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Senior Church History

THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN AND
ITS RESULT IN AMERICAN LUTHERANISM

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"Resolved--That the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions, and commerce."¹

"Resolved--That the Synod reaffirm its position that the Word of God does not permit women to hold the pastoral office or serve in any capacity involving distinctive functions of this office."²

The preceding two resolutions are separated from each other by 123 years. Logic would most likely reverse the order of the two statements; however, they are in the correct sequence. The first is the twelfth resolution of the 1848 Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments; the second is a portion of resolution 2-04 of the 1971 LC-MS convention at Milwaukee. They show the two divergent opinions concerning the role of women in the life of the church and have resulted in a question concerning the ordination of women. This paper will seek to give a view of how the problem of women ordination evolved in America and what the result has been in the Lutheran church.

The first eighteen centuries A.D. saw women, for the most part, subordinate to their husbands. Stories of women's participation in either the church or the community at the time

¹Georgia Harkness, Women in Church and Society (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 126.

²Proceedings of the Forty-Ninth Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, p. 114.

of the American Revolution were infrequent. Molly Pitcher and Deborah Gannett became famous for fighting like men, not for acting like women. The pamphleteer Thomas Paine was one of the first to question whether or not women have inalienable rights as well as the men. Maybe Abigail Adams (1744-1818), the wife of the second President of the United States and mother of the sixth, was the only one who really heard him. A minister's daughter she had already understood that women must have a chance to use the talents which God had granted them. In 1777 she wrote to her husband:

In the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.³

The person most often credited with launching the woman's movement was the Englishwoman Mary Wollstonecraft. In her 1792 work Vindication of the Rights of Women, she stated: "Men, in general, seem to employ their reason to justify prejudices, which they have imbibed, they cannot trace how, rather than root them out." Her effort was basically unsuccessful, because the Industrial Revolution was not yet far enough advanced to give women a measure of independence in the world of work outside the home.⁴

A large step forward was made for women when, early in

³Elsie Thomas Culver, Women in the World of Religion (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1967), p. 170.

⁴Harkness, op. cit., pp. 87,88.

the nineteenth century, spinning and weaving moved from the home to the factory, using equipment run by water power. But the area which greatly aided the ladies was the field of education. Judith Murray indicated that man's mental superiority was due to the fact that he was being led through "all the flowery paths of science" while woman was being "wholly domesticated" from the age of two. She asked:

Is it reasonable that a candidate for immortality, for the joys of heaven, an intelligent being, who is to spend an eternity contemplating the works of Deity . . . should be . . . allowed no other ideas, than those which are suggested by the mechanism of a pudding?⁵

The problem was that women were considered even less educable than Indians. The original purpose of Dartmouth had been to indoctrinate the red man into white man's culture; Harvard, which on occasion admitted an Indian, would not for centuries even consider admitting a woman. All that was desirable was for a woman to learn enough to read the Bible, to write letters to absent husbands, and to cast up accounts.⁶

The earliest settlers from the free churches in England, however, gave evidence that they had brought with them the tradition of educated womanhood. From the very first days in America there were those who insisted that their daughters, like their sons, should be educated persons. There was always a "dame" in the village who could make time to instruct

⁵Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle (Cambridge: Belknap Press, Harvard University, 1959), pp. 16, 17.

⁶Marion L. Starkey, The Congregational Way (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966), p. 283.

the children in the three R's.⁷ The next step for those parents who could afford it was "finishing school." These schools were geared toward preparing a girl to secure a husband and become the gracious mistress of her home. They gave little instruction except in "female accomplishments" such as dancing, piano playing, and art work in yarns or paints. In contrast to "finishing schools" were the "female seminaries" which provided an education in masculine subjects for a girl of the same age. Courses, unthinkable for a self-respecting girl, were offered in mathematics, history, geography, literature, Latin, and science!⁸

Two women who spearheaded the opening of "female seminaries" were Emma Willard (1781-1870) and Catherine Beecher (1800-1878). To open a school Emma Willard had to convince the New York legislature to grant her a charter. Because women were not permitted to speak in the legislature, it was necessary for her to present her proposition for female education in a document. With the support of Governor Clinton she secured an act of incorporation and a small allocation of funds to open a "female seminary" at Waterford, NY, in 1819. Although the funds were withdrawn by the Regents of the State University, the school was moved to Troy, NY, in 1821 at the invitation of its residents and still functions today as the Emma Willard School. Catherine Beecher, the daughter of Lyman Beecher, a famous New England preacher and theologian, and the

⁷Culver, op. cit., p. 171.

⁸Harkness, op. cit., pp. 88,89.

older sister of writer Harriet Beecher Stowe and Brooklyn preacher Henry Ward Beecher, was also deeply concerned with the training of teachers. In 1822 she opened what became a celebrated school at Hartford, Connecticut. Unusual was the fact that she ventured in her writings into the field of religion, concerning herself in her second major work with the more difficult points of theology.⁹

The opening of colleges to the ladies on a coeducational basis came along with the westward movement. While the new communities in the Midwest were nostalgic duplications of the villages from which the settlers had come, many of the old, restrictive traditions had been left behind. One tradition that did not carry over to the West was the prejudice against higher education for women.¹⁰ College education for women was non-existent until 1833 when Congregational-oriented Oberlin Collegiate Institute (now Oberlin College) opened its doors without regard to race, color, or sex. It aimed to elevate the female character by "bringing within the reach of the misjudged and neglected sex all the instructive privileges which hitherto unreasonably distinguished the leading sex from theirs." To accomplish this aim Oberlin provided a shortened literary course which it presumed most of the women would take.¹¹

Antoinette Brown (1825-1921) finished this literary course at Oberlin and graduated in the class of 1847. However,

⁹Ibid., pp. 89-91.

¹⁰Starkey, op. cit., p. 284.

¹¹Culver, op. cit., p. 172.

a year later she horrified the college when she applied to take the three year course in theology. Antoinette had joined the Congregational Church when she was nine and began to take part in prayer meetings at an early age. Now she had her eyes set on becoming an ordained minister. Opposition came from both the college and her family, yet neither could dissuade her. At the conclusion of her course she did not appear in the commencement and for many years her name did not appear in the alumni catalog.¹²

For several years she lectured and then accepted a call to a struggling little Congregational Church at South Butler, NY, for a salary of \$300 per year. A few days before her ordination, her Oberlin college classmate Lucy Stone, a pioneer woman suffragist, declared at the Fourth National Woman's Rights Convention:

It is said that women could not be ministers of religion. Last Sunday, at Metropolitan Hall, Antoinette L. Brown conducted divine services and was joined in it by the largest congregation assembled within the walls of any building in this city (hisses). Some men hiss who had not a mother to teach them better. But I tell you that some men in New York, knowing that they can hear the Word of God from a woman as well as from a man, have called her to be their pastor, and she is to be ordained this month.¹³

On September 15, 1853, Antoinette L. Brown became the first regularly ordained woman minister in America. Rev. Luther Lee preached from the text, "There is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28)

¹²Edith Deen, Great Women of the Christian Faith (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1959), pp. 394, 395.

