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Did God Rest in One Day?

Last spring Southern Presbyterian Press of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary published an anthology, *Did God Create in Six Days?*, edited by Greenville President Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and Rev. David W. Hall (who pastors Covenant PCA in Oak Ridge, Tennessee – where does he find the time?). The book is a manifesto for the growing six-day movement in conservative Presbyterianism, much of the leadership for which is coming from Taylors, South Carolina. It is amusing to observe the difficulty that six-dayers have in describing the length of the creation days. "Literal days" or "solar days" or "24-hour days" present obvious anachronisms. Some are left with insisting that the creation week consisted of "normal" or "ordinary" days. Yet if there is one thing all parties should be able to agree upon, it is that these days – however long they were – were anything but normal or ordinary.

Morton Smith begins the anthology by surveying "The History of the Creation Doctrine in the American Presbyterian Churches." Leaving aside doubts we entertain about some of his claims, Smith's comments about John Murray serve to highlight for us how Reformed creationists beg important questions regarding the interpretation of the days of creation. Characteristic of the argument of Reformed six-day creationists is the language we heard from a recent graduate of Greenville Seminary: "if Genesis one and two are poetic, then you end up with a poetic Adam and a poetic Sabbath." We at the NTJ are unsure of what a poetic Sabbath is, but we confess that it sounds appealing to us. What is the rhythm of Sabbath keeping if not at heart poetic? Still, we understand the gentleman's point. Without a literal creation week, there is no rationale for Sabbath-observance. This logic is found in a 1998 overture to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America from those troublesome TR's (truly Reformed, as opposed to BR, barely Reformed) of the Westminster Presbytery, which Smith cites: "The reason given for observance of the 4th commandment in Exodus 20:11 is based on a 24 hour view of creation."

BEFORE WE TAKE ISSUE WITH that reasoning, we should pause long enough to acknowledge that it holds greater integrity than generic evangelical six-day creationism. At least Smith is prepared to suggest that something stands to be gained or lost in this debate. We know of one PCA pastor who is loudly banging the drum of creationism while at the same time denying the Westminster Confession's teaching on the Sabbath – which renders his theory of origins an idea without consequence.

But Smith's study of John Murray is an example of how sabbatarian-creation logic fails. Murray understood as well as anyone the importance of creation for Sabbath-keeping: "The weekly sabbath is based on divine example," he wrote in *Principles of Conduct.* "The divine mode of procedure in creation determines one of the basic cycles by which human life here on earth is regulated, namely, the weekly cycle."

LET US CONCEDE, FOR argument's sake, that Smith is right about Murray, and that the Scotsman "seem[ed] to have held to the 24-hour creation days." (Smith acknowledges that this is not "expressly stated" in Murray.) So the world was created in 144 hours, according to Murray. Then what happened? "And he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he made." But how long was the seventh day? Murray is very clear that *that* day was *not* twenty four hours. Here is more from *Principles of Conduct:* "In the realm of God's activity in creating the heavens and the earth there were six days of creative activity and one day of rest. There is the strongest presumption in favor of the interpretation that this seventh day is not one that terminated at a certain point in history, but that the whole period of time subsequent to the end of the sixth day is the Sabbath rest alluded to in Genesis 2:2."

From these citations we are forced to conclude that for Murray a literal six-plus-one creation sequence was unnecessary for the establishment of a literal six-plus-one Sabbath-keeping sequence. However symbolic God's days were, Murray saw that creation was still revealed in such a way as to establish the weekly Sabbath as a creation ordinance. So the logic of Sabbath-creationism collapses. And if the seventh day is not literal, why do the first six days have to be?

Although Smith's essay claims to

INSIDE

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survey American Presbyterian thought on creation, including the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, it is largely focused on recent PCA debates, and he neglects OPC reflection on the matter except to speculate on the views of Murray and Cornelius Van Til. This is unfortunate because he omits the 1968 resolution of the OPC's Presbytery of Southern California (comprised of Murray's and Van Til's students), which we believe has not been surpassed as a summary of the biblical and confessional teaching on creation. We republish those eight affirmations in hopes that they will gain a greater reading:

1 . The one true and living God existed alone in eternity, and beside Him there was no matter, energy, space or time.

