



# THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW

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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

This issue centers on the theme of evangelism.

Lee Barrett is the author of *Kierkegaard* in the Abingdon Pillars of Theology Series and the translator of *The Heidelberg Catechism: A New Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Many of our Society know Lee as holding the Mary B. and Henry P. Stager Chair in Theology at Lancaster Theological Seminary. He summarizes his article better than I could when he writes: "*A Christocentric revival must be the foundation of any new efforts to spread the good news. As part of this, the church must get its story straight, and be clear about the content of its faith and the object of its hope. Without that, no amount of funding and no proliferation of innovative programs will do any good.*" May we, who love Mercersburg Theology, be encouraged to pray and work for this end.

Mark J. Lukens speaks as a pastor about evangelism. He summarizes his teaching on the Incarnational Community with this statement. "*The transformative relationship that is the center of the life of the church is the thing, and it does not belong to us. We belong to it. We surrender to it because it is the proclamation and illustration of the life and love of our community across time as well as space. The creeds, the sacraments, and the rites are the language by which we speak of our experience of these things together.*" I cannot help but see that even David F. Wells would find co-belligerents in both Barrett and Lukens in his work against religious marketers.

We are again excited to have our honored member, Alan P. F. Sell, publish a book review in our humble journal. Please 'goggle' his name to get a listing of the 25 books he has written. From across the Atlantic we get a positive comment on W. Bradford Littlejohn's book, *The Mercersburg Theology and the Quest for Reformed Catholicity*. Sell summarizes the book with this statement: "*In Mercersburg theology the author finds the remedy for American Protestantism's disarray.*" The exciting point about this book is that it was written by someone who did not know that our Society existed! This may not seem encouraging but it is because it shows that Mercersburg Theology is taking hold in places beyond our small domain. Though there may be some criticism of the book from those who have more knowledge of the primary sources the point is that God is moving in unexpected places. People are grasping the power of this theology without having attended our convocations! (What a blessing if these new Mercersburg scholars did attend!) Please notice Sell's brief comment on Lee Barrett's article from the Spring 2010 issue of the NMR.

Richard J. Mammona, Jr. is another young scholar who has discovered Mercersburg Theology. He reviews Hans-Jurgen Grabb's book, *Halle Pietism, Colonial North America, and the Young United States*. The book contains fourteen essays that discuss the influence of the Pietism of the University of Halle on Lutheran, Reformed and Moravian churches in our area of Pennsylvania.

**"If God is for us, who is against us?"**

## Evangelism in the Shape of Christ: Beyond the Anxious Bench and Larger Parking Lots

Lee Barrett

"Evangelism" has been a sensitive term in many Protestant mainline circles, best discussed in hushed tones, and only with trusted intimates behind closed doors. Most church leaders do pay lip service to the notion, nodding sympathetically whenever a concern for evangelism is voiced. But even when the need for evangelism is admitted, the signs of embarrassment with the concept are evident. For at least four decades Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and UCC folks have staged conferences on evangelism, launched programs on evangelism, and even created offices of evangelism, only to have the major fruit of such initiatives be the recommendation that local congregations should secure adequate parking and greet visitors warmly.

The reasons for the discomfort surrounding evangelism are manifold. One is its association with the revivalist strand in American religious history. That tradition has several liabilities from the perspective of the mainline (now also known as "old-line" or "side-line"). The most salient is its valorization of the emotional high of the "born-again" experience, a phenomenon dismissed as being too ephemeral and histrionic to be the foundation of the enduring habits of civic responsibility that the main-line has historically cherished. A second is the fear that evangelism presupposes a conviction that non-Christians should become Christians in order to avoid damnation. That religious orientation further presupposes the dialectic of sin vs. salvation, a dialectic that many main-line folks have dismissed in favor of the dialectic of oppression vs. liberation or the dialectic of low self-worth vs. self-actualization. Third, it is feared that the attempt to spread the gospel to non-Christians may suggest that other religions or world-views are false or at least inferior to the Christian faith. Such an attitude would, it is alleged, be detrimental to inter-religious dialogue and to the flourishing of a pluralistic global culture. Suggesting that it might be a good thing to become a Christian is frowned upon as being symptomatic of parochial religious bigotry and, even worse, as simply being bad manners.

More importantly, the mainline seems baffled by evangelism because it has often not had to engage in evangelism. The established colonial religions enjoyed the support of myriad social reinforcements, including the educational system and the civil government, to ensure that young people would remain within the church and that newcomers would join it. Biological propagation, family ties, ethnic bonds, and a host of other things ensured a constant replenishing of the pews. Except for the New School or New Light wings of the Protestant denominations, the habit of persuading people to embrace a particular version of Christianity never took deep root. By the mid-twentieth century, it is significant that "apologetics" and even "missions" disappeared from the curricula of mainline Protestant seminaries.

I will assume that this seeming paralysis about evangelism is a lamentable situation. Let me simply assert an axiom: spreading the good news of

God's saving work in Jesus Christ to those who have not embraced it is intrinsic to Christianity. This is not a reactionary sentiment. If a person really has encountered something wonderful, of course that person would want to share it. But, oddly, that impulse to share the good news is not part of the hard-wiring of most Protestant mainliners. The root of this problem is two-fold. First, there is widespread ambiguity about what exactly the good news of Jesus Christ is, with a correlative tendency to reduce it to something innocuous. Secondly, there is little attention given to how that good news could be communicated, particularly to the way that the content of the good news might have implications for its communicative medium.

In regard to these two questions the Mercersburg tradition has invaluable insights to offer. This claim may initially seem wildly counter-intuitive. The caricature of the Mercersburg movement is that it was an inwardly focused attempt to reprimatinate the church's internal sacramental life. As such (so the popular story goes) it assumed that the proper way to become a Christian was to grow up in the church, nurtured by the church's liturgies and catechisms. That, in turn, assumed a Constantinian situation in which most people were born into the church and remained loyal to it. The prevalent caricature of Mercersburg concludes that the movement had nothing interesting to say to all the heathens outside the sanctuary walls, leaving that distasteful task to the revivalistic proponents of the "new measures." A more subtle variant of this caricature is that the only concept of evangelism that the Mercersburg movement had was: If we celebrate the sacraments rightly, they will come. At most, so the criticism goes, this arcane sacramentalism might appeal to a small religious niche market of folks who are genetically predisposed to value elaborate rituals, but for most people baptism and eucharist are not effective tools for outreach (nor should they be).

This popular assessment of the Mercersburg movement is a distortion, and a dangerous distortion that obscures the guidance that the movement can provide for any sort of authentic evangelism. Most importantly, the likes of Nevin, Schaff, Harbaugh, and Gerhart had a potent response to the first conundrum, the ambiguity about the good news. They had good news to tell, news that was so good that humanity left to its own devices could not even have imagined it.

The problem with much of the feeble efforts at evangelism in the Protestant main-line is that we do not know news good enough to be attractive or even interesting. These days all too often the promise of Christianity is identified with the anticipated success of programs of social ameliorization. The good news of Jesus Christ is reduced to the observation that justice may flourish on earth if humanity gets its act together and rallies behind God's initiatives. In practice, the church then becomes nothing more than the cheering squad for the political left, or the chaplaincy corps of the political right. In either case the gospel is reduced to "political morality tinged with emotion," to slightly embellish the words of Matthew Arnold. Or the good news of Jesus Christ is identified with the message that an individual can become self-actualized, developing inner gifts and capacities in a holistic manner, blossoming like a flower. The church then

becomes a provider of programs designed to foster self-fulfillment, self-exploration, and interpersonal growth, all under the rubric of "spirituality." The good news begins to sound like bits of pop-psychological wisdom from the Oprah Winfrey show.

In both these instances our hopes have become too anemic, too lack-luster. The sights of Christianity have been set too low. Our eschatology longing is reduced to nothing more than a desire for a more equitable distribution of access to health care, or a more functional family, or a more balanced life-style. We yearn for no savior beyond an inspiring political reformer or an empathic life-coach. There is nothing wrong with these aspirations; in fact they are indeed dimensions of the Christian life (and the access to health care is a critical one). But the good news is more than the message that political reform is possible or that personal lives can be more integrated and satisfying. A lot of folks have been able to figure out by themselves that political reform is a good thing; it did not require the incarnation of God in a Galilean peasant or his death on a cross to alert humanity in to that insight. The power of the Mercersburg heritage is that it reintroduces a much more radical, extravagant hope into Christianity. It raises the eschatological bar, promising something so incredible that the world never could have dreamt it up.

In the Mercersburg tradition, this marvelous object of hope and longing is the Incarnation, and, more particularly, a fruit of the Incarnation. Consequently, any consideration of evangelism must begin where the Mercersburg heritage always begins, with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the essence of the good news, the proclamation that must be shared. As Nevin pointedly remarked, "I have no hope, save on the ground of a living union with the nature of Christ as the resurrection and the life. Both for my understanding and my heart, theology finds here all its interest and attraction."<sup>1</sup> The Mercersburg theologians shocked and confused their North American contemporaries by suggesting that the Incarnation is not just a remedy for human sinfulness. The Son of God's assumption of human flesh was not just an instrumental strategy to secure the forgiveness of sins. The pages of Nevin, Schaff, and Gerhart do not portray salvation history as the drama of paradise lost / paradise regained. We are hoping for something much grander and more glorious than getting back to the innocence of the garden. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were much more than a salvage operation, and much moiré than the atonement. Consequently, evangelism should not be equated with the strategy of exacerbating guilt feelings until the potential convert is in a state of sufficient despair to appreciate the relieving news of the forgiveness of sins. Because of this, evangelism should not follow the pattern of "bad news / good news." The good news is not primarily: "You were about to be damned, but, congratulations, now you have been reprieved." The basic dynamic of Mercersburg is not God's "No" followed by God's "Yes," with the requirement that the horror of God's negation be experienced first. In other words, the "anxious bench" is not an appropriate strategy.

