

Christianity in Conflict

Dr. Machen's own story of his early years and of the period from 1929 to 1932, which was published as a chapter in "Contemporary American Theology," edited by Vergilius Ferm and published in 1932 by the Round Table Press. The story of his education and writings and of his years at Princeton has been omitted because of lack of space.

AN ACCOUNT of personal experiences may be interesting for one of two reasons: (1) because the writer is in some way remarkable; (2) because, not being at all remarkable, he may be able to set forth in a concrete way the experience of a considerable body of men. It is for the latter reason, if at all, that the present little sketch may justify its place in the volume of which it is to form a part. I have been asked to contribute to the volume, I suppose, in order that I may show by the example of my own very imperfect, but for that reason all the more typical, experience how it is that a considerable number of persons have been led to resist the current of the age and to hold with mind and heart to that religion of supernatural redemption which has always hitherto been known as Christianity.

In the pursuance of this task, however, I shall not seek to distinguish those elements in my experience which are peculiar from those which I share with others, but shall simply set forth certain observations of mine in the concrete, in the hope that here and there they may by way of example shed some light upon something less unimportant than they are in themselves. It seems to me, even with that explanation, to be rather a presumptuous undertaking; but the responsibility is the Editor's, not mine.

If the question be asked how it has come about that contrary to the majority of the men of our day I am a believer in the truth of the Bible and an adherent of the redemptive religion which the Bible presents, the answer will be found, to a far greater extent than in any other one place, in the home in Baltimore in which, in company with my brothers, Arthur W. Machen, Jr. and Thomas Machen, I was brought up. My father, who died in 1915 at the age of eighty-eight, and my mother, who died in 1931 at the age of eighty-two, were both Christians; from them I learned

what Christianity is and how it differs from certain modern substitutes. I also learned that Christian conviction can go hand in hand with a broad outlook upon life and with the pursuit of learning.

My father was a lawyer, whose practice had been one of the best in the State of Maryland. But the success which he attained at the bar did not serve in the slightest to make him narrow in his interests. All his life he was a tremendous reader, and reading to him was never a task. I suppose it never occurred to him to read merely from a sense of duty; he read because he loved to read. He would probably have been greatly amused if anyone had called him a "scholar"; yet his knowledge of Latin and Greek and English and French literature (to say nothing of Italian, which he took up for the fun of it when he was well over eighty and was thus in a period of life which in other men might be regarded as old age) would put our professional scholars to shame.

With his knowledge of literature there went a keen appreciation of beauty in other fields—an appreciation which both my brothers have inherited. One of my father's most marked characteristics was his desire to have contact with the very best. The second-best always left him dissatisfied; and so the editions of the English classics, for example, that found place in his library were always carefully chosen. As I think of them, I am filled with renewed dismay by that provision of the Vestal Copyright Bill, nearly made a law in the last Congress, which would erect a Chinese wall of exclusion around our country and prevent our citizens from having contact with many things that are finest and most beautiful in the art of the printing and binding of books.

My father's special "hobby" was the study and collection of early editions—particularly fifteenth-century editions of the Greek and Latin class-

ics. Some fine old books were handed down to him from his father's home in Virginia, but others he acquired in the latter part of his long life. His modest means did not suffice, of course, for wholesale acquisitions, but he did try to pick up here and there really good examples of the work of the famous early printers. He was little interested in imperfect copies; everything that he secured was certain to be the very best. I can hardly think of his love of old books as a "hobby"; it was so utterly spontaneous and devoid of self-consciousness. He loved the beautiful form of the old books, as he loved their contents; and the acquisition of every book on his shelves was a true expression of that love.

He was a profoundly Christian man, who had read widely and meditated earnestly upon the really great things of our holy Faith. His Christian experience was not of the emotional or pietistical type, but was a quiet stream whose waters ran deep. He did not adopt that "Touch not, taste not, handle not" attitude toward the good things or the wonders of God's world which too often today causes earnest Christian people to consecrate to God only an impoverished man, but in his case true learning and true piety went hand in hand. Every Sunday morning and Sunday night, and on Wednesday night, he was in his place in Church, and a similar faithfulness characterized all his service as an elder in the Presbyterian Church. At that time the Protestant churches had not yet become political lobbies, and Presbyterian elders were chosen not because they were "outstanding men [or women] in the community," but because they were men of God. I love to think of that old Presbyterian session in the Franklin Street Presbyterian Church of Baltimore. It is a refreshing memory in these days of ruthless and heartless machinery in the Church. God grant that the memory may some day become actuality

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again and that the old Christian virtues may be revived!

