

FINAL PROJECT:  
MERCERSBURG THEOLOGY IN DIALOGUE WITH CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP  
PRACTICES

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**INTRODUCTION**

In the following pages I will present an order of worship as inspired by the Mercersburg Theologians encountered through the course of study. I feel I must begin this work with something of a confession. The irony of what I am about to undertake has not been lost on me. In these five weeks of intensive study of the Mercersburg Theologians, it has become clear to me that these figures did not take liturgy lightly. Indeed, a faithful liturgical composition in such a mindset ought to faithfully represent the wisdom of the Apostolic church in conversation with the insights of the Reformers, the denomination, and the organic development of humankind (including scientific and philosophical insights) leading toward the present. John Williamson Nevin was clear in his aversion to “the modern innovation of totally free prayer,”<sup>1</sup> which conferred on the minister too whimsical a freedom, a freedom not adequately checked by deferral to authorities like those mentioned above. Indeed, Phillip Schaff too wrote of antipathy toward the “one-sided, false subjectivity, sundered from the authority of the objective”<sup>2</sup> demonstrated in such unencumbered, pastorally led, free prayer. While this composition is certainly not free prayer, it necessarily represents a skewing of power to a single individual and is privy to all of the subjectivity inherent in such a skewing. Consequently, I feel I must clarify that my objective is to simulate a dialogue with Mercersburg Theology and worship design rather than to present an authoritative example.

Dialogue of this subjective sort leads one into quandaries wherein competing avenues of direction carry with them equal, though different, merit, and one must simply make an executive

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<sup>1</sup> John Williamson Nevin, *Vindication of the Revised Liturgy: Historical and Theological* (Waterford, Ireland: CrossReach Publications, 2016), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff, “The Principle of Protestantism,” in *The Development of the Church: “The Principle of Protestantism” and other Historical Writings of Philip Schaff (Mercersburg Theology Study Series Book 3)*, ed. David R. Bains and Theodore Louis Trost (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 141

decision without this wisdom of a community. This project could not commence without deciding on an order of worship. Two options seemed equally meritorious: to use the Regular Service on the Lord's Day from the *Order of Worship for the Reformed Church (1866)*,<sup>3</sup> using that structure as a foundation from which to contemporize, or to use the order of worship as currently established in my ministerial context, using that structure as a foundation from which to graft on Mercersburg-influenced theological language and practices. I chose the latter path for two reasons. Firstly, in imagining the conceit of such a dialogue, I presupposed that changes in language would be of less disruption to an active community than changes in liturgical structure. Secondly and more importantly, I find our liturgy's adherence to the *Ordo* as an ecumenical practice is a contemporary way in which the church has attempted to root out "the poisonous plant of sectarianism"<sup>4</sup> in a postmodern context that sees unity quite differently than the Mercersburg Theologians would have seen it. Toward the end of *The Principle of Protestantism*, Schaff predicts that the "growth of division will cause the longing after Christian union to break forth at last with irrepressible force."<sup>5</sup> In a sense, he was right. This longing is very much operational in ecumenical church relations, though union is understood dare I say, more mystically in this day and age.

Another choice that should be addressed at the onset of this endeavor is the choice not to include a communion liturgy as part of the finished form. Some reasons for this are pragmatic. The United Church of Christ's *Book of Worship* contains communion liturgy choices that are

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<sup>3</sup> Jack Martin Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology: The Liturgical Lessons of Mercersburg* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1976), 291.

<sup>4</sup> Schaff, "The Principle of Protestantism," 129

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

strongly suggestive of Mercersburg theological reasoning and forms. A. Hale Schroer names “the epiclesis of the Service of Word and Sacrament II, option B” as particularly clear concerning the “real presence of Christ in the Eucharist”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, he continues, “the structure and the content of the eucharistic prayers in the Book of Worship are reflective of the classic form and sequence restored by the Mercersburg liturgies.”<sup>7</sup>

That said, my reason for omission of this component of worship is more theological than practical. I am concerned about characterizations of Mercersburg Theology that would label it as “essentially a sacramental, more particularly a Eucharistic revival.”<sup>8</sup> There is a richness to the Incarnation-driven theologies of Nevin and Schaff that ought to be able to propel faithful worship construction, even in contexts where Holy Communion is celebrated monthly, quarterly, or even, as the theologians themselves proposed as a minimum, “twice a year.”<sup>9</sup>

It will likely prove helpful to present a few words on the structure of what follows below. Each section of the order of worship will be named and written out fully below. Below the heading of each section will appear an annotation in *bold, blue italics*. Such a structure allows some flexibility to include footnotes related to these annotations. Personally, I have found it to be the least visually cumbersome approach to the task at hand.

