

(3) The Fundamentals Controversy

Beginning in the early part of the 20th century, conservative presbyterians worked on a project to offset liberalism by attempting to reorder ordination vows in the denomination by requiring candidates to admit belief in the "fundamentals". This was done in the light of the fact that the newer interpretations being put on the confession of faith made it virtually impossible for that document to screen the applicants for the ministry. The "fundamentals" included the Virgin Birth, the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture, the vicarious atonement, the reality of the life and return of the Lord and the bodily resurrection of Christ. Some conservatives objected to the term "fundamentals" on the grounds that it was hard to sort out any aspects of the faith and make them more important than others. But there was a feeling of unanimity among conservatives that these points needed to be believed for entrance into the ministry. The difficulties they sparked in the General Assembly were many and eventually the whole concept was challenged by the Auburn Affirmation...a copy of which I will supply and you will see that the implications are of greater meaning than what is actually stated.

(4) Resultant steps:

- (a) the Foreign Missions controversy
- (b) the General Assemblies of the 20's
- (c) the Princeton question

(d) the Mandate of 1934...a very important part of this work since it showed the attitude of liberal churchmen when the issue of freedom of expression is really on the line. Those conservatives who had joined in forming the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions were condemned and given the option of leaving this board or being tried by their presbyteries as divisive brethren, etc. It marked a new turn, sparked by the liberal wing, of authority over ministers in the denomination.

(e) The confession of 1967...broadened the confessional statements of the denomination to place a number of other theological tomes on a par with the Westminster confession. The Confession itself was not dropped but simply given a place as one of the standards to which the denomination attached itself.

(f) Since then the moves of the General Assembly, etc., have been progressively liberal and the denomination has hurt for it. Discovery that many churches had been included in Assembly control illegally allowed a large number of congregations to leave the denomination (late 70's early 80's) and keep their property. This, coupled with hostile depositions by