



NORWEGIAN
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

MARTA STEINSVIK

A Feminist Pioneer in the Church of Norway

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Abstract

This thesis examines the work of Norwegian feminist, author, scholar, and lecturer, Marta Steinsvik (1876-1950). In a controversial career, Steinsvik achieved notoriety for her theological views and contributions with regards to a woman's role in the church. In detailing Steinsvik's activities, largely from her personal archival sources, this thesis suggests that Marta Steinsvik, the first woman to preach in a Christian church in Norway, played a vital role in paving the way for women to enter the priesthood. This project aims to revisit the story of a woman whose contributions to the debate surrounding women in the priesthood have been too sparsely researched, and do not adequately portray the multiple ways she influenced her society. Thus, an important part of this research elucidates her contributions to the debate regarding the role of women as priests. Despite her insatiable hunger for knowledge and her attempts at diverse careers such as medicine, theology, and Egyptology, Steinsvik never completed any of these studies. This point serves to corroborate her contribution even more when considering the importance society places on product vs process. It adds more credibility to the stimulus of her contributions, and, thus, situates her in a unique position of influence. My research will also seek to situate Marta Steinsvik in the society of her times as it relates to both national and international events within the feminist movement. A substantial space is dedicated to expounding on the changes in Norwegian society that came to be known as the golden age of change, and how these changes paralleled her life. The main focus of my thesis will be to properly situate her as a pioneer, prolific writer, agitator, and mouthpiece for the feminist movement in Norway, and, more importantly for the cause of women priests.

Dedication

All of our lives are filled with negotiables and non-negotiables. The non-negotiables would be our parents, our families, and our children, for example. They contribute to our lives in ways that we may not fully comprehend until we are faced with a task as simple as the dedication of a thesis.

I was born and raised in The Bronx, New York. To be more specific, it was the heart of the South Bronx, an infamous ghetto area known throughout the world via literature and movies. *My* world in the South Bronx consisted of two worlds; the one inside my home, and the one I daily entered into upon exiting my home. What many might consider an anticipated step in life's journey, e.g. a Master's degree, back then I viewed it as a possibility analogous to winning the lottery . . . people from the South Bronx did not get Master's degrees!

I dedicate this work to the three most influential women in my life: my feminist grandmother (my own Marta Steinsvik, of sorts) my mother, whose faithfulness and loyalty speak volumes of female strength; and my sister, who at the tender married age of 19 became a second 'mommy' and mentor to me.

Acknowledgements

I became interested in Marta Steinsvik after completing my first year in the Religion, Society and Global Issues Master program. Marta Steinsvik's name came up casually one evening in a conversation with friends; namely, Dr. Sigve Tonstad, a descendant of my subject of study. I was instantly smitten with the palpable force of this woman whose cutting-edge contributions beckoned me to revisit them. My gratitude and debt goes to Dr. Tonstad for having introduced me to her. Thank you so much!

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Gunnar Heiene, my research supervisor, for his positive reception at the suggestion of my research topic. He knew immediately what I was aiming for, and amidst the unorganized babbling of my first meeting with him, he suggested a title that encapsulated precisely what I wanted to research about Marta Steinsvik.

My husband and live-in professor, Dr. Tito Correa, an academician in his own right, was invaluable in serving as a 24-hour extension of my research supervisor.

I am especially grateful to Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal for taking time from her busy days to discuss at length her doctoral dissertation on the Parliamentary debate of women in the priesthood, a book that was priceless and unparalleled for my research.

And last, but most certainly not least, Steinsvik's very own granddaughter, Marit Jerstad, who was so supportive and willing to request viewing permission on my behalf for archives pertaining to her grandmother's history, for allowing me access to her private collection of Steinsvik's books, for taking me to Blåfarveverket to review a more extensive library, but most importantly, for the hours of discussions in which she shared so many anecdotes of her grandmother, thus shedding greater light on the more personal side of Steinsvik. Tusen hjertelig takk!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

During the 19th century, Norway underwent significant changes that permeated every aspect of society. This century is viewed as the golden age of transformation in Norway. These changes encompassed the arrival of the industrial era, the migration from farmlands to big cities, the rise of the protest culture, changes in gender relations, and the clash of liberal theology vs. conservative theology, to name but a few. The women's suffrage movement and the advances it was championing and winning would affect the Church of Norway as well. Among the diverse issues being championed by the women's suffrage movement, admission into clerical service was one of the causes they would advocate. While this last movement comprised many actors, there was one in particular whose contributions to the debate of women priests would prove to be the most effectual.

Marta Tonstad Steinsvik (1876-1950), a Norwegian feminist, author, agitator, and prolific lecturer, became a vital actor in the debate over women in the church. It was her contributions that would be used exclusively by Parliament towards the end of the struggle. This study aims to situate her at the heart of the debate about women in the priesthood in the late 1930s. In a pioneering, yet sometimes controversy-filled career, Steinsvik achieved prominence for her theological views and contributions with regard to women's role in the Lutheran Church of Norway. In detailing Steinsvik's activities, this thesis suggests that Steinsvik, the first woman to preach in a Christian church in Norway at a time when it was forbidden for a woman to do so, played an influential role in paving the way for women to enter the priesthood. Accordingly, a substantial portion of this research will elucidate the Parliamentary debate and Steinsvik's theology regarding the role of women as priests. The central focus of this thesis, however, will be to show Steinsvik as the influential peg that added the theological perspective to the political debates about women in the priesthood. Steinsvik was responsible for contributing to the debate in the political circles from a

perspective that was not only theological, but also feminist (the term “feminist” was not familiar in those days). By modern definitions, however, her viewpoints can clearly be categorized as feminist, and I aim to show this by expounding on the criteria for examining works through feminist and gender historical lenses. Recognizing her contributions as feminist at a time when said label was not universally applied merits a brief explanation. To understand Steinsvik from a feminist perspective requires understanding feminism as “less of a theory—or set of theories—and more a perspective, a lens, a handle on the world and its ideas, a way of acting and speaking. It is less a belief system or a faith; it is more a serious project of identification with real consequences.”¹

Steinsvik’s theological contributions were made during the heightening of tensions of the debates in the late 1930s, causing the issue of women in the priesthood to be taken up in Parliament at least three times within a five-year period. Although Steinsvik was educated in other fields such as medicine, Egyptology, and ancient languages, in addition to theology, this thesis will focus primarily on her theology and advocacy for women priests. I will also focus on situating Steinsvik in the panorama of change for women unfolding in her society. I seek to situate her in an equitable place in her society as a pioneer, prolific lecturer, agitator, mouthpiece, and most prominently, a feminist pioneer in the Church of Norway. My thesis will show that Steinsvik’s theological contributions were crucial to the arguments between the Norwegian Parliament and the State Church with regard to allowing women into clerical service, and perhaps the most effective in concluding said debate. I aim to establish her as a pioneer for women in the Church of Norway despite the fact that she has found scarce acknowledgment in the Norwegian annals of history. She was the first woman to enroll in Menighetsfakultetet (MF) (the Lutheran School of Theology), where she studied from 1918-

¹ Nigel Blake, Paul Smeyers, Richard Smith, and Paul Standish, *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Education, Chapter 4: Feminism, Philosophy, and Education: Imagining Public Spaces*, by Maxine Greene and Morwenna Griffiths, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2003) 77.

1922. Steinsvik was one to speak out on any issue where she strongly disagreed, and this served to set her in a negative light at times, especially as it pertained to her critiques of other religions, medical practices, military practices, and even women's health issues. Yet perhaps the contribution she is most remembered for was when she became the first woman to preach from a church pulpit in 1921. Steinsvik was far ahead of her time, and it is suggested that perhaps this is one of the reasons why she does not hold a more prominent place in the annals of contemporary Norwegian church history.²

The question of admitting women in clerical service was first proposed in Parliament as early as 1912 where it met a hasty and unequivocal defeat. It would be taken up several times again culminating in a favorable decision that "set the door ajar"³ for women to enter the priesthood. The battle was divisive and at times aggressive, and it did not lack for players who had their say in the debate. Women in the priesthood was one of many causes championed by and for women, however, admission to clerical service would prove to be the fiercest, for it was in this debate that church and state met head to head. That this debate occurred during a time of tense negotiations for dominance between liberal and conservative theology can only lead one to question whether the struggle for dominance between the polar theologies was enflamed by the women's suffrage movement and its quest to admit women into the priesthood, or whether the debate over women in clerical service fueled the pursuit for theological dominance.

It was my passion for women's issues and gender studies that led me to the debate of women in clerical service in Norway, and eventually led me quite serendipitously to Marta Steinsvik, a woman who emerged from the shadows of said debate to become the leading voice in its culmination, and eventual accession in Norwegian law. Undisputed is the fact that

² Bjørge Kjersti Myren and Hanne Stenvaag, *Hun Våget å gå Foran: Ingrid Bjerås og Kvinnens Prestetjeneste i Norge*, (Oslo: Verbum Forlag, 2011), pg. 172.

³ Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, «...under forvandlingens lov» *En analyse av stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester i 1930 årene*, (Lund, Sweden: Arcus förlag, 2003), back cover.

the women's movement was started long before Steinsvik came into the picture, and equally so the fact that Steinsvik's arguments were not the only ones coming from the Church's side of the debate, nor were they the first. Of note, however, is the fact that towards the end of the debate it was Steinsvik's arguments that were used exclusively by the members of Parliament, and it is precisely these that provided the foundation of my research questions. Considering that the debate began as early as 1912 and underwent many changes in the presentation of the proposal, engaged actors, debate perspectives, etc., and taking into account Steinsvik's contributions used exclusively towards the end of the debate, I conclude that Steinsvik's contributions left no more room for further debate or new perspectives on either side of the argument. Her theological defense for women in the priesthood is set apart from all the other defenses in that it came from a woman with a theological background who presented a feminist exegetical argument in favor of women priests, and thus deserves closer examination than it has received from scholars past and present. That little has been written about her participation in said debate, or that Steinsvik is not as extensively known as Ragnild Nielsen or Ellen Key, for example, pioneers and feminists in their own right, served as further motivation for my Master's research question.

Steinsvik's theological analysis of the question of women in the priesthood merits broader analysis. Her scholarly skills and strengths as a distinguished lecturer need to be studied more closely in order to respond to the question of Steinsvik as a feminist pioneer in the Church of Norway at the end of the 19th century. Steinsvik was a master linguist with several languages under her belt including arcane languages such as Sanskrit. Her talent with languages such as Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, which she learned and developed quite early in her life, undoubtedly played a strong role in the exegetical development of her arguments in favor of women in the priesthood. Coupled with an education in theology, among other fields, Steinsvik developed a sharp analytical methodology that set her apart from the other

champions of said cause. Her skills as lecturer and researcher would be further ratified by the many newspaper clippings with write-ups regarding her contributions at diverse gatherings, and varied venues. It was only her tract, “Women as Priests” that was distributed among the Parliamentary members directly involved in the discussions towards the culmination of the debate in the late 1930’s. Gaining this level of attention is too major a feat to be dismissed with uninterested indifference.

I also aim to reveal another version of Steinsvik⁴ by summarizing the girl she was, the woman she became, the causes she fought for, and the people who influenced her. But most importantly, the groundbreaking debate at a national level that situated her center stage in the debate of women in the priesthood.

1.1 Topic:

My thesis focuses on Marta Steinsvik, a woman whose influences contributed to significant changes with regard to the role of women in society, and more specifically, in clerical work. Her story is important because it shows her not only as a pioneer in the Church of Norway, but also expounds on a woman who, in retrospect, was ahead of her times. My topic stays in line with the umbrella theme of Religion, Society, and Global Issues, by bringing together in one paper the societal changes in Norway during the 18th and 19th centuries, the upheaval of religious life as Norwegians knew it, and the reciprocal influences of global issues that paved the way for the emancipation of women. More importantly, however, it places a woman at the heart of those changes in religious life as they affected women.

⁴ Although her biography was written by Ingeborg Solbrekken, and she takes up briefly every facet of Steinsvik’s life, I am focusing on one aspect of her lifetime contributions, i.e. her role in the debate of women in the priesthood.

1.2 Research Questions:

This thesis examines the work of Norwegian feminist, author, linguist, and lecturer, Marta Steinsvik (1876-1950), and her contributions to the Parliamentary debates surrounding the controversial struggle for granting women entry into the priesthood. As such, I pose the following questions:

- How prominent was Steinsvik's role in the debate of women priests, a debate that began in the early 1900s, and continued through the late 1930s, with said debate being presented in Parliament three times within a five-year period?
- With so many actors involved in the continually changing face of the debate about opening up the clergy to women, why did Steinsvik's role become more prominent than the others? What are the distinguishing characteristics of her contributions that carry greater weight towards the end of the debate?
- Why has Steinsvik not received greater recognition for her role as a vital pioneer in the debate for admission of women into the priesthood in the Church of Norway?

1.3 Materials – Sources:

The materials and sources I used for my thesis in understanding Steinsvik's role consist largely of her personal files. Her family donated all of her documents, private letters, pamphlets, newspaper articles, and study materials to the Blåfarveverket Museum, and later to the National Library in Oslo. There are over 10,000 documents that include, among others, letters between Steinsvik and friends, family, and colleagues, writings that cover a number of issues dear to her heart, journals that listed all of her speaking engagements, national and international newspapers she subscribed to, and clippings she collected that dealt with the issues of which she was passionate. These have been vital in allowing me to better understand her thoughts and motivations, as well as her struggles and obstacles.

For the purpose of situating Steinsvik within the society of her times, I have relied on history books that portray the changing landscape of Norway in the 19th century. These painted a picture of Norway in the 19th century that included the changes it experienced, shedding light on the evolving relational interactions between the genders, and between the genders and society. Several history books stand out above the rest in their concentration on specific aspects of history. The work of Ingrid Semmingsen, Nina Karin Monsen, Stephan Tschudi-Madsen, and Yngvar Ustvedt, in *Norges Kulturhistorie: Brytningsår - Blomstringstid*,⁵ portrayed the cultural changes such as the importance of a national language, the development of theater and music, and their relevance for purposes of expression, and the development of literature, to name a few. Steinsvik was also a champion for a national language as a means of strengthening a cultural identity, and she translated several literary works into *nynorsk* (New-Norwegian). Her inner circle of friends comprised intellectual and cultural people of national significance within Norway's cultural evolution.

The second book of exceptional relevance to my thesis was Jostein Nerbøvik's, *Norges Historie: 1860-1914*.⁶ Nerbøvik illustrated clearly how the industrial revolution not only changed the face of Norway, but also how it had a marked impact on the interaction and relations between men and woman. Understanding the historical significance of precisely this particular societal evolution, i.e. the changes in relational interactions between men and women, contributes to amplifying the role Steinsvik played in the debate, and comprehending her resolve to further strengthen these changes especially as they affected women.

Perhaps the history book that best encompassed the many facets I hoped to cover within my topic of Steinsvik as a pioneer in the Church of Norway is Ida Bloom and Sølvi Sogner's, *Med Kjønnsperspektiv på Norsk Historie*. To describe the value of this historical

⁵ Ingrid Semmingsen, Nina Karin Monsen, Stephan Tschudi-Madsen, and Yngvar Ustvedt, *Norges Kulturhistorie: Brytningsår-Blomstringstid*, (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co. (W. Nygaard), 1980).

⁶ Jostein Nerbøvik, *Norsk historie 1860-1914: Eit bondesamfunn i oppbrot* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1999).

work for the purposes of my thesis by revisiting history through a gender historical perspective thereby shedding new light on the way society actually functioned, is best explained in their own words:

By looking closely at the continuity and change in the gender divisions of labor and power, and dependency relationships between men and women, we will shed new light not only on the history of daily cultural life, but also of major economic, social and political processes of society.⁷

As for the history of the Lutheran Church with all its conflicts and challenges, I relied on the historical works of Carl Wisløff, *Norsk Kirkehistorie*⁸, and Einar Molland's *Fra Hans Nielsen Hauge til Eivind Berggrav*,⁹ both of which provide an in-depth look into the development of the Lutheran Church and the critical debates ensuing between liberal and conservative theology. While Wisløff provides [DT1]research into the development of the church with its battles of domination between liberal and conservative theology, Molland narrates the same historical occurrences from a cultural perspective by writing about the literary, cultural, and artistic personages who were contributing to these debates via their respective professions.

Steinsvik's biography has been served well by the work of Ingeborg Solbrekken.¹⁰ Hence, the biography I present in my thesis elucidates the milestones in her life as they relate more directly to the research questions I present. My paper aims to present Steinsvik as a pioneer in the church of Norway in the 19th century. Consequently, her family, her education, her relationships, and life experiences, together with the changing façade of Norway as relates

⁷ Ida Bloom and Sølvi Sogner, *Med kjønnsperspektiv på norsk historie: Fra vikingtid til 2000-årsskiftet*, (Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag AS, 1999), (Translation my own) 9.

⁸ Carl Fr. Wisløff, *Norsk Kirkehistorie, bind 3*, (Oslo: Lutherstiftelsens Forlag, 1971)

⁹ Einar Molland, *Fra Hans Nielsen Hauge til Eivind Berggrav*, (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS, 1972).

¹⁰ Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde: Marta Steinsvik liv og virke 1877-1950*. (Vidarforlaget, 2012).

to a diverse array of societal aspects, are vital for the understanding of the making of this particular pioneer, and how she both influenced, and was influenced by, her society.

Countless other sources were used in all of the above-mentioned categories, however, the sources of information I utilized focused primarily on Norway's history in the late 18th century and early 19th century, the history of the Lutheran Church, and the role Steinsvik played in affecting both, with greater prominence upon the latter.

As for the primary research question of this thesis—Steinsvik's influence in the debate for admission of women into clerical service—I relied heavily on Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal's doctoral dissertation that examines specifically the Parliamentary debates of women priests in the 1930s.¹¹ Her work served my own on many levels. She endeavors to present the debate of women in the priesthood as it was developed by various stimuli; namely, the political, the women's suffrage movement's role in said debate, the gender clashes and struggles, and most prominently, the role of the Lutheran Church. The aforementioned sources played a prominent role in this debate, yet it was Steinsvik's theological arguments in favor of women in the priesthood that take center stage in Parliament toward the end of the 1930s. Stendal attributes this to the fact that they came from a woman with a theological background presenting a feminist exegesis of the biblical verses used in the debate.¹² Hence, Stendal's work stands center stage in the production that is the debate of women in clerical service in the late 19th century.

Marit Jerstad, Steinsvik's granddaughter, has been illuminating in sharing recollections of her grandmother. Her memories of her, among others, recall a woman whose books were her constant companion regardless of the ceaseless traveling Steinsvik underwent in her career as lecturer. I shared a few hours with Jerstad in her home in Oslo where she

¹¹ Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, «...under forvandlingens lov» *En analyse av stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester i 1930 årene*, (Lund, Sweden: Arcus förlag, 2003).

