schaff and Nevin. Schaff understood the *Westminster Confession* to be the reigning theory behind American Puritanism—a religious system he relentlessly criticized while at Mercersburg because it led to individualism and ultimately, full atomism. It was not, according to Schaff, an irenic document capable of maintaining community—as the *Heidelberg* was.

That Richards shared this suspicion of the *Westminster Confession* is clear in a paper he presented to the "Council of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System" in July of 1925 in Cardiff, Wales. After discussing the American revisions of the *Westminster Confession*, Richards referred to the great rift in Presbyterianism between conservatives and liberals. He characterized the "post-millenarians" who composed the "Five points of Calvinism in the United States" as "individualists" who "have no sympathy with the social gospel." He was appalled by their "method of defense," which was "to cure the enactment of laws by the state that will make illegal the teaching of evolution in the public schools."[35] The pointed reference was to the trial of John T. Scopes, which was taking place back in the United States during the summer of 1925.

From Richards' point of view, then, the situation in the Presbyterian Church was too volatile. The fundamentalist-modernist controversy left him deeply perplexed—as his address demonstrated. There was too much conflict and intolerance; a liberal spirit (in the irenic, Mercersburg sense of that phrase) seemed to be lacking among the

Presbyterians. Perhaps Richards suffered from Presbyopia. In any case, when the Presbyterians were unprepared to begin union negotiation in 1926, further discussions with them were ended. Richards' eyes turned elsewhere. In time, they looked westward toward the Evangelical Synod.

An Inevitable and Unique Compatibility

When discussions between the Evangelical Synod and the Reformed Church began in earnest, George Richards sat across the table from Helmut Richard Niebuhr. Both men shared a disdain for church disunity. Niebuhr was in the process of writing his book *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* at the time: a rousing sociological critique of the whole denominational system in the United States. According to Niebuhr, denominationalism "represents the accommodation of Christianity to the caste-system." Niebuhr continued:

> The division of the churches closely follows the division of men into the castes of national, racial, and economic groups. It draws the color line in the church of God; it fosters the misunderstandings, the self-exaltations, the hatreds of jingoistic nationalism by continuing in the body of Christ the spurious differences of provincial loyalties; it seats the rich and the poor apart at the table of the Lord, where the fortunate may enjoy the bounty they have provided while the others feed upon the crusts their poverty affords.[36]

Denominationalism was insidious, in the end, because it broke Christians down into competing groups that became more concerned with their own preservation than the advancement of the Kingdom of God (a cultural and theological exposition of which was the focus of Niebuhr's next book).[37] There was no theological justification for denominations, but the ethical consequences of denominationalism for human societies were tragic. In the end, Niebuhr called for an "organic, active peace of brotherhood" that was prepared to cast off lesser loyalties and participate fully in the eternal values of the Kingdom of God.[38]

Niebuhr's concerns for an organic principle and the advancement of the Kingdom of God must have resonated well with Dr. Richards. In his 1918 address, Richards had argued:

> A new organism must evolve, taking into itself the essential Christian elements of the old denominations and eliminating their ephemeral historical forms. This organic principle is the essence of evangelical Christianity.[39]

The opportunity to become that new organism finally presented itself in the negotiations that began in earnest in 1928. Among other things, the possibility of union promised to alter, in complementary ways, the relationship of these historically German communities to America; it promised to make an impact on American culture through a "united effort"; and it offered the occasion to overcome lingering doctrinal differences that plagued, especially, the Evangelical Synod. Through these reconciliation efforts the Evangelical and Reformed Church could serve as a model of "ogranic union" for the larger church union effort within the ecumenical movement.

Already in 1869, the German Reformed Church dropped the *German* from its name. By the turn of the century its members were almost exclusively English speakers and the denomination produced no German language publications. From the point of view of the latter-day inheritors of the Mercersburg tradition, chief among them, George Richards, the temptation for the Reformed Church had always been to become too much like its "English" neighbors—to become, as it were, indistinguishable from the other American Protestant churches. Philip Schaff and John Nevin had rescued the denomination from that fate when it had been threatened by the portable piety of the post-Second Great Awakening "new measures." Part of the Mercersburg inheritance (as opposed to the Ursinus position) was a lingering distrust of the culturally established denominations. And so the Evangelical Synod was appealing to men like Richards precisely because it was not "too American."

In the eyes of the Evangelical Synod, the Reformed Church represented acceptance in American culture. There were affinities because of a common German heritage, but the Reformed Church seemed to have accomplished what some of the leaders in the Evangelical Synod had hoped for a long time to do: they had cast off the language and customs of Germany and become an established American Church. There was also probably an element of truth in the comment of W. F. Henninger concerning the perceived superiority of the East. Following the lead of Reinhold and Helmut Richard Niebuhr, ministerial students from the Synod began to venture east

for further education during the 1920's. A marriage with a partner from that hallowed region, therefore, offered the midwesterners more cultural capital.

Both denominations considered it important to "make an impact through a united effort," but what was meant by this phrase (and similar formulations) is open to interpretation. For the Evangelical Synod, it seems, the accent fell on the first part of the phrase. A strong desire to get involved in American culture and change it for the better was frequently mentioned as a goal of church union. For the Reformed Church, the emphasis fell on the second part of the phrase. The unity itself was perceived to be a desirable goal for the Church and as a symbol to the world of unity in Christ. Perhaps it could be stated this way: for the Evangelical Synod, unity was a practical matter; for the Reformed Church, unity was an ontological affirmation. On the one hand, churches united to do something in the world; on the other hand, churches united to be something in the world.

A third issue the union between the two communions promised to resolve was a certain sense of doctrinal insufficiency on the part of each communion. The Evangelical Synod looked to the Reformed Church to provide the active Calvinist principle in its doctrinal affirmations and in its orientation to the world. Meanwhile, the Reformed Church looked for the moderate Melancthonian Lutheranism that had so shaped its self-understanding during the Mercersburg era. Indeed, George Richards asserted that the union between the two denominations would complete the work that Philip Schaff had begun in 1854 to join the two communions.[40] Eighty years later, thanks in large part to George Richards, Schaff's work was done.

The Church Union Movement in the Aftermath of Union

The success of the Evangelical and Reformed Church adventure engendered a cheery optimism about the prospects of church union in the United States. Already in 1937, informal ecumenical discussions had begun between Evangelical and Reformed Church ministers and their Congregational Christian Churches counterparts in the Saint Louis area, for example. And indeed, by 1943 a proposal for the unification of these two denominations was made public. As initially put forward, the proposed church's "Basis of Union" was a product of the same ethos that had guided the Evangelical and Reformed Church

so successfully: only the briefest outline established the relationship; particulars were entrusted to the future, in the expectation that the new Church would grow and develop as one.

But this time around distrust and suspicion surrounded the courtship. The next fourteen years were filled with revisions of the "Basis of Union," significant court battles, and an endless stream of pamphlets for and against the merger. Finally on June 25, 1957, representative of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches met in Cleveland, Ohio, to celebrate the beginning of their new life together as the United Church of Christ. But unlike the innocents of the earlier church union, these parties came to the altar with a solid prenuptial agreement in hand.[41]

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[1] Carl E. Schneider, "Journey into Union" in David Dunn, ed., *A History of the Evangelical and Reformed Church* (Philadelphia: Christian Education Press, 1961), 286.

[2] For example, the new church created a plan of government that resolved the tensions between the freer, more independent Evangelical system and the ordered, presbyterial system of the Reformed Church. They composed a *Book of Worship* that accounted for and incorporated differences in liturgical understandings and practices. They consolidated their various societies and denominational publications. They merged the seminary faculties of Central Theological Seminary in Ohio with Eden Theological Seminary in Saint Louis, relocating students and teachers to Eden.

[3] Frederick Wilhelm III, the King of Prussia, presided over the unification of Reformed and Lutheran churches in his realm, a unification that began officially on October 31, 1817, with the formation of the Prussian Union Chuch. See Walter H. Conser Jr., *Church and Confession* (Macon: Mercer, 1984), chapter two, especially 13-18.

[4] The connection between European problems and the frontier situation is made by Theophil Menzel in his two chapters "European Background—Evangelical" and "Frontier Beginnings" in Dunn, ed., 147-189; see especially "Effects of the Rationalist Movement," 154-157.

[5] Rupertus Meldenius was a pseudonym for the German Lutheran theologian, Peter Meiderlin (1582-1651). See the *Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia* (New York: Scribners, 1917), 287.

[6] The western expansion of the German Reformed Church is discussed in Josias Friedli, "The Winning of the West" in Dunn, ed., 115-146.

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[7] John W. Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (Chambersburg: 1843).

[8] See Schaff's discussion of the "German Evangelical Association of the West" in *America: A Sketch of its Political, Social, and Religious Character* (New York: Scribners, 1855; reprinted Cambridge: Belknap, 1961), 164-166. Significantly, Schaff expressed his hope that the union principle would be carried into the American mainstream through this unique Association. For the purposes of this essay, the following is of particular interest: "Should [the Evangelical Association] succeed. . . in keeping pace with the times, it must place itself the more as a connecting link between the Lutheran and German Reformed Churches, reach toward both the hand of love and peace, and thus draw them gradually nearer together, and by contributing its share to their final reconciliation in spirit and in truth, accomplish the proper objective of the [Prussian] Union [Church]" (166).

[9] The two articles were "The Failure of German-Americanism," *Atlantic*, July 1916, 16-18, and "The Nation's Crime Against the Individual," *Atlantic*, November 1916, 614.

[10] Portions of this discussion about Niebuhr and the subsequent reference to George Richards appear in a different and abbreviated form in Theodore Louis Trost, "Confessional Identity: An Early Exchange" in M. Douglas Meeks and Robert D. Mutton, ed., *In Essentials Unity: Reflections on the Nature and Purpose of the Church in Honor of Frederick R. Trost* (Minneapolis: Kirk House, 2001), 108-112.

[11] R[einhold] Niebuhr, "Where Shall We Go?" *Magazin für Evangelische Theologie und Kirche*, 47/2 (1919), 125-126; reprinted in Elizabeth Nordbeck and Lowell Zuck, ed., *The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ 4* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1999), 357-362. (During this period, H. Richard Niebuhr used his more ethnic first name, Helmut; he was not known as H. Richard until after he ventured East, to Yale, in 1931.)

[12] Niebuhr, "Where Shall We Go?" 162.

[13] W. F. Henninger, "Why Go At All?" *Magazin für Evangelische Theologie und Kirche*, 47/3 (1919), 194; reprinted in Nordbeck and Zuck, ed., 363-370.

[14] Henninger, "Why Go at All?" 197.

[15] Henninger, "Why Go at All?" 201.

[16] Reinhold Niebuhr, "In Rebuttal, by the Author of 'Where Shall We Go?'" *Magazin für Evangelische Theologie und Kirche*, 47/4 (1919), 270-271; reprinted in Elsabeth Slaughter Hilke, ed., *The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ 6* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2001), 460-463.

[17] Schneider in Dunn, ed., 232; 261.

[18] "Prospectus for 1927," *Theological Magazine of the Evangelical Synod of North America*, 55/1 (1927), 1.

[19] Schneider in Dunn, ed., 275.

[20] Walter Brueggemann, *Ethos and Ecumenism, An Evangelical Blend: A History of Eden Theological Seminary 1925-1975* (Saint Louis: Eden, 1975), 14.

[21] Hugo Kamphausen, "Will It Be Luther or Calvin?" *Theological Magazine*, 56/2 (1928), 131-133; reprinted in Elsabeth Slaughter Hilke, ed., *The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ 6* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2001), 467-469.

[22] Peter the Hermit, "Why Go, Why Not Stay?" *Theological Magazine*, 56/3 (1928), 189-190; reprinted in Hilke, ed., 470-471.

[23] H. L. Streich, "Church Union," *Theological Magazine*, 56/4 (1928), 297-300. See also, for example: A. A. Sussott, "Our Confession," *Theological Magazine*, 56/4 (1928), 263-269; and Carl E. Schneider, "The Evangelical Synod and Church Union," *Theological Magazine*, 56/5 (1928), 321-333.

[24] George W. Richards, "The Historical Significance of Denominationalism: A Paper Read Before the Conference on Organic Union Held at the Invitation of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A." (Philadelphia: 1918), 18-19.

[25] Richards, "The Historical Significance," 23.

[26] See, for example, Philip Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism* (Chambersburg 1845; reprinted in the *Lancaster Series on the Mercersburg Theology I* [ed. Bard Thompson and George Bricker; Philadelphia: United Church, 1964]), 198-200, and the essay "What is Church History?: A Vindication of the Idea of Historical Development" (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1846; reprinted in *Reformed and Catholic: Selected Historical*

and Theological Writings of Philip Schaff [ed. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. and George M. Bricker; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1979]), 107-114.

[27] See George Richards, "Calvinism in the Reformed Churches of Germany," *Reformed Church Review*, 13/2 (April, 1909), 316-345; Richards' reference to Heppe appears on 335. Also see Heinrich Heppe, tr. by T. C. Porter, "The Character of the German Reformed Church and its Relation to Lutheranism and Calvinism," *Mercersburg Review*, 5/2 (1853), 181-206. See also John Nevin, *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1846) and *The Heidelberg Catechism in German, Latin, and English: With an Historical Introduction, Tercentenary Edition* (Chambersburg: 1863).

[28] Quoted by John C. Shelter, "The Ursinus School" in Barbara Brown Zikmund, ed., *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ* (New York: Pilgrim, 1984), 38.

[29] See James I. Good, *History of the Reformed Church in the U. S. in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: 1911), 614. Good's *History* represents the anti-Mercersburg position. The "legitimate" or "legitimating" story is told by Joseph H. Dubbs in Volume VIII of the American Church History Series: *History of the Reformed Church in the United States* (New York: 1903). This historic, multi-denominational series was inaugurated under the editorial directorship of Philip Schaff.

[30] The distaste for disunion in the Reformed Church is perhaps best exemplified in the Church's ability to keep the distinct tendencies of the Mercersburg and Ursinus schools together in one church from the time of the Civil War until the merger with the Evangelical Synod in 1934.

[31] James I. Good, "The First Attempt at Church Union in America," *Presbyterian Quarterly* (1901), 618-626.

[32] Good, "The First Attempt," 625.

[33] James I. Good, "An Organic Union of a Federal Type: A New Milestone of Progress" in *Suggestive Facts and Articles and Closer Relations between the Reformed Church in the United States and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A*, n.d. [circa 1926], 1-9.

[34] Good claims that Richards' argument against the Presbyterian conversations was made in "a recent article. . . in the *Reformed Review*." I have not been able to locate the article in question.

[35] George W. Richards, "Movements in Religious Thought the Last Fifty Years," *The Reformed Church Review*, 5/2 (April, 1926), 113-131.

[36] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Holt, 1929), 6.

[37] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper, 1937).

[38] Niebuhr, *The Social Sources*, 625.

[39] George W. Richards, "The Historical Significance of Denominationalism," 19.

[40] In his definitive history of the United Church of Christ, Louis H. Gunnemann makes the following note: "George W. Richards asserted that in 1854 Schaff entered into correspondence with Professor William Binner, of the seminary of the *Kirchenverein*, then located at Marthasville, Missouri. From that correspondence the conviction grew in Schaff's mind that these two German church bodies should unite. He urged his Mercersburg colleagues to work toward that." See Louis H. Gunnemann, *The Shaping of the United Church of Christ: An Essay in the History of American Christianity* (New York: United Church, 1977), 191.

[41] The story of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and Congregational Christian Churches merger is told in great detail in Louis H. Gunnemann; see especially Chapter 2, 39-56. An account of the process leading up to the merger that focuses on the conflicts within the Congregational Christian Churches is contained in Theodore Louis Trost, *Douglas Horton and the Ecumenical Impulse in American Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard Divinity School, 2002); see especially 73-142.

SOVEREIGNTY AND SANCTIFICATION: REFORMED ACCENTS IN ECUMENISM

Gabriel Fackre

Dialogue with Lutherans on proposals for full communion "concentrates the mind" on the subject at hand. So I discovered in ten years on the Reformed team in the North American Lutheran-Reformed Conversation. Who are we vis a vis our interlocutors? What do we have to share? Are there things we have to learn?

As the specifics of Reformed identity were significantly shaped by sixteenth century exchanges with the Lutheran tradition, they continue to come into bold relief in contemporary encounters. What follows relives historic debates. Yet this time around, like the Leuenberg Concord, important steps are taken beyond the polarization of another day. The advance is reflected in the formula of the North American Lutheran-Reformed accord consummated in 1997: "mutual affirmation and mutual admonition."[1]

In this laboratory of learning I discerned two aspects of the Reformed contribution to ecumenics. One has to do with its ecumenical predisposition as such, and the other with the specific charisms the

[1] The formual appears initially in Keith F. Nickle and Timothy F. Lull, ed., *A Common Calling: The Witness of the Reformation Churches in North America Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), and was at the heart of the *Formula of Agreement* (FOA) adopted in 1997 by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church, USA, the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ. An exploration of the mutuality theme in the Lutheran-Reformed Conversation, and also in the proposed North American Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat and the international Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue on "justification by faith," appears in Gabriel Fackre and Michael Root, *Affirmations and Admonitions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1968). On the Lutheran-Reformed exchange about the same see the writer's "What the Lutherans and the Reformed Can Learn from One Another," Alan E. Johnson, "Seeking a Common Ground: A Response to Gabriel Fackre,: and "Gabriel Fackre Replies," in *The Christian Century* Vol. 114, No. 18 (June 4-11, 1998), pp. 558-561, 563-564).

Reformed tradition brings to the ecumenical arena, "sovereignty" and "sanctification." At the same time, keeping in mind the associated admonition, a Reformed reductionism can hurt ecumenism and close our ears to the contributions and critiques of others.

SOVEREIGNTY

A critical Lutheran word repeated in the dialogue, ever and again: "We're not sure that you Reformed people believe in the Real Presence . . . And you're too casual about the church and too wrapped up in the world. . . . When it comes to Christology, you are Nestorius *redivivus*. . . . Bonhoeffer sums up for us just where the Reformed went wrong. As Bethge put it:

> Botfceffer suspects here [in Barth] the old *extra-Calvinsticum* which does not allow the glory of God to enter entirely into this world. *Finitum incpax infiniti*, me Calvinists say. Bonhoffer protests with Luther against this all his life. *Finitum capax infiniti*. . . .[2]

Bonhoffer's point?

> God is *there*, which is to say not in eternal non-objectivity [but] "haveable," graspable in his Word within the church. . . . It is the honour and glory of our God . . . that giving himself for our sake in deepest condescension, he posses into the flesh, the bread, our hearts, our mouths, entrails, and suffers also for our sake hat he be dishonourably (*unehrlich*) handled, on the altar as on the Cross.[3]

That's why Luther judged you Reformed to be of "a different spirit."

This charge, expressed in one way or another by our North American Lutheran critics, made for much soul-searching.[4] Some of us—both

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[2] Eberhard Bethge, "Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology," in *World Come of Age*, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 36-37.

