



THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW

Journal of the Mercersburg Society
Number XXXX Spring 2009

Linden DeBie....

The Germ, Genesis and Contemporary Impact of
Mercersburg Philosophy

BOOK REVIEW

Alan P. F. Sell & Milton Keynes

on

Linden J. DeBie, *Speculative Theology and
Common-Sense Religion. Mercersburg and the
Conservative Roots of American Religion.*

Philip Schaff

SEP 18 2009

Library

**Biannual Journal of the
MERCERSBURG SOCIETY**

The New Mercersburg Review 40

Contributing editors

F. Christopher Anderson, UCC (editor)
Norman Kansfield, RCA
John Miller, UCC
Linden DeBie, RCA
Deborah Rahn Clemons, UCC
Gabriel Fackre, UCC
John B. Payne, UCC
Joseph Bassett, UUA
Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., UMC
Harry Royer, UCC
Theodore Trost UCC
Anne Thayer, UCC
Lee Barrett, III, UCC

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

F. Christopher Anderson

The 2008 Mercersburg Society Convocation at Princeton Seminary was a great success. The essay, "*The Germ, Genesis and Contemporary Impact of Mercersburg Philosophy*," is the third essay we have published from that fine convocation.

Linden J. DeBie received his doctorate in Philosophy at McGill University in the field of Religious Studies and taught at Seton Hall and New Brunswick Theological Seminary. He is currently working on his new book *Coena Mystica*, a study of the monumental, literary Eucharistic debate between Charles Hodge and John W. Nevin. He is former editor of *The New Mercersburg Review* and an ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America.

We are particularly excited that Alan Sell, a life member of the Mercersburg Society, approached us about writing a book review for Linden's recent book, *Speculative Theology and Common Sense Religion*. Therefore this issue reveals to us that Linden may have retired from editing the NMR but he has not retired from Mercersburg Theology.

Please sit down and enjoy a serious look at certain important philosophical issues that have been involved in Mercersburg Theology from the beginning.

THE GERM, GENESIS AND CONTEMPORARY IMPACT OF MERCERSBURG PHILOSOPHY

Linden Debie

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Ultimately my goal is to suggest Mercersburg philosophy's contemporary impact as a critique of our culture. But if that is the plot there are sub-plots, one of which is to introduce you to my new book, *Speculative Philosophy and Common-Sense Religion*. Another is that I want to celebrate our being at Princeton by talking about her outstanding, late professor James Hastings Nichols and to stir up again in our memories the fascinating debate between the two institutions under the leadership of Charles Hodge of Princeton and John W. Nevin of the Mercersburg Seminary. Finally I want to consider some controversial questions that have never been cleared up.

Let me begin by saying that Professor Nichols was likely the first important modern scholar to put Mercersburg on the map with his most famous work, *Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg*.¹ As soon as I was convinced that I wanted to write my Ph. D. dissertation on Mercersburg,² I met with Professor Nichols just down the hall from here. He was in decline and would soon be overcome by Alzheimer's disease. He died a few years after that.

¹ Based on the lectures he gave at Austin Presbyterian Seminary in 1960, and his subsequent edited volume, *The Mercersburg Theology*. Moreover, it was he along with Howard Hageman and Bard Thompson who created the germ of my study of Mercersburg.

² DeBie, "German Idealism."

When we first met I was impatient enough to blurt out the question that so bothered me, "Professor Nichols," I said, "There are those of us in the Mercersburg Society who still wonder why you used the term 'Romantic' to described the Mercersburg movement?" His recoil was visible and I knew I hit a nerve. I don't remember his reply exactly, except to say that he knew of the controversy. He dismissed the concern as being misplaced, and never retracted his conclusion. Neither did he provide me clarification.

It was an important question and it remains one still. I made it my task to evaluate the degree of Mercersburg's romanticism along with a full-scale investigation of the philosophical underpinnings of this remarkable theological movement. The book is that among other things. I set out in both my Ph. D. dissertation and my book to discover the significant philosophical streams that fed the vibrant river of Mercersburg thought.

Dr. Nichols was, if nothing else, a careful and thorough scholar. He was a first-rate historian, and didn't miss much and got almost nothing wrong. Surely, in part, that was thanks to the first significant, second generation writer on Mercersburg, Theodore Appel, whose biography of Nevin, *Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin*, was published in 1889. I believe that the only significant mistake that Nichols made was not so much of a factual nature, but that the book, unlike Appel's, contained a paucity of references. We were led to trust his research, and with few exceptions Dr. Nichols was worthy of our trust. Which allows me say with upmost confidence, since both men were admirable scholars, that there was little

disagreement between Appel and Nichols, yet there was a danger in being too close to the subject and the most obvious criticism of Appel is that he was engaging in hagiography. In contrast, Nichols was not afraid to criticize Nevin and the Mercersburg movement, and he aimed to be decidedly more objective. In addition, there were significant developments in Nichols, which I will briefly cover a little later in this paper. Once again, all this is meant to prepare the way for articulating Mercersburg's philosophical critique of contemporary American society.

APPEL AND MERCERSBURG

Still Appel introduced the majority of Mercersburg's important new ideas that would be repeated by Nichols, and although Appel drew heavily on Nevin's own early-life biography, "My Own Life" which took us through the Mercersburg period (1862), Appel covered virtually every source available to him. I will list those "firsts" but primarily as they relate to the philosophical and associated theological material.³

The first controversial question which I mention here is to what extent was Nevin Hodge's student (controversial because of the way it might suggest rebelliousness or even disloyalty on the part of Nevin). As I said, through Nevin's short biography Appel reproduced a summary of Nevin's early life and Christian development culminating in his seminary years at Princeton where Appel told us that he was a student of Hodge. Nichols repeated the story in perfect detail and now without exception every writer on the topic speaks of Hodge's prodigal student Nevin. I will address that a little later in this paper.

³ This list is not exhaustive and reflects my concerns with Mercersburg.

As to Nevin's political considerations in general and to the great question of slavery and Nevin's curious quiet during his Mercersburg years, my second controversial question—Appel opened us up to Nevin's strong political convictions. It was he who concluded, I think rightfully, that we consider Nevin's father John as the formative force in his son's life and that his father, John, wrote his graduate speech on "The Sin of Slavery."⁴ And Appel was first to recognize the seeming incongruity in Nevin's early Pittsburgh years when he was a vocal abolitionist and his later Mercersburg years when he was virtually silent on the subject. The controversy persists today and I'll address it in the next section of this paper.

As to Mercersburg's being idealist in a Scottish common-sense realist majority in America, it was Appel who first framed Mercersburg, beginning with Rauch, in the "Platonic" mindset, by which he meant idealist.⁵ Appel reported Nevin's early enjoyment of Ernesti, perhaps by way of Andover, as well as the British Platonists and Romantic poets, and it was Appel who told us that just before and certainly after meeting Rauch Nevin steeped himself in the idealist school of German academics and that later in life Nevin enjoyed reading the mystic Swedenborgin.⁶

⁴ Appel, *Life and Work*, 27.

⁵ Appel, *Life and Work*, 139.

⁶ Appel was also first to reveal what he called "dualism" in Nevin's thinking (which is where Layman in his article "Nevin's Holistic Supernaturalism," gets it). But unlike Layman, Appel traces it back to Union College. What Appel referred to was the popular influence revivalism had on Nevin in contrast to the Old School Presbyterian piety that he grew up with which also pulled at him. So this was not a philosophical dualism but a duality of loyalties to two disparate systems. DiPuccio's statement that Nevin's philosophy is hard to determine because Nevin was a theologian is not helpful. Nevin's philosophy was not systematic or complete, but he was deeply interested in philosophy and had a lot

As to Nevin's thought on Calvin, Westminster and Reformed doctrine, Appel showed how Nevin "gradually" came to outlive his dogmatic Calvinism through his "historical awakening," especially under the influence of Neander.⁷ It was Appel who first said that "the old Puritan life" receded (1840 and thereafter) as Nevin studied the German Reformation.⁸

As to the influence of the mediating school of thought, Appel did not know there was a recognized school called the mediating school or *Vermittelungstheologie* or he simply didn't mention it, but he did remind us that Nevin lived with Rauch when he first came to Mercersburg and that the influence was "significant." Moreover, he likened Rauch to that "better class of Hegellians[sic]," and curiously believed him even more a disciple of Schelling, Schubert and Steffens (while that is most unlikely).⁹

As to the critical epithet "Puritanism," another hovering controversy and a term that Mercersburg tied to mainstream American Protestant religion, Appel was the

to say about it. Furthermore, he did not side entirely with one philosopher but borrowed freely and innovated. Last we must consider the academic world in which Nevin lived. At that time scholars were allowed a far greater versatility among the disciplines such that, for example, Schleiermacher could battle bravely in philosophical theaters, as could Hegel do the same in theological arenas. Consider how the theologian Nevin sojourned frequently in the historical field.

⁷ Appel, *Life and Work*, 79.

⁸ By "life" I take it that Appel means that his Puritan piety was replaced by a German Reformed piety (p. 150).