¹² *Ibid.*, 294.

allowed me to review a small portion of her grandmother's books that she had retained in her personal library, but it was an informational meeting nonetheless. At Blåfarveverket where the remainder of her books were found, I perused hundreds of Steinsviks books; an enlightening exercise in obtaining a picture of the type of literature Steinsvik was interested in, which experts and authors she turned to, and understanding the influences that contributed to her own writings and thoughts.

1.4 Methodology:

In this section I lay out the methodological approaches I employ in my thesis. I will be working fundamentally within the tradition of gender history and biography, but other aspects of historical research will also come into play. I will begin by establishing who Steinsvik was, and what she did, as well as the issues she was responding to in the society of her day. I will not present a fully developed biography, as this work has already been accomplished—the most current written by Ingeborg Solbrekken. My research will develop a different biography that focuses on the milestones in her life that advance parallel to the debated issue, as well as highlighting the culmination of those milestones and how they served to position her at the heart of said debate. Specifically, I will look at her role in the development of the debate surrounding the question of granting women entry into the priesthood in Norway that was taking place in the 19th century. This work incorporates several aspects of research methodology that can help elucidate Steinsvik's contribution to the issue of women in the priesthood. These include a direct understanding of gender history, and most importantly, a definition of feminism, which I will apply in this thesis. All of these aspects of historical research come into play if we are to understand what Steinsvik did, as well as the implications of her contributions, which lie at the heart of my research.

1.4.1 What is Feminism?

I begin by attempting to define feminism. A very basic understanding of feminism might lead one to say that feminism entails the quest for equality between men and women. This definition, however, is not only too general, but it may not speak to the countless ‘feminists’ in the world for whom ‘equality’ may present very different scenarios, some even in contrast to one another. It would also not be justified to attempt a general description that might encompass all feminists in the world, as these have also been born from very different realities. I will begin by attempting to expose the challenges first. My research attempts to posit Steinsvik within the reality of her times regarding the quest to include women in the priesthood. Without an understanding of feminism, the implications of my title would bear no significance in the understanding of the importance of Steinsvik’s contributions. Defining feminism, however, is a task unto itself, demanding a wide range of considerations. In addition to the differences that exist in attempting to label someone ‘feminist’, there is also the factor of historical timing. According to feminist researcher, Chris Beasley, the term “feminism” barely existed before the 20th century. As it was a relatively new term within the long history of Western social and political theory, it creates the challenge of establishing new frameworks with which to analyze research as “feminist”, especially in light of the variations in meaning and theory that have developed over time. Hence, its multiple meanings in contemporary research would prove themselves quite different from those utilized in the 1890s when the term began to be used after having originated in France.¹³ In considering the above, one must concede that feminism was a relatively new term during the time of Steinsvik, if at all used in Norway, despite the active work of the women’s suffrage movement, and despite the progressive minded “feminist” writers she was exposed to during

¹³ Chris Beasley, *What is Feminism: An Introduction to Feminist Theory*, (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1999) xiii.

her upbringing, such as Hulda and Arne Garborg, Henrik Ibsen, etc. Their quests may have been similar, but they were surely not labeled feminist as we understand the word today.

Both Maxine Greene and Morwenna Griffiths expound on similar issues regarding the precariousness of embarking on feminist research, or of neatly placing a particular research within a feminist context. As mentioned in my Introduction, these scholars describe feminism as less of a theory, or set of theories, and more of a perspective.¹⁴ In interpreting or reclaiming the work of feminist pioneers like Steinsvik, we risk anachronism if we call them feminists, but we risk not writing women's history if we don't. Feminist scholar, Rosalind Delmar, shares the same line of thought in stating that there exists no "ideal" or vision in feminism. Rather, it may exist only in the form of an intellectual tendency with or without the benefit of a social movement. (Many feminist writers disagree with Delmar and do not accept feminism as a set of ideas that can exist in the absence of a movement).¹⁵

As I develop the case for Steinsvik as a feminist pioneer in the church of Norway, I am inclined to strongly support the above concepts regarding applying feminist theory more as perspectives, and less as sets of theories. I would argue that this holds true explicitly in the case of Steinsvik. She was actively engaged in the women's suffrage movement and was guest speaker at their meetings a number of times. Her feminist perspective may have started to develop as early as childhood, and continued to be nurtured as a result of the people who comprised her upbringing, the cultural changes taking place in all areas of her society, as well as an advanced intellect that was nurtured early on in her life by a father who possessed an innate conviction that women should be treated as equals to men. Hers was a feminist journey that arose from the individual experiences in her life as well as the totality of all those parts.

¹⁴ Nigel Blake, Paul Smeyers, Richard Smith, and Paul Standish, *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Education, Chapter 4: Feminism, Philosophy, and Education: Imagining Public Spaces*, by Maxine Greene and Morwenna Griffiths, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2003) 77.

¹⁵ Rosalind Delmar in Chris Beasley's, *What is Feminism: An Introduction to Feminist Theory*, (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1999) xiii.

As explained by Greene and Griffiths, her life displayed a journey of identification that today can be better understood through a feminist lens.

1.4.2 Gender History

One cannot articulate the role of feminism in revisiting Steinsvik's story without also expounding on the issue of gender history, since the latter is concerned with understanding the roles of men and women at different times in history as well as their relationship to one another. It is also vital to incorporate a gender historical approach since Steinsvik, for the most part, approached this issue from a theological perspective that incorporated feminist theological arguments. Why a gender historical methodology? I align myself with gender historian, Sonya O. Rose, who describes gender history as being concerned with the changes over time within a single society in a particular period that provide insight into the perceived differences between women and men. Most importantly, Rose states that gender history is concerned with how the gender differences and relationships are produced and transformed.¹⁶ The industrial revolution gave women a voice that could not be silenced. Steinsvik's own relationship with her husband and how it played itself out serves to illuminate that which Rose purports is observed in researching gender history; namely, how gender relations are produced and transformed. Perhaps nothing summarizes the discussions about gender relations and how they are produced and transformed, better than by the portrait of gender relations painted by Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House." Steinsvik personifies the intellectual awakening that the character of Nora experiences in the latter part of the play, and the actions of Nora also echo the decisions Steinsvik made regarding her children and her future at certain times in her life. I will touch on these in the biographical sketch section.

The women's movement cemented a norm in historical research that recognizes the uselessness of excluding gender disparities if one hopes to reconstruct a more complete

¹⁶ Sonya O. Rose, *What is Gender History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 2.

historical interpretation. As historian, Nikki R. Keddie argues, “the approach sarcastically labeled, ‘add women and stir’ was unsatisfying”.¹⁷ It is not enough to simply add women to a historical reconstruction of events if the interpretation is still emerging exclusively from the male perspective. The “add women to the mix” approach would merely propagate half of a story.

A brief explanation of the history of the use of the term “gender” in research also merits mention here. While some may view the terms “sex” and “gender” to be interchangeable, “sex” is more accurately applied to the biological differences between men and women. “Gender” on the other hand, is a concept that more precisely denotes “the perceived differences between, and ideas about, women and men, male and female. Fundamental to the definition of the term ‘gender’ is the idea that these differences are socially constructed.”¹⁸ If we are to sustain the distinctions between “gender” and “sex,” then the need to incorporate a gender historical approach in my methodology becomes vital since we must understand the gender roles extant in Steinsvik’s time and her compliance with, or resistance to, them. In providing historical information regarding the events surrounding Steinsvik’s life, as well as parallel global events that may have further fueled her contributing responses to the issues of her day, I also attempt to address the question of Steinsvik as either mere participant or contributory pioneer.¹⁹

Historian Carolyn Steedman writes, “people’s history and oral history are romantic devices,” and as with any work of history the sources one uses are always limited, and at best provide only “traces of the past, to work on.”²⁰ She also refers to historian Raymond

¹⁷ Nikki R. Keddie in Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks’s, *Gender in History*, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2001) 1.

¹⁸ Sonya O. Rose, *What is Gender History?* 2.

¹⁹ Kristin Norseth, «Menighetsfakultetet og kvinnespørsmålet», (I: Oftestad og Røsæg), as quoted in Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde*, 302. Norseth states that it was the *Women’s Movement* that accomplished access for women to all public offices. This would imply that Steinsvik’s contribution was no more, or no less, than any other participant in the cause for equal rights for women across the board.

²⁰ Carolyn Steedman, *Past Tenses, Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History*, (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992) 41.

Williams' argument that however simplistic it may seem on the surface to revisit and rewrite history, as if the existing facts were enough to produce credible research, "biography, along with memoir and history, is a difficult and perplexing form, partly because in so rigorously asserting its generic factuality, as opposed to the fictionality of myth, or epic, or drama, the writer can disguise his or her use of epic, drama and romance in the narrative."²¹ Historian and biographer, Pam Hirsch, adds, "The biographer's craft is analogous to that of the mosaicist, who creates a picture out of tiny fragments of coloured enamel."²²

Incredible advances have been made in revisiting and retelling the history of women in the past by utilizing the methodologies mentioned above. These have allowed us to ascertain elements in the lives of these women otherwise unbeknownst to us. It has granted us a deeper look into the dynamics of their interactions with the opposite sex, as well as their reactions to the issues of their days, with regard to the times and cultural norms of their societies. Nevertheless, we still have a long way to go if only for the purpose of rewriting the stories of the countless women whose histories have been lost or lie dormant in wait of someone to dig them up and place the pieces of their lives within the kaleidoscopic field that is history. This project aims to revisit the story of a woman whose contributions to the debate surrounding women in the priesthood have been too sparsely researched, and do not adequately portray the multiple ways she influenced her society. The area of my focus will be her theological contributions to a debate that would clearly place her at the helm of reform for women within the Lutheran Church of Norway, more specifically, women in the priesthood.

1.5 Outline:

The first chapter of my thesis is the introduction, which includes the standard technical elements such as topic, research questions, sources, methodology, materials, and development

²¹ Ibid., 162.

²² Pam Hirsch, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon: Feminist, Artist and Rebel*. (London: Pimlico, 1999), ix.

of main argument. Because my thesis aims to credit Steinsvik as an influential feminist pioneer in the Church of Norway in the 19th century, I dedicate the contents of my introduction to explaining feminism and gender history as these were not understood back then as they are today. If we are to accurately portray her as a feminist pioneer, then feminist and gender historical lenses are vital for a proper analysis of Steinsvik and her contributions.

My second chapter revisits the historical background of Norway during Steinsvik's lifetime. I begin by painting a picture of 19th century Norway, known as the golden age of change, by examining the arrival of the Industrial Age and how it created major changes in society, especially with regard to gender relations and the interactions between men and women. A domino effect was produced that created changes in all areas of society, and education would be among the many. At a time when academic education was restricted to the male population, while girls were restricted to schools that focused on domestic training, there were a handful of women who began championing the cause for education reform to include equal educational opportunities for boys and girls. These demands would include equal access to elementary, high school, and university levels. As education reforms began to take shape all through university levels, this forced demanded changes in other areas as well; namely, the workplace. The Women's Suffrage movement, a global movement gaining momentum in Norway at that time, demanded equal rights for women in all areas of society. If women were allowed to enter universities and achieve higher education, then they also needed access to those workplaces in which their newly obtained careers could be put to use. Naturally, these workplaces included the priesthood since theology studies had also been opened up to women. The question was asked pertaining to what a woman would do with a theology degree if not also to obtain access to the priesthood.

The Church is now confronted with perhaps the most significant change of that time, and women would face their fiercest battle yet for equal rights –admission into clerical

service. This challenge to the Church would not be limited to the issue of women in the priesthood, nor was it started by it. Rather, a wave of liberal theology began to seep into the university that challenged the methodologies of scriptural interpretations as well as the strict adherences to church dogma. The escalation of this tug of war between liberal and conservative theology would reach such intense levels so as to demand a meeting on a national level that came to be known as the Calmeyergate meeting after the name of its locale address. I also include in chapter 2 of this thesis another result of this crisis within the Church that would lead to the founding of MF.

Chapter 3 of this thesis enters the life of Steinsvik by setting forth a condensed biography highlighting the milestones in her life that parallel the societal changes taking place. I expound on her early years, her family's influence, her academic journey, her work and family life, and the diverse ways in which Steinsvik engaged in the public discourse of her time.

Chapter 4 focuses on the sermon that brought Steinsvik one of her greatest notorieties –her defiant act of preaching in a church at a time when women were forbidden to do so. I analyze her sermon in order to elucidate her theological skills, her lecture abilities, and her academic acumen that was, unfortunately, overshadowed by the defiance of the act itself. I also make the argument for her intent to further the cause of women priests by displaying a woman's capacity to carry out priestly duties on the same plane as their male counterparts.

Chapter 5 brings this thesis to its culmination by delving into that for which Steinsvik has received inadequate and insufficient recognition –her contributions to the Parliamentary debates of women in the priesthood. This debate began as early as 1912, and culminated in the late 1930s, and its arguments on both sides of the issue were as diverse as the actors involved. Yet, it was Steinsvik's arguments that were used exclusively by Parliamentary

representatives towards the culmination of the debate, and this accomplishment needs to be examined.

I conclude by summarizing the chapters of my thesis with an open-ended question regarding the sparse acknowledgement Steinsvik has been afforded with regard to the debate of women priests in the hopes of awakening a desire to revisit more of her contributions in other areas in order to uncover the diverse ways in which Steinsvik may have had greater impact than that which history attributes to her.

Chapter 2: Historical Background

Before proceeding with an in-depth analysis of Steinsvik's involvement and influence in the political discussions regarding women in the priesthood, it is important to establish a picture of both the contemporary relationship between church and state in Norway during the time of this debate, and to understand why this became an issue that was taken up in Parliament.

At the time, Norway did not have separation of church and state. Article 2 of the Norwegian Constitution designated the Evangelical-Lutheran Church as the official church of Norway and the King as the head of that church. His role as head of the church was, among others, to ensure that the teachings and liturgy were in accordance with the Evangelical-Lutheran confession and doctrine (Article 16) by providing statutes. Hence, church matters were to be discussed and decided upon by members of the government "confessing the state religion" (Article 27), which meant in practice that half of all government members had to be aligned with the state church. According to the wording of Article 16 of the Constitution, the King, as head of the Church, has an "overall responsibility for all church meetings and sermons, and that all preachers and teachers of the state church follow the prescribed norms of the Evangelical-Lutheran religion".²³ It stands to reason, therefore, that regarding the issue of admitting women to clerical service, the King/government would preside over said debate since it would directly impact church meetings and sermons.

2.1 Norway in Transition in the 19th Century:

The mid 1880s saw great changes and paradigm shifts for Norway, which led to a paradigmatic shift in the interaction between the sexes. Commerce and trade were flourishing

²³ Ingvill Thorson Plesner, «State Church and Church Autonomy in Norway», in Gerhard Robbers, ed., *Church Autonomy: A Comparative Survey*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001) 8. As viewed online in 2015 <http://www.religlaw.org/content/blurb/files/Chapter%2022.%20Plesner.pdf>.

and technical innovations were on the rise. Fewer were employed in primary industries, (i.e. fishing and farming) and the business community was evolving into a more market-oriented economy.²⁴ These changes led to increased urbanization, which in turn, influenced both the contemporary culture and settlement patterns. The gap between the culture of “officials” (i.e. the aristocracy that was often synonymous with public officers), and the rural culture, largely agricultural, was narrowing as a direct result of the rise of the construction industry, which led to increased participation and input on behalf of builders who now wanted a say in the layout and functionality of their cities. All these changes gave greater voice to the individual at the expense of the more antiquated ‘community ties’. The face of the class society was also evolving, which gave rise to greater interaction between the sexes. White-collar professions were also increasing and these provided increased opportunities for women in professions like nursing and teaching. Historian D.A. Nerbøvik states that during the 1800s, priests were fast being ‘dethroned’ from the countryside by peasant-born teachers and sacristans.²⁵ No longer were community officials comprised of priests from a special class. The children of these priests comprised 25% of enrolled students in the mid 1800s—a figure that would rapidly change in the second half of the 1800s when only 5% of enrolled students came from families of priests. It was the “sons” of the communities, i.e. farmers, fishermen, carpenters, constructions workers, etc., that were now lining up for these leadership roles. Historian Hans Try argues that the priesthood was perhaps the first profession to become “democratized” in that it was now available to society’s lay folk.²⁶ It’s easy to envision how this shift in the so-called “democratization” of the priesthood as it became more available to these layfolk, would

²⁴ Jostein Nerbøvik, «*Norsk historie 1860-1914: Eit bondesamfunn i oppbrot*» (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1999) 19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁶ Hans Try, *Norges Historie. To kulturer en stat 1851-1884, 11th Volume*, (Oslo: J.W. Cappelens Forlag: 1979) 36.

also awaken the idea among the female population that it could become available for women as well. The spark had been lit.

The brief scenario of Norway in transition during the turn of the 19th century and into the 20th as above described, gives a clear picture of how society progressed in commerce and trade, how this affected communities through increased participation in all matters concerning their daily lives, and how this increasing participation, in turn, contributed to an evolutionary interaction between men and women. “Individual” concerns gained stronger voices as opposed to the former societal structures in which families as entities, and community ties were the norm. This contributed to women now also demanding greater visibility and participation in daily life as well. Although this seems to paint a positive picture for the advancement of women, the flip side of this scenario highlights the struggles women were enduring because of the industrialization of Norway. The poorest of the classes were now relocating to the larger cities in search of work and many endured great hardships. Worst paid among the poor were women, who found employment mostly in the textile industries and matchstick factories. Discussions in Parliament regarding the government’s responsibility and participation in correcting the societal class discrepancies gained momentum. Questions concerning social welfare assistance and how the government would respond to the financial struggles some were experiencing because of the industrialization boom, were also receiving greater attention. Historian Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal states that the issue of state intervention in these matters was revived during the debates of women in the priesthood.²⁷

Following is a summarized chronology of events that changed the face of Norway as well as the development of the debate over women in the priesthood. This chronology will bring us to the height of the debate and to the important role that Steinsvik begins to play as

²⁷ Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, *...under forvandlingens lov: En analyse av stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester i 1930 årene*, 26

this debate intensified in Parliament. Many of these developments will also be covered and enlarged in other sections of this paper.

