

AVOIDING THE HORNET'S NEST: WOMAN SUFFRAGE  
AND SYNODICAL CONFERENCE LUTHERANS

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## ABSTRACT

The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the United States Constitution granted women the right to vote. The movement for “Woman Suffrage” must be seen in its cultural context, in order to understand the arguments used for and against the notion of women voting in the United States. Lutherans in the Wisconsin Synod and the Synodical Conference reacted to this movement with a mixture of apathy, ignorance, fear, disdain, and measured thoughtfulness. The question of allowing a woman to vote in society also led Lutherans to debate a woman’s role in the Church. This paper examines the official publications within the Synodical Conference, which guided the conscientious Christian reader to explore the topic of the roles of men and women in light of God’s Word. My thesis is that Biblical truth and cultural norms led most within the Synodical Conference to oppose the women’s suffrage movement and its goals for society and the church, while those same voices praised the abilities and contributions of women. The writings of Lutheran teachers and pastors also display the interplay between Biblical truth, cultural norms, and personal preference and illustrate how such perspectives contribute to the Church’s public teaching on contentious cultural issues. The Lutheran approach to take every thought captive to God’s Word continues to provide the foundation to deal with similar cultural questions today.

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## INTRODUCTION

“If we expect the trumpets of a given era to sound unwavering notes, we will be disappointed, for the past tells us that politics is an uneven symphony.”<sup>1</sup> With these words Jon Meacham laments how progressive heroes, like President Woodrow Wilson, did not deliver the resounding leadership he expected in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. When it comes to the question of granting the suffrage to women, confessional Lutherans in the Synodical Conference<sup>2</sup> did not present any symphony, much less an “uneven symphony.” The voices addressing the question of woman suffrage were few, and we might be fortunate to find a clarinet playing on the back page of the Missouri Synod’s *Lutheran Witness* or a piccolo in passing in the Wisconsin Synod’s *Gemeinde-Blatt*. There were no official synodical resolutions with statements regarding woman suffrage or the roles of men and women, because “no Lutheran body took official action pro or con.”<sup>3</sup> We may find such silence startling, since the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1920 was the culmination of decades of effort and the single greatest expansion of democratic voting rights in United States history.

Paul Lindemann, a Missouri Synod pastor in New Jersey and the first editor of the *American Lutheran* magazine (1918-1938), was assigned a conference paper on the topic of “women in the church.” He sadly struggled to find anything in the theologically rich literature of his Synod. He wrote, “The fact that in all this literature the question is never exhaustively treated, seems to indicate that it has been considered as definitely settled and, therefore, unworthy of discussion, or as too dangerous and full of controversial possibilities to tackle. Much to the sorrow of the essayist, the great stack of Synodical Reports failed to grant expected illumination. The hornet’s nest has been carefully avoided.”<sup>4</sup> This paper seeks to examine the

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Meacham. *The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels*. (New York: Random House, 2018), 103.

<sup>2</sup> The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (aka Synodical Conference) was founded in 1872 and consisted of the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod, and others. Mark Braun has observed the close confessional alliance at this time: “The Wisconsin Synod praised Missouri’s orthodoxy and sought to emulate it... Missouri and Wisconsin as “separate synods” testified to “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” rejecting any compromise of their teachings to liberalism and “refusing to fraternize with any church body that will not accept our Evangelical Confession.” See Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, (Milwaukee: NPH, 2003), 45.

<sup>3</sup> E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 417. John Philipp Koehler’s *History of the Wisconsin Synod* examines Wisconsin Synod history until 1930 and mentions nothing about woman suffrage or any of the other social movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Lindemann. “The Woman in the Church.” *Theological Quarterly* 24 (1920): 39.

“hornet’s nest” and find what was written in various Lutheran publications. It is my contention that Biblical truth and cultural norms led most within the Synodical Conference to oppose the women’s suffrage movement and its goals for society and the church, while those same voices praised the abilities and contributions of women. By picturing the women’s movement in its historical context and by understanding the response of Lutherans within the Synodical Conference, we begin to see the “hornet’s nest” and the complexity of the topic. After examining the movement and the response of Lutherans to the question of woman suffrage in society, my research has also uncovered the ways in which Lutherans addressed the question of woman suffrage in the church. A better understanding of these issues will illustrate how we too have been influenced by the woman suffrage movement.<sup>5</sup>

A word of caution before we embark on this study, lest we be stung by the language of the day. Every effort has been made to examine all Synodical Conference sources and publications available from 1890 to 1930. Much of what we would consider highly offensive today was not regarded as such by most scholars writing on the topic of woman suffrage during the years under consideration. The verbiage and the expressions used on both sides of the debate were similar, and in the case of the Lutheran authors, they were slightly tamer compared to the scathing opinions of secular authors. In addition, what the Lutheran writers regarded as “praise” for woman and her gifts, abilities, and work, many today would likely label as “sexist.” This topic is, after all, called a “hornet’s nest” for a reason.

## **PART 1: A History of the Woman Suffrage Movement and the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment**

The conventionally recognized date for the beginning of the women’s rights movement in the United States is the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and others. Stanton was the only organizer who was not a Quaker social activist. Mrs. Stanton also chiefly authored “The Declaration of Sentiments,” which was presented at the Convention. She used the Declaration of Independence as a template for the eloquence, structure,

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<sup>5</sup> United States society today and in turn many Christians have been shaped by the feminism of the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the following ways: women vote; women hold public office; women are allowed to have a salaried job and be married at the same time; women have the same rights over their children as husbands and men do. Male and female students are welcome at almost every college. This is all very American. These practices and realities were revolutionary, however, when first proposed and reflect fundamental changes which have taken place over the last roughly 125 years. For further reading see Nathan Pope, *Feminism: Understanding and Balancing Its Impact on Marriage, Family, and Church*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003.

and content to be presented. She wrote: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal.” The organizers had wanted something which would grab the attention of those who heard it and stress the gravity of their “rebellion” against the prevailing order. The Declaration of Sentiments was designed to highlight the chief wrongs perpetrated against women: “The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman... He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise... he has oppressed her on every side.”<sup>6</sup> The litany of wrongs included grievances on equitable divorce, custody and property rights, the ways women were prohibited from higher education and thus the fields of medicine, law, and the ministry. Unequal pay was decried. But the most jarring and controversial focused on the franchise which man has never permitted her to exercise, despite it being an “inalienable right.” It was so shocking that Stanton’s social activist husband refused to attend the convention, if she left the demand in her Declaration. She left it in; he did not attend.

This movement, initiated in Seneca Falls, New York, has been called “equity feminism.” It sought justice and fairness for women, equal to what men enjoyed. That was its stated goal, and suffrage was its major focus. Without the vote, most believed the movement would not accomplish any real gains. The women of this movement did so without necessarily jettisoning their femininity. They were suffragists.<sup>7</sup> The differences between men and women were obvious and important, as we shall see. Nathan Pope states, “The 19<sup>th</sup> century feminists were politically feminine... They were not looking to diminish or eliminate their feminine characteristics.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1851 Elizabeth Stanton connected with Susan B. Anthony, who would prove to be another key figure in the movement. The two women became life-long friends and fellow workers in the cause of women’s rights. Together they started a newspaper in 1868 championing the cause of women’s rights. Though the paper itself had only a 29-month run, the name and principle idea for the paper stuck. It was called *The Revolution*. In a letter to Anthony at the time,

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, editors. *A History of Woman Suffrage in Six Volumes*. volume 1:70.

<sup>7</sup> A distinction is made between suffragists (women in the US who advocated for the vote through largely legal means) and suffragettes (women in Great Britain in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who violently advocated for the vote).

<sup>8</sup> Pope, *Feminism*, 7.

Stanton wrote, “There could not be a better name than *Revolution*. The establishing of woman on her rightful throne is the greatest revolution the world has ever known or ever will know.”<sup>9</sup>

Before the Civil War and into the Reconstruction era, there was a close relationship with the abolitionist movement. Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist leader, had been in attendance at the Seneca Falls Convention and proved to be a wise ally for the suffragists. But it was far from a perfect relationship. Stanton, Anthony, and other women leaders were upset that the push for the suffrage of black men took precedence over a universal suffrage amendment. In turn, the women’s movement descended into racism, especially in the South, and argued that white woman’s enfranchisement would be a hedge against “Negro Rule.” Stanton brushed off any criticism of her tactics by saying, “If the Devil steps forward ready to help, I shall say good fellow come on.”<sup>10</sup> The same racism would be found throughout the movement in the southern States and even in Washington, D.C. When suffragists marched in the nation’s capital in the 1910s, suffragists refused to let black women march alongside them.<sup>11</sup>

After attempts in the 1870s to force the Supreme Court to decide the matter,<sup>12</sup> the leaders of the women’s rights movement turned to state legislatures and even sought a national amendment. In 1890 the two major national groups, the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) and the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). The two groups had initially held different philosophies; the NWSA had been more confrontational and disruptive in public life, while the AWSA sought more respectable avenues to achieve moderate goals. The merged organization (NAWSA) focused more on passing legislation through state governments. Stanton was elected the president of the new organization and Anthony the vice-president.

The “New Woman” also appeared as a powerful concept in the 1890s. This designation was used by women who were often professional or well-educated; they were seeking radical change in society and traditional roles for women. The “New Woman” had some powerful tools

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<sup>9</sup> Harriet Sigerman, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: The Right is Ours*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 95.

<sup>10</sup> Elain Weiss, *The Woman’s Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote*, (New York: Random House, 2018), 135.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. “*The ‘Undesirable Militants’ Behind the Nineteenth Amendment*” by Adrienne LaFrance (June 4, 2019) *The Atlantic*. This is also why many Americans today find it difficult to “celebrate” the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment’s passage.

<sup>12</sup> In 1872 Susan B. Anthony was arrested for casting a ballot in the presidential election. The case never made its way to the Supreme Court, though that’s what suffragist leadership was hoping would happen.

at her disposal, such as, *The Women's Bible*. This work was a commentary on various sections of the Bible, meant to set woman free from the religious traditions which were hindering her emancipation. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the chief author and editor; she published part one (Genesis to Deuteronomy) in 1895 and part two (Joshua to Revelation) in 1898. The first part went through seven printings in six months and was translated into several languages. Stanton made no effort to hide her disdain for traditional religious faith and observance. She rejected the Bible as the word of God<sup>13</sup> and made it clear that the church and clergy are “the very powers that make [woman's] emancipation impossible.”<sup>14</sup> In the preface of *The Women's Bible*, Stanton stated her agenda in publishing this annotated version of certain sections of Scripture: “Women have compelled their legislators in every state in the Union to so modify their statutes for women that the old common law is now almost a dead letter. Why not compel Bishops and Revising Committees to modify their creeds and dogmas?... For so far-reaching and momentous a reform as her complete independence, an entire revolution in all existing institutions is inevitable.”<sup>15</sup> Stanton offers her commentary on the Genesis account in which God said “Let us make mankind in our image” and then makes them “male and female.” She explains her position: “If language has any meaning, we have in these texts a plain declaration of the existence of the feminine element in the Godhead, equal in power and glory with the masculine. The Heavenly Mother and Father!”<sup>16</sup> Another contributor to this commentary points out her belief that in Genesis 1 and 2 there are two entirely different creation accounts, written by two separate authors. “No Christian theologian of to-day [sic], with any pretensions to scholarship, claims that Genesis was written by Moses.”<sup>17</sup> More examples of a similar flavor fill the pages of *The Woman's Bible* and served as an aid to the “New Woman.”

In a preface to a recent edition of *The Woman's Bible*, Maureen Fitzgerald explains that Stanton's methods to achieve radical change within the state, church, and home were not always

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton. *The Women's Bible*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



shared by others, including Anthony. In a letter from Susan B. Anthony to Stanton, we see a major difference in approach apparent in the movement. Anthony wrote,

You say “women must be emancipated from their superstitions before enfranchisement will be of any benefit,” and I say just the reverse, that women must be enfranchised before they can be emancipated from their superstitions. Women would be no more superstitious today than men, if they had been men’s political and business equals and gone outside the ... walls of home and ... church into the great world, and come in contact with and discussed men and measure on the plane of this mundane sphere, instead of living in the air with Jesus and the angels. So you will have to keep pegging away, saying, “Get rid of religious bigotry and then get political rights;” while I shall keep pegging away, saying “Get political rights first and religious bigotry will melt like dew before the morning sun.”<sup>18</sup>

The difference in approach existed, but in the end the animosity to “religious bigotry” remained the same. What they classified as “religious bigotry,” however, others would classify as traditional roles based in natural law and Scripture. More on that later.

By 1900 only four states had granted women the ballot, and they were all small western states. A revival was needed for a somewhat lethargic movement. A new generation of women stepped up to win the vote, women like Carrie Chapman Catt. She was the 41-year-old, handpicked successor to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, taking over the presidency of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1900.<sup>19</sup> Catt was also instrumental in founding the International Woman Suffrage Alliance and served as its first president in 1904. This organization promoted and coordinated groups of suffragists from various countries and held a congress every two years. Catt was part of “... a new generation of women largely influenced by their more active, sometimes militant British sisters who pledged themselves to ‘deeds not words’. These deeds included a variety of exploits designed to capture media, and thereby national, attention for their cause. ‘Sandwichettes’ (women wearing sandwich boards with pro-suffrage slogans) laboured [sic] through the streets.”<sup>20</sup>

Women got more visible and active. They had joined in the 1890s bicycle craze, and now they started playing more sports and attending events, such as baseball games. They went in the hopes that men would see women in the public sphere and then sense the goodness of the

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xxvii.

<sup>19</sup> Stanton, 869.