2. The one true and living God, according to His Sovereign decree, determined to create, or make of nothing, the world and all things therein, whether visible or invisible.

3. God performed His creative work in six days. (We recognize different interpretations of the word "day" and do not feel that one interpretation is to be insisted upon to the exclusion of others.)

4. That no part of the universe nor any creature in it came into being by chance or by any power other than that of the Sovereign God.

5. That God created man, male and female, after His own image, and as God's image bearer man possesses an immortal soul. Thus man is distinct from all other earthly creatures even though his body is composed of the elements of his environment.

6. That when God created man, it was God's inbreathing that constituted man a living creature, and thus God did not impress His image upon some pre-existing living creature.

7. That the entire human family has descended from the first human pair, and, with the one exception of Christ, this descent has been by ordinary generation.

8. That man, when created by God, was holy. Then God entered into a covenant of works with the one man Adam. In the covenant Adam represented his posterity, and thus when he violated the requirement, all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him and fell with him into an estate of sin.

CONTEMPORARY CRITICS OF these affirmations might charge them with sanctioning a "poetic" creation account. If so, it bears noting that, contrary to the slippery-slope fears of the Sabbath-creationists, neither Murray's eternal Sabbath nor the presbytery's interpretive openness have cultivated in the OPC, thirty years later, a "poetic Sabbath," that is, observable decline in Sabbath-keeping. The lesson to be drawn, it seems, is this: if Sabbath-breaking is the ultimate concern of the watchdogs from Taylors, South Carolina, they had better look for causes elsewhere than in one's interpretation of the days of Genesis one and two.

William Hayward Wilson

_____ *SC88*

Liberalism 201

What does it mean to be conservative in the United States? According to *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, being conservative has to do with the maintenance of "existing views, conditions, or institutions." Conservatism's synonyms are "traditional," "moderate," and "cautious" with respect to older norms of "taste, elegance, style, or manners." This is all well and good, but such a definition, from an American dictionary no less, does not help much with the American form of conservatism. The reason is that, American exceptionalism aside, the United States is a novel phenomenon in the course of human history. Of course, antecedents for our form of government exist in ancient Greece and Rome. But the United States as *they* (anti-federal emphasis ours) emerged in the late eighteenth-century were hardly conservative since they abandoned the two institutions that had preserved some semblance of cultural and political order in the West since at least the fifth century, namely, crown and church. What is more, the freedoms won in the American colonies' war for independence were also fairly novel from a European perspective – hence the Old-vs.-New-World rhetoric.

THE UNITED STATES GRANTED incredible intellectual, political and economic freedom to its citizens (slavery notwithstanding) and these freedoms were so unusual that in 1899 the papacy, one of those traditional

institutions of European social order, condemned Americanism as fundamentally incompatible with Roman Catholic teaching and practice. What Pope Leo XIII regarded as hostile to Catholicism was not so much theological novelty, but the liberal ideology that advocated representative forms of government, free markets and the separation of church and state, an ideology that Pius IX had already condemned in his *Syllabus of Errors*. In other words, the very old and very traditional institution of the papacy condemned ideas and sentiments that today's conservatives ironically regard as old and traditional.

THIS IS ANOTHER WAY OF saying that conservatism in the United States is something of an oxymoron. From a historical perspective, our conservatism is really liberalism since it is on the side of the things that nineteenth-century liberals championed – limited government, individual freedom and economic opportunity. This means that watching conservatives trying to deny their liberalism can be very confusing or very amusing.

