

“The recovery of this work of J. Gresham Machen is not like finding a gold mine in the mountains, it is more like discovering a diamond mine. It is a true treasure—one of sparkling jewels and glorious truth. To mine this treasure is to find a deposit in heaven.”

—R.C. SPROUL, Founder, Ligonier Ministries

“With the exegetical skills of a renowned New Testament scholar, the passionate precision of a defender of the faith, and the sweet sympathy of a human being, Machen treats theology as urgent life-and-death communication. Some of his references might be dated (by nine decades or so), but the substance remains as relevant as ever. I can think of few teachers of the past who are more reliable and rewarding to read, and now we can read his insights across the whole span of Christian doctrine.”

—MICHAEL HORTON, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Theology
and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California

“J. Gresham Machen was a man of his times, enmeshed in protracted and penetrating conflict over the triumphant liberalism of his day. He was also a man who transcended his times, because he undertook, with rare learning and clear-sighted understanding, the defense of the faith ‘once for all entrusted to God’s holy people’ (Jude 3). His *Christianity and Liberalism*, for instance, written almost a century ago, still sounds amazingly prophetic. This present volume brings together 50 of Machen’s radio talks of the 1930s, preserving Machen’s voice and emphases in an idiom that is more popular than his more academic books, but no less important. Machen is always worth reading.”

—D. A. CARSON, Emeritus Professor of New Testament,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“J. Gresham Machen was one of the most prescient and courageous Christian theologians of the early 20th century. During his life, Machen was a clear and consistent voice for Christian orthodoxy and evangelical truth in the face of liberalism. This collection of lectures is a valuable addition to the Machen library. They reflect the heart of Machen’s ministry and provide yet another compelling presentation of Reformed Christianity. Machen’s works are as relevant now as they were when they were first written. These lectures are no exception.”

—ALBERT MOHLER, PRESIDENT, The Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary

“These popular essays show the heart of J. Gresham Machen: brilliant, clear, and persuasive, calling everyone to faith and life in Jesus. They will bless and encourage all who read them.”

—W. ROBERT GODFREY, President Emeritus and Professor of Church History Emeritus, Westminster Seminary California

“J. Gresham Machen was one of the best thinkers and writers among Reformed theologians before his untimely death on New Year’s Day of 1937. Machen’s writing is always crisp and clear, without any compromise of cogent argument. When Machen finishes dealing with an unbelieving argument, I always feel that there is nothing more to be said on the unbelieving side. Even though this work is over eighty years old now, I would not hesitate to give it to someone today seeking to learn about the Reformed system of thought.”

—JOHN FRAME, Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy Emeritus, Reformed Theological Seminary

“All of the qualities that enabled J. Gresham Machen to make such an important contribution to English-speaking Protestantism—theological tenacity, clarity of mind, readability, and courageous conviction—are easy to see in this instructive and edifying collection of essays. These talks show once again that doctrine has consequences, with Machen as a superbly gifted guide to the significance of what the church confesses about Christ.”

—D. G. HART, Distinguished Associate Professor of History, Hillsdale College

“J. Gresham Machen was one of the leading Christian scholarly voices of the last century. His ability to distill theology into clear, direct terms intelligible to a lay readership and to explain the gospel to the uncommitted is nowhere better demonstrated than in these radio broadcasts that have here been put in writing. I hope they obtain as wide a readership as possible.”

—ROBERT LETHAM, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Union School of Theology

“Reading Machen’s *Things Unseen* is like reading C. S. Lewis. At first it feels so simple, the waters seem shallow, then without realizing it, you find yourself in deep waters, enthralled at the mystery of the truth of God’s Word.”

—PAUL MILLER, Executive Director, SeeJesus

“In J. Gresham Machen, God gave the church an inimitable champion of biblical orthodoxy and gospel clarity. This book will show you why Machen is one of American evangelicalism’s most important 20th-century thinkers. More to the point, this book will ground you firmly in what it means to see in the face of Jesus Christ the grace and truth and glory of God.”

—RUSSELL MOORE, President, Ethics & Religious Liberty
Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

“J. Gresham Machen wore many hats in his illustrious career, including New Testament scholar, apologist, seminary founder, and churchman. In this welcome volume, we meet Machen the clear and sturdy catechist of Presbyterian doctrine. On every page, Machen commends ‘the pattern of sound words’ revealed in Holy Scripture and confessed by the church, bringing the reader into contact with the invisible things of God so that he or she may meet the visible realities of this life in a God-honoring manner.”

—SCOTT SWAIN, President and James Woodrow Hassell
Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological
Seminary

“J. Gresham Machen’s essays are timeless, though set in the swirling currents of his day, because the Christian faith he describes, the faith revealed in the Scriptures by the Spirit, rises above time. His learned rhetoric, his passionate defense of Christian orthodoxy, his love of the Savior and his church make what you will find in these pages a delight to read, a source of spiritual strengthening, and a bulwark against the destructive effects of a contemporary scholarship that continues to denigrate the Creator, Redeemer, and only Judge of mankind.”

—JOHN D. HANNAH, Research Professor of Theological Studies
and Distinguished Professor of Historical Theology, Dallas
Theological Seminary

“The life and teaching of J. Gresham Machen are rightly revered by contemporary Christians who prize Reformed orthodoxy. Machen’s compelling voice lives again in the pages of this masterful treatment of Christian doctrine. As a theologian for ordinary Christians, his clear and concise communication of biblical truth will draw new readers into a deeper and more personal knowledge of the risen Christ.”

—PHILIP RYKEN, President, Wheaton College

“J. Gresham Machen was a theological titan, a champion of the truth, a guardian of the gospel, and a contender for the faith. In a declining day of spiritual apostasy, he was mightily used by God to teach sound doctrine and refute those who contradicted it. His strong stance, even while others around him were crumbling, marks him as a man to whom we must give strictest consideration. I rejoice to see this long-awaited volume of Machen’s collected writings assembled together into one body of divinity. Blessed will be the reader who devours and absorbs these God-exalting truths.”

