

Dear Dr. Machen

Since reading the last issue of the Guardian, I have been confirmed in feeling that I ought to write you with reference to certain points which I have not had time to discuss with you adequately. (1) The first of these is the method to be used in correcting dispensational error. You are a far more experienced and more capable Christian leader than I, but I have had certain experiences with devout people misguided by dispensationalism, which I think you have not had. I have found that such people will generally listen to specific arguments with definite references but they are not convinced, and I think could not be expected to be convinced, by general phrases such as "the dispensationalism of the Scofield Bible." Professor Murray's article last May and Dr. Allis' two articles in recent issues of the Evangelical Quarterly were more definitely characterized by careful handling of detail. The last issue of the Guardian contained a very effective appeal on page seventy-one, column two-b, but it is all in the realm of generalities and hence in the realm most likely to cause irritation rather than to bring conviction. This is especially true since the doctrine of a literal millennium is seen to be a particular within the general phrase which Dr. Kuiper used.

Furthermore I should find it very helpful if you or someone who disagrees with me in regard to the dispensationalism of Charles Hodge would analyze that question and bring to light the difference which you feel exists. I think my interpretation of Hodge was correct, but I am entirely prepared to be convinced by evidence. I imagine there are many others in my state of mind in regard to that point.

The false idea that certain parts of the Scripture are "on legal ground" in the sense in which these words are used in the Scofield notes, is found in the writings of many great theologians.

(2) Now let me approach in fear and trembling a far more difficult point and let me say again by way of preface that my deep admiration for your Christian leadership has not changed in the least. In pointing out what I think has been an error, I am doing so in the deepest feeling of friendship and with the keenest realization of my own failures. I really think you have misjudged Carl McIntire, and the statement in the second paragraph of the article which begins about the middle of column one, page seventy-one, in the last issue of the Guardian, is not adequate. You seemed so very determined and positive and unwilling to be convinced by anything that might be said to the contrary, that I may have been quite weak and faithless in our recent conversations. I did try to suggest in as kindly a way as I knew how, that I did not agree in your insistence that Mr. McIntire was under obligation to print Dr. Kuiper's letter in full. Whether or not Dr. Kuiper used general words in an incorrect way as I think he did, and whether or not Dr. Kuiper was himself responsible in part at least for the misunderstanding which arose, and whether or not in his letter he introduced arguments irrelevant to the correction of the misunderstanding, - i.e. supposing that Dr. Kuiper's terms were perfectly clear and specific and that he was in no way responsible for the misunderstanding of his article and that his letter was simply a correction of the misunderstanding, - yet an editor is not bound to print material which he honestly thinks irrelevant. His obligation is discharged when he has made such correction as he is convinced is necessary in order to make the testimony of his paper truthful and accurate. In other words, I cannot see that the editor of a Christian paper is under any different obligation from that which rests upon a minister in his pulpit utterances.

[Note the way in which the editor of the Guardian dealt with my reply to Mr. Murray's criticism. I feel that the material excluded was pertinent but the editor was within his rights in excluding what he thought was irrelevant.]

Now, I am sure you will be gracious in realizing that I am simply expressing to you my sincere conviction. What follows is an interpretation of recent events from my own point of view, - I believe that a considerable number of your very best friends and your most faithful supporters feel as I do in regard to your remarks about Mr. McIntire in the issue of the Guardian which preceded the General Assembly. I believe therefore that the change in the presidency in the Independent Board had far more to do with the reaction of the "spirit of democracy" which we have all observed, than with the eschatological question. Some of your friends have interpreted the attitude of the editors of the Guard-

ian toward the Beacon as being undemocratic and dictatorial. The right of a young pastor to start a paper and to conduct it with such degree of success as he can, has not been questioned so far as I know; but I wonder if some interpreted your attitude toward McIntire in this light.

Well, that is about the worst thing I have to say, and if you can forgive me and still regard me as a brother in the Lord, perhaps you will be willing to read my comment on one or two more points.

[The following material numbered as point (3), is of less importance than the other points.]

(3) I have a feeling that there has been a shift of emphasis in your own position or at least in the position of Westminster Seminary in the past five years. I believe thoroughly in the system of doctrine taught in the Scripture as set forth in the Westminster Standards as they existed before 1903. I believe that that system of doctrine is supremely important. I believe, however, that the emphasis upon historical apologetics and Biblical exegesis which characterizes the works of James Orr, Robert Dick Wilson, and your great works on the origin of Paul's religion, the virgin birth, and other subjects, ought to be retained. The apparent tendency in Westminster to substitute what your faculty would call a theological but what I sincerely believe is a philosophical type of apologetics seems to me a tendency in the wrong direction. You have been so great a leader in meeting the unbelieving world on its own grounds of critical scholarship, I hate to see our young men going forth from Westminster with the feeling that critical historical apologetics is of less value than philosophical apologetics.

