Theology, Tradition, and Turbulent Times: Ordination of Women in
the Lutheran Church, 1970

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THEOLOGY, TRADITION, AND TURBULENT TIMES:
ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH 1970

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

HISTORY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
May 2001

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ABSTRACT

THEOLOGY, TRADITION, AND TURBULENT TIMES:
ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH 1970

Donna L. Koch
Old Dominion University, 2001
Director: Dr. Carolyn J. Lawes

Women have been the diligent toilers, the faithful attenders, the patient servers in the Christian Church for centuries. And yet only relatively recently in the United States have they officially been able to preach, administer the sacraments, and minister fully to the spiritual needs of congregations as ordained Protestant clergy. For millions of Lutherans in the United States, 1970 was the beginning of a new era in their church when the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) changed centuries of tradition and prepared the way for women to join the clergy. The third national Lutheran body, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS), at both its 1969 and 1971 conventions retained its conservative position, as it still does today, that the Word of God does not permit women to hold the office of pastor.

This thesis argues that for the LCA and ALC the duality of the push of internal forces within their churches and the pull of external forces in society moved them to accept women’s ordination. For the LCMS, however, the push of its own internal forces was very different, and when confronted with the same external forces, this church body reaffirmed its opposition to women’s ordination. The internal forces include the nineteenth-century immigrant character of American Lutheranism, the assimilation factor, Lutheran theology, and the historical role of women in the three Lutheran bodies. The external dynamics of events occurring in society in the late 1960s include the civil rights
movement, the Vietnam antiwar protest movement, and the women's movement — all of which brought about a questioning of authority, values, and institutions. A brief overview of the contemporary situation for women clergy in the Lutheran Church reveals the continued relevance of these forces.

To support this thesis, the paper will examine secondary sources in Lutheran theology, Lutheran history, and the social history of the late 1960s. Primary sources include interviews with women and men in LCMS and LCA/ALC churches, official church publications and periodicals, oral history narratives from the ELCA Archives, and popular and scholarly works from the sixties.
Dedicated to the Reverend Judith Ann Cobb, who has lived the history
I want to thank Dr. Carolyn J. Lawes, the director of this thesis, in whose class on women and religion in 1996 I first began to research the ordination of women in the Lutheran Church. She has been unfailingly supportive, perceptive in her comments and suggestions, and very patient waiting for me to complete this study. The other members of my committee, Dr. Annette Finley-Croswhite and Dr. Jane T. Merritt, have also offered invaluable assistance and guidance. All the faculty members in the Old Dominion University History Department with whom I studied deserve much praise for not only being excellent scholars and instructors but also for graciously accepting the President’s wife into their midst; it could not have been easy.

For all those who so generously gave hours of their time in interviews, I am very grateful. Their knowledge and experiences added "life" to the printed sources. The Reverend Jean Bozeman also loaned me many books and papers from her personal files, and best of all, never in five years asked me when I was going to return them. And finally, years of conversations with the Reverend Judith A. Cobb far exceeded the two formal interviews cited in the thesis. Her life in the church and personal faith provided not only information for this thesis, but also inspiration in daily life.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Women have been the diligent toilers, the faithful attenders, the patient servers in the Christian church for centuries. Women have been exalted as mothers who lead their children, and often erring husbands, to church; they have traveled to distant lands as nurses, teachers, and missionaries; they have been canonized as saints. And yet, only relatively recently in the United States have they officially been able to preach, administer the sacraments, and minister fully to the spiritual needs of congregations as ordained Protestant clergy. While most American Protestant denominations today accept women into the clergy, others still heed the warning of Thomas Aquinas that women are not up to “that eminence of degree that is signified by priesthood,” or they agree with Samuel Johnson: “A woman’s preaching is like a dog walking on its hind legs. It is not done well, and you are surprised to find it done at all.”

American religious bodies have lagged far behind secular groups in recognizing women professionals and promoting gender equality. By 1917 all but four states admitted women to the bar; by 1972 every law school admitted students on an equal sex basis; by 1944, 90 percent of American medical schools admitted women. But women in the clergy

Style manual used is Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 6 ed., revised by John Grossman and Alice Bennett, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996).

is mainly a post-1970 development. In 1890 about 7 percent of American denominations had women as ordained clergy; today about 50 percent do. In 1974 only about 14 percent of students in theological seminaries were women; by 1993 the figure had risen to 31 percent. By 1997 one-third of the students at the 229 North American graduate schools of Christian theology were women, with the largest number of female clergy found in the Methodist Church.

For millions of Lutherans in the United States, 1970 was the beginning of a new era. The signal for change was perhaps not as loud or as reverberating as that of Martin Luther nailing his ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg, but the announcements from Minneapolis and San Antonio did open an important door, the door for the ordination of women. When the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) met that summer for its national convention, the dramatic change came with a simple voice vote that altered one word in the constitution of that body: “A man may be ordained...” was changed to “a person may be ordained.” In October the American Lutheran Church


3Ibid., 841.


5Ordination in the Lutheran Church is a public ratification of a special call from a specific ministry to someone who has completed the required training, and it is an invocation of God’s blessing on the new pastor. A candidate for ordination must have completed a master’s in divinity degree, a full four year program which includes a one year internship and studies in such areas as theology, Greek, Hebrew, and clinical psychology.

6“Convention Report,” *The Lutheran*, 5 August 1970, 7. The numerous primary source articles from *The Lutheran* are listed in the Works Cited section by date only, with
(ALC) meeting in San Antonio voted 560 to 414 to approve the recommendation that "Women be eligible for call and ordination." Thus in 1970 two of the three main national organizations of Lutheran congregations changed centuries of tradition and prepared the way for women to join the clergy. But what of the third, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS), which despite its name is also a national Lutheran Church?

Although the LCMS national convention did not meet in 1970, the 1969 and 1971 conventions revealed a conservative theology at variance with the other two Lutheran Church bodies and with some within the Missouri Synod itself. Theologian Martin E. Marty surveyed the results of 1969 and 1971 and stated: "But not in the two centuries has a large church body been so savagely torn." Daniel Quiram, pastor of LCMS Calvary Lutheran in Baltimore, remembers this as a time of "turmoil, like a sad family system conflict, a struggle over the authority of scripture, but also a power struggle." The ordination of women was a minor skirmish in the war between biblical literalism and inerrancy and the historical-critical method of study, a war which would eventually divide the church, result in the expulsion of most of the faculty at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, and beget still another national Lutheran group. In 1969 the LCMS convention

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9Daniel Quiram, interview by author, 23 October 1996, Norfolk, VA. All future references are based on this interview.
elected as president Jacob A. O. Preus II, a strong conservative, thus readying the field for battle in the 1970s. In 1971 the convention on a routine motion reaffirmed its stand of over a century that “the word of God does not permit women to hold pastoral office”; the 674 to 194 vote kept the clergy all male, as it is to this day.10

Why did two Lutheran bodies with approximately six million members choose one path, while the LCMS with 2.8 million members chose another? As Lutherans, all three adhered to the primacy of the Gospel and to the theology set forth in the Augsburg Confession and the Book of Concord.11 As Lutherans, they shared similar values, attitudes, and background. But as theologian H. Richard Niebuhr has said: “All our faith is fragmentary, though we do not all have the same fragments of faith.”12 And as the decade of the seventies began, it became apparent that the three Lutheran groups indeed held different fragments.

To understand why the Lutheran Church resisted the ordination of women and why this issue divided Lutherans in 1970, this thesis will examine the tension of internal and external forces upon the Lutheran Church. Before analyzing these forces, however, a brief overview of women’s ordination in American Protestant churches will provide a context for the discussion of the Lutheran church that follows. The focus here will be on

10“Missouri Synod To Stay Fellowship with ALC,” The Lutheran, 4 August 1971, 28.

11The primary statement of principles of Lutheran Doctrine is the Augsburg Confession of 1530. After a series of disputes among theologians over interpreting that confession, a larger collection of documents collectively known as the Book of Concord was assembled in 1580.

the ironies of this history rather than on a detailed narrative, which can be found in numerous other works. For to trace, even in a cursory manner, the leadership role of women in nineteenth and twentieth century Protestant churches in the United States is to follow a trail marked with ironies. While it is in the religious sphere that women have been dominant for centuries, being the majority in membership and the most active in participation, women nevertheless have been seen as an ecclesiastical curiosity. In an entry in *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church* titled “Woman’s Place in the Church,” published in 1965 and thus reflecting the attitudes of the time period under study here, the authors began by noting: “The very fact that an encyclopedia offers an article on this subject when it does not present a companion article on ‘Man’s Place in the Church’ indicates that we are here face to face with a real enigma.” The few women who have been recognized as official American religious leaders are noteworthy for their eccentricities or just because they were such exceptions to the norm. Women such as Ann Hutchinson, Mary Baker Eddy, Kate and Margaret Fox, and Aimee Semple McPherson often receive mention in general American history works, but would not have been found preaching from mainstream Episcopal or Lutheran pulpits on Sunday mornings.

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15 *Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965), 2490.
A corollary to the irony of women being in numerical dominance but an oddity in leadership roles is that gender difference in religious commitment has continued through this century even while women’s roles have changed and expanded in other areas of society. Women as a group are the most committed to religious institutions, and yet they struggle for access to institutional power. Robert Wuthnow, in his 1988 book on American religion, analyzes data from The General Social Survey Cumulative File 1972-1984, which included interviews with over 10,000 men and women. Wuthnow concludes that higher education levels and greater participation in the labor force, social changes in effect by 1970, do not alter the difference in religious commitment between men and women. Women were in general 12 percent more likely than men to say they attended religious services almost every week; and when Protestant women had at least some college education, their participation in organized religion was still 15 percent more than men’s. The church thus continues to be a place where women contribute their time and talents, even when they could devote the same to other organizations. The irony is that such commitment has not been rewarded by the churches with equality of influence or opportunities for service in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Although Martin Luther stressed education for girls as well as boys, writing The Small Catechism for this purpose, and although early education for women in the United States was largely under church auspices, and although colleges admitting women, such as Bryn Mawr and Oberlin, were often founded by religious institutions, there has been a limit to the roles churches find acceptable for women. Oberlin College was the first co-

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educational college in 1834, but when graduate Antoinette Brown wanted to apply to its seminary, the faculty and administrators objected. She was finally admitted, but the school refused her a “license to preach,” and when she graduated in 1850, the seminary did not list her with the men. She finally preached her first sermon in a Congregational church in 1853. And although the Congregationalists were thus the first to ordain a woman, thirty-five years later there were only four ordained Congregationalist women pastors, and as late as 1950 only 3 percent of its clergy were women.

Prior to 1970, the period of greatest activity in the area of women’s ordination occurred in the 1890s. In this era, the churches that recognized women in leadership roles shared several characteristics: They were open to charismatic teaching and often had no formal education requirements for pastors; they were eschatologically oriented, concerned with Christ’s Second Coming and the end of the world; they emphasized missions and evangelism; and they had congregational polity rather than a national organization. Unitarian, Congregationalist, and Disciples of Christ churches, for example, fit this pattern and were among the earliest to ordain women. In comparison, the Lutheran Church does not share these characteristics. A sample of denominations and the years they began granting women full clergy rights include the following: Congregationalist, 1853; Disciples of Christ, 1888; Pentecostal Holiness, 1895; African Methodist Episcopal, 1898; Presbyterian (North), 1956; Methodist, 1956; Episcopal, 1976.

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19Ibid., 16-17.
The labyrinth of ironies continues when one considers that for most of the nineteenth century, American society affirmed men's dominance in the public economic and political spheres while reserving and even encouraging women to dominate (within limits) the religious sphere.20 But at the end of the century, many male religious leaders became concerned about the "feminization" of religion. In response, a broad coalition of mainline Protestant groups in 1911 formed the Men and Religion Forward Movement, the only widespread religious movement in the United States up to that time that specifically excluded women.21 The polar opposite of this organization was the American Association of Women Ministers formed in 1919 under the leadership of M. Madeline Southard and Ella L. Kraft, both Methodists. The purpose of this organization was to gain equal opportunities for women in the ecclesiastical institutions and to encourage women to enter the ministry. It included women from sixteen Protestant denominations and had no rigid doctrinal or educational tests for membership.22 An organization such as this, as well as the publication of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's The Woman's Bible in 1895, seemed to confirm the worst fears of Men and Religious Forward.

For the Lutheran Church, the foremost irony stems from its historical origins. Martin Luther (1483-1546) founded a new church outside the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church and unintentionally began the Protestant movement. By wrestling with

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21 Lindley, 299. The Promise Keepers movement of the late 1990s, while focusing more on the family, had a similar religious basis and echoed some of the same concerns of restoring men to roles they feared had been taken over by women.

22 Gibson, 174.
scripture and recognizing that the church lived in the sixteenth century, not the first century, Luther overturned tradition and removed some of the barriers that prevented lay people from participating fully in the church. Yet centuries after Luther’s revolution, many in the Lutheran Church were clinging to the traditions and constraints of Luther’s era. Furthermore, while Lutheran theology, which will be examined more fully later, opened the church more to lay leadership, it was not conducive to accepting female leadership. Luther closed an important area of service, leadership, and independence for women when he abolished the convent system, and it could be argued that the only new position for women he created was that of the pastor’s wife, with his own wife Katharina Von Bora as the model.

If such ironies form the outer ring of the discussion of the Lutheran Church’s ordination of women, the next concentric ring must enclose a literature review of the major works relevant to this subject. The literature noted below has much to contribute to the discussion of the ordination of women in the Lutheran Church, and the works are essential for an understanding of the complexity of the topic. But, due to some vital omissions, the works also fail to answer adequately the question posed here: Why did the LCA and ALC decide to ordain women in 1970 while the Missouri Synod did not? Thus this review surveys basic Lutheran theology works, which may omit the topic of ordination or slight the cultural climate of 1970; denominational histories, which tend to omit the subject of women; women’s history surveys of the 1970 era, which tend to omit religion; religious history sources, which often omit Lutherans; and finally, those works that while studying women and the church often do not understand the subtle nuances of Lutheranism that separate it from a generic American Protestantism.
Before beginning the review, however, one must recognize that researching and writing on a religious subject presents unique challenges to a historian. Jan Shipps, in an excellent essay “Remembering, Recovering, and Inventing: What Being the People of God Means,” defines and then offers some guidance to the historian visiting the past of a faith community. Shipps distinguishes between denominational history written for a scholarly audience and for a traditional audience of the faithful, and between denominational history written by those within the faith and outside the faith. Her conclusion is that scholarly writing of denominational history is not necessarily a contradiction in terms if those inside the faith community learn to be “outside-insiders,” while those outside become “inside-outsiders.” As Shipps notes: “A willing suspension of belief (or disbelief) makes it less likely that what a historian writes will be confused with efforts at faith promotion or exposé.”

An understanding of basic Lutheran theology is essential to comprehending why the 1970 event was so significant. For an exhaustive foray into Lutheranism, the writings of Martin Luther have been collected in fifty-five volumes as Luther’s Works. But the brief Augsburg Confession, written by Philipp Melanchthon with Martin Luther’s approval, is also a good starting point. However, the subject of women’s ordination is

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not specifically referred to in detail in any of these works. In fact, neither Luther nor Melanchthon spelled out the rules for election, ordination, or installation of pastors. It was left to theologians in later centuries to search the scriptures and Luther’s writings and offer their interpretations regarding this subject. For the perspective of the LCA/ALC, Krister Stendahl’s 1958 essay, which first appeared in Sweden during that country’s long debate over women’s ordination, serves as a model for the hermeneutic argument interpreting the Bible in light of the present. Ten years later Stendahl was Dean of Harvard Divinity School, and the study of his writings in LCMS Concordia Seminary classes was one reason for the expulsion of many of the faculty. Other texts which offer thorough explanations of the arguments for ordaining women are John Reumann’s *Ministries Examined*, Margaret Sittler Ermarth’s *Adam’s Fractured Rib*, and Raymond Tiemeyer’s *The Ordination of Women*. The latter two are of particular interest because they were written at the time of the ordination debate in 1970. But that very fact also prevents them from having the historical perspective to view the secular forces at work at that time. A good source for a chronology of events leading to the conventions’ approving women’s ordination is the essay by Gracia Grindal, “Getting Women Ordained.” All of the above are Lutheran authors who were writing primarily for a

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29 Grindal, “Getting Women Ordained.”
Lutheran audience; thus they fit one of Shipps's categories of denomination historians, those who are bound somewhat by the limits on the data from which they choose to draw their evidence. These works are excellent theological and primary sources, but, with the exception of Ermarth's, they do shy away from secular analysis of the influence of the turbulent sixties. Such analysis would be counter productive to their purpose, seeking approval of women's ordination, for it would acknowledge that the church might have been swayed by secular American culture.

The LCMS position against women's ordination has not varied in the 150 years of the church's existence, only the tone in which the prohibition is stated changes. But for a full explanation of the LCMS position on women, two works are very useful: *The Office of Women in the Church: A Study in Practical Theology* by Fritz Zerbst, which may be the best exegetical statement against women's ordination, and *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women* by German theologian Peter Brunner, published by Concordia Publishing House, the official publisher of the LCMS, and reissued in 1971 at the height of the LCMS'

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of the intra-synodical conflict. An insider writing with an outsider’s perspective is Mary Todd, whose dissertation "Not in God’s Lifetime: The Question of the Ordination of Women in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod" chronicles the LCMS attitude towards women throughout its history. Despite its title, the dissertation is weighted more towards a history of the synod and the woman church suffrage issue rather than ordination. Todd’s thesis is that the critical issue for the Missouri Synod is “authority”; in trying to define its theology as unchanging when forces of change are in reality at work within the church and society, the Missouri Synod has continually redefined authority in scripture, ministry, and gender issues. Todd’s extensive Missouri Synod resources are useful to any scholar studying the LCMS.

In researching the subject of women in the ordained ministry, one problem that arises is the omission of women from sources which, one initially assumes, should feature them prominently. Therefore one feels almost like Diogenes, searching not for one honest man, but for any woman at all. Denominational histories and histories of particular congregations written by church historians or lay scholars contain important historical information, but these works also, particularly prior to 1970, are written in a triumphal tone heralding the theme of that denomination as God’s chosen people, and


33Mary Todd, “Not in God’s Lifetime: The Question of the Ordination of Women in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 1996). Todd’s dissertation has recently been published as Authority Vested: A Story of Identity and Change in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000). As an “outside-insider” she has masterly told the history of the Missouri Synod and its relationship with women. For this thesis, only the dissertation is cited due to the recent publication of the book.
they focus on the bricks and mortar and great men of the church. Thus, although these sources do not yield much specific information about women in the church, indirectly they do reveal much about women's status within the church. Abdel Ross Wentz's *The Lutheran Church in American History* and *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America* were used in all Lutheran seminaries, including Concordia Seminary, into the 1970s; the first book mentions women in three brief sentences referring to the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society. The list of biographical figures for further study at the back of the book do not include any Lutheran women, but rather lists Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan B. Anthony, Clara Barton, Mary Baker Eddy, and Juliet Ward Howe. One would infer from this that the Lutheran church likes its women leaders to be leading somewhere else. Wentz's second book, "larger and more complete" as the 1964 book jacket boasts, still has fewer than five brief references to women.34

These basic history texts of the Lutheran church were supplemented by *The Lutherans in North America* later in the 1970s and used for the next fifteen years as the primary history text in Lutheran seminaries. Written by six church historians, it was intended to be an inclusive narrative history of all Lutherans, although the "all" meant all immigrant groups, not both sexes; the Americanization of the church seems to be its main focus.35 E. Clifford Nelson’s *Lutheranism in North America 1914-1970* appeared in 1972, and from its title would seem to promise much information about Lutheran women as

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women expanded their roles in all areas of society in the twentieth century. Yet in 541
pages, there are only eighteen brief references to women, only eight women are
mentioned by name, and in eight pages of photo collages of church leaders, there is not a
single woman present. In writing his church history, Nelson focused on institutional
development and theology, areas where women were excluded.36 In a 1960 collection of
essays celebrating the centennial of the Augustana Synod, one of the synods that merged
to form the LCA in 1962, only one chapter in eighteen is written by a woman or about
women.37 Moving Frontiers, published in 1964, is an invaluable collection of church
documents, primary sources, and translations of German documents primarily for use in
LCMS theological seminaries and teachers' colleges as a resource in historical theology.38
It covers many topics such as relations with other churches, youth work, missions,
education, and slavery. But the only documents referring to women are an 1872 warning
against women teachers and a 1916 document against women's suffrage. This invisibility
of women reflected the attitude of many Lutherans, no matter what synod, toward the role
of women in the church and helps to explain the assumption until only very recently that
women were to be the background toilers. For the historian, however, it means that one
must look elsewhere for historical data on women in the church.

Perhaps outside the traditional denominational histories more information on the
role of women in the church will be found, providing a context for the 1970 tradition


breaking event. Perhaps exploring sources focusing on women, women’s rights, and the development of the feminist movement in the 1960s will yield rich rewards. But a search of such sources reveals again a paucity of material. Here it is not the omission of women that is notable, but the omission of religion as an important area of gender inequality. Except for a slight nod to *The Women’s Bible*, many authors of women’s history (unless solely focusing on religion) ignore the one area in society where women have informally dominated and formally been excluded from positions of power and influence. Gerda Lerner’s, *The Majority Finds Its Past*, written in 1979 as the new feminism was making itself heard in academia, omits the subject of religion: “...[O]ne generalization about women which holds up is that they were longer than any other group in the nation, deprived of political and economic power.”

Religious power is not recognized.


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In their surveys of women and religion, Blanche Linden-Ward and Carol Hurd Green argue that it was not until 1974 that there was “widespread public attention to women’s desire for ordination,” and that this occurred when three retired Episcopal bishops ordained eleven women against official church policy. Yet six million Lutherans changed centuries of tradition and officially ordained women four years prior to this event, and there was national press coverage when Elizabeth Platz became the first Lutheran pastor in November 1970. What this statement by Linden-Ward and Green seems to confirm is that not only are women overlooked within the Lutheran church and without, but that Lutherans as a whole are often neglected in the study of religious groups.

Martin E. Marty is a Lutheran theologian whose prolific writings span the chasm between traditional Lutheran audiences and a wider mass audience of non-Lutherans, sociologists, and historians. He notes that “Lutherans are not exotic enough to inspire mere curiosity on the part of non-Lutherans.” Indeed if it were not for Garrison Keillor’s Pastor Ingqvist and his wife Judy making regular appearances in the tales from Lake Wobegon on National Public Radio and in Keillor’s numerous books, many Americans would not even be aware of this group of people, much less aware that there were different Lutheran groups who “were divided over the role of women and the color

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of the sky and how to make coleslaw, and...will we recognize each other in heaven...."44

And a scholarly journal, *The American Quarterly*, devoted its entire winter 1978 issue to women and religion; but, again, the Lutheran church was not mentioned. Church historian Christa R. Klein points out that Lutheran denominational history "rarely breaches the walls of the academy as a subject of discussion, nor does it appear to be missed."45 One reason Klein feels this to be true is that the Lutheran narrative does not parallel the history of social reform in the United States. This deviation excludes Lutheranism from the larger Protestant narrative and keeps it from being included in many general history works. At the same time, this lack of social reforming zeal is an embarrassment for many academic Lutherans, and thus social reform is the most popular dissertation topic among Lutheran denominational historians, often to the exclusion of other topics.46 Analyzing the lack of a Lutheran presence in public scholarship, Klein notes that even Lutheran theological schools do not offer much on American Lutheran church history. A survey of Lutheran seminaries in 1989 revealed that the seminaries' history classes focused almost exclusively on the sixteenth century in Europe rather than on the nineteenth or twentieth centuries in the United States.47 Similarly, another Lutheran historian who probes the isolation of American Lutheranism is Mark A. Noll.


46Ibid., 312.

47Ibid., 310.
He notes, for example, that there is not much Lutheran history written for the public even though some of the great church historians have been Lutherans: Jaroslav Pelikan, Sydney Ahlstrom, and Martin E. Marty.48

An excellent series on scholarship in women’s history is the twenty volume set of *The History of Women in the United States* focusing on journal articles written from the mid 1970s to early 1990s, with such topics as women and politics, education, domestic relations, and law. Volume thirteen, edited by Nancy F. Cott, is devoted entirely to women and religion, with articles about Episcopalians, Methodists, Catholics, Congregationalists, etc. Yet not one of the twenty-two articles is devoted to women in the Lutheran Church.

Susan Hill Lindley, a professor at the Lutheran St. Olaf College in Minnesota, is knowledgeable about Lutheranism, but because of the large scope of her work, a study of the history of women and religion in America, she includes only about four pages on Lutherans. Thus there is not much room to establish clearly the variances among the different Lutheran groups. For example, all Lutheran women are included in her description of women’s organizations that did not develop much autonomy until the middle of the twentieth century, even though many pre-ALC and LCA women’s groups had considerable independence.49 Lindley notes that having the alternative of the LCMS possibly minimized the potential divisiveness when the LCA and ALC voted for ordination in 1970, so that those opposed to women clergy could leave and join the

49 Lindley, 300.
Missouri Synod. However, the relatively easy passage of the constitutional changes was not due to this alternative, but to other reasons, such as the history of the other Lutheran bodies, the spirit of the times, and individual leadership. Furthermore, other issues divided the Lutheran bodies so that an LCA member who did not approve of ordaining women would not have shrugged and said, "OK, I'll go to the LCMS because that is all that separates us." Lindley provides an excellent study of women and religion in the United States, but the complexity of Lutheranism may be minimized in large surveys.

Even when historians do include Lutherans in their studies, they sometimes go awry in analyzing this particular faith community. Surveys by Lawrence Kersten and others repeatedly show that Lutheran theology, history, and social ethic set them apart from other Protestants. Similarly, Barbara Zikmund, President of Hartford Theological Seminary, surveys women's ordination in American churches and reaches some conclusions about the whys and wherefores of the process, but Lutherans just will not fit a basic pattern. She notes, for example, that ordination is integrally connected to women gaining lay equality in areas such as voting. Although this is true in general, the connection is more complicated in the Lutheran church. The LCA and ALC churches had been allowing women to vote and to attend national conventions for years before ordination occurred in 1970; conversely, the LCMS allowed women suffrage in 1969.

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50 Ibid., 314.


but thirty years later, women are still not close to ordination. Zikmund also notes that concern for equality in leadership among Lutherans was influenced by developments in the European Lutheran churches that had been ordaining women for decades.\textsuperscript{53} Most Lutherans would say that European developments did not exert that much influence; in Sweden, for example, women’s ordination had to be approved by the church assembly and the National Parliament, a system with which American Lutherans cannot identify. Moreover, the Swedish debate on women’s ordination was so bitter and divisive it is doubtful that American Lutherans would have wanted to emulate it. Furthermore, individual churches in Scandinavia can still bar women from preaching to this day. Finally, Zikmund states: “It is no accident that the periods of greatest advancement for women clergy in mainstream Protestantism always came when there was an under supply of trained clergymen.”\textsuperscript{54} This was not true in the American Lutheran church. Alvin Rogness, President of Luther Theological Seminary from 1954 to 1974, in reflecting on the ordination issue, emphatically states that pastoral shortages was not an issue.\textsuperscript{55} And currently in the LCMS there is concern about a pastoral shortage. The summer 1998 periodical of the Concordia Seminary notes: “The number of pastors being subtracted

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., 344. Also, Carl J. Schneider and Dorothy Schneider, \textit{In Their Own Right} (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997), 187, devote only four sentences to Lutherans in their history of American women clergy and state that European Lutherans set an example that influenced American Lutherans to move towards ordination.

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., 347.

\textsuperscript{55}Alvin Rogness, interview by Lester Fhenin, Oral History Collection, 12 February 1977 (Chicago: Archives of Cooperative Lutheranism, Lutheran Council in the USA, Oral History Collection, ELCA Archives), 72. Further references to this oral history collection will be stated as ELCA Oral History Collection, and further references to the Lutheran Council in the USA will be stated as LCUSA.
from the LCMS clergy roster every year is outpacing the number of pastors being added." Although the number of pastoral vacancies is always in a state of flux, as of March 1998 there were 577 calling vacancies prior to the placing of only 150 seminary graduates in the summer of 1998. The seminary article suggests ways of recruiting more men to the ministry, but never even hints at the possibility of ordaining women as a solution.56

A recent book on the ordination of women in the United States is Mark Chaves's *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*, which is a useful guide to the development of the role of church women. Chaves uses organizational theory and writes as a sociologist; indeed, when discussing biblical inerrancy he states that the topic "begs for a sociological explanation."57 While analyzing the internal and external forces at work in denominations that will affect their decision on women's ordination, he places heavy emphasis on external culture pressure; resistance to women's ordination is thus not a necessary outcome of biblical inerrancy or sacramentalism, but is more "cultural achievement than logical necessity."58 Chaves does not, however, develop in any detail what this pressure is or where it comes from, and there is little historical context because that was not one of his objectives. Yet his overview of the topic offers an interesting, sociological perspective. Because he is covering the hundred largest denominations, his Lutheran sections are by necessity brief.59 Chaves states that whether a

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56 "The Need for Pastors Is Great," *Focus on Concordia Seminary* (Summer, 1998), 4-5.


58 Ibid., 90.

59 Although the majority of Lutherans worldwide ordain women, as recently as the year 2000, the Lutheran Church of Australia voted 416 to 220 at its national convention
particular denomination will ordain women is connected to its relationship with other
denominations that already do. The LCMS, however, was closely aligned with the
ALC, yet that church’s decision to ordain women did not cause the LCMS to adopt a
similar policy, but rather to break off all discussion of possible fellowship with this group
of Lutherans. The Chaves network effect may work for some denominations, but not
necessarily for Lutherans.

Chaves also tries to connect those denominations that refuse ordination to
women, but Lutherans just will not forge another link. He states: “Other sacramental
denominations -- Episcopal, Orthodox, and to a lesser extent Lutherans -- look to the
Catholic Church for signals about how to be good sacramentalist denominations more
than the Catholic Church looks to them.” Lutherans in general, and the LCMS in
particular, would find that statement absurd, just as any linking of the LCMS to more
fundamentalist faiths would elicit a cry of protest from the people in St. Louis. Some
denominations may look similar in their final decisions, but they arrive by very different
paths. Chaves also argues that there is a “loose coupling between roles and practice,” so
that women actually perform clergy roles even though not officially ordained. He refers
to the parochial teachers in the Missouri Synod as an example. For Lutherans, however,
Word and Sacrament ministry is strictly the domain of an ordained pastor; there are no
positions for women in the church that blur this distinction. And finally, Chaves stresses
to continue its refusal to ordain women. “World Scan,” The Lutheran, October 2000, 47.

60Ibid., 60.

61Ibid., 117.

62Ibid., 25.
the importance of women in the seminaries being active for women’s ordination in the 1960s and 1970s, a bottom-up approach to accomplishing the change. For Lutherans, the impetus for change was directed more from the top down. It was the male leadership in the LCA and ALC that exerted the most influence in guiding these churches towards women’s ordination. Therefore, as statistically sound and well researched as Chaves’s study is, by embracing a hundred denominations and drawing general conclusions, the fine distinctions that tell the history of ordination in the Lutheran church can become lost.

Four historians who write on Lutheran subjects for a scholarly audience with expertise, clarity, and objectivity, and who make excellent use of historical sources were particularly helpful in serving as models for this research project. References to their work will appear throughout: Christa R. Klein has been noted above; Frederick C. Luebke researches the effect of German immigration on the Missouri Synod; Alan Graebner explores the relationship between laity and clergy in the Missouri Synod and social issues such as the Synod’s historical position on birth control; and Carol K. Coburn has an excellent study of four generations in a Missouri Synod congregation in the small Four Corners community of Kansas.

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63 Ibid., 95.

64 Elizabeth Platz, interview with author, 10 March 1998, College Park, MD. All future references to Platz are based on this interview.

65 A sample of their work includes the following: Christa R. Klein, Politics and Policy: The Genesis and Theology of Social Statements in the Lutheran Church in America (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); Graebner, Uncertain Saints; Frederick C. Luebke, Germans in the New World (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Carol Coburn, Life at Four Corners: Religion, Gender, and Education in a German Lutheran Community 1868-1945 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992).
This thesis probes the Lutheran underpinnings of ordaining women, explores the American culture of the late 1960s, and analyzes the causes of the divergence in Lutheran attitudes towards women’s ordination. It argues that for the LCA and ALC the duality of the push of internal forces within their churches and the pull of external forces in society moved them to propose and accept women’s ordination. For the LCMS, however, the push of their own internal forces was very different, and when confronted with the same external forces, the resulting tension caused it to reaffirm its opposition to women’s ordination. The internal forces which affected the Lutherans include the nineteenth-century immigrant character of American Lutheranism, the assimilation factor, Lutheran theology, and the historical role of women in the three synods. The external dynamics of events occurring in society at large in the late 1960s, particularly the women’s rights movement, civil rights activism, and the Vietnam conflict, simultaneously pulled some Lutherans into accepting ordination even while pulling others in the opposite direction.

