



**A Short History of the Life of J. G. Machen:
His Relevance for Today--
"...by Faith He Still Speaks, even though He is Dead"**

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"Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."
- Jude 3

Let us not fear the opposition of men; every great movement in the Church from Paul down to modern times has been criticized on the ground that it promoted censoriousness and intolerance and disputing. Of course the gospel of Christ, in a world of sin and doubt, will cause disputing; and if it does not cause disputing and arouse bitter opposition, that is a fairly sure sign that it is not being faithfully proclaimed.⁽¹⁾

Introduction

J. Gresham Machen lived from 1881 to 1937. The old saying that "the more things change the more they stay the same" often seems true. Machen has gone to be with the Lord over 62 years now. Nonetheless, we can learn much from his life. Minimally, from the historical context of his life, we can greatly benefit as we examine the circumstances from his life from around 1920 to his death in 1937 as an opportunity to learn from this controversial time as we apply it our own. Many (if not most or all) of the issues that Machen faced are in one way, shape or form with us today, for example, the interaction, in denominational settings or otherwise, of so-called conservatives, moderates, and liberals in Christendom. In this sense not much has changed since the days of Machen--indeed from the ancient history of Israel or from the early church.

Due to space considerations this paper is not an exhaustive analysis, either in depth or breath, of Machen's life. There is simply too much to cover in a detailed manner. However, what we can examine can be immensely profitable, particularly pertaining to the some of the controversies that raged in the church during Machen's lifetime. In the allotted space I must limit myself to, and will attempt to present the following: First, I will briefly review Machen's early background, from his birth through his education and his becoming a teacher at Princeton Seminary in 1906. Second, I will examine in a little more detail some of the major controversies that Machen was involved in from around 1920 until 1936. Third, I discuss some of the lessons we can learn from Machen's life, that is, some of the implications of these

events and their significance for us today. Fourth, and lastly, I will offer some concluding remarks.

Beginnings

J. (John) Gresham Machen was born on July 28, 1881. His father, Arthur W. Machen, was a prominent Baltimore lawyer, who instilled in his son an interest in legal reasoning, logic and classical literature.⁽²⁾ Machen's mother, Mary (Minnie) Gresham Machen, also exerted a strong influence on her son, among others, in obtaining a thorough knowledge of the Bible and the Westminster Catechism. Machen's father had been raised in Virginia as an Episcopalian, while his mother was a devout "Old School Presbyterian" from Georgia. It appears that Machen's mother wheeled the stronger influence on his spiritual life. (Machen remained a lifelong bachelor and kept close ties to his mother until her death in 1931.) While he was growing up Machen's mother insisted on his attending Baltimore's Franklin Street Presbyterian Church (a Southern Presbyterian Church or part of the Presbyterian Church in the US--PCUS). He joined the church in 1896, at the age of fourteen.

Machen enjoyed a rather privileged up-bringing. He attended a local private academy and received a classical education.

Machen chose John Hopkins University in 1898 to obtain his undergraduate degree (the school was just a few blocks from his parent's home); he had received a Hopkins scholarship. He majored in classics. Machen completed his undergraduate degree in 1901, graduating first in his class. He stayed on for another year to do graduate work under one of the leading classicists in America, Basil L. Gildersleeve, who was an elder in Machen's church.⁽³⁾

After some indecisiveness with what he was going to do with his life, Machen matriculated to Princeton Theological Seminary in 1902. Interestingly, Machen was indifferent if not just plain bored with his studies and often cut class to attend Princeton football games, play tennis, go ice skating, or otherwise. While at Princeton Seminary, Machen simultaneously earned an M.A. in philosophy from Princeton University. In spite of his uncertainty about going into the ministry,⁽⁴⁾ Machen persevered at Princeton Seminary and finished the program in 1905.

Upon completion of his studies at Princeton Seminary, Machen went to Germany for a year to study at the Universities of Marburg and Gottingen. At Marburg he studied under the well-known Adolf Julicher, but was far more impressed by the teaching and piety of Wilhelm Herrmann (a disciple of Albrecht Ritschl), professor of theology. During his second semester in Germany, Machen studied at Gottingen with the New Testament scholars Wilhelm Bousset and Wilhelm Heitmuller. All of the above mentioned professors held to very liberal theological views.

