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THE GOSPEL AND HISTORY

D.B. Knox

"The Protestant Faith"

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I expect you have all done history at school. In itself history is an enigma, one event following another without any apparent pattern. But the Christian gospel contributes significantly to the understanding of history.

It teaches that every event is under the control and within the purposes of Almighty God. In Isaiah 10 the prophet states that the Assyrian army's invasion of Judea was God's judgment on His rebellious people. The prophet Amos reminded his hearers that God was in charge not only of the migration of the Children of Israel from Egypt but also of the Philistines when they landed on the western seaboard of Palestine and of the Syrians when their tribe migrated from Kir to Syria. (Amos 9:7).

In a word, there is no event which takes place in history which is not under the superintendence of God. The gospel teaches moreover that God's purposes are benign, full of blessing, though they also contain judgment on the impenitent and disobedient. History then is to be understood in the light of God's sovereignty and of God's character.

What God's purposes are within history He made known at the beginning at the creation of mankind when the Creator declared "Let mankind have dominion". This dominion was lost when man became enslaved in sin to the devil, so that we now cannot do what we want to do but are carried off by temptation. But this dominion has been re-established through the gospel which is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes. Through the gospel men and women are recalled from government by Satan and restored to the status of sons and daughters of God, where instead of being slaves to someone else they themselves are trusted with authority. They are forgiven and made new in their spirits and enter into fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit. The apex of this re-establishment of man's dominion in God's creation is Jesus Christ. He has completely trodden

down Satan and through the suffering of death has been crowned with glory and honour. He reigns at God's right hand where, through His prayer, he is receiving "the nations as His inheritance and the ends of the earth for His possession" (Psalm 2:8) through the preaching of the gospel and the conversion of men and women to God. It is God's purpose from before the creation of the world that we should be transformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). This purpose is actualized by our fellowship with Him by prayer in the Spirit, by our witness to Him and as a consequence by our suffering for Him. Like our Lord Jesus we too are engaged in a conflict with Satan and the spiritual powers of darkness. The on-going world process may be seen as an expression of man's arrogance against God and on the other hand, an expression of the long suffering of God in the face of this arrogance and of the innumerable injustices which men impose on each other (which are intolerable to the sensitive onlooker and how much more to God the righteous creator). God's long suffering in this situation is for the purpose of providing for our salvation (2 Peter 3:15).

We are all involved in the historical process. The Christian is however, protected both from the absurd optimism which sees man becoming perfect through the historical process, as well as from the despair which results from the meaninglessness which seems to be the only other deduction if history is merely one event following another in an apparently purposeless way. Through the eye of faith, illuminated by the gospel, the Christian will see how his divine calling to witness and to suffer with his Master will not be in vain in the purposes of God. (1 Corinthians 15:58). It is part of God's action establishing His good and benign rule in a world in which evil is at present rampant. God is at work in history working out His just and perfect purposes (seen so clearly in Jesus' life, death and resurrection), and this gives meaning to our Christian life, as well as giving joy in the present and hope for the future.

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21.11.76 47/76

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is broadcast every Sunday at
8:25 p.m. over Radio 2CH

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