



December 15 2021

Retson Genealogy Newsletter

Last year we lost Edith Irene Retson 1942-2020. This year we lost Dale William Retson 1949-2021 and John Kenneth Retson 1940-2021

Calvinist and Presbyterian

My genealogy website is located at <http://www.retson.ca/retsongeneology.html>
On the left side you will see a list of Family Roots.

The Presbyterian Church takes its name from its form of government. Elected elders rather than bishops rule the Presbyterian churches. At a larger geographical area Synod perform the same function for the Presbyteries. . Theologically Presbyterians follow the teaching of John Calvin.

The American and Canadian roots of the Presbyterianism primarily traced back to Scotland and the first Presbyterian churches formed in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, following such European Protestant Reformation theologians as John Calvin and John Knox.

Calvinism (also called the Reformed Protestantism) emphasises the sovereignty of God and the authority of the Bible. Calvinists broke from the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century differing from Lutherans on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, theories of worship, the purpose and meaning of baptism and the use of God's law for believers

Classical Calvinism based its theology on 5 points all of which have been drastically modified by modern Presbyterianism:

1. Total depravity

asserts that as a consequence of the fall of man into sin, every person is enslaved to sin. People are not by nature inclined to love God, but rather to serve their own interests and to reject the rule of God. Thus, all people by their own faculties are morally unable to choose to trust God for their salvation and be saved. This doctrine is derived from Calvin's interpretation of Augustine's explanation about Original Sin. While the phrases "totally depraved" and "utterly perverse" were used by Calvin, what was meant was the inability to save oneself from sin rather than being absent of goodness. Phrases like "total depravity" cannot be found in the Canons of Dort, and the Canons as well as later Reformed orthodox theologians arguably offer a more moderate view of the nature of fallen humanity than Calvin.

2. Predestination (Unconditional election or unconditional grace)

asserts that God has chosen from eternity those whom he will bring to himself not based on foreseen virtue, merit, or faith in those people; rather, his choice is unconditionally grounded in his mercy alone. God has chosen from eternity to extend mercy to those he has chosen and to withhold mercy from those not chosen. Those chosen receive salvation through Christ alone. Those not chosen receive the just wrath that is warranted for their sins against God.(Only in the tiny Presbyterian sects will one hear absolute or double predestination being preached).

3. Limited atonement

asserts that Jesus's substitutionary atonement was definite and certain in its purpose and in what it accomplished. This implies that only the sins of the elect were atoned for by Jesus's death. Calvinists believe that the atonement is limited in the sense that it is intended for some and not all.

4. Irresistible grace

asserts that the saving grace of God is effectually applied to those whom he has determined to save (that is, the elect) and overcomes their resistance to obeying the call of the gospel, bringing them to a saving faith. This means that when God sovereignly purposes to save someone, that individual certainly will be saved. The doctrine holds that this purposeful influence of God's Holy Spirit cannot be resisted, but that the Holy Spirit, "graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ."

5. Perseverance of the saints (the "saints" being those whom God has predestined to salvation) asserts that since God is sovereign and his will cannot be frustrated by humans or anything else, those whom God has called into communion with himself will continue in faith until the end.

The concept of original sin has been severely downplayed by most denominations and flies in the face of modern science which hypothesises that life transcended non life, multiple cell organisms evolved from single cells and man evolved from earlier species in animals in what has been called the theory of evolution. Darwin hypothesized that variations occur in nature that are favourable or useful in some way to the organism itself in the struggle for existence. Favourable variations are ones that increase chances for survival and procreation. Thus man started from inert non moral substances and got better with adaptation.

While Presbyterianism in Scotland evolved from Calvinism, traditional Calvinist principles carry little weight in current Presbyterianism. Predestination occupied a position of concern in reformed traditions longer than other Protestant denominations but even here its importance has disappeared. Predestination today is little more than a historical curiosity for the typical Presbyterian layman. An individual moving each week between a Presbyterian Church, a United Church of Canada (or Methodist in the US) or Baptist would feel quite at home.. Protestants in today's world are quite practical and theology plays a minor role in which Church an individual chooses to attend or not attend.