I do not question the right of a professor in a truly Presbyterian seminary to teach the amillennial view if he believes it. You do not question the right of a professor to teach the premillennial view if that is his conviction. It has seemed to me, however, that the shift of emphasis from historical critical apologetics to philosophical apologetics has resulted in a very strong and disproportionate emphasis upon the amillennial view. This, in my humble judgment, has resulted from a philosophical conception which has unconsciously been allowed to creep in, and has not been the result of careful critical Biblical scholarship.

I am sure you know that I believe in preaching doctrine and in preaching the system of doctrine, but I fear that doctrinal preaching which is more philosophical than exegetical is dangerous. I feel like saying that the doctrinal sermon which is not actually based upon critical historical exegesis of the Scripture is very likely to go astray.

So far I have proceeded through three difficult points. Let me just touch upon another which is likely to be a very sore one. (4) There is among your most faithful friends and followers a deep feeling that any theology which does not result in "a separated life" cannot be truly Biblical. The question of alcoholism in America today with our neurotic mixed race and our fast mechanical life, is entirely different from that question in Palestine in the first century. To argue from usage in the one situation to a conclusion in the other is as illogical as to argue for foot-washing as a modern Christian custom. Such things as [introducing] the use of fermented wine of which converted alcoholics are expected to partake at the communion table, are far more likely to cause an explosion in our ranks than any question of eschatology. The report that some Westminster students use liquor and keep it in their rooms with the approval of some members of the faculty is also likely to produce a serious explosion. I feel also (as an individual) that the commercial stage can never be defended as though it existed merely for drama as a fine art. Not all of your friends and mine agree with the position of Wheaton College in completely boycotting the commercial theatre. We maintain our position without desiring to force it upon our Christian friends who cannot see exactly with us. Nevertheless it seems so useless, such a waste of energy, that a considerable number of our mutual friends, a considerable portion of the Presbyterian Church of America, have to be shocked by the spectacle of some of their leaders in the defense of the faith also defending the products of Hollywood.

How I wish I could sit down with you and Dr. Kuiper and Dr. Van Til and the others and talk over all of these problems. I have written this letter with

great hesitation. I would not offend you for the world but I do hope and pray that these remarks may be helpful.

Yours in Christian fellowship

(Signed) J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.

P.S. I have read this letter over with serious misgivings. I do not know whether I ought to send it or not. On the first two points I have some hopes of persuading you in part at least. On the second two points, I imagine your opinions are quite settled, at I thought it might be helpful for you to know of my feeling and my prayer for you and for Westminster Seminary from these two viewpoints also.

J.O.B., Jr.

Copy of a letter to a member of the Board of Trustees of Westminster Seminary. This letter was written with the understanding that it would be sent to Mr. Wobley for his comment.

January
thirty
1937

My dear _____

I told you in conversation the other day of my conference with the Westminster faculty Monday evening, January twenty-fifth. I feel that you as a trustee of Westminster and as one who has sacrificed so much for the cause we all love, should be informed, and therefore I am writing down certain conclusions which I think were reached.

(1) ~~The faculty stand by Professor Murray's attitude toward alcoholic liquor.~~ They defend him not only in theory but in his practice. Professor Murray drinks liquor and insists upon the principle of personal liberty in doing so. The faculty insist that he is right. This none of them will dispute, I am sure.

We did not exactly agree on definitions of terms in regard to the emphasis Mr. Murray places upon this point, but I feel that I am justified in describing his attitude as follows:- Whereas Dr. Machen believed in a principle of personal liberty which I believe to be wrong, Dr. Machen did not touch liquor because he wanted his testimony on crucial matters of doctrine to be unencumbered. Mr. Murray drinks liquor himself and does not hesitate to state his views and his practices whenever the occasion comes up with students or others. Thus his pedagogical effect upon students is far worse. Mr. Murray stated that his drinking liquor was a matter of principle, but denied that he teaches that others ought to drink to vindicate that principle. I feel that the impact upon young ministers is the same whether Mr. Murray says "I drink from principle" or "You ought to drink from principle." Mr. Murray does admit that it may not be wrong for a person to refrain from drinking, but he does feel that it is very wrong for a person to teach abstinence to others.

