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Volume 40 | Number 1 Article 2

September 2011

Machen and the Gospel

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Introduction

J. Gresham Machen died on January 1, 1937. Of what relevance—for people who live in the twenty-first century—is anything that Machen said or wrote? Machen never saw the greatest achievements of man, some might contend. The Ford Motor Company stopped manufacturing the Model T just ten years before Machen's death. The fastest airplane could fly at only around three hundred miles per hour. And the computer was not to be developed for some three years. Then, once it was developed, a computer filled a room and did not have even one tenth of the computing power that we now carry in our smart phones. If we move the comparisons between Machen's age and our own into the theological realm, perhaps the point becomes more apparent. In Machen's day the Dead Sea Scrolls, which have provided historical and theological insights into the period before, during, and after the days of Jesus, had yet to be discovered. The Roman Catholic Church had yet to convene Vatican II, a watershed event in the history of theology. And Machen had only begun to sample the works of one of the twentieth century's best-known theologians, Karl Barth. So if these theological observations are true, of what relevance is Machen to our own understanding and promotion of the gospel of Christ?

To answer this question, I propose to defend the thesis that Machen's battle with liberalism over the gospel of Christ is as relevant now as it was in his own day. We will see that relevance, first, by exploring Machen's original battle with liberalism; second, by exploring Machen's understanding of the gospel and Christianity, a Christian faith that had, at its core, justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone; and, third, by connecting Machen's understanding of the gospel and of liberalism to our own context. Far from being irrelevant, Machen's writings struck a bell that has been sounded by faithful theologians throughout the ages—by the apostles, the faithful church fathers, Luther, Calvin, the fathers of Dort, the Westminster divines, Hodge and Warfield at Princeton, and a host of others. By looking at Machen's response to the gospel of liberalism, we can be further equipped to deal with liberalism in our own day and encouraged that we are not alone in the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Machen's Original Battle

We can look at Machen's conflict with liberalism, as it pertains to the gospel, from a number of different points. However, a major flashpoint between Machen and liberalism arose over the subject of foreign missions. Famous philanthropist John D. Rockefeller funded a massive study of foreign missions. The compendium of this study, a book titled *Re-Thinking Missions*, edited by Earnest Hocking, concluded that Christianity is, in many ways, the pinnacle of the other religions in the world. In other words, all religions include elements of Christianity. Hocking writes, "In respect to its theology and ethics, Christianity has many doctrines in common with other religions, yet no other religion has the same group of doctrines."[1] Hocking goes on to explain the fundamental nature of Christianity:

> It is of the essence of Christianity that its central teachings are simple. It was one aspect of the genius of Jesus that amid a rich store of earlier codes and doctrines he discerned what was essential and brought it to brief and forcible expression. The essence of the law he states in the two great commandments; the essence of right conduct in the Golden Rule; the essence of prayer in the Lord's Prayer; the essence of theology in the picture of God as Father; the essence of the social ideal in the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven among men.[2]

In this characterization of Christianity, there is no mention of sin or salvation. The absence of these two categories is all the more evident when Hocking gives a description of the aim of Christian missions: "To seek with people of other lands a true knowledge and love of God, expressing in life and word what we have learned through Jesus Christ, and endeavoring to give effect to his spirit in the life of the world."[3]

Subsequently, Pearl Buck, a well-known novelist and missionary to China, wrote a positive review of Hocking's *Re-Thinking Missions*. Buck was at first suspicious of the report, but after she read it from cover to cover, she changed her mind considerably:

> I now confess with enthusiasm and delight that having read it from cover to cover, I put it down with a sense of complete satisfaction. I have not read merely a report. I have read a unique book, a great book. The book presents a masterly statement of religion in its place in life, and of Christianity in its place of religion. The first three chapters are the finest exposition of religion I have ever read.[4]

Buck heaped praise upon this report, and her views on the way that missionaries should operate sheds light on her view of missions:

> Let the spread of the spirit of Christ be rather by mode of life than preaching. I am weary unto death with this incessant preaching. It deadens all thought, it confuses all issues, it is producing in our Chinese church a horde of hypocrites and in our theological seminaries a body of Chinese ministers which makes one despair of the future. Let us cease our talk for a time and cut off our talkers, and try to express our religion in terms of living service, so that we may show others and see for ourselves if our religion is worth anything or not.

