

Heroes of the Faith #08: J. Gresham Machen

Heroes of the Faith

By Dr. W. Robert Godfrey

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Tuesday, January 18, 2005

Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

200 E. Main St.

Taylors, SC 29687

Website: www.gpts.edu

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/gpts

And so it is remarkably foolish of me to conclude this week by talking about J Gresham Machen to an Orthodox Presbyterian group since doubtless numbers of you know at least parts of the Machen story a good deal better than I do. And in any case as a history I ought to have better sense than that. In graduate school I had a friend who studied the Middle Ages primarily and he always used to say, “Well, anybody who tries to do history after about 1500 is just doing journalism, not history.”

And certainly when we talk about a figure as recent as J Gresham Machen who died on News Year’s Day 1937 we are talking about a figure who, after all, is really fairly recent.

Now you younger types may not think of 1937 as all that recent, but there are some here who remember the day. And nonetheless I think it is important that we call to mind the wonderful work of John. Some of you have been wondering what that J stood for. It is John Gresham Machen.

There are people who don’t know the whole story even in OP circles and so it is good to tell that story again especially now that we are coming up on the 50th anniversary of the founding of then OPC.

But more importantly than that Machen’s story is worth telling simply because of its own inherent importance and the inherent attractiveness and testimony that Machen offered to our world.

I am basically a Reformation historian. My wife frequently remarks that I don’t know anything in the 20th century. She things about that particularly about matters around the home and birthdays and things like that. I remember vividly that [?] died in 1477, but I [?] and so coming to Westminster in Escondido I had to teach modern Church history for the first time which I looked at as a disagreeable enterprise.

In Philadelphia I got to teach ancient Church history and Reformation Church history and I said, “Those were the good times.” And [?] Davis had to teach medieval Church history and modern Church history which didn’t think was all that great. But I enjoyed getting into modern Church history and one of the delightful discoveries for me personally has

been J Gresham Machen. And in reading about him and even more reading his own works, being attracted to the strength, to the brilliance and to the clarity of his work.

If you haven't read *Christianity and Liberalism* recently, if you don't want to admit that you have never read it, if you haven't read *Christianity and Liberalism* recently, read it. It is a delight.

But I think to appreciate Machen fully we need to see something of the broad cultural context in which he labored. I think it was Jay took me to task the first day for not starting my overview of the history of the Church in the garden as a good reformed person ought to do, but we won't go back quite that far to see the overview and background to Machen's work.

But it is important to realize that Machen's labors as part of that great reformed movement that began, of course, with the Reformation, with Calvin and has been recognized as a major cultural factor in the development of the West so that you can get books that examine the question: What did Calvinism have to do with the modern Capitalism? What did Calvinism have to do with the rise of modern Democracy? What did Calvinism have to do with the rise of modern science? And even thoroughly secular historians recognize that the answer must be much in every way.

Now they are still warring about exactly what and exactly how much credit should go to Calvinism, but Calvinism is recognized as a major cultural force in the development of the modern West and in some of the most characteristic phenomena of the modern West like Capitalism, Democracy and modern science.

And when America was founded, the dominant theological position of most groups in America in the 17th and 18th century was Calvinism. Not only the Puritan Congregationalists in New England and the Presbyterians in the mid-Atlantic states, but also the Baptists and the Episcopalians were largely dominated by a basically reformed theology. And so America found, to the extent that religion was influential in its founding, a good dose of Calvinism in its background.

But the forces of Calvinism in America began to weaken in the 19th century significantly. Religious change developed in 19th century America and new forces were set loose, forces particularly of Individualism which began to undermine some of the Church corporateness of Calvinism and also to undermine some of Calvinism's historic concerns for society as a whole. Also the 19th century turned remarkably optimistic and Calvinism was felt by many to be too pessimistic.

There were many leading evangelical lights in the 1830s who had become post millennialists and said, "You know, the millennium is just almost here. We are so close that with just a little push we can usher it in."

