

God used Dr. Becker as His Tool in Establishing Fellowship
Between the Wisconsin Ev. Luth. Synod and the Lutheran
Confessional Church of Scandanvia.

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May 29, 1990

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 654
Mequon, Wisconsin

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The history of the connection between the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Lutheran Confessional Church of Scandanavia has spanned almost twenty years although the Scandanavian church has not always been known by that same name. The first contact between the two groups came through an organization called Biblicum located in Uppsala, Sweden. This organization was formed in October of 1968 by G.A. Danell and Dr. David Hedegard. These two men then selected five other men who were known to hold to the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God and to the Lutheran Confessions. Biblicum was never associated with any organization but has always remained completely independent.

In 1970 the Biblicum Institute worked out a folder which provided information about itself. The folder presents the background in which Biblicum was founded as follows.

Biblicum's background is the present theological and spiritual situation in our country. Biblical scholarship has suffered a catastrophic setback, even among active church members. In addition, the attitude toward the Bible and biblical instruction both in church and school are in large measure controlled by the relativism and scepticism of liberal theology. Probably no book has ever been subjected to such intensive criticism as the Bible. In wide circles, -- also in churches and societies, -- doubt about the trustworthiness of the Bible has taken root. All this, -- both the insufficient scholarship and the widespread mistrust in regard to the Bible, -- is a deadly danger for all true Christendom, since the Bible is the only correct norm for Christian

faith and life. Biblical scholarship and biblical faith are on the way to disappearing among our people. No sign of change is discernible either in school, society, or our universities. The theological faculties are appointed by the state and their theological position is altogether determined by a liberal point of view. The excellent conservative scholarly research, which is actually present, can not make its voice heard in that context (Biblicum's Battle for Biblical Faith, Seth Erlandsson and Sten Johansson, translated by Siegbert Becker).

In that same folder the purpose of Biblicum is presented as follows.

The purpose of Biblicum is to conduct scholarly research in and about the Bible with the presupposition that the Bible truly is God's Word and not just a human word, and to give biblical instruction in various contexts, especially to students, (particularly teacher candidates and students of theology). to youth leaders. and others who have assignments in the Church of Christ (Erlandsson and Johansson, pg. 7).

As the men associated with Biblicum grew in the studies of of the Scriptures they began to see a increasing need for a free confessional church in Sweden. But for G. A. Danell these feeling had begun to surface in December of 67. In a conservative magazine of which Sune Svensson, who was one of the seven founders of Biblicum, was the editor, "Nya Vaektaren", Danell writes,

The situation in the Church of Sweden is absurd. The liberal theology of the state church considers fundamental facts of salvation to be of no importance. It sees no decisive significance in the diety of Christ and that the church itself is the most dangerous agency for the dechristianization of the people. The solution is a reformation of the church. If that does not happen, then I see no other hope for the future than a free Lutheran confessional church . . . Therefore I believe that the time for serious discussion of a free church, free in the ordinary sense of the word, has come, not only from the

state but also from the majority of the populace, which makes it difficult for us through its regulating agency (Erlandsson and Johansson, pg. 26).

Other cries for a free church came from David Hedegard, who was another of the founders of Biblicum. Another member of Biblicum, Per Jonsson, wrote against unionism in the Church of Sweden.

In October, 1970, a group of Christians in Uppsala called Seth Erlandsson and David Hedegard to conduct regular worship services apart from the Church of Sweden. As time went on this group became more permanent and became known as the Evangelical Lutheran Mission. Biblicum itself favored this separation but was not tied to this group organizationally as the minutes from Nov. 16, 1970 show.

The members of the board who were present expressed their full support for this fellowship, although Biblicum Institute itself is not the leader of this movement, but now as before it is an institution for biblical research and biblical instruction (Erlandsson and Johansson, pg. 29).

Biblicum itself did not find its permanent home until October 14, 1972 when it dedicated its building in Uppsala, Bible Research Institution Biblicum. On that day Biblicum had planned to hold its dedication worship service at the small chapel where the Evangelical Lutheran Mission had found a temporary home but the size of the crowd forced them to use the cathedral in a service which was completely separate from the Church of Sweden.