In 1906 Machen reluctantly accepted an offer to become an instructor at Princeton Seminary. His duties at first included teaching beginning Greek, exegesis, and an introductory New Testament course. From here he continued to develop in scholarship (e.g., in Pauline studies) and in his own convictions.

After working through his doubts about being in the ministry and the role and relationship of scholarship and piety, Machen was ordained in 1914. He was promoted to assistant professor the same year. Later in his career at Princeton, Machen was offered the chair of apologetics and ethics (1926) by the board of directors of the seminary. However, due to conflicts (see below) it was never realized.

Influences

Of course, a number of factors and individuals influenced Machen. However, several in particular had a profound influence on his thinking.

Machen's views were heavily influenced by the views of "Old Princeton Theology" and its philosophical foundation of Scottish Common Sense Realism (e.g., Thomas Reid).⁽⁵⁾ The three individuals who had the most influence on him at Princeton were William P. Armstrong, Francis L. Patton, and Benjamin B. Warfield, who warmed him to "Old Princeton."

Machen considered himself and consciously chose the title of Calvinist, an adherent of the Reformed faith, in the tradition flowing from the Word of God through Paul, Augustine, Calvin, and in America in the noteworthy and great tradition represented by Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, and the other representatives of the "Princeton School," rather than a fundamentalist (a term that he said that he never called himself). The later title was often put on him by others.⁽⁶⁾ More precisely yet, Machen considered himself in the tradition of the Westminster Confession, of "Old Princeton," and "Old School Presbyterianism." Machen considered himself a fundamentalist only in the sense that if one meant by that, one who is opposed to modernism.

Controversies

Many controversies had been occurring for awhile in the Presbyterian Church (in the) U.S.A., and also relative to Princeton Seminary, and in much of Christendom for that matter. However, around 1920 many of these centered around or at least in some way related to Princeton Seminary and the involvement of among others, J. Gresham Machen.

One of, if not *the* major controversies of the time was the so-called fundamentalist-modernist controversy. Some have referred to this as the conflict "between the naturalism of theological liberalism and the supernaturalism of both confessionalists and revivalists,"⁽⁷⁾ or the Old School Theology or biblical Christianity versus twentieth-century Barthianism and modernism. This issue manifested itself in many arenas. The following and Machen's involvement in them are some examples.

In 1920 Machen prepared for his first involvement in the General Assembly meeting of the Presbyterian Church (in the) U.S.A. The commissioners of the assembly were to deliberate and vote on the Philadelphia Plan.⁽⁸⁾ The plan called for the merging into one federated group--nineteen different Presbyterian denominations--into one national federated church. (The plan was eventually defeated.) This was the beginning of woes for Machen. The president of Princeton Seminary, Joseph Ross Stevenson, was one of the plan's most vocal supporters, along with professor Charles Erdman of Princeton Seminary. Machen found himself in the middle of the debate and in direct conflict with Stevenson, Erdman, and the others who supported the plan. This skirmish at the 1920 General Assembly "officially" brought Machen into the modernist-fundamentalist fray in general, and this battle in the Northern Presbyterian Church in particular.

Machen opposed the union, for among other reasons, because it would unite in one body, denominations that had significant theological differences. That is, the union would come about at the expense of significant doctrines.⁽⁹⁾ The respective doctrinal distinctives would be put aside for the alleged greater good of so-called relevance and influence that the united denomination would exercise.

Also in 1920 Machen delivered the Sprunt Lectures at Union Theological Seminary. The following year these lectures were published as *The Origin of Paul's Religion*.

In 1921 Machen delivered an address to the Ruling Elders' Association of Chester (Pennsylvania) Presbytery on the "Present Attack against the Fundamentals of our Christian Faith, from the Point of View of Colleges and Seminaries."⁽¹⁰⁾ The address was subsequently published in the *Princeton Theological Review* in 1922 under the title "Liberalism of Christianity?" Due to some encouragement, Machen expanded the essay into *Christianity and Liberalism* which was published in 1923.

Thus, from among other factors, with his involvement in the debate about the Philadelphia Plan of 1920, the publication of *The Origins of Paul's Religion* in 1921, and of *Christianity and Liberalism* in 1923, Machen went from a relatively unknown professor of New Testament to one of the central figures and spokespersons in the modernist-fundamentalist controversy, and at that not just within the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., and of Princeton Seminary, but in Christendom.

