THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW

Journal of the Mercersburg Society
Number XLII Spring 2010

ISSN: 0895-7460

Semiannual Journal of the
MERCERSBURG SOCIETY

The New Mercersburg Review 42

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

Lee Barrett's essay was first presented at the Annual Retreat of the Order of Corpus Christi in April of 2008 in New Baltimore, PA. I knew immediately that it should be in the New Mercersburg Review. Lee has kindly added footnotes and made minor changes in order to publish it.

Barrett's essay is divided into three sections. *"Mercersburg Meets Berlin: The Liberal Mutation"* gives us a history of how George W. Richards and Theodore Herman combined Nevin and Schaff with Ritschl and Harnack. *"Mercersburg Meets Basel: The Neo-Orthodox Mutation"* shows us how the theologies of Barth and Brunner changed the older George Richards and his understanding of Mercersburg Theology. In the final section *"The Lessons of the Mercersburg Mutations"* Barrett points out that The Liberal Mutation's weakness was the lack of emphasis on the objective features of Christianity and that The Neo-Orthodox Mutation's weakness was a Zwinglian view of the sacraments.

Barrett concludes by pointing out that we need to be careful in our attempts to be so committed to one theology that we cut out plausible parts of theologies that disagree. The theologies of Mercersburg, Berlin and Basel all need to interact with each other to make a richer theology.

Kenneth Aldrich's review of *Beyond Smells and Bells: The Wonder of Christian Liturgy* by Mark Galli shows us how a growing number of evangelicals are beginning to appreciate liturgy. Galli is managing editor of Christianity Today. His book introduces evangelicals to the wonders of liturgy. Aldrich particularly recommends this book for adult study groups.

Anne T. Thayer once told me that she was not a preacher. The sermon, "Jesus In Public," proves her to have been very wrong.

The Metamorphoses of the Mercersburg Heritage: Mercersburg Meets Berlin and Basel

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Within the present whirlpool of theological currents that struggle to be modishly "up to date," streams of faith and practice can still be found that are intent upon conserving the perennial themes of historic Christianity, themes like the Trinity, the Incarnation, the dialectic of sin and salvation, and the church as the Body of Christ. One such stream is partly a confluence of motifs inherited from the Mercersburg movement of the mid-nineteenth century and motifs culled from the so-called "neo-orthodox" movement of the early to mid-twentieth century. (The category "neo-orthodox" is somewhat unfortunate, for it lumps together thinkers like Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich who were dramatically different from one another). That combination, often a synthesis of Nevin and Schaff on the one hand and Barth and Brunner on the other, is evident in many pastors of the United Church of Christ who were influenced, directly or indirectly, by Lancaster Theological Seminary from the 1930's through the 1960's. That sensibility, now fertilized by "post-liberalism" and "radical orthodoxy," is still alive

and well, although its association with any particular institution is looser. This essay will explore the complex interaction of the Mercersburg theology with neo-orthodoxy, as well as with neo-orthodoxy's "liberal" antecedents, showing how the theologies of Barth and Brunner provided a way to reconceptualize the theology of Mercersburg for a changing intellectual environment, to retrieve endangered aspects of the Mercersburg movement, and to modify and even critique other features of the original work of Nevin and Schaff. Key figures in this saga are Theodore Frederick Herman (1872-1948), professor of theology at Lancaster and later president, and George W. Richards, professor of church history and later president. Herman, who had studied under Emanuel Gerhart (1817-1904) the influential systematizer of the Mercersburg theology, was instrumental in revising the tradition in a late-nineteenth century "liberal" direction, while Richards was instrumental in reviving many of the movement's central emphases with the help of Barth and Brunner. Even though they remained cordial and mutually supportive colleagues, Herman and Richards caused the Mercersburg heritage to morph in divergent directions. Their amicable divergence was all the more remarkable because originally both of them had shared the same assessment of Mercersburg theology and the same basically liberal vision of how it should be modified. This genealogical narration may provide some clues for the appropriate interaction of conservation and adaptation in the development of Christian theology.

To understand this development we must first consider what Herman and Richards and their generation thought were the defining characteristics of the

Mercersburg heritage. For our purposes the important thing is not what Nevin or Schaff really meant, but what Herman and Richards imagined that they meant. Most crucially, by both professors the Mercersburg theology was typically identified with the foundational conviction that Christianity is first and foremost the power of a new life. Christianity is not primarily a set of doctrinal propositions but is a way of being. Even the hallowed definitions of the creeds are not a substitute for an active life of love.[1] Genuine Christianity is to be distinguished from its cognitivist distortions, particularly the rationalism that dissolves its mysteries and the hyper-orthodoxy that petrifies them.[2] According to Richards, the elaboration of orthodox systematic theologies in the seventeenth century represented the fossilization of dogma without the personal experience of the spiritual content of those doctrines.[3] Nevin, in Richards view, had an allergic reaction to Protestant scholasticism's equation of faith with mental assent to abstract doctrinal concepts.[4] Richards was fond of quoting Nevin's admonition that "faith must embrace, *not the notion of supernatural things simply*, but the *very power and presence* of the things themselves."[5] In his book and lectures Richards highlighted Henry Harbaugh's conviction that "It (Christianity) is not primarily supernaturally revealed dogma, law or ritual, but a life – the life of Christ in

[1] George W. Richards, *Creative Controversies in Christianity* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1938), p. 53.
[2] Ibid., p. 197.
[3] George W. Richards, "A Forgotten Theology," in *Church History*, vol. IX, no. 1 (March, 1940), p. 44.
[4] Ibid., p.46.
[5] George W. Richards, "The Mercersburg Theology – Its Purpose and Principles," in *Church History*, vol. XX, no. 3 (Sept., 1951), p. 44.

men."[6] Both Herman and Richards agreed that according to the Mercersburg theologians the essence of faith is not the profession of formulae about Christ but is a union with the living Christ. Important as they are, doctrinal systems are fallible and subject to revision. Richards and Herman claimed that for the Mercersburg authors the Bible was not a compendium of infallibly inspired proof-texts asserting esoteric "facts," as it was for Princeton theologian Charles Hodge, but was a witness to the new life in Jesus Christ, "a revelation becoming ever clearer in the consciousness of the Christian church to the end of time."[7] The Bible is a vibrant text that communicates new life when it is read in the context of a living community, the Christian church.

On the other hand, Herman and Richards knew that the Mercersburg movement was not a celebration of inchoate spirituality; its talk about "life" was not a one-dimensional turn to religious subjectivity. Nevin and Schaff, it was stressed, had rejected pietist spiritualism on the grounds that it lacked any appreciation for the objective mediation of faith through the concrete rituals and practices of the church.[8] Richards regarded the movement as a significant chapter in the nineteenth century's general struggle to understand the relation of the subjective and objective dimensions of Christianity, a

[6] George W. Richards, "The Theology of The Rev. Prof. Henry Harbaugh, D.D.," in *Addresses on the Life and Theology of The Rev. Henry Harbaugh, D. D. and the Rev. Emanuel Vogel Gehart, D.D., LL. D.* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Board, 1918), p. 67.

[7] Ibid., p. 68. See also Theodore Herman, "The Theology of Rev. Emanuel Gerhart, D.D.," in *Addresses on the Life and Theology of The Rev. Henry Harbaugh, D. D. and the Rev. Emanuel Vogel Gehart, D.D., LL. D.* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Board, 1918), p. 20.

[8] George W. Richards, "The Mercersburg Theology," p. 46.

chapter that correctly described faith's subjective dimensions as being the fruit of its objective dimensions.[9] The new life is the product of something beyond the inner experience of the devout believer.

The objective source of the new life is Jesus Christ, and therefore, in the opinion of Herman and Richards, the Mercersburg movement was remarkable for its passionate Christocentrism.[10] In the memory of Richards' generation, the Mercersburg movement was expansively Christocentric rather than narrowly bibliocentric. Richards noted that for Nevin, Schaff, and Harbaugh the narcissistic inwardness of modern Protestantism was diagnosed as being symptomatic of a defective Christology that failed to account for the objective rootage of the new spiritual life of Christians in the life of Christ. In Jesus Christ the organic union of human nature and the divine nature enabled the objective communication of God's own supernatural life to Jesus' humanity. In Jesus Christ the exaltation of humanity, taken into unity with God, was accomplished, so that Jesus has become the Second Adam in whom human nature is completed. Accordingly, Herman emphasized the importance of Emanuel Gerhart's description of Jesus as the "theanthropic person," for only as such could Jesus be the head of a regenerated human race.[11] Richards waxed poetic about the Mercersburg understanding of the glorified humanity of Christ, declaring it to be "the only medium of gracious communication from God to mankind, and of all real approach of man to God, and

[9] Ibid., p. 42.

[10] Ibid., p. 46.

