1 Authority and Freedom: Controversy in Norwegian-American Congregations*

When Pastor Johannes W. C. Dietrichson returned to Norway in 1845 to try to recruit clergy for the Norwegian settlements in Wisconsin, he was frank in describing the extraordinary qualities "to be looked for in the one who is to hold his own on the battlefield of controversy that awaits every honest Lutheran minister over there." In 1858, in a letter to a young colleague newly arrived from Norway, Pastor Johan Storm Munch of Wiota wished him "welcome to the fight," thanking God that he "roused warriors who have the courage to meet the enemy with the shield of faith and the sword of spirit." To his brother he wrote: "Combat in all directions is the order of the day." Metaphors from warfare and the battlefield lent themselves easily to these literary pastors when they were trying to describe a situation that must have appeared incredible to readers in Norway, but which the pastors regularly encountered in their congregations in the New

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World. Strife and controversy were surely not peculiar to the Norwegian immigrants. But the battles seem to have been particularly fierce and bitter because their conflicts had deep roots in social conditions peculiar to Norway. It is no historical accident that the Norwegian settlers in the Middle West were divided from the very outset into two major camps, as is manifested in two synodical church organizations separated from each other by a gulf that was as much social and cultural as theological in nature.

I. THE NORWEGIAN BACKGROUND

A most important social development in Norway during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the emergence of a new elite of professionals and intellectuals to take the place of a weak and vanishing nobility. A similar development was taking effect in other north-and west-European countries. But the new elite had a greater impact in Norway because, in the absence of a powerful nobility, there it stepped unchallenged into a social and political vacuum, forming a top layer of society rather than a new middle class.

This intellectual upper class was composed primarily of professionals, such as physicians, lawyers, architects, and civil engineers, higher civil servants in state, county, and municipality, and above all the Embedsmænd, the officials of the crown. The latter included not only the holders of high administrative offices and judges in the higher courts, but also officers in the armed forces, bishops, deans, and pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, and — after 1811, when a Norwegian university was established in Christiania — professors, scholars, and scientists. This was the core of the elite, which also furnished most of the recognized artists and writers of the time.

This was not a privileged class in the proper sense of
the word. Its social standing was not derived from inherited titles or royal decrees and favors, nor was it based on wealth and economic power. The most important distinguishing attribute of the group was an intangible but highly visible thing called *Dannelse*, that is, "culture" or "polish" — at the same time a quality, an attitude, and a style of life accumulated through succeeding generations by education and upbringing. It involved good manners, tact and dignity in conduct, neatness in grooming and habits, a cosmopolitan outlook, knowledge in the subjects of the liberal arts, a home that bore evidence of good taste, a sense of style, and appreciation of the fine arts. In relation to others and to society at large, it involved commitment and a sense of obligation rather than rights and privileges.

Such qualities were not easily achieved except by growing up in a home that already had them. The new elite, therefore, soon became a well-defined social circle conspicuously distinguished from *Almuen*, or the "general people," a self-sustaining group tied together by bonds of common values and mutual recognition, even mutual acquaintance, and by a criss-cross pattern of intermarriage and kinship.

This cultured elite — although relatively few in number, as could be expected in a small and sparsely populated country, where about 85 percent of the population were peasants — was a dominant element throughout the eighteenth and far into the nineteenth century. Since crown officials as well as municipal administrators and officers were almost exclusively recruited from their ranks, the members of the elite wielded considerable power, both directly and indirectly through personal connections. Obviously, not everyone lived up to the high standards of his class. Occasional abuse of power on the part of crown officials is witnessed by many a just complaint submitted by peas-
ants and other *Almuefolk* (common people) to bishops and high administrators as well as to the king in Copenhagen during the time of Danish rule, and there may have been a great many more cases that were never reported. But it is probably fair to say that, in general, the members of the new elite of Norway did not regard themselves as a privileged ruling class. As in other western countries, including the United States, it was members of the intellectual elite who articulated, proclaimed, and in part implemented the new ideas of freedom, of human rights and individual integrity for all, as laid down in the Constitution of Norway adopted at Eidsvold in 1814. The attitude of the elite was rather that of a professional group, who saw the legitimation of their social status and their position of leadership, not in their "birth right" or breeding or even in their royal appointment, but in their hard-earned professional competence, authorized by Europe's highest institutions of learning and recognized by their qualified peers.

So the members of Norway's elite naturally assumed the responsibility of leadership in national and communal affairs and became the carriers of the political, intellectual, and cultural life of the nation, liberal protagonists in political and cultural developments, and, at the same time, conservative guardians of traditional values.

No less important in the life of the nation than the emergence of a professional elite was the rise of the Norwegian peasants (*Bønder*) during the nineteenth century. This development had even deeper roots in the past. The social and political ideals of the ancient Scandinavians rested firmly on principles that stressed, above all, the dignity and integrity of free men and women. The ancient sagas, with all their accounts of violence, abound in evidence of this spirit. Under an organized state, the peasants had, of course, to submit to many limitations of their old freedoms. But at least in the more
isolated areas, such as Jutland, some parts of Sweden, and practically the whole of Norway, they never accepted those limitations as right and proper and only grudgingly submitted to them. 7

Stirrings of unrest had occurred among the peasants of Norway during the latter half of the eighteenth century, such as the so-called Strilekrigen in Bergen in 1765 and the abortive Lofthuus movement of the 1780s. 8 Of greater significance was the religious awakening started in 1796 by Hans Nielsen Hauge. That movement had important social, economic, and political implications, which were only emphasized by the strong opposition on the part of the authorities, particularly the clergy.

Although Hauge himself stayed within the state church and admonished his followers to do the same, his sharp criticism of the rationalist pastors, particularly in his early preachings and writings, was an open challenge to their professional competence. And the organization of prayer meetings, with laymen preaching and leading the prayers, in direct violation of the Conventicle Ordinance of 1741 (rescinded in 1842), was in fact an emancipation from the exclusive authority of the clergy in religious affairs.