They were remarkably optimistic as to what had been accomplished culturally in America in the early 19th century. And it led in that optimism in many parts of American Church

life to an Arminianizing of theology, a concentration upon man and his will and his goodness and his abilities. Charles Finney became the great preacher of a free will in the matters of evangelism. And even within circles that would have called themselves rather reformed and Calvinistic, that optimism began to have an eroding effect and it is interesting. When you look at some of those theologies the place often where it began to erode Calvinistic theology was in the doctrine of original sin.

The new divinity amongst the Congregationalists in New England and the New Haven theology of Taylor and his supporters, what they focused in on was an attack upon original sin. They kept saying, "Oh, we are really Calvinists. We are just making little modifications. Let's do away with original sin."

I was at a historical conference once and the contemporary church observer Martin Marty was there and Martin Marty said, "You know, I just was at a conference where Robert Schuller was speaking." And he said, "I went up to Rober Schuller and I said, 'I am interested in your phenomenon there in southern California. What kind of theology do you think you are preaching there?'"

And Robert Schuller said, "I am a Calvinist." He said, "I have read Calvin's *Institutes* through time and time again. I know more about Calvin's *Institutes* than my theological professors."

I won't tell you what seminary he went to. It wasn't Westminster.

And Marty said, "You know, Schuller, what you preach doesn't sound like Calvinism."

"I believe all of Calvinism except for original sin."

And Martin Marty said, "I saw in my mind's eye the whole edifice of Calvinism collapsing."

It is true, of course. One of the foundation stones of Calvinism from which, in a sense, all the rest comes naturally is Calvinism's confession that we are all born lost in sin and helpless. If we are helpless in sin there must be a sovereign God who reaches down and sovereignly saves us and he sovereignly reaches down and saves us according to his eternal plan to save his own because of the merits of Christ accrued for his own.

And so Calvinism, in one sense, at least, can be said to rest on the foundation of the doctrine of original sin.

And in the 19th century that was gradually, gradually being eroded.

Also in the 19th century, of course, there was a growing Rationalism. The effects of the Enlightenment and that man centered self confidence that had such devastating effects in France began in the 19th century increasingly to have an impact in America, more slowly than in other parts of the world, but also there in America.

And also in the 19th century, then, in reaction to that rationalism many American Christians were tempted to face rationalism with an anti intellectualism.

There were some American Christians who said, “Well, if the problem is men being proud of their reason, then the Christian answer is not to use reason at all.”

And it seems like it could only be in America that we could have had a political party in the second half of the 19th century that proudly labeled itself the Know Nothing Party. And there was, you see, that... that strain then of anti intellectualism that also began to run through America. And so as Calvinism became a less pervasive cultural force in 19th century America it was American Presbyterianism in particular that preserved that heritage of Calvinism, that continued an important, a recognizable and unavoidable testimony to that historic reformed faith in America.

Now if you know anything about the history of American Presbyterian in the 18th and 19th century you know it wasn't always peaceful. There were a number of church problems and tensions. And those tensions often focused on tensions between those who wanted to stress doctrinal precision in the Church and those who wanted to stress a vital Christian experience in the Church.

Often the tensions were a matter of emphasis. Those that stressed experience said, “Oh, we still believe doctrine, but what we really need is the stress on experience.” And usually those who stress doctrine say, “Well, we need experience, but we really have to stress the doctrine.”

And so American Presbyterianism itself experienced tensions. And one of the great centers of the defense of Calvinism, one of the centers that tried to hold American Presbyterianism together and to hold it faithful was Princeton Seminary.

Princeton Seminary is founded very early in the 19th century and under the leadership of some of the best theological minds that America produced continues a strong, important, relevant, unavoidable testimony to the reformed faith.

When Princeton Seminary was founded one of the commitments that it made was expressed in these words.

“We want to develop in those who shall aspire to the ministerial office both that piety of heart which is the fruit of the renewing and sanctifying grace of God and solid learning, believing that zeal without knowledge or knowledge without zeal must ultimately prove injurious to the Church.”

They wanted piety and learning, both together when necessary, Princeton declared, in order for the Church to be well served. And that was the position that Charles Hodge taught and B B Warfield and on down into the 20th century.

