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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 an annual convocation, engages in the publication of articles and books, and 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

Rev. Dr. Peter Schmiechen's 2014 Mercersburg Convocation Address opens this issue with a very provocative thesis. He writes: *"My thesis is that there are basically six ways saving power is communicated to us. These are: a) participation in the sacraments; b) proclamation received by faith, c) rebirth in the Spirit, d) the praxis of love and justice, e) belonging to the disciplined community, and f) solidarity with Christ who is with those who suffer."* The Retired President Emeritus of Lancaster Theological Seminary always seeks to apply insights from the Mercersburg tradition to our present church life. In this article he continues to raise important questions for us to explore.

We are fortunate to publish Dr. Lee Barrett's 2014 Mackey Lecture at Lancaster Theological Seminary. It is entitled *Mercersburg Meets Bonhoeffer: Complementary or Incommensurable?* Dr. Barrett holds the Mary B. and Henry P. Stager Chair of Theology at Lancaster Theological Seminary. His book *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersection of Augustine and Kierkegaard* has recently been published on Eerdmans. This summer he spoke at a Bonhoeffer Colloquy in Berlin. Upon his return he surprised many of us with a presentation of the similarities between the theology of Bonhoeffer and Mercersburg Theology. If you would want to see the video of Dr. Barrett's presentation the link below will get it to you.

http://video.com/107521500

Dr. Jocelyn McKeon is an Associate Professor in the Chemistry Department at Notre Dame of Maryland University in Baltimore, Maryland. She received her B.S. degree in chemistry from Duke University and her Ph.D. in analytical chemistry from North Caroline State University. She is a recent graduate of Lancaster Theological Seminary, earning her Master of Divinity degree in

May, 2014. In addition to studying the interfaces between science and theology she also researches the use of capillary electrophoresis to measure binding affinities between proteins and antioxidant compounds. Her article compares the theology of John Williamson Nevin to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. This issue therefore has two articles that compare Mercersburg Theology to other theologies. This is a treat.

Rev. Dr. Linden DeBie is well known to students of Mercersburg Theology. We are thankful for his own books and his wonderful work as editor of Nevin's *The Mystical Presence: And the Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper*, *Volume I* in *The Mercersburg Theology Study Series.* In this issue he reviews the book *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology* by Annette Aubert. This review is a good preparation to the 2016 Mercersburg Convocation which will center on the work and the application of the theology of Emanuel V. Gerhart. For those who like to begin reading material in preparation for our annual gatherings this review gets you material that will give you close to two years to get some study done.

The 2014 Mercersburg Convocation was a great success, and there will be more articles from that convocation coming in the Spring issue of the NMR. We thank you for your support via membership and special gifts. Please go to the back of this NMR issue to see the basic information for next year's Mercersburg Annual Convocation. The title of the convocation is *THE FUTURE OF ECUMENISM FROM A REFORMED* PERSPECTIVE. The Keynoters will be the Rev. Dr. Douwe Visser and Dr. Theodore Trost. If you have never joined the Mercersburg Society there is a form in the back that you may send in to us. Thank you.

Re-Connecting Christ and the Church: The Search for the Real Presence

Peter Schmiechen

Mercersburg Address, June 2014

The church is in danger of becoming irrelevant in the minds and hearts of most people. The decline in members and dollars are symptoms of the problem, not the cause. But what problem? First, when churches abuse children and then cover it up, tolerate infidelity, can't deal with hot moral issues without fighting, dividing and ritual warfare, or reach for a new status as back-up choirs for the left and right, people begin to wonder if Christ is in their midst.

Second, in America religion has increasingly been separated from the church. Nevin warned of this problem, but what he saw as a nightmare has become the American dream. In effect, Jesus has been uncoupled from the church. People can search for Jesus without the church, supported by popular books advocating that the light is already in them. In a culture well known for the pretense of innocence, supported by a denial of our actual history, who wants to hear of a Jesus dying on the cross for our sins? But the more we try to make the message palatable by reducing it to the theme that God loves everyone, there is less and less reason to search for Jesus in churches.

The responses to this crisis are the usual suspects: There is of course denial, but some prefer to have the church go underground, gathered as a remnant against the world. The more typical response is the practical one: do something—preferably acts of love and service—in the expectation that people will come back if they only see the good we are doing. For my part, I think it is a Christological problem: Who and where is Jesus? Contained in that question is: Does Jesus have anything to do with the church? To name the problem in terms of the Eucharist: Where in this world is the real presence? How would we know it if we did find him?

Consider this story. Ten years ago my wife and I visited a Roman Catholic church in a small village in Italy. There a sign announced that if I paid several thousand lira, I could see the Sancta Particles of the Body of Christ. Now, as someone who has spent much of his life reading about the knowledge of God in the modern age, this was indeed good news. For but a small fee I could come face to face with the real presence. Who could say no? Well, of course, a Protestant—a Protestant schooled in the rejection of transubstantiation, quick to affirm the sovereignty of the Word of God, which cannot be confined in silver boxes set out for viewing. Let us remember that nearly 500 years ago, Martin Luther dismantled, or if you prefer, deconstructed the medieval church. In his attack on the mass, he rejected transubstantiation, denied that the priest offered a sacrifice to God as a good work on our behalf, as well as the idea that the sacrament works by the mere doing of it. This was not simply a revision of the liturgy; rather it was an attack on the authority and structure of the church, which claimed power over everyone because it was an extension of the incarnation. Indeed, one might say that the most important person in all of Europe was the priest, whose words could turn bread and wine into the very body and blood of Christ.

Faced with this devastating critique, Luther needed to do more than write a new liturgy; he had to reconstruct the church. This involved an alternate view of real presence based on the Word of promise and the response of faith. Therefore the homily was transformed into a sermon of proclamation of the gospel, supported by a vernacular Bible, a new catechism, along with new hymns, all tied to the affirmation of the priesthood of all believers. Note how the questions of Christ and church converge: Christ can indeed be found in the church and the church is part of the proclamation regarding Christ. Now, for our time we must ask how shall we reconstitute the church? As Schaff advised, we must name the dangers we face today, rather than re-enact the battles of the 16th century. Obviously the culture presents many challenges, but at some point we need to face up to the problem of Scripture. The

great tragedy of our history is that a movement that began with the primacy of the grace of a sovereign God has evolved into a religion of law based on an absolute Bible, which ends up defending the authority of culture and worldly powers. There is a disturbing similarity between the medieval idea of transubstantiation and the Protestant idea that thousands of verses have been miraculously transformed into the inerrant Word of God. Our attempt to reconstitute the church in the good news of Christ will always be compromised as long as we remain silent regarding the way faith is directed away from Christ to claims about an absolute and infallible book.

I. Redefining the Church for Our Time

We need to redefine the church because the traditional way does not speak to our situation. First, we usually distinguish between essentials (God, Christ, the bestowal of the Spirit) and non-essentials or secondary matters, such as worship, sacraments, church order, and mission. The problem is that in our time, most of the debates and divisions deal with the so-called non-essentials. In effect, everything has become an essential. On the surface, this seems strange, as when a social policy is placed on par with the Doctrine of the Trinity. But such a new list of essentials uncovers a serious error: we assumed that all Christians share a core of universal doctrines, but differ on the non-essential stuff of church life and order. This I think is wrong. It makes more sense to recognize that each tradition has a unique character of its own, so that faith and praxis are formed by it. Thus a Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Mennonite do not think of Jesus Christ in exactly the same way, but differ on strange accidents of history, like liturgy, hymns and dress. Rather, each views Christ as expressive of a quite distinct form of faith and practice, each uses different New Testament texts, creates distinctive leadership styles, and re-enforces their praxis with quite different forms of worship, prayer and hymns. They fight over liturgy, hymns, and dress because these things express who Jesus is and how they are faithful to him.

This leads to the second point: our definition of the church needs to go beyond the careful examination of our union with Christ and the creedal marks of the church. Of course we need to begin with our origin in Christ. But we also need to speak of norms, authority, a vision of history, and strategies to change the world. If *real presence* refers to a point in time and space where Christ is present with saving power, why would anyone look for that *real presence* in churches which make no claims about norms, claim no authority, and have no confidence that by the grace of God they possess power to change individuals and the world?

For these reasons I propose a definition which includes all those things which allow the church to be faithful and sustain faith and action in this world. Such a definition would describe the church as a community which:

1. Claims its origin and identity in God's act in Jesus Christ
2. Is governed by norms
3. Claims authority in the name of Christ
4. Affirms a vision of history
5. Affirms strategies to change individuals and the world
6. Embodies the new life of Christ in a wide range of structures and practices, which nurture and sustain its common life and mission.

My thesis is that all six of these—as well as their interaction—make up the church. *Origin and identity* tell us a great deal about how churches proclaim what God has done and is doing, as well as how they are defined by this. The NT makes it clear that the church is the creation of God, over against the confusion, misinterpretation, and fear of the disciples and in spite of opposition from the religious establishment and Romans. If this is the case, then the church is a gift and we who have been gathered into the Body of Christ can only confess in gratitude what God has done. As we shall see, the implications are many.

Norms are included because every tradition operates with a governing principle, though not the same. Schaff saw this when he published *The Protestant Principle*. The norm is more specific than

the creed and clarifies what is actually at work in a church's faith and life. For Lutherans and Calvinists, Schaff believed the norm was twofold: the formal principle was the authority of Scripture; the material principle was justification by faith. He also urged us to redefine the church in light of new needs. Thus I would propose that the formal principle is Jesus Christ and the material principle is the new life he brings. Why so? When we are asked, Why are we Christians, I believe few would say: because of the Bible. Instead we would say, because Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. Likewise, in our search for uniting justification and sanctification, I think it would be helpful to use the phrase Schaff actually uses, namely, new life.

The next two components have been largely neglected, much to our detriment. We need to state clearly what is authoritative and what authority we claim for the church. This must be done in the face of the dominant fundamentalism in American Protestantism, which today infects a large portion of our own churches. One of the reasons hot ethical topics are so contentious is because we have failed to cultivate a truly Protestant view of the Bible. The situation is even worse regarding a view of history. Mainline Protestants are so spooked by apocalyptic and millennialist claims that we have largely abandoned the discussion, leaving the way for radio, TV, and right wing religion to define God's intention for the future. I would argue that part of the unattractiveness of mainline religion is its refusal to claim authority and proclaim a vision of the future.