<sup>20</sup> Jamie Schultz. “[Chapter 2] *The Physical is Political: Women’s Suffrage, Pilgrim Hikes and the Public Sphere*,” found in *Women, Sport, Society. Further Reflections, Reaffirming Mary Wollstonecraft*, edited by Roberta J. Park and Patricia Vertinsky, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 32.

suffragist cause. “During the Progressive Era, American women began to more fully enjoy the benefits of physical culture than they had at previous times in history. As Victorian ideologies concerning women’s ethereal frailty, weakness and delicacy began to wane a new, more athletic version of femininity started to take hold.”<sup>21</sup>

Women also began working more outside the home. In 1900 only 6 percent of married women worked outside the home. Among wives with small children almost none worked outside the home. About half of single women worked, at least until they got married or pregnant; and about one in three widowed or divorced women worked out of necessity. The women’s movement was looking to change that, and in 1920, the same year the suffrage amendment was adopted, the percentage of married women in the workforce began to rise dramatically. It is impossible to know what percentage of women sought employment outside of the home to make a political statement and what percentage did so out of necessity. The Industrial Revolution was in full swing and America was changing from an agricultural society to an urban industrial one. There were working class women, who labelled themselves “breadwinners.” These women made a concerted effort to oppose traditional roles. “They rejected the notion that women were best suited for domestic occupations, and they cast domestic service as a form of gender and class oppression akin to slavery.”<sup>22</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, support for woman suffrage and advocating for a wider field of employment for women went hand in hand.<sup>23</sup>

The suffrage movement started to see large scale successes in 1910. That year women gained the vote in the state of Washington; California followed in 1911; Oregon, Kansas and Arizona granted the same in 1912; and Illinois in 1913, the first state east of the Mississippi to do so. In 1912 former president Theodore Roosevelt had founded the Progressive Party, which made national suffrage part of its platform. Roosevelt said, “It is the right of woman to have the ballot; it is the duty of man to give it; and we all need women’s help as we try to solve the many and terrible problems before us.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Lara Vapnek. *Breadwinners: Working Women and Economic Independence, 1865-1920* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 164.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>24</sup> Frances M. Bjoerkman and Annie Porritt, editors. *Woman Suffrage: History, Arguments, and Results* (New York: National Woman Suffrage Publishing Co, Inc, 1915), 217.

The opposition also started to mobilize. The National Association Opposed to Women's Suffrage was formed in 1911. The president of the organization, Josephine Dodge, claimed that her organization and others like it were having a strong impact in the war against woman suffrage: "Since its establishment the campaigns against woman suffrage have been successful in every State where the opposition was properly organized and where the people were fully informed on the question."<sup>25</sup>

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, a flurry of change was under way. The men headed off to war and the women headed to the factories and businesses which had been vacated. In 1916 Alice Paul, a young activist who had spent time learning from the British suffragettes, had founded the National Women's Party to advocate for the passage of a national amendment by violent, militant means. The NWP did not cease their activity during the war, drawing criticism from patriotic Americans. Women also continued to stand sentinel outside the White House with signs saying, "Mr. President How Long Must Women Wait for Liberty?" President Woodrow Wilson had been hardly an enthusiastic supporter, but as the war came to a close he signaled his support for a national amendment. Wilson told the Senate in late 1918, "Democracy means that women shall play their part in the affairs alongside men and upon an equal footing with them... Without their counsellings, we shall be only half wise."<sup>26</sup>

Post-World War I America, however, was not necessarily primed for major electoral change. The US Senate did not ratify the Treaty of Versailles or bring the country into more foreign entanglements with the League of Nations. There had also been nationwide strikes in the steel, coal, railroad and shipbuilding industries in 1919, "more than two thousand strikes around the country." The post-war economy slipped into depression and, just when a person needed a drink, enforcement of national prohibition was "adding to the climate of violence" (prohibition was adopted as the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1918).<sup>27</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment failed in the Senate in September 1918 and February 1919, but finally on June 4, 1919 it was passed by the Senate and sent to the States.

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<sup>25</sup> Josephine Dodge. "Keynote of Opposition to Woman's Suffrage," *The Boston Sunday Globe*, October 16, 1916: 54.

<sup>26</sup> Weiss, 99-100.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Ratification in the states proved much slower than some expected. The suffragists needed three quarters of the forty-eight states in the US to approve the amendment. By the middle of summer 1920, the legislatures of thirty-five states had ratified the amendment, eight had rejected it, three refused to consider it, and two remained to be decided: North Carolina and Tennessee. The former was a “sure bet to reject” the amendment. This left the latter, Tennessee, as the lone battleground remaining. Finally, on August 20, 1920, the Tennessee legislature passed the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution which reads: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.” The passage of the amendment did not end all discrimination on the basis of sex, because the US Constitution puts voting laws and regulations in the hands of the states themselves. Yet, in time every state in the Union granted women the right to vote.

## **PART 2: The Meaning and Rationale for and against “the Vote”**

A central question we must consider is what “the vote” meant to the various parties involved and why they favored or opposed it. On the basis of my research of this topic and its connection to the Lutheran Church, there were three discernable groups which emerged. One was the pro-suffragist crowd (commonly called the “suffs”) which lobbied for the woman’s right to vote; a second was the anti-suffrage crowd (commonly called the “antis”); both of these groups had their religious and secular champions. A third group was the Lutheran pastors and professors who leaned to the anti persuasion, but were more concerned with the Lord’s Word on the subject. It would be a mistake to simply say that all women were suffs and all men were antis. Men had to vote to give women the franchise in the first place; some opposed, some favored it. Women also were divided. For example, the *Woman’s Who’s Who of America* in 1914 listed various public figures and their notable accomplishments; it also includes regularly the phrase “Favors woman suffrage” and “Opposed to woman suffrage.” There were women from diverse backgrounds, occupations and denominations on both sides of the discussion, and although there was a large group in favor of woman suffrage, it was not a majority: 4787 women

in favor of suffrage, 773 opposed to it, and 4084 neutral/non-responsive to the question (49.6% in favor; 8.0% opposed; 42.3% neutral).<sup>28</sup>

The concept of “the vote” was important to women’s rights leaders because it gave deep expression to something far greater. Ellis Meredith wrote in a 4,200 word essay for *The Atlantic* magazine: “You can’t exactly explain why suffrage is desirable... the vote is an indefinable something that makes you part of the plan of the world. It means the same to women that it does to men.”<sup>29</sup> Some men take voting seriously; some do not. The same is true for women, as Meredith pointed out. Yet, there was a basic fundamental need for women to have the vote. Jamie Schultz noted, “Feminists defined the right to vote as central to citizenship and trust that the franchise would be the wellspring from which other rights and privileges might flow.”<sup>30</sup> Alice Stone Blackwell in a 1915 essay titled, “Why should women vote?” gave the reasons for woman suffrage as well as a definition of what the franchise is:

The reasons why women should vote are the same as the reasons why men should vote—the same as the reasons for having a republic rather than a monarchy. It is fair and right that the people who must obey the laws should have a voice in choosing the law-makers, and that those who must pay the taxes should have a voice as to the amount of the tax, and the way in which the money shall be spent. Roughly stated, the fundamental principle of a republic is this: In deciding what is to be done, we take everybody’s opinion, and then go according to the wish of the majority. As we cannot suit everybody, we do what will suit the greatest number. That seems to be, on the whole, the fairest way. **A vote is simply a written expression of opinion.**<sup>31</sup>

This notion, that a vote is simply an expression of opinion, was a common understanding of the movement. In her 2018 book about the latter days of the movement and the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in Tennessee, Elaine Weiss goes a step further: “Holding the franchise, exercising the vote, is a form of power... But this sort of power cannot be wrested simply through demand: it requires a huge societal shift, a slow change of public attitudes, eventually translated into public policy.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Woman’s Who’s Who of America: A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Women of the United States and Canada 1914-1915*, edited by John William Leonhard (New York: The American Commonwealth Co., 1914), 26.

<sup>29</sup> Ellis Meredith. “What It Means to Be an Enfranchised Woman,” in *The Atlantic*, August 1908.

<sup>30</sup> Schultz, 31.

<sup>31</sup> Bjoerkman, 161, emphasis mine.

<sup>32</sup> Weiss, 4.

The reasons for granting women the right to vote were rooted in equality according to the suffs. At the genesis of our country Abigail Adams had implored her husband John Adams as part of the Continental Congress, “I desire you would remember the ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors.”<sup>33</sup> Those who pay taxes and those under the laws should have some say in the administration of the democracy. Women wanted equal rights under the law and the vote was her voice to be heard. For example, in 1915 only seventeen states granted mothers the same parental rights as they did fathers.<sup>34</sup> The vote was the means to change such laws. “I am for progress” became a popular pro-suffrage slogan.<sup>35</sup>

Some educated women did resent the fact that their hired farm hands, who could neither read nor write, were able to vote while they were not. Others believed that giving women the vote would aid the nation. Society was changing rapidly and women would be uniquely positioned to help address problems of modern, urban life. It was one thing, according to Jane Addams, when a woman could live in the country and handle the disposal of trash, the safety of her home, and the feeding of her family without interference from others. It is quite another when you are living in a tenement, where the government must be relied upon to haul away the trash, maintain building codes for safety, and oversee the sale of healthy, edible foods—just to name a few modern challenges. Rather than take women out of the home as some feared, granting women the vote would help the home economically and otherwise. Addams believed, “Many women to-day are failing to discharge their duties to their own households properly simply because they do not perceive that as society grows more complicated it is necessary that woman shall extend her sense of responsibility to many things outside her own home if she would continue to preserve the home in its entirety.”<sup>36</sup>

Many also believed that women would have a purifying effect on politics. The tender nature of a woman, her compassion, her insight, her feminine ingenuity, and her maternal instincts make her an excellent candidate to have the vote. C. William Beebe, a marine biologist,

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<sup>33</sup> Stanton, *A History of Woman's Suffrage*, vol. 1:32.

<sup>34</sup> Bjoerkman, 159.

<sup>35</sup> Weiss, 313.

<sup>36</sup> Bjoerkman, 131.

pointed to the way evolution<sup>37</sup> has brought forth obvious differences between male and female, and these differences should be used to the benefit of the human species. He admitted it was a long way from the jelly fish to equal suffrage. But he also wrote, “If a democracy would survive there must be unity and coöperation [sic] in all its parts.”<sup>38</sup> Basically, Beebe said what is good for the goose is good for the gander, because nature has specialized them to live in harmony, not isolation from each other. Carrie Chapman Catt believed so strongly in the purifying effects of women on politics that after the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1920, she said, “I believe had the vote been granted to women twenty-five years ago, their national influence would have so leavened world politics that there would have been no world war.”<sup>39</sup>

Unlike the suffs the anti-suffrage crowd tended to view the vote as more than an opinion, and stressed different obligations connected with the vote. For example, Lyman Abbott, a theologian and author, wrote a 5,000 word essay in 1903 for *The Atlantic* magazine. Abbott specifically viewed the vote as tool of governance, which exists to exert military force and compel others to obedience. The physical protection of the state and family rested with the men; therefore, men are the ones entrusted with suffrage. He defined the vote in these terms: “A ballot is not a mere expression of opinion; it is an act of the will; and behind this act of the will must be power to compel obedience. Women do not wish authority to compel the obedience of their husbands, sons, and brothers to their will.” Giving women the vote meant more than writing something on a piece of paper on a Tuesday in November. It would turn women into men and “unsex” them, like Lady Macbeth. Abbott wrote, “The first and fundamental function of government is the protection of person and property, and because women do not think that they ought to assume this duty any more than they out to assume that police and militia service which is involved in every act of legislature, that they do not wish to have the ballot thrust upon them.” Abbott also feared that women would give up their highest, most important work, the work for which reason governments exist, i.e. the care and nurture of children. Thankfully, Abbott wrote, the majority of American women are “true to themselves, to the nature God has given them, and

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<sup>37</sup> A Bible-believing Christian would hold to a Creation in six, normal, 24 hour days, and reject the theory of evolution as incompatible with the biblical record.

<sup>38</sup> C. William Beebe, “The Jelly-Fish and Equal Suffrage,” in *The Atlantic*, July 1914.

<sup>39</sup> Stanton, *The History of Woman Suffrage*, volume 6:861.

to the service He has allotted to them—the direct ministry to life,—and will neither be forced nor enticed from it by their restless, well-meaning, but mistaken sisters.”<sup>40</sup>

Anna Rogers explains why she stood against suffrage for women. She wrote, “Mothers are the gardeners of the human race.” Women exert their greatest influence by the dignity of motherhood, not by casting a ballot. Their place is in the home as they shape the next generation. She addresses both what girls should learn and what boys should learn, namely the dignity of motherhood and the necessity of citizenship. In the mind of many antis, woman would be lowering herself from her high moral position free from party politics, if she were to vote. Rogers does not exempt fathers from their responsibilities either: “American men, as a whole, are as strangely weak and invertebrate in their relations to their children as they are in their relations to their wives... Fathers are seldom more than the florists connected with the hothouses.” Anything that takes women away from her high calling in the home should be avoided. Antis would say, “We are for progress, not politics.”<sup>41</sup>

Historian Alan Graebner offers his opinion that an anti-suffrage position was not supported intellectually: “Despite disclaimers, a main pillar of anti-suffrage thought was not intellectual, but emotional, not Holy Writ, but the traditional view on the place and role of women.”<sup>42</sup> My research has found that both sides used emotional arguments and both sides attempted logical, even Biblical arguments. The suffragists often appealed to the emotions and gave stirring arguments about the struggle women have endured, while the antis stoked fears and appealed to natural law and Scripture, even on the pages of *The Atlantic* and the *New York Times*. Josephine Bacon, a noted novelist in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, had her own opinion about the intellect and emotions. She said, “Those of us who still count ourselves as among the incalculable majority of educated American women, a majority for whom I am perfectly willing to stand as spokeswoman, fail utterly to see why we should be forced to defend a [anti-suffrage] position when all the burden of proof lies with the insurgents. The difficulty of our position is increased by the idiotic arguments of the anti-suffragists (with whom our *practical* sympathy lies) and the appalling lack of mental calibre [sic] of the suffragists (whose *theoretical* basis

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<sup>40</sup> Lyman Abbott. “Why Women Do Not Wish the Suffrage,” in *The Atlantic*, September 1903.

