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# North American Lutheranism and the New Ethnics

MARK GRANQUIST

Most American Lutherans are descendants of immigrants who came to North America from northern Europe in the great trans-Atlantic migrations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Lutherans came from Germany and Scandinavia by the millions, and developed their own religious institutions in this new world, coming to dominate religious life in certain sections of the North American continent. But North American Lutheranism has never been solely about Germans and Scandinavians, and in the twentieth century this has become increasingly evident. Lutheran immigrants have arrived in North America from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America.<sup>1</sup> Lutheran evangelistic efforts in North America have targeted non-traditional populations, such as African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, to develop ethnic parishes. Lutheran congregations have also sponsored refugees from around the world, and some of these refugees have founded ethnic congregations of their own. In each of these three ways, North American Lutheranism has become a more diverse and multifaceted group, reflecting the full array of Lutheranism around the world.

1. E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); L. DeAne Lagerquist, *The Lutherans* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999).

## New Ethnic European Lutherans

The great migration of North European Lutherans to North America came in waves. The eighteenth-century immigration consisted, for the most part, of German Lutherans to the Middle Colonies of the United States. Germans also dominated the early-nineteenth-century immigration to the United States and Canada, but they were increasingly matched and supplanted by Scandinavian immigrants by the middle and end of the nineteenth century. World War I, better economic conditions in Europe, and American controls on immigration all served to reduce this massive immigration to a trickle by 1924, and most North American Lutheran groups turned their attention to consolidation and acculturation to their new homeland. But beginning late in the nineteenth century there were also Lutheran immigrants from other areas of Europe — from Finland, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Hungary. These Lutherans too formed ethnic congregations and organizations wherever they gathered, and many of these groups still maintain a distinct ethnic presence in North America, often conducting some worship and activities in their immigrant languages even up to the present time. The Finns formed two separate groupings of congregations: one became a part of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the other became part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).<sup>2</sup> The Slovak Lutherans did likewise, and there is still a nongeographic Slovak Zion Synod in the present-day ELCA.<sup>3</sup>

The presence of Eastern European Lutherans and Baltic Lutherans in North America was increased and refreshed by refugees escaping World War II and Communism in the 1940s and 1950s. The Soviet reoccupation of the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), and the Communist takeover of Eastern Europe (including Slovakia and Hungary), brought a wave of refugees from these areas to Western Europe, and from there some of these refugees were admitted to the United States and Canada.<sup>4</sup> North American Lutherans played an im-

2. Jacob W. Heikkinen, *The Story of the Suomi Synod* (New York Mills, Minn.: Parta, 1985); Ralph J. Jalkanen, *The Faith of the Finns* (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1972).

3. John Adam, *A History of the Slovak Zion Synod LCA* (n.p.: Publications Committee of the Slovak Zion Synod, 1976).

4. Richard W. Solberg, *Open Doors: The Story of Lutherans Resettling Refugees* (St.

portant role in this process through the Lutheran World Federation efforts, and through their own organization, the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), a cooperative agency among various Lutheran groups in North America. Because these refugees were scattered among Europe, North America, and other countries (including Australia), they developed ethnic networks and church organizations that stretched around the world.

The Baltic Lutherans are a good example. There were scattered groups of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian Lutherans who immigrated to North America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and sporadic efforts were made by North American Lutherans (predominantly the United Lutheran Church in America and the Missouri Synod) to minister to them. Individual congregations were formed by these immigrants, and some affiliated with existing Lutheran denominations, while others remained independent. The majority of Baltic Lutheran congregations were formed by refugees who arrived after World War II, and often were affiliated with independent denominations, linked to other refugees around the world. Estonian refugees in North America founded the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1954, as a part of the larger Estonian Lutheran Church in Exile, which has its headquarters in Stockholm, Sweden.<sup>5</sup> The EELC has twenty congregations in North America, with a total membership of nine thousand. The Latvian Lutherans also formed their own group, the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, with forty-six congregations and sixteen thousand members. The Lithuanian Evangelical Church in Diaspora has six congregations and four thousand members.<sup>6</sup>

The experience of Eastern European Lutherans was similar to that of the Baltic Lutherans. Lutheran refugees from Slovakia were for-

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Louis: Concordia, 1992); Frederick K. Wentz, *Lutherans in Concert: The Story of the National Lutheran Council, 1918-1966* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1968).