To support the above thesis, this project uses secondary sources in the areas of Lutheran theology, Lutheran history, and the social history of the late 1960s. The primary sources used include the following: interviews with men and women in both the LCMS and ALC/LCA, including Elizabeth Platz, the first woman ordained in the Lutheran Church; extensive use of the official publication for members of the LCMS, the Lutheran Witness, and ALC and LCA publications such as The Lutheran from the early twentieth century to 1970; documents and oral history narratives from the ELCA archives in Chicago; popular periodicals as well as scholarly works written in the late 1960s and
early 1970s; and various church publications and documents from the three Lutheran organizations.

Using the above resources, Chapter Two will focus on Lutheran tradition, theology, and the historical role of Lutheran women that affected the 1970 decision. It will begin with an overview of the Lutheran Church in the United States and then focus on immigration and assimilation as it relates to women’s ordination. A discussion of basic Lutheran theology and the opposing positions of the LCMS and the ALC/LCA will follow, and a historical survey of women within the Lutheran church will conclude this section. Chapter Three will focus on the turbulent times of the late 1960s and the positive and negative merging of the secular and the spiritual in Lutheran church decisions. Special attention will then be given to the civil rights activism, Vietnam conflict, and women’s movement as they affected the Lutheran church bodies’ actions. Chapter Four will examine the effects of these internal and external forces upon the three organizations in 1970, the contemporary situation for women clergy in the Lutheran Church, and the continued relevance of these forces in the division over women’s ordination within the church. The historical density of this topic means that events which occurred in a sixteenth-century German state, in a mid-nineteenth century Mississippi river town, and in the streets of America in the 1960s had, and continues to have, an impact on whether a woman today stands in a Lutheran pulpit and preaches.
CHAPTER II
THE INTERNAL FORCES AFFECTING WOMEN'S ORDINATION

THE IMMIGRATION FACTOR

To understand why the American Lutheran Church delayed confronting women's ordination until 1970 and then divided on the issue, one needs to look first at the church's immigrant roots. For beneath the surface of American Lutheranism lie the tangled tales of the German Lutherans, the Norwegian Lutherans, the "old" Lutherans who were really the "new" Lutherans, and all those who had previously belonged to state churches, but in this new land were responsible for founding and supporting their own churches. Surrounded by competing religious faiths, scattered across the sparsely settled prairie, or struggling in communities where they were the non-English-speaking outsiders, these Lutherans built churches that confronted the new challenges. The American Lutherans were also affected by the ecclesiastical traditions they had left behind; theologian Martin E. Marty has noted that American Lutherans came from different European countries so "they did not know each other as Europeans and mistrusted each other as Americans."¹

in 1638 and settled on the present day site of Wilmington, Delaware; the first Lutheran church in America was built in 1646 on Tinicum Island in the Delaware River, nine miles southwest of Philadelphia. As more German and Scandinavian Lutherans arrived, they settled predominantly in Pennsylvania, New York, and North Carolina, with Pennsylvania eventually becoming the center of colonial Lutheranism. The patriarch of the American Lutheran church was Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg (1711-1787), sent by the Lutheran church in Halle to organize the American Lutherans. In 1748 he formed the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, the first permanent Lutheran synod in America, and brought the various Lutheran congregations into a larger organizational framework. The founding of Gettysburg Seminary in Pennsylvania in 1826 meant that Lutheran pastors could be trained in the United States, and churches did not have to rely on Europe for their pastors. The General Synod, formed in 1820 to accomplish projects in mission work, education, and publishing that district synods could not do alone, became the first federation of Lutheran synods. From 1820 to 1860 the General Synod tried to be all-inclusive, and in such striving was failure almost assured, for new immigration, a transient population, new theological and intellectual currents in the United States, and the sectionalism that would result in the Civil War all combined to make a single, united Lutheran Church body an impossibility.²

A second great wave of immigration in the 1830s and 1840s brought more German Lutherans, who settled farther west in Ohio and Missouri, including the Saxon Germans who came in 1838 to settle around St. Louis. In 1847, with sixteen congregations, they formed the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio,

² Wentz, A Basic History; Nelson, ed., The Lutherans in North America.
and other States. This organization became the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in 1947. Scandinavian immigrants arriving just before and after the Civil War settled in the upper Midwest, and a constant flow of immigrants from northern Europe continued into the early twentieth century.

These immigration patterns changed the American religious scene so that by 1914 Lutherans were the third largest Protestant group, behind the Baptists and Methodists, and this was still true in 1970. The standard joke was that Lutherans grew by boats and babies. Between 1840 and 1875, fifty-eight Lutheran church bodies or synods were organized, based primarily on ethnic background and geographical location. The names of these larger church organizations reflected the ethnic and geographical divisions, the quilt-like pattern of Lutheranism, that developed in the United States — for example, Icelandic Evangelical Lutheran Synod, United Synod in the South, Texas Synod, Danish Lutheran Church Association. Beginning in the early twentieth century, however, Lutherans outside the Missouri Synod gradually began to search for that illusive common theological ground and drew together in new and larger combinations. The ALC in 1960 and the LCA in 1962 were products of several mergers which occurred over a hundred year period, uniting many of the Scandinavian synods and older eastern Lutheran groups.


4Ibid., 175.

5In 1988 the ALC and the LCA merged to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) with a current membership of about 5.2 million. The above historical review and some of the general historical background that follows are simplified renderings of what church historian Sydney Ahlstrom describes as “the immense complexity of Lutheran institutional history” in Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 761.
Today the Lutheran Church is somewhat more diverse in its membership, but the German and Scandinavian heritage still lingers: Santa Lucia at Christmas with her crown of candles; food festivals featuring lutefisk, lefse, or lebkuchen; the European origins of many hymns; and the preponderance of surnames such as Schmidt, Koch, Andersen, and Johnson. But in 1970, the effects of nineteenth-century immigration was felt at the decision-making national Lutheran conventions in more ways than in quaint ethnic customs, and therefore one cannot underestimate the influence of the immigrant character on American Lutheranism. Church historian Sydney E. Ahlstrom notes that no other Protestant denomination was so transformed by the immigration of the nineteenth century as were the Lutherans. Between 1869 and 1918, three million Germans, at least half of them Lutheran, 2 million Scandinavians, nearly all of them at least nominally Lutheran, as well as large numbers of immigrants from Iceland and parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire pursued their dreams in the United States. As late as 1945, Lutheran theologian Leigh Jordahl described Lutheranism as “tradition-directed” with “an aura of foreignness” hanging over the Church.

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Although the ELCA, in the last several decades particularly, has focused on diversity and committed major resources to reaching beyond its traditional membership, only 2.3 percent of American members are not of northern European ethnic background. Membership statistics for 1998 cited in “Membership Steady, Income Up,” The Lutheran, September 1999, 47.

Ahlstrom, A Religious History, 756.

Ibid.

The symbiotic relationship between the immigrants and the Lutheran church lingered much longer than it did for other Protestant groups in the United States. While American Lutheran churches assisted the immigrants’ adjustment to their new life by providing financial assistance and social services, and while the churches aided in the Americanization process, the churches also continued to tie the immigrants to the traditions and culture of their old life. The immigrants brought an infusion of new members to American Lutheran churches, but these new arrivals also held the churches to the old ways, ways more comfortable for them but unfamiliar to those not of the same ethnic group. The Lutheran churches united Saxons, Prussians, Bavarians, etc. and made these Germans into American Lutherans, just as eventually the various Scandinavians united in American Lutheranism. But by clinging to their European cultural roots for most of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the immigrants were a divisive force, separating one group of Lutherans from the others and slowing assimilation into mainstream American culture.

From the very beginning, the immigrant Lutherans arrived having harkened to very different calls. Once in the new land, they strived to maintain their old world heritage and resist total assimilation through the bonds of church, language, and parochial schools. They clashed with other religious groups, and even more with other Lutherans, as they struggled to maintain what each group considered a purer Lutheran theology. These issues of origin, orthodoxy, and assimilation bear a close examination because they make clear that divisions in the Lutheran Church are long-standing, that Lutherans have

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10 Conrad Bergendoff, interview by Todd Nichol (ELCA Oral History Collection, 18 November 1985), 38.
often approached theological differences defensively, and that the ALC and LCA indeed broke with tradition in 1970 while the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod clung to its conservative, traditional heritage.

For Scandinavian Lutherans the impetus for their exodus was primarily secular, their journey a quest for economic improvement.\(^1\) Between 1820 and 1920 more than two and a half million Scandinavians came to the United States and Canada.\(^2\) In Sweden, overpopulation in some areas, industries crowding out trade guilds, strict class distinctions, compulsory military service, and some political, religious, and social restrictions combined to produce an “America fever” in the mid-1800s.\(^3\) This second act in Swedish-American Lutheranism, following the seventeenth-century colonial one, began in southeastern Iowa in 1848. Succeeding decades brought new Swedish immigrants to Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, and pastors such as Lars Esbjorn embarked on cross-country missionary journeys to organize the settlers into synods. Tuve Nilsson Hasselquist became the foremost leader of the Swedish-American Lutherans as a pastor, synodical president, editor, and college president. The formation of the Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod of North America in 1860 united many of the Swedish Lutherans into their own synod, emphasizing their Scandinavian

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\(^{1}\)The Scandinavian Lutheran community is much too diverse to cover completely in this thesis as it would have to include those from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland. Therefore the Scandinavian influence discussed here will focus only on the Swedish and Norwegian immigrants, the two largest groups. Of the Scandinavian immigrants who came to the United States, half came from Sweden and one-third from Norway; see Wentz, *A Basic History*, 178.


\(^{3}\)Wentz, *A Basic History*, 121.
heritage as opposed to the more Americanized eastern General Synod. Even more importantly, it reaffirmed their confessional position with “the unaltered Augsburg Confession as a short and correct summary of the principal Christian doctrines.”\textsuperscript{14} This group of Lutherans founded Augustana College and Seminary in Rock Island, Illinois, and its own Augustana publishing house.

The Norwegians began to settle in northern Illinois in the late 1830s, moved into Wisconsin and Iowa in the next two decades, and after the Civil War, spread out into the Dakotas. A desire for economic opportunities and a more free and independent life motivated them more than religious fervor, and so these mostly farm families sought the inexpensive land available in the emerging agricultural center of the United States. When a Norwegian immigrant was asked how he could leave a beautiful Norwegian coastal village for the bareness of the American prairie, he answered: “You can’t eat fjords.”\textsuperscript{15} In the rural Midwest, the landscape’s flatness was interrupted only by towers of grain elevators and church steeples, twin symbols of the economic and spiritual growth of the community. From 1825 to 1900 more than 75,000 Norwegians came, proportionally only exceeded by the Irish and Italian immigrations.\textsuperscript{16} The Lutheranism of these new settlers varied and reflected the divisions that existed in Norway. From strict confessionalism, to rebellion against bishops, to the new evangelicalism of Hans Nielsen Hauge promoted in America by Elling Eielsen, all found spiritual homes in the Midwest. Pastor J.W.C.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 125.

\textsuperscript{15}Todd Nichol, \textit{All These Lutherans} (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 12.

Dietrichson organized most of the Norwegian Lutherans along the state-church pattern of Norway, with a synod constitution resembling that of the Missouri Synod. The man who completed the organization of the majority of Norwegian Lutherans was Herman Amber Preus, a strict confessionalist adamantly opposed to the looser, evangelical, pietistic Hauge Lutheranism. Indeed, the conservative attitudes of the Norwegian and the Missouri Lutherans often coincided over the next hundred years. Before the Norwegians established their own seminary in 1876, 127 of their pastors came from the Missouri Synod Seminary. A hundred years later, the great-grandson of Herman Preus, J.A.O. Preus, would leave the remnant of this Norwegian Synod for the Missouri Synod and become president of the LCMS at the pivotal 1969 convention. The ALC, which absorbed most of the Norwegian Lutheran synods in the 1960 merger, was discussing fellowship with the LCMS in 1970 when the vote on women's ordination halted further progress.

The Germans who became the Missouri Synod Lutherans left Saxony out of religious conviction rather than economic concerns; similar to the seventeenth-century English Pilgrims and Puritans, these German Lutherans fled a state church with which they disagreed. They were adamant about establishing a purer Lutheran church in a new land, and therefore religious flexibility was viewed not as conciliation or compromise, but as heresy. While other groups of Lutherans eventually merged in the twentieth century, a hallmark of the LCMS is its singular, seamless past.

\[17\] Wentz, *A Basic History*, 118.

The nucleus of the group that formed the Missouri Synod were followers of Martin Stephan, a pastor in Dresden, and theological students at the University of Leipzig, including Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm (C.F.W.) Walther. The group became known as the Stephanites in Saxony because of their devotion to this charismatic leader, and they agreed to elevating the office of the ministry because of their high regard for Stephan. It is not clear whether the Stephanites were actually harassed in the German provinces for their religious beliefs, but they certainly believed they were, so that the promise of a new land in which to build a “true” Lutheran community was enticing in 1838. The selection of Missouri as the destination was based on Stephan’s reading of some of the popular American booster literature that flooded Europe at this time. In November 1838, with a credit union of over $80,000 and an emigration code which included an ecclesiastical and civil code for authority and order in the future community, five ships carrying 665 passengers sailed from Bremen to New Orleans. The average age of the immigrants was twenty-five, and the ratio of women to men was four to five. These people were young, dedicated, skilled craftsmen, and professionals.\(^{19}\) As J. F. Buenger, one who chose to sail, said to his sister Agnes, who was hesitant to leave Germany: “If you wish to go to hell, stay here; if you wish to be saved, go with us to America.”\(^{20}\) The diversity in background, motivation, and theological orientation among the Scandinavian Lutherans is not found in this German group; here was a dedicated community, unified in purpose, and determined to found a single pure Lutheran community.

\(^{19}\)Todd, 40-47. One ship with fifty-six people was lost at sea.

\(^{20}\)As related by Agnes Buenger’s son to Carl Mundinger, quoted in Todd, 45.
From such a promising beginning did such disillusionment follow. In a tale that sounds much more like something from the 1990s, Martin Stephan within a short time was found to have engaged in sexual misconduct and financial embezzlement. The clergy excommunicated and exiled him to Illinois, from whence he tried to sue for damages. The new religious community was in disarray; the credit union was almost depleted; and there was no heir apparent among the mostly young and inexperienced clergy. From this chaotic situation, C.F.W. Walther, a twenty-nine-year-old pastor, arose as the leader, arguing in 1841 that they were still a church adhering to Word, Sacrament, and Confession. He assumed the pastoral position at Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Louis, which would become the base for the LCMS. In 1843 Walther drafted a constitution for the church in which only male members voted and differentiated between the spiritual priesthood of all believers and the pastoral office, much as Luther did. In 1844 Walther began the German Lutheran biweekly newspaper Der Lutheraner (precursor of the Lutheran Witness periodical) whose mission included exposing “false doctrines...paying particular attention to those Lutherans, wrongly so called, who in the guise and garb of Lutheran teachers preach and disseminate error, unbelief, and sectarianism, to the prejudice and shame of pure and Scriptural Lutheranism.”

21 Der Lutheraner, quoted in Todd, 86.
dominance from 1880 to 1932. The Missouri Synod's growth followed that of the nineteenth century German immigration to the Midwest. From the sixteen congregations with about 3,000 members which met in 1847 in Chicago to establish their organization, the synod increased over the next fifty years to 685,000 members in over a thousand congregations. Today the LCMS has 2.6 million members.\(^2\)

Just as the Lutheran immigrants' reasons for coming to the United States resulted in differences as they organized their American congregations, so too did their European origins divide them as they sought refuge among the familiar in this new land. Often the cultural divisions were displayed architecturally when a church was designed to resemble a village church left behind in Norway or Saxony, a physical reminder of a culture that had to compete with many others in America. Or, as in the case of a Lutheran church in Cambridge, Minnesota, the interior was adorned with Swedish designs while the outside appeared typically American, thus reflecting the congregation's dual personality.\(^2\)

What is significant in the context of this study is that these ethnic divisions persisted so long, slowed Lutheran assimilation, and thus affected reactions to societal changes regarding women in the second half of the twentieth century. Historian Frederick Luebke points out that churches were the easiest immigrant institution to create and almost always served as "conservators of ethnocultural values."\(^2\) In an essay that


relates the German immigrant experience on the frontier to Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, Luebke argues that Turner emphasized the ease and rapidity of assimilation and ignored the attitudes and behaviors of the past that lingered. To Luebke, the evidence from the frontier suggests not environment overcoming culture, but environment and culture interacting: “The degree of concentration necessary for the maintenance of ethnic language and culture is also related to the social distance perceived by an ethnic group between its own distinctive way of life and what it discerns as the culture of the host or receiving society.”

This gulf between a particular community and the society as a whole is evident among most of the Lutheran immigrants, but particularly among the Missouri Synod Lutherans, who came with the expressed purpose of building a separate, unique community. Another factor influencing a group’s maintenance of ethnocultural identity is its internal cohesion. Here again, the description of the nineteenth-century immigrants, and particularly the Germans, fit well. Luebke concludes: “So long as the ethnic group sustains a separate identity, it will have an ongoing history. As individual identities are increasingly shaped by other variables, the identity of the group fades.”

Martin E. Marty has concluded that although Lutherans were often regarded as “peculiar” for their reluctance to learn English and assimilate quickly, the mistrust among themselves and isolation from others contributed to group solidarity within Lutheran church bodies.

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25 Ibid., 151.
26 Ibid.
For most Lutherans, assimilation into American society could not be embraced without dire consequences for the Church and its people. They resisted as long as possible many contemporary American social, political, and economic developments, fearing that accommodation would lead to a diluting of their heritage. In his study of German emigration, Mack Walker describes the Saxon Germans as “people who traveled thousands of grim miles in order to keep their roots, their habits, their united families and the kind of future they wanted for their families.”28 This immigration irony is more understandable when one considers Carol Coburn’s conclusion in her study of a German Lutheran community in Kansas, that the German immigrants were usually families from small rural villages in northern Germany who sought to recreate not the German culture they had just left, but rather the culture of their memories, real or imagined.29 They did not like the modern German society and therefore created an older, idealized German culture in the United States. O. Fritiof Ander, in his essay on Swedish Lutherans for the Augustana Synod centennial, points out: “The immigrant community rested upon an illusion to the degree that its inhabitants sought to recreate a part of the old world which did not exist.”30 In 1854 German historian Philip Schaff described the Missourians this way: “They are still totally German and have not mixed in the least with the English and the American spirit. Even though outwardly they are progressing quite well, they are still


strangers and foreigners, in a new world."³¹ In *Moving Frontiers*, a book of primary documents on the Missouri Synod for use particularly in LCMS seminaries, Carl S. Meyer explains that the two dominant characteristics of the Missouri Church from the Civil War to World War I were its theological conservatism and its isolation from American linguistic, economic, and social patterns.³² The American Lutheran churches thus retained their immigrant character in many ways; the LCMS resisted American acclimation longer and more successfully, but the other Lutheran church bodies also clung to their European heritages, aided by the interdependent factors of language and parochial schools.

Language is often the last vestige of the old life that the immigrants pack away. Language is imbedded in their thought processes and holds them physically to the old country; it cannot be changed as easily as a suit of clothes. Language is held closely to the more personal areas of one’s life, spoken in the privacy of the home and whispered in matters of the soul at church. One often hears a first or second generation immigrant assert that the Lord’s Prayer just does not “feel” right unless spoken in the language in which the person first learned it from his or her mother.³³ Historian Peter Munch relates the story of an elderly member of a Lutheran congregation saying: “I have nothing against the English language, I use it myself everyday. But if we don’t teach our children


³²Ibid.

³³Author’s recollection of her grandmother Rose Burger Stickling, for example.
Norwegian, what will they do when they get to heaven?34 The language of heaven, the language of Luther – these were bonds holding Lutherans to their non-American past, making assimilation difficult, yet at the same time forging a strong internal community linking home, church, and school. Swedish, Norwegian, and German Lutherans all held fast to their native languages well into the twentieth century; in 1900, four out of five Lutheran congregations worshiped in one of twenty-nine non-English languages.35 The impetus for bringing English into the pulpit was World War I and the decrease in the flow of immigrants.

The Swedish Lutherans often assimilated the most quickly, but even among this group, church services in Swedish continued into the twentieth century.36 In Rockford, Illinois, a community known for its many Swedish-American Lutheran churches, the early church service or one service a month was conducted in Swedish well into the 1960s. Swedish Lutherans also sought to preserve their cultural values by linking home, church, and school. Historian Robert Ostergren has studied the community of Cambridge, Minnesota, whose Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church organized a “Swede School” to ensure the survival of the language. A book written for the church’s centennial in 1964 quoted a founder of the school: “We ought to teach our children the language our fathers and mothers spoke, the first European language that ever re-echoed


in the American forest and ever uttered the white man's thoughts in the land of the free."

From 1918 to 1920, the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, with about 445,000 members, debated whether to eliminate Norwegian from the synod's name in order to be more welcoming to non-Norwegians. The Norwegian-American author O. E. Rolvaag wrote essays against the name change, arguing that the name of the church did not define its contemporary character, but rather its origin, and to change it was to succumb to post-World War I nativism. Later in his novel *Giants in the Earth*, Rolvaag had one of his characters, a country pastor, warn a group of Norwegian farmers in Dakota who wanted to leave their old ways of the consequences of total Americanization:

> If this process of leveling down, of making everybody alike...is allowed to continue, America is doomed to become the most impoverished land spiritually on the face of the earth; out of our highly praised melting pot will come a dull...smug complacency, barren of all creative thought....Soon we will have reached the perfect democracy of barrenness....Dead will be the hidden life of the heart which is nourished by tradition, the idioms of language, and our attitude to life.

The final vote at the 1920 convention was not to change the name, and the elimination of *Norwegian* in the title did not occur until 1946.

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40 This Norwegian Lutheran group helped form the ALC in 1960.
The shadow of World War I, which cast a pall in the United States on anything foreign, finally separated Lutherans from the old languages. In Iowa, Governor W.L. Harding issued a proclamation restricting oral (but not written) communication to English. English only was to be used in schools, conversations in public places, speeches, etc. If English could not be spoken in a church because of lack of facility in English by the congregation, services were to be held in homes. The outcry following this proclamation caused the Governor to relent slightly; if absolutely necessary, part of a church service could be in another language if cleared in advance with the Governor. Carl Chrislock, in his essay on the Norwegian name controversy, notes that in accordance with Lutheran tradition of deferring to authority, Norwegian Lutherans in Iowa acceded to this restriction, but in Minnesota, Harding’s edict caused protests among other Norwegian Lutherans.41 In 1919 more than 66 percent of church services in the Norwegian Lutheran Church were in Norwegian, but by 1928, Norwegian-only services had almost disappeared.42

The German language, the language of Luther, had always been important to Lutherans in America. Even in the early 1800s, prior to the Missourians arrival, Lutheran churches debated how much English should be allowed in the church. Those who argued for maintaining the preeminence of German thought that the Lutheran church could not exist apart from the German language. English was too shallow a language for the depths of Lutheran doctrine, they insisted, and furthermore, it was the language of the


42Ibid.
Episcopalians and Presbyterians. The importance of the German language was stressed to the young men in the mid-1800s who answered the call of Pastor J.K.W. Loehe in Bavaria to go to the United States and minister to the new immigrants. Some of these men were pastors, but some were *Nothhelfer*, emergency helpers, sent to alleviate the spiritual needs of the German immigrants and to be missionaries to Native Americans; many later joined the Missouri Synod. A handwritten document was given to each *Nothhelfer* upon his departure with the terms of the agreement, his obligations, and his instructions. Part of the instructions were as follows: “The more strongly the language of the Yankees gains ground, the more the mother tongue is forgotten, and the more necessary it will be to have German Lutheran congregations and institutions of learning in America to be bearers of German theology.” The instructions continued: “Therefore you will conclude no union with congregations which would allow room for English in the office of the ministry and in instruction. Over there [America] German language and customs are the vanguard of the Evangelical Lutheran faith.” At this same time, many Lutherans who had immigrated decades earlier and were members of established congregations in the East and South believed English was essential in American churches. Leaders of the General Synod such as Samuel Schmucker advocated immigrant pastors from Germany attend American schools to acquire “American views of civil and

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religious institutions. But with the arrival of the Saxon Germans, the German language found its staunchest advocates; just as a barrier to Lutheran unity and American assimilation seemed to fall, another was erected.

In Walther's 1843 Constitution, German was the language to be spoken from the pulpit, on the floor of synod conventions, in official minutes of proceedings, and for most church publications. Some Midwest English-speaking congregations, which in other ways agreed with Missouri in doctrine and practice, were not allowed to become members of the Missouri Synod, even though they petitioned to join in 1872 and again in 1887. Rather, they were advised to form their own English conference; these congregations were not accepted into the Missouri church until 1911.

The persistence in the use of German by the Midwest immigrants (about half of the two million German Lutherans in America conducted worship services exclusively in German) earned the hostility of their English-speaking neighbors even before World War I. In 1890 the Bennett law in Wisconsin and the Edwards law in Illinois called for compulsory attendance at schools where instruction was in English. Both Lutherans and Catholics protested these laws, which were eventually repealed. In 1917, the 400th anniversary of Martin Luther's nailing his theses to the church door in Wittenberg, a time for commemorative activities in Lutheran churches, coincided with the entry of the United States in World War I. But the War's anti-German atmosphere was not

46Carl E. Schneider, The German Church on the American Frontier (St. Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1939), 64.

47Todd, 117.

conducive to celebrating anything German for non-Lutherans, and English-only laws reached their peak in 1918 and in the six months after the Armistice. These laws were particularly strong in the Great Plains, where from 1918 to 1921 every state legislature enacted some kind of restrictions on the use of foreign languages.49 Missouri Synod Lutherans were put on the defensive for several reasons: their use of the German language; the mistaken belief shared by many Americans that all Germans, including the Kaiser, were Lutheran; the lack of participation by the Missouri Synod in ecumenical, patriotic church services because of its stand on unionism;50 their initial reluctance to purchase war bonds because of the strong belief in separation of church and state; their early pleas for neutrality; and their calls for calm and patience in waiting for evidence on the Lusitania sinking.51 The result was a series of incidents reflecting the nativist hysteria of the time, including not only the language bans but violence against Lutheran pastors and the burning and vandalizing of Lutheran schools in the Midwest. In Nebraska v. Meyer, the United States Supreme Court in 1923 finally ended the language restrictions by finding in favor of Robert Meyer, a Missouri Synod teacher in a one room parochial school, who had taught a religion class in German.52


50 Unionism is a pejorative term for fellowship with other religious groups without full doctrinal agreement. It has been and still is an epithet to be hurled at those advocating moderation, compromise, or inclusiveness.


Even as the Missourians asserted their patriotism, while simultaneously defending their churches and schools and the essence of their faith, they diminished their use of the German language in official circumstances. Still, the president of the Missouri Synod in the post-war years, expressed his fear that “the loss of the German language would ruin the school system and expose the people to all manner of American heterodoxy.”53 And as late as 1938, minutes at the Synod’s national convention were read in German.54

Scandinavian and German American Lutherans were able to maintain their lengthy adherence to the European languages because of their establishment of parochial schools that taught the languages and reinforced their cultural heritage. Although never as extensive as the German Lutheran education system, by 1917 the Norwegian Lutherans had twenty high schools and an extensive college system. Today twenty-eight colleges and universities compose the ELCA higher education system, which includes such schools as Pacific Lutheran University in the state of Washington, St. Olaf College in Minnesota, and Roanoke College in Virginia.

Norwegian Americans also established parochial schools to compensate for what many felt were inferior American public schools. Some schools supplemented the public ones and met mostly in the summer; others replaced the regular public school entirely. Many Norwegian Lutheran pastors openly opposed public schools because of their fear of succeeding generations losing their cultural heritage, language, and Lutheran faith. Their confidence in the academic quality of the public schools also was weak because of constantly changing school staff, loose discipline, and the employment of predominantly

53Coburn, 146.

54Carl S. Meyer, Moving Frontiers, 355.
female teachers, a practice rare in Norway. Many of these Norwegian Lutherans found their plan for education in the United States in the Missouri Synod model, and in 1858 submitted a plan, never fully realized, to build a school system like that of the Missourians.\(^5^5\)

The Missouri Synod established an extensive parochial education system, from elementary schools to colleges and universities, which is still active today. The goal was to maintain the identity, heritage, and Lutheran faith for succeeding generations amidst the Americanization occurring in the public schools. By the late 1800s, the system included two seminaries, hundreds of elementary schools supported by individual congregations, preparatory schools, and junior colleges. The contact with the German language in elementary schools made possible the continued use of German-language services much longer than would otherwise have occurred as succeeding generations grew more distant from the first generation of immigrants. Carol Coburn's study of the Block community in Kansas paints a detailed picture of four generations of German-Americans from around 1850 to World War II, with Trinity Lutheran church at its center. This community personified the closed, hierarchal, religious community that integrated church, home, and school and successfully transmitted a particular culture through four generations. LCMS schools today attract the usual Lutheran students but also a more diverse student population, as parents dismayed by the lack of discipline or moral instruction in public schools seek alternatives. The Lutheran pastors in the nineteenth century, who did not value the education provided in public schools, would see many of

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their beliefs, with the exception of language, prevailing today, particularly in the larger,
urban school districts. Currently the LCMS operates ten colleges, two seminaries, sixty-
two high schools, and 1,786 elementary and pre-schools.\textsuperscript{56}

The main Lutheran church bodies also established large publishing houses, which
supplied congregations and schools with curriculum and other printed material, first in
the native languages and then in English. This material promoted unity in church
doctrine and practice and addressed social concerns of the day. Currently, these
publishing houses, Concordia for the LCMS and Augsburg for the ELCA, offer an
extensive list of church publications and scholarly work that are the basis for the Lutheran
education system. Thus, language, schools, and publishing houses formed a powerful
triumvirate to preserve tradition and to protect against “false” Lutheranism.

Although the evidence of a strong and lingering ethnic culture among the early
ALC and LCA churches is undeniable, after World War I church historians did their best
to deny this connection as they tried to weave Lutherans into the fabric of America.
Reading their denominational histories reveals the evolution of these churches in their
approach to assimilation and contrasts markedly with the LCMS history. Charles
William Heathcote, in his 1919 book on Lutherans in the Civil War, unabashedly stated
that a distinguishing feature of the Lutheran Church is its “Americanism.” He pointed out
that the church had the responsibility of Americanizing the vast numbers who had arrived
and would continue to arrive from Lutheran countries to the United States.\textsuperscript{57} Abdel Ross

\textsuperscript{56}Samuel Nafzger, “The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod: A Brief History,”

\textsuperscript{57}Charles William Heathcote, The Lutheran Church and the Civil War (New
Wentz, in the preface to his 1933 edition of *The Lutheran Church in American History*, asserted that the Lutheran Church was not, in fact, an immigrant church: "It is as old as the American nation and much older than the American Republic."\(^5^8\) His thesis is that there is a reciprocal relationship between American culture and the American Lutheran Church. Indeed, the chapter titles read more like an American history text book: "In Colonial Times," "At the Birth of the Nation," "In Days of Big Business," etc. The colonies separated from England in the 1770s just as the Lutheran Church separated itself from dependence on European Lutheranism; the Civil War mirrored the combat and strife among Lutheran bodies in the middle 1800s; the industrialization and growth of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries coincided with the burgeoning growth of Lutheranism. Parallels appear everywhere; patriotism swells from every page; and Lutherans march triumphantly through American history: "As the hardy Lutheran pioneer pressed forward with his family to encamp on the frontier and win a home for his children and at the same time to engage in the great American epic of subduing the wilderness and winning a continent for his nation, he carried with him his long rifle and his well-poised axe and usually also his Bible and his faith."\(^5^9\) Although this language seems anachronistic today, it reveals an effort in some of the non-Missouri Synod churches by 1920 to shed their immigrant character and assimilate into American culture. This willingness to change and adapt would surface again in the 1960s, and it would be resisted again by the Missouri Lutherans.

\(^{5^8}\) Wentz, *The Lutheran Church in American History*, 1.

\(^{5^9}\) Ibid., 103.
The parallel of two wars in distant places affecting the immigrant Lutheran 
churches is both ironic and compelling. What occurred in France in the maze of trenches 
along the Somme, and fifty years later what occurred in Vietnam in the villages along the 
Mekong, forced Lutherans in places like Iowa and Missouri to change, to adapt, or at the 
very least, to question the political and social situations enveloping them. But whereas 
World War I compelled Lutherans to shed their foreignness, particularly with respect to 
language, and to join in some ways the predominant American culture, the Vietnam 
conflict caused Lutherans to reassess their attitudes toward authority and power, two 
concepts essential to Lutheranism.