—STEVEN J. LAWSON, President, OnePassion Ministries

“It is not hyperbole to say that J. Gresham Machen is one of the most—some would say the most—significant Christian thinkers of the 20th century. His sobering apologetic against Protestant liberalism was a timely alarm, exposing liberalism’s illegitimate claim to the Christian religion. But now, thanks to Westminster Seminary Press, Machen’s voice is heard once again— yet this time Machen puts forward a positive presentation of the Christian faith. *Things Unseen* is saturated throughout with doctrinal truth as Machen, with urgency in his voice, calls sinners back to the Bible to hear the voice of God afresh and to receive the eternal life only God himself can give through Christ.”

—MATTHEW BARRETT, Associate Professor of Christian Theology,
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“In C. S. Lewis like fashion, Gresham Machen’s radio broadcasts were of a caliber unimaginable in today’s world. These snapshot portraits of doctrine, delivered in exquisite prose designed to be heard as much as read, are simply breathtaking. An accessible compendium of theology that will prove to be the gold-standard for years to come. An outstanding achievement.”

—DEREK W. H. THOMAS, Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic and
Pastoral Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary

“Here is the provocative premise of this countercultural book: At a time when the world’s immediate political, social, and economic crises overwhelm us, the most ‘practical’ act for us is to attend to our soul and its relation to God. It is, says Machen, impossible to deal successfully with the world’s problems until we have come to be right with God. Fifty radio talks spell out what this involves in prose that is as personally engaging and understandable as it is profound in its robust defense of orthodox

Christianity. Machen's vision remains as timely for our day as it was in the 1930s; a time eerily like our own."

—JOHN BOLT, Jean and Kenneth Baker Professor of Systematic
Theology Emeritus, Calvin Theological Seminary

"Professor J. Gresham Machen, first of Princeton, then founder of Westminster Theological Seminary, was writing at a time when his scholarly but profoundly believing testimony made a tremendous difference in both the intellectual and popular mind of the American people, and far beyond them into Britain and Europe. It was written at the height of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy that lasted from before World War I to II. The modernists had taken on board the skeptical principles of the 18th-century European Enlightenment, which openly denied Holy Scripture as a divine revelation of truth from the triune God—as well as miracles and the deity of Christ—and replaced it with the ever-changing ideas of the mind of man. It was their delight to point out that the Fundamentalists were largely uneducated, simplistic, and backward and were thus not worthy to be followed by cultured people. Machen, in this book as well as in others, set them back seriously by demonstrating the good sense made by the ancient truth of the Christian tradition, based upon an assumption of the reliability of the Word of God written. He showed that their Enlightenment principles were, in effect, another sort of faith or religion, and one by no means required by the advances of science and the progress of thought. On the contrary, Holy Scripture made much greater sense of a clear reading of nature, as well as providing an access to the saving grace of God. This volume is typical of the best of Machen's thought: it gives clarity and profundity in its exposition of the great truths that must be faced by any enquiring mind, and therefore, it is absolutely contemporary and is a guide to us today."

—DOUGLAS F. KELLY, Professor of Theology Emeritus,
Reformed Theological Seminary

"J. Gresham Machen enjoys a richly deserved reputation for his unwavering commitment to the historic Christian faith. In the face of devastating attacks upon the foundations of Christian theology in the early decades of the 20th century, Machen stood in the breach and offered a trenchant case against liberalism in his classic work, *Christianity and Liberalism*. With the publication of this volume of Machen's radio talks on Reformed theology, a new generation of believers will be introduced to Machen at

his best. Readers will enjoy a rich feast of clear doctrinal instruction in the basic tenets of Reformed theology. But they will also witness a wonderful model of a Christian apologist who was always prepared to give a defense to anyone of the reason for the hope that is in us, 'yet with gentleness and respect' (1 Pet 3:15)."

—CORNELIS VENEMA, President and Professor of Doctrinal Studies,
Mid-America Reformed Seminary

"Early in my Christian life I read J. Gresham Machen's classic, *Christianity and Liberalism*, and it did not leave my thinking and life unchanged. What struck me was Machen's thoughtful, clear, biblically rich, theologically faithful, and Christ-centered defense of the Christian faith, which was also evident in all of his writings. I am simply thrilled to see back in print a collection of Machen's talks which set forth the glory and beauty of Christian doctrine for another generation. We all stand on the shoulders of giants and Machen is certainly a giant of the Christian faith. Take up this work and read it with delight as once again Machen reminds us of the glory of our triune God, the authority of his Word, and the wonder of God's grace as given in Christ Jesus our Lord. I hope this book will receive a wide reading for today's church in a day which desperately needs sound theology and there is no one better to do so than J. Gresham Machen."

—STEPHEN WELLMUM, Professor of Christian Theology,
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"This collection of radio talks shows all Machen's qualities as a great scholar, a sure-footed theologian, and a fearless champion of biblical Christianity. These addresses are still remarkably contemporary, covering almost the whole range of Christian truth, and robustly intellectual; the beginner will find them easily accessible, the seasoned thinker will find fresh stimulus, and the defender of the faith will take fresh courage."

—DONALD MACLEOD, Professor of Systematic Theology, Retired,
Edinburgh Theological Seminary

"In *Things Unseen* you get vintage Machen: a top-shelf mind, making the deepest truths of Christianity clear and its absolute claims plain to everyone. Something of a Presbyterian C. S. Lewis in this regard, Machen knew that simplicity need not be sacrificed for the sake of profundity. In this first-rate, if sadly unfinished, volume of theology and apologetics you get

both. Take it up and read to learn, to be strengthened and challenged, but most of all to be welcomed into a deeper communion with the living God.”

—DEREK RISHMAWY, Reformed University Fellowship

“Someone said recently that we need ‘a new Machen’ to speak insightfully to present-day theological confusions. That would be great. But, thank the Lord, the old Machen does continue to teach us. These wonderful essays speak powerfully to all of us today—and with refreshing clarity.”

