

The Selling Of The Madison *Opgjør*

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Part I

The purpose of this paper is to show how an agreement between two disagreeing bodies of people can be sold to the more conservative of the two bodies, even if it means giving up a rich heritage. There will be a number of factors that come into play. In some ways the people sold themselves, in other ways they were sold by circumstances and to a great extent they were sold by their leaders. The question before us is unity or unionism. Unity is God pleasing. We can easily establish this fact from many Scripture passages. One of the key passages is Jn 17:20. Jesus asks His heavenly Father to grant unity to his disciples and followers. Unfortunately the Madison Agreement was not a document of unity but one of unionism.

Unity indicates that there is agreement between the two united parties. Agreement would also tend to indicate the same but not in the case of the Madison Agreement. Here we are dealing with pure unionism. The doctrine of church fellowship is ignored. One of the problems which made this paper fairly difficult to write was that there were so many doctrines involved. There was the primary doctrine of the controversy, that of election. But there was also the doctrine of church fellowship and the problem of what the basis of organic union ought to be. But the basic problem was the doctrine of God's Word. How does one interpret and apply God's Word, what is inspiration, etc, all of these come into play. If the participants in the Madison Agreement had had this one doctrine straight, there would have been unity or else there would have been no union in 1917.

The treatment of this subject demands that we return to the origin of the problem. The election controversy has been called the most devastating controversy ever to rock American Lutheranism. I am not certain this holds true in light of some of the modern attacks on God's Word, but I feel it certainly was the most widespread controversy ever. There was not a church body which was not affected by the election strife in the 1880's.

The Norwegian Synod was right in the middle of the controversy. In 1877 C.F.W. Walther delivered a paper on the doctrine of election try the Western District of the Missouri Synod, meeting in St. Louis. This paper was to become fuel for the fire in the later developments. Walther's presentation was according to Art. XI of *The Formula of Concord*, but it drew fire from people within his own Synod. Walther taught the doctrine of election which was taught in Scripture but his opponents denied this fact. They also accused Walther of Calvinism, a charge which Walther repudiated elsewhere in the paper. Walther correctly posited in his defense the fact that the election 'intuitu fidei' which the opponents taught left the door wide open for crass synergism.

F.A. Schmidt and F.W. Stelthorn arose as leaders of the opposition. One is hard put to classify Schmidt, whether he should be included with the Missouri Synod or the Norwegian Synod. His is an obscure story because we cannot be sure of his motives. If he objected to Walther's presentation on grounds of conscience, he had sufficient time to protest prior to the time that he finally did protest, a period of at least a year between 1879-1880. Some would say Schmidt was simply upset over not being called to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He had been the Norwegian Synod's professor there during the joint seminary project and was at that time teaching at the Norwegian Synod Seminary in Madison. Whatever Schmidt's motives, the attitude of one writer about him rings true,

This chapter is the story of a man who brought harm to the church. He fits the warning description spoken by Paul to the Ephesian elders, "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." (Ac 20;30). This man was F. A. Schmidt.¹

Schmidt supported the doctrine of 'intuitu fidei', that God elected man to salvation in view of the faith He foresaw they would have. Such a teaching was not new to the Norwegian Lutheran Church; more on that in a moment. We shall also see, however, that it was not Scriptural. "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." (Ac 13:48). "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from

¹ George M. Orvick, *Our Great Heritage* (Mankato: Lutheran Book Concern, 1968), p. 25.

the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." (2 Th 2:13). Both of these passages place faith after election and not election 'intuitu fidei'.

Schmidt was quick to accuse the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod, and the leaders of his own Synod, along with Walther, of Calvinism. According to him, they were teaching an irresistible working of God in men by saying that God elected men purely out of love without any consideration of foreseen faith. He accused his own Synod of new-Missourianism and of having departed from the teachings of traditional Norwegian Lutheranism. The President of the Norwegian Synod, Dr. U.V. Koren, was a faithful Bible scholar. He correctly answered Schmidt's charges,

We have not learned anything new from them, that is, any new doctrine or any other doctrine than that which we brought with us from the University of Christiania (Oslo). "Orthodoxy" means "pure doctrine", "Orthodoxism" may be translated "doctrinal purism". This consists in making pure doctrine the goal, though it should be only the means to attaining the right goal. The goal should be a true, real, living faith.²

The Norwegian Synod had not adopted a new doctrine from Missouri, rather, as Koren also pointed out, they owed Missouri a great debt for helping them arrive at doctrinal clearness. Though formerly unclear in many respects in spite of its confessional and churchly conservatism, the Norwegian Synod had received, through its connection with the Missouri Synod, an earnest awakening and had arrived at a definite Lutheran firmness.

Nevertheless the Norwegian Synod, in 1883, withdrew from the Synodical Conference and its alliance with Missouri and Wisconsin. They did this not in protest but in an effort to clean up their own house without any outside pressure. They retained the warmest fraternal relations with the Synodical Conference until 1917 when the union was struck. Such an effort to put their own house in order was admirable; however, it was unsuccessful. Schmidt and his followers maintained their position and persisted in their error until 1887 when they withdrew from the Norwegian Synod to form what they called the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood. The action of 1883 had been intended to prevent this split but only succeeded in forestalling it. Koren commented on those who followed Schmidt in true evangelical spirit, "I feel convinced that a great many of those who follow them do it only from ignorance, and would not have done so if they had not imperceptibly, little by little, been led away from the old truth. It is self-evident that party-passion has contributed largely toward this."³ He urged the proper course of action, that was, to follow Paul's advice, and build steadfast, unmovable Christians by training in God's Holy Word.