## **LITURGY FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT – DECEMBER 8, 2019**

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<sup>6</sup> A. Hale Schroer, “The Spirit of Mercersburg in The Book of Worship,” *Prism: a theological forum for the United Church of Christ* vol. 4, no. 2 (Fall 1989), 30.

<sup>7</sup> Schroer, “The Spirit of Mercersburg in The Book of Worship,” 30.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> *An Order of Worship for the Reformed Church* (Philadelphia: Reformed Church Publication House, 1889), 171.

*Adhering to the liturgical calendar and the use of the Revised Common Lectionary that logically follows is an intentional move meant to appeal to how A. Hale Schroer characterizes the “spirit of Mercersburg:” a “vision of evangelical catholicity.”<sup>10</sup> Because this calendar is rooted in the objective, human life of Jesus Christ, I also believe it is of theological significance to the Mercersburg Theologians themselves, who include their own lectionary cycle in the Order of Worship for the Reformed Church.<sup>11</sup> A worship calendar so rooted is one powerful sign that liturgy grows “forth from the mystery of the Incarnation.”<sup>12</sup>*

PRELUDE – “Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates” (instrumental)

*Jack Martin Maxwell elucidates the liturgical context from which the Mercersburg response grew. He produces a report concerning the German Reformed Church in America from the early 1850s. That correspondent bemoans, that the “minister does the preaching and praying,... the choir... does the singing; and the people are listening spectators.”<sup>13</sup> At the same time, he reproduces Schaff’s rubric for the opening of the Provisional Liturgy of 1857, wherein he directs, “The most appropriate commencement of the service is the singing of a short Anthem or one verse of a hymn to excite devotional feelings and the spirit of worship.”<sup>14</sup> Synthesizing these two ideas, I have opted to preserve the character of each musical component of Church of the Apostles’ liturgy (the instrumental pieces remain*

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<sup>10</sup> Schroer, “The Spirit of Mercersburg in The Book of Worship,” 32.

<sup>11</sup> *An Order of Worship for the Reformed Church*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Nevin, *Vindication of the Revised Liturgy*, 66

<sup>13</sup> Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology*, 61.

<sup>14</sup> Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology*, 223.

*instrumental; the anthem remains an anthem; the hymns remain hymns) with an eye for that precarious balance between excitement and participation. That balance is struck in the instrumental pieces (this prelude and the postlude below) through the use of a hymn tune as its basis. This ideally would allow a sense of mental preparation among those gathered even as it is working to prime the heart for the experience of worship (or service, as is the case with the postlude).*

\*CALL TO WORSHIP - Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

*Many components of Mercersburg Theology, in dialogue with United Church of Christ interpretations of the lasting values thereof and congregational concerns pervade this Call. In the first place, it begins with a version of the solemn declaration [1] from the Order of the Reformed Church liturgy. This has the effect of beginning the service “on a note of objectivity and high purpose.”<sup>15</sup> This is folded into the Call to Worship for pragmatic, pastoral reasons, namely a wariness of “high church” in the context. The effect remains the same, I believe. The remainder of the call is a responsive reading of the Psalm for the day, as assigned in the Revised Common Lectionary. Schroer believes that two principles of Mercersburg Theology that ought to apply to liturgical writing are that “the language and style ought to be throughout scriptural as much as possible,”<sup>16</sup> and liturgy “belonged to the people not this minister.”<sup>17</sup> The content and form of this call reflect these principles, which I believe are well-*

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<sup>15</sup> Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology*, 227.

<sup>16</sup> Schroer, “The Spirit of Mercersburg in The Book of Worship,” 26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

*considered. He also contends that Mercersburg theologians teach us that “Liturgy is always provisional and always reflective of time and place.”<sup>18</sup> Schaff writes that “all historical development in the Church, theoretical and practical, consists in an apprehension always more and more profound of the life and doctrine of Christ and his apostles.”<sup>19</sup> These two ideas dialogue well in favor of the inclusive language chosen here. In other places in this work wherein such language choices are made, appeal to these principles is implied.*

*I will also note here (and this will be applicable throughout the liturgy) that the development of a series of responses by the people was a pioneering advancement by the Mercersburg Theologians, one that caused considerable controversy,<sup>20</sup> even if the liturgy of 1866 modestly employs this liturgical tool by contemporary standards. This work will abide by these contemporary tastes, as I see them as organic development from where these Theologians started, and because I see them as embodying a spirit of Nevin’s high view of the laity.<sup>21</sup>*

In the name of God: Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.