[11] Theodore Herman, "The Theology of Rev. Emanuel Gerhart, D.D.," pp. 24-25.

fellowship with him."[12] According to Richards the Mercersburg theologians were unique in their concentration on the glorified humanity of Christ as the font of the new creation.[13] Harbaugh was praised for celebrating the reality that Christ's life becomes our life, and that we die, rise, and live in Him.[14]

Consequently, Herman and Richards agreed that a central tenet of the Mercersburg movement was that the recreative work of Christ is a function of the constitution of his person. As with the best "modern" German theology, the Mercersburg spotlight fell on the Incarnation.[15] The Mercersburg theologians insisted that the Incarnation was not a mere response to the Fall; it was not an expedient necessitated by God's desire to rectify human sinfulness.[16] The birth in Bethlehem was not a mere preamble to Golgotha; the Incarnation was not simply a means to the end of atonement. Herman emphasized the radical nature of this theological move, proudly observing, "In making the fact of the Incarnation cardinal and central to their theology they departed radically from every theological system since the time of Augustine, and, let me add, they passed immeasurably beyond all of them."[17] The Incarnation would have been required even if Adam and Eve had not sinned. The Second Person of the Trinity assumed human nature because of God's primal creative intention to complete the

[12] Ibid., pp. 46-47.
[13] George W. Richards, "A Forgotten Theology," pp. 47-49.
[14] George W. Richards, "The Theology of Rev. Henry Harbaugh," p. 73.
[15] See George W. Richards, *The Heidelberg Catechism: Historical and Doctrinal Studies*, (Philadelphia: Publication and Sunday School Board of the Reformed Church in the United States, 1913), p. 109.
[16] Theodore Herman, "The Theology of Rev. Emanuel Gerhart, D.D.," pp. 25-29.
[17] Ibid., p. 27.

fashioning of humanity in God's image, perfecting human nature so that it would capable of eternal life in fellowship with God. Sin was only a complicating factor that had to be addressed by God and was not the primary impetus for the Incarnation. Humanity is "saved" not by the forensic attribution of Christ's righteousness to the individual, but through the "mystical union" with Christ and the participation in Christ's life, a participation that brings with it justification and sanctification.

Herman and Richards also proposed that the Mercersburg theologians had significantly reconceptualized the inherited Calvinist understanding of God. Richards claimed that thinkers like Nevin, Schaff, and Harbaugh had shifted the focus from God's sovereignty and justice to God's fatherhood and love.[18] Similarly, Herman asserted, "The religion whose cardinal conception is the fatherhood of God can never find adequate interpretation in a theology whose constructive principles are derived from monarchy rather than from family."[19] The older Reformed fascination with the decrees of God had mistakenly defined God in terms of arbitrary will rather than in terms of God's interpersonal nature. Herman enthused that Gerhart had helped correct this theological blunder by suggested that God's nature and human nature are both personal, capable of intentional, free self-giving, and therefore are suited for communion with one another. The Reformed motto "*finitum non capax infiniti*" ("the finite cannot contain the infinite") was based on a misleading conception of God as

[18] George W. Richards, "The Theology of Rev. Henry Harbaugh," p. 57.
[19] Theodore Herman, "The Theology of Rev. Emanuel Gerhart," p. 29.

an inscrutable and incomprehensible substance.[20] Rather, God can be known as a free personal agent who self-commits to a life of love, and therefore corresponds to the drive of humanity for inter-personal fulfillment. The God of love is the object of humanity's "instinct for God," the yearning to love and be loved.[21]

Both Herman and Richards stressed the way in which this incarnational focus led the Mercersburg movement to conceptualize the church as the Body of Christ and to emphasize the Lord's Supper as the extraordinary locus of the mystical union of Christ and the believer. Herman observed that according to the teachings of Mercersburg the church is a new organism whose life principle is the divine-human life of Christ.[22] Similarly, Richards described Mercersburg ecclesiology as defining the church as the organic continuation of the divine-human life of Christ.[23] Through the church the fruits of the Incarnation are actualized in the hearts of humanity in an organic and progressive manner.[24] The sacraments make Christians sharers in life of Christ and enable regeneration.[25] Through the sacraments we are "fed" and "nourished" by the life of Christ's glorified human nature.[26]

Both professors also perceived the Mercersburg movement to be a celebration of the church as a community extended through time that develops through a

[20] Theodore Herman, "The Theology of Rev. Emanuel Gerhart," p. 39.
[21] George W. Richards, "The Theology of Rev. Henry Harbaugh,"p. 68.
[22] Theodore Herman, "The Theology of Rev. Emanuel Gerhart," p. 33.
[23] George W. Richards, "A Forgotten Theology," p. 48.
[24] George W. Richards, "The Mercersburg Theology," p. 46.
[25] George W. Richards, "A Forgotten Theology," p. 48.
[26] George W. Richards, "The Theology of Rev. Henry Harbaugh," p. 74.

dialectical process.[27] The church, and human history in general, is evolving toward a glorious goal. This enabled the Mercersburg thinkers to be more than mere repristinators, for they anticipated a future church that is yet to be actualized in its fullness. Richards pointed out, "Nevin believed that God is in history, and that in His own time and in His own way the nations will become the kingdom of the Christ."[28] This, according to Richards and Herman, gave the Mercersburg movement a progressive orientation and motivated reformist zeal.

Mercersburg Meets Berlin: The Liberal Mutation

Emanuel Gerhart, who had studied under Friedrich Rauch and John Nevin, continued to perpetuate these Mercersburg distinctives during his long tenure (1868-1904) on the Mercersburg/Lancaster faculty, providing a link to the founding generation. However, by 1904 the theological heirs of the Mercersburg tradition were exhibiting a decided shift toward the "liberalism" typical of much of late nineteenth century German theology. At Lancaster Seminary four of the important professors of the next generation, Christopher Noss (theology), Irwin H. DeLong (Old Testament), Theodore Herman (theology), and George Richards (church history) all studied at least briefly at the University of Berlin, where they were influenced by the tradition of Albrecht Ritschl and by the teaching of Adolf Harnack. The career of Theodore Herman, who became a professor in 1910, is illustrative of this metamorphosis. Herman had been Gerhart's

[27] Theodore Herman, "The Theology of Rev. Emanuel Gerhart," pp. 33-34.
[28] George W. Richards, "A Forgotten Theology," p. 51.

protégé and amanuensis and therefore was only one step removed from the thought-world of Rauch and Nevin. But as we shall see, after his sojourn in Berlin Herman's theology began to resemble that of his German mentors. As Richards himself observed, this new generation of scholars and pastors still used the terminology of their Mercersburg forebears, but they injected new content into those inherited concepts.[29]

The theological transformation was made easy by the perceived similarities between Mercersburg thought and German liberalism. The new wave of Lancaster theologians regarded this affinity as being due to the fact that both theological trajectories highlighted the Christian experience of God, mediated through Jesus Christ. To young students like Herman and Richards this similarity was not at all surprising, for they were well aware of the Mercersburg tradition's roots in the "mediating" theology of nineteenth century Germany, which was the same tradition that later contributed to the thought of Ritschl and Harnack. Richards even claimed, "In other words the mediational theology of Germany became, with limitations and modifications, the Mercersburg theology in America."[30] After all, Friedrich Schleiermacher himself, the archetypal "father" of this stand of theology, had maintained that Christianity was not a system of doctrine, or a ritual, but was the life of Christ reproduced in the lives of human beings. Schleiermacher had argued that theological statements are really descriptions of Christian self-consciousness, for all we really have access

[29] George W. Richards, *A History of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church at Lancaster Pennsylvania* (Lancaster: Rudisill and Company, 1952), p. 523.
[30] George W. Richards, "The Theology of Rev. Henry Harbaugh," p. 57.

to is our experience of God, not God in God's own self. God cannot be known through observation or rational inference as if God were some sort of object, like a horse or a rock, only of a supernatural sort. Rather, we know God in the depths of our experience of life in general, through our self-consciousness. The religious dimension of this self-consciousness is the deep, pervasive feeling of being absolutely dependent upon a great mystery that sustains the whole cosmos. In Christianity this feeling is mediated to us through the power of Jesus' consciousness of God, for left to our own devices, we humans feel estranged from God, stuck in worldly ways of experiencing life. The contagious potency of Jesus' God-consciousness enables us to overcome that sense of alienation and share in Jesus' buoyant reliance upon God. In other words, Schleiermacher developed a way of talking about regeneration and the new life in Christ in terms of the communication of Jesus' subjectivity, Jesus' religious experience. According to Herman, Schleiermacher's emphasis of the communication of the spirit of Jesus to the regenerated Christian was the ultimate antecedent of the Mercersburg movement.[31] Similarly, Richards proposed that "modern" theology agrees with Mercersburg that faith is not a series of propositions but is a living union of the soul with God.[32] In other words, the general perception was that Schleiermacher's turn to subjectivity was the real heart of the Mercersburg theologians' turn to "life."

