

**Lutherans in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:**  
**Theology, Politics, and Worship Practice**

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**Abstract**

Clergy and Laity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) have unique world views founded on the two-kingdom theory of church and state. Based on a national sample of ELCA and LCMS clergy and laity in 2006, we examine the two-kingdom theory in practice. Consistent with Hunter's culture war thesis, we find a continuing gulf between the ELCA and LCMS in matters political, theological, and worship. There continues to be greater agreement among LCMS clergy and laity than between ELCA clergy and laity on a number of issues; however, the ELCA clergy-laity gap is not as significant as previous research has suggested. The relative unity within each denomination on important issues has important implications for how Lutherans teach and understand citizenship.

## I. Introduction

In late 1997, two years into his graduate work at Northwestern University, Burkee began the exasperating process of searching for a dissertation topic. Burkee's area of specialization was settling on religion and politics in postwar America, so he came to rest initially on Jerry Falwell and the rise of the Religious Right. But while Falwell and his evangelical Moral Majority was a curiosity to Burkee's advisor – a secular, left-leaning gay historian – he was not adequately obscure and esoteric to serve as the subject of a dissertation.

Fortunately, in one of Falwell's own writings, Burkee came across an allusion to his own church body, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS). Falwell referred to the Missouri Synod's 1970's schism as one of only a handful of conservative victories over liberal intellectuals who had hijacked America's Protestant denominations. He included, at least implicitly, Missouri Synod Lutherans among the Religious Right. While Burkee had not connected the contextual dots – Missouri's conservative takeover in 1969 and Nixon's 1968 victory; the ouster of Missouri moderates and reentry of religious conservatives into politics in the 1970's -- Falwell did. While Missouri's Lutherans may not consider themselves brethren to the Religious Right, clearly many evangelicals do.

While Burkee's dissertation studies focused on the rise of the conservatives who took power in 1969, forcing out self-styled "moderates" in the 1970's, he has been driven since to quantify the extent to which Lutheranism and Lutherans have been shaped by the culture wars that gave form to the Religious Right, and since, perhaps, a Religious Left.

We live in an age of extreme political polarization. Not since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century have Americans been more evenly-divided. Secular observers have only recently noted the rising correlation between religiosity in America and political identity. They call it the "God Gap," which shifted in 1968 to favor Republicans and has, in fits and spurts, grown since 1972. Since then, Americans who go to church on a regular basis tend, in increasing numbers, to vote Republican. This has paralleled the growth of evangelical denominations, the emergence of frequently non-denominational but decidedly evangelical and conservative megachurches, and the stagnation or decline of mainline denominations. In 2000 the "God Gap" favored the George W. Bush by twenty points: Six out of ten voting Americans who answered in exit polls that they go to church about every week voted for the Republican. That number grew slightly in 2004.

In his 1970 *Righteous Empire*, Martin Marty argued that two "parties" were emerging on the American religious landscape, roughly "liberal" and "conservative," divided by critical sociopolitical issues. He found that the state was serving increasingly as a sociocultural actor and that those state-centered issues were shaping the way people thought about their faith, denominations, and identity. In 1992 sociologist James Davison Hunter coined the phrase "culture wars" with his celebrated book of the same name.<sup>[1]</sup> Exploring the historical roots of American cultural conflict over issues including abortion, homosexuality, family, politics and the media, Hunter concluded that two polarized groups have been emerging in America, the "progressive" and "orthodox" (left and right of center; he properly rejects pigeonholing either as "liberal" or "conservative"), with moderate voices squeezed out of both. In the past, he argued, such battles had been expressed through Americans' principal identity, one's religious

denomination. However, the Culture Wars have since the 1970's been realigning identity along the lines of Hunter's polarized paradigm. By the 1990's Americans were beginning to identify more with their political and ecclesiastical "party" than with their denomination. In other words, the Culture Wars have been slowly creating a new ecumenism between the progressive and orthodox, those on the left and right of the new dividing line – the Bible and how it is understood.

