

# NICOTINE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Dedicated to Reformed Faith and Practice

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## Sabbath, Psalms, and Substack

This marks the first issue of the *Nicotine Theological Journal* published since the Winter issue of 2012. Truth be told, the lure of social media and blogging distracted from the rigors of publishing, however modest, the efforts of a so-called “journal.” The thrill of instantaneously posting a piece at a website, compared to the ho-hum assembly of roughly 7,000 words every quarter, laying out the pieces no matter how elementary the format, copyediting, printing the issue, and then mailing it to subscribers – you get the picture. The internet is flashy. A glorified newsletter is what it always was – what you do on a shoestring.

BUT A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE way to the glory of blogging. The internet crashed and lost its appeal.

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Andrew Sullivan, for instance, abandoned the Daily Dish for regular columns in print. Justin Taylor, who for a time was an aggregator without parallel in the New Calvinism world, barely posts more than four times a month for the Gospel Coalition. Of course, some websites persist. For politics, Powerline continues to provide a conservative slant on current affairs. In evangelical circles, Tim Challies manfully posts at least one piece a day, usually with a set of links to articles he is reading, though he also writes essays for his website, Challies.com.

The new social media outlets, as podcasts now inform us, are Substack and Patreon. Here writers and academics who used to blog for free have turned to what they commonly call “newsletters” and ask patrons to subscribe for access to content that is behind a paywall. It appears to be all on-line. Some have made it big in this environment, like Bari Weiss who left the New York Times for her own newsletter, or Glenn Greenwald, whom his co-editors at the Intercept forced off the news website he had founded. A lot of newsletter owners, however, only make enough to support a better brand of whiskey or pad the budget line for book buying. From this reader’s perspective, the Substack phenomenon looks a tad greedy and self-important. You create a newsletter because you think people will pay for what they have been reading for free. You also think that you are wise or smart enough to keep all those readers even after they have to pay for your material.

Substack, ironically enough, by virtue of its newsletter genre, could be seen as a vindication of the original NTJ. The editors way back in 1997 wanted an outlet for a confessional Reformed perspective on church life and a platform for critique of much of the overheated Reformed opinion about all and sundry matters of politics and society. They did not have money for anything ambitious, nor did they have the energy or bluster to attract patrons to start a whole new magazine or journal on the order of *First Things* or the original *Reformed Journal*. So they created a newsletter and called it a journal.

THE NEW ITERATION OF THE NTJ comes with fewer strings and but a couple wrinkles. The journal will be available as a PDF attachment at Oldlife.org and Nicotinetheologicaljournal.org. It will be free initially and then move to a subscription basis through the latter of the two websites (for now that’s the plan but technology being what it is and editors being the age they are, who knows?). The reason for subscriptions is mainly to cover expenses of websites and the small print runs of the journal we will produce for the sake of publicity. This means that readers who want a print copy will need to produce their own.

The wrinkles of the new and improved NTJ is the addition of contributing editors. We have recruited R. Scott Clark of Westminster California, Brad Isbell (PCA) of Presbycast fame, Ken Shepherd, a journalist who attends Wallace Presbyterian in Maryland, and Brian

The *Nicotine Theological Journal*, sponsored by the Old Life Theological Society, will likely be published four times a year. Its aim is to recover and sustain confessional Presbyterianism.

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Co-Editors: D. G. Hart and John R. Muether. Contributing editors, R. Scott Clark, Brad Isbell, Brian Lee, and Ken Shepherd.

Send correspondence, manuscripts, and donations to 101 Budlong St., Hillsdale, Michigan, 49242.

Submissions should not exceed 2,000 words.

Lee, a URC pastor in DC. Of course, we will still receive submissions from anyone. Articles should not run longer than 2,000 words. They are better if in the ball park of 1,000.