No doubt, J. Gresham Machen would be another example of American conservatism's strange ways. In 1926 he testified before the Congress of the United States against the formation of a Federal Department of Education. Machen's reasons for opposing the proposal stemmed from his politics which were decidedly liberal. They may not have been all that unusual for a southern Democrat, which Machen was. But they must have sounded odd coming out of the mouth of a fundamentalist who during the same month that he appeared before Congress also testified before a committee of the northern Presbyterian Church and there did exactly what he criticized Congress of doing. In his remarks before the church Machen blamed liberalism for the controversy that was dividing Presbyterians and argued that preachers who could not affirm such doctrines as the virgin birth be barred from the Presbyterian communion. For Machen, liberalism was an entirely different religion. But before Congress, instead of blaming liberalism for America's woes, he did the liberal thing of telling government officials to leave the American people alone.

SO WAS MACHEN GUILTY OF contradicting himself? Does ideological consistency, for instance, require theological conservatives to be conservative in all walks of life, including politics, economics, and culture? Could it even be that Machen's apparently double-minded performance in 1926 is simply the dark side of conservatism in the United States? What, in fact, Machen's apparent inconsistency shows is that political and religious liberalism are not synonymous. What is more, it suggests lessons for religious conservatives who think they are political conservatives. Whether the philosophy of limited government is liberal or conservative, it is not the easy road to the good life that many political conservatives think.

Machen's reasons for testifying before Congress would likely delight the fans of Rush Limbaugh. The Princeton professor opposed the creation of a federal department of education because he opposed any increase in Washington's powerful bureaucracy. The issue wasn't education; it was politics. "Let us be perfectly clear about one thing," he stated, "if liberty is not maintained with regard to education, there is no use trying to maintain it in any other sphere. If you give the bureaucrats the children, you might as well give them everything else." Machen thereby established his political identity as a liberal, that is, as one fundamentally committed to the principle of limited government.

Machen's politics started with the idea that government was a necessary evil. The state's purpose was not "to produce blessedness or happiness" but rather to prevent "blessedness or happiness from being interfered with by wicked men." The aim of government, then, was to sustain the good life of individuals and families, rather than making a people into a great nation. In a lengthy passage from an address given before Christian day school teachers and administrators, Machen outlined the political creed of all genuine liberals.

> There are certain basic rights of the individual man and the individual family which must never be trampled under foot – never for any supposed advantage of the whole, never because of the supposed necessity of any emergency – certain basic rights like the right of personal freedom, the right of property, the right of privacy of the home, the real freedom of speech and of the press. I believe in the specifically American idea in government – not a nation divided for purposes of administrative convenience into a number of units called states, but a number of indestructible states, each with its inalienable rights, each with its distinctive features, with its own virtues to be cultivated by its own citizens, with its own defects not to be remedied at all unless remedied by its own citizens, and, on the other hand, a Federal government not in possession of any general and unexpressed sovereignty but carefully limited to powers expressly granted it by a Constitution which was not of its own making.

Machen's commitment to limited government was his chief reason for opposing the proposed federal department of education. Governmental control and regulation of education implied that children "belong to the State, that their education must be provided for by the State in a way that makes for the State's welfare," an assumption that undermined the legitimate authority of parents. Protecting the rightful authority of local powers, what Protestants used to call, lesser magistrates, was the other piece of Machen's commitment to limited government. In other words, he opposed federal intrusion into the affairs of other duly constituted authorities, from families, neighborhoods, and counties, up to the state governments that comprised the

United States of America. For this reason, Machen saw in federal programs like a department of education or the Child-Labor Amendment, the same sort of centralization and consolidation of political power that Germany was exhibiting under National Socialism and the Soviet Union under Communism. The American alternative to such efforts was not to centralize and consolidate power in a more progressive fashion, but to avoid centralization altogether and limit national government by dispersing power to a host of local authorities.

