

# Utter Repletion

## or a Special Extended Edition of the Modest Newsletter

### Republic v. Democracy

by Dana Burkinshaw

We have grown accustomed to hearing that the United States is a democracy; such was never the intent. The form of government entrusted to us by our Founders was a *republic*, not a democracy. Our Founders had an opportunity to establish a democracy in America and chose not to. In fact, the Founders made it clear that we are not, and were never to become, a democracy:

*Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security, or the rights of property; and have, in general, been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.*

James Madison

*Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.*

John Adams

*A democracy is a volcano which conceals the fiery materials of its own destruction. These will produce an eruption and carry desolation in their way. The known propensity of a democracy is to licentiousness which the ambitious call, and ignorant believe to be liberty.*

Fisher Ames, Author of the  
House Language for the First Amendment

*We have seen the tumult of democracy terminate...as it has everywhere terminated, in despotism....Democracy! Savage and wild. Thou who wouldst bring down the virtuous and wise to thy level of folly and guilt.*

Gouverneur Morris,  
Signer and Penman of the Constitution

*The experience of all former ages had shown that of all human governments, democracy was the most unstable, fluctuating and short-lived.*

John Quincy Adams

*A simple democracy...is one of the greatest of evils.*

Benjamin Rush,  
Signer of the Declaration

*In democracy...there are commonly tumults and disorders....Therefore a pure democracy is generally a very bad government. It is often the most tyrannical government on earth.*

Noah Webster

*Pure democracy cannot subsist long nor be carried far into the departments of state, it is very subject to caprice and the madness of popular rage.*

John Witherspoon,  
Signer of the Declaration

*It may generally be remarked that the more a government resembles a pure democracy the more they abound with disorder and confusion.*

Zephaniah Swift,  
Author of America's First Legal Text

Many Americans today seem unable to define the difference between the two, but there is a difference, a big difference. That difference rests in the source of authority.

A pure democracy operates by direct majority vote of the people. When an issue is to be decided, the entire population votes on it; the majority wins and rules. A republic differs in that the

general population elects representatives who then pass laws to govern the nation. A democracy is the rule by majority feeling (what the Founders described as a “mobocracy”); a republic is rule by law. If the source of law for a democracy is the popular feeling of the people, then what is the source of law for the American republic? According to Noah Webster:

*Our citizens should early understand that the genuine source of correct republican principles is the Bible, particularly the New Testament, or the Christian religion.*

The transcendent values of Biblical natural law were the foundation of the American republic. Consider the stability this provides: in our republic, murder will always be a crime, for it is always a crime according to the Word of God. However, in a democracy, if the majority of the people decide that murder is no longer a crime, murder will no longer be a crime.

America’s immutable principles of right and wrong were not based on the rapidly fluctuating feelings and emotions of the people but rather on what Montesquieu identified as the “principles that do not change.” Benjamin Rush similarly observed:

*Where there is no law, there is no liberty; and nothing deserves the name of law but that which is certain and universal in its operation upon all the members of the community.*

In the American republic, the “principles which did not change” and which were “certain and universal in their operation upon all the members of the community” were the principles of Biblical natural law. In fact, so firmly were these principles ensconced in the American republic that early law books taught that government was free to set its own policy only if God had not ruled in that area. For example, Blackstone’s Commentaries explained:

*To instance in the case of murder: this is expressly forbidden by the Divine....If any human law should allow or enjoin us to commit it we are bound to transgress that human law....But, with regard to matters that are....not commanded or forbidden by those superior laws such, for instance, as exporting of wool into foreign countries; here the...legislature has scope and opportunity to interpose.*

The Founders echoed that theme:

*All laws, however, may be arranged in two different classes. 1) Divine. 2) Human....But it should always be remembered that this law, natural or revealed, made for men or for nations, flows from the same Divine source: it is the law of God....Human law must rest its authority ultimately upon the authority of that law which is Divine.*

James Wilson, Signer of the Constitution,  
U. S. Supreme Court Justice

*The law...dictated by God Himself is, of course, superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times. No human laws are of any validity if contrary to this.*

Alexander Hamilton, Signer of the Constitution

*The...law established by the Creator...extends over the whole globe, is everywhere and at all times binding upon mankind....This is the law of God by which he makes his way known to man and is paramount to all human control.*

Rufus King, Signer of the Constitution

The Founders understood that Biblical values formed the basis of the republic and that the republic would be destroyed if the people’s knowledge of those values should ever be lost. A republic is the highest form of government devised by man, but it also requires the greatest amount of human care and maintenance. If neglected, it can deteriorate into a variety of lesser forms, including a democracy (a government conducted by popular feeling); anarchy (a system in which each person determines his own rules and standards); oligarchy (a government run by a small council or a group of elite individuals); or dictatorship (a government run by a single individual). As John Adams explained:

*Democracy will soon degenerate into an anarchy; such an anarchy that every man will do what is right in his own eyes and no man’s life or property or reputation or liberty*

*will be secure, and every one of these will soon mould itself into a system of subordination of all the moral virtues and intellectual abilities, all the powers of wealth, beauty, wit, and science, to the wanton pleasures, the capricious will, and the execrable [abominable] cruelty of one or a very few.*

Understanding the foundation of the American republic is a vital key to protecting it.

