J. GRESHAM MACHEN AND THE END OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CONTROVERSY

by

Samuel Jordan Kelley

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DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS

of the thesis submitted by

Samuel Jordan Kelley

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Jill K. Gill, Ph.D.	Chair, Supervisory Committee
Barton H. Barbour, Ph.D.	Member, Supervisory Committee
Shelton Woods, Ph.D.	Member, Supervisory Committee

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For Ben and Shannon—my only brother and my only niece

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ABSTRACT

From 1922 to 1936, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America suffered an extended period of conflict and finally schism. This Presbyterian controversy was part of the broader fundamentalist-modernist conflict seizing American evangelical Protestantism in this era. By the early 1930s, the fundamentalists, led by Westminster Theological Seminary's New Testament professor J. Gresham Machen, began to adopt controversial methods for combating modernism. The most notable of these was the formation of an extra-ecclesiastical, conservative foreign missions board, the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM). Refusing to cede his ground, Machen stood trial in the church's court and was defrocked in 1936 when he refused to repent and be readmitted to the ministry. His actions alienated not only liberals, but even some fellow fundamentalists. Histories of the fundamentalist-modernist conflict and the Presbyterian controversy, and biographies of Machen generally take positions that echo the views of the opposing parties in the Presbyterian controversy. This thesis examines the controversy on a different level, employing historian George Marsden's "insider-outsider" paradigm as a way to understand why the formation of the IBPFM and the Machen trial were such divisive events, even among conservatives. The argument is that Machen was not simply a cantankerous, fundamentalist but a Presbyterian who felt strongly committed to his denomination while also alienated from it because of its acceptance of modern trends.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE END OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CONTROVERSY: INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

> Supporters of Machen tend to interpret him simply at the level of the doctrine for which he stood…The other common interpretation of Machen goes to the opposite extreme and is popular among his detractors. According to these interpreters, the "time of troubles" at Princeton Seminary and Machen's later struggles against the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. can be explained largely in terms of Machen's personality…So, I think each of these levels for understanding Machen has some merit and perhaps they can be balanced against each other in some way. However, I do not propose to explore them any further tonight.
>
> *-George Marsden in "Understanding J. Gresham Machen" (1990)*

Introduction

In late June 1936, John Gresham Machen, a theologian, ordained minister, and spokesman for conservative Presbyterianism, until recently of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (PCUSA), made a bold proclamation. "On Thursday, June 11, 1936," he wrote,

> the hopes of many long years were realized. We became members, at last, of a true Presbyterian Church; we recovered, at last, the blessing of true Christian fellowship. What a joyous moment it was! How long the years of struggle seemed to sink into nothingness compared with the joy and peace that filled our hearts![1]

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[1] J. Gresham Machen, "The Church of God," *Presbyterian Guardian* 2 (June 1936), 98, quoted in Dallas M. Roark, "J. Gresham Machen: The Doctrinally True Presbyterian Church," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 43 (June 1965), 124.

Machen was celebrating a new church—what became the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)—that he and others had founded in response to the unrepentant apostasy they saw in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

This triumphant comment of Machen's might be growing somewhat trite among students of the Presbyterian controversy and Machen. For those who are sympathetic to Machen's views today, it is a reminder of his sacrifices and the hardships he suffered for the sake of orthodoxy eighty years ago. For many mainline Protestants—Presbyterian and otherwise—it is the self-indulgent, self-affirming remark of someone who had never really intended to settle the dispute in the PCUSA unless it was achieved "one hundred percent" on his terms; in other words, in founding the OPC, Machen had accomplished the unremarkable feat of fulfilling a self-fulfilling prophecy. Regardless of perspective, 1936 marked the end of an era in the PCUSA; the period of intense controversies in that denomination was over when Machen and those who followed him were either defrocked as the result of church trials (like Machen's) or left of their own accord.[2]

What historians call the Presbyterian controversy spanned most of the interwar period, and this thesis examines its *dénouement* in the years 1933-36, when the immediate issues that caused the 1936 schism came to the fore and the last straw, so to speak, was placed on the camel's back. The fundamentalist J. Gresham Machen played a major role in the early phase of the Presbyterian controversy, but his actions were particularly central in these three years. The affairs that precipitated Machen's trial and the schism were his doubts about the orthodoxy of the church's foreign missions program

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[2] Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Chuch: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church Since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), 155.

and the legal status (within the church) of an unofficial foreign missions board—the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM)—that he and others founded and whose effect was to challenge, symbolically at least, the official denominational board's authority and influence.

Although behind these events were questions about church order and constitutional procedure, the tolerance of theological diversity and compromise, and issues raised by differences among individual Presbyterians' personalities and regional and cultural outlooks[3]—what made the formation of the IBPFM and the Machen trial such explosive events was that they addressed head-on an overarching and uncomfortable cultural question vexing Protestant fundamentalists in this period. This was the problem of whether they and their denominations were properly insiders—representatives of American culture and mores—or whether they should exist as outsiders on the margins of American life. It was particularly difficult for Presbyterian fundamentalists to settle the issue of how they could reconcile traditional faith with membership in a denomination that they saw as moving away from robust expressions of that faith. For as long as they could, Machen and his followers put off giving a definitive answer to this question, although by 1936 it was clear that they were outsiders. All sides in the controversy worried about the possibility of schism, and concerns over orthodoxy surely motivated fundamentalists. But overall, the IBPFM and the Machen trial rattled the church so much because all parties in the church saw them as having important implications for the status and influence of the Christian faith in modern America.

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[3] These are the issues discussed in Bradley J. Longfield's *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

As a story about how a small group of Presbyterian fundamentalists struggled to define their place in their denomination and their place in American culture, the founding of the IBPFM and the associated trial of J. Gresham Machen, though of small importance for most religions historians, demonstrate the perennial tension between traditional Christian belief and culture, especially modern culture. For J. Gresham Machen and those who associated themselves with him, the tension between the realities of being, in some sense, both an insider and an outsider constituted an unresolved and divisive paradox until 1936. Admittedly, the denominational aspects of the subject of this thesis might be lost on some American readers today, when only forty percent or less of Americans regularly attend church.[4] Nevertheless, Machen and others' struggle to overcome this paradox is important as a reminder to both religious and non-religious Americans that there is something inherent in religion and culture that keeps the claims each makes on individuals and organizations from being fully harmonized.

The Presbyterian controversy was a series of several related contests that PCUSA executives, clergy, seminary faculty, and laypersons engaged in between 1922 and 1936. While the Presbyterian controversy is periodized 1922-1936 for reasons given in Chapters 2 and 3, the origins of the fundamentalist and modernist parties in the PCUSA had deeper roots and took shape well before the controversy erupted.

The battles among Presbyterian fundamentalists/theological conservatives and modernists/theological liberals were fought as part of and along lines that resembled the broader fundamentalist-modernist controversy that was seizing American evangelical

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[4] This figure is from "Fast Facts about American Religion," on the website of the Harford Institute for Religion Research, Hartford Seminary. See http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#attend (accessed August 12, 2013).

Protestantism in the fifty-year period straddling the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Evangelicalism was the dominant expression of Protestantism in America in the nineteenth century.[5] It emphasized the conversion of individuals to a life dedicated to Christ, the authority of the Bible, revivalism (mass conversions through preaching), and a morally upright national culture.

The Presbyterian experience in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy did not always reflect the same trends that appeared in other denominations, and this was partly because the Presbyterians had experienced schism and reunion in the nineteenth century, establishing strong precedents for the Presbyterian controversy. The Presbyterian contests involved questions about the theological, ecclesiological, and cultural orientation of the church.[6] Fundamentalist conservatives stood for a supernatural view of Christianity, argued for and lived by the accuracy and the supreme, unquestionable authority of the Bible, and resisted modern intellectual trends. Liberals tried to put Christianity in step with late nineteenth-century thought, which played down the supernatural in Christianity (including the purely divine origins of the Bible); rejected static views of nature, society, and history; and endorsed naturalistic, evolutionary, and idealist modes of thought. In

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[5] "Evangelical" underwent many changes in usage in the century after the Civil War. It encompassed both fundamentalists and liberals in the early part of the twentieth century but by the '20s and '30s had become distorted as liberals and fundamentalists fought to control the denominations. By the 1940s, liberals had abandoned the term and it became virtually synonymous with "fundamentalist." To complicate issues further, by the 1950s "evangelical" did not equate even with "fundamentalist"; more moderate fundamentalists who wanted to distance themselves from separatists and who had a more positive view of the relationship between traditional faith and culture ceased to call themselves fundamentalists. Current usage of the word "evangelical" can be traced back to this period and the ideals of mid-century "neo-evangelicals"—strongly traditional theologically but open to engagement with the broader culture. Cf. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 10-11, 162-165.

[6] Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, is the source of this classification of the issues involved in the Presbyterian controversy.

other words, liberals revised or rejected some of the views of nineteenth-century American evangelicals, who espoused common sense philosophy and Enlightenment-era views of truth, humanity, and the nature of civilization.

Unlike the liberals in the PCUSA, the conservatives had a self-appointed and trusted spokesman in Machen. There were other conservatives, of course, like Clarence E. Macartney and Carl McIntire—also a part of this story—but none rivaled Machen in leadership ability and militancy in the period in question.

Machen, while a 'fundamentalist' in the sense that that word was understood in the 1920s and 1930s, was part of a special subset of fundamentalism that had its origins in the Old School Presbyterian tradition of the nineteenth century, particular as it was associated with Princeton Theological Seminary. The Old School had a high view of church order, Calvinist doctrine, and the formal expression of the church's belief, the Westminster Confession of Faith. In the nineteenth century, it was opposed to the New School, which held a broader view of the church as an organization and did not guard as jealously as the Old School against doctrinal innovation and cultural influences in the church. Although the parties split the church in 1837 and reunited it in 1870, the divisions occurred recently enough in history to affect the outlook of the twentieth-century church.

In the time of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy and its counterpart in the PCUSA, although many conservative Presbyterians of Old School origin embraced the fundamentalist movement as a way to energize and promote its views in the church, some descendants of the New School joined it, too. This Presbyterian fundamentalist party, then, was a mixed bag: it contained New School revivalists, Old School confessionalists,

premillenialists, postmillenialists, and others. These disparate interests were united in their militant opposition to the theologically liberal, modernist party.[7]

Some in the conservative coalition of Presbyterianism in the pre-controversy period (c. 1900-1920) were disenchanted with fundamentalists' growing militancy, however. When the controversy erupted in 1922 because of an incendiary and very public exchange between the liberal Harry Emerson Fosdick and the fundamentalist Clarence Edward Macartney, a moderate group emerged from the conservative party in the church. It rejected militancy and instead attempted to mediate between the extremes of fundamentalism and liberalism. It gave up its attempts at mediation by 1933, when Machen organized the IBPFM. Moderates joined with liberals in espousing an early form of theological pluralism, which was a means to achieving church unity and the restoration of the peace of the church. They hopefully gave voice to the possibility that there might be a third way in the church. They shared a love of tolerance with the liberals, but theologically were closer to the fundamentalists.

These points of difference—anti-tolerant militancy, and its opposite, a tolerant policy of mediation—between what this thesis calls moderates and fundamentalists were the dominant ecclesiological questions of the end of the Presbyterian controversy. They were not being argued abstractly, however. In their most virulent formulations, they appeared as part of the debate over Presbyterian foreign missions that erupted in 1932 and actually marked the beginning of the end of the controversy.

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[7] I rely on George Marsden's definition of fundamentalism as "militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism" throughout this thesis. See his *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism*, *1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 4.

In 1932, a book appeared entitled *Re-Thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years*. It was the report of a Committee of Appraisal prompted and funded by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to evaluate American Protestant foreign missions and determine in what ways they might be improved and made more effective in their approach to modernity. *Re-Thinking Missions* was a patently liberal report on missions, earning praise from modernists in the church like Pearl S. Buck. It frustrated and upset moderates like Robert Speer and fundamentalists like Machen and those who rallied around him. Although Machen had been on record as a prominent opponent of liberalism in the church since at least 1923, when he published his book *Christianity and Liberalism,* the missions controversy, in hindsight, was to be Machen's last stand.

Machen and his fundamentalist supporters encouraged him in 1933 to overture the PCUSA General Assembly to redress their grievances against the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, which they believed was tolerating modernists such as Pearl S. Buck in the missions field. *Re-Thinking Missions* confirmed their suspicion that modernism was being taught in China and other destinations in East Asia. The overture failed and alienated Robert Speer, the Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions (PBFM), from the increasingly militant conservative cause within the church.

A legal solution having failed them, Machen and his allies took it upon themselves to form a new Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM), which was formally incorporated under Pennsylvania state law in late 1933. Their reasoning was basically this: if the agencies of the PCUSA were not going to hold missionaries to their ordination vows—which were affirmations of orthodoxy—then somebody else had to do it. In the summer of 1934, though the Independent Board was

just a weak, fledgling organization, the General Assembly voted it unconstitutional because it recruited and involved ordained PCUSA ministers who were diverting funds and support from the PBFM. In 1934, Machen and his allies received what were essentially orders to "cease and desist" from their involvement from the Office of the General Assembly. They could quit the IBPFM and remain in good standing in the PCUSA, or else stand trial and, if convicted, lose their ministerial credentials.

This heat, put upon the fundamentalists, might have put a new edge on their zeal and emboldened them. For some, like Machen and his closest allies at his own, new Westminster Theological Seminary, that is exactly what this pressure did. Others, who had stood by Machen through a decade of victory and then defeat in the PCUSA, fell away, not willing to risk the ultimate defeat—the division of the church. In 1935, Machen and others were tried and convicted by the courts of the PCUSA; the following year they formed a new church, the OPC. Those who stayed in the church, like Clarence Macartney, became small voices in a new PCUSA united in tolerance and opposed to any form of exclusivism (save perhaps one dogma: an exclusively tolerant church).

What does one make of this extremely brief but intense period tucked away at the end of the Presbyterian controversy? Was it just the prelude to inevitable schism? Was it just a conflict between modernists and fundamentalists, or moderates and fundamentalists? Is it a story about the true church rending itself from the false?

The formation of the IBPFM and the Machen trial were events shaped by a heightened sense of the tension between traditional Presbyterian belief, on one hand, and American life and their denomination, on the other. Presbyterian fundamentalists felt a strong sense of commitment to both; when these commitments conflicted—or when they

thought they conflicted—fundamentalists felt the acuteness of the tension and expressed their concerns by taking up causes that were related in one way or another to their sense of being insiders, outsiders, or a paradoxical combination of the two.[8]

At the end of the controversy, during the missions crisis and the Machen trial, fundamentalists' response to this tension had two consequences. At the broadest level, the formation of the separatist IBPFM effectively eliminated the moderate party of the church and opened a full-fledged left-right, modernist-fundamentalist divide in the church. In distinction to Bradley J. Longfield's thesis that there were three factions in the church—fundamentalists, modernists, moderates—this thesis sees that moderate party as basically having disappeared by the time fundamentalists formed the IBPFM. The church was living through an age in which centrist mediation was beyond the reach of both the church's left and its right. On the left, a policy of tolerance prevailed: once-moderates united with liberals in the effort to secure the peace of the church. They shared little in common on matters of theology, but they were basically agreed that the church's witness needed to be preserved from fundamentalist militancy. Moderates and liberals had an "insiders" view of the church. The leadership role of the church in American life was supremely important to them; the homogeneity of belief in the church mattered less to them, especially when it was seen as a threat to its leadership role. On the right, an ethos of intolerance and suspicion of the modern institutional church repelled theologically conservative moderates, leaving officers and ministers strictly concerned with the

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[8] The insider-outsider paradox explored in this thesis with regard to Machen and Presbyterian fundamentalists in particular originally appears as a major theme in Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 6-7. This thesis in some respects is an extension and application of that theme, which appears regularly throughout Marsden's works. Cf. also R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), esp. Chapter Six, "The Protestant Majority as a Lost Generation—A Look at Fundamentalism," 150-172.

orthodoxy of the church and its doctrine in a party of their own. These fundamentalists cared about the role of the church in the culture and wanted to nurture their denomination back to health, but they increasingly felt like they were fighting against an impersonal, bureaucratic machine that cared very little about doctrine. They had a complex, paradoxical "insider-outsider" mentality.

Although developments on both the church's left and right contributed to this falling out, this thesis is concerned primarily with the narrower set of consequences that resulted from the founding of the IBPFM and the Machen trial. These were the consequences for the fundamentalist party in the church. Just as the insider-outsider tension signified by the IBPFM divided the church's left from its right, so did it wreak havoc among fundamentalists, dividing those who were willing to allow its existence to lead to schism from those who would rather have given up the Independent Board than split the denomination. In other words, not all the fundamentalists sensed the insider-outsider tension equally, and this eventually led them to split. This thesis attempts a middle course between two prevailing interpretations of the IBPFM and the Machen trial. Rather than see Machen as either a militant schismatic or, more sympathetically, as a stout defender of historical Presbyterianism, this study sees him as both a divider of the church and a defender of it. It argues that a deep current of ambivalence toward the wider culture and the mainline denomination, the PCUSA, ran through his and other fundamentalists' responses to the controversy over missions. This tension endured even in the Machen trial, when Machen himself still appeared somewhat undecided as to whether he was an insider or an outsider. Stated differently, by the end of the

Presbyterian controversy, Machen exemplified better than any other Presbyterian the insider-outsider tension that left American evangelicalism unsettled in this period.

Historiographical Background and Issues of Interpretation

As historian George Marsden noted almost a quarter century ago, those who have studied Machen tend to replicate the love-him-or-hate-him divide that can be traced all the way back to Machen's contemporaries.[9] Marsden and fellow historian Joel Carpenter offer fairly balanced interpretations, seeing Machen as essentially a militant schismatic but also recognizing the paradoxical tensions in the Independent Board. They are far from being as critical of Machen as more liberal observers have been.[10] They rightly argue that the formation of the IBPFM divided the Presbyterian fundamentalists. "The organization of the Independent Board," Marsden says, "split the Presbyterian fundamentalist renewal movement down the middle."[11] Expanding on and indirectly challenging Marsden's and Carpenter's work, the present study sees the insider-outsider tension in Machen's fundamentalism as lasting through the end of Machen's time in the church, when he was defrocked by trial in a church court. Machen was a militant schismatic, but he did not abandon his ambivalent outlook on his denomination even in his trial. It could even be said, "the organization of the Independent Board split Machen down the middle."

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[9] George Marsden, "Understanding J. Gresham Machen," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 11 (1990), 46-49. The epigraph at the head of this chapter is taken from this same address.

[10] See William J. Weston, *Presbyterian Pluralism: Competition in a Protestant House* (Knoxville: University of Tennesee Press, 1997); Loetscher, *Broadening Church*.

[11] George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 41; Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 45.

On the extreme right of this historiographical debate over Machen lie the analyses of D.G. Hart and Christopher Schlect, both of which argue that Machen was more dedicated to the defense of the confessional understanding of Presbyterianism than to the broader fundamentalist movement.[12] While this is true, this thesis sees no inherent conflict between fundamentalism and confessionalism in this period; confessionalism could be, and in Machen's case was, a part of the fundamentalist movement. Schlect's 2005 thesis, though it is the closest thing historians have to a dedicated study of the IBPFM and the Machen trial and excellent for its depth and research, is particularly weak on this point. His use of newly available documents at the Presbyterian Historical Society allows him to make a strong case for the possibility that Machen's trial was executed on legally dubious grounds. Unfortunately, driven by his thesis that Machen was a confessionalist and not a fundamentalist,[13] he misses opportunities to see how much Machen shared in common with other fundamentalists in his ambivalence toward the denomination. Schlect writes in the tradition of Machen's early sympathetic biographers. He says Machen was motivated by his desire to defend a confessional view of the church, and that this separated him both from those who were more inclined to view the church as a "large, central organization"[14] and from other "separatist"[15] fundamentalists. Some of Schlect's conclusions, stemming from his argument that Machen stood only for the

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[12] D.G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003); Christopher R. Schlect, "J. Gresham Machen, Roy T. Brumbaugh, and the Presbyterian Schism of 1934-36," MA Thesis, The University of Idaho, 2005.

[13] Christopher R. Schlect, "J. Gresham Machen," 13.

[14] Ibid., 113.

[15] Ibid., 172-173.

principles of Presbyterian confessionalism, are particularly indefensible.[16] As the present thesis suggests, Machen straddled the line between loyalty to the denomination and independence, not being wholly content with either.

In addition to these works are other studies that touch on the IBPFM and the Machen trial tangentially. One of these, James Patterson's 1986 article in *American Presbyterians* (now the *Journal of Presbyterian History*), is strong in its understanding of the foreign missions crisis and Robert Elliott Speer, Machen's opponent in that crisis. Although it does point out, importantly, that the enmity between Speer and Machen was an argument between conservatives, it does not show much awareness of how that crisis finally drove Speer and other moderates to unite with liberals, or what the basis of that unity was.[17] It does an excellent job of explaining how Machen's militancy eventually fragmented the fundamentalist subset of the conservative coalition in the PCUSA, but does not really explain the meaning of the IBPFM in the wider missions context.[18]

What these relatively minor deficiencies in studies of the IBPFM and the Machen trial suggest is a need for greater attention to their context. A thesis that deals with Machen and the end of the Presbyterian controversy—only about a four-year period—can easily become a story about only a few trees, even though those trees are part of a forest! What is needed is a weaving together and coordination of the several different bodies of

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[16] For example, he says that the separatist impulse often associated with fundamentalism was exhibited in Brumbaugh [an IBPFM member], but not in Machen" (173), and that Machen "did not leave the PCUSA. He was kicked out" (111).

[17] James Alan Patterson, "Robert E. Speer, J. Gresham Machen, and the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions," *American Presbyterians* 64 (1986), 59.

[18] Ibid., 66-67.

relevant scholarship: the literature on the broader fundamentalist-modernist controversy and studies of the Presbyterian controversy; biographical and intellectual studies of Machen; and work on the history of American evangelical foreign missions. These fields *do* intersect naturally, but have not been brought close enough together to do so. Bringing them together not only shines the brightest possible light on the end of the controversy, but it also provides an opportunity for them to correct for each other's weaknesses and fill in important gaps. Taken together, they support the thesis that the IBPFM and the Machen trial were strongly colored by the insider-outsider paradox facing fundamentalists.

The broad, fundamentalist-modernist controversy that wracked American Protestantism for fifty years is the grand backdrop of Machen and other fundamentalists' struggle against modernism. It is indeed impossible to locate the formation of the IBPFM and Machen's trial and separation from the church without first understanding the polarized atmosphere of early-twentieth-century American evangelicalism, the subject of Chapter 2 of this thesis. To hazard an explanation of these events outside of their context would be tantamount to speaking to a small child about your recent trip to Los Angeles, telling her only that L.A. is a place on the globe you hold before her; your story would meaningless for her if she did not first know where North America, the United States, and California were.

Despite some challenges to it,[19] the "two-party thesis" that historians have used to interpret this period in American religious history prevails, and for good reason: while it does not account for every form and permutation of crisis experienced in this era—the IBPFM and the Machen trial, included—it is an apt generalization that demonstrates that fundamentalism and modernism were the two prevailing tendencies, if not distinct parties, in the churches in this era. The endurance of the interpretations given in William Hutchison's *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (1976) and George Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (1980) attest to the continued vitality of the two-party thesis. As indicated above, modernists generally attempted to remain inside the mainstream of American culture—especially regarding intellectual developments—while fundamentalists were more ambivalent. According to Marsden's definition of fundamentalism, Machen ought to be considered a fundamentalist, even though he was certainly much more than that, too. The present study is in accord with that interpretation.

Delving into the literature on the Presbyterian controversy raises an interpretive challenge because it would seem to necessitate moving beyond general descriptions of theological tendencies toward a process of concretely classifying this or that Presbyterian as a fundamentalist, a liberal, or a moderate. This is essentially what Lefferts Loetscher's *The Broadening Church* (1954), Marsden's *Fundamentalism* book, Bradley J. Longfield's *The Presbyterian Controversy* (1991), and William J. Weston's *Presbyterian Pluralism* (1997) do.

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[19] In particular, Douglas Jacobsen and William Vance Trollinger, Jr., eds., *Re-Forming the Center: American Protestantism, 1900 to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and Schlect, "J. Gresham Machen," 3-7.

While this approach is appropriate for studies of the PCUSA in the early part of the Presbyterian controversy (c. 1922-1929), by the time the missions crisis hit and the IBPFM was formed, moderates and liberals were, for all intents and purposes, united in their common aim of preserving the unity of the church; they were insiders. Fundamentalists had rejected the pleas for moderation, and so the liberals and moderates were forced into each others arms, resulting in an alliance, if not a party, based on tolerance and pluralism.[20]Although this idea of tolerance receives attention in works on the Presbyterian controversy, its meaning in this period has not been carefully explored, and the thesis that it was becoming—with help from the new philosophy of pragmatism—an organizing principle in the church has not been thoroughly argued.[21] These issues are raised in Chapter 3. Better than the schismatic precedents of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Presbyterianism or the view that the church was historically and consistently moderate, the emerging pragmatism in the church explains the source of this division between insiders and outsiders.