It seems that both Hocking and Buck perfectly embody the old cliché of liberalism—deeds, not creeds.

This view is worlds apart from Machen's understanding of Christianity. Machen reacted quite strongly to Hocking's *Re-Thinking Missions* as well as to Buck's positive assessment of it. This reaction eventually led to Machen's formation of the Independent Mission Board, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and, of course, his ignominious defrocking from the mainline Presbyterian church.[5] As important as these events are, what is of greater interest is Machen's characterization of Christianity and the function of missions. Also of interest is Machen's understanding of preaching, in contrast with Buck's view of deeds instead of creeds.

Unlike the moralist's approach to Christianity, Machen believed that Christianity at its core is doctrinal. Machen asks the question, "Is it true, then, that Christianity is not a doctrine but a life?" Machen then responds, "The Christian movement at its inception was not just a way of life in the modern sense, but a way of life founded upon a message. It was based, not upon a mere feeling, not upon a mere program of work, but upon an account of facts. In other words it was based upon

doctrine."[6] And for Machen, one doctrine is the touchstone for the Christian faith: "At the center of Christianity is the doctrine of 'justification by faith.'"[7] Machen believed that the rediscovery of the doctrine of justification by faith brought with it the whole of our evangelical freedom. Machen writes, "As expounded by Luther and Calvin the Epistle of Galatians became the 'Magna Charta of Christian liberty.'"[8] Moreover, Machen argues, "What then was the message of Luther which set the world aflame? It was not something that Luther originated but something that he discovered; the Reformation of the sixteenth century was a rediscovery of Paul, and through Paul a rediscovery of Jesus."[9]

Justification by Faith Alone and the Gospel

This question naturally arises: Why did Machen believe that justification was at the center of Christianity? In a word, the doctrine of justification is the nexus of a number of doctrines, as it embodies, in Christ, God's grace given to sinful man to bring about his salvation. Machen embraced the teaching of the Scriptures, the Reformation, and the Westminster Standards, namely, that man was created upright and given a command not to eat from the tree of knowledge. However, Adam did not stand alone; his actions were not his alone, for in the language of older theology, Adam was a public person (*Larger Catechism*, question 22; cf. q. 52). What Adam did, whether he obeyed or disobeyed, would be imputed to his wife and his offspring. Paul makes this point abundantly clear in Romans 5.12 (ESV): "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, …so death spread to all men because all sinned." The idea of representative obedience and disobedience appears throughout the Scriptures. Think, for example, of David's sinful military census. The Lord specifically prohibited Israel from numbering their army because he always wanted his people to know that their strength came from him, not their great numbers (2 Sam. 24.1-10; 1 Chr. 21.1-4). Still, David commanded Joab to take a census, and though it was David's action alone, the people suffered for his action; seventy thousand men died from a pestilence (1 Sam. 24.15). The many suffered because of the actions of one. On the other hand, righteous Noah was obedient to the command of the Lord to build an ark, and as a result Noah's household was saved from the flood (Gen. 6-8). The many benefitted from the actions of one. In a word, Adam was our federal representative and plunged the whole human race into the pit of original sin.

Machen was aware of the different ways by which ancient and modern humanity proposed to extricate themselves from the pit of sin and death. Machen rejected mysticism as an approach to God and redemption because mystics believe that communion with God is based in "ineffable experience," whereas the Bible teaches that a premium is placed upon understanding and knowing the truth.[10] Machen also rejected pantheism because while it makes God near to man by making God everything, it makes God remote by making God a "blind vital force," destroying the personality of God and thereby making impossible any fellowship with him, let alone deliverance from the guilt and shame of sin and death.[11] If pantheism and mysticism are closed roads, then surely man might extricate himself through his own good works—his own show of morality. While on a human level, doing good is certainly better than doing evil, Machen wanted to know the root cause and motivating factor behind such morality.