Shall the Fundamentalists Win?

On May 21, 1922 at the First Presbyterian Church, New York City, Harry Emerson Fosdick, a Baptist, who had been invited to be the associate minister of the church, preached a sermon entitled, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?"⁽¹¹⁾ The sermon contrasted among other issues the conservative and liberal views (which Fosdick subsequently admitted he held) of the virgin birth, the inspiration of Scripture, and the atonement, and pleaded for tolerance of both views within the church.⁽¹²⁾ Through a series of events, the sermon whose title had been changed to "The New Knowledge and the Christian Faith," was reprinted and sent around the country.

This event and the resulting feuds helped to fan into flame the already smoldering fire of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy. For example, this resulted in the Presbytery of Philadelphia, under the leadership of Clarence Macartney, registering a strong response to (1) the presence of a Baptist minister in a Presbyterian pulpit (church), who did not hold to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and (2) who was a theological liberal-modernist. The Presbytery of Philadelphia presented an overture to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. to deal with this situation.⁽¹³⁾

The General Assembly of 1923 did eventually decide on the overture, voting 439 to 359 in favor of it. The overture asked the General Assembly to "direct the Presbytery of New York to take such action as will require the preaching and teaching in the First Presbyterian Church of New York City to conform to the system of doctrine taught in the Confession of Faith."⁽¹⁴⁾ Moreover, the General Assembly was also asked to reaffirm (previously passed in the 1910 and 1916 General Assemblies) the "Five Declarations" or the five necessary or essential doctrines: the infallibility of the Bible; the virgin birth of Jesus; his substitutionary atonement on the cross; his bodily resurrection; and Christ's mighty miracles, as essential doctrines of Scripture; and to reaffirm its adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

While the overture did pass, note that 359 voted against it and eighty-five commissioners filed an official protest against the assembly's action on it.⁽¹⁵⁾

The modernist-fundamentalist debate was now clearly out in the open and the denominational leaders were split on the issue.

In response to this action of the 1923 General Assembly, a committee of 150 Presbyterian ministers, headquartered in Auburn, New York, issued a document.⁽¹⁶⁾ This document became known as the "Auburn Affirmation." It had two major contentions: (1) that the General Assembly had no constitutional right to elevate the five doctrines as special tests for ordination to the ministry, unless the constitution was changed by a vote of the presbyteries"; and (2) that the five doctrines are non-essential to the system of doctrine taught in Scripture and that they are only theories of about what the Bible actually teaches.⁽¹⁷⁾ It was signed by over twelve hundred Presbyterian ministers in the spring of 1924.

The Battle lines

Thus, the battle lines were drawn and there were numerous clashes or altercations between the two views and among those who were themselves theologically conservative--the moderates (e.g., J. Ross Stevenson and Charles Erdman), but thought that the issue was exaggerated, or could be worked, or that peace and unity were more important than doctrine.

As Hart and Muether state it: "The moderates were by no means liberal. Rather, they were influenced by the revivalist impulses of American evangelicalism and believe that effective outreach and church unity were more important than theological precision or uniformity."⁽¹⁸⁾

At the General Assembly of 1925, Charles Erdman (professor of practical theology at Princeton Seminary) was elected as moderator and appointed a commission (committee of fifteen) to examine the cause(s) of division and unrest in the church and to restore "purity, peace, unity and progress."⁽¹⁹⁾ Conservatives who "made unfounded accusation against well-intentioned and sincere Presbyterian ministers" were blamed for the controversy.⁽²⁰⁾

In 1926 the General Assembly appointed a commission to discern the causes of dissension at Princeton Seminary. The faculty and administration was divided with Charles Erdman and J. Ross Stevenson leading the moderate faction, and Machen, William Park Armstrong, and Caspar Wistar Hodge (all faculty members), and Clarence Macartney (a member of the board of directors) leading the conservatives. (Their findings were reported to the 1927 General Assembly).

In 1926 Machen was nominated by the board of directors of Princeton Seminary to take the chair of apologetics and ethics. The nomination had to be approved by the General Assembly of 1926. However, they deferred the appointment, and instead appointed a special committee (as mentioned above) to discern the source of acrimony among the Princeton Seminary faculty.⁽²¹⁾ Machen's promotion was held-up until the reorganization of Princeton Seminary in 1929.

