

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



Volume 88:1

January 2024

Table of Contents

Old Testament Circumcision: Sacramental?

Lowell S. Sorenson 3

The Holy Spirit and Baptism in the Book of Acts

Mark P. Surburg 27

Wives, Husbands, Children, Slaves:

Forming the Faith among the First Christians

John G. Nordling 55

Theological Observer 75

Women's Ordination: Government and Culture Ruling in the Place of
Christ and His Apostles

Funeral Sermon for Walter Dissen

Book Reviews 91

Books Received 95

Theological Observer

Women's Ordination: Government and Culture Ruling in the Place of Christ and His Apostles

Thank you for inviting me to participate in the discussion as a confessional Lutheran church body like the Lutheran Church in Korea contemplates introducing the ordination of women as pastors.¹ I have divided this presentation into two parts: (1) the current state of feminism, of which the ordination of women is a part, as well as how and why Lutheran churches came to ordain women pastors, and (2) the ministry of Jesus in choosing only men to be apostles.

I. The How and Why of the Ordination of Women

Few teachings and practices are as divisive among Lutherans as the ordination of women as pastors, a practice that has opened the door in all churches to other practices (e.g., the blessing of same-sex marriages, as is being proposed by Catholic bishops in Belgium). A fundamental problem is whether God can be spoken of in feminine terms in our prayers and preaching. If so, then the First Person of the Trinity can be understood and addressed not only as “Father” but also as “Father-Mother” or “Mother,” which is already happening. So in the Lord’s Prayer, “our Father” could then be replaced by “our Father-Mother,” and the name of God revealed by Jesus as “Father-Son-Holy Spirit” finds a substitute in “God-Christ-Spirit.” So in churches that have embraced the ordination of women, feminism has already led to a different understanding of God from what is revealed in Scripture.

The ordination of women as pastors has no support in the tradition of church practice going back to apostolic times. There were simply no women pastors or priests. Lutherans ordaining women as pastors is of very recent origin, with the first woman ordained in the 1950s.² At that time, Lutheran churches throughout the world did not know of the practice, and much effort had to be expended to convince parishioners that this was an acceptable practice. When it was first instituted, it was ignored and resisted by the people, but it is now commonplace. By any definition, the ordination of women was an innovation doing away with nearly two thousand

¹ Presented at the dialogue of the Lutheran Church in Korea (LCK) and the LCMS on women’s ordination (Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, January 17, 2023).

² The history of the introduction of women pastors in Germany and Scandinavia has been presented in detail by Gottfried Martens, “The Introduction of Women’s Ordination in the German Landeskirchen and in the Lutheran Churches of Scandinavia,” in *You, My People, Shall Be Holy: A Festschrift in Honour of John W. Kleinig*, ed. John R. Stephenson and Thomas M. Winger (St. Catharines, ON: Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2013), 127–52.—Ed.

years of church practice, and the innovation came with serious consequences regarding how people think of God and how men and women relate to one another. It is a repudiation of Genesis 1–3 of how God created Adam and Eve and how they are related to each other. At the time the institution of the practice in Lutheran churches was up for discussion, the well known confessional Lutheran scholar Peter Brunner of Heidelberg University predicted with accuracy that should women be ordained as pastors, how we understood God would be permanently and drastically changed, and year after year he has been proven to be right.

The current major proponent of ordaining women is the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The ordination of women has become the new orthodoxy and has replaced the older view that only men, but certainly not all men, can serve in the ministry. The LWF presumes that its member churches ordain women or that they soon will. Women's ordination is no longer a topic of discussion in the LWF, which can now be headed by a woman; rather, it is assumed that the ordination of women is now a necessary practice.

In the pastoral epistles, Paul laid down certain specifications for pastors, one of which is that they had to be men (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). Women could not be given this office (1 Tim 2:11–15). Not only has the feminism that has taken over some Lutheran churches led to ordaining women and a different understanding of God, but also arguments used to allow the ordination of women have been used to allow the ordination of homosexuals and even place them in places of church leadership. Women serve as bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), its subsidiary synods, and the state-related churches of Scandinavia and Germany and can even serve as president of the LWF. The code for this is the LGBTQ+ movement. Sexual orientation is no longer a factor for them in who may become a pastor.

