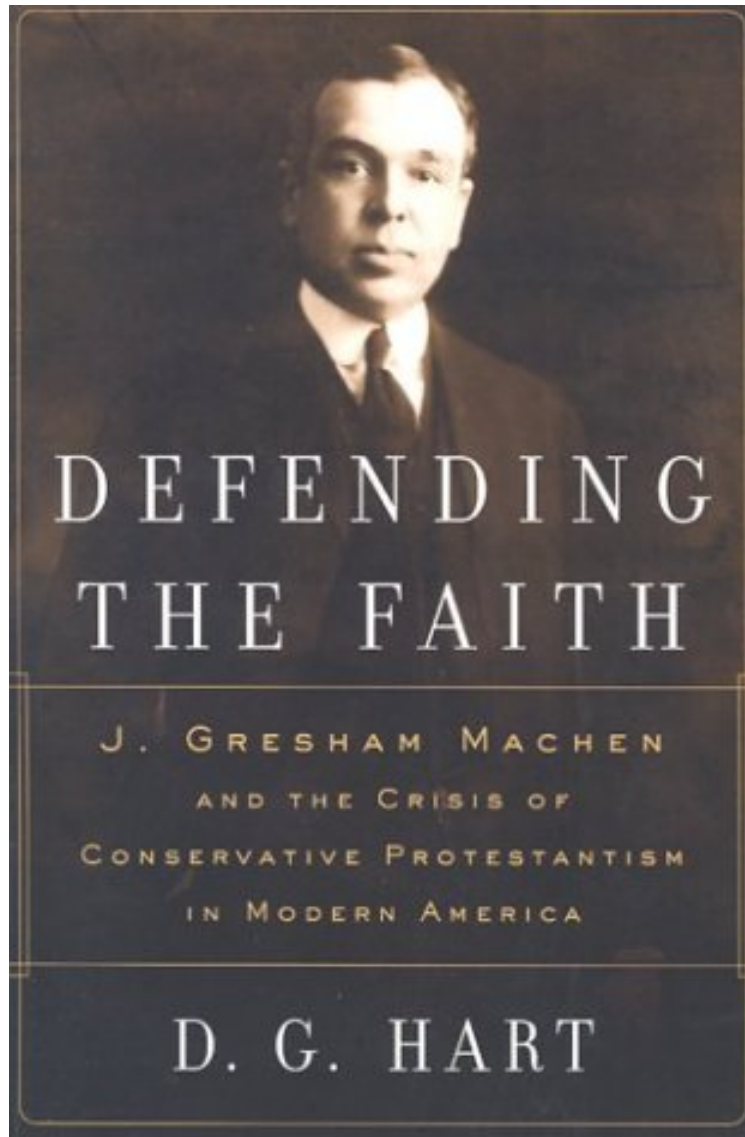


(Download ebook) Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America

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D. G. Hart

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D. G. Hart : Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Beware the Evangelical Moderates By Karl Dahlfred This biography of Machen was a good read, and gave a comprehensive view into the theological, cultural, and social world in which he lived. The author shows how Machen's particular views and approaches to issues did not always fit into the boxes into which people tried to put him, such as fundamentalist. The book is well researched and includes much reference to primary source material. When I finished, I felt like I had a much better understanding of the man who founded Westminster Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). The only disappointing aspect of the book was the lack of information about the founding of Westminster and the OPC. The forces leading up to Machen's founding of each are chronicled much better than the founding of each and their early days. Granted that Machen died very early in the life of each institution, but I had expected more detail about Machen's decision making process and consultation with others in the logistics of starting these institutions. One of the most fascinating aspects of this bio was the way in which the forces of theological liberalism and evangelical romanticism revivalism to which Machen stood opposed are still active today. The forces at work in destroying the PCUSA today were active and present in Machen's day. Most notable is the role of evangelical moderates in marginalizing Machen. Conservative Protestants may often think that Machen's undoing was theological liberalism in the Presbyterian Church. However, the real force that drove him out was evangelical moderates who were willing to overlook theological liberalism and false teaching in order to preserve the organizational unity of the church. On paper, these evangelical moderates had the same theology as Machen, but they viewed Machen's stand for the historic truths of the Christian faith as unloving or unchristian or aggressive. Machen was vaguely labeled as unsocial and unwilling to work with others. He was branded as divisive for insisting that the denomination take a stand against those who deny the church's stated doctrine. It is amazing how these same forces are at work today, not only in the PCUSA, but in evangelicalism more broadly. Modern readers who love biblical truth can learn from this book that they need to be wary of evangelical moderates who may seem like they are on the same page, but in reality will not stand with you when you stand up for the truth. This lesson from Machen's life is eerily relevant for today.

