

## Augustana and Lutheran Identity in America

### Arland J. Hultgren

There are others who have a longer institutional memory than I, and they would take up this topic in ways different from my own. Each of us has had experiences both inside and outside of the Augustana Church that are quite specific, and they affect how we assess that church.

In my own case, I grew up in an Augustana congregation, Mamrelund Lutheran Church, located in a rural area north of Grand Rapids, Michigan, equidistant to two small towns, Kent City and Sparta. Founded in 1866, it is the oldest Augustana congregation in the state.

College and seminary were both here in Rock Island. I was a member of the last class to enter Augustana Seminary. Our class entered in the fall of 1961, but by the time we had finished our very first academic year, we were students at the Lutheran School of Theology—Rock Island Campus. So we are alumni of LSTC, but we were educated by the professors in Rock Island.

But in spite of my rootage in the Augustana Church and its institutions, the course of my professional life has not been at institutions founded by the Augustana Church, except for some time in parish ministry at Trinity Lutheran Church, Tenafly, New Jersey, founded in 1910. Aside from that, the contexts in which I have lived and worked have been primarily in a college founded by Lutherans of the United Lutheran Church in America on the East Coast—Wagner College, Staten Island—and then at Luther Seminary, founded by Lutherans of other traditions, primarily Norwegian, in Minnesota. That means that I have bumped up against other ways of being Lutheran in America. Those experiences have been delightful, puzzling, and sometimes a challenge. They have often provoked me to think about what it meant to be an Augustana Lutheran in America. They have also provided a vantage point from outside.

The assignment to speak about “Augustana and Lutheran Identity in America” was given to me by the program committee several months ago. I have spent time trying to figure out what to do with it. After many false starts, going down blind alleys, I came to a conclusion. I decided that the best way for me to approach the topic is simply to ask the question, Was there a distinctive Augustana way of being Lutheran in America? I realized early on that there are several ways of being Lutheran in America. They are not necessarily better or worse, but they are different. They range over the spectrum all the way from a strict confessionalism, as embodied in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, to the stark simplicity and antipathy toward formal theological education in the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church. These illustrate the breadth of possible ways of being Lutheran in America, and there are others.

Finding something distinctive of any Lutheran body is complicated by the sheer number of synods and associations that Lutherans have created over the years. How many were there? I

have seen various estimates. According to one estimate, Lutherans created some sixty church bodies between 1840 and 1875.<sup>1</sup> According to another, the number of synods created along geographic, ethnic, and doctrinal lines since 1748 exceeds one hundred.<sup>2</sup>

Attempts have been made to unify Lutherans, but we know how slow the process has been. Back in 1965 church historian Winthrop Hudson, a Baptist, wrote words that do not surprise us:

By 1900, there were 24 different Lutheran groups, with the family tree of most of them so complicated, by constant reshuffling, that it was difficult to chart even their individual histories.<sup>3</sup>

I return to the question that I posed: Was there a distinctive Augustana way of being Lutheran in America? I have settled on five different ways. There are certainly others, but I don't think anyone would cross these five off the list.

### I. A Small Church with a Big Heart

The Augustana Church was never very large. At the time of the LCA merger in 1962, it consisted of 629,547 baptized members, 423,673 confirmed, in 1,269 congregations.<sup>4</sup> That was rather small on the American scene, even among Lutherans. It accounted for only seven percent of Lutherans belonging to various synodical bodies. It was much smaller than the big three: the United Lutheran Church in America with its nearly 2.4 million baptized, the Missouri Synod with over 2.3 million baptized members, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church—earlier called the Norwegian Lutheran Church—that became a part of the ALC in 1960 with over 1.1 million baptized members.<sup>5</sup>

#### Membership of the Augustana Lutheran Church in 1962

- 629,547 baptized members.
- 423,674 confirmed members.
- 1,269 congregations.

#### Total Lutherans in North America (1959 statistics):

8,006,932 baptized members.

<sup>1</sup> Krista R. B. *Traditions of*  
Charles Scribner's Sons

*Studies of*  
ork:

<sup>2</sup> Conrad Be  
Lectures, 19

The Augustana Lutheran Church

el-Miller

<sup>3</sup> Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 260.

<sup>4</sup> G. Everett Arden, *Augustana Heritage: A History of the Augustana Lutheran Church* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1963), 410.

<sup>5</sup> The statistics are from the *Yearbook of American Churches*, ed. Benson Y. Landis (New York: National Council of Churches, 1960), 255-56. The figures are for 1959. The precise figures provided are 2,369,263 for the ULCA; 2,304,962 for the LCMS; and 1,125,867 for the ELC. The total for all the Lutheran churches listed is 8,006,932 baptized members.

### Augustana and the Big Three in 1960

- The Augustana Lutheran Church, 629,547 baptized members.
- The United Lutheran Church in America, 2.4 million baptized members.
- The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2.3 million baptized members.
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church (“Norwegian Lutheran Church” until 1946), 1.1 million baptized members; merged to form the ALC in 1960.

But in proportion to its size, Augustana had a very large presence on the North American scene. It had founded several colleges in Minnesota, Texas, and even Idaho that went out of business. But four four-year colleges still existed in 1962—Augustana, Bethany, Gustavus Adolphus, and Upsala—plus Luther Junior College at Wahoo, Nebraska, which merged that same year with Midland Lutheran College.<sup>6</sup> In addition, it had its own theological seminary.

### The Colleges in 1962

Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, founded 1860  
 Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas, founded 1881  
 Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota, founded 1862  
 Upsala College, East Orange, New Jersey, founded 1893;  
 closed in 1995  
 Luther Junior College, Wahoo, Nebraska, founded in 1883;  
 merged with Midland Lutheran College, Freemont, Nebraska in

Then too there were a good number of institutions of mercy, as they were called: 10 hospitals, which often had schools for nursing, 24 homes for the aged, 6 hospices, 10 homes for children, including the remarkable Bethphage Mission of Axtell, Nebraska, for which we kids sold Crimson Hearts. In addition there was the Immanuel Deaconess Institute of Omaha, and the

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<sup>6</sup> For a list of some of the colleges that went out of existence, cf. Emmet E. Eklund, “Lutheran Higher Education: The Augustana Tradition,” *The Augustana Heritage: Recollections, Perspectives, and Prospects*, ed. Arland J. Hultgren and Vance L. Eckstrom (Chicago: Augustana Heritage Association, 1999), 272.

Seaman's Center in New York. The church also supported 42 inter-Lutheran health and welfare agencies.<sup>7</sup>

In an essay prepared for the centennial of the church in 1960, Robert Holmen calculated that Lutheran church bodies, inter-synodical Lutheran organizations, and various associations of Lutherans in North America owned some 300 institutions. Of these, Augustana owned fifteen percent of them, even though it made up only seven percent of the membership of those Lutheran churches. If one goes on to speak of direct ownership by the churches themselves, rather than by inter-Lutheran organizations and associations, Augustana owned thirty percent of the institutions in spite of its membership of seven percent of Lutheran churches of the time.<sup>8</sup>

Augustana "Institutions of Mercy" in 1962

- 10 Hospitals.
- 24 Homes for the Aged.
- 6 Hopices.
- 10 Homes for Children.
- Bethphage Mission, Axtell, Nebraska.
- Immanuel Deaconess Institute, Omaha, Nebraska.
- Seaman's Center, New York, New York.

