

## Two Anniversaries and Five Historians

THOMAS TREDWAY

In 1888, three years after the final parting of the Mission Friends from the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Synod, a meeting between Olof Olsson and Erik August Skogsbergh took place in Minneapolis. Olsson was the Augustana Seminary professor and one-time critic of Waldenström's atonement teaching. Ten years after Olsson attacked Waldenström as a crypto-Unitarian the tables rotated and Olsson found himself the subject of synodical investigation concerning his own orthodoxy. Now singled by the suspicion of heresy, Olsson was in a conciliatory mood and was visiting Skogsbergh, who had once in Sweden been his student and by now had become the great Covenant evangelist, "the Swedish Moody." The two old friends laughed when Olsson related "with fine irony" his experience at a recent meeting of conservative Lutheran churchmen who lustily sang revival songs, printed in their own hymnal—while almost simultaneously warning Swedish immigrants to stay away from the revivalist heresies of the Methodists, Baptists, and Mission Friends. Olsson and Skogsbergh agreed that maybe Christians should share hymns, lay aside their doctrinal problems, and "sing themselves into unity and love."<sup>1</sup>

The last session of this conference is to be a hymn sing. Hopefully, that unity and love will get to Foster and Kedzie Avenues in Chicago this weekend. The purpose of *these* remarks is to explicate some of the issues that divided Olsson's and Skogsbergh's churches, persisting perhaps down to the very anniversaries we now mark. Happily, these issues have not prevented us from celebrating our common history and interests. I want to look at the way five historians treated the events that brought about the departure of the Missionsvänner from Evangeliska Lutherska Augustana-Synoden just twenty-five years after its founding. Why, we might ask as we read their works, are we celebrating *two* anniversaries here?

The scholars I have in mind were, of course, all members of the

Augustana Synod, and they all wrote during the century of the synod's own life. We know that the Covenant produced its own historians. C. V. Bowman, for a time the president of his church as well as its early historian, wrote two volumes about these matters. And what may be their most lively and thorough consideration is also by a Covenanter who was for a decade president of North Park College and Theological Seminary. That is Karl Olsson's *By One Spirit*. But the constraints of time lead me to deal with these five Augustana historians who interpreted what was the most important theological crisis their synod faced. I hope that in the way they throw light on our mutual history the reasons for choosing them will be as interesting to Covenanters as to Lutherans. Clearly, the formation of the Mission Covenant in America had a strong influence upon the Augustana Synod, and that influence changed significantly with time, bringing changes in Augustana itself. Even after they had parted, the two church bodies remained connected.

#### ERIC NORELIUS

The first of the five was, of course, Eric Norelius, who knew personally all of Augustana's founders. He was close to Lars Paul Esbjörn, usually considered "the Founder," and was clearly more sympathetic to him than to the other early Augustana leader, T. N. Hasselquist, first synod president, whose "free and easy ways" repelled Norelius.<sup>2</sup> Though himself twice president of the synod, Norelius is best remembered among those still interested in these matters as the author of *De Svenska Luterska Församlingarnas och Svenskarnes Historia i Amerika* and of *T. N. Hasselquist: Lefnadsteckning*. Both these works are filled with long quotations from letters, minutes, and other documents, so they are a valuable "original source" for early Augustana history. As suggested, Norelius's views were not entirely synchronous with those of T. N. Hasselquist, the figure who towered over Augustana for the three decades after Esbjörn's return to Sweden. There may be a sort of effort at posthumous reconciliation in the biography Norelius wrote of Hasselquist after the latter's death. The book is in the main sympathetic to its subject, though not uncritically. It offers a sense of how Norelius and Hasselquist regarded the rise of the American

Mission Covenant.

Although Tufve Nilsson Hasselquist came out of the Swedish religious awakening, Norelius wants the reader to know that Hasselquist was no enthusiastic revivalist. He was, for example, critical of the newspaper *Pietisten* edited by Carl Olof Rosenius, “one of the greatest religious leaders in the history of the Swedish people.”<sup>3</sup> Nor, says Norelius, did Hasselquist warm to the work of the “spiritual troubadour,” Oscar Ahnfelt, the one-time Royal Opera member who, after an evangelical conversion, made his way across Sweden singing revival songs. In fact, Norelius notes, when Hasselquist was a Swedish parish priest he once kept Ahnfelt from speaking and singing in his congregation.<sup>4</sup> Norelius sees the young Hasselquist as immature but “on the right path.”<sup>5</sup> Presumably, his reluctance to fall completely in with the Pietists was a sign of that.

Once he got to America in 1852, Hasselquist became pastor of the Swedish Lutheran congregation in Galesburg, Illinois. By then, his biographer tells us, he must have thawed toward Ahnfelt, for the new pastor often entered his church on the Sabbath morn in a white frock coat (rather than priestly dress) singing one of the troubador’s hymns—while the congregation joined in. In fact, says Norelius, in his early Galesburg years Hasselquist was so given to such carryings-on that “you could believe that he had become a real radical.”<sup>6</sup> But in 1868, after Hasselquist left Galesburg, a bitter split occurred in the congregation. It resulted in the founding of “Second Lutheran Church” by the town’s Pietists, or Mission Friends.

Norelius cannot forbear remarking that Hasselquist, president of the new synod and trying to hold it together, had himself learned that the free non-Lutheran style he had first adopted in Galesburg had been misused.<sup>7</sup> Now he was “a centralization man.”<sup>8</sup> The late 1860s and early ’70s, says Norelius, were a time when the leadership of the synod had to deal with “an enmity toward religion among our Swedish people,” as well as a “separatist movement that revealed itself here and there.”<sup>9</sup> Some Swedish Americans went to no church at all; others went to the wrong one. Augustana was in a two-front war, and a strong central organization was necessary if the synod were going to survive.