Approaching eighty-seven years of age, I will be so bold as to present myself as a chronological gauge of how things have changed in the life of one person. I was born in 1936, and until I was in my midtwenties, no women served as pastors in any of the mainline churches, including the Reformed, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Anglican communions. Pentecostals and other fringe groups who did not have a carefully outlined doctrine of the ministry allowed women to preach, as both men and women in their assemblies could claim that they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Anyone claiming to be moved by the Holy Spirit could speak at will during their church services, as was thought to be the case in Corinth (1 Cor 14:26–33). Heretical, charismatic groups in the apostolic and postapostolic churches allowed women to preach, a practice that was condemned. It was not a matter of disorganization in having two or more persons preaching at the same time. Rather, it was against what

God established in Genesis: that Adam was the preacher and Eve was the congregation.

Today things are drastically different from the time of my youth, and the change has come with equally drastic speed. The collateral damage in feminizing our practice and doctrine has been catastrophic. When I was ordained into the ministry, no one in any Lutheran church in America thought of ordaining women, unless it was those who were keeping their intentions private. Now at the conclusion of my ministry of sixty years, the tables are turned, and in some seminaries, women constitute the majority of entering students. We are not far off from the time when they will constitute the majority of clergy. All of these developments can be supported by neither Scripture nor the nearly two-millennia history of the church. Jesus taught men and women, but he prepared only men—the twelve disciples—and not all men to be his apostles.

II. How Did it Happen?

The practice of ordaining women did not come about by a congregation, a group of congregations like a synod, or some theologian looking into the tradition of the ancient church and finding something in it that previous generations overlooked. Ordaining women also did not come about by biblical research. It was not a Luther-like experience by which his reading of Romans and Galatians proved that Roman Catholic practice—such as the idea that selling indulgences or paying for masses could free the dead from the pangs of purgatory—stood at odds with the biblical doctrine of justification by grace. Even though Lutherans were and are very careful to show that what they believe is derived from Scripture, Melancthon in the Augsburg Confession carefully demonstrated that what the Lutherans taught about justification was within the universal (that is, catholic) tradition of the church and they quoted the church fathers to prove it. Just as there is no biblical support for women pastors in Scripture, there is also no support in the nearly two-thousand-year history of the church. Neither was anything written in any of the Lutheran Confessions or in the writings of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians indicating that women should be pastors.

In terms of how the church measures time, the impetus for the ordination of women is recent; not even sixty years have passed since the first woman was ordained, and women thus began serving as preachers and the leaders of the liturgy in Lutheran congregations. But ordaining one woman opened the floodgates, and where once no women were ordained, it is now common practice in all the mainline churches, except the churches of the International Lutheran Council (ILC), the East-

ern Orthodox churches, and perhaps the Southern Baptists. Unfortunately, momentum in the Catholic Church toward the ordination of women, especially in Europe, has been building.

For those who are closer to ninety years of age rather than they are to eighty, it is almost as if the ordination of women happened yesterday, and in a way, it did. Within cultural environments in which all occupations are open to women, the practice has spread like wildfire. If a woman can run for president and serve as vice president of the United States and its Supreme Court, there can be little reason why she could not be a pastor, so the reasoning goes. It is now so widespread among Lutheran churches and other mainline Protestant churches—such as the Anglicans, Methodists, and Presbyterians—that the churches in the ILC that do not have women clergy are seen as out of step with the times. Companies that manufacture ecclesiastical attire for the clergy have accommodated themselves to the times. Look at their catalogs, and you will find women dressed in cassocks, chasubles, and copes. Look at any church painting before the twentieth century, and you will find only men in ecclesiastical garb.

III. Details on How it Happened

All this began when legislation was passed by the left-leaning socialist governments of Europe at a time when the principle of equality was in the political air. In 1957, the Swedish parliament passed a law allowing that women be ordained, but giving congregations the right to reject them.³ About twenty years later, the parliament insisted that the congregations accept women pastors that the church authorities assigned to them.⁴ This was not something the people in the congregations asked to have. (Let it be noted that since its founding, the ELCA has had a modified episcopal structure in that the regional bishops appointed pastors for congregations, which had the right to reject the nomination of two bishops, and then the congregation had to accept the third nominee, who was often a woman, and who for reasons of conscience the congregation did not want.) Again it must be said that the practice of ordaining women did not arise from congregations, churches' conventions, synods, conferences of pastors, or theological faculties themselves, but it came from parliaments or other legislative bodies whose members were chosen by political parties and who were not necessarily Lutheran or even Christian. Only later did Lutheran synods in America follow suit, since they saw themselves as part of the same fellowship.

