

The Lutheran Bible Institute and the Augustana Synod

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How the Lutheran Bible Institute (LBI) movement and its school fit into the history of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church was unclear in 1962. Seminary professor G. Everett Arden had determined to include in his definitive history of Augustana a positive assessment of LBI as one of several “expressions of a growing sense of community in the Augustana Church” in “that it has represented a co-operative endeavor with other Lutherans as an evidence of the spirit of Lutheran community.”¹ But Augustana secretary, D. Verner Swanson, reviewing Arden’s manuscript, questioned whether LBI “is primarily expressive of Lutheran Community [*sic*] at all.” Instead, he saw LBI, negatively, “as a reaction of fundamentalism against liberalism in views of the Bible,” while even perhaps positively as “a resurgence of interest in Bible teaching in the Church, and the participation of the laity in the witness of the Church.”²

The truth lays in both appraisals. This essay will illustrate how the church and school stood in relationship over the decade that followed its founding by the Augustana Synod in 1918. Whether perceived positively by some or negatively by others, LBI saw itself as serving as a source of renewal within Augustana, while remaining independent of it.

The Lutheran Bible Institute

The LBI in Minnesota grew rapidly during its first decade of existence. At the opening of its tenth academic year 1928–29, over a hundred students traveled St. Paul, Minnesota.³ Most lived in and attended classes in the cramped former Lutheran seminary building midway between St. Paul and Minneapolis. A year later, on October 13, 1929, the students, faculty, and staff dedicated a spacious three-story building on the corner of Portland Avenue South at East 17th Street in Minneapolis.⁴

As in every previous academic year, the majority of students were single, young adult women. Only 7 of the 37 who graduated at the end of the spring term were men.⁵ Most were Midwesterners, but a substantial number came from the East and West Coasts and from Canada. Not included among the graduates, however, were those men who were only able to attend sporadically, traveling from their farms throughout the Upper Midwest to for short-term classes taught in the winter. In contrast, women, especially those in search of work, may have been more able to relocate from farms to urban areas like the Twin Cities, and were more likely to attend full academic terms.

Over the previous decade, by the end of the spring term in 1927, 253 men and 530 women had enrolled in LBI.⁶ Those who attended classes for one year, whether in consecutive terms of ten weeks or in terms over successive years, received a certificate for their studies. Those completing two years received a diploma. These day-school students attended classes in three, ten-week terms—October through December, January through March, and March through May. Others, such as missionaries on furlough or pastors, attended classes whenever they were able.

LBI students were required to be at least eighteen years of age upon enrollment, but very few of them had previously attended college. Many from rural areas had not even attended high school. Perhaps a few from urban areas had attended a church academy with the intention of continuing their study in a church college. The founders of the LBI movement had intended that such students would study the Bible full time in their school before going on to college.

Monday through Friday during each week in a term, those who took the two-year residential course followed a rigorous schedule that began at 6:30 A.M. and continued through 10:30 P.M. In the afternoons and evenings, two hours of study in preparation were required for at least ten of the fifteen hours of courses per week, taken in the mornings. Included within this routine were many times for corporate worship and prayer.

Along with this theoretical instruction in the classroom was opportunity for practical experience in community service. During

the week, students trained for various forms of gospel outreach. On weekends and several periods throughout the year when classes were not in session, students went to hospitals, jails, nursing homes, orphanages, rescue missions, and work houses, to visit and counsel, lead Bible studies, and worship, as well as to assist with social services. Students also assisted Lutheran pastors by teaching Sunday school and Bible classes, as well as by teaching in church day schools, leading activities for youth, and particularly by canvassing neighborhoods in outreach to the un-churched.

The founders of the LBI movement recognized that it would not be enough to operate a day school which few could attend. Many, perhaps most, had to work during the day to make a living. To reach every student, LBI personnel provided additional programs. Many women and men who were not able to take classes full time during the day were able to take courses while on vacation in the summer or in their own church buildings on evenings and weekends.

In August 1928, just before the fall term began, over a thousand people took part in one of the five weeks of the vacation Bible School. This was held at Maple Hill Farm, a resort on the shore of Lake Independence in Maple Plain, Minnesota. Faculty of the day school offered Bible courses each year, while they taught courses in Lutheran doctrine and teaching methods on alternate years. By 1929, so many working single young adults reserved their places in this popular program that it was difficult to accommodate married couples and families on the spacious grounds of the resort.