⁹ Appel, *Life and Work*, 141—with Nevin duplicating Rauch's classroom lectures on ethics and aesthetics. He directly tied Mercersburg to the mediating school in Germany, although not by name, and he recognized Rauch as an "idealistic realist" which is confusing and no doubt represents his agreement with Nevin that Rauch's *Psychology* combined American and German systems of thought. And while he did not really understand the idealist philosophy, Appel knew exactly the currents that fed that stream of thought, noting that Kant was on the wane in Germany, even as Rauch was under the spell of "Schelling, Fichte and Hegel."

first to point out Nevin's use of the term "modern Puritan system," which Mercersburg and Appel would occasionally and not entirely judiciously shorten to "Puritanism."¹⁰

As to the degree to which Nevin embraced the mediating methodology developed by Hegel, Appel was astute enough in speaking about Nevin's articles on *Early Christianity* to have included the term *aufgehoben*, a critical term for the speculative approach by which history sublimates movements and reconstitutes them in ever new and ascending forms.¹¹

As to the degree to which Nevin distanced himself from certain mediating thinkers and the Hegelian influence, Appel was first to reveal Nevin's awareness of the Hegelian system's implications as spelled out by Rothe. Here Nevin and Schaff took their departure from Hegel and embraced Schelling.¹² Furthermore, Appel assured us that Mercersburg branded Hegel and Schleiermacher "pantheistic," and did it publically and critically. And Appel was first to recognize Nevin as a "speculative thinker," although he was only marginally aware of what that meant.¹³

What Appel was not the first to do was to write that Mercersburg was a romantic movement. However, neither

¹⁰ Appel, *Life and Work*, 157. It was Appel who first (of the second generation writers) translated the review of August Ebrard the renowned expert on the history of doctrine in which Ebrard wrote of Nevin's *Mystical Presence* "... it is in the highest degree evident, that Dr. Nevin has acquired for himself the priceless credit of having transplanted the ripe fruits of the German theological spirit into the American, that is, the essentially English-supernaturalistic and Puritan world of thought."

¹¹ Appel, *Life and Work*, 364.

¹² Appel, *Life and Work*, 359.

¹³ Appel, *Life and Work*, 415.

was Nichols. As far back as 1911 George W. Richards warned Americans of the menace of European romanticism. At that time Richards believed that Mercersburg stood against romanticism, but forty-one years later (but still before Nichols wrote) he changed his mind writing that, "Rauch and Nevin were Romanticists, who beheld the whole order of being from the clod to the Christ as an organism . . ." Still, I would contend that romanticism and the romantic movement are not the same thing: the final question of controversy that I mention here.¹⁴ And while it was not unlikely that Nichols read Richards, it remains that Nichols made popular the notion that Mercersburg was a Romantic movement. I will conclude my paper by engaging this final question in preparation for closing with Mercersburg's formidable challenge to modern philosophy and theology.

THE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION OF NICHOLS AND MY OBSERVATIONS

As I said earlier, Nichols was a careful, modern historian loath to venture too far beyond his discipline. Unlike thinkers of the nineteenth century who were expected to speak authoritatively on interdisciplinary subjects, Nichols fell in with the host of twentieth century scholars and stuck to his field of expertise. Nichols' major contribution was his willingness to look critically at Mercersburg. I will highlight the philosophical and some related theological elements in Nichols' more critical

¹⁴ Richards, "The Mercersburg Theology," 119—149. *History of the Theology*, 274. After all, Richards knew little about European romanticism when first he wrote, and even later his use of the term "romanticism" was more in describing Mercersburg's tastes than its philosophical alliance.

approach, and suggest my own views in an attempt to shed even greater light on these questions, ending with the issue of Mercersburg's romanticism as the departure point for speaking about the contemporary impact of the Mercersburg movement. I will begin with Nichols' criticism of Mercersburg's theory of historical development.¹⁵

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

While Nichols shared a great deal in common with Appel, he was not duplicating his work. What Nichols did not share with Appel and this is crucial for our study, was Appel's support of the "Mercersburg Philosophy" and its related historical "system." Appel, on the other hand, was a full subscriber to that system and to the speculative model of historical development. In contrast to Mercersburg and in accord with most scholars of the twentieth century, Nichols found the idea of historical development naïve. Nichols recognized that the system was "controlled" by the metaphor of "biological growth."¹⁶ Nichols knew that it was a term favored by the romantics, but he should have been clearer in showing how while it remained a controlling metaphor for the speculative thinkers and their mediating offspring, it was not used by them in the same way.

More importantly, in Nichols' criticism of Hegelian historical science he overlooked what remains a deep concern among some contemporary theologians—the challenge in our post-modern world "to rearticulate a

reintegrated worldview."¹⁷ Nichols' measured contempt of Hegelian historical science parodies Hegel's and his school's idealistic excesses without offering a better alternative, as he dismisses, for example, Mercersburg's concern over deism as far more harmless than Hegel's left-wing pantheism.¹⁸ Today we know better, as we consider the fruit of Hegel's pantheism in Karl Marx versus the role rationalistic deism played in creating modern-day humanism. Could Nichols have been more wrong about the relative threats of Deism and Pantheism—as today the church considers the relative threats of Humanism and Communism?

POLITICS AND SLAVERY

Although Appel showed us how politically savvy Nevin was, it was Nichols who made the remarkable statement that the Mercersburg movement "may perhaps be seen as a reaction against Jacksonian democracy."¹⁹ Nichols went quite a bit deeper into Nevin's politics than Appel and was compelling in his description of Nevin's rejection of Jacksonian popularism. However, Nichols did little to improve on what Appel told us with regard to the issue of slavery. Indeed, when he wrote that Nevin became "increasingly more radical in this respect" during his Pittsburgh period it was based on pure conjecture.²⁰ But

¹⁷ Wright, *Challenge of Jesus*, 21.

¹⁸ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 122.

¹⁹ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 260.

²⁰ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 24. Nichols' proof of this seems to rest on the latitude he gave to the various ideas, such as colonization, in *The Friend*, and that he read the fatalistic economists with some sympathy. It may be the case that Nevin evolved from seeing slavery as an evil to seeing it as sin, but it's more likely that Nevin's real evolution was in his systematic rejection of any argument except full emancipation in the end. Nevin most likely always believed slavery was a sin.

¹⁵ Some but not all of these observations are in my book.

¹⁶ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 11. More accurately the term "organic growth." In truth biology had very little to do with it.

Nichols never asked the daunting and currently often repeated question, "Why did Nevin become silent on slavery at Mercersburg?" This was the second lingering controversy I mentioned earlier. Did it have something to do with idealist philosophy as some have suggested? Not likely, since Nevin wasn't silent *upon coming to Mercersburg*.

Appel was surely right that the idea of slavery as sin came from Nevin's father. But as to Nevin's sudden silence on the topic upon his sojourn in Mercersburg and as the suspected by-product of his embrace of idealism, Nevin never published on the specific topic of slavery after 1835, five years before moving to Mercersburg. So if the question is of Nevin's silence on slavery, it wasn't at Mercersburg but five years before that that he went "silent."

Moreover, keep in mind that the criticism was leveled at him long before he died and he was well aware of it and it bothered him. His answer was that he was misunderstood. Nevin often said he was misunderstood. Still, his position was firmly stated in print in Pittsburgh that slavery was "a sin and a great evil" to that he had always held. As

James D. Bratt's essay in *Reformed Confessionalism* raised the very question of why Nevin wasn't more socially activist, and he leveled against Nevin H. Richard Niebuhr's criticism that his theology "intimates Christ against culture, [rather] then[sic] the Christ of culture" (14). He goes on to say that such activism was shunned by both Hodge and Nevin and left to the New Schoolers. Granted, at least at Mercersburg, Nevin was far more interested in the Church Question than the culture question, and he would openly mock the too close identification of the interests of kingdom of heaven with the interests of the world. What Nichols did, though, was put us on the right track seeing Nevin, even though a "practicing and rigorous Puritan," as preoccupied with polite and well reasoned dialogue. Nevin had a Renaissance idea of progress through rational debate—hardly the posture of a crusader, and he continued in that frame of mind throughout his lifetime. And while it may have been naïve, it was heartfelt; that in reasonable debate men and women would do the right thing.

Nichols and Appel rightly reported, eventually he would favor the Abolitionist Party, but both scholars found that he didn't publish that conclusion until after debating all the options in the *Friend*. Prior to that, Nevin's periodical never sided with any party, printing both the Abolitionist and the Colonization Party's positions, until he resigned as editor and gave his personal conclusion on the subject. Nor did Nevin consider himself an activist for the cause. He never joined an anti-slavery group, he never made a speech on the topic and he never distributed or wrote tracts on the subject, all the behaviors of a consistent social activist of his or her time. Furthermore, he openly sought dialogue on the subject in a perhaps naïve belief that a thorough discussion would change people's minds to the hopelessness of the "evil institution of slavery." In the end he felt the war vindicated him.

Now this is not to suggest that Nevin did all he could to abolish slavery, even in terms of his writings. Nor did the thought of his Mercersburg years produce a theology of justice that might be considered prescient today. And if anything, Nevin came to see social-action as highly suspicious. He even went so far as to call humanist motivated social-action, a return to the "Jewish Messianic Heresy."²¹ What was prescient in his views, I believe, was his critique of humanism. Sadly, no philosophical concept of praxis existed then. His only defense was a sort of complaint which today we might call the curse of "political correctness." Nevin mused how ironic it was that he was vilified for his anti-slavery position in Pittsburgh and vilified for his silence on slavery after Pittsburgh, and he boldly wrote how cowardly the

²¹ Nevin, "Sacramental Religion."

churches had been on the topic when he was being attacked. Again, it wasn't until 1860 that the two Presbyterian assemblies renounced slavery, or to suggest it had anything directly to do with his embrace of idealism.

In effect the answer is that Nevin never was an activist even during his "Puritan" period, but rather a member of that class of thinkers very much with Hodge who held to the lifelong conviction, again with certain Enlightenment naiveté and lacking a concept of Christian praxis, that in reasonable debate women and men would do the right thing. So it makes little sense to ask why having moved to Mercersburg Nevin became silent on slavery.