³ Martens, "Introduction of Women's Ordination," 142.

⁴ Martens, "Introduction of Women's Ordination," 144.

This arrangement in Europe between the civil rulers and the church goes back seventeen hundred years when kings, princes, and towns who were financially supporting the church took upon themselves certain prerogatives in how the church should conduct its affairs, ones that in the New Testament belonged instead to the people and their pastors. Rulers involved themselves in who should serve as priests and bishops and how the liturgy should be worded. Until Constantine became the emperor of the Roman Empire, Christianity was an illegal religion. This was because, unlike other religions, it did not allow Christians to worship the emperor as divine. In Rome, the worship of the emperor was like the pledge of allegiance that was required of all citizens, but that respect also required acknowledging the emperor was God. Without himself at first being baptized, Constantine legalized Christianity, and it was soon afterward made the official religion of the empire. Constantine became instrumental in building churches, appointing bishops, and summoning church councils, such as the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), which formulated the core of our Nicene Creed. The Roman Empire embraced an area of land roughly coterminous with modern Europe, and about one hundred years after Rome fell to the barbarians, it was reconstituted in the year 800 as the Holy Roman Empire. There, its emperor and his vassal kings and princes assumed rights to how the church was to be administered and bishops appointed. Only those baptized as Christians could be citizens of the empire, an arrangement that is still called Constantinian Christianity.

This was the world in which Luther lived and in which his Reformation took place. Luther's famous "here I stand" confession was made before Emperor Charles V and the members of the parliament that constituted the empire at Worms in 1521. His followers presented the Augsburg Confession to the same group in 1530. In the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, princes and certain cities were allowed to make their territories Lutheran, while some remained Catholic. The situation was similar in England and Scandinavia, and as was often the case, kings used the bishops to further their own interests. This would have devastating consequences for Lutherans. In 1617, Lutheranism came close to being abolished in Brandenburg (what is now northeastern Germany and eastern Poland) when the prince elector chose to exercise his right over the church and attempted to merge Lutheran congregations with the Reformed but failed.⁵

⁵ Elector Johann Sigismund (1572–1619, ruled 1608–1619) of Brandenburg converted to Calvinism secretly in 1606. Efforts to calvinize Brandenburg were stepped up during the reign of Frederick William, the "Great Elector" (ruled 1640–1688). In 1657, this elector abolished confessional subscription to the Formula of Concord; in 1662, he prohibited anti-Reformed polemics and the study of theology in Wittenberg by his subjects; in 1683, he abolished traditional liturgical vestments and the use of processional crosses at burials. In 1664, the hymnwriter Paul Gerhardt refused to subscribe the edict outlawing anti-Reformed polemics and for this was removed from his office

Two centuries later, his successor Frederick William III, to commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation from 1817 to 1830, succeeded in merging the majority Lutheran population with the minority Reformed population into one church. The newly merged church was known as the Evangelical Church, and its hymns and liturgical forms undermined Lutheran doctrines, especially the Lutheran understanding of the Lord's Supper as Christ's body and blood. Because of his aggressive political agenda, Frederick William III absorbed many of the smaller principalities into what is now the modern nation of Germany, and the Lutheranism that emerged in the Reformation was so undermined that it never regained its Reformation status. Even today, non-Catholic Germans call themselves *evangelisch*, which is more like our word "Protestant." The word *lutherisch* is virtually an unknown word to many Germans.

The ordination of women finds its roots in the Age of Enlightenment, when the rights of kings and the church were denigrated, and modern democratic ideas were born, as was evident in the French Revolution. In subsequent years, the authority that kings had in religious matters slipped into the hands of elected parliaments, whose members were more and more committed to establishing democratic principles with regard to how the churches in their countries should be organized and worship. After World War I, democracy was in the air, and governments fell into the hands of socialist, left-leaning politicians whose sense of equality led them to pass laws allowing women to serve as pastors along with men.

