

The Global Impact of Emmy Evald and the Women's Missionary Society

Lennart Johnsson

Copyright © 2006

Women have from the origins of the human race been very significant, but often they as an “invisible force” have not received their due. One of them is Emmy Evald, as well as the women in the originally Swedish association called *Kvinnornas Hem- och Hednamissions-Förening af Augustana-Synoden* (*The Women's Home and Foreign Missions Society of the Augustana Synod*), which later was named the *Women's Missionary Society*.¹ The society still exists, although both the original Swedish and American names have disappeared. After various changes and mergers through history its work is conducted nowadays by *Women of the ELCA*.

We know quite a bit about the Augustana Synod,² about the origin of the name, its connection with the *Confessio Augustana*, just as we know the significance of the year 1593 for the Swedish Reformation and its consequences. We also know a lot about the men, especially

¹ In this article the only abbreviation will be *WMS*.

² See, e.g., Emil Adalberth, *Augustanasynoden och några nybyggarepräster i Svenska evangelisklutherska församlingarna i Amerika. Några erinringar med anledning av Augustanasynodens 100-årsjubileum, 1960; After Seventy-Five Years 1860-1935. A Jubilee Publication*, Rock Island, Ill., 1935; G. Everett Arden, *Augustana Heritage: A History of the Augustana Lutheran Church*, Rock Island, Ill., 1963; *The Augustana Heritage: Recollections, Perspectives, and Prospects*, eds: Arland J. Hultgren and Vance L. Eckstrom, Chicago, Ill., 1999; *The Augustana Synod. A Brief History of its History 1860-1920*, Rock Island, Ill., 1910; Erik Norelius, *De svenska lutherska församlingarna och svenskarnas historia i Amerika*, Rock Island, Ill., 1916; Oscar N. Olson, *The Augustana Lutheran Church in America, 1860-1910: The Formative Period*, Rock Island, Ill., 1956; George M. Stephenson, *Founding of the Augustana Synod 1850-1860*, Minneapolis 1927; George M. Stephenson, *The Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration: A Study of Immigrant Churches*, Minneapolis 1932; Hugo Söderström, *Confessions and Cooperation: The Policy of the Augustana Synod in Confessional Matters and the Synod's Relations with Other Churches up to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, Lund 1973, et al.

the clergy, in the Augustana Synod, their role and importance in church and society, not least in pioneer America, but also in other parts of the world.³

We can exemplify by comparing what we know of Emmy Evald's father, the well-known minister, Erland Carlsson, Pastor of the Immanuel Congregation in Chicago, Illinois, with what we know of her mother Eva,⁴ who according to her daughter deserved to be called the "mother of immigrants." Emmy writes:

No Swedish clergyman's wife in all America or Sweden has had such an important calling or carried out such a wonderful work with her many-faceted activities, as mother did. She had been richly endowed by God with uncommon physical and mental powers, and she needed them.⁵

³ See, e.g., Conrad Bergendoff, *Augustana Ministerium: A Study of the Careers of the 2,504 Pastors of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Synod/Church 1850-1962*, 1980; Occar Fritiof Ander, T. N. Hasselquist: *The Career and Influence of a Swedish-American Clergyman, Journalist, and Educator*, Rock Island, Ill., 1931; Sten Carlsson, "Augustana Lutheran Pastors in the Church of Sweden," *Swedish American Historical Quarterly*, 35, 1984; Emory Lindquist, *Shepherd of an Immigrant People: The Story of Erland Carlsson*, Augustana Historical Society, Rock Island, Ill., 1978; Sam Rönnegård, *Lars Paul Esbjörn och Augustana-synodens uppkomst*, Stockholm, 1949; Teol. Doktor Carl A. Evald: *Hans lefnad och lifsgärning, tecknade af skol- och studiekamrater, ämbetsbröder, församlingsbor och andra vänner. Minnesskrift. Redigerad och utgifven af Emmy Carlsson-Evald*, Chicago, Ill., 1910, et al.

