

A few links, following up on Sunday's sermon and Sunday School addendum:

The preface to John Nevin's *The Mystical Presence*:

http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/john_nevin/preface_to_the_mystical_presence.htm

Nevin's sermon "Catholic Unity":

http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/john_nevin/catholic_unity.htm

Nevin on the "puritan theory" of early Christianity:

http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/john_nevin/the_puritan_theory_of_early_christianity.htm

An essay on Phillip Schaff's view of church history:

http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/wayne_larson/philip_schaffs_idea_of_historical_progress.htm

Schaff defending the Protestant doctrine of justification:

http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/philip_schaff/responding_to_critics_of_the_protestant_view_of_justification.htm

Schaff on German Theology and the "church question":

http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/philip_schaff/german_theology_and_the_church_question.htm

This is an essay by Scott Collins-Jones on the sacramental theology of Nevin and Lesslie Newbigin:

http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/scott_collinsjones/firstfruits_foretaste_of_the_kingdom.htm

(Several of you met Scott last summer when he came to worship at TPC. He was in town for the PCUSA general assembly.)

Charles Hodge on whether or not the Roman Church is part of the visible church (he and the Mercersburgh men took the same basic view):

http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/charles_hodge/is_the_church_of_rome_a_part_of_the_visible_church.htm

Here are some excerpts (check especially my underlined sections):

"Since the church of Rome," says Turretin, "may be viewed under a twofold aspect, either in reference to the profession of Christianity and of the evangelical truths which she retains, or in reference to her subjection to the pope, and to her corruptions both in matters of faith and morals, we

can speak of her in two different ways. under one aspect, we do not deny she retains some truth; under the other we deny that she is Christian and apostolical, and affirm her to be anti-christian and apostate. In one sense, we admit she may be still called a CHRISTIAN CHURCH. 1st. In reference to the people of God, or the elect, who are called to come out of her even at the time of her destruction, Rev. xviii. 4. 2d. In reference to external form, or certain elements of a dispersed church, the vestiges of which are still conspicuous, as well as regards the word of God and the preaching thereof, which she still retains, although corrupted, as the administration of the sacraments, especially baptism, which as to its substance is there retained in its integrity. 3d. In reference to the evangelical truths, as concerning the Trinity, Christ the mediator, God and man, by which she is distinguished from a congregation of pagans or infidels. But we deny that she can be properly and simply (i.e., without qualification) be called a true church, much less the only and the catholic church, as they would wish to have her called."

In the next paragraph but one, he explains what he means by verity as affirmed of a church, when we say she is vera ecclesia. It includes "verity in faith," or freedom from heresy; purity, or freedom from all superstition and idolatry; liberty in government, freedom from servitude and tyranny; sanctity of morals, as opposed to corruption of manners; and certainty and consolation, or freedom from doubt or diffidence.

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The only point really open to debate is, whether the Romish church as a society professes the true religion. In reference to this point we would remark, 1st. That by true religion in this connection, has ever been understood, and from the nature of the case must be understood, the essential doctrines of the gospel. Men may enlarge or contract their list of such doctrines; but it involves a contradiction to say, that those who hold the essentials of the gospel, do not hold the gospel. This would be saying that the essence of a thing is not the thing itself, but something else. By the essential doctrines of the gospel we mean, and Protestants have been accustomed to mean, those doctrines which, in the language of Hooker, "are necessarily required in every particular Christian man." The question, therefore, as correctly stated by Professor Thornwell, really is, Whether Rome as a society still teaches enough to save the soul? 2. Our second preliminary remark is, that in determining what are the essential doctrines of the gospel, we cannot consent to bow to any other authority than the word of God. We cannot with Romanists and Anglicans, on the one hand, consent to make the judgment of the church the criterion of decision on

this subject; nor on the other, can we submit to the judgment of individuals or sects, some of which would close not the church only, but heaven itself, against all Presbyterians, others against all Calvinists, others against all Arminians, others against all who sing hymns. 3d. A third remark is, that we must distinguish between what is essential to the gospel, and what is essential for a particular individual to believe. The former is fixed, the other is a variable quantity. The gospel in its essential principles is now what it always was and always must be. But what is essential for a man to believe depends upon that man's opportunities of knowledge. A poor Hottentot may get to Heaven though he knows nothing about, or should unintelligently reject many doctrines which it would argue an unsanctified heart in a man nurtured in the bosom of a pure church, even to question. 4. We must interpret language according to the usus loquendi of those who use it, and not according to our own usage. If a man defines justification so as to include sanctification, and says that justification is by works as well as faith, we must understand him accordingly. We may say a man is sanctified by love, hope, and other Christian graces and works; meaning that all these tend to promote his conformity to God; when we could not say, that he is justified, in our sense of the term, by these things.