<sup>41</sup> Anna Rogers. “Why American Mothers Fail,” in *The Atlantic*, March 1908.

<sup>42</sup> Alan Graebner, *Uncertain Saints: The Laity in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod 1900-1970* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), 186.



might have something in it, if they could only stand on it for five consecutive minutes without breaking every law of logic.)”<sup>43</sup>

The primary sources indicate that it was not the cultural norm for a woman to seek the vote. In large measure American society still encouraged and expected women to limit themselves to the traditional roles of wife, mother, and manager of the home. Signs of change were also on the horizon and things were changing rapidly.

Now we get to the question at hand: How did the Synodical Conference Lutherans view “the vote” itself? Lutheran authors who wrote on this subject viewed the vote as more than mere expression or democratic participation. In 1916 Missouri Synod Seminary professor W.H.T. Dau (1864-1944) wrote, “[A woman] does not merely make a statement by which she declares her opinion.” It is more than a pious wish. “In all the world the casting of a vote is regarded as an act of sovereignty, by which some one [sic] declares his will and proposes to realize his will.”<sup>44</sup> The reasons that Lutheran writers leaned toward the anti-suffrage camp will be found in **PART 4**.

### **PART 3: Why Did Lutherans Avoid the Hornet’s Nest?**

As the suffrage amendment was being considered by Congress in 1919, the pages of *The Lutheran Witness*, the main English language publication of the Missouri Synod, took up the topic. Louis Sieck (1884-1952) wrote, “Many of us have been accustomed to regard Woman Suffrage as too insignificant and too absurd to deserve serious attention. Most of us felt... that we could never be induced to discuss this question earnestly. We actually avoided it, hoping secretly that it would die a natural death. Instead of favoring us with an early and natural death, the Woman Suffrage movement has grown to such proportions that the time has come when it cannot be disregarded by the Church, which is to show us from the Scriptures our attitude also toward such questions. ... Equal rights, or suffrage, constitutes one of the profoundest questions which can arise in human government.”<sup>45</sup> This profound question had been consciously and unconsciously avoided by some in the Lutheran Church. Why?

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<sup>43</sup> Josephine Bacon, “Woman Question Not Suffrage Question” *The New York Times*, May 19, 1912: 75.

<sup>44</sup> W.H.T. Dau, *Woman Suffrage in the Church*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House Tract, [n.d.]).

<sup>45</sup> Louis J. Sieck, “Attitude Lutherans Should Take Towards Woman Suffrage” in *The Lutheran Witness* May 13, 1919: 149.

My assertion is that the first factor which led Lutherans to avoid the “hornet’s nest” was the very nature of the Lutheran Church and her ministry. The historic, biblical position of the Synodical Conference was that Lutheran pastors held a divine call from the Lord to preach the law and the gospel and to administer the sacraments according to Christ’s institution. That was the call and the Word was the tool. The Lord has also established civil government and assigned its task as well. The sword was its weapon, the power over life and limb. The two spheres should be kept distinct. Franz Pieper (1852-1931) was raised in the Wisconsin Synod, served two Wisconsin Synod congregations, and was at this time president of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. He addressed the pastor and politics in an article in the mid-1890s. He wrote,

There is a difference between a pastor as pastor or servant of the Church and the pastor as a citizen or private person... Dr. Walther used to give the advice that pastors should not let their political opinions be known in their congregations. It could give the pastor obstacles to his office in times of political unrest. We, on our part, consider this advice to be worthy of attention. The office of the ministry (*Predigtamt*) should be so precious for the pastor, that he avoids most carefully whatever could be an obstacle to his office ... The question that is before us and that remains for us to answer, is whether political activity belongs to the pastor as a pastor ... whether the church should have the task of setting up the civil order and legislation according to their ecclesiastical laws. This question has been answered by the faithful Church with a definitive “no,” and we wholeheartedly agree with this “no.” If we look at Scripture, in all passages that deal with the purpose and mission of the Christian Church, we can find nothing but to preach the Gospel to the Church and to save people.<sup>46</sup>

The Church (and so her pastors) have the calling to “make all things new” (2 Cor 5:17), but not through political upheaval. Through the preaching of law and gospel the Lord himself does his work in the “social lives” of his people, according to Pieper.<sup>47</sup> Woman suffrage was something that could have initially been considered more of a political issue, since it dealt with matters of citizenship in the State.

The Lutheran Church’s position was also aptly summarized by Wisconsin Seminary Professor August Pieper (1857-1946), brother to Franz. He wrote, “The sectarian (evangelical) churches of America cannot understand our Lutheran Church...which wants to preach nothing but the Gospel...[and] refuse as churches to place the holy ministry and the church officers in the

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<sup>46</sup> Franz Pieper. “Sind politische Pastoren ein Unding?” *Lehre und Wehre*, July-August 1896, Vol.42, No.7-8, p.195-196. This translation and all subsequent translations were done by the author.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 198.

service of the government.”<sup>48</sup> Lutheran pastors bristled at the thought of the church being used as a political piece of machinery. Pastor John Brenner (1874-1962), a future president of the Wisconsin Synod, wrote in 1916 in the pages of the *Northwestern Lutheran* magazine: “The Church cannot find a quicker method of self destruction than political activity.”<sup>49</sup>

Another aspect that may have led some to avoid the “hornet’s nest” was that Lutherans, especially Wisconsin Synod congregations, were more prominent in rural communities, where they often made up a majority of the population.<sup>50</sup> This led to a certain amount of isolation from the perspectives and problems addressed in urban areas in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Missouri Synod had more congregations in urban centers and on the east coast. It is not surprising, then, that the Missouri publications addressed issues pertaining to the women’s rights movement, albeit rarely.

Confessional Lutherans in the Synodical Conference were also recovering from the extreme trauma and political duress which many congregations had endured immediately before, during, and after the First World War. The US government used various agencies and surveillance techniques which targeted German Lutheran pastors, leaders, and congregations under the Espionage Act of 1917. The pressure applied could have reinforced certain principles among Lutherans and even led to a certain hesitancy to enter the public arena regarding politics, such as woman suffrage. The Wisconsin Synod, for example, long had a record of protecting the beloved “dividing wall between church and state.”<sup>51</sup> This view has even been called a “defining characteristic of the Lutheran Church” in the United States.<sup>52</sup> This wall was tested and hardened during the war years, as German Lutheran loyalty to the United States was questioned. It would only be natural to see a decrease in political activity on all fronts, so as to not draw further attention to themselves. For example, in July 1917, when Lutheran pastors were specifically

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<sup>48</sup> Stephen Gurgel, “The War to End All Germans: Wisconsin Synod Lutherans and the First World War,” master’s thesis at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, December 2012, p.15. (Accessed online at <https://dc.uwm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1055&context=etd> ) Also available in *The WELS Historical Institute Journal*, 2015 vol. 33, no. 1, p.1-36 and vol. 33, no. 2, p.1-63.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

asked to preach about government bonds on “Liberty Loan Sunday,” the *Northwestern Lutheran* responded with a blunt “No!” and further explained, “We have never used the pulpit as a platform from which to discuss *current events* or *political* or *social* movements.”<sup>53</sup>

A fourth reason for the Lutheran Church’s hesitance on social and political questions would be the immigrant heritage and the attitudes that engenders. Mark Braun has written about the united front that Missouri and Wisconsin took toward various social questions in the early 1900s, when they did address certain questions. He explains how both “churches and their leaders exhibited immigrant conservatism regarding the role of government; such subjects as dancing, the theater, and worldliness; and the role of women in church and society.” According to another scholar, “It was only through maintaining its conservatism and emphasizing its differentness from the surrounding culture that Missourians believed they could preserve their religious identity.”<sup>54</sup> Other topics such as birth control, life insurance, and the social gospel also drew the rebuke of Synodical Conference writers,<sup>55</sup> but this was by no means an extensive or regular occurrence. Change was inevitable, as the English language became the main vehicle for the synod’s preaching and teaching, but the extent of the change remains the subject of debate.<sup>56</sup>

The other activities underway in the Lutheran Church would also have consumed the attention and energy of the leaders, pastors, teachers, and people. Excitement and apprehension were in the air in 1917-1920. The world was a war. The monumental 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation was underway.<sup>57</sup> The Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota Synods merged from a federation of separated synods into one joint synod. Historian E. Clifford Nelson notes, “The years between 1915 and 1920, even between 1917 and 1920, constitute one of the most significant watersheds in Lutheran history in America. Theologically, there was little change, but the self-awareness and the spirit of the church has never been the same.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>54</sup> Braun, 40.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-43.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Alan Graebner, *The acculturation of an immigrant Lutheran Church [microform]: the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1917-1929*, Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1965.

<sup>57</sup> See *The Lutheran Witness*, 1916 Nov 14 “Shall it be a Denatured Jubilee?” and *The Lutheran Witness*, May 1, 1917, “False Ideals of the Jubilee.”

<sup>58</sup> Nelson, 391.

## **PART 4: Woman Suffrage in the State and Synodical Conference Lutherans**

### *Phase One: The 1890s*

The periods during which Synodical Conference writers addressed the question of woman suffrage in society coincided with the periods of increased activity among the suffragists (see **Part 1**). During the first period in the 1890s, Lutheran authors displayed a certain amount of shock whenever they picked up the pen to write about this topic. They viewed this women’s movement as turning upside down the natural order God had established in the world and they could hardly believe it. The first writers on this topic followed the lead of C.F.W. Walther, the American Luther as he is sometimes called due to his great influence on the Church. In one of his final writings in 1886, Walther noted how the Lord had created a certain order and roles between men and women, but this order was now under attack: “Groups of women have organized themselves, disgracefully emblazoning on their banners the slogan “Emancipation of Women,” and have made this their password.” Rather than a step forward for mankind, the “spirit of independence” was seen as a direct attack on the Christian home which seeks to follow God’s Word. Walther pointed out that “the subjection of believing women is not a punishment.”<sup>59</sup> This principle was laid out in Scripture by our loving Lord, but not all agree. “The world says that this is a custom that is not suitable for our times and in our nation.”<sup>60</sup> He comments about these “modern women” who believe women should have the same rights as men: “A blind person can see—to quote unbelievers—that nature has not given women the gifts [necessary] for dominating and governing. Even an atheist must concede that the female is not destined for this kind of calling.”<sup>61</sup>

The issue of women’s suffrage was addressed in passing, as various news items came to light. When female suffrage was brought up before the US Senate as the 16<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1887, Franz Pieper expressed colorful sentiments similar to Walther’s. He wrote: “It is a disgraceful fact for citizens of the United States and must awaken apprehension for the future, that a full third of the Senators are so destitute of all common sense, that the same men could

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<sup>59</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *All Glory to God* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 530.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 533.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 531.

intercede on behalf of a proposal which puts all natural order on its head.”<sup>62</sup> F. Bente, professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis (1893-1926), responded to a judge’s ruling in Pennsylvania which allowed women to enter all sorts of professions from which they had previously been barred. In analyzing all this, Bente concludes: “The reversal of the godly, natural order of things must avenge itself terribly. It turns men into women and women into men and fails to appreciate and even disdains their glorious calling in the family. And when the same gains even more ground, it will lead to the spiritual and physical ruin of the people.”<sup>63</sup> This theme would appear again among Lutheran writers: allowing women political equality with men would turn men into women and women into men.

In 1894 Professor August Graebner (1849-1904) wrote one of the more comprehensive writings on the subject in *Der Lutheraner*, the Missouri Synod’s main church newsletter. It was also the only writing on suffrage to be on the front page of a Synodical Conference publication. Graebner began with a distinction between rights and duties. Rights are things one has the power to do as part of the society; duties are the responsibilities God demands from a person. He discussed how to order society, so that a person’s energy and attention will benefit society the most. In his opinion a woman will prove to be the most useful to society and also the happiest herself, when she is fulfilling the purpose for which God created her “in the house, in the family, with the children.” For Graebner this was clearly evident from her physical stature and from her tender heart. Woman’s work in the home was also valuable for the good of society and for every individual person, and “no people can flourish without it.” Understanding these facts would lead to the wisest and most appropriate distribution of rights and duties within society. It would also give woman “the richest, most noble happiness that this earthly life can offer her.”<sup>64</sup>

Graebner warned against grave developments: “It is therefore a dubious sign of the times, when in our day, especially in the women’s world, it becomes noticeable that there is a distancing from the woman’s sphere of activity, which is assigned by God and which is admitted by an intelligible order of social life. This happens when women force themselves into the

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<sup>62</sup> Franz Pieper, “*Kirchliche-Zeitgeschichtliches: Frauenstimmrecht vor dem Senat der Vereinigten Staaten*,” in *Lehre und Wehre* vol.33, no.2 (February 1887), 56.

<sup>63</sup> Friedrich Bente. “*Aus Welt und Zeit: Frauenemancipation*,” *Der Lutheraner*, vol. 50, no.9 (April 24, 1894), 76.

