

The Not-Quite Founding Father: J. Gresham Machen and the Origins of the PCA

By Sean G. Morris

INTRODUCTION

As I sit down to write this article, it is the Year of Our Lord 2023. This year is a significant milestone for at least two Presbyterian and North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)-related entities, and I hope to address and discuss something of their relationship one to another. The first entity is that of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), which celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year. Not coincidentally, this milestone year for the PCA is the theme of this year's *The Confessional Presbyterian* journal. The other entity, more of an artifact, is J. Gresham Machen's (1881–1937) landmark work, *Christianity and Liberalism*, which celebrates its one-hundredth anniversary this year. Other entries in this year's journal aim to address a number of the founding factors and founding fathers that led to the PCA's formation in 1973. I intend to do so as well, but with a slightly different angle, namely considering how Machen may have been something of an “unofficial” founding father of the PCA due to his legacy and influential thought as outlined in *Christianity and Liberalism*.

At first blush, it seems something of a stretch to suggest that Machen was in any way a factor, much less a founding father, in the formation of the PCA in 1973. After all, Machen died in 1937 at the age of 55, his death pre-dating the founding of the PCA by some 36 years. Moreover, while the PCA was founded out of a desire to escape the prevailing heterodoxy of the old Southern Presbyterian church (the Presbyterian Church in the United States—PCUS), Machen was a founding father of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), whose charter members were keen to establish a new conservative denomination to escape the prevailing heterodoxy of the Northern Presbyterian church (Presbyterian Church in the

United States of America—PCUSA) a generation earlier.

Still, while the doctrinal and cultural factors that led to the formation of the OPC in 1936 and the PCA in 1973 were not identical, there were several interesting parallels that this article aims to tease out. It is undoubtedly true that Machen was an influential figure among American Presbyterians, both in the Northern and Southern churches. It stands to reason that his concerns for the church and her doctrine articulated in the 1920s would have been broadly shared by conservative American Presbyterians nationwide. Furthermore, given the popularity of Machen's thought amongst conservative American Presbyterians, it stands to reason that conservatives in the Southern church, having read about and observed from afar the spiritual decline among their northern cousins, would have taken Machen's prescient warnings to heart and been on the lookout for similar signs of decline in their own communion.

Additionally, as Sean Michael Lucas notes in his major work on the history of the Presbyterian Church in America, “[T]here were connections between followers of northern Presbyterian fundamentalist J. Gresham Machen and their southern counterparts that contributed to the development of conservative dissent within the PCUS.”¹ Lucas notes how Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, which Machen founded, served to supply some of the conservative

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1. Sean Michael Lucas. *For a Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), p. 3.

ministerial leadership to the old Southern church, that several leaders of the “Conservative Coalition”² had trained at Westminster, and some ministers who eventually moved to serve conservative congregations in the PCUS had begun their pastoral service in OPC pulpits. There were numerous organic connections, such that the “flow of thought” from Machen’s pen a generation earlier would have naturally carried over into some of the founding elements of the PCA.

It is important to note these organic connections because it was not as if the concerns that brought about the formation of the OPC in the 1930s and the concerns that brought about the PCA in 1973 were mere coincidences. No, even if Machen were not directly cited or referenced in the writings of the PCA founding fathers, their familiarity with the story of their northern cousins in the OPC, Machen’s battles in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, and the Old Princeton–New Princeton–Westminster Seminary transition meant that the similar concerns of contemporary Southern leaders were a deliberate—*not uncanny*—phenomenon.

There were significant differences, though, in the founding of these two denominations, as Lucas is keen to note. The OPC, from its outset, sought to maintain a self-consciously confessional Presbyterian ethos, whereas many (perhaps most) of the founding generation of the PCA were not as insistent on Westminsterian Reformed theological distinctives as they were on the goal of evangelizing American culture. Conservatives within the PCUS seemed less influenced by leaders or theological emphases from within the OPC and more influenced by the “New Evangelicalism” and its leading lights (men such as the celebrated evangelist Billy Graham).³

Still, many of the issues that troubled southern conservatives—such as the inerrancy of Scripture and confessional subscription—were the same issues that

brought about the exodus of northern conservatives from the PCUSA. While such matters may have occupied a less-central place in the catalog of concerns for conservatives in the Southern church, they were nevertheless present. As such, the concerns of Machen from a generation earlier were factors (if not the leading factors) in the formation of the PCA. Thus, in this way, the “ghost of Machen” had a hand in the foundation of the Presbyterian Church in America.

This article aims to explore further and substantiate how and which concerns of Machen expressed in *Christianity and Liberalism* were yet at play in the creation of the Southern Presbyterian “Continuing Church” in 1973.

METHODOLOGY

In researching and articulating the potential overlap between the concerns of Machen in 1923 and the founders of the PCA in 1973, the methodological approach is fairly straightforward. After a brief biographical sketch of Machen, we will consider first the fundamental concerns as expressed by a number of the founding fathers of the PCA. In this, Dr. Sean Michael Lucas has done the yeoman’s work of compiling the relevant primary sources and writings of the PCA founding fathers into one eminently useful and accessible resource and bibliography via his *For the Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* historical volume. Reference to Lucas’ work for commentary and situating the historical context will be employed at various junctures.

Then, having identified the prevailing issues, controversies, and perceived drift in the Southern Church as expressed by that founding generation of PCA churchmen, we will look back to Machen’s parallel concerns as expressed in *Christianity and Liberalism* and see where there might be overlap and similarity in apprehension. In this way, we hope to substantiate the claim that, given the organic connections between Machen’s influence and early PCA leadership and the PCA founders’ familiarity with Machen’s arguments, the late OPC minister influenced the establishment of the Continuing Southern Presbyterian Church.

I should note here that I am also grateful for the article by Dr. Carlton Wynne entitled “Machen and the PCA,” published earlier this year in the *Reformed Forum Magazine*.⁴ Wynne’s work provides a valuable introduction to Machen’s concerns as they were expressed a century ago and how at least two of those concerns continue to have a bearing on the present

2. The “Conservative Coalition,” as the name suggests, was the name given to the networked efforts of several different organizations and associations of elders and lay people which labored for the preservation of conservative biblical and theological commitments in the old PCUS. This network included groups such as Presbyterian Churchmen United, the Covenant Fellowship of Presbyterians, the *Southern Presbyterian Journal*, and Concerned Presbyterians. PCU was an organization of more than 500 ministers headed by John Richards and Paul Settle.

This coalition of leaders met in 1970 and several times thereafter, leading to the eventual formation of the PCA in 1973 (sans the Covenant Fellowship of Presbyterians).

3. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, pp. 3–4.

4. Carlton Wynne, “Machen and the PCA Today,” *Reformed Forum Magazine* (Spring 2023): 6–8.

life of the PCA. Wynne's article provides a helpful summary overview. It applies Machen's concerns to the contemporary era of the PCA. In contrast, this present article aims to enumerate additional concerns found in *Christianity and Liberalism* and draw the connections between Machen and the PCA's founding in 1973.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, on July 28, 1881 to Arthur Webster and Mary Jones ("Minnie") Gresham Machen, John Gresham Machen is considered by many to be the last of the great Princeton theologians. Though Machen's father was an Episcopalian, his mother was a Presbyterian from Macon, Georgia, and she reared her son in the tenets of Presbyterianism. The family's home church was part of the Southern Presbyterian Church (the PCUS), though Machen would eventually be ordained in the Northern church (the PCUSA) when he went on to teach at Princeton Seminary.

After majoring in classics at Johns Hopkins University, Machen studied at Princeton Theological Seminary and nearby Princeton University. During this time, Machen wrestled internally with whether he wanted to pursue ordained ministry. In 1905, he undertook theological studies in Germany for a year. Engaging with some of the most egregious expressions of theological liberalism, Machen experienced something of a crisis of the soul, though he eventually settled back into historical, orthodox Reformed convictions.

While in Germany, he received an offer to return and teach as an Instructor in New Testament at Princeton Seminary. At age 32, he was ordained in the Northern Presbyterian Church. He served at Princeton for some 23 years until a number of his colleagues and he moved on to found Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929. Machen's time at Princeton was briefly interrupted by his service in World War I, where he volunteered with the YMCA near the war front in France.

Amid the heady days of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy and following in the wake of Harry Emerson Fosdick's infamous 1922 "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" sermon, Machen was nominated as chair of Princeton Seminary's department of apologetics in 1926. However, his colleague, Charles Erdman, and the Seminary President, J. Ross Stevenson, opposed this nomination on the floor of the General Assembly. Because of this, the Assembly did not confirm Machen's election to the position.

Stevenson asked the Assembly to form a committee to help heal a perceived rift in the faculty. There

were essentially two parties: one which believed that Princeton ought to propound the Westminster Confession of Faith as the system of doctrine taught in the Bible, and a second party that contended that the Seminary should represent the variety of views within the wider denomination. A complex series of interviews, investigations, committee recommendations, and additional committee appointments followed. Still, in the end, despite a petition bearing the signatures of over ten thousand ministers and elders of the church, the 1929 Assembly adopted the special committee's recommendation. The Seminary's constitution was amended, and the Seminary's Board of Trustees was reorganized, thus granting control of the institution to Machen's opponents. Machen resigned his faculty position at Princeton Seminary one month after its reorganization, and he subsequently relocated to Philadelphia to found Westminster Theological Seminary that same year.

On March 29, 1935, Machen's presbytery found him guilty of insubordination and stripped him of his ordination. Why was Machen charged so? The presbytery pursued Machen for founding the Independent Board of Foreign Missions in June of 1933, separate from the denomination's official mission board. The 1934 Assembly determined that Machen's action was one of disobedience to his ordination vows, and thus the judicatory removed him from the ministry. Though Machen appealed the Assembly's decision, his appeal was subsequently denied in 1936. Thus, Machen went on to found a new denomination that was eventually called the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Machen died in North Dakota at age 55. It was Christmas break at Westminster Seminary, and he had taken the train to the 20-below-zero winds of North Dakota to preach in a few churches at the request of Pastor Samuel Allen. Contracting pneumonia, he soon found himself in the hospital. On New Year's Day 1937, he sent the now-famous telegram message to John Murray, his colleague at Westminster: "I'm so thankful for [the] active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." Machen died at about 7:30 that evening.