It is then impossible to give any list of essential doctrines of the gospel, if so doing were to imply that all doctrines not included in such list might be safely rejected by men, no matter what their opportunities for knowledge might be. By essential doctrines we mean, as already stated, those which no man can be saved without believing. We shall not undertake the delicate task of giving a list of such doctrines, but content ourselves with remarking that the Scriptures adopt a twofold mode of statement on the subject. First, they give certain doctrines which, they declare, if any man believes he shall be saved. And secondly, they state certain doctrines which, if a man rejects, he shall be lost. These two modes of statement must be consistent, i.e., they cannot lead logically to contradictory conclusions, even though the Bible arranges under the one head some doctrines which it does not place in the other. One reason why more particulars are found under the latter head than the former, no doubt is, that the rejection of a doctrine implies a knowledge of it. And the rejection of a doctrine when known may be fatal, when the knowledge of it, as a distinct proposition, may not be essential to salvation. These essential doctrines therefore may be learned both from the affirmative and negative statements of the Bible. For example, it is said, whosoever believes in Christ shall be saved; whosoever believes that Jesus is the Son of God is born of God; whosoever believes and confesses that Christ is Lord, does it by the Holy Ghost; on the other hand, it is fatal to deny God, for he that

cometh unto God must believe that he is the rewarder of those that diligently seek him. He who denies the Son, the same hath not the Father; he who denies sin, or that he is a sinner, the truth is not in him; he who rejects the sacrifice of Christ, has only a fearful looking for of judgment; he who seeks justification from the law has fallen from grace, and Christ shall profit him nothing; he who denies the resurrection of Christ, makes our preaching and our faith vain; he who denies holiness, and the obligation of holiness, has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel; so he who says that the resurrection is past already, has made shipwreck of the faith. The denial of these doctrines is said to forfeit salvation; but it does not follow that they must all be clearly known and intelligently received in order to salvation. It is a historical fact, as far as such a fact can be historically known, that men have been saved who knew nothing of the gospel but that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. The Scriptures do not warrant us in fixing the minimum of divine truth by which the Spirit may save the soul. We do know, however, that if any man believes that Jesus is the Son of God, he is born of God; that no true worshipper of Christ ever perishes. Paul sends his Christian salutations to all in every place, theirs and ours, who shall call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, their Lord and ours.

That Romanists as a society profess the true religion, meaning thereby the essential doctrines of the gospel, those doctrines which if truly believed will save the soul, is, as we think, plain. 1. Because they believe the Scriptures to be the word of God. 2. They direct that the Scriptures should be understood and received as they were understood by the Christian Fathers. 3. They receive the three general creeds of the church, the Apostle's, the Nicene, and the Athanasian, or as these are summed up in the creed of Pius V. 4. They believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. In one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried. And the third day rose again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end. And they believe in one catholic apostolic church. They acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

If this creed were submitted to any intelligent Christian without his knowing whence it came, could he hesitate to say that it was the creed of a Christian church? Could he deny that these are the very terms in which for ages the general faith of Christendom has been expressed? Could he, without renouncing the Bible, say that the sincere belief of these doctrines would not secure eternal life? Can any man take it upon himself in the sight of God, to assert there is not truth enough in the above summary to save the soul? If not, then a society professing that creed professes the true religion in the sense stated above. 5. We argue from the acknowledged fact that God has always had, still has, and is to have a people in that church until its final destruction; just as he had in the midst of corrupt and apostate Israel. We admit that Rome has grievously apostatized from the faith, the order and the worship of the church; that she has introduced a multitude of false doctrines, a corrupt and superstitious and even idolatrous worship, and a most oppressive and cruel government; but since as a society she still retains the profession of saving doctrines, and as in point of fact, by those doctrines men are born unto God and nurtured for heaven, we dare not deny that she is still a part of the visible church. We consider such a denial a direct contradiction of the Bible, and of the facts of God's providence. It was within the limits of the church the great anti-christian power was to arise; it was in the church the man of sin was to exalt himself; and it was over the church he was to exercise his baneful and cruel power.

