

A 19th Century Debate Revisited:
Low Church (Hodge) vs. High Church (Nevin)
Preston Graham Jr.

One of the consequences of living in a transient society is the degree to which practicing religious people are exposed to a variety of religious experiences even *within* his or her own tradition on any given Sunday. This is of course related to two factors: One factor pertains to immigration patterns even within the American borders such that one expression of a given tradition that was once separated by geography is now more likely than ever to reside within the same demographic context of an alternative expression of the same tradition. For instance, it is a rarity that in most densely populated areas, there are not two or more very different expressions of the same denomination represented *within* demographic proximity to one another. The result is that on any given Sunday, worshippers of the same denominations are crisscrossing one another to attend different services. The other factor is the mere frequency of travel patterns that can result in a person being away from home on a given Sunday. Here again, the average parish participant might well encounter in another city what is perceived as practically an entirely different religious experience from the one experienced at home, even though within the same denomination.

To be sure, the variety of religious expression, within the same tradition even, can be related to many factors that are more or less true for a particular denomination ranging from cultural and demographic to confessional and liturgical. For instance, in some contexts where unity is mostly expressed in a confessional way, some denominations within the same general tradition (say Presbyterian) are quite intentionally more tolerant than others in terms of the way a confession is subscribed to and related to the world, as related to very different understandings of “the communion of saints” and the meaning of inter-denominational ecumenism for the sake of avoiding unnecessary schism—which is of course a topic of orthodoxy in its own right! Other denominations, for instance the Episcopal denomination, will place greater emphasis on unity that is expressed liturgically—so that notwithstanding perhaps a very different emphasis in confessional subscription, the experience of unity in worship is perhaps much greater albeit across geographic lines. And in both of these contexts, the cultural demographic expressions can be vastly different as well. And then again, some denominational context are distinguished less by a confessional or liturgical subscription (albeit self-consciously or not) as to their subscribing to a given philosophy of ministry, political philosophy, and missional philosophy, to name but a few. In short, there are fault-lines within

any given denomination that were perhaps once “beneath the surface” and mostly the privy of religious leaders in previous generations that are now being experienced by the average religious person. And here’s the present point, I suspect that as it pertains to the Reformed and even Presbyterian context in America, this is more so than in most other denominations given the lack of liturgical conformity. For if but anecdotally, it is quite common as a pastor that one of the members of my vary transient church return home after their travels to exclaim, and in so many words, “I attended a church of the same denomination is so and so city, but I hardly recognized it as “our church.” And almost always, this observation is related to a very different experience in worship, which as it will be argued here is related to a very different confessional emphasis (whether intentionally or not—I suspect not in most cases). The purpose then in the present essay is to expose what is arguably one of the most significant “fault-lines” differentiating reformed and Presbyterian churches, even churches that may otherwise reside within the same “camp” relative to “conservative, liberal, missional or traditional, etc. In other words, whereas there may be other so called “fault-lines” within the reformed and Presbyterian context, I suspect that one of the more prominent and increasingly important fault-lines that will have a much greater impact on ecumenism and missional cooperatives is a fault-line that can be described as “high-church” vs. “low church” in so far as this will almost always be exposed in liturgy and especially a given sacramental philosophy and practice.

Along these lines, the purpose of this essay will be to understand the nature of the present high-church/low-church fault-lines by means of revisiting a very significant 19th century controversy. I say “significant” because it is here assumed that much of what is experienced today was “settled” in the 19th century context, albeit often into two very different camps, as has been argued elsewhere—notwithstanding the significance of the modernist controversies in the early 20th century. And especially noteworthy about this controversy given the contemporary experience is the very peculiar, even ironic, alignments that resulted such as to confound perhaps the expectations of many. For instance, the fault-lines of this debate transcended sectional boundaries such as to be either northern or southern, as is all too typical assumed about 19th century religion.¹ Perhaps even more amazingly, it was a debate that divided constituencies within the Old School Presbyterian context as to align with those outside of the Presbyterian context even. In other words, as is arguably the case even today, the fault-line of interest as pertaining to a high-church vs. low church conception of the gospel and Christian

¹ C.f. Preston Graham Jr, *A Kingdom Not Of This World, Stuart Robinson’s Struggle To Distinguish The Sacred from the Secular during the Civil War*, Chapter 1 (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 2002).

religion is a fault-line that has a tendency of uniting those who are in other wise opposing camps—albeit to varying degrees conservative vs. liberal, high culture vs. low culture, etc.

Of course, the debate of interest is the so called “sacramental” debate of the 19th century, one that united Northern Old School Presbyterians Charles Hodge and William Cunningham with Southern Old School Presbyterian Robert L. Dabney against the likes of Southern Old School Presbyterians James Henley Thornwell and John Adger, together with border state Presbyterians Thomas Peck and Stuart Robinson (Maryland at the time) and R. J. Breckinridge (Kentucky), together with German Reformed Church John Nevins and Philip Schaff. Such alignments, again, pitted Princeton (N.J) together with Union (VA) Seminaries against Columbia (S.C.), Mercersburg (PA) and Danville (KY) seminaries. Or yet again, the controversy engaged the pages of *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* against the *Mercersburg Review* and *Southern Presbyterian Review*, and to a lesser degree, even the *Presbyterial Critic* as edited by Stuart Robinson and Thomas Peck (of Maryland).² It has also been noted that it transcended even Philosophical lines, wherein the Old School Presbyterians all remained largely committed to the Scottish Common Sense philosophy as related to the various issues even as Philip Schaff and John Nevins were more influenced by the German Romantic school of philosophical idealism against Rationalism.³ This latter school of thought was often associated with a more new school or “liberalizing” trend in the 19th century by those of the Old School camps. Notwithstanding the relative diversity of the participants, it was all same intra-mural within Protestantism and mostly reformed Protestantism given in that *all* of the above participants clearly distinguished their views from both Roman Catholic and Lutheran theology. In revisiting the debate, it will be discovered that the fissures pertaining to a different emphases in Christology, as related to Soteriology, as related to Ecclesiology, as then finally related to Sacramentology—all of which will be briefly summarized here. For the most part, the present

² Studies on the Mercersburg Theology and Controversy include: E. Brooks Holifield, "Mercersburg, Princeton, and the South: The Sacramental Controversy in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*, 54 (1976), p. 245ff, James Hastings Nichols, *The Mercersburg Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), James Hastings Nichols, *Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), Peter J. Wallace *A Study in the Intellectual Culture Of Charles Hodge And John W. Nevin, Anglo-American Intellectual History*. (Master Thesis: Anglo-American Intellectual History, 1997). Wentz, Richard E., *John Williamson Nevin : American theologian*, (New York : Oxford University Press, 1997). Theodore Appel, *The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin* (Philadelphia: Reformed Church Publication House, 1889; New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), *Reformed Confessionalism in Nineteenth Century America: Essays on the Thought of John Williamson Nevin*. Sam Hamstra, Jr. and Arie J. Griffioen. 1995. 280 p. (ATLA Monograph Series, 38)D.G. Hart, *John Williamson Nevin : High church Calvinist*, (Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Pub., 2005). Brian "Nicholson Calvin's Doctrine of the Spiritual Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Located www.reformed.org/webfiles/antiithesis/v2n2/ant_v2n2_presence.html. For Puritan Sacramental Theology in America, E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974).

