

The Ordination of Lutheran Women in America and the Study of Hermeneutics

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Introduction

On November 22nd in 1970, Elizabeth Platz became the first woman in North America to be ordained as a Lutheran pastor. In 1962, Platz attended the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, planning to study systematic theology, a course then not offered to women. Platz was allowed to study for her Bachelor of Divinity in which the systematic theology major is offered, at that time the degree needed to become an ordained pastor. Platz graduated but as a woman, was unable to become ordained, so she became a lay chaplain at the University of Maryland, College Park; (but not without some difficulty), Platz says,

“In those days pastors came to interview the seniors awaiting call. Heiges [Platz’s advisor at seminary] found the opportunity to tell me that I might not be welcome. And it was true. Pastor after pastor let me know... he didn’t want a women with a degree in systematic theology in his parish, listening to his sermons”¹

In the summer of 1970, the Lutheran Church of America approved the ordination of women and Platz was asked to become ordained and the first Lutheran women pastor in the United States. Platz became ordained later in November 1970.²

While Elizabeth Platz in 1970 was the first time a women was ordained in the Lutheran church in North America, it is true that women have been ordained for a number of years prior in both the European Lutheran churches and in other protestant denominations. As early as 1853, a Congregationalist church ordained Antoinette Brown, but her ordination was not recognized by this denomination. The Methodist

¹Elizabeth Platz, “My Story, Our Story.” *Lutheran Women in Ordained Ministry* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995), 46.

²Jennifer Houston, “Lutheran Women in Ministry part 1,” *Seminary Ridge Review* 3 (2000): 16- 41, 16.

Protestant Church ordained Anna Howard Shaw in 1880, and forerunners to the United Methodist church, the Church of Nazarene and the Presbyterian Church all ordained women before 1900³. In the early twentieth century many other Protestant denominations followed suit. In 1948, the Lutheran Church in Denmark first ordained a woman pastor, followed by the Lutherans in Czechoslovakia in 1953, in Sweden in 1960, Norway in 1961, in France prior to 1962 and in some German Lutheran churches in 1968. In America, the Lutheran church was behind many of the other denominations in terms of the ordination of women, and it was also behind the Lutheran Churches in Europe (although some European countries, such as Finland, waited until after the United States).⁴

Since Elizabeth Platz was ordained, the role of ordained females in Lutheran churches in the USA has grown extensively. Twenty-five years after Platz was ordained, in 1995, 13% of active Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) clergy were female.⁵ Today there are about 2,800 women clergy in the ELCA who make up about 23% of the active roster⁶. Currently the number of women enrolled in ELCA seminaries headed toward ordination is 961, compared to 972 men, which means that nearly 50% of seminary students today are women.⁷

It was less than thirty-four years ago when the first Lutheran women were ordained in the United States, but not all Lutheran traditions in America ordain women. While the ELCA and the three churches that merged to form the ELCA in 1987 (the Lutheran Church of America, the American Lutheran Church and the Association of

³ Information found at <http://www.religioustolerance.org/femclrg13.htm>

⁴ Raymond Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970).

⁵ Houston, "Lutheran Women in Ministry part.1", 16.

⁶ www.elca.org/cw/women.clergy.html

⁷ www.elca.org/cw/faq.html

Evangelical Lutheran Churches) all practiced the ordination of women (the LCA and the ALC in 1970 and the AELC in 1977), the other major Lutheran Church in North America, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), still has not ordained women to public ministry.

Today there are about 8.3 million Lutherans in North America and about 94% are members of either the ELCA or the LCMS. Of the remaining 6% of North American Lutherans, 5% are members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), the rest to eight smaller churches. 2.6 million of the 8.3 million Lutherans are members of LCMS, which means that the ELCA is about twice the size as LCMS.⁸

The LCMS is very clear on their standing when it comes to women ordination. At the LCMS Denver convention in 1969, while the LCA and the ALC were on the verge of ordaining women, the LCMS adopted the following resolution:

The Synod adopted the following declarations as guidelines on this matter [woman suffrage]:

1. Those statements of Scripture, which direct women to keep silent in the church and which prohibit them to teach and exercise authority over men, we understand to mean that women ought not to hold the pastoral office or serve in any other capacity involving the distinctive functions of this office.
2. The principles set forth in such passages, we believe, prohibit holding any other kind of office or membership on boards or committees in the institutional structures of a congregation, only if this involves women in a violation of the order of creation.^{9 10}

⁸ Mary Todd, *Authority Vested: A Story of Identity and Change in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2000), 1.

⁹ The "Order of Creation" is a term that means an understood fixed order of definition of relationships defined by God during the creation. Based on the creation account in Genesis 2 because man was created first, woman is subordinate to man. I will talk about this issue more fully in chapter 3.

¹⁰ Proceedings of the forty-eight Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod as found by: Schroeder, "The Orders of Creation—Some Reflections on the History and Place of the Term in Systematic Theology," 165.

It is clear that the LCMS was at that time hostile to the ordination of women, and they remain so. In 1970, right after the LCMS declared that the ordination of women violated the order of creation, the Lutheran Church of America voted on June 29, to change Section II, Item 1 of its Bylaws by removing the word "man" replacing it with "person", thereby allowing a women to become ordained. The bylaws were changed to read, "A minister of this church shall be a person whose soundness in the faith, aptness to teach and educational qualifications have been examined and approved in the manner prescribed in the constitution and who has been properly ordained...."¹¹ The current constitution of the ELCA is extremely similar on the issue of the ordination of women. In Chapter 7.22 the constitution says declares: "An ordained minister of this church shall be a person whose commitment to Christ, soundness in the faith, aptness to preach, teach and witness, and educational qualifications have been examined and approved in the manner prescribed in the documents of the church..."¹²

Ordaining clergy within any tradition is challenging, because everyone has different ideas about what restrictions should be in existence pertaining to the ordination of women. The Lutheran church in the United States is no different. In the Lutheran churches, ordination restrictions have been changed on a variety of issues; the ordination of minorities; some Lutheran traditions have ordained women, some have not; and currently the ELCA is discussing the issue of the ordination of practicing homosexuals. This paper will examine the issue of the ordination of women in the two major traditions of the Lutheran church in the United States, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod. The ELCA and the LCMS began not so far

¹¹ Bylaws of the Lutheran Church of America

¹² Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

apart, and the two traditions even entered a study of the ordination of women together.

Yet these traditions have recently taken opposite views with regard to the ordination of women. What led two traditions from the same denomination in the same country, to take such opposite views on the same issue? In her book *Authority Vested* Mary Todd says;

The principal visible difference between these two main groups of Lutherans—the ELCA ordains women to public ministry; the Missouri Synod does not. The synod’s insistence on the exclusion of women from public ministry is today the most tangible and obvious element of its identity as a distinct and separate from the main body of other Lutherans in ELCA. Yet this church body’s position on women is not the primary differential, only the necessary evidence of what is—the synod’s stance on the verbal inerrancy of scripture.¹³

This paper will show that the historical and theological changes both traditions have gone through have led each church to develop different methods of biblical hermeneutics, that is, both traditions go about interpreting the Bible differently, which led them to make different choices in regards to the issue of the ordination of women even though they are in the same time, country and have the same materials and the same arguments.

To accomplish the task of assigning both the ELCA and the LCMS a practice of interpretation of the Bible, one must look at the common modern biblical hermeneutic understandings. To do this, we will examine the Avery Dulles’ works on hermeneutics as well as the hermeneutics Krister Stendahl¹⁴ discusses in his book *The Bible and the Role of Women* on the issues of women’s ordination in Sweden, and the hermeneutics

¹³ Todd, *Authority Vested*, 2.

¹⁴ Krister Stendahl was born in 1921 in Stockholm, Sweden. He attended Uppsala University and earned his Th.D. in 1954. In 1944, Stendahl was ordained as a priest in the Church of Sweden. In 1954 Stendahl came to the United States and became an assistant professor at Harvard Divinity School, and in 1963 became the Frothingham Professor of Biblical Studies. Stendahl has written numerous books in three languages. His interests have been the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the use of Old Testament in the gospel of Matthew.

that Raymond Tiemeyer¹⁵ believes are employed in the ordination of women in the United States in his book, *The Ordination of Women*. After studying the different hermeneutical approaches, while the ELCA and the LCMS may not fit completely into a specific method, it is clear that they approach biblical interpretation differently. By discussing each church's stance on the ordination of women and what issue of the ordination of women each tradition chose to emphasize, the differences in biblical interpretation, already apparent, will be shown to be the reason for the difference. By assigning or showing the similarities of a biblical interpretation approach with both denominations and then showing how that hermeneutical method is reinforced or demonstrated by how both traditions respond to the different issues of the ordination of women, it will become clear that differing hermeneutics are responsible in part for the way each church responds to the issues involved in the ordination of women. The conclusion of each group will be different which leads to either ordaining women or not.

By researching the history of women in American Lutheranism, especially the ELCA and the LCMS; the historical impulses that led each tradition to develop or adopt a particular way of interpreting the Bible with regard to this topic will become apparent. After researching hermeneutical approaches, it will be clear that the ELCA and the LCMS interpret the Bible differently, putting weight on different things, and approaching issues differently. By looking at how both synods responded and concluded each of the issues in the ordination of women, it will be clear that the hermeneutical approach is in part responsible for the difference in opinion in these two traditions of Lutheranism in America.

¹⁵ Raymond Tiemeyer is the author of *The Ordination of Women*, an account of the study of the ordination of women done by the Lutheran Council in 1969.

Chapter One: Brief Overview of the American Lutheran Church in regards to the Ordination of Women

It has been nearly 500 years since Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses on the door of the church at Wittenberg and therefore publicly began the Protestant Reformation. Luther's acts eventually led to the beginning of the Lutheran Church. Although most scholars agree that Luther "felt that women should be excluded from ministry because of their inferior aptitudes,"¹⁶ Luther's changes in fact opened up many of the possibilities for women's involvement in the church, which only increased as the Lutheran tradition grew and changed. The history of the Lutheran church is deeply connected to the situation of the ordination of women as it stands today. The Lutheran church is very different today than it was 500 years ago, partly because of the social and cultural changes the world has gone through but also because of the changes the church has overcome. Also, each different tradition in the Lutheran church in the USA has had a distinctive history; which has changed the individual traditions' theology, how the Bible is interpreted or used and how each tradition reacts to issues such as the ordination of women. Not only will the history of the Lutheran church and women in the church set the stage to better understand the ordination of women today, but the separate historical journeys that were taken to form each of these traditions are intrinsically involved in the way that the ELCA and the LCMS interpret the meaning and theology behind the Biblical passages and other issues in determining a standpoint on the ordination of women.