IV. Government and Culture's Incursion into the Church

Thus, in any discussion about whether women should be ordained as pastors in churches that do not have the practice now, it is essential to consider that the decision to ordain them was originally made not on the basis of biblical study and theological principles. It was made by governments that were influenced by the principles set forth in the Age of Enlightenment and perfected in World War I, decisions in which the power of monarchs gave way to so-called democratic principles exercised by elected parliaments. In hindsight, in a world in which all were considered equal, for many people the ordination of women pastors would be inevitable. Nevertheless, since its origins and mandates came from the government, the practice

as pastor in Berlin. Other attempts by princes of Lutheran territorial churches were successful in changing their Lutheran churches into Reformed. In 1560, Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate introduced the Reformed confession to his land. In 1599, Landgrave Moritz of Hesse introduced the Reformed confession to his. Even Electoral Saxony experienced a temporary calvinization under Christian I (ruled 1586–1591). Ernst Koch, *Das konfessionelle Zeitalter: Katholizismus, Luthertum, Calvinismus (1563-1675)* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000), 267, 269, 333, 261, 265, 270.—Ed.

was as unacceptable then as it is now. In reviewing the acceptability of the ordination of women, people are accommodating an issue raised by the government and not by the church. In response, we must say that Caesar has no rights in the church. But for the sake of those churches that have adopted the practice, we also have to respond to this practice, which has no support in the Bible, in the history of the church from the apostolic period to the present, and especially in the Lutheran Confessions and their dogmaticians.

The first legislative action allowing women pastors was made by the Norwegian parliament in 1938, which had previously been part of the Kingdom of Denmark. Before that, Norway had been part of Sweden, so the people had a heightened sense of their independence. For nearly twenty years, Norwegian congregations were given the right to reject women who were appointed by their bishops to be pastors. This right was taken away in 1956. Even then, the people resisted, and the first ordinations of women in a Lutheran church happened five years later in 1961. It is remarkable that for nearly a quarter century, the people resisted accepting a woman pastor.

Eventually, however, their resistance fell, and soon women pastors were allowed in Denmark and Sweden and (not surprisingly) by the Communist-led governments of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Czechoslovakia. Lutheran synods in America would soon follow suit. In the 1950s, the seminaries that would later constitute the ELCA began admitting women into the regular academic programs leading to certification for the ministry and ordination. It happened that upon the graduation of those women, seminary faculty members who favored the ordination of women took the opportunity to propose their ordination. The first was the American Lutheran Church (ALC), which was soon followed by the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), both churches that would eventually constitute the ELCA. Each synod took up the measure at its respective 1970 plenary convention and endorsed it. Although the press reported that there was little or no theological discussion at the ALC convention, nearly half of the delegates—a four-to-five margin—opposed it, much closer than was anticipated. At future conventions, there was no opposition. At its 1969 and 1971 conventions, the LCMS expressed its opposition to allowing women to serve as pastors on the grounds that it was not biblical.

Opposition to ordaining women pastors in Europe came to an end long ago with the deaths of Bishop Bo Giertz of Sweden as well as Bishop Hermann Dietzfelbinger of Bavaria, who stood against his own church convention. Opposition to ordaining women in the ELCA is nil. In Sweden, those opposing the ordination of women were at first allowed into the ministry without endorsing the practice, but now those who oppose the ordination of women are required to be ordained in the

same church services in which women candidates are also ordained, thus compromising their belief that only men should be ordained. As mentioned, in the LWF, the ordination of women is presumed. It is now established dogma and not open for reevaluation.

Here in America the government exercises no control over who may be ordained, but the overarching culture in which we live sees fewer and fewer differences between men and women, and their functions are regarded as interchangeable. Soon may come the day when the churches that do not give women the same advantages given men, such as ordination, will be financially punished by the government in losing their tax exemption. Since the ordination of women began as a government action and not a church decision, there are no agreed-upon reasons for its practice. Some scholars are up front in acknowledging that Paul was against the practice. But in our context, what Paul or any other biblical writer has to say about the place of women serving in the church and their relationship to men or other women no longer matters. His condemnations of homosexual relationships are also brushed aside. In response, we say that in his opposition to women preachers, Paul was going against the prevailing Greco-Roman culture in which women had prominent parts in religious life, particularly in Rome, where they served as vestal virgins and occupied a status of honor next to the emperor himself and with him were highly revered. As such, some early Christians might have speculated that converted women who previously served as priests in a pagan religion could perform a similar service in the church. Thus Paul's prohibition of women pastors and preachers was not a mere reflection of prevalent societal values but a divine correction to prevalent societal values.