Eighteenth-century Norway experienced both stability and growth despite the cracks that were beginning to surface within the Scandinavian Union that comprised Norway and Denmark. With Copenhagen designated as the place for a central administration, the aim of the absolute monarchists was to create a united economic, political, and cultural entity for both Norway and Denmark. Politics, trade, art, and science expanded in Copenhagen, while Kristiania (Oslo's original name) remained a backwater.²⁸ Despite the incompatibilities that developed because of societal progress, most Norwegians did not feel oppressed. They enjoyed their own legal code, and property rights were sacred. Nevertheless, not all was peaceful in the areas of agriculture and religion and the last 20 years of the 18th century gave rise to the likes of Christian Jensen Lofthus, and the preacher Hans Nielsen Hauge, both responsible for uprisings and movements. Lofthus protested against the abuse of the authorities in Agder “bleeding farmers dry” and “town dwellers using their privileges to drive farmers off their land.”²⁹ The rifts in society grew wider, and we begin to witness an uprising among the middle classes as Norwegians begin to criticize Copenhagen as “a blood-sucking leech”, as well as to demand their own bank and university. The growth in population and economic life rewards Norway with financial strength that paves the way for the rebuilding of a Norwegian state in 1814. Parallel to the uprising of the farmers as led by Lofthus, was the uprising of the Haugen movement on the side of the Church. Hauge championed the rights of individual believers to preach the word of God, a monopoly tightly controlled by the state church.³⁰

²⁸ Øivind Stenersen and Ivar Libæk, *the History of Norway: From the Ice Age until Today*, (Snarøya: Dinamo Forlag AS, 2007), 62.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 63.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

The Haugean movement, started by Hans Nielsen Hauge, was a nationwide movement that is credited with the reawakening of the Norwegian Church and with heralding the age of industrialization. This movement can be traced back to April 5, 1796, when Hauge experienced a spiritual awakening of sorts, a near out-of-body experience that was ecstatic in nature and that seemed to speak to him audibly with the message to make His name known to humanity. His spiritual shaking awakened a restlessness in him to preach the gospel in a way that would surely put him at odds with the authorities of the church as this would move him to take evangelism into his own hands. Although it did not begin explosively with crowds assembled to hear him speak, the effect it had on the two or three at a time he shared his newfound spirituality with would be influential enough to start a movement.

The movement was pietistic in nature with a strong belief in the responsibility of every Christian to disseminate the word of God, combined with a social justice ethos that worked to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of others. Hence, one of the duties of a Haugean was to travel the land, take up temporary residence with the inhabitants of the communities they chose, while working side by side with them by day. At night, they would dedicate their time to organizing religious meetings, and preaching. Although their teachings were in line with Lutheran doctrines, they were, nonetheless, in violation of the Conventicle Act of 1741, which granted authority to preach strictly to the clergy, and forbade women from preaching and teaching at all. While the Conventicle Act strictly forbade religious preaching from anyone other than a priest, it nevertheless did not set forth any form of punishment or consequence for the breach of this regulation.³¹ The absence of a specified punishment led to many years of incarceration for Hauge with official sentencing. The Conventicle Act also stated that these religious meetings, when held in homes should be restricted to “men with men” and “women with women”, and solely under the supervision of a state approved

³¹ Tor Edvin Dahl, *Hans Nielsen Hauge*, (Oslo: Tiden Norsk Forlag, 1973) 18.

minister.³² There was also another difference in the supervisory regulations of home organized religious meetings. Should the meetings consist of men, then notification to the church authorities was required. Should the meetings include women, however, a state approved priest had to be present.³³ The duties of Hauge's followers were not subjected to any boundaries with regard to gender and all were invited to join, men and women alike. This freedom, though condemned by the Church, broke with tradition and granted many women across the nation both the inspiration and opportunity to preach and evangelize. In addition, they were empowered to preach the word of God, resist ecclesiastical opposition, and commit to being pioneers in this new Christian movement. While his was not a resolute political endeavor to bring equality to men and women, Hauge was, nonetheless, an instrumental pioneer in the emancipation of women by empowering them with leadership roles within his movement. He "stood on the threshold of a new era".³⁴

Despite the hardships suffered by Hauge because of his defiance of church regulations regarding women preachers, and despite the progress for women in active church service that his movement seemed to have brought about, a tightening of the reigns of sorts occurred around the 1850s, and women were once again placed on the back burner and forced to be silent. This was due in large part to a strengthening of Biblicism, which followed the Haugean movement. This direction towards adherence to "the letter of the Bible" began to characterize large parts of the clergy and laity, and was strongly upheld by prominent figures such as Dr. Sigurd Odland, the theologian who went on to establish MF, and become a vocal opponent to women in the priesthood, or in any church leadership role, for that matter. Ironically, his grandmother, Karen Odland, had been a prominent Hauge follower, and was well known as a

³² Olav Golf, *Den haugianske kvinnebevegelse*, (Oslo: Webergs Boktrykkeri, 1998) 17.

³³ Bisspedømmerådernes Fellesråd, *Fra kirkens kvinneside: en utredning om kirken og kvinnen ved en komité nedsatt av Kirkerådet*, (Trondheim: Stridheim Trykkeri, 1979) 104.

³⁴ Olav Golf, *Den haugianske kvinnebevegelse*, 11, 21, and 23.

preacher in Bergen. When Odland was reminded of his grandmother's speaking engagements at prayer meetings, he would reply, "yes, she did that, unfortunately".³⁵

The Women's Association was also officially established in 1884, with women's rights as their goal. They worked towards obtaining the rights for women, and their proper place in society. The organization consisted of both men and women who belonged to a financially resourceful middle class with political ties and strong influences.³⁶ With progress in education for women taking place, Hagbard E. Berner, a representative from the Leftist Party who sought equal rights for women with regard to all public offices, including the priesthood, presented the question of admission of women to the priesthood to Parliament for the first time. Although the proposal was voted down, it set in motion a process that quickly proved itself to be an issue that would gain momentum.³⁷ On February 9, 1912, a law was passed granting women access to serve in state offices. Not only did women now have access to equal education opportunities at all levels, and in all disciplines, but now they were also granted access to hold public office. This privilege, however, came with some restrictions; namely, 1) they were not allowed to serve in the King's council, 2) they were not allowed to serve as priests in the state church, 3) they were not allowed to serve as diplomats or as diplomatic consuls, and 4) they were not allowed to serve either in the military, or in civil-military service.³⁸ On June 24, 1938, three of the above restrictions were abolished with the exception of admission in the priesthood. Although they had been granted access to the priesthood in principle according to the overall description of the law passed on February 9, 1912, the legislation included restrictions that eliminated any guarantee that a woman could become a priest and seek employment in any church throughout the land. This restriction

³⁵ Bispedømmerådernes Fellestråd, *Fra kirkens kvinneside: En utredning om kirken og kvinnen*, 105.

³⁶ Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde: Marta Steinsvik liv og virke, 1877-1950*, 36.

³⁷ Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, *...under forvandlingens lov: En analyse av stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester i 1930 årene*, p. 54.

³⁸ Arne Fjelberg, *Kvinnelige prester?* (Oslo: Forlaget Land og Kirke: 1958), 7

came in the form of granting individual congregations the right to reject a woman priest should they oppose. Considering the struggles women were having in obtaining equal rights on all fronts, it is clear to see that this restricted legislation did not fully grant women the freedom to become priests.³⁹

2.2 The Evolution of Education for Women in Norway:

The educational system also underwent historical changes that served Steinsvik favorably. Before 1882, girls were not allowed to obtain education past the elementary school level, and elementary schools for girls, for the most part, consisted of education in domestic subjects such as arts and crafts, cooking, childcare, and domestic maintenance. Ultimately, women were trained to be nannies, caretakers, and overall homemakers. A woman by the name of Ragna Nielsen, a rector at an all girls' school, and a feminist in her own right, proposed a radical idea that went at the heart of equality from a human rights' perspective. She is quoted as saying, "A woman's determination is the same as that of a man's, to be human."⁴⁰

Ragna Nielsen was born in 1845, to a law educated father, and a former governess. Her lineage consisted of the knowledgeable and culturally elite of the nation. Her early life would be molded by the strong women around her; namely, her mother and grandmother, both pedagogues in their own right, in whose pedagogical footsteps Nielsen would follow. Misfortune followed the marriage of her parents, which led to a bitter divorce as well as the breakdown of Nielsen's own marriage later in life. Perhaps it was this exposure to the relational tensions between genders that contributed to the development of Nielsen's innate sense of self-awareness and independence. Her leadership skills and feminist traits were

³⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰ Ida Bloom and Sølvi Sogner, *Med kjønnsperspektiv på norsk historie: Fra vikingtid til 2000-årsskiftet*: (Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, A/S: 1999) 188.

inculcated early on by a single mother, among others. Later in life her marriage would play second fiddle to her own resolve to prioritize women's rights and equal education, leaving Nielsen divorced, single, and childless for the rest of her adult life. As an alternative, she poured out her motherly and feminist dispositions on the many young girls and students she would later come to mentor, and for whom she championed equal rights to education.⁴¹ Schools and education were a natural part of Nielsen's upbringing as both her mother and grandmother ran girls' schools in their own homes. Nielsen was herself homeschooled until the age of 12 along with her female cousins. Her biographer writes that Nielsen's childhood playtime consisted of running a school of her own with all of her dolls who were well equipped with miniature school supplies made by Nielsen herself. "She strictly maintained order and discipline, but never took to the rod".⁴²

Nielsen's arguments for equal education for boys and girls stemmed from the understanding of education as a basic human right for all. She disputed the status quo that girls inevitably grew up to be wives and mothers, and suggested instead that no one could know how many among these girls might actually desire a professional career. In addition, she also challenged all theories regarding the need for gender distinctions in order to protect the weaker physical constitutions of women, and instead argued that should there be any physically weak students, boy or girl, each case should be handled individually. Her arguments were quite influential and widely accepted, and when the education reforms were discussed in Parliament, the proposal to preserve these special girls' schools was overthrown, and the need for school subjects tailored specifically for girls was no longer included in the language formulation.⁴³ Of the 114 Parliament representatives, there was only one against. Hence, on June 15, 1882, a legislative reform was enacted in Parliament that granted women

⁴¹ Astrid Lorenz, *Fra de frimodiges leir: Ragna Nielsen, født Ullmann –skolearkitekt og kvinnereformator*, (Oslo: Aschehoug & Co.: 2014) 11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁴³ Ida Bloom and Sølvi Sogner, *Med kjønnsperspektiv på norsk historie: Fra vikingtid til 2000-årsskiftet*, 188.

the right to take the “examen artium” and “examen philosophicum” (university entrance exams), and just a few weeks later Ida Cecilie Thoresen became the first woman in Norway to take the university entrance exam.⁴⁴

Ida Cecilie Thoresen was not a mere eager student standing on the sidelines hoping for educational reforms that would allow her entry to the university. The daughter of the community doctor in Eidsvoll, Thoresen grew up in a conservative home, but early on exhibited radical and independent traits in her strong love for education. She was well informed on current events, and was strongly influenced by the progress Swedish and Danish women were making in conquering the educational limitations in their countries. As early as 1880, she convinced her father to inquire at the Ministry of Church Affairs regarding the possibility of her taking the university entrance exam. The Ministry of Church Affairs turned the inquiry over to the university, and the Faculty of Law clarified that the university entrance exam was available only for men. They concluded by stating that should women wish to take this exam, a change in current legislation would have to occur.⁴⁵

Thoresen was not easily discouraged, and she continued to study for the university entrance exam with the assistance of private tutors. She would go on to approach the Director General of the Ministry of Church Affairs to present a proposal to His Majesty the King, but he would not comply. She then approached a member of Parliament, and State Auditor, H.E. Berner, who showed himself willing to help her. In February of 1882, he presented a proposal to the committee to allow women the right to take the university entrance exam, and stated the request as a “necessary and urgent need”, and that a young woman was already preparing herself for the exam in the hopes of taking it that summer.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Kristin Molland Nordeval, *Mot Strømmen: Kvinnelige teologer i Norge før og nå*, 19.

⁴⁵ Anna Caspari Agerholt, *Den norske kvinnebevegelseshistorie*, (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS, 1973) 59.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

The floodgates for women in academia were not automatically opened, as the road to higher education would still prove too costly and difficult for young girls. Immediately after the initial reform, the question of academic participation and course exams would soon follow. This, too, required legislative action, and by way of a Royal Resolution of 1883, women were allowed to participate in class as well as take the corresponding study exams. It was the Faculties of Humanities and Math/Science that first opened up for women despite the latter expressing skepticism, especially from the Faculty of Medicine, that “women would lose their womanhood, and become something abnormal”⁴⁷ The Faculties of Theology and Law stated that women should not partake of studies in their fields since they did not have rights to hold public office. Parliament’s representative, M.E. Berner, would once again step in to ensure education rights for women across the board. He submitted a proposal stating that women must be granted admission to all official exams. Said proposal was met with little resistance from the committee with the exception of one member, a priest by the name of F.S. Schiørn, who time and again, would vote against anything having to do with the emancipation of women.⁴⁸ Notwithstanding the way paved by Ragna Nielsen as a champion for women’s right to education, and Ida Cecilie Thoresen’s unrelenting inquiries to take the university entrance exam, Norway would see only four female university graduates by the end of the 1890’s, from the fields of mathematics/science, law, philosophy, and theology.⁴⁹ Despite the historical turn of events granting women permission to take the university entrance exams, obstacles for the unhindered and unlimited access to higher education for women continued to arise at every step. It would take all of two years between 1882 and 1884 before most of the details granting women the right to higher education in all disciplines were put in place by

⁴⁷ V. Aubert, «Kvinner i akademiske yrker» (Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning 4, 1961. p. 239, as quoted in Kristin Molland Norderval, *Mot Strømmen: Kvinnelige teologer i Norge før og nå*, (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1982) 19.

⁴⁸ Anna Caspari Agerholt, *Den norske kvinnebevegelseshistorie*, 64.

⁴⁹ Kristin Molland Norderval, *Mot Strømmen: Kvinnelige teologer i Norge før og nå*, 19.

Parliament. Yet the question remained: how advantageous would an education in theology be for a woman if, for example, her goal was to become a priest? Where or how would she use her theological training? Historian Molland described it best when she said, “she could become a teacher or a missionary, but theology would be a cumbersome road to take”.⁵⁰ And a cumbersome road it was indeed!

Failed attempts at granting women the right to take university entrance exams did not deter those in favor, and the proposal for a change in legislation was once again brought before Parliament. On June 15, 1882, Parliament voted in favor of allowing women to complete high school education, and take university entrance exams.⁵¹ We observe a snail-like advancement for women in education, but insufficiently significant to afford women any viable careers in society that would bring them to the level of their male counterparts. Following the vote allowing women to take university entrance exams, the question then arose regarding their overall participation in the [study programs](#)^[DT2], as well as the right to final exams and graduation. The Faculties of Law and Theology expressed skepticism over a woman’s desire to study theology since the priesthood was a public office that [did not factor in](#) ^[DT3]with all other public offices due to the fact that women in the priesthood was totally forbidden.⁵²

Parliament representative, H.E. Berner would once again present the proposal of equal rights to education for women. Thus, on June 14, 1884, Parliament approved legislation that unequivocally expanded educational rights for women to include all the rights and benefits that men enjoyed.⁵³ The legislative amendment also established the official integration of boys and girls in schools. The Parliamentary representatives argued that this was something “natural and morally beneficial to our youth if girls are to be afforded access to education in

⁵⁰ Ibid., 46

⁵¹ Anna Caspari Agerholt, *Den norske kvinnebevegelseshistorie*, (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS, 1973) 60.

⁵² Kristin Molland Norderval, *Mot Strømmen: Kvinnelige teologer i Norge før og nå*, 20.

⁵³ Ibid., 19.

the same line as boys.⁵⁴ This, however, would not necessarily prove to be the final peg in women's quest for equality with regard to education and holding public office. The struggle for granting women the right to hold public office would certainly gain momentum following the admission of women into higher education, but the struggles to allow them to utilize her higher education were yet to come.

In 1884, Marta Tonstad [DT4] would begin her first year at a school for girls at the age of 7.⁵⁵ In the late 1800s the school system was quite class-oriented. Schools for the poor, middle class, and the elite were commonplace, in addition to all schools being gender-segregated up until legislation is passed in 1884, that allows for gender-integrated schools. Though Tonstad began her first year of school at a lower class school (almueskole), it wasn't long before her progressive minded father, Torkel Tonstad, transferred her to Ragna Nielsen's school to ensure that his daughter obtained the same education opportunities as boys.

One year after Marta Tonstad would begin her education, Ragna Nielsen established the first gender-integrated school at high school level, and was also the first to employ female teachers in top positions. This led to an increasing number of girls' schools closing down, these being institutions that served only to train girls for domestic careers.⁵⁶ Her school began with only 19 girls enrolled, but it wasn't long before boys also began to enroll, and in January, 1886, Nielsen could officially claim a gender-integrated school.⁵⁷

2.3 Church in Crisis:

Paralleling the shifts in the social areas described above, Christianity in Norway in the 19th century would also find itself in deep crisis. Historian Wisløff describes a paradigmatic

⁵⁴ Norske Kvinnelige Akademikerens Landforbund, *Kvinnelige studenter, 1882-1932*, Anna Caspari Agerholt (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1932), Chapter 1, 50.

⁵⁵ Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde: Marta Steinsvik liv og virke 1877-1950*, 36.

⁵⁶ Norske Kvinnelige Akademikerens Landforbund, *Kvinnelige studenter, 1882-1932*, 54.

⁵⁷ Astrid Lorenz, *Fra de frimodiges leir: Ragna Nielsen, født Ullmann –skolearkitekt og kvinnereformator*, 143.

transformation that occurred within the Church of Norway at the end of the 1800s. A “modern spirituality” of sorts emerged that seemed to divide the nation into those that welcomed it enthusiastically with its “free-thinking” nuances, and those who endeavored to resist its ingress.⁵⁸ While historical occurrences are rarely, if ever, isolated events, movements can often be traced to individuals who become their spokespersons, of sorts, granting them repute as instigators, initiators, or the like. Such can be said of the movement of liberal theology that permeated the Norwegian Lutheran Church in the late 1800s, which some historians claim arrived and spread with incredible speed. With this Norwegian “Renaissance” came a new wave of thinking that awakened in the individual a heightened interest in all that affected human existence. While it can be modestly described as a reawakening of interest in the arts, politics, sciences, and religion, it was, in fact, much more than that. The Renaissance ushered in the emancipation of self-conscious thinking, and the Church would not be spared the heralding of freethinking that was permeating all other aspects of society. People began questioning the role of the Church with its dogma, rituals, and priestly governance.

Towards the end of the 1800s, the new freethinking ideology began to peak, and questions were being raised regarding religion, dogma, and the individual’s role in spirituality. Some questioned the pietistic attitude of the Church, and began to question seriously the role of priests, while others fought viciously to uphold its traditions, rituals, and control over the Church as an organization. As early as 1795, a man by the name of F.C.W. Wedel Jarsberg (d.1891) wrote a tract entitled “The Clerical Class must be Abolished”,⁵⁹ a bold feat, to say the least.