**Amen.[1]**

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.

May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>19</sup> Schaff, “The Principle of Protestantism,” 76.

<sup>20</sup> Nevin, *Vindication of the Revised Liturgy*, 86.

<sup>21</sup> In defending the liturgy of 1866, Nevin writes that some object that it is too theologically complex for lay members to understand and faithfully participate in. Nevin’s response was “We have no such low opinion of the capacity of our laity.” Nevin, *Vindication of the Revised Liturgy*, 58.

**May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.**

**May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.**

May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

**In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.**

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

**Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen.**

\*OPENING PRAYER

*This prayer is a contemporized version of Schaff's collect for the second week of Advent in the Order of Worship (see footnote at the conclusion of the prayer). Schaff's concern for a balanced spirituality ("A formless spiritualism is no whit better than a spiritless formalism"<sup>22</sup>) is well-heeded at the beginning of worship, where a myriad of considerations must be woven into a compressed introduction. An underdeveloped prayer, even a composed one, errs on the side of formless spiritualism. This example is seasonally, thematically, and theologically rich and appropriate. Put into modern English it is also not out of character with the rest of the service.*

Let us pray:

Almighty God, cleanse our conscience by the daily visitation of Your grace; that when Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ shall come, he may find us fit and ready to meet Him in the company of all

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<sup>22</sup> Schaff, "The Principle of Protestantism," 201.

His saints, who live and reign with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. Amen.<sup>23</sup>

\* HYMN: NCH 122 Come, O Long Expected Jesus (St. 1)

*As mentioned above, Schaff advocates for singing “one verse of a hymn to excite devotional feelings and the spirit of worship.”<sup>24</sup> Immediately following this excitement, the “manuscript... goes directly into the Call to Confession.”<sup>25</sup> There is something of a juxtaposition in this movement that I find compelling enough to maintain (hence, the single verse). One must enter worship with an excitement befitting being a people with the “power of Christ's life lodged in the soul.”<sup>26</sup> However, worship ought also to have a trajectory about it. The Ordo speaks of this trajectory dialogically, but one might just as easily apply the Mercersburg theological emphasis on gradual sanctification. One enters worship as having both the persons of Adam and Christ incorporated into her. Various turns in the service serve to point to various aspects of this dichotomy: one is a recipient of grace and faith (hence the initial excitement), but this same one must also be reminded that she has inherited a predisposition in which she is “by nature prone to hate God and... neighbor” (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 5).<sup>27</sup> At the same time, this very nature has been set free and incorporated into a new creation altogether in the living person of Jesus Christ. Worship could be*

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<sup>23</sup> *An Order of Worship for the Reformed Church*, 40.

<sup>24</sup> Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology*, 223.

<sup>25</sup> Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology*, 223.

<sup>26</sup> John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (Kindle Edition, 2011), 163

<sup>27</sup> Lee C. Barrett, III, trans., *The Heidelberg Catechism: A New Translation for the 21st Century* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2007), 34.

*understood from this point onward as something of a dialectic spiral, with these two polarities informing one another, though the overall movement be one of gradual sanctification. Nevin writes:*

*God regards them as righteous, though they are not so in fact, and makes over to them a full title to all the blessings comprehended in Christ's life. At the same time, he regenerates them by his Spirit, and puts them thus on a process of sanctification, by which in the end they become fully transformed in their own persons, into the image of their glorious Saviour .<sup>28</sup>*

### CALL TO CONFESSION

*This call is taken from the UCC Book of Worship, which clearly heavily drew upon the Order of Worship for the Reformed Church (see footnote at the end of the Call). Such instances of clear influence that have been observed are included to demonstrate the humble synthesizing that Mercersburg theologians demonstrated in their bringing together of pre-existing texts with new language. Maxwell specifically elucidates how the Book of Common Prayer, the Catholic Apostolic Liturgy, and the Palatinate Liturgy are used in small and large measure in the theologians' own liturgical composition.<sup>29</sup>*

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

**But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Let us confess our sins before God and one another.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, 178.