Hodge on whether or not Roman clergy are ministers of the gospel:

http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/charles_hodge/do_rc_clergy_count_as_gospel_ministers.htm

Some excerpts (again, note my underlining):

Do, then, the Romish priests come within this wide definition of ordained ministers? Are they appointed by public authority to teach the Christian religion, and to administer its ordinances? The question is not whether they are good men, or whether they do not assume sacerdotal and other powers to which they have no claim, or whether they are correct in doctrine; but simply whether, in a body professing to hold saving doctrine, they are appointed and recognised as presbyters. If so, then they are ministers within the sense of the received Protestant definition of the term. [This is the ground on which the Reformed churches defended the validity of the orders received from the Church of Rome. "Talis autem est," says Turretin, "episcoporum et presbyterorum vocatio in ecclesia Romana, quae quoad institutionem Dei bona fuit, sed quoad abusum hominum mala facta est. Unde resectio errorum et corruptelarum ab

hominibus invectarum, non potuit esse vocationis abrogatio, sed correctio et restitutio." --Vol. iii. p. 265.]

We maintain that as the Romish priests are appointed and recognized as presbyters in a community professing to believe the scriptures, the early creeds, and the decisions of the first four general councils, they are ordained ministers in the sense above stated; and consequently baptism administered by them is valid. It has accordingly been received as valid by all Protestant churches from the Reformation to the present day.

Calvin, in his Institutes, (Book IV, chs 15, 16), after saying that baptism does not owe its value to the character of the administrator, adds: "By this consideration, the error of the Donatists is effectually refuted, who made the force and value of the sacrament commensurate with the worth of the minister. Such are our modern Katabaptists, who strenuously deny that we were properly baptized, because we received the rite from impious idolators in the papacy; and they are therefore ferocious for re-baptism. We shall, however, be sufficiently guarded against their nonsense, if we remember we were baptized not in the name of any man, but in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and therefore baptism is not of man, but of God, no matter by whom it was administered."

One correction/supplement from Sunday: Someone asked what became of the German Reformed church after Nevin and Schaff. As the German Reformed church got absorbed by increasingly liberal denominations, the orthodox generally left for Anglicanism (not Presbyterianism, as I said on Sunday). In the case of Nevin's own children, all of them ended up Episcopal (though some not until much later in life). The German Reformed denomination entered into various administrative ecumenical alliances in the early 1900s, and then officially merged into the newly formed, liberal-leaning Evangelical and Reformed Church in 1934. This body in turn was absorbed into the United Church of Christ 23 years later, which was on its way to becoming a very liberal mainline Protestant denomination. This is sadly ironic -- the UCC was almost the complete antithesis to everything that Nevin and Schaff had stood for. The UCC was largely dominated by New England Congregationalists, whose low church individualism and anti-traditional approach to theology was the very thing the Mercersburgh men gave their lives to critiquing. As a whole, the UCC was about as far away from the Reformed-catholic vision of Nevin and Schaff as you could get! This is proof that the "Mercersburgh movement" was indeed short lived and ultimately unsuccessful in bringing about the hoped for reforms to the church of their day. To some extent this was inevitable -- after the Civil War/War Between the States, the issues facing American culture were different. The rise of Darwinism and the importation of biblical "higher criticism" from Europe created

a new set of problems and a new set of theological and ecclesiastical alliances. There was seemingly less time to debate the finer points of Reformed theology (e.g., how Christ is present in the Supper, what happens in baptism) when the trustworthiness of the Bible itself was suddenly at stake.

Thus, the German Reformed heritage that Nevin and Schaff promoted was largely lost, at least for a time. The German Reformed slide into liberalism was quite similar to what happened in the other traditional, mainline bodies, such as the Presbyterians and Lutherans, in the twentieth century. In the case of the German Reformed, the pressure to "fit into" mainstream American culture was especially acute in the wake of two world wars in which Americans fought opposite the Germans. All traces of loyalty to the old German Reformed theology were rapidly dissolved, including their commitment to classic Reformed liturgy and the theology of the Heidelberg Catechism. It is safe to say that in the early twentieth century there were no major theologians or seminary institutions in America taking the "high church Calvinism" view of things.