³ E. Brooks Holifield, "Mercersburg, Princeton, and the South: The Sacramental Controversy in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 54 (1976) p. 238-257. (hereafter "Holifield")

method will be to compare and contrast Nevin's views with Hodge, even as their exchange during the mid-nineteenth century was the most widely read and representative of the two perspectives.⁴

The 19th Century Debate Revisited:

Whereas the high-church, low-church debate emerged on several fronts during the 19th century, it was perhaps most essentially and theologically expressed in the sacramental debate that was precipitated by Nevin's *Mystical Presence*, published in 1846. Whereas it took Hodge two years, the *Princeton Review* eventually got around to reviewing the book appropriately subtitled, *Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, evidently due to its having such an impact within his own Old School Presbyterian party. In his "Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper" published in 1848 in the *Biblical Repertory and the Princeton Review*, Hodge affirmed how

Being called upon to investigate the question, what was the real doctrine of the Reformed church on the Lord's Supper? We naturally turned to Dr. Nevin's work and we gratefully acknowledge the assistance derived from it. We differ from him indeed, essentially, as to the whole subject, not only as to the historical question, but as to what is the true doctrine.⁵

It should be noted at the start that Hodge actually only took issue with the "Reformed" portion of the subtitle, in that he readily admitted that Nevin had most likely gotten Calvin right on the subject, at least according to Calvin's personal views as reflected in the *Institutes*. And yet, he raised the question, "should we look to the private writings of the reformers, or to the public confessions? If to the latter, shall we rely on those of Switzerland or on those of the Palatinate, France or Belgium?" He argued that to do so leads only to a "chaotic and contradictory" assessment? But as not to escape Nevin's notice, Hodge then somewhat arbitrarily chose to focus his attention on a document that was purported to best "represent the Swiss views" and "Calvin's views" combined as an ecumenical "symbol in which both parties

⁴ Most of the primary sources used for this study are located in a compilation volume selected from their respected Journals. E.g., Charles Hodge, *Essays and Reviews Selected from the Princeton Review* (New York, Robert Carter, 1857) (hereafter "Hodge Essays"), Relevant articles include, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper", *The Biblical Repertory and the Princeton Review*, 20 (April 1848): 227-77 (hereafter DR), John Williamson Nevin, *Essays and Reviews, Selected from the Mercersburg Review 1850-1852*. (hereafter "Nevin, Essays") The relevant articles include, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper" MR 2:4 (1850) 433 (hereafter DR), John Williamson Nevin, "Noel on Baptism," *Mercersburg Review* (hereafter, MR) 2:3 (1850) 231-265. The other primary source is John W. Nevin, *Mystical presence. A vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, Edited by Augustine Thompson. O. P. (Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott, 1846) (hereafter MP), John Nevin, "Hodge of the Ephesians," *Mercersburg Review* 9.1 (1857): 47-82, John Nevin, "Hodge on the Ephesians, Second Article," *Mercersburg Review* 9.2 (1857): 192-245, John Adger, "Calvin Defended Against Drs. Cunningham and Hodge", *The Southern Presbyterian Review*, 27 (1876), pp. 133-166

⁵ Charles Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper", *The Biblical Repertory and the Princeton Review*, 20 (April 1848): 227-77. Essays, p. 341.

concurrent”— speaking of the ” *Consensus Tigurinus* (resulting from the Zurich conference with Bullinger in 1549, albeit admittedly refuted by the Lutherans).⁶ And in so far as this document was deemed representative of the “Reformed and Calvinistic” point of view, Hodge could say that “in these articles there is not one word, which any of the evangelical churches of the present day would desire to alter.”⁷ Herein, and on the surface, we can observe that one might be tempted to conclude that the debate was much to do about nothing!

And to be sure, there was agreement along generally “reformed” lines such as to easily obscure the deeper issues, even as this was acknowledged by both Hodge and Nevin. For instance, on the side of agreement, Hodge would write in response to Nevin’s *Mystical Presence*:

It is agreed... if the union were merely moral, arising from agreement and sympathy, there would be no mystery about it... but the scriptures teach that our union with Christ is far more than this.

It is agreed... if it is a vital union; we are partakers of his life, for it is not we that live, but Christ that lives in us.. analogous to our union with Adam.;

It is agreed... that this union includes a federal or representative relation, arising from divine constitution; and on the part of Christ, a participation of our nature.

It is agreed further that this union includes on our part a participation of the Spirit of Christ. Its the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who is the spirit of Christ, and dwells without measure in him as our head, who dwells also in his people, so that they become one body in Christ. AS the human body is one by being animated and pervaded by one soul, so Christ and his people are one in virtue of the indwelling of one and the same Spirit, the Holy Ghost.

It is further agreed that this union relates to the bodies as well as the souls of believers... “know you not.” asks the apostle “that your bodies are the members of Christ; know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost who dwells in you?” This union was always represented as real union, not merely imaginary nor simply moral, nor arising from the mere reception of the benefits which Christ has procured. We receive Christ himself and are in Christ, united to him by the indwelling of his Spirit and by a living faith. So far all the Reformed at least agreed.⁸

Likewise, there are many several instances that in response to Hodges critical review, Nevin will concede agreement. For instance, to Hodge’s question, *In what sense is Christ present in the Lord’s Supper*, Nevin replied, “there is not a word in *Mystical Presence* which can be said to affirm what is here (by Hodge) denied... The presence it is made to assert in the

⁶ Hodge, DR, *Essays*, p. 351.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 342-343.

Eucharist is always most carefully represented to be spiritual and not material, dynamic and not local, for the apprehension of faith and not for the apprehension of sense.”⁹ Again, to Hodge’s question, *What is meant by feeding on the body and blood of Christ*, Nevin will answer, “we are told, all reformed agreed,” and after reviewing the four things noted by Hodge, Nevin emphatically affirms, “We find no difficulty in granting all this.¹⁰ And yet again, to the question, *What is meant by the body and blood of Christ as received in the sacrament*, Nevin will testify, “here again, that it does not mean that we partake of the material particles of Christ’s body, nor do they express any mixture or transfusion of substance—here again there is no controversy.¹¹ And on it goes.

