

Chapter 1

## Historical and Theological Legacies of Feminism and Lutheranism

---

L. DeAne Lagerquist and Caryn D. Riswold

---

*"For to remain a member of a historic Church is not to achieve finality.  
A creed is not an imprisoning wall, it is a gate, opening on a limitless country  
that cannot be entered in any other way."*

—Vida Dutton Scudder, *On Journey*<sup>1</sup>

"I AM A STUDENT of theology. I am also a woman."<sup>2</sup> When feminist theologian Valerie Saiving (1921–1992) made these declarations in 1960 they pointed to the rarity of one person claiming both identities. Her essay "The Human Situation: A Feminine View" signaled the beginnings of theological engagement in the second wave of feminism in the United States. Since then an increasing number of women here and around the world has taken up the study of theology. Feminist theology is now a recognized field with its own distinctive themes, classic texts, and characteristic questions. Feminist theologians, like feminists more generally, recognize their commonalities as women and insist that women's experiences must be taken into account. They also recognize the profound reality that all women are not the same. Significant differences grounded in factors such as race, sexuality, class, nationality, or confession, as well as in the particularities of individual life experience, contribute to womanist, mujerista, queer, and other theological conversations.

The theologians in this book were young or not yet born in 1960. They join Vida Dutton Scudder (1861–1954), Valerie Saiving, Martin Luther, and a host of witnesses in exploring the country entered through the gospel gate. Their work enriches the traditions they draw upon and encourages expressions of Christian teaching that are Lutheran and feminist. It explores affinities and tensions between feminism and Lutheran theology as well as the ambivalence and generativity produced by the two together. Moreover, these women bring their varied talents and education, relationships and life experiences to the task of articulating the life-giving message of God's love for their own communities and in their own time and place. They add their voices to a song as rich, dynamic, and resonant as the harmonies of the traditional spiritual "Oh Mary, Don't You Weep" performed a cappella.

Echoing Saiving, the authors declare, "We are Lutherans; we are women; we are theologians." Simultaneously claiming multiple identities, they display a characteristically Lutheran insistence that one can be two (or more) things at once and suggest that their theology and their identities are intricately interwoven. Lutheran theology is thick with both/ands: the Christian is at the same time justified and still a sinner; God governs through both spiritual and temporal means; at the Lord's table we receive Jesus' body and blood truly present in bread and wine that remain bread and wine; a Christian's freedom in God's grace is as absolute as her obligation to her neighbor. The two-ness of being Lutheran and feminist (and other things as well) is more akin to living simultaneously in liturgical and academic time than it is to binary, contesting opposites. These authors also participate in the venerable Lutheran practice of publicly stating and defending one's belief. Such confession is the interpretive activity whereby divine love is spoken into new circumstances.

I am both a historian and a participant in these discussions and developments. I am a feminist because I am a Lutheran Christian; the way I am a Lutheran is shaped by my being baptized but not ordained, feminist, American, a monolingual native speaker of English, of pan-Scandinavian descent several generations removed from "the boat." My feminist and Lutheran identities are those of a woman of a particular age. I was five when Valerie Saiving wrote her landmark essay; the year I graduated from college about fifty American Lutheran pastors were women. My development as a historian of American Lutheranism coincided with the emergence of feminist theology. As I recount recent decades, my recollection of specific people and events is informed by my own experiences. What follows is more a first, personal effort to reflect on what has transpired than an exhaustive, authoritative account—yet it is one that serves the purpose of tracing some of the work of Lutheran women, on whose labor contemporary Lutheran feminist theology builds.

## Luther and the Lutheran Heritage

Neither Martin Luther nor the movement he launched can be unambiguously described as feminist, still there are hints of affinities with contemporary feminist concerns. God's gracious love, the heart of Luther's theology, makes no distinction between women and men who are equal in their brokenness. Divine grace is poured out without regard for any human distinctions, accomplishments, or shortcomings. Everyone comes before God as a beggar needing to be made whole and is fed forgiveness in, with, and under the bread-body and blood-wine. Luther recognized that all stations in life offer honorable work that pleases God and benefits the neighbor—the milkmaid as much as the farmer, the mother as much as the priest, the wife as much as the magistrate. The schools he established enrolled both girls and boys so that all could read the Bible and Catechism. His affection for Katherine von Bora and their children was enthusiastic; their household modeled the Christian home as a school for faith. Nonetheless, the benefits of granting spiritual value to women's domestic responsibilities and providing basic religious education must in retrospect be weighed against the loss of monastic access to theological study and religious leadership for a smaller number of women. A very small number of women with high social position were patronesses of the Reformation, and wives of pastors had opportunity for a new sort of ministry, but the orders of creation restricted women's arenas of activity. The mixed resources Luther's theology and reforms offer to feminist historians and theologians require discerning appropriation lest the dangers overwhelm the gifts.<sup>3</sup>