<sup>1</sup> John Nevin, "The Mystical Union," *The Weekly Messenger*, October 8, 1845.



This is an important guideline for evangelism Mercersburg-style. We could divide theories of evangelism up into those that start with the anguish of the human predicament, and those that start with the joy of the Christian hope. The first strategy tries to put people in touch with their repressed and unconscious aches, yearnings, and alienations, so that they will feel a need for the Christian remedy. It tries to help people get in touch with their guilt, their emptiness, their sense of alienation, their oppression, or their yearning for something over the rainbow. Its assumption is that people will embrace Christianity only when they reach the end of their rope and realize that the options are either Christian faith or remaining in the fetal position. In contrast to this, the second strategy just presents the promise of Christianity, confident that it will be attractive enough to draw the human heart. The attractiveness of Christianity is not dependant upon the experience of a prior deficit. The depiction of the joy is enough to awaken human passion. We are not pushed toward Christianity by our sufferings and fears; rather we are pulled toward it by its intrinsic sublimity. This second strategy is the preferred evangelistic style of the Mercersburg movement.

Rather than emphasizing the problem from which we are rescued, in the Mercersburg tradition the accent falls on God's unexpected "Yes," God's gracious presentation of a gift to humanity that is infinitely more than a remediation of human sinfulness. That intrinsically attractive gift of infinite worth is nothing less than the union of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ. Nevin boldly proclaims, "...the mediation of Christ holds fundamentally and primarily in his person."<sup>2</sup> From all eternity God has intended to draw humanity into a relationship much more intimate than anything that pre-Fall Adam and Eve could have anticipated. According to Nevin, "The object of the Incarnation was to couple the human nature in real union with the Logos, as a permanent source of life."<sup>3</sup> In Jesus the divine and human natures are inseparably joined, and (here is the critical point) the human nature is transformed by that union. Gerhart emphasizes this transformation of Jesus' human nature most emphatically, claiming that in the earthly life of Jesus the divine was progressively communicating the fullness of God's life of love to the Son of Man.<sup>4</sup> Borrowing generously from Irenaeus' theory of "recapitulation," Nevin and Gerhart made the theme of Jesus as the Second Adam, the new creation, central to their Christology. The story of Jesus is the story of human nature's elevation, its glorification, through being embraced by God. The humanity of the Second Adam, Jesus, is infinitely more wonderful than the humanity of the first Adam. Jesus the Second Adam completes what was only implicit in the first Adam, and adds virtues and blessings that Adam's human nature could not even imagine. In

<sup>2</sup> John Nevin, "The Incarnation" in *The Mercersburg Theology*, ed. by James Hastings Nichols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> John Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, ed. by Bard Thompson and George Bricker (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1966), p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> Emanuel Gerhart, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Funk and Wagnalls: New York, 1894), vol. II, p. 276.

Jesus the humanity of pre-fallen Adam is raised to a higher power, to the perfection of self-giving love.

This point cannot be underestimated: at the core of the Mercersburg theology is the celebration of reckless, unstinting, self-oblivious love. The love enacted in the Incarnation is the manifestation in time of the eternal self-giving of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father in God's blessed intra-trinitarian life.<sup>5</sup> This self-giving love is utterly open to the beloved, delighted in the beloved, and devoted to the beloved. It is this self-giving love that beats at the heart of the universe, animating organic life, motivating human relationships, and causing the planets to spin. The self-giving love of God flows through sub-atomic particles, amebas, chrysanthemums, and galaxies. From the mysterious growth of crystals to the exuberance of wedding festivities, the whole cosmic drama is the outpouring of divine love. Put simply: love makes the world go 'round.

So far this theme of the glorification of Jesus' humanity so that it becomes the perfect image of God's self-giving love may not sound like particularly good news. It may be good for the unique individual Jesus of Nazareth, but what attraction could it possibly hold for the unchurched multitudes of the twenty-first century? Why would happily secular gen-Xers be intrigued by this? How could a nineteenth-century understanding of the Incarnation be the content of any evangelistic initiative? More bluntly, what is in it for us? Why should we care about Jesus' humanity?

According to the Mercersburg theologians the compellingly attractive feature of the Incarnation is this: Jesus' human nature was not just the human nature of one isolated Galilean, but was human nature in general, yours, mine, and everybody's. In Jesus, God's very own life of love lodges itself in human nature as such. Nevin boldly claims that Jesus was "the Son of Man, in whose person stood revealed the true idea of humanity, under its ultimate and most comprehensive form."<sup>6</sup> Mysterious as it sounds, a new humanity was birthed in Jesus' person. Aware of the oddness of claiming this, Nevin and Gerhart sought to clarify matters by likening Jesus' relation to other humans as being like the relationship of a prototype to its instantiations, like a species to its members, like an ancestor to its descendants, or like a fountain to the streams that flow from it. Although these analogies may all be wanting, they do point to the fact that we humans, like all other creatures, are not just atomistic individuals but participants in some broader, more general nature. Nevin insists, "...the particular subject lives, not properly speaking in the acts of his own will separately considered, but in the power of a vast generic life..."<sup>7</sup> For Nevin all life is universal before it is particular.<sup>8</sup> The good news for us, then, is that the conjunction of divinity and

<sup>5</sup> See Emanuel Gerhart, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Funk and Wagnalls: New York, 1894), vol. I, pp 319-362.

<sup>6</sup> John Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, ed. by Bard Thompson and George Bricker (Philadelphia: United Church Press), 1966, p. 157.

<sup>7</sup> *The Anxious Bench*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chambersburg, 1845), pp. 124-125.

<sup>8</sup> John Nevin, "The Incarnation," in *The Mercersburg Theology*, ed. by James Hastings Nichols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 83.

humanity in Jesus is the font of a new universal life for the race. The love that makes the grass grow and the planets rotate can flow through us.

In a nutshell, the main theme for evangelism should be that Christ's life of love is now ours. For evangelism the main talking point should be: because of the objective participation of generic human nature in Christ's life, all human beings can share in Christ's transformed, glorified humanity.<sup>9</sup> So, embrace what you already are. This is an amazing and shocking claim. Our true nature, our real nature, is hidden in Christ. That hidden self is already a joyous, blissful lover of neighbors, strangers, and enemies. Even better, that new, glorified humanity does not merely exist in some nebulous heavenly realm, like a Platonic ideal. We earthly creatures who live in space and time can have access to it; it can be experienced here and now and transform the way we think, feel, and act. Through a "real life-union" with Christ that "vivific virtue of his true human flesh" can be communicated to us as an objective force.<sup>10</sup> We can receive "the living virtue," the "real nourishment of his new life."<sup>11</sup> Christ is a fountain from which flows a new set of motivations, desires, aspirations, emotions, and passions.<sup>12</sup> As Christ's vitality becomes ours, we can come to experience the same boundless delight in the "other" that Christ felt, and joyfully pour ourselves out in a life of service as he did.

For Nevin and his theological colleagues the individual's life in Christ is not due to the strength of the individual's faith, or to the capacity of the individual to remember Christ vividly, or to the ability of the individual to "introject" Christ as a role-model (as we psychologically sophisticated moderns would say). Those messages about Christ would not really be good news, for they would amount to nothing more than the enjoinder "you can become more Christ-like if you try real hard." That would just be the announcement of another arduous task, and it would be burdensome. No, the good news is that our own glorified humanity is already actualized in Christ. It is real before it ever blossoms in our own empirical character transformation. We can renounce all Pelagian efforts to flex our religious muscles and try to whip up some self-generated spirituality. We can be confident that the life of love is not the product of our will power. Our own life of love is a sheer gift, already delivered, sitting on our doorstep. Evangelism should not be conducted in the hypothetical imperative mood (you can become a loving person if you do all the right things), but rather in the indicative mood (in Christ, you already are a loving person). The good news is not the announcement of a possibility, but of an actuality: You are a new creature. You are a new creature whether you know it or not. You are a new creature whether you feel it or not. That emphasis was the motivation for Nevin's critique of "subjectivism" in religion and his attempt to redirect the focus the

<sup>9</sup> John Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, pp. 160-170.

<sup>10</sup> John Nevin, "Our Union with Christ," *The Weekly Messenger*, January 14, 1846.

<sup>11</sup> John Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> John Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, pp. 268-270.

"objective" dimensions of Christianity. He wanted to insist that objectively human nature has been sanctified. What news could be better?

Actually, the news does get better. The hope that the Mercersburg tradition encourages is even more extravagant than this, for it extends beyond time and space. The participation in Christ's glorified human nature initiates a process of growth that will only be completed in the resurrection. Eschatologically this old material body will give birth to a higher corporality more suited to express a life of perfect love. The "vanity of nature and the reign of death" will be brought to an end.<sup>13</sup> The telos of the Incarnation is not just the production of human lives that are more Christ-like, but is nothing less than a new heaven and a new earth, an environment of ultimate love and felicity. Lions will lie down with lambs, swords will be beaten into ploughshares, the hills will flow with milk and honey, and there will be no tolls on the New Jersey Turnpike.

If this is the central message that we should broadcast, is it likely that anyone will respond favorably, or even care about it? To be utterly crass, is there a market for the message that in Christ we are already extravagant lovers of God and neighbor? If the Mercersburg tradition is right, the answer is resoundingly affirmative. The twin prospects of a life of unrestrained love and of a new heaven and a new earth answer the deepest yearnings of the human heart, and, in fact, the "groanings" of the entire cosmos. Nevin writes, "Christ thus is the deepest sense, the most urgent want of humanity... The universal constitution of the world looks forward to him as its necessary center."<sup>14</sup> The whole creation labored for this fulfillment, this coming together of the Creator and the creature in a bond of reciprocal love. The inorganic yearns for the organic, and the organic yearns for conscious and volitional life, and that life yearns for the union of the divine and human in Christ.<sup>15</sup> According to Gerhart human being is the completion and climax of the economies of nature, and Christ is the completion and climax of human being.<sup>16</sup> We, and all the physical and chemical dynamics that constitute the substrata of our lives, were formed for blessed communion with God. Phrased in appropriately impressive theological lingo, there is a basis in the constitution of humanity for the theanthropic constitution of Jesus. This basis may be nothing more than a vague stirring of discontent with one's own selfishness, or a longing for a sort of intimacy that no human partner can provide, or a dim premonition that God could be in communion with the soul. Like Augustine, the Mercersburg folks were convinced that our hearts are restless until they rest in God.<sup>17</sup> If that is true, then a certain unconscious receptivity to the gospel's promise of unstinting love, a love given, received, and given again, can be presupposed in all people. Maybe, down deep, there is something in the human heart that instinctively rejoices in the vision of a realm of ecstatic, self-oblivious love. If so, that latent longing in the human heart would be a powerful contact point for evangelism.