RAUCH AND THE SPECULATIVE METHODOLOGY

Nichol's expanded Appel's conclusion that Nevin was on his way towards idealism as early as Pittsburg and by way of the romantic poets, British Platonists et al. and that Rauch provided the modern German system for that direction. Most scholars have followed Appel and Nichols in saying that Coleridge was an early source of Nevin's "idealist perspective,"²² but that is conjecture not coming so much from Nevin himself but from conclusions drawn from Nevin's early appreciation of the romantic poet. Coleridge played a part in Nevin's journey to idealism, but no single source brought him there. Nevin appears to have had an appetite for the Platonic mindset.²³ After

²² Nichols, *Mercersburg Theology*, 7. I disagree with DuPuccio on this. It seems to me he presses Coleridge's influence too forcefully. The Germans are far more prominent in Nevin's development than the English.

²³ Appel recorded a most interesting period of Nevin's post-Princeton days, throughout the thirties, saying that his romantic bent manifested itself in intense social activism and led Nevin to seek the ideal in social reform and in the

Western it took an altogether different direction, toward the idealism of the mediating thought of Germany, the home of his adoptive denomination. Nevin declined the initial offer of the German Reformed Church, but he could not resist a sigh of regret, commenting that not only was he well qualified, but having "a dash of transcendentalism" about him, he might have fit right in with the Germans.²⁴

If several sources brought Nevin to idealism, Frederick Augustus Rauch, his German-born predecessor at Mercersburg, solidified that mindset. However, unlike Appel, Nichols does not consider Rauch a member of the Mercersburg school because of his lack of interest in the Eucharist (among other things). I disagree wholeheartedly with Nichols on this. After all, Nevin hadn't said anything about the Eucharist either until Rauch was dead. Moreover Rauch did write passionately about the Eucharist.²⁵

I prefer what Appel said much earlier, that Rauch created what came to be known as "the Mercersburg Philosophy." There was certainly something to Nichols' observation that Rauch could be considered weak overall in his

prodigal nation's divine errand. Subsequent writers tended to attribute it to his Puritan ethic.

²⁴ Appel, *Life and Work*, 94. Bratt's contention that "his [Nevin's] move to Mercersburg was launched by the Presbyterian schism of 1837 is without proof or merit. Bratt, "Nevin and the Antebellum" 8. All evidence points to the imposition on his conscience as reported in Appel.

²⁵ Rauch, "German Characteristics." Undoubtedly, Rauch was less interested in the Church Question, but of his material published in *The Messenger of the German Reformed Church*, a significant amount was about the unification of the Prussian Church. Also, while Nichols maintained, in contrast to Appel, that Nevin received little from Rauch directly due to the shortness of their acquaintance and Rauch's illness and premature death, as the literary executor of Rauch's books and writings Nichols recognized that it was through them that Nevin was "introduced" to Hegel's "anthropology, ethics, and aesthetics."

ecclesiology. Of course, he was a philosopher or specifically a professor of linguistics,²⁶ and it is very likely that Rauch would compare nicely with Neander and Daub whom Nevin and Schaff believed to be latitudinarians in the mediating school.²⁷

THE ANGLICAN CONTROVERSY

As to the Anglican controversy, Nichols dug deeper than Appel to describe the period 1851-1856 in which he said "Nevin swam in the current of English Anglo-Catholic debate devoting most of his time to the study of the ancient church," even as Nichols adroitly exposed the Tractarian theology as itself "unhistorical,"²⁸ something Appel certainly could not recognize. But Nevin made that swim in his now decidedly German frame of mind armed with the historiography of German scholarship which Nichols admitted outpaced the English. Even Nichols was obliged to say that many of Nevin's most profound quotes were from Tiersch.²⁹ Indeed, in his *Mercersburg Theology*, Nichols admitted that Wilberforce's historical method was a product of Hegel indirectly through Möhler's *Symbolic*, and he described Nevin and Schaff's disagreement here, their parting company with Wilberforce over ecclesiology, and Nichols described how

²⁶ The title at that time was "philologist."

²⁷ More disconcerting, in his first book, Nichols does not directly credit Ziegler with the revelations about Rauch's dubious career move in Prussia, in spite of the fact that Ziegler published in '53 and Nichols in '61. And while the circumstances surrounding Rauch's hasty departure from Prussia were known to Nichols certainly because of Ziegler, all we have is a "Bibliographical Note" in *Romanticism's* appendix saying that Ziegler's book was published in '53. It occurs again in his *MT*, but strangely has '43 as the publication date.

²⁸ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 78-83, 192.

²⁹ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 192 & 199.

Nevin at that time, reminded Dorner that when it came to matters of the church they (Mercersburg) were more Anglican in character.

THE BATTLE WITH HODGE AND PRINCETON

As to Princeton, clearly Nichols knew more about Hodge than Appel and he insightfully observed that Mercersburg's attack on American Protestant faith was effectively an attack on Princeton as the perceived representatives of that system. Nichols was generally supportive of Nevin's historical attack on Princeton, with the result that Nichols could tell us what was really at stake in this important debate, by for example, poignantly contrasting Princeton's strong emphasis of the Holy Spirit in communicating the benefits of Christ and the church, especially the sacraments in Hodge's refutation of Mercersburg's doctrine of full union with Christ,³⁰ and in reasonable agreement with Mercersburg Nichols provided not just a criticism of Princeton's immature historical research, but a pivotal glimpse into opposing systems.³¹

³⁰ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 94.

³¹ Stewart says that Hodge's battles with Mercersburg and transcendentalism led to his "deep distrust of any mysticism in theological construction," but Hodge clearly held that mistrust long before he debated Nevin. Even as he travelled to Prussia to study language his mentors at Princeton had warned him of the dangers of idealism. The following paragraph from Stewart shows how misunderstood the Mercersburg movement generally remains among contemporary scholars, "One American outcome of Hodge's misgivings about Schleiermacher's Romantic theology led to Hodge's bitter disputes with John Nevin, his former student and advocate of the 'Mercersburg Theology' (17), and again, 'Hodge's controversy with John W. Nevin, a former student . . . reveal his rejection of a Roman Catholic understanding of the Eucharist.' Also, this, 'Hodge was perfectly consistent with the Reformed affirmations that sacraments, prayers, and worship services were instrumental to believers' deepening experience of divine grace rather than ends or virtues in themselves' (29). In another example of general ignorance about Mercersburg—Holifield writes, 'In his[Hodge's] own era, no

Likewise, in Nichols' description of the debate with Hodge over the Reformed view of the Eucharist, he did a wonderful job contrasting Hodge's position with that of Berg. It was a fascinating insight. Unlike Hodge, Berg ultimately conceded to Nevin the case of real spiritual presence of the original Reformers—saying their view was permeated with Roman Catholic superstition. It was as if Berg was saying, the Reformers were wrong, let's move on.³² But Princeton held to the myth of unchanging orthodoxy. The triumph of Nichols' short description was his showing that Princeton's great claim of unaltered orthodoxy was false. Appel, as well as the rest of the world knew of Princeton's claim to unaltered orthodoxy, but Nichols was one of the first to unmask it as a myth. Finally, with Appel, Nichols pointed out that Mercersburg consistently rejected Princeton's identifying them with Schleiermacher and the fact that Hodge never acknowledged it. But Nichols added that Nevin was adamant that his use of Ullmann specifically was meant as a corrective to Schleiermacher.³³

Still the perennial statement that Nevin was Hodge's student concerns me. It was the first controversy I mentioned at the beginning of this paper. At face value it was true enough. But allow me this re-evaluation. In Nevin's autobiography he mentioned Alexander and Miller as "in their prime." Of Hodge he said merely,

one engaged a broader set of issues or took on a more distinguished array of opponents" (111).

³² Nichols' conclusion (*Romanticism*, 246) that the reason Nevin started the *Mercersburg Review* was to reply to Hodge was true. What was not true was that he had little alternative because he was "boycotted" by the major journals. Nevin knew full well that it was the long-standing, stated policy of the *Princeton Review* not to publish replies (*Romanticism*, 7).

³³ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 97.

"newly invested."³⁴ Later he talked about the influence of Alexander and Miller without mention of Hodge. Now you might say this was because he was still angry at Hodge. But I think there was more to it. Everybody including I have said that Hodge was Nevin's teacher. But Hodge was only seven years older than Nevin. Hodge had just graduated from the institution himself and there were no PhD's. He had been teaching at Princeton for one year before the arrival of Nevin. So while he was Nevin's instructor, the likelihood was that he functioned more like a tutor than a teacher in our sense of thinking.

Furthermore, Hodge taught Greek and Hebrew, not theology. He was after all installed as Professor of Antiquities and Biblical Languages. So Nevin was a student under a very green Hodge. Furthermore, Hodge went to study in Europe in 1826, leaving Nevin in charge of his Hebrew students for the simple reason that Nevin was the "finest Hebrew scholar in the institution," i.e. he was better at Hebrew than his so-called teacher. So while we might call Nevin Hodge's student, we should do it with the understanding they were quite likely peers in their own minds.

1 NEVIN'S DEPARTURE FROM REFORMED DOCTRINE AND THE SACRAMENTAL DEBATES

Appel was first to describe the hold Zwingli had on the American Protestant churches, but Nichols developed the extent of that drift.³⁵ In contrast Appel was weak in

³⁴ Nevin, "My Own Life," 46

³⁵ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 85. Stephen Graham wrote that "Episcopalians applauded Mercersburg's view of the real presence" (73). However, Mercersburg

delineating Nevin from Reformed doctrine and from Calvin. Nichols on the other hand, did not shy away from the topic.³⁶ But Nichols was hasty in saying that Nevin's departure from Calvin drove him to Melancthon rather than seeing in Nevin a growing appreciation for German confessionalism and the historical maturity that recognized earlier than most that Calvin was not as dominate a force among the Reformed as some scholars maintained. And Nichols also addressed Nevin's reworking of Calvin's psychology, which in agreement with Hodge was everywhere being suspected of being outdated—which led to Nathan Mitchell's doctoral dissertation.³⁷ Nichols wrote that later on Nevin would recant—having realized that Calvin's psychology was closer to his own (and Catholic truth) than to Princeton's. Both Appel and Nichols concluded that Mercersburg's focus was on the Lord's Supper, and they admirably represented Mercersburg's position both drawing heavily on Nevin's *The Mystical Presence* and the facts surrounding Nevin's reply to Hodge's review of *The Mystical Presence*. The only truly strong criticism of Nevin's recovery of the "authentic doctrine of the Lord's Supper," said Nichols, had to do with his weak

stated that most Episcopalian congregations in America had long ago embraced a Zwinglian theology on the Eucharist.