5. E. Theodore Bachmann and Mercia Brenne Bachmann, *Lutheran Churches in the World: A Handbook* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989); Mark Granquist, "Estonian Americans," in *The Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, vol. 1 (New York: Gale, 1995), pp. 486-98.

6. ELCA, *Yearbook of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2001* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001); Mark Granquist, "Lithuanian Americans," in *The Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, vol. 2 (New York: Gale, 1995), pp. 881-94.

tunate to have already existing Slovak Lutheran congregations in North America, and many refugees were able to be settled into these congregations. There were also existing Hungarian Lutheran congregations in North America. Some refugees from Hungary, both from World War II and from the failed 1956 uprising against the Soviets, came to the United States, and in 1957 there were nine ethnic congregations affiliated with the United Lutheran Church in America.<sup>7</sup> Although they did not form their own independent denomination, they did form a "Hungarian Special Interest Conference," which continues to exist and to publish its own materials, linking it with other Hungarian Lutheran congregations around the world. There were also Lutheran refugees from Poland and Yugoslavia, but they seem not to have founded their own general organizations. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) has been very active in working with Lutherans in the former Soviet Union, many of whom are ethnic Germans who had settled in Russia and now are living in Russia, Ukraine, and the Central Asia republics.

#### African and Asian Lutherans in the United States

European and later North American Lutherans were active in the spread of Christianity to Africa and Asia, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The results of this mission work are Lutheran congregations and denominations around the world; out of 63 million Lutherans worldwide, some 17 million Lutherans live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. There are more Lutherans in Africa today (9.7 million) than there are in North America (8.5 million), and the growth rates for African and Asian Christianity are far outstripping those for European and North American Christian groups.<sup>8</sup> Although there has not been a large migration of African and Asian Lutherans to North America as of yet, there are scattered Lutheran congregations in North America worshipping in African and Asian languages, and this trend is

7. L. G. Terray, "Hungary, Lutherans in," in *Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, ed. Julius Bodensieck, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965), pp. 1059-64.

8. Gunther Gassmann, "Appendix: List of Lutheran Churches," in *Historical Dictionary of Lutheranism* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2001), p. 359.

bound to increase in the twenty-first century. The ELCA yearbook lists congregations with active ministries in thirty-three languages, while the LCMS Yearbook lists over a dozen active languages in addition to the European ones.<sup>9</sup>

Lutheran missionary efforts began in the eighteenth century, when, under the influence of pietism, European Lutheran missionaries were sent to India and to native populations in North America. The nineteenth century, the “great” century of mission work, saw Lutheran activity expanded to include China, Indonesia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa, especially Tanzania, Ethiopia, South Africa, Madagascar, and Nigeria. The twentieth century saw further expansion to Japan, Korea, New Guinea, Brazil, and other countries. Today there are Lutheran congregations in more than one hundred countries around the world.<sup>10</sup> This expansion, and the growing strength of Lutheranism outside of North America and Europe, means that these world Lutheran groups will have an increased influence on Lutheranism in North America in the coming decades.

Immigration from Africa and Asia to North America was very limited during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There was some immigration to the United States and Canada from China and Japan, but this was closely regulated, and mostly eliminated by a series of restrictive immigration laws in the United States. But immigration, especially to the United States, was greatly liberalized in 1965, and recent years have seen growing numbers of Asian and African immigrants to North America. Some are students and professionals who have come to study and work in North America; others are refugees fleeing war, famine, and social upheaval in their home countries. Some of these new immigrants to North America have come as members of Lutheran congregations in their home countries, while others have become Lutheran as a result of evangelistic efforts in North America. There are about 23,000 ELCA Lutherans who claim Asian/Pacific Islander heritage,<sup>11</sup> and there is an Association of

9. ELCA, *Yearbook of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2001*; LCMS, *The Lutheran Annual 2000 of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000).

10. Bachmann and Bachmann, *Lutheran Churches in the World*.

11. ELCA, “1988 to 2001 Racial/Ethnic Membership of the ELCA” (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002). This document can be accessed at <http://www.elca.org/re/fyifacts.html> (August 12, 2002).

Asians/Pacific Islanders—ELCA as an organized entity within the denomination.