Besides, there was more to the Hauge movement than a religious revival. Hauge himself was an enterprising businessman, and in a spirit that reminds one more of Anglo-American puritanism than of Continental pietism, he engaged in various commercial activities, took out licence as a merchant in Bergen, and became a dealer in fish and grain. And he encouraged his followers to do likewise. He also organized co-operative sawmills and paper mills, a salt work, and a printing press for his followers, giving them an economic independence that they had never known before. This development also meant the beginning of an “occupational emancipation,” a liberation from the idea that a peasant was forever doomed to be a tiller of the soil.
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However, although Hauge identified himself as "a lowly peasant’s son," and although most of his followers were peasants, his movement was not essentially a peasant movement. It certainly did not become the rallying point for a consolidation of the farming class as a whole. On the contrary, with its strong element of asceticism and other-worldliness, the movement took a negative stand to many customs and usages firmly entrenched in peasant tradition. And with their rather exclusive self-identification as "Friends," the Haugeans tended to accentuate certain social differences and tensions already existing within the peasant communities, causing a cleavage rather than a unification.

On the whole, the Norwegian peasants of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth century lacked an ideological articulation of their social and political goals, and they had little sense of community of interests and solidarity as a class. In matters of state and local government, as well as in their religious life, the majority continued to rely heavily on the guidance and leadership of the professional elite, whose liberal ideas of human rights, and of national and individual freedom, they had not yet learned to embrace.

It was only during the second half of the nineteenth century, as new intellectual and political leaders emerged, that the peasant movement took firm shape as a political and cultural force in Norway. But the social and political fermentation that preceded it, including the Hauge movement, had an important bearing on the early Norwegian emigration to America as well as on the struggles of the Norwegian Lutheran church in the New World.

II. THE AMERICAN SCENE

These, then, were the elements of the Norwegian society that took the main roles in the drama of the Norwe-
gian settlement of the Middle West: a proud and self-asserting peasantry in search of freedom as they defined it, but torn between loyalty to their cultural heritage and rebellion against those who had been the carriers of that heritage, particularly in the affairs of the church; and an intellectual elite with a strong sense of responsibility for the preservation and transmission of what its members considered the higher spiritual values of life.

“Freedom” had become a powerful idea and an effective slogan in the western world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Wars and bloody revolutions were fought in its name, and it became the cornerstone of several newly written constitutions and declarations of independence in many countries. Indeed, the United States of America was not the only country in the world that was pronounced “the land of the free.”

Yet, few nations proclaimed freedom with quite so much fanfare as did the young American nation. And her trumpets were heard and applauded in every country of Europe, creating that indestructible image of America as the very champion of freedom. Whatever economic factors were involved, there can be little doubt that this invigorated quest for freedom in Europe, coupled with the widely accepted image of America as a haven of freedom, became a most important factor in instigating the greatest migratory movement in modern times.

Freedom, however, signified different things to different people. To some it meant national independence and self-government, to others free enterprise and absence of government control, particularly in industry and commerce. To still others freedom was an elective democratic system of government, while some would look for it primarily in terms of freedom to dissent, in religious as well as political matters. By the middle of the nineteenth century, all these freedoms were fairly well established in Norway. But then there were those to
whom freedom first and foremost meant equality, not only equality of opportunity but, even more importantly, social equality, that is, freedom from conventional differentiations of social status, whether based on birth, occupation, or education and upbringing. And it was not least in the latter sense that America was praised as a haven of freedom.

This message had a particularly strong appeal among Norway's peasants, with their newly reawakened quest for social and political recognition. It is not surprising, therefore, that the vast majority of Norwegian immigrants to America during the nineteenth century were peasants, and that "the emigration fever spread through our country districts like a disease," affecting a greater proportion of the population than in any other country except Ireland. The emigration movement had become one important aspect of the growing emancipation of the Norwegian peasants.

Here, too, the Haugeans and other religious dissenters showed the way, following the example of other European countries. Not only were the "Sloopers" of 1825 and Cleng Peerson himself fugitives from religious intolerance. It is worth noting that a great many, perhaps a majority, of the early Norwegian settlers in the Fox River settlement as well as in some of the older Wisconsin settlements were participants in Hauge's religious emancipation movement.

As might be expected, many of these immigrants had strong feelings about their newly won freedom, and it is clear that in their concept of "freedom," social equality was probably the most important element. It comes out frequently in letters sent back to Norway, both in private messages to relatives and friends and particularly, of course, in propaganda letters written for publication in Norwegian newspapers. Says one letter-writer: "Here it is not asked, what or who was your father, but the ques-
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tion is, what are you? . . . Freedom is here an element which is drawn in, as it were, with mother milk, and seems as essential to every citizen of the United States as the air he beathes. . . . It is a natural attribute, common to all. Herein lies the secret of the equality everywhere seen. It is an American political creed to be one people. This elevates the lowly and brings down the great.” 10

Another writer states: “Farmers and artisans are just as good as merchants and officials. They all have practically the same manners.” 11 The new freedom is often described in direct contrast to conditions in Norway: “As proof of the high education of the [American] people it may be cited that the clergy is not regarded, nor indeed regards itself, as better than the common people. The minister dresses just like other members of the congregation. He wears no cassock in church, as in oppressed Europe, to call attention to differences of station in society. . . . Thus everybody is equally free, equally respected, whether he be an official or a farmer, a grocer, or a craftsman.” 12

Typically, the clergy is often singled out as the prime obstacle to freedom in this sense in the old country, and considerable sensitivity is revealed when even the clerical garb becomes a symbol of “oppression.”

In this expression of egalitarianism, directed particularly against the clergy of the church of Norway, the sharply anticlerical Elling Eielsen had, of course, a considerable influence, not only in the predominantly Haugean settlements. It soon appeared, however, that his extreme stand was more than even the staunchest Haugeans in the Muskego settlement could take. Besides, most of the Norwegian immigrants had little taste for Eielsen’s revivalist type of religion. As Hauge’s movement had done in Norway, so the efforts of his disciple Eielsen in America rather split than united the Norwegians in the Middle West. The fears some of them might
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have had of “pastoral overlordship” and “papism” were apparently overcome by their desire for order in their church affairs under the traditional guidance of a properly educated and duly consecrated minister. So appeals were sent to Norway, “hoping to induce some ordained Lutheran Christian pastor to come over for the purpose of gathering the dispersed flock and nurturing it with the good things of God’s house.”

