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PHILIP SCHAFF & JOHN HUGHES:  
IMMIGRANT ROMANTIC VISIONS OF  
AN AMERICAN CATHOLICITY

Drew Denton

REMEMBERING DONALD BLOESCH

Gabriel Fackre

A TRINITY SUNDAY SERMON

*"Resonating With God"*

John Miller

BOOK REVIEW

F. Christopher Anderson...

*Incarnation and Sacrament:*

*The Eucharistic Controversy between*

*Charles Hodge and John Williamson Nevin*

by Jonathan G. Bonoma

Philip Schaff

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The Mercersburg Society has been formed to uphold the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ, Evangelical, Reformed, Catholic, Apostolic, organic, developmental and connectional. It affirms the ecumenical Creeds as witnesses to its faith and the Eucharist as the liturgical act from which all other acts of worship and service emanate.

The Society pursues contemporary theology in the Church and the world within the context of Mercersburg Theology. In effecting its purpose the Society provides opportunities for fellowship and study for persons interested in Mercersburg Theology, sponsors and annual convocation, engages in the publication of articles and books, stimulates research and correspondence among scholars on topics of theology, liturgy, the Sacraments and ecumenism.

The **New Mercersburg Review** is designed to publish the proceedings of the annual convocation as well as other articles on the subjects pertinent to the aims and interests of the Society.

## From the Editor

F. Christopher Anderson

The major article for this issue is by Drew Denton. He is a graduate student at Candler School of Theology, Emory University. He calls himself "an aspiring scholar of American religious history." The article takes many of us in a new direction. The comparison between the great Mercersburg scholar, Philip Schaff, and Archbishop John Hughes of New York is enlightening. It seeks to show us how two immigrants developed visions that were both American and catholic though one was a Protestant and the other was a Roman Catholic! We hope to hear more from Drew Denton in the future. This work of history gives us a bigger picture of the nineteenth century while making us think of the issues we see in immigration and the church in the twenty-first century. It is also wonderful to emphasize Schaff since we often emphasize Nevin.

Our own Gabriel Fackre takes time to give us a personal remembrance of Donald Bloesch. We are thankful that this great scholar was ordained, as was Fackre, in the Evangelical and Reformed Church in the 1950's.

Rev. John Miller presents us with a Trinity Sunday sermon. In a sense it is a meditation on one wonderful illustration that opens up certain texts and the doctrine of the Trinity.

I review a book that I think could be very helpful for introducing Mercersburg Theology to those who are unaware of the distinctive insights of John Williamson Nevin.

The Spring 2011 issue of the New Mercersburg Review is on track to come quite early in the new year. This is because the main article in that issue was presented to us at the 2010 Mercersburg Convocation by Lee Barrett. The theme that he introduced will be further explored at the 2011 Convocation. It will be worth enjoying and it will be coming to you soon.

# PHILIP SCHAFF & JOHN HUGHES: IMMIGRANT ROMANTIC VISIONS OF AN AMERICAN CATHOLICITY

Drew Denton  
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## INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 1841, while American expansionists were raising the standard of Protestant civilization and employing the triumphalist rhetoric soon to be sloganized for posterity as "Manifest Destiny," the German philosopher F.W.J. Schelling was projecting his own vision of the Christian future. "In Germany the fate of Christianity will be decided," he asserted, capturing the confidence of an era of prodigious intellectual accomplishment in his country.<sup>1</sup> The bridge between these competing claims for national custodianship of the Christian future was provided by Philip Schaff, one of Schelling's students, who in 1844 immigrated to the United States to begin the career that would make him that country's preeminent church historian. During his years at Mercersburg Seminary, Schaff would synthesize two strong senses of destiny – that instilled in him in Germany and that awaiting him in America – into a vision of an "American Germany" that would guide church history toward its consummation.

The destiny that had become so manifest in the United States by the time of Schaff's arrival was often promoted as a prerogative of Protestantism. The providential advance of republican government was, in the prevailing rhetoric of the era, directly linked to the demise of "popery," a heresy politically menacing as it was religiously perverse. By mid-century, however, this special vocation of American Protestantism was being challenged by a competing immigrant identity more forceful even than Schaff's – namely, the Irish Catholicism entrenching itself in

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Klaus Penzel, introduction to *Philip Schaff: Historian and Ambassador of the Universal Church; Selected Writings* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1991), xxi.

the cities of the East Coast. So influential was this demographic development that Bishop John Lancaster Spalding could later conclude that "the Irish race is the providential instrument through which God has wrought this marvelous revival [of Catholicism] in...America."<sup>2</sup> The bridge between these two exaggerated senses of divine mission – the "Native American" spread of republicanism and the Irish Catholicization of America – was quite practically embodied in the work of John Hughes, the Irish immigrant whose tenure as Archbishop of New York coincided almost perfectly with Schaff's years at Mercersburg. Throughout his public career, Hughes championed Catholic loyalty to American political principles while at the same time preserving a distinct and even subversive sense of Catholic history and destiny in the New World.

Philip Schaff and John Hughes – the refined German Reformed scholar and the hard-nosed Irish Catholic clergyman – though seemingly a dissimilar pair, stand in a similarly ambiguous relationship to the spirit of mid-nineteenth century America. Both became enthusiastic citizens of their adopted nation, yet often remained at odds with prevailing conceptions of America's religious identity. My contention in this paper is that these two prominent churchmen shared unconventional views of America's role in history because of both their foreign roots and their romantic conceptions of the church. As immigrants, they came to embrace limited notions of America's unique promise for church and world history while validating these notions on distinctly non-American premises. As romantics, they placed the United States at the vanguard of the Christian future, while at the same time setting it in continuity with the medieval past, thereby challenging the preponderant dismissal of pre-Protestant history in American religious culture. Ultimately, both scandalized prevalent churchly conceptions by proposing that America's greatest promise was the promise of a renewed *catholicity*. For Schaff, America would prove instrumental in the emergence of "Evangelical Catholicism," the natural end toward which all of church history – pre and post-Reformation – progressed. Hughes, meanwhile, found in America

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: the Saints and Sinners who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Times Books, 1997), 53.



the promise of a return to the glories of pre-Reformation Christendom by tracing the country's political institutions and cultural identity to medieval Catholic roots.

#### IMMIGRANT IDENTITIES

In order to understand the interpretations of history set forth by Schaff and Hughes, we must first get a sense of the immigrant identities that informed their work. Both immigrated to America as young men. Both initially evinced ambivalent feelings toward their new home but eventually became such thorough Americans that they were sought out as ambassadors of their adopted nation. Most importantly, both lived and worked in immigrant communities which shaped their unconventional conceptions of America's role in the historical development of Christianity.

Philip Schaff was Swiss by birth, and late in life he would recall his youth in democratic Switzerland as a preparation for his Americanization.<sup>3</sup> From the age of fifteen, however, he lived primarily in Germany, and it was in Germany that his spiritual and intellectual identities were forged, the former at a pietist boys' academy in Württemberg, and the latter at the universities of Tübingen, Halle, and – most significantly – Berlin, where the long shadows of Schleiermacher, Hegel, and Schlegel were freshly cast. His seven years of immersion in a legendarily fecund German academy brought him under the tutelage of such luminaries as Baur, Müller, Schelling, and Neander, filling him with a thrilling sense of participation in what he later described as the most dynamic theological movement since the Reformation.<sup>4</sup> Thus it is not surprising that, when offered the chance to move from his promising position in Berlin to the two-man faculty of a remote German Reformed seminary at the western frontier of America, Schaff did not accept without reluctance.

The twenty-five year old Schaff did accept the invitation, styling himself “a missionary of science” to transplanted German

<sup>3</sup> George H. Shriver, *Philip Schaff: Christian Scholar and Ecumenical Prophet; Centennial Biography for the American Society of Church History* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Schaff, *What is Church History? A Vindication of the Idea of Historical Development* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1846), 13.

