

Literature of the Early Swedish
Lutheran Church in America

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When one considers any area of the history of the Lutheran church in America, most people automatically call to mind famous men, dates of interest, or particular events. By considering these areas, a person can successfully outline the events which were most important in that period of history.

One of the areas which is often taken for granted in a historical period is the literature of that time. Certainly it is difficult to think of famous men without thinking of their work, or considering particular events and not associating a writing or at least a record of that event. But so often the writings of a particular period of history are looked at in bits and pieces. At times they are so disassociated from one another, it is difficult to see what an important role they play.

With this in mind, I chose to write about the Christian literature of the American Swedish Lutheran Church between 1851 and 1890. By citing a compilation of such literature, I hope to point out how the literature of this era played an all-important role in the development and growth of the Augustana Lutheran Church.

Before I deal with the specific works of the period, I feel it is important to understand the reasons why this literature is so vital. First of all, it is a common truth. During the development of any church body, the members have a constant struggle not only to grow, but also to keep out false doctrine. Augustana is no exception. Originally, much of the literature was written to promote Lutheran doctrine. In time the tone changed, and the literature was written more to combat doctrinal

errors. Among such errors were those of the Baptists, Methodists, and charismatics of those days whose movement was called the "New Evangelism."

The leader of the "New Evangelism" movement was P. Waldenstroem, who despised, among other things, the Lutheran doctrine of atonement. As time went along, most of the Augustanian followers of Waldenstroem withdrew from the synod. Just how radical these Waldenstroemians became is demonstrated in this quote: "The old pastor and able leader, Erland Carlsson, was practically compelled to resign from his congregation in a struggle over the question of 'saved members.' His resignation did not solve the problem and in 1875 a group of 'New Evangelists' proposed to call a church meeting to determine who was saved."¹

One of the other highly important purposes of the literature of this era was to unite the immigrants, both with one another and with their synod. This literature was also intended to aid the immigrant to adapt to new and different conditions of this foreign land.

First I would like to deal with the literature of the years 1851-1873. These years are basically the time in which the seed is planted and grows into the blooming flower which served well the early Augustanian Church.

1851 - To the best of anyone's knowledge, the first Swedish Lutheran publication in America was a small tract which was published by Rev. L. P. Esbjoern in 1851. This tract was entitled "Greetings of Welcome to the Swedish, Norwegian and Danish Emigrant."

Four thousand copies of this tract were to be sent to those Swedish immigrants whom Rev. Esbjoern was unable to contact in person.

1854 - Esbjoern published another tract which was entitled "A Few Simple Questions and Answers with Regard to Baptism." This tract was published to counteract the Baptist propoganda which was invading the homes of Swedish Lutherans.

Also in 1854, the minutes of the proceedings of the joint convention of the Chicago and Mississippi Evangelical conferences were published. These were the first minutes of a church convention to be published in the Swedish language during the nineteenth century.

1855 - On January 3, 1855 the first issue of a newspaper in the Swedish language was published. The newspaper was called "Hemlandet Det Gåmla och det Nya." The editor and publisher of the paper was Rev. T.N. Hasselquist. The newspaper was religious as well as political, and was a four-page paper with four columns on each page. The second issue was published February 24 and the third issue was published March 10. From that point on, the paper was published every other week. The location of publication was Galesburg, Illinois, and the subscription price was one dollar per year.

Rev. Erland Carlsson had originally been urged to begin this paper, but he claimed that it was impossible for him to edit and publish the paper. The reason was that as pastor of Immanuel Church in Chicago, he had to care for the hundreds of immigrants

who were continually arriving in Chicago.

At first the Swedes had considered publishing a paper together with the Norwegians, but soon this idea was dropped and the plans were made to publish a Swedish newspaper. When Carlsson kept delaying the publishing of this proposed newspaper, Esbjorn urged Hasselquist to pressure Carlsson into starting this venture. Because Hasselquist was unable to persuade Carlsson, he finally began the paper himself.

To begin this venture, Hasselquist visited Minnesota, Chicago, Sugar Grove in Pennsylvania, and Jamestown in order to obtain subscribers. Next he bought an old German printing press out East, searched until he found a Swedish typesetter, and began publishing. Because the paper was losing more money than was coming in after only two years, Hasselquist decided to tack on an extra fifty cents per subscription. This plan saved the paper from going bankrupt.

"Hemlandet...served as a bond of union among the Swedes, who, though separated by hundreds of miles, still felt drawn toward one another by kindred ties. It also became a means of communication between them and the friends and kindred forever left behind in the dear old homeland. Again, it served to instruct the newcomer in the political, social, and religious questions of their new homeland."²

1856 - In July of this year, Hasselquist also began to edit and publish a newspaper which dealt only with religious matters. This newspaper was named "Det Raetta Hemlandet." It was issued

every other week, alternately with the "Hemlandet." The subscription price was one dollar per year for this newspaper, or a dollar fifty for both papers. This new paper was the beginning of what eventually came to be the official synodical mouthpiece of the Augustana Synod, the "Augustana."