[3] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, trans. Bernard Noble (New York: Harper and Bros., 1961), pp. 90-91, 81 (Bonhoeffer quoting Marin Luther, WA 23.157).

[4] For a sample of the back-and-forth on these matters see, Mark E. Chapman, "Why Can't

Lutheran and Reformed—could not forget that Bonhoeffer and Barth were allies in making a faithful witness in the German church struggle. Doesn't this suggest the presence of underlying convergences and even more, possible mutual learnings? In the dialogue, we needed to be clear about what prompted the Lutheran judgments, then weigh their validity.

In sacramentology, Christology, ecclesiology and ethics, the Lutherans perceive the Reformed to be distancing God from the divine *haveability*. Deity seems always out of reach in a Zwinglian memorialism, a Nestorian severing of the natures and an unstable, humanized church and mission. Where are the promises of Christ to be *with* us . . . *in* us . . . under *us*?

Lutherans, past and present, because of their 'haveable' lens, do spot something. We fight against the domestication of Deity. The sovereign God is not to be "handled" by humans. And so in turn, suspect Lutheran eucharistic theology of such control temptations, discover Monophysite tendencies in Lutheran Christology and charge its ecclesiology with an uncritical "continuing of the Incarnation" devoid of the *simper reformanda*. Yes, the Reformed tradition stands unapologetically for the divine freedom! God will not be bound by our human hands, even by the holiest of claimants. The early Barth had it right when he showed how this Reformed commitment works itself out in matters of confession and creed.

> To our fathers the historical past was something which called not for loving and devoted admiration but for careful and critical scrutiny. . . . There are documentary statements of their beliefs . . . but . . . our fathers had good reason for leaving us *no* Augsburg Confession authentically interpreting the word of God, *no* Formula of Concord, *no* "Symbolic Books" which might later, like the Lutheran, possess the odor of sanctity. . . . It *may* be our doctrinal task to make a careful revision of the theology of Geneva or the Heidelberg Catechism or the Synod of Dort or . . . it *may* be our task to draw up a new creed. . . .[5]

We Get this Right?" *Lutheran Forum* Vol.. 27, No. 2 (May, 1993), Gabriel Fackre "Response to Chapman: A Common Calling:," Vol .27, No. 3 (August 1993), Mark A. Chapman, "Response m Gabriel Fackre," Vol.. 27, No. 4 (Advent 1993). On the Lutheran critique see Robert Jenson, "Comment on A Common Calling" *Pro Ecclesia* Vol.1, No.1 (Fall1992), pp.16-20.

[5] Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1928), pp. 229-230.

All of this is of a piece, according to Barth, with the Reformed *Deo Sola Gloria* and thus its "resolute refusal to deify any created thing . . . its *finitum non est capax infiniti*. . . ."[6]

Just because of this "resolute refusal to deify any created thing," Reformed sensibility encourages a light touch on inherited ecclesial things. The givens of church life are corrigible, always re-formable under the Word. The *incapax* and the *sempter* predispose the Reformed to challenge the ecelesial status quo. Especially so where denominational claims are made that here and here alone is Christ's true Body. In the sixteenth century this took the shape of a re-forming movement *within* the church catholic. In the twentieth century it took the shape of an ecumenical re-forming movement *toward* the church catholic. The temptation in the first context was the corralling of deity into ancient homogeneous givens. The temptation in the second context was the delimited association of deity with modem heterogeneous givens.

Ecumenism as the quest for a re-formed life together beyond the multifarious tribal enclaves cannot help but find a home in the Reformed witness to the divine sovereignty. Is it any accident that Reformed theologian W. A. Visser t'Hooft, the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, called the churches out of their historic divisions toward the "*Una Sancta*" based on loyalty to the "*ecclesia reformanda, qui refomata*" mandate of its one Sovereign and thus obedience to the" "kingship of Christ"?[7] The history of Reformed initiatives and involvement in the ecmnenical movement reflects Visser t'Hooft's mandate.

But, wait a minute. There is plenty of evidence also for Reformed foot-dragging, of resistance to the ecumenical impulse, indeed of reversing it by spawning division, by the clams of one or another fissiparous Reformed denomination to be the sole custodian of the treasures of the gospel. Ironically, such Reformed rigidities have

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[6] Barth, *The Word of God*, p. 231. See also Barth's self-critical Reformed comments on these matters in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2 tans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), pp. 68-69.

[7] W.A. Visser t'Hooft, *The Kingship of Christ: An Interpretation of Recent European Theology* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1948), pp. 89-116.

a Lutheran cast to them, a defense of the "haveable," a treatment of "the theology of Geneva" and the "Synod of Dort" as if they were an unalterable Augsburg Confession, the deification of "created things" and thus creatures of the *capax*.

But wait a minute . . . again. Is it possible that the Lutherans have something to teach the "always reforming" people? Do the status quo Reformed themselves represent a reminder to us of something we revisables may forget?

When a Reformed church writes only *semper* on its banners, and neglects the criterion by which it must assess the call to reform under—*the Word*, the charges of our critics do strike home. We are too easily seduced by the *au courant*. Our eagerness to change makes us too ready to abandon the historic givens in order to "keep up with the times." Called to *relate* to the culture under the freedom of the Word, we instead *capitulate* to it. Taking up Pastor Robinson's Reformed cry of "ever-new light and truth shall break forth . . ." we are tempted to omit the criteriological "from his holy Word"

Reformed involvement in the ecumenical arena illustrates the foregoing. The sovereignty commitment makes us ever-ready to challenge tribal givens and internal new ventures in structural church union—for example, the United Church of Christ and the United Church of Canada in North America. At the same time, critics point to tendencies in each of these Churches to succumb to an ideological religious pluralism ready to abandon the Christology that forms both their identity and their ecumenical commitments.[8] This has sparked controversy in both Churches and the formation of protest groups raising questions about the cultural captivity of their denominations.[9]

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[8] See, for example, the United Chinch of Christ's Board for Homeland Ministries "Pluralism Principles" and its "Foundation paper" on the subject by Daniel F. Romero, *Our Futures Inextricably Linked* Division of Education and Publication, 1994. Latitudinarian christological statements of the moderator of the United Church of Canada evoked recent controversy in that Church.

[9] A case in point is the "Confessing Christ" movement in the United Church of Christ. See "The Church of the Center," in Gabriel Fackre, *Restoring the Center* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 27-45.

Missing in a one-note Reformed stress on sovereignty is the Lutheran witness to *solidarity*, God's solidarity with us in the givens. The Word to which we are accountable in our right commitment to re-form the corigible past comes to us through the givens of Scripture: tradition, church and sacrament. Ecumenism that undercuts these "haveables" is false to the very means of grace the Holy Spirit used to bring it to be. And theology devoid of them will be seduced by every claimant Now that purports loyalty to the *semper* and *incapax*.

Of course, mutual admonition works both ways. Lutherans who have little to show in their history of actual ecumenical advance have acceded in their turn to a one-note stress on "solidarity." The givens of inherited creed and cult have so dominated their tradition that even a slightly "altered" Augsburg Confession (1540) is cause for clamor, and small ecumenical initiatives in the direction of close Reformation companions evoke outrage among the self-appointed custodians of Lutheran identity.[10] How much that Lutheran ear needs to hear the Reformed word of sovereignty! Without it, Lutherans fall prey to the same reductionism they rightly criticize in Reformed history. In both cases, "the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you.'" Paul's Corinthian admonitions are as timely as ever.[11]

The promise of the present ecumenical developments is evidence of mutualities in listening. Certainly the remarkable role of current Lutheran ecumenics is evidence of an openness to the *semper*. The secular press in the form of *US News & World Report* captions a

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[10] So the Department of Systematic Theology, "A Review of 'A Common Calling'" *Concordia Theological* Review Vol. 57, No. 3 (July 1993), pp. 193-213.

[11] The difference in Lutheran and Reformed sensibility vis a vis both "sovereignty/sanctification" and "solidarity/simultaneity" is illustrated in the approach to hymnody on new challenges of inclusive language. A comparison of the modest alterations made in the ELCA *Lutheran Book of Worship* to those that press the Reformed *semper reformanda* of inclusivity through increasing alterations in *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (USA), *The Book of Praise* (Presbyterian Church of Canada) and in *The New Century Hymnal* (A UCC agency) is instructive. Here the two traditions need each other. Lutherans are too tradition-bound and the Reformed may imperil the best of tradition by eagerness for change without careful doctrinal scrutiny. On these mutualities see, Richard Christensen, ed., *How Shall We Sing the Lord's Song?: An Assessment of the New Century Hymnal* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1997).

news story, "An Ecumenical Summer." The report had to do with three Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) initiatives up for 1997 vote: the international Lutheran-Roman Catholic proposal to lift mutually the sixteenth century condemnations on justification, a Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat and the aforementioned Lutheran-Reformed Agreement. While only the last has been approved by all parries, the others may yet achieve their goals in one way or another. And, as for the Reformed contingent (including the Reformed strain in the Episcopal tradition), the Lutheran witness to classical doctrine has been heard and commitments made to the same, as in key sections of both the FOA and the Concordat.[12]

The success of the FOA was due, in part, to the re-reading of one another's particularities as charisms *within* a common Body not occasions for excommunication from it. A case in point was the eucharistic controversy. Lutherans in the current dialogue saw that all the classical Reformed confessions and contemporary liturgies affirm the "Real Presence," but do so in the characteristic Reformed framework of sovereignty and not the Lutheran mode of "solidarity" (the concept of ubiquity). Thus Returned language of "spiritual Presence" refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing the believer, in eating and drinking, into communion with the glorified humanity of Christ.[13]

SANCTIFICATION

The 1919 steel strike was long and bitter. The company's "coal and iron police" and strikers fought one another in ways reminiscent of the historic 1892 shoot-out between Pinkerton detectives and Homestead Steelworkers. Why these recurring conflicts in Pittsburgh's

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[12] For example, the inclusion in the final version of the FOA of 14 "affinities in doctrine and practice" of the two traditions appropriated from the 1983 North American "Invitation to Action" cited in James E. Andrews and Joseph A Burgess, eds. *An Invitation to Action: The Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue, Series III, 1981-1983* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 2-3.

[13] In the nineteenth century when similar debates wracked the Reformed churches, John Williamson Nevin surveyed the Reformed catechisms to make just this point. See *The Mystical Presence and Other Writings on the Eucharist*, Lancaster Series on the Mercersburg Theology, Vol. 4, ed. Bard Thompson and George Bricker (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1966).

"steel valley"?

A budding ecumenical development early in the century, the "Interchurch World Movement," took it upon itself to find out what lay behind worker unrest. Its Commission on Inquiry produced The Interchurch Steel Strike Reports that "served to present facts surrounding the employment of men in the steel industry that aroused a sense of resentment against this great corporation throughout the civilized world."[14] Church involvement of this sort in the steelworkers' struggle for justice was a factor in leading the writer to a ten year ministry in the steel valley in mission churches earlier established by the Reformed Church in the U.S. to share in the workers' plight. The configuration here of ecumenism, the Reformed tradition and social struggle, illustrate our second motif: "sanctification."

The impetus for ecumenism has often been the strength that such alliances give for making a witness in the public arena. "Social issues"—such as the wage, horns, working and living conditions in steel towns investigated by the Interchurch World Movement—could be confronted more effectively when churches joined together. The "Life and Work" aspect of world ecumenism is the institutionalizing of the impetus Local, regional and national conciliar ecumenism is often best known for its social witness, and is frequently funded . . . or defunded . . . for stands taken on one or another social issue

Sanctfication in subjective soteriology is the doctrine that deals with grace as "power in" the believer that keeps company with the gate of "favor toward" the same, the impartation of gace inextricable from its imputation. *Becoming* holy as the outworking of the sinner being *declared* holy by a forensic grace has been a Reformed staple, especially so in give-and-take with Lutherans. And the more intense the conversation becomes the more the Reformed insistence on both the *possibilities* of genuine growth in grace and the *imperitives* of grace with its "third use of the law."

What obtains in the personal Christian life carries over in Reformed teaching and practice in the political, economic and social spheres—a

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[14] Arthur Wharton, "What the Church Needs to be Saved," in *Labor Speaks for Itself on Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Co, 1929), p. 95.

public sanctification commensurate with the personal. From Calvin's Geneva forward the Reformed tradition has held the civil order accountable to the regency of Christ (the conjunction of *sovereignty* with *sanctification*), with good hopes for its improvement. Nicholas Wolterstorff identifies it as its characteristic "world-formative" impulse to be contrasted with the "avertive" tendencies of other traditions. (Then-Lutheran Richard Neuhaus took offense in a response to the book).[15] Reinhold Niebuhr was partial to the later Calvin and the later Calvinists (Cromwell) for their world-formative commitments and critical of Luther and the Lutherans for both their privatizing of Christian faith (insufficient "sovereignty") and a stress on moral ambiguity that tended to neglect the possibilities in soul and society (insufficient "sanctification").[16]

The call to and hope for, the world's sanctifying reform predisposes Reformed Churches to look for ecclesial instruments of sufficient strength to take on the secular principalities and powers. In modem times, ecumenical agencies appeared as likely candidates. The support by Reformed denominations for "interchurch" movements for "life and work" purposes was a natural result. Along with the urgings of *simper reformanda*, the imperatives of *sanctificatio* contiributed to the major role they played in the North American conciliar efforts at all levels. And it is quite possible that whatever the announced rationale for two major union efforts in structural ecumenism in North America (the United Church of Christ and the United Church of Canada), the chance for a more effective church witness on social issues surely played a role.[17]

Along with enthusiasm for ecumenism as such because of its potential for social witness, the Reformed tradition within that movement brought to the fore ever and again the concerns of social sanctification. In the Lutheran-Reformed conversations in both Europe and North America, the Reformed

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[15] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 3-22 and *passim*.

[16] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vols. 1 & 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945), pp. 222-223 (Vol. 1) 1, p. 192, p. 196 (Vol. 2).

[17] See Theodore Louis Trost, "The Ecumenical Impulse in Twentieth Century American Protestantism: A Study of Douglas Horton's Illustrative Career (circa 1912-1968), Diss. Harvard University 1998, *passim*.

"mode of thinking'

> begins with the assumption that the obedience of faith in state and society is a matter of the church as a whole also [not just the individual] . . . and that the acting of the Christian must not be separated from this relation.[18]

Echoes of admonishing Lutherans for their "avertive" inclinations can be heard in this Reformed self-definition.

But admonition goes both ways. The strength of the sanctification charism carries with it weaknesses, as Lutherans are quick to point out. Niebuhr in his Lutheran moments said it this way:

> The theologies which have sought to do justice to the positive aspects of regeneration have usually obscured the realities of sin which appear at every level of virtue. . . . . Calvin's . . . doctrine of sanctification arrivers at conclusions hardly distinguishable from Catholic ones . . . the Christian in which sin is broken "in prinicple" claims that the sins which remain are merely incidental . . . without realizing that the sin of self-love is present in its most basic form (Calvin) assuming a *prevailing* inclination to submit to (God's) will.[19]

The susceptibility of the Reformed tradition to illusions along the trail of sanctification has played out in both its ecumenical impulse and its social concern.

While strengthening the will to ecumenism by stressing its ethical fruits, the sanctification side of Reformed faith can so control its understanding of ecumenism most it diminishes the role of doctrinal accord so crucial to considered and lasting ecumenical agreements. In our North American dialogue, the accusation by Lutherans that my own church, the United Church of Christ, had no theology and was "only a social action agency." "the religious cheering section of the Democratic Party," etc. was frequent, with many references to standard media reports of political stands taken by our officialdom. It was no easy both to defend one legitimate "world-formative" commitments and at the same time point to the confessional solidarities in which our Church is grounded. Hence the formation by doctrinally-grounded

[18] *A Common Calling* quoting the Driebergen Report, p. 60.

[19] *The Nature and Destinty of Man.* Vol. 2, pp. 125, 199 & 200.

social activists in our Church of the "Confessing Christ" movement to reclaim these fundaments and call them to the attention of both our critics and the theologically indifferent within our own ranks.

A similar case might be made for the impact of a sanctification rationale for ecumenism on such conciliar ventures as the US National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. When such bodies define themselves essentially in "world-formative" terms, without warrants in the theological substance which were critical to their birth, ecumenical momentum itself is put in jeopardy. Recent efforts of both these councils to reshape their agendas and retrieve their foundations suggest that admonitions about reductionist temptations are being heard, But again, let them be a two-way street, one in which the social sanctification dimension of ecumenism is not replaced by yet another reductionism, this time accession a apolitical pieties and theologies.

Reformed sanctification needs the primer gift of *simultaneity*, another learning from the Lutheran-Reformed dialogue. The Calvinist trust in "the prevailing inclination" of new states of grace in both soul and society has to be sobered by a realism that recognizes the corruptibility of every advance in either of those locales. Simultaneity has to do with the Lutheran *simul iustus et peccator*. The *sanctificatio* must walk with the *simul*. When the former goes it alone, Reformed faith breeds utopian expectations and self-righteous fury in both the life of the believer and in movements of social protest. Sin persists in every sanctifying move forward. The failure to attend to this Lutheran sobriety in matters of social sanctification has resulted in the naivetes of "righteous" actlvisms that silence internal criticism, the neglect of checks and balances within them, and the framing of social issues as simplistic "us and them" battles.[20]May we hear these Lutheran-like admonishments. And, again, vice verse: Lutheran absorptions in the ambiguities of soul and society and inolinations to retreat to the private realm must hear afReforrarrand *hope for* the work ofsanetifying graces under the Lord of both soul and society.

CONCLUSION

[20] See the writer's critique of political fundamentalism with its strong Reformed influences, *The Religious Right and Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1983).

A refrain of this paper is the importance of both affirmation and admonition in ecumenical matters. The tougher of the two is receiving admonishment from the ecumenical other. In this conversation on the Reformed contribution to ecumenics can we "take it" as well as "give it"? Here, finally, in this matter of vulnerability, the motif of sovereignty has a counsel for its stewards. To believe that no human opinion can be equated with the divine Word means that no Reformed accent itself can ever be exempt from self-criticism. The willingness to bear and learn from admonitions, therefore, is built into a Reformed tradition always ready to re-form in accord with the one Word. So our *simper* can walk together with another's *simul*, and yet other companions on the ecumenical path.

MERCERSBURG THEOLOGY RADICALIZED

Richard T. Schellhase

The purpose of this paper is to suggest a new way of speaking of God in light of modern science and technology by radicalizing Mercersburg theology. Although my views will be seen by many readers of the NMR as heretical, I will be in good company. You will remember that both Nevin and Schaff were tried for heresy. With that prospect, and for reasons that follow, I consider myself to be firmly within the circle of the Mercersburg tradition.

Mercersburg As Liturgy

For me, Mercersburg was a *liturgy* before it was a theology. Seventy-seven years ago I was carried into church and baptized by my father. I have never left the church. Every Sunday, before I could understand the words or their meaning, I heard my father say, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves"—and "Harken now unto the comforting assurance of the grace of God." Then followed the Apostles' Creed, the Gloria in Excelsis, etc. (We used the old Order of Worship in the Hymnal of the Reformed Church in the U.S.A., printed in 1866.)