Westminster Seminary was seven years old when Machen died. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church was only six months old; Machen had been elected the denomination's first moderator.⁵

5. Randy Oliver, "Defender of the Faith: The Life of J. Gresham Machen, Parts 1 and 2," accessed June 9, 2023, <https://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/html/ch/CH.h.Oliver.Machen.1.html#F1A>; <https://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/html/ch/CH.h.Oliver.Machen.2.html#F1A>.

SETTING THE SCENE: THE LATE 1960S

Let us consider the historical moment on the eve of the PCA's founding, just before 1973. To be sure, it was not as if these theological departures and moral compromises had arisen out of nowhere and suddenly erupted upon the American church in the mid-twentieth century. Rather, these ecclesiastical tremors had been gradually building for well over half a century, eventually brought to rupture at this point in the Southern Church. A similar boiling point had been reached fifty years earlier in the Northern Presbyterian Church. But it is beyond the purview of this article to survey the ascent of theological liberalism, which had been plaguing the American Presbyterian church since the late nineteenth century. Indeed, this was the very reason why Charles Hodge had gone away to spend two years in Europe—to study in order to confront and rebut the increasingly popular theological liberalism that was making inroads in Germany and coming soon to America.⁶ The leftward drift in the church was something with which Old Princeton Seminary and northern Presbyterians had already been dealing (so Machen and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy) and was something with which both northern and southern Presbyterians had become sadly familiar. At this point, the controversy had reached a breaking point in the Southern Church.

It was the late 1960s in America, and all the social turmoil one associates with that era was operating at full force. With the shadow of the Cold War still looming large over society, America had entered the Vietnam War more tangibly; American political and civil life was fraught with tension. Protests in the streets and on university campuses abounded. Marxist political thought had found a broad embrace on many college campuses and among the rising generation of voters. The Civil Rights Movement was at its height, and its figurehead, Martin Luther King Jr., would eventually be assassinated on April 4, 1968. This was the proverbial

era of “Sex, Drugs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll.” The Sexual Revolution of the 1950s and 60s had been making its inroads throughout American society, and the Southern Presbyterian Church had not been immune. G. Aiken Taylor (1920–1984) noted in an article from 1969 the shocking reality that the behavior promoted by the Sexual Revolution had received official endorsement from Presbyterian leadership. A Presbyterian campus minister in Colorado had written for the university newspaper at the University of Colorado, “...a radical ethical distinction must be made between pre-marital intercourse for the purposes of exploitation, entertainment, and gratification from what *may* be pre-marital intercourse by partners between whom a ‘covenant of intimacy’ exists.”⁷ Official Church Synod newspapers were offering similar counsel regarding the permissibility of premarital sex for Christian young people, and it seemed that the widely embraced situational ethics resounding from the lecture halls and civic platforms of the era had found a happy home even in the Church's pulpits and classrooms.⁸

The protests and demonstrations sweeping society and public university campuses had even begun to appear in Church-related institutions. Whether it was students demanding the right to keep alcohol in their rooms, or demanding that any vestiges of a Christian identity remaining in an institution's curriculum or mission be cast off, or even the University Christian Movement (an official campus work of the National Council of Churches) who had urged students to partake in various disruptive protests, there was a concerted effort by both adults and young people to shirk off any encumbering social restraint and Christian decency. What's more, the official organs of the PCUS in those days could seem to offer nothing better than capitulation. It is beyond the bounds of this article to comment or analyze in-depth on the matter. Suffice to note that, in an effort to minister and retain the youth of the Church who were being led waywardly by their peers, various youth services at the Montreat Conference Center in western North Carolina would offer attractional liturgical innovations. One such service featured

“electric guitars and folk music, especially Bob Dylan's anthem ‘Blowin' in the Wind,’ a dialogue in place of the sermon that focused on social-gospel causes with no Bible references at all, and a lack of traditional liturgical structures. The evening service was more of the same: a jazz trio, a movie that focused on race and poverty, a message that called for economic and political justice,

6. W. Andrew Hoffercker, *Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), pp. 116–117.

7. G. Aiken Taylor, “A New Sexual Ethic?,” *Presbyterian Journal* (29 April 1964): 10.

8. In an official synod newspaper of the PCUS, a writer, in response to the question of premarital sex, responded, “There are so many situations, so many expressions of genital sex. What are they? Where are they appropriate? It is not realistic or possible to expect all youth to wait for marriage to engage in sex. We must not be judgmental. They need to know they will receive understanding from adults who influence them.” L. Nelson Bell, “The Sex Revolution,” *Presbyterian Journal* (24 April 1968): 13.

a litany that focused on social sins, the Lord's Supper accompanied by 'We Shall Overcome,' and the service's ending with 'sacramental applause.'⁹

But more fundamental than the turmoil wrought by society and the church's grappling with the Civil Rights Movement,¹⁰ ascendent communism,¹¹ cries for the dissembling of the State,¹² the codification of female officers in the Church,¹³ and breakneck departure from traditional sexual mores,¹⁴ what alarmed leaders of the Southern Church was the departure of the Church from her confessional moorings. In these divergences, we find great concordance with the warnings issued by Machen a generation earlier.

WHAT ARE THE DIVISIONS?

For all the upheaval that had been increasingly evident through the 1950s and 60s—including sympathy with the societal drift that had become increasingly entrenched in the churches, seminaries, official agencies and courts of the PCUS—it was but a working out of the more elemental shift which had taken place:—a turning away from the authority of the Scripture and the codified teachings of the Reformed faith in the Westminster Standards. As noted above, this leftward drift had been something the Church had been contending with since the late nineteenth century, and the warning cries had been issuing since the 1920s. But now, it seemed, the lines of transgression had been irreversibly crossed.

In 1969, L. Nelson Bell published an article in the *Presbyterian Journal* entitled "What Are the Divisions?"¹⁵ which originated as a speech he had delivered to a joint meeting of the Board of National Ministries and Christian Education at Montreat, North Carolina. In this article, Bell gives the salient points which were of grave concern to conservatives within the Southern Church.¹⁶ I quote him at length here as he sets out what are, in his view, the fundamental fracture points in the Church's communion in those days:

We feel that our seminaries have increasingly stressed a certain form of "scholarship" which takes precedence over the plain meaning of Holy Scriptures and with this there has come an ever increasing loss of spiritual power and relevancy....

Another cause of division in the church is the intrusion into the life and worship of the Church of psychedelic forms of art and music which are unrelated to

Jesus Christ. At best some of these suggest a childish aping of the world, and at worst blasphemy. Surely the Church does not have to appeal to the flesh in order to reach the spirits of people for Christ....

Much is said about making the Church "relevant" to the world in which we live. But the most utterly "relevant" issue today has to do with sin and redemption, and this issue is too often evaded, ignored, or distorted....

The most disturbing development in recent years is the substitution of Humanism for Christianity perhaps unwittingly but nevertheless certain. Humanism is primarily concerned with man's material, economic, social and political welfare. True Christianity is primarily concerned with man's soul and his spiritual welfare, now and for eternity....

As the emphasis of the Church has shifted to men's social needs her influence has decreased. To her has been committed the Gospel of redemption (reconciliation if you wish), not some scheme of social engineering.¹⁷

And then, he enumerates what are perhaps the most basic of doctrinal points which must be agreed upon by God-fearing men and yet which are being consciously and flagrantly de-emphasized in the increasingly liberalized church:

9. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, pp. 216–217.

10. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, pp. 191–200.

11. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, pp. 201–207.

12. "Worse yet was the defense of SDS's actions by leaders at the 1969 Montreat youth conference and their urging of the destruction of the state and the redistribution of wealth. Was this the way in which the next generation was to engage the issues of the day? Was this how the church would include them in the work of the gospel?" Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, 216; Clydie [Paul Settle], "007 Rides Again," *Presbyterian Journal* (27 August 1969): 6.

13. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 212.

14. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 215.

15. L. Nelson Bell, "What Are the Divisions?," *Presbyterian Journal* (3 September 1969): 7–8, 21–22.

16. In his article, Bell quotes General William Booth (1829–1912) of the Salvation Army, who at one point proffered, "The chief danger of the twentieth century will be: Religion without the Holy Spirit, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God and heaven without hell" Bell, "What Are the Divisions?," p. 7. This prescient statement sounds the same notes as H. Richard Niebuhr's (1894–1962) later famous summary of the theology of liberalism: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross" H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 193.

17. Bell, "What Are the Divisions?," pp. 7–8.

Conversion in the New Testament sense.
 Repentance from sin.
 The new birth, which Jesus says, is an imperative, not an option.
 Heaven as man's eternal hope.
 Hell as a place of eternal separation from God.
 The Bible as God's revelation of truth.

I regret to say that on most of these subjects the Church has become strangely silent, and where these words are used one often finds that they are used in a different sense from that of the Bible.

