

A DAY OF OPPORTUNITY:
Augustana and the ULCA

by John Moll

Prof. Brenner
C.H. 373
2/14/94

The year 1918 was an anxious year. The world was at war. In America, Billy Sunday was spreading his evangelical fervor across the Midwest to the joy of some and the chagrin of others. Lutheranism in America was energized because of the Reformation anniversary. Out of the anniversary celebration came the driving force to form the United Lutheran Church in America. In 1918, this union of the General Synod, General Council and United Synod of the South with its rapid development and lack of confessionalism created a stir among every branch of Lutheranism. Proponents and opponents of the merger fed the tension with articles and letters in the various synodical papers of the time. The aspect of the merger created the most commentary was that the Augustana Synod, a member of the General Council, voted in its annual convention of 1918 to not join with the rest in the United Lutheran Church in America. (For greater detail of the events leading to the Merger and of Augustana's reaction, see Appendix A) Many speculated as to what reasons led the Augustana Synod to its decision. The dialogue in the contemporary papers and writings of Lutheran church bodies give to us, Lutherans in 1994, insight into the thoughts and concerns of the different streams Lutheranism in 1918.

The complexity of the dialogue between the many Lutheran papers made this paper difficult to lay out in an orderly way. The thoughts of each church body are written, quoted and critiqued in many places and different times. The comments or ideas of one side included, positively or negatively, the thoughts of the other side. That made it difficult to find and write about the viewpoint of each Lutheran body separately and distinctly. The writer of this paper has tried his very best to quote well and explain clearly what the Lutherans at that time thought and wrote about the Augustana Synod and the Merger into the United Lutheran Church.

In 1918, the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod were part of the

Synodical Conference. They had resolved their differences and joined in fellowship, but they had not merged, nor had they even followed the plan for state-synods. This was the conservative branch of Lutheranism in America. For these Lutherans, unionism, such as the unionism that created the ULCA, was a sinful disregard for proper fellowship principles. The strong voice for this type of Lutheranism among the many Lutheran church papers of the day was The Lutheran Witness, the official magazine of the Missouri Synod. Naturally, The Lutheran Witness heartily approved of the Augustana Synod's rejection of the Merger. A month after the deciding convention in Minneapolis in 1918, M. S. Sommer wrote about the Augustana Synod in an editorial in the July 9 issue:

It is a good sign, it is a comfort to us, and a distinct encouragement to every lover of the truth, that there were men who refused to join the merger. The entire Augustana Synod not only rejected the proposed union, but separated itself now also from the General Council. God grant these staunch men courage and light to continue upon the path with they have chosen!

This separation of the Augustana Synod from the General Council is another historic instance illustrating the truth that unionism produces disunion. The unionist who wishes to unite error and truth acts not only contrary to the Word of the Lord, but fails also in that which he has set out to attain. Instead of bringing about a true union, he finds that he has simply separated himself from faithful defenders of the truth, and joined himself to those who are undermining the very foundation of God's house. The General Council, by entering into this merger, has offended and estranged the best element in its own midst. Many of those who hoped to have this body purify itself of un-Lutheran practises and un-Lutheran teaching are now deeply grieved at the retrogression....

God grant that the witness and testimony which the Augustana Synod has borne by its very action of standing aloof from this merger may hearten others to do likewise. God bless all who prefer His truth and glory to all worldly pomp and show!¹

The Missouri Synod viewed the action of the Augustana Synod as an act of doctrinal confession against the doctrinal weaknesses of the General Council and General Synod. Sommer believed that Augustana rejected the ^wMerger, this unionism, for doctrinal reasons. This opinion was challenged in other Lutheran

¹Rev. M.S. Sommer, "The Augustana Synod", The Lutheran Witness, July 9, 1918, pp.219-220.

papers.² The more liberal Lutherans denied that it was for confessional and doctrinal reasons that the Augustana Synod left the General Council. They insisted that other factors influenced the Augustana Synod. (The writer will detail these other factors under the appropriate Lutheran body.) Prof. Th. Graebner responded in The Lutheran Witness of August 6, 1918. He repeated the charges made in the previous article that the General Council supported false teaching and that the union with the General Synod was a step in the wrong direction, toward a very liberal Lutheranism. So he wrote:

Since the Swedish Lutherans decided not to go along, we concluded that they recognized the danger of organic union with a body which fraternizes with the sects, and permits religious radicals to speak in the name of their body, and that this consideration entered vitally into the settlement of the question whether the Swedes should continue in organic connection with the Council, and, with it, enter organic union with the General Synod....

Or was it unreasonable to suppose that the *Lutheran conscience* of a strong element in the Augustana Synod prompted the action of not only veering away from alliance with the General Synod, but also severing connections with the Council, which by its merger with the General Synod, has committed its affairs to the control of the most "liberal" type of Lutheranism in this country?...In view of the fact that the Augustana Synod has always been the most conservative element in the Council and least involved in unionistic movements, such a construction upon the vote to sever from the Council is eminently reasonable.³

He concludes:

But the resolution to sever relations with the Council cannot be viewed otherwise than as a victory for the conservative element, the staunchly Lutheran element, in the Swedish Church, even as the success of the merger movement in the English synods of the Council must, *if the list of laymen prominent in the movement is scanned*, be regarded as a victory for the lodge-element, the Masonic element. Of this there can be no manner of doubt, and when a synod which contains a strong antilodge constituency declines to enter union with a body whose president is a Freemason, and some of whose most influential laymen are Freemasons, then it is neither contrary to

²Pres. Th. E. Schmauk, The Lutheran, July 18, 1918, p. 9.

