



THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW

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**The Ecumenical Trajectory
of the Mercersburg Movement**

Theodore Louis Trost

**Response to Dr. Theodore Trost
“The Ecumenical Trajectory of the
Mercersburg Movement”**

Deborah Rahn Clemens

BOOK REVIEWS

***A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir
by Thomas Oden***

Reviewed by Kenneth Aldrich.

The Incarnate Word: Selected Writings on Christology

By John Williamson Nevin, Philip Schaff, Daniel Gans

Edited by William Evans

Reviewed by F. Christopher Anderson

Philip Schaff

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

The Society pursues contemporary theology in the Church and the world within the context of Mercersburg Theology. In effecting its purpose the Society provides opportunities for fellowship and study for persons interested in Mercersburg Theology, sponsors 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

The Mercersburg Society continually struggles to be both scholarly and practical. We seek to be both a resource for the university and a blessing to the church. We do not want to be merely an antiquarian society. This issue holds up both of these divergent goals.

Dr. Theodore Louis Trost gave a presentation at the 2014 Convocation that gives us a solid source for seeking to come to grips with what the Mercersburg Movement meant and means for the Ecumenical Movement. Recently a reader asked for a number of copies of the Spring 2015 issue because of its ecumenical content. I assume I will be getting another e-mail soon asking for more copies of this Fall 2015 issue!

The response to this excellent scholarly article was given by someone who is both a scholar and a pastor. Rev. Dr. Deborah Rahn Clemens has a PhD in the Palatinate liturgy and is pastoring a church in Pennsylvania. Her brief remarks reveal what many of our Mercersburg pastors think at this point.

The Rev. Kenneth Aldrich presents us with a review of *A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir* by Thomas Oden. Ken gives a brief overview of Oden's life and changes and his important work in the field which has become known as "paleo-orthodoxy."

The second book review is on *The Incarnate Word: Selected Writings on Christology* by John Williamson Nevin, Philip Schaff, and Daniel Gans, and edited by William Evans. I have fallen in love with this book, largely because it contains so many essays that are so Christocentric and previously not available to the general public.

The Ecumenical Trajectory of the Mercersburg Movement

by Theodore Louis Trost

Department of Religious Studies and New College
The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa

Preliminaries

In the epilogue to his key work *Romanticism in American Theology*, published in 1961, James Hastings Nichols declares that the Mercersburg Theology of an earlier era spoke with "startling actuality" on numerous "contemporary themes of *ecumenical* study."ⁱ In 1962 Klaus Penzel published his Union Theological Seminary dissertation on Philip Schaff with the title "Church History and the Ecumenical Quest."ⁱⁱ And in 1988 George Shriver's brief biography (based in part upon his 1960 Duke University dissertation) bore the title *Philip Schaff: Christian Scholar and Ecumenical Prophet*.ⁱⁱⁱ At the outset of this discussion concerning what might be called the ecumenical trajectory of the Mercersburg movement, I want to begin with a consideration of the word "ecumenical" itself.

"Ecumenical" is something of an anachronism when applied directly to the works of Nevin and Schaff. In their time, the word did function as an adjective, but most commonly in relation to confessions on the one hand and ecclesiastical councils on the other. Thus the ecumenical creeds, according to the Lutheran *Book of Concord*, include the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian creeds; more precisely, the Nicene Creed is ecumenical inasmuch as it is accepted universally by the churches of the East and the West. Similarly, the first seven councils of the church beginning with the Council of Nicaea in 325 constitute the seven ecumenical councils.^{iv} The word was also used in Schaff and Nevin's time in association with the Vatican Council of 1870 -- often with a hint of derision in

non-Catholic circles owing to the exclusion of Protestant and Orthodox Christians from that assembly.

At the turn of the century, the word "ecumenical" attained some currency not simply as a remembrance of things past, or a cry of absence, but also in reference to the whole of the contemporary world. In anticipation of the *Ecumenical Missions Conference*, held in New York in 1900, the bold display of the word "ecumenical" in the conference's title was explained this way by the Rev. William Reed Huntington of Grace Church in New York:

This Conference is called ecumenical... not because all portions of the Christian Church are to be represented in it by delegates, but because the plan of campaign which it proposes covers the whole area of the inhabited globe. Solomon speaks of Wisdom as rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and as having her delights with the sons of men. This is the key to the meaning of ecumenicity. The ecumenical world is the inhabited world, so much of the planet's surface as has been taken possession of by man.^v

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, Robert McAfee Brown, then a religion professor at Stanford University, traced various developments in the usage of the word "ecumenical" during the 20th century: from the literal sense of "one house, dwelling, or world," as in the Greek word *oikos*, to a word endowed with theological content—and intention, as well.^{vi} Brown pointed to the early work of Reformation scholar John T. McNeill, who, in his book *Unitive Protestantism*, insisted that there was an "ecumenical outlook," a "Protestant Catholicity" within Protestantism that advanced "an ideal of Christian unity." This tendency had often been frustrated; nevertheless, McNeill argued, the Reformers themselves "were predominantly conciliatory, and zealous for peace, concord, and communion."^{vii} (McNeill's book was written in connection with its author's own efforts to bring into being the United Church of Canada from Reformed and Methodist

communions; that union was consummated in 1925.^{viii}) Robert McAfee Brown signaled the development of the word "ecumenism" in the direction of unity or even unification as articulated in McNeill's book; Brown saw this emphasis coming into common currency sometime after the first Faith and Order (Lausanne, 1927) and Life and Work (Stockholm, 1925) conferences. By the 1930s, the word "ecumenism" encompassed both the notion of cooperative action in a world-wide context or field of mission, and also included the effort to address—and indeed, to repair—the divisions that prevailed among the Christian churches. Brown concluded that an ecumenical ethos had finally begun to bear fruit during the 20th century.^{ix}

In this preliminary reconnaissance mission into the usage of "ecumenism" and related words, we discover an important distinction that often goes unmentioned in relation to the Mercersburg movement. While the activities of Nevin and Schaff appear inherently ecumenical to us now, the fact of the matter is they were making it up as they went along. To put it another way: they were improvising a score for what would become recognized as ecumenism in the 20th and 21st centuries. In what follows I propose, first, to identify a number of "proto-ecumenical" concerns that emerge in the life and work of Philip Schaff during the Mercersburg period and that develop throughout his career.^x Following Klaus Penzel, John Koehnlein, and Stephen Graham (among others), I agree that Schaff's thinking changes during and beyond the Mercersburg era—particularly with regard to the role of denominationalism in the progression toward the reunion of Christendom.^{xi} Because I am interested in the innovations Schaff brought about that will ultimately comprise the major headings of the 20th century ecumenical movement, I will linger in more detail on this important early material.^{xii} I will then move more quickly through a consideration of how themes from Schaff's career develop in the emerging ecumenical movement of the 20th century up to the Second Vatican Council. Here, I will mention briefly the career of 20th century ecumenist Douglas Horton as one manifestation of a "Mercersburg trajectory." Finally, I will consider the ecumenical

impulse after the Second Vatican Council and turn to the question "What might a late 20th century and early 21st century ecumenist in the Mercersburg tradition look like?"

PART ONE: Proto-ecumenical Themes that Emerge in the Work of Philip Schaff

I drew attention earlier to Robert McAfee Brown's explanation of the etymology of "ecumenical" as a "home" or "dwelling," from the Greek *oikos*. In his book *Crossing and Dwelling*, Notre Dame historian of religion Thomas A. Tweed uses both "dwelling" and "crossing" as components of a theory of religion that develops from this definition: "Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries." Religion, then, is about finding place and moving across space. The aquatic imagery suggests the importance of flow as a complex process. This language of "crossing" and "dwelling" is very suggestive for a discussion of ecumenism.^{xiii}

A. Schaff's progress to Mercersburg (Crossing)

To begin with Philip Schaff, the language of religion as flow highlights how Schaff's theory of historical development relies upon aquatic imagery, particularly the notion of a "mainstream" that moves the church forward through time. In his own advance toward Mercersburg, Philip Schaff crossed numerous geographical and confessional boundaries—indeed, he crossed the Atlantic fourteen times in an effort to foster and enrich mutuality between churches; thus, crossings are key to Schaff's development as an "ambassador of the universal church." In all these crossings, Schaff was working to make visible the one church, the *oikos* or dwelling, or "house not made by hands," to which he believed all of history pointed.

