

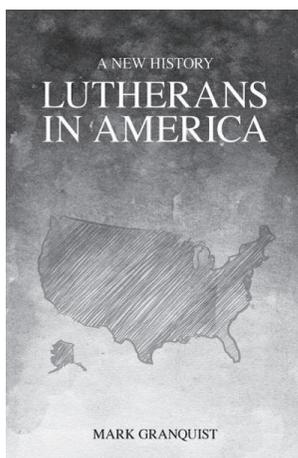
**LUTHERANS IN AMERICA: A New History. By Mark Granquist. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015. 388 pages. Paper. \$44.10.**

*A New History* is the subtitle Mark Granquist has assigned to his *Lutherans in America*. This book is in fact the first comprehensive narrative since the publication of E. Clifford Nelson's *The Lutherans in North America* in 1975. Granquist aims not only to recount the past forty years of Lutheranism on the American scene, but to examine the whole story with "new eyes" and thus to offer a fresh perspective.

Nelson was an unabashed champion of the twentieth-century movement toward unity among American Lutherans and bold enough to predict that even The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) would not be able to forever deny "the implications of its own confession" (303). Granquist clearly demonstrates that this forecast was premature. The Seminex crisis of the 1970s, and its bitter aftermath, sidelined the LCMS. Those who left this denomination to form the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) did become a catalyst for the creation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 1988. However, this same merger, which also involved the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC), resulted in two rather than one major Lutheran church body. Since then, not only have the ELCA and the LCMS steadily grown farther apart from each other, but each of them remains internally divided. Here Granquist draws attention to the moderate and conservative

factions in the LCMS and to the various contending parties within the ELCA, a denomination that in its first twenty-five years has in fact undergone two major schisms and suffered the loss of a million members. In his effort to put these post-Nelson years into perspective, Granquist also stresses the downside of Lutheran denominational mergers. In his estimation, they tend to "disrupt the natural flow of organizations," to break longstanding "patterns of loyalty and affiliation," to divert time and energy away from "direct proclamation of the gospel," and to create "inevitable hard feelings that can drain the life out of any denomination" (283).

For Granquist, the central question with which all members of this same family



of denominations have commonly grappled over the course of their histories is how to be both "Lutheran" and "American." Since their answers were "divergent," or so he asserts, "they argued and divided and united" (197). At the extremes in the nineteenth century were Samuel Simon Schmucker of the General Synod, who was

ready to rewrite the Augsburg Confession in order to better align Lutheranism with the American Protestant empire, and C. F. W. Walther of the Missouri Synod, who in the Predestinarian Controversy, ardently defended the Lutheran emphasis on sola gratia against the individual freedom Americans had grown to cherish in their religious as well as their civic lives. In both cases, the attending conflicts deepened Lutheran divisions. Other Lutherans of this same era sought to strike more of a balance, as Granquist points out, by resisting the wild-eyed versions of revivalism, but employing some of its moderate features on occasion for the sake of congregational renewal and supplementing conversions with catechetical instruction (158–159).

A noteworthy imbalance in Granquist's compelling presentation is the fact that he devotes his first four chapters (one third of the book) to Lutheranism's Old World backdrop and to its beginnings in colonial America, when twenty-five thousand souls at best could be counted as members. On the other hand, considerably less attention is paid to the nineteenth-century confessional movement that enabled both old and newer immigrant groups, albeit in differing ways, to establish their identity as "Lutherans" in the free religious environment of the new nation. Granquist has chosen to be equally parsimonious, moreover, with respect to the details of the Seminex crisis of the 1970s in the LCMS and the ways in which it affected all of Lutheranism in America.

What is also "new" about *Lutherans in America* are Granquist's ample descriptions of people's lives at the congregational level.

Topics include worship and hymnody, the role of women, outreach efforts, pastoral care issues, and ministry to minority groups. To each chapter of the book he adds an often-interesting excursus that underscores this emphasis. Granquist is not the first or the only scholar to go down this path. But "local communities of faith" are the major source of the hope of revitalization he holds out in the twenty-first century for Lutherans, whose total membership since 1975 has declined from nine million to less than seven million, in an America where the population has increased by 50 percent. In many ways, Lutherans in today's post-churched environment are facing a challenge as daunting as did their immigrant forebears. Stripped of the privilege and influence their European state churches could claim, as well as the "standing" their clergy enjoyed, they were nonetheless remarkably creative in their New World context when it came to discovering alternative ways to nurture and to bear witness to their Lutheran understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Granquist laments the fact that too many of us today do not value history. But for those who desire a better future for Lutheranism in America, a good place to start is with his "new history."

*Jon Diefenthaler*

**BEING LUTHERAN. By A. Trevor Sutton. Concordia Publishing House, 2016. 240 pages. Paper. \$14.99.**

Is your church the center of your community? In most cases, the answer is