Lutheran women's access to advanced theological study and public church offices were often restricted in subsequent generations. After authoritative statements of doctrine were gathered into the *Book of Concord* (1580), orthodox theologians labored to systematize the Reformers' insights. Using philosophical tools and concerned to secure the objective claims of theology, they highlighted the specialized nature of theology as an enterprise generally closed to lay people and consequently to women. Because evangelical Pietism strove to restore personal experience of the gospel to a central place and granted spiritual significance to the home, women's activities, particularly as mothers, were given greater value. Without rejecting infant baptism, Pietists encouraged personal awakening, whereby the believer became aware of her sinfulness, received assurance of God's love, and determined to live in a manner worthy of that love. Lay preachers—men and women—were granted authority on the basis of spiritual gifts rather than educational credentials or official positions. Women were authors and readers of devotional literature, including hymns such as Lena Sandell's (1832–1903) still beloved "Children of the Heavenly Father." Pietists

established charitable institutions such as hospitals and orphanages where women engaged in works of love.

## Lutherans in the United States

The entire range of European Lutheranism was carried to North America by several waves of Scandinavian and German immigrants, beginning in the colonial era. Without the support and constraints of state sponsorship, Lutherans in the United States formed churches distinguished from each other by religious and cultural characteristics. Well into the twentieth century, the combination of the high value placed on polity, styles of piety, and confessional matters by many Lutherans and the stress some maintained on ethnic ties and use of non-English languages served to insulate Lutherans from other American Christians. Even Lutherans' internal debates about how much and how best to adapt to their shared American context contributed to isolation and inhibited outreach and discouraged productive interaction across denominational lines. From the late 1800s into the 1980s several rounds of institutional mergers consumed enormous resources and focused the attention of theologians (most often male clergy) on confessional issues that had little resonance with feminist concerns. Likewise, Lutherans' pioneering involvement in bilateral ecumenical dialogues was more likely to cast feminism and women's full participation in the church as a problem than as an opportunity for new insight. By 1988 two bodies—the newly formed, composite Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, rooted in mid-nineteenth-century German immigration—encompassed nearly all Lutherans in their membership. That the ELCA ordained women and had over one thousand women on its clergy roster was among the significant differences between the churches.

## American Lutheran Women before 1970

Once in the United States, Lutherans continued to limit most women's religious roles to the home and congregation, some to the present day. Catechetical instruction prepared girls with a minimal level of theological knowledge. Family devotional practices gave mothers an educational role that could extend to teaching children in congregational settings.<sup>4</sup> By the late nineteenth century, women's organizations provided members with Bible study materials, opportunities for leadership, and connections to the larger Lutheran church and its missions around the world.<sup>5</sup> Early on, some men objected to these groups as subversive and giving too much autonomy to women who were prohibited from ordination and usually from holding office or even voting in congregations. The structure and purposes of Lutheran women's organizations paralleled those in

other Protestant churches, but the groups were a bridge to ecumenical cooperation for only a few leaders. Emmy Evald (1857–1946), longtime president of the Augustana Synod's national women's organization, was active in woman's rights activities including the Woman's Suffrage Association in Chicago; however, she stands as an exceptional rather than a typical case.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century Lutherans established colleges for the education of both young men and women. These institutions of higher learning offered students freedom mingled with constraints. Programs promoted conventional notions of woman's nature and women's roles. Young women were directed toward teaching or nursing or returning home as better-educated potential wives and mothers. But at these Lutheran colleges young women could also catch a glimpse of possibilities for careers in public arenas. The histories of these colleges includes exemplary, inspiring teachers such as Rosa Young (1874–1970) at Concordia College Selma, a Missouri Synod school for African Americans, who encouraged both women and men to follow their calling into church and society.

