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THE CONCEPTS OF UNITY, FELLOWSHIP,
AND COOPERATION AMONG VARIOUS
LUTHERAN BODIES IN AMERICA

Short Title

Unity, Fellowship, and Cooperation

Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

Carl Louis Bernsann

June 1979

1585

Approved by: Carl L. Bernsann

[Signature]

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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this means, this study will be alert to special usage of allied terms, such as, "union," "fraternal," "brotherhood,"

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although a number of works have appeared on the subject of Lutheran unity and a few overviews have presented the popular positions of the Lutheran bodies in America, no detailed examination has been made public up to this time which clearly outlines the conceptions of unity, church fellowship, and cooperation held within various Lutheran Church bodies.

There are several reasons for the lack of such a study. First, the various Lutheran bodies and their members have not always used these terms in the same way. Terms of human language are subject to human limitations, and the terms "unity," "fellowship," and "cooperation" display the war scars of such limitations in much of the official data as well as private usage on the part of individual church members.

This is understandable to a degree since these terms do overlap in their meaning. Even those persons who try to be precise often have used these terms interchangeably with each other and with words of related meaning. For this reason, this study will be alert to synodical usage of allied terms, such as, "union," "fraternal," "brethren,"

"joint efforts," and the like. In regard to each church body we will ask: what does it consider essential for unity (and union)? What does the particular body regard as necessary prerequisites for church fellowship? What must be the ground and basis for cooperation with other church bodies or ecclesiastical groups?

The second difficulty which has plagued works on inter-Lutheran unity is the failure properly to evaluate the sources. Examples and illustrations of a synod's position are often taken from private opinions and expressions of small groups which do not represent the general body adequately. The Gatechism of Differences serves as an illustration of this difficulty. In order to demonstrate official teachings of particular Lutheran church bodies, the author of this work cites church resolutions, articles in "official" publications, books written by individuals, newspaper accounts, etc., without distinguishing among the relative values of the sources.¹ Such an approach often proves so much for or against a particular group that it proves nothing. While a number of church bodies, including The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, officially state that they are held responsible for the statements of their various pastors, publications, and seminaries, even

¹Harold E. C. Wicke, A Gatechism of Differences (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1950), passim.

the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod grants the constant possibility of "casual intrusion of errors" into its pulpits, schools and publications.²

For this reason this study will consider the official resolutions passed by the respective church body in convention as its most important evidence. Such resolutions will be considered the fullest expression of the organization's sentiment. Synodical essays and reports by various officers and official committees will also be considered important evidence. However, since this study will demonstrate that conventions have sometimes acted contrary to recommendations of presidents and committees, such evidence must be clearly distinguished from actual synodical resolutions. This study will also discuss activities undertaken by the church body or on behalf of the church body along with other evidence from secondary sources which seem to relate to the concepts of unity, fellowship or cooperation. Such evidence will have only complementary value to the actual resolutions passed by the synodical body in session.

This study will usually restrict itself to the period following the 1920's. Occasionally, references will be made to historical documents relative to the topic under

²Doctrinal Declarations: A Collection of Official Statements on the Doctrinal Position of Various Lutheran Synods in America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 51.

discussion. The studies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church in America will begin with their actual founding dates, 1917 and 1918, respectively. The study of the American Lutheran Church will begin with its origin as a corporate body in 1930. The other Lutheran church bodies will be examined from approximately the year 1925 up to the present date. This restriction to the period following the first World War is made in order to keep this study from becoming an examination of synods which are no longer in existence. Hence, in order to avoid such a historical survey, this study will be limited to church bodies of this generation and the years immediately preceding it.

Owing to a limitation of certain source material, this study will also have to omit several small church bodies and lean rather heavily on the secondary sources for several other small Lutheran synods. Hence, we shall omit from this study the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (Suomi Synod), the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Finnish Apostolic Church, the Negro Missions of the Synodical Conference, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (Eielsen Synod), the Protes'tant Conference, and the Concordia Lutheran Conference.

The American Evangelical Lutheran Church, formerly known as the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, will be

discussed in its relations with certain other church bodies (the United Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church in America). However, no special chapter can be given to that body since reliable sources were unavailable for this study.

Since the particular church body discussed in each chapter is considered the author of its convention proceedings, and since its official publishing house invariably prints its particular proceedings of convention action, this information will be omitted in the footnotes for the chapters, but included in the bibliography.

The United Lutheran Church in America adopted its constitution in its convention in 1913. This constitution speaks to the subject of unity in its preamble. It not only declares that the synods of the United Lutheran Church are uniting with each other, but it also invites all other Lutheran bodies into the union,

and until such can be attained, continues to invite all evangelical Lutheran congregations and synods in America, one with us in the faith, to unite with us, upon the terms of this constitution.

¹Author, "The Interdenominational Relations of the United Lutheran Church in America" (Unpublished Bachelor's Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1936).

²Minutes of the First General Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1913, pp. 535.

CHAPTER II

THE UNITED LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

A detailed examination will be made of the principles and practices of the United Lutheran Church in its relationship to other Lutheran bodies. Its relationships with non-Lutheran Christian bodies will also be summarized. An extensive treatment will not be given to this second aspect, however, since this topic has been exhaustively treated in a Bachelor of Divinity Thesis under this very subject heading.¹

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¹Author, "The Interdenominational Relations of the United Lutheran Church in America" (unpublished Bachelor's Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1958).

²Minutes of the First Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1918, pp. 63f.

The doctrinal terms of the constitution subscribe to the Sacred Scriptures as the "inspired Word of God and as the only infallible rule and standard of faith and practice," and to the Confessions as a "correct exhibition" of doctrine "in the harmony" of the Scriptural faith.³ Hence, the invitation to union in the preamble of the United Lutheran Church constitution is on the basis of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Article VI section 3 of this constitution lists as part of their objectives,

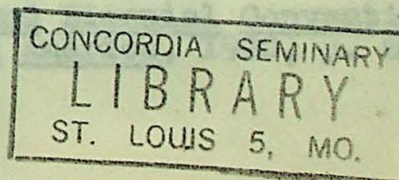
to cultivate cooperation among all Lutherans in promotion of the general interests of the Church, to seek the unification of all Lutherans in one orthodox faith, and thus, to develop the specific Lutheran principle and practice and make their strength effective.⁴

While the constitution of the United Lutheran Church invites other Lutheran bodies to union on the doctrinal basis of the Scriptures and the Confessions, it does not extend this invitation to non-Lutherans, and it forbids its synods and representatives to selectively affiliate with non-Lutheran groups independently of the general body.

As To External Relations. The United Lutheran Church in America shall have power to form and dissolve relations with other general bodies, organizations

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.



and movements. To secure uniform and consistent practice no Synod, Conference or Board, or any official representative thereof, shall give power of independent affiliation with general organizations and movements.⁵

In 1920 the Executive Board of the United Lutheran Church presented to the general convention the Declarations of Principles Concerning the Church and Its External Relationships for its approval.⁶ This document became known as the Washington Declaration after its approval by the convention. After a thorough discussion on the nature and the purpose of the Church, the document goes into detail describing the relationships various denominations within the Christian Church should and may have with one another. Each denomination will:

1. Declare "what it believes concerning Christ and His Gospel . . . and testify definitely and frankly against error."
2. "Approach others without hostility, jealousy, suspicion, or pride in the sincere and humble desire to give and receive Christian service."
3. Recognize the truth of other groups in the areas of agreement "with our interpretation of the Gospel."
4. "Cooperate with other Christians in works of serving love in so far as this can be done without surrender of its interpretation of the Gospel, without denial of conviction, and without

⁵Ibid., p. 66.

⁶Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1920, p. 63.

suppression of its testimony as to what it holds to be the truth."⁷

The Washington Declaration clarified the prerequisites for organic union and full spiritual cooperation in one brief paragraph.

In the case of those church bodies calling themselves Evangelical Lutheran and subscribing the Confessions which have always been regarded as the standards of Evangelical Lutheran doctrine, the United Lutheran Church recognizes no doctrinal reasons against complete cooperation and organic union.⁸

This statement says nothing about pulpit and altar fellowship. Yet, it is logical to conclude that if subscription to the Confessions is sufficient for the organic union of bodies calling themselves Lutheran, then this same standard is automatically sufficient for church fellowship, since union would presuppose church fellowship (although the reverse would not necessarily be true). This statement of the Washington Declaration does not preclude the other prerequisites to union of church bodies of a practical nature (e.g., settling organizational differences, etc.), but it firmly states that the only doctrinal prerequisites for union are the historic Confessions, which in turn, would include a subscription to the Sacred Scriptures.

The Washington Declaration rejects the possibility of uniting with other church bodies without coming to terms with these confessions.

⁷Ibid., p. 95.

⁸Ibid.

We hold the union of Christians in a single organization to be of less importance than the agreement of Christians in the proclamation of the Gospel. . . . Union of organization we hold therefore to be a matter of expediency, agreement in testimony to be a matter of principle. . . . The Churches cannot unite as mere Protestants, but only as confessors. . . .⁹

This document also states flatly that it cannot have church fellowship, that is, pulpit exchange among pastors and intercommunion, with those church bodies presently outside of Lutheranism.

That until a more complete unity of confession is attained than now exists, the United Lutheran Church is bound in duty and conscience to maintain its separate identity as a witness to the truth which it knows; and its members, its ministers, its pulpits, its fonts, and its altars must testify only to that truth.¹⁰

Finally, the Washington Declaration declares that the United Lutheran Church is ready and willing to cooperate with other Christian communions

provided that such cooperation does not involve the surrender of our interpretation of the Gospel, the denial of conviction, or the suppression of our testimony to what we hold to be the truth.¹¹

Such cooperation must be restricted only to those church bodies which are genuinely Christian. The Declaration then proposes nine fundamental "doctrines and principles" as a basis for "practical cooperation among the Protestant

⁹Ibid., pp. 96f.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 97.

Churches." The Declaration makes it clear that these nine points are not a "summary of Lutheran Doctrine, or as an addition to, a substitute for, or a modification of the Confessions of our Church." It is also stressed that these points are in no sense an adequate basis for organic union. They are merely a "criterion by which it may be possible for us to determine our attitude toward proposed movements of cooperation."¹²

The nine doctrines which the Washington Declaration proposes as a basis for cooperation with non-Lutheran Christian church bodies are

1. The Fatherhood of God, revealed in His Son Jesus Christ, and the sonship bestowed by God, through Christ, upon all who believe in Him.
2. The true Godhead of Jesus Christ, and His redemption of the world by His life, death, and resurrection; and His living presence in His Church.
3. The continued activity of God the Holy Spirit among men, calling them into the fellowship of Jesus Christ, and enlightening and sanctifying them through the gifts of His grace.
4. The supreme importance of the Word of God and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as the means through which the Holy Spirit testifies of Christ and thus creates and strengthens faith.
5. The authority of the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the only rule and standard by which all doctrines and teachers are to be judged.
6. The reality and universality of sin, and the

¹²Ibid., pp. 98f.

inability of men, because of sin, to attain righteousness or earn salvation through their own character or works.

7. The love, and the righteousness, of God, who for Christ's sake bestows forgiveness and righteousness upon all who believe in Christ.
8. The present existence upon earth of a kingdom of God, founded by His Son, Jesus Christ, not as an external organization, but as a spiritual reality and an object of faith.
9. The hope of Christ's second coming, to be the Judge of the living and the dead, and to complete the kingdom of God.¹³

Note that the Washington Declaration does not demand that each denomination or movement with which the United Lutheran Church cooperates must subscribe to each of these nine doctrines, but the Declaration does insist that the United Lutheran Church cannot "enter into any cooperative movement or organization which denies" any of the nine points. Neither can the general body cooperate with any denomination or movement which, while not specifically denying any of the above points, "limits the cooperating Churches in their confession of the truth or their testimony against error." Also, those organizations whose "purposes lie outside the proper sphere of Church activity," cannot enjoy the cooperation of the United Lutheran Church, even though the nine doctrines are not rejected.¹⁴

¹³Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 99.

A final section of the Declaration dwells at length on anti-Christian organizations and teachers which deny the cardinal Christian doctrines and teach salvation by human effort.¹⁵ It is to this section of the Washington Declaration that the Pittsburgh Agreement later refers in order to resolve the issue of the lodge. This will be discussed at length later.

The Minutes of the convention reported that the Washington Declaration was adopted unanimously by the delegates who then demonstrated their attitude toward the document by standing and singing two stanzas of "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."¹⁶

The United Lutheran Church at the following convention in 1922 seriously and openly considered what relations it would have with the Federal Council of Churches. This convention had to step cautiously, for if it criticized the Council without qualification, this would be tantamount to censoring the former membership of the General Synod in that body. After recognizing the former membership of the old General Synod in the Council, they then stated that the question of affiliation with that cooperative movement had to be considered anew because of the Council's

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 99f.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 455.

"enlarged program." In this way the convention rejected full membership in the Council, and yet did so without condemning the former membership of the General Synod.¹⁷

The convention decided that it could not join the Federal Council because of its weak preamble, its social emphasis, and its non-ecclesiastical program.¹⁸ Yet, this convention recognized that there were certain areas where they could cooperate with the Council as a consultative member according to the principles of the Washington Declaration. Such areas included the study of unity, some educational work, chaplaincy, surveys, planning, relief work, statistical publications, publicity in general, and transportation arrangements.¹⁹ Predominantly, these areas are in an area which Lutherans would label "externals."

In this same convention a report was given on the Faith and Order movement along with the movement dealing with Life and Work. These movements were still in the formative stages, and hence, the reports on them were quite nebulous.²⁰

When in 1924, however, the convention received certain

¹⁷Minutes of the Third Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1922, p. 73.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 75ff.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 83.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 88-94.

literature on the Faith--Order and Life--Work movements which gave the hope that they were going to be carefully planned free conferences, this convention permitted the sending of delegates. These delegates were instructed to present the Lutheran view on all points, and never take action inconsistent with their Church's doctrinal basis (namely, the Confessions).²¹

A rather detailed report was given to the convention of 1926 on the Stockholm meeting of the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work. The delegates who were sent to this meeting confessed disappointment in the lack of any real accomplishment even though relations among Churches were improved by this conference.²²

This convention also accepted the evaluation of its appointed commissioners who declared the Draft Agenda of the World Council on Faith and Order to be unsatisfactory. Their criticism of this Agenda centered on its lack of clarity, its stress on union of organization, and its insufficient doctrinal basis for organizational union.²³

In the report of the delegates to the Faith and Order

²¹Minutes of the Fourth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1924, p. 533.

²²Minutes of the Fifth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1926, pp. 59ff.

²³Ibid., pp. 64ff.

conference at Lausanne the United Lutheran Church representatives indicated to the 1928 convention their joy at being able to cooperate with the Lutherans from other nations who were attending that conference. All of the Lutherans worked together, according to the delegates from the United Lutheran Church, to present the Lutheran viewpoint.

It likewise revealed a Lutheran strength and consciousness that we saw eye to eye in laboring for the real unity of the church in the spirit of our common heritage of the Reformation . . . It was possible for us judiciously to distribute five hundred copies of the Augsburg Confession and the same number of copies of the Smalkald Articles among the delegates.²⁴

This same spirit prevailed in the convention of 1930. The delegates heard the evaluation of the Lausanne assembly given by their commissioners, and they encouraged continued cooperation with other Lutherans connected with the Faith and Order movement in order to bring about the desired Lutheran influence.²⁵

After the convention of 1922 approved consultative relations with the Federal Council of Churches, the next four conventions heard reports on the Council which always included both negative and positive evaluations. Parts of its program and activities were informative and inspirational.

²⁴ Minutes of the Sixth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1928, pp. 76ff.

²⁵ Minutes of the Seventh Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1930, pp. 65ff.

Yet, according to these reports to the conventions, there was compromise, legalism, attempts to influence legislation, and a Reformed emphasis in the Council.²⁶

A shift was detected in the attitudes of the United Lutheran Church toward the Federal Council at the convention of 1932. The report on the Council given to the convention was quite favorable. The Council criticized modern liberalism and was in the process of re-examining itself and its program.²⁷ Yet, the New York Ministerium criticized the Council for making public pronouncements for all of its members, and the Pennsylvania Ministerium went so far as to propose a severance of relations with the Council.²⁸ Hence, the convention decided to re-examine its relations with the Council.²⁹

This convention also heard a report on the tentative plans for the 1937 assembly of the World Council on Faith and Order. Lutheran influence favored a discussion of the Means of Grace and the worship of the Church at this coming assembly.³⁰

²⁶ Author, op. cit., pp. 27f.

²⁷ Minutes of the Eighth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1932, pp. 52f.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 445f.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 448.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 59f.

Another event took place at this convention which seems to have had a far reaching influence on the relationship of Lutheran bodies in America, even though it seemed quite innocent and routine at the time. The American Lutheran Church was meeting in convention about the same time as the United Lutheran Church convention. Hence, the United Lutheran Church sent greetings to the American Lutheran convention, acknowledging that both bodies held the same Confessions, and looking forward to the day of no misunderstandings but rather union.³¹

The American Lutheran Church in convention returned this greeting which arrived at the United Lutheran Church convention in its last hours. This greeting which came to the convention stated, "We recognize a bond of fellowship in Christ Jesus and thank God for it." The greetings also praised the confessional subscription of both bodies and prayed for the day of union under God through the Confessions.³²

From the evidence which has been already presented, this greeting from the American Lutheran Church had a specific significance to the United Lutheran Church. The Washington Declaration and the Constitution of the general body state that the historic Lutheran Confessions are the

³¹Ibid., p. 170.

³²Ibid., p. 542.

criterion and basis for Lutheran unity and union. Whether the American Lutheran Church realized it or not, their greetings to the United Lutheran Church was virtually a proposal to union in the eyes of the latter church body.

The events at the following convention in 1934 seem to bear out this conclusion. Suddenly, after years of silence, eight synods of the United Lutheran Church in America presented memorials to the general convention requesting negotiations for Lutheran union. Most of these synods in the United Lutheran Church spoke of a union with the bodies of the American Lutheran Conference, which would include, along with the United Lutheran Church, almost all bodies in the National Lutheran Council. The Indiana Synod, however, specifically mentioned the American Lutheran Church alone in its memorial on union negotiations.³³

In response to these memorials the convention adopted a number of statements which has since become known popularly as the Savannah Resolution. This Resolution described the concept of Lutheran unity, the modern apostasy among Protestants, the present confessional loyalty among Lutherans, and the theological basis for union.

³³Minutes of the Ninth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1934, pp. 413ff.

The desire for Lutheran church unity is rooted in the conviction that churches which hold a common faith ought to be laboring together at common tasks and not working at cross-purposes

We recognize, moreover, a wide-spread tendency among Christian groups to abbreviate or dilute the Christian message in the effort to make it acceptable to the modern age

We rejoice that the Lutheran Church bodies in America have held unwaveringly to the faith of the Church set forth in its historic confessions and that all of them, by official declarations, have recorded their sincere purpose to continue in their loyalty to this faith Believing that the testimony of the Lutheran Church is weakened by the divisions that exist within it, we solemnly declare it to be our purpose to do all that is in our power to put an end to these divisions.

We recognize as Evangelical Lutheran all Christian groups which accept the Holy Scriptures as the only rule and standard for faith and life, . . . and who sincerely receive the historic Confessions of the Lutheran Church (especially the Unaltered Augsburg Confession) "as a witness of the truth and presentation of the correct understanding of our predecessors" . . . and we set up no other standards or tests of Lutheranism apart from them or alongside of them.

We believe that these Confessions are to be interpreted in their historic context, not as a law or as a system of theology, but as "a witness and declaration of faith as to how the Holy Scriptures were understood and explained on the matters of controversy within the Church of God by those who then lived." . . .

Inasmuch as our now separated Lutheran church bodies all subscribe these same Confessions, it is our sincere belief that we already possess a firm basis on which to unite in one Lutheran Church in America and that there is no doctrinal reason why such a union should not come to pass. . . .

We direct the President of the United Lutheran Church to bring these resolutions to the official attention of the other Lutheran church bodies in America and to invite them to confer with us with a view to the

establishment of closer relationships between them and ourselves.³⁴

A commission was also established at this time which could conduct any discussions with the bodies which would accept the above invitations.³⁵

Although the Savannah Resolution made it clear that the United Lutheran Church was primarily interested in church union based upon a unity in the Confessions, the American Lutheran Church instructed their delegates to meet with the United Lutheran representatives in order to discuss only pulpit and altar fellowship. It was reported to the United Lutheran convention in 1936 that this difficulty was resolved when the representatives for the United Lutheran Church admitted that it was "self evident" that anything which prevented pulpit and altar fellowship would also prevent union of churches. Hence, the convention received the news that its representatives discussed only the obstacles to church fellowship with the American Lutheran Church rather than procedure for union.³⁶

The questions to church fellowship raised by the American Lutheran Church were the lodge issue, unionism,

³⁴Ibid., pp. 415-417.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Minutes of the Tenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1936, pp. 400f.

and the doctrine of inspiration. Essential agreement was reached on the first two items by appealing back to the statements of the Washington Declaration against anti-Christian organizations and to the Galesburg Rule which declared that Lutheran pulpits and altars are for Lutherans only.³⁷

It should be noted, however, that the actual wording of part two of the document which was to become known as the Pittsburgh Agreement condemns "indiscriminate" pulpit and altar fellowship with non-Lutherans, and states that "no religious fellowship whatsoever be practiced with such individuals and groups as are not basically evangelical."³⁸ This wording does not condemn "exceptions" for whatever might be considered a justifiable reason for church fellowship. Such apparent exceptions do not apply at all to "non-evangelical" groups.

The commission dealing with American Lutheran bodies reported to the general convention of 1938 its progress relative to the American Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. It reported two meetings with representatives from the Missouri Synod late in 1936. Need for unity, conversion and election, and inspiration were discussed. The commission reported

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

agreement on the first two general topics, but it admitted definite disagreement in the area of inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures. The discussion with the Missouri Synod representatives revolved around the wording of the Brief Statement of that church body. The United Lutheran Church representatives were unable to accept the statement in the Missouri document which claimed that the Scriptures are without error or contradiction "also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters."³⁹

The point made by the United Lutheran representatives was that this claim of the Brief Statement went beyond the Confessions and the traditional Lutheran position that the Scriptures are the infallible norm for "faith and life," but not necessarily for history, geography, "and other secular matters."⁴⁰

In the light of this disagreement with the Missouri Synod representatives in 1936, the disagreement between the American Lutheran and the United Lutheran commissioners in 1938 takes on more meaning. The American Lutheran and United Lutheran representatives had completed their statement on Scripture, except for one sentence. The United

³⁹Minutes of the Eleventh Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1938, pp. 467f.

⁴⁰Ibid.

Lutheran commissioners wished to say that the separate books of the Bible, taken together, "constitute a complete, perfect, unbreakable whole of which Christ is the center (John 10:35)." The American Lutheran representatives insisted upon saying that these books, "constitute one organic whole without contradiction and error (John 10:35)." On this one sentence, especially at the word "errorless," the commissions from the two church bodies could not reach agreement by the time of the 1938 convention.⁴¹

The United Lutheran representatives reported to the convention that although these views seemed to go beyond the Confessions, the variation "in itself is not a sufficient warrant to keep the various Lutheran bodies apart." Such views of the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church which seemed to share the Missouri Synod viewpoint are not "outside of a Lutheran conception of the Scriptures." Hence, the United Lutheran Church can tolerate this view of Scripture even though they could not subscribe to it. On the other hand, the other Lutheran bodies which hold the Scriptures to be errorless in secular matters have no right to condemn the position of the United Lutheran Church either.⁴²

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 468f.

⁴²Ibid., p. 469.

In order to clarify the matter concerning the position of the United Lutheran Church on Scripture and inspiration, the convention adopted a statement which has become known as the Baltimore Declaration. The statement thoroughly discusses the concept "Word of God" and the doctrine of inspiration as viewed by the United Lutheran Church.⁴³

It must be noted that, while the convention adopted a statement on the Scriptures, it did not act upon the commission's judgment that the position of the Missouri Synod concerning Scripture is within "a Lutheran conception of the Scriptures." Hence, although this is a very interesting judgment within the United Lutheran Church and is undoubtedly held by many members in that body, it cannot be called an "official teaching" of the general church body.

At this same convention it was reported that the Executive Board decided not to send representation to the 1937 Life and Work Conference at Oxford. While the original intention was to give support to the other Lutherans who would also be there, it was decided later that since the cooption was so extensive, the Conference "ceased to be a Conference of Churches."⁴⁴

It was also reported to this convention that the United Lutherans were working with Lutherans of other

⁴³Ibid., pp. 472-474.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 95.

nations to make the representation in the proposed World Council of Churches based on "Churches and confessions rather than according to territories and countries."⁴⁵ Dr. Knobel told the convention that according to the proposed constitution of the World Council,

a doctrinal basis exists stating that only such Churches are eligible to participate as accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. This was vigorously debated, but was finally adopted by a unanimous vote.⁴⁶

Beyond this, the United Lutheran Church had no further questions concerning the doctrinal basis for the World Council. The question of whether or not all delegates really meant it when they "unanimously" adopted the formulation, seeing that it was "vigorously debated," was not raised.

The complete Pittsburgh Agreement was presented to the convention of 1940 for approval. The convention faced a bit of a dilemma. The historic position of the United Lutheran Church, as already outlined in the Constitution, the Washington Declaration, the Savannah Resolutions and in the general actions of the conventions, has been that the Confessions are enough for a doctrinal basis for union, and that additional doctrinal declarations are not necessary. The American Lutheran Church listed three obstacles to

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 528f.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 99.

church fellowship which were finally resolved in the Pittsburgh Agreement. If the United Lutheran Church adopted the Pittsburgh Agreement, it would seem that it would be rejecting its presupposition that such additional doctrinal statements are unnecessary for union. If it rejected the Pittsburgh Agreement, this would imply a rejection of the true doctrinal position contained therein.

The committee presented this dilemma to the convention. It recommended the adoption of the document with the understanding that it did not contradict the position that the Confessions were sufficient. Concerning any apparent discrepancy with the Washington Declaration, the Constitution, and other United Lutheran statements,

In any case where these Articles might seem to be in conflict with the aforementioned instruments, it is to be understood that these Articles are to be interpreted in the light of those instruments and not vice versa.⁴⁷

The convention did not adopt this latter statement, but it did proclaim that the Pittsburgh Agreement's articles

are not contrary to or contradictory of the positions set forth in the Washington Declaration of 1920, the Savannah Resolution of 1934, or the Baltimore Declaration of 1938.⁴⁸

In spite of these modifications, seventy-one delegates

⁴⁷Minutes of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1940, pp. 263f.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 265.

protested against the Pittsburgh Agreement, claiming that it was a compromise and a departure from the position of the United Lutheran Church. They also claimed that the document adopted a particular view of inspiration and contradicted the Baltimore Declaration by using the word "errorless."⁴⁹

There seems to be a discrepancy between this historic position which was reiterated in a short resolution to continue negotiations for merger "on the basis of our Lutheran Confessions alone,"⁵⁰ and the resolution which called particular United Lutheran documents the "positions" of the United Lutheran Church. This discrepancy is resolved when it is remembered that the particular documents adopted by the United Lutheran Church have always been declared subordinate to the Confessions and are never considered a substitute for them nor a modification of them.

Hence, the convention could declare,

The United Lutheran Church in America has not recognized heretofore, and does not recognize now any obstacle to the establishment of pulpit and altar fellowship or even to organic union (with a group accepting the confessions).⁵¹

For this reason the convention authorized the president to

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 566ff.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 266.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 278.

declare mutual pulpit and altar fellowship between the two bodies when the American Lutheran Church does the same.⁵²

This convention noted that in regard to other Lutheran bodies, "both the Augustana Synod and the Lutheran Free Church regard themselves as never having been out of fellowship with us."⁵³

It was reported to the convention of 1942 that the American Lutheran Church was ready to establish pulpit and altar fellowship with the United Lutheran Church. The convention instructed the president to consummate and declare mutual pulpit and altar fellowship at the earliest possible date.⁵⁴ This was a misunderstanding of the resolutions of the American Lutheran Church. The declaration of American Lutheran "readiness" to declare pulpit and altar fellowship was contingent upon the "whole-hearted acceptance" of the Pittsburgh Agreement as a theologically binding document.⁵⁵ The hope of the United Lutheran Church for pulpit and altar fellowship with the American Lutheran Church based on the qualified acceptance of the Pittsburgh Agreement was not to materialize.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., p. 261.

⁵⁴Minutes of the Thirteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1942, pp. 280f.

⁵⁵Official Minutes of the Seventh Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1942, p. 254.

Upon recommendation of the Executive Board, this convention adopted a resolution empowering its Board to accept membership in the World Council of Churches on behalf of the general body, "if and when" the membership in the proposed Council is established on an ecclesiastical rather than a territorial basis.⁵⁶

An interesting report was given to this convention on the North American Ecumenical Conference, held in Toronto in 1941, and sponsored by the Joint Executive Committee of the American Sections of the Life and Work--Faith and Order movements. It was stormy and oriented toward intervention in the second World War.

