

ROY TALMAGE BRUMBAUGH: BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN PIONEER IN THE NORTHWEST

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Roy Talmage Brumbaugh was born on April 15, 1890, in Pipersville, Pennsylvania, to Dr. Simon Schmucker, and Elizabeth (Moyer) Brumbaugh. The nation was barely twenty-five years removed from the great Civil War, and was yet a decade away from the automobile or the airplane. Benjamin Harrison was President and there remained civil unrest in the country between the forces of organizing labor and industry, socialism and capitalism. Some of the major debates in the country included such topics as Prohibition and Darwinism.

Roy's Christian parents were very instrumental in his development and direction in life. Dr. Simon Schmucker Brumbaugh was born on July 17, 1852, in Bloomfield, Pennsylvania, attended public schools, graduated from Martinsburg Academy, and then taught several years in Pennsylvania and Illinois. He graduated from Missouri Medical College in 1878 (M.D.). He began his practice at Pipersville, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and there remained in a large practice for twenty years. After a year of rest at Hopewell, New Jersey, he moved to Philadelphia and actively and successfully engaged in medical practice there. He was a member of the Presbyterian Church and was a Sunday school superintendent and teacher. He erected a chapel at Pipersville for Sunday school work at his own expense, and the building still stands today as the Pipersville Free Library. There is a note in the library today that says, "A lack of any religious village accommodations was realized by possibly the most educated resident." This was in 1886, and the "most educated resident" Simon Brumbaugh, a physician who met the health needs of the community. He contributed land and the funds necessary for the chapel construction. Sunday school classes were conducted without interruption for the local population until 1950. He married Elizabeth Moyer in 1880. Elizabeth was from a Mennonite farming family of Bedminster, Pennsylvania, and they were members of the Old Deep Run Mennonite Church. Together they had four children, Christine, Isabel, Howard and Roy T.

Though Roy Talmage Brumbaugh was not yet one year old, another event occurred on January 20, 1891, that would have a profound effect on his life. I introduce it here, because it set in motion a series of events that not only had an effect on the life of Roy T. Brumbaugh, and in which he would participate, but came to define his life—who he would be and what he would do. Eventually, it would become known as the fundamentalist/modernist controversy.

Rev. Charles A. Briggs, D.D., at his inauguration as professor of Biblical Theology at Union Theological Seminary delivered an address that would set in motion a series of events that

would change the Presbyterian Church forever. In that address Dr. Briggs made the following statements:¹

1. There are historically three great fountains of divine authority—the Bible, the Church, and Reason.
2. I shall venture to affirm, so far as I can see, that there are errors in the Scriptures that no one has been able to explain away; and the theory that they are not in the original text is sheer assumption upon which no mind can rest with certainty. If such errors destroy the authority of the Bible, it is already destroyed for historians. Men cannot shut their eyes to the truth and fact. But on what authority do these theologians drive men from the Bible by this theory of inerrancy?
3. It may be regarded as the certain result of the science of Higher Criticism that Moses did not write the Pentateuch. Isaiah did not write half of the book that bears his name.
4. Another fault of Protestant theology is in its limitation of the process of redemption to this world, and its neglect of those vast periods of time which have elapsed for most men in the Middle State between death and the resurrection. The Roman Catholic Church is firmer here, though it smears the Biblical doctrine with not a few hurtful errors. The reaction against this limitation, as seen in the theory of second probation, is not surprising. I do not find this doctrine in the Bible, but I do find in the Bible the doctrine of a Middle State of a conscious higher life in the communion with Christ and the multitude of the departed of all ages; and of the necessity of entire sanctification, in order that the work of redemption may be completed. There is no authority in the scripture, or in the creed of Christendom, for the doctrine of immediate sanctification at death. The only sanctification known to experience, to Christian orthodoxy, and to the Bible is progressive sanctification.

Progressive sanctification after death is the doctrine of the Bible and the Church; and it is of vast importance in our times that we should understand it, and live in accordance with it. The bugbear of a judgment immediately after death, and the illusion of a magical transformation in the dying hour should be banished from the world. They are the conceits derived from the Ethnic religions, and without basis in the Bible or Christian experience as expressed in the symbol of the Church. The former makes death a terror to the best of men, and the latter makes human life and experience of no effect; and both cut the nerves of Christian activity and striving after sanctification. Renouncing them as hurtful, unchristian errors, we look with hope and joy for the continuation of the processes of grace, and the wonders of redemption in the company of the blessed, to which the faithful are hastening.