**D**espite these changes, the gap in regular publication, and the folly of following the holy grail of social media, the NTJ's editorial agenda remains the same:

*one of the besetting problems of twentieth-century confessional Presbyterianism is the huge disparity between faith and practice. Conservative Reformed folk have been very good (for the most part) about doctrinal fidelity. But they have not*

*been very astute about maintaining distinctively Reformed practices, and we believe that without the "plausibility structures" of these practices, Reformed orthodoxy will die a slow and painful death, which is another way of saying, it will have nothing to say about the way we daily order our lives. Confessional Presbyterians these days are virtually indistinguishable from any garden variety evangelical. They are involved in the work of their local churches, both on Sunday and throughout the week, they listen to Christian radio, subscribe to evangelical publications, watch wholesome television shows, and listen to Christian music. The odd thing, however, is that confessional Presbyterian theology is markedly different from the lowest-common-denominator theology that holds evangelicalism together. Yet, conservative Presbyterians behave in remarkably similar ways. Either that means there is really no difference between Presbyterianism and evangelicalism, or that Presbyterians have let evangelicals establish the patterns for how they practice the Christian faith.*

*OUR INTENTION HERE IS NOT to imply that Reformed believers will always look different from evangelicals, or even that Christians will always look different from non-believers. Reformed, evangelicals and non-believing people all eat from the bounty of God's creation. But while unbelievers do not ask for God's blessing upon their food, and while evangelicals pray before meals, Reformed believers of an older sort used to pray before and after meals along with reading from Scripture. And those who value the passing on of traditions from parents to children, in other words, who confess the importance of covenant relationships, as the Reformed should, may also linger longer over their meals, and recognize the virtue of fellowship, telling stories and*

*playing games. According to C. S. Lewis, "the sun looks down on nothing half so good as a household laughing together over a meal, or two friends talking over a pint of beer, or a man alone reading a book that interests him." Though Lewis was Anglican, we believe that when he wrote those lines he was expressing truths about the simplicity and depth of creature comforts that apply as much to Reformed Christians as to so-called liturgical ones.*

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## Presbyterians and Anglicans Together

**I**n 1985 Bob Webber (1933–2007) published a travel guide for Boomer evangelicals who wanted a little more altar in their altar call, *Evangelicals On The Canterbury Trail* (Waco: Word Books, 1985). By the time I met Bob, at Wheaton College, in 1995, he was still Episcopalian but some of his students had moved on to Eastern Orthodoxy. I remember meeting a freshman, whose hair had not yet dried from his Baptist immersion, who could not tell the difference between Theodosius and theosis, who was telling me that he had become "Greek Orthodox."

NEVERTHELESS, THOSE EVANGELICAL pilgrims like Bob Webber, who left Bob Jones for the *Book of Common Prayer*, are to be commended for being honest about their dissatisfaction with evangelical theology, piety, and practice and doing something about it. In this

essay, however, I wish to think about what Webber's journey has to say those nominal Presbyterians who are de facto Episcopalians and who should perhaps follow Webber on the trail to Canterbury or even to Constantinople.

**W**ebber gave six reasons for leaving Bob Jones for the Book of Common Prayer:

1. Mystery
2. The experience of worship—
3. Sacramental reality
4. Spiritual identity
5. Catholicity
6. Holistic spirituality

Webber was right that the revivalist fundamentalism he left behind was by parts rationalist, emotionally manipulative, marked by an inadequate appreciation of the sacraments as divinely ordained means of grace, lacking a sense of the catholicity of the church, and shot through with a world-denying version of Platonism. Webber concluded that the best place to find these missing qualities was in Anglicanism.

I RESPECTFULLY DISAGREE. Everything Webber said he was seeking could have been found in Geneva, as it were. He thought that he has already been there and done that but I think he misread the map. One day as we walked from the Billy Graham center to the other side of campus we talked about his spiritual and ecclesiastical pilgrimage. He was educated at Bob Jones, the old Reformed Episcopal Seminary in Philadelphia, at Covenant Seminary, and at Concordia Seminary, St Louis. His educational pilgrimage mirrored his theological and ecclesiastical pilgrimage. He mentioned that he had been raised among the Baptists, associated with the Bible Presbyterians, and then with the

Lutherans. In Canterbury Trail, he explained that, in 1972 he returned to his Episcopal influences.