Molland describes the tumultuous times in the history of the Norwegian Church during the 19th century by first enlarging the picture to include changes in all areas of society: a newly awakened political life, economic expansion and growth, improvements in quality of

⁵⁸ Carl Wisløff, *Norsk Kirkehistorie, Bind III*, (Oslo: Lutherstiftelsens Forlag, 1971), 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

life overall, increase in public education, the emergence of a Norwegian scientist, not to mention the golden age of literature that begins with Henrik Wergeland and includes Sigrid Undseth.⁶⁰ Christianity was not exempted from the influences of change, and as the above-mentioned fields experienced newness and curiosity of thought and change, so, too, would the routine and strongly established beliefs and practices of Christian life come into scrutiny.

From the perspective of a priest by the name of Thv. Klaveness, it was precisely the influences of change in other areas of society that were shaking the established foundation of Christian life in theory and practice. Sunday church attendance began to experience a decline due to the increased activity and availability of trains and steamer ships. It was believed that the arrival of foreign romance literature was captivating the attention of many. In summary, his analysis of the destabilization of Christianity in Norway was largely due to the wave of unbelief sweeping the rest of the world that had, so far, “not fully trespassed the fjords and valleys of this country, but which time would soon render inescapable”.⁶¹

It is easy to understand how changes in so many areas of society would affect every other area as well. Newness of thought in science, literature, industry, etc., inevitably awakens the curiosity and desire for what more remains to be discovered, uncovered, or learned, and believing that faith would go unscathed would be naive at best. The Church, however, was not prepared to embrace these waves of change as a possible advantage for the strengthening and growth of religion. Rather, the changes were viewed as a type of heresy sweeping the nation with the aid of newspapers, increased travels, romance literature, and the surge of hired professors teaching and promoting positivism. In the words of Klaveness, all of the above contributed to the rise of the “predator of unbelief”.⁶²

⁶⁰ Einar Molland, *Fra Hans Nielsen Hauge til Eivind Berggrav*, (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 3rd edition, 1980) 53.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 54

Despite the drastic decline in church membership that occurred during these times, Wisløff writes that the strongly held respect for the belief in the inherited faith of Christianity in Norway still burned deeply among its people regardless of the intense spiritual battles that would ensue in the areas of politics, science, the arts, and religion. The rise in skepticism was not atheistic in nature; it pointed more specifically toward the role of the church and its clerics in a more modernized world where individuals desired a greater participation and say in the affairs of their lives, especially with regard to spirituality. The turn of the century would herald blustering times for the people of Norway, and the church would face its fiercest test yet.⁶³

2.4 Theological Divide:

The late 1800s in Norway marked the beginnings of a slow-rising shift in the relationship between the Church and its constituents. In the Church's status quo, there was no room for personal freedom, either in choices or expression. Membership consisted of strict adherence to the Church's Lutheran Confession, and these were non-negotiable if one was to belong to the state church.⁶⁴ It was precisely in this particular argument that dissention began to stir, and thus, the winds of liberal vs. conservative theology would blow their way into society with gusts that upset the traditional hold of the Church on its constituents. One of the cracks that began to emerge was the Constitutional requirement that public officers be members of the State Church when some began converting to other faiths. To accommodate this quandary, an amendment was made to the Constitution that required State Church membership only for government departmental secretaries, and ministers. Quagmires began to spread as questions were posed concerning the authority of dissenting clerics to administer

⁶³ Carl Fr. Wisløff, *Norges Kirkehistorie*, 12.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

communion to State Church members.⁶⁵ Dissention begins to show its face in other areas of Christianity as Unitarianism makes an entry via the conversion of a theologian by the name of Christopher Janson (1841-1917), who converted during a trip to the U.S., and returned to establish the first Unitarian congregation, the Brotherhood Church. Although the Unitarian Church did not enjoy a long life, it nevertheless contributed to the changing face of religion in Norway.

The increasing arrival of unorthodox faiths brought about the need for clearer representation of their needs and rights. Thus, a man by the name of Abraham Grimstvedt, an individual who would become very influential in the free church circles, established an organization in 1902, that would serve as a mouthpiece for the growing evangelical community.⁶⁶

Another noteworthy movement that added to the changing face of Christianity in Norway was one that began in Denmark in the 1800s with a theologian named N.F.S. Grundtvig and which was further promoted by J. C. Lindberg, P. C. Kierkegaard, C. J. Brandt, among others.⁶⁷ The movement came to be known as Grundtvigianism, and its fundamental appeal was that it saw the word of God as a living experience as opposed to the dogmatic and liturgical emphasis channel embraced by the official clergy. The movement would seek to uphold the sacraments of baptism, communion, and the Church's creed, while reducing the prominence of liturgical and clerical authority.⁶⁸

Prior to the challenges that confronted Christianity during the late 1800s, the seeds of change were sown into other areas of daily life. In the late 1700s, the Haugean movement ushered in an awakening of self-expression in the form of emerging interpretation and

⁶⁵ Ibid., 110-111.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 111.

⁶⁷ Bloch-Hoell, Nils Egede. (May 18, 2016). Grundtvigianismen. Norwegian Encyclopedia, «Store norske leksikon». As viewed on December 4, 2016, <https://snl.no/grundtvigianismen>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

proclamations of the gospel from the lay community at the exclusion of the clergy.⁶⁹ All were encouraged to share the gospel by way of preaching, and women were not excluded. It was a time that saw the empowerment of women preachers, and despite resistance from Church authorities, faith through self-expression began sweeping the nation. The freethinking wave sweeping the nation on all cultural fronts would affect writers and poets as well, for example, as they also began questioning the purpose in all of their writings about the trivialities of everyday life, the squalor of love and romance. There was an overall restlessness for change, and the Church was not immune to these changes. Naturalism began to wear thin. Even Henrik Ibsen stated that poetry was becoming a dying art form.

According to Einar Molland, Norway's wave of positivistic change arrived quite late in relation to the rest of the world. The Orthodox Lutheran Church had managed complete control until the beginning of the 1870s. Perhaps the geographical landscape of Norway, with its deep valleys and high mountains, and its sparse population spread out over vast territory, slowed down the winds of change from reaching every corner of this large country. When it arrived, however, Molland describes it as the arrival of an avalanche.⁷⁰

Something happened that changed the cultural apathy felt by many, and this change seemed to be directed more specifically toward the Church. The strengthening of literature and the arts as a form of expression to be directed in other areas than just romance or the morbidity of everyday life seemed to awaken a greater need for self-expression that affected the relationship of the Church to its members, or more specifically, the relationship of the constituents to the Church. Poets and writers began redirecting their talents for expressing their skepticism about the efficacy of dogmatic teachings on modern society. They questioned why literature should dedicate itself merely to the descriptions of the dark side of life with its trivialities and morbidity of daily life and loves; why not also use literature and the arts for

⁶⁹ Einar Molland, *Fra Hans Nielsen Hauge til Eivind Berggrav*, 10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

spiritual self-expression? According to Arne Garborg, the concept of the blood of Jesus cleansing humanity from sin was no longer practical in his present day society.⁷¹ Christianity was to teach us how to live. He reckoned that Christianity should display a belief in God that included more individual interpretation that leads to self-expression of faith.

At the start of his interpretation of the arrival of this “liberal” theology, Wisløff states that “new” is not how he would describe the liberal theology that Norway began to embrace in the late 1800s. Rather, he states that the waves of change merely tend to arrive later to the far removed coasts of Norway, thus, this “new” theology sweeping the nation was simply put, “new” to Norway, but that from a historical perspective, it actually has its roots partly in the Enlightenment Era, and in where critique of church dogma begins.⁷² According to Wisløff, the thinking and beliefs of the late 1890s did not clearly define what Christianity was all about, neither did it plainly define what the “religious” life entailed. Perhaps this helps to explain the wave of new thinking about Christianity that emerged during this time, and into the early 1900s, despite this new thinking also not being totally positive and clear in its counter analysis. In spite of the personal up and down swings in his own spiritual experience, Arne Garborg was widely read. Wisløff writes that the “religiously interested” were quite interested in what the poets had to say about religious matters. Their insights, writes Wisløff, were more psychologically analytical, and delved deeper into other-dimensional ways of understanding spirituality. Interestingly, however, the wave of newer and freer self-expression with regard to Christian beliefs did not necessarily affect the relationship of believers to the Church, or to Christianity, in a positive way. It did not have an affirmative impact on church attendance or spiritual proclamations.⁷³

⁷¹ Carl Wisløff, *Norsk Kirkehistorie, Bind III*, 113.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 115.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 113.

The winds of change can seldom be traced to their origins with exactitude because these often arrive discreetly, and they imperceptibly permeate all areas of society via the simple conversations between lay folk, the religious discussions among churchgoers, or the influences of academic teachings, for example. Oftentimes there appears to awaken a restlessness, of sorts, that moves people to question the status quo, be it caused by socio-economic dissatisfactions, or perhaps sheer boredom from the humdrum of everyday life that appears to advance too slowly for many. Wisløff points to this phenomenon and states that at no other time in the history of Norway had there been such an exaggerated fixation with religion, religious teachings, spiritual matters, and the cleric. Georg Brandes, the Danish literary critic and researcher, encouraged the awakening of indignation, and what better area to confront than the religious sector with its cemented dogma, traditions, and rituals that too few ever question.⁷⁴ In obtaining a panoramic image of the changes in Christianity as described above that lead to a theological divide, one can see from the earlier mentioned events, in the words of Wisløff, how positivist naturalism, a degenerated pietism and a popular Grundtvigianism, serve to undermine the established State church, the government, and education.⁷⁵

A central question lay at the foundation of the theological divide: how do you proclaim the gospel to a modernized society marching on an evolutionary road of change, while simultaneously holding on to the traditional dogmatic teachings and practices of the Church? How does one apply the gospel to the present time? The debate on how this task should be accomplished, and what the modern face of Christianity should look like, would reach an intensity that conversely obstructed the interpretation and application of the gospel

⁷⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 37.

for those who genuinely sought to understand it. It was at this particular juncture that the Church would be split in two.⁷⁶

The changing religious face of Christianity in Norway, along with the rising variations of how that Christianity should be expressed and practiced, naturally awakens the question of interpretation, scriptural and otherwise. To reform a Church based on the doctrinal teachings that both identify and define it brings one to the natural question of interpretation: who interprets, what is interpreted, and how is interpretation translated to the every day life of practice. To further clarify the complexity of the uprising of the theological debate, one must look closely at the argumentation regarding the Lutheran Confession; teachings based on the *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) concept, that formed part of the doctrinal standards of the Lutheran Church. This concept sought to establish the Holy Scriptures as the divinely appointed authority on matters of spirituality, religion, and practice, which became prominent in said debate, but could be further narrowed down to differences in biblical interpretation. In essence, the debate over biblical interpretation, church doctrinal identification, and the rising need among the religious to make these interpretations relevant to each society is an age-old conflict that is true for denominations across the board to the present day. While some view church dogma and tradition to be a choking stronghold on the development of an individual's faith, others view them as vital for the very preservation of that faith.

In 1900 a book was published by a German theologian, Adolf von Harnack, entitled, *Kristendommens vesen*, (the essence of Christianity). Harnack was a renowned theologian in his day, but also a very liberal one—liberal enough to challenge the very doctrines that framed the Lutheran Church's identity. Theologian J.J. Jansen complimented the book for what he understood as the acceptance of a rational Christian, i.e. that one may accept the belief in God while not necessarily accepting the divinity of Jesus Christ. According to

⁷⁶ Ibid., 114.

Jansen, who is to say that he or she is not a Christian?⁷⁷ Heuch, on the other hand, did not debate the question of an individual's Christianity, and affirmed his inability to do so. Rather, he wished to debate the more substantive issue, namely, the doctrines of the Church as interpreted by the scriptures. Scriptural interpretation informs the believer's conscience as to the traditions and practices that uphold certain beliefs, but the conscience also serves to inform the believer as to the accuracy and relevancy of those doctrines in the day-to-day development of the Christian experience.

Sigurd Odland was a theologian, and a perplexing character, who would come into the debate and ultimately affix a clear demarcation between the liberal and conservative theology by founding his own school for the education of priests in order to safeguard the conservative theological teachings of the Lutheran Church. Molland described this era as the framework within which the life of the Norwegian Church would proceed to play itself out in the 20th century.⁷⁸ Ironically, Steinsvik would choose Odland's school (although he had resigned his position as Rector by the time Steinsvik enrolled) despite his staunch opposition and disdain for women as priests, or in any other leadership capacity.

2.5 Sigurd Odland: Conservatism's Staunch Defender

Sigurd Odland is described by historian Åge Holter as an intolerant, fanatical eccentric, both in connection with the issue of women clergy and with the Church's theology.⁷⁹ He appealed to the archconservative ecclesiastics as well to the archconservative lay folk. The Mission Societies, which consisted of very conservative lay folk who leaned towards a more literal interpretation of the bible, saw in Odland a champion of traditional ecclesiastic practices, while the higher echelon of the Church saw in him a champion for strict

⁷⁷ Ibid., 127.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 71.

⁷⁹ Festschrift utgitt i forbindelse med Det teologiske Menighetsfakultets 75-års jubileum oktober 1983, *De første lærerne*, (Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke, pgs. 81-186: Oslo, 1983), 81.

clerical authority. He stemmed from a line of devoted haugeans, as well as grundtvigians, both of which moved away from the more pietistic nature of Christianity in the late 1800s, early 1900s. It is said that his grandmother was an active haugean, which means she was undoubtedly carrying out the movement's mission of living among the people, working with them by day, and preaching by night. It was the preaching part that surely did not sit well with Odland. Despite his conservatism, however, Odland was not a Biblicist. He supported a historical critical approach to scriptural interpretation, which makes his intolerant fanaticism concerning women in church service, and his fanaticism with preserving the conservative aspect of church dogma, even more perplexing in light of precisely what historical critical approaches purports to do; namely, to contextualize scripture in order to show that the ancient authors reflected their own historical situations. According to Holter, this interesting mix of religious and theological influences afforded him an idiosyncratic profile within theological and ecclesiological circles.⁸⁰ On the one hand, he was staunchly opposed to the liberal theology that sought to alter or redefine the Lutheran Confession and authority in any way, while on the other hand, he defended the historical critical approach to bible study that acknowledged differences of opinion between the bible writers, and that brought to light historical mistakes. His argument in defense of this apparent paradox was to state that, "differences are not the same as opposites."⁸¹

Odland was adamant in his stance regarding the selection of the New Testament scholar that would occupy the vacant position at the university theology faculty. The tug-of-war that ensued with Sweden regarding the university posts reached government levels to the point where a Parliamentary representative described the whole affair as a case straight out of

⁸⁰ Festschrift utgitt i forbindelse med Det teologiske Menighetsfakultets 75-års jubileum oktober 1983, *De første lærerne*, 82.

⁸¹ Carl Wisløff, *Norsk Kirkehistorie, Bind III*, 123.

the Middle Ages with Odland “as the Pope who resolves and binds”.⁸² Both liberals and conservatives seemed to share this opinion of Odland. Nevertheless, it was the very nature of his staunch conservative views that won him accolades among the clerical hierarchy for being a man unwilling to compromise the beliefs of the Church, while drawing ire from the liberal side for his unwillingness to compromise even an inch. Such was the praise from the conservative side, that a former politician by the name of Niels Hertzberg used the scriptural verse from Jeremiah 1:18 to describe Odland: “And I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land.”⁸³ It is no wonder that Odland’s position in matters of liberal vs. conservative theology, as well as the issue of women in the priesthood, would become his badges of honor.⁸⁴ This was, after all, a man who would take up the deliberation of a liberal theologian for the position of New Testament theology at the university straight through the ranks of higher education, all the way to government levels. When he met with resistance even at the highest level of decision-making, he would protest by resigning from his post at the university to establish his own school in which the proper theology for the training of priests could be taught without contamination or stain from liberal influences.

He was an amalgam of complexities despite possessing a scholarly education in historical critical approaches to biblical studies. Nevertheless, he exhibited pedantic-like characteristics when it came to the actual expression of church life. He disliked both the state church model, and the “free church” model. The former because of its need for boards and greater dependence on the state and the latter because it was merely an extension of the

⁸² Festskrit utgitt i forbindelse med Det teologiske Menighetsfakultets 75-års jubileum oktober 1983, *De første lærerne*, 81.

⁸³ Jeremiah 1:18 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁸⁴ Festskrit utgitt i forbindelse med Det teologiske Menighetsfakultets 75-års jubileum oktober 1983, *De første lærerne*, 81.

former except that that individuals were afforded the choice of becoming members themselves. He desired to repair the image of the state church in the minds of its members by reawakening a faith more strongly based on the living God.⁸⁵ He was clearly a man of conflicting beliefs regarding faith, theology, and church workings, which made him all the more difficult to understand. His dissatisfaction at every turn, and in every detail of the Christian's journey, impelled him to start his own school; a school in which he could surely control what came in, and what went out. While this may not appear to bear direct implications to Steinsvik's story, it serves to describe the man who founded a school of theology that would not only serve to satisfy his own pursuits of preserving conservatism with regard to church teachings, but that would serve to demarcate the line between liberal and conservative theology. In addition to his intolerance and fanaticism within the realm of church life and church dogma, Odland was opposed to women serving in any church capacity whatsoever. Ironically, it would be his school that Steinsvik would choose for her theological studies.

2.6 Menighetsfakultetet

The so-called "new" theology that swept the nation in the 1880s and which gave birth to the controversy between liberal and conservative theology was not exactly "new", as historian Wisløff described. It was actually an age-old struggle between a denomination's hold on the beliefs it deems to be mandated by scripture and the arrival of progressive thought that desires broader analysis and research of those very dogmatic beliefs and their application in the Christian life.

As stated earlier, this "new" theology was new to Norway, but considering its debates regarding some basic beliefs of the church, it stands to reason that academia would soon

⁸⁵ Ibid., 82.

involve itself in the struggle for dominance. After all, it is universities that take the role of research, both past, present, and future, and it is in the field of academia where changes can more prominently find fertile ground by the appointment of university teachers whose arena of influence is immeasurable, especially since it was at university levels that priests were trained. The marked point at which theology would come into question, and, thus, attract the attention and engagement of academia, would begin at the very foundation of the Church's identity, i.e. the Luther Confession. On the one hand, some argued that the Lutheran Confession should be interpreted more in general terms, and should allow for individual freedom of interpretation, while the opposing side promoted a stricter interpretation that held to the more traditional dogma with its rituals and traditions.⁸⁶ The suggestion of allowing lay folk to interpret scripture in a way that would make religion more relevant to them became a sore point that moved into academic circles, and understandably so. When a religion begins to question the orthodox dogma of its institution and one side wishes for strict adherence to the Church's teachings, while the other side believes in less strict interpretations, then the logical place to turn to for settling these matters would be the Bible, and biblical interpretation would be the arena that would be fiercely contested by theologians and university professors. This is the arena in which the brothers Ernst and Ossian Sars became prime participants.