Machen understood that in the United States, morality is often an exponent of patriotism. In other words, our government inculcates the nation in a corporate morality: "We must do what is right because Uncle Sam thinks so." Another version of this might be, "Don't lie because it's not the American way." Such expressions of morality are ultimately driven by a love for country, observed Machen. Writing in the wake of World War I, a war attributed, rightly or wrongly, to the nationalism of Germany, Machen asked the insightful question as to whether such a patriotic morality was any different than the morality of Prussia. In other words, to teach a nation to follow the moral code of the country, a code that all other nations must follow, is the same spirit that drove Germany and Prussia to engage in a bloody and costly war.[12]

If patriotic morality is not the answer, then surely a biblical morality is the cure for the guilt and shame of sin, right? Machen was aware of Paul's

teaching in Romans 2: "Even the Gentiles, though they do not know that clear manifestation of God's law which was found in the Old Testament, have God's law written upon their hearts and are without excuse when they disobey."[13] Could not the moral law written upon man's heart as well as upon the two tablets of stone on Sinai give man the moral ladder by which to ascend from the pit of sin and death and rise to heaven? The simple answer is "no." In Machen's lecture notes on Galatians, he observes, "The law made the commands of God so terribly clear that Paul could see plainly that there was no hope for him if he appealed for his salvation to his own obedience to those commands."[14] The law, as the Scriptures clearly show, only brings condemnation. Machen knew that the law is powerless to save; the law only has the power to condemn.

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Certainly, then, a person must believe in God, but should he also not contribute to his salvation in some way? Machen identified this combination of faith and works as a false gospel. In his lecture notes on Galatians, Machen writes, "The enemy against which Paul is fighting in the Epistle can be reconstructed fairly well from the Epistle itself. Paul was fighting against the doctrine that a man can earn a part, at least, of his salvation by his own obedience to God's law; he was fighting against the doctrine that a man is justified not by faith alone, but by faith *and* works."[15] Machen knew that Paul's opponents, the Judaizers, though an ancient foe of the gospel, had descendants in his own day:

> So the error of the Judaizers is a very modern error indeed, as well as a very ancient error. It is found in the modern Church wherever men seek salvation by "surrender" instead of by faith, or by their own character instead of by the imputed righteousness of Christ, or by "making Christ master in the life" instead of by trusting in His redeeming blood. In particular, it is found wherever men say that "the real essentials" of Christianity are love, justice, mercy and other virtues, as contrasted with the great doctrines of God's Word. These are all just different ways of exalting the merit of man over against the Cross of Christ; they are all of them attacks upon the very heart and core of the Christian religion.[16]

Machen rejected all other approaches to salvation—mysticism, pantheism, moralism, and legalism—and recognized that there was only one way to be saved—by faith alone, in the person and work of Christ alone, by God's grace alone. Why did Machen believe that faith in Christ was the only way to salvation?

The answer—to why Machen believed in Christ as the only way to salvation—is found in what the Scriptures teach regarding Adam as our federal representative: "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were constituted sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be constituted righteous" (Rom 5.18-19).[17] Christ is the only one who can save us from the sin of Adam as well as our own personal sins. As Paul writes here in Romans 5, we were constituted, or placed in the category of, sinners by the active disobedience of Adam, and by way of a breathtaking glorious contrast, we are placed in the category of righteous because of the obedience of Jesus Christ. There is a twofold way in which the obedience of Christ saves us and places us in the category of righteous.

First, note what Paul writes concerning the curse that hangs over the head of all people: "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them'" (Gal. 3.10, ESV). It is for this very reason, the curse of the law that hangs upon all people, that Christ came and "was born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (Gal. 4.4b-5a, ESV). Machen explains this point in his lectures on Galatians:

> Christ died that death, which the law fixes as the penalty of sin, when He died upon the cross; and

> since He died that death as our representative, we too have died that death; the penalty of the law is for us done away because that penalty has been paid in our stead by the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus our death to the law, suffered for us by Christ, far from being contrary to the law, was in fulfillment of the law's own demands. We are free from the penalty of death pronounced by the law upon sin not because we are rebels against the law, but because the penalty has been paid by Christ.[18]

Christ has freed us from the penalty of the law and has borne it on our behalf. He suffered for us so that we would not have to suffer.

But second, Christ's work for us does not consist merely in his suffering, as important as this is. Machen makes an important observation when he writes, "I think we can say—if indeed it is legitimate to separate one part of the work of Christ even in thought from the rest—that if Christ had merely paid the penalty of sin for us and had done nothing more we should be at best back in the situation in which Adam found himself when God placed him under the covenant of works."[19] This is what so many in Machen's day, as well as in our own, believe: that Christ merely puts us back in the garden; and left on our own through our own obedience, we must secure our own redemption. But Paul writes, "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5.20-21, ESV). Christ's representative obedience does not merely free us from the penalty against sin but also indefectibly secures our righteous status; Christ secures our redemption, our eternal life.

