



“Emancipatory Potential”: Women Experiencing the Gospel

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I sat down at a table near the front of the chapel and watched women in robes and flowing clothes prepare for worship. Music began, and words of welcome ushered me into this sacred space. As we sang together, I heard a mix of voices that resided deeply in the body. The song “Freedom Is Coming” rose up to the rafters, and it was a song steeped in the womb of the gathering. When the preacher went up to the pulpit, I heard wisdom in her voice; it was the cadence of a woman who spoke through a chorus of “you’re not allowed,” “you’re just a woman,” “you can’t preach the gospel.” As I listened, I found myself grasping at every word. She reminded me that the body of Christ is empty without my body. I looked down at my thighs that spilled over the end of the chair and felt my flesh in that space. My body is part of the body of Christ. My body is the flesh of the body of Christ. My body is here. The preacher remarked that not so long ago a LGBTQ woman would never be able to preach, or that a pregnant woman would never be able to preside at the table, but lo and behold . . . there was a lesbian in the pulpit and a pregnant pastor at the table. When I received the bread from a pastor with a swelling belly, I began to weep. The bread I was given, and the life

Perhaps the most influential and long-lasting social transformation coming out of the 1960s was the women’s movement, which has profoundly changed American society and American religion. This article chronicles this process in light of its impact on church and society.

growing inside of her, presented me with the good news. The embodied gospel that fed me and had me bear witness to promise of life.¹

Elyssa's description of her experience at Embodied Freedom, a theological event commemorating the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, suggests some of the ways that women's religious experiences in 2018 are different from those in 1968. As we explore those changes, we note that 2018 comes not only on the heels of the Reformation anniversary but also two years before the fiftieth anniversary of the first ordinations of American Lutheran women. Placing 2018 in the context of these commemorations helps us to focus on American Lutheran women, their religious experiences, and the place of American Lutheran women's ordination within these changes. Looking at women's religious lives through the lens of the Lutheran Reformation suggests that we ask more specifically about their reception of divine grace. To do so requires understanding what grace is and how it is experienced. Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon's exploration is helpful. Acknowledging that a full explanation would require "an account of the entire Christian religion," she continues "the common person understands grace in a very pragmatic sense, measured by the quality and quantity of one's life as the gift of God, as the mercy and kindness of God, the security afforded by God towards humanity."² God shows favor to humans, offering the gift of a redeemed existence and a favored relationship. Believers are recipients of grace. Melanchthon identifies another, responsive aspect of grace. "Grace is the response of humanity given to God in freedom and love and thanksgiving."³ How, then, has grace been present in women's lives, from the time of the Reformation and through the five centuries of Lutheranism? How has women's reception of and response to grace changed in the last half century?

Identifying and understanding these changes also requires attention both to feminist scholarly practice and to women's experiences. Claiming that women's activities and experience are worthy topics is no longer radical, but scholarship exploring them is still a relatively new enterprise.⁴ American feminism has proceeded in three waves. The first, woman's rights, extended from the nineteenth century to passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. The second, women's liberation, began in the mid-twentieth century and continued into the late 1980s.

¹The first-person narratives are written by Elyssa J. Salinas Lazarski, currently a PhD student at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Here, she recalls the opening worship service at Embodied Freedom, a theological event organized by Lutheran Women in Theological and Religious Studies held at Augsburg College in June 2017 with support from Thrivent and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The preacher was Barbara Lundblad, the presider Martha Schwehn Bardwell.

²Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, "The Grace of God and the Equality of Human Persons," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 42 no. 1 (2003): 10.

³Melanchthon, "Grace of God," 12.

⁴Catherine A. Brekus, "Introduction: Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History" in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007). Brekus considers reasons why women's religious history is still relatively invisible in mainstream American religious history and suggests what contributions it might make there as well as to American women's history.

The multifaceted third wave emerged early in the 1990s. As it was breaking, Rosemary Radford Ruether anticipated three foci in feminist study of religion: telling the history of horrors against and experienced by women, retrieving the history of exceptional women, and devising new standards of significance.⁵ All three continue today.