A trip to Sweden in 1870, says Norelius, firmly convinced

Hasselquist of the danger that “the separatists” represented. There he encountered colporteurs, laymen who traveled across the land distributing Bibles, spreading the revival, but seldom attending their own parish churches. According to Norelius, however, the trip also persuaded Hasselquist, despite his aversion to evangelical excess, that a free rather than a state church was most suited to the growth of true piety.<sup>10</sup> Yet it was neither his time in Galesburg nor his trip to Sweden that most clearly awakened Hasselquist to the separatist dangers, says Norelius. That dubious honor belonged to Paul Peter Waldenström. Waldenström, though an honors graduate of Uppsala and ordained in the Church of Sweden, identified with the evangelical revival and grew ever more critical of the state church. After Rosenius’s death, Waldenström became the editor of *Pietisten* and the leader of the evangelical movement. In 1862, upon Esbjörn’s recommendation, he was called to be professor of theology at Augustana as Esbjörn prepared to return to a pastorate in Sweden.

If Waldenström almost became Hasselquist’s colleague, declining the offer because of pressure to stay in Sweden from his recently widowed father, it was for Hasselquist and Norelius a near miss. For in 1872 Waldenström published his famous sermon on the atonement, which broke with orthodox Lutheran doctrine, holding that Christ’s death brought no change in God’s own disposition toward sinners. God had always loved humankind and hoped for its salvation. Through Jesus humanity was offered the chance to change, to turn to God in repentance. God was not reconciled through the atonement, humankind was. Swedish churchmen found this heretical, for it violated the classical Lutheran sense of the two sides of the divine nature, mercy *and justice*, love *and wrath*. Christ’s death was mistakenly seen to be an entirely human rather than a divine-human matter, they held.

Many of the Mission Friends were taken with Waldenström, especially because he argued not from the long and sometimes tortured history of Christian theology, but simply from the Bible. One implication was, of course, that the Augsburg Confession was not biblical regarding Christ’s death.<sup>11</sup> That was too much for the Augustana leadership. Norelius describes the intensity with which Hasselquist pounced on Waldenström in the church press. Hasselquist’s tireless

opposition to “the new doctrine of the atonement” was responsible for stopping its spread. The result was that the Waldenströmian wave “showed itself among Lutheran congregations less in a falling away from the confessions than in a great strengthening in them.”<sup>12</sup>

One gets a sense from Norelius that the matter between Hasselquist and Waldenström was personal as well as ecclesial. The biography discusses at length Waldenström’s 1889 visit to the United States. “Lektor Waldenström can be a likeable and in many respects capable man,” writes Norelius, but his behavior during that visit and his later comments about it do him no credit. Coming to Moline, Waldenström had been invited by Hasselquist “in the most friendly way” to “the oldest and largest of the Swedish educational works in America,” just a few blocks over in Rock Island. But the Pietist never came to the campus, and his later reflections upon the stay in Moline and on the Augustana Synod were “strongly partisan and judgmental, full of falsehood,” wrote Hasselquist in 1891 shortly before his death.<sup>13</sup> And directly to Waldenström: “You “should have extended your hand to me as a sign of reconciliation, just as I reached mine to you.” (I have translated the Swedish word *försoning* as “reconciliation” here, but it could as well be translated as “atonement,” the meaning and implications of which were exactly at issue in the whole *försoning* debate. It was a nicely pointed barb.) Hasselquist ends with another sort of play on the theological question, this time with a reference to the *blood* atonement of Christ. When Waldenström and he stand at the judgment seat, says Hasselquist, it would go poorly for me if I did not have speaking for me Christ’s blood. And on that day his opponent will need to answer for the way he has mislead humankind.<sup>14</sup> So, for Norelius, the controversy waned as it had waxed—with reference to the profound issues involved, including a soul’s eternal destiny. Salvation as well as Lutheran orthodoxy (if Norelius perceived any essential difference between them) seemed to be at stake.

#### O. FRITIOF ANDER

Forty years later the Augustana Synod got a second biography of its patriarch. This one was not greeted with enthusiasm in the synod, if its author can be credited. He was Oscar Fritiof Ander, like Norelius

a Swedish native educated in the United States after emigrating. A history graduate of Augustana, Ander had written a Ph.D. thesis on T. N. Hasselquist at the University of Illinois. In 1931 it was published by the newly formed Augustana Historical Society. And there was the rub. Ander believed that the leaders of the school, President Gustav Andreen and Dean of the Seminary Conrad Bergendoff, tried to get him to tone it down. They were troubled by what they felt was Ander's harsh treatment of some of the "dirty politics" in the early history of their synod.<sup>15</sup> Ander, especially critical of Lars Paul Esbjörn, stuck to his views. Thirty years later he told an Uppsala academic audience that Esbjörn "would probably have been called 'maladjusted' by psychologists," while Hasselquist was a happier and better-adjusted person.<sup>16</sup> Where did Ander put the Mission Friends on his historical-theological-psychological scale?

A layman, Ander went at his study with a different set of assumptions than Norelius. Divine providence is not treated as a causative agent here or in any of his works, and Augustana's struggles with the Pietists and Mission Friends (whom Ander calls "the New Evangelists") did not have for him the same poignancy which they held for Hasselquist or Norelius, Andreen or Bergendoff, all clergymen. In fact, Ander writes, Hasselquist was "generally considered a very strict pietist" in Sweden, and in America he "never put off [that] garb."<sup>17</sup> In the church newspapers that he edited, Hasselquist frequently reprinted Pietistic articles from Sweden. Well into the next century the whole synod was, per Ander, "strictly pietistic."<sup>18</sup>

For Ander, however, that Augustana Pietism did not have the ecumenical disposition that characterized its Swedish counterpart. The synod was deeply conservative with regard to non-Lutheran Christians, including the Mission Friends. That was clear in the 1875 adoption of what Ander calls "the famous Galesburg Rule" ("Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran ministers, and Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants").<sup>19</sup> Synod leaders were hostile toward the New Evangelists with their "urge to preach and evangelize and [insist] upon 'pure congregations.'" Their leaders, zealous colporteurs, were "poorly trained, or without any training."<sup>20</sup> They spread dissatisfaction among the folk toward Lutheranism, "objecting to its deadness and formalities."<sup>21</sup> With Norelius, Ander notes that while Hasselquist fought on

this front, he also sought to stem the tide of irreligion in the Swedish-American community and its press, especially with the post-war wave of new immigrants.<sup>22</sup> But, like Norelius, Ander says that it was against “the dreaded teachings of Waldenström” that Hasselquist directed his most vehement criticism.