Shortly after 1929, the LBI began to reach thousands more through its correspondence courses by mail and through its radio ministry throughout the Upper Midwest. For the prior ten years (since its founding), faculty members traveled each week to church facilities throughout the Twin Cities to teach courses on the Bible. Typically, they taught these courses on weekday evenings, and at the initiative of the congregation's pastor. It was estimated that from 50 to 500 adults attended these classes each week. Along with these courses, LBI faculty regularly supplied pulpits and altars in worship services on Sundays, serving congregations of the Lutheran church body to which each belonged. Probably many more Lutheran members who lived outside the Twin Cities heard LBI faculty teach and preach in

one-time visits to their congregations to conduct Bible classes from Friday evenings through Sunday mornings.

Far from the Twin Cities, throughout North America, LBI faculty regularly conducted regular Bible Conferences, lasting one to two days each. Over the entire calendar year, they also traveled and spoke to Lutheran pastors' conferences, youth conventions, and Sunday school teachers' conferences. On every available occasion, they spoke on Lutheran church college and seminary campuses. Whenever possible—as often as invited—they spoke at the regional conventions of their respective Lutheran church bodies. But LBI became more widely known in the Lutheran community through the publication of its magazine, *The Bible Banner*, with “subscribers in America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and ‘the islands of the seas.’”⁷

Day-school students relied on the fiscal support of others who attended the Bible Conferences and read *The Bible Banner*. These students paid for their room and board, but none were charged tuition. Unlike the Lutheran colleges, LBI received no denominational subsidy because it belonged to no one Lutheran church body. Instead, the LBI was a faith movement with a school and a motto: “Have faith in God. He answers prayer.”⁸

The international subscriber base of *The Bible Banner* could be explained by a tabulation taken one year before the 1928 fall term which showed that, of the one hundred who had completed the full two-year course of studies, eighteen were serving as overseas missionaries.⁹ Fifteen served in church institutions established for the care of the aged, orphans, and poor. Five women had been consecrated as deaconesses, usually for service in hospitals. Twenty-seven men and women had found work of lay service in congregations, assisting pastors as parish workers, church day school teachers, congregation office secretaries, and home mission developers. One became a lay preacher; another served as an evangelist to Jewish people. The LBI dean and faculty expected that, as a matter of Lutheran commitment and loyalty, each student aspiring to lay ministry must offer herself or himself for service only to her or his respective Lutheran church body. Accordingly, Augustana Lutherans were expected to go from LBI to serve only under the auspices of Augustana church.

By 1927 eight wives of pastors, three pastors, and thirteen students pre-divinity had successfully completed the course of study leading to graduation. Over a year later, in the fall of 1928, a record percentage of members of the entering class of Augustana Theological Seminary—six of thirty-two—were LBI graduates.¹⁰ Although LBI had been founded to provide an education in the Bible for Lutheran laity before they went on to college, it also prepared many who went on the seminary.

An Agency for the Church

Augustana leaders and church members had played a primary role in establishing LBI. On August 30, 1918, four Augustana pastors met together for prayer as they considered the formation of LBI. They were acquainted as colleagues in Augustana's Minnesota Conference. Three worked together closely as members of its Association of English Churches.

The "language question" served as a strong motive for founding LBI. Since before the turn of the century, Augustana Lutherans had been arguing over whether or not they ought to use English. Some, often immigrants from Sweden, insisted upon Swedish. But others noticed already that increasing numbers of young adult Lutherans pleaded that English, the language of the land and of their everyday lives, be used in their churches. While some of these young adults remained in the Augustana Synod, many others who were weary of argument departed for other American churches or became un-churched.

The issue was bigger than the language. Ultimately, Augustana Lutherans argued over who was "the kernel" in their synod: those who insisted upon Swedish as the means to retain old-world customs in the new land, or those who urged that to be Lutheran was more important than to be Swedish. In reply to those who insisted that the true Augustana was solely Swedish in language and culture, one young pastor, who would become an LBI founder, wrote of the needs of the members of his congregation. Speaking of parents who earnestly prayed for the salvation of their children, he wrote:

Will God hear their cries, whether they be in one language or another? Wait until they have learned Swedish? No, now! today! in any language that they understand!¹¹

After years of quiet agitation by several pastors and lay members, in 1908 the Augustana Synod authorized the Association of English Churches “as a consultative agency.”¹² By 1915, Augustana began to establish new congregations that used English. In the Twin Cities, the times seemed right for change. Hundreds of young adults were moving off the farms in the Upper Midwest and into the cities, particularly Chicago and the Twin Cities. Relocated from the enclaves of Swedish-speaking communities and thrust into the English-speaking world, these young Lutherans sought opportunity to express their faith in the English language.