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Coinciding with the second wave of American feminism, Reformation scholars began examining and evaluating its consequences for women. Beth Allison Barr observes, "Religious changes wrought by the Reformation era, 1350–1750, shaped women's religious experiences and even cultural understandings about gender. The impact of the Reformation on women was uneven, inconsistent, and influenced by the actions of women themselves."⁶ In her introduction to *Women and the Reformation*, Kirsi Stjerna echoes the question posed by the title of Joan Kelly's 1984 essay, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?"⁷ Kelly articulates four evaluative criteria that promote a nuanced approach "for gauging the relative contraction (or expansion) of the powers of Renaissance women."⁸ Briefly she considers (1) regulation of female sexuality, (2) women's economic and political roles, (3) women's cultural roles, and (4) ideology about women. Slightly modified, those criteria guide our consideration of how Lutheran women have experienced (or not) the freeing power of divine grace, first during the sixteenth century, then in the United States during the mid-twentieth century, and lastly since 1968.

Although they affirmed divine grace as the basis of salvation, rejected the counsels of perfection undergirding monastic ideals, and acknowledged women's and men's spiritual equality, Martin Luther and his sixteenth-century colleagues regarded men and women as fundamentally different. Protestant Reformers continued to regulate women's sexuality and maintained sharp social distinctions. Women were assigned subordinate roles, generally within the domestic sphere. While the household was granted positive spiritual value, its basis was "a marriage of unequals, not a marriage that looked forward to the more modern idea of marriage as compassionate partnership."⁹ Most women's economic and political roles were limited to the household. Within the church, Lutheran women had

⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Feminist Critique in Religious Studies," *Soundings* 64 no. 4 (1981): 388–402.

⁶ Beth Allison Barr, "What Did the Reformation Mean for Women? A Medieval Perspective on Howard's 'Discriminating Sifter,'" *Fides et Historia* 48 no. 2 (2016): 87–88.

⁷ Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984) 19–50.

⁸ Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance," 20.

⁹ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, "Martin Luther on Marriage and the Family," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (online), July 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y8enlvk2>.

no possibility of formal leadership, despite the advent of the “pastor’s wife” as a semiofficial role. Stjerna and others have expanded our knowledge of exceptional women who were public advocates of reform; however, ordinary women’s experiences of and response to its evangelical message of grace remain obscured by lack of evidence.¹⁰ Spiritual equality supported women’s access to basic religious (and secular) education, but the closure of monastic communities ended women’s opportunities for further education and leadership within those communities. Exceptional women’s cultural influence likely derived from their social status, which mitigated gender-based restrictions. Despite the early stage of scholarship about Reformation notions of gender, there is ample evidence that Magisterial Reformers did not pursue the potential for social equality their theology might have allowed. Rather, they adhered to the conventional views of their time.¹¹ In sum, although “the emancipatory potential imbedded in the gospel proclamation” was not fully realized in the sixteenth century, judgments about the effects of the Lutheran reform movement for women are neither simple nor unambiguous.¹²

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Between the early sixteenth and the mid-twentieth century, Lutheran churches spread around the globe, and the tradition passed through several phases of development that affected women’s participation. Pietist valorization of spiritual gifts afforded some women increased public leadership. Establishment of the female diaconate gave women the option of an official ministry, though not public authority. Local and federated women’s organizations encouraged members’ study, cultivated their piety, developed their leadership, and sometimes provided a channel of influence within congregations and larger church bodies. In increasingly professionalized North American Lutheran denominations, women such as Mary Markley and Cordelia Cox contributed their expertise to the churches’ ministries in higher-education and social-service ministries.

By the early 1960s, American Lutherans were moving into the mainstream of American culture where they encountered the rising second wave of feminism. Despite these changes, much remained the same for Lutheran women. Lutheran

¹⁰ Kirsi Stjerna, *Women and the Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009).

¹¹ See for example, Scott H. Hendrix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn, eds., *Masculinity in the Reformation Era* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008).

¹² Stjerna, *Women and the Reformation*, 1–2.

women had access to the birth-control pill, approved in 1960, but the churches’ standards of acceptable sexual activity remained conservative. Lutheran women could move into expanding economic and political roles beyond their households, even within the church, but ordination was still closed to them. Lutheran women had access to higher education and professional training, in the churches’ colleges or other private and public institutions, but advanced theological education was usually reserved for men. Lutheran ideology about gender was not uniform, but theologians committed to orders of creation maintained a binary, hierarchical understanding that emphasized the differences between women and men. Female members of Lutheran congregations experienced these possibilities and restrictions variously. Some found deep meaning and satisfaction living out their vocation in traditional ways; others pushed for changes. Some resisted calls for women’s liberation; others added their voices to those calls.

