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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 and 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 the subjects pertinent to the aims and interests of the Society.

From the Editor

The first essay is written by Lyle D. Bierma, Professor of Systematic Theology, at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI. He represents the Reformed perspective on what has become the standard catechism for both the Dutch Reformed and the German Reformed denominations. His essay brings to light the influence Melanchton had in the history that led up to the creation of the catechism. He argues that certain parts of the catechism that have been considered to be Reformed actually come from Melanchton and therefore can be considered Lutheran! His historical study helps many of us understand why the catechism is largely irenic and non-speculative in its tone. Bierma concludes his work with this insight on the catechism: *"If one insists on using labels, perhaps the most that should be said is that the Heidelberger is a Melanchthonian-Reformed catechism that sought to respect the boundaries of the Augsburg Confession."* This helps many of us more fully understand why we love the catechism so much.

The second essay is actually three brief essays on a subject that is often debated by people who do not have roots in Mercersburg Theology. Gabriel Fackre, Abbot Professor of Christian Theology, Emeritus at ANTS, argues against what he calls "indiscriminate Eucharist." Joseph Hedden, Jr., the pastor of Tabor UCC, Lebanon, PA, responds by exploring this question: *"Can we assent to the idea of Christ being mystically present in the sacrament while at the same time opening the Table of the Lord for all people?"* This debate has substance.

In the third essay W. Scott Axford, Vice-President of the Society, gives us a look at ecumenism in the thoughts of the 19th century Philip Schaff, the history of the recent 20th century and the 21st century that we are beginning. He is a Member (for the Christian Churches in the U.U.A.) of the National Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission.

The concluding essay is my positive review of Lee Barrett's *The Heidelberg Catechism: A New Translation for the 21st Century.*

Chris Anderson

URSINUS, THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM AND THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

Lyle D. Bierma
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To understand the connection between Ursinus and the AC, we shall examine three things: (1) the historical situation that brought them together, (2) Melanchthon's influence on both the Palatinate Reformation and Ursinus, and (3) the relationship between Melanchthon's AC and Ursinus's HC.[1]

1. Historical Background

When Frederick III became elector of the Palatinate in 1559, the theological and political needs of his territory coincided almost exactly with his own religious predilections. Frederick had been born and raised a Roman Catholic but had adopted the Lutheran faith of his wife during the early years of their marriage. Even before taking over the Palatinate, however, he found himself moving away from the stricter Gnesio-Lutheranism of some of his relatives and toward the more moderate expression of Lutheranism (Philippism) rooted in Philip Melanchthon. As governor, not yet elector, of both the Upper Palatinate and Simmern, Frederick became involved in several attempts to unify the Protestant territories in Germany, and for the rest of his life he would continue to manifest an irenic spirit, spurning theological labels and seeking to ground his doctrine directly in Scripture.

This approach served him well in his early years in the Palatinate, a territory that during the 1540s and 1550s had shifted its official religion from Catholicism to Lutheranism. By the time

[1] Earlier versions of parts of this lecture and full documentation of the sources can be found in Lyle D. Bierma, *The Doctrine of the Sacraments in the Heidelberg Catechism: Melanchthonian, Zwinglian, or Calvinist?*, Studies in Reformed Theology and History, New Series, no. 4 (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999); idem, , "What Hath Wittenberg to Do with Heidelberg? Philip Melanchthon and the Heidelberg Catechism," in *Melanchthon in Europe: His Work and Influence beyond Wittenberg*, ed. Karin Maag (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999); and idem, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

Frederick came on the scene in 1559, most of the major Protestant parties of the day already had a foothold in the Palatinate—Gnesio-Lutherans, Philippist Lutherans, Zwinglians (sometimes today called late-Zwinglians or Bullingerians), and Calvinists. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Frederick's predecessor, Otto Henry, had invited men from all these Protestant persuasions to fill political and ecclesiastical posts during his reign from 1556 to 1559. Frederick continued this practice in the years leading up to the HC, although he soon grew disenchanted with the Gnesio-Lutheran leaders in Heidelberg and filled key positions largely with Melanchthonian and Reformed personnel.

Sensing the need for a statement of confessional harmony among the Protestants that supported his reforms, Frederick commissioned a new catechism in 1562. However, for the sake of Protestant unity in the German Empire and for his own political survival, he had to make sure that this new catechism stayed within certain bounds. According to the Peace of Augsburg (1555), all non-Catholic princes and territories of the Empire were required to subscribe to Lutheranism as defined by the AC; no other varieties of Protestantism were permitted. Violation of these provisions could result in loss of his electoral privileges and even of his territory. In designing a new catechism for the Palatinate, therefore, Frederick III found himself in a delicate position. How could he as a Lutheran elector confessionally repudiate certain Gnesio-Lutheran doctrines that he found objectionable and unify the Philippist, Calvinist, and Zwinglian factions in his realm without violating the terms of the Peace of Augsburg by straying beyond the AC? His answer was the HC. The HC and, for that matter, the whole Palatinate reformation, sought a theological consensus that would fit within the framework of the AC.

2. Melanchthon's Influence on the Palatinate and Ursinus

That the Palatinate reformation might fit comfortably within the framework of Melanchthon's AC is easier to imagine when one considers Melanchthon's longstanding ties to the Palatinate. Melanchthon was actually a native of the territory, born in the little town of Bretten, not far from Heidelberg, in 1497. He received his education in Bretten, Pforzheim, Heidelberg, and Tübingen--all in

the Palatinate and the nearby duchy of Württemberg--and he was awarded the B.A. degree from Heidelberg University at the age of fourteen. When he returned to Heidelberg on a visit in 1524, the now-famous reformer was honored by the university faculty, who presented him with a silver goblet in recognition of his many achievements. A year later both the elector and the peasants of the Palatinate asked him to serve as an arbitrator in the peasant uprisings in the area, a service he performed willingly but with little success.

The Palatine electors had been soliciting advice from Melanchthon as early as the 1540s, but during the reformation under Otto Henry and Frederick III, Melanchthon became something of a long-distance chief adviser. It was he, for example, who convinced Otto Henry to appoint Tilemann Hesshus as head of the theological faculty in Heidelberg in 1557 and who assisted with the reorganization of the university a year later. As we noted earlier, even before becoming elector in 1559, Frederick had found himself moving from Gnesio-Lutheranism to a more Philippist theological stance. He had come to prefer Melanchthon's so-called "altered" version of the AC and had been a signatory to the Frankfurt Recess, a confessional consensus statement drawn up by Melanchthon in 1558. When Frederick wrote to Melanchthon for guidance during the acrimonious Lord's Supper debates in Heidelberg in 1559, he considered Melanchthon's response important enough to have it published a year later in both the original Latin and a German translation. Over the years, Melanchthon declined several invitations to join the faculty of Heidelberg University, but even from Wittenberg his influence on Otto Henry and Frederick III was of such strength that the two electors and the reforms they supervised are sometimes characterized by historians today as "Melanchthonian" or "Philippist."

Melanchthon left his mark also on Zacharias Ursinus, one of his students in Wittenberg and later most likely the major contributor to the Heidelberg Catechism. Ursinus matriculated at the University of Wittenberg at the age of fifteen, and for the next seven years he became not only Melanchthon's pupil but also a boarder at his home and a close and loyal friend. He accompanied his teacher to Torgau when the plague struck Wittenberg in 1552, to

the religious colloquy in Worms in 1557, and on a visit to Heidelberg later that same year. When Ursinus took up his first teaching post in Breslau, he used a catechism by Melanchthon as a textbook and soon felt compelled to defend in print Melanchthon's view of the Lord's Supper that it contained. These "Theses on the Doctrine of the Sacraments," composed and published by Ursinus in 1559, prompted Melanchthon to respond that he had "never seen anything so brilliant as this work." Following Melanchthon's death in April 1560 and Ursinus's departure from Breslau a short time later, the latter gradually moved more into the Reformed orbit. Nevertheless, Melanchthon's stamp on Ursinus's theology, pedagogy, and approach to reform was never fully eradicated by later Zwinglian and Calvinist influences.

In short, Melanchthon's connections to the Palatinate and his impact on Frederick III and Ursinus provided an important part of the context out of which Frederick's territorial reformation and catechism emerged. For Frederick and Ursinus to operate inside the theological fences of Melanchthon's AC, therefore, would seem to be not simply a legal obligation under the Peace of Augsburg, but a very natural inclination.

3. Ursinus's Heidelberg Catechism and Melanchthon's Augsburg Confession

The flagship of Frederick's reformation was the HC, which provides us with the primary test case of his faithfulness to the Augsburg tradition. Did he succeed in his goal of producing a statement of confessional unity within the framework of the AC? It is our contention that Ursinus's HC did indeed meet the criterion of compatibility with the confession of his mentor Melanchthon. We shall explore this claim in some detail by examining: (1) a couple of doctrines on which the HC is silent where the AC is silent; (2) three allegedly Reformed features of the HC that turn out to have roots in Melanchthon; and (3) two places in the HC that appear, at least, to be directly opposed to the teaching of the AC.

Doctrinal Silence

Predestination. It is often pointed out that the HC contains no doctrine of predestination. The most that one can find is two passing references to election: When Christ returns to judge the

living and the dead, he will "take me with all the elect [*auszerwehlten]* to himself in heavenly joy and glory" (HC 52), and the church is "a community elected [*auszerwelte*] to eternal life" (HC 54). There are no questions and answers devoted specifically to election and no mention whatsoever of double predestination, reprobation, or limited atonement.

How does one account for such a muted treatment of election and total silence on reprobation? One possibility is that the authors did not find the topic appropriate for the genre, purpose, and readers of the HC. Predestination is simply too abstract and difficult a subject to include in an instructional tool intended for a general audience of youth and lay adults. After all, Calvin, who wrote extensively about predestination in other works, did not devote a separate question or section to it in the popular Genevan Catechism either.

This line of argument is not wholly convincing, however, for at least two reasons. First, the HC does not shy away from other challenging theological abstractions, such as the doctrine of the Trinity (HC 24-58) or the relationship between the two natures of Christ (HC 46-49). Second, Ursinus's Smaller Catechism (SC), on which so much of the HC is based and which was also intended for a lay audience, has three complete questions and answers on election, the first of which includes a reference also to reprobation. None of these three questions was carried over into the HC.

A more likely possibility for the HC's near silence on predestination is that the authors intentionally steered clear of it for the sake of doctrinal harmony. If Frederick III had had to deal with just the Calvinists in Heidelberg, the outcome might have been different. But his consensus involved followers also of Melanchthon and Bullinger, neither of whom had wished to probe the doctrine of predestination as deeply as Calvin had. It was a subject that Melanchthon had not included in the AC and that soon thereafter he refused to discuss at all. Given Frederick III's own Philippist disposition, therefore, and his desire to bridge the theological divisions in his realm, it is not hard to imagine an unwillingness on his part to grant confessional status to a point of doctrine from which Melanchthon, the AC, and Bullinger, had all shied away.

Covenant. By the early 1560s theological reflection on the biblical notion of covenant was becoming one of the distinguishing features of the Reformed branch of Protestantism. It may seem odd, therefore, that in the HC, which so many have considered Reformed in its orientation, covenant is a relatively minor topic; the term itself appears only five times in 129 questions and answers, two of which are found in the same answer on infant baptism and two in quotations from Jesus about the new covenant in his blood. Even more curious is the fact that Ursinus's Larger Catechism, another source document for the HC, contains no fewer than 55 references to covenant in 38 of its questions and answers, whereas his SC mentions covenant only three times. How does one account for such divergence among related documents written so close together?

Once again, some have suggested that these documents were prepared for different audiences and purposes. The HC and its earlier draft, the SC, were confessions written for a general audience, whereas the Larger Catechism was a more technical work intended for theological instruction at the university. A rather complex subject like covenant, therefore, might be appropriate study material for students of theology, but it was hardly fitting for a lay catechism.