<sup>64</sup> August Graebner, “*Frauenrechte*,” in *Der Lutheraner*, vol. 50, no.9 (April 24, 1894), 71. (See Appendix 1)

machinery of public life.”<sup>65</sup> Women were competing with men in various industries, distancing themselves from their feminine qualities and influence, and crying out: “Equal work, equal pay!”<sup>66</sup> This women’s movement did not ultimately benefit women in Graebner’s estimation: “Everything is designed to make a repulsive caricature out of woman... a woman without femininity, a creature who does not want to be what it is supposed to be, and cannot be what it wants to be, who has thrown away its crown to reach for another, but caught a fool’s cap and did not even notice it.” This caricature was repulsive to Graebner, when compared to the beauty of God’s picture.<sup>67</sup>

What should we do as Christians, Graebner asked? We should be salt and light as Jesus wants us to be. Be aware of the perversities of the world and work to counteract them by recognizing the calling God gives. Graebner went on to admit that it was not wrong for a woman to be engaged in some employment outside the home, yet he cautioned against it. He wrote, “In general, however, the rule will be that our growing or grown-up daughters should not be deprived of domestic employment in the long run, if we set a good example on our part and, in particular, train our daughters as such women willing to do domestic work, to be skillful and efficient, and to appreciate the housewife’s rights as the highest, most noble, earthly women’s rights, rather than, as is unfortunately the case with so many American women, who contemptuously overlook these and suppose they aspire higher when they seek other professions.”<sup>68</sup>

In the conclusion, he did finally advocate a tangible political action: when we have an opportunity to vote on woman suffrage, “let us be Christian citizens who seek the best for city and state, casting our votes **against** such ruinous disorder. Thus, we do our part, what we can do, to set a dam against the unhealthy so-called women’s rights movement.”<sup>69</sup> In my research of the sources, this was the only encouragement to oppose woman suffrage at the ballot box.

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 72. The German here is: “Gleiche Arbeit, gleicher Lohn!”

<sup>67</sup> See the passages quoted: Col 3:18; Eph 5:22-33; 1 Tim 2:9-15, 5:10-14; Tit 2:4-5; 1 Pet 3:1-6; Prov 31:10-31.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 72. Emphasis original.

The reason for opposing the woman's rights movement at times seemed to focus more on cultural norms about male and female expectations, rather than explicit Scripture passages. In 1896 *Concordia Magazine* (a new effort from the Missouri Synod to have an English language, Americanized magazine) stated: "Woman's ambition in the past decade has tended more or less manward. That is, having grown discontent with her divinely ordained sphere, she has been endeavoring to overstep her bounds and pose as that she is not, nor ever can be."<sup>70</sup> In 1898 *The Lutheran Witness* reported that Emperor William of Germany had aroused the anger of the "new woman"<sup>71</sup> by stating his belief "that the life of a woman should be devoted to the cultivation of the three K's: Kirche, Kinder, and Küche" (church, children, and kitchen). The author was not surprised that many were upset, given the rebellion of the "new woman" movement. "The new woman has cast the church aside, because it teaches subordination of the wife to the husband and enjoins domestic duties from which the "taste" of the new woman revolts. The new woman hates children, and is madly exerting her ingenuity in frustrating the ends of matrimony." The disdain for the movement was readily apparent: "Considering woman's momentous functions, the "new woman's" truancy is the most appalling on record, and a sign of the coming dissolution of existing conditions."<sup>72</sup>

Scriptural truth and the normal cultural practices of the day tended to be blended, especially when the topic was given limited space in print. In 1899, *The Lutheran Witness* reported a recent development at the Congregational Theological Seminary in Chicago: they had resolved to admit women for a course of study. The Scriptures, according to this news editorial, distinctly exclude women from entering the public ministry, "while this cannot be said of other avocations, at least not in the same measure." The editorial goes on: "The true scriptural position of woman is that of wife and mother. To enter this state ought to be the aspiration of every Christian girl. And if a woman fills this position, she will have no time nor opportunity for devoting herself to a lawyer's or merchant's or physician's duties."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Alan Graebner, *Uncertain Saints*, 18.

<sup>71</sup> See page 3 and the information on the "New Woman."

<sup>72</sup> *The Lutheran Witness*, "Church News and Comment: Emperor William of Germany," vol.17, no.7 (September 7, 1898), 55.

<sup>73</sup> "News: Congregational Theological Seminary Admits Women," vol.18, no.4 (July 21, 1899), 31.



Another topic of discussion in the 1890s was the call of Lutheran schoolteachers, and the female teacher in particular. In an article on the subject, Concordia St. Louis professor George Stoeckhardt (1842-1913) encouraged his readers to go back to the principles of God's Word, especially in light of the trouble being caused in the church and in the state by all manner of "women's emancipation."<sup>74</sup> Women have gifts in the teaching of children and mentoring other women, and the congregation should make use of those gifts. This article made the key emphasis that to address the problems of the day, a return to the principles of God's Word was necessary. This emphasis would be an important reminder as the women's rights movement continued to march forward.

In an article from *The Lutheran Witness* on "The Woman Question," W.H.T. Dau displayed an appreciation for the gifts of women. He pointed to the "undeniable facts" that "women *may* equal men in mental power, and that, hence, they *can* successfully engage in all those pursuits, for which superior qualities of the mind are commonly understood for fit persons."<sup>75</sup> He wanted to make sure to give "women due credit for the eminent service, which they have, in every age, rendered to mankind." He praised women in his day who were responsible for the physical and moral support of entire households, in the face of a "worthless husband" who happened to be "less than a figure-head." Even when considering a woman ruling in the secular world, he noted: "No sound theologian would think of relieving a British male subject from *obedience* to Queen Victoria, on the ground that he, being a man, should not be subordinate to a woman." God has given gifts and abilities to women. In fact, he went a step further and stated, "Whatever endowments the Creator has bestowed on man or woman *must* be most religiously utilized to the full extent of ability opportunity [sic]."<sup>76</sup> While praising woman and granting her full rights as a child of God, Scripture "does not forget the original order of things, by which the woman was made subject to the man, both before and after the fall." Dau chronicled a litany of Bible passages<sup>77</sup> and concluded that the principle is "a subordination based

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<sup>74</sup> Stoeckhardt, George. "Von dem Beruf der Lehrerinnen an christlichen Gemeindeschulen." *Lehre und Wehre* 43 (1897): 65-74. (Reprinted in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, October 1934, Vol.5, no.10, p.764-773), 772.

<sup>75</sup> W.H.T. Dau, "Scripture on the Woman Question," *The Lutheran Witness*, February 7, 1898, vol.16, no.17, p.132. emphasis original.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis original.

<sup>77</sup> He lists Genesis 2:18,23 compared with 1 Cor 11:8,9; 1 Tim 2:13 and Gen. 3:16 compared with 1 Cor 11:3; Eph.5:23; 1 Cor 14:34; Eph 5:22,24, 1 Tim 2:11, 1 Peter 3:1,5; 1 Tim 2:12; Titus 2:5.

upon the woman's *sex*. The woman as such, not merely the mentally or physically inferior woman, shall be subject." Ability or training or intelligence do not change God's established order, according to Dau. This was the central issue within the discussion about woman suffrage. "There is, then, a line drawn, not by man's hand, but by God's over which a woman may not step without upsetting the order of God. Let reason dispute the wisdom of this order in particular instances, let pride revolt at the idea of subordination, faith will cheerfully bow also to this ordinance of God, not considering the commandments of God grievous when approached by a heart full of love."<sup>78</sup> The Word of God placed woman in this honored position, not to humiliate her or to degrade her sex or to limit her usefulness.<sup>79</sup> Women's gifts can and should be used to the fullest extent possible under the Word. We might wonder if a woman in 1898 viewed this as a "glamorous" life, but Dau points to the Lord's description:

Surely, Scripture has spread such a glamor of exquisite piety and fragrant devotion around woman's truest and noblest work, that of unselfish and self-forgetful ministering, as to almost cause her to forget her subordination, which the Creator has instituted from the beginning for the sake of order and discipline... Obedience is better than sacrifice. The modern woman, who proposes to serve where her service is neither required nor desired, and refuses to serve where her service is most loudly called for, is walking a hard road—hard enough, to cause all her well-wishers to look on weepingly.<sup>80</sup>

### ***Phase Two: The 1910s to 1930***

New developments in the movements of the suffragists prompted a greater response from the Lutheran Church, starting around 1910. States across the country were granting women more and more voting rights. Attitudes were changing regarding the traditional roles of women by the time the 1910s were under way. Franz Pieper shared his opinion on why attitudes were drifting in favor of woman suffrage: "People in our day are becoming more and more oblivious to this divine order, and this is for two reasons. In spite of its wide circulation the Bible exerts less influence on human society than formerly, and good common sense, in spite of all advances in technical science, is rapidly diminishing among men."<sup>81</sup> W.H.T. Dau sensed Satanic influence in the movement: "Just as [Satan] had caused a great calamity in the beginning by a woman whom

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 133. emphasis original.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>81</sup> Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 524.

he enticed, so he plainly intends again, by the feministic movement of our time, to inflict a great injury on the world. We can gather this from the effects of the emancipation of women which have become manifest so far.”<sup>82</sup>

The population of the United States grew from 63 million in 1890 to 106 million in 1920. It wasn't long before other layman's movements were happening across denominations in the US. Franz Pieper took time in 1913 to respond to what was known as the Laymen's Missionary Movement. The movement viewed the task of the Christian Church “not in the saving of sinners, but rather in the ethical transformation of the non-Christian world by proper educational training.”<sup>83</sup> Pieper gave a passing comment on woman's suffrage while discussing the role of women within a Christian congregation. He wrote, “Since woman suffrage in the State implies participation in the rule over men, it is contrary to the natural order which God has established to govern the relation between man and woman... and wherever this order is perverted, His punishments are sure to follow.”<sup>84</sup> This line of reasoning repeated things written roughly fifteen years earlier in the late 1890s. There is a line, drawn by God, and we dare not cross it in Pieper's judgment.

By the mid-1910s Theodore Graebner (1876-1950), a new member of the St. Louis Seminary faculty and a man who would prove to be an influential leader in the Missouri Synod, was taking up his pen in response to questions about woman suffrage. In *Der Lutheraner* of June 1915, Graebner displayed a thorough acquaintance with many of the arguments from the pro-suffrage party. Some asserted that by granting women the right to vote much evil would be expunged, since women “would cleanse politics” and give rise to a “moral awakening.” Whoever said things like this, Graebner noted, didn't understand evil. “Women are sinful humans, just like men.” The woman has a sphere of duty assigned to her by Scripture. Women could do the most good, “if they would devote their time and their interests more and more to the care of the sick, the aged, the children, and the insane.” Graebner stated,

One sees, there are also in other circles other than our own people who recognize, that women taking part in politics is against the order of creation [*Schoepferordnung*] which

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<sup>82</sup> Dau, *Woman Suffrage in the Church*, 7.

<sup>83</sup> Franz Pieper, *What is Christianity? And Other Essays*, translated by J.T. Mueller. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1933. “The Layman's Movement in the Light of God's Word” (paper read at convention of the Southern Illinois District, 1913), 100-101.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

has directed women to their role for all time. We cannot convince the world around us, that the entrance of woman into political life will have only adversity and new disadvantages in the aftermath, because it speaks against the purpose and vocation of woman. Experience shows, however, that also in this matter one cannot deviate from the order of nature [*Naturordnung*], as God has established it, without suffering the consequences.<sup>85</sup>

Graebner's use of the phrase "the order of creation" mirrors the terminology used previously by Lutheran teachers. God has established an order at creation and woman dare not violate it.<sup>86</sup> In a second article in the same edition of *Der Lutheraner*, Graebner concluded: "Where political suffrage is demanded and conceded for the purpose of the **emancipation** of women, to remove them from the authority of the man and submissiveness under God's Word, in that case such demand of the right to vote and granting of the same to women is to be thoroughly rejected."<sup>87</sup>

*The Lutheran Witness* published a poem called "Women's Rights."<sup>88</sup> It asked the question, "The rights of women, what are they?" and then outlined traditional roles for women as friends, comforters, nurturers, parents, homemakers, and those who teach the faith to their children. It didn't mention voting specifically but concluded,

Are these thy rights? Then use them well;  
Thy silent influence none can tell.  
If these are thine, why ask for more?  
Thou hast enough to answer for.

Lest we look askance at the Lutherans, there was a similar poem found in *The New York Times* three years earlier in 1912 which was more pointedly against woman suffrage. L. Case Russell

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<sup>85</sup> Theodore Graebner, "Zur kirchlichen Chronik: Als ein Argument für das Frauenstimmrecht," in *Der Lutheraner*, (June 8, 1915), 226.

<sup>86</sup> Contrary to the conclusions reached by Edward Schroeder, the term was not unknown in the Missouri Synod or her publications before the 1950s. Instead it was taken as a commonly understood Scriptural truth that man was created first in the order of Creation and woman came second (cf. 1 Tim 2:13). This order was considered immutable, again contrary to Schroeder's conclusions. This is clearly the sense in which August Graebner and others had been using the term at least since the 1890s. But like much terminology within the Church, it came into use more when the true doctrine was under attack. (cf. Edward H. Schroeder, "The Orders of Creation –Some Reflections on the History and Place of the Term in Systematic Theology," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, March 1972, vol.XLIII, no.3, p.165-178.)

<sup>87</sup> Theodore Graebner, "Zur kirchlichen Chronik: Allerdings nicht erst durch uebernahme des allgemeinen politischen Stimmrechts," June 8, 1915, vol. 50, no.9, p.227, emphasis original. (Full translation in Appendix 2)

<sup>88</sup> *The Lutheran Witness*, "Women's Rights," vol.34, No.11 (June 1, 1915), 174.

wrote the poem entitled “You Mustn’t Ask To Vote.”<sup>89</sup> It too outlines traditional female roles in bearing and rearing children, but makes it clear: “you mustn’t ask to vote” and “you are too frail to vote.” Verses three and four become more shocking:

[V.3] You may toil behind our counters, / In our factories you may slave,  
You are welcome in the sweatshop / From the cradle to the grave;  
If you err, altho’ a woman, / You may dangle by the throat,  
But our chivalry is outraged / If you soil your hands to vote.  
[V.4] Why not try to be contented / When no hardships we forbid?  
Realize your limitations— / At the best you’re but a rib.  
Tho’ the Constitution class you / In with fools and rogues of note,  
From the pedestal we give you, / Pray do not step down to vote.