<sup>13</sup> John Nevin, "The Incarnation," p. 80.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> *Mystical Presence*, 200-201.

<sup>16</sup> Emanuel Gerhart, vol. II, pp. 24-26.

<sup>17</sup> Emanuel Gerhart, vol. II, pp. 468-469.

Such news would be perceived not only as good, but as superlatively good. Yes, there would be a market for such news, for it would touch people's cores. In this scenario the evangelist does not need to excite the longing or doing anything to make it more poignant; one just needs to present the loveliness of the person, Jesus Christ, who will satisfy it.

The less exuberant versions of the good news, its identification with a just society or a self-actualized, holistic life, simply lack the power to inspire people at their cores over the course of an entire lifetime. Churches based on such truncations of the good news will not attract and hold members over the long haul. Succumbing to such low-intensity hopes, the church would devolve into an institution that provides services that can be found more cheaply and more effectively in other sectors of society. If the good news is that the church is a warm, accepting community, the church is then placed in competition with other warm communities, including fraternal organizations and local bars. Warm communities can be found elsewhere, and often the alternatives do not expect tithing. If the good news is that justice should be pursued, "move-on.org" or the tea party movement (depending on a person's political predilections) can furnish more potent outlets for reformist zeal. Spiritual entertainment, personal therapy, gemütlichkeit, life-coaching, and motivational programs all can be found elsewhere, often in institutions with more money and more sophisticated resources and training than the church could ever hope to duplicate. (If Christianity continues to decline in North America, I fear that the root cause is simply that people are bored with the message propagated by most churches, for that message is just a set of cultural platitudes repackaged in pious-looking wrapping paper.) But the one thing that the church has, that no one else does, is the good news that in Jesus Christ we have already been transformed into extravagant lovers. In short, all we have to offer the world is Christ. Evangelism that communicates that message would be unique indeed. At least it would not be boring.

So far we have been talking about the "what" of evangelism, the question of what good news Christianity has to offer the world. But a second question haunts us: How should this good news be communicated to those outside the fold? To answer this question we need to examine the connection between the ecstatic Christocentrism of the Mercersburg movement and its Christomorphic ecclesiology. Evangelism must be situated in an appreciation of the church as Christ's presence in the world, the church as Christ's mystical body. We cannot discuss evangelism without taking our cues from the nature of the church, and we cannot discuss the nature of the church apart from Christ.

In the Mercersburg heritage the picture of Christ the Second Adam has an earthly, corporate dimension. The church is crucial because, unlike our participation in the first Adam, we humans do not participate in Christ's humanity by mere biological propagation. Christ's glorified human nature does not become part of our genetic code so that it automatically kicks in like an inherited allergy. It is not our biology that bears the power of new life; rather, it is the church. According to Nevin, Christ's life of love is a fountain of spiritual energy that brings a new community, the church, into existence. The new life in

Christ is communicated through this community's formal organization, informal fellowship, official ministries, and sacraments. In fact, the church as a whole is a sort of meta-sacrament, a conduit of grace.<sup>18</sup> The church is the leaven in the lump of humanity, spreading the spirit of Christ throughout the species.

Like the Incarnation itself, the church as the body of Christ is both divine and human.<sup>19</sup> Of course the church is not perfect; its members are finite human beings who gossip in parking lots and quarrel at consistory meetings. But in, with, and under the bickering and superficiality, the new creation in Jesus Christ has already begun to unfold. According to Nevin, the "ideal" church is the impetus toward the new creation contained within the actual church. This movement toward the full blossoming of the ideal church involves a process of externalization in which the spirit of Christ finds increasingly adequate expression in institutional forms. Love should become more and more visible as the church grows into what it already (in Christ) is.

There is a minor note in the Mercersburg symphony that is often overlooked, and it is a minor note with profound implications for evangelism. It pertains to the crucial question of how individuals come to participate in the church's communication of the new life in Christ. Gerhart, echoing his mentors, insists that incorporation into the body of Christ is a gift, of course, but adds that it must be received by faith. Although it is not our faith that makes the presence of Christ in the church real (for Christ is objectively present whether we trust in that presence or not), Gerhart adds the Reformers' point that faith is necessary in order for that objective presence of Christ to become effective in our temporal lives. The sacraments, and the church in general, do not work magically or mechanically. Their high sacramentology did not lead the Mercersburg theologians down the path of the *opus operatum*.<sup>20</sup> Each of them insisted that it is necessary to surrender ourselves spontaneously to the attractive power of the new life in Christ.<sup>21</sup> Of course, the spiritual focus should be on the attractive power of Christ's love, not on the distracting fluctuations of the individual's religious experience. By remaining Christ-focused the individual's heart should be spontaneously drawn to the prospect of becoming a new creature.

Consequently, the Mercersburg theologians did not restrict their interest to the internal spiritual health of the already existing members of the Christian community. Indulging in their penchant for organic metaphors, they all insisted that the church is an organism and like any organism it must grow, it must extend its branches. Evangelism should be a spontaneous, natural expression of the church's Christ-centered vitality. Let me put it simply: If the good news is that humanity has been given new life in Christ, and that new life is God's very own self-giving love, then that love will break through church walls and spread throughout the world. For a group of pastors and teachers who were convinced that new life in Christ is an objective reality, how could it be otherwise? The joy

<sup>18</sup> John Nevin, "The Incarnation," pp. 90-91.

<sup>19</sup> Emanuel Gerhart, vol. II, p. 470.

<sup>20</sup> John Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, p. 40.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 174-175.



would be irresistibly contagious. To use their organic metaphors, it would be like kudzu or honeysuckle or some type of ivy on steroids, extending its love tendrils everywhere.

So here we have one important principle of evangelism: the primary agent of evangelism is the church as a whole, its corporate life of love, and not the lone revivalist. But how does the church as a collectivity go about evangelizing? Is there any difference between intentional evangelism and the church simply being itself and hoping that somebody will notice and respond?

Their Christocentric focus led the Mercersburg theologians to posit principles of more intentional evangelism, at least implicitly. For one thing, the Mercersburg movement was absolutely clear that the church's extensive growth is rooted in its logically prior internal growth.<sup>22</sup> So here is another principle of Mercersburg evangelism: the church can incorporate new members only as it experiences a continuing inner transformation, a continuing assimilation to Christ. Gerhart observes concerning evangelism, "The first and most essential necessity is her [the church's] internal development as to spirituality, morality, Christian consciousness, knowledge."<sup>23</sup> Programs will succeed only in so far as they are "prompted and imbued with the love of Christ."<sup>24</sup> Gerhart warns, "If the work of the church in making disciples of all nations lacks the inspiration of devout faith, or is wanting in genuine love to her Lord, the reaction cannot be healthy; and the Church, though distinguished for the outgoing of her energies and for practical benevolent activities, may nevertheless be receding."<sup>25</sup> More programs, more campaigns, more banners, more web-sites, more buttons will avail nothing if the spirit of Christ is not the dynamo fueling all those endeavors. Evangelism is not about marketing. Genuine evangelism depends upon the real growth of new life in Christ in the church's members.

That spirit of Christ has an intrinsic impetus to express itself in new actions, dispositions, habits, practices, and aspirations that have a public dimension and are publicly visible. Therefore, evangelism primarily happens by the church making visible, for all the world to see, this spirit of Christ. In order to clarify this theme of the manifestation of Christ's spirit, the Mercersburg theologians reflected on the three-fold mediatorial office of Christ: that of prophet, priest, and king. It is through this *munus triplex* that Christ enacts and manifests his spirit of love. Therefore it is this three-fold ministry that the church must incarnate in the church's prophetic, priestly, and royal functions.

The priestly office is not to be narrowly identified with the sacerdotal functions of the church, but rather with Christ's work of uniting humanity with God. The church manifests this aspect of Christ's mediatorial work whenever the new life-communion with God shines forth in the spirit of reconciliation and the drive toward unity. Christians lead lives that dissolve interpersonal barriers, dismantle walls of separation, and heal estrangements. Christians evangelize by

<sup>22</sup> Emanuel Gerhart, vol. II, p. 475.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 475.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 475.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 475-476.

exuding a passion for oneness and a serene confidence in God's embrace that is attractive and contagious. In a way, the hymn is right in claiming that "you shall know they are Christians by their love." In this way the priestly office leads to an evangelism of Christ-like presence in which the very "being" of a person, a person's basic disposition prior to action and teaching, radiates love. So a basic principle of evangelism is: simply be Christ-like.

But that isn't enough for a fully Christomorphic evangelism. The kingly office, the enactment of Christ's rule over human lives and all earthly powers, must also accompany the priestly function. The royal function inspires the effort to transform all earthly structures and institutions so that they can become more apt reflections of Christ's law of love. Gerhart insists, "She [the church] modifies the character and attitude of civil governments. She originates institutions of charity. She turns the material improvements of the world into agencies for the enlargement of her spiritual activities."<sup>26</sup> This motif motivates social action in the world that incarnates Christ's reign of love and thereby inspires conversion. So another basic principle of evangelism is: perform Christ-like acts in the world.