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. The Luther of the 20th Century By B. C. Richards This is an excellent account of one of the most significant Christian leaders of the 20th century. It is not a biography, because Hart restricts the account to the events and issues surrounding Machen's involvement in the Presbyterian controversy over confessionalism and modernism that led up to the reorganization of Princeton Seminary and the founding of Westminster Seminary in 1929, and the subsequent founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1937. However, Hart does give a lot of attention to the cultural and ideological background that informed Machen's writings and actions during that tumultuous period, and so I did finish the book with a much deeper picture of who Machen was. Hart examines Machen's family background and especially the context of Southern Presbyterianism on his mother's side of the family. He examines Machen's paradoxical position in the debate surrounding biblical criticism, which was that while he was squarely in the tradition of confessional orthodox Presbyterianism as opposed to the higher critical schools of theology, he was still eager to exploit all the methods and results that the latest scholarship could provide. In his academic position he wrote scholarly books that defended such doctrines as the virgin birth of Christ, but were nonetheless highly regarded and favorably reviewed by his modernist academic peers because of the high level of scholarship that he was able to bring to bear. For understanding this aspect of his thought, Hart discusses his educational background, and especially his experience studying in Germany and his personal crisis leading up to his accepting a position at Princeton Seminary. Hart also spends a considerable part of the book examining Machen's relationship to the rest of the fundamentalists, especially on confessionalism, evolution, and the role of the Church in society, where Machen diverged from most of his fundamentalist contemporaries. The most interesting part of the book for me was the discussion of Machen's political views and how he saw parallels between the events surrounding the crisis in the Presbyterian church and the developments in American political life. Machen was a full-fledged libertarian politically: he opposed Prohibition (a deeply unpopular view among both fundamentalists and theological liberals at the time); he opposed the creation of a Federal Department of Education, and he also opposed the rise of the welfare state during the New Deal and the Great Depression, which he (rightly) saw as coercive wealth redistribution by the state and a denial of private property. In all these things, he opposed and feared the expansion of state power as the greatest political threat the church faced. He was also aware that a parallel centralization of power and bureaucratization of the church hierarchy was a major part of the driving force behind his opponents in the mainline Presbyterian church. Many are aware of the theological issues that Machen stood for. I don't believe that nearly so many are aware of his social and political views, which were intricately connected to his theological views and especially his view of the role of the church. It is a shame that the Reformed Church seems to have ignored that aspect of Machen's thought. I highly recommend reading this book to get a better understanding of the issues and ideas that were influential for Machen. It is scholarly but accessible, and it also has an extensive bibliography at the end. I would recommend reading Longfield's book "The Presbyterian Controversy" first, because it gives a broad overview of the period for context.

9 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Amazing book about an extraordinary man By Dan Panetti If there is one individual in American history that punctuates the struggle in the church to prevent the separation from reason to religion, fact to faith, it is J. Gresham Machen (1881 - 1937). Hart does an incredible job of putting this larger-than-life character in his proper historical significance and the book is a

must read for any person who wants to more fully understand why the church is so impotent in her ability to relate in a relevant manner to the real issues of the day. Machen's struggle was primarily against the efforts within the Presbyterian church at the turn of the century to modernize and become more relevant to the cultural around them. Machen strongly believed that God's Word was timeless and the emphasis need to remain on educating and equipping the leaders of tomorrow with a strong foundation of theology and understanding of the truth and tenets of Scripture and the celebrated historical creeds of the faith. He became one of the most celebrated professors at Princeton Seminary, but was forced out of this position because of his unwillingness to compromise on the importance of solid biblical scholarship as well as his refusal to kowtow to the political structure within the church. After leaving Princeton, Machen and a few others founded Westminster Theological Seminary, which has gained a reputation for its Calvinistic theology as well as a reputation for solid scholarship, especially in the fields of biblical studies and theology. Machen's primary battle was with the church's move toward anti-intellectualism, the embrace of the emotional and sensational evangelicalism of the day that "won soles" but didn't change lives. Machen was an incredible figure that clearly demonstrated the power and influence of the church's slide away from her historical roots and moorings into the cultural drift we can so easily see in a vast percentage of our churches today - especially in Machen's beloved Presbyterian Church! The historical significance of Machen is only matched by his amazing and colorful personality. He passed away at a relatively young age really at the peak of his significance to the movement attempting to reestablish the importance of intellectual pursuits in the Christian walk; but his legacy is felt today through the lives and works of those who picked up the torch and continued the battle including the works of Francis Schaeffer, Cornelius Van Till, B.B. Warfield, and even Nancy Pearcey.

A study of Machen's thought and career that says much about the issues that unsettled mainstream Protestantism hold on American intellectual and cultural life.

"Defending the Faith reads with the passion and pathos of historical reconstruction at its best. Hart is a gifted writer, and his subject is a fascinating individual." --R. Albert Mohler, Jr. "A readable and compelling narrative. . . . Machen remains worth hearing, and Hart succeeds admirably at making him audible." --Allen C. Guelzo "A challenging, informative, and nonprejudicial look at the most highbrow of the fundamentalists, J. Gresham Machen. . . . For a scholarly book that will provide edifying challenges and enough food for thought to support a hibernation, read Defending the Faith." --Thomas J. Nettles About the Author D. G. Hart studied American history at the Johns Hopkins University and has served as Director of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College and Academic Dean and Professor of Church History at Westminster Seminary in California. He is currently Visiting Professor of History at Hillsdale College. His books include Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism (1994); The Lost Soul of American Protestantism (2002); With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship (2002); John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist (2005); and A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State (2006).