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THE INTERDENOMINATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE
UNITED LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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June 1958

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When it is suggested that the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod establish relationships with interdenominational movements, the objection is often raised that this would be "unionism." If someone would ask why other Lutheran bodies in America engage in such relationships with an apparently clear conscience while the Missouri Synod does not, they often receive the reply that it is safer to concentrate on sound doctrine among our own people rather than participate in such movements. The implication of such an answer is that other Lutheran groups which engage in such relationships run the risk of compromising their Lutheranism. Dr. John W. Behnken apparently gave such an answer at a meeting of Lutheran presidents and representatives considering Lutheran action on the proposed World Council of Churches:

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."¹

Among the various American Lutheran bodies, the United Lutheran Church in America is one of the best examples of a large communion which officially acknowledges the Symbols of Lutheranism and at the same time maintains a relatively extensive series of relationships with various interdenominational Christian groups. This study will ignore the simple question: do these activities constitute unionism? Instead, this study

¹Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1946), p. 221.

will ask more objective question which cannot be answered with a simple (and often dogmatic) yes or no.

What basis or set of principles has the United Lutheran Church in America established to determine and govern its membership in, or association with, interdenominational Christian groups? How and when did these principles develop? Have they been modified seriously in the history of United Lutheran Church activity?

As the United Lutheran Church attempts to follow these principles, when has it rejected proposed interdenominational relationships? When has that communion established only limited interdenominational relationships?

What have been some of the general results of such activities? How have these relationships affected the established principles of the United Lutheran Church? How have the attitudes of that Church body been affected due to such activity? Has its internal solidarity been affected?

Since it is the intention of this study to let the United Lutheran Church in America speak for itself as often as possible, the following chapters lean rather heavily upon direct and indirect quotations extracted from the body's committees, executives, theologians and conventions. Hence, the principal source used in this study are the Minutes of the Biennial Conventions, although other sources such as books and periodicals have not been ignored. This study is primarily interested in the official principles and actions of the general Church body. In part, this is in recognition of Article III, Section 7 of the Constitution of the United Lutheran Church:

In the formation and administration of a general body, the Synods may know and deal with each other only as Synods. In all such

cases, the official record is to be accepted as evidence of the doctrinal position of each Synod and of the principles for which along the other Synods are responsible by connection with it.²

Some have referred to this section of the United Lutheran Constitution as being in opposition to the opinion expressed in the Erief Statement of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod:

The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of, and subscription to, an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine which is actually taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications.³

The primary attention which is given to official actions of the United Lutheran Church in this study is also due, in part, to the fact that many opinions gathered from individuals within this Church body. A fair analysis of such opinions would be beyond scope of this study. For the same reason the interdenominational activities of each of its component synods will not be treated in an exhaustive manner, but only as they affect the United Lutheran Church as a whole.

²Minutes of the First Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (n.p., 1918), p. 64.

³Doctrinal Declarations: A Collection of Official Statements of the Doctrinal Position of the Various Lutheran Synods in America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 52.

CHAPTER II

THE PRINCIPLES USED BY THE UNITED LUTHERAN CHURCH GOVERNING ITS ASSOCIATIONS IN COOPERATIVE AND ECUMENICAL MOVEMENTS

The Convention of 1913

Even before the first roll of delegates was called for organizing the United Lutheran Church, the introductory sermon preached at its first convention on November 14, 1913, called for and suggested certain principles and guidelines for the church body's interdenominational relationships.

The speaker was the Reverend Doctor Henry Eyster Jacobs.

Sooner or later, too, the Lutheran Church in America must define more adequately its relations to other Churches. . . . The student of the Book of Concord knows how, in its Preface, it discriminates between, on one hand, entire Churches--which it emphatically disclaims as condemning--and overzealous partisans on the other, who misrepresent and rancorously attack what we hold to be nothing less than the truth of God's Word; and how it extends the hand of sympathy to the Reformed martyrs of the Netherlands and of France and assures them that the Lutheran Churches are with them "in the fellowship of suffering."

We can never summarily brand, as unchristian, every religious body that has not formally adopted our confession, or, on the other hand, indiscriminately recognize all bearing the Christian name as safe spiritual guides. . . . No plans for preserving mechanical consistency can prevent men . . . from profiting by each other's experience and, in some measure, from co-ordinating their forces; while on the other hand, premature plans for union, without unity both in faith and in principles of practice, paralyze the life of the Church in seeking to suppress denominational distinctions.

May we not expect that the Lutheran Church in America, combining fidelity to its confession with kindly consideration of other Churches, may attain results on American soil, not hitherto reached in Europe? And may we not hope, and should we not pray that American Evangelical Protestantism may learn to appreciate more fully what we have found so precious in the Gospel, until the great Head of the Church, to whom nothing is impossible, shall, in His own time and way, bring about a union far wider than that we have today formed?¹

¹Minutes of the First Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (n.p., 1913), pp. 16f.

Dr. Jacobs suggested the following principles in his sermon:

- a. Avoid both the extremes of condemning church bodies per se and of failing to condemn individuals and groups who attack the Gospel.
- b. There are some legitimate areas of cooperation and fellowship possible with non-Lutherans.
- c. Do not ignore the real interdenominational differences which divide the Church.
- d. The United Lutheran Church has the right and duty to work for a "far wider" union.

In this convention the constitution of the United Lutheran Church was adopted. Article VIII, section 1 of this constitution is very important for this study as it places power of interdenomination affiliation solely into the hands of the communion as a whole rather than its constituent synods.

As to External Relations. The United Lutheran Church in America shall have power to form and dissolve relations with other general bodies, organizations and movements. To secure uniform and consistent practice no Synod, Conference or Board, or any official representative thereof, shall have power of independent affiliation with general organizations and movements.²

At least in theory, therefore, it is wrong to speak of any lack of control and central power in the United Lutheran Church. No Synod within the general body is permitted to affiliate with interdenominational movements. How consistently this is carried out in practice will be discussed later.

Already at this convention, invitations were received to affiliate with non-Lutheran councils and movements, including the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America.³ These invitations will be

²Ibid., p. 66.

³Ibid., p. 95.

discussed later. It is important to note at this point that these proposals were referred to the Executive Board. Since the first convention of the United Lutheran Church the Executive Board has taken a decisive hand in directing United Lutheran Church interdenominational policy. The Executive Board consists of the President of the general body, its secretary, treasurer, six pastors and six lay delegates elected by the general body for a term of four years.

The Washington Declaration of 1920

During the two years following the first convention of 1913, the Executive Board of the United Lutheran Church was repeatedly urged to join or affiliate the general body with cooperative movements. To put it in their own words in the introductory paragraph of the Washington Declaration,

during the past two years the Executive Board has been asked repeatedly to define the attitude of the United Lutheran Church toward cooperative movements both within and without the Lutheran Church, toward movements of various kinds looking in the direction of church union. . . .⁴

In this introduction the Executive Board also referred to Article VIII, Section 1 of the body's constitution. This section of the constitution placed into the hands of the general body the power to form and dissolve interdenominational relations. Since the United Lutheran Church needed guiding principles in forming interdenominational relations, the Executive Board presented the Declarations of Principles Concerning the Church and Its External Relationships for approval. This Declarations of Principles

⁴Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, (n.p., 1920), p. 92.

became known as the Washington Declaration after its adoption.

It is important to remember that, whatever the practice of the United Lutheran Church might be, the intention of the general body, quite evident in its Washington Declaration, is that the individual Synods are not to affiliate or practice fellowship with other church bodies. It is clearly intended that the general body is to maintain central control over all interdenominational activity of its Synods.

Before undertaking a full discussion of this document, it is necessary to note how the United Lutheran Church safeguards the Declaration from becoming another Confession.

the United Lutheran Church declares in advance that it does not regard the statements therein contained as altering or amending the Confessions of the Church in any particular . . . it considers this declaration nothing more the application to present conditions of doctrine already contained in the Confessions.⁵

The United Lutheran Church is referring to the traditional Book of Concord of 1580 when it speaks of the "Confessions." Article II of their constitution names the various parts of the Book of Concord and makes them her own in such terms as "receives," "holds," "accepts," and "recognizes" used virtually interchangeably.⁶

This Washington Declaration presents its principles in a systematic, well thought out way. First, it defines the Church as "Catholic." From this definition it infers the characteristics of a true denomination of that Church. It then shows why these various denominations of the Church

⁵Ibid., p. 93.

⁶Doctrinal Declaration: A Collection of Official Statements on the Doctrinal Position of Various Lutheran Synods in America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), n.d., p. 3.

must define their relationship with one another, and it lists four distinct aspects of this definition. The document after that proceeds to define the relationship of the United Lutheran Church to (a) other Lutheran bodies; (b) Protestant union; (c) Protestant cooperation.

According to the Washington Declaration, the Catholic Church is the "congregation of Saints which will continue forever." The term "Church" can justly be applied to any group of men provided "the Word is preached and the Sacraments are administered." By this activity, the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, the Church makes its presence known among men. On the one hand, the Catholic Church in its state of perfection "is not capable of demonstration," for while God truly sees "the Church--One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic," man sees only "many churches." On the other hand, "wherever the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are administered, the Holy Spirit works faith in Christ." Wherever one finds this, one finds the Church.⁷

From these simple facts concerning the Church the Washington Declaration infers five distinct characteristics of every denomination of the true Church. "Every group of professing Christians calling itself a Church" will also

1. Profess "faith in Christ, as the Saviour of the world and the Revealer of the will and love of God the Father." . . .
2. Preach the Word and Administer the Sacraments. "Every such group bases its preaching and teaching upon the Scriptures and endeavors to proclaim what it has learned from them." . . .
3. Perform "works of serving love." . . .

⁷Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1920, pp. 93f.

4. "Attempt to secure universal acceptance of the truth which it holds and confesses." . . .
5. "Maintain the office of the ministry, commanded and instituted by Christ. . . . the forms which the organization takes will vary with circumstances of time and place and are in themselves matters of expediency."⁸

These are the necessary marks of the Church, and consequently, they are also the indispensable means of identifying each denomination of the Church according to the Washington Declaration. Each group of professing Christians exhibiting these identification marks "is truly, partially and imperfect as it may be, an expression of the one holy Church inasmuch as it displays the marks of the Church."⁹

Two qualifying phrases are to be noted in the Declaration: "partially and imperfect as it may be," and "inasmuch as." On one hand, the Declaration refuses to grant to any denomination the right to claim full, absolute truth without qualification. No denomination has the full truth in a perfect sense. Each Christian group must apply to itself the qualifying "inasmuch as." On the other hand, the Declaration does not recognize all denominations as equal in their churchly quality. Some denominations of the Church are more loyal to the faith of the Church, Catholic than are others. Therefore:

Distinctions must be recognized between one group and another. In making these distinctions . . . those groups in which the Word of God is most purely preached and confessed according to the Holy Scriptures and in which the Sacraments are administered in the closest conformity to the institution of Christ will be the most complete expression of the holy Church. For this reason . . . any

⁸Ibid., pp. 94f.

⁹Ibid., pp. 95.

such group of Christians shall define its relationship to other groups. . . .¹⁰

In which way and according to which criteria is a group of Christians to define its relationship with other groups of Christians? How shall one group act toward and speak to another? The Declaration lists four distinct aspects to be kept in mind as one group of Christians approaches another. Each Christian 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 suppression of its testimony as to what it holds to be the truth."¹¹

Now that the United Lutheran Church has defined its general approach to other Christian groups, to testify for Christ and against error in order to give and receive edification, recognizing the truth among others and cooperating where possible, how does this church body regard the question of Lutheran union, the question of Christian union, and the question of Christian cooperation?

The Declaration has only one short paragraph on the relationship between the United Lutheran Church and the other Lutheran bodies. For full cooperation and organic union only two prerequisites are given:

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

- a. That they call themselves Evangelical Lutheran.
- b. That they subscribe to "the Confessions which have always been regarded as the standards of Evangelical Lutheran doctrine" . . .¹²

The United Lutheran Church in America, through the long, traumatic development of its historic components, has come to recognize and accept in its constitution the Symbolic Books of the Lutheran Church. Having reached this level of Confessional loyalty, however, it is firm in its stand that no test for Lutheran orthodoxy go beyond these historic Confessions. This definition of relations with other Lutherans is spelled out even more clearly in an adopted resolution in the 1944 Convention, that the general body favors union of Lutherans:

on the basis of our common, official subscription to the historic Confessions of the Lutheran Church (especially the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism), in addition to which we will impose no tests of Lutheranism and beyond which we will submit to no tests of Lutheranism.¹³

While it is true that the United Lutheran Church has formed certain documents of agreements, like the Pittsburg agreement with the American Lutheran Church on inspiration, it has always stated that such documents are not modifications of the above stand.

Since this defines the attitude of the United Lutheran Church in America toward every Lutheran body in this country (as each major body in American Lutheranism fulfills the two prerequisites listed above), this report becomes concerned only with the relationship of the United Lutheran Church to non-Lutheran movements among Christian bodies. Such movements

¹²Ibid.

¹³Minutes of the Fourteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1944), p. 241.

as the Lutheran World Federation and the National Lutheran Council, both of which meet the United Lutheran Church requirements for full organic union, will not be considered in this study.