And if we look to another area, global missions, we see the Augustana Church deeply involved. According to David Vikner, no less than 432 men and women were commissioned as missionaries to ten foreign countries over the years, usually accompanied by spouses and children. Most went to India, mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Tanzania.<sup>9</sup>

- A Committee on Foreign Missions organized in 1861.
- The earliest person commissioned was Pastor August B. Carlson to India in 1878.
- The Board of Foreign Missions was established in 1923.

Over the years (1860-1962) 432 persons were commissioned to serve in ten overseas countries.

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<sup>7</sup> Lee H. Wesley, "Social Ministry in the Augustana Lutheran Church," *The Augustana Heritage*, 183-90.

<sup>8</sup> Robert E. Holmen, "The Ministry of Mercy," *Centennial Essays: Augustana Lutheran Church 1860-1960*, ed. Emmer Engberg (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1960), 244.

<sup>9</sup> David L. Vikner, "Augustana in World Mission, 1861-1962: Introduction," *The Augustana Heritage*, 193-95.

One could go on to give details on these and other aspects of Augustana, particularly in its outstanding youth ministry, its homeland missions in the U.S. and Canada, the expansive role of women in the life of the church, and more. On those matters, statistics are more difficult to find.

There is a temptation, of course, to be nostalgic and even try to claim some bragging rights in all this. That is not my intention. Every Lutheran church tradition in America would have bragging rights on some matter. But especially on this 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Augustana Church, neither should we forget what our forebears accomplished. They constituted a small church with a big heart.

## II. A Bridge Church

Augustana was a bridge church. The term “bridge church” was given to me. I was in a conversation one day with a colleague who does not come from the Augustana tradition, but from a predecessor body of the ALC. He said that Augustana was always the “bridge church,” and I think I know what he meant. The thought is echoed in a statement by Edgar Trexler, who came out of the ULCA tradition and served as editor of *The Lutheran* magazine. In his historical record of the ELCA merger process, he says that the Augustana Church, though no longer existing, was “a bridge builder in the merger process.”<sup>10</sup> And then there is that well-known article about the formation of the ELCA in *The Christian Century* in 1987, written by Richard Koenig, “The New Lutheran Church: The Gift of Augustana.”<sup>11</sup>

The relationship of Augustana with other Lutheran churches is interesting from many angles. What is particularly interesting is that it was often caught in the middle of struggles between much larger Lutheran churches, particularly between so-called “Eastern Lutheranism,” meaning the ULCA, and so-called “Upper Midwest Lutheranism,” meaning primarily the Scandinavian bodies, dominated by sheer numbers by Lutherans of Norwegian heritage. It is not an insult to either of those traditions to say that they were often at odds with one another in days gone by; the historical record shows that. The record also shows that Augustana tried as best it could to steer a middle course and to create a bridge between them.

To tell the story of how Augustana worked its way through the maze requires a review of some major turning points in Lutheran history in North America, but within limits. I will limit myself to Augustana’s relationships with the church bodies that made up the National Lutheran Council. Of those eight, four flowed into The American Lutheran Church in 1960, although the LFC came in a bit later, and the other four flowed into the Lutheran Church in America in 1962.

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<sup>10</sup> Edgar R. Trexler, *Anatomy of a Merger: People, Dynamics, and Decisions that Shaped the ELCA* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1991), 246.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Koenig, “The New Lutheran Church: The Gift of Augustana,” *The Christian Century* 104/19 (June 17-24, 1987): 555-58.

### Churches of the National Lutheran Council

(Formed in 1918)

Four that Merged to Form the ALC in 1960

(Figures from the End of 1959)

The American Lutheran Church (The “old” ALC, German background, founded in 1930); 1.0+ million baptized members.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC, Norwegian background, founded by mergers in 1917); 1.1+ million baptized members.

The Lutheran Free Church (LFC, Norwegian background, founded in 1897); 82,000+ baptized members. Joined the ALC in 1963.

The United Evangelical Lutheran Church (UELCL, Danish background; commonly known [by themselves] as the “Sad” or “Holy Danes,” founded in 1896); 66,000+ baptized members.

### Churches of the National Lutheran Council

(Formed in 1918)

Four that Merged to Form the LCA in 1962

(Figures from the End of 1959)

The American Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC, Danish background; the “Happy Danes,” founded in 1872). 23,000+ baptized members.

The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church (Swedish background, founded in 1860). 596,000+ baptized members.

The Finnish Lutheran Church of America (“Suomi Synod,” Finnish background, founded in 1889).

36,000+ baptized members.

The United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA, German, Slovak, & Icelandic

The Augustana Church sought to be on good terms with all of the churches within the National Lutheran Council. But that was not easy, and it caused some irritation among some of the other churches along the way. So if Augustana was eventually to be recognized as “the bridge church,” that honor came with some bumps and bruises within American Lutheranism.

When Lars Paul Esbjörn arrived in America in 1849, he was aware that Swedish Lutherans in the New Sweden colony had been too dependent on the Church of Sweden for its support and totally dependent on it for obtaining pastors. He knew that, in order for a Swedish Lutheran church to survive in America, it had to try new approaches. Moreover, he became aware soon enough that provisions had to be made for educating pastors within North America itself.<sup>12</sup>

Esbjörn had been in America only two years when he and the three Swedish congregations in Andover and Moline, Illinois, and New Sweden, Iowa, joined the newly formed Synod of Northern Illinois in 1851, a coalition of pastors and congregations consisting consequently of Swedes, Norwegians, and “Americans” (English-speaking persons primarily of German origins who had moved westward). Often the membership of Esbjörn and others in that synod is considered nothing more than a prelude to the forming of the Augustana Church, but in fact it was one of the most fateful events for the trajectory that Augustana was to take early on in its life. Membership in the Synod of Northern Illinois was a catalyst for the Swedish Lutherans to become more self-conscious of their way of being Lutheran in North America. It was also a factor in its forming of associations with Lutheran bodies that had been created earlier in the eastern part of the United States—something that the other Scandinavian churches would not do.

By joining the Synod of Northern Illinois, the Swedish Lutherans found themselves quite soon in wider associations of Lutherans outside the Midwest. Those associations were not always happy; in fact, they were often tumultuous. Nevertheless, the Augustana tradition never developed the distrust of so-called “Eastern Lutheranism” that characterized so much of Midwestern Lutheranism.



Lars Paul Esbjörn  
(October 16, 1808-July 2, 1870)  
Ministry in the US, 1849-1863.  
Sole Swedish Lutheran Pastor in North America, 1849-1852.  
Leader in the founding of the Augustana Synod (1860).

<sup>12</sup> Lars Paul Esbjörn, *Report on the Development and Current State of the Swedish Lutheran Congregations in North America, Presented at the Clergy Meeting of the Upsala Archbishop See, 14 June 1865*, trans. John E. Norton (Rock Island: Augustana Historical Society, 2009), 12.

At the time of joining the Synod of Northern Illinois there were not many alternatives. There were only two synods of any viable size in the Midwest at the time. One was the Missouri Synod, founded by Germans in 1847. But that was hardly an option. Even if the Swedes wanted to join that body, it is unlikely that the Missouri Synod would have accepted the Swedish pastors and congregations into their synod. Moreover, there is no evidence that the Swedes wanted to join that synod.<sup>13</sup> The other synod on the scene was the Eielson Synod, formed by Norwegians in 1846. But that was hardly an option because of its strong emphasis on lay preaching and its requirement of evidence of conversion for membership in its congregations.