Perhaps. As in the case of predestination, however, a larger part of the explanation may be that this doctrine was simply too new and too Reformed. Nowhere had it appeared in the Lutheran confessions, and Ursinus himself was just beginning to experiment with it in his first classroom textbook, the Larger Catechism. Moreover, to describe the sacraments as "signs of the covenant" might have sounded to Lutherans raised on the AC too much like the Zwinglian doctrine of "bare signs" or "mere signs." Showcasing such a doctrine in a consensus catechism might have provoked the defenders of Augsburg. It would be quite understandable, then, if Ursinus intentionally left out of the SC and HC all but a few references to a doctrine that he himself was only beginning to think through, that is never mentioned in the AC, and that might threaten the theological consensus Frederick was trying to achieve.

Features of the HC with Melanchthonian Roots

There are, in the second place, several features of the HC that are often alleged to be Reformed, even Calvinistic, but which turn out to have even deeper roots in the Melanchthonian tradition: the threefold structure of the catechism, the theme of gratitude in Part 3, and the treatment of the third use of the law.

Threefold Structure. One of the best known characteristics of the HC, of course, is its triadic structure, outlined in HC 2:

Q. How many things must you know to live and die happily in this comfort?

A. *Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am delivered from all my sin and misery; and third, how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance.*

The most likely source of this question and answer is not difficult to identify. It follows closely the wording of Ursinus's SC, the major source document for the HC. SC 3 reads as follows:

Q. What does God's word teach?

A. *First, it shows us our misery; second, how we are delivered from it; and third, what thanks must be given to God for this deliverance.*

Like HC 2, this answer serves to introduce the major divisions of the material to follow. But what, then, were the roots of the SC's tripartite structure? The most recent research on this question, by Walter Hollweg in the 1960s, concluded that these roots can be traced to two confessions by Reformed theologian Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva.[2] Hollweg pointed out a striking structural parallel between the threefold division of the HC and the threefold work of the Holy Spirit in Articles 17-21 of the shorter of Beza's confessions: first, the Spirit makes us aware of our sinfulness through the law; second, he comforts us with the message of salvation in the gospel; and third, he sanctifies us by mortifying the old nature and creating a new one.

[2] Walter Hollweg, "Die beiden Konfessionen Theodor von Bezas: Zwei bisher unbeachtete Quellen zum Heidelberger Katechismus," in *Neue Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Heidelberger Katechismus* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), 86-123; idem, "Zur Quellenfrage des Heidelberger Katechismus," in *Neue Untersuchungen*, vol. 2 (1968), 38-47.

This thesis is certainly attractive. Beza had developed close ties with members of the Heidelberg community in the late 1550s and likely published his larger confession (*Confessio christianae fidei*) in 1560 in response to a request from none other than Frederick III. His shorter confession (*Altera brevis fidei confessio*) was also well known in Heidelberg, especially after its translation into German in 1562, probably by Caspar Olevianus, one the contributors to the HC. Therefore, we should not be surprised at some of the linguistic parallels that Hollweg points out between these Bezan confessions and the HC.

What Hollweg does not make clear, however, is why this is the only or even the most likely explanation for the threefold organization of the HC. He overlooks the fact that we also find this pattern in Lutheran sources nearly forty years earlier. Some have identified this structure, for example, already in Melanchthon's 1521 edition of the *Loci communes*, which itself might have been inspired by the outline of the book of Romans. Romans proceeds from a treatment of human sin (chs. 1:18-3:20) to the great drama of redemption (3:21-11:36) to the Christian life of thankfulness (12:1-16:27), and the *Loci* too treats, generally speaking, first the topic of law and sin, then the gospel and justification, and finally the life of Christian love.

This triad is found also in later works by Melanchthon—his Visitation Articles of 1528, for example, of which sorrow for sin, faith, and good works form the basic structure. Moreover, the triple work of the Holy Spirit, which caught Hollweg's eye in Beza's shorter confession, was foreshadowed in Melanchthon's AC almost thirty years before. According to Article 20 (*Editio princeps*), the Holy Spirit produces knowledge of sin, faith, and the virtues that God requires of us in the Ten Commandments. This is echoed in Melanchthon's "Apology of the AC" when he asserts that repentance consists of two parts, contrition and faith, and that he will not object if one adds a third part, namely, the fruits worthy of repentance.

There is also another way by which Melanchthon, and perhaps even his AC, might have influenced the threefold structure of the HC. In the early 1900s Johann Reu drew attention to an anonymous summary of Christian doctrine published in Regensburg

in 1547 and reprinted in Heidelberg in 1558.[3] This treatise included a forward by the Gnesio-Lutheran Nicholas Gallus, a former student of Melanchthon's who had later become a strong critic of his teacher's theology. What is so remarkable about this document is not only its threefold structure but also the content of each of the three divisions. Part 1 is entitled "The Law, the Origin of Sin, and Repentance"; Part 2 "The Gospel and Faith"; and Part 3 "Good Works." Even more striking is the terminology in each section that would later appear in both the SC and the HC. It is through the law that we come to know our frailty and "misery" (*elend*), through Christ that God has "delivered" (*erlöste*) us from such misery, and through the keeping of the commandments that we show ourselves "thankful" (*danckbarlich*) to God for what he has done on our behalf. Reu concluded that if the structure of Melanchthon's *Loci* and the Book of Romans exerted any influence on Ursinus at all, it could only have been through the more developed form of this structure in the Regensburg "Summa."

It is not our intent here to choose among these various hypotheses. That task is next to impossible anyway, since by the mid-sixteenth century the triad of Law-Gospel-Good Works had become part of the common stock of Protestant theology. What is significant for our subject today is that this triad was not distinctively Reformed but found some of its earliest Reformation forms in the works of Melanchthon, including the AC.

Gratitude. Some in the past have pointed to the theme of gratitude in Part 3 as the one feature of the HC that is distinctively Reformed. Once again, however, such claims cannot be justified, for this, too, is an emphasis that one finds already earlier in the Lutheran tradition, especially in Melanchthon. As far back as the 1521 *Loci*, Melanchthon had stated that "when we have tasted the mercy of God through faith and have come to know the divine goodness through the word of the gospel . . . , the mind cannot help

[3] Johann Reu, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte des kirchlichen Unterrichts in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands zwischen 1530 und 1600*, pt. 1, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Katechismus-Unterrichts*, vol. 1, *Süddeutsche Katechismen* (1904, reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1976), 198-99, 201-3. The Regensburg treatise, "Ein Kurtze Ordenliche summa der rechten Waren Lehre unsers heyligen Christlichen Glaubens," is found ibid., 720-34.

loving God in return; it exults and witnesses to its own thankfulness for such great mercy by some form of reciprocated service." Luther himself taught in his Small Catechism of 1529 that one is "duty bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey" God for all that he has done for us. A year later in the AC Melanchthon listed thanks to God as one of the virtues required in the Ten Commandments that is reawakened in the regenerate by the Holy Spirit. And just a year after that he explicitly stated in the "Apology of the AC" that "good works ought to follow faith as thanksgiving to God" and that thanksgiving is one of the good fruits of repentance that are taught us in the Commandments. This theme would appear again in Melanchthon's "Scholia" of 1534, in a doctrinal handbook by the Lutheran Urbanus Rhegius in 1536, and, of course, in the Lutheran Regensburg "Summa" of 1547. Perhaps most striking, however, in its linguistic similarities to HC 86 was a question and answer in a catechism by the Lutheran Johannes Brenz from 1535:

Q. Why ought we to do good works?

A. *Not because we pay for sin and earn eternal life with our deeds—for Christ alone has paid for sin and earned eternal life—but rather because we ought to bear witness to our faith with good works and be thankful to our Lord God for his good deeds.*[4]

By the 1540s and 1550s this theme had made its appearance also in Reformed catechisms by Leo Jud and Johannes à Lasco, in the larger confession of Theodore Beza, and in Calvin's *Institutes*. Where Ursinus first encountered it is impossible to say. But there are no grounds for maintaining that this aspect of the HC is distinctively Reformed and missing from the Melanchthonian tradition. As with the entire triadic arrangement of the HC, the connection between gratitude and good works in Part 3 made its first appearance in Lutheran literature, especially Melanchthon's writings, including the AC.

Uses of the law. Finally, it is often alleged that the HC reveals a Calvinist orientation most clearly in its treatment of the law as the norm for a life of gratitude, the so-called third use of the law. The German scholar Wilhelm Neuser did find this third use of

[4] "Fragstücke des christlichen Glaubens," in Christoph Weismann, *Eine Kleine Biblia: Die Katechismen von Luther und Brenz* (Stuttgart: Calver, 1985), 114.

the law also in Melanchthon, but he maintained that by placing its commentary on the Ten Commandments in the section on gratitude, the HC followed Calvin in making this the principal use. For Melanchthon, the first use, the law as a teacher of sin, remained primary.

Is, then, Part 3 of the HC, where the law is introduced as a rule of gratitude, non-Melanchthonian and distinctively Calvinist? The closest the HC comes to an explanation of the functions of the law is in its treatment of the purpose of preaching the law in Q/A 115:

Q. No one in this life can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly: why then does God want them preached so pointedly?

A. *First, so that the longer we live the more we may come to know our sin*fullness *and the more eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness of sins and righteousness. Second, so that, while praying to God for the grace of the Holy. Spirit, we may never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.*

This second reason for preaching the law, namely, so that believers will persevere in their striving to be renewed in God's image, does indeed sound Calvinian. Similar language can be found in Calvin's *Institutes* and Genevan Catechism, the latter of which possibly served as one of the sources for the HC. As Calvin puts it in one place, the law exhorts the believer "like a whip to an idle and balky mule, to arouse it to work."[5]

The first reason for preaching the law, however—so that believers may increasingly come to know their sinfulness and look to Christ for forgiveness—is missing in Calvin, at least as part of the third use of the law. Where it appears in Calvin is only in reference to unbelievers or to believers prior to conversion (the first use of the law)—and not, as in the HC, in reference to the redeemed after conversion. What previous scholarship has overlooked, however, is that this *is* identified as a third use of the law by Melanchthon, who actually introduced the concept of a third use of the law into Protestant theology in 1534. In his 1543 edition of the *Loci* Melanchthon distinguishes two aspects to this third role of the

[5] *Institutes* 2.7.12.

law. First, the law reveals the remnants of sin in the believer's life so that he or she may grow in both knowledge of sin and repentance. Second, it teaches the particular works by which God wants us to exercise obedience. This second, or didactic, dimension to the third use of the law is found also in Calvin. But the first, or pedagogical, dimension to the third use is not; it is a uniquely Melanchthonian formulation.

Was it this Melanchthonian formulation, then, that that eventually found its way into the HC? That is a strong possibility but, once again, not the only one. What Melanchthon describes here as a dimension of the third use of the law, Luther had characterized as an application of the second use (Calvin's first use) to believers. Since the HC never actually numbers the functions of the law, it is difficult to say whether the first part of Answer 115 is a closer parallel to Luther or to Melanchthon. In any case, to identify the uses of the law in Part 3 as strictly Calvinist is hardly correct. In point of fact, the HC combines a Calvinian emphasis on the exhortation to good works with a Lutheran emphasis on the exposure of residual sin in the life of the believer—a remarkable splice of two of the traditions represented in the Heidelberg consensus.

Possible Points of Conflict with the Augsburg Confession

The ultimate test case of the HC's compatibility with the AC is two doctrines in the catechism, again commonly identified as Reformed, that appear directly to attack the Lutheran tradition: the two natures of Christ and the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. How do they measure up to the Augsburg standard?

