

Modernity Confronts Tradition

Concordia College and the Turbulent Twenties

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SPEAKING TO CONCORDIA College coeds in Moorhead as the Roaring Twenties began, President J. A. Aasgaard declared that “Insubordination in the home and . . . school” had caused the “wild search for amusements” and “wave of . . . lawlessness

sweeping the country.” Confronted by this turbulent decade’s cultural divisions, Aasgaard and his successor J. N. Brown defined Concordia as a modern church college. Like their presidential brethren at Augsburg, Luther, and St. Olaf colleges, the two pastors de-

fended their institution’s Norwegian Lutheran heritage from evolutionary theory, theological modernism, and the hedonism of youthful dancing, drinking, and smoking. They deplored secular universities for spawning evolutionists, modernists, and flaming



youth, but they selectively adopted new aspects of American education, seeking accreditation and implementing the changes it required. Concordia thus offers an illuminating case study of the decade's warring Victorian and modern values.¹

World War I quickened American nationalism and ushered in an era of educational reform. All of Minnesota's Lutheran (and Catholic) colleges followed eastern Protestant liberal arts institutions in becoming gateways to the emerging professions of business, law, and medicine. To qualify for accreditation, they met higher professional standards and offered secular subjects—so long as these were taught by Christian professors and informed by Christian perspectives. They embraced intercollegiate athletics and a host of other extracurricular activities and accepted higher education for women because it better equipped them for their God-given duties to home, family, and church. They even conceded that female graduates might take jobs until marriage, when their real work began. At the same time, these educators defended their institutions against the turbulent twenties' threats to Victorian moral and religious values and the nativism that attacked the ethnic traditions their schools had been founded to perpetuate.

THE NORWEGIAN LUTHERAN academy movement that created more than 75 secondary and normal schools in the Midwest, Pacific Northwest, and Canada inspired the founding of Concordia College in 1891. Academies embodied the complementary Norwegian and American identities and ideals of their

FACING: Three Concordia Eves, each with an apple, dressed for physical education. The green tams signify their freshman status.



founders. They developed character by imparting “the Word of God” and Lutheran doctrine; perpetuated ethnicity through Norwegian language and literature instruction; Americanized by teaching history, government, and natural science in English; and enrolled women in domestic science, normal, and secretarial courses as the best preparation for their conventional roles “as sister, wife, and mother.” Many unmarried females would expand these expectations, becoming teachers, nurses, secretaries, or missionaries.²

Asgaard, fearing the academy could not survive as public high schools grew in quantity and quality, started a four-year college program that first awarded degrees in 1917. The newly formed Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (NLCA) then merged its four-year Park Region Luther College program in Fergus Falls with Concordia. Collegiate numbers steadily grew; by the 1929 fall term, 479 enrolled. Almost equal numbers came from North Dakota and Minnesota. Their church-going farm or small-town families prayed at meals and bedtime, dressed respectfully, encouraged education, and did not

Patriotic ceremonies at Concordia, 1917, marking the U.S. declaration of war. President J. A. Asgaard stands second from right.

swear, tell off-color jokes, or use alcohol. Norwegian American Lutheran home life demonstrates that Victorian values—belief in God, the Bible, and virtuous character—were not confined to Protestants of British heritage, as historian Stanley Coben supposed.³

Making a church college American and modern required judicious choices. Concordia—like Luther, St. Olaf, and Gustavus Adolphus colleges—expressed enthusiasm for United States entry into World War I and organized Student Army Training Corps units, another sign of their cultural convergence with national Anglo-Protestant culture. Asgaard demonstrated Norwegian American loyalty with a stirring address to students and townspeople on campus

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after the college band had paraded through city streets. Students sold War Savings Stamps. Women did Red Cross work. Men drilled with the Moorhead Home Guard in the school gymnasium, and 22 had joined the colors by March 1918.⁴