Christians who were, in the dark wilds of America, estranged from the vitality of German theology.<sup>5</sup> From Berlin he imagined the United States – that yet unproven experiment in religious entrepreneurship – to be fraught with the dangers of sectarianism, rationalism, and Roman Catholic opportunism.<sup>6</sup> When he first arrived in Mercersburg, therefore, Schaff understood his role to be, at least in part, that of a protector, defending the immigrant religious community from certain dangerous aspects of assimilation. This wariness of America runs as an undercurrent throughout his famous first lecture, *The Principle of Protestantism*, particularly in its denunciation of sectarianism.<sup>7</sup> Klaus Penzel has described this address, delivered only two months after Schaff's arrival in Mercersburg, as illustrative of his feelings of “immigrant alienation.”<sup>8</sup> Schaff delivered *The Principle of Protestantism* in German, and throughout his first year of teaching at Mercersburg, he staunchly opposed the use of English in replacement of the “uncommonly rich and philosophical” German tongue.<sup>9</sup>

The defensiveness and alienation of the newly immigrated Schaff dissipated quickly. In 1845 he married an American woman of only distant German ancestry and began speaking English in his home. By the end of the decade, he was lecturing exclusively in English, convinced that it was the civil and ecclesial language of the

<sup>5</sup> See Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism*, ed. Bard Thompson and George H. Bricker, trans. John W. Nevin, Lancaster Series on the Mercersburg Theology 1 (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1964), 54.

<sup>6</sup> In 1843, explaining his decision to go to Mercersburg, Schaff wrote that “The brethren who have emigrated abroad... unless help be soon extended to them, are in danger of sinking into irreligion or of falling into the Roman Catholic Church, which is very active on the other side of the ocean, or of being swallowed up by the numberless sects.” Quoted in Perry Miller, introduction to *America: A Sketch of Its Political, Social, and Religious Character*, by Philip Schaff (New York: C. Scribner, 1855; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), xvii.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Schaff, *Principle of Protestantism*, 141 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Penzel, “Philip Schaff: A Centennial Appraisal,” *Church History* 59, no. 2 (June 1990): 213.

<sup>9</sup> Schaff, *What is Church History*, 83.

world's future.<sup>10</sup> Schaff's about-face on the language question was symptomatic of a generally increased comfort with American culture. Returning to Germany in 1854, he delivered a series of lectures on America, the tone of which differs remarkably from that of *The Principle of Protestantism*. Even America's sect system he had now come to view not as an unqualified evil but as "the necessary transition to a far higher and better condition" and, moreover, a "practical application of the universal priesthood and kingship of Christians."<sup>11</sup> Within his first decade at Mercersburg, Schaff had transitioned from a circumspect missionary of the German academy to an ambassador and apologist for American culture.

John Hughes, meanwhile, had emigrated from the Old World to the Pennsylvania frontier – settling in the town of Chambersburg, only fifteen miles from Mercersburg – at the age of twenty, in 1817. Unlike Schaff, however, Hughes and his family had not abandoned a happy life in their homeland. As tenant farmers in the predominately Protestant county of Ulster in Northern Ireland, the Hughes family had felt especially strongly the degradation imposed upon Irish Catholics under British rule. "For five days I was on a social and civil equality with the most favored subjects of the British empire," Hughes recalled of his childhood. "These five days would be the interval between my birth and my baptism."<sup>12</sup> Shaped by this experience of religious repression, Hughes arrived in the New World with the admiration of American freedom and the suspicion of Protestant civil power that would remain with him throughout his life. His religious identity was, like Schaff's, distinctly tied to his nationality; though in contrast to Schaff, Hughes welcomed America's religiously eclectic climate as a boon to this identity rather than a threat to it.

Hughes's rise to the priesthood reads like an early American fable of self-determination: initially refused entrance to Mount St.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen R. Graham, *Cosmos in the Chaos: Philip Schaff's Interpretation of Nineteenth-Century American Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1995), 184-5.

<sup>11</sup> Schaff, *America*, 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> John R. G. Hassard, *Life of the Most Reverend John Hughes, D.D., First Archbishop of New York* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1866), 18.

Mary's seminary, he labored in the school's gardens and privately studied Latin until he was granted admission. For six years he lived serenely in this Catholic enclave of rural Maryland, studying under the French emigrants John Dubois and Simon Bruté, and practicing his religion without harassment. But as fulfilling as these early years in America were, Hughes exhibits only a qualified patriotism toward his new country in the poetry that he wrote as a seminarian. In a poem written for the Fourth of July, he extols the freedoms of "Columbia" as a sign of hope to Ireland: "Poor Erin, .../Columbia invites thee to rise and be free,/ Till she call thee her sister, thou gem of the sea."<sup>13</sup> In another poem, however, he exposes the hypocritical underside of America, taking the perspective of an African slave who praises Columbia's liberties with bitter irony.<sup>14</sup> Thus, while Hughes welcomed the emancipation that America extended to Irish Catholics, he did not uncritically accept any notions of a universal American philanthropy.

Hughes would throughout his career seek an elusive equilibrium between Americanization and self-assertion among Irish Catholics. As Bishop of New York, he "always encouraged assimilation while maintaining the value of particularly positive national qualities."<sup>15</sup> Rather than allow his largely Irish diocese to be ghettoized – whether by itself or by others – Hughes fought tirelessly to ensure that his parishioners recognized themselves, and were recognized by others, as American citizens. In the process he himself became such an unquestionable patriot that presidents from Polk to Lincoln used him as a liaison to American Catholics. Yet "no one could accuse Bishop Hughes of forgetting the land of his birth"<sup>16</sup>; the well-being of Ireland was never far from his mind or his pulpit.

Neither Schaff nor Hughes abandoned his native identity in the process of Americanization; nor did either lose the integrity of

<sup>13</sup> Hassard, 44.

<sup>14</sup> "Hail Columbia, happy land!/ Where freedom waves her golden wand,/ Where equal justice reigns./ But ah! Columbia great and free/ Has not a boon for mine and me,/ But slavery and chains." Quoted in Hassard, 42-3. As Hassard notes, "Those acquainted with the political sentiments of the archbishop in the prime and evening of his life will hardly be prepared for the piece."

<sup>15</sup> Connor, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Hassard, 311.

his Old World religious consciousness by embracing America's religious eclecticism. The ecclesial histories developed by each, therefore, retained continuity with the European past even as they embraced the uniquely American future. Unlike their "native" contemporaries – whose "indigenous passions" of anti-Catholicism and revivalism generally induced an ahistorical fear of the transatlantic, pre-Puritan past<sup>17</sup> – Schaff and Hughes interpreted 19<sup>th</sup>-century America by reaching deep into the Christian past, giving special attention to the roots of the immigrant communities that they served. Thus, as we will see, Schaff envisioned the organism of Christian history as being, in its most immanent manifestation, American of body and Germanic of soul, just like his Mercersburg audience; Hughes, meanwhile, encouraged both American nationalization and Catholic self-assertion within his immigrant church by tracing America's national identity to the ideals of a Catholic Christendom that were most perfectly realized in medieval Ireland. In this way, both married a particular immigrant perspective to essentially romantic views of history.

#### ROMANTICISM AND THE INCARNATIONAL VIEW OF HISTORY

Patrick Carey has characterized mid-nineteenth century Catholicism as having two primary expressions in America: the immigrant church and the romantic church.<sup>18</sup> A similar though less emphatic claim could perhaps be made for the German Protestant churches of the era, the romantic element being best embodied by Schaff's colleague at Mercersburg, John Williamson Nevin.<sup>19</sup> If so, both Schaff and Hughes may be regarded as mediating figures between the immigrant and Romantic impulses of their respective churches, embodying characteristics of both and fusing them into singularly dynamic personas.

Though romanticism resists clear and comprehensive definition, its Christian manifestations in the early nineteenth

<sup>17</sup> Miller, xx.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 29.