The battle was on between the moderates and liberals on the one hand and the conservatives on the other hand.⁽²²⁾

Given the results of the General Assembly vote in 1927, Machen described the assembly as "probably the most disastrous meeting, from the point of view of evangelical Christianity, that has been held in the whole history of our Church." If the proposed reorganization occurred, uniting the two boards, then Princeton Seminary would be "destroyed" and a "new institution of an entirely different type would replace it."⁽²³⁾

The 1927 General Assembly voted to again defer Machen's promotion to the chair of apologetics and ethics, rejected the Five-Point Deliverance or "Five Declarations" of the "essential and necessary" doctrines or fundamentals that had been affirmed in 1910, 1916, and 1923, and in effect adopted the position of the Auburn Affirmation, and voted to look into reorganizing Princeton Seminary.

Reorganization

Based on some of the special committees reports that were formed to find the source of the schisms at Princeton Seminary, it was stated that the source of the difficulties was the two boards that governed the school. There was also testimony and minority reports that the source of the Seminary's problems was not the two board system of governance, but stemmed from the modernist-fundamentalist controversy and the disagreement between the seminary's President, J. Ross Stevenson, and his attempt to exercise more power and authority than had traditionally been exercised by the President of the seminary, and the view(s) of the majority of the faculty has to how the school should be run.⁽²⁴⁾ Over 10,000 ministers and elders in the church signed a petition asking that Princeton Seminary not be reorganized. The fight whether or not to reorganize Princeton Seminary lasted for two years, from 1927-1929.

Prior to 1929 Princeton Seminary had been run by two boards. The board of directors was responsible for the "spiritual" concerns of the school, such as appointing faculty members overseeing the curriculum, and so forth. The board of trustees was responsible for the "physical" concerns of the school, such as the care of the real property (e.g., the buildings and

grounds) of the campus, finances, and so forth. The majority of the board of directors were conservative and agreed with Machen and his allies. The majority of the board of trustees were moderates and sympathetic to J. Ross Stevenson and his vision for the school. Thus, the conflict.

A majority of the directors and the Princeton faculty, and most of the students were conservative. However, most of the trustees, a minority of the directors, the President, and a minority of the faculty and students were so-called moderates.

The General Assembly of 1929 voted to reorganize the former two boards into one board of thirty-three members: one-third from the old board of trustees, one-third from the old board of directors, and one-third from the church at large. Now the seminary was controlled by moderates whose decisions regarding it were final (the new board did not have to present its decisions to the General Assembly for final approval).

Thus, Princeton Seminary was reorganized in 1929, combining the board of directors (who had control of the educational programs), where the majority were conservative, with the board of Trustees (that oversaw or held the real property in trust), where the majority were moderates. They were altered to form a single board which controlled the seminary, with the majority of the new board along with president J. Ross Stevenson being moderates.

The assembly also voted to enlarge the powers of the President (which previous had been more of a figure-head position of (or for) the faculty. Prior to 1902, Princeton Seminary did not have a President. A chairman of the faculty was elected by the faculty to represent them to the board of directors and to preside at faculty meetings. The position of President was created for Dr. Francis L. Patton in 1902 to honor this senior servant and professor of Princeton Seminary. ⁽²⁵⁾ Even after he was inaugurated as President, Patton continued on in much the same manner that he had previously to becoming President. Thus, the faculty had always seen the president as "little more than a presiding officer who, together with his colleagues, decided on the entire educational program for the institution."⁽²⁶⁾

However, Stevenson, who was appointed President in 1914, conceived of his position and of the existence and goals of the seminary in quite different terms than did the faculty. This had already resulted in a number of disagreements between Stevenson and the faculty. Now, with his powers of office even more expanded, this did not set well, to say the least with many of the faculty. Stevenson held to an inclusive doctrinal policy, as opposed to the exclusive doctrinal policy of Old Princeton.

Stevenson stated that: "We are the agency of the combined old school and new school," and that "my ambition as President of the seminary is to have it represent the whole Presbyterian Church and not any particular faction of it."⁽²⁷⁾

Stevenson and those in agreement with him wanted Princeton Seminary to "become a school reflecting the theological pluralism of the northern Presbyterian denomination."⁽²⁸⁾ The result was a complete shift in the orientation of the seminary.

