

The Quest for an American Lutheran Theology: Augustana and Lutheran Quarterly

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The Augustana Synod's 1948 centennial commemorated the founding of its first congregation.¹ The seminary's theological journal, *The Augustana Quarterly*, marked the anniversary by introducing readers to their Swedish heritage. Historical essays by Hilding Pleijel and others on nineteenth-century church life in Sweden explained how Swedish rural piety shaped personal and social life. Gustaf Aulen and Anders Nygren brought Swedish theology, with its fresh approach to the post-war crisis, to Augustana's fully Americanized readership. *The Augustana Quarterly* renewed the relationship between Sweden and America at a crucial time. Lutheran leaders, especially in Scandinavia, were emerging from the crisis of the war with a profound sense that the future of Lutheranism itself depended on a fresh articulation of its Reformation theological heritage. They wanted and needed an American audience, while Lutherans in the United States also sought to participate in this work of theological renewal. American Lutheran relief efforts had convinced Europeans of the American reputation for activism, but Germans and Scandinavians were suspicious of activism in theology, even though quietism was now demonstrably far worse. A new articulation of Lutheran theology was a part of the reconstruction effort needed to restore the spiritual legacy of the churches in the wake of the seeming capitulation of German Lutheranism to the totalitarian Nazi state.

The Augustana Quarterly and *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* (a jointly produced journal from Gettysburg and Philadelphia) both worked to reorient Lutheran theology to address the needs of the hour. They hoped that a distinctive American Lutheran theological voice would help Americans shaping the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches gain more influence in the global Lutheran arena. But this longed-for voice was crimped within the small enclaves of separated Lutheran church bodies. An American

Lutheran theology might yet emerge, some believed, if talent from the several churches were joined. American Lutheranism could then convey a new and united vision for world Lutheranism.

Conrad Bergendoff and Edgar Carlson, two of Augustana's leaders, thought that Augustana's relationship with Sweden could assist American Lutherans to achieve a broader, world-oriented ecumenical vision. Anders Nygren, Swedish bishop and theologian, had become the first president of the Lutheran World Federation and this gave American Lutherans who had been only dimly aware of Scandinavian theology before the war the opportunity to take out their maps to find Lund and Uppsala. For Augustana leaders, the popularity of Swedish theology came at an opportune time for them to make a contribution to the development of Lutheran unity in the United States. A renewed relationship with Swedish theology helped Augustana leaders articulate with some confidence a theological rationale for Lutheran unity on the basis of international and ecumenical work. This helped American Lutherans seeking unity avoid the well-worn ruts of drafting, for decades, theological theses against the Masons and finessing language about biblical inerrancy. Instead leaders sought wider relationships that would offer contemporary and relevant ways to express Lutheran convictions. This examination of American Lutheran theological aspirations will also give readers of *Lutheran Quarterly* an understanding of the second founding of their journal in 1949, and help them appreciate the way that contemporary theological scholarship provided a way for Lutherans in America to find common cause.

Heritage and Theology

The Augustana Quarterly had served since 1922 to bring theological and historical reflection to Augustana's pastors, and to strengthen theological and churchly ties within the denomination. The journal fostered the synod's ever present concern for strength through unity. Articles appeared in Swedish and English from the start, indicating the ongoing generational and theological diversity within the fellowship. Readers learned of major developments within the Church of Sweden, and as the years progressed this reporting became

more positive. This growing admiration marked a surprising turn in the relationship between the churches, since the Augustana's founding pastors and a good portion of the laity in the nineteenth-century Swedish revival had emigrated with very negative feelings about their "mother" church. A telling sign that views friendly to the Church of Sweden would have to overcome skepticism among the rank and file came in the title of an article in the inaugural issue: "Signs of Life in the Church of Sweden." The author, S.G. Hägglund, listed as the most obvious sign of life the American "daughter churches" meaning the Augustana Synod itself and not the Church of Sweden. This pretty much disclosed the attitudinal obstacles existing in the synod. Augustana Lutherans, as Americans, sought theological and spiritual independence.²

The decade of the 1920s involved a rapid Americanization within the Augustana Synod, including the increasing use of English in theological instruction, but it would take still another generation before a distinctive American Lutheran theology would begin to emerge. The major text used in the seminary to teach dogmatics, written in Swedish by Augustana theologian Conrad E. Lindberg, had already been in use for over two decades. In 1922 it was translated and expanded by C. E. Hoffsten, pastor of Immanuel Church, the flagship congregation in Chicago. The English text served the same dogmatic menu to a new generation of American-born seminarians. The book received a favorable review from Lindberg's faculty colleague, Sven Gustaf Youngert, who noted that Lindberg's work was a sound rebuttal to the oft quoted statement (he gave no reference) that the Lutheran Church in America had produced no theologians.³

A review of this work in *The Lutheran Church Review*, by Henry Eyster Jacobs of Philadelphia Seminary, noted that the book was a textbook and not a place to look for originality. Lindberg certainly had mastered the dogmatic method, and this pretty much satisfied the then current definition of a theologian. It certainly satisfied Jacobs, who used his review to make the point to his readers that this exposition showed what kind of teaching went on for the pastors of "this influential synod, covering the entire United States."⁴ There were no doctrinal barriers preventing organic unity with the United

Lutheran Church, he concluded. Such a glowing review for the textbook in a dogmatics course makes it clear that in the transition to English, Augustana theologians now could envision themselves in a wider American context. Jacobs remarked that “the idiomatic English of this treatise shows also the degree to which any obstacle arising from difference of language has been overcome. Where the very same faith is taught in the very same language, minor difficulties cannot long be a hindrance [to organic unity].”

