

The Mercersburg Theology: A Quest for Reformed Catholicism

Jeffrey J. Meyers

August 1992

Lecture #1 Outline

I. Introduction

II. The Mercersburg Men

John Williamson Nevin (1803-1886)

1. As an Old School Presbyterian Puritan (1803-1839)
2. As an Evangelical Reformed Catholic (1840-1851)
3. Theological Vertigo (1851-1854)
4. As a Recommitted Reformed Evangelical (1854-1886)

Philip Schaff (1819-93)

1. As a Young German Evangelical Intellectual (till 1843)
2. Mercersburg Professor (1844-1865)
3. Union Theological Seminary Professor (1870-1893)

III. The Mercersburg Program

1. Historical Consciousness
2. Christology
3. The Church Question
4. Sacramental Renewal
5. Liturgical Renewal
6. Ecumenical Vision

IV. Summary and Evaluation

1. Mercersburg's Reformed Catholicism was one of the first attempts in American Protestantism to discerningly assimilate the best of the central traditions of the church into Reformed orthodoxy.
2. Mercersburg's interest in historical theology was a first step towards coming to grips with the reality of doctrinal development in history.
3. The Mercersburg men were the spigot through which the revolutionary ideas of German Protestant and Catholic theology flowed into the American Reformed theological community.
4. Mercersburg sought to stimulate a "high church" renaissance first within the German Reformed church in America. That restoration, they hoped would then catalyze the whole communion of American Reformed Protestantism to return to its liturgical, sacramental roots.
5. The Mercersburg attempt to relate Reformed theology positively to Roman Catholicism, historically, theologically, and practically, is instructive.