<sup>29</sup> Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology*, 439.

<sup>30</sup> United Church of Christ, *Book of Worship: United Church of Christ* (Cleveland: United Church of Christ, Local Church Ministries, 2012), 36-37.  
*An Order of Worship for the Reformed Church*, 171.

## PRAYER OF CONFESSION

*This is an original composition meant to articulate key aspects of the theology in a compressed, though comprehensible way. Those points alluded to are as follows:*

- 1. Nevin's teleological sense of the Incarnate Christ: "The new life lodges itself, as an efflux from Christ, in the inmost core of our personality. Here it becomes the principle or seed of our sanctification..."<sup>31</sup>*
- 2. Glorification is a necessary corollary to the Telos. Nevin continues, "...which is simply the gradual transfusion of the same exalted spiritual quality or potency through our whole persons."<sup>32</sup>*
- 3. The Christocentrism vociferously advocated for on behalf of these theologians. As Nevin writes, "It is a first principle, a self-evident axiom, in Christianity. To doubt it, is to call Christ Himself into doubt. Has He not said: 'I am the Light of the world?'"<sup>33</sup>*
- 4. The body-centric ecclesiology of the movement. For a more detailed explanation of this ecclesiology, see the Call to Offertory below.*
- 5. The dangers of Christian division, especially in the form of sectarianism. This, according to Nevin, is "the very spirit of Anti-Christ, just because it sets up a*

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<sup>31</sup> Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, 158.

<sup>32</sup> Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, 158.

<sup>33</sup> Nevin, *Vindication of the Revised Liturgy*, 68.

*Christ which is the creature of its own subjective thinking.”<sup>34</sup>*

6. *Sinfulness is a disease, roughly akin to a genetic disease. That is, sin is an inherited quality that we were powerless to prevent and are still powerless to fight by our own doing. Nevin writes, “The passion of the Son of God was the world's spiritual crisis, in which the principle of health came to its last struggle with the principle of disease, and burst forth from the very bosom of the grave itself in the form of immortality.”<sup>35</sup>*
7. *In Advent, it seemed appropriate to close with a reference to a Mercersburg take on Christian hope. Schaff writes, “The ultimate scope of history accordingly is this, that Christianity may become completely the same with nature, and the world be formally organized as the kingdom of Christ; ...the state of the renovated earth, in which God will be All in all.”<sup>36</sup>*

**Gracious God, you have planted in us, your Church, a seed of righteousness in the person of your begotten, Jesus the Christ[1]. We fall short of the glorification we are called to embody[2]. He is the light of the world[3] and we are his body[4]. Yet we have sinned against our very head: arrogantly sowing division and pursuing selfish desires[5]. Forgive us, deliver us from this disease[6], and guide us in our progress toward that glorious day when You will be All in All[7].**

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<sup>34</sup> Nevin, *Vindication of the Revised Liturgy*, 83.

<sup>35</sup> Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, 157.

<sup>36</sup> Schaff, “The Principle of Protestantism,” 193.

## ASSURANCE OF PARDON

*This is a contemporized version of the Assurance found in the 1866 Eucharistic order (see footnote at the end of the Assurance). It was a significant innovation in its time, and I wanted to preserve it because it does a better job than its contemporary counterpoints of explaining how such a pronouncement might be true and believable,<sup>37</sup> this despite historical criticism of the Assurance for its supposedly supernatural claims. That said, some of the clauses that seem to put qualifications on this assurance have been removed. This is not only to suit the tastes of my context, but to resolve a tension between such language and a theological starting point that seems to suggest a more universal, and less conditional salvation.<sup>38</sup>*

As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live. God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. I announce the promise of the Gospel: that your sins are forgiven in heaven through the perfect merit of Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>39</sup>

### \* PASSING THE PEACE OF CHRIST

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<sup>37</sup> As Nevin writes, "The minister does not originate the pardon he pronounces ; neither does the Church ; but the voice of the Church , nevertheless , uttered by him and through him , there where he stands in the objective bosom of this grace , may be and is of immense account for bearing the sense of it with full comfort into the believer's heart."

Nevin, *Vindication of the Revised Liturgy*, 91.

<sup>38</sup> Nevin writes, "The object of the incarnation was to couple the human nature in real union with the Logos, as a permanent source of life"

Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, 156.

<sup>39</sup> *An Order of Worship for the Reformed Church*, 172-173.