It was into that context, then, of American Presbyterianism that J Gresham Machen came, born a son of American Presbyterianism. And as we look again we can see him as a defender of that great tradition in the American scene.

He was born in 1881 in Baltimore and any of you who know Baltimore know that Baltimore is a southern town. Those of you who are Californians may be surprised to hear that Baltimore is a very southern town. It was an even more southern town in 1881. And Machen's roots were in the deep South. The Greshams were from Macon, Georgia. Machen was a southerner in his mentality, in his outlook, in his family. And it was a distinguished southern family.

They had very fine social connections. The mother and father of J Gresham Machen were friends of the mother and father of Woodrow Wilson. That was a nice connection. Woodrow Wilson had Machen over to tea while he was president of Princeton University. There were connections with important people.

Arthur Machen, J Gresham Machen's father, was a prominent lawyer in Baltimore and became quite... I shouldn't say quite a wealthy man, but a very comfortably fixed wealthy man. Any of us would be glad to be so comfortably fixed.

It was also a very devout family. Machen was raised on the catechisms and the Scriptures and was perceived by his parents as being a very talented young man. And so was sent off to Baltimore's own Johns Hopkins University to study. And he graduated with an AB in 1901.

And then came to have some uncertainty as to what he really ought to do with his life. He apparently considered for a time going to law school. But he kept being drawn to theological studies. And so in 1901 decided to go to Princeton Seminary.

In a sense it was a strange decision. The family had close connections with Union Seminary in Richmond, Virginia which was a seminary of the Southern Presbyterian Church. And, in fact, Machen's family were members of the Southern Presbyterian Church. Machen was a Southern Presbyterian at the time that he entered Princeton.

And yet Machen had been very much drawn to the new, the first president of Princeton Seminary, Francis Landey Patton. As a great evangelical leader of the time, Patton was a close friend of the family. And so Machen went off to Princeton and began to study.

He studied there from 1902 to 1905. He had opportunities not only to study, but also to do some traveling. Twice he went to Europe for the summer to study. He particularly was impressed with Germany. He was eager to learn the German language so he could avail himself of German scholarship. In his trip in 1904 he wrote back and said, "You know, I am very much impressed with Germany, but the Germans need two things. Germans need the sabbath."

Those Lutherans, you know, shocking.

“And the Germans need football.”

He said, “Football teaches you a sense of fair play and the Germans could do with learning that.”

You know, there is no word for “fair” in German. “Fair” is a rather uniquely English kind of concept. Germans know about rights and truths and what is according to the rules, but fair... well, we don’t want to get off on that.

Ok.

He was to return after his Princeton years to Germany for a year of study, graduate study, studying six months at Marbourg University, six months at [?] University. One of the letters that most annoyed me that he wrote home during those years was when he was at [?] and he said, “We are having a holiday soon and I can’t decide whether I should stay in the city and study or take the opportunity to go down to Rome and see Rome.”

And his mother wrote back and she said, “Well, dear, I am sure you will make the right decision. Studying is very important. But no educated person can claim to be truly educated unless they have been to Rome. You really ought to go.”

And then she closed the letter as a number of letters from his mother and father were closed with the words, “The pecuniary question need not bother you. I can assure you on that point.”

How we would all love to have somebody write us letters and close with the words, “Don’t worry about the money, just do what you want to do.”

And so from that position of some wealth and privilege J Gresham Machen achieved a very, very fine education. Undergraduate Johns Hopkins, Seminary Princeton, off to German to do graduate work. And he was perceived by those who knew him as a brilliant student.

The faculty at Princeton very much wanted him to come back and help them teaching there at Princeton Seminary. Those who knew him were struck by that brilliance.

But Machen was very hesitant to come back to Princeton. The hesitancy in the first place was a hesitancy because he wasn’t sure he was called to the ministry. He wrestled for a long time with that. He wasn’t finally ordained until 1914. But even more fundamentally he seems to have been wrestling in his heart with the questions of the faith itself.