HE BEGAN TEACHING AT WHEATON in 1968. Four years later, after Reformation day, after he gave a speech in chapel decrying the "tragedy of the Reformation," he became an Episcopalian. He repudiated the rationalism of his fundamentalist-revivalist tradition in favor of "the main-line," as he put it. Arguably, Webber turned from what I call the Quest for Illegitimate Religious Certainty" (QIRC) in fundamentalism to what I call the Quest for Illegitimate Religious Experience (QIRE) in his quest to encounter divine transcendence. He wrote of "becoming sacramental," and quoted Calvin but seems to have missed the fact that the Articles of Religion (art. 25) and the Book of Common Prayer only recognize two sacraments: holy baptism and holy communion. Indeed, in becoming Episcopalian, if the Articles of Religion have anything to say about it (e.g., art. 27), he adopted an arguably Zwinglian approach to the Supper rather than Calvin's more profoundly mysterious view of the body and blood of Christ as represented in his 1541 *Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper*, his Catechisms, the 1559 *Institutes* or perhaps most beautifully, in Belgic Confession Art. 35, where the churches confess that what is eaten by the believer is Christ's "proper, natural body and what is drunk is his proper, true blood" I am unaware of a higher view of the presence of the true body and blood of Christ in holy communion.

**I**t seems now, however, that there are a number of ostensible Presbyterians in our midst who would be happier in Canterbury or perhaps in Constantinople. After all, the Westminster Confession could not be clearer about where it stands

on the principle by which a Reformed worship service is to be organized: "But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 21.1).

**T**he Orthodox traditions use icons on the grounds that it is not in the least contrary to the second commandment to "honor icons as sacred representations, and to use them for the religious remembrance of God's works and of his saints; for when thus used icons are books, written with the forms of persons and things instead of letters" (The Longer Catechism of the Eastern Church, 1839, Q. 521). The Episcopalians at Westminster and Dort, however, opposed images of Christ but the Anglican principle, articulated in art. 20 of the Articles of Religion (as published in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer), says the church "hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in controversies of Faith: and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written...". In short, if it is not forbidden, the church may impose it. This was the church's answer to those dissenting bishops in the 1540s who resisted the imposition of the surplice etc.

IN PRACTICE, PARTICULARLY IN THE Presbyterian Church in America, one notices that candidates for ministry are regularly permitted to take exception to the Standards on the second and fourth commandments. The grounds usually given for taking exception to the Standards on the second commandment are closer to the Greek Orthodox catechism than they are to Shorter Catechism. PCA congregations have been known to put on a live nativity scene, featuring a child portraying

Christ. In 2021, a PCA missions agency published an image of Christ on its website and a review of presbytery records at a PCA General Assembly, in 2017, cited a presbytery that used an image of Christ in a bulletin for presbytery worship service. Such examples could easily be cited from across the denominations of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council. E.g., in my own denomination, the United Reformed Churches, it is not unknown for ministers to preach Sabbath evening catechism sermons on Lord's Day 35 (questions 96–98), in which the use of images of Christ is explicitly denounced as idolatry and plainly forbidden as contrary to God's holy law, while being supervised by the very icon rejected in the catechism.

In my experience, seminary students are usually able to articulate the principle of worship, which Calvin called the "rule of worship" (*regula culti*), but when asked to explain why, in light of the rule, their congregations do what they do in worship, the answer is invariably "because it is not forbidden." When they speak this way, they are theoretical Presbyterians but *practical* Anglicans. That practical Anglicanism runs below the surface too. Just as the Anglicanism envisioned by Webber in 1985 seems to have had little to do with Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, or Perkins, i.e., to say nothing of the English Reformation and the Articles of Religion, so too, for many Presbyterians the Standards are more honored by mouth than by practice. Historically, this approach to doctrinal standards has been more characteristic of Anglicans than Presbyterians. Certainly since the rise of the Latitudinarian movement and then Tractarianism, one may be a Reformational, Anglo-Catholic, low-church evangelical, and in the case of some parishes (e.g., St Aldates, Oxford) downright Pentecostal and remain contentedly Anglican or Episcopalian. As long as one is in formal submission to one's bishop, one is an Anglican. Thus, there are as many ways