⁴ Eva Charlotta Andersson, born 1829 in Timmele, Bohuslän, Västergötland. She emigrated with her family to America in 1851. On the 25th of May 1855 she married Erland Carlsson. The couple had nine children according to Bergendoff in *Augustana Ministerium*; eight children according to Oscar Olson, *The Augustana Lutheran Church in America Pioneer Period 1846 to 1860* (Rock Island, Ill., 1950), p. 178. Eva Carlsson died in her daughter Emmy's home in Chicago, Ill., in 1911.

⁵ See Erland Carlsson Papers, 1844-1893, microfilm, Swenson Center, Rock Island, Ill. See also C. A. Swensson and L. G. Abrahamson, *Jubelalbum Augustana-Synoden, Augustanasynodens församlingar*, National Publishing Company, Chicago, Ill., 1893, p. 46; Nils Forsander, *Lifsbilder ur Augustana-Synodens historian Första delen*, Rock Island, Ill., 1915, p. 105.

I maintain that it's high time we focus on the significance of the women, not least of those in the Augustana Synod and *ELCA*, and to try to indicate the power and spirituality which was the basis of their impact.

Emmy Evald

In connection with Emmy Evald's 80th birthday in 1937 *The Lutheran Companion* wrote, "Her influence and achievements have made her America's most outstanding woman of Swedish descent."⁶

Emmy Evald is a name that many still know of, not least in Augustana contexts. She has also been a well-known person in Sweden, but today she and the *WMS* that she founded are known by only a few. I hope, however, that this will change. She and the *WMS* deserve a much better fate than to end up in oblivion.

She was born in September 1857 in Geneva, Illinois, and died in Chicago, Illinois, in December 1946, almost 90 years old. Between 1892 and 1935 she was the leader and president of the *WMS*. In 1906 she helped to start the newspaper *Missions-Tidning (MT)*. It was to become an important instrument for the women's association in reaching out and informing readers about its activities. The newspaper was published in Swedish during the first years, then later both in Swedish and English. It was called in English *Mission Tidings*, and also had a global impact. She contributed on a regular basis to the newspaper until 1935. She wrote hundreds of articles, especially in the sections entitled "Syskonkretsen" (Siblings) and "Among Ourselves," which I hope in the future to be able to investigate and analyze.

⁶ *The Lutheran Companion*, Sept 16, 1937. "Mrs Evald....is undeniably the best-known woman in Swedish America", (anon.), see Evald Papers, PA 25, Box 1, Folder 2, Biographical Information on Emmy Evald 1920-1946, ELCA Archives, Chicago, Ill.; see also the newspaper *Svea* 13/1 1932.

In 1922 Emmy Ewald was awarded the Vasa Order by King Gustav V, and in 1932, over 70 years ago, *The Lutheran Companion* wrote about her:

A few years ago a Swedish paper in Sweden called ‘Allsvensk Samling’ asked its readers to answer the following question, ‘Which are the five greatest and best known Swedes now living in other lands?’ The result of the vote taken was that Mrs. Emmy Ewald of Chicago was given the first place.⁷

She had a vision. It was born and nurtured in her childhood vicarage milieu. In my research I have found other important influences on Ewald and consequently on *WMS*, for instance from Swedish revival history (Peter Fjellstedt, Carl Olof Rosenius, etc.), and perhaps not least from her schooling in Sweden at Fryxellska flickskolan (Fryxeliska Girls’ School) in Rostad, Kalmar, between 1870 and 1874, under the dynamic and charismatic teacher Cecilia Fryxell. It was said to be the finest girls’ school in Scandinavia. The years in Kalmar, where she also was confirmed together with her sister, and the so-called “Rostad-andan” (“Rostad spirit”),⁸ undoubtedly played a major role in her development and later career. Her studies at Rockford College, Illinois, were also to be of significance for her. Emmy Ewald was during her time at Rockford a classmate with the well-known Jane Addams (1860-1935). The latter was one of the leaders of the American suffrage movement and peace movement, and known for her social work in Chicago, Illinois. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931.

Emmy Ewald was conscious of the possibilities of women. She wrote, “Remember that the work of our society is carried out by, through, for women.”⁹ Women were thus to be the

⁷ *Lutheran Companion*, May 28, 1932, p. 682.

