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Faithful Presence Redeemed

Before Aaron Renn's "negative world," James Davison Hunter was questioning the promise of transformationalism. Both Renn and Hunter were at least implicitly criticizing the assessments of urban pastors like Tim Keller whose apparent success in THEE city seemed to prove that the church could truly redeem culture – even Big Apple culture. If someone could be as successful as Redeemer New York City, then evangelicals and Reformed ministries could do the same in other cities – and AROUND THE WORLD! Renn questioned that set of assumptions when he plotted the three worlds of American evangelicalism (Positive, Neutral, and Negative) and argued that after 2014 Protestants had entered a world in which being Christian was neither positive nor neutral, but negative.

EVEN A DECADE BEFORE RENN, Hunter questioned the influence that Christians were having on American

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society. As readers of Collin Hanson's *Timothy Keller: His Intellectual and Spiritual Formation* learn, Hunter was also responsible for introducing the widely acclaimed New York City pastor to the limits of combining reason and faith along Enlightenment lines and the need for post-modern adjustments. Hunter, according to Hanson, was Keller's gateway to Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre, two Roman Catholic philosophers who theorized the erosion of traditional religious, familial, and educational structures and commitments thanks to the demands of modern society. "Through Hunter, Keller was introduced to the 'big four' critics of secular modernity," Hanson writes. "From this time forward" – 2004 to 2008 when Keller met four times a year with Hunter and Skip Ryan (pastor of Trinity PCA in Charlottesville) – Taylor, MacIntyre, Philip Rieff, and Robert Bellah "became staples in Keller's thinking, writing, and teaching."

Hanson also observes that Keller retooled his apologetics. He switched from blending faith and reason to a more explicit critique of reason and modern persons' confidence in it. Keller saw that the Enlightenment had "run its course." So he wrote a sequel to the best-selling, *The Reason for God* (2008). In *Making Sense of God* (2015), Keller turned back to presuppositional apologetics and the philosophical and psychological intuitions that precede and shape a person's use of reason. Keller's readers could not keep up. His audience remained tied to the apologetics of the Neutral world. "Compared to *The Reason for God*,

Making Sense of God hasn't found a broad audience." (That admission suggests that the biggest audience for Keller's books all along has been not unbelievers but Christians.)

WHAT FOLLOWS IS A REVIEW OF Hunter published in the journal, *Amanuensis*. As laudable as Hunter's book was for critiquing transformationalism, his popular substitute, "faithful presence," undersells the difference that people can make, not in transforming society, but in forming associations and running institutions. Hunter's book is also notable for receiving a highly positive endorsement from Tim Keller: "No writer or thinker has taught me as much as James Hunter has about this all-important and complex subject of how culture is changed." Did reading Hunter prompt Keller to take back any of his prognostications about redeeming the city and redeeming the culture from the 1990s and 2000s? If Hunter is right, wasn't Keller wrong at least for the first half of his New York City pastorate? And now that the Keller Center at The Gospel Coalition has embraced a Bavinckian Neo-Calvinism that is both fully modern and fully orthodox, is Keller's legacy going to be transformationalism or faithful presence?

James Davison Hunter's latest book is perplexing, so much so that it sent me back to his earlier works in hope of finding what led him to write To Change the World. The reasons for confusion are fairly simple. Hunter registers illuminating critiques of contemporary Christian efforts in the United States (e.g. religious culture warriors and their recent evangelical critics) to change the world. He seemed to be headed for a categorical

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dismissal of these efforts to make the world a better place. In this role as critic of faith-based world changers, from the Religious Right to the Anabaptist Left, Hunter relies upon his expertise as sociologist and brims with confidence about how societies work and also how difficult they are to change. This leaves the first two-thirds of the book – divided into three essays – in a strong position as it heads to the finish. But there Hunter stumbles. First, he leaves the impression that his own idea of “faithful presence” might actually change the world. Second, to make this point he takes off his cap as sociologist and dons the robes of a theologian (if they still wear them). The result is a book in which Hunter comes off not only as the smartest guy in the culture – because he knows how societies

work – but also as the most devout Christian in the culture because he has figured out how believers may truly make a difference. This is not Hunter’s intent. But for perplexed readers this reading functions as one way to let off frustration.

