

**THE NEW
MERCERSBURG
REVIEW**

Journal of the Mercersburg Society
Number XLVI Spring 2012

**WHERE IS MAINLINE
PROTESTANTISM TODAY?**

William McKinney

THE NEVIN FAMILY

John B. Payne

BOOK REVIEWS

*The Mystical Presence And the Doctrine of the Reformed
Church on the Lord's Supper: The Mercersburg Theology
Study Series Volume One.*

By John Williamson Nevin, Edited by Linden J. DeBie

Canon and Creed

By Robert W. Jenson

Phillip Schaff

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

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

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

From the Editor

F. Christopher Anderson

I apologize that the Spring issue is coming out in the Fall. We have now changed printing companies and hopefully we will be able to get you the Fall issue in the winter well before our special convocation with The Association of Reformed and Liturgical Worship. (AR&LW) This year we will be meeting at Princeton Seminary. Christopher Dorn is working on an article to introduce this organization to all of us. For more information about the convocation see the ad in the back of this issue.

The Spring issue touches on many differing areas that the Society seeks to emphasize. William McKinney's essay speaks to the present and future state of Mainline Protestantism. John Payne's article looks at the history of the greatest Mercersburg theologian from a differing angle. The first book review point to a sea change in the publishing of Mercersburg Theology and the second one reminds us that Lutherans are also interested in issues that are important to us.

"Where is the Mainline Protestantism Today?" This is an important question. When I heard William McKinney quote Philip Schaff at this year's Craigville Theological Colloquy I knew his message should find a place in the NMR. This is an essay that Schaff and Nevin would have loved to read and to ponder. McKinney's experience as the President of Pacific School of Religion and his lifelong work on mainline religion gives him a unique perspective on this important question. My only regret is that when he presented this no one recorded McKinney's amazing responses to the questions that this address provoked. McKinney's article reminds us that The Mercersburg Society is much more than an antiquarian society.

Our own John B. Payne (retired professor of Church History at LTS) looks at the history of John Williamson Nevin's family. Though we are not an Antiquarian Society we are sincerely interested in the history of the chief theologian of Mercersburg Theology. Dr. Payne's work helps us see Nevin from another perspective, the perspective of his family. For a society that holds tightly to the Doctrine of the Incarnation this is quite fitting.

I have written a rather extensive positive review of John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence And The Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper: The Mercersburg Theology Study Series Volume One*. Our own Linden J. DeBie is the editor. The simple fact is that it is now the new standard text on this very important book. I am very excited by possible future volumes on The Heidelberg Catechism and such works as Nevin's "Early Christianity." I can only say that years from now we will look back to this moment with "much rejoicing."

In the second review we take a look at Robert W. Jensen's book *Canon and Creed*. Our President, Deborah Rahn Clemens, has given us a wonderful book to study this year. It is brief, solid, practical and written in the ecumenical spirit that means so much to those of us who love Mercersburg Theology.

Where is Mainline Protestantism Today?

William McKinney

Delivered at the 29th Craigville Theological Colloquy,

July 17th, 2012 @ 10 AM.

Craigville Retreat Center, Cape Cod, MA

“Mainline” is one of several labels (among them: “mainstream,” “ecumenical,” “modernist,” “public,” “established,” “old-line,” “progressive” and “liberal”) used to refer to Protestant churches and sensibilities whose experience in America dates to the early years of European immigration. Each of these terms is theologically and sociologically imprecise due in part to the fact that in the US setting today even the term “Protestant” is problematic. Sociologically and theologically, the term “Protestant” has little meaning beyond suggesting what one is not: not Roman Catholic, not Jewish, not Muslim, not a “religious none.”

In 1987 a colleague and I published a book with the title *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future*. The book got a lot of attention and is still in print. In the book Wade Clark Roof and I argued that to be “mainline” today is “refer to religious groups that identify with and contribute to the definition of the society’s core values. To speak of a religious group as mainline is to acknowledge its place in the nation’s religious establishment.” This definition assumes an interaction with the culture in which groups both shape the culture and are open to being shaped by it. It makes little sense, we argued, to ignore the new mainline status of Catholics, Jews, Black Protestants, and Conservative Protestants as part of that new religious establishment. Indeed, in the increasingly pluralistic America, we wondered, who is not mainline.

We suggested in the book that there are at least three major Protestant sub-communities, each with distinctive histories and cultures. While one of these sub-communities, Black Protestantism, is distinct in racial composition, the boundaries between Mainline and Evangelical Protestantism are a bit fuzzy, but most observers agree that theologically and culturally the evangelical and mainline traditions have been on rather different trajectories since the late 19th century.

The adjectives “Mainline” and “Mainstream” are often used

interchangeably to distinguish social groups and ideas based on relative power, influence or acceptability. The origins of the terms are not altogether clear. “Mainline” is often said to refer to the wealthy suburbs of Philadelphia’s Main Line and the railroad that serves them or to drug users’ attempt to inject substances directly into the blood system. “Mainstream” probably comes from the larger rivers into which tributaries flow. Both terms assume that some groups or ideas are more popular or acceptable than others. In politics, for example, policy positions that are widely held are viewed as mainline or mainstream; positions that deviate sharply from popular consensus or challenge conventional wisdom are seen as non-mainline.

If you have been listening carefully you may recognize that I have mixed a couple of very different understandings of the term Mainline. Let me begin by looking at two different understandings.

“Mainline” as Establishment

The use of the term mainline with reference to Protestant Christianity has a complex history that is peculiar to North America. Early European immigrants to the United States and Canada brought with them a variety of Protestant and Catholic religious traditions. Most immigrant groups were familiar with the “Old World” pattern of a single dominant faith community functioning as an established church (Anglicanism in England, Lutheranism in Germany, and Catholicism in Spain, France, Italy and elsewhere). Other groups (e.g., Puritans and Quakers) were dissenters and separatists but familiar with the European state church tradition. The early American pattern resembled that of Europe, with Congregationalism functioning as the de jure establishment church in New England as did Anglicanism in parts of the South.

Religious pluralism came early to the American colonies as new immigrant populations brought their own religious backgrounds and practices. With the passing of the first generation of Puritans, new groups brought challenges to the hegemony of Congregationalism in New England. The established church spawned its own dissenters. The more tolerant colonies of the Mid-Atlantic states, Virginia and the Carolinas, were more accepting of religious diversity. Over time, and culminating in the Bill of Rights and disestablishment at the federal and then the state level, the European pattern of state churches was broken.

What remained for several centuries, however, was a religious culture in which some groups, in some areas, continued to hold more power and influence than others. As William Hutchison (1989) has pointed out, through the early years of the twentieth century the social networks of Protestant clergy, leaders of business, culture and government remained very strong. Legal establishment ended but a fairly small number of Protestant churches and their leaders continued to occupy a special privileged place in American culture.

The first sense in which the term Mainline is used with reference to Protestantism, therefore, is with respect to the early dominant churches. Mainline Protestant Churches are those who once occupied the status of formal and, later, informal power in American society. They included Colonial America's "big three" established churches: Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, joined over time by churches of later waves of European immigrants: the German and Dutch Reformed churches and Lutherans of varying ethnic backgrounds and by Protestant traditions of the expanding frontier, Methodists and Disciples of Christ.