There is no one reason offered for women to be ordained, and the one reason they take from Paul—that there is no difference between men and women (Gal 3:28)—is unsatisfactory, since this passage in Galatians does not address the Office of the Holy Ministry. At the present time, gender equality has morphed into gender interchangeability, and so biblical and theological reasons for the practice no longer have to be offered. If men can become women and women can become men, any prohibition against ordaining women has no meaning.

V. Biblical Evidence: Jesus Establishes the Ministry

Many dismiss as irrelevant the passages found in Paul's epistles that disallow the practice of women's ordination. 1 Timothy was not written by Paul, so some modern commentators claim, and so what he says in 1 Timothy 2:12—that a woman should not teach—has no authority for the church. They also say that 1 Corinthians 14:33–37 was not part of the original epistle but was inserted later, even though there

is no manuscript evidence for such a view. More honest are those who acknowledge that Paul opposed women ministers but assert that what he said is no longer valid for us. Thus, it is no longer only governments in Europe, but also the overwhelming force of culture exercised on church life in America and in other countries, that require their churches to ordain women. Likewise, it was not unexpected that practicing homosexuals are now being ordained and that Lutheran churches that ordain women pastors will soon bless same-sex marriages. In some churches, this is already being done.

The world in which Jesus lived was shaped by the Old Testament, in which women did not serve as priests in the temple, and after the temple was destroyed in AD 70, they did not serve as rabbis. Nevertheless, women now serve as rabbis in liberal and some conservative, but not orthodox, synagogues. There is no Hebrew word for “priestess.” Women who were preaching (wrongfully) in Corinth and other New Testament churches (e.g., those churches that were entrusted to Timothy’s care) must have been doing so in those churches that had a majority Gentile membership, since the practice of women preaching was common among the pagans. It was not found in congregations whose memberships were predominantly Jewish, like those in Jerusalem.

One must also look at how Jesus established the ministry. While Jesus called men, women, and children to faith, including the most recently born infants, he appointed specific men as apostles (Matt 10:1–2). In reading the Gospels, it soon becomes obvious that women are more likely to be presented as paragons of faith than are men. Those who are chosen by Jesus as disciples, who were to be his apostles, are often pictured as weak in faith and at first do not understand what he is saying, even when he is speaking of his resurrection.

Take Mary, the mother of Jesus, as an example of faith. She immediately accepts her role to become the mother of God, and when she tells Joseph, he does not believe her and contemplates divorcing her until he is convinced by the angel of the Lord. Later, while most of the disciples flee from Jesus at his trial and crucifixion, the women, including his mother, remain at his side until his death and follow his body to the tomb. While the disciples remain behind locked doors because of the fear of Jews, the women venture out at sundown on Saturday to buy ointments to complete his burial. Then they make their way through the darkness of the early morning of the third day to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus, only to find his body missing. In so doing, they become the first witnesses of his resurrection.

If faith and the intensification of commitment are the only qualifications for the apostleship and then subsequently for the ministry, Jesus should have chosen the women as apostles, but he did not. Each of the Gospels makes a clear distinction between the disciples or apostles and the other followers of Jesus. The disciples or

apostles are listed by name in Matthew 10:1–2, where their obligations are set down. The disciples are the ones told to meet Jesus in Galilee, where they are commissioned as apostles (Matt 28:7, 10, 16–20).

This argument, that the ministry is given to the apostles, can be traced in the other Gospels also. Take, for example, John 21, in which Jesus sets aside Peter and the other disciples for the ministry. What is striking in Mark is that Jesus gives special instruction to the disciples that he does not give to the people: “With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything” (Mark 4:33–34). Churches that ordain women can no longer consider themselves apostolic churches because they have no support for doing so. They are contravening Paul’s admonition that they should not let women preach, and equally important, they are not following the example of Jesus, who in establishing the ministry in the apostles chose only men.