³Prof. Th. Graebner, "The Augustana Synod and Church Union", The Lutheran Witness, August 6, 1918, pp.244-245.

reason, and certainly in conformity with charity, to suppose that reasons of conscience decided the vote against the merger and for separation. What ever the dominant motive may have been, the Swedish-American Church served the best interests of the Church at large by severing its connections with the Council when that body had committed the control of its policies to a body which permits the heresies of Dr. Delk to appear in its official organ. We hope that the stalwart Lutherans within the Augustana Synod will recognize their day of opportunity, and will, in the course of time, out of conflicting tendencies in their midst build up a body which gives honor to God in all things and to men in none.⁴

So Missouri gives Augustana credit for staunch Lutheranism, and Missouri takes the bow, as it were, for the victorious conservatives, even if Augustana never would have accepted credit for it. Yet even in their generosity, the Missourians note "conflicting tendencies" in Augustana and urge her to use this "day of opportunity" to take greater conservative Lutheran strides. To Missouri, the issue was a doctrinal one, and so they preferred to believe that Augustana considered it in the same way. Bente, a few year later, took a less forward position on the role of doctrine in Augustana's decision; "Yet the course chosen by the Augustana Synod was, at least in part, the result also of the secret fear that the new body would rapidly sink to the level of the doctrinal and practical laxism of the General Synod."⁵

In a side light, some other somewhat conservative Lutherans were quoted and critiqued in the Lutheran papers. These Lutherans and their papers are the Ohio Synod and its Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, plus the Iowa Synod and its Kirchenblatt. About a month after Augustana's 1918 convention, Dr. Lenski of Ohio wrote:

Dissatisfaction with the English work done by the Council in the territory of the Augustana Synod may well have been, as the *Lutheran* says, a main cause of the separation. We have had similar experience with the Home Mission work of the Council. When they

⁴ibid., p. 245.

⁵F. Bente, American Lutheranism, Vol. II (St. Louis: CPH, 1919), pp.3,4.

take away our members, entire congregations and pastors, by throwing wide open the door to lodgery, crass unionism, and other un-Lutheran practise, it is clear that such⁶ [methods] can neither attract us nor bring about cordial relations.

Dr. Lenski sarcastically used a comment by The Lutheran that Augustana was dissatisfied with the English work of the General Council. Lenski's point is that Augustana is dissatisfied not because of squabbles over territory, but because of the lodgery, unionism and other wrong practices. In other words, it was doctrinal disagreement that caused the separation.

President Richter of the Iowa Synod wrote at the same time:

They also gave proper consideration to correct Lutheran practice and feared that through the influence of the General Synod, which, as is well known, rejects the Lutheran principle, "Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran preachers and Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants," a denial of Lutheran principles in the new church body would result....We rejoice that the Lutheran conscience of our Swedish brethren has withstood the pressure which has been brought to bear upon it from without and from within in the question concerning uniting in the larger Church.⁷

These "conservative" Lutheran body^{ies} talked about Augustana as one of their own kind. Their thought seems to be, "Augustana rebelled against the liberal agenda of the liberal synods, so they must be conservatives acting on doctrinal principles."

The writer of this paper does not deny that Augustana might have had doctrinal concerns which led them to their decision on the Merger of 1918, but the writer does believe, based on research, that there was more on Augustana's mind than doctrine. It is true that Augustana was one of the least liberal synods of the General Council. It could be very conservative in its Lutheranism.

⁶Dr. Lenski, Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, July 6, 1918, quoted by Prof. Th. Graebner, in "The Augustana Synod and Church Union", The Lutheran Witness, August 6, 1918, pp.244-245.

⁷President Richter, Kirchenblatt, July 6 quoted by Prof. Theodore Graebner in The Lutheran Witness, August 6, 1918, pp. 245,246 and quoted by The Lutheran, August 15, 1918, p.752.

But the view that predominantly doctrinal differences caused the separation is too narrow and does not do justice to the what was written in the church papers of Augustana and other Lutheran bodies.

Other Lutherans did not see the events the same as the conservative Missourians saw them. What reasons did they see and why did they see them?

The next example will be from the much more liberal General Synod. Lutheran Church Work and Observer, an unofficial organ of the General Synod, commented on the merger process in its report of the 1917 convention of the General Council. At that convention, the matter of the merger was discussed and the constitution was approved. The writer, J.A.S., described it:

The German and Swedish elements in the Council were asked to express themselves through several representative brethren...The latter had no fault to find with the doctrinal basis, but feared that the practical work of the great Augustana Synod might be hindered by the union. The older ministers seemed the more timid; the younger expressed the conviction that the Augustana Synod would ratify the constitution. After some discussion, all obstacles seemed to vanish.⁸

Note that the Swedes, the Augustana Synod representatives, had no problem with the doctrinal basis of the new body. Rather, their concern was based on synodical interests. This concern of the Augustana ministers would reappear in the following months as Augustana struggled with the question of its future. The writers in Lutheran Church Work and Observer tried to address this concern and allay the fears of the Augustana men.

In the February 28 edition, Prof. L.S. Keyser in the article, "Augustana and the Merger," addressed some of these concerns with which the Augustana Synod was struggling. His article, although not an official statement of the General Synod, does tell us the thought of the General Synod. Keyser quotes from an article in the Lutheran Companion, a paper of the Augustana Synod. The point

⁸J.A.S., "The General Council's Convention", Lutheran Church Work and Observer, Nov 15, 1917, p. 1.

expressed by the editor of Lutheran Companion is that the Augustana wanted to merge only if all Lutheran bodies, including Missouri, the Norwegians and every other synod, merged equally into the Lutheran Church in America; otherwise, the Augustana Synod preferred to remain independent as well so that it would maintain its Swedish identity and so also its appeal to Swedish immigrants. Keyser encouraged Augustana to keep in mind not only its own interests, but also "the welfare of the whole Lutheran Church and the whole kingdom of God." His encouragement also contained warning, "For a synod to think only of its own affairs would prove it to be provincial and narrow by that very token."⁹