Two Natures of Christ. Apart from HC 80, which condemns the Catholic Mass in no uncertain terms, the most polemical material in the catechism is reserved for the Gnesio-Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity, i.e., the omnipresence of Christ's human nature. The debate over this doctrine helps to explain why, after just a single question on the resurrection of Christ (HC 45), the catechism devotes no fewer than four questions (HC 46-49) to his ascension, a doctrine that focuses on the status and whereabouts of Christ's human nature. According to HC 46, when we recite the clause in the Apostles' Creed "He ascended to heaven," we mean that Christ "was lifted up from the earth to heaven and will be there for our

good until he comes again to judge the living and the dead." But if Christ is "there" in heaven, how can he fulfill his promise to be "here" with us until the end of the world (Q 47)? At this point the catechism explicitly rejects the ubiquity doctrine by stating that "in his human nature Christ is not now on earth"; he is present with us only by his "divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit" (A 47). Q 48 then anticipates the charge that this is tantamount to the ancient Nestorian heresy, which tended to divide the two natures of Christ: "If his humanity is not present wherever his divinity is, then aren't the two natures of Christ separated from each other?" A 48 responds with the so-called *extra Calvinisticum* teaching that "Christ's divinity is surely beyond the bounds [cf. Latin: *extra*] of the humanity he has taken on . . ." but that "at the same time his divinity is in and remains personally united to his humanity." This does not present a barrier to our eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ at the Lord's Supper, for "although he is in heaven and we are on the earth," at the Supper "we are united more and more to Christ's blessed body" through the Holy Spirit (HC 76). But doesn't this explicitly Reformed and anti-Lutheran stance, then, contradict the teaching of the AC? Actually not. The doctrine of ubiquity, which Luther had employed already in the 1520s to support his belief in the real presence of Christ's humanity in the Lord's Supper, was not elevated to Lutheran confessional status until Brenz's Stuttgart Confession in Württemberg in 1559. In the AC of 1530, Melanchthon had said no more than that the two natures of Christ are "inseparably joined together in unity of person" (Art. 3). To be sure, one could read into that text the unstated suppositions of Luther's Christology which are at odds with the HC's *extra Calvinisticum*, but the affirmation in HC 48 that "his divinity is in and remains personally united to his humanity" is, on the surface at least, in full compliance with the wording of AC Art. 3. Indeed, when Frederick III had to defend his allegiance to the HC before the emperor at the Diet of Augsburg in 1566, one of the other electors supported him by arguing that on this point the HC had no more strayed beyond the AC than had Brenz's Gnesio-Lutheran Stuttgart Confession seven years earlier. Both could be regarded as different glosses on the same confessional text.

Real Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. What would seem to be one of the most obvious areas of conflict between the HC and the Lutheran tradition is the doctrine of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Melanchthon had stated in Article 10 of the AC in 1530 that "the body and blood of Christ are truly present and distributed/communicated [*distribuantur*] to those that eat in the Lord's Supper." The German version was even more explicit: "The true body and blood of Christ are truly present *under the form of the bread and wine* and are distributed and received there." The HC seemed to reject this in Q/A 80, which, although an overt attack on the Roman Catholic Mass, describes the Mass in language very similar to that of AC 10. It is nothing less than "a condemnable idolatry," says HC 80, to teach "that Christ is bodily present *under the form of bread and wine*."

This, however, is not the whole picture. Following a change of mind in the 1530s, Melanchthon revised Article 10 in an "altered" edition of the AC in 1540. The article now read, "With bread and wine are truly exhibited/offered [*exhibeantur*] the body and blood of Christ to those that eat in the Lord's Supper." To say that the body and blood of Christ are exhibited or offered "with" the bread and wine is much less precise than to say that they are present "under the form" of bread and wine. How exactly Christ's body and blood are offered "with" the elements is not addressed. Melanchthon later echoed this position in his "Response" to Frederick III during the eucharistic controversies in the Palatinate, when he advised the elector to be content simply with Paul's reference to the sacramental bread as "the communion of the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Frederick and Ursinus seem to have heeded Melanchthon's advice when they constructed the sacramental doctrine of the HC. For one thing, Ursinus quotes 1 Corinthians 10:16 in HC 77, in his answer to the question about where Christ promises to nourish and refresh believers with his body and blood as surely as they eat the bread and drink the cup. But more significantly, like the altered AC, nowhere does the HC state how exactly the outward physical signs of the Supper are connected to the spiritual blessings they signify.

Paul Rorem has identified two views on the relationship between sign and signified in the Lord's Supper that coexist within the Reformed confessional tradition:

> Does a given Reformed statement of faith consider the Lord's Supper as a testimony, an analogy, a parallel, even a simultaneous parallel to the internal workings of God's grace in granting communion with Christ? If so, the actual ancestor may be Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zurich. Or does it explicitly identify the Supper as the very instrument or means through which God offers and confers the grace of full communion with Christ's body? The lineage would then go back to John Calvin (and to Martin Bucer). . . .[6]

Where does the HC fit into this paradigm? Certainly it is not distinctively Calvinian here. Calvin could say, for example in his "Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper," that the bread and wine "are as *instruments by which* our Lord Jesus Christ distributes" his body and blood to us. According to HC 75, however, the Lord's Supper reminds and assures the believer only that "as surely as I receive from the hand of the one who serves and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, . . . so surely he nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life with his crucified body and poured-out blood." Nothing is said here about when or how exactly this happens. The believer can be confident that as certainly as the physical feeding takes place, so also does the spiritual feeding, but there is no reference here to the elements as "instruments" or "means" by which this spiritual feeding occurs, even though Ursinus did not hesitate to use such language in his earlier catechisms.

Nor is the HC distinctively Zwinglian or Bullingerian on the relationship between sign and signified. One finds a parallelism between inner and outer action in the sacrament (see HC 69, 73, 75, 79), but this parallelism is as characteristic of Calvin as it is of Bullinger. What separated the two reformers was not whether the sign and signified are parallel but . . . whether they are *merely* parallel. Are sacramental signs and actions only visual analogies to the grace that the Holy Spirit bestows apart from them (Bullinger), or are they more than analogies, namely, the very means or instruments through which that grace is communicated to believers (Calvin)? Like the altered AC, that is a question the HC does not address.

[6] Paul Rorem, "The *Consensus Tigurinus* (1549): Did Calvin Compromise?" in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 90.

That the HC is entirely compatible with the AC on this point is underscored by the fact that in 1564, one year after the appearance of the HC, Ursinus published a defense of the catechism in a tract entitled "A Complete Statement of the Holy Supper of Our Lord Jesus Christ from the Unanimous Teachings of the Holy Scriptures, the Ancient Orthodox Teachers of the Christian Church, and Also the Augsburg Confession." There he seeks to demonstrate how the eucharistic teaching of the HC not only is grounded in Scripture and the church fathers but also wholly agrees with the AC. What is so striking is that when he refers to the AC here, he has in mind not the altered version of 1540 but the original, unaltered version of 1530! According to Ursinus, the AC says only that the body and blood of Christ are *truly* present, not *bodily* present, in the sacrament. Moreover, anyone who thinks the AC teaches that unbelievers at the table partake of the body and blood of Christ is mistaken, since Art. 13 makes quite clear that faith is a necessary prerequisite to such spiritual feeding.

Ursinus may indeed have a point here. HC 78 and 80 deny only the bodily presence of Christ in the Supper, not the presence of Christ altogether. What is important, however, is not so much whether Ursinus correctly interpreted the unaltered version of the AC, but that he *considered* the HC fully compatible with it. Not only does the HC seem to fit here within the framework of the AC, but the author of the catechism himself *believed* that it did. That more than anything else tells us something about the relationship between Ursinus and the AC.

Conclusion

Surprisingly, the relationship between the Ursinian HC and Melanchthonian AC is more harmonious than one might infer from the fact that each became a doctrinal standard for a different branch of Protestantism. Such harmony is less surprising, however, when one looks at the text of the HC in its historical context. First of all,

the author of the AC had a considerable influence—personally, politically, and theologically—on both the chief architect of the Palatinate reformation, Frederick III, and the chief author of the HC, Zacharias Ursinus. Second, in all his reforms Frederick was under legal mandate and constant political pressure to stay within the theological bounds of the AC. Third, Frederick, by reason of his own disposition, theological inclinations, desire for political stability, and concern for the unity of Protestantism in the face of a resurgent Catholicism, was seeking to bridge the theological gulf between the Lutheran and Reformed parties in his realm.

Is it any wonder, then, that when all was said and done, the HC was muted or silent on such controversial Reformed themes as predestination and covenant, which are never mentioned in the AC; or that some of the allegedly Reformed features of the HC—its triadic structure, the theme of gratitude in Part 3, and the emphasis on the third use of the law—actually had roots in the Lutheran tradition, sometimes the AC itself; or that even the HC's polemics against the Gnesio-Lutheran doctrines of the natures of Christ and his real presence in the Lord's Supper do not directly conflict with the text of the AC?

That does not mean that the HC should now be regarded as distinctively Melanchthonian. It was, after all, a consensus document, not an apology for a particular brand of Protestantism. Furthermore, it does contain some less controversial Reformed features that are not addressed in the AC—its treatment of the descent of Christ into hell, for example, and the numbering of the Ten Commandments. If one insists on using labels, perhaps the most that should be said is that the Heidelberger is a Melanchthonian-Reformed catechism that sought to respect the boundaries of the Augsburg Confession. That is only a more precise way of stating what Frederick III himself said when he was called upon to defend the HC at the Diet of Augsburg in 1566. He repeatedly affirmed his full subscription to the AC and challenged anyone to show where in the HC he had departed from it. No one was able to do so—nor, in my judgment, are we able to do so today.

A Friendly Debate on "The Open Table": I. Essay, II. Reply III. Response Gabriel Fackre & Joseph Heddon

I. The "Open Table" in Mercersburg Perspective

Gabriel Fackre, Abbot Professor Emeritus of ANTS

What might be the response of Mercersburg theology to the current proposal of "an open Table"? The new practice adopted in some congregations from traditions as different as the Episcopal Church in the United States to the United Church of Christ invites commentary from Mercersburg advocates, as it raises questions that have been central to its heritage, from the meaning of the eucharist itself, through Christology to the importance of ecumenism.

First, some definitions and general considerations: "Open table" is not the same as "open communion," though in some of the discussion the two phrases are used synonymously. ***"Open communion"*** has to do with a Table opened by one denomination or congregation to Christians of other denominations or congregations. ***"Open Table"*** refers to a communion table open to anyone, regardless of Christian identity, Christian baptism, Christian faith.

This is the way the question is put in an important article on the subject in the Episcopalian debate by James Farwell in The Anglican Review:

> On any given Sunday should "seekers," those "passing through," unbaptized guests or family members of parishioners, the spiritually curious, or even people of other religions be invited and encouraged to receive the consecrated bread and wine of the eucharist?"[7]

[7] James Farwell, "Baptism, Eucharist, and the Hospitality of Jesus: On the Practice of 'Open Communion'", The Anglican Review , Vol. 86, No 2 (Spring 2004), p 216.

Or, to put it , not as a question, but as an assertion, here is a sentence from another Episcopalian, Timothy Mulder at the 2004 Mercersburg Society meeting:

> Until the Church offers the Eucharist to anyone, for any reason, I think we are letting down the parable of the banquet and the One whose party this life really is. [8]

If an "open table" means the sacrament being offered "to anyone, for any reason," I believe we need another more straightforward way of describing it. I am leaning, at the moment, toward the phrase "indiscriminate eucharist."

What is the theological rationale for offering the Supper indiscriminately, "to anyone, for any reason"? Here is the way Farwell puts it:

> If the meal ministry of Jesus incarnated his vision of the kingdom of God, then ours ought to do the same. Making "baptism" the door to the table is an exclusionary rule, suggesting that one must enter the circle of holiness before one can commune with the faithful . In short, if Jesus was hospitable to all, then we should be hospitable to all. If God is open to all, then our table should be open to all. [9]

Mulder described it this way:

> The Eucharist as a Table of inclusion of all people seems to me to be what the ministry of Jesus was ultimately all about.[10]

Second, on matters of general consideration, the importance of distinguishing between fundamental theological issues and immediate pastoral concerns. As Farwell, who argues fervently against the practice, nevertheless, puts it:

> We do not "check ecclesiastical ID cards" at the altar rail and no pastor in her right mind will deny communion to someone who has, in fact, arrived at the altar rail expecting to receive. It is another matter to extend an unconditional invitation to communion as an official policy, publishing

[8] Timothy J. Mulder, "The Eucharistic Life: From Table to Sidewalk," The New Mercersburg Review No. 35, p. 39.
[9] Farwell, *op.cit.*, p. 219.
[10] Mulder, *op.cit.*, pp. 39, 40.