There was another synod being formed in Wisconsin by Norwegians, the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, popularly known as the Norwegian Synod. But that synod was not yet created; it was created two years later in 1853. Perhaps the Swedes could have waited and could have cooperated to form a broader Scandinavian synod, but that would have been fruitless, for the Norwegian Synod was unmistakably Norwegian and sought to replicate features of the state church of Norway on the American scene.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, its leaders opposed the influences of the Norwegian revivalist lay preacher Hans Nielsen Hauge. Therefore an association with the Swedes, influenced by the Swedish revivalist lay preacher Carl O. Rosenius, was not likely.

There were synods existing in the eastern United States at the time, but they were remote geographically. The Synod of Northern Illinois was the best option at the time. In fact, Esbjörn played a role in its founding. In 1850, a year before its founding, Esbjörn was still the only ordained Swedish Lutheran pastor in the land. During that year he contacted two Norwegian pastors in Chicago who had no interest in joining in with those forming the Norwegian Synod in

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<sup>13</sup> On relationships between these synods, see Mark A. Granquist, "The Augustana Synod and the Missouri Synod," *Lutheran Quarterly* 24 (2010): 42-60.

<sup>14</sup> Additional reasons for not joining this group, even after it came into being, are provided by Hugo Söderström, *Confession and Cooperation: The Polity of the Augustana Synod in Confessional Matters and the Synod's Relations with other Church up to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, bibliotheca Historico-Ecclesiastica Lundensis IV (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup Bokförlag, 1973), 49; cf. also the report by L. Esbjörn, *Report on the Development and Current State of the Swedish Lutheran Congregations in North America*, 8-9. A brief account of the founding of this church body is provided by August R. Suelflow and E. Clifford Nelson, "Following the Frontier," *The Lutherans in North America*, ed. E. Clifford Nelson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 186-88



Wisconsin. Esbjörn approached them about forming a Scandinavian Lutheran synod in Illinois.<sup>15</sup>

Esbjörn cannot, however, be called one of the founders of the Synod of Northern Illinois. It was founded on September 18, 1851, at Cederville, Illinois, about 30 miles northwest of Rockford.<sup>16</sup> Esbjörn and a lay delegate from Andover arrived a day late to miss the actual founding; but both he and the Swedish congregations were received into the synod during the five-day meeting.

The story from the early 1850s to 1860 is a sad one, and we need not go into details. The Synod of Northern Illinois joined the Evangelical Lutheran General Synod of the United States of America in 1853. The General Synod, founded in 1820, was a federation of district synods, and by 1860 it encompassed about two thirds of all Lutherans in North America. It was notorious for its latitude. It seems that any group could join it that claimed in some fashion to be Lutheran. Some of its synods had no confessional statement in their constitutions at all.<sup>17</sup> In the case of the Synod of Northern Illinois, it was received into the General Synod with a confessional statement, but it was a weak one. It claimed that the Augsburg Confession was “mainly correct.” That was not satisfactory with Esbjörn, and when he joined that synod, he made a request that the minutes record that, for the Swedish congregations, the symbolical books of the Lutheran Church are believed to contain “a correct summary and exposition of the divine word.” His request was granted.<sup>18</sup>

The Synod of Northern Illinois founded a college at Springfield in 1851 with the grandiose name of the Illinois State University, although it was not a state school and was hardly a university. In its first year of operation it had four faculty members and 82 students.<sup>19</sup> Lars Paul Esbjörn began teaching there in 1858 with 20 Scandinavian students.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Oscar N. Olson, *The Augustana Lutheran Church in America: Pioneer Period, 1848-1860* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1950), 134.

<sup>16</sup> George M. Stephenson, *The Founding of the Augustana Synod 1850-1860* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1927), 17.

<sup>17</sup> Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 66.

<sup>18</sup> G. Stephenson, *The Founding of the Augustana Synod*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> O. Olson, *The Augustana Lutheran Church*, 266; G. Everett Arden, *School of the Prophets: The Background and History of Augustana Theological Seminary* (Rock Island: Augustana Theological Seminary, 1960), 75.

<sup>20</sup> George M. Stephenson, *The Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration: A Study of Immigrant Churches* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1932; reprinted, New York: Arno Press, 1969), 185.

### The Evangelical Lutheran General Synod of the United States of America (“General Synod”)

- Founded in 1820 as a federation of district synods.
- Roughly 2/3 of all Lutherans in North America were affiliated at one time or another.
- The Synod of Northern Illinois, founded in 1851, joined the General Synod in 1853.
- At its founding in 1860 the Augustana Synod withdrew from the General Synod.

But for Esbjörn and the increasing number of Scandinavians associated with him, the Synod of Northern Illinois was not a satisfactory association, and the conditions at Springfield became intolerable. Doctrinal matters and other issues came to a head in the spring of 1860, and Esbjörn resigned his professorship. From June 5th to June 11th of that year, 26 pastors and 15 lay delegates from 49 congregations founded the Augustana Synod.<sup>21</sup> It ceased at the same time its membership in the General Synod. Its doctrinal statement concerning the Augsburg Confession said that that document is a “correct summary of the principal Christian doctrines.”

#### Founding of the Augustana Synod, Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin June 5-11, 1860

- Twenty six pastors.
- Fifteen lay persons.
- Representing 49 congregations with 4,967 members.
- Confessional statement: “the unaltered Augsburg Confession” is “a short and correct summary of the principal Christian

But the act of cutting off its ties with the General Synod did not mean that the Augustana Synod was to go into isolation. The trajectory of Augustana from the earliest days continued so that it maintained ties with Lutherans outside the Midwest. In 1870 the Augustana Synod joined



Eleven of the 40 Founders of the Augustana Synod  
(June 5-8, 1860)  
in a Photo from 1890

<sup>21</sup> G. E. Arden,

the newly-formed General Council, a coalition of district synods primarily in the East, that was more solidly confessional than the General Synod had ever been. It was established at the invitation of the venerable Ministerium of Pennsylvania in 1866 as a union of synods that “confess the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.”<sup>22</sup> Over the years its membership varied; at one time or another 24 synods belonged to it.<sup>23</sup>

#### The General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (“General Council”)

- Founded in 1867 as a federation of more confessional district synods, most having left the General Synod.
- The Augustana Synod joined in 1870 and was a member until 1918. Augustana was the only non-district synod, the only Scandinavian synod, the largest synod of the General Council.
- Carl A. Swensson, founder of Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas (1881), was President of the General Council, 1893-95.
- The General Council met in Rock Island & Moline in 1915.

Augustana had a unique place within the General Council. It was the only Scandinavian group to join it. It was the only non-geographical synod within it. And it was actually the largest

<sup>22</sup> Quoted from R Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, 141.