to be Anglican as there are bishops. I recall hearing a sermon in England, in the early 1990s, in which the vicar was by turns, for five minutes at a time, a Latitudinarian, an Anglo-Catholic, and an evangelical. It was a remarkable performance and symbolic of the breadth of the Church of England.

IN PRACTICE, WHAT MAKES Anglicanism is not the Articles or even the Book of Common Prayer (Anglicans who love the BCP or the Articles are just as niche as P&R confessionalists). Rather, theologically, spiritually, and practically Anglicanism is whatever one makes of it. If Webber may have the five medieval ecclesiastical sacraments of confirmation, confession, marriage, holy orders, and unction (which were unknown as sacraments as late as the ninth century AD and not ratified in the church until AD 1274), in addition to the two dominical sacraments, then Anglicanism, like evangelicalism, is whatever Webber says it is. After all, the BCP knows of only two sacraments. When Presbyterian and Reformed Christians honor the Standards in theory but ignore them in practice, they are acting more like Anglicans than Presbyterians.

To the degree the real defining, universal characteristic of Episcopalianism is the episcopacy, we come to yet another way that some Presbyterians have become practical Anglicans: polity. The polity of Presbyterians would seem to be rather obvious since, as in Episcopalianism, it is in the name: governance by elders. Nevertheless, in at least two precincts in the PCA, it has, at times, been the custom of a senior pastor and a single session to plant and supervise multiple congregations for years at a time such that for considerable periods of time congregations are deliberately not

particularized and are intentionally without their own session. Formally this practice seems at least quasi-Episcopalian insofar as it replaces a plurality of elders with a single, quasi-Episcopal figure. Again, under the surface, it is not unknown in Presbyterian and Reformed presbyteries to see a single dominating figure function as in a quasi-Episcopal fashion but here we are thinking about an intentional, open, quasiaepiscopal system accepted in the courts of the church.

Bob Webber was a pilgrim. He was justifiably uncomfortable with QIRC-y fundamentalist-revivalism. He presumed he had given Geneva a fair shot. I doubt that but he found a home in the Anglican tradition. At least he recognized that he needed to move. My fondest wish is that my Presbyterian brothers would embrace the theology, piety, and practice of Standards with me but, if after prayerful reflection, they find that their conscience forbids it then those within the ranks of the P&R churches, who are dissatisfied with the Reformed principle of worship, our understanding and practice of the second commandment, and our practice of the Christian Sabbath, have before them the Canterbury Trail. Our Anglican friends will receive them happily and there they will be able to pursue their vision of ministry, mission, and the Christian life without the burdens of exceptions and the inefficiency of presbyterial polity.

R. Scott Clark

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## Machen vs. Women-A War He Never Fought

To anyone familiar with J. Gresham Machen's biography, the words, "Machen and women" will bring two facts to mind: that Machen never married and that he had a particularly intimate relationship with his mother. Much of what we know about Machen comes from the voluminous trove of letters to his mother. His views on segregation (shared in an early letter or two) have gotten him in particular trouble in the era of Wokeness. And in the era of Revoice there is new, if unfounded, speculation about his bachelorhood. And there is ongoing disagreement about the nature of his one (and only?) alleged romance with a Unitarian lady.

THE MORE ECCLESIAL-MINDED Machenite might well have another question: Where did Machen stand on the issues of women, office, and ordination in presbyterian churches, particularly his own? I, at least, have thought a lot about this murky issue. No biographers have cited comments from Machen on these issues, and if such comments existed, they would loom large in women's ordination debates that bubble up from time to time in conservative Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Some consider women's ordination a sort of canary in the confessional presbyterian coal mine, with any talk of approving it being viewed as indicators of faltering biblical fidelity or as a symptom of cultural compromise.

