

Speech at Uppsala Cathedral, November 7, 1914
Lars Gustaf Abrahamson
Translated by John Norton

TRANSLATION: Dr. L.G. Abrahamson's Speech, Uppsala Cathedral, 7 November 1914. SVENSK KYRKOTIDNING, nr. 47, 25 November 1914, pp. 559-563 (Installation of Nathan Söderblom as Archbishop of Sweden.)

Translator's note: Laurentius Gustaf Abrahamson (1856-1946) was born at Medåker, Västergötland, Sweden, on 2 March 1856, and arrived with parents and siblings in the United States in 1868. He attended Augustana College and Seminary, first at Paxton, IL, then Rock Island, from 1872-1880. He received his MA from Bethany College in 1893, and his DD from Augustana in 1894. He was editor of *Augustana* from 1908 to 1939, was president of Augustana's Illinois Conference, and accompanied Swedish Bishop K.H. Gez. von Scheele on his 1893- and 1910 trips to the United States. He was the Augustana Synod's representative to Archbishop Nathan Söderblom's installation at Uppsala Cathedral in 1914, then accompanied him on his U.S. tour in 1923.

The Apostle Paul, in his remarkable sermon at Aeropagus in Athens said: "From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live." (Acts 17:26, NRSV), He settled not only the question of the origin of mankind and their internal relationships, but cast enlightenment upon their migrations, great or small, through all time. These remarkable movements, which, as they took place, seemed so disastrous, have, as we now see, served to realize God's will, and have supported the greatest interests of mankind. This has also been the case with the latest migration of these times, by which the western world has become populated, and its great resources, previously a slumbering capital, now serve humanity. And in my new homeland, we see it as a special sign of God's gracious leadership, that the land has become populated by Northern Europe's physically and intellectually strong and Protestant people, and not, as is the case in the West Indies, Mexico and South America, with southern Europeans. For the building of this nation, which by God's will, certainly has, an important task to accomplish, all northern European countries have been called upon to make their contributions, and give their valuable quota. Now we know, that this migration must be seen as a heavy loss for all patriotic Swedes, and we have never, by spoken word or writing, sought to encourage emigration, since it is the innermost desire of Swedish-Americans that the Swedish people always remain great, powerful, and free, but no human power can stop the continued western migration. Nor could our homeland be freed from this, since it involved the building up of a nation of differing peoples and languages, which, in the question of mankind's spiritual and material development, has increasingly great recognized importance. Have not the Swedish people been pioneers in much of this, as part of mankind's highest development? Have they not carried out their greatest and most honored struggle in support of ideals? And upon that holy ground, and for all Swedes at home and abroad, I give witness, based on personal observations, that the emigrants, their children and grandchildren have made a valuable contribution to the development of my new homeland,. They have not, I dare say, failed in their efforts to honor the name of Sweden. They are not lost, not even to Sweden, which they hold dear with a love deeper than I can describe.

But just as the homeland's greatness has grown out of spiritual powers, and as its church and people are, we hope, tied with unbreakable bonds to each other, so it is with the church of our homeland, around which emigrants and their children and grandchildren have gathered in their diaspora. It is the dear faith of their fatherland that has assembled the sons and daughters of Svea over there. It is the Church of Sweden's Daughter Church, to which the benefits fall, that it can be found in New Sweden. For at the same time, she has worked to gather the scattered around God's Word, organized them into congregations, an sought to encourage their eternal interests, she has, by her great efforts created schooling, arrived out a cultural work which also has had the goal of maintaining a love of their homeland's language, literature and history.

The task I have been given, on this solemn occasion and place, before the leaders of the Mother Church, to present something about the activity of its daughter church, I appreciate very highly, as her insignificant representative, and it will be appreciated greatly by her and all Swedish-America.

