

The Benefit of Having a Worthy Opponent

How the Theology of Seventeenth-Century Puritans Can Be Complemented by the Nineteenth-Century German Thought Known as the Mercersburg Theology

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CHAPTER TWO

The First Trial of Philip Schaff

The phrase “Mercersburg Theology” produces a variety of reactions among clergy, scholars and historians. A great deal of the clergy, scholars and historians in Reformed circles have not chosen to take great interest in the influence of the two professors who taught during the mid-nineteenth century at a small seminary in central Pennsylvania and whose writings composed what came to be called the Mercersburg Theology. Dr. Philip Schaff¹ and Dr. John Williamson Nevin produced such works as *The Principle of Protestantism*, *The Anxious Bench*, *What Is Church History*, *The Mystical Presence*, etc. These works produced controversy in their own day, and among those who take time to digest them in the twenty-first century, there exists a similar (although usually milder) tendency to distinctly take sides for or against the highly Christological understanding of the nature of the Christian church.

Nevin and Schaff introduced philosophical and theological principles in their interpretation of passages of Scripture which the existing church had comfortably appropriated for its own use and to promote its own ends. Some were caught off guard by the conclusions drawn from the Scriptures Nevin and Schaff used because it challenged their underlying assumptions about the nature of the church, and in an effort to defend what they believed to be the historic, orthodox faith, some rather respected theologians and church leaders took issue with the professors of the seminary of the German Reformed Church in the United States. Few responses to their writings were able to truly answer on an equally scholarly level the central themes that became a part of the Mercersburg Theology. Many responses degenerated into simple caricatures which revealed that Nevin and Schaff’s opponents had failed to read and properly digest the material against which they were reacting, or other responses revealed an emotional, perhaps even fear-driven, desperate attempt to discredit the two professors. If they could be linked to philosophers believed to be anti-orthodox in their approach to

¹ The spelling for Dr. Schaff’s name is seen alternately as Schaff or Schaf. For the sake of uniformity, unless contained within a quote which utilizes the latter of the two, the first will be used throughout this paper.

Christianity, or to the Roman Catholic Church and thus out of step with the teachings of the Reformation, perhaps they could be discredited and their ideas proven heretical.

The main consideration of this chapter will be to analyze the key actors and movements represented in the first trial of Philip Schaff before the General Synod meeting of the German Reformed Church in 1845.

The Key Persons Involved in the Trial of Dr. Philip Schaff, 1845²

Philip Schaff

Philip Schaff was born January 1, 1819 in Chur, Switzerland. Early in his life he was placed in the care of an orphanage when his father died and his mother remarried.³ While at the boys' academy in Kornthal he experienced a dramatic spiritual rebirth, described as finding peace with God through the atoning blood of Christ.⁴ He studied in Germany at the universities of Tübingen, Halle and Berlin, beginning at Tübingen in 1837. At Berlin he was influenced by the church historian August Neander. Through his educational experiences Hegel's philosophy of thesis, antithesis and synthesis came to influence his understanding of church history as one of annihilation, preservation and exaltation.⁵ He would come to see in particular in the case of the Reformation that the abuses of the Roman church were abolished while the best of the catholic heritage was preserved with Protestant principles. The end product was a fuller form of Christianity.⁶ It was this philosophy of history which would give birth to the conflict that resulted in his first trial. Not only would his opponents disagree with him about his view of church history and the Reformation, but in their proud defense of their own views they would take great offense at the idea that the weaknesses of Protestantism Schaff assigned to them, could ever be reformed into a higher form of Christianity as Romanism has been by the Reformation. In other words, many of Schaff's contemporaries in America who participated in promoting sectarianism thought of their form of Christianity as a

² Technically, the event referred to here did not possess all the formal elements of a trial, but the term fits well what transpired.

³ Stephen R. Graham, "Philip Schaff: Father of American Church History," *Christian History* 20, no. 4 (2001): 42.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ In "What Is Church History" Schaff distanced himself from any illusion others might have that he followed Hegel fully by describing Hegel's philosophy in its natural form as moving toward pantheism or fatalism where an individual is used blindly by the world spirit, and evil is a medium for producing good, thus displacing guilt and accountability in the process. See Philip Schaff, "What Is Church History: A Vindication of the Idea of Historical Development" in Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. and George M. Bricker, ed., *Reformed and Catholic: Selected Historical and Theological Writings of Philip Schaff*, Pittsburgh Original Texts and Translation Series #4, ed., Dikran Y. Hadidian (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1979), 92. On page 115 of that work he charged the rationalism of Hegel with reducing theology and Christology to anthropology and raising humanity to the throne of the world.