American Lutheranism has undergone its own realignment since the early 1970's. During the 1970's the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) experienced a traumatic split, culminating in the walkout of hundreds of academics, seminarians and congregations generally seen as theologically and politically "moderate." In the years since the synod has experienced continuous "culture wars" of its own – between self-identified and evenly-divided "conservatives" and "moderates" – over issues including but not limited to ecumenism, church governance, and worship practice. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), formed in 1988 and including moderate exiles from the Missouri Synod, has experienced and generated even more acrimony between relatively evenly-divided conservatives and moderates over more contentious issues including gay marriage and ordination, human sexuality, and abortion. Finally, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has experienced its own turmoil in recent years over fellowship and worship practices.

In 2004, Burkee and Walz proposed to investigate the degree to which the Culture Wars – and Hunter's new ecumenism – have played out on broader and congregational levels. Members of the major Lutheran denominations, including the smaller WELS, have noted that in recent years many individual congregations have been adopting new styles of worship, governance, outreach, and even theological practice. Many Lutheran congregations, including most of the largest individual communities, have regular "contemporary" or "praise and worship" services styled on those of leading evangelical Christians (Southern Baptist, non-denominational). They have discarded traditional hymnals in favor of projectors and screens and exchanged bands for pipe organs. Many no longer enforce traditional views of "closed" or "close" communion. Congregational structures are changing also, with many churches adopting organizational philosophies including evangelical "church growth" (cell, or small group) structures or policy-based governance, and reforming models of pastoral leadership (discarding the traditional Senior Pastor-Assistant Pastor model in favor of newer, gifts-based models).[\[2\]](#)

Cultural shifts are reflected in shifting political attitudes and loyalties. A 2001 survey by Walz and Montreal revealed that nearly 85 percent of LCMS clergy self-identify as some form of Republican. In a parallel survey, more than 60 percent of ELCA clergy self-identified as Democrat. We proposed to refine those findings and compare them to lay attitudes and affiliations. We proposed to determine, as in Jeffrey Hadden's 1969 *The Gathering Storm in the Churches: The Widening Gap Between Clergy and Laymen*, the degree to which lay attitudes deviate significantly from those of their clergy.

Implicit in our proposal is that there is more to the "Religious Right" than political identity alone. If denominational identity truly has been breaking down since 1970, as Hunter suggested, conservative Lutherans would not only self-identify as Republicans and vote in lockstep with the "Religious Right," but would also behave increasingly like their evangelical brothers and sisters in personal, family and congregational life.

Our hypothesis, then, is that American Lutheranism is undergoing a realignment as it struggles through the Culture Wars. Lutheranism has been growing increasingly polarized as parishioners leave communities to join like-minded congregations. We believe that our study will identify on the left, or “progressive,” congregations that:

- are dominated by like-minded and politically-active moderates
- practice, increasingly, contemporary/praise styles of worship
- have begun to embrace church growth, cell or small-group membership structures
- practice fully open communion
- have adopted progressive congregational organization models (no longer using the senior pastor – assistant pastor model)
- embrace more progressive approaches to women's participation in the community (most roles outside that of pastor are open to women)
- generally, are growing in membership

Likewise, we believe that we will identify on the right, or "orthodox," congregations that:

- practice traditional, hymnal and liturgy-based forms of worship
- reject church growth, cell or small-group membership structures
- practice theologically orthodox, yet ecumenical, forms of communion (opening the Eucharist to all who believe that Christ's body and blood are present in the bread and wine)
- retain traditional congregational organizational models (if they have one pastor, he or she is a senior pastor; if two, one is senior and the other assistant or associate pastor)
- have membership numbers that are generally stagnant or in decline

Among theologically conservative Lutheran communities there is a third, more traditionalist group that mimics the "progressive" model as detailed above but practices enforced, closed communion and generally bars women from leadership roles. We believe these are generally declining in number and being absorbed into or eclipsed by the second, or "orthodox" group.