¹³Ibid., pp. 394-396.

and expounded on "Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel." His intention in this sermon was to cite Paul against Paul to prove that the passage against women speaking in the church did not mean what it had been traditionally taken to mean:

I cannot see how the text can be explained so as to exclude females from any right, office, work privilege, or immunity which males enjoy, hold, or perform. . . . If males may belong to a Christian church, so may females; if males may vote, then females; if males may preach the gospel . . . if males may receive ordination by the imposing of hands . . . ¹⁴so may females, the reason of which is found in the text.

Trouble, however, arose in 1854 partly because of her sex, but also because her theology did not accord with the Calvinism that was prevalent. Antoinette then resigned her parish and returned to her former work in the slums and to her lecturing. A year later she married Samuel Blackwell and their marriage was blessed with six children.¹⁵ The fact that she resumed preaching was the source of many rude and contemptuous remarks. One editorial gave a graphic picture of a possible scene in the pulpit when Antoinette might have to stop her sermon to give birth to a boy or girl--or even twins.¹⁶ She became a member of the Unitarian Church, along with Lucy Stone, who was expelled from the Congregational Church at West Brookfield, Massachusetts, because of her anti-slavery stand. At the age of ninety Antoinette preached her last sermon in Elizabeth, New Jersey, at the Unitarian Church, which she served as pastor for fifteen years. She was ninety-

¹⁴Starkey, op. cit., p. 298.

¹⁵Harkness, op. cit., p. 112.

¹⁶Culver, op. cit., p. 173.

six years old when she died. By this time, sixty-eight years after her ordination, the census showed there were more than three thousand women ministers in the United States.¹⁷

Charles Grandison Finney, a professor at Oberlin from which Antoinette Brown had graduated, gave a great deal of impetus to the expansion of women's roles in American religious life. Having settled for himself the question of his own soul's salvation on October 10, 1821, this promising young lawyer began studying for the ministry. Following his ordination by the Presbyterian Church in 1824, he began to preach, and revival resulted first in upstate New York. Finney allowed women to participate freely in public prayer during social meetings and permitted them to give their testimonies in public. East Coast revivalists called this a great "evil to be apprehended" and Asahel Nettleton charged, "Whoever introduces the practice of females praying in promiscuous assemblies, . . . will ere long find to his sorrow, that he has made an inlet to other denominations, and entailed an everlasting quarrel in those churches generally." When Finney and his opponents met at New Lebanon, NY, in July 1827 to discuss Finney's "New Measures" in promoting revivals, the group was able to draft compromise agreements on all issues except one: whether or not women should be allowed to pray in mixed assemblies. After several days' discussion the matter was finally dropped.¹⁸

¹⁷Deen, op. cit., p. 396.

¹⁸Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), pp. 229, 230.

In 1835 Finney settled down to the pastorate of the Chatham Street Chapel in New York City and a professorship in theology at Oberlin College in Ohio. Influenced by John Wesley's "Plain Accounts of Christian Perfection," he began to develop in his lectures the doctrine of entire sanctification.¹⁹ The Lankfords and the Palmers built on the revival techniques and teachings of Finney and of their Methodist religious forefather, John Wesley. Wesley himself had experimented with field preaching, lay ministers, women preachers, and class meetings. In August 1835 Sarah Worrall Lankford consolidated the prayer groups she attended at both the Allen Street and Mulberry Street Methodist churches in New York City into one meeting at 54 Rivington Street, the home she and her husband shared with her sister Phoebe and her sister's husband Walter Palmer. That prayer meeting, known around the world as the "Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness," continued for more than sixty years. Phoebe became the more famous of the sisters following her experience on the evening of July 26, 1837, between the hours of eight and nine o'clock. It was that evening, she wrote, when "the Lord gave me such a view of my utter pollution and helplessness, apart from the cleansing, energizing influences of the purifying blood of Jesus, and the quickening aids of the Holy Spirit, that I have ever since retained a vivid realization of the fact."²⁰

The influence of the Tuesday Meeting, linked with the

¹⁹Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 103

²⁰Ruether, op. cit., pp. 226,227.

Palmer's evangelistic activities along the East Coast and into Canada, culminated in the Holiness Revival of 1857-1858, which spread across the country. Initially the Holiness Movement was strongly ecumenical. The Palmers boasted that their Tuesday Meetings attracted Congregationalists, Quakers, Presbyterians, Baptists, and even Episcopalians.²¹ In these meetings, too, women were encouraged to participate in gospel work. Objections to women's involvement were cut down by quoting Peter's words at Pentecost: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17).²²

The Holiness Movement had a theology centered in experience. The revivals of John Wesley and Charles Grandison Finney stressed conversion and a subsequent, separate experience of sanctification. There was a growing emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit. The use of Pentecost and the baptism of the Spirit as examples of the experience of holiness reinforced the idea that believers could expect manifestations of power and extraordinary gifts. Preaching for this movement was not the product of human effort and training but the result of a direct influence by the Holy Spirit. When the question of women ordination first made headway in the nineteenth century, this occurred among these groups whose understanding led them to affirm women's equal right to preach to be a vehicle of the

²¹ Ibid., pp. 247, 248.

²² Smith, op. cit., p. 82.

Spirit. Luther Lee, preaching at the ordination sermon for Antoinette Brown, declared that "every Gospel minister is a prophet, and every prophet under the new dispensation is a Gospel minister."²³

From the very beginning the doctrine of holiness caused divisions within the church. In 1843 the Wesleyan Methodist Church was formed in New York and New England; in 1844 the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church South occurred. It was in a Wesleyan Methodist church that Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1816-1902) and Lucretia Mott (1793-1880) arranged the first women's rights convention. Elizabeth Cady Stanton herself claims to have been converted at a revival of Charles Grandison Finney in Troy, NY.²⁴ The daughter of Judge Daniel Cady of Johnstown, NY, Elizabeth realized early in her life that the laws concerning such things as divorce, suffrage, and slavery needed changing. This led her to the World's Anti-Slavery Convention held in London in 1840 with her newly-married husband Henry B. Stanton who was a delegate there. Here Elizabeth met Mrs. Lucretia Mott who had become a Quaker preacher after having felt the necessity "to preach deliverance to the captives" and "to set at liberty them that are bruised."²⁵

The fact that they were denied the right to speak at the convention because they were women enraged both ladies. Lucretia Mott, however, was hardly surprised by it. She commented, "We could not expect that women should be fully

²³Ruether, op. cit., pp. 21,241,246.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 230,232.

²⁵Harkness, op. cit., p. 94.

recognized in such assemblies as that, while the monopoly of the pulpit existed." The Seneca Falls convention in 1848 was a direct result of this discrimination against women.²⁶ The platform of the convention began with a deliberate paraphrase of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. . . ." The Declaration continued by citing rights which women were denied, including the closing of avenues to college education and to service in the professions such as law, medicine, ministry, and theology. The one resolution of greatest import for the present discussion was quoted at the beginning of this paper.²⁷

Many women now began to show that they could enter fields formerly occupied only by men. Besides Antoinette Brown in the area of religion was the Universalist Olympia Brown. After an education at Mount Holyoke Seminary and Antioch College, she was graduated from the theological school of St. Lawrence University at Canton, NY, and was ordained in 1863. She held several pastorates while married to John H. Willis. Mrs. Phebe A. Hanaford was also an outstanding Universalist minister who is credited with a number of achievements. Besides serving three pastorates for considerable periods, she was the author of a dozen books and for a time the regularly appointed chaplain of the Connecticut Legislature.