Keyser then revealed his and the General Synod's attitude by asking a leading question, "Cannot the kingdom of God and the Lutheran Church be better promoted by a united Lutheran Church than by one that is divided? We are decidedly of the opinion that the scales will descend in favor of a united phalanx." To that end, he tried persuading his readers in the Augustana Synod to accept the Merger. The first concern he saw and addressed was Augustana's fear of losing its identity. He tried countering this fear by pointing to openness of the constitution of the new body. It made provision for a synod to join the merger on special terms, so that it could have a similar relation as Augustana already had with the General Council. Augustana could have its representatives at the conventions and have all the rights of the other member synods, but not lose its identity. Augustana would not be swept under, enjoy unity with brothers and still be able to follow its own special Swedish interests. So Augustana could stop wondering whether to join and instead "...make this the main issue: Shall we join the merger as an integer or on common terms? To our mind, joining the United Church should not be the *crux* but *how* to

⁹Prof. L.S. Keyser, "Augustana and the Merger," Lutheran Church Work and Observer, February 28, 1918, pp. 5.

join it. The question of *how* should, we think, be left to Augustana herself."¹⁰

Keyser encouraged the men of Augustana in various ways that they could survive and flourish withing the United Lutheran Church. Keyser ended by reminding Augustana that "according to Art. VII of the Augsburg Confession, mere matters of church polity are not a sufficient ground for disunion, but only difference in the doctrines of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. And Editor Bengstrom [of the Lutheran Companion] admits there is doctrinal unity between his synod and the United Church."¹¹

These articles were the only ones from the General Synod that addressed Augustana and its decision on the merger. Keyser was disappointed in Augustana's initial lukewarm reactions. Because he saw himself and the General Synod as positive and looking forward, he saw Augustana dragging its feet unduly. He also denied that doctrine had anything to do with the decision. Since he did not want doctrine to interfere with his unionism, he rejected that it was an issue, even though it had been brought up within the Augustana Synod, as noted by Bente earlier. He showed his liberal stripe by ignoring obvious differences, such as lodge membership, between the General Synod and the Augustana Synod. Keyser, like the rest of Lutheranism, encouraged Augustana to make use of the day of opportunity before it in June, 1918. But he wanted them to join the ULCA.

The General Council held a closer attachment to the Augustana Synod, so its members would naturally become more involved in the discussion. The Lutheran, the magazine of the General Council, spent a lot of press on the Augustana Synod's decision. The editors and writers urged, chided and begged the Augustana

¹⁰Prof. L.S. Keyser, "Augustana and the Merger," Lutheran Church Work and Observer, February 28, 1918, pp. 5.

¹¹Prof. L.S. Keyser, "Augustana and the Merger," Lutheran Church Work and Observer, February 28, 1918, pp. 6.

Synod to join them in this new body, the United Lutheran Church. They tried to address and solve all the possible motivations for Augustana to reject the Merger. Some of what they said applied, but the rest had nothing to do with Augustana's decision at all. The articles they wrote provide an interesting view into the General Council and its relationship with the Augustana Synod.

Before Augustana went into convention, the editor of The Lutheran, Rev. George W. Sandt, expressed the concerns of the General Council about the debate within the Augustana Synod over the ^mMerger. He brought up three points for Augustana to consider as it pondered the ^mMerger in its conferences and in its synodical convention. "First, differences in doctrine alone should keep Lutherans apart. No matter what the special interests of synods may be...some sort of union that will link them together in fellowship without interfering with their distinctive work is imperative...." Secondly, Sandt warned against "nationalistic particularism." He wrote, "A policy of isolation and aloofness has wrought havoc with the Lutheran Church's great mission in this country. No synod can adopt it without both a loss to itself and to the Church at large." Thirdly, Sandt pointed out that the German and English speaking synods of the General Council felt at home in the Merger, but only the Swedes did not. He asked why that was, hoping Augustana would see that their type of nationalism ought not separate them because the other bodies had their national background but accepted the ^mMerger. Overall, Sandt saw that the issue was the special national concerns which would interfere with Augustana's decision. His final request was that "If the Augustana Synod keeps aloof, let it do so on high grounds with the welfare of its own body and of ~~the~~ the Lutheran Church as a whole kept clearly in view, and above all with a sincere purpose to submit its

decision to the scrutiny of Him who prayed that His Church might be one."¹²

After Augustana reached its landmark decision, members of the Council offered their interpretation of what had happened in the pages of The Lutheran. A few days after Augustana's convention the June 13 edition of the The Lutheran came out. In that edition, Theodore E. Schmauk, president of the General Council, wrote an article, "The Progress of the Merger." The article focused on the decision by the Augustana Synod in convention and the various reasons for that decision to not merge. First he points to the formation and success of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America which formed a short time before this. He felt that the Norwegian Lutheran Church had led many in the Augustana Synod to feel that they too ought to have their own Swedish church. Any unity among the Lutherans would then have to be on the basis of a loose confederation of four racial synods, English, German, Norwegian and Swedish. President Schmauk also noted that the rejection of the merger fit in with a historical pattern. First, the merger was never given a chance from when it was first suggested. Then pro-merger delegates were kept from the convention, and the Augustana papers gave the merger bad press. In Schmauk's eyes, Augustana had always had a streak of individualism that did not blend or merge with the Council. And now the young leaders were pursuing Augustana's individuality for their own glory and esteem. To Schmauk, this resultant separation was "inevitable."¹³

After the convention, others added their thoughts about what reasons, besides doctrine, led to the separation. A representative of the General Council at Minneapolis for the convention in June heard a variety of reasons in the discussions on the floor of the convention. He reported that a Western, pioneer

¹²Rev. George W. Sandt, "Augustana Synod and the United Lutheran Church of America", The Lutheran, March 28, 1918.