<sup>19</sup> For the classic account of the romantic foundations of Nevin's work at Mercersburg, see James Hastings Nichols, *Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 37ff.

century were united by a common quest to discern God's presence in the historical identity and integrity of the church. The Oxford Movement in England, German Lutheran Confessionalism, and Prussian High-Orthodoxy were all expressions of a conservative romanticism which rendered Protestant ecclesiology in terms of apostolic authority, historical continuity, and doctrinal stability. The Mercersburg theologians, Schaff and Nevin, served as the primary American channel of this theological current.<sup>20</sup> Europe's vigorous Catholic romanticism – promoted by such figures as Chateaubriand and de Maistre in France, Möhler and Schlegel in Germany, and John Henry Newman in England – looked to the Roman Church as a source of social cohesion and epistemological security, often evoking a nostalgia for the political stability and aesthetic superiority of the Middle Ages. As Carey notes, John Hughes became one of the foremost American promulgators of a romantic apologetic in that he "accentuated the historical and cultural effects of Catholicism upon the development of Western civilization."<sup>21</sup> The romanticism shared by Schaff and Hughes regarded the church as a living reality, animated by the divine presence in all periods of its history and all aspects of its work.

Both Schaff and Hughes grounded their romantic views of history in the incarnation of Christ. Hughes called the doctrine of the incarnation "the great idea of the great lever which Christianity presented for the elevation of the human race," and he interpreted the history of civilization as an index of the application of this elevating idea.<sup>22</sup> For Hughes, the reality of humanity's union with God through Christ, as mediated by the Church, served as an explanation for the progressively humane laws and attitudes of Western culture. The Church had eliminated or ameliorated the brutalities allowed by Roman law, the barbarism of the Gothic invaders, the callousness of feudal despots, and the cruelties of capitalist overlords, thereby advancing the "shield of humanity

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Carey, "American Catholic Romanticism," *Catholic Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (October 1988): 595.

<sup>22</sup> *The Complete of the Most Rev. John Hughes, Archbishop of New York: Comprising his Sermons, Letters, Lectures, Speeches, etc.*, ed. Lawrence Kehoe (New York: Lawrence Kehoe, 1864), I: 354.



exalted in the person of Christ by union with the Deity itself."<sup>23</sup> The Protestant Reformation, by fracturing the church's authority and promoting individualistic self-interest, had slowed but not thwarted the progress of the incarnational ideal in the world.

Philip Schaff's incarnational vision of history stood midway between Hegelian idealism – as Christologically enhanced by Neander – and the sacramentalism of Prussian High-Churchmen such as Hengstenberg.<sup>24</sup> Wanting to affirm both ideal development and historical objectivity, Schaff conceived of the church as a "theanthropic continuation of Christ's life."<sup>25</sup> Thus, "all history since Christ finds its central movement in the development of the divine principle of life, which he has introduced to human nature, and which is destined gradually to take all up into its own element, as revealed in his person."<sup>26</sup> The Body of Christ is therefore both the origin and the *telos* of the church. Though objectively complete and unchangeable, it can be subjectively actualized only through the church's progressive organic development in the world.<sup>27</sup>

Schaff's notion of organic development sets his incarnational romanticism slightly at odds with Hughes's. According to Schaff's scheme, the church – like any other living organism – experiences ascending stages of maturity, each new stage arising from a conflict within the previous stage, abolishing its bad or obsolete qualities and preserving and elevating its good. Church history thus unfolds dialectically, the truth ever advancing along a mediating position between conflicting extremes.<sup>28</sup> Hughes, on the other hand, acknowledged a progressive development of civilization and secular history but maintained that the church always embodied the changeless identity of Christ in the world. Hughes agreed that history advances through conflict; the conflict, however, occurs not *within* the church but between the

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 362.

<sup>24</sup> See Shriver, 7-8; also Penzel, "Philip Schaff: A Centennial Appraisal,"

211. <sup>25</sup> Penzel, "The Reformation Goes West: the Notion of Historical Development in the Thought of Philip Schaff," *Journal of Religion* 62, no. 3 (July 1982): 225.

<sup>26</sup> Schaff, *What is Church History?*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 93.

church and the world, the former ever transforming the latter and bringing it into conformity with its incarnational identity. Like many Catholic romantics, Hughes believed that the apex of such transformation had occurred in medieval Europe, and it was the Middle Ages that provided the template for his interpretation of America's promise of a free civilization.

In outlining the American church's continuity with European history, Schaff and Hughes drew upon their romantic impulses as well as their immigrant identities. Having identified these two influences on their historical perspectives, we will now examine how each placed America within the scope of their incarnational vision of the church, Schaff by interpreting America as the site of the next great stage in the Body of Christ's development, Hughes by seeing it as an especially promising compliance with the civil humanity embodied in the incarnational church.

#### PHILIP SCHAFF AND THE IDEA OF AN AMERICAN GERMANY

When outlining the course of church history, Philip Schaff adopted a motif commonly used to reinforce the American Protestant sense of mission and destiny: the belief that the vanguard of Christian civilization advances, as a rule, from east to west. Though he employed the idea cautiously – aware that many Americans had distorted it into "extravagant notions" of divine instrumentality – Schaff accepted the basic premise and oriented his theory of organic development in a westward direction.<sup>29</sup> The center of the church's life had moved west from its birthplace in Jerusalem to Greece; then to Rome and, during the Reformation, to Germany; then further west to England and finally across the Atlantic to America, which would serve as "the main theatre of world and church history in times to come."<sup>30</sup>

Unlike popular proponents of westward progression, however, Schaff interpreted America's unique position not as a radical liberation from the European past but as a natural fulfillment of it. As an immigrant and a romantic he took a rather

<sup>29</sup> Schaff, *America*, 85.

<sup>30</sup> *What is Church History?*, 111-3.

unconventional approach to this convention of American optimism. The distinctiveness of his evaluation of America's function in Christian history is particularly evident in three ways: first, its historical framework is not anti-Catholic, as evidenced by its relatively sympathetic evaluation of the pre-Reformation church; second, it is Germano-centric, grafting America's destiny onto the spiritual mission of the German people; and third, it envisions the end of Christian history and American genius not as the triumph of Protestantism but as the establishment of a new catholicity uniting Roman and Reformation churches.

From his earliest days at Mercersburg, Schaff's view of medieval Catholicism provoked controversy within his Protestant community. Dispelling the standard characterization of pre-Reformation Christendom as the corrupt and faithless regime of an autocratic Papacy, Schaff affirmed that "the Roman Catholic Church as such, during that age, was, by no means, the great Apostasy or kingdom of Antichrist, but the bearer of true Christianity, with its sacred canon and saving ordinances, the mother of the Romanic and Germanic nations, and of the whole modern European civilization."<sup>31</sup> Even more scandalous was Schaff's assertion in *The Principle of Protestantism* that "the Reformation is the legitimate offspring, the greatest act of the Catholic Church." Though intended to extol Protestantism as the most genuine expression of historic Christianity, Schaff's validation of medieval religion as the spiritual forebear of Reformation piety shocked his audience.<sup>32</sup> He elaborates the shortcomings of the pre-Reformation church in typical Protestant fashion, but he traces these

<sup>31</sup> Schaff, "German Theology and the Church Question," in *Philip Schaff: Historian and Ambassador of the Universal Church; Selected Writings*, 96.