³⁶ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 98—99. He revealed Nevin's rejection of double predestination and his feeling that there must be "probation" for those who died without hearing the Gospel. He also did a wonderful job describing Nevin's granting Hodge the point that Calvin's decrees were at the center of his theology, but had he looked closer he would have realized that his own inclinations were right and that it was Calvin's Eucharistic theology that dominated his system.

³⁷ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 100. Mitchell, "Church, Eucharist and Liturgical Reform." Nichols has Nevin realizing that with the publication of Ebrard's work he need not re-psychologize Calvin nor give such harsh criticism to Zwingli—all leading to Mitchell's thesis (Nichols, *Mercersburg Theology*, 145 & 200).

distinguishing of the Reformed doctrine of "table" from the "altar" of the Roman propitiatory Mass. As evidence, Nichols pointed out that Nevin habitually used the term "altar" rather than "table" (perhaps, said Nichols, because of the close proximity of the German Lutherans).³⁸

In contrast, Appel assumed it unambiguous that Nevin never departed significantly from the Reformed view of the atonement, sustaining its forensic and propitiatory character, but Nichols realized that this was significant and worthy of more treatment. However, in those aspects of Reformed doctrine where Nevin more than Schaff deviated from Reformed doctrine, Nichols was somewhat critical, at least in his tone. Of course, these have generally to do with Nevin's late Mercersburg period's alleged "Romanizing." Fundamentally it was his doctrine of the church and especially the elevation of the ministerial office to near sacramental proportions, with Dorner disagreeing as well as Schaff. John Payne made this even clearer than Nichols.³⁹ This is a lingering controversy I did not mention before but take up now. Jack Maxwell in his *Worship and Reformed Theology* put the matter to rest for me. He wrote in 1996 in agreement with Nichols that Dorner was right to raise the criticism that Nevin had deviated from the Reformed position by expressing "high-church" and "priestly" characteristics on the ministerial office. Said Maxwell, if we were to take the language of the Liturgy "in its strict and formal sense, the answer is that ordination is a sacrament."⁴⁰ But he goes on, as Gerhart pointed out Protestants understand a

³⁸ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 106 & 294.

³⁹ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 203.

⁴⁰ Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology*, 241—242.

sacrament to be a source of saving grace. In that case, the ordination is not a sacrament. Maxwell concludes:

Nichols observes that Nevin's position in "The Christian Ministry" is ambiguous in its implications, and so it is. So, too, does a certain ambiguity persist in the ordination ritual; however, there it becomes clearer that ordination does not confer grace or promise forgiveness in the same sense of Baptism and the Eucharist. Instead the ordinand is clothed with an office, the power and authority of which derive directly from Christ. This is safely Reformed.⁴¹

Appel and Nichols conveyed the urgency that was felt by Nevin's colleagues at the time surrounding Nevin's articles on Cyprian. Appel sought to ease the reader's anxiety, but Nichols continued to be concerned. He felt Nevin had left his previous Reformed views in favor of those of Cyprian (articles on Cyprian). Of course, he admitted that Nevin was representing Cyprian and so describing his views accurately—but said Nichols, Nevin was doing it too uncritically, as if were smitten by Cyprian. Nichols found it disturbing that suddenly Nevin could treat table and altar as synonyms and eventually came to prefer the term "altar."

However, we already know the Mercersburg speculative methodology and its dialectical character. Doubtless Nevin, as much as Schaff in his long lifetime of historical research, was deliberate in pursuing a corrective balance to the view that Cyprian and the Roman Curia "high-jacked" the Church, which was Hodge's and the majority

of American Protestants' view. By stressing the integrity of Cyprian's system Nevin sought to return the pendulum's swing toward objectivity, the visible church which he believed suffered at Princeton's hand, and the recovery of the material principle.⁴² Furthermore, while the facts are clear and Nevin's departure from Reformed views on this matter were attested to by Nevin himself, it was curious that Nevin be criticized. Such criticism would be justified if he argued that, as in the debate with Hodge, he was representing the true doctrine of the Reformed. But here he was openly defending the ancient catholic position, and frankly his departure was consistent with his sojourn in the catholicism of the mediating school, even if he might be considered a more high-church member of that mindset, which compared to Dorner and Schaff he certainly was. Again Payne does a better job with this than Nichols. And Nichols is concerned that Nevin sides with Cyprian in making the church a sort of sacred state. Of course, that's exactly what Calvin said.⁴³

The preached word was also something ignored by Appel and raised by Nichols. Again in his critical role Nichols highlighted Mercersburg's seeming negligence of the preached word which he said did not do justice to the Calvinistic position. It is a fact that Mercersburg said little about the preached word, and universal recognition of the prominence of preaching in the nineteenth century does

⁴² This is quintessentially the style of mediating historiography. Later, when Nevin pens *The Dutch Crusade* Nichols says he avoids his controversial side acting the moderate. Once again, Nichols fails to fully appreciate the dialectical approach characteristic of both Schaff and Nevin. They constantly seek the balance: constantly seeking the "higher" synthesis, attacking the extremes such that through the process of *Aufhebung* a new expression arises. Nichols, *Romanticism*, 227.

⁴³ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 279.

⁴¹ Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology*, 242.

not mitigate the criticism. However, it should be noted that Nevin did not set about to describe Calvin's theology but rather the Reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Nor did Mercersburg attempt a systematic theology. In their desire to obtain doctrinal balance they sought to recover what they believed were several of the neglected aspects of Reformed doctrine, as well as introducing certain new theological concepts they trusted.

Finally, Appel said almost nothing about Mercersburg's doctrine of baptism, which scholars like Nichols have pointed out was only a little less than Mercersburg said. Nichols began the chorus that criticized Mercersburg for that. In some minds that led to a diminishing of Baptism in comparison to the Eucharist. Still, John Payne's essay, "Nevin On Baptism"⁴⁴ answers a couple of important questions. It alleviated any sense that there was a void in Mercersburg's sacramental corpus. Secondly, it provided a wonderful and consistent compliment to Mercersburg's doctrine of the ministry as pertaining to the sacraments. Thanks to Payne we can see precisely how, philosophically, the objective fact of Baptismal grace is conferred.

Payne's material work allowed us to see through Nevin's debate with Bushnell and Hodge, into Nevin's Christology which was at work in the power bestowed in Baptism rejecting what he believed to be residual rationalistic elements. We are left with the clear picture that when Jesus gave Peter the "keys" he was passing along to the church and its representative(s) a unique power and authority. We could almost hear Nevin saying, giving Peter the keys did not mean that parents do not

have the most influence on their children's development—nor did Jesus deny it. It did not mean that rituals do not seal the covenantal relationship with God and God's people—nor did Jesus deny it. It did not mean that de-facto, Peter could, regardless of the mind-set of the individual, redeem a person—nor did Rome really say that. It meant that Peter could exercise Christ's authority to grant God's forgiveness of sins and bring the sinner back into fellowship God, the body of Christ and those Saints in communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That was the objective grace given at Baptism that Mercersburg would not relinquish.

CHRISTOLOGY

Appel recognized that Christology was central to Mercersburg theology and Nichols likewise said it was their "organizing principle."⁴⁵ But Nichols also approached the topic critically and said that Schaff "had not been so consistently Christocentric as Nevin." Of course, both were undeniably Christocentric. Nichols himself recognized that Nevin "shared the speculative Christological outlook of Dorner."⁴⁶ Furthermore, Schaff was as vehemently Christocentric as Nevin until perhaps Nevin's articles on Cyprian and his debate with Dorner. But it wasn't Nevin's Christocentrism that was parting them. Rather it was where in the Christological debate Nevin took his departure from many of his contemporary Reformed colleagues and that was the elevation of the Creed to a place which appeared to Schaff (and others) to be greater than that of Scripture. It was the only place in

⁴⁴ Payne, "Nevin on Baptism."

⁴⁵ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 140.

⁴⁶ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 251.

the early material where I found a clearly articulated reservation on the part of Schaff. And while both Appel and Nichols were deliberate in recording the central theme of the Incarnation in the Mercersburg Theology and while they both described where it came from (the German authors), still neither Appel nor Nichols mentioned or seemed to grasp why the Incarnation was central to Mercersburg and the mediators. Understandably perhaps since this is decidedly a philosophical issue. As historians or historical biographers they left the impression that it was something endemic to the mediating methodology. But that is only true insofar as Schaff and Nevin believed that rationalism had forced a wedge between God and mankind and failed to account for the very reason religion exists, which was to reunite God with mankind—hence the obvious emphasis on Christology. Christ's mission was to reunite God and human beings. The very effort that was conducted to combat rationalism was also meant to cure rationalism's symptom: the alienation of God from men and women. In the mind of Mercersburg and of the idealists from Kant right on through to the mediating school, this was foremost in their minds: repairing the damage done to orthodox faith by rationalism.

THE MEDIATING SCHOOL

As to the mediating school of philosophy, Appel demonstrated Mercersburg's debt to German philosophy, theology and history. Nichols went a bit deeper, seeking to better identify the German sources and their thinking, writing that "He [Nevin] felt himself a part of the widespread contemporary movement in Germany . . ."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 295.