Machen's life and mind also provide exceptionally rich perspectives for understanding why he reacted as he did to modernists, moderates, and other fundamentalists in this period and how his outlook affected his status as an insider or outsider. These perspectives are analyzed in Chapter 4. Brantley Gasaway's article on Machen's intellectual outlook demonstrates that he was repelled by pragmatism, although

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[20] Although Bradley J. Longfield rightly recognizes the three-party structure of the church throughout most the controversy, in his treatment of the end of the controversy, he seems forced to recognize that the battle became one fought between pro-tolerant and anti-tolerant groups. *Presbyterian Controversy*, 156-230.

[21] Lefferts Loetscher, *The Broadening Church*, 93, mentions that pragmatism was an influence "through at least the first third of the twentieth century," but when he discusses that period, he does not show how pragmatism was an influence.

it does not connect that disdain for pragmatism with his role in the Presbyterian conflict specifically.[22] Marsden has placed Machen firmly in the camp of Scottish Common Sense Realism, a sympathy that virtually guaranteed that he would be an outsider among mainstream intellectuals in his day.[23] Another issue in Machen biography, as it relates to the end of the Presbyterian controversy, is that, whereas scholars who have studied the Presbyterian controversy have been more inclined to see Machen as fundamentalist, his biographers, who have generally been more sympathetic to him, often call him a confessionalist or some other less opprobrious term. Examples of this are D.G. Hart's *Defending the Faith* (1994) and Schlect's thesis. Machen was indeed an Old School Presbyterian confessionalist and in this sense an outsider among both modernists and fundamentalists who were descended from the broader, evangelical revivalist tradition. However, it is important to recognize that Machen's theological sympathies, while distinguishing him from other fundamentalists, nevertheless do not totally exclude him from their ranks. He could hardly have been such a powerful leader of the fundamentalist movement in the PCUSA if he were not a part of it. Presbyterian fundamentalism was a diverse coalition in the same way that the broader fundamentalist movement as a whole was diverse. Lastly, with regard to Machen's outlook, historians have frequently relied on his libertarian, Southern heritage in explaining his separatist tendencies.[24] While Machen's regional proclivities were a source of his coolness toward the institutional

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[22] Brantley W. Gasaway, "As a Matter of Fact: J. Gresham Machen's Defense of the Metaphysical and the Moral," *Fides et Historia* 41 (Winter/Spring 2009), 47-70.

[23] George M. Marsden, "J. Gresham Machen, History, and Truth," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42/1 (Fall 1979), 157-175.

[24] C. Allyn Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976); Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 31-38; George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 182-201.

church and its cultural role, it was not the decisive factor in his final decision to separate. He felt comfortable to pursue such a rejection of the church only after he felt it had rejected *him.*

Finally, the relevance of the context of foreign missions should inform our understanding of the IBPFM and the Machen trial. Of all the contexts in which the IBPFM and the Machen trial have been analyzed, it is remarkable that more of an attempt has not been made to link the foreign missions situation to the end of the Presbyterian controversy. Chapter 5 describes the changes in Protestant foreign missions in this period and the diverse responses to those changes, one of which was the founding of the IBPFM. In the context of the variety of responses, it is demonstrated that, initially at least, the IBPFM, Machen, and his followers were sufficiently ambiguous in their aims and conduct to straddle the line between independence from and commitment to the PCUSA. This ambiguity had no strategic purpose but was a byproduct of the lack thereof among fundamentalists, who were not agreed as to whether they were trying to reform the denomination or separate from it. For a time, this ambiguity curiously satisfied all of Machen's followers. The IBPFM, although technically an independent organization, was situated on the missions spectrum somewhere between the emerging, independent faith missionary movement of the period and the old, denominational board missions system. It straddled the line dividing insiders from outsiders, in other words, and allowed the fundamentalists to ease the tension between their traditional faith and the direction their denomination and culture was heading—without having to resolve it in favor of either separation or accommodation.

Chapter 6 shows that such fence-sitting would not be tolerated even in an increasingly tolerant church. By the time Machen willingly stood trial for an ecclesiastical crime of which he did not believe he was guilty—demonstrating his own continuing ambivalence in his relationship to the denomination—many of his closest allies either had already broken away or were soon to do so. Machen's ambivalence was due to a sort of tug-of-war between his own diverging tendencies: one toward separation and one toward remaining in the denomination. His Southern outlook and rejection of trends in modern theology made him sympathetic toward an outsider view of traditional Presbyterian faith; his constant engagement with theological issues as a seminary professor and his belief that the PCUSA and other Presbyterian bodies had a duty to remain organized and active as they had been in the nineteenth century preserved some of his insider loyalty to the denomination. His Old School confessionalism contributed to both of these tendencies, paradoxically. The effect of Machen's fence-sitting was that it frustrated the church's leadership and led to his and others' convictions in church trials in 1935. Giving no sign that he was intending to recant and be readmitted to the ministry, he and those who were convicted with him began drawing up plans for a new Presbyterian church.

The arguments and foci of the following chapters paint a picture of a church that was splitting apart due to forces pulling from its left and right. On the left, a new role for tolerance was leading it to turn away from doctrinal understandings of the church. On the right, militancy and separatism were diminishing the opportunities for a moderate, evangelical tolerance that would allow the church to converse with the culture. In the controversy surrounding the IBPFM and the Machen trial in particular, the last, weakened

tendons that had previously held together conservatives stretched and snapped. All of this happened eighty years ago among a cohort of generally well-to-do American males, yet it still holds importance for those who consider it beneficial to think about how Christians relate to their culture. It is important even for those who are not particularly concerned about Christianity, but who nevertheless study cultures and civilizations that were heavily influenced at some point or another by the religion's beliefs. For such historians, to contemplate the complex relationship between Christianity and culture can deepen their awareness of, if not sympathy for, the concerns of historical actors in their fields who just happen to be Christians.

The relatively minor events of the IBPFM and the trial of J. Gresham have significance today—even in an America that is less denominational than it has ever been, less concerned with the role of churches, if not religion, in American culture and public life—because they are but one illustration of the tension that exists between traditional faith and modern culture. There are at least two ways to reflect on this tension. One of these is a simple but meaningful historical approach. The other, related to the first, is more moralistic.

Historically speaking, the healthy tension between traditional faith and culture does not maintain an easy or constant balance. The riders on the beams of the scale are always in danger of sliding too far toward sectarianism, in which case the faith remains isolated from the culture, or too far toward cultural affirmation. In his criticisms of fundamentalism *and* the emergent tendencies of the PCUSA, Machen stood against each of these extremes for a very long time, although after 1936 he took up the sectarian mantle without further reservations. The schism of 1936 was basically a division between

insider, mainline Presbyterians and outsider, separatist, fundamentalist Presbyterians. Left in the gap created by this division were some who saw less of an imperative for separation in the insider-outsider issues and chose to remain in their denomination *and* continue to see themselves as outsiders. This group (best exemplified by Clarence Macartney) quietly maintained a connection between the wider culture and the church, which they saw as needing reform, and their traditional evangelical faith.[25] Later in their histories, even formerly fundamentalist or separatist movements like Machen's OPC and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) also found this approach to faith and culture to be more tenable than a strictly separatist or sectarian approach. While it is the most tenable, it is also the most difficult to maintain. The historical point to bear in mind—regardless of whether one is an historian of religion or some other subject—is that the influence and nature of historically observable Christian faith is nearly always in flux, seeking a balance between faithfulness to its ideals and the need to pay heed to the concerns of the wider non-Christian world. Failure and success are to be expected in any historical observation of Christianity. Machen and the end of the Presbyterian controversy are no exception.

The moral component of this analysis is that there is indeed a place for a solid relationship between traditional faith and modern culture, however difficult it is to obtain and preserve. The one need not make any pretensions to dominating the other, although faith ought to be permitted to address cultural and social issues in the same way that other interests affect such issues. Similarly, modern culture need not exclude faith or insist that

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[25] This is basically the story of many who founded and led the early Fuller Theological Seminary. See George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism.*

God, if He must be included, be made "weightless," as theologian David F. Wells lamented long ago.[26] Rather, the faith-culture relationship—the outsider-insider problem—can be addressed, if not solved, if the claims of each domain are given due appreciation. Such an appreciation is admittedly somewhat of an intellectual balancing act. The characters, institutions, and prevailing approaches described in the following thesis were mostly unbalanced. If we are to understand this period as it was, further talk or expectation of balance must be laid aside. Still, that should not keep us from wondering about what such balance might have looked like.

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[26] David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); see also his related, earlier volume *No Place for Truth: or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

CHAPTER TWO: MODERNISM, FUNDAMENTALISM, AND THE AMERICAN EVANGELICAL HERITAGE

> Modernism, which in varying degrees casts doubt upon the truth of [the Christian] story, may therefore be defined as an attempt to preserve selected parts of the experience after the facts which inspired it have been rejected. The orthodox believer may be mistaken as to the facts in which he believes. But he is not mistaken in thinking that you cannot, for the mass of men, have a faith of which the only foundation is their need and desire to believe.
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> *Walter Lippmann (1929)*

> The Fundamentalists are funny enough, and the funniest thing about them is their name. For, whatever else the Fundamentalist is, he is not fundamental. He is content with the bare letter of Scripture — the translation of a translation, coming down to him by the tradition of a tradition — without venturing to ask for its original authority.
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> *G.K. Chesterton (1931)*

As the nineteenth century drew to a close and the twentieth century dawned, American Christians, particularly evangelical Protestants, experienced crises that challenged the way they understood their faith and its place in American culture. Profound shifts in the basic presuppositions guiding American intellectual life, the influence of new trends in theology and biblical scholarship, and social and political changes wrought by technological advances and an increase in immigration functioned as lines drawn in the sand. These changes forced evangelicals to decide how to continue in their faith and how to relate it to the rapidly changing culture. A result of the growing antagonism between faith and culture was the split of most American evangelical

denominations into two competing camps, the modernists or liberals and the fundamentalists. These emerging approaches differed at the most basic level, although each thought it was preserving the evangelical heritage. Modernists sought to diffuse the antagonism by moving Christian thought beyond older categories of thinking and supporting it with modern thought, while fundamentalists hoped to preserve their faith by sheltering it from the influences of modern culture.

The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (the Northern Presbyterian denomination) suffered an extended and particularly bitter struggle between modernists and fundamentalists, as did the Northern Baptists.[27] However, this observation must be qualified. The divisions in the Presbyterian Church did not emerge along the same modernist-fundamentalist fault lines found in other denominations. The conflict in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. owed at least as much to the historical pattern of schism, pleas for peace and unity, and reunion in the denomination as it did to the contemporary debates between modernists and fundamentalists.[28] Still, whatever its limitations, the general framework suggested by the conflicts between those who accepted and those who rejected modern thought provides a considerable portion of the context needed for understanding J. Gresham Machen and his allies' disagreements with other Presbyterians, the formation of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, Machen's trial, his separation from the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and the splintering of the conservative Presbyterian cohort. Much of the faith-culture,

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[27] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 102-103.

[28] Ibid., 109-110. This is the subject of Chapter Two.

outsider-insider tension inherent in the IBPFM and the Machen trial was connected to the divisive issues in American religious life of this period. It would be hazardous indeed to attempt to explain the early twentieth-century Presbyterian situation in particular without first exploring the historical movements of modernism and fundamentalism in general.

The fundamentalist-modernist controversies in American denominations were so heated partly because the denominations over which these parties fought for control saw themselves as the heirs to the evangelical tradition that had shaped American culture in the nineteenth century. Historian David Bebbington has provided a useful definition of evangelical belief. Evangelicalism has four characteristic traits: 1) conversionism (the belief that all who profess Christianity must be "born again" and strive for Christian discipline in their lives); 2) activism (the belief that one should spread the good news of the salvation offered in Christ through missionary and reform activities); 3) biblicism (the belief that the Bible is the sole authority in matters of Christian faith and practice); and 4) crucicentrism (the belief that Christ's death on the cross was the atoning sacrifice necessary for the redemption of humanity from sin).[29] By the 1920s and 30s, this definition of evangelicalism was undergoing change. Modernists were less conversionist (in the sense of converting individuals) and more concerned with the social aspects of salvation; fundamentalists continued to emphasize conversions but increasingly focused on individuals rather than the entire culture as the object of conversion.

In the nineteenth century, however, evangelicals were usually united in their efforts to express these beliefs to the culture through the religious press, advocacy for

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[29] David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989). See also note 5, Chapter One, above.

various social reforms, and a strong tradition of almost incessant, conversion-oriented revival.[30] From the arrival of the first news of the French Revolution to the end of Reconstruction, evangelicalism and the broader culture influenced and seemed to validate each other. In the minds of evangelicals, the fate of the nation was practically equated with and dependent upon the evangelization of the American people and their moral character. The effect of evangelicals' successes was that by the height of the Victorian era "almost all American Protestants thought of America as a Christian nation."[31] For Protestant Americans, at least, the nineteenth century was the evangelical century.

American Protestants' unquestioned alliance with their nation raised many questions around the turn of the century, when the culture began to drift from what it was at mid-century. A confident, sentimental, and moralistic Protestant establishment was comfortably in place when social, political, and intellectual challenges from within and without threatened the evangelical *status quo*. In these decades, the United States became increasingly specialized, scientific, industrial, and centralized, as opposed to what it had been: simple, agricultural, and local.[32] Modernists and theological liberals responded to the changes in the culture by trying to accommodate their faith to that culture in areas where the two were clearly at odds and offered conflicting frameworks for understanding God, the Bible, and the relationship between God and creation. They believed the

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[30] Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957); Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1965), 3-95; and Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[31] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture,* p. 11. Cf. idem., *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 241-244.

[32] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), xiii, 112-113.

propagation and defense of Christianity needed to be moved out of older categories of thinking and be supported by cutting-edge philosophies and theologies. Part of this project entailed rejecting those parts of the evangelical heritage that they saw as being too narrow to express the full meaning of Christ and Christianity. Fundamentalists reacted oppositely, eschewing the new culture and the modernists who embraced it. They attempted to disengage their faith from modern American culture and cling to nineteenth-century formulations of the faith. By the end of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, many made cultural and ecclesiastical separation a matter of pride and a test of true faith. With these different reactions to cultural change, the perennial tension between Christianity and culture began to strain the bonds of unity among American evangelicals. By the beginning of the twentieth century, evangelicals were divided over the question of how to face their particular historical moment. Nevertheless, despite the very clear differences between modernists and fundamentalists, both of these parties retained certain traits of the nineteenth-century evangelical tradition, albeit in modified form.

Since American Protestant fundamentalism has been best defined as "militant opposition to modernism,"[33] it is appropriate to begin a discussion of the differences between modernists and fundamentalists with a survey of how modernism appeared in

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[33] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 4. Marsden's book remains the standard scholarly treatment of the rise of fundamentalism and was the culmination of a decade of debate over its definition and interpretation. Cf. Ernest R. Sandeen, "Toward a Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism," *Church History* 36 (Mar., 1967), 66-83; idem., *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); LeRoy Moore, Jr., "Another Look at Fundamentalism: A Response to Ernest R. Sandeen," *Church History* 37 (June, 1968), 195-202; George M. Marsden, "Defining Fundamentalism," *Christian Scholar's Review* 1 (Winter, 1971), 141-151; and Ernest R. Sandeen, "Defining Fundamentalism: A Reply to Professor Marsden," *Christian Scholar's Review* 1 (Spring, 1971), 227-232.

American Protestantism and culture, what beliefs it sought to replace, and how, specifically, it tried to square Christianity with modernity. The rise of modernism and theological liberalism[34] from the 1800s to the 1930s has been studied by William R. Hutchison in *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*. Hutchison defines modernism as a cluster of ideas that became prominent in a part of the American evangelical community during the second half of the nineteenth century. Modernism was "the conscious, intended adaptation of religious ideas to modern culture," "the idea that God is immanent in human cultural development and revealed through it," and "a belief that human society is moving toward realization (even though it may never attain the reality) of the Kingdom of God."[35]

The modern intellectual framework to which the first generation of American modernist Protestants sought to adapt their faith was a combination of post-Enlightenment epistemology, Romanticism, and German Idealism.[36] This new framework entailed a shift in philosophic and theological premises and had especially pronounced consequences for biblical scholarship, theology, and evangelicals' views on the scientific study of the natural world. Although these new ideas and movements were already at work among Unitarians, transcendentalists, and some Congregationalists, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century the Scottish Common Sense Realism of Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart—who derived it from the inductive method of Francis Bacon—

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[34] In this thesis the term "modernism" is used to refer to a broader trend of accommodation to modern thought—both in American culture and in the churches—while "theological liberalism" refers to a narrower but closely related theological movement and contrasts with "orthodoxy."

[35] William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1976), 2.

[36] Ibid., 13-24.

reigned supreme in American colleges and the evangelical mind, including the Presbyterians'. Above all, the Common Sense philosophy predicated a directly observable world with a static, non-evolutionary view of nature. This philosophy came in part from Reid's critique of David Hume's epistemology. Hume doubted that man could know that his ideas of the world reflected objective reality; Reid and Stewart did not. They believed that every human mind ran on the fuel of common sense. Therefore, the world being full of observable, fixed facts, anyone could observe and comprehend the world with the use of their common sense.[37] It was an egalitarian epistemology indeed, with an optimistic view of human nature—particularly regarding faculties of mind. Its elegance was in the simplicity and lack of nuance it attributed to human understanding. One historian has correctly interpreted Common Sense Realism as "*the* American philosophy" of its day.[38]

For some turn-of-the-century American intellectuals and theologians, the Enlightenment notion of a world of directly observable facts that could be comprehended and classified by human reason was not put out of practice, but in the realm of theory it was being displaced by the ideas of Kant and his disciples, by the German Idealism of Hegel, and, of course, by Charles Darwin's brand of evolution.[39] In suggesting that the human mind shaped the external objects of the world as it perceived or experienced them, Kant introduced epistemological complexity that was patently incompatible with the simple process of observation inherent in Common Sense Realism. Moreover, Hegel's

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[37] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 14-16.

[38] Ibid., 14.

[39] Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, pp. 123-124.

idea that a rational *Geist*, or spirit, revealed itself through the dialectical process of history flew in the face of the Enlightenment idea that there were timeless, rational laws that governed human nature and the material world.[40] Many evangelicals saw Darwin's theory of natural selection and mutable species as a challenge to Providence and the idea of creation itself. But in the decades before 1900, the evangelicals who would become the first modernists were looking at these new ideas and questioning whether nineteenth-century evangelical views of Christianity were actually correct. Many of them believed they were not, and they sought to use the new learning to broaden their understanding of Christianity and the Bible and their meaning and place in history. Modernists used modern thought, then, not to challenge Christianity as such, but to revise what they thought were errant and misguided evangelical Protestant traditions.

The study of the Bible was a major proving ground for these adaptations. All evangelicals were biblicist and therefore looked to the Bible for their knowledge of God. Additionally, many denominations supplemented biblical authority by relying on historic church creeds and confessions, non-sacred but accepted expositions of the doctrines found in the Bible. This was especially true of Presbyterians, who looked to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) as the founding document of the Reformed tradition for English-speaking people. Evangelical faith and practice in the nineteenth century relied heavily on the Bible—and not just the Bible, but a populist conception of how it was to be read. A mid-century Methodist quipped, "The Bible is a plain book,

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[40] Elizabeth Flower and Murray G. Murphy, *A History of Philosophy in America* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977) 2: 479-482.

addressed to the common sense of man…."[41] Common Sense Realism was the philosophy underpinning American evangelicals' reading of the Bible.[42] The application of Common Sense Realism to the Bible entailed that the Bible was a storehouse of facts about God and creation that could be classified and (usually) interpreted literally.[43] It was a divinely-inspired book and therefore trustworthy.

After the Civil War, American theologians began apprising themselves of the biblical scholarship that came out of German universities and was influenced by the likes of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl—the main theological mediators of post-Enlightenment German philosophy. Part of what these German scholars did was to develop further the higher critical method of biblical scholarship initiated by Schleiermacher. The Higher Criticism was different from earlier forms of biblical studies because it used recently developed literary theories, archeological data, and comparative linguistics to investigate questions about authorship, sources, and the cultural influences that went into the writing of the books of the Bible. Some Old Testament scholars' employment of these techniques led them to conclude that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, and that the book of Isaiah was written by two authors. Likewise, New Testament scholars' findings sewed doubts about the accepted view of Jesus as both fully divine and fully human and about the emergence of Christianity as a distinct, first-century

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[41] Stephen Allen, *The Bible and National Prosperity* (Waterville, Maine, 1851), 8, qtd. in Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America: 1880-1930* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 16.

[42] George M. Marsden, "Everyone One's Own Interpreter? The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History,* ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 90-94.

[43] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 56; Szasz, *Divided Mind*, 16-17.

religion. It began to be thought that the Gospels in the New Testament were based on an accretion of years of oral traditions rather than on eyewitness testimony. It was also suggested that multiple authors were responsible for the epistles of Paul, and not just Paul himself. These conclusions and the methods used to reach them implied "that the Bible should be studied just like any other piece of literature, using the methods of literary criticism, and that it should be studied and understood within its historic context."[44] The Bible appeared therefore not as a common-sense "plain book," that could be read literally, but as a very complicated and, in parts, possibly factually unreliable compendium of texts produced and influenced by ancient people with specific cultural commitments and prejudices.[45] Given these beliefs and modernists' doubts about prevailing methods for reading the Bible, modernists suggested more literary sensitive and historical approaches to reading Scripture.

Intimately associated with these methodological and philosophic developments was the emergence of a new theology that sought to explain how a belief in Christianity and the Bible could be maintained in spite of new biblical scholarship and a society that increasingly understood itself and the material world in terms of modern scientific models. At the same time that scholars in Germany were advancing the new methods of biblical criticism, modernist theologians were trying to use those methods as well as the criteria of Darwinian science, the increasingly influential Hegelian Idealism and Kantian epistemology (in particular, Kant's elevation of the role of experience), to achieve what they believed was a truer understanding of God, Christ, and revelation. Modernists'

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[44] Szasz, *Divided Mind*, 33.

[45] Ibid., 17-18, 30-31.

examination of Christianity in the light of modern thought was related to their acceptance of what Hutchison has identified as another important feature of modernism: the idea that God is immanent and revealed through culture. Divine immanence was a significant belief of modernism, because it allowed modernists to attempt to ease the tension between supernatural Christianity and the modern world by showing that the study of God (theology) and the study of nature (science) were closely related and harmonious intellectual endeavors.[46]

Nevertheless, the shift to a belief in divine immanence was a departure from the theological framework of earlier American evangelicals, which was heavily influenced by the Calvinist Puritan theological tradition. These earlier evangelicals understood God to be transcendent and separate from his creation but also sovereign over it.[47] In the emerging American modernist "New Theology," God's activity and involvement with culture was substituted for that distance. An exponent of the New Theology in 1883 said that modernism sought "to recognize in the composition and on-going of human society a divine revelation and process."[48] In this scheme, the supernatural and natural realms were conflated, and "the supernatural was seen only through the natural."[49] The supernatural could thus be known primarily through experiencing its place in the natural realm. The New Theology also understood Jesus using an immanentist paradigm. Earlier evangelicals believed that Jesus was a fully divine, fully human, special instance of God

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[46] Ibid., 76-94.

[47] Ibid., 79.

[48] Theodore Munger, *The Freedom of Faith* (Boston: Houghton Miffline and Co., 1883), 35 quoted in ibid., 98.

[49] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 26.

entering his creation to redeem it. New Theologians affirmed this belief, but they emphasized Christ's humanity over his divinity, and construed his mission not as being primarily salvific, but as ethical and exemplary.[50] Although certainly both conservative and liberal American evangelicals of the late-nineteenth century stressed outward moral conformity,[51] the modernists were more interested in the moral, behavioral aspects of Jesus's life than in the supernatural features of his person.[52] So it was that in this theological context the Episcopalian preacher Phillips Brooks could exhort his congregation, "Go and be moral. Go and be good."[53] In the New Theology, Jesus was both divine and human but above all a paragon for right conduct.

The New Theologians' emphasis on divine immanence and revelation through culture meshed well with their view of the Bible. Due to the influence of the Higher Criticism upon them, modernists were already looking at Scripture as a diverse collection of ancient texts covered with human fingerprints. But this adaptation to the new view of studying the Bible also seemed to call for an explanation as to why it ought still to be considered a divinely-inspired book. It was a sacred book because, in spite of its very apparent human qualities and "many wrong and terrible things, such as the psalmist's plea to Jehovah to destroy the enemy," it showed God working through human culture to

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[50] Aaron K. Ketchell, "Liberalism," in *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, ed. Brenda E. Brasher. Routledge Encyclopedias of Religion and Society (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 279.

[51] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 26.

[52] Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, 84-86; Szasz, *Divided Mind*, 32.