According to Richards another salient similarity was that both the Ritschlian theology and the Mercersburg

[31] Theodore Herman, "The Theology of Rev. Emanuel Gerhart," pp. 16-19.
[32] George W. Richards, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 117.

theology foregrounded God's love rather than God's metaphysical perfections like omnipotence and omniscience. For both movements God was described as being essentially "personal," meaning an agent with intentions, volitions, and purposes. Those intentions and purposes could be fundamentally characterized as "loving," meaning that God desires the flourishing of human individuals and eternal fellowship with them. Neither movement supported any disjunction of God's merciful love from God's justice, as substitutionary views of the atonement usually had done. From first to last God's redemptive work through Christ is an act of love. Consequently both movements saw a continuing affinity between God and humanity in spite of sin. God is a loving personal agent and humanity was created to be loving personal agents. Thus there remains a point of contact between humanity and God; in fact, even depraved humanity is "incurably religious."[33]

Moreover, the tendency of Mercersburg theology to think in terms of generic categories was seen as neatly dovetailing with Ritchlian theology. "The primacy of the generic in the life of the individual" was a foundational tenet in both schools of thought.[34] According to Richards, modern theology accepts the notion of the solidarity of the race and even the universality of sin, as did his Mercersburg mentors.[35] In this regard both Mercersburg and Berlin diverged from the earlier Reformed orthodoxy that was too individualistic and regarded salvation as a private transaction between God and the solitary soul.

[33] George W. Richards, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 107.
[34] George W. Richards, "The Theology of Rev. Henry Harbaugh," p. 79.
[35] George W. Richards, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 107.

The new generation of theologians continued to value the Mercersburg theology's appreciation of the corporate nature of the church and saw a parallel in Harnack's emphasis of the social context of human life. Mercersburg's use of organic metaphors to describe the church was compatible with modern German theology's intensified interest in Christianity as a social movement with a social ethic.[36] According to Herman and Richards, the Mercersburg theology had been a much needed antidote to evangelicalism's valorization of the atomistic individual and to very privatized and narcissistic understandings of salvation. By being an invaluable reminder of the corporate nature of Christianity, the Mercersburg movement was seen as having an affinity with the bourgeoning Social Gospel movement that was partly inspired by Ritschl's theology.

Furthermore, it was recognized that both the Mercersburg movement and modern German theology agreed that Christian experience had to be articulated in terms borrowed from the evolving conceptualities of successive cultural eras.[37] Both the German and the Pennsylvanian movements were seen as instances of "progressive orthodoxy." The Mercersburg movement's ardent advocacy of historical development seemed to legitimate the appropriation of a more "modern" conceptuality to explain the faith. According to Richards Mercersburg's discovery of "the principle of development in all forms of life" meshed nicely with modern theology's belief in human progress.[38] As Richards

[36] George W. Richards, "The Mercersburg Theology," p. 54.
[37] Ibid., pp. 520-521.
[38] George W. Richards, "The Theology of Rev. Henry Harbaugh," p. 79.

confidently asserted, "The Gospel is permanent and eternal, but theology, or the scientific interpretation of the Gospel, changes from time to time and in lands of different spirit and culture."[39] Surely both Mercersburg and modern German theology agreed that Christianity was discovering increasingly adequate ways to articulate the faith.

For the young Richards and Herman this belief in intellectual progress had an important consequence for the way that they engaged in the theological enterprise. They were convinced that the intellectual culture of the late nineteenth century had progressed beyond earlier philosophies that had futilely sought to comprehend the allegedly objective dynamics and structures of reality. Those earlier philosophies had all succumbed to the allure of metaphysics and had advanced fanciful claims about reality as a whole. They had fabricated concepts of "natures," "essences," and "things-in-themselves," pretended that they comprehended what these things were, and then used them to interpret Christianity. Even the "mediating" theologians like Isaac Dorner who had inspired Nevin and Gerhart had been guilty of this vice, for they had taken Schleiermacher's analysis of Christian subjectivity and paradoxically used it as a spring-board to make speculative claims about the nature of God and the world. Dorner had not been content to describe the contents of Christian experience, but had tried to figure out what the universe must be like in order for such experience to be possible. Rejecting this as useless speculation, Herman lamented that the thinkers who had

[39] George W. Richards, *A History of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church at Lancaster Pennsylvania*, p. 529.

helped catalyze the Mercersburg movement had unwisely "relied on logic and metaphysics to explain the ultimate mysteries of life."[40] However, the newer German theologians like Albrecht Ritschl, Wilhelm Hermann, and Adolf Harnack had grown skeptical of these metaphysical projects and had adopted a new philosophical orientation that interpreted Christian convictions as value judgments. Theological statements are really value-claims. To say that God exists is to say that there is something of absolute value to which human life should be directed. To espouse belief in the Trinity is to commit oneself to structuring one's life according to three different over-arching values. In his inaugural lecture in 1910 Herman announced that the great watchword of the Ritschlian school is "theology without metaphysics," and declared this proposition to be "incontrovertible."[41]

Because of modern theology's stalwart rejection of metaphysics, the Mercersburg theology could not be affirmed in its inherited form, for the works of Nevin and Gerhart were saturated with metaphysical concepts. With laudable candor Richards alerted the church to the fact that there is a "difference between the theology of Mercersburg and the theology of Lancaster,"[42] and concluded, "The theology now taught in the Theological Seminary of your Synod is still Christological, but Christological in an historical and ethical sense, not in a metaphysical and philosophical sense."[43] Herman described the Lancaster faculty as "the spiritual heirs of

[40] Theodore Herman, "The Theology of Rev. Emanuel Gerhart," p.19.
[41] Theodore Herman, "The Epistemological Problem of Theology," *Reformed Church Review*, vol. XVI (July, 1910), p. 287.
[42] George W. Richards, "The Theology of Rev. Henry Harbaugh," p. 71.
[43] George W. Richards, "The Theology of Rev. Henry Harbaugh," p. 72.

the Mercersburg theologians but not servile imitators."[44] Both Herman and Richards emphasized the colossal difference that this shift away from metaphysics made and how, as a result, the contemporary expression of the Mercersburg spirit had to differ from its articulation by the first generation. Both professors dared to critique the venerable ancestors of the movement with which they continued to identify. Herman went so far as to bluntly announce that his mentor Gerhart had been wrong to think metaphysically.

The most significant perceived anachronism was that the older Mercersburg theologians and their "mediating" German mentors of the mid-nineteenth century had held a metaphysical view of the Incarnation. Unfortunately, defining Christ as the hypostatic union of divine and human "natures" was a misguided speculative approach to Christ's identity. Thinking in terms of impersonal categories, it was feared, would only distract believers from the real way in which Christ can be understood. Talking about the assumption of impersonal human nature by the person of the eternal Logos (the theory of *anhypostasia*) made no sense to modern people who had grown weary of the meaningless abstractions of Plato and Aristotle. The appropriate way to comprehend Christ is to think about him in terms of human valuation. Theodore Herman was influenced by the contemporary Marburg theologian Wilhelm Hermann who argued that the affirmation of Jesus' divinity was actually a disguised way of saying that Jesus has the value of God for believers, because Jesus exhibits the ultimate value of

[44] Theodore Herman, Swander Lecture, 1945, typescript, p. 4, archives of Lancaster Theological Seminary.

self-sacrificial love.[45] Theology should start with Jesus' human life, not with the ontological constitution of Christ's person.[46] Ritschl had argued that the contours of this life can be recovered through historical investigation, and that the results will be inspirational. In this vein Richards declared that Jesus was a man through whom God's spirit found complete expression.[47] Consequently, the historical Jesus can be said to reveal God in that Jesus' words and deeds reflect the character and intentions of God. Put simply, the real meaning of the doctrine of the Incarnation is that God is like Jesus. By deriving its content from the human life of Jesus, theology could still be Christocentric, but it would be historically Christocentric and not metaphysically Christocentric.[48]

For another thing, the "new theology" gave much more attention to the coming Kingdom of God on earth than to the new heaven and new earth of Mercersburg's eschatological expectations.[49] The school of Ritschl had subtly modified Schleiermacher's account of Christian experience by emphasizing its ethical dimensions,[50] identifying the feeling of being accepted by God and the value of responsible action in the world as the twin pillars of Christianity. This move supported a belief in ethical progress and the gradual evolution of human society toward the Kingdom. This reorientation of the Christian hope inspired Richards' appropriation of themes from the Social Gospel movement and his endorsement of Walter

[45] Theodore Herman, "The Epistemological Problem of Theology," pp. 281-309.
[46] George W. Richards, "The Theology of Rev. Henry Harbaugh," p. 79.
[47] George W. Richards, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 113.
[48] George W. Richards, "The Theology of Rev. Henry Harbaugh," p. 72.
[49] George W. Richards, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 110.
[50] Ibid., p. 287.