⁸ It can be noted that Rostad played a role in more ways than one, namely, also in the choice of name for Eva and Erland Carlsson’s home in Lindsborg, Kansas.

⁹ Emmy Ewald, “Presidentens årsberättelse”, *MT*, August 1926, No. 2, p. 99.

focus. She herself wanted to be an example for other women in this work. In 1925, almost 68 years old, she writes:

October and November have been very busy months for me. In the Minnesota Conference I visited 16 churches, spoke 21 times and slept in eleven different houses. In the Superior Conference I spoke 28 times in 23 different churches....I slept in 20 different homes. That is going some, it was quite a strenuous trip.¹⁰

When she was almost 70, in 1926-27, she made a world tour and visited the Holy Land, China, India, and several European countries, in order to see how the work of the *WMS* was being conducted and progressing in the field, to show that it had a global impact. She looked upon herself as “a tool in my Master’s service.” She was quick to use another tool, the *WMS* and its organ *Missions Tidning*, which conjointly came to have a global impact.

A Short Historical Background to the *WMS*

It could be interesting to consider briefly the context out of which the *WMS* grew. It can be noted that at the time the *WMS* was founded in 1892 there were already a number of different women’s circles, etc., in America, just as in other parts of the world.¹¹ So why found another society? Was it power, money, competition, or a genuine and burning love of God coupled to love of people which was the reason for the *WMS* and its eventual global impact?

It’s not easy to give a simple answer to this question. There are naturally many different aspects and factors to be taken into account regarding the origin and development of the *WMS*. One basis for the women’s society can be found in the Augustana Synod itself. For mission was

¹⁰ Emmy Evald, “Among Ourselves”, *MT*, Dec 1925, No. 7, p. 9.

¹¹ Emmy Evald mentions in one place the oldest “Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society.” It was organized in London in 1834. Emmy Evald, “Remember - How God Led Us Fifty Years”, *These Fifty Years, 1892-1942*, Women’s Missionary Society of Augustana Synod, Chicago, Ill., 1942, p. 5.

in many ways the reason, aim, and characteristic feature of the work of the Augustana Synod and thereby of the “pilgrim fathers.” The presupposition of mission in a wide sense lay in the spiritual life. Erik Norelius writes:

The different types of missionary activity that have been used in the synod are proof of the existence of spiritual life within it, whether it is a question of home missions, immigrant missions, foreign missions or inner mission.¹²

Home missions also forms an important part, as is clear,

All our congregations owe their existence to such activity, that is through gathering as many of our Lutheran compatriots as have voluntarily joined together in evangelical Lutheran congregations.¹³

It is apparent that many felt a calling and a divine commission to “go out into the whole world,” both at home in America and in other parts of the world. The task was comprehensive. It was not just a question of arranging services of worship and spiritual activities but of much more; for example, to initiate and organize schools, to train clergy, to organize medical care, build churches, schools, hospitals, orphanages, etc.

For the Augustana Synod home missions was not a question of a sort of proselytism, which was claimed to be proven by the fact that the majority of immigrants from Sweden that were approached were nominal Lutherans, even if they were “very bad Lutherans or Christians,” as it was said.¹⁴ The church, it was said, only wanted to offer advice and help, not least of a practical kind, if it was wanted.¹⁵ As far as the urban mission,¹⁶ which is a form of home

¹² E. Norelius, *De Svenska lutherska församlingarnas*, 2.281. Norelius refers, for an expert treatment of this subject, to Dr. P. J. Brodines article in the special book for the jubilee meeting, *Minnesskrif, [s.a.]*.

¹³ Ibid. Note the term “voluntarily.”

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 282.

¹⁵ Ibid.

missions, is concerned, the motivation was put in the following terms: “In these times of apostasy such an activity is of great assistance to the church, especially in the big cities, where the powers of evil are concentrated.”¹⁷

Another vital branch of the missions was of course the so-called mission to the heathens, and in this case the church “knows” that people in the heathen world sit in “the shadow of death and darkness.”¹⁸ Countries that from an early date were the object of the heathen missions of the Augustana Synod were India, China, and Puerto Rico in the West Indies.