It was evident that inerrancy had been a casualty and that the gospel message, the deity of Christ and the way to heaven had been compromised. There were two churches and two different religions, and they could never be reconciled with each other. It would take the next forty years of struggle and controversy for the two positions to go their separate ways. J. Gresham Machen

¹ John J. McCook, *The Briggs Heresy Case before the General Assembly*, J. C. Rankin Printing Co. 1893, pp 51-71.

in his book *Christianity and Liberalism* said, “it may appear that what the liberal theologian has retained after abandoning to the enemy one Christian doctrine after another is not Christianity at all, but a religion which is so entirely different from Christianity as to belong in a distinct category.”²

Roy T. Brumbaugh was raised in a Christian family with godly parents and proper training. He once said that his mother had prayed him into the Kingdom and then into the ministry and that his father had made generous provision for his education. Little was recorded of his early life, but it is known that he graduated from Northeast Manual Training High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on June 25, 1908, and commenced studies at Lehigh College the next year. He was there for one year and then went to Gettysburg College, where he graduated in 1912. It was during this time at Gettysburg that he met Margaret Valentine, who was the granddaughter of the President of the school. They were married on January 24, 1911. She would prove to be the greatest single influence in his life and was the epitome of grace and friendliness to everyone she met. She had a quality of never getting upset about anything and always being positive and confident in the Lord’s blessing. He did graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Illinois during 1914 and 1915. The Gettysburg yearbook, *The Spectrum*, states that he was a talkative, stuttering, effervescent youth who was very casual about his studies but that after his marriage, he became a candidate for valedictorian. His athletic achievements were legendary. He was the “shining star” and was elected captain of both the basketball and football teams. He was not large, but fiercely competitive and disciplined—qualities that would manifest themselves in his latter life

In 1916, he commenced studies at Princeton Theological Seminary. He was a married man with children, and his education was largely financed by his father. At this time, Princeton Theological Seminary represented the conservative side of the above mentioned controversy and Union Theological Seminary the more liberal or modernist position. It was during his time at Princeton that Roy became involved in the issues of the day. The faculty at Princeton included men who were to be influential in the struggle, on both sides of the issues. They included J. Ross Stevenson, John D. Davis, Geerhardus Vos, W. P. Armstrong, Frederick W. Loetscher, Caspar Wistar Hodge, Benjamin B. Warfield, Robert Dick Wilson, J. Ritchie Smith, J. Gresham Machen, and William Brenton Green. These three years at Princeton (1917-19) were a critical time for Roy. During these years he formulated the position that would guide him throughout the balance of his life. The faculty were those whose tutelage would, by God’s grace, articulate that position. Princeton was in the midst of the controversy, and to be a student there at that time could not help but have a profound effect upon a young man. J. Gresham Machen, who was Assistant Professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis until Princeton was reorganized, was the spokesman for the conservative historic position. Brumbaugh graduated from Princeton in 1919 and was ordained by the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (PCUSA) on May 15, 1919.

Upon graduation, Brumbaugh was called to the Harris Street Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia. He served there until 1923. On several occasions William Jennings Bryan spoke at the church, and Bryan would come over to the Brumbaugh home on Sunday afternoon for dinner and a nap. Bryan was a chief spokesman for the prohibition movement, served as

² J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946, p. 2.

secretary of state in the Woodrow Wilson administration and also ran unsuccessfully for President of the United States on four occasions.