Even stronger was the influence of my mother. Like my father, she was an exceedingly wide reader; her book on *The Bible in Browning* is only one gleaned from a very rich field. Her most marked intellectual characteristic, perhaps, was the catholicity of her tastes. She loved poetry with a deep and discriminating love, but she loved with equal ardor the wonders and beauties of nature. Long before the days of "Outlines of Science" and "Outlines" of everything else, she was a student of botany and also a student of the stars in their courses. I shall never forget the eager delight with which she used to stand with me, when I was very young, upon a ridge in the White Mountains and watch the long shadows creep upward upon the opposite heights. She loved nature in its more majestic aspects, and she also loved the infinite sweetness of the woods and fields. I suppose it is from her that I learned to escape sometimes from the heartless machinery of the world, and the equally heartless machinery, alas, of a church organization nominally dedicated to Christ, and refresh my soul with the friendliness of the hills. But beneath my mother's love of nature and beneath her love of poetry that was inextricably intertwined with that other love, there lay her profound reverence for the Author of all beauty and all truth. To her God was all and in all, and her access to God she found only through the new and living way that the Scriptures point out. I do not see how anyone could know my mother well without being forever sure that whatever else there may be in Christianity the real heart of Christianity is found in the atoning death of Christ.

I am glad that in my very early youth I visited my grandfather's home in Macon, Georgia, where my mother was brought up. Its fragrance and its spaciousness and simplicity were typical of a by-gone age, with the passing of which I am convinced that something precious has departed from human life. In both my father and my mother, and their associates whom I saw from time to time, I caught a glimpse of a courtier, richer life, and a broader culture than that which dominates the metallic age in which we are living now. It is a vision that I can never forget. I cannot, indeed, hope to emulate the breadth of educa-

tion attained by both my parents and successfully emulated especially by my older brother; my own efforts seem utterly puny when compared with such true and spontaneous learning as that. But at least I am glad I have had the vision. It has taught me at least that there are things in heaven and earth never dreamed of in our mechanistic world. Some day there may be a true revival of learning, to take the place of the narrowness of our age; and with that revival of learning there may come, as in the sixteenth century, a rediscovery of the gospel of Christ.

In Baltimore I attended a good private school. It was purely secular; and in it I learned nothing about the Bible or the great things of our Christian faith. But I did not need to learn about those things in any school; for I learned them from my mother at home. That was the best school of all; and in it, without any merit of my own, I will venture to say that I had acquired a better knowledge of the contents of the Bible at twelve years of age than is possessed by many theological students of the present day. The Shorter Catechism was not omitted. I repeated it perfectly, questions and answers, at a very tender age; and the divine revelation of which it is so glorious a summary was stored up in my mind and heart. When a man has once come into sympathetic contact with that noble tradition of the Reformed Faith, he will never readily be satisfied with a mere "Fundamentalism" that seeks in some hasty modern statement a greatest common measure between men of different creeds. Rather will he strive always to stand in the great central current of the Church's life that has come down to us through Augustine and Calvin to the standards of the Reformed Faith.

My mother did more for me than impart a knowledge of the Bible and of the Faith of our Church. She also helped me in my doubts. Having passed through intellectual struggle herself, having faced bravely from her youth on the objections to the truth of the Christian religion, she was able to help those who had doubts. And of doubts I certainly had no lack. In this connection, I cannot forbear to speak also of my older brother, Arthur W. Machen, Jr., and of my cousin, LeRoy Gresham, both of whom I greatly admired. A man is in sad case if he must fight the battle of faith and unbelief entirely alone. In

most instances, God uses the help and examples of older and wiser men and women to bring him safely through.
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The period of twenty-seven years during which, with two short intervals, I was connected, first as student and then as teacher, with Princeton Theological Seminary, witnessed the conflict between the old Princeton and the newer forces now dominant in the Presbyterian Church; and finally it witnessed the triumph of the latter in the reorganization of the seminary in 1929.