Also, there was no doubt regarding Stevenson's view as to the source of the problems at Princeton. Stevenson plainly stated: "There has been in the faculty [...] suspicion, distrust, dissension and division, and as I stated before the Assembly, in this Dr. Machen is involved."⁽²⁹⁾

The faculty majority: William Park Armstrong, Machen, Robert Dick Wilson, Geerhardus Vos, Caspar Hodge, William Greene, and Oswald T. Allis stood for Princeton's old charter, Old School Calvinism alone. President Joseph Ross Stevenson, Charles Erdman, Frederick Loetscher, John Davis, and J. Ritchie Smith were moderates and wanted to "mainstream" Princeton with the rest of the Church.

Thus, Oswald T. Allis, Machen, Cornelius Van Til, and Robert Dick Wilson, refused to teach under the authority of the new board, and Clarence E. Macartney declined to serve on it.

The Founding of Westminster

In light of what has been discussed, Machen and other like-minded individuals founded Westminster Seminary in 1929. Two of the chief reasons given for founding the school were to carry on the "Old Princeton" tradition, and train a generation to "defend the faith."⁽³⁰⁾

Machen stated that he could not stay and serve at Princeton because to remain there would only "conceal what has been done" by the church.

Within a few years of the founding of Westminster Seminary it was seen that their graduates would not be welcomed in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., thus there was a perceived need for a new one, that is, a new denomination--The Presbyterian Church of America, later renamed The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).⁽³¹⁾ Machen was one of the chief founder of the new denomination.

The Founding of The Presbyterian Church of America

In addition to the above mentioned factors, there were other reasons for the perceived need to start a new denomination.

For instance, in 1932 the *Re-Thinking Missions* proposal was published. It was a report or evaluation of world missions for the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It stated that missionaries should not work for the "destruction of [other] religions" but for "their continued co-existence with Christianity, each stimulating the other to their ultimate goal, unity in the completest religious truth."⁽³²⁾ In essence, all views were held to have at least some significant truth. Christianity was not so much distinct from or opposed to other religions, but the fulfillment of universal religious sentiments. Also, evangelism was not to be the primary motive of missions, but helping, for example, with food, education, and medicine--that is, the so-called social gospel. Machen and others strongly disagreed with these notions and could no longer in good conscience support the Board of Foreign Missions of the PCUSA.

Machen and others attempted to present an overture to the General Assembly in 1933 regarding this report and other related matters, such as the teaching of the well-known liberal Pearl Buck under the aegis of the Board of Foreign Missions. However, Machen's and the others attempts to remedy the situation were defeated.⁽³³⁾

In 1933, only four weeks after the General Assembly, Machen and some others started their own organization, the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions for promoting "truly Biblical and Presbyterian mission work."

However, the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions was declared unconstitutional by the General Assembly of the PCUSA in 1934, and in 1935 Machen was put on trial and found guilty of disobeying the 1934 mandate. This verdict was upheld by the General Assembly in 1936, which ruled that the Independent Board "expressly contravened provisions of the constitution and did great harm to the peace of the church." It also stated that Machen was guilty of denouncing fellow-ministers in addition to his other offenses, and directed the Presbytery of New Brunswick to suspend Machen and others associated with the Independent Board from the ministry.

Ten days from the closing of the 1936 General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church in America was formed. As Bradley Longfield has remarked: "When, in Machen's eyes, Princeton also gave way to the secularizing tendencies of modernity, the only alternative was to found a new

school based on traditional principles."⁽³⁴⁾

Personality

There is much that can be and has been said in trying to determine the cause(s) of the various controversies and divisions that we have just briefly examined. Some say Machen simply stood for integrity, principle, and the orthodox faith, in the tradition of Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield. Due to the menace of modernity, Machen had to and did take his stand.⁽³⁵⁾

Others attribute the controversies and divisions that Machen was involved in, and often the ringleader of at that, being due to in large part to his peculiar personality, for example, his "temperamental idiosyncrasies."⁽³⁶⁾ That is, it is claimed that Machen was a very difficult man to get along with, even for his friends. Machen has been called just about everything including: bigoted, cankerous, a crank, inflexible, intolerant, lacking the ability to separate people from the issues he disagreed with, militant, narrow-minded, an obscurantist, rigid, temperamental (given to fits of anger), a troublemaker, and so forth.