¹³Theodore E. Schmauk, "The Progress of the Merger," The Lutheran, June 13, 1918, p. 1.

attitude of independence in Augustana ~~and~~ clashed with the centralization of power in the new body. And he noted that some who wanted to maintain close ties to the State Church of Sweden felt that this new body would interrupt that relationship.¹⁴ Another commentator pointed to a spirit "desiring that the synod should receive special credit for every thing it does" led to the break. Perhaps this is again that proud independence that others saw in Augustana. The fear of losing identity and provincialism, a need to be their own group, came up again as well.¹⁵

Sandt, the editor of the The Lutheran, dwells on the "national particularism" of the issue in an article after the convention. He called what happened "a large concession to racial and synodical bias." The reasons he saw for this bias are four. Augustana had distinctive work and interests because it focused its outreach to the Swedish immigrants. Augustana held a strong racial and synodical consciousness; it knew itself, and was comfortable with itself, as a Swedish Lutheran Synod. Augustana stretched across the nation, and so it did not want to be split up and placed on par with territorially limited synods in a new union. Lastly, Augustana was disaffected by the Home Mission interests of the Council when it reached out to Americanized Swedes where Augustana already had churches. Sandt claimed that the last was the most influential factor. He concludes, "...it has placed synodical and racial interests as a clog in the wheel of the Lutheran Church's progress as a whole and set the Church back a generation or more to start afresh on the pathway to its ultimate goal."¹⁶

In a later article, a prominent member of the General Council airs his

¹⁴"The Progress of the Merger," The Lutheran, June 20, 1918, p. 1f.

¹⁵G.H.T., "The Augustana Synod," The Lutheran, June 20, 1918, p. 6.

¹⁶Rev. George W. Sandt, "Our Valedictory to the Augustana Synod," The Lutheran, June 20, 1918, p. 8.

thoughts too, mentioning again the uneasiness between the Council and Augustana that had existed for years. He called them "misunderstandings and jealousies" and that opposition to the merger focused attention on these "alleged infringements upon the autonomy of the synod." He also brings up the relationship between Augustana and the Church of Sweden as a factor. Another factor he recognized in Augustana was their division at the convention. He speculated that in the end they decided to separate from the Merger "because they dreaded the possible division within the synod."¹⁷

But in all these articles, no one admitted the possibility that doctrine was a reason for the split. The editors of The Lutheran were especially opposed to this idea. In each of their articles, they mentioned that it was not doctrine that led Augustana to separate itself, but other, secondary factors.¹⁸ A prime example of this belief is in an editorial reply to President Richter of the Iowa Synod in the Kirchenblatt.

...When the *Kirchenblatt* instances concern for the Galesburg Rule as a reason for the withdrawal, it is most surely mistaken. We can not recall a single case where a doctrinal issue was raised by Augustana though here and there an individual may have feared the liberalizing element in the General Synod. The strong men in the synod, who can be relied upon to hold fast to Lutheran faith and practice, were very largely represented in opposing withdrawal... It was the synodical consciousness and not the "Lutheran consciousness" which was the chief factor in deciding the issue.... To speak of a doctrinal issue as a deciding factor is wide of the mark.¹⁹

President Krauth also raised his voice in The Lutheran against those who saw doctrinal strife as a cause for Augustana's separation. In his own article, he criticized the article written in The Lutheran Witness which was quoted above.

¹⁷Rev. Prof. H. E. Jacobs, D.D., LL.D., "A Critical Convention," The Lutheran, June 27, 1918, p. 1.

¹⁸Sandt, "Our Valedictory to the Augustana Synod," p. 8.

¹⁹"An Interpretation of the Augustana Synod's Action," The Lutheran, August 15, 1918, p. 7.

He denied that there was false teaching throughout the General Council and that the Council was weak in its fellowship practices. Since he did not see a doctrinal problem with the Council, it could not have been, in his eyes, a reason for Augustana to reject the ~~M~~erger.²⁰

A summary of the position of the General Council would be that they saw the Augustana Synod like a brother with whom they quarrelled at times and so had to part, but with whom, since they were brothers, they would eventually be reunited. Augustana appeared aloof and willfully independent to them, but the members of the Council believed their differences were not doctrinal and, therefore, not of a serious nature. On the other hand, they were willing to admit that there may have been concerns about the General Synod and its lodgism within Augustana [see the quote above]. But they would not admit, as was probably the truth, that quite a few in the Augustana were relieved for doctrinal reasons when the ~~M~~erger failed to pass in Minneapolis. As one of their own men reported, "...some of the Augustana men believe that if the United Lutheran Church develops in a conservative way, many of the most decided opponents of the Merger will favor its entrance."²¹ The reasons the Council saw were a nationalistic particularism, which was bound to fade with time, or a historical inevitability due to strife between the Council and Augustana. But this too, they believed would pass away through the years. Every writer expressed the hope that they would one day be united when each party was ready.

The best source for this paper is undoubtedly the Augustana Synod's papers, district convention and synodical convention minutes and some books. Unfortunately, the writer of this paper does not know Swedish or he would have used all those sources. Of course, then this paper would be much longer than it

²⁰J.P. Krauth, The Lutheran, July 18, 1918, p. 9.

²¹"Progress of the Merger," The Lutheran, June 20, 1918, p. 1f.

already is. The best source in English is the Lutheran Companion, a paper of the Augustana Synod. The editors, pastors and laymen used this paper as a forum for their thoughts on the ~~M~~^merger and discussing the thoughts of others.

From November, 1917, when the General Council approved the ~~M~~^merger and sent the matter on to the member synods, till the convention in Minneapolis, the debate flowed freely and quickly, becoming more urgent as June, 1918, approached.

Warning against the ~~M~~^merger, the Lutheran Companion, of the Augustana Synod, wrote: "We must hold ourselves aloof from spiritual fellowship with such churches or denominations, some of whose factors advocate and defend lodgism, dancing as a pastime for the young people under the auspices and sanction of the church, etc."²² Other thoughts against the ~~M~~^merger included the desire that Augustana merge equally and on its own terms²³; some other form of organization, like a federation would be preferable to merger²⁴; it would be a unequal union between the nation-wide Augustana and smaller bodies; Augustana would be swallowed up by the larger, non-Swedish part of the Merger; the Masonic element of the General Synod was a threat²⁵; and the moral decay in the other, more German synods, who did not want to part with their "beer and schnapps", would corrupt the Augustana Synod as well.²⁶

In addition, the reports from nearly all the conferences of the Augustana

²²Lutheran Companion, 1917, p. 522; quoted by F. Bente in American Lutheranism, Vol. II, (St. Louis: CPH, 1919), pp.3,4.