[53] "The Law of Growth" (1877), *The Law of Growth and Other Sermons*, Ninth Series (New York, 1902), 12, qtd. in Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 26.

reveal himself.[54] In the historicist and Kantian scheme of the New Theologians, the Bible became primarily a collection of cultural expressions of experiences of God, and in these truth and divinity shone forth. Thus one early Presbyterian modernist wrote,

> Experience shows us that no body of divinity can answer more than its generation. Every catechism and confession of faith will in time become obsolete and powerless, remaining as historical monuments and symbols….Not even the Bible could devote itself to the entire satisfaction of the wants of any particular age, without thereby sacrificing its value as the book for all ages. It is sufficient that the Bible gives us the *material* for all ages, and leaves to man the noble task of shaping the material so as to suit the wants of his own time.[55]

The Bible therefore contains the basic ideas of divinity but does not explain them in theological terms; that is for Christians in each age to do. In this same reflection it is also clear than the usefulness of creeds and catechisms is similarly qualified: their words do not express truth for all times and places, but contain only a particular historical moment's view of the truth. The historicist views of the Bible and church creeds could— and did— cause controversy in the Presbyterian Church and other denominations.

The greatest continuity between modernists and nineteenth-century evangelicals comes into view by comparing their respective visions of God's kingdom; but even on this matter there were some important differences between them. American evangelicals of the nineteenth century saw their revivals, establishment of churches, schools and

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[54] Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, 52-53.

[55] Charles A. Briggs, *Biblical Study: Its Principles, Methods, and History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 36-37, qtd. in ibid., 92.

colleges, and various parachurch organizations as a means for winning the nation for Christ. The effort to root out sin and establish footholds for righteousness took many forms. Of the several institutions that embodied evangelicals' engagement with American culture, the American Bible Society, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the American Missionary Association, and the American Temperance Society were some of the most famous. The clergy and laity who participated in them saw themselves as laying the groundwork for God's kingdom in America. Even Indian removal, the colonization and abolition movements, and the Mexican-American and Civil Wars, albeit more controversial and divisive among evangelicals, were part of the plan to expand God's kingdom. In terms of their eschatology, evangelicals who participated in such projects were predominantly postmillennial,[56] meaning they believed that the millennium associated with Christ's kingdom in the book of Revelation would precede his bodily second coming. Associated with this eschatology was the belief that humankind has work to do on earth, and that the warning Jesus gave his disciples in the parable of the talents endures in postbiblical times. However, the nineteenth-century evangelical brand of postmillennialism also had an otherworldly aspect; namely, that the kingdom will come by an act of God and not by human effort, regardless of the merits of that effort. Nineteenth-century evangelicals believed they were preparing the field, sewing the seed, watching the grain grow; the reaping was for Jesus to do.

It was mostly modernists that carried the torch of postmillennialism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. While their means of working toward the

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[56] Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

kingdom of God were, on the surface, similar to those of their evangelical predecessors—they sat on missions boards, presided over universities, and were active supporters of temperance and (later) prohibition—they attenuated the supernatural aspect of the kingdom by bringing it in line with more secular notions of the progress of civilization and the idea of divine immanence. The coming of God's kingdom had, of course, been associated with the idea of the progress of American civilization since the time of the Puritans, who did not clearly distinguish between their success as a colonial civilization and the success of God's kingdom. And American evangelicals in the nineteenth century carried forward this idea, which was a major impetus for domestic reform efforts and westward expansion. These Christians, however, did not place as great an emphasis on sheer historical process (dialectical or otherwise) in the coming of the kingdom; for them, the kingdom was more a matter of supernatural, ultra-historical providence. Thus, while Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), the preeminent Social Gospel spokesman, did work among immigrants and the urban poor that resembled earlier evangelical social concern, he did it as part of a modernist theological program whose idea of progress resembled Herbert Spencer's more than it did Cotton Mather's or Lyman Beecher's.[57]

The idea of an historical progression toward the kingdom of God was more than compatible with the modernist doctrine of divine immanence. Since God's immanence and the infusion of divinity in humanity were proven in Christ, it was perfectly reasonable, on this basis, to believe, as the Bostonian George Angier Gordon did, that

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[57] Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, 99, 172-173.

"humanity and human culture…[are] moving toward a divine event called perfection."[58] In sum, what made modernists' belief in the prospect of the Kingdom of God coming close to fulfillment in America different from those of the Puritans or nineteenth-century evangelicals was the extent to which its coming was seen as a simultaneously natural and divine outworking of historical circumstance.[59] While they did not believe that the coming of the kingdom of God would be a mere extension of the temporal order, they had a more optimistic view of how much of it was already present and of what role human ability could play in hastening its coming.

Modernism attempted to improve upon and revitalize Christianity so that it would be viable in a rapidly changing culture, and in order to do this it had to try to reconcile traditional Christian teachings with the categories and modes of modern thought—or at least to make them intelligible within that context. Adaptation to context, a stress on divine immanence, and a progressive view of the kingdom of God were hallmarks of the modernist project. Although it was mostly a departure from the evangelical heritage—one would be hard-pressed to locate the roots of the modernist ideas of adjustment and divine immanence in nineteenth-century evangelicalism—modernists' understanding of the kingdom of God certainly was related to and partly derived from that earlier tradition. Their view of the Bible, although based on new literary theories and scholarship, also made room for tradition—not the literalist tradition of the nineteenth century, but earlier Jewish and Catholic traditions. In keeping in step with emerging intellectual and theological trends, too, modernists were the twentieth-century heirs of the part of the

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[58] Ibid., 193.

[59] Ibid., 175-176.

American evangelical tradition that emphasized the movement's insider status and leadership role.

Despite their eventual retreat to the fringes or "outside" parts of American life, it was the fundamentalists who most eagerly sought to identify with the earlier, dominant evangelical heritage. They, more than modernists, showed the most anxiety over how the question of who would wear the badge of evangelicalism in the early twentieth century would be answered. While modernism was a more or less conscious effort to wed Christianity and modernity, fundamentalism was characterized by conscious resistance to theological innovation in the churches and secularization in the culture.[60] Although individual fundamentalists could be found in nearly every denomination of American Protestantism, fundamentalism also denotes an interdenominational, evangelical movement held together by common theological and cultural concerns. The movement began to take shape in the late nineteenth century and broke apart after 1925, and was comprised of conservative Baptists and Presbyterians, holiness-oriented evangelicals such as Nazarenes and some Methodists, and Restorationists like the Disciples of Christ, among others.[61]

A distinction immediately needs to be made regarding the relationship between these diverse and sometimes opposed traditions and the fundamentalist coalition in which some of their members participated. As the leading historian of fundamentalism, George Marsden, carefully notes,

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[60] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 4.

[61] Ibid., 4-5, 178.

> Fundamentalism was a "movement" in the sense of a tendency or development in Christian thought that gradually took on its own identity as a patchwork coalition of representatives of other movements. Although it developed a distinct life, identity, and eventually a subculture of its own, it never existed wholly independently of the older movements from which it grew. Fundamentalism was a loose, diverse, and changing federation of co-belligerents united by their fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring Christianity into line with modern thought. [62]

This is especially true where Machen and conservative Presbyterians were concerned.[63] Machen's denominational and theological sympathies and those of his conservative Presbyterian allies precluded their participation in some of the more radically interdenominational fundamentalist endeavors, such as the evolution controversy or the World Christian Fundamentals Association. They also did not share many of the views that were most commonly thought of as 'fundamentalist'.[64] Nevertheless, bearing in mind that particular instances hardly ever have all the qualities of their general type—and, even more importantly, that Machen was an exceptionally conservative Presbyterian, anyway—it is possible both to speak of fundamentalism as a movement with its own characteristics and to call Machen and his Presbyterian allies fundamentalists in the sense in which that word was used in the early twentieth century.

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[62] Ibid., 4.

[63] Ibid., 137.

[64] These views or positions included anti-evolution, the repudiation of alcoholic beverages (which they shared with modernists), anti-intellectualism, and cultural taboos against going to the new cinemas and dancing. Premillennial dispensationalism, for which the movement is particularly well known, was conspicuously absent from Machen's fundamentalist outlook.

In *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, Marsden offers a convincing portrait of the movement, which he says had three general characteristics: a "paradoxical tendency to identify sometimes with the 'establishment' and sometimes with the 'outsiders'"; "the relation of fundamentalism to the earlier American evangelical heritage," specifically revivalism and pietism; and "the tension between the trust and distrust of the intellect."[65] The triad of themes Marsden finds in the fundamentalism of this era coincides nicely with the characteristics of modernism that Hutchison identifies. In fact, they fit together so well that analyzing them as pairs is an almost irresistibly attractive way of measuring the differences between modernism and fundamentalism. The themes in fundamentalism also demonstrate that fundamentalism, in its general opposition to modernist adaptations in the churches and shifts in cultural currents, ironically and no doubt unintentionally altered or neglected some nineteenth-century evangelical beliefs and practices.[66]

Fundamentalism's ambivalence concerning the intellect developed alongside modernism's willingness to adapt Christianity to new modes of thought. One of the developments associated with fundamentalism's wariness toward modern thought was its heightened, even fetishistic, attachment in the twentieth century to the Scottish Common Sense Realism that prevailed in the nineteenth. Anything that was not derived from or appeared to contradict the Common Sense philosophy—Idealism and Darwinism, for example—advocates of Common Sense considered unscientific and speculative. By the

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[65] Ibid., 6-8.

[66] Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 114-145, describes these "innovations" in greater depth than space allows here.

early twentieth century, when Common Sense had been superseded by evolutionary modes of science (which modernists *did* adopt), those who still upheld it were regarded as anti-intellectual and backward.[67] The Common Sense belief in a world of directly observable facts—and the American evangelical corollary, a commonsense, plain-person's Bible—was manifesting itself both in the Bible and prophecy conference movements and in the new, dispensational premillenialist *Scofield Reference Bible*.[68] Ironically, both the conference movements and the *Scofield* Bible used Common Sense Realism to reach conclusions about the Bible that were so complex and desperate as to be beyond what most ordinary evangelicals could determine for themselves.[69]

The Bible and prophecy conference movements began in the 1870s and lasted up until the end of World War One. They were a means of spreading and popularizing late-nineteenth-century evangelical understandings of the prophetic and eschatological portions of the Bible and were important precursors to the fundamentalist movement. Many of the leaders at these conferences implicitly endorsed the Common Sense approach and rejected the Higher Criticism's claims.[70] Premillenialism—the belief that Christ would return to earth before inaugurating the millennium—was a major organizing principle, too. Although these movements eventually faded, Bible schools or institutes, which were a kind of outlet for those who were becoming disillusioned with the

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[67] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 214-221.

[68] Ibid., 55-62.

[69] This is part of Timothy P. Weber's thesis in "The Two-Edged Sword: The Fundamentalist Use of the Bible," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History,* ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 101-120. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture,* 217-219.

[70] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 55-62; Szasz, *Divided Mind*, 73-75.

mainstream institutions that trained the ministry, carried on Common Sense approaches into the twentieth century, along with other fundamentalist institutions.[71] The *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909), edited and annotated by C.I. Scofield, a follower of the great American revivalist, Dwight Moody, also demonstrated the tendency to lift Common Sense Philosophy almost to the level of sacred belief. Scofield applied Common Sense principles in a way that was foreign to both the evangelical heritage—in that it argued for interpreting church history in terms of rigidly-defined epochs or dispensations—and the modernist Higher Critical approach.

Of course, as Marsden has noted, fundamentalists were not anti-intellectual *per se*; they were anti-intellectual only in the sense that they rejected "the new perceptual model [that] took place in both the scientific and theological communities" at the end of the nineteenth century, and that they "began to turn to increasingly extreme versions of their view of reality to explain the widespread failure of rationality in the culture."[72] The irony, of course, is that they discredited their own Common Sense views by holding to them so tightly.

The degree to which fundamentalists differed from modernists in their views on the holiness or profaneness of culture is also instructive for measuring the distance between the two movements. Modernists, of course, subscribed to a view of immanence, or an indwelling of God in the processes of human history and culture; fundamentalists, for their part, rejected such an overlap of the natural and the supernatural and actually stressed the opposite: that there was a great divide between the things of God and the

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[71] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 212.

[72] Ibid., 215, 219.

things of man. They emphasized holy living and evidence of personal regeneration, which holiness and Pentecostal groups especially looked for in Christian "perfectionism," or the signs of a second baptism by the Holy Spirit (e.g., speaking in tongues, miraculous healing abilities, etc.). Strong revivalist and pietist influences existed in nineteenth-century evangelicalism, but these strains "tended toward individualistic, culture-denying, soul-rescuing Christianity" in the fundamentalist period.[73] Fundamentalism took traditional evangelical concerns about conversion, regeneration, and personal morality and sharpened them, turning them into a Pharisaic legalism that drew a strict line of separation between the Christian and the world.[74] As a matter of everyday life for fundamentalists in the early part of the twentieth century, this separatism made *verboten* all sorts of "secular" activities: going to the new cinemas, dancing, and, especially during Prohibition, a continued evangelical disdain for alcoholic beverages.[75] The most popular fundamentalist revivalist of the period even criticized the eating of fudge.[76] Briefly, this particular aspect of fundamentalism's resistance to the changes brought about by modernity had a strongly anti-cultural tone. The nineteenth-century evangelical project of

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[73] Ibid., 7.

[74] It should be noted here that the issue of separation from the world played itself out on two levels: one denomination and one cultural. Fundamentalists were quicker to separate from the culture than from their denominations, especially early in the history of the movement (to c. 1917). Even though the fundamentalism of the 1920s and 30s was more apolitical than the fundamentalism of the late 1970s and 1980s, fundamentalists were willing to become embroiled in political issues like evolution and prohibition, thus demonstrating their paradoxical views of their relationship with American culture. Although this thesis is concerned mostly with Machen's relationship to his denomination—which he was unwilling to give up without much fighting—it is important to remember that Machen and other Presbyterians saw the fate of their denomination as having implications for the wider culture. Denominational and cultural issues could not be compartmentalized so easily.

[75] Ibid., 156-157.

[76] This was Billy Sunday (1862-1935), a Presbyterian revivalist. Douglas W. Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 217.

transforming American culture through revival and social reforms was traded for a thin and self-righteous legalism that prohibited almost any involvement with the secular. Culture was not the material through which God could reveal himself, as modernists said it was. For many fundamentalists, it was a lost cause.

Perhaps the trademark by which most fundamentalism in the early 1900s and since has been recognized is a particular view of the nature and coming of God's kingdom: dispensational premillennialism. This eschatology demonstrates very well the outsider-insider paradox that Marsden has identified as a major feature of the movement. In terms of the ideas or views that distinguished fundamentalists from modernists, there was probably none more apparent—or at least more sensational—than dispensationalism.

According to most dispensationalists, their present age (usually the seventh dispensation, or era) was an historical parenthesis, the last before the end of history, the second coming of Christ, and the inauguration of the millennium.[77] It would be characterized by apostasy in the institutional church and "accelerating retrogression" in the culture—both of which fundamentalists felt they saw clearly.[78] The Common-Sense-infused *Scofield Reference Bible* discussed above was one of the hallmark texts that represented this eschatology. Despite how bleak this eschatology appears on its face, there was no strong correlation between it and social inaction; dispensationalists were socially progressive through 1900.[79] It appears that the conservative, anti-activist tendencies in dispensationalism became a driving force in fundamentalism only after

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[77] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 52-54.

[78] Ibid., 63.

[79] Ibid., 86-90.

1900, as a reaction to the Social Gospel and its modernist proponents, with whom fundamentalists did not want to be identified.[80] This is what made them turn away from hopeful social reform efforts. Even after this "Great Reversal" of evangelical social concern was underway, the anti-cultural pessimism of fundamentalism was not enough to undermine it—hence the fundamentalist concern over the teaching of evolution in public schools and the defense of American civilization before, during, and after World War One.[81] Early twentieth-century fundamentalists, therefore, stood in a paradoxical relation to their host culture: on the one hand, they saw it and their denominations as beyond the pale, lost to the unrelenting advances of secularity and apostasy; on the other, they saw American culture as the height of civilized freedom. Luther's dictum about the paradox of the saved sinner apparently applied to the nation as a whole: it was *simul justus et peccator*—at once righteous and a sinner.

In the years after the Scopes Trial in 1925,[82] fundamentalism, suffering a thorough defeat in the churches and the broader culture, lost prominence and publicity. It was no longer a loose coalition held together by a common set of ecclesiastical and cultural contests; rather, losing those contests one by one left its leaders ever more obscure and isolated from each other. As Douglas Frank wryly puts it, these heirs to nineteenth-century evangelicalism were "less than conquerors." Even if this may be a

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[80] Ibid., 91-93.

[81] Ibid., 132, 149, 185-188.

[82] 1925 is the year usually given for the peak influence of the fundamentalist movement and the start of its decline. The trial of John Scopes in Dayton, Tennessee, in July, coincided with that peak. John Scopes, a teacher, intentionally violated a Tennessee law against the teaching of evolution in public schools. His defense was supported by the ACLU, but he lost the case in court. In the court of public opinion, however, anti-evolution efforts, their spokesman, William Jennings Bryan, and the fundamentalist movement suffered the most. After 1925, fundamentalists retreated from the mainstream of American life.

slight overstatement, the fundamentalists certainly didn't appear to the broader culture to be the conquerors of Romans 8:37. Still, fundamentalism did not disappear, nor was it by any means the case that all fundamentalists left the mainline denominations. The fundamentalist heyday was over, however, and the memory of it was not a good one.[83] Modernism, with fundamentalism severely weakened, became an accepted theological outlook in the mainline churches, and the national culture as a whole continued to secularize, slowly but surely.

Generalizations made by applying labels such as 'modernist' and 'fundamentalist' are useful handles for comprehending and speaking about historical trends. There were certain traits common to most if not all fundamentalists and certain traits common to most if not all modernists. The clash between modernists and fundamentalists over the control and direction of the major American denominations and their responses to cultural changes certainly are not illusory. Historical narrative would be an impossibility if some degree of generalization were not allowed. That said, such historical generalization is useful only insofar as it serves as background, as a benchmark by which particular historical subjects such as the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions and the Machen trial can be analyzed and given meaningful context. Those events, it will be shown, pressed Machen and his followers into the outsider, fundamentalist category. It is therefore important next to move closer to the possibility of meaningfully discussing those events. To do this requires an evaluation of how the PCUSA's problems and its solutions to those problems in the nineteenth-century created deeply engrained patterns of church conflict that persisted in the new century and were

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[83] Ibid., 188-195.

shaped by early twentieth-century American thought and the modernist-fundamentalist controversy. The Presbyterians were a tradition-oriented, historically self-conscious and intellectually keen breed, and they were far from having shed those qualities even in the maelstrom of early twentieth-century American religious life.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CHARACTER OF EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM

> In 1837 the Presbyterian church split into two parts, nearly equal in size and influence, the Old School and the New School branches, as they are called, which are very jealous of one another, and hold no formal intercourse. The separation, which with more patience and love might and should have been avoided, was occasioned as much by personal collisions and local interests as by any real differences in doctrine….
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> *Philip Schaff (1854)*

> You see that pragmatism can be called religious, if you allow that religion can be pluralistic or merely melioristic in type. But whether you will finally put up with that type of religion or not is a question that only you yourself can decide. Pragmatism has to postpone dogmatic answer, for we do not yet know certainly which type of religion is going to work best in the long run....Between the two extremes of crude naturalism on the one hand and transcendental absolutism on the other, you may find that what I take the liberty of calling the pragmatistic or melioristic type of theism is exactly what you require.
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> *William James (1907)*

Fundamentalism was a coalition in which the Presbyterians played an essential yet sometimes reluctant role. Their reluctance frequently makes it difficult to see certain Presbyterians as part of the fundamentalist coalition, especially since the definition and popular understanding of fundamentalism have changed so drastically from what the movement signified in the 1920s and 30s. Part of the reason for their wariness was the

high premium they historically placed on their distinctiveness as Presbyterians.[84] Machen himself said that fundamentalism appeared as "some strange new sect," but also offered that, if he had to be identified as either a fundamentalist or a modernist, he was a fundamentalist "of the most pronounced type."[85] He was wary because he was more interested in the defense of Presbyterianism (particularly the Old School variety) than of a nebulous, interdenominational movement that claimed to represent the fundamentals of evangelical Christianity. Fundamentalism and Presbyterianism were odd bedfellows, and this was largely due to the character of American Presbyterianism as it had been shaped by events in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the new theological, intellectual, and cultural forces it encountered as it entered the twentieth.

The historical development of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is instructive for anticipating some of the fault lines and partisanship that appeared during the modernist-fundamentalist controversy in the church in the twentieth. By the second half of the nineteenth century, Presbyterians in the PCUSA were among those in the vanguard of America's national religious and political leadership.[86] They helped give the country its evangelical character, in particular. The events of the first century of the denomination's existence in this country are only part of the explanation for the divisions of the 1920s and 30s, however. Other factors that have not been properly stressed must be reexamined. After discussing the

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[84] George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 128-141, 237. D.G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003), 67-71.

[85] Quoted in Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 63.

[86] Marsden, *Evangelical Mind*; Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 5.

American Presbyterian experience through the nineteenth century, this chapter will emphasize one such factor. This is pragmatism, America's unique contribution to philosophy that arose shortly before the Presbyterian conflict.[87] Unfortunately, for quite some time historians of the Presbyterian conflict have understated or misstated the role of the pragmatist program. It warrants a central role in the history. Its influence on and implications for Presbyterians' debates over possible union with other denominations, their toleration of theological diversity, the basis and relative importance of church unity, and their growing aversion to doctrinal exclusivism within the church are just as important as earlier Presbyterian history and the role of modernism for understanding the character of American Presbyterianism at this time. Pragmatism was a particularly powerful ally of Presbyterian insiders' view of the church, because it was a social philosophy that promoted the ideas of corporate unity and a veneer of consensus rather than division and sectarianism. Those who were committed to the denomination's leadership role in American life were attracted to pragmatic conceptions of the church. Conservatives and ultraconservatives of Machen's Old School sort, even though they participated in the Presbyterian conflict as opponents of liberalism, were also opposed to the pragmatist ideas that had gained influence among—and even temporarily united—the church's liberals and moderates. Fundamentalists did not want to be part of a church that they felt was ignoring important doctrinal issues. Tolerance and pluralism were rally points for those who disagreed with those conservatives who came to be called

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[87] Another factor, the growth of the United States as a domestic and international power, will be considered as a part of chapters 4 and 5.

fundamentalists, and its opposite—intolerance or exclusivism—became a rally point for fundamentalists.

Presbyterianism is a Protestant Christian tradition that looks back to John Calvin, a French-born Swiss theologian who lived at the height of the Reformation; and to John Knox, who brought Calvin's theology and ecclesiology to Scotland and successfully founded the state church of Scotland—the Presbyterian church—upon its principles in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Calvinist and Presbyterian principles also found a home in the thought of many Anglicans, dissenting English Protestants (especially the Puritans), and the Dutch Reformed. Calvin's theology is part of a tradition known as Reformed theology.[88] Calvinism upholds all the essential Christian teachings shared by other branches of traditional Christianity, but it is known particularly for its doctrine of man (man is totally depraved due to sin); its doctrine of God (God is sovereign, or completely in control, over His creation); and its view of predestination (God, from the foundation of the universe, knew whom He would save or damn). In short, Calvinists and Presbyterians have a low view of human nature and a high view of God's grace.[89]

The polity of the Presbyterian Church is suggested by its name. The church is governed neither by a hierarchy of bishops nor solely at the congregational level but by elders (or presbyters, from the Greek, πρεσβύτερος) who meet and rule at the level of the congregation (the session), at mid-councils like local presbyteries and regional synods, and at the highest level, the General Assembly. *The Form of Presbyterial Church*

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[88] Randall Balmer and John R. Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians*, Denominations in America, No. 5 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 3-5.

[89] Ibid., 5-15.

Government and *The Directory of Public Worship, Westminster Standards* contain the basic, classic form of Presbyterian Church government. They were produced in the 1640s in London by the Westminster Assembly, which also created *The Westminster Confession of Faith.* [90]

The Presbyterians had a modest start in British America. Not until 1706 were they numerous enough to have their own presbytery; in 1716, they had enough congregants to form a synod.[91] From the beginning, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. was racked by a conflict between confessional conservatives who came mostly from a Scotch-Irish background and a theologically broader, evangelical, pietist and revivalist party made up of New Englanders of English descent. Notwithstanding important schisms, a tendency toward union prevailed in the church in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Several scholars have agreed that the Adopting Act of 1729 gave early American Presbyterianism its distinct shape.[92] If it did this, the Act also set a pattern for future divisions in the church. The Act combined in one church the Scotch-Irish and the New Englanders and made subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith a requirement for Presbyterian ministers. This certainly pleased the Scotch-Irish faction. But, in order to make subscription a requirement palatable to the New England party, the Act also allowed for some latitude in its interpretation as part of the church's constitution. The

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[90] Ibid., 15-16, 18-19.

[91] Ibid., 24-25.

