

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 FIVE (cont)

Seeking Perspective by Comparison

The attacks on Nevin and Schaff did not succeed in sequestering them as an aberrant blip on the timeline of theological development throughout history. Charles Hodge, whom we might consider to be steeped in Puritan ideals, not only attacked Nevin but also Calvin on the topic of union with Christ, claiming that the magisterial reformer pandered to Lutherans on that topic and then fell short of holding true to the Reformation's position on justification by grace through faith.¹ Calvin taught that justification, sanctification, adoption and glorification all flow from union with Christ. Justification he discerned to be imputation of righteousness and sanctification as impartation of the life of Christ.² His writings seem to have left the door open for further development as to whether union precedes justification. Does union with Christ exist before one consciously exercises faith? Or does it result from forensic justification?

Similar to the later Nevin, as Evans summarizes Calvin, one finds that Calvin maintained a tension between the objective and subjective. What the Spirit produces objectively must be subjectively realized in the person who is in union with Christ. The Holy Spirit serves to bond the believer and Christ and creates faith in a believer which itself is not meritorious but ingrafts a person into Christ. The experience of faith is how one comes to know and be assured of union with Christ. Calvin did not view union with Christ through sacraments as of a different quality than the union developed through the Word. Both "offer and set forth Christ to us" (Institutes IV, 14, 17).³ Evans summarized Calvin's view on baptism as that it is "a real and objectively efficacious means of uniting the believer with Christ."⁴ This, too, ties Nevin back to Calvin. The objective quality of baptism cannot be counted complete without the later exercise of faith.

¹ Evans, 1.

² Ibid., 7-9.

³ Ibid., 14-15, 17.

⁴ Ibid., 17-18.

Regarding the Lord's Supper one finds in Calvin that the partaker of the bread and cup partakes by faith of Christ, not just by the Spirit only, but also by flesh and blood. In other words, union with Christ involves His incarnate humanity and not only His deity. It is more than receiving benefits from Him. Calvin's commentary on John 6:51 records, "For as the eternal Word of God is the fountain of life, so His Flesh is a channel to pour out to us the life which resides intrinsically, as they say, in His divinity. In this sense it is called life-giving, because it communicates to us a life that it borrows from elsewhere."⁵ Christ's humanity serves as a channel both for justification and sanctification. One truly partakes of Jesus' humanity, of His substance, which is communicated by the Holy Spirit who can join what is separated by physical distance.⁶ Considering Nevin's theses may be easier in light of the foundation laid in Calvin's understanding of union with Christ.

Calvin debated Andreas Osiander who had rejected Melancthon's position on forensic justification because he believed the latter taught a formal imputation of Christ's righteousness without recognizing a common life of the believer with Christ. Osiander claimed such a doctrine to be a legal fiction and promoted justification as a communication of essential righteousness as a divine substance which makes the believer actually and completely righteous. Much of that language sounds similar to Nevin's.

The reason for Calvin's refutation of Osiander was that he denied the idea of Christ's essence being inter-mingled with the believer's, for that would make a believer a part of God. Calvin embraced being united with Christ's substance but not His essence. Further, Osiander promoted an unmediated mixture of divine and human available to be partaken of by the believer. Calvin countered with a mediated participation in the divine-human Christ, mediated through a "substantial communion with Christ's incarnate humanity." Thus the flesh of Christ is to be regarded as a fountain to us. The Spirit transfers life to Christ's people from the substance of His flesh. It is not physical molecules which are significant in the Lord's Supper (as in transubstantiation) but the animating force of Christ's life.⁷ To summarize, Calvin stood with Luther in defending forensic justification, but against Osiander who promoted an unmediated union with deity as a means of transfusing righteousness into the believer. Both the transforming and forensic benefits of salvation flow from union with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁸

As the *ordo salutis* was later developed in Reformed federal/covenantal thought, justification began to be considered as a "punctiliar divine declaratory act which

⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶ Ibid., 22, 23.

⁷ Ibid., 24, 26-27.