The key question for me is was Machen a crank, a militant conservative, a troublemaker, or other wise simply because he disagreed with people and let it be known? And/or was it because of an offensive personality in handling these disagreements? Given human nature, we all have our defects and/or idiosyncrasies, perhaps it was a bit of both? I have seen numerous instances where the mere fact that someone would disagree, even in the most gracious or winsome manner, was enough for them to be branded a troublemaker. In other words, some want agreement and "peace" at any price. Others, as we also know from human nature are too quick to cause division(s), and/or even when they are on the right side of an issue handle it in a decidedly non-biblical manner.

Thus, is a "militant conservative," anyone who would disagree and separate over an issue? Is one automatically militant if they disagree or would not do the same thing, or are a "stand-up" kind of person? For instance, it is common for whistle-blowers to find themselves "odd-man-out."

What if Machen had been more accommodating, amiable, or diplomatic in his approach? Was he obnoxious or too obnoxious? Was he...?

Probably we will never know for certain what or what combination of the above factors were the case with the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., Princeton, and Machen. However, we can nonetheless learn from these events by examining our own motives and methods in similar situations that we might find ourselves in today or tomorrow. This can be a valuable lesson for us.

People tend to see Machen "as a twentieth-century Martin Luther standing up for the faith or as a crank."⁽³⁷⁾ Over-simplifying situations can distort the truth.

Lessons We Can Learn

There are many valuable lessons we can learn from the life of Machen. The following are representative of some of the ones that we could and should learn.

First, George Marsden makes some very good points relative to the life and controversies of Machen. For instance, he writes:

It is not difficult to find elements of Machen's commonsense philosophy and of his southernness with which one might disagree. When we do so, though, I think we should be careful not to dismiss all his views just because we have identified

their sources. That would be the genetic fallacy--to think you have refuted a view by finding its origins. Since all our views have origins, they all stand on equal ground in that regard.⁽³⁸⁾

One wants to be careful not to commit a form of the reductionistic fallacy here either.

Thus, even if one concluded that much of the controversies that Machen found himself in were due to his peculiar personality, that does not mean that he was not correct in what he said or stood for. For example, one may have the right view but handle the matter in an inappropriate way.

Second, Machen did make some very insightful observations about the problematic modernistic hermeneutic and where it could lead (e.g., today with what is termed deconstruction).⁽³⁹⁾

Third, again as Marsden points out, "Machen can remind us that it might not be a bad idea for Christians to stop trying to suit current academic fads and to see if there is anything that distinguishes their philosophical outlook basically from prevailing modern ones."⁽⁴⁰⁾ Sometimes, even in academia, the emperor has no clothes. Here I am reminded of the line about "What did the non-Christian scholar say to the Christian want-to-be?": "I'll call you a scholar if you'll call me a Christian." My point is that too often Christian intellectuals are *too* eager to embrace the latest intellectual *fads* or to want to be accepted and recognized by the intelligentsia of the world (1 Cor. 1:20-25; Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:20-21) to the detriment of the faith.

Fourth, in light of the pervious point Marsden again makes a great point when he writes: "Modernist theologies, said Machen, were evading this simple commonsense issue with fancy language about interpretation and the like. Hence they should be exposed for what they were and for denying simple claims as to matters of fact that Christians in every other generation had made."⁽⁴¹⁾

Fifth, and related to the last point, there is a danger in being so "open-minded" that one will believe just about anything if it is packaged or presented "just right" (e.g., in a seemingly learned fashion) and actually become blind or closed-minded to the truth. For example, Machen (wrote in 1927) feared that Princeton Seminary would become "inclusive of those who obscure the great issue of the day; but it will be exclusive of those who have determined to warn the church of her danger and to contend earnestly for the faith."⁽⁴²⁾ Has this not happened in many ways at Princeton and/or other institutions (such as Union Theological Seminary)?

The Question of Intolerance or Tolerance?

The question of tolerance, while certainly an issue or question that was brought up over and over again during the controversies that Machen was involved in, is a perennial concern. We must be ever vigilant to ask ourselves whether we are being intolerant in the bad sense of the term, or too tolerant (e.g., of nonsense or harmful ideas)--in the bad sense of the word.