Machen was well aware of this truth and rejoiced as he looked by faith to Christ because he knew that Christ, the last Adam, had come and succeeded where the first Adam had failed. Machen reveled in the utter simplicity of the gospel: "Such, put in bald, simple form, is the dialogue between every Christian and the law of God. How gloriously complete is the salvation wrought for us by Christ! Christ paid the penalty, and He merited the reward. Those are the two great things that He has done for us."[20] But Machen is careful to stipulate the unified nature of Christ's obedience on our behalf. Machen rejects the common medieval notion that Christ's passive obedience was only his suffering on the cross and that his active obedience was only his law keeping. Rather, Machen explains,

> During every moment of His life upon earth Christ was engaged in His passive obedience. It was all for Him humiliation, was it not? It was all suffering. It was all part of His payment of the penalty of sin. On the other hand, we cannot say that His death was passive obedience and not active obedience. On the contrary, His death was the crown of His active obedience. It was the crown of that obedience to the law of God by which He merited eternal life for those whom He came to save.[21]

The towering figure of Christ stands above all of the claims and efforts of man to extricate himself from the pit of sin and death. Only Christ's representative work can undo the representative disobedience of Adam.

Christ is the reason that Machen opposed all other approaches to God—pantheism, mysticism, moralism, and legalism. Machen observes that the Bible involves three great acts of imputation: first, the sins of Adam are imputed to his descendants; second, the sins of Christ's people are imputed to Jesus; and third, Christ's obedience is imputed to save his people.[22] Because of Christ's work on our behalf, Machen recognizes that we must believe and trust in what Christ has done on our behalf and not trust in what we ourselves can try to do to save ourselves. Machen highlights this difference between man-centered and Christ-centered approaches to salvation in his exegesis of Paul's quotation of Leviticus 18.5 in Galatians 3.11-12: "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.' But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them'" (ESV). Machen explains that what Paul describes here is the nature of the law: "It requires *doing* something." But by way of contrast, "faith is the opposite of doing." According to Machen, to be justified by faith means that a person has not *done* anything. Machen writes,

> There are two conceivable ways of salvation. One way is to keep the law perfectly, to *do* the things

> which the law requires. No mere man since the fall has accomplished that. The other way is to *receive* something, to receive something that is freely given by God's grace. That way is followed when a man has faith. But you cannot possibly mingle the two. You might conceivably be saved by works or you might be saved by faith; but you cannot be saved by both. It is "either or" here not "both and." But which shall it be, works or faith? The Scripture gives the answer. The Scripture says it is faith. Therefore it is *not* works.[23]

Hence, it is Scripture that drives Machen to say, and rightly so, that salvation is by faith alone, in Christ alone.

Machen highlights the Bible's emphasis on faith versus works, or believing versus doing, in his analysis of Jesus and the Roman centurion (Luke 7.2-10; Matt. 8.5-13). The centurion came to Jesus on behalf of his servant who was on his deathbed. The centurion said that he was unworthy to have such an honored guest—Jesus—under his roof and that Jesus need only say the word and he—the centurion—knew his servant would be healed. Machen observes, "The point of the narrative is not that he did anything, but rather that he did nothing; he simply believed that Jesus could do something, and accepted that thing at Jesus' hands; he simply believed that Jesus could work the stupendous miracle of healing at a distance." Machen continues: "In other words, the centurion is presented as one who had faith; and faith, as distinguished from the effects of faith, consists not in doing something but in receiving something. Faith may result in action, and certainly true faith in Jesus always will result in action; but faith itself is not doing but receiving."[24]

If we have not yet noticed, this underlying theology, namely the gospel of Jesus Christ, which has justification at its center, carries massive implications for preaching. Foremost is the difference between the preaching of liberalism and the preaching of orthodox biblical Christianity. In his watershed book *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen differentiated between liberalism and Christianity: the preaching of liberalism begins and ends in the imperative mood. Liberalism appeals to man's will and tells him what he must do in order to be saved. Christianity, on the other hand, begins with a triumphant indicative—Christianity heralds the gracious act of God on man's behalf. In orthodox biblical preaching, the message is founded upon the indicative of what Christ has done for us.[25]