⁶ Graham, 42.

return to a pristine and unspoiled original version of Christianity and not a product of Hegelian processes. So for them there was no chance for further development of their “true” version of Christianity.

One thing that may have been difficult for his opponents to understand was that while Schaff believed in a progress of the church, he did not teach that Christianity could ever progress beyond its own original essence. In other words, it would never evolve into a new religion or counter the original principles it possessed at the start. What evolved was its own understanding of those original principles rooted in the Bible and its ability to live out or live according to those principles.

From Neander Schaff learned an historical methodology and found also a reinforcement of the piety of his earlier life. Other professors he encountered in his university training likewise left distinctive marks on him. Baur introduced him to the concept of organic development. Hengstenberg and Gerlach led him to connect his concept of the kingdom of God with *traditio* of the visible church.⁷

In May of 1843 Revs. Benjamin Schneck and Theodore Hoffeditz were dispatched by the German Reformed Church in the United States to travel to Germany in order to invite an outstanding pastor there to succeed a retiring professor at Mercersburg. The man they intended to call was Dr. Krummacher at Elberfeld. There is speculation that government officials in Prussia would not let Dr. Krummacher go, but the official reason for his declining the call was that he sensed his life calling to be the pastorate and not professional academics.⁸ Instead, Krummacher confidently recommended the twenty-five year old Schaff. In fact, Schaff came highly recommended by many respected theological leaders in Germany.

The synod meeting of the German Reformed Church in the United States voted unanimously in its meeting in Winchester, Virginia in October 1843 to call Dr. Schaff as the professor of church history and Biblical literature at Mercersburg Seminary.⁹ He had been recommended highly by Dr. Krummacher at Elberfeld, Drs. Neander and Hengstenberg at Berlin and Drs. Tholuck and Mueller at Halle.¹⁰ After receiving his call to become a professor in America he was ordained on April 12, 1844 in Elberfeld, Germany. Dr. Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacher charged him to embark on this mission “as the bearer of a pure

⁷ George Shriver, *Philip Schaff: Christian Scholar and Ecumenical Prophet* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), 8.

⁸ James I. Good, *History of the Reformed Church in the United States in the 19th Century*, electronic version ed. Eric D. Bristley (The Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, 2004), 258. Originally this work was published by The Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America (New York, 1911).

⁹ “Proceedings of Synod,” *Weekly Messenger* 9, no. 6 (October 25, 1843): 1690, 1689.

¹⁰ “Report of the Delegation to Europe,” *Weekly Messenger* 9, no. 8 (November 8, 1843): 1699.

German national spirit”¹¹ in order to rescue Germans now living in America from the corrupting influences of “the many headed monster of pantheism and atheism.”¹² He specifically charged Schaff by saying, “you are called to transport the *German Theology*, in its thoroughness and depth and free full life.”¹³ To meet that “many headed monster,” Schaff was “called to meet [it] in the armour of the shepherd boy of Bethlehem, and to smite [it] with incurable wounds.” Krummacher continued on, “You are to go forth as an *exorcist*, and produce the forms, by which thousands of demons that now play their part there [in America], in the shape it may be of angels of light, or at least in the holy vestments of the Church, shall be conjured back into their hiding places of darkness, and the territory vindicated to the Spirit of all truth alone.”¹⁴

Schaff’s own address at his ordination highlighted concerns that their German Reformed friends in America were in danger of falling prey to heathenism, Romanism and sectarianism. When Schaff’s address was published in America many took offense, and so there were planted the seeds of opposition to Schaff even before his arrival in North America. In his sermon on Acts 16:9 (the Macedonian call “Come over into Macedonia and help us!”) which was published in America he affirmed many of the orthodox truths dearest to evangelicals of the day. He spoke of the crucified Christ as the Alpha and Omega whose blood is the one and only source of righteousness. He exalted Christ repeatedly as the only God and source of salvation.¹⁵ Such orthodox confessions would not stop Schaff’s later opponents of accusing him of heresy.