²⁶Ruether, op. cit., p. 289.

²⁷Harkness, op. cit., pp. 96,97.

She tells us of having officiated at the funeral of the oldest Free Mason in America and at the gravesite of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In her book Daughters of America, Mrs. Hanaford mentions sixty of the many women ministers in the nineteenth century and tells something of the life story of most of them.²⁸

It was not unusual in the second half of the nineteenth century for women to occupy pulpits. Although there was resistance, many women overcame it. Amanda Way, born in 1829, appears to have been the first woman to be given a license to preach in the Methodist Episcopal Church, although the General Conference was not ready to allow her to be ordained. Besides her preaching and pastoral ministry in Indiana and Kansas, she held one office after another in the Good Templars (a secret temperance order) until she became the first woman to hold the highest office in the National Lodge. Anna Snowden, a Methodist, took the name Anna Oliver to avoid embarrassing her parents when she decided to study theology and become a preacher. Lorenza Hayes left her teaching position and at age 54 attended Canton Theological School, graduating at the head of her class. A year after she retired from her parishes at age seventy, a delegation of men from two adjacent former parishes encouraged her to come back at any salary within reason.²⁹

Yet with all the advancements women were making, there was as yet little ordination of women. Those bodies which did ordain women had generally first been associated with

²⁸Ibid., pp. 112, 113, 127.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 113, 114, 126-128.

the Holiness movement. Because of the ecumenicity of the camp meetings made famous by the Tuesday Meetings of the Lankfords and the Palmers, local and regional Holiness associations soon began to form. Women were allowed full participation in the early days of the Church of God, Anderson, Indiana, founded in 1881 by Daniel S. Warner. Historian John Smith writes: "Forty years before the time of woman's suffrage on a national level, a great company of women were preaching, singing, writing, and helping to determine the policies in this religious reform movement." Women were considered essential to the leadership of the church and served equally with men. Yet much criticism was heaped upon the likes of Mary Cole, Sarah Smith, and Lena Shoffner, who were considered to be outstanding preachers and evangelists of this body.³⁰

Between the years 1887 and 1897, no less than twenty-three women received ordination into the Unitarian church itself and two additional women were admitted from other fellowships. When the number of women ordinations in the American Unitarian Association dropped drastically during the presidency of Samuel A. Eliot after 1901, Reverend Clara Cook Helvie complained, "The churches of Congregational polity are neglecting their woman power."³¹

The Church of the Nazarene founded in 1908 at Pilot Point, Texas, did not neglect its woman power. Its original

³⁰Ruether, op. cit., pp. 227-230.

³¹Conrad Wright, A Stream of Light (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1975), p. 100.

constitution specifically affirmed the right of women to preach. Lucy P. Knott, the first woman to be ordained by this body, had been associated with Phineas Bresee from the beginning of his ministry in Los Angeles. For a time one entire conference of the church in west Tennessee consisted solely of women ministers.³²

Seth Cook Rees, who served from 1897 to 1905 as the first president of the Pilgrim Holiness Church, stated that one of the fourteen marks of "the ideal Pentecostal church" was the fact that there was no distinction because of gender. In fact, "nothing but jealousy, prejudice, bigotry, and a stingy love for bossing in men have prevented woman's public recognition by the church. No church that is acquainted with the Holy Ghost will object to the public ministry of women." Seth Rees's own wife, Hulda, known as the "Pentecostal Prophetess," preached from the age of sixteen until her death.³³

At this time, also, Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) and the Christian Science Church which she founded were gaining fame around the world. Since she was a sickly child, Mary took interest at a very early age in Biblical stories of miraculous healing. Problems plagued her throughout her life. Too weak for regular schooling, she was coached by her brother. Six months after being married at the age of twenty-two, she lost her husband to yellow fever. A son, born after his father's death, was given to a nurse who told him his mother had died.

³²Ruether, op. cit., pp. 238,239.

³³Ibid., pp. 239,240.

Mary did not see her son again till he was thirty-five, and then the relationship was not a happy one. A second marriage of twenty years ended in 1873 on grounds of adultery and desertion. When she was forty-five, Mary had a bad fall, but experienced a miraculous recovery. At this time she claimed that the principles of Christian Science were revealed to her. After her third marriage to Asa Gilbert Eddy, "a hopeless invalid" who had been healed, ended after five years with his death, she immersed herself in healing, teaching, and especially, publishing. The Church of Christ, Scientist, was chartered in 1879, and Mary gave it her strictest personal attention. Despite all this, she served as the pastor emeritus of the home church until her death in 1910.³⁴

Other women also played major roles in organizing and promoting new movements. Katherine and Margaretta Fox seem to be responsible for the rise of spiritualism in the United States, when in 1848 they supposedly contacted the spirit world in Hydesville, NY.³⁵ The Four Square Gospel cult was the outgrowth of work by Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944) around the turn of the century.³⁶ Over a century earlier Barbara Heck (1734-1804) is credited with supplying the impetus for the organization of Methodism in America. Disturbed by the way in which the men around her were seemingly drifting more and more into worldly pleasures, she made a visit

³⁴Culver, op. cit., pp. 187, 188.

³⁵Siegbert W. Becker, Wizards that Peep (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1978), p. 60.

³⁶Culver, op. cit., p. 190.

to Philip Embury who had neglected his duties as minister to the little flock. "Philip, you must preach to us or we shall all go to hell together, and God will require our blood at your hands." These words of chastisement encouraged Philip to hold services in his own house before a congregation of five--including his wife, Barbara, her husband, and their two servants. When her husband enlisted in the British army and they moved to Canada, Barbara led in the founding of another Methodist society, believed to be the first in Canada.³⁷

The Seventh-Day Adventists were founded by Ellen G. White (1827-1915) and her husband, James White. When she began preaching in her forties, Mrs. White did it because she wanted to testify to the miraculous in her own life. For six years during her childhood she struggled to a normal state of health after a stone which was thrown at her had resulted in a coma. From 1840 to 1844 Ellen and her parents gained much enthusiasm from William Miller, a Baptist layman who predicted Christ's second coming would take place in 1843 or 1844. Ellen, then, claims to have had a vision in which she "heard the voice of God like many waters." Her preaching emphasized "health reform," the eating of the right foods and the practicing of temperance in all things. Through her teaching the need for sunlight, fresh air, and a simple diet, she influenced John Harvey Kellogg to study medicine and to establish the now famous health food center at Battle Creek. When she died, the Seventh-Day Adventists

³⁷Deen, op. cit., pp. 371-373.

claimed 140,000 members, 2500 clergy, eighty medical centers, and a mission on every continent.³⁸