As the immigrants helped change and shape the United States, so did this new 
land mold the immigrants and their churches. The competitive nature of American 
religious freedom allowed the various Lutheran churches to flourish, but also increased 
their insularity and conservatism. In 1929, H. Richard Niebuhr, describing American 
Lutherans of the previous two centuries, concluded that the competition among churches 
encouraged Lutherans in the nineteenth century to become more conservative. He noted 
that even in the East, the United Lutheran Synod after 1918 was much more conservative 
than its predecessors.60 Robert Ostergren’s study of Swedish Lutherans in Cambridge, 
Minnesota, points out that the church stood against radical change in general and against 
the outside world.61 Often the new churches in the West felt the necessity to fight the 
“barbarism” surrounding them, to maintain high moral standards and to implement more

60 H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism (Cleveland: 

prohibitions than they might have in another setting. One of historian Marcus L. Hansen’s arguments in *The Immigrant in American History* is that the frontier churches were inclined to be puritanical. Eugene Fevold, in his studies of Norwegian Americans, relates that conflicts arose when more liberal Norwegians from the mother country visited the Norwegian immigrants in the Midwest. For example, the poet patriot Bjornstjerne Bjornson’s lecture tour in 1880 was not without controversy because of the more liberal nature of his writing. Generally, Lutherans in the nineteenth century united against the intellectual climate of evangelical liberalism, scientific modernism, and the social gospel, reflecting a conservative political and social attitude. Thus, although the LCMS bears the label of “conservative,” it is often a question of degree, and as this thesis in the next chapter looks at Lutheran social attitudes around 1970, it will reveal a conservative heritage that affected the women’s ordination issue.

The conservatism of the immigrant churches was personified by their pastors. Accustomed to the well-established and elaborately conducted services of the European state churches, the disorder on the frontier was confusing to the laity. Moreover, the immigrants distrusted American preachers; Lutherans did not want their pastors to be self-taught, legalistic puritanical leaders, or emotional revivalists, all of which roamed the frontier. For other Protestants, however, the power and respect accorded Lutheran clergy, along with the high church aspects of the Lutheran service, were often viewed with suspicion; to outsiders, Lutherans could seem too similar to Catholics. The

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63 Ibid., 9.

64 Carl E. Schneider, 39.
Reverend J.W. C. Dietrichson in Wisconsin in the mid-nineteenth century was accused of papistry because he seemed to have so much power over his congregation as to be a threat to American democracy.\textsuperscript{65} Indeed, the power of the pastor was real, and he often ruled with a benevolent despotism. For in addition to having the authority of divine call, the pastor was often the best educated person in the community, and the church and the pastor's home functioned as the intellectual and cultural center for the congregation.\textsuperscript{66} This high status also reinforced the traditional male hierarchal structure so that in the Lutheran churches, authority and gender were joined even more tightly than they were in other Protestant churches.

The competitiveness fostered by the lack of a state church presented opportunities for missionary work among the new immigrants and Native Americans in the new frontier settlements. The vast Midwestern prairie and the burgeoning cities of Chicago, St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Cincinnati, filled with German and Scandinavian immigrants, provided almost limitless mission opportunities. Abdel Ross Wentz, in his history of Lutheranism in America, noted that all Scandinavian immigrants were potential Lutherans, and not just because they were members of European Lutheran churches. Many immigrants, only too glad to be free from the control of state churches, initially joined no church. He estimated that among the immigrants arriving after the Civil War, only 7 percent of Danes, not more than 20 percent of Swedes, and less than 30 percent of


\textsuperscript{66}Ibid., 80; Fevold, 13.
Norwegians joined any church. The vastness of the frontier also offered opportunities for evangelism, as the constitution of a Norwegian Lutheran congregation in southern Wisconsin reveals: "This congregation's territory shall extend as far north, south, east, and west as there are Norwegians settlers who will accept this constitution." But which Lutheran church should the new settlers join? Language and customs influenced the decision, but among the Germans and Scandinavians, there were still competing and conflicting choices. The fear of being swallowed whole into a weak American Protestantism affected the way Lutherans from 1850 to 1950 reacted to each other and to the changes in American society. In 1847 recent immigrant Johann Carl Wilhelm Prizloff wrote home to Germany: "Now there is still one question to be answered, and it is the most difficult, namely: why the Lutheran church here in Milwaukee has divided into four factions. A whole book could be written about this question." In 1882, Mattias Dorgathen from Ohio wrote to his parents in Germany: "A few Sundays ago we went to Logen...a new Lutheran church was being consecrated there, they'd separated off from the other. The Lutherans say they don't keep the true faith and the ones who have the new say the old church doesn't teach or have the true faith, it's really something here with religion." And in 1890 a Norwegian-American periodical observed: "They [Norwegian Lutherans] argued predestination in the saloons, with their

67Wentz, A Basic History, 179.

68Fevold, 11.


70Ibid., 448.
tongues, and settled in the alley with their fists."71 Indeed the history of the Lutheran Church in the United States is one of various Lutheran groups accusing the others of being pseudo-Lutherans, corrupted by the modernism, secularism and intellectualism of the day. In 1970, the LCMS would raise these same issues.

For the church groups that later composed the ALC and LCA, conflict engaged them from within and without. Among the Norwegian Lutherans conflict from within centered on the division between the low church pietists, who inclined toward individualism, revivalism, and even leftist politics, and the high church Lutherans, who favored more structure, more pastoral control, and a rigid confessional stance. The desire to remain aloof was driven by the Lutheran disdain for other American Protestants, such as the Methodists and the Presbyterians. David Gustafson points out in his study of historical Lutheranism that the Protestant majority in the United States in the nineteenth century shared certain characteristics, which included promoting individualism in Biblical interpretation, stressing a personal conversion experience as necessary for salvation, and viewing the sacraments as symbolic.72 Some Lutherans felt that their church could only grow if they accommodated this American Protestantism; these “American Lutherans” were mostly in the eastern United States and were more distant from their immigrant past. They were usually affiliated with the General Synod and influenced by Pastor Samuel Schmucker. After 1850, this group was challenged by a more confessional group, led by Pastor Charles P. Krauth, who did not want the word


American anywhere in the name of the synod. Therefore, assimilation did not only refer to accepting the language and customs of the new land, but also to blending in with the predominant religious culture. And in this latter area, the more conservative, confessional Lutherans eventually prevailed, but not before the movement toward Americanization caused bitter dissension and division.

In the twentieth century, Lutheran groups began to merge on the basis of heritage, geography, and doctrine, but there were also negative reasons for coming together. For example, Leigh Jordahl notes that the merger that resulted in the ALC in 1930 was “common blood plus antipathy toward Missouri and fear of the eastern-based theologically formless United Lutheran Church in America.” This ambivalence or conflict over maintaining a “pure” Lutheranism is still apparent in Lutheran congregations at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Whether they should retain the traditional Lutheran liturgy or follow a generic Protestant hymn sing, whether they should be more ecumenical and more socially and politically active, or whether such changes compromise Lutheran identity remain subject to debate. In 1970 the ALC and LCA were well aware that by voting to ordain women they were once again being confronted with a change in their church that could be seen as following the American Protestantism that they had stood so firmly against for more than a century.

If the Lutheran church bodies that became the ALC and LCA were concerned about losing their identity, LCMS history is dominated by that fear, and any discussion of what is essential or not essential in doctrine and practice returns to the mid-nineteenth century.

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73 Ibid., 166.
74 Jordahl, 79.
century debate on American Lutheranism.\textsuperscript{75} When German church historian Philip Schaff returned to Europe in 1854, for example, he classified American Lutherans as to their acculturation and their level of adherence to Lutheran principles into New Lutherans, Old Lutherans, and Moderate Lutherans. The Old were actually the newest, most recent arrivals to the Midwest from Saxony, Prussia, and Bavaria, who abhorred rationalism and pietism and believed in the strict observance of the Lutheran confessions.

Historian Frederick Luebke perceives the Missouri Synod's history as one of seeing hostility and harassment everywhere, and being in a battle for survival.\textsuperscript{76} Mary Todd believes that the first fifty years of the Missouri Synod was a struggle for identity vis-a-vis other Lutherans rather than vis-a-vis American society.\textsuperscript{77} Even the Lutheran plans for the 1917 quadricentennial revealed the gulf between the Missouri Synod and other Lutherans. Missouri leader Theodore Graebner warned that the 400\textsuperscript{th} anniversary could not be celebrated properly if unionism prevailed, if non-Lutheran speakers addressed Lutheran gatherings, or if there were joint celebrations between Lutherans of Missouri Synod and others: “But where there is no unity, there can be no joint worship nor joint celebrations of the Jubilee.”\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{75}Gustafson, 19.

\textsuperscript{76}Luebke, “The Immigrant Condition as a Factor Contributing to the Conservatism of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod,” in \textit{Germans in the New World}, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 11; Graebner, 110.

\textsuperscript{77}Todd, 122.

Lutherans, however, similar to Catholics, came to the United States in large numbers later than other religious groups, and brought with them a particular theological and liturgical tradition that was difficult to reconcile with the Protestantism already here. Lutherans rebelled against this American Protestantism, which Benjamin Franklin called, “happy mediocrity.” Martin E. Marty calls the United States “a nation of behavers,” who are supposed to be tolerant of other faiths, not impose their own faith on others, and stay in their own sphere. To accomplish the above requires less focus on theology and more secularization. For Catholics, Jews, and Lutherans this is a conundrum and requires that practitioners decide what is essential, what identifying marks of their faith must remain for there to be a distinct faith community. If origins are forgotten, rituals abandoned, and theological foundations ignored, the religious community can be lost. Thus, the immigrant past of American Lutheranism, with its assimilation or lack thereof, conservatism, competitiveness, and defensiveness, reached into the 1970s as the three national Lutheran bodies studied women’s ordination. And simultaneously, another force also exerted pressure on the ordination debates, Lutheran theology.

LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

Essential to the forces at work within the Lutheran Church that affected women’s ordination is the reliance on Lutheran theology, with its strict adherence to the Gospel. Sydney Ahlstrom, in his comprehensive *A Religious History of the American People*, explains that although Lutherans divided because of “linguistic differences, geographical

79 Benjamin Franklin quoted in Gustafson, 26.

80 Ibid, 9.
separation, and varying degrees of Americanization...[there was and is] an underlying unity of faith and practice which was probably unequaled among America's large communions except in the Roman Catholic church."81 Any discussion of the ordination of women must consider the teachings of Martin Luther as well as Lutheran and Biblical scholarship from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Lutheran scholar Robert Preus has called the 150 years following the Book of Concord in 1580 the "age of Lutheran orthodoxy," when Lutheran theologians wrote prolifically to develop principles that defended the new denomination from attacks by the Catholic church and that separated it from other emerging Protestant groups.82 These dogmaticians gave a unity to the Lutheran faith, but also proved rigid interpreters of doctrine. The result was not only the Lutheran emphasis on the authority of the Bible, but also an orthodox perspective on the Bible. Both of these Lutheran characteristics become central whenever the women's ordination issue is discussed.

Some historians have placed Martin Luther at a historical crossroads, positioning him at the juncture of the medieval period and modern era. His significance extends far beyond the founding of the Lutheran Church. As 1999 drew to a close, public figures, pundits, scholars -- seemingly everyone -- tried to summarize the last thousand years and rank its personages. Life magazine, in its list of the one hundred most significant people of the millennium, ranked Martin Luther third, behind Christopher Columbus but ahead

81 Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, 761.

of Galileo. From Luther's questioning of the selling of indulgences (documents which secured the soul's release from purgatory), came a theological, political, and social revolution. The philosophical and theological basis for this overturning of the established order is well documented in Luther's prolific writings and those of his followers, many of which compose the Lutheran confessions. When Lutherans speak of theirs being a confessional church, they are referring to the confessions as written in the sixteenth century. All Lutherans, for example, subscribe to the Augsburg Confession. In 1530 Charles V, seeking unity and stability among the various parts of the Holy Roman Empire, called together the princes of his German territories in a Diet at Augsburg. He asked the Lutheran nobility to explain and summarize their religious convictions, and Phillipp Melanchthon, a professor of New Testament at Wittenberg, drafted the twenty-eight article confession to clarify the Lutheran position and to find some common ground with Roman Catholicism. The Augsburg Confession covers a variety of topics such as original sin, justification, baptism, and marriage of priests, and it can be considered the Lutheran Magna Carta. The Augsburg Confession and the expanded Book of Concord of 1580 are the sources most cited, after the Bible, in guiding Lutheran decisions.

The LCMS also gives great weight to a document that has authority almost like a confession. "A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States" was written in 1932 by Francis Pieper, the successor to C.F.W. Walther and the leader of the Missouri Synod from 1880 to 1932. It is a summary of the Synod's stand on controversial issues such as inerrancy. The

"Statement" of almost seventy years ago still guides the LCMS and is prominently displayed today on the LCMS web site.

At the heart of Lutheranism is justification by faith: "On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the Pope, the devil, and the world." This epiphany occurred for Luther while a professor at Wittenberg University. In Romans 1:17, with the emphasis placed on faith rather than righteousness, good works, or law, he found peace in his struggle for worthiness in God's sight. Faith alone, grace alone, Word alone is the basis of Lutheran theology. Yet that bridge from the Biblical Word of God to the present is a difficult one to cross, and it is complicated by the seventeenth-century dogmaticians who developed a doctrine of divine inspiration and inerrancy for Scripture. Thus among Lutheran theologians, the hermeneutics, or interpretation and application of Scripture, can fracture the unity of sola fide, sola gratia, sola scriptura. Luther foresaw the complex situation in his treatise "How Christians Should Regard Moses":

One must deal cleanly with Scriptures. From the very beginning the word has come to us in various ways. It is not enough simply to look and see whether this is God's word, whether God has said it; rather we must look

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85 "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" Romans 1:17. "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1. All biblical references are to the Revised Standard Version. For Martin Luther's own narrative of his awareness of the importance of faith, see Martin Luther, "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings," Luther's Works 34, ed. Lewis W. Spitz (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 336-337. All future references to Luther's Works will be LW and the volume number.

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and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us. That makes the difference between night and day.\textsuperscript{86}

Lutherans exhibit more uniformity than many other denominations, but they still come in all shapes and sizes, so that the right "fit" for all can be difficult.

One could just as easily have a treatise on "How Christians Should Regard Luther," substituting Luther himself for the scriptural passages on which he was writing. Church historian Philip Schaff, upon his return to Germany after teaching in the United States in 1854, described the German immigrants from Saxony, Prussia, and Bavaria in this manner: "Luther is their highest human authority; and indeed, not the free, bold, world-shaking reformer, but the reactionary, scrupulous, intolerant Luther."\textsuperscript{87} Schaff saw the two dimensions in Luther which still puzzle people today. Modern theologian Eric Gritsch concentrates on the radical reformer aspect: "Luther said the most radical things to his church, including, 'You are free.'"\textsuperscript{88} For in rebelling against the theology of the late medieval Christian church, Luther offered freedom from Rome, the Pope, the Pope's ecclesiastical representatives, the law of the Old Testament, and the bureaucracy and encumbrances of a hierarchal church. It is not in the scope of this paper to plumb the theological depths of Lutheranism, but Luther's beliefs and attitudes towards the pastorate, and the interpretations of other Lutheran scholars, is relevant to the women's


\textsuperscript{88}Eric W. Gritsch, interview with author, 30 October 1998, Norfolk, VA. All future references to Gritsch interview are based on this one.
ordination issue. In the late 1960s Lutherans who were studying the issue consulted the history of their Church to understand its views on the ministry. Definitions, restrictions, qualifications, and Luther's views on women were held up as a prism of guiding light, but who held the prism, how it was turned, and which facets were exposed altered the refracted light that was shone on women's ordination.

Let us consider what Luther saw as the purpose of the ministry: "Mostly the functions of a priest are these: to teach, to preach and proclaim the Word of God, to baptize, to consecrate or administer the Eucharist, to bind and to loose sins, to pray for others, to sacrifice, and to judge of all doctrine and spirits.... But the first and foremost of all on which everything depends is the teaching of the Word of God." 89 Theologian Eric Gritsch summarizes the traditional functions of the ministry as "preaching, baptism, Lord's Supper, absolution, worship, intercession, and teaching." 90 But who should fulfill these duties?

For Luther, the answer did not lie within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church; rather, "[I]t should be the custom of every town to choose from among the congregation a learned and pious citizen, entrust him with the office of the ministry, and support him at the expense of the congregation." 91 The ministry as described by Luther and the confessions is not concerned with status, governmental structure, or ecclesiastical power;


90 Eric W. Gritsch, "The Ministry in Luther's Theological Perspective," in Encounters with Luther vol.1, ed Eric W. Gritsch (Gettysburg: Luther Theological Seminary, 1980), 187.

it focuses on the primacy of God’s word. And proclaiming that Word involves service, not power. Luther continually stressed the servant nature of the office, in contrast to Catholicism which delineated between the passive laity and the priests who had special powers to offer salvation through mediation with God. As Gritsch explains in an essay on Luther and the ministry: “[T]he priest presents God on earth as the exponent of a hierarchal structure -- the church -- outside of which there is no salvation.”92 The laity is therefore dependent on the clergy to receive God’s grace. Luther’s radical departure was in teaching that preaching the Word did not convey spiritual superiority or holiness. Indeed, Luther finds Scriptural authority to open the priestly functions to more than a select few, potentially to women. He is harsh in his condemnation of the domination by the Catholic hierarchy: “It is obvious that these pseudo-ordainers -- the bishops -- blaspheme and err in holding that their anointing and ordinations are so necessary that without them no one can be a priest....”93 He calls the priests of his day “the shorn masqueraders” who declare themselves uniquely capable of performing church functions.94 In criticizing the Catholic idea of episcopal succession, Luther states: “Those who oppose this [the priesthood of all believers] have no foundation on which to stand except the fathers, the councils, tradition, and that strongest article of their faith, namely, ‘we are many and thus we hold: therefore it is true.’”95 Four hundred years later, those in


93Luther, “Concerning the Ministry,” 19.

94Ibid., 23.

95Ibid., 24.
favor of women's ordination could say much the same when they observed a Missouri Synod national convention with only male voting members.

Lutheran ministry is thus defined not in terms of offices and office holders, but by its actual work. This view is supported by the spare definition of the ministry found in Article V of the Book of Concord, which does not speak of status, personnel, or procedures, but only of the activity of God in the Word. Luther scholar Robert Jensen explains: “[M]edieval thinking said that God created an organization, the church; the Lutheran Reformation said that God gathers people and that this gathering, the church, creates an organization to carry out its mission.”96 In 1969 representatives of the main national Lutheran bodies met at Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque at the request of the Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council in the USA (LCUSA), to discuss women's ordination and to seek consensus among the LCMS, ALC, and LCA. One section in the records of this meeting, "General Discussion Points," points out the irony for Lutherans in searching Lutheran doctrine for guidance: “Lutherans insist that there is no revealed order of ministry or church government, yet seem to affirm that there is one when it comes to the sex of the pastor.”97

In addition to breaking with the hierarchal episcopate of the Catholic Church, what characterizes the Lutheran pastorate is the duality of common and special


97 “Statement of Findings Related to the Requested Study on the Subject of the Ordination of Women,” Subcommittee on Ordination of Women, Division of Theological Studies, Lutheran Council in the USA, 17-18 January 1969 (internal document in private papers of Jean Bozeman), 84.
priesthood. In “The Address to the Christian Nobility” in 1520, Luther made plain his belief in the priesthood of all believers: “Whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already consecrated priest, bishop, pope,” and cited I Peter 2:9: “You are all a royal priesthood,” and I Corinthians: “Each one of you has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.” But Luther also believed in a special priesthood. Common priests may minister in private; special priests are office holding Christians who minister in public by preaching and teaching the Word and administering the two sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. He considered the special priests to be those “whom God has enlightened with reason and endowed with the gifts to serve.”

Luther also distinguished between emergencies, when all have equal authority to be public ministers, and more normal times, and he believed some were more suited to be public ministers than others. Advocates for women’s ordination placed heavy emphasis on Luther’s belief in the priesthood of all believers, but those opposed did not see an opening for women in this structure. Rather, they continued to see a closed door guarded by the orders of creation.

In the early years of the Reformation, Luther was not concerned with the need for a public rite of ordination that would follow a call of a person to be a public minister. A

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98Luther, “To the Christian Nobility,” 129.

99Luther reduced the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church to two, rejecting confirmation, marriage, holy orders, extreme unction, and penance as sacraments.


101Luther, “To the Christian Nobility,” 129.
partial explanation of this attitude was his scorn for the elaborate trappings of the Catholic Church:

Christ has been made the first priest of the New Testament without shaving, without anointing, and so without any of their “character” or all the masquerade of episcopal ordination. He made all of his apostles and his disciples priests, but through no such masks. So this mask of ordination is unnecessary.102

Furthermore, most of the early pastors were former priests, and as Luther hoped the Bishops would adopt the Protestant positions, a second ordination would be unnecessary. But as the gulf widened between the Catholic Church and the reformers, the need for a rite did arise. The first ordination was in Wittenberg in 1525, but it was not until 1535 that Luther set out a definite order for the examination, calling, and ordination of candidates. Some scholars see the turmoil in the German states after 1525, the threat of disorder and even revolutions, causing him to solidify his original, more loosely defined concept of ministry.103 The rite of ordination Luther composed was entirely new and had only the name in common with ordination in the Roman Church. Not until 1552, after Luther’s death, did his friend Philipp Melanchthon give a fixed form to the rite of ordination.

All the committees and subcommittees of the national Lutheran bodies formed in the 1960s to probe the women’s ordination issue looked to Luther and the confessions for guidance. But the way was not clearly marked. Luther’s vast writings on the pastorate speak more to defining the position than to a discussion of the gender issue. This reflected Luther’s attitude toward women in general; the radical reformer was also very

102Luther, “Concerning the Ministry,” 20.

comfortable with the status quo of the sixteenth century. As Lutheran theologian John Reumann recalled the study papers done on women’s ordination in 1969 by members of the subcommittee for LCUSA, he noted that Stephen Mazak, who wrote the section on “What in the Confessions Speaks to Ordination,” had very little material with which to work: “[He barely] got one page worth, and that takes a little bit of stretching. It wasn’t an issue in the sixteenth century.”

Lutheran theologian Eric Gritsch notes: “Luther did not develop a theological argument against women’s ordination.” But Lutheran scholar Peter Brunner, in a book that the LCMS distributed widely in 1971, stated: “Luther had a very unequivocal answer to the question whether or not women should be called to the pastoral office. And his answer was ‘no.’” Although these two positions may seem polar opposites, in fact it is possible for Lutherans to hold them simultaneously in cognitive dissonance.

The position that Luther did not argue against women’s ordination gains strength from Luther himself having paved the way for women’s ordination, at best unintentionally, when he initiated the Reformation. Luther taught that the mass is not a sacrifice performed by a male representing Christ, but that the only true priest is the resurrected Christ. For Luther, baptism initiates all into a common priesthood, and the Word of God has the power, not the speaker. Luther even said: “If no man is able, let a woman preach and administer sacraments.” But then he added: “The Spirit will surely

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105 Gritsch, author interview.

106 Brunner, 10.
see to it that capable men are found.” Luther wanted women to share in the Gospel’s promise and saw them as an important part of God’s plan. Historian Ann Douglas, in *The Feminization of American Culture*, points out that in many ways the Reformation freed women by revising marriage laws, advocating education for all, and providing access to scriptures written in the vernacular. Luther also elevated the status of women by stressing the significance of domestic labor, by championing love and respect within marriage, and by encouraging men to help with child rearing. Eric Gritsch notes that a married pastorate was a radical departure from the past, and he stresses the respect Luther accorded his wife Katherine von Bora, affectionately calling her “my dear sir Katy.” She was the financial manager of the family, and Luther made her the executor of his will, a practice that was illegal at that time.

Yet it strains credulity that Luther would have advocated ordination for both men and women. He relied more on the second chapter of Genesis than the first, and thus saw woman as created second and the one who brought sin into the world. Luther

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108 Douglas, 304.

109 Martin Luther, “The Estate of Marriage,” *LW 45*, ed. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 40. In this work Luther says that God and his angels smile when they see fathers changing diapers and those who sneer at fathers who help with the children are in fact ridiculing God.

110 Gritsch, author interview.

compared woman to the moon, who though beautiful and full of glory, was secondary to the sun.\textsuperscript{112} He also stated: "[A] wife ought to be obedient to her husband as her lord, be subject to him, yield to him, keep silent and agree with him as long as it is not contrary to God."\textsuperscript{113} Luther believed that a religious vocation for women was not necessary because the home was their vocation. In other words, Luther raised women up to keep them in their place. By shutting the convent doors, Luther freed them in a secular way but closed any official role for them in the institution of the church. The only new role for women possible was as a pastor’s wife, with his own wife Katherine as an exemplar.

Thus when one looks to Luther’s writings, there is little doubt that he did not foresee women preaching from the pulpits in Wittenberg or Eisenach. In his exposition of Ecclesiastes 7:26, Luther wrote:

For she was created to be around the man, to care for children, and to bring them up in an honest and godly way, to be subject to the man. Men, on the other hand, are commanded to govern and have the rule over women and the rest of the household. But if a woman forsakes her office and assumes authority over her husband, she is no longer doing her own work for which she was created, but a work that comes from her own faith and from evil. For God did not create this sex for ruling, and therefore they never rule successfully.

He continues with the comparison to Samson and Delilah, the strong man brought down by the temptress: “If men give in to such women, everything goes wrong.”\textsuperscript{114} The clarity

\textsuperscript{112}Martin Luther, “Genesis Chapter One,”\textit{ LW 1}, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 69.


of Luther’s feelings on this issue is revealed when he compares women to children and fools:

It is, however, true that the Holy Spirit has excepted women, children, and incompetent people from this function, but chooses (except in emergencies) only competent males to fill this office, as one reads here and there in the epistles of St. Paul that a bishop must be pious, able to teach, and the husband of one wife. And in I Corinthians 14:34 he says, “The women should keep silence in the churches.” In summary, it must be competent and chosen men. Children, women, and other persons are not qualified for this office, even though they are able to hear God’s word, to receive baptism, the sacraments, absolution, and are also true, holy Christians...Even nature and God’s creation makes this distinction, implying that women (much less children or fools) cannot and shall not occupy positions of sovereignty, as experience also suggests and as Moses says in Genesis 3:16, “You shall be subject to man.” The gospel, however, does not abrogate this natural law, but confirms it as the ordinance and creation of God.115

The above statement supports the Missouri Synod’s position that since a woman pastor would be in a position of authority over men in the congregation, it would violate Lutheran theology.

Two other theological issues surround women’s ordination, wrapping it in a package that was waiting to be opened in the 1960s. The adiaphorous principle and the order of creation and subordination added complexity to the question. The ALC, LCA, and LCMS theologians had to search for their answer by unravelling these surrounding issues. Some reached one conclusion; others pursued different strands of argument and reached a very different conclusion.

The adiaphoristic principle asserts that some elements in a religious faith are essential and some are non-essential. Any discussion of joining in fellowship with another church body must focus on and reach agreement on those essential matters, but

the non-essential matters should not hinder any proposed unity. To say that something is adiaphoristic does not mean that it is unimportant, just non-essential. Matters such as whether a woman’s head must be covered, whether a worship service should occur during the day or night, or whether an organ or a piano should be used in church are examples of what Lutherans agree are adiaphoristic matters. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession makes this point clearly: “For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian Church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian Church that ceremonies instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.” In other words, liturgy, polity, specific programs, and structure are adiaphorous. Lutheran theologian Leigh Jordahl has stated: “Lutheranism is radically pragmatic. It adopts anything which works in order that the Gospel can be proclaimed with freedom….Now what is good form in one place may be terrible in another place, and what was good twenty years ago may be bad today.”

Until the 1960s, American Lutherans, as Stephen Mazak noted in his 1969 LCUSA report, almost unanimously opposed the ordination of women and did not consider it adiaphoristic. The historic 1970 vote was a seismic shift in theological perspective when the ALC and LCA decided that the issue of women’s ordination fell under the adiaphoristic principle, and thus ordaining women did not violate any core Lutheran doctrine. The LCMS, however, continued to view the ordination issue as essential

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116 Tappert, 32.

117 Jordahl, 88.

118 “Statement of Findings,” 49.
because it is tied to the orders of creation and subordination, and therefore a female pastor is a contradiction in terms.\textsuperscript{119}

The LCMS position against ordaining women was based (as it still is today) on three scriptural passages. First is the creation story in Genesis, with an emphasis on the second chapter. This version states the “orders of creation” in which man was created first and given dominion over all. The second scriptural reference is I Corinthians 14:34-35 adjuring women to keep silent in the church, and the third is I Timothy 2:11-15 preventing women from having authority over men.\textsuperscript{120}

For the LCMS, these Biblical texts spoke clearly and emphatically to deny ordination to women. The summary of the 20-22 September 1969 LCUSA subcommittee report noted that the problems that surfaced “again and again” were orders of creation, subordination of women, and more particularly what it means to “rule.”\textsuperscript{121} John Reumann, chair of the 1968-69 joint Lutheran subcommittee for LCUSA and an author of part of the report, recalled years later: “And the real opposition came, voiced by Professor Scharlemann [the LCMS representative], on the basis of the so-called ‘orders of

\textsuperscript{119}The LCMS does not hold with the iconic belief of the Roman Catholic Church that denies ordination to women because Christ was a male and all the disciples were male, and thus a woman because of her sex cannot become a priest.

\textsuperscript{120}“The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” I Corinthians 14:34-35; “Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.” I Timothy 2:11-15.

\textsuperscript{121}“Statement of Findings,” 82.
creation,' and as we all know in subsequent Missouri debate, it's been the so-called
*Schopfungsordnung* [creation order], which has played the decisive role in rejecting the
ordination of women, rather than the exegesis of any part of the New Testament.\(^{122}\)

The crucial orders of creation/subordination is linked to belief in the literal
inerrancy of the Bible. Mary Todd, in her doctoral dissertation on the LCMS and women,
provides a clear definition of the key terms: "Verbal inerrancy implies an errorless
scripture that is entirely trustworthy in *all* matters, whereas the notion of infallibility
implies an errorlessness in matters of faith and salvation."\(^{123}\) In his 1994 introduction of
the LCMS for its official web site, Samuel Nafziger emphasized that since the early
1970s and the division in the Missouri Church, the LCMS has had a united front: "The
LCMS has reclaimed its historic confessional stance on the doctrine of the authority of
Holy Scripture as the inspired and inerrant Word of God."\(^{124}\) Not taking the Bible
literally in the areas of orders of creation and subordination is to start down a slippery
slope; if one area is denied and deemed irrelevant, what will fall next? Michael Koch,
formerly a LCMS pastor and now a pastor in the ELCA, acknowledges that to the LCMS
the literal interpretation of scripture is paramount, yet it is a selective literalism: "The
Missouri Synod is looking for hard and fast answers in absolute terms. The tradition of
the Lutheran catechism with its question and answer format is a good teaching tool, but it

\(^{122}\)John Reumann (ELCA Oral History Collection), 47.

\(^{123}\)Todd, 2.

\(^{124}\)Nafzger, "The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod."
also can lead to rigidity." Those who disagree with the LCMS position on the inerrancy of scripture question whether when a practice is prohibited, it is because the Bible says so or because the Synod says the Bible says so. Whichever is the answer, Missouri’s beliefs and attitudes toward women always return to verbal inerrancy of scripture. The ALC and LCA position was that of the current ELCA: “The Old and New Testaments are the inspired word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life (ELCA Statement of Faith).”

In a study done in the early 1980s on Christians and their beliefs, researchers found that Biblical literalism, and the associated tendency to choose Biblical accounts over scientific accounts of creation, was the strongest predictor of conservative attitudes of all type – social, political, and economic. And Mark Chaves, in his recent analysis of the ordination of women, finds that among Biblically inerrant sacramental denominations, only 28 percent have ordained women since the 1850s, compared to 55 percent of those who do not hold the Bible to be inerrant.

The theological cord of the immutable order of creation and certain Pauline texts stretches from the sixteenth century to the present. An 1898 article in the Lutheran Witness, the official LCMS periodical, explained women’s proper role: “The modern woman, who proposes to serve where her service is neither required nor desired, and

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125 Michael Koch, telephone interview with author, 20 October 1996. All future reference to Michael Koch are from this interview.


128 Chaves, Ordination of Women, 85.
refuses to serve where her service is most loudly called for, is walking a hard road...”

As the article continues to frame the argument against women having authority over men, it makes clear that the issue is not woman’s lack of ability:

She may have received a finer education than her husband, she may surpass him in intelligence, in resoluteness, in all the virtues of Scripture, still she is obligated to subjection. Just as little as the clever clerk may claim authority over the obtuse proprietor, just as little as the skilled mechanic may displace the ignorant employer, or the powerful chancellor the feeble monarch, on the ground of their superior qualities, just as little may the wife, even supposing her to exceed the husband in every imaginable quality, deny him obedience on that account.

And the argument continues from the wife-husband relationship to any position of woman in society. “As the woman shall not usurp authority over man at home, so she shall not be entrusted with the rule in the congregation.” The reason for this? “There is... a line drawn not by man’s hand, but by God’s over which woman may not step without upsetting the order of God.”