¹⁶ John E. Lynch, "The Ordination of Women: Protestant Experience in Ecumenical Perspective," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 12 (1975): 173-197, 173.

The Beginning: Martin Luther

Martin Luther was born in 1483 the son of a miner in Eisleben Germany. Martin Luther began as a student of law, but later became a monk and then a priest and teacher of theology. In 1517, fed up with the practices of the Catholic Church, Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. After this occurrence, when realizing that he was unable to change the Catholic Church, Luther began to break his ties with the Catholic Church, most notably in 1525 when he married former nun Katharina von Bora. Martin Luther's break from the Catholic Church earned followers who formed the Lutheran Church, which spread throughout Europe, most notably in the Northern countries.

The Lutheran Church Moves to America

In 1619, a Danish Lutheran pastor, Rasmus Jense arrived in North America, and shortly after his arrival, many more Lutherans immigrated to America from Northern Europe. The earliest Lutheran settlement was the Dutch colony, New Netherlands, located on the Hudson River, comprised of mostly Scandinavians and Germans who resided in Holland prior to immigrating to North America. Soon after, many more Lutheran colonies appeared in the area. In 1649, the Lutheran Church in New Netherland was formed but it wasn't until 1657 that Johannes Gutwasser became the first ordained Lutheran pastor at the Lutheran Church in New Netherland. By 1771 at least 80 Lutheran congregations existed in North America.¹⁷

¹⁷ Alvin N. Rogness, *The Story of the American Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1980), 18.

The nineteenth century brought new challenges for the Lutheran church. Issues like “the Louisiana Purchase, the War of 1812, the Monroe Doctrine, and above all, the creation and admission of new states to the growing federal union—all these factors tended to strengthen the new government and foster the new national spirit.”¹⁸ The newfound independence of America led to the eventual breakdown of the established churches in Virginia and New England. Churches like the Methodists, the Baptists, the Episcopalians, the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists established national denominational organizations. But the Lutheran church was slower to respond, and remained divided into many smaller synods. By 1817, the 300th anniversary of the 95 theses there were over 650 Lutheran congregations in North America. In 1820 representatives from Pennsylvania, New York, North Carolina, Maryland and Virginia met in a convention in Hagerstown, Maryland to discuss the formation of a General Synod. The Ohio and Tennessee synods declined to be involved. In 1821, three synods formed the General Synod and in 1826 the Gettysburg Seminary was formed. Between the years 1825 and 1900 marks the period of heaviest immigration of Lutherans from northern Europe, and these new immigrants formed many additional synods.

In 1917 the Evangelical Lutheran Church brought together three Norwegian denominations, the Hauge Synod, the Norwegian Synod and the United Synod. In 1930, three groups of German origin formed together to become the American Lutheran Church. The ALC and the LCA, along with the United Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Free Church all came together to form the American Lutheran Church in 1960.

¹⁸ Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), 66.

The Lutheran Church of America was formed in 1962 when the United Lutheran Church in America, Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, American Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America joined together.^{19 20}

The Formation of the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod

Martin Stephan was born in 1777 in Moravia to Catholic parents who converted to Lutheranism. In 1809 he became the pastor of St. John's in Dresden, the capital city of Saxony. Stephan became a local leader who started a movement known as "Stephanism" in the early 1830s, "when a group of theology students at the University of Leipzig fell under Stephan's influence."²¹ The group of young men in their twenties looked to Stephan for guidance in both their careers and their personal lives in the ministry and steadily became more and more dependent upon him. Stephan started a series of nightly walks and nightly social gatherings involving his group of men and other people in the community, which the local community leaders soon believed possibly "that Stephen might be holding the illegal conventicles they feared as subversive."²²

Because of the trouble the Stephanites were having with the local community and the Saxon government, Stephan began to explore the possibility of immigration in 1833. In November 1838, 665 Saxons traveled to America and settled in St. Louis, Missouri. Soon after, the group purchased a large parcel of land south of St. Louis in Perry County to build a community. Soon after, however, Stephan's leadership began to fail.

¹⁹ Wentz, *A Brief History*, 66.

²⁰ See Visual One.

²¹ Mary Todd, *Authority Vested: A Story of Identity and Change in the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 26.

²² Todd, *Authority Vested*, 27.

Complaints initially arose regarding the amount of money Stephan was spending on himself. Later women of the community started to come forward confessing to having sexual relations with Stephan. Led by the youngest clergyman at the Perry County community, C.F.W. Walther, the group forced Stephan into exile and told him not to contact the community again. In 1841, Walther was called to become the head pastor of what would become the Missouri Synod. On April 25, 1847 the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was formed, with C.F.W. Walther as president.

Suffrage and What Follows: Issues with Women in the LCMS

With the formation of the LCMS, Walther and his successor, Franz Pieper, made their opinion of women's role in church life clear. In his textbook on pastoral theology, Walther wrote that all adult men are allowed to "participate by speaking, deliberating, voting and resolving. But women and the young are excluded."²³ Pieper often spoke of how men and women were created for a different "sphere of activity,"²⁴ women's sphere being the home.

Before women were granted the right to vote in the United States of America in 1920, the LCMS had not concentrated greatly on the issue of women in the church, and even after the Nineteenth amendment²⁵ was passed in 1920, attention was not paid to the issue of women for a while. The issue was surrounded from inside the LCMS with a flurry of articles and opinions, but never was the church directly affected.

At this time in the LCMS, women did not have the ability to speak or vote in the congregation but had the right to veto, or make known that she will not accept a certain

²³ Todd, *Authority Vested*, 148.

²⁴ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* vol. 1.

²⁵ The 19th amendment enabled women the right to vote.

person as her pastor. In 1938, at the synodical convention the issue of women voting in the church was raised, but the convention decided they would continue not to give women voting rights in the LCMS.

Fifteen years later, in 1953 the synodical convention in Houston, Texas took up the concern that some LCMS congregations had passed laws giving women the ability to vote within the congregation. The president of the synod appointed five people to study the issue of women's suffrage, who would report at the next convention in St. Paul, MN in 1956. But it wasn't until 1967 that the special committee concluded "there is no clear or necessary connection between the apostolic teaching of these passages and the issue of women suffrage as such."²⁶ In 1969, the synod passed a resolution allowing women suffrage.

The 1969 Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council to Study Women and Ordination

In 1969 the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church of America requested that the Lutheran Council of America begin a study on women and ordination which resulted in the 1969 Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council to Study Women and Ordination. The ALC and the LCA, along with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches, all participated in the study, with one person represented each church. The committee was comprised of Dr. John Reumann, Dr. Robert W. Bertram, the Rev. Stephan G. Mazak and Dr. Fred W.

²⁶ "Report of the Special Committee on Women Suffrage" Commission on Theology and Church Relations, October 21, 1967.

Meuser. The findings and the report were presented to the annual Lutheran Council meeting in early 1970.

The 1969 Lutheran Council study looked at the following themes in the issue of women ordination; women as the weaker sex, the God is male argument, the orders of creation, certain scriptures directly against women's leadership (1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and 1 Timothy 2), the image of God (Genesis 1), the new age (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 3:27-28), the history of women's involvement in the Lutheran church, the Biblical inconsistency on the subject and the Priesthood of All Believers.²⁷ The 1969 Lutheran Council study looked at these nine themes and came to conclusions about each of them. At the end of the study the Lutheran Council committee came to no conclusion about the ordination of women. The council reported:

Although the gospel does not change, conditions do. New situations, differing customs, continued research, the on-going work of God and the promptings of the Spirit demand constant reconsideration of previous assumptions. The Church must periodically ask whether its practices give the fullest expression of the will of the Lord.

In the past the Church has hesitated to ordain women because scripture seemed to forbid it. Yet strict and literal enforcement of passages such as 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 14: 33-36 has never been applied. In practice churches have given several kinds of leadership functions to women. Hence, and in the light of further examination of the biblical material, the case both against and for ordination is found to be inconclusive. Among the Lutheran Church bodies, therefore, a variety of practices on this question ought not disrupt church fellowship.²⁸

Because the study ended with an inconclusive verdict, the committee recommended that each "church may adopt differing practices in this regard without violating the gospel."²⁹

In 1970 both the ALC and the LCA adapted their bylaws to allow the ordination of women. Elizabeth Platz was ordained to the LCA and was followed by Barbara

²⁷ These arguments will be explained in greater detail in chapter 3.

²⁸ Raymond Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), 8.

²⁹ Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 49.

Andrews who was ordained in December 1970 for the ALC. The LCMS continued to refuse to ordain women and have continued to refuse to this day.

The Formation of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches

In the late 1960's and the 1970s, a strain arose between the president of the LCMS, Jacob A.O. Preus and a faction of the faculty and students at the LCMS seminary Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, stemming from the difference in biblical interpretation and authority.³⁰ While Preus believed in literal biblical interpretation, the faculty from Concordia was teaching historical-critical biblical interpretation. In 1974 the group left the seminary and started Seminex, a new seminary. Because the LCMS refused to recognize those who graduated from Seminex, in 1976 they formed a new synod along with 150 congregations, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches and immediately approved the ordination of women. In 1977, Jan Otte was the first woman ordained as a pastor in the AELC.

The Formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

In 1987 the LCA, the ALC and the AELC joined together to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, which today more than 70% of American Lutherans are members of and women have been greatly involved in the leadership of the ELCA, and because the LCA, the ALC and the AELC all ordained women before the formation of the ELCA, the ordination of women was not a huge issue during the merger, but after the

³⁰ Jennifer Houston, "Lutheran Women in Ministry," *Seminary Ridge Review* 12(2000): 16-41, 25.

ELCA was formed, women continue to make headway and grow as leaders of the church. In 1992, April Larson was elected as the first female Lutheran bishop in America.³¹

Today the ELCA ordains almost as many women each year as men to be pastors, while the LCMS still has not consented to the ordination of women. The history in the formation of these two groups has definitely contributed to the state that both are in today, both regarding and not regarding the issue of the ordination of women. The history of the ELCA is one of many groups constantly making compromises to come together to form a larger church. The ELCA, through the LCA, the ALC and the AELC and the earlier churches that formed those groups, has a history of changing and growing to better come together, while the LCMS has essentially retained much of the same beliefs they originally had when formed. The LCMS has not experienced any merging therefore, because of the history of changes in these traditions, these churches have had different ways of dealing with change and have developed different customs of biblical interpretation.