But there was of course one final agreement that is perhaps the most important to observe—that is that while sharing a generally reformed perspective on the Eucharist, just beneath the surface they agreed to the fact that they disagreed on things at a very fundamental level, beginning with and emphasis in Christology leading eventually to a theology of the sacraments! Hodge, for instance, after pronouncing his agreements, goes on to ask rhetorically, “Do the Scripture teach besides all this, that we are partakers of the human nature, of the real flesh and blood of Christ?... In what sense do we “eat his flesh and drink his blood.. as to have communion with them.. all the reformed answered, that be receiving the body and blood of Christ is meant receiving their virtue or efficacy.” And yet, in an astounding concession as pertaining especially to Calvin, Hodge admits how “some” within the reformed tradition “say it was their virtue as broken and shed... meaning their sacrificial virtue; others said, it was a mysterious supernatural efficacy flowing from the glorified body of Christ in heaven.”¹²

Herein the fault-lines begin to emerge. To be sure, Hodge himself admits the ancient source of the debate, conceding that some reformers not only recognized atonement as a legal event related to the once and for all past sacrifice of Christ of which the Lord’s Table is about, but also that the blood and body of Christ is about a virtue or efficacy tied to a “mysterious supernatural efficacy flowing from the glorified body of Christ in heaven.” And again, as Hodge acknowledges, the whole thing hinges on the emphasis on Christology that goes back even to the 3rd through 5th centuries. And of course, in this again Nevin agreed, albeit on the “other side of the issue from Hodge!

⁹ Nevin, DR, Essays, p. 433.

¹⁰ Ibid., 435.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 436.

¹² Hodge, DR, Essays, P. 343

We have seen where this scheme starts—two phases of thought, it is admitted, come together to a certain extent in the early history of the Reformed doctrine, one which lays all stress on the sacrifice of Christ, as an atonement for sin; and another specially insisted upon by Calvin which carries back our salvation to the idea of Christ's life, as its necessary perpetual source and ground. This latter view it is allowed also, made the human side of Christ's life to be in some mysterious way the depositary and seat of the grace now mentioned, and so the medium of its communication to our souls. The sacramental manducation was held to bring into the soul of the true worshipper a *vivific* power or virtue from the Savior's flesh, once slain on Calvary but now gloriously exalted at the right hand of God in heaven.¹³

As beginning to be exposed therefore, the fault lines go quite deep, as to involve a very different emphasis in Christology leading to Soteriology leading to Ecclesiology and as eventually exposed in the debate on Sacramentology! The sum effect, according to Nevin, is to end up with "two representations that are indeed materially different and that the difference regards points of no common interest and consequence."¹⁴ And here again, that all of this beyond the surface and *within* reformed, even Presbyterian movement in America even to this day! For it could be said today in a way similar to how Nevin described it in his day:

So far then, there might seem to be no strife at all between the *Princeton Review* and the work it seeks to oppose. It set up a man of straw and shows off a harmless sham battle in bringing him to the ground... and yet it would be a mistake to suppose the two parties really of one and the same mind, even in regard to the points thus far brought into view.. the issue which comes into view is indeed false; but behind that there lurks another which is most true and real as well as vastly important, whose presence is more felt than expressed, though the counterfeit that is made to stand in its place.¹⁵

Very briefly then, what are the two views along the lines of Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology and Sacramental Theology as exposed in the 19th century debate between the high-church (Nevin et. al) and the low-church camp (Hodge et al.), again focusing our attention mostly on Hodge's response to Nevin's *Mystical Presence*, and Nevin's response to Hodges response.

1. Christology:

Nevin was clear to say that he was clearly committed to Chalcedonian Christology—the one person, two indivisible natures conception of the second person of the Trinity. And according to Nevin, it is the very mystery of the incarnation that explains the mystery of our mystical union with Christ being transacted unto salvation as then participated in at the Lord's

¹³ Nevin, DR, Essays, 448

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 450.

¹⁵ Nevin, DR, Essays, 436.

Table. So for instance, in his *Mystical Presence*, Nevin argued that “by the hypostatical union of the two nature in the person of Jesus Christ, our humanity as fallen in Adam was exalted again to a new and imperishable divine life.” He further explained, “the object of the incarnation was to couple the human nature in real union with the Logos, as a permanent source of life.”¹⁶ In other words, Nevin believed that the eternal Logos had taken up the human and divine natures into himself “without accepting the Roman and Lutheran doctrine that the two natures of Christ interpenetrated one another through a mutual communication of properties,” as summarized by Holifield. This is a point that Nevin will emphasize throughout his rebuttal of Hodge’s review. Likewise, “Nevin insisted throughout his loyalty to Chalcedonian orthodoxy and that the two nature were “still a single personal being abiding together in organic union.”¹⁷ In short, the “mystery” was most fundamentally rooted in the miracle of incarnation and served as the basis for understanding salvation as continued in Christ’s glorified ministry by the Holy Spirit being transacted in the Lord’s Table.

Hodge, on the other hand, rightly “recognized that Christology was the ‘centre and sum’ of Nevin’s “mystical system.”¹⁸ And yet, he believed that Nevin seemed to exaggerate the unity of the two natures after the manner of the ancient Eutychian heresy which had advocated a belief that Christ had only one nature (Monophysite). Hodge therefore accused Nevin of denying “any dualism in the constitution Christ... the divine and human are so united in him as to constitute one divisible life.”¹⁹ And as if this wasn’t enough, Hodge would therefore accuse Nevin of Sabellianism, which was the second century belief that the three persons of the Trinity are merely different *modes* or *aspects* of one God, rather than three distinct persons. Not to be outdone, Nevin shoot back that that Hodge was guilty of Nestorianism—the 5th century belief rejected at the Council of Ephesus in 431 that Jesus existed as two separate persons, rather than two natures, one person-- the man Jesus and the divine Son of God. As such, the human and divine essences of Christ are held separate such as to imply that God is exempt from suffering or participating in the crucifixion.

Of course all rhetoric aside, it was clear that the two were generally orthodox and reformed on the topic of Christology. Their differences were more of emphasis than belief. One explanation for this can be traced to the influence of Francis Turretin whose *Institutio Theologicae Elencticae* (1679-1685) replaced Calvin’s *institutes* both at Union and Princeton during the mid-nineteenth century, but not at Columbia or Mercersburg. Turretin sought to

¹⁶ Nevin, MP, p. 197.

¹⁷ Holifield, 243-244.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.243.

¹⁹ Hodge, DR, Essays, 378

develop the 17th century principle "the finite cannot contain the infinite" throughout his more rationalist leaning theology. In contrast, Brian Nicholson, observes how "Calvin achieved clarity in his treatment of the sacrament not by thinking *through* it but by thinking *around* it. Calvin acknowledged that at the heart of the sacrament there is a miracle and a profound mystery. He never sought to reduce the mystery to reason but rather preserved the mysterious element." Accordingly, "These two strains of Reformed sacramental theology came into conflict when John Nevin published his controversial *The Mystical Presence* in June 1846."²⁰

2. Soteriology:

The question of soteriology centered around two very different understandings of the relation of union with Christ and justification. a believer's union with Christ. According to Nevin, our justification... rests on the objective merit of Christ, by whose blood alone propitiation has been made for the sins of the world. But this justification, to become ours in fact, must insert us into Christ's life... We must have Christ himself formed in us more and more in a real way in order that "he may be made unto us of God, wisdom and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."²¹ He further described union with Christ as "Christ life... [that] rests not in his separate person, but passes over to his people; thus constituting the Church, which is his body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all..²² IN other worship, what was most important about Nevin's soteriology was that union with Christ was posited along with a forensic or legal conception of salvation as related to Christ sacrificial atonement leading to justification. As summarized by Holifield about Nevin's view, "salvation required more than forensic atonement, but also a living union with Christ in order to attain a new order of existence.. Christ, by overcoming the chasm between the human and divine, manifested his life in the mundane. Through the incarnation, divinity and humanity were actually "made one in a real, inward and abiding way."²³...