"Mainline" as Protestant Sub-community

By the 1920s it was clear that Protestantism was no longer the only major religious tradition contending for the hearts and souls of an increasingly diverse population. Roman Catholics of various national backgrounds were dominant in several major metropolitan areas and Jews had come to positions of considerable influence in major centers of influence such as New York City. Somewhat grudgingly, the religious establishment began to accommodate these traditions. The "mainline" was changing. By the 1950s Will Herberg could write a book entitled *Protestant Catholic Jew*, which he viewed as "the three ways of being an American." He was direct: "Not to be a Protestant, a Catholic or a Jew was somehow not to be an American." The relationship of the historic black churches to the informal religious establishment remained ambiguous.

Some African Americans were members of historically white churches, but most were members of major Black Baptist and Methodist denominations, denied in the religious as in other sectors of American life full participation. Similarly, other faith traditions (e.g., Buddhism,

Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism) and indigenous American faith communities (Mormons, Native American religions) occupied a peripheral role in the emerging American religious system.

American Mainline Religion argued that by the 1960s the notion of an integrated religious establishment had largely succumbed to the influence of religious individualism and true religious pluralism. We point to a new and much more pluriform situation in which few religious groups may be said to hold lasting cultural power and in which groups once seen as marginal share in the society's effort to define its core values and practices have a legitimate claim to be heard.

It was also clear as early as the turn of the Twentieth Century that Protestantism itself had come to include considerable internal diversity. Divided into a growing number of denominations, most of which reflected wider cultural divisions along national, regional, racial and ethnic lines, Protestant Christianity had also become a center of theological and political controversy. The rise of industrialization and urbanization in the 19th century and the new "higher criticism" in Biblical studies pioneered in Germany presented Protestant churches with major intellectual and strategic challenges. Responding to these challenges gave rise to the theological movement known as Christocentric Liberalism and its institutional counterpart, the Social Gospel movement. In turn, scholars and religious leaders seeing Liberalism as a challenge to historic orthodoxy would spawn the Fundamentalist movement, setting the stage for sustained conflict within white Protestantism itself.

The Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, which continued in various forms throughout the 20th century, revealed divisions both among and within denominations. These divisions have been the subject of numerous scholarly studies, most of which have reflected what historian Martin E. Marty has called the "two-party system" in American Protestantism. Most scholars agree that Protestant Christianity is too complex to reduce to only two groups or movements; the hundreds of Protestant denominations present in North America have different histories and theological traditions and differ in demographics and politics. Nonetheless, the intra-Protestant fissures that were apparent by the late 19th and early 20th centuries remain evident today. Various labels have been used to describe the two parties: Liberal and Conservative, Ecumenical and Sectarian, Public and Private, Progressive

and Orthodox, Mainline and Evangelical. Each of these pairs of labels refers to something different (theological orientation, stance toward inter-church and interfaith cooperation, openness to engagement of social and political issues, appeal to various sources of religious authority, etc.). Adding further confusion, these labels are attached to different populations: individuals, congregations, denominations, inter-church organizations such as councils and associations of churches and seminaries.

The first usage of the term Mainline, discussed above, emphasizes the status of a religious group or idea in relation to others. This second use points to particular religious groups and traditions, usually to distinguish between these groups from others. Mainline Protestantism, in this sense, refers to a sub-stream of Protestant Christianity. To what precise sub-stream does Mainline Protestantism refer? This is a more complicated question than it may appear on the surface. As noted above, the European churches that flourished and dominated during the colonial and frontier periods of American history (Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Congregationalists, followed by Methodists, the Reformed churches, Lutherans and Disciples) enjoyed a special role in American culture. These churches also developed special relationships among themselves. The rise of the home missions and Sunday School movements, while strongly denominational in many respects, brought these churches into contact with one another and in 1867 most of these churches were represented in the U.S. branch of the Evangelical Alliance. The early 20th century saw the founding of national church women's organizations and local federations of churches at the local and state levels. In 1908 most of these churches came together as the Federal Council of Churches. Their leaders were in close contact through a variety of national and international conferences on home and foreign missions.

While these churches and their leaders were aware of the presence of other Protestant groups in the United States, they paid them little attention. These groups, while growing, were seen as little threat to ecumenical Protestantism's numerical and cultural dominance. There was little expectation that these cooperating churches would achieve full doctrinal consensus or unite. Each church would retain its freedom, identity and independence, but in the words of German Reformed theologian Philip Schaff in 1893 (in Marty 1986, 270), they

would recognize "one another as sisters with equal rights, and cooperating in general enterprises such as the spread of the Gospel at home and abroad, the defense of the faith against infidels, the elevation of the poor and neglected classes of society, works of philanthropy and charity and moral reform."

The activist impulse was strong in the early years of inter-church cooperation and the ecumenical movement became associated with the Social Gospel. While Protestant Christianity remained relatively orthodox and broadly evangelical in its creedal formulations, its cooperative social and religious agenda had a decidedly progressive bent.

By the 1920s, with growing protest movements rising within the ecumenical denominations themselves over what Charles Hodge of Princeton and others saw as creeping liberalism in the Presbyterian and other churches, it was clear that Protestantism was moving toward schism. Battle lines were drawn within most predominantly white churches, with Presbyterians and Baptists being especially affected. These conflicts spawned new denominations and gave rise to what are today known as Mainline and Evangelical camps.

Both uses of Mainline Protestantism are rather imprecise theologically and sociologically, though widely used by analysts of American religion in dealing with the liberal or modernist wing of Protestant Christianity. This family of churches and sensibilities is distinguished as much by an ethos and series of interrelationships as by doctrine, demographics or organizational structure. Writing of Cambridge, Massachusetts some years ago, a New Yorker editor described the town as having a 19th century sense of "being right and open-minded at the same time." This is not a bad characterization of Mainline Protestantism in the last century.

Most of the nation's leading educational institutions and thousands of national and local cultural and social service institutions were founded by Mainline Protestant churches and laity. While most of the official ties between churches and institutions like Ivy League and liberal arts colleges, art museums and benevolence agencies and their founding churches are gone, they nonetheless share common origins and values. The decades since the 1960s have been difficult for the institutions of Mainline Protestantism, including denominational structures. Its

churches have lost members nearly every year since 1965. These declines have reduced the membership of some denominations by a third or more. David A. Roozen and Kirk Hadaway (1993) reported that in 1990 eight leading Mainline Protestant churches included 22.6 million members, down 6.4 million from 1965. Over four decades these churches' share of the U.S. religious "market" fell from 15.9 to 9.1 percent.

The most recent report of the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, released a few months ago (and using a slightly different definition of "adherents") showed further declines of about 7 million and a 2010 "market share of 7.2 percent.

In addition, membership declines, combined with inflation and the desire on the part of local churches and members to have more choice in allocating mission support dollars, have increased the financial pressure on national and regional church bodies. As denominations have faced financial difficulties they have reduced contributions to regional, national and world-wide ecumenical agencies.

While organized ecumenism has experienced great stress in recent decades inter-church cooperation has continued to flourish. In 1983 the Presbyterian Church (USA) brought together the northern and southern branches of Presbyterianism which had been divided since Civil War times. The new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, founded in 1987 united three major Lutheran streams. The United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) have covenanted to share several ministries, including their overseas mission work. Further, these churches have reached important ecumenical agreements leading to mutual recognition of members and ministries.

Diagnosing the Mainline

As public recognition of the changing shape of mainline Protestantism has grown scholars, foundations and consultants have given a good deal of attention to its current situation and future prospects. This attention has run the gamut from the analytical (changing birth rates, shifting denominational priorities, etc.) to the angry (who failed to lead the churches and why) to the prescriptive (what to do next).