⁸ Ibid., 31, 34.

logically and temporally precedes sanctification.”⁹ But Calvin regarded it as an ongoing state of receiving mercy to cover the sinner. The receiving is accomplished through Word and sacrament. His position seems to flow easily into the organic model Nevin later provided. In fact, Evans characterizes Calvin’s soteriology as organic in that the whole of salvation is communicated at once through spiritual union with Christ. The various aspects of salvation may take some time to unfold and manifest themselves. Whereas the later *ordo salutis* delineated both a temporal and logical sequence of divine work in salvation (election, calling, regeneration, etc.).¹⁰ Thus the focus of one (Calvin) is Christology and the other (federal theology) is theology proper.

Again turning to Evans’ insights, it is not that Puritans steeped in their world of covenant theology had in some way abandoned Christology. It is merely that they focused more on communion with Christ rather than union with Him. For Calvin the incarnation formed a strong focus when discussing the application of redemption to believers. Puritans would come to focus more on Christ’s humanity as an object of contemplation or devotion. In their desire to vigorously resist the Roman Catholic Church, they depreciated the sacraments. They stressed the subjective, the personal over the institutional or sacerdotal. They acknowledged the virtue or power or effects of sacraments but did not build an appreciation of the substance. This reflects a relative absence of writing among Puritans on Christ’s humanity as the instrument of applying redemption, something Calvin had emphasized. Instead there was a stress on the forensic benefits of union with Christ and the transforming work of the Spirit.¹¹ Federalists grew to see the Holy Spirit as representing rather than mediating Christ. That understanding applies to their view of the Eucharist as well. Christ’s humanity was relegated to merely a necessity to set the stage for the atonement.¹²

The later New England Puritans removed themselves even further from Calvin’s concept of union with Christ. It was this group that incited Schaff and Nevin to speak out. The Great Awakening’s emphasis on a point of conversion fit well with the punctiliar characteristic of justification in the *ordo salutis* and contradicted the organic, church-based unfolding of salvation that Nevin prescribed.

Jonathan Edwards bypassed the concept of organic union with Adam and explained original sin in terms of a divine constitution by a conveyance of original sin to all descendants of Adam. In other words, God imputed Adam’s sin to his posterity. They did not organically participate in it.¹³ So neither is there regarded to be an organic participation in Christ. His humanity merely serves as a background to the atonement. For Edwards, grace is immediate and uncreated. The sacraments become unnecessary as a means of grace in his system of

⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 53, 54.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 78-81.

¹² Ibid., 83.

¹³ Ibid., 106, 111.

thought, and so they become for him only symbolic of Christ without the Savior's real presence. Instead, the elements of the Lord's Supper serve as Christ's ambassadors to extend invitation and assure of His love.¹⁴ One can see how students of church history such as Nevin and especially Schaff would be moved to defend the historic view of the importance of sacraments and of true union with Christ's life. By the late 1700's the New Divinity school of thought which arose after Edwards' death widely held that moral merit or demerit could not be transferred from one person to another. Samuel Hopkins, a student of Edwards, held that believers still technically were deserving of punishment and were not worthy of reward and that there was no real transfer of a sinner's demerit to Christ nor a transfer of Christ's merit to the sinner.¹⁵ Union with Christ was then reduced to a willingness to share a common purpose and moral concern. Thus union with Christ would relate almost exclusively to sanctification and could easily become moralistic or legalistic. The emphasis earlier Puritanism retained on communion with Christ's humanity dissolved for Hopkins into an abstract divine intention or constitution to forgive those who meet conditions of repentance and belief.¹⁶ This resulted in the church becoming a voluntary society of friends of Jesus and not an organic unity. Baptism became a mere sign of human friendship toward Christ.¹⁷ Union with Christ lost the depth of mystical union as it transitioned into sanctification almost exclusively.

In contrast, Nevin saw the body of Christ as a living organism which imparts life to its members and not vice versa. The New England Puritans, he felt were making the church into a voluntary, human group, similar to a political party or temperance society.¹⁸ Salvation and church membership had become divorced into two separate entities so that salvation could be fostered in private if one desired, on a subjective, individualistic platform. Nevin countered with a firm belief that the church is the sphere where the grace of God moves one forward in Christian growth. Baptism for Nevin then was an induction into this sphere where one encounters the life of Christ.¹⁹ In his model, baptism calls for faith at some later point if not already present, and faith is then surrendering to God's initiative.