And in his *Mercersburg Theology* he wrote, "By the time of Civil War there were few, if any, native Americans more familiar with the contemporary German theology than Nevin was."⁴⁸ But recently David Layman has downplayed the impact of the mediating school on Nevin writing, "Scholars tend to disregard this living, holistic quality of Nevin's theology largely because they overestimate his adaptation of German theology to the American context."⁴⁹ But German confessional idealism was in fact just that, a purveyor of holistic, living theology and it appealed enormously to Nevin. No, he didn't simply duplicate the German authors without innovation, but it's impossible not to recognize the degree to which he was indebted to the mediating philosophical and historical approach.

For example, Layman argues for originality in Nevin outside of his American synthesizing and reworking of idealism, and he pointed to Nevin's *Summary of Biblical Antiquities* to demonstrate "an incipient concept of development" prior to Nevin's exposure to the German and English concept of historical development. Yet there was nothing original (nor was originality intended) in the work and it was based entirely on Jahn's very popular

⁴⁸ Nichols, *Mercersburg Theology*, 7. Contrast this with what has more recently been stated—Turner says that due to his study in Germany only Schaff could have an "equivalent exposure" [i.e. equal to Hodge] to German scholars. And outside of Schaff, no one among their peers would have been more "comfortable" [than Hodge] in the German language (Turner, "Charles Hodge," 42). Doesn't he know that Nevin preached in German and knew far more about the German philosophers and theologians than Hodge? This blatantly over estimates what Schaff got in Germany and entirely ignores Nevin. Because Turner believed that Hodge stressed the importance of the church, he says Hodge had a "high view of the church" (46). But it is only "high" in comparison to the New Schoolers and revivalists.

⁴⁹ Layman, "Nevin's Holistic Supernaturalism," 193.

Antiquities whom Nevin would later repudiate along with the entire method and mindset of rationalism. Nevin's originality, as Appel suggested, was his enlivening Jahn by making the material more exciting and more enjoyable to read.⁵⁰

In contrast, Nichols recognized Mercersburg's philosophical goal among the idealists of the age with their critique of early nineteenth-century culture in the frequent use of the loaded term "rationalistic supernaturalism;"⁵¹ a term rife with meaning; one which Mercersburg in step with the mediating school used constantly to identify and condemn the age's mindset as ultimately skeptical and penury in its embrace of the unseen world of Spirit.⁵² It was a term in vogue among the mediating school, and while neither Appel nor Nichols

⁵⁰ Appel, *Life and Work*, 8. Layman used the term "existential" in describing Nevin's biblical hermeneutic, yet Kierkegaard wasn't available in translation until the early 1900's and Nietzsche was far too young. Nevin never said or implied that the Bible presented an "existential realm," but rather with other modern idealists and by way of romantic thought, he had come to understand history in its more dynamic "living" dimension (Appel, 199). More troubling was the statement by Layman that "Nevin's earliest Presbyterian writings indicate an early historical and hermeneutical sophistication through which Nevin attempted to overcome the dualistic tendencies of Hodge's thought" (199). But Hodge was only just beginning to articulate his system. Moreover, Hodge had been teaching at Princeton but one year when Nevin matriculated. Alexander taught theology, Miller history and Hodge was the newest member of the faculty. Nevin himself never wrote of Hodge's influence on him. Perhaps in Pittsburgh Nevin began to struggle with the Princeton theology which later became identified with Charles Hodge (although there is no evidence of that). After all, early on Mercersburg considered Hodge and Princeton allies in their struggle against New Measures revivalism. That began to erode with Hodge's tepid review of Nevin's "The Anxious Bench," and grew into open hostility with Hodge's negative review of Nevin's *Mystical Presence*.

⁵¹ Briefly, the term identifies those who while confessing a Christian faith of supernatural origin, cling to a rationalistic perspective which puts in doubt many of the supernatural events upon which that faith is based.

⁵² Nichols, *Romanticism*, 3.

mentioned the school by name,⁵³ they were aware of the movement and its impact on Mercersburg. Nichols recorded Nevin's comment that he found Rothe's *Anfänge der christlichen Kirche* (1837) "the most stimulating book he had ever read."⁵⁴ Of course, Rothe was a disciple of Schleiermacher and Neander and of the mediating mindset.

Still it is evident that Nichols was struggling with the philosophers' systems. Although by the writing of his second book on the subject he had identified them in the speculative school,⁵⁵ he lumps Fichte with Schelling, noting Schelling's impact on Roman Catholic theology. Yet Fichte belongs in an entirely different philosophical camp than Schelling—indeed Schelling is highly critical of Fichte and the absence of any mention of Schelling's reincarnation as a conservative idealist, which is what underlies the reason for his popularity among Roman Catholics and why he was so appreciated by Schaff, failed to recognize the radical change in Schelling's position.⁵⁶ Moreover, Nichols expanded Appel's description of the emergence of Nevin at the hands of the mediating authors

⁵³ *Vermittelungstheologie*: The word cannot simply be seen as articulating a third position, but as actively engaged in negotiation—the *Vermittler* was an arbitrator, whose function it was to bring the two parties together. In this case it was between the new German speculative methodology and the ancient orthodoxy of the ancient church. In addition to negotiating between ideas, the mediators sought compromise within the German Prussian Church itself—between the liberal speculative preachers and church leaders in the tradition of Schleiermacher and the orthodox wing or neo-pietists such as Hengstenburg.

⁵⁴ Nichols corrects this five years later in his edited work, *The Mercersburg Theology*, 4. Here is the first mention of the "so-called 'mediating' group which attempted to relate to theological tradition and Scripture the methods and conceptions especially of Hegel and Schleiermacher." Then he names the obvious: Ullmann, Rothe, Liebner and Dorner.

⁵⁵ Nichols, *Mercersburg Theology*, 7.

⁵⁶ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 66–67.

and elucidated Appel's comments that Nevin was predisposed to a hermeneutic in which feelings and emotions played an important role.⁵⁷ Nichols wrote that by 1835 Nevin believed that the "heart" was crucial in interpreting Scripture, especially the Psalms and that he got this from Herder and DeWette in direct opposition to the rationalism of Stuart.⁵⁸ Furthermore, Nichols rightly asserted that all the while Nevin was suspicious of their piety. However, what was neglected and is more to the point, was that Nevin shared with Schaff and with many neo-Pietists the suspicion that Herder, as much as Neander was latitudinarian: they were weak in their loyalty and devotion to the church and to traditional methods of worship (as I mentioned earlier).

Finally, Nichols pierced beyond Appel's description of Nevin's period of anxiety and his tittering on joining the Roman Catholic Church. Surely Appel expressed the depth of Nevin's misery and frustration, but he said Nevin was equally frustrated with Rome and would never join with such a broken system of orthodoxy. In contrast, Nichols believed Nevin was himself broken, and that he might have gone over to Rome if his depression hadn't frozen him. More important, again in the critical mode, Nichols saw here with good reason a departure from Schaff. Payne as well knows how serious the tension was and Payne clarified how Schaff later admitted to being very disappointed and not sharing in Nevin's "Romanizing" of the church. Nichols, however, maps in

⁵⁷ DiPuccio's frequent use of the term existential (in his *The Interior Sense of Scripture*) to describe this quality in Nevin is not helpful. Existentialism belongs to a future era. His sentiment was more consistent with the fading hermeneutic of the Romantic school, such as Schiller and Lessing.

⁵⁸ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 38.

great detail Nevin's concomitant, growing disillusionment with his mediating methodology, especially the theory of historical development. Nichols believed that Nevin's initial enthusiasm for the soon to reveal itself Church of Saint John was fading as his optimism for the church in general faded.

Unquestionably Nevin was depressed at the turmoil surrounding his efforts and he may have been less optimistic about the prospects of Christendom, yet as late as 1865 and certainly after recovering from nervous collapse, Nevin's firm commitment to the idealist triadic model of historical development with its optimism for the future of religion in the United States was abundantly evident in his article, *The Nation's Second Birth*.⁵⁹

As I said, Nichols wasn't aware of Schaff's deep appreciation of Schelling,⁶⁰ but he knew of Schaff's distrust of Hegel, however without fully realizing how close the three were to each other in speculative methodology.⁶¹ So he's confused how Schaff reconciles Hegel's "unstable" system toward a confident end.

Clearly what Nichols knew of Hegel he got from Schaff. And even as Nichols described the dialectic process of "Catholic Unity," he seemed unaware that it was Hegel's philosophy that he articulated.⁶²

What nobody has addressed, as far as I know, is what was it about Schleiermacher that the mediating school and Mercersburg rejected? Why was Hodge wrong about their

⁵⁹ Nevin, *Messenger*, July 1865, 30:47.

⁶⁰ Penzel, "A Nineteenth-Century Ecumenical Vision," 375.

⁶¹ Nichols, *Romanticism*, 135.

⁶² Nichols, *Romanticism*, 62. Later in *The Mercersburg Theology* he described how advanced German theology was and he used the key term "antithesis" in describing the German concept of historical progress (145).

being followers of Schleiermacher? And it is really not helpful to mention the common answers given: his pantheism, his softness on sin, his weakening of the role of the church in favor of heightening the role of the religious community, and his rationalism. Although these were differences, they were not the fundamental difference that separated them and only pointed to the core of their divergent views. Even Schleiermacher rejected the idea he was a pantheist. But what could the one not abide about the other, such that we might say which position makes most sense to us today?

We must go back to the theologians themselves and listen to what they argue and then determine the conclusions that they could not reconcile. I said before the articulated issues pointed to the unmentioned heart of the matter. For the mediators and certainly for Mercersburg, the suspicion of Schleiermacher began with the residual rationalism that defined the age before him, which made him a romantic, and to some extent defined him and it surfaces in the camps' Christologies. Schleiermacher, as a product of his age, was torn between retaining the full measure of Christ's divinity (which resulted from his exposure to Romanticism's recoil against rationalism), but also his commitment to critical thought. How might he make sense of Christ's divinity to which he was committed in the age of reason?