Ernst Sars was appointed professor of history in 1874, and the latter was professor of zoology at the University of Oslo. Their disciplines afforded them the opportunity to promote their convictions in positivism and the Darwinist view of development. The Church, on the other hand, would not stand idly by in observation of the inevitable freethinking spirit sweeping the nation. Their opposition would be equally fierce. The influences of the academicians undoubtedly permeated the spiritual lives of their students, which in turn would have repercussions outside of university life.⁸⁷ Molland also attributes the advancement of

⁸⁶ Carl Wisløff, *Norsk Kirkehistorie, Bind III*, 127.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

positivism at the university to the Sars brothers despite the neutrality exhibited by the Minister of Culture, and Ernst Sars himself in stating that they were not positivists by definition.⁸⁸ It is noteworthy to expose the impartiality the University exhibited when, on the one hand they appointed the brothers Sars to teaching positions knowing their open support of positivism and Darwinism, while on the other hand denying Georg Brandes lecture presentations on precisely these focuses.⁸⁹ Perhaps it was this very inconsistency that added fuel to the theological fire, or failed to put out the rising flames.

As is often the case with university students, the newness of positivism and freethinking found fertile ground among the youth who were willing to give voice to this “modernism” despite opposition from some areas of academia. According to Wisløff, Brandes, the ‘grand master’ of modern advances, was denied access to the university auditorium in 1876, when he was prepared to present four lectures on Søren Kierkegaard. The student association, however, received Brandes and gave him a platform on which to promote his convictions. He concluded his lectures with publicly declaring that he regarded Christianity as dark and superstitious.⁹⁰ Fierce opposition would not be directed solely at the opponents of traditional Christianity. Contradiction of their views would not be tolerated from the progressive-minded camp either. So determined were they in promoting modernism and freethinking, that they even went so far as to cry foul when Brandes was criticized by a pastor for promoting a book by a German author whose materialistic worldviews even suggested that society should allow for the elimination of unwanted children, a topic all too scandalous for the times. This, they determined, was an infringement on freedom of speech.⁹¹

The so-called “liberal theology” that began to permeate Steinsvik’s society acknowledged the stronghold that the modern development of thought was having on all

⁸⁸ Einar Molland, *Fra Hans Nielsen Hauge til Eivind Berggrav*, 55.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 55; and Carl Wisløff, *Norsk Kirkehistorie, Bind III*, 13.

⁹⁰ Carl Wisløff, *Norsk Kirkehistorie, Bind III*, p. 13.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

aspects of science. Liberal theology now faced the challenge of proving to a modern thinking society that Christianity was still viable to them, and that it still had much to offer, but that it needed to embrace greater openness with regard to the believer's freedom of self-interpretation, especially as it related to science. Consequently, the church would be focusing on the area to which it was entrusted; the personal life.⁹² Their challenge lay in transitioning believers from a spiritual experience that relied on external dogmatic teachings and rituals, to an experience that made room for the individual's own expressions and interpretations of faith.⁹³ Science and reasoning were now entering into a belief system that survived on faith in the mystical and the Church was questioning what role faith would continue to play "in a world where materialistic axioms would now replace causal relationships about existence".⁹⁴

In 1903, when Professor Fredrik Petersen died, a professorial position opened up in the theology faculty of the University in Kristiania. Petersen was professor of dogma, but was not considered a very disciplined thinker in the ways of theological interpretation. His achievement lay more in his popularity among the students for his warmth and caring than for his ability to address complex questions.⁹⁵ One of the applicants for the position was a distinctively liberal theologian by the name of Johannes Ording, whose unconventional liberal leanings, and his distancing himself from the Church's traditional teachings of the Lutheran Confession, was a cause of some concern for the evaluating committee. Nevertheless, the liberal majority at the faculty were not intimidated by his liberal leanings, and voted to hire him, while the university's only remaining conservative professor, S. Odland, dissented. So indignant became Odland over what he perceived as a catastrophic move for the Church, that he took up the issue with Kristiania's Association of Priests, who then forwarded the case to

⁹² Einar Molland, *Fra Hans Nielsen Hauge til Eivind Berggrav*, 58.

⁹³ Carl Wisløff, *Norsk Kirkehistorie, Bind III*, 118.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

the top echelons of the Church, i.e. The Ministry of Church and Culture.⁹⁶ There was dissension among the ranks, and protest grew against Ording, a man who was being considered to teach theology while being openly opposed to the Church's theology. The government voted against the appointment of Ording as professor of systematic theology.⁹⁷

The following year, the position of professor in systematic theology would open up once again, and Professor Ording would be considered once again. With a new round of vacancies to be filled, and an evaluation committee that now consisted of foreign experts, Ording was their first choice, once again with dissent from Professor Odland. The Head of the Ministry of Church and Culture, prost Chr. Knudsen, worked diligently to overturn the appointment, but was outvoted by his colleagues in government. On January 27, 1906, Johannes Ording was officially appointed professor of systematic theology at the University of Kristiania⁹⁸.

The decision was more than Professor Odland could tolerate. Shortly thereafter he resigned from his teaching position in protest over what he perceived an affront to the Church's Lutheran Confessions. A committee would later be formed that raised money to provide Odland with an income for freelancing as lecturer. It wasn't long before the idea of founding a private theology faculty for the right teaching and training of Lutheran priests was born, and in 1913, Odland opened the doors to MF. The newly established theology school would mark the official split and dissension among the liberals and conservatives, and would increasingly draw followers to each side.

It was around this time that Steinsvik decided to become a priest, and with both the theology faculty at the University of Kristiania, and the newly established MF, she would choose the latter in the hopes of becoming a priest while her children were still dependents.

⁹⁶ Einar Molland, *Fra Hans Nielsen Hauge til Eivind Berggrav*, 70.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

So sure was she that an imminent change in legislation that would allow women into the priesthood, that she chose to attend a school whose very premise was based on an arch-conservative scriptural literalism and strict adherence to the Lutheran Confession that would undoubtedly refuse to accept women clergy.⁹⁹ Her decision seemed to reveal either the determined will of one who accepts no obstructions in her life goals, or a profound naiveté in believing that MF might be open to training her as a priest once legislation was passed, as she believed was only a matter of time. Considering her already highly developed research and academic skills, one would be hard pressed to believe the latter. Being the diligent researcher that she was, she had to have been well informed on the developments of the theological debate, as well as the career path of Sigurd Odland, the founder of MF. Nevertheless, Steinsvik's determination to register at the very school established by a fierce opponent of women in the priesthood, attests to both her determination to continue championing the cause of women in the priesthood, as well as her own desire to become a priest. It is apparent that Steinsvik would not be deterred by opposing forces, her actions would be directed exclusively toward her personal goals.

2.7 Calmeyergate Meeting:

As this thesis deals with Religion, Society and Global Issues, the theological divide that would lead to the infamous Calmeyergate meeting bears importance upon the story of Steinsvik in elucidating the upheaval and change occurring within the Church as it parallels the life of Steinsvik and her desire to become a priest. The struggle for dominance between liberal and conservative theology upsetting the Church and society would soon sweep the nation and turn minds to the dilemmas at hand; namely, the struggle for greater participation in Church matters from both the Church, and its members. This struggle began to worry the

⁹⁹ Ingeborge Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde*, 278.

more conservative groups within the church such as the Mission Churches whose strongly conservative convictions clashed with the liberalization of church dogma. A restlessness began to sweep the nation as the lay folk worried that liberal theology would overtake their Church. The working class began to speak up for the organizing of a meeting, a town hall meeting, of sorts, in which they would have a say in the issues affecting them directly. The swelling of the voices of this request led to the formation of a Senate comprising the promoters of these meetings. Its members consisted of Johan M. Wisløff, a priest from the town of Våler who would later be appointed secretary of the Norwegian Lutheran Inner Mission Society; H. Seyffarth, a missionary; Hans Høeg, an educator and headmaster, and an active participant in religious organizations and activities; O. Hallesby, a prominent leader, together with Wisløff, of the Norwegian Lutheran Inner Mission Society; Ludvig Hope, a strong supporter of the layfolk movement; and Absalon Taranger, a teacher turned lawyer who championed the separation of church and state. These men were active and faithful church members who represented the nationwide church organizations and missions.

The backgrounds of these men, and their participation in the newly formed committee, paints a picture of the intensity to which the struggle for greater control of the movement, direction, and voice of the Church, had grown. Invitations to a town hall meeting were sent nationwide to every Church organization, group, and denomination, and the Mission House at Calmeyergate, with a capacity of 950, was filled to capacity with church deputies, and anyone and everyone with interest in the matter. Thus, on January 15, 1920, a meeting was convened that became the talk of the day throughout the land, and the subject of newspapers across the country. It would come to be known as the Calmeyergate Meeting.¹⁰⁰

The turnout alone served to show the importance of this meeting and the intensity of the issues dividing the Church. The wide spectrum of representatives from every Christian

¹⁰⁰ Carl Wisløff, *Norsk Kirkehistorie, Bind III*, 235-236.

and missionary group attested to the level of concern nationwide. The media, however, saw it quite differently. All across the country, the newspaper coverage disparagingly described this meeting as, “the assembly of the thousand righteous”.¹⁰¹

The attendees did not represent a homogenous group. The approximately 950 people in attendance consisted of individuals from all types of church groups, missions, and even of opposing ideologies. So broad and wide were the perspectives, that the chairman of the meeting, Johan M. Wisløff, brilliantly convened the meeting with reflections that pointed to the vast religious background disparities while simultaneously uniting them in purpose. He stated, “we are gathered here, the ecclesiastics, the lay folk, and the ‘unchurched’; the free churches, the national churches, and the Christian people; but we are all here under the same mandate; to state unequivocally that we want nothing to do with this liberal theology in our church work.”¹⁰²

The divergent groups were unanimous in their quest to keep liberal theology out of their institutions and church work. Thus, they developed a framing statement that included their commitment to protecting the revelation of God as handed down by the Church forefathers; i.e. that bible-believing Christians would never cooperate or collaborate with those who did not uphold the authority of the scriptures; and that the officers and representatives responsible for the hiring of clergy and church leaders would never appoint anyone that does not claim to fully accept the Lutheran Confession as authorized by the scriptures. With the exception of one or two naysayers, the votes were unanimous, and these became known as the Calmeyergate guidelines.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 236.

¹⁰² Ibid., 236.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 238.

Chapter 3: Biography

She did many things, and historians seem to find it easier to understand and write about a man who pursued one “great” goal. Women’s lives and women’s histories often look different, more diffuse and are (perhaps) harder to evaluate.¹⁰⁴

Marta Steinsvik, born Marta Tonstad in 1877, lived during a time of dynamic historical changes in Norway in the areas of education, industry, government, and culture. During her lifetime, historical changes occurred that affected her life as a woman in a society that initially did not even allow women to receive the same academic education as men, much less continue past primary school. Steinsvik (her married name) was a young girl ready for high school at a time when the school system experienced groundbreaking changes. The opportunity for young girls to receive the same education as boys was ushered in. Women were granted entry into secondary school, took college entrance exams, and attended and graduated from the university with full degrees in all disciplines. However monumental and groundbreaking these changes may have seemed on the surface, each of these arrived slowly, and not without a fierce struggle. The final hurdle in the road to emancipation for women involved putting that newfound education into societal use by allowing them to hold public office. This deliberation also came slowly and met aggressive opposition. The only office not included at all in these deliberations was the priesthood. Clerical service was categorically closed off due to the theological interpretations set by the church with regard to women in the priesthood. It is at these particular political and religious crossroads that Steinsvik’s contributions become dominant.

Though Steinsvik lived during a time in which the term “feminist” was neither used nor associated with any field of study or emancipation issue, my thesis aims to present her as a woman whose contributions, writings, and theological understanding comprised feminist

¹⁰⁴ Pam Hirsch, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon: A biography* by Pam Hirsch, (London, UK: Pimlico, 1999) ix.

characteristics that would undoubtedly place her within the discipline of contemporary feminist theology. I will analyze her role in the Parliamentary debates regarding women in the priesthood from a historical perspective, and I will also analyze her arguments from a theological perspective. For purposes of this thesis, I will often refer to the term “feminist” when referring to her theological interpretations.

It was Steinsvik who approached the issue of women in the priesthood from a theological perspective and who placed the issue on a platform all its own. Her theological education afforded her the expertise to argue in favor of women in the priesthood from a perspective that set it apart from the other arguments in favor of women’s rights, which argued collectively for women to be granted the right to participate in all of society’s realms in equal measure to men. My research will show the impact of her involvement and arguments in the debate of women in the priesthood, as well as provide brief descriptions of some of the debate perspectives presented in Parliament.

3.1 Early Years

Steinsvik was born on March 23, 1877 to Ingeborg and Torkel Tonstad and died in 1950. Her birthplace was a small valley in the west coast of Norway called Flekkefjord. Her beginnings were humble but by no means poor. Her life paralleled significant changes occurring in Norway that affected political, cultural and social life. Winds of change and “free thinking”¹⁰⁵ were blowing across the country and Steinsvik’s home was no exception to the contagion, as her father was a strong supporter of the freethinking spirit.

Her father was not the first in the family to be smitten with the spirit of freethinking, as his own father, Ole Tonstad II, was also very receptive to the new thinking of the times,

¹⁰⁵ «free thinker» was an expression used to describe those of liberal leanings who believed in the individual’s rights to utilize their own common sense and reasoning regarding matters of religion and politics, for example, independent of authority (Merriam-Webster dictionary).

and rubbed elbows with the politicians of his district; namely, Søren Jaabæk and Ole Gabriel Ueland. Both of these men were politicians, teachers, and farmers, and were instrumental in the founding of the oldest political party in Norway, i.e. The Liberal Party (Venstre). The former became a radical anarchist who led the way for a popular national anarchism that opposed a state church, all forms of militarism, and monarchies. He was also very supportive of equal rights between men and women, and was well versed in the plights and experiences of the lay worker.¹⁰⁶ A part of their ideology was the belief that farmers should also be elected to Parliament. Arne Garborg, Ivar Mortensson-Egnund, and Rasmus Steinsvik, who would later become Steinsvik's closest companions, and partners in their cause, also espoused this ideology. One can clearly see how the seeds of progress, equality, and freethinking were already flourishing in Steinsvik's lineage.

Although her family lived on a farm, Steinsvik was afforded the basic comforts and necessities of life, thanks to the inheritance of a farm from her paternal grandfather. Her childhood was considered one of material privilege, and the progressive-minded attributes shared by the family contributed to the making of a fearless and determined young girl. As with all the other changes occurring in Norway during the 19th century, Steinsvik's educational start would also parallel the positive changes taking place within education. Her father was a faithful follower of the progressive, new thinking that was stirring in their days, and his belief in equality for men and women determined that Steinsvik should receive a good education. Yet she began her education at the age of seven in a school system that was quite socially divided. *Allmueskolen* was the name given to the schools for the poor, and Steinsvik attended one of these, not because she was poor, but because the elitist academic schools were reserved for the young men of privileged backgrounds.

¹⁰⁶ Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde: Marta Steinsvik liv og virke 1877-1950*, 24.

Parallel to Steinsvik's educational tier transitions, the education system in Norway would experience important reforms as discussed in the second chapter. Steinsvik became a student of Ragna Nielsen, mentioned in a previous chapter, who was a lifelong champion for the advancement of women's rights. One of Nielsen's biographers refers to her as an architect of school reform and a reformer for women's rights. In 1885, Nielsen opened the doors to the second gender-integrated schools in the country (despite many historical archives claiming hers as the first).¹⁰⁷ Not only was the gender-integrated concept revolutionary in itself, but that a woman should be at the forefront of the classroom in which academic subjects were taught to the males, was unheard of in her day. One particular colleague of Nielsen expressed shock over her teaching men up to high school level, and simply uttered, "that they should even dare!" referring to her audaciousness in teaching men. It was viewed by some as unheard of and presumptuous.¹⁰⁸

As a student of Nielsen's, Steinsvik was no doubt infused with the new academic opportunities available to her, as well as the with feminist influences from her teacher. Observing a woman at the front of the class was education and influence enough for the young Steinsvik, but that Nielsen should also be educating her in languages and academic subjects, would later in life reflect themselves in her own life as she, too, would become a scholar, an expert in several languages, and a champion for women's rights. Nielsen had undeniably taught Steinsvik well.

¹⁰⁷ According to Astrid Lorenz, in her book entitled *Fra de frimodiges leir*, (Oslo: Aschehoug & Co., 2014), pg. 141, countless articles, books, and magazines have claimed that Nielsen was the first to found a gender integrated school in 1885, but this is not entirely the case. A man by the name of Peter Qvam, as early as 1870 had allowed a young girl to take a high school entrance exam as an independent student (better understood in Norwegian as a *privatist*), and in 1884 he started a gender-integrated school, one year before Ragna Nielsen started her gender integrated school.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 338

3.2 High School:

Steinsvik was considered a gifted student, and she excelled at all levels with top grades. The school reforms mentioned above would grant her a smooth transition to Ragna Nielsen's high school where she would receive an education in religion, Norwegian, English, German, Latin and Greek, geography, mathematics, and arts and sciences.¹⁰⁹ In 1882, women were granted the opportunity to take college entrance exams, and two years later, graduate studies degrees also became available for women. Steinsvik now had the freedom to receive the education of her choice even if this newly obtained right did not automatically grant women leadership positions in society, nor guarantee them employment within their newly acquired professions. Some of these would still be strictly reserved for men only, among them, the priesthood.¹¹⁰ Steinsvik was a natural with languages, and she would go on to study Sanskrit and Hebrew later in life. Her top grades and opportunities continued to follow her as Steinsvik became one of the first young women who was able to pursue a higher education. Her thorough education in languages, as well as her natural talent for them, served her well as she would go on to become a translator of New Norwegian. At the age of 17 she was employed as a secretary by a newspaper entitled, *Kringsjaa*, and she would translate the foreign correspondences into New Norwegian and standard Norwegian from French, German, and English.¹¹¹ Her studies in Hebrew also served to substantiate her contributions to the debate of women in clerical service as she turned to the original language of the Holy Scriptures in arguing in favor of women priests.