The juxtaposition of these two poems illustrates how the Lutherans operated. In passing news blurbs and comments Lutherans could be guilty of a somewhat flippant sexism (by our standards) which was found also in secular authors of the day. Yet, they never denigrated woman as a creation of God. And when Synodical Conference Lutherans gave their full attention to the subject of woman suffrage, readers benefited from a balanced biblical appraisal of the movement in a more loving spirit compared to others of the day.

August Pieper also made a rarely seen comment about the women’s emancipation movement on the pages of the Wisconsin Synod’s *Quartalschrift*, a publication of the Wauwatosa Seminary faculty. Near the end of an influential essay, Prof. Pieper discussed the roles of men and women in view of his overarching question, “Are there legal regulations in the New Testament?” He described the lesser role of woman in the world, as he saw it: “The woman is not to be there as an equally important participant in the work of the world, but ... as a corresponding *help* beside the man. This order of creation no human being will change.”<sup>90</sup> Pieper saw the order of creation in jeopardy. The rebellion against the subordination and modest reserve laid out in God’s Word was “against both, law and gospel.” Pieper warned, “Through this rebellion not only the civil, but also the domestic and above all the moral relationships will be thrown into disorder. The church too under ordinary circumstances cannot without harm endure the equalization of the woman with the man in public activity.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> L. Case Russell, “You Mustn’t Ask To Vote.” *The New York Times*, (May, 8, 1912), 10.

<sup>90</sup> August Pieper, “Are There Legal Regulations in the New Testament?” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Curtis Jahn, ed. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997. Vol. 2, p.146, emphasis original. (Originally published in 1916.)

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

Franz Pieper did not directly address the issue of woman's suffrage in the first volume of his *Christian Dogmatics*, which was first published in German in 1917. Instead, he approached the role of women in a more general way. He praised the equality men and women share "in regard to the participation in the gifts of Christ." Yet, Scripture also teaches that woman was to occupy a subordinate position, even before the Fall into sin. "It is the plain teaching of Scripture that in relation to the man, the woman is in a position of subordination. Both the order of creation and the order established after the Fall assign her that position." Pieper quoted Martin Luther and Scripture to make his case: "God did not set up womankind to rule, neither in the Church nor in secular offices."<sup>92</sup> This is by no means an inferior position, but rather recognizes the inherent differences between men and women and the differences laid out Scripture.<sup>93</sup> Pieper wrote, "Scripture makes the home the sphere of the woman; it distinguishes sharply between the forbidden public and the permitted and commanded domestic activity of woman."<sup>94</sup> He rejected the notion that such a view was limited to the time and "oriental culture" of the first century, and that things are different in America. In fact, Pieper praised the role of women and their high calling to serve as the foundation for society: "Woman ought not be dragged from her place of honor into public life, for it is universally acknowledged that woman is the most influential teacher of the human race."<sup>95</sup> Pieper quoted Martin Luther who again praised the abilities of women in their vocation: "A woman with her little finger does better by a child than a man with both his fists."<sup>96</sup> It should also be noted that Martin Luther did say many things which were demeaning and chauvinistic by today's standards. Writers in the Synodical Conference could quote some of Luther's harsher assessments favorably.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics Volume I*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950).

<sup>93</sup> He points to 1 Cor 14:35, 1 Tim 2:12, 1 Tim 5:14 and Titus 2:3, as the Bible basis for his claims.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 525.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 526.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted *Ibid.*, 525.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. W.H.T. Dau *Woman Suffrage in the Church*, Concordia Publishing House Print, [n.d.], p.8 where Luther is quoted favorably when he calls Eve, "a simpleton, easily led astray" by Satan. For a fuller discussion of Martin Luther's views on woman, cf. John A. Maxfield, ed. *Feminism and the Church, Papers presented at the Congress on the Lutheran Confessions*. St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 2003. The essay, "Martin Luther on the Vocation(s) of Women," states, "...viewed from a modern perspective, Luther expressed both rather negative ideas about women and things that clearly upheld the dignity of women." For Luther, "Marriage is the chief calling of Christian men and women because precisely through procreation human beings fulfill their calling as caretakers of God's world... The

By 1919, on the cusp of the passage of a national suffrage amendment, *The Lutheran Witness* finally chimed in. Louis Sieck was a Missouri Synod pastor who later became president of Concordia St. Louis. A three-part series of articles appeared in *The Lutheran Witness*, addressing woman's place in the home, in the church, and in the state. In this three-fold division, Sieck followed a breakdown commonly used by Lutherans going back to the Middle Ages and used extensively by Martin Luther himself. (Sieck's use of this division did create difficulties in approaching the subject at hand, especially in view of changing economic realities which were taking men and women out of the home to earn a living. Some have mischaracterized Sieck's argumentation here; Mary Todd states that Louis Sieck "argued for a limitation of woman's role based on tradition, not scripture."<sup>98</sup>) The three installments were originally a paper which had been read to the pastors' and teachers' conference of St. Louis and was reprinted by resolution of the conference. Sieck was not interested in debating the history or the future of the movement. The question he sought to answer was: "What is the attitude which God's Word directs us to take towards this movement?"

Sieck repeated some of the familiar arguments, namely that woman's "sphere is the home, and God has assigned her place as well as her mode of life to her there." To remove her from this sphere would be to "unsex her." What was new and refreshing was that Sieck more clearly articulated the principles of God's Word which should guide the discussion. Within the home the relationship between husband and wife is that of head and helper. This relationship finds its model and motivation in the salvific relationship between Jesus Christ and his Bride, the Church. The principle of "subjection" is not a burden but sums up woman's responsibilities and privileges. "We understand that subjection does not mean servitude or slavery, no more than the husband's being the head of the wife means the permission or license to play tyrant."<sup>99</sup> For those

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woman's role as mother is viewed in the broadest terms: she not only gives birth, nurses, and cares for her babies but also manages the household, a vocation that bore considerable authority over both female and male servants. Katherine Luther is a model of precisely this domestic capability, for which reason, no doubt, her husband Martin often affectionately referred to her as 'lord Kate.'" (12-13, emphasis mine)

<sup>98</sup> Mary Todd, *Authority Vested*, 145. Todd goes on, "Such reliance on a vision of the recapture and restoration of a glorified past is a means by which fundamentalists not only cope with the stresses of change, but upon which they base their opposition to change." (146)

<sup>99</sup> Louis J. Sieck, "Attitude Lutherans Should Take Towards Woman Suffrage" *The Lutheran Witness*, (May 13, 1919), 150.

keeping track, Sieck also notes where this relationship is rooted: “St. Paul finds the foundation of this relation in the very order of creation.”<sup>100</sup>

After he discussed her subordination in the church (more on that below), he then addressed her situation in the state: “Here the Bible gives us no direct statements.” But that didn’t mean the Bible has nothing to say on the subject. God has given women the “one divine calling of marriage and motherhood” and so therefore, we should be wary of anything that takes her out of this sphere. In fact, Sieck concluded, “Neither God nor nature ever intended her for politics. And whatever aims to take woman out of her proper sphere and place her on the same level with man is a blow at the home upon which the welfare of Church and State rests.”<sup>101</sup>

But what about those states in which women already have the ability to vote? Sieck wrote, “Since it is something which God neither forbids nor commands, it is a Christian woman’s liberty to vote or not to vote.”<sup>102</sup> This was the salient point of the article—a clear answer about whether it is sinful to cast a ballot or not. Yet, according to Sieck, the danger remained that if a Christian woman becomes too wrapped up in politics or the study of political questions, she may reach the point of “neglecting her home; for all such necessary time taken from the household will be injurious to the future generation by robbing it of its natural right, a mother’s care.” While Sieck had stated that woman suffrage was an adiaphoron, he clearly held an adverse attitude toward it. The gains of the suffragists were producing enough evil to make the cause clearly dangerous for a Christian. Sieck’s rationale, however, was more culturally conditioned than he may have realized. He wrote, “Women are fast becoming masculinized in their dress and habits of speech, and surely the world must be worse for any influence that tends to make masculine women, as well as for any that tends to make effeminate men. Many women are already loose in their language, and others are more and more abandoning those delicate charms of manner which constitute woman’s principal defense against attacks upon her virtue and refinement.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Louis J. Sieck, “Attitude Lutherans Should Take Towards Woman Suffrage” *The Lutheran Witness*, (June 19, 1919), 179.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.



Sieck quoted one of the prominent leaders of the suffrage movement in terms that sound very familiar in 21<sup>st</sup> century America: this feminist leader pictures that the “home of the future is, a father and mother going off to their work and returning at night to find the house cared for by experts, while the children have spent an improving day at the communal nursery.” Sieck concludes, “It is self-evident that a Christian will not soil himself or herself by joining such company, but will vigorously oppose any and every organization in which such sentiments are tolerated.” He drew on this cycle of history which is bound to repeat itself, unless God mercifully grants men and women, who are content with what God has made them: “Make our women the equal of our men, reduce marriage to a civil contract between coequal partners for the supposed convenience and happiness of the parties, and you cause the history of Imperial Rome to repeat itself in this country.” If women were content to raise, educate and train men, they would really be “queens of the world in their own sphere.”<sup>104</sup> Sieck never called for the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to be voted down. He never accused women voters in the State of sinful behavior. And even as he addressed various arguments made by suffragist leaders, he showed a patient, thoughtful love which was seldom found in the heated writings of secular authors.

A few weeks before the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in Tennessee in 1920, the Wisconsin Synod’s *Gemeinde-Blatt* (“church newspaper”) reproduced what another newspaper had to say about “women’s rights.” After laying out a thorough list of rights which a woman has on the basis of Scripture (the right to pray, the right to serve those in need, the right to rear your children, the right to read Scripture, etc.), the author asks the question, “Are you conscious of these rights?”<sup>105</sup> The article approaches the question of the day, not really from the perspective of “rights” but in a way more akin to the Bible’s perspective, i.e. describing duties which the Lord himself places upon woman (and man for that matter!).

After the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, I think it is safe to say the general attitude of Synodical Conference Lutherans was a mix of apathy and anxiety. The student newspaper of Northwestern College, *The Black and Red*, gave the perspective which future pastors held. The milestone was observed as follows in Watertown, Wisconsin: “Very little excitement was manifest” and “the world still moves in its course.” Nothing had changed, and according to the

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ev.Luth. Gemeinde-Blatt*, “Frauenrechte,” vol.55, no.16 (August 1, 1920), 248.

student editor, Edwin Jaster, “no tangible results are prevalent,” except for a few parades in the bigger cities and “rumors of clubs being organized for women voters.”<sup>106</sup> Jaster noted that the main issue was to observe “the mandate of God which subordinated woman to man... we know from history that to disregard the laws of God foretells the ruin of a nation.” He was hopeful that women will take seriously their new right: “The women of German extraction especially have been indifferent to the right of voting, and they especially should feel the necessity of constant voting. They must not become lax in their interest or remain indifferent to the great problem of ruling our nation.”<sup>107</sup>

W.H.T. Dau was still lamenting the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1924. In a short news story, he mentioned a certain Ida Tarbell who had traversed the country and found that “woman suffrage, heralded as a new panacea, has not, as was expected, affected the political life of the nation during four years of trial....The experiment is still an experiment.” We didn’t know any more about a woman’s ability when it comes to administering the affairs of the nation, according to Dau, but what we did still know is how God regards this all: “Neither the Eighteenth [prohibition] nor the Nineteenth Amendment has the backing of the Creator.”<sup>108</sup> Franz Pieper also was not convinced that woman entering the public sphere was such a good idea, even after the passage. Pieper noted that the inauguration of a female governor in the state of Texas was firm evidence “that even before its end the world has completely lost all common sense.”<sup>109</sup>

Theodore Graebner provides a nice conclusion to this section. Graebner oversaw the publication of snippets he had originally written for the Missouri Synod’s *Homiletic Magazine* or the *Lutheran Witness* from 1920-1930. The book was entitled *Pastor and People: Letters to a Young Preacher*.<sup>110</sup> In one section there was question about whether a Christian woman could

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<sup>106</sup> Edwin A. Jaster. “The Suffrage Amendment” in *The Black and Red*, Northwestern College: Watertown, WI. vol. 24, no. 4 (September 1920), 130.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>108</sup> W.H.T. Dau, *Theological Monthly*, vol.4, No.11 (November 1924), 22.

<sup>109</sup> Franz Pieper, “*Kirchliche-Zeitgeschichtliches: Texas hat einen weiblichen Gouverneur*,” *Lehre und Wehre*, vol.71 (February 1925), 61. Cited in Mark Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 42.

<sup>110</sup> Theodore Graebner, *Pastor and People: Letters to a Young Preacher* (St. Louis: CPH 1932). Graebner explained in the preface: These are the “chips from an editorial workshop.” Graebner addressed the changing situations of life in the United States and the questions posed to him by laypeople and church workers. “Doctrinally they represent

vote in secular elections: “The thing is done, women now have the right. ... Now let them vote.”<sup>111</sup> He based his counsel on an interesting distinction between women voting and a woman consumed with political activity. “Her relation to her husband – a helper, who shall acknowledge him as head. Her sphere – the home, the family. Political activity takes her out of both. The use of the ballot does not.” He also pointed out that some pastors imagine that a woman voting in an election “exercises a kind of lordship over the man” and thus “she is committing a moral wrong.” Yet, the whole argument seemed to him “to be far-fetched.” He stated, “I can find nothing here [1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 2] that will forbid a woman to vote at an election.” Graebner treated the issue in striking, practical terms. He said, “There are many sins against which we must warn. Let us not make more sins than there are. Above all, let us not leave the consciences in doubt unless it is a matter in which we are ready to excommunicate those who act according to a conviction which we possibly cannot share. Either institute proceedings of church discipline or leave the matter alone. And I would certainly not say “Thou shalt not” unless I can quote Scripture.” But now that women have the vote “the unrighteous means and purposes involved in the Feminist movement no longer enter into the equation.”<sup>112</sup> They have the right. Now let them vote.