In his earlier books Hunter acknowledged the fundamental antagonism between conservative religious (whether Protestant, Roman Catholic or Jewish) outlooks and the views of secular Americans. He opined that these conflicts were impossible to stop because of antagonistic understandings of the world, authority, and morality. Hunter posed tentative solutions for mitigating these battles for the sake of American society and its democratic structures. In *To Change the World*, Hunter appears to have abandoned the idea that cultural conflicts are inevitable between believing and secular Americans. He proposes as an alternative to cultural warfare the practice of a faithful Christian presence in the myriad of responsibilities that come with familial, social and political obligations. He also suggests that an agenda of cultural transformation is a genuine faith. In sum, instead of looking at the consequences of culture wars for American society, Hunter now turns the tables and examines the effects of the culture wars on Christians themselves.

THE FIRST ESSAY IS A THOUGHTFUL critique of the ideas-have-consequences outlook that dominates much of the evangelical Protestant world. Hunter argues that cultures do not change by political activism. He is more impressionistic than clear about how cultures do change. But the cultivation of leadership and institutions is key. Here the efforts of evangelical Protestants are seriously lacking, as Hunter shows in his second essay where he devotes chapters to the Christian Right (from Richard John Neuhaus to Tim LaHaye), the Christian Left (from Jim Wallis to Randall Balmer), and the Neo-Anabaptists (from John Howard

Yoder to Stanley Hauerwas). Hunter laments that the witness of the church has become little more than talk (often strident) about politics, and again argues that the state is hardly the institution by which to change culture. He writes: “By nurturing its resentments, sustaining them through a discourse of negation toward outsiders, and in cases, pursuing their will to power, [these Christians] become functional Nietzscheans, participating in the very cultural breakdown they so ardently strive to resist.” [175]

IN THE LAST ESSAY, HUNTER CRITIQUES these three varieties of Christian political and cultural engagement before proposing an alternative. The Christian Right and Left and the Neo-Anabaptists all fail in Hunter’s estimation to maintain the balance between being in but not of the world. In pursuing relevance, Christians lose their distinct identity. In defending Christian truths, believers needlessly assume aggressive and confrontational postures. And in the search for spiritual purity Christians often withdraw from the world into an isolated and disengaged community.

This diagnosis of contemporary American Christianity sets up Hunter’s own stab at a remedy – not necessarily “to change the world” but for Christians to retain their integrity while engaging modern society. He calls this “faithful presence.” It is a constellation of Christian convictions and practices, from the Great Commission as a mandate for spiritual formation to the church as an alternative community and culture, that takes seriously – as the other options do not – the problems of difference and dissolution. By difference, Hunter means the high degree of cultural pluralism in modern societies, and by dissolution he refers to the cynicism and skepticism that characterize contemporary intellectual life. Faithful presence, in turn, builds upon the theology of the incarnation to counter dissolution with confidence in

words, thoughts, and ideas (since the word became flesh); it also rejects pluralism by recognizing that truths take shape in embodied forms. According to Hunter, "a theology of faithful presence is a theology of engagement in and with the world around us." At root, it "begins with the acknowledgment of God's faithful presence to us and that his call upon us is that we be faithfully present to him in return." [243] Appeals to Christology and "we" Christians is not the sort of language readers would expect to see from a sociologist teaching not at Liberty University but up the road at the University of Virginia.