## II. Lutheran Social Theology: The Two-Kingdom Theory

The two-kingdom theory of church and state is the central element in Lutheran social theology. H. Richard Niebuhr (1951) termed this model as “Christ and Culture in Paradox,” the idea of allegiance to both heavenly and earthly kingdoms that is found in Luther’s writings and in the Lutheran Confessions. This model “best preserves and safeguards the Biblical tension” of rendering “therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (*Render Unto Caesar* 1995: 33). According to many critics, the two kingdom’s greatest weakness is in its “persistent passivity toward government,” since government does not perform any Gospel-based functions (*Render Unto Caesar* 1995: 33). Though the ELCA and LCMS adhere to this common model in theory, the denominations diverge in applying this model to the 21<sup>st</sup> century public square.

Indeed, there is significant agreement between the ELCA and the LCMS that the two-kingdom theory should in principle provide a resource for political involvement. “Christians are simultaneously in the kingdom of the left hand, which includes the Law and secular reason, and the kingdom of the right hand, governed by grace and the Gospel” (Menuge 2001: 3). To use St. Augustine’s (1962) terminology, everyone is subject to two cities – the city of God and the city of man – that carry different expectations and responsibilities. The challenge is to separate spiritual righteousness from civil righteousness. The church embodies the city of God by its focus on things above. Below, civil governments blessed by God can be effective tools in creating and maintaining good and just societies. Christians can and should occupy civil offices and use them for society’s good.

While the complete story of this divide is beyond the scope of this paper, it is helpful to further examine the evangelical/mainline divide (Guth et al. 1997). Mainline churches such as the ELCA are more likely to interpret the Bible more liberally, be ecumenical, and become agents of change in society. Evangelical churches such as the LCMS and ELCA tend to interpret the Bible literally, be more confessional in their worship practices, and place much greater emphasis on individual salvation than on societal change or transformation. The ELCA is a classic mainline denomination that has been a consistent and sometimes vocal critic of political action. Both the LCMS and ELCA have tended to avoid taking positions on many political issues, allowing the left hand of God to rule in the civil realm as Christ’s redeeming work is ongoing in the kingdom of the right hand. Even within the Lutheran evangelical camp differences between the LCMS and WELS have arisen.

To better understand the LCMS understanding of the two-kingdom theory, we turn to *Render Unto Caesar . . . and Unto God: A Lutheran View of Church and State*. The problem, historically, has been application. Afraid of being too sure of God’s intent in a fallen world, LCMS pastors and parishioners have tended to largely abdicate civil societies to others. Lutherans continue to be underrepresented on the national political scene. No Lutheran has been president, and the highest national office filled by a Lutheran has been that of Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court (William Rehnquist, 1986-2005). Today, 18 Lutherans serve in Congress, but only two of those are Missouri Synod Lutherans (Representatives John Shimkus, R-Ill., and Dave Reichert, R-Wash.). Some of this may stem from a denomination that has gone to great lengths to preserve its

German theology and heritage, especially in the first half of the twentieth century. A larger piece of the puzzle, however, goes back to social theology.

In this regard, the LCMS, like other denominations, tries to avoid the extremes of becoming too politically apathetic or becoming overly involved. The LCMS has tended to err on the passive side. Prior to his recent death, LCMS President Dr. A.L. Barry released a series of pamphlets on important issues to the church. In “What About . . . Pastors,” Barry makes no mention of a public affairs component to clergy duties. “We must never allow other things to take priority over . . . key pastoral duties and activities.” The Church sees its impact through individual Christians pursuing their vocations in an indirect and unintentional influence, letting the Word speak for itself. The expectation is that individual Christians, in turn, will have “a transforming effect upon the society in which they live.”