Still resonating vividly in my ears are the solemn words of The Litany as read in the sonorous voice of my father all during Lent and at every Preparatory Service before celebrating the Eucharist. Its breadth was comprehensive and its cadence was mesmerizing. Among the most moving passages to me were the eight times we responded with "Good Lord, deliver us," after my father intoned phrases like these:

> From lightning, tempest and earthquake; from plague, pestilence and famine; from all disasters by land and by water; from battle and murder, and from sudden death;

and

> By the mystery of thy holy incarnation; by thy holy nativity and circumcision; by thy baptism, fasting and temptation;

The liturgy of Mercersburg was burned into my bones long before I learned of its theology. I was born a Mercersburger, absorbing its

liturgy, adopting its piety and being immersed in its cultus during my childhood and adolescence.

Mercersburg As Place

Mercersburg was also for me a *place* before it became a theology. With the liturgy securely seared into my psyche, my father took me to Mercersburg when I was 13 for my four years of high school (1938-42). Having attended Mercersburg Academy himself for two years, he introduced me to the campus when I was still a baby. Among the photographs I cherish most is a photo taken of me as I sat on the steps of the chapel before I was three years old. On the reverse side of the photo, my mother had written, "Richard at Mercersburg."

Mercersburg as place—a very particular piece of earth, with its special ethos, was ground into my being in no less an important way than had my soul been fed by its liturgy. The power of place cannot be over-estimated. Think how millions of persons for generations have been moved simply by the word of a place: "Jerusalem," or "Mecca," or "Banaras," or "Kyoto," or "Rome."

The relationship between an experience at a particular place and the subsequent memories and reflections on events at that specific site are revealing, and can be transformative. Consider Jacob at Bethel (house of God) and Peniel (seeing God face to face). Existential experiences of real people at particular places cascade through the centuries and are still gathering meaning and momentum for the generations that follow. Some of these have been captured and conveyed to us through scripture, tradition and the church. Moses on Mt. Sinai and Jesus on Mt. Tabor, for example. (And who, *really*, was transfigured there?)

Along with these special people and events depicted in the bible, and the community's memory and interpretation of them, are those later generations who, nourished both by the initial happenings and by the church's additional insights into their meaning, wove the substance of these into our liturgy and theology.

Similarly (but certainly not comparably) for me, Mercersburg as site, grounded its liturgy and theology to a particular place and gave it a very specific identity. I am convinced that place is important, and I still feel the effect of that tremendous force first set forth by Rauch, Nevin, Schaff *et al* as they, led by the Spirit, worshiped, studied and taught in those serene surroundings in south-central Pennsylvania.

I moved into South Cottage on the Mercersburg campus in 1940, exactly 100 years (almost to the day) after John Williamson Nevin took up residence there. (On August 12, 1844, Schaff spent his first night at Mercersburg in South Cottage as Nevin's guest.) Every Sunday for four years, as I entered and exited Trinity Reformed Church (just down the hill) for Sunday School, I passed the grave of Henry Harbaugh. The next hour, at worship in the majestic Gothic chapel, I sang his hymn, "Jesus I Live to Thee." Every Sunday. No exceptions! Every Sunday evening as I lay in bed, hymns from the carillon wafted down the green-swarded campus and lulled me to sleep.

Day after day I was surrounded by a spiritual presence, an intellectual seriousness and a moral earnestness that soaked in, often without my noticing. With the chapel at the top of the campus, there was a sense of the sacred that was inescapable. Even the walls of my dormitory I remember well: scores of framed photographs of cathedrals! (Is that why I visited 25 cathedrals on a trip to England some years ago? Is my time at Mercersburg the reason I have gone time and time again to Even-song at Canterbury and Winchester, and at St. Thomas in New York?)

Even the job I had at Mercersburg conspired to embed the spirit of the place in me. Since I was too small to carry trays in the dining room, I was assigned the task of spending two hours every Saturday polishing the huge offering basin and six plates. Making ready the altar for Sunday worship left its imprint on me. (The altar cross was a gift from President and Mrs. Coolidge in memory of their son, Calvin, Jr., who died when a student at the Academy in 1924.) In short, Mercersburg as liturgy and ethos was now grounded and rooted for me at the very spot where Mercersburg theology had been born. There I met the fathers of the German Reformed faith. And it did not escape me that the person whose name both the town and the theology bore—Hugh Mercer—was one who gave his life in the Revolution for the cause of freedom, not least of which was the freedom of religion.

The question naturally arises: Did I as a 13 or 16 year-old boy know then what was happening to me? The answer is suggested by T. S. Eliot:

> We had the experience but missed the meaning,
> And approach to the meaning restores the experience

In a different form. ---------- I have said before
That the past experience revived in the meaning
Is not the experience of one life only
But of many generations.

Mercersburg as liturgy and place became part of my inner history and self-identity, an existential experience which I cannot escape, and would not if I could. There is an ineradicable essence, a foundational substance and a guiding spirit of Mercersburg in me that will not let me go. It is from this base and within this context that I later learned to love and appreciate the sensibly liberal and inclusively ecumenical theology developed by the saints who lived there 150 years ago.

In short, I am a Mercersburger and, enlarging Paul's words, "Whatever any one dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendents of Abraham? So am I." Are they descendents of Nevin and Schaff? So am I—"I'm talking like a madman!"

Before turning to my own view of God in light of 20th century science and technology from my particular Mercersburg perspective, it may be instructive to see how our Mercersburg fathers dealt with science in their day, especially the new findings of biology, geology and astronomy.

Mercersburg and 19th Century Science

From the very beginning, Mercersburg was prepared to accept and integrate science into its theology. In his inaugural address in 1844, at the age of 25, Schaff revealed his progressive spirit and his conviction that theology needed to be open to science. "Rationalism," he asserted, "was a necessary schoolmaster for orthodox theology, destroying its groundless prejudices and compelling it to accept a more scientific form." Continuing his embrace of science and the arts, he declaimed, "The luxuriant growth of sciences, arts, and social culture lays the church under obligation to appropriate these advances to herself, and to impress upon them a religious character." Toward the end of "The Principal of Protestantism," he enlarges his "embrace" to a hearty hug, writing, "What we most need now is, theoretically, a thorough intellectual theology, scientifically free as well as decidedly believing, together with a genuine sense of history

and a determination to hold fast the patrimony of our fathers to go forward joyfully."

Five years later, in 1849, the "Prospectus" (probably the work of Nevin) was printed in the first issue of the *Mercersburg Review*. It too projects a far-sighted view of Mercersburg's attitude toward science and reads in part

> It will be assumed by the *Mercersburg Review* that the mystery of Christianity is objectively in full organic harmony with the constitution of the world as otherwise known, and that it is capable, accordingly, of scientific apprehension under such form. Room will be made, in this way, for the idea of theology as a living process in the life of the church, and not a tradition simply in its outward keeping. It will be taken for granted that theology is not yet complete.

Even though Darwin and evolution were the primary objects for theological discussion during the last half of the 20th century, there are obvious reasons that neither Nevin nor Schaff addressed them directly. *Origin of Species* was first published in 1859, and our Mercersburg fathers had other concerns in the years that immediately followed. Nevin left Mercersburg in 1853 and was inactive until he began teaching at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster in 1861. Schaff was virtually alone at Mercersburg from 1853 to 1863, when he was given a leave of absence, never to return to Mercersburg to teach. And the Civil War was more than a distraction: The town was a haven for run-away slaves and hassled by Confederate raids (Jeb Stuart came through with demands in 1862, and again in 1863). Classes were suspended after Gettysburg, when more than 600 wounded Confederate soldiers were hospitalized in the seminary's buildings. In addition, the "church question" and the liturgical dispute loomed large and sapped their energies.

However, close examination of the *Mercersburg Review* (MR) and its successors from 1849 to 1888 reveals hundreds of pages in scores of articles and book reviews on the subject of science and religion. The overwhelming tone in the articles was sympathetic and accepting of science. The authors tried as best they could to integrate the findings of science into their theology. Mercersburg was predisposed to appreciate and applaud science because of its respect for the scholarship of colleagues in other academic disciplines and also because they espoused and embraced a theology that was dynamic

and developmental; organic and forward looking. Typical of the attitude expressed in the MR are the following: "The very air is musical with the triumph of science" and "Natural science, like history, is the way of God in the world."

In a review of Max Mueller's "Lectures on Science and Religion," T.G. Apple writes, "It is truly wonderful how the unity of the race, and its organic unfolding, are making themselves felt in our day." (No defensive "creationism" here!) In another review of a book entitled *The Agreement of Science and Religion*, we read, "His general position that there is, and can be, no real contradiction between science and revelation will be generally accepted."

In 1872, in an address to the students of F&M, Professor J.S. Stahr tried to silence the critics of evolution in these words;

> The Darwinian Theory has attracted a great deal of attention, and is regarded on all sides as one of the greatest and most important scientific productions of our century. . . . . There is too much disposition on the part of these self-constituted champions of orthodoxy to oppose new views simply because they are new and do not square with received traditions.

In a review of "Recent Publications", the Editor wrote, "Science asks Christianity to examine the facts of nature. We say, this is a proper demand. It asks, also, that Christianity shall not be so held and taught as to contradict these facts. Right again, we say." It appears that the successors of Schaff and Nevin took their mentors seriously, and we may assume that their impetus came directly from Schaff's inaugural proclamation: "Christianity is organic. This implies development, evolution, progress."

An Unexamined Tradition [Is] Not Worth Following

It would come as no surprise to Nevin and Schaff, and it should come as no surprise to us, to say that history moves on and theology must change. Change and development are inherent in the historical process in light of new knowledge, the continuous discoveries of science and technology, and the cultural, political and economic changes in the secular sphere. Nothing in heaven or on earth is static. All is in flux.

And in our day, especially in this age of science, we must be prepared to re-work our theology. There is no place for a rigid, defensive

theology. For too long, political ideology and personal predisposition have masqueraded as theology. Alfred North Whitehead was correct

> When the Western world accepted Christianity, Caesar conquered; and the received text of Western theology was edited by his lawyers. The code of Justinian and the theology of Justinian are two volumes expressing one movement of the human spirit. The brief Galilean vision of humility flickered throughout the ages, uncertainly.

Nicea and Chalcedon forced the Christian faith into an iron casket, transforming the person of Jesus from an iconoclast to an icon to an idol, twisting the biblical metaphors and images into hardened metaphysical categories. Are, then, the creeds of Christendom useless? Of course not. But we should see them for what they are: culturally conditioned and flawed. If understood symbolically, as poetry, they can still carry a kernel of the faith and link us with believers through the whole sweep of Christian history.

Our creeds will serve us well if we remember John Hick's statement in his Gifford Lectures concerning how we Christians talk in our creeds and in our theology about these ultimate matters: "We speak mythologically about the noumenal Real by speaking literally or analogically about its phenomenal manifestations."

I am pleading for an elasticity of mind, a loosening of our up-tight posture, a little more lightness in our attitude as we do our thinking about God. For is it not true that theology taken too seriously, too uncompromisingly, may fall into blasphemy if it fails to remember that it is simply a human conceit and contrivance? There is always the danger of our revered tradition strangling our current thinking. Tradition may ossify and degenerate, resulting in sterility, barrenness and "a tyranny of the dead." Used properly, tradition may act as an inspiration, a goad and a prod for imagination and intuition to flow from the past into the present. Nevin himself reminds us, "We must not make too little of the fathers, and we must not make too much of them."

Fifty years ago, Wilhelm Pauck made the same point from a slightly different angle. He was writing generally of the Reformation and Protestantism, but the force of his statement is just as applicable today as we consider theology in general and Mercersburg Theology in particular. He wrote,

> No historical movement can be so interpreted that the character which distinguished it as unique among other historical events is once for all fixed in the understanding. . . . The nature of a movement in history can be comprehended only by a constantly fresh attention to the inner and outer circumstances in which it has unfolded itself. . . . Thus Protestantism—can be fully understood only in terms of the transformations and adaptations of its nature which it affected and underwent in the course of its development.

I understand Pauck to be urging us Mercersburgers to move on, or as Schaff would put it, to "move forward." And I think, too, that we could well substitute "Christianity" and "Mercersburg" for his "Protestantism."

This same sentiment is amplified and delineated further in a different way by Tillich in *The Protestant Era* (which he dedicated to Pauck) by what he called "The Protestant Principle," which, he wrote, "is eternal and a permanent criterion of everything temporal." This principle implies that we must engage in the continuous critique and reformulation of our theology. Tillich asks us to guard against thinking that our view—or anyone's formulations of the faith, are absolute. Don't we all agree that theology must be constantly self-critical? At the very least, let us speak with great hesitancy, with a kind of theological stutter, about ultimate matters. Humility and modesty are our standards. This may be what some theologians mean by "the sovereignty of God:" God, not we, always has the last word about God's self!

Let us be honest: God is beyond the reach of reason. We can only probe so far into the beyond and the within. All our theologizing must be tentative because it is temporally bound, culturally biased, and inherently partial. In the end, let us admit that the Ultimate is ultimately impenetrable.

My appeal to followers of Mercersburg is that we begin, collectively, as colleagues who have been fed (if not born and bred) by that remarkably rich theology, to use our gifts to develop new ways to think about God, Christ and the Church in order that the gospel of peace, justice and redemption may be heard and embodied in our day. If Mercersburg Theology (MT) is to have any relevance for the Christian community and the world today, or in the future, it must, I

believe, acknowledge the psychological, sociological, secular, cultural and scientific environment in which we now live.

In 1853, after the MR had been succeeded by the *Mercersburg Quarterly Review*, the new editor, T. Apple, seeking to assure readers that the *Quarterly* would follow the example of the *Review*, remarked that the MR "has waged war against what has been considered established opinion and venerated dogmas." While not exactly courting controversy, our fathers realized, without flinching or compromising, that they were generating serious theological discussion.

Unless we begin to re-imagine our theological metaphors and symbols, MT, I fear, will lose both its vitality and credibility. The task of reformulating the faith belongs to each generation. May I call all those scholars who have absorbed and assimilated the spirit of Nevin, Schaff *et al*, who have the requisite intellectual equipment and spiritual depth, and who, with a new burst of creative energy, empowered by the spirit, to lead us in launching a new era of theological dialogue?

Otherwise, I see no future for our Mercersburg Society other than as an antiquarian club, and little hope for the future of MT other than as a footnote in theological journals. My appeal, then, is for us who are grounded in Mercersburg and its spirit to look forward. That was the direction, ironically, that Schaff, the historian, faced. Twenty years ago, in an article in *Church History*, John Payne, who, before his retirement, sat on the Chair of Mercersburg Theology at Lancaster Seminary and was one of Schaff's successors, wrote that both Nevin and Schaff "rejected a backward looking rigid confessionalism and were open to new forms for the present and future life of the church." Neither would have tolerated an ossified theology. In Mercersburg we have an honorable tradition and a solid base to begin a re-envisioning effort that may invigorate theology generally. Consider three of the foundation stones laid for us:

(1) History and theology are organic and dynamic, not static and dogmatic.

(2) A broad, inclusive ecumenical vision.

(3) A focus on Christology, especially the incarnation.

Even though we revere Mercersburg, we must be honest about its soft spots and cognizant of the cultural and ecclesiastical currents in which they swam. Since "the church question" was the critical problem with which they dealt, much of their thinking and writing revolved around that issue. If we are faithful to our heritage, we must ask, "What is the primary theological question in our day?" My answer is this: "The problem of God, especially in light of contemporary science and technology."

I'm encouraged to suggest some new ways to think about God in light of Nevin's willingness to question traditional views on that subject. In a remarkable polemic, buried in his article entitled "Brownson's Review Again," he first lays out his adversary's position; "God must be out of the world and beyond it altogether, in order to be truly self-existent and independent." Nevin counters, "Our view of the relation between the natural and the supernatural [is] an organic or inwardly living correspondence between the different spheres of existence." His "organic, inwardly living correspondence between them" will be the point of departure for us in this essay.

God is Not The God We Have in Mind

It becomes clear that the God question is of paramount importance when we acknowledge that our Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology and eschatology all depend on and are derivative from our theology. Tillich was correct, "The doctrine of God—is the beginning and the end of all theological thought." Shubert Ogden is even more explicit: "The reality of God has now become the central theological problem" for modern persons. "Rightly understood, the problem of God is not one problem among several others; it is the only problem there is!" The repetition of old nostrums and images is not enough. I vividly recall hearing a baccalaureate address by David Steinmetz, another of Schaff's successors in the chair of church history at Lancaster Seminary. Referring to scripture and tradition, he said, "Repetition without interpretation may be a sign, not of fidelity, but of incompetence." And "interpretation" implies rethinking theology.

What Steinmetz said is manifestly true, we must be prepared to go further, even as far as Gordon Kaufman, the Mennonite theologian, who writes:

> Theologians may no longer regard themselves largely as hangers-on of traditions; they must be prepared to enter into the most radical kind of deconstruction and reconstruction of the traditions they have inherited, including especially the most central and precious symbols of these traditions, God and Jesus Christ. . . . We must now conceive God in terms appropriate to our modern understanding of ourselves and the world.

He then defines the symbol "God" as "a reality, an ultimate tendency or power, which is working itself out in an evolutionary process." As Nevin a century before, had anticipated and predicted, "The reign of tradition will give place to the power of living thought."

Not to move into the future with some similarly bold images consistent with our understanding of our modern scientific outlook is to relegate our religion to the trash-bin of history. There is just no escape from today's science for tomorrow's theology. Sixty years ago William Ernest Hocking had already seen this necessity when he remarked in the introduction to Charles Hartshorne's *Reality as Social Process*, "The chief mark of the modern era (beginning with Descartes) is the inseparability of science and philosophy, of physics and metaphysics." No longer may we ignore science, co-opt it or make an end run around it. We must confront it and integrate its findings into our theology.

As Rustum Roy, a bio-chemist from Penn State University, has written,

> No significant advance in theology will ever be made again by any religious tradition in any part of the world unless the basic insights of science and technology are fully integrated into it. . . . The most significant impact that modern science and technology has had on Judaism and Christianity is on the concept of God.

Theology must integrate the findings of science even though both disciplines by their very nature will always be tentative and incomplete. Science and religion are "opposed" to each other *only* in the way that our thumb is opposed to our forefinger; science and religion work together to get a firmer *grip* on understanding the universe and to *grasp* more fully the meaning of Ultimate Reality. Clearly, science and religion are complementary in their common task of pursuing truth.

The New Science: There's Plenty of Room at the Bottom and At the Top

What is this "science" I've been referring to? In a nutshell: the constantly enlarging and unfolding probe into the Big and the Little, the far away and the deep inside, the infinite and the infinitesimal; the relativity of Einstein, the quantum mechanics of Bohr; indeterminacy, chaos theory, the uncertainty principle of Heisenberg; the astronomy of Hubble and of the telescope that bears his name. It is this science coupled with technology that has led us to unravel the genome and to manipulate the gene; it is what took us to the moon; and it's what brings miraculous cures to millions of us who visit our oncologists, radiologists and surgeons.