The ELCA yearbook lists sixty-three congregations with ministries in a total of eleven different Asian languages, including Cambodian (one), Cantonese (seven), Hmong (five), Indonesian (one), Japanese (one), Korean (eighteen), Lao (five), Mandarin (twelve), Thai (one), Taiwanese (one), and Vietnamese (one). The LCMS yearbook lists seven different Asian-language ministries, including those in Cambodian, Cantonese, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Lao, and Vietnamese. Since there are few, if any, established Lutheran churches in Southeast Asia, it is reasonable to surmise that those North American congregations with Southeast Asian ties were formed by evangelistic efforts among recent refugees, something that will be examined later. But the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Indonesian Lutheran congregations were formed in part by immigrants from Lutheran communities in Asia, and it is this immigration that should be examined first.

China was a center of intensive Lutheran missionary work beginning in 1846, and by World War II a dozen different Lutheran groups were involved in activities scattered around the country, with a total Chinese Lutheran population of approximately 100,000. The war and then Communist triumph in 1949 meant the destruction of much of this work, as foreign missionaries were expelled from China and indigenous Christians closely regulated. Some Chinese Lutherans became a part of the large Chinese diaspora in Asia, and the missionaries followed them to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and other places. Of these "overseas" Chinese denominations, the Lutheran Church in Hong Kong, at about 50,000 members, is the largest. The Cantonese, Mandarin, and Taiwanese-speaking Lutheran congregations in North America can largely be traced to immigrants from the Chinese diaspora. Some of these Chinese congregations in North America have Lutheran roots that can be traced back for several generations in Asia. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong, for example, has cooperated with the ELCA in the establishment of a Chinese-language congregation in Toronto, Canada.<sup>12</sup> The ELCA lists twenty Chinese-speaking congregations, while the LCMS shows thir-

12. Bachmann and Bachmann, *Lutheran Churches in the World*.

teen active Chinese pastors serving twenty-eight congregations and missions.<sup>13</sup>

Lutheranism in Japan goes back to 1892, but the end of World War II and the expulsion of missionaries from China in 1949 were the impetus for more intensive Lutheran activities in Japan. There are about 30,000 Lutherans in Japan, and both the ELCA and the LCMS list at least one Japanese-speaking Lutheran congregation on their rosters. Former missionaries to Japan, such as the Reverend Paul Nakamura, were active in California in the 1940s and 1950s, working with Japanese immigrants and Japanese-American citizens.<sup>14</sup> The situation in Korea is similar to that of Japan, as Lutheran activities in Korea are recent, and the Lutheran presence in Korea is small. The ELCA lists a total of eighteen Korean-speaking congregations, however, which would seem to indicate an extensive outreach to the Korean-American community. The LCMS has shown dramatic increases in its Korean ministries, rising to forty congregations currently, up from eleven congregations just five years ago.<sup>15</sup>

The origin of Southeast Asian Lutheran congregations in North America has also resulted from the same dynamic of war, upheaval, flight, and refugee resettlement. Since there are virtually no Lutheran denominations on the Southeast Asia peninsula, it is clear that all these efforts have been developed in North America to serve Southeast Asian refugees, who have left behind the war, civil strife, and Communist oppression of their homelands. With the United States' withdrawal from South Vietnam in the mid 1970s, and the Communist capture of that area, some Lao, Hmong, Cambodian, and Vietnamese left their home areas for refugee camps in Thailand, or took to the seas to try and reach Hong Kong or the Philippines. LIRS, along with other refugee agencies, began to assist these refugees, seeking congregations to sponsor and provide for refugees to be resettled in North America. Besides the populations in California and Texas, there is also a large settlement of Southeast Asians in the Upper Midwest, due in large part to the sponsorship of refugees by individual Lutheran congrega-

13. LCMS, "Pentecost 2000+" (Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 2002). This document can be accessed at <http://www.pentecost2000.com/USworldnotes.htm> (August 12, 2002).

14. Lagerquist, *The Lutherans*.

15. LCMS, "Pentecost 2000+."

tions. Several Southeast Asian men and women have become Lutheran pastors in both the ELCA and LCMS in the last few decades, and they continue this outreach ministry to Southeast Asian immigrants, with the support of Lutheran synods and districts.<sup>16</sup>

Of all the Asian Lutheran groups, the Protestant Christian Batak Church is the largest, with over 2.9 million members. Located primarily on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia, the Batak Church began with Lutheran mission efforts in 1861, and grew quickly. Most Batak Christians, however, remain in Indonesia (only 1.8 percent live outside of the country), so immigration to North America is limited; there is only one ELCA Indonesia-language ministry listed in North America, in California. Similarly, large Lutheran groups are in Papua New Guinea and India, but immigration from these areas has been limited, as well. There is a century of Lutheran mission work in Pakistan, and though Lutheran work in that country has been consolidated into the ecumenical Church of Pakistan, there is a single ELCA congregation that has a mission in Urdu, the official language of Pakistan.