—RICHARD MOUW, President Emeritus and Professor of Faith and Public Life, Fuller Theological Seminary

“In these still-timely essays we meet profundity wed with clarity. Illustrations from Machen’s colorful life abound. His gift for practical expression shines, as does his knack for gentle suasion. Though he died in 1937, Machen sounds like a contemporary pundit in observing that ‘we are in the midst of a tremendous emergency.’ The response Machen offers: Help in rediscovering ‘an old Book that has been sealed by the seals of prejudice and unbelief,’ so that readers may ‘come into communion with the living God.’ This is a model of biblically faithful, creative, and insightful social commentary and theological exposition.”

—ROBERT YARBROUGH, Professor of New Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary

“These essays on the Reformed faith were forged long ago in the furnace of debate. They are, however, as fresh today, and as compelling, as they were when they were first delivered. Machen speaks with clarity, conviction, a matchless command of the subject, and with the wind of historic Christianity behind him.”

—DAVID WELLS, Distinguished Senior Research Professor, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

“J. Gresham Machen is one of a select band of Christian writers of whom it can truly be said that ‘he being dead, yet speaketh.’ This republication of some of his most important talks will be widely welcomed by those who appreciate his strong and learned defense of orthodoxy, and it will make his thought more accessible to a younger generation.”

—GERALD BRAY, Research Professor of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School

“I am so delighted that the faculty at Westminster Theological Seminary has decided to compile and publish these theological essays to present to the church this wonderful gift of the substance of Machen’s theology. I hope that it gets a wide reading within the contemporary church so that its members might also recognize the present emergency of becoming blind to the things of God and to an ‘unseen world.’ In a very accessible and engaging way, Machen gives us a needed exhortation to pursue the true knowledge of God.”

—STEPHEN T. UM, Senior Minister, Citylife Presbyterian Church,
Boston

“J. Gresham Machen was a hero of the faith and a rare scholar who mastered technical scholarship, popular writing, and dedicated himself to the life of the church. Machen’s timeless monograph, *Christianity and Liberalism*, demonstrates that his clear and orthodox voice still resonates today. Readers will find that his almost-lost *Things Unseen* will speak with the same abiding authority.”

—DAN DORIANI, Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology
and Vice President at Large, Covenant Theological Seminary

“I first encountered J. Gresham Machen’s work as an undergraduate student grappling with modern challenges to the Christian faith. I found in him a mind passionate for the truth and a heart aflame with the gospel. Both of these traits shine through in these essays from the 1930s. We still need to hear what he had to say.”

—TIMOTHY GEORGE, Distinguished Professor of Divinity,
Beeson Divinity School

“Sanity regained in a world gone mad. J. Gresham Machen writes with a heart of love for the Lord Jesus. Cool, clear, and fresh as a mountain stream, he bubbles with living water. Doctrinal indifference, a big issue in his day, is the black plague of ours. The antidote to truth decay is his clarity about who Jesus was, what he said and did, and, above all, how he lives and reigns today.”

—PAUL WELLS, Emeritus Professor of Systematic Theology,
Faculté Jean Calvin, Aix-en-Provence

“These gems by J. Gresham Machen are essential reading now for thoughtful Christians. Historians of conservative Protestantism will also greatly benefit from these essays. . . Machen distills the core doctrines of Christian

theology that he fought so hard to defend against the acids of modernity. Listen for Machen's voice as you read these transcriptions. Lend your ear to this man whose apologetic labors hastened his tragic, early death."

—DOUGLAS SWEENEY, Dean and Professor of Divinity,
Beeson Divinity School

"J. Gresham Machen was one of the lions of Reformed evangelical thought in the 20th century. His clarity of thought and courage borne of a deep conviction and a personal walk with the God about whom he spoke and wrote suffuses this entire book. With disarming simplicity, Machen presents the most important truths in the world and challenges us all to take them seriously. We need more of such clarity and directness today."

—MARK THOMPSON, Principal, Moore College

"J. Gresham Machen was the towering intellectual defender of historic Christianity during one of the most turbulent periods in American church history. These lectures on Reformed theology, delivered in the heat of the battle, are not merely an important theological voice from the past; they will encourage your faith today."

—FRANK JAMES, President and Professor of Historical Theology,
Missio Seminary

"The church is rightly indebted to Machen for his and his associates' principled stand against the onslaught of liberalism in the academy and church. To these men Christianity was first and foremost about truth and that truth as revealed in Scripture and confessed by the church. It is because truth lies at the heart of true religion that he, in particular, had a passion to share it with lay people. This laypersons' guide to systematic theology proves to be an excellent introduction to the faith once delivered to the saints."

—LIAM GOLIGHER, Senior Minister, Tenth Presbyterian Church,
Philadelphia

"Almost eighty years after his death, J. Gresham Machen's voice still speaks with timeliness. In our day, when people question whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God, Dr. Machen's cogent exposition of Scripture in these essays provides needed clarity."

—WILLIAM BARKER, Professor of Church History Emeritus,
Westminster Theological Seminary

“Why am I regularly surprised at the way past authors speak powerfully to the present day? This is the way of all gifted authors: though they write in the past and thus in quite different circumstances, their writings have a timeless quality that more often than not makes them far more relevant than so much contemporary ephemera. Thus it is with these rich and lucid theological meditations of Gresham Machen: the 1930s were different in many ways than the present, but again and again his words address modern issues with such aplomb that they could have been written yesterday. Highly recommended.”

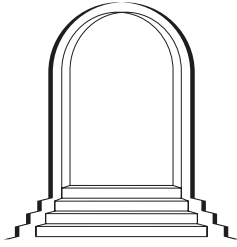
—MICHAEL A. G. HAYKIN, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality and Director of the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“This powerful book on Christian theology fully displays what made Machen great. We see his relentless logic in the clarity of his thinking and the lucidity of his prose.”