The Big, The Very Large, the universe, has always intrigued humankind. And now, with our modern instruments, we can see far into space; astronomers speak of billions of stars among billions of galaxies. An incomprehensible thought! And space, they tell us, is still expanding to accommodate more! What we know about the origin of the universe and the birth and death of stars is truly astounding. It looks as though revelations from the Big Outdoors will keep coming as long and as far as we can see into the future.

But the Little Right Here is also intriguing scientists. Science and technology now speak of the infinitesimally tiny, of a nanometer (one-billionth of a meter; 50,000 times thinner than a human hair; 3 to 5 atoms across). Molecular engineers are building "machines" that will, robot-like, be sent into our bodies to locate a disease and then deliver the drugs on the spot to heal us. "The goal behind nano-tech," reports a journalist, "is to give humans the power to create things much the way nature does: from the bottom up, atom by atom, molecule by molecule." Lest we think this is science fiction, let me report that I learned in August 2001 there were 90 scientists at the University of California, Berkeley, working in this field. Multiply that number by the hundreds of other universities, research centers and corporations working in the field of nano-technology, and the fact that the Federal Government also has this as a priority, and you can see that we are moving into a "brave new world."

Not only is nano-technology applicable to health concerns, but corporations are learning how to build machines that will be a million times faster than today's computers. IBM has already created a supercomputer that is capable of performing 12 trillion calculations

per second, and in March 2002 it announced that it had created a silicon germanium chip that can switch on and off more than 200 billion times a second. And Lucent has developed equipment (called OC-192) that transmits 10 billion bits of digital information a second using a single wavelength of light. These numbers and this technology are quite beyond the grasp of most of us; yet this is the new reality—not just the "virtual reality", in which we live.

You and I (and Al Gore) through our taxes, funded the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) which created the Internet in the late 1960s and led to the World Wide Web in 1991. The WWW already has over two billion web pages (four million on God: "Give me that On-Line Religion") with more than 143 million internet users in the United States alone. This is the new age, but not, I think, the Kingdom.

There is still more to today's science. Consider the way in which S&T have affected what we eat; "trans-genetic Franken-food," some wags call it. Estimates suggest that 65% of our food has been gene-modified. The USDA has approved scores of genetically engineered crops. Today, more than half the world's soybeans and a third of its corn contain genes spliced in from other forms of life. In a recent article, W*ired* reported that "the new botany mechanically transfers genes between organisms that can never mate naturally: An anti-freeze gene from a fish becomes part of a strawberry." A new world has arrived.

But there's more. "The replicating and evolving processes that have been confined to the natural world are about to become realms of human endeavor." That includes cloning. We are all aware that the human species can no longer evolve naturally since there is not enough variety; that leaves the next step in human evolution up to us, with its hopeful and frightful implications.

As if to celebrate the new millennium, we learned to read the human genome in the year 2000. It's been called the "book of life" and the "hand-writing of God" because it is the sum of all genetic material encased in nearly every cell of the human body. It's a very long book—at least three billion chemical letters long. And consider what we find as we read this manuscript. As Jon Seger, an evolutionary biologist and geneticist at the University of Utah, remarked, "Looking at the genome places us squarely with the rest of nature." He and all other biologists agree: the genome has proved that flies, worms, mice,

monkeys, you and I all share many (probably most) of the same genes.

There is no doubt; we live in a world permeated, dominated and permanently changed by science and technology. A few episodes of NOVA should persuade even the most reluctant of us to admit that we live in a new and marvelous world in which S & T have played a major role in helping us to understand ourselves, the world and our place in it. Is there any doubt that our theology must acknowledge this new scientific age?

Even responsible scientists who are committed Christians are urging us to take science into account as we develop our theology. Charles Townes, 1964 winner of the Nobel prize in physics for the invention of the laser, now in his 87th year, is still working in his office every week-day and every Sunday occupies the third pew on the left in a church (First Congregational, UCC) I attend in Berkeley, CA. In his autobiographical work, *Making Waves*, he writes,

> To many in the past, science and religion have challenged each other in an unfriendly way, yet to me the challenge is a friendly one, and one that is likely to be resolved in the long run, by unity. . . . To me science and religion are . . . basically very similar. . . . Their differences are largely superficial, and the two become almost indistinguishable if we look at the real nature of each.

Townes makes clear his own religious views and speaks unequivocally of "this supreme purposeful force we call God" . . . and confesses, "I believe in the possibility and importance of a close and personal relation with God." But he also recognizes science and technology as humankind's "brainchildren" and that "knowledge presents us with inspiring possibilities as co-creators with God." In several passages in his book, he makes declarations like these:

> To an embarrassing degree, we are in charge. . . . We have before us the real ability to remake the world almost in any form. . . . We also have the ability to remake man . . . the possibility of direct chemical modification of inheritance.

J. Robert Nelson, the theologian, says it more succinctly, "Thanks to the practical extension of our brains and bodies in the form of technology, we are directing our own evolution." And Sallie

McFague adds, "We are responsible for taking evolution to its next step."

Bill Joy, co-founder and former chief scientist of Sun Microsystems, in an address entitled, "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us," puts the issue startlingly before us when he says,

> With the prospect of human-level computing power in about thirty years, a new idea suggests itself: that I may be working to create tools which will enable construction of the technology that may replace our species. How do I feel about this? Very uncomfortable.

As we conclude this brief exposition on some current findings and results of S&T, and especially as in awe we contemplate the Big and the Little, we should be aware that there is an increasing realization on the part of scientists that some aspects of the Big and Little may be more closely related to each other than hitherto suspected. Astrophysicists and astronomers, those who are pursuing the Large (galaxies and far-off space), are, astonishingly, finding common ground with particle physicists, those dealing with the Small (genes and nanometers). They each appear to be looking at the same stick from a different end! Eric Haseltine, in a recent article on "The Great Unanswered Questions of Physics," concludes, "Many cosmologists now believe the lumps of the universe—vast stretches of void punctuated by galaxies and galactic clusters—are probably vastly magnified versions of quantum fluctuations of the original, subatomic-size universe. And it is just this sort of marriage of the infinite and of the infinitesimal that has particle physicists cozying up to astronomers these days."

We Are Stardust

The "eureka" moment for me came some years ago when I read that human-kind is made of stardust, literally. And I assume that every reader of this essay is now familiar with this commonplace description of our origin. First came oxygen with the explosion of the first generation of stars, followed by the heavier elements (like carbon and iron), which were forged within supernovas. All this matter somehow drifted to earth on the backs of comets or other celestial-come-to-earth bodies.

Even the most chastened scientists get vertigo thinking of the phenomenon. Myles Gordon, v.p. of the American Museum of

Natural History, exclaimed, "That we are star stuff [is] the most powerful idea I've ever seen." As a consequence of this scientific description of humankind's beginnings as the detritus of stars, some theologians have begun to speak of the "Epic of Cosmic Evolution," shoving the creation story back billions of years to the star wombs from which the elements essential to life have emerged.

My question is this: Why stop at the stars in tracing our origin? Don't science, reason and intuition converge in suggesting that, if life came from elements generated in the stomachs of stars, doesn't it make sense to see the stars themselves as contingent and dependent upon prior processes and celestial happenings? In other words, didn't we and everything else originate in the Big Bang (BB) itself?

The Big Bang is the supreme serendipitous surprise, the elegant effulgence of everything. And one of the most remarkable discoveries of our age—and of any age—has been finding the evidence of this explosion through the detection of Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation (CMBR), often described as the "afterglow" from the birth of the cosmos. John Noble Wilford, science writer for the *New York Times*, reported that this knowledge "emerged from the recondite confines of science, converged with philosophy and religion and struck a reverberating chord with its intimations of cosmic origin." He was reflecting the enthusiasm of George F. Smoot, who electrified the world on April 23, 1992, with the announcement and who, in a subsequent interview, referred to his findings as "a mystical experience, like a religious experience"—"It really is like finding the driving mechanism for the universe, and isn't that what God is?" If you're religious, it's like looking at God."

Another way of viewing this phenomenon is to re-play in the mind's eye the "Epic of Cosmic Evolution" from today back to the BB 15 billion years ago. Given the present scientific explanation of the universe—of all that is and has been, isn't this the proper history of humankind? Shouldn't Mercersburg, given its organic, dynamic, developmental idea of history, be ready to embrace this scientific depiction of the cosmos and be anxious to integrate it into its theology?

Before revealing my own tentative and un-dogmatic suggestion about the substance and being and reality of God, I have one additional consideration to mention; namely the absolute unity and indivisibility of the universe (implicit in the word itself). I believe the world is one.

Heaven and hell are not separate. There is no "up there" or "down here." All is one.

Everything is interdependent and interrelated. Everything in the cosmos is a kissing cousin of everything else. When all is said and done, there is just one big ball of wax! In "A Pluralistic Universe," William James said it well,

> When you come down to reality as such, to the reality of realities, everything is present to everything else in one vast instantaneous co-implicated completeness—nothing can in any sense, functional or substantial, be really absent from anything else, all things interpenetrate and telescope together in the great total conflux.

The mystics of every age and of every religion seemed to sense this. Without "knowing" it, without the benefit of science, they had a gnawing suspicion that beneath and within everything is One; beyond the brokenness is unity. All is One.

Whatever is reality and Ultimate Reality are right here now! In other words (to rephrase Gertrude Stein), I don't believe there is any "out there" out there. There is no one or anything anywhere but here, within this time-space continuum; or within the other possible 5 or 9 or 11 other dimensions that some physicists are currently projecting as a possible multi-verse of which we are a part. Included in this totality, this multi-verse is, of course, God, the Godhead, Deity, the Sacred —or whatever other name we may ascribe to the Divine, the un-created and non-contingent One, and the Ultimate Source of All. And this One, this All, is here now, and nowhere else.

It's been said that "each generation has to create the image of God thatworks for it." In this "We are Stardust" section, I have shown my hand; but before playing it, I'd like to introduce some statements from persons whose theological elasticity I admire, perhaps as a sort of justification for my own thinking "outside the box."

God is Space and The Creator is the Creation

From one of the nation's best-known theologians, Jonathan Edwards, we read this startling statement in *Of Being*, a short essay written in 1721. "It is self-evident, I believe, to every man that space is necessary, eternal, infinite, and omnipotent. But I had as good speak plain. I have already said as much as that Space is God…And it is

indeed clear to me, that all the Space there is not proper to body, all the space there is within the bounds of the Creation, all the space there was before the Creation, is God himself."

"Space is God!" How is *that* for pushing the letter out of the envelope? Edwards wrote that essay when he was 18 years old and, obviously, before he "got" religion and spoke of "sinners in the hands of an angry God." I have the feeling he was closer to the truth at 18 than he was when he was 50 years of age. And his picture of God as space takes on even more plausibility and force when we realize, as he could not, that the volume of every atom is 99% space (to say nothing of most of the universe), which in his image is not only *where* God is but also *what* God is.

A contemporary theologian, Barbara Brown Taylor, responding to her own rhetorical question, "Where is God?" writes:

> All over the place. Up there. Down here. Inside my skin and out. God is the web, the energy, the space, the light—not captured in them,—but revealed in that singular, vast net of relationship that animates everything that is.—God is the unity—the very energy, the very intelligence, the very elegance and passion that makes it all go. This is the God who is not somewhere (up there, down here) but everywhere.

(Note that she also says, "God is—the space.")

My final example is a lay theologian, Robert Neuhauser, who labored thirty years over a 480-page tome (unpublished) entitled *The Creator's Adventure*. Bob, a member of the Society of Friends and an electrical engineer, worked for RCA his entire career and received the David Sarnoff Gold Medal Award as the lead engineer in developing the tube for color TV cameras. We both belong to a discussion club, and some months ago I read a paper expressing some of the ideas I am suggesting in this essay. A week later I received a copy of his manuscript. Our respective views, unknown to each other, seemed to be somewhat complementary, and I quote him here not only to re-enforce my own points but also to illustrate that some scientists with deep spiritual perceptions and sensibilities offer images of God that may be helpful to us all. Bob writes:

> In the beginning, there was only a vast power, a concentration of energy. This power manifested itself at a 'point' devoid of any other feature until the moment it transformed itself into what we call the creation, that vast explosion of creativity that exhibits, in human terms, genius, wisdom and, if I may say so, love. *The Creator is the creation. This is the transforming intuition of our era. Each part of us was with the Creator in the Big Bang, and we have been with the Creator ever since.* [Italics mine.]
>
> All of creation is composed of familiar bits and pieces which are at once both matter and the bearers of forces and fields . . . All things living and dead are composed of the same bits and pieces, or, as we would say, building blocks . . . All the building blocks together with all their forces and fields exploded into existence at the same instant, at the moment when unimaginable energy became the creation. Thus the Creator has infused every part of the creation, indeed has *been* the creation ever since its beginning. We are part of the Creator just like the rest of creation.
>
> The creation comes complete with its own internal workings and forces. No pushes and pulls other than those inherent in the simple nature of fundamental particles are required to explain the complex behavior of the universe.

Lawrence Krauss, the Cornell physicist, concurs completely with Nuehauser's final statement when he says, "As far as we can tell, simple laws of nature explain every event that has happened since the big bang."

What Did the Dalai Lama Say to the New York City Hot Dog Vendor? "Make Me One With the Universe, Please!"

Is there any doubt that at the instant of the Big Bang all was one? That fact gives credence to the belief in the fundamental Oneness of Al. This ultimate unity of everything requires us to speak of transcendence only in terms of immanence. The vertical is dissolved into the horizontal. "There" is always "here." "Then" is forever "now." The transcendent collapses and coalesces into the immanent and the immediate.

One implication of this way of perceiving the reality in which we live is to admit that there can be no intervention by anyone at anytime anywhere! There can be no disruption, incursion or invasion from the outside because there is no "outside;" neither is there an "outside"

substance, being or force. Everything and everyone are here. Together. Interrelated. Interdependent. An eternal indivisible unity.

A pioneer in the "science and religion dialogue," Ian Barbour, in his 1989 Gifford Lectures, noted that "Cosmology joins evolutionary biology, molecular biology and ecology in showing the interdependence of all things. We are part of an ongoing community; we are kin to all creatures, past and present. . . . The cosmos is all of one piece."

Along with the absolute oneness of the universe, a concomitant intuition of science and theology these days is the feeling that "no absolute distinction exists between the living and the non-living," since, presumably, all came into being together at the same time (at least potentially) in the BIG BANG (BB). Everything is one very long continuum, about15 billion years in length!

Two Nobel Laureates, both in physics in successive years, re-enforce this fact. M.H. Wilkins has written, "The demarcation between the living and the non-living becomes more and more difficult to make." And E. Wigner concurs; "The path from not-life to life is continuous." Another Nobel winner in physics, Charles Townes, adds, "All life on earth is related, and must come from essentially the same origin." Just as there is a continuum and a reciprocal relationship between energy and matter (the unified energy/matter field), so it is with non-life and life.

The Big Bang: When God Exploded and Became Incarnate (the first Adam and the last Adam were in the first atom)

With these extensive peregrinations, let us envision a new way of looking at Ultimate Reality, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the God of Jesus Christ; the God of MT; and the God of you and me. Extend in your mind's eye the incarnation back to the very beginning, the BB. Isn't that where and when the Word took flesh and dwelt among us?

"Could it be that the cosmos started when God himself exploded?" This question was the entire text of a letter from Marc Bulte to the editor of *Time* magazine. In reading that exclamatory question, I was somewhat comforted by the thought that mine is not the only mind among humankind to entertain such a vision!

Radicalize Mercersburg's emphasis on the incarnation. Take the incarnation and locate it at and perhaps as the BB. There and then the Ultimate became intimate, the Word was enfleshed, God became human in potential and anticipation. In and at the BB, God left wherever God may have been and whatever God may have been doing. In the BB (or whatever!) God has given God's whole being to become what everything now is and whatever everything shall be. Since God is inextricably in all, it can be said that everyone at every point for all time is equidistant from or with God. If, as Karen Armstrong has intimated, "the doctrine of the Incarnation was an attempt to articulate the universal insight that 'God' and man must be inseparable," then we have a kind of convergence of the scientific finding and the theological instinct that God and humankind share an indissoluble unity within an impenetrable mystery.

Tillich, commenting on Luther's remarks that "God made Himself small for us in Christ," wrote, "In so doing, He left us our freedom and our humanity." Is it too much to suggest that in the BB God made Herself smaller still for us, giving the natural process full freedom to evolve, and from which we have emerged?

If God has incarnated Herself inextricably in this world, this also implies that we cannot leave God, for She is the master [sic] weaver who has woven Her being once for all into the garment of life. We can never de-thread God from us. God is in our very interior. "God bodies forth the universe, which is enlivened and empowered by its source." When we look hard and close, we can see Her there, at our very core and as our very center. There is no life, no being—nothing—outside of God. Try as we might, there is just no way to get away from God! God just sits there, in the space within every atom, as a permanent, persistent Presence that permeates every part of the whole. Even Luther spoke of God "as being nearer to all creatures than they are to themselves, and as being totally present in a grain of sand."

From the medieval mystics to Blake, a sense of the unity of all things and the reality of God at the heart of all are expressed over and over. Jacob Boehm felt it when he wrote, "If thou conceivest a small minute circle, as small as a grain of mustard seed, yet the heart of God is wholly and perfectly therein: and if thou art born in God, then there is, in thyself (in the circle of thy life), the whole Heart of God undivided." And Paracelus "saw" this: "There is nothing in heaven or

upon earth which does not exist in man, and God who is in heaven exists also in man, and the two are one.—Man is a sun and a moon and a heaven filled with stars.—The human body is vapour materialized by sunshine mixed with the life of the stars.—That which exists visibly in man exists invisibly in the ether pervading the world." (He "knew" this before the birth of modern science!) Hildegard of Bingen "saw" all this too, when she spoke for God:

> I am the great and fiery force
> sparkling in everything that lives;
> in shinning of the river's course,
> in greening grass that glory gives."

Finally, Blake: "Christ—he is the only God—and so am I and so are you."

While not identical to the flights of fancy that I am taking, other persons have envisioned similar images, and especially a God who is dynamic and changing, never static and still. Process Theology, for example, has helped move theology into the modern, scientific age. Based on Whiteheadian philosophy and the philosophical theology of Hartshorne, it is frequently referred to as a form of panentheism (all-in-God) in which God is referred to as an embracing presence. We are held within Her womb. "She's got the whole wide world (web?) in Her hands."

Sallie McFague in *The Body of God* identifies herself as indebted to these theological trends and writes,

> We will suggest that the primary belief of the Christian community, its doctrine of the incarnation (the belief that God is with us here on earth) be radicalized beyond Jesus of Nazareth to include all matter. God is incarnated in the world. Christianity is the religion of the incarnation *par* excellence. . . . What if we dared to think of our planet and indeed the entire universe as the body of God? . . . We are suggesting that what is bedrock for the universe—matter, that of which everything is made—might be, in fact perhaps ought to be, applied to God as well . . . The model of the world or universe as God's body is in keeping with the view of reality coming to us from contemporary science.