<sup>23</sup> William A. Good, *A History of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America* (Ph.D. diss.; New Haven: Yale University, 1967), 306-07. At the time of the ULCA merger in 1918 it consisted of 14 synods.

synod within it.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Carl A. Swensson of Lindsborg, Kansas, served as President of the General Council from 1893 to 1895, and it met in Rock Island and Moline in 1915.<sup>25</sup> The host congregations were First Lutheran Church, Moline, and Zion Lutheran Church, Rock Island, which merged with Grace Lutheran Church in 1928 to form St. John's Lutheran Church.<sup>26</sup> Augustana College and Theological Seminary hosted a reception in Denkmann Memorial Hall. Several Augustana persons preached sermons and addressed those present. These included the Synod President Lawrence Johnston (President, 1911-18) and G. A. Brandelle, soon to become the next President of the Synod (1918-35). The incomparable and indomitable Emmy Evald addressed the Women's Missionary Mass Meeting.<sup>27</sup> She was the founder and long-time President of the Women's Missionary Society of the Augustana Church (1892-1935). Among



Emmy Carlsson Evald  
(September 18, 1857—December 11, 1946)  
Founder of the Women's Missionary Society of the  
Augustana Church, 1892  
President of the WMS, 1892—1935

other things, that organization raised money for the construction of the building on the Augustana College campus called at various times the "Women's Builing," "Carlsson Hall," and finally the "Emmy Carlsson Evald Hall."

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<sup>24</sup> E. Theodore Bachmann, *The United Lutheran Church in America, 1918-1962* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 74.

<sup>25</sup> *Minutes of the Thirty-Fifth Convention of the General Council* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1915).

<sup>26</sup> G. Stephenson, *The Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration*, 467.

<sup>27</sup> *Minutes of the Thirty-Fifth Convention of the General Council*, 305-06.

Original Name in 1928: “Women’s Building” or “W.B.”

New Name in 1960: “Carlsson Hall”

New Name in 2008: “Emmy Carlsson Evald Hall”



This sketch is sufficient to show how the Augustana trajectory was to develop within American Lutheranism. It was set on a course that would position Augustana within a large company. Early in the twentieth century one could expect that Augustana would continue as an ally of all the other synods within the General Council to merge with two other large units to form the United Lutheran Church in America in 1918.

### Partners in the Formation of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1918

The Evangelical Lutheran General Synod of the United States of America (“General Synod”), founded in 1820.

The General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Confederate States of America (“United Synod, South”), founded in 1863.

The General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (“General Council”), founded in 1867.

*Augustana Lutheran Church of the “General Council”  
does not join, causing disappointment in ULCA.*

But that wasn't to be. Augustana voted against joining the ULCA at its national convention at Minneapolis in 1918. Four leaders of the ULCA merger came to the convention and made an appeal, and the president of the church, G. A. Brandelle, favored being a part of the merger.<sup>28</sup> But the negative vote was almost unanimous. In his history of the ULCA, E. Theodore Bachmann has a brief section concerning Augustana in 1918. He calls that portion of his book "Augustana Disappoints."<sup>29</sup> He speaks of Augustana's action of withdrawing from the ULCA merger as "a major disappointment" and "a traumatic event for all parties." According to him, the major factor for the negative vote was that the General Council had begun mission work among English-speaking Swedish Americans in Minnesota and other parts of what was called at the time the "northwest." The Augustana people looked upon the mission work as siphoning off the younger people from Augustana congregations whose primary language was English. The transition from Swedish to English had actually begun in the Augustana Church as early as the 1880s, and in 1884 congregations had been urged to use English where appropriate,<sup>30</sup> but the progress was slow. Those leaders who proceeded to form the ULCA without Augustana wrote an official response to Augustana's withdrawal, expressing their "deepest regret that the Augustana Synod could not see its way clear at this time to remain with the General Council and enter with it into The United Lutheran Church."<sup>31</sup>

As the twentieth century moved on, the place of Augustana within American Lutheranism became even more complicated. Not becoming a part of the ULCA merger, Augustana joined up with four other bodies in 1930, primarily in the Midwest, to form the American Lutheran Conference. The others in the American Lutheran Conference were the American Lutheran Church (the German body formed in 1930), the Lutheran Free Church (of Norwegian background), the Norwegian Lutheran Church, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (the pious or sad Danes). From that point on, a casual observer might assume that Augustana had now cast its lot in a different direction and was on the trajectory that led to the formation of The American Lutheran Church in 1960. But Augustana was to be a disappointment to those persons as well.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.; and G. E. Arden, *Augustana Heritage*, 255-56.

<sup>29</sup> E. T. Bachmann, *The United Lutheran Church in America*, 74-75.

<sup>30</sup> A. D. Mattson, *Polity of the Augustana Lutheran Church* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1952), 143.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted from R. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, 281.

**The American Lutheran Conference  
(1930-1954)**

American Lutheran Church (“old” ALC), 1930-1954

Lutheran Free Church, 1930-1954

Norwegian Lutheran Church, 1930-1954

United Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1930-1954

Augustana Lutheran Church, 1930-1952

Here I cannot resist telling an anecdote. Back in 1977 I was new on the faculty of Luther Seminary. I recall a conversation with an older colleague. That gentleman had been a leader in the Lutheran Free Church, which joined the ALC—but a bit late—in 1963. The man made the remark to me: “You know, you Augustana people should have been with us.” In his view, we should have been a part of the ALC merger rather than the LCA merger.

In good humor I played along with him a bit and asked him why he thought things turned out the way they did. His response, also in good humor, was: “Well, the Swedes were always a bit too proud.” It was humor, but I tend to think he also meant what he said.

The official reason for Augustana not to continue on the trajectory toward the ALC was that it disagreed with others in the American Lutheran Conference regarding Lutheran unity. The Conference was promoting Lutheran unity among its own members, but leaving the ULCA, the Grundtvigian Danes, and the Suomi Synod out. The Augustana view was that all eight Lutheran bodies of the National Lutheran Council should be a part of the discussion. Since that was not going to happen, Augustana withdrew from the Conference in 1952.

Augustana’s act of withdrawing from the Conference caused disappointment with those who remained on the union committee. The committee expressed “its deep regret over the situation which has developed by the decisions of the Augustana Lutheran Church.”<sup>32</sup>

When we take a look at the larger panorama of Lutheranism in North America, and as we try to figure out where to locate the identity of Augustana within that panorama, we find that it was often caught in the middle of the movements toward Lutheran unity that were managed by bodies much larger in size. It disappointed those who formed the ULCA in 1918, and it disappointed those who formed the ALC in 1960.

But being of smaller size than the mighty ULCA and being only one in five of the large block making up the American Lutheran Conference, Augustana also had to learn to get along as best it could with the larger bodies. It caused some hurt feelings in doing so. But in the long run, its destiny was to be the bridge church between so-called Eastern Lutheranism and the

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted from *ibid.*, 513.

church bodies located primarily in the Midwest. The basis for that was its view of the church in general. But that is a story that belongs to the next section of my presentation.

### III. The Augustana View of the Church

Another way that Augustana was Lutheran, and distinctive, even if not unique, was its sense of church. Throughout the globe Lutherans have had widely different ecclesiologies and politics. In the case of the Swedish Lutherans in America, one can go back to the writings of T. N. Hasselquist for what was to become the Augustana view. As the first president of the synod, he sought to create a cohesive organization. In 1887 he published a commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, the premier New Testament book on the unity of the church.<sup>33</sup> In that book Hasselquist bemoans the fact that, even though churches share a common confession, too often they split apart. He attributes that to a false sense of spiritual freedom and an inadequate understanding of the nature of the church. He argues in his book, as does Ephesians itself, that



Tufve Nilsson Hasselquist  
(March 3, 1816—February 4, 1891)  
Ministry in America, 1852—1891  
President of the Augustana Synod, 1860-1870  
Editor, *Hemlandet*, 1855—1868; *Augustana*, 1868—1889

the church is not simply a human organization made up of congregations. As Ephesians has it, “There is one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:4-6). The church is a fellowship of believers throughout the world who are gathered into congregations. Christians are therefore not only members of congregations but of the wider church as well.

