

J. Gresham Machen's Theological Method*

By William D. Dennison

The State of Emergency

The modern world and the church are in a state of emergency! J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937) made this declaration in 1934 to his initial radio audience on station WIP in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.¹ Machen's characterization of this state of emergency was unlike what his listeners anticipated. Typical hearers surely would have had in mind the economic volatility of the depression, and the political unrest of fascism and communism, with resulting concerns about the stability and survival of democracy. In North America, the social problems were displayed within the populace each day—poverty, depression, crime, unemployment, and the struggle for human dignity. Certainly, Machen would be directing his audience to the cultural, political, social, and economic issues of his day, focusing on how they could bring resolution to each of these. Most listeners would expect him to discuss, in line with the progressive modernists, how Christianity must meet the culture on its own turf, first analyzing the problems of culture, then offering remedies. However, Machen threw his audience a curve. He said the crisis calls not for confrontation and restoration of the visible culture; rather, it calls for a true knowledge and understanding of the person of God and the “unseen world,” the kingdom of heaven.

*My special thanks to Miriam Mindeman who provided her editorial expertise to the essay.

¹ The radio program aired on Sunday afternoons from 4–4:30PM. The series was entitled the “Westminster Theological Seminary Hour.” Machen's talks were inaugurated in the autumn of 1934 on the subject, “The Christian Faith in the Modern World.” See Luther Craig Long, “Radio Page,” *The Presbyterian Guardian*. Vol. 1 no. 1 (October 7, 1935), 2, and Rev. Paul Woolley, “1932–1937” *The Presbyterian Guardian*. Vol. 3, no. 8 (January 23, 1937), 169.

Some eighty-five years later, Machen's thesis has not lost its jarring effect. Christians today are often fixated upon the political, social, economic, and psychological conditions of human life. Admittedly, as in the 1930s, tyrannical individuals and governments misuse their power, wars characterize the global landscape, social turmoil challenges almost every community, employment difficulties confront each economic system, the gap between rich and poor continues, and mental and emotional disabilities distress large numbers of human beings. Machen was not insensitive to the human predicament in such times. Nor does he posit that culture is condemned anyway, so why care? His premise is rather that, if the Christian engages the culture on the grounds of the culture itself, the believer will always fail. Why? Because such an approach, ignores what humanity really needs, i.e., a true knowledge of God and his unseen world. Modernism's primary concern in the church and in the world is "with the political and social emergency, and then afterwards ... with the unseen things."² However, Machen saw humanity "drowning" in its own cultural cesspool, and he saw the only way to address the mess was to go to the source of the problem—the internal manifestation of evil (sin) in the human soul.³ Simply put, Machen's prescription is to address the external conditions of the human world by first addressing the internal conditions of the human heart. According to Machen, the most "impractical" activity of modernism's practical theology is its failure to address the sinful heart of humanity with the true gospel found in the Bible. For Machen, true practical theology is available in the holistic religion presented in the Bible from Genesis through Revelation. Machen had seen enough of a Christianity focused on culture. In his judgment, society was falling apart "on a gigantic scale" and yet, modernism continued to view sin as an offense against societal

² J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World* [paperback edition] (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 5.

³ See *ibid*; also see Machen's biblical discussion on the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, and how sin is to be understood [*The Christian View of Man* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1937), 190–218; 235–278].

standards. Modernists failed to uncover the depth of the human heart, but Machen understood the root of sin—the “barbarism” of the heart—to be an offense against the person of God and the righteousness of his law.⁴

Machen was also sensitive to modernism’s extending its arms into the evangelical world, a concern validated by any penetrating assessment of current evangelicalism. Perhaps Machen would be aghast to see cultural literacy as the litmus test for being germane in the field of theology and the life of the church.⁵ In contrast, Machen’s own theological method and its content presents a truly practical foundation for the life of the church and the believer. His radio presentations are eloquent, coherent, and highly learned biblical and theological expositions on particular subjects given in a way that never insults his listeners with scholarly pride. At the same time, he addresses specific issues commonly raised by opponents of those doctrines with precise, and easy-to-comprehend arguments in which Christian orthodoxy is defended and supported.⁶ Indeed, his discourses are eminently practical because each broadcast is built on the soul’s relationship with God.

Machen divided his radio addresses into three main topics: (1) the Christian view of the Bible and biblical doctrine of God; (2) the Christian view of man; and (3) the Christian doctrine

⁴ See *The Christian View of Man*, 226, 207.

⁵ In his essay “Introduction: The Forgotten Machen?” D. G. Hart provides a fine brief summary of Machen’s view on “Christianity and Culture” (*Selected Shorter Writings: J. Gresham Machen*, edited by D.G. Hart [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004]: 11–14). See also Charles G. Dennison’s (1945–1999) chapter, “Machen, Culture and the Church,” in *History for a Pilgrim People: The Historical Writings of Charles G. Dennison*, edited by Danny E. Olinger & David K. Thompson (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2002): 27–40.

⁶ Upon Dr. Machen’s death, Casper Wistar Hodge, Jr. (1870–1937) regarded him to be “the greatest theologian in the English-speaking world. The whole cause of evangelical Christianity has lost its greatest leader.” Clarence Edward Macartney (1879–1957) noted: “He was the greatest theologian and defender of the Christian faith that the church of our day has produced.” (“Recent Tributes to Dr. Machen,” *Presbyterian Guardian*. Vol. 3, no. 9 [February 13, 1937]: 189).

of salvation.⁷ These divisions follow the familiar pattern of “logical sequence” found in most systematic theologies. Moreover, the sequence portrays Machen’s understanding of biblical revelation from Genesis through Revelation as an inherently rational, unified system: God (creation), man (created and fallen), and redemption in Christ (grace). The listeners benefited from Machen’s penetrating apologetic purpose, less concerned with argumentation to persuade the unbeliever of the Christian faith, than, with providing a defense for the Christian’s own commitment to true Christianity. As far as Machen was concerned the sacred canons of doctrine and life were under attack so steadily by modernism within the doors of the church that ministers, church officers, Sunday-Day teachers needed clear instruction in order to solidify their understanding of the truth contained in Scripture.⁸ This particular focus did not, of course, prevent believers from confronting the unbeliever. Machen held, however, that since the church still consulted the Bible as the reference for Christian belief, it would be more fruitful to gear the apologetic task to the church.⁹ Without this effort, modernism would continue on its path to invade evangelical churches with errors. After all, in his view, “the ordinary people in the Church ...[were] being deceived” by men in authority who were changing the meaning of words commonly understood in orthodoxy, to undermine the faith of the people in the pew.¹⁰