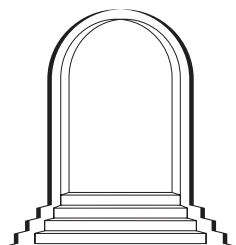
—THOMAS SCHREINER, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Professor of Biblical Theology, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Here is theology that floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee. In these essays Machen defends biblical doctrine with punch and quite stunning verve. Fresh, enlightening, and logically compelling, this is not only good theology but a model of good apologetics.”

—MICHAEL REEVES, President and Professor of Theology, Union School of Theology



THINGS UNSEEN



THINGS UNSEEN

*A Systematic Introduction
to the Christian Faith and Reformed Theology*

J. GRESHAM MACHEN

Foreword by Sinclair B. Ferguson

Preface by Stephen J. Nichols

Introduction by Timothy J. Keller

Afterword by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

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Things Unseen:
A Systematic Introduction to the Christian Faith and Reformed Theology

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Foreword

It is a privilege to serve as the herald who calls attention to this new collection of the work of J. Gresham Machen. Westminster Seminary Press certainly deserves to be congratulated for making the contents of *Things Unseen* available in this new form.

John Gresham Machen (1881-1937) was by any measure one of the towering figures in American Evangelicalism in the first half of the 20th century. He was born into a privileged and devoted Presbyterian family in Baltimore, Maryland. His father was a distinguished and scholarly lawyer, an avid reader, a linguist, and a man of theological acuity to boot. His mother—her husband's junior by more than twenty years—was also a great reader and a deeply thoughtful and sensitive Christian lady.

The young Machen was superbly well educated. Not only did he study classics with the leading Greek scholars of the day both at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Chicago, but thereafter went on to study theology under the most significant conservative scholars in the USA. He was thoroughly versed in Scripture and in the Shorter Catechism from his childhood, but his own Christian faith was permanently confirmed only after deep intellectual struggle.

Machen also became personally acquainted with the liberal theology of the continent of Europe and studied with its most impressive and scholarly representatives. He found some of them to be men of outstanding learning, immense commitment and religious conviction, and with considerable natural powers of communication. To that extent he regarded them with appreciation and respect. But he came to the conviction that the Jesus of whom they spoke was not the Christ of Scripture. He could not therefore save and transform. Partly as a result of this, for the rest of his life Machen sought to lay his very considerable intellectual and academic gifts at the feet of the living Christ, and devoted himself to expressing the gospel as clearly and fully as he could, whether in the pages of learned journals and books, or in more popular form.

The depth of Machen's conviction that liberal theology is not Christianity and the clarity and boldness with which he expressed this, eventually led him to sacrifice the immense privileges of professorship at Princeton Theological Seminary, along with his emotional connection to its history, for the humble

beginnings of Westminster Theological Seminary. He would also give up the dignity of being a mainstream Presbyterian minister for the indignities of leadership in what would become the small Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Although his life was cut short before his fifty-sixth birthday, Machen had already published works of permanent significance such as *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (1930)—a topic on which he had already written in his final year at Princeton—and his powerful manifesto, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923). It is not difficult to see the providential hand of God in his life preparing him to write this latter volume, which continues to make a decisive impact on readers today. He had heard liberal theology “from the horse’s mouth” as it were. He had admired some of its greatest exponents and assessed it with intellectual seriousness. Having weighed it in the balances he found it not only wanting but also capable of bankrupting both individual Christians and indeed the entire church. This helps to explain the vigor and power of his writing.

It is not always the case that an individual with such massive learning is as gifted a popular communicator as Machen. In fact, much of his published material was addressed not to theologians and scholars but to ordinary men and women. Thus, *What is Faith?* (1925) draws on sermons he had preached during the year it was published, while the posthumous *God Transcendent* (1949) contains an eight-message series preached in Princeton in 1923.

In addition to being frequently invited to preach in churches around the country, Machen became a relatively early entrant into the world of Christian broadcasting, and during what would prove to be the closing years of his life he delivered several series of weekly radio addresses. These messages are reprinted here, and they make for nourishing reading. They are talks of a straightforward, personal, serious and biblically literate kind, addressed to intelligent, thinking Christians.

Things Unseen covers many areas of systematic theology. Here you will find pieces on revelation and Scripture, as well as on God as Triune and as Creator, and on man created as his image but, alas, now fallen, with all the tragic entail of human sin. Machen also handles the themes of creation and providence, and the person, ministry, and work of Christ. He did not attempt to deal in comprehensive detail with all these topics. But it is clear from the contents of this book that he recognized the importance in the contemporary world, as well as in first century Ephesus, of teaching “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

There is no dichotomy or schizophrenia here between the preacher,

the biblical scholar, and the systematic theologian. Indeed, although a New Testament scholar, Machen at times discussed the themes of these radio sermons with his younger Westminster colleague and systematic theology professor, John Murray. In preparation for his penultimate radio message on December 20, 1936, Machen consulted with Murray about the nature and significance of Christ's whole life of obedience. Less than two weeks later, as he lay dying in a hospital bed in Bismarck, North Dakota, where he had gone to preach, he sent a brief telegram to Murray: "I'm so thankful for active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." It was his final personal testimony to the wonderful comfort of a theology that is rooted in Scripture and to his own faith in Christ.

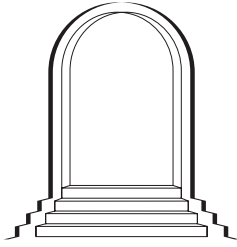
Profound scholarly learning, deep personal faith, and God-created courage characterized Machen's mature life. For that reason alone, everything he published is worth reading. This book provides a wonderful sample. Those who already love his work will rejoice to see these chapters in print again. And if this is your first exposure to him, and you are wondering whether a scholar's words may fly far above your head, you will soon discover that—like his Savior—Machen was able to speak and preach in such a way that ordinary people heard him gladly.

Much of what Gresham Machen wrote was prophetic and remains relevant to the church in our own day. Indeed, the messages in this volume are timeless. For orthodoxy, clarity, and sheer gospel verve they are hard to beat. If they do not at first strike you that way, remember that they were originally scripts. They were written with a view to being spoken, and so the best way to feel their force may be to read them out loud to yourself or to someone else.