From the early seventies (with publication of Dean M. Kelley's *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*) through the 1980s these tended to be sociological in character. By the nineties Mainline Protestantism was receiving greater attention from historians and theologians. Among the many books that have attempted to understand changes affecting these churches are Wuthnow (1988), Hutchison (1989), Hunter (1989, 2010) and Roozen and Hadaway (1993).

By the nineties Mainline Protestantism was receiving greater attention from historians and theologians. Multi-disciplinary studies, including a seven-volume study of the Presbyterian Church (USA) (Coalter, et. al. 1990-1992), an extended volume on the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (Williams 1989) and multi-authored volumes on United Methodism (Lawrence, et al. 1998, Richie, et al. 1997) represent an important resource for understanding this movement.

One of the few theologians who have reflected at length on the state of Mainline Protestantism is the process theologian John Cobb, an active United Methodist and one of the leading scholars of process theology. He titled his 1997 book *Reclaiming the Church: Where the Mainline Church Went Wrong and What to Do About It*. The challenge for the Mainline churches (which he refers to as "old-line" churches) is that they are "lukewarm." "[The] problem is spiritual or one of esprit.... Without strong, shared Christian convictions among their members, churches decline. That is what is happening now." The "vital" church will be culturally engaged with a prophetic edge; it will respond vigorously to societal challenges to its beliefs and practices; it will be a community of theological discourse and learning. Cobb argues that the oldline churches face a crucial choice: renewal, in which the church looks carefully at its internal life and problems and tries to recover the authentic roots of its tradition and practices to remove idolatrous accretions that are no longer appropriate and transformation, which includes renewal, but is much more aware of the corruptions we have inherited from the past. In this view, for Cobb, "our task as Christians is not to recover an original form of life in the church."

Rather, our task, as we try faithfully to continue the Christian tradition, is to respond as effectively and appropriately today to the particularities of our situation as the early church responded in its time. That may involve reproducing some of its teachings and

practices, but that is not the main thing. Our task is to be transformed by the best of what we are now experiencing and learning and to share in the transformation of the world. Instead of concentrating on the deepening socialization of those within the church into inherited images and rituals, it concentrates on reaching out to those who have been alienated from the church by the incredibility and oppressiveness of many of its teachings. Renewal does not confront the realities of Euro-centrism, nationalism, patriarchy, sexual oppression and the hegemony of the Enlightenment world view on which, for Cobb, genuine renewal depends. Cobb's distinction between renewal and transformation highlights one of the issues facing Mainline Protestant leadership today. Are we pursuing a renewal agenda that assumes the redeem ability of the Christian Project or is it time to start over? We don't talk much about the choice because to do so would force a theological debate we are not yet prepared to have.

So where are we today?

Drawing on a variety of studies, including his own work on American congregations, Duke University sociologist Mark Chaves has recently published *American Religion: Contemporary Trends* (2011) to paint a "big-picture" portrait of changes in American religion since 1972. Chaves takes what he calls a cautious approach, focusing on important trends that are both interesting and well documented. Chaves insists—rightly, I think—that one cannot conclude either that "American religiosity is experiencing a dramatic resurgence" or that it has declined dramatically.

Chaves points to several major trends, most of which are familiar. Americans are becoming more diverse religiously and more tolerant and appreciative of religious difference. Religious beliefs are surprisingly stable, but spirituality is more diffuse than it once was; most of those who think of themselves as spiritual also think of themselves as religious, but for a minority the much commented-upon distinction between the two is real. Changes in religious involvement are hard to pin down, because people tend to overstate their religious participation. Chaves tentatively states: "We can see clearly enough to conclude that religious involvement unambiguously is not increasing."

Participation in a congregation, Chaves maintains, is still the most common form of religious involvement. Religious leadership is changing and has become a less attractive career choice. Public confidence in religious leaders has declined precipitously.

Chaves points out that liberal Protestantism is the only major religious group to "have experienced significant, sustained decline in recent decades." Religious involvement is more closely linked to conservative social attitudes than in earlier times. At the same time, "as a set of ideas, religious liberalism steadily has gained ground in the United States, whatever the fate of the denominations most closely associated with it." Significant changes that have taken place in American religion over the past several decades. Rising costs at all levels, declining memberships, lower levels of denominational loyalty and competition for philanthropic dollars have combined to create a financial crisis for most organized religious communities. Some of the healthiest organizations (such as many colleges and hospitals) are the ones furthest removed from ecclesiastical control.

What is the future of Mainline Protestantism in North America?

Several things seem clear. Low internal birth rates, the slow growth of its traditional constituencies and relatively low priority given to evangelism and membership growth make unlikely dramatic changes in its long term pattern of declining "market share." Recent growth among racial/ethnic and immigrant populations should help stem declines but it probably won't reverse them.

Even more interesting that the future of its institutions is the question of the future of Mainline Protestantism's ethos and value system. In a more pluralistic, competitive and adversarial public square this community's historic impulse to bridge conflicting ideas and movements becomes a greater challenge than was true when these churches enjoyed a privileged position in the society. The idea that these churches have a special responsibility for promoting ways diverse groups can co-exist in relation to one another is questioned from within and without. It has been an important component of the history and current identity of Mainline Protestantism and the need for bridging and mediating

institutions continues. No question is more important to these churches as some of them enter their fourth century on America's shores.

This evening I will talk a bit about what I see as the most important issues facing the mainline Protestant community today, which are primarily intellectual and theological. If you have seen my recent Christian Century article that looked at research on American religion you may remember that I argued we are beyond the point where small steps will restore old-line churches to their former status they once enjoyed. To do so is neither feasible nor desirable in my view.

I see few signs that once-established religious institutions are poised for a dramatic turnaround anytime soon. We can be stronger than we are, and we can and should be. I see many signs of hope, mostly in places where Mainline Protestants have historically done their best work:

- when people tell stories: the story of Jesus and of God's love for the world and for themselves
- on Sunday mornings in local churches, where people choose to worship God and hear the word in face-to-face communities of people who come together despite the voluminous temptations to spend their time doing other things
- when people are challenged to live a faith-filled life in the world, caring for one another and for all of creation
- when communicating the Word continues to have a critical edge, comforting the afflicted while afflicting the comfortable.

I do not believe the religious values that brought these institutions into being are particularly threatened. In fact, they remain remarkably resilient. Long-term, the sustainability of these traditions will depend on a couple of key questions. Can the mainline Protestant churches speak to the religious yearnings of younger Americans? Will these churches invest in reaching out to the new populations of the US, especially to immigrant communities? Can they articulate a compelling?

religious message to population groups whose principal exposure to Jesus Christ and to Christianity has flowed through mostly conservative channels? Will these churches be successful in identifying, preparing and supporting a new generation of religious leaders who can help shape new forms of congregating that will be sustainable over time? These do not have technical fixes. They are what Ron Heifetz has called

“adaptive challenges.” The last thing American faith communities need is another round of national programmatic efforts to “reverse declines.” These haven't worked because they don't address the fundamental changes that are taking place in the broader culture.

**But there are concrete things we must be doing
now to prepare us for a
faith and hope-filled future.**

One is to reassert the importance and the spiritual power of congregating. I put the emphasis on congregating rather than congregations because in many people's mind congregation implies what we already know about being church. Don't get me wrong: I have spent most of my career worrying with and about congregations. They have shaped my life in many ways and as Mark Chaves' research reminds us they remain the primary way people live out their religious and spiritual lives. But we also need to recognize that **local churches as we now know them are not the only way Christians have congregated over time and while some form of local gathering remains an essential feature of most religious traditions.**

But wouldn't it be wonderful if we could give birth to a period of experimental congregating? All of us know people who are fellow traveler Christians who for whatever reason are not drawn to the dominant forms of congregating available today, i.e., local churches who gather once a weekend to do their church thing? What we say to people is that whatever the particular beliefs or commitments a church may have there is one way to gather as a faith community.