Like his previous books, Hunter is long on diagnosis and theory and short on application. But *To Change the World* does provide examples of "faithful presence." One is an automotive company in the Southeast that organizes its business around the idea of covenant and asks, "what do we owe our customers and our employees?" A consequence was to price cars at a more affordable rate for inner-city residents, which in turn boosted business. Another example is a Washington, D.C. art gallery whose directors determined that the people in the greatest economic need were those most needy aesthetically. The result was a very successful art show, first exhibited on the streets of Anacostia, before being displayed at Union Station. Hunter also notes the work of a non-profit housing corporation in Michigan that has repaired or constructed approximately 500 homes, complete with architectural designs to reflect the belief that all people are created in the image of God. He includes several more examples, all in about four pages. Hunter believes that faithful presence has the power to change the world, not in the big ways that attract Protestant activists but in the ordinary ones that have a direct bearing on average citizens.

· *WHETHER THESE INSTANCES OF FAITHFUL presence will, with enough people pitching in, actually change the culture is another question and one that Hunter fails to address. Since he devotes a*

historical chapter to Christian movements that did transform the culture in extraordinary ways – from Charlemagne to William Wilberforce – pointing out the gap between Hunter's examples of faithful presence and historically significant Christian movements is not a cheap shot. If the Protestant Reformation was a time when culture changed, does Hunter mean to suggest that the humane business practices of a small car dealer is going to transform society on a similar scale?

Hunter still has the problem of having written at least two books about the culture wars, their reality and deeply entrenched character, and their threat to the society that sociologists study. In which case, the culture wars have not found a peaceful resolution. Christian parents still need to contend with sex education in public schools, a tsunami of pornography in popular culture and on the Internet, abortion, and gay rights activists challenging marriage laws. The directors of an art gallery might well design and execute an exhibit for inner-city poor, but they and their patrons, as citizens of the United States, still need to negotiate all the contested issues that animate the Protestant activists. What Hunter proposes apparently is to ignore real life circumstances that directly affect the ability of believers to practice a faithful presence in public education, entertainment, and public policy. For all of Hunter's plausible critique of Neo-Anabaptist impulses to abandon the world for an isolated community of religious integrity, he gives the impression of offering a alternative that is similarly withdrawn on an island of self-satisfied faithfulness.

HAD HUNTER STUCK TO HIS GUNS AS A sociologist, he could have addressed explicitly the tension that exists for American Christians between faithful presence and citizenship and in so doing offered guidance on how the faithful might improve their skills as

*members of the United States. A significant component of the religious activism and its concomitant naivete is an inability to distinguish between the claims of church membership and those of citizenship. Whether they believe that the United States was founded as a Christian nation or simply are convinced that they cannot leave behind their religious convictions when engaged in any aspect of human existence, especially the public square, Christian activists rarely disentangle their faith from their politics. A sociological reminder about the health of civil society, its variety of institutions and accompanying pluriformity, would have been more helpful from Hunter the sociologist than a call for greater zeal and fidelity from Hunter the lay-theologian. As it stands, *To Change the World* is a valuable personal reflection, with sociological trappings, of an important professing scholar. But the book harbors as much confusion about the differences between matters secular and sacred, or the temporal and the eternal, as among those Protestants who lack Hunter's sociological expertise.*

DGH

SC88

Hillsdale Diarist: Deplatformed

Since moving to a small southern Michigan town to teach history twelve years ago, I have noticed a change in professional opportunities. Teaching at a liberal arts college does not matter in the world of denominations and parachurch organizations as much as belonging to the faculty of a Reformed seminary. Lest readers think this brief excursion

an expression of self-pity, consider the following: what has happened to Tremper Longman since he left Westminster (PA) to teach at Westmont College? The same could be asked about T. David Gordon if you compared his sway while at Gordon-Conwell and pastor in the PCA to his reach as a professor at Grove City College. Then there is Pete Enns who was never a darling of the conservatives in the Reformed-Presbyterian church-parachurch networks. But as a professor at Eastern University he is also not nearly the object of alarm that he was at Westminster (PA).

THE ONE EXCEPTION TO THE RULE IS Carl Trueman. His stature has only grown since leaving Westminster (PA) (does anyone see a pattern here?) to teach at Grove City. At the same time, he is also the only one of these seminary-turned-college professors to leave his field of academic training for the jackpot of sex and gender identity. Should Chris Rufo be worried?

