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PRINCETON'S NEW PRESIDENT

AS THIS issue of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN goes to press, on February 2nd, Dr. John A. Mackay is being inaugurated as president of Princeton Theological Seminary to succeed Dr. J. Ross Stevenson. If one may judge by the radical change in Princeton's policy which developed as the result of the inclusivism of its last president, whose appeal to an inclusive church led to the destruction of the old Princeton in 1929, the inauguration of a president is not a matter of small moment in the life of that institution. Our interest in estimating the significance of the choice of Dr. Mackay, it must be confessed, goes far beyond an academic interest in the history of the institution which for so many years was easily the most orthodox and most influential seminary in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. For even since its reorganization its influence upon the life of that denomination has been considerable, and we make no apology for our continued interest in the state of the denomination which so many of us were compelled to leave in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, even if we were inclined to ignore developments in the old organization, we could not for we have been pursued relentlessly even in our exodus. Moreover, our particular interest in Princeton is timely in view of the recent reiteration of the old allegation that the issues involved in the departure of certain professors and directors from Princeton in 1929 were altogether personal or administrative as distinguished from doctrinal.

THE CLAIMS OF PRINCETON

The appointment of Dr. Mackay may well serve as a test of the validity of the claim of loyalty to its historic position which has been made by the authorities at Princeton, notably in certain deliverances which were published in the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* in Novem-

ber, 1929, a few months after Westminster Seminary had opened its doors:

"The reorganization of the Seminary undertaken and completed by the General Assembly was concerned only with the reorganization of the administration of the Seminary. It had nothing to do with its theological position, except to strengthen the safeguards whereby it should be held to the teaching of the Reformed Theology in accordance with the standards of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A."

"In the one hundred and seventeen years of its history, Princeton Seminary has stood with firm steadfastness for the propagation at home and abroad, and for the scholarly defense of Evangelical Christianity as formulated in the standards of the Presbyterian Church. In taking up the duties assigned to it by the General Assembly, . . . the Board . . . feels that it has a solemn mandate from the Assembly to continue unchanged the historic policy of the Seminary and to do nothing whatever to alter the distinctive traditional position which the Seminary has maintained throughout its entire history."

The hollowness of these claims appeared at once in the fact that signers of the Auburn Affirmation were included in the membership of the new Board, apparently with the full approval of the other members. Fidelity to the historical doctrinal position of the Seminary was interpreted so liberally as to allow the inclusion in its governing Board of some who had joined in an attack upon the full truthfulness of the Bible and had given expression to a radical indifference to a number of the central facts and doctrines of Christianity, including the substitutionary atonement and the bodily resurrection of Christ. Consequently the subsequent appointment of professors whose writings set forth positions at great variance with the historic orthodoxy of Princeton was not without warning. (See the articles of Dr. Van Til in *Christianity Today*, Jan., Feb., 1933; Feb., Apr., May, 1934.)

religious adventure only slightly dims the significance of the fundamental character of the issue. There has not been and there will not be a surrender by the conservative Presbyterians. What Dr. Machen represented in doctrinal conviction is believed by a very large number of ministers and laymen. They will now gather about a new leadership. But Machen's name is secure.

Out of the historic issue of fundamentalism, which began about 1920 in the Northern Baptist churches but has continued unabated among a minority in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., that is, the Northern Presbyterian Church, he emerges in death as the theologian and crusader, as learned and valiant a spiritual warrior as the Protestant church has produced in modern times.

Newspaper readers and the uninformed opponents of Dr. Machen within his own household have fashioned in their minds a characterization of the man which is in fact a caricature. J. Gresham Machen was a gentleman. That is the word. Born of an excellent family of the South, in Baltimore, Machen was a Christian after the Presbyterian order. And that means a living, doctrinal, cultured and spiritual faith. . . .