Meanwhile, even more alarming, people making their stand on the side of biblical truth and the

⁷ *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, v. His untimely death prevented him from completing the third division. Furthermore, at the time of Machen’s death, Ned B. Stonehouse (1902–1962) suggested that Machen was planning on two more years of addresses “rounding out a survey of Christian doctrine that might prove helpful especially to college students and classes in Bible study generally.” Without mentioning specifics, Stonehouse’s point hints that Machen was planning on going beyond the third division—the doctrine of redemption (see “Introduction” in *God Transcendent and Other Selected Sermons*, edited by Ned Bernard Stonehouse [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949]).

⁸ See *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 63–66.

⁹ For example, Machen stated the following in defending the inspiration of Scripture, “Its chief use is enabling Christian people to answer the legitimate questions, not of vigorous opponents of Christianity, but of people who are seeking the truth and are troubled by the hostile voices that are heard on every hand” (ibid., 63).

¹⁰ Ibid., 136.

creeds of the church were being “treated as troublemakers.”¹¹ Hence, Machen chose to deliver profound educational and practical addresses to guard and defend the orthodoxy of true religion in the Christian church.¹²

With this understanding, Machen gives candid warning to seminaries and ministers. Concerning seminaries, he remarks that too many “*are* nurseries of unbelief; and because they are nurseries of unbelief the churches that they serve have become unbelieving churches too. As go the theological seminaries, so goes the church.”¹³ In contrast, Machen asserts, “Out of real theological seminaries, where the Bible is expounded and defended, come ministers and evangelists who know what they believe and why they believe it; and the preaching of such ministers and evangelists is graciously used of God for the salvation of precious souls.”¹⁴ Moreover, he challenges the ministers as they enter the pulpit on Sunday morning to forsake their own religious experiences, their supposedly expert advice, their opinions on the issues of the day, and any promotion of self.¹⁵ Instead, Machen pleads for ministers to come out of their study in prayer and meditation as true servants of Christ, ambassadors of the King, ones who will expound faithfully, from their open Bibles, the gospel found in Christ.¹⁶ For Machen, this posture on the part of the minister does not change in the context of the unbeliever. He was convinced that unbelievers are not persuaded by rhetorical niceties, but by the truth presented as prescribed

¹¹ Ibid., 137.

¹² At the time of Machen’s death, he was eulogized as a great defender of Christian orthodoxy. D. G. Hart’s title of his fine work on Machen captures that exact sentiment about Machen’s life work and commitment (*Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994]).

¹³ *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 65.

¹⁴ Ibid., 67. It was Machen’s desire that the newly formed Westminster Theological Seminary would serve the church in such a capacity. See his address upon the opening of the seminary (“Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan,” in *What Is Christianity? And Other Addresses*, edited by Ned Bernard Stonehouse [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951], 224–233).

¹⁵ See *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 85.

¹⁶ Ibid., 85, and see also p. 60.

by Scripture. Since, the deep roots of sin blind the unbeliever to the gospel, no neutral realm of reason, experience, or common sense can entice the unbeliever. Those who are not Christians need to be born from above by the message of the gospel in Jesus Christ as testified in the entire Bible. True, Machen speaks often about the benefits of reason, experience, and common sense. In these radio addresses, however, he states clearly that all these elements are to be viewed in subordination to the truth of God's Word. Specifically, they function in the manner that God, the Creator and Ruler over all things has created them to function. We know this from the Bible.

The Bible's Position in Machen's Theological Method

Machen's theological method is rooted in the revelation of God's Word. He is persistent and inflexible; he begins every discussion of doctrine and life with the premise that the Bible is the authoritative and infallible record of God's revelation. Machen's commitment is clear: "The first prerequisite, then, for any advance in Christian doctrine is that those who engage in it should believe in the full truthfulness of the Bible and should endeavor to make their doctrine simply a presentation of what the Bible teaches."¹⁷ This directive is consistently applied to his own theological method throughout his radio addresses—he practiced what he preached. In fact, as far as Machen was concerned, the Bible registers certainty about all that God reveals in the universe. Everything that the Bible discusses is factually true. Moreover, any discussion of facts and truth must presuppose the Bible. In his addresses, the Holy Scripture is the starting point of any discussion that encompasses God, humanity, and the world in all their broadest categories.¹⁸

¹⁷ *God Transcendent*, 146.

¹⁸ In most of Machen's writings during his entire professional academic career, he held true to his pledge to this starting point. This position is apparent in major works such as the virgin birth of Christ, the origin of Paul's religion, and the character of faith. There were times, however, when he was not as consistent to this presupposition as other times (see footnote #22 below).

Machen realized that theologians often appeal to such categories as reason, experience, empirical facts, common sense, and rhetoric, hoping to establish a common ground of appeal to all of humanity and then to build a Christian view of doctrine and life. He rejected, however, this procedure for a number of reasons. First, as we have seen already, he consistently applied the biblical truth concerning sin and its effects upon all the human faculties. Sin's effect upon a person's entire being prevents that person from being able to receive the truth of God's instruction for doctrine and life. The gospel must change a person's heart in order for that person to truly understand the content of God's supernatural revelation as well as his natural revelation. For this same reason, in the second place, Machen would not surrender God's Word to what he called the abstractions of philosophical analysis, i.e., a naturalistic view of reason, experience, empirical facts, common sense, and rhetoric.¹⁹ According to Machen, these abstractions undermine the concrete fullness of supernatural religion found in the Bible. Even so, he was fully aware of the Bible's teaching about human beings as the image of God in the post-fall era. In this era, human beings remain intelligent and moral creatures. Specifically, Machen was cognizant that, after the fall, human beings still think, feel, speak, and have a simple consciousness of reality that constitutes their existence. These human traits either operate to suppress the truth of God's revelation or, by means of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, they are used to serve the triune God of the Bible. This antithetical divide is powerfully and profoundly driven home in Machen's radio addresses.