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One way to witness this shift is to tell stories. Here is the story of three generations of Lutheran women. I begin with my grandmother Joanne, a finance pioneer, lifelong Lutheran, and feminist model. In the mid-1960s, Joanne was excelling at her career as a CFA (Certified Financial Analyst) and starting a family with her husband. I recall hearing stories about her life in man’s world of corporate America. She told a story of having to enter the back door of a men’s club in order to meet a client because no woman had ever entered the front door. She was not afraid of questioning the patriarchal system and instilled that inquisitive nature in my mother, Jill. One day when Jill was in Lutheran grammar school, she questioned the color of Christ’s skin. “Why is his skin so light when he was born in a place where people have darker skin?” Jill was promptly taken to the principal’s office, and my grandmother had to come in to answer for these remarks. Joanne was confused why her daughter would ask such a question, but then she realized that it was a valid question. Jill was taking the lessons she learned and questioning the world she saw, thereby teaching her own mother that even religion can be questioned. The desire to question social norms and the status quo provided both these women the opportunity to wonder about the world and about their faith. This also paved the way for me to make a career out of curiosity, as a seminary student and doctoral student in theology.

Three events in 1968 are emblematic of the second wave of feminism then gaining momentum. New York Radical Women organized four hundred women

to protest the Miss America contest, its degradation of women, and its association with militarism. A parallel demonstration included selection of the first Miss Black America. Together these events signaled feminist critique of commodified female sexuality, insistence on female autonomy and worth distinct from judgments about women's bodies, and rejection of racialized standards of beauty. Second, Yale University began admitting female undergraduates, and soon after Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow enrolled in Yale Divinity School. Other formerly male institutions also became coeducational, and women's enrollments swelled.¹³ This increased educational attainment supported growing access to networks and positions of influence. More specifically, women equipped with advanced theological training challenged church teaching and practice. The third event was an explosive instance of such challenge: Mary Daly published *The Church and the Second Sex*. Relatively mild compared to her later work, it nonetheless criticized conventional ideology about women, pushed toward new standards, and energized reassessment of Christianity.¹⁴ Even as Martin Luther did not appear *ex nihilo*, each of these events was part of a growing, multidimensional movement for women's liberation in every arena of life. Some women, including Daly and Christ, asserting that Christianity is essentially patriarchal and thus inevitably harmful to women, left the churches for alternative forms of spirituality. Others, such as Ruether, found resources for reform of Christianity within the tradition itself. Lutheran women took both positions, as well as a third that rejected the criticisms altogether.

In Lutheran circles, as elsewhere, debate about women's roles was underway before 1968. At its 1965 convention, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) affirmed “women's suffrage in the congregations as long as it did not give women authority over men and it maintained the notion of the ‘created order.’”¹⁵ Beginning in 1948, Danish Lutherans ordained women, followed by the Swedish church in 1960, and the Norwegian in 1961. However, ordination was closed to women in all of the North American Lutheran churches in 1968. Deliberation about ordaining women was an occasion for collaborative study among the three major Lutheran denominations and, at the same time, highlighted differing biblical hermeneutics,

¹³ In 1968, 8 percent of American women and 13.3 percent of men had completed a four-year college degree. In 2016, the gap had (slightly) reversed: 33.7 percent of women and 33.2 percent of men had that degree. See “Percentage of the US Population Who Have Completed Four Years of College or More from 1940 to 2016, by Gender,” Statista, <https://tinyurl.com/y8tyyvhg>. “The postwar period has seen an explosion of college enrollment by women. In 1947 there were only 523,000 women enrolled in college. By 1988 that number was 13.7 times greater, a total of 7,166,000.” John H. Bishop, “The Explosion of Female College Attendance,” Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies Working Paper Series, Cornell University, November 1990, <https://tinyurl.com/y8aqdfkr>.