Ander thinks that prior to the atonement controversy there seemed to be “no doctrinal differences between the ‘New Evangelists’ and the Augustana Synod.”<sup>23</sup> But enter Waldenström, who in fact played into Hasselquist’s hands by giving him “a clear basis for attack.” Now he could fight with “a powerful weapon,” the charge of heresy. The new atonement theology, Ander suggests, allowed Hasselquist go from defense to offense. And attack he did, genuinely frightened: “Our Waldenströmians are insane. God help both them and us.”<sup>24</sup> Editor Hasselquist convinced many readers of the newspaper *Augustana* that the Mission Friends put Waldenström above the Bible. They had been contaminated “by the evil spirit.”<sup>25</sup> Without attributing the charge to Olof Olsson, who made it in an 1878 address in Rock Island, Ander notes that the synod’s leaders called Waldenström a Socinian, “which the people feared even if they did not understand.”<sup>26</sup> In the end, says Ander, Hasselquist fought any threat to his synod with the same weapon—the accusation of heresy. Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians alike, all seeking to make inroads among the Swedish Americans, were tarred with that brush. But the *Missionsvännen* got the most pitch. Following Norelius, Ander concludes, “No one can say to what extent ‘New Evangelism’ would have played havoc with the Augustana Synod, if it had not been for Hasselquist.”<sup>27</sup> He also notes that Hasselquist came to feel that “official discussions of theological questions were dangerous and the Synod should avoid them.”<sup>28</sup>

The adherents of “the New Evangelism” allied themselves with what Ander calls “the stray anti-Augustana groups among the Swedes.”<sup>29</sup> When they left the synod, “Some of the dissenters organized ‘The Mission Society’ while others joined the General Synod, but later these two groups, after much argument, reunited, forming the ‘Missions Förbundet.’”<sup>30</sup> Thus does Ander quickly deal with the thirteen years between Waldenström’s atonement sermon and the formation of the Mission Covenant.

## GEORGE M. STEPHENSON

George Malcom Stephenson might not have wished to be numbered among "Augustana historians." He was a frequent critic of the synod, and many of its second-generation leaders regarded him as a hostile. An Uppsala historian, Gunnar Westin, once remarked that through Stephenson he had received a somewhat "mörk bild" of Augustana. Westin was pleasantly surprised upon finally meeting people like O. Fritiof Ander and Conrad Bergendoff who represented a more progressive generation than the one that had alienated Stephenson.<sup>31</sup> In any case, the latter, who earned a Ph.D. at Harvard after his undergraduate years at Augustana, devoted the early days of his University of Minnesota career to a study of the religious history of Swedish America. It resulted in two books, *The Founding of the Augustana Synod, 1850-1860* (1927) and his opus, *The Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration* (1932). Stephenson was also involved in synod affairs and was, in fact, one of the persons who managed to have Conrad Bergendoff called to be dean of the Theological Seminary, which he felt was itself the sign of a more enlightened time in Rock Island. (He once remarked that the Covenant was wise to locate its school in Chicago; Augustana, stuck as it was in Rock Island, had no institutional presence in the great Swedish-American Centers, Chicago and Minneapolis.<sup>32</sup>) So because of his education, his scholarship, and his on-going involvement in church life, Stephenson was, I think, an "Augustana historian," though he might well have chafed at the designation.

An early chapter of *Religious Aspects* considers Waldenström "the great personality and intellect," who was "very conservative and bitterly opposed to modern Biblical criticism, although . . . more critical and intellectual in . . . exegesis than was Rosenius." Despite the furor raised by his famous sermon, "Waldenström's fundamentalism . . . was just as pure and uncontaminated as the body of doctrine embalmed in the symbolical books of the Lutheran church."<sup>33</sup> Stephenson maintains that "When the cobwebs of theological controversy are brushed aside, Waldenström's doctrine and that of the state church . . . differ only in emphasis and terminology."<sup>34</sup> By the 1930s, he insists, Waldenström's teaching had won many younger



Swedish pastors; “it is seldom that the old Lutheran doctrine is heard, if indeed the Atonement is mentioned at all.”<sup>35</sup>

But if that was so when *Religious Aspects* was written, other differences could not be so easily reduced. That is clear from Stephenson’s treatment of the rise of the American Missionsförbund. Its founders had hoped, he writes, that they could develop a relationship to the Augustana Synod that would allow them to remain at least nominal Lutherans. But Hasselquist, et al., condemned them with the same bitterness that some Swedish pastors had aimed at Rosenius, Waldenström, and the colporteurs. For their part the Pietists saw in Augustana too much attention to church organization and not enough to “Christ the Redeemer.” They looked at the ministry in the way the Apostolic Church did, Stephenson maintains. The inner call was more important than formal ordination and dress; congregations simply chose one of their number to “break the bread of life.” In contrast to the Galesburg-Ruled synod, the Mission Friends opened their pulpits and communion tables to all true believers, Methodists and Baptists included. Stephenson calls them “Hyper-evangelicals.”<sup>36</sup> (More of this too later.) He traces the congregational splits in Galesburg, Chicago, Swede Bend (Iowa), and other Swedish settlements. By the mid-1870s, he writes, three groups emerged: the Augustana Synod on the right, an Ansgar Synod in the center, and a Mission Synod on the left, each with its respective journal, *Augustana*, *Zions Banér*, and *Missionsvännen*.<sup>37</sup> So from Stephenson one gets the sense that, with or without the atonement fight, Hasselquist and company would not long have put up with the *Missionsvännen*.