In 1915, the poem “Women’s Rights” appeared in the *Lutheran Witness*. It listed the rights to work, serve, suffer, “brighten earthly homes,” and concludes: “Thy silent influence none can tell/If these are thine, why ask for more?/Thou has enough to answer for.” In 1959 and again in 1971, Concordia Publishing House issued a book by German theologian Peter Brunner that reiterated the LCMS position. Brunner states: “An argument that believes it can derive a case for the ordination of women from the changed

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129 “Scripture on the Women Question,” editorial, *Lutheran Witness*, 7 February 1898, 133. The numerous primary source articles from the *Lutheran Witness* are listed in the Works Cited section by date only, with the full citation given in the footnotes.

130 Ibid., 132.

131 Ibid.

position of women in modern society has no validity in the church.”\textsuperscript{133} In 1962, a summary of the LCMS position on the role of women in the church stated: “Blessed is every Lutheran woman who rejoices in her fortunate position in the Order of Redemption and gratefully serves her Savior with enthusiasm and zeal under the limitations placed upon her by the Order of Creation and delineated for all times in the Scriptures.”\textsuperscript{134} This one sentence incorporates all the LCMS arguments against ordaining women: Woman is blessed by God because she has been saved by grace and knows her place; she is to serve the Lord in gender-restricted ways, but with a smile; moreover, she is fortunate to have these opportunities given her secondary status in creation from which there is no redemption, no opportunity to rise.

In contrast to these arguments, in the late 1960s, the ALC and LCA laid out their positions on the ordination of women and a Biblical justification in numerous documents, articles, and books. The following is a brief summary. The ALC and LCA stress the version of creation in the first chapter of Genesis in which God created both male and female in God’s image. Moreover, with the coming of Christ, the orders of creation -- if they existed -- were replaced by the order of redemption. Further, since a pastor serves, rather than rules, authority is not the issue. Paul’s admonition against women in the church was addressed to a particular church in Corinth riven by chaos and immorality and to establish order, he returned to the customs of the Jewish synagogues. And the Timothy passage arose when Gnosticism and other sects were threatening the reputation of the church. Those in favor of ordaining women stress Galations 3:27-28, with its

\textsuperscript{133}Brunner, 32.

\textsuperscript{134}“Woman Suffrage in the Church,” Lutheran Witness, 20 March 1962, 7.
equality under the new order: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put
on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither
male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Other arguments remind us that in
the New Testament women such as Lydia and Priscilla were preaching and prophesizing,
and that women were the first to see and proclaim the risen Lord. Also, since the
ecclesiastical hierarchy arose in the medieval church, it is not a biblical or Lutheran
tradition. The conclusion is that the role of the church leader depends not on gender, but
on need, ability, and social custom. One must decide which scriptural instructions apply
to the time written and which apply to all time, when it is necessary to see the Bible in its
entirety rather than in bits and pieces.135

These opposing positions were evident in the early 1970s. President Kent
Knutson of the ALC asked the ALC seminary faculties to debate, discuss, and announce
their answers to two key questions: “Do you find that the Scriptures forbid the ordination
of service of women in the ministry?” and “Do you find in the Scriptures orders of
creation which enunciate a principle of women being subordinate to men?” The
Wartburg faculty’s response was similar to the other ALC/LCA seminaries’: “Our answer
to both questions is a unanimous ‘No!’”136 In contrast, in a 1970 Newsweek interview, the
Reverend Herman Otto, a leader in the LCMS, stated: “A Missouri Synod Lutheran who

135 Reumann, Ministries Examined. Also Ermarth, Adam’s Fractured Rib; Tiemeyer, The Ordination of Women; and Stendahl, The Bible and the Role of Women.

refuses to accept Holy Scriptures as the absolute, immutable truth in every respect is a contradiction in terms.”

Thus, the LCMS sifted the Scriptures and Lutheran theology and concluded that the traditional roles for women should prevail in the church, while the ALC and LCA determined that since there was no conclusive biblical and theological evidence for or against the ordination of women, ordaining is permissible among the Lutheran national bodies. But given the internal forces at work within all three national Lutheran church bodies, the decision by the ALC and LCA to ordain women was momentous. Timothy Lull, President of Pacific Lutheran Seminary in Berkeley, in describing the Lutheran church of a hundred years ago stated: “Perhaps no development would surprise our forebears more than the ordination of women in 1970.” The roles played by the immigrant character of American Lutheranism and Lutheran theology offer insight into why the vote for women’s ordination divided along the lines that it did. But there was one more internal force at work in 1970 -- the various roles throughout the decades that women in the ALC, LCA, and LCMS had been allowed to play or had crafted for themselves.

THE HISTORICAL ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

The unique aspect of the clergy is that people enter this career because they feel called to it by God. The question arises, therefore, did God not call Lutheran women

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137 "Hunting Lutheran Heretics,” Newsweek, 3 August 1970, 47.


until 1970 and then only call the ALC and LCA women? The answer is that women felt called before this time, but expressed their religious calling in other ways. Usually women found their work within the church in the stereotypical nurturing and care-giver roles or in the domestic duties of cooking and cleaning rather than in the ecclesiastical or administrative hierarchy. Centuries of tradition, supported by the theology of the orders of creation, the Pauline texts, and the belief in the different gender spheres, confined women to the areas of *kirche, kinder, kuche* (church, children, kitchen). And, as evidenced by the almost total lack of recognition of women’s work in official Lutheran histories prior to 1970, their traditional work was often undervalued or completely invisible.\(^{140}\)

The following report from the 1929 national conference of the LCMS illustrates the background role to which most women were limited:

The status of women in the Church was not even discussed at the meeting of Synod. Our host, as a matter of course, did not have a woman raise her voice to make an announcement at the table. A man with a stentorian voice did that. Nor did a woman preach the opening sermon. And yet the ladies were there; they visited the sessions and conducted themselves in an exemplary manner. They sang in the services and at the concert of the Bach chorus. They prepared and served the meals. Some took dictation and prepared manuscripts. In their homes many entertained their friends and their husbands’s friends. In short, without one word of altercation, they just naturally and gracefully took their part....At the convention in River Forest, the men raised their voice in denouncing error and in defending the Truth. And the women saw that the men were made comfortable, both before and after the fray.\(^{141}\)

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\(^{140}\)The current ELCA web site at [http://www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org) features a historical time line that contains more information on the deaconess program and Lutheran women leaders than appears in any of the church histories available around 1970.

It did not seem proper or even “natural” for women to venture too far from the hearth. But as nineteenth-century philosopher John Stuart Mill noted in *The Subjection of Women*: “The unnatural generally means only uncustonary, and everything which is usual appears natural. The subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural...Was there ever any domination which did not appear natural to those who possessed it?”

Mill could have made these most apt remarks after observing the LCMS gathering noted above. Yet if women were not physically present at that assembly and many similar ones, they nevertheless were present in numbers which far exceeded the men in their congregations. The history of women in the ALC and LCA congregations and in the LCMS have some similarities but also many contrasts. As members of missionary societies, teachers, deaconesses, and pastors’ wives, women strengthened their churches, forged new identities, wielded power to various degrees, and directly or indirectly influenced the eventual ordination of women in 1970.

The early women’s groups organized first to meet the needs of the struggling immigrants and their own newly formed congregations. When these needs were met or were not as dire by the end of the 1800s, the women launched national and international programs. An early Lutheran women’s society was formed in Charleston in 1825; in 1837 the wives of pastors in the Hartwick Synod in New York formed a women’s organization, and more women’s organizations followed the immigrant churches

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143 Deane L. Lagerquist, *From Our Mother’s Arms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 41.
Conrad Bergendoff (1895-1997), president of Augustana College for almost thirty years and one of the major Lutheran scholars of the twentieth century, stressed the importance of the women’s organizations: “You had women’s organizations before you had a congregation. Many congregations were formed on the basis of a women’s group that had gotten together. And people did come together where they farmed, and many times the products were sold at bazaars for the benefit of the church treasury. The women saved many an infant church, and they were a center for the life of the community.”

In general, the churches that formed the ALC and LCA had a much longer tradition of active participation by women in the life of the congregations as well as women’s organizations that were more independent of male control and more financially independent. Although women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries could not vote in church meetings, the money they raised spoke for them; whereas a congregation’s main expenses were met by general contributions, special gifts often came from the women. In 1857 the Lutheran women in Decorah, Iowa, helped the young Luther College financially, and in 1865 the women of First Lutheran in Rockford, Illinois, raised money for a new building. In 1875 the First Augustana Church in Minneapolis passed a motion that “They [the women] may elect their own treasurer and have charge of their funds, using them to the best advantage.” Some women’s groups in South Dakota and


145Bergendoff (ELCA Oral History Collection), 39.

Minnesota even loaned money to farmers.\textsuperscript{147} Lutheran women united for companionship, but also to accomplish specific goals, often acquiring and managing financial resources so that the Church could grow.

One of the most outstanding American Lutheran women was Emmy Evald. Educated in Chicago, Sweden, and at Rockford College, she was the daughter of a pioneer Lutheran pastor, and wife of the pastor of the most influential Lutheran church in Chicago. Evald was also a leader in the women's suffrage movement, helped to found Augustana Hospital in Chicago, and founded the Women's Missionary Society (WMS) in 1892. The WMS grew so large that one year its income exceeded that of the entire Augustana Synod, and it had hundreds of thousands of dollars invested in securities and property. As Conrad Bergendoff noted: "[The WMS] was unique in American Lutheranism because of what they did." He also recognized that Evald's forceful presence was not often popular with pastors.\textsuperscript{148} When she died in 1946, Bergendoff paid tribute to Evald as "a militant leader in the movement for women's rights, world traveler, soul-stirring speaker, missionary crusader, founder of the Missionary Society of the Augustana Synod and for forty-three years its dynamic president, [she] was a maker of history."\textsuperscript{149}

Women, money, and the power that accompanies money, were often contentious issues. In 1907, the Augustana Women's Missionary Society raised $12,000 for a new hospital in India, but before donating the money, the WMS noted that no woman sat on

\textsuperscript{147}Lagerquist, 35.

\textsuperscript{148}Bergendoff (ELCA Oral History Collection), 48.

\textsuperscript{149}Conrad Bergendoff quoted in Fjellman, 212.
any missionary board and made known its “desire that the future management of the hospital be wholly under the control of the WMS.”\textsuperscript{150} The Augustana Synod acquiesced, and the WMS became a power outside the official church structure. However, the organization did not always prevail in its battles with the male power structure. In 1927 the WMS raised $121,000 for a new women’s dormitory at Augustana College. The site on which it wanted to build was opposed by the men because it ruined their view, and they wanted the dorm built in a lower, marshy area. When the women chose a site which would have required the women to climb many steps up a hill, the men objected again, arguing that such strenuous climbing would be harmful during the women’s “monthlies.” The women continued their objections to being put in inferior locations, but they ultimately lost.\textsuperscript{151}

Although Lutheran women were not usually political and social activists, those who belonged to the pre-ALC and LCA congregations tended to be more active both in the church and in the community. In \textit{Twenty Years at Hull House}, Jane Addams described her work to secure the municipal franchise for women in Chicago, and as chair of a federation of a hundred women’s organizations, she noted: “We were joined by a church society of hundreds of Lutheran women, because Scandinavian women had exercised the municipal franchise since the seventeenth century and had found American


\textsuperscript{151}Ibid., 115.
cities strangely conservative."[152] Conrad Bergendoff similarly noted that women were on the faculty at Augustana College in the 1880s; that women began voting in local congregations in 1907; and that women were delegates to the national convention in 1930. "The women had a place in Augustana that I don’t know if any other Lutheran body had anything similar."[153]

The women’s missionary societies fostered women’s policy making, budgeting, fund raising, writing, and speaking skills, while supporting missionaries abroad. Nevertheless, the churches that later became the LCA and ALC, while more open to women’s participation, were also tied to a patriarchal system and to traditional gender roles. For example, some men questioned the need for women’s groups in the Skaninaven, a publication of the Norway Evangelical Church in the 1890s. In a long questionnaire that asked why there should be women’s organizations, one question asked: "Are there no socks to mend?"[154] And not all non-Missouri Lutheran women were raising their voices for equal rights. A 1911 article in Mission Tidings, the magazine of the Augustana Women’s Missionary Society, states: “[the missionary society] is to be no uprising of suffragettes.”[155] Moreover, although women had the opportunity to serve on church councils and vote in pre-ALC/LCA congregations for decades before the right was offered to women of the LCMS, the involvement of women varied with each


congregation. Edna Crute, a long time member of First Lutheran Church in Norfolk, Virginia, recalls that she was the first woman Sunday School Superintendent in 1960 (the majority of the teachers were women, but the superintendency had traditionally been reserved for a man). As superintendent, Crute automatically became a member of the governing church council, the first woman so to serve. She recalls always being put last on the agenda, and when she began to speak, the men started picking up their papers and acting as if the meeting were already over. Crute had to argue vigorously for additional resources for children’s Sunday School material which, she believed, the men did not deem as important as other expenditures and which were just “woman matters.”

The ALC and LCA women’s organizations did, however, begin in the late 1950s to study women’s ordination and to report to the national convention in favor of the change. In the 1960s they also provided national leaders, such as Margaret Wold, Evelyn Streng, Constance Parvey, Margaret Ermarth, Doris Spong, LaVonne Althouse, Mildred LeRud, and Arna Njaa, who advocated women’s ordination. In 1960 Burnice Fjellman, in her Augustana centennial essay, recognized the poor record of the church in using women’s talents, and urged the church to study the issue: “There has been a great reluctance to admit that women have the ability or the right to be theologians...it is inevitable that it [women’s ordination] must be discussed, if we accept as true the equality of men and women before God.” These women leaders wrote, spoke publicly, worked with and influenced men in positions of authority. In March 1970, the Board of Directors of the Lutheran Church Women voted to express “approval and appreciation”

156 Edna Crute, interview with author, 28 July 2000, Norfolk, VA.

for the proposition that would come before the 1970 convention, and asked the church to adopt it and to implement it "creatively and vigorously."¹⁵⁸ John Reumann, in his work on the ministry of the church, credits the in-depth study by the LCW for increasing the pressure for women’s ordination.¹⁵⁹

The path to women’s ordination in 1970, although encountering rough spots along the way, was thus made smoother by decades of women’s involvement in the ALC/LCA churches. While there were no women pastors, the churches that eventually merged to form the ALC and LCA had opened positions to women on synod staffs for decades, although these positions tended to be in the traditional areas of women, children, and students. Mary Markley held a United Synod staff position as early as 1919; Mildred Winston, who from the 1940s was a leader in women’s concerns, was Director of the LCA Education Fund; and Cordelia Cox, the first woman to head a major national Lutheran agency, directed World War II refugee resettlement as Director of Lutheran Immigration from 1948-1957.¹⁶⁰ Compared to the traditional gender roles for women in the LCMS, the ALC and LCA had been moving towards women’s ordination with deliberate speed.

The Missouri Synod approached 1970 with a history of almost total denial of the possibility of women holding positions that took them very far from hearth and home or would put them in a position of authority over a man. Indeed, until the first decades of the twentieth century, there was practically no official lay activity, with the exception of


¹⁵⁹Reumann, 121.

the voters' assembly, for either men or women. This situation is in marked contrast to the majority of American Protestant denominations. Carol Coburn, in her excellent study of a German Lutheran community in Kansas from 1868 to 1945, believes that one reason for this lag in lay activity was the high esteem in which the pastor was held by the congregation. Hardly anyone in the mostly rural churches had achieved the education level of the pastor, who was proficient in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, German, logic, history, and math. Furthermore, Lutheran theology worked against such organizations because sacramental duties of the clergy separated them from the laity, and the repudiation of good works as a means of salvation seemed to erect a barrier to benevolence groups. Moreover, volunteerism and secular group formation seemed too American, while the kinship ties of the community were strong enough to take care of those in need.\textsuperscript{161}

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, informal groups, such as the Ladies’ Aid, sewing circles, and mission groups, did form. The Frauenvereine (Ladies Aid Clubs) were more often found in urban congregations, as in St Louis where they sewed, washed, and ironed for the seminary students. But church leaders cautioned against them because pastors were too overburdened to supervise them; autonomy was never mentioned. Furthermore, the women were to put their husbands and children first and foremost.\textsuperscript{162} As the leader of the Missouri Synod in the early decades of the twentieth century

\textsuperscript{161} Coburn, 38.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 49.
century, Francis Pieper, stated: “Woman ought not to be dragged from her place of honor into public life.”

Eventually in 1917 the Lutheran Laymen’s League was formed, but still no official women’s organizations were sanctioned by the Missouri Synod. In 1929 a National Lutheran Ladies Aid was formed, an auxiliary of the Lutheran Laymen’s League. In 1930, as a Synod women’s organization was being discussed for the first time, Paul E. Kretzmann, a leader in the Missouri Synod, wrote the following about women’s organizations:

And as for women’s organizations, the whole tenor of Scripture, as set forth above, indicates that they are not to take the public initiative or leadership in the work of the congregation or the Church at large. Large organizations or federations of women’s clubs within the Church are in danger of becoming busybodies in other men’s matters since their enthusiasm for the cause in which they believe is apt to lead them to a propaganda that may interfere with the work of the individual congregations.

By the fall of 1930, a meeting of the district presidents in the Synod had formally opposed the formation of a Synod women’s group. There was no Emmy Evald in St. Louis.

In 1938, some Missouri women tried again for a national federation and made a direct appeal to the Synod convention. The convention responded by appointing a committee of five men to study the issue. Finally the 1941 convention voted to sanction a woman’s organization, but under the Synod’s control. The discussion in 1942 was whether the new organization should include the word missionary in its title or be more

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general, and whether it could have its own treasurer or must use the Synod office. In
1942 the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League was formed, with its own treasurer.
Alan Graebner, a historian of the Missouri Synod, believes that by keeping the focus of
the organization on missions, the Synod prevented women from becoming involved in the
polity of their congregations or the Synod. Throughout the 1930s, the women’s groups
were characterized by a high degree of clergy control and were devoted almost
exclusively to missions. Graebner notes that the nearly universal feature of the Mission
Society was collecting small sums saved from household budgets and “study sessions so
endless as to be mindless.”

An interesting book on the LCMS Missionary League is churchwoman Ruth
Meyer’s *Women on a Mission*. Written in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of
the League, it reveals not only the League’s history but also the time in which it was
written, 1967. Some of her statements seem ironic in light of the nearly static position
of women in the LCMS. She states, for example, that the formation of the organization
“was the result of the changing role of women in society through centuries. This brought
about a renewal by the church [in 1942] of the practical application of its doctrine to the
role of women in the church.” When she looked ahead to the future, Meyer straddled
the issue that was then looming in the Missouri Synod, suffrage for women: “Woman’s
role in the future, as in the past, will be determined both by the society in which she lives
and by its reflection on the practice of the church.”

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165 Graebner, 139-140.


167 Ibid., 19.
Witness article acknowledged that the formation of the League was not effortless, but it had succeeded "after 27 years of struggle to become an established and accepted arm of the Missouri Synod."168

By the late 1960s, the League had grown to almost 200,000 members, but structure and staff were small. Graebner points out in his study of the organization that it never really tackled difficult or controversial subjects and did not act as a women’s advocate in the church. Issues such as contraception, divorce, or feminism did not touch their “studies,” as they focused on mission topics in India and Africa. The ALC women’s convention in 1969 heard presentations on war, racism, and poverty at home, while the main report of the LWML was on the choice of the eight foreign mission projects named as grant recipients.169 Moreover, women were not appointed to task forces or commissions, even on women’s issues, until the 1970s and then with limited assignments. As Mary Todd notes in her study of power in the Missouri Synod: “The ‘woman question’ [on the public ministry and suffrage] was raised, studied, and answered by men.”170 And there was no official statement from the Women’s Missionary League comparable to the 1970 Lutheran Church Women’s statement urging the LCA and ALC assemblies to implement the ordination of women.

If women in the LCMS were not to be leaders in their congregations or involved in organizations beyond their congregations, what were their roles in society as envisioned by the Missouri Synod? First and foremost they were to be wives and


169 Graebner, 183-185.

170 Todd, 5.
mothers. In the 1930 article mentioned above, P. E. Kretzmann delineated the ideal role for women:

Her natural and chief circle of activity remained, as it had been of old, the home, and her chief function and glory was that of a wife and mother. The care of the home and the children, the guiding of the house and the keeping at home...the being in subjection to their husbands in the obedience of the Sixth Commandment...That is the very highest position to which she may aspire.\(^{171}\)

In 1962, when the LCMS discussed woman suffrage, the Lutheran Witness reminded its readers of the church’s 1956 report which stressed that the rightful place for a woman was in the home, not in voting assemblies: “The ‘prophetresses’ [those women in public ministry] have left no mark on history. But eternity alone can tell the full story...of the incalculable effects of the ‘silent listener’ – the Christian wife and mother.”\(^{172}\) Such a position repeats the importance of a woman’s subtle background influence while noting that she will receive her full reward in heaven.

In a 1969 issue of The Lutheran Witness near Mother’s Day, a full page was devoted to the ideal mother. The main article, written by Mrs. Paul Kurt, praises mothers for cooking and cleaning, and then introduces the subject of the working mother:

Our society is not quite sure it should accept the working wife and mother as the equal of that domesticated woman who cooks, bakes, scrubs, cleans, and putters around the yard. Yet there are many working wives and mothers — teachers, welfare workers, nurses, clerks, secretaries, waitresses, musicians — who do more to improve human life than the mother who is caught in the afternoon social whirl....when personal ambition is allowed to dominate her role as wife and mother, the family will suffer.\(^{173}\)

\(^{171}\)Kretzmann, “The Position of Women in the Church,” 359.


\(^{173}\)Mrs. Paul Kurt, “This is a Woman,” Lutheran Witness, May 1969, 24.
The author probably thought her position on working mothers, within specific occupations, as supportive. The working mother certainly ranks higher than the mother who is on a “social whirl,” or some non-paid activity, the League of Women Voters perhaps, that has snatched her from home. This 1969 issue also included a mother’s prayer. The prayer asks the Lord to help wives and mothers forgive “when our birthdays or anniversaries are forgotten, when remarks are made that hurt our feelings...when we forget when hunting season starts, when our husband does not want to talk to us while watching a football or baseball game, or when he drops into the easy chair when he comes home from work.” The emphasis here is on women patiently accepting their lot in life, and by all means making the men comfortable. If the wife is disappointed or slighted, the husband does not alter his behavior; rather, it is for the wife to adapt. This view of womanhood one year before the national ALC and LCA Lutheran conferences approved the ordination of women foreshadows the three national Lutheran church bodies approaching the issue very differently.

An emphasis on the domestic role for woman and warnings of the dangers when she strays too far can be found throughout Missouri writings. In 1930, Lutheran Witness contributor W. G. Polack cautioned men not to marry “a public spirited woman” for she would “lead a movement for better babies without having children of her own.” And a seminary professor admonished that a woman with both a husband and a career was

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174 Ibid.
175 W. G. Polack, quoted in Graebner, 136.
practicing "a type of twentieth century bigamy."176 These attitudes made it very difficult for an unmarried woman with a career to find a comfortable position in her congregation. In 1969 Nancy Corbett, a loyal Missouri Synod member and managing editor of a magazine for Sunday School teachers, wrote an article for the *Lutheran Witness* which articulated the lonely position of the single woman in the LCMS. She lamented that the church seemed unaware of the single woman’s existence or attached a “silent stigma” to the unmarried woman.177 Such an article in the official Missouri publication ranks right up there with Luther nailing the Ninety-five Theses to the church door. Even though Corbett is non-adversarial, by pointing out that single women do exist in congregations, that the church is ignoring them, and that there are ways to include them in congregational life, she is forcing the membership to face the reality that women other than wives and mothers are sitting in the pews. This sounds rather elementary, but as the above examples from the *Lutheran Witness* prove, it was a radical departure from the traditional help-mate wife, nurturing mother, and inspiring missionary articles that dominated the LCMS publication.

Since it is obvious that not all women do marry or have children, what was to become of these nonconformists? In 1930 P. E. Kretzmann outlined the possibilities: “And if the Lord has not given her this highest honor [being wife and mother] for which he created woman in the beginning, then He has indicated clearly where her ambition may find a legitimate outlet. It is in teaching positions in the Church where any lordship or


leadership of men is not involved.” And indeed, a religious service available to LCMS women — but not to ALC or LCA women in as significant numbers — was that of parochial school teacher, since the LCMS has long operated a system of elementary and high schools, junior colleges, and senior colleges in addition to seminaries. Therefore LCMS women did have access to a position of prestige and authority within the church that other Lutheran women did not. Nevertheless, their status was inferior to that of men teachers, and according to Kretzmann, the position was considered to be a poor substitute for motherhood.

In the early years of the Missouri Synod, all teachers were male, usually candidates for the ministry, but gradually women outnumbered the men. By the end of the nineteenth century, the increase in female teachers caused the church to examine if this was an acceptable practice. The answer was in the affirmative, provided certain restrictions were observed. The 1929 Missouri Synod Proceedings from the national convention stated that the calling of male graduates from the synodical colleges to teach in parish schools must remain the rule, and that schools should strive to replace women teachers with men as soon as local conditions permit. The 1929 position was in effect in 1970, but a resolution passed at the 1965 convention seems to say that a woman teacher has the same status as a man teacher, and while he may be preferred, she cannot be dismissed because there is now a man available, a situation which had occurred often

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in the past.\textsuperscript{180} It had been the practice of the church only to employ women in the lower grades, however, so that these teachers were not in positions of authority over older male students. Fred Kramer, a professor at Concordia Seminary from 1956 to 1976 and a member of the LCUSA committee which studied the women’s ordination issue, recalled for the ELCA Oral History Project this instructional limitation. He was a student in parochial schools in the 1920s when it was decided that women could teach men up to the age of fourteen. He was asked in 1977 if that custom continued. He replied that it had mostly broken down, but that it would still depend on the school, part of the country, and local custom.\textsuperscript{181} About the time of the women’s ordination question in the late 1960s, there were almost 4,000 women teachers and about 2,500 men teachers in the LCMS parochial schools.\textsuperscript{182} It has long been debated within the LCMS whether or not parochial teachers are part of the ministry, for if they are, then ironically, the LCMS has more “ordained” women than any church in the United States.

One form of religious service open to all Lutheran women, and an out of home employment possibility which would have been acceptable to P. E. Kretzmann, is a very ancient one — that of deaconess. In the first century the early Christian church employed the services of unmarried women to nurse the ill and render auxiliary service to the church. This program, always small, declined after the sixth century, but was revived in Germany in the 1840s and brought to the United States in the 1850s. The first

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 170.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Fred Kramer interview by John Reumann (ELCA Oral History Collection, 17 February 1977), 43.
\item \textsuperscript{182} Gude, “Women Teachers,” 163.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
American deaconess was Louisa Marthens, who for fifty years established and managed hospitals and orphanages from Philadelphia to Chicago. Both the LCMS and the other Lutheran groups had deaconess programs, although the Missouri Synod's program was not established until 1919. Founded and defined by men, the deaconesses worked mainly in nursing and teaching. The 1930s was the high point of deaconess involvement with 457 in the pre-ELCA programs. In the year 2000, there were eighty deaconesses in the ELCA, and deaconesses may now include married women. The Missouri Synod deaconess program gradually evolved into a more professional one when it became associated with Valparaiso University in 1943. By the mid 1970s, the Valparaiso program was admitting non-LCMS women to the program, but that was controversial and a strictly Missouri Synod program was established at Concordia River Forest in Illinois. The deaconess career was not adopted by many women because of the restrictions of living in a motherhouse and wearing habits, the confusion with Catholicism, and the increasing opportunities for women in higher education and careers. The deaconesses had very little impact on the issue of women's ordination. One might assume that pressure for ordination came from the bottom up, through women already working in the church, but this was not the situation; deaconesses did not as a rule advocate for the ordination of women. And in a perverse way, the program was even counterproductive

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185 Lindley, 380.
186 Reumann, 121.

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to ordination because a woman who wanted a professional position in the church could be
told by the leadership that one already existed for her as a deaconess.

The "woman problem," however, was on the Synod’s mind in the second half of
the twentieth century. Two Lutheran Witness articles, one from 1953 and one from 1963,
reveal the Synod’s observations on the changing roles for women in American society.

The 1953 article began by describing the problem:

One of the major sociological problems of our time is that of women – what are
our highly trained women going to do with their training after they have left the
normal employment market to enter marriage? Almost every day there come to
my desk college-trained women who have held responsible positions in business
before marriage, but who now find themselves restless and groping for some sense
of satisfaction to be drawn from their lives. Certainly the first responsibility of the
mother and wife is to the home but modern living trends, smaller living quarters,
and numerous labor-saving devices give the woman many unused hours.187

The author continues that the problem is exacerbated by the husband who does not know
how to handle this awkward situation because he considers it a reflection upon himself if
his wife wants to work outside the home, “and probably with good reason.” The solution?
Use this “untapped resource” of idle, bored women at church. In what positions? The
author describes five: social worker, deaconess, secretary, evangelist, and most
interestingly, janitor. Under this final category, he states: “But we can hear the cry [from
the women]: ‘But I have no training.’” This is not a problem, however, as he neatly
explains: “Certainly no woman can say she is not thoroughly trained to do light
housekeeping chores. If any of the women contracted to do this on a regular basis, the
paid janitor could do the heavy work.”188 Thus the solution for these restless college

March 1953, 6.

188Ibid.
educated wives is to have them volunteer as a janitor to continue their housecleaning skills at church.

Ten years later, as the women’s ordination issue was being raised in the ALC and LCA, a Lutheran Witness article focused on the opportunity for women in the church. Under the headline “Hands Dedicated to Christ,” are six photographs of women’s hands performing various tasks: typing, mimeographing, preparing reports, taking shorthand, playing the organ, and directing a choir. The article focuses on the traditional roles in existence for decades and omits any administrative or ecclesiastical leadership possibilities. The boundaries were very narrowly drawn when women left the home.

One other position for women in the church, an unpaid one, should also be mentioned -- the pastor’s wife. Today, one would refer to the pastor’s spouse in ELCA churches, but for the Missouri Synod and the ALC/LCA pre-1970, “wife” is the correct term. As noted above, the only position for women in the church after the Reformation was that of pastor’s wife. Katherine von Bora, Luther’s wife and a former nun, was the illustrious forerunner of this marriage-based role. Conrad Bergendoff has acknowledged that many pastors’ wives were better at fund raising and speaking than their husbands, and that they affected the church in profound ways. In 1970, with the position of women in society undergoing reappraisals, changes, and challenges, all the national Lutheran groups had something to say about this honored but often thankless role. The contrast in the manner in which they looked at the pastor’s wife is illustrative of their varying approaches to women.


190 Bergendoff (ELCA Oral History Collection), 51.
A Lutheran Witness article of that year reviews the history of Katherine von Bora and then turns to the pastor’s wife of 1970. It acknowledges the difficulties, service, and loneliness of the position and the increasing number of women employed outside the home before asking: “Must we conclude, then, that the sad words, ‘The glory hath departed,’ will soon be written over the parsonage?” The answer is for women to persevere: “What a joy for any woman to stand by the side of a good man absorbed in the task of ministering....”

Ruth’s “whither thou goest” attitude is mentioned, and the author concludes by thanking “those queens of the parsonage” but not with any offering of respite or anything more substantive than the consolation that the position is a noble calling.

Also in 1970, The Lutheran of the LCA featured an article titled “Your Next Pastor.” Its thesis was that congregations should expect that a pastor fresh from the seminary may not look or act quite the same as the ones of the past: He may have a beard and sideburns, wear bright colors, have longer hair, play a guitar, be very concerned about social issues such as racism, and want to include more of the laity in the service. And the author explains that the pastor’s wife may also not be cut from the same dark clergy cloth of the past. A congregation needs to know that she is not to be employed gratis as an assistant pastor; she may not attend all the church functions; she may have a career (if there are no pre-school children); she may even wear a miniskirt.

Given the conservative nature of Lutheran congregations, this article may not have been well

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received, but it is significant that the national church was looking at women as individuals and not as mere appendages of their husbands. A 1972 issue of The Lutheran featured an advertisement/public service notice from Minister’s Life and Casualty Union picturing a young woman sitting at a desk. The title asks “Is your Minister’s Wife Expected To Be an Assistant Pastor?” The public service message states:

In an age when more and more attention is being directed toward liberating women from traditionally confining roles, it seems particularly appropriate to consider ways in which ministers’ wives can be freed from obligations that are often unnecessary and frequently frustrating....The greatest contribution a minister’s wife can make is to be herself, building on her own interests.193

Such heresy would not have found its way onto the pages of the Lutheran Witness. And to be sure, many in the ALC and LCA would also have considered this notice heretical, but the advertisement signals that many in the church hierarchy had made a profound paradigm shift.