¹⁴ Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968). Particularly when mentioning Daly in the context of Lutheran women's experience, notice should be given to Caryn D. Riswold, *Two Reformers: Martin Luther and Mary Daly as Political Theologians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

¹⁵ Gracia Grindal, “Women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 182.

confessional stances, and cultural attitudes about gender.¹⁶ The formal study process was conducted almost entirely by men. Despite that oversight, leaders of the women’s organizations enthusiastically supported women’s ordination. In the larger debate some advocates minimized differences between women and men to argue that women were just as capable of the office as men while others emphasized differences, asserting that women would bring distinctive, feminine gifts to pastoral work. Having concluded that neither Scripture nor the Confessions was decisive, in 1970 the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) each voted to open the pastoral office to women. In the more conservative LCMS, theologians read the same authorities as opposed to women’s ordination, and the matter was never brought to a vote. Nearly fifty years later, the number of ordained women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has risen from zero to 16,232, or 27 percent of the total.¹⁷ In 2015, of the sixty-five regional bishops, nine were women. The presiding bishop of the ELCA is also a woman, Elizabeth Eaton.¹⁸ Women’s entry into the church’s public leadership is the most visible change since 1968. The significance of the change for those women called to pastoral ministry is obvious, but it extends beyond to other women and to all participants in this church.

Deliberation about ordaining women was an occasion for collaborative study among the three major Lutheran denominations and, at the same time, highlighted differing biblical hermeneutics, confessional stances, and cultural attitudes about gender.

My path to seminary and current work in theology was guided along the way by the strong hands of women; from Susan B. Anthony, who’s face donned the coin I received from the tooth fairy, to the words of Gloria Anzaldúa that told me my mixed Mexican and Scandinavian heritage was never a problem, to my mother and grandmother, who continued to provide their support throughout my life. I was inspired by the first female pastor in my church to consider the calling of word and sacrament. Being a teenager who wanted to be a pastor was an odd occurrence in my social group, but it led me all way to seminary straight

¹⁶ Grindal, “Women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church,” 182–84; Maria Erling and Susan Wilds McArver, “Case Study on Women’s Ordination,” in *Sources of Authority in the Church: Lutheran Traditions in North American Contexts*, ed. David Brondos (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2012); also Maria Erling, “The Americanization of American Lutheranism: Democratization of Authority and the Ordination of Women, Part I,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 11, no. 6 (October 2011): <https://tinyurl.com/y7nhdhph>; and Susan Wilds McArver, “The Americanization of American Lutheranism: Democratization of Authority and the Ordination of Women, Part II,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 11, no. 6 (October 2011): <https://tinyurl.com/y7yrt3c8>.

¹⁷ “ELCA Facts,” ELCA.org, <https://tinyurl.com/ycx4zfoe>.

¹⁸ “ELCA Celebrates 45 Years of Ordaining Women,” ELCA.org, November 19, 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/yatdl7lz>.

after college. My seminary classes propelled me to question my biblical assumptions and consider my theological beliefs. I was given space to explore the nature of God and my responsibility to this world. The closer I got to being a pastor, the more I felt called to the classroom. I stayed quiet about this because I felt like I was betraying all those female pastors who paved the way for me. I closed myself off in my own *Anfechtung*, where the questions I had been taught to ask felt painful. When I was finally guided out of that space by professors, family, and a little time in the Redwoods, I was resolved to go for doctoral work in theology. It was with this decision that I was reminded that my challenges to the status quo and my questions were my gift. It was a precious gift planted in me by the Spirit and nourished by the women in my family.

A full accounting of American Lutheran women's experience of gospel grace in 2018 and the ways in which women's ordination contributes to their experience would require research far beyond the scope of this essay.¹⁹ No doubt it would reveal a range of experiences, including personal stories of reconciliation and fulfillment as well as disappointment and even betrayal within the church. Slightly modified, Kelly's criteria for assessing women's experience in the Renaissance highlight some of the larger-scale changes since the mid-twentieth century. Although the focus here is upon religious life, that life takes place in the cultural and political context of the United States where much has changed for women since the 1960s, and some things have not. In the mid-1960s, white women earned less than sixty cents for every dollar a white man made; in 2016, they earned eighty cents to the dollar.²⁰ In 1972, Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment to the Federal Constitution, but it still has not been ratified.²¹ In 1975 *Roe v. Wade* changed rather than ended the national debate about reproductive rights, which continues today. In 1967, there was one woman in the US Senate and ten in the House, including Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to Congress; in 2017, there were twenty-one women in the Senate and eighty-three in the House.²² Hillary Clinton lost the presidential election to Donald Trump in 2016; following his inauguration, millions of women (and men) united in protest marches.