Philip "Schaf" was born (1819) in the Swiss village of Chur, which lies some 50 miles southeast of Zürich along the Rhine River—not far from its source.^{xiv} He was baptized in the Reformed

Church and, despite his upbringing in "poverty and obscurity," he excelled at school—where he spoke both Italian and German. At the age of 15 he left the canton of Graubünden, crossed over into Germany, and entered the academy for boys at Kornthal, Württemberg. He was confirmed in the Lutheran Church there and also experienced during the winter of 1836 a "new birth from above," which, he remarked, "determined all my life and activity." From Kornthal, Schaff went to the gymnasium in nearby Stuttgart, where he boarded with William Julius Mann in the Mann family home. (The two roommates were life-long friends. Mann came to America shortly after Schaff's removal there and served for a time as pastor in a German Reformed Church before settling among the Lutherans in Philadelphia.)

Schaff's theological studies began at the age of eighteen at the university in Tübingen. He preferred the more evangelical professors Schmidt and Dorner to the rationalists Strauss and Baur, although he did concede that Baur exposed him to the idea of historical development. Schaff spent his last year of university studies at Halle and Berlin. At Halle he resided in the home of Tholuck and served as the professor's secretary. At Berlin he found himself in a distinguished circle of church leaders and scholars that included Old Testament professor Hengstenberg and church historian Jacob August Neander. These many associations would lead ultimately to his call to Mercersburg. After receiving the degree of licentiate of theology from the University of Berlin, Schaff served as tutor to the son of noblewoman Frau von Kröcher and traveled with mother and son through Switzerland and Italy during the spring of 1841. They came eventually to Rome, where Schaff was granted an audience with the Pope. He was 22 years old. Schaff's uneasiness with the formality of kissing the pontiff's red slippers was noted in his diary; he also observed that "the nostrils of [the pope's] capacious nose were soiled with snuff." After their exodus from Rome, the von Kröcher party reposed for a time among the Waldensians at Turin.^{xv}

Upon his return to Berlin, Schaff assumed the role of *Privatdozent* or "contingent faculty member," at the University—

teaching, among other things, the theology of Schleiermacher. During the spring of 1843, he met pastors Benjamin Schneck and Theodore Hoffeditz, two emissaries from the German Reformed Church in Pennsylvania who invited him to become professor at Mercersburg. Schaff interpreted this invitation as a Macedonian call to mission. His ordination sermon, preached shortly before he left Germany for his new life in America, was based on the plea in Acts 16.8, "come over and help us." It concluded with an eschatological vision of a united Christendom gathered into one triumphant throng and the suggestion that it was toward the actualization of such a universal church that he would labor in America. Schaff envisioned the grandest of crossings, one that took him

...far beyond sea and land, mountain and valley... space and time... sin and death, into the land of true liberty endlessly manifold and yet one, where there shall be no Europe, no America, no Catholicism and no Protestantism, but an undivided Kingdom of God: No Old World, and no New World, but one glorious Church of the redeemed.^{xvi}

Schaff delivered this sermon in the church of world-famous preacher Friedrich Krummacher at Elberfeld in the Wuppertal region (near Barmen). In his progress to Elberfeld, Schaff had again crossed boundaries. This time he was ordained according to the Rhine ritual (that is to say a Reformed liturgy) but into the Prussian Union Church under the sponsorship of a missionary society that oversaw the sending of clergy to foreign lands.^{xvii} Then, en route to America he stopped in England and met with Professor Edward Pusey and other members of the Oxford movement. He also visited with various other religious groups in England even though his English ability was quite limited at the time.^{xviii} This habit of meeting people face-to-face, even people with whom he had strong disagreements, was characteristic of Schaff's traveling practice for the rest of his life. It was a natural habit for him to meet people directly. Inevitably, the *Angesicht zu*

Angesicht mode of encounter became a key component of subsequent ecumenical behavior in a later century.

B. *The Principle of Protestantism and Its Despisers*

Schaff interpreted his call to America as an invitation to become a "missionary of science"; his purpose was to bring German scholarship in its fullness into active participation in the life of the American Church.^{xix} His book, *The Principle of Protestantism*, is a display of Germanic erudition. Schaff intended this work to build bridges between the German churches in America and the churches in Germany, to be a type of crossing itself for the thoughtful conveyance of a living and vigorous theology of the Anglo-German kind. Klaus Penzel describes the fundamental assumptions that lie behind *The Principle of Protestantism* this way:

Its most important ingredients were the high-church notion of the church as the Body of Christ, the *Christus-prolongatus*; the romantic-idealistic philosophy of history with its novel principle of historical development; the Neander-Schmid distinction of the three apostolic types of Peter, Paul, and John as key to understanding the nature and history of the New Testament church; and the romantic vision of an "Evangelical Catholicism."^{xx}

In addition, *The Principle of Protestantism* is noteworthy for its manner of argumentation, particularly the way Schaff brings into dialogue (in the main text as well as in the footnotes) the various authoritative writings of different Christian traditions, including Reformed and Lutheran confessions, as well as Robert Bellarmine's writings in defense of Roman Catholic orthodoxy. Nevin had used a similar strategy, but toward more polemical ends, in his book *The Anxious Bench*.^{xxi} As for the "principle of Protestantism" itself, Schaff subdivides it into two. The "formal principle" is Protestantism's emphasis on the primacy of scripture. The message of scripture provides the more important "material principle," the doctrine of justification by faith through grace.^{xxii} These two material and formal principles, according to Schaff, "are

inseparably joined as contents and form, will and knowledge, and strictly taken constitute but two sides of the same maxim: Christ in all.^{xxiii} Thus Schaff asserts the central place of Christology in his conception of the church.

A major portion of *The Principle of Protestantism* describes the many manifestations of sectarianism, a disease that spread in America thanks to its free institutions and the separation of church from the state. In the end Schaff blamed the problem on what he called "Puritanism"—the guiding force behind most American Protestantism (here he probably meant "congregationalism" as a form of church polity). Ultimately this Puritanism led to "full atomism." It resisted development. It ran counter to the whole flow and stream of history by asserting isolation against union; it mistook a part for the whole; and it denied organic connection to the living stream of the church in that it maintained no historical connection to the communion of saints—or other contemporary Christian communities—through confession or creed. Schaff went so far as to insist that "Puritanism" was unbiblical: "John 17," according to Schaff's exegesis, "inflicts the death blow on the *whole* sectarian and denominational system."^{xxiv}

In accordance with other proponents of "high church" ecclesiology, Schaff insisted that the church must be seen not simply as a gathering of like-minded Christians, but as a divinely constituted, historical, and visible institution. He saw in the Prussian Union Church the embodiment of the oneness toward which the Church was inclined. Near the end of *The Principle of Protestantism* he writes:

From the state...under Frederick William the Third, proceeded in the first instance that union of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches, which has since become almost universal in Germany, and must be regarded now as a great step gained toward the catholicity and unity necessarily involved in the idea of the Church itself. It is not good either that Christ's bride should bear the name of

a mere man, as Lutheran and the like. The title of Evangelical is much more catholic and appropriate.... The future belongs certainly to the union and within its range precisely the most religious life is to be found at the present time.^{xxv}

But in contrast to the other major movements concerned with the nature of the church, such as the Oxford movement, Schaff saw the church neither as strictly bound to one institution, such as the office of bishop, nor to a static orthodoxy, whether that of the Westminster Confession, the Lutheran Book of Concord, or the Church of Rome. Instead, the church was a flowing stream, a "mainstream" that flows mid-river, whose course had been shaped by Rome, Augsburg, Westminster, and many others, including some dissenting sects. He believed that through it all, and despite zig-zags and false turns, the kingdom of God was growing, flowing, rowing (as it were) toward fruition.