The Lutheran witness was several times injected . . . but there were not enough of us to leave any apparent permanent influence . . . So long as the Lutheran testimony is not suppressed or denied, even though these conferences at present often prove unsatisfactory to Lutherans, to withdraw from these contacts and adopt a policy of isolationism would be to deny the leading of the Spirit. . . . With each new gathering of American Christians it becomes clearer that the American Lutherans should not divorce themselves from general Christian movements in America but should take every opportunity to bear vigorous testimony to the truth as they see it.⁵⁷

Once again the delegates and the convention seem to be guided by the words and the spirit of the Washington Declaration which permits cooperation and conference with

⁵⁶ Minutes of the Thirteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1942, p. 133.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 137f.

evangelical communions, no matter how bad they might otherwise be, providing that there is no denial or suppression of Lutheran testimony.

The subject of membership in the Federal Council of Churches also came up in this conversation. During the past four conventions, the United Lutheran Church had received cautious but optimistic reports on the Federal Council, and it had heard the delegates tell those conventions that the Council is improving in its evangelical spirit.⁵⁸ This convention of 1942, however, now received the official invitation from the Council to join as a voting member. The Protestant Episcopal Church had just entered the Federal Council as a voting member, although previously it had held only consultative membership, so the Council considered it an opportune time to ask the United Lutherans to do the same thing.⁵⁹

The visitors to the Council listed numerous arguments for and against full affiliation with the Council. This seemed to be done in order to help guide the decision of the convention, rather than because the visitors actually believed all of the points themselves.⁶⁰ Prior to the convention, a committee of three was appointed by the

⁵⁸ Author, op. cit., pp. 28ff.

⁵⁹ Minutes of the Thirteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1942, p. 123.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 123ff.

Executive Board for a special report on this matter to the convention.⁶¹ This committee in turn told the convention that because the Council was still a Reformed group and because no changes had yet taken place in its constitution, the United Lutheran Church should not join it as a voting member. This committee told the convention, however, that because of certain changes and improvements in the policy of the Council since 1932, greater cooperation is now possible.⁶²

The debate on this question lasted over two hours. The recommendation of the three man committee was adopted, but not without strong opposition. A strong desire to join the Council as full members had risen among many of the delegates.⁶³

The convention of 1944 received reports on the Federal Council which echoed the tone and content of earlier reports,⁶⁴ and a brief report on the development of the World Council of Churches without evaluation.⁶⁵ However,

⁶¹Ibid., p. 128.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 131f.

⁶³Ibid., p. 479.

⁶⁴Minutes of the Fourteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1944, pp. 113ff.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 119.

this convention dwelt more on its relationships with other Lutherans in America.

The commission dealing with Lutheran relationships reported to this convention that no further developments had taken place in the area of relations with the American Lutheran Church. The American Lutheran Church representatives had suggested new meetings, but that suggestion was regarded by the United Lutheran representatives as "neither necessary or promising." They also reported that the Missouri Synod suggested new talks, beginning with the topic of Scriptural inspiration. The United Lutheran commissions felt that to begin with such a topic would "preclude hope of progress."⁶⁶

The commissioners also reported on the theses proposed by the American Lutheran Conference attempting to establish a minimal basis for pulpit and altar fellowship. This report was quite critical. The commissioners stated that it was built around the "old Chicago Theses and the Minneapolis Theses." The proposal by the American Lutheran Conference was declared

neither forward looking, fruitful, nor necessary as an approach to our common problem. In the Washington Declaration we already have . . . a better statement . . . of the real tests of evangelicalism.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 240f.

⁶⁷Ibid.

It is understandable that the general convention did not adopt this evaluation as bluntly as it was given. It omitted the opinion that the American Lutheran Conference Basis or Overture is not "forward looking, fruitful, nor necessary," and it contented itself in saying that "we have a statement," rather than calling it a "better" statement.⁶⁸ If the convention had spoken as bluntly as the commissioners, the bodies of the American Lutheran Conference would understandably have taken offense.

While lack of patience was shown with the caution of the American Lutheran Church, the confession officially interpreted the statement by the Norwegian Lutheran Church concerning "selective fellowship" as a "practical fulfillment" of fellowship with the United Lutheran Church. Thus, full fellowship was declared with the Norwegian Lutheran Church on the basis of their declaration.⁶⁹

Finally, this convention reiterated the essence of the Savannah Resolution, emphasizing that beyond the historic Confessions, "we will impose no tests of Lutheranism and . . . we will submit to no tests of Lutheranism."⁷⁰ Since all Lutheran church bodies accept these confessions,

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 242.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

we regard ourselves in full fellowship with all other Lutheran Church bodies in America which with us accept the established Confessions and continue to invite declarations to the same effect on the part of all those bodies which have not already made such declarations.⁷¹

The report was given to the 1946 convention that, upon an invitation by the President of the United Lutheran Church, all church bodies of the National Lutheran Council along with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States met in Columbus, Ohio, September 6, 1945, in order to reach a "common understanding with reference to the World Council of Churches." Since the Council was still in the process of formation, it was felt that it was the ideal time for Lutherans of America to raise objections, if any, before the adoption of its constitution. All of the representatives of the Lutheran bodies present agreed that representation in the World Council must be on the basis of confession rather than territory. Then the presidents of the United Lutheran Church and the Augustana Synod revealed that their bodies have committed themselves to membership in the Council on the condition of such confessional representation. None of the other Lutheran Church bodies had yet taken such action.⁷²

All of the presidents and representatives present,

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1946, pp. 219f.

except for these of the Missouri Synod, joined in making a fuller statement on their agreement. All agreed that "we earnestly desire to extend the influence of our Lutheran testimony within the entire Christian world community through the generation." All agreed that Lutheran representation must be on a confessional basis. All agreed to work with the Lutheran World Convention to accomplish these ends. Only the Missouri Synod representatives abstained.

In fairness to the record and to the representatives involved, it should be stated that Dr. J. W. Behnken spoke words of caution about the contemplated step, presenting the view of his Church that it is "definitely committed to doctrinal unity rather than joining many groups."⁷³

The United Lutheran Committee on Inter-Lutheran Interests happily reported to this convention that the "first fruits" of the agreement made at Columbus appeared in the resolution by the American Lutheran Church's Executive Committee to recommend to its next convention at Sandusky that it join the World Council of Churches providing the representation be on a confessional basis.⁷⁴

The year of 1948 saw the general convention of the United Lutheran Church once more consistently applying the principles of its Washington Declaration. The convention of this year once again declared its willingness

⁷³Ibid., p. 221.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 222.

to merge with any or all bodies of the National Lutheran Council.⁷⁵ The convention received the happy news that the World Council of Churches met the requirement of confessional representation, and hence, the United Lutheran Church was now a member of that cooperative agency.⁷⁶

Finally, the convention commended a statement by the General Secretary of the Federal Council that the Council "is an instrument, not of union, but of cooperation."⁷⁷

This convention also went into extensive detail in outlining United Lutheran objections to the proposed constitution of the National Council of Churches of Christ, a merger of the Federal Council with several other agencies. There was strong desire at this convention to join the National Council as a voting member. Yet, there was no move in the convention, strong as this desire seemed to be, to set aside the principle that the United Lutheran Church may cooperate only with evangelical church bodies where conviction is not denied nor testimony suppressed. There seemed to be little hope at the 1948 convention of changing the proposed constitution of the Council. A full discussion of the detailed objections to the proposed

⁷⁵Minutes of the Sixteenth Biennial Convention, 1948, pp. 653f.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 254f.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 247.

constitution is contained in the Bachelor's Thesis on this topic to which reference was made earlier.⁷⁸

This same secondary source gives a complete discussion of the original constitution, the United Lutheran amendments, other amendments, and the resulting articles accepted by the Planning Committee of the National Council. The extent of the changes the United Lutheran Church produced within the constitution was a monumental achievement. Most of the constitutional changes served to safeguard the evangelical membership of the Council and to insure the concern that representatives to the Council would represent actual church bodies and not councils, conferences, or nebulous groups.⁷⁹

Although the convention joined the National Council by "an almost unanimous vote," President Fry promised that the officer of the Church will be "diligent to preserve the principles for which the Church has thus far stood."⁸⁰ Indeed, the convention of 1950 saw this pledge demonstrated in regard to the United Lutheran Church's internal solidarity. On the report that a number of congregations and pastors were ignoring the principles for which the general body stood, a survey questionnaire was made of the practices of

⁷⁸ Author, op. cit., pp. 35-39.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 39-46.

⁸⁰ Minutes of the Seventeenth Biennial Convention, 1950, pp. 506f.

the church body's parishes and pastors. The committee assigned to this survey reported:

It is deeply disturbing to learn that about one-third of the local councils reported on admit non-evangelicals. A way must be found to sensitize the consciences of our pastors at this point and to encourage them to help their local councils of churches become councils of evangelical churches or to let their congregations' refusal to join stand as a protest against loose affiliation of evangelicals with non-evangelicals.

The admitted participation of some 62 of our congregations in inter-denominational communion services while serious enough percentagewise, is an evidence that we have an important educational task before us. Surely the pastors and councilmen who are directly responsible do not fully appreciate the significance of our Church's doctrine of the Lord's Supper if they reduce it to a service promoting international good will, or the sentimental sign of fellowship.⁸¹

The convention, in response to this information, encouraged the constituent synods to submit in advance the proposals to establish relations with state councils to the Executive Board for review and counsel.⁸² It also approved the action of the Executive Board which had taken educational measures to more thoroughly acquaint the pastors of the general body with its principles involving cooperation and church fellowship.⁸³

Finally, this convention of 1950 received the report on the two questions being placed before all members of

⁸¹Ibid., p. 493.

⁸²Ibid., p. 502. *Seventh Biennial Convention.*

⁸³Ibid., p. 1046.

the National Lutheran Council: (1) Are you ready for union with all bodies in the Council? (2) Are you ready for federation with those church bodies? The convention answered "yes" to both questions.⁸⁴ It also reported that the representatives of the United Lutheran Church were meeting with the representatives of the Danish Evangelical Church (presently known as the American Evangelical Lutheran Church).⁸⁵

The United Lutheran Church commission assigned to negotiate with other Lutheran bodies reported to the convention of 1952 that it had friendly discussions with the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Augustana Synod, and the American Lutheran Church. The discussion with the Danish Lutheran centered upon possible obstacles to merger. These included differences of culture and national backgrounds, the territorial spread of the smaller body, and the "Grundtvigian emphasis."⁸⁶ The discussions with the American Lutheran Church, the first since formation of the Pittsburgh Agreement, were "solely of an exploratory character." The report to the general convention mentioned, however, that the United Testament, drawn up by the bodies

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 923.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 925.

⁸⁶Minutes of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention, 1952, p. 927.

preparing for an American Lutheran Conference merger, was discussed.⁸⁷

This convention also heard some rather disturbing news indicating that all was not right concerning their relations with the National Council of Churches. Certain by-laws were added to the National Council constitution permitting a number of delegates-at-large into certain units of the Council. It was reported that the United Lutheran representatives immediately complained to the National Council.

President Fry made a quiet statement to the General Board on December 2, that the United Lutheran Church would probably hold participation in all such units of the Council in advance.⁸⁸

President Fry presented his candid views in his personal column to the pastors of the United Lutheran Church.

It was disconcerting to discover the mischievous old "coopted membership" abuse reappearing at Cleveland too. I suppose that we were too sanguine in expecting bad habits to be outgrown so quickly, or, to put it differently, new principles to be assimilated all at once. . . .

Anyway, the provision for numerous "members at large" in the by-laws of several lesser units of the National Council was an embarrassment and a cause of concern to the delegation of our Church at this convention. It made us assume an ungracious role more than once when all of us would have preferred to nod a compliant,

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 387f.

yes, for the sake of good will.⁸⁹

In both of the following conventions the delegates heard a positive as well as a negative report on the National Council of Churches. There are increasing instances of cooption, guest participants in the Council who are not necessarily evangelical, and statements which praise "unity" and place an imperative behind it without defining the term. The Bachelor's Thesis to which this study has already referred discusses these points in detail.⁹⁰ For the purpose of this study, however, it is sufficient to note that up to 1956 the United Lutheran Church in convention is not at all pleased with everything in the National Council and recognizes that its membership in the Council is placing a strain upon its principles and bases for cooperation. At what point the United Lutheran Church will feel the strain justifies severance with the Council is an open question.

The convention of 1954 heard a highly favorable report from the Committee on Interdenominational Relationships concerning the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches. One comment actually commended the World Council

⁸⁹Franklin Clark Fry, "The State of the Church," News Letters from the Pastor's Desk Book, January, 1951.

⁹⁰Author, op. cit., pp. 49-52.

for edifying them in their Lutheranism.

When some of us, being Americans, were tempted at times to become impatient at what seemed an almost undue preoccupation with theology, we remembered as Lutherans that we ought to welcome it. . . . Here, to a special degree, our association with fellow Christians in the ecumenical movement should recall us to our own past. Thanks to the World Council of Churches, we are inspired to be more consistent Lutherans at this point than ever before.⁹¹

This convention continued to deal with the problem of those pastors and parishes within its midst which were not living up to the principles, but were joining church councils which were open to all and joining non-Lutherans in celebrations of Holy Communion. Nine local state councils of churches were examined by the Executive Board and the findings reported to the convention. Those councils who violated the principles of the United Lutheran Church in their constitutions were labeled as unacceptable for pastoral and congregational affiliation. A guide was given to the pastors of the general body which summarized and quoted the Washington Declaration. Once again, pastors and parishes were warned against interdenominational services which included Holy Communion as a denial of Lutheran conviction and a suppression of Lutheran testimony.⁹² For a full discussion and listing of the local

⁹¹Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention, 1954, pp. 486f.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 495ff.

councils evaluated by the United Lutheran committee before the convention, see the Bachelor's thesis quoted above.⁹³

It was reported to the convention of 1954 that a "large number of problems" were still being discussed with the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (formerly the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church).⁹⁴ No general response was evident, however, to the age-old appeal of the United Lutheran Church to an all Lutheran union on the basis of the historic Confessions. Most of the members of the National Lutheran Council had either responded negatively or with qualifications to the invitation of 1950 from the Council.⁹⁵

The United Lutheran Special Commission reported to the convention of 1956 concerning its meetings with the representatives of the American Lutheran Church in 1955 and later in May of 1956. The first meeting was again of an exploratory nature. The United Lutheran representatives repeated that their church body "has consistantly declared itself in fellowship with the other Lutheran Church bodies in America." This first meeting selected a subcommittee

⁹³ Author, op. cit., pp. 81-83.

⁹⁴ Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention, 1954, p. 1051.

⁹⁵ Minutes of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention, 1952, p. 927.

of six to "clarify and define the three articles of the Pittsburgh Agreement."⁹⁶

This subcommittee reported to the two commissions in May of 1956.

There exists no need for additional doctrinal formulations; there is sufficient doctrinal agreement to enable . . . fruitful discussion regarding the goal and program of total Lutheran unity in America and the responsibility of the Lutheran Church in inter-Protestant relations.⁹⁷

While this statement sounds like a capitulation to the United Lutheran Church principle that no doctrinal agreements beyond the Confessions are necessary for union and fellowship, this declaration does not say that. All it states, in United Lutheran terminology, is that additional doctrinal statements are not necessary in order to discuss the goal and program of unity.

When the two commissions met, they recognized that they had each produced a number of declarations on doctrine and practice in addition to the Confessions, documents which were accepted by one body but not the other. President Schuh of the American Lutheran Church reported that the Washington Declaration and the Baltimore Declaration had been submitted to all American Lutheran Church

⁹⁶Minutes of the Twentieth Biennial Convention, 1956, p. 1056.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 1057.

pastors for conference study and comment. About fifty percent of the pastoral conferences replied to these documents. The majority of those conferences replying considered the United Lutheran Church documents "adequate." The criticism was directed toward their implementation in regard to Scriptural authority, admission of non-Lutherans to Lutheran pulpits, and lodge pastors.⁹⁸

After reviewing the similarities between the United Lutheran Church and the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, the convention endorsed the United Lutheran--Augustana joint invitation to all other Lutheran bodies inviting them to "consider such organic union as will give real evidence of our unity."⁹⁹ At least in 1956 the United Lutheran Church was not speaking alone when it repeated its life-long invitation to union on the basis of the historic Confessions.

The consistency with which the United Lutheran Church in America has followed their principles in regard to unity, fellowship and cooperation has enabled this chapter to present an uncomplicated picture as compared to some of the chapters to follow. Unity or agreement in the Scriptures and the Confessions is sufficient for union of organization, church fellowship, and full spiritual

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 1058.

cooperation. On the basis of this principle, proclaimed in the early years of the church body's existence and reiterated again and again up to the convention of 1956, the United Lutheran Church has always hoped for unification of all Lutherans in America.

This church body has shown equal consistency in following its basis for cooperation with other churches. If a denomination is evangelical, if it does not deny the cardinal truths of the Christian faith, if the denomination or group of church bodies involved does not force the Lutherans to deny their conviction or suppress their testimony, then cooperation is possible and often desirable. The cooperative efforts of the United Lutheran Church with the World Council of Churches has proven to be much more happy and successful than its relations with the National Council of Churches, and its predecessor, the Federal Council of Churches. The United Lutheran Church in America has worked in close cooperation with Lutherans of other nations in molding the World Council into a cooperative agency in which Lutherans could participate with a clear conscience. In their dealings with the Federal Council and the National Council, however, the United Lutherans usually stood alone in their admonition and testimony. This study indicates that if events continue in the future as they have in the past, United Lutheran Church relations with the World Council shall

continue to improve, resulting in Christian growth and edification. However, such optimistic hope cannot be voiced in regard to the National Council of Churches.

Although some pastors and parishes within the general body have not consistently followed the principles involving union, fellowship and cooperation, the general church body is not indifferent to these departures from principle. It has taken steps in the past and was taking steps up to its 1956 convention to correct such abuse and educate its pastors and people to its principles.

At the 1923 convention the delegates received

with a great deal of satisfaction the council's new interpretation of its regulations, as this removed all just fears of a super-church and safeguards the rights of participating synods.¹

In 1926 the convention received a report on the Universal Christian Conference of Life and Work which met at Stockholm. A general impression was given to this convention that this conference was a good thing.² There was no thorough evaluation, however, such as the one given by the United Lutheran delegates to their convention.³

¹ Minutes of the Sixty-Third Annual Convention, 1923, p. 204.

² Minutes of the Sixty-Seventh Annual Convention, 1926, p. 100.

³ Minutes, p. 15.

CHAPTER III

THE AUGUSTANA EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, known as the Augustana Synod in its earlier years, seems to have had a relatively "conservative" tendency in the 1920's. Apparently some members of the Augustana Synod feared that the National Lutheran Council was developing into a "super-church." In the convention of 1923 the delegates received

with a great deal of satisfaction the council's own interpretation of its regulations, as this removes all just fears of a super-church and safeguards the rights of participating Synods.¹

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¹Minutes of the Sixty-Third Annual Convention, 1923,
p. 204

²Minutes of the Sixty-Seventh Annual Convention,
1926, p. 162.

³Supra. p. 15.

The Augustana Synod joined the American Lutheran Conference in 1930 and subscribed to the doctrinal statement of the Conference, the Minneapolis Theses. The Theses and their definition of "unionism" was reaffirmed in 1935.

Where the establishment and maintenance of church fellowship ignores present doctrinal differences or declares them a matter of indifference, there is unionism, pretense of union which does not exist.⁴

This convention of 1935 received a report on the coming Lutheran World Convention which was to meet in Paris that same year. The convention sent representatives since it had a "sympathetic interest." Finally, in this convention, the general church body faced an overture by the Protestant Episcopal Church which invited the Augustana Synod to explore closer relations. A commission was appointed by the Augustana Convention to meet with representatives of the Protestant Episcopal Church and consider the various issues.⁵

The commission was not ready to continue. However, there was a generally unfavorable reaction to negotiation with the Episcopalians in the convention of 1936. President Bersell stated in his address to the convention:

⁴Minutes of the Seventy-Sixth Annual Convention, 1935, p. 174. +173

⁵Ibid., pp. 177f.

It is my opinion that nothing is to be gained by such conversations with other non-Lutheran church bodies on the part of our Synod as a fractional part of the Lutheran Church in America. First let us set our own house in order as Lutherans. Let us find each other in full fellowship and cooperation, and then unitedly approach other communions to attain to the fullest possible measure of comity. Any other approach becomes a divisive rather than a unifying factor.⁶

This same convention left it up to the executive committee what relations should be established with the Life and Work or the Faith and Order movements.⁷ No guidelines or bases for such relationships were discussed in the convention.

In 1937 President Bersell strongly criticized pastors and congregations of the Augustana Synod for violations of the "Galesburg Rule." He reminded the convention that this "Rule" was embodied in the Minneapolis Theses which the convention had reaffirmed only two years earlier.

We must respect this concordat, for it is not only a promise given to brethren, it is also an expression of our faith. Some pastors and churches of the Augustana Synod have already given offense and have compromised their Synod in the eyes of fellow Lutherans by their loose practice in regard to secretism and unionism concerning which the Minneapolis Theses are very explicit . . . may it soon be said that there is no church in the Augustana Synod that officially recognizes a secret order inviting its members to come and worship in that church as a body. A Lutheran pastor may preach anywhere, provided that he does so

⁶Minutes of the Seventy-Seventh Annual Convention, 1936, p. 24.

⁷Ibid., p. 210.

without a compromise of his message, or without any discount of his identity as a Lutheran pastor, or without any false assumption that they will be "asked in return" to preach in a Lutheran church.⁸

The Committee on Reference and Comity reported to this convention that the House of Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church apologized for any proselytism of the past and promised to respect the convictions of other Christian congregations in the future.⁹

In his speech to the 1938 convention president Bersell rejoiced that his last year's admonition had had a "wholesome effect," and that examples of un-Lutheran practice were coming to a halt. He also happily reported that closer relations were evident between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. He hoped that this tendency would continue "until we Lutherans will all recognize one another as brethren at the altar of the Lord."¹⁰

The year 1939 finds the Augustana Synod convention authorizing delegates to attend both the Faith and Order and the Life and Work Conferences.¹¹ The convention also favorably received an invitation by the framers of the

⁸Report of the Seventy-Eighth Annual Convention, 1937,
pp. 20f.

⁹Ibid., p. 240.

¹⁰Report of the Seventy-Ninth Annual Convention, 1938,
p. 19.

¹¹Report of the Eightieth Annual Convention, 1939,
pp. 28f.

World Council of Churches to consider membership in the Council.¹²

In the convention of 1940 the delegates followed the recommendation of President Bersell and the Committee on Reference and Comity by declaring Augustana's membership in the proposed World Council of Churches providing that representation in the Council is on a confessional rather than a territorial basis. The report made by the committee and adopted by the convention stated that there is "nothing in the constitution or program of the Council which compromises the faith or order of any of the churches adhering to the Council."¹³

In 1941 the convention heard a report by its committee that Augustana was working with the American Lutheran Conference to discover and study "every possible approach to closer unity among Lutheran general bodies in America." Areas of cooperation were examined in which synods could work together in the war emergency. It was reported that the Missouri Synod would cooperate with the rest of the church bodies of the Conference in areas of physical and personal relief.¹⁴

¹² Ibid., pp. 38f.

¹³ Report of the Eighty-First Annual Convention, 1940, p. 204.

¹⁴ Report of the Eighty-Second Annual Convention, 1941, pp. 249f.

With a somewhat different concern the delegates heard the report that the Anti-Saloon League and the Minneapolis Temperance Union with whom the Augustana Synod had been cooperating in opposing alcoholic beverages were not working well together. These two forces were told to "get together" or the Augustana Synod would withdraw support from both agencies.¹⁵

A discouraging report was made to the delegates in 1942 that the relations between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod were deteriorating due to difficulties within the Synodical Conference and "internal hedgings."¹⁶

The 1943 convention looked forward to the results of the American Lutheran Conference study on a minimal basis for pulpit and altar fellowship among Lutherans. It was also reported that the American Lutheran Conference invited its constituent members to "invite into pulpit and altar fellowship those Lutheran groups with whom they are not now in fellowship."¹⁷

The Augustana's synodical convention in the following year adopted both the report and the evaluation of its

¹⁵Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁶Report of the Eighty-Third Annual Convention, 1942, p. 241.

¹⁷Report of the Eighty-Fourth Annual Convention, 1943, p. 278.

Commission on Lutheran Unity and the American Lutheran Conference's Overture for Lutheran Unity. The Overture is a proposed basis for Lutheran pulpit and altar fellowship. It occupies a mediating ground between the so-called "conservative" and "liberal" requirements for pulpit and altar fellowship. Over against the position of the United Lutheran Church in America, this document states that "some points" of doctrine and practice have arisen since the writing of the Confessions which have "rightly required" additional formulations and theses. Over against the position of the Missouri Synod, the Overture declares:

We believe that the Minneapolis Theses, the Brief Statement and Declaration and the Pittsburgh Agreement, all of which we believe to be in essential accord with one another, have made sufficiently clear the position of the three major groups within American Lutheranism; we believe that no additional theses . . . are at this time necessary for the establishment of pulpit and altar fellowship among Lutherans.¹⁸

This Overture continues by stating that each synod should continue allegiance to its own particular theses. It pledges the bodies of the American Lutheran Conference anew to the Minneapolis Theses.¹⁹ The Overture states that no new documents are necessary for church fellowship. This does not disclaim that new formulations might

¹⁸ Report of the Eighty-Fifth Annual Convention, 1944, pp. 293ff.

¹⁹ Ibid.

be necessary for organic union. Hence, the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church were not violating the words nor the spirit of the Overture when they formulated the United Testimony in 1952 as a doctrinal basis for their proposed union.

The report of the Commission on Lutheran Unity added that unity must "grow from within." It cannot be produced by any single source be it "doctrinal formulae, emotional enthusiasm, ethical idealism or social cooperation." This report, which was adopted in full by the convention, reminded the church body that unity does not mean merely union. In this context it quoted the formula: unity in essentials, freedom in non-essentials, love in all things.²⁰ According to the report of this commission, the Overture of the American Lutheran Conference was to be submitted to the member churches of the Conference for approval and later to all Lutheran church bodies in America.²¹

Dr. Bersell told the delegates to the 1945 convention that he was proud of the ecumenical interests and accomplishments of the Augustana Synod. A new avenue for ecumenical activity was reported. A "fraternal visitor"

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

attended the Federal Council of Churches.²² The president told the convention that the Synod should now seriously consider membership in the Federal Council.

I realize full well the "pitfalls" of unionism and syncretism that may be involved, but I also believe that a "golden mean," without compromise of confessional loyalty can be found.²³

The convention took the following action:

We endorse the statement of the president that "each one faithful and true to its own confession, will seek out other churches in brotherly, selfless love, that they may be banded together in the ministry of the world that the Lord of the Church desires" . . . We, therefore, memorialize the National Lutheran Council to take steps to establish a consultative relationship with the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, and express ourselves as a Synod ready to enter into such a relationship.²⁴

Evaluation of the strong points and weak points of the Federal Council, such as the steps taken by the United Lutheran Church,²⁵ were completely missing from this convention. While the expressions of President Bersell were very true, they lacked the definitive precision which would produce firm principles and bases for cooperation. No description of the "churches" to which the Synod will apply its selfless love is given. No guidelines are

²²Report of the Eighty-Sixth Annual Convention, 1945, pp. 14f.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 31.

²⁵Supra, pp. 31ff.

given to the National Lutheran Council to enable it to come to a decision.

In 1946 the convention heard about some more of Augustana's ecumenical accomplishments from the president. Once again President Bersell stated that Augustana was the first Lutheran Synod to join the World Council of Churches. The "door to the establishment of a Lutheran Federation of Churches stands open today." The president felt that after the establishment of such a federation full organic unity would come.²⁶

The president's report to the convention in 1947 echoed this same tone. "Dissatisfaction" was registered over the refusal of the National Lutheran Council to establish consultative relations with the Federal Council of Churches, but the Augustana convention decided to let the matter rest for the time being.²⁷

Actually, if the National Lutheran Council had acquiesced to the request of the Augustana Synod, such action would have been directly opposed to the principle followed by the United Lutheran Church that representatives in a council of Churches should represent churches

²⁶ Report of the Eighty-Seventh Annual Convention, 1946, pp. 13f.

²⁷ Report of the Eighty-Eighth Annual Convention, 1947, p. 25.

and not other councils.²⁸ This seems to be another instance in which either the Augustana Synod did not agree with the United Lutheran Church principle, or, more likely, had not even thought about such a principle.

The president reported to the 1948 convention that he favored nothing less than a union of two-thirds of the Lutherans in America. Such a union would be a merger excluding the Synodical Conference.²⁹ The general convention declared itself "in favor of the organic union of the participating bodies of the National Lutheran Council together with any other Lutheran group . . . with federation as an intermediate step if necessary."³⁰

Prior to 1949 Dr. J. W. Behnken, the president of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, invited all Lutheran bodies through their respective presidents to a free conference to "bring about unity of Christian faith and fellowship." President Bersell replied that such a method would delay the consummation of "such unity."³¹ This seems to be an instance of talking past one another. Dr. Behnken indicated that he had in mind a unity in doctrine and practice, while Dr. Bersell apparently was thinking of a

²⁸ Supra, pp. 37f.

²⁹ Report on the Eighty-Ninth Annual Convention, 1948, p. 38.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 406.

³¹ Report of the Ninetieth Synod, 1949, pp. 49f.

union of church bodies.

