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CONFLICT AND COMMUNITY:
A CASE STUDY OF THE IMMIGRANT CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES*

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ABSTRACT

Conflict within the immigrant church was oftentimes a central feature in the development of ethnic communities and their conceptions of peoplehood and religious identification. This case study examines a schism that tore apart various Norwegian-American settlements in the late nineteenth century. Known as the "Election Controversy," churches within the Norwegian Synod were forced to determine the extent to which election was based solely on God's grace. Households in the Crow River settlement in central Minnesota could not agree on a single position and the schism eventually resulted in the division of the church. The lines of conflict were drawn according to sub-communities based on regional background and a chain migration to the settlement that juxtaposed people of different cultural backgrounds in a single community. While those from many sub-communities remained within the church, the new church consisted of those from the Gausdal sub-community, a group that carried a very distinct cultural pattern from Norway. Yet the conflict was exacerbated by the incongruous symbols of the developing church. Ironically, the church in a more democratic environment had shifted theologically toward a less egalitarian stance in regard to salvation, an important shift especially to those who were culturally distinct and felt deprived of power in the congregation. The conjunction of a community structure rife with socioeconomic cleavages and a theology with inherent ambiguities and contradictions, then, created a synergy that resulted

in tumultuous conflict in Crow River. In spite of the schism, however, the election controversy was an example of conflict, but not cultural disintegration. On the Synod level, the new church bodies formed out of the conflict played a large role in unifying the Norwegian-American church. And locally the schism did result in smaller congregations, but the new churches were more culturally cohesive than in the past.

"Go . . . out in the congregations, and look on the schism where the scornful laugh of Satan mixes with the death cries of the people as the billows of party strife dash the people against the rock of salvation only to have them fall again into the sea of their own agitation. . . . Go into the community, and see the glances of Cain exchanged; see the people pass each other on their way to church, and hear the church bells ring strife into the air. . . .

Norwegian-American clergyman, 1887

Religious identification has often been considered a central feature of the ethnic communities in the United States.¹ The environment in America, according to some historians, was "so new and so dangerous," that immigrants were induced immigrants to feel "more need than ever for the support of their faith." Such sentiments have led others to stress the religiosity of immigrants who saw their faith reinforced in the New World. For religion, writes another, was the "very bone and sinew" of immigrants' ethnicity which "performed many useful functions."²

In short, historians of ethnic communities in the United States have tended to emphasize the various functions of the immigrant church. Influenced by functionalist thought, the church has been viewed as an essential institution that performed various roles, all of which ameliorated dissent, provided frames of reference, and aided in acculturation.³ In many cases, such analysis is correct: the ethnic church did facilitate adaptation to life in the United States. Yet by emphasizing stasis, scholars are neglecting an obvious and extremely important facet of immigrant life in the United States: the dynamic nature of religious development and ethnic group formation.

Perhaps, more significantly, the stress placed on "function" conceals the role played by conflict and schism in influencing and fashioning religious, theological, and community development in the United States.⁴

The American society into which European immigrants were arriving in the nineteenth century was one of striking flux which was reflected both in religious organization and ethnic allegiance. Cut away from the state churches of Europe, immigrants were forced to forge new religious organizations in a society which had consciously separated church and state. The result was the American denomination, a voluntary organization based on common beliefs attempting to achieve common objectives.⁵ Likewise, the immigrants' perceptions of peoplehood also underwent a continual process of change. Carrying local or regional allegiances to the United States, the immigrant's sense of peoplehood had to be forged in relation to localistic ties carried from the old country, as well as national allegiances to their former country and to the United States, both of which were often developed and certainly elaborated upon in America.⁶ Importantly, immigrant religion and ethnic identification not only underwent a continual process of change, but they were often intimately tied to one another. Changes in the social structure or in the sense of peoplehood, for example, were reflected in modifications in religious and theological identifications. On occasion, ambiguities between the two were so difficult to reconcile that ethnic conflict or religious schism resulted.⁷

Schism and conflict were periods of extremely rapid change and redefinition of community organization, theological values, and the meaning that underlay them. Some observers have argued that this conflict occurring in societies experiencing widespread change illustrates the occasional disintegrative character of religion in the society.⁸ Geertz, on the other hand, has constructed a counter-model which attempts to integrate change. When scholars deny the independent roles of culture and social structure, they see the discontinuities between them as instances of cultural and social disintegration. Geertz argues instead that discontinuities in a dynamic society are the result of a disharmony in the relationship between culture and social structure which ultimately creates social conflict — not social or cultural disintegration.⁹ While schism and conflict in immigrant communities created bitterness, it worked to redefine cultural and theological meaning in the new American environment. By overestimating the simple functions performed by the immigrant church, by underplaying the dynamic nature of the society of which the immigrants were a part, in short by painting a romantic picture of the immigrant church, historians have failed to adequately address the relationships between the church, ethnicity, and conflict, and thereby have neglected an important source of social and cultural change.

This case study examines a religious schism that occurred in a rural Minnesota Norwegian-American community in the late nineteenth century. After years of relative peace in the settlement, the community composed of regional subgroups that had settled together and

formed a Lutheran church experienced conflict resulting from a tension that became more pronounced as colonization continued and land resources became less abundant. Yet it was ultimately touched off by a theological schism that dramatically portrayed the secular and spiritual inequalities in a milieu that had been so often celebrated for its egalitarian features. In this instance, the church and its symbols did not reduce dissension and facilitate integration into the community, but actually intensified inter-ethnic group strife. The tension between the developing social structure and the cultural symbols of the church created a synergy that resulted in restructured community relationships and better articulated theological constructs. The morphology of the community, which will be examined first, was a source of potential conflict, but importantly so was the church, and it was the result of these elements working together that created a situation where the "church bells [rang] strife into the air."

Community Morphology

Rural immigrant settlements in the United States obviously did not spring forth full-blown, but had to be created over time. Colonists had to enter a region; land had to be obtained, and farms had to be built. As settlement continued, some ethnic settlements expanded, some contracted, and inter-nationality group contact increased as land became increasingly scarce. The order in which a household entered the settlement colored its opportunity for land and social interaction. While the earliest households had ample land from

which to choose, their opportunities for primary group ties usually were more limited than those which followed.