HISTORY MAY BE OUR ONLY HELPER IN discerning Machen's views, so here's some history. The northern Presbyterian Church in the USA (in which Machen labored until 1936) first ordained women as deacons, serving equally with

men, in 1923, though there may have been a less-formal deaconess role previously allowed or maintained, somewhat like many PCA churches have today. Machen's opinion on admitting women to the ordained officeriate is unknown. Maybe he was indifferent. Maybe he shared the views of his Princeton colleague, the great B.B. Warfield, who favored some sort of "deaconing women," to use a Tim Keller term.

MORE LIKELY, THE ISSUE WAS JUST not on Machen's radar...he was busy battling theological liberalism (which he called "a different religion from Christianity") in his Christian church. He described liberalism this way in his landmark book *Christianity and Liberalism* which was published the same year (1923) that pious PCUSA elders first laid hands on deaconing women. Machen was fighting for the life of his denomination in the 1920s, so it just may be that "little" things like deacons in skirts seemed insignificant compared to atrocities such as the Auburn Affirmation, which undermined nearly all the essential doctrines of the church.

By 1930 when women ruling elders were first ordained, Machen was fighting for his own ecclesial life, having become a *persona non grata* with PCUSA elites, and was fighting for the life of his newly-established seminary, having resigned from Princeton after nearly 25 years of association with the northern church's flagship theological school.

Machen was a busy man. Maybe he never married for that reason alone. He may also have lacked the time or energy to address the women-as-officers issue. We'll never know.

WHEN IT COMES TO WOMEN IN church office, the views of Robert Speer are not unknown. Speer was an esteemed, broad-church evangelical, a PCUSA missions

major-domo, and one of Machen's archnemeses. Speer, along with Princeton figures Charles Erdman and J. Ross Stevenson, represented the sort of peace-loving pious moderate that ultimately doomed the PCUSA to a slide into unbelief. He was a major supporter of the 1928 commission of fifteen elite women (Speer's wife among them) which met in Chicago. Their work, cheered and guided by Speer, led to three overtures, but Speer did not get all he wanted in 1930. The two proposals to de-sex the PCUSA book of church order entirely or allow women to serve in preaching roles failed. The one to allow female ruling elders passed.

Again, Machen's view of these issues is unknown. His friend Clarence Macartney was an outspoken but unsuccessful opponent of the changes. By this time Machen would have been loath to favor anything Speer supported, but...silence. Was it single-minded devotion to the most pressing issues or indifference that kept Machen from fighting these ecclesial innovations? Many conservative critics say that the great failure of Machen and his allies was the fact they did not file ecclesial charges. Rather, they simply argued, tried to persuade, and sought to win assembly votes and hold positions of influence. Maybe they should have been more concerned with "broken windows policing" of polity issues—issues which may have seemed small then, but seem huge today.

Whether the ordination of women to the offices of deacon, then to ruling elder was inevitable and just a symptom of the slide or whether it actually made the slope all the more slippery...well, that's a subject of debate. Women pastors in the PCUSA did not gain approval until 1956, two decades after Machen's untimely death. It seems like a long time for for women to climb into pulpits, considering the movement for full women's equality began in 1930.

One strong piece of evidence for Machen's opposition to women officers remains: The denomination he fathered in 1936, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, restricted all of its offices—deacon, elder, and pastor—to men from the very beginning.

Presbyterians of the twenty-first century will need Machen's stubbornness and high-minded commitment to doctrine to withstand the coming intersectional-egalitarian onslaught. And they may need an even more robust commitment to biblical polity than the men of Machen's day were able to muster.

Brad Isbell

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## Before and After Trump

Since the last time we published the NTJ, an electoral victory for an unsavory New Yorker (that is permissible here since one of the co-editors is himself a New Yorker) turned much of the political, cultural, and religious world from predictable polarization into a seemingly endless quest for new layers of antagonism. Add to the 2017 inauguration of Donald Trump the politics and science of Covid-19, and the protests surrounding George Floyd's death in May of 2020 and the topsy-turvyness of the "Trump era" only became more discombobulating. If you are reading this, our congratulations go out to you for surviving. (Thriving is only for Protestant converts to Roman Catholicism.)