In regards to the issue of the ordination of women, the history of the LCMS and the ELCA is important in understanding where both churches stand on the issue today as well as how their stances on the ordination of women was developed. After having an appropriate background on the subject of the ordination of women in the Lutheran American churches and realizing the differences between the two largest Lutheran American synods, the next step is to look at the reason for the difference, namely hermeneutics or the method of interpreting the Bible.

³¹ Todd, *Authority Vested*, 1.

Chapter Two: Biblical Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics or the method of interpretation of scripture plays an important part in the outcome of biblical scholarly exegesis. The method of hermeneutical thought that is applied to an interpretation of the Bible can influence what is determined from a scripture. In the case of the ordination of women, the groups that eventually form the ELCA and the LCMS both have distinctively different styles of using hermeneutics. These different approaches lead to the adoption of different attitudes towards the ordination of women in each tradition. By looking briefly at how hermeneutical thought was developed, and getting a general understanding of the study of hermeneutics as well as how hermeneutics were used in the country of Sweden as pertaining to the ordination of women and how hermeneutics can be applied to the study of the ordination of women in general outlined by Raymond Tiemeyer and Grant Osborne and lastly, the methods of hermeneutics as outlined by Avery Dulles; a better understanding of how hermeneutical study fits into the interpretation of the scripture used in the argument of the ordination of women will be developed.

What are Hermeneutics?

Raymond Tiemeyer simply defines hermeneutics as how scripture is interpreted and applied.³² The Anchor Bible Dictionary defines hermeneutics more generally calling it the “art of understanding”. Hermeneutics can be defined both in a more general study and a more specific study, the more specific study referring to the methodology and procedures used to interpret the Bible, instead of just the conditions that make

³² Raymond Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), 25.

understanding the Bible possible which is the more general study, hermeneutics also is about the process of understanding. Hermeneutics can also be used in contrast to exegesis; exegesis is the practice of interpretation while hermeneutics are the theory of interpretation.

The idea of hermeneutics dates back to ancient times. Aristotle deals with hermeneutics in *On Interpretation* or *Peri Hermeneias* by interpreting the logic of statements and hermeneutical troubles being treated logically, an approach that dominated until the 18th century, when Schleiermacher changed hermeneutical practices. Schleiermacher's work shifted the focal point of understanding texts and interpreting texts to the preconditions that exist to make understanding texts viable. Schleiermacher believes that misunderstanding threatens to disrupt communication. Later, Wilhelm Dilthey took the practice of hermeneutics farther and introduces the historical consciousness. The development of the hermeneutics is important in adopting methods that will be up to date and useful today.

Clearly there is more to understanding the study of hermeneutics and the development of hermeneutics. This last section has provided a background of understanding the remainder of this study on hermeneutics and the ordination of women. Through this general knowledge, one can dig deeper into hermeneutical study, looking at the role that hermeneutics played in the argument of the ordination of women.

Krister Stendahl and *The Bible and the Role of Women*

The role that the country of Sweden played in the ordination of women argument in the United States was of greater influence than any other country. When American

Lutherans were starting to seriously discuss ordaining women in the Lutheran Churches, the Swedish Lutheran Churches had recently gone through the same experience and had dealt with many of the same problems the Americans were dealing with. In America, the Swedish Lutherans had gone through great division on the subject and many debates and most importantly like America, the Swedish Lutherans focused much of the argument on scripture and therefore the role of hermeneutics as it pertains to the ordination of women. In his book *The Bible and the Role of Women* Krister Stendahl talks about the role that hermeneutics played in the ordination of women argument in Sweden. The book was later translated into English and became one of the most influential pieces of literature in America during the American Lutheran's struggle with the ordination of women.

In 1958 for the Church Assembly in Sweden, Krister Stendahl wrote a short study called *The Bible and the Role of Women* in regards to the debate on the ordination of women which had at that time reached its climax in Sweden. In 1965, he translated this study into English. Stendahl found "the problems which were at the center of the Swedish discussion were far from parochial... I decided to present the essay as it stood, and to have it function as a case study."³³ Stendahl wrote that the role scripture plays in the decision making process in the church is important but difficult, especially when dealing with "questions which did not emerge in biblical times but which, rightly or wrongly, seem to force themselves upon us... That is why I find it necessary to give so much attention to the problem of hermeneutics, i.e., the principles of interpretation"³⁴.

³³ Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 1.

³⁴ Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women*, 5.

Stendahl defined the term “exegete” as one who interprets the biblical texts not only as to their historical meaning, but he also determines how these texts are to be applied to a contemporary problem not envisaged by the early church”³⁵. In the situation of the ordination of women, biblical exegete is important but it is possible for the interpretation of the Bible to have different outcomes for different groups based on how the groups are interpreting. Stendahl believes that hermeneutics is also important and have direct implications to the exegete and outcome of issues; there are however different methods of hermeneutics, which change the exegetical outcome.

The work Krister Stendahl did on hermeneutics in reference to the ordination of women in the Church of Sweden had great impact on the ordination in America. Stendahl concluded that different outcomes are possible in interpreting the Bible in regards to the ordination of women because of different hermeneutical methods. Because different methods of hermeneutics changes the outcome of the argument, it is important to examine the different hermeneutical approaches to pinpoint which method each tradition uses that then points to the different outcomes in decision on the argument of the ordination of women.

Dulles’ Hermeneutical Typology

In his book *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, Avery Dulles lists what he claims are the ten hermeneutical methods that seem to be the most apparent in modern theology. Dulles’ methods are all methods already in use; he believes that “the most pressing need is not for the elaboration of new methods, but rather for a critical

³⁵ Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women*, 8.

assessment of those already in use.”³⁶ In this paper, hermeneutics is used for looking at events that have happened in the past, classical uses of hermeneutics is needed to adequately look at how the Lutheran traditions have used the Bible in response to the question of the ordination of women. I feel that Dulles’ methods are the most encompassing and complete of the hermeneutical methods I have studied. The ten methods that Dulles outlines are;

- Classical Doctrine Approach
- Biblical Theology Approach
- Spiritual Exegesis
- Word Theology Approach
- Existential Hermeneutics: Theology of Proclamation
- Experimental-Expressive Approach
- Authorial Intention
- Historical Reconstruction
- Narrative Theology
- Liberation Theology

The first hermeneutical approach Dulles talks about is the Classical Doctrinal Approach. This approach has been in use for many centuries and consists of using the Bible as an inspired text, and a source of Christian Doctrine. The text and passages are used to support positions of the church. Creeds and theories are developed as a “patchwork of citations from Scripture.”³⁷ Scripture is the most important aspect of affirming or establishing a point, once scripture has been used to develop the doctrine, the

³⁶ Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 200), 71.

³⁷ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 72.

doctrine itself becomes important, as is the tradition behind the use of the doctrine.

Dulles describes the problem with this approach in three thoughts. First of all, scripture is usually used as a quote out of context and the real or full meaning cannot always be known out of context. It is important to know who is speaking and to whom. Second, the authors of the Bible may have had gradual understanding of Christ and statements and ideas can be changed through time. Lastly, Biblical language is not always straightforward but can be expressed in poetry or mythical or metaphorical language.³⁸

The second approach Dulles outlines is the Biblical Theology Approach. After the World War 2, reactions against the doctrine approach arose. Scholars started to explain the teaching of the Bible in terms of biblical concepts. The Biblical Theology Approach consists of the Bible becoming explained through themes and how the themes are followed and changed throughout the bible. This approach also contained the idea that the Bible themes should be contrasted with other thinking, such as Greek concepts.

Spiritual Exegesis is the third approach Dulles outlines in his book. This movement began in the 1940s and 1950s with Catholic theologians “advocating a return to the biblical and patristic sources, revived the kind of spiritual exegesis that they found in the Greek fathers and medieval monastic theologians.”³⁹ The Spiritual Exegesis approach claimed that the Bible is a living word and must be sought out, the Bible is addressed to the reader and is a direct tie to God. Spiritual Exegesis emphasizes that by reading the Bible one can directly speak to God and hear his living word. Dulles warns however, “excessive enthusiasm for spiritual meanings led in some cases to fanciful

³⁸ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 72.

³⁹ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 73.

allegorical interpretations... who exhibited an intemperate hostility to modern critical scholarship.”⁴⁰

The fourth approach is the Word Theology Approach. This method is considered the Protestant version of Spiritual Exegesis and was conceived by Karl Barth. Barth also calls the Bible the living word of God, he claims that Christ speaks to the reader through the scripture, but unlike the Spiritual Exegesis approach, Barth believes that not just the text but the events described in the text is how one can experience Jesus Christ. To gain an understanding of the Bible and to adequately read the Bible, Barth believes the reader must be a Christian believer, and that the Holy spirit not only affected the writers of the Bible but inspires the readers.⁴¹

The fifth approach is the Existential Hermeneutics; Theology of Proclamation. This method was developed by Rudolf Bultmann and influenced by Heidegger. Bultmann believed that “the real intention of the Bible was to impart an authentic self-understanding to the human person struggling to attain authentic existence.”⁴² Bultmann believed that the New Testament is a structure of myths and he wanted to get rid of the myths to see the truths that were hidden. He took a very strong view on the historical aspects of the Bible, especially about the historicity of Jesus. In the 1950s and 1960s Ernst Ruchs and Gerhard Ebeling, scholars who studied under Bultmann, modified the method of Existential Hermeneutics. They claimed that the Bible must be understood as a place in history of the word of God. The word of God has a history just like Christianity and the Bible recognizes one place.

⁴⁰ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 74.

⁴¹ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 75.

⁴² Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 76.

The sixth method of hermeneutical study outlined by Dulles is the Experimental-Expressive Approach. This method uses the Bible historically, "the theologian turns to the Bible to recover the foundational experiences of the early community, to make those experiences intelligible to men and women of our day, and to express them in ways that evoke and confirm the contemporary experience of grace"⁴³ which has already been experienced prior to reflection by theologians. In this method, the Bible is not thought of to be the authoritative word of God but a text with the written history of a prior experience that can be learned from. Dulles writes that the biggest problem with this method is the vagueness of the term "experience." Dulles believes that experience is influenced and changed by presuppositions and biases, which make the method difficult.

Authorial Intention is the seventh method that Dulles outlines. In this method the Bible is an interpretation of the truth God has given to inspired writers. Using investigative techniques, scholars try to find what the original inspired meaning was behind the passages written. The problem with this method is the "meaning of any text is separable from what the author intended by it. Texts... take on meaning from the context in which they are handed down and from the perspective of the readers."⁴⁴

Historical Reconstruction is another form of historical-critical study and tried to find a frontal meaning to the Bible. By finding the sources closest to the actual events portrayed in the bible, it is possible to achieve the closest reliable historical restoration. This method was used by Adolph Harnack who tried to get close to the historical Jesus.