*Religious Aspects* is liberally salted with epigrammatic observations about its leading figures. Of Johann Gustav Princell, the Augustana-educated and eventually suspended ultra-free churchman, Stephenson says, “He perhaps had reason for calling a synod ‘organized hypocrisy.’”<sup>38</sup> Stephenson is sympathetic to Olof Olsson, declaring that if his spirit had prevailed, “the religious history of Swedish-America might have been written in a very different fashion.”<sup>39</sup> E. August Skogsbergh, whom Stephenson calls “the greatest popular preacher the Swedish-Americans have produced,” is one of only two persons, the other Hasselquist, with actual pictures in *Religious Aspects*.<sup>40</sup> The reader might conclude that of these two, the Augustana president

and the Covenant evangelist, the author may have tilted toward the latter.

Stephenson writes that the Mission Covenant, when organized from the Mission and the Ansgar Synods in 1885, was orthodox and a victory for the moderates.<sup>41</sup> The more radical Princell had wanted no structure beyond the local congregation at all. Among churches originating in “the Lutheran family,” the Covenant “enjoys the unique distinction of adopting no formal creed—not even the Augsburg Confession.” It “accepts the Word of God and the Old and New Testaments as the only rule of faith and conduct.”<sup>42</sup> That, of course, did not sit well in Augustana. There, Stephenson said in *The Founding of the Augustana Synod*, “Not for one minute could the symbolists admit that the Augsburg Confession was an antiquated document. . . . They would never recede one step from the position that [its] framers had formulated for all time the tenets of the Christian religion. What was the truth in Luther’s generation was the truth in theirs and would be the truth in the church of their children.”<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, like Ander, Stephenson sees a “trace of the Mission Friend spirit,” in Augustana, citing Olof Olsson’s survival as evidence.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, that is where Stephenson’s sympathies lay. His own pietistic Augustana up-bringing in Iowa and his on-going quarrel with what he scornfully called the “fetish of ‘pure doctrine’”<sup>45</sup> in Augustana seem to have generated that feeling for the “Hyperevangelicals.”

#### G. EVERETT ARDEN

G. Everett Arden, long-time professor of church history at Augustana Theological Seminary, also called the Mission Friends “Hyperevangelicals.” Today that connotes excess and excitability, but it was first used by Swedish historians. They applied it to the nineteenth-century Pietists who, in these scholars’ view, stressed God’s grace without a balancing emphasis on divine law and justice.<sup>46</sup> One supposes that the term was also attractive to Lutherans like Arden because it kept the term “evangelical” for more “mainline” Protestant bodies, such as his own. It is still used that way in Europe.

While trying to be fair to the “Hyperevangelicals,” Arden is not as sympathetic as Stephenson. As the 1962 merger into the LCA

approached, Arden was commissioned to write his synod's history. *Augustana Heritage: A History of the Augustana Lutheran Church* appeared in 1963, one of the last publications of the synod's Rock Island press. An Augustana Seminary graduate, Arden had finished a doctorate at the University of Chicago and been on the seminary faculty since 1945. He writes *Augustana Heritage* as a faithful synod member, convinced of the working of God's purposes through his church. The work is reflective and scholarly as well. For example, Arden is the single Augustana historian, many of whom sought to establish the academic *bona fides* of the patriarchs, to mention that L. P. Esbjörn took the shorter and essentially practical course at Uppsala rather than a more theological and intellectually strenuous one.<sup>47</sup> Like O. Fritiof Ander, Arden says that Esbjörn had a "strong streak of egocentricity."<sup>48</sup> One might conclude that Esbjörn's lack of a "thorough theological training in Sweden"<sup>49</sup> may have stamped Augustana history from the beginning. "The Augustana Church over the years has developed a number of skillful practical churchmen," Arden writes, "but few outstanding theologians."<sup>50</sup> But finally, balancing faith with scholarship, he writes that Esbjörn was "under the guidance of God, the chosen vessel called to found on American soil a new church and begin a new chapter in the saga of a Swedish Lutheran tradition in America."<sup>51</sup>

In his treatment of the American Covenant, G. Everett Arden relies heavily on Bowman's two histories, *Missionsvännerna i Amerika* (1907) and *The Mission Covenant of America* (1925). In a footnote Arden acknowledges that while he was writing *Augustana Heritage* Karl Olsson was preparing *By One Spirit*.<sup>52</sup> That book might have caused Arden to adjust some of his treatment of the Covenant.