With no established "ecumenical ethos" to appeal to during the Mercersburg era, the response to *The Principle of Protestantism* was hostile—in certain quarters, at least. On the one hand, Schaff was criticized by his coreligionist, Joseph Berg, who had a theory of history (a mythology, really) that was significantly different from the history Schaff presented. Berg traced the Reformed Church's lineage through various Reformed communities and the Waldensians back to the apostolic times with no entanglement whatsoever with Roman Catholicism. Furthermore, Berg considered the Roman Catholic Church to be no church at all or the church of the Antichrist. In this regard he was fairly typical of many Protestant divines in the mid-19th century. Indeed only a few months before Schaff arrived in Pennsylvania, Berg's own neighborhood in Philadelphia experienced extensive anti-Catholic rioting. Berg pursued charges of heresy against Schaff in the aftermath of *Principle of Protestantism's* publication, and eventually crossed the Delaware to join the Dutch Reformed Church. Another response to Schaff's work came from Charles Hodge, the prominent Princeton professor and prince of Presbyterian orthodoxy who had

studied in Berlin for a time. Although Hodge appreciated Schaff's emphasis on justification and the centrality of Scripture, he was critical of the notion that the church somehow needed to be made visible in its unity, since the real unity that mattered to him was spiritual. He also insisted that there was much more cooperation and collaboration among the Protestant denominations than Schaff allowed through the spirit that animated the true, albeit invisible, church.

But Schaff wasn't content with the notion of the invisible church. Schaff's concern was more radical—both more worldly and more idealistic; his concern was with making the church a visible reality on earth in the reunion of Christendom itself.

C. Themes Developed in Schaff's Life after *The Principle of Protestantism* and in "The Reunion of Christendom" (Dwelling)

After an uneasy beginning at Mercersburg, Schaff settled down to the work that would comprise the major headings of the 20th century ecumenical movement, as James Hastings Nichols had put it. He labored in the German Reformed Church until 1863, when the war's proximity to Mercersburg led to an extended sabbatical. Schaff moved to middle Manhattan, where he initially worked on behalf of the Sabbath Society. He also lectured at Andover and Hartford seminaries. In 1870 he became a professor at Union Theological Seminary and remained there for another 22 years. I will sketch this proto-ecumenical work briefly, in rough chronological order.

First, Schaff continued his defense of historical development in his writings, notably the articles "What is Church History?" (1846) and "German Theology and the Church Question" (1852). He considered the enterprise of writing church history key to the idea of the church itself and to the church's development. His famous 7-volume *History of the Christian Church* (1882-1892) and his scholarly collection of *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* (1886-1890) are two fruits of this conviction. Second, he pursued his effort to draw German and American churches into dialogue. He

published the journal *Der Deutsche Kirchenfreund* (1848-1853), which strived to place the greatest scholarship from Germany before United, Lutheran, Moravian, and Reformed churches of German descent in America. The watchwords for this publication were those of Meledinius: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." When Schaff resigned from his editorial duties, his friend William Julius Mann took over responsibilities as editor. He also lectured abroad about the state of religious affairs in America, resulting, for example, in the publication of his book *America: A Sketch of the Political, Social, and Religious Character of the United States of North America* (1855). And he wrote about events and people in Germany for an American audience, as in his book *Germany: its Universities, Theology and Religion* (1857). Third, Schaff was active in liturgics and other aspects of church life. He helped develop the German Reformed Church's provisional liturgy of 1857 that reflected his Christocentric understanding of the church and affirmed its historical nature by including forms and phrases that extended back to before the Reformation. He produced a German hymnbook (1859) for use in the churches of various denominations and also a *Catechism for Sunday Schools and Families* (1862). Schaff also placed contemporary churches into communication with their forbears through the publication of the *Creeeds of Christendom* (1877). Fourth, he served as an ambassador for the church universal. In this capacity he fostered face-to-face encounters across denominational lines, as in the Evangelical Alliance, and within confessional communities, as in the Alliance of Reformed Churches.^{xxvi} He also establishes a number of societies, and that fostered conversations and generated scholarly collaborations, such as the American Society of Church History and the Society of Biblical Literature. And remarkably, for a non-native English speaker, he traveled between Great Britain and the United States as chair of the translation committee to revise the King James Version and make a more accessible and scholarly sound Bible available to the English-speaking world.

Schaff delivered his final address—it could be called his last will and testament—in Chicago at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893. Entitled "The Reunion of Christendom," Schaff surveyed the religious landscape of the entire world, celebrated the progress of Christianity throughout the world, and envisioned in this development signs of the coming kingdom, to be achieved, or granted, perhaps, in the coming century. Notable in the address is Schaff's delineation of types of unified action that would lead to the reunion of Christendom: first, voluntary associations of individuals such as the Evangelical Alliance; second, federal union in which groups retain separate identities but cooperate together for a common purpose such as mission (the Alliance of Reformed Churches was one example); and finally, organic union, in which a common governing principle unites all parties as in the Prussian Union Church. His attitude toward denominationalism has moderated significantly. As reunions among Protestant groups advance, Schaff anticipated the greater work of uniting with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.^{xxvii}

In remarkable contrast to *The Principle of Protestantism* and along lines he first developed in his book *America*, Schaff now distinguishes between sectarianism and denominationalism. He affirms that each denomination bears a particular theological gift for the larger church. This may be the philosophy behind the 14-volume series of books that Schaff proposed but did not live to see published as the *American Church History Series*. For this series, Schaff had contracted authors such as Williston Walker, Leonard Bacon, and Joseph Dubbs to write histories of their particular denomination. This attitude of a positive embrace of denominations is reflected in "The Reunion of Christendom" in a series of benedictions in which Schaff calls many (but not all) denominations "glorious." So, for example, he says:

The Congregational Church is a glorious church: for she has taught the principle and proved the capacity of congregational independence and self-government based

upon a living faith in Christ, without diminishing the effect of voluntary cooperation in the Master's service.

The Principle of Protestantism placed emphasis on the church question and ended, in its final thesis, with the fulfillment of the eschatological trajectory initiated by Jesus' prayer for his followers in John 17. At the end of his career, "The Reunion of Christendom" advances this same vision:

Before the reunion of Christendom can be accomplished, we must expect providential events, new Pentecosts, new reformations—great as the ones that have gone before. The twentieth century has marvelous surprises in store for the world, which may surpass even those of the nineteenth. History now moves with telegraphic speed, and may accomplish the work of years in a single day. The modern inventions of the steamboat, the telegraph, the power of electricity, the progress of science and of international law (which regulates commerce by land and by sea, and will in due time make an end of war), link all the civilized nations into one vast brotherhood.^{xxviii}

PART TWO. From Mercersburg to Vatican II and Beyond

A. S. Parkes Cadman and the World Coming Together

"The Reunion of Christendom" ends with an assessment of Schaff's 19th century activities and a prophetic glimpse into the next century. The appeal of Schaff's vision of Christianity reuniting, of the "dwelling" of the church united on earth, is confirmed in a sermon preached in 1908 by S. Parkes Cadman, pastor of Central Congregational Church in Brooklyn, the second largest Congregational Church in the United States at the time. Cadman shares in the grand optimism of Schaff, perhaps also in Schaff's confidence in the rule of international law, and envisions a century of Christian progress as a foregone conclusion:

The trackways of a policy embedded in the wider interpretation of the gospel are laid and the new era takes

shape before our comprehension. Travel, exploration, and commerce have demanded and obtained the *Lusitania* on the sea; the railroad from the Cape to Cairo on the land, and they have left no spot of earth untrodden, no map obscure, no mart unvisited. Keeping step with this stately and unprecedented development, and often anticipating it, the widening frontiers of our missionary kingdom have demonstrated again and again how the church can make a bridal of the earth and sky, linking the lowliest needs to the loftiest truths. And best of all in respect of methods is the dispersal of our native egotism. We have come to see that the types of Christianity in Europe and America are perhaps aboriginal for us, but cannot be transplanted to other shores. "Manifest destiny" is a phrase that sits down when Japan and China wake up.... What will be the joy of the harvest? Throw your imagination across this new century, and as it dies and gives place to its successor, review the race whose devotion has then fastened on the divine ruler and the Federal Man, Christ Jesus. For nearly a hundred years the barriers that segregated us will have been a memory. The Church will have discovered not only fields of labor, but forces for her replenishing. Then will our posterity rejoice in the larger Christ who is to be. The virtuous elements of all other faiths will be placed under the purification and control of the priesthood and authority of Jesus. ...in the light of his appearing they will assume new attitudes and receive his quickening and thrill with His pulse (210-211).^{xxix}

Cadman looks here for visible unity, on the one hand, and shares with Schaff the notion of historical progress, on the other. While not a social gospeler per se, Cadman certainly reflects liberal assumptions about the world's future shortly after the turn of the century. Like Schaff, Cadman argued for a universal church and even suggests (elsewhere in this sermon) that his own denomination of Congregationalists needed a deeper understanding of church that was not tied to a particular polity. There is no small irony in his use

of the *Lusitania* as an example of technological advance and a symbol of the new age, since that ship's sinking by the Germans in 1915 stands as a symbol subsequently of the world's tragic divisions.

B. H. Richard Niebuhr

Both Schaff and Cadman had concerns about denominationalism that stemmed from their belief in the necessary unity of the church. But in the 20th century, a critique of denominationalism arose from another perspective. It came through sociology and found its sophisticated articulation in the book *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* by H. Richard Niebuhr. Niebuhr equated denominationalism *not* with theological convictions that were the focus of the denominational histories contained in the *American Church History Series*, but with class affiliation. He considered denominationalism to be sinful because it perpetuated race and class differences in the culture. In the aftermath of the Great War, a war that neither Schaff nor Cadman imagined was possible, Niebuhr wrote:

Denominationalism in the Christian church is... an unacknowledged hypocrisy. It is a compromise made far too lightly, between Christianity and the world. Yet it often regards itself as a Christian achievement and glorifies its martyrs as bearers of the cross.... The division of the churches closely follows the division of men into the castes of national, racial, and economic groups. It draws the color line in the church of God...; it seats the rich and poor apart at the table of the Lord, where the fortunate may enjoy the bounty they have provided while the others feed upon the crusts their poverty affords.^{xxx}

Here, it seems, the flow of history has drifted back toward Schaff's initial stance against sects as outlined in *The Principle of Protestantism*. This notion that denominations are "sinful" comes to dominate a major faction of the ecumenical movement throughout most of the 20th century.

As he was writing this critique, Niebuhr was engaged in an effort toward church unity as a member of the committee on church union for the Evangelical Synod of North America. In this capacity, he pursued church union negotiations with Schaff's German Reformed Church. Niebuhr sat across the table from George Richards during these negotiations and in 1934 the two churches united to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church.^{xxxii} This merger was an actualization of the church unity Schaff long ago anticipated, namely the joining of Lutheran and Reformed churches akin to the Prussian Union Church. But it also stood as a testament against the problem of denominationalism as H. Richard Niebuhr had defined it.

C. Douglas Horton

If Philip Schaff's generation was proto-ecumenical, then a major figure of first-generation 20th century ecumenism is Douglas Horton. His interests developed along Mercersburg lines, and his lifetime activities could be said to parallel Schaff's own life, hitting many of the same headings of ecumenism that have been traced above for Schaff. Horton was raised in the very same Congregational Church in which S. Parkes Cadman had preached. After graduation from Princeton in 1912, Horton studied abroad in Europe and replicated Schaff's penchant for travel. He listed the universities at Edinburgh, Oxford, and Tübingen as his places of learning. Horton developed an interest in German theology while in Europe and he would eventually become the first American to translate a significant work by Karl Barth. (The second translation of Barth's work appeared under the editorship of George Richards from Lancaster Seminary along with Karl Ernst of the Reformed Church's Mission House in Wisconsin.) Horton then returned to the United States and completed his divinity degree at Hartford Theological Seminary in 1915. He also met at Hartford his wife Carolyn Scudder Williams, a member of the famous Dutch Reformed missionary family of Scudders.^{xxxiii}

Horton served three pastorates: the first in Middletown, Connecticut, the second in Brookline, Massachusetts, and the third in Chicago at the Hyde Park United Church—a congregation affiliated with both the Congregational Christian Churches and the Presbyterian Church. Interestingly, John T. McNeil, who had written the book *Unitive Protestantism*, as well as Wilhelm Pauck (another early translator of Barth who would eventually supervise Klaus Penzel's dissertation on Schaff at Union) were both members of the church council at Hyde Park during Horton's pastorate. Horton quickly became involved in ecumenical activities in Chicago. With several other members of his church and with a group of Episcopalians, Horton proposed a plan for uniting Anglican and Congregational churches. Called "The Basic Formula for Church Union," it included this mission statement: "It is the manifest duty of Christ's followers everywhere to exert themselves to the utmost in realizing their unity in him. DEUS VULT! It is the will of God for this generation."^{xxxiii} He also continued his practice of traveling to Europe during the summers, just as S. Parkes Cadman and Philip Schaff had done. In Europe he attended the activities of the International Council of Congregational Churches, Faith and Order, and Life and Work. All these involvements led eventually to his election as General Minister of the Congregational Christian churches in 1938. In that capacity, Horton is best known for his effort to unite the Evangelical and Reformed Church with the Congregational Christian Churches to form the United Church of Christ. Ironically, a legal battle advanced by the Cadman Memorial Church in Brooklyn pitted Horton against some of the members of the church in which he had been raised and nearly upended the UCC merger. During this period, Horton also served as moderator of the International Council of Congregational Churches, an organization that would be absorbed, after Horton's lifetime, into the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Horton's career was not limited to the denominational realm. He also served as an educator, and, upon leaving his position as General Minister of the Congregational Christian Churches on the eve of the UCC merger, he became Dean at the Harvard Divinity

School. To some consternation, he brought the first Roman Catholic professor into the fold of the Divinity School, Christopher Dawson. After the merger, Horton wrote a book entitled *United Church of Christ* (1962) that discussed the new church in relation to its Constitution, treating its preamble almost as a confessional document. Horton also served as chair of the Faith and Order Commission during this time. In this capacity, he presided at three conferences, most notably Montréal in 1963. Present at that conference was Monsignor Willebrands, who would go on to work for the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity. Perhaps the climactic event of Horton's lengthy career was the Second Vatican Council. As chief representative of the International Council of Congregational Churches, Horton served as unofficial dean of the Protestant Observers at all sessions of Vatican II from 1962 until 1965. For a time, it seemed, the way toward the reunion of Christendom had opened up. At the conclusion of the fourth session of the Council, the various observers exchanged gifts with the Secretariat, gifts that symbolized or summarized the particular tradition of the donor's communion. As he notes in his *Vatican Diary*, Horton offered a parchment-bound copy "with a suitable inscription in gold on the cover" of Williston Walker's *Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* to the Secretariat—a gift in the tradition of Schaff's *Creeds of Christianity*. Walker had been enlisted by Schaff in the late 19th century to write a history of Congregationalism for the *American Church History* series, a series that included a volume on Roman Catholics.^{xxxiv}

D. Post Vatican II

If we keep to the notion of history flowing and enabling boundary-crossings, as suggested by Thomas Tweed, then we have a model for tracking what happens after the Second Vatican Council. In the case of Douglas Horton, he becomes engaged in local, grassroots inter-confessional dialogue in his hometown in New Hampshire. With regard to the Roman Catholic Church at large, significant changes occur such as the use of the vernacular language instead of Latin in the celebration of the Mass and a new

openness to marriages between Catholics and members of other faiths.