There is division today, because many of us believe that there are certain absolutes....¹⁸

Near the end of his article, Bell outlines the final fissures of division as he sees them:

There is division in the Church because the constitution of the Church—the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms—is no longer held valid by many... There is division in the Church because some are preoccupied with organization to the point where they are willing to sacrifice our position as a confessional Church on the altar of an inclusive ecumenism.¹⁹

Three years earlier, Roy LeCraw had distilled the controversy in the church thus:

“The central issue is this: Is the Bible really God's infallible, inerrant witness to men, written by the hands of men who were directly under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit? Or is it merely a record of man's religious instincts, bearing witness to his 'growing awareness' of God but containing many allegories, myths and sayings which are only human in thought and application?”²⁰

BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE: 1960S AND 1920S

Decades earlier, Machen had been observing much the same divergence in his own ecclesial world. Modern liberalism in the early twentieth century had already been denying the plenary inspiration of Scripture. Therefore the authority which the Bible held in the esteem of conservatives was not to be found among theological Liberals. The Bible, while an eminently helpful and fascinating artifact of antiquity, *as a book*, held no greater authority than any other book.²¹

Given this new void of authority for one's theological convictions, the Modernist would often fill the space formerly held by the authority of the Bible with the authority of *Christ*. Many a Modernist finds distasteful some of the harsh-to-modern-sensibilities commands or the gruesome conquests condoned by God in the Old Testament. Or he finds some of the arguments and instructions of Paul to be out of step with contemporary sentiments. So he cannot ascribe such statements as those to be from the mouth of God, but merely evidence of the prejudices of the time and culture of the text's human author. But Christ—ah, the verbatim statements of Christ surely have divine quality, and therefore the theological basis and warrant for the Modernist's belief lies with the words of Jesus of Nazareth.²²

But even here, many Modernists will admit that numerous statements attributed to Jesus are disagreeable—particularly those he makes concerning hell or his condemnation of certain sins and behaviors. And so even here, a “sifting within sifting” must occur to ascertain the truly authoritative words that form the basis for the Modernist's Christianity. It is not all the words in the Bible, nor is it simply all the words of Jesus, but only some of the words of Jesus which are authoritative (provided they survive the critical scrutiny and sophisticated scholarly criticism to which they must be subjected).²³ Ultimately, as Machen put it, the Modernist is obliged to reject a vast deal that is essential in Jesus' example and teaching—notably His consciousness of being the heavenly Messiah. The real authority, for theological Liberalism, can be only “the Christian consciousness” or “Christian experience.”²⁴ Contra orthodox Christianity, which is founded upon the authoritative testimony of the whole of Scripture, Modernist-Liberalism was “founded upon the shifting emotions of sinful men.”²⁵

Such rationale was something that the Southern Church leaders knew all too well. In 1968 Nelson Bell wrote that “the differences within the Church are primarily *doctrinal*, not operational, and it is

18. Bell, “What Are the Divisions?,” p. 8.

19. Bell, “What Are the Divisions?,” p. 21.

20. Roy LeCraw, “The Issue Is the Bible,” *Presbyterian Journal* (31 August 1966): 12.

21. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism: Legacy Edition* (Westminster Seminary Press, 2019), p. 78.

22. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, pp. 78–79.

23. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 79.

24. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 80.

25. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 81.

a deep cleavage about *the content of the Christian faith* which lies at the root of our trouble” (emphasis original).²⁶ As Machen observed in his day, one of the significant problems in Bell’s era was the tendency toward refashioning Christianity into a subjective experientialism, one in which the emotional and psychological needs of the modern man were met through the so-called “Christian experience” or “Christ consciousness.”²⁷ Bell observed that the essential tenets of genuine, historical Christianity were being decried as “rigid orthodoxy” in an effort to sweep aside what the modernist viewed as old-fashioned and cumbersome ideological restraints. Holding to such beliefs made for an obstreperous inflexibility that rendered the modern church incapable of ministering to a modern world with its modern needs.²⁸

And what were some of these purportedly unfortunate, stubborn old-fashioned principles?

- An affirmation of Scripture’s self-attestation that its words are “inspired by God”;
- a belief in an actual virgin birth of the Lord Jesus;
- a belief in the truthfulness and historicity of the miracles purported to be performed by Jesus;
- the belief that Christ truly died and shed his blood on the cross of Calvary for the forgiveness of the sins of his people;
- the belief that Christ truly rose again in the self-same body that was slain on the cross and that numerous of his disciples saw him, heard him, ate with him, and touched that body;
- the belief that heaven and hell are real places to which the souls of all men (one way or the other) are destined and that Satan is a real and malicious personality actively laboring against the purposes of God;
- the conviction that the message of salvation on the basis of faith in the once-dead-now-risen Jesus for the forgiveness of sins is the only hope for mankind and that this message must be proclaimed profligately throughout the world.²⁹

The careful reader will observe the overlap between Bell’s enumerated list of convictions and the tenets held by the so-called “Fundamentalists” of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy of Machen’s day.³⁰

DOCTRINE AND SCRIPTURE

But, as was true in Machen’s day, so it was proving to be likewise in the days of the PCA founders: the

fact needed to be insisted upon that Christianity was, at its core, a religion founded on doctrine and historicity, not sentiment or mere aspiration.³¹ The proponents of theological Liberalism seemed fixated on ridding Christianity of all previous advancements in understanding from generations past. To disregard or discard the advances of earlier eras in an academic field, with the desire to start afresh in every age—such a practice would be utter folly in any other scientific discipline. But in theology, such an approach was celebrated, as such an approach was in the service of returning to a more pristine iteration of Christianity. Machen diagnoses this approach inherent to Liberalism as simply a disdain for doctrine. But this disdain, Liberalism would claim, is merely a healthy skepticism toward the *historic presentations or summations of Bible teaching*. However, Machen holds that it is a scorn not merely to historical *expressions* of Bible teaching but a disdain to the teaching of Scripture itself—against the words of Paul or the Lord Jesus as much as it is against the propositions of Nicaea.³²

The theological Liberals of Machen’s day were keen to “emancipate” Christianity from the accretions of doctrine that it had amassed over the centuries, with some even cataloging the doctrinal accretions from the early church and even the Apostle Paul! Ultimately, they desired to return to the pure, primitive, non-doctrinal religion announced by Jesus himself.³³ The Jesus of Liberalism was a man who announced general principles of religion, ethics, and wise maxims for living. However, even if one granted the claims of the text-critical scholars and their reductionistic approach to the four gospel accounts, one would still be left with a religion proclaimed by Jesus that is very much wedded to the announcement of an historical event and not merely permanent moral principles. Jesus announced an event, a rooted-in-history event that had a bearing on the souls of men, but an historical

26. L. Nelson Bell, “One Moment Please,” *Presbyterian Journal* (11 December 1968): 10.

27. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 80.

28. Bell, “One Moment Please,” p. 10.

29. Bell, “One Moment Please,” pp. 10–11.

30. The “five points of fundamentalism” were, namely: the verbal inerrancy of Scripture, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Birth, a substitutionary theory of the Atonement, and the physical and bodily return of Christ. F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone, eds. “Fundamentalism,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 650.

31. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 47.

32. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 46.

33. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, pp. 29–30.

occurrence nonetheless. Moreover, he interpreted the event he announced: the coming of the Kingdom. According to Jesus, this Kingdom-Arrival was the turning point of the ages, and a great share of his recorded teachings revolve around what a life lived in that Kingdom ought to look like³⁴—doctrine for life as a Kingdom disciple:

The modern liberal desires to produce upon the minds of simple Christians (and upon his own mind) the impression of some sort of continuity between modern liberalism and the thought and life of the great Apostle. But such an impression is altogether misleading. Paul is not interested, merely in the ethical principles of Jesus; he was not interested merely in general principles of religion or of ethics. On the contrary, he was interested in the redeeming work of Christ and its effect upon us. His primary interest was in Christian doctrine, and Christian doctrine not merely in its presuppositions, but at its centre. If Christianity is to be made independent of doctrine, then Paulinism must be removed from Christianity root and branch.³⁵

Years later, in 1961, Aiken Taylor observed, “Today’s departures from the faith—in the name of orthodoxy—are many. However, the reasons why there are such departures are relatively few...and invariably associated with some basic attitude toward the Bible or the church.”³⁶ Taylor lamented that this attitude had been so widely embraced by the church in his day (an attitude not unlike that adopted during Machen’s day): that the Bible is more concerned about facilitating man having an experience of religion rather than explaining or giving understanding to the subject of religion itself.

34. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, pp. 31–32.

35. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, pp. 25–26.

36. G. Aiken Taylor, “Biblical’ Theology,” *Presbyterian Journal* (25 October 1961): 5.

37. D. G. Hart, “Machen on Barth: Introduction to a Recently Uncovered Paper,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 189–96.

38. “Machen, however, in what became his typical response to inquiries about neoorthodoxy, said that he did not think the theology of crisis was a return to evangelical Christianity, but his limited knowledge made final judgment difficult. So for a fuller assessment Machen referred the Scribner’s executive to Cornelius Van Til, Westminster’s newly appointed professor of apologetics who eventually became one of America’s most outspoken foes of Barthianism.” Hart, “Machen on Barth,” p. 189.

39. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 18.

40. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 221.

CHRISTIANITY AND ENCOUNTERISM

Here it is incumbent upon us to note that one difference that must be acknowledged between the theological Liberalism of Machen’s day and the Liberalism with which the PCA founders dealt was the more full-orbed presence of Barthianism or Neo-Orthodoxy in the latter variety. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the influence of Barthianism on the PCUS in any meaningful way. Still, it should be noted that Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886–1962) outlived Machen by some twenty-five years, and Barth’s *magnum opus*, *Church Dogmatics*, was published in stages from 1932 to 1967. While the full-flowered Barthianism that impacted the Southern Church in the 1960s may not have been at its developed capacity in Machen’s day, Machen was undoubtedly aware of Barth and had engaged with some of Barth’s early publications, which had been released before Machen’s death.³⁷ So while Machen’s interactions with the works of Barth and neo-orthodoxy were limited,³⁸ their effects on the North American theological world were not insignificant.