Rauschenbusch's call to "realize on earth in the social order of the nations the reign of life and love."[51] The older metaphysical sensibilities of Mercersburg had fostered a piety that was way too other-worldly. Theology needed to recover a confidence in the power of human efforts, in co-operation with God, to actualize the new order of love and justice.

The anti-metaphysical animus motivated both Herman and Richards to rethink Mercersburg's sacramentology. This was serious business for the belief in Christ's real spiritual presence in the Lord's Supper was at the heart of the movement. But, given the rejection of metaphysical categories, baptism and the Lord's Supper should no longer be though of as conveying any sort of vivifying substance or holy vitality. The sacraments do not work through sacramental magic or through the immediate infusion of grace. Of course, according to Herman and Richards the Mercersburg theologians had been right to differentiate themselves from Rome's belief in the automatic mediation of grace. The Mercersburg preference for organic and ethical metaphors was a vast improvement over the Catholic mechanical and forensic metaphors. However, the Mercersburg folks had lapsed back into metaphysics by insisting upon a unique, objective divine/human presence communicated through the sacramental acts. This made Jesus' life seem like some sort of substance that gets transferred to believers. Rather, the sacraments should be seen as pointers to the story of Jesus and the perfecting of the human spirit. Through meditation upon those rituals

[51] Ibid., p. 156.

the power of Jesus' life can inspire the lives of the participants.

From the perspective of Berlin circa 1900, another flaw in the Mercersburg theology became visible. The church also should not be conceptualized metaphysically, as if it were some sort of repository of supernatural power. Because of the primacy of the ethical life, the church should be redefined in terms of its reformist mission to the world.[52] Accordingly, Richards declared that the church is an organ for the realization of the Kingdom on earth. The church should not focus inwardly on the salvation of its members or the regeneration of its own community, but rather outwardly on the transformation of the social order. Most importantly, the church should be devoted to its action in the world rather than yearning for its glorious consummation in heaven. Consequently the church came to be seen not so much as a sacramental institution but as a fellowship of people with a mission. [53] The spirit of Christ motivating the members of the church empowers the struggle to actualize the Kingdom of God.

Mercersburg Meets Basel: The Neo-Orthodox Mutation

In the late 1920's yet another shift became evident in the theological thinking of the heirs of the Mercersburg tradition. The early writings of Karl Barth (who after 1935 would settle in Basel), Emil Brunner, and their colleagues which had already caused an earthquake in Europe began

[52] Ibid., pp. 119-123.
[53] George W. Richards, "The Theology of Rev. Henry Harbaugh," p. 79.

to trigger aftershocks in Pennsylvania. This new theological sensibility was variously called "the theology of crisis," "dialectical theology," or "neo-orthodoxy" (the Lancaster faculty preferred "the theology of crisis"). The impact of this revolutionary movement is most evident in the theological maturation of George Richards. In 1928 Richards invited Brunner to give the Swandler Lecture at the Seminary. In the early 1930's he helped translate two volumes of sermons by Barth and his theological fellow-traveler Eduard Thurneysen,[54] and wrote the introduction to one of those volumes, *Come Holy Spirit.* In 1934 he confessed his indebted to Brunner and Barth in his own most widely read work, *Beyond Fundamentalism and Modernism*.[55] Loud echoes of Barth and Brunner can indeed be heard throughout that volume. Even Theodore Herman, who remained more sympathetic to the tradition of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, expressed appreciation for Barth's reminder that God's approach to humanity precedes humanity's response.[56] He admitted that Barth had reintroduced into theology a salutary recognition of the "objectivity" of God, a theme that functioned as an antidote to the reduction of Christianity to a set of

[54] Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, *Come Holy Spirit*, trans. by George W. Richards, Elmer G. Homrighausen, and Karl J. Ernst (Edinburgh; T & T Clark, 1934); Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, *God's Search for Man*, trans. by George W. Richards, Elmer G. Homrighausen, and Karl J. Ernst (New York: Round Table Press, 1935).
[55] George W. Richards, *Beyond Fundamentalism and Modernism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. x.
[56] Theodore Herman, "My Spiritual Pilgrimage," in *The Bulletin of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church*, vol. XIX, no. 4 (Oct, 1948), p. 166.

bourgeois human values.[57] According to Herman's later reminiscences, this shift in theological sensibility led him to realize that Jesus was more than the possessor of divine value, as the Ritschlians had claimed, but was the very incarnation of God.[58]

What drew Richards (and to some extent Herman) to these "theologians of crisis" was their strident insistence that God's Word comes to us from beyond our own hopes, fears, and aspirations. Brunner was applauded for proclaiming that the Word of God is something different from human words, unexpectedly erupting into our world.[59] Brunner rightly asserted that this revelatory Word does not arise out of human experience, as Schleiermacher and Ritschl had taught.[60] According to Richards, Barth was correct that theology is not about humanity's religious experience, no matter how profound it may seem.[61] Richards agreed with Barth that, in opposition to the program of Schleiermacher, we should not make our own consciousness the subject matter of theology.[62] Revelation does not simply augment and intensify the moral precepts and virtues that naturally appeal to human beings; rather, revelation confronts humanity with a radically counter-intuitive way of life that humanity neither sought nor desired. Richards appreciated Barth and Brunner for reminding complacent, culturally-

[57] Theodore Herman, "Modern Trends in Religious Thought," in *The Bulletin of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church*, vol. V, no. 3 (July, 1934), p. 150.
[58] Theodore Herman, "My Spiritual Pilgrimage," p. 154.
[59] George W. Richards, *Beyond Fundamentalism and Modernism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 10-11.
[60] Ibid., p. 11.
[61] Ibid., p. 173.
[62] Ibid., p. 200.

conformed Christians of the irreducible otherness of God. Barth, like that Danish voice in the wilderness Søren Kierkegaard, realized the significance of the fundamental "qualitative difference" between God and humanity.[63]

As Richards recognized, this sense of God's otherness led Barth and Brunner to stress the agency of God in the establishment of any relationship with humanity.[64] God is so different from human being that any access to God must be due to God's initiation. There is no journey of humanity to God. Rather, God journeys to humanity. This decision of God to go in search of the lost prodigal is so drastically self-sacrificial that it is contrary to all human understandings of love, all of which involve some reciprocity and self-interest. The Gospel flouts common sense and ordinary cultural values. By revealing God's own self through the self-emptying life of Jesus Christ, God has done something new that cannot be correlated with ordinary human experience or even comprehended. As Barth observes, the appropriate thing to do in the presence of such a God is to bow before the divine mystery without understanding it.[65]

Richards realized that this view of God had enormous implications for the understanding of salvation. The new life in Christ is not the fruition of any natural human longing, but is exclusively begotten by the Spirit of Christ in the human heart. God's Word from beyond our words gives birth to a new life. Richards approved of Homrighausen's assertion that Barth and Thurneysen proclaimed "a God who is more eager to be our God than

[63] George W. Richards, *Creative Controversies* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1938, p. 205 .
[64] Ibid., pp. 215-216.
[65] George W. Richards, *Beyond Fundamentalism and Modernism*, p. 12.

we are to be His children or our neighbor's brothers."[66] The "neo-orthodox" theologians' discovery of the priority of revelation in regard to knowing God led to a reinvigorated appreciation of the priority of grace in regard to salvation.

The disjunctive strand in Barth and Brunner also inspired Richards to rethink history and eschatology. God's otherness means that God is not immanent in the historical development of human culture.[67] In 1932 Richards lectured on Barth's "philosophy of history," noting that Barth did not have one.[68] (It was a short lecture.) As Barth had claimed, if the Gospel really is good news, it cannot be a rebroadcast of the news about the alleged historical progress of the human spirit. According to Barth, the Kingdom of God is indeed coming, but its inception will be due to God's agency, not to humanity's own efforts. Richards enthused that we can have courage in the face of the uncertain future because we have confidence in God's promise. He approvingly quoted Barth's remark that we can work to renew Germany because we expect a New Jerusalem to come down from heaven.[69] Eschatological confidence should inspire reformist zeal during the interim period.