OF COURSE, DECENTRALIZING power – what we today call devolution – would mean less uniformity and even less efficiency. But Machen would not blink in the face of these negative consequences. He even went so far as to say that inefficiency and diversity were good things in and of themselves. Although Machen was not at all happy with many of the individual states' policies, he was far more comfortable with forty-eight governments having a spoon in the pot rather than allowing the federal government to be the sole chef. In fact, he thought there was "a great safeguard" in the multiplicity of local governments. What is more, Machen believed that such multiplicity would foster greater competition, another benefit of decentralization. He held that "there ought to be the most unlimited competition – competition between one state and another." If such competition led to inefficiency so much the better. Efficiency was no magic wand. Instead, if directed to harmful ends it was equally destructive. As he told senators and congressmen, "a more uniform and efficient system of public common school education . . . is the worst fate into which any country can fall."

THIS IS A PLACE WHERE contemporary conservatives would likely be uncomfortable with political liberalism since many on the right not only want to reduce the hold of the federal government on educational policy and funding, but also think they know what a good education looks like and desire to see the blessings of such a curriculum extended to all of America. But Machen did not flinch from the consequences of limited government. Local control in the service of liberty meant all people having a say in the way they lived their lives. And this meant a greater chance of diversity in all walks of life. Of course, the distribution of power to local authorities would not work out automatically for the good of the nation. What Machen thought to be in the best interests of America was a wide spectrum of families and local communities determining their own affairs, not the dissolving of familial and regional idiosyncracies for the sake of national interest.

Today, Machen's views would not make sense to many Calvinists. That's because they follow the older Puritan view that insists on commonly held convictions being the best way to preserve social harmony, and on true religion as the bedrock for good government. Machen clearly departed from this tradition, and this is partly explained by the legacy of the Puritan conception of government in postbellum America. Ever since the end of the Civil War, northern Protestants had been advocating various ecumenical and interdenominational endeavors in order to work together more efficiently, establish a united Protestant front against the centralized and uniform power of America's growing Roman Catholic population, and extend the virtues of Anglo-American morality to all classes, races, and regions. But even if such uniformity and power were in Protestant-friendly hands, Machen's liberal instincts resisted.

If some would accuse Machen of leaving religion out of politics, his defense was that injecting morality into public debates is not the only form religious influence can take. Machen appealed to aspects of theology other than the Decalogue, such as liberty of conscience, the limits of church power, Presbyterian polity, and sphere sovereignty. The *Westminster Confession*'s teaching on liberty of conscience supplied a hermeneutic of suspicion ever watchful for abuses of power. Even in cases where authority was legitimate, such as in the spheres of the home, church and state, the doctrine of sphere sovereignty implied that these authorities had limits and could not go beyond them. State control of education was a flagrant violation of sphere sovereignty. But so was parochial or church-based schooling since the family was the sole institution responsible for the training of children.

PRESBYTERIAN POLITY WAS another piece in Machen's political liberalism. Unlike episcopal forms of government, Presbyterians and Reformed locate church power, not in the hands of one officer or bishop, but rather vest it in a series of graded courts, the membership of which consists of pastors and elders holding equal rank. Presbyterian polity protects the rights of lower courts against those of the higher, and contributed to Machen's wariness of higher courts usurping the powers of local bodies. In other words, Presbyterianism is the form of church government most compatible with such sociological notions as mediating structures or the Roman Catholic doctrine of subsidiarity. The idea behind both concepts is that large structures like those of centralized government are clumsy if not ruthless in addressing the variety of circumstances and problems of ordinary individuals, families, congregations and communities. Accordingly, the state should not perform tasks which other institutions and communities can perform for themselves. In the words of Pius XI's *Quadragesimo anno*, "Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what

lesser and subordinate organizations can do."

IRONICALLY, IT HAS BEEN Roman Catholics in the twentieth century, those who affirm an infallible centralized authority, who have done the most to explore the political implications of subsidiarity. In contrast, twentieth-century American Protestants, whose very denominational diversity vindicates the principle of subsidiarity, lament their lack of uniformity and pine for a Protestant pope who will give them the order and stability necessary for greater influence.