In the next generation of New England Puritans Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) who served as president of Yale adopted a view of faith that made it an adherence to a set of abstract propositions rather than union with Christ. In fact, union with Christ is a topic hard to find in his writings.²⁰ He continued the line of reasoning that denied imputation of merit/demerit, so justification was not to be rooted in Christ but in His death. Evans summarizes, "Having minimized the objective solidarity of the Christian with Christ, and having robbed the sacraments of

¹⁴ Ibid., 112.

¹⁵ Ibid., 122, footnote.

¹⁶ Ibid., 124, 126.

¹⁷ Ibid., 127.

¹⁸ Haroutunian, 94-95.

¹⁹ Ibid., 103.

²⁰ Evans, 134-135.

objective efficacy, the anxious were relegated to their own subjectivity.”²¹ The stage was then set for Nevin and Schaff to respond with an insistence on objective union with Christ and the significance of the sacraments as a means of partaking of Christ’s life. They wanted to return to the Biblical sacramental views of Calvin and the earlier Reformed confessions.²² Nevin attempted to mediate between the moralism of New England and Princeton’s doctrinal emphases.²³ His approach would not mesh with Hodge’s rational ways which were apt to reject anything that appeared mystical like Calvin’s view of union with Christ.

Returning to the seventeenth century, the earlier Puritans did not evoke such a strong response from Nevin, although he would have had objections to what he perceived to be the abstract nature of federalism. Thomas Boston in Part II of *Man’s Fourfold State* addresses the mystical union. His focus is on the union between Christ and individuals who are broken off from Adam’s life and now grafted into Christ to partake of His life. He insists that Christ lives in believers as surely as our souls live in our bodies. What he describes is more than legal union but is supported by the law because Christ served as Surety to fulfill the law in behalf of sinners.²⁴ Adam is seen as the natural and moral root of humanity in the covenant of works. Since the Messiah was the seed of the woman, He was not regarded as having been represented by Adam in the fall. Since a branch cannot grow from two stocks simultaneously, one must be broken off from Adam and grafted into Christ.²⁵ All are born into this world as branches on a killing stock, for the root of the stock (Adam), died in Paradise. What is transmitted to Adam’s posterity is a corrupt nature, guilt, the curse and death. Boston describes very practically the effects of the curse when he says that because of it one’s prosperity destroys him, religious activity yields no profit, learning puffs up and one’s own work prevents him from coming to Christ.²⁶ It would not be hard to brand this teaching as organic in nature and to read Boston’s words as the summation of participating organically in Adam and not in some abstract way having guilt imputed to a person.

Boston further employs organic terms when he depicts Jesus as the Branch (Zechariah 3:8), the Root (Isaiah 11:10) and both Root and Branch together (Revelation 21:16). By Him divine life is diffused, faith serving as the instrument along which life flows. Believers who are united to this new stock are united to the whole Christ – specifically to His human nature as flesh of His flesh and bone

²¹ Ibid., 137.

²² Ibid., 147.

²³ Ibid., 155.

²⁴ Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State, of Primitive Integrity; Entire Depravity; Begun Recovery; and Consummate Happiness or Misery* The Whole Works of the Late Reverend Thomas Boston of Ettrick, vol. VIII (Aberdeen: George and Robert King, 1850), 177-179.

²⁵ Ibid., 181-182.

²⁶ Ibid., 186.

of His bone (Ephesians 5:30), and to His divine nature (sharing the Spirit of Christ as in Romans 8:9; and 1 John 4:15).²⁷

John Owen in *Communion with God* wrote that the Old Testament saints did not know boldness before God, but the being of Christ took away the distance between humans and God.²⁸ Owen further describes communion as God communicating Himself to believers who give themselves to Him which actions again all flow from union with Christ, as he describes the sweetness of communing with Christ, something it is hard to imagine Nevin writing, as sweet communion did not seem to be a frequent theme of his writings.²⁹

J. V. Fesko summarizes Owen on union with God by stating he recognized all the benefits of redemption flow from that union. Union for Owen is more than an intellectual concept. It is as Fesko says, a “spiritual conjugal bond effected by the Holy Spirit.”³⁰ He sees no contradiction between holding to union with God and to the *ordo salutis*. He places justification first in the order of salvation because Romans 4:5 says that God justifies the ungodly. Therefore, it must occur before all other aspects of redemption which are inseparable from justification.³¹

Owen was the chief influence on the Savoy Declaration, and in section 11:1 he wrote that justification is not accomplished by God infusing righteousness into sinners but by the pardoning and accepting them as righteous for Christ’s sake and not because of anything accomplished in them or by them.³² He wanted to guard against the Roman Catholic doctrine of double justification which first sees an infusion of a habit of grace or charity placed into the recipient at baptism and then secondly recognizes the works produced by that infused grace.³³ He wanted to guard against turning sanctification into justification. Yet one would not violate what Owen was trying to avoid by seeing justification as being declared righteous because inserted into Christ’s life as per Nevin. Justification and sanctification can still be kept separate, and there is not the risk of adopting a justification by works which Owen resisted.