I feel, however, that McFague has either a failure of nerve or a logical lapse. She blinks, theologically, by withholding God's Spirit from the "radical incarnation" she champions. She divides God from His Body

(the universe) by speaking of what appears to be a separate "Soul" or "Spirit" or "Breath" that enlivens the Body. "God," she writes, "is related to the world as spirit is to body." She writes, "Think of God metaphorically as the spirit that is the breath, the life, of the universe, a universe that comes from God and could be seen as the body of God." To me, she seems to hold back something of God from the "radical incarnation" she espouses. (I would also similarly fault B.B. Taylor, whom I quoted earlier.)

I am profoundly indebted to Process Theology, the Panentheists and Ms. McFague; but, rather than thinking of God as Encompassing Womb (a warm, cuddly and safe teddy-bear kind of cocoon for us to inhabit), I am at present more committed to what I have tried to express, namely, that we see God as absolutely, totally, fully, finally and completely incarnate in the cosmos. What I am expounding is theo-en-pan-ism (God-in-all), not a God who encircles all, although that is certainly a pretty picture! The primordial pre-BB God is now the contingent post-BB God, relativized by the nature of the process set in motion by Being Itself, the Ground of all Being.

If we begin to think of the incarnation in this extended and radicalized way, we may also incorporate into this view a new understanding of the atonement, of self-emptying, self-giving, sacrificial love; of the One poured out for all, for the many. Is it any more unreasonable to say or believe that "God gave God-self completely, once and for all, to come in (and as?) the universe in order to gift us life and life eternal in, through and with the processes set in motion at the BB by God-self;" rather than to say or believe that "God the far-off Father literally begot an only Son and sent him literally as Himself once for all time and for all people to Bethlehem to appear in a particular person (Jesus of Nazareth) in order that all who believe in this singular and unrepeatable event shall be saved?" Did God the Father, literally, Himself become, literally, His own Son, who then, literally, sacrificed Himself (or is Son) and by his death saved only believers from their sins, then to be literally rescued, resuscitated and taken back up to heaven?

Let us recognize the way in which Christian theology has too often twisted itself into a Gordian knot. Isn't John Hick's observation true? "A metaphorical son of God had become the metaphysical God the Son, the second person of the Trinity." Let us loosen up and treat

theobgy more as poetry than prose. My version of these archetypical events begins below.

Things Are Not As They Seem. Nor Are They Otherwise

I am contending that the Godhead at some point (the BB) began a new phase of God-being, giving up and leaving behind all that God-self had been in order to become (in my mind) the Force of life and love in the universe from the BB until the final whimper. God the Source became God the Force, beginning a new form of Being and Becoming, committed to an unknown future. This implies identification and at-one-ment at the outset with whatever emerged from the BB. Here, at and in the BB, the incarnation and the atonement converge. In fact, they were never separate. They are experienced and expressed as one event throughout time and space within the physical, chemical, biological, cultural and spiritual processes as these unfold. The separation of the incarnation and the atonement is for descriptive purposes only.

In his classic work on Christology, *God was in Christ*, Donald Baillie, expressed clearly the inseparability of both doctrines within traditional theology. "The incarnation," he says, "not only gives us the Christian view of God, but also gives us the outcropping of divine atonement . . . ." There, at the fountainhead of being, at the Big Beginning, the heart of God, the incomparable love for all that was to come, was revealed, anticipated and pre-figured. Charles Dinsomre's poignant passage points to the very core of Ultimate Reality, "There was a cross in the heart of God before there was one planted on the green hill outside Jerusalem."

This self-emptying Coming—the Advent of God as we know God since the BB, implies that there is nothing left "up there" or "back there" before the BB. All that God is, is now here within the unity and oneness of the universe. I agree with Hartshorne's view of Whitehead's thought that "God as primordial is the necessary seat of the 'pure potentials' without which nothing could be possible" God, in Whitehead's word, "prehends" us; that is, She feels for and with us. And "what is that," adds Hartshorne, "but to say that God (in the best possible sense) loves all?"

God: the Source and Force of Life and Love in the Universe

You will have discerned that my working definition of God is this: "The Source and Force of Life and Love in the Universe." And, of course, I use the term BB as a symbol or metaphor of a time/space occasion rather than as a precisely-timed or accurately-described actual event. When the Source became the Force, the One was poured into the all. Now we have One-in-all as well as One-with-all. As Rustum Roy, the Pennsylvania State University scientist has written, "Reality is not just the intention of God, it is the embodiment of God.—God is the essence of meaning behind, or infused or hidden, in Reality . . . The meaning of God is betrayed but not paraded by all Reality."

The importance of the incarnation I derive directly from Mercersburg. I simply extend the incarnation/atonement back a few billion years. The question arises, "Has God dissolved into and disappeared within the universe?" My God/Force toward Life and Love is now irreversibly within the universe: perhaps only as intention, urge or inherent possibility; perhaps as some nascent or inchoate hint that resides in the center of every cell; or perhaps like cosmic background music you can "hear" if you are attune to it. This may be similar, albeit only analogically, to the cosmic microwave background radiation from the BB that scientists claim to have "felt" with their instruments. Life and love have derived their existence, impetus and power from the God/Source. Intuitively, we sense that their origin came from the primordial God/Source. Looked at from another angle, this is not far theologically from Tillich, who, as one interpreter puts it, "had worked to bridge this gulf between the divine and the human by maintaining that the infinite appears as the self-transcending element in everything finite." The Catholic theologian, Hans Kung, in his *Credo*, implies as much when he asserts that "God is the dimension of infinity which is hiddenly present in all our everyday calculation."

Is there doubt in anyone's mind that there is in the universe some Force that seems to point things toward life and the will to live as well as toward love and the will to consider someone other than self as equally unique, real and valuable? We're here, alive, and trying mightily to break out of being only for self. To trace the origin of species and the earliest life-forms and pre-life chemicals through the cosmos back to the BB is a tedious scientific task, full of twists and turns and unexpected detours, blind alleys and dead-ends. But all the evidence seems to suggest that from the very beginning there was "in the air" at least a lure—which is tantamount to an implicit or incipient Force, toward life and love. The God-Force was and is persuasive, not

coercive, a persistent presence permeating the whole creation while giving a full measure of freedom to the matter at hand, although it sometimes appears as if God has tied Her hands behind His back!

My scientific friend, Bob Neuhauser, asks a relevant question toward the close of his book. He knows that his readers (and now perhaps mine) will ask, "Where is the warmth in the breath that animates the clay?" "Source" and "Force" sound so cold. Where is love? In response to his question, Bob writes, "We must return to the principle of affinities, those propensities that pull each part of the creation together in its loving embrace. It is an embrace that creates, nurtures, and extends new manifestations of the creation. . . . Is that not love in its purest form?" For him, love is a "web of affinities that suffuses all things." At its fundamental base, love is propinquitous affinity and attraction.

I believe that God now operates only on this side of the BB. This radical incarnation/atonement that God effected was Her greatest sacrifice. This was God's ultimate and irretrievable gift. She transformed Her energy into matterand now lingers in the universe as the Force toward life and love. God is now (post-BB) a kind of Cosmic Cheshire Cat whose benevolent smile is left on the screen of the cosmos, accompanying us as a gentle Presence down the highways, byways and alley-ways of history. She has bequeathed "affinities" to us which may, in our hands, mature into love.

(My Cheshire Cat is of course related to Thompson's "Hound of Heaven," whose cosmic canine wears a more fearsome face than my people-friendly feline. My Cat is more amiable and tender, with a pleasant purr, to be distinguished from that testosterone-driven Hound with his off-putting bark. Thompson's canine seems to pursue us aggressively from a kennel located outside the world. My feline operates quietly and subtly from within the same reality in which we reside.)

A Distinction With a Difference

While it may appear that I am bringing God back into the universe as a separate, distinct all-powerful Being, this is not what I intend. Rather, "the lingering Force" I have in mind is what remains in the universe from God's movement from energy to matter, or from Source to Force, comparable to the cosmic microwave background radiation, the residue left over from the BB. Looked at slightly

differently, we may say that God can't get away from Herself or from the noise and the effect of the BB any more than we can shake loose from our shadow or escape from the sound of our own voice. Even God cannot erase the tracks She left in the cosmos or wash away Her footprints from the sands of time and space.

By intuition and imagination we perceive these traces of the God/Source, which we now identify and speak of as the God/Force. And the recognition of this transference of energy—the sense of this divine descent, the incarnation, empowers us. This is the God/Spirit we perceive, recreate, refashion and embellish because it was there for us before and within the BB and is now here with us and for us as Powerful Presence after the BB. It is not wholly unlike the "spirit" a parent leaves a child. (And isn't this "Spirit"—of God and of parent, "Real?") We might say that we can "feel" the Force or Spirit of the God/Source that remains from the act of transformation, which we have been referring to as a "radical and complete incarnation." To lift a word from Whitehead (picked up by both Roy and Schilling), we may speak of God's shadow, Her residue from the BB, as a "lure;" i.e., a lingering longing, an eager cheer-leader type of influence, remaining in the cosmos as a kind of wistful and hopeful presence of the Sacred Source that was and in memory still is, the ground, background, foreground and playground of the Whole Shebang.

Although it seems as if God may not have been able to get away from Himself, when He incarnated Himself completely within His creation; in fact, He did—at least in large part! But it is we who, through our own creative consciousness and sensitive perceptions, are now partners with God in bringing Him back as Force through our acknowledgement of His Presence. It is in part by *inference* and *deference* that we have come to a knowledge of God as the original Source and the benign Force.

Every day we are faced with our dependence and contingency. Therefore, we *infer* a God as Source. And, in modesty and humility, we must *defer* to this Something or Someone who is both prior and primary to all else. In wonder and awe, we bow before the Primordial Being who preceded the BB. The image of the God/Force we sense here and now is based on our natural backward over-the-shoulder look where in our mind's eye we see the anticipation and intention of the God/Source. In other words, we recognize the God/Force by *inference from* and *deference to* the God/Source.

This *inferential* and *deferential* projection of a God/Force *now* from a God/Source *then* may be a human conceit and creation, a kind of sleight of mind maneuver, but it may, none-the-less, be effective as a transforming power in our daily lives. If we choose (and I do), we may make this God-shadow, these God-tracks, this lure of God, into a transforming and powerfully present Spirit in our personal and social lives—not through *its* "intervention" but through *our* recognition of its salubrious presence and intention that "betrays but does not parade" its original pre-BB Source.

The British historian, Herbert Butterfield, paints an evocative picture of a child who plays the piano poorly when practicing "on her own." But, when the instructor is in the room, even though she simply sits there and says nothing, the child plays better. Just so, without intervention or interference, the Sacred Force may help us better to live and love just by being there. Present as Shadow. Present as Tracks and Lure; no more, but equally important, no less.

Is God and the World One or Two? Yes!

The question arises: Is there any distinction between God and the universe (and, therefore, by reduction) humankind? Is there one or two? This is a perennial theological conundrum neither ignored nor evaded by Nevin. Writing about this impenetrable puzzle, he makes some surprising statements. "Dualism involves a great truth—pantheism also involves a great truth." And, he claims, "we are bound to do justice to the truth which underlies pantheism as well as to that which underlies dualism." The resolution of this enigma is elusive, but let's give it a try.

> Question: "Is there one or two?
> Answer: "Not one; not two."
> Question: "How is this possible?
> Answer: "Like the ocean and the wave; they are not one, not two.
> Like the singer and the song; they are not one, not two."
> Question: "Are we and God one?"
> Answer: "Not one, not two."

Harold Schilling, a physicist and the first holder of the title "University Professor" at Pennsylvania State University, an active layman in his local church and also an early figure in the science and

religion dialog, has suggested that "God could be conceived as indigenous to nature, acting from within its own depths, persuasively, as though from its very heart without violating its systemic integrity." (Note: he says "persuasively," not intrusively nor invasively by intervention.) "Indigenous" means "native" or "living within." Schilling, therefore, seems to tilt toward "one" not "two," and I tend to lean that way too. But without being wholly facetious, may I suggest one and one-half, and not simply because that's a compromise?! Rather, that "one-half" may be the Cosmic Cheshire Cat whose smile is just around the corner from my conjectured Force! Before more fully unveiling my own position, there is another question the answer to which may lead us toward my conclusion.

Are Atoms "Persons"?

An astounding and instructive phenomenon these days is the growing number of scientists and theologians who speak—perhaps symbolically, yet suggestively and significantly—of an atom's "personhood," its "relationships" and its "freedom to choose." For example, Dennis Overbye wrote recently in the Science Section of the *New York Times* that atoms act like "an entangled interactive world whose constituents derive their identities and properties from one another in endless negotiation—a city, in one physicist's words of 'querulous social inhabitants'. In other words, they are telling a tale of relationships."

Charles Birch, an eminent biologist who has taught at the University of Sydney and the University of California, has written;

> There are no substances. What exist are relations and these relations involve subjectivity—that is, some form of sentience—at the heart of all entities from protons to people.—A feeling is a feeling is a feeling.—Mind cannot arise from no mind. Subjectivity cannot emerge from something that is not subjective.

Birch quotes approvingly Sewall Wright, a geneticist, who claims that properties such as mind and consciousness must exist in the most elementary particles. He also cites W.E. Agar, a cellular biologist from Cambridge who assumed that "all living organisms are subjects." Birch affirms as much: "The world is more like a life than a mechanism. It is feeling through and through, from protons to people."

Freeman Dyson, a physicist since 1953 at the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton, claims that "mind is inherent in every electron, and the processes of human consciousness differ only in degree but not in kind from the processes of choice between quantum states which we call 'chance' when they are made by electrons."

Almost one hundred years ago, Miguel Unamuno, the premier Spanish philosopher/theologian of the 20th century, intuitively felt the sensibility of cells and anticipated what quantum physicists are now telling us. "No more absurd than so many other dreams which pass as valid theories," he wrote,

> is the belief that our cells, our globules, may possess something akin to a rudimentary cellular, globular consciousness or basis of consciousness . . . We may fancy that these cells may communicate with each other, and that some of them may express the belief that they form part of a superior organism endowed with a collective personal consciousness.

(A question: is there a cosmic ceiling on consciousness?)

An evolutionary anthropologist at Harvard, Terrence Deacon, argues for what he calls "emergent spirituality." Since, as he claims, "the experience of being a person is the emerging from prior chaos, then this is

> a universe in which spirituality is emergent as well. . . . The epic of evolution need not be feared as an anti-myth that eliminates spiritual meaning, purpose or value from the world, but embraced instead as a new story about everyday miraculous emergence of spiritual experience. It is not the destroyer of value in the world, but its redeemer.

Fifty years ago, Charles Hartshorne, one of the founders of Process Theology, conjectured that "each cell in [one's] body has its own little will to live." In considering cells as "real" individuals, he said, "The cells' real function is to be agents of cosmic law—i.e., expressive of God's will." And, visualizing what's going on within each atom, he surmised, "The electron, too, is a social being endowed with sentience." Finally, in a full burst of fancy, he added, "There is nothing which is not in some sense God." He was simply echoing his teacher, Whitehead, who, wrote Hartshorne, believed that "sentience, or 'feeling' is taken as universal (from atoms to people), and God is characterized as 'the unification of all things' (in the divine 'consequent nature)."

If we believe that "personhood" has some of the elements of feeling, consciousness and relationship, is it out of the question to accept what these scientists and theologians are intimating about the basic structure of reality? It seems to be people-producing and people-friendly from its very origin and within every atom. Early in 2002, the *New York Times* ran an extensive interview with one of the nation's foremost scientists, John Wheeler, long-time physics professor at Princeton, who, at 90, still comes to his office. He keeps a journal, and his entry for Jan. 29, 2002, reads in part: "We are back where Plato, Aristotle and Parmenides struggled with the great questions: How Come the Universe, How Come Us, How Come Anything? But happily also we have around the answer to these questions. That's us." He seems to have embraced "the anthropic principle."

Just as science leads us to feel the cosmic background radiation from the BB, may not religion help us to sense the Force for life and love that moves toward creating persons and that remains in the background and foreground of the reality in which we live and which may represent the initial intention, will and philanthropy of God that pre-dates and may have occasioned and been the reason for the BB itself? The Source became the Force that became "personal" (at least as potential) within each atom in the universe.

At this point in our essay it might be well to confess that when we (any of us) talk of God we speak metaphorically, symbolically, poetically, intuitively and imaginatively. Who of us can speak otherwise of Ultimate Reality? None of us can speak with certainty and authority about Ultimate Matters and Ultimate Concerns. The real God, the God who stood behind all things, the Source, and the contingent God, the God who became the Force and is within all things, this dipolar God is forever shrouded in mystery, beyond the reach of reason, yet partially sensed and accessible through intuition and imagination, which often go by the name "revelation." In the final analysis, however, whatever view of God we hold is the result of a leap of faith.

Though Weak of faith, I believe in Forces and Powers Who Crowd Every Inch of the Air. There is proof, my consciousness. Obviously Kindred to These Powers.

Let us pause in our excursus to ask what we mean by faith; how, after we employ reason, intuition and imagination, we must ultimately admit that it is by faith that we live, however we may conceive of God. At the very least, in the words of Wallace Stevens, let us "believe without belief, beyond belief." To say with Tillich that "I think I believe" or that "I believe I believe" or that "I hope I believe is not dissimulation, evasion or equivocation. It is a modest hope, a hesitant affirmation and a dawning realization that I am free to think, to believe and to act, but always without absolute certainty and often with doubts and bouts of despair.

I have always been encouraged by Tillich's description of faith and its relationship to doubt. "Faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern," he writes. "It is the continuous tension between itself and the doubt within it." In a later book, he adds,

> doubt should not be considered as the negation of faith, but as an element which was always and will always be present in the act of faith. Existential doubt and faith are poles of the same reality, the state of ultimate concern . . . One is ultimately concerned only about something to which one essentially belongs and from which one is existentially separated . . . There is no human being without an ultimate concern and, in a sense, without faith.

Those sentiments make the burden of doubt much easier to bear for many of us.

Borrowing from other people, I have developed my own definition: Faith is the willing suspension of cynicism, skepticism, doubt, disbelief and despair for the sake of living joyously, lovingly and confidently in gratitude, humility and awe. For me, faith is an attitude that points my face to the future in trust that life is good, a gift of grace. It is continuous concern about ultimate matters. I have had a life-long wrestling bout with who and what God is; therefore, I have concocted, by the mental gymnastics exhibited in this essay, my own views which in part relieve me of the intellectual disquietude I have had with many of the more traditional ways of talking about God.

In the end, perhaps Luther said it best; "Faith does not require information, knowledge and certainty, but a free surrender and a joyful bet on [God's] unfelt, untried and unknown goodness."

When I say, "I believe in God," I am suggesting that I believe I am ontologically grounded to and within Ultimate Reality. I really do believe that I was already "alive"—from the very beginning, within the mind (the thought) and within the will (the intention) of the God/Source; and I became more explicitly alive in matter when the God/Source morphed into the God/Force at the metaphoric moment of the Big Bang. To say, "I believe in God," is an affirmation that implies I am intimately related to and integrated into that Ultimate Reality I call "God." And the reverse is also true: God is intimately and ultimately—from the beginning to the end, related to me. I have come out of the core of God, who is still with me. We all know, don't we, "that we are bound eternally and inescapably to the Ground of our being?"