Alma White lays claim to being the first woman bishop in church history. Around the turn of the century she founded a small sectarian Holiness body called the Pillar of Fire. Because the veil of the Temple was rent asunder at Christ's crucifixion, she believed that now both men and women are invited into the Holy of Holies: "Let Christ reign in the heart, and woman will take her place beside men and help to fight the battles of life, and not only be a helpmeet, but socially and mentally his equal."³⁹

Yet in the major religious bodies in the U.S. women were not taking their place beside men. Ordination was still beyond their grasp. The women in these religious groups contented themselves at this time by organizing missionary societies. "Females who are disposed to contribute their mite towards so noble a design as diffusion of the gospel light among the shades of darkness and superstition" were invited to join the Boston Female Society for Missionary Purposes. Miss Mary Webb, an invalid from Boston, gathered together fourteen Baptist and Congregational women on October 9, 1800, for that very purpose. A chain reaction, then, took place throughout the New England area and beyond and the Female Society was speedily copied. To give some direction to this movement it was requested that correspondence from the other societies be addressed to Mary Webb. By 1818 letters

³⁸Ibid., pp. 230-236.

³⁹Ruether, op. cit., p. 240.

were being received from ninety-seven different societies. This initial venture by Miss Webb has led to the formation of hundreds of thousands of local women's missionary societies, aid societies, and guilds, on the one hand, and the national denominational and interdenominational women's societies, on the other hand.⁴⁰

Samuel J. Mills, born at Torrington, Connecticut, April 21, 1783, had heard much about missions to the heathen ever since he was an infant. His mother's words, "I have consecrated this child to the service of God, as a missionary," made a lasting impression in his mind. Eventually his schooling led him to William College, Massachusetts, in the spring of 1806. Shortly thereafter he and a group of friends took a walk and were compelled to seek refuge from a storm under the shelter of a haystack. During this Haystack Prayer Meeting, Mills and his cohorts conversed on the duty of missions to heathens. When Samuel became a member of the Divinity College at Andover, he decided it was time to unite his efforts with those of Adoniram Judson, Samuel Nott, and Samuel Newell in establishing a mission among the heathen in some foreign land. Their appeal was taken to the General Association of Massachusetts and eventually led to the formation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.⁴¹

With the advent of foreign mission emphasis after 1810,

⁴⁰R. Pierce Beaver, All Loves Excelling (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), p. 14.

⁴¹Joseph J. Kwiat, History of American Missions to the Heathen (Worcester: Spooner and Howland, 1840), pp. 28-30.

the Cent Societies began contributing to the American Board. The announcement that the first party of missionaries including Nott, Hall, Rice, Judson, and Newell would be sailing to India in 1812 led immediately to the formation of at least six Female Foreign Missionary Societies in New Haven, New London, Stepney, and Wethersfield, Connecticut, and in Franklin and Tyringham, Massachusetts. These organizations sprang up rapidly and many of the older societies also became devoted to this cause. Large numbers of these groups declared themselves to be auxiliaries to the American Board, and then to the Baptist, United, Methodist, and other societies as they were founded. By 1818 there were fifty principal auxiliaries in cities and counties along with 250 allied local associations, both male and female. The list of Associations in 1839 shows a tremendous increase with a total of 923 men's associations and 680 ladies.⁴² The ladies also specialized along functional lines in their support of missions with two types of auxiliaries: Bible and tract societies, which provided literature for work overseas as well as at home, and education societies, which assisted poor youths in the expense of theological education for ministry at home and abroad.⁴²

By the time that America had begun overseas mission work in 1812, British missions in India, the South Seas, and West Africa had already been in operation for twenty years. The American Board looked especially to the London Missionary Society for advice, while the American Baptists had the examples of Carey, Marshman, and Ward at Serampore along with that of

⁴²Beaver, op. cit., pp. 22,25,26,35,36.

the Baptist Missionary Society. Often it was noted that missionaries were handicapped in dealing with the women in foreign fields because of their sex.⁴³ Women school-missionaries were needed if "a solid foundation was to be laid for the budding Christian congregation through the education of girls, the future mothers." American and British mission societies did the pioneering in this area.⁴⁴ The need for women in the overseas endeavors was recognized and was provided for, at first, by the wives of the missionaries themselves. Rev. Jonathan Allen, in a farewell sermon on February 5, 1812, for Missionaries Judson and Newell who would soon be leaving for India, directed the following comments to their wives:

My dear children--you are now engaged in the best of causes. It is that cause for which Jesus the Son of God came into the world and suffered and died. You literally forsake father and mother, brothers and sisters, for the sake of Christ and the promotion of his kingdom. In this employment, you, probably, have an arduous work before you--A work that will occupy all your talents and much of your time.

It will be your business, my dear children, to teach these women, to whom your husbands can have but little, or no access. Go then, and do all in your power, to enlighten their minds, and bring them to the knowledge of the truth. Go, and if possible, raise their character to the dignity of rational beings, and to the rank of christians in a christian land. Teach them to realize that they are not an inferior race of creatures; but stand upon a par with men. Teach them that they have immortal souls; and are no longer to burn themselves, in the same fire, with the bodies of their departed husbands. Go, bring them from their cloisters into the assemblies of the saints. Teach them to accept of Christ as their Savior, and to enjoy the privileges of the children of God. . . . May you live to see the fruit of your labors, in the conversion

⁴³Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁴Fritz Zerbst and Albert G. Merckens, The Office of Women in the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), p. 10

of thousands of your sisters in the east, and find that they, with their husbands and others, have turned from their Idols, to serve the only living and true God. And may the Lord himself be with you, and support you, and comfort you, and be your portion forever.⁴⁵

What prophetic words these were! Ann Hasseltine Judson became the premier heroine of that foreign mission. Patiently she discharged her missionary responsibilities in approaching the Burmese women, even the wife of the unfriendly viceroy in Rangoon. When her knowledge of the Burmese language was sufficient, she prepared a child's catechism and used it in teaching. She wrote scores of letters to promote the mission fields and courageously ministered to her husband Adoniram through his two years of hellish imprisonment during the war between Great Britain and Burma. When she learned that their house was to be searched, she took the Burmese translations of the New Testament on which her husband had labored many years and sewed them up in a pillow which Adoniram was allowed to keep with him in prison. When she died in 1826, Judson wrote her mother:

Much she saw and suffered of the evil of this evil world, and eminently was she qualified to relish and enjoy the pure and holy rest into which she has entered. True, she has been taken from a sphere into which she was singularly qualified, by her natural disposition, her winning manners, her devoted zeal, and her perfect acquaintance with the language, to be extensively serviceable to the cause of Christ; . . ."

Dr. Judson's two later wives, Sarah Hall Boardman and Emily Chubbuck, carried out their functions with the same amounts of enthusiasm.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Beaver, op. cit., pp. 51,52.

⁴⁶L. Helen Percy, Adoniram Judson: Apostle of Burma. Anderson, Indiana: Gospel Trumpet Press, 1926), esp. p. 110.