Population dislocation was not the only cause for worry. The Great War and the great flu epidemic had heightened anxieties throughout the Upper Midwest as they had in North America generally and indeed throughout the whole world. The President of the Association of English Churches reported that low numbers of students were attending Sunday school and as well “that private pastoral work is so little in demand” by members for spiritual care. He saw these to be symptoms of deep spiritual problems in Augustana, nothing less than “a spiritual winter” in which “devout souls are freezing to death.” He decried that, as the consequence of the war:

There is much talk about famine in the world, but that famine is not as much a famine for bread as it is a spiritual famine. The hunger is spiritual; the famine is nothing but the Word of God can satisfy.¹³

In 1914, Annette Elmquist, a student at the State University in New York, confessed that she was “going-in’ [*sic*] for all that the world offered and yet deep down in my heart there was such a hunger for something better, such a realization that my life was bringing forth only ‘hay, wood, and stubble’ with nothing that really counted for Christ.”¹⁴ She concluded that she felt intensely the need for “knowledge of God’s Book, of someone who would help me to study it.”

She found her way to A.B. Simpson's Missionary Training Institute in nearby Nyack, New York. While she delighted in the educational program and the opportunity to prepare for foreign missionary service, she felt far removed from her beloved Lutheran beliefs and traditions. She came to believe that her Lutheran church could and should have a Bible institute of its own, distinctly Lutheran in contrast to "Reformed" schools such as the one in Nyack. She complained:

There is no church which, according to doctrine, puts more value on the Word of God than the Lutheran Church, and yet the majority of our people are sadly ignorant of that Word and in most cases have been given very little, if any, help towards knowing how to study it.¹⁵

Upon returning to her home in Minnesota, Elmquist reported a conversation with "some of the girls" at Gustavus Adolphus College in St Peter. They said that

they wanted to do some kind of mission work, but did not know what was open to them. One who expects to graduate this year said: 'I don't feel satisfied to teach—I want to do something for Jesus, but I don't feel prepared, nor do I know what I can do.' . . . Just the other day a Sunday School teacher said to me, 'If you only knew how I have wept and prayed over my Sunday school lessons, but I have no material to help me and I don't know how to teach.'¹⁶

She was one of hundreds of young adults who pleaded for God to move Augustana Lutherans to pray for "a small band of people to begin to believe in God" for "a great 'Recruiting Station' for foreign missionaries and inner mission workers, a mighty 'Power House' of prayer . . . a source of new life and inspiration for the home congregations."¹⁷

Elmquist eventually learned of four pastors who had prayed for such a Bible school—George N. Anderson, Samuel M. Miller, Roy F. Thelander, and Claus A. Wendell. She promptly joined the effort. An Association and Board of Directors soon were established. It included members from nearly all North American Lutheran church bodies, including the Augustana Synod. "I am still of the opinion that our school should remain independent," wrote the school's first

dean, “that we ought to grow naturally without being put in the straightjacket of synodical lines.”¹⁸ In this spirit, LBI avoided the control of any church body in order instead to serve them all. The result was the first North American inter-Lutheran movement founded largely by and for lay members.

Still, the founders were Augustana members. On September 17, 1919, the school held its first class for “a dozen girls and one brave young man” in the basement of an Augustana congregation, First Lutheran Church in St. Paul.¹⁹ During the first two years before she went on to missionary service in Africa, Elmquist—now Mrs. George Anderson—taught some of the classes, among the first women to teach in any Lutheran institution of higher education. Thirty years later, one of the pastors recalled that during World War I, there was a “great hunger” for God among the young:

As we studied the Bible we were more deeply convicted of sin. We sensed the war and the great flu epidemic as a judgment calling to repentance But how to reach the people, engrossed in war and work and consumed by the world's spirit?²⁰

A dozen years later, in 1961, Arden expressed his appreciation that LBI met these needs in Augustana especially during its first decade. He assessed positively that LBI “has stimulated the reading and the study of Scripture and has thus caused the lives of many people to be enriched by new religious insight, greater spiritual maturity, and deeper Christian commitment,” to play “an important role as a recruitment agency for full-time church workers” to fulfill “an important function as an evangelizing agency in the church.” At the same time, Arden could not help but levy an additional assessment, that “the Bible school has also assumed a somewhat controversial role as a critic of the church.”²¹

LBI as Renewer and Critic of Augustana

Many of those who established, supported, and attended the LBI were worried about the influence of “the world” and of liberalism on Augustana and its institutions. LBI pioneer Annette Elmquist had

come to know well the “world’s spirit” in the State University of New York. She now “longed to be among those who loved Jesus.” Between the two, she recalled, “I could not conceive of two environments so entirely different as that which surrounded me at the university and that which I now faced. Oh! how happy I was—never homesick a minute!”²² She was not alone in her assessment. Adolf Hult, a prominent teacher of the synod, had already called for a school, different from Augustana’s colleges and seminaries, to reach lay people.