He never rejected the faith. He never went through a period of Liberalism himself, but he seems to have gone through a real period of wrestling whether the faith that he learned at home was, in fact, true, was, in fact, the whole story. And his experience in Germany particularly brought that into focus for him. And the place where that came to the most

strong focus was in some classes that he attended taught by Wilhelm Herrmann. Herrmann was one of the leading liberal theologians of Germany in that day. Herrmann's position can be found really rather well summarized in Machen's book *Christianity and Liberalism*. Herrmann's position was the kind of Liberalism that Machen talked about in his book.

But Machen clearly was dramatically moved by his personal contact with Herrmann.

He said, "What I see in Herrmann is so radically different from that liberal indifference that has captivated New England. There is a power. There is a vitality. There is an attractiveness in Herrmann that I find almost irresistible."

The letters home are remarkable. He wrote, "I should say that the first time that I heard Herrmann may almost be described as an epic in my life. I can't criticize him as my chief feeling with reference to him is already one of deepest reverence. Herrmann refuses to allow the student to look at religion from a distance as a thing to be studied merely. He speaks right to the heart. And I have been thrown all into confusion by what he says. So much deeper is his devotion to Christ than anything I have known in myself during the past few years."

A real spiritual struggle is going on in Machen's soul.

"Herrmann," Machen said, "in his religious earnestness and moral power had been a revelation to me. Not only has he given me a new sympathy of the prevailing German religious thought, but also I hope I may leave his classroom better morally and in every way than when I entered it."

He says, "Perhaps Herrmann does not give the whole truth. I certainly hope he does not. At any rate he has gotten hold of something that has been sadly neglected in the Church and in orthodox theology."

And then he says, "It is the faith that is a real experience, a real revelation of God that saves us, not the faith that consists in accepting as true a lot of dogmas on the basis merely of what others have said."

You see, Herrmann was teaching that religion is our experience and something about that touched Machen at that point in his life. Maybe he had felt in himself something of a kind of dead orthodoxy in his own background and in his own personal experience. But something gripped him in what he saw as the sincerity and the earnestness and the power of Herrmann and it shook him.

It was a very important part of his life. Apparently Charles Hodge had had something of the same experience when he had gone to Germany before and had met Peter Schleiermacher, something of the same experience. But Machen was shaken by the Liberalism that he faced there and it was a very important moment in his life. It was a moment that concerned his mother a good deal.

You know, Machen corresponded regularly with his family and he was very close to his mother, very devoted to his mother. Some have thought almost neurotically devoted to his mother. I don't think that is true. I don't see any signs of neurosis. They were just very, very close. They confided in each other. And with his father as long as his father was alive for that matter.

But Machen wrote from Germany and said, "You know, I have been invited to go back to Princeton Seminary. I think I need to stay three more years in Germany and study."

And Mrs. Machen was concerned. She didn't like all she had been hearing about Herrmann. She didn't know a lot about Herrmann, but she didn't think it was the best kind of influence. And apparently she wrote to him and she said, "I think you really ought to come home and go teach at Princeton," and maybe said something like, "Get away from that kind of influence."

And in response to that we have the only really sharp letter Machen ever wrote his mother. And it is a very important letter, I think, because it gives real insight into his character.

He wrote back and said, "Mother, the way I hear you is that you are asking me to recommit myself to the old faith without really thinking things through." He said, "Mother, what I am afraid you are telling me is that if I really thought it through I would become a liberal and, therefore, to avoid me becoming a liberal you want me stop thinking." He said, "Mother, that is the way Jesuits behave, not the way Protestants behave. Mother, I believe we must be scrupulously honest in our approach to religion and honesty requires that we look at every nook and cranny of both sides of a question and I want to do that."

And in that letter... but you find it, really, through all of Machen's correspondence in all of his life, you find that integrity, that commitment to honesty. He could not be satisfied until he had examined both sides of the question with scrupulous fairness.