The new ecumenical environment also plays a role in the development of liberation theology in Latin America. A perusal of the footnotes of any significant Roman Catholic liberation theologian after Vatican II reveals the engagement with Protestant thought, particularly with the works of Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Harvey Cox. Two notable features of Latin American liberation theology were the notion of the church of the poor, thus elevating a concern signaled by H. Richard Niebuhr's book *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, and the emphasis on base community readings of the Scripture, as manifested, for example, in the volumes produced by the community at Solentiname.^{xxxv} This practice of lay engagement with the biblical text aided by the guidance of a trained theologian (in this case, the Nicaraguan priest Ernesto Cardenal) harmonizes with Schaff's notion of the principle of Protestantism. Certainly, this era also led to significant interfaith cooperation in the sanctuary movement, as Catholic refugees from El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala found shelter in the basement of Protestant churches. Subject to the flow of church history, as Tweed and Schaff might describe it, liberation theology fell into disfavor during the papacies of John Paul II (who censured Cardenal upon his arrival in Managua in 1983) and Pope Benedict (who had been among the *periti* during Vatican II).^{xxxvi} But with the appearance of the new pope from Argentina, the flow of history may yet move in a different direction. The recent beatification of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador may be a sign of a new time....

CONCLUSION

I have suggested that Philip Schaff was an ecumenist before the term existed. We have seen S. Parkes Cadman, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Douglas Horton all developing themes that were dear to Schaff, even if their activities were not pursued consciously according to some pre-established Mercersburg tradition.^{xxxvii} Today, the contemporary scene of ecumenism continues along lines

first inaugurated by Mercersburg. Interfaith dialogue goes on, notably Lutheran and Reformed bilateral talks. There has been some backing away from Schaff's fuller vision of the reunion of churches. But what we may call a Schaffian quest for the center, for the mainstream, endures. Here we may cite the latest World Council of Churches' consensus document entitled, simply enough, "The Church"—bringing us back to the "church question" that occupied Schaff throughout his career.

As a final question, we may ask, "What does an avowed ecumenist in the Mercersburg tradition look like today?" One answer to this question is Gabriel Fackre; he exemplifies for the 21st century the model of a Mercersburg ecumenist. Fackre embodies a Mercersburgian ecumenism in his irenic approach to dialogue, his commitment to confessional traditions, and his dwelling in the mainstream—the full flowing waters—of ecumenical conversations. If I were to highlight three things shared in common by the ecumenical figures Philip Schaff, Douglas Horton, and Gabe Fackre, they would be as follows.

First, a commitment to creeds as the central lore or resource for the whole church. For Schaff, this commitment is actualized in his monumental three-volume collection, *The Creeds of Christendom* (1877). Douglas Horton's "Introduction" to Williston Walker's *Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* establishes Horton's commitment to the confessional tradition maintained in his own denomination—a tradition whose very existence many in his denomination had argued did not exist.^{xxxviii} Fackre's commitment to the Christological affirmation of the "Barmen Declaration" is a recurring theme throughout his work. Additionally the importance of the preamble to the United Church of Christ's Constitution has figured centrally in Fackre's understanding of both UCC particularity and the denomination's gift to the larger church.^{xxxix}

A second point of commonality among these ecumenists is their deep engagement in the work of societies—that crucial face-to-face conversation with others holding beliefs both similar and

different. Schaff's commitments ranged widely and included, among others, the Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Evangelical Alliance, the American Society of Church History, and the Society of Biblical Literature. Douglas Horton served in leadership positions in numerous organizations, including the International Council of Congregational Churches, Faith and Order, the World Council of Churches, and as Protestant Observer at Vatican II. Fackre's commitments range from a small interfaith coffee shop in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, called "Encounter," to "Table Talk," an ongoing theological dialogue among pastors and seminarians, to leadership roles in the World Council of Churches, to the establishment of the Craigville Colloquies, and the founding of the Mercersburg Society itself.

A third commonality lies in the commitment these men share to Christ at the center of an inclusive church. We see this commitment in Schaff's affirmation of denominational difference in an inclusive Christendom as articulated in his address "The Reunion of Christendom" and as actualized—at least on the library shelf—in the form of the fourteen volume American Church History Series—which Schaff planned and arranged for publication, and for which he selected the authors. Douglas Horton's achievement in this regard, would be the United Church of Christ. Fackre's contribution along this line is his participation in and articulation of the process of mutual affirmation and admonition that he advanced during his many years of involvement in the dialogue between Lutheran and Reformed churches.

At the end of his career, Philip Schaff thought that the reunion of Christendom might take at least another century to accomplish. Less chastised enthusiasts like S. Parkes Cadman thought, initially, it could be accomplished within a generation, perhaps, or at least during what they anticipated would be the "Christian Century." H. Richard Niebuhr articulated an urgent demand to bring to an end the barriers denominational divisions perpetuated. In response to that mandate, Douglas Horton helped bring about an organic union that seemed, at first, to serve as a

model for more ambitious unions in the near future. Gabriel Fackre has helped to effect mutual recognition of ministries and fellowship at the table between communities that had been divided for centuries.

Grand gestures like Vatican II or "new Pentecosts," as Schaff called them, tend to be the measure by which the success of ecumenism is judged. But the movement itself advances less obviously in the passionate commitments, and in the hopes, of people like Schaff, Horton, and Fackre. Their commitment to a vision of the "Church of John," as Schaff might describe it, or the "Beloved Community" in a civil rights era mode, charts a course for ecumenism in the 21st century.

ⁱ James Hastings Nichols, *Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg* (Chicago: Chicago, 1961), 310-311. Italics added.

ⁱⁱ Klaus Penzel, "Church History and the Ecumenical Quest: A Study of the German Background and Thought of Philip Schaff" (Th. D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1962).

ⁱⁱⁱ George H. Shriver, *Philip Schaff: Christian Scholar and Ecumenical Prophet* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1988). See also George H. Shriver, "Philip Schaff's Concept of Organic Historiography" (Ph. D. diss., Duke University, 1960). A third dissertation that appeared during this period of increasing interest in the Mercersburg movement was written by my father; see Theodore Louis Trost (Jr.), "Philip Schaff's Concept of the Church" (Ph.D. diss., New College, Edinburgh University, 1958).

^{iv} They appear under this designation and under Schaff's [posthumous] editorial supervision in Henry R. Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 2nd ser., vol. 14 (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1899).

^v Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions, *Ecumenical Missionary Conference, Vol 1* (New York: American Tract Society, 1900), 10-11. W.R. Huntington authored the essay "The Church Idea: An Essay toward Unity" (1870), which led to the drafting of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (1886), a statement of essential Anglican identity, including: 1. the holy scriptures, which contain all things necessary to salvation; 2. the creeds (Apostles' and Nicene), as the sufficient statement of Christian faith; 3. the sacraments of baptism and holy communion; 4. the historic episcopate.

^{vi} Robert McAfee Brown, *The Ecumenical Revolution: An Interpretation of the Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 12-15.

^{vii} Cited in Brown, 27. See also John T. McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism: The Ecumenical Spirit and Its Persistent Expression* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1964; 1930 orig.), 60ff; 333-334.

^{viii} McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, 7; 326-328.

^{ix} Brown, *The Ecumenical Revolution*, 27. Another early use of the word "ecumenical" was employed by Shailer Mathews, Dean of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, in 1929. In a report concerning his tenure as president of the Federal Council of Churches, Mathews wrote: "I am grateful... for the opportunity of having some part in organizing the early stages of what I believe must become a sort of ecumenical Protestantism in America." Shailer Mathews, "The Growth of the Federal Council Prior to the War," in Samuel McCrea Cavert, ed., *Twenty Years of Church Federation* (New York: Federal Council, 1929), 27.

^x The work of John Nevin during this period has been delineated in detail in a recent Roth Prize-winning article. See "Michael J. Stell, "The Church Question, the Creed, and Christian Unity: The Ecclesiology of John Williamson Nevin and the Ecumenical Task," *The New Mercersburg Review* 52 (Spring 2015): 3-46.

