

What Is A Presbyterian?

(This is another of a series of informative articles on present-day religions, written for the Charlotte News by leading authorities of the various faiths and denominations. Other articles describe other faiths.)

By DR. JOHN SUTHERLAND BONNELL, Minister of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City

What is a Presbyterian? A Presbyterian is a Protestant who belongs to a particular form of church government. The word Presbyterian refers not to a special system of doctrine or worship but to a representative form of church government.

In Greek, "presbyteros" means "elder." The Presbyterian Church is governed by elders: teaching elders, who are ordained ministers or pastors, and ruling elders, elected from the ranks of the Church.

BIBLE BELIEFS
What do Presbyterians believe about the Bible?

Presbyterians believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and "the only infallible rule of faith and practice" and that they are the source of those truths by which men live. They believe in the "inspiration" of the Scriptures, that God spoke through men whose minds and hearts He had touched. They therefore emphasize inspired men, not inspired words.

Most Presbyterians have rejected the view of inspiration held by pre-Christian pagan writers that

the personalities of inspired men were annulled, that they were "possessed" or entranced by a spirit so that they became "pens of God" or wrote down what Deity had dictated. Rather they believe that God employed the personalities of chosen men in making His Divine revelation. Presbyterians do not equate tradition with the Bible. Tradition plays a decidedly inferior role in Presbyterian thinking.

BASIS OF CREED
What is the basis of the Presbyterian creed?

In 1643, the Parliament of England appointed 151 laymen, clergymen and church scholars to draw up a system of Reformation doctrine and government. They labored for six years, holding 133 sessions, and produced, among other important theological works, the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is recognized as the Creed of English-speaking Presbyterians. Most Presbyterians also accept the creed of the early undivided Christian Church—the Nicene and the Apostles' Creeds.

Do Presbyterians believe in heaven and hell?

Yes. The Bible and human experience teach that we are living in a moral universe where sin carries its own appropriate penalty and righteousness its own reward, including the vision of God. The New Testament emphasizes the eternal nature of the punishment which sin inevitably incurs, the severest of which is separation from God.

It is understandable that men should think of the spiritual world in material terms. Heaven is a world of gold, walls of emerald and jasper, and gates of pearl. Similarly, hell has been pictured as a world of fire, brimstone and sulfur. While these are symbols, it must not be forgotten that they represent a spiritual reality.

All thoughtful Christians will, however, reject as immoral and unchristian the teaching once proclaimed that the bliss of the redeemed will be heightened by watching the sufferings of the damned.

ONLY PLACES
Heaven and hell are not only places; they are also states of mind and character. They have their commencement in the here and now. An utterly selfish, unloving man could find no happiness in the Christian heaven because he carries hell in his heart.

What Sacraments are observed?

Only two: Holy Communion (the Lord's Supper) and Baptism. Presbyterians honor and revere Mary as the Mother of our Lord. But they reject the traditions which have grown up through the centuries concerning her. These have resulted in such dogmas as the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, which, Presbyterians

believe, have no foundation in the Scriptures.

TOMORROW — What is the Presbyterian attitude to divorce and birth control? Do Presbyterians employ the contraceptive? Do Presbyterians believe in predestination? Do Presbyterians believe in the Resurrection?

Do Presbyterians believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Yes. This belief is central in Presbyterian doctrine, which teaches that Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, for us and for our salvation became man. Therefore, He is true God and true man; at once the Revealer of God and the Saviour of men. Do Presbyterians believe in the Trinity?

TRINITY BELIEF
Yes. The Trinity is frequently invoked in worship, at every Baptism and in the benediction at the close of each service. When God is spoken of as three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—Presbyterians do not think of Him as three individuals. That is tritheism. One God reveals Himself in three manifestations.

Do Presbyterians accept the virgin birth? Yes. A majority of Presbyterians, among whom this author is included, undoubtedly believe that the entrance of Jesus into our world was by a miraculous birth as related by St. Matthew and St. Luke. This doctrine is set forth in the Apostles' Creed, the Westminster Confession of Faith and in the Doctrinal Statement of the Basis of Union of Presbyterian Churches. All Presbyterians believe in the incarnation—that God was made flesh and came to man in Jesus Christ.

Some find a symbolic rather than a physical meaning in the accounts of the birth of Jesus. They base their views on the contention that the physical details of His birth were not taught by Paul or Jesus Himself.

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AN ARABIAN STYLE veil masks actress Corinne Calvet, French-born star, as she holds hands with her new husband, Jeff Stone. They were married in Tangiers. (AP Wirephoto)

Gifts To Dr. Salk To Go To Trust Fund

PITTSBURGH (AP)—Dr. Jonas E. Salk, developer of the anti-polio vaccine that bears his name, said today that contributions being sent him would be deposited in a trust fund and that none of the money would "be used by me personally."

His statement early today came after announcement of the fund last night on the "See It Now" television program of Edward R. Murrow.

SALK STATEMENT
Although not revealing how much money he has received, Dr. Salk issued this statement:

"I have had numerous inquiries as to the disposition of money being sent to me spontaneously and without solicitation as an expression of the sincere feeling of many people.

The funds received have been deposited in a trust, the disposition of which will be made when there has been time for consideration and consultation.

We want to emphasize that we are not soliciting funds. Nor have we authorized anyone else to do so. We have no right to ask people not to express their feelings in any way they see fit. The funds received will not be used by me personally."

Since Dr. Salk's vaccine was revealed to be 99 to 90 per cent effective a week ago, an estimated 10,000 letters, telegrams and telephone calls have been sent him by his university office.

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Do Presbyterians believe that Baptism is necessary to salvation?

No. They accept this rite, ordinarily performed by sprinkling water on the person, as a holy sign or seal of the Covenant of Grace—an outward symbol of inward regeneration. While Baptism is "urgently recommended in the Presbyterian Church, and while its omission is regarded as a grave fault, it is not held to be necessary for salvation.

The Confession of Faith declares: "Grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it that no person can be regenerated or saved without it."

Do Presbyterians baptize children?

BAPTIZE CHILDREN
Yes—to signify that they, too, are received as members of the church and are in union with Christ. When these children have reached the age of discretion, they will assume the obligation taken on their behalf by their parents.

Presbyterians do not believe that children, dying without Baptism, are excepted from the bliss of heaven or the vision of God.

Do Presbyterians believe that Christ is spiritually present in the Eucharist? Presbyterians do not believe that Christ is offered up in the Sacrament to the Father.

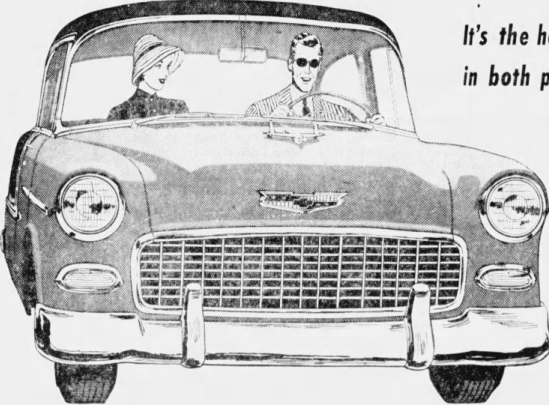
Do Presbyterians believe in predestination? Do Presbyterians believe in the Resurrection?

CHINA DRAWS STUDENTS
TOKYO — In Red China says nearly 1,000 students from 14 foreign countries are studying there. Most of them are from Russia and iron curtain countries. Dr. Peiping says there also are students from Finland, India and Indonesia.

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