Machen further highlights the differences between Christianity and liberalism by comparing Christian preaching to the ancient peripatetic philosophers. Machen notes that the Cynic and Stoic philosophers ambulated about, preaching to people on how they should live. Christianity took an entirely different approach in that the apostles did not appeal to man's will but instead told a story: "Could anything be more impractical than the attempt to influence conduct by rehearsing events concerning the death of a religious teacher? That is what Paul called the foolishness of the message."[26]

If we stop to think about it for a moment, if we believe that preaching is supposed to beget a man-centered effort at imitating Jesus, then we must admit with Machen, "As a mere ideal, Jesus is a failure."[27] Rather, Machen believed that a person must be grasped by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that this occurs through the preaching of the gospel of Christ.[28] Once a person is redeemed, then, and only then, does Jesus' life serve in an exemplary manner: "The example of Jesus is useful to the Christian not prior to redemption, but subsequent to it."[29] This is the difference between the preaching of liberalism and the preaching of Christianity—the difference between the bald imperative and the triumphant indicative that is followed by the imperative. Machen understood that "liberalism finds salvation . . . in man; Christianity finds it in an act of God."' Machen clarifies this difference when he explains, "He is our Savior, not because He has inspired us to live the same kind of life that He lived, but because He took upon Himself

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the dreadful guilt of our sins and bore it instead of us on the cross. Such is the Christian conception of the Cross of Christ."[30]

The Perennial Relevance of Machen's Battle and the Gospel

The question that stands before us now is this: Have we a need for Machen's militant stance vis-à-vis liberalism? There are certainly those in the broader church who believe that Machen and his ways are and should be a thing of the past. In his latest book, Harvard theologian Harvey Cox tries to make the case that the church has moved beyond the need for creeds and confessions, a period marked by the likes of Machen and fundamentalism.[31] Cox argues that in the days of Jesus, the church knew nothing of lines of division, lines that separated orthodoxy from heresy. Cox contends that the early church did not know of one Christian faith but of multiple Christian faiths—those that emphasized the historical Jesus, others the universal Christ, and still others the mystical inner Christ.[32] According to Cox, therefore, the gospel of Thomas should not be excluded from the Bible, as who is to decide whether it is orthodox or heretical.[33] Hence, Cox believes that the church is now moving into the "Age of the Spirit," where the truth of Christianity is not contained in a creed but is instead something to be embodied.[34] Cox also resonates with the sentiments of well-known evangelical pastor Rick Warren, who argues that the church now needs a second Reformation, one based on deeds, not creeds. Similar to Warren, Cox happily reports that poetry, drama, and dance are finding their way back into sanctuaries across the country.[35]

At this point one cannot help but invoke the old cliché—the more things change, the more they stay the same. Cox's book is heralded as prophetic and timely, and Cox himself is called "a groundbreaking theologian."[36] Yet how are his views different from the views espoused in Rockefeller's *Re-Thinking Missions* or by Pearl Buck's positive assessment of the same? Echoing the sentiments found in *Re-Thinking Missions*, Cox writes of his discovery of the appreciation of Jesus in the other religions of the world, from his contact with persons of other faiths in a course he taught on the subject of Jesus:

> I quickly learned that Christianity has no monopoly on Jesus. Hindus understood him as an avatar, Buddhists as a bodhisattva, and both Muslims and Jews as a prophet of God. Even agnostics found something fascinating and admirable in him. They were not all that attracted to Christianity, but they were all drawn to Jesus for his exemplary courage, his compassion for the disinherited, and his willingness to stand up to corrupt political and religious authorities.[37]

To be frank, this is an expression of classical liberalism—of the very sort that Machen so vigorously opposed. Additionally, such an assessment flies in the face of Jesus' own words. As C. S. Lewis has observed, Jesus does not present himself as a mere man, or a good teacher, but as God in the flesh. We are thereby faced with a trilemma: he is either a liar on the level of demon, or a lunatic on the level of a person who thinks himself to be a poached egg, or Lord. And if he is Lord, we have the moral obligation to fall on our faces and worship him as such.[38] Machen's stand against liberalism must be our stand against the same, and we must fight the battle with the same weapons: the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Cox's praise of the embodiment of faith over and against creeds, and his celebration of the inclusion of poetry, drama, and dance in worship, also echoes Buck's desire to see preaching eliminated. The more we entertain, the less room we find for preaching the gospel of the risen and ascended Messiah. People begin to look for entertainment and unwittingly buy into the world's assessment of preaching—that it is a foolish way to spread the gospel of Christ. One need not go far into the church to find sheer entertainment masquerading as worship.