The Anti-Missouri Brotherhood joined with the Norwegian Augustana and the Norwegian Danish Conference to form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America in 1890. The Norwegian Lutheran religious scene in 1900 was (in order of size) the United Church, the Norwegian Synod, the Hauge Synod, the Eilsen Synod, the Church of the Brethren and the Lutheran Free Church. The last two bodies were splinter groups from the United Church and have little to do with our topic. These six groups all represented Lutheran (at least nominal) people of Norwegian descent. It did not take long before efforts were underway to bring them all back together under one roof.

The battle cry of the union forces was, "In fundamentals unity; in non-fundamentals liberty; in all things charity." This raises the question I brought out in the introduction, the authority of Scripture. Just what is a fundamental doctrine? Granted, we have such a dogmatical distinction, but it is a distinction of importance with relation to our salvation, not to be placed in comparison to the non-fundamental doctrines. God's Word is God's Word and it speaks clearly so that there is no room for disagreement whether it speaks of so-called fundamental or non-fundamental doctrines. Who then is to draw the line between doctrines which must be agreed on and those in which there may be liberty? President Koren correctly pointed out that agreement in all articles of faith clearly laid down in Scripture was necessary and was not spiritual tyranny (of which he had been accused).

To promote the cause of union, a series of conferences were carried on between the years of 1890 and 1910. Fortunately Schmidt was always involved and kept any sort of union from being consummated for many

² George O. Lillegard, ed., *Faith of Our Fathers* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1953), p. 99.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

years by his polemics against the position of the Synod. We could only wish that he had had as vocal a successor as he himself had been. The unionists were undemanding as far as the Norwegian Synod went but were also unyielding as far as their own demands for freedom went. Many writers in discussing this period referred to the frequent sheep-stealing done by the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood and to unbelievably synergistic statements on their part. They were a messed up body of "Lutherans" who were constantly polemicizing against the Norwegian Synod which they had left. The Norwegian Synod had a real problem because they had always tolerated 'intuitu fidei' and we will see how it haunts them in the coming years. We might just insert a comment here about H.G. Stub. He is going to be sharing a major responsibility for the selling of the Madison Agreement in this paper but to be fair, when there is an opportunity to say something positive about him, I will take it. Stub is a leader of the Synod cause during the years of these conferences. He is unrelenting in his demands for Article XI and even in the years of compromise at at Madison, I think he still believed only that. If I say more I will be going into conclusions and it is too early for those. Let it be said that as long as Koren was alive, Stub was a faithful leader of the Norwegian Synod.

The first of the conferences was held in Wilmar, MN, Jan 6-12, 1892. Here the breach was apparent. Stub, Koren and the Synod presented the doctrine of inspiration as a doctrine on which agreement must be reached before talks could be carried on. The United Church did not feel this way. In a persuasive speech, United Church President, G. Hoyme swung the majority to his side and the Norwegian Synod proposal was voted down. "In regard to church union let the Synod and the United Church consider the unanimous acceptance of the canonical books of the Bible as God's revealed, infallible Word on the part of both church bodies as a fully sufficient basis for church union."⁴ This was a wide open statement able to be interpreted in a number of ways. It was not sufficient for church union. During the course of these conferences a number of preliminary doctrines were 'agreed' upon but the major issue, that of election, was not taken up until 1897. That meeting resulted in a stalemate. They had a problem trying to harmonize these two views; God alone works conversion and conversion in a certain sense depends upon man. The easy way to harmonize those two is to admit that the second is a false assumption.

The next meeting was at Lanesboro. They made no progress there except to agree to hold a series of free conferences in the years to come. The first conference was scheduled for Austin, Jan 18-25, 1899. This conference was a farce. This can be seen by the number of participants, 21 from the United Church, two men from the Hauge Synod and one from the Norwegian Synod. The only significant fact is that the one Norwegian Synod delegate was Rev. Rasmus Malmin. He was to become one of the most active participants in union negotiations which led to *Opgjør*.

In 1901 the Norwegian Synod invited the Presidents and the theological faculties of the three synods to a colloquy in St. Paul. During that meeting all involved were able to agree on a statement concerning the certainty of salvation. It would seem that a major roadblock to the union was the participation of Schmidt on the Union Church's Union Committee. Recognizing this fact the Synod requested that the United Church replace Schmidt in 1902. That request was denied and things went from bad to worse for the union plans.

I wish I could end this paper here. The years from 1902 to 1905 were very quiet and unprofitable as far as union efforts went. But just as it seemed that everyone might be content with the status quo, the Hauge Synod was able to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory for confessional Lutheranism. In their convention of 1905 the Hauge Synod passed a resolution for a committee to pursue Norwegian Lutheran unity. The Norwegian Synod convention of that same year brought the first signs of the coming disintegration of that body. Dr. Koren was 79 years old at this convention and was in failing health. It was common knowledge that it would be only a short time before he would have to relinquish the duties of President. Out of respect, the Synod elected him to another term. The Vice President, who would obviously be stepping in shortly, was Stub. There were some last minute dealings to get this accomplished as he was ineligible for the office but accomplish it they did. The part which bode no good was the slogan of the backers of Stub, "Let's break the Decorah ring!" Luther College in Decorah

⁴ E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian Americans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1960), p.135.

had become the citadel of the Synod confessionalism just as St. Olaf in Northfield had become a stronghold of the United Church. Stub was clearly the candidate of the more liberal element in the Synod.⁵

Stub prepared a good set of theses on election and they became the basis of the discussions between 1908-1910. They also brought about no results. Because of this fact Stub brought a set of revised theses to the meeting in 1910. Beckman of the United Church had written theses which he revised for the meeting and Eastvold of the Hauge Synod brought a new set of theses. On the motion of Kildahl of the United Church (Vice-President), they voted to make Eastvold's theses the new basis of discussion whereupon the Norwegian Synod Committee withdrew themselves from the meeting. To make the matter even worse, President Dahl of the United Church labeled Stub's theses as "unbiblical and un-Lutheran." This charge became of prime importance in the protests to the Madison Agreement below. This is an area where one has a hard time making sense of all the developments. Kildahl and Stub were at each other's throats, Dahl declared Stub a virtual heretic and the Synod's committee was out of the negotiations. For all practical purposes, the union should have been dead. The United Church and the Hauge Synod did come to full doctrinal agreement at this meeting but they did not strike any outward union.