Church in Sorn with chains for chaining fornicators and other sinners for punishment

Calvinism came to Scotland through John Knox. James I (James VI of Scotland) believed that Presbyterianism was incompatible with monarchy declaring "No bishop, no King". By the time he died the Church of Scotland had a full panel of bishops and archbishops. Charles I together with Archbishop Laud attempted to modify liturgical practices with a Prayer Book of 1637. In 1638 the General Assembly in Glasgow the National Covenant signed by a large number of Scots protested the introduction of the new practices and went on to abolish the office of bishops setting up on a Presbyterian basis and resulting in the Civil wars and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Episcopacy was restored to Scotland after the restoration in 1660. The modern situation dates from 1690 when the Glorious Revolution resulted in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland in addition to the Church of Scotland. Problems arose following the Church Patronage Act of 1711 which gave landowners or patrons the right to appoint ministers, Following 1843 a large portion of the Church broke away to form the Free Church of Scotland. These quarrels in Scotland were keenly felt in Canada and most Scottish settlements in Canada had both a Church of Scotland and

Free Church.

The great influx of population from Ulster (Northern Ireland) did not begin until 1718. The first group that came with Rev. James McGregor from Adhadowey parish, County Londonderry. Our Ancestors the Archibalds came about 1719 to Nutfield New Hampshire which was shortly afterwards renamed Londonderry. In the 1760s six siblings of this family relocated to Truro Township, Nova Scotia. Back in Scotland, the seceding groups tended to divide and reunite among themselves leading to a proliferation of Presbyterian denominations in Scotland. Presbyterians in New England usually were absorbed into Congregationalist churches. In 1801 a plan of union and mutual assistance was entered into by Congregationalist and Presbyterians in New England. Under this plan, Congregationalist going west or south usually went into Presbyterian Church. The majority of Presbyterians in the United States are part of Presbyterian Church(USA) which was organized in June 10 when the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the United Presbyterian Church in United States amalgamated. In Scotland, the Church of Scotland Act 1921 finally recognized the full independence of the Church in spiritual matters and the Kirk was able to unite with the United Free Church of Scotland in 1929.

In Nova Scotia Reformed settlers of Germanic roots, started St. Andrew's Church in Lunenburg in 1753; they joined Church of Scotland's Nova Scotia Synod (which had been founded in August 1833) in 1837.

In Truro, Nova Scotia, First United Church (Presbyterian until 1925) was founded in the 1760s by Scot-Irish from the United States. Both Londonderry and Truro Townships sought a Presbyterian minister who belonged to the Burger or Associate Synod of the Succession Church which had split with the Church of Scotland over issues of Doctrine and lay patronage. They insisted that their pastor be university-educated and favoured a graduate of one of the Universities in Scotland. The Burgher Synod had split twice from the Church of Scotland (The established Calvinist Church in Scotland) when Ebenezer Erskine had led the succession from the Church of Scotland and second when they further divided into Burgher and Anti Burgher branches as a result of the Church Patronage Act which gave landowners or patrons. On July 28 1770 David Archibald authorized the posting of a notice calling Heads of Families to gather at the local Meeting House to determine whether they wished to apply to the Reverent Mr. Cook to be their settled minister and under what terms as well as to appoint a day for the election of Elders. The "Call" dated September 13 1770 was signed by 50 fifty 'Elders Freeholders and other inhabitants of Truro'. Samuel Archibald our Ancestor and his brother David Archibald were among 7 Elders elected.