Such was the case of the Crow River settlement in central Minnesota. Located primarily in Colfax and Burbank townships of northern Kandiyohi county, its first colonists arrived in 1859 after living for eight years in Norwegian settlements in Wisconsin. As initial settlers in the first wave of colonization, two brothers scouted out the region in the fall of 1858 and returned with their families the following spring. While they plowed their newly claimed land and began the arduous process of farm-building, additional immigrants soon arrived, and by the fall of 1860, thirteen households lived in the embryonic settlement.¹⁰ The settlement's growth was a classic case of chain migration; nine of the fifteen household heads formerly had lived in the Scandinavia settlement in Waupaca County, Wisconsin while three others wed women who were among its former residents. Moreover, the marriage bonds that facilitated the migration united households from regions throughout Norway, a pattern that would be reversed in later years.¹¹

The households in the initial wave of settlement to Crow River were at a distinct advantage when compared with those that followed. Not only could they choose from the large expanses of open land, but they paid a lower price for it than would later migrants. Enjoying greater possibilities for material success, the pioneers formed a distinct group as the settlement grew. As late as 1890, although many of the pioneers had retired from active farming, all but one of the

ten active households were among the upper half of the society in landed wealth and four of the six wealthiest included the early households.¹² Likewise, children of the pioneers often wed one another; and when they did not, they rarely married someone from their own region in Norway. Indeed, only one of the group's ten marriages through the 1880s wed a couple of the same regional background (see Table 2). Unlike later immigrants, then, the early arrivals based their sense of peoplehood not so much on former ties in Norway as on experiences shared in the United States such as similar residences in Wisconsin and common migration to Minnesota. And the basis for this peoplehood did not lose its saliency as the settlement progressed, but continued as marriages continued to cement endogamous bonds of kinship.

The early migrants, however, were the germs of what would become distinct sub-communities based on region of origin in Norway. In spite of unique patterns of wealth and intermarriage, the first settlers usually claimed land that ultimately would be part of a spatially defined sub-community. The earliest immigrant household, for example, originated from the parish of Drangedal, a mountainous area in the region of Telemark in Southern Norway. Those who followed in 1859 or 1860 had been born in Bygland, Setesdal near Drangedal, in the central community of Gausdal, Gulbrandsdal, or in the western coastal district of Moster and Stord, Sunnhordland. The sub-communities took form as settlement accelerated. A violent Dakota Indian rebellion which occurred in 1862 halted new in-migration and

frightened away those already present. But as old residents began to return in the mid-1860s, so did new households. Thirty-seven households arrived in 1867 and 1868, for example, 24.3% of all households which would settle in the Crow River community. Likewise, over half (53%) of the households that moved to the settlement arrived between 1865 and 1871.¹³

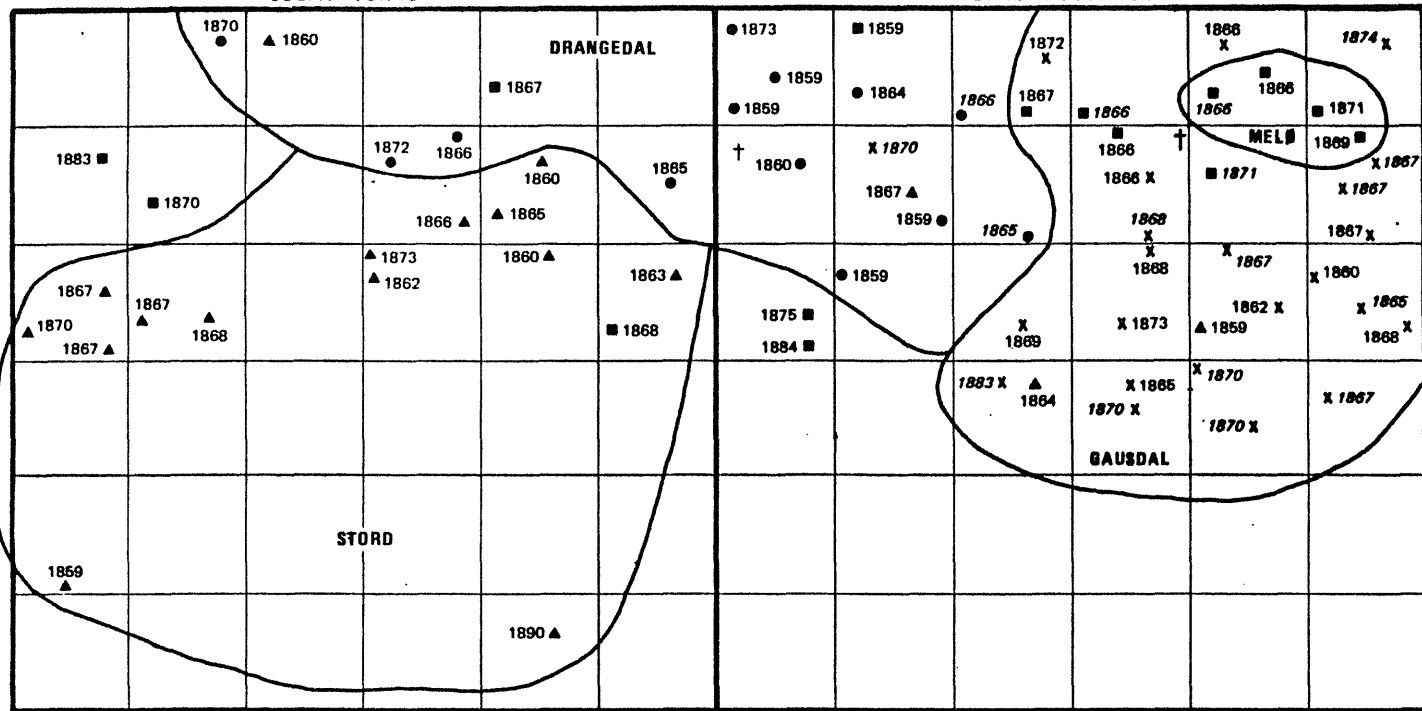
The settlers of the mid-1860s came overwhelmingly from regions already represented by households in the pioneer wave. Migrants originating in Drangedal, Telemark were the earliest group, arriving on the average about 2-1/2 years before the members of the next community, those from Bygland, Setesdal (see Table 1).¹⁴ Likewise, households from Stord and Gausdal followed early settlers and soon they were joined by people from Melø, Helgeland and Naustdal, Sunnfjord as well as others from Sweden, Denmark, and other Norwegian regions. Members of the earliest sub-communities had often lived in other settlements to east -- those from Drangedal for an average of 6.4 years -- while the later arrivals tended to move directly from Norway.