Although married women were allowed into these foreign mission fields, entrance was still blocked to the single woman. Dr. Rufus Anderson, a great theoretician and administrator of American missions, who served for a time as foreign secretary of the American Board, wrote in 1836:

It has been urged upon missionary societies to send out unmarried females for (female education); which of course would imply the existence of families where these could find a home. Few however appear to be aware of the difficulties of placing the single female in circumstances to live and labor happily in pagan lands. The difficulties cannot be stated here. The result to which missionary societies and missionaries generally have been conducted is, that unmarried females should rarely be sent on missions, except in connection with families to which they are related by ties of nature or of intimate and endeared friendship, and where it is known that they would be received gladly as permanent members of the family. If this rule is departed from, it should only be in compliance with the wishes of some particular family or missionary station, and the person should be selected as far as may be in the manner they shall propose.

Up to the semicentennial year, 1860, of the American Board, it had appointed 691 females compared with 567 males, according to Dr. Anderson's tabulations. The difference between the two figures represents unmarried women. The lists totaled, at least, 137 single women missionaries. Of these only thirty served overseas, while the rest labored in the several American Indian missions.⁴⁷

Rev. David Abeel, an American missionary to China, recognized the need for women, married or single, in the mission fields. A minister of the Reformed Church in America who had gone to the China coast as chaplain of the Seaman's Friend Society and then served as a missionary of the American Board from 1830 until his death in 1845, Rev. Abeel persuaded some

⁴⁷Beaver, op. cit., pp. 61,62,71.

women friends of missions and the Rev. B.W. Noel to take direct action in organizing a "female agency" since the existing societies were so reluctant to move. The British responded in London by founding The Society for Promoting Female Education in the East.⁴⁸

In America Rev. Abeel's plea was heard by Sarah R. Doremus of the South Reformed Church in New York. This woman's story is one of the most remarkable in the whole history of American Protestantism. Besides working for the American Board missions and then those of the Reformed Church separately, she threw her energies into a multitude of local projects. She inaugurated a Sunday service in the New York city prison and stimulated the organization of the Women's Prison Association. She was a founder of the House and School of Industry, of the Nursery and Child's Hospital, and of Woman's Hospital. She helped to organize the Presbyterian Home for Aged Women and aided in the managing of the City and Tract Mission and of the New York Bible Society. Her first attempt in response to Rev. Abeel's appeal had to be deferred because of objections by Dr. Anderson and the American Board. But later when Mrs. Francis Mason, home on furlough from the Burma Mission, attempted to drum up support for the appointment of single women to her mission field, then Mrs. Doremus again accepted the challenge and led the movement. The result was the incorporation in February, 1861, of the interdenominational Woman's Union Missionary Society of America. Mrs. Doremus remained its president until her death in 1877. Soon auxiliaries

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 87.

or branches made their appearance in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, and elsewhere.⁴⁹

By the 1860s and 1870s, neither the fears of the men on the general missionary boards nor the misgivings of the women themselves could halt the momentum of the ladies in this area. A glance at the following list of other principal groups and their founding dates in the post-Civil War days shows the great number of denominations which were involved in this movement:

- Woman's Board of Missions (Congregational), 1868.
- Woman's Foreign Missionary Society (Methodist Episcopal), 1869.
- Woman's Foreign Missionary Societies of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 1870.
- Woman's Auxiliary (Protestant Episcopal), 1871.
- Woman's Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, 1873.
- Woman's Parent Mite Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1874.
- Christian Woman's Board of Missions (Disciples), 1874.
- Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America, 1875.
- Woman's American Baptist Home Missionary Society, 1877.
- Woman's Executive Committee for Home Missions (Presbyterian), 1877.
- Woman's Board of Foreign Missions, Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1878.
- Woman's Missionary Society of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1879.
- Congregational Women's Home Missionary Association, 1880.
- Woman's Home Missionary Society (Methodist Episcopal), 1884.
- Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention, 1888.
- Woman's Auxiliary, Presbyterian Church in the U.S., 1912.⁵⁰

Devoted women in Ohio launched the first organization of Lutheran women in America, dating back to 1879. The Women's Missionary Society of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, headquartered in Springfield, developed into the very aggressive Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the General

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 88-90.

⁵⁰Ruether, op. cit., pp. 305,306.

Synod. The General Organization of the Women of the General Council dates from 1911, although synodical organizations had been effected earlier. In the United Synod of the South, the women's societies continued to function along synodical lines. In 1920 all these were merged into the Women's Missionary Society of the United Lutheran Church in America.⁵¹

The doors were slowly opening wider for the women. In 1889 Hartford Theological Seminary in Connecticut was the first to open its doors willingly to female students. Because of new opportunities that were presenting themselves to the ladies, the faculty felt that women must be fitted to respond scholastically and practically. Yet while women were received "on especially the same terms as men," this did not mean that ordination was to be contemplated. Rather, they were pointed toward missionary work, Christian teaching, and charitable opportunities. By 1920 the faculty had adopted a new policy: "In view of the changed attitude of the churches toward the ordination of women, we no longer require women to state on entering the seminary that they do not expect to enter the ministry."⁵²

The changed attitude of the churches toward the ordination of women was a result of higher criticism. The Biblical prohibitions against women speaking in the church were regarded in many denominations as culturally conditioned and having limited authority for the present. The initial statement by Dr. Lukas Vischer in the World Council of Churches' Concerning

⁵¹John Aberly, An Outline of Missions (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1945), p. 71.

⁵²Elsie Gibson, When the Minister is a Woman (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), pp. 20, 21.

the Ordination of Women gives evidence of the changing attitude toward this subject as he writes:

The question whether women can undertake the responsibilities of a pastor in the Church is not a new one. It came up from time to time in earlier centuries. A careful enquiry into the history of the office of deaconess, and the importance of widows in the Christian Church, would bring to light some interesting facts in this connection. But during the last few decades it has cropped up in an entirely new way. In earlier centuries the question was more peripheral and could be dismissed fairly easily. But more recently a much more fundamental question has been raised: does the life of the Church adequately reflect the great truth that 'in Christ there is neither male nor female?' Does the Order of the Church adequately express this truth? There is growing insistence that women should assume more responsible functions in the life of the Church; this demand has grown particularly strong within the ecumenical movement, in which so many women have played a leading role. It is typical, for instance, that women spoke at the very first World Conference on Faith and Order (1927). Six women issued a statement, which was recorded in the Minutes: 'that the right place of women in the Church is one of grave moment and should be in the hearts and minds of all.' They pointed out that if the Church seeks deeper unity it must re-examine the question of the relationship between men and women, and that the mission task makes it imperative to put to better use all the gifts available in the Church. They deliberately refrained from raising the problem of church order in this connection. But already at that time it was clear that it would be impossible to avoid facing the question later.⁵³

Ordination had been a theoretical possibility for a long time among the Congregational, Baptist, and Disciples women if they could only convince a local congregation to accede. A significant increase in the number of women ordinations was noted after 1900. By 1927 the Congregationalists alone counted one hundred women ministers. Other denominations began popping into the picture. The Methodist Episcopal Church in 1924 began allowing ordination of women as local