^{xi} Klaus Penzel, "Philip Schaff's Life-long Quest for 'Evangelical Catholicism,'" *The New Mercersburg Review* 14 (Autumn 1993): 13-14; Stephen Graham,

Cosmos in the Chaos (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); John M. Koehnlein, "Theology on a Crooked Line: Philip Schaff's Understanding of Evangelical Catholicism," *The New Mercersburg Review* 19 (Spring 1996): 35-37; Theodore Louis Trost, "Exposing, Experiencing, and Explaining America," *The New Mercersburg Review* 23 (Spring 1998): 3-24.

^{xii} Nichols, *Romanticism*, 310.

^{xiii} Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossings and Dwellings: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2006), 54. A preliminary effort to apply Tweed's method to the life and work of Philip Schaff appears in David Bains and Theodore Louis Trost, "Philip Schaff: The Flow of Church History and the Development of Protestantism," *Theology Today* 71/4 (January 2015): 416-428.

^{xiv} Philip Schaff permanently affixed a second "f" to his name sometime after his arrival in America. His lifelong friend, William Julius Mann, speculated that the additional "f" suggested the musical notation "ff," *fortissimo*, and the verb "schaffen," to create. See W. J. Mann, *Erinnerungsblätter* (Reading: Pilgersbuchhandlung, 1894), 49.

^{xv} David S. Schaff, *The Life of Philip Schaff, In Part Autobiographical* (New York: Scribners, 1987), 53-58.

^{xvi} "Dr. Schaff's Sermon at Elberfeld," *Weekly Messenger*, IX (September 4, 1844): 1869-1870.

^{xvii} Shriver contends that the Lutheran rite was followed. See George H. Shriver, ed., *American Religious Heretics*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 20. However, the "Rhine Rite" is reported in "Dr. Schaff's Sermon at Elberfeld": 1866.

^{xviii} This account follows George Richards, "The Life and Work of Philip Schaff," *Bulletin of the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church* 15/4 (October 1944): 161-162.

^{xix} "Dr. Schaff's Sermon at Elberfeld": 1869-1870.

^{xx} Klaus Penzel, *Philip Schaff: Historian and Ambassador to the Church* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1993) xli.

^{xxi} See Theodore Louis Trost, "The Anxious Bench: An Invitation to Lutheran and Reformed Dialogue," *New Mercersburg Review* 12 (Fall 1992): 16-25.

^{xxii} Klaus Penzel traces the origin of these categories to K. G. Bretschneider *Handbuch der Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (1814; 4th edition 1838). See Penzel, *Philip Schaff*, 76, n4.

^{xxiii} Philip Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism*, Bard Thompson and George H. Bricker, eds. (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1965; originally published, 1845), 122.

^{xxiv} Philip Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism*, 140-152.

^{xxv} See *The Principle of Protestantism*, 194-195.

^{xxvi} For Schaff's key role in the Alliance of Reformed Churches, see Philip D. Jordan, "Cooperation without Incorporation: America and the Presbyterian Alliance, 1870-1880," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 55/1 (1977): 13-35. For Schaff's role in the history of the Evangelical Alliance, see Philip D. Jordan, *The Evangelical Alliance for the United States of America, 1847-1900* (New York: Mellen, 1982).

^{xxvii} For a skillful elaboration of these matters see John Payne, "Philip Schaff: Christian Scholar and Prophet of Ecumenism," *Prism* 9/2 (1994): 28-42.

^{xxviii} Philip Schaff, "The Reunion of Christendom," in Penzel, *Philip Schaff*, 334.

^{xxix} S. Parkes Cadman, "A New Day for Missions," in Grenville Kleiser, ed., *The World's Greatest Sermons, Volume X* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), (210-211) 204-216.

^{xxx} H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Holt, 1929), 6.

^{xxxi} The ecumenical conviction of George Richards is a topic beyond the scope of this essay. Significantly, Richards relates himself to the tradition of Mercersburg and he identifies Mercersburg commitments in the Faith and Order and Life and Work movements. See George Richards, "A Forgotten Theology," *Church History* 9/1 (March 1940): 37-53, especially 51-53.

^{xxxii} For a detailed examination of Horton's life and work, see Theodore Louis Trost, *Douglas Horton and the Ecumenical Impulse in American Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

^{xxxiii} Quoted in Trost, *Douglas Horton*, 202, 52n.

^{xxxiv} Douglas Horton *Vatican Diary 1965* (Boston: United Church Press, 1966), 178.

^{xxxv} Ernesto Cardenal, ed., *The Gospel in Solintename* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010; 1976-82 orig).

^{xxxvi} H. Mark Roelofs, "Liberation Theology: The Recovery of Biblical Radicalism," *The American Political Science Review*, 82/2 (Jun., 1988): 549-566.

^{xxxvii} As noted above (footnote 31), George Richards identified himself as an ecumenist standing explicitly in the Mercersburg tradition.

^{xxxviii} Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* with an Introduction by Douglas Horton (Boston: Pilgrim, 1960), v-xii.

^{xxxix} See, for example, the chapters "What Does the United Church of Christ Believe?" and "The Confessional Heritage of the United Church of Christ" in Gabriel Fackre, *Believing, Caring, Doing* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 2005). Fackre explicitly anchors his commitment to the "basics" of faith through the Mercersburg tradition. See, for example, Gabriel Fackre, *Restoring the Center* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 16.

Response to Dr. Theodore Trost “The Ecumenical Trajectory of the Mercersburg Movement”

Monday June 1, 2015 Lancaster Pa.
The Rev. Dr. Deborah Rahn Clemens
Pastor of New Goshenhoppen United Church of Christ
Former President of the Mercersburg Society

Thank you, Ted, for your thorough review of Schaff’s ground-laying work and innovations leading to the 20th and 21st century ecumenical movement inside the Christian community.

Schaff’s vision of “No Europe, No America, no Catholicism, no Protestantism, but an undivided kingdom of God” is uplifting to the point of biblical prophetic eschatology. But alas, as we still await the coming of the Lord, we also still await such signs of Christian unity.

In *The Principle of Protestantism*, Schaff (as you have reminded us) balanced his vision on four legs: 1/ unwavering belief that the church is the organic Body of Christ, 2/ an idealistic philosophy of history, 3/ a recognition of the biblical trajectory of apostolicity from the Church of St. Peter (Rome) to the church of Saint Paul (reformation) to the church of St. John, Love, and 4/ a romantic vision of evangelical Protestantism.

It is ironic that the two central principles of *The Principle of Protestantism*, the primacy of scripture and the doctrine of justification are not obvious unifiers, but actual points of deep division within the church (especially when it comes to interpretation of scripture and justification, as boundaries are drawn around issues of behavior and morality.

Also, Schaff’s progressive ideology, expecting ecclesiastical unity to be enhanced through modern inventions (the steamboat and the telegraph to the internet today) is hardly being realized currently. We need to ask: Can the ecumenical dream (which is still our Christ-made mandate) come to life through a methodology used in the former century: bi-lateral or multilateral conversations about confessions and creeds, and/or world, national and local societies formed for the specific purpose of fostering Christian unity? Ted, I must confess you seem a bit more optimistic than I am about the future of such methods and agencies. The reality is national bodies, councils of churches, and judicatories are all suffering from diminished interest and lack of funding. Americans (my only vantage point for this debate) have overwhelmingly rejected word from above decrees by denominational hierarchies. Reaction to the Fundamentalism of hard-right Christians and shock of sectarian violence in Islamic countries have caused near-evangelical zeal not for Christ, not for faith, not for religion, but for cultural secularism. To top it all off, we live in an environment of anti-intellectualism. Our quick answer to technology has truncated the populous ability to listen to lectures longer than ten minutes or so, let alone read or study. So in-depth colloquies designed to bring convergence by finding the right verbiage prove ineffective beyond being occasional exercises for the scholarly elite.