The fifth component has to do with the formation of churches. In my work on atonement theories, I discovered that theories contain two parts: *what* Jesus does and *how* it is transmitted across space and time. Thus Anselm tells the reader at the close of *Cur Deus Homo* that one should go to the altar and receive the Eucharist. Or, Luther proclaims the good news and then declares that we are to repent and believe. I have called these means of grace, strategies to change the world, and in this paper, forms of real presence. There is good reason why we refer to these modes of transmission as means of grace. Consider the great commission: we

are commanded to make disciples, teach, and baptize. They are not gimmicks, or mere technique. Rather, they are the means for transforming the world. To the extent that we have not thought of baptism in these terms, we reduce it to naming and a sweet photo op ceremony.

My thesis is that there are basically six ways saving power is communicated to us. These are: a) participation in the sacraments; b) proclamation received by faith, c) rebirth in the Spirit, d) the praxis of love and justice, e) belonging to the disciplined community, and f) solidarity with Christ who is with those who suffer. Now, church traditions develop under the formative power of these six means of grace. Against the rationalist assumption that all churches have a common, identical set of essentials that are interchangeable, but differ in terms of secondary or historical accidents, I propose that we see distinct church traditions as being formed by a dominant means of grace. Thus, if one looks at a typical Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Mennonite, their views of God, Christ, sacraments, church, and the Christian life have a different character because they have been formed in a distinct way. The reforms carried out by Luther and Calvin, on one side, and the Mennonites on the other, make this clear. On each side, little things become the occasion for great debates and division because everything has been invested with value derived from the formative principle.

Finally, the sixth component includes what is formed by these dominant patterns of grace. Churches embody a pattern of grace in their total life: practices, symbols, calendar, structures, art, and architecture. The practices and traditions of congregations are important because they are connected to the primary vision of their life. As a community of Christ in this world, it is necessary to claim space with wood and stone, to create beauty on earth, and lest we forget, come in out of the rain.

To summarize, I want a broader and more inclusive definition of the church, inclusive of those things that allow the church both to survive in time as well as be faithful. It is also a definition which explains how and why traditions vary.

II. The Search for the Real Presence.

I now wish to focus on how the real presence is found in different forms of the church. As noted, I have argued that churches are formed by the way saving power is communicated to us over time and space. This saving power may be called means of grace, strategies to change the world, or what I now call *forms of real presence*. At the outset let us consider the relation of Catholic and Protestant visions of grace. This is a good place to start, in light of our Reformation heritage and the Mercersburg tradition, Catholic and Protestant represent two essential yet different affirmations regarding real presence. I will be using the word Protestant rather than Reformed because I want to make it clear that I am referring to both Lutheran and Reformed perspectives.

By Catholic I refer to that vision of Christian faith which begins with the incarnation and sees the church, sacraments, religious orders, and endless sacred places and practices as embodying the presence of Christ. In its medieval form, this embodiment takes the extreme form of total identification: the church is an extension of the incarnation, bread and wine are changed into body and blood, the priest's words and actions re-present the death of Christ on the cross. I call this an extreme form of the Catholic view, partially because it is the view so objectionable to the Reformers, but primarily because I want to retrieve a positive view of Catholic, not bound to this medieval extreme.

By Protestant I refer to that vision of Christian faith which affirms the divine Word of judgment and grace, calling for repentance and faith. There is indeed an incarnation of the Word and a bestowal of the Spirit, but Word and Spirit are always present in a paradoxical way: Christ and his benefits are truly present, but they cannot be seen or contained, only received by faith. Luther did not deny incarnation or real presence, but centered it in the Word of promise. In that Word proclaimed, Christ and all his benefits were present. Indeed, he could shock readers then and now

with the comment that he could celebrate the Eucharist anywhere and at any time because it was constituted completely in the Word.

What we have then, in Catholic and Protestant, are two ways of viewing real presence. They are different and not easily combined. This can be illustrated if we look at two issues which cause Luther and Calvin great difficulty:

1) The first is the mode of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Luther insists on a literal reading of the Words of Institution, denies carnal eating, but then just before Marburg he tries to silence critics by suggesting that Christ's presence is a form of uncircumscribed spiritual presence. But what does this mean? On the other side, Calvin insists on a spiritual reading of the Words of Institution, rejects Zwingli's view, but then complicates matters by his heavy reliance on John 6: that we eat and drink the flesh and blood of Christ in order to be united with him and share his benefits. Even Nevin finds this an embarrassing dilemma and sets out to correct the matter.

I propose that the reason Luther and Calvin tie themselves into knots is that they have moved from the medieval view of identification to the Protestant view of paradox. But instead of staying with their new paradigm of the Word of promise, where we encounter Christ, they continue to use the Catholic language of physical presence or eating flesh—language so heavily tied to the extremes of the medieval Mass.

2) The second is the relation of Word and Eucharist. Both are caught in the same dilemma: on the one hand, the Word offers Christ and all his benefits and the Eucharist offers nothing new or more; on the other hand, both want to insist that the Eucharist is absolutely necessary. Having abandoned the view that the Eucharist was everything, just what is its role given the new paradigm of the Word-event? When they speak directly to the question, they offer correct but less than persuasive answers. What is surprising is their reluctance to claim the new paradigm they have introduced. For Luther, the Word as Eucharist is a second event wherein Christ is present and offers the forgiveness of sins to the faithful community. This explains his dismay at Zwingli's rejection of real presence in

favor of a service of remembrance. If the people ever hear this, says Luther, they won't come! Calvin's most powerful answer to our question is at the beginning of the discussion of the Eucharist in the *Institutes*, where he describes the Eucharist as a communal event. He gives us the wonderfully personal image of a joyous family celebration, where the father, who has repeatedly blessed his children, now blesses them again with gifts. For both Luther and Calvin, the stronger rationale for the Eucharist lies in the realm of the communal celebration of Christ's presence and his gifts.

These references to Luther and Calvin support the basic point I am making: In the Catholic and Protestant views we have two very different visions of Christ's presence. In general, Luther and Calvin see the Eucharist as the encounter of the Word with faith, bestowing the union of Christ with us and all Christ's gifts. Where they run into difficulties is when they try to answer specific questions by returning to the imagery and logic of the medieval Mass.

Now the more we differentiate Catholic and Protestant, the more we must ask whether they are mutually exclusive. I think the answer is No, as long as we do not equate Catholic with the medieval Mass, or Protestant with the memorialist view. In one we have absolute identification, in the other remembrance replaces real presence. But I think Luther and Calvin demonstrate that the Catholic vision of incarnation need not lead to the excesses of the church as the extension of the incarnation, nor to Zwingli's view that things of this world cannot be bearers of grace. Certainly Nevin and Schaff do not see Catholic and Protestant defined in these exclusive ways. The Catholic vision calls for participation in a sacramental community, where grace is embodied in the community as well as its faith and practices. The Protestant vision calls for a community formed by the Word and the response of repentance and trust of the heart. Both assume incarnation and a community formed by grace, but each forms churches in very distinctive ways.

Perhaps we can find common ground between the two visions in Paul's claim that we have this treasure in earthen vessels. One can read these words to mean the vessel becomes the treasure, or that the vessel has nothing to do with the treasure. But I don't think either represents what Paul is saying. Rather, Paul joins together the catholic and Protestant visions by affirming that things of this world are bearers of grace, without absolutizing them. There really is grace on earth, in, with and under the community of faith. If we need a name for the point where Catholic and Protestant visions touch, perhaps it may be called an evangelical union.

The ability to make a distinction between the treasure and the vessel requires that we consider another complex issue. This is the use of organic images. They clearly introduce the theme of realism and incarnational embodiment. But can they be used without the literalism that draws us into identifying the bread with Christ or the church with Christ?

Let us begin with basics. Organic images are used in the early church because Jesus Christ means a transformation of persons and relations to God and one another. To be Christian is to *be* in a new way. The reorientation of heart, mind and will are so severe it is like a death and rebirth. This applies to both the point of origin and to the continuation of Christian life. Consider the two most important images of new life: vine/branches and the Body of Christ. Both point to the fact that we are dependent on Christ—one might even say absolutely dependent. Union with Christ also means union with one another. John's image adds a warning that doing good works is required, lest we be cut off like barren branches. Paul's image adds that union with one another does not nullify differences but creates a higher form of being

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These images are also valuable because of what they exclude: Christian life is not merely a sharing of ideas, a new teaching or a formula for self-help. It is a new life and it is a gift. It therefore rules out all claims that *our* thoughts and actions are the basis for who we are or shall become. There can be no illusion that

we created the church, or that the church is a voluntary association of like-minded people, or that churches are autonomous. All this explains why the organic metaphors keep reappearing: as food feeds our bodies, so Christ feeds our souls. Organic images serve as a guard against Pelagianism, rationalism, and individualism.

The danger, however, is that while organic images too easily become over extended, leading to literalism and even the excess of identification. Consider the basic image that our souls depend on Christ as our bodies depend on bread and wine. This analogy is easy to grasp and rich in possibilities. But things get complicated when we come to the imagery of John 6, which declares that we are to eat and drink the body and blood of Christ. This, I think, overextends the basic image and takes us into a completely different realm. It simply does not follow that eating and drinking flesh and blood explains how we are united to Christ. Note that Luther stays away from John 6, for two obvious reasons: Zwingli is constantly using John 6:63 (the flesh is of no avail); secondly, he knows it cannot be taken literally. Calvin, by contrast, repeatedly uses John 6, emphasizing that union with Christ requires eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Christ. But to this day, that creates problems for Calvin's interpreters.

Similar problems arise when we use organic images (e.g., vine/branches) to explain our union with Christ. Once we are born into this world, with the chord to our mothers severed, we have no experience of such a physical union. Vine/branches obviously implies dependence on Christ but can also imply loss of identity or being subsumed into Christ's person or life. Now for some traditions, this is not a problem. The Alexandrian tradition is quite willing to affirm that in Christ's one person, the human nature is subordinated to the divine nature. On such a model, our incorporation into Christ would mean being subsumed into Christ and too quickly leads to the view that the church is an extension of the incarnation. But this flies in the face of our doctrine of justification, where we affirm that union with Christ does not

eliminate the human person, still caught in the tensions of sin and grace.