The ninth method is the Narrative Theology; the Cultural-Linguistic Approach. This approach is reminiscent to mid-twentieth century biblical theology. This method

⁴³ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 77.

⁴⁴ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 79.

believes that the Bible is consistent of primarily stories and people who have their own agendas should accept each separately on their own terms instead of put into categories.

Dulles' last method is the Liberation Theology. In this approach a hermeneutical circle is adopted, which starts and ends in the social reality. In this method all scripture is ready in light of existing social problems and all scripture that does not agree with the social existence is thrown out and "they announce the gospel as they have interpreted it within the context of their commitment to liberation."⁴⁵

These 10 approaches, while not necessarily a perfect fit for all subjects and occasions, are a broad overview of the basic modern hermeneutical methods. The practicing of hermeneutics is operative in any kind of biblical exegesis and these basic methods can be employed as a general form to guide the hermeneutical thought. In this paper I will be using Dulles Classical Doctrine approach and the Experimental-Expressive approach. I believe that the LCMS has adopted close to Dulles Classical Doctrine approach in interpreting the Bible in regards to the ordination of women, while the ELCA has used the Experimental-Expressive approach. In more simple terms, I believe that the LCMS has used solely the Bible while making their decision, while the ELCA also used the Bible as the primary resource; the ELCA also used modern day cultural norms.

Hermeneutics and Women in the Church

The ELCA took into account what was going on in the world outside the Bible when making a decision about the ordination of women. The ELCA looked at the way women were treated outside the church in America and how other countries were

⁴⁵ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 84.

responding to women in a pastoral position. In his paper, "Hermeneutics and Women in the Church" Grant R. Osborne writes about the hermeneutical approaches that changes the interpretation of scripture involving the ordination of women involving cultural norms and if scripture can transcend different cultural changes.

Osborne starts by stating what he believes are the four possible positions one can have on the subject of a women's subordination to men and position of authority in the church. He lists them as;

1. Women are subordinate to men and cannot have position of authority in the Church; 2. women are subordinate to men but may have positions of authority in the Church; 3. women are equal to men and should have positions of authority in the Church; and 4. women are equal to men and should not have positions of authority.⁴⁶

To come to a conclusion about which position is correct, Osbourne gives three biblical passages to deal with; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15. When dealing with biblical passages Osbourne outlines three different hermeneutical stances to the subject. Osborne's first approach is that all the command passages in the Bible are correct and therefore must be followed. They are all literal and can be applied to norms in all societies. The second view is that command passages are all cultural and not literal or normative. They must be reinterpreted to be in use today. The third stance is that both "cultural and normative commands are found in Scripture, and we must decide what category an individual command fits before we apply it to this age."⁴⁷

Osborne immediately discards the second view; the Bible is obviously more than a collection of cultural commands for the time when the Bible was written. The Bible was written meaning to transcend different cultures and times. Osborne also eliminates the

⁴⁶ Grant R. Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Women in the Church," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977): 337-352, 337.

⁴⁷ Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Women in the Church," 337.

first stance, claiming, "each of the epistles was written to meet a specific problem in the first-century Church. When we study these religious principles in the light of their cultural and sociological context, we discover a complex interplay between cultural and normative in the early Church."⁴⁸ The stance that Osborne believes is correct is the third stance, that biblical passages are a combination of cultural rules and transcultural commands. The trouble is "distinguishing between the timeless principles and their cultural applications within individual parenetic passages."⁴⁹

Osborne gives three general principles for interpreting the difference between cultural and normative commands. The first principle is that moralistic biblical passages must be used in conjuncture with historical events. To distinguish what is cultural and what is normative, historical background must be known. The second principle is that passages that deal with an issue in a systematic fashion are generally containing issues that are used the same way in other parts of the Bible. The third principle is that biblical passages must be interpreted in historical and literary context. Some stylistic writings are used in the Bible and one must be aware of that.

Osborne has declared that the Bible can be used out of the cultural time that it was written in, but not all passages are transcendent. When dealing with biblical hermeneutics in regards to the ordination of women, it can be confusing and there are defiantly problems.

⁴⁸ Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Women in the Church," 338.

⁴⁹ Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Women in the Church," 338.

Tiemeyer's Hermeneutical Problems Regarding the Ordination of Women

In his study *The Ordination of Women* Tiemeyer outlines some problems with the study of the ordination of women hermeneutically. Tiemeyer answers whether scripture is being “asked to answer questions they had never asked.”⁵⁰ First of all, Tiemeyer claims that the practice of the church is to be taken seriously but not literally. He claims that in the history of religion, to take all scripture literally would change almost everything in modern day Christianity. He believes that “scripture is the norm, but the norm is not always found by a simple literal reading”⁵¹. For instance, in the Bible the word “ordination” as it is known today is not used. Acts and Matthew and the Epistles suggest types of ordination but no practice is known.

Another problem Tiemeyer examined was whether scriptural instructions should be applied only in the time that they were written or to all times? Because different pressures quite different from the pressures and situations we find ourselves in today surrounded the early church, should we still abide by all instructions? And if some customs should be rejected which ones and why? Tiemeyer claims that the early church was influence by the Old Testament, First-century Judaism, Greek culture, Roman culture and philosophies of the day, all which supported subordination of women. The current day trends in the United States are opposed to women subordination. He wonders is this reconciled? Tiemeyer also claims it is important to take the Bible as a whole and not just “in bits and pieces or proof texts,”⁵² it is impossible to create a biblically based argument on one single scripture without looking at the rest of the Bible. Also, what should we do about conflicting passages?

⁵⁰ Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 25.

⁵¹ Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 25.

⁵² Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 27.

Tiemeyer also wonders how should historical research be applied. Should some scriptures be considered better because of who the author is or where or when they were written? What about the changes that took place during the time the Bible was written. Would those account for the conflict? This leads to Tiemeyer's last question, should different scripture passages have different degrees of emphasis? Specific books in the Bible could be given more importance than others but this may not be appropriate. Tiemeyer wonders if all aspects of the Bible come in different levels of importance. Should parables be taken more seriously or orders, or the New Testament or the Old Testament? Different denominations, through hermeneutical practices give different aspects of the Bible a layering of importance.

With these issues, the study of hermeneutics becomes even more complicated and difficult to use. Tiemeyer lists these questions and explains how the practice of hermeneutics can become even more complicated to use. Even though Dulles lists different methods, there is overlapping and because of how complicated hermeneutical study is, there is no clear way to completely distinguish between different hermeneutical approaches, but because of the vast difference between the approach of the ELCA and the LCMS it is possible to assign very different methods of hermeneutics. The assignment of the Classical Doctrine Method to the LCMS and the Experimental-Expressive Method to the churches that eventually make up the ELCA helps to highlight the differences between the two traditions' hermeneutical approaches and lends to a better understanding of why the two traditions chose to react to the ordination of women in a different way. To apply the hermeneutical methods into the ordination of women, it is important to understand the basic arguments behind the ordination of women, what is looked to for

authority on the subject, and how it is argued. When looking at the arguments both for and against the ordination of women in the Lutheran church, first one needs to start at the beginning and what Martin Luther's views on women in ministry was.

Chapter Three: Martin Luther and the Ordination of Women

When looking at the arguments behind the ordination of women in the Lutheran tradition, it's important to look to what the founder of Lutheranism, Martin Luther, said on the subject. The Lutheran churches give Martin Luther authority and his theology can be transferred into the arguments used by the Lutheran Council study when examining the ordination of women, most notably his belief on the Priesthood of all believers.

Martin Luther never referred to the subject of the ordination of women directly or in depth, most likely because he never thought it would be an issue. Since Luther's views are not known, one must only speculate what he thought on the subject, by reading his opinions on other aspects of Christianity. Tiemeyer says, "The Lutheran confessions say nothing about the ordination of women. They do have points to make on the ministry."⁵³ As the founder of the Lutheran Church, Luther's views were considered important. Luther's confessions and insights into ministry in general is more significant, his views on women's ordination may not be as important, both because they are greatly unknown and because his own concept of *sola scriptura* reduces the value. What he says regarding ministry can be used for both sides of the argument and many of his themes have become important to the issue.

Martin Luther's Theology Applied to the Ordination of Women

In the process of splitting from the Catholic Church, Martin Luther developed his most prominent theology, justification through faith alone, not through works, which means that because we have faith in God, we are saved, not because we have been a good

⁵³ Raymond Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), 33.

person or because one has given money to the church. While this is important, it is “his [Martin Luther] teachings on the ministry, however, hold the most significance for this study [the ordination of women].”⁵⁴ One of Luther’s advances in the area of the theology of ministry, the Priesthood of all believers, is very important in regards to the issue of the ordination of women. Although Luther believed strongly in that there should be some persons set apart to an “office of ministry,”⁵⁵ he believed that the office of ministry should be to represent believers to other people as well as to tend to the preaching and the dispensation of the sacraments “Luther meant that every Christian... is a priest of equal standing with and to every other Christian... All Christians, said Luther, have a priesthood, but not all have a public priestly function”⁵⁶. The belief in the priesthood of all believers means that every Christian because of their baptism and because of the sacraments, is not in need for a priestly mediator between themselves and God. Luther developed the idea of a priesthood of all believers early in his career, but as the reformation “progressed, emphasis on the priesthood of all believers dimmed”.⁵⁷ This principle stresses the openness between a believer and God, because of this openness and the empowerment of all believers; those who are accepting of ordination for women use this view. But because Luther emphasizes the need for a separate position of ministry to administer the sacraments, those opposed to the ordination of women also use this argument.

Luther also adopted a new understanding of the office of ministry to the church. While the Roman Catholic Church has a *magisterium* or teaching authoritative office, the

⁵⁴ Mary Todd, *Authority Vested* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 8.

⁵⁵ Todd, *Authority Vested*, 8.

⁵⁶ Todd, *Authority Vested*, 8.

⁵⁷ Todd, *Authority Vested*, 8.

Lutherans have a *ministerium*, or a ministry of service or servanthood.⁵⁸ In Lutheran theology there is no order of ranking among ordained officials, all serve the church in different ways but there is no spiritual ranking distinction between the office of pastor or bishop unlike the Catholic church which has a hierarchy of ministry.