American Lutherans' decision to ordain women coincided with these and other second-wave developments. As American women's political, economic, and

¹⁹ An approach other than the one taken here might begin with autobiographical work by Lutheran women including: Gail Ramshaw, *Under the Tree of Life: The Religion of a Feminist Christian*, rev. ed. (Akron, OH: OSL, 2003); Heidi Neumark, *Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx* (Boston: Beacon, 2003); Deanna A. Thompson, *Hoping for More: Having Cancer, Talking Faith, and Accepting Grace* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012); Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner and Saint* (New York: Jericho, 2013); Kaethe Schwehn, *Tailings: A Memoir* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014); Jacqueline A. Bussie, *Outlaw Christian: Finding Authentic Faith by Breaking the "Rules"* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016).

²⁰ Kevin Miller, "The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap," American Association of University Women, <https://tinyurl.com/y74kbbpp>.

²¹ At the 1982 deadline, only thirty-five of a required thirty-eight states had ratified the ERA.

²² Anna Brown, "The Data on Women Leaders," Pew Research Center: Social and Demographic Trends, March 17, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/y98dm8vs>.

cultural roles were expanding, so too within Lutheran churches. Each year, more women have answered calls to pastoral ministry, equipped for the work both by their personal gifts and by formal theological training. In a slowly increasing number of congregations, worshippers heard the gospel preached by women and received the sacraments from women. Lay women assumed greater responsibilities for congregational governance and worship. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978) and the National Council of Churches’ *Inclusive Language Lectionary* (1983–85) introduced more expansive language. Beyond revision of old resources, Lutheran women contributed to the production of new hymns and liturgical resources informed by emerging feminist theology.²³ Although not only women and girls encountered these changes, women and girls were offered affirmation of their experiences and the opening of new possibilities for response.

These developments echoed trends in larger Lutheran and ecumenical communities in which Lutherans participate. Addressing the critical and constructive tasks Ruether identified, the growing corpus of feminist theological work took various forms, including devotional resources, newsletters, academic publications, and reports. While on the staff of the World Council of Churches, Lutheran Constance F. Parvey wrote the *Sheffield Report on the Community of Men and Women in the Churches* (1983), which anticipated transformation of the whole church, not only of women’s lives. As the number of women with advanced theological training grows, so has their presence on seminary and college faculties as well as in church leadership. Individually and in collaboration, they deepen and expand upon the Lutheran theological tradition, taking up familiar topics such as the theology of the cross and vocation and pushing into new areas such as ecotheology and interfaith work.²⁴ Since 1988, Lutheran women in theological and religious studies have gathered annually to share their work and worship together.²⁵

Lutheran institutions underwent a series of reorganizations during these decades. The disagreements about biblical interpretation exposed by deliberation on women’s ordination led to the LCMS’s schism and the formation of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Congregations (AELC) in the 1970s. In 1988,

²³ Notable contributors include Gail Ramshaw, who worked on the lectionary and has written many liturgical resources, and hymn writers Susan R. Briehl, Susan Palo Cherwien, and Gracia M. Grindal, who also served on the committee for planning the *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

²⁴ Among the many examples of this work: Mary M. Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge: A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997); Deanna A. Thompson, *Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism, and the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); Marit Trelstad, ed., *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013); Martha Ellen Stortz, *Called to Follow: Journeys in John’s Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017); the several women contributors to the six volumes of *The Annotated Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015–17), including editors Kirsi I. Stjerna and Mary Jane Haemig; Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Basic, 2005); and contributors to Lisa E. Dahill and James B. Martin-Schram, eds., *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016). For additional examples, see the annotated bibliography produced by the ELCA Justice for Women Program in 2012: <https://tinyurl.com/yc7ojba4>. An updated bibliography is expected in 2018.