“Go out from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1 NRSV) said God to Abraham, living in Mesopotamia. Abraham obeyed, went west and came to Canaan, and there built an altar to God. Thus, the deepest foundations were laid for the building of a nation, which would be so important to the realization of God’s Will, and the building of His kingdom. Then God, in the late 1840s and early 1850s, came to Swedish clergymen, to Lars Esbjörn in Norrland, to Tuve Nilsson Hasselquist in Skåne, and to Erland Carlsson and Jonas Swensson in Småland, and said to them: “Go forth out of your homeland, leave the future offered there to faithful and talented clergy, follow along with the emigrants, suffer and struggle together with them, and build altars to the Lord your God.” They obeyed God’s call. Fathers and brothers, do not misinterpret why I mention their names in this holy place. These men long since rest in their sacred graves, but they laid the foundations, and were involved in building the walls of the temple in which throngs now a part of the triumphant congregation have received their upbringing, now the spiritual home for 300,000 of your children over there, which shall become such a home for as yet unborn descendants, and from which spiritual strength goes out to the throngs, which still do not yet wish to count themselves as children of this home, yes, even out to the heathen world, where that young church, with its missionary activities, has lit its watchfires.

These men drew the plans for, and influenced, our churchly activities. They laid out the basic guidelines which have since guided its work. They were wise builders, since it was vital to lay the foundations and build upon them, and not let what they built, as is the case with so much of what is built, fall into ruin. No, the children and grandchildren of the emigrants have a churchly home.

After 10 years’ preparatory work, some impoverished clergy and poor congregations gathered in 1860, 54 years ago, to organize the Swedish Lutheran Church in America, the Augustana Synod. Of those who were at that meeting, we still have one man in active service, who has done an important work in the building of our church, the northerner, Erik Norelius (b. in Hassela, Hälsingland), ordained in 1856. I wish to name him on this occasion as the patriarch of my Church. Our statistics make it clear that the little Church founded in 1860 now has some 1,200 congregations, with assets which last year were estimated at a value of \$11,157,075, or over 40 million Crowns, reaching from coast to coast, where the emigrants went ashore, to the shores (p.560) swept by the waves of the Pacific Ocean, and from Alaska in the north to the Gulf of Mexico in the south. Within these congregations are organized around 300,000 Swedish-Americans. But it should be said that the church has a direct influence on those throngs which still are not members of our congregations. Many of them visit our churches more or less regularly, we baptize, teach in our Sunday schools, and then confirm their children, we express God’s blessing over the marriage of the young, since civil ceremonies are the exception among Swedes in America, we are called to visit them when they are sick, and finally commit them to their final rest. We emphasize that one cannot measure the results of our church activities by published statistics, as encouraging as they are. The rule is that persons do not ask to join our congregations before they are driven to do so by religious need, since along with membership in a free church comes a responsibility that they do not wish to accept, and is not driven by a positive spiritual interest.

I cannot describe here the work, patience, sacrifice, and effort needed to build an organized church body from poor emigrants. That part of our Church history is not yet written and may remain so. Yet here stands our dear Church, and that is enough for us to know. I do wish to say that the deprivation and work has to be limited to the founders mentioned, no, it has been needed ever since, and is needed now. It is vital that our clergy work among the settlers on the wide prairies, in the great forests, and mining areas, and to share their poverty, while guiding them to Heaven and building congregations. But as the financial condition of our countrymen is strengthened, so is that of our clergy. It is a thankful people among whom we work. The members of small, simple congregational built pleasant, comfortable homes for themselves, and for their pastors. But since we must always work new fields, pastors are still called to carry out a demanding and path breaking work.

The activity of our churches, which have the goal of gathering our countrymen, scattered throughout that great land, around God’s word, we call “home mission.” It is also our most important activity, for upon its success depends the future of all our activities. But it is a task which places great demands on our clergy, and the generosity of our congregations. Doing this work, our congregations must, in most

cases, also struggle to maintain themselves, while contributing annually about \$100,000. This activity is carried out in part by a centralized body, elected by the Synod, but for the most part, by the mission boards of the respective conferences.

