

## J. GRESHAM MACHEN AND THE NEW REFORMATION

by Dr. Robert Anderson

### Reformation Sunday, October 30, 1994

From the publishing of his book *Christianity and Liberalism* in 1923, until his death in 1937, J. Gresham Machen publicly and faithfully labored for the reform of the church of this century. A Presbyterian minister and scholar, Machen lived in a time which saw the spread of religious liberalism over a large sector of the church, including his own denomination, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Machen described religious liberalism as being "...rooted in naturalism--that is, in the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity" (*Christianity and Liberalism*, p. 2). Liberalism denied the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ, His miracles, His substitutionary atonement and His bodily resurrection from the dead. With loyalty to the Scriptures and with masterful scholarly ability, Machen argued that supernaturalism, which liberalism denied, was part and parcel of historic Christianity. Christianity would cease to be Christianity without supernaturalism (the creative power of God). As an example of the importance of the supernatural to the historic Christian faith, we quote from *Christianity and Liberalism*:

"...Hope (for guilty sinners) is to be sought only in a creative act of God. And that creative act of God--so mysterious, so congruous with the character of God who is revealed as the God of love--is found in the redeeming work of Christ. No product of sinful humanity could have redeemed humanity from the dreadful guilt or lifted a sinful race from the slough of sin. But a Saviour has come from God. There lies the very root of the Christian religion; there is the reason why the supernatural is the very ground and substance of the Christian faith." (p.105)

Because liberalism was not Christianity, Machen maintained it had no right to be in the church. Because, in fact, it was already in the church, he said that the crying need of the hour was a separation between the two--liberalism and historic Christianity.

With the courage and zeal of the 16th century reformers, Machen sought the reform of his own denomination; his efforts, in time, brought a separation. He sought this "new reformation" by unwearied effort in writing, teaching, speaking, and in the institutions he established. In the providence of God he did not see his efforts visited with the success God gave to the likes of Luther or Calvin, but he never despaired of a new Reformation. In his book, *What is Faith?*, Machen wrote,

"When the true Reformation comes, it will come through the instrumentality of those upon whom God has laid His hand, to whom the gospel has become a burning fire within them, who speak because they are compelled to speak, who, caring nothing for human influences...and external Church combinations..., speak the word that God has given them

and trust for the results to Him alone. In other words, it will be brought about by men of faith." (p.104)



Western Reformed Seminary holds to the view of Christianity held by the beloved Machen, to the Christianity which depends upon "the entrance of the creative act of God". If God wills, her students will be instruments for a new and true reformation. RA



### *Pray for our Faculty*

- **John A. Battle, Jr., Th.D.** -- *President; Assoc. Prof. of New Testament*
- **Christopher K. Lensch, S.T.M.** -- *Registrar; Asst. Prof. of Old Testament*
- **Kevin M. Backus, Ph.D.** -- *Adjunct Prof. of Biblical Counseling*
- **Leonard W. Pine., M.Div.** -- *Adjunct Prof. in Practical Theology*
- **Robert A. Battle, Ph.D. Cand.** -- *Adjunct Inst. in Biblical Languages*
- **Tito S. Lyro, M.Div.** -- *Adjunct Inst. in Bible and Theology*

### *Pray for our Students*

We have both full-time and part-time students this year. They come from all walks of life and from all around the world. Some are in the full Master of Divinity program; others in the other masters programs or taking particular classes as special students. Most have families, are holding down jobs to support themselves, and are involved in the ministries of their respective churches. Pray especially for our BP students. They are:

Also pray for our graduates, who are serving the Lord in America and around the world.



**The world is our mission field...**

***Western Reformed Seminary***  
**5 South "G" Street, Tacoma, Washington 98405**  
**(206) 272-0417**