The first appeal was to the Wisconsin Synod from the people of Sweden came in the form of a request to the Board

for World Missions from the mission of the free church movement in Sweden, called the Bibeltrogna Vanner (Bible - Faithful friends). They were associated with missions in Kenya and Ethiopia. Edgar Hoenecke who was the Executive Secretary of the Board for World Missions at that time was going to meet with them while he was at a meeting with our missionaries in Kisii, Kenya.

The Commission on Doctrinal Matters also received a request from the members of Biblicum. They had become familiar with the Wisconsin Synod through the materials which we had put out. Among these materials was our doctrinal statement "This We Believe" and a number of articles written by Dr. Siegbert W. Becker. It was these materials which led the board at Biblicum to make the following requests. Already in the fall of 1971 the Biblicum Institute board took up the question of the desirability of having the WELS send a guest lecturer to Biblicum. The board also discussed the possibility of sending Sten Johansson to a foreign university, where he could receive a biblically faithful theological training. But the Biblicum Institute did not have the financial resources to bring this about without outside help. Therefore the board resolved on Nov. 29, 1971, that "Per Jonsson shall ask Prof. Becker to what extent Biblicum could count on financial help from the U.S.A. and to what extent a stipend could be arranged for Sten Johansson to study at a foreign university (Erlandsson and Johansson, pg. 33).

In Per Jonsson's dealings with Prof. Becker they worked out a request for Prof. Becker to lecture in Uppsala under the auspices of Biblicum. They also discussed the need for a free confessional church in Sweden. This request was submitted to the Committee on Doctrinal Matters. In the *WELS Report to the Nine Districts*, which came out in April of 1972, it was reported that:

"Private funds were also set aside for Swedish language training and for a month's visit for Dr. Becker to help found a truly confessional lutheran Swedish free church."

When all of the necessary permission had been granted the men in Sweden worked out an itinerary in cooperation with the people of Bibeltrogna Vaenner, who had also made contact with our synod through the World Mission Board.

In August of 1972, Prof. Becker and his wife spent a month in Sweden lecturing in Umea, Uppsala, Scania and Lund. In addition to this he worked on research for Biblicum. Prof. Becker was very well received. His lectures were attended by hundreds. The members of the board of Biblicum also found Prof. Becker's lectures to be very worthwhile as is shown by this resolution which took place on Oct. 13, 1972.

Professor Becker's lectures during his visit to Sweden shall be published in a book of about 100 pages with the title Skriften och Saligheten. The lectures to be translated by Kjerstin Jonsson. Publication to be managed by Per Jonsson. The book to be printed in 2,000 copies (Erlandsson and Johansson, pg. 33).

Kjerstin Jonsson was the wife of Per Jonsson who possessed a very good command of the english language. She is also the one who was responsible for translating "This We Believe."

The WELS had also requested that Seth Erlandsson give guest lectures in the U.S.A., however, the board of Biblicum felt that the situation in Sweden was too tense for him to leave at that time. They did want to maintain contact with

the WELS so Oct. 13, 1972 they made this request to the WELS: "The Synod ought instead examine the possibility of sending a researcher-lecturer and a pastor-missionary for temporary consultations and activity in Uppsala and Sweden (Erlandsson and Johansson, pg. 34.)"

In the meantime Prof. Becker had reported at a joint meeting of the World Mission Board and the Committee on Doctrinal Matters. These two committee decided to to elect a smaller committee to represent their interests in the Sweden matter. President O. J. Naumann, and President Carl Lawrenz were appointed to work with Prof. Becker in this matter.

Several meetings were held by this committee. They resolved to ask to men from Sweden to come and present their situation in various lectures and presentations. Since the men from Sweden were not able to come at that time and since a situation had arisen which required prompt attention, they decided to send Prof. Becker and another man to Sweden during the Easter recess of the Seminary.

The men at Biblicum were going through some major difficulties regarding the question of separation from the Church of Sweden. Articles had appeared in the magazine Nya Vaektaren which were written by Per Jonsson and Sten Johansson which spoke of the increasing difficulty of remaining in the state church. At one of the meetings of Biblicum Seth Erlandsson stated that he intended to leave in the near future. Per Jonsson, however, did not wait. On

the 3rd of November, he submitted his request for release from the Church of Sweden effective June 1, 1973. This news was not received favorably by Dean G. A. Danell.