Second, we have in Mainline Protestantism and the United Church of Christ a very serious governance problem. American religious bodies owe much of their organizational impulses to our Presbyterian neighbors, with local units combined into regional bodies and then gathered into more “general” (usually national) assemblies. With some slight variations, each “setting” of the church practices a form of representative democracy and balances to varying degrees commitments to covenant and autonomy. Almost all of these levels of organization are defined geographically and most of their boundaries have been in place for hundreds of years.

Almost no-one believes this is working anymore. Most denominational leaders, when they think about it, recognize that while our governance structures may have made sense at one time they no longer empower the church for mission. In fact, some of these structures barely exist beyond the organizational charts on which they appear.

Financial problems may force changes in time but in my experience restructuring to solve financial problems almost never works. It begins and ends with two questions: What can we afford and how can we protect our turf and our interests? The right questions are different: What are we called to be and to do? How can our structures remain faithful to who we are as a people? How can we organize ourselves for mission in ways that are accountable and sustainable over time?

Let me give two illustrations of our current systemic dysfunctionality.

First, the United Church of Christ is a regional church with national aspirations. Our historic strength has been in the Northeast and the Middle West with a few outposts in places like Hawaii. For the past forty years in the United States, all of the population growth has been in the South and the West. Have you ever wondered why the UCC has been unable to mount a significant program of new church development? Part of the reason is that where we have the capacity to do new church development are the places with less need for new churches.

Second, think about some of the emerging challenges Mainline Protestant churches face. Everywhere across the country we have aging physical plants with decades of deferred maintenance. Remember all the wonderful new church school wings our churches built in the 1940s and 1950s? What is happening to them 50 and 60 years later? At best they are getting tired. At worst they are a continuing financial drain as fewer members struggle to keep their churches afloat. Or think about the growing immigrant populations of our nation: Latinos, Filipinos, people from the South Pacific, etc. When I was a seminary president I would receive calls from conference ministers asking why my school was not preparing more Latino graduates to serve Hispanic new church starts. Fair question, to which I would respond, also fairly, "When are your churches going to start sending us Latino students so we can prepare them for ministry?"

Neither of these issues fits neatly into any of the structures we have at the conference and national levels. We are organized along geographic lines, not missional lines. As a result, year after year we fall further behind in our ability to address the missional challenges our churches face.

Third, Mainline Protestantism faces a serious theological education challenge. When the United Church of Christ came together in the 1960s it adopted the Congregational Christian practice of encouraging church related seminaries to do their work with the church's blessing but with very limited financial support. This was not all bad. Our seminaries became leaders in developing their own bases of financial support. We haven't faced the severe declines in denominational support that Episcopal, United Methodist and Lutheran schools have faced because our seminaries never had it!

During our lifetime we have seen dramatic changes in theological education for ministry. You know them all. With very few exceptions, denominational seminaries have become regional ecumenical centers for the education of men and women of various religious backgrounds and interests pursuing a variety of vocational goals. Like their students, seminary faculties have become more mixed in denominational background; in the UCC today, four of our seminaries have non-UCC presidents. With the rise of often well-funded religious studies departments in public and private universities, seminaries are challenged to recruit and retain strong faculties. I would argue that each of these is a mixed blessing.

If those weren't enough problems, theological schools have been forced to shift more and more of their educational costs to the students themselves. M.Div. tuitions of \$15,000 per year are no longer unusual and financial aid funding has not kept pace with tuition increases. One of the main reasons for the financial instability of our seminaries is simply scale; our schools aren't just small, they are tiny. They are too small to cover the rising costs any school must meet. It is no longer possible for most schools of 100-150 Full Time Equivalent students to pay for the faculties, libraries, Instructional Technology, administrations and financial aid for students that they must have.

The result: fewer students feel they can afford three years of graduate education, those who do enroll face increasing debt loads when they graduate and seek a call. Combined undergraduate-seminary debt levels of \$50-60,000 are not at all unusual, all of which is happening when fewer churches can afford full-time pastoral leadership that pays a living wage.

Free-standing theological schools are especially vulnerable. Without changes, which are happening very slowly, we will continue to see schools close or make dramatic shifts in their mission. This is, frankly, another area in which Mainline Protestantism's governance deficit does not serve us well. Everyone recognizes the problem but few are empowered (or willing) to take appropriate action.

And so, this morning, **I leave you with three major strategic challenges facing mainline Protestant churches.** We have ignored them for too long. Tonight I will suggest an even larger challenge that will test, above all, our capacity to do serious theological work together.

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The Nevin Family

John B. Payne

(Presented to the Iris Club of Lancaster,
Pennsylvania, on February 16, 2011.)

The Nevin family was a prominent one in Lancaster County from the mid-1800s through the first quarter of the 20th century. The family did not, however, originate here. The patriarch, John Williamson Nevin, was born February 20, 1803, the oldest of ten children in Franklin County near Shippensburg. His parents, of Scotch-Irish Presbyterian extraction, were John and Martha (McCracken) Nevin. John Nevin the elder, though a farmer, underwent a classical education at Dickinson College. Nevin's middle name, Williamson, came from his South Carolinian uncle on his mother's side. Her name was Margaret Williamson, and she was the sister of Hugh Williamson, a distinguished physician and lawyer and a framer of the U.S. Constitution. Another brother, John Williamson, after whom Nevin was expressly named, was a wealthy bachelor merchant in Charleston. The uncle maintained a close relationship with his namesake and designated him as executor of his estate. When Nevin's father died in 1829, it fell to him as the oldest son to be also the executor of his father's estate. As he reported in his autobiography, he became therefore "a man of business as well as a man of letters and books."

On the slavery question, there were likely countervailing views, those of his South Carolinian uncle and those of Nevin's own father, which early on were decidedly antislavery and which no doubt helped to persuade his son to adopt a similar view.

Nevin's father impressed his son also with the importance of avoiding tobacco and liquor. The father clearly had a major impact upon him in other ways, for he was a man of industry, integrity, learning and piety as well as a strong churchman. John Williamson Nevin was baptized and catechized in the Middle Spring

Presbyterian Church. At the tender age of 14, he went off to Union College in Schenectady, N.Y., where he excelled in his studies and where he encountered revivalistic religion for the first time. He experienced what he later called "a true awakening" at the hands of the moderate Connecticut revivalist, Asahel Nettleton, even though he was critical of the morbid introspection it induced in him. After a period at home, during which he battled a severe gastrointestinal illness and wrestled with his own religious state and the issue of his vocation, he decided, under some pressure from his family, to pursue theological studies at Princeton Seminary (1823-28), which he came to think of as his second home, a place of scholarly leisure, friendship and peace. He gained there a strong appreciation of the Reformed, especially the English and Scottish Presbyterian, tradition. In addition, he acquired there a high view of Scripture as the inspired Word of God and gained a mastery of Hebrew as well as Greek. That knowledge led to his being asked to teach at Princeton while Professor Charles Hodge was on sabbatical in Europe for two years.