Yet it must be sorrowfully mentioned, that our fundraising activity is more difficult now than ever before, despite being carried out more energetically than ever. And this is because of the material with which we must now work. The emigrants who arrived some decades ago were not always examples of good behavior, but there was in them a respect for holiness, in which we found a common bond for our activity. Among them, spiritual awakenings could arise. But sadly, many of those now arriving are stricken by bitterness towards the Church, towards their fosterland, and all social order. It often takes a long time before we can sit by their side to speak of their fathers' God and Church. They must be prepared by hard experience. And we win many to the Lord and his Congregation. When we cannot win their elders, we work to win their children.

What has now been said about the state of mind of sadly many of the now-arriving Swedes, answers the question asked so often of me, why there are so many we are unable to reach through our activities?

We might also ask: Why are there so many back home, who do not attend church? Send us better material and we will show better results. For an ocean voyage does not change their hearts. We ourselves are not satisfied with what we have won, but are firmly determined to continue, regardless of the demands placed upon us. We have not yet retreated from any field, however stony it may be. But I have found yet more who gladly admit that the development of our free church and all its institutions during half a century, has been no small task.

It is difficult for me to resist the temptation in this connection to answer the question so many thousands of fathers and mothers ask: What will become of our emigrated children? But I can only touch upon it with a few words. In that western land of great competition and possibilities, Darwin's "survival of the fittest" is especially valid. This places our countrymen at a crossroads, where they must choose between laying aside ugly practices and traditions, and become energetic workers, or go under. Sadly, many go under, and nothing is heard of them. But I am happy to confirm that most are successful, despite, especially in the beginning, that this must take place under great difficulties, of which they knew nothing when they emigrated. If the Swedes here at home wished to work as hard as they have to do over there, without complaint, then they would not need to leave their homeland for financial reasons. But it is through need and trial that the gold in the Swedish character is discovered. And it is there, even if hidden by baser elements. So, a people has been created there that are a strength of the nation, and who make the Swedish name shine. And the longer the Swede lives abroad, the prouder he becomes of that time.

Children and grandchildren of people who left their homeland out of dissatisfaction praise their Swedish heritage. And no citizens are valued more highly than those who come from, or had their heritage in, Ultima Thule.

But after this departure, I return to what is my greatly appreciated task. What has made possible the development of our Church as it has taken place, is its educational activities. That the founders of our Church were wise builders, is shown by the fact that while they laid its foundations, they also founded institutions of higher education. Augustana College and Theological Seminary shares its birthday with the Synod. Its fathers understood that they could not make themselves dependent on their fatherland's Church to secure the necessary clergy, but that they must educate them by themselves. Imagine how different it might have been for the once-thriving Swedish mission to Pennsylvania and Delaware, if the Swedes there had founded schools and trained their own clergy. As long as clergy came from the homeland, their congregations lived a healthy life, and even when they were left without shepherds, they struggled to maintain themselves as long as they could. As late as 1831, Swedish preaching took place at Gloria Dei Church in Philadelphia, and only 17 years later, Pastor Esbjörn arrived in America. These Swedish congregations had many remarkable clergy, but did not have what the Germans had in the same region, (p.561) which had been served so well by the Swedes, an organizer like the great Muhlenberg.

Thus, our beloved faith is no longer preached in those churches built by Swedes. A similar fate has been prevented for the Augustana congregations by its higher education efforts, activities which required great efforts and deprivation. This was at first intended to train clergy, but its unavoidable development led it to create comprehensive secondary schools (colleges), which, as to courses, are the equal of other colleges in the land. Now our Church has four full-class colleges. Those who complete their degrees in them can, without further entrance examinations, continue their studies at all universities in the country, with the

exception of Harvard, which does not recognize examinations from any other educational institution, plus at universities in our homeland and in Germany. We further have six four-to-five-year institutions.

