

The Twin Churches of Christiania, Minnesota

From 1854 to 1864

A Study of the Causes of Immigrant Church Conflicts

by A. Gerald Dyste

"It was said that if one saw a white painted church on each side of a road, one could be sure of being in a Norwegian community." 1.

In the early 1850's a small group of Norwegian settlers found their way to a beautiful, heavily wooded rise of hills on the edge of the Big Woods in Eureka Township of Dakota County in Minnesota. The name these immigrants chose for their new community was "Christiania," the name by which the capital city of their homeland was known at the time. Their choice of that name may indicate that they had grandiose dreams for the growth of this new community. If so, such hopes were never to be realized. The rich prairies surrounding the Norwegians' hills were very quickly claimed, first by a settlement of "Hoosiers" from Indiana, and soon after by groups of German, Irish and Czech Catholics. Being surrounded in this way had the effect of severely limiting the Christiania community's potential for growth. Even at the height of its development there were no more than two hundred and fifty Norwegian families in the settlement.

If Christiania was never to achieve any fame because its size, it was to achieve a dubious notoriety for its church wars. A mere ten years after the arrival of the first settler, after many bitter and divisive conflicts, the landmark Twin Churches of Christiania were established. In a short time nearly identical buildings were erected atop the highest hill in the area, on opposite corners of the intersection of the two main roads in the community. Both of these churches took the name Christiania Lutheran Church, and both claimed to be the original and only true Church of that name.

The fiery story of these twin churches can have much more than an antiquarian interest for us. The British immigration historian Phillip Taylor summed up the role of the immigrant church, and the Norwegian's special place in that history, in these words: "The immigrant community's central institution was the church. The importance of religion to the newcomers needs no further proof. But since in America there was far more freedom than at home, and since the entire American tradition from the end of the eighteenth century favoured free competition in religion even more than in business, tensions that might have been accommodated within a state church became, in the new country, the occasion of separate organizations. Of this tendency to divide as well as grow, Norwegian Lutheranism furnishes a striking example."2. A history of the twin churches of Christiania provides an especially illuminating microcosm of the Norwegians' legendary contentiousness. A noted historian, who is a proponent of local histories, claims that, "If you want to study the ocean you must begin by putting one drop of sea water under a microscope."3. The Christiania settlement is well suited to be that

small "drop of sea water" that can help us understand the whole "ocean" of immigrant church history in America.

The first immigrant to arrive in what is now the Christiania community was a seventeen year old adventurer named Ole Olson. His father, Ole Thorson, from Hallingdal in Norway, had settled first in Muskego, Wisconsin and had then joined a group that moved on to Koshkonong. In the fall of 1853, a little over a year after southern Minnesota had been opened to settlement by a treaty with the Indians, Thorson sent his youngest son there to look for land. Young Ole travelled by river boat to Hastings and then followed the Vermillion River to the southwest corner of Dakota County. There he claimed 120 on the northwest edge of a small lake that came to be known as Chub Lake. Ole spent the winter on his claim in a rough log shanty he erected. He wrote that he met no other humans that winter except some friendly Indians who occasionally stopped to visit him.⁴ The following summer Ole's family left Wisconsin and moved to Ole's claim in Minnesota to establish a new home. Another Norwegian family, Peter Sampson and his wife and their son Magnus, came with the Olson family. An early description of the new community is found in a letter that Magnus Sampson wrote to the Norwegian-American newspaper, *Emigranten*, in March of 1859. He says there: "Our trip took us through Madison, west to Prairie Du Chien. We crossed the Mississippi and traveled through Iowa by way of Decorah and other small towns until we reached Minnesota, where at that time no towns were to be found. Mantorville, Rochester, and other small towns were at that time desolate and uninhabited. We went to Sioux Creek (Chub Creek), where we remained for a time, explored the land around about until we discovered Sioux Lake (Chub Lake), where we settled down. This was the 20th of July in 1854. We then started to gather feed for our cattle, which proceeded nicely because there was plenty of hay. But the time passed slowly, for we had no neighbors within a distance of eight miles, and we saw no white strangers the first ten weeks. The land is exceptionally good. To the west of Sioux Lake (Chub Lake) is a forest, and to the east a prairie. The land is rich in plow land, hay, pasture, and water."⁵

The next Norwegians to arrive, in June of 1855, were Peter Thompson, a young single man, and Juel Knutson and his wife, Inga. The two men were friends from Valdres, Norway. They also came to Christiania from Muskego by way of Koshkonong. Juel Knutson and his wife were the parents of the first child born in the Christiania community. Their son Thedeman was born on December 1, 1855.

Later in the summer of 1855, a wagon train of settlers from Muskego, Wisconsin, arrived at Christiania. These included Johann Loe, Johannes Torbenson Leine, Lars Johnson, and their families. They originally came from Telemark in Norway. With them came Ole and Stephan Torrison and Lars Mohn and their families, together with Peter Ruh and his two sons, Martin and Ole. These were all from Eidsvoll in Norway. Martin Ruh, who later became a pastor, wrote the following description of their arrival in Christiania: "After examining the land in several places we decided to settle in Dakota County, Minnesota, some seventeen miles from Hastings and twenty miles from the mouth of the Vermillion River. The first thing we had to do was to clear away the almost impenetrable underbrush so as to make room for the wagons and the other things we had

brought along. The covered wagons were our only shelter until far into the fall. We had traveled past far better areas, boundless plains where the land could be cultivated with much less work than the one we now took possession of. If one had possessed any knowledge of the manifold trials and worries attached to the pioneer life, then one would have said, 'No, thank you,' to Minnesota with its cold and snow.⁶