It could also be noted that Lutheran missionary efforts in Jordan and the West Bank have produced the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan, and it is from this group that the existence of five Arabic-language Lutheran congregations in the United States can be traced. The continuing tensions in the Middle East, and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the area, have caused many Arab Christians to leave the area, and many of these have immigrated to North America. There is an Association of Lutherans of Arab/Middle Eastern Heritage in the ELCA.<sup>17</sup>

Africa is the continent where Lutheranism is growing most quickly, and if there are only yet a few North American Lutheran congregations of direct African background, this is a situation that is bound to change in the coming century. In Africa, the largest Lutheran populations are in Ethiopia (2.6 million), Tanzania (2.5 million), Madagascar (1.5 million), South Africa (850,000), Nigeria (800,000), and Namibia (750,000), almost all of whom became Lutheran in the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> Nine ELCA congregations have ministries in African languages: there are congregations using Amharic (six), Oromo (two),

16. LCMS, "Pentecost 2000+."

17. ELCA, *Yearbook of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2001*.

18. Bachmann and Bachmann, *Lutheran Churches in the World*.

and Yoruba (one). The LCMS lists congregations worshipping in Ethiopian, Sudanese, and Tigrinya. Outside of the single congregation worshipping in the Yoruba language of Nigeria, the rest of these congregations worship in the languages of the Ethiopia-Eritrea-Sudan area of Eastern Africa — Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya, Ethiopian, and Sudanese. Many immigrants have come to North America since 1980 as war, famine, and economic instability have seriously affected this region of Africa. Lutheran efforts in Ethiopia go back to the end of the nineteenth century, and the church that resulted from this mission, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Jesus, is the largest Lutheran denomination in Africa.<sup>19</sup> Ethiopia has struggled in the last twenty-five years through a socialist revolution, civil and regional wars, and massive famines that have destroyed much of the infrastructure of the country. Lutheran relief agencies from Europe and North America have been active in efforts to rebuild this part of Africa, and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services has settled refugees from Ethiopia in North America, resulting in these ethnic congregations. The LCMS has sixty-five preaching stations to serve approximately two thousand African immigrants in North America.<sup>20</sup>

### Ministry to American Minorities

Although much of the Lutheran work in North America centered around ministry to European immigrants, there have also been numerous attempts (often sporadic and underfunded) to reach out to minority populations in North America, especially Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics. There is, in fact, a long history of such efforts among European and North American Lutherans, some of which have had lasting results, though many efforts failed.

Mission work among the Native Americans was often one reason cited for sending European missionaries to North America, and often a pretext for colonization.<sup>21</sup> In the seventeenth century, the short-lived

19. Gassmann, "Appendix: List of Lutheran Churches," p. 359.

20. LCMS, "Pentecost 2000+."

21. Henriette Lund, "Indigenous Americans, Lutheran work among," in *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, vol. 2, pp. 1119-22.

colony of New Sweden on the Delaware sponsored the work of Johan Campanius among the Delaware tribe, and in the eighteenth century German pastors such as Conrad Weiser Jr. and John C. Hartwick worked for a time among tribes in Pennsylvania and New York. As Lutherans expanded into the interior of the continent in the nineteenth century, mission work was undertaken by many different synods and groups. The Pennsylvania Ministerium and the Missouri Synod supported work among the Chippewa and Dakota peoples in Michigan and Minnesota, while the Iowa Synod sent missionaries among the Crow tribe in Montana, though these workers were killed.

In the twentieth century, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church operated the Lutheran Indian Mission in Oklahoma among the Cherokees, which eventually developed into a social service agency. Two of the longer-lasting missions, still operative today, were begun among the native tribes in the Southwest: The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod developed the Apache Indian Mission in Arizona at the beginning of the century, working on the San Carlos and Fort Apache reservations, and the synod still maintains an active presence there. The Navajo Evangelical Lutheran Mission at Rocky Point, Arizona, was developed in 1960, and still provides active service to the Navajo people in northern Arizona; its congregation, House of Prayer Lutheran, is listed as the only Navajo-speaking congregation in the ELCA.<sup>22</sup> The LCMS has ten full-time and several part-time workers who serve native American populations.<sup>23</sup>