The old Princeton Seminary may have been good or it may have been bad—opinions differ about that—but at least it was distinctive and at least it was a power in the affairs of men. It was known throughout the world as the chief stronghold of a really learned and really thorough-going "Calvinism" in the English-speaking peoples. Even its opponents, if they were scholars, spoke of it with respect.

The old Princeton Seminary first resisted, then succumbed to, the drift of the times. It did not succumb of its own free will; for the majority of its governing board as well as the majority of its faculty desired to maintain the old policy; but that board was removed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1929 and another board was placed in control. Thus the future conformity of Princeton Seminary to the general drift of the times was insured.

This view of the matter has been strenuously opposed by many of those responsible for the change; but how any other view can possibly be taken by any real observer it has always been beyond my power to comprehend.

When the reorganization of Princeton Seminary took place, some men felt that so fine a scholarly tradition as that of the old Princeton ought not to be allowed to perish from the earth. Obviously it could not successfully be continued at Princeton, under the new and unsympathetic board, but elsewhere it might be carried on.

It is being carried on at the new Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, which was founded in 1929, largely through the initiative of self-sacrificing laymen, "to carry on and perpetuate the policies and traditions of Princeton Theological Seminary, as it existed prior to the reorganization thereof in 1929, in respect

to scholarship and militant defense of the Reformed Faith."

The new seminary is vigorously opposed to the intellectual decadence which is so widely manifested in our day. It sets its face like a flint, for example, against the indolent notion that scholarly preparation for the ministry can be carried on without a knowledge of the original languages of the Bible. It is opposed to short cuts and easy lines of least resistance. It is in favor of earnest work, and its students as well as its faculty share that attitude. In particular, it believes that the Christian religion flourishes not in the darkness but in the light.

My whole heart is in this institution and in the cause that it represents. I believe that that cause involves not reaction, but true progress; and I rejoice in my comradeship with the hopeful group of men who constitute its faculty. Particularly do I rejoice in my comradeship with the students. Technically I stand to them in the relation of teacher to scholar; but in reality I often receive from them more than I can give. They have taught me by their brave devotion to principle, by their willingness to sacrifice all for the sake of Christ, that the old gospel is an ever new and living thing. The true hope of the Church rests in such men as these. Meanwhile, as I meet with them in prayer and labor, I feel anew what a blessing Christian fellowship is in the midst of a hostile world.

We who are reckoned as "conservatives" in theology are seriously misrepresented if we are regarded as men who are holding desperately to something that is old merely because it is old and are inhospitable to new truths. On the contrary, we welcome new discoveries with all our heart; and we are looking in the Church, not merely for a continuation of conditions that now exist but for a burst of new power. My hope of that new power is greatly quickened by contact with the students of Westminster Seminary. There, it seems to me, we have an atmosphere that is truly electric. It would not be surprising if some of these men might become the instruments, by God's grace, of lifting preaching out of the sad rut into which it has fallen, and of making it powerful again for the salvation of men.

There are certain root convictions which I hold in common with West-

minster Seminary and with the journal *Christianity Today*—in common with these representatives of the ancient yet living tradition of the old Princeton. I hold (1) that the Christian religion, as it is set forth on the basis of Holy Scripture in the Standards of the Reformed Faith, is true, and (2) that the Christian religion as so set forth requires and is capable of scholarly defence.

The former of these two convictions makes me dislike the term "Fundamentalism." If, indeed, I am asked whether I am a Fundamentalist or a Modernist, I do not say, "Neither." I do not quibble. In that disjunction as the inquirer means it, I have very definitely taken sides. But I do not apply the term "Fundamentalist" to myself. I stand, indeed, in the very warmest Christian fellowship with those who do designate themselves by that term. But, for my part, I cannot see why the Christian religion, which has had a rather long and honorable history, should suddenly become an "-ism" and be called by a strange new name.