This was the situation when Stub addressed the district conventions of 1910. The districts took the stand of the union committee but then recommended that the committee should continue its work as long as there seemed to be some hope of an eventual agreement. The districts also felt that the two forms of the doctrine of election ought not to be divisive of church fellowship and it would be regrettable if such should be the case. Another meeting was held in December and again the results were the same. The Norwegian Synod again withdrew over the theses of Eastvold.

This was the bleak situation at the close of 1910. It is hard to believe that Madison was just over two years down the road. E. Clifford Nelson, a thorough United Church supporter, lists three reasons for the impasse. First, personalities; second, the apparent failure to recognize changes in the present situation over against the old election controversy; third, the persisting residuum of antithetical theological method. Then he adds,

The closing of the year 1910 seemed to sound the death knell of the desired tripartate union, and the future seemed to hold few, if any, signs of hope. Optimism had all but disappeared as the religious and secular presses began to discharge the literary evidences that men were returning to the theological wars.⁶

Part II

The committees of both groups were disbanded in 1910 but the idea of union would not die. One of the reasons the union hopes remained was the work which was going on for a common hymnal and liturgy. In 1911 the United Church appointed a new committee. Stub recommended the same to the Synod. From Nov 21-21, 1911 the two committees met in St. Paul and ran into the same problems as before, how to treat the two forms. These new committees had one totally new feature. They were composed of parish pastors, there was not a theologian on either of the committees. That appears to this author as a particularly useless way of arriving at doctrinal unity but then we can honestly question if that was what the majority really wanted. There are other differences in this meeting. They left their polemics outside the meeting room. The Norwegian Synod did not charge Synergism, the United Church did not charge Calvinism or new-Missourianism. This meeting ended with the appointment of a subcommittee consisting of Revs. Malmin, Lee, Gunderson and Tangjerd. These men were to meet and draft a proposal to be presented Feb 12, 1912 in Madison.

Even this attempt to solve the impasse was not entirely successful. They still could not arrive at an acceptable statement on the two forms question. Finally, during the course of the Madison meeting Pastors S. Gunderson and I.D. Ylvisaker were sequestered in a room by themselves until they came up with an acceptable

⁵ George M. Orvick, op. cit., p. 29.

⁶ E. Clifford Nelson, op. cit., p. 128.

statement. The final settlement revolved around this thought, each side should judge the opponents' conclusion from their premise. The Synod operated from the premise that election referred to God's decree in eternity, the United Church said that it was the carrying out of that decree in the final glorification of all believers. The document they drew up, commonly called the Madison Agreement or *Opgjør*, is attached to these pages as an Appendix.

Careful examination of the Madison Agreement reveals that it accepts without reservation the second form (*intuitu fidei*) as being of equal authority with the first form (election unto faith) of election. Anyone can see that these two cannot stand side by side. The Synod had always tolerated 'intuitu'. Their catechism contained this view, but never before had it been granted equal authority. This fact was frequently pointed out through the official organs of both Synods but never seems to have sunk in to the people and turned them off to this union. Indeed, a large number saw at once that the Synod, by accepting the Madison Agreement, would shift its position with regard to the second form. There was a great deal of difference between tolerating a definition of a doctrine under certain definite circumstances and accepting this definition without reservation.⁷ The Madison Agreement, in reality, contained two views, the one of election, the other of God's subsequent will to save believers.

One article in the *Lutheran Herald* compared the *Opgjør* with what was termed the Wittenberg *Opgjør* of 1536. (The author referred to Butzer's less than honest dealings in bringing about a temporary union between the Swiss and the Germans over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper.) The language of the article was polemical. "To him who stoutly maintains that the expression, "on account of man's conduct" solves the mystery in man's conversion, and that the doctrine it expresses is contained in the Lutheran Confessions, to him we confidently reply: You are ignorant of the contents of the Lutheran Confessions and besides, a synergist."⁸

The Synodical Conference did not sit idle in the marketplace during these days of union talks. They basically did two things; they suggested three steps to be taken in relation to *Opgjør* and they appointed a committee to meet with the Synod and discuss the proposed merger. The Synod should see to the elimination of the coordination of the first and second forms of election from theses 1-3 of the Madison Agreement. They should include in the rejection of man's good conduct also a rejection of his omission of the so-called willful resistance. They should enter into a fraternal discussion with the Synodical Conference on the former theses of Call and Conversion as well as of the present theses on Election. To that end the Synodical Conference appointed W.H.T. Dau, F. Pieper and J. Schaller (later replaced by T. Schlueter) as the committee to meet with the Norwegian Synod.

F. Pieper published *Zur Einigung* in response to the Madison Agreement. The tenor of this book was conciliatory and showed a willingness to meet and discuss the Madison Agreement, but it did not waver an inch from the historical position of Art XI. The tone of this book should have done much to promote discussions but the discussions were few. A. Pieper and J. Schaller criticized F. Pieper. They considered Pieper's attitude totally unwarranted. The committees had come together with the intention of striking a merger no matter what. History points out that their impression was correct but at the time they were severely criticized for judging hearts. All I can say is the committees' actions spoke loudly in support of Pieper and Schaller, even in 1912. Ten years later in hindsight, J.P. Meyer was able to conclude, "The matter presented in the second form is Scriptural doctrine, yet to identify this matter with the doctrine of election is contrary to Scripture and the *Formula of Concord*."⁹ I think F. Pieper was simply trying to get the Norwegian Synod to consider preserving the fraternal relations which had grown so warm over the past 50 years. Finally, Carl Meyer, in editing the Missouri Synod history, *Moving Frontiers* has to conclude, "Procedural questions on both sides, impatience and the haste for union on the one side, lack of an urgent desire to maintain unity on the other side, these played their part in the breakdown of fraternal relations between the Norwegians and the Missouri Synod."¹⁰

⁷ S. C. Ylvisaker, ed., *Grace for Grace* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943), p. 101.