Were one to look for theological insight in this journal during the 1920s, however, one would have to be satisfied with a rather limited range of topics. Writers expounded on practical solutions to protect Lutheranism from bad societal influences—such as planning for more effective Sunday schools. In the numerous Bible studies one might detect the background noise of theological dispute over inspiration, while in the occasional speeches given by church leaders readers might sense the growing recognition that the church needed to become more relevant to new American concerns. The relationship to Sweden was being renegotiated in the journal but the instruments for a new self-understanding were still under construction. Revisions to the pastoral handbook of the Church of Sweden, for instance, had to be reported to American readers because many pastors were still using the Swedish ritual. Augustana’s important liturgical tradition, analyzed elsewhere in this issue, had not yet been published. In the last issue for 1922, however, a hint of things to come came in a small notice at the bottom of the page: a visit from Sweden’s archbishop Nathan Söderblom would occur in 1923.

The visit of the archbishop became a catalyst for an increasingly positive orientation to ecumenical and international relationships within Augustana, at a strategic time. Americanization within the synod would continue, but it would occur in the context of a deepening relationship between two churches, and on the basis of a shared awareness of the worldwide reach of the Lutheran churches. Linguistic ties were lessening, but the possibility for partnership began to emerge. Augustana enlisted in the longer project of the fledgling ecumenical movement, and joined with other American Lutherans in the task of constructing a worldwide Lutheranism.

This ecumenical orientation, and the development of a cooperative Lutheranism on the basis of ecumenical commitment, did not emerge in Augustana without resistance from more conservative voices in the synod. Readers of *The Augustana Quarterly* could follow two streams of thought in their journal. A more pietistic stream directed towards the task of schooling the young at home and in congregations channeled the attention of readers to initiatives like the formation of Lutheran Bible schools and the promotion of morality in society. The dramatic turn in world events during the mid thirties, however, as Germany came under totalitarian rule, made these isolationist strategies of church growth and nurture seem more and more irrelevant. In this key decade, *The Augustana Quarterly* also changed editorial hands.

Oscar N. Olson became editor of the quarterly at the end of 1934 while he was a pastor in Berwyn, Illinois, after having served briefly as a professor at the seminary in Rock Island. He was one of four professors who left their positions in 1931 through the actions of the board of directors, just before Conrad Bergendoff became the new dean of the seminary.⁵ His commitment to an ecumenical and international perspective was apparent at once. In 1935 his article, entitled, "The position of the Church in the Present World Situation," originally delivered to the Augustana pastors in the Illinois Conference, reported on the new outlook that had developed because of the emergence of the Third Reich." Olson noted that "the controlling idea of Naziism [*sic*] is the 'totalitarian state,' to be achieved through subordination to the 'leader' as dictator.....If Naziism [*sic*] were only a political form of government or a social program, the Church might support it, but unfortunately it also embodies a number of ideas entirely foreign to the spirit of the Church, such as persecution of the Jews, revival of old Teuton paganism, the so-called 'Aryan clause,' and violation of the constitutional rights of the Church."⁶

Olson used his role as editor to expand the horizon of Augustana's pastors. At the end of almost every issue, his "editorial notes" included news and information from around the globe and regular reports culled from *Svenska Teologiska Kvartalskriften* (The Swedish Theological Quarterly) edited by Swedish theologians Gustaf Aulén, and

later by Ragnar Bring. Augustana's pastors were well supplied with updates on the latest trends and events within Scandinavian Lutheran scholarship. They knew Aulén had proposed a new and dramatic understanding of the doctrine of the atonement in his book *Christus Victor*. Aulén's colleagues at the University in Lund in Sweden also received regular notices in *The Augustana Quarterly*. This made its readers aware also that Swedish theology provided fresh insights into an alternative understanding of Lutheranism based on fresh readings of Luther. Swedish theological perspectives offered something valuable to them because they provided a Lutheran alternative to the stale and theologically rigid polarization between Modernism and Fundamentalism. After the war, due to Olson's regular reporting on developments in World Lutheranism, *The Augustana Quarterly* readers understood the significance of Swedish theology for rebuilding the Lutheran reputation in the world. Augustana theologians—Eric Wahlstrom, G. Everett Arden, and Conrad Bergendoff—had also done and would continue to perform yeoman's duty in translating Swedish theology for American readers.

A Wider American Lutheran Interest in Swedish Theology

The theological scene at other Lutheran seminaries was also changing in the period after the war. Raymond Stamm, professor of New Testament at Gettysburg Seminary, edited *The Lutheran Church Quarterly*, the journal of Gettysburg and Philadelphia seminaries. His theological orientation may be described as a kind of disgruntled liberalism. In a letter (August 1945) to a former student working on his doctoral degree, Stamm wrote of his satisfaction to read that people who disagreed with Niebuhr are "beginning to talk back to him much more vigorously than they did a few years ago."⁷⁷ He went on to identify his ongoing liberalism in stating that "until men like Barth, Dodd, Ott and Piper give me a far more satisfactory answer to the question, 'Why is History?'. . . then Case and Matthews still have something to say." As a New Testament scholar, Stamm seemed to read widely in the theological literature as well, and had developed negative views of the new Swedish Theology. He gathered steam when he dismissed Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros* as a work "which

can stand neither the test of historical nor philological facts, but which has been hailed by conservatives as a veritable lifesaver for the apologist in his efforts to show the superiority of Christianity.” Stamm instead wanted a theology more positive, and life affirming, something he did not find in neo-orthodoxy, which he found much too pessimistic.