Barred from ordination and seminary training, Lutheran women found other ways to answer their vocations. Some became deaconesses, some taught subjects such as English, history, or music at Lutheran colleges, and some were lay professionals in the local and national church. On the forefront of the churches' confession through works of love, deaconesses also reflected upon the religious basis of their ministry and its theological significance. Sister Ingeborg Sponland (1870–1951), director of Deaconess Hospital in Chicago, observed:

To us as deaconesses truth cries out that all human beings have a soul which has been bought by the blood of Jesus Christ for the Kingdom of heaven. There can be no discrimination as to nationality or creed when it comes to serving our Master. He served all humanity and bids us to follow in his footsteps. In modifying our methods so as to be able to serve people of various nationalities and creeds we gain a broader vision and a deeper sympathy and understanding—a compassion and love for souls that are without Christ.<sup>6</sup>

This expansive view of the church's responsibilities in the world was a challenge to these churches' narrow focus upon their own members and to an emphasis on right belief without action. Sister Elizabeth Fedde's (1850–1921) comment that the deaconesses were themselves the Bible their patients read, calls such a distinction into question, particularly if word and sacrament are elevated above or separated from works of love.

Lutheran women in the twentieth century also were particularly active in campus ministry and social service. No doubt many women found their work

personally rewarding and religiously significant. Nonetheless, the church was not always prepared to receive their gifts. Mary Markley (1891–1954), executive for student work in the United Lutheran Church (ULC), described the difficulty in 1939:

I grant you that the church-related colleges may be in a dilemma. They are educating not females, ladies, or women, but personalities. They are sending these personalities—Christian women with initiative and a sense of responsibility—back into churches in which outmoded practical methods persist from the individual congregation all along the line to national boards and church bodies.<sup>7</sup>

Her colleague Mildred Winston's (1900–1980) experience illustrates the situation. Following graduation from Susquehanna College in the 1920s she pursued advanced study at Biblical Seminary in New York. When no Lutheran college was willing to employ her, she joined Markley as a lay professional with the ULC. For three decades Winston encouraged young women to answer callings within the church; in the 1950s she organized programs that provided young women with practical work experience, theological training, and opportunities to meet professional women in a range of occupations. Cordelia Cox (1901–1997), for example, brought her training and experience as a social worker and college instructor to her work as the first director of Lutheran Refugee Services, where she oversaw the resettlement of 57,000 displaced persons and refugees. Women such as these produced workshops, newsletters, and reports rather than volumes of systematic theology; they were reflective about their work directing the church's ministry in the world and deeply engaged in what today we call practical theology.

### **Lutheran Women from the American Second Wave to the Third Wave**

In the second half of the twentieth century Lutheran women continued their involvement in women's organizations and their work as lay church professionals. At the same time, the emerging second wave of the American women's movement exacerbated the tension between Lutheran theology that made no distinction between women and men with regard to God's grace and Lutheran polity and practice that restricted women's use of their talents and training. Increasingly Lutheran women turned their energies to reflect on their own experience and religious heritage; like women in other traditions they criticized Lutheranism's shortcomings, retrieved its resources, and reconstructed its treasured messages for themselves and the church. As in other Christian churches,

inclusive language, worship leadership, and ordination were early pressing issues. Feminist leadership came from women's organizations, from wives of clergy, from women students and faculty on college and seminary campuses, and from women academically trained in theology and called to pastoral ministry. Decisions in 1970 by the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church in American (LCA) to begin ordaining women expanded women's access to Lutheran theological education. By the twenty-first century Lutheran women were deeply engaged participants and publicly visible leaders in church and academy. Access to theological education and the presence of women at Lutheran seminaries and other institutions contributed to the development of a feminist Lutheran theology that addresses practical matters such as liturgical language, ethical issues such as domestic violence, and systematic matters such as those included in this volume.