Astute readers may have already noted the careful bifurcation in the language employed by proponents of theological Liberalism (which Machen was ardently opposing): the division between historical events or facts with religious principles, ethics, and morality. In Machen’s day, this Liberal conviction was often expressed as portraying Christianity not so much as doctrine but as a life lived in conformity to the principles of love and brotherhood espoused by Jesus of Nazareth.³⁹ While these earlier iterations of Liberalism were not as concerned with understanding Christianity in terms of being an historical phenomenon, Barthianism *did* seek to recapture understanding Christianity as an “event.” The problem is that even with Barthianism’s sympathy toward historicity, its redefinition of “event” led neo-orthodoxy to share the same fatal flaw with earlier theological Liberalism: a redefinition or downplaying of doctrine.⁴⁰

Machen observed that in his time, Liberals were averse to a faith founded upon propositions:

What is it that forms the content of that primitive teaching [of the church]? Is it a general principle of the fatherliness of God or the brotherliness of man? Is it a vague admiration for the character of Jesus such as that which prevails in the modern Church? Nothing could be further from the fact. “Christ died for our sins,” said the primitive disciples, “according to the Scriptures; he was buried; he has been raised on the third day according

to the Scriptures.” From the beginning, the Christian gospel, as indeed the name “gospel” or “good news” implies, consisted in an account of something that had happened. And from the beginning, the meaning of the happening was set forth; and when the meaning of the happening was set forth then there was Christian doctrine. “Christ died”—that is history; “Christ died for our sins”—that is doctrine. Without these two elements, joined in an absolutely indissoluble union, there is no Christianity.⁴¹

Likewise, the Southern Presbyterians dealt with this aversion to propositional religion in their day. In redefining “event” as something more along the lines of “encounter,” the definition of “revelation” had likewise been redefined. Instead of the divine self-revelation being the source of mankind’s knowledge of God, human religious experience (or “event”) was now reckoned as that source.⁴² Again, Aiken Taylor summarized, “The modern theologian says that God is *all* the time doing things and every act is a *revelation* of Him. When we rightly interpret His acts they *become* revelations to us” (emphasis original). According to Taylor, three of the great fallacies to which the Church had fallen prey in his day were the notions that 1) Revelation is Event, 2) The Bible is Witness and Instrument, and 3) The Church is Mission.⁴³

Again, the influence of Barthianism can be detected in that second notion, the idea that the Bible itself was not God’s revelation but only a *witness to* and *instrument of* that revelation. Revelation was anything—any *event*—by which man had a God-encounter and was not exclusively the domain of sacred Scripture.⁴⁴ For Barthians, committed as they were to Christocentrism over against the earlier Liberals’ quest for the “historical Jesus,” the greatest revelation of all was the self-revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.⁴⁵ The Bible was a valuable *witness to* this revelation, it was an *instrument* (perhaps the most ideal instrument) *to* this revelation, but it was not itself entirely synonymous with God’s revelation. Revelation was an event; thus, any religious experience/event that a man underwent served as a kind of revelation to him. From the perspective of the conservatives in the PCUS, the unfortunate consequence was that—paraphrasing Syndrome from Disney-Pixar’s 2004 film, *The Incredibles*—if everything is revelation, nothing is.⁴⁶

A further consequence—and recapitulation of what Machen saw in his day—is the separation of religious experience from religious knowledge or teaching. The words of the Bible were understood as “the fruit of

some one’s reflection upon God’s mighty acts in the world.”⁴⁷ Scripture was but one, if not the chief, witness among several to God’s revelation. Like a witness in a courtroom setting, the witness is not the same thing as the event or the crime, but rather one who can *point to* and *give an account of* the event. Of course, the problem here—as both Taylor and Machen before him denoted—was that historical events in Scripture were always accompanied by context and propositional truths that offered an interpretation of the “religious encounter.” It was often the pattern of Scripture not to simply “witness” to an event but to explain that event with propositional truths—doctrine.⁴⁸ Taylor argued that Christians understood that “revelation is first and foremost intellectual propositions” that interpreted the mighty acts of God in history.⁴⁹

DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

Not only was the doctrine of revelation undermined in the 1920s and the 1960s, but so was the doctrine of Christ, and often in a similar fashion. Because of the ascendent neo-orthodox view that, on the one hand, purported a great Christocentricity and sought to place the great emphasis of Christian theology on the supreme revelation of God’s self-disclosure through Christ, yet on the other hand, created a dichotomy between Christ and his Word, the Southern Presbyterians in the late 1960s were forced to play close attention to the theological word-games

41. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, pp. 26–27.

42. H. M. Rumscheidt, “Neo-Orthodoxy,” in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald K. McKim, 1st ed., (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 254.

43. G. Aiken Taylor, “Biblical Theology,” p. 5.

44. G. Aiken Taylor, “Biblical Theology,” p. 6.

45. H. M. Rumscheidt, “Neo-Orthodoxy,” p. 254.

46. “God’s Truth Does Not Change,” Gateway Resource Library, July 1, 2022, <https://gatewayresourcelibrary.com/gods-truth-does-not-change/>.

47. G. Aiken Taylor, “It Is!-It Isn’t!-It Is!-It Isn’t!” *Presbyterian Journal* (January 15, 1964): 8.

48. “Jesus announced not only an event; He announced also the meaning of the event...He certainly did announce an approaching event; and He certainly did not announce the event without giving some account of its meaning. But when He gave an account of the meaning of the event, no matter how brief that account may have been, He was overstepping the line that separates an undogmatic religion, or even a dogmatic religion that teaches only eternal principles, from one that is rooted in the significance of definite historical facts; He was placing a great gulf between Himself and the philosophic modern liberalism which today incorrectly bears His name.” Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, pp. 32–33.

49. G. Aiken Taylor, “Revelation Is More Than Event,” *Presbyterian Journal* (September 4, 1963): 11.

being played in their day. In September 1964, Aiken Taylor observed this wordsmithing sleight-of-hand in his editorial “Christ and Scripture, or Christ in Scripture?”

In denominational Christian Education publications, he observed that the need to know Christ and the need to know his Word were often treated as two distinct endeavors: “Our people must know the Bible *and* they must know what life in Christ means... We must teach the Bible in the church school. We must *also* teach those things pertaining to man’s response to God in the 20th century.”⁵⁰ He traced out this bifurcation which, more than suggesting, outright asserted that knowing the Bible’s content was an entirely different endeavor from knowing Christ Jesus; one may come to know Jesus Christ apart from the Bible. The prevailing doctrinal attitude in the Southern Church during these days, insofar as it understood the relation to Christ and the Bible, was that to read and study the Bible would serve one in a significant accumulation of facts but that Christianity truly entailed coming to know Christ—a sentiment to which, at face value, any conservative, orthodox Christian would add his hearty “Amen!” However, that same orthodox believer would insist that—far from being competing endeavors—the way to know

Christ is to meet him through his appointed manner of disclosure, namely his Word. To know Christ is to know him through the Scripture:

The Christian religion is a religion of revelation, of truth, of the Word of God. The Bible (which is God’s revelation, His truth, His Word) is not a substitute for Christ, it is the way *to* Christ. It is the divinely appointed means of grace whereby we find Christ, meet Christ, learn of Christ—and in which we commune with Christ.⁵¹

While many of the editorial letters in the *Presbyterian Journal* focus more specifically on the doctrine of Scripture, many touch on matters that have implications regarding the doctrine of Christ. In 1964, Nelson Bell wrote an editorial in which he highlighted the remarkable similarity of matters as they played out during the era of Machen and the present:

During the “Fundamentalist-Modernist” controversy of thirty years ago strenuous objections were raised against any definition of “essential doctrines.” Nevertheless, the fact remains that *unless there are essential doctrines there can be no Christianity*, for the Christian faith is about a Person and there are things to believe and things to preach about the Lord Jesus Christ which center in Who He is and what He has done.⁵²

Bell observed that the theological sea changes were certainly *different* doctrines than those historically confessed, but the phenomenon was hardly new. Indeed, these doctrinal and ecclesiological divergences were simply a regurgitation of old errors with which the church had often contended—throughout the centuries and even a mere forty years prior, such as the Northern Church dealt with in Machen’s day. The “new theology,” “new morality,” and “new evangelism” (which will come into further play below under the doctrine of the church) were hardly new at all. Rather, they were tired rehashes of previous attempts to bring the church’s doctrine and practice into closer alignment with contemporary mores.⁵³ Furthermore, this new theology was keen to distance itself from the conviction that all men are genuinely lost apart from Christ.⁵⁴ And if man is not utterly lost in his sin, if his sinfulness is just a tainting and not a death sentence that alienates him from an utterly holy and righteous God, what real need is there for a sinless Christ to redeem sinful wretches?⁵⁵ Could it be that the saints of old, from the ancient fathers to the martyrs of the Reformation, perished needlessly believing and contending for such a doctrine?⁵⁶

50. G. Aiken Taylor, “Christ and Scripture, or Christ in Scripture?,” *Presbyterian Journal* (September 2, 1964): 14.

51. Taylor, “Christ and Scripture, or Christ in Scripture?,” 14.

52. L. Nelson Bell, “For This We Must Contend,” *Presbyterian Journal* (January 8, 1964): 9.

53. Aiken Taylor quotes a letter published in a PCUS seminary student newspaper in which two students assert, “We fail to see how the Church can become theologically responsible and obedient to the voice of the Spirit until steps are taken to change the present situation.” G. Aiken Taylor, “When There’s a Stand To Take,” *Presbyterian Journal*, (December 16, 1964): 12.

54. L. Nelson Bell, “Not ‘New’—But Very Different,” *Presbyterian Journal* (May 26, 1965): 7.

55. Although Bell does not explicitly make the connection, the downplaying of man’s sinfulness often came hand-in-hand with the doctrine of the “fallen humanity of Christ” that was promoted in Barthianism, a theological strain that was at its height of popularity in these days. Denying the utter sinlessness of Christ was a common notion in the theological liberalism against which Machen contended. However, the liberals of his day came at this notion from a different angle than the neo-orthodox theologians with whom the later twentieth-century Southern Presbyterians were dealing. Though distinct, this denial of the sinlessness of Christ has significant overlap in terms of the problems it raised. For further examination of this notion, see Thomas Haviland-Pabst, “Christ’s Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy: Fallen or Not?,” *Themelios* 43, no. 2, accessed June 9, 2023, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/christs-humanity-in-current-and-ancient-controversy-fallen-or-not/>.