Arden traces the course of congregational fractures, synodical alignments, newspaper blasts and counterblasts, schism and rapprochement which preceded the 1885 Chicago meeting where the American Missionsförbund was founded. He writes that Carl A. Björk, "a shoemaker by trade" and later first president of the Covenant "symbolized the hyperevangelicalism which was becoming characteristic of the non-conformist wing of Swedish dissent." Arden repeats the story of how, in Swede Bend, Iowa, on Good Friday, 1867, Björk was maneuvered into preaching in the absence of his pastor, Magnus

Håkanson (also, Arden evenly notes, a “former cobbler”). In “this quiet and unspectacular way, without resort to theological training or ecclesiastical ordination” there began a revival in the congregation. Arden adds that if Pastor Håkanson had stayed in Swede Bend, instead of being replaced by a high churchman, there would likely have been no split.<sup>53</sup> He relates how Björk and fellow Mission Friends received “their own independent ministerium” through the Danish-American Lutheran pastor Charles Anderson.<sup>54</sup> Arden also offers accounts, again based largely on Bowman, of the splits in Chicago and Galesburg. The Missionsvänner earned their name because of their mission to win souls and their concern for Christian service and charity. They believed, Arden writes, that the Augustana churches were simply extensions of the Church of Sweden “with few of its virtues and many of its faults.”<sup>55</sup>

Arden laments the treatment given the Ansgar and Mission Synods by Augustana’s leaders. It was “a regrettable attitude . . . since such rigid and negative reactions served only to crystallize the opposition, aggravate the tensions, and hasten the decision to separate.”<sup>56</sup> Arden notes that in the earlier stages of the split, the Pietists considered themselves Lutherans, said so in their documents, and differed mainly in terms of polity from Augustana. Arden also discusses a third group of “secessionists,” located mainly in the eastern states. They were strong Congregationalists, regarding all synods and councils as un-scriptural. Led by J. G. Princell, they held that the local gathering of true believers was the only church the New Testament knew.<sup>57</sup>

And it was Princell, Arden insists, “who may be said to have . . . led the Mission Friends out of the Lutheran household in America.”<sup>58</sup> Arden traces Princell’s checkered career—from Augustana seminary to a stint on one of the Chicago Swedish papers, to the Lutheran seminary in Philadelphia, and thence to Gustavus Adolphus Swedish Church in New York. He carefully discusses the suspension of Princell from the Augustana ministerium. Its leaders tolerated Princell until in 1876 he became a Waldenströmian; it then took them just two years to suspend his clergy standing.<sup>59</sup> So Arden’s judgment that it was J. G. Princell who led the Mission Friends out of the “Lutheran household” appears to be tied, as Princell’s unfrocking itself was, to the theology of Waldenström. Unlike Stephenson, who holds that

the Augustana-Covenant break did not hinge on atonement issues, Arden sees them as its very essence.

Arden treats Waldenström's career and ideas fully. The atonement sermon came "without previous warning," he writes, and it represented a significant deviation from "historic Lutheranism." Waldenström's "*Var står det skrivit?*"—his insistent resort only to the Bible—meant "that the historical development of understanding and perspective, the growth of maturity and perception, all must be shoved aside in favor of a grammatico-philological literalism." "To let Scripture alone decide theological issues was not as simple as it sounds, and to ask, 'Where is it written?' did not always give unequivocal answers."<sup>60</sup> Given that religious events in America were invariably informed by Swedish developments, it was not long until the new atonement teaching took over among the Pietists here, Arden maintains. The *Missionsvännen* became Waldenström's standard bearers here, making the "new theology" their *ståndpunkt*. At that point, Arden writes, they were no longer Lutheran, "nor did they profess nor wish to be known as such." Now compromise was impossible; Augustana could not accept "theological viewpoints which contradicted or seriously modified the historic confessional position of the Lutheran Church." If prior to the Waldenström battles the synod had been less rigid and the Pietists less eager for freedom, the split might have been avoided.<sup>61</sup> So for Arden it was Princell's conversion to the "New Theology" that precipitated the schism.

Like other Augustana historians, Arden is much taken with Olof Olsson and his role in this controversy. But he does not emphasize the side of Olsson that Stephenson did. Olsson had "perhaps the most discriminating mind in the Augustana ministerium," Arden writes. That may, of course, be faint praise, given his views on Augustana theologians. In any case, for Arden, Olsson's 1878 address, "The Reformation and Socinianism," was "a penetrating analysis" of Waldenström's theology, which Olsson saw as "but a reappearance of the old Socinian heresy of the sixteenth century."<sup>62</sup> That heresy, arising from two Polish brothers, denied the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity and held that Jesus' death, a noble example of self-sacrifice, was not a divine act appeasing God's wrath. Similarities to Waldenström are apparent. Arden does not mention

Olsson's regret over having given this speech nor the synod's later investigation of Olsson's own orthodoxy.

In any case, it is clear to Arden that a split was by the mid-seventies inevitable. It represented, he holds, the greatest theological crisis the synod faced, and Waldenström lay at its heart. When it was over it had hurt the synod. It cost members, created bitterness among Swedish Americans, and gave the secular Swedes an opening "to ridicule and deride the church of Christ, pointing to 'the disciples of the Prince of peace who fly at each other's throats.'" But it was also healthy, for it deepened confessionalism, purged the synod of dissidents, and made it clear that Augustana occupied a position somewhere between "high" and "low" in the "American Lutheran household."<sup>63</sup> Presumably when Arden wrote that in 1963 it meant somewhere between the heirs of the Missouri and the descendants of the General Synods.

#### CONRAD BERGENDOFF

Conrad Bergendoff spent his scholarly and ecclesiastical life in these Augustana precincts between ultra-conservative and more liberal Lutherans. Of the five Augustana historians who wrote during the century of the synod's existence, Bergendoff is the one who did *not* author a book that directly considered the Augustana-Covenant break. His own doctoral work in the history department at the University of Chicago had resulted in *Olavus Petri and the Ecclesiastical Transformation in Sweden*, published in 1928. Bergendoff had avoided the Divinity School at Chicago because he knew he would not find congenial the American liberal theology then prevailing there. But when he became dean of Augustana Theological Seminary in 1931 the trained historian took the chair in systematic theology, not church history. Most of his published work while at Augustana was primarily theological in character, though he considered theological questions in their historical contexts rather than *sub specie aeternitatis*, as a systematic theologian would have. After his 1962 retirement as Augustana's president, Bergendoff wrote an historical survey, *The Church of the Lutheran Reformation*, in which he did briefly address the formation of separate Covenant churches in Sweden and the United

States. His lifelong involvement in Swedish America led Bergendoff at a number of times to make comments about the Covenanters. These invariably combined wistfulness over the loss of Augustana people to the Mission Friends with a clear sense that when these folk left the synod, they left Lutheranism as well. Nonetheless, Bergendoff certainly enjoyed close relationships with many Covenant friends, and was, for example, the speaker at Clarence A. Nelson's 1950 inauguration as president of North Park.