Although Norwegian households of various regional backgrounds were mainly arriving in the 1860s and early 1870s, available open land permitted regional groups to form spatially distinct subcommunities in the Crow River settlement (see Fig. 1).¹⁵ Settlers from Drangedal, reflecting their early arrival, concentrated in northwestern Burbank township and tended to drift towards the west into Colfax township as colonization continued. Those originating in Gausdal congregated around the first such settler in western Burbank township. Immigrants

TABLE 1

Sub-community	Arrival Dates				Difference	
	United States		Crow River		Years	N
	Mean		Mean			
1. Drangedal, Telemark	1858.2	9.1	1864.6	4.4	6.4	16
2. Bygland, Setesdal	1862.0	8.1	1867.2	6.2	4.2	9
3. Stord, Sunnhordland	1864.6	10.1	1867.0	8.3	2.4	25
4. Gausdal, Gudbrands.	1871.8	8.8	1872.7	7.7	.9	44
5. Other	1871.8	9.4	1873.8	8.7	2.0	23
6. Naustdal, Sunnfjord	1872.3	8.0	1873.5	5.7	1.2	14
7. Melø, Helgeland	1877.9	9.3	1877.9	8.8	.0	9

BURBANK TOWNSHIP



† GAUSDAL CHURCH

**ITALIC NUMERALS INDICATES
MEMBERSHIP IN GAUSDAL CHURCH**

X GAUSDAL

▲ STORD

● DRANGEDAL

■ OTHER (BYGLAND, MELØ, NAUSTDAL)



SCALE IN MILES

from the western coastal area of Stord and Moster dominated central Colfax township, people from the latter area primarily concentrated in the western portion of the township. The smaller and often later sub-communities of Bygland, Melø, and Naustdal tended to congregate in regions to the north of the two townships not mapped here, although some outliers lived in Colfax and Burbank.

In addition to sociospatial differentiation, developing ties of kinship reflected in marriage patterns indicated increasingly cohesive sub-communities. Rather than marrying outside of the regional subgroup, as earlier immigrants had done, youth increasingly tended to wed others of similar backgrounds. Immigrants and their children from the Stord sub-community, for example, celebrated marriages 55 times between 1862 and the turn of the century. Forty-six of those participants, or twenty-three couples, wed partners of Stord background while only nine married people outside the sub-community. While this is the most striking example, each sub-community, with the notable exception of the early settlers, exhibited patterns of intermarriage well above .01 level of significance with one degree of freedom (see Table 2).¹⁶ Clearly, not only were members of the sub-communities settling together, but they were marrying one another as well.

The chain migration that was essential in creating the sub-communities and the patterns of intermarriage and spatial differentiation that sustained their cohesiveness imply the advantages that community membership provided. Moving to a strange area, immigrants undoubtedly benefitted from close ties of kith and kin.

TABLE 2

Patterns of Inter-marriage
Within Crow River's Regional Sub-Communities

Sub-community	Marriages		χ^2	Level of Significance*
	Endogamous/Exogamous			
Early settlers	1	9	0.3	>.70
Gausdal	16	18	31.1	>.01
Stord	23	9	67.7	>.01
Naustdal	11	7	49.0	>.01
Smaller sub-communities**	8	6	53.4	>.01

*one degree of freedom

**Meløy, Bygland, Drangedal

Social adjustments were eased and the formation of farms was facilitated by exchange of labor and trade of land, implements, and crops.¹⁷ Moreover, political advantages that were to be had within local government or in the church increased as the sub-communities grew.

While sub-communities in the Crow River settlement were formed in America, they carried very real cultural differences from Norway. For although Norway was a political unit with a state Lutheran church, its peasantry practiced diverse customs of courtship, marriage, fertility, use of alcohol and religiosity. One example might suffice. Eilert Sundt, in his monumental work on Norway's peasantry in the mid-nineteenth century, noted the striking variations in "bundling," a pattern of courtship which often involved premarital sex as a couple became more intimate. Not surprisingly, it also resulted in an increased incidence of prenuptial conceptions and births.¹⁸ While "bundling" was anathema in some areas particularly along Norway's west and south coast and Sundt pronounced their subsequent "morality" good, Norway's central mountain communities regularly practiced the custom. Courtship differences were not an isolated instance of varying cultural patterns. Coastal regions with low rates of prenuptial births remained areas affected heavily by pietist movements and temperance movements; they tended to contribute to Christian missions and as late as 1953 they were the stronghold of Christian political parties. Depicted as the "dark coastal strip," the area remains typified by its conservative moral behavior.¹⁹

The sub-communities of Crow River originated from areas with strikingly different cultural patterns. Those households emigrating from Gausdal, for example, had lived in a mountainous region with widespread "bundling" and high rates of prenuptial births (see Figure 2). Likewise, those from Melø in extreme north Norway had been exposed to practices resulting in a rate of illegitimacy just below that of Gudbrandsdal (see Table 3). Immigrants from Bygland, Drangedal, Naustdal and Stord, on the other hand, emigrated from the dark coastal strip which reflected its puritanical mores in low rates of prenuptial births. Fragmentary evidence indicates that such patterns were replicated in Crow River through the 1880s. Although pre-nuptial births were rare, the incidence of prenuptial conceptions in a small sample reiterates patterns observed in Norway. Youth from Gausdal practiced a courtship similar to that of their parents in Norway and at odds with other sub-communities in the settlement and their cultural background (see Table 3).