The legacy of Nevin and Schaff has been picked up in bits and pieces by a variety of theologians, especially by conservative American Presbyterians. This is a large reason why their books have remained in print. It is probably safe to say that there is more interest in Mercersburg today than ever before. I talked to Daryl Hart about his recent biography of Nevin and he told me that he was not only surprised that Nevin was being included in the American Reformed Biography series, but he was shocked at how many people were eager to read his new work on Nevin. (Again, if you're interested, I highly recommend it:

http://www.prpbooks.com/inventory.html?target=indiv_title&id=900). Nevin and Schaff have remained important because they were first rate Reformational scholars and historians, and many are just now catching up with their insights. In recent years there has been a revived interest in Calvin's theology of the church and sacraments (the "church question" is still the burning issue of the day!), especially as these things relate to the mission of the church, and the contribution of Mercersburgh to these areas are invaluable. The Christocentricity of Mercersburgh -- rethinking all of theology in terms of the person and work of Christ -- is their most enduring contribution. Their desire to use the incarnation as a theological model for answering questions about the nature of the church and its mission, as well as questions about the sacraments, is very useful.

Of course, in many Reformed circles, "Reformed catholicity" is no more welcome today than it was in the mid-19th century America, and many of our present controversies over these issues are largely recapitulations of the controversies that surrounded Mercersburgh in the 1840s-1860s. As I said on Sunday: likenesses in the sermon to people and events you are familiar with today may

not be totally coincidental! If much of the sermon on Sunday seemed like deja vu....well, perhaps it is. There is nothing new under the sun.

Also, you may want to look again at the report I sent out after the CREC presbytery meeting in Lancaster:

Another exciting thing about the trip was getting to visit some of the historical sites in Lancaster. Yes, it's Amish country -- and we were about 10 miles from the location of the recent schoolhouse massacre. But it's also an area with deep German and Dutch Reformed roots. We saw several very beautiful churches in the city of Lancaster and the evening worship service one night was held in a spectacular 275 year old German Reformed church building. If only Birmingham had church buildings like those in Lancaster! We also got to tour the lovely campus of Franklin and Marshall College and visit Lancaster Theological Seminary and the Phillip Schaff Library, where the librarian took several of us into the archive vault to see various historical documents. (I think our intense curiosity in all things German Reformed made the librarian's day!)

One of the most important Reformed movements in American history grew largely out of the Lancaster area in the 19th century. John Williamson Nevin, one of the most important theologians in American history, is usually connected with Mercersburg, PA. In fact, the theological movement that he and German immigrant Phillip Schaff led became known as the "Mercersburg Theology." (Mercersburg is a small town in southern PA, not too far from Lancaster). Nevin was a professor at Mercersburg Seminary, which moved to Lancaster and became Lancaster Seminary, in 1871. He also ended up serving as the President of Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster from 1866-1876. If you want to learn more about Nevin (and pick up a lot of good theology and American history along the way), I suggest looking into Daryl Hart's new biography on Nevin, *High Church Calvinist*. (The title is very fitting!)

What was the "Mercersburg theology" all about? Why are Nevin and Schaff so important today? In short, "Mercersburg theology" focused on the centrality of Christ and the church. It was thoroughly Christo-centric -- our whole salvation, and the fulfillment of God's purposes for the creation, reside in the person of Christ, the Word-made-flesh, crucified and risen for us. The church, as the body of Christ, shares in his life, through the means of grace. Jesus works by his Spirit in the ministry of the church, through word, sacraments, and service to unite his people to himself and make his presence in the world known. The Mercersburg theology claimed to be reformed, evangelical, and catholic, over against the short-sighted sectarianism of most American Christianity. Men like Nevin were

very concerned about the direction of the American church -- particularly, its unhealthy pre-occupation with making a certain kind of religious experience proof of saving grace ("revivalism"), its radical individualism, its disdain for tradition and obsession with novelties, its lack of concern for church unity, its neglect of ways in which God works through ordinary means (e.g., catechizing children), and so on. Nevin and Schaff believed the question of the hour, the question facing the American church, was "the Church question." And so they devoted their lives to answering the question, "What is the church?" They viewed their own day as a time of unhealthy transition and crisis in the Protestant church, and they were determined to reform the church's view of herself, including her practice of the sacraments, liturgy, and ministry. Sadly, their work was only a partial and temporary success and their "Reformed and catholic" vision was never fully realized.