<sup>32</sup> Indeed, because so much of *The Principle of Protestantism* seems uncomfortably anti-Catholic by today's standards, it is hard to grasp the degree of anti-Catholicism which stirred its denunciation as Papist or Puseyite. Schaff's invectives against Rome in this address – for instance, describing papal supremacy as "an artful, cunning policy, disguised beneath a show of urbanity, the Jesuitic maxim of the end sanctifying the means, and a heartless disregard to both national and individual rights...taking up all the elements of the world's corruption into its own constitution" – are exceptional and perhaps indicative of his "immigrant alienation." The bulk of his Mercersburg work is, while still unapologetically Protestant, more charitable toward Rome – and thus even more threatening to Protestant caricatures.

shortcomings to immaturity rather than apostasy. Medieval Christianity stood in the same relationship to the evangelical Reform as did the religion of the Old Testament to the church of the New, laying the orderly legal foundation from which a more highly developed, "manly" expression of faith could eventually arise. Thus medieval Catholicism was, in Schaff's view, a necessary and beneficial stage in the development of Christianity, providing authority and discipline for the infant nations emerging from the Roman ruins, "till such time as they might be ripe for a fuller appropriation of the evangelical principle."<sup>33</sup>

Schaff labels this epoch of church history the era of "Romano-Germanic Catholicism," for it was in this era that the German people began to assume a special role in the evolution of Christianity.<sup>34</sup> Once baptized and civilized by the disciplinarian church of Rome, the Germanic nations of medieval Europe began to cultivate a deeper inner appreciation of Christianity than their teachers. Schaff traces this special propensity for interiorizing Christian truth to the natural character of the Germanic people, who "from the beginning," long before their conversion, had evinced a "predominant tendency toward the world of thought and feeling" and a "love of truth" conducive to Christianity.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Schaff suggests that the Germans had been appointed, as if by "prophetic preparation" for the acceptance of the faith.<sup>36</sup> Their natural disposition to inward things became the means by which the internal forms of Christian faith began to assert themselves against the external, legalistic forms of the Roman church. This German-Roman conflict, subtly festering throughout the later middle ages, eventually ripened into the Protestant Reformation.

<sup>33</sup> *Principle of Protestantism*, 71.

<sup>34</sup> See Schaff, *History of the Apostolic Church: With a General Introduction to Church History*, trans. Edward Yeomans (New York: Scribner, 1853), 36-7.

<sup>35</sup> *Principle of Protestantism*, 63; see also 142. In *America*, Schaff demonstrates that a decade of American assimilation had not weakened his confidence in the German people's natural proclivities to intellectual robustness and Christian piety. For example, he describes respect for the female sex as an "old Germanic trait, celebrated so early as by Tacitus," but finding its fullest expression under the influence of Christianity (55).

<sup>36</sup> *Principle of Protestantism*, 62.

The Reformation, which Schaff considered the "center of gravity" of church history,<sup>37</sup> was a gift of German culture to the world.<sup>38</sup> Through it the German people fulfilled the highest aspirations of medieval Catholicism and ushered both the church and Christian civilization into a new era of spiritual freedom and maturity. Schaff did not believe, however, that the Reformation marked the end of the Germans' special service to the church. Protestantism, like every positive development, had produced its own "diseases," of which rationalism and sectarianism were the most menacing. Schaff's notion of dialectical development stipulated that these diseases would eventually be overcome by a second reformation which would unite the evangelical freedom of Protestantism with a stronger, more catholic ecclesiology.<sup>39</sup> Perceiving signs of renewal in the currents of contemporary German theology, Schaff believed that Germany was poised to begin this second reformation as it had the first – "to act the second time a world-historical part."<sup>40</sup> It was with this confidence in the continuing capacity of the German people to determine the course of church history that Schaff first addressed his audience of fellow German immigrants in Mercersburg.

Even in his early Mercersburg years, however, Schaff recognized that the internal capacities of the German people would not be sufficient for the realization of the second reformation, the ultimate goal of which would be to unite Catholicism and Protestantism into a higher apprehension of true Christianity.

As Germany initiated the division of the church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, so it is her noblest task in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to lay the cornerstone for the still more splendid achievement of union...To accomplish this, however, she requires the help preferably of those nations endowed with a special practical talent, with

<sup>37</sup> Penzel, "The Reformation Goes West," 230.

<sup>38</sup> *Principle of Protestantism*, 61ff.

<sup>39</sup> *What is Church History?*, 98-104.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

the gift of organization, namely the English and the North Americans.<sup>41</sup>

An alliance between the German and English peoples – including their offspring in America – would be necessary, Schaff believed, because the English possessed a genius for industriousness and efficiency that complemented the Germans' incomparable thought-life. The two ethnic groups shared a number of common traits, as they were both "off-shoots from the same Teutonic root."<sup>42</sup> In its practicality and organizational skill, England was reminiscent of the medieval Roman church (Schaff traces these tendencies of the English character to the "Romanic element" introduced in the Norman conquest).<sup>43</sup> In the sixteenth century, however, England applied its practical talents to the German ideals of the Reformation and became the "political world-force of the evangelical church."<sup>44</sup> In Schaff's mind, while Germany remained the spiritual and intellectual force of Protestantism, England had become its exemplary civilization, an evangelical empire appointed "to succeed Rome and the Romano-Germanic empire in the supremacy of the world."<sup>45</sup> The front line of Christianity's historical progression had moved west of the continent, and while Germany would continue to provide its impetus, the English peoples would provide the environment necessary for its prosperity. Eventually endorsing English as the language of the Christian future and otherwise extolling the favorable qualities of "that wonderful island," Schaff saw the temperament of Anglo and Anglo-American Protestantism as perfectly compatible with the demands of the church's destiny. More than one historian has described him as an inveterate Anglophile.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Schaff, *Der deutsche Kirchenfreund* 1 (1848): 9; quoted in Penzel, "The Reformation Goes West," 233.

<sup>42</sup> *America*, 48.

<sup>43</sup> *Principle of Protestantism*, 143.

<sup>44</sup> *What is Church History?*, 113.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Frederick K. Wentz, "Samuel Simon Schmucker and Philip Schaff: Nineteenth Century Ecumenical Pioneers," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 15, no. 6 (December 1988): 580; also Miller, xviii.



The fusion of German idealism and English pragmatism would occur most auspiciously not in England but in America, the land destined to be "the main theatre of world and church history in time to come."<sup>47</sup> As early as *The Principle of Protestantism*, Schaff proposed that German immigration to America was a providential means of uniting the richness of German theology and the richness of Anglo-American resources for the greater benefit of Christianity.<sup>48</sup> The creation of an "American Germany" would mitigate the evils of rationalism and sectarianism so rampant in the United States. More importantly, it would confront the rapid advance of Roman Catholicism. Echoing widespread nativist fears of an all-out Catholic takeover in the Western territories, Schaff warned of a "gathering conflict" between Protestantism and Romanism.<sup>49</sup> His interpretation of this conflict bore no resemblance to the paranoia promulgated by Lyman Beecher, however; rather than react with "wild fanaticism," Schaff's dialectical imagination welcomed the coming clash as a portent of the eventual convergence of Protestantism and Catholicism.<sup>50</sup> America would be not a proving ground of Protestant supremacy but a venue for the consummation of a "higher position" in which the "truth of both tendencies" would be "actualized, as the power of one and the same life."<sup>51</sup>

A decade later in his *America* lectures, less circumspect of assimilation and American religious chaos, Schaff saw the destinies of the German and Anglo-American churches as even more tightly intertwined. "Surely God has brought together these two nations, branches of the same original Teutonic stock, upon American soil...so that as one people they should promote the kingdom of God and Christian civilization."<sup>52</sup> Once again Schaff couched the mission of this "American-German church" in terms already vivid in the popular imagination, namely, the impending climactic showdown between Catholics and Protestants in America.

<sup>47</sup> *What is Church History?*, 113.

<sup>48</sup> *Principle of Protestantism*, 205.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 216; see Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West* (Cincinnati: Truman & Smith, 1836).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *America*, 223.

Convinced that the fate of the Reformation – that quintessentially German expression of Christianity – would be decided in America, Schaff interpreted the Roman Catholic Church's designs on the American West as tantamount to a strategy for nothing less than the "re-conquest of the German nationality."<sup>53</sup> But again, though he employed the conventions of popular Protestant apocalypses, Schaff's view of the "last decisive engagement between Romanism and Protestantism" was neither nativist nor alarmist. Rather, he anticipated that the friction would forge an "evangelical Catholicism."<sup>54</sup> Even if the alarmists' worst fears were realized and the Roman church did reclaim all German and American Protestants, this incorporation would only lead to "a complete regeneration and rejuvenation of Catholicism."<sup>55</sup> The more likely outcome was that the mediating influence of German theology, when applied to the unprecedented confluence of religious competitors in America, would allow Protestantism to "consolidate, concentrate itself, and out of the phoenix-ashes of all Christian denominations and sects, rise glorified as the truly universal, evangelical Catholic Bride of the Lord."<sup>56</sup>

When Schaff followed his East-to-West rule of historical progression to the conclusion that "the ultimate fate of the Reformation will be decided in America," he was, on the surface, simply confirming a belief that had been common among many American Protestants since the seventeenth century and was enjoying increased currency in the anti-Catholicism of the mid nineteenth century. Schaff's perspectives as an immigrant and a romantic, however, gave a most unique texture to his portrait of America's role in Christian history. The Reformation which would find its fulfillment on the American continent was a natural extension of medieval Catholicism; a project still primarily controlled, even on American soil, by the German people; and an incomplete task, the ultimate goal of which was not to eliminate Catholicism but to synthesize with it. In short, America's destiny

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

was, in Philip Schaff's vision, to enable the catholicization of German Protestantism.

