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## The Meaning of History

By W. STANFORD REID

**H**ISTORY! What is the use of that? How will that ever help a Christian?" Such were the words addressed to a young university student some years ago, when he stated that he was hoping to devote part of his life to the study of history. Christian friends could not understand his doing such a thing.

Two years later, while attending a theological seminary, he told his desire to one of his professors. Little encouragement did he receive, however, for the professor said that it was a useless subject. History would never do any good. It would be far better for the student if he went into the field of Old or New Testament in which he would deal directly with the Word of God. History was but the unmeaning acts of men.

Sad to say, this attitude is one which is only too common among Christians today. Frequently the defenders of *historic* Christianity seem to feel that everything but Bible history and doctrine is useless. Of what help can the facts of history be in winning men to Christ, or in strengthening souls in the Christian life? Therefore, they turn their backs on history as "unmeaning."

The self-same Christians, however, would be troubled if they were told that this is the position of Karl Barth. But is it not? When we deny the importance of history, we deny the importance of the historic occurrence of the historic facts basic to Christianity: the incarnation, the virgin birth, the death and resurrection

of Christ. Bible history cannot be separated from the rest of world history. If we attempt to make such a separation we lose the Biblical view of history, for we take out of history the revelation, accomplishment and application of redemption.

This naturally brings us to the question: what is history? The Christian who would separate Bible history and secular history into two watertight compartments must unavoidably separate secular history from God. Redemption and history will be disconnected, history being left to stand alone as a series of independent self-existing facts. Can history, then, have any meaning? Whence did it come? How does it move? Whither is it going?

But even if it should have a meaning, who will interpret it for us? We cannot, for we cannot see the extent of the forest while we are in the center of it. God cannot, for we have separated Him from history. He may break in at certain points, but history is not His. The only logical conclusion is that for us history can have no meaning. The beginning, middle and end of history is chance. God does not control history—we cannot. Therefore it must run under its own power, and who can say what will happen next?

But to understand history, we must turn first of all to that which goes before history and will continue after history, that which envelopes history—eternity. Except for the Christian view, eternity is taken seri-

# Presbyterianism versus Independentism

By the REV. PROFESSOR R. B. KUIPER

## Divergent Views

THE terms *Presbyterianism* and *Independentism* designate divergent views on church government.

This is not to deny that in some respects they are in agreement. For one example, both the Presbyterian and the Independent are vigorously opposed to what is known as hierarchy. That they will have nothing of a pope goes without saying, but they also refuse to recognize bishops with authority over ordinary clergymen and their churches. Therefore they count it an abomination whenever a clique of influential men presumes to lord it over Christ's church, and they refuse to be cowed by such high-sounding titles as moderators, stated clerks, or board secretaries. For another example of agreement, the Presbyterian and the Independent alike resent every interference of the state with the spiritual affairs of the church.

Yet it is no exaggeration to assert that a wide gulf yawns between Presbyterianism and Independentism.

According to Independentism each local church or congregation is a law unto itself. It may choose to be completely independent of every other congregation, in which case it will call itself undenominational or unaffiliated. Or it may prefer to associate itself with other congregations in a loosely knit denomination. Then conferences will be held for mutual counsel, but judicatories with authority over the local churches are out of the question. This describes the form of government in vogue in most Baptist and Congregational churches.

Presbyterianism, on the other hand, insists that Holy Scripture requires, if not explicitly, yet by unmistakable implication, that the individual congregation associate itself with other congregations of the same faith, not in a loose conference, but in a federal union with a graded system of judicatories or courts. Presbyterians, to quote the Form of Government of both The Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., "hold it to be expedient, and agreeable to Scripture and the practice of the primitive Christians,

that the Church be governed by congregational, presbyterial, and synodical assemblies." And they ascribe a measure of authority to presbyteries over sessions and to synods or general assemblies over presbyteries.