Romanticism had taught him that the unseen world of Spirit and the visible world of flesh were intertwined in a way that was intelligible if not necessarily visible?

Schleiermacher believed that Spirit animated flesh and made it transcendent. How else might we explain the poetry of Goethe or the music of Mozart? Certainly the

flesh was infused with virtues, powers and abilities that could not be explained simply by considering the material reality. As much as consciousness makes the human experience infinitely more evocative than animal experience, so might the consciousness of the divinity, inhabiting the mind of the man Jesus, make him all that Scripture and tradition believed him to be: the Son of God. Jesus was Christ, for Schleiermacher, because the very consciousness of God owned his consciousness! Now we can see the mediating departure and Mercersburg's rebuke. In his effort to make sense of the Incarnation, Schleiermacher emphasized, to the exclusion of Jesus' entire being, the degree to which he was God. He was God in his mind (and I don't mean to be snide). It wasn't that Jesus thought he was God. Schleiermacher insisted he was God, by virtue of sharing God's consciousness. Mercersburg said no! They reverted to orthodoxy. Every aspect of Christ's being was divine. Today we might say, every molecule of his body as well as his Spirit were as much God as his mind. To fail to believe that was to be derailed by skepticism in the form of a powerful rationalistic argument based on credibility. For Schleiermacher and the rationalists of his age, the credible thing to believe was that as much as consciousness is invisible, it stands to reason that the character of Christ be driven by the unseen force of a wholly unique and divine consciousness. To them it was the logical way to understand a man being God. But the credible argument was not the preferred argument to those who rested their faith on Scripture and apostolic tradition. Scripture and tradition leads us to believe that all of Jesus was God. And when we are united with Jesus we are

united with all of him, body and soul, and therefore are united with God. It's not simply his good counsel, his charisma, his wisdom, his ethical effect, or even his meritorious benevolence that we receive in him—but Him: His body and his blood and his soul and his mind. All of him! So obviously, Nevin who was especially keen to recognize the implications of the critique of rationalism in the mediating agenda, insisted on allowing the critique full play, which meant that the material principle, which had the life of God and the benefits of God materially and spiritually visited in God's chosen vessels, must be sustained as it was in the ancient Church where there existed no strong resentment of a mystical reality superimposed on a natural world. To do otherwise was to bow to the timidity of popular debate with its love of reasonable and credible pronouncements in keeping with the growing popularity of empirical science.

PURITANISM

Both Appel and Nichols were clear about Nevin's sojourn from practicing Puritan to an avid reader of idealist material although debate continued about the why and how of it. What has surfaced was concern over the way the term was used pejoratively. As to the controversial brand of Puritanism, both Appel and Nichols continued to use the term Puritanism to describe the predominant Protestant theological mindset of the day. Likewise they both recognize it as an abbreviation of the initial and clearer term "modern Puritanism." Nichols wrote of this popular religious bent:

The predominant type of religion in the country they habitually described as 'Puritan,' although what they intended might be better identified as 'Evangelicalism' than as classical Puritanism.⁶³

Others have pointed out the error in this, most notably in 1974 Brooks Holifield and more recently John Payne.⁶⁴ What is very important about this issue, however, is how characteristic it was of Hegelian speculative science. According to Hegel and speculative science, every historical manifestation had a form, that is, its essential nature or "ism" which required a name and which was not simply a generalization of a pattern of thought or behavior but an ontological reality. Perhaps, the best thing to do is to stick to the original name coined by Nevin "modern Puritanism" but this still creates problems. Clearly, the religion promoted by the *Puritan Recorder* was no more like classical Puritan faith than was Princeton's theology like that of the Reformers or as they might pretend, original Christianity, and yet Princeton spoke as if they were the modern representatives of the old Reformation faith. Still, as I have repeatedly argued, (a) this was characteristic of Hegelian speculative science—every historical manifestation had a form that was its essential nature or "ism" and that form required a name, and (b) was encouraged by the fact that Mercersburg was in open debate with the editors of the *Puritan Recorder* who

⁶³ Nichol, *Romanticism*, 2.

⁶⁴ John Payne picks up the fact that back in 1974 Brooks Holifield, a significant writer on Puritan history, found Nevin's sacramental view of Puritan worship naïve (126-7). Richard Wentz, "Nevin and American Nationalism," mentioned the problem as well, writing that Mercersburg paid "little critical attention to the justification of the usage" (27).

publically declared they "spoke for all the faithful of New England."⁶⁵

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIQUE

Clearly while both Appel and Nichols made enormous contributions to the study of Mercersburg, neither Appel nor Nichols knew enough about idealist philosophy and as I've shown they were only dimly aware of the systems they knew Mercersburg considered. The time that would be required to understand Hegel, if that's even possible, precludes a thorough understanding of what of Hegel Mercersburg liked and disliked. Neither Rauch, Nevin nor Schaff gave themselves entirely over to a particular epistemology, philosophy, historian, theology, or methodology. But the influence and full implications, especially of German mediating thought (speculative theology), is the original contribution that my book makes, along with the full inclusion with Appel (against Nichols), of Rauch in the Mercersburg school. Here Mercersburg is understood within the philosophical currents themselves, along with the cultural, political and theological forces that demanded answers from philosophers be they amateur or professional—answers about what is important and what we know for sure about nature, history and reality, and where we should be headed culturally, intellectually and spiritually. And while there's no doubt that the conclusion was hinted at by Appel and Nichols and several of the authors that followed, without a deeper philosophical understanding, it

is difficult to clearly understand what systems Mercersburg benefitted from and in what ways. The original contribution of my book identifies Mercersburg within the speculative field, their comfort, for the most part, with the thinkers usually identified among the German mediating school of thought and their aggressive criticism of common-sense realism.

ROMANTICISM AND THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIQUE

Now I said I would conclude with Mercersburg's critique of contemporary culture and I want it to do so by beginning with Nichols' claim that Mercersburg represented an example of *Romanticism in American Theology*, the title that produced the controversy I outlined initially in this paper (we have come full circle). I will follow that with what I believe might be Mercersburg's advice to contemporary philosophers and to evangelical philosophers (or better evangelical catholics) who seek to provide an epistemology and apologetic for their orthodoxy.

The movement that produced the Romantic era is generally considered to be the Enlightenment which followed the Renaissance and preoccupied much of 18th century Europe. It intensified certain tendencies within the Renaissance, as a continuation of the scientific thought of Newton, Locke and Descartes among others. It abhorred superstition and eschewed traditional methods of inquiry preferring reason, experimentation and empirical analysis for intellectual progress. Some would see in this a fierce rationalism that was bound to eviscerate many traditions, especially those of orthodox Christianity.

The Romantic period in Germany, which developed largely in reaction to the rationalism that marked the Enlightenment, concluded about the time of the brilliant poet Hölderlin who died in 1832 (the same year as Goethe and two years before the death of Schleiermacher). Schiller and Lessing were long dead, and Friedrich Schlegel recently dead. So are Keats and Shelly. Wordsworth is sixty-two and Coleridge will die in two more years. The saying goes of the Romantic movement: Goethe the divinity, Schlegel the high-priest and Schleiermacher the prophet. But as much as the Enlightenment was a development of and reaction to the Renaissance, the same can be said of the poets and writers of the Romantic movement. In reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the Romantic writers enshrined the Renaissance dream of developing and heightening human language, discovering ways that language might fully express Augustinian and neo-Platonic qualities of thought in a deliberate attempt to articulate the deepest and most profound concepts of the human experience (just think of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*). Hindsight would suggest a Promethean obsession that would come to no good. But taken to a lesser degree, the magnificent conceptual edifices of the Romantics would inform if not entirely convince, thinkers for generations to come. Listen to what Bard Thompson, a Mercersburg product and scholar, wrote of the Romantics:

The Romantics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries looked at the Renaissance as too much associated with classical decorum, while still admiring its emphasis on individual genius. Romanticism finally

delivered the Middles Ages from its besmirched reputation—but only for the time being. Romantic historians rediscovered the medieval world—the age of Catholic faith, almost infinite in its variety and color, populated by heroic and self-effacing people, magnificently comprehensive in its learning, with cathedral spires punctuating the landscape with exclamations of God. It seemed exceptionally beautiful to them, which the Renaissance, populated with the likes of the Borgias, appeared exceptionally pagan.⁶⁶

Taken at the right dosage, you can see Schaff and Nevin as having drunk at the Romantic well. However, that was not all there was to being a Romantic. Much had changed by the end of the 18th century. As Jack Forstman convincingly argued,

Schlegel coined the term “Romantic” as it was applied to the new movement in which Schleiermacher participated. Yet the two soon went their separate ways. By the time Schleiermacher had published his *Speeches* he had reversed the romantic agenda of perceiving a reality beyond this world and instead sought an hermeneutic which would enable a scientist to perceive the infinite in the finite.⁶⁷

Perceiving the infinite in the finite captured so beautiful the very soul of Mercersburg—not Romantic at all. Not inclined at all to romantically transcend this world for the

⁶⁶ Thompson, *Humanists and Reformers*, 33.

⁶⁷ DeBie, “German Idealism in Protestant Orthodoxy,” 19 paraphrasing Forstman, *A Romantic Triangle*, (115—119).

next, but to do what religion had always done: make the infinite assessable—something Kant had sanctioned; it was to make the kingdom of heaven a hierophany bursting forth in human experience. More importantly, for our study of Mercersburg, the discovery of that infinite presence in human experience was not for Rauch, or Schaff, or Nevin anything akin to a feeling of utter dependence, as Schleiermacher would have it, but a mystery historically mediated and sacramentally dispensed by the church alone (their departure from Hegel as well).