Many more relatives and friends from Muskego and Koshkonong followed these first families to Christiania during the next few years. Almost all of these next settlers were from either Eidsvoll, or the Seljord parish in Upper Telemark. These first settlers in Christiania brought with them as personal assets little other than their physical strength and some simple farming skills. Their shared Norwegian heritage gave them a group identity in this land of cultural pluralism, but this shared heritage was in no way a homogeneous cultural tradition. The regions of Telemark and Eidsvoll had very different topography, with different methods of farming and their own unique social customs. Although they both spoke the Norwegian language, their dialects were so different that they had difficulty understanding one another. One important thing that they did share from Norway, that should ideally have had the power to unite them, was their Lutheran faith. Still, they could not help remembering what a difficult task it had been to organize this shared faith into congregational structures in Muskego and Koshkonong. The Norwegians there had fought bitterly about the church. How were they to avoid this in Christiania? In America there was no State Church to supply them with a church building and a pastor. But then, here there was also perfect freedom to organize the kind of a church they wanted. What kind of a church should it be? How would they avoid the conflicts, the schisms, and the divided homes and communities they had experienced in Wisconsin? Above all, where would they find a pastor out on this raw edge of the frontier when many settled communities hundreds of miles to the east still had no pastor?

The young community's first answer to this question proved to be a very unfortunate one. Daniel Brown, one of the more colorful characters in the history of Minnesota's religious life, came to Christiania in 1857 to attempt to start a congregation. The story of Daniel Brown's ministry illustrates the kinds of difficulties a community could face in the early days on the wide open and disorganized outer fringes of the American western frontier. Brown had apparently had some seminary training in Sweden but been in trouble with the law there and was forced to flee. On arriving in America he arranged to be licensed by one of the eastern Lutheran synods to work as an evangelist on the frontier. He came to Christiania after being driven out of the East Union parish in Carver county because of his problems with alcohol. All the testimony of that time seems to point to the fact that Brown was an alcoholic. His story is the familiar tragic story of high ideals and great talent wasted by that disease. Some of the story of Brown's life was told by Ole Paulson, the man to whom much of the credit for eventually establishing the first incorporated congregation in Christiania must be given. In 1855, shortly after his arrival in Carver county, Paulson states that he saw Brown standing with a group of men who were drinking. Brown raised his glass and said to the group, "Skoal, boys, I am not a hypocrite." Paulson says that he thought to himself at the time, "No, that you are not, it is very plain for everyone to see just what you are." Paulson and others of that time referred to Brown as a "forfalden drukkenbolt" (a fallen drunkard). His drunkenness was

seen only as a moral failing or sin.⁷ Peter Carlson, the pastor who drove Brown out of Carver County and re-established the East Union parish there, tells about him in these words: "He was here a long time, dragging around his whiskey keg. He hunted, fished, drank, preached, baptized, married, and so forth. At times he became so intoxicated that he lost all human respect."⁸

In spite of his alcoholism, Brown apparently was able to conduct a successful ministry in Christiania for some time. There is even a tradition that he effected at least a partial organization of a congregation in Christiania. Tradition in the community agrees that he had a "golden tongue." Elias Aas, a later pastor of the original Christiania congregation, adds the sad comment in his memoirs that Brown preached best when "he had a little in the head."⁹ A common story in the community tells how Brown organized the first choir, leading the singing with his own beautiful voice. Mention is also made that the women in the choir were "very admiring." A note in Peter Thompson's family Bible, telling that he and his wife were married in 1858 by a Reverend John Brown, may be a surviving record of Daniel Brown's ministry.

It is not difficult to imagine how, with his talents and personal charisma, Brown's first months in the community would be marked by enthusiasm and excitement. As his problems with alcohol became more and more apparent, the struggling little congregation that was beginning to take shape was undoubtedly faced with the same kind of divisive strife that faces any church today when there is trouble with the pastor. Some surely wanted to get a different pastor and erase all memory of Brown, perhaps a few remained loyal to him and to the congregational organization he had begun. Whereas Brown may have begun his ministry on a positive and unifying note, there is a consensus that it ended, as did his ministry in Carver, with shame and embarrassment, leaving the community badly divided.

Daniel Brown's failed ministry in Christiania has a further historical significance in the picture it provides of the isolation of communities during the first years of the frontier, and of the near anarchy that existed at that time. There were no churches, to be sure, but there were also no schools, and few of the other social institutions and governmental or law enforcement agencies that are a part of established communities. Also, there was little or no communication between communities, making it difficult to check up on the more unscrupulous adventurers who preyed on the settlers during those unstable times. The con-artist, religious or secular, had a field day in this setting. The urgency, therefore, for establishing communities and churches and local governmental agencies was great, and it is amazing to find how quickly this task was accomplished. The early years of the Christiania settlement will seem to be filled with great conflict and strife, but it is important to bear in mind the kinds of conditions under which the people labored.

It is easy to imagine how bitter it must have been for the settlers in Christiania to realize that they had been duped into following someone like Daniel Brown. The passion with which they now turned to more established and traditional churches and pastors can well be understood.

In their search to find a replacement for Daniel Brown as a pastor for their community, the settlers had to look for help from the three Norwegian Lutheran synods that had by this time been organized by the Norwegian congregations in America. These three synods were the Eielsen Synod, organized in 1846, the Synod of Northern Illinois, organized in 1851, and the Norwegian Synod, organized in 1853.