⁸ I. G. Monson, "The Verdict of History" *The Lutheran Herald* (Vol. 8, N. 21), p. 486.

⁹ J. P. Mayer, "What is the Purpose of Organizing 'The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Norwegian Americans?'" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Vol. 23, Oct 1926), p. 164.

¹⁰ Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), p.292.

The Madison Agreement was well received on the other end of the Lutheran Church in America. Schmauk at the General Council convention in Toledo praised the union efforts. "The Gospel of Christ appeared, to teach men that they were all of one blood and all had one God as their Father. Divided at Babel., they were united by love and humility at Zion."¹¹ L.S. Keyser, General Synod theologian, while he praised the conciliatory tone of Pieper's book, realized that Pieper had not budged an inch. He also realized that *Opgjør* contained some double talk. He defended the United Church interpretation of *Opgjør*. The problem was that Keyser was such a full blown Synergist, he really was not doing the cause of union any favor by taking sides.

Part III

Many realized the vast difference between conditional toleration and unconditional acceptance. They felt that such problems would be ironed out before any merger was struck. Warning flags went up that the Synod would be abandoning its old position if it proceeded into a merger without first clarifying *Opgjør*. The evidence which appeared in print in *Lutheraneren* and the *Lutheran Herald* following *Opgjør* indicated there was no agreement on the interpretation of the document and demanded further statements of agreement which were not secured. Even after the first meeting in St. Paul in 1911, some of the Synod Union Committee members expressed the thought that they never suspected that there was such great difference between the United Church and their own Synod.¹²

During the whole controversy, Stub maintained that the Synod was holding its historical position, the same position as that of the Synodical Conference, and the Missouri Synod. Kildahl, Vice-President of the United Church, was of a different opinion. He said, "The doctrine contained in the Missouri Synod's reports of the 1877-79 conventions is the doctrine against which we fought; and that doctrine I do not find in *Opgjør*."¹³ It was a foregone conclusion in his mind that the Synod by accepting the committee's report, would have to break with Missouri. Graebner, still editor of the *Lutheran Herald* pointed out that this was not a passing remark made in the company of intimates but was an opinion committed to writing in official organs of the United Church. The *Opgjør* does not contain the doctrine taught by the Missouri Synod and the old Norwegian Synod and a break in their fellowship would certainly result if the Synod accepted this document. President Stub, were you reading or listening?

The action of Stub in calling a special Synod convention in 1913 spurred the minority into action. This was the first cold, hard evidence that Stub was going to press for full merger. The minority was led by Stub's colleagues on the Seminary faculty, J. Ylvisaker, O.E. Brandt, and E. Hove. These men circulated a petition to those pastors that they knew to be in agreement with them, in order to present a solid front at the convention. Stub got hold of one of the petitions and had it published in order to discredit the minority. He called it an anonymous (we may substitute: below the belt) attempt to undermine the basis for union. That description was hardly fair. It was not anonymous, the men who received it knew who had sent it. The text of the petition will reveal that it is hardly against union but that any union should be only on the basis of full doctrinal agreement. The minority had attempted to go about their work in the least divisive manner they could think of, but history tells us they would have been better off coming out in the open at the start. This would have taken away Stub's advantage when he was the one to reveal this 'anti-union' agreement.

The minority did come out in public with their opinion. Its Norwegian name was *Bønnskrift*. A brief look at this document will show that it is loyal to the confessions and loyal to the union movement. It expresses loyalty to a Scriptural union. The authors state in the preamble their loyalty to the union movement but they express their fear that the doctrinal harmony necessary for union had not yet been attained. Paragraph 1 objected that the United Church had not yet announced its agreement with the Synod's interpretation of *Opgjør*. Quite the contrary, the United Church Committee members, especially Kildahl and Gunderson (one of the two who finally hammered out the agreement) declared that the Synod's interpretation of *Opgjør* was all wrong.

¹¹ G. T. Lee, ed., *The Lutheran Herald* (Vol. 8, N. 42, Oct 16, 1913), p. 983.

¹² S. C. Ylvisaker, op. cit., p. 180.

¹³ T. Graebner, ed., *The Lutheran Herald* (Vol. 8, N. 20, May 15, 1913), p. 457.

Paragraph 2 cited the unfavorable judgment of the United Church on Stub's theses of 1910. This judgment had never been retracted. Paragraph 3 cited the differing interpretations of *Opgjør*. Paragraph 4 made clear the difficulty caused by the United Church maintaining fellowship (brotherly relations) with church bodies with which the Synod could not practice fellowship. In conclusion, the minority *Bønsskrift* expressed hope that no final measures would be adopted before the difficulties pointed out in the memorial to the Synod of 1913 had been removed. The Madison Agreement was a good basis for continuing negotiations. They had no desire to annul the Madison Agreement yet they were positive in their request for the removal of certain inequalities inhering in the document and for greater clearness regarding inter-synodical relations. The delegates listened politely while the minority memorial was given and then at the urging of Stub voted 394 to 106 (subject to what would be overwhelming congregational approval) to approve the majority report, In the words of Stub, nothing less was involved than the honor of the Norwegian Synod and the cause of union.¹⁴ After 1916 it really got hot for the minority. Congregations were split and minority pastors found it almost impossible to serve their parishes. It was in this year that concerned members of the minority were urged by Dau, Pieper and Graebner to remain with the Norwegian Synod for the time being and witness to the truth.