### **Part 5: Woman Suffrage in the Church and Synodical Conference Lutherans**

The passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment did not bring an end to debate about the role of woman in society, much less in the Lutheran Church. If anything, the discussion and debate intensified as woman became more active in secular society. John T. Mueller (1885-1967) noted, “The question of woman suffrage in sphere of politics has given rise to new problems in the Church.”<sup>113</sup> Yet, despite the questions and problems which arose, the same biblical principles applied in the home, in society, and in the church. My research found unanimity on this point.

During the 1890s, the issue of women subverting the principles of Scripture (headship-helper and subordination as outlined above) in Lutheran congregations was almost non-existent.

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the stand of our Lutheran Confessions. In their practical application of Scripture they do not claim to offer anything startlingly novel. Where they touch on matters undecided in the Scriptures, the opinions in these letters, and the advice given, reflect the evangelical stand of the fathers of our Synod.” (iv)

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>113</sup> John T. Mueller, “Are 1 Cor. 11:3-16 and 1 Cor. 14:33-40 Parallel Ordinances?” *Theological Monthly* vol. 3, no. 8-9 (August-September 1923), 244.

C.F.W. Walther (1811-1887) clearly taught in his pastoral theology textbook and in his description of a well-ordered congregation that men were to take the lead in voting in the church. He wrote, “For active participation in speaking, deliberating, resolving, and voting in such congregational meetings only the adult male members of the congregation are to have the right; women and teenagers are to be excluded.”<sup>114</sup> Other authors in synodical publications regularly praised women in the church for their rights as children of God: the right to pray, to read their Bibles and receive the Sacrament, to train their children in the instruction of the Lord.<sup>115</sup> They enjoyed the full rights of God’s children and yet their calling and spheres of duty were different. Some from other churches had argued that “women are unsafe spiritual advisers.” But according to more than one Seminary professor, this “is not the Scriptural reason why women ought not fill public offices in the Church. Scripture forbids women to ‘speak in the churches’ *because they are women*, not because they are always and necessarily inferior to men in mental capacity.”<sup>116</sup>

In 1895, while addressing the role of a woman in a Christian congregation, Professor George Stoeckhardt described how the subordination principle might be displayed. In his comments on 1 Corinthians 14:34, he wrote how women should be silent in the public assembly in the presence of men. “The opinion is not as if the church affairs were none of the concern of younger Christians and Christian women. It is dealing with who should talk, advise, vote and decide.” He doesn’t prohibit women from attending the congregational meetings or assemblies where decisions are made. This is an interesting opinion given the fact that these were the days when men and women sat on different sides of the church and men would receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion first. Stoeckhardt simply states, “The men express their opinions and make a decision, while the younger members and women listen and remain silent and silently agree

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<sup>114</sup> Walther, C.F.W. trans. by J.T. Mueller. *The Form of a Christian Congregation*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 47. Walther cited 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 in support of his conclusion. Cf. also C.F.W. Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology*. ed. by David W. Loy; trans. by Christian Tiews. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 438 for identical treatment of the conclusion.

<sup>115</sup> See August Graebner, “*Frauenrechte*,” in *Der Lutheraner* vol. 50, no.9 (April 24, 1894), 71-72.

<sup>116</sup> George Luecke, “Church News & Comment: Somebody recently objected,” *The Lutheran Witness*, March 7, 1898, vol. 16, no. 19, p.150, emphasis original. Similar thoughts were expressed by W.H.T. Dau, “Scripture on the Woman Question,” *The Lutheran Witness* vol.16, no.17 (February 7, 1898), 132-133.

with what is right.”<sup>117</sup> This was one way to faithfully uphold the subordination principle delineated in Scripture.

The Finnish Lutheran Suomi Synod allowed woman suffrage in their congregations and woman delegates in their church-wide assembly of 1908. Ludwig Fuerbringer (1864-1947), editor of *Der Lutheraner* and professor at Concordia St. Louis, labeled this “an unlutheran and unbiblical innovation.” To his knowledge this was the first Lutheran group in the country to do such a thing, and it certainly did not agree with the apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 14:34f and 1 Timothy 2:11f.<sup>118</sup>

Louis Sieck’s article on the Lutheran attitude toward woman suffrage (referenced above) contained a section specifically examining woman’s role in the church. She was to be praised and given the high position Scripture affords her, but “she is not granted suffrage nor leadership in the congregation and is barred from the public ministry.” He then explained how Lutherans embraced the gifts of women, “Our Church follows apostolic practise [sic] when it uses women as teachers of children, grants them the right to express their opinion, hears them when they wish to voice their wishes or judgments in congregational matters, but reserves the right of suffrage and the public ministry to men.”<sup>119</sup> Theodore Graebner answered a question about “Woman’s Place in the Congregation” and stated that even though he does not think women should take part in the discussions of a voters’ meeting or vote, yet exceptional cases of appropriate service could arise: “Where there are too few men to conduct the business of a congregation, one would be compelled by necessity to give the women some right in the administration.”<sup>120</sup>

In 1916 the faculty of Concordia St. Louis was asked to respond to a question about voting, which arose in a congregation of the Lutheran free church of Germany.<sup>121</sup> A pastor and

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<sup>117</sup> George Stoeckhardt, “Von Gemeindeversammlungen.” *Der Lutheraner*, vol. 52 (June 18, 1895), 103.

<sup>118</sup> Ludwig Fuerbringer, “Eine unlutherische und unbiblische Neuerung,” *Der Lutheraner* (Sept 8, 1908), 287. In the late 1950s representatives of the National Evangelical Lutheran Church (Finnish Lutherans) wanted to join the Missouri Synod, and they were met with cordial overtures. Representatives of the two churches started meeting “in an attempt to somehow reconcile the difference between the two synods’ practices” (see Mary Todd, *Authority Vested*, 163-164).

<sup>119</sup> Sieck, 162.

<sup>120</sup> Theodore Graebner, *Pastor and People: Letters to a Young Preacher* (St. Louis: CPH 1932), 125.

<sup>121</sup> For some unknown reason the pamphlet was not translated and distributed in English until a few years later, as the preface indicates. Mary Todd lists the date of publication as 1923 but gives no supporting evidence for this determination.

two laymen from his congregation disagreed sharply on the question of woman suffrage in the church. Both parties were united in their adherence to God's Word and even to the fact that Scripture forbids women from speaking in the church. The pastor pointed out that since Scripture forbids women to speak in the church and since voting is a type of speech, it must necessarily be forbidden to women. The two laymen, however, objected. They said that there is no explicit command saying "Thou shalt not vote," but merely the injunction against women speaking in the church. In the faculty response, penned by Dau and published a few years later, the wise warning sounded forth, "When explaining Scripture, we must be careful not to form a purely mechanical understanding of the words of Scripture and must not insist on mere literalness."<sup>122</sup> If that were the case, women wouldn't be able to speak or sing in church at all! "Women are forbidden to speak only in a certain connection, namely, in so far as their speaking is not compatible with their subjection to men."<sup>123</sup> The principle of God's Word is the principle of subordination of woman to man. "Accordingly, it is of no moment whether the women who speak or teach in the church are married or unmarried. For in both passages [1 Cor 14 & 1 Tim 2] in which Scripture forbids the speaking of women it has added a reason that applies to the female sex as such, not only to the married women."<sup>124</sup> Dau went on to explain the Scriptural foundation: "Strict attention must be paid to this two-fold ground for the prohibition of woman's speaking in the church: First, it is contrary to the original order adopted by God at the creation of man; secondly, it is contrary also to the positive law laid down for the first woman."<sup>125</sup> He made it evident that the Fall into sin did not change God's original order or impose new burdens upon Eve. "Accordingly, this is the plain teaching of Holy Scripture, that the woman who wants to live sincerely in accordance with the will of God must not do anything by which she ceases to be subject to man."<sup>126</sup>

The question then arose, Is voting an act in which a woman obtains the rule over a man? "She does not merely make a statement by which she declares her opinion. That is never

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<sup>122</sup> W.H.T. Dau, *Woman Suffrage in the Church*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House Tract, [n.d.]), 4.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

forbidden; it may even become a woman's duty to do so, namely, when a confession of divine truth is demanded." A vote is more than a wish or expressing an opinion. "In all the world the casting of a vote is regarded as an act of sovereignty, by which some one [sic] declares his will and proposes to realize his will."<sup>127</sup> But what if the things the men vote for are ungodly or wrong? What recourse does a woman have? Dau stated, "God knew very well that the men are just as little immune from error and infallible as the women; still He accorded the overlordship to men. If the women want to assert their right will over the wrong will of men, they must choose a different way, by which God's Word is not rendered void."<sup>128</sup>

The two laymen in this case of casuistry also argued that a woman's contributions to the church entitled her to say how the money is spent. Giving money to the church or supporting a local congregation did not give the right of suffrage, according to Dau. Otherwise, the rich would get two votes, the poor member no votes, and money would be king in the congregation. Dau did allow women the right to veto in the calling of a pastor, since the right to call a minister belongs to the whole church and if someone has an objection when a candidate does not fulfill the qualities for a pastor laid out in Scripture, any person in the congregation may issue the veto. But Dau wrote, this is not a vote per se. "Even though the woman cannot speak or vote in the congregation at the election of a pastor, because of the order which God has made, she has nevertheless the right of veto: she can make known to the congregation that she will not accept a certain person as her pastor, and the congregation is compelled to heed her protest."<sup>129</sup>

The men will display the love of Christ in their leadership of the congregation. "The sovereignty of the man over the woman does not mean that in such matters as have not been decided by God's Word the men may do as they please, without regard for anybody... The very authority of sovereignty which the men possess lays upon them a great responsibility over against the woman. They dare not use their sovereignty like tyrants, but should place their great right at the service of the woman and do what is meet for all and may be of benefit to all. The

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. Theodore Graebner reaffirmed this contention and quoted Dau in his book *Pastor and People*, 125.

better they know how to do this, the less desire for woman suffrage will be voiced among them.”<sup>130</sup> This was how the children of light may show the glory of their Father.

Professor Dau also wrote that this case was not a judgment regarding woman suffrage in the State. The state may follow “the natural order of creation”<sup>131</sup> or it may find female suffrage will collapse and come to nothing. The faculty would not “categorically condemn” a conscientious Christian woman who voted in the State. “However, something that is a right in the State and in the world is not for that reason a right also in the Church.” There was no doubt in the faculty’s mind that “the demand to accord suffrage to the women in the congregation is caused by the spirit of the times and the present movement throughout the world in favor of woman suffrage. If it were not for these causes, it is likely that this question would not have arisen in our congregations.”<sup>132</sup>

Another aspect to this cause of casuistry was that the matter of woman suffrage threatened the union of two Lutheran Free Church bodies in Germany. Dau acknowledged that the matter is not an article of faith upon which the church stands or falls, but it cannot simply be ignored. When the Word of God has led someone to the conviction that woman suffrage is Biblically wrong, he cannot simply accept it for the sake of smooth sailing. He wrote, “For when a person begins to evade the authority of the Word of God in questions pertaining to faith and life, there is nothing to keep him from continuing this practise [sic] and emancipating himself more and more from Scripture. He has sacrificed the principle of the authority of Scripture and, instead, permits reasons of expediency and opportunist reflections to determine all his actions.”<sup>133</sup> Yet, Dau was still hopeful that a union could be reached and he did not give a clear answer about how divisive the issue of woman suffrage should be. Near the end of the *Gutachten*, he wrote, “Accordingly, while urging you to hold fast your Scriptural conviction and your testimony, we would with the greatest earnestness counsel you to think of ways and means for establishing church-fellowship among you spite of the difference in this practical question which still exists among you...The Word of God can also bring it about through your calm, kind,

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.



and patient testimony that the present opposition to your position on woman suffrage on the side of your opponents will subside and the latter come over to your side.”<sup>134</sup>

Paul Lindemann (1882-1938) provided an insightful writing on the topic of woman suffrage in the church. Lindemann was a pastor in the English District of the Missouri Synod and a founding member of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau. At the time Lindemann believed, “All in all the Lutheran Church was hiding its light under a bushel.”<sup>135</sup> His conference paper, prepared on the topic of “women in the church,” brought the light of God’s Word to the historic practice of the Missouri Synod and explained it in a winsome manner. His main points were: “Christians all agree: 1. That women shall be subject to men. 2. That there is no express Bible-passage which denies woman a vote; 3. That wherever the voting of woman is a stepping out of her subordinate position, it is contrary to Scripture. Only this question may be variously judged and interpreted, whether the voting of woman in certain cases and under certain conditions is a departure from the station which God has assigned her.”<sup>136</sup>

Lindemann addressed what he believed to be the chief question: are the commands of St. Paul binding upon the women of today, namely that they must remain silent in the churches (1 Cor 14; 1 Tim 2)? If silence is demanded, then why not also covering the head (cf. 1 Cor 11)? The key to understanding the Bible’s teaching about male and female roles was to understand the difference between *customs*, which reflect Biblical principles and can change, and *principles*, which are divinely commanded and cannot change.<sup>137</sup> Veiling of the woman’s head was a custom which acknowledged a man’s headship (i.e. the principle). Some were tempted to turn “silence” in the churches into a culture or time-specific custom. Lindemann wrote, “But how about the “silence” feature? Was that, too, merely a custom? As far as the absolute silence in the presence of men in public meetings is concerned, we may answer with a qualified “yes.” ... Woman’s silence was to give token of her modest and retiring nature of her acceptance of her appointed relation to man.”<sup>138</sup> The silence of women was commanded by the apostle to reflect

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>135</sup> Richard O. Johnson, *Changing World, Changeless Christ: The American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1914-2014*. (Dehli, NY: ALPB Books, 2018), 7.