By 1856, ten pastors from Norway were serving at least twice as many congregations in Wisconsin and Iowa, forming the clerical leadership of the Norwegian Synod established in 1853. These state-church pastors, although dispersed over a wide area and physically distant from each other, had much in common to tie them together as a group and set them apart from the majority of the settlers. All of them had been brought up in the traditions of the intellectual elite. Also, in keeping with the pattern of the Norwegian elite, most of them were related by kinship. And all of them were at least indirectly acquainted beforehand, with many common acquaintances in the homeland. Some of them carried the names of prominent lineages who had distinguished themselves in politics, administration, or the professions in Norway. Even the forms and spellings of their family names set them apart from the rest of the immigrants, and everything in their conduct and manners — their taste and style of life, the type of Norwegian they spoke, the kind of clothing they wore — served to identify them as members of the intellectual elite. With all this, the state-church pastors, supplemented by a few immigrant doctors, journalists, and other professionals from Norway, formed a social and cultural milieu of their own, quite distinct and socially distant from their parishioners — not unlike the situation in rural parishes in Norway.

In their political views, these immigrant pastors cer-
certainly embraced the principles of the American Constitution — after all, those principles were part of their own intellectual heritage. What Nelson and Fevold say about Norwegian (and Swedish) immigrants in general applies equally to the pastors: “In the fifth [and, we may add, sixth] decade[s] of the nineteenth century they were bound with strong bonds to the ideals of freedom which they judged were best expressed in Republican political opinion.”¹⁵ Some of them, at least, were much in favor of the free church resulting from the separation of church and state, in contrast to the situation in Norway, “where the Church slumbers sweetly in the arms of the State.”¹⁶ But they had little regard for what they termed the “Yankee spirit” with its emphasis on money and technology to the neglect of the finer things in life — “here is neither art, poetry, nor science; here are dollars and steam — that is all.”¹⁷ They observed with horror the professional incompetence of self-established “doctors” and itinerant preachers, and they looked with concern at the American common school, which at that time left much to be desired, both with respect to the academic quality of the teachers and the discipline and general ethical values — “they live in a free country, and they are supposed to have freedom to do as they please.”¹⁸

On the whole, in the eyes of the Norwegian state-church pastors, life in the Middle West in the 1850s entailed “both good and bad . . . under circumstances which in all respects are fermenting and unsettled.”¹⁹ They shared a deep concern for their countrymen who, in a misguided attempt to find “freedom,” were quick to abandon the best of their cultural heritage with nothing to put in its place but the crudest and most vulgar “Yankee manners.” As members of a cultured elite, the pastors felt an obligation to provide leadership and guidance in filling what they considered a cultural vacuum. It
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is in this light that we must see their efforts to establish parochial schools in their congregations, or to promote an interest in reading good literature by setting up parish libraries and organizing reading clubs. 20 Their effort was to supplement rather than replace the values of the American frontier by furnishing the cultural and spiritual values that they felt were lacking without abridging the social and political principles upon which the American society was built.

III. CHURCH ORDER AND SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

The chief concern of the Norwegian pastors was “to bring about church order” (at tilveiebringe Kirkeorden) among the Norwegian immigrants. 21 As theologians and churchmen, and as “spiritual advisers” (Sjælesørgere, literally “caretakers of souls”), they had a professional concern for right doctrine as well as for proper organization and ritual in accordance with the confessional writings and ordinances of the church of Norway. They were bound by their oath of office and ordination in the homeland as well as by the constitution of the Norwegian Synod in America.

At the same time, the pastors realized that “in this land of freedom,” where the settlers “have complete liberty to form and shape a church body in whatever manner they see fit,” 22 no viable organization could be established except on the basis of a voluntary but firm commitment on the part of the members. In this respect, a church did not differ from any other voluntary association, be it a political party or a charitable organization devoted to a cause. It was deemed necessary, therefore, that those who — of their own free will — chose to join a Norwegian Lutheran congregation should explicitly commit themselves to the confessions as well as to the order and ritual of the Norwegian Lutheran church. This
implied, as a matter of course, that in questions of ritual and faith the congregation would have to rely on qualified experts, that is, on the judgment of those who had both the professional competence (by a bona fide theological education) and the proper legitimation (by ordination and the congregation’s letter of call) to make decisions in such matters. Hence the demand that those who chose to join such a congregation should explicitly commit themselves to “show the minister thus called by you and the congregation to be your spiritual authority the respect and deference that a member of the congregation owes his spiritual adviser in everything he requires and does in conformity to the church ritual of Norway.”

To understand the firm position taken by Johannes Dietrichson and the other pastors from Norway on the issue of ministerial authority—which was soon to become a hot one in several congregations—it is important to keep two things in mind:

In the first place, in the area of religion, the situation facing the pastors and the immigrants in general was particularly confused, truly “fermenting and unsettled.” Not only did several established non-Lutheran churches and sects as well as a bewildering variety of Lutheranism (including Eielsen’s revivalist brand) compete for the attention of the immigrants, but numerous self-established “clergymen” and itinerant preachers, with an assortment of more or less biblical interpretations of Christianity, were constantly vying for their souls, sometimes with considerable success. Dietrichson repeatedly points to this state of affairs as the main reason for the “churchly confusion . . . in this land harrowed by so many erring sects,” where the Norwegian settlers, “in a vague longing to partake of the blessings of the church, had turned to self-established preachers, who further confused their conception of what a church should be
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(deres kirkelige Sans).” This was the reason why he included in the conditions for joining a Norwegian Lutheran congregation an explicit promise that the members would not call or accept anyone as their “minister and spiritual adviser” (Præst og Sjælesørger) who could not demonstrate that he was a duly called and consecrated minister according to the Norwegian-Lutheran church order. As Professor Nelson puts it, “Dietrichson sought to establish a frontier church with built-in defenses against vagrant ministers and ecclesiastical charlatans.” And this was a concern that continued to be shared by many of the other pastors from Norway as they experienced exactly similar difficulties.

