

a. The Federal Council of Churches...1908

The Federal Council no longer exists as such but its formation was the predecessor for the present bodies and in historic perspective it is very worth noticing.

(1) Foundational moves:

The concept of such a council probably found its roots in the World's Evangelical Alliance, founded in London in 1846. At the same time Schmucker, the Lutheran theologian, was advocating a world church with unity in structure and individuality in local expression. American churchmen were involved in the alliance and these two forces gave the idea of the hope of a similar body in the US. The Alliance had a nine-point statement of faith that was very evangelical and the insistence on doctrinal orthodoxy tended to discourage liberals from seeking inclusion. This limited participation and resulted in the Open Church League of 1894...with a broader base, but not much commitment and the body soon died. (The League)

But the American Evangelical Alliance was formed in 1867 and was headed by the strongly evangelical James McCosh. In 1885 it was superseded by a body known as the American Congress of Churches. Neither of these was a church council per se but a working fellowship of denominations.

A more particular fellowship developed in New York with the 1894 conference at Union Seminary and the formation of the Federation of Churches and Christian Workers of New York City in 1895. This group was obviously somewhat local in its constituency but it gave a call for a larger body or a federal type of organization that could be representative on a more national level.

Independent of this, to a large extent, was the Religious Education Association of 1903. It came to existence under the leadership of liberally minded scholars with W.R. Harper, the Hebraist, as one of the foremost. The aim of the body was to help in the curriculum development of better teaching materials for churches. It gave its support to the general call of the New York body for a national instrument.

At the same time, the National Federation of Churches and Christian Workers in America was formed in 1900. It joined in 1905 in calling for a unity effort in this sort of representation.

Meanwhile, two federation congresses were held, the first in Philadelphia in 1901 and the second in Washington, DC in 1902. These congresses featured a