As a member of a woman’s organization, parochial teacher, deaconess, or pastor’s wife, Lutheran women sought or found ways to serve the church. But there is one other way in which a woman’s influence and worth is recognized, the very basic act of suffrage. Is she allowed to vote at voters’ assemblies of the congregation, at district or synod assemblies, at national conferences? An important step for women in ascending to any official position in the Lutheran church was gaining the right to vote on issues affecting their congregations.

By the early twentieth century, women in the pre-ALC and LCA churches were gaining the franchise in congregational meetings. Augustana Lutheran churches moved to this in 1907, although some congregations in the West such as one in Portland, Oregon,

193The Lutheran, 15 November 1972, 3.
had initiated women’s suffrage in 1872. By the 1930s, following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, the right to vote was more common in the non-Missouri churches. For example, in 1934 the United Lutherans approved women as congregation council members and delegates to the national conventions. In 1944 the American Lutherans included women at national conventions, and in the post World War II era, more and more voices were raised for full participation by women. In the 1950s Olga Nilsen Berglund wrote a long letter to *The Lutheran Herald* asking why the church was willing to train women in its colleges and urge them to serve, but not give them equal opportunity to be heard in church matters. She observed the composition of the biennial convention, mostly retired, elderly men, and found it unrepresentative of the church membership: “Our church has alert, educated, and willing women with eyes to see above the kitchen sink.” By 1960, 50 percent of boards and committees at most levels had women members making policy decisions.

This situation was not found in the LCMS, and as with women’s organizations, the history of women’s participation and leadership was not nearly as long or as strong in 1970 as it was with the other two Lutheran groups. In fact, the issue of women’s suffrage did not even come to the convention floor for discussion until 1938. The founding father of the Missouri Synod, C. F. W. Walther, in his 1872 work *Pastoral Theology* set forth the position that only adult male members had the right to speak and to vote at

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196 Lagerquist, 114.
congregational meetings. In 1938, when the first official challenge was raised, in good Lutheran order, a committee of men was established to study the matter and report back years later. Fifteen years later, in 1953, the question arose again, and another committee of men was assigned to probe the Scriptures for guidance, but the conclusion was preordained. A Denver pastor’s long article in the Lutheran Witness explained:

If we do not want the spectacle of a wife standing up in some future voters’ meeting of the LCMS and at the top of her shrill voice giving her husband a good dressing down in public assembly, if we rebel against a thought like that, then let’s correct the neglect which has brought about woman suffrage in other churches.

The report submitted at the 1956 convention upheld the positions of the LCMS, although it conceded that the committee could find no explicit prohibition of women suffrage in the Bible.

Nevertheless, in the late 1950s Missouri Synod pastor Russell C. Prohl raised the possibility of not only women voting but also women holding other positions in the church and even preaching. His book, which Concordia would not publish, drew swift response from the Missouri Synod upper echelons, and the Committee on Woman

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200 Russell C. Prohl, Women in the Church: A Restudy of Woman’s Place in Building the Kingdom (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957). Margaret Wold, a member of the ALC ad hoc committee to study women’s ordination in the late sixties, found Prohl’s book the most helpful in guiding her through the relevant scripture. Margaret Barth Wold, “We Seized the Spirit’s Moment,” Lutheran Women in Ordained Ministry 1970-1995, ed. Gloria E. Bengston (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995), 19.
Suffrage issued a statement in the *Lutheran Witness*. It referred laity and clergy to all the previous studies and concluded: “Any congregation...which grants woman suffrage is urged to reconsider this practice in light of Scripture and the glorious position of woman in marriage and in the home, and also in the light of the consequences of such practice in the history of the church.”201 In other words, the authority of Scripture, the sanctity of the home, and the history of the world would unite against a woman raising her hand in a church basement to vote on whether to create three more parking spaces by removing a tree. The 1959 convention reaffirmed the non-suffrage position and again stressed the key issues forbidding women’s voting: “...two principles must not be violated: (a) women must not engage in preaching or in publicly teaching men in the church; (b) whatever participation of women in congregational affairs is granted, the principle must be upheld that women do not usurp authority over men.”202

But some small changes were afoot in the 1960s. The subtitle of a 1962 article in the *Lutheran Witness*, “Does the Missouri Synod’s Position Give Women a Feeling of Inferiority?” reveals at least a sensitivity to women’s feelings. The issue of who is representing the woman who is unmarried, divorced, or whose husband cannot attend meetings, is at least mentioned, and again it is noted that Scripture does not expressly forbid women voting. In the end, however, the author Walter Stuenkel, who chaired the Committee on Woman Suffrage, dismissed such concerns and reiterated the order of creation argument. And yet, Stuenkel did open the door a little: “Synod has resolved not

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to give up this position unless very powerful reasons are advanced for adopting superior administrative patterns that are also in complete harmony with the Scriptures."\(^{203}\)

In 1965, the last LCMS conference where some of the more moderate church leaders had control of the assembly, a position statement passed which stated that "woman suffrage in the church [is] contrary to Scripture only when it violates the above-mentioned Scriptural passages [I Corinthians and I Timothy]."\(^{204}\) This statement revealed a shift that perhaps the two Scripture passages usually cited to prohibit woman suffrage might not refer to voting, but rather to the more general principle of not placing women in positions of authority over men. At this 1965 convention in Detroit, the assembly also passed a resolution allowing women to be eligible for positions on some boards and commissions as advisory members, if they were named by appointment.\(^{205}\) That such an action occurred only in 1965 serves as a reminder of the glacial pace of change in the LCMS.

In 1969, the LCMS finally granted women suffrage.\(^{206}\) The explanation for the change included the following: The Bible did not expressly forbid women voting; in voters’ assemblies, women are no more able to turn their vote into "an instrument of usurpation" than are men; and the I Corinthians and I Timothy passages apply to women


\(^{204}\)"Woman Suffrage in the Church," *Lutheran Witness*, June 1969, 8.

\(^{205}\)Ibid.

\(^{206}\)Mary Todd’s dissertation and recent book provide an excellent narrative and analysis of women’s suffrage in the LCMS.
preaching, not voting. Thus, a seismic shift occurred in the Missouri Synod just one year before the other Lutherans voted to ordain women. To follow with another radical move, one explicitly prohibited at the 1969 gathering, was impossible for this tradition-bound Synod. Furthermore, after 1969, a conservative faction led by J.A.O. Preus directed the Synod, and the opportunity for further modifications in Missouri positions had passed. The first convention with women delegates in 1971 included six women among the 1,020 delegates. Until that year, only 10 percent of LCMS congregations had allowed women even to attend voters' meetings, and none ever attended the national convention. As late as the 1998 national convention, 93.3 percent of the delegates were male. And because of the policy of congregational polity, even today, some LCMS congregations do not allow women to vote.

As American Lutherans studied, or ignored, the issue of women's ordination at the end of the 1960s, they looked within. They were primarily people of rather recent arrival in the United States, and as such, carried an immigrant's baggage. They were proud of what differentiated Lutherans from other Protestants and had a history of women's involvement in congregations which varied in influence. Any decision on ordination and whether one Lutheran body could accept another's choice would reflect these internal forces. The ALC and LCA grappled with their histories and identities and

207 Ibid.

208 Ermarth, 115.

decided to expand the role of women in the church. The Missouri Synod read the text from their past and could not turn the next page to approve women's ordination.

And yet, this is only half of the explanation for the divide that occurred on women's ordination in 1970. For as much as Lutherans look to the past for spiritual guidance, they also must confront the present in which they live. The turbulent social and political times of the late 1960s in the United States also played a role in altering or reaffirming traditional Lutheran attitudes. As Dorothy Marple, an executive director of Lutheran Church Women, stated: "I truthfully think that the push for the ordination of women came as much from what was happening in society itself, as it did from within the life of the church and the women's organizations." Margaret Wold, a leader in the national Lutheran women's organization acknowledged that contemporary events challenged the church to examine its own traditions and assumptions. The next chapter will examine the societal changes which impacted women's ordination.

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211 Ibid.
CHAPTER III

THE EXTERNAL FORCES AFFECTING WOMEN'S ORDINATION

LUTHERANS IN A CULTURAL CONTEXT

All religions face the conflict between being a part of the world yet apart from it. Church historian Sydney E. Ahlstrom, commenting on religion and culture, pointed out that the Christian church has always been in a state of tension with its social surroundings, with the church usually being against or above the prevailing culture.1 H. Richard Niebuhr's classic 1951 work Christ and Culture focused on just this dilemma. Similarly, Karl E. Mattson, an Augustana Lutheran pastor, stated in 1960: "The Lutheran must rather walk the narrow, dialectic ridge whereby he never isolates himself from the world nor is ever completely of it."2 In 1970 the issue of women's ordination was that ridge for the Lutheran church. A sociologist studying women's ordination may observe that "organization rules have their source, in part, in external institutional pressure on the organization rather than in internal problems to which rules are solutions."3 But Lutherans do not want to be perceived as pushed by "external institutional pressure" or swayed by popular mass culture. They take pride in their confessions, which not only guide them but restrain them from adopting the fad of the moment and deserting their


faith of centuries. This conservative heritage affected all Lutherans as they considered the ordination of women. Nonetheless, religious institutions have always been involved in and affected by social, political, and economic events, and the particularly jarring and disruptive events of the late 1960s affected the Lutheran Church as they did other denominations.

Hamlet's line, "The time is out of joint," could well apply to this period in American history. But while his statement is a lament that would be echoed by many, others viewed the 1960s more optimistically. Lutheran theologian Gracia Grindal refers to "the jaunty, liberal spirit of the times." And in his chronicles of the 1960s, Todd Gitlin personifies the era with a dramatic description that pushes Hamlet's despair to the background: "There are moments when the zeitgeist struts on stage so theatrically it fairly screams." The women's ordination issue came before the three largest national Lutheran bodies at just this moment. In 1968 the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, the raucous Democratic National Convention, and the Tet Offensive and My Lai Massacre shocked Americans. The following year, Neil Armstrong walked on the moon; 400,000 young people cavorted at the Woodstock Music Festival; and the Trial of the Chicago Seven threatened chaos in the American judiciary system. And in 1970, National Guard troops fired on antiwar protestors at Kent State; U.S. troops entered

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Cambodia; the first Earth Day warned of environmental crisis; and angry college students shut down or organized strikes at 448 colleges and universities.⁶

These specific events crowded into the foreground of the large canvas of the time. Painted in the background, in broader brush strokes, were other societal issues: Scornful indifference to the past; bitter disillusionment with the Establishment; impatient zeal for reform; brazen questioning of authority; and cautious enthusiasm for the technological explosion. The generation gap seemed to accelerate and increase the tension. Postwar economic prosperity brought an increase in educational opportunities such that by 1960, the United States was the first society in history to have more college students than farmers, and by 1969, three times more students than agrarians.⁷ These students often viewed the world differently from their parents and grandparents, and their behavior seemed to threaten what these older generations had worked to secure. In the film The Graduate, although plastics represents a dream come true to the older generations, it is a symbol of falsehood and lies to the younger. The Bomb held positive connotations for the older generations because it meant the end of World War II and peace in the Cold War, but to the younger generation it represented massive destruction and a threat to the future.

Compressed into a few intense years in the late sixties, these events entered the political, economic, and cultural institutions and pushed their way into the churches. Robert Wuthnow, in his study of religion and American culture, emphasizes that


⁷Gitlin, 21.
American religion has been restructured since World War II as it has been remolded by the forces of change in society. Whether a bulwark against the culture, a mirror reflecting the culture, or a chameleon adapting to the culture, the American church met a formidable challenge in the turbulent sixties. Before this thesis examines specifically the Lutheran church in relation to three seminal events of the time period — the Civil Rights Movement, the Antiwar Movement, and the Women’s Movement — and their effect on women’s ordination, it is helpful to note the symbiosis of organized religion in general and the sixties culture.

The *Time* magazine cover story of April 8, 1966, is most illustrative of the challenge organized religion faced as the popular periodical’s cover dramatically asked: “Is God Dead?” This feature generated the third heaviest reader mail in the seventy-five years of *Time*’s existence, with most of it opposed to the article. The question was deliberately ambiguous, so responses ranged from a general discomfort to anger over the question itself. For the query could mean God never existed; God in the image of white-bearded man in heaven is dead, but a more relevant, hip one exists; or God in organized religion is dead, but as a spirit He is still presiding over the universe. The article surveyed various theologians and church members and nonmembers on the “new atheism,” emphasizing the confusion and uncertainty, particularly among the young,

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8Wuthnow, 5.

about religion. Other authors wrote of more threats to organized religion: a desertion of theology for anthropology, a revival of Protestant liberalism, an emphasis on personal and situational ethics rather than law, a revolt against authority, and a secular optimism. Writing over twenty years later, church historian Ronald Flowers described the church in the sixties as part of the maligned establishment, considered part of society’s problems rather than a solution. Even the venerable theologian Sydney Ahlstrom in 1970 conceded that there existed “a tidal wave of questioning of all the traditional structures of Christendom,” and he imagined Dietrich Bonhoeffer calling from the grave for a secular interpretation of biblical language.

Bookstore shelves filled with books written from a decidedly nontraditional religious perspective: Gabriel Vahanian’s The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era (1961); Schubert M. Ogden’s Christ Without Myth (1961); Paul Van Buren’s The Secular Meaning of the Gospel (1963); and the one which gained the most attention, Harvey Cox’s The Secular City (1965). Cox claimed that urbanization and secularization had made traditional Christianity obsolete to the “technopolitan man”:

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10“Toward a Hidden God,” Time, 8 April 1966, 82-87. Two Lutheran theologians are cited in this article, Martin E. Marty and Krister Stendahl.


“The church must respond constantly to social change, but it is hampered from doing so by doctrines...infected with the ideology of preservation and permanence.”\(^{14}\)

Some of the clergy who received the most media attention were more comfortable in t-shirts than in clerical collars. The Catholic Berrigan brothers, Daniel and Philip, burned files of local draft boards in a Baltimore suburb in 1968, and in 1971, Philip was convicted of conspiring to kidnap Henry Kissinger and to blow up several federal buildings in his opposition to the Vietnam War.\(^{15}\) Many clergy joined Vietnam protest marches and civil rights demonstrations and from the pulpits preached peace and justice along with the Gospel.

As noted in the previous chapter, Lutherans traditionally have not fit the mold of other Protestants in the United States; therefore, their response to the cultural context may be different. Are Lutherans even affected by the \textit{sturm und drang} of the times, and do they alter their thoughts and actions accordingly? One of the hallmarks of the sixties that accompanied the events mentioned above was political and social activism. To the degree that clergy and laity participated or refrained from participation, they revealed their receptivity to questioning authority and changing traditions. For Lutherans to desert their four hundred year history of male dominance in the pulpit, they would have to embrace, or at least offer a handshake, to some radical (for Lutherans) ideas – gender equality, sharing of authority and power, and adaption to American culture.

\(^{14}\)Harvey Cox, \textit{The Secular City} (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 91.

\(^{15}\)Bell, 465.
Certainly Luther himself was influenced by his times, and not only in his attitude toward women. The corruption of the Catholic church was both a precipitating factor and a reinforcement for the Reformation; the invention of the printing press in the 1450s allowed for mass dissemination of his ideas; and the economic power of the German states made Luther a world player. Furthermore, there was clearly an interdependency between the socio-political situation and the Reformation. The reorganization of German states independent of papal control aided Luther, while the German princes felt freer to reject papal authority because Luther provided a legitimate religious alternative.

In the late 1960s Luther himself became a symbol to some for the social revolution occurring in American society, although Lutherans questioned the accuracy of this symbolism. In 1969 social critic and author Paul Goodman wrote a lengthy article for the *New York Times Magazine* titled “The New Reformation” which featured a photograph of sixties protestors juxtaposed with Martin Luther defying the Catholic Church. Goodman wrote: “The situation is very much like 1510, when Luther went to Rome.... There is everywhere protest, revaluation, attack on the Establishment.”

Lutherans, of course, could not let this analogy stand unchallenged, and theologian Eric Gritsch responded with an article examining whether Luther really was a revolutionary. Luther did indeed use violent and incendiary language, but he argued against political insurrection. He even wrote a treatise in 1523 on “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed,” which argued for the two kingdoms concept of a spiritual

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government and a secular one, both of which deserved allegiance. Violence was only acceptable to save a neighbor's life, but passive resistance in some circumstances was acceptable. Gritsch therefore saw limitations to the parallel of Luther the reformer inciting young students to revolt against the establishment. In a Missouri Synod publication, Richard Koenig also commented on the Goodman article, and he questioned employing religious vocabulary in a broader sense than the Reformers intended when Goodman claimed that "alienation is a Lutheran concept."18

The use of Luther as a symbol for protest and societal change is a complex one, for the Reformation did indeed transform European society. But Lutheran theology tends to emphasize stability and deference to authority, and not social reform. In *Christ and Culture*, Richard Niebuhr describes Lutherans in 1951 as having a high regard for authority and a belief that legal and religious institutions are "dykes against sin, preventers of anarchy rather than positive agencies through which men in social union render service to neighbors."19 The function of the church is to preach the Gospel and keep religion separate from the secular world.

Such separation, however, can be difficult to achieve, and even the separation itself is a response to the culture. For by remaining above the fray or apart from social movements, one is responding and reacting to them. As the events of the middle to late

17 Eric W. Gritsch, "Martin Luther and the Revolutionary Tradition of the West," in *Encounters with Luther* vol. 1, ed. Eric W. Gritsch (Gettysburg: Luther Theological Seminary, 1980), 7-23.


19 Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 188.
sixties unfolded, Lutherans approached cautiously, carrying a tradition of noninvolvement and an avoidance of being influenced by contemporary social movements. The "preservation and permanence" decried by Harvey Cox are the strengths which Lutherans see in their faith. Although change was certainly in the air and filtered into the discussion of women's ordination, it had to pass through Lutheran socio-religious history. And understanding this background helps decipher the different reactions of the ALC, the LCA, and the Missouri Synod.

Most Lutherans united in the nineteenth century against the intellectual climate of evangelical liberalism, scientific modernism, and the social gospel, reflecting a conservative political and social attitude. The LCMS may bear the label of "conservative," but it is often one of degree. Looking back to 1860, Lutheran theologian Sydney E. Ahlstrom expressed with pride that "a single minded determination to create a church that would withstand the seductions of culture and popular religious pressure" was the origin of the Augustana Synod. He was referring to nineteenth-century revivalism which Lutherans found anti-intellectual, with uneducated clergy and superficial hymns of "Gospel tunery," but he could just as well have been referring to 1960. In 1919 C. W. Heathcote wrote a history of Lutherans and included this description: "The history of the Lutheran Church in America is distinguished primarily by its conservative spirit...In this age, with the growing multiplicity of new faiths and promulgation of Neo-Rationalism,

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Neo-Stoicism, and benevolent humanitarianism, the Lutheran Church holds to the Bible as the Word of God.\textsuperscript{21}

A notable exception occurred during the Civil War when political and cultural differences were stronger than theological unity. The Lutheran Church in the North supported the Union government, while the southern Lutherans supported the Confederacy, and both sides were ardent in the righteousness of their respective causes. The Missionary, a Lutheran periodical in Pittsburgh, editorialized: "The idea of some persons, that the Christian ought to keep silence at a time like this, when the very existence of government is threatened and every interest of humanity and religion is at stake, is simply an absurdity. Government is an ordinance of God." But a leading Lutheran pastor in Georgia wrote: "I look upon the secession of the southern states as the grandest, most noble, chivalrous, patriotic and God-like achievement ever effected by an oppressed people in the world."\textsuperscript{22} The division was clear in 1861, but officially the Lutherans divided in 1863 when those Lutheran churches in the Confederacy formed their own synod. Even after the war, this group remained as the United Synod of the South until 1918 when it merged with several other synods in the North.

Until the 1960s, this conservatism in matters religious and matters secular continued. Carol Coburn's study of a midwest Lutheran community from 1868 to 1945 found that these German-American Lutherans were not involved politically through church programs, holding firmly to the separation between church and state. The two

\textsuperscript{21}Heathcote, 146.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 71-72.
issues, however, which could arouse their concern was fear of Roman Catholicism and certain moral and social reforms, primarily prohibition and woman suffrage; they were against both.23 A 1950 work that surveyed the relationship between church and state among mainline religions commented: “But in spite of a constantly increasing minority which feels that the Church has a large responsibility for social and political conditions, Lutherans have continued their European tradition of aloofness from any active participation as churchmen in affairs of state.”24

In 1922, Max Weber wrote his classic *The Sociology of Religion* and argued that religious organizations could exert leverage toward evolutionary social change. He found, however, that Lutherans shied away from such leverage. “The Lutheran Christian has all that is needful for him, if only the Word of God is proclaimed pure and clear; the remaking of the external order of the world and even the remaking of the church is a matter of indifference, an adiaphoron.”25 Robert Wuthnow’s study of organized religions’ relationships to society since World War II reported two principles governing the behavior of church members in the turbulent year 1968. People who held to a literal interpretation of the Bible tended to be significantly less politically involved than those who did not. But there was also a tendency for regular churchgoers to be more active politically than irregular or non-churchgoers.26 Lutherans, particularly LCMS members,

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23 Coburn, 127.


26 Wuthnow, 235.
fit both the first category and the second category. As recently as 1996, a Lutheran article lamented that more Lutherans were not visible on the national political scene and urged the laity to rethink political quietism as a Lutheran virtue. The author noted that “Lutheran leaders rarely trumpet their political convictions in the public square.”

Although some may look favorably on political or social activism by a congregation or a national church because it seems to put one’s faith to work in daily life, such officially church-sanctioned actions can also have negative consequences. Many in the laity consider their church to be a place of sanctuary, a refuge from daily strife and do not want it to become another actor on the political stage. Others fear that the involvement of organized religion in political issues blurs the line separating church and state; for example, most Lutherans are not supportive of the recent political activities of the religious right in American politics. Furthermore, a 1992 study of Lutherans by Mark Noll points out that one of the strengths of Lutheranism is its recognition that the occasional incongruity between personal moral vision and comprehensive public crusade can lead to excessive zeal and dangerous overreaction.

A church or a congregation taking a stand on a particular social or political issue can also divide congregations and weaken the church in the long run. For while Judeo-Christan teachings emphasize concern for the poor and oppressed, there can be legitimate disagreement on how best to accomplish these goals.

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29Since the 1960s, the national Lutheran church bodies have addressed social and political issues with declarations of support or condemnation coming from their national
Although changing the constitution of a religious organization is not the same as participating in a sit-in or a march on Washington, it does signify an accommodation to the more modern, liberal, and secular American society. In the 1960s, many were calling for inclusion of those whom society previously had discriminated against and demanding equality of opportunity for all regardless of race or gender. Would Lutherans who traditionally had been conservative and resistant to change be influenced by this activism? And who were the Lutherans of 1970 who would decide the fate of women's ordination?

*A Study of Generations*, published in 1972, was an extensive two year socio-religious survey of 5,000 Lutherans between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five that provides a profile of Lutherans in the three major church bodies. Lutherans were 98 percent white, more affluent and better educated (a third with some college background) than the average population, attended church more frequently than other Protestants, resided primarily in small towns, and if over fifty years of age were usually of Scandinavian and German background. Revealing the closeness of the Lutheran community, three out of four Lutherans reported no non-Lutherans in their immediate family, and many counties in Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas claimed over half of the assemblies or offices. The ELCA, for example, issued a statement in support of the Million Mom March for gun control held in Washington, DC, on 14 May 2000. Subsequently, the majority of writers to the Letters to the Editor section of *The Lutheran* criticized the ELCA for taking this position. These writers may or may not reflect the majority of Lutherans, but they do reveal the division among church members on social issues.

population as Lutheran. Several counties in Nebraska and Texas also fit this pattern.\textsuperscript{31}

About half of all Lutherans saw themselves as conservative ("I hold or retain the essential beliefs of the Christian faith") rather than fundamentalist ("I believe all things in Scripture are literal and historical") or liberal ("I am willing to change some aspects of the faith in the light of new understanding"). Only 14 percent would insist that other Lutherans and Christians must agree totally with their beliefs. The study, however, also pointed out marked differences between LCMS Lutherans and other Lutherans. Missourians definitely leaned toward accepting the Bible as inerrant and infallible, with 75 percent claiming to accept faith over science, while just under half of the other Lutherans made that claim.\textsuperscript{32}

On social issues the study found that Lutherans as individuals described themselves as for social justice, but could disagree on how much the church as an institution or an individual congregation should be involved in pursuing those goals.\textsuperscript{33}

The ALC and LCA were more closely aligned on social issues and openness to change than either one was with the LCMS. And a sharp difference of opinion centered on the role of women in the church. Although this study did not devote much space to the issue, it did reveal that 66 percent of ALC members surveyed and 75 percent of LCA members favored ordination of women, while only 45 percent of Missouri Synod members did.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31}Marty, "Patterns of Religious Pluralism," 69.

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 108.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., 154; Graebner, 203.

\textsuperscript{34}Strommen, 272.
Around 1970 another study aimed at determining the impact of religion on the secular lives of Lutherans and to assess characteristics and attitudes that Lutherans held in common. Described as the Lutheran ethic, these attitudes influenced the way Lutherans approached the social changes of the sixties, including the ordination of women. Based on 886 interviews in the Detroit area with clergy and laity from the three main Lutheran bodies, it confirmed Niebuhr’s 1951 description of Lutherans as being somewhat removed from contemporary socio-political concerns.35

The 1970 survey also polled Lutherans on whether women should have as much voice as men in church decisions, finding 98 percent of ALC and LCA Lutherans said yes, while 47 percent of the LCMS answered in the affirmative. On the question of ordination of women, LCA laity was 73 percent in favor; ALC, 68 percent; and LCMS, 47 percent. Among the clergy on the ordination question, 62 percent of the LCA clergy was in favor; 30 percent of the ALC clergy; and 8 percent of the LCMS clergy.36 These figures reveal that women’s ordination was not universally accepted by all Lutherans, but that the laity was more receptive than the clergy, particularly the Missouri clergy. The Lutheran church has always been clergy-led, with laity involvement a relatively recent development. If the ordination of women was to become a reality, it required the sponsorship and support of the male clergy.

The above description of Lutherans seems to indicate that they would be opposed to changing tradition and allowing women into the clergy. Sociologist Mark Chaves, in

35Kersten, 26.

36Ibid., 124-125.
an article on the issue of women’s ordination, concludes that when a denomination resists
gender equality, it is resisting a modern liberal attitude which values the individual above
the group: “A denomination’s formal policy about the status of woman is less an
indication of woman’s literal status within a denomination and a more ritual enactment of
its position on the liberal/modern agenda.”37  The very characteristics that make
Lutherans Lutheran often hold them back from accepting or advancing changes in
structure and authority both within the church and without.

And yet there were signs indicating possible changes ahead. *A Study of
Generations* found that three-fifths of Lutherans in the late sixties favored Christian
involvement in social action.38  Revealing the secular issues affecting Lutherans, *The
Lutheran* featured articles with such titles as “Lutheran Chaplain Killed in Vietnam,”
“Should I Picket?” “My Daughter on Drugs?” and “Lutheran Memorial Damaged in
Madison Bombing.” And in a condensed version of the 1970 report of LCUSA on
women’s ordination, Raymond Tiemeyer wrote: “Although the Gospel does not change,
conditions do. New situations, differing customs, continued research, the on-going work
of God, and the prompting of the Spirit demand constant reconstruction of previous
assumptions. The Church must periodically ask whether its practices give the fullest
expression of the will of the Lord.”39

38Strommen, 291.
39Tiemeyer, 8.
In 1970 Margaret Sittler Ermarth wrote *Adam’s Fractured Rib*, an LCA publication. Stressing the revolutionary nature of the times and the forces of change at work, she set forth many feminist issues and concluded the Church must respond.40 The forces of change and reform concentrated in the civil rights, antiwar protest, and women’s movements encircled the era in not only change, but also controversy and confrontation. As the three movements followed paths that intersected, merged, and diverged, they also crossed the path of women’s ordination in the Lutheran Church. Such a coinciding of social and political issues with an ecclesiastical one is not new, but the meeting was complex given the internal dynamics of Lutheranism. Ermarth and others believed that the secular events were an impetus for the Church to change its views regarding women. But other Lutherans saw the changes occurring in society and either did not see a connection to women in the church or saw the church as an institution which should not be swept along by emotional appeals not firmly rooted in church doctrine. Although it is not within the scope of this thesis to offer a detailed analysis of the three movements and the Lutheran Church, it is important to reflect on their interconnectedness to understand the differences among Lutherans on ordaining women.

**THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam protests shared some important characteristics. They both involved a younger generation rebelling against the past errors, materialism, and racism of older generations. Their parents left their mark on

40Ermarth, xiii.
history by surviving the Depression and achieving victory in World War II; now they were seeking their own mountains to conquer. Both movements shared high profile media time as the conflicts were brought with sound and fury into the living rooms of America. Both movements shared organizational and tactical skills, the Vietnam protestors learning from the Civil Rights activists who proceeded them. Both movements involved religious organizations and clergy in their causes, and the religious values of peace and helping our “neighbor” gave purpose and language to the movements. There were significant differences also between the two movements. The goal of the Civil Rights Movement was to force the white power structure to include blacks and to make all Americans aware that prejudice and discrimination existed and was morally and legally wrong; the goal of the antiwar movement was to force the United States to cease its intervention in Vietnam and to make Americans aware that the war wounded the United States even though the battles were not fought on American soil. The antiwar groups often drew a more radical element who employed tactics more confrontational and violent than passive resistance, marches, and economic boycotts. The style of dress and personal appearance of the antiwar protestors, with “psychedelic” clothing or no clothing at all, and long hair for the men, were designed to show disdain for the conventions of middle class American society. The Civil Rights workers veered in the other direction, dressing to indicate seriousness of purpose, nonthreatening behavior, and respect for the American democratic ideals which they wanted extended to all citizens. Another difference between the two movements was the association of illegal drug use with the war protestors and with some of the soldiers fighting the war. The goals of the Civil Rights movement were clearer, more unified, and less ambiguous than those of the
antiwar movement. And the location of the protests varied, with civil rights activity occurring mostly in the South and later in some northern cities, and antiwar protests focused on Washington and college campuses.\textsuperscript{41}

These differences affected the support which the two causes received from the religious establishment, for it did not necessarily follow that the clergy who were involved in civil rights would also be active in antiwar protests. Michael Friedland, in his study of white clergy in the sixties protest movements, found that fewer clergy participated in antiwar demonstrations than in civil rights ones.\textsuperscript{42} Perhaps only five percent of the nation’s clergy were active opponents of the war; five percent, supporters; and the remainder, not involved at all.\textsuperscript{43} Black clergy led the Civil Rights Movement and came later to the antiwar campaign, if they participated at all; conversely, white clergy were early leaders in protesting the war, but generally came later to the Civil Rights Movement.\textsuperscript{44} White clergy in both areas, however, were often ahead of or even at variance with their congregations in political and social activism, with more laity supporting civil rights than antiwar activity.\textsuperscript{45} Consequently, activist clergy were more


\textsuperscript{42}Friedland, 6.

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., 145.

\textsuperscript{44}DeBennedetti, 89, 148.

\textsuperscript{45}Graebner, 203.
often in positions which insulated them from the constraints of being a parish pastor; they often held administrative positions in their churches at the national level or served as chaplains on college campuses.\textsuperscript{46}

The tie between the Civil Rights Movement and the church was there from the very beginning. The bravery of the black clergy and others in the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 was one of the earliest markers along the civil rights trail. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose leadership in Montgomery made him a national figure, tied his philosophy to that of other religious leaders, most notably, Paul Tillich, H. Reinhold Niebuhr, and John C. Bennett, and he appropriated the language of well established white clergy along with the language and rhetorical style of black preachers.\textsuperscript{47} His leadership assured that the Civil Rights Movement would also be a religious one. When northern white clergy joined in the southern protests, civil rights was clearly marked as a moral issue, and media coverage increased. Hundreds of Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic clergy participated in the 1963 Washington march, in Selma in 1965, and in the Clergy Mobilization March in Washington in 1967.\textsuperscript{48}

Lutheran support of civil rights for African-Americans in general has a long history. One of the most important national Lutheran leaders of the nineteenth century, Samuel Schmucker, offered his house on the campus of Gettysburg Seminary as a station

\textsuperscript{46}Friedland, 7.

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., 4.

on the Underground Railroad.⁴⁹ A 1969 article in the *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* examined the issue of Lutherans on social policy and argued that "a more advanced argument favoring racial integration developed within the reputedly conservative body [the LCMS] than among more ‘liberal’ Lutherans."⁵⁰ This article reveals the desire of many to be seen as staunch defenders of rights for African Americans, but ELCA pastor Michael Koch also believes it to be an accurate assessment of the various Lutheran groups’ historical record on race. In 1965 Jeffrey Hadden conducted a random survey of almost 7500 clergy in six Protestant denominations, including the ALC and LCMS. He found that all Lutheran clergy in the survey overwhelmingly supported the civil rights issue, but that the laity (of all the groups studied) were less committed. Most opposed clergy activism, preferring that pastors remain moral spokesmen within the congregations.⁵¹ But Martin Luther, who can admittedly be quoted on almost any topic, had stated: "Those are lazy and useless preachers who do not tell the princes and lords their vices."⁵² And on the civil rights issue, many Lutherans followed this directive.