## Serious Consequences

To the casual reader the difference just described may seem relatively insignificant. That it really is of very great importance will appear from a comparison of the consequences of the Presbyterian and the Independent positions.

Two railway tracks, let us say, run parallel for some distance. At a given point they diverge. The angle of divergence is thirty degrees. That is not a large angle. For a short distance the two tracks remain near each other. But a couple of hundred miles from the place of divergence they are far apart. In much the same way the seriousness of the difference between Presbyterianism and Independentism is revealed by its consequences.

A few of these consequences may be named. A citizen is charged by the state with a crime. He is tried in the proper court and found guilty. If he wishes, he may appeal to a higher court. In view of the fallibility of human judges and juries it is only fair that he have this privilege. To deny him the right of appeal would be manifest injustice. It may safely be said that on this there is general agreement. But if a church-member is charged with an offense and found guilty by an ecclesiastical court, should he not have a like opportunity of appeal? It is difficult to see how more than one answer to that question is possible. Yet in an Independent church the very possibility of appeal is excluded. Presbyterianism, on the other hand, makes full provision for it.

The conclusion is warranted that Presbyterianism, much more than Independentism, is conducive to justice in the church.

That the present divided condition of Christ's church is far from ideal goes without saying. It does not follow by any manner of means that present-day efforts at church union

are commendable. By and large they are utterly despicable because they are rooted in doctrinal indifference and advocated by deniers of the cardinal truths of our religion. But this does not alter the fact that the manifestation of the unity of true believers is a desideratum. To say that this exhausts the meaning of Christ's prayer "that they all may be one" were folly, but that it is implied in His prayer admits of no doubt. And who can deny that the divine Head of the Church is glorified, not only by the actual spiritual unity of those constituting His body, but also by the outward manifestation of this unity?

How clear that Presbyterianism makes incomparably better provision for this manifestation than does Independentism! Independentism makes hardly any provision for it. Many an Independent is utterly indifferent to it and even scorns it. The typical Independent is an individualist and cares little about church organization. Therefore, in the course of history Independentism has become a most fruitful mother of sects. But Presbyterianism demands that those of like faith be welded together in a compact ecclesiastical organization. To be sure, a Presbyterian is not a visionary. He is not so foolish as to suppose that in this dispensation, sin and error being as prevalent as they are, the organizational unity of all who are Christians not merely in name but in reality will be perfected. He is too hard-headed for that. Besides, when he insists that those of like faith belong in one church, he takes the phrase of *like faith* extremely seriously. But so far as feasible he does strive for the realization of that ideal, all to the glory of the Church's great Head, Jesus Christ.

A third matter bound up closely with the difference between Presbyterianism and Independentism is of supreme importance for our day. It is the matter of doctrinal soundness.

A minister in a church with the Independent form of church government teaches heresy from his pulpit, let us say. His fellow-ministers may admonish him and in certain instances may even exclude him from member-

ship in their ministerial conference. But if his congregation is willing to have him, there is no way of deposing him. Surely, it is no wonder that the erstwhile sound Congregational churches of New England departed so soon and so far from the faith. Nor is it cause for surprise that almost countless errors are being proclaimed from the pulpits of most undenominational churches. If heresy does not run wild today in an Independent church, there is a great danger that tomorrow it will.

Presbyterianism has the distinction of putting a check on unsound doctrine. It provides definite machinery and definite procedure for dealing with false teachers. For instance, if a minister departs in any important respect from the doctrinal standards of the denomination, and after kindly admonition persists in this departure, the constitution of the church demands that he be brought to trial. On being found guilty he may be deposed. That done, he is barred from every pulpit of the denomination.

Beyond dispute, Presbyterianism safeguards purity of doctrine much more effectively than does Independentism. It is much more insistent that the Church of Jesus Christ be kept "the pillar and ground of the truth."