Be that as it may, a commitment to liberalism in the classic political sense need not mean an equal commitment to individualism. One of the reasons why Machen's liberalism fails to resonate with contemporary Calvinists is that they do not see how his politics are rooted in the notion of legitimate authority. It was not that Machen believed all governmental power was always harmful. Rather, it was when government overreached its proper bounds that Machen expressed alarm. The real problem with the growth of the centralized power is that it breeds individual rights. The tension of modern politics is not between individuals and the compelling interest of the state. Instead, as Mark C. Henrie argues, the power of the state has risen in direct proportion to growth of individual rights. "For the rights that have been 'recognized' by the modern liberal state are not so much rights against the state as they are rights against other social bodies that used to have some measure of authority in the lives of men and women." Machen's plea for liberty, in fact, was an argument for the freedom of legitimate authorities to exercise power in their proper spheres. For him it was the essence of paternalism to let government do good things that involved it in spheres where it should not go.

THE LESSONS OF MACHEN'S liberalism are many. But the one that sticks out during a presidential primary season when neo-Calvinists are jumping on the George-W.-Bush bandwagon because of his born-again experience and their own biblical convictions is that it's okay for religious conservatives to be liberal. This is another way of saying that theology does not determine politics, especially if we keep in mind that theology is a little more than morality. *World* magazine recently received the brush off from the *Times*', William Safire, for the publication's hatchet-job of John McCain. Marvin Olasky, who edits *World* and serves as an advisor to Bush, lamely responded that *World* covers the news from a "biblical perspective." This means, "among other things, that we take personal morality seriously." But so does William Safire who thought *World*'s coverage was immoral. Could it be that a biblical perspective on politics would attend to such matters as scale, power, economics, and self-interest, not just the Sixth Commandment (i.e. abortion) and the Seventh Commandment (i.e. drunkenness and Cindy McCain's stock in Anheuser Busch)? Machen's politics would surely indicate so. But as long as religious conservatives continue to evaluate candidates and issues simply through a moral squint, they provide positive proof, contrary to their own assertion, that religion is irrelevant to all areas of life. Morality may, but the doctrines of the Trinity, creation, providence, and eschatology do not have much to say about NAFTA, HMO's or NATO.

IRONICALLY, BY REDUCING Christianity to ethics, today's religious right turns out to offer little more than the old religious left which performed a similar reductionism in its effort to shape American public life and show the relevance of Christianity.

Liberalism is a hard subject to learn.

Townsend P. Levitt

_____ *SC88*

39 Alexander Hall

Misspelling Presbyterianism

Rearrange the letters in her name, a friend recently told us, and "Britney Spears" spells "Presbyterians." We tried it, and it's true. The significance may extend no further than evidence of the popularity of computer-based anagram programs. Then again, the young pop diva may serve as a fitting metaphor for the ways in which Presbyterianism can be jumbled to the point of being unrecognizable.

A FEW YEARS AGO, GENEVA Press published a book with a title we wish we thought of first: *How to Spell Presbyterian*. We would have written it differently, as the little primer for new members described Presbyterianism in characteristically mainline terms. Still, we credit the author with recognizing that joining the church involves a spelling lesson.

In contrast, conservative Presbyterians seem more eager to disguise Presbyterian identity. One leading advocate of contemporary worship has written, "although I am a Presbyterian, I confess that I do not share [the] desire for us always to 'look like Presbyterians' before the watching world." As a result, his book on worship is an example of badly misspelled Presbyterianism, so bad that this fellow's church may actually be singing songs originally made popular by Ms. Spears.

WE ENCOUNTERED ANOTHER example of misspelled Presbyterianism in the winter 1999 issue of *Regeneration Quarterly*, where a Presbyterian pastor describes his recent "millennial pilgrimage," that is, a tour

of Rome and Constantinople. Confronted with the impressive spirituality of the Roman and Eastern churches, the pastor returned to his church "more frustratingly committed to unity than ever," lamenting that "Presbyterians do schism better than Italians do spaghetti sauce."