Secondly, it is important to keep in mind that what the pastors were claiming for themselves was geistlig Øvrighed (ecclesiastical, clerical, or spiritual authority) as distinct from verdslig Øvrighed (temporal or civil authority) of federal, state, or local government. This distinction was firmly rooted in Lutheran theology. Although the principle was compromised by the establishment of principality and state churches in Germany and Scandinavia, the distinction was recognized in principle in the state church of Norway and there jealously guarded by the clergy as a safeguard against government interference in church affairs, particularly in the professional theological and ecclesiastical matters of doctrine and ritual.

In America, with its complete separation of church and state, the danger of interference in church affairs from civil authority would seem remote. Here, again, the establishment of spiritual authority in the congregations filled a vacuum, thereby fulfilling a necessary condition for bringing about order in a chaotic situation. Yet, when civil authority in fact reached a hand into the same vacuum, undoubtedly with the same intention — to create order out of chaos — the pastors saw it as a potential
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threat to the autonomy of the church and took their precautions.

In the organization of their congregations, the pioneer pastors followed the church order of Norway, "with such changes as were made necessary" by the conditions of the New World. According to these regulations, the pastor "shall have assigned to him some of the most godfearing, sincere, zealous, and good parishioners" to be his Medhjælper, or assistants, "in attaining Christian conduct and influence." Their principal duty was to aid the pastor "by word and deed" in maintaining order and discipline in his parish. In America, the most important adjustment was that the pastor's assistants were elected by the congregation rather than appointed by a dean or a bishop, although they still had to be installed and sworn in by the pastor. Besides, their activities seem to have been broadened until they became a kind of governing body for the congregation.

In 1847, the legislature of Wisconsin Territory passed an act "to provide for the incorporation of the Protestant Episcopalian Church and other religious denominations." Dietrichson, the only Norwegian state-church pastor in the territory at the time, welcomed this legislation, as it enabled individual congregations to incorporate, with the right to hold property as a "body corporate." In the form it was given, however, the law could not be described only as "enabling legislation." Probably in consideration of the chaotic conditions in church matters prevailing in Wisconsin at the time, the legislature proceeded to give detailed prescriptions concerning the organization of "such church or congregation."

Not only was it required that each congregation "by a majority of ballots elect two church wardens, and not less than three nor more than eight vestrymen . . . [who] shall form a vestry and be trustees of such church or congregation," with detailed prescriptions for the
election process and the subsequent recording with the register of deeds of the civil authorities. Even the duties of the trustees within the congregation were spelled out in detail, with conditions for the competence of "such board . . . to transact business," determining, among other things, who "shall preside, and have the casting vote in case of a tie." According to the law, then, the vestry of an Episcopalian congregation could function as a "board of trustees" so long as it was elected, composed, and organized — as well as having its meetings conducted — in accordance with the letter of the law.

In Section 3, however, the law sets up somewhat different regulations for the incorporation of "any other church, congregation, or religious society." It suggested, in fact required, that the congregation "elect any number of discreet persons . . . not less than three, nor more than nine in number, as trustees to take charge of the estate and property belonging thereto." These trustees are here clearly distinguished from "the elders or deacons, church wardens or vestrymen" of the congregation, and their realm of authority is clearly defined as "all affairs relative to the temporalities thereof." This wording made it possible to avoid a confusion of spiritual and civil authority.

Obviously, since the trustees were established by civil law, they had to be regarded as an arm of the civil government, and this was acceptable to the Norwegian pastors (1) so long as the trustees' authority was limited to the temporal affairs of the congregation, and (2) so long as they were clearly distinguished from the congregation council consisting of the pastor and his assistants, who represented spiritual authority. To emphasize this point, Dietrichson added in the Parish Journal: "They [the trustees] are not to involve themselves in the spiritual and purely churchly matters of the congregation." 32

The same principle, separating the functions of the
trustees from those of the congregation council, was adopted in other Norwegian Lutheran congregations, notably in the “constitution” establishing the Spring Prairie church in 1849. This constitution, written by Dietrichson but confirmed by the members of the congregation with 143 signatures, stipulates as follows: “The churchly affairs (kirkelige Anliggender) of the congregation are governed by a congregation council (Menighedsraad) consisting of the congregation’s assistants (Medhjælpere). . . . The temporal affairs (verdslige Anliggender) of the congregation are governed by the trustees (Forstandere) elected by the congregation in accordance with the law of February, 1847.”

Likewise, after H. A. Preus had taken over the Spring Prairie pastorate in 1851, he organized several “annex” congregations in the area and, in the “bylaws” drawn up for those congregations, he followed in general the wording of the original Spring Prairie constitution.

A few years later, the separation of civil and spiritual authority in the congregation was asserted in even stronger terms by Johan St. Munch in Wiota. In December, 1856, this congregation adopted a new bylaw which was undoubtedly in all essentials written by Munch. It was entered into the records of the congregation explicitly as being in compliance with the Wisconsin Incorporation Act of 1847, and the opening paragraph sharply states the limits of its authority: “Solely the external temporal affairs concerning this congregation shall be discussed in the congregation meetings and be ruled by this bylaw. All other matters are subject to the congregation council (i.e., the pastor and his assistants) and the Norwegian-Lutheran Synod for settlement.

Not only the power of the trustees but also that of the congregation meeting — even the jurisdiction of the bylaw itself — is here explicitly limited to the temporal affairs of the congregation, while “all other matters” fall
Southern Wisconsin

The Parsonages
of the Norwegian Synod
1856

MINNESOTA TERRITORY

La Crosse

IOWA

Washington Prairie (Koren)

Prairie du Chien

ILINOIS

Black Earth (Brodaht)

Madison

Spring Prairie (H.A. Praus)

Waukesha (Dierichson)

Koshkonong (A.C. Praus)

Lake Michigan

Lake Geneva

Lake Manitowoc (Ottesen)

Lake Winnebago

Scandinavia

Wauwa

Neenah

Minneapolis

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under the spiritual authority of the pastor and his assistants as guided only by the constitution and bylaws of the Norwegian Synod.