As Machen's procedure takes its starting point in the Bible, he constantly brings to the forefront the aforementioned antithetical divide in accessing and communicating the message of

¹⁹ See *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 108, 126. For an example, see Machen's riveting criticism of the use of experience outside the context of submission to the Bible (ibid., 76–79).

Scripture. Indeed, Machen incorporates reason, experience, empirical facts, common sense, and rhetoric into his paradigm. He strongly affirms that true biblical religion is inherently rational because its message conforms to the rationality of its messenger, God; at the same time, he rejects the rising tide of opinion from unbelievers and modernist thinkers that the biblical message is irrational. Alternatively, many theologians, who, in order to demonstrate the rationality of biblical religion, proceed in a logical manner from natural revelation to special revelation, including starting from the loci of the theistic proofs for God's existence. Machen admits that he supports the use of the theistic proofs.²⁰ In fact, in his discussion about God's works of creation and providence, he offers an elaborate causal argument for God's initial activity as Creator, and God's ongoing sustaining of the universe.²¹ Machen's formulation has a subtle twist, however, that can be missed. Unlike many of the theologians before him, he does not employ natural revelation or the theistic proofs as a neutral starting point to construct a rational understanding of the Christian religion. Interestingly, he identifies little value to an independent appeal to natural revelation and the theistic proofs because, in the post-fall era, human beings go multiple directions with the testimony of nature, failing to arrive at a true knowledge of a personal God. Sin has blinded the eyes of human beings to the truth about God's revelation in nature.²² Human logic now suppresses the truth in unrighteousness. According to

²⁰ Ibid., 15–16.

²¹ *The Christian View of Man*, 88–89, 100–112, 114.

²² See *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 17, 21, 27; See also *The Christian View of Man*, 5–6. There has been a debate surrounding Machen's use of theistic proofs; do they stand as a neutral starting point as constitutive components to construct the justification for theism (old Princeton apologetic), or do they stand as a justification of theism already within a presupposed biblical understanding of Christian theism (presuppositional apologetic of Cornelius Van Til)? Besides our present discussion from his radio address, perhaps, the most interesting comment Machen makes about the theistic proofs appears in his article, "The Relation of Religion to Science and Philosophy," *Princeton Theological Review*. Vol. 24, no. 1 (January 1926), 59. In this expansive article of E. Y. Mullins's volume, *Christianity at the Cross Roads*, Machen argues against the distinction Mullins makes between philosophy and religion as well as his belief that theism is solely dependent upon a saving relationship with Christ. In his opposing argument, Machen writes: "Now these effects of sin are removed by Christ. But that does not mean that He [Christ] causes us to relinquish the theistic proofs which were open to us even in our unredeemed

Machen, this problem can only be righted by starting with the special and supernatural revelation of God.²³ To understand nature and the first cause, Machen tells his audience that Christians must have their “Bible open” before them as “the revelation of God through nature has the stamp of approval put upon it by the Bible.”²⁴ A logical and rational understanding of the Christian religion begins with the logical and intellectual content and substance of biblical revelation.²⁵

When Machen addresses the issue of experience, he declares that true biblical religion is the height of religious experience because of its teaching concerning knowledge, communion, and fellowship with the sole personal God of the cosmos. In contrast, he vigorously attacks the autonomy of human experience as being the *standard* for religious truth. His analysis continues to be riveting for our own day. The culture enters into public forums and inquires of major religious movements throughout the world in order to identify the best religious qualities that can elevate religious experience as a common denominator for all peoples, a method of examination Machen refers to as “the great inquiry racket.”²⁶ After all, he perceived that such a method of

state, or that He causes us to despise that measure of understanding of those proofs which, through common grace, was attained even by unregenerate men. What it does mean is that we are enabled through the redemption offered by Christ to see clearly where formerly our eyes were darkened. The experience of regeneration does not absolve us from being philosophers, but it makes us better philosophers. And so far as the intellectual defense of Christianity is concerned, the fact should never be obscured that theism is the logical prius [prior] of faith in Christ. ...The old order of apologetics is correct: first, there is a God; second, it is likely that He should reveal Himself; third, He has actually revealed Himself in Christ. It is a serious fault when the last of these points is put first” (59). Machen’s language here is definitely congruent with the old Princeton apologetic. Machen continues: “But what we do affirm is that when the logical as distinguished from the temporal order is being established, then theism does precede the acceptance of Jesus as Redeemer and Lord. The gospel sets forth the way in which God saved man; that gospel cannot be understood unless its presuppositions are accepted; those presuppositions are the Christian view of God and the Christian view of man; and the Christian view of God is based upon theism” (59–60). One must be alert to how Machen, in his radio addresses, speaks of theistic proofs in the mid-1930s, and how he speaks of them in the mid-1920s. In his radio addresses, there is movement away from the construct of the old Princeton apologetic. See footnote #37 below which complements the material in this footnote.

²³ *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 28.

²⁴ *The Christian View of Man*, 87; *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 20.

²⁵ Machen also voices his concern for the “anti-intellectual tendency in the modern world.” In fact, he supports the “primacy of the intellect,” especially in the context “to break down the false and disastrous opposition which has been set up between knowledge and faith” (*What is Faith?* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965 (1925)], 26).

²⁶ *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 77. Note also Machen’s broader discussion on pages 76–79.

inquiry would have to reject the truth of biblical revelation since true Christianity does not fit into the world's common denominator. Machen maintains a simple test by which the church and the Christian can evaluate these movements endorsed by secular culture and modernism. He turns to his standard—the Bible. He states, if the movement “agrees with the Bible, we approve it; if it disagrees with the Bible, we oppose it, no matter what external successes it may attain and no matter even what apparent graces it may seem to our superficial human judgement to induce here and there in its adherents.”²⁷

Machen's discussion about empirical facts is intriguing. A growing and strengthening position in modernism at the time was that natural empirical facts excluded anything to do with supernatural revelation.²⁸ In fact, for many, secular science had established that the objective use of the scientific method terminated any justified belief in Christianity. Machen counters this by saying that the use of empirical facts is only truly enlightening when science and biblical revelation are viewed as complementary. Reflecting upon Psalm 104, Machen makes his point: “There is nothing in modern science that invalidates the teaching of the Bible regarding God's care for His creatures; nay, there is much that wonderfully confirms it, if only we had eyes to see.”²⁹ Again, because of the blindness of sin, modern science is paralyzed, unable to comprehend a holistic view of God and his creation. In contrast, leaving no room for a neutral approach to facts, Machen notes that “the *Christian* religion is most emphatically dependent upon facts—facts in the external world, facts with which ‘science’ in the true sense of the word certainly has a right to deal.”³⁰ In God's Word and creation, there is no contradiction between

²⁷ Ibid., 77.