At the time the Declaration was formulated there seemed to be "wide-spread discussion" concerning uniting all "Protestants" into one body. Therefore in the next section the United Lutheran Church defines itself over against the proposal to unite all Protestants. It is to be noted that the term "Protestants" is used rather than "Christian." The general attitude of the Declaration toward such a union is negative and yet friendly as the following five points are made:

1. Union of organization we hold, therefore, to be a matter of expediency; agreement in testimony to be a matter of principle.
2. A clear definition of what is meant by "Gospel" and "Sacrament" must precede any organic union of the Church. . . . The Churches cannot unite as mere Protestants, but only as confessors.
3. The Protestant Church Bodies in America . . . set forth . . . the views of Christian truth for which each of them does now actually stand in order that . . . the nature and extent of their agreements and disagreements may become apparent.
4. We . . . are therefore ready . . . to give answer concerning our reasons for accepting and maintaining the doctrines and principles set forth in the Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.
5. 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. ¹⁴

Several things are to be noted concerning these five points. First, nowhere does the Declaration make the Augsburg Confession or any of the

¹⁴Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1920, pp. 96f.

other Symbols of Lutheranism a sine qua non of Protestant union. This, of course, does not mean that the United Lutheran Church would be prepared to give up any of its contents, or even the documents as such. However, the Declaration, having pointed out the general principles, implies that the general body is willing to discuss doctrine and practice without threatening to compel a future union of churches to subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions. These five points do make it clear, however, that the contents of the Lutheran Symbols will have to enter into such a discussion leading to Protestant union.

Secondly, it is interesting to note that the Declaration proposes these five points as relevant to a "Protestant" union. This would exclude the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Communion, and according to the definition of some, the Anglican Communion. Werner Elert raises a criticism of such an omission as far as the Roman Church is concerned: "The Lutheran Church, at any rate, cannot consider the ecumenical whole as complete without the Roman Church."¹⁵

Finally, many Lutherans will find the qualifying "more" in point five questionable. For some, the unity of confession must be complete and absolute, not merely an improvement of quality. Whether the framers of the Declaration were making a concrete distinction between a "complete unity" and a "more complete unity" is a problem for further study.

The attitude of the Declaration toward the idea of Protestant cooperation is not a negative as it is toward the proposal for Protestant union. The United Lutheran Church is ready and willing to cooperate with other

¹⁵Elert Werner, The Christian Ethos (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), p. 374.

Church bodies and interdenominational movements:

in all such works as can be regarded as works of serving love, through which the faith of Christians finds expression; 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.¹⁶

This statement clearly indicates that the Christian faith must be the motivating factor of such an interdenominational activity. The end of "works of love" is not really an end in itself. The works of love must be the result of the Christian faith. Hence, the Declaration states that it "cannot give general approval to all cooperative movements" because "cooperation is not an end in itself, but merely a means to an end."¹⁷

Whenever the United Lutheran Church is invited to affiliate with an interdenominational organization, it should according to the Declaration ask itself three questions:

1. What are the "purposes which it seeks to accomplish?"
2. What are the "principles on which it rests?"
3. What would be the "effect which our participation will produce upon the independent position of our Church as a witness to the truth of the Gospel which we confess?"¹⁸

The Declaration then proposes nine fundamental "doctrines and principles" as a basis for "practical cooperation among the Protestant Churches." Again, 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 admitted

¹⁶Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1920, p. 97.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁸Ibid.

that they are not a full and adequate basis for organic union. They are only a "criterion by which it may be possible for us to determine our attitude toward proposed movements of cooperation."¹⁹

The nine doctrines guiding the cooperative activity of the United Lutheran Church are these:

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 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 create 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 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.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 98f.

The Declaration does not demand that each interdenominational movement in question verbally acknowledge each of these nine doctrines, but it does insist that the United Lutheran Church cannot "enter into any cooperative movement or organization which denies any" of the nine listed points. Neither can the United Lutheran Church affiliate with such a movement if, while not specifically rejecting any of the above doctrines, it "limits the cooperating Churches in their confession of the truth or their testimony against error." Any organization or movement whose "purposes lie outside the proper sphere of Church activity," even if it does not deny any of the nine doctrines or suppress testimony of the truth, cannot hope to have the United Lutheran Church affiliate with it. While the Church cannot participate in organizations dedicated to social reform, enforcement of law, or settlement of industrial conflicts, it may "heartily recommend to the pastors and members of its congregations" these organizations as "important spheres of activity for Christians."²¹

The final section of the Declaration dwells at length on anti-Christian or non-Christian emphases of many organization. Without naming any of them, the Declaration condemns them and indicates that "all our pastors and the members of our congregations" are to be warned against them and to "scrutinize with the utmost care" their doctrines and principles.²²

This Declaration of Principles, after it had been amended was presented to the general convention in 1920, and adopted unanimously according

²¹Ibid., p. 99.

²²Ibid., pp. 99f.

to the official minutes of this convention, was received quite warmly:

The adoption of the Preamble, and therewith of the Declaration as a whole, was taken by a rising vote which was unanimous. While standing, the Convention sang two stanzas of Hymn 195, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." The President then declared the Preamble and the entire Declaration was adopted.²³

Subsequent Development of Principles Guiding External Relationships

In the Convention of 1922 the "Representative Principle" was given its first official recognition in a standing resolution:

All representatives of agencies of the United Lutheran Church are urged to do their utmost so that the representative principle be strongly maintained in all cooperative organizations. This applies to the tendency at present in such organizations themselves to add to the representatives of denominations increasing numbers of individuals, under various designations as members (co-opted, at large, corresponding, advisor, affiliated, etc.) with varying powers.²⁴

The thinking behind this "Representative Principle" is that if an agency or an interdenominational federation allows individuals to affiliate on a co-opted basis, not necessarily representing a member denomination, then such individuals could change the purpose and the activity of such a body. The member denominations might be trinitarian, while the mass of "members at large" might be unitarian.

The principles involved in the Washington Declaration of 1920, along with the "Representative Principle" expressed officially in 1922, were

²³Ibid., p. 455.

²⁴Minutes of the Third Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (n.p., 1922), p. 70.

identified in the Report of the President to the 1950 convention by Dr. Franklin Clark Fry as "two criteria" which have "governed all decisions regarding any working partnership or formal association with other Protestants." The first of these two criteria Dr. Fry summarizes as the evangelical principle which the "Washington Declaration of 1920 enunciated . . . in clear and ringing words." Dr. Fry proclaimed strongly that the United Lutheran Church has followed this evangelical principle "unwaveringly."²⁵ The United Lutheran Church has refused affiliation, according to the Report of Dr. Fry, whenever the organization in question includes "non-Evangelicals" or has a constitution which would permit non-evangelicals to enter at some later date. The "representative principle," according to Dr. Fry, has been emphasized so much by the United Lutheran Church that the principle and the church body have "become almost synonymous." Every representative in an interdenominational organization must represent an evangelical denomination, not themselves or "organizations which are less than churches."

Since the convention of 1954, the Executive Board has reviewed the constitutions and by-laws of the various state Councils of Churches at the request of individual synods within the United Lutheran Church.²⁶ Two questions are specifically asked of each constitution:

1. Is the "evangelical principle" safeguarded in the Constitution?
2. Is the "representative principle" safeguarded in the Constitution?

²⁵Minutes of the Seventeenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1950), p. 32.

²⁶Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1954), p. 494.

The Executive Board, on the basis of the answers to these two questions, then states whether membership by the local synod is "in consistency with interdenominational standards" of the United Lutheran Church.²⁷

The inevitable conclusion to this part of the study is that the United Lutheran Church in America, from the very start of its existence, has worked with definite principles guiding its interdenominational activity. These principles were expressed carefully and systematically within four years after the birth of the general body and have been used by the general body in its actions and in the self-examination of its constituent synods.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 445.

CHAPTER III

COOPERATIVE AND INTERDENOMINATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS INITIALLY OR ULTIMATELY DECLINED BY THE UNITED LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

The United Lutheran Church confronted, in the early years of its existence, a variety of invitations by interdenominational organizations to become affiliated with their programs. The more comprehensive movements, such as the National Council of Churches of Christ and the World Council of Churches, had not yet come into existence. Hence, many of these invitations which the United Lutheran Church received in its earlier years came from small, activist groups.

One of these movements was the Lord's Day Alliance. At the first Convention of the United Lutheran Church they extended an invitation to affiliate. It was referred to the Executive Board of the general body. Two years later, at the same Convention which approved the Washington Declaration, the United Lutheran Church declined any association with this movement:

chiefly an account of the sabbatical principles and legalistic methods of the organization and its intrusion of the Church into the sphere of the State.¹

The Executive Board noted, however, that it was not enough simply to condemn the program and principles of the above organization. Therefore, it recommended that

plans be devised by which our people may be taught, inspired and impelled by the Church both to a right understanding and use of the

¹Minutes of the First Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (n.p., 1912), p. 83.

Lord's Day and to the adoption and pursuit of the highest ideals of Christian citizenship.²

Another movement which extended an invitation to the United Lutheran Church was the Interchurch World Movement. According to the minutes of the Second Convention, this was more than an invitation. Immediate action was necessitated by "insistent effort" from both without and within the United Lutheran Church. Hence, the Executive Board "decline participation on the part of the United Lutheran Church, its boards and agencies." The reason for the declension were not spelled out. The only reasons given was that it was on "constitutional grounds." The implication seemed to be that this was a forcefully militant body.³

The Interchurch Council on Organic Union also asked for consideration. The Convention of 1920 stated that the Executive Board reported on this movement along with others, but took no action.⁴ Since this movement was not considered in subsequent Convention reports, it probably can be assumed that it died in committee.

In 1920 the World Conference of Faith and Order asked for consideration by the United Lutheran Church. At this time, however, the request was neither studied nor acted upon.⁵ Two years later, the United Lutheran Church was faced by an immediate invitation to join both the World Conference of Faith and Order and the Universal Conference of the Church of Christ

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

on Life and Work. Forced into action by the invitation, the President provisionally declined both.⁶ A report of both movements was given to the Convention of 1922. The report seemed a bit nebulous. This is understandable since these movements had not yet taken any kind of concrete shape.⁷ Both of these movements will be treated extensively in Chapter V, since after the Convention of 1922 the United Lutheran Church slowly developed relations with them. These culminated in the affiliation of the United Lutheran Church with the World Council of Churches in 1948.

The action of the United Lutheran Church toward the American Bible Society in one sense could not be considered a rejection. When a representative from this agency addressed the First Convention in 1913, Dr. G. M. Jacobs presented a resolution "commending this venerable organization as most worthy of the encouragement, support, and cooperation of our pastors and congregations."⁸ Yet, when in 1920 it asked the general body for official recognition and a place on its budget, the United Lutheran Church declined the request, but merely recommended the cause of the society to all member congregations.⁹

Finally, the Young Men's Christian Organization also might be considered in this chapter. In 1924 this movement invited the United Lutheran Church to appoint a standing committee to confer with the movement on

⁶Minutes of the Third Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (n.p., 1922), p. 38.

⁷Ibid., pp. 88-94.

⁸Minutes of the First Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1913, p. 88.

⁹Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (n.p., 1920), p. 686.

"matters of mutual concern." The United Lutheran Church acceded to this request in order to "help the Y. M. C. A. in its declared purpose to establish itself more firmly on a sound evangelical basis."¹⁰ Reports were given to the Convention of the United Lutheran Church until 1936.

During this period the reports by the standing committee were of a very general and factual nature. Now and then they revealed some critical evaluation:

Local associations are absolutely autonomous in matters of immediate administration and policy and the National and State organizations of the Y. M. C. A. are able to do little more than recommend action and exert whatever influence they can through the traveling secretaries.¹¹

There seems to be increasing emphasis on the Christian message and purpose among those higher up in the Councils of the organization. The difficulty lies in the almost complete autonomy often allowed to individual associations and secretaries.¹²

In the convention of 1934 Pastor A. R. Wentz "expressed the hope that the Commission would be fully prepared to present a statement for the consideration of the Church at its next convention."¹³ Yet, the

¹⁰Minutes of the Fourth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1924), pp. 95f.

¹¹Minutes of the Fifth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1926), p. 551.

¹²Minutes of the Eighth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1932), p. 526.

¹³Minutes of the Ninth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1934), p. 552.

Minutes of the next convention reported that there was no report of this committee. It was moved and carried that this committee on Conference with the Y. M. C. A. be discontinued.¹⁴ No explanation was given for this action of the convention.

¹⁴Minutes of the Tenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1936), p. 462.

of the Church is the Federal Council of Churches and its various agencies, the National Council of Churches. The association by the United Lutheran Church of these agencies gives a good comprehensive review of the way in which the general body puts into practice the principles outlined in Chapter II.

At the first convention in 1918 the delegates heard an address by the president of the Federal Council of Churches. The general body at that time recognized that the Federal Council provided a "medium through which Evangelical Churches in this country have been able to cooperate for common objects." The question of relationship with the Federal Council was referred to the Executive Board.¹

The convention of 1920 started the relations by sending four visitors to the next Federal Council meeting.² The United Lutheran Church seriously and openly considered what to do about the Federal Council at the following convention in 1922. The convention had to stop continually, however, for

¹Minutes of the First Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (1918), p. 25.

²Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (1920), p. 25.

CHAPTER IV

THE RELATIONS OF THE UNITED LUTHERAN CHURCH WITH THE FEDERAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST AND THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Of all interdenominational movements to which the United Lutheran Church has given attention, the one which occupies more space in the official Minutes of the Church is the Federal Council of Churches and its larger successor, the National Council of Churches. The examination by the United Lutheran Church of these movements gives a good comprehensive overview of the way in which the general body puts into practice the principles outlined in Chapter II.

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¹Minutes of the First Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (n.p., 1918), p. 85.

²Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (n.p., 1920), p. 86.

if they criticized the Federal Council without qualification, this would be tantamount to censoring the former membership of the General Synod in that body. First, they recognized the fact that the old General Synod was a member of the Federal Council of Churches. Then, they stated that the question of affiliation with the Federal Council had to be considered anew because of the "enlarged program" of the Council. Thus, the convention avoided condemning the former membership of the General Synod.³

At this convention the Executive Board told the delegates that the United Lutheran Church should not "enter into corporate relations with, or become a member of, the Federal Council."⁴ They gave the convention three reasons:

1. While the Federal Council is a federal union, the confessional statement in the Preamble is weak. . . . "In Jesus Christ as their divine Lord and Savior" . . . "Unitarians . . . can so interpret the words 'divine Lord and Saviour' as to accept them and join the Federal Council without any change in the Preamble. . . . It differs also . . . from our Declaration of Principles . . . 'the true Godhead of Jesus Christ and His redemption of the world by His life, death and resurrection.'⁵
2. The Federal Council attempts to have the world "follow Christian principles" before the world is "truly converted to Christian principles" "Attention is here called especially to the Social Creed of the Churches. . . ."⁶
3. "The program of the Federal Council is so constructed as to embrace practically every activity of the Church."⁷

³ Minutes of the Third Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (n.p., 1922), p. 73.

⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 75f.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 78f.

⁷ Ibid., p. 82.

Yet, the Executive Board admitted that there are areas in which the Church may cooperate without involving "the question of fidelity to the faith." For this reason, the convention accepted the Board's evaluation and approved a list of activities in which the United Lutheran Church could cooperate with the Federal Council as a consultative member, having voice but no vote. Areas in which they could participate were (a) Study of the question of Christian unity; (b) Common phases of educational work; (c) Army and Navy chaplains; (d) General surveys; (e) Conference and exchange of departmental plans; (f) Declarations on matters of public concern, published only by those bodies which approve; (g) Relief work; (h) Assembling and publishing Church statistics; (i) Publicity; (j) Transportation arrangements.⁸

Before continuing with the development of relations between the United Lutheran Church and the Federal Council of Churches, it is necessary to note an important development in the conventions of 1920 and 1922. In 1920 the convention granted "tentative permission" to the Home and Foreign Mission Boards, the Board of Education, the Sunday School Board and the Women's Missionary Society to "associate themselves ad interim with the parallel interdenominational Councils, Commissions, Societies, etc."⁹ This permission became more concrete in 1922 when this tentative permission was confirmed, and permission was also granted to the Boards of Northwestern Missions and others to join the Home Missions Council or the Foreign Missions Conference.¹⁰

⁸Ibid., p. 83.

⁹Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1920, pp. 86f.

¹⁰Minutes of the Third Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1922, pp. 69f.

These agencies were considered to be "interboard bodies" bearing no relationship with the Federal Council of Churches. Little did the conventions realize at this time that in 1950 these "interboard bodies" with which United Lutheran boards were affiliated would merge with the Federal Council to form the National Council of Churches, thus forcing the United Lutheran Church either to withdraw its agencies from these interboard bodies or to enter into full membership with the new National Council of Churches.

During the early years of consultative affiliation with the Federal Council of Churches, the reports to the United Lutheran conventions were fairly negative. In the visitor's report of 1924 some things were seen at the Federal Council convention of which they approved. Other things "served to deepen our conviction" that the United Lutheran Church should not be a full member.¹¹ In 1926 the visitors reported that the Federal Council "is a constant expression of Reformed Protestantism of the most distinctive type." It is "largely committed to a legalistic conception of God and human life." The evangelicals "do not give character to the Council as a whole." From its expanded machinery it will either "collapse from within" or become a "super-church body." "Unfaithfulness" and "compromises" are evident.¹² In 1923 there was no visitor's report to the convention.

¹¹Minutes of the Fourth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1924), p. 95.

¹²Minutes of the Fifth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1926), p. 103.

By the convention of 1930 the tone of the visitor's report seems to change a bit, although the negative side is still clearly presented. According to the visitors, the existence of the Council is justified by its Department of Research. The Council reports given on the rural and urban church were "informative," "suggestive," and "inspirational." Yet, they reported, there are strong attempts by some groups to influence Federal Council legislation. Again the visitors stated that they are glad that the United Lutheran Church has consultative membership only.¹³

In 1932 the visitors reported an "unusual interest" in spiritual matters. The Federal Council Commission on Evangelism criticized "modern liberalism." The Federal Council was re-examining itself.¹⁴ Yet, at this convention there was a strong critical attitude toward the Federal Council. The New York Ministerium criticized the practice of the Federal Council for making public pronouncements for all of its members.¹⁵ The Pennsylvania Ministerium went so far as to propose a severance of relations with the Federal Council.¹⁶ Action on these two memorials by the convention was to direct the Executive Board to "re-examine our relationship to the Federal Council of Churches and make recommendation."¹⁷

¹³Minutes of the Seventh Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1930), pp. 52f.

¹⁴Minutes of the Eighth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1932), p. 53.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 445.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 446.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 443.

The visitor's report to the convention of 1934 noted some sentiment in the United Lutheran Church to withdraw from the Federal Council and other sentiment to become full members. The visitors stated that there was "less reason for withdrawal and more reason for adherence than there was in 1922." Yet, the hindrances to full membership listed in 1922 are "for the most part still cogent."¹⁸ Obviously, the United Lutheran Church's opinion of the Federal Council is slowly improving.

The representatives to the Federal Council gave the 1936 convention a detailed report on the various activities of the Council. Their evaluation of the sessions was that there was an increase in evangelism, education, and conservative theology. They added, however,

the relationship of the United Lutheran Church in America with the Federal Council of Churches offers an opportunity not to receive service, but to render a conservative and constructive influence.¹⁹

Another favorable but cautious report was given by the consultative representatives in the convention of 1938. "A more conservative spirit" was noticed in the Federal Council convention. Some activity of the Federal Council "might seem to give the impression" that the Council is trying to direct world unity efforts. Yet, there is a "growing scriptural approach" to the Council's problems.²⁰ This convention also approved the

¹⁸Minutes of the Ninth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1934), p. 103.

¹⁹Minutes of the Tenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1936), p. 32.

²⁰Minutes of the Eleventh Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1938), pp. 92f.

withdrawal of its committee on Army and Navy Work from the Federal Council of Churches in order to work with other Lutherans through the National Lutheran Council.²¹

Along with the usual factual report on Federal Council activities, the visitors reported to the convention of 1940 that the Federal Council is re-examining itself, asking, "what is the will of Christ?"²² Those visitors also reported that efforts were being made to merge certain "interboard bodies" with the Federal Council. The United Lutheran Church convention was warned that if and when this takes place, their denomination would have to decide whether to withdraw from all of them or to form another relationship with all of them.²³ The representatives of the United Lutheran Church noted the violent attack which certain groups had made on the Federal Council. The foundation for these attacks were "utterances of individual members for which the Federal Council of Churches should not be held responsible."²⁴

Prior to the Convention in 1942, the Federal Council of Churches extended an invitation to the United Lutheran Church to affiliate as a voting member. Since the Protestant Episcopal Church had just entered the Federal Council as a voting member, the Council considered this to be an opportune time to ask the United Lutheran Church to do likewise. In order

²¹Ibid., p. 526.

²²Minutes of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1940), p. 107.

²³Ibid., p. 110.

²⁴Ibid.

to assist the Executive Board to make a wise recommendation to the convention, the visitors to the Federal Council presented a list of arguments for and against constituent membership on the part of the United Lutheran Church.

Some of the basic arguments against full affiliation had been presented before; other are new: (a) "It is still not a unity in faith"; (b) "The Federal Council of Churches still does not properly distinguish . . . between the legalistic and evangelical principles, between the true functions of the State and those of the church"; (c) "Full membership would weaken the distinctive Lutheran position"; (d) "The Federal Council tends to become a super-church"; (e) It would interfere with the general Lutheran picture, delay union and offend some people; (f) It would lead to interdenominational pulpit, altar prayer fellowship; (g) It would endanger our people to the errors of others; (h) It would not be worth the expenditures involved."²⁵

The basic arguments which the visitors listed in favor of full membership are obviously inconsistent with those already listed opposing full membership. A summary of these arguments in favor of full membership are as follows: (a) "The Atlantic City Convention has clearly revealed that the Council does not interfere with any denomination's doctrinal basis or historic practices"; (b) "There is no attempt to coerce any individual or group"; (c) "The United Lutheran Church has a distinctive contribution to make"; (d) "The Lutheran Church now is the only major

²⁵Minutes of the Thirteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1942), pp. 123f.

Protestant Church outside of the FCC"; (e) The Federal Council is not a super-church; (f) Cooperation does not affect doctrinal differences; (g) Relationship with the Federal Council will have no affect on Lutheran union; (h) The United Lutheran Church has full membership in other agencies; (i) The United Lutheran Church will become more constructive and less critical; (j) The world crisis demands more cooperation; (k) All Lutheran bodies should unite with the Federal Council if "our essential Lutheran positions are not affected in any way"; (l) "If the United Lutheran Church profits by . . . consultative membership, it should not hesitate to accept the invitation to constituent membership."²⁶

Obviously, these reasons for and against constituent membership are neither consistent nor well organized. Apparently, they are summaries of the arguments given to the visitors from different quarters. The action of the Executive Board, after receiving the visitor's report, was to state that "it would be unwise at this time to accept constituent membership in the Federal Council of Churches, but that . . . the matter be referred to a special committee of three for study and report."²⁷

This committee of three then gave its report which seems to summarize the evaluation of the visitors during the last ten years:

The FCC is primarily an association of churches of the Reformed group. There has been no essential change in the constitution of the FCC. . . . However, the changes in the policies of the FCC since 1932, and changes in general conditions in the world in recent times, favor a closer working relationship between the ULCA and the FCC. . . . The discussion and negotiations in which the FCC is now engaged . . . involved the possibility of fundamental changes in its organization

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 125f.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

which would make necessary a complete reconsideration of our relationship to it or to the new body.²⁸

The committee of three ended its report by recommending continued consultative membership in the Federal Council and that an official commission be formed to make biennial reports to the Convention of the United Lutheran Church. When this recommendation was made to the convention, however, a substitute motion was presented that the United Lutheran Church join as a constituent member of the Federal Council. After a debate lasting two sessions, the question was called and the substitute motion was voted down. The original motion of the three-man committee was adopted.²⁹ Although the motion to join the Federal Council as a full member was defeated, it demonstrated that a strong desire to join had risen among some delegates.

The negative side in the visitor's report in 1944 on the Federal Council was still present, but the positive evaluation predominates. The visitors were "heartened" by a "continued advance" toward an "evangelical spirit." Liberalism of "yesteryear is waning." Unionism is conspicuous by its absence. There is still an overemphasis upon "machinery and function," "programs and action," and the tendency is still strong for the Federal Council to act without the authority of its member bodies. The visitors add that if the proposed new agency is

voluntary association of several communions, without commitments by them which might involve compromise of the faith, in one organization, for the sake of exchanging ideas, consulting with one another in matters of mutual interest, inspiring one another to increasingly effective witness-bearing for Jesus Christ . . . in that case . . .

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 131f.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 479.

the ULCA would find itself mightily drawn to acceptance of an invitation to assume membership in the new Council from the beginning.³⁰

The Commission to the Federal Council of Churches was directed by the convention "faithfully to interpret the spirit and life of the ULCA to the FCC, and to interpret the spirit and life of the FCC to the ULCA."³¹ In turn, this commission suggested that the convention "commend the FCC for its action in more fully establishing the control of its executive committee over its publications and pronouncements" and also recommended to the Federal Council that the application for membership by the Universalist Church and the Church of the New Jerusalem be rejected.³²

Before the convention of 1946, the Executive Board again debated the arguments for and against constituent membership in the Federal Council and centered its main objection to full membership on the Council's violation of the representative principle:

The United Lutheran Church disapproves in principle of the provision . . . which allows any representation in the Executive Committee of the Federal Council which has not been initiated by the Churches themselves. Our Church specifically disapproves of the inclusion of six representatives of the interests of the state and local councils of churches in the Federal Council's Executive Committee.³³

The Commission to the Federal Council of Churches gave the convention an objective, factual report on the Council's activities. It concluded its

³⁰Minutes of the Fourteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1944), pp. 113f.

³¹Ibid., p. 117.

³²Ibid., pp. 251f.

³³Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1946), p. 266.

report by commending "the work of the Federal Council to the loyal support and the prayerful concern of the United Lutheran Church in America."³⁴

In 1947 the Committee on Interdenominational Relations reported to the Executive Board of the United Lutheran Church concerning the latest convention of the Federal Council held the previous year. In this convention of the Federal Council the question was raised as to the relation of the Council to Church union. The Disciples of Christ and the Congregational Christian Church has presented memorials which proposed that the Federal Council sponsor conferences designed to promote church union among member denominations. These memorials were opposed by the United Lutheran delegates as unconstitutional. It was decided by the Federal Council convention to ask member churches of the Council if they were interested in such a conference on union. The Committee on Interdenominational Relations expressed the opinion, based on this convention, that there were two opposing groups in the Federal Council:

One group sees the Federal Council as an instrument for church union. A second group would restrict its purpose to the largest measure of inter-church cooperation consistent with the faith.³⁵

Accordingly, the Committee on Interdenominational Relations proposed that the Executive Board notify the Federal Council that it heartily approves a statement of the General Secretary of the Council, namely, "The Council is an instrument, not of union, but of cooperation." This committee also recommended that the President of the United Lutheran Church both turn

³⁴Ibid., p. 536.

³⁵Minutes of the Sixteenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1948), p. 246.

down the proposed union conference and also accompany this rejection with the section concerning Protestant organic union from the Washington Declaration. This Committee later reported to the Executive Board that the Federal Council refused to sponsor the union conference but did "offer the services of its staff and the use of its office force" to those who wanted to participate.³⁶

In April this same Committee reported that it complained to Dr. S. W. Calvert on a direct appeal made to the United Lutheran Parishes by the Federal Council for closer cooperation. The Committee seemed satisfied with his answer:

I write to assure you that in the future, we will make no approach to Lutheran Congregations except through the United Lutheran organizations.³⁷

At this point in the development of relations between the United Lutheran Church and the Federal Council of Churches, the question of the proposed constitution for the National Council of Churches comes into view. The Commission to the Federal Council reported the two basic obstacles in the constitution: (a) The proposed National Council constitution would let in unevangelical bodies and agencies; and (b) It permits cooption of personnel not representative of the member churches. If both of these obstacles were eliminated, according to the commission, the National Council Constitution would be tolerable. The Commission claimed that the United Lutheran Church was doing everything it could to remove these obstacles:

³⁶Ibid., p. 247.