Given Stamm’s predilections as an editor, the readership of *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* was less informed than Augustana’s about the world Lutheran situation, but after the war it was hard to avoid reporting at least some of the work that Lutherans were doing to create the Lutheran World Federation. A.R. Wentz, the president of Gettysburg Seminary, and a leader in creating the constitutions of both the LWF and WCC, wrote a letter in the spring of 1948 to Stamm to push him to include greater coverage for Eastern Lutheran readers. Almost a year had passed since the founding of the LWF in 1947. Stamm was a popular teacher of the New Testament in Gettysburg, but in these years he lived at Camp Devitt, a tuberculosis sanatorium, confined for rest and treatment. He could not venture out in public, so he was only in contact with the theological world through his reading. Wentz promised to send a complete report on the assembly, especially section I.⁸ Then the *Quarterly* could arrange for a review of the assembly that would, Wentz suggested, provide for a “scholastically respectable way,” to respond also to any “reports that any one might present.” Prodding further, Wentz noted that “we ought to have some story on the assembly somewhere in the *Quarterly*,” and that he had written reports for both the 1923 Eisenach, and 1929 Copenhagen meetings of the Lutheran World Convention. The slow pace of getting this story out, giving time for the detailed “scholastic review,” suggested strongly that Stamm did not sense the urgency in reporting on these fast moving developments. He had not been part of the trans-Atlantic diplomacy and reconstruction work that had spurred A.R. Wentz along with other American Lutherans—Sylvester Michelfelder, Ralph Long, Frank Fry, P.O. Bersell, and Lars Boe—to press forward in acquainting their church members with the world Lutheran scene.

Stamm’s editorial work on *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* was however appreciated by the leadership of Gettysburg and Philadelphia

seminaries, and provided a way for him to remain productive in the long periods when he had to stay isolated. He remained out of circulation, pouring his energy into work he could finish while resting, and responding from afar to the several initiatives Wentz described for him. Other American Lutherans, who had traveled more, were a veritable gold mine of ideas and projects during these years. As editor, Stamm could at least feature these initiatives and provide an arena for debate. One proposal that stirred him especially was the brainchild of N.J. Gould Wickey, the director of the United Lutheran Church's board of higher education, and a former president of the Association of American Theological Schools. He promoted a plan for an Inter-Lutheran post-graduate theological school.⁹ Responding to the difficulties some students found in pursuing theological study at American universities, Wickey's plan would provide a fully Lutheran, and confessional, environment for the development of an American Lutheran theological voice. Details of the plan awaited, but the broad concept had been proposed by Wickey to the annual meeting of Lutheran theological professors. Stamm, sensing a conservative impulse in the proposal, wrote to Wentz that the collective effort to draw the "best students" from the several schools, as well as the "cream" of the faculty seemed to imply something dire and unfair about the existing state of theological seminary education. He was convinced that a Lutheran school would only isolate Lutherans further from the contemporary streams of scholarship and theology. He solicited articles for and against the effort in an upcoming issue of the quarterly, and succeeded in persuading Wentz to suggest a suitable opponent to the plan.¹⁰

Stamm had his own prescription to energize American Lutheran theology. A note of "resolve" should be present at this critical time to induce forceful, forward momentum in the church. In an address prepared in the fall of 1945, which was delivered on his behalf, he told students to avoid "Gnostic" dualistic responses, which they may hear in the latter day seductive voices that call God "the Totally Other" (e.g., Barth). He did not applaud theologies that "have built an altar to Dualism" (e.g., Ragnar Bring, who explored the dramatic dualism in Luther). Instead he provided students with his own insight into suffering and perseverance. As he wrote:

Christ placed the responsibility for Sin on man himself. He never explained to his disciples why God made a world which he saw was 'good,' but into which Sin could enter; or why God created a living spirit who would become a 'Devil and do such things as the Devil, and men more devilish than Satan himself, are doing. Instead, he repulsed the Tempter and went about doing good, getting rid of Sin and evil. That and that alone is the Christian answer, even though it be a Cross."¹¹

Raymond Stamm clearly felt that there was enough theological material to fill the pages of *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* without depending on influences from abroad. Other men at Gettysburg Seminary, however, were not only more interested in telling the story of the development of the Lutheran World Federation, but also at being involved in the practical work to bring new Lutheran and theological impulses to American Lutherans. Carl Rasmussen, professor of systematic theology at Gettysburg Seminary, who was of Danish background but a pastor in the ULCA, was commissioned by the United Lutheran Church Publication Board to travel to Scandinavia in the summer and fall of 1946 to solicit manuscripts for translation. He became the broker between a wider American Lutheran readership and Scandinavian theologians, and brought many titles to print. Rasmussen himself translated Anders Nygren's *Commentary on Romans* and was instrumental in steering the choices of the United Lutheran Church's Muhlenberg Press.