The theme of the unity of the church which would run throughout Schaff’s life was employed in his ordination address in the form of a call for other Germans to reach out and help the church in America which is also a valid part of the body of Christ, no matter how troubled it may appear to be. He urged his brothers and sisters to work for the maturity of the American church and warned that if such activity was avoided, it would work to the Germans’ own defect because of their being one with all who are in the body of Christ. He said, “So we may see that if any one refuse his sympathy to our fellow countrymen in America, on this poor ground, he can have no conception as yet of the Church, and the life of Christ’s body flows not through his veins.”¹⁶

Further on in that sermon he spoke of the danger of Romanism as an enemy using terms of “serpent cunning” and “abounding idolatry.” But he also acknowledged a true strain of the Church within it. He warned of Roman

¹¹ Philip Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism*, ed. Bard Thompson and George H. Bricker, vol. 1 of *Lancaster Series on the Mercersburg Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 238, note 2. This work was previously published by United Church Press, 1845.

¹² “Ordination of Professor Schaff,” *Weekly Messenger* 9, no. 50 (August 28, 1844): 1866.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “Ordination of Professor Schaff,” *Weekly Messenger* 9, no. 51 (September 4, 1844): 1869.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Catholicism's advances in the new world by saying, "They are the fruit simply of the propensity man has naturally to trust in a religion of works." He elevated the Word of God and justification by faith above human tradition and referred to the evangelical church as having apostolic character and catholicity.¹⁷ Such statements could be viewed as pre-refutations of the later attacks he would bear of being a Romanizer or of supposedly teaching that justification is not by faith.

If Schaff is known at all in America, most would identify him with his astounding work as a church historian. He entered an American context where church history was downplayed in seminaries.¹⁸ America was developing and expanding due to immigration and inventions. This excitement and progress left little room for reflection on historical perspectives. The revivalism that was popular at the time and was eager to save souls had little use for the history of the church. Anyone whose concern it was to build the Church and to use church history to do so would be viewed as out of place. Schaff considered history to be second only to God's Word as a sure guide for the Church.¹⁹ He must've had some idea that he would be out of place upon arrival in his new homeland but probably never dreamed either that he would stir controversy as quickly as he did or that he would find immediately a like-minded colleague in John Nevin who had already immersed himself in German theology.

When Dr. Schaff arrived in America he visited many places and spoke numerous times. He was in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on August 8, 1844 and heard John Williamson Nevin's sermon "Catholic Unity" delivered to the Triennial Convention of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church and the German Reformed Churches. This sermon would later be published with *The Principle of Protestantism* at Schaff's request. The same edition of the *Weekly Messenger* which reported on Nevin's sermon also included letters to the editor which recounted Schaff's arrival at Mercersburg. Large crowds gathered, a band played, and the welcome was remarkable. Schaff said, "When the heat and burdens of office are ready to weigh me to the ground, I shall remember this evening – the brightest in the past history of my life..."²⁰

Schaff was received into the Eastern Synod at a meeting in Allentown, Pennsylvania which met October 17-23, 1844. Immediately at the end of the synodical meeting, Schaff was inaugurated as professor of theology at a service held for the occasion in Reading, Pennsylvania. Schaff's own address at his inauguration was the cause of the formal conflict that arose within the next year. The contents of his address were heavily criticized by his opponents. It was soon published under the title *The Principle of Protestantism*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. and George M. Bricker, ed., "Introduction" to *Reformed and Catholic: Selected Historical and Theological Writings of Philip Schaff*, Pittsburgh Original Texts and Translation Series #4, ed., Dikran Y. Hadidian (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1979), 1.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1-2.

²⁰ "Letters to the Editor," *Weekly Messenger* 9, no. 49 (August 21, 1844): 1861, 1863.

Later in life Schaff became a strong advocate for ecumenism. He used his intellectual abilities to act as an ambassador in an attempt to help various branches of Christianity to relate to and understand each other. He made fourteen trips back to Europe after his move to America in 1844. In those trips he attempted to help the European and American churches relate better to each other.²¹ Europeans were shocked at the American church's division and sub-division. Hegel's interpretation of American church life in its many sects and divisions was that congregations hire and fire ministers freely, and they operate by whim or an unrestrained imagination, being unrestrained by external establishment.²² The lack of proliferation of multiple denominations in Europe at the time may have stemmed from a stronger sense of continuing catholicity and respect for church tradition than was practiced in America where a subjective spirit of individualism prevailed. The American church lacked a respect for any guiding authority and would bristle at most efforts to produce unity.