This convention also received a very favorable report on the Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches and heard the opinion that it was a "demonstration of the essential unity of true believers in Christ."³² In this report the term "unity" apparently refers to an agreement in faith. This same convention in a resolution repeated its desire to see "eventual organic unity of all Lutheran bodies."³³ It must be noted that popular usage in the reports and resolutions of conventions of the Augustana Synod makes the term "unity" bear both the meanings of agreement in faith and union of church bodies. It is also to be noted that the report which claimed that the Amsterdam Assembly demonstrated the "essential unity of true believers" did not explain the object of the word "essential." Did it mean merely essential to a valid saving faith in Christ? Did it refer to pulpit and altar fellowship? Did it mean that this unity was the essential prerequisite to organic union? The report and the resolution seems to lack necessary precision.

The National Lutheran Council sent a questionnaire to the ninety-first Synod asking whether it would consider union or federation of the bodies of the Council. Synod

³²Ibid., p. 41.

³³Ibid., p. 54.

answered affirmatively to both alternatives and directed their committee to study the "whole problem in the light of the decisions reached by the various bodies."³⁴

This convention also voted to join the National Council of Churches on the assumption that the proposed constitution as amended by the United Lutheran Church in America would be adopted by the Council. Very little discussion of the constitution or the proposed amendments took place in the convention, however. This convention and the report of the president exhibited the same tone in regard to ecumenical relations as the earlier conventions. The Augustana Synod's leaders are proud of their Synod's ecumenical accomplishments, and they heralded these accomplishments.³⁵

The ecumenical tone of this nature was intensified in the reports and the presidential address given to the convention of 1951. The president lamented the "great disappointment and a serious setback to the Lutheran unity movement" in that many church bodies of the National Lutheran Council indicated that they were not ready for either merger or federation. The president declared that his body was the "most consistent and persistent of all

³⁴Report of the Ninety-First Synod, 1950, p. 370.

³⁵Ibid., p. 368.

the bodies in its efforts toward Lutheran unity." Again he referred to the accomplishments of the Augustana Synod in regard to the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches.³⁶

This convention passed a moderate resolution, however, asking its members to recognize the National Council of Churches as a cooperative agency and not "as a body organized to compromise the faith and practice of any Christian Church." This resolution also cautioned church parishes not to affiliate in local councils which do not conform to the National Council's constitution.³⁷ This convention took no action, however, to evaluate the local and state councils for its pastors and parishes as did the United Lutheran Church. Finally, this convention permitted its committee to continue discussions with the Joint Union Committee, representatives of the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church negotiating for union. The convention made it clear, however, that it preferred a more inclusive Lutheran union.³⁸

Augustana made this preference clear by the way in which it dealt with the United Testimony of Faith and Life

³⁶Report of the Ninety-Second Synod, 1951, pp. 48f.

³⁷Ibid., p. 59.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 348ff.

in 1952. This document is an extension of the Minneapolis Theses and was to form the theological basis for the merger among the American Lutheran Conference bodies. First, the convention placed itself squarely in the tradition of the United Lutheran Church by declaring:

The Augustana Lutheran Church traditionally has taken the position that adherence to the historic confessions . . . is sufficient for Lutheran unity and that no additional doctrinal statements are needed.³⁹

This resolution continued by stating that the Augustana Synod is in "substantial agreement" with the United Testimony. This qualified acceptance, reminiscent of the way in which the United Lutheran Church adopted the Pittsburgh Agreement, prompted some representatives of other Lutheran bodies to think that the Augustana Synod rejected this document.⁴⁰ Finally, this convention expressed itself "as being unwilling to continue in unity discussions which are not open to all Lutheran general bodies and which do not include the consideration of ecumenical relations."⁴¹

This action severed Augustana from the merger negotiations involving most of the bodies of the American Lutheran Conference.

The conventions of 1953 and 1954 reflect the actions

³⁹ Report of the Ninety-Third Synod, 1952, pp. 374f.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

of the convention of 1952. There were some arguments back and forth between the representatives of the Augustana Synod and the Joint Unity Committee on just how open the merger negotiations were toward "ecumenical relations." The passing of the American Lutheran Conference was noted by the convention without very much emotion. The delegates once again heard how distinctively ecumenically minded the Augustana Synod is.⁴²

Although the president of the Synod expressed skepticism over just how valuable free conferences were in achieving unity, Augustana had representatives at a general free conference which met in March of 1955.⁴³ In connection with this conference Dr. F. C. Fry of the United Lutheran Church sent an invitation to the Augustana Synod suggesting a joint invitation for union to all other Lutheran bodies in America. Dr. Fry listed a number of common elements between his Church and Augustana.

1. Both the United Lutheran Church and the Augustana Synod adhered to the Confessions. (Reference is made to the Constitutions of the two bodies).
2. Both declared that such subscription is sufficient for unity. (Reference is made to the Augustana Convention of 1952 and to numerous resolutions by the United Lutheran Church).
3. Both have given open invitations to union of Lutheran bodies.

⁴²Report of the Ninety-Fifth Synod, 1954, p. 434.

⁴³Report of the Ninety-Sixth Synod, 1955, pp. 439ff.

4. Both participate in ecumenical movements.

5. Both have regional and local autonomy.⁴⁴

It is interesting to note the reaction of local conferences in the Augustana Synod to all of this. Eight conferences expressed themselves in favor of the United Lutheran Church invitation. (California, Columbia, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, New York, Red River Valley, and Texas). Two conferences (Iowa and Nebraska) favored a renewal of negotiations with the bodies of the former American Lutheran Conference. Two conferences (New England and Superior) did not express themselves.⁴⁵ The general convention of 1955 accepted the United Lutheran Church's proposal to issue joint invitations for total Lutheran merger.

There was a slight hope of renewed interest in 1956 with the proposed merger among the bodies of the former American Lutheran Conference, but the decided interest was in the results of the joint invitation in conjunction with the United Lutheran Church.⁴⁶

Only four bodies, including the Augustana Synod, it was reported to the 1957 convention, expressed themselves in favor of an immediate, all inclusive Lutheran merger. Yet, it was resolved to begin negotiations among these

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 443ff.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Report of the Ninety-Seventh Synod, 1956, pp. 427f.

four church bodies on the basis of their common acceptance of the invitation.⁴⁷

To a large degree, the terms unity and union are interchangeable in the reports and resolutions of Augustana's conventions. While it is stated at times that unity is not merely outward union, the concept of unity as used by the conventions invariably includes the concept of church union.

The consistency and clarity of principles noted in the United Lutheran Church are completely missing in the Augustana Synod. Until the convention of 1952 the Augustana Synod seemed to set no specific basis for union with other church bodies. In the 1930's the Synod subscribed to the Minneapolis Theses, the doctrinal bases for church fellowship among the bodies of the American Lutheran Conference. It adopted the report of the president which called the Minneapolis Theses a "concordat" and a "confession of our faith." It accepted the Overture of 1944 which pledged its signers anew to the Minneapolis Theses. Yet, in 1952, the convention declared that the Confessions are sufficient for union and consequently for church fellowship.

This church body joined the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches of Christ. Yet, it did not establish clear principles guiding its cooperation

⁴⁷Report of the Ninety-Eighth Synod, 1957, pp. 456f.

with other Christians in these agencies. Many presidential messages and committee reports boasted of ecumenical interests, and even of being the most ecumenical church body among American Lutheranism. Compared to the healthy, objective and careful interest of the United Lutheran Church in cooperative movements among Christians, this boasting of the Augustana Synod is entirely out of place.

The first of these Principles is illustrative of the remaining eleven.

According to the Word of God, the Congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth.¹

Pastor A. B. Satalian, author of a secondary source dealing with the teachings and practices of the Lutheran Free Church, stated that all congregations in this body recognize the Word of God, that is, the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the only absolute, true and dependable source of spiritual life and Christian faith. These congregations also accept the "ancient symbols of the Christian faith and the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism" and adhere to them.²

¹ Omer Sonderud and Charles Lutz, editors, American Lutherans (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1955), p. 59.

² A. B. Satalian, Our Fellowship (Minneapolis: Messenger Press, n.d.), pp. 101.

CHAPTER IV

THE LUTHERAN FREE CHURCH

The Lutheran Free Church, a relatively small body of Norwegian origin, is known for its emphasis upon congregational polity and expresses this emphasis in its Twelve Principles. The first of these Principles is illustrative of the remaining eleven.

According to the Word of God, the Congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth.¹

Pastor A. B. Batalden, author of a secondary source dealing with the teachings and practices of the Lutheran Free Church, stated that all congregations in this body recognize the Word of God, that is, the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the only absolute, true and dependable source of spiritual life and Christian faith. These congregations also accept the "ancient symbols of the Christian faith and the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism" and adhere to them.²

¹Omar Bonderud and Charles Lutz, editors, America's Lutherans (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1955), p. 39.

²A. B. Batalden, Our Fellowship (Minneapolis: Messenger Press, n.d.), pp. 10f.

Pastor Batalden, however, identifies his church body with the principles of the Washington Declaration in regard to the requirements for church fellowship. His church recognizes other church bodies on this Scriptural and confessional basis and it expects to be recognized by other Lutheran church bodies on this basis.

This is a sufficient basis of faith, doctrine and life Any additional doctrinal theses are unnecessary for mutual recognition of the congregation.³

The question must be raised, however, if doctrinal theses in addition to the Scriptures and the Confessions are unnecessary, then just what position do the Twelve Principles occupy in the requirements of the Lutheran Free Church for union, fellowship, and cooperation?

An answer is found in this church's recent relationship with the attempts to unite the bodies of the American Lutheran Conference. In 1951 President Burntvedt told his convention that he favored the "unity talks" which were progressing among the other members of the American Lutheran Conference. The convention responded to his suggestion by directing a standing committee to explore possibilities for union.⁴ The convention of 1956 seemed to continue a manifestation of interest in such unity

³Ibid.

⁴Annual Report of the Lutheran Free Church--Fifty-Fifth Annual Convention, 1955, p. 35.

discussions. After the congregations of the general body had failed to endorse the proposed merger with the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church by the necessary three-fourths majority, the subject of the proposed merger was raised again. The convention directed the congregations of the general body to study the proposed constitution of the merging group in the light of the Twelve Principles of the Lutheran Free Church.⁵

This much seems to be clear. While the Twelve Principles are not necessary for pulpit and altar fellowship in as much as the Lutheran Free Church is in church fellowship with many bodies which do not subscribe to their Principles, these Principles do seem to be necessary in any consideration of union. This is understandable, since this document deals with the subject of church polity, a subject which must always be discussed in connection with organic merger.

This document is not a prerequisite for cooperation with other Christians. The Lutheran Free Church holds membership in such cooperative agencies as the National Lutheran Council, and the Lutheran World Federation. It is not a member of the World Council of Churches nor the National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁵Annual Report of the Lutheran Free Church--Sixtieth Annual Convention, 1956, p. 158.

However, just what did the Lutheran Free Church consider to be a prerequisite to cooperation and church fellowship. In none of the primary or secondary sources available were any principles set forth proposing bases for cooperation with other Christian church bodies. As for the question of pulpit and altar fellowship, the evidence is incomplete. The secondary sources seem to take a position similar to that of the United Lutheran Church.⁶ Yet, when the Lutheran Free Church affiliated with the American Lutheran Conference in 1930, it automatically subscribed to the Minneapolis Theses as the doctrinal basis for the Conference. Since the Minutes of the United Lutheran Church indicate that the Lutheran Free Church was always in fellowship with them,⁷ it would seem that this church body took it for granted that a subscription to the Scriptures and the Confessions was sufficient for church fellowship.

⁶Supra, p. 28.

⁷Supra, p. 29.

CHAPTER V

THE UNITED EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The United Evangelical Lutheran Church, a small body of Danish decent, is typical of the so-called "middle group" within Lutheranism in that it does not use the term "brother" or "brethren" in the technical sense which implies full pulpit and altar fellowship. Thus, in the Minutes of this church body's conventions (exemplified by the 1928 reference to Lutherans in Europe) virtually any Lutheran group might be called "our brethren in the faith."¹

Yet, this church body has considered itself relatively conservative, as exemplified by the high praise in the 1930 convention which was given to the conservative Lutheran World Convention held in Copenhagen in 1929. The delegates considered this meeting of the Lutheran World Convention an improvement over the earlier one.

We were mightily stirred with an intense feeling of inward unity in spite of outward differences. It was most gratifying to . . . feel our spiritual relationship.²

¹Report of the Thirty-Second Annual Convention of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1928, p. 28.

²Yearbook of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Convention of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1930, p. 14.

This convention was also given the assurance that the American Lutheran Conference which it was joining was not a "super-church." Pulpit and altar fellowship was declared and recognized in this convention with all bodies within the American Lutheran Conference and with the Icelandic Synod since all of these churches are in "full doctrinal harmony." As far as other Lutheran bodies are concerned, "we continue to stand with open hearts and minds toward such other Lutheran bodies as are not included in the American Lutheran Conference."³

In 1935 the convention of the general body reaffirmed the Minneapolis Theses' definition of unionism and appointed a Committee on Fellowship to confer with committees of other Lutheran bodies. This move may have been stimulated by the Savannah Resolution of the United Lutheran Church. However, the convention report was not clear concerning such a possible connection.⁴

A very fraternal greeting from the president of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church was conveyed to the convention of 1937.

It is my humble hope, for your Church and mine, that

³Ibid., p. 117.

⁴Yearbook of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Convention of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1935, pp. 25f.

recognizing their differences, they may also realize their fundamental unity.⁵

More greetings were exchanged with the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1938 which spoke of "preserving the unity among us in the bond of peace."⁶

An agreement was reached in 1939 with the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church to cooperate in serving parishes which are too small to support one pastor. Two such small parishes of the different Danish church bodies in close geographical proximity with each other may select a pastor from a list of clergymen which both church bodies have approved for this purpose. Such a pastor would then serve both parishes with the Word and the Sacraments. Normally, this cooperation involving fellowship in the pulpit and altar would take place only in such emergency situations. The deliberations which resulted in this agreement were conducted with a "brotherly spirit" and in the "desire to cooperate wherever such cooperation would bring relief and tend to build up a living Church."⁷

The convention of 1940, however, reported that this

⁵Yearbook of the Forty-First Annual Convention of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1937, p. 166.

⁶Yearbook of the Forty-Second Annual Convention of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1938, p. 214.

⁷Yearbook of the Forty-Third Annual Convention of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1939, pp. 99f.

carefully worked out plan for cooperation was not favorably received by many of the churches for whom this plan was adopted. Most of the parishes in question desired to be served by a pastor from their own respective church body.⁸

A short, objective report was given to the convention of 1941 concerning the All Lutheran Conference which met and discussed areas of cooperation which synodical bodies might observe in the light of the wartime emergency. The "Articles of Agreement" were recorded for the sake of information.⁹

The convention of 1942 expressed itself on further Lutheran cooperation:

We suggest as highly desirable the enlargement of the scope of the American Lutheran Conference, so its constituency may become representative of the Lutheran Church in America. Pending this consumation, we recommend that the National Lutheran Council sponsor from time to time free general conferences for consultation in regard to our mutual Lutheran problems and opportunities for service.¹⁰

A proposal was made in the following year to unite with the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church. Since the delegates did not feel ready for organic union, this recommendation

⁸Yearbook of the Forty-Fourth Annual Convention of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1940, p. 17.

⁹Yearbook of the Forty-Fifth Annual Convention of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1941, pp. 16ff.

¹⁰Yearbook of the Forty-Sixth Annual Convention of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1942, p. 187.

was referred to a committee for study.¹¹ The convention, however, approved the idea of an American Lutheran Convention in the form of a free conference involving cooperation and discussion but no necessary pulpit and altar fellowship.¹²

The Overture of the American Lutheran Conference was accepted in 1944 which proposed that pulpit and altar fellowship is possible on the basis of the Confessions and the additional official documents of the various church bodies.¹³ A report was also given to this convention concerning the progress in the meetings with the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church. One meeting began by singing a hymn by Bishop Grundtvig, "God's Word is Our Great Heritage." This meeting also discussed "further cooperation" in the "spirit of cordial Christian fellowship."¹⁴ The convention decided that further cooperation with the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church might include joint Sunday school institutes, joint festivals of Reformation, missionary rallies, guest lecturers from each other's church body, etc.¹⁵ The convention uttered the prayer

¹¹Yearbook of the Forty-Seventh Annual Convention of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1943, p. 169.

¹²Ibid., p. 179.

¹³Yearbook of the Forty-Eighth Annual Convention of the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1944, p. 172.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 18f.

¹⁵Ibid.

that "this meeting, as a link in a chain of helpful, cooperative efforts between the two synods, might lead eventually to a truly united Danish Lutheran Church in America."¹⁶

From this information it is clear that the United Evangelical Lutheran Church does not regard absolute and complete doctrinal agreement necessary for cooperation, joint worship in missionary and similar rallies, and other common endeavors. Although the agreement on the Word of God was still left unformulated, they joined together in Grundtvig's hymn proclaiming this Word as their heritage.

It was not until the next convention of 1946 that agreement was reached with the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church on the principal bone of doctrinal contention which had existed between them--the doctrine of the Word of God.

The holy Scripture, that is the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, constitute the history of God's revelation for the salvation of mankind and man's reaction to it. As such we accept the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God and the supreme and infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.¹⁷

This statement seems to be a paraphrase of a section from the Pittsburgh Agreement. Whether or not the convention realized this similarity when they accepted the

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Yearbook of the Fiftieth Annual Convention of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1946, p. 179.

joint agreement is unknown. The amendment was moved and adopted that the committees "coordinate their doctrinal statements with the American Lutheran Conference."¹⁸ This convention also stated that the way for merger with the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church was not yet cleared, and that more meetings were to follow with this Danish church body.¹⁹ This was the last time that the official Yearbook made any reference to this church body. Either these meetings were not held, or the reports of such meetings were not given to the United Evangelical Lutheran conventions.

Also in 1946 the question of membership in the World Council of Churches was introduced to this convention. The delegates were told that the proposed membership in the Council involved no real compromise of their theology and that the Council is not a legislative body.

It will be noticed that while there will not be full unity of faith in the World Council of Churches, there will be a certain unity in that it will be a fellowship of churches which accept Jesus Christ as God and Saviour.²⁰

Nevertheless, the convention decided to postpone its decision on the World Council for one year.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 14f.

²¹ Ibid., p. 179.

The convention noted in 1947 that the American Lutheran Church, the Augustana Synod, the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the United Lutheran Church had all voted to join the World Council of Churches. After a rather confused discussion and some maneuverings on the floor of the convention, the general body resolved to authorize its Church Council to join the World Council of Churches on behalf of the general church body. The reasons given in the "whereases" are worthy of note.

1. The general body has been invited to join.
2. The Council accepts our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour.
3. The Council is "merely a fellowship of Churches with no legislative powers over the participating bodies and can act for them only as far as any or all of them have commissioned it to do so."
4. Membership is on a consultative basis only.
5. Membership in the Council "does not imply altar and pulpit fellowship."
6. There is a need for cooperation, an opportunity for influence and witness, and because other Lutherans have joined.²²

In these points made by the convention in favor of affiliation in the World Council the word "fellowship" is used in two different senses. It is used to designate the relationship Christians have with each other owing to their faith in Christ, and the word is used in the more

²²Yearbook of the Fifty-First Annual Convention of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1947, pp. 26f.

technical sense to signify that close relationship involved in the exchange of pulpits and in intercommunion.

In the convention of 1948 the general body invited the church bodies of the American Lutheran Conference to consider merger. The president of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church admitted to the convention that "unity must come before union," but he claimed that the members of the American Lutheran Conference seem to have that unity. The debate which came later favored unity, but the delegates for a while were uncertain concerning how to go about acquiring unity with other Lutherans. The action of the convention was to leave it up to a commission "to contact the Church Councils . . . of the constituent bodies of the American Lutheran Conference" to consider further cooperation and eventual merger of the members of the conference "and other Lutheran Churches of our land."²³

This commission had very successful meetings with the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the American Lutheran Church. However, the president of the general body declared himself out of sympathy with the proposed merger of the bodies in the National Lutheran Council.

To this writer it became evident that there is not present in the discussions of . . . (the National

²³Yearbook of the Fifty-Second Annual Convention of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1948, p. 217.

Lutheran Council bodies) . . . that certain something which makes for the full fellowship desired.²⁴

The convention of 1950 agreed with its president and rejected the National Lutheran Council proposal for a more inclusive merger.²⁵

The convention in 1952 unanimously accepted the United Testimony as "one of the finest produced" among doctrinal statements.²⁶ It was also reported to this convention that the Augustana Synod had voted against the United Testimony.²⁷ The erroneous nature of this report has already been discussed.²⁸

From this study it becomes evident that the United Evangelical Lutheran Church never clearly defined what is necessary for union, church fellowship or cooperation. The resolutions speak of doctrinal unity and agreement in faith. Yet, complete agreement in doctrine is not required for cooperation, even that cooperation involving pulpit and altar relationships.

Agreement in such doctrines as the Word of God is not

²⁴Yearbook of the Fifty-Fourth Annual Convention of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1950, p. 6.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 204f.

²⁶Yearbook of the Fifty-Sixth Annual Convention of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1952, pp. 206f.

²⁷Ibid., p. 207.

²⁸Supra, p. 63.

a prerequisite for such cooperation involving preaching and the administration of the Sacraments. Yet, the agreement in this doctrine was required before any consideration of merger could take place.

The church body speaks of pulpit and altar fellowship being applied to certain Lutheran bodies. The resolutions of the convention do not seem to prohibit such fellowship from other Lutheran bodies, however. The United Evangelical Lutheran Church quietly adopted the Overture which proposes church fellowship with all Lutherans on the basis of the existing documents, and the general body has not seen fit to bring up the subject again.

The General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,
 Proceedings in Fellowship, published by the Board of Christian Education,
 1922, p. 131.

Journal of the General Synodical Convention of the
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1922, p. 131.

CHAPTER VI

THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

At the very beginning of the Evangelical Lutheran Church's existence, it resolved that no fellowship or "churchly cooperation" was to be carried out with church bodies which did not share the faith and confession of Lutheranism. The Hauge Synod, however, one of the component parts of the merger of 1917, obtained the modification that this resolution does not condemn weddings, funerals, Decoration Day programs, graduations, etc. in which ministers of other church bodies take part. Nor is it supposed to condemn "practical enterprises" such as ecumenical mission conferences, laymen's movements, student federations and the like.¹

In 1922 there was a general move toward other Norwegian Lutheran elements. A committee was elected to negotiate "differences in doctrine and practice" with the Lutheran Free Church, the Lutheran Brethren, and the Eielson Synod.²

¹The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, "Statement on Fellowship," Lutheran Herald, XLIII (July 12, 1958), 6f.

²Report of the Second Extraordinary Convention of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, 1922, p. 131.

In the convention of 1923 President H. Stub reported successful negotiations with the Lutheran Free Church, but an unfavorable response from the Lutheran Brethren and no response at all from the Eielson Synod.³ While this convention reflected rising tension with the Lutheran Brethren, it rejoiced over the fraternal relations with the Augustana Synod, the Joint Synod of Ohio, the Iowa Synod, the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Icelandic Synod.⁴

President Stub reported to the Third Extraordinary Convention that there were now no differences in doctrine with the Lutheran Free Church. This convention authorized him to invite other Scandanavian Lutheran church bodies to a free conference in order to discuss federation.⁵

The Minneapolis Theses were presented to the general convention of 1926 and were adopted. This established pulpit and altar fellowship with the Iowa, Ohio, and Buffalo Synods. "The correct Lutheran principle is an official and definite agreement as to altar and pulpit fellowship." These bodies were recognized as having come

³Report of the Second General Convention of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, 1923, p. 18.

⁴Ibid., p. 111.

⁵Report of the Third Extraordinary General Convention of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, 1925, p. 200.

to a "complete agreement and understanding in all essential things."⁶ Full agreement was also declared with the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, and pulpit and altar fellowship was to be established on the condition that that church body adopt the Minneapolis Theses.⁷

In 1930 the American Lutheran Conference was presented to the convention "as a result of" the pulpit and altar fellowship established with Ohio, Iowa, Buffalo, Augustana, and the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church. The foundation of this cooperation and fellowship was to be "agreement and unity in faith and practice."

The first and primary basis for cooperative efforts in other than external affairs, must be altar and pulpit fellowship.⁸

The convention was assured in 1934 that the American Lutheran Conference was still only an agency for cooperation among its members and that no plans were being made for organic union.⁹

In 1936 the Evangelical Lutheran Church began to consider its relations with all Lutheran bodies in America.

⁶Report of the Third General Triennial Convention of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, 1926, p. 76.

⁷Ibid., p. 222.

⁸Report of the Ninth General Convention (Second Biennial) of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, 1930, p. 17.

⁹Annual Report, Eleventh General Convention, 1934, p. 16.

The convention rejoiced that, as far as official statements were concerned, the United Lutheran Church, the Synodical Conference, and the American Lutheran Conference were "in agreement with us in matter of confession of faith and in opposition to unionism." This convention expressed the desire that pulpit and altar fellowship be established with the Synodical Conference and the United Lutheran Church along with independent synods, and it established a committee to confer and report.¹⁰

It should be noted how close in time these declarations come to the United Lutheran Church's Savannah Resolution of 1934. These statements by the Norwegian Lutheran Church seems to be, at least in part, a response to that United Lutheran Church Resolution. In any event, these statements of 1936, while departing from the earlier emphasis that all spiritual cooperation and church fellowship must be based upon complete agreement in "all essential things," discuss pulpit and altar fellowship rather than the organic union in which the United Lutheran Church is interested.

Virtually nothing about this matter comes up in convention again until 1944. At that time the convention is faced with the American Lutheran Conference's Overture which suggests that the Confessions and loyalty to the

¹⁰ Annual Report, Twelfth General Convention, 1936,
p. 31.

existing documents are sufficient for a declaration of pulpit and altar fellowship. As an expression on this subject the convention adopted a statement that echoes much of the basic thought of the Overture. This resolution "extends our hand of fellowship to all American Lutherans" on the basis of the Confessions and the additional doctrinal statements which are "in essential accord with our own."

Wherever our congregations and pastors find those ties that bind Lutheran Christians and that teaching and practice conform to official declarations, they may in good conscience selectively practice fellowship in both worship and work.¹¹

This convention also examined the question of closer relations with our Lutherans of the National Lutheran Council. The convention called for more cooperation in the Council, but it spoke of "not being ready for organic union."¹² It is difficult to conclude from this information that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is insisting upon greater theological agreement as a prerequisite for church union, since the convention does not explain why it is "not ready" for organic union. Subscription to the Confessions, subscription to the particular theological documents of the various church bodies, and loyalty

¹¹Annual Report, Sixteenth General Convention, 1944, pp. 404f.

¹²Ibid., p. 34.

in practice to these subscriptions are prerequisite to church fellowship. The United Lutheran Church interpreted this action of the general convention to be a de facto declaration of full pulpit and altar fellowship with the former church body.¹³

The Evangelical Lutheran Church openly considered its relationship with non-Lutheran Christians as the president presented the picture of the proposed World Council of Churches in 1946. Many of the same points given to the Augustana Synod and to the United Evangelical Lutheran Church were also presented to this convention. Membership implies no altar or pulpit fellowship, but offers the opportunity to cooperate with other Christians where it can be done according to "our principles and our Confessions."¹⁴ These evaluations were repeated for the most part by the Church Council to the general convention. Yet, the proposal did not meet with general favor, and the delegates deferred action until the next convention.¹⁵

In 1948 the convention rejected the proposal to join the World Council of Churches by a negative majority of

¹³Supra, p. 34.

¹⁴Annual Report, Seventeenth General Convention, 1946, pp. 17ff.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 41.

two-thirds.¹⁶ The delegates reacted favorably, however, to the proposal by the United Evangelical Lutheran Church to explore the possibility of merging the church bodies of the American Lutheran Conference. The convention took note that the United Evangelical Lutheran Church has been closely allied with their body in teaching, confession, spiritual life, and history.¹⁷ We cannot call these factors "prerequisites" to organic union for the Evangelical Lutherans, but this church body seems to consider these theological and non-theological factors in considerations of merger.

The general convention in 1950 rejected the proposed merger or federation of all National Lutheran Council bodies on the grounds that the "time is not now at hand" and that "we are not ready."¹⁸ Instead, the convention resolved to continue exploring merger possibilities with the American Lutheran Church and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church by studying each other's official statements and practices.¹⁹ From this action it is very clear that, while agreement in the expressions of the Minneapolis

¹⁶Annual Report, Eighteenth General Convention, 1948,
p. 492.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 493

¹⁸Annual Report, Nineteenth General Convention, 1950,
p. 37.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 35.

Theses and other documents is sufficient for church fellowship, for merger considerations it is also necessary to study official resolutions and practices.

The negotiations among the American Lutheran Conference bodies culminated in the United Testimony which the convention of 1952 adopted.²⁰ This document mentions a number of points relative to unity, fellowship, and cooperation.

1. The Christian faith is fellowship--fellowship with Christ, the Head, and fellowship with all believers, who are members of His Body the Church . . .
2. Christian faith seeks fellowship, that is, the discovery and practice of this spiritual fellowship with other Christians. . . .
3. For the true unity of the Church, and therefore for the full realization of spiritual fellowship of believers with one another, it is essential that there be agreement concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.
4. There are erring brethren. They are brethren, because with us they share justifying faith. They are erring in so far as they depart from the truth as revealed in the Scriptures or from the life demanded by the regenerating Gospel. We . . . confess our common faith, but we realize the danger of condoning error We acknowledge the measure of unity that exists, we must at the same time bear witness against error as we see it.

