

**THE MYSTICAL PRESENCE; A  
VINDICATION OF THE REFORMED  
OR CALVINISTIC DOCTRINE OF  
THE HOLY EUCHARIST**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649654253

The Mystical Presence; A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy  
Eucharist by John W. Nevin

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**JOHN W. NEVIN**

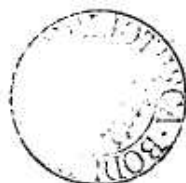
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A VINDICATION OF THE  
REFORMED OR CALVINISTIC DOCTRINE  
OF THE  
HOLY EUCHARIST.

BY THE  
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PHILADELPHIA:  
J. B. LIPPINCOTT & Co.  
1846.

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1846, by  
J. B. LIPPINCOTT & Co.,  
in the clerk's office of the District Court of the United States, in and for the  
eastern district of Pennsylvania.

PHILADELPHIA:  
KING AND BAIRD, PRINTERS,  
No. 9 George Street.

## PREFACE.

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THE following work has grown directly out of some controversy which has had place, during the past year, in the German Reformed Church, on the subject to which it relates. This stands related to it, however, only as an external occasion, and has not been permitted to come into view, in any way, in the work itself.

It is not felt that any apology is needed for the publication.— This is found in the importance of its subject, which must be left of course to speak for itself.

As the Eucharist forms the very heart of the whole Christian worship, so it is clear that the entire question of the Church, which all are compelled to acknowledge, the great life-problem of the age, centres ultimately in the sacramental question as its inmost heart and core. Our view of the Lord's Supper must ever condition and rule in the end our view of Christ's person and the conception we form of the Church. It must influence at the same time, very materially, our whole system of theology, as well as all our ideas of ecclesiastical history.

Is it true that the modern Protestant Church in this country has, in large part at least, fallen away from the sacramental doctrine of the sixteenth century? All must at least allow, that there is some room for asking the question. If so, it is equally plain that it is a question which is entitled to a serious answer. For in the nature of the case, such a falling away, if it exist at all, must be connected with a still more general removal from the original platform of the Church. The eucharistic doctrine of the sixteenth

century was interwoven with the whole church system of the time; to give it up, then, must involve in the end a renunciation in principle, if not in profession, of this system itself in its radical, distinctive constitution. If it can be shown that no material change has taken place, it is due to an interest of such high consequence that this should be satisfactorily done. Or if the change should be allowed, and still vindicated as a legitimate advance on the original Protestant faith, let this ground be openly and consciously taken. Let us know, at least, where we are and what we actually do believe, in the case of this central question, as compared with the theological stand-point of our Catechisms and Confessions of Faith.

The relations of this inquiry to the question concerning the true idea of the Church, will easily be felt by every well-informed and reflecting mind. If the fact of the incarnation be indeed the principle and source of a new supernatural order of life for humanity itself, the Church, of course, is no abstraction. It must be a true, living, divine-human constitution in the world; strictly organic in its nature—not a *device* or contrivance ingeniously fitted to serve certain purposes beyond itself—but the necessary, essential form of Christianity, in whose presence only it is possible to conceive intelligently of piety in its individual manifestations. The life of the single Christian can be real and healthful only as it is born from the general life of the Church, and carried by it onward to the end. We are Christians singly, by partaking (having *part*) in the general life-revelation, which is already at hand organically in the Church, the living and life-giving body of Jesus Christ. As thus real and organic, moreover, Christianity *must* be historical. No higher wrong can be done to it than to call in question its true historical character; for this is, in fact, to turn it into a phantasm, and to overthrow the solid fact-basis on which its foundations eternally rest. It must be historical, too, under the form of the *Church*; for the *realness* of Christianity demands indispensably the presence of the general life of Christ, flowing with unbroken continuity from the beginning as the medium of all particular union with him from age to age. Then, again, the historical Church must be *visible*, or in other words,



not merely ideal, but actual. The actual may indeed fall short immeasurably of the idea it represents; the visible Church may be imperfect, corrupt, false to its own conception and calling; but still an actual, continuously visible Church there must always be in the world, if Christianity is to have either truth or reality in the form of a new creation. A purely invisible Church has been well denominated a *contradictio in adjecto*; since the very idea of a Church implies the manifestation of the religious life, as something social and common.

The whole conception that the externalization of the Christian life is something accidental only to the constitution of this life itself—a sort of mechanical machinery, to help it forward in an outward way—is exceedingly derogatory to the Church, and injurious in its bearings on religion. An outward Church is the necessary form of the new creation in Christ Jesus, in its very nature; and must continue to be so, not only through all time, but through all eternity likewise. Outward social worship, which implies, of course, forms for the purpose, is to be regarded as something essential to piety itself. A religion without externals, must ever be fantastic and false. The simple utterance of religious feeling, by which the spirit takes outward form, is needed, not for something beyond itself, but for the perfection of the feeling itself. Forms, in this sense, not as sundered from inward life, of course, but as embracing it, enter as a constituent element into the very life of Christianity. As a real, human, historical constitution in the world, the outward and inward in the Church can never be divorced, without peril to all that is most precious in the Christian faith. We have no right to set the inward in opposition to the outward, the spiritual in opposition to the corporeal, in religion. The incarnation of the Son of God, as it is the principle, forms also the true measure and test, of all sound Christianity, in this view. To be *real*, the human, as such, and of course the divine also in human form, must ever externalize its inward life. All thought, all feeling, every spiritual state, must take body, (in the way of word, or outward form of some sort,) in order to come at all to any true perfection in itself. This is the proper, deep sense of all liturgical services in religion. The necessity here

affirmed is universal. The more intensely *spiritual* any state may be, the more irresistibly urgent will ever be found its tendency to clothe itself, and make itself complete, in a suitable external form. Away with the imagination, then, that externals in Christianity, (including the conception of the visible Church itself,) are something accidental only to its true constitution, a cunningly framed device merely for advancing some interest foreign from themselves. To think of the Church, and of Christian worship, as *means* simply to something else, is to dishonour religion itself in the most serious manner.

If the present work may serve to fix attention on the momentous point with which it is concerned, and thus contribute indirectly even to a clearer understanding of Protestant truth, I shall feel that it has not been written in vain. May God accept it, and crown it with his blessing.

J. W. N.

Mercersburg, April, 1846.

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