> that policy through service bulletins, announcements, websites, and the like.[11]

Let's move, after these general considerations, to a point of view on it from, I will argue, the Mercersburg tradition.

Union with Christ

In evaluating the proposal for indiscriminate communion, various things enter this Mercersburg mind. One of them is how it relates to the ecumenical movement which is so much of a part of our tradition, the Mercersburg Theology being the pioneer of ecumenism in this country according to the great church historian, Sydney Ahlstrom. I have done some research on how this subject is treated in ecumenical documents, in current literature where it is being discussed in national Churches—Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, Reformed. And I have consulted ecumenists—Jeffrey Gros, ecumenical officer of the National Council of Catholic Bishops, Paul Crow, leading ecumenist and historian of the Faith and Order movement, Geoffrey Wainwright, drafter of the document, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Lutheran theologians Richard Koenig and Joseph Burgess. They have helped me track down the documents to be cited and have expressed their own agreement with them.

Another is how the *Zeitgeist* may impact Christian doctrine, as in Nevin's and Schaff's critique of the anxious bench reflecting the culture's individualisms and subjectivisms. We'll ask that question too about the "open table" proposal.

Most important is the matter of the nature of this sacrament and the Christology related to it. We move first to these theological issues:

Nevin states what he believes to be the classical teaching of the Reformed tradition on the Lord's Supper:

> …the sacramental doctrine of the primitive Reformed Church stands inseparably connected with the idea of a living union between believers and Christ, in virtue of which they are incorporated into his very nature, and made to subsist with him by the power of a common life. In full correspondence with this conception of Christian salvation,

[11] Farwell, *op.cit.* p.218.

as a process by which the believer is mystically inserted more and more into the person of Christ, til [becoming] thus at last transformed into his image, it was held that such a real participation of his living person is involved always in the right use of the Lord's Supper.[12]

Holy Communion, therefore is a union with Christ in which the believer is "mystically inserted more and more into the Person of Christ." Here is the "high" view of the eucharist associated with Mercersburg -- union with the mystical presence of Jesus Christ, the giving of a "life" that overcomes death which comes to those nourished by this divine-human Person..

Given the awesome nature of this meeting, there must be a "right use of the Lord's Supper." (1 Cor 11:27-28 is in the background here, of course), hence a preparation commensurate with the nature of the occasion. Thus the Preparatory Service so much part of the German Reformed Church liturgies, and later that of the Evangelical and Reformed Church which used almost the exact words of its Reformed ancestors:

> Being of such a sacred nature it is plain that the Table of the Lord can be rightly approached only by those of who are of a truly devout, repentant and believing mind . These holy mysteries are not for the worldly, the irreverent, or the indifferent. All who are impenitent and unbelieving, and who refuse to obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ have no right to partake of this Table.... [Moreover] those doing so eat and drink judgment to themselves, not because they are ....unworthy, but because they eat and drink unworthily, not discerning the Lord's Body.[13]

Commenting tersely on this same point in his discussion of Reformation eucharist liturgies, Schaff says:

> The Lord's Supper was never intended for unbelievers.[14]

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[12] John Williamson Nevin, The Mystical Presence (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1846, Reprinted by Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000. Edited by Augustine Thompson, O.P.

[13] "The Preparatory Service," The Hymnal (St. Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1947), 18.

[14] Philip Schaff, The History of the Christian Church Vol. VI (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), p. 669.

Why so? Here the christological assumptions enter in. Who is this Person to whom we are joined at the Table? He is the one who said "repent and believe the good news..." (Mark 1:15) Of course, then the warning that without such discernment of the demands of this Body, one "eats and drinks judgment against themselves" Hence the echo of Schaff in the Order for Holy Communion of the former E&R Church shaped by the Mercersburg tradition:

> The Lord's Table, therefore, can be rightly approached only by those who are of a devout, repentant and believing mind.[15]

No indiscriminate invitation here. Such indulgence would seem to be reminiscent of H. R. Niebuhr's indictment of the liberal Protestantism of his day as espousing a "God without wrath who brings humans without sin into a kingdom without judgment by a Christ without the cross." The love of Christ is tough as well as tender, at the Table as well as at the tomb.

This commitment to a disciplined Christian community had its origins in early Christian worship practice that continues to this day in some traditions, distinguishing the Liturgy of the Catechumens from the Liturgy of the Faithful. Eberhard Bethge describes how strongly Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed in this:

> The question of the arcane discipline was not as peripheral for him as the infrequency of the phrase [in his Letters and Papers from Prison] might suggest.... It was predictable that he was interested in the early Christian practice of excluding the uninitiated, the unbaptized catechumens, from the second part of the liturgy in which the communion was celebrated and the Nicene Creed sung.[16]

Mercersburg's own stress on the cruciality of right preparation for Holy Communion was related, of course, to its struggle against the anthropocentric individualisms and subjectivisms represented in the piety of the anxious bench. "Whosover will may come to Jesus" if that individual feels in their

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[15] "The Order for Holy Communion," *Ibid*, 21.

[16] Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer" A Biography Revised Edition, Revised and Edited by Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 2000), 881.

heart so moved. The altar call of the 19th century is strikingly parallel to the call to the altar of the 21sts century which invites to come forward "anyone, for any reason" if so moved to do so.

Where then does baptism enter the picture? Back to the Mercersburg formulation of the eucharist as union with and incorporation into Christ. Walter Krebs, in his article "Word and Sacraments" in The Mercersburg Review of 1867 speaks to the linkage, that is to say the sequence of Bath and Meal:

> Holy Baptism is the means of grace whereby the Holy Spirit ingrafts, for the first time, in any substantial sense, the believer into Christ…As Baptism has reference to the introduction of life and consequent formation of a life-union, so the Lord's Supper has reference to its maintenance and growth.[17]

Note the echo of this assertion about baptism in the Introduction to the Order for Baptism in the UCC which does so by quoting BEM:

> Through baptism Christian are brought into union with Christ with each other and with the church of every time and place (129)

(While the UCC Orders for Word and Sacrament I and II do not specify the Bath as preparation for the Meal they surely assume it in the Invitation.)[18]

The Mercersburg assumption is this sequence: baptism is entry into life in Christ; the Supper is nourishment in the same. This is nothing new, of course, for it is the Great Tradition of the universal Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church sums it up with way, also with its distinctive emphasis of sacrifice:

> The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply by Confirmation

[17] Walter E. Krebs, "The Word and the Sacraments," The Mercersburg Review Vol. XVI, 1867, 371.

[18] Service of Word and Sacrament I: "This table is for all Christians who wish to know the presence of Christ and to share in the community of God's people"(44) ; Service of Word and Sacrament II: "In company with all believers of every time and beyond time, we come to this table to know the risen Christ in the breaking of bread" (68)

> participate with the whole community in the Lord's own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist.[19]

This requirement of baptism for those who come to the table runs right against our present cultural grain. Jane Rogers Vann of Union Theological Seminary, Virginia puts it this way:

> In an age of instant gratification, the idea of withholding anything at all, for simple treats to extraordinary privileges (and their attendant responsibilities) is quite unusual. This culture of indulgence makes the church's insistence on the traditional sequence of baptism and Eucharist seem harsh.[20]

Ecumenical Views

By citing The Catechism of the Catholic Church. we have entered the ecumenical arena. Thus, the relevant section from BEM which represents Reformation and Eastern Orthodox traditions says,

> Christ commanded his disciples thus to remember and encounter him in this sacramental meal as the continuing people of God until his return …The eucharist is essentially the sacrament of the gift which God makes to us in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Every Christian receives this gift of salvation through communion in the body and blood of Christ…each baptized member of the body of Christ receives in the eucharist the assurance of the forgiveness of sins… and the pledge of eternal life."[21]

Echoing the word that the eucharist is the meal for Christ's "disciples," "every Christian," "each baptized member," the Lutheran-Episcopal Agreement says:

> We affirm the mystery of the New Birth in Christ by water and the Spirit. Holy Baptism, duly administered with water and in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and understood as God's action of adoption, initiates into the Body of Christ and (in principal at least)

[19] "The Sacrament of the Eucharist," Article 1322, Catechism of the Catholic Church, English translation (Liguori: Liguori Publications, 1994), 334.

[20] Jane Rogers Vann, As I See it Today: The Blessing of a Eucharistic Blessing," Union Theological Seminary & Presbyterian School of Christian Education

[21] "Eucharist," Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982), 10.

gives access to the Holy Eucharist and the reception of Holy Communion."[22]

Or again, the Anglican-Orthodox "agreed statement on the eucharist":

Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, as many ecumenical statements, including our own on Christian initiation..., have affirmed, the unrepeatable means of our rebirth and incorporation into the body of Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. It is in the Eucharist that that this new life in Christ is nourished and strengthened by the same action of the Holy Spirit." Again the biblical sequence (Acts 2: 41-42)

Moving back closer to home, look at the the Lutheran-Reformed Agreement, and also COCU. The FOA cites Marburg Revisted and Invitation to Action as presupposition for the sacramental teaching of its participants, the UCC and RCA included. Both echo BEM, and Invitation to Action specifically citing that document as its premise, "communion of the faithful" being one of its five themes, with the latter's joint statement on the Lord's Supper affirming that "Holy Communion richly nourishes us in our devotion to a life of faithful discipleship..." Baptism initiates into discipleship and Holy Communion nourishes the disciple. The COCU Consensus puts the same thing this way in speaking about confirmation "as an effective sign of continuing and growing incorporation into the life of Christ (Eph 4:13-16), of which Baptism is the foundation and the Eucharist is the regular renewal." This is the recurring sequence.

Conclusion

So the subject has come up in our time and in our traditions. Some are pressing hard for it. From a Mercersburg point of view it is worth asking:

1) Does it comport with a high doctrine of the Lord's Supper that presumes and requires baptism and faith for a graced meeting and communion with Jesus Christ?

[22] ..... Joseph Burgess and Jeffrey Gros, Growing Consensus.....

2) Is the pressure for an indiscriminate eucharist coming from cultural trends resistant to biblical norms and disciplines, awash in individualism and the authority of human experience?
3) Will the policy and practice of indiscriminate eucharist affect the ecumenical future of a denomination endorsing it?

I believe the Mercersburg answers to these 3 questions are: No, Probably and Yes.

II. The Presence of the Lord at His Table: A Reply to Gabriel Fackre

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Dr. Fackre's essay outlines the traditional Mercersburg understanding of the Lord's Table, following both Philip Schaff and John Williamson Nevin. Nevin and Schaff both held that Christian believers and believers only are meant to partake in the bread and wine. However, must we, as Mercersburg pastors and theologians follow this line of thinking? Can we assent to the idea of Christ being mystically present in the sacrament while at the same time opening the Table of the Lord for all people? It is the purpose of this essay to respond to Dr. Fackre's position and to show that an understanding of the Open Table can indeed be consistent with the Mercersburg/ Reformed understanding of the Mystical Presence of Christ. I will follow Dr. Fackre's own schema in responding.

1. *"[The Open Table does not] comport with a high doctrine of the Lord's Supper that presumes and requires baptism and faith for a graced meeting and communion with Jesus Christ."*

Let us begin quite simply: The Mystical Presence of Christ, in Nevin's understanding of the Eucharist, is an encounter with the risen Jesus himself. Nevin renounces any memorialist understandings as well as mechanical/rationalistic doctrines of the Supper. Nevin asserts: "We communicate, in the Lord's supper, not

with the divine promise merely, not with the thought of Christ only, not with the recollection simply of what he has done and suffered for us, not with the lively present sense alone of his all-sufficient, all-glorious Salvation; but with the living Saviour himself, in the fulness [sic] of the glorified person, made present to us for the purpose by the power of the Holy Ghost."[23] The worshiping congregation, when participating in the Communion meal, meets with their risen Lord in the eating and drinking at the table.