The ELCA, on the other hand, has had fewer misgivings about entering the political arena. Unlike the LCMS, the ELCA as an institution has issued numerous positions on moral, social, and political issues of the day. For example, the ELCA issues social statements, messages, and social policy resolutions and statements that address a plethora of domestic and international issues. While the LCMS has focused on life and educational issues, the ELCA has concentrated on poverty, environmental, women’s, and racial issues. In any event, a Washington presence may best demonstrate the difference in political activity between the two synods. The ELCA has a Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA); due to budgetary constraints, the LCMS recently closed its Office of Government Information (OGI).

Part of the ELCA-LCMS political divide today – ELCA pastors are largely Democratic and LCMS pastors predominantly Republican – may have its roots in immigrant value systems (Luebke 1972). Richard Jensen (1970) and Paul Kleppner (1970) suggest that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, German Lutherans – the bulwark of what became the LCMS and what comprised much of the former LCA – subscribed to a ritualist model, while Scandinavian Lutherans – who form a foundation of today’s ELCA – were pietist in their value systems and politics. (The ELCA today has a sizable German block.)

Pietists encouraged government involvement at all levels to battle sin in its various forms, such as slavery, alcohol, and discrimination against women and immigrants. For much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Republican Party upheld this activist model to which many Scandinavian Lutherans adhered. Today, it is the Democratic Party that believes in a more activist government. Ritualists, on other hand, were concerned with government intrusion into the personal rights of its citizens, and were less likely to oppose slavery or alcohol. In fact, some ritualists believed that “to legislate morality was to threaten the authority of the church in spiritual matters” (Luebke 1973: 150). Ritualists, including German Lutherans, wished to maintain traditional values through means outside of government, such as a system of parochial schools. The Democratic Party of the 19<sup>th</sup> century tended to be more receptive to this ritualistic agenda. Today, however, the Republican Party expresses more concern about governmental intrusion in citizens’ lives. Thus, history may be a guide in explaining the roots of the Lutheran divide on the role of the church in society.

Another aspect of the Lutheran divide today is that clergy and laity relate very differently in the LCMS and ELCA. In the LCMS, the clergy and laity are much closer, theologically and politically, than in the ELCA. The LCMS, then, is a classic evangelical or orthodox church that focuses its mission on bringing the Gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ as savior – to people worldwide. Involvement in political and social issues is of much less importance. The ELCA, on the other hand, has gone the way of mainline Protestantism, in which clergy tend to be more liberal, theologically and politically, than parishioners. Though focused on the Gospel like LCMS clergy, ELCA pastors nonetheless exhibit a greater receptivity to and concern for the issues of this world.

Then there is the WELS, which is more conservative – theologically and politically, than the LCMS. Unlike the ELCA, the WELS and its members demonstrate little political activism. Much of this political quietism may be traced to the Lutheran two-kingdom theory of church and state. The church preaches the Gospel and brings believers in Christ the good news of eternal salvation. Drawing upon Romans 13, the state is an authority instituted by God to wield the sword, to keep order and peace in a society of sinful human beings.

In *Civil Government: God's Other Kingdom*, WELS pastor and professor Daniel M. Deutschlander emphasizes the caution with which the WELS and its members approach politics and government. Political activity by the church may harm the pursuit of its mission, proclaiming the Gospel. Pastors and church workers are cautioned against running for office, signing a petition, or giving a media interview, fearing that such efforts would detract from the message of the Gospel. Individual members, however, are encouraged to fulfill their roles as responsible citizens by obeying laws, voting, and become otherwise active as they see fit. While resisting the evil of some government action is appropriate, parishioners are admonished not to fall into the “evil of revolution.”

Consistent with its belief that the church and the government play distinct roles, the WELS objects to use of government chaplains for the armed forces, prisons, and some government-run hospitals. Care for the “the souls and minds” of these government employees is the work of the church, not the state. The WELS prefers that a parish pastor or a pastor called by the church administer to the needs of these people.