²³Rev. Carl J. Bengstrom, "What Action Will the Synod Take in Regard to the Merger?" Lutheran Companion, January 12, 1918, p. 2.

²⁴E.A. Peterson, "The United Lutheran Church Question," Lutheran Companion, May 18, 1918, p. 246.

²⁵Rev. Alf. Bergin, Ph.D. "The United Lutheran Church and the Augustana Synod," Lutheran Companion, March 9, 1918, p. 122f.

²⁶Alf. B. Olson, "Matters of Opinion," Lutheran Comapnion, March 30, 1918, p. 160,161.

Synod on the discussions of the ^wMerger had been "strong in favor of not joining with the other synods concerned into an organic union at the present time. The feeling seems to be general that such a union now would be detrimental to the further development of our Synod and to a successful prosecution of the work which in the providence of God has been allotted to it."²⁷ The Iowa Conference rejected the merger because "the basis on which the merger is proposed is not broad enough to ^eembrace all Lutheran bodies."²⁸ The New York Conference held a lively discussion in which the older pastors opposed the merger while the younger favored. The result was that they favored a federation for future success because they might have been swept away in the merger. They voted a strong negative to the planned merger.²⁹

After the convention, the Lutheran Companion gave readers its summary and analysis of what happened. One commentator wrote:

The prevailing thought in the minds of those who spoke against the merger seemed to be that the time was not now ripe for such a step; that the Augustana Synod still had a mission to perform among the Swedes of America, a work that could best be performed by acting alone; and that the proposed union, embracing as it does only a part of the Lutheran Church in America would prove an obstacle in the way of an ultimate federation of all Lutheran bodies in this country.³⁰

An eyewitness of the convention in Minneapolis wrote later:

...it was the sense of a large majority of the delegates that the Swedish Lutheran Church could better fulfill its mission as an independent organization. Here, fifty-eight years after the first meeting of the Augustana Synod, nationality again asserted itself. "We have had our own service book for these years while the General Council has had hers, which shows that we are not amalgamating,"

²⁷"The Coming Convention of Synod," Lutheran Companion, June 1, 1918, p. 266.

²⁸"Iowa Conference at Burlington," Lutheran Companion, April 27, 1918, p. 202.

²⁹"New York Conference," Lutheran Companion, May 4, 1918, p. 223.

³⁰Rev. E.E. Ryden, "Convention of the Augustana Synod," Lutheran Companion, June 22, 1918, p. 295.

said Doctor M.C. Ranseen, one of the prominent leaders for many years. "If we merge, it will go with us as it has with the Swedish Baptist and Methodist bodies, and we will be unable to appeal to the Swedish immigrants as a Swedish Church," suggested the Rev. J.G. Dahlberg. "The Mission Friends could do this, as they are a church composed exclusively of Swedes." (These are personal notes by Stephenson at Minneapolis on June 8, 1918)³¹

But the Augustana writers rejected the charges that they acted on "national particularism" and that Augustana had already decided to separate well before 1918, according to "historical inevitability." Augustana did admit that nationality did play a part in the decision, as it naturally would. But it was not a major factor. Nor did Augustana's relationship with the Church of Sweden have a role as some said in The Lutheran.³² And the debate at the convention in Minneapolis was real, not a show. The issue had not been decided, though most delegates knew how they would vote. And yet, they were not told how to vote either, except for those from the Minnesota District which had many conflicts with the Council's Home Missions attempts over the years.³³

The one reason that Augustana claimed as its primary motivation to reject the ^mMerger into the United Lutheran Church was its desire for federation. Augustana saw merger as a hindrance for a variety of reasons, but favored a looser federation which allowed freedom to pursue their interests, yet still enjoy unity. One writer put it like this, "it is is not the larger co-operative unity we would oppose, but only that very seriously we want it brought about in another way, and a way which we think the only safe way for our specific work,

³¹George M. Stephenson, The Founding of the Augustana Synod, Rock Island, Ill.: Augustana Book Concern, 1927, p. 151. Footnote in the book for this section is to S.G. Ohman, Augustana-Synodens Sjalfstandighetsforklaring, 1918, and G.M. Stephenson, Kyrkliga Vagar och Afvagar, 1918.

³²C.J. Sodergren, "The Merger," Lutheran Companion, July 6, 1918, p. 339.

³³"Did the Merger Receive a Fair Show in Minneapolis?" Lutheran Companion, July 6, 1918, p. 334f.

namely by church *federation* as at least a *first* step, and not to take all at once and all of a sudden such a momentous step as a *merger*."³⁴ Note that Augustana even took the first steps toward bringing about such a federation at that same 1918 convention in Minneapolis; "A committee was elected at the same time, to work for a closer relation with `all other Lutheran bodies in America, with a view to effecting an ultimate union of the entire Lutheran Church in America.'" What this federation would be was not decided then, though ~~some~~ some had a good idea of what they wanted. "The feeling in regard to such a federation (or whatever it might be called) seemed to be that its meetings should be for consultation and arbitration rather than for legislation, leaving the "sovereignty " in the hands of the individual synods."³⁵

Some in the Augustana Synod wanted a federation to use as a springboard to an even larger unity of Lutherans in America. ~~Some~~ ^{They} hoped a looser organization would attract more members. "We are in favor of a broader Lutheran union than that aimed at in the merger that was under discussion, a federation of national bodies until such time when there shall have arisen a popular need of an organic union."³⁶ But the federation plan was rejected by the General Council as inadequate for real unity of action and more of a hindrance to real unity than an aid.³⁷ Adolf Hult, a pastor and professor at Augustana Theological

³⁴Peterson, p. 246.