Not insignificantly, throughout the controversy, both Nevin and Hodge agreed that this view of union in relation to salvation was consistent with Calvin's. The following illustration from Calvin's *Institutes* more than sustains this agreement.

We expect salvation from him — not because he stands aloof from us, but because engrafting us into his body he not only makes us partakers of all his benefits, but also of himself... you become a member of him, and hence one with him... It will never do to separate Christ from us, nor us from him; but we must, with both hands, keep firm hold of

²⁰ Brian Nicholson, *Calvin's Doctrine.*, p. NA.

²¹ Nevin, MP, p. 170.

²² Ibid., p.169.

²³ Holifield, 246.

that alliance by which he has riveted us to himself. This the Apostle teaches us: “The body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness,” (Rom. 8:10)... He tells us that the condemnation which we of ourselves deserve is annihilated by the salvation of Christ; and to confirm this he employs the argument to which I have referred, viz., that Christ is not external to us, but dwells in us; and not only unites us to himself by an undivided bond of fellowship, but by a wondrous communion brings us daily into closer connection, until he becomes altogether one with us.²⁴

As then related to these two aspect of salvation——legal (or imputed) and actual union with Christ’s nature-- Nevin described how, “our interest in the one sacrifice accomplished on the cross... include(s) a true participation in the life of him by whom the sacrifice was made. We can make no intelligible distinction here between the crucified body of Christ and his body and that which is now glorified in heaven... To partake of the “broken body” and “shed blood” of the Redeemer, if it means a real participation in his person at all, must be to communicate with him as now exalted at the right hand of God.”²⁵ In other words, salvation was not merely the result of forensic imputation; it presupposed the vivifying communion with the incarnate life of Christ in the present era awaiting its glorified consummation in heaven. As affirmed by John Adger as well, “there is a legal difficulty which justification removes. But does there not remain a difficulty as to the vital connection? Must there not be some nature tie of life betwixt the Redeemer and his people?”²⁶

On the contrary says Hodge! “As to the nature of our union with Christ,” Hodge first wanted to clarify, contra accusations from Nevin, “that it (our union) is not merely moral, nor is it merely legal or federal, nor does it arise simply from Christ having assumed our nature, it is at the same time real and vital.” And yet, over against Nevin’s “actual union with Christ’s nature,” Hodge countered, “but the bond of that union however intimate or extensive, is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, in Christ and in his people” rather than “a mysterious power emanating from the glorified body of Christ in heaven.” About the latter, he exclaimed, “it falls very far short or rather is something entirely different from the doctrine of this book.”²⁷

In short, Hodge aligned himself with those in the Reformed tradition who believed that the meaning of Christ’s “body and blood” (in the Lord’s Supper) pointed exclusively to the “virtue of a body broken and the blood shed” in relation to “their sacrificial atoning efficacy.” However,

²⁴ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1559*, ed. J. T. McNeill and F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), III.2.24. c.f. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953)

²⁵ Nevin, MP, p.170.

²⁶ John Adger, *Life and Times* (Richmond, 1889) p. 313-25. Quoted in Holifield, p. 247.

²⁷ Hodge, DR, Essays, p. 381.

Hodge admitted as well that there were others still who “insisted that besides this there was a vivifying efficacy imparted to the body of Christ by its union with the divine nature, and that by the power of the Holy Ghost, the believer in the Lord’s Supper and elsewhere received into his soul and by faith this mysterious and supernatural influence.”²⁸

Again, one view held to a “forensic only” understanding of “Christ body and blood” in the Lord’s Table, whereas another view held to a “forensic plus vital union” understanding. And to Hodge’s credit, he readily admitted that the latter “was clearly Calvin’s idea” and proceeded to quote Calvin in saying:

“we acknowledge without any circumlocution that the flesh of Christ, is life-giving, not only because once in it our salvation was obtained; but because now we being united to him in sacred union, it breathes life into us... because being by the power of the Spirit engrafted into the body of Christ, we have a common life with him; fore from the hidden fountain of divinity life is, in a wonderful way, infused into the flesh of Christ and thence flows out to us” Again, “Christ is absent from us as to the body; by his Spirit, however dwelling in us, he so lifts us to himself in heaven, that he transfuses the life-giving vigor of his flesh into us, as we grow by vital heat of the sun.”²⁹

But notwithstanding Calvin’s view however, Hodge then takes a position that is perhaps more than anything else reflecting of how history will proceed. For on the one hand, he will advocate for an ecclesiastical unity that makes room for Calvin’s position based on historical precedent saying, “those who held to the one expressed their fellowship with those who held to the other.” And yet, as to the question concerning the right view he declared, “if a decision must be made, the higher authority is certainly due to the doctrine of sacrificial efficacy first mentioned... It is difficult to reconcile the idea that a life giving influence emanates from the glorified body of Christ with the universally received doctrine of the Reformed church that we receive Christ as fully through the ministry of the word as in the Lord’s Supper.”³⁰

Basically, “Hodge feared Nevin’s mystical union covertly substituted a theory of inherent righteousness for the doctrine that God graciously imputed Christ righteousness to the elect believer” according to Holifield. He further explains, “it was clear to Hodge that for Nevin’s system, the believer received the righteousness of Christ by participating in his nature, which Nevin believed to be uniquely through not exclusively manifested in and through the sacrament.”³¹

As should be discerned by now, neither Hodge nor Dabney had any desire to discard the reformation notion of union with Christ altogether. Hodge, however, was unwilling to

²⁸ Ibid., p. 364.

²⁹ Quoted in Hodge, DR, Essays, p. 364.

³⁰ Hodge, DR, Essays, P. 365-366.