So while Nichols' was right to see in Mercersburg a romantic influence in their recovery of the supernatural in everyday life; in their "romantic and idealistic . . . hope of ecumenical and theological synthesis—the ever-upward spiral of cultural advance;"⁶⁸ in their use of the Romantic movement's favorite metaphor of "organic unity;" in their shared hermeneutic that ties in sympathy the interpreter to the interpreted. All of these fall into the category of "romantic" as adjective: Mercersburg contained romantic elements.

The problem is that the main reason for Nichols calling Mercersburg *Romanticism In American Theology* was essentially because of the influence of Schleiermacher. But the Schleiermacher that the world knew had moved on and so had Europe and so had Mercersburg.

Effectively, Nichols used Romanticism in his title as a noun when it should have been an adjective—such as might be the case in the title "Romantic Influence in American Theology." So Nichols misunderstood what it was in Schleiermacher that Mercersburg shared

philosophically, but more importantly where philosophically they sharply disagreed.

Today we continue to examine the movements that bred us and to critique them given the great advantage of hindsight. Contemporary scholars for the most part have learned the lesson taught by such as Richard Rorty and others, who in the tradition of philosophical critique have exposed the Enlightenment as unaware that its philosophic discoveries, along with a host of related scientific discoveries, were not a pure representation of reality but the imposition on reality of thoughts and ideas all based on a metaphysical notion of purpose. In that he displayed the Emperor as having the proverbial "no clothes," i.e. the Enlightenment's embrace of rationalism as the sole beneficiary of objectivity and truth belied the arbitrariness of their holding their rationalistic mirror up to nature in unmeasured confidence that it described nature as it truly was without the imposition of cultural bias.

Now we know that the systems contained countless presuppositions, much like a mirror with a myriad of cracks—the one grand one being the historical record. Said Rorty, "Since Hegel, we have had a series of philosophical movements which tried to historicise[sic] epistemology, seeing in history the same sort of sovereign arbiter that earlier philosophers found in God or Nature."⁶⁹ If there is a common failing in Mercersburg as well as all of German idealism it was that! That their embrace of history was naïve, in that they believed history would provide meaning in the events of our past that would represent reality in the same way that, for example,

⁶⁸ Nichols *Romanticism*, 189.

⁶⁹ Rorty, "Life at the End of Inquiry," 6.

the reality of dissected organs represent human anatomy. The first mistake was underestimating the complexity of history.⁷⁰ The second mistake was to do philosophy as if it could be done as easily and objectively as classification in science. The third mistake was to believe that human cultural progress was inevitable—much like naïve cultural Darwinians (e.g. Spencer) thought evolution was always spiraling upward to a higher level of species. For Mercersburg this is especially curious given their commitment to Scripture. It is mystifying that Rauch, Nevin and Schaff in their profound and undeniable reverence for Scripture, seemingly ignored Scripture's (at least Eschatology's) clear indication that history isn't going to get better—that the church isn't going to culminate in the love and acceptance symbolized by St. John, but that history will culminate in a big mess⁷¹ and the ultimate climatic return and rescue of God.

CRITIQUE OF SUBJECTIVISM AND PURELY ANALYTICAL APPROACHES

It's not difficult to see why idealism did not take hold in America in spite of Mercersburg's erudition. Soon pragmatism would become the strongest philosophical informant to American culture and following that the contemporary inclination toward a purely analytical approach. Thus today when one reads Hegelian theories of development they appear grossly naïve in that exaggerated

⁷⁰ This is clearly the case with their thinking that the Puritans of the 18th century were remotely like the Protestant congregations who hungrily subscribed the *Puritan Recorder* of the 19th century.

⁷¹ Or at least if ignoring apocalyptic—recognizing there is no reason to understand Scripture as anticipating a steady improvement of our species, culture or the church before Christ's return.

vision of inevitable upward progress, be it for civilization or the church. And the result has been a distancing of such bombastic and triumphalistic theories to the safe harbors of cultural subjectivism, leading to isolated academic departments of specialization. But here might germinate Mercersburg's and the speculative sciences' critique of our contemporary situation.

I refer back now to the problem stated at the paper's beginning by N.T. Wright which is the challenge in our post-modern world "to rearticulate a reintegrated worldview." Let me say a bit more about that. I share with Bishop Wright the sense that since the Enlightenment more and more we have been led to believe that "faith and history are antithetical."⁷² Wright went on to say,

The Enlightenment notoriously insisted on splitting apart history and faith, facts and values, religion and politics, nature and supernature, in a way whose consequences are written into the history of the last two hundred years—one of the consequences being, indeed, that each of those categories now carries with it in the minds of millions of people around the world an implicit opposition to its twin, so that we are left with the great difficulty of even conceiving of a world in which they belong to one another as part of a single indivisible whole.⁷³

Ironically, this complaint is not just an evangelical Bishop's complaint, but it echoes the concerns of others, some of whom couldn't be further afield in their worldview. Listen to the concerns of E.O. Wilson,

⁷² Wright, *Challenge of Jesus*, 15.

⁷³ Wright, *Challenge of Jesus*, 21.

Pulitzer Prize-winning biologist and later day Positivist as he criticizes the way universities and colleges have effectively "dissolved their curriculum into a slurry of minor disciplines and specialized courses"⁷⁴ with the effect that departments neither talk to nor really understand the direction of the other's work. Wilson went on to say:

Some philosophers of science have thrown up their hands, declaring that the borderlands between the natural and social sciences are too complex to be mastered by contemporary imagination and may lie forever beyond our reach . . . But that is what philosophers are supposed to do. Their task is to define and explain the limits of science . . .⁷⁵

Still, that was what Kant attempted and which led to what Wright describes as "a background of modernist and secularist reductionism."⁷⁶ There is clearly a disagreement of those who envision truth and the world in terms of the raw assemblage of scientific facts and who believe that meaning is entirely cultural and subjective, and those who like Wilson are more optimistic, believing that in the cooperation of the scientific fields our species can harmonize scientific findings in a descriptive way, bringing them together in a comprehensive and objective understanding of reality—and that in that noble scientific task we have our meaning and purpose in life.

⁷⁴ Wilson, *Consilience*, 13.

⁷⁵ Wilson, *Consilience*, 227.

⁷⁶ Wright, *Challenge*, 24.

I'm inclined to believe that Wilson with his later-day Positivism is off the mark. While I agree with him that we have so divided our academic disciplines that we no longer are speaking comprehensively to each other and that it is ignoble to wallow in subjectivism fearing the pursuit of a reintegrated worldview, I believe he is wrong to conceive of understanding utterly within the empirical arena. I share with speculative philosophy and with Mercersburg and with Bishop Wright a concept of a metanarrative which provides direction and meaning to our lives.

In contrast to Wilson, for whom the "whole" is really the sum of the parts—that is the idea that if we do empirical science long enough and well enough "the whole picture will be made clear," I believe that the unity of knowledge is not simply the recognition that we are here to figure out how nature works; to provide more facts, more experimental data and so develop a greater ability to understand and predict the outcomes of the laws of nature and thus be able to manipulate nature for the benefit of humankind. All well and good, perhaps, but not all there is to our engagement with the world. Speculative science offers a recovery of the pursuit of knowledge and understanding as conceived in the uniquely human pursuit of completeness.

CRITIQUE OF CERTAIN CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL VIEWPOINTS

Moreover history, no longer naively conceived, still remains the significant source of that completeness. As in Mercersburg's departure from the strict speculative philosophy, evangelical philosophers who seek to provide

an epistemology and apologetic for their orthodoxy must engage contemporary culture in an authentic debate about history and meaning and not simply impose on it dogmatic ultimatums. Contemporary evangelicals of both the very conservative perspective and the older, confessional perspective can neither disregard scientific discoveries nor impose alternative, bogus scientific methods in order to uncritically sustain a particular interpretation of Scripture. It is as Mark Noll so clearly expressed an example of *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

CONCLUSION

Today Mercersburg would condemn the mindset of the cultural war waged by the Radical Religious Right. Long before Noll wrote of the "intellectual disaster of fundamentalism," Mercersburg had already uncovered the "scandal" which to quote Noll, is "that there is not much of an evangelical mind."⁷⁷ Armed with a resonant critique of Enlightenment gifts *and baggage*, relieved of its underestimation of the complexity of history, unsatisfied with the rampant subjectivism of the host of contemporary academic departments, Mercersburg is in a unique position to once again offer a mediating alternative between secular culture and evangelical dogmatism by articulating to the secular and sacred world an historical apologetic that is philosophically astute and focused entirely on the Christ event as the key to human completeness in the philosophical sense, and human salvation in the theological sense.

⁷⁷ Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 3.

Bibliography

- Appel, T. (1889). *The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin* (Vol: Religion in America). (E. S. Gaustad, Ed.) Philadelphia: Reformed Church Publication House.
- Bratt, J. (1995). Nevin and the Antebellum Culture Wars. In S. H. Griffioen (Ed.), *Reformed Confessionalism in Nineteenth-Century America* (pp. 1-21). Lanham, Md.: The Scarecrow Press.
- DeBie, L. J. (1987, July). German Idealism in Protestant Orthodoxy: The Mercersburg Movement, 1840-1860. *Diss. Mc Gill University*. Montreal.
- DiPuccio, W. (1995). Nevin's Idealistic Philosophy. In J. a. Sam Hamstra (Ed.), *Reformed Conessionalism in Nineteenth-Century America* (pp. 43-67). Lanham, Md.: The American Theological Library Association.
- DiPuccio, W. (1968). *The Interior Sense of Scripture: The Sacred Hermeneutics of John W. Nevin*. Macon: Mercer University Press.
- Forstman, J. (1977). *A Romantic Triangle: Schleiermacher and Early German Romanticism* (Vols. AAR Studies in Religion, 13). Missoula: Scholars' Press.
- Graham, S. (1995). Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg. In S. H. Griffioen (Ed.), *Reformed Confessionalism in Nineteenth-Century America* (pp. 69-92). Lanham: The Scarecrow Press.
- Holifield, E. B. (2002). Hodge, the Seminary, and the American Theological Context. In J. W. Moorehead (Ed.), *Charles Hodge Revisited* (pp. 103-128). Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Layman, D. W. Nevin's Holistic Supernaturalism. In S. H. Griffioen, *Reformed Confessionalism in Nineteenth Century*

America: Essays on the Thought of John Williamson Nevin (pp. 193-208). Lanham: The American Theological Library Association.