While defending against “100 percenter” anti-hyphenate slurs, Aasgaard and other Norwegian Americans kept their ethnic organizations. They condemned coercion, insisting that Americanization must be voluntary. The NLCA retained Norwegian in its name while using English more frequently for worship and education. In 1925 the Norse-American Immigration Centennial held at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds in St. Paul provided its planners an excellent opportunity to present a middle-class, business-oriented, upwardly mobile account of Norwegian settlement, material progress, and assimilation. Exhibits, addresses, concerts, and worship services reinvented ethnic identity in ways that both accepted and resisted New World culture. Concordia joined in: its choir performed, Aasgaard gave the festival sermon, and Professor J. A. Holvik served as centennial committee secretary and program chair. He wrote and directed *Norsemen in America*, a pageant earlier presented during commencement weekend in Moorhead. The entire student body took part in scenes depicting Norwegian contributions to American development, from the arrival of Leif Erickson to the first Lutheran college graduating classes.⁵

CONCORDIA EMBARKED on its college program at a time of educational progress. Secondary, collegiate, and graduate institutions multiplied, and liberal arts colleges offered entrée to the professions. State governments, universities, regional organizations, and other agen-

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cies worked to establish standards at each level and ease transitions between them. Early in the twentieth century, the North Central Association (a consortium of institutions in seven states, including Minnesota) had standardized secondary education and listed accredited high schools, aiding college and university admissions. By 1913, it and other regional bodies named colleges that met several criteria. Aasgaard and Brown—seeking expanded opportunities for Norwegian-American youth—welcomed these trends, while more conservative schools resisted them in order to preserve their ethnic and religious independence.⁶

Accreditation would allow Concordia graduates to be hired as teachers and admitted to graduate and professional schools throughout the nation. Aasgaard and Brown attended joint meetings of the Lutheran Educational Conference and the Association of American Colleges, which offered a national forum to church schools for debating faculty recruitment, freshmen orientation, finances, and other issues confronting them.⁷ Both men, like officials at Augsburg, Gustavus Adolphus, Luther, and St. Olaf, borrowed ideas from the student-personnel movement, hired deans of women and men to provide counseling, and standardized mental testing, freshman orientation, placement, and supervision for intercollegiate activities. They also modernized ownership, forming a new Concordia College Corporation from 812 northern Minnesota and North Dakota NLCA congregations. As required for North Central accreditation, Concor-

dia replaced two previous governing bodies with a single board. While eastern colleges substituted businessmen for clergy on their boards, Concordia retained a majority of NLCA ministers as directors.⁸

To become accredited, institutions had to have an endowment, and in 1919, Aasgaard launched a \$200,000 campaign. Rev. Otto H. Pannkoke, a nationally known Lutheran fundraiser, assisted with planning and publicity, as he later did at Luther and St. Olaf. Although poor crops and prices limited collections to half the goal, Aasgaard took other steps forward. The new board approved paying \$2,400 salaries to department heads with doctorates, signing teachers with at least two years of graduate study, building a library, and purchasing books.⁹

These actions enabled Brown, who succeeded Aasgaard in 1925, to take the final steps to accreditation. Under the slogan “Ask God and tell the people,” the 1926 endowment campaign held rallies in each ministerial circuit and sent bimonthly mailings to families. Professional Lutheran fundraiser Dan Weigle assisted with the Fargo—Moorhead drive, emphasizing “education, religion, business—the great triumvirate of temporal progress, happiness and success.” A church college deserved support for the essential role it played in making the United States wealthy and powerful. Weigle’s rhetoric echoed that of Bruce Barton, an evangelist for modern advertising and the best-selling author of *The Man Nobody Knows*, which depicted Jesus as a successful salesman and publicist.¹⁰



"Kozy Korner Kot," a joke for these dormitory residents

The campaign was not without controversy. When Fargo's Ku Klux Klan newspaper headlined an attack made on the group in a Bible study lecture radio-broadcast from Concordia, Brown feared the city's pro-Klan businessmen would not support the endowment drive. He assured *The North Dakota American*: "Faculty have no restrictions placed upon them by the administration regarding your organization" because "there is at least a 50-50 division of opinion among our pastors."¹¹