Other Lutheran efforts have focused on northern Canada and Alaska. In 1894 a Norwegian pastor, T. L. Brevig, was assigned to Alaska to serve Norwegian Lapps who had been brought to Alaska to assist with a program to introduce reindeer to the Native population. Soon Brevig was also ministering to the Native populations, founding the Teller Mission, which brought the Lutheran message and medical care to the area.<sup>24</sup> Today the ELCA has five Inuipait-speaking congregations in Alaska that are the result of this missionary work. Also serving diverse populations in Northern Canada and Alaska is a pan-

22. ELCA, *Yearbook of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2001*.

23. LCMS, "Pentecost 2000+."

24. E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene Fevold, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian Americans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1960), vol. 2, p. 95.

Lutheran organization called LAMP, Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots. Begun in 1970 by Les Stahlke, this organization now works with Native populations in Canada and Alaska, with long- and short-term mission workers serving scattered Arctic communities.<sup>25</sup>

There have been a number of other efforts by Lutherans to work among Native Americans, both on the Native reservations and among Native American populations off the reservations, many of which are locally developed initiatives. In the ELCA there is an American Indian/Alaska Native Association formed to advance the interests of Native Americans within that denomination.

The story of African-American Lutherans parallels that of the Lutheran efforts among Native Americans. Though there have been African-American Lutherans since the seventeenth century, Lutheran denominations in North America have not always been consistent or helpful in encouraging the growth of this population of Lutherans. There have been many efforts to extend African-American Lutheranism, but far too often these efforts have been sporadic, and they have sometimes failed for lack of long-term interest and planning. There are, however, significant pockets of African-American Lutheranism that continue not only to exist but to thrive in North America.<sup>26</sup>

The initial history of African-American Lutheranism begins in colonial New York and New Jersey, when occasional African Americans (free and slave) joined local Lutheran congregations and relied on Lutheran clergy for various pastoral functions. As early as 1669, an African American named Emmanuel was baptized and taken into the membership of a New York Lutheran congregation by the Reverend Jacob Fabricius. It was, however, among southern Lutherans that a substantial population of African-American Lutherans was developed, although most of these came from slaves owned by white Lutherans. Lutherans migrated to the southern colonies of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia beginning in the eigh-

25. LAMP, "A History of LAMP" (Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots, 2002). This document can be accessed at <http://lampministry.org> (August 12, 2002).

26. See Richard C. Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns: The Centennial Edition of Black Lutheran Mission and Ministry in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977); Jeff G. Johnson, *Black Christians: The Untold Lutheran Story* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991).

teenth century; one of the most notable of these early groups was the Salzburg Lutherans in Georgia, who began arriving in that colony in 1734. Although the Salzburger settlement in Georgia was intended originally to be free from the use of African slaves, this initial determination was soon discarded, and slavery became common among southern Lutherans. The Lutheran ownership of slaves, however, brought with it all the common questions that surrounded slavery and religion in the southern United States: could and should slaves be baptized and made Christians, and, if so, what was their place in southern Lutheran congregations? Some African Americans were baptized and admitted to local congregations during the colonial period, although these efforts were sporadic, and sometimes controversial. During the nineteenth century, southern Lutherans began to actively seek to Christianize both slave and free African Americans, though they carefully sought to maintain a distinction between the races. African Americans such as Jehu Jones, Alexander Payne, and Boston Drayton studied at American Lutheran seminaries, and Jones founded the first African-American Lutheran congregation, St. Pauls Colored Lutheran Church, in Philadelphia, in 1832.<sup>27</sup>

Just prior to the Civil War, southern Lutheran synods had substantial African-American populations, estimated at from 10 to 25 percent of total membership. But the emancipation of the slaves after the Civil War led to a quick decline in these numbers, and southern synods exacerbated this exodus by requesting that African-American Lutherans form separate congregations and synodical organizations, a move that effectively excluded many African-American Lutherans from membership. Beginning in 1877, there was a series of Lutheran initiatives begun with African Americans in the South, organized by the Synodical Conference and Joint Synod of Ohio, which resulted not only in African-American Lutheran congregations and pastors, but also training schools and colleges in the South.

