

4. The Presbyterian community (as a unit)

(foundation notes are on pages 24-26)

There are many parts to the Presbyterian community and so we are treating them as a mass with notes here and there on the derivation of particular groups. This is not the most satisfactory system but it will work for us in the course and so we are doing it that way. Presbyterianism is essentially the polity ideas of Calvin as developed by Knox

a. Following the war of independence:

As I have note earlier, the presbyterian clergy were strong promoters of the colonial side. Although they had enjoyed full religious freedom in the Pennsylvania-New Jersey complex, they had been under various bans in Virginia and had generally resented the church state complex. Under the general services of Witherspoon, a committee was convened in 1785 to survey the presbyterian setting. The result was that in 1786 a structure was outlined with 16 presbyteries, 4 synods and a general assembly. In theory the presbytery is the real authority with the other bodies serving administratively for clarification of ideal but not for policy making (this has been much revised in passing years). In 1788 the Confession of Faith, the catechisms, the directory of worship, and the form of church government were adopted. These were to give the presbyterian constituency a form of unity for the more practical development and maintenance of its order.

b. In the National period we note the following items:

(1) the Presbyterian community was a major participant in the second great awakening. The camp meetings were particularly its instrument and the church was held together on the frontier. Unfortunately the continued sectarian ideals brought from the old world continued in the New and were much the cause for the defection of Barton Stone (Christian Church) and the Campbells, (Disciples of Christ) (1800-1810).

(2) There was likewise a small schismin the Tennessee/Kentucky territories when a number of churches withdrew and formed the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Part of the issue was in the area of theology..these churches having a few Arminian ideals in place of the standard Calvinism. A number of these churches returned in 1906 but the reunion was not complete and a continuing body of Cumberland Presbyterians is with us today. The general issues are about the same.

(3) The Presbyterian bodies on the whole were not slow in the work of missions. Each tended to develop its own group or council on the subject. But the mainline body quickly developed