³¹ Holifield, p. 248.

acknowledge Christ's presence by the spirit in any objective sense, only in so far as the Holy Spirit unites Christ to the believer subjectively. It was therefore a union that was unique to the Lord's Supper. And so Hodge asked, "besides this union effected by the Holy Spirit, is there on our part any participation of Christ's human body, or of his human nature as such?" He answered "the mode of reception is not confined to the Lord's Supper but takes place whenever faith is exercised."³² In summary of his position, Hodge wrote:

Christ is really present to his people, in this ordinance, not bodily, but by his Spirit; not in the sense of local nearness, but of efficacious operation. They receive him, not with the mouth, but by faith; they receive his flesh, not as flesh, not as material particles, nor its human life, but his body as broken and his blood as shed. The union thus signified and effected, between him and them is not a corporeal union, nor a mixture of substances, but spiritual and mystical, arising from the indwelling of the Spirit. The efficacy of this sacrament, as a means of grace, is not in the signs, nor in the service, nor in the minister, nor in the word, but solely in the attending influence of the Holy Spirit.³³

Here again, it would seem at first that Hodge and Nevin are saying basically the same thing. But the difference was that in Hodge's system, there was no "objective" presence of Christ's humanness in the supper being communicated, even if spiritually by faith. It was rather the Spirit's "attending influence" along side of the Lord's Supper, as it was an occasion on par with others for the Spirit to work. In response, Nevin charged against Hodge that "the only union with Christ which [Hodge's] reformed doctrine allows is one that holds under a purely mental form between him and our souls, through the intervention of the Holy Ghost, exclusively altogether of his human life as such. Our relation to his body is at best remote and indirect. This is not in any way the bond and medium of our communication with his higher nature. The idea of any participation in the case of believers, in Christ's human body, nature, or life, as such, is declared to be foreign entirely from the original faith of the Reformed church."³⁴

Hodge on the other hand *criticized* Nevin's position for thinking that "in order to our salvation it was requisite that the work of restoration should not so much be wrought for us as in us... [as if] "the Logos, the divine Word, took our humanity into personal union with himself." The problem with his according to Hodge was twofold: First, "it implies a participation in the entire humanity of Christ, for if we are joined in real life unity with Logos, we should be exalted to the level of the son of God." And secondly, "this union of Christ and his people implies no ubiquity of his body, and no fusion of his proper personality with theirs."³⁵ According then to

³² Hodge, DR, Essays, 369.

³³ *Ibid.*, 372.

³⁴ Nevin, DR, Essays 444.

³⁵ Hodge, DR, Essays, p. 375.

the sum effect of Nevin's soteriology, Hodge concluded that "the whole method of salvation is necessarily changed by this system. We become partakers of the sin of Adam, by partaking of his nature; we become partakers of the righteousness of Christ, by partaking of his nature... there can be no imputation of either sin or righteousness to us except that they belong to us."³⁶ Along with Calvin, Nevin would have exclaimed, "Amen," but not as if a "new system," but rather the same system in his view that was held by the overwhelming majority of reformation history, even if diminished in modern American Puritanism.

In sum, whereas Hodge's understanding of salvation was to emphasize the forensic aspect, Nevin's was to emphasize the vivifying aspect as related to being engrafted into Christ, even as essentially connected to the forensic aspect. This will all lead then to a discussion of the meaning of efficacy in the Lord's Table—where both will recognize efficacy as dependent upon the Holy Spirit, but in very different ways applied.

3. Sacramental Theology

Nevin believed that the doctrine of the Lord's Table was intimately related to soteriology:

It stands inseparably connected with the idea of an inward living union between believers and Christ, in virtue of which they are incorporated into his very nature, and made to subsist with him by the power of a common life.. In full correspondence with this conception of the Christian salvation, as a process by which the believer is mystically inserted more and more into the person of Christ, till he becomes thus at last fully transformed into his image, it was held that nothing less than such a real participation of his living person is involved always in the right use of the Lord's Table.³⁷

According then to Nevin, the efficacy of Lord's Supper "is the objective power of the sacrament as the real presence of Christ's life by the Holy Spirit, mystically brought into the soul of the worshipper through the receptivity of faith, as something different from the subjective working of this faith itself as well as from all its accompanying exercises."³⁸ Quoting Ursinus concerning the supper, "we are made partakers not only of the Spirit of Christ, and of his satisfaction, justice, virtue and operation; but also of the very substance and essence of this true body and blood, which was given for us to death on the cross, and which was shed for us, and are truly fed with the self-same unto eternal life."³⁹ This participation in Christ's true body and blood, according to Nevin, was through the Holy Spirit, again evoking the mystery of Calcedonian Christology. "As such," notes Nevin, "our fellowship is with the Father and with

³⁶ Ibid., 384.

³⁷ Nevin, DR, Essays, p. 423.

³⁸ Ibid., 437.

³⁹ Nevin, MP, 229.

His son Jesus Christ himself THROUGH the Holy Spirit... it is a REAL communion with the Word made flesh, not simply with the divinity of Christ, but with his humanity also, since both are inseparably joined together in his person and a living union with him in the one view, implies necessarily a living union with the other as well" (emphasis Nevin's). As then what happens in the Lord's Supper, Nevin further described how it may be said that we are "fed and nourished by his very flesh and blood. The communion is truly and fully with the Man Christ Jesus and not simply with Jesus as the Son of God."⁴⁰

As summarized then by Holifield, the relationship between salvation and Eucharist for Nevin, is that "the incarnation was itself the atonement (through a divine imputation of righteousness to the believer was necessary for the completion of the process) and the Eucharist was the central event in the Church because it was the foremost occasion for participation in the new creation. The salvation represented by the Eucharist was the completion of humanity, through participation in the incarnate Christ."⁴¹ Here again, Nevin will clarify that feeding on the flesh of Christ did not entail a "local transformation of the Savior's body into the elements" nor any "oral or corporeal contact with it in any way." Rather, he said, "the mystery holds not in the sphere of the flesh, but in the sphere of the Spirit. We feed upon the broken body and shed blood of Christ, by faith. But that which is imparted to us through our faith, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is the true divine human life of the Son of Man himself, objectively present in the sacramental transaction as such, and really carried over into our persons under this form."⁴²

Concerning then the efficacy of the Lord's Supper, what was crucial for Nevin was to clarify that there was an efficacy by the Holy Spirit peculiar to the Lord's supper such that "the grace which exhibits is actually made over to them, at the time, in this very transaction itself."⁴³ This was especially onerous to Hodge. He declares with amazement that Nevin "ascribes to them (the elements of the Lord's Supper) a specific and "altogether extraordinary power" and that there is a presence and of course a receiving of the body and blood of Christ, in the Lord's Supper, "to be had nowhere else" against which Hodge asserts, "and in direct contravention of the confessions of the Reformed churches."⁴⁴ This of course troubled Nevin, who would respond by saying: "what is viewed as spiritual and accomplished by faith [according to Hodge] must be held to exclude all action from Christ's body; an efficacy which is from the Holy Ghost can not be at the same time bound to sacrament signs; and the intervention of this

⁴⁰ Nevin, MP, p. 53.

⁴¹ Holifield, 246.

⁴² Nevin MP, p. 229.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 171.