After another two-year period at home when he carried on preaching after being licensed in 1828, the issue of vocation was finally settled when he became professor of Biblical literature at the Presbyterian Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh (1830-40). During this time, he edited and wrote articles for the journal he founded, *The Friend* (1833-35). Its title and purpose were probably influenced by the periodical of the same name published by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the famous English poet and essayist. Like Coleridge, Nevin expressed in Platonic terms his intent to address the moral and religious questions of the day which are of permanent value rather than "the fleeting forms of opinion." Two moral questions to which he gave much attention were temperance and slavery. While Nevin excoriated slavery as a great sin, he adopted at first a neutral stance between two proposed solutions for the evil, colonization or emancipation, but when he was forced to resign his editorship of *The Friend* in 1835 after publishing a strong rebuke of the evil, he issued a parting shot proudly proclaiming himself an abolitionist. As a zealous Calvinist moralist, Nevin also addressed

such matters as sabbath observance, theaters and ladies' fairs. He regarded ladies' fairs as "a specious form of charitable activity" and was not pleased that the ladies chose to hold a fair when he was absent from the city to get married.

The marriage on January 1, 1835, was to Miss Martha Jenkins of Churchtown, Lancaster County. She was the second daughter of Robert J. Jenkins, who was the ironmaster of Windsor Forge near Churchtown in eastern Lancaster County. Robert Jenkins was a prominent citizen of the county, a member of the state legislature and of the U.S. Congress. Of Welsh extraction, his grandfather John Jenkins received from William Penn a large tract of land along the Conestoga. Robert Jenkins' father David had purchased the Windsor Iron Works and built a large house near Churchtown and at his death left the business and property to Robert. The house still stands. The wedding ceremony was performed by the Rev. John Wallace, minister of the Presbyterian church in Pequea. There is a painting of the young Martha Jenkins Nevin by Jacob Eichholtz in the Phillips Museum of Art at Franklin and Marshall College. It was a gift to the F & M collection from the Rev. John Nevin Sayre, Martha's grandson, about whom I shall say more shortly.

Nevin continued his career in Pittsburgh until he was called to the German Reformed Theological Seminary and Marshall College in Mercersburg as a professor in 1840. He became also president in 1841, a post he held until the union of the college with Franklin College in Lancaster in 1853. You may ask why he, a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian, was called to a German college and seminary. The answer is that the college and seminary were hard-pressed to find someone, and Nevin, who had mastered German already in Pittsburgh to read German philosophy and theology, came highly recommended.

Nevin's Platonism was enhanced at Mercersburg by an increasing appreciation of German Romanticism and idealism stimulated by his colleagues, the German-educated Friedrich Rauch

and Philip Schaff, a Swiss who received his university training in Germany. Along with Schaff, Nevin created the so-called Mercersburg Theology, which stressed a Christocentric, high-church sacramental theology that bore some resemblances to the high-church Anglicanism of that day. He wrote many pieces on ecclesial, liturgical and sacramental reform for *The Mercersburg Review*. In 1843, he wrote *The Anxious Bench*, which aroused a considerable controversy within the German Reformed Church concerning revivals. Nevin considered revivals often to be more displays than expressions of true piety.

In 1846, Nevin wrote his most important work, *The Mystical Presence*, a detailed theological exposition of the Lord's Supper, in which he was critical of the dominant view of the Lord's Supper in mid-nineteenth-century Protestantism: namely, as a mere memorial of Christ's death on the cross suggested by the words, "do this in remembrance of me." Nevin pointed out, however, that such a view does not do justice to the true Reformed view going back to John Calvin that in the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, the believer experiences a true mystical communion with Christ.

In 1855, Nevin moved with his family to Lancaster and, shortly after their arrival here, his mother-in-law, Mrs. Jenkins, died. He became once more an executor of a family estate. The family thus moved in 1856 to Windsor Forge, the home of the Jenkins family for several generations, and resided there until 1858. When he was no longer needed at Windsor Place, he and his family moved into Lancaster and built a fine house on what is now Columbia Avenue. The house was named Caernarvon Place.

After a period of retirement, he returned to college teaching and administration, serving from 1861 to 1866 as professor of history and aesthetics and from 1866 to 1876 as president of Franklin and Marshall College. He was also professor of mental and moral philosophy from 1868 until his death in 1886.

In addition to those duties, Dr. Nevin served as pastor of St. Stephen's Reformed Church, which met on the college campus. He also influenced the founding of St. Luke's Reformed Church (1874), now St. Luke's United Church of Christ, on Marietta Avenue, where his daughter Alice taught. Some daughters baptized in that congregation were named for Alice.

John Nevin became a good friend to his neighbor across the street, President James Buchanan, and, at Buchanan's request, Nevin presided at his funeral, which took place at Wheatland (Buchanan's home) at 4 p.m. June 1, 1868. Nevin used the German Reformed liturgy and delivered a lengthy funeral sermon. Buchanan was buried in Woodward Hill Cemetery, where Nevin himself is also buried alongside his wife and six of his children.

Martha Jenkins Nevin continued to live in their home until she died there at age 85 on January 13, 1890. The funeral took place there the next day, and was conducted by Dr. Emanuel Gerhart, president of the Reformed Theological Seminary, now Lancaster Theological Seminary. The location of Caernarvon Place is where Degel Israel synagogue now stands. A remnant of the Nevin estate is the carriage house behind the synagogue building.

John W. and Martha Nevin had eight children, only six of whom lived into adulthood. The oldest, William Wilberforce (1836-1899), was named after the British politician and philanthropist who was an ardent opponent of the slave trade, indicating at this early date the father's strong objections to that nefarious practice. He graduated from Franklin and Marshall College, and was honored as the valedictorian of his class. He studied and practiced law in Lancaster in the 1850s, but when the Civil War broke out, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and rose to the rank of captain. After the war, he returned to Lancaster and took up once again the practice of law. From law he then turned to journalism. He served as an editor first of the *Lancaster Express*, then of the *Philadelphia Press* and later of the *Washington Chronicle*. A lover of travel, he wrote *Vignettes of Travel: Some*

Comparative Sketches in England and Italy as well as *A Comparison of Lancaster, England, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania*. He is buried in the family plot in Woodward Hill Cemetery.

The second son, Robert Jenkins Nevin, was born in 1839 in Allegheny City, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, and attended Franklin and Marshall College. Like his brother William Wilberforce, he enlisted in the Union Army, serving first as a second, then as a first, lieutenant and captain of the Independent Battery I of the Pennsylvania Volunteers, reaching the rank of major and commanding the Central Brigade in the defense of Washington, D. C., against the rebels. After the war, he was ordained an Episcopal priest in 1867 at West Chester, Pennsylvania, at the Church of the Nativity, which he served until he was called in 1869 to St. Paul's Within the Walls, the first Protestant church in Rome, Italy, which he served for 37 years. He himself obtained funds for the building of the church, which was begun in 1870 and completed in 1876. It was not an easy feat for him to obtain permission from the Vatican to construct this church, but the Roman Catholic Church adjusted to it and that harmony was ultimately signified by the joint visit to the church on December 2, 1960, by Pope John XXIII and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fischer. The architect was G. E. Street, a famous English architect of the late nineteenth century. The masonry inside and outside of the church consisted of what Nevin called lake-colored brick from Siena. St. Paul's was unique in carrying on not only an unusual mission and ministry but also in overseeing some outstanding works of art, mosaics by Edward Bourne Jones and George W. Beck as well as beautiful stained-glass windows, the subjects of which were chosen by the rector himself. An avid art dealer, Nevin bequeathed to the cathedral upon his death various objects of painting and sculpture.