Now surely this must take the reader aback. American Presbyterians renowned for schism? To the contrary, since the civil war, Presbyterians have done union faster than Greeks do constitutions. After the Old School-New School reunion in 1869, the northern church has welcomed Cumberland Presbyterians (1903), Calvinistic Methodists (1904), the United Presbyterian Church of North America (1958), and finally the prodigal southerners (1983). Not to mention other ecumenical activity such WARC, NCC, WCC, and COCU. In that same 140 year period, they have seen only the Orthodox Presbyterians (1936) and the Evangelical Presbyterians (1981) depart, small losses involving more noise than numbers.

Of course, what our Presbyterian pilgrim really meant to say was that *sectarian* Presbyterianism does schism in ways that make Italian chefs' mouths water. Mainline Presbyterians are ecumenists, and conservative Presbyterians are separatists, each for reasons that they find compelling. But what strikes us as most odd, and even, permit us to say, a tad dishonest, is this author's refusal anywhere to identify himself as a sectarian Presbyterian. He is, after all, a ministerial member of the Presbyterian Church in America, a denomination that has a more convoluted story of separation (some of which can be legitimately called schism) than perhaps any other American Presbyterian denomination. The PCA represents four groups of Presbyterian renegades, the original PCA, a group that left the Presbyterian Church, U.S., and the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, a group that left the Bible Presbyterian Synod, a group that left the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a group that left the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.

THE RESULT IS A SEVERELY conflicted picture: a Presbyterian separatist in denial, disguised as a mainliner searching for unity. The author seeks resolution by observing that in the end it may matter less what church you are a member of than what church you are longing for. But this only raises the question, why be Presbyterian at all? We believe that it is far better to say that the church you are a member of is a good indication of the church that you are longing for. For conservative Presbyterians, this gets complicated, because it involves an identity and a hope that try to balance separatism and ecumenicity. This is not a formula that will make sojourns to Rome easy, but, no matter how poorly executed, it is an ecclesiology that will result in better spelling.

T. R. Beauregard

More Women, Fewer Chaplains

As this issue of the *NTJ* goes to press (sounds like a real magazine), special committees of ministers from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America are debating what to do about women in the military. This issue surfaced several years ago when Presbyterian chaplains, who objected to the Clinton administration's policies (not to mention politics), asked their respective communions for advice. Should they go along with men and women serving along side each other, or could they object to the military's procedures on the grounds that the churches holding their credentials had ruled that the Bible forbade women from serving in the military? Talk about eisegesis. Some presbyters in both denominations objected to the way the issue had come before the church. The church declares the whole counsel of God and has already done so. If to this point she has not spoken on women in the military, then it's a little late in the game to make the Bible condemn what Bill Clinton has wrought. But thanks to the Republican sentiments running strong in both denominations, each church will weigh the merits of reports that, if the chaplains get their way, will force the military to accommodate their objections.

THESE DEVELOPMENTS HAVE caused us to wonder whether the real problem is not women but chaplains in the military. What, for instance, does a Lutheran pilot do when an Orthodox Presbyterian minister is administering the Lord's Supper? For that matter, what's the Hindu Sargent supposed to do Sunday morning at 11 o'clock? If units of the military were broken down according to churches or religions, then it might be possible to have a PCA minister serving in a PCA unit. But such segregation runs the risk of typecasting believers. Jews, for example, might be counted on to be really good grenade throwers as long as they had slings, and Calvinists could hone their skills as flame throwers (just ask Servetus). But such identification of belief with military skill does not seem a wise move for religionists who claim to be peacemakers.

Then there is the question of why we need chaplains to begin with. If the United States only fought wars defending its own territory the way the Founding Fathers appeared to intend, then we could actually have churches near military bases across America and let regular clergy serve the troops as part of real congregations. Of course, once you start shipping soldiers around the world, the ministry of word and sacrament requires a different form of delivery from the kind Christ and the apostles practiced.