How could the Klan attract Norwegian Americans in the numbers Brown estimated? The NLCA *Lutheran Church Herald* criticized "the invisible empire" for its violence and secrecy. Still, Victorian values made many Lutherans sympathetic to Klan goals, if not methods. They feared Catholic power and supported KKK opposition to bootlegging, immorality, modernism, and evolution as well as its defense of American ideals, the Bible, and Christian morality. The Klan's

100-percent Americanism offered Norwegian Americans an opportunity to demonstrate loyalty. Lutheran pastor and professor N. J. Gould Wickey, who spoke at a Klan meeting in Ulen, Minnesota, perhaps led Brown to overestimate KKK strength. In any case, Brown's neutrality did not save the Fargo campaign.¹²

After weeks of selling Concordia, 4,000 volunteers canvassed every NLCA congregation in the corporate territory. Collections yielded more than the required \$500,000, and North Central accreditation soon followed in 1927. Brown called this achievement the greatest event in college history.¹³

ALTHOUGH THE NLCA blamed universities for America's growing immorality, its colleges adopted some university practices while retaining the required daily chapel and Sunday worship attendance that secular institutions abandoned. Earlier,

university presidents had awarded clergymen many professorships and insisted that Christian ideals offset the teaching of scientific naturalism. By the 1920s, however, more undergraduates partied and fewer worshiped. Chapels and Christian student-association buildings physically separated religion from academics, symbolizing, some writers thought, the failure of professors to integrate spiritual and intellectual concerns.¹⁴

Concordia modeled its curriculum on a widely shared structure of concentration and distribution requirements, embodying the traditional belief that liberal education should impart a unified experience and worldview. Every student took Christian doctrine and the Bible, English composition and literature, two foreign languages, and physical education as well as chose a major and minor field informed by Christian

principles. They prepared to teach secondary school or attend graduate or professional programs. A coed later recalled that her courses and professors had prepared her well for graduate study.¹⁵

During the decade's anti-evolution debates in Minnesota and the nation, the NLCA's *Lutheran Church Herald* often condemned Darwinism as an "anti-Christian theory contrary to the Bible." It viewed evolution as a threat to Christianity, morality, the home, and the nation and said it should not be taught in public schools. Yet the NLCA was split in 1927 on the question of supporting Minnesota's anti-evolution legislation put forward by Baptist fundamentalist William Bell Riley. Many local NLCA pastors and lay people backed the bill because it restored the connection of church and state and saved children from the false religion of evolutionary atheism. But NLCA college presidents and leaders opposed the bill. St. Olaf's president, Lars Boe, said it contradicted the teachings of Jesus, Lutheranism, and the constitutional

separation of church and state. Lutherans should not use the state to impose religion like Catholic and Reformed churches did. As Concordia's President Brown pointed out, "Educating the public through the pulpit and the press" was "the only permanent solution." He made sure Concordia students got the message from chapel speakers like Luther President Oscar Olson, who called evolution "irresponsible speculation."¹⁶

The NLCA also battled scientific modernism, a theological movement based at the University of Chicago's divinity school that emphasized a socio-historical approach to Scripture. In 1925 an alarmed NLCA issued its fundamentalist-influenced Minneapolis Theses, which accepted the Bible as the "inerrant word of God" and the "only infallible authority in . . . faith and life." The *Lutheran Church Herald* called on its colleges to inoculate against modernism. President Brown described it as "shallow," and 1928 valedictorian Raymond Bangs urged his classmates to join "this fight." By siding with American

fundamentalists in combating modernism, Concordia revealed another way it had culturally assimilated.¹⁷

Despite Darwinism, Concordia and other Lutheran colleges taught biology, chemistry, and physics because they believed that science, properly understood, did not contradict God's truths. In this, they followed English philosopher Francis Bacon (1561–1626). According to Baconian tradition, long held by American Protestants, only erroneous inferences and theories contradicted the Bible; facts never did. For example, biology professor A. M. Sattre rejected evolution because it relied on unproven hypotheses. He presented it as theory in class and invited questions, but he opposed similar discussion in public schools. A *Concordian* editorialist mirrored Sattre in asserting the compatibility of science and religion: "If scientists would wait for more light there would be less criticism of Scripture." Few American scientists shared these beliefs. Most