We need spiritual Bible schools in the church, where the Spirit’s discipline, and the liberty of Christlike love, will advise, protect, and take hold in the new formation of whole personality. Where, especially shall the layman go for a shorter time of spiritual equipment in Scripture and Scripture’s significance for the whole of life?²³

Hult shared Elmquist’s plea to meet the needs of English-speaking young adult Lutherans. But he also asserted that the “world’s spirit” Elmquist had known in the State University of New York was found also in Augustana’s colleges. He observed this because nearly all his students came from these schools. Over his long tenure in the seminary, Hult thundered against the intrusion of secular standards on a church educational system: “Too often they have come under the dangerous influence of the state’s ‘leading-strings’. . . . The church’s ideals, the church’s point of view, all these must be eliminated.” While he conceded that a few spiritually mature students might survive, he insisted that “The majority, however, will become spiritual monsters, spiritual shrinking and foreshortened. The opposite should be found.”²⁴

Hult called for an institution that would be a “biblical preparatory house,” separate from the colleges. Accordingly, young adults would study in such a “churchly Bible school, a Biblical armory,” before entering a college or university of the church or of the state.

A Bible school could be conducted without the faith-ruining elements a cultural college must endure or cease to exist . . . The situation demands, and the need requires, that we have such an institute. Our secular schools cannot fill such an institute’s purpose Not a school where one acquires general education, but a Bible school, specifically that!²⁵

Olga Wallin, a collaborator in the founding of LBI and a longtime member of its staff, interpreted *bibiskt rusthus* as “Biblical armory.” This proved important to Hult as he confronted what he perceived to be the erosion of Lutheran confessional teaching in Augustana.

But Samuel Miller had not meant to be confrontational as he took up his duties. To his shock, the Association had called him to serve as the first dean of LBI. For over five years, he had championed the use of English in Augustana congregations, while serving as the pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Minneapolis and, before, of Trinity Lutheran Church in Moline, Illinois. Reiterating the plea that Elmquist among others had advanced before—for which Arden would express appreciation much later—Miller explained LBI’s purpose. At the beginning of the first academic year, in 1919, Miller stated that LBI would reach its students with its positive witness.

To glorify the Great Person of the Bible, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; to carry out The Great Purpose of the Bible to add to ‘the great stream of spiritual life that ought to be flowing thru [sic] our Lutheran Church’; toward The Great Product of the Bible ‘that we might be filled with missionary zeal’; to have faith in The Great Power of the Bible ‘to challenge men and women everywhere to turn to the Word’; and to demonstrate The Great Prayer-Promise of the Bible as ‘a free-standing organization’ independent of ecclesiastical control which in prayer would trust in God for its support.”²⁶

Miller and his colleagues insisted that Bible training ought to be part of every Christian’s education, to educate “men and women who, while earning their living in the various vocations, could give service in spiritual things in the church”—specifically, in the Lutheran church.²⁷

Miller also never intended that he himself would be the sole standard bearer for the LBI movement. Through the 1920s, by his design, he was only one of several full time faculty members, pastors called by its Board and its Association. Miller urged Conrad Bergendoff to join the faculty, but Bergendoff declined the call, although he eventually became president of Augustana College and Theological Seminary in Rock Island, Illinois. Carl J. Södergren, widely known in the Augustana church, and Miller’s teacher in the

seminary, accepted the call. The arrival of Alfred B. Anderson—known as A.B.—signified the participation of Norwegian Lutheran Church in America members in the LBI movement. Joining Anderson later in the decade was his colleague in the Norwegian church, Odd Gornitzka. In the coming decades faculty and students represented nearly every Lutheran church body in North America. From its beginning, several part-time faculty members also served, including Annette Elmquist and Claus Wendell.

By 1922, Miller as dean had heard from within the Augustana Synod criticisms directed at LBI. Initially, he felt that the criticism had been lodged by people who neither knew the movement nor its school. But there were also internal disagreements within the LBI. It was with Wendell, one of the founders of the LBI, that Miller “passed through one of the most difficult experiences” he ever had known, feeling compelled to oppose his good friend on the question of Evolution.

LBI and the question of Evolution

Certainly one of the most difficult issues facing religious America during the 1920s was the question of evolution. In 1922, the question hit home when William Jennings Bryan came to Minnesota to speak on “Evolution and Its Dangers.”²⁸ Bryan had been invited by the Northwestern Bible and Missionary Training School and First Baptist Church by its pastor, William Bell Riley, part of “the broad fundamentalist coalition that emerged after World War I” to espouse “political causes as well as efforts to fight modernism in the churches.”

