



The Mercersburg Theology and the Quest for Reformed Catholicity:

W. Bradford Littlejohn

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Description: In the mid nineteenth century, Reformed churchmen John Nevin and Philip Schaff launched a fierce attack on the reigning subjectivist and rationalist Protestantism of their day, giving birth to what is known as the "Mercersburg Theology." Their attempt to recover a high doctrine of the sacraments and the visible Church, among other things, led them into bitter controversy with Charles Hodge of Princeton Seminary, as well as several other prominent contemporaries. This book examines the contours of the disagreement between Mercersburg and Hodge, focusing on four loci in particular-Christology, ecclesiology, sacramentology, and church history. W. Bradford Littlejohn argues that, despite certain weaknesses in their theological method, the Mercersburg men offered a more robust and historically grounded paradigm for the Reformed faith than did Hodge. In the second part of the book, Littlejohn explores the value of the Mercersburg Theology as a bridgehead for ecumenical dialogue, uncovering parallels between Nevin's thought and prominent themes in Anglican, Catholic, and Orthodox theology, as well as recent debates within Reformed theology. This thorough study of one of the most creative movements in American theology offers an alluring vision of the quest for Reformed catholicity that is more relevant today than ever.

Endorsements: "For an increasing number of Protestants, the dismemberment of Protestantism is a scandal, an oozing wound in the body of Christ, leaving behind a twisted Christ as painful to behold as the Isenheim altarpiece. But what is a Protestant to do? The Reformation was itself a rent in the vesture of Christ, so how can Protestants object to the tin-pot Luthers and Machens who faithfully keep up the Reformation tradition of fissure and fragmentation? . . . We need an American Reformation that recovers the original catholic vision of Protestantism, and in pursuing this, American Protestants do well to take a page from early twentieth-century Catholics and embark on a program of ressourcement, and to this program Littlejohn's book is a valuable contribution . . . Here he explains the Mercersburg Theology fairly and thoroughly, and shows how Mercersburg interacts not only with nineteenth-century Reformed theology but with the developments in Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican churches over the past two centuries. Above all, Littlejohn is deeply conscious that historical theology is never an end in itself, never an exercise in mere antiquarianism. We remember so that we can know how to go forward, and we seek to recover lost resources so that we can pave a fresh future. [Littlejohn] demonstrates how Mercersburg, and especially Nevin, can assist in forming an American Protestant churchliness." --from the foreword by Peter J. Leithart. "Deeply sympathetic to the Mercersburg theologians, Nevin and Schaff, Littlejohn presents a plea for Reformed theology to take Church, sacraments, and apostolic succession seriously as divine means of salvation. By linking Mercersburg to the Oxford Movement, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the Catholic movement of nouvelle théologie, this book contributes toward a renewal of Reformed theology. Littlejohn's ressourcement of the Mercersburg Theology is courageous and stands as a model of solid ecumenical theology." --Hans Boersma, author of *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross* and *Nouvelle Théologie & Sacramental Ontology* "Littlejohn has joined a growing number of fine scholars who have recently discovered the Mercersburg movement. Long overdue, research into this unsung and brilliant faculty of philosophers, theologians, church historians, and pastors has begun to reveal one of America's most accomplished yet neglected schools of thought. With his focus on John W. Nevin, the school's theologian, Littlejohn's contribution is most welcome for the new and relatively untreated areas he opened up, namely Mercersburg and the Oxford movement and Mercersburg and Eastern Orthodoxy. H

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