Even the conciliatory bodies founded for the sole purpose of ecumenicity have all pretty much given up the goal of organic unity. Today the focus is good will ventures, mission, justice, and social projects, working together, not living together. This is a model that makes little difference between what is intra-Christian and what is inter-faith. And, lest I sound too depressing, institutions have become so insular there is low energy for even these.

So, is ecumenism dead? Not in the least! Ecumenism is alive and it is happening. It is occurring in our local churches each and every day. As a local church pastor I see it as the agenda now dished out onto our plate.

Think about it. Americans intermarry today in record numbers. Years ago this was rare. Today it is rare that two spouses come from the same denominational famil, even more and more from the

same faith. Most modern families are already a mix of confessional upbringings.

Americans drift, crossing and dwelling, from denomination to denomination even into sects with substantially different sacramental theologies. They do it with not even a flinch of guilt or regret. People join churches based on the charisma of the pastor, the friendliness of the parishioners, of the locus of the building, style of worship and music, not confession or creed.

This obviously can be bad, if it leads to sectarian puritanism, as Schaff would say, or if the general attitude is, none of that old stuff matters anyway and sacraments are no longer God-given means of grace.

But it can be good if we see it as the new frontier of ecumenicity where each local church is a laboratory for practicing unity. Where there is “no Europe, no America, no catholic, no protestant but an undivided kingdom of God.” Where, as Schaff preferred, the best mode of encounter happens Angesicht zu Angesicht, face-to-face. Perhaps the laity instinctually recognizes church beyond the distinctions of confession or taste. Where Schaff’s motto “I am a Christian, I think nothing Christian is foreign to me” is believed. The point is, since our congregations are already a mixed breed, what a golden opportunity this is for Mercersburg to design resources to help them to grow into congregations of evangelical and reformed catholicity. (St. John’s)

Albert Walsh launched this vision in his 2011 book entitled *United and Uniting*, written for the United Church of Christ specifically.* In it he says, “The UCC was formed under the Holy Spirit to be first and foremost, in the task of ecumenicity to be united and uniting.” This must have real meaning to the people in the pews. But to date the laity has been marginalized in ecumenical discussions. Walsh goes on to make the case that this should be the agenda of every local congregation (instead of trying to find more members to bring in more money). Ecumenics is the local church’s agenda. This can turn our heads from individualization, isolation, and relativism. It can turn us from the social differences that divide us. It can be a corrective to that notion of autonomy or self-law. If ecumenism is the local church agenda and in our mission statements, then

evangelism, Christian Education, worship, and mission all may evolve in fresh ways.

Can we offer guidelines for congregations to help them illustrate in their time and place how they navigate unity in essentials, liberty in non-essentials, and in all things charity? Can we help members to accept differences as gifts and blessings that add to the fabric of the Christian story?

Schaff, Nevin, and we agree unity must be Christocentric.

Wouldn’t it be delicious if our laity learned the church is not a democracy or a group of like-minded people (or about soup kitchens only) but a priesthood of Christ’s servants feeding on his body and extending his ministry?

I believe Mercersburg principles are the principles that can enhance unity in local congregations in the 21st Century. Yes, even our regard for creeds can enhance unity when taught that the ecumenical creeds are revelatory gifts, not tests for orthodoxy, that sacraments are food from the living Lord not to be controlled by any earthy domain, that the liturgy lets the people share the voice of the Apostles and martyrs and all the saints and need never be privatized or static.

This should be our agenda as a society: To reach into the local church and help them recognize their power to launch the future in faith in their ecumenical opportunities. Give them the tools, then ask them to report back, and teach a lesson to the institutions, council of churches, and judicatories.

Here table fellowship, the greatest barrier to organic merger, is already happening. For every local church is, though not whole but holy, a mainstream that flows mid-river, whose course has been shaped by Rome, Augsburg, Westminster, and dissenting sects. Schaff’s idealistic philosophy of history just might turn out to be realized yet. May God grant it. What does an avowed Ecumenist look like today? He or she looks like a local church pastor.

Thank you for getting me thinking, Ted.

- Albert J. D. Walsh, *United and Uniting: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology for a Church in Crisis*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene OR, 2011

BOOK REVIEW

A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir by Thomas C. Oden. IVP Academic ISBN 978-0-8308-4035-9, 334 pages reviewed by Kenneth Aldrich.

I have enjoyed clergy autobiographies ever since I read *The Confessions of St. Augustine* as a young minister. So I picked up this one at the 2015 Mercersburg Society Convocation expectantly and was not disappointed! It not only charts the itinerary of the author's spiritual pilgrimage but also chronicles the course of American culture and religious life during the past eight decades.

The book's nine chapters are grouped into three sections: "Early Years", "Change of Heart" and "Homeward Bound", dealing respectively with (a) his early formation and academic career, (b) his dramatic spiritual *volte face*, and (c) his mature work as a leader in the recovery of historic Christian self-understanding and in the development of inter-confessional convergence through renewed appreciation of the Church Fathers.

A Change of Heart is dedicated to Edrita Pokorny Oden, Dr. Oden's beloved wife and soul mate, who died in 1998 after a courageous battle with cancer. His heartfelt reminiscences of Edrita and of others who graced

his life give readers an insight into the author's human sensitivity and personal spirituality.

Oden was born in rural Oklahoma in 1931 (a milieu that Steinbeck described so poignantly in *Grapes of Wrath*). He grew up in an observant Methodist family – not terribly affluent, but comfortable enough to survive the great depression intact.

His prayerful grandmother was an early religious influence on young Tom – as was his musically gifted mom, "who could be tough but in a most gentle way." His dad was a conscientious country lawyer, who taught Sunday school and was dedicated to the pursuit of justice rather than the accumulation of capital.

As a young man, the author sensed a call to the ministry. As he matured, he enthusiastically embraced a liberal-progressive theology which fit nicely with the post-World War II euphoria flooding both church and state. It was a well-meaning revision of post millennial eschatology that saw the church as a change agent of human society bringing in the Kingdom of God through political and economic reform. This shaped his thinking as he studied at the University of Oklahoma, Perkins Divinity School, and at Yale, where he received his doctorate. Along the way Oden explored psychology and existentialism, began his professional career, and became recognized as an up-and-coming young author in the field of pastoral theology. He also was ordained in the United

Methodist Church, served parishes, and taught at Phillips Seminary in Enid, Oklahoma.

In 1970 the author accepted a call to teach at Drew, where he soon befriended an older fellow professor, Will Herberg, whose influence would change his life profoundly. Herberg, a former Marxist who had embraced Conservative Judaism, challenged Oden intellectually, philosophically, and spiritually, urging him to re-examine the authenticity of his faith by carefully studying the teachings of Christian apologists from the earliest centuries of the church's life. Oden accepted the challenge and devoured the patristic authors. In the process he rediscovered and came to cherish their insights and wisdom. This "change of heart" enabled him to develop a postmodern theological understanding known as "paleo-orthodoxy." Many of his colleagues did not appreciate and were even hostile to his new *Glaubensbekenntnis*. Nevertheless, he continued to propound it and to live out its implications.

Oden became a fast friend of Richard Neuhaus, the founder of *First Things*, and through this association encountered many Catholic theologians whose interest in *resourcement* dovetailed with Oden's own pursuit of patristic studies. Among these were Avery Dulles and Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Emeritus).

Oden is an intensive scholar and prolific writer. Of all his works, the many-volumed *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* – of which he is general editor

along with Christopher Hall – may prove to be the most historically significant in that it meets a longstanding need in the life of the church.

Oden's conviction of an underlying unity within the Body of Christ inspired him not only to promote dialogue between those in mainline and conservative Protestant denominations but to engage in conversations with those of virtually every persuasion from Evangelicals and Pentecostals to Roman Catholics and Eastern Christians; all the while remaining loyal to his own Wesleyan tradition.

He became a world traveler, seeking to know and experience personally the many branches of the Christian family in their own milieu and culture. The book records his pilgrimages, connections, and understandings. One that particularly fascinated me was the foundation of the Center for Early African Christianity.

