

d. The Presbyterian Community

(1) In retrospect:

Presbyterianism is, in some ways, the contribution of Calving and a government of elders. John Knos is the Scots representative who brought to Scotland the Calvinistic polity and saw the ideals enacted into law. Presbyterianism differs from congregationalism in polity by having a federation of like-thinking churches (a synod). But within the synod the individual churches under the organizations of presbyteries call their own pastors and determine their own affairs...a difference between their structure and that of the Methodist or Anglican systems. Presbyterianism, like others, I guess, is not free from schism and, in some ways, the form of government, etc., lends itself to this very nicely. Certainly in Scotland the Presbyterian sects were numerous and this diversity was carried into the new world as well. We do not point out each of these bodies with detail...but their divisiveness was a key point, you will remember, in the development of the Disciples of Christ and the Christian church groups. There are some particular issues, already noted by us in the earlier part of this syllabus, that one should keep in mind as they were formative in the approach this community has taken to liberalism:

(a) The Old Side/New Side division of the 1740's...the issue, the division, the resolution.

(b) The Old School/ New School division of the 1840's...the doctrinal issue, the slavery question...the Hodge-Barnes problem and the resolution.

(c) The development of Union Seminary

(2) The hersey trials

A number of these became public issues in the denomination at the close of the last century. As the base of theological liberalism broadened, a number of important men were called into question on the issue of beliefs. Among these were the seminarians, Preserved Smith and C.A. Briggs. After rather tortuous trials these men left the denomination, as did several others, although the degree of error in their teachings was of such magnitude that one wonders why the proceedings were so difficult. But the system, as I noted earlier, made trials and schisms very easy but the outgrowth of them was often very difficult. Therefore many in the denomination resented the appearance of being "witch-hunters" and were prone to be less circumspect when error was suggested or in evidence. The conservative element lost the battle in the Presbyterian arena largely because of its unwillingness to hold a firm line with the presbyteries on candidature and credentials. Hindsight is always easy..and in this case correct.