Danell had written articles which seemed to favor separation. As editor of Nya Vaektaren he had published articles which favored separation. Now when words became a reality Danell backed away from the idea of separation. He condemned Per Jonsson for the steps he had taken. He took his feelings a step further when he participated in conducting a communion service in St. Michael's (the Uppsala congregation of the State Church) and condemned Seth Erlandsson for not participating. Eventually this division ended up in the resignation of Danell and two other board members from the board of Biblicum.

The Wisconsin Synod became actively involved in this issue when Prof. Becker came under criticism. Pastor Tom Hardt who was pastor of St. Martin's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Stockholm. This congregation was an independent congregation which has not entered into fellowship with any Lutheran confessional church. One would have thought that Pastor Hardt would have been happy to see Per Jonsson leave the state church but instead he only criticized. Hardt accused Erlandsson, Jonsson, and Engquist of having made contact with the Wisconsin Synod in a highhanded way. Hardt also found fault with the fact that Becker had encouraged the Swedish pastors to first of all make the true teachings of God known and also to leave the

Swedish church. St. Martin's accuses Becker of having given the advice "that a Swedish Pastor has a right to promote confessional Lutheran doctrine and practice within the Church of Sweden as a 'base of operations' (Erlandsson and Johansson, pg. 83)." Hardt does not quote the source to which he is referring so it is impossible to put the comment into its context. Prof. Becker had made reference to his own withdrawal from the LCMS and had drawn comparisons. He also made comparisons with the Church of Sweden and with Luther in the Catholic Church. In the end the arguments were really not over whether or not a pastor should leave but whether or not a pastor should attempt to instruct his congregation before he leaves. Hardt felt that a pastor in the Swedish Church had no right to say anything against a the state church. He felt that a pastor who was having doctrinal differences with the state church should leave quietly and pleasantly because the pastor is the one who had changed. In Hardt's view a Swedish pastor pledged himself to liberalism when he accepted the office of pastor in the Church of Sweden.

In Prof. Becker's opinion the pastor has a duty to instruct his congregation when God's Word is not being taught in its truth and purity. Also in the Ordination Promise of the Church of Sweden the pastor pledges himself to the Word of God in its truth and purity and also to the confessions.

The important thing to see is the way that this controversy brought the men who remained in Biblicum even closer together. This controversy also cemented the ties between the WELS and the Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden. This controversy blew back and forth for a period spanning almost two years - a time during which the WELS and the LCCS had continued to come closer together.

Prof. Becker was able to make the trip to Sweden during the Easter recess of 1973 with very favorable results as the following report from the Book of Reports and Memorials, Aug. 8-15, 1973 shows.

The visit was made from April 22 to 30. Several very important meetings and consultations were held at Biblicum in Uppsala with unexpectedly favorable results. Among these was the early severance of membership from the state church by Dr. Seth Erlandsson, the decision to publish a "Lutersk Sandebrev," (a monthly circular of four pages), to present the cause of the confessional free church movement to the Swedish people, the drafting of a strong confessional document, titled "Upprop" (German: Aufruf, Aufforderung, proclamation), which is to be presented to other orthodox Lutheran leaders for their signatures, and then to be mailed to thousands of Swedish pastors and people as a challenge to take the step out of the state church as the only action consistent with their protest against the heresy rampant in the Church of Sweden.

"During the seven days of conferences as Uppsala all concerned made every effort to explore the extent of doctrinal agreement between the Ev. Lutheran Mission and our Synod. Every point that was not immediately agreed upon was thoroughly discussed, and full agreement was reached on every point. It was quite apparent that no hindrance had been found to a declaration of church fellowship.

There was also a discussion about the ability of the young church to support itself. The men from the Wisconsin Synod encouraged the Evangelical Lutheran Mission to be careful about the amount of outside help it accepts. This advice was well received and agreed with. However, they did find some things which they were able to finance yet were immediately needed. They submitted this list of things which they needed to the WELS.