In the twentieth century, North American Lutheran denominations have made repeated efforts to increase their African-American membership. The focus of much of this work also shifted in the twentieth century with the massive African-American migration to the urban areas of the northern United States; as a result, urban missions largely

27. Johnson, *Black Christians*.

replaced the rural South for much of this work. By the time of the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Lutheran denominations had begun to push for integrated congregations, especially in urban areas, and to actively seek out African-American members, although such programs often varied, and were at times uneven. The late twentieth century also saw the rise of African-American Lutherans as pastors, bishops, denominational officials, and college and seminary professors, with a visibility within national denominational circles.

Another area of significant African-American presence for North American Lutherans is among Africans in the Caribbean area, notably the Virgin Islands of the United States and the countries of Suriname and Guyana. In these areas, mission work has been long-standing, and the initial mission efforts with free and slave populations have given way to substantial indigenous and independent African Lutheran churches. In turn, African immigrants from these areas to North America have added to the diversity of the Lutheran denominations here.

The Virgin Islands in the Caribbean were initially a colony of Denmark (the Danish West Indies), and it was through the efforts of Danish Lutherans in the eighteenth century that African slaves there were baptized and made Lutheran.<sup>28</sup> Beginning in the 1740s and 1750s, the Danish Lutherans began systematic attempts to reach the African population of the islands, but it was not until the work was shifted from Danish to the Creole language of the slaves that much success was had. By the end of the eighteenth century, African Lutherans (free and slave) outnumbered the Danish Lutherans, and the colonial government had embarked on a program to establish schools and congregations for them. African Lutherans in the Danish West Indies created a truly indigenous African Lutheran culture on the islands, one of the first successful attempts to accomplish this in a non-European culture.

When Denmark sold this colony to the United States in 1917, the Lutheran congregations and institutions there came under the control of the United Lutheran Church in America, which eventually constituted these Lutherans with others from Puerto Rico as the Caribbean

28. Benjamin H. Pershing, "Virgin Islands," in *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, vol. 3, pp. 2443-44.

Synod of the ULCA in 1952. But Lutherans from the Virgin Islands had already been coming to the United States, as early as the 1870s, to find economic advancement and to escape the poverty of the islands. Several North American Lutheran congregations, most notably Transfiguration Lutheran Church in Harlem, New York City, were founded by Lutherans from the Virgin Islands. Lutherans from the West Indies also contributed early African-American Lutheran leaders, such as the Reverend Daniel Wiseman, the first African-American pastor to be formally trained, and deaconesses Emma Francis and Edith Prince, who served both in New York and in the Virgin Islands.<sup>29</sup>

The stories of African Lutherans in Guyana and Suriname parallel those of the Virgin Island Lutherans: in other words, a colonial ministry to slave and free populations grew into an indigenous church. Although these two countries have become independent, there are significant ties between them and Lutherans in North America. In Suriname, white Lutheran congregations established in the eighteenth century began in 1791 to baptize slaves.<sup>30</sup> This led in turn to the formation of a native Lutheranism of African and Creole background, and worship in the language of the people. Several African Lutheran congregations were formed in Suriname, and have continued to exist even through long periods of isolation and the antipathy of the dominant Reformed Protestantism of the colonial government. In the twentieth century, North American Lutherans, especially the Lutheran Church in America, worked closely with Surinamese Lutherans to strengthen their congregations and programs.

Lutheranism in Guyana traces a similar history. European Lutherans, mainly Dutch, began congregations in what was then British Guiana in the eighteenth century, but racial attitudes and suspicions hindered evangelism with slaves and free Africans until the 1830s.<sup>31</sup> The Reverend Mr. Junius began a practice of baptizing Africans and Creoles at this time, and laid the foundation for African Lutheran congregations in the country. The Lutheran congregations eventually came under the care of the United Lutheran Church in America in 1915, but when Guyana became independent in 1966, so did the Lu-

29. Johnson, *Black Christians*.

30. Johnson, *Black Christians*.

31. Johnson, *Black Christians*.

theran Church of Guyana, although many ties continued to exist between this church and North American Lutherans.<sup>32</sup>

Out of nearly 9 million North American Lutherans, there are approximately 105,000 African-American Lutherans, a figure that both the ELCA and the LCMS are actively seeking to increase. As of 2001, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America had over 120 pastors and nearly 53,000 members who were African American,<sup>33</sup> and although the new denomination's goal of a 10 percent membership of persons of color (or those whose primary language is not English) has proven elusive so far, the ELCA has continued to stress the importance of this goal. In the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, as of 2001, there were 100 pastors and nearly 54,000 African-American members.<sup>34</sup>

Both denominations have active organizations in place to further African-American Lutheranism: the ELCA has a Commission for Multicultural Ministry and an African-American Lutheran Association, while the LCMS has a Board for Black Ministry Services. Both denominations have worked to produce worship materials for African-American Lutherans, as well as other materials of a historical and devotional nature. The history of Lutheran efforts among African Americans has shown time and again, however, that simply having organizations and materials in place is not enough to ensure the success of such ministries, and that local and independent efforts are often equally as important.