Among those who have been willing to tell the "princes" of their moral duty toward African-Americans have been women; furthermore, the similarity in discrimination and subservience between women and African-Americans also stretches

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⁴⁹Heathcote, 60.

⁵⁰Ralph Moellering, “Lutherans on Social Problems 1917 to 1940,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 44 (February 1969): 36; Koch, author interview.

⁵¹Hadden, 159.

⁵²Luther quoted in *The Lutheran*, November 1996, 22.
far back in American history. In 1856, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote to Lucy Stone acknowledging the major differences between the status of a slave and a woman, but also noting their commonality: “[Bondage] frets and chafes her just the same. She too sighs and groans in her chains; and lives but in the hope of better things to come.”53 Historian Gerda Lerner, in her work on women’s history, noted that women have the high visibility of other minority groups; they are more readily identified by their physical characteristics than for their personal qualifications.54

When Lutheran leaders looked at women’s ordination, it was difficult for many not to see a similarity in issues with the Civil Rights Movement. Whether the location was a small rural congregation in central Illinois or a large urban congregation in Minneapolis, women “integrating” the pulpit, appealing for equality, and being judged on ability rather than gender echoed the sentiments and language of the Civil Rights Movement. Lutheran theologian Krister Stendahl stated: “[T]he question about ordination of women cannot be separated from the total problem of emancipation of women in our society. In the U.S., where we have learned to detect the dangerous flaws in the slogan ‘separate but equal,’ that insight gives urgency to our concern for the right place and role of women in our church and in our ministry.”55 LCA Lutheran Church Women leader Dorothy Marple felt that much of her involvement in striving for women’s

53Elizabeth Cady Stanton quoted in Martin E. Marty, Pilgrims in Their Own Land (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984), 296.

54Lerner, 8.

55Stendahl, The Bible and the Role of Women, 5.
ordination came from a workshop she attended on racism."56 And Constance Parvey, a
graduate of Harvard Divinity School who in 1970 served in campus ministry, argued that
those who said the time was not yet right for women clergy were using the same tired
arguments of those who said to African Americans, “Wait.” In an article calling for
women’s ordination, she wrote: “Just as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended segregation
in the United States, baptism ended segregation among those united in Christ.”57 The
1964 civil rights legislation outlawed discrimination on the basis of race or sex, and while
not extending to churches, did help change perceptions about appropriate gender
professions. While many churches, however, were comfortable advocating equality for
all races, they were reluctant to do the same for both sexes.58

The Civil Rights Movement also gave a boost to women’s ordination in a more
circuitous way. For while the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s had several
origins, one source was the anger many women who participated in the struggle for civil
rights felt about the way they were treated by men in the Movement.59 And the women’s
movement, as will be shown later, definitely had an impact on women’s ordination. This
lack of respect for women was revealed most dramatically in Stokley Carmichael’s now
infamous comment on the position of women. The remark even made a footnote in the

56Dorothy J. Marple, “God at Work among Us,” in Lutheran Women in Ordained

203.

58Ermarth, 148.

59Kathleen C. Berkeley, The Women’s Liberation Movement in America
(Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 161; and Ermarth, 148.
position paper on the role of women in the church which was presented at the LCA 1970 convention.

It may come as a surprise even to careful observers of the contemporary scene that the ‘woman problem’ has split the ranks of the New Left and other radical groupings. For instance, Stokley Carmichael summed up SNCC’s attitude crudely but succinctly thus: ‘The only position for women in SNCC is prone.’ Many women who have worked for SDS long and hard have been so insulted and injured by being ignored by policy-making units while they answered telephones, printed, folded, and stamped, that they have left the movement.60

That such an example was printed in an official document for the fifth biennial convention of the LCA reveals how the sixties culture had entered the convention hall in Minneapolis as an important, if unelected, delegate.

THE ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

As the longest war in American history, lasting nine years from the 1964 Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the 1973 Paris Peace Agreement, the Vietnam conflict cast a long shadow over United States. Those who opposed the war came from a broad spectrum of society without one person or organization directing the opposition. Marked by diversity, the antiwar movement encompassed some who believed the war was illegal and/or immoral; some who questioned the domino theory; some who thought the war racist; and some who considered the limited war concept unwinnable. Many historians of the era point to 1969 as the peak of protest activities both in size and militancy. After 1970, the protestors splintered into even more diverse groups, such as the more violent

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Weathermen, while the majority of protestors worked through established political channels. Each year after 1970 there were fewer demonstrations and consequently less media coverage, but for the Lutherans considering the ordination issue in 1970, the timing coincided with the peak of the antiwar demonstrations.

As religious leaders and clergy were involved in the Civil Rights Movement, so were they a part of the antiwar movement. Michael Friedland, in his excellent study of white clergy in the sixties protest movements, points out that religious leaders brought to the movement the skills and ecumenism they had learned in their civil rights activities, and they often provided a rallying point for more moderate critics of the war. In 1965 Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam (CALCAV) formed under the leadership of Lutheran pastor Richard Neuhaus, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, and Father Daniel Berrigan. Other nationally prominent members of the clergy who were actively involved were William Sloan Coffin, John C. Bennett, and Reinhold Niebuhr. Martin Luther King, Jr. became an antiwar leader in the spring of 1967 and a co-chair of CALCAV, but not all African American clergy were so involved. Ralph Bunche and Roy Wilkins, for example, refrained from participating in the protest movement.

The involvement of clergy and laity in the protests varied greatly. Writing in 1969, Richard Neuhaus believed that less than 5 percent of American religious leadership had an active involvement, and he believed the responses of churches was very mixed.

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61 Gitlin, 411; DeBenedetti, 3.

62 Friedland, 6.

63 DeBenedetti, 173.
Conservative groups supported the war effort; mainstream Protestant denominations, attempting to remain neutral, were mildly critical of the government's policy. Neuhaus commented in 1970: "Since the Tet offensive of 1968, religious opinion seems to be indistinguishable from the general public's disillusionment with the war, but disillusionment has not led to opposition in all cases."64 Mitchell Hall, in his study of the involvement of religious groups in the protest movement noted the strong correlation between liberal theology and liberal politics. Of the twenty-eight Protestant groups represented on the national committee of CALCAV in the mid sixties, most were from the Methodist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and United Church of Christ churches. Fewer than six were from the LCA, ALC, or American Baptist churches, and only one from the LCMS.65

Hall also used various surveys from the sixties to argue that clergy tended to be much more dovish than the laity.66 A good example of this gap between clergy and laity was apparent in an incident in Tulsa in 1969. The Lutheran Witness reported that a Lutheran church was offering a counseling service to young men who were struggling with their consciences over the war and the draft. The Tulsa newspaper objected, and the pastor in reply saw a double standard; it was all right for taxpayers to receive advice on how to avoid paying taxes, but not for these men to seek counsel on the draft. The author

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66Ibid., 66.
of the article concludes: "Is it true...that we have devised a system that offers socialism for the rich and free enterprise for the poor?"67 The Letters to the Editor section in the next issue criticized both the Oklahoma church and the author of the article. One state legislator wrote: "Frankly, I am convinced that I am only one of many Lutherans who is getting tired of so many articles in the Lutheran publications which take positions on governmental issues dealing with social and political matters."68

The war certainly touched Lutherans as it did so many others. They served in the armed forces, nursed the wounded, marched in protest, were wounded or killed. Christ the King Lutheran Church, a storefront mission in Chicago, was across the street from the federal building where the trial of the Chicago Seven antiwar demonstrators occurred. During the four and a half month trial, a hundred thousand people came to the church for meetings, refreshments, counseling, and press conferences.69 A leader in the antiwar movement was Richard John Neuhaus, the young Missouri Synod pastor of St. John the Evangelist Lutheran Church in the Bronx. Having been active in the civil rights movement, he was one of the relatively few LCMS clergy active in the antiwar movement. In addition to his organizational work with CALCAV, Neuhaus signed, along with over 200 other clergy including Martin Marty, "A Call To Resist Illegal Authority" in 1967 which challenged the legitimacy of the war and urged Americans to support draft

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resistance. By the mid seventies, however, Neuhaus and many other clergy became disenchanted with the more radical stance of the remnants of the antiwar organization and the lessening of the spiritual nature of the group. Leaving CALCAV, Neuhaus stated: "[It was] appallingly clear to me that in no way did I believe what this organization was about any more."  

By the late sixties, all three national Lutheran groups were addressing in some manner the social and political problems facing the country. At the 1966 and 1968 national assemblies of both the ALC and LCA, many of the reports and resolutions concerned contemporary social issues. For example, the LCA issued statements on capital punishment (1966), social welfare (1968), conscientious objection (1968), poverty (1966), race relations (1964), and Vietnam (1966). The 1966 LCA Vietnam Statement opposed the escalation and unilateral withdrawal policies and noted that Vietnam defied simplistic solutions. The statement exemplifies the middle road which Neuhaus noted that most churches followed: It supported the right to freedom of expression and the right of dissent; it noted the danger posed by international Communism; it was sympathetic to both those who served in the military and those who were conscientious objectors; and it called for all to work for peace as it deplored the escalation of the conflict. In 1967 the

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70 Hall, 19; Friedland, 193.

71 Friedland, 238. Almost twenty years later, Neuhaus supported the American involvement in the Gulf War because he believed it to be a just war undertaken with legal authority. Ibid., 249.

72 Grindal, "Getting Women Ordained," 165.

LCMS encouraged prayer and study, but did not condemn or endorse the war.\textsuperscript{74} And in 1968 it issued "Guidelines for Crucial Issues in Christian Citizenship," which sought to put the war in a Christian context and advise those considering protest and refusal to serve in the military.\textsuperscript{75} It is a thoughtful document with a series of questions for anyone contemplating objector status.

At first glance, the Vietnam protest movement may not seem to have a strong connection to the women's ordination issue, but in an indirect way it did have an impact. The antiwar activists were one more group in the sixties who were questioning conventional authority, values, and traditions, and the very fact that some of the protestors were affiliated with religious organizations made their impact on ecclesiastical matters even more relevant. The Vietnam conflict aroused many women who had their first experience questioning authority and speaking out publicly over the war issue.

Judith A. Cobb, associate pastor of First Lutheran Church in Norfolk, Virginia, and recently named associate pastor of St. James Lutheran Church in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, has memories of students in 1970 at Upsala College, a Lutheran school, wearing black armbands in protest over the bombing of Cambodia. She remembers the

\textsuperscript{74}Hall, 46.

civil rights and Vietnam protest movements giving her valuable experiences in public speaking and organizing large groups.  

But such rebellious activism was a double edged sword. It could work to further the cause of women’s ordination or to hinder it, and in 1970, it swung both ways. Some Lutherans believed the protests signaled disrespect for legitimate authority and the beginning of chaos; and some viewed the radicalism of the movement as a call to reestablish order and return to traditional values. In their study of women in the sixties, Blanch Linden-Ward and Carol Hurd Green argued that Americans in that time period perceived change as occurring at a “rapid and dangerous” pace. Throughout the war, the violent demonstrations were always the minority in the protest movement, and only a minority of college students opposed the government’s Vietnam policy and actively demonstrated. Public opinion, measured in various polls, sided with the Nixon strategy for Vietnam, a combination of escalation, bombardment, and peace talks. Thus, while most changes were in reality gradual and violence was rare, many Americans thought they were in the midst of revolutionary tumult. The electronic media delivered vivid images of conflict in Saigon, Washington, and Kent State directly to the American public. Americans saw more than they experienced, but the images gave those distant events a feeling of immediacy and proximity. The images of the late 1960s which most

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76 Judith A. Cobb, interview by author 29 October 1996 and 20 June 2000, Norfolk, VA. All future references are based on these two interviews.

77 Linden-Ward and Green, xv.

78 DeBenedetti, 243.

79 Gitlin, 411.
Americans remember are of flag burnings, campus buildings under siege, and large protest marches led by unkempt, long-haired youths. These were also the images which dominated the news media in the months preceding the two 1970 Lutheran conventions.

Cold War politics was another aspect of the Vietnam war both in the initial American involvement and in the subsequent escalation. By protesting, many activists seemed to personify the Communist threat at home, and because Communism equaled atheism, it was a concern for the religious community. In a Louis Harris poll in December 1967, 75 percent of the population believed antiwar demonstrators encouraged the Communists to fight harder; 70 percent saw the demonstrators as disloyal.\textsuperscript{80} Several letters to the editor in \textit{The Lutheran} from January 1970 were written in response to an editorial urging an American withdrawal from Vietnam. The letters revealed the intertwining of subversive Communism with antiwar activism. A writer from Ohio stated: “It seems as if a person who loves peace and follows the example of our Saviour is considered a Communist. If I can do anything to protest this stupid, idiotic aggression that America is waging on the people of Vietnam, I will do it.” But another writer from New York wrote: “You say that for the U.S. to ‘conclude this pointless and hopeless war in Vietnam’ would be a superb Christmas present for the world. I wonder what you’d say if after a few years the Communists dominate the world.” Another writer from Florida urged that the writer of the editorial be removed from the staff of \textit{The Lutheran} because “his writings lead one to believe he desires the Communists to take over America.”\textsuperscript{81} In

\textsuperscript{80}Hall, 66.

\textsuperscript{81}"Letters to the Editor," \textit{The Lutheran}, 21 January 1979, 49.
the unstable atmosphere of the late sixties, challenging authority could be seen by some as a threat to order, American democracy, and even God. The domino theory could not only apply to Vietnam and Southeast Asia but also to American society and particularly to matters religious.

If the LCA Lutheran found its readership incensed over perceived disloyalty and the changes occurring in society, it could only be more so in the Missouri Lutheran Witness, the LCMS periodical with decidedly more conservative readers. A letter in February 1970 from a reader in Jefferson City, Missouri, touches on all the themes that aroused the ire of many:

I was greatly displeased by the January Witness. It has all the looks of a hippie magazine. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has long been a great conservative force in the world, and I know the January edition does not represent the squares who shave and bathe and support the Missouri Synod. When I think of the beards and long hair, I think of 'pot,' pornography, Fidel Castro, and the kind who would destroy their nation and deliver it to the communist world with its godless movement. I know we squares are not perfect, but at least we try to look and act like we think God wants us.82

A look back to the January 1970 issue which precipitated the above letter reveals a Lutheran Witness very similar to past issues, but it does have two photos of young men with hair just to their necks, a pastor playing a guitar, and perhaps a few more articles than usual devoted to youth. The perception for this reader, however, was radical change. Ordaining women in the Lutheran Church was also a radical change. Some Lutherans accepted it as necessary and long overdue, while others rejected it as a violation of order and orthodoxy.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

As the Civil Rights Movement aroused the nation to confront racism and become a more just society, as the antiwar protests warned the country of the quagmire of its Vietnam involvement, so the women's movement awakened Americans to the realization that half its citizens were denied the opportunities and privileges accorded the other half. And just as the first two movements influenced in various ways the women’s ordination issue for Lutherans, so did this second wave of feminism. The women’s movement, which began in the early sixties and coalesced in 1966, set about to raise the consciousness of the American public to the sexual discrimination that still bound women to inferior positions in society and limited their options. It wanted to reform the economic, political, and social institutions which had set gender barriers, and certainly religious institutions such as the Lutheran Church had erected some high barriers. Such church policies as allowing only men to vote, limiting participation on boards and committees to men, and denying ordination to women came under scrutiny at the same time as women marched and protested gender discrimination in the secular society.83

The nineteenth-century women's movement and the one that followed a hundred years later are strikingly similar in some respects. Both followed paths that intersected with civil rights movements, and both touched upon women’s role in the church. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony’s History of Woman Suffrage chronicles the women who had worked tirelessly for the abolition of slavery and then were rejected

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83 One of the earliest feminist works on women and religion was written in 1968 by a Catholic theologian. Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).
as delegates to the 1840 World’s Anti-Slavery Convention in London. “The excitement and vehemence of protest and denunciation [led by the male clergy] could not have been greater, if the news had come that the French were about to invade England.” Such blatant discrimination aroused the women to consider their own position in society as similar in some ways to that of the slaves whom they were trying to free. And thus Stanton records: “The movement for women’s suffrage, both in England and America, may be dated from this world’s Anti-Slavery Convention.” In 1848 when the first women’s rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, the delegates produced a document that echoed the colonies’ grievances against George III in the Declaration of Independence, but the “Declaration of Sentiments” recounted the injustices inflicted upon women by men. Although focusing on the suffrage issue, the “Declaration” also noted the lack of equality for women in the church: “He allows her in Church, as well as State, but in a subordinated position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the church.” One of the resolutions passed at the convention therefore also addressed woman’s position in religious institutions: “Resolved, that inasmuch as man, while claiming for himself intellectual superiority, does accord to woman moral superiority, it is pre-eminently his duty to encourage her to speak and teach, as she has an opportunity,

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85 Ibid., 62.

86 Ibid., 71.
in all religious assemblies.\textsuperscript{87} More than seventy years would pass before women received the right to vote through the Nineteenth Amendment, but more than a hundred and twenty years would pass before women in the LCMS were allowed to vote at church meetings and before women could be ordained in the LCA and the ALC.

As Lutherans considered ordaining women in the late sixties, they had to study and discuss the issue within a twentieth century context. The post-World War II American society in many ways offered expansive opportunities for women. The availability of more domestic labor saving technology, easier access to better birth control methods, and an increase in opportunities for higher education combined to present greater freedom of choices. Based on the 1970 census, a 1971 \textit{New York Times} article concluded: “After a decade of striking change, the American woman is now considerably more likely to attend college, work, live alone, marry late, be divorced or separated, and outlive her husband than she was at the start of the nineteen-sixties.”\textsuperscript{88} In 1940 only about 18 percent of married women ages 25-35 worked full time; in 1970 the figure was about 38 percent. In 1950 less than 30 percent of women had BA degrees, but by 1972, 45 percent did, with more seeking graduate degrees in all fields.\textsuperscript{89} In ALC and LCA seminaries, women began to appear, seeking master degrees in non-ordination programs. Their skills, intellectual powers, and willingness to serve the church were now

\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., 72.


finding avenues leading to the seminary, and some women began thinking that the position of pastor was possible.90

In this setting was the new feminism born. Most historians of the women’s movement find the publication in 1963 of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* to be a convenient starting point for the movement because the book gave a name to a simmering grievance and provided an ideological position. In retrospect, one can note that Friedan primarily focused on one group of women -- white, bored suburban wives -- and she did not give much consideration to other groups such as suburban women who were busy and fulfilled, women who were already working outside the home while trying to manage a family, and most African American and other women in minority groups. But *The Feminine Mystique* did verbalize a growing discontent among American women for more opportunities outside the confines of domesticity, and in 1966 Friedan co-founded the National Organization for Women (NOW).91 It was during this same time period that the white women working in civil rights organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) found themselves restricted to domestic or secretarial duties or to fulfilling the sexual needs of the men in the movement. In a replay of the dispute at the 1840 London conference, women in the civil rights organizations, after being ignored or ridiculed by the men, responded with a written record of their grievances and a call for women to organize. In 1964 and 1965 Casey Hayden and Mary

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90 For example, in 1969, 109 of the 4,258 students in Lutheran seminaries were women. Grindal, “Getting Women Ordained,” 176.

King presented papers at retreats and conferences on the roles prescribed for women, arguing that women, like blacks, were an oppressed group in society. In 1967 at the Chicago National Conference for a New Politics, attempts by women to bring the matter to the floor were dismissed, with one male leader saying: "Move on, little girl; we have more important issues to talk about here than women's liberation."\(^92\) Sheila Rowbotham, in her history of the woman's movements, states: "The chapters of the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) became one of the recruiting grounds for the early women's liberation groups which began to form in 1967."\(^93\) Elizabeth Cady Stanton would have understood this origin of the second wave of feminism. A cartoon from the late sixties captured the sexist situation by showing a woman surrounded by dirty dishes and holding a crying baby. Speaking on the telephone, she says: "He's not here; he's out helping the struggle of oppressed people."\(^94\)

The new feminist movement, however, did not have one main goal as did the suffrage movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; it sought liberty and equality for women in all aspects of society. By 1970, "women's liberation" was a widely recognized and highly charged phrase, but what it meant was ambiguous. Some feminists focused on the cause of women's plight, but split over whether capitalism or the patriarchal system was to blame. The goals, strategy, philosophy, tactics, and style of the new women's groups varied widely, although most Americans ignored the diversity and

\(^{92}\)Ibid., 44.

\(^{93}\)Ibid., 376.

\(^{94}\)Gitlin, 371.
found "Women's Liberation" a convenient umbrella to cover all women who questioned gender restrictions. Gerda Lerner, who founded the first master's degree program in women's history, divided the groups into two categories in 1970. The Reform Movement, which included NOW, used traditional democratic methods similar to the older feminist movements for winning legal and economic rights. The Women's Liberation movement, which included groups such as WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) were more radical in their goals and tactics. But all feminists, according to Lerner, had certain core beliefs:

What all new feminists have in common is a vehement impatience with the continuance of second-class citizenship and economic handicaps for women, a determination to bring our legal and value systems into line with current sexual mores, an awareness of the psychological damage to women of their subordinate position, and a conviction that change must embrace not only laws and institutions, but also the minds, emotions, and sexual habits of men and women.

The new feminists were mostly white, middle class, well educated daughters of the World War II generation who had some economic security. Although not a cohesive group, they succeeded in raising the consciousness of the country, and from their peak activity years between 1969 and 1975, they changed forever the perception of women and the assumption that women would have to accept a male dominated status quo. The vote for women's ordination in two of the national Lutheran bodies coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the woman suffrage amendment. In honor of that event, women's groups came together for the Women's Strike for Equality. On 26 August when thousands of

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95 Linden-Ward and Green, xiii; Berkely, 162.
96 Lerner, 32.
97 Ibid.
women marched to commemorate the 1920 victory and to demand equality in 1970, the
unity of the march was for many the symbolic high point of the women’s movement.98
For those supporting women’s ordination, 1970 was also a lofty summit in Lutheran
church history.

The new feminism of the late sixties shared more than the goal of improving
woman’s lot with the feminism of earlier decades. As was also true of the civil rights and
the antiwar movements, many people mistrusted and feared the changes which the
movement advocated. The second wave of feminists was mocked by critics as were
previous generations of women’s right activists. Martha Weinman Lear, writing in the
New York Times in 1968, stated: “It is the feminist burden that theirs is the only civil
rights movement in history which has been put down consistently by the cruelest weapon
of them all — ridicule.”99 One only has to look at the article in Time magazine following
that 1970 women’s march to see an example of this condescending attitude: “No one
knows how many shirts lay wrinkling in laundry baskets last week as thousands of
women across the city turned out for the first big demonstration of the Women’s
Liberation movement. They took over Manhattan’s Fifth Avenue, providing not only
protest, but some of the best sidewalk ogling in years.”100

98Berkely, 57.

March 1968, in American Society since 1945, ed. William L. O’Neill (Chicago:

100Time, 7 September 1970, quoted in Pooley, “A Question of Authority,” no page
number.
But the new feminism differed from the older one in two significant ways. It met with political responsiveness sooner, and it captured the media’s attention almost immediately. In the late sixties and early seventies, the popular press discovered the “feminine mystique” and female militancy. A survey of article titles from that time period reveal a change in the tone and substance from ones of only a few years previous: In *McCall’s*, “Let’s Put Women in Their Place, Like for Instance, City Hall”; in *Redbook*, “Harmful Lessons Little Girls Learn in School” and “More than a Mother”; in *Sports Illustrated*, “Onward the Feminine Invasion: Lady Jockeys”; in *Seventeen*, “In My Opinion We Need a Woman President”; in *Lady’s Home Journal*, a Billy Graham article, “Jesus and the Liberated Woman.” Suddenly it seemed as if the liberated woman was everywhere — in the bookstore, on the front page of newspapers, and on television news broadcasts.

Today some of the issues raised by women seem obvious, or have been settled decades ago. But they were earthshaking to many in the late sixties and often were met with fear, anger, or condescension. In 1970 the *New York Times* reported on the revolution in women’s attire: “Without any confrontation, demonstration or even artful campaigning, women are securing another right: the right to wear pants to work....These male executives are doing with the same grace what their forebears in Congress did fifty years ago when they granted women the vote. Men today see it as inevitable. It will make life easier around the office, and besides, there’s a larger bogey - the midiskirt.”

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One of the issues raised for women pastors centered on clerical garb. What would the women wear? The early Lutheran women pastors and seminarian students recall this topic being discussed with great earnestness when the subject was ordination. Elizabeth Platz, the first woman ordained in the Lutheran Church, recalls the ridiculousness of people focusing on this issue and wondering if there would be a unistole, pants suits for women pastors, or whether clerical collars would need to be frilly or lacy.\textsuperscript{102} The subject of outer attire deflected from the real work-related issues while at the same time allowed those in position of authority to appear to be making concessions. The Church was not so different from secular institutions in this matter.

At the end of 1969 and early 1970, the three most popular news magazines in the country ran extensive articles on women's liberation, trying to explain just what it was and how people were responding to it. It would have been nearly impossible to have escaped the subject. \textit{Time} took a decidedly negative approach: "Women's rising expectations...are increasingly out of kilter with reality." And the article concluded: "The radical women have opened a Pandora's box. But that of course is their birth-right. They are her direct descendants."\textsuperscript{103} One can almost hear the invocation of the "orders of creation." The five page \textit{Newsweek} article was written by a woman who was not sure where she stood on the issue as she began her research. "For a newcomer to women's liberation, the truly jolting experience is the first encounter with the anger that liberationists feel toward men. It bristles through the literature of the movement and it

\textsuperscript{102}Elizabeth Platz, author interview. Elizabeth Platz was ordained 22 November 1970.

\textsuperscript{103}"The New Feminists: Revolt against Sexism," \textit{Time}, 21 November 1969, 56.
explodes into conversation in great hot blasts of doctrinaire invective.” After profiling various leaders and discussing the issues, she concludes that the movement is about “options.” *Life* magazine devoted ten pages to the movement in December 1969, and justified the coverage: “Today women’s liberation has become a serious national movement. In less than two years, it has grown in numbers and militancy.”

It is important to recall this time period through the examples given above to understand the atmosphere surrounding the Lutherans in the late sixties as they discussed the ordination of women. For they did not form their study groups, write their position papers, and read the Bible in a vacuum. The women’s movement, whether supported or opposed, did raise the consciousness of both men and women to the status of women in American society. For example, in 1970 John Leonard wrote a column for *Life* in which he explained that no longer could he see television shows the way he used to and just accept them: “I was, alas, aware once more of the Woman Question.” As he surveyed the current television offerings, he was forced to notice the portrayal of women in subservient positions: “If women have a profession, it’s usually nursing, where they minister to men. If they are superior to men, it’s because they have magical powers. If they are over thirty years old, they’ve got to be widows, almost always with children, so that they can’t run around enjoying themselves like real people.” Could not this also be the scenario in

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most churches of that time — women functioning as care givers to men, women in authority mainly in the Pentecostal churches where they may have achieved that position through special gifts, and women locked into a domestic setting? That a man was explaining the incongruousness of women’s situation in a popular medium accessible to almost everyone, in a magazine that ranked with apple pie as an American tradition, speaks volumes about the women’s movement permeating the American consciousness in 1970.

When Lutheran seminarian Constance Parvey argued for women’s ordination in 1969, she relied as much on the changes occurring in society and women’s new roles in that evolving society as she did on theology: “In the modern situation where we have so quickly changed from a rural to a technological culture, there is a need for recognizing a new woman’s role.”\textsuperscript{107} But for many Lutherans, it was not that simple. There may be change at the office, in the hospital, on the construction site, but the sanctuary is different. When one considers how the women’s movement and the changes it wrought affected women’s ordination, a closer approximation of the situation is found in a statement by Marty Nesselbush Green in her study of gender in conservative Protestantism in the early twentieth century: “Gender ideology interacts with as well as reacts to the gender ideology of the larger society.”\textsuperscript{108} When Lutherans studied women’s ordination, they had three reactions. Some acknowledged openly that the changes in the

\begin{quote}
“The Mary Tyler Moore Show.”
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{107}Parvey, “Ordain Her, Ordain Her Not,” 205.

status of women in society should also be reflected in the church; others recognized that secular culture did impact the issue but maintained that changes should only be made if there were sound theological reasons for women’s ordination; and finally, others rejected the influence of contemporary conditions and held firmly to their traditional position, viewing themselves as the saviors of true Lutheranism.

For those Lutherans in the first group, the women’s movement raised the consciousness of men and women to the inequity in the church and gave language to that gap between the ideal and reality. The person who perhaps more than any other influenced Lutherans to ordain women was Krister Stendahl, who actually supported women’s ordination before the rise of the women’s movement in the sixties. His 1958 book *The Bible and the Role of Women* set forth the arguments for ordaining women when that subject was before the Lutheran Church in his native Sweden. Later, as a professor and Dean of Harvard Divinity School, he continued working for women’s ordination in the United States. In 1966 the American edition of his book carried his arguments into the American debate, and by that time some of his statements seemed to echo the sentiments of those influenced by the changing role of women in society. He found it irrational, for example, to state: “In world affairs you may accept emancipation - and before God there is neither man nor woman -- but in the church’s life and its worship it is not so....The only alternative - so it seems to me -- is to recognize the legal, economic, political, and professional emancipation of women, and that with joy and gratitude, as a great achievement.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women*, 40.
Another work which the church studied as it wrestled with women's ordination was *Adam's Fractured Rib*. Its author Margaret Sittler Ermarth, then a professor of history at Wittenberg University and the chair of the LCA subcommittee studying the role of women in the church, discussed women in society in the first section of the book. Covering such topics as women doctors, unequal pay, the SDS, and NOW, she set the ordination issue firmly in the context of the overall discrimination women faced in society.\(^{110}\)

The consciousness raising of the sixties was very important to both women and men who began to see women's role in the church in a different light. Willetta Heising was a University of Washington political science major who married a career Navy man in 1946 and joined his LCMS church. For more than twenty years, as they moved with his career and she raised five children, she did not question the church's position on women. But in the late 1960s when her daughter was at LCMS Valparaiso University, she became aware of the limitations imposed on her when she wanted to serve in church-related activities. Other Lutheran experiences in the late sixties increased her awareness of the inequities posed by the church, and she was both amazed and impressed when she saw Elizabeth Platz wearing a clerical collar in the early seventies. As Heising explains: "It was the same old Gospel, but a different world."\(^{111}\) Heising went on to graduate from Yale Divinity School in 1977 and became an ordained Lutheran pastor in 1981 when she was in her fifties. Eric Gritsch believes that public expressions on the

\(^{110}\)Ermarth, 3-26.

\(^{111}\)Willetta Heising, interview by author, 18 November 1997, Williamsburg, VA. All future references to Heising are based on this interview.
status of women in society, the changes occurring in so many areas for women, and the
intensive study given to the issue among Lutheran theologians exerted some peer pressure
on the clergy to look favorably on the ordination issue. According to Gritsch, one might
have looked ridiculous or too Missouri if one did not support women in the pulpit.\textsuperscript{112}

In the joint Lutheran study done by LCUSA on women’s ordination, included
with all the Biblical and theological reports on the subject was one titled “Sociological
Factors in the Ordination of Women” by Ronald L. Johnstone. Although only a small
part of the whole study, its inclusion signaled that a non-theological aspect, the role of
women in society, was being taken into consideration. Johnstone detailed the recent
changes in women’s lives, including gaining suffrage, the gradual decline in the double
standard of sexual freedom, the entrance of women into the professions, and the legal
provisions for equal rights.\textsuperscript{113} The introduction to the LCUSA report states: “Today, in
a time of widespread change, women are achieving new dignity, rights, and
responsibilities in all areas of life in the world, so that one can properly speak of a
‘revolution’ in the status of women.” It continues: “We are called to consider anew what
we have readily assumed.”\textsuperscript{114} And the report concludes: “The revolution in women’s
affairs is deep and broader than most people imagine. When churches get around to a
position on this, it will probably be too late.”\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{112}Gritsch, author interview.

\textsuperscript{113}Ronald L. Johnstone, “Sociology Factors in the Ordination of Women,” in “A
Statement of Findings,” LCUSA Exhibit A, ELCA Archives, Chicago.

\textsuperscript{114}“Statement of Findings,” 2.