The reason for raising these questions is the recent issue of Ligonier's *Tabletalk* magazine (Feb. 2023). If you don't know, this is the 100th anniversary of the publication of Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*. For anyone who esteems Machen and values the book, this is a worthy decision by the editors at Ligonier. But the collection of authors selected to write about the author and the book is curious.

Here is the table of contents which more or less mirrors Machen's: Steve Nichols on the modernist controversy, Bob Godfrey on worldly philosophy, Chad Van Dixhoorn on doctrine, Jonathan Gibson on God and man, David Garner on the Bible, Brandon Crowe on Christ, Scott Clark on Salvation, and our own John Muether on the church. In case you missed it, the authors, aside from Nichols who is the chief academic officer for Ligonier, are all seminary faculty (current or retired). In the seminary sweepstakes, Westminster

(PA) comes in first. It has four authors. Westminster (CA) comes in second with two. Reformed Seminary (FL) has one. They all are also seminary professors.

Once upon a time, this writer was known as "Machen boy." (To be clear, no one yelled "BOY!" at me at General Assemblies. That is not a label I resist even if I wish people paid a little more attention than they do to other books I've written – like *The University Gets Religion* (1999), a monograph about the creation of religious studies as an academic discipline and the way that the study of Scripture and theology needed to find its way in a world dominated by research universities. It is not a sequel to my intellectual biography of Machen but it does cover similar ground for about a third of its content and picks up on lessons learned from pondering Machen's place in the world of American learning. It also contains a subtext of critical interaction with the Neo-Calvinist critique of secular universities and praise for the integration of faith and learning that was prominent in evangelical higher education (and popularized by George Marsden's books, *The Soul of the University* [1994] and *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* [1997]; and Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* [1994]). The reason for this turn down the trail of shameless self-promotion is to suggest that "Machen boy" may not be an accurate description of my career. At the same time, if I still fly under that banner, why wouldn't the editors of *Tabletalk* include me?

I CAN THINK OF REASONS NOT TO TAKE this personally. One is that the editors also did not ask Carl Trueman to write for the February 2023 issue. That too is odd since he was the one chosen by Eerdmans to write the introduction to the new edition (2009) of *Christianity and Liberalism*. (That year, by the way, was an odd one to reissue the book since it did not coincide with any anniversary divisible by twenty-five.)

But it did turn Trueman into another voice of some authority about Machen and his most famous book. This seems like another piece of support for the thesis here. Once you leave the seminary classroom to teach undergraduates, you lose your ecclesiastical and theological status.

Looking at *Tabletalk* confirms a thought I have had for the last decade or so. What about a collection of essays from Reformed seminary faculty turned undergraduate professors? The thought that accompanies this one is that gaining assent to contribute to such a volume could be more difficult than impeaching Trump. Longman, Gordon, Trueman, and Enns likely have all sorts of reasons for not wanting to be together in the same book. Even so, the collection might be instructive. For one, these professors could comment on the differences between teaching late adolescents and graduate students, college seniors and second-career aspiring pastors, courses accessible to an undergraduate with little theological literacy and classes that help men under care pass licensure and ordination exams.

JUST AS INTRIGUING WOULD BE reflections on differences between the audiences of college and seminary faculty – even the calculations by editors at religious publishers. If it is the case that Christians in the pew perceive seminary faculty as more worthy of attention than college professors, that contrast may say something about Reformed churches' estimate of the arts and sciences. It also likely reveals much about the way Reformed and Presbyterian communions have grown up around the formation of specific seminaries (RTS and PCA; WTS and OPC).

For four-office Presbyterians, this may be an encouraging development. It indicates that Calvin was on to something when he recognized doctors

of the church (teachers at the Geneva Academy) as an office in the church beyond pastors, elders, and deacons. What he could not have seen coming was the aura that attaches even to ruling elders or non-ordained church members who teach at seminary.