An aspect that can easily be forgotten but which was of central importance from the start of the Augustana Synod’s activities, and which through the years became an increasingly significant part of mission for the Synod and for *WMS*, to reach out with the good news to compatriots and others, was of course information services. This was in the form of publication of newspapers and books. Here I only need to mention, in addition to the already mentioned organ of the *WMS*, *Missions-Tidning*, the Augustana Book Concern in Rock Island, Illinois. All of the above is thus an important background and context for the origin and development of the *WMS*.

The Women’s Missionary Society

Emmy Evaid writes in a proposal, seemingly for a meeting of the *WMS* (the date is not known):

¹⁶ Urban missions were built up in amongst other places Chicago, Ill., where it consisted of no less than eight different activities: support and labour office, emergency mission, creche, street and bar mission, prison mission, hospital mission, hospice, and immigrant mission. Ibid. p. 283.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Norelius writes: “It would be opposed to the nature of the spiritual life and the true faith, if the people that possesses the pure word of God and has tasted and seen how good the Lord is, should settle down and not give a thought to or feel sympathy for those who sit in the shadow of death and darkness around the world.” E. Norelius, *De Svenska lutherska församlingarnas*, 2.282.

‘God the Lord God planted a garden’ - Gen. 2-8. It was in the garden where woman met Christ 1st. after the resurrection. It was in the garden when a woman was commissioned to be the first person to proclaim the tidings of the resurrection. ‘Go, tell’ was the Lord’s first command to woman. ‘Woman’ was the first word uttered by the resurrected Saviour. ‘Woman, why art thou weeping.’¹⁹

Not least of all, women were involved in the different missionary activities mentioned above, through prayer and intercession, fund-raising and practical work. Some of these women, with Emmy Evald in the forefront, felt at the end of 19th century that even more could be done. They did at least have the freedom to get involved, for freedom, especially freedom of religion, was an important reality in the so-called pioneer country. This was different in comparison with the situation in Sweden with its state church. An individual was not forced to belong to a church, but joined voluntarily.²⁰

The women’s society that Emmy Evald initiated started with a coffee gathering and a handful of women discussing and planning what was to become *Kvinnornas Hem- och Hednamissions-förening af Augustana-Synoden*, later called the *Women’s Missionary Society*, WMS. They called a first meeting in 1892 in Lindsborg, Kansas, which about 50 women attended. It was held in connection with the Augustana Synod’s conference and annual general meeting, i.e., the men’s.

¹⁹ Evald Papers, PA 25, Box 1, Folder 5, Notes and Writings, ELCA Archives, Chicago, IL.

²⁰ An ambivalent attitude to the Church of Sweden can be detected. Whilst there was criticism, for example, of compulsory membership and the lack of choice, there was also dependence and fascination. It was considered the “mother church.” Almost half a century after Esbjörn, Hasselquist, and Carlsson had left Sweden, the church in Sweden is called the mother church: “It was a heartfelt joy for Dr. Carlsson’s many friends to meet him in 1893 at the great jubilee to commemorate the Uppsala Meeting, and he also was happy to see them again and revisit his school, and to meet with the representative of the mother church, the reverent bishop, K. H. G. von Schéele.” Nils Forsander, *Lifsbilder ur Augustana-Synodens historian*, p. 126.

The law of the mustard seed seems to have applied. The society grew from just a few women with a few dimes in their pockets to at one period a membership of almost 70,000 with a budget of millions of dollars and with great influence on church and society, not just in America, but all around the world. Emmy Evald was to become their leader and president for over four decades. In 1926 we can read:

One of the main factors in promoting missionary activity in the Augustana Synod is the Women's Missionary Society, which was organized in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Carl Swenson at Lindsborg, Kan., on June 6, 1892. This meeting was brought about through the deep interest, energy and foresight of Mrs. Emmy Evald. She was elected president at the organization meeting and has remained the efficient executive and prime mover in all the undertakings of the society to the present day. The society has spread over the entire United States and into Canada. It is made up of well-organized branches, which include thirteen conference societies and one from each synodical mission district. At the first meeting there were about fifty women present. Today the total membership is 61,052. Of this number 20,921 are juniors. Besides contributing large sums every year to different enterprises in the home field of the synod, the society has done great work in the foreign field.²¹