Do this and it will almost certainly become clear that you are listening to clear-headed biblical Christianity at its finest. And you will perhaps sense why it is that Machen's personal presence made such an impression on people and why they followed his lead. Here then, "through his faith, though he died, he still speaks" (Heb 11:4). That is indeed a cause of thanksgiving. But it is also the best reason to encourage you now to read on in the pages that follow. Be instructed, encouraged, humbled, strengthened, and best of all—as Machen would have wished—be brought to a deeper knowledge of, trust in, and love for the Lord and for his Word.

Sinclair B. Ferguson
Visiting Scholar of Systematic Theology
Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

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THINGS UNSEEN

PART 1



*The Christian Faith
in the Modern World*

Preface to *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*

During the first four months of the year 1935, the author of this book delivered a course of radio addresses over Station WIP, the arrangements for which were made by the Rev. Edwin H. Rian on behalf of Westminster Theological Seminary. The addresses are here published in a form very similar to that in which they were delivered. The resulting book may perhaps lay claim to a larger degree of unity than that which is usually possessed by published addresses because these addresses proceeded in logical sequence. Little more than a beginning, however, is made of the treatment of the subject indicated in the title. The Christian view of the Bible and a part of the biblical doctrine of God are presented (of course only in summary fashion), whereas other great elements in the Christian faith—the Christian view of man and the Christian view of salvation—are left for future treatment.

The author desires to express his heartfelt gratitude to his friend, the Rev. Edwin H. Rian, of the Board of Trustees of Westminster Theological Seminary, to whom the plan for the delivery of such a course of lectures was due, and whose unfailing encouragement and help made possible the carrying out of the plan. The author is also indebted to colleagues in the Faculty of the Seminary—particularly to Mr. John Murray, who is in charge of the Department of Systematic Theology—for counsel generously given him with regard to certain of the subjects treated in the lectures.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN

The Present Emergency and How to Meet It

At the very beginning, I may as well tell you plainly that I am not going to talk about the topics that are usually regarded as most timely just now; I am not going to talk to you about the gold standard or about unemployment or about the NRA or about the Brain Trust.¹ Possibly some of you may discover that certain things I may say have a bearing upon those topics, but those topics are not the topics about which I am going to talk.

Instead, I am going to talk to you about God and about an unseen world.

May I reasonably expect you to be interested in such very intangible topics as these?

There are many persons who say “No.” We are living, say these persons, in the midst of a serious emergency. One economic system, they say, seems to have broken down, and another is not quite ready to be put into its place. Everywhere are to be found unemployment and distress, almost everywhere there are wars or rumors of wars. In the midst of such distresses, who, these persons say, could be so heartless as to spend his efforts upon doubtful speculations regarding a life beyond the grave? Time enough to deal with that other world when we have set this world in order! Let us deal bravely—so the argument runs—first with the problems that we can see; and then, when we have done that, we may possibly find opportunity afterward to deal with the unseen and intangible things.

I have much sympathy with persons who speak in that way. I do not mean that I agree with them. On the contrary, I disagree with them with

1. The National Recovery Administration was a controversial Great Depression-era federal agency. The “Brain Trust” was a popular term for President Roosevelt’s advisors.

all my soul. But I do say that I can sympathize with them, and I think I can recognize the element of truth in what they say.

It is certainly true that circumstances do alter a man's choice of the things to which he shall turn his attention. If you were living at Little America along with Byrd², I could hardly advise you to go in to any great extent for landscape gardening. What is true, moreover, of different positions on the earth's surface is true also of different times. There *are* times of emergency when work that is needed in ordinary times is no longer in place.

The World War, of course, gave us a stock example. In time of war, people turned their attention to things very different from the things that they did at ordinary times. If I may use the very humblest of all examples, the example of myself, I may say that in the time of peace before the war, I taught Greek; in the time of war, I made what I am afraid was the world's worst effort at running a small delicatessen store. Other persons did things that were more useful but were even more remote from their ordinary occupations. It was a time of emergency, and things that were ordinarily needed were no longer in place.

I am perfectly ready to admit, moreover, that although the World War is now over, the emergency remains with us to the full. Indeed, the emergency is far more serious than we could ever have imagined it would be. Little did I think, for example, as I walked through the little town of Zingem on the Scheldt River in Belgium on the morning of November 11, 1918, and saw the dead lying beside the road and went out into the positions across the river so recently occupied by the enemy, and as I gloried in the strange peace of that November morning when the noise of war that had so long seemed to be an inevitable part of human existence gave place to a strange, eloquent, unbelievable silence—little did I think, and little did men far wiser than I think, that the peace then vouchsafed to humanity would result after sixteen years in a condition like that which faces us today. Little did I think that a war supposed to make the world safe for democracy would be followed by an era in which, in Italy and in Germany, as well as in Russia, democracy and liberty would be openly despised and would be replaced by a tyranny far more crushing and soul-killing, in many respects, than the cruder tyrannies of the past. Little did I think that

2. Little America was a series of Antarctic exploration bases, the first of which was established by Richard Byrd in 1929.

even in America the civil and religious liberty which was our dearest possession and which was won by our fathers at such cost would be threatened as it is being threatened today.

No thoughtful man can possibly look out upon the world today without observing that we are in the midst of a tremendous emergency. It does seem perfectly clear to thoughtful people, whether they are Christians or not, that humanity is standing over an abyss.

At such a time, is it any wonder that this world with its pressing problems would seem to many persons quite sufficient to occupy all our thoughts? Is it any wonder that the pressing problems that are before our very eyes should crowd out attention to God and to an unseen world?

Persons who adopt that attitude may, with some plausibility, argue that the most important thing that you have to do for a man is not always the first thing that you must do for him. If a man is in the water, drowning, the most important thing to do for him is to preach the gospel to him for the saving of his soul. But that is not the first thing to do for him. The first thing to do for him is to pull him out of the water. He cannot even attend to the gospel for the saving of his soul when his ears are full of salt water. The first thing that you have to do for him—even though it be not the most important thing—is to pull him out of the water and give him artificial respiration. Then and then only can you preach the gospel to him for the saving of his soul.