Leaders of the ALC and LCA women's organizations were in tune with feminism and advocated for women's ordination. Margaret Wold, then executive director of American Lutheran Church Women (ALCW), is an extraordinary but not unique example. She served on the ALC's committee to study women's ordination; her book *The Shalom Woman* (1975) offered a gentle push toward feminist theology. In the 1980s, led by Bonnie Jensen who had earned an M.Div. from Wartburg Seminary, ALCW programs focused on social conditions affecting American women and fostered personal connections among Lutheran women around the world. Having raised their consciousness of the overwhelmingly white membership of the church, in 1983 the national board appointed three women of color as members-at-large: Annie Briggs, Maria Gomez, and Barbara Tucker. Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), LCA, and ALC women's group leaders cooperated in sponsoring a series of theological conferences for women that featured women theologians. Together they insured that when the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was formed in 1988 the organizations' common commitments to expansive ministry by and for women continued through both Women of the ELCA and the Commission for Women. The latter was charged to promote "the full participation of women; to create equal opportunity for women; to foster partnership between women and men; to assist the church to address sexism; to advocate for justice for women in the church and society."<sup>8</sup>

Feminism and Lutheranism also met on campuses. Wittenberg University historian Margret Sittler Ermath published *Adam's Fractured Rib: Observations on Women in the Church* in 1970. Students were introduced to feminist ideas through the publications of Catholic theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether and Letty Russell, one of the first women ordained in the United Presbyterian Church, as well as other theologians. A contributor to this volume spoke at a St. Olaf College chapel service during Women's Week in 1976. The student newspaper,

referring to her as “little Krissie Kvam, ‘Christian Feminist,’” reported that her talk included “gentle prodding” toward the “continual social and self-criticism” Christ stressed.<sup>9</sup> Women involved in campus ministry already were engaged in theological work and were among the first ordained. Among them Constance F. Parvey assumed international, ecumenical responsibilities with the World Council of Churches’ program “The Community of Women and Men in the Church.” The women hired by religion departments at Lutheran colleges were not all Lutherans; moreover, Lutheran women, including several authors in this volume, followed their academic vocations to non-Lutheran institutions. Gail Ramshaw, who taught religion at LaSalle University in Philadelphia, is but one notable example. If her deeply Lutheran and feminist identity is not immediately evident in her prolific publications on liturgical language and worship or in her widely used lectionary editions, it is clear in her autobiography, *Under The Tree Of Life: The Religion of a Feminist Christian* (1998).

At Lutheran seminaries feminism arrived slowly. Adjunct instructors and faculty wives were among the first to engage the conversation. Wives of the faculty who walked out from Concordia Seminary in 1974 were among the founders of the Lutheran Women’s Caucus, a pan-Lutheran group with explicitly feminist objectives. Lois Snook, wife of a faculty member at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, edited *In God’s Image: Toward Wholeness for Women and Men*, published by the Lutheran Church in America in 1976 and distributed by other church bodies. After ordination was opened to women, they enrolled at Lutheran institutions in growing numbers.<sup>10</sup> Their presence and their activities pressed feminist concerns. Luther Seminary students, for example, organized a conference on Christianity and feminism that featured speakers including Lutheran ethicist Mary Pellauer, then on the faculty of Union Theological Seminary, New York.<sup>11</sup> Other women chose to attend non-Lutheran schools such as Yale Divinity School. Some took the long path through ordination and parish ministry prior to further graduate study; others went directly into academic programs in ethics, biblical studies, church history, theology, or other fields. Lutheran seminaries began to hire women into full-time, tenurable positions in the 1970s. The first two appointments were both in Christian education: Jean Bozeman, a laywoman, to the faculty at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) in 1971, and Pastor Margaret Krych at Lutheran School of Theology at Philadelphia (LSTP) in 1977. The following year, church historian Faith Burgess (now Rohrbough) was appointed at LSTP to teach and as academic dean. Pastor Norma Cook Everist, a deaconess consecrated in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, was appointed at Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, in 1979. Through the next decade the number of faculty women grew as did the range of subjects they taught. In 2004 Phyllis Anderson became president of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, California, the first woman president of a Lutheran Seminary in the USA.<sup>12</sup>