²⁸ See his penetrating criticism of naturalistic evolution, *The Christian View of Man*, 129–142.

²⁹ Ibid., 108.

³⁰ *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 55.

religion, science, and facts. Machen insists that the Bible tells us the facts: “No facts, no good news; no good news, no hope. The Bible is quite useless unless it is a record of facts.”³¹ For him, the Bible’s record of facts is grounded in history, specifically the progressive organic revelation of God.

Machen’s understanding of common sense has captured the attention of many in light of the influence of Thomas Reid’s (1710–1796) common sense realism (CSR) upon the old Princeton theologians like Charles Hodge (1797–1878).³² Reid’s version of realism sought to counter the rising tide of modern skepticism in such philosophers as David Hume (1711–1776). Machen often uses the phrase “common sense” in his radio addresses as he applies the expression to the believer and to the unbeliever/modernist. For him, the supernatural element of biblical revelation is common sense and, thus, the reader of God’s Word must understand the text as a common-sense document. In contrast, he maintains that the unbeliever/modernist removes common sense from the realm of special revelation.³³ Once the unbeliever/modernist takes such a step, the text stumbles into the realm of nonsense as a foolish product of worldly learning. As Machen accents the antithetical use of common sense, his point about the dangers of philosophical abstraction is manifested before the listener. Philosophical formulations, in this case CSR, are abstractions if not framed in conformity to the special revelation of God’s Word. Further, in his discussion of anthropology, Machen sets forth true common sense against idealism and materialism (material empiricism). Although he expresses sympathy with idealism against materialism (we must have the idea of the object in our mind) and, he acknowledges that

³¹ Ibid., 57; See also Machen’s view of fact related to God’s providence, *The Christian View of Man*, 109.

³² Perhaps, the best example of the Old Princeton theologians using the method of Reid’s CSR appears in the early pages of Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1899), 1–17.

³³ See *The Christian View of Man*, 156–157, 284.

objects exist outside the mind (empiricism), he points out his disdain for both philosophies.³⁴

Alternatively, he promotes a philosophy of common sense in strict conformity to Scripture. Of

course, care must be exercised when exploring Machen's viewpoint. He is not engaged in

synthesis, nor in the search for a resolving golden mean between idealism and empiricism.

Again, his view of common sense is not as a neutral point of contact with the

unbeliever/modernist aiming to counter skepticism. Instead, his view of common sense

presupposes the truth found in the Scriptures that everything appears in the universe as God

created it to be. In other words, the external world factually exists because God created external

objects, and human beings possess thought and consciousness (soul) because God created them

in his image. Machen delivers the *standard* clearly; he appeals to common sense because "the

Bible is a wonderfully common-sense book."³⁵ His position is well-defined as he confronts

extreme skepticism about the personhood of Christ. He merely pleads with his audience to read

the gospels as common sense, and he prompts, "ask yourselves whether the Person there

presented to you is a living, breathing person."³⁶ Without a doubt, for Machen the Bible does not

reveal common-sense because it voices Reid's position; instead, it is a common-sense book

because it records all things as they actually are from the creative, commanding, providential

hand of God.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid., 150–158.

³⁵ Ibid., 156. In Machen's worldview, the Bible and common sense are never in contradiction (see *ibid.*, 254).

³⁶ *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 200.

³⁷ Review footnote #22 above as you consider the content in this footnote. As stated, much has been written about the relationship of Reid's version of CSR and the old Princeton theologians, including Machen. Darryl G. Hart's article, "The Princeton Mind in the Modern World and the Common Sense of J. Gresham Machen," *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. XLVI, no. 1 (Spring, 1984): 1–25, and George M. Marsden's article, "J. Gresham Machen, History, and Truth," *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. XLII, no. 1 (Fall, 1979): 157–175, are fine articles that bring the subject to the forefront. Also, a helpful study in this area is Kim Riddlebarger's, *The Lion of Princeton: B.B. Warfield as Apologist and Theologian* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015). A couple of years after Hart's input, Greg L. Bahnsen (1948–1995) wrote a challenging article on the relationship between Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) and Machen's apologetics, addressing specifically the so-called association and dependency of Machen upon

Machen's discussion about rhetoric goes back to the term's classical roots. How do we view the persuasion of speech (language) with respect to the message being communicated? For the unbeliever/modernist, the rhetoric of the Christian supernatural message is psychological verbiage that has no connection with the factual, empirical world. For this reason, Machen anticipated that they might express serious concern with his radio addresses, fearing listeners might find them too brilliant and eloquent.³⁸ The unbeliever/modernist might see Machen's method and use of rhetoric as persuasive enough to lead his audience away from understanding any legitimate discussion of the consensus of religious experience in the natural world. Machen sets the stage to counter such a criticism. He denies possessing brilliance and eloquence. Instead, if anyone is persuaded by his arguments and message, he contends it must come as a blessing