It might seem to be the same way with humanity as a whole. Humanity is drowning in the water, or, to change the figure slightly, is sinking in the mire. The first thing to do might seem to be to pull it out, in order that after it has been pulled out we may ask it to deal with the unseen things. Let the church show what it can do with the plain emergency as it actually exists in this world—the argument might run—and then, if it proves able to do that, the world may think it worth listening to if it talks about God.

Plausible reasoning this is—plausible, but utterly untrue.

In the first place, the program that this reasoning proposes will not work. It proposes that we shall first deal with the political and social emergency and then afterward deal with the unseen things. But what was it that brought the emergency upon us in the first place? Was it something in the realm of that which can be seen? Not at all. The physical resources of the world were amply sufficient for the world's needs. No, the thing that brought the emergency upon us was something in the realm of the unseen things. It was an evil that was found within the soul of man.

That evil was not quite so simple as was at first supposed. Not many of us, I think, would now hold that the war was due solely to the sins of the Kaiser or the German military machine. The evil, alas, was considerably more widespread than that, but at least it clearly lay within the realm of those intangible unseen things. It lay within the soul of man and within the sphere of the relations between man and the unseen world.

Moreover, if it was something within that realm that brought the emergency to us in the first place, it is also something in that realm that keeps the emergency with us today. The distress of the world is due clearly to an evil that is within the soul of man.

Hence these so-called practical men who would neglect the realm of the soul and of the soul's relations to God in order to deal with the economic problems of the day are the most impractical people that could possibly be imagined. They always remind me of a man who tries to run a gasoline engine that is not producing a spark. You may have your engine in fine working order; there may be a good flow of gasoline; there may be the most perfect lubrication: but if there is something wrong with the ignition system, your engine will not run. I think I remember trying the experiment inadvertently sometimes in those heroic days before the invention of self-starters when a Ford was still a Ford. I cranked my engine until I was very red in the face and until my temper suffered considerable strain. I imagined that I needed an expert capable of discoursing on the most intricate principles of dynamics. But despite all my efforts and despite all my search for mechanical learning, the miserable engine would not start. Why? Because there was anything wrong with the engine? Not at all. Henry Ford had done his work well. But because I had forgotten to turn on the switch, it would not start. So it is with these practical men who are not interested in the human soul or in God. They are cranking the engine of society furiously; they are proposing all sorts of radical changes in the machinery. But there is one little thing that they have forgotten. They have forgotten to turn on the switch. The engine is not producing a spark; and until it produces a spark, it will not run.

The truth is that the analogy of the drowning man does not apply to the evils of society. To pull a drowning man out of the water is a simple physical effort. But to pull society out of the mire into which it has fallen today is not a simple physical effort at all, but a highly complex matter; and at the very heart of it is that mysterious portion of the mechanism known as the soul of man.

It is impossible, therefore, to deal first with the social and political evils of the day and then deal afterward with the unseen things for the simple reason that without dealing with the unseen things you cannot deal successfully with those social and political problems at all.

In that point I am particularly anxious to avoid any misunderstanding of what I am saying. I certainly do not mean by what I have been saying that religion is to be regarded merely as a means to a higher end. I certainly do not mean that God is to be dragged in merely to help us out in the troubles that face us at the present emergency. If I meant that, I should be rejecting the central things of the Christian religion and should be saying something quite contrary to the Bible.

We ought to be perfectly clear about this point. If you regard religion merely as a means to attain worldly ends, even the highest and noblest of worldly ends—if you regard religion, for example, merely as a means of meeting the present emergency in this world—then you have never begun to have even the slightest inkling of what the Christian religion means. God, as he is known to the Christian, is never content to be thus a mere instrument in the hands of those who care nothing about him. The relation to God is the all-important thing. It is not a mere means to an end. Everything else is secondary to it.

But what I do mean is that God has so ordered the course of this world that in this case—unlike that case of the drowning man—it is impossible to attain the lower end until the higher end has been attained. It is impossible to deal successfully even with these political and social problems until we have come to be right with God. No emergency can possibly be so pressing as to permit us to postpone attention to the unseen things.

Indeed, the emergency ought to have exactly the opposite effect; the evils of the time, instead of leading us away from God, ought to lead us to him. There was a time not so very long ago when this world might have seemed to a superficial observer to be a fairly satisfactory place. Even then the evil was there, but it was covered up; the abyss over which we were standing was concealed by the amenities of modern life. When I was a student in Germany in the years 1905–1906, the world might have seemed to a superficial observer to be getting along fairly well without God. It was a fine, comfortable world, that godless, European world before 1914. And as for another European war, that seemed to be about as far beyond the bounds of possibility as that the knights should don their armor and set their lances again in rest. The international bankers, we supposed, obviously

would prevent an anachronism so absurd. But we have since discovered our mistake. That godless European and American world proved to be not so comfortable after all.

Today the world is in a state far more disquieting than that which prevailed in 1918. Europe is armed to the teeth. Russia stands under the most systematic and soul-crushing tyranny that the world has ever seen. In Germany, fiendish wickedness is being practiced in the name of science, and in that country as well as in Italy, even the form of liberty—to say nothing of the reality of it—has been abandoned. Civil and religious liberty are being treated openly as though they have been merely a passing phase in human life, well enough in their day but now out-of-date. In America, the same tendencies are mightily at work. Everywhere there rises before our eyes the specter of a society where security, if it is attained at all, will be attained at the expense of freedom, where the security that is attained will be the security of fed beasts in a stable, and where all the high aspirations of humanity will have been crushed by an all-powerful state.

Is this a time when we ought to be contented with things as they are? Is it not rather a time when we ought seriously to ask ourselves whether there is not some lost secret which must be regained if humanity is to be saved from the abyss?