In the end he decided not to stay in Germany. He decided to come home and he decided he would take up teaching at Princeton Seminary as an instructor in New Testament. But he was able to do that because he felt he had given a hard look at both sides and when he came back to Princeton he was still not really settled, I don't think we can say, in where he stood. But in his honesty, in his integrity he had gone through an experience which for the rest of his life made him a remarkably fair person. Mutual observers of the conflicts later in the Presbyterian Church always testified that Machen was fair to his opponents not only in a personal courteous sense, but also fair in describing their views.

Even Pearl Buck, H L Mencken and others testified to the fairness of J Gresham Machen. And Machen was always compassionate towards liberals. He was compassionate to those who went through periods of doubt. He understood those things. He even respected liberals as long as they were honest.

What troubled him deeply in his soul was when he saw dishonesty. He couldn't abide people who signed one statement of faith and taught another. That was dishonesty and a betrayal of God.

And so he returned to Princeton and in the years from 1906 until 1914 we see him in that Princeton context and in his studies coming to a firmer and firmer and clearer and clearer commitment to what Princeton had always stood for, what the president of Princeton Seminary declared to be the old Calvinistic theology without modification. Princeton was proud in declaring there has never been a Princeton theology.

Oh, there was a New Haven theology. There was a new divinity up at Harvard. But there has never been a Princeton theology because Princeton had simply taught unmodified Calvinism. And that is what Machen embraced at Princeton the Westminster Confession of faith and Catechisms.

And it was that comprehensiveness of theology that appealed to Machen. It was the integrity, the honesty of that theology as it wrestled with the Scripture that appealed to Machen and that is why although Machen in later life would often make common cause with Fundamentalists, he never was comfortable being called a Fundamentalist. The Fundamentalists were those who often could come up with just a handful of points to summarize their theology. And Machen was one who was committed to a comprehensive theological position, the kind of integral, honest, full theological position that he found in the Westminster Confession.

He also was one who continued to be committed to intellectual rigor. He felt the seminary was a place where there needed to be sound scholarship and the best kind of theological rigor. He thought Princeton provided that. That was part of Princeton's honesty and service.

And when Machen was there as a teacher in 1909 there was what was called the student revolt of 1909. Students began to complain about their professors. That is fairly endemic to students in any case, but this was a particularly serious sort of revolt against three of the professors who were said to be so boring as nearly to be unbearable and Machen was not one of them. He was always regarded as a very exciting teacher.

But Machen was very concerned about this and he wrote in a letter, "The students are exhibiting a spirit of dissatisfaction with the instruction that is offered them. They want to be pumped full of material which without any real assimilation or any intellectual work of any kind they can pump out again upon their unfortunate congregations. Other seminaries have yielded to the incessant clamor for the practical and we are being assailed both from within and from without."

He was concerned, you see, that students didn't want to think. They wanted to be sloganiers and they wanted to be canon firers and all they wanted was a pile of

ammunition given to them to stick in the canon and shoot off at the enemy without any thought.

And Machen said, “That is never going to serve the Church. Ministers need to know what they believe and they need to know why they believe. They have to teach what they have really assimilated into their own hearts.”

You know, Kuyper had exactly the same approach at the Free University of Amsterdam. He wanted the students to read all of the opponents so that they could really work through the challenges to the faith and know where they stood.

He wanted them to be reformed because they really understood it and believed it, not just because they were able to mouth a formula. And Machen held that same position.

Machen also was very concerned, as part of his commitment, that Calvinism remain culturally influential in America.

He said once, “Seventy-five years ago Christianity tended to dominate western culture.”

I don’t know if that was a very good historical comment, but nonetheless that is what he saw. He said, “Today, paganism nearly controls western culture. And we have to reassert our Christian influence and the only way to do that is by being doctrinally comprehensive and intellectually rigorous. If we allow ourselves to fall in with the anti intellectualism of our time, we will only convince others that Christianity is a pleasant delusion. We don’t want that. We want to maintain our influence.”

And Princeton had been an influence. Princeton continues to be an unavoidable presence in the national scene.