#### JOHN HUGHES AND THE IDEA OF A CATHOLIC AMERICA

John Hughes – priest, polemicist, and promoter of Irish immigrant political power – was the bogeyman of many a Protestant visionary in antebellum America. Confronting anti-Catholicism with equal vigor, even to the point of arming his churches against the prospect of nativist riots, he stoked the fears of Catholic militancy that resonated as far as the writings of Philip Schaff. Yet Hughes was equally well known as an American patriot who believed passionately in the “genius of [American] institutions” and in the promise of the “Republic which is becoming ‘the seat of Empire.’”<sup>57</sup> Like Schaff, Hughes stood both inside and outside the mainstream of antebellum American optimism, embracing America's world-renewing potential by framing it within his romantic and ethnically-formed vision of church history. Like Schaff, Hughes believed that America was uniquely positioned to overcome the deficiencies of the Reformation and help bring about a restored catholicity. He sought to prove this primarily by demonstrating that America's political and cultural genius was an expression of the centuries-old genius of the Roman Catholic Church and was rooted not in the spirit of the Reformation but in the practices of medieval Christendom.

Hughes' portrait of the Middle Ages was more flattering even than Schaff's. While he did not construe it as an unblemished golden age – admitting, for example, its bellicosity and abuses of power – Hughes, like other contemporary Catholic romantics, regarded medieval Europe as the high-water mark of world history. In this age the Church had been able to apply its incarnational ideal of a humane society most effectively, because the collapse of the Roman Empire had presented it the special challenge and special opportunity of effecting a “new creation” from within the ruins. The fall of Rome had exposed Europe to the chaos and cruelty of

<sup>57</sup> Quote from a correspondent to the Albany Evening Journal, cited in Hughes, *Works*, I: 444.

“the Northern barbarians.”<sup>58</sup> The Church, however, had “rushed to the rescue of humanity,” laid the foundation of a just, enlightened, and charitable civilization, and eventually tamed the Germanic hordes.<sup>59</sup> Thus far, Hughes's interpretation of the early Middle Ages is essentially the same as Schaff's – both saw the Church as having providing necessary structure and stability in the precarious post-classical world.

Hughes moved beyond Schaff by asserting that the medieval Church provided not only exterior order but also a profound degree of inward renewal, charity, and religious and political freedom. The civilizing of the barbarians was no mere imposition of law – it was an implanting of a new principle within the soul and a thorough “renovation of the mind.”<sup>60</sup> Medieval Europe developed thriving universities. Its monastic orders produced immense achievements of the intellect, serving as the keepers of organizational genius, agricultural skills, and scholarly riches that continued to benefit humanity into the industrial age.<sup>61</sup> And when “the frozen hearts of the north melted into humanity and pity” under the influence of the Church's incarnational ethic, medieval society became a commonwealth of mercy and compassion unmatched in human history.<sup>62</sup> Rather than view medieval Christianity as the ground from which a more mature, internalized faith would spring, Hughes held that the highest aspirations of Christian history had all come to fruition in pre-Reformation society.

Among the most notable achievements of this fecund medieval Catholicism were two foundational principles of American politics: representative government and the separation of church and state. Undercutting one of the pillars of American anti-Catholic rhetoric, Hughes claimed that there was in the Middle Ages “a remarkable tendency in favor of real democracy.”<sup>63</sup> The

<sup>58</sup> Hughes, “The Church and the World: A Lecture” (New York: E Dunigan & Brother, 1850), 14.

<sup>59</sup> Hughes, “A Lecture on the Mixture of Civil and Ecclesiastical Power in the Governments of the Middle Ages” (New York: J. Winchester, 1843), 14.

<sup>60</sup> “The Church and the World,” 14; also “Mixture of Civil and Ecclesiastical Power,” 8.

<sup>61</sup> *Works*, I: 359-60.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 380.

<sup>63</sup> “The Church and the World,” 16.

idea of a deliberative assembly which gathers to check the power of a monarch was a medieval invention, as evidenced by the formation of the Cortes of Spain, the Estates General of France, the Diets of Germany, and the Parliaments of England. These assemblies patterned themselves after the representative organization pioneered by the Church in its councils. "The bishops assembled in council and representatives of other orders were there also," Hughes reasoned. "I defy any historian to find any other origin for the representative form of government."<sup>64</sup> The Church also promoted from its beginning the principles of suffrage and election, by electing clergy into greater positions of prominence according to their merit. These historical precedents, rather than the hypothetical "social contract," accounted for the spread of democratic governance in the modern world.<sup>65</sup>

Likewise, the separation of church and state – so often cited among Protestant polemicists as a basis for attacking the perceived political presumptions of the Papacy – was, in Hughes's mind, a legacy of medieval Christendom. The Church of the Middle Ages defined itself in opposition to the state, serving as a constant protector of the people against the tyrannical ambitions of secular rulers. If the Church did interfere with the state, it was always in an attempt to prevent political tyranny – something Americans unapologetically endorsed – rather than to enforce religious ideas. "It certainly never was a principle of the Church, to coerce men's religious convictions."<sup>66</sup> Having grown up under the apartheid of state-enforced English Protestantism and having spent much of his career fighting state-sponsored Protestantism in the New York public schools, Hughes saw the mixture of church and state as a deviance introduced by the Reformation. "There is certainly no denomination of Christians that has so little reason to be in love with Church-and-State-Unions as the Catholics," he maintained.<sup>67</sup> Religious freedom was one of several principles successfully appropriated from historical Catholicism by the United States. Seeking to forge a sustainable identity for his parishioners as both

loyal Americans and faithful Catholics, Hughes preached that "the greatest elements of our institutions, namely, representative government, electoral franchise, trial by jury, municipal polity, were all inventions of Catholics."<sup>68</sup>

According to Hughes's distinctly immigrant perspective, the richness of this medieval civilization – in all its Christian charity, intellectual achievement, and political enlightenment – was best exemplified by the nation of Ireland. Though Hughes did not afford as prominent a role in church history to the land of his birth as Schaff did to Germany, he subtly identified the Irish as the standard-bearers of Christian civilization. Just as Schaff maintained that the German people were predisposed, even before their conversion, to a deep intellectual apprehension of the Christian faith, so Hughes asserted that even as pagans the Irish exhibited a capacity for charity unmatched in the world;<sup>69</sup> and when "the charities of heaven's religion were engrafted on the stock of native generosity" in the fifth century, Ireland became a beacon of sanctity to barbarian-flooded European continent.<sup>70</sup> In addition to practicing superlative virtue, Ireland also became the "school of Europe," preserving and promulgating a peerless intellectual life throughout the period of the barbarian invasions.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, by emancipating their slaves in the eleventh century, the Irish demonstrated the extent of medieval Christendom's devotion to the principles of political freedom.<sup>72</sup> By embodying the full potential of a Christian society, the Irish "became the apostles at once of Christianity, and indirectly of civilization, too."<sup>73</sup> In tracing the medieval origins of American ideals, therefore, Hughes imparted a sense of not only religious but also national continuity to his largely Irish-American audiences.

Hughes grieved that the enlightened Christian civilization exemplified by the Irish had been rent asunder and its spirit traumatized by the Protestant Reformation. The "vital principle" of

<sup>64</sup> *Works*, I: 363.