56. L. Nelson Bell, “Were They Wrong?,” *Presbyterian Journal* (April 2, 1969): 15.

Likewise, Aiken Taylor observed the theologians of his day advocating that the church should continue promoting the salvation available in Christ while not insisting that one believes in the Christ of the Scriptures. Assent to the doctrines of the virgin birth, the miracles of Christ, heaven, hell, and the like were not essential. Strangely, while one might employ terms such as “God,” “Salvation,” “Jesus Christ,” “Holy Spirit,” and “Gospel,” it was not incumbent upon one to take these terms in the same manner as the Scriptures from which he acquired those terms.⁵⁷

The Southern Presbyterian church dealt with aberrant Christology due to the influence of Barthianism that had been winding its way through the academy and seminaries for the past decades. The Christological errors with which they dealt were slightly different from those with which Machen had to contend, for full-fledged Barthianism had yet to run rampant through the North American context, as noted above. However, there were notable similarities between earlier and later errors, and there was some overlap between the doctrine of Christ aberrations of the 1960s and those that Machen observed in his day. Those aberrations with which the Southern Presbyterians dealt generally fell into the same two broad tendencies as in the time of Machen: namely, 1) downplaying the sinfulness of man while suggesting the potential sinfulness of Christ in his human nature, and 2) a downplaying of the supernatural events or miracles of Scripture. Machen observed that the great project of theological Liberalism insisted that man was not so morally heinous as conservatives would posit. Rather, man simply stood in need of moral improvement. As such, Jesus did not come so much to deliver man from a judicial condemnation or cosmic wrath but to model an ethic of love by which all mankind could be raised to a higher plane of living. So then, if man’s sin was not an issue that needed addressing, it is no longer quite so necessary that the Jesus of history, whom we read about in the Scripture, be sinless.

For Liberals, this posed no problem on an intellectual level. But, for adherents to the Christian faith, Machen observed, that thing which makes Jesus utterly unique among man—indeed wholly other from mankind—is taken away. If the sinlessness of Jesus is denied, this new theologically Liberal faith system bears no continuity between itself and the historical iterations of Christianity.⁵⁸ Indeed, in redefining this doctrine of Christ, it must be said that the religion of Christianity and the religion of liberalism hold two very different views as to the significance of Jesus of Nazareth:

There is a profound difference, then, in the attitude assumed by modern liberalism and by Christianity toward Jesus the Lord. Liberalism regards Him as an Example and Guide; Christianity, as a Saviour: liberalism makes an example of faith; Christianity, the object of faith...liberalism regards Jesus as the fairest flower of humanity; Christianity regards him as a supernatural person.⁵⁹

Machen further observes that this tendency within Liberalism to downplay Jesus’ sinlessness, in essence, denies his identity as a Supernatural Person and that this intellectual redefinition in the category of “sin” is not too far removed from the category of “miracle.” Suppose Jesus is not a Supernatural Person as it pertains to sin. In that case, it follows that he is not a Supernatural Person at all, and therefore the miracles attributed to him—or at least the theological requirement that one must assent to belief in the miraculous aspects about his person—need not be affirmed.⁶⁰

Machen admits that, supposing Liberalism might be correct, it would be far easier for one to believe and embrace the New Testament were it not for its miraculous accounts, but then the Jesus that is presented in Scripture is nothing but an ideal (or ethic or “new morality” as the later iterations of this theology would put it) to imitate. Christians are left, then, with a man worth emulating and a higher lifestyle-ethic worth enacting, but for “those who are under the thrall of sin [this] is a cruel mockery...if Jesus was merely a man like the rest of men, than an ideal is all that we have in Him.”⁶¹ Once again, to reject the miraculous aspect of the person of Jesus—and so to redefine the doctrine of Christ to make Christian theology more palatable to modern sensibilities—is to reject the Savior as he is disclosed in the Scripture:

Reject the miracles and you have in Jesus the fairest flower of humanity who made such an impression upon His followers that after His death they could not believe that He had perished but experienced hallucinations in which they thought they saw Him risen from the dead; accept the miracles, and you have a Saviour who came voluntarily into this world for our salvation, suffered for our sins upon the Cross, rose again from the dead by

57. G. Aiken Taylor, “‘Believe the Gospel’ Includes Miracles,” *Presbyterian Journal* (December 12, 1962): 10.

58. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 91.

59. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, pp. 98–99.

60. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, pp. 102ff.

61. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 106.

the power of God, and ever lives to make intercession for us. The difference between those two views is the difference between two totally diverse religions.⁶²

The rebuttal Machen articulated was much the same as the later Southern Presbyterians insisted upon: to deny the miraculous aspects of Christ's life and ministry is to gut Christianity of its essence. One is left with a religion that may be some kind of spirituality, but it is not the Christianity of the Scriptures, for Christ Jesus is essentially a supernatural Person.⁶³ Moreover, far from being simply an example by which men are inspired to live lives of loftier ideals,⁶⁴ "Jesus is no mere example for faith; but the object of faith" [emphasis mine].⁶⁵

DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Not only were the doctrines of revelation and Scripture assaulted with similar tactics in the 1920s and 1960s, but so too was the doctrine of the church. As Lucas notes in his work,⁶⁶ and Aiken Taylor likewise,⁶⁷ three of the great fallacies to which the church had fallen prey in Taylor's day were the notions that 1) Revelation is Event, 2) The Bible is Witness and Instrument, and 3) The Church is Mission. In that last arena, we find the church doctrine malignantly redefined, both in the days of Machen and in the days of the PCA's founding.

In the 1960s, the increasingly popular notion was that church did not "do" missions; instead, it *was* mission. Taylor argued that this "essentially pantheistic existentialism" would result in the negation of "world missions" and global evangelism efforts.⁶⁸ In some regards, the aforementioned trends were three facets of the same gem. That is, the new assertions of "Revelation is Event," "The Bible is Witness and Instrument," and "The Church is Mission" were all just three particular

extrapolations of the prevailing "subjective and existential approach to religion" that had arisen via the strange Barthian and liberal theological amalgamation against which the Southern Church was contending.⁶⁹

In this re-casting of the church's identity as "mission," Taylor observes that this essentially conflates the church as institution or organism or people with the task that God has given the church to do: "'Church' means 'the called ones.' 'The Church is mission' therefore means, '*The called ones is mission.*' That is about as enlightening as saying 'Women is marriage.'"⁷⁰ The Liberal notion was that the church was really just one vast missionary initiative, and therefore the church could not but help be a constant missionary endeavor, for that is the task to which she was called.⁷¹ But Taylor and others would argue back that while, yes, Christians are called to the missionary enterprise, that was precisely the point: the church *does* missions; it does not follow that because the church is busy with the work of missions throughout the world that the church *is* mission. Certainly, the church *has* a mission, but it does not existentially "become" mission merely by existing in places throughout the world. Taylor perhaps captured the mistaken impulse best when he summarized it as:

"The Church is mission" is the offspring of a universalist theology which rebels at the thought that some people have something which other people don't have ... [according to this modern theological opinion] evangelism must not be thought of in terms of some who "have" and others who "have not." All men are under the Lordship of Christ, but some are in mission, some are not yet in mission — while the mission itself embraces *all* men.⁷²

Lucas summarizes this radical redefining of the institutional church's essential, organic identity by the mid-twentieth century Liberals when he observes, "Instead of sending missionaries who were specifically called to a particular field to share the gospel, each Christian's secular calling contributed to God's mission and every sphere in which the individual found himself provided the opportunity to assist in forming an authentic human community."⁷³ Instead of the church being that place where the good news of Christ was proclaimed to sinners in need of reconciliation with the holy God with whom they were alienated, the church was rather a *mission* bent on proclaiming—by existing and facilitating—throughout the world "political, social, and economic justice." Instead of the church being that organization into which sinners

62. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 112.

63. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 116; Taylor, "Believe the Gospel Includes Miracles," 10.

64. "Today there are many who would so dilute Christianity and so broaden its base as to make it nothing more than a glorified set of moral and ethical standards." Bell, "Were They Wrong?," p. 15.

65. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 116.

66. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 222.

67. Taylor, "Biblical Theology," 6, 16.

68. G. Aiken Taylor, "Mission' a Threat to World Missions," *Presbyterian Journal* (August 1, 1962): 10–11.

69. G. Aiken Taylor, "Biblical Theology," 16.

70. G. Aiken Taylor, "Biblical Theology," 16.

71. Taylor, "Mission' a Threat to World Missions," 10.

72. G. Aiken Taylor, "That Word 'Mission,'" *Presbyterian Journal* (February 13, 1963): 10.

73. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 223.

were gathered for the worshipping of the Risen Lord Jesus and the perfecting of the saints, the church rather ought to “[realize] one’s existential situation guided the individual in the application of love for the purpose of human flourishing.”⁷⁴

In Machen’s day, similar-sounding notes had been struck. The later neo-orthodox/Barthian influence of the mid-twentieth century provided a variation on a theme from what was uttered in the 1920s. Attacks on the doctrine of the atonement, for instance, provided the launchpad for several of Machen’s articulations. Machen’s concerns regarding the church had more to do with how two entirely different theological belief systems could cohabitate in the same spiritual communion. In contrast, the PCUS was struggling through an attempt to redefine church “as mission” and likewise redefine missions and evangelism in the process.