The third aspect of theology credited to Luther that has meaning in the subject of the ordination of women is the concept of *sola scriptura*, which means scripture alone, that the Bible should be the sole authority for teaching and the only source. The Bible should be the sole authority in all situations and "it is within this debate that the issue of interpretation, or hermeneutics, rests."⁵⁹

Peter Brunner, a LCMS associated scholar, came up with a summary of Luther's views on the ordination of women by studying Luther and his works. They are:

1. All Christians have the spiritual power to proclaim the Word of God and that includes women.
2. In the assembled congregation, only he may preach the Word who has been called to do so by the church.
3. Only he may be called, who has the ability.
4. In determining whether one possesses the ability, spiritual and natural factors must be considered.
5. The subordination of the woman to the man, as has been established in the Old Testament; rather it has been substantiated by the Holy Spirit through the pronouncements of the apostles.
6. The Holy Ghost would contradict himself if he allowed women to preach in the services of the congregation as long as there were men present whom he has inspired thereto.
7. The *ordo*, which must be maintained here, has a spiritual character; it is the work of the Holy Ghost. The moral attitude, which corresponds to this *ordo*, is propriety. Neither the *ordo* nor its corresponding sense of the propriety dare be violated.
8. As long as the presupposition holds true that there are men present whom the Holy Ghost has inspired to preach, it is not proper for the woman to be called to exercise publicly the pastoral office.
9. One can safely assume that the Holy Spirit, in keeping with his directive in the Holy Scriptures, will see to it that capable men are not lacking. Should

⁵⁸ Todd, *Authority Vested*, 10.

⁵⁹ Todd, *Authority Vested*, 1.

these unusual circumstances prevail, nevertheless, then—but only then—must women also preach in the services of the congregation.⁶⁰

Aspects of Luther's theology can be used in the argument for the ordination of women, but it is true that he never directly addresses that topic. By outlining Luther's views, one can see how they were applied in the arguments about the ordination of women outlined by the 1969 Lutheran Council study; Luther's priesthood of all believers is especially used. Luther's views play an important role in parts of the argument because of the biblical base of his arguments. The main issue for both the ELCA and the LCMS is the Bible, which coordinates with Luther's idea of the sole authority of scripture. Luther's views were an important part of the argument completed by the 1969 study because of their biblical basis and his authority and like Luther, all the arguments about the ordination of women that came before the United States studied the issue were an impact, including other countries that had recently gone through the same process that America was beginning.

⁶⁰ William G. Wise and Kenneth Taglauer, "Theological Refractions," *The Springfielder* (1970): 44-54, 50-51.

Chapter Four: The Influence of Sweden

The Ordination of Women in Europe

As I have stated earlier, North America was not the first Lutheran communities to contemplate the ordination of women, in fact many of the European countries began to ordain women long before the United States began the process. Many different issues affected the ordination of women in Europe, and it is clear that the process across the Atlantic affected what was going on in America. Watching what other Lutherans were doing helped encourage Americans to study this issue themselves. This is most common of the situation in Sweden. After Krister Stendahl's book, *The Bible and the Role of Women*, was translated into English and read, the situation in Sweden was one of the major contributors to the discussions of unrest with the situation of the ordination of women in the United States. By looking at how Sweden and other European countries handled the process of accepting the ordination of women in their churches and why they chose to ordain women, we can have more insight as to how the United States reacted.

Kenneth Taglauer's Three Basic Factors Precipitating Ordination of Women in Europe

In the article "Theological Refractions: the Question of Ordination of Women as Reflected in Lutheran Journals", Kenneth Taglauer's three reasons that ordination of women was allowed in European countries are listed. The first reason is the lack of clergy in Europe in the 1940s due to the World War 2. Because so many clergymen were involved in the war or killed in the war, women were able to find work as clergy when they

normally would not have. The second reason is the need for special ministers to specifically counsel women. In Denmark for instance, women pastors were needed to do prison work with women prisoners. The last reason Taglauer lists is the imbalance of women in parishes and social concerns involving churches female population.⁶¹ These three reasons list the acceptance of the ordination of women in Europe more out of need than choice as the situation was in the LCA and the ALC. The fact that the European churches began to ordain women at that time is significant because of the influence that they had over the American churches. The fact that any Lutheran church was ordaining women began to spark interest in America. The case in the country of Sweden was especially influential because of the literature from Sweden that was read by Americans.

Sweden: A Case Study

In 1957 and 1958 question as to whether women should be ordained in the Church of Sweden became substantial. It was in 1958 that the majority of the Church Assembly voted to accept the ordination of women, thereby nearly splitting the Church of Sweden,

The conflict over the ordination of women had nearly split the Church of Sweden. The long male tradition is mighty. The struggle to leave it behind blighted the spirits. But precisely for that reason the Swedish experience is valuable. It laid bare unresolved tensions that do exist, though more covered, in other churches and in Western society at large. What to the conservatives in the churches seemed as matters of faith and doctrine also exists in vaguer forms in the minds of many in a more secular setting.⁶²

It was in 1960 that the first three women were ordained and by 1982 nearly one tenth of the total Lutheran priests in Sweden were women. Clearly the Swedish churches

⁶¹ William G. Wise and Kenneth Taglauer, "Theological Refractions," *The Springfielder* (1970): 44-54, 45.

⁶² Britta Stendahl, *The Force of Tradition: A Case Study of Women Priests in Sweden* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 6.

decision, ten years before America Lutherans made the same decision, came at a price, but also triumphed. The impact that the European countries made on North America in regards to the topic of the ordination of women is significant.

Around 1923, when women were just allowed to vote in Sweden, talk began to circulate as to whether women should be allowed to become priests. A proposal favoring the ordination of women went before the Church Assembly that year and was debated. The 1923 proposal favored the ordination of only single or unmarried women because that would allow them to perform "efficiently".⁶³ The proposal, however, was never resolved.

In 1945 the Equal Rights Law was passed in Sweden, which renewed interest in the ordination of women. In 1946 the Swedish Parliament requested a study and appointed a commission to report on the subject. "The majority of the commission favored the ordination of women. The minority registered and motivated their dissent."⁶⁴ Professors of New Testament studies in Uppsala issued a statement opposing ordination to thwart the attempts by the commission. The statement said:

We the undersigned declare herewith as our definite opinion resting on careful research that to introduce to the Church a ministry of so called women priests would constitute a departure from faithful obedience to Holy Scripture. Both Jesus' choice of his apostles and Paul's words about the place of women in the congregation are built on principle and are independent of time-bound circumstances and views. The current proposal of allowing women to enter the priesthood of the Church of Sweden must therefore be said to entail serious exegetical obstacles.⁶⁵

The report by the commission was sent out despite the statement, but twelve out of the thirteen diocese Councils turned the proposal down. The proposal was turned down for

⁶³ Britta Stendahl, *The Force of Tradition*, 69.

⁶⁴ Britta Stendahl, *The Force of Tradition*, 69.

⁶⁵ Britta Stendahl, *The Force of Tradition*, 69.

many reasons; some were simply uncomfortable with women as priests, others were upset at the stipulations put in the proposal, such as that women priests could only work where a male priest was also working. Marta Leijon said that,

In spite of everything said in this great report, this paragraph [on stipulations applied to women priests] after all puts the woman theologian in a separate position, which gives her a kind of lower priestly rank than that of the man theologian. This can neither help the Church nor the joy of her co-workers in their vocation.⁶⁶

The arguments that the Church of Sweden went through regarding the ordination of women are very similar to those the Lutheran Churches in North America looked at during the 1969 study. The Church of Sweden discussed the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, and the roles created for man and woman in the stories, also looked at was the priest's role of representing Jesus and what factor gender of the priest. The concept of the order of creation was studied, as well as specific scripture.⁶⁷

These arguments were discussed, "the impending vote became viewed as a test between two different views of interpreting the Bible."⁶⁸ The arguments got so intense that the Sweden Justice Department developed a "Conscience Clause". This clause declared that whether or not the ordination of women is passed, that "to avoid a church splitting separation the Committee views it necessary that these divisions not be exaggerated or sharpened and that neither side be pressed in such a way that it can be regarded as persecution."⁶⁹

In 1958, the Church of Sweden allowed women to become ordained. In 1960, the first three women became women priests in the Church of Sweden and by 1980 one-tenth

⁶⁶ Britta Stendahl, *The Force of Tradition*, 70.

⁶⁷ Most often, 1 Corinthians 11:3-5, Genesis 1-2, Galatians 3:26-28.

⁶⁸ Britta Stendahl, *The Force of Tradition*, 74.

⁶⁹ Britta Stendahl, *The Force of Tradition*, 75.

of the clergy in Sweden was female. The influence of Sweden and the other European countries carried over to America, where Americans began to study the hermeneutical problems and issues related to the ordination of women. Now that it is clear what precedence the discussion of the ordination of women in America, it is important to understand the arguments and how each church (LCMS and the churches that make up the ELCA) hermeneutically treated the arguments.

Chapter Five: Biblical Interpretation

To determine what hermeneutical approach the LCMS and the ELCA adopted in regards to the ordination of women, one must look at the argument for and against the ordination of women. Outlining all the arguments involved and then looking at how both the ELCA and the LCMS treated each argument, gives great insight into the type of hermeneutical method both traditions use.

Ordination of Women: the Arguments and the 1969 Lutheran Council Study

In the 1969 study commissioned by the Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. involving the LCA, the ALC, the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches and the LCMS; there were nine basic arguments that were discussed. These arguments became the foundation for the decision to ordain or not ordain women in the United States. The 1969 Lutheran Council study ended with an inconclusive answer, allowing all the individual groups involved to make their own decision.

The first argument is the Weaker Sex Argument. The weaker sex theory originated from Genesis chapter 2 and 3. The theory basically revolves around the fact that women were created second, and because they were created after men, and because woman was deceived, woman is the weaker sex and therefore unable to lead men. This theory ranges from the idea that women are capable but it is simply inappropriate for women to lead men, to the idea that women are unable to “managing herself.”⁷⁰ This theory was disposed of by the Lutheran Council study because it is usually not an argument used in the Lutheran church, “When the representatives from the churches met in Dubuque to compare views on the question, some were strongly opposed to ordination,

⁷⁰ Raymond Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1970), 9.

but not one argued that woman was by nature incapable of receiving God's charismatic gifts."⁷¹

The God Is Male argument is the second theory looked at. This idea claims that God is the Father and Jesus Christ was made male in the image of God. There are no female goddesses in the Bible and no female power source at all. Jesus was not arbitrarily made male, but purposefully. Also Jesus chose 12 males as his disciples, because males are whom Jesus chose, men are only allowed to become pastors. This theory was inconclusive because its based on faulty logic. If one kept to the rule that God is male and Jesus is male, women have no place at all in Christianity, and there is no line to draw. Also the reasons for the all male apostles are never mentioned in the Bible. The reason why all the apostles are male is unknown.