Scottish CSR and the old Princeton apologetic. Bahnsen essentially advocated that Machen held to Van Til's position on apologetics, and that Machen's apologetic should not be aligned with CSR and the old Princeton apologetic (see Greg L. Bahnsen's, "Machen, Van Til, and the Apologetical Tradition of the OPC," in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, edited by Charles G. Dennison & Richard C. Gamble [Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986]: 259–294). When a close examination of the use of the phrase common-sense in Machen's theological method is applied over his lifetime, it would seem that Bahnsen was on the right track. It may be true that Bahnsen curbs his discussion too strongly to conform Machen firmly to Van Til's apologetic. For example, despite knowing about the article, Bahnsen does not deal with Machen's statement about theistic proofs and apologetics found in Machen's article, "The Relation of Religion to Science and Philosophy," 59 (see footnote #22). Those comments did not fit Bahnsen's thesis. On the other hand, Marsden definitely takes the challenge of what Machen wrote on that exact page (59) and concluded, "Although he himself [Machen] did not often put it this way, his common sense affirmations were in fact based on presuppositions concerning the Triune God revealed in Scripture. In fact, Machen took a Biblically founded view of reality as basic and derived an epistemology from it" (J. Gresham Machen, *History, and Truth*, 174). Although Marsden definitely notes Machen's comments in 1926 about the theistic proofs, he fills the void in Bahnsen's argument by noting the larger picture of Machen's historiography throughout his lifetime. As the battle against modernism became more intense in Machen's life from the 1920s into the 1930s, it should not be surprising that this historian of New Testament orthodoxy would sharpen the consistency of his historiography to match his starting point. Indeed, a careful examination of the starting point of Machen's theological method (the absolute authority and truth of God's Word), and the position of the concept of *history* in biblical revelation with respect to his starting point, makes for a compelling argument that Machen was closer to Van Til's apologetic than he was to old Princeton's version of apologetics when he voiced his radio addresses. After all, in 1926, he was already quite assertive that any practice of "non-Christian theism" was "unstable" ("The Relation of Religion to Science and Philosophy," 39). Perhaps, his eventual contact with Van Til pressed him to finally perceive that the only true view of theism is Christian theism. Only in this context can the theistic proofs and common-sense reality make sense.

³⁸ See *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 35.

from God.³⁹ Machen was fully aware that any true persuasion to the Christian gospel is the work of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:1–16). Again, Machen’s method takes a correct view and use of rhetoric in submission to the teaching of Scripture, and not to Isocrates, the Sophists, Cicero, Quintilian, and their modern disciples.

At this point in our discussion, we have noted that the foundation of Machen’s theological method is his steady fidelity to the Bible as the starting point of any construct of theology. In light of the gravity of sin’s effects on the human condition, special revelation is the necessary prerequisite for interpreting God, human beings, and the world correctly. Our depraved condition prevents a neutral and autonomous use of logic, experience, empirical facts, common sense, and rhetoric in order to arrive at the absolute truth as God intended. All of these qualities need to be set aright and directed by the infallible revelation of God’s Word. The work of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart performs that task. For the believer, the Holy Spirit opens the heart to the full-orbed framework of revelational truth, whereas for the unbeliever and modernist the fullness of truth is veiled because of their stubborn hearts.

Biblical Inspiration and its Application in Machen’s Theological Method

Since the absolute authority and foundation for Machen’s theological method is the Bible, there remains for us to grasp how he viewed the supernatural inspiration of God’s Word and its application. His view of inspiration will provide penetrating insight into his technique of constructing theology. Machen begins not with the normal discourse about inspiration *per se*. Instead, his view of inspiration focused upon the concept of “plenary inspiration,” i.e., every part (every particular text) of Scripture is the inspired Word of God. To put it another way, the *whole*

³⁹ See *ibid.*, 36.

of Scripture is inspired, including every *particular part* (text) in Scripture.⁴⁰ Machen's procedure makes sense in light of modernism's acceptance of some parts of Scripture as true but denial of other parts of Scripture as true, e.g., they may deny any text that includes a supernatural miracle. Machen was bent on defending the whole of Scripture as inspired. After all, the Holy Spirit is the mainstay of the biblical doctrine of inspiration. As Scripture's final author, the Holy Spirit protected the human authors, "in supernatural fashion," from "errors which appear in ordinary books."⁴¹ Moreover, the Holy Spirit's operation upon the human authors is not to be viewed as a mechanical operation. The writers were not machines or stenographers.⁴² Machen's point was quite simple: God does not deal with the various authors as machines, or as sticks or stones, but he "deals with them as men."⁴³ Each author, as a person, had their own literary style, personality, education, and source information that contributed to their particular narrative. These human traits only function in an infallible manner as they submit to the Holy Spirit's activity in the author. Hence, all the *parts* of God's Word are *completely* true with respect to matters of facts, and it is authoritative with respect to what it commands.⁴⁴

Since the *entire* Bible, from Genesis through Revelation, is the unified product of the Holy Spirit, there is an organic flow within the fabric of biblical revelation. Specifically, its unified continuity is progressive in nature. The movement Machen outlines is simply from the Old Testament to the gospels of the New Testament (focusing on the ministry of Christ), and from the gospels to the apostles' proclamation and application of the gospel in the book of Acts and the various epistles. Machen applies this view of Scripture to the formulation and defense of

⁴⁰ Ibid., 36–39.

⁴¹ Ibid., 49.

⁴² Ibid., 46.

⁴³ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, 37. Note also Machen's fine summary of the doctrine of plenary inspiration (*ibid.*, 45).

each rubric of doctrine and life he addresses (e.g., Scripture, creation, God [Trinity], God's decrees, predestination, providence, creation and fall of man, covenant, sin, law, and salvation by grace). In this context, we are peering into the precise execution of Machen's theological method. Every subject in the corpus of theology is constructed upon the sole infallible unity, content, and teaching of Scripture.

Furthermore, a theologian constructs the content of theology upon the foundation of the grammatical-historical understanding and interpretation of the biblical text. The Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic languages appear in the biblical narrative as the history of revelation progressively unfolds. At the core of biblical revelation is its historical character—the activity of the living and true God—which controls every theological construct. Machen clearly applies this principle to every topic of theology he presents in order to arrive at a coherent understanding of that subject according to God's Word.⁴⁵ For Machen, this means that the history of revelation—not reason, experience, empirical facts, common sense, or rhetoric is the ground of any theological task and formulation. All of these later five characteristics, if they are to participate positively and