So the spiritual authority of the pastor and his assistants, the separation of church and state, and the limitations of verdslig Øvrighef in relation to geistlig Øvrighef were firmly established in the congregations served by pastors of the Norwegian Synod — at least in principle.

There can be no doubt that the great majority of the Norwegian settlers were happy and pleased with the arrival of the ordained pastors from Norway, and highly appreciative of their work. Besides — to some at least — it was a matter of gaining prestige over their Haugean and Eielsenian neighbors to have a "real" pastor and a "proper" church ritual as well as a "cultured" atmosphere in the parsonage.

On the other hand, it soon appeared that the very presence in the settlements of Norwegian professional ministers and their families, with their refined manners, speech, and dress, was a constant source of irritation and was even felt by some as a threat to their newly won freedom. For one thing, their presence was a constant reminder of the settlers' own lowly origin, something that they had hoped to leave behind and forget. An attitude of supersensitive suspicion was also present; the pastors' efforts to establish proper church order on the basis of ministerial authority were easily construed to be just another attempt to keep the "common people" in their place.

Opposition came from outside as well as from inside the congregations. The Norwegian state-church pastors were under almost continuous, at times vicious, attacks by anonymous writers — in such papers as Nordlyset and Den Norske Amerikaner. Thus, J. W. C. Dietrichson was spitefully attacked by an anonymous writer in
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*Nordlyset*, accusing him of embezzlement. Another writer described him in a pamphlet as “a government-paid spy-priest . . . whose pastoral activities in America served as a vehicle for material interests and other hidden motives in order to discourage emigration.” About a decade later, Elias Stangeland — who had been sharply criticized in *Emigranten* and in newspapers in Norway for his activities as an emigration agent — made his paper *Den Norske Amerikaner* the medium for a running attack on the Norwegian state-church pastors, accusing *Emigranten* of being their “organ,” claiming that he was criticized by the ministers because he was “the son of a peasant” (*en Bondesøn*), and advising his readers to get rid of the clergy from Norway.

From a different quarter, the pastors of the Norwegian Synod were accused of “papism” and “dead ritualism.” Elling Eielsen and his followers had pledged themselves to the declaration that “with the popish authority and the customary ministerial garb [of the church of Norway] we will have nothing more to do.” They continued to have much influence in the settlements, especially among those who, in Pastor Munch’s words, still were “afraid of a minister with cape and collar (*bange for Prael med Kappe og Krave*).” The result was not only an occasional defection from the Norwegian Synod, which could be serious enough when it reduced the economic base of a congregation to the point where it could no longer survive on its own. In many churches it also resulted in a certain ambivalence on the part of the settlers, a reluctance to commit themselves totally to the ritual of the church of Norway or to any specific church order — the very problem that J. W. C. Dietrichson had tried to guard against. This might also bring about financial difficulties, both for the congregation and for its pastor. Mrs. Munch describes the situation in two of her husband’s congregations:

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"In the Dodgeville and Otter Creek congregations they are completely insane, they do not want to incorporate and join into a regular congregation. They want to build churches, but they are to be open to any odd tramp who wants to come and preach to them, and of these there are a large number in this country. Law and order are not supposed to rule in their congregations, this is a free country, they say, and everyone can do as he pleases. If he wants to contribute something for his minister, that is fine, but if he does not, he may leave it at that. They will not hear of rules and regulations among themselves. And in this manner it cannot possibly go on any longer, especially since Munch hardly has received half of what he should have had during these two years." 41

Clearly, the problem was not merely one of economics. It was "freedom" bordering on anarchy pitted against the rigors of a firm church organization with its implications of ministerial authority.

In many congregations, regular opposition groups were formed, trying to curb and control the pastor's authority, particularly in regard to church discipline and the right of the minister and his congregation council to exclude open offenders. In Muskego, where C. L. Clausen had been installed as pastor in 1843, his authority was challenged by a group of his parishioners, who had previously rejected Eielsen's exaggerated informality but still had strong Haugean leanings. They accused the pastor of "rather aristocratic" behavior and "haughty and overbearing manners." In particular, they criticized his insistence that "the Dano-Norwegian church ritual of 1685, with later amendments and ordinances now in force in Norway, must be the absolute norm of constitution both for pastor and parish . . . especially . . . concerning confession and absolution," and they rejected his demand that the congregation remain exclusively
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Lutheran and not allow anyone but a Lutheran pastor to preach in its church — "a dictum that may not be so easy to enforce." The whole affair ended with Clausen resigning from that church in 1846, declaring that he "could have nothing further to do with a congregation that refuses to honor the churchly rules on which it is founded."42

Ten years later, Munch had similar problems in Wiota. The issue there started out as a dispute over firm organization, particularly in financial matters. There were quarrels about the costs of church and parsonage and considerable delinquency in paying the pastor's salary. But it soon appeared that the underlying issue was the extent and limits of ministerial authority. In this case, the government-imposed trustee organization became an instrument for the opposition in its attempts to curb the pastor's authority, especially in the gray area between "civil" and "spiritual" authority, where the distinction was perhaps less clear and, therefore, subject to different interpretations. Finally, the trustees, under the leadership of Hans Fr. Schjager, tried to reorganize the congregation independently of pastoral authority for the purpose of calling another minister.43