The Orders of Creation is an especially interesting argument and one of the most serious arguments in the Lutheran Council study. This argument claims that woman is subordinate to man, because a hierarchical structure was created when the world was created. This argument is centered on Genesis 2 and 3. Genesis 2:18 and 20b-22 says,

The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'... But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.⁷²

Genesis 2 says that God created women to be a helper to man, but it wasn't until Genesis 3: 16 that God told Eve "your husband... shall rule over you." Because it is woman who is deceived in Genesis 3, the orders of creation claim that man was made to rule over woman. In the article "Orders of Creation—Some Reflections of the History and Place

⁷¹ Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 9.

⁷² Genesis 2:18, 20b-22.

of the Term in Systematic Theology” Edward H. Schroeder sums up St. Paul’s views on the Orders of creation in eight points.

1. Because it is shameful for a women to speak in Church.
2. Because of the angels.
3. Because even the law says they should be subordinate
4. Because man was not created for women, but women for man.
5. Because Adam the man was chronologically first in the creation sequence.
6. Because nature itself teaches that women are to have heads covered as a sign of subordination.
7. Because man in the head of woman (or husband is the head of the wife).
8. Because woman came from man, and not vice versa—although now it’s vice versa.⁷³

The problem with the orders of creation comes with the redemption. Because God waited until after the fall to command Eve to subordination at the hands of her husband, some think that “maybe the subordination of woman wasn’t an order of creation after all, but an order of judgment... and maybe the orders of creation are all upstaged by the order of redemption.”⁷⁴

The most used argument both for and against the ordination of women are Biblical passages. There are passages that both seem to support and seem to go against the subordination of women. The next argument the Lutheran Council study looked at is Scripture against the ordination of women. Tiemeyer says, “Certain passages have been cited so convincingly through the years for the subordination of women and against their ordination that they must be examined in detail.”⁷⁵ The most common scriptures used when arguing against the ordination of women are 1 Corinthians 11, 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2.

⁷³ Edward H. Schroeder, “Orders of Creation—Some Reflections on the History and Place of the Term in Systematic Theology,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* (1972): 165-178, 168.

⁷⁴ Raymond Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 11.

⁷⁵ Raymond Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 11.

The first scripture is 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16;

I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband and the head of Christ is God. Any Man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. (For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman but woman for man.) That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels. (Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.) Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God.⁷⁶

It is clear from this scripture that women were involved in the church as well as men.

Paul makes the distinction of men and women, claiming in the first part of this passage that men have authority over women. But instead of dwelling on that, Paul wrote about covering women's heads in church as an act of respect, switching from the subject of the subordination of women, to practices. Paul also writes that women and men are interdependent in the Lord.

The next biblical passage commonly used as an argument against the ordination of women is 1 Corinthians 14: 33-36.

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 now, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35

This passage is more straightforward than the former passage also from 1 Corinthians. The controversy surrounding this passage is from inconsistencies with other passages. Just three chapters earlier in the first passage I talked about, Paul gives women instructions to cover their head when praying or prophesizing, but then in this passage gives the instructions that women should keep silent in church. Raymond Tiemeyer has six ideas to reconcile the differences between the two passages. The first idea is that someone else inserted these verses later. Tiemeyer believes that the passage sounds out of context with the rest of the chapter. Tiemeyer's second idea is that this passage and the first passage are from two different letters and Paul changed his mind in between the two letters. The third idea is that Paul was thinking of different contexts in the two passages, most likely house meetings in the former passage and public worship in the latter passage. Tiemeyer's next idea is that Paul was stating his personal preference against prophesy in chapter 14 but giving permission in 11. The fifth idea is that Paul means just wives in the second passage instead of all women. The last idea Tiemeyer has to reconcile those two passages is simply that he was displeased with the wives who had interrupted. No matter what the reason for the difference, it becomes puzzling and the simple command becomes a little more confusing, which makes it an imperfect argument.⁷⁸

The third passage commonly used as an argument against the ordination of women is 1 Timothy 2:11-14. Tiemeyer writes that it is believed that some of the churches were becoming unrestrained and this passage was meant to reign them in.⁷⁹ This

⁷⁸ Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 13.

⁷⁹ Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 14.

passage instructs women to stop teaching, and that she has no authority over men, because of the orders of creation.

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.⁸⁰

This passage is similar to the second passage in its straightforwardness. Women are to serve the Lord by child bearing and not teaching or speaking. Tiemeyer lists four ways those for the ordination of women “handle” this passage.⁸¹ The first idea is to point out that most churches are not following this passage correctly because if this was to be followed completely, women would not be allowed to do things such as vote in the church, teach Sunday school or sing in the choir. Tiemeyer’s second idea is that this refers to the place of women in nature but not the orders the creation. The third idea is that this is to be ready legally but not followed because women were teaching in even the early church when this passage was written. The last idea is that this passage refers to wives but not to women in general.

Another argument studied by the Lutheran council study is the image of God. This argument comes from Genesis 1, but not Genesis 2 where the order of creation argument begins. In Genesis 1:27 it says, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”. In this section of Genesis it seems to state that man and women were both created in the image of God, and

⁸⁰ 1 Timothy 2:11-14

⁸¹ Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 14.

that women are “worth just as much as man.”⁸² After the fall, Adam still had the image of God because it is spoken of in Genesis 5 when Adam passed on the image of God to his son, Seth and again in Genesis 9 when it is the basis for prohibiting murder in the story of Noah. If women kept the image of God after the fall is unclear. The New Testament talks about the Image of God also, but in a different way. In the New Testament only Jesus Christ is created in the image of God, but others attain it through baptism. Colossians 1:15 says; “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” And Colossians 3:9-10 says; “Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have up on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” The problem is the two creations stories aren’t completely congruent in regards to the place of women. The first creation story in Genesis 1 implies that women have the image of God, while the creation story in Genesis 2 talks about the order of creation.⁸³

The New Age argument states that with the coming of Christ a new order has been made. Once a person has accepted Jesus Christ, they enter a new status. Like the idea of the image of God being created through baptism, the new age idea is centered on the acceptance of Christ. This argument is based on the verses 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 3: 27-28. 2 Corinthians 5:27 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” Through Christ everyone is renewed, but what that means to the situation of women is not clear until Galatians 3:27-28 is added; “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

⁸² Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 21.

⁸³ Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 21.

male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”⁸⁴ Here, we learn that women are not unable to be a follower of Jesus, Tiemeyer says;

In it [Galatians 3:27-28], Paul stresses that entirely new status of all who are in Christ—women included. People had been giving thanks, as prayers put it, that they were not women, barbarians, unbelievers, or slaves. Their religion told them that the grace of God had saved them from being born a girl. But Paul is telling them here that women and slaves are not second-class citizens in Christ.⁸⁵

The Galatians passage seems to speak against the orders of creation, both arguments seem to be inconclusive.

The role of women historically in Christianity and the Lutheran Church also had a role in the decision whether to ordain women. The most influential aspects of women's historical involvement are the women in leadership roles in the Bible. In the New Testament, Paul speaks of women like Phoebe in Romans 16 who hold some kind of leadership roles in the church. The actions and roles of women in other Lutheran churches also influence the decision to ordain women, as the Swedish Church did to the American Lutheran Churches.

In the Scripture discussed in this paper so far, women have been told that they are not allowed to speak in church at all, that they can pray and prophesize but must wear head coverings when doing so, and that male and female do not exist in Christ. Passages used in this argument don't always agree with each other, and sometimes seem to even contradict each other. Besides confusion about what scriptures say there is the question of how to determine which scripture is to be used, which is valid and more important. What part of the passage is important? Today it is not common to see women wearing head coverings in Lutheran American churches, but yet we aren't sure if women can lead

⁸⁴ Galatians 2:27-28.

⁸⁵ Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, 22.

men. Why are some parts of scripture more important than others and how is it decided? Biblical inconsistencies in both what is said and what is practiced are another problem concerning the ordination of women.

The last argument talked about is the priesthood of all believers, envisioned by Martin Luther. It exists in the Bible in 1 Peter 2:9 which says "but you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." This idea claims that by Christian baptism, all believers are ordained. Through the Priesthood of all believers Christians are given equal status in the eyes of God, all are ordained as his priests. The problem exists in what ordination encompasses. Martin Luther does believe in a separate office of ministry, but who exactly should be in that separate office is not clear.

The LCMS and the Ordination of Women

When identifying the reason the LCMS has not ordained women; despite many other Lutheran traditions, both in the United States and in other countries, have done so; one must look at each of the issues involved in the decision and how the LCMS reacts and treats each issue. The nine issues outlined by the 1969 Lutheran Council study on the ordination of women that the LCMS was involved in, are the basic issues looked at by the LCMS. The treatment of the biblical passages and biblically related issues are tied to a way of interpretation of the Bible, or a hermeneutical method. In this section we will be looking at the treatment of these issues by the LCMS to assess what hermeneutical

method, as outlined by Dulles, was used in the decision not to allow the ordination of women in the LCMS.

One of the biggest concerns in the Ordination of women discussion for the LCMS is the order of creation argument, "this theme is carried out in the discussion of the relationships of woman to man as is expressed in the worship, prophetic and educational activities of the Church."⁸⁶ This argument is looked at from the utmost seriousness from the LCMS. The main issue is the relationship between men and women and how they should react.

The main argument is focused on the scripture in Genesis 2 and 3. The LCMS claims that the order of creation is infallible and made women subordinate to men, Schroeder writes, "He [God] arranged the pieces of the cosmos in their places... and also gave placement to the man and the woman who live on the earth in God's creation... these first two humans are seen by the report to be in an order of ranking with reference to each other... personally in terms of super ordination and subordination."⁸⁷ In his article "The Orders of Creation" Edward Schroeder outlines the view the LCMS has on the orders of creation. Schroeder starts by expressing the importance of the orders of creation, and the validity this argument has; some arguments against the orders of creation were it was implemented after the fall and the redemption of Christ erased it, but Schroeder and the LCMS dismiss this idea. Schroeder does however say it is possible to violate the orders of creation; "an order of ranking between the man and the woman can indeed be violated—women can assume power and subordinate women and men might

⁸⁶ William G. Wise and Kenneth Taglauer, "Theological Refractions," *The Springfielder* (1970): 44-54, 47.

