

## **CHURCH HISTORY REVISITED**

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This is not another attempt at understanding historiography but an appreciative essay of the methods and applications of Allan A. MacRae as a teacher of church history.

On coming to seminary, the present writer was surprised to learn that the President of the school (who was also Professor of Old Testament) taught the courses in church history. Dr MacRae's lectures were never dull. Class time passed quickly and often one left the room thinking that in some way both he and Allan MacRae had actually been in those places where the events of history transpired. The method of Dr MacRae was to present the substance of history in a meaningful way with obvious and apparent application to the present day. From his approach the student learned as much about the meaning and application of history as about its content.

### **THE CONTENT OF HISTORY**

History is made worthwhile by its content. Its benefit lies not so much in our immediate experience as in the substance of the material offered. To this end the content of history may be seen under three general heads: (1) objective realities, (2) subjective assessments, and (3) providential arrangements. These are not mutually exclusive but essential differences in the categorization allow them to be visible and separate entities for the purposes of our consideration.

The objective realities are the historical entities that are seen in history no matter who tells the story or writes the book. Whether the chronicler is a theologian, an economist, a social theorist, the names and the events are the same. Luther, for example, is still Luther whether the chronicler writes as a Protestant loyalist, an atheist, or a papal secretary.

Subjective assessments differ in that they reflect the interest, background, and viewpoint of the writer who is actually serving as an interpreter of the objective realities. While many scholars hesitate to admit subjectivism in their assessments it is still there as indicated by Latourette who noted candidly: "No historian can write without bias, and he who professes to do so is either deceiving or self-deceived."<sup>1</sup> This however does not make subjective assessments any less a part of history. Without them we would be hard-pressed to have a feeling or an emotional awareness of the whole. Furthermore, one writer's subjectivity may turn the objective entity in such a way as to allow a fuller illumination as to what it really was. These assessments are an important part of the content but we must be aware of what they are and view them in a different light from the way we