*This practice, when linked with the confession/assurance, is an exemplification of the spirit of new creation so treasured by Nevin. He writes, “Christ is not only the end of the old creation, its necessary complement and completion; he is the principle also of a new creation, in which the old is required to pass away.”<sup>40</sup> This action demonstrates such walking in newness of life.*

\* HYMN: NCH 116 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (St. 1-4)

*The remainder of the hymn selections are well-known and complete, emphasizing “participation” end of the musical spectrum alluded to above.*

SCRIPTURE READING:

*As suggested in the Order of Worship, two readings, the Gospel and an epistle are read aloud. Though the lectionary cycle employed in that composition is not the same as the contemporary version, it is worth noting that the epistle lesson for Advent 2, Romans 15:4-13, happens to be the same in the Reformed cycle<sup>41</sup> and in year A of the Revised Common Lectionary.*

Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

SERMON

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<sup>40</sup> Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, 193.

<sup>41</sup> *An Order of Worship for the Reformed Church*, 39.

*Several years ago, Sidney D. Fowler, the Senior Minister of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Washington, DC, identified six vital themes of the United Church of Christ. The sixth was, “we listen for the still-speaking God.” A sermon is necessary following the readings, for Scripture that is not contextualized, interpreted, and proclaimed to the community does not reflect this assertion about God. The Mercersburg theologians liturgical journey began with a resolution that “a committee be appointed to report to the next Synod... ‘specimens... such as may be called for in the circumstances of the Church in this country.’”<sup>42</sup> While it is true that said specimens referred to liturgical examples and not sermon forms, my point in elevating this aspect of the Mercersburg mission is that it looks in equal measure toward the past and the present. Such a logic should prove applicable to preaching as well. Pastors must exegete faithfully (which means in accord with historical tradition) in a manner suitable to their contexts. Though the 1866 liturgy provides no guidance in this act, Nevin was quite clear that this be handled with the utmost care, writing, “There never has been an agency instituted so extensive as [the pulpit]... The world owes much to it, as it respects learning. Refer to the Middle Ages. Witness all the present time. Almost all our important institutions of learning have grown out of its interests.”<sup>43</sup>*

*Discussion of this topic allows me to briefly address one typical component of Mainline liturgical practices that is absent from this order, namely a Children’s Sermon. These are double-edged swords of sorts. Ostensibly they serve an inclusionary function, providing instruction to children at a developmentally appropriate level. In practice, they are often*

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<sup>42</sup> Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology*, 69.

<sup>43</sup> John Williamson Nevin, *The Reformed Pastor: Lectures on Pastoral Theology*, ed. Sam Hamstra Jr. (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 5.

*afterthoughts, opportunities for incongruent levity, or even simply opportunities to speak indirectly to the adults in the congregation through veiled parables. Nevin in advocating for a system of catechism writes that “children growing up in the bosom of the Church... should be quickened into spiritual life in a comparatively quiet way... to adorn the Christian profession, without being able to trace the process by which the glorious change has been effected.”<sup>44</sup> Though catechism is far from a systemic reality in the contemporary church, Nevin’s point could certainly be taken to mean that children ought to fully experience worship, receiving exposure to concepts that they may not grasp fully at the time but will grow into.*

#### PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE, THE LORD’S PRAYER, AND THE APOSTLES’ CREED

*Antipathy toward over-reliance on free prayer certainly is an undisputed driving force of the Mercersburg liturgical movement. Nevin thought particularly lowly of the practice. William B. Evans reports his saying, “Most men [sic] view free prayer as the product of separate thinking and reflection of the minister. But in such a form it is always defective and unliturgical.”<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, Schaff’s position is not as etched-in-stone. Maxwell, in combing through the Provisional Liturgy, is convinced that Schaff is responsible for writing at least the first and second forms of “The Regular Service on the Lord’s Day.”<sup>46</sup> The latter of these*

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<sup>44</sup> John Williamson Nevin, *The Anxious Bench in Catholic and Reformed: Selected Theological Writings of John Williamson Nevin*, ed. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. and George H. Bricker (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978), 111.

<sup>45</sup> William B. Evans, *A Companion to the Mercersburg Theology: Evangelical Catholicism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century (Cascade Companions Book 44)* (Eugene, Cascade Books, 2019), Kindle location 2050.

<sup>46</sup> Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology*, 220.