The second of the two convictions just formulated—that the Christian religion requires and is capable of scholarly defence—does not mean that a man ever was made a Christian merely by argument. There must also be the mysterious work of the Spirit of God in the new birth. But because argument is insufficient it does not follow that it is unnecessary. From the very beginning, true Christianity has always been presented as a thoroughly reasonable thing. Men sometimes tell us, indeed, that we ought not to be everlastingly *defending* Christianity, but rather ought simply to go forth to *propagate* Christianity. But when men talk thus about propagating Christianity without defending it, the thing that they are propagating is pretty sure not to be Christianity at all. Real Christianity is no mere form of mysticism, but is founded squarely upon a body of truth.

The presentation of that body of truth necessarily involves controversy with opposing views. People sometimes tell us that they are tired of controversy in the Church. "Let us cease this tiresome controversy," they say, "and ask God, instead, for a great revival." Well, one thing is clear about revivals—a revival that does not stir up controversy is sure to be a sham

revival, not a real one. That has been clear ever since our Lord said that He had come not to bring peace upon the earth but a sword. A man who is really on fire with a message never thinks of decrying controversy but speaks the truth that God has given him to speak without thought of the favor of men.

In all controversy, however, the great principle of liberty should be preserved. I am old-fashioned in my belief that the Bible is true, but I am equally old-fashioned in my love of freedom. I am opposed to the attack on freedom in whatever form it may come. I am opposed to the Soviets, and I am opposed to Mussolini. For the same reason also, I am opposed to the rapidly growing bureaucracy in this country. I am opposed to a Federal department of education; I am opposed to monopolistic public schools; I am opposed to a standardization that treats human beings as though they were Ford cars.

For the same reason, to say nothing of far deeper reasons, I am opposed to a church union which is the deadliest enemy of Christian unity. I am opposed with all my mind and heart to the depressing dream of a monopolistic Protestant church organization placing the whole Protestant world under one set of tyrannical committees and boards. I am opposed to the growing discouragement of free discussion in my own church and other churches. I am opposed to secret church courts or judicial commissions. In all ecclesiastical affairs I believe in open covenants openly arrived at. I am opposed with all my might to actions like the action of the last Presbyterian General Assembly tending to discourage publicity regarding measures proposed for adoption by the church.

Just because I believe in liberty, I believe in the right of purely voluntary association. I believe in the right of a voluntary association like the Presbyterian Church. If a man does not believe that the Bible is true, and in his interpretation of the Bible is not an adherent of the Reformed Faith, I am opposed to exerting any compulsion on him to become a Presbyterian minister. If he adopts some position other than that of the Presbyterian Church, let him have full liberty to become a minister in some other body. But if he does choose to

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 become a Presbyterian minister, I hold that he should be able honestly, and without mental reservation, to subscribe to the ordination pledge setting forth that for which the Presbyterian Church exists. Without such honesty there can be no possibility of Christian fellowship anywhere for those who do with their whole heart hold to what that pledge sets forth. And true Christian fellowship, not forced organizational union of those who disagree in the whole direction of their thought and life, is the real need of the hour.

I take a grave view of the present state of the Church; I think that those who cry, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace," constitute the greatest menace to the people of God. I am in little agreement with those who say, for example, that the Presbyterian Church, to which I belong, is "fundamentally sound." For my part, I have two convictions regarding the Presbyterian Church. I hold (1) that it is not fundamentally sound but fundamentally unsound; and I hold (2) that the Holy Spirit is able to make it sound. And I think we ought, very humbly, to ask Him to do that. Nothing kills true prayer like a shallow optimism. Those who form the consistently Christian remnant in the Presbyterian Church and in other churches, instead of taking refuge in a cowardly anti-intellectualism, instead of decrying controversy, ought to be on their knees asking God to bring the visible Church back from her wanderings to her true Lord.