We mentioned that one of the actions of the Synodical Conference was to appoint a committee to meet with the Norwegian Synod and iron out some difficulties. This is a sad story between these two brothers. Although the minority received much support from the Synodical Conference in those crucial years, the committee never met with the Norwegian Synod as intended. The Synodical Conference Committee was to address the Synod convention in 1913 however the Church Council (the Norwegian Synod's Coordinating Council) deemed such an appearance inadvisable. They instead appointed a committee to meet with them. This was not what Dau and Pieper had been assigned to do and they said so. They offered to meet on their own responsibility as private persons but they would not function as a Synodical Conference Committee except before the entire convention. The next Synodical Conference convention affirmed the action of its committee but it also extended to the committee wide latitude in dealing with the Synod. During 1915 Stub employed stalling tactics and the Synodical Conference Committee did not press for a meeting until late in the year. A date and place for a meeting was arranged for 1916 but Stub and another member of the Norwegian Synod Committee, O.P. Vangsness were both hospitalized. Stub's illness lasted a long time, Vangsness' was fatal. The 1916 Synodical Conference Convention reviewed the whole situation and gave the Committee power to continue to seek dialogue. By now the Synod's Church Council deemed it inadvisable and inexpedient to have any meeting before its convention in June 1917. That meeting resulted in full merger, fellowship was ended and the Synodical Conference focused all its attention on the minority.

I do not believe we have the right to sit in judgment on the actions of these two committees in these years. We might wish that the Synodical Conference Committee had gone beyond its powers in 1913 but such actions are not permissible when you are a representative of an entire body. I can hardly blame the men for not wanting to expose their necks to the axe. What we finally have to say is it is extremely difficult to untangle the involved skein of affairs (historical circumstances, theological presuppositions and personality conflicts) which surrounded *Opgjør*.

Part IV

The Synod had tolerated 'intuitu fidei' for a long time. It is regrettable that the man responsible for the Norwegian catechism also lent his name to the second form of election, Eric Pontoppidan (Pontoppidan's Theory). Eric Pontoppidan (1698-1764) was greatly influenced by the 17th century Germans, Gerhard and Scriver. One of the historical causes I see behind the selling of the *Opgjør* compromise is the lack of solid confessionalism which the church of Norway experienced. Although Lutheranism came to Norway at a fairly early date many feel that it was a forced acceptance until much later. Pontoppidan is a century and a half removed from Luther or Chemnitz. We also find that the pietism of Franke and Spener which had brought

¹⁴ E. Clifford Nelson, op. cit., p. 195.

refreshment to the church of Norway at the beginning of the 18th century left its mark on the church not the least through Eric Pontoppidan.¹⁵ (Here too is the background, I feel, for the Norwegian emphasis on deeds, not creeds.) Rationalism took its toll on the Norwegian church in the mid 18th century but the Haugean revival reestablished a more sanctified way of life which the settlers brought with them to America. They rejoiced to be able to share their common faith with people of common descent.

There were many national causes which helped the union in the early 20th century. May 17, 1914 marked the Norwegian Independence Centennial and resulted in delegates of all Norwegian American church bodies sending envoys to the homeland to help celebrate this festival. There were also visitors from Norway to America in these crucial years. Probably the most influential were the two men (P.W.K. Bockman and Hans Nielsen Hauge) who attended the Minnesota district convention in 1912 (the first district to approve the Madison Agreement). It is well to note the presence of a new factor among Norwegian Americans which exerted a subtle but none the less significant influence on the union movement. The reference is to the appearance of cultural and nationalistic societies which cut across church boundaries and theological differences (singing societies, literary clubs, temperance societies, sports associations, welfare groups and lodges).¹⁶ Two prominent societies were the Norwegian Society in America, organized to preserve the Norwegian language and culture (its membership was primarily Lutheran) and the Bygdelag Movement: Bygd is a district in Norway and Lag is a society in America. They were to cultivate and perpetuate the memories and culture of the homeland.

The common fallacy of this union movement was the same as that of the ecumenical movement today, that spiritual union of true believers in Christ Jesus must be manifested if it is to exist at all.¹⁷ The people had been fighting the election controversy for a long time and they were tired of it. They had implicit trust in their Union Committee and its judgment. They had been led for many years to exaggerate the importance of an outward union. It was evident that there was much grassroots support for a union. Although it is not excusable, it certainly is understandable. They were very much yet a community with their fellow Norwegians and they wanted to express that in all phases of their lives. The charge of being 'not a friend of union' was one of the most serious which could be lodged against any Norwegian Lutheran.

The English paper of the Synod, the *Lutheran Herald*, changed editors in the middle of this controversy. Graebner of the Missouri Synod had been the editor but resigned in July 1913 because of increasing congregational duties. This is borne out by the statistics, his congregation had grown to over 900 in a few short years. Whether there were other factors or not, the Norwegian Synod union forces received a shot in the arm when G.T. Lee was appointed editor. Lee was a member of the Union Committee and used the *Herald* as a tool to bolster that union. The whole tenor of the magazine changed when the new editor took over. Listen to his optimistic prediction:

Practically all the Lutheran bodies in America today stand squarely on the Confession, whatever differences may still obtain on intricate doctrinal questions which no theological acumen will ever suffice to answer or clarify. If confession of sin (rather than 'doubtful disputations') were made more prevalent, within the next decade there would be more real unity in doctrine and practice than even the most sanguine would dare to hope.¹⁸

By the years 1912-1917 the Synod was ignoring doctrinal discussions and working on practicalities of union in order to get everyone excited with the thought of union.

Finally we have to treat Stub. If any one person could have been able to prevent a compromise union, he was that person. He was the President. The mantle of the departed Dr. Koren had fallen on him, he could have

¹⁵ Herman A. Preus, "History of Norwegian Lutherans in America to 1917," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* (Vol. XL, October, 1967), p. 102.