Chemistry class, 1922



Despite Darwinism, Concordia and other Lutheran colleges taught biology, chemistry, and physics.



accepted evolution in some form and rejected Baconianism for its empirical certainty and its reactionary stand against Darwin's ideas.¹⁸

In contrast, NLCA faculty used Baconian empiricism to dismiss higher Biblical criticism as ungrounded theory. Concordia's religion courses thus avoided the corrosive influence of modernism. Required classes were first-year Bible, second-year church history, and third-year Christian doctrines, which comparatively studied the Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran traditions. Enrollees in an elective apologetics course scientifically investigated Christian evidences, Biblical archaeology, and criticism. Philosophy courses similarly aimed "to develop . . . a constructive Christian view of the universe and life." Students' faith would be secured in classes that examined pragmatism, materialism, neo-realism, and idealism or the history of philosophy—a survey of ancient, medieval, and modern thinkers Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Hegel.¹⁹

Accreditation mandated that faculty have advanced degrees, which were granted by universities infected by modernist and evolutionary heresies. To assure a pool of devout candidates, Concordia's leaders urged Lutheran schools to send their graduates to doctoral programs and then hire them as teachers. Aasgaard and Brown recruited only co-religionists committed "whole-heartedly to the teachings and practice of our church." A chemistry professor should have a Christian personality and interpret

science in light of the Bible, which excluded "crass evolutionists." A religion professor should be a serious-minded church worker who backed "personal Christianity." Concordia faculty met religious criteria better than academic ones. At mid-decade, all were Lutheran; 77 percent claimed Norwegian ancestry; 65 percent graduated from Lutheran institutions; and only 43 percent held advanced degrees, a shortcoming Concordia struggled to rectify.²⁰

ALTHOUGH 50 PERCENT OF Concordia's students were female, traditional male attitudes about women ensured that their academic experiences differed from those of men. Like many Victorians, NLCA colleges accepted Christian higher education for women because it better prepared them for their religious duties. Mothers advanced God's kingdom by nourishing love and forgiveness in the home, bringing their families to worship, teaching Sunday school, singing in choirs, and laboring in Ladies Aid societies. The NLCA blamed immodest flappers for rising divorce rates. It did not officially support women's franchise even though Norway had adopted universal suffrage and Norwegian American suffragists demanded it. (Once females won the vote, though, church and college valued it for safeguarding the family, advancing child-welfare laws, and enforcing Prohibition.) Concordia prepared coeds for domesticity with talks about "Choosing a Life Partner,"

Sunday-afternoon teas arranged by deans of women, and engagement and wedding announcements in the student newspaper.²¹

Male educators steered coeds into some programs and excluded them from others. Early in the 1920s, half the women majored in English literature; few selected the "male" disciplines of science and mathematics. By 1929 only 28 percent chose English, while history and home economics majors increased and seven women majored in mathematics, exceeding the number of men. Newly arrived Mae Anderson contributed to this increase. A Concordia mathematics graduate, she earned her master's and doctorate degrees at the University of Chicago. Hedwig Ylvisaker, another Concordia BA and Chicago MA, drew women to history.²²

Home economics, health, and physical education afforded sex-segregated classes but also a community for women. Home economics offerings increased during the decade, resolving the dilemma of home versus career for many coeds. The department furnished practical training for the home, prepared high-school teachers, and provided background for prospective nurses and dieticians. Classes took field trips to businesses and homes. Omicron Tau Delta, a national home economics society, developed professional spirit, sponsored speakers, and raised funds.²³

The college administered annual physical examinations and compelled treatment for problems revealed. Women, like men, took three years of physical training meant to correct bad posture, foster play and comradeship, establish healthy habits, and fortify character. They played field hockey and soccer outdoors in the fall, basketball and volleyball indoors in the winter, and competed at kitten ball (as softball was known before 1930), tennis, and track outdoors in the spring.