³⁷Ibid., p. 248

Long conferences and detailed correspondence have been involved in our honest effort to find a way in which the ULCA could take part in the NCC. Thus far that way has not been found. The devoutly earnest search is being continued.³⁸

The Committee on Interdenominational Relations was then directed to draw up a statement of difficulties hindering United Lutheran participation in the National Council. First, the Committee listed those difficulties "involving obscurities of vocabulary interpretation." Here, they cited Article II, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; Article IV, 2, (a), (b); Article V, 3; and Article X, 2. Some of these objections are technical, but others are not:

In Article II, 4, the term "devotional fellowship" is used. Its meaning seems a bit vague to us. Does it mean the promotion of so-called "ecumenical services of worship"?

In Article II, 5, here our concern is especially great. "To foster and encourage cooperation between two or more communions." Does this mean that the National Council would consider it its responsibility to serve as an active agent for the production of integral union of denominations.

Throughout the constitution we found ourselves confused concerning the relationship of the divisions to the council and vice versa. The constitution would allow us to conclude that the council is a thing apart from the divisions and that the divisions are granted an autonomy which would appear to nullify most of the advantages sought in the formation of the National Council.³⁹

The second group of difficulties listed in the constitution are violations of the Representative Principle. Agencies must be governed by boards whose personnel are representative of the member Churches. Any excuse which would permit individuals, agencies, or local councils which do not represent member churches to enter the National Council is objection. According to the Committee, the Council must be a Council of Churches, not

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 743.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 273f.

a Council of councils or a Council of "members at large." Instances of the violation of this principle in the Constitution were in Article III, 3, 4; Article IV, 2, 4; Article IX, 3; Article X, 4, 9; Article XI, 7; Article XII, 4; Article XIV, and Article XV.⁴⁰

A third group of obstacles to full United Lutheran membership were listed as constitutional violations of the Evangelical Principle. The Council and its members must be evangelicals in the sense of Article III of the Washington Declaration. The Committee wisely aimed its chief criticism at the Preamble of the constitution, especially the words, "to manifest the essential oneness . . . by the creation of the inclusive cooperative agency. . . ."

The Preamble seems to imply that the Christian Churches of the USA have already achieved "essential oneness" in Jesus Christ and their Divine Lord and Saviour. This implication we find unwarranted by the facts.⁴¹

Other parts of the constitution which this Committee cites as violating the Evangelical Principle are Article II, 1, 6; Article III, 2 (a), (b), 3 (b); Article IV, 3; Article V, 8; Article IX, 3; Article X, 3; Article XI, 7; Article XII, 4; and Article XIV, 2. Most of these sections referred to are really violations of the Representative Principle, since they would permit Churches, agencies, and individuals which are not evangelical to enter the National Council.⁴²

In the spring of 1948 these difficulties which the United Lutheran Church had with the proposed National Council constitution were discussed

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 273f.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 276.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 276ff.

with National Council officials. After this discussion the chairman of the United Lutheran Church Commission observed:

1. The National Council representatives were conciliatory.
2. Some terminology was clarified.
3. The National Council representatives were hoping that the new body will free itself of such inefficiency."
4. "Some NCCUSA Conferees seem to have believed that the ULCA would be satisfied if a mere majority of the church boards . . . could honestly be considered evangelical. It seemed to clear the air when our insistence on a body made up of evangelicals only was expressed."
5. Other Protestants are not sensitive about cooption.
6. It is impossible to delay the formation of the National Council
7. "In each conference the final appeal to us has been that we come into the new organization and help from within to modify it in the direction of our own ideals."
8. "United Lutheran spokesmen have made it clear that they want to join the National Council providing that there is no "compromise of principle."⁴³

When the time came for recommendations to the convention by the Executive Board, the only thing which could be proposed was to continue to work for the desired changes in the National Council of Churches.⁴⁴ Thus, the convention of 1943 ended with a question mark. There was a strong desire to join the National Council as a constituent member. At this time there is no immediate hope of changing the National Council constitution. Yet, there is no move in convention to set aside recognized convictions and principles.

Prior to the convention of the United Lutheran Church in 1950, the

⁴³Ibid., p. 279.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 280.

Federal Council placed an interpretation on its confessional statement which made it much more tolerable to the Lutheran delegates. The Commission to the Federal Council of Churches reported on this point to the Executive Board. The Executive Committee of the Federal Council had openly declared in 1948 that the confessional statement of the Council was identical in meaning with that of the World Council of Churches. The World Council commits itself to Jesus Christ as "God and Savior." This action of the Executive Committee was approved in the plenary session of Federal Council by a "decisive vote." The Commission expressed the hope to the Executive Board of the United Lutheran Church that the constitution of the National Council go one step farther and incorporate "a confessional statement identical with that of the World Council" in wording as well as meaning.⁴⁵

The United Lutheran convention of 1950 was crucial as far as inter-denominational relations were concerned. In this convention the United Lutheran Church had to decide what it was to do with the National Council of Churches which was about to come into existence. Of the eight merging agencies the United Lutheran Church had consultative relations with two: (a) The Federal Council of Churches; and (b) The International Council of Religious Education. It had full membership in five: (a) The Foreign Missions Conference; (b) The Home Missions Council; (c) The Missionary Education Movement; (d) The National Protestant Council on Higher Education; and (e) the United Stewardship Council. The only merging agency with which the United Lutheran Church had no relation was the United

⁴⁵Minutes of the Seventeenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1950), pp. 415ff.

Council of Church Women. The Committee on Interdenominational Relationships accurately summed up the dilemma of the Convention:

our Church is confronted with a decision either to consolidate and expand its cooperative activities with other Protestant and Orthodox communions, or to curtail them sharply. The only choice which is no longer open to us is to maintain the status quo.⁴⁶

In the eyes of the Leaders of the United Lutheran Church the correct choice in regard to the National Council was full membership. The President, Dr. F. C. Fry, revealed this opinion in the opening speech before the convention of 1950 in which he called the step "possible." He also regretted that the United Lutheran Church was not making this decision jointly with all other Lutheran bodies:

None of us United Lutherans would have chosen the present order of events. Our strong preference would have been for the ranks of American Lutheranism to have closed into a solid phalanx first, with our position vis-a-vis the rest of Protestantism to be determined later. Unhappily this more desirable procedure has been denied to us. The question which confronts this 1950 convention is: Shall the United Lutheran Church take the step toward Christian co-operation which is possible today?⁴⁷

Dr. Fry listed the evangelical and representative principles as the correct guides for his Church and concluded:

The United Lutheran Church must be prepared to go where these correct principles lead. . . . The common danger which besets all of us is a temptation to try to lead these vital principles to the conclusions which we have prejudged as desirable, rather than to allow the principles to lead us.⁴⁸

Dr. Fry denied that the United Lutheran Church has in any way compromised its principles. The changes which have taken place are in the Federal Council.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 447.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 31.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 34.

The significant change from the past . . . is to be found in a new willingness on the part of our fellow-evangelical Christians to recognize the principles of the United Lutheran Church even to the extent of remoulding almost every article of the constitution of the National Council of Churches in accordance with them rather than in any abandonment of our principles by our Church itself.⁴⁹

This latter point will be discussed more fully in Chapter VI of this study.

A rather full report was given to the convention on the history and content of the constitutional changes for the National Council. The leaders of the United Lutheran Church had met with the leaders of all major members of the Federal Council and openly presented the two principles along with difficulties in the proposed constitution. The Planning Committee of the Federal Council suggested six changes in the proposed constitution "in the hope that these few alterations would solve the difficulties." The United Lutheran representatives made it clear that they did not, but that it was a step in the right direction.⁵⁰ Other bodies proposed minor amendments of which the Executive Board approved, but which did not change the picture.

Dr. Fry was then placed on the strategic National Council Committee on Programs and Procedures, and approval was given to three United Lutherans to serve on other planning committees.⁵¹ The National Planning Committee then invited the United Lutheran representatives to make specific amendments which would make the constitution more acceptable to the United Lutheran Church.

When this series of amendments was presented to the Executive Committee of the Planning Committee its immediate reaction was one of disappointment. The view was expressed that the amendments were "discouragingly numerous."

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 440f.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 444f.

Yet:

Very few modifications were made to our proposals. Not one of the few minor rephrasings that were agreed upon involved any compromise of our Church's basic principles. . . . Continued concern was felt at only four comparatively minor points. . . . The Planning Committee of the NCCUSA has agreed to present to the constituting convention with its own full endorsement, and without even any necessary mention of the ecclesiastical body. . . . initiating such changes, all proposed amendments submitted prior to March 1, 1950, to which the unanimous approval of the members of the Planning Committee has been given.⁵²

The minutes for this convention then gave an analysis of the Constitution and the proposed amendments by the United Lutherans together with the final action of the planning Committee of the National Council. The more important of these amendments are given below:

Preamble

Proposed: In the providence of God, the time has come when it seems fitting more fully to manifest the essential oneness of the Christian Churches of the United States of America in Jesus Christ as their Divine Lord and Saviour, by the creation of an inclusive co-operative agency to continue. . . .

Amended: to manifest oneness in Jesus Christ as Divine Lord and Saviour, by the creation of an inclusive co-operative agency of the Christian Churches of the United States of America to continue. . . .

Final Action: Approved.

Article II, Section 1

Proposed: To manifest the essential oneness of the co-operating churches in spirit and purpose for the furtherance of their common mission in the world.

Amended: To manifest the common spirit and purpose of the co-operating churches in carrying out their mission in the world.

Final Action: Approved.

Article II, Section 3

⁵²Ibid., pp. 450f.

Proposed: To continue and extend the work . . . as may from time to time be agreed upon.

Amended: . . . extend the work . . . as the churches may from time to time agree upon.

Final Action: . . . extend the work . . . as the churches through their representatives in the Council may from time to time agree upon.

Article II, Section 4

Proposed: To encourage devotional fellowship and mutual counsel concerning the spiritual life and religious activities of the churches.

Amended: To counsel concerning the spiritual life and religious activities of the Churches.

Final Action: To encourage fellowship and mutual counsel concerning the spiritual life and religious activities of the Churches.

Article II, Section 5

Proposed: To foster and encourage co-operation between two or more communions.

Amended: . . . co-operation among the churches for the purposes set forth in this Constitution.

Final Action: Approved.

Article II, Section 6

Proposed: To promote co-operation among local churches and to further development of councils of churches in communities, states, or larger territorial units.

Amended: . . . local churches by furthering in communities . . . the development of councils of churches in full agreement with the Preamble of this Constitution.

Final Action: To promote co-operation among local churches and to further in communities, states or larger territorial units, the development of Councils of Churches . . . in agreement with the Preamble of this Constitution.

Article III, Section 3 (b)

Amended by restricting membership in divisions, etc. to communions "in agreement with the Preamble of this Constitution."

Final Action: Approved with minor rewording.

Article IV, Section 2 (a), (b)

Amended by requiring state councils to be "in agreement with the Preamble" and "constituted by the communions in its area."

Final Action: Approved with minor rewording.

Article IV, Section 3

Deletion was recommended and approved.

Article IV, Section 4

Proposed: A church Board or Agency which without official action of its communion participates in one or more of the Divisions . . . shall have membership in the Division or Divisions concerned but not in the Council itself.

Amended: . . . shall have membership without vote in the Division or Divisions concerned.

Final Action: A church Board or Agency of a communion not holding membership in the Council may have membership in one or more of the Divisions of the Council.

Article V, Section 3

This was amended and approved by adding "in agreement with the Preamble. . . ."

Article IX, Section 3

This was amended by making each member of the Executive Committee a member in good standing of a communion which is a constituent member of the Council. The Amendment was approved with minor rewording.

Article X, Section 2

Some minor changes were added and approved which tend to emphasize that only the Council develops a "basic philosophy" which is automatically the philosophy of its divisions.

Article X, Section 3

The words, "including those of communions which are not constituent members of the Council," were eliminated.

Article X, Section 4

After numerous wordings and rewordings, it was agreed that although a Division in the Council may draw other members from churches not members of the Council, such churches must be those who would "accept the Preamble."

This must also be "subject to confirmation by the Executive Committee of the Council."

Article X, Section 9

Proposed: Each Division may establish such professional or lay advisory section as it may seem desirable.

The United Lutherans urged deleting.

Final Action: Each Division may sponsor such professional or lay advisory groups within the field of interest as the Division may seem desirable.

Article XI, Section 7

This was amended to give the same rights to Joint Departments and Commissions as it gave to Divisions in Article X, Section 4, with the same restrictions. The Amendment was approved with some rephrasing.

Article XI, Section 8

The Lutheran amendment wished to deprive the Joint Departments from "developing the basic philosophy" independent of the Council. Approval was finally given to the qualification, "subject to the provisions of Article V, Section 1."

Article XII, Section 4

The same amendments and changes were made here as in X, 4 and XI, 7.

Article XIV, Section 2

It was amended and approved that the Field Department must include representatives of the National Council, not merely the territorial councils and the four Divisions.

Article XV

It was amended and approved to make all members of the Department of Publication members of the constituent communions of the National Council.⁵³

Other changes were proposed by other denominations, but they were of a minor, technical nature. An examination of the foregoing data, the proposed Constitution, the United Lutheran Amendments, and the final rewording of the National Council Planning Committee, would seem to indicate

⁵³Ibid., pp. 452-470.

that invariably the United Lutheran Church got its way. In only a few instances (Article II, Sections 4 and 6; Article IV, Section 4; and Article X, Section 9) did the Planning Committee seem to compromise the wording and perhaps the content of the United Lutheran amendments.