### Hispanic Lutheran Missionaries and Missions

Much of what can be said about African-American Lutherans parallels the experience of Hispanic Lutherans in North America, although Lutheran contacts with the Hispanic world are of much more recent origin, beginning mostly in the twentieth century. Until the last century the official status of Roman Catholicism in the Latin American world,

32. Bachmann and Bachmann, *Lutheran Churches in the World*.

33. ELCA, "1988 to 2001 Racial/Ethnic Membership of the ELCA."

34. Board for Black Ministry Services, LCMS, "LCMS Black Ministry: What is Black Ministry?" (Board for Black Ministry Services, Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod). This document can be accessed at <http://blackministry.lcms.org/whatis.html> (August 12, 2002).

and Protestant sensibilities about "sheep-stealing," had limited most Lutheran efforts in Latin America to the organization of small European expatriate or ethnic congregations, especially in Brazil and Argentina. In the twentieth century three elements combined to increase Hispanic Lutheranism: growing opportunities for Protestant work in Latin American countries, the acculturation of expatriate and ethnic Lutheran populations to Hispanic cultures, and a large-scale immigration of Hispanics into North America itself.

On the heels of the Spanish-American War, a young Swedish-American pre-seminary student, Gustav Swenson, went to Puerto Rico and established a bilingual congregation there in 1898. He was followed shortly after by Lutheran pastors from the General Council in 1899, and a series of North American Lutheran missionaries soon came to work in Puerto Rico, most notably Alfred Ostrom of the Augustana Synod, who worked on the island from 1905 to 1931.<sup>35</sup> Beginning in the 1920s, native Puerto Rican pastors were trained at Lutheran seminaries in North America, and by 1952 the Lutheran congregations on the island were combined with the congregations on the Virgin Islands to create the Caribbean Synod; there are currently twenty-six congregations and 5,200 Lutherans in Puerto Rico.<sup>36</sup> As with the congregations on the Virgin Islands, the heavy immigration of Puerto Ricans to the United States (especially after World War II) has drained the strength of Puerto Rican congregations, but there are Lutheran congregations (especially in the New York area) that have benefited from this migration. There were other scattered Lutheran missions throughout the Hispanic Caribbean, including congregations in Cuba developed by the LCMS beginning in 1911, and small congregations on other islands.

Probably the largest part of the Hispanic population in North America has resulted from immigration from Mexico, while a smaller part has come from the countries of Central America. Most of the Lutheran efforts in these countries are fairly recent, and most do not extend back further than the post-World War II period. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico (ELCM), for example, is an offshoot of the

35. Benjamin H. Pershing, "Puerto Rico," in *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, vol. 3, pp. 1991-92.

36. ELCA, *Yearbook of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, 2001.

Latin American Lutheran Mission (LALM), which was organized in 1946 as the result of scattered efforts from a decade earlier.<sup>37</sup> The LALM has its base in Laredo, Texas, and supports the efforts of the ELCM, which is located just across the border in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. The LCMS has similar ties to two smaller Mexican Lutheran denominations, as well as a long-running radio ministry to Latin America, a Spanish-language version of the "Lutheran Hour," whose roots go back to the 1940s.<sup>38</sup>

The bulk of Hispanic Lutherans in the United States, however, do not come as a result of immigration from the small Hispanic Lutheran denominations of Latin America, but as a result of outreach by Lutheran congregations and agencies among Hispanic immigrants to North America. The vast majority of Hispanic immigrants to North America come as Roman Catholics, but some are nominal adherents, or they are estranged from the Roman Catholic Church. Some are attracted to Protestant denominations in the United States, and up to 25 percent of North American Hispanics are now Protestant. The training of Spanish-speaking pastors and church workers, who found Hispanic congregations in North America, is key, and some Lutheran seminaries, such as the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest, in Austin, Texas, have Spanish-language programs. The ELCA has 180 congregations that list worship in Spanish (including the congregations in Puerto Rico), with a Hispanic membership of 39,000, up 45 percent since 1988.<sup>39</sup> There is in the ELCA an *Asociacion Luterana de Ministerios Hispanes de la Iglesia Evangelica Luterana en America* (Association of Hispanic Ministries in the ELCA), which organizes and promotes Hispanic ministries. The LCMS lists 120 Hispanic congregations in North America, with "96 Hispanic workers" on its rolls, and has an "LCMS Hispanic Conference" that has met regularly since its formation in 1976.<sup>40</sup> Both the ELCA and LCMS produce hymnals, devotionals, and theological materials in Spanish for the use of these growing ministries.