Maxwell, J. (1976). *Worship and Reformed Theology*. Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press.

Mitchell, N. D. (1978). Church, Eucharist and Liturgical Reform at Mercersburg: 1843-1857. *Diss. Notre Dame*.

Nevin, J. W. (1964). *My Own Life: The Earlier Years* (Vol. No. 1). Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Eastern Chapter, Historical Society of the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

Nevin, J. W. (1849). Sacramental Religion. *Protestant Quarterly Review* (6), pp. 129-140.

Nevin, J. W. (1978). The Anxious Bench. In C. Y. Bricker, *Catholic and Reformed: Selected Writings of John Williamson Nevin* (pp. 9-126). Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press.

Nevin, J. W. (1846). *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*. Philadelphia: United Church Press.

Nichols, J. H. (1961). *Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.

Nichols, J. H. (Ed.). (1966). *The Mercersburg Theology*. Wipf and Stock.

Noll, M. (1994). *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Payne, J. (1995). Nevin on Baptism. In S. H. Jr (Ed.), *Reformed Confessionalism in Nineteenth-Century America* (pp. 125-151). Lanham: The Scarecrow Press.

Rauch, F. A. (1835-1836). German Characteristics. *Weekly Messenger of the German Reformed Church*, 1 (New Series) (No. 19, 23, 27, 30, 35, 39,).

Richards, G. W. (1912). The Mercersburg Theology Historically Considered. (W. W. Rockwell, Ed.) *Papers of the American Society of Church History*, 3 (2), pp. 119-149.

Rorty, R. (1984). Life at the End of Inquiry. *London Review of Books*, 6 (14/15), pp. 6-7.

Rorty, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Stewart, J. W. (2002). Introducing Charles Hodge to Postmoderns. In J. W. Moorhead (Ed.), *Charles Hodge Revisited* (pp. 1-39). Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Turner, J. (2002). Charles Hodge in the Intellectual Weather of the Nineteenth Century. In J. W. Moorhead, *Charles Hodge Revisited* (pp. 41-61). Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans.

Wentz, R. (1995). Nevin and American Nationalism. In S. H. Griffioen (Ed.), *Reformed Confessionalism in Nineteenth Century America* (pp. 22-42). Lanham, Md.: The Scarecrow Press.

Wright, N. (1999). *The Challenge of Jesus*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Ziegler, H. J. (1953). *Frederick Augustus Rauch, American Hegelian*. Lancaster: Franklin and Marshall College.

BOOK REVIEW

Linden J. DeBie, *Speculative Theology and Common-Sense Religion. Mercersburg and the Conservative Roots of American Religion*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008. xiii + 116. \$9.60.

Dr. Linden DeBie is among the most thoughtful expositors of Mercersburg theology, which originated in the Pennsylvanian village of that name, where Frederick Rauch, John Williamson Nevin and Philip Schaff were seminary professors of the German Reformed Church. We are here offered a lucid, concise, account of the way in which proponents of this theology, indebted as they were to Kant's view that the mind initiates knowing, to Hegelian idealism, and especially to Schelling's efforts in overcoming Kant's phenomena-noumena dualism by emphasising the organic connectedness of all life; and in general sympathy with those German theologians who mediated between the positions of Schleiermacher and Hegel, clashed with the 'sitting tenant' philosophy of common sense realism which was so widely espoused by nineteenth-century American Protestants - above all by professors at Princeton Theological Seminary, whose leading campaigner was Charles Hodge. The generality of Protestant theologians upheld the body-mind dualism originally propagated by Descartes, but filtered, in the wake of Lockean empiricism by the Scottish realists, Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart, in reply to the perceived scepticism of Hume. This yielded the nature-spirit dichotomy and a reliance on intuition, or, in more theological contexts, on the Holy Spirit: 'Time and again, in evangelical doctrine after doctrine, the world of heaven

and earth were forced apart and held distinct, except through the exclusive intervention of the Spirit' (p. 22).

Over against this the Mercersburg theologians advocated the organic union of will and reason in the mind and, for their pains, they were accused by Hodge of the madness of uniting spirit and flesh. A further charge against them was that their understanding of catholicity, their interest in patristics, and their emphasis upon the sacraments, indicated that they were unduly enamoured of Rome. If such mediating theologians as Dorner, Rothe and Neander were the primary influences upon the philosophical and theological thinking of the Mercersburg theologians, the German 'High Church' neopietists were the inspiration of their ecclesiological, liturgical and sacramental standpoints. Some labelled them 'Puseyites', others (to whom a few defections from the Reformed Church were grist to the mill) regarded them as crypto-Roman Catholics. Nevin, never one to pull his punches, responded to the charge as, for example, when he wrote of the Lord's Supper, 'There is a palpable contradiction in making Christ identical with matter or symbol. This is heathenism.'⁷⁸ Hodge repudiated the Mercersburg view of the Church as an organism, and of doctrine as subject to development, on the ground that the Bible's truth is unchanging, and the true Church is a spiritual union of those, known to God, who are its members. Yet another source of tension concerned the Calvinist/continental view of Church-state relations, according to which the state was expected to support the Church, over against American voluntarism.

⁷⁸ J. W. Nevin in William H. Erb, ed., *Dr. Nevin's Theology. Based on Manuscript Classroom Lectures*, Reading, PA: I. M. Beaver, 1913, 394.

Underlying the intellectual strife was the Mercersburg contention that whereas the Calvinistic realists insisted upon maintaining the dualism of the worlds of sense and spirit apart, they were right to hold them together in accordance with the axiom that 'nature exists only for mind' (p. 66). Their opponents, they were convinced, 'stunted the growth of the kingdom of God by making its appearance in the natural world mechanical and artificial' (p. 95), as when appeal was made to external 'evidences'. In the wake of Rauch, the Mercersburg theologians adhered to the orthodox view concerning the noetic effects of sin. While this was, on the one hand, an implicit concession to dualism, it was also, on the other hand, the route by which they came to appeal, over against Hodge's biblicism, to the person of Christ as the interpreter of Scripture. Furthermore, as if to rebut Hodge's claim that they peddled esoteric, pantheizing nonsense, Nevin's emphasis upon the believer's union with Christ by the Spirit 'allowed full participation in Christ's divinity (and humanity) [at which point Schaff demurred] with no hint of a pantheistic identification of humanity with God' (p. 98). The tussle between Hodge and Mercersburg ended inconclusively because it was a classic case of weighty intellects passing one another on different trajectories; but Dr. DeBie hints that Nevin won the fight on (scholarly) points.

The author carefully unravels a tangled web of influences and arguments, and the above summary merely scratches the surface of this tightly-packed book, which prompts a number of discussion points. First, like many others Dr. DeBie labels Locke an empiricist, but this does not tell the whole story. Locke held that knowledge is

gained by sensation and reflection,⁷⁹ and in ethics he was on the rationalist side. Again, the author bypasses the question how far Nevin was correct in likening Locke to the medieval nominalists.⁸⁰ Secondly, when the author declares that 'America provided the first testing ground of voluntary religion' (pp. 7-8), he seems to sweep the continental Anabaptists and the English and Welsh Separatists out of history. Thirdly, I am puzzled by some oscillations in his remarks on Schleiermacher. For Schleiermacher, we are informed, 'the beginning of the process of discovering God ... is fundamentally emotion, or emotion's determinative force, will' (p. 41). By contrast, 'a noncognitive approach was unsatisfactory to' Hegel (ibid.). No doubt; but is the author endorsing Hegel's judgment or not? He ought not to, because he has just said that Schleiermacher's 'feeling' 'recognises its utter dependence on another as the ground of its existence' - a cognitive operation indeed; but then he cites, with apparent approval, an author who claims that Schleiermacher and others were 'opting for an intuitive grasp, an emotional response, a worship of they knew not what' (p. 41, n.). This is a travesty of Schleiermacher's position. Fourthly, In connection with the Mercersburg interest in, and distinction from, the Oxford Movement, Dr. DeBie explains that the latter 'sought to restore the high-church ideals of the 1600s' (p. 46). I fear that this assertion obscures more than it reveals. Fifthly, Dr. DeBie makes passing reference to the influence upon Nevin of

⁷⁹ J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, II.i.4.

⁸⁰ See Nevin's *History of Philosophy Lectures*, transcribed by George B. Russell, [1850], Archives of the United Church of Christ and the Evangelical and Reformed History Society, Lancaster, PA, AMsS, 11-12, 78.

Mercersburg Society Membership Form

Upholding the Church:

Evangelical, Reformed, Catholic & Apostolic.

(Please photocopy this page, fill it out & mail it in.)

Name:

Mailing Address:

E-mail Address:

Home Phone:

Office Phone:

Cell Phone:

Denomination:

Membership Type: ☐ Regular \$ 35.00.
☐ Life \$ 300.00
☐ Church \$ 50.00
☐ Student \$ 10.00

Extra Gift:

Please remit with your check to:

The Mercersburg Society
Rev. Dr. Thomas Lush
310 West Main Avenue
Myerstown, PA 17067



**THE NEW
MERCERSBURG REVIEW**

38 S. Newberry Street
York, PA 17401