In 1894, at the age of 17, she took the university entrance exam and was awarded the grade *laudabilis prae ceteris*, which translates to "exceptional", or equivalent to an A+. One year later, she took her second exam with the same results. Her academic brilliance took her

¹⁰⁹ Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde*, 37.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

on a path to medicine, and in the fall of 1894, Steinsvik began her medical studies at the University of Oslo, then known as Kristiania.

While taking advantage of the newly awarded opportunities for women in education,¹¹² she also bore witness to the activist participation of several women, among them her former teacher, Ragna Nielsen, in issues pertaining to the emancipation of women, as the latter was leader for the Women's Suffrage Movement for some years. Nielsen's cousin, Ella Anker, would also become a major influence in Steinsvik's life. Not only had she been a student of Nielsen's high school, and had taken the university entrance exam, but she sympathized with Nielsen's theosophical beliefs, and had surely been well schooled in the subject. It was around this time that Steinsvik encountered theosophy, and was immediately drawn to it. She and Anker would form a lifetime friendship with theosophy and feminism as the ties that bound them. This newfound ideology lay at the core of Steinsvik's consternation over the practice of vivisection in medical school.¹¹³ Theosophy had taught her about the oneness with all of creation and the call for compassion for all sentient beings. Steinsvik was unable to reconcile the experimental use of animals for what she viewed as the senseless gratification of the human curiosity.¹¹⁴

3.3 Academic Journey/Family Life/Work Experience:

Steinsvik was a mere 19 years of age when she married Rasmus Steinsvik, but not before living with him out of wedlock first. Although her parents were freethinkers, they nonetheless held traditional views on issues such as marriage. Yet Steinsvik held other beliefs regarding the union between a man and a woman, and this caused her parents much distress.

¹¹² (I elaborate more on the educational reforms occurring in the late 1800s to early 1900s, in my section entitled, «The Evolution of Education for Women in Norway».

¹¹³ The Britannica Academic dictionary describes vivisection as “*the cutting of or operation on a living animal usually for physiological or pathological investigation*”, as viewed online on November 23, 2015, <http://proxy.via.mf.no:2063/bps/dictionary?query=vivisection>

¹¹⁴ Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde*, 51.

She rejected the traditional institution, and was not interested in either a church wedding or a marriage certificate. She decided to simply move in with Rasmus, a move quite unheard of in her time, and something she would later declare may have been the cause of her father's stroke.¹¹⁵ From an early age, Steinsvik exhibited a tenacity and determination that could not be silenced, and she would live her life with a fervor that would take her into several academic disciplines. Her personal life would be lived no differently, and this same tenacity would show itself in any issue that stirred her conscience. By the age of 19, she already possessed an impressive academic CV with several languages under her belt, and work experience as a translator for a Norwegian newspaper.

As mentioned above, Steinsvik would not go on to complete her studies in medicine as these introduced her to what she perceived as the gruesome practice of vivisection. Her hunger for knowledge was insatiable, however, and in 1902, she went on to study oriental languages and history of religion.¹¹⁶ These studies would pave the way for furthering her education, and in the spring of 1912, Steinsvik travelled to London, with her newspaper translation work in hand, and began studies in Egyptology, Egyptian archeology and excavation. She would study under Professor Flinders Petrie, a renowned Egyptologist and archeologist who contributed greatly to the field of archeology by inventing a sequence dating method that would make possible the reconstruction of history from the remains of ancient cities.¹¹⁷ Her biography relates that she had been invited on an excavation in Egypt, as well as offered a position in the archival department in Theben, but declined out of fear of being away from her children for too long.¹¹⁸ By the time Steinsvik was 25, she was mother to five children, had attained an impressive achievement in academic studies, and was renowned as

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 74.

¹¹⁶ Bjørg Kjersti Myren and Hanne Stenvaag, *Hun Våget å Gå Foran: Ingrid Bjerkås og kvinners prestateneste i Norge*, 174.

¹¹⁷ *Britannica Academic*, s. v. "Sir Flinders Petrie," as viewed on November 23, 2015, <http://proxy.via.mf.no:2063/EBchecked/topic/454163/Sir-Flinders-Petrie>.

¹¹⁸ Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde*, 208.

an official translator of news correspondences, literature, and books. Likewise, by the time she was 36, the weight of all of the above would intensify with the passing of her husband in 1913.

These challenges would not deter Steinsvik as her interest in academia was stimulated yet again when she becomes the first woman to enroll in MF. Her choice of schools stemmed from a desire to become a priest. The irony of her choice of schools lies in the fact that the issue of women in clerical service was a debate still in its infancy and was still being fiercely debated. In addition, MF was a religiously conservative school that was founded by a theologian who was adamantly, and aggressively opposed to not only women in any kind of church work, but who also resisted anything and everything that hinted at religious liberalism in any way, shape or form. So convinced was Steinsvik of the imminence of admission of women in clerical service, that the school's reputation, and the founder's public viewpoints did not deter her from seeking the priesthood anyway. Yet the ever strong and defiant Steinsvik would complete three years at the school, and would drop out just short of completion precisely due to the admonition she received after her infamous sermon in the Grønland Church on April 23, 1921, where she was warned that a repeat of said action would result in expulsion.¹¹⁹

So much more can be said of Steinsvik; her studies, her experiences, the plays and books she translated, the articles, journals, and books she wrote, and the countless lectures she gave throughout the country, but as mentioned earlier, her biography has already been written. This thesis aims to give prominence and elucidation to her most important contribution, i.e., her role in the Parliamentary debate regarding granting women admission in the priesthood.

Despite the advances women were making with regard to education, public opinion regarding women's advances in society were still volatile. The doors to all fields of education

¹¹⁹ Bjørg Kjersti Myren and Hanne Stenvaag, *Hun Våget å Gå Foran: Ingrid Bjerkås og kvinners prestetjeneste i Norge*, 177.

were now open for women, but not the opportunity for employment within those fields. These would be achieved later, though not without a struggle. The one field that would produce the fiercest fight was the field of religion and the struggle for granting women admission to clerical service. According to Anna Caspari Agerholt's history of the women's movement, Bishop Johan Christian Heuch, a Parliamentary representative and fierce opponent of women in the priesthood, stated that one either accepts the bible teaching as is, or simply regard it as an outdated, old book—but that its teachings are clear from cover to cover regarding the prohibition of women holding public office, and being regarded equal to men.¹²⁰ Bishop Heuch would meet his match in Steinsvik, for it was precisely in the interpretation of the Bible that she would later challenge this belief all the way to Parliament.

Notwithstanding the unyielding obstacles in the struggle for women in the priesthood, the debate in Parliament was gaining momentum, and for many, the predictability of the priesthood opening up for women was beginning to appear as a given. Perhaps it was her presumption of the outcome, coupled with her bold, but forbidden, move to be the first woman to preach in a church service that ultimately caused her to be pressured into discontinuing her theology degree so close to completion. Tragically, the door to the priesthood for women would not be opened until shortly after her death in 1950. Her developing convictions would surpass the confines of her obscure birthplace and would produce a voice with far-reaching repercussions throughout the entire nation. However simple her origins and life may have been, and despite the choices and opportunities Steinsvik was afforded, and notwithstanding the forceful personality she would become, her life was nonetheless filled with heartache and trials, accomplishments and failures, firsts and lasts, and uncompleted journeys. These will be summarized in the conclusion.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 38.

Steinsvik was born the same year as the founding of an anarchist newspaper, “*Fedraheimen*”, a medium used for the promotion of reforms within political, religious, agrarian, and linguistic fields, a magazine whose goal it was to ensure a solid national identity. It was quite probable that *Fedraheimen* was a newspaper that Steinsvik’s father subscribed to, and perhaps was read aloud in the home.¹²¹ The founder of the magazine was Arne Garborg, a well-known Norwegian writer, poet, and intellect, who, together with his wife, Karen, would later in life form part of Steinsvik’s innermost circle of friends, and closest companions. Garborg was coincidentally born the same year as Steinsvik’s father. He and his wife were figureheads in championing the use of *landsmål*, (New Norwegian) officially changed to *nynorsk* in 1929, as the literary language, and in 1918 he translated Homer’s *The Odyssey* to New Norwegian.¹²² His wife, Hulda, was a literary and cultural figure in her own right. She was a writer, novelist, playwright, theater instructor, and folk dancer, and most certainly not a mere observer of the freethinking spirit. She was also widely known for promoting the use of the Norwegian rural costume known as the *bunad*, (a 20th century label referring to the rural costumes dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries). She went on to found the Norwegian Theatre, and as with Steinsvik, she, too, was a fierce champion of women’s rights.¹²³

Garborg employed the editorial assistance of a young theology student by the name of Ivar Mortensson-Egnund who would also form part of this intimate circle of Steinsvik’s friends. Later in life, these three families, the Garborgs, The Mortensson-Egnunds, and the Steinsviks, would purchase a piece of property together in Labråten, Asker, approximately 20 kilometers from Oslo, or Kristiania, as it was then called. This place would come to be known

¹²¹ Ibid., 31.

¹²² Per Qvale, *From St. Jerome to Hypertext: Translation in Theory and Practice*, (Oslo: St. Jerome Publishing, H. Aschehoug & Co. (W.Nygaard), 40.

¹²³ Hulda Garborg. (2014, 13. mars). I Store norske leksikon. Hentet 5. november 2015 fra https://snl.no/Hulda_Garborg.

as “Askerkretsen”, a place in which the artistic, political, and intellectual juices flowed freely.¹²⁴ “And it was from here that projects and initiatives would be set in motion regarding the direction of the country; New Norwegian, or *landsmål*, would be established as the language of literature, some of the greatest works of Norwegian literature would be written, the Norwegian theatre would be founded, the national costume, or *bunad*, would be revived, as well as folk dance, the oldest childrens’ magazine would be edited, and it was from this place that some of the most important strategic culturally nationalistic questions would be settled.

The topic of language in Norway in the 19th century is one that cannot be dealt with lightly. The passion of the above-named families, as well as countless other Norwegians, with regard to establishing New Norwegian as the national language, played a significant role in the cultural development of Norway. It was born out of the nation’s quest for identity solidification after having obtained their independence from Denmark in 1814. A struggle for language arose from this independence when Norway declared that their shared language could be called Danish or Norwegian (since Danish was the dominant language as a result of their former union). In other words, the majority of Norwegians felt it was all the same for them. Denmark, on the other hand, would not hear of it. They were adamant about calling the language Danish since the language spoken in Norway was pure Danish.¹²⁵ The struggle for language identity began when Norway was faced with establishing their own language as a result of Denmark’s refusal to allow it to be called anything but Danish. The impact of language on the cultural and political scene in Norway will be discussed at greater length in my section entitled “The Evolving Face of Norway in the 19th Century”.

¹²⁴ Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde*, 85.

¹²⁵ Einar Haugen, *Kampen om Språket*, p. 183, in Ingrid Semmingsen, Nina Karin Monsen, Stephan Tschudi-Madsen, Yngvar Ustvedt, eds., *Norges Kulturhistorie: Brytningsår-blomstringstid*, (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co. (W. Nygaard).

The Steinsviks, Garborgs, and Mortensson-Egnunds were a mix of three families that complemented one another and seemed destined to come together. Their goals and convictions regarding the direction of the country complemented one another, and their backgrounds seemed to add to the neatness in which they fit together like the pieces of a puzzle. “The three men were raised on farms, and were old-fashioned farmboys, and the three women were citygirls. The men offered courses in New Norwegian (*landsmål*), while the ladies attended courses in *landsmål*. Three farmboys and three city girls would together strengthen and promote the use of New Norwegian, which formed a part of the overall drive to solidify the independence of the nation, by way of a newspaper entitled *The 17th of May*.”¹²⁶

On the surface it would seem that Steinsvik’s academic achievements, career milestones, and public engagement would evidence a privileged and trouble-free life. Despite her equanimity as lecturer, and the intellectual demeanor with which she approached every issue, she also endured her share of heartache. Her developing convictions would surpass the confines of her obscure birthplace and would produce a voice with far-reaching repercussions throughout the entire nation. Having had five children by the time she was 29 in 1906, the birth of her fifth child would prove to be such a life-threatening delivery, that her doctor informed her she would probably not survive any more births. Comprehending the impossibility of guaranteeing an end to more pregnancies if she continued living with her husband, she made the bitter decision to leave her children and her home in order to ensure her survival. This move also implied that she would have to discontinue her studies in Egyptology. Her decision to leave her children would no doubt be considered scandalous even

¹²⁶ Alfred Fidjestøl, *Frå Asker til Eden: Historia om Askerkretsen 1897-1924*, (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 2014), 17.

by today's standards, but Steinsvik would be defined by her determination to do what was right; she was, after all, leaving them with their father.¹²⁷

She suffered under the hands of a demanding husband who conspired to have her institutionalized in a psychiatric ward because Steinsvik would venture off to Germany to learn at the feet of Rudolf Steiner, the philosopher and theosophist who swept Steinsvik off her feet. She left home in pursuit of Steiner and his theosophy, leaving her children with their father; a move that was considered nothing short of scandalous for her time, but one she defended by stating that her children were in good hands with their father. despite Henrik Ibsen having already introduced society to this new female genre via his play, *A Doll's House*.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde, Marta Steinsvik liv og virke 1877-1950*, 115-116.

¹²⁸ Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde*;, 148.

Chapter 4: The Infamous Sermon of 1921

The debate for women in the priesthood, her desire to become a priest, and her involvement in this debate would now come to a crossroads, and by invitation from a liberal priest by the name of Carl Johan Ecktell, who supported and championed the cause of women priests, on April 24, 1921, this stocky 44 year old, fair-haired, widowed mother of five known as Marta Steinsvik, climbed the steps to a pulpit that had only borne the weight of male preachers since its inception in 1869. As she stood there facing her audience, she opened her mouth and began to pray:

Dear Father, you who are in heaven,
You, who are everywhere, and yet always in heaven, because wherever you
are, it is heaven,--
Be with us today; create in us a clean heart,
A will as strong as steel, a flaming spirit that never tires in your service!
And cleanse our bodies, that they may be a temple for you!
Let the warmth of your love fill us completely and flow out from us to
everything and everyone! Amen!¹²⁹

She went on to speak for approximately two hours in a church that was built with a sitting capacity of approximately 880, and it was standing room only.¹³⁰

It is not her opening prayer bearing similitudes to the Lord's Prayer that stands out as deserving of analysis. Neither is it the analogies in her prayer that so closely resemble characteristics of her own personality, and the issues that came to define her, although these, too, will be briefly examined. Steinsvik's prayer preceded a sermon that delved into the 5th chapter of Hebrews, verses 1-10, a sermon known for its application during the Easter season, and she went on to do what no other woman had done before; she shared with the congregation a hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture. Not only does she dare embark on the forbidden act of preaching from a pulpit when it was forbidden for women to do so, and

¹²⁹ Marta Steinsvik, *Præken til aftensang i Grønlands kirke, 4de søndag efter paaske 1921*, (Kristiania, Briskeby Boktrykkeri A/S, 1921) (translation my own) 1.

¹³⁰ https://lokalhistoriewiki.no/index.php/Gr%C3%B8nland_kirke, viewed on February 27, 2015.

not only does she proceed to present a hermeneutical interpretation of scripture, but Steinsvik chooses a book and chapter known for the advanced level of Ancient Greek in which it was written, the audience for whom it was written, which scholars claim were the learned teachers of Paul's day, as well as the complex theme of the book which touches on the role of the high priest and the fulfillment of that role in Jesus Christ. Her decision to accept the parish priest's invitation to preach, and her choice of topic were clear indications that Steinsvik was not taking this opportunity lightly. This brilliant linguist, who was a summa cum laude student throughout her academic life, and who had two and a half years of theology under her belt, was not about to play it safe. She must have been fully aware of what the consequences of her actions would be, and however harshly history may wish to judge her, she accomplished placing the debate over women priests back in center stage.¹³¹

Steinsvik begins her sermon by describing the verses she would present as the most beautiful and intimate in the Epistle to the Hebrews. She then proceeds to give a brief history of this book, its language, literary form, and the suggested origins of the letter. As for the author of the Book of Hebrews, Steinsvik takes great care in sharing the diverse scholarly speculations regarding authorship, but summarizes by stating her conviction which is the one she learned from the renowned German theologian, Adolf von Harnacks, who theorizes that the author was a woman, most likely Paul's close co-worker, Priscilla. It comes as no surprise that Steinsvik would sympathize with this particular theory. Nevertheless, she does not give this center stage in the main focus of her sermon. Rather, she concludes that regardless of whether it was a man or woman, the most important point to be made concerns the power in the words themselves.¹³²

¹³¹ Bjørg Kjersti Myren and Hanne Stenvvaag, *Hun våget å gå foran: Ingrid Bjerås og kvinners prestedtjeneste i Norge*, (2011), 184-185.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 188.

As Steinsvik continues with her interpretation of scripture, she explains the well-known aspects of the verses which deal with sin, salvation, and reconciliation, and she places these within the context of Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane. Her sermon presents the traditional Easter story, and she presents it in a traditional manner. Yet her words bear semblances unlike most traditional sermons about the Easter story. Her formulations and descriptions reflect characteristics resembling a more theosophical perspective as she speaks of the blood of Christ spilling to the ground and "baptizing" the earth which resulted in a literal earth-shaking moment. When she speaks of sin, she connects the spiritual consequences with the deterioration that it creates on all of the natural world, humans and nature alike. And as she elaborates further on the need for the the spilling of the Son of God, she connects this not only the our planet, but for the sake of renewing the entire cosmos. Such descriptions and formulations are undoubtedly draped by the theosophical influences she was exposed to.¹³³

She was not alone in the assumed responsibility of the resulting consequences. The priest who invited her, Carl Johan Ecktell, knew full well what he was getting himself into, and the confrontation he would endure. Nevertheless, he defended his actions by pointing to a loophole in an old resolution that stated that a parish priest had the authority to allow a theology student preach from a pulpit. His response to the controversy? The resolution granting a priest the authority to invite a theology student to preach did not clarify which gender that student had to be.¹³⁴ The response was swift, and in the following days, Ecktell endured fierce criticism from his peers. In Ecktell's defense, however, the bishop of Oslo, Jens Tandberg, did not have such harsh judgments for him either. In a response he published in the national newspaper, *Aftenposten*, Tandberg expressed himself in more general terms by sharing his beliefs that Paul's words in the New Testament regarding a woman keeping

¹³³ Marta Steinsvik, *Præken til aftensang in Grønlands kirke 4de søndag efter paaske 1921*, Kristiania: Briskeby Boktrykkeri A/S, 1921, 3.