<sup>65</sup> "The Mixture of Civil and Ecclesiastical Power," 18.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>68</sup> Hughes, "The Catholic Chapter in the History of the United States: A Lecture" (New York: E. Dunigan & Brother, 1852), 33.

<sup>69</sup> *Works*, II: 150.

<sup>70</sup> *Works*, I: 33.

<sup>71</sup> *Works*, II: 150; see also I: 33ff.

<sup>72</sup> *Works*, I: 383.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 365.

an incarnation benefiting *all* humanity, which had animated medieval Catholicism, was replaced in many quarters by the Protestant notions of limited atonement and election. Hughes maintained that these exclusivist ideals led to the devaluation of the holistic good of society and the glorification of self-interested materialism.<sup>74</sup> By rejecting the efficacy of good works, Protestants also eliminated personal motivation for charity and mercy, substituting it with “an impulse of selfish activity.”<sup>75</sup> Protestantism was, in Hughes’s mind, simply religious shorthand for greed, individualism, and rationalism. He also charged the Reformation with having subordinated the church to the state – in both Protestant and Catholic nations – undermining both the religious freedom and the protection against royal absolutism provided by the medieval Church. In place of the “majestic social edifice” grounded in the humanity-affirming principle of incarnation, it erected a “temple of interest.”<sup>76</sup> The lasting infrastructure of Protestantism, Hughes lamented in an almost Marxian dirge, was a network of factories, banks, poorhouses, national debts, standing armies, and exploited workers.<sup>77</sup>

In Hughes’s view, the industrial juggernaut most representative of this deviant form of Christian civilization is the nation of England. Hughes, like Schaff, recognized England as the world’s most effective implementer of Protestant ideals. For Hughes, however – and here it is impossible not to hear in him the voice of an embattled Irishman – Protestant England created not freedom and progress but oppression and enslavement. Its extraordinary wealth – which Hughes traces to, among other things, seizing ecclesiastical property, criminalizing mendicancy, and forcing laborers to work on what were once observed as religious holidays<sup>78</sup> – had obscured the more important fact that “there is no nation in the world, and above all no Christian nation, in which

there is such an amount of poverty and wretchedness as in England.”<sup>79</sup>

By thus romanticizing medieval civilization, as typified by Ireland, and demonizing the social effects of Protestantism, as typified by England, Hughes adopted a “semi-apocalyptic view of history.”<sup>80</sup> Confident that the destructive influences of the Reformation marked only temporary digressions in the course of human progress, Hughes looked forward to the time when a reunified Catholicism would again serve to enlighten society, so that “the world might, finally, be emancipated from barbarism and infidelity.”<sup>81</sup> This time would not be long in coming. Within a hundred years, Hughes imagined, Protestantism would have all but dissipated, and the bells of St. Paul’s Cathedral would once again send echoes of the *Te Deum Laudamus* ringing throughout London.<sup>82</sup>

Impressed, as Schaff was, with the energy and ingenuity of American life, Hughes believed that the United States would play a major role in facilitating such a renewal. Having already employed the medieval principles of democracy and religious freedom to marvelous effect, America faced “a remarkable and favorable opportunity of making great advances in civilization.”<sup>83</sup> In order to connect this opportunity to his romantic vision of revitalized Catholicism, however, Hughes needed to disentangle America’s identity from “a certain vague, traditional memory of Protestant ascendancy” and Anglo-Protestant origins.<sup>84</sup> This he accomplished by sketching a revisionist account of American history, proving it to have been just as Catholic as Protestant. The New World had been discovered by Columbus, a devout Catholic sailor who was financed by a stridently Catholic monarch for the purpose of extending the influence of the Church. England’s claim to the North American land that the Protestant Stuarts eventually colonized derived from the explorations of Cabot, an Italian

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 369.

<sup>75</sup> “The Church and the World, 19”; see also *Works*, I: 526.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 533.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 384-5.

<sup>79</sup> *Works*, I: 517.

<sup>80</sup> Carey, “American Catholic Romanticism,” 597.

<sup>81</sup> *Works*, II: 89.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>83</sup> *Works*, I: 370.

<sup>84</sup> “The Catholic Chapter,” 7.



Catholic, sailing under the flag of what was at that time still a Catholic country.<sup>85</sup> Catholics could take credit for having introduced to the English colonies the venerable Catholic principle of religious freedom, for "the palm of having been the first to preach and practice it is due, beyond all controversy, to the Catholic colony of Maryland."<sup>86</sup> The state and federal constitutions, in making this principle a pillar of American government, had followed the precedent set by Maryland's Catholic pioneers. The American Revolution had been a success thanks to the intervention of Catholic France against a Protestant coalition of English soldiers and Hessian mercenaries.<sup>87</sup> And, most recently, expansion had drawn a vast number of French, Spanish, and Mexican Catholic settlements under American government, making it unfeasible to speak of the United States as a Protestant nation.<sup>88</sup> As a country committed to religious freedom, detached from much of the evil of Old World Protestantism and historically connected to the riches of Catholicism, America was well positioned to be what Ireland had been in the Middle Ages: a light of virtuous civilization to the nations of a barbarized Europe.

Thus, in Hughes's view, the nativists who feared a Catholic plot to conquer America were making a conspiracy of what was readily apparent in the facts of history. "Everyone should know it," he declared. "Everyone should know that we have for our mission to convert the world, including the inhabitants of the United States, the people of the cities, and the people of the country, the officers of the navy and the marines, the commanders of the army, the Legislatures, the Senate, the Cabinet, the President, and all!"<sup>89</sup> As he ministered to his fellow immigrants, whose swelling numbers were making such a conversion seem increasingly possible, Hughes

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 31-32.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 14. Hughes claims, moreover, that in prosecuting the war against America, the British Army was unable to count on its usual number of Irish recruits, as Irish Catholics were inclined to support the cause of American freedom. For Hughes's defense of the Revolution as a just war which Catholics should have supported – and did support – wholeheartedly, see *The Church and the World*, 29ff.

<sup>88</sup> "The Catholic Chapter," 16.

<sup>89</sup> *Works*, II, 101.

fashioned a new sense of national identity and destiny that was unequivocally Catholic and yet, in its exuberance in democracy and freedom, quintessentially American.

#### CONCLUSION

Only a few years after the United States finally extended its borders to the Pacific Ocean, Philip Schaff observed that "the grandest destiny is evidently reserved" for the American people, a destiny that would be fulfilled "according to the victorious march of history, with the sun from east to west."<sup>90</sup> Employing rhetoric similar to that of Thomas Hart Benton – who from the Senate floor was forecasting the extension of America's blessings into eastern Asia<sup>91</sup> – Schaff projected that the country's newly acquired position would enable it to spread the kingdom of God across the Pacific Islands and into Japan and China.<sup>92</sup> The kingdom of God meant for Schaff, as for Benton and like-minded expansionists, a "global, English-speaking Christian civilization."<sup>93</sup> Yet Schaff's vision, drawn from German Romanticism rather than American millennialism, remained fundamentally distinct. America's role in the church and in the world was to actualize what remained, in essence, a German mission to fashion the purest elements of Christian history – both medieval Roman and modern Protestant – into a vital new catholicism.

In 1846, while preparing for the war that gave the United States a firm hold on the Pacific, President James K. Polk had summoned John Hughes to the White House to seek his support. Supposing that an invasion of Catholic Mexico might prove problematic for American Catholics, the President asked Hughes to promote support for the war within the Church and to recommend priests to serve both as pastors to Catholic soldiers and as liaisons to

<sup>90</sup> Schaff, "The Significance of North America for the Future Development of the Kingdom of God," in *Philip Schaff: Historian and Ambassador of the Universal Church; Selected Writings*, 177-8.

<sup>91</sup> For examples of Benton's rhetoric, see, for example, Charles L. Sanford, ed., *Manifest Destiny and the Imperialism Question* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1974), 45ff.

<sup>92</sup> Schaff, "The Significance of North America for the Future Development of the Kingdom of God," 181.