Two thousand University of Minnesota students were among the more than 12,500 Twin Cities citizens who sought to hear the “Great Commoner.” They heard Bryan assail “evolution as a menace to civilization” while “defending the Bible against all attackers.”²⁹ One of their professors, who taught zoology, heard Bryan make what he took to be nothing less than a personal attack upon his vocation. “The opponents of evolution,” the professor retorted, “have no more right to ridicule the teachings of science than scientists have to ridicule the teaching of religion.”³⁰

None of this might have pertained directly to LBI except that Claus Wendell also offered his own response to Bryan, neither on his own behalf nor on behalf of LBI, but now as “the regional secretary for the Lutheran students” and pastor of Grace Lutheran Church,” the Augustana congregation located adjacent to the University of Minnesota. He declared:

In the recent uprising against the theory of evolution it is customary to brand its adherents as a pack of atheists whose one purpose in life is to undermine the Christian faith of the rising generation and rid the world of the Bible. And in the name of fairness and truth, I rise to protest.³¹

But then, he turned to offer a favorable word for evolution as a theory as well as evolutionists as persons. This latter statement drew Miller’s attention:

If the Bible is used as it should be, ‘to make us wise unto salvation,’ and not as a text book in science; and if the evolution theory is viewed not as a mechanical substitute for God which is not at all necessary, but as the *modus operandi* of creation, there is no conflict whatsoever.³²

Miller, in reply, was grieved that his fellow pastor and good friend would come to the defense of an *atheistic* evolutionist “who in his classes ridicules faith in a personal God, special creations by God, and all the Christian doctrines of sin and salvation by the atoning blood of Christ.” He questioned Wendell’s assertion that several “theistic evolutionists . . . ‘have accepted the evolution theory without surrendering their Christian faith.’” He also asserted that evolution remained an unproven theory which “would lead to deism and be entirely at variance with the Christian faith.” Miller stated:

I simply make the point that a Christian teacher speaking of ‘the theory of evolution as the *modus operandi* of creation should give his definition of evolution that he might not cause confusion. Otherwise, he must not be surprised when he finds that the enemies of the Bible count him as being on their side, and the friends of the Bible do not know where to count him.³³

Not wishing to have LBI share in the harsh criticism that his views would draw, Wendell submitted his resignation. He and Miller remained friends, but were hurt over the incident.

Miller did not deny that God *could* use evolutionary processes to create the world, but rather asserted that “the unregenerate scientist . . . can never discover anything about the origin and the destiny of the universe” that he reveals in his word. He was concerned that anti-Christian teaching against the Christ of the Bible would compel people to fall from Christian faith. His students at LBI—a few of whom had attended schools such as the University of Minnesota—were acquainted with, but became frustrated by, evolutionary theories. It was not that faith opposes intellect, but rather that faith was required for intellect.

Whatever God has revealed about Himself and His work in His Word I want to know, but what He has not revealed there, I do not care if I ever know. He has revealed much about His work of creation in the Word, and that I want to study and understand in the enlightenment which the Word alone can give.³⁴

In this, Miller signaled a sharp division between LBI and colleges or university. Four decades later, Arden termed this “a difference in educational philosophy.”

The Bible school traditionally tends to conceive of education in terms of vocational training and dogmatic indoctrination. The liberal arts college thinks of education as a process of growth in the capacity for well-informed critical thought achieved through the disciplines of the liberal arts.³⁵

This distinction, for which Elmquist had hoped and for which Hult worked to establish, in time would come to serve as a judgment against even Augustana’s colleges and seminary. Increasingly, Miller in the public role of dean, would find himself a critic of Augustana all the more concerning not only its educational policies but, to a far greater extent, its ecumenical outlook.

Miller remarked that the controversy over evolution “is not the main issue today, the discussion about that theory is only the devil’s smoke-screen by which he tries to becloud the main issue.” Instead, “the main issue,” as he saw it, is “the person and work of Jesus Christ, the state of man, and the validity of the Bible as the Word of God.”³⁶ But soon there would be a more directly divisive issue that

LBI and Augustana would have to face, the question of Liberal, or modernistic theology.

LBI and the question of Liberal Theology in Augustana

The question of Liberal theology arose in conjunction with the visits of two distinguished Lutheran theologians to the United States. In 1923, the LBI summer session welcomed Ole Hallesby, Norwegian theologian and professor. Miller noted with appreciation Hallesby's sharp criticism of liberalism in the church.

We were particularly grateful for the striking and clear way in which he laid bare the differences between the liberal and the conservative position in theology. He certainly showed how impossible it is to take any mediating position between these two . . . We have the same denials over here, presented in the same subtle fashion as is done in Europe.³⁷

Days before he visited the LBI summer session, Hallesby delivered at Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul a series of lectures on what he termed "positive" and liberal theology.³⁸ LBI people were moved to action by these lectures. As had Hallesby, so now Miller would confront liberalism in North American Lutheranism generally and in Augustana specifically.