As Owen wrote on imputation he spoke of a “coalescence into one mystical person” with Christ by faith. He places forensic imputation as an outgrowth of union with Christ.³⁴ At one point he said, “Our actual interest in the satisfaction of

²⁷ Ibid., 188.

²⁸ John Owen, *Communion with God: Of Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, each person distinctly, in love, grace, and consolation* (Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2016), 7.

²⁹ Ibid., 8, 41.

³⁰ J. V. Fesko, “John Owen on Union with Christ and Justification” *Themelios* 37.1 (2012): 12.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 13.

³³ Ibid., 14.

³⁴ John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith* rpt. (Lexington, KY: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 190. This is the same language used by Calvin cited earlier.

Christ depends on our actual insertion into his mystical body by faith, according to the appointment of God.”³⁵

Owen offers a theory as to how sinners become righteous through imputation but Christ does not become a sinner through imputation. He believed that the imputation of sin to Christ took place before any union between Him and sinners. However, after sinners are placed in union with Christ His righteousness is imputed to them in a way that makes them righteous.³⁶ Fesko points out, “Given that Christ’s suretyship is legal in nature and involves the imputation of the sins of the elect to Christ and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the elect as a stipulation of the *pactum salutis*, Owen rests redemption upon the forensic.”³⁷ Nevin would recognize the legal aspect of redemption but not devoid of the organic union or partaking of Christ’s life. In *The Doctrine of the Saints’ Perseverance*, Owen presents Christ and believers as making one mystical body. Would that not imply a common or shared life as the members of the body partake of the life of its Head?³⁸

Remember that one of Owen’s goals was to distinguish between justification and sanctification. When understood in that light, it is not terribly difficult to find more common ground with Nevin than one might expect. Fesko wrote regarding Owen’s position, “Or stated another way: the proximate source of the believer’s redemption is union with Christ with its dual benefits of justification and sanctification. Justification has priority, however, over sanctification because at its core is the perfect and complete imputed righteousness of Christ, the ultimate cause of which is Christ’s voluntary acceptance and promise to be covenant surety for the elect in the *pactum* between the Father and the Son.”³⁹ If Owen’s forensic justification is rooted in union with Christ, is that union with Christ strictly a legal matter as well?

In *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, Owen argued that the use of the term justification in Scripture is always forensic, rendering a judgment that determines one’s relationship to the law (e.g., Deuteronomy 25:1; Proverbs 17:15).⁴⁰ Perhaps Nevin would not have argued against it being exclusively a legal term apart from being inserted into the life of Christ. He would argue that one is declared righteous and free from the guilt of the law because of participating in the life of Christ, not that any gracious habit is infused as the Roman Catholic position maintained.

³⁵ Ibid., 198.

³⁶ Ibid., 323. Also, Fesko, 16-17.

³⁷ Fesko, p. 18.

³⁸ John Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed* The Works of John Owen, vol. XI ed., William H. Goold (Oxford: Leon, Lichfield, 1654), 339.

³⁹ Fesko, 18.

⁴⁰ Owen, *Justification by Faith*, 111.

Among other Puritans, Richard Baxter stated that unless one is planted in and lives in Christ, he has nothing else from God. The Westminster Larger Catechism places union with Christ as antecedent to justification, sanctification or all other benefits.⁴¹ These do not seem to preclude a participation in Christ's humanity. The Puritan Thomas Cole in *A Discourse of Regeneration* cited the incarnation as that on which the believer's union with Christ is founded. He said, "The Human Nature of Christ is the foundation of all our Communion with God: our access to God is through the veil of his flesh." And further, "The Hypostatical Union of the Divine and Human Nature in the Person of Christ, was in order to the Spiritual Union of our Persons to the Person of Christ."⁴² Cole also defined regeneration as "implantation of the soul into Christ."⁴³