The center enables those of indigenous African churches and others to study the early church fathers from their own continent. Likewise, it stands as a reminder to Western Christians that Africans first brought the faith to Europeans and not the other way around.

When reading *A Change of Heart*, be sure not to neglect the copious footnotes. The footnotes are more anecdotal than citational and thus significantly enrich and embellish the narrative.

Throughout this autobiography, one discerns a self-effacing matter-of-factness in the author's discussion of his manifold attainments. Due credit is given to others – both contemporaries and those of previous generations. This volume also exudes a profound sense of gratitude for the privilege of knowing so many wonderful people during the course of the author's eventful life.

Certainly *A Change of Heart* will commend itself to those who share the reviewer's admiration for Thomas Oden and his many extraordinary achievements. I am equally convinced that those of other schools of thought will find it worthwhile reading as well, in that it illuminates the remarkable emergence of paleo-orthodoxy in Christian academic life together with its attendant theological challenges and ecumenical possibilities.

Dr. Oden presents his readers with *brain food and soul food*: a fascinating mixture of personal biography, cultural history and theological exploration.

BOOK REVIEW

The Incarnate Word: Selected Writings on Christology
John Williamson Nevin, Philip Schaff, Daniel Gans
Edited by William Evans
Wipf and Stock ISBN 978-62564-522-7, 251 pages.
Reviewed by F. Christopher Anderson

Romans 13:7 states that we are to give “honor to whom honor is due.” We need to continually take time to stress the importance of the publications in *The Mercersburg Theology Study Series*. Not only should we honor those who have worked and are still working on the various volumes in this series but we need to honor those who have made this important work financially possible.

In case you did not know who is financing this project may I remind you that it is this society! This is a practical example of a “structural good.” Though we all can find short comings in our society, on this one issue we should all rejoice that we have had money to sustain this important work. Let us give thanks for the Mercersburg Society! If there were no Mercersburg Society, I do not see who would have given the money for this series.

My review of *The Mystical Presence: And the Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper (Volume I in The Mercersburg Theology Study Series)* that appeared in the Spring 2012 NMR was simple. I basically said that I was mad at the editor, Linden DeBie, because his

excellent essay and wonderful footnotes forced me to buy a book that I already owned! One may summarize this review of *Volume IV* as saying that I sadly announce that one must purchase this volume also because these essays have previously only been available in *The Mercersburg Review!* This is the first time these volumes have been printed in a book format. This volume is therefore a must-have for any serious student of Mercersburg Theology.

In 1891 Henry M. Kieffer, the editor of *College Chapel Sermons by the Late John Williamson Nevin*, said: “It is a subject of very frequent remark, and of very general regret, that the late Dr. John Williamson Nevin left so little of his profound teachings in permanent form.” (5) *Volume IV* does much to alleviate this problem. Harry Royer told me that, while he was a seminarian at Lancaster Theological Seminary, George Bricker encouraged him to read these essays in *The Mercersburg Review*. Now we may all have access to them because of this wonderful series. With each volume that is completed, we build up a permanent Mercersburg library.

In a sense this volume serves like a one-volume theological text on Christology for the Mercersburg theologians. It is similar to the way *Christology in Context: The Christian Story* serves as a one-volume theological text for Gabe Fackre’s volumes of theology. I read through *Volume IV* in a very short period of time and discovered that it has a surprising unity of purpose and thought that one would not expect from essays from three differing theologians that were written at differing times.

Obviously one realizes that it is a collection of differing essays but these essays stand together very well in one volume.

The first thing one will probably notice from reading the volume through is that these three theologians have a very high and confessional Christology. The theological rumor of any pantheism in their theologies is directly confronted and dismissed. After that it becomes clear that the Christology of these three theologians is not discussed in a vacuum but is related to the other important loci of theology. Evans writes, “The recognition above—that the Mercersburg theology is best understood as Protestant Christian theology based on Scripture and deeply informed by patristic and Reformational insights (and often expressed in an idealist idiom)—is significant for the continuing legacy of the Mercersburg movement.” (xxxvi)

In one essay Nevin exposes a very partisan translation of a German Lutheran work of theology that Nevin calls a “mutilation” made to teach “baptistic theology.” (1) I loved seeing Nevin expose this underhanded attempt at misinformation. There are also two essays where Nevin reviews the works of two differing German theologians on the question of whether or not the Incarnation would have happened if there were no Fall. What I found exciting about these two essays is not where Nevin ends up on this particular question but that he is open to exploring both options. Nevin is not a close-minded theologian. One can sense his excitement in discussing such a rich question.

He is open to new insights on the topic. This should be a lesson to us.

One of the reoccurring debates between what could be called the Hodge School of Reformed Theology and Mercersburg Theology has been on the question of what or where is the center of the atonement. Those who follow Nevin tend to answer the Incarnation or Bethlehem and those who follow Hodge tend to answer the Death of Christ or Calvary. This volume shows us that the Nevin answer is not as simple as one might think. Nevin argues in the essay "*Jesus and the Resurrection*" that the American evangelical church of his time did not emphasize the importance of the resurrection. He writes: "The gospel begins in the birth of Christ only to complete itself in his resurrection. Without Easter, Christmas can never be more than an Ebionitic lie or a Gnostic dream." (153)

In discussing this at our first Lancaster area study of this book Richard Christiansen quoted Calvin's *Institutes Volume I, Book 2, Chapter 16, Section 5*. "Now someone asks, 'How has Christ abolished sin, banished the separation between us and God, and acquired righteousness to render God favorable and kindly toward us?' To this we can in general reply that **he has achieved this for us by the whole course of his obedience.**" (Battles, Volume I, page 507) The point here is that Calvin does not center the atonement on Calvary only but on "the whole course of his obedience." I am very thankful to Richard Christiansen for pointing out this passage from

Calvin. Though I know it will not put an end to this seemingly endless debate, it certainly helps me understand both the doctrine itself and Nevin's own perspective. (Those interested in joining one of the various geographical studies of this book please contact Chris Rankin for information.)

There is one -page essay by Philip Schaff. In reading this essay I could not help think of Schaff as C. S. Lewis with a scholarly biblical education. Somehow I had the misconception that the Christological phrase "from above" and "from below" did not appear in theology until the 1950's. Well I was obviously wrong. Schaff discusses them in 1861 and builds a very powerful Christology "from below" in these 53 pages. The title of his essay is "The Moral Character of Jesus Christ." I do not think it is a title that fits all of the important themes that we find in the essay. Yes, he does deal with the moral character of Jesus Christ but in so doing he delves into much deeper territory.

One of the main reasons I have compared Schaff to C.S. Lewis involves what has become known as "Lewis's trilemma." (One may find a brief article on this in Wikipedia and it is spelled as I have spelled it!) Lewis stressed that Jesus' claims of divinity can lead one to see him as either a liar, a lunatic or Lord. Schaff presents this same trilemma but instead he used the words "a madman or a blasphemer" in 1861. (198)

The final essay is one by Daniel Gans. It was published in *The Mercersburg Review* in 1854. This essay is 24 pages long. It is titled "The Person of Christ." It deals with the doctrine of the Lord's Supper and the view of the Church as "...not a mere outward organization, but a divine-human life-power, originating in the Person of Christ, with an inward, historical connection with the world, containing the very help we need and must have as sinners." (236)

I hope that this review wets your appetite for this volume.

*Manuscripts submitted for publication
& books for review should be sent to:*

Rev. Dr. F. Christopher Anderson, OCC, Editor
THE NEW MERCERSBURG REVIEW
38 South Newberry St., York, PA 017401
E-mail: fcba@comcast.net

*(Manuscripts must be submitted as an attachment.
Please include biographical information.)*

President: Rev. Dr. Carol Lytch,
President of Lancaster Theological Seminary

Vice President: Rev. Dr. Linden DeBie
ldebie.ccd@verizon.net

Secretary: Rev. Dr. John Cedarleaf
john.cedarleaf@gmail.com

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605 White Church Road, York Springs, PA 17372
tomlush@verizon.net

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