¹⁶ E. Clifford Nelson, op. cit., p. 151.

¹⁷ George O. Lillegard, op. cit., p. 156.

¹⁸ G. T. Lee, op. cit. (Vol. 9, N. 21, May 21, 1914), p. 486.

persuaded the Synod to tread cautiously but he did not. I have pointed out some reasons why I consider that surprising. First, his staunch defense of their position against Schmidt in the period 1880-1900. Thin, his hostility to Kildahl and his offense at the statement of Dahl that his theses were 'unbiblical and un-Lutheran'. A man will tolerate many things but this was tantamount to calling him a false prophet and a heretic.

However, already in 1908 we see signs of danger. In relating Koren's address to the districts in 1908 he omitted a significant paragraph. Whether this was intentional or accidental it was inexcusable for a man with such a position of authority. This was the paragraph omitted,

The doctrinal discussions which have been carried on with other Norwegian Lutheran church bodies have not, it is my conviction, led to any reliable results. The disagreement which appeared in the discussion of the last point (election) in which we follow the Book of Concord word for word surely rests on disagreement in the doctrine of conversion (synergism). That a series of theses on the doctrine is adopted does not prove that there is thorough agreement. This we have experienced before when all our positive theses were accented while violent objections were made to the antitheses although these were only inevitable conclusions of the former. If only insignificant things were at stake, then it would not be right to separate; but when the question is raised whether God alone is our Savior, then we cannot be too careful. Perhaps the necessary antitheses may yet be submitted. If agreement concerning such things can be attained, then there would be real rejoicing.

This paragraph Stub omitted. He was also the leader of the declaration in 1910 that the two forms ought not be divisive of church fellowship.¹⁹

After the 1912 Synodical Conference convention, Stub more or less slandered the Synodical Conference and the Missouri Synod with the terms, new-Missouri, borrowed from Schmidt, and the old insinuation of Calvinism. He attempted to show that the Synodical Conference and the Missouri Synod had departed from the old position. His constant meddling in favor of union cannot be tolerated as right. The action of the Synodical Conference was not a divisive action according to Ylvisaker in *Grace for Grace*,

The action of the Synodical Conference must not however, be regarded as causing a considerable minority in the Synod itself to oppose union on the basis of the Madison Settlement and the other controverted articles as has been intimated. A much greater opposition to the Madison Settlement than the 1912 vote (209-12) would indicate appeared immediately after the document was published. A strong opposition to the acceptance of the Madison agreement was voiced at all the district conventions, but the arbitrary tactics used, as well as the explanations offered by committee members and others, served to confuse and even intimidate the voters, so that the real strength of the opposition does not appear in the final poll.²⁰

Stub's stigmatizing of the minority petition was referred to above.

Stub's address to the Synod of 1914 was based on Jn 17:20-23 and stressed the external union (which the passage does not refer to). He saw to it that a peace committee was established to prepare a smooth way for the joint meetings of 1914. When it appeared that that course might fail, he and Kildahl ironed out their own differences. They issued the Stub-Kildahl Declaration which served to remove one of the major stumbling blocks to union. Stub was a relative liberal in spite of his objections to Schmidt and Kildahl. Although he remained upset at the old 'unbiblical and un-Lutheran' charge, he accepted the argument that the Madison Agreement was the final word and superceded all previous statements. This was just a cover-up for the same statement Dahl expressed in 1910. The United Church was talking out of both sides of its mouth. They said they had not issued the statement against Stub as a body (just their President) therefore they need not retract it as a body. I submit Stub knew it and should have pointed it out.

Stub was a bundle of contradictions in those years. One moment he praised *Opgjør* to the heavens, the next he insisted that paragraphs 1-3 must go. His classic defense is summed up, "to demand more than the

¹⁹ Herman A. Preus, op. cit., p. 117.

²⁰ S. C. Ylvisaker, op. cit., p. 112

Opgjør would be tantamount to stretching the bow so taut it would break."²¹ I submit one final piece of evidence of Stub's popery in selling the Madison Agreement as it was once again evidenced in his dealings with the Minority.

First I will say that I do not doubt that the document they have called *Bøskrift* is written with good intentions. But notwithstanding, one will also agree with me that the method of procedure they have used is new among us, and that it is not right. The Synod has established a Union Committee, whose President I am, and it was put in this Committee's hands to do what it could to clear up whatever difficulties in its opinion, remain, and so come with a proposition to the Synod. The Committee has tried to do its best. They have devoted much time and energy to this cause. It was not the concern of other men to take this matter in their own hands and send out a document to secure signatures for its consideration with complete neglect of the body's chosen Committee.²²

In Stub's opinion the strict confessionalism of the mid 19th century had served its purpose and the day had come for broader union.

Part V

No report on the Madison Agreement would be complete without a final chapter on the document which helped seal the fate of the conservative minority of the Synod, the Austin Agreement. This document was signed in 1917 and resulted with a greater part of the minority joining the union 'under protest'. Negotiations had been continually held with the minority since their protest in 1912. There was not a pastor in the majority that did not want to see his minority brothers join him in the union. The decision arrived at in Austin basically stated that the minority could join the merger on the basis of their own doctrine, but with "mutual fraternal recognition". The following is a portion of a letter from the Joint Union Committee to Pastors C.K. Preus and I. B. Torrison, who had come to the leadership of the minority.