## **J. Gresham Machen: Defender of Christianity**

*by Jillian Ross*

Currently in America some within Evangelicalism are opposing core doctrines: the Scripture's complete authority, the exclusivity of Christ for salvation, and the exhaustive foreknowledge of God. As evangelicals we face a great battle—a battle for the faith. Our opponents are wolves in sheep's clothing who use the name "Evangelical" but deny its teaching. In our battle we must do all to stand for the Author and Finisher of our faith. Let us now walk down the hall of history to learn how one from a previous generation engaged the grievous wolves of his day.

On a frigid New Year's Day 1937, J. Gresham Machen breathed his final breath. Rather than recuperating during Westminster's winter recess, Machen traveled to North Dakota to preach. Once there, he contracted pneumonia. At the age of 55, he laid bedridden in Bismarck. With life fleeting away, he wrote these words: "I'm so thankful for [the] active obedience of Christ. No hope without it."<sup>1</sup>

What would cause a man endowed with a large inheritance to die such a lowly death? What compelled him to go to North Dakota when the stakes were so high? What drove this man?

J. Gresham Machen was born July 28, 1881 in Baltimore, MD. Throughout his life, Machen received the best education. He graduated from John Hopkins University, then earned his Masters of Divinity at Princeton Seminary. Afterwards, like most excellent scholars of his day, he studied in Germany. In Germany Machen encountered the greatest trial of his faith: German Liberalism.<sup>2</sup> Machen came face to face with the most pious man he had ever met; yet this professor "affirm[ed] very little of that which I have been accustomed to regard as essential to Christianity"<sup>3</sup> In the end Machen kept the faith. In 1906 he returned to the United States and joined the faculty at Princeton Seminary.

By the early 1920s, Machen's recognition as a scholar had increased. At the same time, controversy was brewing in both the Presbyterian and Northern Baptist conventions. In both denominations liberals were vying for control. Aware of the liberals' unorthodox teaching, Machen relentlessly opposed it.

Machen became the chief voice for the conservatives in what came to be known as the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy.<sup>4</sup> As the controversy gained momentum, Harry Emerson Fosdick, the leading liberal, delivered a sermon entitled "Shall the Fundamentalist Win?" (May 12, 1922). In his sermon, Fosdick portrayed fundamentalists as divisive people unwilling to allow for differing views. Machen responded in his great apologetic work, *Christianity & Liberalism* (1923). He contended that liberals, by denying Scripture's authority, established a

<sup>1</sup> Ned Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir*, 508.

<sup>2</sup> German Liberalism was defined by a set affirmations and denials. It affirmed modern science and the goodness of man. It denied the authority of Scripture, Christ's deity, and the miraculous.

<sup>3</sup> Ned Stonehouse, 209.

<sup>4</sup> Historically fundamentalism was defined by a set of core beliefs such as the authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ, and the virgin birth (to name a few). Even though he held to these core beliefs, Machen refused to call himself a fundamentalist because many fundamentalists did not hold to reformed theology (which was very "core" to him). So he preferred to call himself a Calvinist.

different foundation than that of true Christianity. The liberals then erected a structure distinct from Christianity. Moreover, liberalism was the chief rival of Christianity, for in every point the two stood in opposition to one another. *Christianity & Liberalism* temporarily stopped the mouths of the opponents. Machen had won a great battle in the war.

After their defeat, the liberals reassembled and strategized. By portraying themselves as the peacemakers, they gained the support of the “silent majority.”<sup>5</sup> Faced with the reality of the liberals’ dominance, the Presbyterian conservatives struggled for victories. In the summer of 1923 the Presbyterian General Assembly elected a liberal moderator. Later, they delayed Machen’s appointment as Chair of Apologetics at Princeton (1926). When Machen pushed for an investigation of the Presbyterian seminaries, the committee reported no doctrinal errors. With little hope for Princeton, Machen resigned and helped to establish Westminster Theological Seminary (1929).