Those who favored the Norwegian Synod sought to recreate in America congregations that reflected the order, discipline, formalism, and orthodoxy they had known in their churches in Norway. They also wanted to have pastors who fit the mold of the authoritarian pastors they had known there. The first ordained Church of Norway pastor to arrive in America, J. W. C. Dietrichson, fit this mold very well. As pastor of both Muskego and Koshkonong parishes in Wisconsin he would have been an influence on many of the Christiania settlers during their years in those communities.

The Eielsen Synod was led by Elling Eielsen, who had been active in Muskego and the Fox River settlement in Illinois in the early years as a "Haugean" lay preacher. He would also have been well known by many of the Christiania settlers. Following his ordination, Eielsen founded the synod that was called by his name. He rejected the state church trappings of order and formalism, writing into the constitution of the synod a requirement that he believed was the only essential to having a true church: that all members must have had the "experience of salvation."¹⁰ Immigrants who wanted to have congregations as nearly opposite to the Church of Norway as possible were drawn to this synod. Many of the Christiania settlers were undoubtedly influenced by Eielsen.

Between these two extremes there was a middle-of-the-road synod known as the Synod of Northern Illinois. This synod consisted of a mixture of Scandinavian and German Lutherans. It had especially become the home of the Swedish Lutherans in America, but it also included many Norwegian congregations.¹¹

There are indications that although the community was badly divided in the aftermath of Daniel Brown's ministry, there was a concern for maintaining church unity in the settlement. As they turned to these synods for help, they were to discover that a concern for church unity within a community was not always the synods' paramount concern. The approach the synods made to individual communities often had the flavor of a political campaign for support for their points of view. Each synod seemed to feel that they had an exclusive claim on the truth, and they competed vigorously to establish congregations in the Norwegian settlements that would accept their tenets.

The first representative of an official synod to arrive in Christiania was Laur Larsen, an early frontier missionary for the Norwegian Synod. He had arrived in America in late October of 1857 and had accepted a call to the Rush River parish in Wisconsin. In later years Laur Larsen was to serve as the president of Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. According to his journal, his visit to Christiania in 1859 was one stop on his third missionary journey to Minnesota.¹² In 1858 he had sought to establish a Norwegian Synod congregation for four Norwegian families in Carver County in the aftermath of the

ministry of what he called a "false prophet." Peter Carlson, pastor of the largely Swedish East Union congregation, was incensed at that time with Larsen's attempt to pull members away from his parish.¹³ Larsen's stated purpose in coming to Christiania in July of 1859 was also to get rid of a "false prophet." It would seem likely that Daniel Brown was the false prophet referred to in both instances.

Larsen states in his journal that no attempt was made to organize a congregation in Christiania, but that he recommended a pastor who he said would be coming to nearby Goodhue County in the fall. This referred to Bernt Julius Muus, a newly ordained pastor in Norway who had accepted a call from the Norwegian Synod to serve Holden Church in Kenyon.¹⁴ That Larsen did not organize a congregation in Christiania in the summer of 1859 may indicate that, in the heat of the battle over Daniel Brown's ouster, a consensus within the community could not be reached for the formal establishment of a congregation, at least not under the auspices of the Norwegian Synod.

It is thought that Elling Eielsen preached in Christiania sometime during this period as well, but the exact date is not known.¹⁵ This may explain the tradition that there was a faction in the community that wanted to form an Eielsen Synod congregation. That this was not pursued may indicate that there was opposition to this synod, as well, and may indicate that the community was trying to find a synodical affiliation all could agree on.

It is in the context of this contest of the synods that the arrival of Ole Paulson in Christiania in the fall of 1859 must be viewed. Ole Paulson, a young Norwegian, had settled in Carver County in 1855 and had been a part of the East Union parish there. He had been a leader in the move to drive out Daniel Brown, and had become a close friend of the pastor who replaced Brown, Peter Carlson had persuaded Paulson to become a colporteur, a combination religious book salesman and evangelist. Paulson began this work in 1859 and his trip to Christiania was one of the first he made as a part of his new calling. Even though he was a layman, Paulson represented an official contact with the Synod of Northern Illinois. As a member of the East Union parish he was active in the Minnesota Conference of the Synod of Northern Illinois, serving as the treasurer of the conference.¹⁶

During Paulson's visit to Christiania he organized and conducted a two-week-long series of prayer meetings which were held in homes in the settlement. As a result of these meetings a religious awakening spread through the community. Paulson writes in his memoirs of the real hunger for a genuine and sincere religious life that he met in Christiania. It is significant that no sign of the split in the community appeared at this time. He said that the only opposition he met was the passive resistance of one man who sat with his hat on his head and smoked his pipe throughout one of his meetings.

Paulson returned to Carver after these meetings to extend to his pastor, Peter Carlson, an invitation from the Christiania community to come and organize a congregation. Perhaps Paulson's ability to point the community to this compromise synod inspired new hope in the people for uniting all of the factions in the community into one congregation.

It was during the week after Christmas in 1859 that Ole Paulson actually brought Rev. Peter Carlson to Christiania. During this week a meeting was held to organize a congregation. An official incorporation was not effected at this time but the intent to do so was stated, and a Letter of Call was given to Pastor Carlson. The new congregation was also given the name Christiania Lutheran Church at this meeting. While the unity that existed within the community at this time may have been a fragile one, there seemed to be a hope that this congregation, organized under the auspices of the Synod of Northern Illinois, could be an acceptable compromise to which all the people in the community could subscribe.