In spite of these enthusiastic endorsements of themes from Barth and Brunner, Richards was never a one-dimensional proponent of the "theology of crisis." He shared Homrighausen's disavowal of any desire to

[66] Elmer G. Homrighausen, "Preface," in Karl Barth, *God's Search for Man*, p. vi.
[67] George W. Richards, *Beyond Fundamentalism and Modernism*, p. 31.
[68] George W. Richards, "Barth's Philosophy of History," in *The Bulletin of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church*, vol. III, no. 4 (Oct, 1932), p. 18.
[69] George W. Richards, *Beyond Fundamentalism and Modernism*, p. 276.

promulgate some ideology called "Barthianism."[70] Richards' mature work of 1938 even advocated that Barth and Schleiermacher should be held in a healthy dialectical tension.[71] The Christian life is lived in the countervailing pulls of the themes of the discontinuity of God and humanity and the continuity of God and humanity. Barth is right that there is a qualitative difference between the two, but Schleiermacher is also right that there is a qualitative kinship. Of course the kinship was seriously damaged through humanity's sin, but the Father and the child have still been seeking each other. In spite of the fact that God's ways are not our ways, our hearts cannot rest until we commune with the Absolute. In Richards' version of this dialectic, it must be noted that the accent falls on what God does to search for and find lost humanity. God's otherness and agency are given priority over humanity's yearning for God.

While appreciating the "theology of crisis" as a corrective to his own earlier "liberalism," Herman never endorsed it to the extent that Richards did. He feared that Barth had denied the essential correlation of revelation and experience, the correlation between God's quest for humanity and humanity's quest for God. By doing so Barth had sundered the organic relation between God's Spirit and the human spirit that had been so central to the Mercersburg tradition.[72] He invoked the spirit of Philip Schaff to counteract the "eschatological" theology and its

[70] See Elmer G. Homrighausen, "Preface," in Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, *God's Search for Man*, trans. by George W. Richards, Elmer G. Homrighausen, and Karl J. Ernst (New York: Round Table Press, 1935), p. vi.
[71] George W. Richards, *Creative Controversies*, pp. 13-14.
[72] Theodore Herman, "The Meaning of History," in *The Bulletin of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church*, vol. III, no. 4 (Oct. 1932), p. 43.

dangerous dualism of time and eternity. That dualism severed the organic connection of our present reality and our future hope that made the historical development of Christianity possible.[73] Moroever, the sharp disjunction of divinity and humanity made their organic union in the Incarnation nothing more than an incomprehensible juxtaposition.[74] Herman admonished his friend and colleague Richards to eschew the allure of Barth's dichotomistic thinking.[75] Herman's considered opinion was that Christianity needs Barth's theocentrism without Barth's dualism of God and humanity.[76] Herman developed his own version of a dialectic, stating that God is neither wholly transcendent nor wholly immanent.

This new "theology of crisis" that stood liberalism (the Ritschlian orientation of Herman and Richards in their younger days) on its head was hailed by Richards as having several parallels with the tradition of Mercersburg. Like the Mercersburg theologians, Barth and Brunner insisted that revelation is not the mere communication of information about divine matters. Expecting the Mercersburg audience to hear a familiar refrain, Richards quoted Brunner's declaration that faith is not a philosophical or theological system of doctrine; God's Word is not a set of formula that invites detached

[73] Theodore Herman, "The Life and Labors of Philip Schaff," in *The Bulletin of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church*, vol. IX, no. 3 (July. 1938), p. 151.
[74] Theodore Herman, Swander Lecture, 1945, typescript, p. 5, archives of Lancaster Theological Seminary.
[75] Theodore Herman, "The Autonomy and Authority of God" in *The Bulletin of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church*, vol. VI, no. 1 (Jan., 1935), pp. 45-46.
[76] Theodore Herman, "Karl Barth and Professor Zerbe" in *The Bulletin of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church*, vol. II, no. 2 (April, 1931), p. 44.

theoretic contemplation.[77] That was one theme that Mercersburg, German liberalism, and the theology of crisis could agree upon. As Richards noted, according to Barth and Brunner God's Word is intended to be a catalyst for the transformation of human lives. That motif sounded strikingly similar to the older Mercersburg conviction that Christianity is first and foremost the communication of a new life and not the transmission of data.

Of course, Barth and Brunner gave this existential theme a different nuance. Whereas the Mercersburg theologians had used organic metaphors and the vocabulary of "nurture" and "feeding," and had talked about the communication of Christ's "vitality" and "energy," the theologians of crisis, with Richards following them, shifted to the rhetoric of confrontation. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is an act of God that challenges humanity, demanding a response. God's Word is a linguistic action that God performs, declaring a divine purpose, making a promise, and issuing an imperative.[78] The appropriate human response should be acceptance of the purpose, trust in the promise, and obedience to the imperative. The Word does not so much communicate new energy as provoke repentance and a change of life.

Even more importantly, the Mercersburg theologians and the theologians of crisis shared a common focus on the priority of the "objective" features of Christianity. God stands over against human experience; awareness of God comes from outside us through a divine act, and does not arise from the dynamics of human subjectivity. God

[77] George W. Richards, *Beyond Fundamentalism and Modernism*, pp. 6-7.
[78] Ibid., pp. 3, 6.

comes to us not out of the depths of our own selfhood, but as something from beyond ourselves. Both Nevin and Barth knew that "one cannot speak of God by speaking of man in a loud voice."[79] As a result both the Mercersburg movement and neo-orthodoxy stressed the priority of God's action in revelation and salvation. Both Nevin and Barth realized that we need grace in order to be transformed; we cannot be reborn through programs of self-help. Richards' contention that the sermons of Barth and Thurneysen were designed to humble us and to make us rely upon God parallels his description of the Mercersburg theology's insistence that the new life in Christ is a gift that must be received with gratitude.[80] Moreover, in both movements the recognition of the priority and objectivity of God's action then leads to a buoyant optimism grounded in the power of God's omnipotent love. Consequently, both movements regarded God not as a static essence or as an immanent force, but as a personal agent who acts, bringing about an entirely new state of affairs for humanity.

But even given these similarities, the "dialectical theology" of Barth and Brunner was perceived as diverging from the Mercersburg heritage in several important ways. Most importantly, Richards warned, "Let us remember that the dialectical school has dealt a solar-plexus blow to the theory of historical development."[81] Barth and Thurneysen had regarded the Kingdom of God as an eschatological eruption into history, rather than as a social eventuality growing out of history. In

[79] George W. Richards, "A Forgotten Theology,"pp. 41-42.
[80] George W. Richards, "Preface," in *Come Holy Spirit*, pp. v1-v11.
[81] George W. Richards, "The Mercersburg Theology," p. 54.

accomplishing God's ultimate purposes, God does not primarily work through human culture, or even through the evolution of the church, but usually works in spite of them. Because of the highlighting of divine transcendence, the dialectical theologians also construed the church not so much as "an organism mediating salvation through sacramental channels" but as the proclaimer of good news.[82] Although the church is certainly called to love neighbors and enemies, its call to enact love and justice is not the root of its identity, but is a fruit. The church is not the primary hands through which God works in the world. These themes were all inscribed in Richards' *Beyond Modernism and Fundamentalism*, showing the extent not only of his modification of the ecclesiology of the Mercersburg movement, but also his modification of his earlier Ritschlian optimism about human progress.

So far we have been concentrating on the reception of the early work of Brunner and Barth by the heirs of the Mercersburg theology. That early work, called the "theology of crisis" by the Lancaster faculty, had stressed the disjunction of the divine and the human. However, the works of Barth that appeared in the 1930's, particularly the first volumes of his massive and magisterial *Church Dogmatics*, began to emphasize a different theme: the solidarity of God and humanity in Jesus Christ. Although neither Herman nor Richards would live to read the final volumes of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, a shift in tone and focus was already evident in the early volumes that they had at their disposal. Barth scholars delight in arguing about how significant this seeming shift in Barth's work

[82] Ibid., p. 55.

actually was, and about exactly when it occurred (or even if it occurred). We shall not step into these troubled waters. For our purposes the important thing is that echoes of some such shift are evident in Richards' later appropriations from Barth, and that these appropriations suggest even tighter correlations between Barth and the Mercersburg movement.

According to Richards, Barth, just as much as Nevin and Gerhart, came to locate reconciliation in the "person" of Christ (meaning by that the entire sweep of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection), and not merely in his atoning work on the cross. God's grace, not human sinfulness, is their common point of departure. Like the Mercersburg theologians, Barth claimed that the wondrous thing about Jesus is the Incarnation itself, God's embrace of human nature and the elevation of human nature to communion with God. The mystery of reconciliation and sanctification is identical with the mystery of the Word made flesh. Just as Nevin and Gerhart had done, Barth too insisted that the Incarnation, defined as the covenantal fellowship of God and humanity in Jesus Christ, would have occurred even if humanity had not sinned, for this fellowship was God's most basic and primal intention. The life of Jesus was the enactment of God's self-giving love for humanity and of humanity's loving and obedient response to God.[83] Consequently, Nevin, Gerhart, Barth, and Richards could all describe Jesus as the presence of God in humanity and the presence of humanity in God. For all of them the essence of the Incarnation was the loving covenantal fellowship of God and humanity, which was God's

[83] George W. Richards, *Creative Controversies*, pp. 50-55.

ultimate purpose in the creation of the universe.[84] God's eternal will was to communicate God's very own abundant life to humanity in Jesus Christ.[85]

As with Nevin, for Richards and the later Barth one of the most salient aspects of the Incarnation was the glorification of Jesus' human nature. Embraced by the divine life, the human nature of Jesus became the faithful covenant partner whom God intended. In Jesus' God-manhood is included the fullness of humanity. In Jesus a new kind of humanity came to birth.[86] Jesus was a new creation, the Second Adam.[87] Richards dramatically quoted Barth's assertion that the exaltation of humanity occurs in Jesus, for "in Jesus Christ, Who is true God, man is snatched away from the ordinances and necessities of his mere humanity, made partaker of the free, transcendent, eternal life of God Himself. In Jesus Christ the glory of God, without ceasing to be His, has become ours."[88] It could not have been said better by Nevin himself.