In one sense it is ironic that Machen is accused of being intolerant, since at least politically speaking Machen was a libertarian.⁽⁴³⁾ However, Machen responded that since the church was a voluntary organization, and one was not forced to join it, the church had the right to insist on its own beliefs, that is, the beliefs that one was required to hold in order to be a member of it.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Correspondingly, since ministers have taken vows or pledged to be faithful to their call, when they violate them (e.g., theological liberals), they ought to be honest about it and simply leave the church if they do not hold to its requirements. Machen was not trying to deny others their rights to believe and practice what they want, but simply asked them to not be hypocrites in the church and hence violate the rights of those in the church to have it as they believe it should

be. Is this really so intolerant? Machen extended to others the same rights he wanted for himself, for example, the right of free association. Thus, he simply asked the modernists to leave the orthodox church and if they wanted to, go start or join their own like-minded modernistic group.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Therefore, Machen's point was not that liberals did not have a right to their views, but that they did not have the right to espouse these views in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. because ministers and elders had pledged to be faithful to the Bible and to the Westminster Confession.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Machen wanted to have at least one conservative Calvinistic, Westminster Confession affirming seminary.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Was that so intolerant?

Machen believed, and I for whatever it is worth concur with him, that controversy "of the right sort" is inherent to the proclamation of Christianity.⁽⁴⁸⁾

My mentor, Walter Martin used to say: "Controversy for the sake of controversy is sin; controversy for the sake of truth is a divine command!" In context, I think that 1 Corinthians 11:19; Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11; and Revelation 2:2 supports us, even demands of us to be intolerant of some things and teachings.

The names have changed today, but the issues sound very similar (e.g., John Sanders and Clark Pinnock, the openness or wideness of God, inclusivism, pluralism, and so forth). Are we too open or tolerant or not "intolerant" enough?

To Stay or Not to Stay

A major question from Machen's life concerns his decision to leave Princeton, which precipitated a number of professors leaving with him (e.g., Robert Dick Wilson, Oswald T. Allis, Cornelius Van Til), and starting Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia to carry on the conservative tradition of "Old Princeton." Should Machen have gone?

Thus, another important question for us is the issue of separatism. When, if ever, should we, and when should we not, separate from other Christians and/or from those who claim to be? Is separating from others or being "separatistic" bad or wrong or always wrong, or when is it wrong not to separate? These, at least for me, can be tough questions. But, they are questions that we must nonetheless ask ourselves and one another.

This seems to be a classical/contemporary issue. Over and over again we--Christians--are faced with this issue and need the wisdom of God to know what to do and how to do it (Prov. 2:6; 3:5-8; James 1:5). There are two extremes and God hates them both. (1) The first is the needless divisions, dissention, and factions that occur in the body of Christ (see, e.g., Prov. 6:19; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:1-11; and Gal. 5:20). (2) But on the other hand, God is not pleased when we do not disassociate or separate ourselves from certain people and situations where continued involvement with those who claim to be Christians (and/or are Christians) will comprise our faith (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 1 Tim. 1:3-7; Titus 1:10-12; 3:10-11; Rev. 2:2, 6, 14-16, 20-21; 3:19). Thus, while on the one hand we are to keep the bond of peace and the unity of the Spirit (e.g., Phil. 2:2-8; Col. 3:15), on the other hand we are to avoid like the plague that which defiles us. We are to have unity in the body of Christ, but it is to be unity and peace in the truth and not some type of "artificial" unity! The peace we are to have is the peace of God and not the "peace of the world" (see, e.g., Matt. 10:34-40; John 14:27; 16:33). However, we need the wisdom of God to know the difference between the two. For example, when does a child need to simply be held and not scolded when they have done wrong, and when do they need "tough love," that affirms them and lets them know that they are loved, but that their *conduct* is unacceptable?

Also, which is better (that is, if this is not a false dilemma): faithfulness or so-called fruitfulness?

Some other key questions for me is could, or should, Machen have stayed in the PCUSA and at Princeton, or would he have had to comprise? It appears that he was forced out.⁽⁴⁹⁾ But, if he was forced out was this his fault in the first place? Or was it a result of his being obedient to God--to please God and not man (e.g., 1 Sam. 15:22-23; Gal. 1:10)? Did Machen have other legitimate opinions--without disobeying God or violating his conscience? What other choice did he have? Would he have been forced to go against his conscience or out of the aforementioned groups? I am not saying that I have all the answers, but I do know that these questions need to be asked, and not just to discuss Machen's life, but for our own sake today as well.