⁴⁵ On this point, Machen stands on the principle that he outlined in his inaugural address at WTS that Systematic Theology stands upon "the foundation of Biblical theology," i.e., that the topical arrangement and construction of the system of truth taught in the Bible (Systematic Theology) is built upon the rich comprehension of the "history of the revelation" that the Bible presents (Biblical Theology). Biblical Theology is prior to Systematic theology in the practical work of the theologian and the minister. Machen even remarks that the faculty of WTS belong with those theologians who affirm that Biblical Theology is prior to Systematic theology (see "Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan," 228). Here, Machen is definitely echoing the thought of two of his beloved teachers at old Princeton. First is, B. B. Warfield, who wrote: "Systematic Theology is not founded on the direct and primary results of the exegetical process; it is founded on the final and complete results of exegesis as exhibited in Biblical Theology. Not exegesis itself, then, but Biblical Theology, provides the material for Systematics" ("The Idea of Systematic Theology [1896]," in *The Princeton Theology: 1812–1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield*, edited by Mark A. Noll [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983], 252). Second is, Geerhardus Vos, who wrote: "In Biblical Theology both the form and contents of revelation are considered as parts and products of a divine work. In Systematic Theology these same contents of revelation appear, but not under the aspect of the stages of a divine work; rather as the material for a human work of classifying and systematizing according to logical principles. Biblical Theology applies no other method of grouping and arranging these contents than is given in the divine economy of revelation itself" ("The Idea of Biblical Theology," *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, edited by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980]: 7).

constructively in theology, must function in submission to the historical character of God's revelation. What is enlightening about Machen's theological method is his strict compliance with the chief principle of interpreting Scripture, i.e., "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself" (WCF: I:9). The essence of this principle of interpretation is grammatical-historical—it is biblical theological. It could even be suggested that Machen's theological method and its product from his radio addresses is a topical edition of what is known today as Biblical Theology. It may not be as sophisticated as present Biblical theologians may like, but it is a rich and solid initiative—a skeleton edition of an integrated Systematic Theology informed by a Reformed view of Biblical Theology.

Plenary inspiration is, therefore, the foundation for a holistic understanding and knowledge of true Christianity. In that understanding of biblical revelation, we noted that the parts and the whole, the unity and the diversity, are connected integrally from Genesis through Revelation. Also, at the very core of Machen understanding of biblical revelation is its progressive, historical character. History is the landscape of the unfolding revelation of God, and the Bible is composed of many historical documents as one historical canon.⁴⁶ The parts of Scripture and the whole of Scripture makes no sense without the continual progressive activity of God's providence in history. For Machen, this point is crucial because it speaks to the *essential* problem within modernism. Modernism has adopted a naturalistic view of history which rules out the supernatural activity of God. It reduced the universe to an analysis of natural laws that has no reference to God or the unseen world. This approach undermines the truth and activity of God, the infallible inspiration of the Bible, the deity of Christ, the miracles of Christ, and so on. In contrast to the modernist's inventions, the veracity of the historical revelation of God in his

⁴⁶ See *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 68

Word undergirds everything Machen maintains about Christian orthodoxy. We must keep in mind here that Machen is primarily a New Testament scholar.⁴⁷ He was most interested in the nature and character of the historical record found in the New Testament, and then in all of Scripture.⁴⁸ As we have seen, he follows that exact path in his radio addresses. Machen was interested in the integrity of the New Testament and the rest of Scripture's testimony about the truth of God, human beings, and the world. He asserts that the events and teaching contained in the text are factually true; there is no possibility for error since God is the primary author.

Machen's theological method provides *evidence* for the content of his theology. Consistent with his hermeneutical principle in constructing theology, this evidence is found within the Bible itself. The Bible is self-authenticating.⁴⁹ For example, as a historian, Machen speaks to the skeptic on the common ground of history;⁵⁰ note, however, how carefully he accomplishes this, without compromising his commitment to biblical revelation. Dealing with the historical facts of the Bible, he maintains that fellow historians must function as he functions, i.e., that the source of historical data is found in the material (documents) of investigation and information. For Machen the historian, the source of the historical verity of the Bible is found in

⁴⁷ We can observe this point well, when his brief "introduction" to the New Testament is examined in light of the corpus of his other writings. Moreover, as we have been stating, he viewed history as the key to the study of the New Testament: "This book is primarily historical. ...Biblical history is not different in this respect from any other history. The Bible, after all, is a record of events; the gospel is good news about something that has happened. That something is simply the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ—which was explained and applied by the apostles whom he commissioned. Apostolic history, which we shall here study, is different from secular history; for the apostles were in possession of a divine authority which is valid still for the church of today" ["Introduction" in *The New Testament: An Introduction to its Literature and History*, edited by W. John Cook (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 9].

⁴⁸ In his inauguration address, as Assistant Professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary (May 3, 1915), Machen expresses the importance of history for the reader of the biblical text: "The student of the New Testament should be primarily an historian. The centre and core of all the Bible is history. Everything else that the Bible contains is fitted into an historical framework and leads up to an historical climax. The Bible is primarily a record of events" ("History and Faith" in *What Is Christianity? And Other Addresses*. Edited by Ned Bernard Stonehouse [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951], 170).

⁴⁹ See *The Christian View of Man*, 4.

⁵⁰ See *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 219.

the prime material of investigation—the Holy Scriptures, and it is confirmed in the experience of the believer which produces faith. This point is the absolute presupposition of Machen’s view of historiography, and there is no compromise with this presupposition.⁵¹ Following the consistent structure of Machen’s thought, the evidence for every theological construct is found in the organic understanding of revelation in the text. In contrast, the evidence for the skeptic and modernist’s interpretation of Scripture fails to honestly uphold the narrative of the text itself. Although Machen appealed to a common sense reading of the biblical text on the part of the secular historian, he realized that the evidence for the truth of the historical narrative resides in the document of Scripture itself.