\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., 82
Even some members of the LCMS clergy admitted that the women’s movement had a positive impact on women’s roles in the church. Fred Kramer, a professor at Concordia Springfield Seminary from 1956 to 1976 who helped write some of the recommendations on Missouri women suffrage in 1969, reflected on that time when interviewed in 1977:

‘Women’s Lib’ affects the women in the Missouri Synod too, perhaps in ways that some pastors don’t fully realize. After all, ‘women’s lib’ has a lot to do - or does it or doesn’t it - with more women all the time going into jobs outside of the home. I do think it hangs together, and I am of the opinion that we in our church must wake up to the fact that you don’t just have men coming to the meetings and making all the financial decisions, when often the women will earn as much as the men, and when in many of our congregations the women are a majority and quite a few of them wage earners.116

Elizabeth Platz was the first woman ordained in the Lutheran Church in the United States, and as in 1970, she is the Lutheran Chaplain at the University of Maryland. In reflecting on that turbulent time, she recalls that when the resolution passed at the convention, Paul Orso, President of the Maryland Synod of the LCA, told her, “Now you are a person,” referring to the one word change in the constitution. Certainly, the goal of the women’s rights movement was just that, allowing a woman to participate as a person and to be judged by her abilities rather than by her sex. Platz stated: “The rights issues, questioning of authority, the whole upheaval – women definitely had a role in what today we call a paradigm shift.”117 And Jean Bozeman, Assistant to the Bishop of the Virginia Synod of the ELCA and in 1976 the first woman ordained in the Virginia Synod,

116Fred Kramer (ELCA Oral History Collection) 42.
117Platz, author interview.
points out that one of the important facets of the women's movement was increasing women's self-esteem, helping them recognize what they were capable of doing.\textsuperscript{118}

One of the strongest pieces of evidence that the women's movement affected the ordination issue lies in the swiftness of the formation of committees to study, issue reports, and bring the subject to the convention floor in the late sixties. In an ALC Men's periodical in 1970, feminist author Caroline Bird acknowledges that "the most startling innovation since 1966 has been the appearance of a new kind of woman."\textsuperscript{119} She is referring to a woman who was seeking equality, opportunity, and responsibility in all areas of society and who became much more visible and difficult to ignore after 1966. A Gallop Opinion survey reported that in 1962 less than 30 percent thought women suffered job discrimination, but in 1970, 65 percent described discrimination in business and professional areas.\textsuperscript{120}

But was there a sudden change in the Church's attitude that also coincided with the new awareness of women's status in society? In 1964 a reader wrote *The Lutheran* asking where the LCA stood on women's ordination. The response was that the question had not arisen in large assemblies: "It's likely that there is very little sentiment in favor of ordaining women in the LCA."\textsuperscript{121} In an editorial in the *Lutheran Quarterly* in May 1966, Philip J. Hefner declared the role of women in the Lutheran Church "the greatest hidden

\textsuperscript{118}Jean Bozeman, interview by author, 18 October 1996, Virginia Beach, VA. All future references to Bozeman are based on this interview.


\textsuperscript{120}"Gallup Opinion Index, Report 63," September 1970, quoted in Chafe, 240.

\textsuperscript{121}"My Question Is....," *The Lutheran*, 29 July 1964, 46.
problem.” But he also states: “It is unlikely that we will feel a need to ordain women in the near future.”

Also in 1966, the LCA Commission on the Comprehensive Study of the Doctrine of the Ministry asked all thirty-one presidents of the synods which composed the LCA about this “hidden problem.” All thirty-one said that “to their knowledge the role of women in the life of the church had never come up for discussion within their synods.”

ELCA pastor Judith Cobb feels that the Lutheran Church looked archaic compared to other institutions by the late sixties, and pastor Jean Bozeman admits that the church was lagging up to this point: “If we believe our theology, we [the church] should have been leading, not following.” By 1970, the ALC and LCA may not have been leaders, but they were catching up. It stretches credulity to think it a coincidence that church bodies focused their attention on women at the very time when legal, educational, and political institutions, along with businesses and professions, began to examine their gender practices. It was about this time that newspapers began to eliminate their “Help Wanted Male” and “Help Wanted Female” columns, and many in the Lutheran Church saw this as a processional which the church should join.

Lutheran pastors Jean Bozemanz, Judy Cobb, and Elizabeth Platz do not believe that the cultural climate of the sixties drove the ALC and LCA to ordain women, but they do recognize the role that the women’s movement played. Bozeman firmly believes that “the Lutheran Church is a church that lives within and without the culture; culture

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123 Ermarth, 107.

124 Bozeman, author interview.
challenged us, but women’s ordination was a slow and methodical process based on theology.” Elizabeth Platz remembers a button of that time that read: “If you don’t want to ordain women, don’t baptize them.” In other words, the theology comes first and is an a priori argument for ordaining women. The majority of the ALC and LCA Lutherans involved in the women’s ordination issue fit into the second category; they believed the women’s movement was a factor, but not the main one in the ordination vote in 1970. It was extremely important then, as it is to this day, that the decision to ordain be theologically sound, with secular influences exerting not a shove, but a tap on the shoulder. Even though Krister Stendhal referred to the role of women in modern society, his landmark book’s full title is The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics. His argument for ordaining women is based on hermeneutics, interpreting the Bible in the candle light of the time in which it was written and also in the electric light of the present. Thus he frames his argument on the sola scriptura basis so important to Lutherans.

For the Lutherans in the second group, theologian Gracia Grindal presents the chronology of women’s ordination in her essay “Getting Women Ordained,” and in other works since 1970. The very first sentence in her detailed description of the ordination process unambiguously states: “Though the late 1960s were years of unprecedented social upheaval, Lutherans studied and debated women’s ordination on the grounds of the
Confessions and Scripture.”127 She points out that although Ermarth and Parvey and
others made appeals based on the status of women in society, other women leaders in the
church stayed away from that argument. Writing in the Lutheran Standard just prior to
the convention, Director of the ALC Women’s organization Margaret Wold made a plea
for conversation and discussion of the issue, but avoided using feminist language. Her
influence, along with Evelyn Streng’s, a professor at Texas Lutheran, was important on
the ALC committee appointed to study ordination in 1969. Their presence was crucial,
according to Grindal, as they prepared the resolution that would go before the ALC
convention in 1970.128 Elizabeth Platz also praised Streng and Dorothy Marple,
Executive Director of LCA Lutheran Church Women, for being articulate spokespersons
and arguing not just from the position of “everyone else is doing it.”129

What is noticeable, however, in Grindal’s explanation is that she does mention
the women’s movement frequently, if only to say it was not crucially important to the
success of women’s ordination at the two conventions. It was a presence, impossible to
ignore, but most Lutherans would not want to cede it much influence. Grindal points out
that the theological studies of the church had consistently emphasized that ordination was
not passed because of a “woman’s agenda,” and even if some delegates may have voted
“to some extent” on the basis of equal rights, the “theologians of the two churches
repeatedly resisted such reasons for change.” “Only at the end of the debates,” according


128 Ibid., 173.

129 Platz, author interview.
to Grindal, “did the women’s liberationists have much impact on the discussion.” In fact, Grindal claims that if the vote for ordination had come after the feminist movement had gathered sufficient strength within the church to push for it on the convention floor, the vote would have failed in 1970. And based on the internal forces at work within the Lutheran church, she is undoubtedly correct. The discussions among theology professors in seminary settings formed the basis of the approval of women’s ordination. And yet, the climate of the time was certainly conducive for at least the ALC and LCA to approve ordination.

The feminist movement also affected the women who became pioneer pastors. Elizabeth Platz says that often the issue turned on what a woman was rather than what a pastor did, and this concept is very disturbing to Platz who sees herself as a pastor who is a woman, rather than a woman pastor. That way of thinking has caused Platz some difficulty with feminists then and now. As she reflects back to 1970, she recalls that often the media and feminists wanted her to carry a certain agenda because she was The First. But she did not really have a feminist agenda. In all her comments to the media immediately after ordination and since then, she has repeatedly pointed out that a stereotypical feminist perspective on ordination does not suit her. This position has not always been met with support by women who did not come into the ministry as smoothly as she did, and their anger has hurt Platz. Willetta Heising has also been bothered by a connection to feminism but in a slightly different way. She explains: “Men get calls;


131 Platz, author interview.
women are feminists. It was seven or eight years after being ordained before someone asked me about my calling to be a pastor; people just assumed that I had another agenda."  

Thus the women’s rights movement reflects diversity and complexity in its effects on women’s ordination, even for those who benefitted from the feminists’ advocacy.

While LCA and ALC delegates were influenced in many different ways by the women’s movement when they voted at their assemblies in 1970, the role of the men in those church bodies needs to be noted. For the approval did not spring from a grassroots movement of women in the church. The Lutheran church has always been very much clergy-led, with laity involvement a relatively recent development, and the support of male clergy was vital. The studies of women’s role in the church and the resulting reports were done in the seminaries, with mostly male leadership. The Kersten study in 1970 revealed that on the question of ordination of women, the LCA clergy was 62 percent in favor, the ALC, 30 percent, and the LCMS, 8 percent. Although these figures reveal the differences between the LCA and the more conservative ALC, their support far exceeds that of the Missouri clergy, which made a significant difference in advancing the position and carrying it to favorable votes at the conventions. Jean

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132 Heising, author interview.

133 Judith A. Cobb, author interview.

134 Kersten, 124-125.
Bozeman has stated that the change passed so easily in both assemblies because of the male leadership and the strong manner in which they argued the position.\footnote{Bozeman, author interview.}

The women surveyed for this paper all expressed the sentiment that they had often benefitted from the support of the male clergy. Judith Cobb remembers her home pastor in Baltimore, Richard Lundeen, encouraging her in her religious studies in the 1960s and telling her that ordination was possible in her lifetime.\footnote{Judith A. Cobb, author interview.} Elizabeth Platz praised the support given to her by Donald Heiges, President of Gettysburg Seminary. According to Platz: "He saw the world with a broader lens. If I hadn’t encountered him, I might not have been ordained."\footnote{Platz, author interview.} Other male leaders who supported women’s ordination include Krister Stendahl, Raymond Tiermeyer, John Reumann, William Larsen, William Lazareth, Robert Marshall, Kent Knutsen, Alvin Rogness, and Jack Rubin.

An excellent example of the support given by some of the male leadership in the LCA and ALC occurred at the 1968 LCA national convention. As the \textit{Dallas Times Herald} reported on the assembly meeting in that Texas city, it began an article with the statement: "The Lutherans have heard from the women who had the 'big guns' on their side this time." The article reported that in a debate over whether women should have "proportionate" or "adequate" representation in decision-making bodies of the denomination, the issue almost became "a laughing matter" until the theologians spoke up. "As laughter pealed across the convention hall, Mrs. Louise Schoemaker of
Philadelphia expressed resentment that whenever the subject of women is broached there is a tendency toward 'nervous laughter.' At this point the Rev. Dr. George Forrell of Iowa spoke in defense of Schoemaker and the women: "I agree. The convention reaction to women speakers reveals sexism which is regrettable." When a woman delegate noted that in the future there may be more female clergy than male, she was assailed with laughter among the delegates (590 male and 90 female). Then Krister Stendahl arose and "sobered the crowd." He rebuked the convention: "The possibility of the majority of clergy being women is not funny -- the matter is in the hands of God." Such leadership complemented the women who supported ordination and helped smooth the path to the relatively easy passage of women's ordination at the LCA and ALC conventions.

The third reaction to the women's movement in relation to women's ordination was decidedly negative. Robert Wuthnow, in his study of American religion since World War II, found that feminism generally deepened the division between religious conservatives and religious liberals. Certainly this was true among Lutherans. The theologians studying women's roles and finally advocating for women's ordination often expressed their fear that the ordination issue would derail the post 1945 trend toward joint Lutheran activity, and in particular would sever the close ties between the ALC and

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140 Wuthnow, 227.
LCMS. Some opposed the ordination change for this very reason, while those supporting ordination thought that the issue could be seen in an adiaphoristic way so it would not be a hindrance to ecumenism. But in reality, the 1970 votes of the LCA and ALC did fulfill the prophecies of those who saw the divisive nature of the issue. To this day, joint Lutheran services are problematic, if not impossible, and the LCMS will usually not participate if women clergy are officiating in a service.

The equality which the feminists were demanding was a lightening rod to most in the LCMS. Mark Chaves, in his recent book on women in American religion, points out that prior to the Civil War, arguments for the ordination of women were based on the extraordinary abilities or sensibilities of the women, but that after 1865 the arguments were based on gender equality. Such equality, as has already been shown, is counter to the “orders of creation” which dominate Missouri theology, and thus was a major stumbling block to women’s ordination. Certainly equality relating to authority was not negotiable for many in the LCMS hierarchy. Lawrence Kerstan’s 1970 study of Lutherans asked those surveyed to respond to this statement: “In the modern family, the wife should have as much to say as the husband in making decisions.” All groups of laity and clergy, with the exception of the LCMS clergy, agreed overwhelmingly; among the Missouri clergy surveyed, 38 percent disagreed. The issue here is authority, and it therefore also relates to the position of a woman pastor, a woman in authority.

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141 "Statement of Findings," 2; Reumann, 122-123.

142 Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 83.

143 Kersten, 99.
One of the goals of the feminist movement was to gain federal legislative support for eradicating gender discrimination. Such action fanned the fear of the federal government over-reaching its boundaries. Missourians respect governmental authority, and therefore it is even more dangerous for the government to sanction practices which are in opposition to Missouri doctrine. In 1916 many Missouri clergy actively campaigned against woman suffrage. Missourian W.H.T. Dau wrote a description of the church's position on woman suffrage: "Just as he [the devil] had caused a great calamity in the beginning by a woman whom he enticed, so he plainly intends again by the feministic movement of our time, to inflict a great injury on the world."\textsuperscript{144} His words are not so different from those of an Indiana LCMS congregation in 1977 regarding the Equal Rights Amendment: "One of the gravest attacks on the churches of our land today comes in the form of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution...The ERA, if it becomes law, would empower the government to require our Synod, contrary to the teaching of sacred Scripture, to call women as professors to our theological seminaries and to ordain women as pastors for our synod's congregations."\textsuperscript{145} In reality, the First Amendment would preclude this, but the fear of the outside world encroaching on the church with dire results is often reflected in the attitude of the Missouri Synod.

The activities of the women's movement also threatened the church with the feminization of religion, the same argument heard in the nineteenth century. As Gerda Lerner has pointed out: "When women have entered an occupation in large numbers, this

\textsuperscript{144}W. H. T. Dau quoted in Graebner, 85.

\textsuperscript{145}Todd, 281.
occupation has come to be regarded as low status and has been rewarded by low pay."\textsuperscript{146} Thus not only would women shake theological foundations, they would “take over,” and then devalue the position with spiritual and financial repercussions.

One must also remember that just as the majority of the population supported the Vietnam war effort and were not out protesting in the streets, so the majority of the American public was not marching for feminist issues either. In Lawrence Kersten’s 1970 study of Lutherans, respondents were asked to comment on this statement: “Women who really desire full time careers should not marry because the roles of wife-mother and career women are basically incompatible.” Almost 30 percent of the Missouri clergy agreed, but so did 39 percent of the laity in the LCA laity, 42 percent in the ALC, and 48 percent in the LCMS.\textsuperscript{147} The feminist cause was often seen as a danger to traditional family life, and many, in addition to Lutherans, fretted over this aspect. In a 1971 \textit{Good Housekeeping} poll of 1000 members of its consumer panel, questions were asked about the goals of women’s liberation. There was overwhelming support for equal pay for equal work, equality in hiring practices, and nondiscrimination statutes. But support fell off dramatically for any change in child related issues or sharing household tasks.\textsuperscript{148} In 1983, an LCA survey of laity and clergy indicated that when people were polled on their attitude toward women in politics and increasing women’s status in society, they overwhelmingly approved by as much as 75 percent, but as soon as the

\textsuperscript{146}Lerner, 7.

\textsuperscript{147}Kersten, 99.

\textsuperscript{148}Gould, 72-73.
words “women’s liberation” were used in a question, the favorable response fell to 25 percent or less.\textsuperscript{149} And this was after fifteen years of familiarity with the feminist perspective and the comforting knowledge that the sky had not fallen; in 1970 the new feminism was unknown territory. The women’s movement presented both positive and negative images and messages, and Lutherans just like everyone else had to contend with both and evaluate the effects of the new feminism.

The women’s movement as a threat to the home was a negative perception for many, and in the LCMS, which stressed the wife and mother role as God-assigned, this negativity was intensified. Statements such as the following from a 1970 \textit{New York Times} article were not designed to allay fears: “So while organized groups and political lobbies tackle such ready targets as state law and education and employment discrimination, the crucial battle for women’s liberation will be fought within each nuclear family....”\textsuperscript{150} The extremists in the women’s movement, who often received the most media coverage, increased the fear and anger of many towards the feminists. Ti-Grace-Atkinson is quoted in a 1969 \textit{Life} article: “Marriage means rape and lifelong slavery. It’s so immature to grow babies in people’s bodies. If one had test-tube babies, there would be less chance of deformed fetuses.”\textsuperscript{151} In a 1968 article, Atkinson proposes raising children communally and states: “It’s just not honest to talk about freedom for


\textsuperscript{151}Lear, “The Second Feminist Wave,” 73.
women unless you get the child-rearing off their backs." The popular periodicals of the late sixties and early seventies repeatedly point out how very emotional the women's liberation subject is and how it starts arguments in most settings. Negative reaction to the goals of the women's movement could range from a condescending comparison to the suffragettes, to mild disapproval over feminist protests at the Miss America competition, to strong aversion to the theatrics of WITCH. Around 1970 the controversy linking lesbian issues to the feminist movement surfaced, and this only increased the fear among conservative groups.

In addition to the movement's own more radical segment causing it to lose mainstream support, feminists also were linked to groups with whom they had no connection except in some people's perception that all radicals were united in a multi-racial-gender conspiracy. Charles DeBenedetti, in his study of the antiwar movement, notes that even though black power militants were not involved with the mostly white leadership of the war protests, most Americans saw black power and antiwar protestors as related in challenging national institutional values. The women's rights activists also could be perceived as another link in the chain pulling down American values. The cover story of a March 1970 Newsweek was "Women in Revolt," and the cover featured a woman with her arm raised, a clenched fist thrust defiantly upward. The similarity to

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153Berkeley, 50.

154DeBennedetti, 150.

155Newsweek, 23 March 1970.
the black power symbol is unmistakable. Even a 1970 issue of a periodical of the ALC Men, which was devoted to women’s ordination, featured on its cover a headless clerical robe with a ruff collar and bow and in the lower corner the female biology symbol with the raised clenched fist and the words “Women’s Liberation.” Gerda Lerner’s 1979 work on women in American history offers this definition of radical feminism: “Radical feminism combines the ideology of classical feminism with the class-oppression concept of Marxism, the rhetoric and tactics of the Black Power movement, and the organizational structure of the radical student movement.” This statement from the seventies would confirm the worst fears of anyone already leery of feminism as it brings all the discordant societal groups together. Blanche Linden-Ward and Carol Hurd Green in their study of the women’s movement state: “Although the civil rights struggle, women’s lib, and the war in Vietnam directly affected a minority of Americans, most believed their lives were changed or threatened by these and other social revolutions, and they made subsequent personal and political decisions based on such misbelief.”

Even the LCUSA report on the role of women in the church, favorable as it was to women’s ordination, anticipated some negative consequences of ordaining women. In Ronald Johnstone’s report on the sociological factors of ordaining women, he listed some possible outcomes. There could be an increase in feminization of the church; women might be the “socio-emotional” leaders as a compliment to “task-oriented” men leaders;

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156 Event, December 1970.
157 Lerner, 36.
158 Linden-Ward and Green, xv.
consequently, there could be less emphasis on doctrine; there might be more emphasis on healing and supporting in the present and less on salvation for the church triumphant; recruitment of males for the ministry could be more difficult; and there could be a decrease in the participation of men in church, particularly among men of lower socioeconomic class. Johnstone concludes by saying that how these scenarios play out will depend on the number of women ordained. Such a list of possible outcomes from a study supporting ordination would not be a comfort to most in the LCMS.

And finally, acceding to the women’s agenda in the feminist movement could be viewed as starting down a slippery slope of one change after another to accommodate society’s fluctuating mores. Just as many nineteenth century Lutherans saw their brothers and sisters falling prey to an “Americanization” which was not true to Lutheran theology, many Missouri Lutherans in the sixties were concerned that such laxity was occurring in the tumultuous sixties. An article in the *Lutheran Witness* stated: “Women’s status in society is hardly at stake, but the church’s credibility is.” Even worse, the Church might have to admit that it had been wrong for centuries. This same article in May 1970, just prior to the other Lutheran bodies’ convention votes on ordination, sought to lay out the pros and cons of the issue. One reason for not ordaining reflected this fear of error: “If it [the church] begins ordaining women, it might give the impression it could have done so all along. It would be adding to a growing list of such admissions. Confidence in the church is already shaken. This could hurt more.” But then the author acknowledges the

\[\text{159 Johnstone, “Sociological Factors,” 66.}\]
church's complicity in this situation: "But part of the credibility damage is due to
admissions that have been delayed too long as it is."¹⁶⁰

The LCMS leadership saw the women's movement as another reason to hold to
what Scripture had told them for centuries, not to ordain women. Peter Brunner, the
resource for much of the Missouri argument against ordination, states it very clearly: "An
argument that believes it can derive a case for the ordination of women from the changed
position of the woman in modern society has no validity in the church."¹⁶¹ The
Missourians had accepted woman suffrage in 1969, a major change in their polity, but to
leap to ordination would be crossing a chasm far too wide and deep. LCMS pastor
Daniel Quiram in looking back to that time period remembers it as a time of turmoil in
the country which had repercussions in the Missouri Synod. To him it all focused on
authority. Who had authority in the Country, Church, Synod, Scripture?¹⁶² To the
LCMS, the best response to the current chaos was clinging to the doctrine as defined by
Francis Pieper in 1932 and the practices of the past decades, if not centuries. In 1977
James Adams of the St. Louis Post Dispatch, having followed closely the developments
in the LCMS which resulted in their internal conflicts, wrote Preus of Missouri which
chronicled the past and current history of the Synod. He states: "If Missourians somehow
got the notion that — along with those sweeping changes of the '60s — their Bible was

¹⁶¹ Brunner, 32.
¹⁶² Quiram, author interview.
being undermined, some backlash seemed likely.” The backlash occurred in the seventies when Synod President J.A.O. Preus and the hardcore conservatives forced out the President of Concordia Seminary and the majority of the faculty who were deemed too liberal, and congregations and members who disagreed left the Synod. That is another long story in Lutheran church history, but what is relevant to the woman’s ordination issue is that the spirit of the times did not ease the Missouri Synod into acceptance, but rather strengthened its resolve to stand firm against the most significant role for woman in the church, that of pastor.

Although religious institutions see faith, sin, grace, salvation and other spiritual concepts at work in the world, and although they usually desire that their members be witnesses, if not proselytizers, in the secular world, the reverse situation is not easily acknowledged. Should secular concepts such as equality, modernity, competition, and profit be a part of ecclesiastical life? Should church members bring the contemporary world into the sanctuary? When Lutherans considered the ordination of women, they did so looking backwards at their heritage and traditions, Lutheran theology, and, of course, Scripture. But they also had to face forward to confront the world in which they were living, and a merging of the secular and the theological was the result.

The result, however, was that all Lutherans would not end their journey at the same place. The complexity of the internal and external forces almost guaranteed that. Elizabeth Platz explained the difference this way: “For the LCA [and the ALC], it came down to – if there isn’t a reason not to, then go ahead. For the Missouri Synod, the

\[163\] Adams, 24.
attitude was — if there isn’t a reason to, then we shouldn’t do it.”164 Judith Cobb
summarizes the difference between the two Lutheran attitudes in this manner: “The
Missouri Synod sees the duty of the church to fight against the world. It is Christ against
the Culture. The LCA and ALC believe that God reveals Himself in places within the
world and sees the world as full of opportunities. It does not have to be an adversarial
relationship. God reveals himself through culture and learning.”165 The different
perspectives compelled the three Lutheran groups to reach very different conclusions
thirty years ago, decisions which to this day they are attempting to recognize, understand,
implement, and support.

164 Platz, author interview.

165 Judith A. Cobb, author interview.
THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN 1970

In 1970 the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod approached women’s ordination from different directions. When face to face with the issue, each did not respond to its internal forces and the contemporary culture’s external forces with uniformity or unanimity. The LCA was the leader among Lutheran church bodies, studying women’s ordination and preparing the way for change ten years prior to the 1970 convention. In 1964 the LCA established a Commission on the Comprehensive Study of the Doctrine of the Ministry to make recommendations about the nature of ministry, with women’s ordination part of the larger study. By 1969, twenty-four women enrolled in LCA seminaries had stated their intention to seek ordination.1 Margaret Ermarth’s Adam’s Fractured Rib, and other works by theologians such as Robert Tiemeyer, explained to clergy and laity the rationale for women’s ordination. Also by the late sixties, articles about Lutheran women pastors in Europe and ordination in general began appearing in The Lutheran. One such article featuring several women in the seminaries seemed to have as an underlying purpose to paint women’s ordination in as non-threatening colors as possible.2 William B. Trexler, the recent past ELCA Bishop of the Florida and Bahamas Synod, was completing his

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1Ermarth, 102.

studies at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in 1970.\textsuperscript{3} He does not recall any opposition to ordaining women among his associates: "I remember it as one of those things whose time for implementation was past due."\textsuperscript{4} Thus, when the LCA study stated in 1970 that "the point has now been reached where a responsible church has no choice but to participate in the movement toward a greater freedom and action for women," delegates were prepared to hear it.\textsuperscript{5}

The ALC also worked diligently to prepare for its vote at the 1970 national assembly.\textsuperscript{6} In 1967 its leadership proposed an extensive study by LCUSA, a group composed of all three major synods. Its report was condensed by Raymond Tiemeyer into a widely-distributed book that traced the history, theology, and Biblical basis of women’s ordination, anticipated difficulties, answered questions, and concluded by advocating the full participation of women in the church:

> Although the Gospel does not change, conditions do. New situations, differing customs, continued research, the ongoing work of God, and the prompting of the Spirit demand constant reconstruction of previous assumptions. The Church must periodically ask whether its practices give the fullest expression of the will of the Lord.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{3}William B. Trexler became the senior pastor of First Lutheran Church in Norfolk, Virginia, 1 January 2001.

\textsuperscript{4}William B. Trexler, e-mail interview by author, 3 November 2000. All future references to Trexler are based on this interview.

\textsuperscript{5}Commission on the Comprehensive Study of the Doctrine of Ministry, 15.

\textsuperscript{6}On 22 December 1970 Barbara Andrews became the first woman ordained in the ALC, one month after Elizabeth Platz’s ordination in the LCA.

\textsuperscript{7}Tiemeyer, 8.
Not all LCA or ALC clergy and laity supported women’s ordination, however, as the “Letters to the Editor” section in *The Lutheran* revealed just prior to and after the conventions. In June 1970, a Wisconsin man took issue with the Board of the Lutheran Church Women for supporting ordination and argued that it was presumptuous to think that the majority of LCW women were in favor of ordination; he also expressed concern for the damage to ecumenism with the LCMS and the Catholic Church if the ALC and LCA ordained women.8 Revealing the differences among congregations, a woman from New York was delighted by the LCW action: “I’m one LCW member who would be grateful to have just one woman elected to our congregation’s church council.”9 In August, a man from Cleveland wrote: “I have asked several opinions in this area on the ordination of women and comments are ‘Women are too catty.’ I’ll go to a church where men preach.”10 Elizabeth Platz recalled that in her first year after ordination, there were many congratulatory letters, but also some calling her an Antichrist, and she received so many harassing phone calls she had to change her phone number.11 The votes in favor of women’s ordination were cast in Minneapolis and San Antonio with relative speed and ease, but changing the hearts and minds of six million members would not be as easy. However, the LCA and ALC leadership had at least set congregations on the path to gender equality in the pulpit.

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9Ibid.


11Platz, author interview.
The attitude within the LCMS was very different. As the LCA and ALC hierarchies moved towards women's ordination, the LCMS mostly ignored the issue, caught up in an internecine conflict to which the ordination issue was minuscule. Since 1945 the LCMS had been pursuing a less rigid stance on many issues; indeed, its membership in LCUSA reflected a spirit of cooperation absent in the first hundred years of Missouri's history. But the election of Jacob Preus as president in 1969 paved the way for a political and religious struggle within the LCMS for its conservative soul. The vocabulary of those describing events at the LCMS conventions of this time is filled with political rhetoric. Martin E. Marty in 1972 referred to Preus's "highly organized supporters" and noted: "Whatever either side says about the Holy Spirit speaking truth through the majority vote, neither is leaving matters up to the Spirit." With a touch of irony, the political activism of the late sixties had reached into the LCMS. The cause was different, and there were no violent confrontations, but conservatives had learned to mobilize their forces, control membership on important boards, and seize key committee chairs. LCMS pastor Daniel Quiram's recalled the politics, which were new to him at church conventions -- walkie-talkies on the floor, caucuses, "political activism that was based on a theological position." The goal was to drive from their positions within the church those, particularly professors in the seminary, who did not subscribe to the ultra conservative theology. Michael Koch, a 1973 graduate of Concordia Seminary, believes that most of the faculty and students in the seminary at this time were in favor of ordaining women, and that about thirty women did protest outside the Milwaukee

\[12\text{Marty, "Missouri's Inner Struggle," } \textit{The Lutheran}, 15 \text{ November 1972, 11.}\]

\[13\text{Quiram, author interview.}\]
convention hall in 1971.\textsuperscript{14} The men inside the hall, however, held the votes and controlled the decisions. Thus the LCMS national assembly, which followed the other two Lutheran conventions, reaffirmed that “the Word of God does not permit women to the pastoral office,” and rested its case on I Corinthians 14:34 and I Timothy 2:12-14.\textsuperscript{15}

WOMEN’S ORDINATION THIRTY YEARS LATER

Thirty years have passed since the ordination of women became a reality for two major Lutheran bodies and a continued denial for the other. Today the LCMS has about 2.6 million baptized members in about 6,200 congregations and about 8,700 male pastors.\textsuperscript{16} In 1974, President of Concordia Seminary John H. Tietjen and forty-five of the fifty faculty at Concordia Seminary were suspended, and a Seminary in Exile (SEMINEX) was founded with about 400 of the 600 Concordia students.\textsuperscript{17} Many of the clergy and laity who disagreed with the LCMS positions formed a separate Lutheran church body, the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) in 1976 with about 100,000 members; the AELC merged with the ELCA in 1988.\textsuperscript{18} Michael Koch believes that in the 1980s about 25 percent of the women in LCA and ALC seminaries were from

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14}Koch, author interview.
  \item \textsuperscript{15}Nelson, \textit{Lutheranism in North America}, 261.
  \item \textsuperscript{16}“LCMS News,” accessed 4 October 2000; available from \url{http://www.lcms.org}; Internet.
  \item \textsuperscript{17}Adams, 33.
  \item \textsuperscript{18}Reumann, 200. At the first convention of the AELC, in contrast to the LCMS conventions, 70 percent of the delegates were laity and one third of these were women. Tietjen, \textit{Memoirs in Exile}, 270.
\end{itemize}

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the LCMS.\textsuperscript{19} The 1995 national convention, which was 95 percent male, affirmed the right of women to vote in congregations, but not to serve as elders, presidents, or vice-presidents of congregations; individual congregations may occasionally alter this directive if unusual circumstances warrant.\textsuperscript{20} Although the 1969 LCMS convention passed a resolution allowing congregations to institute women suffrage, voting is still not a right enjoyed by all Missouri women. In 1986 the last church-wide survey of women suffrage found that women were still prohibited from voting in 20 percent of the congregations. Concordia River Forest professor Mary Todd notes in her research that no statistics have been gathered since then, but based on observations, this still seems an appropriate figure.\textsuperscript{21}

Since the LCMS schism in the seventies, the subject of ordaining women has been closed, not open to discussion, debate, or compromise. A 1995 adult study guide for the role of women in the church begins with an eight-year-old girl asking her father why she can’t be a pastor some day. The father responds: “God gave certain jobs to men and certain jobs to women. For example, God made women, not men, to be mothers.”\textsuperscript{22} The book continues in a question and answer format to explain the church’s opposition to ordaining women. It outlines three arguments made for ordaining women: functional --

\textsuperscript{19}Koch, author interview.

\textsuperscript{20}Herbert C. Mueller, Jr., \textit{The Service of Women in the Church} (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 37.

\textsuperscript{21}Todd, 244.

\textsuperscript{22}Mueller, 37.
she can do it; emotional -- I want to do it; and cultural -- times have changed. The LCMS response to each is succinct and final: “Each ignores the authority of God’s Word.”