This view persisted throughout the life of Augustana. It is affirmed in the book called *Christian Dogmatics* by Conrad Lindberg, which was the basic text used in systematic theology

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<sup>33</sup> Tufve N. Hasselquist, *Försök till en grundlig och dock lättfattlig förklaring af Pauli bref till Efeserna* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1887).



from the late 1800s well into the 1920s.<sup>34</sup> That view is echoed also in writings by Conrad Bergendoff, Eric Wahlstrom, and Edgar Carlson.<sup>35</sup> It also had a practical effect, for it had a bearing on how the Augustana Church governed itself and related to others. There was a strong national expression of the church, and a strong sense among its members that they are part of the church beyond the congregation and even the denomination. And that sense of church has affected developments in Lutheranism in North America more than many people realize. I'll cite two examples.

First, it surely affected the merger of 1962. Augustana and the ULCA had different traditions, but they were able to come to a common understanding.

Theodore Bachmann has described the ULCA as a general body that came into existence by the approval of its constituent synods; the synods, he says:

transferred limited powers to the national body, notably in external relations; in other respects they retained an ecclesial equivalent to “states rights” over against the national government. In contrast to the centralized authority in most other Lutheran bodies with their districts or conferences, there was a certain decentralization in the ULCA.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, the Constitution of the ULCA said that “each Synod retains every power, right and jurisdiction in its own internal affairs not expressly delegated to The United Lutheran Church in America” (Article VIII, Section 4).<sup>37</sup> Nothing like that appears concerning the conferences within the Constitution of the Augustana Church.

The contrast of the ULCA with other bodies that Bachmann mentions can be observed in the case of Augustana. Augustana had thirteen geographical conferences in

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<sup>34</sup> Conrad Lindberg, *Christian Dogmatics* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1922), 372-73. The Swedish edition was published in 1898.

<sup>35</sup> Conrad Bergendoff, *The Making and Meaning of the Augsburg Confession* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1930), 50-51; idem, *The One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church*, The Hoover Lectures 1953 (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1954), 94-95; Eric H. Wahlstrom, “The Church,” *What Lutherans Are Thinking: A Symposium on Lutheran Faith and Life*, ed. Edward C. Fendt (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1947) 247-64; idem, *The Church and the Means of Grace* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1951); idem, *God Who Redeems: Perspectives in Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 179-90; Edgar M. Carlson, *The Classic Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), 106-09.

<sup>36</sup> E. T. Bachmann, *The United Lutheran Church in America*, 131.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted from R. Wolf, *Documents on Lutheran Unity in America*, 277.

1962, and each had been the creation of the church; each was in fact a unit of the national church.<sup>38</sup>

The outcome of the merger negotiations leading up to 1962 was a hybrid to some degree. The LCA was like the ULCA in that its various synods were incorporated, examined candidates for the ministry, and conducted ordinations. But in another, very important way the LCA was more like Augustana: the national church was more centralized, and the synods were units with limited powers within it; there was more of a sense of church across the U.S. and Canada.

A second example of the Augustana effect can be detected in the construction of the ELCA in 1988. To show what might have been, there was a proposal during the merger negotiations that the new church should consist of small synods or districts within larger regions. The larger regions would each have a bishop and its own legislative convention. We would, in effect, have a federation of territorial churches. The national church would be weak; its presiding bishop would be one of the regional bishops serving on a rotating basis. There would be no national conventions at all.

Although that design was proposed, it was not entertained very seriously or for very long.<sup>39</sup> At one of the meetings of the merger commission, Reuben Swanson—a prominent figure in Augustana, and the first President of the Augustana Heritage Association—took to the floor and said that he opposed the proposal, adding, “We are mandated to form one church and this option will not fulfill the task given to us. It will produce a federation, not a church.”<sup>40</sup> Insofar as that was the Augustana view of the church, it carried the day.

Augustana’s way of understanding the church also had a direct bearing on its ways of doing outreach both globally and in home missions. These became activities of the national church, often in cooperation with other Lutheran bodies. It also affected habits and patterns for financial support of the church. As early as 1873 congregations were expected to contribute to the national church, based on their confirmed membership and a formula established by the synod.<sup>41</sup> The concept of grace giving was not the Augustana way to support the national church. Augustana’s way made the creation of institutions of learning and care possible. Finally, Augustana’s way of understanding the church affected its ecumenical outlook. It became a charter member of the National Lutheran Council in 1918, the Lutheran World Federation in 1947, the World Council of

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<sup>38</sup> G. E. Arden, *Augustana Heritage*, 408.

<sup>39</sup> E. Trexler, *Anatomy of a Merger*, 80.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>41</sup> A. D. Mattson, *Polity of the Augustana Lutheran Church*, 240-41.

Churches in 1948, the National Council of Churches in 1950, and the Canadian Council of Churches in 1952.

#### IV. Theology

A fourth way of being Lutheran in America has to do with theology. Each strand of Lutheran tradition has had a distinct flavor. Some of the most obvious are the Grundtvigian heritage among one wing of the Danes, the controversies over election among the Norwegians, or the principles for the interpretation of Scripture in Missouri, and so on.

In the case of Augustana, there was one famous controversy, which had been ignited in Sweden, the so-called Waldenström controversy, which led to the formation of the Mission Covenant Church in North America in 1885. But aside from that, the Augustana Church was relatively free of theological conflict within itself, and it was not particularly affected by the multitude of movements and controversies within American Christianity in general.

How does one describe the Augustana way within the theological stream of Lutheranism in America? The early leaders had to steer a course through confusing times. They had problems with leaders of other denominations and with other Lutheran bodies. Coming to clarity was not easy, but it did come.

In 1856 Lars Paul Esbjörn wrote a letter in which he speaks of himself as being liberated from current views of the Protestantism he had encountered in Illinois. He says in that letter that he had gained greater clarity in the gospel, that the new birth is given in baptism, not in an emotional conversion, and that anyone is worthy of the Lord's Supper who hungers for grace and accepts it by faith. He concludes: "I have become more and more convinced that what our people and the whole world need is, Gospel. We have had too much law and human works, so that the consciences of both teachers and hearers have been burdened."<sup>42</sup>

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, a new wave of immigrants came from Germany and Scandinavia with a more conservative view of the Lutheran confessions, and that affected all the synods that created or joined the General Council. Moreover, a period of scholastic orthodoxy reigned in theological education in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. That was surely the case at Augustana

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted from Conrad Bergendoff, *The Doctrine of the Church in American Lutheranism* The Kubel-Miller Lectures, 1956 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), 39-40; for an account of his struggles in detail, cf. L. Esbjörn, *Report on the Development and Current State of the Swedish Lutheran Congregations in North America*.