Add to that some words from John Bunyan who said concerning the indwelling of God in a believer that such "begins first in its Eminency, by his Possessing our Flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ."⁴⁴

Thomas Goodwin identified three levels of union. First there is union with Christ before creation. Second, that union was developed by the incarnation. Third, Christ then acts to "take the soul, to work in it all that he as a common person hath wrought for it."⁴⁵ The language about Christ being a common person strikes a great similarity with Nevin's generic humanity. In like fashion, Jeremiah Burroughs called Adam and Christ "publicke persons."⁴⁶ He wrote, "Christ is wonderful in his sufferings, because he suffered as a common Person, he did not suffer as a particular man." Goodwin, also, calls Christ "a person representative."⁴⁷ He further stated, "Our life is bound up in the bundle of the life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."⁴⁸ Yet elsewhere he denies that specifically the humanity of Christ is the medium by which the divine nature is united to believers.⁴⁹ His reasoning begins from a position that Old Testament saints were united to Christ as their Head no less than New Testament saints. "It could not then be by the physical virtue put forth by the human instrumentality of such a king." He argues that the Son of God had to unite with Old Testament saints apart from the incarnation. No Scripture proofs are offered to support his line of thought. Goodwin went further to say that if Old Testament saints had immediate union with the Son and New Testaments saints share union mediated only through His

⁴¹ R. TudorJones, "Union with Christ: The Existential Nerve of Puritan Piety" *Tyndale Bulletin* 41.2 (1990): 188.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴³ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 487.

⁴⁴ Jones, 189.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁴⁶ Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Saints Happiness* (London: Printed by M. S. for Nathaniel Brook at the Angel in Cornhill, 1660), 243.

⁴⁷ Jones, 195.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴⁹ Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, Vol. II, Nichol's Series of Standard Divines (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1861), 401-402.

human nature, that the Old Testament saints enjoyed a higher union with greater privilege.⁵⁰ John 1 indicates that it was expressly through the incarnation that John and the other Apostles experienced the glory of God. Goodwin's assumptions about a mysticism of direct union with God as Spirit apart from the incarnation are not able to be supported with Scripture.

John Flavel said union with Christ is more than mental and not physical. He added that it is more than "union by covenant only," and more than love or affection. The covenant union is dependent on mystical union. He describes the union as being incorporation into and not only adhesion to Christ.⁵¹ These phrases about being more than union by covenant only in terms of a participation in the life of Christ seem to mesh well with Nevin's insistence on insertion into the life of Christ. Flavel notes that this union is possible only because of the incarnation and that it knits the heart of the one participating intimately to Christ. All spiritual well-being flows from it. It is efficacious and indissoluble.⁵² After reviewing various Puritan writers on the topic, R. Tudor Jones concluded, "It is the humanity of the God-man that provides the ontological bridge between us and the divine nature."⁵³ John Flavel credited the hypostatical union with advancing human nature in Christ far beyond the capabilities of any other person.⁵⁴ None of the Puritans surveyed proposes theosis or an essential union as the members of the Trinity share.

In reviewing the Puritan use of federal theology to describe union and its benefits, Jones speaks of the tendency when developing covenant theology to employ a rationalistic scholasticism that goes beyond what is strictly Scriptural.⁵⁵ His conclusions sound similar to themes found in Nevin.

Considering how important the objective presence of Christ in the collective church was in Nevin's thought, while the Puritans obviously employed a contrasting approach to ecclesiology, it should be noted that in the Puritan David Clarkson's "Public Worship to be Preferred Before Private," as he argues for a priority of public worship over private, individual worship, he wrote "There is more of the Lord's presence in public worship than in private." He believed that the promise from Christ "I am with you always" in Matthew 28 was given to the church employing the ordinances entrusted to her and not to individuals. Those ordinances are given for the perfecting of the saints (Ephesians 4).⁵⁶ His direction

⁵⁰ Ibid., 402.

⁵¹ John Flavel, *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* vol. II (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820), 38-39.

⁵² Jones, 192.

⁵³ Ibid., 193.

⁵⁴ John Flavel, "Of Christ's Wonderful Person by John Flavel," retrieved from www.monergism.com/christ%E2%80%99s-wonderful-person-john-flavel, 3.