But worse trouble was to come from certain elements within the congregations, who were no less fierce in their independence and no less sensitive to anything that smacked of "pastoral overlordship" than the radical Haugeans were, and far more impious in their modes of expression. Most of them were heavy drinkers, for which the Norwegians had won a probably well-deserved reputation in the settlements. This, however, was only part of the trouble and may have been more a symptom than a cause of a problem which, again, obviously had deep roots in the struggle of the Norwegian peasants for emancipation from the patronizing dominance of the Old-World elite, reinforced by vague and downright naive concepts of American "freedom."
Almost legendary is the treatment that J. W. C. Dietrichson received from these rowdy elements of his congregation at Koshkonong. Best known — and most widely reported — is the celebrated “affair Funkelien,” the story of a drunkard who had been placed under the discipline of the church but who in a demonstrative fashion showed his contempt for the action during a divine service. When thrown bodily out of the church, he brought charges against the pastor for assault and battery, and the pastor was fined on the basis that he had committed an act “that threatens civil rights.” This incident took place in 1845. More disturbing to the pastor was undoubtedly what happened a couple of years later, when another drunkard stirred up a racket around the parsonage. As Dietrichson wrote:

“Since shortly after Christmas there has hardly been a week that this man has not either by day or by night used abusive language about the pastor, cursed and shouted, and sung the vilest and lewdest songs about the pastor, sometimes just outside and sometimes inside the fence at the parsonage. . . . Shameful abuse of my honor both as a man and as a pastor, coupled with threats against my life, have poured from the mouth of this man, drunk or sober.”

When the disturbance was finally brought to the church, with the result that the pastor had to cancel his service, suit was brought against the agitators. It was in this connection that Dietrichson had the incredible experience of having a flagrant disturber of the peace acquitted in the courts of Dane County on the basis of a defense asserting that the pastor, his congregation, and the Lutheran church in general were “a menace to our blessed freedom.”

Less well known is probably the fact that Dietrichson’s experiences at Koshkonong were not unique. Similar incidents occurred in other congregations in the 1850s, although they were seldom recorded as meticu-
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lously for posterity as were the ones at Koshkonong. It was not unusual that pastors were exposed to abuse and name-calling, and in some settlements it even came to harassments, vandalism, and disturbance of the peace.

Munch at Wiota had his full share of such abuse, both at congregation meetings and around the parsonage. Mrs. Munch gives hints concerning it several times in her letters; she refers to “a good share of gossip and slander circulating about us, and always ill will and opposition and grumbling and an ungodly way of living everywhere.” Details are seldom given, but on one occasion she tells about a drunk who came to the parsonage while Munch was away, made himself at home in the parlor, and refused to leave, “insisting that it was his house since the congregation had paid for it and not the minister.” And “Munch is having many similar annoyances.” On one occasion, a puppet dressed in Norwegian clerical garb was put on display in a neighbor’s window, to the amusement and laughter of passers-by, and Munch mentions that he “got tired of these constant harassments.” Obviously, the rowdy elements in his congregation offered substantial support to Schjager’s independence movement.

From Gustav Dietrichson’s congregations at Rock Prairie (Luther Valley) and Jefferson Prairie, there are contemporary newspaper reports of disorders and vandalism both in and outside of the Norwegian Synod churches during services. In this case also, charges were brought against the offenders, but the case ended in one mistrial after another because of false witness and hung juries. Among the sworn testimonies presented to the court was one to the effect that it was customary in Norwegian congregations for people to bring liquor to the church and to refresh themselves during services. Emigranten, reporting the case, warned that in the future similar offenders would not be able to plead that they “live in a free country.”

26
At Waupaca the problem apparently did not come to violence or overt disturbances. But Olaus Duus deplored a situation “where there is truly so little honesty and authority that one shudders . . . where law and order are held in lowest esteem.” He found it “exasperating to see so much ugliness prevailing here and hindering my ministry.” ⁵⁰ In Coon Prairie, somewhat later, A. C. Preus, who had taken over that congregation in 1863, had troubles and “much disturbance” from drunkards and from lay preachers who “thundered against the state-church pastors with the long cassocks.” ⁵¹

IV. FREEDOM AND AUTHORITY

In the debates, struggles, insults, harassments, and occasional acts of violence that the pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway experienced in America, they encountered “freedom” in its most naive, unreflected form. Some of the actions taken against them, such as Schjager’s protest movement in Wiota, were purposeful and deliberate attempts to limit or abolish the authority of the pastor. Others were nothing but senseless acts of defiance, where it is hard to see any motive but blind class hatred. In either case, behind the actions was a concept of freedom that obviously was more concerned with “bringing down the great” than with “elevating the lowly.”

In this respect, the Haugeans and the rowdy elements — strange bedfellows though they were — mutually encouraged and reinforced one another. The peasant class from Norway was trying to emancipate itself from the authority of the Old-World elite. They tried to do this, not by elevating themselves to the level of the elite, but by attempting to eliminate altogether an authority that seemed particularly incongruous when transferred to the American scene — with its established principles of freedom and equality as understood by the settlers.
"This is a free country" was a powerful slogan frequently heard, which in the minds of many had become an umbrella to cover and justify all kinds of unrestrained behavior — ranging all the way to vandalism, harassment of others, and disturbance of the peace.

The seriousness of the problem stemming from the naive but widespread notions of freedom in the settlements is indicated by the fact that the editors of *Emigranten*, who thought it one of their concerns to enlighten the Norwegian immigrants about conditions in America, found it necessary off and on to publish lengthy discussions of "the true nature of freedom," attempting to explain the difference between "freedom under law and order" and "license," or unbridled lawlessness. For the pastors, who were trying to introduce church order in the settlements, the situation was greatly aggravated by the fact that even the courts and their juries, themselves composed largely of people with little or no education, regularly sided with the rowdy elements, acquitted obvious offenders, and even imposed fines on the pastor for trying to keep hecklers and disturbers out of his church during services — all in the name of "freedom."

Under these conditions it is not surprising that the good pastors would sometimes, like Johannes Dietrichson, lose their patience and break out in frustrated exclamations about "disse velsignede Frihedsgriller" ("these blooming vagaries about freedom"), although Dietrichson (so far as we know) was the only one to express himself in public on the matter. We have already quoted a couple of sarcastic remarks about the American brand of freedom in Mrs. Munch's private letters; there were many more of the same. Even the usually soft-spoken Olaus Duus declared in a letter to relatives in Norway that he was about to become "too satiated with all this lauded freedom and vulgarity."
It would seem, then, that the conflicts between the pastors of the church of Norway and certain elements of their American congregations were based on a simple ideological dichotomy of freedom versus authority, and this, no doubt, was the view of many contemporaries as well as of most early chroniclers. The reality was not quite that simple.