Women who combined Lutheran theological commitments and feminist goals worked to change the church as well as to articulate their beliefs. They found partners among like-minded Lutheran men and other feminists. In 1978 the *Lutheran Book of Worship* incorporated inclusive language in reference to human beings while retaining conventional forms in reference to God. In the 1980s and 1990s Lutheran journals—*Dialog*, *Word & World*, *Currents in Theology and Mission*—published special issues devoted to feminism.<sup>13</sup> In 1988, when Lutheran ethicist Karen Bloomquist and systematic theologian Mary Knutsen reflected on feminism as a potentially new starting point for theology, they each emphasized their hope that feminist theology would foster renewed and freeing expressions of the gospel.<sup>14</sup> To the degree that feminism coincided with Lutheran themes and was not made explicit, some audiences were unaware of it. Opponents of feminism, however, were vigilant in their criticism, sometimes leveling personal attacks on women labeled as feminist. Indeed, a search of the American Theological Library Association's standard index of religious periodicals returns many anti-feminist articles in Lutheran publications but relatively few articles that combine feminist and Lutheran concerns. Even work by authors who identify themselves as both Lutheran and feminist seldom is labeled as such unless the title makes the connection obvious. This may be an oddity of the indexing process, but it also points to the difficulty in recognizing this hybrid and varied sort of theology and in distinguishing it from other Lutheran or feminist theology, particularly when the approach rather than the topic is feminist and Lutheran.

Practical reforms were evident in the policies and practices of the ELCA, formed in 1988. Advocates of women's full participation in the church and of an inclusive church (the goal referred particularly to people marginalized by race, ethnicity, or language) supported the ELCA's representational principle requiring the membership of churchwide and synodical boards to have gender balance and be racially diverse. In addition to Women of the ELCA and the Commission for Women, other units of the so-called "new church" were led by women whose qualifications included advanced theological degrees. Mary Pellauer, Coordinator for Research and Study in the Commission for Women, brought a combination of academic credentials and social activism on behalf of women to her responsibilities. Phyllis Anderson, Director for Theological Education of the Division for Ministry, had experience in a parish, on a synodical staff, and at LSTC in addition to her advanced degree. Karen Bloomquist, Director for Studies in the Division for Church and Society, had similar preparation. Later she took a comparable position in the Lutheran World Federation. Positions like these demanded a great deal—time, energy, creativity, wisdom, and patience; they also provided the women who held them with opportunities to encourage ministry to and by women, to advocate for women, and to advance feminist theology.

Women who had jobs in church offices, in congregations, and on campuses gave significant support to younger women by a variety of means. Particularly relevant to this volume was their early and consistent commitment to the Lutheran Woman's Pre-meeting to the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). This group, now called Lutheran Women in Theological and Religious Studies (LWTRS), has met every year since a brief gathering in advance of the 1987 AAR/SBL national meetings in Boston. Without formal membership and often led by women early in their careers, the group gathers to explore shared convictions, concerns, and challenges. Its purposes are religious, academic, and social. Discussion of academic papers, announcement of publications, and advice about jobs take place alongside requests for prayers, worship, and meals. The study and practice of religion are not divided; rather, they are mutually enriching and nourishing of personal relationships. These are not women who agree on every point, and not every Lutheran woman who might come chooses to do so. Nonetheless, those who gather agree that participation brings precious gifts that include both the experience of being recognized as simultaneously Lutheran and feminist and the joy of companionship in the work of articulating this double identity. Continuing that work, this volume articulates systematic theology that is at once Lutheran and feminist in the third wave. We now turn to an identification of a number of central theological themes when feminist and Lutheran convictions come together.

## Theological Themes

In the preceding narrative, DeAne Lagerquist focused on the women theologians who have already contributed to the *semper reformanda* ("always reforming") work of Lutheran theologies. Historical study and recollection illuminates why they could do what they did and where they did their work. In the following, I focus on four key theological themes that emerge from this narrative to ground transformative Lutheran theologies and consider their specific resonance with feminism: vocation, authority, paradox, and grace.

### VOCATION

History shows that Lutheran theological reflection on vocation remains a mixed resource of the tradition for women. It names a spiritual value for socially undervalued work, while accepting the orders of creation mandating a limited arena for women's work. Lois Malcolm, one of the authors of this volume, suggested in 1995 that a "Lutheran understanding of vocation as that which one does (whether in the home, at work, as a public citizen, and so on) for the good of the neighbor to enact God's creative purposes in the world" is an important point of resonance with feminism because it affirms "God's ongoing presence

and transforming activity" in the world.<sup>15</sup> Scholarly reflection on Luther and vocation is extensive. With some feminist focus and criticism of that tradition of reflection, we can see how the doctrine of vocation in Lutheranism provides a particular resource for feminist theology when it comes to understanding the relationship between God and human beings.