Finally, the WELS questions organized lobbying efforts like the “Christian Right” and the “Christian Left.” The “earthly kingdom of Christ” that groups such as these desire will not occur. Moreover, such divisive movements can have a negative impact on the preaching of law and Gospel. Since members’ true citizenship is in heaven, they should not become too entangled with the affairs of this world.

### **III. Previous Research Findings**

#### *Kersten's Lutheran Ethic*

A key reference point in understanding Lutheran clergy and laity involvement in public affairs is Lawrence W. Kersten's *The Lutheran Ethic* (1970). Kersten's work had two main objectives. First, he addressed the role and impact of religion on the attitudes and values of Lutherans in the three-county area of metropolitan Detroit. Second, he

examined “the extent to which traditional Lutheran beliefs, attitudes, and behavior – the Lutheran ethic – remain viable in the secularized, urban culture of 21<sup>st</sup> century America (16).” The Lutheran ethic is a total ideology, a complete “anschauung” or worldview. It includes theological beliefs, social attitudes, and religious and non-religious behavior, and specific roles for laymen, clergy, and the church. Data was collected from three primary sources: interviews with 886 Lutheran lay people, a questionnaire completed by 241 Lutheran parish clergy; and a mailed questionnaire returned by 1,095 Eastern Michigan University students of all faiths. Kersten included all four branches of Lutheranism in his study: Lutheran Church in America (LCS); American Lutheran Church (ALC); Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS); and Wisconsin Evangelical Synod (WELS).

First, Kersten examined the role of the clergy. The traditional role of preaching the Gospel had been challenged by greater involvement in the secular world. Even more problematic, most laypersons and the theologically liberal clergy differed widely in interpreting a pastor’s role. Perceptions of clergy involvement differed along other demographic lines. White and Black Lutherans had varying views on the role of clergy, with Black Lutherans urging greater clergy involvement. Younger Lutherans were more likely than older Lutherans to see the role extending into social, economic, and political realms.

Perhaps most importantly, Kersten noted denominational trends among clergy involvement in government and politics. Among both LCS and ALC clergy “a theology of social reform and humanism seems to be replacing the traditional Lutheran emphasis on providing comfort in this world and soul-saving for the next (210).” Belief and attitude differences existed between theologically liberal and conservative Lutheran clergy. Arrayed on a continuum, LCMS clergy appeared well right of LCS and ALC clergy but somewhat left of WELS clergy. LCA and ALC clergy were most politically active, followed by some LCMS pastors; most LCMS and WELS clergy remained uninvolved, politically, and thus more in tune with the relative conservative laity.

In sum, Kersten’s illuminating 1970 work moved the frontiers of our understanding of Lutheran clergy politics forward. It emphasized the communitarian worldviews of the LCA and ALC clergy and the individualist worldviews of LCMS and WELS clergy (Leege and Kellstedt 1993). Clergy on the Lutheran theological right continued to stress the “vertical” aspect of religion, including preaching the Gospel and emphasizing personal morality (Thomas 1989). Clergy on the Lutheran theological left, while certainly not eschewing the Gospel, put more emphasis on the “horizontal” aspect of religion, including the redemption of this world (Benson and Williams 1982). To what extent do LCMS clergy today hold to this “vertical” dimension? We provided an initial answer in our 2000 study of LCMS Wisconsin clergy.

#### **IV. Methodology**

Our survey represents the most extensive survey of Lutheran clergy and laity since the 1973 publication of Merton Strommen's (et al) *A Study of Generations*. Strommen surveyed about 5,000 Lutherans on their beliefs, values, attitudes and behavior, although he rarely drew distinctions in his findings between the dominant denominations at the

time (American Lutheran Church (ALC); Lutheran Church in America (LCA); and LCMS.

Our study proceeded in two phases. The first phase, a survey of Lutheran clergy, invited approximately 15,437 Lutheran pastors (representing the entire sample universe) to take the 45-minute survey, distributed by an internet-based survey tool. In all, 1,971 took the survey over the months of June and July, 2006.