Even within the Reformed community, there are signs of compromise. I was once asked to baptize a child at a conservative Reformed church but was told that the month of December would not be a possible time because of scheduled choir numbers and special music pieces. While choirs and special music are certainly debatable matters, the more fundamental issue is that the visible preaching of the gospel of Christ in the sacrament of baptism, a rite ordained and instituted by Christ

himself, was being pushed aside by music. Evening worship among Reformed churches is also in decline. How can the dying hear the message of the gospel when churches close their doors and do not strike the rock in the wilderness to bring forth the living water of life?

Machen alerts us to another problem that appeared in his own day and continues to affect churches today, even within Reformed circles. Machen laments that when people come to the church, they only find the turmoil of the world. Machen writes, "The preacher comes forward not out of a secret place of meditation and power, not with the authority of God's Word permeating his message, not with human wisdom pushed far into the background by the glory of the Cross, but with human opinions about the social problems of the hour or easy solutions of the vast problem of sin. Such is the sermon." Machen laments,

> *We must continue to stand with Machen and demand and expect that our ministers will herald the gospel of Christ and accept no substitutes.*

> Is there no refuge from strife? Is there no place of refreshing where a man can prepare for the battle of life? Is there no place where two or three can gather in Jesus' name, to forget for the moment all those things that divide nation from nation and race from race, to forget human pride, to forget the passions of war, to forget the puzzling problems of industrial strife, and to unite in overflowing gratitude at the foot of the Cross? If there be such a place, then that is the house of God and that the gate of heaven. And from under the threshold of that house will go forth a river that will revive the weary world.[39]

Sadly, Machen's characterization of pulpits in his day is still relevant. Once, when one of my elders on session came back from a vacation where he and his wife attended a conservative Reformed congregation for worship, they reported that the pastor sounded more like an angry man railing against societal ills than a minister bringing the balm of the gospel to the people of God. We must continue to stand with Machen and demand and expect that our ministers will herald the gospel of Christ and accept no substitutes.

However, another alarming trend is growing within the broader church, even within the walls of evangelicalism. Well-known evangelical historian Mark Noll recently wrote a book titled *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism.* Bottom line, Noll's answer to this question is "yes"—The Reformation is over. Noll's basic argument is that in the wake of Vatican II and the publication of the Roman Catholic Church's *Catechism*, Rome's position on justification "now seems to fall somewhere between John Wesley's Arminianism and the Augustinian positions maintained by Martin Luther and John Calvin." Noll explains,

> Thus, on the substance of what is actually taught about God's saving work in the world, if not always on the exact terminology used to describe that saving work, many evangelicals and Catholics believe something close to the same thing. If it is true, as once was repeated frequently by Protestants conscious of their anchorage in Martin Luther or John Calvin that *iustificatio articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae* (justification is the article on which the church stands or falls), then the Reformation is over.[40]

In one sense, Noll's comments represent a great change since the days of Machen, but it is not a change for the better.

In Machen's day, he could count on fellow so-called evangelicals to stand shoulder to shoulder with him against the Roman Catholic Church. But now, Noll's book represents pressure from within evangelicalism to compromise with Rome because there is no great perceived difference between the two camps. The problem is that Noll's analysis is false. In fact, the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church has become far worse than anything that the Council of Trent ever said on salvation and the doctrine of justification. Aside from

the fact that the *Catholic Catechism* continues to endorse the proclamations of Trent, Vatican II goes on to promote the doctrine of the "anonymous Christian." *Lumen Gentium*, a proclamation of Vatican II, states,

> Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—these too may attain eternal salvation. Nor will divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life. Whatever of good or truth is found amongst them is considered by the church to be a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men and women that they have at length have life.[41]