Feminism focuses on securing and protecting women's ability to shape their own lives and relationships. In this way, it focuses on the social and political realms of human life. Lutheran theology holds that women and men have the freedom to shape their own lives because their primary relationship is with God. God calls women and men to the various roles and places that shape their lives, thus no man-made institution has the inherent right to limit those offices and places. This adds a theological component to understanding social and political human life. Luther understood that institutions of this world are inherently sinful and flawed because they are human creations; God's ability to work through them comes from grace. What Luther did not understand—indeed, the late medieval world did not yet appreciate—was that patriarchy was and is one of those inherently flawed and sinful institutions. A contemporary understanding of systems of oppression and privilege that comes with feminism helps us to deconstruct the problematic elements in a Lutheran idea of vocation and reclaim elements that are particularly resonant with feminist theology.

Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren has been one of the most influential thinkers on vocation in Lutheranism, in part due to his 1957 book *Luther on Vocation*. In it he discusses at length "the concept of man as a fellow-worker with God," an idea worth considering, while he rejects outright the claim that this means the human being is "an independent ethical subject." Like Luther, Wingren insists on maintaining absolute human dependency on God. Nuancing this idea of dependence with a careful construction of human agency is necessary.<sup>16</sup> Wingren's own analogy that follows this claim and informs his discussion of "co-operation" with God makes plain its limitations. He uses the master-serf relationship as parallel to the God-human relationship: "The serf is free, for example, to move his hands and feet; the master does not decide their movements in detail." The larger situation and condition of the serf's life is, of course, bondage: "When the slave . . . does what he is commanded in field and meadow, he is his master's 'fellow-worker.' This is about the way Luther conceives of man as a 'fellow-worker' with God."<sup>17</sup> Whether or not we agree that this is what Luther meant when he suggested that God calls human beings to participate in the ongoing work of creation, Wingren's interpretation that a slave is a master's fellow worker because she carries out the master's order, without any meaningful agency, is both imperialistic and paternalistic.<sup>18</sup>

The initial suggestion that humans are called to be God's fellow workers in the world, however, is one that resonates with feminism insofar as it can

contribute to an understanding of shared power and interdependence in the God-human relationship. Further on in his writing, Wingren suggests that "Creation, the work of God, is carried out through the person who, being faithful to his vocation, is a coworker against the devil."<sup>19</sup> A similar and more relevant discussion of such a model of the God-human relationship comes from systematic theologian Philip Hefner and his detailed construction of the created co-creator: "The term *created* indicates that the human species did not design its own nature or role in the world."<sup>20</sup> This preserves the sovereignty of God as creator that grounds the Lutheran tradition. "The noun *co-creator* corresponds to the freedom of the human being."<sup>21</sup> This preserves the real agency embedded in the human condition. Hefner points out that this freedom is not mere liberty or sheer power to do as one wishes without constraint. It is about decision making and choices that have real consequences within human existence.

Hefner and Wingren both emphasize in Luther and the Lutheran tradition a foundational relationship wherein God calls the human being to carry out God's work in the world. This understanding of vocation has been foundational for the emergence of Lutheran women's theological work. The type of shared power and interdependence implied and illustrated by Hefner corrects the limitation of Wingren's interpretation of vocation and provides one key theological basis for Lutheran feminist theology.

## AUTHORITY

Feminists have long understood that the patriarchal presumption that men have authority over women because of the socially constructed privileges of the male is a fundamentally flawed and genuinely dangerous idea. Lutheran theologian Marc Kolden points out that the Lutheran tradition understands two ways the sin of unbelief manifests itself in human life: when we overvalue our human nature and try to flee from finitude, or when we sink into it and undervalue our human nature *imago Dei*. In this way he has learned from Valerie Saiving's groundbreaking feminist critique of the classical Christian notion of sin as pride.<sup>22</sup> She shows that under patriarchy, the problem for men is that they presume too much authority, where the problem for women is too limited a sense of authority. The way in which authority is rethought and even reimaged using Luther's idea of the priesthood of all believers provides a second theological basis for a Lutheran feminist theology in the twenty-first century. We see how women throughout the history of the tradition have built on this idea in forming organizations, doing ministry, and teaching long before their ordination by the church body was allowed.

