

V. Contemporary Ecumenical Efforts

In this short section we will mention a number of the items in progress at this time. I cannot discuss them all in detail...mostly because the teacher doesn't know enough about them! But what I do know I will try to share with you so that our ignorance may be great together. And I suppose we should not even jest about such things but in a syllabus like this there must be something to lighten the load.

A. Consultation on Church Union (COCU)

(Sometimes referred to as Churches of Christ Uniting)

1. Beginning:

The concept of a great merger of major protestant churches was expressed publicly by Eugene Carson Blake, Presbyterian clergyman and later secretary for the World Council of Churches. Blake noted that the multiplicity of churches in the United States did not seem to him to be the will of God. He proposed a merger in which the Presbyterian Church and the Protestant Episcopal Church would invite the Methodist church and the United Church of Christ into a series of discussions with the aim of producing a single ecclesiastical body that would have about 20 million members.

The move was quickly acted on by the Episcopal church...Bishop James Pike spoke strongly for it and at the annual convention in 1961 the Episcopal Church voted to join in such a project. Blake's proposal had been made the previous year.

In that the action was merely to begin a consultation, all the bodies mentioned gave general approval and the COCU commission (a sort of study council) was activated in 1962.

2. Brief Historical Note:

The member bodies entered into the discussion of the understanding of sacraments, ordination, worship and liturgy. By 1970 a plan was formulated for the merger of the bodies in stages...something of an enfolding in one another. This was a mild compromise between the opposing suggestions of...1) everyone giving up all ideas and constituting a whole new order...2) all meeting under a common umbrella and determining what operations could be kept from what body.

But in 1973 the member communions rejected this plan. The thought by some was that the union plan was precipitous...that it did not make sufficient allowances for understanding and history, etc. (Very little was said about real theological issues: the Bible, the atonement, etc., but much about peripheral issues: the ordination, service liturgy, etc.) To uninformed outsiders it appeared that COCU might collapse at this point but in actuality it moved to retrenchment.

3. Present status:

The general secretary of COCU is Gerald R. Moede with the offices in Princeton. In 1984 a plenary session was held in Baltimore--the 16th--and some action was taken towards a merger that will grow by consensus. But the final matter is still up in the air as the churchmen work out differences. My information is not current beyond