⁴⁴ Hodge, DR, Essays, 387

agency as a connecting bridge between Christ and his people, serves only to show at the same time how fully he is parted from them in his own life, and a particularly in his own life under its strictly human view. ⁴⁵

For Hodge, the efficacy of the Lord's Table was not anything to do with an objective, albeit mystical and spiritual, union of Christ with the elements. Rather it was due to the occasion itself that is used by the Holy Spirit subjectively upon the believer. So for instance, in response to the question, "*What efficacy belongs to the Lord's Supper as a Sacrament*, Hodge replied first by clarifying what it was not (an emphasis that Nevin felt circumvented the real question). Hodge said, "On this point the reformed.. reject the Romish doctrine that the sacraments contain the grace they signify, and that they convey that grace by the mere administration." Relative to the Lutheran doctrine, Hodge again rejected "the Lutheran doctrine which attributes to the sacraments an inherent supernatural power, due indeed not to the signs, but the word of God connected with them, but which is nevertheless always operative, provided there by faith in the receiver." Relative to the "Socinians and others," Hodge again rejected that "the sacraments are mere badges of profession, or empty signs... they are declared to be efficacious means of grace." Okay then, so Hodge makes it clear that he is "reformed." But in what sense? His answer in comparison to Nevin is revealing. He continues by declaring,

their efficacy as such is referred neither to any virtue in them nor in him that administer them, but solely to the attending operation or influence of the Holy Spirit precisely as in the case of the word... they have in them the moral objective power of significant emblems and seals of divine appointment.. just as the word has its inherent moral power.. but their efficacy as means of grace.. depends entirely, as in the case of the word, on the co-operation of the Holy Spirit. Thus the power is in no way tied to the sacraments. It may be exerted without them. It does not always attend them, nor is it confined to the time or place.⁴⁶

Hodge will go on to compare the Lord's Supper to the lump of clay that was used by Christ to bring healing in the gospels, wherein the "effect was due to the attending power of Christ."⁴⁷ As was seized upon by Nevin, there is perhaps no other statement from Hodge that makes it so clear that he was not Calvinistic in his Eucharistic theology. More recently Julie Canlis, in her excellent study entitled, "Calvin, Osiander and Participation in God" concludes about Calvin's view that "Salvation is not a transaction, but rather our inclusion into a form of God's own communion—our adoption. God's fatherhood is not an article of faith, nor is our adoption a stage in the process of salvation. We know his fatherhood when we participate in Jesus' relationship with God, as child and Father. Here the properties of God are not abstractly,

⁴⁵ Nevin, DR, Essays, 448

⁴⁶ Hodge, DR, Essays, 372.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

but relationally conceived, and for Calvin the key to this is *participation in the Spirit* without which not one can taste either the fatherly favor of God or the beneficence of Christ.”⁴⁸ In Calvin’s own words, that the efficacy of the Lord’s table is *not* merely an “attending operation of the Holy Spirit” apart from a real participation with Christ spiritually by the elements themselves was emphatically declared wherein, “the substance of the sacraments is the Lord Jesus, and the efficacy of them the graces and blessings which we have by his means... internal substance of the sacrament is conjoined with the visible signs... Thus, as a brief definition of this utility of the Supper, we may say, that Jesus Christ is there offered to us in order that we may possess him, and in him all the fullness of grace which we can desire.”⁴⁹ In another place, Calvin will further affirm what was later Nevin’s point exactly, namely that “no extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit, which transfuses life into us from the flesh of Christ.”⁵⁰

4. Low Churchism vs. High Churchism

Hopefully by now, it is becoming clear that the issues at hand are far from trivial pursuits or even pedantic obsessions. At state, especially from a pastoral perspective, was nothing short of a very different conception of salvation in relation to the church. For Hodge, the whole system espoused by Nevin seemed all too, and in his own words, “churchy.” He further elaborated, “it makes religion to be a church life, its manifestations a liturgical service, its support sacramental grace. It is the form, the spirit, the predominance of these things, which give this book a character as different as can be from the healthful, evangelical free spirit of Luther or Calvin.”⁵¹ Notwithstanding Hodges clear misreading of Luther and Calvin as has already been demonstrate, he all the same was quite astute at recognizing the consequences of the debate in terms of pastoral ministry and the church as a whole. For at one point in the debate Hodge would raise what he described as the “main” (perhaps better “practical”) question:

⁴⁸ Julie Canlis, “Calvin, Osiander and Participation in God,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 6:2, April 2004, p. 15. For an summary of Calvin’s view of participation and efficacy in the Lord’s Supper, cf. John Calvin, *Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ n (1540)* Written in 1540, it was published in 1541. Beza calls it “a little golden Treatise on the Lord’s Supper for the use of his countrymen in French.” It was afterwards translated into Latin by Galars and made such a contribution to common understanding that “a termination of those most unhappy controversies, in which all the learned and all the good deservedly acquiesced, is chiefly to be ascribed under God to that treatise.” Such was Beza’s admiration for it. One version that was translated from the French by Henry Beveridge (1849) may be located at http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/john_calvin/short_treatise_on_the_holy_supper_of_our_lord_jesus_christ.htm

⁴⁹ *Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ*

⁵⁰ John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, (Brunsvigae : C.A. Schwetschke, 1863-1900)p. 37: 48. For works on Calvin’s view of the sacraments, see Joseph N. Tylenda, “Calvin and Christ’s Presence in the Supper-True or Real”, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 27 (1974): pp. 65-75, Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953), John Adger, “Calvin Defended Against Drs. Cunningham and Hodge”, *The Southern Presbyterian Review*, 27 (1876),

⁵¹ Hodge, DR, Essays, 387

The main question is whether we come to Christ and then to the church; whether we by a personal act of faith receive him and by union with him become a member of his mystical body; or whether all our access to Christ is through a mediating church—Dr. Nevin decides against the evangelical system... it follows by necessity as he himself says, from his doctrine of a progressive incarnation, “that the church is the depository and continuation of the Savior’s theanthropic life itself and as such a truly supernatural constitution in which powers and resources are constantly at hand, involving a real intercommunion and interpretation of the human and divine.”⁵²

Again, problematic for Hodge was a system that most essentially begins with the assumption that “the historical church must be visible... [Where] an outward church is the necessary form of the new creation in Christ Jesus, in its very nature.” He continues, “as to the mode of union with Christ, it is regeneration. But (according to Nevin’s view) this regeneration is by the church. E.g., if... then it would seem unreasonable that a man should be united to Christ and made partaker of his nature otherwise than by union with this external, historical church, as that he should possess the nature of Adam by immediate creation, instead of regular descent. It is by the ministration of the living church, in which the incarnation of God is progressive, and by her grace-bearing sacraments, that the church life, which is the same as that of Christ, is continually carried over to new individuals. The life of the single Christian can be real only as born and sustained to the end by the life of the church, which is the living and life giving body of Christ.”⁵³

Nevin would have agreed, except to add about the efficacy of the church in so many words, “not necessarily and not necessarily immediately.” In other words, true to the reformational qualification, the whole issue of salvation in, with and by the church was clearly viewed by Nevin as predicated upon the instrumentality of faith, which was a free gift of God conditioned upon divine election. Again, Nevin would say things like, “the presence... is always most carefully represented to be spiritual and not material, dynamic and not local, *for the apprehension of faith* and not for the apprehension of sense.⁵⁴ Nevin further clarified that “it is the objective power of the sacrament as the real presence of Christ’s life by the Holy Spirit, mystically brought into the soul of the worshipper *through the receptivity of faith*.⁵⁵ And yet again, Nevin clearly specified that his system recognized “no mechanical (immediate and necessary) virtue in the sacramental elements, no magical power belonging to them in any way to confer grace apart from the action of the Holy Ghost.”⁵⁶

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Nevin, *Essays*, p. 434.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.437.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.448.