Bergendoff believed that two failings, which had characterized his synod's history, were the loss of the *Missionsvänner* and the failure to attract the majority of immigrant Swedes.<sup>64</sup> Whether either of these groups, the Pietistic Waldenströmians or the transplanted Norse pagans, was ever likely to become Augustana Lutherans is, of course, debatable. But Bergendoff, who always insisted that he was first a Lutheran and only then a Swedish-American one, did look with nostalgia on the folk church that Olaf Peterson and Gustavus Vasa had reformed in the sixteenth century. And he regretted that its unity had been rent three hundred years later by the revivals. Waldenström, Bergendoff notes, followed a more independent course than his predecessor Carl Olof Rosenius had, and after "liberal forces finally forced the repeal of the hated [Conventicle] act in 1858," the Pietists were free to meet and to organize independently. "The Mission Covenant thus became a church body, and the unity of the folk church was broken."<sup>65</sup> In the later nineteenth century the Church of Sweden, though poorly attended, did by its loyalty to its confessions and liturgy win "a respect not given to individual groups living on meager revival fare."<sup>66</sup> In a 1953 series of lectures on *The One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church* Bergendoff noted that the effort to create a pure church of true believers inevitably had difficulty in the second and third generations: "here the free church has been no more successful than the folk-churches. Holiness is not inherited."<sup>67</sup>

Some nineteenth century Lutherans such as S. S. Schmucker of Gettysburg Seminary sought to fit their church into American patterns. For Bergendoff that was "spineless Lutheranism." It was, he says, repudiated by orthodox churchmen who would not give into "an imitation of revivalistic practices and confessional indifference."<sup>68</sup> Lutheranism "refused to conform to contemporary culture that went

from rationalism through romanticism to secularism, materialism, and atheism.”<sup>69</sup> These were the challenges Swedish-American Lutherans from Hasselquist to Bergendoff had faced: countering “meager revival fare” on the one hand and the “isms” of modernity on the other. With satisfaction Bergendoff noted in an article written in 1960 for *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift*, the Uppsala church history journal, that as Augustana merged into the new LCA, it won a victory on at least one of these fronts: “the confessional standard for which Esbjörn contended has become the doctrinal standard of this [new] body.”<sup>70</sup>

Bergendoff did not really think that the atonement was the essential issue between Augustana and the Mission Friends, though it was not his nature to second-guess his synodical forefathers. In his dissertation on Olavus Petri, Bergendoff says that Petri’s genius lay not in creating “new forms and doctrines,” but in using the best of the German Reformation.<sup>71</sup> That is how he regarded the work of the founders of the Augustana Synod as well: they took the best of Swedish Lutheranism and brought it to the New World. It was not for their heirs to speculate about mistakes or false steps.

That disposition led Bergendoff to what he thought really *was* the central issue between Augustana and the Covenant. He made this clear in his 1963 review of Karl Olsson’s *By One Spirit*. Bergendoff was appreciative, but guarded, confessing to “a variety of emotions” as he read the eight hundred pages. He first felt admiration—for the mastery of Swedish sources, the careful research, and “the idiomatic English.” But this was balanced by sadness at Olsson’s long account of dedicated men who were “almost constantly in strife.” “Was it necessary that so much spiritual vigor should be expended on fighting with fellow Christians?” In a rare ironic moment Bergendoff wonders how Olsson chose his title, *By One Spirit*. Echoing Arden, Bergendoff maintains that the Pietists’ desire for freedom was problematic. “Has not freedom been praised too highly if it eventuates in criticism of all spirituality but one’s own?” Bergendoff, the ecumenist, asks. Further, Olsson’s history might be a study in what happens when a church seeks unity without a creed and is not willing to define “non-essential” doctrines. Olsson himself sees the problem, Bergendoff writes, quoting the former’s own question: “If you really do not know what orthodoxy is—how do you judge heresy?”<sup>72</sup> Bergendoff thinks that



Olsson understands the difficulty that lies in attempting to establish and maintain a community of Christians without some statement of that community's beliefs—a creed or confession.

#### CONCLUSION

All of these matters were, of course, debated in one of America's many nineteenth-century ethnic enclaves. The five historians considered here themselves reflect the gradual transition from life in that enclave to participation in the wider American social and religious culture, a process Dag Blanck and other historians of ethnicity have examined. Just ahead of the Waldenström outbreak, the Augustana Synod's Norwegian minority departed peacefully—in the manner of modern Norwegian-Swedish break-ups. So the Augustana-Mission Friends drama was essentially an in-house Swedish-American affair. By the time it had cooled down, neither Augustana nor the Covenant was purely Swedish-speaking. Both made English their official language in the 1920s. Swedishness has not been an important factor in the churches, LCA and ELCA, into which the life of the Augustana Synod has flowed, nor does it seem to be a dominant influence in the polyglot Covenant Church of today. Back in the *fosterland*, in the meanwhile, the Swedes have gained a reputation as a people given to moderation and compromise—"the Middle Way." Today the Swedish national dialog rarely parses theological niceties as it did a century and a half ago. It is one of history's twists that the nineteenth-century religious fustigation these five historians discussed was all carried on in the language of a people today seen as irenic, moderate, and mostly a-religious.