What is often overlooked in the discussion of the ordination of women pastors is the Genesis account of creation and the fall into sin (Gen 3:1–2), which Paul establishes as the reason women should not preach and thus should not be ordained as pastors (1 Tim 2:12–14). In the original creation, there was no division between what was religious and what was secular, what we Lutherans would call the two kingdoms. In their ordinary existence, Adam and Eve were God’s creation, and in every moment of their lives, they were to acknowledge him as their creator. In this arrangement, Adam was to be the preacher and Eve the congregation. Her first step in the wrong direction was engaging in a conversation with the serpent, for which she was not equipped. It was to Adam and not to her that God spoke, and so qualified Adam as a preacher. What she knew of the conversation between Adam and God was secondhand. She was not chosen as the spokesman of that first community of man and woman, and so she was not equipped to speak about it. That might be the reason Paul said she was deceived.

The ordination of women is only the tip of a larger iceberg. Underneath the surface are different understandings of God and human beings, and this has led to seeing differences between male and female as nonexistent. Some churches have gone beyond ordaining women to ordaining practicing homosexuals and transsexuals. If what Paul says about women not preaching was applicable in only his cultural context, then what he says about other things in other places is not applicable to our situation either. The authority of Scripture has been comprised and its inspiration denied.

VI. Church Tradition

Before a church adopts any new practice, it should look at and assess what the church has done in previous years and even centuries. The unanimous church tradition from the days of apostles until the late 1930s is that only men qualified by other pastors can be ordained as pastors. There is no restriction on the blessings with hands in any number of situations, such as confirmation and marriage, and at the beds of the sick and dying. Such was the ministry of Jesus, who laid his hands on the sick, and we should do it also. The laying on of hands in the rite of ordination, however, is another matter, since Paul says that it should be done with caution (1 Tim 5:22). He also said women may not teach, and since apostolic time the church has understood this to mean that they also cannot be ordained as pastors. We are not the first to face the ordination of women. Sometime in the second century, the pseudepigraphic document known as the Acts of Paul and Thecla surfaced as supposedly coming from Paul. Because of the document's claim to be written by Paul, its content had to be evaluated before it could be recognized as canonical and binding with the same authority as other documents claiming to be of apostolic origin. Apostolic origin determines a document's biblical authority.⁶ Since the Acts of Paul and Thecla presented Paul as having women baptize and preach, a right that Paul specifically denied to women in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy (documents that were recognized as authentic), the Acts of Paul and Thecla was rejected as forgery. In the third century, a heretical group known as the Montanists, which claimed special revelations from the Holy Spirit, also allowed for women preachers. The Montanists were not unlike today's Pentecostals in claiming that the Holy Spirit gave direct revelations to believers that took precedence over anything Scripture had to say.

The Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox communions, which constitute about three quarters of Christendom, do not ordain women. Some Catholic and Eastern Christian theologians are advocating for it, however, under the pressure and influence of an ever-increasing feminist culture.⁷ Such mainline churches as the

⁶ David P. Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1979).

⁷ Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (1907–2005), influenced by Sergius Bulgakov, challenged the theological arguments against ordaining priestesses in the Eastern Christian churches. A consultation on the rule of women in the church, held at Rhodes in 1988, recommended that women be ordained not to the priesthood but to the diaconate (and thus serve in the liturgy side-by-side with priests), a recommendation that was enacted in 2017 in the Patriarchate of Alexandria. Frederica Mathewes-Green claimed in 2007 that she and other women are allowed to preach in the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. Michael Plekon, "The Russian Religious Revival and Its Theological Legacy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 211–212; Philip Kariatlis, "The Role of Women in the Orthodox Church: A Historical Overview of Consultations and Conclusions Reached in the Twentieth Century," *Phronema* 21 (2006): 29–39; Catherine Clark,

Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Episcopalians, and the United Church of Christ (UCC) already ordain women, and even a conservative group like the Southern Baptists is under feminist influences to ordain them in the future. Any church that ordains women no longer stands in the apostolic tradition since what the church does contradicts what Paul said and how Jesus and the apostles conducted their ministries.

This means that the churches that comprise the ILC remain in the apostolic, catholic tradition in that they teach and practice what was commonly and universally believed and practiced without coming up with innovations in doctrine and practice. This is precisely the way in which the Lutherans presented themselves in 1530 to the emperor and the Roman Church of that day in the Augsburg Confession. No better model is laid out before us than the one set forth by the Augsburg Confession, in which every doctrine taught by the Lutherans and their practice not only had biblical support but also had precedents in the early church fathers and later church theologians. Such support for women preachers and the ordination of women is completely lacking.