On these matters, Nevin displays something of a mixed mind. He chides Calvin for using substantive language of flesh and blood, finding it to be too heavy a reliance on Christ's humanity, instead of the whole person of Christ. He even appeals to John 6:63 that "the flesh is of no avail" and wishes Calvin had substituted "the organic law of Christ's human life" for the continual reference to flesh and blood (*Mystical Presence*, 152). Yet in his own constructive statement he returns to the theme of receiving Christ by partaking of the body and blood (*Mystical Presence*, 178) and on this point quotes with approval the Heidelberg Catechism (*Mystical Presence*, 180). In spite of his intention to correct this matter in Calvin, in the end we are back to Calvin's point. This, however, may be exactly where Nevin wants to be. Like Calvin, Nevin wants to place the emphasis on the person of Christ, rather than one nature. But in fact both give priority to the Word made flesh: it is by His flesh and blood that we partake of the His new life.

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On our union with Christ, Nevin relies heavily on organic images. He wants *more* than a moral union. His favorite image is not vine/branches but root and branches, allowing him to affirm an organic union with Christ over against rationalism and spiritualism. At such moments one realizes that Nevin sides with Alexandria over Antioch. Alexandrians have no trouble accepting the subordination of Jesus' humanity to his divinity in the person of Christ. He can say without hesitation that we *subsist* in Christ, though he is careful to affirm that on earth we struggle with sin till the resurrection (*Mystical Presence*, 31). So on one level, Nevin uses organic images that clearly invoke the substantial language of Athanasius and Chalcedon. But in his own constructive position, he steps away from organic images and speaks of the law of organic life in the person of Christ bearing new life, connecting his center with our center. The point is that the entire discussion is complicated by Nevin's use of three very different language systems: There is the substantial language of Chalcedon, balanced

by the modern language of person. Then, alternating between these two systems is a third, namely, that of organic metaphors. Do the organic images side with Chalcedon or modern personal language, or flow in between? In the end it is not clear how the image of *root/branches* relates to *Jesus as the law of new life*?

Organic images are extremely important to discussions of Christ and the church, but require caution. We do well to remember that they are metaphors. While they appear to have privileged status because of their implied substantive character, they still need to be explained. It is interesting that when we go to explain them, we end up using the personal language of heart, mind, and will. For example, even the Gospel of John declares that to abide in Christ is to do his will. We also should note that in the synoptics, the words *love, follow, called, and sent* are just as decisive in naming the relation of the disciples to Jesus as the organic images in John and Paul. For all their seeming realism, the organic images are not more descriptive of the Christian life than action verbs or non-organic images. I think Nevin recognizes this in his preference for personal language in describing Christ and our relation to him.

Thus far I have argued that Catholic and Protestant views of real presence constitute two essential visions of the church. Most of us have spent a good part of our lives making just this point and it would be easy to end right here. I want to urge you to take one more step forward: We need to go beyond the discussion of Catholic and Protestant and recognize that there are at least six ways grace has formed churches. Besides Catholic and Protestant, the other four are: Spiritual Rebirth, Participation in the disciplined community, Acts of love and justice, and Solidarity with Christ who is with those who suffer. We have, in effect, six ways in which Christians speak of the event of Christ's real presence.

The first advantage of this approach is that it gives us a positive way to understand differences between traditions, in contrast to the traditional method of: "I'm right and you are wrong." It assumes that the gospel has a richness which we have been

reluctant to acknowledge. It forces us to make a choice: either one must fall back on the old practice of condemning all views but one's own, or one must accept the fact that God is working in ways that exceed our old ways of thinking. I choose the latter.

A second advantage is that it opens the door to new sources of vitality that go beyond one's dominant tradition. Now of course you already know this, as you engage in an ecumenical theology and embrace a variety of liturgies, forms of spirituality, witness and service. Indeed, in our time, God is mixing things up and revealing means of grace where we did not expect it. By contrast, churches will restrict their spiritual life and growth when they insist that only one pattern is correct, and therefore define everything in a rigid way according to that means of grace. This not only cuts one off from other Christians but in general restricts growth.

All of this leads to the fact that the church is formed by multiple patterns of grace. We heartily claim the Protestant vision, with strong affirmations of the Catholic vision. For us, our challenge is to open ourselves to the fullness of God's grace and let that continue to reform even those formed by the 16th century. Schaff saw changes coming which would surpass the impasse of Protestant and Catholic in the 19th century. What is happening in our time is not necessarily a new, single third way, but the recognition that the churches see Christ's real presence in sacramental participation, the Word of promise, spiritual rebirth, the disciplined community, acts of love and justice and solidarity with those who suffer. In each one of these, cross and resurrection, repentance and faith, death and new life come together. because, in each one, Christ is present.

Notes

John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence and Other Writings on the Eucharist*. Vol. IV of *Lancaster Series on the Mercersburg Theology*. Edited by Bard Thompson and George H. Bricker. Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1966.

Mercersburg Meets Bonhoeffer: Complementary or Incommensurable?

Lee C. Barrett
September 25, 2014
The Mackey Lecture @ Lancaster Theological Seminary

A couple of decades ago *Saturday Night Live* featured a comedic spot entitled "What If?" The skits were hilariously bizarre examples of what logicians call "counterfactual hypotheticals." One episode posed the intriguing question: "What if Attila the Hun had been a hospital chaplain?" Another asked: "What if Eleanor Roosevelt could fly?" Initially, my response to the suggestion that Mercersburg theology and the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer shared deep commonalities resembled my reaction to those old television episodes.

After all, what possibly could an early nineteenth century religious movement, originating in an obscure village in south central Pennsylvania, aimed at confessional and liturgical revitalization, have to do with the career of a maverick early twentieth century theologian who smuggled Jews out of the Third Reich, engaged in espionage, was implicated in a plot to kill Hitler, and ended his life with martyrdom? What could a theology born in the hinterland of North America have to do with Christian reflection emanating from Berlin, the cosmopolitan epicenter of Protestant thought and piety?

But then a conversation with Peter Mackey made me realize that the hypothesis that a deep parallelism exists between the Mercersburg theologians and Bonhoeffer had been voiced long ago at Lancaster Theological Seminary by my remote predecessor, Gabriel Fackre. And then I remembered the career of another

faculty member, Francis Ringer, who combined a profound Eucharistic mysticism with a fiercely counter-cultural liberation theology indebted to Bonhoeffer. And then I began to think that the connection of the two theologies might not be so far-fetched.

In fact, even a little cursory exploration suggests that Mercersburg and Bonhoeffer shared much in common. I am not talking about any direct genetic connection between the two, or even any vague influence. Although Bonhoeffer was well aware of Philip Schaff as an historian, he was not at all familiar with John Nevin as a theologian. Moreover, after months of meticulous research, I have concluded that Nevin and Schaff never read a word by Bonhoeffer. However, their similarities were not entirely accidental. Both the anti-Finneyite polemicists and the anti-Hitler subversive were spawned, in part, by the ferment in German theology that had begun in the late eighteenth century and continued throughout the nineteenth. The intellectual movements in Germany, including romanticism, idealism, and the mediating theology, that nurtured Bonhoeffer had earlier generated ripples that had been felt across the ocean. John Nevin and Philip Schaff were part of a broader theological trend that included right-wing Hegelians like Philip Marheineke, and mediating theologians like Isaak Dorner. Mercersburg was the North American pole of a transatlantic paradigm shift that shook both the Lutheran and the Reformed worlds. It is significant that Bonhoeffer cut his theological teeth on these same influences (although, unlike Nevin and Schaff, his theology was chastened by reading Kierkegaard and Barth).

The deep similarities between Mercersburg and Bonhoeffer are not to be sought in a particular doctrinal modification or in a specific philosophical innovation. Rather, it was a much more fundamental similarity in spiritual worlds that united the Mercersburg theologians with Bonheoffer. The parallelisms on specific issues were functions of a more basic agreement about the nature and purpose of the Christian life. They identified the basic dynamics of the faith similarly, and therefore reconceived particular doctrines similarly. The similarities, however, must not be overplayed. There were indeed striking dissimilarities; in fact, one

big divergence caused their reflections about church and society to veer off in different directions. I will explore both the similarities and the differences, and propose that even the differences may be regarded as complementary rather than oppositional. Maybe an encounter of the two theologies will generate a fruitful dialectical tension; perhaps Mercersburg enthusiasts can be enriched by an exploration of Saint Dietrich, and perhaps Bonhoefferians can benefit from an investigation of Nevin and Schaff. We will focus on a comparison of Nevin (rather than Schaff) and Bonheoffer, for it was Nevin's Christological reflections that suggest the strongest parallel with Bonheoffer's piety.

Let us begin with the similarities. Perhaps the most basic convergence is that both Nevin and Bonhoeffer were grace-centered, "*gratiocentric*." The Mercersburg movement had a deep and abiding allergic reaction to the popular mechanistic revivalism and the prevalent religiously-tinged moralism of the nineteenth century. To Nevin and Schaff, revivalism and moralism were nothing but self-centered exercises in Pelagian self-justification. Either the individual saves herself by the intensity and sincerity of her conversion experience, or by the tenacity and rigor of her ethical commitment. In either case, salvation, a blessed life, depends upon something that the individual does, on a human work. As an alternative, the Mercersburg theologians advocated a more Augustinian turn to the grace of God, present in Jesus Christ and available in the objectivities of church's worship life, particularly the sacraments.

Bonhoeffer thoroughly shared this antipathy to salvation by works. In fact, his enthusiasm for the doctrine of *sola gratia*, grace alone, may even have exceeded that of the Mercersburg theologians. In 1928 Bonhoeffer expressed agreement with Karl Barth that all human religions, all human spiritualities, are nothing but an exercise in sinful self-justification.[1] In all forms of human piety people try to save themselves by the profundity of their religious experience. That project, according to Bonhoeffer, is the

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1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), vol. 10, p. 353.

antithesis of Christian faith. God saves us; we emphatically do not save ourselves. Nevin and Bonhoeffer, in their respective contexts, were the implacable enemies of the theological liberalism that ascribed to humanity the power to pull itself up by its bootstraps.