<sup>93</sup> Penzel, "Philip Schaff: A Centennial Appraisal," 220.

the Mexican people. The Bishop agreed without reservation.<sup>94</sup> He could do so in part because he believed the advance of republican government to be a mandate not only of American destiny but of Catholic identity. In conquering northern Mexico, democratic America was fulfilling the demands of history – not, as many supposed, by increasing the domain of Protestantism but by sowing the social seeds for a renewed Catholic social order.

Philip Schaff and John Hughes, two notable and contemporary theological personalities of disparate denominational identities, evinced a common mixture of assimilation and alienation in their views of their adopted country's destiny, each accommodating a strong sense of American loyalty to a distinctly immigrant romanticism. In an aggressive and uncertain era, rife with both factious assertion and national enthusiasm, they served as stranger-patriots: effective but heterodox chaplains of America's historical mission.

<sup>94</sup> Hassard, 287. Polk also wanted Hughes personally to go to Mexico on a diplomatic mission, a request which the bishop declined for unstated reasons.

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## Donald G. Bloesch: 1928-2010

by Gabriel Fackre

The Mercersburg Society has good reason to pay tribute to Donald Bloesch. Here are some reasons given by a long-time friend.

Don Bloesch and I entered the ministry of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in the early 1950s. Since then we have been in many of the same church struggles for doctrinal integrity. Both of us helped to draft founding documents of confessional groups in the United Church of Christ attempting to re-assert that denomination's christological and ecumenical identity and saying a firm "No!" to current "culture-Protestantism." At the same time, we had our disagreements, yet ones always agued out with mutual respect.

In 1978 Don began a writing project in systematic theology. First came the two volume, Essentials of Evangelical Theology followed by the seven volume series, Christian Foundations. There is nothing like this achievement in the world of contemporary theology. During this period Don continued writing timely works on the interface of theology and culture. Second only to Carl Henry, Don was the premier theologian of evangelicalism in this country. At every step along the way his loving spouse, Brenda, was a partner in his work and witness.

I have seen the impact of Don's writing on many pastors. Not only its ability to deepen their understanding of the Christian faith, but also to render them more aware of the importance of doing solid theological work as background to their preaching and teaching. For pastors in old-line denominations who despair of the ideological direction too often taken by their Churches, Don's example of being a loyal opposition from within the ranks of the establishment, has given them new determination to "hang in." Sadly he was not well appreciated in his own Church. However, I managed to include him as one of seven formative UCC theologians in an essay in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary book of the denomination.

One of Don's great contributions was his effort to bring evangelicals into dialog with the broader Church and take account of the longer and wider "Great Tradition."

A book of his that I would recommend to Mercersburgers is the final volume in the Christian Foundations series, The Last Things. Our Theological Tabletalk group of pastors from mainline denominations who meet weekly on Cape Cod spent three months on it with many eyes opened. They not only gained fresh perspective on the doctrine but also a new understanding of how an evangelical thinker of Don's breadth and profundity can shatter all the stereotypes that prevent clergy trained in conventional mainline seminaries from engaging evangelical theology.

For all that, my favorite systematics in the Christian Foundations series is the volume on Christology, Jesus Christ another book of natural interest to those influenced by Nevin and Schaff.. Here Don lays out the classical teaching on both the Person and Work of Christ, but does it in his special way. He stresses that we are in a "battle for Christology" today as he draws on the wisdom of the great minds of the Church—Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin—and with more recent figures such as P.T. Forsyth to whom Don dedicates his Christology volume. Further he was not afraid, as an evangelical, to take up in this volume the christologically related subject of Mary, developing a modest mariological position faithful to his Reformation framework. Most interesting of all, in terms of influential interlocutors, is Bloesch's long-time engagement with the thought of Karl Barth. One sees clearly how Barth has influenced Bloesch. Yet Bloesch is able also to make some telling criticisms of Barth..

While Don Bloesch "did it his way," unique in the contemporary field of systematic theology, he was, as he described himself an "evangelical, Reformed, and catholic" thinker. I'm proud to have been his friend and co-laborer in the theological and ecclesial vineyards for over half a century. He is now with his Lord and the church triumphant, both of which he served so faithfully.

## SERMON \*

### by John Miller

### *"Resonating With God"*

June 7, 2009 Trinity B

Isaiah 6:1-8 Psalm 8

Romans 8:12-17 St. John 3:1-7

My forte has never been creativity. In fact my greatest act of creativity, my 27 year-old twins, is due, at least in part, to my wife. In my years of ministry both in the parish and in various organizations within the Church, my greatest work has come in the area of editing; taking what others have said and adapting that to new or different situations. Some may call this "specialized plagiarism", but I prefer "editing".

In preparing for my sermon yesterday in my parish, I came across a sermon about resonance. This is a term of physics that has to do with vibrations and the transfer of energy without physical contact. This was a wonderful way of taking a new look at the Gospel text, and perfect for our discussions here at this year's Convocation. Falling back on my editing abilities, I continue, adapting that sermon for this august body of thinkers and doers of Mercersburg Theology. Get ready to use both the left and right hemispheres of your brains.

Imagine that you are sitting at a piano, and with your left hand you press down on the key in the middle of the keyboard – middle C. What do you hear? One full note that fills your ears and your senses. It is pure.

Then imagine that with your right hand, you press down very, very gently on the key exactly seven keys above middle C, the note of C one octave above middle C. Imagine you've pressed the key so gently that the hammer doesn't strike the strings in the piano. Those strings remain undampened, or as the musicians say, "open." Now, without moving your right hand or releasing the key an octave above middle C, imagine that once again your left hand presses down on the piano key for middle C, and once again hear that beautiful tone. Now, imagine letting go of middle C. You might

expect that all sound would stop. But you can still hear a musical tone. It is here that we may pull the right and left halves of our brains together.

The beautiful music that results from this exercise is a demonstration of the transfer of energy without physical contact. The sound waves traveling through the piano from one place, cause an action in another. That action results in music.

The vibration of the strings of middle C has caused the strings to vibrate on the C note one octave above – so much so that you can hear it softly. The undamped, open note has been made to resonate by the lower note. The vibrations of middle C have given life to the strings one octave away.

So, this might be another way to imagine God – not another way to see God, but a way to hear God. God is that powerful musical tone at the center of the universe, vibrating so steadily that all that is open and undamped will begin to vibrate also.

Imagine that you are those open strings one octave above middle C. You begin to resonate, not because something, or someone, has struck you or plucked you as a harpist does, but because you are open and in tune with God. We are able to resonate with God because we are made to be in tune with God, a gift imparted by being created in the image of God.

With this in mind, listen to Jesus' words to our old friend Nicodemus. Jesus tells him, "*No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.*" Jesus strives to put Nicodemus in tune with the music that God makes in the creation. He does not de-humanize him, but seeks to re-humanize him by liberating his spirit from the brokenness and folly of the fallen world – so that his spirit may be resonate with the Spirit of God that has given life to all of the creation.

Is it allowable to think of being "*born from above*" as God's profound music at the center of the universe causing us to come alive because we resonate with God's very music in the creation itself? Can it be that Nicodemus, in asking his questions of Jesus, is seeking to undamp himself from all that keeps him from resonating with God, a desire he feels because he sees others in Jesus' midst resonating with God?

Jesus tells Nicodemus, "*What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*"

We hear the music of God, and do not know from whence it comes. This music gives us birth, for we resonate with the music within the Spirit of God. Maybe St. Paul is sharing the same truth when he writes to the church in Rome, "*All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.*" I am suggesting, "All who resonate with the music of God are children of God."

Paul then says, "*When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*" We might say, "When we resonate with God's music, it is the very vibrations of the Spirit of God vibrating our spirit, showing us how we are birthed by God, making us children of God." God begets us by making us sing the same song of God's creation.

In our musical musings, one note vibrating causes another to do the same. That reality is a model of the incarnation. When we resonate with God, similarly, God is incarnate within us. The challenge is to make our resonance possible by being in tune. Tunefulness is certainly a gift of grace, but we tune ourselves by sharing in the life and death of Christ.