Nevin was a champion of Calvinism at a time when Calvinism was rapidly losing popularity. But Nevin insisted that that Calvin taught more than just a doctrine of predestination. Indeed, a major concern of his was the way in which so many American Calvinists had departed from Calvin's understanding of the sacraments and the church. Nevin wrote a book on the "real presence" of Christ in the Supper, entitled *The Mystical Presence* (http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/john_nevin/preface_to_the_mystical_presence.htm). It remains in print to this day and is widely regarded as the best book ever written on Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper. (For a more contemporary restatement of the same doctrine, see Keith Mathison's book *Given for You*. Mathison chronicles the debate over the Supper between Nevin and Princetonian scholar Charles Hodge. Historians widely agree that Nevin won the debate, hands down.)

Other Nevin works remain in print and are very valuable in assessing the current state of American Christianity. "Bible belt" Christians like ourselves can especially benefit from his work *The Antichrist* (it's not what you'd think!). The Mercersburg movement was heavily burdened with a desire for the re-uniting of the church, and one of Nevin's greatest sermons called for Christians to pursue catholicity rather than denominational agendas (http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/john_nevin/catholic_unity.htm). He had the foresight to see that a divided church was a weakened church, and that a church weakened in this way would be vulnerable to the rise of secularism.

Throughout his life, Nevin struggled with health issues, no doubt brought on by overwork and the stress of ecclesiastical controversy. But he was incredibly productive, nonetheless. In addition to his books and teaching, he was heavily involved in the Mercersburg Review, one of the most important theological

journals of the day. While at Lancaster Seminary, we got to see some old editions of the journal in the archives. The journal had to cease publication during the 1860s because, as Confederate soldiers marched towards Gettysburg, they burned the printing house in Chambersburg, PA. (Southern Presbyterians never really like Mercersburg theology anyway!) I eventually hope to get several important articles from the Mercersburg Review onto the web, as they represent some of the best Reformed scholarship ever done in America. (If anyone wants to volunteer to help with this project, let me know! :-))

Nevin's sidekick, Schaff, was the greatest scholar on American soil in the second half of the 19th century. He was involved in almost every major theological project of the era. He wrote an 8 volume church history that is still considered a classic (<http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/About.htm>). He oversaw the translation and editing of a 30+ volume series of the church fathers that is still the standard set for Protestants who want to read early church writings -- perhaps you've seen it on my shelves (<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/>). He oversaw the production of the Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia, which was a standard reference work for decades. He edited volumes of poetry, hymnals, and a 3 volume set of creeds and confessions (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds1.toc.html>), as well as writing biographies, catechisms, essays, etc. He also wrote several books that continue to be of value, such as *The Principle of Protestantism* -- another in-print work well worth reading if you want to understand what the 16th century Reformation was all about and how it should be viewed against the backdrop of the medieval church. Schaff had a very organic and optimistic view of church history -- while he believed in the value of tradition, he also expected God to continue to grow and mature his church into the future. (For some insight into Schaff's view of church history, see: http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/wayne_larson/philip_schaffs_idea_of_historical_progress.htm).

Schaff was also an expert in liturgical history and theology. Nevin and Schaff gave a huge chunk of their careers to liturgical reforms -- they desired to reshape German Reformed worship in accord with the best liturgies of the early church and the 16th century Reformation. The project remained controversial and eventually they had to settle for a compromise. But the service book they produced is an excellent historical resource, synthesizing a lot of the best liturgical materials from church history into an integrated whole. Our service at TPC has a lot of features in common with their proposals.

You'll be hearing more about Nevin and Schaff soon, Lord willing. It goes without saying that Nevin and Schaff were not perfect, and many of their later followers were more enamored with their defects than what they got right.

Sadly, the Mercersburg movement never made that large of an impact on the American church and fizzled out by the 1880s. For many, Mercersburg is nothing more than an intellectual curiosity -- or proof that "Reformed catholicism" / "high church Calvinism" simply cannot thrive in America. Unfortunately, the German Reformed church eventually got absorbed into what has now become the United Church of Christ -- probably one of the most liberal denominations in America today -- and thus the legacy of Mercersburg has become tainted. But the heritage of Nevin and Schaff lives on in a variety of ways and we should regard them as fathers in the faith. Their insight and works are of enduring value.

If you're looking for just one book that gives a synopsis of why we need the Mercersburg men as guides in our own day, I suggest reading Philip Lee's *Against the Protestant Gnostics*. Lee shows that Nevin and Schaff are refreshing exceptions to much of what's wrong with the American church. Also, note this website dedicated to Mercersburg:

<http://mercersburg.reformedcatholicism.com/>

Ok, that's enough of a history lesson, I guess.....I may talk a little more about Nevin and Schaff on All Saints Sunday.