One of the outstanding paintings Nevin owned which was not given to St. Paul's was one by the fifteenth-century Italian painter, Sano di Pietro, named *Saint Anthony Distributing his Wealth to the Poor*, which had belonged to the estate of Count

Augusto Caccialupi. Nevin apparently bought all that remained of this collection. That painting is now a part of the Samuel H. Kress Collection in the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

Robert Nevin received two honorary doctorates, the Doctor of Laws and the Doctor of Divinity. He was honored to be chosen the president of the Fourth Convocation of the American Churches in Europe, held at Nice, France, April 19, 1899. He died on September 20, 1906, and was buried with military honors in Arlington National Cemetery.

The third son of John W. and Martha Nevin was Richard Cecil Nevin. He was born April 15, 1843, in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, and attended Franklin and Marshall College, graduating in 1863 with an A.M. Degree. Like his brothers, he joined a company of volunteers during the Civil War. He fought in the battle to defend Columbia, Pennsylvania. After the war, he taught briefly at a private school for boys in Oxford, Pennsylvania, and then, like his brother Robert, he studied for the Episcopal priesthood at General Theological Seminary in New York City as a member of the class of 1868, but, before he could graduate, he died in 1867 and is buried in the Nevin family plot in Woodward Hill Cemetery. The altar in St. Paul's Within the Walls was given in his memory by the Nevin family.

John and Martha Nevin had three daughters: Alice, Blanche and Martha, each of whom was gifted in her own right. Alice was born August 1, 1837, in Pittsburgh. She was the founder in 1895 of the Iris Club of Lancaster, where her portrait still hangs. Alice Nevin was very active in church and city. She was a fine musician, organist and choir director at First Reformed Church in Lancaster, where the well-known Henry Harbaugh was pastor and a long-time disciple of her father. She was also organist at St. Stephen's Church on the Franklin and Marshall campus and later at St. Luke's Reformed Church, now St. Luke's United Church of Christ, on Marietta Avenue, where she was also a Sunday school teacher and exercised such admiration and influence that children were named

for her. She wrote music for an Easter hymn, "The Lord of Life is risen. Sing, Easter heralds, sing!" which had been translated from German into English by Henry Harbaugh. This hymn was sung at her funeral in the Franklin and Marshall chapel on November 19, 1925, and may be found in the volume, *Hymns and Carols for Church and Sunday School*, which she published in or about 1879.

She owned a beautiful home at 227 Lancaster Avenue, built for her in 1900-1903, where she enjoyed entertaining guests. So much was she a presence in the city that she was sometimes referred to as "Miss Lancaster."

Alice's sister Blanche (1841-1925) was an outstanding artist, especially sculptress—in fact, perhaps the first important sculptress in this country. She studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia and then pursued the study of sculpture in Italy. Her sculpture *Maud Muller*, based on a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier, was exhibited at the World's Fair in Philadelphia in 1876. Examples of her work here in Lancaster are the horse drinking fountain at Columbia Avenue and West Orange streets, sculpted in 1898, which was created in honor of Blanche's mother, and the *Lion in the Park* in Reservoir Park finished in 1905. But more famous on a national basis is the statue of General Peter Muhlenberg, a Revolutionary War hero, which is in Statuary Hall in the Capitol in Washington, D.C. She also sculpted the bust of President Woodrow Wilson.

Blanche painted a portrait around 1878 of Harriet Lane Johnston, the niece of James Buchanan, who, before she was married, accompanied him to the White House in 1857. Both Harriet Lane and Blanche Nevin were born in Mercersburg. Without much question, Blanche spurred Harriet Lane Johnston's interest in art, which led her to play a role in the creation of the National Gallery of Art.

Miss Nevin was multitalented. Besides being an artist, she was also a poet who wrote several poems, a few of which were set

to music. She wrote "The Bridal Welcome Song" to welcome the meeting of her nephew Francis Sayre and Jessie Wilson at Windsor Forge. Its opening stanza is:

Fling the door open, and swing the gate wide,
Welcome the entering feet of the bride.
Eager the groom at the threshold stands
Holding his arms, and his outstretched hands.
Blessed are you who true love win!
 Jessie, come in--
 Come in.

Blanche read this poem in full at a meeting of the Iris Club in 1897.

She bought Windsor Forge, the former family home on her mother's side, in 1897 and restored it to its previous grandeur. She also owned a house in Manasquan, New Jersey, and enjoyed spending time in New York and Philadelphia, although in one letter of January 1916, she reported that she did not enjoy New York City so much any more because she was afraid of the automobiles. She was fond of peacocks and puppies.

The youngest daughter was Martha Finley Nevin, who was the only one of the children of the John W. and Martha Jenkins Nevin family to marry. In 1882, she married Robert H. Sayre of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, who had survived four previous wives. Robert Sayre was the chief of several executives from the Lehigh Valley Railroad who in 1860 purchased a paper corporation which they turned into the Bethlehem Iron Company, which eventually became Bethlehem Steel. He was therefore quite wealthy. There is a Robert H. Sayre marker in Bethlehem on Wyandotte and West Third streets with his dates, 1824-1907.

Robert and Martha Sayre had two sons, John Nevin Sayre and Francis B. Sayre. John Nevin

Sayre, who preferred to be called Nevin, was born in 1884 in South Bethlehem. He attended several outstanding institutions of higher learning such as Princeton University and the Episcopal Theological School, receiving from the first a B.A. in 1907 and from the second a Bachelor of Divinity in 1911. In addition, he studied at Union Theological Seminary in New York City (1908-1910) and the University of Marburg in Germany (1913-1914). He taught at Princeton for two brief periods, 1911-1912 and 1914-1915 and also at Boone University in Wuchang, China, in 1913.

He was moved to become a parish priest and served from 1915 to 1919 at Christ Church in Suffern, N.Y.; that is, during the World War I years. He showed himself to be at heart a pacifist and thus not in support of the war, a position with which his parish was not exactly sympathetic. He joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) in 1921 and became a well-known peace activist. He went to Germany in 1921 to spur peace efforts and in 1927 to Nicaragua to try to reach the guerilla leader Sandino. He failed to see him but did manage to stop the bombing of Nicaraguan villages by appealing to the U.S. Congress and the State Department to support his message of peace.

Before, during and after World War II, he was very active in promoting peace, all the more so when he became international secretary of the FOR. He visited many Latin American nations and the Philippines, where he was able to persuade its president, Quirino, to free Japanese prisoners and send them home. He kept up his peace pursuits through the time of the Vietnam War, when at age 82 he marched five miles in a demonstration against the war. Two years after his death the Episcopal Peace Fellowship established the John Nevin Sayre Award to be given every three years to a worthy recipient in honor of his or her efforts for peace and justice.

John Nevin Sayre's brother, Francis Bowes Sayre, born in 1885, attended and obtained degrees from Williams College (1909) and Harvard Law School (1912). In 1913, he married Jessie

Wilson, daughter of President Woodrow Wilson, in the White House. His aunt Blanche Nevin attended the ceremony. Jessie Wilson was not only a lovely young woman but quite intelligent and socially active. A graduate of Goucher College, she worked for the Democratic Party, the League of Nations and the League of Women Voters. She was also a productive and caring mother. In January 1915, Francis B. Sayre Jr., was born, and then, in March 1916, Eleanor Axson Sayre, and, in 1919, another son, Woodrow Wilson Sayre.