[92] Ibid., 25-27. See the second chapter in Leonard J. Trinterud's *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-Examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1949); Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), 2; Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, 39-40; and William J. Weston, *Presbyterian Pluralism: Competition in a Protestant House* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 4.

clergy who debated and ratified the Act made it clear that "there were some doctrines necessary and essential to the whole, and others that were not," and that "these essentials might be understood and stated differently by some."[93] Thus, the standard history of American Presbyterianism in this period calls the Act a "compromise."[94] Unfortunately for the peace of the church in the centuries ahead, the subscriptionists and the New Englanders did not settle the matter of whether these debates over exceptions to subscription, which took place on the morning of the day of the Adopting Act, were an official part of the Act itself, which was passed in the afternoon.[95] Although it is somewhat hazardous to trace the history of discord in American Presbyterianism back to a single origin, the Adopting Act of 1729 is conspicuous enough to demonstrate that partisanship and argument occurred early in the denomination's history.

Issues other than bare subscription also strained or divided the church in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Of these, the revivalism of the First and Second Great Awakenings was perhaps the most pronounced. Still, even the schisms of 1741 and 1837, precipitated by the awakenings, were eventually healed in the reunions of 1758 and 1869, respectively. In the 1730s, with the Great Awakening spreading like wildfire along the eastern seaboard, the subscriptionists grew alarmed at the revivalistic preaching that openly questioned the inherited, allegedly stale faith of the church's leadership and ministers—preaching that was sometimes done from pulpits in churches that had no permanent minister. The subscriptionists' solution was to assert ecclesiastical authority.

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[93] Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 49.

[94] Ibid., 48.

[95] Ibid., 49-50; Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, 30-40.

As historian Leonard Trinterud noted, "…The Scotch-Irish party were driving for an all-powerful synod through which they would be able to root out the growing revival."[96] In 1741, the subscriptionists—the so-called Old Side—succeeded, excluding the New Side revivalists (particularly those associated with Gilbert Tennent) from the synod and thus from the American Presbyterian Church.[97] Only in 1758 after the Great Awakening had grown tired did the two sides reunite on the twin bases that there would be no supreme authority in the synod—an Old Side concession—and that revivalists had sometimes strayed into error but that those errors had been corrected—a New Side concession. There was no discussion about how the two decades of controversies over subscription bore on the unity of the church, and so the subscription question was avoided in the interest of peace. Both sides lost something of what they wanted in the reunion, but the church was indeed whole again.[98]

The Presbyterian Schism of 1837 that occurred toward the end of the Second Great Awakening was much like the schism of 1741 in that it was a conflict between confessional subscriptionists, now called the Old School, and evangelical revivalists, called the New School. Although George Marsden in his study of the New School notes four causes of the schism apart from the importance of the Confession and revivalism,[99] the confessionalist-revivalist conflict model captures the bulk of their differences. In 1837, the Old School party excluded from the church four synods that participated in the

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[96] Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 68.

[97] Ibid., 104-108.

[98] Ibid., 144-49.

[99] Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, 67.

1801 Plan of Union with Congregationalists, calling the Plan "unconstitutional" and opened a door to doctrinal laxity. The New School, for its part, called the Old School party's retroactive motion unconstitutional because the General Assembly had affirmed the Plan for nearly forty years by that point. Each side considered itself the rightful Assembly of the Presbyterian Church.[100]

In the 1860s, after the Awakening and the Civil War were over, the Plan of Union was undone, and the New School had been on its feet for some time and distanced itself from other denominations on the "evangelical united front," there seemed to be a possibility for a reunion of the two Presbyterian bodies.[101] By 1869, the New School was more theologically conservative and had repudiated the un-Calvinistic ideas of the New England Congregationalists. Even a good deal of the Old School admitted that orthodoxy now was prevalent in the New School Church.[102] When reunion was reached in 1869, it was based on an agreement that the simplest formula for subscription to the Confession would be best. The churches were reunited as the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. by a vote of 285-9.[103]

In the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Presbyterian Church, a tendency toward a single, reunited church prevailed, but that possibility was not easily realized. It typically involved a great deal of argument on the part of the broader, revivalist party, whether the New Side or the New School. These hard-won reunions materialized only after intense

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[100] Ibid., 70-71.

[101] Ibid., 213.

[102] Ibid., 220, 223-224.

[103] Ibid., 224-225.

and frank theological debate, which provided a solid foundation upon which the reunited bodies could rest. The unity and the purity of the church were understood to be equally serious matters. Reunions notwithstanding, within the Old School party there always remained a particularly intransigent and extremely strict confessional group that could not be led to believe that the less confessional party was not shot through with doctrinal error or at least tolerated such errors. It was the voice of a very small minority. It was the voice of a very large majority drawn from both schools that reunited the church in 1869.[104]

In the 1870s and 80s, a cluster of new theological ideas confronted the Presbyterian Church and tested its newly-gained unity. This, of course, was modernism or liberalism, and in this period lie some of the seeds of the Presbyterian controversy of 1922-1936. Unfortunately, the secondary literature on the controversy does not include an entirely satisfactory account of how the Presbyterian Church moved from the nineteenth century into the twentieth and how that transition affected its character. Two general schemes for understanding the church's encounter with modernism and fundamentalism in this period have prevailed, but neither adequately explains why the conservative party divided as the controversy progressed, especially toward the end, when the Independent Board was formed in 1933 and Machen went to trial in 1935.

The first of these schemes posits a church that was diverse from its inception and had a "characteristic moderation"[105] about it. According to this view, the modernist-fundamentalist debate strained but did not entirely undo the mediating qualities of the

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[104] Ibid., 225-228.

[105] Loetscher, *The Broadening Church,* 1.

church. In his 1954 study, Lefferts Loetscher writes, in the context of a discussion of the Special Commission of 1925 that affirmed the orthodoxy of the church at the height of the controversy, "the American Presbyterian Church has been from the beginning a combination of diverging tendencies, maintained in fairly equal balance….The main stream of the Church's life—at least previous to reunion—had not been 'left wing' or 'right wing' but mediating…."[106] William Weston's detailed, well-documented, and more recent study suggests likewise: "Yet, while the Presbyterian Church upholds an ideal of one orthodoxy, within it a variety of views always have coexisted."[107] Weston understands the history of the church as a competition between conservatives and liberals over the loyalist center, "a vast mass whom they are trying to win over."[108] Moderation prevailed in the church.

The problem with this scheme—interpreting the history of the Church in terms of its moderation or the desire of its communicants to preserve the Church—is that it does not totally account for the extent to which modernism and fundamentalism were unlike any of the upsetting "divergent tendencies" the church had faced in its past, nor does it account for the mobility of those "alliance-building" conservatives of the 1910s who only became more "moderate" as the controversy progressed into the 1930s.[109]

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[106] Ibid., 131. Cf., ibid., 1-8, 119-120.

[107] *Presbyterian Pluralism*, xii.

[108] Ibid., xi.

[109] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 119.

Liberalism challenged "major tenets of the traditional faith…."[110] Fundamentalism altered many of them, too. The mediation interpretation posits the existence of a loyalist party to guide the church, but because it focuses on a party that wished to preserve "the order of the church as it is," it draws attention away from the historical dynamics of the church's liberal and conservative parties.[111] The confidence one can have in the efficacy of a mediating or loyalist element in the church weakens the farther apart the diverging tendencies are—as was the case in the Presbyterian controversy—because the supposed loyalist party must eventually ask itself and state clearly, "For what does this party stand, besides the Church itself?" Weston says that the Church's constitution guides its understanding of itself and determines what ideas can and cannot be tolerated,[112] but even the official position of the Church can be broadened by a vote of its councils. Therefore, a major problem with the mediation thesis as an explanation of the church's history, at least in the period of the 1920s and 30s, is that it makes too little of the question of the dynamics, influence, and orthodoxy of new liberal or fundamentalist doctrines in the church.

An even more glaring issue with the mediation thesis is that it does not account for the fact that, effectively, there was no moderate party left in the Presbyterian church by the 1930s. The conservative coalition in the 1910s included later moderates like Charles R. Erdman and Robert E. Speer—both of whom wrote articles for the

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[110] Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, 245.

[111] *Presbyterian Pluralism*, xi. Weston's interpretation, since it relies on semi-static categories like 'liberal', 'conservative', and 'loyalist', is particularly weak on this point.

[112] Ibid., 110-116, xiii.

theologically conservative series *The Fundamentals* (1910-1915).[113] By 1925, both Erdman and Speer had distanced themselves considerably from such explications of conservative doctrine, even though they did not alter their theological positions. Due to the intensity of the fundamentalist opposition in the early 1930s, they sided with modernists. Similarly, Clarence E. Macartney, a fundamentalist of Machen's stripe until 1935, quickly recoiled from the extreme fundamentalist party in Presbyterianism after Machen and others refused to resign from the IBPFM.[114] He remained a fundamentalist, but chose to work actively as an individual pastor and not to separate from the denomination. What these three figures illustrate is that, while moderation and loyalty to the church were ideals treasured by some individuals in the church, they were not strong enough to hold together a truly distinct moderate party during the end of the Presbyterian controversy.[115] The mediation thesis conceals more than it reveals when used as a way to describe the makeup of the church in this period and the behavior of its leaders.

Another manner of interpreting how the fundamentalist-modernist crisis affected the character of the Church has been to highlight antecedents or semblances of modernism and fundamentalism in the New School of the 1800s. The theses in this vein say more about the structure of the church than does the mediation thesis, but, when

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[113] Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 138, 188.

[114] Ibid., 124-125, 210-211.

[115] This is perhaps the weakest and most unclear part of Weston's interpretation. He does not give a consistent account of *how* the loyalist party or mediating element in the church exists. In *Presbyterian Pluralism*, 110, he suggests that the party's existence is *ad hoc*: "The loyalist party becomes a party when it is attacked, when it has a common enemy to mobilize against." This does not square with what he says elsewhere, where he suggests that the party is an enduring part of the denomination's life: "The loyalists are not ambivalent 'moderates' in the middle of a liberal-to-conservative spectrum, but a party with a distinctive interest in advancing the traditional order of the church as it is" (xi).

considered together and examined in the full light of the evidence of the Presbyterian controversy, fall short of fully explaining the twentieth-century situation. Lefferts Loetscher's *The Broadening Church* and George Marsden's history of the New School represent this approach.

Loetscher, while arguing that the character of the church was mediatory, also found a place for modernism in the history of the church in noting that "broad continuities can be discerned, if the identity is not pressed too closely, between earlier New School positions and the later liberalism."[116] Marsden, while partly in agreement with Loetscher, has reservations about that interpretation: "Viewing New School Presbyterianism in the context of the wider evangelical movement, it becomes clear that, despite its undeniable affinities to the tolerant doctrinal position of theological liberalism, the New School had nearly as great affinities to twentieth-century fundamentalism."[117] As counterexamples to the New-School-as-proto-liberal thesis, Marsden astutely notes the New School's revivalism, Biblicism, and emphasis on fundamentals as a means to unity, and says that these actually suggest a connection between the New School and fundamentalism.[118] Still, he recognizes a problem with his and Loetscher's search for continuities and resemblances, admitting that "the lines of continuity become hopelessly blurred as the twentieth-century issues replace those of the nineteenth century."[119]

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[116] Loetscher, *Broadening Church*, 18.

[117] Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, 246. Cf. George M. Marsden, "The New School Heritage and Presbyterian Fundamentalism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 32 (1970), 142.

[118] Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, 246.

[119] Ibid., 248.

The difficulty of this approach is not limited to its shortcomings as an explanation of the divide between modernists and fundamentalists, but extends also to its inability to account for the enmity and fine differences that arose late in the controversy between mediating conservatives, Old-School-type fundamentalists like Machen, and those who maintained what Marsden calls the "New School element in the heritage of Presbyterian Fundamentalism."[120] Continuities with and resemblances to the New School can be found among not only the fundamentalists but among those moderates who repudiated fundamentalism in the 1920s and 1930s. Their applicability to both mediating conservatives and fundamentalists renders them of little use in attempting to distinguish between the two groups.

A few brief comparisons of prominent theologically conservative Presbyterian spokesmen will highlight the cracks in this approach. While Marsden points to Billy Sunday and William Jennings Bryan as exemplars of New Schoolism in the fundamentalist party of the twentieth-century,[121] both the tolerance of New Schoolism and its emphasis on revivalism, Biblicism, moral living, and the like featured in the thought of mediating conservatives like Robert Speer and Charles Erdman, who eventually grew opposed to Sunday and Bryan's militant fundamentalist rhetoric and anti-intellectualism. Speer and Erdman are actually better evidence for the persistence of the New School outlook in the twentieth century than any other liberal or fundamentalist of the same period. In the 1890s and 1900s, Speer was a devoté of the late nineteenth-

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[120] Marsden, "The New School Heritage," 145.

[121] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 135-136.

century evangelist D.L. Moody and a premillenialist.[122] Similarly, Erdman subscribed to premillenialism, admired Moody, and in 1917—before the controversy erupted—proudly introduced Sunday at a revival in New York.[123] What differentiated Speer, Erdman, Sunday, and Bryan from Machen and Carl McIntire was the issue of the militancy with which deviations from church order and teaching ought to be resisted. But even on this matter, the Old School Machen, the more New School Carl McIntire, and other separatist Presbyterians found room to quarrel and eventually divided along different lines.[124]

The larger issue toward which these historiographical debates and individual examples point is that the criteria for understanding the opposing sides in the Presbyterian controversy and the character of early twentieth-century Presbyterianism in general are inadequate and somewhat misdirected. The theses that the mediatory tendency of the church continued to win out in the twentieth century, and that Presbyterian modernism and fundamentalism might be correctly interpreted in terms of Old School or New School tendencies fall short of explaining what was at work in the Presbyterian Church in the 1920s and 1930s. They are useful as far as they go and explain a good part of what happened, but they do not explain why people of essentially conservative theological positions came to divide. The beginnings of the answer to this question can be found by considering another: whence came the emphasis on tolerance that guided the church's decision making processes in the 1920s and 1930s?

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[122] Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 185-188.

[123]Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy,* 138-143; Frank, *Less than Conquerors*, 180-181.

[124] Christopher R. Schlect, "J. Gresham Machen, Roy T. Brumbaugh, and the Presbyterian Schism of 1934-36," M.A. Thesis, University of Idaho, 2005, 152-215.

Toward the end of his book on the New School, after discussing the reunion of 1869, Marsden leaves readers with a haunting and pregnant sentence: "Tolerance was, perhaps, a real issue."[125] Tolerance was a part of nineteenth-century evangelical life. It was a necessary precondition of interdenominational cooperation in reform efforts, and it certainly made reunion talks and reunion itself possible in 1758 and 1869. But, as Trinterud and Marsden have shown, that brand of toleration did not preclude rigorous theological discussion and an acknowledgment of the incompatibility of certain views with Reformed doctrines.

In the 1920s and 30s, the theological exchange between liberals and fundamentalists was at a very low ebb, as liberals plead for unity and cooperation and fundamentalists denounced the modernization of culture and the apostasy of the established churches. The context in which ideas like tolerance, diversity, and pluralism were understood had changed by the early twentieth century. The most powerful idea driving this change was the new philosophy of pragmatism. Recent historians of the Presbyterian controversy have not emphasized enough either the roots or the pervasiveness of pragmatism in their discussions of the issues of tolerance and unity in the Church in this period. The scholarship was heading in the right direction when Loetscher brilliantly saw the connection:

> It is interesting that Presbyterians—who did not formally hold the tenets of the pragmatistic philosophy at all—were implying a more pragmatic doctrine of the Church at just about the same time that [Charles Sanders] Peirce and [William]

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[125] Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind,* 228.

> James were formulating the philosophy of pragmatism. The philosophy and the ecclesiology were products of the same forces in American life.[126]

Still, even Loetscher understated pragmatism's force, and since his study of the conflict appeared, scholars have continued to recognize it only here and there. D.G. Hart, who does pragmatism more justice than do other scholars in his fine biography of Machen, mentions it only sporadically, along with other early twentieth-century intellectual factors. When he does mention it, he describes it as a primarily utilitarian philosophy that mostly affected individual theologians' views of the truth of ideas or fueled the Church administration's emphasis on bureaucratic efficiency or practical matters.[127] These insights into pragmatism's influence are true, but they do not plumb the depths of the philosophy's influence as a new, organizing principle in the Church. It is worth noting that the pragmatist approach to church conflict that embedded itself in the Presbyterian Church in the 1920s is the theme of Weston's study, though he does not mention it by name and really does not seem to recognize it.[128]

The philosophy of pragmatism had its roots in the thought of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), the American logician who gave it its name, and William James (1842-1910), who was its first great expositor. The soul of pragmatism is its substitution of a realm of contingent ideas and truth for absolutes. As essentially contingent, ideas

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[126] Loetscher, *Broadening Church*, 59.

[127] Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 100-101, 114-115, 119.

[128] The basis for such a judgment is that pragmatism, as a philosophy, entails that certain ideas can win out over others as they prove their relatively greater utility and that in the meantime we must suspend judgment as to their ultimate truth value. Ideas prove their worth in their utility and in their consequences. In describing Presbyterian pluralism as a competitive system where "each body offers to the world its distinctive features, making its case that these are good," and in saying that "competition appeals to the practical," Weston is suggesting a pragmatic approach to church conflict. *Presbyterian Pluralism*, 128.

gain credence not by being accurate reflections of reality (that would be the representationalist, Common Sense philosophy) but by functioning as tools which, when "picked up" and used, yield desirable results.[129] One recent historian of the philosophy has said that pragmatism is a "process of making our way as best we can in a universe shot through with contingency."[130]

The most important features of pragmatism that shaped early twentieth-century American Presbyterianism were not its emphasis on the practical or its utilitarian view of ideas (Were traditional Christian beliefs *useful*?), but rather its views on the degree of freedom and non-conformity permissible in social and other organizations and its views on *why* such latitude was desirable. Such views—pluralism, diversity, multiculturalism—are now almost indistinguishable from each other, given their ubiquity and their permeation of much twentieth-century American thought. What these ideas needed to work, however—what they needed in order to get off the ground—was a companion idea, which turned out to be the *sine qua non* for pragmatism as a social philosophy. This idea was tolerance.

The pragmatists wanted a social organism that permitted a greater (though by no means unrestricted) margin for difference, but not just for the sake of difference, and not even because they thought principles of love and fairness required it. They wanted to create more social room for error because they thought this would give good outcomes a

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[129] Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 337-375.

[130] Ibid., 360.

better chance to emerge. They didn't just want to keep the conversation going; they wanted to get to a better place.[131]

Although it was other figures—Arthur Bentley, Horace Kallen, Randolph Bourne—and not James or his fellow pragmatist, John Dewey, who were social pragmatism's best-known standard bearers,[132] it is an inescapable fact that "the value at the bottom of the thought of [Oliver Wendell] Holmes [, Jr.], James, Peirce, and Dewey is tolerance."[133] As a social philosophy based on the belief that the best society would tolerate a plurality of ideas and viewpoints, pragmatism also had to have a way to fence those ideas in so that the centrifugal forces of diversity could not cause society to unravel. Hence, for the pragmatists, "Democracy means that everyone is equally in the game, but it also means that no one can opt out. Modern American thought, the thought associated with Holmes, James, Peirce, and Dewey, represents the intellectual triumph of unionism."[134] These distinctively secular versions of the ideas of tolerance and unity were pragmatism's chief and most significant bequests to American Presbyterianism in the early twentieth century.

Even if Loetscher's assessment that Presbyterians "did not formally hold the tenets of the pragmatistic philosophy" is correct and that "the philosophy and the ecclesiology were products of the same forces," there is ample evidence that pragmatism's social implications had gained a hearing in contemporary Presbyterian life

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[131] Ibid., 440.

[132] Ibid., 379-408.

[133] Ibid., 439.

[134] Ibid., 441.

and were one of the many sources of disagreement between the fundamentalists and the more moderate conservatives and liberals.

Harry Emerson Fosdick's well-known and oft-cited 1922 sermon "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" for example, echoed James warning about the need to "postpone dogmatic answer"[135] and was, overall, a plea for tolerance within the church.

> Has intolerance any contribution to make to this situation? Will it persuade anybody of anything? Is not the Christian church large enough to hold within her hospitable fellowship people who differ on points like this and *agree to differ until the fuller truth be manifested?*[136]

Such thinking was not only in debt to the pragmatic ideal of leaving room for error, discovery, and disagreement, but also carried in it the already-familiar liberal doctrine of God's revelation of himself through culture.

It was not just modernists like Fosdick who implicitly endorsed pragmatism. George Marsden briefly notes pragmatism's influence on the apologetic work of the moderate Robert Speer, who "defended the deity of Christ almost entirely on the grounds of the evidence of the doctrine's practical benefits."[137] Charles Erdman, who in 1906 was elected to the newly-created chair of practical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, "inside and outside the seminary…tended to reinforce his predilection to

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[135] William James, *Pragmatism*, in *The Works of William James,* Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 144.

[136] "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?," in *Sermons in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit 1630-1967*, ed. DeWitte Holland (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1971), 342. Emphasis added.

[137] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 122.

subordinate theoretical to practical concerns."[138] While a tendency toward cooperative action had usually prevailed over reflection and theological disputation in nineteenth-century American evangelicalism,[139] pragmatism was a new, foreign philosophic rationale for tolerance and unity in the early decades of the new century. It gained traction in Presbyterian circles because the denomination, like the philosophy, was a part of the consensus-oriented, Anglo-Saxon establishment in early twentieth-century America. But the pragmatic rationale was more rooted in new ideas of social experiment and democratic pluralism than in the evangelical sentiment of tolerance that prevailed in the preceding century. To be sure, in Speer and Erdman especially (both of whom were products of nineteenth-century evangelicalism), the nineteenth-century cooperative spirit dwelt alongside the growing preference for tolerance; but, as the controversy progressed, this new definition of tolerance became the focus as each plead for the breadth and unity of the church.[140]

The question of tolerance, deeply imbedded in the pluralist vision of America's first pragmatists, was cracking the church in two places. It not only divided conservatives from liberals—a division based on their patently different theologies—but, more importantly for this part of the history, moderate conservatives from fundamentalist conservatives. The strife within the conservative party was, in some sense, the result of meta-theological arguments—arguments about the existence and tolerance of theological variation in the church. Fundamentalists detested the tolerance of liberalism in the

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[138] Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 138.

[139] Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 114.

[140] Ibid., 156-161.

church, although even on this matter their protestations were not uniform. Moderate conservatives were willing to tolerate liberalism in order to preserve the unity of the church. The new, pluralistic outlook was by the 1920s a force to be reckoned with in American Presbyterianism.

The character of early twentieth-century Presbyterianism cannot be described as other than mixed. Loetscher's and Weston's search for the mediating center of the church and Loetscher's and Marsden's analogizing between the New School and the later modernist and fundamentalist movements have shown historians of the Presbyterian conflict that the history of the church in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries church cannot be ignored. On the other hand, what those accounts lack in explanatory power is made up for by looking to the emerging pragmatic view of tolerance as a cause of the falling away of moderates from the conservative coalition in the 1930s. But it was not just impersonal ideas from outside of the church that were straining the conservative coalition. As the leader of the fundamentalist part of that coalition, which made a slow withdrawal from the church in the last decade of Machen's life, Machen had a strong personality and deeply held beliefs that kept the coalition together for as long as it lasted but also contributed to its outsider, minority status and, upon leaving the church, the new church's small size. Developments coming from the church's left certainly shaped the end of the Presbyterian conflict, but Machen's confidence in an extremely precise definition of Presbyterianism also contributed to it. He was as opposed to pragmatism as

those whom he considered enemies were drawn to it.[141] His personal background and the influences upon his beliefs explain why he was as reluctant to keep company with those who tolerated modernists as he was to keep company with modernists themselves.

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[141] Brantley W. Gasaway, "As a Matter of Fact: J. Gresham Machen's Defense of the Metaphysical and the Moral," *Fides et Historia* 41 (Winter/Spring 2009): 47-70); J. Gresham Machen, *What is Faith?* (1925; repr., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 27-45, 174-180.

CHAPTER FOUR: J. GRESHAM MACHEN: HALF-HEARTED FUNDAMENTALIST

> The facts of the Christian religion remain facts no matter whether we cherish them or not: they are facts for God; they are facts for both angels and demons; they are facts now, and they will remain facts beyond the end of time.
>
> *J. Gresham Machen (1925)*

> What are facts without interpretation?
>
> *C.S. Lewis* (1955)

John Gresham Machen thought he well understood the distinction between evangelical and pragmatic notions of toleration, and he often made distinctions of this and other sorts in his informal role as head of the conservative party in the Presbyterian Church in the 1920s and 30s.[142] Machen also thought he understood a much larger issue: the place of traditional Christianity as it related to bare-bones, interdenominational fundamentalism, on one hand, and liberalism, on the other. Throughout his career, Machen was caught between these two movements as he tried to prevent either from distorting Presbyterian distinctives. When liberals and moderate conservatives pled for a doctrinally inclusive church, Machen upheld orthodoxy. When fundamentalists of the Billy Sunday and William Jennings Bryan type pled for the fundamentals of Christianity

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[142] In the defense of orthodoxy by which Machen catapulted himself into the Presbyterian controversy *Christianity and Liberalism,* 20, he associated pragmatism with tolerant relativism, which is where James's and Dewey's disciples eventually took pragmatism: "It never occurred to Paul that a gospel might be true for one man and not for another; the blight of pragmatism had never fallen upon his soul." For historical analysis of James and Dewey, see Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time 1912-1917* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1959), 140-65.

and the waging of a culture war against modernism, Machen sided with them only reluctantly. He did this not because he shared their Americanism—he was opposed to official Christian support for the culture and politics—but because at least they believed in traditional, supernatural Christian beliefs, even if they could not articulately defend them. Machen was a half-hearted fundamentalist at best, and it was this half-heartedness—and the qualities that fed this half-heartedness, his rigorous confessionalism and Southern mentality—that contributed to the intramural debates within and eventually the disintegration of the conservative party in the Church. He remained partly in favor of the fundamentalists, but also in favor of a distinctly Presbyterian identity. In other words, he was simultaneously partial to outsider and insider views of American Presbyterianism.