Now we come to evangelism in light of the prophetic function, and, in many ways, this is the most controversial. The prophetic function is the revelation of truth, associated with the teaching role of the church. The story of the elevation of Christ's human nature and its communication to believers must be told in words to other people. People need to know something about Christ's earthly ministry, and about his death and resurrection, and about the promises made to the church in order to experience full, mature communion with Christ. Gerhart warned that without the prophetic function the sacerdotal function would devolve into mere outward observances and the royal function would degenerate into works-righteousness or ecclesial imperialism.<sup>27</sup> That is why the first Mercersburg generation so lionized the program of religious nurture, the "system of the catechism." The theologians who relied on the Heidelberg Catechism, theorized about the Eucharist, and wrote volumes of doctrinal history knew that the experience of Christ and the internalization of Christ are shaped by convictions about Christ. This means that Christians should actually articulate the good news of the new life in Christ. To put it crudely, in a rather unpopular idiom, we should not hesitate to "witness" to the difference that Christ has made in our lives. Evangelism necessarily involves a dimension of "telling," telling those outside the church about the joyful life in Christ that could be theirs. In a way, the prophetic office is the capstone, for it is the indispensable explanation of why a person has a reconciling demeanor and why a person is passionately enacting love in the world. It is not enough to go up to a heathen on the street and silently radiate Christ-like vibrations. It is not enough to work feverishly for Habitat for Humanity without telling anyone why you are doing it. The Christian actually has to talk to people about religious matters, in fact, about very personal religious matters.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 475.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 430-431.

So evangelism Mercersburg-style is like the proverbial three-legged stool. The church evangelizes by progressively making the new creation in its midst evident in its reconciling presence (the priestly office), in its enactment of the law of love (the royal office), and in its explicit witness to Christ and the new life available in him (the prophetic office).<sup>28</sup> To put it simply, evangelism should involve a reconciling interpersonal presence, the visible pursuit of shalom, and passionate witnessing. Those outside the church should be able to look into a Christian's eyes and see a deep at-one-ment with God, marvel at the public works of love and justice, and then hear an account of how both the serenity and the reformist zeal are rooted in Christ's communication of his very life to the believer. The love of Christ must be sensed, enacted, and described. This is evangelism by presence, deed, and word.

One final issue must be addressed. Although Christ is the ultimate agent of evangelism, who exactly are his earthly emissaries? The church as a whole, of course, is the body that makes these functions possible, but the church as a collectivity is often not the agent that encounters unchurched individuals. Therefore all individual members should also enact this three-fold ministry to the world in their daily vocations. All members are representatives of the church and all should be channels of this three-fold grace. Each Christian life should instantiate the *munus triplex* of Christ. This is the final and perhaps most challenging principle of evangelism Mercersburg-style. Laypeople, in their ordinary roles in the world, are the primary agents of evangelism.

So the conclusion is this: Genuine evangelism flows from the church's union with Christ's glorified human nature. Nothing of spiritual significance can happen if that connection with Christ is not nurtured. A Christocentric revival must be the foundation of any new efforts to spread the good news. As part of this, the church must get its story straight, and be clear about the content of its faith and the object of its hope. Without that, no amount of funding and no proliferation of innovative programs will do any good. The church must recover the good news of God's embrace of human nature in Jesus Christ; the church must have something truly compelling to tell the world or the world will discover that it can get along without the church-of-the-truncated-gospel quite nicely. Having experienced the new life in Christ, the church must be willing to manifest it in the lives and words of its members as they work in the world. Any form of Christianity that makes new life in Christ its central concern would necessarily regard transformed Christ-like lives as the primary vehicles of evangelism. We witness with our lives as we radiate, perform, and proclaim Christ's self-giving love. This recipe for evangelism sounds daunting, and impossibly far-fetched. Is it too Polyanna-ish to be practicable? Indeed it would be way too utopian if the success of our endeavors were up to our own stamina, virtue, and profundity. But the fruits of our evangelism are not dependent on our spiritual heroics. That assurance may be one of Mercersburg's most important legacies.

## Head, Heart and Spirit: Toward the Incarnational Community

The Rev. Mark J. Lukens, OCC

Some years ago, I was lucky enough to be in Florida during the feast of the Epiphany... and so I went to worship in this beautiful UCC church, built in a kind of weathered wood, Florida style with a minister right out of central casting. He was handsome, tall, with a beautiful head of silver hair, preaching to a congregation of well heeled men and fashionably slender ladies in expensive but understated outfits. All of us were treated to a very erudite and informative sermon... most of it on the astronomical phenomenon which would have made a star, (actually I think it was a planet) appear to stand still in the night sky-interesting, most definitely-but I couldn't help but think that the Planetarium does it better and they have a light show and a snack bar

About a year after that, I went to a mega church on Long Island. This one also with a pastor out of central casting, a Robert Schuler look alike in an Armani suit with a voice that defined the word mellifluous. And with the aid of some multi-media technology, a staff of attractive men and women and a young associate who looked suspiciously like Matt Damon, had us clapping and nodding to a 30 minute sermon on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm that I would have called "Jesus, my cosmic chiropractor- smoothing out the rough spots of life" if anyone had asked me. No one did, of course. I tell you, it's great to be one of the chosen but woe be unto to those who are not.

About three weeks ago, I went to my uncle's funeral. He was a devout Catholic of a Dorothy Day/Daniel Berrigan bent who worshiped at a university based Catholic Community in Connecticut, but which upon his death refused him the grace of a burial because "we don't do that here." Pro-life in extremis, I guess. So he had his funeral, ironically perhaps, at St Pius X Roman Catholic church. It was a mass of flawless rite executed with just a little less personal warmth than my mechanic puts into a brake job on my Honda.

And to think, that we stand behind our pulpits and look out at our sea of empty pews and wonder why. We go to our Association meetings and to church growth seminars and search for the magic formula or marketing plan that will make our churches grow- OR we give up and sit around desperately assuring ourselves of our purity and righteousness while we mourn for the good old days when we at least thought we had some relevancy to someone under 75 years of age. All of this without, I believe, ever seriously asking ourselves what in God's holy name we are doing here in the first place. What is the point is of this, Holy waste of time, as Marva Dawn so aptly put it, this snake oil we are selling that no one seems to want to buy anymore?

Now, I'm not an academic theologian. I'm just a small church pastor and a tent-maker at that. I was raised a Roman and came to the United Church of Christ after a brief sojourn in the UUA, (for which I blame my wife). Well, her and the cup cakes- they had some incredible cup cakes at this church. I found my calling in the UCC and later found Mercersburg through the Order of Corpus



Christi after asking the one person on the Confessing Christ email list whom I could understand, what the letters 'OCC' meant after his name, our Abbot, Richard Price.

And, I love the UCC, and I get irritated with those who trash our passion for justice, and mission because those are genuine efforts to live the great commandments; worthy and consistent with our emphasis on a living and loving faith. Frankly, I also appreciate the fact that the UCC's general disarray and disorganization saves it from the excesses of authoritarianism that plague so many other traditions, a blessing that I admit can occasionally feel like a curse. But I also think we have a tendency to suffer from a similar crisis of understanding as our Unitarian cousins; and, in fact, most of the church catholic: We know who we aren't but not who we are. More to the point, we don't know WHY we are and what that means for us in terms of our relationships to God and to one another. We don't ask ourselves enough what the point is. And we need to because when we don't, when we aren't sure, that's when we see people leaving over a sermon, or an issue, or tearing each other up over things like ONA, or whether we sit or stand for communion, or what Cleveland did, as they make up their own reason for being here.

And, so who and why are we? Are we merely the caretakers of a dying tradition? I think we are if we take any theology or tradition, too literally and enslave ourselves to its forms, or if we take ourselves too seriously for that matter. In my opinion, if we are worrying about the purity of our devotion to the original form of any theology or liturgy for that matter, rather than taking an organic or dare I say, incarnational view of it, we might just be those whitened sepulchers that Jesus talked about- a corpse just waiting to be pronounced.

Are we a collection of like minded individuals seeking sanctuary from a world in which evil reigns? This has got to be the most tempting Idolatry of American Protestantism, especially in its conservative and Arminian forms and one can see why. Because even though we drive an SUV, live in a gated community and eat too much every day, we get to be a persecuted minority (just like the disciples) in a secular humanist world spiraling toward a well deserved destruction. So we create a separate reality for us good and chosen ones while we wait for the rapture. We buy our flat screens TVs from a Christian store, go to Christian movies and hire Christian plumbers to unplug our Christian toilets. This is the so-called purpose driven church. It is popular because it simplifies our lives, affirms us in our righteousness, allows us to "stick to our own" and divides the world into easily identifiable categories emphasizing shared virtues most of which are already ours to claim, and praise Jesus for that!! But are those values are not gospel values, they're American civil religious values. And those communities tend to be unforgiving and prone to savage their own when, as inevitably happens, those virtues are challenged and feet of clay are revealed.

Are we a social justice organization? I hope we're just and I hope we're social. I've worked in organizations like that for 30 years. I still do and it's ennobling and worthy work, a ministry, and I've noticed that the best agencies are characterized by an almost religious commitment to a single minded purpose that they maintain through times when the cause is popular and when it isn't. We

need to do that with our gospel mission and the work of the church, rather than be what so many of our liberal churches are: amateurs diletantish-ly flitting from concern to concern in the effort to fulfill another agenda like looking for causes that affirm us, or unite us in something good, or that will grow the church. Church ministries are important, but they are children of the church, not the church itself, ministries of the community, not the basis for the community.