It is this language of encounter (sometimes called transaction or communication in *The Mystical Presence*) that is so important to Nevin. Christ is present not in the elements themselves—such as in the doctrine of transubstantiation. Instead, the entire Eucharistic action is essential for our meeting with the Risen Christ.[24] In fact, Nevin's idea of an objective revealing of Christ in the Supper dovetails nicely with his understanding of organic union between the Christian and her or his Lord.

The understanding of Christ's Mystical, Real Presence as encounter is broadly echoed across the Calvinistic wing of the Reformed Church. Perhaps it has been nowhere so boldly or radically proclaimed as in the theology of Juergen Moltmann. Moltmann indicates that in the Communion Feast, the Risen Christ is indeed present. In words that very well could have been written by John Nevin, Moltmann states: "It is not the historical remembrance as such which provides the foundation of the Lord's supper, but the presence of the crucified one in the Spirit of the resurrection."[25] And exactly because it is the *Risen* Christ made present, the Feast is to be understood eschatologically—that is, the foundation of the meal is not *primarily* a memorial remembrance of

[23] John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Eucharist*, ed. Augustine Thompson, O.P., (J.B. Lippincott: Philadelphia, 1846; repr., Wipf and Stock: Eugene, Oregon, 2000), 52-53.

[24] "And so we say, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper—not the *elements*, of course, as such, but the *transaction*, the sacramental mystery as a whole—includes, or makes present objectively, the true life of Christ. . . . ." Ibid, 114.

[25] Juergen Moltmann , *The Church in the Power of the Spirit,* trans. Margaret Kohl, (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1993), 250.

the upper room but rather a celebration of the in-breaking of God's Kingdom through raising Jesus from the dead.[26]

The New Testament witness is unanimous that the encounters with the Risen Jesus are unpredictable, and demonstrate remarkable signs of the coming age— the Kingdom of God. Mary Magdalene expects to find Jesus imprisoned in the tomb and does not recognize his presence in the garden. (John 20:1-18) Later on that same day, the Risen Jesus appears suddenly among the disciples, despite locked doors. (John 20:19) Luke reports that Jesus vanishes and appears with startling unpredictability. (Luke 24:13-35) All four Gospels confirm that encounters with the Risen Christ are surprising and shocking.

If we affirm that our encounter *today* in the Feast is with that same Risen Jesus, then we must also affirm, with the New Testament witnesses, the freedom of the Risen Christ. The Risen Christ is freed from all bonds both literal and figurative. Fencing the table—whether to include only the baptized, only the confirmed, even only the Christian believers—is a disavowal that the table is the Lord's table and it is the freed, Risen Lord, not the church, who issues the invitation.[27] To state the matter using more precise theological vocabulary, we may indeed say that because of the Freedom of the Risen Christ, the Sacrament of the Eucharist can be the cause of conversion for an unbeliever.

It should come as no surprise that Nevin denies that the Eucharist can be a cause for conversion to Christianity. He writes: "The object of the institution [of the Supper] is to confirm and advance the new life, where it has been already commenced. It has no power to convert such as are still in their sins."[28] However, it is hard to reconcile this statement with the Real Presence of the Risen Christ or even "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8) Isn't the presence of Christ himself converting? Saul of Tarsus was converted while 'still in his sins' by an encounter with the Risen Christ. Must a Mercersburg theologian split the Risen Christ in two—one present generally in

[26] Ibid, 242-260.

[27] Ibid, 244.

[28] Nevin, 172.

conversion and one present only in the sacrament for the baptized? To deny someone the sacrament on the grounds that they are not baptized, could be, *at least potentially*, denying them access to the converting presence of the Risen Christ.

2. "[The pressure for an indiscriminate Eucharist probably comes] from cultural trends resistant to biblical norms and disciplines, awash in individualism and the authority of human experience."

On this point I most strongly disagree. Perhaps for some open communion is an accommodation to modern culture and individualism. However, a quick view of several leading theologians advocating for the Open Table quickly gives one pause: Markus Barth, Gordon Lathrop, and Juergen Moltmann.[29] All of these theologians are committed to church orthodoxy and biblical Christianity. Instead, one could propose that the Open Table is about a rediscovery of the New Testament virtues of hospitality and forgiveness. Hospitality is a bedrock issue for the New Testament and Jesus' gracious hospitality was indeed scandalous. "This man eats with sinners and tax collectors."(Luke 5:30) "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." (Luke 7:39) We in the church should expect to be scandalized by the openness, the foolishness of Christ's hospitality—for Christ calls the weak, the lame, and the broken. Christ's followers come from the highways and byways. And, in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we are indeed reminded of the power of grace to overcome our divisions (Ephesians 2:14). We should remember that we live by grace--not just the others or the outsiders live by grace, but we ourselves! Remembering the words of our Lord in the sacrament, "given for

[29] Although outside the scope of this paper, it would be interesting to look at the communal and ecclesial arguments employed by Barth, Lathrop, and Moltmann. All three explicitly *avoid* individualistic arguments for the Open Table in favor of communal ones. See Markus Barth, *Rediscovering the Lord's Supper,* (John Knox Press: Louisville, Ky; 1988; repr., Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR, 2006); Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology,* (Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, 1993); and Juergenn Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit.*

you for the forgiveness of sins," (Matthew 26:28) we recall our own unworthy approach and our own false pride before the bread and the cup. Writing on the matter of forgiveness, and in an entirely different context than the meal, Dietrich Bonhoeffer states:

> Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother [sic] still a brother, with whom, I, too, stand under the Word of Christ? Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ? Thus the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by that one Word and Deed which really binds us together--the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.[30]

Remembering how strongly the Protestant Confessions connect the meal to forgiveness, we too can recall the mercy found at the Table.[31] We realize that we all stand under the judgment and forgiveness of Christ—saint and sinner, Christian and non, redeemed and lost. Indeed, I would propose that the Sacrament of the Table teaches us how to rely on grace, and not on our own works. The Open Table, specifically, is an exceptional ritual enactment of justification by faith and of Bonhoeffer's living "in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ." We come with nothing in our hands and we have no right to approach the table—yet, because of Christ's invitation, we come, side by side with the least of these and the little ones.

3) "[The policy and practice of indiscriminate Eucharist will] affect the ecumenical future of a denomination endorsing it."

[30] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein, (Harper and Row: New York, 1954), 28.

[31] Forgiveness of sins is the first of the listed benefits in *both* Luther's Small Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism. See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom,* Volume 3, (Harper & Brothers: New York, 1877), 91; 332-333.

Dr. Fackre is clearly more familiar with the ecumenical movement than I am. I will not argue with his conclusion here for I believe he is essentially correct. The Open Table will clearly have ecumenical repercussions; some of them negative. Instead of disagreeing with this point, then, I will propose some ecumenical ways forward.

First, let us be clear: Baptism before the meal will always be the norm. The Biblical or recurring sequence to which Dr. Fackre refers (Baptism, then Eucharist) is, of course, the way in which most of us came into the faith and it will be so in the future. However, as noted above, several proponents of the Open Table are also well-known liturgical/ecclesiastical theologians. Are they 'voices crying in the wilderness' attempting to get us to study more carefully our own biblical/theological roots? We may want to listen to what biblical texts have moved them to advocate for an Open Table. It should also be noted that, even among the leading proponents of the Open Table, catechesis and baptism are the next essential steps in Christian formation and discipline.[32]

Second, there would seem to be some common ground on the ecumenical field regarding the sacrament. Both Dr. Fackre and I argue for the Real, Mystical Presence. Proponents of Open Table can indeed claim the label Christocentric, just as Nevin and Schaff affirmed that identification for themselves. A fruitful line of conversation may indeed be: what do we mean by Christocentrism? How is Christocentrism vital to the sacrament? What sort of shape would our Eucharistic practice take if it were fully Christocentric?

Third, in our 21st Century postmodern understandings, we have largely abandoned the certainties (but not the convictions themselves) that drove the sacramental debates of the 16th Century. In other words, we at least try to be more modest in describing the *how* of Christ's presence in the sacrament. For example, many theologians and pastors now acknowledge that all our attempts to label the means of Christ's presence (consubstantiation, transubstantiation, mystical presence, memorialism and so on) are not biblical terms but attempts to explain intellectually the Biblical witness. Therefore, can we not say—in all humility--that there is

[32] See Lathrop, 131-132.

some room for ambiguity and mystery in the modern understanding of the sacrament? The Lord's Table is indeed a mystery. Might we wish to confess it as such?

The Open Table is more than a debate on church tradition and modern congregational practice. *First*, the Mystical Presence and the Open Table can indeed exist side by side in our congregational life and in our theology. *Second*, the understandings that lead to an Open Table do indeed have biblical relevance and substance. *Finally*, though we will not agree ecumenically, the practice of the Open Table may lead us to a deeper understanding of the terms we use and our own bias in understanding said terms.

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III. A Response to Joseph Hedden's Thoughtful Response

Pastor Hedden and I have a history. I came to know and appreciate this fine pastoral theologian while teaching at Pittsburgh Seminary for a term in 1996-1997, saw him in action with his colleague Jim Fishbaugh while attending their church on occasion in that period, and have been associated with him since in the Mercersburg Society. Here is a worthy critic of my essay, as we both share basic convictions not only about what transpires in the eucharist but about many things theological.

So how come this difference on the "Open Table"? I'll try to sort this out briefly in this response.

A major premise of Joe's argument, as I read it, is his stress on "the freedom of the Risen Christ," the sovereign One able to offer himself and his gifts when and where he so chooses, not being bound by human restrictions, and in this case, ecclesial standards. Surely, this stress on the divine sovereignty is good Reformed thinking. It is no accident that Moltmann is referenced as his theology of hope tilts that sovereignty forward, all claims to the domestication of the End in the Now being considered suspect. And that Markus Barth who stresses so the Reformed *finitum non capax infiniti* could sharply attack BEM including its accent on the Real Presence, and tell one of his students fresh from study at St. Andrew's, "Beware the Scottish sacramentalists" (no doubt having Thomas Torrance in mind).

What happens when the Reformed accent on the freedom and majesty of God/the Risen Christ becomes the defining criterion for matters eucharistic? Its logic is Zwinglianism that distances deity from the Supper. Yet Pr. Hedden is no memorialist, but a strong believer in the Real Presence at the Table. Indeed, the encounter there is seen as potentially a converting sacrament, echoing a strain in the Methodist tradition. (I have quizzed Geoffrey Wainwright, Methodism's best known interpreter, on this since he drafted the BEM document in which, contrarywise, Bath and Meal are

inextricable. He told me that Wesley assumed that those so potentially convertible at the Table were in that period all assumed to have been baptized. Further, that the current Methodist marginal allowance for the unbaptized partaking is understood as a request for entering the community, the pastor being expected to confer right away with the unbaptized communicant about the need for baptism.) Perhaps Pastor Hedden would hold this to be the case too, as he recognizes the linkage of Baptism and Supper as the norm.