The faculty as a whole are very emphatic in their opposition to the teaching of total abstinence. I think we agreed on definitions at that point. The faculty think it wrong to teach that ministers in this present day and age ought not to drink liquor.

We did not discuss other social practices at any great length, but the countenancing of the entire program of what we call worldliness characterizes the attitude of the Seminary faculty very strongly.

[The above sentence has been said to be a misrepresentation. I think it is entirely correct. The trustee to whom I was writing, and we at Wheaton are the "we" in the phrase "what we call worldliness."]7

Mr. Rian supports Mr. Murray one hundred per cent in his theory and in his practice of personal liberty. I happen to know from other sources that Mr. Rian frequently or occasionally speaks to our friends against what we would call

"the separated life." For that reason alone I should have been opposed to Mr. Rian's election as the president of the board of trustees of the Seminary.

[The next two paragraphs, and the next to the last paragraph in this letter, are of lesser importance.]

We spent some time last Monday evening in discussing the change of emphasis from the type of apologetics which characterized the work of Dr. Robert Dick Wilson to the type characterized by Dr. Van Til. I have very high regard for Dr. Van Til, and I do not wish to be understood as objecting to the constructive side of his philosophy. I think it is a very real contribution and a valuable supplement to the type of apologetics which Dr. Wilson advanced. I think, however, there is a very serious fault in Dr. Van Til's epistemology. Dr. Van Til frankly and emphatically stated that he does not agree with the underlying assumptions of the arguments of James Orr, Charles Hodge, and Robert Dick Wilson. He claimed that Dr. Machen agreed with him in this point. I know that Dr. Machen in recent days was greatly affected by Dr. Van Til and Professor Murray. I do not doubt that he expressed himself as being in sympathy with their views, but logically Van Til's system would cut the ground from beneath "The Origin of Paul's Religion" and "The Virgin Birth" just as much as it would cut the ground from beneath Wilson's "Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament."

I have read three long mimeographed studies by Professor Van Til, and have conferred with him in regard to them. I think I understand his point of view thoroughly. He does not believe that it is possible or reasonable to deal with an unsaved man on the basis of factual historical Christian evidences. The only possible means of dealing with an unsaved man is simply to use an "ad hominem argument" to destroy the unsaved man's conclusions. Now to me Charles Hodge's Systematic Theology is the very best statement of the Reformed faith. A rejection of Hodge on the part of a Professor in Westminster Seminary is to me a reductio ad absurdum. If Hodge, Orr, and Wilson are fundamentally wrong according to Van Til, then Van Til must be wrong somewhere.

I shall always regret that my last letter to Dr. Machen (December fourth, 1936) was critical. In as kindly a way as I knew how I brought up the two issues mentioned above which I discussed with the Westminster faculty last Monday evening. Although I regret having taken these matters up, now that Dr. Machen has gone to be with the Lord, yet in another way I am glad to say that I did bring these issues up before his death and am not raising new questions after the departure of our great leader. Dr. Machen's death, in my judgment, gives greater importance to these questions. His life testimony was in the field of historical critical apologetics. His world-renowned courage and scholarship counter-balanced objectionable things in Westminster, and his attitude toward liquor and other worldly practices, completely abstaining from liquor and tobacco, did not begin to have the harmful effect upon the lives of young men which Murray's attitude will increasingly have if correction is not made.

I raise two other questions in my December fourth letter to Dr. Machen, which we did not have time to discuss in my meeting with the faculty last Monday. These questions were (1) the method of attack on "the dispensationalism of the Scofield Bible" and (2) the intolerant and undemocratic attitude of the Westminster group toward Mr. McIntire's independent paper. I feel that Dr. Machen's attitude on these two questions in the last few months of his life was not at all characteristic of him, but that he was influenced by those who are now dominantly in control of Westminster.

I feel that the philosophy of time held by the Westminster faculty, and Dr. Van Til in particular, is at the basis of much of the attack upon the premillennial position which goes on in the Westminster classrooms. The Westminster faculty do not see this point and we did not have time to argue it. I hope to take up the matter later on.

What I fear is that the Presbyterian Church of America, necessarily going the way of the separated life, the strongly evangelical and historical type of apologetics and evangelism, and quite largely colored by premillennial teaching, may have to part company with Westminster Seminary. I wish that parting of the ways might be prevented. I do not believe God will bless a drinking, worldly ministry.

Yours in Christian fellowship

(Signed) J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.

P.S. The above has been hastily composed but I want to get it mailed today. Please use it as you think the Lord would have you.