During Dr. Brumbaugh's ministry at Atlanta another event occurred that would further define the battle lines. On Sunday morning, May 21, 1922, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, a Baptist, preached a sermon at the First Presbyterian Church of New York City that would illustrate the depth of the departure taken by the modernists from the historic position. The sermon was entitled "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" In this sermon Fosdick compared the various views on such doctrines as the virgin birth, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the atonement, and others and proposed that all views be acceptable in the church and that there be more tolerance. The sermon caused enough negative reaction that Fosdick eventually resigned as associate minister of the First Presbyterian Church of New York City. The sermon identified some of the fundamentals of the faith that would become the basis for a document that became known as the Auburn Affirmation. The Auburn Affirmation was issued in response to an action taken at the general assembly in May of 1923. At that assembly, action was taken requiring men to affirm their faith in the infallibility of the Bible, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, his substitutionary atonement on the cross, his bodily resurrection, and his mighty miracles as essential doctrines of Holy Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith, and that affirmation of these five doctrines was required for ordination. The Auburn Affirmation contested the constitutional right of the assembly to require affirmation of these five doctrines for ordination and also said that the five doctrines are non-essential to the system of doctrine taught in the Bible and are just theories. The case of the Auburn Affirmation was debated and discussed for several more general assemblies up through 1927, and no decisive action was taken against the document or the more than 1,200 signers. Great damage was done to the church by this indecisiveness and inaction. Many signers of the Auburn Affirmation came to positions of great power in the church. The die had been cast, but the final chapter would not be written for another decade or more.

Also in 1923 Dr. J. Gresham Machen's book *Christianity and Liberalism* was published. It was immediately recognized as the clearest presentation of the two opposing positions in the PCUSA. It also established Machen as the leading spokesman for the truths and great doctrines of Biblical Christianity.

In 1923 Brumbaugh was called to the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church of Coatsville, Pennsylvania. There he was succeeded by Wilbur M. Smith, who later became a professor at Moody Bible Institute. It was during this time that the differences in the PCUSA began to spill over into the other agencies of the church. In October of 1923, the Rev. Robert Dick Wilson, D.D., LL.D., professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Literature at Princeton Seminary wrote an article for *The Presbyterian*, entitled "Friendly Advice to the Foreign Board." In this article he criticized the Board of Foreign Missions, which was under the control of the PCUSA, for its entanglement with missionaries who did not hold to the doctrines of the church. The mission controversy led to the publication of a book entitled *Re-Thinking Missions* in 1932. This publication, primarily financed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and prepared over several years by representatives of at least seven denominations, proved to be a pivotal event. One of the conclusions of *Re-Thinking Missions* was that Christianity should make efforts to better understand the other religions in the countries where it is being presented, and to "recognize and

associate itself with whatever kindred elements there are in them.” This procedure tended toward recognition that there was truth in all religions and that missionaries needed to understand the things in common and present Christianity in light of these common truths. The question then became: if the authorized Foreign Mission Board of the PCUSA was espousing doctrines contrary to the Holy Scripture, then shouldn't the people in the churches, who were sending the money to the mission board, be aware of that, and should there be an alternative mission ministry? This question eventually led to the formation of a renegade, independent mission board, founded in 1932, with Dr. Machen as its founding leader, called The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM). Brumbaugh was on the founding board of directors.

In 1929 Brumbaugh was called to the Bethany Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. This church was also called the Wanamaker church, because it was founded by and largely built with the help of John Wanamaker, a retail magnate. Brumbaugh was installed as pastor on October 3, 1929, and was later called to the First Presbyterian Church of Tacoma, Washington, in May of 1930. Whether the Presbyterian controversy played a part in his short tenure in Philadelphia would have to be investigated. In any event, there was another event that took place in 1929 that Brumbaugh played an eventual part in.

The reorganization of Princeton Theological Seminary, which took place in 1929, had its roots much earlier. Princeton Seminary was the bastion of historic Christianity in the PCUSA. It represented the separated (not inclusivist) Calvinistic (reformed) system of doctrine that was set forth in the Holy Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Princeton Theological Seminary was founded in 1811 by the order of the PCUSA. The governance of the institution developed over the years to include a board of directors and a board of trustees. The board of directors had authority over the educational program (what was taught) and the board of trustees simply held the property in trust. As a result of the reorganization, a single board of trustees was placed in charge of the seminary and the entire program of the seminary came under the control of a group who were no longer sympathetic to the historic doctrine. The reorganization of Princeton led to a situation where men could no longer be taught the historic doctrines without them being diluted with the new modernism. Men like Machen could not tolerate this and on July 18, 1929, a group led by Machen met in Philadelphia to organize a new seminary, which would carry on the tradition of pre-1929 Princeton. Westminster Theological Seminary was founded; the founding faculty included Robert Dick Wilson, J. Gresham Machen, Oswald T. Allis and Cornelius Van Til. Brumbaugh was on the founding board of directors of Westminster Theological Seminary.³