Machen continued to battle for orthodoxy in American Presbyterianism. For years he vocally objected to liberals on the foreign field. When one liberal missionary resigned from the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Society, the board regretted her departure. In response Machen founded the Independent Board of Foreign Missions for those desiring a “truly Biblical and Presbyterian mission work” (1930). A year later the General Assembly declared the board unconstitutional. Things continued to get worse. In December 1934, Machen’s local Presbytery appointed a jury to try him for “violations of his ordinal vows.” In March of 1935 the jury found Machen guilty of insubordination.

While at first glance these events look like utter defeat, “it is when men have felt compelled to take a stand against error that they have risen to really great heights in the celebration of truth.”<sup>6</sup> Throughout the controversy Machen won small victories through his speaking engagements, publications, and weekly radio program. In 1936 the Presbyterian Church in America (now called the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) was founded; Machen was elected moderator. Machen’s influence was far reaching;<sup>7</sup> even today he inspires Christians to earnestly contend for the faith.

Machen died a lowly death because he “held unswervingly to the hope he professed” (Heb 10:23). He was a stranger and pilgrim on earth driven by “a message of divine grace . . . destined to burst forth . . . and bring light and freedom to mankind.”<sup>8</sup> His legacy for us is best explained by his own words from *Christianity and Liberalism* (51): “Indifferentism about doctrine makes no heroes of the faith.”

### **Who Were the Magi?**

*By Dana Burkinshaw*

Each year as we approach the holiday season, our preparations for Christmas include revisiting the events surrounding the birth of our Lord. Bethlehem, the shepherds, and the angels are all familiar to us. But not much is generally known about the mysterious “Magi” who came to worship the infant Jesus.

Most of what we associate with the “Magi” is from early church traditions. Most have assumed that there were three of them since they brought three specific gifts. (But the Biblical text doesn’t number them. An Eastern tradition speaks of *twelve* Magi.) They are called “Magi” from the Latinized form of the Greek word *magoi*, transliterated from the Persian for a select sect of priests. (Our word “magic” comes from the same root.)

<sup>5</sup> The “silent majority” were orthodox Christians who strongly desired unity and peace in the denomination.

<sup>6</sup> J Gresham Machen, *The Importance of Christian Scholarship*, 24

<sup>7</sup> His Greek grammar (published in 1923) is still used today. Both Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church stand today as testimonies to his desire for defending the faith.

<sup>8</sup> J Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 15-16.

As the years passed, traditions became increasingly embellished. By the third century, they were viewed as kings. By the sixth century, they had names: Bithisarea, Melichior, and Gathaspa. Some even associated them with Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the three sons of Noah, and thus with Asia, Africa, and Europe. A fourteenth century Armenian tradition identifies them as Balthasar, King of Arabia; Melchior, King of Persia; and Gaspar, King of India.

These are all very interesting traditions, but what do we *really* know about the Magi?

The ancient Magi were a hereditary priesthood of the Medes credited with profound and extraordinary religious knowledge. After some Magi, who had been attached to the Median court, proved to be expert in the interpretation of dreams, Darius the Great established them over the state religion of Persia. (The Greek historian Herodotus identified their key skill as oneiromancy – divination by dreams, not astrology, as is widely believed. Also, contrary to popular belief, the Magi were *not* originally followers of Zoroaster. That all came later.)

It was in this dual capacity whereby civil and political counsel was invested with religious authority, that the Magi became the supreme priestly caste of the Persian Empire, and continued to be prominent during the subsequent Seleucid, Parthian, and Sassanid periods.

One of the titles given to Daniel was *Rab-mag*, the chief of the Magi (Dan. 4:9; 5:11). His unusual career included being a principal administrator in two world empires: the Babylonian and the subsequent Persian Empire. When Darius appointed him, a Jew, over the previously hereditary Median priesthood, the repercussions resulted in the plots leading to the lion's den. Daniel apparently entrusted a messianic vision (to be announced in due time by a "star") to a secret sect of the Magi for its eventual fulfillment. It is possible that Daniel used the considerable financial resources available to him to establish an "endowment" to be presented to the Messiah upon His arrival. But first, let's cover some historical background.

Since the days of Daniel, the fortunes of the Persian and the Jewish nations had been closely intertwined. Both nations had, in turn, fallen under Seleucid domination in the wake of Alexander's conquests. Subsequently both had regained their independence: the Jews under Maccabean leadership, and the Persians as the dominant group within the Parthian Empire.