With letters of introduction to church leaders and theologians, Rasmussen gained first-hand exposure to the dramatic development of World Lutheranism during those critical months of restructuring after the war. He took copious notes from his meetings with Scandinavian church leaders in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark, asking their opinions on what works ought to be translated. He kept charts and scorecards, and wrote extensive descriptions on the social and cultural contexts for each of the churches. It was clear that Sweden's economic, cultural, and religious situation was far more comfortable than that of the formerly occupied countries. Church leaders expressed resentment and frustration, worry and stress in their conversations with him. In a typical conversation with John Kiehn, owner of a book concern in Copenhagen, Rasmussen asked: "Has Denmark, in recent years, produced works that rank

with those of Brillioth, Billing, Bring, Aulén, Nygren, Josefson, and others in Sweden?" Kiehn acknowledged the challenge of the moment: "Unhappily the answer is, 'she has done very little; but there is now a beginning!' Why has she done little? For one thing, she has, except for a luminary like Kierkegaard, been satisfied to borrow from Germany—and, latterly, from Sweden too."¹²

Rasmussen's colloquial notes reveal that European leaders, too, were not thinking small. This was the time for Lutheranism to emerge from its parochial isolation and address the world. Nils Soe, a theological professor at the University of Copenhagen, met Rasmussen the next week. From this visit Rasmussen learned how little Scandinavian leaders knew about American Lutherans. Missouri's fundamentalism and Reformed activism was visible to them but little was known of the other American Lutherans. Soe exclaimed to Rasmussen, "Such a trip, and mission, as yours comes just at the right time! Within the last week, at a youth conference in Sweden, Bring and I were discussing the possibility of liaison (with Americans). Otherwise European Lutheranism is isolated!"¹³

A pivotal meeting of world Lutheran leaders also took place during Rasmussen's time in Sweden. The executive committee of the Lutheran World Convention convened in Uppsala from June 24–26 to reorganize after the war. Rasmussen took extensive notes at the meeting. His notes, written in a private short hand are filled with exclamation marks and underlined phrases. The meeting began with a discussion of funding and also included a discussion of the state of the churches in the various regions of Europe. There was a significant degree of unease over how to reconcile relationships with German church leaders. German representatives had difficulty traveling through the Russian zone at that time and only one, Bishop Meiser, eventually arrived on the third day of the meeting. Fierce debate over the need for a worldwide structure made the meeting very tense. For Scandinavian church leaders the debate focused on the question whether worldwide Lutheran organization would compete and detract from the World Council of Churches. Should the Lutheran world structure be a "church," as some in Germany hoped, or should it be something else? Seeking to persuade the Scandinavians, some American pressed for the development of a

Lutheran federation of churches. Part of the Scandinavian reluctance to participate in a separate Lutheran world structure stemmed from yet unresolved antagonism from the experience of occupation. On page fifteen of his notes Rasmussen wrote: “**Definitely decided: Lutheran World Federation!!**”¹⁴

In an address composed after his trip, Rasmussen starkly reoriented his American Lutheran audience: “the earth has swallowed up Germany. One often hears the statement that Scandinavia must now look in other directions. . . . Nothing would be more natural than the nurture of closer relations with America.”¹⁵ Rasmussen’s observations pretty much describe the developing theological discussion among American Lutherans. They were open to closer relations that would give them an opportunity to project their own voice in the emerging arena of world Lutheranism. Because Nazism had destroyed the organizational strength and cultural authority of German Lutheranism, Lutheranism after the war would have to find a new pole star. “Even they who think that Germany will again recover a position of leadership, do not venture to predict how far in the future such recovery is, or what the religious climate will be when it comes,” wrote Rasmussen.¹⁶

Were American Lutherans ready to reorient their theological compass? Could Swedish theology gain American followers? The way forward needed American theological leadership, too, and a focal point that every Lutheran around the world could see clearly. The answer came in the form of Swedish theological interest in Luther, the “Luther Renaissance,” which had begun both in Germany and in Scandinavia between the world wars, and was now gaining an ever wider following. Thanks to Rasmussen and encouragement from the United Lutheran Muhlenberg Press, these works were now being translated into English. The Augustana theologian, Edgar Carlson, provided English readers with an introduction in *The Reinterpretation of Luther*, a critical review of recent Swedish theology, published by Muhlenberg in 1948. The title reveals the larger ambition advanced for American Lutheran readers: Luther himself would foster a “Lutheran” theology, without the usual synodical or national descriptors. It would be a fresh Luther, one not bound by a particular ethnic Lutheran tradition.

Bishop Anders Nygren, the first president of the Lutheran World Federation, led under the banner, "Forward to Luther," as a way to call Lutherans towards a united future. Nygren's *Agape and Eros*, translated in three volumes during the mid 1930s, demonstrated how systematic theology based on Luther research derived a method of categorization and motifs, which identified the essential Christian message. In the several interviews that Rasmussen conducted in Sweden, another book was urged upon him as needing a translator. Swedish scholars employed Luther research to address the urgent issue of the relationship of the church to the world. They had created a book on the church, and urged Rasmussen to bring their ecclesiological discussion to a wider, American readership. The English translation, titled, *This is the Church: Basic studies on the nature of the Church*, came out in 1952. The work of fourteen scholars, it demonstrated that in spite of "divergencies [*sic*] of emphasis—new light can be thrown on all these problems through a careful examination of what Luther had to say about them."¹⁷ Nygren and other Swedish theologians, with their call to return to the sources, found in Luther an unusual way around Germany towards a "new" worldwide Lutheran theology.