⁵³Dr. Lukas Vischer, "The Ordination of Women," Concerning the Ordination of Women (Lausanne: Impr. La Concorde, 1964), p. 1.

preachers, although they still did not grant them full membership in the General Conference. Even though the presbyteries constituting the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. voted down ordination of women as ministers in 1930, yet in the same ballot they allowed women to become ordained elders.⁵⁴

Even those denominations which did not ordain women were gradually becoming more tolerant of women speaking in church assemblies. In 1918 two Baptist laywomen, advocates for the Woman's Baptist Missionary Union Training School, were the first women to address the Southern Baptist Convention. The Methodist Episcopal Church South granted women lay rights in 1920, and four years later Southern Presbyterian women began serving on national boards. Even some Lutheran synods allowed women to speak at synodical meetings and in some cases to hold church offices during the 1930s.⁵⁵

While the events of World War II disrupted the gender roles especially in the European churches, advances for women were prompted among the American churches also. The first meeting of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948 provided the opportunity for an international discussion of the "Life and Work of Women in the Church." Inez Cavert of the Federal Council of Churches in America had compiled the study "Women in American Church Life" for this meeting too. In editorials concerning this meeting written in 1952, The Christian Century called for women's ordination and produced a series of articles "intended to make better known to the

⁵⁴Ruether, op. cit., pp. 315, 316.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 316.

American public women who are playing conspicuous parts in the church life of this country." In 1952 also the United Church Women of the National Council of Churches urged member denominations to continue to study the role of women.⁵⁶

Theological objections against the ordination and ministry of women (the Bible, Christian doctrine, and ecclesiastical tradition forbid it) began to break down in the more flexible theological climate of the times. Biological arguments (it would not work because a woman's church and family obligations would conflict) were no more serious here than in any other professional career. It seemed that the social questions (neither men nor women want a woman preacher) were the greatest obstacle for a woman's appointment to parish pastorates, though a less serious barrier to their ordination.⁵⁷

In 1956 the Methodist Church removed all restrictions based on sex and women were permitted membership in the Annual Conference. The single restriction that ordained women had to be assigned under local provision and not under the itinerant rule was now lifted. One of the most amazing ladies in this body was the Rev. Margaret Henricksen, who served as pastor to seven congregations in northern Maine, and in 1969 was appointed District Superintendent at Bangor, Maine. Her book Seven Steeples gives a graphic description of her pastoral experiences.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 318, 319.

⁵⁷Harkness, op. cit., p. 133.

⁵⁸Margaret Sittler Ermarth, Adam's Fractured Rib (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 61, 62.

1956 was the year, too, in which the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (Northern) set aside the opinions of its forebear John Calvin who refused to permit women to speak in meetings, to say nothing of exercising any priestly office, when he exclaimed: "It is the height of impudence to urge here the approval of earlier times, for it is plainly evident that this abuse did not become implanted except with the barbarous confusion of the whole of Christianity." In 1964 the Southern Presbyterian Church followed the example of its northern neighbor and gave full ordination to women.⁵⁹

For a long time in the United States it seemed that the Lutheran women had contented themselves with their position and role in the church. They were involved not only in the missionary societies, to which a brief reference has already been made, but also with deaconess work. William Alfred Passevant, a seminary student of Samuel Schmucker at Gettysburg, became interested in the underprivileged people in the mountains near Gettysburg when he was sent out to distribute Bibles in these neglected areas. He, then, undertook measures to improve both the physical and spiritual conditions of these people. Later during his ministry in Baltimore and Pittsburgh, he continued his charitable activities. In 1849 he equipped a small Pittsburgh hospital to provide care for sick soldiers discharged from the Mexican War. He began an orphanage. Through his acquaintance with Theodore Fliedner of Kaiserswerth, Germany, the German founder of the Protestant order of deaconesses,

⁵⁹Harkness, op. cit., p. 134.

William introduced deaconesses into American churches. Having resigned his Pittsburgh pastorate in 1855, he devoted himself entirely to organizing institutions of mercy and to missionary work among Lutheran immigrants. Hospitals were founded in Milwaukee, Chicago, and Jacksonville, Illinois, and orphanages at Mt. Vernon, NY, Germantown, Pennsylvania, and Boston, Massachusetts.⁶⁰

Both in the number and in the quality of its institutions of charity, the Augustana Synod, in proportion to its size, led the Lutheran bodies in America and stood among the first of all American Protestant bodies. Its fifty-four institutions constituted twelve children's homes, eleven hospitals, twenty-one old folks' homes, and ten hospices. The deaconess mother house at Omaha, for which the synod assumed responsibility in 1903, had eighty-eight deaconesses. The Lutheran Deaconess Association, with its headquarters at Fort Wayne, Indiana, was a cooperate venture of the Synodical Conference when it was organized in 1919. The people and congregations of the bodies in the Synodical Conference also assisted in the management and support of a large number of health and welfare agencies, among which were twenty-seven hospitals, twenty-five institutions for the care of children, and seventeen homes for the aged.⁶¹

A sampling of views from leading American Lutheran theologians over the last century shows the strong positions

⁶⁰ Abdel Ross Wentz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), pp. 105, 319.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 197, 219, 220.

these men held regarding a woman's place in the church: Samuel Schmucker (General Synod) would not even allow women to lead in prayer. Edmund Jacob Wolf (General Synod) pointed out that subordination was not only established in creation, but made sure by history. Although in 1897 Henry Eyster Jacobs (General Council) said women may speak sometimes in public, two years later he reverted to the rule that they must be silent "except there be no man." C.F.W. Walther (Missouri) affirmed that Scripture excludes women from voting, teaching in public assemblies and having authority over men, but does not forbid their teaching privately and in parish schools. Franz Pieper (Missouri), who believed that women were not even to ask questions publicly, was alarmed by woman suffrage and commented: "Woman ought not be dragged from her place of honor into public life."⁶²

The fact that these views are no longer shared by many today is made evident by reading just a portion of the report organized by the Department on Cooperation of Men and Women in Church, Family, and Society and the Department in Faith and Order and presented to the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, May 10-12, 1963:

Many are of the opinion that the evidence of the New Testament speaks clearly against admitting women to the ministry. However, it should be seen that the New Testament is not always used in the appropriate way in the discussion of this issue.

Modern historical research on the Bible has given us a new awareness of the extent to which the biblical witness is conditioned by and oriented to historical situations. Therefore biblical teaching cannot be abstracted from

⁶²Dr. Fred W. Meuser, "What Have Lutherans Said? History," The Ordination of Women (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), pp. 35,36.

the historical context in which the books have been written. The Bible is not a collection of proof texts, and questions cannot be answered by quoting single passages. Therefore if we are confronted with problems of today's world we cannot find the answer by quoting single passages. Every question must be understood and answered in the light of God's revelation in Christ which is the centre of Scripture. This methodological principle is very important for the discussion of ordination of women. Both supporters and opponents tend to quote single passages for or against such ordination. However, it should be clear that no answer is given by a single reference, e.g. to Gal 3 or I Tim. 2. An answer can be given only by taking into consideration the whole of the Bible and the historical situation to which each single passage refers.