There are many more paradigms like these, but all of them, I think, fail as church because the gospel calls us to a different, more profound type of community than the one they offer: an incarnational community bound by ties of kinship, by an intimacy that transcends our differences, by our common creation as images of the divine which we experience as the post-modern ethicist Bauman says, "as an imperative toward the other;" a hard wired need for connection, for transformational union that runs directly counter to the messages we get from our society and culture. This cause or that cause, justice here or mercy there, are not our prime directive. Communion is our prime directive: with God our Creator and with our siblings through our brother Christ. Until we recognize our role as the community where the process of radical identification and that peculiar means of transformation, we call incarnation is undertaken, I think we will continue to run around in ever shrinking spirals talking to ourselves about things that no one cares about and killing ourselves in the process. Or, we can take a serious and praxis oriented look at this gift we have been given, this incarnational theology of Mercersburg, which believe can help us understand that we are first and always a worshipping community of Christians across space and time committed not to issues per se, because our intimacy as a family of faith transcends "issues," binding us together whether we agree or not or even whether we like each other or not. A communion which is realized most obviously and clearly when members of that family, find the grace to lose the argument as well as to win it because they are truly dedicated to the ultimate cause: union, and the transformation that is its process, its outcome and its promise. "And the word became flesh," as Nevin said, "in this simple, but sublime enunciation, we have the whole gospel comprehended in a word" in a divine act of identification and solidarity. Social justice is a function of that worshipping community, James is right, faith without works is dead. And it doesn't matter what we believe, it truly doesn't if who we are doesn't affect what we do and who we are. But the purpose of the church is to be a incarnational community, a community in which God is made manifest in the lives of God's people. In other words, church is a place where we make change because we are changed by the real presence of Christ at work within and among us. That may mean that I am led to protest abortion, while you are led to defend them and still we greet each other in grace, if and when we are united in our love for God and for one another in our absolute understanding of the worth of one another in the eyes of God and by our experience of sacrament, in the Eucharist and also, as Leonardo Boff might put it, as a sacramental community. I saw this in my own congregation when the Moderator said, "let's do this ONA thing," and the congregation passed it unanimously not because everyone was comfortable with it or in agreement with it. They weren't, but they were willing to trust each other enough to try it because

they believed in the goodness and love of one another and in the real and abiding presence of Christ in the life and worship of the community. This was not an event, but rather, a part of a counter-cultural process. We live in a culture in which we have raised up the idolatry of the individual to the exclusion of all else in our embrace of economic and social systems which to a large degree have liberated us from some of the more onerous aspects of social conformity but which we have not succeeded in replacing with any genuine form of community. The freedom we crow about rather incessantly in our culture has become, in the words of that great philosopher, Janis Joplin, "nothing left to lose" because like a spoiled adolescent we have sent mommy and daddy packing, but we are too painfully caught up in the vortex of our own narcissism and the hormones run amok in our new found freedom to figure out what to do next. So we wallow around in a self obsessed subjectivism, bobbing up and down on our own personal anxious benches all the while trying to absolutize that self subjective self-obsession as my spirituality, my decision for Christ, my experience, my salvation- which I am entitled to by virtue of my membership, in the chosen people, that is, the people I choose (perhaps for e harmony's 29 measures of compatibility). As that attitude eats away at the social contract, our sense of our belonging to a community, however flawed, (and it was) that is more important than just ME breaks down, we become angrier and lonelier. Since we no longer understand why we should give a damn about anyone else but ourselves, we are more and more outraged about any sort of social responsibility, less inclined to be civil which means in turn that we reinforce our own individualistic, narcissistic culture in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. Freedom has become for us an idol that we worship, which in fact is little more than the absence of external control and communal responsibility reinforced in our faith by what I believe is an erroneous understanding of the cross as a symbol, not of Christ's union with his children, or of a selfless sacrifice or the hope of resurrection, but of a persecution of the righteous ubermensch in the name of the oppressive community of the mediocre ala Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, the kind of "Tea Party" Jesus we see in Mel Gibson's epic, "Passion of the Christ."

For most of the mainline church, we too are so tied to the culture we live in that we don't know how, or maybe we aren't sure we want to challenge that culture of death (as Pope John Paul called it ). So we see our people picked off by the emergent church and the mega church and the "slappy happy hippy dippy church" because rather than offering the kind of alternative theology lived out in worship, but also in our attitudes, our way of being as a community, as a presence in the world, a way of life in which freedom is a means to an end, made manifest most perfectly in the voluntary surrender of that freedom in favor of union, the letting go of MY way, for THY way, we stand instead for a confused kind of individualism and narcissism lite, "liberated" from the stifling bonds of our inherited community maybe, but without a clear understanding of what exactly we are liberating ourselves FOR. And so, we find ourselves running from what was without any clear idea as to where we are going or why. The result is, that in an era in which our people have been trained to be "educated consumers," they find us, as Mary Karr wrote of her brief sojourn in the liberal Protestant church,

"sterile and bland," a bunch of Father Mulcahy's thrashing around sweetly but impotently, lacking in the passion that is integral to any intimate relationship- a passion, Karr found in the Roman Catholic church. Let's face it, why waste a perfectly good hour or two on a precious Sunday morning in church when you'll get thinner at the spin class, more thrills on e trade, more bargains on e bay, more friends on Face Book, more opportunity for good deeds by strolling down to the Habitat work site, and for that matter, a more certain guarantee of salvation by tuning into a televangelist. And you can access that salvation from your living room and you don't even have to put your pants on do it. Going to Church is, let's face it, is a waste of time. It won't get the porch fixed, the waist slimmed, or the hair trimmed and if you are looking for inner peace or affirmation, there are plenty of gurus, motivational speakers, miracle drugs and Chicken Soup for the Soul books that will demand less and on some level at least, probably deliver more with less effort of what you are seeking, because they make it all about you. If you want your self actualization Christian flavored, there are Christian Pilates, Christian weight loss and the handsome young pastor down at mega church central who will do that for you with a kind of theo-political jihad mentality in which a buff and mighty Jesus slugs it out with the forces of evil and you can tell the good guys by their solid abs and their manly virtues. Only the best and the brightest can be on the Jesus team and being the best means staying away from pollutants whether environmental or human and sticking with the winners. That means that we do have to answer the question, "why?" Why waste that time, why come here? We can't turn our noses up at it, because when we do, we turn them up at our prime directive: to make disciples of the nations.

There is nothing wrong with Pilates or virtue or Habitat for Humanity or even drugs for that matter. Chicken Soup makes me sick, but hey, different strokes. But what all of these things are pointing to is very important, and it is at the root of why we are the answer to what these folks, our folks are seeking. And that is the imperative toward communion, the aching after what is intrinsic to our very nature. We are created in love, set upon this earth with a yearning for union with the One who completes all things. The One who aches also for us with a yearning that is divinely expressed as incarnation and which in turn is offered to us as abiding a community that is communion. That is what will bring people to the church, to the gospel, that which has always been integral to Christ's own being: the quest for an intimacy that lifts them up, that honors them as and where they are, but also challenges them to become their authentic selves. And it starts with the "where they are" part. At Bethany our most effective evangelical outreach to date for example, has been our bowling team. By talking to other bowlers and by the example of their love for each other, they've brought a dozen new members. Another, which I am sorry to say we stupidly discarded, was our youth group. Now we have no youth. We have toddlers but no teens because we didn't realize what we were letting go of. Children's participation in liturgy, in sacrament and in sermons and children's Sundays have been another effective tool because they emphasize community and connection, they honor the gifts folks bring and the path they are on, where they are on it. Precisely because they require others to tolerate squirming, squawking children until they learn to rejoice

in them, they tell those children that they are a beloved part of this community and the adults, that they need to lighten up and rejoice in the miracle of new life: as messy and noisy as it always is.

That gift of connection and communion is precisely what I believe this theology has to offer to evangelism. The genuine community that Christ calls us to, that God created us thirsting for. A community which is incarnational, ad which, rather than emphasize violence and death, emphasizes creation and union re-enacted as sacrament again and again and again. Ours is a theology which doesn't just slavishly regurgitate ancient rites for their own sake, but which educates as it inculcates its members into the rhythms and rituals of the community, letting them know "we do this because..." In short, in terms of today's understanding of church, a counterintuitive disaster and yet a message that is already resonating profoundly especially among the millennial generation. Young people, victims of the narcissism of my generation, people who are all too aware of their hunger and thirst for genuine communion are quietly seeking that community of head, heart and spirit, the discipline of confession and creed, the communion of sacrament and liturgy and the shared journey of becoming rooted in something beyond themselves. And they are more and more ready for a faith that is not about what we want, but about what God calls us to, a faith in which we become who we are meant to be in transformative relationship in imitation of the incarnate of Christ. They are looking for us and we have to let them know we are here.

When Christ tells us that I am the truth and the life, I believe he means that quite literally, indicating that it is in direct communion with his personhood, both divine and human that we are transformed, not from sinner to saint in the traditional sense of individualistic theology but from incomplete individuals into our completion as community in transformative relationship. The theology of Mercersburg, is revolutionary if it is understood as Nevin understood the incarnation itself; as the central theme of our faith. Incarnational theology is dynamic, relational and transformative. The sacraments, like the confessions and creeds are understood not as personal possessions or litmus tests, but as proclamations of the incarnational community, as the means by which we live and move and have our being.

There is an often told and probably apocryphal tale of an orthodox priest who was teaching a class on the apostle's creed at a Divinity school. A student raises his hand and asks the priest what he should do if he doesn't agree with the creed, to which the priest replies, "keep saying it, you'll get it." "No," the student persists, "I do understand, I just don't agree with it." "Yes," the priest said, "but it's not your creed, it's the church's creed, keep saying it, you will get it."

The transformative relationship that is the center of the life of the church is the thing, and it does not belong to us. We belong to it. We surrender to it because it is the proclamation and illustration of the life and love of our community across time as well as space. The creeds, the sacraments, and the rites are the language by which we speak of our experience of these things together. Our community is radically inclusive and it is radically elastic in the sense that those things which bind us that we surrender to are also our liberation; opening us

up to explore the infinite dimensions of this relationship with God and with God's people. That makes the incarnational community attractive to those who need to bring their heads as well as their hearts to church. It is dynamic and communal, not a personal journey of enlightenment, but a fulfillment of our collective yearning for union which is, (perhaps paradoxically), the ultimate desire of our individual souls. Like the Trinity in a sense, it is an intimacy that does not consume but which rather realizes the ultimate being of its participants. It offers a model of God who is immutable in the relentlessness of her love, but otherwise dynamic, affected and effective: in active, organic relationship with that which she has created; a being connected to that in which she has breathed her breath of life, head, heart and spirit. What we have to offer is a healthy, life giving diet to a culture gorged and yet starving on the fast food of individualism and narcissism- looking for love in all the wrong places. It's a challenge, no doubt, a challenge that requires us to recognize the ways in which we have failed in our own discipleship, failed to meet our hungry and hurting in ways that speak to them and with them in ways in which they can hear- and that we can do better.