Lutheran Unity through Theology

The work of Carl Rasmussen to bring new Scandinavian theology to the shelves of American pastors proceeded apace into the 1950s. But book-length works took a good bit of time to translate. A more immediate impact on the theological conversation among Lutherans was launched by seminary presidents, who held several meetings to plan for the eventual merger of several theological journals. It is hard to know who was the driving engine for this proposal because details about the number of meetings they held, and who sponsored them, have yet to surface, but a significant meeting was held in March 1948 and by November final agreement was achieved to found a new Lutheran theological quarterly.¹⁸ A reader of *The Augustana Quarterly*, however, would not have known that "his" journal was about to fold.

The Augustana Quarterly ceased publication and merged with *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* at the end of 1948, along with other seminary

publications, to form *The Lutheran Quarterly*, in order to foster a greater and more united American Lutheranism. During 1948 the decisions to form the new quarterly journal were kept under wraps, pending a number of personal decisions being made by key leaders. Conrad Bergendoff, who had been president of Augustana College and Seminary and who had in that capacity represented Augustana at the seminary presidents meetings, had just come through a difficult year. The Augustana Synod at its meeting in 1947 finally decided to separate its college from the seminary. Bergendoff opposed this division, and was very candid in his opinion that seminary education ought to be closely aligned with the latest scholarship not only in theology but in the social and physical sciences. Bergendoff had strong ties outside the Augustana Seminary circles. His scholarship on the Swedish Reformation put him in close contact with Swedish theologians and historians. He had also received his early seminary education at the Philadelphia Seminary of the United Lutheran Church in America.

In letters to Abdel Ross Wentz in the early spring of 1948 it is clear that Bergendoff had not yet decided whether he would stay on as college president or take on the position of seminary president. Wentz offered him a post on the Gettysburg faculty, in recognition that Bergendoff may have wanted distance and a new start. In the end he decided to stay in Rock Island, as president of the college.¹⁹ At its meeting in June the synod elected Karl Mattson, Bergendoff's brother-in-law, as president of the seminary.

If it had not been for the series of meetings related to consolidation of the theological journals, Mattson would normally have become responsible also for maintaining a theological quarterly. Mattson's correspondence files, however, do not include any records or information related to the theological quarterly, nor did he receive any news about an impending decision to merge one quarterly with another.²⁰ Mattson, who received his advanced theological training at Union Seminary in New York, had participated along with Bergendoff in the biennial meetings of a Contemporary Lutheran Theology group, started by Joseph Sittler. Membership was by invitation, and everyone was expected to present papers regularly. The group also included Missouri representatives Jaroslav Pelikan and Otto Kretzman.²¹ Mattson was certainly prepared to make

decisions about a theological quarterly, but it seemed as if that ship had already departed. Bergendoff seemed to have won a consolation prize when he left his seminary position. He became the new editor of *The Lutheran Quarterly* in 1949. Given that there is no indication to readers of *The Augustana Quarterly* that a merger was afoot, the decision to close that quarterly and merge into a new one must have also been waiting for Bergendoff's decision.²²

The new arena, however, did not foster the kind of creativity that results from a long immersion in a distinct tradition, where a shared vocabulary and set of values sets thinkers free from limitations imposed when ideas have to be introduced. The disappearance of familiar publications meant the loss of well-known conversation and sparring partners.

An intelligent Augustana pastor who watched the disappearance of *The Augustana Quarterly* expressed dismay at the loss of his, and presumably the synod's, theological freedom with the new venture, even though the well-known Bergendoff was at the helm of the new venture. C. J. Södergren, pastor and teacher in Minneapolis, had submitted an article to be published in *The Augustana Quarterly* but because of the merger into *The Lutheran Quarterly*, Editor Oscar Olson told him to resend it to the board chaired by Bergendoff. "Dear Brother Olson," Södergren wrote in English; then, switching to Swedish, he continued: "*Tack for upplysninga! Kunde just tro att dä va ugglor i mosen.*" ("Thanks for the information! I suspected a little mischief has happened (owls got into the hat)"). He declined to send the article to "the combination [because] they'll be too terribly orthodox for my heresies." In fact, the whole project, including the orientation towards an ecumenical future held little appeal. "This ecumenicity business is a serious joke to me. The idea is fine, but it's a far cry from here to there. Even the enthusiasts are growing tepid of late. And for good reasons. Laymen could greet each other and shake hands, but not priests. Too much *enchiridii* in their attics. Far more orthodoxistic than the Bible."²³

Södergren viewed *The Augustana Quarterly* as a forum where Augustana people enjoyed a kind of freedom from suspicion, which did not exist in the new inter-Lutheran world. They could develop their own distinctive voice, drawing on their shared experiences and

traditions. They sought to make a contribution to a broader fellowship of Christians through what they called “the wider church,” by which they usually meant Augustana’s own evangelical and churchly mission. The new structures of Lutheran cooperation that emerged after the war introduced a new vision, the goal of a united world Lutheranism. For leaders like Södergren Augustana gave up its own separate but necessary voice in order to foster the emergence of an untried and loosely constructed instrument. *The Lutheran Quarterly* would perhaps provide a place for new ideas and themes to be brought forth and tested, but it would be hobbled. Familiar relationships, old sparring partners, and well-known values and themes of a long tradition of discourse were made obsolete. An American Lutheran Theology, if it emerged, would have to be a new creation rather than an expression of a long tradition.