But there was another, less obvious, fundamental similarity. Both Nevin and Bonhoeffer agreed that the good news of Christianity cannot be exclusively identified with the forgiveness of sins and the rescue of the sinner from damnation. They both rejected any reduction of the overarching Biblical narrative to the plot line of paradise lost and paradise regained. That narrative, embedded in much Protestant theology, had been dominated by legal concepts and metaphors, particularly the notion of obedience to the will of God, the transcendent source of order. In that older view typical of the Protestant scholasticism that flourished in the seventeenth century and continues to influence many strands of contemporary piety (and typified the thought of Nevin's nemesis Charles Hodge), the goal of human life is perfect obedience to the will of the righteous God. Adam and Eve had been endowed with the capacity to obey God perfectly and continue in the state of paradisiacal righteousness. However, the violation of God's laws has disrupted this original blessedness and thwarted humanity's movement toward this *telos*. The ultimate problem that fuels this old drama is sin; the issues of guilt and moral/spiritual debility are the most tormenting worries. Individuals have rebelled against God's principles and purposes, preferring their own self-will to the glorification of God and the good of God's creation. Humans have violated God's order, polluted themselves, and rendered themselves worthy of punishment. In this venerable Protestant scholastic view, individuals need to recover the right legal relationship with God and enjoy the restoration of the divine favor which Adam had forfeited. Only then can the proper relation of obedience to God's will be reestablished. Consequently, the Christian story is a tale of transgression, corruption, reprieve, recovery, and restoration, particularly the restoration of the status of being a good and faithful servant of the Lord. That is the version of the Protestant story dear to conservative Lutherans and Calvinists, and cherished by many Christians in 19th century America and 20th century Germany.

Both Nevin and Bonhoeffer were discontent with that reductionistic version of the Christian story. For Nevin and Bonhoeffer the basic plot of the Christian story is very different (although it contains the fall/reprieve/recovery drama as a chapter). For them the most basic Christian meta-narrative is the story of humanity's growth in godlikeness, *theosis*, stretching from creation to the eschaton. It is the saga of the journey from ordinary creatureliness to participation in God's moral perfections. The basic problem is not sin (although that is a seriously complicating factor), but is rather the unfinished nature and incompleteness of original humanity. The first Adam was not the perfection of human nature. The fullness of faith, hope, and love were not part of our original composition, but had to be attained.[2] The good news is that God is at work in the church, human history, and individual lives to nurture a new, extravagantly loving humanity, a process that will be consummated beyond time. Salvation is not merely the restoration of an original right relation with God, but is rather a transformation of human nature into something far more lofty than the prelapsarian state of Adam and Eve.

Let us look at the way that this version of the Christian story, a story of spiritual maturation, affected their reconceptualization of specific theological topics. Let us start with the truly foundational concept: God. Nevin diverged from the Calvinism of his day by foregrounding God's love and relationality rather than God's sovereign will and metaphysical perfections. In fact, God's omnipotence is significant to Nevin only because it guarantees that God possesses the power to accomplish God's loving purposes. Given this focus on love, it is natural that Nevin would emphasize the intercommunion of the Persons of the Trinity much more than any of his American contemporaries did, who remained focused on the "economic" Trinity (the Persons defined in terms of their actions toward the world). According to Nevin, the Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the love that flows between them. Mutual indwelling is the

[2] William Erb, *Nevin's Theology, Based on Manuscript Class-Room Lectures* (Reading: I. M. Beaver, 1913), p. 199.

very nature of God.[3] God should be imaged not as a solitary individual, a self-contained potentate, but rather as the perfect life of unity-in-difference. God is the internal dynamic of differentiation and reconciliation that manifests itself externally in the creation and consummation of the universe.

Bonhoeffer focused on love as God's defining characteristic just as much as Nevin did. For Bonhoeffer, the pattern of Jesus' life is the disclosure of God's very nature.[4] Because Jesus' life manifests profligately self-giving compassion, that same self-giving must be God's definitively divine quality. God is essentially the giving of the Self to the Other; that self-emptying dynamic is the essence of God's Trinitarian life. God is not glorious self-sufficiency, aseity, or unilaterally exercised sovereign power. God is not the apotheosis of the domineering will. Bonhoeffer was deeply troubled by the vocabulary of sovereign power, awesome majesty, universal control, ordering will, and judicial rectitude. That sort of language suggested that God is first and foremost the monarch and the judge who dominates the universe, coercively enacts the divine purposes in history, and commands human beings to follow God's directives. That description made God sound a little too much like Adolph Hitler. So, Bonhoeffer, like Nevin, opened the door to the "immanent" model of the Trinity, stressing the reciprocity and mutuality that typify human relationships.

Because of this common emphasis of relationality, further similarities appear in Nevin's and Bonhoeffer's respective understandings of sin. For older iterations of Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy, legal and constitutional motifs predominated in the exposition of human depravity. In the older views, sin was most basically the violation of God's laws. Adam was the legal representative of humanity as a whole, either because we inherit Adam's debt, or because Adam was appointed by God to be the

[3] John W. Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, ed. Linden J. De Bie (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012), p. 196.

[4] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke* (Munich and Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus / Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1986-98), vol. 13, p. 362.

"federal head" of the entire human race. In any case, Adam's legal liability is imputed to all other humans. As a result, God has punished humanity by withholding divine favor, which causes individuals to succumb to Adam's corruption and inevitably produces personal and damnable violations of God's law. This forensic language paradoxically functioned to augment the sense of the individual's own personal responsibility for transgressing God's commandments, at the same time that it reinforced an awareness of sin's inevitability and universality.

As an alternative to this view, Nevin's understanding of sin, while still employing the vocabulary of "law" and "disobedience," focused much more intensively on sin as a spiritual disease, as a derailment of progress, and as the disruption of unity. Nevin ascribed the motivation for the fall not to a deliberate refusal to offer perfect obedience, but to the all-too-human susceptibility to the wiles of Satan, understandable in creatures who had not yet grown into full spiritual maturity. Adam and Eve were not created with fully-developed holiness, but only with the potential for holiness; Adam and Eve were like gullible children. The sin of our primal parents can only be imputed to their posterity because we participate in their corporate humanity. Human nature in general has become misdirected and disordered, no longer motivated by the impulse toward union with God. Nevin concentrates not on the individual's liability to condemnation, but on the alienation of humanity as a collective entity from God, human individuals, and nature.

Bonhoeffer made parallel moves, substituting a relational conceptuality for a legal one. Sin is what Augustine called being *incurvatus in se*, "curved in" on oneself; it is a failure to develop the other-regarding *telos* of human nature.[5] It is self-containment, the drive toward self-sufficiency, the yearning to be independent of God and neighbor, needing no one and relying on no one's help. Sin, according to Bonhoeffer, is the vain longing for autonomy, the ambition to go it alone, the desire to be the quintessential self-reliant rugged individual. (In a sense, sin is the celebrated

5 *Ibid.*, p. 363.

"American way.") It is much deeper than the violation of any law, deeper than the disruption of cosmic order; it is a misorientation of the self away from the Other. Somehow, humanity has failed to grow beyond its infantile self-obsession.

Given the pervasiveness of relational language in their texts, it should be no surprise that Nevin and Bonhoeffer developed similar understandings of the soteriological significance of Jesus Christ. For Nevin, the main problem was not humanity's violation of God's law, and therefore its liability to divine judgment. Consequently, Jesus was not primarily construed as God's atoning act, objectively accomplished *extra nos*. Nevin disliked exclusively legal rhetoric that suggested that Christ's fulfillment of the law is forensically imputed to us, and that this imputation is not grounded in any transformative union of the believer with Christ. For Nevin, the good news is not exclusively that God has done something to get us off the legal hook, quite apart from any human response or subjective appropriation. If that were true, the Incarnation would be crucial only because it is the necessary foundation of the atoning work of Christ that satisfies the requirements of retributive justice.

Nevin did not subscribe to that reductively sin-oriented view of the work of Christ. For Nevin, the significance of Jesus cannot be restricted to Jesus' atoning work. Of course, he agreed that the atoning work was important, affirming that Christ was the bearer of our sin and guilt. However, for Nevin the Incarnation was not just the necessary precondition for Christ's work of atonement.[6] Nevin tended to explain Christ's redemptive work, including the atonement, as the actualization of the goal of human nature that God had intended from creation. Consequently, salvation is a function of Christ's person in all its aspects, not just in his passion. According to Nevin, "The mediation of Christ lies primarily and mainly in the constitution of his person by itself considered."[7] The Incarnation was necessary to complete the work that God had begun at creation. Nevin insisted, "Humanity requires this union… By the

6 John W. Nevin, "The Apostle's Creed," *Mercersburg Review* 1 (1849): 315.

7 Erb, *Op. cit.*, p. 243.

union of both natures the human becomes glorified."[8] Jesus was the injection of new divine life into humanity, an empowerment that far surpassed the capabilities of Adam's created nature. The sheer fact of the Incarnation is foregrounded in Nevin, for in Christ the ontological gap separating the Creator and the creature has been bridged. By claiming that creation and redemption are one continuous act, Nevin was seeking to overcome Protestant theology's tendency to regard redemption as the supersession of a creation that had gone awry. Redemption fulfills the original creation by raising it to the more exalted life for which it had longed. Nevin was implicitly endorsing the controversial doctrine that the Incarnation would have occurred even if humanity had not sinned.[9] God's decision to become incarnate preceded the contingent event of the fall, and was not an afterthought conditioned by the actuality of sin.

Nevin objected to understanding the Person of Christ solely in terms of the need to redeem humanity from sin. Old Reformed theologians who made that mistake were adamant that the separate integrity of the divine and human natures must be preserved because each one must play a unique and separate role in the accomplishment of redemption. For the old Reformed scholastics, the human nature of Jesus needed to offer satisfaction to God for humanity's sin, and fulfill all righteousness. Meanwhile the divinity of Christ was necessary in order to render the sacrifice and the obedience perfect and give them infinite worth. These functions were different, and required that each nature play its unique part in securing the resolution of humanity's legal liability. Accordingly, the Reformed scholastics insisted that Jesus' human and divine natures were united without exchanging properties. The humanity of Jesus was not deified, and the divinity was not subjected to human limitations.

Nevin's foregrounding of the Incarnation motivated him to think of the union of the two natures of Christ in a very different

8 *Ibid.*, p. 264.

9 John W. Nevin, "Liebner's Christology," *Mercersburg Review* 3 (1851): 55-73.

way. It was crucial for him that in Christ the universal form of human nature has been suffused with the divine life. According to Nevin, human nature in general was assumed by the Logos and thereby transformed into something far more exalted than Adam and Eve's condition. In Christ human nature in its totality was united to the personhood of God, and was sustained and perfected by the divine nature. While the two natures of Christ were not merged or confused, they did interpenetrate one another and exchange properties; in other words, there was a *communicatio idiomata*. In Christ human capacities were glorified and suffused with divine life, without becoming divine in themselves. The humanity of Christ was progressively transformed throughout Christ's life, finally being perfected through the power of the Spirit in the ascension.[10] Jesus Christ is the New Creation in whom the intended development of human nature, which had been botched by Adam and Eve, is recapitulated.