Humility, of course, is required as well to save us from getting lost in the penultimate as we seek after the ultimate and to help us to understand that it truly is more important that our congregations join in the reading of scripture, for instance, than that they get all the words right. Humility frees us from the tyranny of works righteousness expressed as virtue without throwing out holiness because it is not personal virtue that matters, but the willingness to surrender self to relationship. The one who cleans the toilets must be lifted up for the importance of his service and the outcast welcomed because the gift of eliciting love and of creating opportunities for its expression in service is as precious as the gift of offering it.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, for the sake of evangelism and for the sake of the gospel we serve, we honor people where they are and as they are while challenging them as well to be the saints God made them to be. We expect them to be the gracious and loving, courageous and faithful people that we know they really are and we rejoice and celebrate both the gifts they bring and the gifts that we acquire in our journey together. We must and we can do it, because God created that hunger in us, for connection and intimacy, for a community of head and heart- a blessed community that is who we really are.



## BOOK REVIEW # 1.

W. Bradford Littlejohn,  
*The Mercersburg Theology and the Quest for Reformed Catholicity*,  
Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009. Pp. xvii + 195.  
\$13.80.  
ISBN 13: 978-1-60608-241-6.

Reviewed by Alan P. F. Sell  
Milton Keynes, U.K.

Let it be said at the outset that this well-produced book is a credit to both author and publisher. It deserves to be widely read in theological, historical and ecumenical circles. It is fluently written, the style oscillating between the elegant and the homely – as when ‘Hodge offers his two cents.’ Readers of the Mercersburg type will be encouraged, others will be challenged, some (especially historians of philosophy) may wish for more at certain points, and, no doubt, a few will be infuriated; for we are dealing here with nineteenth-century theological-cum-ecclesiastical fires the embers of which are still warm and, in some places, are flickering into renewed life, such (to mix metaphors) are the sensitivities of Reformed doctrinal antennae. Littlejohn’s objective, is by no means antiquarian. On the contrary, his diagnosis is that the several varieties of current American Protestantism have so departed from a true understanding of the Church as to have fallen into fractious sectarianism. Nevin, he declares, foresaw this: he ‘knew that the reigning Reformed scholasticism did not possess the theological resources to cope with the swelling tide of subjectivism and arid rationalism, the twin daughters of the Enlightenment which threatened to overwhelm American Christianity’ (1-2). (I pause to observe [a] that there was more than one Enlightenment; and [b] that when Enlightenment thinkers opposed on moral grounds certain ways – notably Reformed scholastic ways – of expounding Christian doctrines, and when they encouraged people to question untoward authoritarianisms whether Biblicist or ecclesiastical, they did well.<sup>29</sup> However it may have been with Nevin, I should not like to think that Littlejohn himself is of the tribe of wanton Enlightenment-bashers). In Mercersburg theology the author finds the remedy for American Protestantism’s disarray. More than that: in a fresh departure in Mercersburg studies, he investigates the degree of compatibility between his favoured theology and that of the Anglo-

<sup>29</sup> See Alan P. F. Sell, *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel. Theological Themes and Thinkers 1550-2000*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005, ch. 3.

Catholics in England, the Eastern Orthodox traditions and the *Nouvelle Théologie* of Henri de Lubac and others in the Roman Catholic Church.

Littlejohn first adjusts himself to the positions of D. Hart, R. Wentz and J. Nichols, all of whom have toiled in the Mercersburg field. Not completely satisfied by any of them, he awards the highest grade to the last. He next introduces us to Nevin and Schaaf, and also to Charles Hodge of Princeton, whose role in this tale is that of supreme opponent of Mercersburg. There follows a sketch of the intellectual environment in which the three worked. This takes the form of a breathless scamper through the history of philosophy from Descartes (D- on account of his dualism) to Hegel (A for his healing of the Cartesian-cum-Kantian breach). On the way we meet Thomas Reid and the Scottish Common Sense Realism, so important for the understanding of nineteenth-century American Presbyterian thought – and hence of Hodge’s thought. It is unfortunate that partly perhaps because of compression, partly because at this point he summarizes secondary sources, Littlejohn is less than fully clear on the matter. In the first place the term ‘common sense’ requires careful elucidation: there is a spectrum of common sense approaches with Oswald and Beattie at one end and Ferrier at the other. Secondly, the judgment that ‘Of crucial importance for theology was Common Sense Realism’s thoroughly dualistic outlook’ (21) needs to be set against Reid’s objective of bringing self-consciousness and sense perception together. In the course of doing this he argued that Hume’s sensation was an abstraction that could not be dissociated from an experiencing self. This in turn led Andrew Seth to say that ‘by maintaining a theory of Immediate Perception, Scottish philosophy destroys the foreignness of matter to mind, and thus implicitly removes the only foundation of a real dualism.’<sup>30</sup> Littlejohn doffs his cap to Schleiermacher, though it is not made clear that in the eighteenth century ‘feeling’ was understood to concern the whole person and hence had cognitive import, was not a matter of emotion only, and was certainly far removed from present-day feel-good cosy glows.

With a discussion of Hodge *versus* Schaaf on the latter’s work, *The Principle of Protestantism*, we approach the heart of this book – an account of the tussle between Hodge and Nevin over *The Mystical Presence*. The root of the dispute was Nevin’s incarnationalism, which Hodge construed as post-Hegelian pantheizing immanentism. At this point Littlejohn nails his colours to the mast. Hodge’s judgment, he declares, is ‘skewed and off base’, and is revelatory ‘more of Hodge’s own presuppositions than Nevin’s’ (63). For the most part Littlejohn’s account of the opposing arguments is judicious and fair though, if I may emulate the author’s style, on occasion Hodge emerges as more of a noodle than Nevin.

As befits one who endorses a theology deemed to have significant ecumenical potential, Littlejohn offers three exotic chapters: the first on English Anglo-Catholicism (‘The dons across the pond!’); the second on Mercersburg and Eastern Orthodoxy, the third on the *nouvelle théologie* of de Lubac as it bears

<sup>30</sup> A. Seth, *Scottish Philosophy. A Comparison of the Scottish and German Answers to Hume*, Edinburgh: Blackwood, (1885), 2nd edn, 1890, 76-7.

upon the definition of catholicity. I shall refer to these shortly. Meanwhile I note Littlejohn's concluding aspirations. He hopes that 'By exposing the presuppositions of Hodge's system of doctrine, Mercersburg may show many how their "Reformed" doctrine is more a product of the Enlightenment than the Bible or the Reformation' (170); and that Mercersburg theology will be a 'welcome mat' to Anglo-Catholics, the Orthodox, and Roman Catholics influenced by de Lubac. Time will tell.

Before proceeding further I note a few points of detail. Littlejohn writes that Hart 'tends to emphasize Nevin's critique of Protestantism as a critique aimed at recent low-church innovations, rather than a questioning of Protestantism as such' (4). But Nevin was more than a little concerned about what he regarded as 'low church' liturgical tendencies within the German Reformed Church, especially as these were represented by J. H. A. Bomberger. Littlejohn somewhat surprisingly passes over this issue, its relevance to the Lord's Supper and the mystical presence notwithstanding. Secondly, he refers (18) to 'the liberal United Churches of Christ.' The plural is a slip, and the adjective is not universally applicable to the members of that denomination. Thirdly, Nevin referred disparagingly to 'The fond notion which some have of a republican or democratic order in Christianity' which relies upon 'the popular vote' (113). It cannot be denied that some in the tradition of those whom Nevin pejoratively branded 'Puritan', as well as some Presbyterians, have thought of their church order as being democratic – and, sadly, the newly-published *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* defines the Congregational order as democratic. But Congregationalism is far removed from democracy, if by 'democracy' we mean 'one person, one vote and government by the majority.' It is not the will of the members that is sought, but the mind of Christ the sole Lord of the Church; and the quest is for unanimity in Christ, not human majorities.

This is a most stimulating book, and part of its stimulus results from an enthusiasm for Mercersburg which sometimes prevents Littlejohn from guarding his flank. But it is also a modest book in that the author understands that there is more work to be done (172). I hope that he will undertake some of this work, and that in doing so he will derive benefit from K. Penzel on Schaaf, J. W. Stewart and others on Hodge, Peter B. Nockles on Anglo-Catholicism, and from a number of those who have contributed articles to this journal. Among the last is Lee Barrett who has admirably demonstrated the illumination to be derived from the bringing together of the theologies of Mercersburg, Berlin and Basel.<sup>31</sup> In what follows I shall propose seven discussion points by way of showing how some British Reformed theologians who are not in the line of Hodge or Nevin, might be drawn into the debate. I launch forth from points raised by Littlejohn without in any way implying that in this book he should have extended the discussion in the ways I am suggesting.

<sup>31</sup> Lee C. Barrett III, 'The metamorphoses of the Mercersburg heritage: Mercersburg meets Berlin and Basel,' *The New Mercersburg Review*, XLII, Spring, 2010, 5-44.