Very shortly after this meeting, however, during a revival meeting in one of the homes in the community, something happened that was to seriously threaten this unity. In the excitement of the meeting an old woman of the community had a severe emotional breakdown. Ole Paulson described the tragedy in his memoirs in these words: "Something unfortunate happened. An old, very lovable woman who hadn't been converted, but, at the same time needed the saving grace by faith in the Saviour, became at once deranged and entirely uncontrollable. She was the most lovable old woman, full of evangelical gladness and life. She raved for a couple of weeks and died in this circumstance, without, as far as we could see, the light in her soul. This shocked all of us. Now Satan 'got water for his mill.' The revival got the blame for this unlucky event. Was it true, as the world thought and said, that the revival was insanity and fanaticism? Now it was our duty to take hold and save the rest of the settlement because of this unfortunate incident. The awakened used to gather on Sundays for the reading of Scriptures, prayer and song. The opposition organized themselves to oppose revivals. They came in a procession and disrupted the readers, and caused them to scatter."17. Whatever the cause of the old woman's breakdown, the events that Paulson described began a period of bitter strife and conflict in Christiania that would ultimately result in the creation of two separate congregations in the settlement. Undoubtedly those who favored the Norwegian Synod, with its opposition to revivals and lay preaching, comprised the opposition party. The beginning of the ministry of Ole Paulson and Peter Carlson in Christiania is an example of how marked the difference in emphasis between the Swedish Lutherans and the Norwegian Synod could be.

It is important, however, to make a further observation about a comment in Ole Paulson's memoirs quoted above. He records that the "opposition disrupted the readers" in one of Paulson's and Carlson's prayer meetings, and "caused them to scatter." This violent outbreak (physical fight?) is perhaps the strongest piece of evidence we have that in the spring of 1860 there was only one congregation in Christiania. If there had been two congregations at that time, the members of one congregation would never have come in a procession to disrupt the worship service of the other congregation. The event can only make sense if it is seen as a part of an "in-house" struggle between people who understood themselves to be members of one congregation.

This view agrees with a description of these formative years written by Reverend Nels Wikre. Wikre served from 1869 to 1881 as the pastor of the congregation organized by Peter Carlson and Ole Paulson. In an article he wrote in the *Lutheraner* in 1878 he says

this about the splitting of that congregation: "It is now just a little over twenty years since the first Norwegian families settled here. It was with many troubles and hardships, which always accompany pioneer life in a strange land, that our countrymen spent the first years here. Pastor Paulson was one of the first who proclaimed the Word here; then Pastor P. Carlson came. People gathered and listened, and 'The Voice, crying in the wilderness' began to echo in the hearts of sinners; a congregation was organized. God's Word did not return empty, but showed itself also here to be a 'Hammer that shatters rock' and a balm to heal the broken, a power to humble the proud, to lift up the deep, and smooth the rough places. The speechless spoke, the mute sang, the lame stood on their feet, the crippled sprang about and praised God. That's the way it was in Christiania. People hadn't seen anything like it before. It happened here as everywhere the 'Wind of the Spirit' was felt. Many were bewildered and wondered, 'What can this be?' Others ridiculed. The 'Fire of the Lord' was cast upon the earth, and there was strife; the members of one's household became one's enemies. The Prince of Darkness was angry and pulled mightily on his chains of hell to get hold of those souls who had escaped his snares. The world rejoiced and the friends of Christ wept and waited. And so a split occurred in the congregation, or perhaps more accurately, the people divided themselves into two factions, and the hot-headedness and anger and accusations and blasphemy, usually associated with such a split, unfortunately found all too open entrance to many a home and heart. Pastor Muus of the Norwegian Synod adopted one faction while the other honored their call to Pastor Carlson.¹⁸

Putting aside Wikre's obvious bias and his inflammatory rhetoric, it is evident that he is confirming the view that Ole Paulson's awakening brought about the organization of a congregation, and that later the congregation was divided into two warring factions.

It is very vital to note that it was in the spring of 1860, after the sickness and death of the old woman, that the formal articles of incorporation for the first congregation in Christiania were drawn up, giving legal status to the vote taken in late December of 1859. The meeting to draw up these articles of incorporation was held at the home of Juel Knutson on April 24, 1860. These original articles of incorporation still exist in the congregation's archives.¹⁹ It should be noted also that it was in the spring of 1860 that the Swedes and Norwegians left the Synod of Northern Illinois and organized their own synod, The Scandinavian Augustana Synod.

A listing of the regional origins of the original officers of the new congregation in Christiania is illuminating at this point. Lars Johnson, Sigur Larson Torger Juvland and Ole H. Olson were all from upper Telemark. The others, with the exception of Knut and Peter Thompson who were from Valdres, were all from Eidsvold. This broad inclusion of members from both of the main Norwegian regions represented in the community indicates that this first congregation was formed by the whole community.²⁰

Pastor Peter Carlson continued to shepherd the struggling little congregation until July of 1861. As Pastor Wikre stated in his article in the *Lutheraneren*, it was during this formative first year of the life of the new congregation in Christiania, from the spring of 1860 to the summer of 1861, that it divided itself into two factions. During this time

"Pastor Muus adopted one faction while the other honored their call to Pastor Carlson." Ole Paulson agrees with this when he says in his memoirs that, "the faction that organized themselves to oppose revivals got help from an aggressive pastor who organized their congregation," referring undoubtedly to the same pastor, Reverend Bernt Julius Muus.²¹