Maybe that inclination to a middle way preserved Swedish Lutheran unity in America, once the Mission Friends had departed. O. Fritiof Ander's Hasselquist biography and the 2008 history of the Augustana Church by Maria Erling and Mark Granquist both make the point that of the major Lutheran ethnic groups in the United States, the Swedes are the only ones to have kept themselves in one church body.<sup>73</sup> That may be. Viewed as half-full, Augustana was clearly not characterized by the continuing organizational ruptures that marked the less tranquil development of other ethnic Lutherans. But the

claim to unbroken unity can be debated. In this regard, anyway, Waldenström may have done those who make the unity claim a favor. His adherents followed him in their impulse to validate all Christian thought and experience by the Bible alone. When they finally began their own church, the Mission Friends did not, therefore, bother calling themselves Lutherans. So “purged of these dissidents,” in Professor Arden’s barbed phrase, the synod remained united. Whether that means that the religious and ecclesiastical life of the Swedes in the New World was less contentious than that of, say, the quarrelsome Germans or the fractious Norwegians, is of course, discussable.

What was not discussable, at least for Esbjörn, Hasselquist, et al., was, of course, the *Confessio Augustana*. They had named their synod after it. And it was in refuting Waldenström that they became most ardent in their defense of the creed. Recall that both Norelius and Arden held this to be the central point in the whole Augustana-Mission Friend controversy, while Ander and Stephenson saw it instead as offering a sort of pretext by which to intensify a struggle already under way. The latter two, both laymen, were less troubled by theological issues than the two clergymen, Norelius and Arden, were. Stephenson thought contemporary Lutherans did not trouble over this issue much at all.

Perhaps the most important study of atonement theology to appear in the twentieth century was by Gustav Aulén, a Swedish scholar who was eventually, in the manner of the his countrymen, chosen a bishop of their national church. The fifth of our historians, Conrad Bergendoff, played an important role in introducing the work of such Swedish theologians to the American churches. Aulén’s 1931 book *Christus Victor* argued that the medieval and Reformation understanding of Christ’s death, the satisfaction view that long prevailed in the West, was elaborated relatively late in Christian history. It held that God’s justice had to be satisfied by a sacrifice for human sin and that Christ was a divine and perfect substitute for mankind, paying in his suffering the price for those sins. Aulén wrote that this view was itself the product of a legalism prevailing in the West *after* 1000 A.D. It was not the primary view of the Patristic Church through the first millennium, nor was it ever current in Eastern Orthodoxy. This older view, Christ the Victor, sees his death as a conquest of humanity’s

ancient enemies: sin, death, and the devil. This freed humanity from their power, offering life as children of God. So Waldenström may have pre-figured Aulén at least in one way. They both held that the legalistic doctrine of the atonement, which Hasselquist and company had so ardently defended from the Augsburg Confession, was not the essential New Testament view. In a 1998 article on the course of the atonement controversy in Lindsborg, Kansas, Philip Anderson makes the point that Aulén late in life remarked that he found Waldenström's teaching "very congenial to his own."<sup>74</sup>

Ander and Stephenson wrote that the real nub of the Augustana-Covenant controversy did not lie in Waldenström anyway. Bergendoff agreed, though he would not have said so bluntly. Nor did it lie in recrimination and name-calling, no matter how that had plagued both Covenant and Lutheran history. Unlike the preceding four historians, Bergendoff largely ignored that. There are, of course still other matters that may *seem* increasingly to have separated Lutherans and Covenanters. Chiliasm, a preoccupation with events at the end of the world, grew stronger among the latter, though it was also present in some Augustana circles. By the mid-twentieth century Augustana no longer tended toward a "pure membership" view of the church, as the Covenant did, but many of Hasselquist's generation certainly had been inclined that way. Bergendoff may have been sympathetic with the "Swedish folk church," a term he preferred to "State Church." But Hasselquist certainly was not. In time, Augustana public worship grew increasingly liturgical, but not in the early days; Covenant services continued to be less formal. Both churches had synodical forms of government and were leery of bishops. Thus in many ways, Covenant-Lutheran differences were in degree rather than in kind, I think.

In his review of *By One Spirit* Conrad Bergendoff offered his own judgment on what *was* the most serious matter between Augustana and the Mission Friends. It lay in the basic question of how a church is constituted and maintained and how it should relate to other Christian bodies. And pre-Waldenström that was in one sense Hasselquist's central problem too. For him, as well as for Bergendoff, if a church were to remain united, it must have a formal creed. The first Missionsvänner did not think so. That is why Bergendoff saw a

significant continuing issue between Lutherans and Covenanters. It was not only a specific creed, the one written in Germany in 1530, the Mission Friends abandoned; they believed they needed no creed but the Bible whatsoever. Though writing about the twentieth century revivalist Lewi Pethrus rather than the nineteenth century Pietists, the Swedish novelist Per Olov Enquist captures this attitude about formal creeds nicely in his recent work, *Lewi's Journey*:

A creed came from human beings and not from God. It was something that a group of people pulled out of the Bible and that would basically cause nothing but division. The clear words of the Bible were sufficient. The word "creed" was always spoken with the underlying connotation of "academic theology," . . . and in any case reeked of the state church.<sup>75</sup>

For Hasselquist, of course, the Pietists' giving up the Lutheran creed was the issue; for Bergendoff it was that they had no written creed at all. And that led to ecumenical questions.

In the nineteenth century Augustana's confessional loyalty tended to close off dialog with other Christians. That was the problem with creeds as the Mission Friends understood them: they created divisions. As the Augustana Synod opened outward in the twentieth century, some of its ecumenists, notably Conrad Bergendoff, believed that the creeds might serve as a base from which Lutherans could address and even listen to other Christians. In that sense, an evolution of the synod's self-understanding is reflected in the careers and writing of the five historians I have discussed. By the time of its passing, Augustana had become a full participant in inter-church dialog.