This vision of the progressive glorification of Christ's human nature was crucial for Nevin's intensive concern for the union of humanity and divinity. Christ's actualization of this new life in union with God is the root of all individuals' own spiritual completion.[11] Just as human nature as a corporate reality fell in Adam, so also human nature as a corporate reality has been sanctified in Christ. Because human nature in the generic sense is united with God in the person of Christ, the potential scope of the atonement is universal (although salvation is not universal, for not all individuals are united to Christ in faith). The sanctified humanity of Jesus, suffused with God's life, is the door through which we pass into union with his divinity;[12] the glorified human nature is the indispensable medium through which we participate in his person as divine.

Bonhoeffer paralleled many of Nevin's Christological emphases, all of which revolved around the theme of relationship with God. For Bonhoeffer, in Jesus Christ divinity and humanity

10 Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, p. 169.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 173.

12 Erb, *Op. cit.*, p. 292.

share properties, and therefore human nature is perfected, achieving a more glorious destiny than had been possible for Adam and Eve. Capitalizing on the doctrine of divine *kenosis*, Bonhoeffer based the elevation of humanity in the condescension of God to dwell with lowly human beings.[13] He remained, in some regards, a good Lutheran, and he therefore foregrounded the theology of the cross. God's presence in Christ was paradoxically enacted in weakness and suffering. The fullness of God's life is revealed in the apparent emptiness of a sacrificial death. Jesus is the disclosure of God's self-giving love, a love so intense that it expends itself in suffering for others. It is that unconditional, unstinted passion for self-giving (which is the essence of divinity) that is communicated to Jesus' human nature. Jesus the human, our brother, is suffused with the extravagantly other-regarding disposition of God. Jesus can be the "Man for Others" precisely because he is the incarnation of the God who is for others.

Given all this focus on relationality, it is no shock that Nevin and Bonhoeffer shared overlapping understandings of faith. Both of them rejected the identification of faith with mental assent to propositions about the state of affairs in the universe. In the scholastic Protestant view, faith is the comprehension of the meaning of supernaturally revealed data, the affirmation that the data is accurate, and trust in the data's veracity. This type of faith has a pronounced cognitive dimension, which is alleged to ground affective and behavioral changes. The model of faith's basically cognitive quality is that of a conscious subject processing data about the external objective world, trusting the truth of the conclusion, and concomitantly experiencing a passional change. The model suggests that the better a Christian you are, the clearer and more numerous are your doctrines. That would make me a really fine Christian, for I believe in the doctrine of *anhypostasia*, and you probably do not even know what that is. The ludicrous nature of this view was obvious to Nevin.

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[13] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, vol. 13, p. 362.

For Nevin, faith is a very different sort of phenomenon. He rejected the dichotomistic model of the knowing subject over against the known object, with the subject scrutinizing and analyzing the object from a distance. Instead, Nevin borrowed from romanticism the model of knowing through the knower's participation in the known. For Nevin, a person can only truly know something of existential importance by experiencing it from the inside. This type of knowledge is even more intense than an intimate interpersonal relationship in which the two parties nevertheless remain essentially distinct. Rather, religiously relevant knowing is a veritable identification with the other, in this case with God-in-Christ. Faith is a kind of meditative knowledge that involves the introjection of the known into the life of the knower. The qualities of the known become the knower's own qualities. In his sermons Nevin gestured toward this phenomenon by citing the admittedly inadequate analogy of the inspirational power of persons who lead such noble lives that that they insinuate themselves in the deepest recesses of the souls of those who behold them.[14] In an even more profound way Christ can be internalized and function as the true core of an individual's personality. This "putting on" of Christ is a deeper bond than any relationship based on affection, admiration, mutual interest, or covenantal commitment. Faith is a real unity of the life of the believer and the life of Christ involving a union with the potency of Christ's incarnate humanity. In faith the believer absorbs the passions and virtues of Christ and begins to share in Christ's way of experiencing life. Through participating in the life of the church, the believer internalizes the hopes, loves, and joys that characterize Christ's personhood. It is for this reason that Nevin describes faith as a mystical union with Christ, in which the Holy Spirit enables the humanity of Christ (and its union with the divine) to become savingly effective in the life of the individual.

Bonhoeffer defined faith in similarly relational terms. He shocked his fellow Lutherans by insisting that personal

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[14] John W. Nevin, *College Chapel Sermons*, ed. Henry Kieffer (Philadelphia: Reformed Church Publishing House, 1891), p. 74.

transformation is part of faith in Christ, for Christ is introjected into the believer's psyche. As it was for Nevin, so also for Bonheoffer faith was putting on the mind of Christ, and taking into oneself the spirit of Christ. We know Christ only by participating in Christ. Throughout his changing, evocative, and fragmentary literature, Bonhoeffer consistently maintained that faith is not just belief in doctrinal propositions, but is a fundamental reconfiguring of every aspect of personal identity. He even proposed that in faith Christ becomes the believer's real "I," displacing the Cartesian "ego" so prized by modernity.[15] Just as much as Henry Harbaugh, Bonhoeffer could heartily intone that Christ lives in me and I live in Christ.

The shift from legal to relational language also led Nevin and Bonheoffer to link justification and sanctification in parallel ways. For older Reformed and Lutheran theologians, the essence of justification is Jesus' satisfaction of God's legal demands of justice, and therefore the assurance that the individual is no longer liable to punishment. This assurance that retributive justice had been satisfied makes possible relief, freedom from fear of God's condemnation, and a new love for this benevolent God who has arranged this reprieve. The sinner who is conscious of justification is motivated by gratitude to become a good and faithful servant of the Lord. In this way justification is the necessary presupposition of sanctification. Any real transformation of the believer's spiritual life is rooted in the conviction that the external legal situation of the individual has been rectified.

For Nevin, on the other hand, justification and sanctification are parallel fruits of the believer's union with Christ. He resisted the tendency typical of the older Protestant scholastics to regard the rectification of the sinner's legal status and the transformation of the sinner's heart as separate phenomena connected only by the motivational power of gratitude. Nevin certainly did not discount the importance of being declared "righteous" by God apart from any personal merit, but his convictions about this justification were

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15 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Works: Life Together* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), vol. 5, p. 56.

informed by his convictions concerning the mystical union with Christ. He proposed that the righteousness of Christ does not remain outside us sinners as something externally imputed, as if it were a mere legal transaction; rather, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us because Christ's very life has been infused into us. As Nevin explains, there is no basis for God's imputation of righteousness to us except the living union with Christ.[16] For Nevin, we are declared righteous because the life of Christ the righteous one has entered us, and therefore what is Christ's has become ours. In a parallel manner, for Nevin sanctification occurs because the new life of Christ indwells us and empowers us to grow in righteousness. Christ's motivational core becomes our motivational core, and we develop Christ-like dispositions and passions. Both being declared righteous and actually becoming righteous are the fruits of faith's identification with Christ.

Bonhoeffer relates justification and sanctification in the same way, placing the emphasis on spiritual union with Christ. Like Nevin, Bonhoeffer insists that in faith Christ becomes the center of the believer's life. Concerning justification, he maintains that we fall in love with Christ, desire Christ, and therefore when God looks at us, God sees Christ the beloved who is righteous, and we are therefore deemed righteous. Concerning sanctification, he explains that because our hearts are captivated by the unconditional, self-giving love that God has shown us, we fall in love with that kind of extravagant love. Because individuals become like that which they love, it is inevitable that lovers of Christ's love will start to feel like Christ, and act like Christ. For Bonhoeffer, faith in God's forgiveness is inseparable from love; therefore, the unconditional acceptance so dear to Lutherans necessarily involves discipleship.[17] The forgiveness of sin is intrinsically linked to following Christ (although it is not based on the successful following of Christ). Put another way, justifying grace makes an ethical claim on us and draws us toward discipleship. God's forgiveness calls us to reflect

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16 Erb, *Op. cit.*, pp. 226, 296.

17 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Works: The Cost of Discipleship*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), vol. 4, p. 45.

the suffering, self-giving love that has been extended toward us. Trust in God's compassion enacted in Jesus generates in us a new life of existence for others. Therefore, without abandoning the Lutheran theme of salvation by grace alone, Bonhoeffer could insist upon uncompromising discipleship, costly grace (no cheap grace), and identify the Christian life with the following of the Sermon on the Mount. He took the Sermon on the Mount with absolute seriousness, and advocated for pacifism, sounding much like an Anabaptist. Much to the horror of many of his Lutheran colleagues, Bonhoeffer boldly proclaimed that only those who are obedient truly believe. Because of this he was accused of legalism, Pelagianism, self-righteousness, and every other evil thing in the Lutheran lexicon. But, in a way, all he was doing was inching toward the Mercersburg version of the Reformed tradition, with its rooting of both justification and sanctification in the union with Christ.

Finally, both the Mercersburg theologians and Bonhoeffer gave priority to the Christian community over any allegedly autonomous, self-creating individuals. For Nevin, the collectivity is prior to the individual; that assertion functioned as a general metaphysical principle for him. Generic human nature is a more basic reality than its manifestation in individual human persons. The conclusion that Nevin draws from this principle is that the church community, with its practices, its rituals, its hymns, its music, its prayers, and its confessions, shapes the individual believer. Nevin even declares that the church is an extension of the incarnation.[18] Ecclesial life is the typical channel through which we are ingrafted into Christ. We become one with Christ through immersing ourselves in the life of the church. No wonder that Nevin and Schaff had such a potent sense of the importance of the great cloud of witnesses extended throughout space and time, and therefore an abiding appreciation of historic ecclesial traditions and a passion for ecumenism.

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[18] John Nevin, "The Church," in *The Mercersburg Theology*, ed. by James Hastings Nichols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 56-76.

Bonhoeffer shared a similar churchly sensibility. In his early thesis *Sanctorum Communio* he proclaimed that the church is God's revelation in its social form, and even that it is Christ existing as community.[19] Throughout his career he argued that human nature is "intersubjective," meaning that our most primal sense of our unique personal identity is forged through our interaction with others.[20] If there is no Other, there can be no self. For him, even our awareness of God as the cosmic Other is mediated by our interaction with human others, particularly those in the church. In other words, we encounter God through the interactions of the church community. That sense of the importance of the visible Body of Christ fueled his commitment to preserve its integrity against the Nazi attempt to deform the church into the ideological department of the Third Reich. It also motivated his ecumenical zeal, as well as his advocacy of a church that transcended racial differences over against the nationalistic ecclesia of the Aryan Volk.

