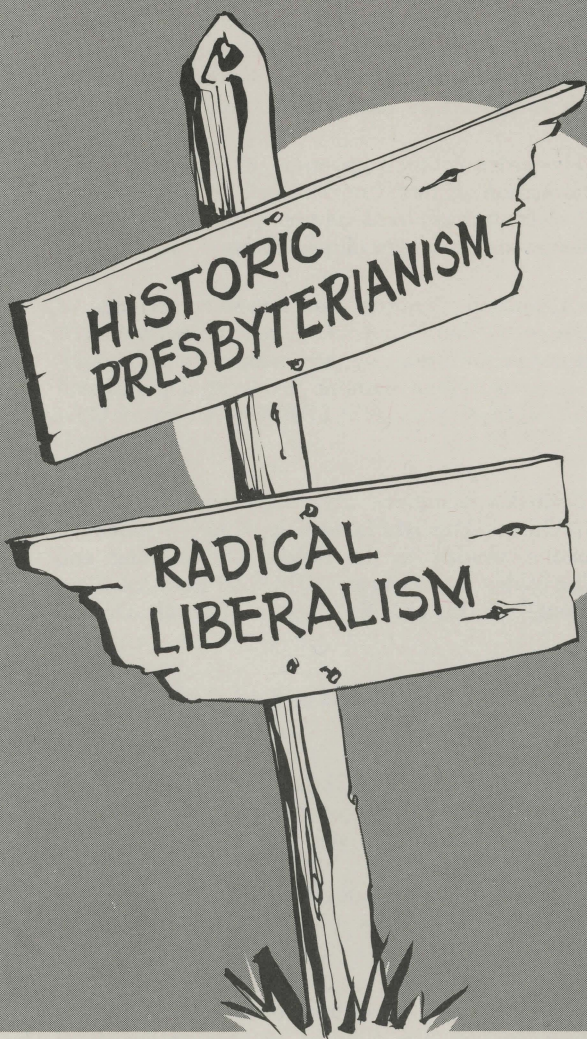


PRESBYTERIANS



WHICH WAY?

FORM OF GOVERNMENT

The Way of Radical Liberalism

Radical ecumenists are striving mightily to merge the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern) with the United Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. (Northern), and with the Church of Christ Uniting (COCU). Neither of these bodies possesses the same standards of doctrine or order which Presbyterians have traditionally cherished.

The order (church government) of the UPUSA denomination differs from historic Presbyterianism in that control of local church property is placed explicitly in the hands of presbytery.

"A particular church shall not sell, mortgage or otherwise encumber any of its real property and it shall not acquire real property subject to an encumbrance or condition without the written permission of the presbytery . . ." (UPUSA "Form of Government," 62.12).

Both denominations have departed from historical, Biblical Presbyterianism in their practice of ordaining women to the offices of Teaching and Ruling Elder and Deacon (UPUSA "Form of Government," 38.02; PCUS "Book of Church Order," 9-2).

COCU definitely rejects a Presbyterian form of government:

" . . . the Church of Christ Uniting accepts and will maintain the historic office or order of bishop." ("A Plan of Union," p. 49)

The office of Elder is abolished: " . . . orders of ministry . . . shall be deacon, priest or presbyter (minister), and bishop." ("A Plan of Union," p. 49)

The Presbyterian system of church courts is abolished, as is the Biblical pattern of the local church: "No longer shall Parish be the equivalent of congregation; in fact, a Parish may contain several congregations . . . of different socio-economic and ethnic make-up. Parish structure replaces the local congregation as the basic unit of church life." ("A Plan of Union")

The Way of Historic Presbyterianism

The Bible makes it plain that "where the indwelling of the Holy Ghost is, there, under Christ, is the church power; . . . this church power is to be exercised representatively, and . . . in presbyterial courts . . . (and) there are three names of office, and no more, viz., the preaching-elder, the ruling elder, and the deacon." (A. A. Hodge, "Essays on Presbyterianism")

It is to this, Presbyterian, system of church government that all Presbyterian ministers, elders, and deacons are committed by their vows of ordination.

"Presbyterians do maintain . . . emphatically and positively . . . that the main characteristics of their church government are clearly taught in the Word of God. They do believe that Presbyterianism is by divine right" (John J. Rice, "The Presbyterian Church," p. 36).

God says that only men are to be elected to office in the Church of Jesus Christ (I Timothy 2:8ff).

God says that elders elected by the people are to govern under Christ (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5ff; Exodus 3:16; I Timothy 5:17).

God says that believers are to assemble in local fellowships, and that such assemblies are called "churches." (Acts 2:41-47; 8:1; I Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:20; Heb. 10:25)

Presbyterians who take seriously their vows of ordination, are unwilling to permit ecumenical churchmen to abolish historic Presbyterianism.

"We believe the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. may lawfully unite only with such 'other ecclesiastical bodies whose organization is conformed to the doctrines and order of this church' (B.C.O. 18-6:7). Therefore the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. could not be constitutionally united with the United Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. or the Church of Christ Uniting, because of their doctrinal inclusiveness." (Faith and Purpose of the Steering Committee for A Continuing Presbyterian Church")

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