Miller promptly targeted another visitor from Europe. Enthusiastic as he was to welcome Hallesby, he was adamant to refuse welcome to Nathan Söderblom, the Archbishop of Sweden. "Though the writer is a member" of Augustana, commented Miller, "he cannot join in the general chorus of joy and approval that is being expressed by so many," for "the Archbishop is a great and wonderful man," but "his message does not ring true."³⁹

Later in 1923, Söderblom, his wife, and son traveled throughout the United States. He delivered numerous lectures, but also preached several sermons. When the Archbishop spoke in the Twin Cities, Miller was astounded at what he heard or did *not* hear. He heard Söderblom preach a sermon on prayer "full of beautiful generalities" on how we ought to "gather around our elder Brother, Jesus, and follow His example in praying," but nothing "positively and

specifically Christian” was said about Jesus’ death and resurrection, “our High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for us.” Miller heard Söderblom speak about the necessity of the “new birth” from “materialism” toward such “higher things” as “literature, music, art, etc.,” but he heard nothing about one’s need for new birth in Christ, even though Söderblom had preached from John 3, “Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”⁴⁰ He heard the archbishop lecture on “friendly cooperation between the churches,” but nothing of “whether or not a conservative Lutheran should be willing to cooperate with any liberal even if he be a Lutheran.” Invited to a reception for the archbishop, Miller decided that for “conscience sake” he could not attend:

All the liberals plead for love and cooperation, but God’s Word says in 2 John 10-11: ‘If any one cometh to you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting: for him that giveth him greeting partaketh in the evil works.’⁴¹

Miller did not intend that LBI be separate from other Christians. Four years later, in 1927, the LBI board president reported glowingly of the Christian unity shown at the World Conference on Faith and Order in Lausanne, manifest by the overwhelming conservative Christian tone of the speeches and deliberations there and the necessity for “that inward and personal experience of union with the living Christ” expressed in all its events.⁴² But the concerns of the Life and Work conference that Söderblom would host in Stockholm two years later were for Miller and LBI supporters another matter entirely.

Publicly, no one in the Augustana church loathed Söderblom more than Adolf Hult, who called the Archbishop “the most dangerous man of the Lutheran Church.”⁴³ Hult had followed Söderblom’s thought for years, but now excoriated the archbishop’s recent book, *Christian Fellowship*. He contended that “Söderblom has the Liberal idea of Scripture” by noting the archbishop’s mention that the “Biblical religion of revelation or prophecy began with Moses, perhaps with Abraham,” and then derisively challenged, “Pastors and theologians among us who defend Söderblom” to

“preach that to our people, and watch the result!”⁴⁴ But Hult was infuriated all the more as it seemed to him that Söderblom denied the Lutheran understanding of the substitutionary atonement confessed in the person and work of Christ; no less than an

evasion from the truth of Scripture which is plainly shown to the Church, which causes some of our men to imagine that Söderblom teaches the Biblical and Lutheran atonement doctrine. . . . Do not our people know that modern Liberals use all the old terms but with a wholly other meaning?⁴⁵

In application, Hult judged Söderblom’s Life and Work project to be deficient for any truly Lutheran church that seeks the cause of Christian unity. Two years later, he asserted:

Christ’s New Testament brings us two main conditions of Church unity: Unity in the Word and doctrine, first, then also unity of heart-fellowship with God in Christ. It does not set the latter alone to the excision of the former,—so that theologians may have license to cut the Word to pieces and then orate beautifully about heart-unity and organization-unity.⁴⁶

Nearly forty years later, later, Arden would judge that Hult’s critique reflected “very little understanding of the modern ecumenical movement.”⁴⁷ But two years before Söderblom convened the Life and Work Conference, Hult sounded his bold warning: “God rip off the cobwebs from the eyes of our Augustana Synod, that it may ‘look unto Him whom they have pierced’ (Zechariah 12:10) by wanting submission to the clear Word of God.”⁴⁸

Little of this might have pertained to the LBI except that Professor Hult, like Dean Miller, published his views in the LBI magazine. Their diatribes left no positive impression upon Gustaf Brandelle, the President of the Augustana Church. Not only had Söderblom participated in the dedication of the new Augustana Seminary buildings, but the Archbishop also installed—or as some would put it, consecrated—his friend into a second term. Brandelle had only words of praise for the Archbishop. When Söderblom died some eight years later, Brandelle memorialized that the Archbishop gave the Church that precious “inheritance which is connected with the word *ecumenical*.”⁴⁹ Brandelle eulogized that, for the sake of the unity

of the Church in *evangelic catholicity*, Söderblom “kept the faith” by advancing what he saw the true image of the church, toward world peace and good will.⁵⁰

But during Brandelle’s administration, Hult criticized the Augustana church by asking, “What church unity did Christ advocate?” Referring to the increasing debate then taking place in Augustana following the Life and Work Conference, Hult asked whether on the question of unity “shall we not remain Scripture Lutherans even in this?”⁵¹ This second occasion that served to give expression to the concerns of Miller and Hult, on the one hand, and those of Brandelle, on the other, hardened the opposing positions taken between friends and foes of LBI. Hult’s pronouncement, coupled with Miller’s critique, served as a strong judgment against growing trends in the Augustana church itself. How, then, was LBI a source of renewal within the Augustana church while simultaneously its critic?