Associated with our Augustana College, we have our common theological seminary. This seminary is one of the strongest links binding us together as a church. The property of these institutions reaches some \$1,728,980. But as hard as it was for our congregations, whose generosity is called upon for so many purposes, to collect that sum, it also requires larger annual efforts to maintain these institutions. Last year they rose to \$357,667, a sum covered partly by students, and partly directly from the congregations. We easily understand what honorable work is required to make congregations understand the importance of this activity, and to encourage them to freely give the needed funds. And we must not lose sight of the fact that we have worked with a poor people who have had to work hard to support themselves. Now we are working to gather funds for those educational institutions, and here we have succeeded well, as relates to the two older. But this expansive activity has the greatest importance for us in our religious and cultural work. In addition to our getting our strong clergy support, we raise men there to take important places in society. Students from our schools have already made themselves known in politics, in the professional- and business world. And they have contributed to raising the reputation of our people in the entire nation. Between three and four thousand young men and women study each year in these, our schools.

As concerns our church's charitable work, I will only mention the following. She has built and maintains 9 children's homes, 6 homes for the aged, two deaconess homes, 5 hospitals, of which one, Augustana Hospital in Chicago, represents a value of \$350,000, and has a national reputation, 2 emigrant homes, and is further building inner mission homes in several of our larger cities. The value of these institutions is over one million dollars, and their annual operations require substantial amounts.

As we held our organizational meeting, our Synod made a decision recognizing our responsibility concerning foreign (heathen) missions. First, we supported Fosterlandsstiftelsen's and Herrmansburg Society's missions, but since 1867 it has strongly supported the General Council's mission to India, and since 1908 has had its own mission to the Honan Province of China. Both these foreign missions require annually around \$50,000.

After this general information about my Church's main activities, I shall briefly seek to tell something of her doctrinal positions, constitution and congregational activities.

The Augustana Synod states in the article on its confession, which all our clergy must sign, that it, as a universal Christian, and especially Evangelical Lutheran body, recognizes not only the oldest Church creeds, the Apostolic-, Nicene- and Athanasian- and also the unaltered Augsburg Confession, understood as our Church's confessional writings, as given. This has been my Synod's confessional position from its beginnings, and shall remain so in the future. This faith is a precious inheritance we have received from our Mother Church. We have retained it, it has been the sustaining power of our Church, and we shall give it as an inheritance to those yet to come. It is impossible for you, my listeners, to understand the battles our Church's founders fought, to preserve it. At that time the reputation of our Church did not stand as high in our country as it now does. And our pastors and the poor emigrants became immediately surrounded by representatives of proselyting churches. "You are poor," they said, "and we are rich; we can support your clergy, build churches for you and help you in every way, if you simply will join with us." No, said the impoverished immigrants and their impoverished clergy, our faith is not for sale. It is our greatest gift, our precious faith. And then they continued their work without any support from either the Mother Church or any other, while continuously opposed by proselyting faiths. But their faithfulness and immovable holding to the truth made our Church possible, and the same faithfulness has since maintained and developed her. The faith we have defended, has been our defense. It has continued, with sword in one hand and trowel in the other, to build the walls of our Church. "Sola fide, Biblia Sacra" has been our Synod's password, and that the whole Lutheran Church in the United States. Through the abiding power of these truths, she has won. She has grown ahead of one church body after the other, and now she is growing faster than any other church in that land.

In relation to the above, we have been judged in various ways in our fatherland. On one hand, we have been suspected of not being firm in our faith, and on the other hand, that we have been too strongly conservative, but both these accusations are incorrect. As for the former claim, we must recall that we, surrounded as we were on all sides by proselytizing churches, have had to continuously do battle for our dear faith. We have stood immovably upon "Confessio Augustana invariant." It is seen in our published

instructional books. But on the other side, we do not believe that the theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries set the final stone in the building of theological teaching, nor that theological science has uttered its last word. We do not view our confessional writings as the Catholics do their relics, but as living, life-giving realities, as expressions of God-given, salvation-producing truths. We freely admit the limits of our power to comprehend, but standing upon this once-and-for-all-given foundation, the material and formal principles of the Church, we strive to understand more about the Eternal God, and His Revelations.

