

B. An assessment of various church mergers

We have mentioned some in class at earlier times but to those we add the following with rather painfully brief notes:

1. The Presbyterian merger of 1983

2. The coming Lutheran merger

Projections are for a merger of the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church to merge officially in 1988. All the groundwork has been achieved and all the members are in agreement on policy. A new name has not yet been decided (I think that is accurate, when things like this are happening during your life time it is not always easy to be right on top of them) but it has been decided that the headquarters will be in Chicago. It will create a body of about 5½ million members. The Missouri synod is remaining apart as are a couple of smaller bodies.

In the meantime the Lutheran churches in this merger have established study commissions of various types with everything from the Reformed to the Catholic churches. The Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Washington, D.C., has celebrated divine worship with Catholic priests and Lutheran pastors as joint celebrants. A new wave of Lutheran interest into ecumenism has had bishopric groups visiting everything from the Pope to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Quite a lot of things are happening in Lutheranism and most of it does not seem like it will work in favor of the interest of the Gospel

3. An historic study: the United Church of Canada.

This union featured presbyterian, methodist, some baptist and congregational bodies and was consummated in 1925 after nearly 25 years of discussion. It is hailed as an ecumenical success although in growth, development, etc., all of the entering bodies have indicated a decline in the union. An attempt was made to amalgamate church government patterns so as to not bring a totally new thrust to any one segment and this has been somewhat successful. Evangelicals in the Presbyterian church of Canada largely rejected the merger and maintained separate status. From our rather jaundiced view the United church is a good study in how to lose effectiveness in witness. It currently is involved with talks among Anglicans and some smaller bodies.

4. Finally....merger discussions exist among a number of smaller churches. The EC, Free Methodist, and Wesleyan Methodist regularly discuss merger concepts with the Nazarenes, etc., and themselves. But doctrine is still important to these churches and the Gospel is still a real issue so they have not, as yet, been able to come up with a satisfactory theological formula.