Borrowing from the later Barth, Richards could now more vigorously affirm with Nevin and Gerhart that the church is in some sense the body of Christ, for the glorified humanity of Christ is communicated through the church as it proclaims the story of Jesus with gratitude and praise. Because the church has been commissioned to tell and retell the sacred narrative of God's reconciling work in Christ, the church is the typical means through which Jesus' new humanity is made available. The Spirit

[84] Ibid., pp. 52, 57, 112.
[85] Ibid., p. 57.
[86] Ibid., pp. 111-112.
[87] Ibid., pp. 128-129.
[88] Ibid.,p. 154.

that unites Christians to the mind of Christ is mediated through the Spirit-filled ecclesial community.[89] For this reason, the church can be affirmed to be the Body of Christ, for Christ is made present though the church's narration of the sacred story. Once again, as with the Mercersburg theologians, the corporate dimension of Christianity is logically prior to its individual dimension.

However, even Richards' partial appropriation of themes from the later Barth was not entirely congruent with the tradition of Mercersburg. Most basically, the Mercersburg theologians had used organic and vitalistic categories to explain the union of divinity and humanity in Christ as well as the union of Christ and the church, and Richards, following Barth, did not. Implicitly critiquing the Mercersburg theologians, Richards noted that the Eastern Orthodox churches had described the union of humanity and divinity in Jesus as "organic" and as a "revitalization" of human nature.[90] Such discourse is "pharmacological," suggesting that the Incarnation was the infusion of some sort of supernatural energy into human nature. For Richards, this "Greek" view of organic union treated the Incarnation too impersonally and mechanically and drew attention away from the enactment of Jesus' life in time and space. The Incarnation was not like a human person being plugged into a divine power source with the electric current turned on. In these remarks it is evident that the anti-metaphysical streak in the Ritchlian theology lived on in Richards' appropriation of the later Barth. Consequently for Richards the Incarnation should not be construed as a coming together

[89] Ibid., pp. 113-121.
[90] Ibid., pp. 144-151.

of disparate natures, but as a union of patterns of intention and action. The basic metaphors used to describe the relation of humanity and divinity in Jesus should be interpersonal ones, not substantival ones. The relation of the humanity of Jesus and his divinity should be thought of as the reciprocal enactment of love and not as a communication of vitality.[91]

As a result, Richards, like Barth, was suspicious of the sacramentology of the Mercersburg heritage. The vitalistic imagery of Mercersburg could suggest that grace is a type of divine energy that is infused into believers.[92] The way that the mystical union with Christ was described could make it sound like some sort of ontological bond. That was unfortunate, for the thought forms of the contemporary world are no longer compatible with Platonic metaphysics and the reification of abstract concepts like "human nature." Even the ontology of the early nineteenth century German romantics and idealist philosophers who had influenced Rauch and Nevin was no longer credible. Rather, the union of the believer with Christ should be thought of interpersonally, as the bond of love. In other words, Richards interpreted Christ's union with the believer as being effected by the power of God's love upon the individual's heart, eliciting a loving response, rather than by the performance of the sacred ritual. Of course, the ritual can stimulate such a loving union, for it points to Christ's love. For Richards the celebration of the Lord's Supper was parallel to the preaching of the Word; it proclaimed Christ in a tactile form rather than an

[91] Ibid., p. 12.
[92] George W. Richards, "The Mercersburg Theology," p. 55.

exclusively verbal form. Therefore the Supper is a pointer to Christ rather than an enactment of the real spiritual presence of Christ.

Barth's reflections on the sacraments had a decidedly Zwinglian flavor that reinforced similar tendencies in Richards' own thought. Barth tended to regard the sacraments as a human response of gratitude to God rather than as God's gracious offering of God's very own self to humanity. (In his last years Barth came to reject the concept of "sacraments" entirely.) For Barth this was partly a function of his ferocious commitment to the theme of God's transcendent freedom; the Holy Spirit can evoke faith through any means that the Holy Spirit chooses to employ. In a way, this was Barth's way of preserving the Reformed theme that the finite cannot contain the infinite and was a vestige of his earlier emphasis of God's radical otherness. God's actions cannot be confined to any set of earthly rituals or structures. Barth was reluctant to say anything that might suggest that God had been bound to anything human, be it a ritual or an institution, and thereby had compromised the freedom of God's grace. This reluctance was also due to Barth's firm conviction that human nature has already been united to Christ and exalted in Christ. Consequently, the individual does not need to be united to Christ through the sacraments but only needs to recognize that she already is united to Christ whether she knows it or not. In Barth's terminology the sacraments serve a "noetic" rather than an "ontic" function; they help us to recognize something rather than actualize something. Barth feared that talk of the sacraments as somehow contributing to the union with Christ would suggest that Christ's own person

was somehow not enough for the union with Christ to be real. Such language, he feared, implied that the Incarnation required a little sacramental supplementation.

To further complicate matters, Barth's view of the church, and the partial reflection of that view in the later works of Richards, diverged significantly from the ecclesiology of Mercersburg. For Barth, as for many Reformed theologians, the church is "a creation of the Word" (*creatura verbi*). When the church, empowered by the Spirit, witnesses to Christ, the church as a human organization becomes the community that God intends it to be. For Barth the church is truly the church in so far as it hears, interprets, and proclaims God's word. The church, like John the Baptist, is a herald announcing the good news of Jesus Christ. The church exists because God wills that there should be a community that will bear witness to Christ through its words and deeds. This view is extremely different from regarding the church as a sacramental community that is itself a participation in Christ's very life. Although the church can be said to be Christ's body on earth and to be united to Christ, that affirmation really means that the church, through the action of the Holy Spirit, can participate in Christ's prophetic ministry to the world. The church testifies to Christ but does not really embody in Christ in the way that the Mercersburg theologians meant.

The Lessons of Mercersburg's Mutations

As we have seen, at Lancaster Seminary the Mercersburg heritage was first modified in a liberal direction, and then in a "dialectical" direction, and finally

in a "later Barthian" direction. Each of these reinterpretations claimed to be continuity with the spirit of the original movement, and each maintained that they were faithfully articulating the faith in thought-forms that were intelligible to contemporary culture (as the founding generation would have wanted). In practice, each of these reinterpretations allowed some aspects of the original movement to be highlighted and other aspects of it to be neglected. The liberal reinterpretation emphasized the transmission of the spirituality of Christ to the believer. It captured the original Mercersburg movement's conviction that Christianity does centrally involve the transformation of the Christian's subjectivity. It also aptly rooted this transformation in the impact of the life of Christ upon the believer, and saw this impact as being mediated by the spirituality of the church. However, it failed to do justice to the Mercersburg conviction that the union of God and humanity is an already accomplished objective reality, and that that reality is accessible through the tangible, objectively given practices of the church. In other words, it jeopardized the priority of revelation and the priority of grace. The "dialectical" interpretation of Mercersburg modified the tradition in the opposite direction, stressing the objectivity of Christ apart from and prior to the transformation of the believer's experience. However, the emphasis of God's otherness fostered an inability to appreciate the ways that God is active in such earthly realities as history, the church, and the sacraments. Finally, the "late-Barthian" reinterpretation adequately stressed the reality of the Incarnation and the actuality of the transformation of human nature in Christ, whether anyone responds to that actuality in faith or not.

Moreover, this foregrounding of the exhalation of humanity echoed the central theological concern of Nevin and Gerhart. However, Barth's intense concentration on the all-sufficiency of the salvation accomplished in Christ led to a relative lack of interest in the church's sacramental participation in that reality. To oversimplify, the liberal phase nicely preserved the Mercersburg concern for authentic subjective transformation, the dialectical phase expressed the Mercersburg commitment to the objectivity and priority of God's action, and the Barthian phase captured the Mercersburg devotion to the Incarnation.