Sometimes it is said that the 'biblical doctrine on men and women' does exclude any consideration of admitting women to the full ministry. But the New Testament does not contain a developed doctrine on this relationship. As the New Testament in all its parts witnesses to Christ, it is not concerned to establish a system of doctrine. Every question with which the Church is confronted is answered by referring to the central reality of Christ. The centrality of Christ even makes possible the use of different anthropological statements in the Bible. Therefore one cannot speak of New Testament doctrine on men and women and draw conclusions from such a doctrine we think is established. We have to examine the new situation in which we live in the light of Christ's Lordship.⁶³

The contemporary movement in Lutheranism to ordain women as pastors, however, did not even originate with any theological studies, but because of the connection of the church and state in certain countries of Europe. The ordination of women in Lutheran churches occurred in those countries where the government, to some extent, controlled and thus regulated the church. Since the time of Constantine, church and state, altar and throne, have existed in alliance with only a few interruptions. At first kings in certain Lutheran countries appointed bishops and pastors and provided for the church's financial support. The church, then, has tended to reflect in its organization

⁶³"The Ordination of Women: An Ecumenical Problem," Concerning the Ordination of Women (Lausanne: Impr. La Concorde, 1964), pp. 6,7

the desires of the government in power. Thus it is not surprising that the first decisions to ordain women in Lutheran churches were political, not ecclesiastical. Such was the case with Norway, when in 1938 the parliament decided to permit women pastors. Until 1956 a woman appointed to be the pastor of a congregation by the government could be rejected by the congregation, but a law that year removed this veto power. Finally in 1961 a woman was ordained. The subsequent actions in Denmark, Sweden, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia were, also, taken by governments with socialist or communist leanings.⁶⁴

The case in Sweden can be used to illustrate the tension which exists between the church and state. In Swedish legislation this question of woman ordination required passage in the Parliament and the consent of the Church Assembly. In 1957 the Church Assembly vetoed the legislation and asked for more time to study the question. Since 1946 a Commission had been appointed by the government at the request of Parliament to study the problem. The recommendation was for the inclusion in the proposal that although women "shall have the same access as men to ordination," there should always be one male minister in each parish, not necessarily the rector. By 1957 the government felt that there had been enough debate and called a new Church Assembly the following year. The Assembly voted for ordination of women, even without the limitation that had been recommended by the Commission, in spite of great

⁶⁴David P. Scaer, "May Women be Ordained as Pastors?" *The Springfielder* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, Sep., 1972), Vol. XXXVI, No. 2, p. 89.

opposition from a number of bishops.⁶⁵

A law permitting ordination has been in effect in Denmark since 1947, with ordination being practiced the following year. Women were pastors in Czechoslovakia as early as 1953, but they were not allowed to become chief pastors of parishes until 1959. In Sweden the law was put in effect in 1959 and has been practiced since 1960. Reports from France indicated that the Lutheran Church there had several women pastors prior to 1962. As of February, 1968, twenty of the twenty-seven member churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany permitted ordination together with seven of the thirteen territorial churches in the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany. All of the territorial Lutheran churches in the German Democratic Republic permit ordination of women.⁶⁶

The break in American ranks came on the question of vote and voice for women in congregational meetings. At the turn of the century, the model congregational constitution supplied by the General Synod gave women the right to vote but not to hold office. In 1907 Augustana allowed women to vote and in 1930 permitted women to be delegates. Shortly thereafter in 1934 the United Lutheran Church decided that women could be delegates, church councilmen, and board and commission members.⁶⁷ Another barrier was overturned when the seminaries of the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America

⁶⁵Krister Stendahl, The Bible and the Role of Women (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 2,3.

⁶⁶Meuser, op. cit., pp. 34,35.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 36.

admitted women into their regular Bachelor of Divinity programs. The next step could have been predicted--what is to be done with the women B.D. graduates?⁶⁸

The American Lutheran Church's Board of Theological Education reported in 1966 that it would permit the enrollment of women in its theological seminaries to receive the B.D. degree, while fully knowledgable of the fact that their church did not ordain women. The next year the ALC's Church Council asked the Board to study the questions that had been raised concerning women's ordination. The faculty of Luther Seminary came to the conclusion that there was nothing decisive in the biblical, theological, or practical objections, while the ecumenical objection, the most serious objection of all, was difficult to assess.⁶⁹

The "ALC Seminary Position Paper on Ordaining Women" adopted by the St. Paul, Minnesota, faculty on October 30, 1968, read as follows:

Four sets of objections are urged against the ordination of women to the ministry: biblical, theological, practical, and ecumenical.

1. The New Testament does not confront the question of ordination of women and therefore does not speak directly to it. On the other hand, nothing in the New Testament speaks decisively against it.
2. Although the ordination of women raises new and difficult questions, there is no decisive theological argument against the ordination of women.
3. The practical objections, however serious, do not by themselves settle the question for Lutherans. As long as no decisive biblical or theological objections are raised, the ordination of women remains a possibility.
4. The most serious objection is the ecumenical, that Lutherans ought not unilaterally in the present divided state of Christendom make decisions which affect

⁶⁸Scaer, op. cit., pp. 91,92.

⁶⁹Meuser, loc. cit.

all Christian churches. But inasmuch as other churches already have ordained women to the ministry, and some churches not presently ordaining women are open to discussion of its possibility, the exact weight of this objection is difficult to assess.

In view of the considerations above, we can see no valid reason why women candidates for ordination who meet the standards normally required for admission to the ministry should not be recommended for ordination.⁷⁰

The Lutheran Church in America arrived at the same conclusions in 1968 when its Commission on the Comprehensive Study of the Doctrine of the Ministry approved the practice. This commission had been appointed in 1964 and managed to include a discussion of the matter in its report to the 1966 biennial convention. The report readily admitted:

At present in this church there is neither theological nor social consensus on this question, and there has not been sufficient time or study given to warrant a final decision now. However, since ordination of women is an open question in American Lutheranism, and a seriously discussed matter in many Lutheran churches, it seems reasonable to recommend, as we do, that in the future this church study the question in depth.⁷¹

Since the ALC and the LCA do not have their own theological commissions as does the Missouri Synod, they relied heavily on the Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. to provide them with a solution. The conclusions of this study published in 1970 were not fully persuasive one way or the other. The committee felt that all the major arguments against ordination of women were less than decisive, as were the arguments for ordination. A portion of the conclusion includes the following paragraph:

While the Gospel is determinative for the church's ministry, not contemporary developments, and that Gospel

⁷⁰Ermarth, op. cit., p. 113.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 100, 101.

does not change from age to age, nonetheless it is necessary to ask from time to time whether areas of the church's life such as practices regarding the ordained ministry do properly reflect that Gospel and the will of the church's Lord in the world amid the new situations. We must ask whether what we have been accustomed to continue warranted in the face of what we are actually doing in some instances and amid what is happening in God's world, and is the fullest expression currently possible of faith and of the Spirit's activity. Lest we miss the ongoing work of God and promptings of his Spirit, we are called to consider anew what we have readily assumed.⁷²

