

The Ecumenical Movement

At the beginning of the twentieth-century the Student Volunteer Movement (later became the Student Christian Movement) expressed a shared concern for evangelism. At the same time there was also a desire to recover shared denominational heritage. This growing sense of a oneness in Christ was further encouraged by the merging of two Methodist groups in England that formed the United Methodists. In 1910 over 1000 delegates attended the International Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh. Its task was to survey the world mission of the non-Roman Catholic churches. From this meeting three main movements arose. The Faith and Order Movement sought to tackle the doctrinal differences with the aim of uniting the divided denominations. Interrupted by the First World War, it eventually held a conference in 1927 at Lausanne and another in 1937 at Edinburgh. It then worked towards forming the World Council of Churches, which was constituted in 1948 at Amsterdam. Another movement from the 1910 conference was that of Life and Work. This was focused on the relation of Christian faith to social, political and economic issues. They also held further conferences in 1925 and 1937. Their 1937 conference at Oxford saw the proposals for the World Council of Churches and joining with the Faith and Order Movement. The third strand was the International Missionary Council. Formed in 1921 it integrated with the World Council of Churches in 1961. In 1968 and 1975 the Roman Catholic Church sent "participating observers" to the World Council of Churches Conferences.

Answer:

The World Council of Churches was formed in 1948. It arose from three earlier movements that originated out of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. These movements were "Faith and Order", "Life and work" and "the International Missionary Council". The Roman Catholic Church remained non-members but observers.

Mission and the World Council of Churches

In 1968 the World Council of Churches held at conference at Uppsala with the theme "Behold I make all things new". The conference discussed various topics dividing up into six study groups. "Renewal in mission" was the most controversial document that the conference produced. Prior to the conference there had been great emphasis on the importance of bringing non-Christians into faith in Christ. However, in the draft copy from the conference this aspect was hardly mentioned. The emphasis was on reconciliation within humanity rather than reconciliation with God. Religious conversion was seen as of little importance. The retired General Secretary stated "A Christianity which has lost its vertical dimension has lost its salt and is not only insipid in itself, but useless for the world". The result of the debate that followed saw the conversion aspect have a more central position in the final form of the document. It was recognised that a turning to faith also resulted in service to others. However, these trends were challenged and at the Bangkok conference in 1973 salvation became defined as the struggle for economic justice, human dignity and hope against despair in personal life. Both the Eastern

Orthodox and the Evangelicals objected to such a narrow interpretation and at the “Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation” held the year after, a more balanced view of evangelism and service was argued for. The Nairobi conference of 1975 reaffirmed this with the phrase “Mission is the confession of Jesus Christ by both word and deed..... Christians are called to engage in both evangelism and social action”.