So, if any of this is accurate, the reader may be wondering if Bonhoeffer may have been nothing more than a Teutonic reiteration of Nevin and Schaff in a subsequent century; maybe he was just a Mercersburg type with an attitude, or a Mercersburg theologian with a penchant for blowing up genocidal dictators. But, we should not draw such a conclusion so precipitously, for there were some glaring differences between Mercersburg and Bonhoeffer. I cannot imagine John Nevin trying to assassinate Jefferson Davis or James Buchanan, not even if they were flagrantly lethal tyrants. And this is not just a difference in temperament or political context; there are theological reasons why Bonhoeffer (in spite of some conservative instincts) would become a saboteur and a counter-cultural experimenter, while Nevin remained politically and culturally traditionalistic.

Although they were both thoroughly Christocentric, Nevin and Bonhoeffer understood the fruits of the Incarnation somewhat differently. When Nevin talked about the divine nature and the

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[19] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Works: Sanctorum Communio* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), p. 63.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

human nature of Christ exchanging properties, he stressed the glorification of Christ's human nature, and its participation in God's eternity. But when Bonhoeffer discussed the same topic, he emphasized that God's self-sacrifice, the divine embrace of suffering, is communicated to Jesus' human nature. The essence of the divine nature revealed in Christ is the willingness to bear the sufferings of humanity. Because he was the manifestation of God, the human being Jesus of Nazareth therefore shared this divine self-emptying. In Jesus, human nature learned to give itself extravagantly and unconditionally to others. So, Bonhoeffer concludes, when we are united to Christ in faith, we share in the power of God's suffering love. We are inspired and emboldened to give our lives to and for our neighbors. Bonhoeffer was clear that to put on Christ is to put on the way of the cross. The Christian life is intrinsically a life of martyrdom. Of course, this might be a symbolic martyrdom as the Christian pours out her time and energy for the well-being of her neighbors, or it might be a literal martyrdom, as it was for Bonhoeffer. But in either case, when Jesus calls us, he calls us to come and die for our brothers and sisters, just as God did.

Also, Nevin and Bonhoeffer differed on what might be called the issue of generic human spirituality. Let me put it this way: Nevin could do business with people who call themselves spiritual but not religious, while Bonhoeffer could not. Put another way, Nevin had a pronounced otherworldly streak, which was more recessive in Bonhoeffer. For example, Nevin insisted that the entire creation, encapsulated in humanity, is directed toward the *telos* of participation in the infinite life of God. He exclaimed, "The whole world, in the deepest sense, is longing and striving after a union with God. Nothing less than a union with its divine creator can satisfy the soul."[21] For Nevin, creaturely life is unsatisfying, for it suffers from vulnerabilities, limitations, immaturity, and fragmentation. In this terrestrial realm the polarities of finite/infinite, self/other, material/spiritual, body/ mind, and Creator/creation were not yet unified. The finite world continues to

[21] Erb, *Op. cit.*, p. 131.

be riddled with disjunctions that beg to be reconciled. Human nature, bounded by space and time, needs to be suffused with the divine life and thereby attain the ultimate goal for which it was created: union with God.[22] This union with the Godhead is not alien to human nature, for "there was certainly a necessity in the constitution of the world for a union of humanity with the Godhead."[23] We are all spiritual orphans, Christian and non-Christian, yearning for our celestial home in God. That restlessness of the heart provides the basis for all human religiosity and spiritual questing.

Bonhoeffer, however, did not believe that all humans are hard-wired to yearn for union with the infinite. Human beings, he concluded, are not all instinctively inclined toward mysticism. He opined that the notion that we have a God-shaped cavity that only God can fill is only true of some individuals in some cultures. Other-worldly spirituality, he concluded, is culturally learned; it is not innate.[24] And he came to believe that the modern world was no longer promoting other-worldliness. But that shift to a more secular cultural, uninterested in transcendence, should not be denounced as a crucial blow to Christian faith, for Christian faith is not predicated on humanity's alleged spiritual quest. That is what he meant by his infamous claim that we live in a religionless age, and that humanity had come of age.[25] Religion, by which he meant other-worldly spirituality, is no longer the starting point for the self-understanding of modern people. For Bonhoeffer, this waning of the hunger for other-worldly fulfillment is actually a boon to Christianity, for according to Christian faith transcendence is not reunion with the infinite, but rather is the pouring out of one's life for the neighbor. A life of self-sacrifice, not the pursuit of the infinite, is the Christian way to encounter God.

[22] *Ibid*, p. 125.

[23] *Ibid*, p. 132.

[24] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. by Eberhard Bethge, trans. by Reginald Fuller, et. al. (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 280.

[25] *Ibid.*, section 3.

Of course, the Mercersburg folks and Bonhoeffer also differed in their understanding of the church. Nevin and Schaff were mostly intent upon recalling the church to its true identity as the Body of Christ on earth, an identity that had been eroded by rationalism, moralism, and revivalism. In order to become healthy, the church had to recover its historic confessions, creeds, liturgies, and spiritual practices. Therefore, the Mercersburg theologians encouraged a strong sense of the concreteness of the church in its institutions and rituals. If the church could reestablish strong connections with its historic traditions, the uniqueness of Christian identity would be recovered and the lives of Christians would be spiritually revitalized.

Bonhoeffer, however, became profoundly disillusioned with the institutional church. He observed that the Church of the Prussian Union cherished the historic confessions, used the traditional catechisms, sang the venerable hymns, and celebrated the sacraments in the time-honored manner, but still the vast majority of clergy voted in 1933 to adopt the Aryan Paragraph, which stipulated that no person of Jewish descent could serve as a civil servant in Germany. Of course, ministers counted as civil servants, and therefore no Jewish-descended person could serve as a minister of Word and Sacrament. For Bonhoeffer, concern for his brothers and sisters in Christ who were ethnically different from the majority of the church was a fundamental aspect of Christ-like love. For him, the Aryan paragraph was not "adiaphora;" it was not an indifferent matter that did not directly impinge upon the issue of salvation. The situation for him was *status confessionis;* the very essence of the church was a stake. So, he declared that the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union was an apostate, heretical organization. What he discovered was that confessional and liturgical integrity by themselves did not guarantee the authenticity of the Body of Christ. The ecclesial community must walk the walk, and not only talk the talk. The love celebrated in the Eucharist must become visible in deeds of compassion, and in active resistance to evil, if evil is threatening our neighbors. It is for this reason that Bonhoeffer for the rest of his life began to explore other forms of Christian community outside the institutional church, including his

experiments with monasticism at Finkenwalde and with the *ad hoc* groups that coalesced in prison.

Nevin and Bonheoffer differed on yet one more point. The Mercersburg folks tended to see God acting through the church to sanctify the world; the church is the leaven in the world's loaf. But Bonhoeffer's understanding of the union of divinity and earthly reality in Christ led him to conclude that Christ is also working beyond the church, and even beyond Christianity.[26] Christ is present not only in the Eucharistic celebration, but is also present with all persons who suffer, and in all efforts to alleviate that suffering. Christ can be encountered whenever believers are called to serve concrete human beings with concrete problems in concrete situations. In his last years, that kind of self-sacrificial service to the world beyond the church, especially to his fellow prisoners whether they were Christian, Marxists, Jewish, or pagans, became almost a sacrament to him. The imperative to serve our hurting brothers and sisters even fed his resolve to try to eliminate a genocidal maniac.

Conclusion

So, what does Nevin have to do with Bonhoeffer? What does Mercersburg have to do with Berlin? The most striking discovery is that the Mercersburg theologians and Bonhoeffer were on parallel tracks in regard to many of the central motifs in Christianity, in spite of differences in context and language. Their many similarities were all governed by one central conviction: the good news of Christianity is that humanity can participate in God's vitality and thereby experience reconciliation, harmony, and unity. It is not primarily the news that our liability to punishment has been rectified or that we can be empowered to obey God more diligently. The situation from which Christ saves us is not so much retributive justice as it is isolation from God and neighbor. Our problem is our obsession with our private well-being and our concomitant failure to embrace our neighbors, rather than a propensity to break rules and incur guilt. Both Nevin and Bonhoeffer turned away from a rhetoric dominated by legal images, and turned toward a rhetoric governed by relational metaphors. For Nevin and Bonheoffer, the

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26 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

truly good news is that through the Incarnation humanity and God have become lovers, and can joyfully participate in one another's lives. .

But we have also discovered a set of divergences. One way or another, all of their specific differences were functions of their dissimilar assessments of finitude and worldliness. For example, he proclaimed, "This world we know is indeed empty and vain…We need trials in the world to teach us the emptiness and vanity of the world."[27] He continued, "We are now in the world, whose symbol is the tossing, heaving, restless sea. We are in a frail bark at the mercy of the powers of the world which we of ourselves and in our own strength are helpless to resist or to overcome."[28] This sense of powerlessness and abandonment is remedied by the Incarnation. Through Christ, we are joyfully reincorporated into Christ's family and transcend the sorrows of temporal life. Jesus is God's enactment of solidarity and intimacy with humanity that heals the wound of purely individuated existence. The barriers that inhibit a cosmic community of reciprocal indwelling are removed.

In spite of his embrace of martyrdom, Bonhoeffer's piety was much more robustly earthly. Bonhoeffer's hope was not for eternity, not for the reconciliation of all things in God's plentitude, but rather for the perfection of finite creaturely life. Bonhoeffer wanted a worldly Christianity, in which Jesus' radical self-giving suffuses his followers, and, eventually, the entire world. The life of self-sacrifice on this planet, within these confines of space and time, is the path to blessedness.