The second phase, a survey of Lutheran laity, was difficult to implement. With the exception of the WELS, which maintains an incomplete online database of clergy contact information, all ELCA and LCMS pastors are listed in public directories, and all but fewer than 5% use e-mail. Identifying a sampling of Lutheran laity is much more difficult: Since the 1970's direct mail has rendered ineffectual blind mail-based surveys. Moreover, most congregations were reluctant or refused to release congregational directory information due to legal and privacy concerns. Telemarketing has been shut down by the proliferation of cellular phones and do-not-call lists. And e-mail spam filters make it difficult to reach laity electronically.

Sampling the entire universe, we identified 400 congregations willing to identify practicing members to take the survey. Most ran announcements in Sunday bulletins or distributed announcements by e-mail or newsletter. For control purposes volunteers were asked to e-mail our research assistant requesting a survey. On October 1, 2006, 1500 survey links were e-mailed. Rolling invitations continued, as volunteers requested participation. More than 2,700 Lutherans took the laity survey, which closed on November 30, 2006.

To determine sampling reliability, a final phase of print surveys was distributed to 100 randomly-selected congregations on October 23, 2006. Each congregation received between 50 and 150 print surveys made available to members unable to take the online survey. This final phase concluded on December 31, 2006, with 432 survey responses.

We aimed in our survey of laity to correlate political self-identification with a number of characteristics:

- Church membership
- Religious participation
- Orthodox or Progressive identification
- Age
- Race
- Gender
- Class
- Geographic region

Each survey has four parts, in this order: Political Affiliations and Attitudes; Theological Attitudes; Worship Practices and Preferences; and Demographics. Online and print editions took between 25 and 45 minutes to complete.

Questions in the first two sections allow for change to be measured in Lutheran political and theological attitudes since 1969. Merton Strommen's 1973 *Study of Generations* is the most comprehensive of the three surveys conducted during the period (including Hadden's *Gathering Storm* and Lawrence Kersten's *The Lutheran Ethic* (1970). Yet Strommen's survey is the least helpful in allowing for comparative analysis. While Kersten and Hadden distinguished Lutherans by denomination, Strommen opted instead to group Lutherans together – a legitimate decision, given demonstrations by Hadden and Kersten of widespread similarities between Lutheran laity in the day's three major denominations (LCMS, American Lutheran Church and Lutheran Church in America (ALC and LCA, predecessor bodies to the ELCA). Strommen's may have been the last generation when it would be appropriate to refer generically to Lutherans.

Of greater value are the Hadden and Kersten studies. While Hadden's sample was larger than Kersten's, both drew similar conclusions and, more importantly, broke down responses by denomination (Hadden surveyed only ALC and LCMS in a body that included laity and clergy from several other denominations; Kersten surveyed Lutherans from all four denominations, including WELS). Many of their questions, however, are geared to the survey's context, a post-Civil Rights Movement world, addressing lay racism and attitudes regarding clergy participation in civil disobedience and political activism.

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## **V. Findings (see PowerPoint presentation for tables)**

We focus our findings in three areas – politics, theology, and worship practice – for two denominations, the ELCA and the LCMS. For clergy, we have 1,892 completed surveys, based on a 74 questions, including a number of questions with multiple variables. There are 859 ELCA surveys, 969 LCMS surveys, and 64 WELS surveys. With such a small number of WELS surveys, it is difficult to make conclusions that may be representative of WELS clergy; therefore, we focus on the ELCA and LCMS clergy populations. For laity, there are 3,175 completed surveys, based on 71 questions, including a number of questions with multiple variables. Where possible, we used the exact same question wording in the ELCA and LCMS surveys. There are 970 ELCA surveys, 2059 LCMS surveys, and 80 WELS surveys. With such a small number of WELS surveys, it is difficult to make conclusions that may be representative of WELS laity; therefore, we focus here as well on the ELCA and LCMS laity populations.