*forms includes an option for free prayer.<sup>47</sup> I similarly believe that there is room for such prayer in a contemporary Mercersburg-influenced liturgy. It is certainly a high order. Nevin writes, “Prayer, to be as it should be, must be liturgical, must bear the general religious life of the congregation, must be the representation of a general religious life.”<sup>48</sup> The Prayer of the People ought to provide the minister such ground to express her knowledge of and care for the congregation. It can be an opportunity to develop trust, a commodity that was less in doubt in Nevin’s religious context.*

*That said, guidelines are necessary and should be illuminated here. Church of the Apostles’ Prayer of the People is roughly a four-fold structure: a prayer of Thanksgiving, a prayer of petition, intercessions, and naming the joys of the congregation. One result of reading the Order of Worship is that it reveals to one the depth and specificity that is possible through this time of prayer. The first of the three sections of our prayer appear in the Regular Service on the Lord’s Day, but that liturgy reveals gaps in our emphases. Biblical commandments to pray for the Church and the leaders of the nations appear in the 1866 composition, but rarely are touched upon in our own prayers. These should be regularly included. Even in a politically fraught environment, praying something akin to “rule their hearts and bless their endeavors, that... justice and peace may every where[sic] prevail”<sup>49</sup> should find favor among politically divergent groups. Additionally, the Mercersburg petition*

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 221

<sup>48</sup> Evans, *A Companion to the Mercersburg Theology*, Kindle location 2050.

<sup>49</sup> *An Order of Worship for the Reformed Church*, 14.

*on “behalf of all classes and conditions of men”<sup>50</sup> and women ought to become standard in order to prevent this prayer from becoming too provincial and insular.*

*The Lord’s Prayer appears universally in those liturgies studied in this term. It is a mainstay of worship still, and perhaps little more needs to be said about it.*

*The Apostles’ Creed is one of three major emphases that Nevin identifies in his Vindication of the Revised Liturgy. It is hard to imagine having a Mercersburg-influenced document that does not include it in some way. This creed, along with others (the Nicene Creed, the United Church of Canada’s A New Creed) is used occasionally in our regular worship. With teaching, I believe congregants would grow more comfortable in its more frequent usage. That teaching would be two-fold. The first would concern how creeds are used liturgically in the contemporary United Church of Christ. One of the seven phrases from the United Church of Christ’s founding traditions is “Testimonies of faith rather than tests of faith.”<sup>51</sup> J. Mary Luti and Andrew B. Warner explain the meaning of this statement as it relates to this historic creeds: “it is not our practice to require assent to specific creedal propositions as a ‘test’ of our faith’s authenticity, nor is our practice to make ‘orthodoxy’ a condition of belonging.”<sup>52</sup> One way creeds can function is to exude ecumenicism. It voices the historical belief of the unified catholic Church, recalls the generations of diverse members of Christ’s Body who have likewise recited it in the past, are reciting it in the present, or will*

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>51</sup> “What We Believe,” in *Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ, Volume Seven: United and Uniting*, ed. Frederick R. Trost & Barbara Brown Zikmund (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 316.

<sup>52</sup> J. Mary Luti and Andrew B. Warner, “Catholics in the United Church of Christ,” (Cleveland: United Church of Christ, 2008), 17.

*recite it in the future, and unites us with them through the power of the Holy Spirit. As a corporate Body, the Church proclaims the historical truth of the Apostles Creed, a truth still operational in the holy catholic Church, even if an individual should question a specific article of faith s/he recites. A tension is kept between the need for individual conscience to be assuaged and knowledge that “such cardinal virtues of faith, hope, love, trust, and service cannot be based on vague sentiments, passing intuitions, or misleading teachings.”<sup>53</sup>*

*The recitation of the Creed is also a faithful response to having heard the Word read and proclaimed. By voicing this creed, we stake our claim in its ancestry and heritage and humble ourselves. Ours is an inherited faith, and though our reason may balk at individual articles, the Creed in total grounds us in a living tradition, one that prevents us from individualizing the faith out of existence, or, as Lee Barrett writes, reducing “Christianity without remainder to moral action or vague feelings of transcendence.”<sup>54</sup>*

*The other component of the aforementioned teaching requirement concerns communicating the specialness of the Apostles Creed in particular. Nevin’s own words can perhaps can communicate this best. Of the creed he writes that after a period of development in community, it...*

*resolved itself into a common rule of faith, or canon of truth, which the universal Church held from the beginning as of Apostolic origin and Apostolic authority. In this character, the symbol has been received through all ages, by all branches of the Church, both Oriental and Occidental, as the primary and most fundamental expression of the Christian faith.<sup>55</sup>*

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<sup>53</sup> Lee C. Barrett, III, trans., *The Heidelberg Catechism: A New Translation for the 21st Century* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>54</sup> Barrett, *Heidelberg Catechism*, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Nevin, *Vindication of the Revised Liturgy*, 66.