The new journal showed many signs of having been shaped through the work of a select group of men from the “Contemporary Lutheran Theology Group,” in particular who now had a wider inter-Lutheran and ecumenically orientation in which to share their views. Articles from both Bergendoff and Mattson, who had previously presented papers to the group, made their way onto the pages of *The Lutheran Quarterly*’s early issues. These had already been vetted by the discerning eyes of these leading, “younger” Lutheran theologians, who by the time of the launch of the quarterly were the established voices of Lutheran theology. A short paper Bergendoff presented in April of 1946 had now become a book under the same title, *Christ as Authority*. This was reviewed in the first issue of the new quarterly by Gettysburg Seminary’s president, Abdel Ross Wentz, member of the editorial council, who liked it, and concluded his review by stating: “The editorial council of *The Lutheran Quarterly* considers itself fortunate in securing as its editor one who thinks with such originality and depth, who expresses himself so clearly and forcefully, and who writes so smoothly and attractively.”²⁴

A Collective Theological Voice

The first volume of the new *The Lutheran Quarterly* was sent out to all subscribers to previous journals. A new forum where a united

American Lutheran voice could begin to emerge had been created. In one book review, the new vigor of these American Lutheran writers received recognition. C.G. Carlfelt, professor of theology at Augustana Seminary and member of the editorial council, reviewed T.A. Kantonen's book, *Resurgence of the Gospel*. Carlfelt found a new and revealing way to refer to the improvement in theology represented both in the book under review, but supposedly also in the ascendant thinking within Lutheran circles represented in the new publication: "Today theology is becoming a masculine science, and theologians of the present are not surpassed in mental acumen by any other group."²⁵ There is a bit of status anxiety revealed in such a statement, but also a hopeful outlook for the potential impact of *The Lutheran Quarterly* since Carlfelt at least noted that theology, though a masculine science, was also a group project.

The collective voice of American Lutheran theologians came through in the new journal in such a way that no single "man" stood out. This cooperative spirit makes it difficult to identify a breakthrough for American Lutheran theology, and it also makes it hard to lift up distinctive elements and assign them to any one "system" or theology for American Lutheranism, at least at first, and this was the design. What does come through instead is the commitment of *The Lutheran Quarterly* to provide a forum, a public space where Lutheran theology and scholarship could be seen and heard and subjected to open debate. The aims of *The Lutheran Quarterly* were spelled out on the bottom of the table of contents in every issue. It is to be "a forum 1, for the discussion of Christian faith and life on the basis of the Lutheran confession, 2, for the application of the principles of the Lutheran Church to the changing problems of religion and society, 3, for the fostering of world Lutheranism, and 4, for the promotion of understanding between Lutherans and other Christians." It is interesting to note that discussions are to be based on "the Lutheran confession." Considerable discussion must have been behind the articulation of that 'confessional' basis. Six seminaries signed on to the work of the new quarterly. They were: Capital, Wartburg, Philadelphia, Gettysburg, Augustana, and Luther. Missouri was not in this mix, though the existence of the Contemporary Lutheran Theology Group that included Missouri leadership had provided

the important early platform for sharing theological ideas. The post-war years of exciting mutual discovery among American Lutherans required each church to relinquish much of their autonomy and control. *The Lutheran Quarterly* was an achievement made through some real sacrifice.

When the editorial policy of the journal is examined, the cooperative nature of the venture is even clearer; “contributions need to be frank and fair in their discussion of moot questions; free from controversial animus; and of real scholarly and practical value to the readers.”²⁶ This kind of open invitation was by no means unique in the annals of American theological discussion, but it is worth noting that the several distinct cultural voices of Lutheranism were here blending into a chorus, and this put each potential contributor on a new stage, with a new, as yet only imagined audience: a united Lutheran and American church. The applause, however, would have to wait a bit, while a few critical and somewhat jarring notes were struck. Before any constructive work could be done, it was important in good Lutheran style to thoroughly critique the present situation. “The New Crisis in American Lutheran Theology,” an article in the first volume of the new issue, served to thoroughly clear the ground. Charles Kegley, associate professor of religion and ethics, and dean of the Graduate School at Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary, Maywood, Illinois, had very little to say of a positive nature. Kegley announced that American Lutheran theology stood at a “crisis” point, and rehearsed the need for a contemporary theological response to historical criticism, a new appraisal of the nature of the church, and the limitations of human words about the Word, which he believed the two leading schools of thought among Protestants (liberalism and neo-orthodoxy) had to offer. Unfortunately, when asked what Lutheranism had done during the twentieth century, he surveyed the field and discovered that, “in the entire history of American Lutheranism there have been less than a dozen works which dealt with the structure and content of theology, and even these were based, usually directly, upon standard German or Scandinavian textbooks in dogmatics.” What he wished for had not yet appeared: “But as for the creation of a new system or the developing of an original standpoint or