Emmy Evald's motto was "Go tell!" This was one of the driving forces for her and the WMS. The vision that was to be put into concrete practice came to expression in very different activities in different parts of the world and to exert a global impact. The basis of the vision and activity was not found in the Augsburg Confession or any official decision, but in the Word of God. What objection could the men have with that sort of argument? We have thus a woman

²¹ *Our Church Abroad: The Foreign Missions of the Lutheran Church in America*, ed. George Drach, Rock Island, Ill., 1926, p. 178f.

who with decisiveness brings women to the fore in the patriarchal world of that time. Emmy Ewald is well aware that these female resources have not been used properly earlier in the church and the Augustana Synod. A change is needed.

It is, however, not only a woman who advocates women and makes an impact both at home in America and worldwide, even in male dominated areas, but Emmy Ewald turns to a man for confirmation, support and encouragement for herself, the women, the society, and its activities. It's not an ordinary man, but the Lord and Savior that these women confessed and believed in, the man from Nazareth, who is the resurrected Savior.

In the above quotation there are at least three keys to understanding the global impact that came to characterize Ewald and her *WMS*. Firstly, that it is naturally about women. Secondly, that they precisely as women have received a seemingly special commission. Thirdly, that they are to obey the command "Go tell!" which means going out into the world "to proclaim the glad tidings, the good news."

The well-known words from the so-called missionary commission in Matthew 28:18 ff. have as a result of Ewald's choice of Bible quotations and interpretative claims a secondary importance. There is a more precise and pointed identification of the receiver of the divine commission to "Go tell!" It is women before men who receive the task, and thereby have a special obligation, not only to think and talk about God's will, but above all to do it.

Emmy Ewald succeeds, with a conscious choice and decision, in slowly but surely bringing women to the fore in different ways in a hierarchical, male-dominated world. Through her work and the *WMS* she was to realize a number of projects both at home and out in the heathen world, and to construct many buildings for various purposes in America, India, China,

Africa, and the Holy Land. An important instrument in this was the earlier mentioned newspaper *Missions-Tidning*, which for a time had 25,000 subscribers.

Spirituality - The Driving Force of the Global Impact

I would claim that there is a driving force in every person. The question is what it is and what implications and consequences it has.

There is thus a *spiritus, dynamis*, and driving force, not just in a theoretical or spiritual sense, but also and perhaps above all in a practical way, with significance for people's lives. We find precisely this in the lives of Emmy Evald and the *WMS*.

The concept of spirituality has become fashionable, but much debated. It can be made to mean almost anything at all. I start though from the following definition:

Spirituality is about faith—in this instance the Christian faith—but not as a theoretical system of teachings, but as something that is lived and practiced in the Christian community and in particular historical and social situations. Research into the history of spirituality attempts to discover patterns, theological convictions and mentalities that form the ways of living the Christian life of individuals, groups and periods, and which are the driving force in their religious praxis.²²

This is a broader definition of religion, in which even religious practice is included, which can also, for example, mean social involvement.

²² “Svensk Spiritualitet. Tio studier av förhållandet tro—kyrka—praxis,” ed. Alf Härdelin, *Tro & Tanke* 1994:1-2. See also Alf Härdelin, “Spiritualitet—ny deldisciplin eller kyrkovetenskapligt totalperspektiv,” *STK 62 (1986)*; *Kyrkans liv: Introduktion till kyrkovelenskapen*, ed. Stephan Borgehammar, Verbum, Stockholm, 2001; see further Karl A. Olsson, *By One Spirit*, Covenant Press, Chicago, Ill., 1962; George Hall, “The Missionary Spirit in the Augustana Church,” *Augustana Historical Society*, Publication No. 32, Rock Island, 111, 1985, et al.