Other Norwegian settlements throughout the Upper Middle West composed of regionally based sub-communities encountered conflict based on dissimilar patterns of behavior carried from Norway. One settlement in Wisconsin was divided between people from the region of Hardanger and other areas to the south known in the settlement for their piety. After a house had been built by a "Southerner," four Hardanger-born brothers who were skilled fiddlers asked permission to hold a housewarming dance. "But the Southerner didn't like this," one man remembered; "He looked at [the fiddlers] awhile and then he

FIGURE 2
NORWEGIAN ORIGINS OF CROW RIVER SUB-COMMUNITIES

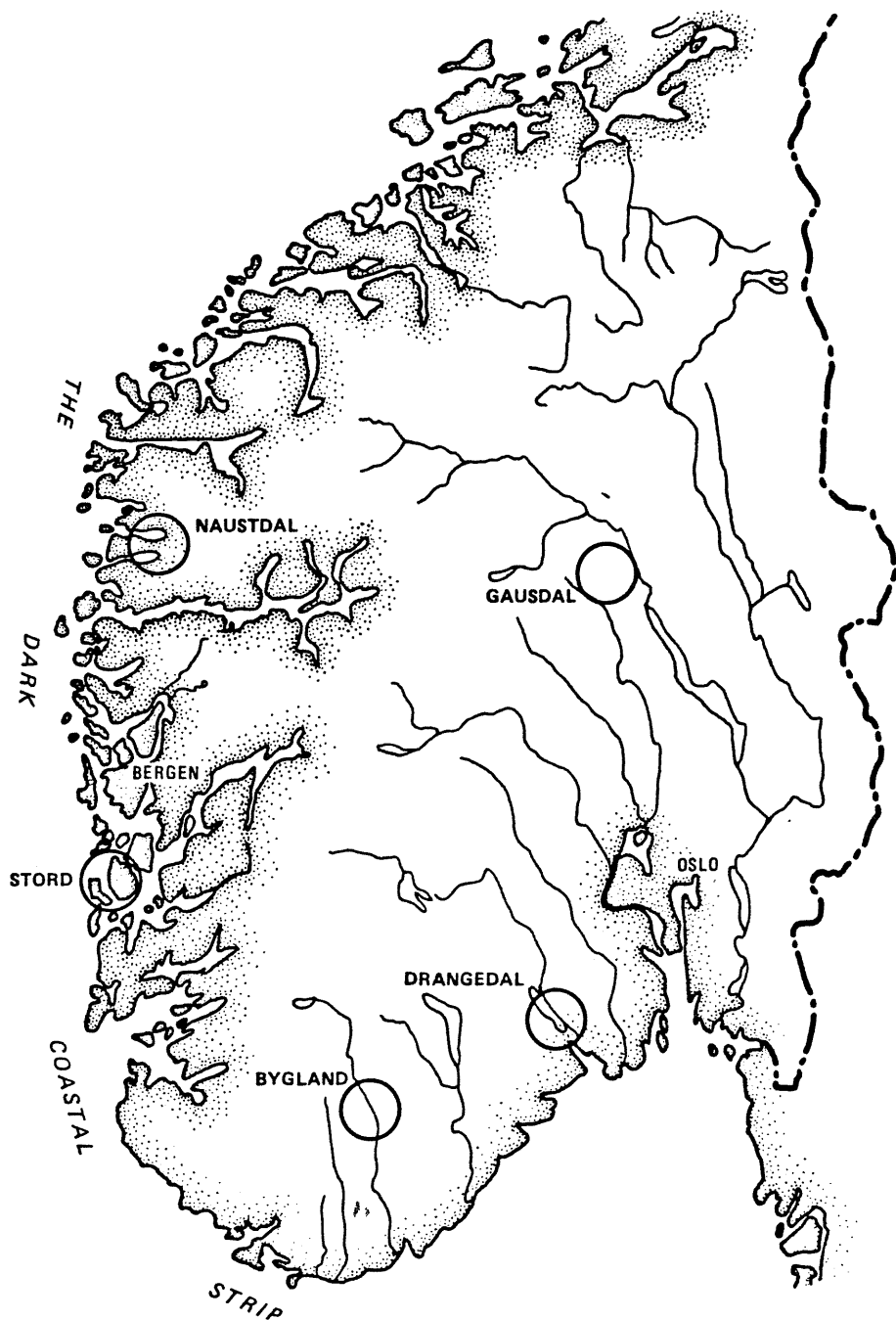


TABLE 3

	in Norway 1855*		in Crow River 1859-1889	
	Rank among 63 districts	Illegitimate births per 100 marriages	prenuptial conceptions** per 100 births	N
Bygland, Robygdelaget	5	13.7	.0	6
Drangedal, Nedre Telemark	13	20.9	—	0
Naustdal, Sunnfjord	14	21.8	14.3	7
Stord, Sunnhordland	20	25.5	11.1	9
Melø, Sundre Helgeland	56	67.8	—	0
Gausdal, Gudbrandsdal	61	70.4	66.7	11
Other			.0	2
Mixed Marriages			27.8	18
TOTAL		----	24.5	53

*Source: Sundt, pp. 427-8 (according to district)

**Child born 7 months or less after date of marriage.

answered, "No," he said, "we're not like the Hardanger people with dancing every evening!" And morality often was translated into religiosity. Religious dissension existed between the more easy-going Hardanger people and the immigrants from the region of Sogn in another Wisconsin settlement. The Sognings viewed the Hardanger community as undevout--they drank and swore and then went to church, one said--while Hardanger people regarded their counterparts as hypocrites for no matter who they were, "the minister declared them blessed!"²⁰

The changing community morphology thus created the framework for cleavages not in the earliest stages of settlement but as the colony developed. Initially peopled by those who had lived in Norwegian settlements to the east where they had developed cross-regional ties, the Crow River settlement soon segmented into regional sub-communities as immigration increased and as land was taken. In settling around a Lutheran church in a Norwegian community, members of a sub-community could live near one another in the new land, while their spiritual needs were fulfilled. But households were also settling among those with dissimilar backgrounds and cultural patterns. Such a setting could result in conflict, often within the confines of the major rural Norwegian-American institution--the Lutheran Church.