### **Politics**

We focus first on politics, and in particular the differences among LCMS and ELCS clergy and laity, and the differences within each Synod between the clergy and laity in each Synod. We start with basic political issues, including partisanship, ideology, and vote choice. As the Culture Wars thesis would suggest, there is a sharp divide between

the ELCA and the LCMS on party identification. As noted on Table page 2, ELCA clergy lean heavily Democratic, with 64 percent of pastors saying they identify as a Democrat or lean Democratic, including 77 percent of female ELCA clergy. The laity is less Democratic, though 41 percent of ELCA members say they consider themselves a Democrat, or lean in that direction. There is a very different story in the LCMS, where 75 percent of laity and 81 percent of clergy consider themselves Republican, or lean that way.

A second fundamental political question is political ideology. Again we see considerable differentiation here, particularly between the ELCA and LCMS clergy and laity, but also within the ELCA. In the ELCA, 38 percent of laity and 56 percent of clergy consider themselves to be liberal, including 76 percent of female clergy. Strong majorities among both LCMS clergy (82 percent) and laity (75 percent) view themselves as conservative.

These party and ideological preferences translate into voting preferences much as might be expected, albeit with some caveats. Among ELCA clergy, Democrats Al Gore in 2000 and John Kerry in 2004 garnered 62 percent and 69 percent of the vote, respectively. The laity was another story, with George W. Bush beating Al Gore in 2000, 51 percent to 42 percent, and Bush favored over Kerry in 2004, 50 percent to 44 percent. The ELCA clergy-laity divide evident in the literature certainly holds true here. Among the LCMS, Bush did very well among clergy and laity. Pastors favored Bush over Gore 89 percent to 7 percent, and Bush over Kerry 87 percent to 8 percent. Among the laity, Bush beat Gore 77 percent to 16 percent, and Bush beat Kerry 79 percent to 16 percent. A clergy-laity divide exists in the LCMS, but not nearly to the same degree as in the ELCA.

One question includes a number of different statements, asking clergy and laity if they agree or disagree with them on a five-point scale, from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). While a discussion of each of these 20 items is beyond the scope of this paper, several items are particularly illustrative.

Lutheran political literature, from Kersten to Strommen et al. to more recent work, such as Walz, Montreal, and Hofrenning (2003), suggests the ELCA is more comfortable with government solutions to problems than the LCMS. We see this borne out in our data. For example, consider question 22.A: “The federal government should do more to solve social problems such as unemployment, poverty, and poor housing conditions.” Among laity, 72 percent of ELCA members strongly agreed or agreed with this statement; 45 percent of LCMS members similarly agreed. Among pastors, the split was even more pronounced, with 85 percent of ELCA pastors agreeing with the statement, with less than half that number, 38 percent, of LCMS pastors concurring. The LCMS relies on private initiatives to address societal problems, while the ELCA puts more of its faith in the public sector.

The roles are reversed when it comes to the use of capital punishment in America. Almost 38 percent of ELCA members agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I oppose capital punishment.” Only 16 percent of LCMS members concurred. Among pastors, the differences again were even more stark. Almost 13 percent of LCMS pastors agreed with this statement; 72 percent of ELCA clergy agreed with the statement. As theory would suggest, LCMS clergy and laity come down similarly on issues such as this.

At the same time, a significant gap continues to exist between ELCA clergy and laity. Though ELCA laity are certainly a distinct group from LCMS clergy and laity on these issues, the ELCA clergy exhibit even higher levels of agreement on these two, contentious issues.

## **Theology**

The literature suggests that in matters of theology, LCMS clergy and pastors will be much more in lockstep than in the ELCA, where we expect the clergy-laity divide to be more significant in political issues. This is largely the case. One question is illustrative: “The Bible is the inerrant Word of God, both in matters of faith and in historic, geographic, and other secular matters.” An almost identical number of LCMS members (75 percent) and clergy (76) strongly agree with this statement. Conversely, only 4 percent of ELCA clergy strongly agree with this statement; 26 percent of ELCA members strongly agree. The same trend holds true on additional theology questions. For example, only 10 percent of ELCA pastors, including 6 percent of female ELCA pastors, strongly agree that “Adam and Eve were real persons.” Conversely, 85 percent of LCMS laity, and 90 percent of LCMS clergy, strongly agree with the statement.