DGH

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Catechesis Is Theological Retrieval

Imagine Beth Moore meeting Richard Muller. Ms. Moore is a relatively ordinary American evangelical who became a phenomenon through blending biblical teaching and a feel for women's domestic and religious domains. Some points she's made in many books that provide the rudiments of Bible study indicate she has not done wide reading in systematic theology or the Protestant confessions. "Only in America" you say? In 2015, Ms. Moore was attracting crowds of 10,000 women in London for one of her "Colour" conferences.

MULLER, IN CONTRAST, IS THE historical theologian that most of Big Eva (Gospel Coalition and Redeemer City-to-City) ignored. He plumbed the riches of Protestant scholastic theology (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), first, to recover the sources accurately, and second, to counter the idea that the Reformation was in the very same lane as the succession of Great Awakenings – as in, confessional Protestantism was little more than Whitefield-to-Finney-to-Graham. The original several generations of Protestant theologians relied on categories supplied by patristic and medieval theology even while adding

insights from Scripture that owed to the Renaissance's literary and linguistic scholarship. For Muller, the ordinary phrase or sentence from the Westminster Confession was the tip of the iceberg of Protestant erudition. But is Muller the counterweight to Beth Moore? Might an ordinary Protestant be better served by going somewhere between Muller and Moore, say to the Westminster Confession?

One reason for suggesting this meeting is to wonder how the current fashion of theological retrieval will go for ordinary American evangelicals and even confessional Protestants. Gavin Ortlund's book from a couple years ago, *Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals*, contends that the greatest resource for the contemporary church is theology from all of church history, both before and after the Reformation. The added appeal of such retrieval is to reduce Protestant prejudice against Roman Catholicism. Some specific benefits of retrieval are topics on which Protestantism is weak – such as the doctrine of angels. He also thinks retrieval can help Protestants with the doctrine of divine simplicity. A look back to the medieval and early church might also assist in re-framing modern debates about the atonement.

ORTLUND CONCEDES THAT RETRIEVAL has potential problems. But it can also illuminate the church's understanding of the faith. The analogy he uses is American geography. Having grown up in the South and Midwest, Ortlund assumed Washington, D. C. was part of the Northeast corridor. But after living near the nation's capital, he came to know the city as part of the mid-Atlantic region with a distinct set of networks from New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. By analogy, ancient and medieval theology minimizes the Protestant sense that Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism are foreign.

What Ortlund (and other proponents of retrieval) does not calculate is how little historical theology matters to your average Protestant, evangelical or confessional. Imagine your ordinary church member of a Baptist congregation. A pastor encouraging his flock to read John Owen or John Bunyan instead of listening to Charles Stanley podcasts could take some doing. The same goes for a book-reading Presbyterian who waits expectantly for the next Tim Keller book. Now you have to encourage him to pick up Gregory Nazianzus or Duns Scotus? Historical theology has limited possibilities for believers who may be better served by reading the Confession of Faith.

MAYBE SEMINARY TRAINING CAN benefit future pastors if it includes more ancient and medieval texts, though keeping up with the latest data dump of Herman Bavinck could take time away from reading Basil of Caesarea. Reformation era Protestants did build on ancient and medieval theology even while bringing fresh insights into the study of Scripture. Understanding what came before the Reformation and noticing which authors the Reformers read, praised, and critiqued is one way to appreciate the breadth of church history and Protestantism's place in it. But at a certain point this feels like looking for a family tree on Ancestry.com when what the person doing the search needs is greater dexterity in negotiating a spouse and children.

It may well be that when it comes to sermon preparation, church controversies, and Sunday school curricula, the work of theological retrieval is too heavy a lift. As someone who recently had to prepare for a discussion of Augustine's doctrine of justification, it became fairly clear that the Bishop of Hippo was not going to be much help in maintaining and defending the forensic aspect of justification (i.e., imputation of Christ's righteousness).

That leaves proponents of theological retrieval in a position akin to political philosophers. You may come to appreciate all the philosophical and political insights that informed the American Founding – from Aristotle and Cicero to Locke and Montesquieu. But if that appreciation tempts you to abdicate your responsibilities as an American citizen, to think that you really belong to ancient Athens, medieval Paris, or seventeenth-century Edinburgh, your intellectual retrieval is more fantastic than a help.