## CALL TO OFFERTORY

*This offertory section is perhaps the one most fraught with potential pitfalls, lest the language be suggestive of the Pelagianism both Schaff and Nevin bemoaned in their writings. Schaff in particular expresses concern about the slippery slope to Pelagianism that is possible once orthodoxy becomes confused. In “The Principle of Protestantism,” he writes of an example in Holland in which the church “found itself assailed by Arminianism, which itself again ran out finally into formal Pelagianism and Rationalism.”<sup>56</sup> The Call to Offertory is an original composition that is therefore self-consciously Reformed, while also incorporating aspects of Mercersburg theological reasoning. In particular:*

1. *This call highlights the unique Mercersburg conception of the Body of Christ. Schaff writes that “God’s will is that the body of the redeemed should exhibit an organic communion that may be the image of the union that holds between himself and the Only Begotten Son.”<sup>57</sup>*

We are a people that recognizes that even though there is nothing we can offer God to earn God’s faithfulness, God in Christ has redeemed us, uniting us into one body destined toward Christ’s glorious purpose.[1] Let us give of our earthly treasures in joyful thanksgiving!

OFFERTORY ANTHEM: - “Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming”

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<sup>56</sup> Schaff, “The Principle of Protestantism,” 126.

<sup>57</sup> Schaff, “The Principle of Protestantism,” 135.

*In addition to what has already been mentioned above concerning the use of familiar tunes and Schaff's own proposal for the use of anthems and choirs, this anthem is liturgically appropriate because of its placement. It is an offering of talents to the glory of God from a choir composed of the congregation itself. It is therefore not in danger of creating too big a spectacle and/or encouraging passivity among the congregation.*

\* **DOXOLOGY: NCH 779 Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow**

*Much like the Lord's Prayer, the Doxology has been a staple of worship in this service for some time. It appears also in the Regular Service on the Lord's Day from the Order of Worship for the Reformed Church (1866),<sup>58</sup> and was well regarded enough among the committee members who composed this work, that upon completing the Provisional Liturgy in October of 1857, "the committee rose to sing"<sup>59</sup> it. Like with the Solemn Declaration, I have opted for inclusive language. One way to apply the Incarnational focus of Mercersburg is to infer God's power and authority are necessarily relational. If one believes this to be the case, it stands to follow that when the community, the Body of Christ, sees itself more fully mirrored when singing the story of God, God's person is more readily understood.*

\* **OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

*Much of what was written in the annotation to the Call to Offertory is applicable here. The clarification concerning the source of righteousness found in this prayer is another*

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<sup>58</sup> Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology*, 291.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

*bulwark against Pelagianism. Its inspiration is a collect in the Order of Worship (see footnote below). Another theme elucidated in this prayer is the absence of the Eucharist. The real, mystical presence of Christ in that sacrament is named and acknowledged as something of the ideal offertory response. Thus, we must pray to remain strong until that efficacious, sanctifying element of worship imbues us with tangible grace.*

**Holy One, blessed are you, who make us new, and by your grace allow us to serve ever more faithfully. At this table, where we present bread and cup – humble gifts through which you impart your very essence into us – we present gifts of tithes and offerings for your blessing. It is not from our own righteousness that we give, but Christ’s faith working in us.<sup>60</sup> Keep us strong in knowledge of this faith until we are able to partake once again of your glorious presence. Glory be to you; through Jesus Christ. Amen.**

\* HYMN: NCH 116 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (St. 5-7)

*See previous hymn annotation.*

\* BENEDICTION

*This Apostolic Benediction is what appears in the Lord’s Day service of the Order of Worship.<sup>61</sup> It is fitting to close with a sending that historically links this gathered body with its many members, far-flung across distances of time and space.*

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<sup>60</sup> *An Order of Worship for the Reformed Church*, 39.

The original language is “that we may be found in Him; not having our own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ.”

<sup>61</sup> *An Order of Worship for the Reformed Church*, 17.

The Grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you  
all. Amen.

POSTLUDE: – “Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates” (instrumental)

*See Prelude annotation.*

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