Machen applied the intrinsic relationship between the parts and the whole of Scripture to the manner in which we read, understand, and interpret biblical Christianity as a *system* of truth. The diversity and unity of Scripture shape our comprehension and interpretation. First, the diverse authors (parts) of Holy Scripture present one central unified message (whole) of the gospel in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit—the holistic system of truth. Whatever rubric of theology is the focus of Machen’s attention, the doctrine is presented as a coherent and consistent dogma of Scripture from the Old Testament through the New Testament. The different authors present the various components of the subject matter, which is gathered into one unified teaching

⁵¹ Machen points out that a naturalistic view of history can only provide a probability argument for Jesus’ resurrection, i.e., that Jesus probably rose from the dead. Machen held that even if human beings accepted this challenge (trial) from the naturalistic historian, it should lead the person to find the Easter event in Scripture as true. Machen is not saying here that the believer must start with the probable argument in order to reach the conclusion of the certainty of the resurrection. Given the context, Machen’s comments reveal that he already held that the Bible confirms the verity of Christ’s resurrection because it took place in history and was witnessed by the experience of many. History and experience that give rise to faith makes Christ’s resurrection a certain event, not a probable event. For Machen, therefore, any probability argument when viewed in light of Scripture will dissolve into absolute certainty (see “History and Faith,” 181–183). Furthermore, Marsden’s article, “J. Gresham Machen, History, and Truth,” does a fine job of placing Machen’s conception of history in the context of the various viewpoints of historiography in his day.

from Scripture.⁵² Second, as a “convinced Presbyterian,” Machen states that the Reformed and Presbyterian Confessions and catechisms (notably the Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF] and Catechisms) are to be viewed as the best summary of true biblical Christianity. Making specific reference to the Shorter Catechism, he declares it contains a “marvelous comprehensiveness and ...faithfulness to Scripture, with its solemnity and its tenderness, [it] is the truest and noblest summary of what the Bible teaches that I have ever seen.”⁵³ Each chapter in the Confession and each question and answer in the Shorter Catechism are viewed as parts of the whole system of truth presented in Scripture. Machen is unapologetic to his radio audience about his commitment to the historic Reformed and Presbyterian tradition.⁵⁴ He constantly uses the WCF and catechisms to assist his instruction. Often, he discusses his subject matter as a joint exposition of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation as summarized in the relevant question and answer of the Shorter Catechism.⁵⁵ Using this procedure, Machen, in no way places the Shorter Catechism on an equal platform with Scripture. Instead, he posits that the answer provided in the Shorter Catechism must be “in accordance with the Bible.”⁵⁶ With this being said, Machen is quite direct about his allegiance to Calvinism when he discusses the biblical doctrine of predestination. He states: “...that from the point of view of science Calvinism is ‘the only respectable theology.’ Calvinism alone does justice to the unity of the world, as it certainly alone

⁵² *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 45–58; 103–104. Machen stated: “It is very important to see that it [the Bible] presents a system of truth, and it is very important to view that system not in part but as a whole” (ibid., 104).

⁵³ Ibid., 87–88.

⁵⁴ This agenda is the specific focus of one of his addresses, “The Creeds and Doctrinal Advance” in *God Transcendent*, 144–153. Also, Machen’s opening address to his audience at the new Westminster Theological Seminary put it well: “That system of theology, that body of truth, which we find in the Bible, is the Reformed Faith, the Faith commonly called Calvinistic, which is set forth so gloriously in the Confessions and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church” (“Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan,” 229).

⁵⁵ Although he mainly focuses upon the Shorter Catechism, that does not mean Machen leaves the main content of the WCF to the side. In fact, he accents strongly the phrase “the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole” (WCF I:5) in his articulation of plenary inspiration (see *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 71).

⁵⁶ See *The Christian View of Man*, 265; cf. also “Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan,” 229.

does justice to the teaching of the Bible.”⁵⁷ Although he clearly viewed Arminians as true Christians, he asserts that their position on predestination is “absurd,” “abhorrent,” and in “error” when viewed in the context of the clear teaching of Scripture.⁵⁸

With the *system of truth* presented clearly before his listener (the teaching of Scripture as summarized in the Westminster Standards), Machen considers, as a defender of the faith (apologist), the objections to the teaching of Scripture. Using his theological method, he follows up solid instruction as to the what and why of Christian beliefs by unmasking and exposing the folly of modernism’s and unbelief’s attack upon supernatural revelation. Machen is persistent in his message that modernists and unbelievers’ construction of Christianity is antithetical to the true supernatural religion of the Bible.⁵⁹ Machen possessed the uncanny ability to unveil the core presuppositions of the modernist and the unbeliever. According to Machen, their presuppositions are based on worldly and naturalistic views of factuality, reason, experience, common sense, and morality which leaves them in skepticism, relativism, non-doctrinal religion, and plain unbelief. Machen viewed all these components as mistaken avenues to truth in contrast to the Christian’s sole foundation for both truth and conduct, the Scripture, a product not of human experience but of God’s Word.⁶⁰ Machen could not be clearer; the system of truth found in Scripture is fixed—it is the Archimedean point against the “kaleidoscope” of every form of skepticism.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *The Christian View of Man*, 46.

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, 56–70.

⁵⁹ One of Machen’s most famous comments comes to mind at exactly this point: “...it may appear that what the liberal theologian has retained after abandoning to the enemy one Christian doctrine after another is not Christianity at all, but a religion which is entirely different from Christianity as to belong to in a distinct category.” Later, he continues, “...modern liberalism not only is a different religion from Christianity but belongs in a totally different class of religions” (*Christianity and Liberalism*, [new edition] [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009 (1923)], 5–6).

⁶⁰ See *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 79. Machen declares: “In sharp distinction from that view [modernist], we make the Bible, and the Bible only, the test of truth and of life. There is no living authority to interpret the Bible for us” (*ibid.*, 84).

⁶¹ See “The Creeds and Doctrinal Advance,” 152.

Machen goes further. Presupposing the truth of Scripture, he proceeds to challenge those who dispute his presentation on any theological topic to read the biblical text as any history book, using common sense. Machen was confident; if the objector followed his prescription, they would arrive at the same conclusion as his about what the Bible teaches on the subject.⁶² For Machen, a plain, clear, and simple reading of Scripture is a common sense reading of Scripture. It can be suggested, in fact, that his view of common sense corresponds to the perspicuity of Scripture (WCF I:7).⁶³ Machen makes this point succinctly: “You see, I hold that the Bible is essentially a plain book. Common sense is a wonderful help in reading it.”⁶⁴ *The Bible reads as to the way things really are.* Such a reading of Scripture should support the convictions of the believer, and it should challenge those who struggle with their faith and those who are agitators against biblical orthodoxy.⁶⁵

Machen’s theological method of unity (whole) and diversity (parts) pertains to another realm—the controversy between doctrine and life. If we are to encapsulate what Scripture, in all its parts, principally teaches, the third question and answer of the Shorter Catechism provides the

⁶² Henry W. Coray (1904–2002) relayed an occasion in Machen’s class, “Gospel History” at Westminster Theological Seminary, where he followed his own prescription. Coray states: “I recall that one day in class he [Machen] said something like this: ‘The great [Wilhelm] Herrmann presented his position with such power I would sometimes leave his presence wondering how I could ever retain my confidence in the historical accuracy of the Gospel narratives. Then I’d go to my room, take out the Gospel of Mark and read it from beginning to end at one setting—and my doubts would fade. I realized that the document could not possibly be the invention of the mind of a mere man’” (*J. Gresham Machen: A Silhouette* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981], 19).