Indeed, since the internal crisis in the seventies, the Missouri Synod has become more conservative and dogmatic. Bishop William Trexler observes: “In my experience, the LCMS has become even more rigid in recent years. Some of the more moderate voices in LCMS left that denomination in the sixties and seventies....The legalistic view of scripture and church polity has driven the LCMS for decades.” A review of the church’s statements on women at the beginning of the twenty-first century reveals a somewhat softer tone, but still a rigid doctrine. The inferiority of women has been de-emphasized, and there is a heralding of the professional positions women may occupy within prescribed boundaries: “The Christian response to the service of women in the church emphasizes the full equality of women and men in their relationship to God and creation, and rejoices in the distinctive identities and responsibilities which God has bestowed on men and women in their service to Him.” And how does the LCMS of the year 2000 address the ordination of women specifically? A recent “Office of the President Statement: The Ordination of Women” makes clear that nothing has changed since 1847: “Our church opposes the ordination of women to the Public, Pastoral Ministry, not simply because the Synod says so, but because the Scriptures say so....This

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23 Ibid., 26.
24 Todd, 330; Koch, author interview.
25 Trexler, author interview.
is the ground on which we must stand.” The last sentence, an allusion to Martin
Luther’s refusal to recant at the Diet in Worms -- “Here I stand, I can do no other” -- thus
joins Scripture, Lutheran theology, and the denial of women clergy in an indivisible
LCMS trinity.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the result of the merger of the
LCA, ALC, and AELC in 1988, currently has about 5.2 million baptized members in
almost 11,000 congregations. From two women ordained in 1970, the number of
female clergy has grown to 2,358, or 13.4 percent of the 17,600 ELCA ordained clergy.
According to James G. Cobb, Associate Dean of Admissions and Church Relations at
Gettysburg Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, in the year 2000 women comprised
about half the enrollment in ELCA seminaries, with many more students entering as
older, second career students, a trend evident also among male students.

Thus, a generation later, for most ELCA Lutherans a woman in a clerical collar is,
if not fully accepted, at least expected. According to Jean Bozeman, who was the only
woman on the full-time faculty of a Lutheran seminary in 1970, in some congregations
accustomed to seeing women in the pastoral role, young people ask if men can also be

27Ibid.

28“Inside ELCA Congregations,” The Lutheran, December 2000, 47.

29Figures provided by Judy Day, Commission for Women of the ELCA, by e-mail
to author, 31 October 2000. The synod with the most active clergy women is Metro
Chicago with ninety-six or 26.8 percent; the synod with the fewest is North Carolina
Synod with twenty-eight or 10.8 percent. The percentage of women pastors rises to 18.7
percent when only active, not retired, clergy are considered.

30James G. Cobb, interview by author, 2 February 2001, Gettysburg, PA. All
future references to James G. Cobb are based on this interview.
pastors. The climate for women clergy, though still often chilly, has improved due to the support of the church hierarchy that has sponsored workshops, written discussion guides, and has been generally supportive, while the sheer increase in the number of women clergy has helped change the perceptions of both clergy and laity.\(^{31}\) Yet it would be misleading to assume that after thirty years there are no problems for women who become pastors in the ELCA. As James G. Cobb regretfully notes: "Congregations still associate authority with a deep voice."\(^{32}\) Cultural conditioning cannot be changed as easily as words on a piece of paper.

Since the increase in women’s ordination among mainline churches in the 1970s, several national studies have examined the effects of this ecclesiastical change. One study surveyed fifteen predominantly white Protestant denominations using data from 1993-1994. The title of the published work, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*, is an apt description of the situation facing women clergy. The authors conclude: "In spite of overall growth in numbers...clergy women remain significantly underpaid and underemployed relative to men. Women are more likely to serve part-time, to leave parish ministry, and to serve in specialized ministry."\(^{33}\) As this thesis has noted, Lutherans do not always follow the pattern of other Protestant denominations, so a pertinent question is: Do ELCA clergywomen fit the above description?

\(^{31}\) Bozeman, author interview.

\(^{32}\) James G. Cobb, author interview.

Lutherans have also studied the results of their 1970 decision.\textsuperscript{34} In 1980, one hundred of the 187 ordained women met to share their stories and concluded: “Our progress has not been without pain, but the struggle has been fruitful. Still there is much to be done.”\textsuperscript{35} In 1990, a survey found the following problem areas: Women often struggle to establish a pastoral identity; the male clergy still offer resistance to accepting women as pastors; and some lay women also object to clergy women, viewing them as invading an institution in which the “homebound amateurs” had status and denying the validity of their own volunteer work. The twenty year retrospective also noted that women were not as often called to be senior pastors of large congregations.\textsuperscript{36} It was not until 1985 that June Nilssen broke this barrier at a large church in Milwaukee.

At the twenty-fifth anniversary of women’s ordination, the ELCA Commission for Women and the Department for Research and Evaluation began work on a three-part study of women clergy. The survey was sent to all clergy women and a sample of 800 clergymen and resulted in over 1,800 responses. The survey found that women continue to wait longer for first calls than do men, but unlike other Protestant denominations, almost all ELCA clergy women serve their first call in a congregation rather than in a specialized ministry. The “three year rule,” which requires all ELCA pastors to serve a congregation before moving into a specialized ministry puts pressure on the church to

\textsuperscript{34} For essays by clergy women and women involved in the 1970 decision, see Gloria E. Bengston, ed., Lutheran Women in Ordained Ministry 1970-1995 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995).


place women in this most visible position and to help move women into leadership roles. Looking only at first call positions, there was little difference between men and women in the community context (rural, urban, etc.) of their first congregations. But women were more often called to congregations with significantly fewer financial resources, were paid below salary guidelines, and went On Leave from Call more than clergymen. The last finding revealed that women were more than twice as likely to be On Leave, with about one-third citing the reason as conflict with parish or staff, one-third on leave for study, and the remaining clergy women not active for a variety of reasons.  

Unlike many other denominations, the placement, acceptance, and success or failure of ELCA clergy women are often dependent on the bishops of the church. Elected for six-year terms, the sixty-six bishops administer synods, such as the Virginia Synod, Southern California Synod, and Grand Canyon Synod, whose boundaries reflect geography and size of the Lutheran population. The bishops are the synods’ pastors, and in the course of their duties also become the gatekeepers to pastoral positions, for they decide which names are forwarded to which congregations seeking pastors. In *A Still Small Voice*, Frederick J. Schmidt Jr. surveyed a random sample of ELCA women pastors in the 1990s and concluded that it is the bishops who shape the church. Jean Bozeman, assistant to the Bishop of the Virginia Synod, has stated that one of the main tasks facing the church after the 1970 ordination vote was to educate bishops on gender issues, and

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that significant progress has been made in the last thirty years.\textsuperscript{39} Florida Bishop William B. Trexler describes the current situation: “I know that it is still difficult to open up some congregations to accept women as pastoral candidates for their call list. While I have seen a lot of change toward greater acceptance, there is still a long road to travel until there is equality in mobility.”\textsuperscript{40}

Women clergy in the ELCA find themselves limited by the “Stained Glass Ceiling” as they continue to be under-represented at the senior pastor of large congregations and bishop levels. It was not until 1992, twenty-two years after women were first ordained, that April Urling Larson was selected as a bishop, and three more years before there was a second woman bishop. In the year 2000, the ELCA had three women in this key position determining who will have access to call committees and mediating congregational conflicts. Bishops who advocate and support women clergy are essential to fulfilling the promise of women’s ordination, and thus in 1992, the ELCA Commission for Women conducted a study of the twenty-three women who between 1987 and 1992 had received sufficient votes in the nominating process to be considered serious nominees.\textsuperscript{41} While the report stressed the individual differences in the elections and among the nominees, some patterns emerged.

\textsuperscript{39}Bozeman, author interview.

\textsuperscript{40}Trexler, author interview.

\textsuperscript{41}The vast majority of synods use the ecclesiastical ballot process in which there are no nominations before the first ballot. Voters at synod assemblies may enter any eligible person’s name on the first ballot which becomes the nominating process. Everyone who receives a vote is listed on the second ballot with the number of nominees decreasing on subsequent ballots until one achieves the required number of votes.
There remains ambivalence about women and power among both male and female clergy and laity:

If it has generally been the case for men who would be bishop, that they be circumspect, strong but not outspoken, apparently ambivalent about their interest in power, moderate in their opinions and modes in character, then it is all the more so for women. If we are suspicious of anyone who appears to seek this office, we are doubly suspicious of women who seem interested in it. ... *Women and power* are still two words that, when put together, are perceived by many as threatening and unseemly. Women have internalized this message, and so, many women still feel as uncomfortable about acknowledging and embracing their opportunities for, and even calls to, positions of power and authority as others may feel about accepting them in such roles.\(^{42}\)

Furthermore, the nominating process with the ecclesiastical ballot is not as favorable to women as a pre-assembly nominating process.\(^{43}\) And the lack of role models for women at this level of authority and administration is telling. None of the women nominees had aspired to become a bishop; few had mentors to encourage or guide them; once nominated, they were unsure how to respond, whether to campaign or not; and in general they were intimidated by the process.\(^{44}\) Yet while the nominees expressed their confusion and lack of confidence, assembly members often used terms to describe the women and their nominations that implied just the opposite and that were not applied as often to male nominees: “pushy,” “conspiracy,” “special interests,” “too aggressive,” and “overbearing.”\(^{45}\) Finally, as with women pastors, there was a sentiment often expressed by assembly members that although they had been opposed originally to the idea of a


\(^{43}\) Ibid., 15.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 9.
woman bishop, they changed their opinion when they had knowledge of a particular

woman.46

Thus after thirty years, Lutheran clergywomen and their position in the church
share some similarities to women in other denominations, but some difference have also
emerged. The contrast between 1970 and 2000 is illustrated in the experience of Judith
Cobb, a seminarian in the early 1970s pursuing a master's in theology, who returned to
complete her studies for ordination twenty-five years later. At Gettysburg Seminary in
1972, she was one of only six women students, three of whom were seeking ordination.
At twenty-five years of age, she was the oldest woman student. She remembers that the
women's role in the seminary was "to be perfect and make peace," and that the women
felt as if they were being scrutinized under a microscope. Some of the faculty were
supportive, but others were angry. Some pastors' wives worried about the influence of
these new women in the seminary. Cobb believes that the women had to be
academically faultless; the first and hardest question was usually directed to a female
student, sometimes with the male faculty member blowing cigar smoke in her face. At
the same time, the women were expected to fulfill the traditional gender role of the
gracious hostess. And the women were always compared to male pastors because there
were no women role models. She recalls the constant refrain: "Pitch your voice lower
and sound louder."47

When Cobb continued her seminary studies and training in 1996, she found the
situation different in many ways. One-half of the students were now female, with many

46Ibid., 6.

47Judith A. Cobb, author interview.
beginning second careers, and the average age was forty-one. She did not sense any tension in the student body or among spouses as in the seventies. But the biggest change was the presence of role models in the churches and seminaries. Almost all the current women seminarians believe that their discernment of a call was helped by seeing other women as pastors. By the nineties, many congregations had for several decades been providing girls opportunities to serve in “official” roles as lectors and acolytes to experience leadership in church services. However, Cobb noted that some things have not changed: “The underlying sociological fact is that women still are not generally accepted in authoritative situations in the church.” There are few women in parishes with more than 250 members, and the first question often asked of a clergy woman in an interview is, “What will your husband say?” Cobb compares those early days of women pastors to the current situation this way: “I felt that when I returned we were on phase two of ordaining women, with a couple more phases still to come.”

When Jean Bozeman considers the changes since her ordination in 1976, she sees the benefits all around: More women on church councils and in offices at all levels, good role models for both girls and boys, and recognition of different leadership and decision making styles. She also notes: “When women’s roles change, men’s roles have to change.” Men have now recognized that they can also function in areas where they were needed but excluded, such as in teaching the younger children in Sunday School. “By being more inclusive, the church is using the talents of 100 percent of its people.”

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48 Ibid.

49 Bozeman, author interview.
Two closing stories reveal both the "uphill calling" and the uplifting experience that have coexisted since 1970 for women who become Lutheran pastors. In December 1998 Daphne Burt, the Lutheran pastor of the Campus Christian Community at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia, offered to record devotions for a local Christian radio station which aired a "Pastor's Lesson" three time a day by local clergy. The station manager rejected her offer: "I have been instructed not to include any more female pastors, as there seems to be a strong prohibition against such in Scripture...It is our understanding from Scripture that men are to hold the office of pastor in a church, not women." Thus women continue to struggle for acceptance and respect as clergy both within the church and in the secular community. The other story, however, proves the power of women pastors as role models and their acceptance as the norm in the church and the community. As the twenty-first century began, Judy Cobb was approached by a young girl whose school assignment was to choose a career, research its qualifications and duties, and if possible come to school for Career Day dressed as someone in that occupation. Her choice was that of a Lutheran pastor. To this eleven year old girl, it seemed only natural that along with the possibility of being a fireman, doctor, or pilot, a good career choice was being a pastor like Judy Cobb.

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51 Judith A. Cobb, author interview.
THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FORCES THIRTY YEARS LATER

This thesis has examined the internal and external forces that influenced the ordination of women thirty years ago, and one might assume that these forces have vanished or diminished with time so they would not continue to affect women's ordination in the LCMS or the Lutheran Church as a whole. One would be mistaken. Sometimes the effects are readily apparent and sometimes they are less obvious, but their presence raises questions whose answers will not be known for years.

One of the internal forces that exerted pressure on Lutherans was immigration, with the added weight of assimilation, identity, and competition. These three factors pushed their way into any discussion of women's ordination and any attempt at Lutheran cooperation. Looking at the ELCA and LCMS in this new century, one can still see the traces of immigration's influence. Sometimes it appears as a vestige of its former self, paying homage to Lutheran Church history in the United States. In 1998, for example, the Augustana Heritage Sesquicentennial was held at Chautauqua, New York. Six hundred members of the former Augustana Synod gathered, in the first national reunion since its merger into the former LCA, to enjoy workshops on Scandinavian heritage, sing Swedish hymns, and remember their pioneering Lutheran ancestors.52 Sometimes it appears in a totally new form as Lutheran congregations absorb the immigrants who have arrived in the United States in the last few decades. For example, Salem Danish Lutheran Church in Brooklyn recently changed its name to Salam Arabic Lutheran, a new beginning for a century-old church that now sits in the heart of a Middle Eastern ethnic

52 "Lutherans Celebrate 150 Years of Augustana Heritage," The Lutheran, November 1998, 49.
neighborhood. And Zion Lutheran Church in Rockford, Illinois, once a predominantly Swedish-American congregation, has integrated the Vietnamese immigrant community into the church. Both the ELCA and LCMS, while still predominantly composed of members of German and Scandinavian background, recognize that the old ethnic boundaries have shifted. Just as in the nineteenth century, church growth is dependent on the arrival of new immigrants, and again, the immigrants have choices in church membership. As the Lutheran churches strive to become more inclusive, the question of assimilation will also arise. Church historian Mark A. Noll states the problem: “The task is to steer between the Scylla of assimilation without tradition and the Charybdis of tradition without assimilation.”

Immigration also raises many questions which the ELCA and LCMS will need to face in the new century. Will Lutherans have to lose some of their culture and traditions to appeal to those of non-Lutheran background? As the ethnic face of the United States changes, will becoming more “American” mean something radically different from what it did in the nineteenth century? Women’s ordination prior to 1970 was a victim of the conservative nature of the immigrant church in America. Will welcoming those who have never been Lutherans, whether recent immigrants or just non-Lutherans, introduce a heterogeneity that may shake the LCMS position of not ordaining women? Or will its position hold as new members seek out the Missouri church because of its prohibition against women pastors? Will the current shortage of pastors in the ELCA, combined with the opportunities for mission work among the new immigrants, compel the church

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more actively to encourage women to become pastors and to provide more opportunities for their service? Will the increasingly multicultural nature of the United States prove an incentive to recruit more actively women of color to become Lutheran pastors, and will they then have even more opportunities to serve in a multicultural Lutheran Church? Will the LCMS, facing its own shortage of pastors and seeing the opportunities for growth among the new immigrants, change its position on women clergy, or will it continue to take pride in not being swayed by contemporary culture? Answers to these questions would require a crystal ball, but the questions reveal the impact that immigration and assimilation continue to have on the Lutheran Church.

One aspect of immigration discussed in Chapter Two was competition. Nineteenth-century immigrants wrote home about the arguments and fisticuffs that occurred among the various Lutheran groups, and church publications carried on bitterly long diatribes accusing each other of being pseudo-Lutherans. The rhetoric is usually scaled back today, and there have not been any physical altercations reported, but conflicts and competition still survive, sometimes in surprising places. In 1998, for example, the promotion of an ELCA pastor to chief of Navy chaplains was delayed in the United States Senate pending an investigation of a complaint by a LCMS Navy chaplain that he had been discriminated against by the ELCA chaplain because he was Missouri Synod.55 For non-Lutherans a job discrimination complaint filed by one Lutheran against another might seem strange, but followers of Lutheran church history see a familiar pattern.

In 1970 the national Lutheran groups were trying to adjust to the tempestuous sixties culture while still maintaining their identity. The LCA and ALC were the culmination of Lutheran mergers begun at the turn of the century which blended the ethnic backgrounds, customs, and practices of many synods to achieve a larger Lutheran presence through consolidation. Such mergers of necessity involve compromise, with gains and losses for all involved. The LCMS has never engaged in such an endeavor and thus lays claim to a “purer” Lutheran church body that has not had to compromise its identity. The identity issue surfaced in an October 2000 *Wall Street Journal* article that focused on the trend among Protestant denominations, after decades of ecumenism and church switching among baby boomers, to reassert their religious identities. When a 1996 poll revealed that only 3 percent of Americans could say anything about Lutheranism other than it was a religion, with some assuming a connection between Lutheranism and Martin Luther King, Jr., the ELCA launched Project Identity, a $5.2 million two-year public relations campaign. The LCMS must find this effort strange in light of the recent fellowship agreements the ELCA has signed with the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Moravian, Reformed, and United Church of Christ denominations. These agreements further separate the Missouri Synod from the ELCA while they call into question the identity issue in this new century.

In the year 2000, identity is still at the heart of any discussion involving change. Called to Common Mission (CCM) is the full communion agreement between the ELCA and the Episcopal Church, which allows for an exchange of clergy, recognition of each

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other's members and sacraments, and joint missionary and social work. Approved by the ELCA churchwide assembly in August 1999, this recent move toward ecumenism has raised those past ghosts of Lutheran controversy, with the perceived loss of authentic Lutheranism the largest specter. Following these agreements, the President of the LCMS, A.L. Barry, stated: "These decisions have only pushed our two churches further apart."57 The epithet of unionism, which some contend corrupts Lutheranism, has been hurled at the ELCA by the LCMS. The most controversial aspect of the agreement centers on the ELCA’s adoption of the historic episcopate and the process for ordaining clergy. That the Episcopal Church since 1976 includes women clergy only adds another layer of negativity to the issue for the LCMS.

Within the ELCA, Lutherans are divided over the issue as well. Some Lutheran congregations have threatened to leave the ELCA, and about thirty of the sixty-six synods have sought some kind of exemption from the agreement.58 These actions are more reminiscent of the divisive nineteenth century than the merging twentieth century, revealing some of the old geographic and ethnic divisions. The New York Times explained the opposition to the CCM: "[M]any Lutherans in the upper Midwest, the faith’s historic heartland, retain a suspicion of bishops, a legacy of their Scandinavian ancestors who came to the United States determined not to allow bishops the power they had in their native land."59 And in an interesting blend of modern scientific vocabulary

57 "Setting the Stage," The Lutheran, October 1999, 12.


and theology, Margaret Madson, a theologian from Minnesota, has argued: “Every church has a genetic code, a kind of DNA, that determines its official teaching. Every time a denomination’s DNA requires more than the word alone, the gospel is corrupted.” The adiaphorism which often dominated arguments on women’s ordination has risen again as Lutherans question if the controversial episcopate section represents a change in administration only or in doctrine. Furthermore, the old lines thirty years ago that divided those favoring women’s ordination from those opposing it have been redrawn. For example, Luther Seminary professor Gracia Grindal, a supporter of women clergy, has argued vigorously against Called to Common Mission. As many expected, but some disbelieved in 1970, women bring various and diverse perspectives to the theological table.

It is difficult to separate the internal dynamics of identity and theology for Lutherans. Theology determines Lutheran identity, but as discussed in Chapters Two and Three, identity also is influenced by other factors. Although all Lutherans may ascribe to the Augsburg Confession, there always has been, and still is, room for differences in interpreting Martin Luther and the Bible. Mary Todd argues that for the LCMS, its identity depends upon adherence to Scripture verbal inerrancy and non-ordination of women. The ordination issue presents the LCMS with a way to be distinctive, to have an identity that differentiates it not just from other Protestant denominations, but from

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60 "Groups Organize To Resist CCM," *The Lutheran*, January 2000, 44.

61 "We Cannot Submit," *The Lutheran*, November 1999, 55.

62 Todd, 7.
other Lutherans. Lutheran theologian John Reumann has concluded: "Since then [1971],
the ordination-of-women issue can be said to have become increasingly important in the
eyes of the LCMS leaders. To oppose it was a mark of orthodoxy."  
University of Maryland Lutheran Chaplain Elizabeth Platz believes that by so doing Missouri defines
itself in the negative, by being against something.  

Although posing one's identity in the negative may appear to be self-defeating,
many observers of the American religious scene find benefits to churches that adopt such
a stance. Since the mid 1960s mainline churches, particularly more liberal ones, have
experienced a decline in membership, while conservative denominations have grown. In
a study of religion in America, Jackson W. Carroll concluded that becoming a “one
audience” church seems to increase, or at the very least, to maintain the membership
roles. C. Peter Wagner, Director of the Institute of Church Growth, an evangelical
group, stated in 1976: “Show me a growing church, and I will show you a homogeneous
unit.” Twenty years later, Randall Balmer surveyed the American church scene and
reached a similar conclusion: “The most popular and successful religious movements in
American history have been exclusive, not inclusive...they have offered a relatively
narrow, circumscribed set of beliefs, doctrines, and behavioral standards, and then

63Reumann, 123.
64Platz, author interview.
65Jackson W. Carroll, “Continuity and Change,” in Religion in America 1950 to
the Present, Jackson W. Carroll, Douglas W. Johnson, and Martin E. Marty (San
Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979) 44.
66Ibid.
demanded that their followers subscribe to those tenents to the exclusion of all others.”67

Lutherans have traditionally been concerned about the real and perceived loss of their distinctive theological heritage. While issues such as the episcopate are currently a concern to the ELCA, women’s ordination is no longer a factor in that fear. Not every ELCA Lutheran is ready to welcome a woman into the pulpit, but most would not see a woman as a threat to Lutheran heritage. For the Missouri Synod, however, women’s ordination and Lutheran theology are inseparable. As long as the church leaders hold fast to verbal scripture inerrancy as vital to Lutheranism, it will continue to deny ordination to women.

As the internal forces of immigration, identity, competition, and theology continue to make their presence felt, so also do the external forces of contemporary society. The specific externalities may have changed in thirty years, but an outside culture still surrounds the church. And the Lutheran responses to these forces, as Christa Klein noted, in her study of Lutheran social statements, are “not static or predetermined.”68 There are choices to be made and consequences to accept.

The third chapter of this thesis focused on the relationship between the tumultuous sixties and women’s ordination and specifically examined the civil rights, Vietnam protest, and women’s movements. Thirty years later some of these issues are


An example of this trend toward conservative orthodoxy is the Southern Baptist Church which voted in June 2000 to ban female pastors as part of a shift toward codifying a more fundamentalist theology. In 1998, the denomination passed a resolution that wives should “submit graciously” to their husbands. Hanna Rosin, “Southern Baptists Vote To Ban Female Pastors,” *Washington Post*, 15 June 2000.

no longer relevant, but others remain contentious. There is no longer a Vietnam conflict
tearing at the conscience of the nation and inciting protestors to demonstrate in the
streets; there is no communist megalith to threaten our freedoms, including that of
religion. Other international crises have arisen, but since the Vietnam War, no single
conflict has ignited the domestic scene, rallied diverse protest groups, and polarized the
religious establishment as occurred in 1970. Thus, one cannot connect that particular
issue to women’s ordination in the twenty-first century.

When one reflects on the drive for African American civil rights in the 1960s, the
conclusion is similar to that regarding women clergy: Much progress has been made, but
much remains to be done. Overt racial discrimination in voting, education, housing, and
employment has been generally eliminated, but subtle discrimination and racism continue
to plague us. The high intensity activism of the sixties has been replaced by debates over
affirmative action, quotas, and profiling. Do the civil right issues still have relevance for
women as clergy? In the ELCA, one can see the effects of some of the practices
employed to increase opportunities for minorities. Under the ELCA Constitution, a quota
system ensures that 60 percent of the members of national assemblies, councils, and
committees are composed of laity, and that as nearly as possible, 50 percent be female.
Whenever possible, the clergy representatives of the above bodies are to be equally
divided among male and female, and persons of color are to be represented.69 Although
not without controversy, the system has opened the national decision-making bodies of
the church to women, although the leadership continues to remain mostly male, and local
congregations are not required to meet the standards. Within the LCMS such a quota

69ELCA 1989 Constitution, quoted in Schmidt, 79.
system would be an anathema and the delegates to the 1998 LCMS triennial convention were 93.3 percent male. Finally, the issues of justice and equality which dominate any racial civil rights discussion is absent when the subject is the rights of women in the LCMS. Because of the inerrancy of scripture position, equality is not within the realm of possibility, and justice is not applicable. Michael Koch, a former LCMS and now ELCA pastor, observes that the Missouri Synod sees the issue of ordination of women exclusively in theological terms, not as one of justice: "The different Lutheran churches are just not speaking the same language." The nineteenth century Lutheran immigrants would understand this lack of communication very well.

The combination of the women's movement raising the consciousness of the country to gender inequality, the industrial-technological changes in society, and the legislative and judicial actions against gender discrimination have succeeded in removing many of the economic and legal barriers confronting American women in 1970. Although status, leadership positions, and compensation continue to be areas of gender inequity, from the athletic field, to the corporate board room, to the space shuttle, to a Congressional— if not a White House — office, women are occupying formerly male-only-need-apply positions. And how have these changes of the last thirty years affected the Lutheran churches? The answer for the ELCA, as explained above, has been an increase in the total number of women clergy, some modest gains in leadership positions, an increase in laity acceptance (but with some lingering distrust), persisting inequalities in pay and positions — but overall, a church that tries to use the talents of all its members.

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71 Koch, author interview.
The "feminization" of the church, driving men away from clergy positions and lay leadership, has not occurred. And finally, no woman pastor would say it has been easy; the "uphill calling" usually requires a woman pastor to scale a mountain. But the increase in the number of women clergy does indicate that access has been made easier and the summit is reachable.

The gains made by women in the secular society over the last thirty years have not, however, transferred to the LCMS, which continues to see Scripture as justifying women's subordination and therefore prohibiting any concession. A recent Office of the President Statement on Ordination of Women is unyielding: "[S]ome would say that St. Paul’s comments are simply a result of his cultural bias or that what Paul says here applies only to his own day and age, but not to ours....It is totally inappropriate to attempt to sever St. Paul’s comments on the role of women in the church from the rest of Scripture." President Alvin Barry even sees the possibility of gaining a competitive advantage by withstanding the "modern" onslaught: "I know that as our Synod continues to speak faithfully on this issue, we will find that there are bundles of folks in other church bodies who are distressed at the direction they notice their church headed with this issue and other related issues. This is an opportunity for us."72

When one considers the effects of the women's movement on the LCMS thirty years later, one also must ponder the attitude of women within the Missouri Synod. In 1984 LCMS President Ralph Bohlmann appointed a President’s Commission on Women composed only of women, but nothing came from this Commission in support of

women's ordination as all the members opposed it. Current president Alvin Barry
retained the Commission on Women, but he listed the women's issues for them to
consider, and women's service in the church was not included. According to Mary Todd,
the women of the Missouri Synod are often themselves a barrier to change. No
professional women's or lay women's groups have asked for representation on the
Commission on Theology and Church Relations, the synod agency that would launch a
discussion of the ordination of women. And any informal group raising the issue is
"dismissed as troublesome feminists."73 The Lutheran Women's Missionary League
continues to concentrate on mission efforts, as it has since its beginning in 1941 and does
not advocate for women's position in the church. In 1991 the LWML, unlike the LCA
and ALC women's organizations thirty years earlier, refused to take a position on
women's ordination because it was deemed a political question and they desired to
remain "apolitical."74 Women who disagree with the Missouri position on women tend
to leave the church and seek a spiritual home elsewhere. Thus, in the LCMS there is an
absence of women willing to study or debate women's ordination, a lack of professional
female theologians, and certainly no feminist minority to raise the consciousness or to
challenge the church hierarchy.

A sign of the LCMS intransigence on women's ordination is its response to the
current shortage of pastors. In the spring of 2000, seventy-four calls from congregations

73Todd, 346-347.
74Ibid., 304.
for a seminary graduate went unanswered because there were not enough new pastors.\textsuperscript{75}

In the summer of 2000, President Barry appointed an “action group” to address concerns about recruitment and retention of full-time professional church workers in the Synod.\textsuperscript{76}

But the possibility and opportunity of changing the church’s position on women’s ordination has not yet entered into the plans for meeting their need for pastors in the twenty-first century.

CONCLUSION

In their survey of four centuries of American women’s religious writing, historians Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether caution: “[A]ll who write and read in this field realize that we are still in the early stages of discovering, analyzing, and integrating women and religion into American religious history.”\textsuperscript{77} The history of women’s ordination in the Lutheran Church is a significant piece of that history, for it illuminates one part that has for too long been in the shadows. As delineated in the first chapter of this thesis, women and Lutheran history have often been neglected because of the general disregard for women in history and theological works, the omission of religion in women’s history, and the slighting of Lutherans in many

\textsuperscript{75}John F. Johnson, President Concordia Seminary, form letter to author, 1 November 2000.


church histories, unless they are specifically Lutheran denominational histories. Furthermore, although the ordination of women by the LCA and ALC occurred only thirty years ago, its very acceptance by these Lutherans may also inadvertently work to keep attention away from the historical struggle to ordain women. As theologian Martin E. Marty reflected on the changes in the church since 1900, he noted: “Few Lutherans can remember the slow awakening and opposition to this practice [women’s ordination].”\(^{78}\) If time has erased memories of the conflict, that is an affirmation of women clergy, but it may also prevent us from understanding the past and its effects on the present. The women who are Lutheran pastors certainly have not forgotten their personal histories in reaching the pulpit, but even they may not be aware that the relative ease or difficulty they experienced in accepting the call has roots leading back to nineteenth-century immigrants, the women’s organizations of the last century, Luther himself, and the sixties protest movements. Furthermore, within the LCMS the consistent relegation of women to non-leadership positions and the unswerving belief in the subservience of women hinders a complete, unbiased evaluation and analysis of women in the Lutheran Church.

Therefore, this thesis has sought to illuminate one particular aspect of American religious history by focusing on the internal and external forces which affected the ordination of women in 1970. The internal forces of an immigrant past, identity, competition, theology, and women’s history in the church simultaneously induced change and resisted change. Heritage and tradition can enrich a church or imprison it. As theologian Jaroslav Pelikan defined the duality: “Tradition is the living faith of the dead

and traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.” 79 Contemporary secular culture also offers opportunities and challenges which can be embraced or rejected. James G. Cobb sees change and transformation as the very essence of Christianity. 80 In their study of Lutheranism, Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jensen saw the Lutheran confessions as relevant and vital in contemporary society: “The Lutheran confessions, therefore, are not irrelevant summaries by esoteric theologians. They are documentary evidence that the Lutheran testimony of the Christian faith in the world is not the product of an otherworldly asceticism or an inner worldly theocracy; Lutheran Christian witness is born in the sociopolitical conflict between God’s word and his world.” 81 The secular American culture of the 1960s was just such a conflict, one which for the LCA and ALC resulted in the decision to ordain women and for the LCMS resulted in continued opposition. More than the result of individual leadership or in-depth theological studies, as important as they were, the decision whether or not to ordain women in 1970 was reached by the intersection of tradition, theology, and contemporary culture.

The ordination of women in the Lutheran Church is a study in the power of both an organization’s internal dynamics and the external culture of time and place to effect change or to resist change. It is also a study in the way the Lutheran Church perceived women in the past and view them today. It is an opportunity to observe women’s evolving perception of themselves and their contributions to the church. The barrier to the ordination of women in the Lutheran church was erected over time and built of the

80 James G. Cobb, author interview.
81 Gritsch and Jensen, Lutheranism, 33.
bricks of tradition, theology, and culture. It stood until the material with which it was built began to crumble and until the winds of change blew so hard it could not continue to stand. That it fell was due to the combined power of the church’s internal forces and the external forces of contemporary culture. That a remnant of the wall still remains is due to its particular composition: it is built of matter that resists change, and its builders take pride in its being able to withstand assaults from the outside while it continues to divide and separate.
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With particular interest to this thesis, from 1988 to 1990, she was on staff as the Education Director at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Missoula, Montana. As a life-long Lutheran, she has been a member of Augustana, LCA, ELCA, and LCMS congregations. She has served in almost every volunteer position in the church including being a member of Church Council, Sunday school superintendent, call committee member, Synod committee member, and a teacher of pre-school through adult education classes.