⁵⁵ Jones, 195.

⁵⁶ David Clarkson, "Public Worship to be Preferred Before Private," retrieved from www.covenanter.org/reformed/2015/8/18/david-clarksons-sermon-on-public-worship-to-be-preferred-before-private?rq=david%20clarkson, 3-4.

is more practical than doctrinal and certainly not sacramental, instead focusing on the subjective benefits, but it demonstrates an awareness of the significance of the church if one is to have life. What is implied is that the objective nature of the church and its offices serves as a safeguard against runaway subjectivity. Subjective, ecstatic, private experiences are not to be trusted if they array themselves against the elements of public worship.⁵⁷ Clarkson expresses that pulling away from public ordinances is pulling away from God.⁵⁸

Final Thoughts

The Mercersburg Theology continues to this day to stir controversy. Nevin fell outside the lines on some favorite doctrinal tests (e.g., limited atonement) and bore influence from German philosophy which is counted as taboo, but neither of those factors place him outside the field of real usefulness to one who wishes to contemplate the significance of union with Christ. The similarities with Puritan theology indicate that often the differences were those of emphases and not of fundamental content.

On the Puritan side, there is not found a perfectly monolithic solidarity on matters pertaining to union. Nor are they free from philosophical influences that the present conservative, Reformed establishment shies away from. The mysticism of some is not what some modern Reformed readers expect to find.

Nevin emphasized sacraments over the Word which brings life. The Puritans emphasized the Word over the sacraments which mediate the life of Christ. Would not the best choice to be to indulge in the practical and spiritually nourishing writings of the Puritans informed by the high-church view of Nevin and Schaff? Reformed churches claim to receive Word and sacrament both as means of grace. The Puritans elevated the Word in reaction to the empty sacramental ritualism of the Roman church, perhaps going too far in attempting to rid the church of all things resembling Romanism and in doing so distancing themselves from the sacramentalism of the magisterial reformers such as Calvin. Nevin and Schaff held up sacraments against the rational scholasticism of Hodge and the man-centered revivalism of Finney. They perceived a great threat in what New England Puritanism had become, forecasting that once a low view of the church was adopted, the next step would be a low view of the Apostles and finally a low view of the Scriptures, culminating in an empty liberalism.

Regarding the tug-of-war between the objective and subjective orientations in Christianity, Schaff spoke the maxim that the union of both is the perfection of both. Nevin becomes so consumed with avoiding doctrine based on abstract decrees which are isolated from organic unity that he seems to negate that God can work through decrees at will and is not bound to work exclusively by organic

⁵⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 9.

principles as Nevin defines them. If God should choose who will be saved before the foundation of the world, one cannot explain away Scriptures such as those in John 6 which allude to the Father giving the elect to the Son by decree.

Puritans stress subjective response to the degree that they are in danger of allowing the church to become a voluntary society instead of an organic union that gives life to its members. Yet as the latter part of the chapter illustrates, they were not completely devoid of the significance of the collective church. Nor was the idea of organic participation in Christ's life completely absent. Just as there has been much debate in the history of the church over Paul's statements about justification by faith without works and James' on justification by faith with works, and there have been attempts to explain that there is no real contradiction based on gaining an understanding of the specific settings each addressed, so a degree of the separation between Nevin and the Puritans has to do with the specific setting each was addressing.

Nevin attempted to mediate between rationalistic, abstract-oriented orthodoxy and runaway subjective mysticism by presenting Christ's humanity as the link of believers with the divine nature. In the same way he sought to mediate between transubstantiation and the view that the Lord's Supper is only a memorial designed to evoke emotional responses. It is the opportunity to be nourished by Christ's humanity.

At first glance, it seems Nevin's arguments are defeated by Owen's teaching that justification is legal. Yet the two do not have to be counter to one another if the legal declaration of righteousness is founded on the very life of Christ existing within the believer. The emphasis on partaking of Christ should serve as a safeguard to those who might feast on the beauty and rich depth of Puritan doctrine and allow it to begin to replace the person of Christ in their trust and affections.

One who embraces Mercersburg and the seventeenth-century Puritans together should enter corporate worship with the fullest of expectations and have the highest regard for and loyalty toward the church, loving it as the continuing embodiment of the very life of Christ and expecting to be nourished by Christ in Word and sacrament.

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