By passing the motion to strike the word "man" and insert the word "person" in Section II, Item 1, of the LCA Bylaws, the Lutheran Church in America adopted the statement that "a minister of this church shall be a person . . ." At its Minneapolis convention the largest Lutheran body in the U.S. granted women the right to ordination on June 29, 1970. Further recommendations called upon the LCA to insure that:

- opportunities for service in the ordained ministry are presented on a continuing basis to young men and young women in LCA congregations;
- seminaries of the church make it publicly known that they welcome women students for the ordained ministry;
- provision is made within the seminaries for adequate personal counseling of women students;
- a climate is created within seminaries which supports the acceptance of women theological students;
- seminaries encourage women to pursue advanced study in theological disciplines and call women to their faculties as they qualify for teaching particular disciplines;
- presidents of synods actively seek congregational calls for women ordinands;
- congregations are encouraged to call women pastors;
- boards and commissions of the LCA and synods call ordained women to staff positions;
- boards and commissions of the LCA and committees of synods actively seek ordained women members.⁷³

While the ALC was struggling with the same question at

⁷²Raymond Tiemeyer, The Ordination of Women (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), pp. 51, 52.

⁷³Fifth Biennial Convention of the Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the Lutheran Church in America, 1970), pp. 433, 539, 540.

their San Antonio convention from October 21-27, 1970, the LCA headquarters in New York announced that Elizabeth Platz of Baltimore would become the first LCA woman minister. Elizabeth had received her Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1965 and was now to be ordained in the chapel of the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, where she had served as an assistant to the Lutheran chaplain for five years. Now she was called to be a campus pastor to the University of Maryland Lutheran Chaplaincy.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, the ALC had encountered barriers in their discussions on the subject. Opposition because of scriptural principles and on account of the confusing and ill-defined LCUSA study became very evident. One pastor said that his church which had previously favored women ministers now had turned seventy-five per cent against it simply because of the LCUSA report. "I don't see how this convention can vote on something so poorly defined," one pastor intimated. Yet the ALC did vote and the ordination proposal was passed 560 to 414.⁷⁵

Barbara Andrews, who was born with cerebral palsy and had spent her entire life in a wheelchair, became the first woman minister in the ALC. Her ordination took place on December 20, 1970, at Edina Community Lutheran Church, Edina, Minnesota, where she was called to be an assistant pastor.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Lutheran Standard, Vol. X, No. 24 (November 24, 1970), p. 20.

⁷⁵Christianity Today, Vol. XV, No. 4 (November 20, 1970), p. 43.

⁷⁶Lutheran Standard, Vol. X, No. 25 (December 8, 1970), p. 18.

The debate in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod concerning women centered on the suffrage question and dated back to 1938 when the committee referred to Dr. Francis Pieper's positions that women not be granted voting membership. The whole matter was dropped until 1953 when another committee was appointed to complete an exegetical study on I Corinthians 14, I Timothy 2, and other applicable texts. Along with the resulting exegetical study, the committee added at the St. Paul convention in 1956 a number of pertinent sections which are quoted below:

Whereas, the committee does not state that it finds woman suffrage in our congregations forbidden in express words in the Scriptures, but emphatically warns against any anti-Scriptural practice whereby the headship of man to woman in the affairs of the church would be surrendered; . . .

Resolved, (d) That all congregations who administer their affairs through the male voters' meeting be urged to continue this policy, but to inform the entire membership on the transactions of the voters' meetings, and to impress upon the men the importance of utilizing this blessed privilege of suffrage to the utmost to the glory of God and the welfare of the church; and be it further

Resolved, (e) That we urge any congregation in the membership of Synod now, or applying for membership, which grants woman suffrage, to reconsider this practice in the 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, and to consider the danger of offense to others and to conform⁷⁷ to the historic position of Synod in this matter; . . .

The reports at the conventions all remained very similar until the 1965 Detroit convention saw a slight shift in emphasis. There a resolution read, ". . . we consider woman suffrage in the church as contrary to Scripture only when it violates the above-mentioned Scriptural principles." The

⁷⁷"Woman Suffrage in the Church," Proceedings of the Forty-Ninth Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, p. 510

Scriptural principles to which this sentence makes reference are here enumerated:

1. On the basis of I Cor. 14:34,35 and I Tim. 2:11-15 we hold that God forbids women publicly to preach and teach the Word to men and to hold any office or vote in the church where this involves exercising authority over men with respect to the public administration of the Office of the Keys. We regard this principle as of binding force also today because I Tim. 2:11-15 refers to what God established at creation.

2. As stated at the St. Paul convention in 1956 and at the San Francisco convention in 1959, we consider woman suffrage in the church as contrary to Scripture only when it violates the above-mentioned Scriptural principles.

3. In Gal. 3:28 St. Paul speaks of the redeemed children of God and their blessed relationship with Christ and with one another. This blessed relationship through faith does not cancel the order God has established at the time of creation but sanctifies and hallows it.⁷⁸

Finally in 1969 the culmination of years of study resulted in the conclusion that "in the matter of suffrage, then, we must conclude that there is nothing in Scripture to prohibit women from exercising the franchise in the voters' meetings of the congregations to which they belong."⁷⁹

Because of the uncertainty as to what this all involved, resolution 2-04 from the 1971 LC-MS Milwaukee convention, a portion of which was quoted at the beginning of this paper, was a necessity. This statement, withholding the ordination of women to the pastoral office, was adopted by a rising vote of 674 to 194. Where will Missouri go from here? Has she taken the first step on the road to women ordination? Missouri has had a number of tangles with the subject during the past decade. Relations with the ALC with whom Missouri had declared altar and pulpit fellowship in 1969 were immediately strained when the ALC adopted women ordination just a year later.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 517.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 521.

The considerable tension between LC-MS and Seminex was only increased when Seminex certified Ms. Jan Otte as qualified for the ministry.

And how will we in the Wisconsin Synod be affected by all this? Will it simply pass us by? A study done by Lawrence Kersten seems to indicate that we have difficult times ahead of us in this very area. Two questions were posed to laymen and clergy alike: "Do you think women should have as equal a voice in church decisions as men?" and "Should women be allowed to become ordained ministers?" The chart shows the percentage of those answering "yes."

| | | LCA | ALC | LC-MS | WELS |
|-------------|--------|-----|-----|-------|------------------|
| Question 1: | Laymen | 91 | 86 | 71 | 49 |
| | Clergy | 98 | 98 | 47 | 0 |
| Question 2: | Laymen | 73 | 68 | 47 | 39 |
| | Clergy | 62 | 30 | 8 | 0. ⁸⁰ |

Throughout this paper we have seen a number of methods Satan has used in getting man to minimize what the Bible says on this subject. May we never become blind to the wiles of Satan. As we look at the difficult times that we may encounter, may we always keep our eyes focused on God and His Word with which He has entrusted us.

⁸⁰ Lawrence K. Kersten, The Lutheran Ethic (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), p. 125.

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