It is true, as noted by Holifield, that “Nevin understood the church as a visible, life-bearing, supernatural constitution, rooted in the person of Christ, and as much as object of faith as any other centre Christian doctrine. Since Jesus Christ was the theanthropic Redeemer, the Church, as the ‘form of his continual presence in the world,’ was a divine-human, visible but supernatural, bearer of redemptive grace. The church was the extension of the Incarnation, the Body of Christ.”⁵⁷ As further described by Holifield, Hodge “defined the Church as simply ‘the whole number of the elect’ and insisted that the visible organization was an expedient but superfluous attribute.”⁵⁸ And yet, Nevin of charged back that Hodge’s conception of the church as an invisible community of the elect under girded the individualistic subjectivism of the American Reformed denominations. For instance, whereas we have mostly focused on the sacramental debate in so far as it was related to the Lord’s Supper, Nevin elsewhere related the same themes to the Baptist controversy which pitted what he described as the classical and reformed tradition against the particularly American context that stresses subjectivism and individualism. About this, Nevin wrote against the anti-paedobaptist position:

We call the system popular with due thought and consideration... for while it goes against antiquity and the authority of the universal Church... it requires no very profound examination to see that the system held falls in strikingly with what may be termed the natural mind of the world, and in such view is exactly suited to gain popularity and credit. The Baptist theory excludes mystery, and turns religion into a thing of measurable intelligence and common sense.. it falls in thus with the tendency of Protestantism to assert the rights of the individual subject in religion, over against the claims of objective authority... it is not to be denied, that such extreme subjectivity or individualism has come to form the reigning character of Protestant Christianity at the present time; and especially may this e said to be the case in our own country, the land of universal freedom and toleration, where the very idea of Church is in danger of being swallowed up and lost in the distraction of sects as the only true and proper form of the Christian life.⁵⁹

By “Protestantism,” Nevin was not doubt thinking within his own tradition as well. The debate with Hodge was in his mind but one more example of fighting against the subjectivist and individualistic tendencies of the times, wherein the same language shows up frequently throughout Nevin’s rebuttal of Hodge. Speaking again of Baptism, the whole issue of efficacy my means of the operation of the church was determinative for Nevin as to the fundamental rationale for why we should baptize infants—as the logical practice after the principle of sacramental efficacy. He wrote in another context in defense of his proposed liturgy for the German Reformed Church:

⁵⁷ Holifield, 249, quote taken from John Nevin’s “Hodge on the Ephesians” in MR 9 (1857)

⁵⁸ Ibid., 250, Hodge quoted in “Idea of the Church, PR 25, 1853, 253ff.

⁵⁹ Nevin, John Nevins, “Noel on Baptism” MR. May 1850 in Essays, p. 232-233

Our spiritualists admit that God *may* make baptism the channel of His grace--may cause the thing signified to go along with the outward sign, when He is pleased to do so; only they will not have it that His grace is in any way bound to the ordinance. Will they not admit then also, that the sacrament ought to be so used as to carry with it the benefit it represents; that God designed it to be in this way more than an empty form; and that it is the duty of all, therefore, to desire and expect through it what it thus, by Divine appointment, holds out to expectation?⁶⁰

Here again, Hodge would have been linked with the so called “our spiritualists” as those within the reformed tradition even who might very well affirm infant baptism, but as to loose its fundamental and theological rationale, as pertaining to the sacraments as an efficacious means of grace, albeit again qualified by the sovereign election of God. Clearly then, contra Hodge, Nevin wanted to stimulate a “high church” renaissance, first within his own newly adopted German Reformed communion, but eventually within the whole of American Reformed Protestantism” as observed by Holifield.⁶¹ That is to say that on a fundamental level, Nevin charged Hodge’s perspective as indicative of an “inevitably low view of the mystery of the incarnation itself, and low view of the church.”⁶²

Historical Epilogue and Conclusion:

As has been demonstrated, it would be grossly negligent to reduce the 19th century sacramental debate to mere issues of mode and even efficacy. Rather, at the heart of the controversy was a very different emphasis in Christology leading to different emphases in soteriology, Sacramento logy, and finally ecclesiology. Indeed, the sacramental question was considered by both Nevin and Hodge to be of the utmost importance. Why? Because in the words of Nevin, “our view of the Church finds its exact measure always in our theory of the holy sacraments.”⁶³ As concluded as well by Brooks Holifield, “Nevin believed that sacramental thought reflected fundamental Christological and ecclesiological assumptions.”⁶⁴

As was initially noted, what is perhaps most amazing still is the way this debate cut across the typical fissures in 19th century American religion, no less so than today perhaps. As Nevin himself noted then, when it came to the relationship of the soteriology and ecclesiology, there was a “silent war” distinguishing two very different visions of Christianity.⁶⁵ As to the historical constituents, there was again on the high-church within the Old School

⁶⁰ John Williamson Nevin, “Vindication of the Revised Liturgy: Historical and Theological,” *Catholic and Reformed: Selected Theological Writings of John Williamson Nevin* edited by Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. and George H. Bricker. (Pickwick Press, 5001 Baum Boulevard, Pittsburgh, PA 15213).

⁶¹ Holifield, 239.

⁶² Quoted by Holifield p. 239.

⁶³ John Nevin, *Weekly Messengers* (9 August 1848); Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, p. 247) Quoted by Holifield, p. 250

⁶⁴ Holifield, p. 239.

⁶⁵ John Nevin, thoughts on the church quoted in Holifield p. 249.

Presbyterian tradition such as included John Adger, James Henley Thornwell, Thomas Peck, Stuart Robinson and R.L. Breckinridge. In just a few short years after the sacramental debate, R. L. Breckinridge would side with the north, Thornwell and Agar with the South, and Robinson and Peck with a distinctive “border state” movement during the civil war.⁶⁶ On the low-church side was Old School Presbyterian Charles Hodge in the north, and staunchly southern loyalist and Robert Lewis Dabney.

On the high-church side, Brooks Holifield tells how John Adger also acknowledged that the doctrine of the Church was the battleground of the nineteenth century and he expressed his intention to combat both the alleged tyranny of Rome” on the one hand and “the anarchical subjectivism of ecclesiastical radicals” on the other.⁶⁷ And yet “by 1857 when John Adger assumed the chair of church history at Columbia Seminary in South Carolina with the duty of lecturing on Presbyterian polity and sacramental theology, most southern Presbyterians had apparently chosen to publicly ignore the Mercersburg-Princeton controversy.” And yet again according to Holifield, as evidence by Adger’s lectures in ecclesiology, “in Adger’s mind, it was Hodge who was suspect, concluding that Hodge never quite comprehended the subtleties of either church government or sacramental doctrine.”⁶⁸ Holifield tells how “Adger would decide to instruct his annual lectures from two sources—Calvin’s *Institutes* and the writings of the disputants at Princeton and Mercersburg. And Adger decidedly came down on the side of Mercersburg.. even as his lectures were in part devoted to rebutting the *Princeton Review* article in which Hodge first criticized Nevin’s book. When he lectured on the Lord’s Supper, using book four of the *Institutes*, he openly affirmed and approved of Nevin’s interpretation of Calvinistic doctrine, and drew upon the historical investigations in Nevin’s *Mystical Presence* while warning his students that Hodge’s analysis of Calvin was “imperfect, partial and unsatisfactory.”⁶⁹...