One of the things that struck me as I reread some of the literature of the conflict of the 1920s is how the secular press could not avoid taking account of Princeton Seminary. The struggles that went on at Princeton Seminary were regularly on the front page of the *New York Times* and other papers throughout the country. And editorials in the *New York Times* and other papers talked about this struggle between the Modernists and the Fundamentalists.

Princeton, you see, was an unavoidable presence testifying to reformed orthodoxy in the national scene. And surely part of the tragedy of our day is that we don’t have a voice like that anymore.

The Missouri Synod Lutheran Church still occasionally makes the papers as a testimony to confessional Lutheran orthodoxy. But the testimony of Calvin’s orthodoxy has sort of faded away from the national scene and surely what we would want to see if God grants us renewal is opportunity to see that kind of influence revived again.

But most importantly I think, Machen as a good Calvinist was committed to a religion and a theology that was radically God centered. What he saw as the prevailing problem in his day was that religion was becoming man centered and experience centered.

In the days of the student unrest in 1909 a Presbyterian minister had anonymously written to one of the papers attacking the faculty and supporting the students at Princeton and insist that all doctrines shall be fashioned according to the nature and the spirit and the laws of life.

Machen had heard that same thing from Herrmann in Germany. It is our experience. It is our life. It is our understanding that we then take and make into doctrine which we believe.

And Machen saw that as a religion that was ultimately self centered and man centered. And one of the recurring cries of Machen's teaching and Machen's preaching and Machen's appeal was that life must flow out of doctrine. Life must flow out of the truth. Life must flow out of Jesus Christ as a historical person who redeemed us on the cross.

Jesus is not an idea that we fashion according to our own experience and desires. But Jesus was a historical person who lived and died and was raised again from the dead and about whom we have an authoritative apostolic witness that tells us who he was and what he believed. And on that basis we live our life.

Our experience, our life, our everything must be shaped by that deposit of the truth. And that point is so brilliantly developed by Machen in *Christianity and Liberalism* that I really do encourage you to read that again.

Just one quote there.

“Christian life,” Machen wrote, “is the fruit of Christian doctrine, not its root. And Christian experience must be tested by the Bible, not the Bible by Christian experience.”

It is a point that is so clear and in some ways so simple as to seem hardly needing to be said. But what Machen was to discover in his own life was that it needed to be said not only to liberals, but to conservatives. There are a lot of conservatives who are conservative because it is experientially pleasant for them. They are by nature sort of conservative. They feel comfortable being conservative.

A kind of example of that, I made a little strange example. I had a lot of friends in graduate school who had been raised as Roman Catholics and had regarded themselves as quite devout Roman Catholics. They loved the Latin mass and when the Latin mass was done away with they stopped going to mass. And I thought to myself, they were very conservative Roman Catholics, but their conservatism rested in that experience that they enjoyed the aesthetic pleasure that they derived from the Latin mass. And when the Latin mass disappeared their experience wasn't there anymore and therefore they weren't anything anymore.

And I think Machen must discover, as we will see, that there were conservatives like that as well.

Well, one who... just very briefly to the more familiar to part of the story. So Machen's commitment to his service to the Church.

Machen's church was, first of all, the Southern Presbyterian Church. He spent 33 years in the Southern Presbyterian Church, 3/5ths of his life. It was really only in 1914 on the very eve of his ordination that he became a Northern Presbyterian. He was a Northern Presbyterian for about 22 years. He was an OP for a little less than six months. That wasn't his choice.

He labored, though, in that scene of the Northern Church to try to see a reformation there. Because he saw the forces unbelief working, eroding, undermining. And he was concerned about what he saw amongst the conservatives in the Church.

As early as 1916 Machen admits, "The mass of the church here is still conservative, but conservative in an ignorant, non polemic, sweetness and light kind of way which is just meat for the wolves."

Oh, yeah, there the people are conservative. But they don't know why they are conservative. They won't invest themselves to defend their conservativeness. All they want is to be loving and he said they are going to be gobbled up by the wolves.

So at this mark in his life the way in which Liberalism had spread in the Church was something of a mystery.