Now all that Machen ever did was to hold fast to the faith and insist that those of his denomination who had taken their vows should do likewise. He was unwilling to yield an inch to the trend of modern thought. That in his sight did not touch the eternal Word of God, unchanging and unchangeable. He had the scholarship to make himself read and heard. . . .

Whatever the developments may be, one must salute the great spirit of Machen who knew the height and depth and breadth of religion. Differ from him as one will, he was a Christian of apostolic ardor. He believed in the infallible Bible, the virgin birth of Jesus, the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the final and complete redemptive authority of God. Machen was not intolerant in the harsh sense. He was a lover of his fellows, a companion of the greatest charm, and he fought for what he believed was the truth always in the Christian spirit. Of course he did not tolerate what he felt was wrong, and no real person does. Tolerance after this manner is immoral and mean. Machen was a fundamentalist in the sense that he

would make his doctrines prevail if he could, but though he was a formidable protagonist, and stood defiant and sometimes vehement against actions that to him were ethically evil and intellectually subversive of Christianity, it is hazarding little to say that in all of his embattled career he did not forget his cause or himself.

It is very hard for most people who read thus far to understand how such a man, with his academic discipline in large part received in a liberal atmosphere, could be such a doctrinaire. But the writer, for one, can understand. Setting aside what Dr. Machen believed, which it is not suitable for me to estimate, I say it is of prior importance that he believed. He served his day by a deepening belief. He sought the truth diligently, devotedly, and with dedication. *Veritas Vos Liberabit.*

Pearl S. Buck

(Reprinted from THE NEW REPUBLIC of January 20, 1937)

ADMIRED Dr. Machen very much while I disagreed with him on every point. And we had much the same fate. I was kicked out of the back door of the church and he was kicked out of the front one. He retaliated by establishing a church of his own. The mother church was called the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, but he gave his church a bigger name—the Presbyterian Church of America. Of course what he did not realize was that he could never have lived in a church. As soon as it had become an entity he would have had to compromise with this opinion or that, or more impossible still to him, with a majority opinion, and he would have had to break again with them all. One might say death was merciful to him, except I have an idea he enjoyed his wars.

The man was admirable. He never gave in one inch to anyone. He never bowed his head. It was not in him to trim or compromise, to accept any peace that was less than triumph. He was a glorious enemy because he was completely open and direct in his angers and hatreds. He stood for something and everyone knew what it was. There was no shilly-shally in him. His attacks were intelligently conceived and logically executed, with

a ruthlessness that was extraordinary in its consistency. In another age he would have burned people at the stake in serene confidence that he was serving his God truly. And so he would have been, for his God was a jealous God, and he served with a whole-heartedness of which only a few great spirits are capable. In a present world of dubious woven grays, his life was a flaming thread of scarlet, regardless and undismayed. He was afraid of nothing and of no one. Fortunately he was called to the limited field of Protestant religion. In the Catholic Church he might have become a dangerously powerful figure, and had he found his expression in politics, our country might have chosen him as the first candidate for dictatorship. It was therefore a comparatively mild matter that he merely hounded from the church those who held a creed different from his own.

The church has lost a colorful figure and a mind which stimulated by its constant contrary activities. He added life to the church, and it needs life. And we have all lost something in him. We have lost a man whom our times can ill spare, a man who had convictions which were real to him and who fought for those convictions and held to them through every change in time and human thought. There was a power in him which was positive in its very negations. He was worth a hundred of his fellows who, as princes of the church, occupy easy places and play their church politics and trim their sails to every wind, who in their smug observance of the conventions of life and religion offend all honest and searching spirits. No forthright mind can live among them, neither the honest skeptic nor the honest dogmatist. I wish Dr. Machen had lived to go on fighting them.

The Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary

IN THE death of its chairman, Dr. J. Gresham Machen, the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary loses a man of simple Christian faith. The home in which he was reared was a home of culture and refinement but first of all a home of child-like faith. In that faith of his childhood Dr. Machen continued to live and in the joy of the sufficiency of that faith he died.