Why did Machen's beliefs develop along these lines and why did his fundamentalism not include concerns about the culture at large? What implications did this have for his role as a founder of the IBPFM, for his trial, and the subsequent splintering of the conservative Presbyterian coalition? The various influences on Machen's development have been dealt with extensively by his biographers, and they really need not be recounted here except briefly and as they relate to the qualities that separated him from other fundamentalists—e.g., his general indifference toward change in the culture, his Old School, confessional view of the church, and his intellectual acumen—and from liberals and moderates—e.g., again, his indifference to the erosion of Victorian culture, his exclusive, confessional view of the church, and his resistance to pragmatic notions of toleration.

Probably the most important developmental factor in Machen's life was that he was reared as a well-to-do, educated Southerner.[143] His mother, Mary Gresham, was from Georgia, and his father, Arthur, was from Baltimore, where Machen was born in 1881. He was educated in the classical curricula of private schools as a boy and inherited significant sums of money from his father's and mother's families throughout his life. Machen sympathized with the Confederate view of the Civil War: it was an assault on liberty and states' rights. His view of African Americans was that they could represent the best of humanity, but that they should not mix with whites. This Southern aristocratic outlook was important for keeping Machen from fully understanding—and being understood by—the Republican, pro-Union culture of the North, where he lived most of his life. These Southern roots were also important for shaping and supporting his libertarian view of the relationship between churches and the American state.

Machen's libertarianism appears most inconsistent in his decidedly un-libertarian view of church order. Machen, for example, believed in the Christian's liberty to drink alcoholic beverages (thus his opposition to the PCUSA's support for Prohibition) but did not extend this liberty to the realm of doctrine, which is why he so opposed modernist doctrines. Despite his intolerant stance on doctrinal innovation in the church, Machen supported a variety of liberties in the civil realm. Machen was staunchly opposed to what he saw as the tyranny of Roosevelt's New Deal,[144] to the organization of public lands

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[143] The following short biographical sketch of Machen's outlook is based on Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir*; Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*; and Hart, *Defending the Faith*.

[144] One evidence of this is that Machen's brother, Arthur, was comfortable enough to write in a letter to him, "The country seems to be headed towards universal bankruptcy or (what is substantially the same thing) a species of bolshevism." Arthur W. Machen, Jr., to J. Gresham Machen, August 6, 1933. MA.

under the National Parks system, and even to laws prohibiting jaywalking in Philadelphia, where he lived. Machen's libertarianism extended even to other religions in the American public square. Unlike most of his contemporaries, who were vehemently anti-Catholic, Machen supported Catholic Al Smith in the presidential election of 1928. The key to understanding Machen's religious libertarianism is that he saw religious liberty as a civil good; but he did not see the church itself and its own affairs as beholden to the same ideals that he regarded so highly in the civil sphere. He often said that to be a member of a church was voluntary; to be a member of the civil order was not.[145] Membership in the church therefore entailed a different, more stringent set of commitments than did participation in American civil life. Having remarked generally on Machen's outlook, it is now possible to look at specific issues that arose in his dealings with the church.

A good question to keep in mind in the discussion of the particulars of Machen's thought is one many historians have raised: was Machen truly a fundamentalist? Virtually all historians who have studied the Presbyterian Church in this period have agreed that he was; a few have made a distinction, emphasizing that he was a confessionalist.[146] An

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[145] J. Gresham Machen, "The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 165, Essentials for Prospertity, (Jan., 1933), 45.

[146] The distinction involves an appreciation of the fact that confessionalists were concerned with a narrower set of issues than were fundamentalists as whole. 'Fundamentalism' is a broader term referring to the cooperative movement involving a host of anti-modernist evangelicals from several traditions—Baptist, Presbyterian, holiness Wesleyans, etc. Some of the features of "garden-variety" fundamentalism would be Americanism or patriotism, literal interpretations of the Bible (including prophecy), anti-evolutionism, and the rejection of strong drink and pleasures like the cinema and dancing. 'Confessionalism' refers to equally anti-modernist Protestants whose views stemmed more from their adherence to historical statements of doctrines—confessions—and would include Old School Presbyterians, certainly, but also Lutherans and the Dutch Reformed. For interpretations that see Machen primarily as a fundamentalist, see Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*; and Weston, *Presbyterian Pluralism.* Those emphasizing his confessional aspects are Hart, *Defending the Faith*, and Christopher R.

important interpretive task would seem to be settling the issue of whether Machen should be classified as the one or the other in the Presbyterian context, the broader evangelical setting, or both. The dichotomy is somewhat misleading if not false, however, because fundamentalism had confessionalists as part of its constituency.[147] Presbyterianism *qua* an ecclesiastical polity, Presbyterianism *qua* a strictly confessional system, and fundamentalism are three categories that overlapped in complex and often confusing ways in this period. On one hand, Old School Presbyterian confessionalism is an historically accurate criterion for distinguishing Machen from other fundamentalists and is beneficial for sifting out the very fine differences among Presbyterians, conservative or otherwise. On the other hand, as a perspective from which to interpret the separatist IBPFM, the Machen trial, and the deterioration of the conservative Presbyterian party, confessionalism is too narrow a category and risks missing the forest for the trees. Machen's confessionalism was a contributing factor in his peculiar sort of fundamentalism, and, despite its antipathy to other fundamentalist tenets, took its place alongside them in the fight against modernism. Such an interpretation of Machen has enough support to continue to be used in describing events in this period of Presbyterian history. Even if Machen's confessional concerns toward the end of the Presbyterian controversy seem to refute the fundamentalist label, a thesis for which Christopher

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Schlect, "J. Gresham Machen, Roy T. Brumbaugh, and the Presbyterian Schism of 1934-36," M.A. Thesis, University of Idaho, 2005.

[147] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 4. D.G. Hart, though arguing mostly from a confessionalist perspective, recognizes this also in *Defending the Faith,* 5-6. This point was raised in Chapter 2, also.

Schlect provides much proof,[148] his participation in the IBPFM and his response to the charges brought against him in 1934-35 bear out the interpretation of Machen as a fundamentalist.[149] Especially by repudiating intellectual/theological and organizational trends in the church, he cast himself as an outsider in an insiders' denomination—a confusing and precarious position.

About the only thing Machen had in common with Presbyterian fundamentalists like Roy Talmage Brumbaugh and non-Presbyterian fundamentalists like William Bell Riley was militant anti-modernism.[150] This militancy was the most salient and unifying feature of fundamentalism in Presbyterianism and evangelicalism as a whole in this period. But besides that single, important point of agreement with fundamentalists, Machen had other, more narrowly defined sympathies. One of these was his Old School, confessional conception of Presbyterianism. His devotion to that tradition put him at odds with both fundamentalists and modernists on intellectual, ecclesiastical, and, to a lesser extent, cultural issues.

Almost every scholar has noted that Machen was an Old School Presbyterian theologian in the Charles Hodge-B.B. Warfield tradition at Princeton.[151] In its emphasis on theology and right doctrine rather than piety or revivalism, this tradition was among the most intellectually rigorous in American Protestantism. As was noted in the previous

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[148] Schlect, "J. Gresham Machen," iii, 112.

[149] This is part of the argument in Chapters 5 and 6.

[150] Schlect, "J. Gresham Machen," 45. I follow Marsden and Longfield in their understanding of fundamentalism as militantly anti-modernist evangelical Protestantism.

[151] George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 185; Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 24-26; Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 43-49; Weston, *Presbyterian Pluralism*, 32.

chapter, some of the clergy representing that tradition were the last to accept the terms of reunion with the more reformist and revivalistic wing of the Presbyterian Church in 1869. The Old School men at Princeton, after the reunion, found a new enemy in modernism. This remained the situation into the early twentieth century, except that rather than the issues being Biblical inerrancy or the revision of the Westminster Confession—the liberal Charles Briggs took modernist positions on these issues—essential Christian doctrines like the deity and virgin birth of Christ and the veracity of miracles were under fire.[152] Machen, though his faith had been tested during his time as a thoughtful, admiring student of liberal theologians in Germany, had emerged by the 1910s as a defender of all of these beliefs.[153] He rejected liberalism. By the time Warfield died in 1921, Machen was the leading Old School theologian of his day. He authored a scholarly defense of the supernatural origins of Paul's Christianity in 1921 and defended the doctrine of the virgin birth in a volume published a decade later.

It was in the premium that Machen placed on the intellect that he seemed least like a fundamentalist and most like a mainstream Protestant, if not a modernist. Still, Presbyterians, almost by definition, were intellectually oriented. Especially in the early years of the republic, they were attacked by Baptists and Methodists for being too theologically oriented and not focused enough on spiritual matters and growth through revival and conversions. Despite sharing a respect for the intellect with the mainstream Presbyterian tradition, Machen did not spare it any criticism. He is a tricky case. His

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[152] Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, 245.

[153] Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (1954; rpt., Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2004), 72-116.

attitude toward the intellect as such seems to disqualify him as a fundamentalist. His respect for the intellect, reasoned argument, and almost judicial concern for clarity were conspicuous parts of his outlook clear up to the very end of his life when he was most separatist and most militant.[154] Additionally, judging from the fact that the broader fundamentalist movement began to die after 1925, he is peculiar for having stayed so late in the world of denominational and seminary politics. He produced high-quality biblical scholarship. He repudiated fundamentalists' "rough-house"[155] methods and affirmed those of the mainstream. When Machen addressed Princeton in 1912, saying, "The Church is perishing today through the lack of thinking, not through an excess of it," he had liberals in mind, whom he saw as "making our theological seminaries merely centres of religious emotion."[156] However, Machen could just as easily have spoken those words of fundamentalists, who frequently insisted on the defense of a few basic Christian doctrines and were removing themselves from a position of engagement with the culture. He may have liked Billy Sunday "for the enemies he has,"[157] but he shared little else in common with him and those of his type.

Machen was just as out of place among the mainstream leaders of the church and the modernists. While he kept current with modern culture and showed a willingness to examine and exchange arguments with liberals and was in that sense like them, he did not

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[154] Correspondence between J. Gresham Machen and Arthur Machen, Jr., September 1934 to June 1935, Machen Archives. Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 150-54.

[155] A term Machen used in a letter to his mother, Minnie Gresham Machen, in 1915 regarding his visit to a Winona Bible Conference. Quoted in Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 196.

[156] J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity and Culture," *Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913), 13.

[157] Machen to M.G.M., 1915. Quoted in Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 189.

believe the changes brought by modernity warranted the alteration of traditional Christian beliefs.[158] Whereas modernists had rejected Common Sense Realism and had embraced historicism, Machen maintained the Common Sense outlook and rejected historicism.[159] As D.G. Hart notes, "Machen's theological strictures against liberal Protestantism, though informed by rigorous scholarship, were in many ways only learned variations of fundamentalist biblical literalism."[160] Indeed, the fierce arguments for biblical inerrancy that came out of Old School Princeton in the late nineteenth century and later were a source that inerrantist fundamentalists found attractive.[161] Machen, like many fundamentalists, believed that the meanings of historical facts were plain and not open to modern reinterpretation. Therefore, even though his approach to thought was not stereotypically fundamentalistic, he was a fundamentalist in his militant opposition to modernists and those who tolerated them and in his view of Christianity as inherently supernatural. Those were the qualities that defined a good part of fundamentalism in the 1920s and 30s, and Machen certainly had them.

Machen's Old School view of the church was closely associated with his call for more thinking in the church. The Old School ecclesiology was much more formal and doctrinal than the ecclesiology of Presbyterian moderates and liberals; and those of fundamentalists, who leaned toward interdenominational cooperation and less structured

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[159] See George M. Marsden, "J. Gresham Machen, History and Truth," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42/1 (Fall 1979), 157-175.

[160] Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 5.

[161] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 117-118; and Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Premillenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

forms of the church. Above all, the Old School approach was confessional.[162] Machen's confessionalism—and his extremely high view of the Confession—was part of what repelled some fundamentalists from Machen and contributed to the unraveling of the larger conservative Presbyterian coalition that took shape between 1900 and 1920. In his thesis, Schlect gives a good example of this: the falling out between Machen and Roy Brumbaugh, a fundamentalist Presbyterian minister in Seattle. Their split derived partly from Machen's insistence on adherence to the Westminster Confession, which the Old School considered the basis of Presbyterian polity. He wanted to preserve Presbyterian principles of church order as much as possible, even at the height of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy; when Brumbaugh opted for independency instead, Machen was disappointed in him.[163] Still, even if Machen couldn't agree with fundamentalists like Brumbaugh on a positive vision for how a theologically orthodox church was to be ordered, they could at least agree that toleration was not a principle that should be extended to anybody who tolerated modernism. In the broader context of fundamentalists' fight against modernists, the weakness of Schlect's thesis about Machen—that he was not a fundamentalist but a confessionalist—becomes clear. Granting that confessionalism is a criterion for making distinctions among Presbyterian fundamentalists, they were nevertheless all fundamentalists, united in their opposition to modernism and those who tolerated it.[164]

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[162] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 110.

[163] Schlect, "J. Gresham Machen."

[164] This demonstrates that, curiously and counterintuitive to the popular understanding of fundamentalism, Machen and fundamentalists did have to embrace tolerance in some degree: they had to be able to tolerate each other's differences (dispensationalism being one) long enough to fight modernism in the church. They

Evangelical moderates and modernists' view of the church, more than that of Brumbaugh-type fundamentalists, disappointed Machen, because for them (in his estimation at least), doctrine either played second—or third—fiddle to concerns about evangelistic work and church unity (in the case of the moderates) or else was ignored in favor of the idea that Christianity was not a doctrine but a way of life (modernists).[165] They favored a tolerant, diverse Presbyterian Church that, he said, was not based on the precise meaning of historical facts—doctrine—but upon a "complex of ideas" rooted in religious feeling.[166]

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Machen believed that a church directed more toward tolerance and peace than toward correct, precisely stated doctrine was just a compromise that would dilute and eventually destroy the church's orthodoxy and the lifeblood of its witness and work. It was a compromise with pragmatism: "If, therefore, we want the work [of the Church] to proceed, we must face and settle this conflict of means; we cannot call on men's beliefs to help us unless we determine what it is that is to be believed."[167] His ecclesiology was therefore not only confessional but exclusive and intolerant. "But when I say that a true Christian Church is radically intolerant," he wrote in 1933, before forming the Independent Board, "I mean simply that the Church must

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were willing to tolerate *these* differences, however, because they were not related to the liberal theology they all despised. Eventually even this alliance fell through, as will be discussed below in Chapter 6. See Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 102-103.

[165] Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 17.

[166] Ibid., 60.

[167] Machen, *What is Faith?* (1925; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1991), 176.

maintain the high exclusiveness and universality of its message."[168] He saw strict adherence to the Confession and to the essential points of doctrine as the only way to guarantee the fidelity of ministers.

For their part, evangelical moderates and liberals found Machen's confessionalism to be an unnecessarily exclusive and narrow definition of the church's beliefs. This was not because they saw it as too formal for their purposes, as Brumbaugh did, but because they did not believe that *strict* subscription to the Confession was required for the ministry or even for the preservation of orthodoxy. They argued partly on the basis of the Adopting Act of 1729 and the existence of Old School-confessional and evangelical parties in the church that the church was a broader institution than Machen said it was. This was essentially the argument of *The Auburn Affirmation,* a document signed in 1924 mostly by many moderate and liberal and a few conservative Presbyterian ministers in the wake of the spat over Fosdick and Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism.* The *Affirmation* said that its signatories affirmed orthodoxy but added that many theories or interpretations could be applied in understanding, for example, the doctrines of the virgin birth or Christ's performance of miracles.[169] For Machen's moderate and liberal opponents, the history of the church supplied much of the evidence for their views, and those views were also backed up by contemporary pragmatist ideas of pluralism and tolerance.

Machen deplored this view of the church; it was but an open door through which modernism could enter. The church did indeed come to accept modernism, but Machen

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[168] J. Gresham Machen, "The Responsibility of the Church," 45.

[169] Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 77-79.

somewhat exaggerated the prevalence of modernism in the church and its various ministries. This was the case particularly in the years prior to the Special Commission of 1925, which satisfied many conservatives and moderates in affirming the health of the church. As George Marsden has noted in his study of Fuller Theological Seminary, which begins with a cast of characters drawn from the era of the Presbyterian controversy, "Most northern Presbyterians were closer to traditional orthodoxy than to radical liberalism or 'modernism.' As late as the early 1920s approximately half the ministers and elders who made up the General Assembly of the denomination were ready to affirm the nonnegotiable importance of the 'fundamentals'…."[170] This was not enough for Machen, however. He wanted all, not just half, of the ministers to affirm these fundamentals; any indication that there were ministers who refused to do this meant that the battle for the faith had to proceed apace.

The picture so far given of Machen is one of an Old School Presbyterian traditionalist who did not share much in common with fundamentalists besides a militant commitment to the defense of supernatural Christian belief; but who certainly was more sympathetic to their outlook than to that of moderates and liberals. In his response to the cultural crises that were slowly dismantling Victorian American culture, Machen was even more removed from the outlook of these groups. As Henry May argued so thoroughly in *The End of American Innocence* (1959), his classic treatment of the period, turn-of-the-century America was held together by a leadership that shared a common

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[170] George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 33.

moral, cultural, and progressive vision of the country.[171] By 1917—just around the time of the Presbyterian Controversy—that vision was showing signs of wear.

Although Machen was part of the "dominant cultural tradition,"[172] he was a Southerner. The influence of his Southernness should not be overdrawn in accounting for his attitudes toward separation or secession from the church or its agencies. After all, many Northern fundamentalists left their denominations, too. Moreover, the idea of separation or being called out of the world has roots in Puritanism, which influenced American evangelicals, and the idea is, of course, found in Scripture, beside calls for Christian unity. What Machen's Southern qualities explain best is why he showed less concern than his Northern fundamentalist, moderate, and liberal peers to take part in the efforts either to preserve (in the case of fundamentalists) or to adapt (liberals) Victorian culture and thus to maintain its position of leadership in American national life. Machen was remarkably different from them: he was a libertarian Democrat and believed the church should not make political pronouncements; they were mostly Republicans and believed the church was a proper custodian of American life.

Machen's outlook, it should be noted immediately, was not anti-cultural or even indifferent to cultural change. Indeed, among the list of changes that Machen gave in *Christianity and Liberalism* as evidence of modern culture's force, the "decline of literature and art" was one.[173] Machen was a thoroughly literary man: he was reared on the classics and known to carry a volume from the Loeb Classical Library to read during

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[171] May, *The End of American Innocence*. See esp. Part One, "The Nineteenth Century Intact."

[172] Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 5-6.

[173] Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 8.

the in-between moments of his days.[174] Hardly opposed to culture, what Machen was opposed to was religious establishment, cultural hegemony of any sort, and attempts to force a cultural consensus; he stood radically in favor of civil liberties, especially those of minorities, even when they conflicted with the vision of those in the mainstream of the church.[175] In fact, of the several examples that could be—and have been—trotted out to demonstrate Machen's lukewarm attitude toward the cultural hegemony of Northern "W.A.S.P.s," none is better than his opposition to the church's official position on Prohibition.

Machen's refusal to support the church in its advocacy of Prohibition baffled and alienated fellow churchmen, pegging him as an outsider in yet another way. This single instance of Machen's opposition to the church's authority, if not his perennial opposition to a policy of tolerance in the church, probably contributed to the deferment of his appointment as Professor of Apologetics at Princeton.[176] Machen thus explained his vote against the church's taking a position on Prohibition:

> It is a misrepresentation to say that by this vote I expressed my opinion on the merits of the Eighteenth Amendment or the Volstead Act—and still less on the general question of prohibition. On the contrary, my vote was directed against a

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[174] Paul Woolley, *The Significance of J. Gresham Machen Today* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), 18.

[175] On Machen's libertarianism and its frequent connection to his Southern outlook, see Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy,* 31-41, 49-53 and Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 135-142. For personal accounts of his libertarianism, see Woolley, 19-20; and Henry W. Coray, *J. Gresham Machen: A Silhouette* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981), 45-55.

[176] See Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 336-338; Hart, *Defending the Faith,* 135.

> policy which places the Church in a corporate capacity, as distinguished from the activity of its members, on record with regard to such political questions.[177]

Machen was not only a civil libertarian then, but he opposed the church's taking an official position on any civil or moral matter, regardless of whether he was sympathetic to its stance. This was a peculiarly Southern attitude, as Bradley Longfield notes. In the Southern view of the spirituality of the church, "[i]ndividual Christians had a right and a responsibility to strive to effect the common life of the nation; but the church, as a spiritual institution, was constrained to remain within its own sphere."[178] The effect of implementing this ideal in the South was, of course, the Southern churches' *de facto* approval of slavery and segregation. In Machen's adopted home in the North, however, it allowed him to distance himself from many of the PCUSA's attempts to influence the culture explicitly.

The idea that the church ought not to become involved in civil affairs was unthinkable to Northern Protestants—fundamentalist, moderate, liberal, or whatever. As a Southerner in the North, Machen stood out in the PCUSA. Whereas moderates like Erdman and Speer and liberals like Fosdick and Henry Sloane Coffin (also a Northerner) believed that the church could transform the culture through its actions, Machen believed that if the church could influence the culture at all, it would be in the realm of ideas and through the preservation of its own purity and the orthodoxy of the doctrines it taught.[179]

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[177] Machen to Clarence Macartney, May 24, 1926, letter quoted in Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, 336.

[178] Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 35.

[179] Ibid., 224-225.

Machen and his Northern brethren shared a concern for culture, but they did not share the same beliefs about how Christians, through the church, could and should nurture culture.

When historians advise that Machen ought not to be considered a fundamentalist, but a confessionalist or something else, they definitely have intuition on their side. Machen's obvious dissimilarities to other fundamentalists and readers' own ideas about what a fundamentalist is and is not make it simple to exclude him from the category. However, the definition of fundamentalism aside, such an interpretation is deficient for a number of other reasons. A confessionalist interpretation would have to ignore that confessionalists before Machen and even Machen himself approved of what interdenominational fundamentalists were arguing for, even if they disapproved of their methods. In other words, it precludes the possibility that confessionalists might be fundamentalists.[180] It is also deficient because it diminishes the *ad hoc* nature of the fundamentalist movement and the variety of motivations that lay behind fundamentalists' militant opposition to modernism. In Machen's case, that motivation was doctrinal and confessional rather than cultural, and grounded in theological scholarship rather than appeals to traditional faith. Finally, as a matter of the study of American evangelicalism in this period, it is extraordinarily difficult to understand Machen without understanding him as a fundamentalist. Excluding him from the category of fundamentalists almost renders that category incoherent. The term 'fundamentalist,' if it didn't represent a distinct, unified branch of evangelicalism, at least signified a tendency. If anyone in the Presbyterian Church had that tendency, it was Machen.

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[180] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 103.

Machen's peculiar brand of fundamentalism had a profound impact on the shape of the end of the Presbyterian Controversy. Seemingly untroubled by any issue other than the orthodoxy and role of the church and the fidelity of its ministers, he had no qualms about separating from Princeton Theological Seminary—after it was reorganized along inclusivist lines in 1929—and founding Westminster Theological Seminary. That reorganization, at least in his opponents' opinion, was a matter of seminary politics and fairness. Machen saw it as a grave loss to the conservative Presbyterian cause, which indeed it was.