But if the aberrations to the understanding of “church” and man’s need concerning God and what the church offered to such a needy world were not of the same *species* in these two eras, there were undoubtedly of the same *genus*. As the Southern Presbyterian conservatives contended against a downplaying of man’s native sinfulness and their opponents’ assertion that what the world truly needed (and what the church could offer) was economic and social justice and an opportunity for human flourishing, Machen observed in his era a “supreme confidence in human goodness.” Beneath men’s “rough exterior” was enough human nobility, if one would but dig deep enough, that it would overcome the world’s evil.⁷⁵ The help that man needed to aid him in his plight was entirely native: “The evil that is in man is to be overcome not by a foreign good but by a good which man himself possesses.”⁷⁶

The need of mankind was, as Machen surmised from these Liberal interlocutors, remarkably superficial and—he hastened to add—pagan. Machen observed, startlingly, that 75 years prior, the culture had been predominantly Christian. But as he took stock of the culture in 1923, he found it to be predominantly pagan.⁷⁷ One wonders what he might have made of the cultural milieu of 1973, to say nothing of 2023.

The great need of the moment, as the theological Liberals of the 1960s saw it, was human flourishing. In 1923, Machen noted quite the same:

Modern preachers are trying to bring men into the Church without requiring them to relinquish their pride; they are trying to help men avoid the conviction of sin. The preacher gets up into the pulpit, opens the Bible, and addresses the congregation somewhat as

follows: “You people are very good,” he says; “you respond to every appeal that looks toward the welfare of the community. Now we have in the Bible—especially in the life of Jesus—something so good that we believe it is good enough even for you good people.”

Contrary to an outlook that assumed man’s basic goodness and need for flourishing, Machen would argue, “The situation of mankind was desperate because of sin; but God has changed the situation by the atoning death of Christ.” That God had done something about man’s hopelessly dreadful condition is, in fact, what makes the good news good.⁷⁸ The mission of the church, Machen’s opponents would assert, is to preach a salvation that will save all men everywhere, irrespective of whether they have heard of Christ or what kind of life they might live. The church need not offer doctrine but something which “will meet the universal need of the world... some means of making effective in right living whatever creed men may chance to have.”⁷⁹

Another common overlap between the eras is an emphasis on experience. Revelation as event, a man encountering a Christ-experience as Scripture witnesses to Christ, and an experiential church that lives mission were all key emphases in the 1960s. Machen observed in his time that the “modern liberal Church is fond of appealing to experience. But where shall true Christian experience be found if not in the blessed peace which comes from Calvary?”⁸⁰ In this statement, Machen was speaking specifically in defense of the traditional doctrine of the atonement and not the doctrine of the church, per se. Nevertheless, the emphasis on *experience* paving the way to one’s churchly belonging and the downplaying of old, “harsher” doctrines to redefine them along more palatable lines was common in both eras.

To speak of man’s alienation from a holy God who was angry at sin was a horrifying notion to the liberals of Machen’s day.⁸¹ God’s righteousness and holy purity were not attributes to be emphasized nearly so much as his love—a quality to be highlighted at the expense of all others: “Let us, it is urged, regard Him not as a moody Despot, not as a sternly righteous Judge, but simply as a loving Father.”⁸²

74. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 223.

75. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 65.

76. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 142.

77. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 66.

78. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 125.

79. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, pp. 126–127.

80. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, pp. 132–133.

81. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 135.

82. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 137.

In what is perhaps his most damning indictment of the redefining of the church's message and mission for the needs of the modern era, Machen states (emphasis mine):

[Regarding] the improvement of earthly conditions ... these things indeed are to be welcomed. They may so palliate the symptoms of sin that there may be time to apply the *true remedy*; they may serve to produce conditions upon the earth favorable to the propagation of the gospel message; they are even valuable for their own sake. But in themselves their value, to the Christian, is certainly small. A solid building cannot be constructed when all the materials are faulty; *a blessed society cannot be formed out of men who are still under the curse of sin.*⁸³

Rather than the church being that institution ordained to proclaim the message of God and sinners reconciled, Machen was persuaded that, in too many cases, she had merely become another mouthpiece pontificating earthly solutions to earthly miseries. Rather than propagating the news of peace with God, freedom from sin, and everlasting hope, the church had contented herself with merely advocating for a program for earthly betterment: "Thus the warfare of the world has entered even into the house of God. And sad indeed is the heart of the man who has come seeking peace."⁸⁴

A NEW SEMINARY, NEW MISSIONS AGENCY, AND NEW DENOMINATION

As a brief aside, what follows here is not so much an academic thesis to pursue but rather an historical parallel to note. While there is likely no grand implication to derive here, it is interesting to observe that in the Northern Presbyterian Church as Machen endured his travails, Westminster Theological Seminary was founded in 1929, and the OPC was founded a few years later in 1936. Around that time, Machen also founded the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions in 1933. Seven years passed between the founding of a new Northern Presbyterian Seminary and the new Northern Presbyterian Church.

A generation later, similar trials were happening in the

Southern Presbyterian Church. Reformed Theological Seminary was founded in 1966 in Jackson, Mississippi. And then, seven years later, in 1973, the PCA was established in Birmingham, Alabama, first named the National Presbyterian Church, changing to its present name the following year. Just prior to the founding of RTS, the new Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship was established in 1964.⁸⁵ Kenneth Keyes notes that Rev. William P. Hill organized the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship when it became evident that those at the helm of the PCUS's Board of Missions were no longer interested in evangelism. As the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions had become for the Northern Church, the PEF eventually became a sending agency for missionaries that Southern conservatives could support.⁸⁶ Many Southern churches had stopped supporting the PCUS' Board of World Missions for reasons not dissimilar to those which led Machen to disavow the PCUSA's Board of Foreign Missions.

While not making overly much of the similarities between the "origin stories" of the PCA and the OPC, they are nevertheless interesting to note: a new seminary, a new missions agency, and then a new denomination—in each case, with seven years' time between the new seminary and the new denomination's establishment.

CONCLUSION

There is more that could (and likely should) be said on this subject and further research to be done, but that is beyond the purview of the present article. Although the challenges posed by the theological Liberalism in Machen's day were not identical with the Barthian-influenced liberalism faced by PCUS conservatives in the mid-century, the pressing issues at both the founding of the PCA and the issues outlined by Machen in *Christianity and Liberalism* have significant overlap. As observed in this article, merely by considering issues surrounding the doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of Christ, and the doctrine of the church, one finds striking similarities between the theologically Liberal contentions and conservative-orthodox rebuttals in both the 1920s and the 1960s. Northern and Southern Presbyterians faced remarkably similar battles within a generation of one another.

Further analysis might be pursued by comparing additional doctrinal *loci* of Machen (both in *Christianity and Liberalism* and his other works) with the issues raised by conservative Southern Church leaders which were not covered in this article. Further research might also be conducted regarding the specific men who had

83. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 162.

84. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 184.

85. "PEF: Our History," Reformed Evangelistic Fellowship, accessed June 20, 2023, <https://www.refglobal.org/our-history.html>.

86. Keyes, "History of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)," <https://www.jrp-pca.org/about-jrp/a-brief-history-of-the-pca/>.



J. Gresham Machen, undated photograph.

trained at Westminster Seminary who would later be part of the “Conservative Coalition” in the PCUS and eventually serve in the PCA. It would be fascinating to document who those specific ministers were (as well as those who might have served first in the OPC and later came to serve in the PCUS/PCA) such that the organic connection between Machen and his seminary and the founding of the PCA could be conclusively substantiated.⁸⁷ But even in analyzing the handful of doctrinal concerns outlined by Machen in *Christianity and Liberalism* with those of some of the PCA founders in the years leading up to 1973, the salient matters are too similar to be coincidental. It is evident that the convictions and concerns of Machen were matters of which the Southern Presbyterian leaders were

undoubtedly aware, and that Machen’s own ecclesiastical experiences had informed their concerns.

Sufficient for the purposes of this article is to conclude that the shadow of Machen loomed large in the minds of the founders of the PCA. The spirit of 1923, however auxiliary, was very much at play in the actions that led to December 7th, 1973. ■

87. As but one example of an organic connection, the PCA Historical Center notes William A. McIlwaine’s correspondence with Machen. McIlwaine pastored a church in Florida (that now bears his name), which went on to become one of the founding congregations of the PCA in 1973. Contained in that correspondence collection are seven letters: dated 21 August 1934; 8 September 1934; 19 January 1935; 16 February 1935; 11 May 1935; 6 April 1936; and 20 May 1936 [one page each]. See pcahistory.org/pca/50th/index.html.

In Brief: A New Denomination (1,974 years old!). This excerpt is drawn from Otto Whittaker, *Watchman, tell it true: The life and Here-I-Am-Lord times of Bill Hill—pastor, evangelist, and one-time liberal who came back to every jot and tittle of the inerrant Word of God* (Manassas, VA: Reformation Educational Foundation, 1981), pp. 411–451.

Fifty months after [Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship founder and executive director] Bill [Hill]’s “Go Along Or Go Forth” article, 260 PCUS churches would depart that denomination to form [the] “PCA”—the Presbyterian Church in America—and continue worship as set forth by the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Catechisms, the Book of Church Order, and other historical Presbyterian documents.

Millions of words might be written to detail the dissensions between PCUS liberals and conservatives, which, during those fifty months, led progressively to “the Separation”....

When PCUS presbyteries in 1954 voted down the proposed union with the highly liberal northern Presbyterian church, those who had voted *for* union, feeling only the loss of a battle in a war which still might be won, simply began working all the harder, using assorted irregular and often unconstitutional strategies for union at any cost. By 1970 they had already radically deflected the teachings of all four PCUS seminaries away from dedication to the Bible as the inerrant Word of God and from commitment to the church’s historic Westminster Standards, and a Joint Committee Of Twenty-Four (12 representatives of each PCUS and UPCUSA) was busily working on a study draft of a new Plan of Union to be presented to the 1971 General Assemblies of both churches....

Another action of the 1971 General Assembly had been to denounce a PEF work which had tended to give Bill an image best described as “the Gresham Machen of the southern Presbyterian church.”