J.O.B., Jr.

Mr. Woolley's reply to the Trustee addressed in my letter of January 30, 1937.

Dear Mr. _____

March 9, 1937

Thank you for your letter of March second. I am exceedingly glad that you have taken up with a member of the Seminary staff the matters of which it speaks. I feel that, although that way is not always followed, it is by far the most satisfactory way and perhaps we shall, by mutual consideration, be able to throw some light upon the subjects concerned.

Turning now to Dr. Buswell's letter to you, dated January 30, 1937, I should say that some of the statements of fact upon the first page of that letter are correct. The following statements are quite inaccurate: "but he (Mr. Murray) does feel that it is very wrong for a person to teach abstinence to others" and "the countenancing of the entire program of what we call worldliness characterizes the attitude of the Seminary faculty very strongly." Further, Mr. Murray does not insist upon a "principle of personal liberty." He is insisting simply upon the Apostle Paul's principle of Christian liberty. In addition to these points, I feel that the first page conveys a very misleading impression because it gives the idea that Mr. Murray's influence strongly encourages members of the student body to use alcoholic beverages. I do not believe that this is a fact. I know of no evidence for it. The whole impression created is that drinking is an accepted custom among Westminster students. This is positively contrary to fact.

May I say very emphatically that the faculty is exceedingly anxious to see maintained the highest moral and ethical principles among the students. Should any case of intemperance be brought to its attention, it would wish to deal with it immediately. One such supposed case was recently brought to the attention of the faculty. I am informed that you have been given some information about the matter. The case was carefully investigated and the rumors concerning the student were found to be erroneous and no evidence of intemperance on his part was discovered. It did appear, however, that he had on certain occasions used alcoholic beverages and the question of the expediency of his use was discussed with him and he has come to see additional light upon the question of such expediency.

I think that the principle, which, I believe, characterizes the position of all of the members of the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary was set forth in the editorial entitled "Godliness and Christian Liberty," which appeared in The Presbyterian Guardian for February 27, 1937. The position which makes departure from a policy of total abstinence a sin is a position which makes our Lord Jesus Christ a sinner. The faculty of Westminster Seminary is not willing to take that position and I trust that it never will be willing to take that position. But it is an utter misrepresentation to say that the countenancing of worldliness characterizes the faculty. I cannot denounce such a perversion of facts too strongly. The Bible again and again points out the necessity of separation from the things of the world and the faculty of Westminster Seminary would have no reason for existence if it were to depart from the teaching of what the Bible teaches.

Turning now to the second subject of Dr. Buswell's letter - the matter of Dr. Van Til's apologetic - may I say that I feel very confident that Dr. Buswell does not understand Dr. Van Til's position. I was of that opinion throughout our conversation with him and I am more and more confirmed in that feeling by Dr. Buswell's letters and discussions with Dr. Van Til. I think that a large portion of the two paragraphs of page 2 of Dr. Buswell's letter, which deal with Dr. Van Til, is erroneous. Dr. Buswell states, for example, "Now to me Charles Hodge's Systematic Theology is the very best statement of the Reformed Faith. A rejection of Hodge on the part of a Professor in Westminster Seminary is to me a reductio ad absurdum." I agree that a rejection of Hodge on the part of a professor in Westminster Seminary would be a reductio ad absurdum, but to imply that Dr. Van Til makes such a rejection is absurdity in itself. I do not for a moment mean to imply that Dr. Van Til necessarily agrees with everything that Charles Hodge has said. I do not myself and I do not suppose that he does or that any other thinking man is likely so to do. But to imply that there is a rejection of Charles Hodge's system of theology is simply quixotic. The point which Dr. Van Til is trying to make is very simply. It is this. In reasoning

every one starts from certain premises. But the premises with which the Christian starts must be different from the premises with which the unbeliever starts. This I think must be admitted. But it does not mean that a Christian and an unbeliever cannot get together and reason on a common basis of factual material; of course they can. It does mean, however, that by the Christian the universe cannot be accepted as the same as it would be without God.

Later in his letter Dr. Buswell refers to "a philosophy of time" held by the Westminster faculty. Again I feel confident that Dr. Buswell entirely misunderstands what he thinks to be a philosophy of time held by the Westminster faculty. The faculty as such has never discussed a philosophy of time as far as I know, but even if its members should agree on what may be said about time I am sure that there would be nothing about it of the surversive character indicated.