terminology, in no sense has American Lutheranism shown any such creativity."²⁷

Because Kegley did not find anything standing, he did not actually violate the policy of the new quarterly not to attack the work of another Lutheran theologian, but that could hardly comfort readers. This was real invective. The most damning part of his assessment came in Kegley's prognosis for future theological contributions. He did not think anything was likely to come from professors at seminaries, for their work was characterized, he believed, by a "domination of the present by the past," and because their students were under such scrutiny by their ordination committees. The parochial nature of seminary education so limited the horizon of professors that, "if a theological revolution is in full swing throughout the world, these teachers would have little time in which to familiarize themselves with its issues, little pedagogical opportunity to interpret these to their undergraduate classes, and most certainly little hope of participating in the formation of its decisions."²⁸ Alas, to Kegley, it looked as if Lutheran professors were fated to sit on the sidelines if they did not find a way out of their closely guarded schools.

The frustrations of a director of graduate studies are easy to detect in this essay, but it is worth pointing out that his article described a real ambition, and was also bracing to read. It was also predictable. A mirror "crisis" for American Lutheran theology had also surfaced in the first volume of *The Augustana Quarterly*, in 1922. American Lutheran theological journals were themselves conceived, again, and again, as answers to such crises. In providing yet another forum for voicing the "oft repeated charge that American Lutheranism had produced no theology," *The Lutheran Quarterly*, for another generation, entered into the supposed void. The advent of this new publication, however, opened the discussion to a much broader audience than one church body. The culture of criticism, of indictment, of sparring, that may have been easily understood and even appreciated within the smaller circle of colleagues in one seminary family, did not play so well farther afield. Kegley did not have to wait long to hear a response to comments like: "by equipment and present obligation they (seminary professors) generally are rendered incompetent to do original and creative work."²⁹

The response came from a seminary professor at Northwestern Seminary, in the Twin Cities, James J. Raun, who wrote "Toward an American Lutheran Theology," for the last issue of the year in November, 1949. The longed-for theology will come, he wrote, for "Within the somewhat shifting walls of American Lutheranism there is today a goodly number of men who have been through a theological pilgrimage which is symbolic of what Lutheran theology in America is experiencing today."³⁰ American Lutheranism was not a static entity, and *The Lutheran Quarterly* was one of the signs that "walls are shifting." Kegley had advised that the smaller seminaries, in particular, where the faculty numbers would have to teach in fields well beyond their primary competence, would eventually give way, and churches would consolidate resources and personnel. Raun was less ruthless in his prescriptions, and more hopeful about the prospects, even in smaller places. He understood that these men were trying to teach in less than ideal circumstances, but, it was better to think of them as "doing an unsung, yet creative job" than to dismiss them as incompetent. Raun's notion was that an American Lutheran Theology would yet emerge from elements present in their current undeveloped form. Theology professors, he noted in the then fashionable language of life and growth, were working to "germinate and nurture what in some further day an American Augustine or Luther will synthesize into a collective (not systematized, we hope) expression of Lutheran theology, clothed in all the freshness, hopefulness, and democracy that are so typical of the American genius."³¹

Raun's portrayal of a future American Lutheran theology identified criteria that would make it "American." If it were fresh, hopeful, and democratic American theology would stand on its own. Raun admitted the need for a reorientation, but "American theologians should not simply echo any European school." Raun shared the ambivalence of American Lutherans who as yet had not articulated and owned their own theological voice, and had only recently become acquainted with Scandinavian Lutheran theology. He expected that Scandinavian models would have only a limited influence: "Even Lundensian theology which to this writer represents the best in Luther research and the new approach, still fails to shake

off the old world atmosphere and spirit of church-state-ism, and lacks the vitality and freshness characteristic of our new world.”³² Americans should follow Luther rather than Luther research to the future. The “spirit” of Luther could guide and orient American Lutherans, and this did not have to be further labeled as German, Swedish, or even American. What was needed was something universal, and this, to Raun and others going back to the essential beginning, ultimately meant a search for what was truly Christian. Typically American in his near invocation of original innocence, the labels, institutions, traditions, and ‘isms’ of every sort seemed to Raun to obstruct the fresh possibilities of “our new world.” What Raun believed would really push Lutheran theology forward was also typically American, drawing from its brilliance in organizational matters: a new American Lutheran Theology would emerge from a synthesis of a collective effort.

A collective effort, however, did actually have to take some form; it demanded not only organizational competence, but patience and also some content. *The Lutheran Quarterly* represented an achievement along those lines by creating room for collaboration and mutual encouragement. Later observers may have felt that the post-war generation of the 1950s lacked the creative spark needed to galvanize a new generation, and the lasting contributions of this generation of theologians will probably be remembered primarily for designing and building the structures for the Lutheran World Federation and for the World Council of Churches. Lutheran leaders, Seminary presidents, professors and college faculty from schools of all sizes were sent to work on far-flung projects and enlisted in the ecumenical work of international councils, dialogues, and federation projects. The wider “task” inspired them and subsequently brought even Lutheran church bodies together. American Lutherans were finally persuaded that ecumenical and inter-Lutheran work was God’s will for the churches. Thus, an American Lutheran theology or, more broadly, an American Lutheran approach to theology, was shaped through these efforts. As a collective effort, it sought to be genuinely Lutheran, rather than any one particular type of Lutheran. It also sought to convince American Lutherans that Lutheranism was an identity broader than simply “American.” This could be a model for

Swedish Lutherans, for German Lutherans, and for the particular passions of every age.