This work began in 1969 when Ben Wilkinson, who some years later would succeed Bill as PEF’s executive director, went to Mexico with Jimmy Lyons, then pastor of Swannanoa Presbyterian, Swannanoa, N.C., and returned appalled by the quality of evangelism they’d found there. Knowing Bill’s concern for foreign missions—a concern intensified by Dr. Nelson Bell’s resignation from the Board of World Missions after five years of looking on while much of its purpose was de-toured—he lost no time in reporting to Bill and the PEF board the situation he and Jimmy had found south of the border.

In January, 1970, the board directed the PEF executive committee to form a commission to study the situation and report on the advisability of beginning a program of overseas evangelism consistent with the stated purposes of the Fellowship. Acting on the commission’s recommendations, PEF a short time later established its Executive Commission On Overseas Evangelism—familiarily written ECOE and pronounced “echo”....

At its first meeting ECOE faced what [board chairman] Jimmy Lyons recalled as “a grim question. Would we be willing to become a *sending* agency for missionaries overseas? That is to say, would we actually send out missionaries from ECOE? The question was debated into the wee hours of the night. Over and over it was predicted that if we took this step of actually sending missionaries out, rather than just sending financial support to selected ones, we would be putting the life of PEF in jeopardy. There could be such a severe reaction on the part of the liberal hierarchy [of the PCUS] that the whole Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship could be ‘outlawed’ as far as the southern Presbyterian churches were concerned. It could very well mean the end of everything Bill Hill had worked and prayed for through the years. But Bill was absolutely fearless. ‘So what?’ he said. ‘God started PEF and PEF is not going to end until He’s ready for it to end. And if this is the time for [it] to end, then we wouldn’t want it otherwise.’....

In its 1971 censure, the PCUS General Assembly had described ECOE’s method of operation as “a grave departure from the orderly process of the Church,” and with that statement rather automatically had also denounced ECOE’s parent organization, the PEF.... During these same days in 1971, Jimmy Lyons recalled, “PEF collectively and individually bore a great deal of vilification” from the PCUS liberal leadership—cheered on, no doubt, by the UPCUSA leadership and the National Council of Churches.

Understandably, no one in PEF bore more of such vilification than Bill Hill. The fact that he had founded PEF and was its leader, compounded by his membership on the Steering Committee For A Continuing Presbyterian Church and “the Gresham Machen image” that ECOE had given him in some eyes, especially aimed liberals’ abuse at him.

As part of the “severe reaction on the part of the liberal hierarchy” foreseen as early as 1970, Bill on April 2, 1972, was called on the carpet by an administrative Commission especially appointed by Hanover Presbytery “to investigate the activities of members of the Presbytery in organizations promoting a continuing church.” As Bill implied in a statement read before the Commission, the summons issued him had described the purpose of the meeting somewhat more jovially:

“Since the chairman of this Commission informed me that the purpose of this meeting was to get acquainted,” he said, “I would like to begin by telling you something about myself.”

He then read them an eight-page report covering his Presbyterian ancestry, conversion, schooling, and ministry, in which he said, “More than ever, after I went into full-time evangelism and began talking with ministers and laymen all over our denomination, I realized what was taking place in it.” Declaring to his investigators that he had made it a policy

not to discuss those realizations in the pulpit, he then turned directly to the real issue:

“It appears that this evening by an act of Presbytery I am being questioned for having fully adhered to the faith of my fathers, holding firm to the Bible and the standards of the Church. The indication is that I am being accused of having violated my ordination vows in believing the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of our Church, thus refusing to be a part of a Church which does not believe them and wants to abandon them.

“Then I am accused by implication of being divisive and disturbing the peace of the church. Let me point out to you, gentlemen, that there is a published document written by an appointed commission of our General Assembly which in itself will divide our Church. The document was written with that presupposition. It was written into a plan by which the church may be divided. Those who promoted the appointment of the commission on union with the northern Church are themselves the dividers of our Church. Those who work to abandon the Confession of Faith and Catechisms and unite with a church which has no binding doctrinal standards are themselves the dividers of our church. They are determined to go into a new church and fifty-five times in this Plan of Union that church is referred to as just that, a *new* church.

“So if anyone is going into a new church, they are the ones. I am not going anywhere. I am continuing in the same church I’ve been in all my life, the same church in which my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were ordained ministers. I am continuing to believe what I believe our church has always stood for. They may take the power structure and carry it into their new church if they wish; they certainly will not carry the Confession of Faith or the Catechisms into it because, for the most part, they don’t believe them.

“In the meantime, those who believe as I do will carry on the work of evangelism and teaching according to the instructions of the Word of God in a *continuing* church. Not a *new* church, but a *continuing* church.

“It is a monstrous lie to say that those who hold true to the Confession of Faith, the Catechisms, and the governmental structure set forth in the Book of Church Order prior to 1933, when the liberals began tampering with it, are dividing the church. Efforts of the liberals, sometimes *undercover* efforts, systematically from the early ’Thirties have increasingly divided our church. It is now split wide open, and those who do not believe the standards on which it was born are the ones who have split it....

“The departure of my church [the PCUS] from the Word of God, from its own constitution and polity by the apparently deliberate design of the radical ecumenicals, together with what this organization proposes to do in the next few years, make me feel that it is no longer the church to which

I made my ordination vows. I have kept those vows and intend to keep them as part of a church which will continue true to the Word of God. Those who are like-minded, when the present ecclesiastical power structure is pulled out from under us, intend to form another more spiritual and more useful in the hands of the Lord, who said, ‘Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’”

In the informal discussion that followed his statement, Bill told the Commission that he expected to leave the church. Asked why he hadn’t already left it, he answered that he was “waiting for some of my brethren to make up their minds.”

Dr. Ernest Trice Thompson, a member of the Commission, asked whether Bill felt any guilt about using contributions given to PEF to finance ECOE.

“There’s nothing to feel guilty about,” Bill told him. “We have clearly made public the purpose of ECOE. In meetings, our men clearly and carefully ask that if there are any in the congregation who don’t want any part of their contributions to PEF used for ECOE, they need only to so designate when giving.” (It should be noted that there never was any ill will between Bill and Dr. Thompson. In fact, in mentioning “E.T.’s” name in connection with his Seminary schooling, Bill paused in his report to say, “Dr. Thompson has always been my friend and I value that friendship, even though I disagree profoundly with some of his views of Scripture and fundamental doctrines of the faith.”)

Surprisingly, the Commission in its report to Presbytery stated that it had received assurance from Bill that he had not and did not intend to “initiate efforts to convince any person or congregation not already committed, to join the Steering Committee’s attempt to organize a continuing body of organizations and presbyteries outside the ongoing life of the PCUS.”

Bill immediately made written protest to the Commission:

“Gentlemen, there is very definitely some misunderstanding here.... I now clearly state that I did not, do not, and will not give any such assurance of my intentions as you reported to Presbytery. To do so would be to violate my conscience before God....”

In August, 1972 the Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church of Savannah, Ga., which had already separated from [the] PCUS and declared its status as independent, announced a meeting to be held the first week of September “to organize a Vanguard Presbytery for a Continuing Presbyterian Church”....

Some members of the Steering Committee had mixed emotions about the Vanguard action, wondering if it would in any way undercut the Committee’s plans. It had taken most of them by surprise, but not the Committee’s administrator, Dr. John Richards, who had worked closely with Todd Allen and, after Vanguard’s formation, had invited him to sit in on Steering Committee meetings.

Nor had Bill Hill been taken by surprise. On the contrary, he had been invited to attend the organizational meeting, but had declined for several reasons.... [The Steering Committee] had determined, they reminded Bill, to wait until February, when they would know whether the “escape clause” was still in the Plan of Union to be voted upon.

“I told those who insisted on waiting that there was nothing to be gained by it,” Bill recalled. “I told them there wasn’t going to be any escape clause in the Plan, and that they knew it, so all we’d do was lose another five or six months’ time. They didn’t disagree, but they did feel that having waited as long as we had, we could well afford to wait a little longer, because then we’d have ‘established fact’ to work with instead of ‘educated guess.’ And they had a point there.

“But I’d promised the Lord I wouldn’t stay in a church whose leaders dishonored Him after February, and I knew that if the Steering Committee waited until then for the Plan of Union, we’d still need another two or three months after that to get rolling. So I went ahead and asked Hanover to dismiss me so I could join Vanguard.”

Hanover summarily refused his request. To dismiss him to Vanguard would constitute an official recognition of Vanguard, an action to which nothing could move them.

So Bill joined Vanguard without such sanction.... As it turned out, Hanover’s refusal to dismiss was a matter of record, but its reproach was yet to come.... At its April meeting—held ironically at the Rivermont Church near Hopewell which Bill had organized—it brought against him “defrocking charges for joining a presbytery without permission of his own”.... Bill, however, still had friends in Hanover—conservatives, middle-of-the-roaders, and even a few who leaned leftward—and they joined strongly to protest any attempt thus to banish him from PCUS pulpits.

Dr. E. T. Thompson satisfied all parties concerned, the *Richmond News Leader* said, “by offering in a conciliatory gesture the resolution that recognizes that Mr. Hill has left the church, notes that the Presbytery regrets it, and ‘wishes God’s blessings on his future work.’”

In response to that motion, the newspaper reported, “A voice vote roared approval.”

In May, 1973, ministers and elders representing 260 PCUS churches met at Atlanta in a convocation called by the Steering Committee for the purpose of deciding whether conservatives should establish a Presbyterian denomination independent of [the] PCUS.

At that meeting, Bill Hill delivered the opening message.... He had titled his talk “The No-Compromise Man And the No-Compromise Church.” As the following excerpts show, it was not only a subject fitting that occasion, but also one even more appropriate, even priceless, today and in the days still ahead.

Explaining that the Word of God abounds with illustrations of both [the] no-compromise man and the no-compromise church, he expounded on these in reverse order:

“Our Lord in the *Revelation* writes to each of the seven churches of Asia Minor. Out of the seven there are only two for which He has no word of rebuke. To the other five He says many things by way of commendation but always comes around to a solemn warning about ways in which they have *compromised*.