While the annual meeting retains *Opgjør* unchanged as a basis for the consolidation of the three negotiating churches and, while the annual meeting is expressly aware of the three reservations...contained in the request from Prof C.K. Preus and Rev I. B. Torrison, the annual meeting nevertheless invites that group of men and congregations, whose views are expressed in the above mentioned request, to join in forming the new church under complete equality and mutual fraternal recognition.²³

This invitation was declined until some further changes were made. These changes could be termed concessions to the minority. The changes consisted in the dropping of the first phrase above, "While the annual..." and in an additional note which declared Preus and Torrison's objections to be completely in line with Scripture and the Confessions. The Committee, however, then added a footnote which stated that the resolution must not be interpreted as overthrowing *Opgjør* as a basis for the union. For this reason Aaberg is able to conclude, "The fact remains, however, that the concessions seemingly granted by the joint Committee to the Minority in the "Austin Settlement" were effectively taken back by the Joint Committee in the note which they subsequently added to it."²⁴

The layman elected (Swenson) to convey the final resolution of the Minority to the Joint Committee failed the cause of the Minority miserably. When he delivered the resolution to the Joint Committee, he was asked a number of questions, all of which he answered wrong. He stated in effect that the resolution did not consist of an addition to the original invitation extended to the Minority by the Joint Committee. He affirmed that the Minority resolution he bore was not to be set before the respective Synods but was intended as a

²¹ E. Clifford Nelson, op. cit., p. 191.

²² Theodore A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill* (Mankato: Board of Publications Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), p. 57.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

communication to the Committee alone. And he also claimed that the resolution was never intended to be published. Such a "news release" was never the intent of the Minority in offering the resolution, however, as such, it was gladly accepted by the Union Committee. Swenson, in effect, nullified all the concessions which the minority had received. Preus, from the floor of the 1917 convention, got the Minority resolution in the minutes of the convention, however, by that time it was too late. The minority entered the union under the same premise of the Norwegian Synod, the false premise that unity in essential doctrines was sufficient for union in outward organization. Thus Nelson can dismiss the Austin Agreement as 'that which allowed the Minority to fulfill its real desire for union without losing face.'²⁵

That is harsh to say the least. I prefer the assessment of the Austin Agreement made by Aaberg.

The Austin Settlement bears its own special mark of sorrow and tragedy. When the Majority in the Synod cast aside their doctrinal heritage in favor of one united Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, they had made it clear in the years from 1912 to 1917 that this is what they wanted to do.. The Minority men who went into the Merger of 1917 under the Austin Settlement, however, had displayed a far different spirit. They too desired a united church, but a church united in the truth. When the true nature of "The Settlement"(Madison) was revealed after the 1912 district conventions, they rose up in arms to defend the heritage of truth which God had graciously preserved for them in an earlier generation. There is much evidence in the negotiation of the Austin Settlement to show that they not only cherished the truth but also intended that it should sound forth, and eventually prevail over the synergistic error in the new church body. They undoubtedly have proclaimed the truth in their own teaching and preaching in the classroom and pulpit where they have served, and have thereby been a blessing to the Merger. Yet the final basis on which they entered the new church body effectively denied to them the opportunity for a true state of confession (*statu confessionis*), and they, by their acceptance of that basis, denied it to themselves.²⁶

The final result of the Austin Agreement was that an even smaller segment of the original minority broke fellowship with the Norwegians, formed their own Synod and rejoined the Synodical Conference. That body we today know and carry on fellowship with as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. "We, members present of the Synod for the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, ministers, delegates of congregations, and members of congregations, join together for this purpose of continuing the work of the Synod on the old basis and according to the old principles."²⁷

Part VI

In summary I would like to present my own conclusions and reactions to the Madison Agreement or *Opgjør*. I appreciated the article by Rev Monson in *The Lutheran Herald*, "The Verdict of History." His article compared the Madison *Opgjør* of 1912 with the Wittenberg *Opgjør* of 1536. Butzer by his ambiguity regarding the term "worthy communicant" was able to bring about a temporary concord between the ideologies of Wittenberg and Zurich over the Lord's Supper. As soon as Luther found out the truth, the Concord was over. Such was the Madison *Opgjør*. "Eagerness is not the highest quality in a worker for union. Common honesty is worth more. Loyalty to Scripture truth is also better than eagerness. The very name of Butzer is suggestive of compromise theology. There is something to be learned from the Wittenberg *Opgjør* of 1536."²⁸ Unfortunately, his warning went largely unheeded. We might extend his comparison further. I think we could compare the Luther-Melanchthon relationship with that of Koren and Stub. Both of the followers held the doctrinal line while the older men were alive but after they died, both went far afield of conservative, Lutheran theology. And I might also point out that the warning of Luther went largely unheeded. He had warned that election was a

²⁵ E. Clifford Nelson, op. cit., p. 220.

²⁶ Theodore A. Aaberg, op. cit., p. 69.

²⁷ George M. Orvick, op. cit., p. 34.

²⁸ T. Graebner, op. cit. (Vol. 8 N. 22), p. 506

doctrine which required a degree of spiritual maturity to discuss. In 1912 the question was discussed on streets and in the lanes, in stores and in saloons, and articles of incendiary nature were incessantly sent out.²⁹

The Norwegian Synod, by their strong desire for union, bought a real package of doctrinal indifference from the United Church. The resentment of the United Church was not so much against the Missouri Synod as it was against all orthodox doctrinal strictness. The attitude of the union-minded majority was that doctrinal strictness and soundness was something that had been necessary when they were so isolated in the early years of the Norwegian immigration but by 1917, such a need had disappeared. Their whole attitude was that the center of the road, their "unity, freedom, charity" principle was the best. I cannot help but think of the Lord's warning to the church in Laodicea, "Because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth." (Rev 3:16).

It amazes me that after fifteen years the Missouri Synod would be starting down the same road. After holding strong principles of fellowship for many years, they begin to succumb to the union bug. I cannot stress how much I have come to treasure our Scriptural doctrine of fellowship by writing this paper. We know what the Scriptural basis for fellowship and union is, true unity in all doctrine on the basis of God's inspired, inerrant Word.