THE SOLUTION TO BETH MOORE THEN may not be Richard Muller but the Shorter Catechism.

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SC88

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Without Erdman, No Machen?

My initial acquaintance with J. Gresham Machen was the name on the building where I went to pick up mail and pay bills while an M.A.R. student at Westminster Seminary (the original). I had decided to enroll at WTS thanks to an abrupt reversal of prospects at Temple University (my alma mater). My plan for life after a B.A. in film studies, fresh from the sober reality that only four percent of independent film makers support themselves with a living wage, was to work in the university's law school library (low level work in support of the professional librarians) and enroll at Temple for an M.A. in history. Tuition remission, thanks to full-time employment at the university, would take me deeper into the English history that attracted me after taking a course on the Tudors and two courses in Shakespeare.

BUT THAT PRETTY GOOD LAID PLAN went for naught when administrators at the library decided they had sufficient numbers of hetero-white-male staff. I soon discovered the blessings of Westminster's late application deadlines.

My very first visit to the seminary came after returning to the States from a three-month stay at L'Abri. Francis Schaeffer was my initial guide to Christ-and-culture dynamics because the resources in the Protestant world of my youth (fundamentalist Baptist) were meager. Studying existential philosophy and twentieth-century American literature did not nurture a crisis of faith. It did raise questions about where to put such knowledge among the beliefs that supplied purpose in the life of a twenty-year old Phillies' fan. With few standards by which to evaluate Schaeffer's assessment of western civilization, I did look to him at least as providing a green-light to worlds that were seemingly alien to the pastors and members of my home church.

Little did I know that Schaeffer had transferred from Westminster to Faith Seminary and so implicitly chose Carl McIntire over Machen at an earlier part of his life. Schaeffer's Presbyterianism made no impression whatsoever. But his take on abstract painting and the films of Ingmar Bergman spoke to me in ways my Baptist pastor could not. Either way, a visit to Westminster on a cold Saturday in February with a friend from L'Abri visiting Philadelphia from Colorado was one stop on my Schaeffer-was-here pilgrimage. (My friend was also considering enrolling at Westminster.)

When I started at Westminster in the fall of 1979, I encountered Machen "good and hard." That was because my introduction came through his New Testament Greek grammar. I still recall

studying verb paradigms during the Orioles-Pirates World Series and wondering if I could ever master all of the forms - English seemed so much easier – just add or subtract an "s" or an "ed." (I had yet to take Hebrew.) Little did I know that the author of the grammar was the founder of the seminary. That he grew up in Baltimore rooting for the Orioles when they were a minor-league team was on the order of knowing that the contemporary pope (John Paul II who visited Philadelphia that year) hailed from Poland. Who knew? More like, who cared?

I did manage to learn enough about Machen in a church history course (Modern Age) to buy a used copy of *Christianity and Liberalism* – a 1924 edition – as part of an effort to stock the library of an aspiring graduate student. Even so, no one on the faculty at Westminster assigned Machen's most important book or told any of the stories that had led to the seminary's founding or the creation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. For much of Westminster's history, a guiding assumption of faculty was that students coming to the seminary would have already known about Machen and the Presbyterian controversy. Instruction about his life and ecclesiastical battles would have been redundant.

I WAS, THOUGH, PART OF A SHIFT AT Westminster when the seminary was self-consciously trying to recruit students from a broader range of Protestant backgrounds. It was also a time when the seminary's orientation was intentionally extending beyond the limited prospects of the OPC.

So after graduating from Westminster and waiting tables in Center City Philadelphia with many white men who were not hetero, I started a Masters program at Harvard Divinity School with the intention of obtaining an academic credential to put me in good standing with graduate history programs. My plan was to study Reformation history and a first-year

course with Luther was so agreeable that I used his name for my Automated-Teller-Machine card password.