The Executive Board of the United Lutheran Church was evidently satisfied with the final results. The recommended to the convention:

That in the expectation that the constitution will be adopted as submitted on April 25, 1944, together with amendments substantially as now proposed by the Planning Committee for the NCCUSA, the United Lutheran Church in America assume membership in the NCCUSA.⁵⁴

Dr. F. R. Knobel presented this resolution and admitted that the United Lutheran Church opening itself to certain "dangers" if it passed the resolution, but he indicated that "fidelity to our convictions and courage in their expression" would negate these dangers. After some discussion a substitute motion was presented to refer the issue to the constituent synods during the next two years. This was lost after a brief discussion. A rising vote was taken on the original motion, and it was adopted by "an almost unanimous vote." President Fry then promised the convention that the officers will be "diligent to preserve the principles for which the Church has thus far stood."⁵⁵

While the convention of 1950 ended on a hopeful, optimistic note, the convention of 1952 seemed to be charged with the apprehension that things were not well in regard to the National Council. The Committee on Interdenominational Relationship reported that certain by-laws added to the National Council constitution permitted a number of delegates-at-large

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 479.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 605f.

into certain units of the Council. The concern of the United Lutherans was made clear to the General Board of 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 obedience.⁵⁶

Yet, there was an attempt both by the Committee on Interdenominational Relationships and by Dr. Fry sympathetically to understand the reason for this cooption on the part of the National Council. The Committee stated:

Our delegates observed with regret and anxiety that the representative principle, although thoroughly recognized and incorporated in the constitution and general by-laws of the Council, was not consistently applied in the by-laws of a number of subdivisions of the Council. This condition was apparently due in part to a lack of full comprehension and assimilation of this principle into habitual thinking processes on the part of many organizers of such "units" of the National Council. The by-laws of several units called for large numbers of "members-at-large." At first glance, this category was hardly distinguishable from coopted members.⁵⁷

Dr. Fry presented his candid opinion 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. After all, our ULCA convictions at this point have been just about as foreign to the thought patterns of other Protestants as they could be--until just the day before yesterday!

Anyway, the provision for numerous "members at large" in the by-laws of several of the 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 complaint, yet, for the sake of good will.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Minutes of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1952), pp. 387f.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 400.

⁵⁸Franklin Clark. "The State of the Church." News Letters from the Pastor's Desk Book (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, January, 1951), .

Finally, the Committee on Interdenominational Relationships reported on the finds of the National Council Committee on Constitution and By-Laws. Two proposals were brought before the National Council convention in Cleveland to amend the Preamble of the Constitution. One proposal asked that the Preamble be widened to provide for a "more inclusive fellowship" and to embrace "all those who want to join in seeking to bring God's Kingdom in the World." The other proposal suggested that the Preamble be narrowed by changing "Divine Lord" to God," thus requiring all member churches to more fully express their faith in Christ's deity. The National Council committee recommended to the National Council's General Board that the Preamble stay as it was for two reasons: (a) The present Preamble "has been generally accepted as a basis of cooperation among the Evangelical Churches of America for more than forty years;" and (b) "It is soundly biblical," because it employs biblical language. It is important to note that the United Lutheran Committee called this a "gratifying report," thus, implying endorsement of the Preamble's status quo.⁵⁹

The minutes of the 1952 convention also gave summary of the North American Lay Conference of the Christian and His Daily Work, called by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America and the Canadian Council of Churches at the request of the World Council of Churches. In general the conference was praised for being theologically grounded and for having good practical insights. However, it

stumbled a bit . . . when it attempted to set down on paper a formal statement of what had been accomplished and what decisions reached. The end product was a kind of all-inclusive statement that

⁵⁹Minutes of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention, 1952, pp. 413ff.

lacked firepower. The areas of discussion were so wide that it was virtually impossible to tie them into one neat package in the course of an hour.⁶⁰

The report to the Executive Board by the Committee on Interdenominational Relationships informed the Convention of 1954 that, according to the United Lutheran delegates to the National Council, the first two years of the relationship with the Council has been good. They believed that all of the pronouncements of the Assembly were evangelical, with one exception :

The single paragraph of the Message which was unsatisfactory, and indeed disturbing, to us as Lutherans was one which praised "unity" of an undefined type and attempted to place an imperative behind it.

An amended draft was permitted to be substituted which defined this unity a little more carefully as resting in Christ as divine Lord and Saviour.⁶¹

In 1953, however, a disturbing element occurred:

Following an intense and sometimes unhappy discussion in the Committee on Polity and Strategy . . . The General Board of the National Council adopted a statement . . . on "Categories of Participation in the National Council and its units." . . . The preceding debate, which extended over several months, was disturbing to the representatives of our Church. Views contrary to ours on these fundamental issues were strongly pressed by some influential representatives of other Churches. Earlier decisions . . . which were in agreement with the principles which we uphold were called into question. A few insistent voices advocated a general re-examination and reversal of policies . . . on which the very participation of the United Lutheran Church is based. The result . . . was frankly a compromise.⁶²

This compromise was the statement of the General Board of the National Council which permitted "guest participants" to have a voice in the affairs

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 393f.

⁶¹Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1954), pp. 431ff.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 450ff.

of a certain division if they are qualified in that particular field, regardless of whether or not they were evangelical. The U. L. C. A. Committee on Interdenominational Relationships held this to be several steps backwards:

The Church ought to . . . rely solely upon confessing Christians . . . to apply the Gospel to life. . . . No one who is not nourished by Word and Sacrament or who does not share its evangelical faith can understand or interpret the Church. . . .

The United Lutheran Committee recommended, therefore, that the United Lutheran delegates be cautioned to watch out for abuses of the "guest" participation in the various divisions.⁶³

Finally, the Committee on Interdenominational Relationships reported on a document sent out by the General Board of the National Council to member denominations urging them to take certain steps. The Committee listed these recommendation and added the Lutheran evaluation:

1. The National Council asked that congregations "co-operate with each other." The Committee called on "Synods and congregations to follow the same principles of interchurch co-operation . . . as our Church at large."
2. The Committee was willing to combine projects with others "to enhance community impact."
3. The Committee was willing to "study possible classifications of areas of work."
4. The Committee observed that since Lutherans follow the Church Year, they will not be able to "call attention to the major special day and week observances" called by Protestants.
5. The Committee agreed that the co-operative work of a denomination is also considered to be the work of member congregations.
6. The Committee agreed that congregations should share the cost of projects.

⁶³Ibid.

7. The Committee left the individual Congregations to decide on what they wish to include in their bulletins.⁶⁴

In the minutes of the convention of 1956, the last ones available for this study, the representative principle is still being violated. The Committee on Interdenominational Relationships, reporting on the National Council's Assembly in 1954, stated that an amendment to the constitution was proposed which "aroused the misgiving" of the United Lutheran representatives. It permitted the four divisions to elect six instead of three members of the General Board. Dr. Fry candidly told the Assembly:

One deterrent to the United Lutheran Church joining the National Council in 1950 was the already large number of members of the General Board not directly representing denominations even before this increase was proposed.

Yet, this undesirable amendment was carried "by a heavy majority."

The Committee continued the report of events by commenting:

This action highlights one of two simultaneous trends that we look on with concern and regret. The legislative functions of the General Assembly, which was designed to be the plenary body of the National Council of Churches and which adheres most closely to the principle of direct representation of member communions, have faded to a minimum. The General Board is increasingly the actual policy-making body of the Council. At the same time, the General Board is becoming even less directly representative of the denominations. All members of the board must be approved by their communions but in numerous instances they are chosen to embody the interests of units of the Council.⁶⁵

The delegates to the various divisions on the National Council still gave reports and evaluations similar to the frank analyses of the earlier years. The delegates of the Study Conferences on the Church and Economic life stated that they were impressed both with the "disintegration in

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 457f.

⁶⁵Minutes of the Twentieth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1956), pp. 527f.

general Protestant thought" concerning "God, man and nature" and with the "vigor with which American Protestant leaders are probing" the problems of life. It was perhaps unintended to contrast the emphasis of Protestantism as disintegration of thought and vigor of action, but it is a rather pungent evaluation.⁶⁶

The leaders of the United Lutheran Church are still opposing dangerous trends and trying to enlighten members of the Council with Lutheran and Christian insights. After a discussion in a meeting of the National Council's General Board concerning worship where members of other faiths are present, Dr. Fry explained Lutheran opposition to any joint worship with non-Christians.⁶⁷

Finally, it was reported that in the meeting of the General Board of the National Council in 1955 it was decided to accept the invitation to enter into relationship with the World Council of Churches as an "Associate Council." Conceivably, if this study were continued ten years from now, Chapters IV and V might merge, since the World Council and the National Council appear to be growing closer together.⁶⁸

Looking back over the history of the relationships of the United Lutheran Church with the old Federal Council and its offspring, the National Council, it is possible to see both a development in positive attitude and a retention of critical evaluation. The United Lutheran attitude has progressively become more helpful and optimistic in many of the reports on

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 542.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 530.

⁶⁸Ibid.

this American federation of Churches throughout the years. As was seen in the minutes from 1930 on, the Council was described as becoming more conservative and evangelical. Yet, in other reports it is evident that the United Lutheran Church has not blinded itself to the limitations of the Council. In recent years the fear seems to have appeared that some of the things which are not well, such as violations of the representative principle, are growing worse. The chief questions left unanswered in this chapter is this: At what point will the United Lutheran Church in America regard the violations of principle by the National Council sufficiently severe to necessitate a withdrawal from the Council?

Initially reported both the faith and order and the life and work confessions, partly because they seemed to be similar to small, orthodox statements of that day which were also starting for re-education. After 1923, however, the Executive Board received certain literature on these statements which gave the hope that they were going to be carefully planned from the start. The convention period of the United Lutheran Church to send delegates to both conferences providing (a) that the United Lutheran representatives have and freshen shall and may present the Lutheran view on all points; (b) that the doctrinal basis of the United Lutheran Church to say forth "at the proper time"; and (c) that the Lutheran delegates cover their action commensurate with their church's doctrinal basis.²

In 1926 the United Lutheran delegates to the Universal Conference on Life and Work, held at Stockholm, Sweden, in 1925, reported on the subjects

²Minutes of the North Central Synodical of the United Lutheran Church in America (Minneapolis: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1927), p. 134.

CHAPTER V

THE RELATIONS OF THE UNITED LUTHERAN CHURCH WITH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATIVE MOVEMENTS OF CHURCHES

The relations of the United Lutheran Church with the World Council of Churches and its parent bodies, the World Conference on Faith and Order and the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, had run from the extreme of provisional rejection of the parent bodies in 1922 to the constituent affiliation with the World Council in 1948.

As was discussed in Chapter III, the United Lutheran Church provisionally rejected both the Faith and Order and the Life and Work conferences, partly because they seemed to be similar to small, activist movements of that day which were also bidding for membership. After 1922, however, the Executive Board received certain literature on these movements which gave the hope that they were going to be carefully planned Free conferences. The convention permitted the United Lutheran Church to send delegates to both Conferences providing (a) That the United Lutheran representatives--in love and frankness-- shall and may present the Lutheran view on all points; (b) That the Doctrinal Basis of the United Lutheran Church be set forth "at the proper time"; and (c) That the Lutheran delegates never take action inconsistent with their Church's doctrinal basis.¹

In 1926 the United Lutheran delegates to the Universal Conference on Life and Work, held at Stockholm, Sweden, in 1925, reported on the subjects

¹Minutes of the Fourth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1924), p. 533.

discussed at the Conference. They covered the problems of war, social adjustment, drink, divorce, and economic difficulties as they relate to Christianity. The delegates concluded:

We must confess to a certain measure of disappointment in that the conference did not give us a solution of at least some one of the problems that were discussed. . . . The Conference has given us no new message, nor has it told us of new and wiser ways of applying Christ's teaching to the problems which confront all the nation . . . perhaps, we expected too much. . . . It had its values. . . . The greatest good will register itself in better relations between the Churches, . . .

Finally, the delegates recommended that the question of future United Lutheran participation in the Conference on Life and Work be left to the determination of the Executive Board. The Convention adopted this recommendation.²

Concerning the World Conference on Faith and Order, the United Lutheran appointed Commissioners reported in 1926 that the Draft Agenda, proposed propositions for the Conference, was unsatisfactory.

They proposed a number of changes:

1. Drop the Preamble which recognizes "both the large measure of agreement that exists among us concerning the things of God and the great loss and hindrance that our divisions cause."
2. Drop the part of Subject I which claims that only in a united Church can human society be "purified and inspired."
3. Revise Subject II to define the Church and explain how it is carrying on the Work of Christ by bringing people to faith.
4. Eliminate the implication that the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are a sufficient doctrinal basis for organic union.

²Minutes of the Fifth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1926), pp. 59ff.

Other changes suggested were in the areas of the Ministry, the Means of Grace, and the Church.³

As a result of these objections, along with suggestions by other Churches, the Draft Agenda was merely appended to the end of the program as suggestions for discussion. The Executive Board recommended that, although the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order has continued to coopt members, the United Lutheran Church continue their relations with the Conference.⁴

The convention of 1928 had nothing to say about the Universal Conference on Life and Work. However, a considerable amount of attention was given to the World Conference on Faith and Order. The delegates gave an enlightening report on its assembly in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1927. The opening address was given by Professor Werner Elert, a young theologian who had just come to teach at the University of Erlangen. The United Lutheran delegates believed that his address stated their position on the question of unity:

Unity in Christ and unity in the truth are identical. . . . If we are not one in the truth, neither are we one in Christ. Therefore, all who would unite themselves in Christ, must examine whether they are one in the truth. . . . Find the unity of Christians in the truth and express the truth with clearness without compromise with error.⁵

According to the report of the United Lutheran delegates, however, the Conference did not measure up to this ideal. There were tendencies to

³Ibid., pp. 64ff.

⁴Ibid., p. 76.