NOTES

1. The Augustana Synod was founded in 1860; its first congregation, in New Sweden, Iowa, organized in 1848. The 1948 centennial year was also the occasion for a change in name - from the Augustana Synod to the Augustana Lutheran Church.

2. Sven Gustaf Hägglund, "Livsreleaser inom svenska kyrkan," *The Augustana Quarterly* 1.1 (1922): 55-61.

3. S. G. Youngert, "Notes and Comments," *The Augustana Quarterly* 1.2 (1922): 188-9.

4. This and subsequent quotations in this paragraph come from Henry E Jacobs, book review of *Christian Dogmatics and Notes on the History of Dogma*, by Conrad Emil Lindberg, *Lutheran Church Review*, 41.3 (1922): 285-6.

5. This episode is discussed in the recent history of the Synod, *The Augustana Story*, and won't be rehearsed here, except to indicate that Olson understood the contending parties in the synod, and had reason to suspect the designs of those who promoted progressive causes within the synod. This makes his open minded approach to new theological developments signs of a genuine conviction.

6. Oscar N. Olson, "The Position of the Church in the Present World Situation," *The Augustana Quarterly*, 14.1 (1935): 44.

7. This and the following two quotations are from Raymond Stamm to Otto Reimherr, August 29, 1945. Stamm papers, Seminary Archives, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.

8. Wentz to Stamm, April 7, 1948. Wentz presidential papers, correspondence with Raymond Stamm, Seminary Archives, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.

9. N. J. Gould Wickey papers, Convocation of Theology Professors file, Special Collections, the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.

10. Wentz to Stamm, Nov. 1, 1947 Wentz presidential papers, Seminary Archives, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.

11. Raymond Stamm, "Faith, Hope and Love, the Instruments of Christian Knowledge," unpublished address to "Fellow-Workers in the Laboratory of Life." A.R. Wentz presidents file, Seminary Archives, Raymond Stamm correspondence file, Undated, filed between Sept 9 and November 1945.

12. Carl Rasmussen Papers, interview with John Kiehn, Bethesda Boghandel, June 7, 1946. Rasmussen papers, Box 12, Seminary archives, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.

13. Notes from interview with Soe, June 12, 1946. Rasmussen papers, *ibid*.

14. Carl Rasmussen papers, box 13, file "Sweden," Seminary archives, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. Emphasis in the original.

15. Carl Rasmussen, "The Religious Situation in Post War Scandinavia," manuscript copy, Rasmussen papers, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, 3.

16. *Ibid*.

17. Anders Nygren, ed., *This is the Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952) book-flap text.

18. This writer has not found the official minutes of the decisive meeting in March in the Gettysburg seminary archives Wentz files, or in the National Lutheran Council files at the ELCA archives. There is a reference to an upcoming March 27th, Pittsburgh meeting to discuss merger of the journals in a letter Wentz wrote to Conrad Bergendoff on March 9, 1948, [Bergendoff responded that he could not attend] and references to a Pittsburgh meeting is also in correspondence between A.R. Wentz and Raymond Stamm, editor of the *Lutheran Church Quarterly*. Wentz and Bergendoff correspondence, Wentz personal papers, Box 37. For correspondence with Stamm, Wentz presidential papers, Raymond Stamm file, Seminary Archives, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.

19. Ibid.

20. Mattson's papers are an otherwise complete record of his transition to the seminary from Hartford, CT where he had been president of the New England Conference. They include for instance the architect's drawings of the new home that had to be built on the campus and letters arranging for instruction of courses in the fall.

21. It was a pan-Lutheran group, by invitation only, that eventually received support from the Lutheran Lay Men until it dissolved because the president of the LLM was a member of the Masons, and did not appreciate the reservations of the Missourians. Information about funding and tensions related to Masonic membership are revealed in the papers of Gould Wickey, Special Collections, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. Note that the Contemporary Theology Group and the Convocation of Theological Professors are different groups, see above, note 9.

22. There are no announcements of the new quarterly in *The Augustana Quarterly* during 1948, and Oscar Olson's correspondence contains only three letters mentioning *The Lutheran Quarterly*, and the end of Olson's editorship, from authors submitting articles who learned after the fact that the quarterly was folding. Oscar Olson papers, ELCA archives, correspondence November 1948.

23. C.J. Sodergren to Oscar N Olson, November 23, 1948. Olson papers, ELCA archives.

24. Abdel Ross Wentz, review of *Christ As Authority*, by Conrad Bergendoff, *Lutheran Quarterly*, 1.2 (1949): 122.

25. C.G. Carlfelt, review of *Resurgence of the Gospel*, by T.A. Kantonen, *ibid.*

26. From the masthead of the *The Lutheran Quarterly*, 1.2 (1949): 122.

27. Charles Kegley, "The New Crisis in American Lutheran Theology," *The Lutheran Quarterly*, 1.1 (1949): 35.

28. *Ibid.*, 37.

29. *Ibid.*

30. James J. Raun, "Toward an American Lutheran Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1.4 (1949): 425.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*, 429.