<sup>136</sup> Paul Lindemann, “The Woman in the Church.” *Theological Quarterly* vol.24 (1920), 121.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108.

the principle of a man's headship and woman's acceptance of that principle. Lindemann stressed the need to distinguish between custom (good and virtuous practices) and principle (binding on all people for all times). "The subjection of woman is a Biblical principle."<sup>139</sup> In fact, he stated:

The subordinate position has a wider scope than the mere marital relationship... The subordinate position which woman is to take is a general command, binding upon all women in the world. In meetings of Christians, in political meetings, in general social intercourse with men, the woman must never forget that she is a woman and must not usurp the position of man. We might here bring forward the well-worn statement of the proper sphere of woman as a home-maker and home-builder, the great influence she wields quietly and silently in Church and State, or the fact that she is really the chief pillar of society, etc.; but the arguments are too well known to need further expatiation.<sup>140</sup>

Had things changed so much by 1920 that a woman no longer needed to remain "silent in the churches"? Lindemann conceded: "All around, times and conditions have changed regarding woman. Some States have granted her equal suffrage with men. She goes to the polls and casts her ballot." In light of this understanding, Lindemann imagined still more arguments: "Why not let down the bars in the administrative affairs of the church? Why not permit her to vote with the men on affairs of the church? Why not let her hold office or represent the church at synodical conventions? Some churches are ordaining women to the ministry and giving them pastorates. We do not want to go so far, but grant us at least a voice in the church-affairs in which we are so vitally interested,— perhaps more than most of the men... Why, then, this old-fashioned, Oriental discrimination against our sex? No taxation without representation! Give us the vote — *Stimmrecht!*"<sup>141</sup> This was his writing as devil's advocate in entertaining fashion.

Lindemann did confess that the arguments in favor of increasing a woman's role within the church sounded "just and plausible enough." He even stated, "There are congregations that have granted her equal rights with men in the administration of congregational affairs," although he did not indicate whether these were Synodical Conference congregations. The question Lutherans must ask themselves should be: is this right and permitted by God's Word? It isn't enough to say: "We've always done this way; we don't want to create any novelties!"<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-118.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-112.

<sup>142</sup> Or as Lindemann had it in his paper: "*Es ist bei uns immer so gewesen; wir wollen keine Neuerung schaffen.*"

The question of voting, especially in the church, was on everyone's minds: "We must admit that there is no Bible-passage that forbids women to vote. To vote to express one's opinion in oral or written form, to lay a ballot into the box or hat, is not expressly denied women. Such an action does become sinful when thereby woman desires to emerge out of her subordinate position and with the men desires to participate in the actual church-government."<sup>143</sup> Lindemann did describe instances when women might be asked to give their opinion about something and everyone within the church might "vote" in a sort of straw poll. There might be rare instances "where it would not conflict with the divinely appointed relationship of woman to man."<sup>144</sup>

The Church could operate in ways that acknowledge the gifts and abilities of women, according to Lindemann. Moreover, we would want to find ways to include them in the building of the Lord's kingdom. "Our women are a force in the church over which we ought not to ride rough-shod. But this principle must be maintained, that also in congregational affairs man is the head, the ruler, and woman the helpmeet. We ask her opinion. We value it. It may determine our action."<sup>145</sup>

Yet, Lindemann ended with a little "levity": "We tremble to think of a voters' meeting in which both sexes are represented. It is sometimes enough to keep peace in the family of the church council composed only of men. Imagine a mixed council. You cannot. It staggers imagination. Imagine women deacons,<sup>146</sup> or rather deaconesses, take up the collection. What an opportunity to display the dressmaker's art or the latest concoction in the millinery line! But let's stop. The question is not one for levity."<sup>147</sup> Thankfully, the Lutheran Church of his day did not see such spectacle from the ladies. Lindeman concluded: "We are happy to see that the women in the Lutheran Church have not yet been permeated to any great extent with the general modern

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 119. See also John Brug, "Your Question, Please: A woman's 'right' to vote," in *Forward/Northwestern Lutheran*, (November 2000), 32. We like to clamor for our "rights" as Americans. But Brug clarifies, "There is no biblical basis for claiming that such actions and participation are a God-given right. We would approach the question not from the point of view of right, but of how to best fulfill our duty to uphold the biblical principles." Brug concluded, "The principle is not 'don't vote.' The principle is 'don't exercise authority over men.'"

<sup>145</sup> Lindemann, 120.

<sup>146</sup> Many old German congregations called the church council members "deacons" and these men had the responsibility of gathering the offering during each divine service.

<sup>147</sup> Lindemann, 121.

spirit of female restlessness. They have, as true daughters of the Lord, always proved amenable to the instruction of the Word, and will in the future, no doubt, abide willingly by its precepts. We owe them much also in our church-work. Let us with them, in the light of the Word, with love and consideration, continue to do the Lord's work with singleness of heart."<sup>148</sup>

John T. Mueller, professor at Concordia St. Louis from 1920 to 1964, observed how many churches of his day were responding to the new rights woman enjoyed in the state. Questions naturally were being asked. Do women get the same rights as men, namely, to preach and vote within the church? "Most churches have answered this question in the affirmative. Such churches as have denied woman these rights are comparatively few. Even the Lutheran churches have not followed a uniform practise [sic] in this matter, although conservative Lutheranism, on the basis of Paul's injunctions in 1 Cor. 14 and 1 Tim. 2, has stoutly denied to woman in the Church equal rights with man. It has maintained that the injunctions of Paul in theses passages are final, pertaining to all Christian churches for all time. Woman is neither to teach nor to usurp authority over man."<sup>149</sup> Since he was part of the conservative Lutheran Church, Mueller did not see a need to deal exhaustively with the question of women's rights: "That question, according to the writer's view, has been definitely settled."<sup>150</sup> The question, rather, was how to reconcile the apostles' commands in 1 Corinthians 11 that women cover their heads and the commands in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 that women be silent, do not teach, and do not usurp authority over men. Mueller practiced good Lutheran hermeneutics, letting Scripture interpret Scripture. Some reasoned that because women don't have to cover their heads, they also don't have to be silent, and are able to teach and assume authority over men. Mueller clarified 1 Corinthians 11, "The apostle urges the custom [of a woman veiling her head] very strongly... and by no word does he indicate that the custom of veiling should be observed by all Christians for all time. Not so much the custom as rather what the custom indicates, namely, the subordination of woman, is the point which he wishes to stress."<sup>151</sup> The head covering was useful as a sign of the underlying

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> John T. Mueller, "Are 1 Cor. 11:3-16 and 1 Cor. 14:33-40 Parallel Ordinances?" *Theological Monthly* vol. 3, no. 8-9 (August-September 1923), 244.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

principle. But Paul's commands in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 dealt more directly and permanently with the principle,

On the other hand, however, woman, when speaking in the congregation, not only revolts against the clear command of God, but also usurps authority over man, subverts the divine rule of order, and entails upon the Church the perils of false doctrine and general disorder and confusion, through her amenability to fraud and deception. It is for these reasons that Paul forbids women to speak in the churches -- an injunction to remain in force at all times.<sup>152</sup>

Part of Mueller's reasoning here was that "woman was deceived" (1 Tim 2:14) and therefore, she was more susceptible to false doctrine and confusion. That seemed to be part of the thinking of the day among some. Mueller did include many situations in which a woman may speak, teach, and voice her opinion in the Church. She was to do these things, "...only in such a way that the injunction of Paul be not violated: 'I suffer not a woman to *teach* nor to *usurp authority over the man*.'" <sup>153</sup> A woman was not absolutely prohibited from teaching or speaking, since there are clear passages of Scripture which encourage women to teach other women and children. The issue has always been the honoring of the subordination principle: "In no case has conservative Lutheranism permitted her to teach and speak in the assembly when this would militate against the rightful authority which man holds over woman... So much must be clear to every one [sic] who approaches the subject without bias. What Paul is intent on maintaining in the churches is the authority of man established by God, and the preservation of God's pure Word."<sup>154</sup> Other Lutheran groups may have given ground to the liberalism spreading through American churches in the 1920s,<sup>155</sup> but the Synodical Conference stood clearly on God's Word.

By 1930 the question of the Christian woman and her place in the church continued to be a burning question. Paul Kretzmann (1883-1965), author of a popular commentary on Scripture, reaffirmed "God's definite and unshakeable order" that woman "was not to be subordinate in an absolute sense. She was to be at [man's] side, in a subsidiary position, yet more in the nature

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 248-249. Emphasis original.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 248-249.

<sup>155</sup> For example, the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy had begun in the Presbyterian Church in 1922 and soon touched every denomination in the country.

of an auxiliary.”<sup>156</sup> Based on 1 Timothy 2:12, it was clear to Kretzmann that God has assigned woman the position of “subjection” in which she yields headship to the man. Therefore, “God has placed the business of the Church in the hands of men, and therefore any and every attempt of a woman publicly to influence these affairs is a usurpation of rights which cannot be squared with God’s plain command and prohibition.”<sup>157</sup> Woman enjoyed a variety of opportunities to serve and use the gifts God had given her in her chief function and glory as wife and mother.<sup>158</sup>

### *Dissenting Opinions*

My research revealed only three instances within the Synodical Conference where the traditional judgment prohibiting women voting in the Church was challenged or seemed to be at variance. In 1920 one congregation in the Wisconsin Synod from the Pacific Northwest district reported to the Synod Convention: “We have Woman Suffrage. Our committee list is our membership list.” The entire district at the time consisted of 12 stations, 7 pastors, and 503 communicants. No further information is given about the specific congregation or about whether the matter was ever addressed.<sup>159</sup>

The second dissenting opinion came in written form. There was a 1921 English District essay that was not accepted. The essay and its surrounding circumstances seem to indicate alternate beliefs about woman suffrage in society and its implications in the church. Alan Graebner mentioned in an endnote: “The only clear sign of impending dissent I have located through the early thirties came, predictably, in the English District. In 1921, an essay by Pastor C.C. Morhart of Cleveland, “Woman Suffrage and Its Implied Privilege of Preaching, Teaching, and Holding Office in the Church,” was not accepted by the convention, but “because of its particular difficulties was referred back to the essayist.”” The official proceedings did not even mention the subject of the essay, nor did they reprint it as was the custom.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Paul E. Kretzmann, “The Position of the Christian Woman, Especially as Worker in the Church,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* vol.1, no. 5 (May 1930), 352.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>159</sup> Edward C. Fredrich, *Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee: NPH, 2000), 133.

<sup>160</sup> Alan Graebner, *Uncertain Saints*, endnote 55, p. 239-240.

Lastly, *The Northwestern Lutheran* in 1921 printed a report which highlighted the activities of a Wisconsin Synod delegate conference (pastors and laymen) held in Potsdam, Minnesota. According the report, a certain Rev. Baumann gave a “discourse” on the topic of “Woman’s Suffrage in our Congregations.” He discussed the various passages often quoted against woman’s suffrage and indicated that these were “written by the holy writer on account of prevailing customs... and that today we are not in conscience bound to those rules, as in our time customs have changed.” The speaker defended his case “against all protests of fear” regarding the damage Woman Suffrage might do in congregations. He stated, “If the weaker sex should come to man in the congregation in the Christian spirit and ask to be permitted to vote as a co-worker in the Kingdom of God, then we are by no means acting against God’s will, if we grant her this permission. However, should our Christian sister demand the right to vote in a domineering spirit, then we are to work against that spirit.”<sup>161</sup> This opinion from Rev. Baumann, while addressing the spirit of submissiveness laid out in Scripture, does seem to be an aberration.

### **Conclusion: Quo Vadis?**

The Merriam Wester Dictionary defines “sexism” as “1. prejudice or discrimination based on sex, *especially*: discrimination against women or 2. behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex.” Many people would probably accuse these Synodical Conference Lutherans of sexism. They were seeking, however, to outline what God’s Word says about the roles of men and women, a distinction based on sex. For them, and for us, the Word of God is the source and norm of all faith and life. The hornet’s nest is real, and this is a tough topic. We may yet get stung when dealing with such an important issue.

As we have seen, the Lutherans were somewhat shocked that they had to address the question of woman suffrage in society and then in the church. The traditional roles for men and women in a Lutheran home and congregation were generally understood and accepted. Around the 1890s when societal movements brought women’s issues to the forefront, Lutherans were slow to address the topic. They were flippant in some ways, condescending in others. However, a clear adherence to the biblical principles of headship for man and subordination for woman resounded from the Synodical Conference.

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<sup>161</sup> E.S.H. “Red Wing Delegate Conference,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* vol.8, no.23 (Nov 8, 1921), 365-366.

As the world continued to change drastically into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the churches filled with German immigrants were changing too. Traditional ways of viewing life, such as the division of life into three estates (Church, State, Society), were not always clearly articulated or understood. Within such a framework Lutherans sometimes struggled to make sense of the urban, industrial atmosphere in which they found themselves. New situations and questions led Lutherans to modify their view on a woman's vote in society. Writers initially spoke out against woman suffrage on the basis of Scripture, natural law, and cultural customs. They warned against the dangers when God's Word was ignored, but they never claimed woman suffrage was sinful per se. As society became more accepting of woman suffrage, Lutherans acknowledged it as *adiaphora* to which principles of headship and subordination still applied. Each woman was called to live according to God's Word and her own conscience, especially in voting. When culture and customs changed, some applications did change among Lutherans. Terminology and understanding became sharper as the debate went on and as society shifted. But this came with a greater clarity on that central question: what does the Bible say?