What I learned from ten years of dialog with the Lutherans, four of them on the Reformed-Lutheran team that laid the groundwork for the 1997 Formula of Agreement, is that we have admonitions to hear from that tradition, as well as admonitions to give to it. The two-way street is our offer to them of the accent on Reformed sovereignty -*non capax*-on many matters (social ethics, updating confessions, even on the eucharist), and Lutherans teaching us something about their accent on the divine solidarity—*capax*-especially so regarding the inseparability of the Head from the Body. In Lutheran Bonhoeffer's wise words in Act and Being, Christ is "haveable…within the church." In matters eucharistic, the promises of Christ are to be believed: his freedom is to be for us as well as from us, in binding himself to and with us in the church through the indissolubility of Word, water and bread/wine. Interestingly, the Lutherans in the pre-FOA discussions recognized a kindred respect for that promise in the Mercersburg tradition of their Reformed interlocutors that, I believe, had something to do with us, finally, having an FOA. (Of course, the common commitment to Real Presence and the inseparability of Bath and Meal is stated differently, as in the Mercersburg construal of the former as the Holy Spirit bringing the baptized communicant into special relationship with the real humanity of the Risen Christ, and admonishment of Lutherans of the temptation to domesticate Christ "in, with and under" the elements...even as they admonish us of the temptation to so stress the distance of the Risen Christ from the action and elements that we become Zwinglians.) So the lesson, for me, on this issue is wariness of a too rigid insistence on the divine sovereignty ("the freedom of the Risen Christ") to the neglect of the divine solidarity with us in the church that would put in jeopardy

the promise of Christ to come to us in the church with its linkage of Bath and Meal, and thus, inadvertently, play into the current culturally shaped buzz words of a boundaryless "hospitality" and "inclusivity."

A final observation. The reason there are such firm preparatory warnings in classical Mercersburg, Reformed, and E and R liturgies, following 1 Corinthians 11: 27-29—now sadly lost even in many of our current Bath-Meal eucharists—is because the Real Presence of Christ is a tough as well as tender love, a "holy love" (P.T. Forsyth). It is not, as such, "converting." That is why the liturgy holds that the Risen Christ in the eucharist, always there by his promise, is "efficacious" only when approached with a graced penitence and faith. Otherwise we invite the Corinthian judgment as we encounter our Lord there, "not because they [we] are sinners, but because they [we] are impenitent sinners… not discerning the Lord's Body."

Thank you, Joseph Hedden, for attempting to make the case for an Open Table, not by the too-frequent culturally captive categories—"sloppy agape" in our lingo-- but from within the Mercersburg tradition itself. For all that, I don't believe that case can be made.

APOSTOLIC, ORGANIC, AND DIVIDED:
Mercersberg Then and Faith & Order Now
the Reverend Mr. W. Scott Axford
A Lecture given at the 2007 Convocation of the Mercersberg Society, on Tuesday, June5th

"Before the reunion of Christendom can be accomplished, we must expect providential events, new Pentecosts, new reformations—as great as any that have gone before. The twentieth century has marvelous surprises in store for the Church and the world, which may surpass even those of the nineteenth. History now moves with telegraphic speed, and may accomplish the work of years in a single day. The modern inventions of the steamboat, the telegraph, the power of electricity, the progress of science and of international law (which regulates commerce by land and by sea, and will in due time make an end of war), link all the civilizations into one vast brotherhood.[33]"

"*Conclusion*: We welcome to the reunion of Christendom all denominations which have followed the divine Master and have done his work. Let us forgive and forget their many sins and errors, and remember only their virtues and merits.[34]"

"There is room for all these and many other Churches and Societies in the Kingdom of God, whose height and depth and length and breadth, variety and beauty, surpass human comprehension." A quotation of Romans 11:33-36 then ends, "To him be the glory forever. Amen." [35]

Thus wrote the Reverend Doctor Philip Schaff in concluding what he called "the sum of my life and of my theological activities, and my testament to the church and to my contemporaries."[36], and what Doctor Klaus Penzel, in his wonderful 1991 intellectual

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[33] Klaus Penzel, ed. *Philip Schaff, Historian and Ambassador of the Universal Church, Selected Writings.* Mercer University Press (Macon, Georgia, 1991), p. 334. Hence, "Penzel". I am indebted to Convocation organizer the Rev. Dr. Llewellyn P. Smith of the Society's Corporate Board for furnishing me with this invaluable book—from the Andover-Newton Theological School [Franklin Trask] Library, no less.
[34] Penzel, p. 336.
[35] Penzel, 340.
[36] Penzel, 296.

compendium of Dr. Schaff and the church, on which I largely draw, called "the culmination of a life abounding in ecumenical aspirations and accomplishments;...the end result of the long road Schaff had traveled."[37] Entitled *The Reunion of Christendom* and delivered at least in part at the famous World's Parliament of Religions at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, as well as for the National Conference of the Evangelical Alliance there, at risk to his health and against medical advice, it was virtually Dr. Schaff's last public pronouncement before his death a month later in New York on October 20th.

I would like to consider, of necessity briefly, *first*, something of that 19th-century vision, at least as culled by Dr. Penzel, *second,* ecumenical work in our own century and *last*, give for our Society's ongoing reflection, its tendencies, limitations, and possibilities for the 21st century ecumenical situation, at least, *second,* as it seems from my own regular involvement as a State Council of Churches Faith and Order Co-Chairman, and member of the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches.

First, we consider the approach of Dr. Schaff to the Apostolic, Organic—and Divided—Church: an approach I suspect is still rather present among us today. Writing in the January 1855 *Mercersberg Review* on "German theology and the Church Question", he defines himself as "a Protestant divine of the German historical school."[38] We recognize that school's influences of Hegel and Schiermacher—of dialectic, idealism, and pietism—categories by which he analyzed that Church Question. In addition to being commendably irenic (especially for its time), we find throughout its theory of *historical development.*

As he wrote in 1855's *Review*: "The noblest and most efficient way of defending Protestantism, is not to run down and abuse, but rather to glorify and defend Catholicism, as the bearer of mediaeval Christianity, and as a necessary preparation for Protestantism itself, without which the latter could as little have made its appearance, as Christianity without Judaism, or as liberty

[37] Penzel, 296.
[38] Penzel, 110.

without the school of authority and obedience. In the same way we may say, that the honor of the New Testament is not diminished, but increased rather and properly guarded, by giving the Old Testament all due credit and importance as a preparatory dispensation of the Gospel.[39]

He adds: "Development is properly identical with history itself; for history is life, and all life involves growth, evolution and progress. Our bodily existence, all our mental faculties, the Christian life, and the satisfaction of every individual, constitute such a process of development from the lower to the higher. Why should not the same law hold, when applied to the whole, the communion which is made up of individuals? ....why not also in the Church?"[40]

Of particular note for us, and in this place, Dr. Schaff writes: "To this position has, for example, Dr. [John Williamson] Nevin been forced....Consequently there remains for him nothing except the German theory of development, which, in the mean time, is held in reproach by almost all English theologians. As long as he adheres to this theory an exodus to Rome will be impossible, as it would be retrogression, and consequently a nullification of the fundamental law of historical development. For this, in the nature of the case, implies progress, an advance from the lower to the higher, and this must hold good when applied to the Church..."[41]

One hears here the consistent references to progress and regression, and, applied to the divided Body of Christ, a conviction that the history studded with divisions must necessarily be one embodying forward movement, synthesis out of antithesis (perhaps out of *95 Theses*!), and a new and higher understanding of the One, Holy, Apostolic, and Catholic (Universal) Christian Church. The Reformation, for example, is for Dr. Schaff "not a work of Satan, but a divine fact, which we for a good reason believe, it must be

[39] Penzel, 105-6.
[40] Penzel, 109.
[41] Penzel, 110. I am grateful to Society Member Professor Dr. John Payne for his explanation of this quotation during the subsequent question time: Dr. Schaff knew of Dr. Nevin's deepening doubts about the validity of Protestant Church and sought to counter the latter's consideration of whether this meant he must convert to Roman Catholicism.

viewed and defended as a *new phase* in the progressive development of Protestantism, as an *advance* on the earlier periods of the history of the Church."[42] This outlook he calls "the last but safe anchor" on the question.[43]

One cannot resist—again, especially in this place—observing a similar understanding of Reformation development among the first generation of New England Unitarian Congregationalists during the period of Andover's founding 200 years ago. This is a stream especially flowing through Professor Sydney Ahlstrom's documentary volume on them, *An American Reformation*[44], with the Rev. Dr. Henry Whitney Bellows' description in 1859 of his colleagues "as Protestants of the Protestants"[45], not "advocating a return to systems we have abandoned....not in the interest of Romanism... aiming at the re-establishment of a hierarchy...."[46] One recalls the Rev. Dr. William Ellery Channing's early question about his colleagues: "Do they not dissent from their brethren simply because they believe that their brethren dissent from their Lord?"[47] The sound you hear is the rumbling in the Andover Study of his correspondent, the Reverend Dr. Moses Stuart, located just down the street (and perhaps from the Reverend Dr. Samuel Miller, down the turnpike[48]).

One sees this doctrine of Church development applied when Dr. Schaff wrote that "the historic denominations are permanent forces and represent various aspects of the Christian religion which supplement each other."[49] Undoing them "would destroy all denominational distinctions and thus undo the work of the past.[50] Rather, evincing his future vision and optimism, he declares: "All

[42] Penzel, 110. In all quotations, any emphasis is in the original.
[43] Penzel, 110.
[44] Ahlstrom & Johnathan S. Carey, eds., Wesleyan University Press, 1985.
[45] Ahlstrom, *op. cit.*, p. 384. "The Suspense of Faith, A Discourse on the State of the Church".
[46] Ahlstrom, *op. cit.*, p. 373.
[47] *The Works of William E. Channing, D.D.* American Unitarian Association. (Boston, 1878), p. 480. "The System of Exclusion and Denunciation in Religion Considered." (1815).
[48] i.e., at Princeton.
[49] Penzel, 309.
[50] Penzel, 310.

divisions of Christendom will, in the providence of God, be made subservient to a greater harmony. Where the sin of schism has abounded, the grace of future union will much more abound."[51]

One notes at this point his use of the passive voice: of present divisions to *be made* part of a greater reunion in the future. "[C]hurch history," he declares, "shows that this opposition, and that all errors and divisions, even though they may have a long and almost universal prevalence, must, in the end, serve only to awaken the church to her real work, to call forth her deepest energies, to furnish occasion for higher developments, and thus to glorify the name of God and his Son Jesus Christ."[52]

I am reminded of the perceptive question (in a different context) of a nearby colleague and fellow Mercersberg member: "Are denominations the gracious flowering of human diversity—or are they the manifestation of human sin?"[53] We take as a commonplace this tradition's upholding of the organic over the atomized in our understanding of the Christian Church, but one senses the matter is less definitively upheld than may at first appear.

We find a practical ecclesial application of this outlook of historic development in 1890, when, after the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (of which Dr. Schaff was by now a member in New York) voted unexpectedly to revise (of all things) its Westminster Confession of Faith. He endorsed the project in his paper "Creed Revision in the Presbyterian Churches." Observing that "the desire for some change is deep, general, and irresistible",[54] he stated that "It is impossible for individual Christians or churches to be stationary; they must either go forward, or go backward."[55] The point here is not the merits of the Creedal question itself, for which we have neither time—nor, may I say, at the moment, an Effectual Calling. Rather, it is to notice Dr. Schaff's categories of analysis, and his framing the question as one of inevitable development, be it forward or backward. He saw *church history* as

[51] Penzel, 310.
[52] Penzel, 132.
[53] The Reverend Mr. Duke T. Gray, Pastor Emeritus, The First Parish (Universalist) in Malden, Mass.
[54] Penzel, 281.
[55] Penzel, 281.

"the best and most complete *defense of Christianity*".[56] As Dr. Penzel summarizes it: "to define the nature of the church is to define the task of the church historian.... that only those who know the Universal history of the church can also be expected to perceive the true nature of the Universal Church."[57] This is the opposite of the order of the three-year Andover curriculum Peggy[58] described for us yesterday. In fairness, his most commonly held academic chair, after all, from Mercersberg to Union Seminaries, was Professor, not of Theology, but of Church History.

The commitment and lifelong witness and work of the Reverend Professor Philip Schaff was to the life and unity of the Body of Christ, evidenced by his charitable and interested positive comments on its often-maligned parts, particularly of Roman Catholics when speaking to Protestants. He once wrote, pointedly, that "The hatred of Rome covers a multitude of sins."[59] This commitment is a clear and lasting legacy, and, indeed may be called an irenic and shining light in the life of 19th century Christendom. I'm particularly happy to note, in his 1893 World's Parliament address, his positive mention of the Universalist protest against "a gross materialistic theory of hell with all its Dantesque horrors", and of our doctrinal roots in common with Origen and St. Gregory of Nyssa.[60] And: he even referred to our antecedents in this place as the *Congregational*, not *Puritan*, Church—thus presaging, among us, a long-prosecuted (and eventually successful) project in our own day by our fellow-member—and, imminently retiring colleague—from nearby Chestnut Hill:[61] "Congregational", not "Puritan".