Was each one of these theological revisions nothing more than an attempt to restate the central themes of the heritage in a new idiom? Certainly not. It was not the case that each new theology simply told the same old, old story in new words. The story got substantially changed in each retelling. The modifications were not just in the form of articulation but in the very substance. One strategy ignored the objectivity of God's gracious action, another ignored the organic union of humanity and divinity, and the other ignored the sacramental communication of new life in Christ. Each strategy failed to do justice to some essential concern of the Mercersburg movement, and each one failed to produce a type of piety that could genuinely be called the heir of the Mercersburg spirit. The Mercersburg tradition without a focus on the objectivity of the Incarnation and the means of grace is no longer recognizable as the Mercersburg tradition. The Mercersburg tradition without an appreciation of the organic union of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ is no longer recognizable as the Mercersburg tradition.

Finally, the Mercersburg tradition without the sacramental participation in Christ is not recognizable as the Mercersburg tradition. Of course, Richards and Herman may have been willing to admit all this, for the preservation of a tradition was not their central theological aim. They may have protested that there are more important things than the reconceptualizion of a theological heritage.

In light of these failures to preserve all the essential points of a heritage while adapting it to new conceptual environments, should venerable traditions like Mercersburg simply be frozen in time, protected from tampering, in order to preserve their integrity? Must every attempt to reformulate old truths in more relevant ways necessarily end in the truncation and distortion of those truths? Perhaps not. Maybe Richards himself inadvertently pointed to a happier outcome. By the late1930's Richards began to exhibit a tendency to set seemingly contradictory theological trends in dialectical tension with one another, without locating an innocuous middle-of-the-road position. Perhaps he was on to something.

Let us pause and consider how such a mutually enriching conversation based on such a dialectical tension might proceed with these characters. Imagine a hypothetical conversation between Nevin and Gerhart on the one hand, and Barth on the other. Barth would repeatedly announce his primary conviction that in Jesus Christ God has drawn all of humanity into a glorious covenantal relationship. God's purposes have already been achieved and humanity cannot add anything to God's triumphant, already-accomplished work. Barth

would exclaim that the Christian life should be sheer receptivity, gratitude, and joy. And surely Barth would be right. But Nevin might reply that for Barth the saving act is so complete that it tends to dissolve the significance of the progressive appropriation of that victory by human beings. For Barth the church is a witness to what has already been accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; it makes known what is already the case. But, Nevin might object, the church not only bears witness to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, but also participates in that narrative by enacting it liturgically. Through union with Christ the church continually passes from death to new life. Nevin would point out that Barth may have been insufficiently attentive to the ways that the Spirit works in the church and in history, moving the cosmos toward the promised future consummation. Barth failed to account for the phenomenon of Christ-like growth in the earthly lives of communities and individuals; Barth failed to do justice to the reality of sanctification in earthly time. Nevin would suggest, with all due respect for Barth's valuable insights, that by adding a dimension of "participation in Christ" to his theme of "witnessing to Christ," this deficit could be easily corrected. And surely Nevin would be right.

But Barth would have something to say to Nevin and Gerhart. By stressing participation in Christ, they may have inadvertently redirected attention to the human response of faith. Barth would note with some alarm and sadness that they had talked as if the participation in Christ happens partly through our co-operation, for they had described the faith with which the sacraments must be received as if it were partly an act for which humans can

take a great deal of credit. This (and here Barth would emphasize the irony) pushed them in a suspiciously Arminian direction and left them vulnerable to the very same objections they had lodged against the proponents of the "anxious bench." Barth would remind them that the good news is not about what our faith can accomplish but is rather about what God has accomplished. And surely this is right.

The point of this imaginative exercise is to illustrate the way in which the pluriform nature of a tradition as it evolves can be an enriching thing. In this scenario Barth needed to be reminded that our growth in Christ is real, that it actually happens during our earthly lifetime. The Mercersburg theologians needed to be reminded that we should not imagine that any such growth is the fruit of our own prowess in whipping up faith. Both were right in what they affirmed, but neither affirmed the Gospel in its multi-dimensional fullness. Each viewpoint was deficient in some respect. If each party would admit their need for one another's admonitions, then, perhaps, the Berlin-style liberals could enter the conversation and alert all parties to the societal consequences of God's action in Christ.

Perhaps the truth is more likely to emerge through the interaction of contrasting perspectives. Perhaps that is the conviction that informed Schaff's dialectical reconstruction of Christian history. Perhaps that is the reason why our canon has four very different gospels rather than one. After all, the theological enterprise is a response to God's action, an invitation to witness to the unprecedented thing that God has done. Surely the multi-faceted significance of the fact that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us cannot be exhausted through

any one theological idiom or perspective. The mistake of each of these modifications of the Mercersburg heritage (and perhaps of the Mercersburg heritage itself) may have been the impulse to develop a comprehensive theological system that ruled out certain plausible perspectives. Maybe our appreciation of the enfleshment of the Word will become more profound when Berlin interacts with Basel, and when both interact with Mercersburg.

"Jesus Out in Public"

Anne T. Thayer
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at Lancaster Theological Seminary
Luke 7:36-8:3, June 8, 2010
Mercersburg Convocation, Santee Chapel

What a vivid story our gospel lesson provides for us today! We can see it happen in our mind's eye. Jesus at dinner, a woman making a scene, a little parable told to catch the listener, guests muttering, Jesus doing itinerant ministry with an unexpected group of followers. As I've been considering this story in light of our convocation theme of evangelism, what has struck me particularly is that Jesus is out in public. He's teaching; he's healing; he's eating; he's forgiving; he's mingling; he's conversing. And, he's attracting attention.

Evangelism, it seems to me, is often a matter of our helping get Jesus out in public so that people will hear his message, seek him out, invite him to dinner, invite their friends over to meet him, and then find forgiveness, find new ways of living, be overwhelmed with love. Luke describes Jesus' ministry as "proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God." What does this look like? In chapter 7, Luke mentions the blind receiving their sight, lame walking, lepers being cleansed, deaf hearing, the dead and those near death being raised, the poor having good news preached to them. In our pericope, Jesus shares table fellowship, teaches, forgives sin, and goes on to seek out other people. Evangelism here is

broader than a specific practice. It is what happens when folk come into contact with Jesus.

I bet a number of you have read CS Lewis's classic tale, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* about children from our world who enter a very different world through a magical wardrobe. They find themselves caught up in the struggle between good and evil and finding their own destinies in the process. Perhaps you remember the children's reaction the first time they hear the name Alsan, the name of the lion who is the Jesus character in the story. "At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump in his inside. Edmund (who had already joined forces with the evil White Witch by succumbing to a temptation to eat candy) felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. (He will become a leader in battle before long.) Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer." (The girls will soon love Aslan deeply and offer him companionship in his hour of trial.) (Lewis 65) Thus the children have different reactions to Aslan based on their previous experiences and what they'll be called to do.

We see much the same in our text this morning. When people come into contact with Jesus they have different reactions. Here, the woman responds to Jesus in an extravagant way. She has encountered him somewhere or somehow before. She seeks him out to anoint him with perfume. Her love overflows in extravagant hospitality offered in a stranger's house. Simon, the host, on the other

hand, is more ambiguous in his response. He seems to be interested in Jesus enough to invite him to dinner to meet some of his friends. But then when Jesus gets there, Simon is stingy with his hospitality and is pretty clearly suspicious of Jesus' identity as a prophet. Even so, he listens and "gets" the thrust of Jesus' parable of the forgiven debtors. Simon's other dinner guests are suspicious too, muttering among themselves about Jesus' behavior. At the end of the pericope, yet another response comes from the women who have decided to follow Jesus and give him financial support.

Whenever Jesus gets out in public he will provoke different responses. Evangelism is messy. There will not be an easy correlation between our efforts and the responses generated. This should not surprise us. Sometimes it will be, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep" (Luke 7:32). Sometimes it will be, "Jesus will be at your house for dinner tonight? I'll be there and I'll bring a gift!!" Sometimes it will be, "Who does he think he is? How can he say that to me? How can he say that to her?" Sometimes it might be, "Jesus, let me follow you. I have deep pockets and am willing to join right in." Following Luke's lead, the goal is to get the focus on Jesus – proclaim and bring the good news – and let Jesus provoke the reactions.