This is not the place to pass judgment on character. But because the pastors often claimed that they were misunderstood and “misjudged” in their attempts “to introduce a somewhat better congregational order” among their countrymen in America, one is justified in pointing to the fact that these ministers voluntarily chose to leave their home country, sacrificing the material, cultural, and social comforts to which their high station in society had made them accustomed, to serve the pioneer settlements in a new land which, for all they knew, was still a wilderness. This attitude is at least an indication that they were men of strong faith and devotion to the cause of ministering to the religious and cultural needs of their countrymen. They all shared a deep sense of responsibility and duty, which permeated everything they said, wrote, and did relative to their mission. Had their motives been derived from a selfish desire to establish themselves in a high position of authority, they would have been better off staying in Norway.

Besides, their intellectual heritage was not that of totalitarian authority. The era of rationalism and “enlightened despoty” had long since passed in Scandinavia as in the rest of Europe. Nor was it that of the empiricist-utilitarian tradition so prevalent in Britain and America, where the individual human being, basically selfish, stands alone in competition with all others, with or without the protection of a government. Theirs was the heritage of Continental idealism, emphasizing the social nature of man. In this tradition, too, freedom is
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as essential to man as the air he breathes, but it presupposes a social order within which alone the individual has the freedom and security necessary for a free realization of one's "self." The ideal is a society, not where everybody has equal status and responsibility regardless of personal achievement, but a society under law and order freely assumed, where everybody has the opportunity to qualify himself to the limit of his capacity and incentive.57

It was this tradition that the Norwegian pastors in the Middle West brought with them from the old country. "Freedom" to them meant freedom to unfold, to be able to realize one's potentials, both as an individual and as a people. With it went the responsibility of one's achieved identity and status in relation to others. In contrast, they looked with concern upon the egalitarianism of the settlers, which to them meant an indulgence in vulgarity in a self-righteous refusal to recognize quality, achievement, and competence.

From the pastors' point of view, therefore, there was no incongruity between freedom and authority based on proven and recognized competence. It was this kind of legitimate authority in churchly affairs that the pastors were claiming.58 Hence the enormous weight given to the congregational call as a source of ministerial authority. Like their counterparts in Norway, the pastors in the Middle West looked upon themselves as professionals, whose hard-earned competence in churchly affairs had been authorized by Norway's highest institution of learning granting them a divinity degree, had been confirmed by the church through the holy act of ordination after further examination by a bishop, and had been recognized by each congregation by the act of calling a pastor to its service. The voluntary nature of the commitment to the pastor's authority on the part of the congregation and its individual members left freedom unabridged.
NOTES


2 J. St. Munch to Laur. Larsen, January 12, 1858 (translated from the original in Luther College Archives).

3 J. St. Munch to Andreas Munch, November 16, 1857 (translated from the original in the present writer's possession); also in Helene and Peter A. Munch, trs. and eds., The Strange American Way: Letters of Caja Munch from Wiota, Wisconsin, 1855-1859, 119 (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois, 1970).

4 See Alexis de Tocqueville, The Old Regime and the French Revolution, Part 3, Chapter 1: "How towards the middle of the eighteenth century men of letters took the lead in politics and the consequences of this new development," 138ff. (Garden City, New York, 1955).


6 The population of Norway was 907,000 in 1815; by 1855, it had increased to 1,479,000.


10 From a copy of a letter, dated January 1, 1849, found in the book of records kept by the secretary of the Voss Correspondence Society of Chicago, translated by Albert O. Barton, "Norwegian-American Emigration Societies in the Forties and Fifties," in Norwegian-American Studies and Records, 3:31f. (Northfield, 1928); also in Blegen, Land of Their Choice, 203.

11 Nils Hansen Nærum, Muskego, Wisconsin, to J. H. Nærum, Porsgrund, Norway, November 16, 1845, published in Bratsberg Amts Correspondent, March 5, 1846, translated by Blegen, Land of Their Choice, 199.

12 Carl Thorsteinsen, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to his father, July 19, 1853, published in Morgenbladet, November 28, 1853, translated by Blegen, Land of Their Choice, 275ff.


14 A. C. Preus and H. A. Preus were cousins; G. F. Dietrichson was a cousin of J. W. C. Dietrichson's father; his wife was a sister of A. C. Preus and thus, of course, a cousin of H. A. Preus. Brandt married a double cousin of Ottesen. Also Stub and Koren were related.

15 E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold, The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1:171 (Minneapolis, 1960). The pastors of the Norwegian Synod seldom expressed themselves publicly on political issues. On one occasion, however, in answer to an attack in Den Norske Amerikaner, a statement was issued by A. C. Preus, "De norske præsters politiceren" in Emigranten, December 5, 1856. On behalf of himself and the rest of the pastors from Norway he embraced the
principles of the new and liberal Republican party, particularly in opposition to slavery. It was only after they got involved with the Missouri Synod (causing some of the more liberal pastors to return to Norway) that the Norwegian Synod pastors issued their controversial slavery statement of 1861.


17 Jacob A. Ottesen to friends, [September?] 1852, published in Den Norske Tilsiku, November 20, 1852, translated by Blegen, Land of Their Choice, 287.

18 Caja Munch to Henriette and Caroline Munch, February 23, 1857, quoted in The Strange American Way, 110.

19 J. St. Munch to Andreas Munch, November 16, 1857, quoted in The Strange American Way, 110.

20 See E. Clifford Nelson, ed., A Pioneer Churchman: J. W. C. Dietrichson in Wisconsin, 1844-1850, 37, 218 (New York, 1973); on Pastor Munch’s efforts to establish a Norwegian primary school that would not be limited to his own congregation but would draw its students from a wider area, see Peter A. Munch, “Social Class and Acculturation,” in The Strange American Way, 225-227.