At an LWF-sponsored conference of women clergy, Nigerian theology lecturer Hauwa Hazael Madi said, “Man or woman, both have a common value, both were created in the image of God.” Having a common value is true in speaking how we, men and women, stand before God in being judged as sinners and being judged as righteous in Christ, but it is not true in how we were created and for what functions we were created. Adam possessed the image of God directly from God in God’s creation, and in her being taken out of the side of Adam, Eve possessed the image of God from Adam and through Adam. This means that Adam and Eve possessed a common humanity, not in a way that there were two human races, one male and one female. There was only one “mankind” or “humankind,” but man and woman each had and continue to have distinct functions that are derived from how each was created and what each was created by God to do. Fathers are not and cannot become mothers, and mothers are not and cannot become fathers. Despite the current North American culture’s madness on this issue, men’s and women’s functions are not interchangeable; men cannot become women, and women cannot become men.

“Orthodox Church Debate over Women Deacons Moves One Step Closer to Reality,” *Religion News Service* (blog), March 9, 2017, <https://religionnews.com/2017/03/09/orthodox-church-debate-over-women-deacons-moves-one-step-closer-to-reality/>; and Frederica Mathewes-Green, “Women’s Ordination,” Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, January 10, 2007, <http://ww1.antiochian.org/node/17953>.—Ed.

Every church service is a replication of how God created man and woman in Genesis. When a woman leads the worshipping congregation and preaches, the original order—set down in Genesis 2 and restored and reflected in the imagery of Christ and his church—is disrupted, and the gospel of salvation is undermined. Left unchecked, the gospel eventually deteriorates to the point that another entirely different gospel is put in its place. This can be a slow process, but its conclusion is that differences between men and women no longer matter. In the case of the UCC, this sexual confusion presents itself as the gospel. Plymouth Congregational Church, a leading UCC church in Fort Wayne, says of itself, “As a progressive Christian community, we understand the gospel as calling us to affirm LGBTQ people, work for justice and peace, care for the planet, and partner with others here and around the world in mission.” There you have it.

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Funeral Sermon for Walter Dissen¹

“Christ is risen from the dead, by death trampling down death, and to those in the tombs granting life!”

Let this acclamation, taken from an ancient Easter hymn, serve as our own acclamation, as we recall the life of Walter Dissen and give thanks to God, our Father, and to our Savior, Jesus Christ, for the life now ended, and for the life now knowing no end.

Dear Eunice, sister; dear David, Martin, Fred, brothers; Marilyn; and to all the family and friends of Walter:

What a warrior Walter was! What a warrior! The biographical sketch in the bulletin is but a bare-bones outline of Walter’s accomplishments, of his loyalties, of his commitments. But those of us who knew Walter and worked with him and struggled with him know that the flesh on those bones was animated with an uncommon intellect, perhaps honed by his legal training, and was animated by a courageous and tenacious commitment to the Christian faith as articulated by the Lutheran Confessions. We will allow that biographical sketch to have its way, as limited as that is. But you who were of his family will have numerous memories that only close relatives

¹ This sermon was preached on August 26, 2023, at Kramer Chapel, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

have: growing up with Walter, stories connected with his youth, family gatherings, reunions, and much more of such experiences. No doubt your minds and hearts are even now in this moment rekindling many of those memories, of a life lived long ago or perhaps not so long ago.

Then there are those of us who worked and struggled with him during various controversies that roiled our church and schools. The biographical sketch mentions this: his critical tenure on the board of Concordia Seminary during the days of the walkout, when he stoutly defended the truth and integrity of the Holy Scriptures against the insidious inroads of higher criticism. For this, Concordia Seminary awarded him the *Christus Vivit* Award in 1984. I myself still have vivid recollection of the invaluable role played by Walter when he served on the board of this seminary in the struggle to maintain this seminary's integrity as a fully theological, confessional seminary for the training of Lutheran pastors. In those moments Walter's tenacity of purpose and his righteous contentiousness, if I might express it so, were immensely helpful and ultimately vindicated. For his service of our board Walter received the *Miles Christi* Award in 2011. *Miles Christi*—"Soldier of Christ"! Indeed, what a warrior Walter was! And we shall surely miss that man!