I further believe that this God who is within is also behind and beyond all these linguistic, cultural and cogitative constraints we devise to describe, and, unfortunately, too often to devalue, the Sacred One.

Jesus Christ Is the Same Yesterday, Today and Forever (the God/Force as Love)

With such a radicalized and universalized version of Mercersburg and the incarnation, "Where," we might ask, "is Jesus Christ in this scheme?" My response is this. Jesus is where he always has been: in history; in Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem; in time and space. And, as Bultmann has suggested, he has risen into the *kerygma* and now resides there, in the Gospel, and in the hearts and minds of millions of persons who have seen in him the life and love of God.

If "God is the primordial seat of the 'pure potential' of all, without which nothing could be possible," then Jesus is one place in history where that "pure potential" became concrete and actual in an uncommon way. In Jesus the hiddenly inherent within Ultimate Reality became manifestly apparent. For me, Jesus represents in his being a truly authentic person because he seemed saturated with Sacred Presence. He acknowledged dependence on the God/Source while remarkably exhibiting in his life the God/Force. It is as though Jesus is a kind of lens through which we may see more clearly the

vision, the will and the inclination of the God/Source/Force. For us Christians, Jesus is the person who in his own "solitary" life has mirrored, reflected and released the God/Force behind the benevolent smile of that Cosmic Cheshire Cat. He is, therefore, the pioneer and guide for those of us who see the power of that Force breaking forth from his life.

Tantalizingly, Tillich talks of the New Being, but never unambiguously identifies it as Jesus. Rather, he speaks of its transforming and transformative power. "The New Being, which for Christian faith is manifest in Jesus as the Christ," he writes, "is effective in the life of the individual as well as in the life of the community." He seems to imply, and I agree, that persons of other cultures, traditions and religions—as well as sinful and doubting you and me, may "participate" in the New Being, which for me is the God/Force that had the God/Source as its predecessor and that lies latent but patiently potent within the core of every atom.

Tillich turns from philosopher to preacher when he says,

> We must ask ourselves—whether we also have experienced something of a New Being in ourselves. . . . To enter the New Being we do not need to show anything. We must only be open to be grasped by it."—"It is the power of the New Being to create life out of death, here and now. . . . Where there is a New Being, *there* is resurrection, namely, the creation into eternity out of every moment of time. . . . Resurrection happens *now*, or it does not happen at all. It happens in us and around us, in soul and history, in nature and universe.

In attempting to integrate some of Tillich's insights and implications into my own categories, I would note that, rather than to identify Jesus as the New Being, he has Jesus bring "the message of the New Being" in which he also participates and therefore reveals its power. My "Force" for life and love is that reality and power that refuses to over-power by restraining itself and remaining in the background, lying in wait but always ready to join hands with those who would tap into its potential.

Christ Plays in 10,000 Places, Lovely in Limbs, Lovely in Eyes Not His.

My understanding of "Christ" (in distinction to Jesus) is more nuanced and more broadly defined than in most textbooks! I

understand the term "Christ" to represent that image, power and reality of eternal intention and action for good that permeates the universe, inhabiting, at least as potential and intention, every cell everywhere. (God the Source has come as God the Force.) I understand "Christ" as something akin to the Force for Life and Love, a sibling to that Cheshire Cat to which I've been alluding. The perception of this Christic reality was prompted for me by the impulse generated by the life and death of Jesus, who embodied to an unusual degree the divine intention, inclination and disposition. The apprehension of, the participation in, and the transformation by this reality are available to all persons.

The United Methodist theologian, John Cobb, Hartshorne's chief interpreter, implies as much when he writes,

> It is clear that creative transformation [his term for the Christ power of love and grace] was immanent in Jesus, as it was in Moses, Socrates, and Gautama, and as it is in each of us. . . . Since the word incarnation is key to Christian language, let us say that in an important sense God is incarnate in all things. . . . I want to assert strongly that Christ is not limited to the historical figure of Jesus. . . . I want to say equally strongly that it is irresponsible to speak of Christ without the connection to Jesus.

A critic of Cobb writes, "Christ virtually comes to be identified by Cobb with whatever is good in the world. . . . Cobb seems to think that whatever is good in the world is the work of God or Christ. . . . Christ becomes for Cobb an almost infinitely broad symbol rather than a particular person."

Obviously I side with Cobb in this matter, but wish that he had added "for Christians" after his word "irresponsible."

It appears as if Whitehead's "Primordial God" is analogous to what Cobb refers to as "Logos" or "Word." From my perspective, whatever is meant by these terms became incarnate as God/Force within the universe. There is a reality behind these symbols, but I see this power operating in the shadows as a benign yet persistent Presence without being either invasive or coercive. These "Christic" forces become evident as we are encouraged by the underlying reality to engage in acts of love and justice.

The "cosmic Christ" is another metaphor for the inclusiveness of this universal and ever-present Force that may be seen being concretized

in any act of civility, compassion or kindness any where at any time by any one. Any tendency or action to further wholeness, healing or shalom is, to my mind, Christic. Any thought, word or deed that reveals the gracious reality and hospitality at the heart of the universe is Christ-like. In these temporal events we see realized the sacred intent. The cosmic Christ is a way of speaking about the plentitude of sacred presence and the ubiquity of this Force for love. This way of thinking is not far removed from Paul's description in Colossians "Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God—born before creation, both the first principle and the upholding principle of the whole scheme of creation."

In short, the appellation "Christ" is the title the Christian community assigned to Jesus in faith that his life was a valid and vital representation of God's will. The Christ image emerged from the interplay and intersection among the perceived disposition of God, the life of Jesus and the projection of the Christian community. You will have noted that I enlarge and extend the meaning of this title, just as I have radicalized the incarnation. And I am willing to admit that "my" Christ fits my definition, just as "your" Christ fits yours. Blake observed this long ago:

> The vision of Christ that thou dost see
> Is my vision's greatest enemy.
> Thine has a great hook nose like thine.
> Mine has a snub nose like to mine.

Intimately related to the cosmic Christ concept is what I have labeled the "Force of love" in the universe. As the churchman/physicist Schilling expressed it,

> Love, sensitivity and tenderness [one of Whitehead's favorite words] are potent forces of the cosmos, and operate internally at the core of all occasions. The reality that embodies these efficacies is, I take it, what Christianity means by the 'Christ' . . . Wherever the creative and redemptively tender elements of life are at work among men of all cultures and religions, in shop or mart, the political area or academic hall, there Christ is actively present, even though he may be incognito.

There is more than a kernel of truth in what we have all read, "God/Christ has no hands but our hands to do his work on earth today?" In this way we see ourselves as co-creators with God of a heaven here on earth.

Some years ago Edwina Sandys, Churchill's granddaughter, sculpted a figure she titled "Christa," depicting Christ on the cross as a woman. That image, while shocking to some viewers, suggests an extension of the title "Christ" which, obviously, I have stretched even further.

A Cross In the Heart of God

Moving from the primordial (pre-BB) God to the contingent (post-BB) God, Whitehead concludes his moving exposition on "God and the World" with this provocative and poetic passage:

> What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relation, the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world. In this sense, God is the great companion—the fellow-sufferer who understands.

Of course, we may not take Whitehead literally; he has already indicated the inseparability and indivisibility of God and the world. Here he is speaking figuratively and imaginatively about the interchange and symbiotic relationship between God and humankind.

God is the great companion [one who "eats" with us] because She has become the cosmos and is, therefore, always present; forever the abiding Presence. She is the fellow-sufferer because by becoming actual and concrete She has not only completely given up Herself but also because in anticipation and intention She knows She will suffer as the process unfolds and as Her benign Spirit--the benevolent smile of the Cosmic Cheshire Cat—looks on understandingly and empathetically while the whole cosmos groans and seeks to save itself from futility and meaninglessness by grasping from its depths and center the love which from the beginning has been in the mind and heart of God. That love, which hesitates to let us go, is the power of the primordial God emptied into the BB as the suffering servant and issuing forth as the consequent and relativized God in the form of the cosmic Christ. Behind the smile of the Cheshire Cat—and within it, is an inestimable sadness, an undeniable wistfulness and an intense identification with the pain and suffering in the world. That is why

Whitehead rightly calls God not only "the great companion" but also "the fellow-sufferer who understands."

It is our task to put a human face on that Cat, to add flesh and blood and fur, and so to build up its body that future generations may see the transforming and saving power in its sad smile. Pascal penned what for me is an unforgettable and uncomfortable truth that will forever sting those of us who are still "asleep." "Jesus Christ", he wrote, "will be in agony until the end of the world. We must not be asleep during all that time." The author of *Revelation* had it correct: "Behold, in the midst of the throne stood a Lamb as though it had been slain. The Lamb [was] slain from the foundation of the world." And "the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to living waters."

As we "see" the God/Source empty itself into the universe in and through the Big Bang, we "sense" that suffering love seems to be embedded in and integral to this action. That "insight" leads us to believe that love is at the heart of the universe. It is that truth that frees and motivates us to follow in its train. In Jesus, we Christians see a reflection of this same God/Force of love displayed in his life of pain. In the cosmic Christ, we become aware that in empathy and sympathy other persons engage in loving actions and gestures for others. Slowly, it dawns on us that it is now our turn to respond and add to that God/Force by offering ourselves in the service of love through which alone progress will be made toward that celestial city, the New Jerusalem. Only a new consciousness will lead to a new life and a new world.

> Sitting at the master's feet, the novice asked, "Can you foretell the future?"
> The master said, "That's easy. Today is just like yesterday.
> Tomorrow will be just like today, unless, of course, there's a change in consciousness."

The Paradox of Grace

There remains one additional theological concept that is critical to my own thinking, what Donald Baillie calls "the paradox of grace." St. Paul gave Balllie the clue for this paradox when he confessed, "I, yet not I, but the grace of God." And Paul of course took his cue from Jesus who attributed all his love and power to God. Jesus was so God-conscious and so unself-conscious that he believed that any good

he could do, all his acts of love, all his healing power and energy, were from God. "I can of myself do nothing." "The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing." "If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true." "No one is good but God alone."

As Baillie testifies, "all the good we do is the action of God in us . . . but this does not abrogate human personality nor disclaim personal responsibility." Congruent and concurrent with the paradox of grace is the paradox of faith, as Tillich makes clear. "God creates the faith through which it is received. We do not create faith by will or intellect or emotional self-surrender. We are grasped by faith." Barbara Wheeler, President of Auburn Seminary, a sister institution of Union in New York City, recently echoed Tillich,

> I have come to believe that faith is basically not a human product, but a gift of God . . . Only God can give us the power to love the whole world and to care about those who suffer in it. . . . Only God can change our hearts.

I concur. It is the God-Source-Force all the way, from beginning to end. But that in no way excuses us from working assiduously night and day to believe, to trust and to love. In the first instance, we owe all to the God/Source, the One before the beginning. And, in a secondary sense, we credit all that we might become to the God/Force behind and within the Smile of the Cheshire Cat that chases us through the lineaments and interstices of our lives. Behind and within that benevolent and beneficent Smile, which never wears a frown or a grimace, but does have a tragic sense of sadness about it, is the Source who has given Herself as a gift of grace, the ultimate act of self-giving love, the incarnational atonement which we have here been exploring.

We are most truly human and most truly free when we learn in humility to attribute all we are to the Source/Force behind and within all. What is, was first God's, in Her mind, heart and soul, before it became ours. This is just another way of speaking about "prevenient grace," God's innate graciousness in anticipation of our coming and becoming. God's grace "made me do it;" i.e., to do whatever "good" I may ever do.

Things are not as they seem. Nor are they otherwise.

Let me recapitulate. What I have been envisaging in this essay is that the God-head, full of Christic intent, reconfigured and transformed God-self (at the BB?) from the Source to the Force toward life and love in the universe. God left that prior mode and abode and became fully and finally incarnate and at-one-with every part of the reality in which we live-- inextricably embedded in every atom and particle of the big enchilada which emerged from that single dot of energy at the beginning of time/space and in which, as Force, God is now embodied and seeks as a kind of background cosmic disposition to lure the whole universe toward life and love. I believe that we are ontologically connected and related to this whole reality and process.

The human acts of care, concern and love seem to mirror, reflect and enlarge the smile of the cosmic Cheshire cat. In these ways we enlarge, expand and amplify the God/Force. Even though we do these deeds in full freedom, we act, nonetheless, in faith and humility that it is by the power of the God/Force that they are accomplished. "Not I, but the God/Source/Force/Christ in me!" In the meantime, we may find this way of living to be personally redemptive and transformative.

Butterfield has a wonderfully suggestive image buried in one of his books. "History", he said, "would stop happening if God held His breath." When he penned that startling sentiment, he may have been thinking of the Hebrew word "DBR," which is to be translated "Word/Event." That is, when God speaks, something happens! (And God said, "Let there be light." And there was light!) And the plural form of DBR means "history," implying that God is somehow in all happenings and events.

I believe the God/Force keeps breathing-whispering-acting-smiling in all people, places and things as a lure, a nudge, a hope, and a spirit; always cheering us on, not from the sidelines, but from the middle of the field, from within each particle as it emerged from the BB. The Big Bang was God's big blow out, when She cast Her lot with us.

My way of looking at the reality in which I live is simply an intuitively radical extension of Mercersburg Theology and, more fundamentally, of John's vision of the Word, the Logos, as the divine self-manifestation of Ultimate Reality: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Here at the very beginning, at the Big Bang, was the Source that became the Force that is in all

things and therefore with and within us all for all time. All of us, by God's own choice and action, are ontologically related to Her as well as to each other. In pondering the meaning of John 1:1 two hundred years ago, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the poet/philosopher imagined this:

> 'Tis written, "In the beginning was the Word."
> If by the Spirit I am truly taught;
> Then thus: 'In the beginning was the thought.'
> Is it the Thought which works, creates, indeed?
> 'In the beginning was the Power,' I read.
> The Spirit aids me: now I see the light!
> "In the beginning was the "Act," I write.

That "Act" was the Big Bang!

Fifty years ago, Tillich, working with the same text, wrote, "The Word of God is every reality through which the ultimate power breaks into our present reality—a person, a thing, a text, a spoken word."

We Come from God, Who is Our Home

We began this journey at Mercersburg, where the incarnation reigned supreme in its theology. From within that context and upon that foundation, I have sought to extend and expand the meaning of God's coming in light of modern science and technology by forcing us to think back to the very beginning of the universe, the Big Bang, where I have been envisioning the initial incarnation occurred. It is from that point, that dot, that concentrated bundle of energy, that all we now know had its beginning. And because God came irrevocably then, at the BB, there has not even been the possibility of an intervention since that occasion. All of God came and is now here.

With T.S. Eliot, I agree that no matter how one seeks to interpret the first Coming, which for me is also the final Coming, the Advent of God, the incarnation is

> The hint half guessed, the gift half
> understood, ----------
> Here the impossible union.

And, again, with Eliot,

> We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Goodnight God. I Hope You Enjoy Being The World—Four and one half- year- old Danu Baxter

A Radical Mercersburg Considered

Linden DeBie

This article is written in response to Richard T. Schellhase's, "Mercersburg Theology Radicalized." First, I want to address the degree to which Mercersburg was controversial. Although, as Richard said, the Mercersburg professors were accused of heresy, they were unanimously exonerated. Had the Mercersburg theologians lived in Germany, their views would have been generally accepted. Even late in the controversy, Nevin and Schaff were shocked that Dorner had come out against them, so convinced were they that their views were essentially consistent with the mainstream of contemporary European theology (especially of the German mediating school of thought). So, Mercersburg did not set out to be controversial, nor did they mean to be provocatively progressive.

The second point I want to make is a personal one, but it sets the tone for my consideration of Richard's paper. In sharp contrast to Richard's experience, Mercersburg was a theology for me before it was a liturgy. Unlike Richard, I did not grow up in a Mercersburg church (Southern California, I believe, has no Mercersburg churches). Moreover, I expect my personality is fundamentally different from Richard's. Although my grandfather was our minister and I loved him dearly, and while the liturgy was solidly Reformed (spoken in Dutch at one service until the early 1950's), as a young boy, I must confess, I found worship unimpressive.

The prayers were lost on me. I felt captive to my parents' requirement that I be there. The sermon was incomprehensible. Sunday school was OK when the biblical stories were well told, but "communion" (which was what we called it) just added length to an overly long routine, and left but this single impression: the incredible sound of three hundred little glass cups clicking into place in the pew racks.

Nor was anything impressive about the furniture, except for a little boy—those arrow tips on the light fixtures pointing down kept my mind busy most Sunday mornings determining who would die should they come flying down (earthquakes were common in my town). And I don't honestly believe my disliking of Sunday worship had to do with a difference in what happened in Richard's Mercersburg church. I don't believe his service was anymore vital (to a child) than mine

was. No, I expect it's the fundamental differences in our personalities. Some of us are not visually or communally oriented. We're more introspective, private, and iconoclastic by nature. Just one thing about that whole experience enslaved my soul and destined my course quite likely forever: high-minded thought.

The "*Domini*" (minister, but literally "Lord") was considered the teacher of the community. When I was able, I began to compare and contrast his theology with my own. The doctrine of predestination especially intrigued me. I loved wrestling with the ideas and (I must be honest), I envied the esteem with which the *Domini* was regarded. These were the things that impressed me about my community. Not that I wasn't shaped by our communal meals (almost always consisting of little ham buns), the way we voted, bought our homes, educated our children, argued, fished, dated, got married and looked on Jews and homosexuals. These shaped me too. But the love of thought and theology's high regard made me love my church experience.

So, unlike Richard, I cannot expect an eyewitness' credibility in order to be convincing on the topic of Mercersburg. His opening paragraphs remind me of the opening sentiments of St. John's first letter, lines to the effect of, "I was there, I heard, saw and touched. I am eyewitness." On the other hand, since I defend a less radical perspective, perhaps some readers will not require me to be a "true" child of Mercersburg. Rather, I speak as one who fell in love with Mercersburg for its ideas and then came to appreciate its genius in liturgy.