The original Scots-Irish Presbyterians were from two branches of the Secessionist United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and prior to their union in 1817 which created the Synod of Nova Scotia, there was the Associate Presbytery of Truro, elected in 1786, and the Presbytery of Pictou, erected in 1795. There were still Church of Scotland congregations and ministers who remained outside this group, before its incorporation in New Brunswick on January 30, 1833 (Synod from 1835) and in Nova Scotia. For other Synods formed in Canada see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyterian_Church_in_Canada)

On June 15, 1875, the four Canadian Presbyterian churches, The Canada Presbyterian Church (June 1861), The Presbyterian Church of Canada in Connection with the Established Church of Scotland (1831), The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of the Maritime Provinces of British North America (1867), and The Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces (1866), representing many of the parallel events and controversies within the Church of Scotland joined to form The Presbyterian Church in Canada, in Montreal's Victoria Hall.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada under this name has existed since 1875. The United Church of Canada claimed the right to the name from 1925 to 1939. Once the largest Christian denomination in English-speaking Canada, in 1925 some 70 per cent of its congregations joined with the Methodist Church, Canada and the Congregationalist Union to form the United Church of Canada. The terms Continuing Presbyterians and Non-Concurring Presbyterians were then used by those who did not participate in the merger, until the legal right to use the name "Presbyterian Church in Canada" was regained in 1939. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that

although the institutional Presbyterian Church in Canada may legally have merged with the Methodist Church, the United Church had effectively vacated the name and it remained available to the non-concurring Presbyterians.

On June 9, 1925, the group consisting of those Presbyterian congregations, and a number of minority groups which did not concur with Church Union into the United Church of Canada, met for prayer just before midnight in Knox Presbyterian Church (Toronto). Some 79 dissenting commissioners, and others equally concerned about the future of their church, had come to resume the General Assembly of the "continuing" Presbyterian Church that night. After adjourning early in the hours of June 10, they later reconvened as the General Assembly, and also met with others (including women's missionary groups) into a congress at St. Andrew's Church (Toronto); these two key Toronto congregations provided much of the input and support for the Presbyterian Church Association, in this fight against Church Union. The "continuing Presbyterians" title remained until 1939. About 30 per cent of the former Presbyterians remained separate from the United Church at the time of the divide, although the actual vote remains uncertain. After 1925, the "rebuilding" was slowed in the 1930s by the Great Depression, and the Second World War. The period from 1945 saw expansion from urban growth and immigration, especially from Presbyterian strongholds such as Scotland and Ireland. At present the Presbyterian Church in Canada has about 1000 congregations across the country.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada like other mainline denominations has been wrestling with modern social issues and decline in membership. In 1998, the Presbyterian denomination prohibited gay and lesbian pastors and denied licenses to preach to these ministers; in 2012, however, that ban was lifted by the assembly. The Presbyterian Church in Canada has never limited the roles of its members on the basis of their sexual orientation. These roles include church school teachers, musicians, youth leaders, ruling elders, teaching elders and members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries." At the 2016 General Assembly, the church referred reports on human sexuality to various committees. The 2021 General Assembly agreed to adopt two parallel definitions of marriage, one exclusively heterosexual and one providing for same-gender marriages, leaving the choice to ministers and church sessions. Since 1966, the denomination has ordained women as both elders and ministers.

Churches in earlier generations told a great deal about the life of its participants. Secularism continues to make inroads on religion and religion continues to play an ever diminishing role in the life of the modern person. The power of the church has been much diminished due to disclosures of sexual, and cultural abuse within its institutions World wide the Lutheran Church is the largest protestant organization but even it is starting to decline in membership. Church populations are greying and more and more churches are amalgamating or simply closing. Today's genealogist interest quite often turns to the distant past searching for records before the state's recording of vital records.

Updates to http://www.retson.ca/retsongeneology.html	since September 1 2021
Gould	http://www.retson.ca/Gould.pdf
Gutterson	http://www.retson.ca/gutterson.pdf
Preston	http://www.retson.ca/preston.pdf
Wilcox	https://www.retson.ca/wilcox.pdf
Retson Genealogy Newsletter October	https://www.retson.ca/retsongenealogynewsletteroct2021.pdf

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