So long as witness can be borne to the truth as we see it in Christ, a measure of outward fellowship may be enjoyed even with such as differ

²⁰ Annual Report, Twentieth General Convention, 1952,
p. 502.

with us in the apprehension of certain aspects of the truth.

5. There is room for a large measure of cooperation in externals which need not involve the principles of spiritual fellowship. So long as there is no compromise of divine truth, such cooperation in external matters may be practiced with secular groups or with other Churches.²¹

The use of the term "fellowship" in this document is applied to the wider meaning of that relationship existing among all believers and the more restricted sense referring to pulpit and altar fellowship. There seems to be three distinct relationships proposed by the document: (a) Full realization of spiritual fellowship based upon agreement concerning the Gospel and the Sacraments; (b) A measure of outward fellowship based upon the question of whether or not witness can be borne to the truth; and (c) Cooperation in externals with churches and secular groups providing that there is no compromise with truth.

As in 1950, the Evangelical Lutheran Church was not prepared for a general merger among American Lutheran bodies and turned down the invitation to an all Lutheran merger. The president expressed his personal opinion why this was done.

Sociological and psychological phenomena play a part,

²¹Doctrinal Declarations: A Collection of Official Statements on the Doctrinal Position of Various Lutheran Synods in America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), pp. 105f.

but more significant are the different evaluations which our respective churches give to certain emphases and practices, some of which are theological in their roots.²²

The president also indicated that a union of two-thirds of American Lutheranism now, that is, union excluding the Synodical Conference, would harm a total union of Lutherans later.²³

Since the church bodies with whom the Evangelical Lutheran Church was planning to merge were already members of the World Council of Churches, the question of membership in the Council was bound to arise again either in the merged church or in the Evangelical Lutheran Church itself. The convention of 1956 decided to face the issue now rather than disturb the future merged church with this problem. Many of the same arguments used in the previous convention of 1946 for joining the World Council were present again. This time the delegates voted to join the World Council of Churches by a very slim margin. The votes of "yes" needed to join the Council were 1,413. The motion obtained "yes" votes of 1,434 over against 685 votes of "no."²⁴

At this point the chair ruled that Article Ten of

²²Annual Report, Twenty-Second General Convention, 1956, pp. 6f.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 476.

the Articles of Union was not altered by the convention's decision to join the World Council.²⁵ Article Ten states that at the constituting convention of the merged church the general body shall apply for membership in the National Lutheran Council, the World Lutheran Federation, the Canadian Lutheran Council, and the World Council of Churches. The action of joining the World Council, according to Article Ten, is to be reexamined at the first general convention of the merged body after the merged church has so affiliated. A standing committee on relations will also be established to negotiate with any or all Lutheran churches "with unification as an objective." The principle involved in these measures is in "loyal accord" with the United Testimony, and it is summarized thus:

We pledge to one another continuing purpose to seek out and utilize the strength that lies in the oneness of the whole fellowship of believers in Christ, while faithfully safeguarding the truth and the power which are in full mutual belief and confession of Christian truth. We, therefore, recognize the need for councils and conferences with fellow Christians of different confession, on the various levels of agreement and interest, and for joint action where good works may be accomplished and faith not denied.²⁶

Prior to 1936, pulpit and altar fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church seemed to depend upon agreement in the Confessions and in other commonly accepted

²⁵ Ibid., p. 508.

²⁶ The Joint Union Committee, Report of the Joint Union Committee to the Convention of the Negotiating Churches (n.p., 1958), pp. 144ff.

documents such as the Minneapolis Theses. From 1936 on, however, this church body recognized basic agreement among all major Lutheran bodies in America. This church body ceased thinking in terms of establishing full pulpit and altar fellowship with individual church bodies and in 1944 adopted the principle of selective fellowship, that is, pulpit and altar fellowship with those pastors and parishes demonstrating loyalty to the Confessions and to their own additional doctrinal statements.

This church body has been traditionally cautious concerning organic union. It has given very few specific requirements for such union, however, and has often spoken in vague terms of "not being ready" for such union. Confessional subscription, official statements, practices, and many non-theological factors seem to be worthy of consideration before such a step.

This body has also been quite cautious in the area of cooperation with non-Lutheran Christians. The final decision on membership in the World Council of Churches in 1956 was anything but unanimous, and the subject of membership in the National Council has never arisen in convention.

The bases for Christian cooperation stated in the United Testimony and Article Ten of the Articles of Union includes the opportunity to witness without compromise, a genuine Christian faith in the group with whom you are

cooperating, and opportunity for joint action where there exists agreement and interest. No organized presentation of these principles of cooperation has been attempted in the body's church convention.

Whereas of German background, the Joint Synod of the North, the Iowa Synod, and the Buffalo Synod, were the first to form the American Lutheran Church. In this regard the American Lutheran Church was instrumental in helping to form the American Lutheran Conference which expressed the doctrinal basis in the words of the Minnesota Synod.

In 1888 the American Lutheran Church made an apparently friendly gesture toward the United Lutheran Church in America. It sent them a greeting during the last hours of the 1888 convention, recognizing the common subscription of both church bodies to the Nicene Confession and the Augsburg Confession "union which God through the Holy Spirit has wrought."

Although this probably caused quite a stir in the United Lutheran Church at the time, the actual results of such a greeting were very similar to what obtained by

Walter D. Rupp and Charles Lutz, editors, American Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), pp. 241f.

1888, pp. 181f.

CHAPTER VII

THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

Three synods of German background, the Joint Synod of Ohio, the Iowa Synod, and the Buffalo Synod, merged in 1930 to form the American Lutheran Church. In this same year the merged church was instrumental in helping to form the American Lutheran Conference which expressed its doctrinal basis in the words of the Minneapolis Theses.¹

In 1932 the American Lutheran Church made an apparently innocent gesture toward the United Lutheran Church in America. It sent them a greeting during the last hours of the 1932 convention, recognizing the common subscription of both church bodies to the historic Confessions and hoping for ultimate "union under God through the Confessions."²

Although this probably seemed quite harmless to the American Lutheran Church at the time, the actual results of such a greeting were very similar to that obtained by

¹Omar Bonderud and Charles Lutz, editors, American Lutheran (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1955), pp. 24ff.

²Supra, pp. 18ff.

waving a bone in front of a hungry dog. The United Lutheran Church apparently viewed this greeting in the light of its Washington Declaration which states that subscription to the Confessions is a sufficient theological basis for unity. The United Lutheran Church convention set forth the Savannah Resolution inviting all Lutheran bodies in America to confer "to the establishment of closer relationships" based on the Confessions.³

Hence, the American Lutheran Church had to face the question of future concrete relations with the United Lutheran Church in 1934. President Hein told his convention of the American Lutheran Church that "it is not a difference in doctrine which separates us from the United Lutheran Church, but a difference in practice."

The Masonic question and indiscriminate pulpit and altar fellowship with non-Lutherans should be cleared up.⁴

The convention agreed with this opinion and stated that

until such a time as pulpit-altar fellowship is officially established between the ULCA, the Church holds that fellowship between pastors and congregations of these two bodies as a common practice is inconsistent with the principles of our constitution, but the church does not regard joint services at historical Lutheran anniversaries and other cooperative activities, . . . as a violation of the spirit and principle of the constitution so

³Ibid.

⁴Official Minutes of the Third Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1934, p. 22.

long as the united testimony given in such services and through such activities promotes conservative Lutheranism.⁵

The convention did not define which section of the constitution it had in mind, but this statement apparently has reference to Section 3 of Article II: "The Church regards unity in doctrine and practice as the necessary prerequisite for church fellowship."⁶

Since this unity might have been achieved through the Chicago Theses of 1929, president Hein lamented the rejection of these Theses by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States. Furthermore, the president was disturbed by an article appearing in the Lutheran Witness which seemed to state that disagreement over such questions as marriage and divorce, the doctrine of Sunday, betrothal, John's Baptism, etc. were divisive of church fellowship.

If these matters are essential to unity in the faith and if this type of unity is to be the basis of a union with other Lutheran bodies, there is no hope whatsoever for the Lutherans of this country ever to get together.⁷

The ALC in the convention of 1934 took action in regard to both the proposal by the United Lutheran Church

⁵Ibid., p. 235.

⁶Bonderud and Lutz, op. cit., p. 5.

⁷Official Minutes of the Third Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1934, p. 25.

for discussions and the possibility of closer relations with such bodies as the Missouri Synod. The resolution noted that their church should try to bring about "Lutheran unity on the basis of the Scriptures and the Confessions," and that "cooperation along certain lines is already practiced." Hence, the convention authorized a committee to confer with similar committees from other church bodies "with the end in view of establishing pulpit and altar fellowship on the basis of the Minneapolis Theses."⁸

Finally, this convention permitted "occasional public and civic religious services" provided that the "truth revealed in Christ as the Redeemer is not denied." Such matters were left largely to the discretion of the individual pastor.⁹

In 1936 a report was given to the convention on the progress of the negotiations with the United Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod. Parts I and II of the Pittsburgh Agreement, reaffirming a stand against anti-Christian organizations and "indiscriminate fellowship" with non-Lutherans, represented the successful negotiations with the United Lutheran Church in America. Progress was

⁸Ibid., p. 235.

⁹Ibid.

also reported in the talks with Missouri Synod representatives.¹⁰

Negotiations with Missouri culminated in the Declaration, a document making certain emphases and modifications in the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod. This Declaration was presented to the 1938 American Lutheran Church convention in conjunction with the Brief Statement as a doctrinal basis for pulpit and altar fellowship. The resolutions by the Missouri Synod, henceforth known as the St. Louis Resolutions, were also presented to this convention. The St. Louis Resolutions accepted the Declaration and the Brief Statement as a doctrinal basis for future fellowship, but it made certain modifications in the Declaration, which, in turn was a modification of the Brief Statement. The Declaration stated that it will tolerate slight variations from the demands of the Brief Statement in points dealing with anti-Christ, the conversion of Israel, the physical resurrection of the martyrs, the interpretation of the thousand year reign in Revelation 20, and the terminology "visible side of the Church." The Declaration asked that the Missouri Synod declare that these modifications "are not disruptive of church fellowship." The St. Louis Resolution replied that these things "need not be divisive of church fellowship." 1938

¹⁰Official Minutes of the Fourth Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1936, pp. 5ff.

This phrase varied at times, but the words "need not be" were invariably used.¹¹

The convention of the American Lutheran Church declared the two documents "a sufficient doctrinal basis for church fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church." The resolution added as an after thought that "it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines." Yet, the convention declared itself willing to negotiate these points also. The resolution failed to note the difference of wording between the Declaration and the St. Louis Resolutions, however, since this resolution declared that those points described as "not divisive of church fellowship" by the Declaration were also "recognized as such by the Missouri Synod's resolutions."¹²

While it may be understood why the church bodies were not yet ready to declare pulpit and altar fellowship, the American Lutheran Church declared, opposition altars should cease. Finally, the convention stated that the Brief Statement, viewed in the light of the Declaration, is not in contradiction to the Minneapolis Theses. Hence, the delegates saw no reason why they should give up membership in the American Lutheran Conference. At the same

¹¹Official Minutes of the Fifth Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1938, pp. 7ff.

¹²Ibid., p. 255.

time they were willing to submit the joint documents (the Brief Statement and the Declaration) to the members of the American Lutheran Conference for their "official approval and acceptance."¹³ Actually, such official consideration by the bodies of the American Lutheran Conference did not take place. These twin documents were never brought up for discussion in the conventions of the member churches of the American Lutheran Conference.

Regarding relations with the United Lutheran Church, the convention noted that full agreement on the subject of Scripture had not yet been reached. The delegates resolved to continue negotiations with that body "in the interest of removing difficulties, doctrinal and practical, which may now exist."¹⁴ The committee did not give the convention a detailed report on the point of disagreement, however, as was given to the United Lutheran Church convention.¹⁵

The convention of 1940 reported on the completed Pittsburgh Agreement with the United Lutheran Church. Again no explanation was given concerning the exact nature of the difficulty. The American Lutheran Church, to the ultimate discomfort of the United Lutheran Church, accepted

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 256f.

¹⁵Supra, pp. 23f.

the Pittsburgh Agreement "with the definite conviction that this agreement is in complete harmony with the Declaration and the Brief Statement."¹⁶

The continued troubled negotiations with the Missouri Synod were also reported in 1940. The Missouri Synod commissioners had raised a number of objections to the resolutions made by the 1938 convention of the American Lutheran Church. This report noted that the Missouri representatives approved of the explanations of the American Lutheran representatives on over half of the disputed points. Among the explanations approved by the Missouri Synod representatives was the clarification of the statement that "it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines."¹⁷

This convention approved of the explanation given by their representatives.

We concur with our commissioners . . . "everything that Scriptures teach is God's Word and therefore binding." However, for clarity's sake we add: not every traditional explanation of a Scriptural statement is binding. The traditional explanation may not be the sense intended by the Holy Ghost and therefore may make further study under His guidance necessary; and, since human shortsightedness and sin may preclude the finding or the universal acceptance of the divinely intended sense, we

¹⁶ Official Minutes of the Sixth Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1940, p. 315.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 14ff.

thank God that it is not necessary for establishment of church fellowship to agree in every explanation of a Scriptural statement.¹⁸

The convention seemed to forget momentarily the doctrinal agreement binding together the American Lutheran Conference when it declared, "We entertain the confident hope that our sister synods . . . will occupy the same ground in these matters now occupied with us."¹⁹ This statement could be interpreted to mean that the American Lutheran Church hoped that the member churches of the American Lutheran Conference would adopt the twin documents of the Brief Statement and the Declaration. The statement is not clear, however, and it could be interpreted to mean that the American Lutheran Conference was not now united in doctrine. Such an interpretation would militate against the position that the Minneapolis Theses were a sufficient doctrinal basis for church fellowship within the Conference.

The convention resolved that the difference in practice between their body and the Missouri Synod was not as great as Missouri seemed to think. This convention also decided that, while "prayer fellowship is wider than church fellowship," yet this difference in viewpoint is not divisive of church fellowship.²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 313f.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

The delegates found themselves trying to straddle two church bodies which were too far apart. Neither the Missouri Synod nor the United Lutheran Church, both of which crossed swords in 1936 over the doctrine of inspiration, cared for the declarations of the American Lutheran Church that the Brief Statement and the Pittsburgh Agreement meant the same thing. Objections were already being heard in both church bodies on this point. Hence, the convention declared:

circumstances do not now make it possible to enter into pulpit and altar fellowship with these bodies, . . . [but we will] . . . continue to work toward full unity and ultimate pulpit and altar fellowship.²¹

The voices in protest from the Missouri Synod and the United Lutheran Church were louder than ever by 1942. To meet this problem the delegates of the American Lutheran Church adopted this carefully worded resolution.

Whereas the ALC has adopted the Pittsburgh Agreement and accepted the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod in the light of the Declaration of the Commissioners of the ALC as a basis for pulpit-altar fellowship; and

Whereas, though these documents . . . differ in wording, and yet express the true position of the ALC; and

Whereas, the ULCA has adopted the Pittsburgh Agreement; and the Declaration of the Commissioners in connection with the Brief Statement has found acceptance within the Missouri Synod and was proposed by the intersynodical commissioners of the Missouri

²¹Ibid., p. 316.

Synod as an integral part of the doctrinal basis for future church fellowship; and

Whereas, to our regret fellowship has not resulted since apparently in both bodies there are large and influential groups in disagreement therewith:

Therefore Be It Resolved, that the ALG declares its readiness to establish pulpit and altar fellowship with either or both of these honorable church bodies on the basis of their full and wholehearted acceptance of and adherence to either of these documents, in the hope that the existing obstacles may be removed and that pulpit and altar fellowship may be declared at an early date;²²

Since neither the Missouri Synod nor the United Lutheran Church were giving their "full and wholehearted acceptance" to these documents, no fellowship resulted with either of these bodies. The American Lutheran Church had accepted the Brief Statement and the Pittsburgh Agreement in the light of its Declaration. The Missouri Synod had accepted the Declaration, with modifications, in the light of the Brief Statement. The United Lutheran Church had accepted the Pittsburgh Agreement "on the basis of our Confessions alone."²³

According to the Official Reports for the convention of 1944, the Doctrinal Affirmation, a document attempting to merge the thought of the Brief Statement and the

²²Official Minutes of the Seventh Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1942, p. 254.

²³Minutes of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1940, p. 266.

Declaration, was presented without enthusiasm. It did not find acceptance.²⁴

A study on possible "selective fellowship" was presented to the convention. The plan was similar to the one adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1944. This proposal, which was studied until 1946, spoke of "certain obstacles" to full fellowship with the United Lutheran Church. These obstacles included "lodge membership of pastors, unionism, and even doctrinal statements." This proposal admitted that pulpit and altar fellowship was being practiced with some United Lutherans and, in one isolated case, with the Missouri Synod. The plan suggested opening American Lutheran pulpits to all United Lutheran pastors who "by their teaching and practice give evidence of sincere adherence to the Pittsburgh Agreement which we understand in the light of our Declaration." The plan included also opening American Lutheran pulpits to members of the Synodical Conference who "recognize our Declaration as truly Lutheran."²⁵

This plan was adopted in 1946, by declaring that,

pastors and parishes of the American Lutheran Church shall be free to have pulpit, altar, and prayer fellowship with such pastors and parishes of other Lutheran synods as agree, in doctrine and practice,

²⁴Official Reports of the President and Various Boards and Committees, 1944, pp. 9ff.

²⁵Ibid.

with the declarations made in sections 1, 2, 3, & 4 of Article II--Confession of Faith--of the Constitution of the American Lutheran Church.²⁶

This convention, however, took no action to reverse its decision of 1934 which condemns fellowship with the United Lutheran Church "as a common practice" as a violation of the Constitution.²⁷ Hence, it appears that at this time two opposing interpretations existed among the resolutions of the American Lutheran Church.

This convention also voted to join the World Council of Churches, providing that representation shall be on a confessional rather than a geographical basis. The same points raised in other Lutheran conventions, that membership in the council is not a compromise of position and does not involve pulpit and altar fellowship, were also presented to this convention.²⁸

In 1950 the convention faced a number of issues: a proposed doctrinal statement drawn up with the Missouri Synod known as the Common Confession, the proposed merger with the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the proposal to merge the bodies belonging to the National Lutheran Council.

²⁶ Official Minutes of the Ninth Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1946, p. 23.

²⁷ Supra, p. 97.

²⁸ Official Minutes of the Ninth Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1946, p. 283.

Before taking action of the individual issues, the convention gave this statement as an introduction.

We recognize that this involves more than external organizational relationships, but requires an inner unity of faith, practice and spirit. Therefore, Lutherans may rightly expect from one another reassurances of their fidelity to the Word of God and the Confessions of their Church. This may call for more than a reaffirmation of confessional statements of the past and may necessitate formulating our Church's teaching in the light of current developments and needs (I Peter 3:15).²⁹

This resolution continued, after it stated the above thoughts as their guidelines, by adopting the Common Confession "as a correct and concise statement of our faith in the doctrines herein confessed" in agreement with the Missouri Synod, by approving continued merger negotiations with the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, and by rejecting the proposed merger of federation of the bodies of the National Lutheran Council.³⁰

Regarding the last item of the resolution, the convention added that they are convinced that any "negotiation for organic union must begin with discussions of doctrine and practice."³¹

The convention in 1952 accepted the United Testimony

²⁹Official Minutes of the Eleventh Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1950, pp. 285ff.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., p. 288.

as a doctrinal basis for the proposed merger within the American Lutheran Conference and rejected membership in the National Council of Churches. The reasons for the rejection of Council membership were that such membership "does not necessarily follow membership in the World Council," that such membership would "involve a drastic change in the deep going polity in large areas of our church life," and that such membership would "increase the hindrances in present merger negotiations."³²

In the convention of 1954 the delegates faced some objections within their church on selective fellowship.

While Selective Fellowship presents a difficult administrative problem, the Committee on Union and Fellowship agreed that to revoke it now would do violence to church approved fellowship which it has fostered among Lutherans; and that to exchange it now for a declaration of total altar and pulpit fellowship with all Lutherans would involve major long range decisions by the Church which has declared that all approaches for fellowship with other Lutherans must be made on the basis of doctrinal discussions and considerations of church practice.³³

The convention then dealt with individual problems. Now that the American Lutheran Conference was dissolving, what relations should be observed with the Augustana Synod which was not going along with this merger? The convention expressed its desire to maintain full fellowship with that

³²Official Minutes of the Twelfth Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1952, p. 354.

³³Official Minutes of the Thirteenth Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1954, pp. 344f.

church body.³⁴ The convention then adopted the full Common Confession, parts I and II as a statement of agreement with the Missouri Synod. The convention repeated its expressed desire to discuss doctrine and practice with the United Lutheran Church. Finally, the delegates once again voted against membership in the National Council of Churches.³⁵

In connection with this section rejection of National Council membership, the convention expressed itself on relations with non-Lutheran Christians.

The American Lutheran Church realizes that she is not alone in the world. She finds herself living side by side with other Christian communions. This obligates her to find a God-pleasing way to live together with them in the light of her historic character by which she refrains from the practice of church fellowship at the price of compromising any truth.

The denial of church fellowship to any other Christian communion does not stem from a condemnatory spirit in her toward other churches who witness for Christ in a lost world. The ALC is motivated in her attitude by faithfulness to the truths and convictions she holds. . . .

Major problems arise in the American Lutheran Church when she tries to determine what relationship she should have with non-Lutheran communions in cooperative organizations such as the WCC and the NCCCUSA. Her present membership in the WCC allows her to explore the extent to which she may cooperate in this area without jeopardizing the distinctive Lutheran confessional position of the Lutheran Church.³⁶

³⁴Ibid., pp. 348ff.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 350ff.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 353ff.

In 1956 the convention recognized the United Testimony and the Report of the Joint Union Committee as demonstrating "their unity in faith, principles and purposes."³⁷ The convention then committed itself fully to union with the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church by a vote of 169 to 11. The Finish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America was invited to participate in the coming merger.³⁸

The convention received the report from its committee that

we are not one in practice with the synods of the Synodical Conference, but we are convinced that doctrinal unity exists between the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and our Church.³⁹

The convention also adopted a joint statement of the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church subcommittee, to the effect that there is no need for additional theological formulations.⁴⁰ As Chapter II has already pointed out, however, while this statement reflects the tone of the Washington Declaration rather than that of the Overture and the Minneapolis Theses it says nothing more than that the church bodies may engage in discussions

³⁷Official Minutes of the Fourteenth Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1956, p. 342.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 342f.

³⁹Ibid., p. 352.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 353ff.

on the goal and program of unity without further documents as a prerequisite to such discussions.⁴¹

The convention also asked the Joint Union Committee to take steps to preserve the "measure of fellowship and cooperation" which the merging churches now have with the Augustana Synod.⁴² Since the American Lutheran Church was (and still is) faced with the prospect of an Augustana Synod, with whom it has full fellowship, entering a union with the United Lutheran Church, with whom the American Lutheran Church has only selective fellowship, the convention took two steps to help meet this coming crisis. It expressed the hope that the Joint Union Committee will find it possible to negotiate with the bodies of the members of the United Lutheran--Augustana merger to effect a "federation which will include all major Lutheran bodies in America."⁴³ Secondly, the convention liberalized its position on selective fellowship, at least in wording.

Resolved, that the American Lutheran Church extend the hand of fellowship to all Lutheran church bodies who faithfully adhere to the Word of God and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, whose official declarations and congregational practice testify to their loyalty to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions; and be it further

⁴¹Supra, p. 45.

⁴²Official Minutes of the Fourteenth Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1956, pp. 353ff.

⁴³Ibid.

Resolved, that wherever congregations and pastors of the American Lutheran Church find that they are mutually agreed in confession and practice with congregations and pastors of other Lutheran church bodies, they may in good conscience practice fellowship in worship and work; and be it further

Resolved, that this action supercede all previous actions taken by the American Lutheran Church relative to Selective Fellowship.⁴⁴

This final statement of the resolution clarified the apparent discrepancy of constitutional interpretations between the resolutions of 1934 and 1946. This resolution in effect rescinds and takes precedent over the previous interpretations of the Constitution. Although the committee had originally recommended a statement referring to whole-hearted adherence to synodical statements of doctrine as a requirement for fellowship, that part of the resolution was not brought up for adoption.⁴⁵

The American Lutheran Church has shown great interest in inter-Lutheran relations. While the United Lutheran Church has been interested primarily in church union, the interest of this church body has been pulpit and altar fellowship. Great changes have taken place in regard to prerequisites for such fellowship. At times this church body seems to require complete doctrinal and practical agreement. At other times this communion makes it clear that it is impossible to agree on all explanations and

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 356.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 355f.

teachings of Scripture.

After many years of attempting to achieve church fellowship with the major Lutheran bodies of America through doctrinal discussion and theological declarations, the American Lutheran Church adopted the principle of selective fellowship: pulpit exchange and intercommunion with those Lutheran parishes and pastors who subscribe to the Confessions and doctrinal statements of their own body and apply their subscription loyally to their church practice.

This church body still requires an examination of doctrine and practice among synods as a prerequisite for church union. It has never listed just how much agreement in theological expression and practice is necessary for such union. An example of such agreement necessary for union, however, is given in the United Testimony.

This body has also in recent years attempted to outline some considerations in regard to cooperation with other Christians outside of Lutheranism. The principles are still quite weak and undeveloped, however, for the reasons for the rejection of membership in the National Council of Churches, both in 1952 and 1956 were extremely vague and nebulous.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NATIONAL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Primary sources were not available for the study of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church. According to the presupposition that the actual resolutions by church bodies in convention would form the most important data, there would ordinarily be some question as to whether a chapter on this church body should be included in this study. The only independent source available for the examination of this communion is a work by Pastor J. E. Nopola, a recent president of the church body. In this work he reviewed the past sixty years of his communion's history.

Since the history of this church body of Finnish descent has such a direct affect upon the principles and the practices of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, however, this body, the National Evangelical Lutheran Church, will be examined on the basis of this single secondary source.

Early in the history of this Lutheran group, an attempt was made to unite with the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, popularly known as the Suomi

Synod. Because of certain delays and some theological differences, nothing of a concrete nature developed from these early attempts.¹

At the convention of 1922, the subject of fraternal relations with the Missouri Synod was taken up. The Board of Directors was authorized to begin negotiations with Missouri representatives. At this time Pastor Salonen of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church expressed his disapproval of the Missouri Synod's policy against woman suffrage as an "insurmountable barrier to union." Several pastors joined him in "espousing the cause of woman's rights" while most of the clergymen of that body did not voice an opinion.²

In the convention of 1923 the delegates of this body were addressed by officials of the Missouri Synod. These officials, including President F. Pfotenhauer, convinced the convention that "true doctrinal unity existed between the two churches." Fraternal relations based on altar and pulpit fellowship were established with the Missouri Synod at this convention. The issue of woman suffrage was not discussed at this convention and was left unresolved.³

¹J. E. Nopola, Our Three Score Years, A Brief History of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church (Ironwood: National Publishing Company, 1958), p. 49.

²Ibid., p. 25.

³Ibid., pp. 25ff.

Following this convention, perhaps stimulated by certain attacks by the Missouri Synod upon the Finnish Lutheran state church, Pastor Salonen began some rather strong attacks upon the Missouri Synod.⁴ In order to avoid a possible rupture within the church body, the convention of 1924 declared an end to the deliberations with the Missouri Synod. This did not mean that fraternal relations were severed, however.⁵

Shortly after this convention, a dangerous threat to the unity of the church body came when a leader of the Gospel Association, an evangelically minded group within the state Church of Finland, arrived in America for a visit. The question arose whether or not to invite him to preach in National Evangelical pulpits. Thirty-three pastors favoring the Missouri Synod viewpoint would not accept him. Fourteen pastors who agreed with Pastor Salonen accepted him. The remaining sixteen pastors were uncertain.⁶ After this crisis was over, most of the pastors seemed to feel that a form of selective fellowship was the answer. Those who wished to associate with the representatives of the Gospel Association of the Church of Finland could do so. Those who wished to have

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 29.

⁶Ibid., p. 30.

fraternal relations with the Missouri Synod could make that choice also. Gradually, certain pastors left the church body for membership in the Suomi Synod, and others were "called home," leaving the rest of the clergy to settle down to quiet relations with the Missouri Synod.⁷

According to Pastor Nopola the situation has remained basically unchanged up to the present time. The National Evangelical Lutheran convention considered union with the Missouri Synod in 1956. Pastor Nopola reported two meetings with the Missouri Synod representatives. The representatives recognized that "doctrinal agreement has been confirmed," and that only the question of church government needs agreement. The representatives of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod asked that before union takes place the officials of the two bodies set as their "ultimate goal" the unity in practice on this issue of woman suffrage.⁸

Pastor Nopola seems to think that union with the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod is imperative. In this historical survey of his church body he states that union will have to come by necessity if not by choice. The small body cannot exist independently.⁹ The author, as president

⁷Ibid., p. 31.

⁸Ibid., p. 51.