Also in 1856, at Galesburg, Illinois, a collection of songs was published which had been taken from the "Ahnfelts Saenger" and other Swedish hymnals. It was entitled "Fifty Songs: Swedish Bookprinting Office." This little hymnbook was intended for use at worship services. It appears that it was the first hymnbook published in the Swedish language in America.

Another important tool for the Swedish Lutheran Church was also published in 1856. It was the translation of the Euchiridion of Luther's Small Catechism in both Swedish and English by L.P. Esbjoern.

1857 - There were several important items published at Galesburg in 1857. There was the publishing of a proposed constitution for the Evangelical Lutheran congregations in North America, which had been accepted at the joint Chicago and Mississippi Conference Convention. This convention met at Chicago from March 18-23, 1857. The Augsburg Confession was published, but only the first 21 articles were included. Also published were: "Dr. Martin Luther's Letters to Two Pastors in Regard to Anabaptism," which had been written in 1528, as well as some small tracts, such as "Ought One to Read More than the Bible?" and "True Humility." There was also published at Galesburg an ABC book referred to as

the Swedish Primer; it was edited by Dr. A.R. Cervin.

On November 7, 1857, in Red Wing, Minnesota, E. Norelius began to edit and publish a newspaper which was entitled, "Minnesota Posten." This newspaper was very much like "Hemlandet" and was consolidated with "Hemlandet" on October 13, 1858, when "Hemlandet" was moved from Galesburg to Chicago.

1858 - A Swedish translation of Herman Fick's "The Luther-Book," or, "The Life and Work of the Dear Man of God, Doctor Martin Luther," was published at Galesburg in 1858. The translation was most likely done by Hasselquist.

1859 - In Chicago, a small selection of songs by E. Norelius was published. It was entitled "Salems Saenger," and had music for four voices.

1860 - At the office of the "Hemlandet" in Chicago, a ninety-page book was published which was entitled "In Memory of King Oscar, the Lover of Peace: A Plain Historical Presentation of his Life and Work as Ruler." This book was a reprint from an unknown Swedish author.

1863 - "There was a need felt throughout the Synod for a missionary paper to inform the members of the Synod. In 1863 a separate missionary department was added to 'Raetta Hemlandet,' and from that time until its union with 'Augustana' the paper was known as 'Raetta Hemlandet och Messionsbladet.' This new department involved additional expenses, and when the two papers were joined, it was decided that the missionary department should be dropped and those who desired a missionary paper in Swedish could order

one from Sweden. This decision was not favorably accepted by the subscribers, so in 1870 it was decided to issue a separate missionary paper. The first issue was released in January 1870. The paper was known as 'Missionaeren,' and was edited for the first two years by Norelius and the following two years by J.P. Nyquist.

1872-1874 - In the time span between 1872 and 1874, Norelius had started a new church paper known as 'Luthersk Kyrkotidning.' It was a semi-monthly paper and was printed by A.C.F. de Remeé in Red Wing, Minnesota. The first issue was printed in January, 1872.

Dr. O. Olsson started a church paper in 1873 known as 'Nytt och Gammalt.' Only six issues were released. In the fall of 1873, it was decided to unite all these papers: "Raetta Hemlandet och Augustana, Missionaeren, Luthersk Kyrkotidning," and 'Nytt och Gammalt,' into one paper known as the 'Augustana.' The new paper was issued semi-monthly, and was edited by Drs. Hasselquist, Norelius, and Olsson. Dr. A.R. Cervin was employed as office editor. The first issue was released in January 1878. It was printed by A.C.F. de Remeé in Moline, Illinois."³

Because Hasselquist was chief editor of "Augustana" until 1889, he greatly influenced the contents and the tone of the paper. "With the starting of 'Augustana,' Hasselquist not only planned to counteract the influence of the "New Evangelism,' but also to wage war upon everything that he considered evil. Like all reformers, he believed that he lived in the most evil and sinful of all ages, and warned his people 'to watch the signs of

the times.' Some of the signs which Hasselquist thought were pointing to the end of time were Internationalism, Socialism, and Communism, which he denounced as hostile to all the present rules of society, Christianity, and civil order. In the same light he viewed all secret societies, and those who did not share this view he condemned as 'copperheads.' All questions were to be judged by the Word of God, and this meant not only the condemnation of the Knights of Labor, but even of the Good Templars because their organization was secret. Among the other 'signs of the time' which were vehemently denounced in the columns of 'Augustana' were the doctrines of the Freethinkers which were expounded in some of the Swedish-American newspapers. He fought 'cheap literature,' 'cheap novels,' and 'stories,' directing this attack primarily against competitors of his old paper, 'Hemlandet,' which through 'continued stories' sought to increase their subscription lists. On the other hand, he recommended 'good' literature, which, by his interpretation, was reading of a religious nature. He fought Materialism, declared that theaters were evil, tobacco a vice, dancing wicked; and all the true friends of the Word were warned against the 'skating rinks,' which were put in the same class with the theater and the dance hall. In every way, on every question, the Augustana Synod was saturated with puritanism and ultraconservatism, which C.A. Swensson proudly described as 'true conservatism.'⁴

