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On Both Sides of the Atlantic

G. A. Brandelle

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at so many times about the church's common witness before the world. This witness was not just for individuals, but for all peoples and nations. The world should understand the unity which already existed in a divided Christianity. For me and many others, there's something great in that thought, that there, in the far north, a burning soul lay before the altar of Uppsala Cathedral, praying that the Church, the Church in the world – might become one, as Christ himself is one.

Did he set his goals too high? Lesser souls could not follow him. They saw only the risk, only the dangerous obstacles lying in the way. He saw something else. He saw the goal, and it drew him onward. On the mountain top he found few. But that was where the road led. There he went.

The English poet Browning's words in "The Grammarian's Funeral" were written for one like Nathan Söderblom:

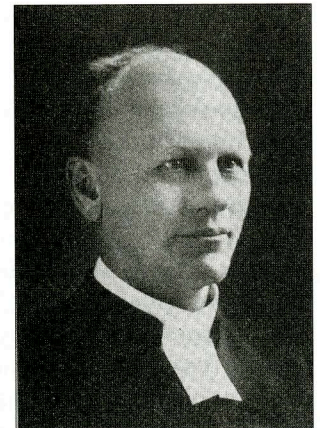
*Here – here's the place, where meteors
shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go! Let joy break with
the storm,
Peace let the dew send!
Lofty designs must close in like
effects;
Loftily lying.
Leave him – still loftier than the
world suspects,
Living and dying.*

On Both Sides of the Atlantic

BY G. A. BRANDELLE (1861–1936). PRESIDENT OF
THE AUGUSTANA SYNOD

(Previously printed in *Hågkomster och livsinytryck till minnet av Nathan Söderblom* (1934))

TRANSLATED BY JOHN E. NORTON



Among Swedes in America and their descendants there has always been a significant number who, because of their direct or indirect relationship with Sweden, have followed, with more or less lively interest, developments in their old homeland. It was thus with some surprise that they found about 20 years ago, that a relatively young professor from Uppsala University had been named Archbishop of Sweden; more so because the other candidates were well-known and powerful men, known both for their education, practical abilities, and fear of God. Among the so-called right-thinkers in both America and Sweden, there were not a few who had their doubts about the orthodoxy of the chosen one.

It did not take long before the new archbishop began both to speak and act in his new capacity. Then it soon became clear to the doubtful and questioning where the Archbishop stood in relation to the fundamental

truths of salvation. There was an immediate shift of opinion among many, and soon he won everyone's confidence and fast friendship. It was soon understood, both at home and abroad, that a new day had dawned for the Church of Sweden.

He took up his duties in times of utmost gravity. The great World War had broken out only a few days earlier. No one had any idea how many lands would be pulled in, what frightful results might befall them, and when it would cease. The young archbishop threw himself into the confusion, firmly determined that whatever happened to him, he would seek mightily to bring an early end to the fighting, and above all, retain the neutrality of the Scandinavian countries. He contacted leading churchmen everywhere in Europe with the goal of uniting them in an attempt to quickly bring war hysteria to an end. National forces were however too strong to accomplish any such end. But the Archbishop became

known quickly throughout all Europe, and was shown respect everywhere.

A new day dawned at the same time for the Augustana Synod, concerning the Church of Sweden's appreciation for, and evaluation of, the synod. In a surprising way, the archbishop approached the Augustana Synod and let them understand that he saw it as a true limb of the greater Lutheran church body. He also invited the Synod to be represented at his inauguration. The invitation was accepted with joy and thanksgiving, and a representative was sent.

I will never forget the good will he showed me when I, in January of 1922, visited Germany on behalf of our heathen mission, and returned home through Sweden. My visit in Sweden lasted only two weeks, but the Archbishop saw to it that they were well filled with sermons, lectures, and meetings of various kinds. I was naturally well aware that this

attention was not because of my insignificant person, but because I represented part of the Lutheran Church. Discussions were almost completely limited to religious conditions here. He certainly felt sometimes that these conditions were better ordered in Sweden than America, and I have to agree. On the other side, he was more than willing to admit that our activity in America included much which appealed warmly to him. It is clear that one who has lived his entire life so completely associated with the state cannot in the turn of a hand accept the ways of working within the free church, as surely as a "free church" man could not be put into a state church and immediately find himself at home.

In the early summer of the same year (1923), in connection with his journey to Philadelphia for a November convention of the World Alliance, Archbishop Söderblom was invited by the Board of Augustana College and Theological Seminary in Rock Island, the synod's oldest college and only theological seminary, to visit as many of the Synod's congregations and institutions as time and strength permitted. To our great joy, he accepted the invitation, and in good time the honored guest arrived, followed by his dear wife and son Johan, who acted as private secretary.

Many of our people had seen and heard Bishop von Scheele when he honored us with his deeply-appreciated visits in 1893, 1901, and 1910. Now that the Archbishop himself was coming, they expected that he would be much more formal than a bishop. Imagine their great surprise when they got to know Söderblom. "He's just like one of ours," was heard everywhere he went. He was unconcerned and free in his appearances at ceremonial events. There is a large Lutheran association in New York City, The Luther Society, which once a year arranges a great festival with invited speakers. The event in question was held during the time the Archbishop was in New York. He was invited to speak. He came, and

carried out his assignment in a masterful way, as always. His subject was: "Personal Impressions of Christianity in the United States." The hall was filled by a mighty host, many very prominent people. (Editor's note: Söderblom later estimated about 1,300 dinner guests at his 45-minute Astor Hotel speech, plus a national radio audience.) The Archbishop was right in the middle of his speech when he stopped suddenly, then continued by singing one of Sanké's revival songs. [Editor's note: "The Ninety and Nine," translated into Swedish and proposed for the 1920 supplement to *Svenska Psalmboken*]. Nothing like that had certainly ever been heard by his audience. For the Archbishop, it worked to permit such a surprise. If anyone else had tried a similar maneuver, his reception would have been different.