Women's hockey team, 1926, which would have played intramurals or, perhaps, Women's Athletic Association competitions

Like universities, Concordia championed hygiene instruction as a form of moral education, including gender-segregated talks by the college nurse warning all freshmen about immoral sex and venereal disease.²⁴

Females ranked higher academically than males. The *Concordian* attributed their success to more study, fewer activities, and superior writing. Twice as many qualified for the Alpha Honors Society. They usually took the junior and senior class prizes for highest scholastic average. Yet the faculty mirrored society's prejudices by naming male valedictorians and female salutatorians.²⁵

By 1929 Concordia had 504 alumni; among 232 female graduates, just over 18 percent had pursued graduate study, nearly 77 percent had taught, and only 18 percent had become homemakers. These numbers suggest that most women expected to work for a time after commencement. The percentage holding jobs in 1941 is more startling, given the

NLCA expectation that women marry and have children. Alumni numbers had nearly tripled; among 723 living women, married homemakers now totaled 39.6 percent and 52.9 percent still toiled in education or other occupations. One may speculate that hard times influenced many. Perhaps some worked to repay educational loans. Degrees may have kept others from finding partners. If they chose careers over matrimony, their decision replicates the actions of first-generation college-educated women. If married and still working, their experience anticipates the rising percentage of women in the labor force after World War II.²⁶

COLLEGE LIFE CREATED AN undergraduate subculture that was passed down to successive student generations. During the twenties, this subculture embraced fun and extracurricular activities, opposed academic excellence, and

set national youth fashions, aided by movies and magazines. Deans of men and women at secular universities adapted college life as moral education, claiming it offered connections and such middle-class life skills as competitiveness, manners, and leadership. Presidents Aasgaard, Brown, and their fellows at Augsburg, Gustavus, Luther, and St. Olaf, however, valued only experiences that did not conflict with their traditional Victorian code. They offered their students a sanitized Norwegian and Swedish Lutheran version of college life.²⁷

Concordia's Norwegian Lutheran ethos distinguished it from eastern colleges that had lost their religious and ethnic character. It and sister institutions sent delegates to Lutheran Student Union meetings and took pride in the high number of male graduates attending seminary.

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Daily chapel, Sunday worship, Luther League, weekly men's and women's devotional groups, Bible study, and Daughters of the Reformation meetings equipped youth to serve the NLCA as adults. The *Concordian*—which could not print without presidential approval—embraced both the college motto *Soli Deo Gloria* (“Glory to God Alone”) and the Lutheran Student Union admonition that school publications further Christian ideals. Professors and pastors, who published or delivered talks in Norwegian, stressed preserving the language. Students used Norse for Edda Society monthly meetings, Ibsen play productions, declamatory contests, choir concerts, and celebrating Norwegian holidays by singing folk songs while dressed in native costume. Some still conversed in the language, and during the 1925 fall term, for example, 137 studied it for academic credit.²⁸

As debate, music, and other extracurriculars expanded, sports gained a more prominent role in collegiate life. The president awarded athletic letters at chapel and stressed how sports built manly character and prepared youth for life's struggles. Recognizing that athletics brought public visibility, Concordia joined Gustavus and St. Olaf as well as Catholic St. John's and St. Thomas in forming the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference in 1920; Augsburg and St. Mary's affiliated later in the decade. Since intercollegiate athletics excluded females,

physical educator Charlotte Blake organized a chapter of the national Women's Athletic Association (WAA). Coeds attained membership and letters by playing sports and attending physical-education classes. They were invited to a WAA Minnesota college play day hosted by St. Olaf.²⁹

Aasgaard and Brown championed student government and used it to regulate extracurricular activities. Governance stimulated institutional pride, encouraging collegians to accept regulations and attack rule-breakers who damaged the school's good name. The Student Forum nominated convention delegates, appointed committees, and enforced discipline. Here, as in academics, women were excluded from leadership. Male forum presidents and

female secretary-treasurers were the norm, and class officers replicated this pattern. Men headed the athletic board; women at times led the literary, musical, religious, or social boards. Only two coeds became editor-in-chief of the *Concordian* even though nine served as associate editors. Men dominated business, circulation, and advertising positions while women filled 52 percent of other department jobs and 60 percent of reporter appointments. On the yearbook, men were editors-in-chief and comprised 62 percent of the staff; women served as associate editors. After another college refused to debate Concordia's coed squad, the *Concordian* called it an affront to the college girl's ability. Yet the newspaper later supported an all-woman team, arguing that it helped enfranchised females comprehend politics.³⁰