While in an 1854 lecture in Germany Schaff promoted the freedom in America as a positive opportunity for the church there to grow and to reform itself from within apart from the state dictating its direction, he warned against sectarianism.²³ As the Civil War came to Pennsylvania, Schaff withdrew to New York (1863) and in 1870 began teaching at Union Theological Seminary there.

John Williamson Nevin

John Williamson Nevin (1803-1886) was born and reared in rural Pennsylvania. He attended Union College in New York state where his Presbyterian faith was challenged by revival preaching in that Puritan institution. He was sixteen years older than Schaff. He joined the German Reformed Church in 1840 and became professor of theology at Mercersburg. He authored *The Anxious Bench* and *The Mystical Presence*, both of which had a defining influence on the development of the Mercersburg Theology. *The Anxious Bench* launched an attack against revivalism. *The Mystical Presence* defended what Nevin understood to be the historical and Biblical understanding of the presence of Christ's humanity in the Lord's Supper of which believers could partake by faith.

After these he produced *Antichrist* which identified the spirit of antichrist with those who deny the true nature of Christ's incarnation. Nevin's teaching on salvation laid very high significance on the incarnation – the joining of the human and the divine in one person, Jesus Christ. The atonement was of course necessary then to bring the benefits of salvation to all who believe. The church is understood to be the body of Christ, not just an invisible entity, but a visible, in-the-flesh manifestation of the life of Christ in this world. In 1849 the *Mercersburg*

²¹ Thomas Albert Howard, "Philip Schaff: Religion, Politics, and the Transatlantic World," *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 192.

²² *Ibid.*, 199.

²³ *Ibid.*, 200-202.

Review was founded, and in it Nevin published articles on the early church and Cyprian in order to further develop his doctrine of the church. Payne refers to Nevin as holding to a “somatic, not just a spiritual unity and catholicity.”²⁴ The Mercersburg professor concluded that the early church was far more Catholic than Protestant.²⁵

Nevin received further training at Princeton Seminary (graduating in 1826) and would have opportunity to take the place of Dr. Charles Hodge when Hodge traveled to Europe to study. Ironically, Hodge would turn out to be one of Nevin’s outspoken critics as the Mercersburg Theology developed. Before coming to teach at Mercersburg Nevin taught at Western Seminary (Presbyterian) in Pittsburgh.

There have been suggestions made that differing degrees of health between Nevin and Schaff accounted for differences of approach in their dealings with opponents. They were close theological allies who seemed to work well together, but Nevin was characterized by a gloomy soberness and Schaff with optimism and a concern to unite all.²⁶ Nevin’s attacks were often caustic, inviting harsh responses which often were aimed at Schaff as well. While Schaff may have had to endure repercussions due to sharp words issued by Nevin towards their opponents, Nevin and Schaff were close allies in their defense of the organic nature of the church. Nevin spoke for hours at Schaff’s trial in his defense. He wrote a defense of Schaff in the introduction to *The Principle of Protestantism*.

Joseph Berg

If Nevin was Schaff’s greatest ally in the events surrounding his first trial, Joseph Berg (1812-1871) was his leading foe. Berg was born in Antigua, British West Indies, the son of Moravian missionaries.²⁷ Berg was pastor of the German Reformed Church on Race Street in Philadelphia. He was an outspoken anti-Romanist and a powerful leader. He, too, was a gifted man. While pastoring he earned a doctor of medicine degree from Jefferson Medical College. On one occasion ministers in Philadelphia elected him to publicly debate a noted “infidel,” George Barker, from England, who challenged the inspiration of Scripture. Berg won the debate. Mr. Barker conceded for the first time in his career, returned to England, was converted to Christianity, and answered a call to preach.²⁸

²⁴ John B. Payne, “Schaff and Nevin, Colleagues at Mercersburg: The Church Question” *Church History* 61, no. 2 (June 1992): 180.

²⁵ W. Bradford Littlejohn, *The Mercersburg Theology and the Quest for Reformed Catholicity* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 17.

²⁶ D. G. Hart, *John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist*, American Reformed Biographies, series ed. D. G. Hart and Sean Michael Lucas (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2005), 107.

²⁷ “Berg, Joseph Frederick,” hanging file at the Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society, Lancaster, PA.

²⁸ Edward Tanjore Corwin, *A Manual of the Reformed Church in America 1628-1902* 4th ed. (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1902), 312-313.