Exactly when Pastor Muus organized the Norwegian Synod congregation in the Christiania community must be dealt with at this point. Bernt Julius Muus arrived from Norway and preached his first sermon in Holden Lutheran Church of rural Kenyon on November 6, 1859. In his letter of call he was given a commission by the Norwegian Synod to minister to "all the Norwegian Lutherans in Minnesota."²² There were, of course, a number of pastors and congregations of other synods in Minnesota at this time that were ministering to Norwegians, and this revealing rubric in Muus's letter of call shows the rather startling degree of disregard the synods had for each other's ministry. John Bodnar, an immigration historian, states in his book, *The Transplanted*, "Much of the initial impetus toward immigrant church formation involved a desire to hold on to traditions which appeared threatened, and was generated by aggressive church leaders." Leaders were engaged in what he referred to as "clerical careerism." He adds that "Communal factionalism could reach intense proportions when differences emerged between rival leaders within concentrations of newcomers."²³ The synodical and clerical competition that began to take place in Christiania in 1860 seems remarkably illustrative of this observation about immigrant church life in America.²⁴

Both Wikre and Paulson state in their writings that Muus first visited Christiania during the winter of 1860. Muus's pastoral record book confirms this, stating that he visited Dakota County twelve times in 1860, undoubtedly to meet with the emerging opposition faction within the Christiania congregation. The first indication of the intention to organize a second congregation is a letter of call sent to Pastor Muus and dated in 1861. This certainly reveals that, at least for some of the opposition, the split within the congregation was considered irreconcilable by that time. It is interesting to note that this call was sent at the same time that Pastor Carlson resigned and Pastor Nils Olsen arrived as the first resident pastor of the Christiania parish. There is a very real possibility that the Letter of Call to Muus in 1861 may have occurred during the interim period between pastors and may have represented an attempt by the Muus faction to pull the entire congregation into the Norwegian Synod with them. Of significant interest is the fact that another letter of call was sent to Muus in 1862, revealing either that he refused to accept the 1861 call or that it was revoked by the group that sent it.²⁵

The timing in all of these events would fit in with information uncovered in a report that Reverend Eric Norelius, the president of the Minnesota Conference of the Scandinavian Augustana Synod, made to the annual meeting of the conference on December 4, 1861. Norelius reported on a parish visit he made as Conference President to Christiania during the year where, he states, he met with the "opposition party." This is another strong indication that there was still one congregation divided into two factions even that late in 1861.

Norelius comments favorably here on the "sound and calming" ministry of Pastor Nils Olson, and states that the opposition could find nothing against him except "den gamla dumma" (the old stupidity) that he was "a Frankean."²⁶ This reference to the Frankeans reveals a favorite accusation used by the Norwegian Synod against the Synod of Northern Illinois and their successor group, the Scandinavian Augustana Synod. Prior to 1851 several Scandinavian pastors had been associated with the Frankean Synod, a small German-American group that held some unorthodox views about the sacraments.²⁷ The Scandinavians had quickly severed relationships with them and joined in organizing the Synod of Northern Illinois. It is this old and very tenuous connection with the Frankeans that Muus's "opposition party" used against Pastor Olsen. In addition to revealing that there were still attempts being made to heal the breach between the factions in Christiania late in 1861, Norelius's report also indicates the way the synods were attempting to exacerbate the struggles within congregations by stirring up old theological arguments. Norelius was justifiably critical of the irresponsible stretching of the point needed to come up with the old tenuous association with the Frankeans as a theological justification for the campaign being carried on by the Norwegian Synod in Christiania. Norelius's statement about Nils Olsen conducting a "calming" ministry would have fit the generally stable, formal, orderly and basically conservative style of pastoral ministry common to both the Augustana and the Norwegian synod pastors. In their attempt to avoid the kind of splitting and dividing so common among the Norwegians, the Augustana Synod may well have been more accommodating of divergent theological expressions, especially of revivalism and lay preaching, than the Norwegian Synod, but they clearly rejected the Frankean theology on the sacraments.²⁸

Several pieces of evidence seem to indicate that a genuine split of the original congregation in Christiania, and at least the tentative formation of a second congregation under the auspices of the Norwegian Synod, did take place in 1862. Apparently Muus did accept the call sent to him in 1862 since no record of a later call exists. Furthermore, two laymen from Christiania, Asmund Asmundson Lunde and Ole Olson Qvale, are listed as delegates to the annual convention of the Norwegian Synod which was held at Holden Lutheran Church in June of 1862. No mention of the existence of a Norwegian Synod congregation from Christiania had been made in previous convention minutes.²⁹ Although the Norwegian Synod congregation did clearly exist in 1862, no formal articles of incorporation for the congregation were drawn up until 1864. The congregation was formally registered in the court house in Hastings on February 12, 1864.³⁰ With that action the Twin Churches of Christiania were born.

Sometimes when one is putting together a jigsaw puzzle, one ends up with several pieces that don't fit. Writing the history of the division of the congregation in Christiania is somewhat like that. One piece that does not seem to fit or make sense is the choice of a name for their congregation by the Norwegian Synod group. In the document they registered at the county courthouse in 1864 the following statement of the name of the congregation is made: "We subscribing, living in the County of Dakotah, State of Minnesota, having joined together to an Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, resolve, that the name of this congregation shall be 'Christiania Congregation,' but if any other congregation in this county shall have recorded this name, then the name shall be:

"Dakotah Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation.³¹

It is difficult to imagine how a doubt could have existed in 1864 about the legal existence and name of the original Christiania congregation organized by Peter Carlson. Yet, this clause in the Norwegian Synod congregation's charter seems to imply that there was such a doubt. The articles of incorporation for the first Christiania Lutheran Church had been drawn up, as was stated, in April of 1860. These articles were not recorded in the county courthouse, however, until December 10th of 1861 after Nils Olson had arrived as the first resident pastor. The name recorded in the official courthouse records for the congregation at that time, however, was "Christiania Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation." Unless this congregation had disbanded in 1864, or was close to disbanding, there could have been no question about the name, and the name of the Norwegian Synod congregation clearly should have been Dakotah Lutheran Church. Why could this confusion have existed? If we turn again to Wikre's article in the Lutheraner we find that he does speak of continuing trouble during Pastor Olson's years, saying: "There was strife and confusion without end. And as there are always those who like to fish in troubled waters, so there was no lack here of those who saw their mission not to heal but that the lame might sooner be dragged down. Anyway that's the way it seems to me. Still there was distress and sighing and tears at Christiania. The congregation struggled for its existence. The chosen cried to God night and day, saying "Lord! don't you care that we perish?" The Lord slept, so it seemed. The opposition rejoiced, the waves rose higher and higher, so that the ship was hidden by the waves, but then the Lord rose up at the helm, where he had lain all the time, and "stilled the winds and the sea, and it was calm."³²

There is a hint here that there could have been a time in those early years when the original Christiania congregation did almost cease to exist, when the ship was "almost hidden by the waves." It may well have been possible, at the time of the Norwegian Synod congregation's letter of incorporation, that there was a question as to whether or not another congregation by the name of Christiania did exist in the county. This may have been the occasion of the "opposition's rejoicing" that Wikre spoke of! It is possible to imagine that Muus had made such an impressive case for the Norwegian Synod among the families of the community that the majority of the members of the original Christiania congregation had agreed to leave that congregation and had declared their intention to join Muus's group. As suggested before, there may even have been a move afoot to call Muus as the pastor rather than Nils Olsen.

If such a situation existed in 1864, however, it did not last long. We know that the original Christiania Lutheran Church not only did not die out, but continued to exist and grow as a congregation. As Wikre states, "there was a stilling of the winds and seas" of conflict within the congregation. The congregation not only survived, but rebounded from its troubles very quickly. The very next year it had enough strength to build a new church, a log church building costing six hundred dollars was erected by the congregation under Pastor Olson's leadership in 1865. This was the first church building in Christiania as well as in all of Eureka township. The Norwegian Synod congregation built its first church building in 1867, just across the road from this log church.

Having traced the history of the Christiania community and its twin churches, it is clear that an old saying among the Norwegian-Americans, "Ingen strid som kirke strid" (No fight like a church fight) could have been coined expressly for Christiania. It needs to be kept in mind, however, that their experience was not an uncommon one. All immigrant groups experienced such conflict. The Norwegians were perhaps only unique in that all their fighting was done under the umbrella of Lutheranism. It is significant that there were almost no non-lutheran sects among the Norwegians.³³

E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene Fevold, in their history of Norwegian-American Lutheranism, tried to give as sympathetic and positive a view as possible of this penchant for splitting and dividing among the Norwegian churches in America: "The discontented Norwegian often found two or more congregations in a single community, representing diverse tendencies. From these he could choose the one to his liking and remain within the Lutheran fold. In this way the deplorable propensity to schism which resulted in so much ill will and strained human relations may not have been without blessing for the Lutheran Church in America."³⁴

Many who have lived for a lifetime in the Christiania community would agree with that assessment. Many state that although there was great pain and bitterness associated with the church wars, the existence of "Twin Churches" in the community was not without blessings. A short walk across the road to the "other" church has provided a way for many to stay Lutheran, to stay in a Norwegian ethnic church, and to stay within the fellowship of the total Christiania community. Together in ministry, often in spite of themselves, the Twin Churches provided the psychological and spiritual support the immigrants of Christiania needed.

The twin churches of Christiania were to continue to be involved in church strife during the ensuing years. By 1910 there were two additional Norwegian Lutheran congregations in the community, and each of these was also named "Christiania Lutheran Church!" The original twins continued to stand side by side on their hilltop for nearly one hundred years. In 1957, however, the second (1893) church building erected by the Norwegian Synod congregation burned to the ground. That congregation merged with the two latter-day Christianias and built a new building two miles to the west, in the community of Eidsvold. It is now known as Christiania Lutheran Church of Lakeville. In 1878, the other twin, the one founded by Peter Carlson, tore down their first log building and built a new church on its site. This building still stands today, serving the congregation that is now known as Highview Christiania Lutheran Church of Farmington. This congregation spent the years from 1896 to 1964 as a member of the synod known as The Lutheran Free Church, being commonly known during those years simply as "The Free Church." Today these "Twin Churches" are both members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and are cooperating in many ways in a shared ministry to the now increasingly urbanized area that encompasses the boundaries of the old Christiania settlement.

Historians generally list four causes for the religious conflicts among the immigrant churches. Most would say that the two most important root causes are the socioeconomic class differences and the regional-ethnic differences the immigrants

brought with them from Europe. Jon Gjerde, in his article, "Conflict and Community," says that whatever other pressures are present in a religious conflict, the final split will occur on the basis of one or the other of these socio-economic cleavages or pre-existing "fault lines" in a community.³⁵

As has been noted several times in the study, a new emphasis is also being placed on impact of the unprecedented freedom the immigrants found in America as a cause for the splitting and dividing of the immigrant churches.