Concordia's eight gender-segregated literary societies offered a wholesome alternative to sororities and fraternities, which were prohibited. The brother-and-sister bodies elected officers each term, held spring rush for freshmen, and conducted autumn initiations. Weekly programs



Concordia College cagers, 1925–26, ready for intercollegiate competition



Cook Helga "Mother" Fjelstad (above) and student waiters and kitchen staff



featured prose, poetry, and music as well as talks. At annual open houses, societies competed: Men debated and women staged the one-act plays they wrote, dramatized, and cast—after a faculty censor had screened the scripts. As the decade progressed, societies steadily grew more social. They built homecoming floats and hosted brother-sister banquets at local hotels, picnics at nearby parks, and parties on campus. By all accounts, the societies were popular; in 1924, 95 percent of male and 90 percent of female sophomores, juniors, and seniors joined. Faculty advisors stressed the worth of belonging, which the *Concordian* reinforced. It counseled freshmen to make friends, learn cooperation, and discover talents. High participation in college life indicates that Concordia had few studious outsiders or modernist rebels.³¹

MIDWESTERN CHURCH colleges created a homelike atmosphere and functioned like well-

regulated families, with patriarchal presidents enforcing Victorian rules. Concordia newcomers praised their "new and larger family." Junior "Big Sisters" assisted first-year "siblings" during orientation. Students called cook Helga Fjelstad "Mother" because she gave them coffee and "kindly advice." Alarmed by youthful "pleasure hysteria" and "the amusement problem," Aasgaard, Brown, and other Lutheran presidents banned liquor, tobacco, dancing, cards, pool, billiards, bowling, and leaving town without permission.³²

Dormitory residents rose by bell at 6:30 A.M. They attended meals, daily chapel, and classes at scheduled times and reported for study hours in their rooms every night but Sunday. They took part in writing dormitory regulations, which the dean of women believed would "bring about self-control and the refinement of character." They dressed properly for family-style meals, where the student headwaiter was expected to prevent smutty stories at table.³³

Jazz Age hedonism tested Victorianism. Lutherans associated dancing, alcohol, and smoking with female sensuality and promiscuous sexual equality. Ragtime had started a national dance craze featuring greater physical expression and intimacies. While modern youth might consider dancing a form of respectable socializing and personal expression, Victorians like President Brown labeled it a "worldly amusement that has caused the downfall of a half-million women in our country." He expelled all who danced and rejected parental appeals on behalf of their wayward offspring. Chapel speakers censured jazz as "the most atrocious thing on earth" because it served "the devil." A collegian called Prohibition violations a "national disgrace."³⁴

But Victorianism did not make Norwegian American Lutherans killjoys. Collegians told jokes and assigned nicknames. Faculty embraced entertainment as legitimate, and mixed-gender socializing and dating gradually replaced segrega-

Midwestern church colleges created a homelike atmosphere and functioned like well-regulated families.

tion. Concordia banned cars and made sure that events were chaperoned, then expanded “wholesome” campus entertainment. The college refurbished the men’s dormitory parlor in 1922 and installed a Majestic radio there in 1930, an improvement over earlier equipment. It permitted mixed groups to take boat rides on the Red River, have picnics at Gooseberry Mound, and attend all-college parties, Junior-Senior banquets, and society gatherings.³⁵

Movies were another matter. NLCA clergy feared that films corrupted youth. They initially called for government censorship, hoping that a new Motion Picture Code would create “entertainment on a high plane.” Concordia met this standard by showing George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner* in Main Auditorium. (The more conservative Concordia College—St. Paul, a Lutheran Church Missouri Synod school, offered a similar program.) Yet by decade’s end the NLCA concluded, “Movies have come to stay.” (Swedish Lutheran Gustavus Adolphus had already dropped “unapproved movies” from its list of banned activities.) On the other hand, the NLCA embraced radio without quibble and urged its “greatest possible [religious] use.” The science club pioneered the technology with a wireless set. Like Luther College, Concordia hoped to secure a license for broadcasting student and faculty programs. When this goal proved too ambitious, Fargo’s WDAY transmitted college chapel services and concerts.³⁶