The Norwegian Synod was considered hard lined when it would not drop its insistence on Art XI as the only proper definition of the doctrine of election. The United Church demanded liberty and was just as hard lined. In the case of the Madison Agreement there was a definite winner and loser and I do not need to point out which was which. The key to the entire matter is once again a conditional toleration versus unconditional acceptance and equality of the two forms. The mistake of the Synod was not in their doctrine of election but in their doctrine of fellowship. It was a victory of the heart over the head, "Both sides eager for union and weary of conflict, sought desperately to find a way in which they could be delivered from the clutch of bitterness and each could join the other without giving up his own views. It was a case of the victory of the heart over the head."³⁰

Finally, I have to side with Aaberg, "The Norwegian Synod was won over to the support of the Settlement in 1912, not by such bold statements regarding its compromising nature as have been made in more recent years by leaders within "the Merger", (witness Nelson above) but rather by the steadfast claim of the Synod's committee and officials that it "faithfully preserved the Synod's doctrinal position of the 1880's."³¹ Thus was the Madison *Opgjør* sold.

²⁹ George O. Lillegard, op. cit., p. 106.

³⁰ E. Clifford Nelson, op. cit., p. 181.

³¹ Theodore A. Aaberg, op. cit., p. 52.

Appendix

The Madison Agreement

Regarding the doctrine of election the union committees subscribe to the following:-

AGREEMENT (OPGJØR)

1. The union committees of the Synod and the United Church acknowledge unanimously and without reservation that doctrine of election which is presented in Article XI of the *Formula of Concord* and in Pontoppidan's *Sahdhed til gudfrygtighed*, Question 548.

2. Since both the negotiating church bodies recognize that the *Formula of Concord* presents the pure and correct doctrine of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confession concerning the election of the children of God to salvation, it is deemed unnecessary to church unity to draw up new and more extensive theses regarding this article of faith.

3. Since, however, it is generally known that concerning the doctrine of election two forms of presentation have been used, both of which have gained prescriptive right and recognition within the orthodox Lutheran Church;

While some, in agreement with the *Formula of Concord*, make the doctrine of election comprehend the entire salvation of the elect, from the calling to the glorification (*Formula of Concord*, Art. XI, 13-24; Jacobs), and teach an election "to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth";

Others, like Pontoppidan, in conformity with John Gerhard, Scriver, and other acknowledged teachers in the Church, define election rather as the decree of final glorification, with faith and perseverance wrought by the Spirit as its necessary presupposition, and teach that "God has predestinated all those to eternal life who from eternity He has seen would accept the proffered grace, believe on Jesus Christ, and remain steadfast in this faith unto the end"; and since neither of these two forms of doctrine presented in this manner contradicts any doctrine revealed in the Word of God, but (each) does full justice to the order of salvation as elsewhere presented in the Word of God and the Confession of the Church, we hold that this fact ought not to cause any division in the Church nor disturb that unity of Spirit in the bond of peace which God desires should prevail among us.

4. Since, however, during the doctrinal controversy among us, words and expressions have been used, rightly or wrongly attributed to the one party or the other, which seemed to the other side a denial of the Confession of the Church or lead to such denial,

5. On the one hand we reject;

a) The doctrine that the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ is not the only cause of our election, but that there also in us is a cause on account of which God has elected us to eternal life;

b) The doctrine that in the election God has been determined by, or has taken into account, or has been directed by, the good conduct of man or by anything which man is or may do or omit to do, "as of himself or from his own natural powers";

c) The doctrine that the faith in Christ, which is indissolubly connected with election, is wholly or in part a product of, or dependent upon, man's own choosing, power, or ability (compare, however, *Formula of Concord*, Art. XI, 70-72, 82-85)

d) Or that this faith is the result of a power and ability imparted to man by the call of grace, a power now dwelling in, and belonging to, the unregenerate heart, to come to a determination to accept grace.

6. On the other hand, we reject;

a) The doctrine that in the election God acts arbitrarily and without motive and points out and counts indiscriminately a certain arbitrary number of individuals, and ordains them to conversion and salvation, while the others are passed by.

b) The doctrine that the will of God regarding our salvation is of two different kinds, one revealed in the Scriptures in the general order of salvation, and another, different from this one and unknown to us, which concerns only the elect, and imparts to these a deeper love, a more effective calling from God, and a larger measure of grace than are brought to those who remain in unbelief and condemnation.

c) The doctrine that, when the resistance which God in conversion removes from these who are saved is not removed from the others, who finally are lost, this difference in result has its cause in God and in a different will regarding salvation in His act of election.

d) The doctrine that a believer can and ought to have an absolute certainty of his election and salvation, instead of an assurance of faith, built upon the promises of God, and joined with fear and trembling and with the possibility of falling from grace, which, however, by the grace of God he believes will not become a reality in his case.

e) To summarize, all views and doctrines concerning election which directly or indirectly would conflict with the order of salvation and would not give to all a full and equally great opportunity of salvation or which in any manner would violate the word of God which says that "God will have all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth," from which gracious and merciful will of God all election to eternal life has its origin.

On the basis of the above agreement the union committees submit to their respective church-bodies to adopt the following

RESOLUTION.

Whereas, Our Confession establishes that "for the true unity of the Church it is sufficient that there be agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel and in the administration of the Sacraments"; and

Whereas, Our former committees, by the grace of God, have attained unity in the doctrines concerning the calling, conversion, and the order of salvation in general and we all confess as our sincere faith that we are saved by grace alone, without any cooperation on our part; and

Whereas, The negotiations of our new committees have led to a satisfactory agreement concerning the doctrine of election and to an unreserved and unanimous acknowledgment of the doctrine of election which is presented in the Formula of Concord, Art. XI, and in Pontoppidan's *Sandhed til gudfrygtighed*, Question 548;

Therefore we hereby declare that the essential unity now attained concerning these doctrines is sufficient for church union.

May Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, grant us the grace of His Holy Spirit that we all may be one in Him and ever remain steadfast in such Christian and God-pleasing union! Amen.

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