Thus, like Machen over sixty years ago, we need the love and wisdom of God to know when and how to separate from others.

Peace at All Costs?

We are to pursue peace (as I have already mentioned above), but not at all costs. Did Charles Erdman, for example, want peace at too high a cost? Erdman stated that: "I love the institution I have served for twenty years," however, "but I love still more peace and the progress of the Presbyterian Church."⁽⁵⁰⁾ Was the peace that Erdman wanted the peace that God wanted, or was it the peace that most of us want from are fallen nature, peace at just about any cost, so that I do not have to fight, do not have to confront, even in the Spirit of true love (Gal. 4:16)? Again, the questions must be asked.

Conclusion

Unfortunately for me, I must end this paper. There are many more issues that I would have liked to discuss and also many more details or issues that I did mention that I would like to discuss much further. But, space precludes me from doing that here. While I do not have all the answers to the issues and questions posed in this paper, I know that it is nonetheless beneficial to examine them. I certainly have views on most of the issues presented in this paper, yet I more certainly know that I need the love and wisdom of God to know precisely what position(s) He would have me take, and how it should be done. I am thankful that God gives wisdom to those who lack it.

I speak as one who is not a Calvinist. Nonetheless, I recognize the right of individuals to have an institution that fairly and faithfully espouses their views, without being called names or being subjected to *ad hominem* attacks. I think the liberals would want the same right, yet sometimes they are more closed-minded, dogmatic, and intolerant than any fundamentalist I have ever meet.

In conclusion I have greatly profited and learned much from examining parts of the life of J. Gresham Machen, and in my final analysis I think that like others in the "hall-of-faith (where I would place him) we can learn much from the life of Machen because as was [is] said of Abel, it can as well be said of J.G. Machen: "...by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead" (Heb. 11:4, NIV).

Endnotes

1. J. Gresham Machen, as quoted in David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Volume 2: The Majestic Testimony, 1869-1929* (Edinburgh, New York: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 364.

2. Darryl G. Hart, "J. Gresham Machen," in the *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, Walter A. Elwell, ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 130.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5.

6. D.G. Hart and John Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1995), 12-13.

7. Ibid., 21-22.

8. Ibid., 15-17.

9. For further information on Machen's objections to it see, e.g., Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, Vol. 2, 333-34; Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 15-16; and Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, 42.

10. See J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), Preface; Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, Vol. 2, 339; Longfield, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, 28-31.

11. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, Vol. 2, 338-39; Edwin H. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict* (Philadelphia: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1992), 17-18.

12. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, Vol. 2, 338; Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 23; Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 9-10; Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, 17-18.

13. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, Vol. 2, 347-48; Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 11, 27; Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, 19-24.

14. As quoted in Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 11.

15. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, Vol. 2, 347-48.

16. See Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, Vol. 2, 349; Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 23-24; Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, 25-36.

17. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, 25-26.

18. Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 24-25.

19. Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 24. Also see Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, Vol. 2, 359-60; Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, 34-35.

20. Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 24.

21. George M. Marsden, "Understanding J. Gresham Machen," in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (1990), 47.

22. See George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 182.

23. As quoted in Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, Vol. 2, 379.

24. See Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, Vol. 2, 372-73, 377-81, 391-93; Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 25-26; Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 162-73; and Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, 37-56.

25. See Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, 39-40.

26. Ibid., 41.

27. As quoted in Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 163-64.

28. Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 56.

29. As quoted in Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 166.
30. See Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 26, 38; Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 177-78; and Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, 60.
31. *Ibid.*, 26-28.
32. As quoted in Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 27.
33. See Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 30-37.
34. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 177.
35. See Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 185-86.
36. See *ibid.*, 186-87.
37. *Ibid.*, 187.
38. *Ibid.*, 197.
39. *Ibid.*, 198.
40. *Ibid.*, 199.
41. *Ibid.*, 194.
42. As quoted in Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Vol. 2*, 380.
43. See, Hart, *Handbook of Theologians*, 139-40, 141-42; and Marsden, "Understanding J. Gresham Machen," 56, 57.
44. *Ibid.*
45. George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 175.
46. See, e.g., Hart, *Handbook of Theologians*, 139.
47. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Vol. 2*, 380-81.
48. Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 7.
49. See, e.g., Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 36-39; and Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 149.
50. As quoted in Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 164.

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Revision Date: 7/26/00

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