³⁵Conrad Peterson, "The Attitude of the Augustana Synod to the Question of Lutheran Unity," Lutheran Companion, July 20, 1918, p. 367.

³⁶"The Synodical Convention at Minneapolis," Lutheran Companion, June 22, 1918, p. 307.

³⁷"The Augustana Synod and Federation," The Lutheran, July 18, 1918, p. 8.

Seminary³⁸, wrote an excellent article in response to the General Council's attitude toward Augustana's desire for a federation. He wrote in direct response to an article written by A.C.P. in the Lutheran, July 4, 1918. The writer of this paper realizes that this quote may seem too long to be included in a paper, but this is the best example of what men in the Augustana Synod thought about a federation instead of ⁱⁿMerger. Remember that this was the greatest reason, in their eyes, to reject ⁱⁿMerger into the ULCA. Adolf Hult wrote:

...this is the massive idealism of Augustana's plans and purposes: she wishes the ultimate United Lutheran Church of America to federate and organically to merge all the matured spiritual and ecclesiastical resources of each main type [of ethnic Lutheran background] into one organic body. These differently equipped and natively endowed types will be mutually complementary types, forming nuclei ("U.L.C. one nucleus") for "a church which will one day be wholly and truly united" (Lutheran, July 18). Augustana deems the limiting of the ultimate fused type to the determining influence of a sectional, chiefly Eastern, type, as the U.L.C. after all is, to be an ultimate loss of richness and physique, of historical and spiritual inheritance, future initiative and ideals. And if the U.L.C. asks: Why not come and do it in the U.L.C.? We answer: Because we are not ready! That would be, indeed, a "merger;" it would not be a fusion of total life, inheritance and principles, *done now*... [those outside the ULCA] "must not stunt themselves [in their maturation as an American Lutheran body] by an arrested growth, through mechanical, external merging: to do so were un-ideal, impractical and inimical to the welfare of our near-future American Lutheran Church.... The frequent scorings of Augustana's far-seeing idealism among our dear Eastern friends ought to be completely eliminated, in favor of a manly, practical, factual discussion on *whatever basis the various synodical bodies, and types, desire!* Is it not our right to want what we want? We do not "stand for division," A.C.P., please drop that charge; but for a bigger foundation, constructed of the massive stones of the various types of American Lutheranism: "Missouri" (mightiest of all Lutheran bodies, bigger than U.L.C.), Norwegian, Augustana, Ohio, Iowa, etc. How could the U.L.C. even dream of setting the time on the clock of unification, when... [it is not even one-third of American Lutheranism?] ...And when it comes to making overtures... "It is not at all a case of: Here are we, of the so and so section, or "nucleus" of the coming Lutheran Church of America, come to us, make "overtures" with us! But rather so: Here are we American Lutherans of the Synodical Conference type, of the U.L.C. type, of the Iowa type, of the

³⁸Conrad Bergendoff, The Augustana Ministerium, (Rock Island, Ill.: Augustana Book Concern, 1980), p. 63.

Augustana type, and others, sections, fragments, tendencies, varied historical developments, each one limited, each one with some intrinsic, native riches; come, brethren, one and all, let us "get together," mutually make overtures of all to all, mutually seek to federate and, when God will, unite organically. Let no section, or type, forget this spirit of mutuality, if it would big-heartedly aid a final merger of all into a future American Lutheran Church. That basis of union is yet to be formed, conceived, formulated, yet to be given expression with the inclusiveness of the various types represented. Leave the "overture" idea wholly. Let us grow together, federate, unite.³⁹

In June, 1918, the Augustana Synod rejected the plan to merge with the General Synod, the General Council and the United Synod of the South. Other church bodies claimed that they saw what was really happening in Augustana. These others said that doctrinal differences led them to end fellowship, their racial, nationalistic attitude kept them aloof from merging with other nationalities or the breakup was the result of long years of conflict. But Augustana did not see themselves in that light. While some concerns were expressed about doctrinal differences, especially with the General Synod, or about Augustana's⁵ special mission to the Swedes, these were not the major factors in many people's minds. Rather, the desire for a looser federation than the merged body led them to their decision in 1918. This loosely united organization would satisfy the concerns of doctrinal purity and provide opportunities for special missions. Most in the Augustana Synod probably did not have the high idealism for the federation of Adolf Hult, but when they needed a solution to their concerns and called for a focus for the future, they found that working for a federation was the answer. Those in Augustana who strove for American Lutheran unity needed direction, and so they adopted the federation as their goal. Those who wanted to avoid close ties with lodgism and beer drinkers could avoid those entanglements in a loose federation that only talked together and did not act

³⁹Adolf Hult, "Augustana's Idealism in her "Federation" Action," Lutheran Companion, August 31, 1918, p. 443f.

together. And those who wished to retain their advantage in reaching Swedish immigrants could keep their identity and culture.

American Lutheranism in 1918 was a close group who kept their eyes on each other. Some looked with disappointment on others' doctrinal laxity. Others looked feverishly for partners to join them on their high road to unity. And others were in the middle, seemingly oblivious to the others and their attitudes. Augustana was in the middle, but not unwittingly. She knew where she was. It seemed she could be both confessional and still work toward the unionism of the liberal bodies. Was Augustana aware of the contradiction between unionism and confessionalism, or not? Although they had undoubtedly been warned by the Missourians, the leaders of Augustana must not have believed that confessionalism and the unionism of the liberals were contradictory. Most lay members of the Augustana Synod probably were not aware that what they did was contradictory, namely, rejecting the ULCA and still furthering broad Lutheran cooperation through a federation. They clung to both with a clear conscience.