It was at this time that the Magi, in their dual priestly and governmental office, composed the upper house of the Council of the Megistanes ("magistrates"), whose duties included the absolute choice and election of the king of the realm. It was therefore a group of Persian-Parthian "king makers" (rather than kings) who entered Jerusalem in the latter days of the reign of Herod the Great. Herod's reaction was understandably one of fear when one considers the background of Roman-Parthian rivalry that prevailed during his lifetime.

Pompey, the first Roman conqueror of Jerusalem, attacked the Armenian outpost of Parthia in 63 B.C. In 55 B.C., Carssus led Roman legions in an attack on Parthia proper. The Romans were decisively defeated at the battle of Carrhae with the loss of 30,000 troops, including their commander. The Parthians counterattacked with a token invasion of Armenia, Syria, and Palestine. Nominal Roman rule was reestablished under Antipater, the father of Herod the Great, who retreated before another Parthian invasion in 40 B.C.

Mark Anthony reestablished Roman sovereignty in 37 B.C., and, like Carssus before him, also embarked on a similarly ill-fated Parthian expedition. His disastrous defeat was followed by another wave of invading Parthians, which swept all Roman opposition completely out of Palestine (including Herod himself, who fled to Alexandria and then to Rome). With Parthian collaboration, Jewish sovereignty was restored and Jerusalem was fortified with a Jewish garrison.

Herod, by this time, secured from Augustus Caesar the title of "King of the Jews." However, it was not until after three years (including a five month siege by Roman troops) that he was able to occupy his own capital city. Herod had thus gained the throne of a rebellious buffer state, which was situated between two mighty contending empires. At any time, his own subjects might conspire in bringing the Parthians to their aid.

At the time of Christ's birth, Herod was close to his final illness. Augustus was also aged, and Rome, since the retirement of Tiberius, was without any experienced military commander. Pro-Parthian Armenia was fomenting revolt against Rome (which was successfully accomplished within two years).

The time was ripe for another Parthian invasion of the buffer provinces, except for the fact that Parthia itself was racked by internal dissension. Phraates IV, the unpopular and aging king, had once been deposed, and it is not improbable that the Persian Magi were already involved in the political maneuvering requisite to choosing his successor. It is conceivable that the Magi were taking advantage of the king's lack of popularity to further their own interests with the establishment of a new dynasty, which could have been implemented if a sufficiently strong contender could be found.

It is entirely conceivable that at this time the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, culminating in Daniel's writings (one of their own Magians), was of profound motivating significance. The promise of a divinely imposed world dominion at the hands of a Jewish monarch was more than acceptable to them. (Their own Persian and Medo-Persian history was studded with Jewish nobles, ministers, and counselors.)

In Jerusalem, the sudden appearance of the Magi, probably traveling in force with every imaginable oriental pomp and accompanied by adequate cavalry escort to insure their safe penetration of Roman territory, certainly alarmed Herod and the populace of Jerusalem.

It would seem as if these Magi were attempting to provoke a border incident, which could bring swift reprisal from Parthian armies. Their request of Herod regarding the one "who was *born* King of the Jews" was a calculated insult to him, a non-Jew who had contrived and bribed his way into that office. Consulting his scribes, Herod discovered from the prophecies in the Tanach (the Old Testament) that the Promised One, the Messiah, would be born in Bethlehem. Hiding his concern and expressing sincere interest, Herod requested that the Magi keep him informed.

After finding the babe and presenting their gifts, the Magi "being warned in a dream" (a form of communication most acceptable to them) departed to their own country, ignoring Herod's request. (Within two years, Phraataces, the parricide son of Phraates IV, was duly installed by the Magi as the new ruler of Parthia.)

The lavish gifts bestowed upon the Christ child would have funded His family's flight to Egypt in order to escape the maniacal wrath of Herod.

The gifts presented by the Magi – gold, frankincense, and myrrh – were also prophetic, speaking of our Lord's offices of king, priest, and savior. Gold speaks of His kingship; frankincense was a spice used in the priestly duties; and myrrh was an embalming ointment signifying his death. In the millennial kingdom, He will also receive gifts of gold and frankincense (Isa. 60:6), but no myrrh. His death was once and for all.

### A Quotation

*discovered by Dana Burkinshaw*

"In it [the Hebrew language] we hear God speak...thus study directed toward learning this language might rightly be called a kind of Mass or divine service....The Hebrew language is the best language of all, with the richest vocabulary....If I were younger I would want to learn this language, because no one can really understand the Scriptures without it. For although the New Testament is written in Greek, it is full of hebraisms and Hebrew expressions. It has therefore been aptly said that the Hebrews drink from the spring, the Greeks from the stream that flows from it, and the Latins from a downstream pool." - Martin Luther