⁵Minutes of the Sixth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1928), p. 75.

formulate ambiguous statements which could be interpreted in several ways.

Yet, according to the delegates, the Conference has much in its favor:

The Conference . . . was sane and self-possessed and was never swept off its feet by any outbursts of oratory or wave of enthusiasm. . . . It pointed the only way in which the Christian Church can even hope for a solution of the problem of disunity, namely the calm, unhurried consideration of its fundamental tenets in a fraternal and non-controversial spirit, with the earnest hope and expectation of reaching such agreement in the unity of the Spirit as will prove to be the bond of peace, in the meanwhile giving itself earnestly to that common approach for the salvation of the world, which found unanimous approval by the Conference in its report on the Message of the Church.⁶

A new element appeared at this time in the relationship development of the United Lutheran Church. The United Lutheran delegates met with other Lutherans from various parts of the world and worked with them in presenting the Lutheran viewpoint:

A common point of view was developed in regard to the work of the Conference. 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 Smalcald Articles among the delegates.

Finally, the seventy Lutheran delegates of various bodies representing twelve nations presented a statement to the Faith and Order Conference on the Lutheran viewpoint concerning unity.⁷

It is not surprising, therefore, to find in the recommendations made to the United Lutheran convention a plea that the United Lutherans continue to keep in touch with other Lutherans and work with them in their association with the Conference on Faith and Order. The United Lutherans decided to

⁶Ibid., p. 79.

⁷Ibid., pp. 76ff.

continue participation in the Conference, but also to keep in touch with the Conference's Continuation Committee on its plans and purposes.⁸

Finally, a detailed presentation was given to the Convention of the Reports of the Lausanne Conference. After presenting the text in full, it was evaluated as omitting certain key doctrines, inadequately defining others, and as not being in proper form if used as a basis for Church union.⁹

The Commissioners to the Conference on Faith and Order analysed the reports from the Lausanne assembly even further from the 1930 convention. The reports with its Preamble is not meant to be a union document, but merely a presentation of the areas of agreement and disagreement among the Churches. About the same things were approved and disapproved as in the Convention of 1928. These Commissioners heartily applauded the Conference's statement that "ambiguous statements and hasty measures may hinder rather than hasten the work of unification." As in the former convention, it was recommended and adopted that the Commission continue to report on the Conference's progress, to present the position of the United Lutheran Church, and to keep in contact with other Lutherans on these developments.¹⁰ As in previous years, there was no comment on the Conference on Life and Work given to the convention.

By the convention of 1932 the Commissioners were able to report on

⁸Ibid., pp. 80f.

⁹Ibid., pp. 81-96.

¹⁰Minutes of the Seventh Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1930), pp. 65ff.

tentative plans for the 1937 assembly of the World Council on Faith and Order. The Means of Grace and the Worship of the Church was suggested. Aside from this information, the only other important action taken was that the convention asked the Conference that in the future the representatives should be officially appointed by the Churches, rather than person representing themselves.¹¹ Again, nothing was mentioned in this convention concerning the Conference on Life and Work.

In 1934 the United Lutheran Commission gave the convention a factual report of the preparations taking place for the 1937 assembly of the Faith and Order Conference. There was no evaluation given in this report except the comment that in the American Regional Committee the American churchmen usually had little enthusiasm for the proposed program of theological discussion if there were to be no practical application to living issues.¹² For the first time since the convention of 1926, a brief report was given on the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work. This report stated that since there was a movement to consolidate the different world movements into one union, it was recommended that the United Lutheran Church not officially participate in the Conference on Life and Work, but merely continue informal contact.¹³

The Commission on World Conference on Faith and Order presented to the 1936 Convention the final preparations which had taken place for the

¹¹Minutes of the Eighth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1932), pp. 59f.

¹²Minutes of the Ninth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1934), pp. 107ff.

¹³Ibid., p. 111.

1937 assembly. It was to be held in Edinburgh, Scotland, and the proposed program was intensely theological. It was reported with approval that the Conference's Continuation Committee was recommending that the Conference itself not be responsible for any service of Holy Communion, but that various denominations may hold their own at the Conference and invite whom they like. After this report by the Commission, the Executive Board of the United Lutheran Church recommended, among other things, that:

we deem it unwise to give representatives of the Youth Group a voice in the Conference. As members of Christian Churches they are represented in the Conference through the delegates of their Church.¹⁴

Once more, the United Lutheran Church, by the above recommendation, tried to reduce the degree of cooption.

At this Convention the question arose of sending delegates to the Universal Christian Conference for Life and Work,¹⁵ scheduled to be held in Oxford, England, in 1937. Permission was given to do so. One of the important reasons given was that since other Lutherans would be there, the United Lutherans should also be there in order to assist them in giving Lutheran testimony. It was pointed out, however, that the United Lutheran Church would hold future relations with the Conference in obedience until after the report on the coming Oxford assembly.¹⁶

¹⁴Minutes of the Tenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1936), pp. 82ff.

¹⁵Apparently, this group has undergone a frequent change of names. Two years earlier, the Minutes referred to it as the Universal Christian Conferences on Life and Work. In 1922 and earlier years the Minutes called it the Universal Conference of the Church of Christ on Life and Work. Later the Minutes will again refer to it as the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 85f.

The convention of 1938 revealed some startling developments. The World Conference on Faith and Order meeting in Edinburgh in 1937 voted to merge with the Conference for Life and Work. The two Conferences proposed have a general assembly every five years, a Central Committee meeting annually, and two commissions, one for Faith and Order, and one for Life and Work.¹⁷ The question arose, what was the United Lutheran Church going to do about their relations with this organization and its parent bodies?

It was reported to the convention that it was decided in January of 1937 not to send representatives to the 1937 Life and Work Conference at Oxford. The reason given was that the cooption was so extensive that it "ceased to be a Conference of Churches."¹⁸

Concerning the Conference on Faith and Order, it was proposed and adopted that the United Lutheran Church continue their relations with that group, pending further developments in the organization of the World Council of Churches.¹⁹ In regard to the formation of the World Council of Churches, from the start the United Lutherans began working with the World Council to be on the basis of "Churches and confessions rather than according to territories and countries." The Executive Committee of the

¹⁷Minutes of the Eleventh Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1938), pp. 97f.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁹Ibid.

Lutheran World Convention also approved the World Council commitment to "Our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour."²⁰ Dr. Krabel also reported on this point:

According to the proposed constitution, 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.²¹

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

The convention resolved to cooperate with the proposed World Council of Churches in its formation and to work very closely with other Lutheran Churches in the world to insure that the representation of the proposed Council be on the basis of confession and not territory.²²

There is little material on the World Council or its parent bodies in the convention of 1940. The Conferences of Faith and Order and Life and Work have taken a background position to the larger organization in the Minutes of the United Lutheran Church. At this time, the world chaos was causing most of the delays in forming the World Council. The recommendations of 1938 were reaffirmed.²³

In spite of the continued world chaos in 1942, the Executive Board

²⁰Ibid., pp. 523f.

²¹Ibid., p. 99.

²²Ibid., p. 101.

²³Minutes of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1940), pp. 111f.

recommended that it be empowered to accept membership in the World Council of Churches on behalf of the United Lutheran Church "if and when" the membership of the World Council is established on an ecclesiastical rather than a territorial basis.²⁴ The convention adopted this recommendation apparently without debate.²⁵

A brief report was also given to this convention on the North American Ecumenical Conference which was held at Toronto, Canada in 1941 and was sponsored by the Joint Executive Committee of the American Sections of the Life and Work--Faith and Order movements. According to the report by the United Lutheran representatives, it was story:

Early in the sessions of the Conference it became clear that the occasion was to be utilized to exhibit the Churches of the United States as completely committed to intervention in the present war on the side of Canada and Britain. This was resented by many of the delegates. Political and partisan feelings were aroused and clamored for utterance. The committee on arrangements was charged with being unfair. This unhappy result was aided by the intemperate tones of some of the American speakers, and especially by a series of lectures delivered by the flaming interventionist, Reinhold Niebuhr.²⁶

The United Lutheran delegates, however, added that they were glad that they were there. The reasons they gave for this feeling seem to be in full harmony with the content and tone of the Washington Declaration.

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 to adopt a policy of

²⁴Minutes of the Thirteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1942), p. 133.

²⁵Ibid., p. 547.

²⁶Ibid., p. 137.

isolationism would be to deny the lading of the Spirit. . . . With each new gathering of American Christians it becomes clearer that 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.²⁷

Nothing new was reported to the convention of 1944 on the World Council except that the United Lutheran Church is continuing its present relationships with the World Council through the Faith and Order Conference, enlarging its commission on the Faith and Order Conference from three to seven, and reiterating the contention that representation in the World Council must be of the Churches themselves and on a confessional basis.²⁸

Because of the continuation of the war, there was little to report to the 1946 Convention concerning the World Council of Churches. From the recommendations by the Executive Board, it is evident that the form which the representation will take is still uncertain.²⁹

It was also reported to this convention that, upon an invitation by the President of the United Lutheran Church, all 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 in America to raise objection, if any,

²⁷Ibid., p. 138.

²⁸Minutes of the Fourteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1944), pp. 119, 254.

²⁹Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1946), pp. 229f.

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 Lutheran Augustana Synod revealed that their bodies have committed themselves to membership in the World Council on the condition that representation would be on a confessional basis. None of the other Lutheran bodies had yet taken such an action.³⁰

All of the presidents and representatives of the Lutheran Bodies, except for the Missouri Synod, joined in making a fuller statement of 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 to insist that Lutheran representation be on a confessional basis in the Council. All agreed to work with the Lutheran World Convention to accomplish these ends. Only the Missouri Synod 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."³¹

The United Lutheran Committee on Inter-Lutheran interests happily reported that the "first fruits" of the agreement made at Columbus appeared in the resolution by the American Lutheran Church's Executive Committee on recommend to its next convention at Sandusky that it join the World Council

³⁰Ibid., pp. 219f.

³¹Ibid., p. 221.

of Churches providing the representation of the Council is on a confessional basis.³²

In 1948 the Executive Board reported to the convention that it accepted membership in the World Council of Churches in behalf of the general body. It explained, through the report by the committee on Interdenomination Relationships, that all stated conditions had been met by the World Council. A few minor amendments were suggested for the constitution and the allocation of seats, but United Lutheran membership was not made to hinge upon these recommendations.³³

The delegates to the Amsterdam Assembly reported to the Executive Board a favorable reaction:

The character and mood of the Amsterdam Assembly were strongly reassuring the Lutherans. . . . It is plainly evident now that the World Council of Churches does not convey of itself as an instrument for indiscriminate Church unionism. . . . We were all impressed with our mediating position. In many regards American Lutherans stand midway between European Churches with their intense concentration on theology and other American Protestants with their equally emphatic stress upon Christian activity.

The delegates gave a comprehensive summary of the messages of the World Council and made a fairly favorable evaluation. They also mentioned that "a few voices" desired to alter the affirmation of "our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour." The Council decided that Churches that desired to change the formula may present their desires in writing at the next assembly.³⁴

³²Ibid., p. 222.

³³Minutes of the Sixteenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1948), pp. 254f.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 261ff.

Since the United Lutheran Church was now a member of the World Council of Churches, it terminated its official commission to the World Conference of Faith and Order, which is now part of the World Council.³⁵

A Committee of U. S. A. Member Churches was formed in 1949 as a committee of the World Council of Churches. Its purposes were quoted with approval to the United Lutheran Convention in 1950: (a) To strengthen the liason between the World Council and its members in the United States; (b) To carry out the work of the World Council in the United States "within the Council's own adopted policies"; and (c) To cooperate with the New York staff of the World Council.³⁶

The Committee on Interdenominational Relationships summarized a "gratifying statement" to the Executive Board in 1950 made by the Central Committee of the World Council:

The World Council of Churches is not and must never become a Super-Church. . . . The purpose of the World Council is not to negotiate unions between Churches, but to bring the Churches into living contact with each other and to promote the study and discussion of the issues of Church unity. . . . The member Churches recognize that the membership of the Church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own Church body. They seek, therefore, to enter into living contact with those outside their own ranks who confess the Saviourhood of Christ. . . . Membership does not imply that each Church must regard the other member Churches as Churches in the true and full sense of the word. The member Churches of the World Council recognize in other Churches elements of the true Church. . . . The member Churches . . . seek to learn from each other and to give help to each other in order that the Body of Christ may be built up and that the life of the Churches may be renewed.³⁷

³⁵Ibid., p. 252.

³⁶Minutes of the Seventeenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1950), p. 431.

³⁷Ibid., p. 437.

The delegates of the Third World Conference on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches gave a thorough report. The subjects discussed were the nature of the Church, the ways of worship, and the obstacles to fellowship at the Lord's Table. The delegates implied that Lutherans held a mediating position:

The Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed Churches constituted the central, dominant core of the conference. Anglican influence was very strong and at times aggressive. The Orthodox on the right flank . . . generally allied themselves with the Anglicans. The more radical Reformed, on the left flank of the conference . . . were now particularly aggressive. . . .³⁸

The rest of the report of the delegates revealed frank and open points of agreements and differences among the three "flanks";

The faith expressed was undisputedly trinitarian. . . . The Chalcedonian doctrine of the two natures of Christ was repeatedly voiced, pointing to the divine and human aspects of the Church. . . .

There was a fruitful demonstration of the Orthodox and Anglican emphasis on office, the Lutheran emphasis on the doctrine of the Word and Sacraments, the Reformed emphasis on doctrine and discipline, and the "free Church" emphasis on the fruits of the Spirit. . . .

It was particularly unfortunate that the tradition whose understanding of the Eucharist could have done more than any other to restore the balance and insist upon biblical realism . . . was not able to make itself heard . . . because of the barrier of language. . . . The translators were not able to overcome this handicap. . . .