Augustana had in 1918 a day of opportunity to take a firm stand in either for unionism or for confessionalism. Instead they chose the middle road, rejecting neither. And so unionism and laxity of fellowship practices continued to plague Augustana and to erode its confessionalism. This laxity in fellowship existed in Augustana from the beginning, but did not destroy Augustana's confessionalism as quickly as it destroyed others. Augustana could have closed its history in 1918, but due in part to its pietistic view of adiaphora, dancing, drinking, card games and the like, and in part to some confessionalism, it did not give in to its poisonous fellowship practices for over forty more years. Laxity of fellowship did eventually finish off the Augustana Synod in 1962. Can you imagine what a blessing Augustana would have been if it had seized that day of opportunity and joined the confessional Lutherans of the Synodical Conference?

American Lutheranism would be different.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

Arden, G. Everett. Augustana Heritage. Rock Island: Augustana Press, 1963.

"The Augustana Synod and Federation." The Lutheran. July 18, 1918. p. 8.

Bengstrom, Rev. Carl J. "What Action Will the Synod Take in Regard to the Merger?" Lutheran Companion. January 12, 1918. p. 1,2.

Bente, F. American Lutheranism. Vol. II. St. Louis: CPH, 1919.

Bergendoff, Conrad. The Augustana Ministerium. Rock Island, Ill.: Augustana Book Concern, 1980.

Bergin, Rev. Alf., Ph.D. "The United Lutheran Church and the Augustana Synod." Lutheran Companion. March 9, 1918. p. 122f.

"The Coming Convention of Synod." Lutheran Companion. June 1, 1918. p. 266,273.

"Did the Merger Receive a Fair Show in Minneapolis?" Lutheran Companion. July 6, 1918. p. 334f.

Graebner, Prof. Th. "The Augustana Synod and Church Union." The Lutheran Witness. August 6, 1918. pp.244-245.

Hult, Adolf. "Augustana's Idealism in her "Federation" Action." Lutheran Companion. August 31, 1918. p. 443f.

"An Interpretation of the Augustana Synod's Action." The Lutheran. August 15, 1918. p. 7.

- "Iowa Conference at Burlington." Lutheran Companion. April 27, 1918. p. 202.
- Jacobs, Rev. Prof. H. E., D.D., LL.D. "A Critical Convention." The Lutheran. June 27, 1918. p. 1.
- Keyser, Prof. L.S. "Augustana and the Merger." Lutheran Church Work and Observer. February 28, 1918. pp. 5,6.
- Krauth, J.P. The Lutheran. July 18, 1918. p. 9.
- "Merge or Submerge." Lutheran Companion. December 14, 1918.
- "New York Conference." Lutheran Companion. May 4, 1918. p. 223.
- Olson, Alf. B. "Matters of Opinion." Lutheran Companion. March 30, 1918. p. 160,161.
- Peterson, Conrad. "The Attitude of the Augustana Synod to the Question of Lutheran Unity." Lutheran Companion. July 20, 1918. p. 367.
- Peterson, E.A. "The United Lutheran Church Question" Lutheran Companion May 18, 1918. p. 246f.
- "The Progress of the Merger." The Lutheran. June 20, 1918. p. 1f.
- Ryden, Rev. E.E. "Convention of the Augustana Synod." Lutheran Companion. June 22, 1918. p. 295f.
- Sandt, Rev. George W. "Augustana Synod and the United Lutheran Church of America." The Lutheran. March 28, 1918.
- Sandt, Rev. George W. "Our Valedictory to the Augustana Synod." The Lutheran. June 20, 1918. p. 8.
- Schmauk, Theodore E. "The Progress of the Merger." The Lutheran. June 13, 1918. p. 1.
- Schmauk, Pres. Th. E. The Lutheran. July 18, 1918. p. 9.
- Sodergren, C.J. "The Merger." Lutheran Companion. July 6, 1918. p. 339,340.
- Sodergren, C.J. "The Merger." Lutheran Companion. December 14, 1918.
- Sommer, Rev. M.S. "The Augustana Synod." The Lutheran Witness. July 9, 1918. pp.219-220.
- Stephenson, George M. The Founding of the Augustana Synod. Rock Island, Il.: Augustana Book Concern, 1927.
- "The Synodical Convention at Minneapolis." Lutheran Companion. June 22, 1918. p. 306,307.
- G.H.T. "The Augustana Synod." The Lutheran. June 20, 1918. p. 6.

Appendix A

The events that led to the merger in 1918 were straightforward. The General Synod, General Council and United Synod of the South had been working together for years on projects including mission endeavors and a new service book for public worship. This cooperation continued with the joint planning of the celebration for the quadri-centennial of the Reformation. In April, 1917, the joint committee for that celebration proposed unification of the three bodies and sent their resolution to the presidents of the three church bodies. From there events moved very quickly so that by November, 1917, all three bodies had approved a constitution for the new united church body. Then the matter was left to the forty-six constituent synods of the three federated bodies.⁴⁰ At this point the presses began to run with the story of the merger, especially the story of Augustana's decision to not join. In June 5-11, 1918, when the Augustana Synod met in convention in Minneapolis, the decision was made to break from the General Council and not join the merger. In November, 1918, each of the three federated church bodies held their own final conventions and then met for the first convention of the United Lutheran Church in America. See the photocopied sheet for a copy of the resolution of the Augustana Synod as it was presented to the General Council at its meeting and the Council's response.

⁴⁰G. Everett Arden, Augustana Heritage, (Rock Island: Augustana Press, 1963), p. 254.

Total Membership of General Council

Clerical, 90; Lay, 82; Total, 172.