WITH THOSE CATAclysmic events in mind (and we did not even mention the red hot hysterics over Brent Kavanaugh's nomination and appointment to the Supreme Court or the Joan-of-Arc like aura of Greta Thunberg and the impending doom of

increasing temperatures around the globe), I was surprised to find a piece about the candidacy of Donald Trump from the Spring of 2016 in a special issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that needed to be filed or moved in preparation for the new semester. What, I wondered, could I have been thinking in 2016, six months shy of the election, compared to what I now perceive to be the achievement and legacy of Trump's highly flawed presiding over an almost equally flawed government and the country it monitors and orders? Did the outcome of the 2016 and 2020 elections change my understanding particularly of the support Trump received from eighty-one percent of the white evangelical Protestants who voted in 2016?

Here is the opening from that piece, "Fundamental Mistakes":

*Once upon a time, social scientists who study religion and politics in the United States thought they understood voters who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ—read: evangelical Protestants. Beginning in the late 1970s, when Jerry Falwell, a Baptist minister in Virginia and founder of Liberty University, launched the Moral Majority, which became the lobbying arm of white Protestants alarmed by the nation's moral decline, evangelicalism seemed to make sense of America's two-party system. Just as the white Protestant world grouped into mainline and evangelical clusters, so liberal Protestants, the ones who retained the nation's historic denominations, voted Democrat in ways that the morally strenuous Protestants could not. Evangelicalism seemed to capture the affinity between conservative Protestantism and the GOP, an analysis that looked plausible from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush.*

*Then came Donald Trump. As the debates among Republicans took place, pollsters quizzed voters, and early primary returns came in, support for Trump from believers seemingly so opposed to his own failed marriages and at times vulgar remarks was not only a surprise but a phenomenon that defied 35 years of faith-based electoral expectations. As much as born-again leaders distanced themselves from Trump, polling data suggested that rank-and-file evangelicals were supporting the Republican candidate at levels that contradicted the assumption that conservative faith and politics go hand in hand. As David Graham reported in *The Atlantic* after Trump won Indiana by five points over Ted Cruz, "evangelicals never did come through for Cruz."*

*While analysts are scratching their heads over the apparent inconsistency of evangelical voters, not many pundits are scrutinizing a generation's worth of scholarship about born-again Protestantism. For some scholars, evangelicalism was always a contrived identity that actually hid more than it explained. It was supposed to be a resilient and pious force in American life. Trump's candidacy and appeal to evangelicals certainly question that supposition. He may even demonstrate that evangelicalism was a feeble hook on which to hang so much of the American electorate.*

Re-reading the rest of the article, one line in particular stuck out: "The challenge that Trump poses is whether evangelicals still qualify as traditional, orthodox, and morally serious if the candidate for whom they vote is none of the above." The reason for that line's fillip is that after forty years of scholarship on American evangelicalism, all of a sudden a standard applied to evangelicals was not the one that historians and theologians had tested, debated, and resolved. Evangelicals could no longer be understood as moderate conservatives, people who

were not going to be as sectarian, rigorous, or as mean as fundamentalists, people who knew how to get along in the modern world. They were supposed to be people who rose above fundamentalist judgmentalism and binary outlook, people who could see issues as more than simply “compromises with falsehood or wickedness.”

**N**ow, with Trump, evangelical thought leaders and outsider pundits (who opposed Trump, of course) judged born-again Protestants to be insufficiently fundamentalist. Evangelicals were supposed to return to the perspective on the world they had repudiated to move from fundamentalist categories of black-and-white (no shades of gray). In other words, with Trump as a candidate or POTUS, evangelicals were supposed to use norms in evaluating a Republican candidate and president that their grandparents had rejected. The opposite of nice and moderate became the norm for evangelicals and if they did not judge and condemn Trump, then they were nominal believers. Instead of Billy Graham’s transactional ability to move in the circles of power and celebrity, evangelicals needed to emulate William Jennings Bryan and condemn a president the way a judge in Dayton, Tennessee convicted John T. Scopes for teaching evolution.