Theological differences are a fourth cause that must be considered. These theological differences are almost always relegated by secular historians to a last and very insignificant place as the cause for the conflicts.³⁶ In almost every instance among the immigrant churches, however, theology was the sole reason and justification given by the people and their pastors for their conflicts. Almost all of their theological arguments had been brought with them from Europe. Throughout the nineteenth century the Lutherans in Norway had sought to re-define both the nature of their faith and the proper form of their church. Opposition to the kind of revivalism that had apparently been involved in Paulson's and Carlson's prayer meetings in 1860 had consumed the Church of Norway for almost a century. The famed pastor, Magnus Landstad, was one of the leaders of this opposition within the State Church of Norway. It is significant to note that Landstad was the pastor of the Seljord parish, the parish from which many of the Telemarkings in Christiania came. The emotionalism that was associated with the old woman's derangement in 1860 understandably raised fears in the hearts of those who had Landstad's leadership in their backgrounds.³⁷

The Norwegian Synod strove to reduplicate in America the theology and practice of the Church of Norway by taking an extreme position against lay activity and revivalism. The case can be made that the Augustana Synod departed to some degree from the similar conservatism on these issues on the part of the Swedish State Church. Some of its pastors were clearly more open to aspects of the pietistic movement than was their mother church in Sweden.³⁸ Nonetheless, the two synods were not so far apart theologically that theology could be said to be the only cause for the schism in Christiania.

Interestingly, absolutely no evidence can be found within the Christiania community to show that socioeconomic class difference played any part at all in their church conflicts. A comparison of assessed property valuation of the members of the two churches in 1880 revealed that the members of the congregation organized by Pastor Carlson had an average of \$105.00 more assessed value on their land than those of the congregation Pastor Muus eventually founded.³⁹ If Carlson's congregation was the more low-church and pietistic congregation, then according to sociological theory it should have been made up of people of a lower socioeconomic class than those belonging to the high-churchly Norwegian Synod congregation. The figures indicate, however, that no such difference existed between the two congregations, and that socioeconomic class could also, therefore, not be the sole cause of the splitting of their congregations. Much data exists to demonstrate that socio-economic class was determinative in conflicts

elsewhere, but other causes must be sought for Christiania.

Region of origin in Europe was another vital factor in immigrant community development and church formation among all the ethnic groups that came to America. National boundaries were often less important than the boundaries of the local regionalisms that dotted Europe. These local regions were the key to the people's ethnic identity. The Norwegian region of origin of the immigrants in Christiania was also central to their identity. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that it was this regionism which ultimately became the decisive factor in choosing sides in the schism that took place in Christiania. That split finally evolved into an almost perfect division between the immigrants from Telemark and those from Eidsvold. Had the conflict involved only personal theological belief there would certainly have been some instances of individuals crossing this regional barrier in the community. To suppose that all those from Telemark were of one mind theologically and all from Eidsvold of another stretches belief. With the final result being so clearly drawn along regional lines it is especially hard to give credence to the relatively minor theological differences between the two synods as the justification for the division.

Finally the effect of American freedom on the immigrants and its role in their church conflicts must be examined. In the quotation from Philip Taylor's *Distant Magnet* cited earlier, Philip Taylor says that, "the American tradition favoured free competition in religion even more than in business." Soren Bache, a young adventurer and diarist from Drammen, Norway, came to Muskego, Wisconsin, in 1839 and was able immediately to put his finger on that which was unique about American religious life, and to identify it as the major cause of conflicts and divisions within denominations and sects. He wrote in his diary that "So many sects spring up in this free country that they seem to be an expression of business enterprise rather than of sincere religious spirit."⁴⁰ The compromise hammered out in the Continental Congress that left America with a policy of "non-establishment" of religion, or as it is popularly known, "freedom of religion," meant that religion was required to enter the great American theater of competitive enterprise. Competitive promotion of their institution is a basic rule of survival for churches in America. The need to "sell" a product applies to churches just as it does to soap and automobiles, or to political ideas and ideals.

It is a truism that unrestricted competition has a way of becoming cutthroat. If MacDonald's builds in a new commercial development one can be quite sure that Burger King will soon build nearby, often right across the road. In much the same way, if one denomination or synod built a church in a community in frontier America, another would surely try to develop its brand-name outlet nearby. It is apparent that this spirit of unrestricted competition was somewhere at the root of all of the splits in the Christiania settlement. Denominations sought predominance. Clergymen were interested in pursuing what Bodnar called "careerism." Success for parish pastors and synod leaders was then as it is today, measured by the size and continuing growth of their religious institutions. To strive and compete for a success related to growth is "as American as apple pie." Immigrant clergymen caught on to this very quickly and joined the competition with an enthusiasm that may not always have seemed to be tempered by christian humility and charity.

To imply that developing a larger share of the market for their brand of Lutheranism was the only concern of the pastors and synod leaders of that day is certainly to carry this argument too far. There is no doubt that they truly believed that they were following the will of God in attempting to establish what they saw as the true theology and the true church in the communities of the American frontier. The task these pioneers faced of adapting to this entirely new system of organizing, and operating churches was truly formidable. That they were able in a short time to establish churches in every community in America, support them financially, and staff them with trained leaders is undeniably a credit to the immigrants and their religious leaders. That they entered into this task with enthusiasm and zeal is only commendable. Nonetheless, if one is to study realistically the conflicts that took place in the immigrant church, it must be recognized that the competing denominations and synods, in spite of the sacred nature of their mission, fulfilled the same function as any of the other businesses that were seeking to sell their products to customers in the American competitive marketplace. In Europe there was a captive market. People were required by law to shop at the state church's store, so to speak. In America the individual was free to shop around, and in order to persuade him to buy a particular product one had to advertise it and aggressively go out and sell it.