BUT THOSE ASPIRATIONS RAN AGROUND in a course on American religious history in which *Christianity and Liberalism* was assigned reading. The professor, William R. Hutchison, had recently written *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Harvard, 1976), and was not the sort of scholar you would expect to praise Machen. But in his chapter on the fundamentalist controversy, Hutchison devoted several pages to Machen, included a full-page photo of the Presbyterian, and gave *Christianity and Liberalism's* author high praise for presenting his foes' positions charitably and for rendering a critique that was both fair and penetrating.

The combination of reading Machen while also seeing him praised by a professor at Harvard was borderline jaw-dropping for an impressionable young graduate student. Yes, I did wonder why professors at Westminster did not either acquaint students with Machen or praise him while explaining the strengths of his scholarship and reasoning. But whatever Harvard's treatment of Machen meant for Westminster's place in his legacy, this exposure to Machen was almost intoxicating. What prevented intellectual inebriation was the sobriety needed to apply to grad school, pass seminars, write research papers, and take comprehensive exams. A 400-page dissertation another reason to stay calm.

My advisor at Harvard, Hutchison, was a formidable scholar, intimidating in person even while gracious in being accessible to students on and off campus. He was a Quaker who identified with the liberal Protestants he studied all the while letting the historical record and judgments of other scholars supply the final verdict. Hutchison also said enough about evangelicals in the news (this was the era when the Moral Majority was up and running) to let students know that he was unimpressed. I still remember a seminar

meeting when he made a bet that in a decade no one would recognize Jerry Falwell's name (the Virginia Baptist had just appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine). His regard for Princetonians like Machen did not in any way lead to appreciation for conservative (non-mainline) Protestantism more generally.

As it turns out Hutchison engaged with Machen at least in part because Princeton Seminary was in his family's past. Here is how David H. Hall, the great historian of Puritanism (and more) described Hutchison's father in a "memorial minute" for *The Harvard Gazette*:

Bill grew up in a distinctively Protestant world. His father, Ralph C. Hutchison, earned a master of divinity degree at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1922 and, after being ordained as a Presbyterian minister, took a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania. Ralph Hutchison entered the field of higher education, a decision that led to a position at Alborz College in Tehran (1926-31) and to two college presidencies, the second at his alma mater, Lafayette College (1945-1957). He was also a long-time trustee of Princeton Theological Seminary, which declared after his death in 1966 that "Dr. Hutchison loved his church and served it well." To his only son, then on the eve of graduating from college, he counseled choosing "a high vocational objective on an idealistic basis."

AS A MISSIONARY TO TEHRAN AND A board member at Princeton Seminary, Ralph C. Hutchison was likely someone Machen knew and kept tabs on. It's also likely that the elder Hutchison was no fan of Machen, perhaps even less so than Bill Hutchison's father-in-law, James King Quay. A missionary to Egypt in connection with the YMCA, Quay served at Princeton Seminary as Vice President of Development.

Between the Hutchisons and the Quays, Bill Hutchison would have had plenty of exposure to people within the Princeton and PCUSA establishment. That environment in turn could have well soured Hutchison on Machen as the bomb-thrower and curmudgeonly conservative who threatened the seminary and the denomination's foreign missions board's stability.

But that is not what I took away from Bill Hutchison. Although he disagreed with Machen, he also portrayed the polemicist with respect even in subsequent books about Protestant foreign missionaries. Hutchison even encouraged my scholarly curiosity about Machen.

But what if Hutchison's background had been Episcopalian, not Presbyterian? What if his father had been a college administrator at Sewanee and on the board of Virginia Seminary? Would Hutchison have known much about Machen? And if he hadn't sufficient acquaintance to write about Machen in his books, would I have ever stumbled on to Machen?

I GET IT. THE LORD WORKS IN mysterious ways. And even more humbling, those ways are not designed merely to direct my biography. The story here is really about Machen and how the scholarly world has assessed his life and career.

Even so, if not for Hutchison's ties to Princeton and the PCUSA would I have ever encountered Machen and the reasons why Charles Erdman and others saw him as a threat to the mainline churches' status in the upper echelons of American society?