The Lutheran Bible Institute and the Augustana Synod

During their personal meeting in 1962, Samuel Miller reiterated to G. Everett Arden that the Bible institute “has looked upon itself as an *interior resource of renewal*.”

Like the Rosenian movement in the Church of Sweden, the Bible Institute has insisted that it exists for the renewal of the spiritual life of the church, but that such renewal must occur within the structured life and activity of the existing ecclesiastical community, and not through separatistic withdrawal and isolation.⁵²

LBI was pan-Lutheran from its inception and expected each student and faculty member to remain loyal to the Lutheran church body in which they held their membership. But above this, they were to hold ultimate loyalty to all that the Bible revealed.

Dedicated to the simple task of teaching the Bible, so that its message might be made more widely known and deeply understood, and insisting that the faith and practice of the church, including both clergy and laity, must conform to this message, it was perhaps inevitable that the Bible school would sooner or later emerge as the church’s critic.⁵³

Truly, LBI fit into Augustana and every other Lutheran church body from the outside in order to serve as a source of renewal within them all. Arden recognized this:

Indeed, the insistence of the founders of the Lutheran Bible Institute upon maintaining a “free-standing institution” was perhaps partially motivated by the desire for sufficient freedom to enable the school to observe and comment without fear of ecclesiastical muzzling.⁵⁴

But LBI stood as a witness to renewal not only to Lutheran church bodies but also within Lutheran bodies, including Augustana, which were becoming increasingly divided within.

The prerogative of a critic of the faith and practice of the church has been expressed by the Lutheran Bible Institute, generally speaking, from the premises of a fundamentalistic Lutheran orthodoxy.⁵⁵

Joined together here were fundamentalism, Lutheranism, and orthodoxy. Some accused Miller and his colleagues of being Reformed, not Lutheran, and of assuming a Fundamentalist posture. To the advocates of LBI, it stood for a Lutheran orthodoxy expressed in a warm piety, both of which had been traditional if not comfortable within Augustana.

But during the 1920s, the meaning of the very term “Lutheran” met growing debate. Much of the debate is based upon mutual misunderstanding. On the one hand, Miller may or may not have had a point when he expressed to a professor in the Augustana Seminary his concern over a growing trend in Western thought, wondering if such an evil might emerge within even the Augustana church. Noting all the “beautiful” rhetoric of the liberals, he remarked:

But if you just lift one little corner and squint under it, you can see the devil with its horns and tail and hoofs and all. The religion of the miraculous new birth is unknown to the religious man of today. He thinks he can find God through science and, of course, the only god he finds is the god of this world.⁵⁶

On the other hand, Miller did not then know that Brandelle had approvingly invoked Söderblom’s summation of the Christian life:

“There is no other liberty worthy of the name save the life under the constraint of the Lord.” When asked what Christ meant to him, Söderblom replied, “The center of my theology is the mystery of the vicarious sufferings of Christ.”⁵⁷

What was for certain was that by 1928 when LBI had served for a decade, the ultimate issue among Augustana Lutherans—as among nearly all Lutherans in North America—was the question of defining Lutheranism. The debates over the influence of the “world” on the institutions of the Church, and the disputes over Evolution and Liberal theology, all pointed to the deeper question; which way was Augustana heading, and to whom would it look for direction and guidance? Those involved in the LBI attempted to act as renewers and critics of Augustana by training a generation of biblically-literate young people, and by giving them theological guidance to navigate the confusing world around them. Through these graduates, and through their writings, the leaders of LBI sought to give a definitive answer to the questions above.

NOTES

1. G. Everett Arden, *Augustana Heritage: A History of the Augustana Lutheran Church* (Rock Island: Augustana Press, 1963), 311, 315.
2. D. Verner Swanson to Malvin H. Lundeen, August 27, 1962. ELCA Churchwide Archives, Elk Grove Village, Illinois.
3. “L.B.I. Personals,” *The Bible Banner* 4(10), October 1928, 15.
4. While details of the school’s progress were reported regularly in the movement’s magazine, *The Bible Banner*, the school’s development and progress was summarized in Wallin, “Lutheran Bible Institute Early History” unpublished manuscript. ELCA Region 3 Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota: LBI collection.
5. “Graduates,” typewritten and notated listing, office records of Golden Valley Lutheran College/LBI, New Brighton, Minnesota.
6. “The Lutheran Bible Institute Catalog, First Edition, 1927.” LBI collection, ELCA Region 3 Archives.
7. “Publications.” *L.B.I. Memoirs 1919-1934* (Minneapolis: Lutheran Bible Institute, 1934).
8. Samuel Miller published several short volumes of his sermons on specific themes, mostly from daily LBI chapel services. The volume that expressed his trust and confidence in God’s providence during the years of greatest fiscal want in the LBI was *Have Faith in God; He Answers Prayer* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1952).
9. LBI 1927 Catalog, 11.
10. “LBI News,” *The Bible Banner* 4(10), October 1928, 15.