Yet that warrior, so defined and so remembered, lies here before us, mute to our ears and soon to return to the dust from which, in the beginning, God brought forth man. From dust to dust—that is the encompassing description and narrative of man when man is remembered by way of moments of the past and by the works of his hands and his mind.

But "Christ is risen from the dead, by death trampling down death, and to those in the tombs granting life!" May we not, then—*must* we not, then—take a closer look at this man bound for his tomb? Must we not, as though with eyes of a prophet, see things far away that are also up close? Before the service we had the opportunity to view the body of Walter as it lies in its coffin. I submit that that is a good and pious practice. And I have no doubt that, as the counselors and psychiatrists inform us, it serves to bring some closure to the grief of family and friends. But let us consider again this man in the reality of his body, over which we pray and sing, and which with prayer and song we shall soon commit to the earth.

Where shall we begin? Again, "Christ is risen from the dead, by death trampling down death, and to those in the tombs granting life!" We begin where all claims of Christian faith must begin: in the story of another man, born of flesh from his virgin mother, who spoke truth because he was Truth, who hated the lie of man's rebellious self-righteousness because he was the Righteousness of God, who finally died by the hands of unrighteous men in order to justify the sinner, and who by the will and power of his Father put death to death through his resurrection in his flesh from the dead. Why all of this? That we too, that Walter also, might share in and participate

in that man's righteousness and the newness of that man's life. How so is all of this? "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:4–5). Those were the words we recited just moments ago in the Remembrance of Baptism. But let us add to these words other words—words from the apostolic pen of Saint Paul:

You he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. . . . But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. . . . For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. (Eph 2:1, 4–6, 8–9 RSV)

So considered, the body of Walter over which we pray and sing and with prayer and song shall soon commit to the earth, well, is not dead. Rather, in the speech of saintly Paul, Walter sleeps. As one thinker rather boldly put it, for the faithful Christian, death is not fatal. Bold perhaps, but why not speak in such bold terms? We shall soon quote that man, sent by God into the flesh, the incarnate Word, God from God, Life from Life. He spoke no less boldly, giving us the right, yes, the obligation to speak boldly: For the faithful Christian, death is not fatal. For that man said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me shall live, even though he die, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25, my translation). Those were the words of our common Savior and Lord, in whom Walter most definitely believed. And so, according to the words of our Savior and Lord, Walter shall never die. Bold words? Strange words? Utterly mysterious words? Perhaps. But such is the calculus that arises from the resurrection of Jesus in the flesh. That flesh, we must hasten to add, which Walter again and again, with faith and Christian intention, joyously ate in the Eucharist of Christ the Crucified. Hence the words of our Gospel text:

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. . . . I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:35, 38–40 RSV)

The Scriptures are filled with such promises! We are, then, constrained to consider our brother and friend anew. The body over which we pray and sing and which we soon with prayer and song shall commit to the earth is the silent but living reality of a God-given continuity that began with Walter's Baptism and stretches out into the eternity of God's own life—a life free of sin, free of that death occasioned by trespass, a life without tear and toil of mind and hand, a life that is nothing other than the life of Jesus, the Christ, eternal Son from the eternal Father, given and proffered by him to Walter, and a life in the freedom of faith received and participated in by Walter.

So considered, the biographical sketch in the bulletin assumes a deeper meaning. The life so lived in the flesh was a life, yes, born of woman and lived among men, but also a life encompassed and renewed by the Spirit of God through water and the Spirit, set upon the way of righteousness and faith, which has its end not in the grave but in the halls of the heavenly temple where the glory of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit calls forth the everlasting hymn: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, Almighty, heaven and earth are filled with your glory."²

"Christ is risen from the dead, by death trampling down death, and to those in the tombs granting life!"

There is, then, I suppose, only one more thing to say—a prayer for us: "Grant," O heavenly Father, "that we also may be faithful unto death and receive the crown of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever."³ Amen.

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² Cf. Sanctus, in *Lutheran Service Book*, ed. The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 161.

³ Collect of the Day, Funeral Service, in *Lutheran Service Book*, 278.