He wrote in 1930, "Here as elsewhere the destructive forces have been content to labor for the most part in the dark, behind the scenes, eroding almost imperceptibly in so many ways and in so many places and acting," he wrote, "fundamentally through dishonesty by saying they believed one thing and then acting another way."

He said, "They keep saying they only have a different interpretation of the creed." He said, "It is not a different interpretation when the creed says, 'Raised on the third day,' and they say he wasn't raised on the third day. That is not a different interpretation. That is a contradiction."

But that kind of dishonesty deceives many people.

In away I think Machen for some time... my impression is... I may be wrong, here, my impression is that in some ways Machen for a time in the battle was somewhat hampered by the fact that he was an honest southern gentleman. I think he really suspected for a long time that there would be honesty on the other side. I think he really expected for a time that honesty liberals would leave the Presbyterian Church so they didn't belong.

But the doctrine of original sin caught up with him I think.

He labored. He labored for reform, recognizing that in the long run an association of belief and unbelief in the Church was an intolerable evil. And so he worked, along with many others, trying to get the Church to commit itself and it discipline itself according to the truth. The Church did seem conservative.

If the general assembly in 1910, again in 1916 and again in 1923 declared that all office bearers in the church must confess that the Bible is infallible, that Jesus is born of a virgin, that he died a substitutionary atonement in his death, that he was raised bodily from the dead and that he had performed miracles. And ministers in the Church simply thumbed their nose, some of them, at those rulings of general assembly.

The conservative tide seemed to reach a high point at the general assembly of 1925. And there the assembly explicitly criticized the presbytery of New York for allowing Modernists to preach in their churches and ordaining Modernists to the ministry.

And the delegates from the New York presbytery stood up and said, “We don’t care what you say to us. We are going to go on doing what we are doing. You don’t have a constitutional right to bind us in whom we will ordain.”

And then in a sense came the moment of decision. The conservatives at the general assembly of 1925 had a working majority. They could have proceeded at that point to discipline the presbytery of New York for its rebellion against the general assembly. But they didn’t. They yielded instead to the appeal to establish a committee.

Sometimes you want to hear about study committees in the Christian Reformed Church, we can have a talk.

They elected instead to have a committee to try to study the peace of the church.

The concern is, I think probably genuinely felt. Well, we will give them this year’s study and then we will get them next year. But next year never came.

The summer of 1925 after the general assembly met was the summer of the Scopes trial, the monkey trial in Tennessee. And that trial turned the national mood around. The national mood which had been somewhat sympathetic to conservative religion was radically changed by the ridicule heaped upon Fundamentalism in the reporting of that trial.

And when the general assembly gathered in 1926 the conservatives no longer had a working majority. They found themselves a much weakened minority. And that really was the beginning of the end.

The assembly of 1926 had before it as one small matter the ratification of an action of the faculty of Princeton Seminary to promote J Gresham Machen to be professor apologetics

and ethics at the seminary. It was a matter of form and routine. The assembly always just automatically approved seminary promotions that had been voted by the faculty and board.

They refused to approve that promotion and, instead, appointed a committee to investigate Princeton Seminary. And that committee was what led ultimately to the reorganization of Princeton Seminary, a reorganization designed by the president, J Ross Stephenson so that Princeton now would represent the whole church.

What more reasonable appeal could be made? Why should Princeton represent just one fraction in the Church? Princeton is our oldest and largest seminary. It should represent the whole church.

But that meant the whole church that included Modernists and Calvinists.

Old Stephenson said, "Oh, no, we will always remain conservative."

How he put those two statements I never quite understand.

"Oh, no we will always remain conservative."

History may be able to judge whether J Ross Stephenson was right or J Gresham Machen was right when Machen said, "This reorganization spells the end of Princeton Seminary as a bastion of Calvinism."

And so in 1929 Machen and some of his supporters withdrew and founded the small seminary in Philadelphia, Westminster Theological Seminary and hoped there to continue the battle.

The liberals had Union Seminary in New York pumping Modernism into the Church. Now the conservatives had a seminary that could pump orthodox ministers into the Church.