It is difficult to characterize this statement as anything but salvation by good works. Rome once had semi-Pelagius upon its throne, but he has now abdicated his place of honor to his father, Pelagius. Rome does not stop here but also states, "The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, first among whom are the Muslims: they profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge humanity on the last day."[42]

It is a sad testimony of the devolution of theology when we have to defend the claim among professing Christians that the faith of Abraham is not the faith of Islam and that Yahweh, the one true living God, is not Allah. Jesus tells us in the Word that Abraham longed and looked forward to his advent—Abraham longed for the advent of the Messiah (John 8.56). In other words, Abraham looked to Christ by faith alone, and though he was an ungodly man, he was justified—declared righteous in the sight of God (Rom 4.1-3). The faith of Abraham and Islam hold nothing in common. Noll's call for the end of the Reformation reveals at least two things: (1) that he is unfamiliar with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, and (2) that so-called Protestants no longer understand their own faith—they are no longer familiar with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sentiments like Noll's clearly demonstrate the perennial relevance of Machen's call to stand firm on the gospel of Jesus Christ. We cannot and must not surrender to the cries for peace when in truth there is no peace.

Conclusion

Let us hope that in light of the present challenges to the gospel, whether from the broader church or even within our own circle, we see the benefit of Machen's stand for the truth. When it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is no compromise. We must pray that our faithful Lord would grant us the spirit of humility and love to spread the gospel far and wide so that the lost and dying of the world are delivered from the lies and half-truths of false gospels. At the same time, we must pray that Christ would pour steel into our spines so that we boldly proclaim the gospel of Christ—that God came in the flesh to save fallen humanity from sin and death by standing in our place, not only to pay the penalty for our corporate and individual transgression of God's law but also to fulfill the law on our behalf; moreover, that the way of salvation is not by doing or looking within but by faith alone, by believing in Christ alone. We must pray that God would continue to send faithful ministers to herald the wonderful gospel of Christ and that our Lord, through Word and sacrament, would continue to gather a bride for himself.

Endnotes

1. Ernest Hocking, *Re-Thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1932), 49.
2. Hocking, *Re-Thinking Missions*, 50.
3. Hocking, *Re-Thinking Missions*, 59.
4. Pearl Buck, "The Laymen's Mission Report," *The Christian Century* (23 Nov 1932). This essay is a reprint that has no page numbers. All subsequent quotations are taken from this source.
5. See D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 148-59.
6. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 20-21.
7. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 141; also idem, *What*

Is Faith? (1925; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 200-01.

8. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 144.
9. J. Gresham Machen, *God Transcendent* (1949; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 88.
10. Machen, *What Is Faith?* 49.
11. Machen, *What Is Faith?* 53.
12. Machen, *What Is Faith?* 124-25.
13. J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (1937; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 187.
14. J. Gresham Machen, *Machen's Notes on Galatians*, ed. John H. Skilton (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1972), 159.
15. Machen, *Notes on Galatians*, 9.
16. Machen, *Notes on Galatians*, 10.
17. Translation mine. Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, 2 vols. (1975; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 1.290-91; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 420-21; Charles Hodge, *Romans* (1835; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 173-74.
18. Machen, *Notes on Galatians*, 159.
19. Machen, *God Transcendent*, 187.
20. Machen, *God Transcendent*, 190.
21. Machen, *God Transcendent*, 190.
22. Machen, *Christian View of Man*, 216.
23. Machen, *Notes on Galatians*, 178.
24. Machen, *What is Faith?* 88-89.
25. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 47.
26. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 48.
27. Machen, *God Transcendent*, 74.
28. Machen, *God Transcendent*, 91.
29. Machen, *What Is Faith?* 111.
30. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 117.
31. Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 1-20, 150.
32. Cox, *The Future of Faith*, 59.
33. Cox, *The Future of Faith*, 64-65, 87-89, 165.
34. Cox, *The Future of Faith*, 7.
35. Cox, *The Future of Faith*, 76.
36. Cox, *The Future of Faith*, front and back covers.
37. Cox, *The Future of Faith*, 48.
38. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Collins, 1952), 54-56.
39. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 180.
40. Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 232.
41. "Lumen Gentium," § 16, in Austin Flannery, O. P., *The Basic Sixteen Documents of Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (Northpoint: Costello Publishing, 1996), 222.
42. "Lumen Gentium," § 16, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 221-22.