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 We can, if we are Christians, still be confident and joyous in these sad days. This is not the first time of unbelief in the history of the Church. There have been other times equally or almost equally dark, yet God has brought His people through. Even in our day there are far more than seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to the gods of the hour. But our real confidence rests not in the signs of the times, but in the great and precious promises of God. Contrast the glories of God's Word with the weak and beggarly elements of this mechanistic age, contrast the liberty of the sons of God with the ever-increasing slavery into which mankind is falling in our time, and I think we shall come to see with a new clearness, despite the opposition of the world, that we have no reason to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

THE Editor of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN has asked me to add to this autobiographical sketch a few lines concerning Dr. Machen's work in the years between its publication in the fall of 1932 and his death. Hesitantly I have consented. May they not mar the original.

About the time the above sketch came from the press there also appeared in the bookstores of the nation a volume entitled "Re-Thinking Missions." It focused the thought of Protestant church-members in America upon the state of the foreign missionary enterprise. The increasing trend toward Modernism in the foreign missionary work of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. had long been a matter of concern to Dr. Machen. Impelled by his sense of duty as a minister of that church, in the light of the disquieting attitude of its Board of Foreign Missions towards the report "Re-Thinking Missions," Dr. Machen presented to the Presbytery of New Brunswick a proposed overture to the General Assembly concerning remedies for the situation in the Board. The overture was debated on April 11, 1933. Dr. Machen offered the overture and a carefully documented printed argument in its behalf. His speech in its support was one of the most masterly presentations of the principle that the Bible must be the decisive, the final criterion of all Christian endeavor that this generation has heard.

The General Assembly of 1933 definitely refused to take action to remedy the state of affairs in the Board of Foreign Missions. In order to provide a channel through which true Presbyterians could support foreign missionary endeavor that would be loyal to the Westminster Standards, Dr. Machen encouraged the formation of The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. Its object was, exactly as its name indicates, to provide a Presbyterian foreign missionary agency which should be free from modernistic ecclesiastical control. Its first president was Dr. Machen, who served from the time of the formal organization of the Board until a few weeks before his death, and the growth of the activi-

ties of the Board has been constant.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. meeting in 1934 issued a mandate ordering all members of that church who were members of the Independent Board to resign from the Board under penalty of ecclesiastical discipline. The Assembly further declared that "A church member or an individual church that will not give to promote the officially authorized missionary program of the Presbyterian Church is in exactly the same position with reference to the Constitution of the Church as a church member or an individual church that would refuse to take part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper . . ."

Dr. Machen recognized in this mandate one of the most vigorous attacks ever made by a Presbyterian Church upon the principles of Christian liberty and Biblical obedience. Members of a Christian church were to be forced to desist from their efforts to forward the preaching of the gospel abroad and contributions toward the support of modernistic agencies were placed upon the same basis with respect to the Constitution of the church as the commands of our Lord Himself. Dr. Machen could not but refuse to obey such an un-Christian mandate. He stated:

"I. I CANNOT OBEY THE ORDER.

A. Obedience to the order in the way demanded by the General Assembly would involve support of a propaganda that is contrary to the gospel of Christ.

B. Obedience to the order in the way demanded by the General Assembly would involve substitution of a human authority for the authority of the Word of God.

C. Obedience to the order in the way demanded by the General Assembly would mean acquiescence in the principle that support of the benevolences of the Church is not a matter of free-will but the payment of a tax enforced by penalties.

D. All three of the above mentioned courses of conduct are forbidden by the Bible, and therefore I cannot engage in any of them. I cannot, no matter what any human authority bids me do, support a propa-

ganda that is contrary to the gospel of Christ; I cannot substitute a human authority for the authority of the Word of God; and I cannot regard support of the benevolences of the Church as a tax enforced by penalties, but must continue to regard it as a matter of free-will and a thing with regard to which a man is responsible to God alone.

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."

Dr. Machen was brought to trial before a special judicial commission of the Presbytery of New Brunswick on February 14, 1935, because of his refusal to obey the mandate. He was denied the right to present his defense, and after a solemn farce was sentenced to suspension from the ministry.

Late in the year 1934 and early in 1935 indications began to appear in the editorial pages of *Christianity Today* of a change in the editorial policy of that paper away from its former cordial encouragement of the Independent Board. As Dr. Machen has indicated above, his support of the principles which that paper had hitherto maintained had been whole-hearted. It had stood, as he did, for a fearless defense of the principles of Christian truth and action in the church, regardless of consequences.