Put differently, if Hutchison's father had not been part of the Presbyterian world of Princeton-Seminary-after-Old-Princeton, would I, an unmarried (but engaged) hetero-white-male Protestant, have stumbled on to J. Gresham Machen. DGH

Pro-Choice Christian Conservatives

Among the various objections to liberalism (in the Lockean-American-Founding sense) is the contention that liberal societies give too much room for individuals to choose their own identities (sometimes called “expressive individualism”). Patrick Deneen in his book *Why Liberalism Failed* argued that the “most basic and distinctive aspect of liberalism is to base politics upon the idea of voluntarism – the unfettered and autonomous choice of individuals.” One example he supplies is marriage. The expansion of human choice transformed marriage “from an institution based upon familial and property considerations to a choice made by consenting individuals on the basis of [love].” For Deneen, a professing Roman Catholic, this change in expectations about marriage has the unwholesome effect of making romance, not sacraments, the bond of the marital union.

CARL TRUEMAN ECHOES DENEEN, AND so adds to the Christian objections to liberalism, when he observes that the LGBTQ+ revolution is downstream from voluntarism in the sphere of Christianity. What once was the default position in Western Europe before 1500 – membership in the Roman Catholic Church – became a choice: “Today, we do not simply choose to be Christians; we also choose what type of Christian we want to be: Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist.”

Hostility to choice among Christians is odd if only because without the capacity to change faiths, Christianity would not exist. After all, the first Christians grew up Jewish. If they were true conservatives and inherited the world and faith in which they grew up, they would have remained Jewish (and had some hard knocks to be sure). But when Jesus called

his disciples, he did not threaten with coercion. Peter, John, Andrew, Matthew – they all *chose* to leave what they had been doing and follow their Lord.

However you come down on matters of free will, predestination, and effectual calling, for appearance’s sake the resolve of adults to leave a life of unbelief behind and make a public profession of faith is a version of expressive individualism.

THAT BASIC REALITY OF CHRISTIAN history – that people decided to give up other faiths and become Christians – should push conservative Christians of liberalism to qualify their objections to the political order that prevailed in the late eighteenth century. It goes without saying that people make lots of bad choices. But without choice, no Christians.

On the Other Hand: Ethnic Confessionalism

Christianity may have been a choice originally, but thanks at least to the logic of covenant theology (inherited from the Old Testament) and the importance of infant baptism (as the sign of the covenant), followers of Jesus do not become such simply by choice. You can be born into the faith. Ethnic confessional Protestantism (think Dutch Reformed and Scottish Presbyterians) is like being Jewish. Here is Yair Rosenberg in *The Atlantic* (Feb. 2022):

well-meaning people have trouble fitting Jews into their usual boxes. They don’t know how to define Jews, and so they resort to their own frames of reference, like “race” or “religion,” and project them onto the Jewish experience. But Jewish identity doesn’t

conform to Western categories, despite centuries of attempts by society to shoehorn it in. This makes sense, because Judaism predates Western categories. It’s not quite a religion, because one can be Jewish regardless of observance or specific belief. (Einstein, for example, was proudly Jewish but not religiously observant.) But it’s also not quite a race, because people can convert in! It’s not merely a culture or an ethnicity, because that leaves out all the religious components. And it’s not simply a nationality, because although Jews do have a homeland and many identify as part of a nation, others do not.

Instead, Judaism is an amalgam of all these things—more like a family (into which one can be adopted) than a sectarian Western faith tradition—and so there’s no great way to classify it in English. A lot of confusion results from attempts to reduce this complexity to something more palatable for contemporary conceptions.

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Second Hand Smoke

The Balance Sheet

Marriage, as everyone knows, is chiefly an economic matter. But too often it is assumed that economics concerns only the wife’s hats; it also concerns, and perhaps more importantly, the husband’s cigars. No man is genuinely happy, married, who has to drink worse gin than he used to drink when he was single. (H. L. Mencken, *Prejudices: Fourth Series*, “Reflections on Human Monogamy”)

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