Since Machen saw church affairs through the lens of Old School confessionalism, when he got wind in 1932 of a new, liberal missiology that involved Presbyterian missionaries, he reacted strongly to the theology undergirding it, questioning the orthodoxy of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions (PBFM) and the missionaries it sent out. In the eyes of those who defended these missionaries, Machen was hampering the mission of the church and its unity. Machen's formation of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, which rivaled the official PBFM, and the trial that followed from his refusal to quit and dissolve the board were painful, parochial (in every sense) conflicts in the Presbyterian Controversy. Throughout these episodes, Machen was cast as an outsider by the Presbyterian establishment. He partly agreed with that assessment, because he believed the church had changed; but he was not willing to concede that he had abandoned traditional American Presbyterianism. Thus, in some sense he was not willing to abandon the "insider" status his denomination represented. Machen willingly endured the consequences of maintaining this paradoxical position for four years, between 1932 and 1936, because he believed the confessional foundations of

the church were at stake. During that time, the last remnant of the conservative Presbyterian alliance disintegrated as Machen held out for a time when the Church would return to embrace orthodoxy wholeheartedly and shut out liberalism. Others could not or would not wait for such a time, as they grew tired of the fight or realized they were constitutionally incapable of schism. The IBPFM and the Machen trial were intimately intertwined, with the one giving rise to the other. Nevertheless, the Independent Board arose out of such a special set of circumstances—missions—touched such a raw nerve in the church, and got a response so far out of proportion to its own size that it must be considered in its own chapter. To Machen, the creation of the Independent Board was a rampart shielding orthodoxy from the bureaucratic mechanisms of the church. To much of the rest of the church and to Robert Speer, the Secretary of the PBFM, it was an irksome and symbolic, if not real, threat to the Church.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE FOREIGN MISSIONS CRISIS AND THE FORMATION OF THE INDEPENDENT BOARD FOR PRESBYTERIAN FOREIGN MISSIONS

> …Everywhere Christians are called upon to search the sources of their own faith. Let us indicate certain ways through which this desire may be realized, and in so doing illustrate more nearly what we conceive emerging as a permanent function of the mission in the modern world.
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> Almost everyone now agrees that religion cannot be handed on as a finished doctrine, without renewal of insight by those who undertake to transmit it. But the ways of this renewal are various, just as the meaning of Christianity may be realized in different ways, in thought, in application to conduct, in immediate personal experience. None of these ways can be safely omitted.
>
> *Re-Thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years (1932)*

The trustees and directors of Princeton Seminary began planning the seminary's reorganization in 1926 as a way of ending the strife between fundamentalists and their more irenic opponents. The plan eventually adopted in 1929 took the seminary's two boards—the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors—and made them one, effectively ending the conservative directors' theologically exclusive policy at the seminary. While the matter was still unsettled in 1927, J. Gresham Machen reacted strongly to the proposed changes in a pamphlet, "The Attack Upon Princeton Seminary." In it he asserted, with a cautious pessimism: "The end of Princeton Seminary will, in some sort, mark the end of an epoch in the history of the modern church and the

beginning of a new era in which new evangelical agencies must be formed."[181] In the mind of the most skeptical partisan, Machen's words seem a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, perhaps even a veiled threat of schism. To the most charitable Machenite, they are a wise prediction of a future that came to pass. Either way, however, these words mark Machen's entry into formal church politics. From this point forward, his words would be backed up by action. So it was that in 1929, when the trustees and directors reorganized Princeton, Machen promptly exited with a few of its faculty and founded Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, across the Delaware River.

The creation of a new seminary was not blatant schism, though.[182] The PCUSA had several seminaries and none of their graduates was prohibited from entering the ministry, provided they met the requirements set by the Church. In fact, as this chapter and the one following argue, Machen's most militant moves—all at the end of the Presbyterian Controversy—while certainly characteristically fundamentalistic, demonstrate a more subtle trait of fundamentalism than the obvious ones of schism or separation. Beginning with the establishment of Westminster, Machen sat firmly on the fence that separated independence from denominationalism. This may be taken as an instance of the paradox George Marsden noted of fundamentalists in this period, who alternated between identification with and rejection of their mainstream host culture.[183]

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[181] Machen, "The Attack Upon Princeton Seminary," (n.p., December, 1927), 33.

[182] Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 44, notes this.

[183] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 6-7. Marsden may be alluding to the same phenomenon in a slightly different way in *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 41. He says, concerning Machen and the IBPFM: "Again he [Machen] attempted to have all the benefits of both denominationalism and independence." At any rate, it is one of the goals of this thesis—particularly of this chapter and the one following—to elucidate Machen's behavior in light of this phenomenon. Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 151,

While Machen showed no ambivalence whatsoever in his attitudes toward the Yankee culture of the North, he was most certainly ambivalent in his relationship to the Church. In remaining in the church, Machen identified with denominational life and its insider status in American culture; in fighting the Church, however, and in making slow, incomplete moves toward separation from it, he rejected it as an outsider would. This ambivalence, and the militancy with which Machen and his allies tried to assert their views, was what finally shattered what was left of the conservative Presbyterian coalition. Machen was not a full-blown outsider, but was torn between allegiance to and estrangement from the PCUSA. Additionally, his was a drawn-out break with the church, not a cut-and-dry instance of schism, as William Weston's and Lefferts Loetscher's histories suggest. As such, it must not be evaluated hastily. This chapter considers the first breach, the formation of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM), which Machen and a few other militant conservatives organized in 1933. They formed the Independent Board because they thought the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Mission (PBFM)—the official missions board of the denomination—was too sanguine about the possibility that modernism was being preached in the missions field. It was controversial even among conservatives. What set off this particular episode of concern for missions was the publication in 1932 of the liberal *Re-Thinking Missions*, which was the report of a revisionist missions committee funded by John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

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also notes the tension. However, while he sees Machen as primarily a confessionalist, I take this insider/outsider tension as further reason to evaluate Machen as part of the fundamentalist movement of his day.

Before considering the IBPFM, however, it is necessary to take stock of the crisis in Protestant foreign missions in this period so as better to understand and situate where exactly the Independent Board sat in the grand scheme of things.

Missions, the sending of ministers and other Christian workers into the world for the purpose of proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel, was a prominent feature of nineteenth-century American evangelicalism. Like other evangelical endeavors of that period, foreign missions was a cooperative effort and in that sense interdenominational. The historian James Alan Patterson, a biographer of Robert E. Speer, Machen's rival in the missions controversy in particular, notes that social improvement and ecumenism were parts of the missionary movement that all evangelicals accepted immediately before the fundamentalist-modernist controversy erupted.[184] This interdenominationalism, if not social concern, was perhaps best exemplified in early evangelical foreign missions by the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM), which was founded in 1810 and represented a variety of denominations.[185] While many Presbyterians were involved with the ABCFM, the Old School Presbyterians were not—a fact that says much about how the Old School saw itself even a century before the missions crisis became part of the Presbyterian controversy.[186]

At the same time that they were interdenominational undertakings, the earliest evangelical foreign missions efforts held a critical view of indigenous religion and culture

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[184] James Alan Patterson, "The Loss of a Protestant Missionary Consensus: Foreign Missions and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Conflict," in Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk, eds., *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 76.

[185] William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 45.

[186] Ibid., 46.

in the foreign countries to which missions boards dispatched them. The fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3) implied not only that the first humans had fallen into sin, but that, as the ancestors of all humanity, they imputed their sin to them. Human nature and culture being depraved, and human efforts at salvation being inadequate, the Christian and evangelical understanding of the solution was that humanity needed divine rescue. This rescue mission came in the incarnation, ministry, and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the news of which was spread through the church's missions efforts. The logic of American evangelical missionaries was that people who had not heard the gospel and applied it to their culture were at a disadvantage and needed to hear from Christian missionaries, just as those missionaries had heard it at home.[187] However, as William Hutchison notes, the biblical motivations for missions were not the only ones. A thinner, humanitarian compassion for the benighted (rather than sinful) "lost souls in the thrall of the Devil," and the undoubted belief that God was using America for a special purpose "at the threshold of the millennial age" also motivated missions in the nineteenth century.[188]

This early consensus held through the end of the Civil War but, like evangelicalism as a whole in this period, it underwent a transformation and eventually cracked and fissured under the weight of some of the same issues that gave rise to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy.

American Protestant thought about foreign missions involved not only the consideration of American evangelicals' problems in their own backyard but also the new questions they found before them in their nation's rise to power. By 1900, as a

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[187] Ibid., 46-48.

[188] Ibid., 48.

consequence of a weak Spanish government, new naval technology, and a cohort of ambitious American men, the United States had become a world power. One historian of the geopolitical aspects of this period has said that "America would never again acquire so much territory as it did during those explosive five years between 1898 and 1903…A turning point had been reached in the way the United States related to the world."[189] The new peoples with whom America entered into formal, colonial relations included Filipinos, Guamanians, and Puerto Ricans. This was, of course, in addition to the various other peoples with whom evangelical missionaries had come into contact since the founding of the ABCFM.

A transformation in missions related to the dawn of America's imperial age was a conscious move toward missiologies that combined Christianization with civilization. The founding of schools and hospitals, run by the missionaries themselves, became part of the evangelical missionary enterprise. This was a break with the tradition associated with Rufus Anderson, the General Secretary of the ABCFM from the 1830s to the 1860s. Anderson did not want the preaching of the pure gospel to be bound up with efforts at social improvement that tied missionaries to their host cultures, even if these ventures proved highly practical (for example, the establishment of schools for teaching English). He promoted the autonomy of well-established native churches, and advocated a simple "go in, evangelize, plant churches, and get out" policy. In the period following Anderson's secretaryship, there was also less desire to cooperate in the ABCFM, as

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[189] Warren Zimmerman, *First Great Triumph: How Five Americans Made Their Country a World Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002), 8.

denominational missions boards and their missionaries preferred to have more control over their work.[190]

Although a common commitment to civilizing and preaching tended to obscure essential differences between conservative and liberal missionaries even into the first decade of the twentieth-century,[191] that consensus unraveled in the decade of World War One and the 1920s as questions about the proper emphasis and scope of foreign missions became associated with the theological divide between fundamentalism and liberalism. According to Hutchison, three issues provided the major points of difference: 1) premillenialism; 2) the indispensability of the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 16-20); and 3) the relationship between Christianity and other religions (i.e., whether Christianity was spiritually superlative or there was parity among all faiths). Fundamentalists varied in their views on the first of these, affirmed the second, and wholly rejected the possibility that Christians might learn something from other religions. Liberals tended to reject the first two, often sought common ground between Christianity and other religions, but usually still saw Christianity as the superlative faith.[192]

For purposes of understanding the place of Machen and the IBPFM in this emerging foreign missions crisis and the end of the Presbyterian controversy, there are actually three classes of response to the crisis that ought to be considered. Among liberals, there were those who wanted to change how Christian missionaries related to non-Christians in the lands they visited, and to emphasize the similarities of world

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[190] Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 77-78, 95-102.

[191] Ibid., 112-113, 118-119.

[192] Ibid., 112-113.

religions to Christianity and de-emphasize the conquest of Christianity. A second group included those like Speer, who wanted to maintain the missions *status quo* of the period before the crisis emerged. Finally, there were so-called faith missionaries and other independent missions groups that separated from denominational and other cooperative missions agencies and their sources of funding, and (in the case of faith missionaries) chose instead to rely on "God alone" as the basis of their efforts. A very brief consideration of this spectrum of missions positions demonstrates that the IBPFM, as an Independent yet Presbyterian organization, and Machen, as one of its founders, do not qualify either as denominational or as utterly nondenominational, interdenominational, or independent in their sympathies. The IBPFM, as a missionary agency, and Machen, as its leaders straddled the line separating the fundamentalist independency of organizations such as those that supported faith missions from the traditional structures and aims of denominational missions boards. It was compromise that maintained the tension between being inside and outside the Protestant establishment of the period.

The species of missions that was farthest removed from the controversy over the Independent Board was, ironically, the independent fundamentalist and faith missions group. Missionaries associated with this group eschewed denominational associations and boards, not so much because the fundamentalists were losing the battle in the denominations as because denominational missions, in their view, required too much preparatory education, moved too slowly, and were not emphasizing the pure gospel enough.

An excellent example of this type was W. Cameron Townsend (1896-1982), an extremely successful American organizer of faith missions in Latin America. As a young

man studying at Occidental College in Los Angeles (today's BIOLA), Townsend was aware that he could finish college, go to seminary, and become a missionary supported by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Instead, inflamed by the activist Student Volunteer Movement and the biography of J. Hudson Taylor—an early leader of faith missions—he decided for the *vita activa*.[193] There would be no formal theological preparation or a test to confirm his orthodoxy and fitness to become a missionary—both of which were criteria that Machen and even Speer would require in their capacities as boards missions organizers. As William Svelmoe, Townsend's biographer, puts it, "Townsend was much happier doing something than preparing to do something."[194]

Robert E. Speer, representative of the second group, held to the authority and rectitude of the missions outlook of the pre-liberal, pre-fundamentalist era. Hutchison fairly describes Speer as the "man in the middle" in the debates between liberals and fundamentalists in the Presbyterian Controversy, especially where this debate affected foreign missions.[195] Speer, as secertary of the PBFM, attempted to shield it from the innovations of both separatists and liberal revisionists. He saw both groups as a threat to the unity and purpose of the PBFM. In April 1929, when Machen wrote Speer a letter questioning the "humanitarian" emphases and orthodoxy of PBFM missionaries—well before *Re-Thinking Missions* appeared and the IBPFM was formed—Speer replied (in keeping with the two-pronged civilizing and Christianizing view of missions) that "it is

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[193] William Lawrence Svelmoe, *A New Vision for Missions: William Cameron Townsend, The Wycliffe Bible Translators, and the Culture of Early Evangelical Faith Missions, 1917-1945* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 7-14.

[194]Ibid., 14.

[195] Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 147.

of course possible to divide the first [humanitarianism] from the second [evangelism] but not the second from the first." "…In our [the PBFM's] policy all philanthropic work is tributary to and associated with the primary aim of evangelization."[196] Similarly, guarding himself and the Board on the left flank, he proved to be almost as critical of the theology of *Re-Thinking Missions* as was Machen.[197] Caught in this theologically conservative but non-militant middle, Speer and others of his sort were discovering more and more every year that the ecclesiastical mood of the 1920s and 30s tended to swallow mediators whole rather than admire or exalt them.

The third outlook on missions that existed on the eve of the formation of the IBPFM was what can be called the liberal missiology. For all of its talk of inclusivism and tolerance, the liberal movement had its own exclusive and intolerant orthodoxies.[198] Such is an inevitable feature of any individual, movement, or institution that makes claims to truth. In the case of the liberal missiology of *Re-Thinking Missions*, what was excluded was the "narrow" concept of missions that held sway in one form or another for the first one hundred years of American evangelical missions.[199] This was evangelization through preaching and the building of churches, and the associated outflow of material aid in the form of schools, hospitals, etc. *Re-Thinking Missions* asserted a contrary formulation of missions:

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[196] Robert E. Speer to J. Gresham Machen, April 30, 1929, Speer Papers (hereafter, SP).

[197] Speer tried to see what good he could in its suggestions about methods, however. Ibid., 169-170. Hutchison bases his account of Speer's view of *Re-Thinking Missions* on Speer's book-length response *"Re-Thinking Missions" Examined* (1933).

[198] Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 171, recognizes Speer for making this point.

[199] Hence the subtitle of *Re-Thinking Missions*: "A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years."

> We believe, then, that the time has come to set the educational and other philanthropic aspects of mission work free from organized responsibility to the work of conscious and direct evangelization. We must be willing to give largely without any preaching; to cooperate with non-Christian agencies for social improvement; and to foster the initiative of the Orient in defining the ways in which we shall be invited to help.[200]

The chairman who directed the committee that issued *Re-Thinking Missions* was the Harvard philosopher William Ernest Hocking (1873-1966). A student of the American idealist Josiah Royce (1855-1916), Hocking had broader purposes and a more utilitarian vision for Christianity than traditional missions allowed for. He wanted missions to be a program for discovering and sharing a world faith that could counter secularism in foreign lands.[201] In accordance with the philosophy of pragmatism, he advocated pragmatic solutions to the problems that stood in the way of this goal. "…The ways of this renewal are various, just as the meaning of Christianity may be realized in different ways, in thought, in application to conduct, in immediate personal experience."[202] One of the "permanent functions" (as the report called them) of the new missions was "promoting world unity through the spread of the universal elements of religion; enlivening the churches at home and abroad through rapport with each other."[203]

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[200] The Commission of Appraisal and William Ernest Hocking, *Re-Thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After one Hundred Years* (New York: Harpers, 1932), 70.

[201] Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 159.

[202] The Commission of Appraisal and William Ernest Hocking, *Re-Thinking Missions*, 45.

[203] Ibid., 28.

Among Presbyterians, the liberal who most famously stood by this new vision for missions was not a theologian or even a minister, but a hugely popular novelist. She was the daughter of American Presbyterian missionaries in China—where she was raised—and a missionary herself, and her name was Pearl Sydenstricker Buck. Buck called the report "right in its every conclusion."[204] Her assessment shocked both Machen and Speer; it put the latter under great political pressure to get her to resign, until she did so freely in 1933.[205] As historian Grant Wacker has shown, Buck's (1892-1973) defense of the Committee of Appraisal's findings came at a time in her life that coincided with the "waning of the missionary impulse"[206]—a time when mainline missions as a whole was moving away from an evangelistic conception of itself toward a view that saw Christianity as an expression of pan-cultural good will and human ideals, and its missionaries as workers who worked for the fulfillment of those aims in the field.[207]

The outlook of *Re-Thinking Missions*, combined with Buck's public, unreserved defense of the book, was the final straw for conservatives who had been questioning the orthodoxy of foreign missionaries since at least the early '20s.[208] In 1933, Machen, with other fundamentalists' backing, moved to have something done to ensure the soundness

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[204] Quoted in Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 167.

[205] Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 205-206.

[206] Grant Wacker, "The Waning of the Missionary Impulse: The Case of Pearl S. Buck," in Daniel H. Bays and Grant Wacker, eds., *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home: Explorations in North American Cultural History* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2003), 191-205.

[207] Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 175.

[208] Ibid.,

of missionaries, particularly those in East Asia.[209] Machen, and those for whom he spoke, wanted to be sure that the monetary offerings of evangelical, "Bible-believing Christians," were supporting orthodox missionaries; they felt such contributors had the right to be guaranteed that their funds were being used in such a way.[210] It was a matter of honesty not only among fellow believers, but also in the relation of the church toward God. The failure of fundamentalists to secure such a guarantee cleared a path that, when Machen and others trod down it, began to divide the conservative party in Presbyterianism.

The first step taken toward getting a formal redress of these grievances was an unsuccessful overture that Machen made to New Brunswick Presbytery in April, urging the General Assembly of 1933 "to take care to elect to positions on the Board of Foreign Missions only persons who are fully aware of the danger in which the Church stands and who are determined to insist upon such verities as [the essential and necessary articles underscored by the General Assemblies of 1910, 1916, and 1923]."[211] The overture succeeded in the conservative Philadelphia Presbytery, however, and subsequently received a hearing before the General Assembly of 1933, opening on May 25 and meeting in Columbus, Ohio.[212] That did not turn out well for the fundamentalists, though.

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[209] One can see not just from the Buck case but from the other content in Machen's pamphlet, "Modernism and the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.," (Philadelphia: By the author, 1933) that East Asia and China in particular was a major concern of fundamentalists in the missions crisis. See esp. 65-110.

[210] Machen, "Modernism and the Board of Foreign Missions," 12.

[211] Machen, "Modernism and the Board of Foreign Missions," 1.

[212] Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 206.

As the voice of Presbyterian fundamentalism in this period, *Christianity Today*, gloomily reported,

> The 1933 Assembly has come and gone—and all things continue as they were. Nothing was done to remedy the evils in the Church that cry aloud for redress….The Overture from the Presbytery of Philadelphia relative to the Board of Foreign Missions was rejected, the Modernist-Indifferentist [i.e., moderate] party was continued in power and still dominates practically all the Boards and Agencies of the Church.[213]

Specifically, what transpired at the Assembly, as the article bitterly notes, was the triumph of a moderate, inclusive conservatism over a fundamentalist, exclusive conservatism. That triumph had its representative in the longstanding Secretary of the PBFM, Speer, confidence in whom the Assembly affirmed. While the overture represented fundamentalists' distrust of Speer and served further to alienate him from their cause, despite his essential agreement with their theology, *Christianity Today* correctly recognized that, earlier in the century, he and other conservatives had had more in common and gotten along better:

> Time was when this conservative party dominated the Church,--until there grew up within it, and at last separated from it, an "indifferentist wing"—composed of those who protest their orthodoxy at every available opportunity, yet who, in fact if not by word, have by joining hands with the liberal or modernist party,

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[213] "The General Assembly," *Christianity Today* 4 (Mid-June 1933), 1. N.B.: This periodical is not the same as the one known so well today. The current *Christianity Today*, founded by Billy Graham, began circulating in 1956.

> consented to the idea of an inclusive church, in which the conservatives shall be a barely tolerated minority, if even that.[214]

Behind this intramural dispute among theologically conservative Presbyterians was a disagreement about the proper place and mode of tolerance in the church. As *Christianity Today* said, one month before the disastrous 145th Assembly in May,

> In representing the fundamentalist as a conservative become militant it seems to us that the *Christian Century* has complimented the fundamentalist. In our estimate at least a pacifist conservative is not a very commendable figure.[215]

In other words, militancy was the watchword of the fundamentalist group, which was now completely shorn of moderates by the missions controversy.

The overture in Columbus not only was a final, open breach with moderates, but also was followed closely by the formation of the controversial Independent Board—a board which fundamentalists felt *would* guarantee the orthodoxy of missionaries and the safe allocation of funds. The formation of the "new Board," as Machen and others like Roy T. Brumbaugh, Samuel D. Craig (editor of *Christianity Today*), H. McAllister Griffiths (managing editor, *Christianity Today*), and others called it, "could not be done without a feeling of deep regret that it *had* to be done, and without a silent prayer to God that He would bless those whose only desire was to be loyal to His truth."[216] The goal was to keep a low profile and serve conservative Presbyterians who felt slighted by the

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[214] Ibid., 4.

[215] "A Conservative But Not a Fundamentalist," *Christianity Today* 3 (Mid-April 1933), 1.

[216] H. McAllister Griffiths, "The 145th Assembly—New Board Announced," *Christianity Today* 4 (Mid-June 1933), 13.

PBFM. The article reporting the formation of the IBPFM pleaded, "It is not intended that the new Board shall interfere in the slightest with the support of sound missionaries now on the field. Designated gifts for such purposes will, of course, continue to be made through the existing Board."[217] Essentially, its existence provided ultra-conservative Presbyterians a way to earmark their donations for conservative missionaries. The article concluded strongly but carefully that, "one may rightly compromise concerning many things—persons, policies, methods, so long as they do not involve surrender of principle. But the man who asks another to surrender truth for expediency's sake, to compromise truth, is asking him to sell his soul for a mess of pottage."[218] Apparently, so long as principles were kept center-stage, compromise was not inherently dangerous. The PBFM was asking Presbyterians to surrender principles that ought not to be surrendered, and thus compromise with it was out of the question.

The above comments from *Christianity Today* demonstrate that the founders of the IBPFM were justifying their actions by appealing to a single principle: faithfulness to traditional Presbyterian doctrine. For some of the fundamentalists, that principle was a powerful motivation for separation from the denominational missions board. However, behind the question of faithfulness lay the issue of separation, as both George Marsden and Joel Carpenter have noted;[219] and, to complicate the matter further, behind the separation question was the problem facing all fundamentalists in this period: were they

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[217] Ibid., 14.

[218] Ibid.

[219] See note 11, chapter 1, above.

insiders or outsiders in American life and in their denominations? Was separation from part or the whole of the PCUSA required to maintain that faithfulness?

As the IBPFM materialized and began to have consequences in the wider world of the PCUSA, Machen and his fundamentalist allies gave assorted answers to these questions—answers that eventually divided them. In subtle contrast to Marsden's and Carpenter's evaluations, the argument here is that, in founding the IBPFM, Machen was not claiming outsider status, nor was he irreversibly on the course toward ecclesiastical separation. Even when he was brought to trial he was not one-hundred-percent schismatic. Rather, he continued to send mixed signals to great effect: he was a part of the denomination yet separate from it; under its authority and yet not; an insider and an outsider. Understandably, since he would not concede either to separation or to the official missions board of the church, Machen's cohorts had to interpret and respond to this tension for themselves. One of the first to do so clearly was Clarence Macartney.

Macartney, a minister in Pittsburgh and a close second to Machen in terms of militancy, was certainly concerned with faithfulness to Christ. To Harry Emerson Fosdick's 1922 sermon, he replied with an equally vigorous fundamentalist sermon: "Shall Unbelief Win?" However, while sharing their principles, he disagreed with the fundamentalists of *Christianity Today* that the only uncompromising response to the decision of the 1933 General Assembly was to form a "new Board." As Bradley Longfield notes, Macartney was averse to schism for reasons stemming from his upbringing.[220] Macartney, not willing either to secede or to give up his principles sent

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[220] Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 106, 206-207.

Machen a telegram saying, "Do not use my name as joining in new board letter follows";[221] but also wrote Griffiths, before the General Assembly of 1933 met,

> …The need is great to reconstruct our Foreign Board, and if my name will add any strength to our cause at the General Assembly, I shall be willing to have it presented. This, of course, is with the understanding that the elections are made in the usual way. How could a new Board be organized? The only method of reform seems to me to put in loyal members as we have opportunity.[222]

Macartney shared every one of Machen's opinions concerning the "indifferentist" attitude of the Board of Foreign Missions save for one: that separation from it was necessary. Even though Macartney felt that the PBFM was growing wayward, that did not mean he thought schism was the only solution. He did not share the pragmatic views of liberals or moderates, but, when faced with the issue of separation, he sided with the church, choosing to work for changes in it from within. His commitment to the denomination was fully compatible with his commitment to traditional Christianity. In other words, he was willing to maintain an outsider perspective while remaining within the PCUSA fold.