Berg's message of disdain for the Roman Catholic Church was well received during the 1840's. Any of Nevin and Schaff's teachings that resembled the life or tradition of the Roman church was regarded as heresy for the spirit of the times moved leaders such as Berg to believe that the further one removed himself/herself from the Roman Catholic Church, the closer one came to apostolic purity. The Mercersburg Theology would cause him such grief that in March of 1852 he resigned the German Reformed Church and joined the Dutch Reformed. Later he would teach at that denomination's seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey (1861-1871). He was not alone in his frustration with the German Reformed Church. While there were those who spoke publicly in favor of Nevin and Schaff, at this time the *Lutheran Observer* and *Puritan Recorder* published articles sounding alarms concerning what was coming out of Mercersburg, and the Dutch Reformed Church cut ties with them.²⁹

Berg preached a sermon at the beginning of the synod of 1844, one week before Schaff was inaugurated as professor in the seminary. It was the opening sermon of the synod meeting and his retirement sermon as president of the synod. The address warned against sects, saying that "Sectarian bigotry is always a curse."³⁰ (Imagine his shock when he would learn that the professors at the denominational seminary would link his stream of thinking regarding church history with that of the sects!)

He made plain in his sermon that he understood the German Reformed Church not as a product in any way of the Roman Catholic system, but as a result of splinter groups who through the ages, enduring terrible persecution and who, having been forced into hiding in remote locations in Europe, preserved the true church of the apostles. A week later Schaff would offer a different view of church history and how the German Reformed Church got to be where it was at the time. In presenting an alternative view, he would trample on Berg's sacred, anti-Romanist ground.

Earlier that year, on May 3, there were riots involving Irish Catholics in the Kensington section of Philadelphia. Many in America hated Catholics and were working to promote a movement that only native-born Protestant Americans could serve as public leaders. Such were represented in the Native American Party which was actively involved in society. In the Philadelphia riots thirty-nine houses were destroyed and two Catholic churches were burned.³¹ Berg edited the *Protestant Banner* during the early 1840's and later the *Protestant Quarterly*. These papers were filled with ant-Romanist articles. The articles addressed topics such as monasticism, Jesuit activity, superstition and magic, etc. In an article entitled "Moral Tendencies of Popery" he challenged anyone to show proof where the discipline and government of the Roman church ever improved the

²⁹ Littlejohn, 17.

³⁰ Joseph Berg, "A Sermon Delivered at the Opening of the Synod of the German Reformed Church, at Allentown, Pa., October 17th, 1844" *Weekly Messenger* 10, no. 10 (November 20, 1844): 1913.

³¹ Good, 275-276.

morals of a country. He claimed that the opposite was true – that Roman Catholic countries are plunged into the depths of depravity.³²

Berg published several books against Romanism such as *Lectures on Romanism* (1840) and *The Great Apostasy...* (1842) and in 1843 attempted (unsuccessfully) to convince the synod of the German Reformed Church to condemn Roman Catholic baptism as invalid.³³ He was not alone in his crusade against Romanism. In 1845 the Presbyterian General Synod (Old School), against Hodge's sentiment, did condemn Roman baptism as invalid, referring to the Roman Catholic Church as having "long since become utterly corrupt and hopelessly apostate."³⁴

Berg published *The Old Paths* in the spring of 1845. In it he presented the Reformation as a return to the New Testament church. He identified the Roman church as the great apostasy, having nothing to do with the true church. The true church was instead to be traced through Polycarp, Irenaeus and the Waldensians in Europe. In the preface he denied that "the Protestant Church is merely a Reformed Romanism."³⁵

In it he also made a statement that revealed a characteristic of his reasoning. He was an all-or-nothing fellow. Schaff was eclectic and was willing to take the good from even a poor system of thought. Schaff seemed to stay away from either/or choices in theological systems and instead pursued a mediating course of both/and. For instance, instead of an invisible or visible church, Schaff promoted one church that was both. Hear the attitude of Berg in this quote: "The church of Rome, and by this term we mean the Papal establishment as it now is, including all its present doctrines, rites and usages, this church has either *always* been the church of Christ or it has *never* been known or owned by the Lord. Either it is, and always has been since the period of its existence, *the apostacy*, or it is and always has been *the church*."³⁶

The fact that the sects through which Berg traced the history of what he regarded as the true church had been so violently persecuted by the Roman church during numerous centuries fostered suspicion and outright animosity toward anything that seemed Romanish. Berg described Roman Catholic treatment of true saints

³² Joseph Berg, "Moral Tendencies of Popery" *Protestant Banner* I, no. 2 (June 17, 1842): 113.