Francis B. Sayre taught at Williams College and at Harvard Law School, and was ambassador to Siam from 1925 to 1931. He lost his wife Jessie to a sudden death. In 1933, Sayre was appointed assistant secretary of state by Franklin D. Roosevelt, and in 1937, he married once again, this time to Elizabeth Evans Graves. In 1947, he was appointed representative to the United Nations Trusteeship Council and served as its president. After retiring from government service in 1952, Sayre served as president of the House of Deputies of the Episcopal Church of America in Japan. He died on March 29, 1972.

His son, Francis B. Sayre Jr., who lived from 1915 to 2008, a total of 93 years, continued the Sayre family tradition of outstanding service to church and nation. He studied at Williams College, the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Union Theological Seminary in New York City. During World War II, he served as a chaplain on the *USS San Francisco*, which, according to his account, had "quite a war record, two and a half years through battle, hell and damnation." After the war, he was rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in East Cleveland, Ohio, and served as industrial chaplain for the Diocese of Ohio, an experience which influenced his later work as Dean of the Washington Cathedral, a position he held from 1951 to 1978.

Just as he was a strong advocate for labor rights, he was also an avid champion of civil rights and of peace who denounced the harangues of Sen. Joseph McCarthy against supposedly creeping

Communism in American society, took part in the march with Martin Luther King Jr. to Selma, Alabama, and in protests against the Vietnam War. He even opened the cathedral to youths protesting against the Vietnam War. Aware of the influence of his position as Dean of the Washington Cathedral, he told the *Washington Post* in 1977, ". . . whoever is appointed the dean of the cathedral has in his hand a marvelous instrument and he is a coward if he does not use it." He was eager for the great civil rights leader to speak at the Washington Cathedral, but it was only after many years of campaigning that King accepted his invitation to preach what would be his last sermon before being assassinated in Memphis in April, 1968.

Sayre even dared to criticize in public such politicians as Lyndon B. Johnson for unethical conduct and Richard Nixon for pursuing the Vietnam War, but he went beyond criticism of politicians to attack preachers such as Billy Graham for concentrating too much on personal sin and personal renewal and not enough on social sin and social reform. He attacked the injustice of segregation in 1953, a year before the Supreme Court knocked down that practice in the schools. Sayre was also critical of Israel in a 1972 Palm Sunday sermon for "oppressing" the Arab residents of Jerusalem.

Over his long tenure at the Washington Cathedral, Sayre also gave considerable attention to the cathedral itself. Its nave and bell tower were completed while he was Dean. His funeral was held at the cathedral, and he is buried there. He is survived by two daughters and two sons, one of whom, by the way, is named Francis Nevin Sayre.

The Rev. Dr. Nathan Baxter, who was a former student of mine both in the Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry programs at Lancaster Theological Seminary and who is now bishop of the Central Pennsylvania Episcopal diocese in Harrisburg, was one of Francis B. Sayre Jr.'s successors as

Dean at the Washington Cathedral and was in attendance at his funeral.

BOOK REVIEW

John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence And The Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper: The Mercersburg Theology Study Series Volume One*. Eugene, Oregon, Wipf & Stock Publishing Co., 2010. 339 pages. Edited by Linden J. DeBie.

F. Christopher Anderson

There will be two types of reaction to this first volume in *The Mercersburg Theology Series*.

- 1) Those who are new to Mercersburg Theology will echo Psalm 95 and react with praise and thanksgiving.
- 2) Those who have spent many years building up an extensive library of Mercersburg Theology might react with more of the anger that is found in such psalms as Psalm 137!
 - TO THE FIRST GROUP: You need only read this one paragraph. GO BUY THE VOLUME! This first volume is the new standard volume. This is my advice: "Do not buy the older volumes of *The Mystical Presence* no matter how low the price becomes. (The second group of people will be dumping them!) Instead buy this volume with praise and thanksgiving."

I represent the second group. The anger I refer to comes from the fact that the series is so good that we will feel that we must spend more money to get something that we thought we already had! This is a particular problem to those of us who have highlighted, written notes and made stars to emphasize important quotes in our personal copies of the Thompson and Bricker volume. Not only will we get less money for selling our old copies to future Mercersburgers but we will feel badly getting rid of something that we have annotated for ease of review! This will force many of us to keep both volumes. At an age when I am trying to downsize my book collection Linden forces me to add another book to my library without getting rid of another one!

At our annual convocation I confronted Linden J. DeBie, as a friend, and spoke the truth in love to him. "Why Linden did you do this? I already have Thompson and Bricker's *The Mystical Presence and other writings on the Eucharist!* Why did you improve it in so many ways that I have to spend this money to get all that you have added to it?"

The truth is that a few days with the new volume answered my question. The fact is that Linden has done a great job in editing this new work.

First there is an introduction to the whole series by W. Brad Littlejohn that is so encouraging to all of us that love this theology. Merely looking at the thirteen planned volumes will get all of us excited. This essay rehearses the history of Mercersburg Theology and honors the start of the Mercersburg Society in 1983 and the launching of *The New Mercersburg Review*. (This little engine that could journal appreciates as much attention as it can get.)

Yet the important point in this introduction is that it says "...they are seeking to retrieve the Mercersburg Theology not merely as a historical curiosity, intriguing for the light it sheds on nineteenth-century piety, but also as a living voice to speak to contemporary Protestantism." (viii)

Littlejohn states that the three goals of this new series of books are:

- 1) "...to reprint several significant Mercersburg works for the first time"
- 2) "...to reprint in a definitive, standardized and readable form, select works ..."
- 3) "...to include a few key texts from Mercersburg opponents..." (xiii)

Second, Linden was able to get Mark Noll to give this particular volume a two page introduction. Having his name in this volume will open this volume up to more than "the regular group of suspects." Having attained my M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary I have a certain perspective on what may influence those who refer to themselves as 'evangelicals' to purchase a volume of theology. Mark Noll's name is very helpful in this respect. I have already been seeing a rising interest in this

theology in more conservative Reformed groups. May this interest grow larger with Mark Noll's foreword.

Noll reminds us that Nevin's works "...have never received the attention they deserve." (xvii) He writes: "Much more is at stake in a series like this one, however, than simply better history. At stake is also the potential for direct encouragement to think through, or to rethink, exceedingly important matters of Christian faith and practice." (xviii)

Third, Linden has given us an eighteen page introduction that sets the stage for the work itself. His essay gives us an accessible and brief overview to Nevin's life and work, to the background to *The Mystical Presence* and to the impact of this great book. Linden told me at the annual convocation that he has been living in the 19th century in order to do this work. (Linden, we thank you and Dr. Who for your time travel.)

These three things are good enough reasons for the purchase this book but there is even a more compelling reason. The truth is that one could (illegally) photocopy these essays I have discussed and get away with not purchasing the book. This would only make sense if the essays were the only improvements. It is the footnotes in this new volume that are the shocker.

The footnotes look as extensive as those in *The NIV Study Bible* or those in *The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* and they are more extensive than those that are in *The Orthodox Study Bible* or *The New Oxford Annotated Bible!* Yes, there were some Editor's notes in the back of the Thompson/Bricker volume and there were a even few footnotes. Yet I, personally, love that all the notes are included in the footnotes in the new volume. One does not have to interrupt one's reading to go to another page and then lose track of what one was thinking.

Those of us who read *The Mystical Presence* often miss some or many of the arguments because we are so distant from the theologians and philosophers to whom Nevin refers whether by name or concept. Yet when one opens this edition one may find extensive footnotes that cover all of these issues. When you see this book in person merely open it and take a look at the footnotes. They are a marvel. Sometimes the footnotes (see page 126) take up more

than 90 or 95% of the page! Working through this volume's footnotes alone will be a blessing to many of us who already have extensively worked on previous volumes!