Now I wish to turn to the fifteen-year period from 1874-1889. We saw that in the early Augustana Church there was much literature

published. While it continues to be strong for these next fifteen years, it does decline. This is mainly due to the fact that the Augustana Synod did not have its own printing office and had to have its printing done by private corporations. Even so, the "Augustana" was still printed, as well as the congregational and synodical constitutions, catalogues for Augustana College and the Theological Seminary, and some tracts. The important publications of these years are as follows:

1878 - One of the most important publications was entitled "Concordia Pia," which contained "all the Confessional writings of the Lutheran Church and the Declaration of Faith and Doctrine at Uppsula, Sweden, 1593-. It was edited by a committee consisting of Drs. O. Olsson, T.N. Hasselquist, E. Carlsson, and P. Sjveblom."⁵

In 1878, the publication of a small newspaper called "Skolvaennen" began. Publication of this newspaper ended in May, 1880. This paper was intended to build enthusiasm for donating money to the Augustana College and Theological Seminary. The publication of this paper resulted in generous contributions. Its publication was resumed, for a brief time, from August 15-December 19, 1883, when a new college building was being constructed at Rock Island.

1879 - In October of 1879, Luther's Small Catechism was published with the explanations included. This book contained 139 pages and was intended for use in Sunday Schools, Christian Day Schools, and in Confirmation instruction. Many previous years of committee work and even a trial edition preceded the

final publication. This catechism was the official textbook of the Augustana Synod until 1902 when it was revised.

1880 - This year brought about the beginning of a small annual calendar which was called "Korsbanerit." Its publication was begun by Drs. O. Olsson and C.A. Swenson. The calendar contained both historical and religious articles. From 1881 through 1883, the society known as "Ungdomens Vaenner" continued publication of the calendar. In 1884 the calendar was published by the Augustana Tract Society. From 1885 through 1889 it was published by the Augustana Book Concern. Then from 1890 on the Augustana Synod took over the responsibility of publishing the calendar.

1885 - In 1885, a series of sermons entitled "Korsets Predikan" was published. This sermon series follows the Augustana Synod's third series of sermon texts for Sunday morning worship service. A number of pastors contributed their sermons for the book. It was published under the direction and authorization of the Illinois Conference, but as was customary in the Augustana Synod, whatever profit was derived from the sale of this book was directed to the treasury of the Augustana College and Theological Seminary. For a long time, this book was the only book of sermons which the Augustana Synod published.

1886 - Rev. S.P.A. Lindahl and Rev. H.P. Quist, on their own, began to publish a Sunday School paper called "Barneus Tidning" in January, 1886. Once again, the profit from this paper went to the treasury of the Augustana College and Theological Seminary.

In 1890, this Sunday school paper was donated to the Lutheran Augustana Book Concern and the Synod assumed the responsibility of continuing its publication together with a thousand dollars in liabilities.

1887 - In 1887, a Bible History was published which contained 199 pages. In it were 52 stories from the Old Testament and 60 stories from the New Testament, plus a brief history of the Jewish people from the time of Malachi until the time of Christ's birth. This Bible History became the official textbook for Sunday Schools, Christian Day Schools, and Confirmation classes.

In addition, this is the year in which a blank page book was published entitled "Record of Ministerial Acts." It was intended for pastors to keep records.

1889 - An English translation of the Bible History, which had been published in Swedish in 1887, was published in 1889. This is a strong indication of just how early the Swedes and the Augustana Synod adapted themselves to the English language.

This concludes my study of the literature of the Swedish American Lutheran Church from 1851-1890. I believe that after careful consideration, one can see just how instrumental this period of literature was. Not only did the literature of this time period help to fight error and rally together the leaders and laymen of the Augustana Synod, but it also caused the Synod to grow in numbers by providing information for adults and making teaching aids available for children.

Another important consideration of the literature of this

period is that it helped to generate much money for both the Augustana College and the Theological Seminary. Some writings were specifically for that purpose, while others made it a secondary benefit. Although money is not all-important when we undertake God's task, it is the only mode of accomplishing that task while on this earth, and such literature did just that for the young Augustana Synod.

Endnotes

1. O.F. Ander, T.N. Hasselquist (Rock Island: Augustana Historical Society, 1931), pp. 165,166.
2. The Augustana Synod (Minneapolis: Lutheran Minnesota Conference, 1948), p. 174.
3. Ibid., pp. 179,180.
4. Op. cit., O.F. Ander, pp. 171, 172.
5. Op. cit., The Augustana Synod, p. 185.

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