YES, THAT IS A WAY OF SAYING THAT Harry Emerson’s question, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” received the answer that he thought unimaginable. Evangelical academics, secular university professors and administrators, news reporters and editors, and public officials all turned on Donald Trump the way the deacons at Calvary Baptist Church (where I grew up) repudiated Thurlow Spur and his touring music group, the Spurlows, because Mr. Spur had been divorced. One strike – at least in marital and sexual matters – and you were out with fundamentalist Baptists. With Trump, of course, the strikes had filled columns in the spread sheet for

years and no one seemed to mind, from Howard Stern to Chris Matthews and producers of the television show, “The Apprentice.” But once he ran for president, evangelicals were supposed to find their inner fundamentalist and turn on any brief from pastors or ordinary believers who, like Harry Emerson Fosdick, contended for tolerance and freedom of thought in the church.

IN FACT, FUNDAMENTALISTS WERE never that exacting with political candidates. The Harts were predictably Republican depending on the third-party candidate. But they did not expect Dwight Eisenhower to believe in the rapture, or Barry Goldwater to believe in Jesus, or Richard Nixon to be a nice guy. They were two-kingdom well before their time. They understood at least intuitively that American politics were one thing and the rigors of church life another. They would not have cared for “The Wire,” but if they could have had the expletives bleeped and the sex scenes cut, they never would have been surprised that the world’s form of worldly politics was filled with characters who veered from the “traditional, orthodox, and morally serious” beliefs they held.

If graduates of Bob Jones University could do that, why not alums from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Wheaton, and Calvin?

D. G. Hart

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## 39 Alexander Hall

### Pro-Life Liturgical Calendar

**P**resbyterians are challenged in the liturgical calendar department. So let’s get that out of the way. This is not the place

to learn greater insights into the cycle of seasons that Lutherans, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics observe. (Because the Eastern Church is off by ten days or so thanks to their ongoing use of the Julian Calendar, keeping track of their church year is even harder for Protestants who struggle for two months out of the year with observing professional basketball, hockey, and baseball seasons.)

BE THAT AS IT MAY, IT DOES SEEM that the incarnation receives a lot of attention when people talk about Advent and Christmas. A piece at an on-line Southern Baptist publication (yes, dear reader, you read that correctly, Southern Baptist), informs readers that Advent affords a time to ponder the wonders of the incarnation. “John 1:14 is clear: ‘The Word became flesh.’ In other words, it was the Son from eternity who became incarnate, not the divine nature. The Son, who is in eternal relation to the Father and Spirit, willingly humbled himself and chose to assume a human nature in obedience to his Father and for our salvation (Phil. 2:6-8).” Maybe Baptists are putting too much emphasis on the incarnation instead of locating the significance of Advent and Christmas in Christ’s birth. But a Roman Catholic on-line newspaper confirmed that during Advent, “Catholics are challenged to refrain from secular demands and distractions by creating an atmosphere of holiness in honor of the holy event.” Those four weeks provide a space “to prepare for the mystery of the Incarnation.”

**H**ere’s the problem. Pro-life Christians insist that human life begins not at birth but at conception. Wouldn’t the best time to prepare for the mystery of the incarnation be nine months plus four weeks before December 25? Marking the period before the start of Mary’s pregnancy would put Advent around February 25, give or take. After all, the time when the Word became flesh was inside the womb of the Virgin Mary, an idea that makes the humiliation of Christ all the more profound. If it

confounds human expectations to think of God assuming the form of a small, needy, and helpless baby, how much more gobsmacking is the idea of God in the frame of a fetus inside the womb of a Jewish adolescent?