Seminary, as reflected in the *Christian Dogmatics* written by Conrad Lindberg,<sup>43</sup> who taught dogmatics from 1890 until his death in 1930. The Swedish edition was published in 1898, and the English version appeared in 1922. In spite of all that we find insufficient in scholastic orthodoxy today, it must be said that it helped to preserve and promote essential Lutheran convictions. But in the opening decades of the twentieth century some new impulses were being felt. In 1911 a new English edition of the *Book of Concord* was published, edited by Henry Jacobs of the Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia.<sup>44</sup> In 1915 the first two volumes of *The Works of Martin Luther*—often called the “Philadelphia Edition”—were published, providing Luther to readers in the English language.<sup>45</sup> In 1917 Lutherans celebrated the four-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation.

In the case of Augustana, there are some particular events and personalities to which one can point to catch something of a profile of how its theological heritage developed. In 1922 the Augustana Church launched a new theological journal known as the *Augustana Quarterly*, which continued to exist until 1948 when it merged with others to form the *Lutheran Quarterly*.<sup>46</sup> A review of the contents of that journal over the decades shows that theological research and conversation was not as stale, unimaginative, or isolationist as we might think. Issues of all kinds related to theology and the church were taken up and discussed. Then in 1923 the Augustana Church received the Archbishop of Uppsala, Nathan Söderblom, as a guest, accompanied by his wife Anna. He was in the U.S. from late September until early December of that year. During that time he preach



Nathan Söderblom  
(January 15, 1866—July 12, 1931)  
Archbishop of Uppsala, 1914-1931  
Nobel Peace Prize, 1930  
America Tour, 1923

<sup>43</sup> Conrad E. Lindberg, *Christian Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Seminary, 1898);

<sup>44</sup> *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Seminary, 1911).

<sup>45</sup> *The Works of Martin Luther*, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Seminary, 1915-1917).

<sup>46</sup> For information, cf. Maria Erling, “The Quest for an American Lutheran Theology: Augustana and *Lutheran Quarterly*,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 24 (2010): 20-41, and on this and other publications, cf. Virginia Follstad, *The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church in Print: A Selective Union List with Annotations of Serial Publications*, ATLA Bibliography Series 53 (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2007).

lectures not only at major universities, including Harvard, Chicago, and the University of California, Berkeley, but also at Augustana College and Theological Seminary, Gustavus Adolphus College, and Luther Junior College at Wahoo, Nebraska.<sup>47</sup> Although his travels in America and reception by the Augustana Church were not without controversy both within that church and among its critics outside,<sup>48</sup> he made a huge impact on the synod. The sheer force of his personality made a huge hit with many. In addition, people could sense the archbishop's warm and heartfelt feelings for Augustana. Probably the most lasting effect was a renewed interest within Augustana in its relationship to the Church of Sweden and its theologians. As a sequel to his visit, Söderblom invited Conrad Bergendoff to be in Uppsala in 1926 and 1927. He made arrangements for Bergendoff to work on his doctoral dissertation on the Reformation in Sweden, as well as enabling travel to conferences, and to meet ecumenical leaders coming to Uppsala.

In the very same year of Söderblom's visit to America, 1923, the first edition of *The Faith of the Christian Church* by Gustaf Aulén was published in its Swedish version.<sup>49</sup> It was not published in English until 1948 however and it did not seem to receive much notice



Conrad Bergendoff

(December 3, 1895—December 23, 1997)

Dean of Augustana Theological Seminary, 1931-1935

President, Augustana College and Seminary, 1935-1948

President, Augustana College, 1948-1962

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early on. It took until the 1930s for this work and his other famous book, *Christus Victor*,<sup>50</sup> to receive notice in the *Augustana Quarterly*.<sup>51</sup> But his works did receive attention, and they had a major and lasting effect on theological education at the seminary.

But we know that already by 1930 there had been a growing interest in new perspectives in theology. After the death of Professor and Dean Conrad Lindberg in August of 1930, there was a major change in the composition of the faculty. The change took place over the next couple of years in an era that historian Gerald Christianson has called “the Augustana renaissance.”<sup>52</sup> The new Dean was Conrad Bergendoff, who also taught systematic theology. Three others were added: Carl Anderson in Old Testament, Eric Wahlstrom in New Testament, and A. D. Mattson in ethics and sociology. The story of this transition has been told many times over, including an account in the book by Maria Erling and Mark Granquist.<sup>53</sup> Historian G. Everett Arden, of the class of 1932, was a front-row observer of the change. He makes this comment:

The writings of contemporary theologians from Scandinavia, Germany, England and America were the subjects of reflection and discussion, bringing new insights

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<sup>50</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor* (New York: Macmillan, 1931); the Swedish version was published in 1930.

<sup>51</sup> Carl G. Carlfelt, “Recent Theology and Theologians in Sweden,” *Augustana Quarterly* 14 (1935): 14-39.

<sup>52</sup> Gerald Christianson, “The Making of a Modern Seminary: Augustana Seminary in the 1930s,” an address at the AHA Gathering in 2006; available online at [http://augustanaheritage.org/christianson\\_on\\_augustana\\_seminary.pdf](http://augustanaheritage.org/christianson_on_augustana_seminary.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> Maria Erling and Mark Granquist, *The Augustana Story: Shaping Lutheran Identity in North America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 235-52.

regarding the relevance of the gospel to a world of bewildering tensions. Such names as Aulén, Nygren, Bring, Soderblom, Barth, Brunner, Niebuhr and Tillich became part of the daily vocabulary on Zion Hill.<sup>54</sup>



Augustana Theological Seminary  
Photo from the 1950s

The story of Augustana's theologians is too big to cover here. It has been covered in part in essays by Bernhard Erling and myself in the book called *The Augustana Heritage*, containing essays from the Augustana Gathering at Chautauqua in 1998. Erling deals with systematic theologians, and I deal with biblical scholars. But our essays tell only part of the story. For one thing, they do not cover persons outside systematics and biblical studies. Moreover, we deal only with faculty members at Augustana Seminary. We do not attend to the work of all those theologians at work in the church-related colleges. That would be an interesting field of study. The same is true of all those theologians of Augustana heritage who have taught at institutions not related to the Augustana Church.

It is interesting to peruse through issues of *The Augustana Quarterly* and *The Augustana Seminary Review*, published from 1949 through 1962, and ask whether there are topics that were distinctly of interest to the theologians of the Augustana Church.

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<sup>54</sup> G. E. Arden, *School of the Prophets*, 232.

And of course there are. There are essays on trends in biblical studies,<sup>55</sup> articles and reviews of books in systematic theology,<sup>56</sup> articles on Lutheran churches in America and around the world,<sup>57</sup> an article in 1957 by Carl E. Lund-Quist, Executive Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation from 1952 to 1960, called “The Tasks of the Lutheran Churches of the World,”<sup>58</sup> and an interesting article by Eric Wahlstrom in 1957 concerning discussions in the Church of Sweden on the ordination of women.<sup>59</sup> There are several articles on global missions,<sup>60</sup> social ministry and ethics,<sup>61</sup> pastoral care,<sup>62</sup> and evangelism.<sup>63</sup> The *Augustana Seminary Review* went to all alumni of the seminary and kept a conversation going that was distinctively Augustana in terms of major interests.