But Machen said the battle couldn't be left just at that point. It had to go on on every point. And one of the burdens to his heart was to see Modernism off the foreign mission field. He tried to get the missionary arm of the Church purified according to God's Word and it didn't work. And so Machen and some of his supporters decided, "We have to have missionaries that we could be confident about, missionaries that we can support unequivocally. We will found an independent board for Presbyterian foreign missions."

And then all the liberals smiled with glee because they felt they could get Machen on this one. He is disturbing the peace and order on the Church.

They couldn't get him for founding a new seminary, because they... those liberals had already founded a new seminary. But now he is attacking the agencies of the church. The only sin left in Liberalism, the sin against the organization.

And the general assembly of 1934 only nine years after there had been a conservative majority in the general assembly, the assembly of 1934 issued a mandate that all Presbyterians must withdraw from this schismatic, unruly, independent board of foreign missions.

There was a cry from the conservatives in the church that the general assembly must be tyrannical. But some resigned from the independent board and some abandoned Machen. And Machen said, "We cannot continue to support Modernistic missionaries. That is faithlessness to the Lord."

And so Machen was placed on trial. Within nine years of a conservative majority at general assembly that consistently reformed found themselves on trial. Machen was placed on trial through a complicated situation that can be described as nothing but a kangaroo court in the presbytery of New Brunswick where he had been ordained.

The presbytery of New Brunswick had been formed in the days of George Whitefield by the Tennents because the presbytery of New Brunswick was so eager to see that the gospel should be preached. The presbytery of New Brunswick was founded in the name of the revival and the Great Awakening that people should come to know Jesus Christ and be saved. And now it was the presbytery of New Brunswick that placed J Gresham Machen on trial and suspended him from the ministry for defying a mandate of the general assembly.

And it was in response to that tyranny, it was in response to that persecution of those who were faithful to the Lord that those who had been disciplined left the Presbyterian Church USA and founded a church that was temporarily known as the Presbyterian Church of America and eventually became the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Machen lived less than six months after the founding of the church. He was literally worn out and worked to death. Died traveling off to the Dakotas to preach in the dead of winter to a handful of small churches there. It is hard to know what would have happened had Machen lived. Perhaps he could have stopped the McIntire split that took place only a few months after his death. Perhaps had he lived he would have been able to encourage that large number of conservatives who abandoned him to join in the effort.

But in the providence of God he was taken. In the providence of God his hope to have a large church culture and influential to testify to the Americans, see, didn't really develop.

In the providence of God I think it was revealed that a lot of conservatives really were just as much oriented to the experience of their religion as were the liberals. And they weren't gripped by the truth with the kind of faithfulness that Machen had.

Now I don't think we have to say that Machen was right about everything. One of Machen's failings I think was that he was too brilliant, not that he wasn't a good communicator, but many people didn't see things as quickly and as clearly as Machen

did. And Machen was so honest that he felt he had to follow those clear convictions. And maybe if he had been around longer he would have been able to help others to see that and lead them in the way.

But what we can say about J Gresham Machen was that he was valiant for the truth.

In his book *Christianity and Liberalism* he wrote, “At the present time when the opponents of the gospel are almost in control of our churches, the slightest avoidance of the defense of the gospel is just sheer unfaithfulness to the Lord. God has always saved the church. But he has only saved it not by theological pacifists, but by sturdy contenders for the truth.”

Now by that J Gresham Machen did not mean theological nit pickers. J Gresham Machen meant those who saw the gospel and the reformed faith as the comprehensive expression and summary of that gospel and who were willing to contend for that.

May God make us contenders for his truth.

We have this special treat this morning. This is a real point of historical contact.

When J Gresham Machen died he was brought back to Philadelphia for the funeral service, his body. They held the funeral in the Spruce Street Baptist Church. There wasn't a Presbyterian Church, apparently, where they could have it. And they had [?] at the funeral, Dwight [?] and he is going to sing for us now, at least part of what he sang at Machen's funeral.