“The two no-compromise churches stand out as shining lights. One was the church at Smyrna.... He commends them for their steadfastness under trouble and poverty, assures them that they have vast spiritual riches, comforts them with the fact that He knows they have resisted, and have exposed and cast out infiltrators of the ‘synagogue of Satan.’ He tells them of things they must yet suffer, saying ‘Fear none of these things.... The devil shall cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried and ye shall have tribulation ten days.’ *Then comes the great challenge*: ‘Be thou faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life.’

“The other church honored is that at Philadelphia. He assures them that He knows their work, challenges them by saying, ‘I have set before you an open door, which no man can shut.’ He knows that despite their small size and weakness they have kept His Word and have not denied His name. He assures them that at the Judgment Seat all will know that He looks with a special favor upon this no-compromise church... that He also will keep them in the ‘hour of temptation which is coming upon the whole world to try them that crawl upon the earth’....

“As we read these letters our hearts thrill with admiration and joy for the two no-compromise churches. They have been unwilling to compromise in faith and in morals. They have been quick to detect hypocrisy and to turn from it. As we come to these days when God seems to be setting before us ‘an open door,’ surely we should listen to His words and hear the ring of His challenge, ‘Hold fast that which thou has. Let no man take away thy crown—be faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.’

“Two no-compromise churches. There was *something good* in all of the other churches, but that good was spoiled by compromise. Now, let’s turn our attention more specifically to the no-compromise *man*, because no-compromise churches must be made up of no-compromise men.

“There are three things about a no-compromise man: 1) He refuses to compromise in small things and as a result, he does not fail when the big test comes. 2) He refuses to make his decisions on the basis of possible harmful consequences to himself. 3) He is obedient to the Word of God and separates himself from unbelief and immorality....

“This is a hard lesson to learn. It is particularly hard in these

soft, easy-going days of permissiveness. It's easy to compromise today. It's easy to rationalize and say, 'Well, under the circumstances there doesn't seem to be any harm, and who knows, maybe some good will come if I go ahead and conform.' Oh, sure, we know at the time that we are compromising in a sense and that we are going along with unbelief and apostasy and immorality, but it's easy to think that 'in these modern times' maybe that's the best thing to do.

"And then we rationalize that if we take a stand it will divide some churches, divide the denomination, and cause untold bitterness and ill will, so maybe we better go along and live in peace. We are too concerned with saving our own necks, saving our property, saving our ecclesiastical reputation. We don't want to make fools of ourselves, so what's the harm in just going along, when maybe some good will come out of it? And it's so easy just to compromise and save our own necks. Lots of people fall for this line. Lots of *good* people. Lots of *judicious* people. Lots of *sincere* people. Lots of *godly* people.

"But not the no-compromise man. If it is the fiery furnace that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego preferred to compromise, so be it. If it means the loss of church property, so be it. If it means the loss of face and reputation, so be it. God helping us, we will stand in the face of laughter, in the face of misunderstanding, in the face of bitterness and persecution. No matter what the cost, we will stand and we will not make our decision on the basis of what happens to us as a result.

"Our Lord faced this same crisis as He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. He knew what awaited Him there. He could have turned back, gone out into the Gentile world, and done much good. But He knew God's will, so He set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem. Then that lonely night in Gethsemane when He struggled ... praying that the cup might pass from Him, that He might not have to drink its bitter potion.... He could easily have slipped away that night and eluded the enemy. He could have done much good. He could have lived out His life in peace. Except for one thing: He refused to compromise, even to save Himself from His enemies....

"All through life we face dreaded decisions. I am thinking now of a group of men who were deliberating and wrestling in prayer and conference about a decision for the future. They said, 'What if it means the end of our organization? What if it means that our friends will leave us?' But they made their decision deliberately; regardless of what the consequences might be, regardless of what the power structure might do, regardless of threats from presbyteries and General Assembly, without compromise they decided to go forward and not turn back.

"Hardly ever does any man face a decision quite as momentous as we are facing today. There are those who say, this movement might fail. It might fragment. We might lose our church property. We might be branded as schismatics. Bitterness and recrimination might follow our decision. What

will we do? Considering the possible tragic consequences but despite such possibilities, leaving everything in God's hands, we must make a clear and unfaltering decision that we will not compromise with unbelief and immorality in high places in the Church.

"The no-compromise man never in such decision takes into consideration possible evil consequences to himself. He is bound by the Word of God, as he sees it. He must obey God, not men....

"Does the Word of God preach separation from unbelief and apostasy? Separation from immorality?... Is our task that of preaching the Gospel to the ends of the earth? Can we do it best in a reborn church, faithful to the Scripture and to the Reformed faith and obedient to the last command?

"A successful army must have an impregnable beachhead, a fortress from which to move out and conquer. Can we move out and witness from a corrupt, tottering ecclesiastical power structure controlled by men whose testimony is not clear and who compromise and distort the Gospel? What will we do? I cannot say for you, my brothers, but I can say for myself. I will not go on in compromise. I am ashamed that I have gone along as long as I have. The time has come to obey God and not compromise.

"In closing, may I ... give you a word of personal testimony? ... God gave me a burning passion to be used by Him to bring men to Christ. But at Seminary I got a mixture of truth and unbelief. I had sown in my mind the seeds of doubt about certain parts of the Word of God. I wasn't greatly bothered by it. I was all for seeing people changed and not too particular about the authority of God's Word. I remember how I sneered at fundamentalists. I participated with the liberal leadership of my presbytery, seconded motions for overtures from Hanover Presbytery to the General Assembly, motions which laid the foundation for the liberal takeover. How blind I was ... how ashamed I am now....

"But some six or seven years after I entered the ministry God began to show me—particularly through a godly retired missionary who worked in our midst in Hopewell—that I was a ship without an anchor. The missionary had seen what I was, and out of her meager pension, offered to pay my way to Moody Bible Institute for a week-long program commemorating its one-hundredth anniversary.

"I went, didn't like what I heard, thought all the speakers were too critical and narrow-minded.... And yet, God was dealing with me ... before very long He opened my eyes to the total and absolute authority of the Word of God ... my ministry began to change. I began to see ... that there were strong forces in the wrong direction in the church ... in most all Protestant denominations ... I didn't say much about it. Didn't tell my people about it. I said that it was enough just to preach the truth and not worry them with a lot of stuff

that didn't really concern them. After a while God showed me what a mistake I was making.

"I began to warn my people, as God taught me, about the dangers of liberal tendencies in the church. In the 'Fifties God called me away from my pastorate to full-time evangelism and as I visited in hundreds of churches across the Southland, I began to see how deep the inroads of unbelief and apostasy were, how they reached down even to the smaller churches....

"This is an awesome hour. For myself, I must say that there can be no turning back, regardless of the cost. I know from personal experience—having participated in it for a time—what goes on in the liberal establishment. I want no part of it. No matter how painful or humbling the future may be, God helping me I can no longer compromise the Gospel or disobey my Lord.

"Some may disagree, and I respect their sincerity. But for me, *any turning back would be a sinful violation of my conscience and disobedience to Almighty God.* I know the reborn church will not be a perfect church. I do not know whether or not it will fragment. I do not know the future—but I do know the decision I must make; to decide otherwise would be to compromise.

"It's said back in the [early 1900s], Dr. Warfield, a professor at Princeton, was out for an afternoon walk on the even of a General Assembly meeting which was held at the very height of the controversy between liberalism and orthodoxy in the Northern Church. As he strolled along, he met a lady of the neighborhood who said to him, 'Oh, Dr. Warfield, I do hope and pray that we're going to have peace at this General Assembly!'

"Yes, madam,' that stalwart defender of the faith replied, 'I, too, hope and pray that there will be peace—but *never peace at the expense of truth.*'

"Like Dr. Warfield, we'd like to see peace, but we cannot, dare not, compromise truth for the sake of peace. I think I can hear the Lord saying to us, 'Behold, I set before you an open door. Fear not the tribulation which will come upon you ... be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life.'"

Almost unanimously, the ministers and elders attending that meeting in May, 1973, voted to establish a Presbyterian denomination independent of [the] PCUS. After a second organizational meeting in August, the first General Assembly of that denomination was held in December at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. There 382 commissions representing 260 congregations adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith and other historic Presbyterian standards and appointed committees to administer home missions, world missions, Christian education, and business affairs, with that the "re-birth" of the continuing church—the Presbyterian Church in America¹—was complete and official.

One of the first acts of the Steering Committee after its organization in 1971 had been to ask Morton H. Smith to

make a study of the PCUS General Assembly's departure from Scripture and from doctrinal standards,² a project later documented by the book, *How Is the Gold Become Dim.*³ In that book Dr. Smith, professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, had expressed the widely acknowledged truth that "if a new church is to be formed ... she must assume the work on evangelism and missions as well as the nurture of her own." In obedience to that conviction, PEF offered and [the] PCA accepted ECOE—its thirteen missionaries and candidates and a fund of almost \$100,000—to help the church's own newborn agency, Mission to the World.■

1. The name first chosen for the denomination was *National Presbyterian Church*, but that choice was protested by a UPCUSA church in Washington, D.C., which bore the same name. Although it probably could have defeated threatened legal action, the new denomination quietly deferred and adopted *Presbyterian Church in America*.

2. "The departures of [the] PCUS from her historic positions are so massive," Dr. Smith wrote, "that it is difficult to document them fully. We have thus limited this study to actions of the General Assembly of the church."

3. [Ed. Morton H. Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim (Lamentations 4:1): the decline of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., as reflected in its Assembly actions* (Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church, faithful to the Scriptures and the Reformed faith, [Jackson, MS], 1973), xii, 202pp. Repr. 2nd ed., xii, 448pp.]■