Visiting Clergymen

Rev. L. G. Abrahamson, D.D. Rev. F. Jacobson, Ph.D.
 Rev. James F. Beates Rev. Oscar Krauch
 Rev. P. O. Bersell Rev. J. William McCauley
 Rev. C. L. Brown, D.D. Rev. S. G. Okman, D.D.
 Rev. John A. Eckstrom Rev. Walter Rohde
 Rev. Paul H. Heisey Rev. Mauritz Stolpe, D.D.
 Rev. Axel C. H. Helander Rev. P. Z. Strodach
 Rev. Charles H. Hemsath Rev. Carl G. Toebke

—16

A committee of three was authorized to be appointed to consider the matter of the Treasurer of the General Council and to bring in a recommendation. This committee reported as follows in the Second Session:

Inasmuch as the withdrawal of the Augustana Synod from the General Council has been accepted and an honorable discharge has been granted, and

Whereas, we have been informed that Mr. A. G. Anderson, the present treasurer of the General Council, and a member of the Augustana Synod, recognizes that his offices should cease, therefore your committee, believe that the office of treasurer is now vacant, and we therefore nominate for the unexpired term of Treasurer of the General Council, Mr. John B. Franke, Fort Wayne, Ind.

We herewith express to Mr. Anderson the appreciation of the General Council for the faithful and thorough manner in which he has performed the duties of his office.

We recommend that the chair appoint a committee to audit the Treasurer's accounts.

JAMES M. SNYDER,
 F. P. D. MILLER,
 WM. H. HAGER.

The report was adopted, and on motion the Secretary cast the ballot of the General Council for Mr. John B. Franke to serve as Treasurer for the unexpired term of Mr. A. G. Anderson, who vacated the office.

In the Third Session the following committee was appointed to

OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

audit the accounts of the Treasurer of the General Council: James M. Snyder and G. E. Schlegelmilch, Esq.

The following resolution of withdrawal by the Augustana Synod was read by the Secretary:

DENVER, COLO., OCT. 14, 1918.

THE REV. DR. THEO. E. SCHEMAUK,
President of the General Council,

Lebanon, Penna.

DEAR DOCTOR:—At the late Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod, held in Minneapolis, Minn., in the month of June, 1918, the following resolution was passed:

Whereas, The Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod has decided not to join the proposed merger of the General Synod, the General Council and the United Synod South, and

Whereas, The relation on the part of the Synods belonging to the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America, appears to be of such a nature that the joining of the merger on the part of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America carries with it all the Synods belonging to the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America, in which event also the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod of North America would become a party to the merger; therefore, be it *Resolved*:

1. That the Synod do now proceed to dissolve its connection with the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America;
2. That the Synod respectfully requests of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America the privilege to withdraw from the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America at its next meeting.

By reason of the above resolution, the undersigned, President and Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod of North America, would most respectfully petition the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America for an honorable dismissal from membership in the said the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America.

Most sincerely yours,

G. A. BRANDELLE,
President of the Ev. Lutheran Augustana Synod of N. A.

JOS. A. ANDERSON,
Secretary of the Ev. Lutheran Augustana Synod of N. A.

The Rev. Dr. Kretschmann moved that the resolution be received, the petition granted and an honorable dismissal given. On motion of the Rev. Dr. J. A. W. Haas, the resolution of the Augustana Synod and Dr. Kretschmann's motion were referred to a committee for the framing of a proper resolution. The President named the following committee:

The Presidents of Synods, the Rev. Dr. Weller to be chairman, and the Rev. Drs. J. A. W. Haas and T. W. Kretschmann. Later, the Rev. Dr. H. E. Jacobs was added to the committee.

The committee reported as follows in the Second Session:

Whereas, The Augustana Synod, after fifty years' identification with the General Council, and active co-operation in its work, has formally notified this General Council of its desire and intention to withdraw; and

Whereas, The reason assigned for such withdrawal is the union of other Synods of the General Council in The United Lutheran Church of America; and

Whereas, The founders of the Augustana Synod, even prior to the formation of the General Council, earnestly co-operated with those who founded that body in the clear confession, maintenance and defense of the confessional position for which the General Council has always stood, and in the efforts to give such position that wide recognition which it has today attained; and

Whereas, The General Council remembers with thankfulness the devoted lives and services of Doctors Hasselquist, Olson and Esbjörn, Jonas Swensson, Drs. Carlsson and Norelius, and other fathers of the Augustana Synod, and the efficiency of Drs. Carl Swensson and Ranseen as presidents of the General Council,

Therefore, be it Resolved—

That we record with great satisfaction the fact that the Augustana Synod so long in unity of faith with the General Council does not withdraw because of any differences in faith and practice;

That we remember with gratitude the saintly lives and noble examples of the fathers of the Augustana Synod;

That we express our deepest regret that the Augustana Synod could not see its way clear at this time to remain with the General Council and enter with it into The United Lutheran Church;

That we appreciate the desire of the Augustana Synod to co-operate with

The United Lutheran Church in educational and missionary work, especially Foreign Mission work, to which the Augustana Synod has furnished so many laborers and given such full measure of devotion for many years;

That we express the hope that the Augustana Synod may soon determine to enter into organic union with The United Lutheran Church and aid in the formation of one American Lutheran Church;

That these resolutions be spread upon our minutes, published in our church papers, and transmitted to the President of the Augustana Synod.

The Rev. Mauritz Stolpe, D.D., of the Augustana Synod, addressed the General Council in appreciation of the past, in regret of the present necessity, and in hope of the future. He was followed by the Rev. L. G. Abrahamson, D.D., the Rev. F. Jacobson, D.D., the Rev. S. G. Oehman, D.D., and others. After these addresses, the report of the committee was adopted by a rising vote.

On motion of the Rev. Dr. Cooper, the following was adopted:

Provisional Order of Business

Opening of Convention with Prescribed Form.

Brief report of object of meeting by President.

Presentation of Resolution of Withdrawal of Augustana Synod by its delegation.

Report of General Council Section of Ways and Means Committee and Transaction of business incident to merger.

Report of Treasurer.

Report of Finance and Budget Committee.

Report of Trustees of General Council.

Foreign Mission report.

English Home Mission report.

German Home Mission report.

Slav and Hungarian Mission report.

Porto Rico and Latin America Mission report.

Board of Publication Report.

Sunday School Work Committee report.

Arbitration Committee Report.

Church Book Committee report.

Quadri-Centennial Thank-Offering report.

Archivist report.

Inner Mission report.