1. Temporary help for the Ev. Lutheran Mission In Sweden to support Pastor Sten Johansson. This will amount to about \$250 per month.
 2. Immediate assistance to cover some of the travel expenses of Pastor Sten Johansson in presenting the "Upprop" document to various confessional groups for signatures. Perhaps \$100 per month.
 3. Partial support for the publication and mailing of the "Lutersk Sandebrev" of Pastor Per Jonsson. Total cost - \$5,000 the first year.
 4. Subsidy of some kind for publishing original and translated articles of a confessional nature. This amount will vary with the amount of material published and the copies that will be sold in Sweden.
 5. Possibly some help to publish the "Upprop" document in sufficient copies to reach more people in Sweden.
 6. Some slide lectures, filmstrips and taped material for instructing the Swedish pastors and church leaders in mission and evangelism methods. All the leaders speak English.
 7. Above all, the prayers of our people are asked for by our friends in Sweden, for they know that they will prevail in their struggle only as God the Holy Spirit gives them strength and faithfulness and pleasing fruits on their labors with his holy Word.
- Book of Reports and Memorials, 1973.

God-

The Sweden situation and request for aid was submitted to our synod at the 1973 Synod Convention. The request was enthusiastically received and the synod made the following resolutions.

Resolved, a) That we thank the Lord for the confessional Lutheran stand of certain orthodox groups in Sweden; and be it further

Resolved, b) That we encourage extra-budgetary gifts to the "Sweden Conference and Aid Fund" to give these groups needed help; and be it finally

Resolved, c) That we include these people in our prayers.

(Proceedings, 1973)

In the fall of 1973 three men from Sweden were able to come to the U.S.A.; Dr. Seth Erlandsson, head of Biblicum, and assistant pastor of St. Matthew's at Uppsala (formerly ELM), Pastor Per Jonsson of Landskrona; Pastor Lars Engquist of Ranea. At the meetings there was a through discussion of "This we Believe" and "Your Blessed Fellowship in Christ." At the end of the meeting our Commission on Inter-Church relations was able to make the following statement.

On the basis of the doctrinal discussions held in Sweden over the past two years by Dr. Becker and Pastor E. Hoenecke, and on the basis of our Commission's discussion that the past two days with Dr. Seth Erlandsson, Pastor Per Jonsson, and Pastor Lars Engquist, and on the basis of printed materials which have come to our attention from St. Matthew's Ev. Lutheran Congregation of Uppsala and its pastor, Pastor Sten Johansson, and Assistant Pastor Dr. Seth Erlandsson. (1) that we declare ourselves to be agreed in doctrine and practice with St. Matthew's Congregation of Uppsala, whose members have withdrawn from the Swedish State Church, and find nothing to hinder the practice of church fellowship with this congregation and its pastors, and (2) that we inform our Synod of our findings, and (3) that we likewise find ourselves in doctrinal agreement with Pastors Lars Engquist and Per Jonsson, but realize the need for clarification of their present situation (membership on Pastor Lars Engquist's part in the apostate Swedish State Church and involvement on Pastor Per Jonsson's part with the Bibeltrögnvänner) before we could enter into fellowship with them.'

(Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Vol. 71, 1974, pg 60 - 62. G. Hoenecke)

Thus it was that the Wisconsin Synod came into fellowship with the men from Sweden. We can see how God used Dr. Becker as His instrument. It was through materials that were written by Prof. Becker that the original request came. It was through Prof. Becker's willingness to learn the Swedish language that we were drawn even closer together. His visits drew helped the men of Sweden by giving them strength and encouragement as well as the truth of God's Word. Prof. Becker returned to Sweden on at least a yearly basis. He encouraged offerings to the Swedish Aid Fund. He taught our people and pastors about struggle of our Christian friends in Sweden through his numerous articles which appeared in the WLQ and the Northwestern Lutheran. He translated the works of the men of Sweden into english. His name appears on almost every synodical committee dealing with Sweden. One realizes the tremendous amount of influence he had when you look at the scarcity of articles written in our Synod after the death of Prof. Becker. It was something which was very near and dear to his heart. There was also a trust fund established for the LCCS with monies from his memorials.

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