What is true about humanity as a whole is also true, I venture to think, about you. The world is weary and perplexed today. Well, how is it with you? Are you contented with your lives as they are now? I suppose that many of you are. But some of you, I know, are discontented and looking for something entirely different from that which you now possess. That is true of rich as well as of poor; it has little to do with your particular situation in this world. To such hungry souls I think I have something to say in this little series of talks; and there are many hungry souls today.

But why is it that I have something to say to you? Is it because I am an expert in religion and because I can draw upon great resources of wisdom and experience in order to help you deal with the problems of your lives? Is it because I am a skillful soul-physician who can point you to hidden resources in your own souls upon which you yourselves can then draw? I may as well say at once that if that is the program of these addresses, I cannot expect you to attend to them anymore. There are many persons in the world, there are many persons speaking “over the air,” who are far wiser and more learned and in every way more gifted than I. No, I certainly cannot expect you to listen to me because of any wisdom of mine, for I have

none. I cannot expect you to be particularly interested in any opinions of mine that I may be bold enough to present.

There is just one reason why I may possibly expect you to listen to me. I may expect you to listen to me if I can bring to you a message from God. If I can do that, then the very insignificance of the speaker may in a certain sense be an added inducement to you to listen to him, since it may help you to forget the speaker and attend only to the message.

It is just this that I am trying to do. I am asking you to turn away from me and my opinions; I am asking you to turn away from yourself and your opinions and your troubles; and I am asking you to turn instead that you may listen to a word from God.

Where can I find that word? I am going to try to tell you in the next one of these little talks. Not in myself and not in you, but in an old book that has been sealed by the seals of prejudice and unbelief but that will, if it is rediscovered, again set the world aflame and show you, be you wise or unwise, rich or poor, the way by which you can come into communion with the living God.³

3. These talks have been reprinted in Hart, D.G., *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004).

How May God Be Known?

In the first talk of this little series, I tried to tell you why I think you cannot postpone attention to God and to an unseen world. It is true that this world presents pressing problems, but you can never solve even those problems aright unless you first face the question of your relation to God. That is the all-important thing, and the distresses of the present time only serve to press it still more insistently upon our attention.

But if it is important for us to face the question of our relation to God, how can God be known to us? How can we discover whether there is a God at all, and then, if there is, what sort of being he is?

I have something rather simple to say about that question at the very start. It is something that seems to me to be rather obvious, and yet it is quite generally ignored. It is simply this: that if we are really to know anything about God, it will probably be because God has chosen to tell it to us.

Many persons seem to go on a very different assumption. They seem to think that if they are to know anything about God they must discover God for themselves.

That assumption seems to me to be extremely unlikely. Just supposing, for the sake of the argument, that there is a being of such a kind as that he may with any propriety be called "God," it does seem antecedently very improbable that weak and limited creatures of a day, such as we are, should discover him by our own efforts without any will on his part to make himself known to us. At least, I think we can say that a god who could be discovered in that way would hardly be worth discovering. A mere passive subject of human investigation is certainly not a living God who can satisfy the longing of our souls.

Some years ago, I was asked to contribute to a composite volume which

had as its general title, *My Idea of God*.¹ Various writers told, each of them, what his own idea of God was. One said, "I think of God so"; another said, "I think *so*." Now I shall not presume to say whether the essay that I contributed to that volume had any particular merit at all. Perhaps it was a rather poor effort. But I do very deliberately maintain that I was right at least in saying at the beginning of it that if *my* idea of God were really mine I should attach very little importance to it myself and could reasonably expect even less importance to be attributed to it by others.

A divine being that could be discovered by my efforts, apart from his gracious will to reveal himself to me and to others, would be either a mere name for a certain aspect of man's own nature, a God that we could find within us, or else at best a mere passive thing that would be subject to investigation like the substances that are analyzed in a laboratory.

I think we ought to stick to that principle rather firmly. I think we ought to be rather sure that we cannot know God unless God has been pleased to reveal himself to us.

How, then, has God revealed himself to us?

In the first place, he has revealed himself by the universe that he has made. How did the world come into being? It is here. That cannot be denied. But how did it come to be?

The question forces itself upon the attention of every thinking man. We may try to evade it. We may just say that it is unanswerable. We may try to put it out of our minds. But it continues to haunt us all the same, and for ages it has haunted the human race.

I think the universe itself provides the answer to that question. The answer is itself a mystery, but it is a mystery in which we can rest. The answer is a very simple answer. The answer is that the world came into being because God made it. It is the work of an infinite and all-wise and all-powerful God.

That answer presses itself upon different people in different ways. It has been defended by philosophers and theologians by way of detailed reasoning. That reasoning has been divided logically into what are called the "theistic proofs"—indications in the world itself that point to the existence of a personal God, Creator and Ruler of the world.

I am not going to speak of them here except just to say that I think they are good proofs, and that the Christian man, whether he has a detailed

1. *My Idea of God: A Symposium of Faith*, ed. Joseph Fort Newton, Litt.D., D.H.L., 1926.

knowledge of them or not, ought never to depreciate them or regard as a matter of no importance the debate about them among philosophers and learned men.

But I am not going to attempt any exposition of those proofs. What I do want to do is just point out that the testimony of nature to nature's God comes to different people in different ways. I remember listening some time ago to a lecture by an eminent man of science. The lecturer traced the progress of scientific investigation and pointed out, if I remember aright, its material benefits. But then he paused to speak of another product of the scientific spirit; the true scientist, he said, is brought face to face at last with the ultimate mystery, and at that point he becomes a religious man. There is endless diversity in the world, said he, but the progress of investigation has revealed the electron; and the electrons, said he, are all alike—they are machine-made—and their marvelous likeness reveals the existence of a mystery into which man cannot penetrate; in truly religious awe the man of science stands at length before a curtain that is never lifted, a mystery that rebukes all pride.