It is important to note that other conservative Presbyterians, too, had reservations either about the most militant fundamentalists' conclusions about the hopelessness of the PBFM or about the formation of the IBPFM. As James Patterson notes, Donald Grey Barnhouse, a fundamentalist minister located in the heart of conservative

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[221] Clarence E. Macartney to J. Gresham Machen, telegram, 27 May 1933, Machen Archives (hereafter, MA).

[222] Clarence E. Macartney to H. McAllister Griffiths, May 17, 1933, MA. C.E. Macartney to J. Gresham Machen, May 18, 1933, MA, is of the same effect.

Presbyterianism—Philadelphia—remarked, after visiting Asia, "I am personally convinced that the vast majority of our missionary body is personally devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ."[223] A former director of Princeton Seminary, Frank H. Stevenson, agreed with Machen, Macartney, and others that the formation of Westminster Seminary in 1929 was an appropriate response to the reorganization of Princeton. But in response to a query from H. McAllister Griffiths—who was helping Machen recruit for the IBPFM—he wrote

> Please do not use my name as a member of the proposed new Board of Foreign Missions. The plan may work admirably but I cannot contemplate for a moment taking on the responsibility….It seems to me most unwise for the Westminster leaders to be the head and front of the men who are trying to get on the Board of Foreign Missions, or to set themselves up as a new Board. We are monopolizing things too much and giving the appearance of being in this thing in order to grasp power. If we cannot name anybody but ourselves for these positions now, we had better wait until we can find men outside our Board and faculty, even if we lose some of our momentum….Let's keep ourselves, if we can, in the background.[224]

In voicing concern about the fact that the Westminster leadership was almost identical to the group spearheading the formation of the IBPFM, Stevenson foreshadowed a crisis that was to occur during the two following years.

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[223] "Report of Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse concerning His Visit to Presbyterian Foreign Mission Stations in Asia," *Presbyterian* 105 (October 31, 1935), 5, qtd. in James A. Patterson, "Robert E. Speer, J. Gresham Machen, and the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions," *American Presbyterians* 64 (1986), 66.

[224] Frank H. Stevenson to H. McAllister Griffiths, May 18, 1933, MA.

The formation of the IBPFM, then, elicited a variety of responses from self-proclaimed Presbyterian fundamentalists. The differences among these responses were enough to begin to divide the conservative Presbyterian coalition, specifically because that awful possibility—schism—colored the entire situation. Behind the issue of separation, however, was the issue of whether these representatives of traditional Christian belief could survive or be effective in a denomination that was not dedicated solely to those beliefs. Changes in theology, the world stage of foreign missions, and modern American culture were forcing these men to evaluate where and how their beliefs were situated in the world. All of them agreed that the church was vulnerable to modern culture, but, beyond this point, they were not agreed about which was the proper path to take toward solving this conflict. They could remain reluctant insiders, become awkward, separatist outsiders, or, as the IBPFM seemed to allow some to do, embrace the paradox of vital, traditional faith coexisting with modern culture.

The last of these was what Machen decided to do. For the moment, in 1933, the IBPFM was so small (as it would remain), so peculiar, and so new that it was able to live solely on the energy in its own cells, so to speak. It was an inspiration to (relatively) many conservatives—not just those associated with Westminster. For the fundamentalist Presbyterians who participated in it or approved it, it was a sign that something was being done not necessarily to separate completely from the indifferent leadership of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., but at least to protest and challenge it.[225] In other

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[225] This is suggested by correspondence either congratulating Machen on the formation of the IBPFM or asking for copies of his pamphlet, "Modernism and the Board of Foreign Missions: John A. Bell to J. Gresham Machen, May 28, 1933, telegram; Olive Chattaway to J. Gresham Machen, June 10, 1933; J. Gresham Machen to W.S. McIlwaine, July 15, 1933. In this last letter Machen writes, "I suppose I have

words, they saw it as an ingenious way to identify with the denominational establishment while also condemning the changes and accommodations it was making in response to modernity; in the IBPFM, they could be insiders and outsiders simultaneously. It was a perfectly tenable position. The board's awkward status, youthful vigor and sense of invincibility would not last long, though.

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received over a thousand letters asking me for copies—some of them for many copies." Apparently, not all of this correspondence was archived or even kept long by Machen himself.

CHAPTER SIX: THE INDEPENDENT BOARD UNDER FIRE, MACHEN ON TRIAL, AND A PARADOX RESOLVED

> No, the lesson of experience in these matters is only too plain. Such movements do not stop half way.
>
> *J. Gresham Machen (1927), referring to the plan to reorganize the administration of Princeton Seminary*

In 1923, when Machen published *Christianity and Liberalism*, he was primarily a scholar-theologian specializing in the New Testament. That was his vocation. A decade later, his vocation had expanded. He was not only a scholar and faculty member at Westminster Theological Seminary, but also an administrator there and a significant source of its funding. Around the time of the General Assembly of 1933, Machen and others planned the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. For Machen, this new endeavor entailed assuming its presidency and other organizational duties. As Machen's friend, Caspar Wistar Hodge—who stayed at Princeton after the reorganization of 1929—reminded him in April of that year, "B.B.W. [Benjamin Warfield] said long ago that things were going to be much worse before they got better…."[226] Although Machen wouldn't live to see many "better" days, Hodge was right about things getting worse. The day after the first meeting of the group that was to organize the IBPFM Machen wrote his brother, Arthur W. Machen, Jr., in Baltimore:

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[226] Caspar Wistar Hodge to J. Gresham Machen, April 25th, 1933, MA.

> I have been having a perfectly terrific time, lecturing twice a day at Jackson, Mississippi,….This came at just the wrong time when I ought to have been here working night and day in preparation for the first meeting of the new Board of Missions yesterday. When I got back to Philadelphia I found a perfectly terrific pressure of work awaiting me. The meeting lasted all day yesterday, and the results were not quite as large as I had hoped. A vast deal remains to be done. There is no reason for too much discouragement about the matter, yet I do feel somewhat appalled. Tomorrow I have an all-day meeting of the Presbyterian League of Faith in New York and a terrific rush after it to an installation service where I preach the sermon. Then another installation sermon the following night at a different place. There is a veritable mountain of unanswered correspondence awaiting me here….I have bitten off more than I can possibly chew this year.[227]

Even from such a simple letter to a dear brother, it is clear what Machen thought he was doing at this point in his career. He was working for the church: doing routine work like installing new ministers and attending conferences, as well as not-so-routine work—like forming a new independent missions board. Although he was not known for having many obvious affinities with the fundamentalist movement of his day, he regularly showed the ambivalence that many fundamentalists had toward the existing denominational structure, which was the sense that they were both a part of it and yet somehow alienated from it. Machen felt at home enough in the PCUSA to continue to participate regularly in the installation of its ministers; yet he also claimed that its Board of Foreign Missions was abrogating its responsibilities, and that

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[227] J. Gresham Machen to Arthur W. Machen, Jr., June 28, 1933, MA.

"Modernism…is…deeply embedded in the entire machinery of the Presbyterian Church."[228] After the 1933 General Assembly, Machen maintained an especially high level of tension between himself and the PCUSA—behavior representative of the insider-outsider paradox that George Marsden has noted of fundamentalism in this period.[229]

Even before the IBPFM was formally established, Machen's plan for the extra-denominational missions board was enough to alienate some of his associates and dampen their enthusiasm for pursuing conservative Presbyterianism as he was pursuing it. They leaned toward a commitment to the denomination, or at least toward efforts to reform it from within. This was demonstrated in the preceding chapter. From 1934 to 1936, the heat was on full blast. In the last two years of the Presbyterian controversy, the PCUSA used the denomination's system of courts to challenge Machen's and the IBPFM's methods. Ultimately, this added pressure drove away a few more conservatives who were not willing to risk a division of the church and its institutions, leaving a small remnant that would—and did—accept a schismatic exit of conservatives from the church. Machen, ever the leader, of course held out to the last. Even then, his beliefs and actions regarding his place in the life of the PCUSA remained inconsistent and paradoxical. In continuing to resist challenges to the IBPFM, Machen took a definite outsider approach in his conflict with the church. In submitting to trial by a church commission that he did not believe was legitimate, he implicitly affirmed that the church had some degree of authority over him, and that he was, despite his actions, still a part of it.

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[228] J. Gresham Machen, "Three Observations about the Assembly," *Christianity Today* 4 (Mid June 1933), 5.

[229] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 7.

The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions first convened on June 27, 1933, but did not formally adopt a constitution until October 17, 1933. At the October 1933 meeting, the Presbyterian laymen and ministers present decided to install the following men as the board's officers: Rev. J. Gresham Machen, president; Rev. Merril T. MacPherson, vice president; Rev. H. McAllister Griffiths, secretary; and Mr. Murray F. Thompson, treasurer.[230] The group present was culled largely from the institutional centers of Presbyterian fundamentalism: Westminster Theological Seminary and *Christianity Today*. Griffiths was managing editor of *Christianity Today*, and Samuel Craig served as its editor. Machen and Rev. Paul Woolley were faculty at Westminster Seminary; Craig was one of the seminary's trustees. Frank H. Stevenson's concern that the IBPFM might appear as a power grab apparently did have basis in truth. However, a surprising feature of the constitution of the board was that a few women were present at the meeting and given positions.[231]

By the time of the October meeting it had already been decided by the temporary executive committee, which organized the new board in June, to make Rev. Charles J. Woodbridge, a missionary in West Cameroon, Africa, the general secretary of the IBPFM. The appointment of Woodbridge was just one point where the issue of money would arise in the affairs of the Independent Board. The minutes of the October meeting record that those present agreed to allocate $500.00 for the travel and moving expenses

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[230] "Minutes of the Meeting of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions Held October 17, 1933," 1, MA.

[231] Ibid.

incurred by Woodbridge and his family.[232] Samuel Craig, who had been serving as temporary treasurer on the temporary executive committee between June and October, had already received $851.16 on the board's behalf from donors and other contributors.[233] Considering that this was 1933 and the height of the Great Depression, it is surprising that it could get any money. The IBPFM treasurer's report for the period April 5 to October 13, 1934 indicates continued success. The board's balance on April 5 was $1,283.10; by October 13 it had receipts amounting to $7,072.73 and, after all disbursements, retained a new balance of $2,024.31.[234] By way of comparison, Christopher Schlect's research shows, based on figures available in the *Minutes* of the PCUSA's General Assembly, that between 1929 and 1936 the total receipts of the PCUSA decreased. Specifically, between 1932 and 1936, giving to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions decreased from $967,327.39 to $597,092.68. However, the numbers for these years also indicate that the rate of decrease was at least decreasing itself; the reduction in giving was stabilizing.[235] Even the most unsympathetic observer of the Independent Board would have been forced to admit that it was taking only a few fundamentalist pennies for every Presbyterian dollar earned. Schlect's contention that for the PBFM, "elimination of the Independent Board was a matter of survival,"[236] if

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[232] Ibid.

[233] Ibid., 3.

[234] "The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions—Treasurer's Report for the period from April 5 to October 13, 1934 (as audited by Lybrand, Ross Bros. and Montgomery) with Summary of Contributions," MA.

[235] Christopher R. Schlect, "J. Gresham Machen, Roy T. Brumbaugh, and the Presbyterian Schism of 1934-1936," 89.

[236] Ibid., 88.

understood in terms of ledgers, dollars, and cents, is vastly overstated. If his statement is understood in the sense that economics is guided by motivations other than reasonable desires for fiscal soundness—if it is guided also by irrational covetousness and jealously—then Schlect is absolutely right: the IBPFM was a threat indeed.

Looking at the IBPFM's bottom line is not the best way to see how it shaped the end of the Presbyterian conflict, however. Neither its size nor its influence, relative to that of the PBFM, were ever very significant. Rather, it was a nuisance and a threat simply because it existed—and *professed to exist independently*. But, in fact, it did not exist wholly independently. Its semi-independence was the source of what little power it had. Eventually, this ingenious, fence-sitting, ambiguous quality proved to be too much for PCUSA executives, the majority of General Assembly delegates, and even some of Machen's closest allies. As Machen himself wrote in 1923 in *Christianity and Liberalism*, this was not an age for quietly settling issues or seeking "'peace without victory'; one side or the other must win."[237] By 1933, even the liberal and moderate factions in the church seem to have taken this view, and they wanted Machen and other fundamentalists to be clear about whether they were in or out of the denomination.

Some of general secretary Charles Woodbridge's comments about the position of the Independent Board illustrate the ambiguity on several levels. In the first place, the Independent Board fostered ambiguity in the relations of its members and missionaries to the primary denomination concerned with its existence, the PCUSA.

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[237] J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923; repr., Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 2009), 5.

The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions is an agency established for the quickening of missionary zeal and the promotion of truly Biblical and truly Presbyterian foreign missions throughout the world. It is independent in that it is not responsible, *as an organization*, to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., or to any other ecclesiastical body.[238]

"As an organization" the Independent Board was indeed independent. Woodbridge was exactly right. However, as individuals, IBPFM board officers and the missionaries they sent out and funded were mostly—though by no means necessarily—members of the PCUSA and thus subject to its laws. Woodbridge notes the reality of dual membership, though not the problems that might arise from it. "The Rev. and Mrs. Henry W. Coray are the first missionaries appointed by the Independent Board. Mr. Coray has been for several years the pastor of a flourishing Presbyterian Church in West Pittston, Pennsylvania." "The Rev. R. Heber McIlwaine is our third missionary….For over a year he has been Assistant Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, PA.,….[239] The problems associated with the dual allegiance of Independent Board members and missionaries would heighten after 1934. It is very telling that the General Assembly meeting in that year ordered PCUSA-ordained *members* of the Independent Board to resign; it did not order the dissolution of the IBPFM itself. The potential effects of the order were clear, though. The Independent Board was a creature of PCUSA members; if those board officers and missionaries resigned, the Independent Board would cease to be

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[238] Charles J. Woodbridge, "The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions: A Statement as to its Organization and Program," (Philadelphia, PA: by the author, 1934), 2. Emphasis added.

[239] Charles J. Woodbridge, "The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions: Side-lights upon its Work and Witness," (1934), 3, MA.

anything but an organization that existed on paper. The fact that donations to the Independent Board, given during the collections of tithes and offerings during worship in PCUSA congregations, also highlighted the problem of how independent this independent organization was or could be. Whether the IBPFM was independent, it was difficult to say. If understood solely at the organizational level, then the IBPFM undoubtedly was independent of other organizations; if understood at the level of the individuals who participated in it—as members, missionaries or as donors—then it most certainly was not wholly independent of the PCUSA.

Another point of ambiguity was not a matter of church order but one of identity. Were those associated with or sympathetic to the Independent Board more concerned about remaining distinctively Presbyterian, or were they more concerned about the "fundamentals of the faith," as they shared those with Baptist Christians, Methodist Christians, and others? Woodbridge's pamphlet "The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions," printed in 1934, calls the board "an agency established for…truly Biblical and truly Presbyterian foreign missions…."[240] Its members and missionaries were Presbyterians. However, later in the pamphlet he reports a broader base of support for their work, which suggests its affinities with the broader interdenominational fundamentalist movement of the day:

> From many quarters of the globe words of encouragement have been pouring into our office. Missionary after missionary has expressed his joy over the step which has been taken. The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, through its organ the

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[240] Woodbridge, "The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions: A Statement," 2.

> "Moody Monthly," heralds the movement as a Revival within the Presbyterian Church. On missionary day at the Institute Founder's Week Conference, when the work of the Independent Board was presented, an audience of fifteen hundred persons broke into applause. Such is the reception which our venture is experiencing.[241]

Woodbridge goes on to note the approval and support of the Christian and Missionary Alliance and the *Sunday School Times*, two other important fundamentalist institutions of the period.[242] This interdenominational base of support for the IBPFM prefigured the liberal-conservative (as opposed to denominational) structure of religion that characterized post-World War II America.[243] Finally, the tension between a distinctly Presbyterian and a broader fundamentalist identity is evident in some of the comments Woodbridge received about the Independent Board. An unnamed candidate for the board, writing from Korea, said he wanted to apply for the IBPFM "because this Board stands faithful to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, and if I am appointed under this Board, I shall not lose my Presbyterian identity." The answer to the question of how the two related to each other—Presbyterian identity and "fundamental doctrines"—was not clearly articulated. Similarly, another candidate in Pennsylvania, wrote, "I am perfectly in accord with the position it [the IBPFM] has taken. I know of no other Board I have confidence in, faith missions excepted. I prefer to be in active Presbyterian

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[241] Ibid., 6.

[242] Ibid. For information on the CMA and the *Sunday School Times* see Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 70, 75, 96, 202-203.

[243] The standard work on religion in postwar America remains, after a quarter century, Robert Wuthnow's *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

work."[244] Apparently, just as the Presbyterian-raised Cameron Townsend found himself opting for faith missions instead of work organized by a denominational missions board, other Presbyterians were making an opposite choice in going in for the IBPFM. They operated somewhere in the space between a sympathy for what "pure-gospel" faith missionaries were trying to accomplish and a desire to remain dedicated to and organized in accordance with distinctively Presbyterian principles.

The final ambiguity that is apparent in the life and operation of the IBPFM in this period arises from how IBPFM members saw themselves in relation to the changes happening within American Presbyterianism—in this case changes in missions. This concern was different from the questions of independence or Presbyterian identity discussed above, although it was closely related to the latter of these. Their belief was that Presbyterians, by continuing to cooperate with the PBFM, were deserting their heritage. Above all, this was a claim about the history of their church. How could their church abandon them? How could they have found themselves on the outside, so to speak, of mainstream historical developments, when for a century they had been on the inside? Their answer was that the church and its missions board had become apostate.

The IBPFM was in the unenviable situation of having to justify itself as the true heir of Presbyterian foreign missions. The Independent Board said that the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions was not doing what missionaries ought to do or had done in the past. Woodbridge wrote in 1934,

The situation which the Independent Board is seeking to face is that there are:

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[244] Both comments appear in Woodbridge, "The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions: Side-lights," 6, MA.

> Contributors who have not been able conscientiously to give to the official Board.
>
> Young Presbyterians who wish to retain their Presbyterian heritage, but who cannot conscientiously apply for service under the official Board.
>
> One of our chief purposes is to bring together these two groups, that Biblical Presbyterian Foreign Missions may never die.[245]

The idea of heritage was not understood just in terms of Presbyterian polity, but in terms of what the church had done historically in the realm of foreign missions. The Independent Board, on the basis of its own investigations, those of other Presbyterians, and the publication of *Re-Thinking Missions*, considered the situation of and attitude toward missions in the 1930s to be a far cry from what it was even a quarter century earlier. In 1934, a missionary with the PCUSA in India wrote Woodbridge. His comment is a fitting conclusion to this exploration of the ambiguities involved in the life of the Independent Board. He said,

> Yesterday we received an official visit from the ….Secretary of all the Missions of our Board (Presby. U.S.A.) in India…The conversation from the first was about basic questions of our faith…The difference in our views was fundamental, he appealing to 'experimental' Christianity and I to God's Word for final authority……He nevertheless admits that my belief and position were those of the Presbyterian Church and Board twenty-five years ago.[246]

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[245] Woodbridge, "The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions: A Statement," 6-7. Bold type in original.

[246] Woodbridge, "The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions: Side-lights," 8, MA.

Regardless of whether the secretary of missions in India said this, there is value in this comment. The sentiment behind this statement from a supporter of the Independent Board to its general secretary is one of indignant shock. It might have been humorous to this missionary (if it weren't so tragic to him) that someone who was responsible for overseeing Presbyterian missions in India could admit that, in only twenty-five years, the views of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions had changed substantially. Twenty-five years earlier, before the fundamentalist-modernist controversy and the foreign missions crisis had peaked, denominational missions boards were more insistent that the gospel should be proclaimed exclusively, even if this entailed offending the religious sensibilities of missionized peoples. The Independent Board looked back on that heritage and that era of missions fondly, but it could not continue to endorse the present PBFM—the one than countenanced Pearl Buck and the Laymen's Commission. For the fundamentalists associated with the Independent Board, there was nothing ambiguous about how the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions felt about its heritage. It clearly was turning away from it.

How independent was the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions? How distinctively Presbyterian was it? How in harmony with the history of the church was it? The Independent Board answered these questions thus: "Wholly independent, fully Presbyterian, and totally committed to missionaries' propagation of the faith once delivered." Not just the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions but the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. begged to differ. As early as November 1933, Dr. John McDowell, the moderator of that year's General Assembly spoke out in favor of the church's authority.

> …If any minister, elder, deacon, or communicant decides to remain in the denomination, while they have the right to work for any changes in doctrine, in government or in work which they desire, they must work for these changes in harmony with the constitutional procedure; and while they are so working for them, they must be loyal to the doctrine, government and work of the Church as embodied in the local Church and in the Boards and Agencies of the General Assembly. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. stands for liberty, but it must not be forgotten that it is liberty within the law and within loyalty.[247]

Mention of Machen or other members of the Independent Board is conspicuously absent, even though it was to them McDowell was referring. The phrase "decides to remain in the denomination" is particularly pregnant; the full sentence is almost a conditional version of the question many PCUSA churchmen must have been asking themselves: "Are they"—are Machen and the Independent Board—"deciding to be in this denomination?" Part of the tension between the IBPFM and the church administration was that Machen would have argued—and *did* argue, in his trial—that he was exercising his liberties "within the law and within loyalty." The controversy in the church over the actions of IBPFM members was not just a legal contest, but a contest over the mantle of Presbyterianism. Even though IBPFM members were sparring with the institutional church, they believed they represented true Presbyterianism. Presumably, the PCUSA

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[247] John McDowell, "John McDowell's Statement Concerning Membership in the Presbyterian Church in the USA," *The Presbyterian* 103 (November 16, 1933), 8. Reprinted as Note 11 in Edwin H. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940; repr., Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1992), 217.

executives who laid these allegations on the IBPFM's doorstep believed that they represented Presbyterianism.

Things hadn't changed by January of the following year, when the PBFM issued "A Statement Regarding the Evangelical Loyalty of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A." Its opening paragraph reads, in part,

> There is no work more deeply loved and trusted by the Presbyterian Church than its foreign missionary work, but it is evident from communications and reports which have come to the Board that there are some earnest members of the Church who have been disturbed by unwarranted representations with regard to the evangelical loyalty of the Presbyterian Church as a whole and especially its foreign missionaries and foreign mission agencies.[248]

Again, Machen and the Independent Board receive no direct mention. The only clear actors in the passage are the Board of Foreign missions, its missionaries, the PCUSA and some of its "earnest members." Machen and the Independent Board were not going to take the hint, however, if that was what this was.

By early May 1934, the writing was on the wall. In a letter to his brother, Arthur, Machen said he was gearing up for "the most critical General Assembly that has taken place since 1929."[249] In December of that year, when it was even clearer that he and other

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[248] Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., "A Statement Regarding the Evangelical Loyalty of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.," January 15, 1934, MA.

[249] J. Gresham Machen to Arthur W. Machen, Esq., May 15, 1934, MA.

IBPFM officers and members were going to be charged if they did not resign, he reflected,

> On May 3, 1934,…….we [IBPFM officers] were handed a typewritten statement informing us that "after a most careful study the General Council" was "of the unanimous opinion that the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, in its organization and operation, is contrary to fundamental principles of the Constitution of our Church," and that we and our associates in this organization were "violating" our "ordination or membership vows, or both."[250]

Machen and the Board were exasperated. Not only were they being notified of this charge against them right before the 1934 General Assembly met (which opened May 24, 1934, in Cleveland, Ohio), but the argument was distributed and sent to the commissioners (delegates) of the Assembly without the defense (the IBPFM) being able to make its case public also. The 1934 Assembly's charges were based on a short work distributed as *Studies of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.*[251] Machen cried foul. H. McAllister Griffiths made a failed protest in the Assembly.[252] The "Proposed Action" of the General Assembly called for the resignation of Machen and others from their participation in and association with the Independent Board.[253] To

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[250] Machen recounted all of this in his "Statement to the Special Committee of the Presbytery of New Brunswick in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A Which Was Appointed by the Presbytery…and the Relation of Dr. Machen to the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions," December 12, 1934 (Philadelphia: n.p., 1934), 6.

[251] Rian, *Presbyterian Conflict*, 104.

[252] Machen, "Statement to the Special Committee," 6-8.

[253] The 1934 General Assembly's "Proposed Action" against Machen *et al.* was reprinted in the rear of Machen's "Statement to the Special Committee," 68-74.

borrow one of Machen's favorite metaphors for the PCUSA, after the 1934 General Assembly the well-greased gears in the ecclesiastical machinery began moving against him.