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<sup>55</sup> Eric H. Wahlstrom, “Eschatology Today,” *ASR* 3/4 (1951): 31-35; idem, “Studies in the New Testament,” *ASR* 7/3 (1955): 27-29; Carl A. Anderson, “Isaiah 7:14 in the New Translation,” *ASR* 5/2 (1953): 3-8; N. Leroy Norquist, “New Insights in Biblical Interpretation,” *ASR* 14/4 (1962): 21-27.

<sup>56</sup> Carl G. Carlfelt, “Significant Books in the field of Systematic Theology,” *ASR* 2/4 (1950): 8-12; idem, “Recent Books in the Systematic Field,” *ASR* 5/4 (1953): 6-11; Edgar M. Carlson, “Christian Hope,” *ASR* 4/4 (1952): 10-13; Hjalmar W. Johnson, “The Theology of Paul Tillich,” *ASR* 10/4 (1958): 3-13; Richard H. Englund, “The Christocentric Theology of Cullmann,” *ASR* 11/4 (1959): 3-18.

<sup>57</sup> Eric H. Wahlstrom, “Recent Theological Literature in American Lutheranism,” *ASR* 1/2 (1949): 11-13; idem, “Hannover and Lund,” *ASR* 4/4 (1952): 15-25; G. Everett Arden, “Sources for the Study of American Lutheranism,” *ASR* 4/2 (1952): 21-23; Malvin H. Lundeen, “Whither Augustana?,” *ASR* 6/4 (1954): 3-14.

<sup>58</sup> Carl E. Lund-Quist, “The Tasks of the Lutheran Churches of the World,” *ASR* 9/3 (1957): 3-10.

<sup>59</sup> Eric H. Wahlstrom, “Ordination of Women and the Authority of Scripture,” *ASR* 9/4 (1957): 8-11.

<sup>60</sup> George F. Hall, “The Theological Task of the Missionary,” *ASR* 6/2 (1954): 3-26; N. Arne Bendtz, “Lutheran Strategies in World Missions,” *ASR* 9/2 (1957): 25-32.

<sup>61</sup> A. D. Mattson, “Impressions from Recent Literature in Christian Ethics,” *ASR* 1/4 (1949): 5-8; Oscar A. Benson, “The Social Thrust of the Augustana Lutheran Church,” *ASR* 12/2 (1960): 13-29.

<sup>62</sup> Granger E. Westberg, “Significant Developments in the Field of Pastoral Care,” *ASR* 2/4 (1950): 13-17; Paul R. Swanson, “The Contribution of Pastoral Care,” *ASR* 14/4 (1962): 13-20.

<sup>63</sup> Melvin A. Hammerberg, “The Growing Edge of the Church,” *ASR* 2/3 (1950): 6-23; H. Conrad Hoyer, “Give God’s Gift of Grace to All,” *ASR* 8/3 (1956): 3-16; G. Everett Arden, “Lutheran Evangelism in America,” *ASR* 9/2 (1957): 3-24; P. O. Bersell, “Augustana’s Outreach,” *ASR* 14/3 (1962): 1-16.



It is dangerous here for me to name major figures in theology, since I would leave some out and cause offense. But it is fair to limit myself to some major books published by Augustana theologians who have passed away; surely no one can object to my mentioning them. That is doubly so because those that I shall mention are world-class books, not simply for Augustana consumption but for theological schools and churches everywhere. Conrad Bergendoff wrote the definitive book in English on the Reformation in Sweden, called *Olavus Petri and the Ecclesiastical Transformation in Sweden*, published in 1928, and reprinted in 1965.<sup>64</sup> Edgar Carlson introduced current Swedish research on Luther to the English-speaking world with his book called *The Reinterpretation of Luther* in 1948.<sup>65</sup> And Eric Wahlstrom published an outstanding book on the theology of Paul, called *The New Life in Christ*, published in 1950.<sup>66</sup> In addition, G. Everett Arden and Eric Wahlstrom translated the famous book by Gustaf Aulén of the University of Lund, *The Faith of the Christian Church*, published in 1948.<sup>67</sup>



The Spire above Ascension Chapel  
Augustana Theological Seminary  
Building Constructed in 1923

By way of an all too brief summary, one can say that the Augustana theologians did both original research and writing in the various branches of theology, and they seemed to think that it was their unique vocation to interpret the works of Swedish

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<sup>64</sup> Conrad Bergendoff, *Olavus Petri and the Ecclesiastical Transformation in Sweden* (New York: Macmillan, 1928; reprinted, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965).

<sup>65</sup> Edgar M. Carlson, *The Reinterpretation of Luther* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948).

<sup>66</sup> Eric H. Wahlstrom, *The New Life in Christ* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1950).

<sup>67</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *The Faith of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948).

scholars for the English-speaking world. Their written work met the scholarly standards of the academy, but were also written in service of the church—something that is desperately needed today.

## V. Worship

There was a fifth way that Augustana had a distinct profile within American Lutheranism. That is worship. And for many persons, the Augustana liturgy is the most lasting memory of that church.

Lutherans brought to America a wide range of liturgical orders from their homelands, and they created new ones in America. G. Everett Arden wrote his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago on the relationships between theology and liturgical forms in America.<sup>68</sup> In that work he surveyed over thirty liturgical orders in use at various times in North America.

The Swedish Lutheran church

### Augustana at Worship

- Basic Pattern: The Swedish Rite of Olavus Petri from 1531.
- A case of “*lex orandi, lex credendi*”:
  - The way a people worship has a direct bearing on what they believe (and vice versa).
  - The liturgy teaches the faith to children and new members, sustains that of the community.
- The Augustana Liturgy: God’s transcendence and imminence in our *understanding* and in our *experience*.

The liturgy remembered: *The Hymnal and Order of Service*  
(Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1925).

The Swedish Lutheran situation was different from that of the Germans, since there was only one official liturgy used throughout Sweden at any given time. The early pastors and congregations used the Church of Sweden liturgical handbooks, as attested in the writings of Lars Paul Esbjörn, Erland Carlsson, and Eric Norelius.<sup>69</sup> The pattern of the Sunday morning

<sup>68</sup> G. Everett Arden, “The Interrelationships between Culture and Theology in the History of the Lutheran Church in America” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1944).

<sup>69</sup> Lars Paul Esbjörn, *Report on the Development and Current State of the Swedish Lutheran Congregations in North America*, 2; Eric Norelius, *De Svenska Lutherska församlingarnas och svenskarnas historia i Amerika*, 2 vols. (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1890-1916), 2:249; for a quotation from Erland Carlsson, see Oscar N. Olson, *The Augustana Lutheran Church in America: Pioneer Period 1846-1860*, 365.

liturgy had been set by Olavus Petri,<sup>70</sup> whose order of service appeared for the first time in 1531.<sup>71</sup>

In one of his essays, Conrad Bergendoff claimed that in 1860 “the Augustana Synod was the most liturgical Lutheran Church in America.” He goes on to say that “none of the German Lutheran synods...had as rich a Lutheran service as the Swedish churches.”<sup>72</sup> In any case, Augustana never created its own liturgy; it simply brought it from Sweden. Using the Swedish rite was a distinctive way of being Lutheran in America. And it gave decisive shape to the character of Augustana Lutheranism. We have here a case of *lex orandi, lex credendi*. That is to say, the way a people worships has a direct bearing on what they believe. The liturgy teaches the faith to the people.