1. *Union with Christ.* Littlejohn quotes Nevin as saying that by the 'inward living union between believers and Christ' believers are 'incorporated into his very nature, and made to subsist with him by the power of a common life' (42). This union, he continues, is not spiritual only, but is a union with Christ's manhood (67). Again, Nevin declares that 'The object of the incarnation was to couple the human nature in real union with the Logos, as a permanent source of life' (103); and that 'Humanity, as a single universal fact, is redeemed by Christ, truly and really' (60). It is not difficult to see in such remarks the impetus towards Littlejohn's discussion of *theosis* as adumbrated in Orthodox thought. There does seem, however, to be a puzzling oscillation between speaking of believers as united to Christ and the whole of humanity as being so united. There is also the question of the nature of the union. In a paper on 'Regeneration' Bomberger declares that 'Man is not deified by regeneration. In it men become Christians, but are not made Christs.'<sup>32</sup> With many others on his side the Welsh Presbyterian, Huw Parri Owen, insisted that 'The ontological distinction between the Creator and all creatures is absolute and permanent',<sup>33</sup> and elsewhere he made the logical point: 'It is an obvious self-contradiction to affirm that one experiences an ontologically complete identification with, or absorption into, the Supreme; for one could not have any consciousness of any kind without a distinct, enduring, subject – without *oneself*.'<sup>34</sup> While those who query divinization/*theosis* are ill advised polemically to brandish 'pantheism' and 'divinization' as pejorative terms, they are entitled to greater clarity on the matter than is sometimes provided, and they need to be shown how the points made by Bomberger and Owen are mistaken, or, if they are not, how they may be circumvented by those who stand for *theosis*.<sup>35</sup>

2. *Word and Sacraments.* A related question concerns the way in which the mystical union of the believer with Christ is inaugurated. In one place (100) it appears that Nevin makes baptism the agent of the union; in another (48) Littlejohn finds him in the line of the 'old Reformed view' that 'the sacrament [the Lord's Supper] accomplishes a real union with the person of Christ.' We are thus confronted by the broader question, How is salvation mediated to us? In this

<sup>32</sup> J. H. A. Bomberger, 'Regeneration,' *Proceedings of the Second Council of the World Presbyterian Alliance*, 1880, 552. See further on Bomberger and Mercersburg, Alan P. F. Sell, 'J. H. A. Bomberger (1817-1890) versus J. W. Nevin: a centenary reappraisal,' *The New Mercersburg Review*, VIII, Autumn 1990, 3-24; reprinted in idem, *Commemorations. Studies in Christian Thought and History*, Calgary: University of Calgary Press, and Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998, ch. 10.

<sup>33</sup> H. P. Owen, *Christian Theism. A Study in its Basic Principles*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984, 102.

<sup>34</sup> Idem, *The Christian Knowledge of God*, London: The Athlone Press, 1969, 189.

<sup>35</sup> See further Alan P. F. Sell, *Confessing and Commending the Faith. Historic Witness and Apologetic Method*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006, 70-79.



connection the relation of the Word and sacrament is crucial, and it may be suggested that Nevin's sacramentalism discourages him from giving due place to the preaching of the Word. Thus Nevin argues that 'Christ's presence in the Supper was "specific in nature, and different from all that has place in the common exercises of worship"' (47). Littlejohn expounds the point thus: the Supper 'offers a profound grace and participation in Christ that cannot be found elsewhere in the Christian life' (47), and this he regards as the historic Reformed view which has come to be 'flatly denied' by those who hold that 'the ordinances become merely different instruments for accessing the same grace' (47). Is this the historic Reformed view? Calvin may advise us: 'the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace.'<sup>36</sup> Indeed, 'the right administration of the Sacrament cannot stand apart from the Word.'<sup>37</sup> It sounds to me as if Calvin would have us understand that the sacraments witness to the same gracious saving activity that is proclaimed in the Word, and that they cannot justifiably be sundered from the Word. It does not seem that Calvin believes that either sacrament as such or in isolation effects the union of the believer with Christ.

3. *The heart of the Gospel.* Littlejohn fairly sums matters up by saying that the Mercersburg theologians 'made as their starting point the Incarnation, in which the infinite became finite, the natural became supernatural, Spirit took on matter, the deathless died and the mortal became immortal' (173). Leaving on one side the question of the analysis of such claims, the nagging feeling persists that Mercersburg theologians are inclined to play down the Cross. Of course the incarnation is temporally and logically prior to the Cross – Christ can do what he does only because he is who he is; but in terms of Good News and the inauguration of the Church the Cross is of central importance: 'The doctrine of the Incarnation,' wrote P. T. Forsyth, did not create the Church; it grew up (very quickly) in the Church out of the doctrine of the cross which did create it – in so far as that can be said of any doctrine, and not rather of the act and power which the doctrine tries to state.'<sup>38</sup> For this reason, 'Our approach to Christology is through the office of Christ as Saviour. We only grasp the real divinity of His person by the value for us of His Cross.'<sup>39</sup>

4. *The nature of the Church.* Littlejohn quotes Schaff's opinion that the Church is 'the kingdom of Christ on earth', and that it is 'the continuation of the life and work of Christ upon earth' (78). The former claim requires to be considered in relation to the widespread scholarly opinion that while the Church is called to witness to God's kingly rule it is not co-terminus with the kingdom. The latter claim requires to be set against P. T. Forsyth's terse judgment: 'It is a regenerated

<sup>36</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xiv.17.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.xvii.39.

<sup>38</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, (1909), London: Independent Press, 1957, 50 n.

<sup>39</sup> *Idem*, *The Church and the Sacraments*, (1917), London: Independent Press, 1953, 33.

human nature in which Christ dwells. But that cannot be a prolongation of His Incarnation, wherein there was no regeneration.'<sup>40</sup>

5. *The matter of the Church.* Littlejohn shows that at the heart of the running battle between the Mercersburg theologians and Hodge is the formers' 'recovery of the centrality of the visible Church' over against 'Princeton's rigorous dichotomy between the true invisible Church and the dubious visible Church' (10). Further, 'Nevin insists that we do not allow [the Church] to degenerate into an ideal abstraction; the Church is the corporate body of believers, and is as visible and real as Christ himself when He walked on earth' (68, cf. 167). I suggest that here we have the heart of Congregational catholic ecclesiology: the saints gathered into the Church catholic in the only way possible if the Church is to be visibly embodied on earth – that is, into one of its local expressions. There are not many churches, but one Church in many places; otherwise, as Calvin saw, Christ would be divided, which cannot be.<sup>41</sup> The implication is that on the ground of the Son's saving work the Father, by the Holy Spirit (normally through the preaching of the Word), calls and gathers the saints into a visible company, with the result that while they remain in the world they are not of it: their true citizenship is in heaven. This would appear to be so far compatible with Littlejohn's account of Nevin's 'sharp distinction between the Church, the locus of divine life, and the world, the object that must be transformed by that life' (66). But later he reports Nevin's view as being that 'In the Church, as "catholic", the whole of mankind and all of his endeavors are raised up from their fallen state, beyond even the created state, into a new age that brings all to completion' (169) – which is puzzling since the visibility of the Church has just been re-emphasized yet we now seem have in view more than the saints. In passing I note the Mercersburg (and Littlejohn's) dislike of the idea of the Church as comprising 'voluntary gatherings of individual saints' (169). Certainly the Church is a body, not a collection of isolated atoms; but the word 'voluntary' should hold no fears. When the Separatist, Robert Browne, declared that 'The Lord's people is of the willing sort',<sup>42</sup> he was not thinking of voluntary membership of darts clubs and suchlike organizations; he was expressing positively what his fellow-Separatist, Henry Barrow declared with heavy irony of the Act of Uniformity of 1559: 'All this people ... were in one daye, with the blast of Queen Elizabeth's trumpet, of

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 82. I have elsewhere observed that 'the Mercersburg theologians and Forsyth are nowhere farther apart than here.' See Alan P. F. Sell, 'What has P. T. Forsyth to do with Mercersburg?' *The New Mercersburg Review*, XXII, Autumn 1997, reprinted in *idem*, *Testimony and Tradition. Studies in Reformed and Dissenting Thought*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, 195.

<sup>41</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.i.2; cf. his *Commentary on Ephesians*, 4: 5.

<sup>42</sup> R. Browne, *A Treatise of Reformation without tarrying for anie*, (1582), in *The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne*, eds. Leland H. Carlson and Albert Peel, London: Allen & Unwin, 1953, 162.

ignorant papists and grosse idolaters, made faithfull Christianes and true professors.<sup>43</sup>

6. *Varieties of catholicity*. Littlejohn explains that in Schaaf's opinion, 'The Catholic Church, though operating within an Augustinian tradition, had not adequately appreciated the corrupting powers of sin, that man "is unable to produce from himself anything that is good"' (30). Hence the importance of the doctrine of justification, which directs us to God's grace alone for salvation and spiritual growth. Interestingly, the Mercersburg theologians do not seem to be equally troubled by another side of Augustine's thought, namely, a sacramentarianism that when faced with the necessity of dealing with sins committed after baptism deemed regenerating, concluded that priests were, by ordination, endowed with *potestas* and were thus able to absolve sinners. (I put this crudely for the sake of brevity). From this has flowed the ecclesiastical sectarianism that requires communion with the Bishop of Rome for ministries to be fully recognized and sacraments to be 'valid' or 'regular'. We thus have the separation at the table of the Lord of those who by grace alone God by the Spirit has already made one in Christ and engrafted into the one Church catholic. It is tragic. It is an affront to the work of the triune God. It elevates polity above the Gospel, and it denies the fact that those stand in the succession of the apostles who proclaim the apostles' doctrine. It has always seemed odd to me that Nevin, with his ability to discern sects, did not take the full measure of one to two rather large ones. Much of this applies also to the Anglo-Catholics. In connection with them, Littlejohn explains Nevin's view that 'the visible Church flows out of the authorization of its ministers; rather than its ministers being authorised by the Church which is first instituted generally' (112) – in other words the ministers are above the Church because they inherit the apostles' commission. But according to the Presbyterian scholar, T. W. Manson, there was no 'handing on' of authority from the apostles to their successors such as would justify what Robert Mackintosh, that self-styled 'refugee' from the Hodge-like Presbyterianism of the Free Church of Scotland to Congregationalism, bluntly called 'nonsense about apostolic succession.'<sup>44</sup> Without question both Manson and Mackintosh saw the value of the *pastor pastorum*, but they would have abominated any notion that religion is somehow 'done to' the people by the ministers, and they would have insisted that it is the Church, not the ministers, that celebrates the sacraments. To

<sup>43</sup> H. Barrow, *The Writings of Henry Barrow 1587-1590*, ed. Leland H. Carlson, London: Allen & Unwin, 1962, 283. See further Alan P. F. Sell, *Saints: Visible, Orderly and Catholic. The Congregational Idea of the Church*, Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications (now from Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock), 1986, ch. 2.