The Church Controversy

"After the pioneers built their log cabins and sod houses," according to the Crow River church historian in 1961, "their first

thought was religion."²¹ Perhaps an overstatement, the Crow River settlers nevertheless did rapidly organize a church. After first religious services were held in June of 1860, a church that would ultimately become the Crow River Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized on All Saints' Day, 1861 under the leadership of B. J. Muus, a pioneer pastor who held services among unchurched Norwegians on the frontier. The church was Lutheran, its ministry had been trained in Norway, and its liturgy was transplanted in the Norwegian, but its structure developed into something radically from the church in Norway. Instead of a state church with involuntary membership, Crow River church, like other Norwegian Lutheran churches in the United States, depended on voluntary membership. Instead of an upper-class pastor who often disdained the peasant congregations he was sent to serve, the Crow River clergyman depended on his congregation for his very job. And instead of a rather narrow range of discussion of church issues, Norwegian-American church congregations, Crow River among them, actively pursued answers to questions inside and out of doctrinal issues.

The Crow River church joined the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, known more simply as the Norwegian Synod, of which Muus was also a member. Characterized as the "high church" alternative of Norwegian Lutheranism in the United States, the Synod tied itself closely to the conservative German-American Missouri Synod from its inception.²² Norwegian Synod pastors were trained at Concordia Seminary, a German-American Lutheran institution, well into the 1860s.

Likewise, they also took conservative political stands that were consistant with those of their Missouri Synod counterparts, but at odds with their parishioners. In 1861, for example, the Norwegian Synod laity discovered that its clergy offered theological justifications for slavery. Amidst the Civil War, parishioners allied with a minority of the clergy to oppose the Norwegian Synod's official neutrality on the slavery issue. The majority of clergymen remained firm on the question, however, in spite of the loss of a few congregations over the stand. Minor conflicts continued to plague the Synod, but it was the schism in the 1880s arising from the question of election that eventually tore apart the Norwegian Synod. The orthodox view, still in association with the Missouri Synod, argued that election or predestination was based solely on God's grace. Another conception, based on the theology of the Lutheran church in Norway, gave men and women a greater role in their salvation, a role that the Missouri Synod and its Norwegian Synod allies argued made faith the cause of election which ultimately repudiated the sovereign activity of divine grace in salvation. In short, the powers that were within the Norwegian Synod, by accepting the former view, seemed to be advocating doctrine that affirmed Calvinistic determinism. The opposition group that developed, which became known as the Anti-Missourians, was appalled at this Calvinism and placed greater regenerative emphasis in the individual himself.

As the conflict spread, the religious press became filled with tendentious debate and soon a schism appeared inevitable. In 1884,

the Anti-Missourian encouraged Anti-Missourian congregations to bypass the synodical treasury. Instead the churches were to make contributions to an Anti-Missourian auxiliary treasury which would in effect give financial support to the continuance of the schism. Three years later, the group now known as Anti-Missourian "Brotherhood," established its own seminary in Northfield, Minnesota. The Brotherhood then left the Norwegian Synod after they had been accused by the Synod of being schismatics. Given the alternative by the Synod to withdraw or compromise their convictions, they chose the former course.

The controversy began among the clergy, but it quickly spread to the laity. Church members vehemently discussed the theological questions, according to one participant, "on the streets and in the alleys, in stores and in saloons, and through a continuous flow of agitating articles [in newspapers and periodicals]." Sometimes words led to fights. "They argued predestination in the saloons, with their tongues," said one, "and settled in the alley with their fists."²³ While fisticuffs might have been rare, certain Norwegian congregations suffered wrenching internal strife. "The ties of old friendships broke," remembered a man. "Neighbor did not speak to neighbor. The daughter who was married to a member of the other party became a stranger in her father's house. Man and wife turned into dog and cat. Brothers and sisters were sundered from one another. On the other hand, old enemies became friends and were reconciled only when they found themselves on the same side of the insurmountable fence which

had been raised between the [Anti-Missouri] and [Norwegian] Synods."²⁴ The dissension within congregations were not isolated instances. One third of the pastors and congregations withdrew from the Synod as a result of the conflict. In Minnesota alone, 69 congregations left the Synod. More tumultuous conflict occurred in 23 additional Minnesota congregations which ultimately split apart, one faction remaining in the Norwegian Synod while the other joined the new Anti-Missourian Brotherhood.²⁵

The Crow River congregation was among those 23 churches in Minnesota that split over the Election Controversy. The church survived the conflict through the 1880s, but a division arose in 1890 and a majority of the 114 voting members decided in favor of retaining Norwegian Synod allegiance. In response, a group among the minority declared they would withdraw and form their own church. Since the seceding households demanded a division of church property, a meeting was held at which an agreement was reached that would permit division if those leaving the church equalled one-fourth of the membership. On November 12, the declaration of secession was delivered and signed by 33 voting members. While the seceders believed they comprised the necessary one-quarter of the membership, the leaders of the Crow River church determined that only 25 were members in good standing. This lesser number, which did not constitute one-fourth of church membership, permitted the Crow River membership to argue that the seceders were not entitled to the division of church property. Not surprisingly, the seceders were not satisfied with the decision.

Meetings continued to be held and the majority of Crow River voting members remained adamant about their doctrinal stand. The question finally went to an outside board of arbitration which finally hammered out an agreement between the contending parties in late 1893, over two years after a new church had been formed based on Anti-Missourian doctrine on February 14, 1891.²⁶

While the litigation dragged on, the members of the new church, like the Crow River church members before it, quickly set about to build their place of worship. The new church building, smaller in size than the Crow River church, was situated within the Gausdal sub-community. Moreover, its name, the Gausdal Norwegian Lutheran Church, indicated the regional background of the majority of its members. Of the 33 households that formed the new church, 29 had originated in Gausdal (see Figure 2).²⁷ Households in the Gausdal sub-community, clustered in an enclave and practicing customs at odds with the other regional communities, were likely candidates for dissatisfaction within the Crow River church. Statistical tests confirm that background in Norway, rather than time of arrival or wealth, was the overriding reason for membership in the new church.²⁸ Thus, while the theological discord was based on intellectual disputes, the lines of conflict were closely linked to social relationships within and between the sub-communities in the settlement.

