

(c) Presbyterian Groups

The most consistent of these is the Concerned Laymen, a group numbering about 400,000 advocates with a monthly publication and other means of communication within the body. It is perhaps the strongest of all "internal" reform movements but still does not fare well at the General Assembly, etc.

(d) Summary note: There are similar resistance groups within most of the reformed bodies. I cannot summarize them all in these notes. But the task of restructuring the church from within via a church in a church concept is a difficult task that has not yet been done in church history...and I am speaking of the body, not one isolated congregation, etc.

6. Contemporary Ecumenical Efforts

In these brief notes are mentioned some of the items in progress at this time...not in detail but in the general connexion of things and the student can keep the ears opened as time goes on.

a. Church Merger movements of various proportions:

(1) Consultation on Church Union (COCU)

The concept of a great merger of major protestant churches was expressed publicly by Eugene Carson Blake, Presbyterian clergyman and later secretary of 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 invited the Methodist and United Church of Christ Churches 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 such a project. (The original proposal was in 1960, incidentally.) In that the action was simply a proposal, all the mentioned bodies gave general approval and the COCU commission in the form of a study council was activated in 1962.

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 of one another. This was a mild compromise between the opposing suggestions of either everyone giving up all ideas an constituting a whole new order or all meeting under a common umbrella and determining from that body what operations could be kept.