⁸⁷ Schroeder, "The Orders of Creation," 167.

even willingly be subordinated... violation occurs when one refuses to stay in his box."⁸⁸

Violation is possible but not what God wants, and it is a contradiction to the will of God. This argument is intact hermetically because the argument is centered on the Genesis 2 and 3 scripture and disregards the scripture from Genesis 1, especially Genesis 1:27 on the Image of God argument.

The Weaker sex argument is also based in Genesis 2 and 3, and talks about how women and men were created differently, most notably that women were created without the same skills and gifts of men. While the LCMS never says that women are unable intelligently to become a pastor, there is the theory that women are given a different role than men. Ulla Hindbeck, a former Swedish pastor who left the ministry says, "This call applies to all men. They have the possibility of being apostles because they are men... woman is not called to be an apostle. She has another calling, namely, motherhood."⁸⁹

The LCMS treat the argument of the three main biblical scriptures used in the ordination of women argument (1 Corinthians 11, 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2) perhaps most seriously. In David P. Scaer's article "May Women be Ordained as Pastors?" the author outlines the three scriptures and the exegetical stance of the church.

The primary biblical passage to talk about it is 1 Corinthians 14. In 1 Corinthians Paul is writing to establish a guide to the worship life of the Corinthian congregations. In chapter 11, the other passage from Corinthians we will discuss, Paul talks about the practice of covering women's heads when prophesizing or praying. In chapter 14 Paul discusses the need for clarity when preaching, but the section on dealing with the silence of women in church is the important passage in this discussion. Scaer asks a few

⁸⁸ Schroeder, "The Orders of Creation," 167.

⁸⁹ Ulla Hindbeck, "Women and the Ministry," Logia 9 (2000): 21-22, 21.

questions in regards to this scripture; first of all "What does Paul mean by requiring the silence of women in the church?" and also "Can Paul's prohibition be interpreted sociologically as being the custom of the day and hence not applicable in another time or culture?"⁹⁰

Scaer answers the first question by stating that the prohibition of the speaking of women applies to the regular worship services because chapters 11 to 16 of 1 Corinthians deals with regular worship services, so chapter 14 must also. Scaer says that the passage says nothing about women teaching in schools or taking an active role in a church as long as they are not leading public ministry, further that speaking in public has to do with leading worship services not participating, "Paul does not mean that women may not participate in the public singing of congregations and the spoken prayers... the command to keep silent is a command not to take charge of the public worship service."⁹¹

The second question Scaer asks is about the cultural and sociological aspects of the prohibition. Could it be possible that the prohibition of women not to speak was cultural and not transcendent? Scaer believes that people who do not believe this passage is a strict opposition to women pastors either see the passage as Paul "reflecting current mores which did not let women speak... [Or] Paul is reflecting his own hang-ups about women."⁹² Scaer answers the first question by saying that Corinthians was a Gentile congregation and it was in Jewish not Gentile congregations what women were prohibited to participate in worship services, so it was unlikely that Paul is talking about a cultural norm of the community. Scaer further says that it is unlikely that Paul had hang-

⁹⁰ David P. Scaer, "May Women be Ordained as Pastors?" *The Springfielder* 36 (1972): 89-109, 95.

⁹¹ Scaer, "May Women be Ordained as Pastors?," 96.

⁹² Scaer, "May Women be Ordained as Pastors?," 97.

ups about women or was misogynistic because of his close relationships with women believers of that time such as Lydia, Pricilla and Phoebe.⁹³

When talking about 1 Corinthians 11, Scaer disputes the idea that it makes not sense in relation to 1 Corinthians 14. Women don't have to wear hats in church anymore so why should we keep the other commandments is one argument which Scaer finds absurd, "true, our churches do not demand that women attend church with covered heads... but this should hardly permit us to dismiss the theological principles contained in this pericope."⁹⁴ The rule that heads must be covered when praying is an expression of piety but the command that women are not allowed to speak in church is a theological principle. Scaer also says that just because Paul says that women should have their heads covered when praying and prophesizing does not mean that he believes that it is correct or right.

The last passage Scaer covers is 1 Timothy 2:12-14. In this passage Timothy says that women are to have no authority over men or to teach men. Scaer says that there are two bases for Timothy's argument. The first base is that Timothy is asserting this authority as an apostle and if we accept his authority we must accept this to be true. The second base is that Timothy goes back to the order of creation argument with this verse, and there for it is correct. However, this verse does not say anything "about prohibiting women from instructing children in the church, school or home. This does not disrupt the family rights."⁹⁵

Scaer also talks about Galatians 3:28, and disagrees with the idea that the meaning behind Galatians 3 is that through Jesus the roles of men and women are abolished.

⁹³ Scaer, "May Women be Ordained as Pastors?," 98-99.

⁹⁴ Scaer, "May Women be Ordained as Pastors?," 99.

⁹⁵ Scaer, "May Women be Ordained as Pastors?," 104.

Scaer believes that by faith we are justified and that in God there are no people who are better or above others, but that doesn't mean that we get rid of the orders of creation or the gender roles assigned by God, "Paul never suggest that the role of man or female could ever be exchanged, or that Greeks would become Jews or vice versa."⁹⁶

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's argument regarding the ordination of women does not rely on what other churches are doing or even what other Lutherans are doing. The church relies solely on the Bible to make decisions and in the Bible solely on the scriptural passages that instruct. Almost no concern is given to cultural changes when regarding whether it is appropriate for women to become ordained in the LCMS.

David Scaer appropriately says, "Ordination... can mean exactly what the church wants it to... Generally in the Missouri Synod the term ordination by common consent is used to designate the service in which an individual is recognized as being capable of performing all the functions of the pastoral ministry."⁹⁷ To the LCMS ordination is an important distinction to make when describing the roles a minister can play. William Wise outlines the duties that only a minister can perform;

1. Preaching in the worship services of the congregation;
2. Leading the services of worship;
3. The administration of the sacraments in the worship services;
4. The decision as to who is to be admitted to the Lord's Supper; the imposing of the degree of excommunication and its revocation;
5. The granting of absolution in the confessional;
6. The acts of confirmation and ordination.

These roles are not to be fulfilled by women, and to this day are restricted to men.

⁹⁶ Scaer, "May Women be Ordained as Pastors?," 105.

⁹⁷ Scaer, "May Women be Ordained as Pastors?," 93.

The ELCA and the Ordination of Women

The churches that formed together to create the ELCA (LCA, ALC and AELC) had a very different method of biblical interpretation on the subject of the ordination of women than the LCMS. Because the ELCA is built of those three different traditions, I'm going to first talk primarily about the LCA and the ALC because they approached the idea of the ordination of women in a very similar way and then talk about the AELC. Because the AELC was an offshoot of the LCMS, they have a different path, but the LCA and the ALC both joined the 1969 study and left the study with the same outcome.

The ALC and the LCA both rejected some of the theories or issues looked at by the council immediately. First of all the argument that women are the weaker sex and incapable of receiving God's spiritual gifts was rejected, along with the argument that God is male and therefore ministers should be male. The church saw these arguments as weak without proper scriptural background and not serious biblical theology.

One of the main issues the LCA and the ALC dealt with was the order of creation argument. The groups looked at two forms of the argument. The first form is the idea that women were "created by God second, and therefore, by their nature they are subordinate to men. Another form of the argument is that women are subordinate to men because it was Eve who sinned in the garden."⁹⁸ The churches dealt with this issue in a number of ways. First of all it is unclear if God created an unchanging eternal order of creation at the moment of creation, or if the order of creation was created with the fall. Also it is unclear if the redemption of Christ did away with the order of creation or if it is still present in the New Testament. The churches could find no solid position on the order of creation argument, which made the argument less solid and less trustworthy. To

⁹⁸ Jennifer Houston, "Lutheran Women in Ministry," *Seminary Ridge Review* (2000): 16-41, 18.

learn more about the order of creation after the redemption of Christ the ALC and the LCA turned to the New Testament.

Because the issue of the subordination of women is still in existence in the New Testament, the three scripture passages were looked at again by the ALC and the LCA. The churches started at 1 Corinthians 14, which they claim that the "passage seems straightforward, until you read the passage just a few chapters earlier in which the author, Paul, says that when a women prays or prophesies she should do so with her head covered."⁹⁹ Once again the focus is on the trouble between telling women to pray with their head covered and then a few verses later telling women not to speak in church. Unlike the LCMS, the LCA and the ALC take the seemingly contradiction between the two passages to be a inadequate argument, "Paul's lack of clarity made this 1 Corinthians passages a poor argument against the ordination of women."¹⁰⁰ The LCA and the ALC looked next at the passage 1 Timothy 2:11-14. The churches handle this scripture by saying that if this passage were to be followed literally, "there have had to be drastic changes to women's role in the church, even in 1970. If women are to be truly silent in church, they could not read scripture lessons, sing in the choir or perhaps even teach Sunday school."¹⁰¹ This scripture was also disregarded because it was unclear.

The biblical passages that seem to support the ordination of women such as Galatians 3:27-28 were also considered. These verses, which say; "For as many of you were baptized into Christ have clothes yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus," were also disregarded because it does not speak directly to the

⁹⁹ Houston, "Lutheran Women in Ministry," 21.

¹⁰⁰ Houston, "Lutheran Women in Ministry," 21.

¹⁰¹ Houston, "Lutheran Women in Ministry," 21.

subject of the ordination of women. The unclarity of the biblical passages and the inconsistency between them became one of the main points of the LCA and the ALC, if the Bible has no clear case, one must look somewhere else.

One of the main influences of the decision to ordain women in the United States came from the many other denominations and Lutheran churches in other countries that decided previously to ordain women. John Reumann of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia talks about the impact that other countries had on the United States in regards to the ordination of women in his introduction to Krister Stendahl's book *The Bible and the Role of Women*. Reumann says, "Of Lutheran churches, five national bodies ordained women even prior to the Swedish action: Denmark... Norway, France, Holland and Czechoslovakia... All of this suggests that in the Christian world scene the problem is... changing with some rapidity."¹⁰²

Contrasting Biblical Hermeneutics

It is clear that the LCMS and the traditions that joined to form the ELCA have different hermeneutical approaches that have led to the difference in opinion as to the right of ordination of women. Both churches give different arguments priority or approach scripture or theology differently because of the hermeneutical methods they have assumed. By looking at how each the LCMS and the ELCA have looked at these arguments the hermeneutical distinctions between the churches will become apparent, and it is clear that the LCMS has used a Classical Doctrine approach while the ELCA uses the Experimental- Expressive approach.