⁶³ Machen makes this exact connection between the perspicuity of Scripture and his conception of common sense in his opening address for Westminster Theological Seminary (see “Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan,” 227).

⁶⁴ *The Christian View of Man*, 26; see also *ibid.*, 58.

⁶⁵ If one is familiar with the method of Van Til’s apologetic, one will note that Machen, in his radio addresses, is absolutely in tune with Van Til’s paradigm. First, the starting point of Van Til’s apologetic is the absolute truth of the historical revelation of God in Scripture, specifically the self-attesting Christ of Scripture. Second, the teaching of Scripture is best summarized in the Reformed Confessions and ecumenical creeds of the church. Third, the content of Scripture is the *system of truth* which the Christian defends as summarized in those Confessions and creeds. Fourth, the defense of Christianity, in its truest form, is the Reformed faith. A close analysis of Machen’s addresses reveals this exact format.

way with these words: “what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.” On the basis of this answer, Machen identifies doctrine as what humans are to believe, and life as what humans are to do. He notes further: “It [doctrine] puts truth before conduct, doctrine before life. It makes truth the foundation of conduct and doctrine the foundation of life.”⁶⁶

Machen’s serious concern here was that modernism, liberalism, and elements of evangelicalism had reversed this paradigm by putting life (conduct, experience) first and doctrine second. Such a reversal, according to Machen, is contrary to the teaching of Scripture as a holistic system of truth. The Bible opens with doctrine: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The Bible begins with the person of God and his activity; it does not begin with a “program of life” or an “exhortation.” Even when the Bible presents the way of life, that way of life is grounded in doctrine, e.g., the preamble to the ten commandments in Exodus 20. God’s commandments are introduced by doctrine: “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Ex 20:2). Doctrine, the revelation of God in his activity is the foundation for the believer living before his holy Creator. In terms of the unity and continuity of Scripture, Jesus takes the same position, uttering: “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 4:17).⁶⁷ Because the kingdom is at hand (doctrine), human beings must repent (do). Importantly, Machen’s deliberation on doctrine and life is not to be placed in the traditional paradigm of theory and practice. He presents biblical doctrine not as some abstract concept of theory, but as something integrated with life for Christians. Christian doctrine is living—it is alive in believers, directing what we believe and how we live, and it is grounded in what God has done, especially in the death and resurrection of Christ. For Machen, doctrine is

⁶⁶ *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 88.

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, 98–100.

life; the Bible offers immediate communion, experience, and knowledge, not about God, but with God.⁶⁸

Conclusion

When examining Machen's theology, we can see that much of it mirrors the orthodoxy of his predecessors. Machen acknowledged his tremendous debt to the theology of Charles Hodge (1797–1878), A.A. Hodge (1823–1886), B.B. Warfield (1851–1921), and Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949). As intended, his theology stands in the glorious tradition of Reformed orthodoxy and Presbyterianism of old Princeton Theological Seminary.⁶⁹ As he composed his radio addresses, he was also assisted by his discussions with the young systematic theologian at Westminster Theological Seminary, John Murray (1898–1975). However, a close examination of his theological method reveals a distinctive characteristic. As a New Testament scholar, he realized most acutely that the historical integrity of the biblical text is the key basis for his argument against the secular attack upon the biblical text. As one who studied in Germany, he had seen the rotten fruit produced by the German pietistic movements dating back to the seventeenth century. Their call to return to the Bible, but away from the creedal heritage of the Reformation, had left the church in a chaotic experimental version of Christianity, one that had

⁶⁸ See *ibid.*, 120.

⁶⁹ The expression "old" Princeton is often associated with the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929. The intent of the new institution was to maintain the traits of historic Calvinism and Presbyterianism as found at Princeton Theological Seminary prior to the days when a modernist agenda began to take hold. In his opening address about the purpose of Westminster Theological Seminary, Machen declares: "...Princeton Seminary is dead, the noble tradition of Princeton Seminary is alive. Westminster Seminary will endeavor by God's grace to continue that tradition unimpaired; it will endeavor, not on a foundation of equivocation and compromise, but on an honest foundation of devotion to God's Word, to maintain the same principles that the old Princeton maintained" ("Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan," 232–233). From his own perspective, Machen tended to see the death of old Princeton on February 16, 1921, the day B.B. Warfield died. Machen wrote to his mother after Warfield's funeral, stating: "It seemed to me that the old Princeton—a great institution it was—died when Dr. Warfield was carried out." (Letter from J. Gresham Machen to Mary Gresham Machen 20 February 1921, "J. Gresham Machen Papers," Archives—Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA).

lost its solid foundation in biblical doctrine, especially by undermining the historical factuality of God's activity in history. With this false religion squarely at home in American churches, Machen rose to the challenge. He pled for a return to the Reformation, for a return to the principle of *sola scriptura* as the true and final governing principle for doctrine and life. Machen's addresses demonstrate his clear, practical, and relevant theological instruction. They show his rare gift for applying the system of Christian doctrine to the concrete, practical domain of life, clearly a contribution as valuable to us today as to Christians in his time. We can conclude with his call to come to the Bible, a call eminently suitable for the twenty-first-century church: "A return to God's Word! We had science for the sake of science, and we got the World War; we had art for art's sake, and we got ugliness gone mad; we had man for the sake of man and got a world of robots—men made into machines. Is it not time for us to come to ourselves, like the prodigal in a far country? Is it not time for us to seek real progress by a return to the living God?"⁷⁰

⁷⁰ "The Creeds and Doctrinal Advance," 153.