<sup>44</sup> See T. W. Manson, *The Church's Ministry*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948, ch. 2; Robert Mackintosh, 'Church union – hopes and cautions,' *The Congregational Quarterly*, XI, 1933, 452. Those who enjoy theology of the more bracing sort may care to consult Alan P. F. Sell, *Robert Mackintosh: Theologian of Integrity*, Bern: Peter Lang, 1977. See also idem, *Aspects of Christian Integrity*, (1990), Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998, ch. 4.

Mackintosh the problem was not episcopacy as such, but the 'superstitious doctrine of sacramental grace' associated with it.<sup>45</sup> In justice to Schaaf and Nevin it must be noted that they were not uncritical of Anglo-Catholicism. In particular, while welcoming its recovery of the early Church, they found it too backward-looking – a judgment that does not prevent Littlejohn from uncritically asserting that Anglo-Catholicism 'put an indelible stamp of the future history of the Anglican Communion, and ensured the survival of that Church by breathing new life into her' (90).

7. *Revivalism*. While it is not impossible to find more charitable responses to Finney than Nevin's, the latter is on firm ground in lamenting revivalism's 'emphasis on the immediate, subjective encounter of the believer with God [which] set the stage for a more anthropocentric, unchurchly, and unsacramental style of religion' (20). Certainly it is possible to demonstrate that in circles in which conversion became the favoured route into the Church, local Congregational covenants declined,<sup>46</sup> mission halls erupted, and baptism was sometimes neglected. It is interesting to compare Nevin's case against revivalism with that of Mackintosh, from whose pamphlet, *The Insufficiency of Revivalism as a Religious System* (1889) I have already quoted. Like Nevin, he laments the individualism that revivalism encourages. Like its parent, the earlier evangelicalism, it 'does not wish to be distracted by any wider moral outlook than the desire to save one's own soul in the first place, and, secondly, to promote the salvation of the souls of other individuals. It has, and can have, no thought of the kingdom of God.'<sup>47</sup> As to the revivalist's procedure – 'What counsel does the revivalist offer?', Mackintosh asks. He answers, "'Resolve to be converted to-night, and all must go well." Could unreality go further? ... Human souls are not their own, to dedicate or to withhold. Boasting is excluded here.'<sup>48</sup> Again, Mackintosh argues that intellectual and moral considerations prevent educated public opinion from resting in conversionism:

Apologetic forbids it. The sources of doubt are so many, and so serious, that we are driven to counterbalance them, not by mere force of authority, not by 'miracles and prophecy', or by machine-made arguments of Paley's school, but by internal evidences – *i.e.* by a view of the inherent moral probability of the Christian revelation. But conversionism is absolutely inconsistent with an ethical view of life. If conversionism is right, Christianity cannot be the complete moralising of human life. ... [A] conception of salvation as being a spasm in the individual life does not give us any help towards the kingdom of God.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> R. Mackintosh, *The Insufficiency of Revivalism as a Religious System*, bound with his *Essays Towards a New Theology*, Glasgow: Maclehose, 1889, 33.

<sup>46</sup> See Alan P. F. Sell, *Dissenting Thought and the Life of the Churches. Studies in an English Tradition*, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990, ch. 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

But the 'decisive [anti- revivalist] consideration' is that 'the Church's tradition is anti-individualistic. Infant baptism is the great rock of offence to the triumphant revival.'<sup>50</sup> One can almost hear Nevin's 'Amen' - though if he knew what was coming on the next page he might have second thoughts about Mackintosh, who there declares that 'The High Churchman, in spite of his tall talk, is as great an individualist as any ranter. His community is the aggregate of baptized individuals, as the other's is of converted.'<sup>51</sup>

I have not been able to develop any of the foregoing seven points. They are no more than hints of trains of thought that have been started by W. Bradford Littlejohn's stimulating volume. At most they suggest that just as Littlejohn has reached out to traditions other than his own (and let there be more of this), so, as Lee Barrett has shown, the enquiry into a wider than American sample of diverse Reformed responses to neuralgic theological and ecclesiastical questions that transcend oceans and channels alike may not be altogether fruitless.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 28.

## BOOK REVIEW # 2.

### **Halle Pietism, Colonial North America, and the Young United States**

Edited by **Hans-Jürgen Grabbe**. Published by Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart. Pp. 321. Hardcover, €59.00, c. \$78.00. ISBN 9783515087674.

Reviewed by **Richard J. Mammana, Jr.**  
richard.mammana@yale.edu Yale Divinity School

The landscape of German-settled Pennsylvania is dotted with biblical place-names: Bethlehem, Nazareth, Ephrata, Lebanon. Zion, Salem, Jerusalem, and Tabor give their names to the many former union churches of the state, most of which are now either Lutheran- or UCC-affiliated.<sup>52</sup> One of the major—and now mostly forgotten—reference-points for early German-speaking Pennsylvanians was not a biblical place-name, however, but rather one from Sachsen-Anhalt in what is now eastern Germany: Halle.

The University of Halle, founded in 1694, was a major center of education and religious formation with Pietist emphases for the Lutheran and Reformed clergy who served in the 18th and 19th century mission-field, especially in German-speaking Pennsylvania. Theological currents at Halle influenced émigré German clergy before and throughout their service in the young United States. Mark Häberlein, along with other authors in this important new collection, argues that an understanding of Halle's role in American religious life is critical for a clear understanding of "early failures and later successes."

Each of the fourteen essays in *Halle Pietism, Colonial North America, and the Young United States* provides a rich view of Halle's influence among the first generations of German Americans. (A number of the chapters in this collection began life as papers delivered to an academic conference of the same name in Wittenberg in 2002.) Three essays stood out especially for this reader for the ways in which they illuminate the history of Pennsylvanian religious life from a wide variety of Halle-based perspectives.

In "The *Pfarrhaus* as Model in Defining German-American Identities," Marianne S. Wokeck explores the role of parsonages in providing stability for the Lutheran and Reformed clergy organized by Henry Melchior Muhlenberg and Michael Schlatter respectively. Through the *Pfarrhaus*, Wokeck reads an

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<sup>52</sup> My wife assures me that no matter how heavenly I believe them to be, Scranton and Annville are not biblical place-names.

important example of continuity between colonial American religion—organized in terms of language or theological affinity rather than geography—and its roots in parochially-organized German-speaking Europe. She finds that for all clergy in this period, “the time they spent in a particular place was critically linked to the influence they had locally. How long pastors served their congregations was most often tied to their status.” Clergy-housing in parsonages attached to formally organized congregations was an important—and to my knowledge, hitherto unresearched—ingredient in the process through which “German-American ways formed out of Old World knowledge, memories, and expectations” came into conflict with and were transformed by “New World experience and understanding.”

Steven M. Nolt’s essay entitled “‘Mingle Our Religious Concerns with the Affairs of the State’? Nationalism, Reform, and Pennsylvania Germans in the Early Republic” builds on his important work in *Foreigners in Their Own Land: Pennsylvania Germans in the Early Republic* (Pennsylvania State University Press and the Pennsylvania German Society, 2002). Nolt looks at local resistance to the revivalist activities of Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) among German-speakers near and in Reading, Pennsylvania. Local laymen from Lutheran and Reformed congregations protested revivalist meetings here in the late 1820s, arguing that they were “dangerous to the liberties of the people” and insisting that they would “not assist in maintaining Clergymen who advocate them or are concerned in their support.” Nolt is adept at excavating the reasons for these protests in Halle-inspired Pietism and its political implications for Pennsylvania German Americans. He is especially helpful in locating the roots of this response in the earlier experience of German Americans with British colonial political culture, still a part of recent memory for this remarkably cohesive community.

Another significant essay is Wolfgang Splitter’s relatively negative assessment of early Halle-based work in North America. In “*Divide et impera: Some Critical Remarks on Halle Missionaries’ Formation of a Lutheran Church in Pennsylvania*,” Splitter notes that the writings of August Francke (1696-1769) and Henry Melchior Muhlenberg do not offer a “concrete idea of the objectives, potentials, and limits of [the] pious expedition” resulting in the organized establishment of Lutheranism in Pennsylvania. Their early lack of awareness of peculiar American challenges and ecclesiastical, social, economic, linguistic, and other conditions makes the survival of institutions they sponsored or founded all the more extraordinary. Splitter adapts rigorously-research statistical data to fascinating charts about the leadership of the Pennsylvania ministerium from 1748-1800 (pages 85-91); these charts provide a useful way of seeing the fragmentary character of early American Lutheranism, as well as the extent to which German universities such as Halle had direct impact in colonial pulpits.

Additional essays cover important connections among Halle Pietists, Methodists and Moravians (Theodore H. Runyon); the place of North American Hallensian missions in a wider “Pietist Lutheran network” that included missions in India (Norman J. Threinen); the conflicted relationship between Johann Christoph Sauer (1695-1757) and Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (the late Donald

F. Durnbaugh); and the impact of Halle’s theological legacy in formative arguments among “Americanists” and “Confessionalists” in American Lutheranism (A. Gregg Roeber). The late Carola Wessel examines broadsides as a source for the appeal of Halle-based Pietism, and Renate Wilson explores the botanist Gotthilf Heinrich Ernst Muhlenberg (1753-1815) and the orientalist Johann Christopher Kunze (1744-1807) as second-generation Halle Pietist clergy working in a North American context.

The unfortunately high price of this volume puts it outside the easy reach of most readers, but it should be accessible in good research libraries or through inter-library loan services. For the detailed, careful picture of transatlantic religion its essays offer, it deserves a wide and interested audience.



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