11. Samuel M. Miller, "The Kernel," *The Lutheran Companion* 26(2), January 12, 1918, 20-21.
12. Arden, 243.
13. Claus A. Wendell, "President's Report." The Association of English Churches of the Augustana Synod: Eleventh Annual Convention . . . October 22-26, 1919 (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1920), 16.
14. Annette Elmquist, "A Plea for Prayer for a Bible School," *The Lutheran Companion* 26(6), February 9, 1918, 66.
15. Elmquist, 67.
16. Elmquist, 67.
17. Elmquist, 67.
18. Minutes, Lutheran Bible Institute Association 4th Annual Business Meeting, February 1, 1921.
19. C.J. Södergren, "Reminiscences," *L.B.I. Memoirs 1919-1934* (Minneapolis: The Lutheran Bible Institute, 1934)
20. Samuel M. Miller, "In Retrospect," *The Bible Banner* 25(11) November, 1949, 4.
21. Arden, 315.
22. Elmquist, 66.
23. Adolf Hult, "En Bibelskola Behofves," *Minnesota Stats Tidning*, January 8, 1918, 8. Translation assistance by Aina Abrahamson.
24. Hult, "En Bibelskola Behofves," 8.
25. Hult, "En Bibelskola Behofves," 8.
26. "Dean Miller's Sermon," *The Bible Banner*, July, 1922, 8.
27. "The Purpose of a Bible School Course," *The Bible Banner*, 3(4), July, 1922, 8.
28. "Bryan's Engagement Here Cancelled; Will Speak at Hippodrome," *The Minnesota Daily* 23(16) October 21, 1922, 1.
29. "Mind Worship is Flayed in Speech by the Commoner," *The Minnesota Daily* 23(17), October 24, 1922, 1.
30. "Sigerfoos Defends Evolution Theory," *The Minnesota Daily* 23(18), October 25, 1922, 1.
31. "Dr. Wendell Defends Theory of Evolution," *The Minnesota Daily* 23(19) October 26, 1922, 1. Wendell had assumed his new capacity as a Regional Secretary for the Lutheran Student Association of America" (LSAA) formed only in May 1922.
32. "Dr. Wendell Defends Theory of Evolution," *The Minnesota Daily* 23(19), October 26, 1922, 1.
33. Samuel M. Miller, "At the Dean's Desk," *The Bible Banner*, 3(6), November, 1922, 7.
34. Samuel M. Miller, "The Evolution Controversy," *The Bible Banner*, 4(3), May 1923, 8.
35. Arden, 312.
36. Miller, "At the Dean's Desk," 8.
37. Samuel M. Miller, "Visitors from Europe," *The Bible Banner* 4(6), November 1923, 4.
38. O. Hallesby, *The Main Difference Between Positive and Liberal Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1923).
39. Miller, "Visitors from Europe," 4.
40. Miller, "Visitors from Europe," 4.

41. Miller, "Visitors from Europe," 5.
42. Samuel M. Miller, "World Conference on Faith and Order," *The Bible Banner* 3(10), October 1927, 12-13.
43. Adolf Hult, "Söderblom as a Temptation to the Augustana Synod," *The Bible Banner*, January 1924, 6.
44. Hult, "Söderblom," 6.
45. Hult, "Söderblom," 6.
46. Adolf Hult, "What Church Unity Did Christ Advocate?" *The Bible Banner*, 1(11), November 1925, 5.
47. Arden, 317.
48. Hult, "Söderblom," 7.
49. Bishop Edvard Rodhe, "The Heritage from Nathan Söderblom," *The Augustana Quarterly*, 11(1), January, 1932, 22.
50. Brandelle, "The Archbishop of Sweden: *In Memoriam*," *The Augustana Quarterly*, 11(1), January 1932, 38.
51. Hult, "What Church Unity Did Christ Advocate?" 5.
52. Arden, 315.
53. Arden, 315.
54. Arden, 316.
55. Arden, 316.
56. Samuel M. Miller to S.J. Sebelius, June 1, 1923. LBI collection, ELCA Region 3 Archives.
57. Brandelle, "The Archbishop of Sweden," 37.