### Practical Applications

At this point a question forces itself upon us. If it is true that Presbyterianism safeguards the doctrinal soundness of a church, how is it that the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. is today honeycombed with Modernism? But the answer lies right at hand. The denomination just named has long since ceased to deal with heresy in the Presbyterian way. For decades already, though heresy abounded, heresy trials have been conspicuously absent in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. When more than a thousand of its ministers publicly announced as their opinion that the doctrine of the inerrancy of Holy Scripture is harmful and that belief in such supernatural events as the virgin birth, the miracles and bodily resurrection and in the precious doctrine of the satisfaction of divine justice by the vicarious atonement is non-essential for a Presbyterian minister, not one of them was brought to trial. On the contrary, the man who led in the attack on the infamous

### The Elders' Fund

**B**E SURE to read the announcement concerning The Elders' Fund on the last page of this issue. This work needs your support by prayers and gifts.

Auburn Affirmation was disciplined as a disturber of the peace. Not the deniers of the faith were deposed, but that valiant defender of the faith, Dr. J. Gresham Machen, was cast out. That the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has renounced Presbyterian doctrine is as plain as broad daylight. That it has renounced Presbyterian polity in its dealing—rather its failure to deal—with heresy is just as plain. On this score the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has substituted for Presbyterianism that neglect of corporate responsibility which is characteristic of Independentism.

At present many self-styled orthodox ministers in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and in certain other Presbyterian communions as well, take a position which is utterly untenable. They claim to preach the truth without compromise in their own pulpits but disclaim responsibility for what is preached in other pulpits of their denomination. In proclaiming the truth to their own congregations they feel they are doing their whole duty. If a fellow-presbyter publicly denies the substitutionary atonement, they, like Gallio, care for none of these things. Not even when the very heart of Christian truth is at stake does it occur to them to prefer charges of heresy. A Congregational minister might conceivably be pardoned for taking this position. But how a minister who calls himself Presbyterian can assume this attitude is a puzzle indeed. Has he not subscribed, supposedly *ex animo*, to Presbyterian polity? Has he not solemnly vowed to study the doctrinal purity of the denomination? In the name of plain logic, nay in the name of common honesty, he should do one of two things—either bring his heretical co-presbyter to trial or renounce Presbyterianism and declare himself Independent. His present position is patently false. In fact, it is difficult

to see how it is less false than the position of the minister who has subscribed to the system of doctrine of the Westminster standards but preaches Modernism.

In recent years a number of congregations have had the courage to come out of the corrupt Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. That is praiseworthy. Realizing that he who believes has no part with an infidel and that the temple of God has no agreement with idols, they have obeyed the apostolic injunction to come out and be separate. But some of these congregations have to the present time remained Independent. One can conceive of circumstances under which such a church might for a little time prefer to be unaffiliated. But in the long run no church which is truly Presbyterian will wish to continue thus. A church which is Presbyterian in doctrine but not in government is not really Presbyterian. An "Independent Presbyterian Church" is a contradiction in terms. Of course, this is not to say that a group of Presbyterians may not conduct any religious work which is not under ecclesiastical control. That is another matter. There is no good reason, for instance, why a number of Presbyterians may not undertake the publication and distribution of Christian tracts independently of a church judicatory. But once more, and emphatically, a congregation which is truly Presbyterian cannot wish to remain Independent but will want to associate itself with other Presbyterian congregations in a Presbyterian denomination.

The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. does not stand alone in its disloyalty to Presbyterianism. Most of the Presbyterian churches in our land are in process of losing their hold on Presbyterianism. In some instances the process is far advanced. Both Presbyterian doctrine and Presbyterian polity are being renounced. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in spite of whatever imperfections it may have—and no church is perfect—is determined to be Presbyterian both in doctrine and in polity. It takes Presbyterianism seriously. May it do so increasingly.

And may the day be hastened when all true American Presbyterians, now scattered abroad in several denominations, will dwell together as brethren of one house, as sheep of one ecclesiastical fold.