As guest of the Augustana Synod during his American tour, Söderblom should certainly head for the Synod's seat in the city (Rock Island) where its theological seminary is located. A large, beautiful building complex, consisting of lecture rooms, library, and chapel, as well as dormitories for the students, had just been completed. Inauguration would take place on 6 November. At that time, the Archbishop held a speech mentioning that:

"The Augustana Synod, the Swedish Church in America, makes up the largest community of Swedes outside our borders. In this, we sense the breadth of the call which for 80 years has brought Swedish men and women to this country. Later generations shall, with possibly greater surprise and admiration, hear the true story of your community's growth from the first poor immigrant dugouts, sod churches, and schools with small beginnings, into the strong, youthful seat of higher education which spreads out across one of Rock Island's beautiful hills, and which, by the building we dedicate today, increases the college and gives worthy space to the theological faculty which draws its students from the many Swedish schools in this land. Our times require the goal-

oriented sense of empowerment within your students, and their fearless Christian trust."

As vice-chancellor of Uppsala University, he brought its good wishes, expressed as follows: "In sincere appreciation for what this seat of higher education, in a short time and from small beginnings, has been able to accomplish, Uppsala University awaits with lively anticipation the growth of Augustana's faculties to an institution of university status, meeting the highest demands of scientific research."

As Archbishop, he continued: "In my capacity as Archbishop of the Kingdom of Sweden, I, the Christian Church, and its congregation in the homeland, ask God's blessing upon this expanded educational institution at this solemn time, upon its President, its Deacon, its professors and other teachers, its administration and those who here benefit and shall benefit from education in the highest of all subjects, God's will, counsel, and actions for the salvation of mankind, and upon the Augustana Synod, its newly-installed President."

Such warm, confident, and heartfelt words had never before been spoken to the Augustana Synod by any of the highest officials of the Church of Sweden. No one can deny that we were greatly pleased.

In the summer of 1923 I attended the first Lutheran World Conference in Eisenach. The trip went via Sweden, with a short stop at the Archbishop's home. There I was met by the same hearty friendliness as during my first visit. At that time, January 1922, there were many visitors in the Archbishop's home. One evening, a group of 125 unemployed men had been invited for supper. Afterwards was a joint vespers service. Those who have had the pleasure of participating in vespers at the Archbishop's know what it means. Even now, in the middle of the summer, there were many visitors. At our table sat a Catholic bishop, a U.S. senator from Utah, a couple of other strangers whose name and position I've forgotten, and

the president of the Augustana Synod.

The Archbishop was naturally part of the Eisenach meeting, and played one of the main roles, as one might expect. Certainly there were those who were not at all pleased that he had come. Quiet attempts had been made to close the door to him. The American delegation made it clear, however, that nothing such could happen. Opposition evaporated, and the general feeling was that the Archbishop was more welcome than anyone else.

He also attended the 1929 World Conference in Copenhagen. Despite his poor health, he took an active part in the discussions. Not satisfied with that alone, he appeared during the conference at places outside Copenhagen. It seemed impossible for him to spare himself, despite all pleas that he not strain himself.

And finally there was the celebration of Christianity's introduction to Sweden in 830, with construction of Ansgar's Chapel at Björkö. During

his own life, Nathan Söderblom had experienced the insurmountable power of Christianity. He recognized its importance to past generations, for today's, and those generations to come. For that reason he worked towards celebrating the 1100th anniversary of St. Ansgar's coming to Sweden in an appropriate way. The people of Sweden supported him, and the memory of that celebration will remain a clear, shining point of light in the history of Sweden and its Church.

Finally, I hope it may be permitted for me to cite a speech the Archbishop held on 4 December 1923, just before his return from America to his homeland, at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York:

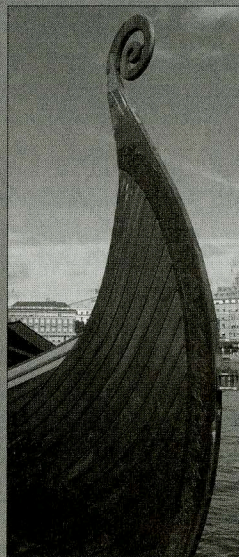
"I am a guest in this country of our American daughter church, the Augustana Synod. A dearly missed brother in the episcopal service of Sweden (Bishop von Scheele) visited the Augustana Synod three times before the World War. It has now been my longed-for pleasure to travel

from the Atlantic to Pacific, under the warmest guidance possible, to see how wonderfully our daughter Church, the Swedish Church in America, has grown during the past two or three generations in every area of the Church's religious work, education, and charity. I have thanked God from the depths of my heart, as I have witnessed how living, how praying, how full of daring and love and action the Swedish Church is in this land, and how much God has already let her carry out. – Now our Church in Sweden has a true daughter as a result of the Swedish immigration, which according to God's call makes its contribution to the continued building of your universal nation."

The Archbishop deeply understood the Augustana Synod's character, efforts, and situation, truthfully and completely. Certainly none of his predecessors saw in the Augustana Synod what he saw, and he had the will and courage to say straight out what he felt he had found.

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