In June, 1935, there was organized at a meeting in Philadelphia, called together by a committee of which Dr. Machen was a member, The Presbyterian Constitutional Covenant Union. Its declared purposes were (1) to make "every effort to bring about a reform of the existing church organization [of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.], and to restore the Church's clear and glorious Christian testimony, which Modernism and indifference have now so grievously silenced, but (2) if such efforts fail and in particular if the tyrannical policy of the present majority triumphs, . . . to perpetuate the true Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., regardless of cost."

Under the auspices of the Covenant Union there began publication, on October 7, 1935, of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN. This paper has car-

ried on the vigorous policy which formerly characterized *Christianity Today*. With the issue of September 12, 1936, Dr. Machen became the senior editor of this journal and continued as such until his death.

In the autumn of 1934 there was inaugurated by Westminster Theological Seminary a Sunday afternoon Radio Hour. From the very beginning Dr. Machen delivered the weekly addresses during this broadcast. They presented to the far-flung audience in simple, living, forceful phrase the great truths of the Reformed Faith, beginning with the need for a knowledge of God and the answer to the question, "How may God be known?" The addresses delivered during the winter of 1934-1935 were published in February, 1936, under the title *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*. The addresses of the year 1935-1936 were prepared for publication by Dr. Machen during the autumn just passed. The prospect of their early appearance brings a thrill to every one who loved him.

In the late spring of 1936 there came before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. the appeals of eight defendants who had been convicted in the courts of the church upon charges growing out of their failure to obey the mandate of the 1934 Assembly. The best-known of these defendants was Dr. Machen. There also came before the same Assembly the cases of other ministers of the church who had been disciplined because they had in other ways made the Bible their final standard of authority. The General Assembly placed the word of man above the Word of God, and choosing to honor the mandate of 1934 rather than the eternal Word, it upheld the convictions of the ministers and confirmed the decisions of the synods in the non-judicial cases. Thus the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. unequivocally demonstrated its failure to make Jesus Christ the King and Head of the Church.

Upon June 11, 1936 there was constituted in the city of Philadelphia The Presbyterian Church of America, dedicated to the upholding of the Word of God and of the authority of Jesus Christ above all human documents and councils. As was alone befitting, the great leader whose unerring judgment and unrivaled penetration of vision had for so long guided the

cause of true Presbyterianism in this country, and concerning whom these lines are written, was elected Moderator of the First General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church of America.

To the end he spent himself in the cause of that church and his last public action was to address, though in a burning fever of body, a rally in the city of Bismarck, North Dakota, gathered to inform the people of that state of the call of this day to Christian duty.

On New Year's Day, 1937, he laid down his earthly garb for the glories of the heavenly city and, clothed in the righteousness of Christ alone, entered the gates of the city of God.

New Pittsburgh Church Crowns Efforts of Dr. Machen

THREE weeks before he died Dr. Machen visited the home of Miss Anna Moody Browne in Pittsburgh, to discuss with her the plans for the organization of a congregation of The Presbyterian Church of America in Pittsburgh. For a long time he had recognized the need of such a church, and expressed many a wish that it be formed at the earliest possible moment. Those hopes are now about to be realized.

On Friday evening, January 22nd, an "information meeting" under the auspices of The Presbyterian Church of America will be held in Pittsburgh. Miss Browne has graciously offered the use of her home at 6112 Kentucky Avenue for that meeting. The Rev. Robert L. Atwell, pastor of the church at Harrisville, Penna., and the Rev. Charles J. Woodbridge, Chairman of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, will be the speakers.

All persons within the Pittsburgh area who are anxious to know more about the Presbyterian crisis and the cause for which Dr. Machen gave his life are cordially invited to attend this important meeting. An opportunity will be given for the asking of questions at the conclusion of the addresses, and it is expected that a particular church of The Presbyterian Church of America will be formed immediately.

A church service will be held the following Sunday, with the Rev. Robert L. Atwell presiding.