Applications within a Christian congregation changed somewhat too. Whereas writers in the 1890s discouraged women from attending a voters' meeting or voicing their opinions to the men, writers in the 1920s saw a changing landscape and opportunities for women to use their God-given gifts. The writers under consideration held to the headship and submission principles in society, church, and home, but were forced to examine applications in the light of God's Word. Lutherans viewed the vote in a congregation to be more than a statement of opinion. The vote was viewed as an expression of the will, in which one person sought to have his or her will impressed upon another. Voting was viewed as an act of power—which is why suffragists sought the power in the first place—and thus, a woman's vote in the church was seen as a violation of the principles of God's Word. Society may have shifted, but this application in the church remained consistent from 1890 to 1930.

Throughout the discussion Lutheran leaders also displayed a love for women as God's creation and as souls bought by the blood of Christ. They praised their gifts, as they saw them, and sought to find ways for women to serve within society and the church. They saw different "spheres" that God had established for women and for men, as Scripture describes them. They invited women and men to vigorously carry out their callings within those spheres. The call to live boldly as God's people within our vocations remains a heritage for us to embrace today.



Lutherans in 2020 America face additional questions regarding human sexuality and gender identity. The very fundamental issue of what makes a person “male” or “female” is under attack. Societal shifts have led to changes in laws and still more battles being fought in statehouses and courtrooms. How do cultural norms impact the public teaching of the confessional, evangelical Lutheran Church today? Where society will go next? Only the Lord himself knows.

And so, *quo vadis* – “where are you going?” The question of woman’s role within the church continues to be a burning issue for men and women who care about the Word and about living holy lives according to it. Each generation must reclaim and treasure the truths of God’s Word. What does Scripture say? What are appropriate applications of it? Are our attitudes and practices shaped by Scripture or by society? What does subordination and headship look like today? There’s no shortage of new questions, and even old ones have a way of reappearing. Yet, God has given testimony in his Word for us to believe and follow. May we, like Lutherans before us, strive to meet these questions with biblical certainty and with the uncompromising love of Christ.

## — APPENDIX 1 —

August Graebner. “*Frauenrechte*,” in *Der Lutheraner*, vol. 50, no.9 , p .71-72, April 24, 1894. Translation by Benjamin Schaefer.

“What a person is authorized to do, or what he can claim as a power toward others, that is his right. What he is commanded and he is obligated to perform, that is his duty.

The right of the woman is what she is authorized to do. These powers now differ according to various legal acts or legal relationships. In her relationship to God, in the realm of religion, the woman, if she is a child of God, has the powers which God has granted to all his children on earth, the right to pray, to use the means of grace, to be well pleased in God her Savior, to console herself with his grace and protection, as the Canaanite woman exercised such rights in the Gospel. In the sphere of family life, the wife in her relationship with her husband has the right to require love, fidelity, protection, and care for herself; as a mother, she has the right to command her children, as God has established such rights in the fourth and the sixth commandments, and that the civil law also guarantees this and other rights in this area. / But the woman is also a member of the human and civil society, and the rights which she has or ought to have in this field are what one usually thinks when one speaks of women's rights in our day, and which we want to briefly explain in this essay.

Human society is the community of human beings for mutual service, and insofar as this community is governed by laws, it is called the civil society or the state. But the powers granted or guaranteed to a member of such a society by existing orders or laws are his rights in this realm. Now, human and civil society does not exist without danger. When God created the first humans, he said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). Then, after the Fall into sin when the waters of the flood were gone, God blessed Noah and his sons, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth ... All that moves and lives, that is your food; like the green herb, I give it all to you ... Whoever sheds a man’s blood, by men shall his blood be shed ... Be fruitful and multiply, and move about on the earth, that you will increase on it” (Gen 9:1-7). And even in the New Testament, the purpose of the civil order and its maintenance protected by God is stated as “that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and holiness” (1 Tim 2:2). The next purpose of all human orders should be that they should live together and increase more and enjoy the goods of the earth, enjoy the temporal well-being of their body, goods and honor. For this purpose, every member of the human and civil society should serve in his part, and for this purpose the duties and rights of the individual members of society should be directed to mutual service. The existing orders and laws, by which the rights of the individual are determined, will then most correspond to the purpose of the commonwealth. This happens when they open and assign to each member of the commonwealth the mode of action, which most closely corresponds to his capacity for service.

If we ask further, where the sphere of activity will lie, in which the woman can prove to be chiefly a useful member of society, then the answer must be: in the house, in the family, with the children, where the man should rest and gather strength for work, which is appropriate to his physical and mental nature. This is evidenced by the body of the woman, who is smaller, more delicate, and weaker than the man; that is, more suited to the works of the family in the nursery, and, more particularly, to the fulfillment of the word: “Be fruitful and multiply,” which God alone assigned to her at all times at Creation. This [stature and assignment] makes the protection of the home’s solitude necessary for her and is incompatible with the exercise of most male

occupations. But the faculties of the mind and heart that are peculiar to the female sex, namely that the woman is kinder, gentler, more considerate, more compassionate, more sensitive, more fearful than a man, make her more adept for effectiveness in the domestic circle and less suitable for the activity in the harsher environment of commercial life with its miserable struggles and duties, which demand strength and decisiveness and strong courage and firm appearance, in short a male person. And if we consider now, how important for the well-being of the individual, the family, the whole people, is the work that is done in the home in the education of the children, their physical and mental sustenance in healthy and sick days, how great the influence of the modest, careful, sympathetic housewife who exercises a positive influence on the man, if she remains and works in her feminine vocation, then we must admire and praise the wisdom and goodness of God, who has given such a helper to man in Creation. According to body and soul she is so rightly invested in this important activity, without which no people can flourish, namely the activity of the woman in the quiet solemnity of the family circle. Thus, even the distribution of rights and duties in human society will be the wisest, the most salutary, and the most appropriate to the purpose of God, according to which the woman would direct her energy to being the wife, the mother, the governess, and the caregiver of the children, one who is regarded and remains loved by the man, provided for, and protected as an honored helper. Such an order of things is then at the same time the one in which the woman herself finds herself best situated and enjoys the richest, most noble happiness that this earthly life can offer her.

It is therefore a dubious sign of the times, when in our day, especially in the women's world, it becomes noticeable that there is a distancing from the woman's sphere of activity, which is assigned by God and which is admitted by an intelligible order to social life. This happens when women force themselves into the machinery of public life, in the courtrooms and department stores, on the speaker's platforms and the battlefields of political parties or in some workshops of male business, when the girls go to work in droves in factories and trade-shops where they often spoil body and soul, rather than working as servants in the kitchen or as chambermaids and nannies to give housewives a helping hand and at the same time receive practical schooling and experience for their own later housewife profession. This distancing is also happening, when women resort to advocacy or to political or social agitation, making speeches across the country. The extent of this tendency may be illustrated by an example... [*Graebner presents statistics from Michigan in 1892 and discusses the number of professions women were engaged in.*] Thus, women in commercial life compete with men, while they are increasingly deprived of their feminine influence and alienated. With the growing number of women in industry, they are quite self-sufficient in that they feel that they are an element of industrial life that needs to be mindful of their rights. So they say, for example: "Equal work, equal pay!" And since commercial life is in many ways mixed up with political life in this country in particular, the next step is to demand political rights for women, the political right to vote, the right to hold political office, including to step on ranks of men in political life. It is perfectly consistent when not a few of the spokeswomen of this movement for the assertion of the so-called women's rights in all seriousness advocate the introduction of a women's clothing, which comes closer to men's clothing. Everything is designed to make a repulsive caricature out of woman, as holy Scripture describes her (cf. Col 3:18; Eph 5:22-33; 1 Tim 2:9-15, 5:10-14; Tit 2:4-5; 1 Pet 3:1-6; Prov 31:10-31), a woman without femininity, a creature who does not want to be what it is supposed to be, and cannot be what it wants to be, who has thrown away its crown to reach for another, but caught a fool's cap and did not even notice it.

How should we Christians behave in these times? Answer: We are supposed to be a salt of the earth and seek the best of the state (Matt 5:13; Jer 29:7). But as the Savior continues, “If salt loses its saltiness, with what shall it be made salty?” Here he wants us to bear in mind that we ourselves should first be wary of the perversities of the world, which we should then counteract in the world. First of all, our Christian women and girls should recognize their calling themselves, let them be loved and honored, and let them be content and faithful in it, as in the circle in which they primarily serve their neighbor and can be pleasing to God and esteemed by mankind. In addition, Christian fathers and mothers should stop and educate their daughters, not preferring to send them to factories or department stores, instead they should engage them with domestic work at home or as servants in decent, and where possible, Christian families and allow them to learn and obtain a love for housework. This is not to say that a Christian girl may not be for a time engaged in employment, in which for example she learns to be an expert seamstress or to treat the sick, or that there are circumstances in a family that make it necessary or desirable, that the daughters look for work other than domestic work. In such cases, it will be preferable to choose those employments with which women and girls, and in turn, other women and girls, can best serve, and therefore concerning these things it is desirable that they remain in women’s hands, such as the shops of dressmakers and other seamstresses, the shops of women’s hat makers, stores belonging to female store owners where mainly women shop, and so on. In general, however, the rule will be that our growing or grown-up daughters should not be deprived of domestic employment in the long run, if we set a good example on our part and, in particular, train our daughters as such women willing to do domestic work, to be skillful and efficient, and to appreciate the housewife’s rights as the highest, most noble, earthly women’s rights, rather than, as is unfortunately the case with so many American women, who contemptuously overlook these and suppose they aspire higher when they seek other professions. Therefore, it would certainly be good if, especially in larger cities, suitable people were willing to arrange suitable places for such girls who would like to work as servants in families. In cities where we have several communities, there could be a sort of Intelligence Bureau led by Christian widows, where gentlemen and those seeking employment could turn, even girls from neighboring rural communities who wanted to serve in the city. Such an arrangement would be a great blessing in this regard.

But then, in the case that it should come to a vote open to men and women [i.e. plebiscite] on the admission of women to political suffrage, as this year in Kansas, let us be Christian citizens who seek the best for city and state, casting our votes **against** such ruinous disorder. Thus, we do our part, what we can do, to set a dam against the unhealthy so-called women’s rights movement, which is operated by fanatical women and politicians preying on women’s voices. A.G.

## — APPENDIX 2 —

Theodore Graebner. “Zur kirchlichen Chronik: Allerdings nicht erst durch uebernahme des allgemeinen politischen Stimmrechts”, June 8, 1915, vol. 50, no.9 p.226-227. Translation by Benjamin Schaefer.

“Of course, woman has not just stepped out of the position, which was intended for her by God, by taking over general political voting rights. It is only a further step to blur the line between man and woman, which God established with the creation of the first humans. According to the

physique as well as according to the vigor of the soul, man and woman are different. The man is physically stronger and has other gifts, which identify him as a natural breadwinner and protector of woman, as the protector of the home and fatherland. The woman, however, has the characteristics of the soul and body, which are less for the rough struggle of life, especially of public life, politics, government, warfare, and more for work in the family circle. Even before the women's movement got underway, the unbelieving world was no different. The woman is not adapted for the vast majority of work in industry, in public life generally, especially in government. And the fact that she is not so skilled, one must not call a result of faulty development and it is not a disgrace for the woman, but this is a difference made by the Creator himself between the sexes. Above all, however, the wife has the duties which she has to provide as a spouse, as a mother, as an educator for the children, and as the manager of the household. Where she does not undertake any of these duties, there is evil in the house, in the state, and also in the church. The conscience of the unconverted man, where it has not been confused and perverted by the fantasies of women's rights activists, realizes that this is the real position of women, both as regards their physical as well as their mental nature: to serve the husband as a helper and to assume the duties of motherhood and the manager of the household. The Holy Scriptures teach that this is the God-desired position of the woman (Gen 2:18-24; 3:16; Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:19; 1 Tim 2:12 and other passages). However, the woman has often stepped out of this position before she aspired to the right to vote in political elections, as is proved sufficiently by women pushing (even without any external necessity) into all sorts of occupations, which to this point had been the responsibility of men. Hence, both among married and unmarried persons there is an aversion to the assumption of maternal duties, which is the result of abhorrent sins against the fifth and sixth commandments. On this path the demand for political equality with the man is now a further step, and not only in itself the **entry** into a godless relation to the man, which is contrary to the order of nature (*Naturordnung*). In this unnatural relationship, the woman, as soon as she surrenders the duty of female obedience to the husband, forgets or wickedly pushes aside the duty of child-raising and the other duties which belong to her as wife, wife, and mother. This is what she does now, above all, in order to be able to enter public life. The modern women's movement consciously and deliberately aimed at liberating the woman from the relationship of submissiveness to the man, to "set her free," to "emancipate" her. Therefore, where women seek the right to vote and are granted the right to vote on such grounds, so as to satisfy the demands of women for absolute political equality, setting aside the demands which the family places on women, setting aside the natural differences between them the sexes and the vocation of woman as wife and mother, setting aside also the doctrine of Scripture on the relationship of woman to man, in a wicked, proud sense and open rebellion against God's Word, in short, where political suffrage is demanded and conceded for the purpose of the **emancipation** of women, to remove them from the authority of the man and submissiveness under God's Word, in that case such demand of the right to vote and granting of the same to women is to be thoroughly rejected. In fact, it is clear to anyone who has somewhat familiarized himself with the writings of women's rights activists where they set forth their demands, that this is what they are after, namely the emancipation of women, their total detachment from the relationship which is founded in nature and God's Word. From the fact that the advocates of this movement are, almost without exception, unbelievers, even deniers of God, a person can also recognize which spirit the modern women's movement is a child of." (**emphasis** original)

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