I am not saying that the man of science had a true knowledge of God. I do not think that he had. I should have liked, if he had been willing to listen to me, to tell him of the way in which, for little children as well as for learned men of science, that dreadful curtain of which he spoke has been pulled gently aside to give us at least a look into the mysteries beyond. But at least there was one aspect of nature that brought the scientist to the threshold of a knowledge of God.

To some men the testimony of nature to nature's God comes by such precise knowledge of nature as was possessed by that scientist. To others it comes by a reasoned consideration of the implications of nature's existence. But to still others it comes by what Browning calls "a sunset-touch."² To one man in one way, to another in another.

To me nature speaks clearest in the majesty and beauty of the hills. One day in the summer of 1932, I stood on the summit of the Matterhorn in the Alps. Some people can stand there and see very little. Depreciating the Matterhorn is a recognized part of modern books on mountain-climbing. The great mountain, it is said, has been sadly spoiled. Why, you can even see sardine cans on those rocks that so tempted the ambition of climbers in Whymper's³ day. Well, I can only say that when I stood on the Matterhorn

2. Robert Browning, "Bishop Blougram's Apology," in *Men and Women*, 1855.

3. Edward Whymper (1840–1911) was an English mountaineer and explorer.

I do not remember seeing a single can. Perhaps that was partly because of the unusual masses of fresh snow which were then on the mountain, but I think it was also due to the fact that, unlike some people, I had eyes for something else. I saw the vastness of the Italian plain, which was like a symbol of infinity. I saw the snows of distant mountains. I saw the sweet green valleys far, far below, at my feet. I saw the whole glorious round of glittering peaks, bathed in an unearthly light. And as I see that glorious vision again before me now, I am thankful from the bottom of my heart that from my mother's knee I have known to whom all that glory is due.

Then I love the softer beauties of nature also. I wonder whether you love them with me. Some years ago, in the White Mountains, I walked beside a brook. I have seen, I suppose, hundreds of brooks. But somehow I remembered particularly that one. I am not going to tell you where it is, because if I did you might write to the C.C.C.⁴ or the National Park Service about it and get them to put a scenic highway along it, and then it would be forever ruined. But when I walked along it, it was untouched. I cherish the memory of it. It was gentle, sweet, and lovely beyond all words. I think a man might travel through all the world and never see anything lovelier than a White Mountain brook. Very wonderful is the variety of nature in her changing moods.

Silence too, the silence of nature, can be a very revealing thing. I remember one day when I spent a peaceful half-hour in the sunlight on the summit of a mountain in the Franconia range. I there experienced something very rare. Would you believe it, my friends? It was really *silent* on that sunny mountain top. There was not the honk of a motor horn; there was no jazz music; there was no sound of a human voice; there was not even the rustling of the leaves. There was nothing but a strange, brooding silence. It was a precious time indeed. I shall never forget it all my life.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not asking that everyone should love the beauties of nature as I love them. I do think, indeed, that the love of nature ought to be cultivated. At least, I do not think that government ought to go into the business of crushing it out of a people's soul as the United States government is doing by some of the artificialities and regularities of its National Parks. I think some sweet and delicate little things ought to be left untouched. But I well understand that there are many people who do not love the beauties of nature. Are they shut off from finding God revealed in the world that he has made?

4. Civilian Conservation Corps, a Great Depression-era federal work program.

Indeed, that is not so, my friends; indeed, it is not so. The mystery of the existence of the world presses itself upon different people in different ways. I remember, for example, a talk that I heard from a professor at an afternoon conference service many years ago. I do not know just why I should remember it, but I do remember it. The professor said that he had a friend who had come to a belief in God, or had come back to a belief in God, by—what do you suppose? Well, by a trip through Europe! As he went from city to city and observed the seething multitudes, the throngs upon throngs of men and women, somehow, he said, the conviction just seemed to come over him: “There is a God, there is a God.”

Was that a foolish fancy? Were those experiences in my own life of which I have been bold enough to speak merely meaningless dreams? Or were they true testimonies to something marvelous beyond? Were they moments when God was graciously revealing himself to me through the glory of the world that he has made?

I think a Christian ought not to be afraid to give the latter answer. The revelation of God through nature has the stamp of approval put upon it by the Bible. The Bible clearly teaches that nature reveals the glory of God.

In a wonderful passage in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul says that God’s “invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Rom 1:20). Here the Bible approves the arguments of those who in systematic fashion argue from the existence of the world to the existence of a divine Maker of the world. But the Bible also approves those more unreasoned flashes of knowledge in which suddenly we see God’s workmanship in the beauty and the majesty of his world. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork,” says the psalmist (Ps 19:1). And what said our Lord Jesus Christ? “Even Solomon in all his glory,” said he of the lilies of the field, “was not arrayed like one of these” (Matt 6:29).

All that is true. The revelation of God through nature is a very precious thing. But then a serious question arises: if God has revealed himself through the things that he has made, why do so very few men listen to the revelation? The plain fact is that very few men arrive by a contemplation of nature at a true belief in a personal God. Even those scientists whose religious views are sometimes being incautiously welcomed by Christian people are often found, upon closer examination, to believe only in a God who is identical with a spiritual purpose supposed to inhere in the world

process itself and are found not to believe at all in a living and holy God—the true God who created the heavens and the earth.

Why is that so? If God has revealed himself so plainly through the world that he has made, why do men not see?

Well, when men do not see something, there are two possible explanations of the fact: one is that there is nothing there to see and the other is that the men who do not see are blind.

It is this latter explanation which the Bible gives of the failure of men to know God through the things that he has made. The Bible puts it very plainly in that same passage already quoted from the first chapter of Romans. “Their foolish hearts,” says Paul, “were darkened” (Rom 1:21). Hence, they did not see. The fault did not lie in nature. Men were “without excuse” (Rom 1:20), Paul says, when they did not see what nature had to show. Their minds were blinded by sin. That is a hard saying, but like many other hard sayings it is true. You will never understand anything else that I may say unless you understand that we, all of us, so long as we stand in our own right and have not had our eyes mysteriously opened, are lost and blind in sin.