I must take this opportunity to say a word about the constitutions of our Church. Here it is often asked, why our Church does not establish the episcopate, in order to be like the Mother Church. Let me assure you that the reason it has not happened has not been because of any notable discomfort with the position of bishop. Most of the founders of our Church were ordained by bishops, and most of us would willingly admit that the name "bishop" has a better Biblical- and church-historic sound than has the name of "president." But we turn our attention to the following circumstances: our newly-built church had to struggle for its existence, and carry out its founding work without having an organic connection with the Mother Church, nor from which it received support beyond personal gestures, freely given (p.562) for her. We do not wish this to be seen as any disapproval towards the Mother Church, for we ourselves see it as God's gift, that we from the beginning were dependent only on His grace and our own small resources to carry out our activities. The Methodist Church carried out a very energetic mission among newly-arriving Swedes, but it became the great weakness of those Swedish Methodist congregations they organized, that they depended on American gold for their existence. But now it is easily seen that it was impossible for the small, poor, and widely dispersed congregations and their pastors, who had to share the poverty of the immigrants, to establish the episcopate. They thus had to establish their church organization in the way that best fit their conditions, and by which they could gain the best possible results. Every pastor had to become a mission bishop for his great area. And how might a bishop be paid during a time when pastors were suffering the worst deprivations? It should further be noted that many Lutheran synods existed in America when our emigrants arrived there, and they had no episcopate. Our weak congregations and their clergy felt the need of placing themselves in organic connection with an already-organized synod, and thus they joined in the Northern Illinois Synod, at whose school Pastor Esbjörn became a professor, with the intent of preparing clergy for the Swedish immigrants. There he continued until he was forced, on confessional grounds, to leave it, to teach those who became the first Swedes ordained in the New World.

As an answer to the question that may be asked, as to why our Synod, in its current state of development, does not establish the episcopate, I wish to remind that such a step would isolate them from all the other Lutheran churches in the country, which would have been an error now, as work is being carried out to create an organic association among the various parts of the church. Our Synod is only about one-twelfth of the Lutheran church in the land, and none of the other synods have the episcopate. It is now in organic relationship with the gathering of synods bearing the name of General Council, together with which it carries out foreign mission and through which organization it can exercise a wide-spread influence, but if it created the episcopal form of governance, that connection would be dissolved.

And in the question of our constitutional work, it has continued ever since Pastor Erland Carlsson wrote the first constitution, until congregations, conferences, and Synod got their own now existing constitutions, which may, come to be changed as needed to support their activities.

Our order of worship is such that church-minded emigrants feel at home when they come to us. We use the Mother Church's church handbook, with the small changes which necessity requires, and we sing the same glorious hymns. And I cannot fail, on this solemn occasion, to bear witness to the great mission that the Swedish Hymnal carries out among the emigrants in diaspora. It has, next to the Bible, been their foremost inspiration. I have found it, worn and tear-stained, in pioneer dugouts and log cabins, and in the comfortable homes of now successful emigrants. It has been the key by which many hearts were turned to holy influence. And the children of emigrants love the hymnal above all other songs offered them. I have seen the noble influence these hymns and their tones can bring, even to the otherwise sorrowfully-unreachable Mormons in Utah.

Our published Catechism follows very closely that used in the Mother Church. We have since published books needed for the energetic activity we must carry out to win and keep youth in church and Sunday schools, which have such great importance for a free church in a land where no religious

instruction is given in public schools. Our Church's publishing house, Augustana Book Concern, located in Rock Island, had sales of newspapers and books last year of \$165,336, and has a property value of \$216,776. This is a hugely important activity for our Church, and its cultural work among our people has been developed over just 25 years.