Linden has also helped those of us whose Latin is weak or no-existent. All of those sections that were Latin footnotes in the Thompson and Bricker volume have been translated! This is something that should cause much rejoicing! Yes, we have to buy this volume because it is such a fine improvement!

I also am very impressed with the bibliography, the Scripture Index and the Subject and Author Index that are in the back of the book. The bibliography is extensive and up to date. The Thompson/Bricker volume did not have either a scripture index or a subject and author index. These are very helpful for scholars, preachers, teachers and students. Even if you do not buy the book you will want to visit a library once in a while merely for this improvement.

(I also have an odd appreciation for this volume. The old volume was about 8 ¾ by 6 inches and this one is about 10 ¼ by 7 1/8. Even the size of this volume is an encouragement to hold it and to study it. To grasp the size of this new volume picture this. You can now hold this volume in your left hand the way Billy Graham held his large floppy leather Bible in his left hand while preaching. You should now understand why I call this an "odd" appreciation.)

Historically we know that there were more volume planned in the *Lancaster Series on the Mercersburg Theology* in the 1960's. Many of us have lamented that that series was not completed. This present volume lists thirteen possible volumes in this new series. (xv) I am particularly interested in the volume on The Heidelberg Catechism that would have our own Lee Barrett as the editor.

Do we want this new series to be completed? Are we willing to help get this project off the ground? In the Series Introduction Littlejohn credits The Mercersburg Society "...for generous financial support" in order to make this series a success." (xiv) Your annual support of the Society has already helped this series because of the decision of the Board to walk out in faith. So even if you do not purchase this volume your membership has already accomplished something.

Yet I call upon the members of the Society to step up to the plate as individuals and support this series. I would ask all of you who care for Mercersburg Theology to go out and buy this volume. This will encourage all those who are working on it to continue this great enterprise. We do not want to have happen what happened to the Pickwick Press series in the 1960's.

If it was not for Mercersburg Theology I would now call for an altar call. ("I see that hand.") But I hope you get the point.

Lastly, I want to make it clear to Linden that he need not worry about seeing me at the next convocation. When I approach him at Princeton it will not be with anger but with much love, appreciation and encouragement.

BOOK REVIEW

Robert W. Jensen, *Canon and Creed*. (2010) Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press. 136 pages.

F. Christopher Anderson

Bob Dylan sang:

“Because something is happening here
But you don't know what it is
Do you Mister Jones?”

There has been something happening in the theological world for so long that things might becoming clearer even for Mister Jones. For well over a century and more the theological world has been questioning certain presuppositions of modernity.

The truth is that there have been big names involved in this. Karl Barth, Henri De Lubac, David Seinmetz, Nancey Murphy, John Theil, John Sawyer, William Placher, Hugh Old Oliphant, Thomas Oden, Thomas Merton, Donald McKim, Ulrich Luz, William DiPuccio, Alasdair MacIntyre and many other have written about the limitations of modernity from many differing perspectives.

Obviously John Williamson Nevin and Philip Schaff were on this train even before those that I have mentioned. Nevin gave us the theory of looking for help beyond our age in such works as “*Early Christianity*.” Schaff gave us primary documents in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* and *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*.

I want to recommend this years Mercersburg study book as a something that clarifies much of this earlier work. Jensen benefits by standing on the shoulders of those who have come before him and he makes cogent arguments in a very short book. Brevity gets more important to me the older I get.

His first paragraph contains this sentence: “One may safely suppose that neither canon or creed, not yet their relation, is high on many contemporary believer's list of concerns.” (1) I wonder if Jensen might have underestimated the effects of the above scholars. Some of us actually have a great interest in both creeds and canon and in their relationship to each other. Are the voices in the wilderness getting heard in the areas where actual people live? Does Mister Jones see more than we are giving him credit for seeing?

Concerning the canon Jensen points out that Irenaeus' book *Against Heresies* was probably written around the year 180. The surprise it that Irenaeus quotes most of the books of the New Testament as being scripture at that early date! This disarms those who would want us to believe that the canon was developed much later and by people with suspect motives that involve governing the Roman world.

Jensen spends much time on the creeds and concludes the first chapter by saying “..neither 'canon'/'Scripture' nor 'creed' can be grasped without reference to the other.” (18) Modernity has worked hard to separate the two of them but Jensen sees that they need to be together. He points out that “It was the rule of faith that saved the church from abandoning its founding canon.” (28)

Jensen has no problem viewing this as circular reasoning but he defends it in this manner. “Canon confirms creed, and creed confirms canon. The circle is not, however, vicious, for the argument is aimed not to convince the heretics themselves but to reassure those living in that very community; the argument is warranted by the community's life and the intended readers envelopment in it.” (34)

Jensen directly deals with the various questions that arise. He speaks to the issue of “the canonical text of a passage over against a scholarly construction that is said to represent an 'earlier' or even 'original' version.” (53) I particularly like his distinction between “the historical Jesus” and what he more correctly calls “the historians' Jesus.” (57) He also deals with how Christians are to interpret and even name the Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh or the Old Testament.

He defines the difference between dogma and creed in this sentence. "Such dogma differs from creed in that it does not directly emerge from the community's founding communal consensus, the *regula fidei*." (65)

Jensen does bring up an important issue that he does not solve. He writes: "In response to the crises of the second century, the church received a trio of institutions to guard its identity through time: canon, creed and episcopate." (71) Jensen spends less than six pages on this third one. He states "On the other hand, the record of episcopal governance during some periods, including the present moment, may well dampen enthusiasm for its restoration where it is not currently in place." (75)

What I see as worth the price of the book is his brief chapter 9, "The Creed as Critical Theory for Scripture." He builds up to it but it is important on its own. He writes "The church cannot simply opt out of modernity's critical pathos; we may not be of the word, but we are in it, and all in it now are critics. The question has to be 'Following what critical theory, and penetrating to whose agenda should the church read its Scripture?' My answer is implicit in all the foregoing chapters. The community positioned to perceive what a scriptural text is truly up to is the church, and the creed is the set of instructions for discerning this agenda." (81)

Jensen has three chapters showing how this works with specific texts. They are "Genesis 1:1-5 and the Creed," Luke 1:26-38 and the Creed" and "Mark 14:35-36 and the Creed." These three chapters give us specific examples of how one would use the creed in the interpretation of specific scripture passages.

The afterword is a bombshell. He writes "Before modernity, what we are now likely to call systematic --or dogmatic or constructive---theology was not thought of as an enterprise distinct from biblical exegesis. Indeed, such foundational masterworks as Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* or Origen's *First Principles*---with which Origen created the whole discipline of systematic theology---were written as preparatory studies for what their authors regarded as the real theological work, reading scripture." (118) He then goes on to say that today the exact opposite is the case.

This raises a very important question for me. Recently a young graduate from a good seminary in the Mid-West attended a monthly Reformation Documents study that I attend. He later spoke of how he felt that he was not prepared for the depth of the study. One of the participants told him that all of us felt the same way when we began this type of study. There are no seminaries that would prepare anyone for such studies. A person can graduate from seminary with very few courses on theology. Theology has become but one small part of the large academic curriculum. A recent *Christian Century* interview seemed to say that seminarians need less theology and more MBA courses!

This is a problem that we need to think about. How are we to rethink our seminaries' curriculum?

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