Thus Mercersburg is not so much a place for me (although, of course, it is), no more than is Jerusalem, or Bethel, or Sinai. They are symbols whose meaning lies in both what happened there and how what happened shaped and gave meaning to the world. And Richard is right, Mercersburg, like most movements of thought and significance in the nineteenth century, was appreciative of science. I have argued in many places that philosophically and theologically, Mercersburg was at the cutting edge of the science of religion. They spearheaded in America the movement to repair the rift created by deistic types of thinking; thinking that too widely separated the worlds of flesh and spirit. Yet, in Europe, many thinkers and movements were seeking the same ends. Mercersburg had a unique contribution to make and they were novel simply by being in

America, but the campaign was one shared by many nineteenth-century evangelicals, all reacting to the excesses of rationalism and more specifically, the muddying of orthodoxy at the hands of speculative theologians and philosophers.[1]

However, while their fascination and certain embrace of science was progressive and popular, they were by no means unfettered in their admiration of science. Indeed, they led the way in cautioning Christians about the limitations of science. Their central doctrine of the Incarnation restored the place of God in human history and required union with God to be as much corporeal as spiritual. But materialism: the growing temptation of science to believe that matter is all there is, was something to be denied, as much as science's growing egotism that all things would be given to the humanitarian evangel through his (Richard might say "her") skill in science and technology. They cautioned against the Promethean spirit often rampant in science, without retreating to defensive and superstitious alternatives. Indeed, they were at the cutting edge of theology, applying a novel, historical method of speculative science as they encouraged the church to rediscover the Heidelberg Catechism, the place of the Creeds and historic communion practice. Couple that with their philosophical distancing of the more left-wing progressives (Hegel and Schleiermacher), aligning themselves with the orthodoxy of the German mediating school of thought, and we must conclude that in most ways Mercersburg was conservative in character.

Granted, Mercersburg's was a bold and new approach to American theology. (Nathan Hatch's dissertation theorizes that Nevin sought to adjust what Hatch believed was Calvin's tired and outdated psychology according to nineteenth-century discoveries.) Yet, for all its inventiveness, Mercersburg rejected what they likely today would call 'scientism'. We have only to listen to one of the most prophetic pieces of nineteenth-century religious prophesy to hear Nevin's caveat

> All we need to protest against in this case, is the insanity of making nature, in its own sphere, the end of all knowledge; the madness of imagining, that moral interests can ever be subordinated safely to material intere sts; the wild hallucination of dreaming, the great battle and work of life for

[1] Most especially Schleiermacher and Hegel.

> man is to be accomplished by physics and mechanics, by insight simply into the laws of nature and mastery of its powers, by chemistry, geology, mineralogy, metallurgy, and other such studies, by polytechnic ingenuity and skill applied to all manner of ways to business and trade, There is a higher view than all this, in which the study of nature becomes itself the study of mind, and the material meets us everywhere as the sacrament of the spiritual and divine.[2]

So Mercersburg appreciated the impressive accomplishments of science and they respected and applied science's rigor and reason, but they also recognized its shortcomings, as have been made so apparent over recent decades, and they anticipated the breach of ethics so daunting in our own age. Truly the "elasticity of mind" commended by Richard was practiced by Mercersburg and as Richard pointed out, it corresponded with the changing elasticity of history and the study of natural phenomenon. But Mercersburg would not stretch their imaginations as far as Richard might have liked them to.

Still, it is correct that Mercersburg believed themselves to be scientific. They understood history based on a subtle principle of constant change within a constant immutable. (Hegel referred to it as the principle of "*aufheben*" or "sublation".) Likewise, both Schaff and Nevin battled feverishly against unreasoned religion and made clear that much of their distaste for revival methods arose from the irrational emotionalism associated with revivals. Their progressive theology was certainly scientific, but it was patently un-materialistic and with virtually the host of outspoken critics of Condorcet, Bacon, Comte and the positivists' agenda, the Mercersburg professors stood against the unhealthy belief that through human ingenuity we will eventually explain all the laws that govern the universe. Furthermore, in a number of ways they critically anticipated the later American development of pragmatism.

The Mercersburg professors did not believe science could provide "all the answers" and if they were alive today, I expect they would not be surprised to learn that the residual exuberance and romantic optimism of the Enlightenment, which having failed in what it promised and

[2] John W. Nevin, "Commencement Address," Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, PA 25 July 1867. *The Mercersburg* Review, 14 (1867), p. 507.

produced what many had feared, led to what scholars call "post-modernism." Today we read books and articles describing the Enlightenment's rather unscientific, ideological baggage.[3] In contrast, what developed in the wake of positivism, at least in the humanities if not elsewhere, were departments dominated by relativistic thinking.[4] But the lingering deterministic scientists and philosophers remain undeterred in their crusade to explain the universe according to "a small number of natural laws." Listen to the unabashed advocate of modern-day positivism, Edward O. Wilson:

> I admit that the confidence of natural scientists often seems over-weening. Science offers the boldest metaphysics of the age. It is a thoroughly human construct, driven by the faith that if we dream, press to discover, explain, and dream again, thereby plunging repeatedly into new terrain, the world will somehow come clearer and we will grasp the true strangeness of the universe. And the strangeness will all prove to be connected and make sense.[5]

Wilson should not be ignored, insofar as his program seeks to apply science's rigor and method to all the disciplines in order to make knowledge converge and cohere. (He calls his program "consilience".) He readily admits that it is a Herculean undertaking, maybe even impossible—but to not undertake it, says Wilson, is to fail in the ultimate human quest. He would not flinch if we regarded him, as many have, quixotic. My greatest concern is his ideology—where the goal and the method of science drive the quest, rather than the transcendent, wholly-other Word of God. It is the question of motivation and the critical evaluation of both science and theology's claims that require careful examination. It seems to me that as much as religion, science must be questioned about its motives and its raison d'être. Still, there should be no disagreement that science is the

[3] One example is Richard Rorty's, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[4] This has created a whole other set of problems. Some describe the lack of communication and agreement among university departments as a veritable "tower of Babel".

[5] Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Random House Inc., 1999). The reference to "a small number of natural laws" appears on the book cover. The quote can be found on page 12.

way we gain knowledge about the natural world and Mercersburg would agree.

So, Richard and I do not part company on the theoretical goal of the full agreement between science and religion. (Although, as a colleague pointed out to me, what chance is there of that given the fact that theory drives scientific exploration and theories can be very subjective.) Of course, Aquinas believed that science and religion must agree, as well. So did Frederick Rauch, the Mercersburg movement's philosopher and the first of the three original professors to teach at the seminary. But I suspect none of them would accept Richard's suggestion that we jettison what they would take to be essential Christian doctrines, simply because current discoveries in science and technology raise questions about those doctrines. Indeed, my experience tells me that these doctrines have not been so much disproved as tested.

Of course, I expect that all of us agree that science, done properly, is duty-bound to refute itself if the evidence suggests it. Evidence is paramount to science. Evidence cannot be less thought of in religion. Science and religion must ultimately agree on the evidence. Even in human experience, evidence must corroborate the findings of religion and science, and while science is sometimes slow to reject its popular dogmas, we must admit that religion has been characteristically slower. But religion does apply experience (understood as a product of divine/human relationship) when overcoming wrong thinking. The place of women in the Church is one historical example. Slavery is another. But the inward, organic existence of God in human life and history is not suggestive of even enlightened pantheism (Richard calls his theology "theo-en-pan-ism").[6]

What follows is my argument that pantheism (or it's more recent modifications) is not a theist's solution to scientific skepticism, that orthodox Christian teaching is not refuted by the Big Bang Theory, nano-technology, the Genome Project, Darwin's theory of natural

[6] I must respect that theo-en-pan-ism is not the pantheism addressed by Mercersburg. However, it is enough like it that I am certain the same criticism would be leveled against it by Mercersburg. The important difference in the newer version is that God and the universe are not identical, but share an identity. However, that is a far cry from orthodoxy's *creatio ex nihilo* and the traditional insistence that God is not to be identified with creation.

selection, nor any of the innovations mentioned by Richard, and furthermore, that in the problem of theodicy we may have at least a point of departing insight for Christians whose faith has been tested by recent scientific discoveries. Mercersburg will continue to be our mutual foil.

In Richard's example, when Nevin argued with Brownson that God has a "living correspondence" with his creation, he was reacting to Brownson's attack which misguidedly associated Mercersburg with pantheism. In fact, Nevin's remarks were aimed at deistic theology, but more passionately at mainstream evangelicals, whose pneumetology left little room for the corporeal Christ to unite with the believer. Likewise, with regard to Schaff, Richard suggests that his *Principle of Protestantism* endorsed rationalism as the "necessary schoolmaster for orthodox theology . . ." Indeed, Schaff believed that rationalism had brought an end to dogmatic intolerance and the prejudices that put denominations at each other's throats. This is clear from thesis #80 in his general summary. But theses #89-90, which, in short, have their source in Schelling, were precisely the warning Schaff raised against the later Hegelians (Bauer and Rothe, for example), when they described the way the church would evolve within the state, becoming something quite alien to what Christ had originally established. Said Schaff, the inevitable changes within which history is bound-up can no more lead to the church transcending itself than an acorn can transcend itself and become a peach tree. The original ultimately determines the limits of growth and development. Said Schaff, Christianity cannot transcend itself. It cannot become what Richard describes and still be Christianity.

Richard has rightly ferreted out the "theophanic" present in both Mercersburg and Chalcedon. The question is how far to take God's association with creation. This immediately brings us back to Hegel and the question of pantheism. Certainly Hegel was of unquestionable influence on Mercersburg, no doubt by way of the later mediating school of German theologians and historians. But Hegel's speculative method would hardly be comfortable with pure materialism. Rather, his dialectical materialism (if we can trust Lukacs' term and hence, depiction of Hegel's system) sustained an idealistic "spirit". Indeed, Hegel placed scientific materialism in the same camp as rationalism, erring too far on the side of objectivity, missing the essential subjective quality of reality and not nearly in tune enough with the phenomenon of intuition. Of course, Richard has blended the material

with the spiritual—but many analytic philosophers, such as Daniel Dennett, would see nothing more than sophistry in this. Dennett believes that the world is all there is. He is adamant that mixing what is an entirely arbitrary and natural process with language or theories about God is what he metaphorically calls the use of a "sky-hook," which is "a 'mind-first' force or power or process, an exception to the mindless, motiveless mechanicity" which is the universe.[7]

But Mercersburg was critical of Hegel and of pantheism, and identified itself with the more recent German mediating school of intellectuals, where the refutation of pantheism was important. Part of the stated agenda was to understand God's involvement with creation without too closely identifying God with creation. In contrast, Hegel believed he had solved the problem of theodicy by making evil a necessary part of an infinite process, which ultimately must be understood to be God (or at least *Geist*). But of course, he was left with an ontologically dialectical universe in which good and evil are opposing forces, but also balancing forces whereby one cannot exist without the other. In contrast, the German mediators, with Mercersburg, sustained theodicy as a troublesome mystery and would not allow evil a place in the natural order of things. Mercersburg shared with orthodoxy the conclusion that evil was a huge mistake and blight on creation; that God was over and above evil; that God was apart from creation. Richard finds this thinking naïve.

That's a big problem for Richard. He tells us that God is the source of everything good. But his metaphysics are obvious. God is also the source of everything bad. All that stardust that makes us God, not only gives rise to a Mother Theresa but a Hitler. It is the source not only of UNICEF but of Auschwitz and the Final Solution. I get the impression from Richard that God is a necessary, grand unifying metaphysical theory that can provide us ultimate meaning. But I expect he won't sway a host of scientific determinists and analytical thinkers who are more likely to share with LaPlace the perhaps apocryphal answer he gave Napoleon when he asked him how it was he had written such a great work on the universe without ever mentioning its creator once. Said LaPlace, "Sir, I had no need of that hypothesis."

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[7] Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 76.

The problems for Richard become even more apparent when it comes to Christology. When God is everybody, Jesus is just somebody. Oh, he's a very significant somebody, but still right along side many other significant somebodies. Richard's Christology is similar to the controversial figure much on the minds and lips of Mercersburg, Schleiermacher. His theology did wrest from rationalism a simply human Christ, but the vestige of rationalism was latent in his Christology and rendered us a far from supernatural Christ. Christ's divinity was based on his God-consciousness. We share in Christ and subsequently in God, when we share Christ's God-consciousness. But Mercersburg insisted that unity with Christ was mystical, and that it included full participation in his person (not merely a noetic experience, but full incorporation in Christ), which was unity with his corporeal being as much as with his spiritual being. In other words, all of Christ.

Still, Richard has credibly observed that while the question considered most urgent for Christians by Mercersburg was the Church question, the critical *philosophical* question of the nineteenth century and of our own, new millennium remains the question of God. Many nineteenth-century rationalists allowed that God existed, but in a remote and distant way. So the battle was with rationalism's banishment of God.

Today, the remoteness or distance of God is often snidely attributed to God's non-existence (or, as in the case with Richard and the Whiteheadians, God's limited existence). Still, on many people's minds is the question of God's meaningful contact with the world. In that respect, the question is the same, and I would venture to say that although Mercersburg perceived it to be a vital question, haunting the educated of their day, today it has become a question asked as often on the covers of popular magazines, as in university classrooms.

Richard answers the question from what he perceives is the scientific perspective. He argues that he cannot help himself given the overwhelming scientific evidence and the way many scientists have left room for the divine, expressly through physics' Big Bang Theory and quantum mechanics. Nevertheless, Richard's jump is far beyond a host of discreet physicists that have left the door ajar for God. Generally, they are cautious when speaking about God. The best popular, door ajar statement that I've run across is the one by Stephen Hawking when he wrote:

> . . . there is no physical necessity for a beginning. One can imagine that God created the universe at literally any time in the past. On the other hand, if the universe is expanding, there may be physical reasons why there had to be a beginning. One could still imagine that God created the universe at the instant of the big bang, or even afterwards in just such a way as to make it look as though there had been a big bang, but it would be meaningless to suppose that it was created *before* the big bang. An expanding universe does not preclude a creator, but it does place limits on when he might have carried out his job![8]

In their disciplined constraint to work from evidence alone, physicists speaking about God do so from the realm of conjecture and carry no more weight of argument than theologians (and I would suggest less). Richard bases his conclusions on recent scientific discoveries which led him to believe that God is in everything and thus is in us (is us). His All is One theology harps back to the originator of the idea, Parmenides. Nor is Richard shy about admitting that he is a "theo-en-panist" and that he wants us to get with it. So it is that particular theological perspective that needs to be addressed in light of Mercersburg.

It is not enough to say that Mercersburg was open to scientific discoveries, and then say we should embrace the evolving God theory of Hartshorne and Whitehead (et al.). I am quite confident that the Mercersburg professors would quote the hymn, "Thou changest not." But much has recently been made of how theology and science might converge, and how ideas about God and ideas about nature might agree.

The recent point of convergence was only hinted at by Richard, and that is the encouraging but not entirely helpful theory of complementarity. A host of fine theologians interested in dialogue with science have discussed this theory evoking great interest from the public. Originally it came from Niels Bohr when he suggested that it might be helpful in solving seeming contradictions in physics, expressly how matter sometimes acts like particles and sometimes like waves. The paradox might have been theorized away when some

[8] Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), p. 9.

quantum physicists were ready to scrap literal models of reality and render experimental evidence in purely mathematical terms. Bohr and others resisted that approach and suggested that models are necessary in order that physics correspond to the familiar world and the cultures that humans inhabit, and in order that scientists might continue to work and communicate together.

Subsequently Bohr suggested that complementarity might be applied to other seeming paradoxes. Two examples in theology were divine love verses divine justice and determinism verses free-will. In their enthusiasm, other philosophically minded scholars proposed other, grander examples of complementarity, like science verses religion and God verses Nature. At this point, the caution was raised where God and the world were suggested as complementary and here is where we find Richard.

The danger in this was long ago recognized by Christopher B. Kaiser, a former physicist and chaired professor of theology at the Reformed seminary in Holland, Michigan. In *Christology and Complementarity* Kaiser wrote, "The principal difficulty encountered in regarding God and the world as 'complementary', in Bohr's sense of the term, is that Creator and creature are generally thought to be two distinct 'entities', in Christian 'theism', rather than two 'modes' of a single entity as 'wave' and 'particle' are two 'complementary' modes of an atomic object in physics."[9]

The article was really about Christology, and while it went a long way in enlightening us as to how we might safely understand some of the similarities experienced by physicists upon their discoveries in quantum mechanics and the discoveries of the apostles when they encountered something entirely new in Christ, the article goes beyond the issues raised by Richard. Still Kaiser's opening comment puts the matter before us. Wrote Kaiser, "Any attempt to view God and the world as 'modes' of a single being in this sense would seem to lead to a form of 'pantheism'."[10] As a Reformed theologian and a former physicist, Kaiser saw that form as unacceptable.

As much as in physics, Richard offered the insights of biology and technology, as issuing a challenge to orthodox Christianity to

[9] Christopher B. Kaiser, "Christology and Complementarity," *Religious Studies*, 12 (1976), pp. 37-48.
[10] Ibid.

relinquish some of its time-honored beliefs. Yet, there seems to me to be no scientific evidence to do so. As I said earlier, some analytical philosophers and modern theologians find the orthodox Christian religion either wrong or antiquated. Some offer ideological alternatives which they feel better match the scientific evidence. Richard is one such theologian. However, I find no compelling scientific evidence to suggest that God is us and we are God. Rather, it seems to me that the conclusion results from the lack of scientific evidence that there is a God. So the question might be, what is it about biology or technology or physics that suggests that God is a separte being and that "All" is not "O ne"?

I've shown how even a leading physicist allows that a creator God, who existed before and apart from time and matter, might have created the universe. That seems consistent with revealed religion and our sacred texts and tradition. I've allowed for the great discoveries and advances of technology and alluded to its horrific consequences when used improperly. So I feel I've satisfied physics and technology as to the lack of disagreement between them and an independent, supernatural deity. I've only to mention now the science of biology, to consider whether there are any discoveries there that would disallow God's independent, sovereign and unique place in the universe.

The challenge before us then, especially if we want to preserve our connection to Mercersburg, is to wrestle with the issue of God's involvement with and in creation in a way that embraces the substantiated conclusions of modern biological science and does not violate what our ancient tradition holds to be true. That, it seems to me, requires us to return again to the problem of theodicy, especially in light of Darwin's theory of natural selection, because theodicy, in addition to struggling with the seeming paradox of the existence of evil and of a good and all powerful God, expressly deals with creation and with the questions of what is good and what is evil.

Nothing in Richard's review of biology, including the amazing progress made in genetics and the strides made in medicine, etc. vitiate the classical idea of God. Rather, the challenge comes from evolutionary science and what is, I believe, a parallel theological challenge which comes from theodicy. My conclusion is that Richard's pantheistic position would likely endorse evolution and might seek to solve the problem of theodicy by allowing evil a place

in God's creation. The tremendous scientific evidence supporting evolution and the obvious fact of evil might lead people in this very direction. For the sake of argument, let us grant the fact of evolution. Is it still possible to retain an orthodox understanding of God and creation and address theodicy without compromising God's independence of creation?

Biology has very little to say about God and what it might say must be concluded by inference. Some infer that if we did evolve from inert matter, God did not create us. The conclusion is that since adaptation is random and mindless, life cannot be thought of as a creation. Creation implies a guiding force. Rather, Darwin's theory argues for a pattern of randomness and holds that the laws of probability and chance determine all the outcomes. Of course, the only way this makes sense is within the sheer size of time itself. The argument is made that while it did not take an infinite amount of time for us to get where we are today, it took nearly that long.