The struggles with the Mission Friends may have helped the Lutherans to understand themselves better. At first they circled the wagons, protecting their creed and identity. But later Augustana began to relax, realizing that to hold to one's confession did not preclude conversation and fellowship with people of other doctrinal traditions. That was a tilting toward Olof Olsson rather than Hasselquist or Esbjörn. That did, of course, raise the question that the Pietists had originally raised: if it were possible to get back to the gospel message of the New Testament, why was a creed necessary at all?

Whether Lutherans have settled that question is not presently clear. It is certainly the case that Bergendoff wavered through his ecumenical career between loyalty to the Lutheran confessions and a nagging sense that behind them must lie some scriptural truth, which other denominational groups had, like the Lutherans, also grasped. Again, that begged the original Mission Friends' question: why formulate and then rigidly hold to a creed when simple biblical truth could be discerned?

What is evident from the consideration of these five Augustana scholars is that their denomination's move toward ecumenism seems to have come in part from historical reflection on the controversies of the nineteenth century, especially those with Swedish and Swedish-American Pietists. Some thoughtful Augustana Lutherans—Olof Olsson or Conrad Bergendoff are examples—missed the Covenanters and wished they might have remained together. But since that did not come to pass, the immigrants' heirs can at least sing our favorite Swedish hymns together.

#### ENDNOTES

1. George M. Stephenson, *The Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration* (Minneapolis, 1932), 286.
2. *Ibid.*, 176.
3. G. Everett Arden, *Augustana Heritage: A History of the Augustana Lutheran Church* (Rock Island, IL, 1963), 8.
4. E. Norelius, *T. N. Hasselquist: Lefnadsteckning* (Rock Island, IL, n.d. [1900]), 19.
5. *Ibid.*, 20.
6. *Ibid.*, 52.
7. *Ibid.*, 53.
8. *Ibid.*, 63.
9. *Ibid.*, 158.
10. *Ibid.*, 165ff.
11. The Augsburg Confession, Article IV, Of Justification, states, "sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, *has made satisfaction* for our sins." And Article XX, Of Good Works, contains the phrase "that *the Father may be reconciled* through Him" (my italics).
12. Norelius, 208.
13. *Ibid.*, 209.
14. *Ibid.*, 210f.

15. O. Fritiof Ander to George M. Stephenson, 28 May 1931, Stephenson papers, Box 2, University of Minnesota archives.
16. O. Fritiof Ander, "Augustana-kyrkan vid sitt sekelskifte," *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 60 (1960).
17. ———, *T. N. Hasselquist: The Career and Influence of a Swedish-American Clergyman, Journalist and Educator* (Rock Island, IL, 1931), 7-9.
18. *Ibid.*, 52, 79.
19. *Ibid.*, 111.
20. Stephenson and Arden both note that the first generation of immigrant Augustana pastors schooled in America also lacked solid academic training.
21. Ander, *Hasselquist*, 161.
22. *Ibid.*, 163.
23. *Ibid.*, 164.
24. *Ibid.*, 166.
25. *Ibid.*, 168.
26. *Ibid.*, 170.
27. *Ibid.*, 171.
28. *Ibid.*, 86.
29. *Ibid.*, 165.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Gunnar Westin, *Mina unga år i skola, baptistsamfund och universitet* (Stockholm, 1967), 228f.
32. Stephenson, *Religious Aspects*, 291.
33. *Ibid.*, 106ff.
34. *Ibid.*, 108.
35. *Ibid.*, 114.
36. *Ibid.*, 264-67.
37. *Ibid.*, 273f.
38. *Ibid.*, 276.
39. *Ibid.*, 285.
40. *Ibid.*, 277.
41. *Ibid.*, 284.
42. *Ibid.*
43. George M. Stephenson, *The Founding of the Augustana Synod* (Rock Island, IL, 1927), 72.
44. Stephenson, *Religious Aspects*, 284f.
45. *Ibid.*, 287.
46. I am indebted to Dag Blanck for help he gave in finding the use of the term *hyperevangelisk* by Swedish church historians such as Carl Alfred Cornelius and Ernst Newman.
47. Arden, *Augustana Heritage*, 27.

48. Ibid., 28.
49. Ibid., 34.
50. Ibid., 100.
51. Ibid., 28.
52. Ibid., 188.
53. Ibid., 162f.
54. Ibid., 170.
55. Ibid., 162f.
56. Ibid., 172.
57. Ibid., 174.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., 182-86.
60. Ibid., 179.
61. Ibid., 187.
62. Ibid., 186.
63. Ibid., 187.
64. Conrad Bergendoff to Emmer Engberg, 7 July 1955, Bergendoff Papers, Box 16, Folder 2, Augustana College Library.
65. Conrad Bergendoff, *The Church of the Lutheran Reformation: A Historical Survey of Lutheranism* (St. Louis, 1967), 217.
66. Ibid., 218.
67. Conrad Bergendoff, *The One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church* (Rock Island, IL, 1954), 45-46.
68. Bergendoff, *Church of the Lutheran Reformation*, 239.
69. Ibid., 242.
70. Conrad Bergendoff, "A Century of Augustana History," *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 59 (1959).
71. Conrad Bergendoff, *Olavus Petri and the Ecclesiastical Transformation in Sweden* (New York, 1928), 147.
72. Conrad Bergendoff, review of Karl A. Olsson, *By One Spirit*, in *Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly* 14 (1963): 33f.
73. Ander, *Hasselquist*, 225; Maria Erling and Mark Granquist, *The Augustana Story: Shaping Lutheran Identity in North America* (Minneapolis, 2008), 3.
74. Philip J. Anderson, "'Strangers Yet Acquainted': The Personality of Religious Schism in Lindsborg, Kansas," *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 49 (1998): 218.
75. Per Olov Enquist, *Lewi's Journey*, trans. Tina Nunnally (New York, 2005), 270.