So what, then, ultimately, is Dr. Schaff's vision for the divided Body of Christ?

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[56] Penzel, 147.
[57] Penzel, 125.
[58] Dr. Margaret Bendroth, Executive Director of the American Congregational Association, Boston.
[59] Penzel, 107, *note.*
[60] Penzel, 331.
[61] The Rev. Mr. Joseph A. Bassett, Pastor of The First Church in Chestnut Hill, Mass., 1969-2007.

Perhaps influenced by his experience of the meta-creedal Prussian Union Church in Germany,[62] and as suggested by our opening quotation, he looked "to a *higher union of Protestantism and Catholicism* in their pure forms, freed from their respective errors and infirmities. These yearnings of the present, when properly matured, will doubtless issue in a reformation far more glorious, than any the Church has yet seen."[63] He also, of course, saw the numerous local German Reformed-Lutheran arrangements in local towns in Pennsylvania. During the 1890 Presbyterian controversy, he concluded that "We need a theology, we need a confession, that starts, not from eternal decrees, which transcend the utmost limits of our thoughts, nor from the doctrine of justification by faith, nor from the Bible principle, nor from an particular doctrine, but from the living person of Jesus Christ, the God-man and Savior of the World....love is the key which unlocks his character and all his works....We need...a bond of sympathy between the various folds of the one flock of Christ, and [so] prepare the way for the great work of the future...."[64]

It is an almost eschatological vision, reflective in some ways of 19th century idealism, not to mention pietism, and of a professor's understanding of historical development, albeit one under the Providence of God. It has been observed that Dr. Schaff, for all his important work furthering what he called "a bond of sympathy" among fellow disciples, never, as Dr. Penzel puts it, "offered a specific, detailed blueprint of the concrete ecclesiastical arrangement that would embody the 'evangelical catholicism' he so fervently hoped and worked for."[65] Indeed, his lifelong friend, D. William Julius Mann, who would embrace Lutheran confessionslism, was among those critical of him on this point.[66] Rather, Dr. Schaff looked to "that salvation [which] comes not from theology, science, or learning, under any form...but from *life*, from those *divine-human* powers, those aged yet ever youthful

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[62] Penzel, 322.
[63] Penzel, 144.
[64] Penzel, 292.
[65] Penzel, 154.
[66] Penzel, 296, *note.*

supernatural facts, which alone have founded and which alone can renew and complete the Church."[67]

Second, we turn now to the ecumenical work of our own century, albeit quite briefly, and particularly as this work of unity is understood and practiced in what we have come to call the Faith and Order Movement, both in our own Churches' participation in State and National such Commissions (which next month [19-23 July] will celebrate its 50th Anniversary, at Oberlin College), and in what since 1948 has become the World Council of Churches. Then, *last*, equipped with this admittedly initial understanding, I shall conclude with a few observations about the resources, situation, and challenges which we, honoring the Merscersberg tradition, and into a Society formed, face—collectively as a Society, and in our various denominations and local churches. (I'm happy to note the resonance of some of what follows with last night's pulpit eloquence.)[68]

What we think of, broadly, as the ecumenical movement, has, of course, many sources, including such as Dr. Schaff's Evangelical Alliance, and the World Parliament, and the call for missionaries in historically non-Christian and colonial lands, and Christians' reaction to the unprecedented carnage of the First World War in Christian Europe. The first sources, of course, are Christ's own call and high priestly prayer "that they may all be one" in John 17:21, and the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, and similar Gospel imperatives. In the United States, the Federal Council of Churches, from 1908 on, was formed to encourage mutual cooperation among the separate Protestant denominations, with an attempt at that point NOT to make too much of theological divisions but to act together based on a broad Christian consensus. This body would later become the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and it would come to reflect the more explicit theological basis of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. This latter body, explicitly NOT as a super- or one-world-church, was formed in 1948, putting together three

[67] Penzel, 115.

[68] Communion Sermon by the Reverend Dr. Gabriel Fackre, Andover-Newton's Abbot Professor *Emeritus*.

previously separate ecumenical projects: the International Missionary Council, the Life and Work movement (concerned with common Christian responses to war, poverty, oppression, and natural disasters), and Faith and Order (concerned with overcoming doctrinal barriers to the visible unity of the church, such as sacraments, ministry, and ecclesiastical authority). You will find this, and more, in the Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon's 2003 book *The Vision of the Ecumenical Movement.*[69] The First World Conference on Faith and Order was in Lausanne in 1927, followed by Edinburgh in 1937 (the capital of that great country of emigration and cleaved-to memories), and then Amsterdam for the World Council formation in 1948, and down to the present. These are those among us today who have attended some of these quadrennial assemblies.

Soon local councils of churches gave regional roots to such global and denominational work, with Faith and Order Commissions representing bodies both in and out of formal Council Membership (most prominently Roman Catholics) as part of these local institutions—as, for example, the one I co-chair in Rhode Island with the priest who is the Ecumenical Officer of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence. Sometimes these departments are variously named, such as the Commission on Christian Unity of the Massachusetts Council of Churches (whose longtime distinguished Executive Minister, the Rev. Dr. Diane Kessler of the United Church of Christ, has just retired). Some of those participants, too, are with us here today.

Lukas Vischer, of the World Council Secretariat, provided a valuable introduction to Faith and Order in his 1963 *Documentary History.*[70] He points to the particular context and nature of Faith & Order work and reports, undergirded by a theory of engagement, conversation, and, therefore, *relationship*. He explains: "In contrast with numerous earlier efforts towards unity, the modern ecumenical movement does not consist in an appeal to the churches to overcome the differences which separate them on the basis of a

[69] Chalice Press (St. Louis), p. 124.

[70] Lukas Vischer, ed., *A Documentary History of the Faith & Order Movement*, 1927-1963. The Bethany Press (St. Louis). Hence, "Vischer".

certain predetermined understanding of unity. Rather, the churches have resolved, on the basis of their common origin in Christ, to enter into conversation with one another, and in the framework of this tentative fellowship to seek the way to greater unity and to follow this way as it may be revealed and opened to them by God."[71] Note the *active*-tense verbs: "to enter into"; "to seek the way"; "to follow this way".

Mr. Vischer describes this as "a relationship of systematic theological conversation with one another"[72] wherein "The delegates have to ask themselves what steps the churches take today on the basis of the present situation and what steps ought to be aimed at and achieved."[73] Mr. Vischer comments: "This statement is of far-reaching importance. For it alters, so to speak, the perspective."[74] I comment: it sure does, and in concrete ways. Today.

By the formation of the World Council in 1948, he observes, "the encounter had become a real commitment. From now on the churches were living together."[75] (After all, remember the insight which followed reading the conclusion to Professor Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*:[76] what is the most difficult thing Christians are called to do in this life? Answer: to live with other Christians.)

And, central to this is substantive, sustained, and systematic *theological* engagement. Again, from Mr. Vischer: "the theological conversation follows its own laws and needs in accordance with its own character. It must certainly take place within the context of the living fellowship of the churches, but it must not come to be dominated by practical and pragmatic considerations." Its special position corresponds to that of "theology in the church as a whole…the churches have agreed to give it this important place in

[71] Vischer, p.8.
[72] Vischer, 10.
[73] Vischer, 11.
[74] Vischer, 14.
[75] Vischer, 16.
[76] University of Notre Dame Press. (South Bend, Ind., 1981), p. 245.

their common life."[77] And, as we have observed all-too-often in our own time, woe be to those churches that don't!

I am happy to say that I have seen this theological primacy in action at the National Council. In our March meeting two years ago at Morehouse College in Atlanta, in the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Chapel, the Faith and Order Commission was presented with a so-called urgent statement on the environment from a variety of seminary professors who had a recognizable and mutual political bent. The draft statement began: "God's Earth is sacred." Now, although that political bent was probably shared by most of those present—and some said that the issue was so dire as to require some kind of statement, doctrinal niceties aside—it was wonderful to see theological integrity trump everything else. Many of us, from the Reformed to the Lutherans to the Greeks, couldn't get past the first four words: "God's Earth is sacred." No it isn't, we said. Christians are neither pagans not pantheists, nor panentheists. The word went back: Don't ask for Faith and Order's *imprimatur* when you don't have the theology straight. The Council staffer present quickly moved to put the statement on the Table. It's still there. (Thanks be to God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is!)

When we consider what issues the Commission needs to take up (there are about four groups at various stages of a four-year process called a "quadrenium" leading to a published document), our criteria are whether they are church-dividing, or, for that matter, church-uniting. My own quadrenium at the moment is on Justification, Sanctification, Divinization (*Theosis*), and Justice, chaired by a Greek Orthodox Professor of Theology at Providence College (a Dominican school).[78] And we go right at the questions, as only committed fellow-believers can. I remember when the Orthodox talked of how the sacrament of Baptism *changes* our human *nature* as we become more and more divine (that's what "*theosis*" is). We had to scrape our Dutch Reformed colleague[79] off the ceiling, along with the rest of us Calvinists. As he said to his

[77] Vischer, 18.
[78] Professor Dr. Despina Prassis.
[79] Professor Dr. George Vandervelde, Christian Reformed Church, now of blessed memory (d. 2006).

Eastern friend of many years: "This was all clear enough till you bloody Greeks came up with all these obscure words!" Close inquiry then followed as to the exact meaning of the relevant Greek terms.

I also remember vividly when the then-Roman Catholic Bishop of Providence[80] came to Rhode Island Faith & Order to discuss John Paul II's 1995 papal encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint.* When he got to the sentence stating that the Church at Rome has preserved a line of unity in the Western Church for 2000 years, guess who went ballistic: the Lutherans! It's wonderful to hear how these traditions yet speak.

The point to be made for our reflection today is that of the substantive and sustained work on issues which is Faith and Order in its essence. Consider the tangible developments in our own lifetimes: the 1999 Roman-Lutheran Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith (dismissed as a possibility by Dr. Schaff), done 482 years after Luther; the 1999 new agreement on parishes and mutual episcopal ordination (etc.) between the Episcopalians and the Lutherans; the 1997 Reformed-Lutheran Formula of Agreement on mutual affirmation and admonition, in which some here present had a hand; the now-historic 1982 Faith & Order Paper *Baptist, Eucharist, and Ministry* ("BEM"), and the more recent one on the supposedly untouchable "ecumenical third-rail", *The Nature and Purpose of the Church,*1998, which the Rhode Island & Massachusetts State Councils discussed together via Faith & Order in twelve sessions extending over a year-and-a-half across the two-state region (one of which was here locally at Merrimack College). Not to mention (though I just did) the Consultation on Common Texts, which gave us the 1983 Common Lectionary and all the local church study, fellowship, and common materials which resulted.

These achievements, surely gifts of the Holy Spirit, rest not on theories of history, nor just on mutual cooperation (one that guards our continuing and separate institutional bureaucracies), but on what Mr. Vischer describes as altered perspectives, and on focused theological conversation.

[80] The Most Reverend Robert Mulvey (retired, 2005).

And so, *Last,* this brings me, in the light of all this, to some concluding thoughts for our own common work and witness.

Over the last two years, the Rhode Island Faith and Order Commission spent over a dozen very fruitful two-hour sessions reading the aforementioned Dr. Kinnamon's book on ecumenism. An ordained Disciples of Christ minister, and Professor at Eden Seminary in Saint Louis, and formerly of National Faith & Order, and now on the National Council's Advocacy Justice & Service Commission (read "Life and Work"), he is well known to many of us. He was in Boston for the 2004 Christian Unity Prayer Octave, and in Providence in the 1990s for the annual New England Ecumenical Institute, held at his *alma mater*, Brown, and was recently in Rome to present a paper for the Disciples on the Eucharist. He has met over the years with at least thirty different State Councils across the United States.