A contentious issue, more so within the ELCA, has been the role of women and homosexuals within the church. The results of one question in this arena appear to contradict the literature. When asked to respond to, “All clergy positions should be open to women,” 90 percent of ELCA laity and 93 percent of ELCA clergy agree or strongly agree. In the LCMS, only 11 percent of clergy but 30 percent of laity agree or strongly agree with this statement. The same effect is at work in a second statement, “All clergy positions should be open to practicing homosexuals.” In the LCMS, zero percent of clergy agree or strongly agree with this statement, while 6 percent of laity agree or strongly agree. In the ELCA, 39 percent of laity and 40 percent of clergy agree or strongly agree with this statement. The subtle divide on these questions is within the LCMS, not the ELCA.

## **Worship Practice**

Among the multitude of questions, we focus for now on one statement: “I would like to see worship in my congregation become more contemporary (clergy: my worship is becoming more contemporary).” About a quarter of laity in each denomination agreed with this statement – 27 percent in the ELCA and 23 percent in the LCMS. Among pastors, it is interesting that worship is in fact becoming more contemporary, with 55 percent of ELCA clergy and 37 percent of LCMS clergy agreeing that this trend is occurring. This may be one area where both the ELCA and the LCMS are becoming more “evangelical” in the sense of adopting worship practices that have been at the forefront of the megachurch and evangelical movement.

## **VI. Conclusions**

In traditional Lutheran form, we may ask “What Does This Mean,” echoing the words of Martin Luther in his Small Catechism. As discussed earlier, much has been made of the tensions within each of these denominations, and to a lesser extent in the WELS. What

our data may suggest is that in the LCMS, members and pastors are much closer, in terms of theology, politics, and worship practice, than they may realize. Tensions remain in the LCMS in several areas, most notably in how to best spread the Gospel message. Yet with a foundation based in part on general agreement on matters theological, political, and in worship practice, the Synod may have the reservoir of common ground on some issues to pursue these issues. At the same time, we have yet to examine fully the extent of the differences within clergy, and within the laity, on these issues. This tends to be where the real action lies, with both moderates and conservatives staking out their ground. With moderates now in control of the Synodical political structure, we expect the Church to continue its evangelical ways, even as conservatives fight such initiatives.

The story in the ELCA is a bit more complex. We are aware of the continuing tensions within the ELCA on issues such as homosexuality and its connection to clergy. This tension, part of the ELCA vision to reach out and be an inclusive Lutheran denomination, will certainly continue. Our data suggest that controversies such as these may continue to be exacerbated by the clergy-laity divide on issues theological, political, and to a lesser extent, in worship practice. Where the clergy and laity do seem to be at least a bit more united is in some political and worship practice dimensions; greater differences continue to exist in theology. The evangelical outreach model may appeal to a traditionally mainline Synod such as the ELCA, even as it continues to deal with its own internal politics.

## References

- [1] James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (1992:
- [2] One example See how this has played out on a local level in Tom Heinen's recent article in the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, "70 Churches Launch 'Purpose' Campaigns" (24 September 2004: <http://www.jsonline.com/lifestyle/religion/sep04/261528.asp>). Witness also the proliferation of extra-seminary training programs (in the LCMS, including DELTO and the Pastoral Leadership Institute); Intra-denominational organizations (in the LCMS, including Renewal in Missouri, the Association of Courageous Churches, and *In Statu Confessionis*); overtly political organizations (in the LCMS, including Balance Concord, Consensus, the Lutheran Concerns Association and Jesus First,); and news outlets (in the LCMS including Affirm, Christian News, DayStar, Reclaiming Walther, and dozens of other web-based outlets and listservs).
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