Luther speaks extensively about spiritual power and authority in his 1520 treatise "The Freedom of a Christian." Authority in this sense is God's alone. This was an essential element of Luther's reclamation of justification by grace

through faith and rejection of works righteousness: the priest or bishop does not have authority to forgive; God forgives. In claiming that "we are all equally priests," and that "as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another divine things,"<sup>23</sup> Luther elevated the worth of ordinary Christians and provided the seed for what Lutherans speak of as the priesthood of all believers. This egalitarian impulse provides a basis for retooling a theological understanding of authority in a Lutheran and feminist theology. The authority of one human being over another is not part of this picture, and where Luther's emphasis was on deratifying the tyrannical authority of the church in his day, feminist theology deratifies the implicit authority of men over women in patriarchy.

The feminist work of Muslim scholar Amina Wadud provides a helpful image that captures a view of authority resonating with this idea. Wadud describes in detail the *tawhidic* paradigm for her work. *Tawhid* refers to the oneness of God and is a foundational concept in Islam. She also describes it as "the operating principle of equilibrium and cosmic harmony."<sup>24</sup> She imagines the oneness of God as the top point in a triangle and human beings as the two bottom points of the triangle. They relate to God as their spiritual authority and relate to each other as equals along a horizontal plane. Submission in Islam is only to Allah, Wadud argues, not one person to another. Similarly, Gustaf Wingren states plainly that "before God all are equal, for before God we have no office occupied in relation to our neighbors on earth and the basis of distinction and difference there."<sup>25</sup> In relation to each other, human beings are equal and authority rests with God alone. Any attempts of a person to exert authority over another person, whether it be master and slave, rich and poor, or man and woman, is symptomatic of the fallen creation in which it takes place. This was a crucial basis for the Lutheran reformation of the Christian tradition and is a fundamental claim of feminism.

We see how women in the Lutheran tradition have claimed authority in a variety of ways throughout its history: the pastor's active wife, the liturgist writing hymns, the teacher of music at a Lutheran college, or the author of a groundbreaking book on Luther, feminism, and the cross. They were empowered to do this in part because of this theological understanding of authority wherein all are called to be priests to one another regardless of gender. That human beings do not inherently possess authority over one another on the basis of race, gender, social class, sexuality, or any other distinguishing characteristic is a second key theological basis for Lutheran feminist theology.

## PARADOX

The ways in which Lutheran theology inhabits and preserves paradox establishes a third basis for Lutheran feminist theology. Whether it be in recognizing human beings as both justified and sinners, God as both hidden and revealed,

or Christians as citizens of both heaven and earth, the Lutheran tradition maintains a “both–and” structure and methodology that provides a third theological basis for Lutheran feminist theologies. Indeed, it enables theologians to be both Lutheran and womanist, *mujerista*, or feminist. This “twoness” is claimed in different ways by all of the authors collected in this volume, and it has shown itself throughout the traditions informing them. Paradox is then not a convenient excuse for holding contradictory truths in tension; paradox is the way in which both Lutheran and feminist theologies recognize the complications of human life in the world and in relationship with God.

Feminism in the twenty-first century works with an intersectional methodology, taking seriously the fact that human life is lived at the intersection of identities. These identities emerge from the socially constructed meanings of race, gender, social class, age, ethnicity, sexuality, and many other things. Living in the tensions that often emerge when one is, for example, simultaneously oppressed and oppressor on the basis of different axes of identity (gender and race, perhaps) is what feminists, womanists, and *mujeristas* work to make sense of today. The Lutheran theological idea of one person as both saved and sinning can ground exploration of privilege and oppression in a new way.

Similarly, feminist reflection on God finds resonance with the Lutheran idea that God is hidden and revealed. Theologians who are also feminist have made a commitment to engage a religious tradition, despite the patriarchal baggage it has accumulated over the centuries. This represents a conviction that God can work in and through unlikely things like patriarchal institutions. Luther maintains that “the invisible things of God are virtue, godliness, wisdom, justice, goodness, and so forth,”<sup>26</sup> and that these things are not always perceptible to theologians. In addition, a foundational Christian claim emphasized by Luther is that God is most fully revealed in the most unexpected places. This includes a young unmarried woman, a Jewish itinerant teacher, as well as suffering and the cross. Claims that revelation and truth can be found in unexpected places and in the margins holds particular meaning for women who are making sense out of their experiences of marginalization and pain in a patriarchal world and church. God could be and is present even and especially there.