Are these differences symptomatic of a basic incompatibility that negates all the parallelisms that have been detected? I sincerely hope not, for the same divergences inform much of Christian history and even the New Testament itself. Far from being mutually exclusive, the "mystical" and the "worldly" impulses may well be complementary. Both trajectories have something to teach the other, and something to learn from the other. On the one hand, the Mercersburg enthusiasts could learn from Bonhoeffer's conviction

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27 Nevin, *College Chapel Sermons*, p. 54

28 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

that to put on Christ is to put on God's extravagant self-giving, even to the point of giving one's life for others. And the descendants of Mercersburg could learn from Bonhoeffer to see Christ in the faces of suffering human beings everywhere, no matter who they are. Bonhoeffer could teach folks like Nevin that the efficacious experience of the mystical presence of Christ in the Eucharist requires that the celebration of the sacraments must be part of a broader ecclesial ecology in which love is enacted. On the other hand, Bonhoefferians could learn from Mercersburg to cultivate a holy discontent with the world, and to nurture a longing for a peace and satisfaction that the world can neither give nor take away. Put simply, Mercersburg theologians could learn costly discipleship, and Bonhoeffer devotés could learn an eschatological, cosmic mysticism. If that were to happen, maybe the church could proclaim a Gospel that is as complex, multi-dimensional, and fully-orbed as the God whom we worship.

John Williamson Nevin & Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: Mystical Eucharistic Theologies in the Reformed Protestant & Roman Catholic Traditions

Jocelyn McKeon
Mercersburg Address, June 2014

During the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries two theologians, the Reformed Protestant John Williamson Nevin and the Roman Catholic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, developed distinctly singular mystical understandings of the Eucharist within the context of their own doctrinal traditions. To this end their respective understandings about the nature of the Eucharistic sacrament were, as one would expect, based on orthodox theological beliefs. However, these Eucharistic understandings were also formed within the frameworks of particular philosophical ideas and in dialogue with the contemporary science of the time. The intention of this essay is to explore these two Eucharistic understandings in the following ways: (1) examine their philosophical and scientific influences; (2) compare the unique aspects of the two Eucharistic theologies, in particular with regard to Christology and ecclesiology; and (3) reflect on how this study might contribute to further ecumenical understandings in the twenty-first century Church.

John W. Nevin: German Idealism, Frederick Rauch, and the "Mystical Union"

In mid-nineteenth century America John Nevin, a theologian, and Philip Schaff, a historian, co-developed and propagated a

theological strain of "evangelical catholicism" based in the German Reformed tradition – a theological strain that has been passed down as "Mercersburg theology". Characteristics of Mercersburg theology include the following: (1) theological basis in the Calvinist tradition; (2) theological focus on the Incarnation; (3) a focus on "organic unity" and historical movement of the Church; and (4) an emphasis on life-sustaining grace through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, as they are administered through the Church. These characteristics of Mercersburg theology, especially those numbered (2) – (4), ensured that it would be considered a theological anomaly on the religious landscape of nineteenth century America.

As a means of coming to a greater understanding of these fundamental aspects of Mercersburg theology it is helpful to explore the philosophical and scientific ground out of which it arose. For example, a critical point to articulate is that at the time of Mercersburg's development much of American Calvinist religion and theology was based on common-sense realism, a form of philosophical realism that came from Scotland. Realism, with its roots in the Enlightenment, emphasized a confidence in the senses and what could be empirically measured in an objective, "common-sense" manner. As summarized by DeBie, a primary attraction for theologians of common-sense realism involved maintaining a "consistent metaphysical dualism [between the material and spiritual realms]" that "kept the worlds of nature and spirit 'safely' apart" (xi). Indeed, a primary concern for theologians operating out of this philosophical paradigm, such as Mercersburg's key rival Charles Hodge at Princeton, was the potential for profaning the divine by 'unification' with the material world. Indeed, as a means of avoiding such profaning, a "cardinal tenet [of more dualist theologies such as Hodge's] was the mediating role of the Holy Spirit, conducting exchanges between the seen and unseen" (DeBie 27). Moreover, from an ecclesiological perspective, proponents of common-sense realism saw it providing a philosophical underpinning to the belief in a "common", invisible spiritual bond connecting all the individual members of Protestant denominations into one Church.

As a counter to these concepts John Nevin developed his Mercersburg theological ideas based on German idealism and speculative theology. Contrary to maintaining a dualistic understanding of the 'seen' and 'unseen', German idealism attempted to bring the material and spiritual realms into an organic unity. One of the originators, and most influential, of the German idealists was Georg Hegel. Not only did Hegel's philosophy propose that all life be seen as a unified single reality (organic union), with the supernatural (the Absolute) realized in the natural, but it also articulated an "understanding of history as a dialectical and upward progression" (DeBie 45). Mediating these Hegelian ideas to America in general, and to his colleague John Nevin in particular, was Frederick Rauch in the publication of his book *Psychology*. In his book (for which John Nevin wrote the preface to the second edition) Rauch articulates a mental philosophy influenced directly by Hegel that is not only "confined to the study of the subjective mind" but also traces the "development of the objective mind" all the way to its "grasp of absolute mind in art, religion and, in philosophy" (Ziegler 73). Within the context of Christian theology "Hegelian philosophy of religion maintains a creative and self-revealing God", "supports a close reciprocal affinity between God and men", "finds [Christian doctrine] as a necessary phase in the reconciliation of men to God", *and* emphasizes that Christianity is the "absolute religion" since its content is absolute mind (Ziegler 79). For this reason many of the mediators of Hegelian philosophy, including Rauch, who wanted to bring it more in line with orthodox Christian doctrine focused on the unifying dogma of the Incarnation. As DeBie summarizes: "the solution offered by the [German idealism] mediators was the very person and work of Christ as a recovery of the material (objective) principle to balance the age's [in this case, the nineteenth century's] utter preoccupation with the formal (subjective) principle…the material principle was required to ground Protestants in objectivity and retrieve the gospel's center, which was a living, divine presence operating in the world and through the church" (55-56).

In the development of Mercersburg theology Nevin utilized Rauch's mediated Hegelian idealism as a means of re-recasting and

"bringing up to date" some of the fundamental Calvinist tenets, especially as regards the following: the Eucharist and the Church. Adhering to Calvin's belief in the "spiritual real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist, Nevin emphasizes the following in an article in *The Weekly Messenger*: "The fact that the Christian life holds in an actual communication with the humanity of Christ, and that this, in particular, forms the soul of the Lord's Supper" (qtd. in The Mercersburg Theology 197). The inclusion of the humanity of Christ in conjunction with the Lord's Supper as a 'real presence' is why Nichols describes Nevin's theology as an "organic incarnational theology". Theologically it is critical for Mercersburg that both Christ's body and blood be present in the Eucharist since humans are in need of both physical and spiritual redemption by Christ, the second Adam. In his book *The Mystical Presence* Nevin details the way in which Calvin's view of the "spiritual real presence" in the Eucharist can be re-cast with up-to-date psychology, as articulated by Rauch: "The vivific virtue of [Christ's] flesh can be apprehended on our part only by faith, and in this form, of course, by the soul only, through the power of the Holy Ghost. Still it extends to the body also, in the end…Christ's Person is one, and the person of the believer is one; and to secure a real communication of the whole human life of the first over in the personality of the second, it is only necessary that the communication should spring from the center of Christ's life and pass over to the center of ours." (Nevin 159-160). This mystical union and materially non-localized participation in the "spiritual real presence " of Christ's flesh and blood through the Eucharist by the power of the Holy Spirit has implications for both the individual believer and the Church as a whole. For not only does Christ "communicate his own life substantially to the soul on which he acts, causing it to grow into his very nature", but Christ's life is also actualized in history and constituted in the Church (Nevin 168). Indeed, Mercersburg insisted that a supernatural union with humans needed to involve a type of organic "glue" – a "glue" in the person of Christ that contained the essences of both spirit and matter (DeBie 97-98). In this way Mercersburg not only countered the dualism of common-sense realism with the tenet of the "mystical

union" (body and spirit) between Christ and the believer, but it also refuted the more inward emphasis of American Protestantism by arguing that "the church was an objective, historical institution imbued with divine [organic] life" (DeBie 91).

Teilhard de Chardin: Lamarckism, Bergson, Blondel, and Eucharistic Cosmo-Christogenesis

In the early to mid-twentieth century Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest trained as a paleontologist, also developed a mystical understanding of the Eucharist and the progressive, evolutionary, organic movement of divine life in the world. Characteristics of Teilhardian theology include the following: (1) grounding in a Roman Catholic understanding of a transubstantiated Eucharist; (2) organic unity between spirit and matter; (3) overall progression, through the process of evolution, to greater degrees of complexity and consciousness; and (4) a teleological movement through evolution toward an 'Omega Point', an actualization of Christ within the context of the material cosmos.

Similar to the examination of John Nevin's Mercersburg theology, the foundations for Teilhard's theological ideas are illuminated through a closer investigation of its philosophical and scientific influences. In many ways Teilhardian theology represents a continuation and elaboration on the major themes associated with Romantic, speculative philosophy and science from the nineteenth century. And it was for this reason that Teilhard's theology was in a somewhat unique position to be both in and out of step with the philosophy and science of its time. For example, even though much of the optimistic and objective tendencies of Romantic, speculative philosophy had been supplanted by more realist and existentialist philosophies of the twentieth century, Teilhardian theology was based in nineteenth century idealism, organic unity, and progression. Moreover, whereas most of the biological community had settled on Darwinian theory as the most cohesive and consistent explanation for evolution, Teilhard remained out of step by basing his scientifically-influenced theology more on the evolutionary theory of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. Based on these observations it

would seem that Teilhard was more concerned with keeping the more intuitive, over-arching aspects of his theology intact than focusing on the more nitty-gritty, "on the ground" details informed by the genetics of his day. And, indeed, this very general assessment of his philosophical and scientific influences would certainly correlate well with his more intuitive-mystic nature.

Whereas John Nevin, informed by Hegelian philosophy, focused more on the historical progression of Christ in the world, Teilhard stressed cosmological evolution in his progressive theology – an evolutionary theology that culminates in Teilhardian cosmo-Christogenesis. In particular, with his idea of cosmo-Christogenesis, Teilhard proposed the following: "The universe [is] fulfilling itself in a synthesis of centres in perfect conformity with the laws of union. God, the Centre of centres. In that final vision the Christian dogma culminates. And so exactly, so perfectly does this coincide with the Omega Point [Christ]..." (The Phenomenon of Man 294). Within this theological scheme there is a union of spirit and matter as "Christ invests himself organically with the very majesty of his creation". In so much as Teilhard sums up cosmo-Christogenesis, he highlights the following characteristics: (1) the Christian movement has the overall features of an evolutionary *phylum*; (2) this "Christian phylum" has its roots in biogenesis and its pre-life germ in inorganic matter from the beginning of the universe and; (3) the movement within this phylum is a purposive, teleological "impulse" with progress toward a "spiritual and transcendent pole of universal convergence", namely the Christ-Omega Point (The Phenomenon of Man 297-298).