On the low-church side, Robert L. Dabney, is said to have “used his growing influence to propagate the sacramental doctrine that Nevin and Adger found so distressing.” For instance, Holifield reports how “Dabney regularly told his students that Calvin had advanced an ‘impossible theory’ that violated not only the testimony of Scripture but also the intuitive reason.’ He believed Zwingli had been far more emancipated from superstition and prejudice than the other major sixteenth century reformers, Even sharing Zwingli’s views of the Lord’s Supper as a “commemorative seal” even if it didn’t sufficiently recognize the “sealing nature” of the

⁶⁶ Cf. Preston Graham, *A Kingdom Not of This World...*

⁶⁷ Holifield, p. 252.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 242.

sacrament.⁷⁰

Clearly therefore, the debate then resulted in some strange “bed-fellows.” It united some who differed in their sectional, political, philosophical, even confessional loyalties, while dividing others who shared in the same. It could be argued that the same holds true today, albeit across a whole host of fissures that ordinarily depict American religion. That the “silent war” continues even today is evident, if but anecdotally. On the low-church side, most of the skepticism concerning the visible church as an essential element of the gospel is informal and unorganized. The term “church” is still used, but in a way that speaks comfortably of “Christians throughout history” dismembered of any visible and definable aspect “on earth as it is in heaven.” More recently however, this skepticism has been popularized in more blatant forms such as to even suggest that it would even be unbiblical and sinful to participate in a visible Church.⁷¹

Of course the intent of this essay has been limited to an historical-theological analysis. What awaits is an exegetical determination of which vision, high-church or low-church is most consistent with the canonical Christianity.⁷² If it is concluded with Nevin’s that the “high-church”

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ On the low church side, For instance, David Barrett, author of the World Christian Encyclopedia, estimates that there are already 112 million *out-of-church Christians* around the world. He expects this number to double by 2025. (From “Growing numbers of Christians leaders leaving church” at www.churchcentral.com, June 10, 2004) The Barna Research Group has observed a marked *increase in spirituality* over the past two-years measured in terms of Bible reading, participation in weekly small group Bible studies and personal prayer. But not surprisingly, church attendance and involvement has remained relatively flat. (Reference by Allie and Jenni Parker, “Research Reveals Ambiguous Religious Involvement” in *PCANews* (www.christianity.com)) And at a time when the so-called *twentysomethings* are increasingly “absent from Christian churches,” 80% say that their religious faith is important in their life. (Only 31% of *twentysomethings* attend church in a typical week, compared to 42% of those in their 30’s and 49% of those in their 40’s. See The Barna Research Group of Ventura, California, “Twentysomethings Struggle to Find Their Place in Christian Churches,” *The Barna Report* September 24, 2003. www.barna.org.) And whereas the “number of unchurched adults has nearly doubled” since 1991, rising from 39 million to 75 million (a 92% increase!), spirituality in America is relatively high, where 80% of Americans not only believe in God, but believe that God still works miracles today. (The Barna Research Group of Ventura, California, “Number of Unchurched Adults Has Nearly Doubled Since 1991,” *The Barna Report* May 4, 2004 located at www.barna.org) More recently however, this skepticism has been popularized in more blatant forms such as to even suggest that it would be unbiblical and sinful to participate in a visible church. (C.f. Harold Camping’s, *The End of the Church... and After* www.familyradio.com/graphical/literature/church/church_contents.html (p.259-260) On the high-church side, again if but anecdotally, it is the perception within the PCA that a growing number of mission churches are being planted on a high-church philosophy in the various “frontier” regions relative to the PCA, as to include such things as was advocated by the high-church position in the 19th century including weekly communion and an ecclesial understanding of conversion by means of Christian baptism and incorporation into the body of Christ vs. a “sinner’s prayer kind of spirituality.

⁷² For instance, with respect to Christian Baptism Gal. 3:27-29 could be studied such as to argue that the language of *e'nedu/sasqe* (lit. to wear, put on) is figuratively used in the bible to describe ones identity (c.f. Mk. 5:15, Lk.16:10, Ac.12:21). Therefore, “as you were baptized” (immediately) Paul says, “you were clothed (“given an identity”) with Christ.” In other words, whatever happens in baptism, Paul want to affirm that it is like *giving up OUR names to Christ*. But is the nature of the new idenity? From passages like Col. 2:12-14, 1Peter 3:21, Titus 3:5, it could be argued that this new identity “is not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life. AS such ,it is a sacrament that is by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world” in order to be saved! (WCF

spirituality is not only a reformational but also Biblical, then this would result in a whole different spirituality and ecclesiology as is inferred from a low-church position. For instance, according to the high-church spirituality, one would see a much greater emphasis on ecclesial conversions than on “sinners prayer” conversions—wherein baptism is utilized as converting ordinance less an testifying ordinance, even as this would be applied to both adults and infants *in order* to be saved. Likewise, worship services would be ordered less according to the principles of revival with an emphasis on “band and bible” as to produce a decision and more according to the principles of efficacious union with Christ such as to emphasis a more sacramental focused liturgical service, albeit for both evangelistic and renewal purposes. Evangelism itself would become more organic as to self-consciously view the organized church as relevant, which of course ought to transform the way “church” is conducted as to be more missional such that everything is done as if the nation are present vs. as if in “holy huddles.” On and on it goes—the difference a high-church vs. a low-church spirituality makes in terms of Christian outreach and discipleship.

28:1). For in the language of 1Peter 3:21, this “baptism now saves you” as to reference the efficacious and converting power of Christian baptism, albeit always predicated upon divine election. With respect to the Lord’s Supper, John 6:25-65 could be studied such as to argue that the language of “eating and drinking” Christ is best interpreted to mean much more than pointing to a mere figurative moral or even “legal” union with Christ, but rather to a spiritual union as to partake of the mystical (Trinitarian) presence of Christ as Nevin has argued (vs. corporal presence)—this as by a careful study of the argument in John. For instance, the teaching in John 6 would be interpreted with a careful analysis of the way the passage flows, as to include vs. 51-57 especially, and the “Just as” language as relate to the union of Jesus to the Father as paradigmatic to our union with Christ (note esp. 57-58). In other words, it is the kind of miracle that explains the Trinity, even as this seems to perfectly coincide with John 14:6ff and Christ promise to come again by the Holy Spirit. (c.f. John 17:21ff).