[In the two paragraphs immediately above, Mr. Woolley shows that he does not understand Dr. Van Til's type of apologetics. I am confident that I have spent much more time on Dr. Van Til's work and in conference with Dr. Van Til on these points, than Mr. Woolley has spent. I have been a student and a teacher of philosophy for some time. However, these points are of minor importance compared with the question of the use of intoxicants.]

With reference to the first paragraph of the third page of Dr. Buswell's letter, I am not sure that I know what Dr. Buswell would say about "the method of attack on 'the dispensationalism of the Scofield Bible.'" I think myself that the method of attack has not always been wise. I think that view of mine is shared by others, but the important thing is not the method but the question of whether there are certain important errors in the Scofield Bible which need to be pointed out. As I see it, there are. Some of these errors, for example, are the following statements:

"By obedience man came to a personal and experimental knowledge of good and evil - of good as obedience, of evil as disobedience to the known will of God." (P.10)

"(2) As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. iii. 24-26, iv. 24, 25). The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as a fruit of salvation" (p. 1115)

"The righteous man under law became righteous by doing righteously." (p. 1323)

I think you will agree about the unscriptural character of these statements. I have taken them from a Scofield Bible that I have used personally for a long time. I believe that the Scofield Bible has in many respects been a blessing, but I think that it would be a greater blessing if its notes were not accepted as if they were almost as authoritative as the text of the Bible itself. It seems to me that that is a dangerous attitude into which many people have fallen. If those who love the Scofield Bible would only be willing to admit that it has shortcomings, everyone would be far wiser and better off.

The expression concerning the second matter mentioned just in passing in this first paragraph of page 3 of Dr. Buswell's letter, "the intolerant and undemocratic attitude of the Westminster group toward Mr. McIntire's independent paper" does not, I feel, characterize at all the attitude of the faculty of Westminster Seminary. It was Dr. Machen's feeling and it was the feeling of many of the rest of us that Mr. McIntire had made an untrue statement in the editorial notes of his paper with reference to an article by Professor Kuiper. It was, and is, our feeling that it is unethical for an editor to make untrue statements and then not be willing to correct them by printing a reasonable correction. After much discussion and after the erroneous statement had done a great deal of harm, Mr. McIntire finally printed a correction in his paper. It was not, however, in a form which was acceptable to the person who had been injured and it was accompanied by the development of hostility toward people who, including myself, were doing our best to help Mr. McIntire. It is my feeling that a number of the items which have appeared in the Christian Beacon during the course of the past months reflect Mr. McIntire's increasing and very sad hostility to the Seminary. It is an entire misunderstanding of Dr. Machen to think that he was only influenced by others to oppose Mr. McIntire's conduct. He felt that a lowering of Christian standards had taken place that could not possibly be justified, and he was most vigorous in that position.

[I do not think Mr. Woolley is just in his reference to Mr. McIntire.]

In conclusion let me say that the position of Westminster Seminary today is exactly what it was when it was founded in the summer of 1929. Westminster has tried throughout its history to be loyal to the Bible and loyal to the Lord Whom the Bible proclaims. It has not changed its principles nor has it changed the theology that it is teaching. It was a matter of common knowledge to many people in 1929 that Mr. Charles L. Huston, of Coatesville, did not take an active part in the support of Westminster Seminary because, in part at least, he was opposed to the use of tobacco by Dr. Robert Dick Wilson. That incident shows that the position of Westminster Seminary on such matters is nothing new. During the period when national prohibition was a law in this country there were some members of the faculty who thought that such a law was a mistake. There were others who thought that such a law was expedient. But I think that there never was, and I hope there will not be, a member of the faculty who thought that prohibition was a divine law and I do not see how anyone who reads the Bible can think so.

Essentially the matter at issue is not at all one concerning particular problems of conduct. By misrepresenting the situation at the Seminary that has been made to appear to be the case. The real issue is a question of Biblical exegesis. Do we really believe the Bible? That is the question.

If I have not dealt with the matters at hand fully enough, I would be only too glad to write you further or to talk the matter over with you. I think that clarity on these matters is of great importance. I should be perfectly willing to come to _____ to see you if that would be of any service. I feel that President Buswell is misrepresenting the Seminary throughout the country as reports from widely scattered places to us indicate. I do not know whether it is possible to get him to understand the Seminary's position, but I think that perhaps you and others will understand it.

[The next to the last sentence in the above paragraph is entirely untruthful. I dealt only with the Westminster faculty and trustees in private until after the Guardian's article in defense of liquor.]

With kindest regards,

Sincerely yours

(Signed) Paul Woolley

Registrar and Secretary