¹³⁴ Bjørg Kjersti Myren and Hanne Stenvvaag, *Hun våget å gå foran: Ingrid Bjerås og kvinners prestedtjeneste i Norge*, 184.

silence in the temple were applicable to the times in which it was written, and should not be applied to all times thereafter.¹³⁵ Neither Ecktell's actions nor Bishop Tandberg's were substantial enough to shift the current mode of thought regarding women priests to, at the very least, middle ground. At a bishop's conference during the fall of that same year, a statement was issued declaring the unanimous consensus, with the exclusion of Tandberg's, that sanctioned the Church's stand regarding what they believed was going against the word of God in allowing women to be priests.¹³⁶

To say that her activity on that infamous Sunday on April 24, 1921, caused a stir is a gross understatement. The major newspapers across the country covered the story with intense attention. Her actions not only awakened debate surrounding the illegitimacy of what she had done, but it served to bring the debate about women priests back to center stage. Despite having been the first female student to enroll at MF, the school's willingness to allow women in the theology faculty was limited solely to the study of theology, not to the actual function as priests. They, too, would express their disappointment by threatening expulsion should her actions be repeated. Steinsvik did not complete her theology studies and Norderval claims that Steinsvik quit in protest of the school's objection and warning. Her granddaughter, Marit Jerstad, disagrees. She claims her grandmother was forced to quit due to the financial circumstances created by being a widowed mother of five and having to provide for her family.

The national newspaper, *Aftenposten*, covered the story the very next day on its front page under the headline, "Mrs. Steinsvik Preaches at an Afternoon Mass in the Grønland Church: it goes against applicable provisions, but the parish priest takes full responsibility." The article proceeds to detail the event and the questions it raised as to who was responsible.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 185.

¹³⁶ Bishops conference protocol, case 07/1921, *Women's access to the priesthood*, as footnoted in Kristin Molland Norderval's book, *Mot strømmen: kvinnelige teologer i Norge før og nå*, (1982), 41.

The Bishop had been contacted for comment, but stated that he had not received all of the information regarding the incident, and did not want to comment before he had had a chance to speak to the parish priest. The parish priest in charge of the Grønland did comment and confirmed his decision, without regret, to have turned over the pulpit to Mrs. Steinsvik. Not all reactions were negative, however, as some of the most prominent layfolk present expressed gratitude for having heard Mrs. Steinsvik preach, and her actions certainly injected new life into the question of women priests. Sadly, not a single mention of her actual sermon and scriptural interpretation she presented was commented on. This may have been her shining moment in proving herself, beyond doubt, as a brilliant theologian in the role of priest, yet that most important of details got lost in the clamor of her mere presence on a pulpit.¹³⁷

It was after she stopped her studies that Steinsvik's career as a lecturer took off as she traveled from coast to coast all across Norway, accepting speaking engagements in order to feed her children. A personal diary book that is now archived at the National Library, along with all the documents pertaining to her life, shows the extent of her travels in a day-by-day registry of travel days, speaking days, and locations. The months were filled to the last day, and her speaking engagement normally did not keep her at any given place longer than an average of two days. Personal letters testify to the care and attention she maintained with regards the care of her children as she communicates with them to send them money, to instruct them on how to handle the collectors, and to touch base to see how they were all doing. Her granddaughter recalls vividly seeing her grandmother travel with a large trunk of books that never left her side.

¹³⁷ Nasjonalbiblioteket. Arkivskaper: Marta Steinsvik, Ms.fol. 4561:J-J:1, (1877-1950).

In summary, that which rises above all else like a steeple in the church of history, was the provocative act of a woman daring to prove herself worthy of the pulpit on equal plane as her male counterparts, and the paradigmatic ripples created with every step she took towards that pulpit, the staying power she exhibited as she uttered every well-researched and analyzed word, and the debate to which she became a pivotal figure, all on that peaceful Sunday of April 24, 1921. Steinsvik gained notoriety for that simple, but scandalous, act, and she would go down in history more for the infamy of that disobedient act than for the actual gift she possessed to be regarded as one of the most influential theologians of her time.

As was to be expected, her defiant act created ripples that landed her on the front page of the official newspaper, *Aftenposten*, the very next day, and the very next day would not be the one and only time Steinsvik would be featured in the media. With the aid of the parish priest, Steinsvik breathed new life into the debate over women priests. Perhaps the one tragic oversight in this entire preaching affair, however successful it was at keeping the debate alive, was the omission of any analysis or comments whatsoever regarding the actual contents of her message. Two hours worth of preaching in the form of a hermeneutical interpretation of complex scripture that surely required hours of study and preparation, yet not a word was mentioned about her academic abilities.

At the time, women were only allowed to speak at religious gatherings that were not housed in churches, did not use the pulpit, and did not attempt to interpret scripture. These rules were established by a Royal edict of December 22, 1911, which stated that women were allowed to hold lectures in church gatherings, but were prohibited from preaching from a pulpit during an official worship service. In essence, the prohibition to keep women from speaking at religious gatherings was primarily for the purpose of preventing them from interpreting the Holy Scriptures. This, however, is precisely what Steinsvik would do on that infamous Sunday in 1921. Surely a woman of Steinsvik's academic stature, a lecturer, a

researcher, and an activist, would not accept an invitation to preach from a pulpit without taking advantage of the opportunity to exhibit the interpretational capabilities of a female theologian. If Steinsvik aspired to be a priest, then she was not about to lose the one chance to prove what she was made of, and what she had to offer. When Steinsvik was asked how she felt with regard to being the first woman to interpret Scripture from a pulpit, she referred to the Royal Resolution of 1913, in which the language specified the authorization theologians had to interpret Scripture during a regular church service. Since the formulation of the Resolution did not specify gender, Steinsvik took advantage of that language ambiguity to refer to the theologians and theology students, both men and women, that fell under this authorization. Her response to the question simply stated that the fact that female theologians had not taken advantage of that right did not imply that the right did not apply to the women as well.¹³⁸

Myren and Stenvaag describe her sermon as bearing an originality that reflected her entire life's engagement on so many levels. Despite the unconventional nuances she gave her scriptural interpretations, the lack of greater reactions might be attributed to the overall attention and focus that was placed on the fact that a woman was preaching in a church. Likewise, Myren and Stenvaag write that her speaking skills, her personal commitment, and the seriousness with which she preached on that day, also attest to the benevolent spirit in which the sermon was received.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde: Marta Steinsvik liv og virke 1877-1950*, 306.

¹³⁹ Bjørg Kjersti Myren and Hanne Stenvvaag, *Hun våget å gå foran: Ingrid Bjerås og kvinners prestedtjeneste i Norge*, 191.

Chapter 5: Debate in Parliament

Steinsvik spoke diligently on the subject of women in the priesthood, and she published pamphlets on the subject as well. In a tract published a few years before she enrolled in MF, she began by asking a question: “In which area of society can women contribute the most outside of the home? The answer was quite simple; in the priesthood.”¹⁴⁰ A simple question immediately followed by a concise answer. As early as 1891, an official request for women to be allowed to hold public office, including the priesthood, had made its way to Parliament for the very first time without success. Two years later, a similar petition was introduced proposing the same, only this time the priesthood was excluded from the list of offices women wanted access to. This particular office would continue to be closed to women.¹⁴¹ The Parliamentary representative who reintroduced the modified proposal did not exclude the priesthood out of any personal conviction or principal; rather, he reasoned that the overall vote might stand a better chance of passing if they excluded the priesthood. However, the proposition in its entirety would be voted down once again.¹⁴² Norway’s Constitution did not contain any stipulation for the right of women to hold public office. Nevertheless, this restriction did not discourage women from benefiting from the freedom they were granted in education, and by the end of 1910, the University of Oslo, then known as The Royal Frederik University, boasted a total of 67 female university graduates in the fields of medicine (40), philology (11), lawyers (9), science (6), and theologians (1).¹⁴³ The female medical graduates were exempt from the restrictions on women holding public office because their degrees automatically granted them licenses to practice medicine. Many viewed this as a possible solution to the existing problem, and it becomes quite apparent to foresee the pressures that an

¹⁴⁰ Marta Steinsvik, «På hvilket område i samfundet kan kvinnen gjøre sin største innsats utenfor hjemmet?» National Library archives, 4561:B:59.

¹⁴¹ Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, *...under forvandlingens lov: En analyse av stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester i 1930 årene*, 54.

¹⁴² Kristin Molland Norderval, *Mot Strømmen: Kvinnelige teologer i Norge før og nå*, 46

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 46.

increasing number of highly educated women would place on the government in deciding what society intended on doing with this new wave of educated women.

The debate for women priests would be taken up again in 1912, and continue into the late 1930s, with an escalation occurring between 1938 and 1940. In the 1930s, the issue was presented in Parliament at least three times within a five-year period, a strong indication that its conclusion lay just around the corner if for no other reason than to finally bring it to a close. The women's movement was on the forefront of equal rights across the board, but among the many areas in which women were seeking equal access, no other issue burned so fiercely, and met with greater opposition, as that of women in the priesthood. It was an issue that was debated with the same end goal; that of permitting women priests, but was approached from different perspectives and in different arenas. Perhaps that which rendered this particular issue so difficult to resolve was the fact that, while the end goal was the same, it was debated on two separate platforms; the political platform, and the state church platform. This creates a scenario of two separate debates going on simultaneously, but each dependent on the other if progress was to be made. On the one hand there were politicians arguing equal rights for women in all areas of society, while on the other hand there was opposition from the church toward equality in this particular field. It is the Church's opposition that makes the matter all the more difficult to resolve since the debate within church circles must first be settled if the issue were to stand a chance in Parliament. In other words, the biblical teachings regarding a woman's role must be clarified before the equal rights argument could be made at the level of government. To better understand the rigor of this conflict, it is revealing to obtain a picture of gender relations both in the public sector as within church circles. Hinnaland Stendal, whose dissertation focused exclusively on the Parliamentary debate over women priests, states that the underlying central divisions in the debate are to be found in divergent points of view about the relationship between the sexes, different understandings of

Christianity, varying insight as a parliamentarian and different views of the historical development.¹⁴⁴

My thesis aims to show Steinsvik's vital influence in the debate over women in the priesthood, especially toward the end of the debate in the late 1930's. While her participation was not the only influence, her argumentation in favor of women in clerical service must have been strong enough both theologically and socially, to have motivated Parliament to use her arguments exclusively toward the final rounds of said debate. Participation in said debate ranged from the women's suffrage organization, to politicians, and undoubtedly, male clergy and Church administrators. Yet hers was the defense used exclusively by the Parliamentarians championing this cause.

In order to understand the impact Steinsvik's involvement had on the debate over admission of women to clerical service, it is necessary to obtain a contextual picture of the debate in the Norwegian Parliament, as well as the development of the arguments themselves.

As mentioned in my section on the arrival of the industrial age in Norway and how it influenced gender relations, migration to the cities was moving more women into the job market and out of the agricultural lives they previously shared with their husbands. This societal change awakened women to the deficiencies in gender equality, emboldened them to become more active in all areas of society, and empowered them to fight for the rights to do so. Nevertheless, Norway was still a largely male-dominated society, and despite the arguments from the supporting side of the Church, these were often erroneously promoted with an underestimation of women's abilities by pointing to their rights to be both taken care of and respected.

The opposing side purported to argue that religiousness was a part of womanliness, and while that may seem like an argument in support of women priests, it was actually meant

¹⁴⁴ Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, «...under forvandlingens lov: an analyse av stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester in 1930-årene», 390-391

to depict women as the more emotional of the sexes; perhaps this was meant to show an instability, or sorts, that would make them ill equipped to be priests.¹⁴⁵ As for the opponents in the Church, subordination theology was a one-sided and unmoving argument, which reduced the role of women to homemaker and mother. They made the case against women ministers by arguing that the nature and characteristics of women that equipped them for the roles of homemaker and mother absolutely excluded full gender equality. The gender equality ideology, or the supporters of women priests, attempted to broaden this narrow image of women's characteristics by informing of their needs, their abilities, their areas of responsibility, but with an emphasis on the individual rather than the gender determined. They also borrowed from the opposing side's arguments regarding the maternal and caring natures of women as precisely that which makes them all the more suited to be priests.¹⁴⁶

While each side with their respective perspectives argued for or against women priests either from a human rights perspective, a gender equality perspective, or from the standpoint of the state church, the undeniable truth was that since the beginning of the 20th century, the Church had already begun to experience a shift in thinking as to its overall role in society. Christianity had been undergoing a power struggle between liberal and conservative theology that questioned the traditional dogmatic teachings of the church and how these were still relevant to a society that was slowly evolving into a community that demanded that their Christianity allow for more personal expressions of faith.¹⁴⁷ The debate was rendered all the more complex by the diversity in political parties, each arguing theologically from their own sides. The state was championing the cause as a human rights issue having primarily to do with the state, the women's movement demanded that all public offices, including clerical

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 392.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 392.

¹⁴⁷ Carl Wisløff, *Norsk Kirkehistorie, Bind III*, 118.

offices, be opened to women, while the Church, both the nay-sayers and the yea-sayers, were attempting to retain control over internal matters they deemed to belong to the Church.¹⁴⁸

Add to this mix the one argument that all sides claimed, despite its irrelevance to the issue at hand, and that was that from a practical perspective, there were no women to be found in the 1930s for whom becoming priests would have been relevant, neither was the demand for priests such that it would mandate a decision to allow women priests in the eventuality of a shortage of male priests. This was surely a reality that was in the back of everyone's minds, for or against. This concern was published in an issue of the *Lutheran Church Times* (Luthersk Kirketidende), when D.A. Frøvig, a clergyman and theologian, contrasted the contemporary need for women priests with the need for priests in general that existed in 1926, when the championing of women priests would have been more relevant in light of the scarcity of priests.

The situation eight years later had changed drastically with more than 150 male theologians waiting in line for positions in the church, while increasingly more dropped out of theological studies in all likelihood due to the scarcity of jobs. This presented a conundrum regarding the legitimacy and timing of the debate over women priests at a time when there were men waiting for jobs as clergy, and not a single woman in line for the same.¹⁴⁹

The first female theologian graduated as early as 1899, but never sought the priesthood as a profession, a move that might have hastened the debate over women priests at a time when clergy positions were in high demand, while actual available clergy were scarce. A school colleague described Valborg Lerche as a very pleasant fellow student as likeable as the next, but with little to no women's emancipation spirit to be found in her.¹⁵⁰ She worked as a

¹⁴⁸ Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, «...under forvandlingens lov: an analyse av stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester in 1930-årene», 397.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 241-242.

¹⁵⁰ Kristin Mollan Norderval, «Mot Strømmen: Kvinnelige teologer i Norge før og nå», (1982), 23.

social worker in the Mission Church where she would remain until her death in 1931.¹⁵¹ It was precisely this individual and her life choice that served as a point of opposing argumentation from Carl J. Hambro, the then Parliamentary Chairman. In the 1938 debate, Hambro was quick to remind the audience of Lerche, the above-mentioned theologian, and her wonderful contributions to the Church in the capacity she chose, as if to dismiss the need for women priests since they could still be effective in other areas with their theological education.¹⁵²

Women had gained access to higher education in all fields as early as 1884, but as of 1930, only three had gone for a degree in theology. Considering the ratio of prospective women priests to the intensity and duration of the debate (if one took into account the three theologians possibly choosing clerical service), perhaps the greatest credit goes to the women's movement that, despite being divided into two main political parties, stood united and firm in their quest for demanding all public offices, including clerical, be opened to women.¹⁵³ The reality that all the actors in the debate for women priests faced in the late 1930s regarding supply and demand for men and women, the perspectives and motives of the politicians involved, and the foundational theological struggle between liberal and conservative theology that the Church had endured, no doubt raised the question concerning the legitimacy of pursuing said debate. It would seem that an impasse of sorts now permeated the issue, tugging it from all sides, and preventing it from moving forward. Enter Marta Steinsvik.

¹⁵¹ Although Valborg Lerche chose to work as a social worker in the Mission Church despite her degree in theology, and was described as a pleasant fellow student with no emancipatory drive, her comments regarding the challenges and limitations women faced in the field of theology, and the financial consequences of pursuing such a position, no doubt point to her internal deliberation of the possibilities. Perhaps it was not a lack of emancipatory spirit that she possessed, but a resignation, of sorts, that did not allow her to envision the possible outcome of pursuing this issue.

¹⁵² *Odelstingstidende*, 1938:734, as quoted from Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal's book, «*under forvandlingens lov: En analyse av stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester i 1930-årene*» 242.

¹⁵³ Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, «*...under forvandlingens lov: an analyse av stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester in 1930-årene*», 397.

She was the first female student to have enrolled in MF in 1918, a school that was established by the former professor of theology at the University of Kirsitia in defiance of what he perceived as the liberalization of theology. Unlike her former peers who distanced themselves from the issue of women priests, Steinsvik took the debate head-on as she, herself, aspired to be a priest.¹⁵⁴ When Steinsvik began at MF, she was not a young, naïve teenager about to begin her journey through knowledge. By this time in her life she had been widowed, had 5 children, had several languages under her belt, including Ancient Greek, Hebrew, and Sanskrit. Steinsvik had a theory about the spiritual, physical, and intellectual development of women. Her theory was that there existed two transitional ages in a woman's life that she referred to as the first and second stages of youth. In the first stage, the forces of life in the universe concentrated themselves on the development of the life functions. These would weigh heavily, in her opinion, on the physical and spiritual endurance of women. In return, nature would reward them well. Perhaps she was referring to the reward in the way of offspring.

The second stage, the most significant, began in the 40s when the universal forces would now shift to the development of the intellect. The 50s would be the age in which a woman would reach the intellectual maturity previously owned by the husband in her early ages. In these theories we grasp her understanding of the female anatomy in touching on her physical, spiritual, reproductive, and intellectual developments. While a man's brain elasticity was diminished in his middle-age, it was at middle age that a woman's brain was renewed and revitalized, and it was at this time in a woman's life when the potential of her intellectuality was at its best. So convinced was Steinsvik of her understanding of the purpose and potential of a woman, that it was precisely during these years when she travelled ceaselessly throughout the land giving lectures on the topics she was passionate about. In these words we hear the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 243.

undertones of her exposure to theosophy as she refers to the energy forces of the universe, her feminist inclinations in pointing to a man's ownership of a woman's body, but also hinting at the emancipatory journey that would eventually come in her middle ages. Steinsvik manages to encapsulate her studies in medicine, anthroposophy, and religion, in that brief, but all-encompassing description, of a woman's life journey.¹⁵⁵

If the struggle for equality and emancipation for women was a hard one, then all the harder was the one missing peg, i.e. admission to clerical service. It was in this particular area that the "ugliness" of opinions surfaced regarding women in general, and women in office. From the Church's perspective, it was a matter of biblical interpretation, and for many this perspective included a hierarchical condescension that at times expressed itself in a hostile manner perhaps contributing all the more to women's resolve to gain access to the clergy. The dissention from some turned to gender attacks, as is often the case when an opposition is between men and women. In a feature of a *Church Magazine* (Kristelig Ukeblad), a comment stated "how terrible it would be for a congregation to have women priests imposed on them who are old spinsters or old grandmothers, and some even carrying a pet".¹⁵⁶

Steinsvik's was not a direct participation that began at the commencement of the debate. Rather, she emerged from her own journey replete with activist empathies and contribution, as well as academic education that eventually and inevitably brought her to the heart of the Parliamentary debate. Her contributions to said debate begin imperceptibly and sporadically as one emerging from the shadows, until her arguments in favor of women in the priesthood become so prominent that Parliamentary representatives began using her arguments exclusively in the late 1930s when the debate was reaching its peak. It was her

¹⁵⁵ Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde*, (2012), 206.