The Augustana way of being Lutheran in America was taught, first of all, by the way that the liturgy began. After an opening hymn, the pastor spoke or intoned the words of Isaiah’s vision in the Temple (Isaiah 6:3):

Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts!  
The whole earth is full of His glory.

Then in a spoken voice, the pastor continued with the words:

The Lord is in His Holy temple; His throne is in heaven. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of an humble and contrite spirit. He heareth the supplications of the penitent and inclineth to their prayers. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto His throne of grace and confess our sins.

The Confession of Sins that follows makes definitive affirmations about the nature of God. God is holy and righteous, but God is also a God who receives “with tender mercy all penitent sinners.” On the basis of that, God is addressed directly in prayer as merciful and gracious. If one can take the Common Service of 1888—a forerunner of the liturgy in the SBH, LBW, and ELW—as a measure of comparison, the Confession of Sins in the Augustana liturgy is noticeably both longer and more descriptive of the character of God. God is portrayed as compassionate and merciful, a God who has “promised...to receive with tender mercy all penitent sinners” who turn to him and “seek refuge” in his compassion.

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<sup>70</sup> For a discussion of his liturgical works, see chapter 5 (“The Liturgical Works”) in Conrad Bergendoff, *Olavus Petri and the Ecclesiastical Transformation in Sweden* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), 147-77.

<sup>71</sup> An English translation of the Mass of Olavus Petri (1531) is provided in an appendix to the work of Eric E. Yelverton, *An Archbishop of the Reformation: Laurentius Petri Nericisu Archbishop of Uppsala, 1531-73* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), 97-102.

<sup>72</sup> Conrad Bergendoff, “Augustana’s Idea of the Church,” *Augustana Seminary Review* 7/2 (1955): 21-22.

The combination of those liturgical elements creates within the person at worship a sense of both the transcendence and the imminence of God. God is holy and righteous; but God is also merciful and gracious. God draws near to hear us and forgive us. In a rather audacious manner, in our worship we hold God to his promise “to receive” the penitent and “to forgive us all our sins,” and not only *for our sake* but also “to the praise and glory” of God’s holy name. That is as much as to say that if God expects praise and glory, God must remain faithful to his promise and forgive all our sins.

Although the service provided a theological perspective on God, it went beyond theological *understanding* to create for us an actual *experience*, a sense of the presence of God, if we are open to the promptings of the Spirit. One may justly wonder whether any other Lutheran liturgy has ever been so explicit about the presence of God within the community gathered for worship. To be sure, the announcement of God’s presence is done in a way that still preserves the otherness of God, but God’s nearness is declared in such a way that it is not only announced but is to be experienced. The pastor declares that “The Lord is in His Holy temple,” and no one should miss the meaning. The temple is the present parish church and its gathering. The Lord “is nigh unto them” who are gathered; “he heareth the supplications of the penitent and inclineth to their prayers”; and so we “draw near with boldness to his throne of grace.” Yes, “his throne is in heaven,” but it is accessible to those who gather for worship. To gather at the throne of God means that the distance between the heavenly and the earthly has been overcome. We enter into the courts of the Lord.

Any good ecclesiology will affirm that “where two or three are gathered” in Jesus’ name, the risen Lord is among them (Matt. 18:20). But the Augustana liturgy made it explicit, not only by teaching a theological truth, but by doing what it could to make that an experiential reality in people’s lives. The presence of God, both transcendent and imminent, was experienced by worshipers in a way that could not be experienced elsewhere in the world outside. That meant that Sunday worship was not simply a means of charging one’s spiritual batteries for the rest of the week—an instrumental view of worship. Sunday worship was itself the highpoint of one’s relationship with God and Christ. All other forms of devotional life were subsidiary to worship on Sunday morning. That is a distinct way of being Lutheran in America, even if it is not necessarily unique.

#### Closing Comment

I have covered only five aspects of the Augustana Church which, I think, help delineate what was distinctive about its way of being Lutheran in America. These have to do with its being a small church with a big heart, its location as the bridge church within the spectrum of Lutheranism, its sense of church, its theological contributions, and its worship.

But on an occasion when we celebrate the Augustana heritage, lest we get too nostalgic, it is important for us to remind ourselves of a glaring fact. The Augustana Church that we remember most vividly is the Augustana Church of the 1950s; it went out of existence in 1962.



The closing decade of the Augustana Church was the era of President Dwight David Eisenhower for the most part. The fifties were the days when religion was booming, including civic religion that helped keep the churches afloat. It is Eisenhower who declared in 1952, just before taking office, that “our government has no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is.”<sup>73</sup> In 1954 the Pledge of Allegiance was revised to include the phrase “under God.” And in 1956 Congress voted the national motto to be: “In God We Trust.”

The Pledge of Allegiance  
Revised June 15, 1954

I pledge allegiance to the Flag  
of the United States of America,  
and to the Republic for which it stands:  
**under God,**  
one Nation  $\wedge$  indivisible,  
With Liberty and Justice for all.

Churches were booming. New buildings were constructed. Attendance and membership were up. From the beginning of 1950 to the end of 1960 the Augustana Church grew numerically by 35%.<sup>74</sup> But that was not unusual, since all major denominations increased in size dramatically at that time. That was an era that we shall probably not see the likes of again in our lifetimes.

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted in various newspapers, such as The New York Times (December 23, 1952); cf. G. Elson Ruff, *The Dilemma of Church and State* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1954), 85. .

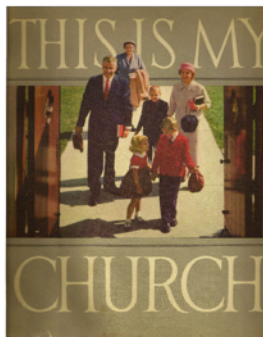
<sup>74</sup> The percentage is based on statistics for the end of 1949 and 1959 in *Yearbook of American Churches*, ed. George F. Ketcham (New York: National Council of Churches, 1959), 237, and *Yearbook of American Churches*, ed. Bebsib Y. Landis (New York: National Council of Churches, 1960), 255. The figures are, respectively, 440,244 and 596,147 baptized members.



Augustana Lutheran Church  
Denver, Colorado  
Constructed in 1959

But be that as it may, what has often impressed a lot of observers of church life in the century of its existence is that the Augustana Church was able to accommodate a wide range of attitudes and activities within one body without breaking apart into separate Swedish Lutheran churches. It was able to combine a clear but moderate Lutheran confessionalism along with pietism, social activism, ecumenism, liturgical worship, strong central leadership, strong congregations, global and national missions, and a desire for Lutheran unity. All of those things, which can pull a church apart in different directions, were a part of the Augustana profile. What Augustana held together, others might put asunder.

I recall that when I was a pastor in New Jersey in LCA days, another LCA pastor of ULCA tradition made a memorable remark. He told me that “Whenever you meet another Lutheran pastor, you will quickly know whether he is Augustana. If he is, all you have to do is wait a minute or two, because he’ll let you know it.”



Augustana Lutherans Going to Church  
From the cover of a book published by the  
Augustana Church in 1960

That remark prompts memory of that other remark I mentioned earlier. We should take seriously the remark of my elderly colleague when he said that the Swedes—the Augustana people—were always a bit too proud. It is possible that at times we have been too proud. But on this occasion, we should throw caution to the wind. We should not fail to honor those who have gone before us for their work, and we should not hesitate for a moment to give thanks for the Augustana Church.