These were tumultuous times in the history of the church, and in the midst of them Brumbaugh moved to Tacoma to become the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. He was forty-one years old and had a wife and four children. The First Presbyterian Church of Tacoma boasted a formal membership of 1,850, with about 1,000 attending regularly; it was one of the largest in the denomination on the West Coast. The church edifice was a grand structure, and the church was organized with programs for everyone. The church had been without a pastor for a year, and there were some strong elders on the session of the church who were in charge of the

³ Edwin H. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict*, reprinted 1992 by The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, p. 37.

program. One of the foremost programs of the church was the Scofield Bible Study classes conducted by the elders.

Dr. Brumbaugh came to Tacoma by car from Philadelphia, which was an exciting trip at that time. During most of the trip, his son Roy stood in the front passenger compartment with his hand on the top of the windshield.

The issues that were present on the East Coast were also present on the West Coast to some degree. The IBPFM was formally organized on October 17, 1933, and the Rev. J. Gresham Machen was elected as its first president. As new revelations continued to appear pertaining to the modernism in the Board of Foreign Mission, more and more people converted over to support of the IBPFM. This support of the new board worried the denomination so that it became a major issue at the next general assembly held in Cleveland, Ohio, in May 1934.

That general assembly adopted a deliverance that stated that every member of the church is required by the constitution to support the missionary program of the church in the way that each member must take part in the Lord's Supper. Each Presbytery was mandated to take action against its members who were also members of the IBPFM. The deliverance became known as "The Mandate" and the consequences of it would play out over the course of the next year. Finally the controversy that had simmered for more than a decade was going to be decided in the church courts.

Back in Tacoma, the First Presbyterian Church prospered in many respects, and Brumbaugh, the evangelist, preached the gospel, and many people made professions of faith. However, there was an undercurrent of dissension in the local church that was a microcosm of the denominational controversy. In the local church there was a group of elders who had their plan for the church and a strong pastor who had his plan. As the controversy intensified nationally, it intensified locally and small differences that might have been overlooked in a more peaceable climate became big issues. The lines of demarcation were established and it became apparent that there would eventually be a showdown.

It took over a year for the Mandate to trickle down to the local level. It was the presbyteries that were instructed to implement the mandate and there were periods of notification in accordance with the Book of Discipline, and procedures that carried over till the summer and fall of 1935. All the while, sides were taken in the First Presbyterian Church and it was a difficult time to carry on the work of the church. If Brumbaugh left the church, he would lose the building, his pension, the prestige of being pastor to one of the largest churches in the denomination, and other attendant privileges. In spite of all of this, on August 21, 1935, Brumbaugh informed the denomination of his withdrawal from the PCUSA. Finally he was free. On Thursday night, August 22, 1935, the first meeting of the First Independent Church of Tacoma was held with over 700 in attendance. Ironically, the only facility available to accommodate the new church was a Scottish Rites Temple, right across the alley from the First Presbyterian Church. A new church had begun, fresh and free from denominational control. It was a wonderful feeling of excitement and expectation. As the different presbyteries dealt with other members of the Independent Board, many were suspended, some were admonished or rebuked; and one presbytery, the Presbytery of Chester, refused to take action against the Rev.

Wilbur M. Smith, who had followed Brumbaugh at the Coatesville Presbyterian Church. Brumbaugh was tried in absentia and suspended from the PCUSA. On March 29, 1935, Dr. J. Gresham was declared guilty in a sham of a trial and suspended from the ministry of the PCUSA.

A sad chapter in Presbyterian church history had come to an end. The same church that had suspended Dr. Charles A. Briggs for heresy in 1893, had, in 1935, suspended Dr. J. Gresham Machen from its ministry for his FAITHFUL ADHERANCE TO THE WORD OF GOD.

Dr. Roy T. Brumbaugh continued on as Pastor of the Tacoma Bible Presbyterian Church until his death on January 3, 1957. The last twenty years of that ministry, although not without controversy, saw an active, enthusiastic, evangelistic church, with a special emphasis on the military personnel from the local military bases.