¹⁵⁶ Anna Caspari Agerholt, *Den Norske Kvinnebevegelses Historie*, (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1973) 240.

publication, “Women as Priests” that was distributed among the Parliamentary representatives and used as the argumentation by the yay-sayers.¹⁵⁷

While Steinsvik was neither the first nor the last to engage in the debate from within Norwegian Church circles, her argumentation is unique in that it came from a woman with a theological background who approached the issue from what we would classify today as a feminist theological approach, though Steinsvik and her contemporaries would not have referred to it as such.¹⁵⁸ As early as 1916, just a few short years after the birth of the debate, Steinsvik had already participated in the National Voting Rights Association Congress as a guest speaker addressing this very topic of women priests. Her speech would be followed up with an appeal to the Ministry of Church and Teaching to consider whether it might now be possible to allow qualified women as priests to participate in the church’s momentous work in the country.¹⁵⁹

Some may argue that the debate over women in the priesthood was championed by the women’s suffrage movement as an issue that had more to do with achieving total equality for women on all fronts, while the church focused on securing the authority and apostolic and institutional integrity of the Church.¹⁶⁰ Hence, Steinsvik was merely another player in the ongoing debate. While this view may be endorsed by some, it was precisely Steinsvik’s scriptural interpretation that was unconfined from any outside support; secular, political, or otherwise. Even more so, Steinsvik argued for the scriptural interpretations as being the sole authority for settling this debate, and as such, should the scriptures prove in favor of excluding women from the priesthood, then we would all be bound to being faithful to the teachings of the word of God. It was Steinsvik’s feminist arguments vs. the androcentric

¹⁵⁷ Bjørg Kjersti Myren og Hanne Stenvaag, *Hun Våget å Gå Foran*, (Oslo: Verbum Forlag, 2011) 182.

¹⁵⁸ Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, «...Under Forvandlingens Lov: En analyse av Stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester i 1930-årene» (Lund: Arcus Forlag, 2003) 294.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁶⁰ Kristin Norseth, «Menighetsfakultetet og kvinnespørsmålet», (I: Oftestad og Røsæg), as quoted in Ingeborg Solbrekken, *Kors og Kårde*, 302.

arguments against women priests that sets hers apart from all others. The suffrage movement was a struggle that clearly sought the support from precisely the areas of society it proposed women should be allowed entry. This would imply a connecting thread for their arguments to substantiate their convictions that women must be granted the same rights and opportunities as men, without exception.

Steinsvik purported to argue for women in the priesthood as something she believed was divinely sanctioned, independent of what society may, or may not, have endeavored for with regard to women's overall rights. Hence, it is important to this work that both her life and her education be given due exposure in order to substantiate this claim. According to Norderval, Steinsvik was one of the first and most avid fighters for women in clerical service, and her own call to be a priest led her to enroll as a student of theology at the Luther School of Theology.¹⁶¹ Her enrollment stands as testament to her conviction that women should be priests, and indeed, are better suited to be priests as well as to her presumption that it would be only a matter of time until women would be admitted to the priesthood.

Hinnaland Stendal makes an interest observation regarding the underlying force of the debate over women priests as being neither new nor revolutionary, nor a liberal issue, per se. Rather, it was fueled by the existing strife between liberal and conservative theology. As mentioned earlier, this controversy arose from the societal changes Norway was experiencing perhaps as a result of the enlightenment spreading throughout Europe, which began to question the rigidity of dogmatic interpretations. The progressive minded, or new thinkers, pushed for a loosening of the dogmatic stronghold the Church had on its constituents with its traditions and rituals, in exchange for a biblical narrative that allowed for more personal expressions of faith, and took into account the contemporary societal issues. Hinnaland Stendal purports that it was these confrontations that lay at the root of the debate of women

¹⁶¹ Kristin Molland Norderval, *Mot Strømmen; Kvinnelige teologer i Norge før og nå*, 25

priests.¹⁶² Upon deeper reflection of that observation, and with an understanding of the theological controversy that had started long before, it becomes evident why the debate of women priests intensified and endured. If the politicians were attempting to please their respective political constituents, and the Church, with its all-too-progressive liberals, and the staunch dogmatic conservatives, were attempting to gain control, then one would be hard pressed to believe that the genuine concern for women themselves was everyone's top priority. This virtue might only be attributable to the women's movement who stood united for all women, religious or otherwise, educated or not, married or single....and Marta Steinsvik.

Steinsvik enters the debate by distributing copies of her tract entitled, "Women as Priests", (*Kvinner som Prester*), which, in turn, is distributed to all of the Parliamentary representatives assigned to this debate. Bjørg Kjersti Myren and Hanne Stenvaag refer to her as the argument supplier for the yay-sayers in the debate.¹⁶³ She was a master debater and lecturer with a solid academic background that lent enormous credence to all she spoke and wrote about. Her presentations evidenced the time she invested in extensive research to ensure that her listeners were receiving a proper education on the issues she presented. This was substantiated in the hundreds of newspaper clippings with reviews that revealed the same conviction her listeners walked away with, i.e. a legitimate and qualified researcher.

The pamphlet is a hefty 27 pages long, and she begins by briefly informing of the exhaustive and inclusive participation of women from all walks of life, and on all platforms, in the issue of women priests. She follows that with a reminder of the Martin Luther's Reformation, and how they still celebrated that historical event in their time.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, «...Under Forvandlingens Lov: En analyse av Stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester i 1930-årene», 288.

¹⁶³ Bjørg Kjersti Myren and Hanne Stenvaag, «Hun våget å gå foran: Ingrid Bjerkås og kvinners prestedtjeneste i Norge», 182.

¹⁶⁴ Marta Steinsvik, *Kvinner som Prester*, Kristiania: Menighetsfakultet biblioteket, 1934, 1.

Before Steinsvik proceeds with her lengthy and detailed explanations for the biblical verses used both for and against women priests, she sets the platform on which it will be discussed. Her prologue to her interpretation begins by addressing all those who desire to grant women access to clerical service, and reminding them that they have no need to fear as to the numbers of those who oppose. That which she claims is of utmost importance is to ask whether this particular reform would be good and beneficial, and whether women as priests would be right and in accordance with Christianity's spirit and nature. She refers to a statement made by the Ministry of the Church to Parliament in which they state that the eventual inclusion of women in the clergy would go against the word of God, and the principles of the Lutheran Church; an act she claims she would never support herself should it be proven to be justified.¹⁶⁵

Whether her words are judged as motivated by a personal agenda, or very sincere in her quest for understanding God's truth in the matter is debatable. That she employs a very neutral stance from the start, while also claiming that the truth had not yet been clarified, proves to be a brilliant approach for letting her audience (and/or readers) know that her argument is independent of any existing argumentation for or against women priests. A listener's reaction would most likely be to expect something new to be added to the debate. For the remainder of the tract, Steinsvik proceeds to give an exegesis of the creation story as possibly showing a hierarchy of importance, and she sets this within the context of Paul's words in 1 Timothy chapter 2, where Paul describes Adam being created first, and then Eve as proof of headship. Interestingly, however, is how Steinsvik takes this implied hierarchy and gives it a different spin by setting forth the fact that in the creation story, the inorganic material is created such as heaven and earth. Then she continues by stating that next came the organic material –nature, plants, grass, and fruit bearing trees. This is then followed by the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 2.

creation of animals, fish and fowl. After which comes humanity; first Adam, and lastly, Eve. She makes the claim that if we are to view creation from an ascending hierarchical perspective, then woman would naturally be considered the crowning glory of creation.¹⁶⁶

Naturally this would not stand as a scholarly argument in support of women priests in and of itself, but Steinsvik then embarks on an exegetical interpretation of some of the more controversial terminology such as what “helpmate” (*lalein*) means (the term used to describe what Eve will be for Adam) from the original Greek language. Her tract does not just focus on this particular terminology. Steinsvik proceeds to discuss rabbinical interpretations from the Talmud, she discusses the women of the Bible and their relationship vis a vis to Christ, discussions and studies in theological circles past and present, and theological insights from the Church Fathers. What Steinsvik presents is a paper that resembles a shortened dissertation on the issue of women priests. In addition, Steinsvik informed that it wasn't until 150 years after Paul that an official priesthood was established implying that the prohibition of women priests could not have originated with Paul if the need for priests did not arise until 150 after Paul.¹⁶⁷ No other argument ever presented was as all-encompassing and exhaustive as the one she presented, and no doubt there was nothing more to add to the subject. She brilliantly concludes by prioritizing the authority of the Bible over all arguments for or against women priests, but simultaneously reminds her readers that Christ himself never spoke out against women in clerical service. Stendal describes Steinsvik's contribution as not revolutionary, but reformist in nature, pointing to the significance of the history of the Lutheran Church as emerging precisely from a desire for development and progress, and reiterating the revolutionary significance of the first coming of Christ for women.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶⁷ Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, «...Under Forvandlingens Lov: En analyse av Stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester i 1930-årene», 297.

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Chapter 6: Conclusion

My thesis aimed to show Marta Steinsvik as a pioneer in the feminist movement that championed the cause for opening up the priesthood to women. She was neither alone in this activist movement, nor was she its originator. She was, however, a pioneer in having contributed a theological foundation that was independent of the political nuances and motivations present in both the political side of the arguments. I argued that it was Steinsvik's contributions that ultimately tilted the argument toward a positive vote after all other arguments had been exhausted. Theological argumentations for the cause of women in the priesthood lay at the center of the debate, and controversial scriptural texts, such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, and 1 Timothy 2:11-12,¹⁶⁹ were used as support for both sides of the debate. That which made Steinsvik's argument distinct, according to Stendal, was that it was theological support presented by a woman with an academic background in theology, who put forth an exegetical approach of both Old and New Testament scripture, which she presented with feminist arguments. Feminism as we know it today, was not a concept in Steinsvik's day since the term itself did not even exist. Yet Steinsvik's arguments, analyzed from a contemporary gender historical approach, meet all of the criteria to label her a feminist who presented a feminist theological argument. It was those arguments that had been published in 1934 in a journal entitled *Norges Kvinder* (Women of Norway), and were used during the height of the debate in the late 1930s.¹⁷⁰

I began this work by establishing the methodological approaches that I found important to this particular study including feminism and gender history. Since my thesis

¹⁶⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (NRSV) "women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."

1 Timothy 2:11-12 (NRSV) "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent."

¹⁷⁰ Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, «... Under Forvandlingens Lov: En analyse av Stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester i 1930-årene», 293-294.

focuses on the feminist actions and contributions of a woman who lived in an age in which feminism was not known as such, it was important to understand and contextualize these concepts in order to substantiate the claims of this paper. I sketched a picture of Norway in the 19th century, an era known as the golden age of Norway, the period in which Steinsvik lived. This era marked the arrival of the Industrialist Age which affected every aspect of society. Most especially impacted was the Church. The sudden progress of society brought with it a certain level of liberalism that affected people's attitudes toward the Church. The spirit of the Enlightenment empowered the nation with a degree of independence from the dictates of government, society, and even the Church. Freethinking emerged and new questions were being asked about the empiricist commitment to the theology of the Church. This presented the possibility of revisiting the doctrines of the Church to see if there was room for expansion or change. For the staunch *sola scriptura* adherents, this proved a serious threat.

One argument led to another, and soon a battle between liberal and conservative theology had been ignited. University teaching positions in the faculty of theology that suddenly became available created a tug of war between the liberals and the conservatives. The battle would be fierce enough to witness the resignation of a conservative professor of systematic theology over the hiring of a liberal theologian for the New Testament department. This competition led the disgruntled theologian, Sigurd Odland, to found MF that would serve to defend what he saw as the true teaching of the Lutheran Confession, especially as concerned the training of priests. This battle would rise to a level of national discord leading to the organization of nationwide meeting between all leaders of all churches from all over the land, as well as lay folk interested in the issues at hand. This meeting, which would come to be known as the Calmeyergate after its location, was attended by approximately 950 people.

I gave brief descriptions of aspects of society that were affected by the arrival of the Industrialist Age, such as gender relations and migration to the cities. Nevertheless, I gave greater emphasis to those sections of society that are of relevance to Steinsvik's life in order to show both how those societal changes may have changed her, and how she reacted to the events of her day. As her world evolved quickly, Steinsvik also developed and evolved in relation to those societal changes that worked to her advantage. The education reforms coincided precisely with the ages at which Steinsvik transitioned from one educational tier to the next. Education was in her blood as it flowed from parents who were also educators and liberals and who aspired to give the same educational and professional opportunities to their daughter as male students enjoyed. She proved to be a gifted student with a diverse grasp of languages that came at an early age, and continued through university. Her academic accomplishments were nothing short of brilliant, and at the age of 17 she was awarded the grade of *laudabilis prae ceteris*, not once, but twice, which is the equivalent of a *summa cum laude*. At this tender age, she also boasted several languages, and worked as a secretary at a local newspaper entitled, *Kringsjaa*, where she would translate the foreign correspondences into New Norwegian and standard Norwegian, from French, German, and English. Steinsvik also had command of Hebrew and Sanskrit, which would serve her later in life in her theology studies, and her studies in Egyptology.

Steinsvik's insatiable hunger for knowledge would propel her into a life as lecturer, writer, activist, and agitator. As lecturer, she was widely sought after and she traveled the entire country speaking on a wide range of issues from health to theology, and current events. A personal diary shows her appointments nearly filling up the days of each month with only a day or two in between for travels. Hundreds of archived newspaper clippings are filled with adulatory reviews about her lectures. She was praised as a lecturer who clearly demonstrated exceptional research skills in her demeanor, her delivery, and the substantive contents of her

topics. Her archives are filled with hundreds of newspaper clippings of reviews expressing gratitude for her visits, as well as exceptional appraisals of her research skills and pedagogical strengths in the presentations of her lectures.¹⁷¹

Her engagement in public life would be as diverse and prominent as were her academic accomplishments and her life experiences. She engaged herself in the public arena on issues as varied as vivisection, women's rights, military practices of torture on German prisoners of war, women's health issues, contraceptives, the morality of the teachings of the Catholic Church, Judaism, and health, to name but a few.¹⁷² That which stands above the rest in the broad arena of her involvement, however, was her engagement in the debate of women in the priesthood. The issue of women in the priesthood became the crowning glory of her involvement in the public arena, and one that most accurately displayed her academic studies in theology, as well as her sharp analytical skills, not least because of her heartfelt conviction to becoming a priest herself.

Her commitment to the issue of women priests, and the momentum this issue was gaining, no doubt reassured her of its imminent realization. Perhaps this is why she boldly accepted to preach from a church pulpit when it was strictly forbidden for women to do so. Surely, she seized the opportunity to display the theological skills of a woman displayed on the highest platform in the church. Steinsvik did not just preach on that infamous Sunday on April 24, 1921, she interpreted scripture in the same capacity, and with equal authority, as a full-fledged theologian or priest, and she did it in the presence of approximately 880 curious and interested church members who no doubt came to witness the defiant act of this mother and grandmother. In addition, she took on one of the most complex chapters of the New Testament, i.e. chapter five of the Book of Hebrews; a book speculated to have been written by a scholar of the Law; namely, Paul, to the scholars of his day. It goes without saying that

¹⁷¹ Nasjonalbiblioteket: Arkivskaper: Marta Steinsvik (1877 – 1950), MS.fol. 4561:J-J:1

¹⁷² Ibid., 4561:B:82

her defiant act would cause waves across the land, as newspapers nationwide covered the defiant, yet historical, event. She desired to be a priest, so she promoted the issue by both proving a woman's capacity to exegete, while demonstrating the women's movement's resolve to press forward with this issue. Unfortunately, women would not be granted complete access to the priesthood until 1938, and even then it was contingent upon the congregation's approval of having a woman priest. The Parliamentary decision approved of allowing women priests, but granted congregations the authority to reject a woman priest should they be assigned on. It would not be until one year before Steinsvik's death that women were granted full rights to serve in the priesthood and to officiate in communion services.

On the surface, Steinsvik's life paralleled changes in society that served to her advantage, providing her with opportunities that would otherwise not have been available to her. Her intellectual acumen benefited fully from the educational transformations taking place in her society, and she worked through high school and university with results equivalent to *summa cum laude*. At a young age she moved in with an older man whose anarchistic convictions appealed to her idealistic nature. By the time she was 25, Steinsvik's life was overflowing with five children, a chauvanistic and demanding husband, and ideals that would not keep her silent, or in the home expecting to be cared for. Her feminism developed early in life from parents who sought equal education for their daughter as for boys. Higher education reforms worked to her advantage, and she took full advantage of them by going on to study medicine, theology, and Egyptology. She did not complete any of these studies, but she would go on to study on her own for the rest of her life. Her detractors use her involvement with theosophy to overshadow her brilliance as a theologian, exegete, and lecturer. Steinsvik struggled in her personal life as well, and in her younger days fell in love with Rudolph Steiner while married to Rasmus Steinsvik. Upon the death of her husband, Steinsvik was left

to care and provide for her five children, a reality that forced her to be away from them even more in order to comb the land earning wages through lectures and tract purchases.

It can also be argued that her influence is diminished in significance because she never completed her studies in either theology, medicine, or Egyptology. I conclude to the contrary. The incompleteness of her education supports the strength of her impact in society, and more specifically to the issue of women priests, precisely because her independent studies, which she carried out on her own throughout her entire life, are what made her a sought-after lecturer, a respected theologian and academician, a writer, a scholar, an agitator, an activist, and a role model for the complete emancipation of women. It's easy to see why history has overlooked her when you consider that society tends to only take into account "finished" accomplishments, but Steinsvik leaves behind a legacy with much to yet be discovered, and if we are able to comprehend and accept that her contribution was one of both process and product, there is no telling how much more can yet be uncovered from her works.

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