²⁵ A notable example of this scholarship: Mary Jane Streufert, ed., *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

the ALC, LCA, and AELC, the three bodies that ordained women, formed the ELCA. The new church stated clear goals for increasing women's participation in governance and as staff. Women of the ELCA, independently incorporated and self-funded, continued and expanded the work of the traditional women's organizations: assisting women in "full discipleship."²⁶ The Commission for Women was charged by the ELCA Constitution to "enable this church to realize the full participation of women; to create equal opportunities for women; to foster partnership between men and women; to assist this church to address sexism; to advocate justice for women in this church and society."²⁷ For more than a decade and a half, the commission carried out this advocacy, addressing issues such as domestic violence and clergy misconduct as well as promoting women's contributions to the life of the church. Anticipating a major denominational restructuring, Agnes S. McClain, chair of the commission's board, noted, "Work for justice around issues of gender is work done not for the sake of women alone, but for the sake of and for the health of the whole church."²⁸ In 2004, the commission was replaced by the much smaller Justice for Women program.

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Coinciding with feminism's third wave, American Lutherans are revising their teaching about sexuality and gender, changes that address Kelly's first and fourth areas of evaluation: regulation of sexuality and gender ideology. While the transformation is uneven, it is widespread and perhaps most evident in connection with two ELCA social-teaching statements: *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* adopted in 2009²⁹ and a statement on gender justice anticipated for 2019.³⁰ Rather than laying down regulations, the first provides a theological framework for understanding human sexuality and its expression. It is concerned primarily not with women's experience but rather with fostering trusting relationships and "life-enhancing and appropriate ways of giving expression to this complicated dimension of ourselves."³¹ Marriage and family are identified as foundational for such expression. Controversially, the statement acknowledges the variety of forms these

²⁶ ELCA Constitution, 1988, 16.51.11.

²⁷ ELCA Constitution, 16.41.D897 a.

²⁸ Quoted by Pauline J. Chang, "ELCA Commission for Women Propose New References to 'Gender Justice,'" *The Christian Post*, October 28, 2004, <https://tinyurl.com/ydbmaqkh>.

²⁹ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," 2009, <https://tinyurl.com/y92y2dyr>.

³⁰ As of the writing of this article, a draft of the statement is in circulation for comment. ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice, "Draft Social Statement on Women and Justice: For Study and Response Prior to September 30, 2018," November 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/yc2m4nvp>.

³¹ "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," 28.

take, including same-gender couples. It recognizes the influence of multiple cultural forces and practices on sexuality and condemns those that encourage harm rather than preventing it. The 2009 Churchwide Assembly also authorized development of a statement on gender justice. The November 2017 draft affirms that all people are equally made in God’s image and the goodness of sexuality. Boldly naming sexism and patriarchy as sin, it rejects “the belief that females are secondary to males and more sinful than males,” and repudiates hierarchies “based on race and ethnicity, ability, social or economic status, or sex (what our bodies look like biologically) or gender (how people express themselves).” The preparation of this statement is, on the one hand, an acknowledgement of the continued need to expose the horrors of sexism and patriarchy in and beyond the church and, on the other hand, an effort to marshal the theological and other resources of the church in opposition to those sins and in support of new standards of right living. In keeping with the fourth aspect of grace discussed by Melancthon, it calls for a response to grace that proclaims grace and works to realize the “emancipatory potential” of the gospel for women and all people.

Half a millennium after Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses, half a century after Daly’s *The Church and the Second Sex*, almost fifty years since Elizabeth Platz and Barbara Andrews were ordained . . . some things have changed for women. Elyssa’s personal narrative illustrates how those changes are experienced by three generations of women in one family. Women’s leadership during the Reformation commemorations is one visible instance of such changes and an indication that those are for all the church’s members. Today, American women’s sexuality is less regulated, but women are too often subjected to abuse or harassment. More economic, political, and cultural roles are open to women, but many women lack practical access to them. Ideology about women and gender is shifting, but not without vigorous, sometimes violent opposition. Within Lutheran churches, the possibility that women receive gospel grace as “for you” is enhanced by the presence of female pastors who are simultaneously as good as and different from male pastors. Avenues for women’s response “to God in freedom and love and thanksgiving” have increased. In the early twenty-first century, the gospel’s “emancipatory potential” for women’s lives in the present world is more realized than it was in the sixteenth. And yet, even as the Reformers’ work was incomplete and is ongoing, so women’s emancipatory experience of grace and full participation in the body of Christ is uneven, and the movement toward those ideals continues. ⊕

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