This story also helps us to see that wherever Jesus is, there will be sinners. Who are the sinners in this story? The most obvious is the woman who had the reputation for being a sinner. We don't know what her sin was – maybe she was a prostitute (a traditional assumption), maybe she was a seller in the market with a reputation for

overcharging her customers, maybe she was vicious in what she said about others, maybe there were rumors surrounding the untimely death of her first husband, maybe she was insufferably arrogant, maybe she owed a debt she was unwilling to pay. We don't know. But we do know that she had a reputation as a sinner in her town, and that by the time she's at Jesus feet she knows that her sin has been forgiven and she is moved to love. The next sinner in this story is Simon, the Pharisee. His visible sin here is rudeness, not treating a guest with proper hospitality. When Jesus arrived, he was not greeted with a kiss, given water to wash his feet, or anointed with oil, all of which should have been granted to a guest teacher. We learn that this poor hospitality is a symptom of his deep failure to love. He has led a pretty righteous life, he doesn't sense himself as needing much in the way of forgiveness and so seems to expect others to live up to his standards. He has plenty of observable righteousness, but is stingy when it comes to love, and so is rejecting God's purpose for himself.

What do we need to learn here? If we are going to be serious about evangelism, we need to expect to meet sinners, starting with ourselves. Like Simon, we are likely to find that when we invite Jesus in, we learn more and more deeply that we ourselves are sinners. Remember Peter who felt brave at the name of Aslan? When he meets Aslan face to face, he is moved to admit his part in his brother Edmund's treachery. He says, "That was partly my fault, Aslan. I was angry with him and I think that helped him to go wrong." (Lewis 124) When we go public with Jesus, we'll find ourselves being encountered by Jesus in public as well. This may not be fun, but it is vital

as Jesus is the true prophet who knows just what kind of people we are.

And evangelism brings us into the company of other sinners. If we invite Jesus in, he'll bring sinners in too. How are we going to respond to them? At least some of them won't be well-schooled in the ways of church and, like the very demonstrative woman in our story, will countervene the social conventions that all of our congregations have. We have to speak Jesus' words of forgiveness with great boldness. We need to hear them for ourselves, we need to hear them for others. We need to hear them in the depths of our persons. When forgiveness is deeply received, there is often an exuberance to the love shown in return. For as Lee reminded us yesterday, we are made to respond to Jesus in love. Such extravagant love may be especially visible in new believers, but it can also be awakened in old believers and turn them to new forms of spiritual seeking and service. Either way, this needs to be welcomed and blessed, nourished and guided; it needs to be grafted in to the vine of the church to the make it ever more fruitful.

Note what Jesus says to the woman after he declares that her sins are forgiven. "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Now, where is she to go? It is clear that at least some of the inhabitants of her town would not readily let her be in peace. Noting the pathos here, Fred Craddock asserts that this sinner needs a "community of forgiven and forgiving sinners. The story screams the need for a church, not just any church but one that says, 'You are welcome here.'" This is a critical point for us, for those who such a strong sense of the importance of the church in the life of one embracing and being embraced

by Christ's new life. How much forgiveness can we tolerate? What kinds of forgiven sin are we willing to deal with? How deeply will we remember what we ourselves have been forgiven? Will we offer the healing that is needed? What gifts do we have to bring to bear?

Returning to Narnia for a moment, after Aslan has given his life for Edmund, releasing him from the power of the White Witch and restoring him to his siblings, a dreadful battle ensues. Edmund is left seriously wounded. Lucy, the youngest, had early on in Narnia been given a small flask of a healing cordial as a gift. She is called upon to use it now, to restore her brother to full life and strength. Those of us with Mercersberg-tuned ears are likely to hone in on the means of grace, especially the life-giving sacraments as a key gift we have to offer forgiven sinners in need of strength and healing.

But before we settle down here with these good and potent gifts, we need to hear something else. Lucy wants to stay with Edmund after giving him the cordial. But Aslan speaks sternly to her, "Daughter of Eve, others also are at the point of death. Must more people die for Edmund?" A few forgiven sinners and we might be tempted to stay focused on them. But our pericope, like Aslan, reminds us that Jesus' public ministry keeps pressing on.

Soon after this dramatic dinner at Simon's home, Jesus is on the road, "proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God." But note too that his followers travel with him. Men like Peter, James and John. Women like Mary, Joanna and Susanna. These women are described as having been healed of various diseases. There is no particular reason to think they had

previous reputations as sinners, like the woman we met in Simon's house. Even so, it is clear that they are putting their money, power and social position at risk in what they are doing. Women leaving home to travel with a teacher would have been very unconventional, perhaps even more shocking than the behavior of the woman weeping at Jesus' feet and letting down her hair. Indeed the Roman historian Josephus blames the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Emperor Claudius (an event that Luke mentions in Acts 18) on a Jewish teacher defrauding a prominent Roman woman. (Tiede 165) But Jesus does not disparage Mary, Joanna or Susanna for being women or because they are wealthy or come from prominent social locations. Rather, he welcomes them and puts the gifts they bring to use.

When Jesus gets out in public, he gains followers that we, given our culture and traditions, might not expect. Who knows who our evangelism will bring into the fellowship of Christ? But those drawn to Jesus, finding healing and forgiveness in him, and wanting to follow him will have gifts to be embraced and put to use. Not only do those drawn in need to have their love and gifts affirmed, the whole church needs their gifts to continue to do its work with ongoing vigor, health and faith.

If indeed evangelism is what happens when Jesus gets out in public, it will be messy and it will be joyful. Some will see only scandal; some will see the salvation of God coming in power. Evangelism will challenge us and it will renew us. Jesus will help us church folk to see ourselves anew as sinners, be forgiven and so grow in love. Jesus will draw others, sinful and sick, to himself and grant them forgiveness and healing. They too will

become lovers of God. We're called upon to use our gifts to help Jesus be visible, to meet people. We're called upon to offer great hospitality, to incorporate newcomers into our community, to discover their gifts and help them put these gifts at Jesus' disposal. Evangelism, it seems to me, is a matter of our helping get Jesus out in public, of enabling encounters between Jesus and others, "proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God." May this convocation empower us toward that end. Amen.

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BOOK REVIEW

Beyond Smells and Bells: The Wonder and Power of Christian Liturgy

By Mark Galli
Paraclete Press, 2008. 143 pages. USA $16.95
ISBN: 978-1-55625-521-1

Reviewed by Kenneth Aldrich,
Retired Episcopal priest
Chair of the Mercersburg Society's Membership Committee.

Mark Galli, managing editor of Christianity Today, is one of the increasing number of Evangelicals who, in the course of their faith pilgrimage, have rediscovered the beauty and sanctifying grace inherent in liturgical worship. Since Galli embraced liturgical worship some thirty years ago, he has much to share regarding its impact on his life and Christian growth; hence this little book - A Reasoned Introduction to What Liturgy Is All About. It serves most admirably as an educational tool for those of us already enjoying traditional Christian worship by furnishing us with a fuller understanding and appreciation of what we are experiencing. Additionally, it can function as a palatable antidote to residual, ingrained protestant prejudices against formal sacramental worship. (The author's credentials, as one who both affirms the Reformation and espouses Reformed theology, tend to allay the suspicions of those who might ordinarily shy away from anything that smacks of "high church" propaganda.)

While the book's style is articulate and intellectually appealing, make no mistake: Beyond Smells and Bells, as the tongue-in-cheek title suggests, is hardly redolent of the work of Dom Gregory Dix or other learned liturgists. It is decidedly anecdotal rather than academic since the author is, after all, a journalist and not an academician.

Thus, if you are already a scholar and/or pastor who is well versed in liturgical Wissenschaft, do not expect to learn any particularly new facts about the subject (although you may indeed learn something new in terms of useful apologetics.) What this volume does do, however, is to make its subject readily accessible to the person in the pew in a manner both engaging and revelatory. It is at once reader friendly, warm and intimate while being challenging, ~~persuasive~~ persuasive and edifying to the Christian seeker.

In addition to its fourteen short but informative chapters, Beyond Smells and Bells comes replete with appendices treating the shape of the liturgy, describing the Christian year and comparing outlines of the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian Liturgies.

The U.C.C. liturgy is not included. ☹ (This omission is probably explained by the author's apparent unfamiliarity with the rich worship tradition of the Evangelical and Reformed component thereof.) Although Galli does not seem to have studied the Mercersburg

corpus, he does arrive at conclusions in total conformity with Mercersburg principles; and I can, therefore, recommend his book to our membership unreservedly.

The author takes the reader on a personal journey through many facets of liturgical form and function and relates them to Christian life and work in terms of a highly practical spirituality. It is an ambitious task which Galli, in general, performed rather well. I do, however, have some reservations about the way he carried it out. For example, I believe undue emphasis and a disproportionate share of quotations is allotted to the 1978 Episcopal liturgy, thereby shortchanging somewhat all of the others. It is particularly regrettable that he begged off dealing in depth with the Eastern Churches, for we have so much to learn from them. Nevertheless, the author has covered all the bases of the Western tradition quite adequately and laid a sound foundation for those interested in pursuing the subject further.

If you have been looking for a good book to use in an adult study group dealing with worship and related topics such as sacramental theology and the psychology of Christian spirituality, Beyond Smells and Bells fills the bill perfectly.

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