⁹Ibid.

of his church body, told the Missouri Synod delegates at their synodical convention in 1956, "the time is not too far distant when we shall be an organic part of the Missouri Synod."¹⁰

The full implications of these relationships in the light of the primary evidence from the conventions of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod will be discussed in Chapter IX. It may be concluded at this point, on the basis of the limited and secondary evidence available, that the National Evangelical Lutheran Church does not require absolute agreement in doctrine and practice as a prerequisite to church fellowship or union. The difference of practice concerning woman suffrage, which many pastors of this church body found grounded in doctrine, has not hindered the pulpit and altar fellowship with the Missouri Synod, nor has it apparently hindered the considerations of organic union with the Missouri Synod on the part of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Yet, on the other hand, there seems to be some sort of a point of departure in doctrine and practice beyond which this church body will reject pulpit and altar fellowship. At present, its pastors apparently do not have pulpit and altar fellowship with the Church of Finland,

¹⁰ Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1956, p. 791.

although at one time many pastors observed such fellowship without censure. The bases for Christian cooperation with other groups has not been established by this report due to the lack of evidence.

CHAPTER IX

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH--MISSOURI SYNOD

At this point in the study of unity, church fellowship, and cooperation one of the principles outlined in the introduction should be repeated. Although some Lutheran church bodies, including The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, have stated that the general body is responsible for all sermons from its pulpits and all articles in its periodicals, this study views such sermons, articles, books, committee reports, etc. as secondary evidence.¹ The actual resolutions passed by the church body in convention will be considered primary evidence. Certainly, by selective quotation from either the Confessional Lutheran Publicity Bureau on one hand, or the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau on the other, one could draw completely opposite conclusions concerning the position of the Missouri Synod on unity, fellowship, and cooperation. The secondary evidence presented must be interpreted in the light of the actual synodical resolutions and not visa versa.

In 1917 the synodical convention adopted the report

¹Supra, p. 2.

of a committee which observed that the efforts being made by members of various synods to discuss and illiminate doctrinal differences were "laudable and worthy." Since there was such an "earnest and proper desire to remove . . . the doctrinal differences separating the several Lutheran synods," the convention authorized a committee to examine the resultant documents and offer appropriate advice.²

The convention of 1920 declared that, in agreement with the report of its committee, the theses adopted by the negotiating synods offered "a sufficient basis for agreement in this doctrine" of conversion. Since unity in the doctrine of election was not yet achieved, the convention declared itself ready, in conjunction with the Wisconsin Synod, to continue the doctrinal discussions and

recommended them to the intercessory prayers of its members in order that the praiseworthy aim of complete doctrinal union, and, God willing, of peaceful cooperation of said Synods may be achieved.³

Several things should be noted here. First, the convention used the term "union" in the sense of "unity" or

²Proceedings of the Thirtieth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1917, p. 77.

³Proceedings of the Thirty-First Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1920, p. 83.

"agreement." Although the Missouri Synod usually uses the word "unity" when referring to agreement in doctrine and "union" when referring to merger of church organization, at times these two terms are interchangeable, even as in the case of other Lutheran bodies. Secondly, "complete doctrinal union" seems to be the basis for "peaceful cooperation."

The convention of 1923 received the report of its committee on the doctrinal negotiations among the Joint Wisconsin, Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods. Although objections were raised to certain points in the doctrine of election, the convention resolved to continue the negotiations and elected another intersynodical committee, expressing the hope that "unity of faith" would be the end result.⁴

A report was given to the delegates on the discussion which took place between officials of the Missouri Synod and those of the Finnish National Evangelical Lutheran Church. Agreement in "principle doctrines" was reported. The basic point of division was the question of woman suffrage in the church. The convention expressed the expected "joy" over these desirable results and authorized

⁴Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Regular Meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1923, p. 83.

continued negotiations "that complete unity may be achieved between the two synods in all matters, also in the practical question of woman suffrage."⁵

This convention did not declare fraternal relations with this church body, nor did it authorize limited pulpit and altar relations. It did, however, extend to ministerial students of this Finnish church body the same educational privileges enjoyed by Missouri Synod seminarians at Missouri's seminaries.⁶ This could be considered the beginning of what developed into full spiritual cooperation and fraternal relations.

The committee dealing with Finnish relations reported to the convention of 1926 that the Finnish church body had broken off negotiations for union with the Missouri Synod. "Friendly relations" remained undisturbed, however, and this small Finnish church body cooperated spiritually with the Missouri Synod by sharing the same church buildings in certain localities for mission purposes, by sending two Finnish students to Missouri schools for ministerial training, and by publishing tracts through the resources of Concordia Publishing House.⁷

⁵Ibid., pp. 84f.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Proceedings of the Thirty-Third Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1926, pp. 141ff.

Synod resolved to continue a committee for further negotiations with the Finnish-American church body, "so that under God's blessing complete unity between the two synods may be achieved."⁸ Hence, in spite of the disturbance within this Finnish Church, the Missouri Synod planned continued negotiations whenever the Finnish representatives should be ready, and continued cooperation with this church body in spiritual matters.

More of a critical note was sounded in this convention concerning negotiations among the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo, Missouri and Joint Wisconsin Synods. The committee gave a fairly optimistic report, indicating that complete agreement among the negotiating Synods had been reached in the doctrines of conversion and election. The committee raised the question whether the adoption of the theses which were being written could be followed by a declaration of unity in doctrine and by fraternal recognition. The question was left unanswered.⁹

The convention recognized that all points in the theses were not yet clear and free from all error. The delegates advised simpler, shorter theses, especially on the subject of Christian fellowship.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., pp. 136ff.

We implore all Christians of our Synod diligently to beseech the Lord of the Church that a God-pleasing, perfect union in the Truth and in love be achieved to the glory of His name and the welfare of His Church.¹⁰

In 1929 the question of accepting or rejecting these Intersynodical Theses was presented to the convention by the Missouri Synod's Intersynodical Committee. This committee favored the theses and encouraged their adoption.

Failure to adopt some of the proposed changes was not due to any differences in doctrine between the colloquents, but to the fact that most of the colloquents considered the proposals liable to misunderstandings or superfluous. Important additions were also made We consider the question whether the theses can be adopted to be distinct from the question whether we can enter into fraternal relations with the synods with which we have been conferring. The latter is at present excluded by the connections into which, sad to say, these synods have entered and the fraternal relations which they maintain with Lutherans who are not faithful to the confessions. These theses are a matter by themselves, and Synod ought to take action on them.¹¹

The above reference to "Lutherans who are not faithful to the confessions," is in reference to the Norwegian Lutheran Church from which the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church severed relations. The Norwegian Lutheran Church entered into church fellowship with the synods of Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo in 1925 on the basis of a document now known as the Minneapolis

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 140f.

¹¹Proceedings of the Thirty-Fourth Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1929, p. 110.

Theses. According to this committee, then, the Missouri Synod cannot have church fellowship with another church body, even if doctrinal differences are settled, as long as that church body has fraternal relations with a third body with whom the Missouri Synod has no fraternal relations.

The Examining Committee, appointed by the convention to discuss these theses and give recommendations, presented an extremely negative report. Most of the specific criticism centered on election, the bone of contention with the Norwegian Lutheran Church. Their critical comments, however, also extended over the entire theses.

All chapters and a number of paragraphs are inadequate . . . at times they do not touch the point of controversy; at times they incline more to the position of our opponents than to our own . . . Much in the theses is not sufficiently simple to be understood by laymen--an unconditional necessity in confessional theses

Your committee considers it a hopeless undertaking to make these theses unobjectionable from the view of pure doctrine. It would be better to disregard them as a failure.¹²

This Examining Committee concluded its report to the convention by advising the delegates, in rather strong language, not to continue theological conferences with the Ohio, Iowa and Buffalo Synods since it was not desirable, under the circumstances to come to an agreement with them.

¹²Ibid., pp. 110f.

It now seems to your committee a matter of wisdom to desist from intersynodical conferences. By entering into a closer relationship with the adherents of the Norwegian Opgjøer, the opponents have given evidence that they do not hold our position in the doctrines of conversion and election. In view of this action further conferences would be useless and only create the impression as if we were endeavoring to come to an understanding, which is not the case.¹³

This statement by the Examining Committee was quoted in 1943 by the convention of the Wisconsin Synod in order to show that such an opinion used to be the position of "old Missouri." This erroneous conclusion will be discussed more completely in Chapter XII of this study.¹⁴

It is precisely against such an erroneous conclusion that this study has stressed that committee reports, essays, private expressions by officials, etc., are only secondary evidence. In this particular case the convention did not accept the recommendation of its Examining Committee, and hence, the opinion of the Examining Committee cannot be considered the voice of the Missouri Synod at this convention.

First, the convention had to reject the discredited Intersynodical Theses in such a way that the rejection would not become tantamount to an accusation of false doctrine toward the Missouri Synod representatives which

¹³Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁴Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1943, p. 68.

had helped to formulate these theses. Therefore, the convention by adopting the report of its committee on Intersynodical Matters acknowledged with thanks the progress which had been made in these theses in the presentation of correct scriptural doctrine and declared that the personal faith of the colloquents should not be called into question. This convention did not accept the advice of the Examining Committee that the Missouri Synod should not participate in further conferences, but it declared that such future conferences should take into account the exact point of controversy, pertinent history, and the fellowship which the Ohio and Iowa Synods had established with the Norwegian Lutheran Church.¹⁵ This convention in no way "closed the door" to future theological negotiations with other Lutheran bodies.

Finally, this convention noted that the "good relations" with the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran National Church have continued. The convention continued its spiritual cooperation with this church body and voted to assist their ministerial students with \$1,200 per year for their studies at Missouri Synod seminaries.¹⁶

¹⁵Proceedings of the Thirty-Fourth Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1929, pp. 112f.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 95.

The relations with this Finnish body continued to improve.¹⁷ The convention of 1932 received a list of minor corrections to a doctrinal paper which had been presented to the pastors of the Synod for their discussion and comment. The convention adopted this set of doctrinal statements as "a brief Scriptural statement of the doctrinal position of the Missouri Synod."¹⁸ This document, which has been known as "the" Brief Statement, defines unionism as "church fellowship with adherents of false doctrine" and states that the orthodox character of a church body is determined, not only by its official subscription, but also by "the doctrine which is actually taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications."¹⁹

The proposal was made at this convention to unite the member churches of the Synodical Conference into one church body. The delegates authorized a committee to study the question, discuss the matter with the other members of the Synodical Conference, and to report its findings

¹⁷ Proceedings of the Thirty-Fifth Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1932, p. 152.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁹ Doctrinal Declarations: A Collection of Official Statements on the Doctrinal Position of Various Lutheran Bodies in America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), p. 51.

to the next synodical convention. This convention said nothing about an investigation of doctrinal unity within the Synodical Conference. Such doctrinal unity was assumed.²⁰

This Committee on Organic Union reported to the convention of 1935 that the other synods of the Synodical Conference were unresponsive to the plan for merger. The Norwegian and Slovak Synods felt that differences in language did not permit an immediate merger. No other reasons were given.²¹ Once again the delegates rejoiced over the fine relations which the Missouri Synod retained with the Finnish Lutherans in the National Evangelical Lutheran Church.²²

The delegates to this convention noted that the American Lutheran Church was seeking to establish pulpit and altar fellowship with the Missouri Synod, and that the United Lutheran Church in America was inviting all Lutheran bodies to confer with them regarding establishment of closer relationships. The convention responded to these invitations by declaring a willingness to negotiate.

²⁰ Proceedings of the Thirty-Fifth Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1932, p. 164.

²¹ Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1935, p. 219.

²² Ibid., p. 220.

Resolved, that we declare our willingness to confer with other Lutheran bodies on problems of Lutheran union with a view towards effecting true unity on the basis of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions.²³

Several things should be noted in this resolution. First, even though the American Lutheran Church indicated that it was only interested in pulpit and altar fellowship rather than organic union, the Missouri Synod was willing to confer on the subject of "union." Secondly, while according to the Savannah Resolution the United Lutheran Church was willing to discuss unity in order to achieve union, the Missouri Synod was willing to discuss union in order to achieve doctrinal unity. Finally, it should be noted that the Missouri Synod, according to this resolution, was willing to discuss doctrine with other Lutheran synods---not on the basis of its Brief Statement---but on the basis of the Scriptures and the Confessions. This was the basis for which the United Lutheran Church was looking. On the other hand, the American Lutheran Church told its representatives to discuss doctrine on the basis of its Minneapolis Theses.²⁴

The reasons given by the convention for accepting these invitations to discuss unity and fellowship were that the Missouri Synod has "always recognized the duty

²³Ibid., p. 221.

²⁴Supra, p. 99.

and desirability of 'the conservation and promotion of the unity of the true faith'" and that "external union and cooperation is based upon internal unity, oneness in faith, confession, doctrine, and practice."²⁵

In the following chapters it will be shown that the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and the Norwegian Synod rejected the invitation to discussion offered by the United Lutheran Church in America. There was no report attempted to harmonize the reasons for their rejection and the above reasons for the Missouri Synod's acceptance of the United Lutheran invitation.

The Missouri Synod's Committee on Lutheran Union gave a very favorable report to the convention of 1938. According to this report, however, the negotiations did not seem to discuss the Scriptures and the Confessions as the resolution of 1935 directed them but their discussions seemed to center upon the Minneapolis Theses and the Brief Statement.²⁶

The representatives of the American Lutheran Church presented their Declaration, a supplement to and modification of the Brief Statement, with this introduction:

²⁵ Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1935, p. 221.

²⁶ Proceedings of the Thirty-Seventh Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1938, p. 221.

Having carefully discussed with representatives of the Honorable Synod of Missouri, in a number of meetings and on the basis of the Minneapolis Theses, the Chicago Theses, and the Brief Statement . . . the points of doctrine that have been in controversy between us or concerning which a suspicion of departure from the true faith has arisen, we now summarize what according to our conviction is the result of our deliberations . . .²⁷

The Declaration then declared acceptance of the Brief Statement with modifications and supplementary statements on certain points. This document asked the Missouri Synod to declare these modifications on the doctrines of the Antichrist, the conversion of Israel, the resurrection of the martyrs, the thousand year reign mentioned in Revelation 20, and the terminology concerning the church to be "not disruptive of church fellowship."²⁸ The Missouri Synod responded by adopting the report of its committee on Intersynodical and Doctrinal Matters.²⁹ This report found agreement in the doctrines of inspiration, predestination, conversion, Sunday, and the Means of Grace.

It is similarly gratifying that concerning the Holy Scriptures the Declaration of the American Lutheran Church representatives specifically and in opposition to some other Lutheran bodies emphasizes the verbal inspiration and the inerrancy of the Scriptures.³⁰

This report recognized the points for which the American

²⁷Ibid., pp. 221f.

²⁸Ibid., p. 226.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 228ff.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 228f.

Lutheran Church asked tolerance of interpretations and teachings. First, the Committee recognized that while the Missouri Synod teaches that the pope is the "very Anti-Christ for the past and the future," the synodical fathers have declared that deviation in this matter "need not be divisive of church-fellowship."³¹ With the same or similar terminology the Committee declared that toleration of the opinion that the nation of Israel may be saved, that there might be a special resurrection of the martyrs, and that Revelation 20 can be interpreted within limits in various ways is not necessarily divisive of church fellowship. For each of these points the Committee referred to various quotations in Lehre u. Wehre prior to 1880.

The Committee's report included this interesting footnote.

With reference to the term "synodical fathers": . . . this must not be understood in any way as if we were basing any doctrine on what the synodical fathers teach. We simply mention the fact that they consider some non-fundamental doctrines as not necessarily divisive of church-fellowship.³²

This report indicated that the American Lutheran Church wishes the right to speak of the "visible side of the Church" when referring to the "use of the Means of Grace."

³¹Ibid., pp. 229f.

³²Ibid., p. 229.

Your committee finds that our synodical fathers conceded that the Word and the Sacraments may in a certain sense be considered as belonging to the essence of the Church. Therefore, a difference in this point need not be divisive of church-fellowship when this expression, "the visible side of the Church," is understood in the light of our Synod's pronouncement by Dr. Walther in Das Buffaloer Kolloquium, 1866, p. 9.³³

In all other matters the committee found perfect agreement. Difference in some phraseology was recognized, but the members of the committee felt that such phrases and terms "contain the truth as expressed in the Scriptures and our Lutheran Confessional writings."³⁴

The convention declared the Brief Statement "together with the Declaration" and the "provisions of this entire report of Committee No. 16" as the "doctrinal basis for future church-fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church."³⁵ The committees are still to strive for full agreement in the points of divergent opinion and terminology. The convention also recognized that

for true unity we need not only this doctrinal agreement but also agreement in practice . . . where there is a divergence from Biblical, confessional practice, strenuous efforts must be made to correct such deviation. We refer particularly to the attitude toward the anti-Christian lodge, anti-

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., p. 230.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 231f.

Scriptural pulpit and altar fellowship, and all other forms of unionism.³⁶

After both Synods adopt the Brief Statement and the Declaration, this doctrinal basis for pulpit and altar fellowship is then to be presented to the bodies of the Synodical Conference for approval and to the bodies of the American Lutheran Conference to establish "doctrinal agreement with those church bodies with which the American Lutheran Church is in fellowship."³⁷

This convention received the favorable report on its relationship with the Finnish National Church, and it continued its spiritual cooperation with this small church body by its subsidy and a promise to see about permitting an instructor from this body to teach at the Springfield Seminary. This convention also declared that relations with this body have "continuously been friendly and fraternal."³⁸ This statement seems to have made official a de facto pulpit and altar relationship which had never been formally declared by any action of a previous convention. Nor had any recognition or consideration been given to this matter within the Synodical Conference. It is interesting that The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod would consider itself obligated to consult its sister

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 232f.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 234f.

synods of the Synodical Conference before declaring pulpit and altar fellowship with the American Lutheran Church, and yet, casually declare that fraternal relations have continuously existed with the National Evangelical Lutheran Church without bringing this matter before the Synodical Conference.

Finally, this convention took note of the breakdown in the negotiations with the United Lutheran Church in America over the question of inspiration.³⁹ Although this breakdown occurred over a declaration in the Brief Statement concerning Scriptural inerrancy in the areas of history, geography and secular matters, the convention still declared itself willing to continue negotiations with the United Lutheran representatives "on the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions."⁴⁰

This resolution of 1938 becomes even more interesting when in the convention of 1941 the representatives of the Missouri Synod reported to the delegates that

on account of the unwillingness of the ULCA commissioners to accept the paragraphs of the Brief Statement dealing with the doctrine of inspiration it seemed useless to us to invite them to meet us, and the ULCA commission likewise did not send us a request for a conference.⁴¹

³⁹Ibid., p. 227.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 233.

⁴¹Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1941, p. 286.

If such discussion with the United Lutheran Church were to take place on the basis of the Scriptures and the Confessions, then why should the negotiations have broken down over the rejection of certain expressions of the Brief Statement? The Missouri Synod representatives may have felt that the expressions in the Brief Statement were in harmony with the Scriptures and the Confessions and, therefore, by discussing the Brief Statement, they were also discussing the Scriptures and the Confessions.

The judgment of this committee which declared negotiations with the United Lutheran "useless" because that church body rejected certain points in the Brief Statement seems to be out of harmony, however, not only with the resolution of 1938, but also with a declaration by the convention of 1941 that the Missouri Synod is going to continue its efforts to achieve true unity in doctrine and practice "only on the basis of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions."⁴²

The Committee on Lutheran Church Union gave this convention a report on the latest developments in the relationship with the American Lutheran Church, and it outlined the pertinent sections in the 1940 convention of the American Lutheran Church. While according to

⁴²Ibid., p. 301.

the convention of the American Lutheran Church most of the points raised by the Missouri Synod representatives were satisfactorily answered by the American Lutheran commissioners,⁴³ the Missouri Synod committee left the impression that most of the American Lutheran explanations were unsatisfactory.⁴⁴

This committee then commented to the conventions concerning the Pittsburgh Agreement. The committee raised the question of how the American Lutheran Church could come to an agreement on Scripture with the United Lutheran Church which had rejected some of the Brief Statement's comments on inspiration, and yet maintained agreement with the Missouri Synod on that doctrine. The American Lutheran commissioners maintained that the United Lutheran Church had receded from its former opposition to verbal inspiration. This explanation did not satisfy the Missouri Synod representatives, however, since the Pittsburgh Agreement contained "loopholes for a denial of the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures."⁴⁵

The general evaluation of the American Lutheran convention of 1940 given by the Committee on Lutheran Church

⁴³ Supra. p. 103.

⁴⁴ Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1941, pp. 277ff.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 278ff.

Union was quite critical. The committee was especially concerned about the statement, "not every traditional explanation of a Scriptural statement is binding," made by the American Lutheran convention in defense of its earlier statement that it was not necessary to agree in every non-fundamental doctrine for church fellowship.

The Missouri Synod committee felt that these words might

create the impression as though a clear-cut statement acknowledging the binding force of all Scripture passages were a dangerous statement to make and required some limiting, or restrictive, additions. We are all the more compelled to say this because the position that the traditional explanation of a Scripture passage is not necessarily the right one has never been questioned in the Lutheran Church.⁴⁶

This committee was also disturbed by the statement of the American Lutheran Church that it has no intention of leaving the American Lutheran Conference.

It is this turn of events which fills us with disappointment and alarm. In all sincerity we had hoped that the American Lutheran Church would join us in our endeavor to hold high the banner of uncompromising loyalty to the Word of God and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, both in respect to doctrine and practice⁴⁷

This statement went on to imply that apparently some leaders of the American Lutheran Church do not have such loyalty.⁴⁸ This evaluation seems to have overlooked the

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 280ff.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 284ff.

⁴⁸Ibid.

fact that the American Lutheran Conference had established the Minneapolis Theses as a doctrinal basis for church fellowship. If the Missouri Synod wished the American Lutheran Church to leave the American Lutheran Conference, the only possible way to accomplish this would be to demonstrate that the Minneapolis Theses were in error or inadequate. It would not follow that simply because the American Lutheran Church subscribed to the Brief Statement in the light of its Declaration that it should now withdraw from the American Lutheran Conference. It is possible that members on the Missouri Synod committee assumed that the American Lutheran Church rescinded the Minneapolis Theses when they accepted the Brief Statement. It is also quite possible that these committee members quietly ignored the Minneapolis Theses after the earlier preliminary discussions and hoped that they would go away.

While this committee raised the question of American Lutheran loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions, it admitted that if some members of that church body do not agree with the Missouri Synod on certain minor points that such a situation "does not necessarily make fellowship impossible."⁴⁹ Finally, this committee reported to the convention concerning the objections raised by the Norwegian Synod and the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and the suggestion

⁴⁹Ibid.

by these synods that negotiations with the American Lutheran Church be suspended under the circumstances.⁵⁰

The convention, in response to the information given in the report of its Committee on Lutheran Church Union, resolved that true unity in doctrine and practice be based upon the Word of God and the Confessions alone. The delegates did not take the advice of the sister synods of the Synodical Conference to suspend negotiations with the American Lutheran Church, but resolved to continue these negotiations to achieve doctrinal unity. Such negotiations in the past have accomplished some good, and as long as the American Lutheran representatives request continued doctrinal discussions, it is God's will that Christians "strive for doctrinal unity," the convention stated.⁵¹

Such new negotiations should attempt to formulate one, clearly written document. This single document would not be considered a repudiation of "any doctrinal statement made in our Brief Statement," the convention declared, but some statements in the latter document may need to be "more sharply defined or amplified."⁵²

These resolutions concluded by stating that such a

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 293.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 301f.

⁵²Ibid.

single document would be submitted to the Synodical Conference by the Missouri Synod and to the American Lutheran Conference by the American Lutheran Church after its formulation and acceptance by the two church bodies. The member churches of the Synodical Conference were invited by these resolutions to enter the negotiations.⁵³

The Norwegian Synod and the Joint Synod of Wisconsin registered official protests with the Missouri Synod convention of 1944 against its continued negotiations with the American Lutheran Church. The Norwegian Synod added that the resolutions passed by the Missouri Synod in 1938 concerning relations with the American Lutheran Church were "church divisive." While the resolutions of 1938 consider certain points to be not necessarily divisive of church fellowship, the Norwegian Synod holds that it is necessary for church fellowship to agree in all matters of doctrine.⁵⁴

The Joint Synod of Wisconsin emphasized that the Missouri Synod, by continuing negotiations with the American Lutheran Church, was inconsistent "with the course followed by your Synod in an earlier stage of these intersynodical negotiations." The communication from the

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 302f.

⁵⁴ Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1944, p. 241.

Wisconsin Synod then cited the advice of the Examining Committee to the convention of 1929 to cease negotiations.⁵⁵ However, this advice was not adopted by that convention.⁵⁶ Hence, this advice that the Missouri Synod should cease negotiations was not a "course followed" by the synodical body in earlier years, but it was rather a personal opinion held by some within the church body.

The Missouri Synod convention responded to the objections of its sister synods that, since the Doctrinal Affirmation has been completed by the Missouri Synod and American Lutheran Church representatives, no further negotiations will take place until the Synodical Conference has taken action on this document. If this new doctrinal basis for fellowship is approved, said the convention, it will supercede the resolutions and previous documents on this subject from 1938 to 1941.⁵⁷ In this way the convention felt that it had met the objections to negotiation and to the resolutions from 1938.

In response to a number of objections and questions on prayer at intersynodical meetings, the convention declared that while no prayer fellowship existed with the

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 240f.

⁵⁶ Supra, p. 129.

⁵⁷ Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1944, p. 250.

American Lutheran Church,

joint prayer at intersynodical conferences, asking God for His guidance and blessing upon the deliberations and discussions of His Word, does not militate against the resolutions . . . provided such prayer does not imply denial of truth or support of error.⁵⁸

Finally, this convention was faced with a number of memorials asking for synodical membership in the National Lutheran Council. The convention responded by declaring that the constitution of the National Lutheran Council would involve the Missouri Synod in unionistic principles and practices. The delegates directed its praesidium and the Doctrinal Unity Committee to study the constitution of the Council and determine the areas in which the Missouri Synod could collaborate "in such matters as involve no violation of conscience and no denial of the truth."⁵⁹

This study was not ready for the convention of 1947. Therefore, the convention of that year declared that the policy and activity of the National Lutheran Council was not clearly defined, that the Missouri Synod was still willing to cooperate with the Council in matters "agreeing with Synod's principles," and that a special committee

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 251.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 252.

should continue the study of relationship with the Council.⁶⁰

This convention of 1947 also faced the new developments taking place within the American Lutheran Church. First, the American Lutheran Church rejected the joint doctrinal statement known as the Doctrinal Affirmation. Representatives of that church body told Missouri Synod representatives that this document canceled the position for which the Declaration of the American Lutheran Church stood.⁶¹ Since the American Lutheran Church rejected the Doctrinal Affirmation, this document was not considered by the Missouri Synod convention.

Secondly, the American Lutheran Church had failed to present the twin documents, the Brief Statement and the Declaration to its sister synods in the American Lutheran Conference for their evaluation and consideration.⁶² Instead, the Missouri Synod committee on Doctrinal Unity reported that the American Lutheran Church "agreed to" the Overture on Unity produced by the American Lutheran Conference.⁶³

⁶⁰ Proceedings of the Fortieth Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1947, pp. 536f.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 494f.

⁶² Ibid., p. 498.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 497.

According to the Missouri Synod committee, this Overture proposes that

each Lutheran body remain faithful to its particular confessional statement, without subscribing for itself to the confession of any other Lutheran church body. Thus, by ignoring the existing differences in doctrine, fellowship is to be established by resolution, rather than by actual agreement in doctrine as Scripture requires.⁶⁴

This evaluation is not quite fair to the Overture.

This document assumes that there are no doctrinal differences dividing Lutherans from one another, providing that those Lutherans accept the particular official documents listed by the Overture. The position of this Overture is that the Minneapolis Theses, the Brief Statement, the Declaration, and the Pittsburgh Agreement are all in "essential accord with one another."⁶⁵

Finally, since the American Lutheran Church recognized that not all Lutherans of the other church bodies live up to the principles and practices of these particular documents, the American Lutheran Church adopted the principle of selective fellowship with those particular parishes and pastors who are loyal to their church body's particular documents.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Supra, p. 55.

⁶⁶ Proceedings of the Fortieth Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1947, pp. 498f.

The Missouri Synod convention reacted to the American Lutheran Church's rejection of the Affirmation and the acceptance of the Overture by declaring that

the 1938 resolutions shall no longer be considered as a basis for the purpose of establishing fellowship with the American Lutheran Church . . .⁶⁷

It must be noted, however, that these resolutions were so treated not because of any false doctrine therein, but because the conditions outlined in them were not fulfilled by the American Lutheran Church, and because they were being seriously misunderstood. However, the convention resolved to continue negotiations with the representatives of the American Lutheran Church in order to obtain doctrinal unity, and it advised the negotiations make use of existing doctrinal statements and make new statements if necessary.⁶⁸ The Missouri Synod also rejected church fellowship with the American Lutheran Church at this time since "full agreement in doctrine and practice . . . has not been reached."⁶⁹

This convention also responded negatively to the idea of selective fellowship. Every pastor and parish in the general body has pledged to act in agreement with fellow members. Hence, every pastor and parish has

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 510.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 501.