Machen employed his honed, last-minute writing skills in response to New Brunswick Presbytery's calls for his response to the General Assembly's action. As he had in the Princeton debate of 1927-29 and the Buck episode of 1932-33, Machen issued a pamphlet responding to the charge that he and other IBPFM members wad violated their terms of office as PCUSA clergymen. Machen said essentially two things in his pamphlet:

> I. I CANNOT OBEY THE ORDER….
>
> II. THOUGH DISOBEYING AN ORDER OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, I HAVE A FULL RIGHT TO REMAIN IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U.S.A., BECAUSE I AM IN ACCORD WITH THE CONSTITUTION OF THAT CHURCH AND CAN APPEAL FROM THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO THE CONSTITUTION.[254]

As for what all this meant in the immediate future, Machen had an answer for that, too. He asked, "What should be done about the matter?" He replied, "The answer to that question is very simple. Since the Action of the General Assembly was unconstitutional, it should be ignored both by the individuals concerned and by the Presbyteries."[255] This was the beginning of the end for Machen, in terms of his being an officer in good standing with the church. The action of the 1934 Assembly led directly to his trial in February-March 1935, and, because he did not recant, to his loss of ministerial

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[254] Machen, "Statement to the Special Committee," 14-15. Capitals in original.

[255] Ibid., 65.

credentials. But before that trial and its effects can be understood, it is necessary to turn back and consider the issue of where and why Machen had to face these charges.

It would not be the General Assembly—the high council of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.—that would try Machen if he did not resign from the Independent Board. The action of the 1934 Assembly, in accord with Presbyterian order, called for presbyteries having IBPFM members in their jurisdiction "to ascertain…whether they have complied" with the notice to quit the board and, if not, "to institute, or cause to be instituted, promptly such disciplinary action as is set forth in the Book of Discipline."[256] If found guilty, Machen had the right of appeal to the General Assembly of the following year, in 1935. In other words, the church's system of courts very closely resembled the system of appellate jurisdiction in federal and state courts in the United States.

Machen was to be tried in New Brunswick Presbytery, unless he relinquished his position on the Independent Board and severed his relations with it. This was problematic, because Machen tried to transfer his membership to Philadelphia Presbytery in early 1934, before the General Assembly met. His transfer was held up by the objection to it of forty-four Philadelphia Presbytery members who appealed to the Synod of Pennsylvania. When the time came for Machen to be contacted by a presbytery as to whether he was going to comply with the orders of the General Assembly, it was New Brunswick Presbytery, not Philadelphia, that had jurisdiction.[257] The matter of jurisdiction was an important one: Philadelphia Presbytery would have been much more

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[256] *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* 1934, quoted in "Appendix," in Machen, "Statement to the Special Committee," 74.

[257] Rian, *Presbyterian Conflict*, 116-118.

sympathetic with his views than New Brunswick Presbytery, owing to Philadelphia's status as a conservative stronghold.[258]

Machen did not meet with a special committee of New Brunswick Presbytery at the end of 1934, "because it refused to allow him the privilege of the presence of a stenographer."[259] The committee wanted to discuss with Machen his position concerning the ruling of the General Assembly and the consequences of his continued involvement with the IBPFM. Machen wanted his own stenographer, because he was worried that the proceedings of the meeting would be prejudiced against him. Nobody at the meeting sympathized with him. It was one of several minor slights that Machen felt, in the aggregate, prejudiced the whole affair in favor of the authority of the church as established at the 1934 General Assembly. On December 20, 1934, New Brunswick Presbytery decided to bring him before a Special Judicial Commission, which would hold its first meeting on February 14, 1935.[260] The trial ended with a guilty verdict on March 29:

> The Judicial Commission having carefully heard the testimony and weighed the evidence by a vote of 6 to 0 finds the Defendant guilty [of all charges]…. And the Judicial Commission, in accordance with the above finds and in exercise of the authority vested in it, does hereby judge and determine that the said Defendant, J. Gresham Machen, shall be suspended from the office of a minister in the

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[258] Rian, *Presbyterian Conflict*, 135 and Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 154 raise this point.
[259] Rian, *Presbyterian Conflict*, 119.
[260] Ibid., 120.

Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, until such time as he shall give satisfactory evidence of repentance.[261]

Machen never showed repentance for his steadfastness as a member of the IBPFM, and he soon found a new church home in the Presbyterian Church of America (later the OPC). He and other conservative, separatist Presbyterians began making plans for a new church by forming the Constitutional Covenant Union in 1935.[262]

The significance of Machen's ouster from the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. extends beyond its proximate consequences, much like the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, of a decade before. The Scopes trial was a legal victory for anti-evolutionists, but a cultural and intellectual victory for evolutionists. The Machen trial was a legal and cultural defeat for conservative Presbyterians, however. Machen's defeat especially signaled the culture's and the church's repudiation of militancy as an acceptable approach to settling issues—cultural, theological, and otherwise.[263] As Lefferts Loetscher noted in his history *The Broadening Church*, "The termination of the judicial cases in 1936 marked the virtual cessation to date of theological controversy within the Church's judicatories."[264] Since it was followed closely by the formation of a new denomination, the Machen trial can also be seen as marking the end of the period when mainline denominations had a virtual monopoly on Protestantism in the United States; after the

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[261] *Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Complainant vs. J. Gresham Machen, Accused*. Trial Transcript, 411-412, MA.

[262] Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 211.

[263] Such militancy reappeared in the mainstream in the late 1970s and 1980s with groups like the Moral Majority, whose political stances drew more attention than their theologies.

[264] Loetscher, *Broadening Church*, 155.

1930s, they would have to share the American religious landscape with new fundamentalist churches. One of these, even though it is no longer considered fundamentalist, was Machen's Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Historians agree that the Machen trial's consequences were far-reaching, but from that point opinions tend to diverge. At least two sympathetic accounts of the trial compare it to Martin Luther's refusal to recant at the Diet of Worms for his attacks on the Roman Church.[265] Historians like Lefferts Loetscher and William Weston see it as the end of a period of conflict that allowed the church to get back to its moderate theological moorings and institutional harmony.[266] Darryl Hart's and Christopher Schlect's views of what happened rest on a confessional understanding of Machen. For them, Machen's views of American Presbyterianism were inextricably tied to his view of the Westminster Confession, and they say this sharpened his differences with both fundamentalists and the mainline church, particularly with reference to how the church related to the surrounding culture.[267] Because fundamentalists and the representatives of the mainline churches agreed so much about the importance of the church-culture alliance—even if they disagreed on doctrine—these scholars see less warrant for calling Machen a fundamentalist.[268]

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[265] See Rian, *Presbyterian Conflict*, 124-125 and Stephen J. Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004), 14-15.

[266] Loetscher, *Broadening Church*, 155 and Weston, *Presbyterian Pluralism*, 115-116.

[267] Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 160-170; Schlect, "J. Gresham Machen, Roy T. Brumbaugh, and the Presbyterian Schism of 1934-36," 26-45.

[268] Hart wisely presses this point less than Schlect, however.

All of these interpretations are convincing to some degree, but, they also keep Machen in a category separate from the rest of the Presbyterian conservatives, save for those who left the PCUSA with him to found the OPC. The obvious question is, if he was so different from these fundamentalists, how could he have led them for so long? There is no disputing that Machen was a confessionalist, but, as argued in Chapter 4, that does not preclude a fundamentalist interpretation of his views. As George Marsden noted at the beginning of *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, a marked theme of fundamentalism in this era was a wavering between two "opposing self-images." He continued, "This tension reflected an ambivalence in [fundamentalists'] relationship to the major denominations," and their relationship to American culture.[269] While Machen's cultural outlook was characteristically and even consistently Southern and libertarian, his view of the PCUSA denomination wavered and was resolved in secession only at the very end of the controversy in 1936. This shared ambivalence bound him and other conservatives together for most of the controversy, until other interests arose and splintered it. These conservatives' differing degrees of ambivalence toward the denomination is the key to understanding the falling away of some from the movement toward the end of this period.

One of these issues has already been noted above. The desire to work from within for the reform of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions was one, and disagreement over the propriety of forming the Independent Board led Clarence Macartney and Frank H. Stevenson to distance themselves from Machen. Macartney and Stevenson, in other words, wanted to remain inside the denomination, but to approach its problems from a minority, outsider's perspective. After 1934, the conservative coalition suffered more

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[269] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 7.

reverses under mounting pressure from the center of authority in the church, the Office of the General Assembly. These losses were due mostly to the close relationship between the Independent Board and Westminster Theological Seminary.

The problem was that certain trustees and faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary—Samuel G. Craig, Clarence Macartney, Oswald T. Allis—were concerned that Machen and others' resistance to the ruling of the 1934 General Assembly would have collateral effects on Westminster. Particularly, they were concerned that Westminster graduates would not be able successfully to seek ordination in the PCUSA because of the seminary's association with the IBPFM. This was not merely a practical concern, but also one of principle: was it appropriate to be so divisive, as Machen suggested? To J.F. Schrader, one of these conservative associates, Machen wrote a letter expressing sorrow over the disagreement and saying that, nevertheless, he saw Westminster and the Independent Board as linked together in the same cause:

> Is it a fact that Mr. Griffiths and I, in announcing the formation of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, acted in a hasty and divisive fashion and without adequate support among the men who were in the councils of Westminster Theological Seminary?…Let me say that we certainly regarded ourselves as having the support of both you and of Dr. Craig….Westminster Seminary will die, it seems to me, unless it goes forward vigorously to keep this great issue between Christianity and Modernism before the church. I am not interested in teaching men what is in the Bible if I have no plan to suggest to them as to how they can go into foreign lands in accordance

> with our Lord's command, and proclaim that gospel which they have studied within the class rooms of our Seminary.[270]

Just before his trial got started, Machen, who could be bilious and hot tempered, wrote his brother about how frustrated he was with Craig and *Christianity Today*'s doubts about the wisdom of continuing with the IBPFM: "As we are trying to fight against the Modernist enemy, Dr. Samuel G. Craig is engaged in sniping at us from the rear. I spent about five hours the other day talking to Mr. Shrader and Dr. Allis, trying to prevent the publication by Dr. Craig of something like a direct attack against me and against the Independent Board in *Christianity Today*."[271] In June, after Machen had been found guilty, Machen wrote Macartney the following:

> Whether the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions ought to have been started is one question, but whether, now that it has been started, it could possibly be abandoned or modified to placate the enemies of the gospel is quite another question. Westminster Theological Seminary is of course the institution that is dearest to my heart and for which I have made the greatest sacrifices. But what kind of institution shall it be? Shall it be an evangelical institution or a middle-of-the-road institution? That is the real question that is now before us.[272]

It was not to be a middle-of-the-road institution under Machen. Machen believed that if the denomination rejected the seminary, then good riddance to the PCUSA. In the

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[270] J. Gresham Machen to J.F. Schrader, Esq., December 20, 1934, MA.
[271] J. Gresham Machen to Arthur W. Machen, February 8, 1935, MA.
[272] J. Gresham Machen to Clarence E. Macartney, June 28, 1935, MA.

autumn of 1935, Macartney and Craig resigned from the Board of Trustees of Westminster. Oswald T. Allis, on the Old Testament faculty, resigned also.[273]

On the other side of the continent, a totally different scenario was playing out that nevertheless involved the same questions about the relationship of conservative principles to the life of the denomination. Schlect's important thesis demonstrates that Machen was not as exuberant about schism as has commonly been thought—at least not a schism shorn of strategic value. Schlect cites an extremely revealing letter from Machen to Roy T. Brumbaugh, a Presbyterian pastor in Tacoma, Washington, and an IBPFM member. Brumbaugh wanted schism immediately, but Machen warned against it.[274] Machen said,

> About one matter I think you misunderstand my position. Far from thinking that there is any human possibility of reform of the existing organization of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., I agree with you to the very full in holding that such reform is quite beyond the bounds of any human probability….My point is that when the split comes—the split which certainly seems to me to be inevitable—we ought to make every effort to make it clear that it is the majority that has split away from us, and not we who have split away from the majority.[275]

Schlect takes this as evidence of a deep conflict between Machen's confessionalism and Brumbaugh's fundamentalism. He is right to see it as proof of the fine shades of difference that existed among conservative Presbyterians and which no

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[273] Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 211; Rian, *Presbyterian Conflict*, 63-64.

[274] Schlect, "J. Gresham Machen, Roy T. Brumbaugh, and the Presbyterian Schism of 1934-36," 185-186.

[275] J. Gresham Machen to Roy. T. Brumbaugh, October 8, 1934, cited in Schlect, "J. Gresham Machen, Roy T. Brumbaugh, and the Presbyterian Schism of 1934-36," 186n.

doubt contributed to the fragmentation of the coalition. However, on a broader level, what the conflict shows is that not all fundamentalists had the same attitude toward the existing denominations. The interpretation offered in the present thesis does not make a necessary distinction between fundamentalists and confessionalists (or some other group) but accounts for the historical fact that the latter were sometimes a subset of the former, and that fundamentalists were not held together just by a common militant belief in supernatural Christianity, but by somewhat less powerful and more easily-broken links such as their views of denominationalism and how principle and allegiance to institutions could or could not be reconciled. Machen wanted separation, but not one that involved merely walking away from the church. The symbolic authority of the institutional church, although corrupted in Machen's eyes, still seemed important enough for him to remain in it until it rejected him. When the positions of the resigning Westminster associates and Brumbaugh are contrasted with Machen's views, it is clear just how torn Machen was between the ideal of maintaining the purity of Christian principle and the necessities of his role as an active, leading churchman.

Machen's desire to remain in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. long enough to stand trial, and to continue to challenge it in spite of his belief that it could not be reformed, has broader significance than a purely confessional understanding of his motives can account for. What his actions in the years 1932 to 1936 demonstrate at the broadest level is that he was more able or more willing than most of his fundamentalist brethren to tolerate a basic paradox. This paradox was that he felt that he belonged in his denomination, but that it had turned from its heritage and refused to do what he thought it ought to do, which was to proclaim orthodox Christian belief in an unbelieving world.

His formation of the Independent Board demonstrates this paradox. His standing trial in a court that he felt had no jurisdiction over him and in a church that he thought was theologically corrupt and flouted constitutional procedure also reveals the paradox. This was more complicated than a good-guy-bad-guy issue; it was an issue of how exclusive Christian principles, as represented by Machen, could fit into a denominational culture that was moving away—though not as drastically as Machen sometimes claimed—from stout defenses of traditional Christianity. Other fundamentalists were less ambivalent or not ambivalent at all about how to resolve this matter. Among these were, of course, Robert Speer, Clarence Macartney, Samuel Craig, and Oswald Allis. These men Machen criticized for being indifferent, for going only halfway, or for being "middle-of-the-road." To these charges, they replied that they were orthodox but that they just disagreed with him on the proper relationship between sincere, traditional faith and life in a denomination in transitition. Ironically, the words Machen wrote in 1927 regarding the moderates' plan to reorganize Princeton Theological Seminary could now be applied to what was left of his own movement, which left the PCUSA and founded a new Presbyterian church: "Such movements do not stop half way." Machen and his allies were free at last to found what they considered a true Presbyterian church.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE: MACHEN'S LEGACY AND THE LEGACY OF THE GOSPEL

> If J. Gresham Machen and other teachers had not seceded from Princeton Seminary and initiated an alternate scholarly voice, the Evangelical movement in America in this century would have been considerably impoverished. The subsequent withdrawal of Orthodox Presbyterianism from the mother denomination constituted a disastrous loss of white corpuscles from the parent body. But it also saved the denomination from tearing itself apart in an allergic reaction.…But their isolation did enable them to maintain a form of biblical orthodoxy with integrity of conscience, although not always with the balance and catholicity which continuing involvement with other leaders would provide. Their witness formed a plumb line for the rest of Evangelicalism, reminding it of the fallibility of modern innovations and holding before it an ideal of absolute fidelity to Scripture, even though this ideal was imperfectly attained.
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> *Richard F. Lovelace (1979)*

When J. Gresham Machen split with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in 1936 and formed a new Presbyterian denomination, he was founding a church that was small but, he believed, true. It would not tolerate modernism in any degree. Regarding his former denomination, Machen believed that it was destined for greater and greater apostasy in its toleration of modernism—its size, infrastructure, solid membership and influence notwithstanding. Machen made this assessment of the church after two decades of battles over whether the emerging modernist theology would be tolerated along with the older evangelical and confessional approaches to Presbyterian belief. By the time the PCUSA found him guilty of violating his ordination vows—with which the church charged him when he continued to operate the anti-modernist Independent Board for

Presbyterian Foreign Missions—he had to admit that conservatives' efforts in those twenty years had finally failed. Machen, who sometimes saw the world in dualistic categories, did his best to turn this defeat into victory. In forming the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, he believed he had finally accomplished his task of separating the true church from the false.

The immediate outcomes of Machen's struggle with the church were much more complex than this dualism suggests. The long-term consequences for twentieth-century American evangelical Protestants, especially Presbyterians, also indicate the complexity. The consequences can best be summarized as representing a conflict between how traditional Christians relate to their culture and to changes in it. This also includes changes in their denominations. If the history of J. Gresham Machen's role in the end of the Presbyterian conflict, a heavily denominational affair, can offer anything to contemporary American believers who are organized less and less often by denomination, it is that it provokes thought about the problem of relating faith to culture and life as we live it, whether in churches or in the most quotidian, apparently secular parts of our lives. In fact, the significance of Machen's ordeal for historians of religion and for historians who from time to time encounter religious beliefs in their subjects, is that historically observable Christianity is very rarely, if ever, totally sectarian or totally reflective of broader cultural trends. It is usually some uneasy combination of the two, wavering between the poles of sect and bondage to culture. A forced separation of the kind Machen pursued ultimately makes little difference in the long run. Regardless of its denominational bases—separatist or non-separatist—if traditional Christian belief is to remain a significant part of the world, it has to abandon strict separation and engage in

some way with the world, while at the same time resisting actions and attitudes that will cause it to lose its distinctiveness.

Machen biography and the historiography of the Presbyterian conflict sometimes overlook the complexity of the issues that Machen struggled to resolve and which continue to haunt American evangelicals who want to think seriously about their faith. Many historians seem to have taken Machen's or his opponents's words for it in believing that the essence of the conflict in the PCUSA was between loyalty to the denomination and its duly constituted laws and procedures (Loetscher and Weston), on one hand, and Presbyterian confessional orthodoxy (Rian, Hart, and Schlect), on the other. George Marsden, Joel Carpenter, and Bradley Longfield better appreciate the cultural aspects of the theological and ecclesiastical controversies in which Machen was involved, but they still see Machen simply as schismatic and sectarian—which he *became* but was not always. As Marsden wrote in 1980, "Although [Machen] attempted to remain broad-minded and humane, he soon found himself increasingly caught up in peculiarly Presbyterian struggles that eventually forced him into a virtually sectarian position."[276] It took a relatively long time for Machen to become "sectarian," and that is partly what this thesis has demonstrated, dispelling the notions that he was simply either a rancorous hair-splitter or a simple defender of confessional Presbyterianism.

Although this thesis has argued that the context in which Machen and other conservative Presbyterians were living was in some sense dualistic, divided between modernist and fundamentalist tendencies in the church and in the culture, the PCUSA and

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[276] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 138.

the OPC hardly qualify as the embodiments of modernism and fundamentalism (or orthodoxy, as Machen would have termed it), respectively. That essentially likeminded, orthodox churchmen—many of whom were sympathetic to Machen's views—could end up fighting one another and eventually settle into two denominations is a clue that a purely dualistic interpretation of the end of the conflict is faulty. The main thrust of this thesis has been that Machen himself was deeply ambivalent about how to deal with the disconnect he perceived between traditional Christianity and his denomination, which he saw, as many others did also, as making too many and too great concessions to modernity. This ambivalence presented itself toward the end of the Presbyterian controversy as a paradox. Machen and those closest to him felt that they were simultaneously insiders and outsiders—a part of the denomination and yet estranged from it by its recent attempts to broaden its theological base. Only with mounting pressure from the PCUSA General Assembly did these churchmen resolve the paradox in favor of either separation from or continued membership in the PCUSA. Despite Machen's eventual separation from the church, this paradox stayed with him to the end of his time in his former denomination.

The insider-outsider paradox, the problem of remaining allegiant both to one's faith and to the demands made upon all citizens of the world, regardless of faith, can be intense for modern people, especially if their faith is more traditional than modern (i.e., faith that insists that supernatural beings like demons, angels, and the devil exist; and that supernatural events like miracles, bodily resurrection, and healing through the Holy Spirit, occur). Such people are often forced to recognize that their beliefs are

incomprehensible in the context of modernity.[277] In order to achieve some level of comfort or normality in their lives, they feel that they cannot reasonably maintain that they are both insiders and outsiders in the modern world; in other words, there is a strong temptation to resolve the paradox in favor of either sectarianism or worldliness. Rather than see the paradox as a thorn to be removed, however, Christians and historians who study or encounter them would do well to consider the possibility that this paradox is actually normal and healthy, a symptom of vibrant faith that neither feels too at home in the world nor too comfortably and safely removed from it. Machen, like many Christians, reacted to the influence of worldliness in the church by pursuing the opposite vice, sectarianism. He truly believed that this was the best option available to him.

In view of what Machen did, the question becomes whether his response—separation—is the only appropriate response traditional Christians who want to maintain that faith can make when confronted with the frequent conflicts between traditional faith and modern culture. Consideration of a few cases from twentieth-century American Presbyterianism demonstrates that separation is not necessary for the maintenance of orthodoxy, nor does separation alleviate the insider-outsider tension felt by people of traditional faith.

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[277] For example, in a recent interview with *New York Magazine* reporter Jennifer Senior, Associate Justice Antonin Scalia of the United States Supreme Court, confided, "I even believe in the devil." Senior responded, "You do?," to which Scalia retorted, "Of course! Yeah, he's a real person. Hey, come on, that's standard Catholic doctrine! Every Catholic believes that." Daniel Burke, "Scalia says atheism 'favors the devil's desires'," October 7, 2013. http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/10/07/scalia-says-satan-is-a-real-person/comment-page-13/. Accessed October 7, 2013.

The first of these cases goes back to 1965, when the Presbytery of Los Angeles of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA)[278] began admitting UPCUSA-affiliated students from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, an institution with fundamentalist roots. Prior to 1965, throughout the 1950s, Fuller students had been denied ordination in the denomination because of their affiliation with fundamentalist Fuller. Fortunately for these students' plans for the ministry, the presbytery lowered its guard and deemed the neo-evangelical Fuller graduates acceptable, mostly because they had abandoned the militancy and intellectual isolation for which fundamentalism was known. Hence, evangelical Presbyterian Fuller graduates were able to bridge the divide that had opened up thirty years prior; educated at Fuller, they maintained orthodox belief with memberships and pastorates in a mainline denomination.[279] As the struggle for acceptance in the presbytery suggests, however, to separate into their own denomination would have been easier if not necessary.

The second case in recent Presbyterian history demonstrates that even separation is not an easy path and does not guarantee that the new church will not have to face changing currents in theology and culture. This case involves a denomination that had its roots in the PCUS, the mainline Presbyterian denomination of the American South. In the early 1970s, due to the presence of theological liberalism and the involvement of some PCUS ministers in the civil rights movement, a Continuing Church Movement in the

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[278]The UPCUSA was the result of a merger of the PCUSA and a smaller denomination, the United Presbyterian Church of North America in 1958. The UPCUSA, in turn, merged with the southern branch of the Presbyterian Church, the PCUS, in 1983 to form the PC(USA).

[279] This account of the relationship between Los Angeles Presbytery and Fuller is found in George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

denomination took a large number of pastors and their congregations out of the church to form the theologically and socially conservative Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).[280] The irony here is that the PCA is no longer tied to the conservative social views of the South, specifically civil rights issues, but is a national denomination whose largest congregation is Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. The senior pastor of that congregation, Timothy Keller, is the author of several popular books on Christianity, which, while doctrinally traditional, regularly make points of contact with modern culture and scholarship. Keller does not demonstrate any consistent attachment to either conservative or liberal social views, in contrast with PCA origins.[281]

Both of these cases demonstrate that the price of maintaining traditional Christian belief in the modern world is the acceptance of a paradox that can never be totally resolved in favor of holiness and true faithfulness, but also, if that faith is to be maintained, cannot be ignored or underestimated. It must be subjected regularly to careful, solemn reflection. Machen was a champion of Christian thought and orthodox belief, but he was certainly overly optimistic about the prospects of strict separatism. His legacy is therefore mixed. The 1965 L.A. Presbytery case with Fuller Theological Seminary, and the contrast of the PCA of 1973 with today's PCA demonstrate that traditional Christian belief can sustain more contact with mainstream culture and

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[280] Rick Nutt, "The Tie that No Longer Binds: The Origins of the Presbyterian Church in America," in Milton J. Coalter, *et al.,* eds., *The Confessional Mosaic: Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Theology*. Part of the series, *The Presbyterian Presence: The Twentieth-Century Experience* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 235-256. For more on the specifically anti-war concerns of American clergy, which affected all denominations, see Jill K. Gill, *Embattled Ecumenism: The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trials of the Protestant Left* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011).

[281] Especially representative of his style is *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008).

denominations than Machen believed was possible or fitting. More important than the denominational separation issue is whether traditional Christians are willing to cultivate searching attitudes about their faith and the world they live in, being fearless about what ideas they might run across and who they might have to serve. That kind of attitude is not born of or limited by denominational affiliation, race, economic class, or any other category by which humans sort themselves. Rather, it is the fruit of renewed people, people with transformed hearts and minds, who go out into the world, proclaiming, "Christ is king, and the king has commanded me to live a life empowered by Him and by His love."

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