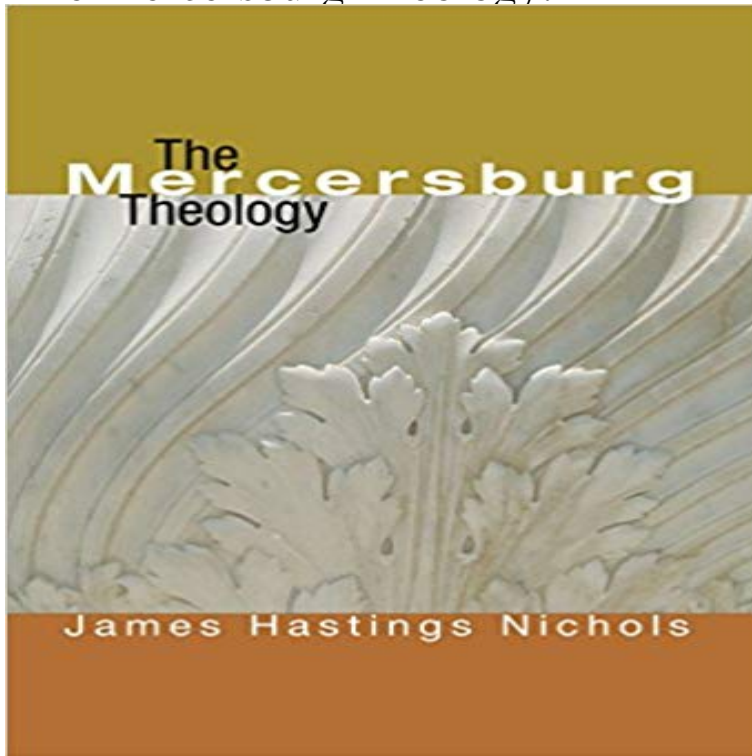


The Mercersburg Theology:



The Mercersburg theology was a protest against many of the Puritan tendencies dominant in American religion in the mid-nineteenth century. Its spokesmen emphasized the catholic heritage in Protestantism and fostered the ecumenical hope of a reunion of Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Orthodoxy. They presented a high church sacramental conception, as opposed to the predominant revivalistic, individualistic, and sectarian habit of mind. The movement was generally disapproved as Romanizing and its popular influence was accordingly minimal. The two creative writers were John Williamson Nevin, the theologian, and Philip Schaff, the historian and liturgical scholar, who taught together at the college and seminary of the German Reformed Church at Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. Their books, tracts, and periodical articles had only a limited circulation and are no longer generally accessible, having been little regarded in the intervening years. The general stance of the Mercersburg men was parallel to that of the high church Lutherans of Germany and the Tractarians in the Church of England. The movement was the chief American counterpart to these developments, since the American Episcopalian disciples of the Tractarians could scarcely be compared to Nevin and Schaff in theological stature. The Americans were more philosophically oriented than the Anglo-Catholics, utilizing the concepts of Schelling and Hegel to interpret the classical doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation and to define the relation of private judgment to Church tradition. They were also mediators to America of much of the mid-nineteenth-century German theological scholarship. The Americans were also more conscious than the Tractarians of the implications for theology of the new historical consciousness prevalent in Germany. Schaff set forth the

idea of the historical development in the same year as Newman's famous essay on the subject. But while the con

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