THERE IS A WAY TO FIX THAT. It's called isolationism. That of course makes us part of the lunatic fringe, though neither of the editors belongs to the Reform Party. (If only they'd call it Reformed. . .) Still, isolationism allows

the church to be the church. Perhaps, the better thing to call it is just war theory, a doctrine which appears to justify the defense of a nation's borders but raises questions about countries that act like the global police. Either way, a military based on home soil would prevent churches from having to create the new office of chaplain to keep in step with the nation-state. Instead, the church could go about its regular business of a local, residential, clergy.

The biggest problem with chaplains, however, may be that the military attaches too many strings and compromises the so-called ministry of military clergy. Here the recent report in the February issue of *First Things*, "Sex and the Married Missileer," on the case of Lt. Ryan Berry should be read by all commissioners and delegates to the upcoming assemblies. At a first reading, the problem Berry faced was precisely the problem of introducing women into the close quarters of a missile alert facility in North Dakota. As a good Catholic, Berry objected to having to be stationed with women, sensing that such a situation put him in the path of temptation. And here we should state emphatically that we don't think it's the greatest idea in the world for unmarried men and women to live together as they must if serving in the military. Male headship and gender roles are entirely beside the point. Exegeting the Seventh Commandment isn't that complicated.

AS BERRY SOON LEARNED, THE real issue was the complete sellout he received from the chaplains' top brass when they ruled that the Berry's concern was a "personal" religious matter, not "a specific religious practice" of the Roman Catholic Church. If these chaplains had any ounce of courage, they should have come to Lt. Berry's aid and helped him retain his good standing in the military, not to mention assisting with the cure of his soul. But somehow the lures of serving the only standing superpower in the kingdom of man have a way of obscuring the needs of the members of the kingdom of God. We fear those lures will be especially evident when the General Assemblies of the OPC and PCA consider women in the military. This almost makes us think the Solomonic thing to do would be to make the chaplaincy the only position in which women may serve in the Armed Forces.

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Making a Pact with the Nice Devil

In the Fall 1999 issue of *Auburn Views*, the president of Auburn Seminary, Barbara Wheeler, marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the *Auburn Affirmation* with remarks on what PCUSA advocates of gay ordination can learn from liberal Presbyterians. Of course, conservative Presbyterians relish such arguments because it proves the slippery slope character of liberalism – what today is a denial of the virgin birth, seventy-five years later turns into the ordination of homos. But the real lesson of the Presbyterian controversy of the 1920s is not the moral turpitude of liberals. It is rather the mushiness of evangelicals.

In this piece, Wheeler gives a relatively straightforward reckoning of the events that led to the writing of the *Auburn Affirmation*. Liberals in the Presbytery of New York were about to be disciplined because they would not require candidates for the ministry to affirm doctrines that the General Assembly had ruled "necessary and essential." The *Affirmation* was an appeal on constitutional grounds for liberty in the church: on the one hand, the power of ordination lay with presbyteries, not the General Assembly; on the other hand, historically the church had tolerated a variety of interpretations of these cardinal doctrines.

BUT THE DOCUMENT WAS NOT successful in creating space for liberals. Instead, as Wheeler shows, New York's leading liberals were forced to sign a pact with the evangelical, Charles Erdman, the moderator of the 1925 General Assembly, before they could gain the wiggle room they desired. Before and at that Assembly, Henry Sloane Coffin, persuaded Erdman to short-circuit a split in the church by appointing a Special Committee to study the Presbyterian feud. Only then did liberals acquire breathing room. And that's because the Erdman-appointed committee ruled that the cause of controversy in the church was the meanness of conservatives like J. Gresham Machen. Those people were bitter, intolerant and divisive, and the committee warned that unless they stopped spreading suspicion, they would be disciplined by the church. Under Erdman's leadership, niceness became orthodoxy. In an article on Erdman and Coffin for the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (Feb 2000), Wheeler confirms this conclusion. She quotes Erdman, "in debating Christian doctrines . . . one needs a vein of humor, common sense, and brotherly love." This is what divided Erdman and Machen, she contends. To "be nice to your theological opponents" was a controversial position in the 1920s.