21 The expression is that of J. W. C. Dietrichson, Reise blandt de norske emigranter i “De forenede nordamerikanske Fristater” (Stavanger, 1846), here translated from Halvorsen, Festskrift til Den norske Synodes jubilæum, 1853-1903, 24 (Decorah, Iowa, 1903); see also A Pioneer Churchman, 79.

22 Dietrichson, Reise, translated from Halvorsen, Festskrift, 24f.; see also A Pioneer Churchman, 79.

23 This is part of Dietrichson’s famous “Four Points” as given in Reise, here translated from Halvorsen, Festskrift, 24. I have translated Hørighed og Lydighed as “respect and deference,” which is probably the meaning Dietrichson had in mind. The words in Norwegian also carry the harsher connotation of “submission and obedience,” which seems to have been the interpretation preferred by those who were concerned about “papism” and “pastoral overlordship.” Much of the controversy in the Norwegian settlements concerning the role of the pastors was based on different interpretations of words.

24 Reise as quoted by Halvorsen in Festskrift, 25; the Koshkonong Parish Journal, also from Halvorsen, 23, note.

25 Reise as quoted by Halvorsen, 24; A Pioneer Churchman, 153; also in the Spring Prairie Parish Journal (Halvorsen, 36).


27 “Our gospel and our teachings are concerned that, above all, the two regimes, the spiritual and the civil, are well separated and in no way confused”; Martin Luther as quoted by J. St. Munch in Mit forhold til statskirken og dens embede: En bekjendelse, 8f. (Horten, Norway, 1875); also quoted, along with similar statements by Luther, in S. Broch, Norsk kirkeret, 10f. (Kristiania, 1904).

28 See Broch, Norsk kirkeret, 11-16.

29 Broch, 105.

30 A glance at the Koshkonong Parish Journal for February 12, 1847, reveals that they also concerned themselves with financial and legal matters; see A Pioneer Churchman, 174f.
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31 Laws of the Territory of Wisconsin, 85–90 (Madison, 1847).
32 A Pioneer Churchman, 178. In making this statement, Dietrichson was in full accord with the Wisconsin law as well as with Lutheran theology. It was not based on a “faulty interpretation of the law,” as claimed by Nelson (A Pioneer Churchman, 257, n. 55), nor was it a slip into “the Gnostic dichotomy that pitted the realm of material things, the evil, against the realm of spiritual affairs, the good” (Nelson, “Introduction” to A Pioneer Churchman, 33). See Nelson and Fevold, The Lutheran Church, 115f., where the separation of spiritual and civil authority in the congregation is described as “the unfortunate pietistic . . . error of identifying the good with the ‘spiritual’ and the base with the ‘material’”). In his Tischrede, “Von der Obrigkeit,” Luther describes civil authority as “a sign of divine grace” (Dr. Martin Luthers Werke, Part 3, 155 [Hamburg, 1827]). Although demanding that the spiritual and civil regimes be kept strictly apart, he certainly did not think that civil authority was of the Devil. Nor is such an idea implied in the separation of church and state or in Dietrichson’s distinction between the civil authority of the trustees and the spiritual authority of the congregation council.

33 From the Spring Prairie Parish Journal, quoted by Halvorsen, Festskrift, 37f.
35 “Forhandlings-protocol for Wiota Norsk-lutherske menighed, 1856.”
36 Nordlyset, September 9, 1847; A Pioneer Churchman, 180.
37 Dietrichson, Reise; A Pioneer Churchman, 237, note 2, with reference to Johan Reiersen, in Norge og Amerika, November, 1846.
39 From the “Old Constitution,” translated from J. A. Bergh, Den norsk lutherske kirkes historie i Amerika, 28 (Minneapolis, 1914); see also Nelson and Fevold, The Lutheran Church, 1:338.
40 Ministerialbog for the Norwegian Lutheran congregation in Dodgeville, March 17, 1857.
41 Caja Munch to her parents, May 31–June 1, 1857, quoted in The Strange American Way, 97.
42 A Chronicle of Old Muskego, 134, 151, 162, 163; A Pioneer Churchman, 143f.
45 Dietrichson in the Koshkonong Parish Journal; see A Pioneer Churchman, 179.
46 Caja Munch to her mother, January 18–20, 1858, quoted in The Strange American Way, 133.
47 Caja Munch to Henriette and Caroline Munch, February 23, 1857, quoted in The Strange American Way, 76.
From an unpublished autobiography, Vita Mea, which Pastor Munch wrote for his children in 1903–1905; see The Strange American Way, 184.

"Optøier under gudstjenesten," in Emigranten, March 28, 1856.


Hjalmar R. Holand, Coon Prairie, 71 (Minneapolis, 1927).


The remark is found in the postscript to Reise blandt de norske emigranter, as Dietrichson comments upon Clausen’s report from Muskego, "where one of the officers of the church refused to follow the discipline laid down in the Ritual and wanted to ... nullify all power to ban the openly ungodly from the congregation," which brought about Clausen’s resignation. Dietrichson remarked: "It is deplorable that these blessed notions about freedom, even in churchly affairs, shall be applied in such a manner that the church is not even to have the right held ... by any private club, to exclude open offenders"; A Pioneer Churchman, 143f.

O. F. Duus to "Dear ones at home," February 3, 1856, quoted in Frontier Parsonage, 17.

A classical example would be Knud Langeland, Nordmændene i Amerika (Chicago, 1888).

Munch, Vita Mea, quoted in The Strange American Way, 184.

Christian Bay, a Norwegian representing a later generation of the same cultural tradition, presents the following definition of freedom, which I believe comes very close to the ideal concept of the intellectual elite of nineteenth-century Norway: "A person is free to the extent that he has the capacity, the opportunity, and the incentive to give expression to what is in him and to develop his potentialities." The Structure of Freedom, 15ff. (New York, 1965).

The term "legitimate authority" was coined by the German sociologist Max Weber to designate the kind of authority that is based on the consent of subjects who recognize the qualifying attributes of the leader, as distinct from "non-legitimate domination," which is not based on the consent of the ruled but has its source in political, military, or (particularly) economic power. Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology, translated and edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, 941–955 (New York, 1968).