Importantly, however, fourteen Gausdal households chose not to withdraw from the Crow River church although they continued to live in

the Gausdal sub-community. While place of birth was of overriding importance in inducing secession, the backgrounds of those from seceding sub-groups who did not secede clearly indicate that they were more acculturated and had closer ties with the sub-communities that also remained. Earlier arrivals, such as the pioneer Gausdal household that entered the region in 1860, tended not to secede from the Crow River church. The average Gausdal household that remained in the church arrived in the settlement nearly three years earlier than the average that left. Likewise, while the Gausdal sub-community was similar to other regional sub-communities in per household wealth, a stark division existed between those who remained in Crow River Church and those who joined the new Gausdal Church (see Table 4). Clearly, the less wealthy tended to leave the church.²⁹ Finally, ties of kinship differed due to a greater incidence of exogamous marriages among those who remained in the church. Marriage patterns among Gausdal church members had resulted in 13 couples marrying members within the sub-community compared to only four outside the regional group between earliest settlement and 1889. Conversely, only three children within those Gausdal households that remained in the Crow River church had wed others from Gausdal compared to 14 who married outside the fold.³⁰ The process of community formation thus continued. On the one hand, a large segment of the Gausdal sub-community removed itself even further from interaction among Norwegians in the settlement by forming its own church. Meanwhile the other portion of the sub-community moved closer to Norwegian

TABLE 4

Quartiles

	<u>Poor</u>				<u>Wealthy</u>			
	<u>First</u>		<u>Second</u>		<u>Third</u>		<u>Fourth</u>	
Gausdal	11	34.4	5	15.6	9	28.1	7	21.9
Crow River	1	10.0	2	20.0	2	20.0	5	50.0
Gausdal	10	45.4	3	13.6	7	21.9	2	9.1

households whose origins were culturally distinct by remaining within the church. The result was continued societal change and periodic cultural conflict wherein larger theological questions and moral precepts were intricately tied to local patterns of interaction.

Conclusion

The Election Controversy within the Norwegian Synod is a dramatic instance of a rural immigrant community that faced religious controversy. Clearly, the church in Crow River was not serving to integrate the immigrant households into the Norwegian-American community, but instead ultimately contributed to cultural conflict. That conflict was closely linked to the changing social configuration of the community. Only when migration to the area swelled could sub-communities, fashioned around regional backgrounds, develop.³¹ Originally based on a chain migration, these developing regional communities tended to become more intricate as endogamous patterns of marriage further tied together the increasingly large and spatially distinct regional subgroups. Unlike linear models of acculturation, the sub-communities developed and separated after an enlarged chain migration permitted segmentation into individual regional communities while at the same time reduced land resources constrained them.

Structural change within the community enabled socially distinct sub-communities to form, but the church was the medium through which the conflict was expressed. The church was the central community

institution and its theology was a major intellectual construct. Dislikes and disagreements were expressed in this symbolic language which oftentimes contained deeper significance within the social structure. For the church was the centerpiece of cultural symbols of life in America as well as carryovers from Norway. Time and time again, Norwegian immigrants celebrated the greater freedom in the United States. "Freedom is here an element which is drawn in, as it were, with mother milk," wrote an early Norwegian immigrant, "and seems as essential to every citizen of the United States as the air he breathes."³² Likewise, democracy was another catchword and, as with freedom, the church was forced to respond. The Norwegian Lutheran church in America differed according to an 1879 Norwegian-American novel since it was "an institution which stood in need of patronage and support" and the congregation paid the pastor's salary and therefore had the privilege of censure.³³ The church thus acted as an American body -- formed on American principles of voluntary membership and democratic representation -- even though its rituals had been used in Norway and were conducted in the Norwegian language. Such a circumstance was not without its incongruities. During an intense debate, a Missourian pastor threw up his arms when a vote as called on the election question. "How could a majority determine what was God's law?" he argued. The vote as held, however, since church members contended that the ministry did not necessarily have the sole power to interpret the law either and perhaps a democratic solution would come as close to the truth as possible. One member was so bold as to

suggest that the pastor, who was not only a Missourian but who opposed the vote, was a "false teacher."³⁴

The incongruous symbols of the developing church often stood in stark contrast to one another. Ironically, the church in a more democratic environment had been shifted theologically toward a less egalitarian stance in regard to salvation. Structural differences in the community made this paradox especially objectionable to the minority sub-communities. For through a new form of tyranny, a majority of culturally distinct people now determined church policy, a cruel twist of fate in the supposedly freer environment of the United States. In a sense, the powers in the congregation were worse than the upper class pastors in Norway who had held their parishioners in contempt for the majority advocated an interpretation of election which was not only contradicted by age-old Norwegian Lutheran doctrine, but was antidemocratic to believers in the most profound sense: it denied that all who believed had the possibility of eternal salvation.

The conjunction of a community structure rife with socioeconomic cleavages and a theology with inherent ambiguities and contradictions, then, created a synergy that resulted in tumultuous conflict in Crow River. Most Norwegian Synod congregations escaped so dramatic a schism since settlement patterns had not resulted in the juxtaposition of sub-communities so culturally distinct as those of Gausdal and the "dark coastal strip." Likewise, earlier debates over synodical stands such as the neutral position on slavery prior and during the Civil War had led to debate and conflict within

congregations, but nothing of the scale that occurred in the late 1880s and 1890s. It was rather the combination of a changing social structure in the United States and a new meaning of religious doctrine that provided a flash point ignited by the election controversy. As a minority, members of the Gausdal sub-community in Crow River were not only denied access to power in their own congregation but forced to accept an interpretation of election both un-Norwegian and an example of what seceders called "unChristian exclusivism." In the end, members of the Gausdal sub-community decided to secede, to form a church where the theological cleavages would be shifted to their favor.