Given the sheer magnitude of time, some scientists and philosophers are adamant that existence as we know it could and did come about accidentally. But it seems that the time in question must be relegated to the time after the Big Bang, because time has no meaning before the Big Bang. Was the time since the Big Bang enough time for chance and the random forces of nature to arrive where we are today? In the countless galaxies, during the billions of years since the Big Bang, did one planet evolve life that led to our modern culture exclusively through a mindless and random process of chance? I don't think so.

However, more important for the discussion is what Christians call providence. Isn't the doctrine of divine providence compromised by the absence of physical evidence of any tampering with nature by God? Clearly the Darwinian principle of gradualism in adaptation doesn't require or allow any creative leap in our evolution, although some maverick Darwinists have suggested it.[11] Enforcing gradualism would leave theists with a description of creation that began with the Big Bang, and continued on uninterrupted and without divine intervention.

Rather, what is clear from natural selection is that God is not evident in the geological/anthropological record, which suggests to me, at

[11] The recently deceased paleontologist Stephen Gould is one.

relinquish some of its time-honored beliefs. Yet, there seems to me to be no scientific evidence to do so. As I said earlier, some analytical philosophers and modern theologians find the orthodox Christian religion either wrong or antiquated. Some offer ideological alternatives which they feel better match the scientific evidence. Richard is one such theologian. However, I find no compelling scientific evidence to suggest that God is us and we are God. Rather, it seems to me that the conclusion results from the lack of scientific evidence that there is a God. So the question might be, what is it about biology or technology or physics that suggests that God is a separate being and that "All" is not "O ne"?

I've shown how even a leading physicist allows that a creator God, who existed before and apart from time and matter, might have created the universe. That seems consistent with revealed religion and our sacred texts and tradition. I've allowed for the great discoveries and advances of technology and alluded to its horrific consequences when used improperly. So I feel I've satisfied physics and technology as to the lack of disagreement between them and an independent, supernatural deity. I've only to mention now the science of biology, to consider whether there are any discoveries there that would disallow God's independent, sovereign and unique place in the universe.

The challenge before us then, especially if we want to preserve our connection to Mercersburg, is to wrestle with the issue of God's involvement with and in creation in a way that embraces the substantiated conclusions of modern biological science and does not violate what our ancient tradition holds to be true. That, it seems to me, requires us to return again to the problem of theodicy, especially in light of Darwin's theory of natural selection, because theodicy, in addition to struggling with the seeming paradox of the existence of evil and of a good and all powerful God, expressly deals with creation and with the questions of what is good and what is evil.

Nothing in Richard's review of biology, including the amazing progress made in genetics and the strides made in medicine, etc. vitiate the classical idea of God. Rather, the challenge comes from evolutionary science and what is, I believe, a parallel theological challenge which comes from theodicy. My conclusion is that Richard's pantheistic position would likely endorse evolution and might seek to solve the problem of theodicy by allowing evil a place

in God's creation. The tremendous scientific evidence supporting evolution and the obvious fact of evil might lead people in this very direction. For the sake of argument, let us grant the fact of evolution. Is it still possible to retain an orthodox understanding of God and creation and address theodicy without compromising God's independence of creation?

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least from the scientific perspective, that God is not a part of creation in the way that natural phenomenon, like sunlight, is. Although Richard is right that Mercersburg (expressly Nevin) argued that the supernatural "must be supremely natural"[12] such that both are present in the combined spheres of nature and spirit and are everywhere active one with the other (in contrast to strict dualism), this is not suggestive of the being of God. So while our experience (intuition) leads many of us to believe in unseen forces, and science, in many cases, supports this, those unseen forces should not be confused with God. Rather, the relationship between God and creation is one of two different entities and the force of that relationship is predominantly, although not entirely, moral (spiritual as opposed to physical). What we gain, however, from recent scientific breakthroughs, is the impression that the existence of what our tradition has called "the supernatural" in observable phenomenon, leads some of us to conclude that there is a Creator behind the phenomena. Still, no evidence suggests that the phenomena are the Creator.

Take for example an analogy from the human experience of birth. I suppose you could say that the mother created the child, after a manner. She certainly gave the child life. But the mother is not the child, and after the mother gives birth to her child, most of her influence over the child is moral. If, as Christians believe, God's relationship with us is spiritual and supernatural, it would have the same sort of character. Indeed, Scripture and experience suggest as much.

Mercersburg was keen to affirm a constant spiritual force or presence active in the natural world, but would certainly have been critical of overstating miraculous intervention in everyday life. The constant abiding presence of God in natural life by means of the Holy Spirit is not to be viewed as God's constant interference in and overriding of nature's laws, but a prevailing presence within those laws, and the influence of the Holy Spirit most generally in all of life should be viewed as the Spirit's reflection or impression of apostolic faith on the individual (or community) by means of moral and spiritual

[12] John W. Nevin, "Natural and Supernatural," rev. of *Natural and the Supernatural, as together consisting the one system of God*, by Horace Bushnell, *Mercersburg Review*, 11 (1859), p. 189.

influence.[13] Moreover, as with the analogy of the mother and child, the integrity of God's relationship with us would require a similar distancing of influence in order to allow us the freedom of self-discovery and a voluntary desire to be in relationship with God.

Biology and physics support Richard, that indeed we are made of matter that exploded with the Big Bang and that we are a part of creation and not above it (biologically speaking). Our dominance over nature comes by virtue of our brains, which are bigger if not more sensitive, than other species' brains. Evolutionists insist (as they must as constrained by their methodology) that our constant adaptation to the changing environment and our urge to survive explain our biology, physiology and psychology, which although obviously different from other species, became that way through the same process.

But none of that precludes creation by God, nor divine/human interaction. Indeed, our human peculiarities have much to do with religion, even if these are explained sociologically, and while this conclusion prohibits a literal interpretation of Genesis, it in no way denies any teaching or moral lessons there offered.

Perhaps an approach, if not a solution, to the problem of evil (theodicy) might be gleaned from the evolutionary perspective. Clearly animals know nothing of evil. If a Pitbull is considered more evil than a Golden Retriever, it is a human, emotional characterization and not justified biologically. Even if we allow that animals have emotions and they clearly do at a more simple level, still, there is neither regret nor the possibility of regret in, for example, the

[13] Recent serious research into paranormal phenomenon is increasingly suggestive of the unseen powers alluded to by religious people throughout the centuries. Furthermore, String Theory, Chaos Theory and other such progressive fields of scientific investigation have led many to rethink what had been an often three dimensional scientific perspective. Still, there is nothing here that would lead us to equate God with the physical universe. Rather, these fields have pioneered in recognizing super-sensuous structures underlying reality, which while not alive (in our sense of the word), appear inherently creative (they are like powers and principalities). In other words, these new fields have opened up new possibilities and created new ways of thinking, for minds previously closed to the idea that midst the randomness there is purpose.

emotions of a lion when it kills a gazelle. In stark contrast, often humans feel regret, even when killing for food.

Clearly there is no room within biological science for an ontological concept of evil, and yet I have no doubt that we cannot be moral beings unless we know the difference between good and evil. My conclusion is that any concept of evil that is not arbitrary requires a transcendent source. Otherwise, our species will have to get on without such a thing as evil, unless we contend (as many have done) that whatever is evil is evil by common consent. I expect that will never satisfy us.

Of course, up until recently the materialistic or empirical mindset of most scientists was that there is no and never will be any evidence of transcendent phenomenon in natural phenomenon (the bias of post-Enlightenment). The search for human morality took on the same rigid character as it did for the so-called hard sciences. Evolutionary sociologists believed that at some point early on, our developing human instincts clashed with habitual feelings, and so a tension developed between instinctual behavior and what we have come to call 'conscience'. They argued that morals developed, like everything else, through adaptation.

The theory is that early in our development we would have had to make life and death decisions that had painful biological and psychological implications. Anxiety, despair, depression, enormous grief, would have taken a tremendous toll on our health and our feelings of well-being (even as they do today). They observe this tension and anxiety in the "lower species" as much as in *Homo sapiens*.[14] Primitive "rules" of behavior would have developed from those experiences among our ancestors' original communities that would favor the choice that lessened the emotional damage created by the decision, as well as allowing the offending individual the sanction of corporate forgiveness.

A general theory holds that allying those fears likely came as a result of communal rules and sanctions which offered convincing proof that while particular actions were painful, they were necessary (moral). Today we realize that our emotions, our regrets and anxieties, are tied directly to our fears and ambitions. The suggestion continues that

[14] Mary Midgley, "The Origen of Ethics," in *A Companion to Ethics*, Peter Singer, Ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1991), pp. 3-13.

early on, as we became distinctively human and developed what many refer to as a 'conscience', standards of right and wrong came to be instituted in every human culture. Initially these were tied directly to survival and adaptation. Over time they were abstracted from their source for a variety of sociological reasons made possible by our growing intelligence and cultural complexity.

Many evolutionary sociologists, along with a host of modern ethicists, argue that the morality that we created was originally practical, but upon cultural elaboration these practical social rules and directives took on a quasi-religious character. At that point and they would conclude to this day, morals are based purely on human conventions. Of course, that is because they begin their analysis with what some believe to be an arbitrary, post-Enlightenment *a priori*, i.e. that contact with the divine is impossible (since they maintain there is no divine and that the world follows immutable physical laws). Still, many of them do not want to entirely jettison an ultimate sense of right and wrong.

Although debate about the foundations of morality continue, with some insisting on a universal right and wrong and others holding that mores are a product of culture—every sane thinker insists that individuals, institutions and governments should do what is right and refrain from doing what is wrong. However, it is difficult to imagine this being taken as seriously as it must, if right and wrong are products of human convention.

Granting the biological development of ethics in human culture, there might be a way to come at the problem of theodicy and perhaps gain insight at least into the human side of the problem of evil. When our species ceased to live and die as all non-human creatures did before and after us, that is, without the kind of angst and despair that defines us as a species, calling our experience "suffering", we set the stage for the conundrum. We asked ourselves and what we believed to be our God (or gods), "Why do we suffer? Is God the source of evil?" And our reflections on death and disease and the fear and pain they caused us, were raised as questions about ultimate reality.

In posing these questions, the paradox of theodicy was forged. "If God (or the gods) are either the source of all things, or powerful enough to control our destinies, then God either brought evil upon us or is doing nothing to prevent it. It would follow that some would ask, is God (or the gods) the author of evil?"

I believe that a reasonable response can be found in God's self-limiting love, which is more and more becoming an attractive theological hypothesis. For human beings, the idea of dis-empowering oneself is an easy one to grasp. Anyone raising a child or nurturing a relationship of mutual devotion, respect and care knows the necessity of a kind of love that sacrifices power, knowledge and authority on behalf of the beloved. In the case of the omnipotent Deity, it would not surprise me that God did and does the same all the time on behalf of God's creation. It makes sense that the God who is love would limit God's knowledge and power for the sake of our growth, freedom, and spiritual and moral development.

If that is the case and I believe it is, it would easily open the door for evil to enter the world, both in the form of malevolent forces and in the deeds of men and women, without implicating God. It goes even beyond the older idea of God permitting evil. Rather, God disenables God-self from acting, for the sake of the beloved. Evil enters the world, but God is not its source, even indirectly.

We affirm two distinct entities, divine and human (uncreated and created). Furthermore, we can envision two distinct moral inventories. One is divine and perfect, the other human and flawed. The first is God's knowledge of right and wrong. The second is our sense of right and wrong. I see no scriptural prohibition in the idea that our ethics are the product of natural selection, as long as there is room for historic and "supernatural" encounters with God. Those encounters would impact the forces of adaptation as much as natural phenomenon would, and surely give direction to the shaping of our moral universe.

This makes sense theologically, as it is apparent that our morality developed anthropomorphically. Nor does this view violate the findings of biological science. It only violates some scientists' presupposition that there is no such thing as supernatural phenomenon (no skyhooks). (Admittedly, it does place stress on Darwin's theory of gradualism.)

However, at the same time it is essential to observe that as much as God is not creature, but creator and entirely different from sentient creatures, God's moral inventory is above our own and very often different from our own. What we might think of as good or as a good choice, may be evil in the sight of God and this may apply to an entire culture or sub-culture, as much as to an individual.

Evolutionary sociologists might readily agree that our sense of evil surfaced along with our growing brains and their subsequent complexity, intelligence and reflectiveness. At some point we began to call some things evil and other things good. Usually we agreed, although a lot of change transpired over thousands of years. Apparently enough change occurred for some to say our conclusions about what is good and evil are completely arbitrary and generated by a subjective principle of social consensus or convention. Still, there is enormous cultural continuity in what we believe to be right and wrong.

Why is it not possible that God, through an act of divine love in self-limiting, allowed us to find our ethical way? This would allow God omnipotence in morality as well as power, but even, by way of analogy, as a parent refrains from forcing his or her will on a child out of love and the desire that the child learn from experience, it would also allow that our sense of right and wrong is not identical to God's. It makes it necessary that if we are to discover what is right and wrong, we have to do it essentially by ourselves. Yet it also allows that God, by means of a loving and non-controlling relationship, can provide the means for ethical as well as religious self-discovery. It also sustains the idea that God is in touch with us in a way that historically, many of us have called "supernatural". Finally, it holds Creator and creature strictly apart, in that we are not God nor vice versa, no more than the parent is the child. Of course, there is a way in which it makes sense to say that the image of the parent is in the child.[15]

Thus evil, or at least evil acts qua human behavior must be said to be a product of humans and our cultural institutions and in no way produced by God. The traditional Augustinian position is sustained: We choose evil out of our own desire to embrace evil. But it adds the new dimension: we ourselves determine what is evil according to our experience. Yet our construction of morality constantly conflicts with God's. God's idea of good and evil is frequently different from any particular culture or individual's idea of good and evil. Indeed, what we Christians affirm is that Christ presented to the world a human

[15] Of courses, there is no biological or material exchange, one with the other. The pressing need felt by most orthodox theologians is to avoid allowing the corrutability so evident in us to also exist in God, which is precisely the problem of Theodicy.

model of the divine ideal (both moral and spiritual) and in fact, it did conflict with Jesus' day's cultural sense of right and wrong. I expect it is still conflicting, and we are still trying to understand precisely what it was that Jesus was showing us.

Evolutionary science is not equipped to address the question of the existence of evil and certainly not the existence of the devil or the belief that an earthquake is malevolent, or the conclusion that the death of an innocent makes God unjust and the author of evil. It does, however, claim the potential to explain our theological reaction to these impressions. Therefore, science is only prepared to deal with the perception of evil. If evil exists beyond human experience and Scripture seems clear to affirm that this is the case, it is not likely that it can come under biological science's scrutiny, unless it is in a very indirect way. It can and does however, come under ethical and theological science's scrutiny.

In contrast, theologically, we have every reason to speculate that God stands in independent relationship with us, suffering along with us as a result of God's self-limiting love, which is the only way our species can be free to enter into independent, mature relationship with both God and each other. We have only to compare and contrast relationships in human experience to know the truth of this. Where control or excessive power exists, the relationship is less than ideal, and the ideal is what God has in mind for us.

In conclusion, I hope I've at least cast doubt on any science that would make a pantheistic theology essential to a scientific perspective. Nothing in the latest discoveries in physics, technology, biology and the related fields requires or even suggests such a move. Rather, science leads in the opposite direction, and the most recent, most innovative science points rather to expunging simple materialistic and mechanistic models of the universe, to embrace dynamic, purposeful models of our world—where once again, we might sense the hand of the Creator without turning the hand (and the rest of the Creator) into creation.

BOOK REVIEW

Looking for Grace by Kenneth Aldrich

Richard Mouw, *He Shines In All That's Fair* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 2003).

I consider myself a Lutheran rather than a Calvinist (as an Anglican, I can be pretty much whatever I want); nevertheless I've developed a great respect for the Reformed tradition because (A) the 39 Articles are more Calvinist than anything else; (B) H. Richard Niebuhr convinced me that Calvinists have the most fruitful way of relating Christian faith to culture; and (C) the theology of the *Mystical* Presence—which Nevin assures us is derived from Calvin, is by far the most satisfying understanding of Eucharistic worship I've ever encountered. So when I saw this book advertised I immediately ordered a copy and then had to wait six months for Eerdmans to get it to me as they had run out of first editions and waited to print up some more. It was well worth the wait.

This work is subtitled, "Culture and Common Grace" and originally was delivered as the Stob Lecture at Calvin College and Seminary for the year 2000. It serves as a useful introduction to contemporary Calvinist thought as well as a kind of primer on the central issues Calvinists grapple with to those not well versed in this tradition as well as a friendly challenge to Christians of all persuasions to consider these questions. In his irenic presentation, Richard J. Mouw, the much esteemed president of Fuller Seminary and a highly respected Christian philosopher, disarms those predisposed to reject Calvinism out of hand by his well reasoned arguments and ecumenical comprehensiveness.

The book is not long (only a 101 pages) and therefore easily readable. It is felicitously unlike many other theological treatises, in that it does not indulge in a multitude of excursions into peripheral areas of interest. To those not involved intra-Calvinistic dialogue, it might appear a little plodding at first since it begins by addressing controversies which beset the Christian Reformed Church in the last century, but these set a helpful stage for what follows and the book moves rapidly on to related issues which should engage the interest of all serious Christians, whatever their label. As might be expected, Reformed theologians are those most often cited, but others such as

Arminian Anabaptist John Howard Yoder and Roman Catholic J. Bryan Heher are given respectful attention. Thus the discussion becomes truly ecumenical rather than merely intra-confessional. The only voices not heard from are those of the Eastern Church. But, alas, this is all too often the case in American theological discussions.

The central thrust of Mauw's lecture is to assert and defend the importance of "common grace" for Christians. Among other things common grace affirms the continuing essential goodness of God's creation despite our fallenness. Mauw's wishes to make it clear that God interests himself not only in the "elect," but in the whole of his creation. The corollary of this is that God's elect must interest themselves also in every aspect of his creation, particularly as this affects the lives of follow human beings. "We proceed with caution, knowing the rebellious manifesto of our first parents—'We shall be as gods!'—still echoes all around us. But we also know—and this is an important message for common grace theology—that the Spirit of the reigning Lamb is indeed active in our world, not only in gathering the company of the redeemed from the tribes and nations of the earth, but also in working mysteriously to restrain sin in the lives of those who continue in their rebellion, and even in stimulating works of righteousness in surprising places" (pp. 86-7).

Although Mauw does not shrink from classical Calvinist notions of sovereignty, depravity, election and predestination, he does not present them in the form of a smug "us vs. them" dichotomy. God alone, not the theologian, knows the names and number of his elect. "For all 1 know—and for all any of us can know—much of what we now think of as common grace may in the end time be revealed to be saving grace" (p. 100).

This little book reminds us to look for God's grace and glory everywhere, in expected places and quite unexpected places as well. It contrasts the "wideness of God's mercy" with the limitations of our understanding. It remains biblically and confessionally orthodox while catholic in its openness to the unfathomable possibilities of God's grace. I think *He Shrines in All That's Fair* is a book to which Nevin and Schaff could say, "Amen," and more importantly, one in which Christians of good will from many other backgrounds as well as from Calvinism can discern much profitable reflection on what constitutes a faithful *Weltanschauung*.

An invitation to join the Mercersburg Society and attend the annual convocation!

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