The language question is a reality for us in our churchly activities. It did not exist, as long as the old emigrants dominated, but now we have their children and grandchildren to deal with, and for them, English is their everyday language. But it is with joy that I confirm that their Swedish mother tongue is often their language for special events and church. Even those who themselves have difficulty in expressing their thoughts in Swedish prefer to hear preaching in that language. We have congregations that have celebrated their sixtieth anniversary, in which sermons are still given only in Swedish. But the time has already come when we must carry out vigorous activities in English, and especially to reach those whose parents were not members of a congregation. The Swedish language will not die out in America because of our congregational-, school-, and publishing activities, and the influence our people have gained an influence which has resulted in the creation of Scandinavian professorships and literature at several of the land's foremost universities. But the day will surely come, when we, in addition to Swedish, must use English in our religious work. For, however much we love our mother tongue, we love even more our Savior, His hard-won faith, and our Lutheran belief, and we are not willing to lose any of this, by reason of language. Thus we have already established congregations in which all activities are carried out in English. We will still organize Swedish congregations, as they are needed, but many of our current congregations will gradually shift to use of English. But, they will not be lost to our people and church; just the opposite, the influence we as a church can bring will grow.

This incomplete presentation of the activities of the Augustana Synod has been presented thanks to the friendly request of the Church of Sweden's respected Archbishop, and with the friendly permission of the same High Authority, I am permitted to finally carry out an honored task, given me by my Church and its honored President.

Four years ago, the Daughter Church of the Church of Sweden, and its oldest educational institution, celebrated its 50th year with grand festivities. That festive occasion was a monument erected by the emigrants, their children and grandchildren, and on which they inscribed their Ebenezer with thanks and praise to their fathers' God, whose grace and forgiveness have passed to their children. A fiftieth anniversary must seem as nothing, in a land where congregations can celebrate a thousand years, but the first fifty years of a free church is yet of great importance to it. For during that time, the strength of its foundations were well-tested. But to our great joy, we found that our dear Mother Church judged our activities with friendliness. She sent one of Her Bishops to represent her at our festival, and we can never forget the worthy and loving way in which he carried out his duties. Not only during the great jubilee festival held in Rock Island, but by the physically and mentally- strenuous work he carried out in all parts of our great country. (p.563), binding daughter to mother with new and stronger ties. Then the great honor fell to us, one we could not even dream of, that Uppsala University sent its Rector Magnificus as its representative, who in his eminent way carried out his task. Greetings and well-wishes also came from other Bishops of the Church of Sweden, the southern Swedish university (Lund), many other organizations and individuals. Those were grand days for the daughter church, days that will never be forgotten by those who had the special fortune of experiencing them, and for all the Mother Church did for us, I now extend the sincere thanks of your Daughter Church.

And then came an invitation from the Mother Church's highest servant, to be represented at this solemn occasion, an invitation which both demonstrates the love it gives witness to, and its importance to us, deeply gripping our hearts. My Church eagerly grasped the hand extended in love and confidence. She gives thanks for your great love, and the honor you have shown us.

Your Daughter Church greets our Mother Church, with the assurance that she will continue, as before, to strive to the uttermost, in encouraging the physical and spiritual welfare of her emigrated children. And she hopes deeply to fulfill this task, so that she might continue to merit the recognition of the Mother Church.

I have been asked especially to bring the greetings and well wishes of the Synod and its honored President to the newly-elected Archbishop, who will now be blessed to his high and responsible call.

God bless the beloved fosterland, its beloved King and his House! God Bless the Church of Sweden, its Bishops and all its clergy! May he let His Spirit be richly poured out upon this northern land! Amen, in the name of the Triune God!

A true and correct translation,

John E. Norton, ed., Augustana Historical Society Newsletter
4015 36th Ave. Ct.
Moline, IL 61265
tel. 309 736-3131, cell 309 756-6854
email: jnorton3614@gmail.com