In spite of the vituperative debate and schism, the election controversy in Crow River was an example of conflict rather than disintegration. Certainly the Norwegian Synod declined in power, but it was replaced by new church bodies that reflected increased antinomianism and greater lay control ultimately leading to greater lay involvement. Ironically the Anti-Missourian group played a significant role in the movement to unite all Norwegian Lutherans in a single church body. Likewise, although schisms did result in smaller congregations, the new churches were more culturally cohesive than in the past. Yet the conflict did engender curious and seemingly paradoxical stands. In the Crow River community, for example, the sub-community that withdrew and joined a more revivalistic, antinomian, pietistic church body did not reflect such beliefs in its attitudes towards courtship and use of alcohol. On the other hand, the sub-communities from the "dark coastal strip" did not maintain a pietistic

stance on the question of predestination. One might argue that the paradox was simply that, a paradox that is impossible to decipher in this particularistic situation. Yet the incongruities between the social structure and the cultural symbols provide keys to some attempt at explanation. For the Gausdal seceders the inadequate representation in the church coupled with the theological significance of predestination in relation to equality were probably of such overriding importance that behavioral inconsistencies were overlooked. Likewise, the pietistic church leaders of the Crow River church were now tied into pastoral coalitions that also created inconsistencies, but choices had to be made and the dialectic between culture and social structure ultimately led to change.³⁵

Notions of sectarianism, voluntarism and revivalism were pervasive in the Norwegian Lutheran church in the United States especially when compared with the State Church of Norway. Certainly questions of theology did influence the Norwegian peasantry especially in the periods of lay revivals, but they were nowhere near as convulsive as those which occurred among Norwegian immigrants in America. The denominationalism of the Norwegian-American Lutherans resulted in a church more responsive to the needs of its parishioners, but for the very same reason also more prone to schism and conflict. That the church bells could "ring strife into the air" was intricately tied to the complex transplantation and adaptation of an institution that not only defined orthodoxy but ethnicity. And that strife was made all the more likely by the fluid dynamic, expanding nature of the

society of which nineteenth-century Norwegian Americans in Minnesota were a part.

Footnotes

to

"Conflict and Community:

A Case Study of The Immigrant Church in the United States"

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- 1. See, for example, Martin Marty, "Ethnicity: The Skeleton of Religion in America," Church History 41 (1972):5-21; and Timothy L. Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America," American Historical Review 83 (1978):1155-85.

- 2. Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (Boston, 1951):127; Andrew M. Greeley, The Catholic Experience (Garden City, NY, 1969):196; Randall M. Miller, "Introduction," in Randall M. Miller and Thomas D. Marzik, eds., Immigrants and Religion in Urban America (Philadelphia, 1977):xv.

- 3. See Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life trans. by Joseph Ward Swain (Glencoe, Ill., 1954); Bronislaw Malinowski, Magic, Science, and Religion (Garden City, N. Y.,

1954); Kingsley Davis, Human Society (New York, 1958); and Robert K. Merton, "Manifest and Latent Functions," in Social Theory and Social Structure (Glencoe, Ill, 1957).

4. Of course, religious conflict has not been totally ignored.

Noteworthy studies that examine intra-nationality theological strife include Victor R. Greene, "For God and Country: The Origins of Slavic Catholic Self-Consciousness in America," Church History 35 (1966):446-460; Timothy L. Smith, "Religious Denominations as Ethnic Communities: A Regional Case Study," Church History 35 (1966):207-226; Jay P. Dolan, The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics 1815-1865 (Baltimore, 1975); Peter A. Munch, "Authority and Freedom: Controversy in Norwegian-American Congregations," Norwegian-American Studies 28 (1979):3-34. See also Abner Cohen, Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hansa Migrants in Yoruba Towns (Berkeley, 1969); Abner Cohen, ed., Urban Ethnicity (London, 1974); and Robert H. Bates, "Ethnic Competition and Modernization in Contemporary Africa," Comparative Political Studies 6 (1974):457-84 for examples of religious and ethnic conflict in other regions of rapid change.

5. See Sidney E. Mead, "Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism in America," Church History 23 (1955):291-320; L. A. Loetscher, "The Problem of Christian Unity in Early Nineteenth Century America," Church History 32 (1963):3-16; and Robert C. Ostergren,

"The Immigrant Church as a Symbol of Community and Place in the Upper Midwest," Great Plains Quarterly 1 (1981):225-38.

6. Marcus Lee Hansen, "Immigration and Puritanism" in The Immigrant in American History (Cambridge, 1940):114-21; Smith, "Religious Denominations as Ethnic Communities," op. cit., passim.
7. In spite of Smith's powerful analysis of the relationships between religion and ethnicity in America, he presents a linear argument of change that usually deemphasizes the role played by ethnic and religious conflict in bringing about that change. See Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America, op. cit.
8. See, for example, Thomas F. O'Dea, The Sociology of Religion (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966):13-18, 103; J. Milton Yinger, Religion, Society and the Individual (New York, 1957):56-72.
9. Clifford Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example" in The Interpretation of Cultures (New York, 1973):142-69. See also Edmund R. Leach, Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure (Boston, 1965); Arjun Appadurai, Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case (Cambridge, 1981). Other significant studies examining conflict and its effects include Victor Turner Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society (Ithaca, 1974) and Natalie Z.

Davis, "The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon," Past and Present 90 (1981):40-70.

10. Victor E. Lawson, Illustrative History and Descriptive and Biographical Review of Kandiyohi County, Minnesota (Willmar, Minnesota, 1905):124-5; Carl M. Gunderson, Crow River Evangelical Lutheran Church 1861-1961 (n.p., 1961):7-10.
11. Hjalmar Holand, De Norske Settlementers Historie: En Oversigt over den Norske Invandring til og Bebyggelse af Amerikas Nordvesten fra Amerikas Opdagelse til Indiankrigen in Nordvesten med Bygde- og Navneregister (Ephraim, Wisconsin, 1909):199-207; Martin Ulvestad, Norge i Amerika (Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1902):18. See Robert C. Ostergren, "Kinship Networks and Migration: A Nineteenth-Century Swedish Example," Social Science History 6 (1982):293-320 for an analysis of the importance of kin in facilitating migration.
12. Kandiyohi County Tax Records, 1890; Crow River Lutheran Church records; Gunderson, op. cit.:7.
13. Crow River Lutheran Church records; Gunderson, op. cit., passim.
14. Crow River Lutheran Church records; Gunderson, op. cit.
15. Figure 1 was constructed using the county plat book of 1886, plat

maps in Lawson, op. cit., the Crow River Lutheran Church records, and Gunderson, op. cit. Gunderson was particularly valuable since it indicated place of residence as well as time of arrival in the community.

16. Crow River Lutheran Church records; Gunderson, op. cit.

17. Benefits derived from ties of kinship and neighborhood provided utilities, both pecuniary and non-pecuniary, that tended to reduce the incidence of migration from an immigrant community according to another rural case study. See Jon Gjerde, "The Effect of Community on Migration: Three Minnesota Townships, 1885-1905" Journal of Historical Geography 5 (1979):403-22; and John S. MacDonald and Leatrice D. MacDonald, "Chain Migration, Ethnic Neighborhood Formation, and Social Networks," Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly 42 (1964):82-97.