Although the views of Henry van Dusen, expressed in the Christian Century and Theology and Crisis received full discussion and a measure of assent, the position was reaffirmed that "a conference, gathered together in the Name of Christ . . . does not claim the right to ordain or authorize its own ministry to celebrate the Sacrament."³⁹

In 1954 the Committee on Interdenominational Relationships presented a thorough report for the convention concerning the Evanston Assembly of the

³⁸ Minutes of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1952), pp. 426f.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 247ff.

World Council of Churches. The report was highly favorable in its evaluation of both the proceedings and message. One comment in particular was interesting, for it expresses gratitude to the World Council for wholesome influence upon the United Lutheran Church:

When some of us, being Americans, were tempted at time to become impatient at what seemed an almost undue preoccupation with theology, we remember as Lutherans what 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.⁴⁰

Virtually nothing new was reported to the convention of 1956 concerning the World Council of Churches. The Committee on Interdenominational Relationships presented a rather factual report prepared by Dr. Visser 't Hooft, general secretary of the Council, and seemed to approve of its contents. At one point this report stated that the "central purpose of the World Council" was to manifest unity "more fully today and to deepen it for tomorrow." Much of the report looked forward to the conference on "The Nature of the Unity We Seek" to be held at Oberlin, Ohio. There was no other evaluation by the United Lutheran officials.

In contrast to the hard, up-hill battle which the United Lutheran Church has fought to form and maintain relations with the National Council of Churches without surrendering its principles, the success of its relations with the World Council and its parent bodies has been much more evident. The hard, painful battles over the evangelical and the representative which were evident in Chapter IV, are missing in this chapter;

⁴⁰Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1954), pp. 436f.

⁴¹Minutes of the Twentieth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1956), pp. 552ff.

True, the United Lutheran Church had to fight for the representative principle, according to the reports in the Minutes, but in the case of the World Council and the Faith and Order Council, it had a host of Lutheran allies from other nations. The United Lutheran Church worked hand in hand with the members of the Lutheran World Convention and the National Lutheran Council to insure that the doctrinal basis and the membership representation of the World Council would conform to its principles. Hence, Chapter IV ended on an apprehensive question: Will the National Council of Churches get so bad that the United Lutherans shall be forced to withdraw? This chapter ends with the optimistic hope that the World Council of Churches shall continue to grow in Christian insight and to edify its Lutheran membership.

CHAPTER VI

THE INFLUENCE OF THESE RELATIONS UPON THE UNITED LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Impossibility of Properly Analysing the Influence of the United Lutheran Church upon Interdenominational Movements in this Study

This chapter may seem unfair to a member of the United Lutheran Church in America. In this part of the study an examination will be made of the apparent influence of interdenominational movements upon the United Lutheran Church, but no study will be presented showing the influence of that Church upon the interdenominational movements. "Why not present both sides?" a member from the United Lutheran Church might ask.

It is true that the Minutes of the general body present a long list of changes and modifications wrought upon the interdenomination movements. According to the reports of delegates, the Federal Council of Churches and the Conference on Faith and Order grew continuously in conservatism. According to the United Lutheran commissions and committees, the influence of the United Lutheran Church was felt in many divisions and activities of these movements. The Lutheran position was continuously clarified among interdenominational leaders, and conservative interpretations were placed upon the constitution of the Federal Council.

A member of the United Lutheran Church would point to the large number of changes wrought by their Church in the constitution of the National Council of Churches. Instead of declaring that the Christian Churches of the United States have "essential oneness," it now states that there is a oneness in Christ, manifested in part by the Council's formation. Instead of claiming that the spirit and the purpose of the Churches is essentially one, the

constitution now says that the Churches have a certain spirit and purpose in common. Many broad, sweeping commitments in the constitution are now limited "the purposes set forth in the constitution"; many broad generalizations are now restricted to "agreement with the preamble of this constitution."

The difficulty is this. If a study were made of the influence of the United Lutheran Church upon the interdenominational movements on the basis of the United Lutheran minutes and other reports of that body's leaders and committees, the objections could be raised that only the Lutheran viewpoint was being presented. If a study of such influences were made on the basis of the official reports and minutes of the interdenominational agency, which is beyond the scope of this report, one would probably face the difficulty of anonymity. The interdenominational agency in question often would not wish to indicate the source of any changes of influences:

The Planning Committee of the NCCCUSA has agreed to present to the constituting convention with its own full endorsement, and without even any necessary mention of the ecclesiastical body or interdenominational agency initiating such changes, all proposed amendments. . . .¹

External evidence can be found to support United Lutheran claims that the real changes which have occurred have not been the adoption of principles and practices of the United Lutheran Church but rather the willingness of interdenominational agencies to recognize those principles.² An example of this evidence is found in Apostles of Discord, a work which would not particularly be interested in validating or invalidating the United Lutheran principles:

¹Minutes of the Seventeenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1950), p. 451.

²Ibid., p. 34.

In fact, with the formation of the National Council, doctrinal lines appear to have been, not loosened, but tightened. To the disappointment of those Protestants who believe that the ecumenical movement should serve as a genuinely free fellowship of all Protestant churches, the ban against Unitarians and Universalists has been enforced with great rigidity. Thus, the United Church Women--one of the twelve agencies that had merged to establish the National Council--in 1951 took steps to oust all Unitarians and Universalists from its national boards, noting that "these persons are from denominations which are not thought to be in agreement with the preamble of the constitution."³

Yet, this same work also cites evidence showing that the National Council of Churches does not adhere to United Lutheran principles. This book complains that J. Howard Pew, a promoter of closer relationships between the Church and economic "libertarianism," has infiltrated his own group, the National Layman's Committee, into the National Council of Churches. It claims that this organization directed by Pew has dug deep into the National Council's business and Finance Committee for the purpose of spreading Pew's economic views:

Pew is not surrendering. Already he has urged his allies, once they have been distributed on various National Council Committees, to attend meetings without fail and to work for adoption of the "right" kind of stated policy.⁴

Naturally, this work is not interested in cooption for the same reasons as the United Lutheran Church, but it is complaining about the same phenomenon.

A thorough examination of such evidence, along with an analysis of the official minutes and reports of each of the interdenominational movements discussed, would be the only fair way to determine the changes in such organizations and the extent to which these changes are the result of the influence of the United Lutheran Church. The most which can be done in this

³Ralph Lord Roy, Apostles of Discord: A Study of Organized Bigotry and Disruption on the Fringes of Protestantism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953). p. 213.

⁴Ibid., pp. 305f.

chapter is to examine on the basis of the official and semi-official data the extent to which these organizations have influenced changes in the United Lutheran Church.

The Apparent Changes in the Interpretation of Principles

The Washington Declaration, after establishing the nature of the Catholic Church and the characteristics of true denominations of this one, holy Church, enumerates the conditions for cooperation among Churches. A weakness of the Washington Declaration, as discussed in Chapter II, was that it listed only the conditions by which the United Lutheran Church may cooperate with "Protestant" churches. It is true, that the Declaration does not prohibit the application of these conditions also to Eastern Orthodox groups, the Roman Catholic Church, or the other divisions of Christianity. The Washington Declaration simply ignores the existence of these groups and talks about "Protestant" cooperation.

One of the developed changes in the interpretation and application of the principles of the Washington Declaration was that in the gradual association with the Faith and Order Conferences, the World Council of Churches, the possible limitations of the term "Protestant" and, through the above interdenominational agencies, has had relationships with Eastern Orthodox bodies, Anglicans (which some consider to be non-Protestant), and Armenian Christians. As yet, these principles have not been applied to the Roman Catholic Church in the official United Lutheran reports.

A second apparent modification in the interpretation of the principles occurred in the changing view of the United Lutheran Church toward the doctrinal basis of the Federal Council of Churches. In the convention of 1922

the United Lutherans considered the formula that Jesus Christ is "divine Lord and Saviour" weak and inadequate since it is capable of false interpretation.⁵ In 1950 the convention accepted the judgment that the confessional formula of the Federal Council (and consequently the National Council) was as adequate and strong as the formula of the World Council of Churches. The reason for this new interpretation of the controversial formula, as it was discussed in Chapter IV, was that plenary assembly of the Federal Council officially equated the formula "divine Lord and Saviour" with that of the World Council "God and Saviour."⁶ This modification of the original interpretation of the Washington Declaration could be justified on the basis of two presuppositions: (a) since any formula is not a guarantee of protection from non-Christians; (b) The important thing is not the words themselves but the official meaning which is given to them.

In 1942 a list of arguments for and against becoming constituent members of the Federal Council of Churches was presented to the United Lutheran convention. The arguments so listed, however, were not only unsystematic but they were also inconsistent, in part, with the principles of the Washington Declaration. Several of the arguments favoring full membership and at least one against it were based on expediency: (a) The Lutheran Church is the only major Protestant body outside of membership; (b) World crisis demands working together; (c) It would not be worth the

⁵Minutes of the Third Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (n.p., 1922), pp. 75f.

⁶Minutes of the Seventeenth Biennial Convention, 1950, p. 415.

expense.⁷ The Washington Declaration however, asks that judgment on such a problem be based upon three basic questions: (a) The agency's purpose; (b) The agency's principles; and (c) The effect upon Lutheran witness to the truth.⁸ It did not seem to be the intention of the committee which presented them to support them as valid arguments but merely as points of view which had been presented to the committee. In view of the principles in the Washington Declaration, however, should not the United Lutheran visitors to the Federal Council have distinguished between those arguments which were in agreement with the recognized principles from those arguments which were not?

While this study has shown that there was a large number of amendments made in the constitution of the National Council of Churches due to the instigation of the United Lutheran Church, it also discovered that a few amendments were not accepted by the National Council's Planning Committee in the form in which the United Lutheran representatives presented them. The United Lutherans recognized that a few "modifications" were made to their proposals, but they denied that this involved any compromise with their principles.⁹ This will be open to question to many who examine the amendments and their final form. In Article II, Section 4, the United Lutherans wanted to exclude from the purpose of the Council the encouragement of "devotional fellowship." The only satisfaction they received was

⁷Minutes of the Thirteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1942), pp. 123ff.

⁸Minutes of the second Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America (n.p., 1920), p. 98.

⁹Minutes of the Seventeenth Biennial Convention, 1950, p. 450.

that the Council would "encourage fellowship" eliminating the word "devotional."¹⁰ The distinction between a "devotional fellowship" and a "fellowship" is rather vague, especially since the framers of the constitution did not define their terms. In Article X, Section 9, the United Lutherans wished to delete the section permitting National Council divisions to establish advisory sections. The final result was that the divisions were permitted to "sponsor" advisory sections.¹¹ This seems to be a concession in the direction of cooption.

Finally, it must be noted that the Minutes, for 1952 through 1956, as discussed in Chapter IV, have indicated that cooption in the National Council of Churches is not improving but seems to be getting worse. How much worse it will have to get before the United Lutheran Church recognizes an unbearable strain on its representative principle is a question which that communion might have to answer in future years.

The Critical and Sympathetic View toward Other Denominations

In the area of the attitude of the United Lutherans toward other denominations there is a reasonable amount of consistency. The reports in the Minutes have always attempted to give a positive and a negative evaluation of the interdenominational agencies and its members from its earliest years down to the present. In recent years, however, a paradox seems to have appeared. While the discussion in Chapters IV and V reveals that the critical attitude toward various denominations has not ceased, yet there has increased an attempt to understand sympathetically the position of others even though the United Lutherans cannot agree with them. The frank

¹⁰Ibid., p. 454.

¹¹Ibid., p. 464.

opinion of Dr. Fry from his monthly edition of the Pastors of his Church seems to exemplify this attitude:

The wonder is that our principles were received so affirmatively by so many hearers. Nobody resented them. Nobody, or almost nobody, even raised a complaint as to where we Lutherans have been all this time or why we have not helped to shape what we now want to reshape. That was magnanimous. . . . we ought to understand them kindly.

One man confessed with amazement still in his eyes, that he hadn't even realized that his state council of churches had overlooked having a doctrinal preamble in its constitution until a ULCA synod called his attention to it. Wouldn't I please sit down immediately and compose a suitable form?

Yet, Dr. Fry interprets this sympathetic attitude in complete consistency with the United Lutheran principles:

So we go forward. This is no time for discouragement or the abandonment of our Church's sound convictions. It is a day for enlarging hope and friendliness.¹²

The Patient and Impatient Attitude Toward Other Lutherans

Here again a paradox seems to have developed, in part, due to the experience of the association with interdenominational agencies. The relationship which the United Lutheran Church wished to establish with the World Council of Church led it, in 1945, to meet with every major Lutheran body in America (except for the Joint Synod of Wisconsin) and patiently to explain to them the United Lutheran attitude and approach to the World Council.¹³ In a report from the convention of 1950, however,

¹²Franklin Clark Fry, "The State of the Church." News Letters from the Pastor's Desk Book. (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, August, 1951).

¹³Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church of America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1946), pp. 220f.

there seems to be a slight element of impatience with American Lutheran bodies which were not considering affiliation with the National Council of Churches:

If the constitution of the new Council of Churches contained a confessional statement identical with that of the WCC, and if the basis of voting representation insured direct responsibility to the member churches, it would seem probable that the Lutheran general bodies in America, now members of the World Council would also become National Council.¹⁴

A more poignant example of United Lutheran impatience with other Lutherans who do not seem to follow the principles outlined in this study nor the United Lutheran application of them is contained in the monthly News Letter to the U. L. C. A. pastors:

A prominent Missouri Synod pastor in Cleveland ambled amiable over to our table for a chat on the second day. His opening salvo was one of unrestrained enthusiasm. He was warmly gratified at the positive evangelical tone of the speeches and prayers which he had heard. Not a single discordant, unorthodox note had been struck. Several public statements would have qualified as "good Missouri Synod utterances." He meant it as high praise! One unregenerate ULCA'er gently reminded our Missouri friend that the outspokenly evangelical character of the National Council had been solidly strengthened and confirmed by our Church's influence. The way to accomplish it was not be remaining aloof.¹⁵

The Weakening and Strengthening of United Lutheran Internal Solidarity

The final paradox resulting, at least in part, from the influence of relationships with interdenomination agencies is the irony that while many synods, pastors and congregations have not lived up to the principles of the United Lutheran Church, the general body has taken definite steps to bring

¹⁴Minutes of the Seventeenth Biennial Convention, 1950, p. 417.