If this scenario is a realistic portrayal of the church scene in America, then there should be no surprise that religious conflict developed. Competition is the nature the marketplace. This fact gets at the heart of what can be called the "American" cause of religious conflicts in the immigrant churches. The Christiania settlement, as it has been examined in this study, provides an interesting example of the effect of this American cause. There was really only one natural division within the community. This consisted of the two regions in Norway from which the settlers came. No evidence can be found of a socio-economic class division within the community. It is also very hard to argue that theology was the root cause of the divisions. Without the deliberate selling of their product by the synods, and without pressure being put on families and individuals to reject one position and "buy" another, it is very unlikely that the schism would have taken place. The assessment that "outside" agitators had provoked much of the conflict in the community was often made by lay members of both churches in Christiania.⁴¹

The American system of freedom of religion, with all of its admitted benefits, must be identified as being quite often the primary cause, and always a contributing cause of the conflicts among the immigrant churches. The unrestricted freedom of religion that met the immigrants in America not only allowed them to make choices, but demanded that they make choices. Community harmony and religious unity, while perhaps always seen as good things, were often sacrificed in the heat of the competition for adherents. And always, under the stress of this competition the underlying social, economic, or ethnic differences that pre-existed in the communities provided the rallying point for an "us" against "them" choosing of sides in the religious rift when it finally came.

Notes:

1.
Ingrid Semmingsen, *Norway to America*, trans. by Einar Haugen (Minneapolis), 1978, 137.
2.
Philip Taylor, *The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to the U.S.A.* (New York, 1971, 217, 218.
3.
Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, trans. by Barbara Bray (New York, 1978), 276
4.
Information from an Olson family history written by Beverly Best and Delpha Bakken. Archives, Highview Christiania Lutheran Church, Farmington, Minnesota.
5.
Emigranten, March 14, 1859.
6.
Martin Ruh, "Reminiscences", 19-21. Archives, Highview Christiania Lutheran Church.
7.
Ole Paulson, *Erindringer af Pastor Ole Paulson*,
Efter hans død gennemset af professor Sven Oftedal, translated
by Torstein O., Kvamme, (Minneapolis, 1907), 78.
8.
Eric Norelius, *De Svenske Luterska Forsamlingarnas och Svenskarnes Historia i Amerika* (Rock Island, Illinois, 1890), 698.

9.
Elias Aas, A Pioneer Pastor (Minneapolis, 1970), 141.
10.
E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene Fevold, The Lutheran Church
Among Norwegian-Americans, I (Minneapolis, 1960), 130.
11.
Nelson and Fevold, The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-
Americans, 191.
12.
Karen Larsen, Laur Larsen: Pioneer College President
(Northfield, Minnesota, 1936) 81.
13.
Emeroy Johnson, A Church is Planted (Minneapolis, 1948), 94.
14.
Larsen, Laur Larsen, 81
15.
"Centennial, Christiania Lutheran Free Church, 1859-1959," 4
16.
Paulson, Erindringer, 95,96. Paulson was later ordained and
served as the pastor of Old Trinity Lutheran Church near Augsburg
College in Minneapolis, where he became affectionately known as
Augsburg's grandfather.
17.
Paulson, Erindringer, 97.
18.
Nils Wikre, "Lit Fra Kristiania," in Lutheraneran, December,
1878, 394-395.

19.
Original Articles of Incorporation, Highview Christiania
Lutheran Church Archives.
20.
"Centennial," 4.
21.
Paulson, Erindringer, 97.
22.
"Holden Through One Hundred Years," Centennial Book of Holden
Lutheran Church, Kenyon, Minnesota, 15.
23.
John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants*
(Bloomington, Indiana, 1985), 146.
24.
It must be said here, in Muus's and the Norwegian Synod's
defense, that Laur. Larsen had made the first contact by an
official synod in Christiania, and that he had recommended that
the community get in touch with Muus when he arrived. The spirit
of competitiveness was alive and well in all of the synods.
25.
"One Hundred and Twenty Five Years, 1857-1982," Christiania
Lutheran Church, Lakeville, Minnesota, 4.
26.
"Protokoll Hallet vid Minnesota-Konferensens Sammantrade I
Marine, Washington Co., Minnesota, den 4de Des, 1861."
27.
Nelson and Fevold, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-
Americans*, 135.

28. Robert Ostergren, *A Community Transplanted: A Trans-Atlantic Experience of Swedish Immigrant Settlement in the Upper Middle West, 1835-1915* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1988), 213.
29. "Beretning om Forste Overordentlige Synode for den Norske-Evangelisk-Lutherske-Kirke i Amerika, Avholdt i Holden Kirke, Goodhue Co., Minnesota, fra 12te til 20de Juni, 1862."
30. Official Dakota County Records, County Courthouse, Hastings, Minnesota.
31. Official Dakota County Records.
32. Wikre, "Lit Fra Kristiania," 395.
33. Larsen, Laur Larsen, 81.
34. Nelson and Fevold, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans*, 124, 125.
35. Nelson and Fevold, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans*, 124-125.
36. Jon Gjerde, "Conflict and Community: A Case Study of the Immigrant Church in the United States," in *Journal of Social History*, (1986), 682.

37. Gjerde, "Conflict and Community," 680.
38. Einar Molland, *Norges Kirkehistorie, I* (Oslo, 1979), 682
39. George M. Stephenson, *The Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration*, (Minneapolis, 1932), 265.
40. Dakota County Tax Assessment Records for 1880, Minnesota State Historical Society Archives.
41. Clarence Clausen and Andreas Elviken, trans., *A Chronicle of Old Muskego: The Diary of Soren Bache, 1839-1847* (Northfield, Minnesota, 1951), 138.
42. Personal interviews with second-generation members of the Christiania community: Thilda Steen, Elvira Borg, and others.