"foregone the right to establish fellowship with another church body independently" of the Missouri Synod. To do so, said the convention, would violate the "law of love and the spirit of fellowship."⁷⁰

Finally, this convention reaffirmed the earlier resolution permitting joint prayer under certain circumstances and distinguishing such prayer from church fellowship which involves prayer and worship among congregations.⁷¹ Since opposition to joint prayer continued in the form of various memorials and complaints, the convention of 1950 resolved to hold a full discussion of the question of prayer fellowship and joint prayer in abeyance until a treatise on "Prayer Fellowship" could be published.⁷²

This convention of 1950 was also faced with a multitude of memorials asking for the Synod to condemn the St. Louis faculty opinion that Romans 16:17 has been misapplied, the Statement made by forty-four pastors of the Missouri Synod asking for a more loving attitude toward other Lutherans, the essays and writings of several pastors and professors within the general body, the

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 519.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 517.

⁷²Proceedings of the Forty-First Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1950, p. 659.

alleged lack of discipline within the Synod, the newly formed Common Confession which constituted the last doctrinal statement of Missouri Synod and American Lutheran representatives, and many other issues.⁷³

The convention responded to these objections in various ways. First, it approved the traditional explanation of Romans 16:17-18. This verse was a condemnation of "joint religious work and worship" with all who "persistently adhere to false doctrine." The use of this Bible passage in the Brief Statement was declared "Scripturally correct." Yet, this convention admitted that "there may be legitimate differences of opinion in purely exegetical matters" involving grammar, word meanings, and the like. Pastors and people should continue to study this passage from Scripture that God's message may "always be held and properly applied among us."⁷⁴

At the same time, the Synod refused to condemn the Statement of forty-four Missouri Synod pastors who in 1945 lamented this interpretation of Romans 16:17-18. This document points out that Lutherans who differ from the Missouri Synod in some points of non-fundamental doctrines are not necessarily "belly servers" who love to "deceive the hearts of the simple." The convention simply

⁷³Ibid., pp. 587-634.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 655ff.

resolved to permit the study of issues raised by the Statement to continue. Objections to the Statement and its signers were referred to proper "channels."⁷⁵ Hence, the views of the signers were still tolerated within the Missouri Synod. One of the opinions expressed in this document restates the position of the resolutions of 1938 in clear language.

We affirm our conviction that in keeping with the historic Lutheran tradition and in harmony with the Synodical resolution adopted in 1938 regarding Church fellowship, such fellowship is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church.⁷⁶

Although the resolutions of 1938 were no longer in effect, the points and principles presented in them have never been condemned by the Missouri Synod. By tolerating the Statement and its signers, the Missouri Synod continued to tolerate these principles from 1938 within the general body.

The delegates, by a vast majority vote, adopted the Common Confession as a "statement of these doctrines in harmony with Scriptures." With the adoption of this document by the American Lutheran Church, it would become a statement of agreement on these doctrines. The convention added that more amplification of some doctrines

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 658.

⁷⁶Speaking the Truth in Love: Essays Related to A Statement, Chicago, 1945 (Chicago: The Willow Press, n.d.), p. 9.

may be needed in the future. This document was to be presented to the Synodical Conference by the Missouri Synod and to the American Lutheran Conference by the American Lutheran Church.⁷⁷ However, this document was not to be the basis for an immediate church fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church.

The committee which had been assigned the task of evaluating the National Lutheran Council and reporting such evaluations gave a majority and a minority report to this convention. The members of this committee found the constitution of the National Lutheran Council to be above reproach.

The Constitution of the National Lutheran Council as it reads contains nothing which would make it sinful for the Missouri Synod to sign

Furthermore, the provision in the National Lutheran Council Constitution "that a Participating Body may determine the extent of its participation in the work of the Council" would make it possible for the Missouri Synod to become a member of the National Lutheran Council and to participate in one or the other purely external objective(s) without violating its principles concerning unionistic services.⁷⁸

The majority on this committee, however, felt that many of the activities of the National Lutheran Council involved the spiritual work of the Church. This in turn

⁷⁷ Proceedings of the Forty-First Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1950, pp. 585ff.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 675f.

would involve the principles governing pulpit, altar and prayer fellowship.⁷⁹ These members of the committee asked: what would be gained by joining the Council? Nothing, they answered, that could not be obtained by cooperating with it from without. They postulated that the Missouri Synod would only be an irritant in the Council and needlessly offend the bodies of the Synodical Conference by joining the Council now.⁸⁰

A lay member of this committee, Mr. W. C. Dickmeyer, presented a minority report. The Missouri Synod would not become an irritant in the Council, he contended, if it spoke the truth in a loving manner. The Synod would compromise nothing by joining, and hence, there is no reason why the Missouri Synod cannot affiliate.⁸¹ Finally, Mr. Dickmeyer cited question 216 of the Synodical Catechism to show that Lutheran Christians normally can and should pray with one another.

Why are we to say "Our Father" . . . because all believers are in Christ the children of one Father and should therefore pray for and with each other.⁸²

The synodical convention did not accept Mr. Dickmeyer's recommendation, and it ignored his arguments. The delegates

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 679ff.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 682ff.

⁸²Ibid., p. 683.

resolved, as in earlier conventions, to cooperate with the Council "wherever it can be done without compromising Scriptural principles," but they rejected affiliation with the Council because many of its activities are "unionistic" and because it engages in the work of a Church.⁸³ It should be noted, however, that this convention did not take Mr. Dickmeyer nor his minority report to task. The delegates simply ignored the dissenting opinion.

The Common Confession, Part II, was presented to the convention of 1953 along with a host of memorials asking for the reconsideration and condemnation of both parts I and II. Most of these memorials were from the same people or the same group of people who had complained about prayer fellowship, doctrinal laxity, and other matters to earlier conventions. The convention dealt with most of these memorials by referring them to earlier resolutions or to the proper channels.⁸⁴ The delegates resolved to postpone action on Part II of the Common Confession, however, until the pastors and parishes of the Missouri Synod had an opportunity to more carefully examine the addition.⁸⁵

The Common Confession has some interesting statements

⁸³Ibid., p. 692.

⁸⁴Proceedings of the Forty-Second Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1953, pp. 526ff.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 528.

on the subject of unity, fellowship and cooperation.

We dare not condone error or have altar and pulpit fellowship and unscriptural cooperation with erring individuals, church bodies, or church groups that refuse to be corrected by God's Word. We must also be alert . . . to establish and maintain fellowship with those whom He has made one with us in the faith . . .⁸⁶

Part II of the Common Confession acknowledges one as a "brother in the Lord" if he "acknowledges the Holy Scriptures as his only authority in all matters of faith and life and conforms thereto." Any false doctrine or omission of true doctrine creates divisions in the Church. Toleration of such false doctrine also disrupts the Church's unity.⁸⁷

The convention referred the question of "What is a Doctrine?" to the two seminaries for a more complete definition and discussion.⁸⁸ This resolution seemed to imply that even though the Missouri Synod knew what a doctrine is (because it was using the term "doctrine" all the time), a careful definition and description of the term needed proper attention.

The convention also resolved to continue doctrinal discussions and negotiations with the American Lutheran Church in spite of the opposition from certain quarters.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 505.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 516.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 539.

It gave a number of reasons for this decision: (a) Progress has been made toward doctrinal unity by past negotiations; (b) Such negotiations offer an opportunity to give a Christian witness; (c) The Church authorities have already planned the next meeting; (d) The committee is looking forward to a discussion of the United Testimony which is to serve as the doctrinal basis for the merger among the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church; (e) Such negotiations are a fulfillment of one of the objectives of the Synodical Conference, "to strive for true unity in doctrine and practice among Lutheran church bodies."⁸⁹

Finally, the subject of possible membership in the Lutheran World Federation came before this assembled church body for the first time. A committee of three was appointed to study the constitution, objectives and practices of the Lutheran World Federation and report its findings concerning possible membership in or cooperation with the Federation in time for a thorough pastoral examination prior to the convention of 1956.⁹⁰

The report of this committee of three came out too late for a thorough examination by pastoral conferences

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 534f.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 563.

prior to the convention of 1956. According to this committee report, the Lutheran World Federation was a Church because it was doing the work of a Church. Since the Federation was a Church, and since its component members were obviously disunited in doctrine, the Missouri Synod could not affiliate itself in this federation. Such affiliation would involve pulpit and altar fellowship at least indirectly, and hence, the affiliation would constitute unionism.⁹¹

The convention basically agreed with the evaluation of its committee and "respectfully declined" the invitation to join the federation. Membership, the convention stated, would commit the Missouri Synod to cooperation involving a "union in spiritual matters with groups not in doctrinal agreement" with the Missouri Synod. However, the Synod stood ready to discuss this rejection and its reasons with the representatives of the Lutheran World Federation.⁹² According to this resolution, then, the Missouri Synod cannot cooperate with others in spiritual matters when such church bodies are not in doctrinal agreement.

This convention received another invitation from the

⁹¹Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1956, pp. 528ff.

⁹²Ibid., p. 538.

United Lutheran Church and the Augustana Synod to "consider such organic union as will give real evidence of our unity in the faith."⁹³ Naturally, this invitation was "respectfully declined" by the convention since the Missouri Synod did not believe that such unity was sufficient for union. The "unity now existing" was not the same as "doctrinal unity" in the eyes of the convention. Yet, the convention was willing to meet with the inviting synods and discuss the differences in order to resolve them.⁹⁴ Here once again, the Missouri Synod stood ready to negotiate, even though the church bodies in question have entirely different presuppositions on the questions of unity and fellowship requirements. The resolution added that the other members of the Synodical Conference be invited to such discussions when they are held.⁹⁵

The delegates also faced the question of what to do with the Common Confession, in which Part II was still awaiting synodical resolution, now that the American Lutheran Church was obviously going to merge with other church bodies who had not subscribed to the Common Confession. The convention first declared this document, Parts I and II, to be in complete agreement with Scripture

⁹³Ibid., p. 519.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid.

and the Confessions, and then it resolved that the Common Confession cannot be regarded as a functioning basis for pulpit and altar fellowship.⁹⁶ It is not clear just what position this gives the Common Confession when compared to other basic doctrinal theses, such as the Brief Statement. The Brief Statement is also viewed by the Missouri Synod as being in complete agreement with Scripture and the Confessions. Yet, this document also has not been regarded or employed as a functioning basic document toward the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowship with other church bodies.⁹⁷

When this convention received the reports that the Norwegian Synod had broken fraternal relations with the Missouri Synod and that the Joint Synod of Wisconsin was preparing to sever relations, it produced a rather lengthy resolution in contrast to earlier resolutions which had merely asked the president of Synod to answer the objections by letter. This time the convention expressed its regret over any "lovelessness or lack of brotherliness" which may have come from the Missouri Synod. It promised to make every effort to "avoid that which is wrong and to become more firmly established in that which is right." It was recognized that each body in the Synodical Conference

⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 504f.

⁹⁷Supra, p. 144.

accepts the pronouncements of Scripture as final, and yet, there exists "a difference of interpretation and practice."⁹⁸

This seemed to come close to a candid admission that doctrinal as well as practical differences existed within the Synodical Conference. If there is a line between a "difference of interpretation" of Scripture and a difference in a "doctrine" or formulation of Scriptural revelation, that line appears thin. Yet, the Missouri Synod has no desire to sever pulpit and altar fellowship with synods within the Synodical Conference in spite of these differences in "interpretation" and practice. The resolution continued by calling for more discussions, negotiations, and the formulation of documents "concerning doctrine and practice" within the Synodical Conference. The convention promised that negotiations with other church bodies would not be initiated without inviting the other synods of the Synodical Conference to participate.⁹⁹

As the convention affirmed the principle that some differences in "interpretation" and practice are not divisive of church fellowship in the above resolutions, it reaffirmed this same principle in its approval of the

⁹⁸ Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1956, pp. 516f.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 517.

report of the Advisory Committee on Doctrine and Practice. This committee was appointed earlier to examine an essay given by Dr. Wm. Arndt about which there had been accusations of false doctrine. The convention approved this report on doctrine and practice as a correct evaluation of the Arndt essay.¹⁰⁰

This report which the convention approved agreed with the Arndt essay, with a few modifications, on all but one point. The report agreed that the terminology "visible side of the Church" may be a matter of terminology. It agreed that slight differences concerning the resurrection of the martyrs, the conversion of the Jews, and the beginning of the thousand year reign need not be regarded as divisive of church fellowship. It concurred with the opinion that we identify the Papacy as the Antichrist on the basis of Scripture and history. It agreed that error in non-fundamental doctrines is not necessarily divisive of church fellowship, although the report emphasized that such a statement did not mean indifference to teachings of Scripture. When shown that certain teachings are contrary to Scripture, such errors cannot be persisted in or the church body has no respect for Scriptural authority.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 525.

¹⁰¹The Advisory Committee on Doctrine and Practice, A Report to the Praesidium of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (n.p., 1956), p. 28.

The end result of the convention's approval of this report was simply a reaffirmation of the theological points made in the resolutions of 1938.

A rather startling resolution was also passed by this convention. The delegates declared that every interpretation of documents approved by Synod "which would be in disagreement with the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Brief Statement" are rejected.¹⁰² This resolution was in response to the barrage of memorials criticizing the Common Confession. The question is left unanswered whether this resolution applies to all synodical resolutions as well as the Common Confession. Also does this resolution apply only to private "interpretations" or to actual resolutions and documents which may contain statements inconsistent with the Brief Statement? Many within the Missouri Synod have consistently accused the Synod of violating the Brief Statement by admitting that certain non-fundamental doctrines are not necessarily divisive of church fellowship. Many individuals would claim that the Brief Statement makes divergencies in the doctrines of Anitchrist, the resurrection of martyrs, etc., divisive of church fellowship. This resolution, given such a latter interpretation, could

¹⁰²Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1956, p. 546.

resolve the apparent inconsistencies between the Brief Statement and many resolutions already discussed in this chapter.

In reaction to a resolution by the Synodical Conference defining unionism one memorial requested the Missouri Synod to reconsider such a definition. The convention responded to this request by directing the seminaries of the Missouri Synod to study the question of unionism and make the results of this study available to the members of the general church body by 1958.¹⁰³ This study has not yet been made public. This resolution of the convention, however, did not direct itself to the definition given by the Synodical Conference. In fact it treated the memorial as if the criticism were directed toward resolutions of the Missouri Synod rather than the resolution of the Synodical Conference.

Whereas, however, implications and interpretations have been attached to these expressions of Synod which have disturbed the consciences of some¹⁰⁴

A possible reason for this course of action is that the Missouri Synod felt that it would disturb the peace which remained in the Synodical Conference to permit this memorial to remain directed against the Conference. The restudying of the unionism issue, therefore, was treated

¹⁰³Ibid., pp. 549f.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 550.

as an internal affair within the Missouri Synod rather than as a doctrinal question concerning the Synodical Conference.

This convention then passed a resolution criticizing "intemperate and unbrotherly expressions" in certain unofficial publications with the church body. It requested the Synod's officials to admonish the editors who offend in this respect.¹⁰⁵ The resolution places a new interpretation on a comment in the Brief Statement. The Brief Statement claims that an orthodox church body is responsible for its publications. If publications persistently destroy the unity of the church through its articles, then the orthodoxy of the general body is called into question.¹⁰⁶ This resolution, however, speaks of "unofficial publications within Synod."¹⁰⁷ Thus, the implication seems to be given that disruptive articles in official publications of the church body would call into question synodical orthodoxy, but unofficial publications do not necessarily do this. This could be a solution for the difficulty the Missouri Synod faces with rival publications within the body presenting various views in doctrine and practice.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 553.

¹⁰⁶Supra, p. 131.

¹⁰⁷Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1956, p. 553.

Finally, this convention faced the issue of woman suffrage in the Missouri Synod. After hearing a committee report on this subject which stated that it did not find woman suffrage "forbidden in express words in the Scriptures," the convention urged

any congregation in the membership of Synod now, or applying for membership, which grants woman suffrage, to reconsider this practice in the light of Scripture . . . and to conform to the historic position of Synod in this matter . . .¹⁰⁸

The convention refused to call woman suffrage sinful, but advised strongly against it in the light of the traditional interpretation of Scripture by the Missouri Synod. It is ironic that in this same convention President J. E. Nopola of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church, a church body which openly permits woman suffrage, told the convention that "the time is not too far distant when we shall be an organic part of the Missouri Synod." He also mentioned that "our bodies have been in fellowship since 1923."¹⁰⁹

It must be remembered that the Missouri Synod had never formally declared church fellowship with this body. Fraternal relations simply seemed to grow into reality starting with the convention of 1923. President Nopola also personally admitted after this convention that he was informed by Missouri Synod representatives that unity in

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 570.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 791.

the practice of woman suffrage should take place before organic union.¹¹⁰ Hence, according to the Missouri Synod, this issue of woman suffrage is not a barrier to church fellowship, but it is a roadblock to organic union.

The personal views of members in church bodies, even statements by leaders within these bodies, cannot be given the same importance as the actual synodical resolutions, as has been stated repeatedly. In 1954 the Missouri Synod was unofficially represented by the Reverend J. H. Gockel at an "All Lutheran Free Conference." Pastor Gockel proposed three "Basic Principles for Lutheran Unity." He proposed that unity be consummated on the Bible as the Word of God, on the Lutheran Confessions wherever these Confessions restate that which is "expressedly taught in the Bible," and on an evangelical application of Biblical principles and of brotherly admonition.¹¹¹ Even the principles of the United Lutheran Church in America go further than this.¹¹²

President J. W. Behnken of the Missouri Synod drew nationwide attention in the winter of 1959 when he rejected a proposal by the National Lutheran Council for an "exploratory meeting . . . to examine present cooperative activities

¹¹⁰Supra, p. 119.

¹¹¹J. H. Gockel, "Our Common Ground," an address to the All Lutheran "Free Conference," found in the All Lutheran Conference, 1954, pp. 32ff.

¹¹²Supra, p. 20.

in American Lutheranism and the possibility for extension of such activities."¹¹³ President Behnken apparently assumed that such discussions would ignore questions of doctrine. In this connection President Behnken expressed his personal opinion that the doctrinal positions of the merging bodies within the Council were in a "state of flux."¹¹⁴ This study was not able to substantiate whether or not verbal assurance was given to Dr. Behnken that doctrinal issues would be included in the proposed discussions. The original letter by Dr. P. C. Empie, executive secretary of the Council, did not mention the specific topic of doctrinal issues, but it did speak of examining both the cooperative activities among Lutherans and the "possibility for extension of such activities." In such a discussion it would be difficult to keep out doctrinal considerations.

Dr. Empie assured Dr. Behnken in a second letter that the Council was also interested in "doctrinal soundness as a basis for all church relationship." In response to this second letter, Dr. Behnken informed Dr. Empie that the Missouri Synod

has always expressed not only a willingness but an ardent desire for meetings which would make doctrinal

¹¹³"Open Forum," American Lutheran, XLIII (March, 1959), 67.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

discussions a primary item on the agenda of the meeting: and today the Missouri Synod re-emphasizes its willingness and readiness to do just that under similar conditions and propitious circumstances.¹¹⁵

Perhaps Dr. Behnken had the difficulties of the Synodical Conference in mind when he mentioned "propitious circumstances." He listed in an earlier letter that the striving of the Synodical Conference bodies for greater harmony in "doctrine and practice" was one of the reasons for the declination of the National Lutheran Council invitation.¹¹⁶

In the various official resolutions of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod clear distinctions are not always made among the concepts of unity, union, fellowship, and cooperation. Occasionally resolutions referred to union when they meant unity, and visa versa. Sometimes, when the subject of discussion was church fellowship or cooperation the resolutions and decisions of the conventions spoke as if the subject were organic union. The very name of the Synod's committee negotiating doctrinal unity in the 1930's, the Committee on Lutheran Union, bears out this conclusion. This committee invariably dealt with fellowship and agreement in doctrine, but not a consideration of organic merger.

¹¹⁵"News of the Church in the World," Lutheran Witness, LXXVIII (March, 1959), 123.

¹¹⁶"Open Forum," op. cit., p. 67.

Such a confusion of identification can have important consequences. If the proposal to "cooperate" or to have "fellowship" brings to mind the immediate picture of organic union, then the standards for organic union invariably become imposed upon the simple issue of cooperation or fellowship.

The term fellowship, however, has usually been used by the synodical conventions in the technical sense of pulpit and altar relations with other church bodies. Very often the concept of "prayer fellowship" was specifically included in the term "fellowship." Joint prayer has consistently been separated from prayer fellowship in the thinking of the conventions, so that the requirements for prayer fellowship are not superimposed upon all instances of individual Christians from various church bodies praying with one another.

The concept of cooperation has invariably been used by the conventions in the restricted sense of "externals" or "non-spiritual" matters. The conventions have not yet faced the issue of the exact deliniation between things "spiritual" and things "external," but the conventions have often implied that in "spiritual" cooperation lies the exercise of either pulpit, altar or prayer fellowship.

How much agreement in doctrine and practice is necessary before church union can take place? Before church fellowship can be declared? Before "spiritual" cooperation

can be put into effect? At times, the implication seemed to be given in the resolutions of the Synod that the same prerequisite existed for union, fellowship, and cooperation, namely complete unity in doctrine and practice. The specific resolutions and actions discussed in this chapter, however, do not bear out such an implication.

Fairly complete agreement seems to be necessary in practice as well as in doctrine before church union can take place. Woman suffrage within parishes appears to be a barrier to the proposed union with the National Evangelical Lutheran Church. Yet, this question has been handled by the Synod's representatives. The conventions have never spoken on this subject relative to church union. The question might be raised, if this question of woman suffrage is a barrier to union, then why did the 1956 convention permit woman suffrage to continue its existence within the general body? Parishes tolerating woman suffrage were only "urged" to "reconsider."¹¹⁷

This chapter has quoted many resolutions of Synod which seem to state that complete agreement in doctrine and practice is a prerequisite for church fellowship. Unionism consists of church fellowship with adherents of false doctrine. A heterodox church body is marked also by its false practice and toleration of error. Yet,

¹¹⁷Supra, p. 167.

at the same time, other resolutions and actions of the Missouri Synod clearly indicate that certain variations in doctrine, terminology, and practice are not necessarily divisive of church fellowship. These variations are not in "open questions" but clearly in the area of non-fundamental doctrines." This principle was very clearly stated in the convention of 1938 and reaffirmed in 1956 by the acceptance of the Advisory Committee on Doctrine and Practice Report. The conventions have made it clear that such deviations are never automatically non-divisive of fellowship, but they can be non-divisive of such fellowship. If a church body deviates on a non-fundamental doctrine, which has been considered not necessarily divisive, in such a way that it shows no respect for clear teachings of Scripture, then such a deviation is divisive of fellowship. If, on the other hand, a church body disagrees on such a non-fundamental doctrine because, while the body bows to the Word of God, it has serious exegetical or practical questions, then such a disagreement does not void church fellowship.

It is this principle which permits the Missouri Synod to remain within the Synodical Conference during its present stresses and strains in the areas of doctrine and practice. All members of the Synodical Conference are willing to bow to the Word of God and submit to what it clearly says. The deviations among the bodies of the

Synodical Conference are in the areas of interpretation, explanation, and application of such teachings of God's Word.

The conventions have not clearly indicated just which documents of the Church are prerequisite to church fellowship. At times the conventions have spoken of unity and fellowship on the basis of the Scriptures and the Confessions. At other times, the Brief Statement was given added consideration. At still other times, the conventions indicated that additional documents and formulations were necessary to amplify statements in existing documents. In the latter situation even the Brief Statement is an insufficient prerequisite for church fellowship. This entire area needs clarification.

The Missouri Synod has indicated that it will cooperate with other church bodies in matters which do not involve a violation of conscience or a denial of truth. However, the conventions have never thoroughly examined the limits of these "matters." The Synod will cooperate with others in areas which are not "spiritual." "Spiritual matters" seem to be those areas which would involve some form of church fellowship. In order to amplify this area, a thorough study would be needed of the limits of church fellowship, especially the question of joint prayer, and the deliniation, if any, between "spiritual" and "external" matters.

Until such clarifications are made, the Missouri Synod will constantly be open to accusations of heterodox practice in its cooperation with other church bodies. At the present time the Missouri Synod is engaged in spiritual cooperation in the Synodical Conference with one church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, which has severed fraternal relations with the Missouri Synod. Does such cooperation involve church fellowship? The question of the terms "federation" and "church" would also be worthy of study in this general area.

CHAPTER X

THE SLOVAK EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Regretably, the primary sources for the earlier years for the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church are in the Slovak language and, hence, unavailable for this study. This study, therefore, begins with the convention of 1941 in which this church body evaluated what it called the "union negotiations of the Missouri Synod with the American Lutheran Church." The delegates to this convention agreed that the basis for church fellowship with the American Lutheran Church ratified by the Missouri Synod in 1938 was a "sufficient foundation for future church fellowship."¹

In the eyes of the delegates to this convention of the Slovak Synod the American Lutheran Church broke this foundation by its "unwillingness to disassociate itself from the American Lutheran Conference" and by its "unsound Pittsburgh Agreement with the United Lutheran Church in America."² The convention then declared that such

¹Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Regular Convention of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the United States of America, 1941, p. 108.

²Ibid.

conditions made a God-pleasing "union" impossible. The convention prayed that "all differences that now exist in the Lutheran Church might one day be removed and a general, God-pleasing union be consummated."³

Actually, this convention did not distinguish very clearly between a "union" and church fellowship. The negotiations between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod were aimed only at church fellowship, not union of church bodies.⁴ Yet, these resolutions consistently referred to an attempt to achieve a God-pleasing union. Interest in fellowship seemed tantamount to interest in union.

In the convention of 1947 this church body took a firm move in the direction of cooperation.

Whereas, It is desirable that the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church have a clearer understanding of and closer cooperation with other Lutheran Church bodies of America, particularly with the Zion Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Synod, therefore, be it

Resolved, that the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church elect an active committee with authority to reopen discussions with the said Zion Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁵

The Proceedings of the following conventions make no mention

³Ibid.

⁴Supra, p. 99.

⁵Official Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Regular Convention of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1947, p. 218.

of such a relationship or negotiations. This resolution indicates that cooperation with other church bodies is desirable, but it lays down no prerequisites or bases for such cooperation.

A proposal was made to the convention of 1953 to merge with The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod as a district of that church body. A committee was instructed to study this question and report.⁶ At the following convention in 1955 the delegates deferred the decision to affiliate with the Missouri Synod as a non-geographical district.⁷ No concrete reasons were given for this action, nor were any bases established for such a merger in the future.

An objective but brief report was given to the convention in 1955 about the troubles within the Synodical Conference. The evaluation of these difficulties was very general and vague. The convention expressed its regrets over such disturbances in the Conference and reaffirmed its loyalty to the Holy Bible as source and norm of all matters in faith and life,⁸ but it offered no concrete solution to these difficulties.

⁶Official Proceedings of the Thirty-Fifth Convention of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1953, p. 69.

⁷Official Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1955, pp. 38f.

⁸Ibid., p. 66.

The Proceedings of one of the Missouri Synod conventions quoted an evaluation given by the Slovak Church on the Common Confession. The delegates to the 1951 convention of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church declared the Common Confession to be in complete agreement with the Scriptures and the Confessions and a "sufficient basis for further negotiations with other Lutheran bodies."⁹

It is very difficult to draw many conclusions about the concepts of unity, fellowship and cooperation within this church body on the basis of the limited evidence. There is obviously sentiment within the body for union with the Missouri Synod. Why such a move was deferred is not known. We can draw no conclusions, therefore, on the prerequisites this church body demands for organic union.

This Slovak church body certainly has confused the concepts of unity or agreement, union and church fellowship in past conventions. It has shown interest in cooperation with other Lutheran church bodies, but it has given no prerequisites--at least in the English language--for such cooperation. It is possible that these principles and concepts have been more carefully and thoroughly discussed in earlier conventions in the Slovak tongue, but on

⁹Proceedings of the Forty-Second Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1953, p. 497.

the basis of the confusion of concepts and failure to outline the bases for union with the Missouri Synod or cooperation with other Lutheran Church bodies, it is also possible that this church body has not carefully thought through these concepts.

CHAPTER XI

THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN JOINT SYNOD OF WISCONSIN AND OTHER STATES

The study of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin's attitude toward the concepts of unity, fellowship, and cooperation begins with the convention of 1929. The delegates to this convention were told that the Intersynodical Theses of 1928 were the results of ten years of work and that this document was the unanimous confession of the faith of the representatives of the Missouri, Wisconsin, Ohio, Buffalo, and Iowa Synods.¹ The convention resolved to continue this work with other Lutheran synods and it urged its conferences to study and examine these Theses "that the result of ten years' work be made the property of all."²

After The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod rejected these Theses as inadequate, the following conventions of the Wisconsin Synod completely ignored them. Thus, the Wisconsin Synod at this time did not officially alter

¹Proceedings of the Twentieth Biennial Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1929, p. 47.

²Ibid.

its evaluation of the Intersynodical Theses as a desirable result of ten years' work.

In 1935 Professor E. C. Reim gave an essay to the convention of that year which was consequently accepted. He discussed the concept of church fellowship and its implications. Church fellowship, Fr. Reim admitted, differed from Christian fellowship among individuals, but Christian fellowship expresses itself in church fellowship.³ The basis for church fellowship is agreement in doctrine and practice. When there is a divergence of doctrinal opinion, only the "thorough going Unionist" would declare fellowship possible.⁴ The recent mergers among the Norwegian and the eastern Lutherans, Professor Reim declared, were typical of such unionism.⁵

Fr. Reim then made a rather critical study of the United Lutheran Church's Savannah Resolution, attempting to show that the United Lutheran Church made a qualified subscription to the Confessions and did not mean the same thing by their subscription that other Lutherans mean.⁶ Doctrinal differences are important. They call for immediate attention.

³Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1935, p. 21.

⁴Ibid., p. 23.

⁵Ibid., p. 27.

⁶Ibid., pp. 37ff.

Any such differences should be frankly recognized, freely discussed, and in charitable Christian spirit an earnest effort made to find the common ground of truth in the Word of God.⁷

This excellent statement which advocated resolving differences by discussion and attempted to find common ground in God's revelation, seemed to be ignored by the author in the conclusion of this essay. He concluded by advising the convention to reject the invitation by the United Lutheran Church for a discussion and conference on the possibility of closer relations.⁸

The convention did not reflect Professor Reim's argument that the United Lutheran Church inadequately subscribed to the Confessions. The resolution by the delegates assumed that the United Lutheran Church was loyal to the Confessions, but it rejected the basis proposed by the Savannah Resolution which made fellowship dependent only upon Scriptures and the Confessions. Such a basis

fails to take into consideration two facts: (a) That doctrinal issues may arise which did not exist and were not even foreseen at the time these confessions came into being; (b) That confessional writings, even as Scripture itself, may meet with varying and often contrary interpretations.⁹

Because of these two factors, the resolution continued, differences have come into existence in both doctrine and

⁷Ibid., p. 39.

⁸Ibid., p. 46.

⁹Ibid., pp. 107f.

practice. This resolution cited several instances such as unionism, lodge toleration, and the like.

While some of these questions are often relegated to the realm of church practice, we hold that it is dangerous thus to segregate practice from doctrine.¹⁰

Finally, this resolution closed the door on all possible negotiations with the United Lutheran Church in America under the existing circumstances.

These last-named conditions constitute obstacles to an early establishing of fellowship between the United Lutheran Church and our own body, which obstacles only the former itself can remove. Until this is done we must regretfully decline this invitation.¹¹

Thus, the Joint Synod of Wisconsin refused to discuss closer relations or the doctrine and practice involved in closer relations until the United Lutheran Church removed the obstacles of unionism, lodge toleration, and the like. It is understandable that some have received the impression that the Wisconsin Synod is saying: first meet our standards and then we will negotiate our differences. This action seemed inconsistent even with the point made in the Reim essay concerning differences being resolved through admission, negotiation, and finding common ground for a starting point.

The convention of 1937 investigated certain cases of disputes with The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. One of

¹⁰Ibid., p. 108.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 108f.

these cases involved the withdrawal of support from the Wisconsin Districts of the Missouri Synod owing to certain teachings of Dr. Adolph Haentzschel of that latter body. The chaplaincy question was also given to a committee to study at this time.¹²

The convention in 1939 denounced the practice of church bodies sending their pastors into the chaplaincy of the Armed Forces because it constituted a violation of Church and State, because it made impossible a practice of sound Lutheranism, and because any pastor outside of the chaplaincy could accomplish the same duties.¹³

The delegates of this convention also condemned the Missouri Synod negotiations with the American Lutheran Church. Since the Sandusky Resolution of the American Lutheran Church in 1938 and its Pittsburgh Agreement with the United Lutheran Church, the convention said, it is "evident that there was no real doctrinal basis for church fellowship."¹⁴ All negotiations and doctrinal discussions should not come to a halt.

¹²Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1937, p. 55.

¹³Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Convetnion of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1939, pp. 57f.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 61f.

Under existing conditions further negotiations for establishing church fellowship would involve a denial of the truth and would cause confusion and disturbance in the Church and ought to be suspended for the time being.¹⁵

The convention granted that negotiations could be resumed later, when the Sandusky Resolution and the Pittsburgh Agreement are recognized for what they are, and if such negotiations strive to remove these obstacles and establish true doctrinal unity.¹⁶

This resolution is a modification of the earlier resolution of 1935. While the earlier one rejected negotiations as long as the other church body tolerated varied practice, this resolution rejected negotiations as long as the other church body tolerates varied doctrinal formulations.

This question of when to negotiate and when not to negotiate received further attention in the convention of 1941. The Committee on Union Matters cited many Bible passages which spoke of "rejecting," "marking," "avoiding," as proof that negotiation and verbal testimony should cease under certain conditions. The continued negotiations of the Missouri Synod, this committee warned, will turn

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

testifying into denying and confirm the "opponents in their unfirm attitude."¹⁷

The convention took note that the Joint Synod of Wisconsin was invited to future negotiations, but it was told by the committee, "our answer must obviously be in the negative."¹⁸ This church body had become determined to practice the policy of non-negotiation initiated in 1935. While the delegates did not act specifically on this evaluation, they left it in the hands of their committee representatives to tell the Missouri Synod "no."

The committee placed a question mark over the Missouri Synod's cooperation and coordination of activities in relief work for orphaned foreign missions and welfare work in this country.

What is presupposed in coordination? Could we practice coordination with any church that is "basically evangelical" (in the broad sense in which this term is used in the Pittsburgh Agreement)?¹⁹

Finally, this convention went into greater detail in the objections to the Armed Forces chaplaincy. It conflicts with the doctrine of the divine call. Since when does the United States Army have the right to issue a divine

¹⁷Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1941, pp. 76f.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 77.

call to a chaplain from one camp to another? It encourages unionism, especially in the light of the "spirit of doctrinal indifference which pervades the regulations of the War Department."²⁰

In 1943 three Wisconsin Synod pastoral conferences attempted to get the chaplaincy question reopened. President J. Brenner declared that there is no proof where the Wisconsin conventions erred in 1939 or 1941. Hence, he said, the question would not be reopened, or it would cause confusion.²¹

This convention of 1943 also received news of a letter sent by their president Dr. J. Brenner on their behalf to the Missouri Synod. Missouri was asked to return to its so-called former position. Dr. Brenner cited the report of the Examining Committee to the Missouri Synod convention of 1929 to show that the principle of non-negotiation used to be the principle and practice of the Missouri Synod at that time. This argument, however, was completely unfounded.²²

The convention of 1945 attacked the Missouri Synod with a barrage of complaints. Most of the criticism in

²⁰ Ibid., p. 44.

²¹ Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1943, pp. 12f.

²² Ibid., p. 68.

this convention was directed against the instances of cooperation between the Missouri Synod and the other Lutheran church bodies. These objections included such instances as cooperation with the National Lutheran Council in work among prisoners of war, participation in dedications of Lutheran service centers, serving on certain committees and in certain conferences, serving as guest essayists in local conventions of the American Lutheran Church, and in general, anticipating union not yet in existence.²³

"Cooperation in externals" (What in church work can truly be said to be purely external?) may hide our wounds, but it will not heal them. Joint endeavors will not remove the existing differences, but it may lead us to forget them and to grow indifferent to the authority of the inspired Word²⁴

The convention directed that a letter summarizing these objections be sent to the Missouri Synod convention.²⁵ The convention raised a number of legitimate questions. It asked just what is external, and where is the line to be drawn between the external and the actual work of the Church. It also asked for specific principles justifying such cooperation, if the basis for churchly

²³Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1945, pp. 74f.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 77f.

²⁵Ibid., p. 78.

cooperation is to be complete agreement in doctrine and practice. These are questions which the Missouri Synod has yet to answer comprehensively. This convention showed, by its use of terms, that it has not distinguished clearly between union and either unity or fellowship. It spoke of "anticipating union" by cooperation. This could be referring to "anticipating unity in doctrine and practice" which the Wisconsin Synod regards as prerequisite to any cooperation among Christians. It might also be an identification of the principles governing organic union with the principles governing cooperation.

In 1947 the Union Committee told the convention that the basis for pulpit and altar fellowship proposed by the American Lutheran Church, namely, the Brief Statement and the Declaration taken in conjunction with each other, is insufficient chiefly because the Declaration tolerates divergent views on certain doctrines.²⁶ This convention also approved and sanctioned "A Study on Boy Scoutism," an examination and criticism of the scouting movement within the Lutheran church bodies as a form of unionism. The convention learned that a letter was sent to the Missouri Synod convention by president Brenner on this subject.²⁷

²⁶ Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1947, pp. 101ff.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 106ff.

More specific objections to various forms of cooperation between the Missouri Synod and various other Lutheran agencies were brought to the attention of the convention of 1949. Some of the earlier objections were repeated, and new objections were made to the devotions with other Lutherans at the Bad Boll free conference in Germany, and to the Missouri Synod's participation in the book, Scouting in the Lutheran Church.²⁸

This 1949 convention approved the floor committee's rejection of local free conferences among Lutherans. The convention expressed its willingness to meet officially with other church bodies, provided that these synods admit that differences exist and agree that each of these differences must be removed before church fellowship can take place.²⁹

A special committee evaluated the Common Confession to the convention delegates in 1951. Virtually every major article and section was criticized as inadequate or misleading. The committee agreed that the section on "Church Fellowship" can be correctly understood in part. Yet, the committee noticed, there was nothing said of

²⁸Proceedings of the Thirtieth Convention of the Evangelical Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1949, pp. 112f.

²⁹Ibid., p. 115.

prayer fellowship in the definition. The term "unscriptural cooperation" was left undefined. This committee rejected the phrase stating that Christians must be alert to establish and maintain fellowship with those whom He has made "one with us in the faith." Faith is invisible, and thus, fellowship can only be based upon confession and practice.³⁰

This Common Confession is meaningless also in the view of the selective fellowship practiced by the American Lutheran Church, said the committee. In spite of all of the words by Missouri officials defending the Common Confession and other acts of unionistic cooperation, the old criticisms still stand in the eyes of this committee.³¹

The report listed some new objections, notably the communion agreement with the National Lutheran Council that service men can receive the Blessed Sacrament from a chaplain of another Lutheran Synod, if it is an exceptional situation and if the individual has the Lutheran faith concerning the Sacrament.³² Aside from this new objection, most of the other criticisms, adopted in their entirety by the convention, were raised in earlier conventions.

The convention of 1953 was told that another clear

³⁰ Proceedings of the Thirty-First Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1951, pp. 128ff.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 136ff.

³² Ibid.

letter was sent to the Synodical Convention of the Missouri Synod, telling the Missouri delegates to suspend discussions with the American Lutheran Church until that latter body accepted the Brief Statement's definition of unionism and "has begun to put this principle into practice."³³

Since the Missouri Synod did not obey the admonition received by letter, the Committee on Church Union proposed a resolution declaring that the Missouri Synod, by its unscriptural cooperation, the Common Confession, its practice of joint prayer with those not in fellowship, its negotiations with a church body which has unscriptural presuppositions regarding doctrinal agreement, has brought about "the present break . . . now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuance of our affiliation with the sister synod."³⁴

A substitute motion called for an immediate break with the Missouri Synod, but this was rejected in favor of the original motion.³⁵ Obviously, in spite of all of these differences in practice involving doctrine, the Wisconsin Synod had no general desire to sever relations

³³Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1953, p. 96f.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 104f.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 105f.

with the Missouri Synod at this time.

Prior to the next convention, a series of Twelve Tracts were printed under the authority of the Conference of Presidents of the Wisconsin Synod. These tracts attempted to summarize and discuss the issues of dissention with the Missouri Synod. The tract on Prayer Fellowship (Tract number ten) condemns praying with other Lutherans who are striving with us for unity on the basis of God's Word since such prayer "creates the impression of church fellowship and of unity of faith where they do not exist."³⁶ The tract on Cooperation in Externals (Tract number eight) admits that some "external cooperation" is permissible. Under this type of cooperation would come clothing distribution through agencies outside of the Synodical Conference and a joint ownership of a burial lot.³⁷ Other forms of so-called "external" cooperation, such as joint facilities for spiritual work (service centers), charitable organizations, and the like, involve church fellowship directly or indirectly and, therefore, constitute unionism.³⁸

³⁶The Conference of Presidents, The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, Prayer Fellowship (n.p., [1954]), pp. 5f.

³⁷The Conference of Presidents, The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, and Other States, Cooperation in Externals (n.p., [1954]), pp. 3f.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 4f.

This tract considers the Communion Agreement between the Missouri Synod and the National Lutheran Council the height of cooperation involving church fellowship without doctrinal unity. All of these horrible developments came about, continues the tract, when the Missouri Synod began cooperating in externals in the first place.

When Lutherans of various stripes are encouraged to associate with each other . . . it comes as no surprise if they begin to fellowship on a more intimate spiritual level. To trust that it will be otherwise is to be as blissfully unaware of reality as a Lutheran congregation that arranges to have its young people attend roller-skating parties with the local Catholic Youth Organization and then dismiss all fears that such camaraderie will lead to closer attachments . . .³⁹

In 1955 the Committee on Church Union advised the delegates to the convention of that year to terminate church fellowship with the Missouri Synod because of the differences in doctrine and practice which had developed.⁴⁰ The convention did not take the advice of its committee. Instead, it decided to postpone action on termination of church fellowship until after the Missouri Synod's convention of 1956.⁴¹ Thus, Missouri was given another chance to mend its doctrines and practices.

³⁹Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁰Reports and Memorials of the Thirty-Third Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1955, pp. 77ff.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 86.

Professor E. Reim protested strongly to the Wisconsin Synod convention, saying, "I can continue in fellowship with my Synod only under clear and public protests." The convention, however, gave Professor Reim a vote of confidence and refused to accept his resignation from the Wisconsin seminary.⁴²

The Wisconsin Synod held a special recessed convention shortly after the Missouri Synod convention of 1956. The only pertinent thing this special recessed convention did was to "hold in abeyance the judgment of our Saginaw resolutions" until the convention in 1957.⁴³

The convention of 1956 faced many memorials, some advising a break in relations with the Missouri Synod and some asking the Wisconsin Synod not to break those relations.⁴⁴ The floor committee strongly advised a suspension of church fellowship with Missouri. According to this recommendation, the Wisconsin Synod would continue to support joint projects in the Synodical Conference until other arrangements could be made.⁴⁵

This would have been a very interesting development

⁴²Ibid., pp. 87f.

⁴³Proceedings of the Thirty-Fourth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1957, p. 130.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 131-136.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 136ff.

had this recommendation been carried out. The Wisconsin Synod would have found itself within the Synodical Conference engaging in spiritual cooperation with a church body with whom relations had just been severed.

The recommendation was rejected by the convention by a vote of sixty-one to seventy-seven.⁴⁶ This convention instead resolved that

we continue our vigorously protesting fellowship over against the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, because of the continuation of the offenses with which we have charged the sister synod⁴⁷

There were many protests from various delegates and some officials within the Wisconsin Synod after this vote. These protesting individuals believed that the Wisconsin Synod was becoming guilty of unionism by continuing to remain in fellowship with a heterodox church body like the Missouri Synod.⁴⁸

It is evident from the use of terminology that the Joint Synod of Wisconsin does not clearly distinguish at all times among the concepts of union, fellowship and cooperation. Their committee dealing with questions of church fellowship and cooperation is called the Church Union Committee. Yet, at no time, with the possible exception of the 1932 proposal to unite the member churches

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 144.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 144f.

of the Synodical Conference, has this committee dealt with the problem of organic union. Since the question of union has never officially arisen on the floor of the convention during the past generation, no conclusions can be drawn concerning the requirements of this church body for such union, except to say that its requirements for fellowship and cooperation would also apply to organic union as well.

For fellowship the Wisconsin Synod demands perfect and complete agreement in matters of doctrine and practice. It has consistently rejected the possibility that certain non-fundamental doctrines are or need not be divisive of church fellowship. While individuals within the Wisconsin Synod have agreed that not all "fellowship" in Scripture is "church fellowship," it is generally conceded by these individuals that individual fellowship always manifests itself in church fellowship.

Perfect agreement in all matters of doctrine and practice are also required by the Wisconsin Synod as a prerequisite for cooperation with other Christian groups. Such cooperation, holds the Synod, always involves church fellowship directly or indirectly. Church fellowship includes proclamation of the Gospel, administration of the Sacraments, or worship and prayer--even among individuals.

It is granted by the Wisconsin Synod that certain forms of cooperation can be genuinely external, such as a

clothing drive. Yet, even these forms of cooperation are not desirable since there always exists the danger of such forms of "external" cooperation leading to actual cooperation in the work of the Church.

Many individuals and groups within the Wisconsin Synod are highly sensitive to the recent differences which have developed between their church body and The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. While the entire Synod of Wisconsin has repeatedly admitted that differences exist between the two bodies involving doctrinal considerations as well as practice, the Synod remains in fellowship with the Missouri Synod in the Synodical Conference. Joint spiritual cooperation has continued with the Missouri Synod and is continuing in spite of these differences. Certain individuals and groups within the Wisconsin Synod realize that if this situation continues, then the Wisconsin Synod is admitting, de facto, that not all differences in doctrine and practice are divisive of church fellowship or spiritual cooperation.

Those differences in practice, involving doctrinal considerations, include subscribing to doctrinal formulations which are ambiguous and misleading as adequate and true doctrines, denying the truth by negotiating with heterodox church bodies under untruthful circumstances, cooperating with heterodox bodies in both external and spiritual matters, labeling "joint prayer" as a thing apart from "prayer fellowship," and tolerating within its midst

false doctrine and practice. By continuing in fellowship with the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod is labeling these specific differences in doctrine and practice as not necessarily divisive of church fellowship.

The Wisconsin Synod disagrees with the Missouri Synod on a more important question, namely, how to resolve doctrinal and practical differences when they do exist. The Missouri Synod is always willing to negotiate with other church bodies when such negotiations include questions of doctrine and practice. The Wisconsin Synod strongly disagrees. It is willing to negotiate and discuss questions with heterodox church bodies only under certain conditions. At times the conventions have stated that such discussions can take place only after the heterodox body has removed variations in church practice. At other times, the condition for such discussion has been the acknowledgment of the verbally inspired Sacred Sacraments as the only authority in all matters of which it speaks. At still other times, the opponents are required to admit, not only that doctrinal differences exist, but that each one of these doctrinal differences must be eliminated before church fellowship can take place. Naturally, a church body which recognizes certain non-fundamental doctrines as not necessarily divisive of church fellowship would be unwilling to agree with Wisconsin's presuppositions. These requirements for discussion and negotiation do not contradict each

other, but the Wisconsin Synod has not as yet clearly spelled out when these various requirements would be applied in specific conditions. For instance, should the Wisconsin Synod, according to its own principles, require the Missouri Synod to clean up variations in practice within the general body and to reject the theological contents of its 1938 resolutions, that some non-fundamental doctrines are not necessarily divisive of fellowship, before discussions and negotiations can take place?

and particular is the Norwegian Synod declined to participate in the work of the Norwegian Lutherans in 1917 into the general body known today as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

At its constituting convention in 1918 Pastor B. ... delivered an essay on the subject of unity which was subsequently approved. The unity of the ... of the delegates, does not come with formal ... but with regeneration. Those who do not listen to the word of God, however, prove that they no longer ... of Spirit. The larger Norwegian Synod had ... of this. Hence, it was necessary to separate ...

The 1938 convention condemned the National Lutheran

... of the First Annual Convention of the ... of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church.

CHAPTER XII

THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

This church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, has up until recent times been known as the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. It began its particular history when a small group of pastors and parishes in the Norwegian Synod declined to participate in the merger of the Norwegian Lutherans in 1917 into the general body known today as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

At its constituting convention in 1918 Pastor B. Harstad delivered an essay on the subject of unity which the convention subsequently approved. The unity of the Spirit, he told the delegates, does not come with formal agreements, but with regeneration. Those who do not listen to the Word of God, however, prove that they no longer keep this unity of Spirit. The larger Norwegian Synod had become guilty of this. Hence, it was necessary to separate from them.¹

The 1920 convention condemned the National Lutheran

¹Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1918, pp. 107ff.

Council as a unionistic body. The delegates were told that affiliation with the Council commits a church body to internal church work without doctrinal agreement, and brings its members into "intimate relation" with unionistic church bodies.² Leaders of this convention also condemned the application of the word "brethren" to heterodox Lutheran bodies. Orthodox church bodies have no business sending "fraternal greetings" to other Lutherans.³

In 1923 another convention approved essay condemned the theological basis for the Norwegian Lutheran merger of 1917. This doctrinal agreement of 1917 was known as the Opgjør or Agreement. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod has always considered it both inadequate and in error.

A Christian brotherhood must rest on unity of faith and doctrine. Brethren, members of the same Church, should speak the same thing, be of the same mind, avoid those who cause dissensions and offenses contrary to the doctrine.⁴

The convention of 1925 reaffirmed that fellowship and cooperation can be had only with orthodox church bodies. It defined orthodox church bodies, however, as those where the congregations teach the Word of God in truth and purity,

²Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1920, pp. 71ff.

³Ibid., p. 74.

⁴Report of the Sixth Annual Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1923, p. 64.

and subscribe to the Bible and the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church.⁵

The convention of 1926 heard a multitude of essays on the subject of unionism. In these various doctrinal papers the delegates were told,

It avails nothing that one vehemently denies the accusation of indifference to doctrine if he practices fellowship with error: his actions belie his words.⁶

Church fellowship in any form or manner with such as are persistent errorists in practice is unionism.⁷

Can you conceive of Dr. Walther or of Dr. Wm. Koren or of President H. A. Preus worshipping together with the many Lutheran heretics . . . assembled to attend the Lutheran World Convention at Eisenach?⁸

In 1932 a very strong resolution was passed by the convention condemning cooperation with other Christian church bodies while any doctrinal or practical differences are involved.

Anyone, who is a member of an orthodox church, but who supports the institutions of an erring church, is acting contrary to the warning given by God in His Word Such a person is not only endangering

⁵Report of the Eighth Annual Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1925, p. 93.

⁶Report of the Ninth Annual Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1926, p. 51.

⁷Ibid., p. 52.

⁸Ibid., p. 56.

his own soul's salvation, but his sin is an offense whereby he may lead others astray.⁹

The principles for church fellowship, cooperation, and intersynodical negotiation on differences in doctrine and practice were clearly listed and adopted by the convention of 1936 under the title of Theses on Church Union. Because of the importance of these theses to this study, they are presented in full.

Theses on Church Union

In view of the fact that continued efforts are being made to unite all Lutherans in one fellowship, we adopt the following theses as expressing the principles which must guide us in seeking to effect such fellowship:

Thesis I. The spiritual unity of the Holy Christian Church, which is the Body of Christ, is not dependent upon any such externals as a common organization or language, but alone upon the possession of the saving faith in Jesus Christ. True Christians will, however, "endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," Eph. 4:3, and will therefore also seek to establish and maintain church fellowship with all who are one with them in confessing the true faith.

Thesis II. We acknowledge one, and only one, truly unifying influence and power in matters both of doctrine and practice, namely the Word of God; and only one God-pleasing procedure in striving for unity: That "the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God lead holy lives according to it."

Thesis III. Through such teaching of the Word, unity and (when deemed desirable) union have been attained

⁹Report of the Fifteenth Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1932, p. 79.

in the past. Examples: the early New Testament Church, the Lutheran Reformation, and the Synodical Conference.

Thesis IV. We hold that inter-synodical committees are useful in promoting Christian fellowship only: (a) when the various groups or synods have, through their public ministry of the Word, given each other evidence of an existing unity in spirit, and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and to arrange for some public recognition and confession of that fact; (b) or where it is clear that those in error sincerely desire to be taught the "way of God more perfectly." Acts 13:26.

Thesis V. Where such evidence of unity is lacking, or where it is clear that those in error do not sincerely desire to "be taught the way of God more perfectly," but such committees nevertheless are elected to confer with them with the view to Church fellowship, there is grave danger that the work of these committees will result in indifferentism and in compromise of Scriptural doctrine and practice. (For examples of this, consider the mergers and unions of recent years among Lutherans.) The duty of testifying to the truth of God's Word and thus promoting unity, rests at all times upon all Christians. Cf. I Peter 3:15.

Thesis VI. Scripture warns us clearly and emphatically against entanglements with errorists (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10; I Timothy 6:3-5). Any reluctance to heed these warnings and commands of Scripture is unionism already conceived in the heart, which if allowed to develop, will result in full-fledged unionism, as history also testifies.¹⁰

These theses do not clearly distinguish at all times between fellowship and organic union. The concepts of fellowship and cooperation are broadly grouped under the title of "union." This document makes it clear, however, that not only is perfect agreement in faith and practice

¹⁰ Report of the Nineteenth Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1936, pp. 32ff.

a prerequisite for any form of fellowship or cooperation, but also that these differences cannot be resolved by discussion and negotiation. Only God can resolve the differences, and if He has not resolved them by either removing them, or if He has not given the heterodox representatives a humble spirit and an eagerness to be taught the way of God, then such discussions are useless.

These theses ignore the question of whether or not God, Who works through the Word and the Sacraments to accomplish His gracious purposes, can also work through His Word in doctrinal negotiations in order to accomplish His purposes. Also, thesis VI fails to distinguish between the errorists who are false teachers and those who err out of simplicity.

A convention approved essay in 1940 rejected the distinction traditionally made between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines.¹¹ The content of the essay was in reaction to the possibility that some non-fundamental doctrinal differences are not necessarily divisive of church fellowship.

The convention of 1941 condemned the practice of intercommunion with other Lutheran bodies which apparently had occurred on occasion within the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

¹¹Report of the Twenty-Third Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1940, pp. 14ff.

Members of Synod should not commune at altars of unaffiliated Churches, nor should members of unaffiliated Churches be communed at our altars.¹²

This same convention encouraged its members to study the issues of unionism, and to obtain and read the Brief Statement for their edification.¹³ Another essay on the subject of unionism was accepted by the convention.¹⁴

This convention took two apparently contradictory actions. It expressed gratitude to the Missouri Synod for the spiritual care which its armed forces chaplains had shown to service men from the Norwegian Synod. The convention expressed the hope that its member congregations would contribute financially to the Missouri Synod aid.¹⁵ Yet, at the same time, the convention placed a question mark over the chaplaincy issue.

In view of the peculiar dangers connected with this kind of work, the Synod asks its commission to be constantly on the alert to uphold and guard our principles in the matter of unionism.¹⁶

The convention of 1943 reflected this same tension. The delegates heard bitter attacks by its president on

¹²Report of the Twenty-Fourth Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1941, p. 14.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 29ff.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 52.

unionists,¹⁷ and at the same time designated July the Fourth as "Loyalty Service Sunday" for a collection for the Missouri Synod's Army-Navy Commission.¹⁸

The Army-Navy Commission still received the compliments of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod at its 1944 convention, but once again, the question of a relationship between chaplaincy and unionism was referred to the general body's pastoral conferences for consideration.¹⁹

The delegates to the convention of 1946 were told that their church body rests its doctrinal case upon the Brief Statement as the dogmatic standard for truth.²⁰ A very thorough evaluation and criticism was given to this convention of the Doctrinal Affirmation. The convention agreed that this was a very inadequate document. This Affirmation even repeated "certain errors" which originally appeared in the Missouri Synod resolutions of 1938.²¹

The convention of 1947 did not repeat the accusation

¹⁷Report of the Twenty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1943, pp. 8f.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁹Report of the Twenty-Seventh Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1944, p. 41.

²⁰Report of the Twenty-Ninth Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1946, p. 15.

²¹Ibid., pp. 25ff.

that these resolutions of Missouri in 1938 contained errors, but it learned that its representatives had requested the Missouri Synod to reconsider and rescind them because they were "not an adequate basis for fellowship."²²

The chaplaincy question came up again in the convention of 1948, but nothing concrete was concluded.²³ The Evangelical Lutheran Synod did not criticize the chaplaincy of the Missouri Synod as the Wisconsin Synod was doing. This convention did take the Missouri Synod severely to task, however, for certain cooperative activities which involved joint prayer, church work, and other "brotherly associations."²⁴

Finally, this convention once again asked the Missouri Synod to suspend doctrinal discussions with the American Lutheran Church.

Let us resolve to drop for the time being all doctrinal discussions with our opponents, and such relations which imply doctrinal agreement with our opponents, in favor of discussions with our acknowledged brethren in the Synodical Conference, that all may be convinced of the deep meaning and implications of the Brief Statement.²⁵

²²Report of the Thirtieth Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1947, p. 48.

²³Report of the Thirty-First Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1948, p. 64.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 67f.

²⁵Ibid., p. 68.

The convention of 1949 adopted the contents of an essay on "Cooperation in Externals." This presentation dealt specifically with the errors of the Missouri Synod in its cooperation with the National Lutheran Council and other Lutheran groups outside of the Synodical Conference. The essayist summarized his findings in the words of theses prepared by local pastoral conferences.

1. Unionism is joint worship or joint church work with those who do not confess the true faith in all respects.
2. If orthodox Lutherans cooperate or associate with heterodox Lutherans in any phase of the Church's work such as education, missions, charities, etc., they disregard the fact that joint church work with false teachers is unionism just as much as is joint worship.
3. The test of so-called externals in church work is whether they may properly be carried on with all manner of churches and religious or civic organizations.
4. Since the National Lutheran Council, as well as the Lutheran World Federation, was organized to promote cooperation in church work among all Lutherans, without regard to doctrinal differences, we object to them as unionistic organizations and refuse to take any part in their activities.²⁶

The essay approvingly quoted a multitude of secondary sources written by Missouri Synod Lutherans during the 1920's.²⁷ The essayist admitted that at one point in

²⁶ Report of the Thirty-Second Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1949, pp. 31f.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 33ff.

history of the Norwegian Synod found that it was "cooperating" with the Roman Catholic Church against legislation which would be harmful to parochial schools. Such cooperation could have been carried on with Hindus, for it involved no "joint prayer," or work of the Church.²⁸

The convention referred to this essay approvingly when it sent its regular communications to the Missouri Synod convention asking for an end to "cooperation in externals."²⁹ This same resolution declared that the "free conferences" suggested by the Missouri Synod would be of "doubtful value."³⁰ This part of the resolution is in harmony with earlier resolutions, particularly the Theses on Church Union, which declare doctrinal discussions with other Lutherans valid only under limited conditions.