37. Bachmann and Bachmann, *Lutheran Churches in the World*.

38. LCMS, "10th LCMS Hispanic Conference Seeks Autonomy," *LCMS News*, no.

44. This can be accessed at <http://concordtx.org/missions/hisp.htm> (August 12, 2002).

39. ELCA, "1988 to 2001 Racial/Ethnic Membership of the ELCA."

40. LCMS, "10th LCMS Hispanic Conference" and "Pentecost 2000+."

## The Present and Future of Ethnic Ministry in American Lutheranism

The work of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services organization should be mentioned, as its effort has led, at least indirectly, to the growing ethnic diversity of North American Lutheranism.<sup>41</sup> Although LIRS settles refugees in North America without regard to religion, and although its main purpose is not to "Lutheranize" the refugees, the fact that they work through the structures of local Lutheran congregations means that the refugees are often provided with the supportive atmosphere of a Lutheran fellowship, and this has much to do with the growth of Lutheranism among certain refugee populations, most noticeably the Southeast Asian community, where Lutheranism is historically unknown.

The future would seem to suggest the increasing ethnic diversity of North American Lutheranism, although perhaps not to the degree, or with the rapidity, which its most ardent supporters might wish. The major North American Lutheran denominations are still predominantly white and European in background; the ELCA, for example, is still 97 percent white. Both the ELCA and the LCMS have set aggressive goals for diversity, of which they have, unfortunately, fallen short. In 1988 the newly formed ELCA suggested that its goal was to reach the point of being 10 percent "people of color or those whose primary language is not English," but this goal seems elusive, even though a large number of mission starts are funneled in this direction. In the LCMS, the Black Ministry Services board declared its desire to double the number of black Lutherans (in the LCMS) to 100,000 "by the early dawn of the New Century," and the World Mission Department declared its intention to start one thousand new cross-cultural ministries by 2000;<sup>42</sup> though these goals were not met by the desired dates, and have not yet been met, they are still the stated intentions of the denomination itself.

The drive to increase ethnic diversity of North American Luther-

41. See Richard W. Solberg, *Open Doors: The Story of Lutherans Resettling Refugees* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992).

42. LCMS, "Pentecost 2000+"; Board for Black Ministry Services, LCMS, "LCMS Black Ministry: What is Black Ministry?"

anism can, however, lead to tensions and problems. The slow pace of diversification has sparked anger within minority Lutheran communities, who suspect that the denominations are not as committed to these goals as they say they are. A glance at the history of such efforts shows that some of these suspicions have had, in the past, a basis in reality. On the other hand, the progress toward these goals has not always seemed to match the resources devoted to the work, and critics feel that funds spent to begin and sustain struggling ethnic congregations are yielding very meager results. They worry that general efforts for evangelism and mission starts are being shortchanged in favor of ethnic ministries, and that this is a cause of the slow shrinkage of the denominations. In the ELCA, the goal of 10-percent minority representation is institutionalized in quotas for synodical and national positions; this has led not only to hard feelings on the part of some, but a very real fear that an already thin minority leadership (lay and clergy) is being diverted and misused.

Whatever the tensions and problems, it is clear that North American Lutheranism is slowly becoming more ethnically diverse. Perhaps the history of Lutheran work in North America among non-European populations could be a corrective and a lesson, as it seems that the growth of Lutheranism in North America among ethnically diverse groups is as much or more a result of initiatives from the local level as it is a result of the actions of boards, commissions, programs, and well-intended goal-setting. The history of such efforts is clearly uneven, as time and money are expended in bursts, with periods of shifting, neglect, and even abandonment in between. The most effective ways to reach ethnically diverse populations have been, it seems, efforts that are local, continuous, and based within the local cultures themselves, efforts that have led to the slow diversification of Lutheranism in North America up to this point in time.

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