18. Eilert Sundt, Om Saedeligheds-Tilstanden i Norge (Christiania, 1857); Eilert Sundt, Fortsatte Bidrag Angaaende Saedeligheds-Tilstanden i Norge (Christiania, 1864); Eilert Sundt, Om Saedeligheds-Tilstanden i Norge. Tredie Beretning (Christiania, 1866). See also Jon Gjerde, From Peasants to Farmers: The Migration from Balestrand, Norway to the Upper Middle West (New York, forthcoming 1984) for an analysis in courtship patterns in Norway and their alterations among immigrants in the United States.

19. See Gabriel Øidne, "Litt om Motsetninga Mellom Austlandet og Vestlandet," Syn og Segn 63 (1957):97-114.

20. Quoted in Einar Haugen, The Norwegian Language in America: A Study in Bilingual Behavior (Philadelphia, 1956), Volume 2:358-359.

21. This paragraph is based on Lawson, op. cit. and Gunderson, op. cit.

22. The best description of the election controversy, on which this and the following paragraph are based, is E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold, The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Minneapolis, 1960) Volume 1:253-70. For an earlier description, see Th. Eggen, "Oversigt over den Norsk-Lutherske Kirkes Historie i Amerika" in Johs. B. Wist, ed., Norske-Amerikanernes Festskrift 1914 (Decorah, Iowa, 1914):228-32.

23. U. V. Koren, "Hvad Den Norske Synods Har Villet og Fremdeles Vil," Samlede Skrifter 3 (1890):444.

24. J. A. Erikson, "Større end det Største," Ved Arnen (1939) cited in Dorothy Burton Skårdal The Divided Heart. Scandinavian Immigrant Experience through Literary Sources (Oslo, 1974):180.

25. Nelson and Fevold, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 254. Minnesota figures were derived from congregational histories in O. M. Nordlie, Den Norske Lutherske Menigheter i Amerika 1843-1916 (Minneapolis, 1918):436-80.
26. Lawson, op. cit.:128; Gunderson, op. cit.:21-22; History of the Charter and Early Members of the Gausdal Lutheran Church: Ringville Prairie and Georgeville, Minnesota (n.p., n.d.):1.
27. History of the Charter and Early Members of the Gausdal Lutheran Church: Ringville Prairie and Georgeville, Minnesota (n.p., n.d.).
28. A statistical technique known as logit analysis was employed to determine the effect of sub-community membership, wealth, and arrival time in Crow River on secession from the church. Similar to regression analysis, logit analysis is designed for instances where the dependant variable (in this case, secession from the church) is dichotomous and hence unsuited for ordinary linear regression. Three independent variables were used to explain secession from the church: sub-community membership, wealth (measured in real and personal wealth valuated for tax purposes by Kandiyohi County in 1890), and time of arrival in Crow River (derived from church records. Sub-community membership boosted the chances of secession enormously ($t=4.289$ with 74 degrees of freedom) indicating that its effect on secession was no statistical

fluke. Wealth and arrival time, on the other hand, did not affect secession significantly ($t=0.854$ and 0.377 , respectively, with 74 degrees of freedom). Testing for the effect of sub-community membership and wealth alone led to similar results, as did a trial with membership and time of arrival alone. For an explanation of logit analysis by a historian, see J. Morgan Kousser, "Making Separate Equal: Integration of Black and White School Funds in Kentucky," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 10 (1980):399-428.

29. Although wealth did not directly affect secession from the Crow River Church, logit analysis also suggests the tendency of wealthier members within the Gausdal sub-community remaining in the church ($t=4.423$ with 75 degrees of freedom for a wealth-sub-community interaction variable, which measured the effect wealth had on secession for members of the Gausdal sub-community only).
30. The varying chi-square values resulting from the different marriage patterns were striking. While the Gausdal households that remained in the Crow River Church had an index of 7.99, those that seceded had a value of 178.15 indicating an extremely strong tendency toward endogamous marriage. Both values have a probability of $>.01$, but that of the Gausdal seceders was the least probable of any group observed in the community.

31. Parallels exist between the behavior of the Nuer and Tiv in forming

segmentary lineages in Africa and that of the Norwegian immigrants in the American Upper Middle West. Since land was also a source of power among the farming immigrants, attempts within the sub-communities to increase their landed holdings vis a vis other sub-communities probably occurred. Insufficient source material, however, prohibited further examination of any such incidents. See E. E. Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer (Oxford, 1940); Marshall D. Sahlins, "The Segmentary Lineage: An Organization of Predatory Expansion," American Anthropologist (63) 1961:322-45.

32. Peter A. Munch and Helene Munch, The Strange American Way (Carbondale, Ill., 1970):205. For other examples of such Tocqueville-like expressions from Norwegian immigrants, see Johan Reinert Reiersen, Veiviser for Norske Emigranter (Christiania, 1844) translated by Frank G. Nelson, Pathfinder for Norwegian Emigrants (Northfield, Minn., 1981); Theodore C. Blegen, ed., Land of Their Choice: The Immigrants Write Home (St. Paul, 1955); and Gunnar Urtegaard, "Og Huen Tages Ikke av Hovedet for Noget Menneske'," Tidsskrift Utgive av Historielaget for Sogn 27 (1981). For an excellent fictional account of the different uses of "democracy" and "freedom" to justify the stands of contending parties in a church schism, see O. E. R  lvaag, Peder Victorious: A Tale of the Pioneers Twenty Years Later (New York, 1929):44-62.

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33. Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, Falconberg (New York, 1879):99, cited

in Skårdal, op. cit., p. 131.

34. Ft. Ridgely and Dale Lutheran Church records. This congregation, located to the south of the Crow River settlement, also experienced strife between localized sub-communities and also split, this time into three congregations, in 1885.
35. In the continuing tension between religion, ethnicity, cultural symbols and social structure, it would be interesting to determine if the new Gausdal church innovated changing patterns of behavior which made it consistent with the new theological pietism while the old pietists from the dark coastal strip became more adamant participants in a high church liturgy. Such analysis, unfortunately, is beyond the scope of this essay.