³³ Good, 276.

³⁴ George Warren Richards, *History of the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in the United States 1825-1934 Evangelical and Reformed Church 1934-1952* (Lancaster, PA: Rudsill and Company, Inc., 1952), 250.

³⁵ Joseph Berg, *The Old Paths or A Sketch of the Order and Discipline of the Reformed Church before the Reformation, As maintained by the Waldenses Prior to that Epoch, and by the Church of the Palatinate, in the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1845), vii.

³⁶ Berg, *The Old Paths*, ix.

in terms of the “attitude of a malignant demon, drunken with cruelty.”³⁷ He identified “persecution [as] an essential feature in the papal system.”³⁸

An article in the *Weekly Messenger* of the German Reformed Church in 1843 (unknown author) also traced the lineage of the true church through the sects to the Reformation. It said, “I challenge anyone to trace through any other branch of the Christian Church an Apostolic Succession so unbroken and satisfactory.”³⁹ It explained that the true church in Europe traced its way back through Polycarp to the Apostle John. After Polycarp, bishops settled in the south of Gaul and then the Rhone River region, afterwards being driven into the mountains of Germany and Switzerland by persecution. They resurfaced during the Reformation.

In another edition of the *Weekly Messenger*, one in which a part of Schaff’s ordination proceedings were printed, there was an article entitled “What Are Ministers to Do in the Great Controversy of the Age.” It says that the “high sounding title ‘the holy Catholic Church’ was unknown to such simple hearted writers as Peter, Paul and John...” It goes on to call all to beware of “those whose sympathies are with that organized, visible communion, called the ‘one Catholic and Apostolic church,’ rather than with the vast communion of believers which constitute Christ’s true spiritual body.” It urges readers to study the simplicity of the primitive church and to learn of how the Roman hierarchy developed and so “to trace the growth and establishment of that spiritual despotism which through ages of darkness held the world in chains.” It claims that “The true antagonist to formalism is spirituality – spirituality not in words and opinions, but in life and power.”⁴⁰

The tension was forming for a battle concerning the concepts of a visible and an invisible church, between a faith that emphasized the spirit only versus one which regarded spirit and body, the immaterial and the material, to be inseparably joined which would force both parts to be regarded together. For Nevin and Schaff, there seems to have been little emphasis on the invisible church as the only true church. In an article from the *Protestant Banner* which Berg edited, the author stated that the Catholic church tries to make the church visible through apostolic authority which becomes “a spiritual despotism which allows no authority to the Word of God, farther than what may be determined by what it calls the Church.” It goes on to explain that Peter, the Roman church’s “original autocrat” did not wield physical authority over Ananias and Sapphira and so never had them arrested and executed.⁴¹

A sermon Joseph Berg preached in 1839 observing the one hundredth anniversary of the German Reformed congregation of which he was pastor had

³⁷ Berg, “Moral Tendencies of Popery,” 113.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

³⁹ *Weekly Messenger* 9, no. 13 (December 12, 1843): 1717.

⁴⁰ *Weekly Messenger*, 9, no. 50 (August 28, 1844): 1868.

⁴¹ “Papacy,” *Protestant Banner* I, no. 2 (June 17, 1842): 118.

Proverbs 22:28 as its text: “Remove not the ancient land-mark, which thy fathers have set.” He included among ancient landmarks the Heidelberg Catechism. He said, “Let no man tell us that they are antiquated and obsolete, and that God’s truth needs revision and emendation!”⁴² It was not that Nevin and Schaff would clamor for revision and emendation. Instead, they would claim that they, in continuity with the historic church, upheld what was truly the ancient landmarks and accuse Berg and rationalists and pietists and sects of pirating the ancient landmarks and assigning new meaning to them.

The fact that some of Nevin and Schaff’s students later joined the Roman church opened the door for further attacks on the Mercersburg movement. Berg charged Schaff with elevating the church above Christ, the sacraments above personal faith and tradition above the Bible.

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⁴² Joseph Berg, “The Ancient Land-Mark, being the Substance of a Discourse Preached September 29, 1839 by Joseph F. Berg, on the Centenary Anniversary of the Organization of the German Reformed Church on Race Street, Philadelphia” (Office of the Christian Observer, 1840).