I maintain that spirituality can also be about migration in a broad sense, that is, the migration of thoughts and ideas. An interesting publication in this context that I would refer to is *The Immigration of Ideas*, which treats of the significance of spirituality. I quote: “the initial spark that ignited the fires of revival was the proclamation of the doctrine of justification by faith,” and it also points out that there is a difference between “having an opinion based on reasonable inference (belief that) and having a conviction based on sensible perception (belief in).”²³

Through above all Emmy Evald’s initiative and spirituality she was able to start one project after the other. A lively description of her indicates:

Here comes a vivacious little woman, her chin lifted, her eyes raised forward and upward as though entranced by a vision splendid. With lively step and gesture she beacons and invites followers. Oh, yes, we recognize our energetic, enthusiastic, indefatigable president, Mrs. Emmy Evald, who has served in that capacity these forty years.²⁴

Emmy Evald herself writes in 1942 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the *WMS*:

For 73 years I have been interested in missions; having begun my work for India at the age of 12. In 1888 I organized in the Immanuel church, Chicago, a Women’s Missionary Society with two hundred members and two Junior Societies with one

²³ *The Immigration of Ideas: Studies in the North Atlantic Community: Essays Presented to O. Fritiof Ander*, ed. J. Iverne Dowie and J. Thomas Tredway, Augustana Historical Society, Publication No. 21, Rock Island, Ill., 1968.

²⁴ “Paper” from Doris Hedeem Spong, Lindsborg, Kansas, 22/6 2002, in the speaker’s possession. See also Doris Hedeem Spong, “Led by the Spirit: The Women’s Missionary Society and the Augustana Lutheran Church Women,” *The Augustana Heritage: Recollections, Perspectives, and Prospects*, ed. A. Hultgren and V. Eckstrom, 252-257. I had the privilege at *Augustana Heritage Association Gathering 2002*, June 21-23, Bethany College Lindsborg, Kansas, of meeting Doris Hedeem Spong and hundreds of others who have been active in the Augustana Synod and the *WMS*. Doris Hedeem Spong was president of the *WMS* for a number of years.

hundred eighty members... These, with my big Bible class, 1882, were the first societies that joined the Women's Missionary Society of the Augustana Synod in 1892.²⁵

Emmy Evald writes that when God's power comes from on high, then we think God's thoughts and do God's Will.²⁶ Theory and praxis, word and deed are one.

In Emmy Evald we find a spirituality that comes from Christian faith. It is the theoretical starting point that has practical consequences. Evald was to inspire and influence. She is fearless and even dares to challenge the men. An example of this is the so-called Women's Building at Augustana College, Rock Island, nowadays called (ironically) *The Carlsson Building* after her father. According to Emmy men are the problem! They are moreover given help and support by the denominational newspaper *Augustana*. She writes about this problem and the building (observe, in her "own" newspaper *Missions-Tidning*):

We cannot but be sorry that our denomination's newspaper *Augustana* can so misrepresent the real state of affairs by blaming the Women's Mission Board for the indefensible delay with the women's building at Augustana College....Who is to blame? Adam's sons, who from of old wanted to put all the blame on Eve's daughters, but remember that it's not one person's fault if two fight. When Dr Abrahamson attacks us so inconsiderately, we must defend ourselves, but we are sorry about this battle in

²⁵ Emmy Evald, "Remember—How God Led Us Fifty Years," *These Fifty Years, 1892-1942*, Women's Missionary Society of Augustana Synod, Chicago, Ill., 1942, p. 5.

²⁶ She writes: "Women's strength was wasted for many years in our Augustana Synod until the dynamo of the Women's Missionary Society was placed at the feet of the Master. Through the power of God from on high we think God's thoughts, do God's will." "Ordf:s årsberättelse" [E. Evald], *MT*, Juli 1935, No. 1. p. 49.

printer's ink in our newspapers. This is not how it should be. God preserve us from such internal conflicts.²⁷

Emmy Evald thinks of the future and makes lively challenges. She herself had her own examples and ideals. In her own words, "The best leader is one who is not at all afraid of being criticized, and is not easily hurt. A person who does nothing is never criticized."²⁸ She sees the biblical Hanna, who is willing to pray, work, serve, and dare to do God's will as an example:

Hanna was a leader among God's people....Leaders are not always the most talented, oh no, they are the ones who like Hanna are willing to pray, to work, to serve, to sacrifice and to dare to do God's will....The powerful and willing leader is the one who says: 'Come, let's do it'. Such persons believe in themselves, in the thing they are trying to do, and in their colleagues, and they become excellent leaders. The best leader is the one who is not at all afraid of being criticized, and is not easily hurt. A person who does nothing is never criticized.²⁹

Uma Bersell, a close friend of Emmy and Carl Evald (Emmy's husband was a pastor in the Augustana Synod) claims that a born-again person, that is someone who lives a spiritual life in close union with God, cannot but be missionary.³⁰

Spirituality Means: "Go, tell!"

That *dynamis*, power, "struck" Emmy Evald and was passed on, primarily in and through the *WMS*, is evident. The vocation was part-time or until retirement. The 77-year old Emmy writes in 1935 in *Missions-Tidning*:

²⁷ Emmy Evald, "Syskonkretsen," *MT*, June 1926, No. 1, p. 35.

²⁸ "Presidentens rapport" [Emmy Evald), *MT*, Aug 1928, No. 2, p. 99.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 98f.

³⁰ Uma Bersell, "Doktor Carl A. Evald såsom vän och befrämjare af missionen," *Minnesskrift*, 1910, p. 76.

See how I retired—not from work: No, I did not refuse to be re-elected as the Women’s Missionary Society president on account of my high age; it was for other reasons. I do not realize that I will be seventy-eight years of age in September, full of vigor, health and strength—God’s wonderful gifts. The last four years have been the most strenuous years of my life. I am not the worse for it, though I wish it had been more harmonious and congenial with some members of the Chicago Board.

She continues: “It will give me great pleasure if the Women’s Missionary Society will keep me busy....”³¹

She mentions that she does promise not only to supervise the New York Lutheran Home for Women, which has been a great blessing to three thousand three hundred girls in four years, but also to remain as a member of the Men’s Mission Board for the sake of the China Hospital in Hsuechang, Honan.

Once more in her old age she gives expression to what the commission “Go, tell!” means, with its concrete implications:

Since I organized the W. M. S. in the year 1892 and as president have for forty-three years been keeping up its work by grace and strength of the Lord. I praise and thank God for this wonderful opportunity in my life to have served the mission cause and obeying the resurrected Saviour’s challenge, so dear to me, ‘Go, tell.’ All is done to the Lord’s glory by His guidance and help. It is overwhelming to acknowledge the blessing from on high; the sixty-three buildings built during these forty-three years. It is a marvelous miracle performed by our Master, using you and me as His tools, as His servants. What an honour to help Him with these

³¹ Emmy Evald, “Among Ourselves,” *MT*, July 1935, No. 1, pp. 28f.

miracles!....The work now is to sustain and maintain these ‘miracle buildings’ of the Lord, which I have stressed time upon time. I am greatly thankful to all the dear W. M. S. members that have stood by me so loyally and so faithfully, co-operating for the Master’s cause. None of us will ever regret that our lives have been used for our Master’s service.³²

Conclusion

I have tried to point to women, and especially to Emmy Evald and the *WMS*, as active agents, innovators, and entrepreneurs, their significance and function in and for the life of the church in a broad sense, as a consequence of their spirituality, how they have contributed to the development of church and society at various levels in a multicultural America. We discover heroic female contributions to philanthropic activity in general, with spiritual support and social help to the needy, an activity that still continues in and through the *Women of the ELCA* today. Women point to a hope, a light for the world, despite everything that above all we men mess up in our world.

Lennart Johnsson is senior lecturer and head of Religious Studies at Växjö University, Sweden. He has studied at the University of Uppsala, where he has written dissertations in Studies in Faiths and Ideologies, and Ecclesiology. He has taught at the University of Uppsala and the Johannelund School of Theology, has been a university chaplain in Uppsala, and served parishes in Stockholm and Wederslöv, Småland.

³² Ibid., p. 28.