Obviously, moving Advent to late February would create problems for Lent, Good Friday, and Easter. Chances for a revision of the liturgical calendar consequently are unlikely. But the logic of pro-life Christians (which are generally sound and commendable) may not demand but should prompt a reconsideration of attaching too much importance to Christ's birth. Without such a consultation, the traditional celebration of Christmas, with proper preparation during Advent, could well signal that Jesus did not become the incarnate son of God until Mary's delivery.

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### The Gift that Keeps on Giving

The years since the last issue of the NTJ have not been the best for J. Gresham Machen, one of the biggest inspirations for this glorified newsletter. The tragic deaths of African-Americans at the hands of police in American cities, and the subsequent outrage about race relations in the United States (which went global in the summer of 2020), drew Machen into the crossfire. His attitudes to integration, based on his own notions of White-Anglo-Saxon superiority, which he expressed in private correspondence with family members, turned Machen into an easy target for drive-by shootings from committed Protestants who sought to purge conservative Presbyterianism of its racist past. (Another possibility was that said snipers wanted to collect scalps in the sport of anti-black racism.)

FOR SCHOLARS WHO DID NOT LET THE news set the terms for their analysis, though, Machen remained relevant. That is, at least for George Yancey and Ashlee Quosigk. In their book, *One*

*Faith No Longer: The Transformation of Christianity in Red and Blue America* (NYU, 2021), the authors use Machen's argument in *Christianity and Liberalism* that the modernist controversy was not an internal fight but a battle between two different religions to diagnose the current state of Protestantism.

*The type of divide this book explores was previously examined in the work of Gresham Machen, a Presbyterian minister working in the early nineteenth-century [sic] United States. His work, based not primarily on sociological analysis, but rather on theological analysis, Christianity and Liberalism, first appeared in 1923 and clearly articulated what he perceived to be the foundational differences between "orthodox Christianity" and "liberal Christianity." Machen argued that liberal forms of Christianity were directly opposed to, in his view, the true gospel in that liberalism (i.e., progressivist Christianity) holds to a view of God and man that is completely opposite to biblical Christianity (i.e., conservative Christianity). . . . Thus, the divides taking place within Christianity have been perceived by other, albeit biased, scholars in other fields, even if by different names. . . .*

*If Machen is correct in his analyses, then many conservative Christians are outsourcing their theology without a clear understanding of what exactly is taking place. In other words, conservative Christians may be, to a certain extent, ignorant of the differences between themselves and progressive Christians, and to a certain degree also of the differences between their former conservative theology and their new, more progressive theology. This possibility is strengthened by a recent study of US Evangelicals that suggested most interviewees' moral authorities were in fact more progressive than they*

*themselves realized or felt comfortable expressing outright. Perhaps, in addition to pluralism, the reason conservative Christians are more apt to consider progressive-leaning Christians as part of their in-group and/or use progressive Christians' resources is that their theology has been gradually becoming more progressive without their full realization. (87-88, 90)*

What is the world coming to when sociologists, even if a century later, confirm that confessional Presbyterians had a point?

SC88

## Second Hand Smoke

*John Updike, who passed away in early January, 2009 and will be sorely missed by the Old Life Theological Society, wrote some of the most vivid descriptions of the human experience. In Roger's Version (1986) he turned his remarkable perceptiveness to pipe smoking, an enjoyable labor that during the Reagan era was still possible in Harvard Divinity School offices before the fundamentalists won.*

The pleasures of a pipe. The tapping, the poking, the twisting, the cleaning, the stuffing, the lighting: those first cheek-hollowing puffs, and the dramatic way the match flame is sucked deep into the tobacco, leaps high in release, and is sucked deep again. And then the mouth-filling perfume, the commanding clouds of smoke. Oddly, I find the facial expressions and mannerisms of other men who smoke pies stagy, prissy, preening, and offensive. But ever since I, as an unheeded admonition to Esther some years ago, gave up cigarettes, the pipe has been my comfort, my steeplejack's grab, my handhold on the precipitous cliff of life.

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