¹⁰² John Reumann, "Introduction" found in Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women*.

The LCMS looks at the Bible as the Word of God, God's word written down and to be followed. All-important arguments for the LCMS come from the Bible, most notably Genesis 2 and 3 and 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. These passages are declared correct and legitimate and issues of only cultural use are denied. The LCMS believes the all parts of the Bible are true; because the Bible is the living word of God, either all or nothing in it must be true. Their hermeneutical style is using scripture passages that seem to outline the arguments clearly, such as the passages on the order of creation in Genesis and the passages in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. Because all scripture is true, the scripture that seems to contradict these more clear scriptures are found to fit in, through genuinely adequate ways, the problem is the idea of the scriptures contradicting each other is not even considered. The arguments that are lacking Biblical substance, such as the God is Male argument, are generally dismissed.

The hermeneutical method outlined by Dulles that seems to most match the LCMS' handling of the situation of the ordination of women is the Classical Doctrine Approach. This approach is the oldest method outlined by Dulles. This approach the Scripture is the only source. The Bible is seen as a living example of God's word; it is how we communicate to God and how God communicates to us. The LCMS use the Bible exclusively to view the issue of the ordination of women. The way the LCMS looks at the Bible is that it is the only source and the literal source; to the LCMS all parts of the Bible must be true. To interpret the Bible, the LCMS discerns what the message is and then obeys the word of God. There are some ways that the LCMS does not entirely match up to the Classical Doctrine approach however. The LCMS doesn't rely on the tradition of Lutheranism to the degree that the Classical Doctrine approach recommends,

also, the LCMS depends on the scripture alone to answer the question of the ordination of women and do not use the doctrine to equal degree that scripture is used.

The hermeneutical style of the ELCA differs from the LCMS in the way they look at the Bible. Unlike the LCMS who tends to claim the Bible is the Word of God, the ELCA seems to believe that the Bible is the Word of God interpreted into writing and therefore not every part of the Bible needs to be literally true and correct at all times, and many themes and issues in the Bible can change with the social and cultural change in the world. Instead of dismissing interpretations of scripture passages that don't match up with other passages, the ELCA acknowledges the disagreements between passages and the biblical discordance on the topic of the ordination of women and therefore claims the biblical evidence alone is inconclusive and looks outside the Bible for answers at what other traditions are doing. The ELCA tends to look heavily outside of the Bible, which the LCMS does not. The ELCA looks to the changing culture and what other churches are doing and how they are handling the subject.

I believe that the ELCA and the churches, which joined to create the ELCA, are most similar to the hermeneutical method of the Experimental-Expressive Approach. In this approach the Bible as a way God communicates to man but not the only way. The theologian uses the Bible to gain the experiences of early Christians and how to use those experiences today. The Bible is the primary source and the most important source for the ELCA but not the only source. The ELCA gains wisdom outside of the Bible when the answers aren't there. How the churches treat the Bible passages when looking at the issue of the ordination of women, the authority seems to be on the experiences of the

people in the Bible and when the experiences seem to far away from us today, they are more cultural experiences then normative experiences.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ See Visual Two.

Conclusion

The year 1970 marked a huge change in the Lutheran Churches in America. A split was created between the ALC and LCA and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. With the legalizing of the ordination of women the ALC and the LCA changed their churches forever and the decision not to allow women to be ordained the LCMS also changed the state of their organization. That moment in American Lutheran history became the biggest difference between the two largest Lutheran synods in America, “beyond demographics, however, outside observers would immediately recognize the principle difference between these two main groups of Lutherans—the ELCA ordains women to the public ministry, the Missouri Synod does not.”¹⁰⁴ These two churches are defined even today by the difference in allowing women a position of ministry.

The ELCA and the LCMS both derived from the same beginning, Martin Luther. Through a complicated history and origin, both the ELCA and the LCMS developed distinctive hermeneutical styles. Perhaps the ELCA developed their hermeneutical style because of the merging and changing their group went through, or perhaps the group was open to change because of the in place hermeneutical style. The LCMS may have been more reluctant to work with other synods because of the hermeneutical style or their style may have been developed because of their actions. Whatever the case, the history of the groups has a place in the development of the methods of biblical interpretation.

The LCMS’ hermeneutical method of the Classical Doctrine approach is demonstrated by their insistence on the verbal inerrancy of scripture. The LCMS believes in a “scripture that is entirely trustworthy in all matters, whereas the notion of

¹⁰⁴ Mary Todd, *Authority Vested* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 2.

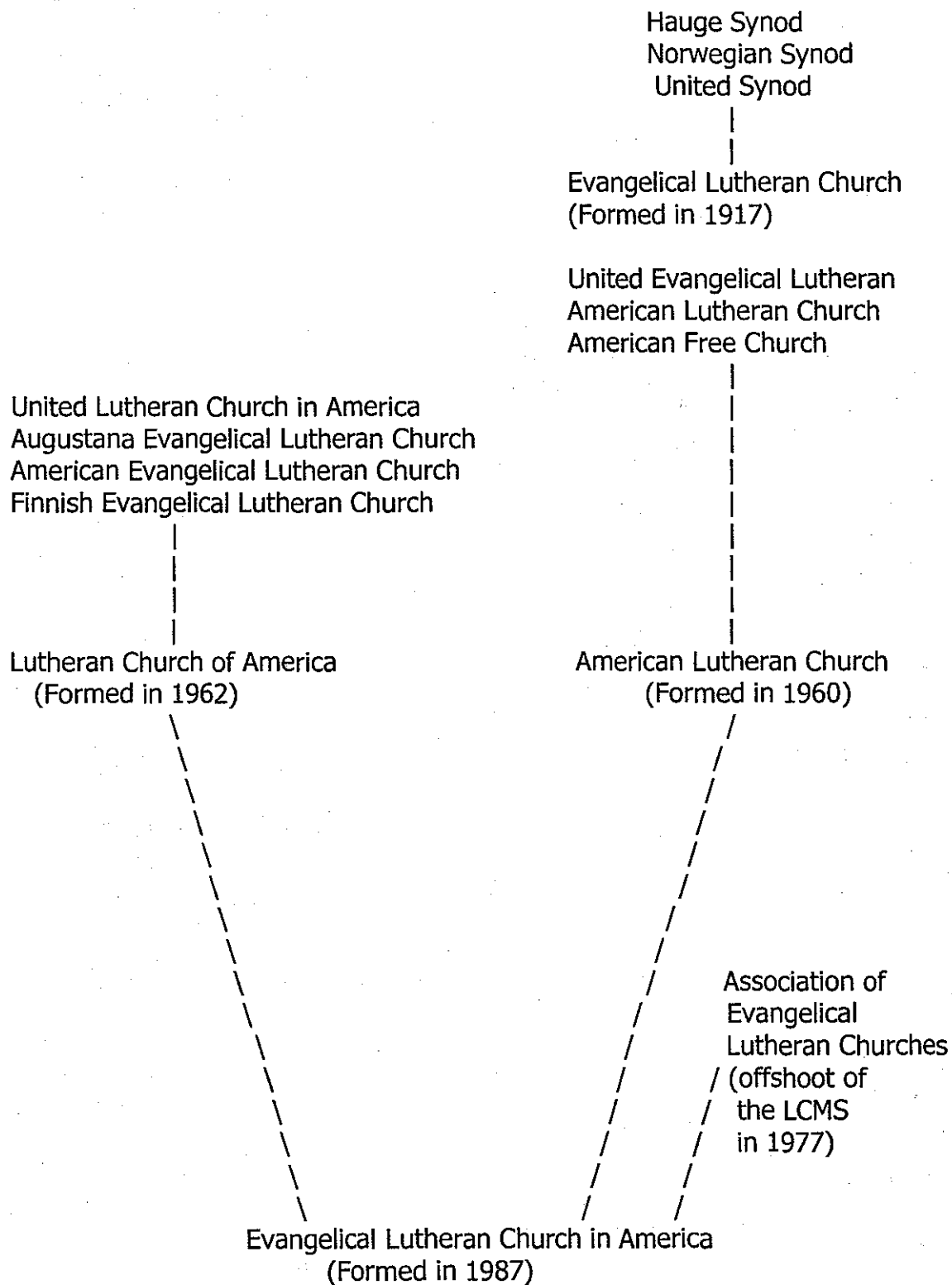
infallibility implies an errorless ness in matters of faith and salvation.”¹⁰⁵ This hermeneutical method leads the LCMS to fit all scripture into the most prevalent scripture messages and ignore the outside culture changes and the doings of others.

The ELCA adopted the Experimental- Expressive approach, which directs theologians to look outside the Bible as well as in the Bible, using many resources. The ELCA also used the Bible but differently then the LCMS. The ELCA sees the Bible containing the word of God but not necessarily the entire Bible being the word of God. They see inconstancies in the message in the Bible and are content if the entire Bible is not the truth today, and are content with the idea that Christians must take in account cultural changes when looking at the Bible.

These differences in hermeneutical methods have enabled both traditions to use the Bible to come to different conclusions in regards to the ordination of women. Neither tradition is wrong and neither is being unbiblical or unfaithful. Simply both the ELCA and the LCMS use different methods to interpret the same material which, this study shows, can lead to very large differences.

¹⁰⁵ Todd, *Authority Vested*, 2.

The Formation of the ELCA



Visual Two

THEME	1969 Study	ELCA	LCMS
The Orders Of Creation	A valid argument however there are issues That work both for and Against the argument, so It becomes inconclusive	The ELCA believes that the orders of creation in invalid because of conflicting scripture such as Genesis 3.	The LCMS believes this to a valid argument.
The Weaker Sex	Invalid argument due to the fact that Women are capable Of receiving the gifts of God.	Invalid argument	Invalid argument
Image of God	Faulty, it is not known why men were chosen To become the disciples, Invalid argument.	Invalid argument	Invalid argument
Scripture Against	Inconclusive, all scripture reviewed has merit and Some seem to counter Others.	Inconclusive	The scripture clearly says women aren't To be in the Office of Ministry.
Biblical Inconsistency	Valid, there is inconsistency.	Valid.	Invalid, all scripture can Be reconciled.
God is Male	Faulty, if this were Followed women could Not even be members of The church.	Invalid argument	Invalid argument
The New Age	Not enough scriptural support	Not enough scriptural support	Invalid argument
The Priesthood Of all Believers	Inconclusive, Luther's views not known	Inconclusive, Luther's views not known	Inconclusive, Luther's views not known.
History of Women Involvement	No scripture support.	Leads to favor the ordination of	Should not be used. women.

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