The primary philosophical and scientific influences for this Teilhardian theological understanding have their basis in ideas from Henri Bergson and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, respectively. More specifically Teilhard's idea of an enduring "impulse" of divine life moving through the phylum has its basis in Bergsonian philosophy. His over-arching ideas pertaining to the biological pattern of that phylum have their basis in Lamarckian evolutionary theory.

It is clear that Teilhard, who studied Bergson's writings early in his career, was influenced by the Bergsonian concepts of *duration* and the *élan vital*, an impulse of life running like a current through all

living things. In *The Phenomenon of Man* Teilhard emphasizes the natural movement in the duration and organic unity of matter itself: "To our open eyes each element of things is henceforth extended backwards (and tends to be continued forwards) as far as the eye can see in such a way that the entire spatial immensity is not more than a section 'at the time t' of a trunk whose roots plunge down into the abyss of unfathomable past, and whose branches rise up somewhere to a future that, at first sight, has no limit" (47). Bergson's other concept that Teilhard appropriates is that of the so-called *élan vital*, a fundamental and immanent force in nature, although he modifies the concept to incorporate a *telos* (ultimately the Omega Point) to this elementary life impulse. This focus on a purposive "life impulse" is also the reason that Teilhard tends to constellate his theological ideas around Lamarckian evolutionary theory. A distinguishing feature of Lamarck's theory (contra to Darwin's, for example) is his emphasis on orthogenesis, a general term for an immanent, inner "push" in living things that cannot be accounted for by purely physic-chemical explanations. Again, in *The Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard makes the following comment: "Orthogenesis is the dynamic and only complete form of heredity. The word conceals deep and real springs of cosmic extent…Without orthogenesis life would only have spread; with it there is an ascent of life that is invincible." (108-109). Although Teilhard would reject a purely naturalistic explanation for the Christian phylum and its Christogenesis-progress toward the Omega Point, Lamarckian ideas of the unified 'within' (spiritual) and 'without' (matter) of evolutionary movement certainly provided a biological grounding for his theological ideas.

Teilhard's theological focus on Christogenesis and its philosophical and scientific underpinnings are further supported and complemented by his views on the Eucharist. Within the context of the Roman Catholic doctrine on the Eucharist one could easily confirm Teilhard's belief in a "transubstantiation" of the elements. However, as one can observe in the following excerpt from *Hymn of the Universe*, his views on transubstantiation extend far beyond the Host and the Cup to include the entire cosmos:

"If I firmly believe that everything around me is the body and blood

of the Word, then for me (and in one sense for me alone) is brought about that marvelous "diaphany" which causes the luminous warmth of a single life to be objectively discernible in and to shine forth from the depths of every event, every element." (28)

Within the context of this profession of faith there are at least two philosophical points to highlight. First, it has been noted that the philosophical foundations for Teilhard's views on the transubstantiation can be traced back to Leibniz, especially as mediated by the French philosopher Maurice Blondel (Grumett 173). In a similar way that John Nevin's eucharistic "mystical union" addressed the issue of the material non-localization of Christ's humanity by applying Rauch's psychological concepts, Teilhard based his transubstantiation views on Blondel's action of the *vinculum substantiale*, a "bond of substance". In his book *The Divine Milieu* Teilhard describes the physical activity of God in the cosmos and the Eucharist through the *vinculum substantiale,* which he identifies with Christ:

"Little by little, stage by stage, everything is finally linked to the supreme centre in *quo omnia constant*. The streams which flow from this centre operate not only within the higher reaches of the world where human activities take place in a distinctively supernatural and meritorious form. To save and establish these sublime energies, the power of the Word Incarnate penetrates matter itself; it goes down into the deepest depths of the lower forces. (19)"

Second, a philosophical question is raised regarding the transformation that Teilhard's cosmic Mass brings about for the individual believer, and therefore for the entire Church. In his article "Teilhard's Eucharist: A Reflection" Joseph Fitzer summarizes the Teilhardian perspective: "That the world is a 'sacrament' is due to the Incarnation itself…Teilhard's prayer [of consecration] expresses his comprehension of what has already taken place and effectively continues. The desired consecration is *already there;* Teilhard's quasi-liturgical prayer makes what is already there *there for him,* for his consciousness" (253). As Fitzer notes, this is more of a religiously epistemological (as opposed to a religiously ontological) understanding of the believer's

transformation, a "transignification" as he describes it. However, for Teilhard there is still very much an objective realism to what the individual "catches on to", namely the fullness of God's deeds through cosmo-Christogenesis in the eucharistic elements and the entire spiritual-material universe (263).

Nevin and Teilhard: A brief dialogue between their mystical Eucharistic theologies.

Having engaged in this parallel investigation of the philosophical and scientific influences of Nevin and Teilhard's Eucharistic theologies, this final section will highlight points of dialogue and complementarity between the two. First, in the case of both theologies, the Eucharist acts as an axis through which the power of the Incarnation moves, organically unifies and transforms reality. As Joseph Fitzer observes in "Teilhard's Eucharist: A Reflection" this process is one of "eucharization". In the case of Nevin "eucharization" has its origins in the Incarnation and its transformational effect continues along the axis of the catholic Church. For Teilhard eucharization also has its origins in the historical Jesus and the Incarnation; however, its actualization in the world extends beyond the life-giving, grace-providing spiritual nourishment of individual believers and the Church to include a transformation of the entire cosmos.

Second, in the case of both mystic understandings of the Eucharist, there is an effort to overcome dualism and ground the transformative divine power of the Incarnation in reality. Indeed, there is this core belief in both theologies that not only has the Incarnation happened at one unique moment in history, but that the Incarnation also extends organically into the future and provides a divine *telos* manifested in the world. In the case of Nevin's Eucharistic theology this organic, teleological movement is manifested and observed in *historical* actualization. As James Nichols summarizes: "Nevin was ready to supply a whole idealistic scheme of the natural order and of history, graded in a hierarchy of being and meaning to the summit of God-manhood" (*Romanticism in American Theology* 148). In a complementary way Teilhardian

theology emphasizes a *biological* actualization of the Incarnation through the process of cosmo-Christogenesis to a "summit of God-manhood" he describes as the Omega Point.

And this second point correlates well with the third and final point of this essay; namely what this extended exploration of the two Eucharistic theologies may specifically contribute to the topic of ecumenism. In both theologies there are Eucharistic emphases that focus on an active Christological 'presence' in their own ways, even if the philosophical details of the non-localized presence is considered mystic in nature. David Grumett, in his essay "Church, World, and Christ in Teilhard de Chardin", articulates the ecumenical possibilities of these complementary views on the Eucharist: "At the very least, it would seem that this attempt [by both Nevin and Teilhard] to situate a theory of eucharistic presence in the context of a general theory of the action of Christ on substances in the world might provide foundations for an ecumenical understanding of the nature of Eucharistic substance" (92). In both cases this active body-spirit 'presence' of Christ is proposed to move along an axis of 'Eucharistic transformation' toward a convergence point in the future. In this way both Mercersburg and Teilhardian theology assert that the Church, specifically through the sacrament of the Eucharist, is a divinely transformational meeting place – an organic, unified meeting point between Christ and the world. And, moreover, for both theologies this assertion means that the Church will only fulfill this function in the world when it is unified.

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BOOK REVIEW

The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology by Annette Aubert.

Linden DeBie

An old controversy is resurrected with new insights in Annette Aubert's *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology*. The gift of *German Roots* is allowing us to hear the mediating theologians "on their own terms." Dr. Aubert accomplishes the task in two ways.

First is her application of Trans-Atlantic Theology. The second way Dr. Aubert gets to a deeper understanding is via her historical method. The result provides us the above mentioned insights, for example, her juxtaposition of the classic *loci* method which the traditionalist Hodge revered (but not without his own adjustments) and the new, mediating theology's (Gerrish would call this the new "Liberal Theology") "central dogma" approach preferred by Nevin, Schaff, and Gerhardt. We look forward to Dr. Aubert's deeper contrast of these methodologies by way of the Trans-Atlantic Theology in future works, as the current book could only provide an overview.

Yet on that score, Dr. Aubert provides us a very helpful summary of the mediating theology (*Vermittlungstheology)* such that we can sort through the myriad mediations the scholars believed were necessary. Examples are the mediation between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, or it might be with the methods of biblical criticism and historical idealism, or with rationalism and Pietism, or the more complex disagreement between Schleiermacher and Strauss. But in summary, the point of "mediation" was to solve the host of problems raised in the wake of Liberal Theology's more orthodox response to rationalism.

Of course, it is when Dr. Aubert turns to Emmanuel Gerhardt that her analysis goes considerably deeper. She seeks to compare Gerhardt with perhaps the reigning Protestant theologian in America at the time, Charles Hodge. We recognize the historic trajectory and its appeal to post-modernism: questions of continuity and discontinuity must adjust our supercessionist presuppositions and provide insight into historical steps and missteps amidst cultural change. This of course will be within the confines of theology and expressly within the important question of atonement theory. Still it is a significant chapter in theology in general and indeed theology in the nineteenth century that remains informative today.

Gerhardt is most remarkable in that he was one of the first in America to address the same issues as the German mediators within their idiom, and the first to do so by producing a magisterial system of theology. Likewise, with this he adopted the central dogma method. But his emphasis was slightly adjusted from an emphasis on the Incarnation of Christ—to a focus on the person of Christ. Dr. Aubert is clear to point out that Gerhardt, with his Christocentrism, his balanced emphasis on both the human and divine Christ, his preference for organic metaphors over mechanical ones, his reliance on experience, his preference for the Gospel of John, his focus on the reunion of God with mankind, his depiction of Christ as archetype, his romantic push-back from the priority of reason for all aspects of life and faith, is not innovative in these respects. Gerhardt had inherited the mediating schema from his teachers at Mercersburg Seminary. But he became an expert himself, engaging directly with the German sources. So his was a systematic genius. He was adept at synthesizing what he had learned and organizing it to address the perceived needs of his American audience. But as expected, he would also inherit the wrath of the critics of this approach.

Today the theological terrain is as rugged, expansive and uneven as ever, and its contours are being studied more for what they tell us about ourselves than what they tell us, univocally speaking, about God. That may be a humbling lesson for theologians reticent to practice their art in an historical context. But surely that is the great contribution of Dr. Aubert's book. We should look forward to more from Trans-Atlantic Theology in the future.

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