Paul said if we suffer with Christ – meaning, if we imitate his life – "*we may also be glorified with him.*" We might say, "As we incarnate Christ into our very being, we will resonate with God in the same way that the Son resonates with the Father."

If we say that the Father resonates with the Son, we are saying that the Father is incarnate within the Son. When we resonate with God, God is incarnate within us. The music of God animates us. The Spirit – if in this moment we can hear the Spirit as the wind of God's glorious music – gives us life by making us resonate with God.

As this is Trinity Sunday, maybe we should say that there is not one note, but three notes – a full chord – playing at the center of the keyboard that makes resonant the other open note.

Again, in demonstration of my ability as an editor, I would like us to listen to a quote from an Anglican theologian, Jeremy Begbie. Every so often we need to be reminded that truth may come also from Canterbury, and not just Pittsburgh (Nevin) or Berlin (Schaff). In *Beholding the Glory*, Begbie asks:

What could be more apt than to speak of the Trinity as a three-note-resonance of life, mutually indwelling, without mutual exclusion and yet without merger, each occupying the same 'space,' yet recognizably and irreducibly distinct, mutually enhancing and establishing each other? To speak of three strings mutually resonating instantly introduces a dynamism ... far truer to the trinitarian, living God of the New Testament.

The Lord's voice is the music at the center of all life in which we strive to be in tune. Through our being formed in Christ, by imitating the life he showed us, we turn from the sin of the broken world that dampers us, and open ourselves to being made resonant with the eternal life of God.

Jesus explains it this way to Nicodemus: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*"

As we reflect on the lesson from Trinity Sunday, we give thanks that we do not perish, but are made eternally resonant with God the Father who resonates with God the Son who resonates with God the Holy Spirit, the very "three-note-resonance of life, mutually indwelling, without mutual exclusion and yet without merger." Better yet, listen for the music of God, and be prepared to vibrate with the divine beauty made know to us in love.

\* (Editor's Note: This homily becomes all the more poignant when we remember it was preached in a liturgy featuring truly glorious music and in the context of our convocation entitled, "Sight, Sound and Sacrament.")

## BOOK REVIEW

### *Incarnation and Sacrament: The Eucharistic Controversy between Charles Hodge and John Williamson Nevin.*

By Jonathan G. Bonomo

WIPF and Stock Publishers, 135 pages, \$18.00

ISBN 13:978-1-60899-340-6

Reviewed by F. Christopher Anderson

One of the weaknesses of the Mercersburg movement is the lack of a solid yet brief introduction to this theology for other Reformed Christians. I recommend this book to fill that need. In only 127 pages Jonathan G. Bonomo introduces Nevin especially to those who have been raised in the world of Charles Hodge and Princeton Theology. One should not need not be reminded that this is a big world.

First of all Bonomo honors Mercersburg as "one of the most important theological schools of the nineteenth century." (2) The school may have been small but recent studies have continued to honor the place of Mercersburg Theology. *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* by B. A. Gerrish is one example. This gives many of us hope that the work of Nevin is finding its way into places where it was opposed in the nineteenth century.

Second, the book honors Nevin by putting him in the context of Charles Hodge and Princeton Theology. Bonomo does this in a manner that also honors Hodge. All too often Hodge is not honored by those who have agreed with Nevin on the various debates of the nineteenth century. Now that we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it seems who should be able to lighten up. Bonomo's book is a great introduction to Mercersburg Theology without presenting Hodge as a "straw man." Bonomo's point is that we can learn from



both Princeton and Mercersburg. This is one of the reasons that it is a great introduction to the issues.

Bonomo reminds us of many of the major differences between the theologies of Hodge and Nevin.

- Hodge held on to a Scottish Common Sense Realism philosophy. (6)
- Nevin had a "nominalist bent" that "presupposed a realist metaphysic." (This is hard for many of us to even understand today.) (17)
- Hodge's theology was largely dualistic. (19)
- Nevin's theology was "fundamentally a system of union." (19)
- Hodge saw theology as "the science of collecting these facts and putting them into a coherent system." (7)
- Nevin's theology was strongly "Christological." (16)
- Hodge charged Nevin with pantheism. (99)
- Nevin emphasized that the divine union with human nature in Christ was simply the historic Christianity of the creeds and replied that Hodge didn't understand the incarnation. (99)
- Hodge felt most comfortable with the later "...solidification of the understanding of Reformed churches." (37)
- Nevin was more comfortable with the earlier understandings of the Reformed Churches (Calvin & Bullinger etc), the views of the whole ecumenical church and the writings of the church fathers. Some of his views even correspond to Eastern Orthodox theology. (101)
- Hodge's theology was largely forensic. (12)
- Nevin's theology was largely incarnational. (16)
- Hodge saw justification as simply a legal declaration. (106)
- Nevin saw the sacraments as the means of union with God. (107)
- Hodge worried Nevin denied forensic imputation.
- Nevin did "...not deny forensic imputation." (77)
- Hodge stressed only forensic imputation.
- Nevin also stressed that the righteousness of Christ comes to the Christian "...as part of his life." (78)

- Hodge saw Christ as basically "the federal representative." (76)
- Nevin taught: "The Word accordingly became flesh, that is assumed humanity into union with itself." (74-75)
- Hodge was a "predestinarian Calvinist." (126)
- Nevin was "a sacramental Calvinist." (126)
- Hodge saw the Bible as a plain book to be interpreted by common sense. (7)
- Nevin was very worried about how sects in Protestantism could interpret the scriptures without any understanding of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. (81)
- Hodge interpreted scripture by piling individual texts upon texts. (7)
- Nevin "...saw the historic Creeds as normative for a proper interpretation of Scripture." (81)
- Hodge worried that Nevin was a follower of Hegel and Schleiermacher. (69)
- "Nevin was not a slavish follower of innovative German theologians." (69)
- Hodge's theology was more individualistic. (17)
- Nevin's theology was more organic. (17)
- Hodge tended to see Christianity as "a system of doctrines." (15)
- Nevin viewed Christianity more "fundamentally as a *life*." (15)
- Hodge was largely Zwinglian on Holy Communion.
- Nevin was Calvinistic on Holy Communion.

Bonomo shows the reader that these differences put Hodge and Nevin on a collision course. Bonomo then gives us a picture of the train wreck.

The book does center on what has become the most discussed controversy between the two of them. Simply put Hodge held to a more Zwinglian view of Holy Communion and Nevin taught that Calvin held to the "mystical presence" position. Bonomo's book rehearses the story of Nevin's *The Mystical Presence* and Hodge's criticisms. Those who have not only read

Nevin's masterpiece but have read book 4 of *The Institutes*, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, *The Second Helvetic Confession* and other Reformed Church documents wonder how Hodge could disagree with Nevin. But he did.

Bonomo points out in a footnote that "This was a point where his (Hodge's) Scottish Common Sense metaphysic largely determined his conclusion." (38) Simply put Hodge's argument was that there were three views on Holy Communion. Hodge's point is that the last of the three views was a "*via media*" between Zwingli's view (the first) and Calvin's view (the second) and that this third view is the correct position. (37) This section of Bonomo's book is very helpful for the student of Mercersburg Theology. Without Bonomo's explanation Hodge seems to merely be out of touch with what Calvin clearly wrote. Bonomo reveals that Hodge did not use Calvin against Nevin and the reason is simple; Hodge thought Calvin's view was corrected later! (37)

Sadly, Hodge's view won the day. On the whole the American Protestant Church has become Zwinglian in it's view of Holy Communion. Bonomo's book is another promising sign that things may be changing.

There is obviously more to this book than I have stressed in this brief review. Yet again I see this book as a bridge between what became the dominate Reformed way of thinking in America with what was taught in that small town in Pennsylvania.

The last page of Bonomo's book has this simple statement: "...the theological schools of Princeton and Mercersburg needed each other in the nineteenth century, and that they continue to need each other today." (127) I could not have said it better myself. This is a book to give to some of our non-Mercersburg Reformed friends who do not even know what Mercersburg Theology is.

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