A study of the doctrinal position of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference (a group of pastors and laymen who had severed relations with the Missouri Synod in 1950)³¹ was authorized by the convention of 1952. Nothing concrete resulted from the few discussions which were held,

²⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Report of the Thirty-Fifth Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1952, p. 65.

however, and the Orthodox Lutheran Conference continued to walk its separate path apart from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

The delegates to the 1953 convention indicated that they were extremely disturbed by the latest approaches of the Missouri Synod toward the Lutheran World Federation.³² The Missouri Synod had directed a study and a report on the principles and practices of this federation in regard to possible relationships. This, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod felt, was very unhealthy.

"Our Relations with the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod," a pamphlet which the 1954 convention reviewed, told much of the history of the difficulties between the Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, concentrating upon the resolutions of 1938, the Missouri Synod's concept of Joint Prayer, the Common Confession, cooperation with other church bodies, negotiations with other church bodies under undesirable conditions, and the general indifference of the Missouri Synod toward the seriousness of the objections.³³ The pamphlet concluded by stating that there was "no longer any real unity between

³² Report of the Thirty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1953, p. 69.

³³ Report of the Thirty-Seventh Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1954, p. 40.

our Synod and the Missouri Synod." The Missouri Synod

has broken its bonds of fellowship with us by its persistent adherence to a course which we have with all justice condemned and by its growing tolerance of unionistic activities and unionistic "brethren."³⁴

In 1955 the convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod formally declared the suspension of fraternal relations which had been implied in the 1954 pamphlet. The convention reviewed once again the negotiations of the Missouri Synod with the American Lutheran Church, the resolution by Missouri in 1938, the joint prayer principle, the cooperation with the National Lutheran Council, and the Common Confession.³⁵ The convention recognized that the Synodical Conference adopted a desirable resolution defining unionism. This resolution on unionism, the Norwegian representatives reported, had "considerable opposition from Missouri Synod spokesmen." The Synodical Conference did nothing effective on the subjects of the Common Confession, joint prayer, scouting, and other issues.³⁶

Since "real meeting of minds" and "unity of spirit,"

³⁴Our Relations with The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (published by the Union Committee of the Norwegian Synod, 1954), pp. 3ff.

³⁵Report of the Thirty-Eighth Regular Convention of The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1955, pp. 40ff.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 44f.

prerequisites for fraternal relations, were lacking in the discussions with the Missouri Synod, the convention declared that "further negotiations will be fruitless." The delegates declared all fellowship relations with The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod suspended "until the offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned have been removed by them in a proper manner."³⁷ This convention, however, made it clear that it wished to continue fraternal relations with those who "agree with us in our stand and who testify with us against these present errors and unionistic practices." A re-alignment of conservative Lutherans was suggested.

To this end we hereby declare our desire to maintain and establish fraternal relations with those synods, congregations and individuals who are of one mind and spirit with us in matters of Christian doctrine and practice.³⁸

This statement could be interpreted in two different ways. It could indicate that synods, congregations and individuals who agree with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod should now leave the Synodical Conference, separate themselves from the Missouri Synod and re-align themselves with the Norwegians. However, according to this declaration, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod could also be inviting Synods, congregations and individuals to retain fellowship,

³⁷Ibid., pp. 45f.

³⁸Ibid., p. 46.

even if they remain in the Synodical Conference. It is uncertain just what was in the minds of the delegates to this convention. While on one hand they spoke of re-aligning true Lutherans who agreed with them in doctrine and practice, they were also willing to "attend to whatever problems may arise in connection with the work of the Synodical Conference."³⁹

The immediate developments which followed the convention of 1955 indicate that this body accepted the second interpretation, to remain in fellowship with Synods and parishes which remained in the Synodical Conference. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod has maintained its fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod and has remained within the Synodical Conference even though it has not renewed its relations with the Missouri Synod. The convention of 1956 promised to re-examine the issues to see if the causes of suspension of relations have been removed, but the suspension of fellowship is to remain until a future convention declares otherwise.⁴⁰

This convention of 1956 took only a passing glance at the problem involving suspension of fellowship with the Missouri Synod and at the same time selective fellowship

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Report of the Thirty-Ninth Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1956, pp. 46f.

with the members of the Synodical Conference.

Resolved, that the Norwegian Synod meet with the other Synods of the Synodical Conference to determine whether or not the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference are now in doctrinal agreement.⁴¹

Throughout the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod the conventions have failed to distinguish carefully among the concepts of union, fellowship, and cooperation. The Norwegian Synod has not considered organic merger with another Lutheran body, and yet, it has established principles on "church union" which in actuality discuss fellowship and cooperation under the title of "union." It can be assumed, however, that prerequisites for fellowship and cooperation would also be applied to the question of organic merger.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod requires perfect agreement in matters of doctrine and practice before any fellowship or cooperation can take place. Any cooperation with heterodox church bodies which involves joint worship or joint church work is sinful unionism. The test for truly "external" cooperation is whether or not such cooperation could be carried on with secular or heathen organizations.

Since the Missouri Synod has fallen under the condemnation of these prerequisites, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod has suspended all fellowship with that church body.

⁴¹Ibid.

Yet, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod retains its membership in the Synodical Conference and shares the joint worship and work of the Conference. It is impossible to explain such action on the basis of the principles outlined by this church body. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod, by this action, is engaging in selective fellowship and church work with a church body within the Conference which is considered unionistic and guilty of doctrinal error.

Prerequisites for doctrinal discussions with erring church bodies are either the actual establishment of unity to such discussions, or at least a willingness to be taught the Word of God. It is upon this latter basis that the Evangelical Lutheran Synod justifies its willingness to negotiate with the Missouri Synod in conjunction with other bodies of the Synodical Conference regarding doctrine and practice.

CHAPTER XIII

THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNODICAL CONFERENCE OF NORTH AMERICA

Perhaps this chapter should not be included in this study. This study is an examination of the concepts of unity, fellowship and cooperation within various Lutheran church bodies in America. It is not certain, however, just what the Synodical Conference is. Some sources claim that it is a federation. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod welcomed the union of the Breslau Synod and the Saxon Free Church into "our federation," referring to the Synodical Conference and its affiliates.¹ The Lutheran historian, Dr. A. R. Wentz, claims that the Conference is not a church body, but an advisory council.²

On the other hand, according to the evaluation of the Lutheran World Federation by a specially appointed committee, a "federation" which engages in the work of a

¹Report of the Thirty-Second Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1949, p. 75.

²Abdel Ross Wentz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), p. 225.

Church is a Church and not a federation.³ Certainly, the Synodical Conference engages in the work of a Church, and yet, it has only advisory powers over its members.

This study, having taken note of the question concerning the federative or churchly character of the Synodical Conference, will not attempt to answer the question. While official statements coming from the Conference relative to the concepts of unity and union, fellowship and cooperation will be noted, such resolutions and declarations by this Conference are not binding upon its member bodies unless these member churches so desire.

In its earliest years the Synodical Conference adopted a number of theses on unity which are noted here as a historical introduction to the modern period with which this study is concerned. The Unaltered Augsburg Confession was declared the "sole external tie" binding all true Lutheran congregations. Official acceptance of the other Lutheran Confessions were not regarded as absolutely necessary for unity providing that these Confessions were not denied.⁴ Acceptance of the Augsburg Confession, however, also involves all of the doctrinal teachings logically

³Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1956, p. 529.

⁴Proceedings of the Sixth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1877, pp. 6ff.

deduced from this Confession.⁵

Unorthodox church practice, such as union and church fellowship with non-Lutherans and toleration of secret societies, were considered a mark of confessional disloyalty by these early conventions of the Synodical Conference.⁶ Toleration of erring pastors, use of temporary pastoral calls, disinterest in parochial schools, toleration and use of non-Lutheran educational material, and failure to exercise doctrinal discipline also contradict loyalty to the Augsburg Confession.⁷ The delegates to the Synodical Conference in these early years did not expect absolute perfection, however, but they did expect the church body in question to exercise this discipline seriously so that "little by little" the doctrinal faith may become evident in church life.⁸

Aside from a few essays, the Synodical Conference made no further noteworthy declarations on unity, fellowship, and cooperation until recent times. The delegates to the Synodical Conference convention of 1934 approved the refusal of its officials to cooperate with the Universal

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Proceedings of the Eighth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1879, pp. 15ff.

Christian Council for Life and Work. The Life and Work movement was declared unionistic and modernistic owing to its alleged close connection with the Federal Council of Churches of Christian America.⁹

In the convention of 1938, the delegates favorably received an essay delivered by Professor Theodore Hoyer on the "Unity of Faith."¹⁰ This essay, although it went unchallenged by members of the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods, thoroughly represented the viewpoint of the Missouri Synod in regard to prerequisites for doctrinal discussions. The essay that the synodical fathers have,

at all times been ready to meet anybody who was willing to listen to their testimony, to establish true unity, if possible. They have done this even when the motive on the other side was wrong. In such meetings, however, they have always kept in mind the object, true unity of faith.¹¹

The delegates to the 1940 convention accepted an essay on fellowship by a representative of the Wisconsin Synod, Professor W. Schaller.¹² Our brethren in the faith,

⁹Proceedings of the Thirty-Fourth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1934, p. 109.

¹⁰Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1938, pp. 47ff.

¹¹Ibid., p. 47.

¹²Proceedings of the Thirty-Seventh Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1940, pp. 10ff.

made brethren by their faith in Christ, exist in heterodox communions as well as in orthodox churches. Members of orthodox church bodies, pointed out Professor Schaller, can be concerned only about brethren with whom they can join in church work.

For all practical purposes, the brotherhood of faith is the membership of that great body which we call the Synodical Conference.¹³

A full report was also given to this convention on the relationship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. Resolutions of both church bodies pertinent to that relationship were given in full.¹⁴ Although representatives of the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods criticized action by the Missouri Synod, the Synodical Conference itself merely asked the Missouri Synod to consider framing future agreements into one document rather than a document from each church body.¹⁵

The second World War interrupted the holding of regular conventions until 1944. By that time the friction between the Missouri Synod on one hand and the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods on the other had become much more critical. A Committee of Intersynodical Relations was created in

¹³Ibid., pp. 11f.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 81ff.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 88f.

order to study the causes of friction and report.¹⁶ The convention also encouraged the editors of official church papers to meet and unify policies. The member synods were encouraged to deal with unofficial publications as they felt it necessary.¹⁷

The convention of 1946 did little about the conflict over scoutism and the question of joint prayer with other Lutherans except to encourage the member synods to consult and discuss the matters with one another.¹⁸ The conference did not criticize the Missouri Synod.

We urge the Committee on Doctrinal Unity of the Missouri Synod to continue in its efforts at preserving the truth of the Gospel and the true unity which alone can make for sound Lutheran fellowship.¹⁹

However, the 1948 convention did imply that the Missouri Synod was cooperating with other church bodies in some church work.

We wish to caution that such things only as actually are externals be regarded as externals . . . and that wherever there is cooperation in such externals

¹⁶Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1944, pp. 101ff.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁸Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1946, pp. 69f.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 69.

it be not made the occasion for joint work in the spiritual sphere.²⁰

The presidential address to the convention of 1950 was given by a representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Professor S. C. Ylvisaker, in the absence of President Schlueter. In his address, Professor Ylvisaker attacked the Missouri Synod's position on joint prayer, and other related matters. The note was attached to the address that Missouri Synod members on the Committee on Intersynodical Relations "are not in agreement with some of the opinions in the presidential address."²¹

The Committee on Intersynodical Relations approved of the definition of unionism given in the Brief Statement, namely, "church fellowship with adherents of false doctrine." The committee was able to come to no final agreement concerning the limits of church fellowship, however, for they could not agree on whether or not joint prayer was included in this concept.²²

According to this committee, a "false doctrine" is any deviation from what is taught in Scripture, but not everyone who deviates from Scripture is an "adherent" of

²⁰ Proceedings of the Fortieth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1948, pp. 146f.

²¹ Proceedings of the Forty-First Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1950, pp. 9ff.

²² Ibid., pp. 128f.

false doctrine. Those who deviate from weakness are brothers in the faith. Those who are not willing to be instructed show that they are not brothers in the faith but false teachers.²³ The convention adopted this report, recognizing the points of disagreement without taking sides on those points.²⁴

In 1952 the Intersynodical Committee was able to unite in giving a highly critical evaluation of "Lutheran Men in America." The committee accused this organization of unionism and attempting to promote unscriptural fellowship. This organization states that it tries to develop "a better understanding," "fellowship," and "cooperation" among all Lutherans. The committee seized the word "fellowship" and interpreted it in the sense of pulpit and altar fellowship, and attempted to show that Lutheran Men is a rank unionistic society.²⁵

In its evaluation the committee also implied that there can be no joint activities which do not involve church fellowship or cooperation which does not interfere with Synodical Conference principles.²⁶ These implications

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Proceedings of the Forty-Second Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1952, pp. 152ff.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 153f.

have not been thoroughly examined by the Missouri Synod, and hence, it is understandable why the representatives of that church body made no objection to the committee's evaluation.

A multitude of essays on the various issues of controversy filled the 1954 convention of the Synodical Conference. The essays by representatives of the member synods included the areas of the Common Confession, the military chaplaincy, scouting, and various other divisive issues.²⁷ An essay by Pastor E. E. Kowalke, representing the Wisconsin Synod, is worthy of note for this study. He claimed that the Brief Statement does not give a full definition of unionism when it calls unionism church fellowship with adherents of false doctrine. Rather, Pastor Kowalke said, unionism includes all forms of church work and joint worship.²⁸

This point in his essay was particularly interesting in the light of the resolution passed by the Conference at the request of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod defining unionism and taken, in part, from the Concordia Cyclopaedia of 1927.

²⁷Proceedings of the Forty-Third Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1954, passim.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 102ff.

Religious unionism consists in joint worship and work of those not united in doctrine. Its essence is an agreement to disagree . . . all joint ecclesiastical efforts for religious work (missionary, educational, etc.) and particularly joint worship and mixed (promiscuous) prayer among those who confess the truth and those who deny any part of it, is sinful unionism.²⁹

It was against this definition that objection was raised by some members of the Missouri Synod at its 1956 convention. The Missouri Synod did not defend the Synodical Conference resolution but merely resolved to study the matter.³⁰

In the 1956 convention of the Synodical Conference President W. A. Baepler raised the question of whether or not the Conference could continue to exist in the light of its condemnation of "joint worship and work of those not united in doctrine" on one hand, and the existence of difference of differences and severed fellowship within the Synodical Conference on the other.³¹ President Baepler answered in the affirmative,

since the disunity which is threatening to destroy our organization is not caused by disagreement in doctrine but by differences of opinion with reference

²⁹Ibid., pp. 199f.

³⁰Supra, p. 165.

³¹Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1956, pp. 7f.

to application of Scriptural teaching, i.e., in the field of practice,³²

This opinion is not in harmony with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod's principle that differences in practice are not less divisive of church fellowship than differences in doctrine. It is also out of harmony with the principle of both the Wisconsin and the Norwegian Synods that Missouri's defense of the Common Confession and teachings regarding joint prayer, cooperation, and the like constitute differences in doctrinal teaching and not merely variations of application.

Finally, this opinion of the president is unsupported by a resolution passed in this same convention encouraging the Union Committees of the member synods to draw up doctrinal statements on the controversial issues, "to assist in the solution of any unsolved doctrinal problems existing in the Synodical Conference."³³ Indeed, the Conference's Committee on Doctrinal Matters is "chiefly concerned with the clarification of doctrinal differences and a mode of procedure to resolve the differences."³⁴

Whether the difficulties within the Synodical Conference are called practical differences, doctrinal differences, or given some other label, is not the point.

³²Ibid., p. 8.

³³Ibid., p. 145.

³⁴Ibid.

The point is this. One of the four members of the Conference has severed relations with another member of the Conference, and yet shares in church fellowship, joint worship and joint church work within the Conference. This action is inconsistent with the principles employed by some of the member churches in the Conference.

The convention of 1958 heard and adopted a report by its committee concerning the infallibility and inspiration of Sacred Scripture.³⁵ The delegates praised its Joint Union Committee and repeated the admission of earlier years that the differences which divide the bodies of the Synodical Conference are doctrinal.

We urge this Committee to continue its God-pleasing endeavor to establish a doctrinal statement aiming at full agreement in all matters of doctrine.³⁶

The very use of the word "union" in the title of the Joint Union Committee and in earlier usage indicates that the Synodical Conference uses that term as a virtual synonym for "unity." In general, the Synodical Conference of North America reflects the principles and practices of its member synods. Where there have been conflicts among its member church bodies in principle and practice, the Synodical Conference has reflected a mixture of those

³⁵Proceedings of the Forty-Fifth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, 1958, p. 46.

³⁶Ibid.

various points of view. The Conference has made and is making serious attempts to resolve its own difficulties in doctrine and practice, and at the same time, its officials have frequently maintained its orthodoxy, purity, and unanimity as compared to the heterodox synods outside of the Conference.

It is not surprising, therefore, that frequently other Lutheran bodies look with disfavor upon the Synodical Conference for boasting of purity in doctrine and practice in spite of the divergencies of doctrine and practice within the Conference and at the same time condemning divergencies in doctrine and practice among non-Synodical Conference Lutheran bodies as sinful unionism and heterodoxy.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ORTHODOX LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

On July 11, 1951 an invitation to a meeting was extended to one hundred nineteen pastors and laymen of the Missouri Synod who had previously signed a document known as the Confession of Faith Professed and Practiced by All True Lutherans. The purpose of this meeting was to organize a conservative Lutheran church body.¹ The original invitation stated that this group of conservative Lutherans would be willing to return to the Missouri Synod,

whenever the present Missouri Synod organization returns to the Brief Statement position, especially when it rejects the 1945 Chicago Statement and the 1950 Common Confession and causes the individual adherents of these documents to reject them or expels such adherents from membership in Synod.²

This meeting became the constituting convention of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference. This convention was told that the mark of true orthodoxy is the practice as well as the confession of true doctrine. The Missouri

¹Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference, 1951, p. 4.

²Ibid.

Synod, through its heterodox practice, has become unorthodox.³

Yet, at a time when the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Joint Synod of Wisconsin were both in full fellowship with the Missouri Synod, the Orthodox Lutheran Conference resolved to declare full agreement and unity with the Norwegian and Wisconsin Synods within the framework of the Synodical Conference.⁴ It would seem that church fellowship with synods holding church fellowship with a heterodox body would be a very poor way to ^{begin} ~~being~~ an ecclesiastical organization dedicated to pure orthodox practice.

The Orthodox Lutheran Confession of Faith reaffirmed the Brief Statement and made a special point of condemning selective church fellowship, toleration of non-fundamental doctrines, the Chicago Statement, the Common Confession, the concept that there are dark areas of Sacred Scripture, and several other erroneous teachings.⁵

The delegates to the second convention of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference, not only subscribed to the Confession of Faith, but they also required all male and female communicants to sign the Confession.⁶ The convention also

³Ibid., p. 15.

⁴Ibid., p. 47.

⁵Ibid., pp. 51ff.

⁶Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference, 1952, p. 62.

recommended a model constitution for each congregation in the general body. This constitution insists that each communicant of the Conference must know and subscribe to the Augsburg Confession, the Small Catechism, and the Brief Statement.⁷

This church body, dedicated to orthodox doctrine and practice, appears to require perfect practice as well as pure doctrine as prerequisites for any relationship with other churches. Yet, this religious group seemed to be quite willing in its earlier days to practice selective fellowship with certain synodical bodies in the Synodical Conference who were still in fellowship with the heretical Missouri Synod. This inconsistency remains unexplained.

The Conference has attempted to protect its alleged purity of doctrine and practice by requiring subscription to its particular Confession of Faith, the Brief Statement, along with the historic Augsburg Confession and Small Catechism. Conformity with these confessions in faith and life are the price of merger, fellowship, or cooperation.

⁷Ibid., p. 76.

CHAPTER XV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Lutheran church bodies in America are divided on the degree of unity necessary for organic union, church fellowship, and cooperation with other church bodies. Every Lutheran body in America insists upon agreement in at least the historic Lutheran Confessions before merger with other church bodies can take place. Each Lutheran Synod refuses pulpit and altar fellowship with those churches which do not at least subscribe to the Augusburg Confession and the Small Catechism. All Lutheran bodies in this country demand at least an evangelical character from church bodies before any church cooperation can take place.

Beyond this, however, the Lutheran bodies studied would fall into approximately five different groupings in regard to their respective requirements for union, fellowship, and cooperation. Into the first category would go the United Lutheran Church in America and the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church. These bodies require subscription to the Sacred ^{Scriptures} ~~Sacraments~~ as the Word of God and to the historic Confessions of the Lutheran Church as a prerequisite for both organic union and pulpit and altar

fellowship. Generally, these two Lutheran bodies will cooperate only with other church bodies which are basically evangelical and when such cooperation does not deny or compromise the truth of the Lutheran Confessions. The Augustana Synod has not been as consistent in following these principles nor has it been as explicit in presenting them. The United Lutheran Church and the Augustana Synod are planning a merger in conjunction with the small Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. These two latter church bodies have not been included in this study.

The Lutheran Free Church seems to fall into a second category by itself. It appears to demand only confessional subscription as a prerequisite for church fellowship. Yet, its actions indicate that out of love for its principles of congregational polity and the body's emphasis upon its Twelve Principles, a document which exhibits this congregational emphasis, any Lutheran church body wishing to merge with the Lutheran Free Church must come to terms with this question of polity.

Into a third general category would fall the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church. These three bodies, which are planning to merge in 1960, agree that confessional subscription must often be supplemented by additional statements concerning doctrine and practice. Such doctrinal

considerations, exhibited by the Minneapolis Theses and the United Testimony, are necessary for any consideration of organic union. Those Lutheran bodies not subscribing to these documents in addition to the Lutheran Confessions are not automatically denied church fellowship. The American Lutheran and Evangelical Lutheran Churches are willing to consider "selective fellowship" with those pastors and parishes of Lutheran bodies not subscribing to the United Testimony if they are loyal to the historic confessions in doctrine and practice. The United Evangelical Lutheran Church has not appeared to have thought through the question of church fellowship as have the American and Evangelical Lutheran Churches. All three church bodies in this grouping cooperate with other Christians in the National Lutheran Council, the World Council of Churches, and the Lutheran World Federation. They have not affiliated with the National Council of Churches.

The National Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, and the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church appear to fall into a fourth category. These three church bodies insist that for any consideration of merger, a fellowship or churchly cooperation the churches in question should come to an agreement in all matters of doctrine and practice, even when these matters are not specifically treated in the Lutheran Confessions. In general, however, this is more or less of an ideal.

While the Missouri Synod allegedly cooperates with member churches of the National Lutheran Council only in "externals" it fully cooperates in spiritual matters with churches in the Synodical Conference with whom differences in doctrine and practice exist. The question of woman suffrage is a barrier to organic union between the National Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod, but this question is no barrier to full church fellowship or to full spiritual cooperation. While agreement in all matters of doctrine and practice is most highly desirable out of loyalty to the Word of God, some variations in non-fundamental doctrines are considered not necessarily divisive of church fellowship.

Into the fifth and last general category falls the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Orthodox Lutheran Conference. These church bodies insist upon absolute and complete agreement in every doctrine and in each point of practice. Non-fundamental doctrines are always divisive of church fellowship. All cooperation of a churchly nature involves such church fellowship, and hence, falls under the same requirements. These three bodies are basically divided in the extent to which these principles are consistently applied. Separation is required for those who deviate in doctrine and practice, and negotiations which attempt to eliminate these differences can

take place only under certain circumstances. The particular requirements for doctrinal discussions with other churches are not completely clarified among these three bodies.

Many of the church bodies examined in this study have demonstrated areas of unclear thinking and they have confused the issues of union, fellowship, and cooperation. A number of conclusions, therefore, may be drawn from this study which should be noted in future negotiations and relations among Lutheran church bodies in America.

First, many Lutheran church bodies should clarify their respective unity requirements for organic union, church fellowship, and churchly cooperation. Once this clarification has been made, the church bodies should be careful not to confuse the issues, so that the requirements for organic union do not become super-imposed upon the simple issues of cooperation or church fellowship. Some Lutheran church bodies will insist that the unity requirements necessary for union, fellowship, and cooperation are all exactly the same. In such cases it would be desirable if they would show why this is so.

For this reason it will be necessary for some bodies to clarify certain doctrinal concepts involved in their requirements for union, fellowship and cooperation. What is the nature and extent of the Church? What is the difference between a church and a federation in nature and function? What are the limits of church fellowship? Is

church fellowship distinct from churchly cooperation? Is a "doctrine" a formulation by the church or a revelation of Scripture? If it is a formulation in response to revelation, then how does a doctrine differ from Scriptural interpretation? Is there a basic difference between doctrine and practice, and if so, is one more important than the other in regard to Christian unity? In view of the human fallibility of Christians who compose the Church, how perfect does agreement and homogeneity in doctrine and practice have to be before organic union, church fellowship or churchly cooperation can take place?

Before dealing with another Lutheran body through negotiations and doctrinal discussions, the official position of the other church body should be noted in regard to its requirements for union, fellowship and cooperation. The joint invitation recently extended by the United Lutheran Church and the Augustana Synod failed to take into account the fact that many Lutheran bodies do not believe that subscription to the Scriptures and the Confessions is enough of a doctrinal basis for organic merger. Former discussions conducted by representatives of the Missouri Synod with representatives of the United Lutheran Church on the basis of the Brief Statement failed to recognize that the United Lutheran Church refuses to submit to doctrinal declarations above and beyond the historic Confessions.

When a synodical body remains loyal to its particular doctrinal declarations, other Lutheran bodies who wish to establish close relations should come to terms with those documents. Any church body hoping that the Lutheran Free Church will merge with it must first come to some kind of terms with the Free Church's Twelve Principles. Any future negotiations between The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church, the 1960 merger of certain "middle of the road" synods, must take into account, not merely the Brief Statement, but also the United Testimony. Any future negotiations with the planned merger of the Augustana Synod and the United Lutheran Church must be on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions, or else the new body must be shown that the particular documents being discussed do not go beyond Scripture and the Confessions.

In all activities of men as they meet and discuss, it must be remembered that unity, manifested in oneness of organization, in pulpit and altar fellowship, and in spiritual cooperation, is a gift of God. God's gifts, however, are only given through the Word and the Sacraments. As God, through these Means of Grace, speaks to us the truth in love, Lutherans will learn to more readily and effectively speak the truth in love to one another. Meanwhile Lutheran Christians pray for unity, fellowship, and cooperation in the words and spirit of the "General Prayer."

And may we, in communion with Thy Church and in brotherly unity with all our fellow-Christians, fight the good fight of faith and in the end receive the salvation of our souls.¹

¹The Lutheran Hymnal, authorized by the Synods constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), p. 13.

(Illustration for 1957 by National Lutheran Council unless otherwise indicated)

1. The United Lutheran Church in America	2,725,411
2. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod	1,228,159
3. The Evangelical Lutheran Church	1,082,809
4. The American Lutheran Church	972,929
5. The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church	376,198
6. The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Iowa States	342,992
7. The Lutheran Free Church	77,304
8. The United Methodist Lutheran Church	64,829
9. The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church*	53,281
10. The American Evangelical Lutheran Church*	35,093
11. The Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church	20,140
12. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod	15,601
13. The British Evangelical Lutheran Church	9,500
14. The Finnish Apostolic Church*	8,001
15. The Negro Members of the Synodical Conference*	7,429
16. The Church of the Lutheran Brethren*	4,220

APPENDIX

LUTHERAN CHURCH BODIES IN THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA AND CANADA

(Statistics for 1957 by National Lutheran
Council unless otherwise indicated)

1.	The United Lutheran Church in America	2,395,611
2.	The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod	2,228,133
3.	The Evangelical Lutheran Church	1,082,809
4.	The American Lutheran Church	972,929
5.	The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church	576,198
6.	The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States	342,992
7.	The Lutheran Free Church	77,304
8.	The United Evangelical Lutheran Church	64,629
9.	The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church*	38,281
10.	The American Evangelical Lutheran Church*	23,043
11.	The Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church	20,140
12.	The Evangelical Lutheran Synod	13,601
13.	The National Evangelical Lutheran Church	9,500
14.	The Finnish Apostolic Church*	8,001
15.	The Negro Missions of the Synodical Conference*	7,429
16.	The Church of the Lutheran Brethren*	4,220

17. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Eielsen Synod)*	1,500
18. The Orthodox Lutheran Conference	1,000**
19. The Protes'tant Conference*	1,000**
20. The Concordia Lutheran Conference*	350**

*Lutheran Church bodies not examined in this study.

**Approximations of membership.

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