¹⁵Franklin Clark Fry, "The State of the Church." News Letters from the Pastor's Desk Book (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, January, 1951).

these synods, pastors and congregations back into an agreement with its principles and practices.

One of the first indications in the official data that the synods, pastors and congregations of the general body were not consistently following the recognized principles in practice was a recommendation by the Committee on Interdenominational Relationships to the Executive Board in 1947 to study the "relationships of synods to state federations and of congregations to local federation."¹⁶

In his opening speech to the Convention in 1950, Dr. Fry warned that merely because the United Lutheran Church might decide to join the National Council this did not mean that every synod and congregation could form relations indiscriminately with anyone they wished. His speech condemned comity arrangements, open communion and other acts of unionism:

The entrance . . . of our Church into the National Council will not relieve any synod or congregation of the strict duty of judging every additional interdenominational relationship with equal scrupulousness. . . . True ecumenicity does not consist in ignoring profound Christological differences, in slurring over the faith or in reducing the dignity of the Church. . . . The participation of our Church in the National Council . . . would not give an implicit sanction to synods or congregations to affiliate themselves with state and local council. . . .

we cannot participate in formal comity arrangements. . . . When denominations accept comity among themselves anywhere, each one of them in effect makes a public declaration that the others possess and teach the Gospel in such purity and completeness that its own communicants moving into comity areas will find the churches doctrinally interchangeable. . . .

Pastors and Congregations shall not practice indiscriminate pulpit and altar fellowship with pastors and churches of other denominations, whereby doctrinal differences are ignored. . . . Our trumpet must never give an uncertain sound.¹⁷

¹⁶Minutes of the Sixteenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1943), p. 249.

¹⁷Minutes of the Seventeenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1950), pp. 35ff.

This convention received a report on the degree to which local synods and congregations had formed interdenominational relations on a local level. The data given on the local relations of synods was good. Most of them had no constituent relationship with state councils of churches, and most of the rest appear to have entered them with caution. The picture given of the congregations, however, is quite different. Only 51 per cent of the congregations answered the questionnaire concerning their interdenominational relationships. Of these (1,493 congregations) 513 (34 per cent) are members of local interdenominational council. One half of these 513 have full membership, one quarter have consultative membership, and one quarter did not specify. Of the 513 congregations 167 admit belonging to councils which allow non-evangelical groups to join. Twelve per cent of the 513 participate in interdenominational communion services.¹⁸

One of the reasons for this rather startling picture of so many congregations violating the evangelical principle might be traced back to a resolution in 1944 which merely "suggested" that relationships of synods and congregations do not "go beyond the pattern" set by the general body.¹⁹

The committee assigned to make this survey of Congregations and Ministers claimed that it was the responsibility of each local synod to control the interdenominational relations of congregations. Yet the report of this committee frankly faced the problems and offered their solution:

It is deeply disturbing to learn 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

¹⁸Ibid., p. 491.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 487.

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 interdenominational communion services while serious enough percentage-wise, 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.²⁰

The Executive Board then adopted the recommendations that:

the committee on Interdenominational relationships be instructed to prepare the "guide to the principles governing local interdenominational relationships to our congregations, their auxiliaries and ministers" . . . (to be published in the Pastor's Desk Book)²¹

It was also moved and adopted by this convention that the United Lutheran Church "encourage its constituent synods to submit in advance for review and counsel by the Executive Board, proposals to establish relationships with state councils or other interdenominational agencies."²²

So it was that, while the convention of 1950 did not take any legalistic steps to correct the situation, it did act to educate the pastors and congregations through the "guide to the principles" to be put into the Pastor's Desk Book, and it did at least "encourage" synods to ask the Executive Board for an evaluation of local councils before joining. As a result, a number of constitutions of local councils began to come into the Executive Board sent in by the synods.

They examined and reported to the convention of 1952 on the interdenominational councils of Iowa, Washington, Michigan, Oregon, Virginia, and

²⁰Ibid., p. 493.

²¹Ibid., p. 502.

²²Ibid., p. 1046.

West Virginia. They also reported on the Canadian Council of Churches, and this will be discussed later. On the basis of their critical finding on these councils, the local synods were advised accordingly not to affiliate with them until the necessary changes were made bringing these council into conformity with evangelical and representative principles. The direction from the 1950 convention to prepare a "guide to principles" had not yet been fulfilled by this convention.²³

By the time of the convention of 1954, the Executive Board had examined Nine Councils, several of them two times, and had rejected four of them on either the evangelical principle, the representative principle, or both. Those councils accepted were The Pennsylvania Council of Churches, the North Carolina Council of Churches, the Portland, Oregon Council of Churches, the Colorado Council of Churches, and the West Virginia Council of Churches (provisionally). The councils rejected the Georgia Council of Churches, the Iowa Council of Churches, the North Dakota Council of Churches, and the Oregon Council of Churches.²⁴ At this time the Committee on Interdenominational Relationships had finished the "guide to principles governing local interdenominational relationships of our congregations, their auxiliaries and ministers." This document is a carefully worked out summary of the Evangelical Principle, using extensive quotations from the Washington Declaration and the Representative Principle. It lists points which the congregations are to look for in judging the constitutions of the church

²³ Minutes of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1952), pp. 435ff.

²⁴ Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1954), pp. 495ff.

councils in question. Activities for which they are to be alerted are comity arrangements, evangelistic programs of councils and interdenominational communion services:

any United Lutheran participation in comity conferences should be upon approval of the proper officials of the synod.

Evangelism is a basic responsibility of every Christian Congregation. This responsibility cannot be surrendered to a council of Churches. However, common planning . . . may be desirable and in some cases is effective.

Interdenominational services in which the Sacrament of Holy Communion is included and even "featured," whether they occur on Holy Thursday, at Easter sunrise, or "World-Wide Communion Sunday," or at any other time in the year, clearly deny Lutheran conviction and suppress our "testimony to what we hold to be the truth." . . .

It also warns the pastors:

For the sake of a consistent testimony to the Gospel, United Lutheran Pastors should join ministerial associations only if the fellowship consists wholly of ministers of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as Divine Lord and Saviour. Since members of ministerial associations do not represent their congregations in such memberships, but come together solely on an individual basis, the representative principle does not apply.²⁵

Another list of state councils was evaluated and reported to the convention of 1956. The councils approved by the Executive Board for United Lutheran affiliation were those of New Jersey, Pennsylvania (for the second time), Texas (provisionally), and Virginia. The Tennessee Council of Churches was rejected on the grounds of the representative principle.²⁶

As the final example of the effect of such interdenominational relations upon the solidarity of the Unity Lutheran Church, this study refers to the request of the Canada Synod to affiliate with the Canadian Council of Churches

²⁵Ibid., pp. 498ff.

²⁶Minutes of the Twentieth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1956), pp. 564f.

in 1950.²⁷ The answer to the request was reported to the next convention in 1952. The answer was "no." The United Lutheran Church refused to consider one synod acting for the general body, representing it to a national Canadian council of churches. Furthermore, the Canadian Council violated the two principles: they said nothing about the deity of Christ in their constitutional preamble, and they had many non-ecclesiastical religious bodies which voted as affiliated members. Permission was given, however, to have "friendly visitors" to the Council as a whole (if the other synods having congregations in Canada agreed), and to have limited affiliation with the Department of Ecumenical Affairs, since this department was considered an auxiliary agency of the World Council of Churches.²⁸

The report of the "friendly visitor" told the convention of 1954 that the Canadian Council has "very little authority of its own." Yet, the visitor pleaded for continued contact with the Council:

it affords an excellent opportunity for representatives and leaders of the churches to get to know one another. . . . As far as the Lutheran Church is concerned, the Canadian Council offers the only platform where her voice may be heard in Canada. . . . Certainly, it is our definite conviction that we ought to keep in touch with the Canadian Council of Churches.²⁹

The same visitor admitted in 1955 that he did not have much of a report to give since the last meeting held by the Canadian Council was "one of the weakest held in recent years."³⁰

²⁷Minutes of the Seventeenth Biennial Convention, 1950, p. 513.

²⁸Minutes of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention, 1952, pp. 435ff.

²⁹Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention, 1954, pp. 471ff.

³⁰Minutes of the Twentieth Biennial Convention, 1956, p. 546.

The apparent changes in the attitude and actions of the United Lutheran Church which were stimulated at least in part by her interdenominational relationships have been presented in the form of paradoxes. While placing great attention upon the evangelical and representative principles, the United Lutheran Church has broadened certain applications of those principles and is now struggling under the strain placed upon the representative principle by the National Council of Churches. Her attitude toward other Christian groups has retained its critical evaluation and yet increased in its attempt to understand their problems sympathetically. The view toward other Lutheran bodies has resulted in patient explanations under some circumstances and impatient exasperation under others. Finally, the interdenominational relations have apparently tempted congregations, pastors and a few synods to form indiscriminate relations with other faiths. Yet, the general body has been stimulated to balance this laxity by a program of encouragement and education.

If, therefore, the question is asked: has the interdenomination relations of the United Lutheran Church had a good or a bad effect upon its Lutheranism, a legitimate answer would be "yes."

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

This study has presented the topic of United Lutheran interdenominational relationships under three basis considerations: (a) Principles; (b) Practices; (c) Effects upon the United Lutheran Church.

A rather extensive study of the principles which the United Lutheran Church has developed in the Washington Declaration and used to guide its interdenominational activity has revealed a very systematic analysis of the Catholic Church, the denominations and their relationship to the Church and to each other, and how this analysis applies to the question of organic union and the question of cooperation. The standard for immediate union and full fellowship is the Lutheran Confessions. A full discussion of the content of the Confessions must be a prerequisite for any consideration of organic union. An extensive list of doctrinal requirements is presented in the Washington Declaration and highlights the deity of Christ, the reality of sin, the grace of God in Christ, the Scriptures as the source of truth, and the Means of Grace as the instrument of forgiveness. The United Lutheran Church does not demand that the interdenominational agency in question be absolutely clear on all aspects of these points, but it does insist that these points are not denied, that the Lutheran representatives are not bound in their testimony and witness, and that the agency recognize these points to the degree that non-evangelicals are excluded.

Along with its "evangelical principle" a point of polity was soon developed by the United Lutheran Church, which became known as the "representative principle." It stated that all representatives of the interdenominational agency in question must represent an actual church body (which, the

evangelical principle said, must be truly Christian).

The central chapters of this study examined how the United Lutheran Church put these principles into practice. With very few exceptions, this communion held its two principles before it with every interdenominational invitation and consideration. Following these principles, it was led to reject affiliation with many small, activist agencies in its earlier years. These principles kept it from becoming a voting member of the Federal Council of Churches until a conservative interpretation was placed on the doctrinal formula in its preamble by the Council's plenary assembly and until the new constitution, loaded with United Lutheran amendments appeared to safeguard the two principles. While the United Lutheran Church did not act hastily in establishing full relations with the National Council of Churches, its relationship has been strained by continuous violations of the representative principle by the divisions of the National Council.

The United Lutheran Church also acted cautiously in forming relations with the Conferences on Faith and Order and Life and Work. It was far more active in Faith and Order since the Conference on Life and Work continuously violated the representative principle. The United Lutherans were able to work closely with other Lutherans through the Lutheran World Convention in influencing the World Council of Churches and its parent bodies. The minutes of the United Lutheran Church seem to indicate that the relations with the World Council are far more satisfactory and successful than with the National Council.

Using the official minutes as a primary source, supported by some semi-official data, this study presented areas in which the United Lutheran Church seemed to have been influenced by its interdenominational activities. Much of such influence seems to be paradoxical. While remaining critical of other

denominations, it has become sympathetic. While working patiently at times with Lutheran bodies in America to make them appreciate and if possible accept the United Lutheran principles, it has at other times grown impatient with other Lutherans who seem slow in interdenominational concern. It has conservatively held up the principles as guidelines, and yet, it has broadened its application of these principles. Finally, the United Lutheran Church in America has recently discovered that many of its pastors and congregations have deviated seriously from its principles, possibly influenced by a superficial understanding of the interdenominational activities of the general body. Yet, this discovery has stimulated the general body to educate its pastors and congregations to a greater understanding and appreciation of its principles and practices. Although deviations of synods have not been as great as those of the congregations, the general body has taken steps to guide its synods toward a more consistent Lutheran practice.

In conclusions this study would suggest topics for further study: (a) An examination of the various interdenominational agencies with whom the United Lutheran Church in America has associated to determine the extent to which they have been directly and indirectly influenced by that body; (b) An examination and a comparison of the principles, specifically developed or implied, used by other Lutheran bodies in America which guide their interdenominational thinking and actions; (c) A study of United Lutheran congregations and pastors, statistically validated, to determine their knowledge of and agreement with the recognized principles and practices of the general body.

"After reading this study," the reader might ask, "I would still like to answer the original question: is this activity of the United Lutheran Church in America unionism or not?" If by "unionism" the reader means

doctrinal indifference resulting in indiscriminate fellowship, then the answer must be a resounding "no." Doctrinal indifferences would not have produced the United Lutheran sweat, toil and caution presented in this study. If, on the other hand, the reader identifies "unionism" with a spiritual fellowship on the local level which is inconsistent with the principles and practices of the general body, then the United Lutheran Church must be criticized for unionism. In the latter instance, however one more suggestion for future study presents itself: to what extent do the pastors and congregations of any Lutheran body in America follow the principles and practices of their general bodies?

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