The full title of his book gives you its slant: *The Vision of the Ecumenical Movement and How It Has Been Impoverished by Its Friends*. The chapter titles give a further sense, each one puncturing commonly-held assumptions which subtly perpetuate our divisions. For example: "Why Cooperation Is Not the Goal of Ecumenism"—Renewal is; "Why Uniting Diversities Is Not The Vision"; or "Why [Councils of Churches] Are Not Structures Alongside the Churches"—all of which ultimately impoverish the life of Christ's One, Holy, Apostolic, and Universal Church. Dr. Kinneman, too, rather alters one's perspective—and from the inside of the enterprise.

The state of Ecumenism in our 21st century, I think—and Dr. Kinneman writes—demands a deeper engagement from us than formerly. At every level of what we've come to think of as good, irenic, and charitable interaction, and mutual work with fellow-believers of other Christian affiliations, Dr. Kinneman, and others, are challenging our assumptions, our insularity, our smugness with our own tradition's Great Teachers, and our sometimes implicit belief that these divisions among us are now such longstanding historical facts, that maybe Christ (as the contrarian critic puts it) really did die to found denominations, and not just His Church. This may fall the most heavily on those of us who are most interested in the ancient Apostolic traditions, and in the fullness of

the liturgy; and who are used to thinking of ourselves as a bit more engaged in the whole Church than the local storefront Pentecostals—or, perhaps most notoriously, more than the recent head of the Southern Baptist Convention who said, *proudly*, that he didn't have an ecumenical bone in his body. And, more subtly, it challenges us to recognize, as Lukas Vischer reminds us, that frequently even "official agreements say so little and are phrased so vaguely that they are evidence less of unity than of division."[81] (One English observer once characterized such ecumenical pronouncements as the mutual affirmation of unimportant beliefs.)

Since the seismic developments of the Second Vatican Council, and the others (already mentioned) which followed, we no longer have the luxury of simply being cordial when necessary, and resolving too many conversations on substantive theological and ecclesial matters simply by quoting Westminster, Dort, or Heidelberg; or Luther, Calvin, Nevin & Schaff, or Barth, Edwards, Murray, or Channing—and then going home. They are the God-given shoulders on which we stand, to be sure, but they are the *beginning* and enabling substance of our ecumenical work, and not its *ending*: a *first* word, and not the *last*. There are those here present, from the Society's beginning, and now long in the tooth, who were concerned that our work of preservation and witness for Christ's Church not become simply historical.[82] The Reverend Dr. Karl Barth himself wrote, in *Church Dogmatics* I.2. §20.2(2.(*d*)), about our respective *Doctores Ecclesiae*: "when we hear him that means that we have to pay attention to the lines of his exposition and make them our own. But when we do that, we cannot simply repeat what he has drawn....And that means that we have to draw it out and develop it....the Church of to-day, with all the experience which it has since acquired and the responsibility in which it itself stands, has to listen to them....The Church of to-day would not be accepting them if it were simply accepting or reproducing them in their historical form."[83]

[81] Vischer, 9.
[82] e.g.,the Rev. Dr. Herbert C. Davis, Pastor Emeritus of the Eliot Church in Newton, Mass.
[83] 1939. E.T., Professor G.T. Thomson, *The Doctrine of the Word of God.* T.&T. Clark (Edinburgh, 1956), pp. 618-619.

And indeed, one thinks of the witness in Holland of the Pastor of our gathered tradition's First Church in North America,[84] now in its 401st year, "bewail[ing] the state and condition of the Reformed Churches, who were come to a period in religion, and would go not further than the instruments of their Reformation. As, for example, the Lutherans, they could not be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw.... [also] you see the Calvinists, they stick where he left them; a misery much to be lamented; for through they were precious shining lights in their times, yet God had not revealed his whole Will to them...."[85]

Perhaps this is just the age for us to ponder anew the many ecumenical tasks for which our precessors have given us so much equipment. We may wish to consider what fruits of extended *theological* engagement we are called to plant and till, well beyond our familiar confines. Much as do Faith and Order Commissions everywhere, we may discern the need to take up an issue through which the ecumenical church—and our own churches and understanding—may be enriched and deepened. And then: *we have to sustain it*.

As cousins in the Reformed family, following in our various ways lines which take us from Mercersberg, and, two centuries later, from Andover, perhaps these are the times to engage not only the other cousins, but the neighbors as well; and to do so from an altered perspective of what such engagement can mean. Indeed, with slight paraphrase, and amidst the challenges of this world, we may find, as we quoted the Reverend Professor Dr. Schaff saying at the beginning, that "The twent[y-first] century has marvelous surprises in store for the Church and the world, which may surpass even those of the nineteenth."

May God make it so among us, and for Christ's Church.

[84] Plymouth, Mass., gathered in Scrooby, England, 1606 (including the author's forbears).
[85] The Reverend Mr. John Robinson's Farewell Sermon, 20 July 1620, Delftshaven, Holland, as reported in Edward Winslow, *Hypocrisie Unmasked: A True Relation* (1646). The Club for Colonial Reprints (Providence, R.I., 1916), p. 397.

THE HEIDLBERG CATECHISM:
A New Translation for the 21st Century
Lee C. Barrett, III
(Pilgrim Press, 2007, $6.50)
A Book Review by Rev. Dr. F. Chris Anderson

This excellent book contains three differing sections. First there is a fifteen page general essay entitled *"Catechism and Doctrines – What Good Are They?"* Second there is a nine page essay entitled *"The Distinctiveness of the Heidelberg Catechism"* Third there is the new translation of the catechism itself that begins with a two page introduction entitled *"Notes on the Translation."*

I. "Catechism and Doctrines – What Good Are They?"

This section is worth the price of the catechism alone and is one great reason for this edition becoming a standard. How many times have you heard lay people or even clergy dismiss catechisms and confessions as being a waste of time. Randi Jones Walker's popular book, *The Evolution of a UCC Style: Essays in the History, Ecclesiology, and Culture of the United Church of Christ* (Pilgrim Press, 2007) has even agued that in the future "…we will need our liberal style, but not a set of doctrines." (128)

Barrett goes directly into this debate with both a solid grasp of historical theology and George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*. He points out that: "Communities of faith attract and hold human hearts and minds because they offer answers to life's most enduring questions; Where do we come from? Why are we here? What can we hope for?" He states: "These convictions, rather than our polity or programs, most basically define who we are." (5-6)

He rightly points out that "The messages of many discordant and even warring cultural voices vie for mastery in our heads." (6) In order to discern what is part of our Christian heritage we need to grasp our "core convictions as Christians." (6) He believes that a renewed interest in "the core doctrines expressed in our catechisms" (7) could be used to renew the life of our churches.

Barrett briefly reviews the history of how "…many contemporary Christians have turned to religious experience or ethical action rather than theological convictions to provide the glue

that holds the church together." (8) He disputes the claim that believing in core convictions automatically leads to intolerance.

He makes it quite clear that everyone has doctrines. As a matter of fact it is impossible to live without doctrines. He uses the example of brushing one's teeth. We do this practice because we have a belief or a doctrine that teaches us there are important personal and health reasons for doing so. Therefore doctrine influences behavior. Our doctrines are the lenses through which we see the world. Everyone has lenses. He concludes by writing: "Consequently, doctrines are not just cognitive propositions that are dispassionately entertained by the mind; rather they are rules that regulate the well-springs of both feeling and action." (10)

In a few paragraphs Barrett summarizes Lindbeck's insight into the importance of doctrine as "grammatical rules" and "the rules of the game." (10) To this insight he adds the historical point that "To be effective, doctrines must have developed over a period of time. They must be evident in the lived history of a human community, stretching back into a community's past." (11)

Our ancestors wrote these catechisms because they know that our faith "…is not an amorphous experience that spontaneously wells up in people..." but that it has "…objective content, a public teaching." (13) They were written because the writers "…feared that the Christian life would love its distinctive shape unless its central themes were publicly acknowledged and affirmed." (13)

Barrett also disagrees with the growing belief that catechisms and confessions were "impositions by authoritarian elites." (14) He points out that they grew out of the life of the community as they faced various issues.

Barrett also writes against the belief that having theological convictions holds us back from new insights. "On the contrary, the approbation of convictional tradition is actually a prerequisite for any novel theological insight." (15) He explains that being in a theological tradition is actually being part of "a historical extended conversation." (15)

Barrett does criticize the scholastic period of "post-Reformation-era theologians." (16) There were theologians who did separate the head from the heart. But he stresses that this was not so in Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, Ursinus or Olevianus. The

Heidelberg Catechism is a good example of a document that cares for both the head and the heart.

II. "The Distinctiveness of the Heidelberg Catechism"

The general discussion on catechism, confessions and core doctrines leads very naturally into the specific qualities and history of the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563. This material can be found in differing introductions to the catechism but it is very well done here. He is not merely repeating what has been done before but he has digested it and made it his own.

He rehearses the history of the catechism that is quite well stated in the Professor Bierma's essay in this volume of the NMR. He also points out that though it is Reformed that it has a Lutheran flavor. The authors "…strive for biblical simplicity and shun arcane complexities of scholastic theology, a policy that gave the catechism its simple elegance." (23) It is practical and not speculative. It is personal and not abstract. It is more of a uniting document than a divisive document. It is biblical and less metaphysical than many other catechisms. It is more passionate and less heady than other catechisms. It has a wonderful flow that comes from the structure of "guilt, grace and gratitude."

III. The Translation Itself.

The translation uses inclusive language except in reference to God. This makes it similar to the 1988 CRC translation. Barrett has consciously tried to keep the same flow as in the much beloved 1963 United Church Press translation of Miller and Osterhaven. This is especially seen in the classic Question and Answer # 1. Barrett has made very few changes to this often memorized portion of the catechism.

It is also great that the scripture texts are largely written out. The size of the 2007 translation is basically the same as the 1963 translation and therefore is perfect for carrying in one's jacket pocket. The price is a mere $6.50 and therefore this is a great edition for confirmation classes.

Barrett has favored using the German version of the text "except in instances where the meaning is clearer in the Latin text." (28) He has also sought to break down the longer German sentences into "…the natural rhythms of the English language." (28) The scriptures are quoted in the New Revised Standard Version.

One of the major translation changes has to do with the use of the word, "satisfaction." In Question # 40 the 1963 version used the words "make reparation" but Barrett uses "make satisfaction." In Question # 42 of the 1963 translation the word "reparation" is uses whereas Barrett uses the word "satisfaction." In Question # 60 of the 1963 version "expiation" is used whereas the 2007 version uses the word, "satisfaction." Both versions use the word "satisfaction" in Question # 61.

Barrett attributes the use of other words than "satisfaction" in these places as relating to the power of Neo-Orthodox theology at the time of the translation. He told a group of pastors that there is no way that the word satisfaction should not be the word used in these Questions.

Many will immediately ask how does he handle the "non-irenic" Question # 80? This is his entire note on the subject: "Note: Parts of this question first appeared in the second 1563 edition of the catechism. The portions in parenthesis were not added until the third edition of 1563." (96) This is very similar to how the 1988 CRC translation note.

There is also a brief but very helpful bibliography at the end of the book. It includes fifteen books that come from both the German Reformed and the Dutch Reformed traditions, from both primary sources and modern commentaries, and from both introduction level single volumes and three volume extensive sets.

I highly recommend the widespread use of this particular translation of the catechism. It should be a standard for confirmation and a standard for giving to new members for many years to come. Students and lovers of the catechism will use it along with the 1902 20th Century Edition, the 1963 Miller & Osterhaven version, and the 1988 Christian Reformed Church translation. Yet for me it is the essay on doctrine that makes it a special tool for teaching in the 21st century. There is no essay of similar insight, weight or importance in any of these other translations. The people we minister to need something this solid to digest. Let us thank God for this gift to the church.

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