WHEELER SEEMS TO THINK PRO-gay ordination Presbyterians can gain a similar outcome if they follow the example of the Affirmationists. What she doesn't see is that once liberals sought relief from Erdman, they can't go back to a position that faithfulness is the hallmark of the church. At the beginning of her piece, for example, Wheeler writes that the recent decisions by the PCUSA about barring gays from ordination are ones that the constituencies of Union and Auburn seminaries "think are *wrong*: not only *misguided*, but *unfaithful* to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and therefore theologically *false* and *damaging* to the mission of God in the contemporary world"[emphasis ours]. Who sounds like Machen now? How much does Wheeler have a sense of humor about gay ordination? Are her words nice to her ecclesiastical opponents? If

anything, the example of the *Auburn Affirmation* is that pro-gay forces today should use the language of toleration and diversity of perspectives. Words like "wrong" and "unfaithful," however, do not admit a variety of interpretations about gay ordination. Wheeler's is a right view. And those who don't follow the right view are, to borrow the words of Don Imus, "not on the side of the baby Jesus."

But the problem here is not so much that Wheeler hasn't seen what the Affirmationists were up to as much as that she has not figured out what happened to the PCUSA once it made Erdman's piety the norm for church life. For instance, Wheeler complains that the gay party is "pretty mushy on polity questions." Well, so was Erdman. After all, polity, theology and liturgy don't matter compared to a "holy character" (Erdman's words). Wheeler herself falls into this trap when in a footnote she says of Machen that Jack Rogers, after reading a draft of her article, reported that the Princeton conservative "held Erdman in contempt, once calling him a pinhead." It would be nice to know how Rogers came by this information and why Wheeler thinks such second-hand reports bolster her case. For some, such gossip (a violation of the ninth commandment, the one the PCUSA strung Machen up on) could actually create second thoughts about the author's niceness. Still, if Wheeler is going to hold Machen to the standard of Erdman, then she better make sure that none in her party ever say mean things about the anti-gay party, like calling them "homophobes." But even worse, what is Wheeler going to do if she discovers that anti-gay Presbyterians are as nice as Charlie Erdman, people who don't eat babies but also oppose gay ordination?

IN THE END, WHEELER SUFFERS from the same problem that Camille Paglia noted about the PCUSA several years ago when the denomination started down the road of accommodating homosexuality. Wheeler is trying to domesticate something that according to Pagila is inherently unbiblical. Gay sex cannot be made to conform to the standards of the Seventh Commandment, according to Paglia. Nor can homosexuality, she adds, be made to fit "the chipper Chamber of Commerce language of the country club brochure, the authentic voice of 1950s American Protestantism, with its trimmed-lawn view of sex and emotion." Of course, the piety of the Presbyterian Ward and June Cleaver is exactly what the PCUSA exuded thanks to the likes of Charles Erdman who turned love of neighbor into never giving offense. But gay advocates only have their liberal forebears to blame.

THE REAL LESSON FROM seventy-five years ago is for liberals not to get in bed with evangelicals. If Coffin had not colluded with Erdman and if liberals had actually left the PCUSA at that momentous moment in 1925, then, of course, they would have had to suffer Machen's glee. But at least they would have been free of Machen's sentimental colleague, Erdman. And they would have had their own church where they could have ordained and married gays as fast as they wanted.

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Second Hand Smoke

If the NTJ *were ever to start a diet plan, the following from John Barth's* The Floating Opera *seems like a good start to the day.*

I recommend three Maryland beaten biscuits, with water, for your breakfast. They are hard as a haulseiner's conscience and dry as a dredger's tongue, and they sit for hours in your morning stomach like ballast on a tender ship's keel. They cost little, are easily and crumblessly carried in your pockets, and if forgotten and gone stale, are neither harder nor less palatable than when fresh. What's more, eaten first thing in the morning and followed by a cigar, they put a crabberman's thirst on you, such that all the water in a deep neap tide can't quench – and none, I think, denies the charms of water on the bowels of morning?

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