One final example of paradox made plain in the Lutheran tradition is the way in which Luther appropriates Augustine’s ideas about the city of God and the city of this world, insisting that the Christian inhabits both. The claim that human life on earth is part but not all of the story for Christians resonates with feminist eschatology and sparks discussions of hope. The promise that God works in the world despite broken and sinful human structures and institutions answers feminist anger at injustice and violation. All of the ways in which paradox is a characteristic of Lutheran theological thinking enable feminist reflection on the intersectional reality of human life in the twenty-first century.

## GRACE

The final and perhaps most all-encompassing basis for a Lutheran feminist theology is grace. Grace is the reason that God calls each human being. Grace is the reason that humans need to submit to no spiritual authority other than God. Grace is the force that holds many things in tension and paradox. Grace claims us and our webs of relationships, including broken human beings and sinful human structures with the ability to conceive of justice and the capacity to bring it more fully into reality. A Lutheran feminist theology understands the gift of grace that was incarnate most fully in the person of Jesus and continues to be experienced in the sacramental relationship with Christ.

Luther insisted on reclaiming a deep sense of God as present in the sacraments, despite corrupt and wicked priests and church teachings about their character and effectiveness. When discussing baptism, he states that "it is not man's baptism, but Christ's and God's baptism, which we receive by the hand of a man."<sup>27</sup> The sacraments are signs of grace in visible form and ritual. The human participants merely make visible the invisible grace that comes from God. The sacraments were central to Luther's reformation of the Christian church and continue to be central to Lutherans today. A robust theology of the sacraments provides a basis for Lutheran feminist theology insofar as it emphasizes locations of God's transformative power and presence in the world.

The sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist are central because they are grace fully present in this world. In the same way, grace continues to be the empowering spirit of creation which was fully human in the incarnation. Feminist theologian Ann Milliken Pederson points out that the story of the incarnation is itself wrapped up in "economic realities, political histories, religious struggles, and formidable social boundaries."<sup>28</sup> The affirmation that the finite is capable of holding infinite grace, both in the sacraments as well as in the life and person of Jesus the Christ, gives transcendent meaning to feminist claims about the bodily integrity of women and the daily reality of all human life insofar as it is shaped by gender, race, class, sexuality, and myriad other concrete things. Twenty years ago, Karen Bloomquist articulated theology's need for a new starting point because of feminism:

[T]he starting point of feminist theology is deeply pastoral. It begins with the concrete experiences of real human beings, not in order to apply timeless truths to their lives, but to open up a pragmatic inquiry that seeks to understand the pains and contradictions in those experiences.<sup>29</sup>

Bloomquist goes on to add that the starting point is also transformative because it brings about new possibilities.

This collaborative chapter has reflected that commitment toward new possibilities insofar as it started with the experiences of real women in the Lutheran

tradition and proceeded to consider the theological claims that made both their stories and this volume possible. Claims about vocation affirm that women and men are and have been called by God to a variety of places, from hospitals to congregations to the academy. No man-made institution appropriately limits the location and scope of that call based on gender. Reflections on authority show that the equal relationships of every human being to God deratifies explicit and implicit forms of gender-based authority. Understanding paradox helps women and men see that it is wholly possible to be feminist and Lutheran, especially in a theological tradition of paradoxes about God hidden and revealed. This is feminism grounded in a Christian tradition and inhabiting the margins of that tradition, grounded in contemporary human life and inhabiting the margins of social systems. Finally, because Lutheran theology intentionally focuses on grace as embodied and concrete, Lutheran feminist theology is uniquely possible and indeed transformative.

### Suggested Readings

- Bengtson, Gloria E., ed. *Lutheran Women in Ordained Ministry, 1970–1995: Reflections and Perspectives*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995.
- Lagerquist, L. DeAne. *From Our Mothers' Arms: A History of Women in the American Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987.
- Preus, Marilyn, ed. *Serving the Word: Lutheran Women Consider Their Calling*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988.
- Goldstein, Valerie Saiving. "The Human Situation: A Feminine View." *Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (April 1960): 100–112.
- Stjerna, Kirsi Irmeli. *Women and the Reformation*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2009.
- Wingren, Gustaf. *Luther on Vocation*. Trans. Carl C. Rasmussen. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957.