Did collegians obey institutional

rules? Those who internalized their home and church moral code did, and they criticized those who did not. Shocked by worldly Park Region transfer students who likely did not share his abhorrence of tobacco, cards, and alcohol, Olaf Olson knelt by their dormitory doors and prayed for their salvation. Others condemned “the lustful dance hall” and ragtime’s “luring rhythm and filthy story” that stirred “foul thoughts,” or they urged abandoning “the jargon of the flapper” and adopting speech “befitting college-bred men and women.” Editors insisted “College Rules Are Law” and claimed that the cross-crowned college motto *Soli Deo Gloria* should “forever remain” in every graduate’s heart. In 1930 a voice teacher denied that coeds were modern: “They’re just nice, old fashioned girls.”³⁷

Still, complaints by pious students about “fast-moving pleasure seekers” and “cigarette fiends” indicate rule breaking. Many alumni recalled “the fun” after curfew when they socialized in dormitories or climbed out windows for nocturnal adventures. The bright lights of Fargo lured collegians. A woman’s scrapbook recalls her dates, lists nicknames, and contains tickets for the Fargo and Orpheum theaters, a card for the Blue Bird Café in the Metropole Hotel, and streetcar transfers. One insolvent student walked his date to Sunday services on winter evenings. In warmer weather, friends borrowed the motorcycle he had purchased for a summer job, loaded girls in the sidecar, and went cruising around town.³⁸



Concordia couple, 1926: a rare image.

“BY THE 1910S,” historian W. Bruce Leslie concludes, eastern Protestant colleges had replaced their ethnic and religious distinctiveness with “a common collegiate culture.” In contrast, mainline midwestern Protestant colleges adhered to Victorian standards through the 1920s. They separated church and world by proscribing alcohol, cigarettes, wicked novels and movies, jazz, and flappers, although some accepted demure ballroom dancing. The more conservative Lutheran Church Missouri Synod permitted beer, a concession to its German origins, but delayed Americanization until anti-German attacks during World War I made English the language of classroom instruction. Though they preserved immigrant loyalty longer than the NLCA schools, LCMS colleges like Concordia–St. Paul were slower to become four-year, accredited institutions or offer BA degrees to women.³⁹

Concordia emerged from the Jazz Age as a modern church college. It became more American while perpetuating its Norwegian Lutheran identity for decades to come. It banned social dancing until 1969 and limited intervisitation into the twenty-first century. It still strongly identifies as a Lutheran liberal arts college today. Radio and movies did expose students to jazz and flappers. Yet Lutheranism, Victorian rules, and student-personnel techniques withstood pleasure-seeking and directed the expanded extracurricular activities toward religious purpose. An endowment and accreditation raised faculty and academic standards, which better prepared graduates for entry into American life. In these ways, a conservative college adjusted to the challenges of modernity during a turbulent decade. □

Notes

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1. *Concordian*, Feb. 9, 1921; *Clay County Herald* (Hawley), Feb. 11, 1921; Carl Chrislock, *From Fjord to Freeway: 100 Years—Augsburg College* (Minneapolis: Augsburg College, 1969), 140–41, 144–48, 151, 161, 164; David T. Nelson, *Luther College, 1861–1961* (Decorah, IA: Luther College Press, 1961), 210–11, 214, 216, 218–21, 231, 250; Joseph Shaw, *History of St. Olaf College, 1874–1974* (Northfield: St. Olaf College Press, 1974), 280–81, 284, 305–09. For similar changes at Minnesota's Swedish Lutheran college, see Doniver A. Lund, *Gustavus Adolphus College: A Centennial History, 1862–1962* (St. Peter: Gustavus Adolphus College Press, 1963), 110–11. On the turbulent twenties, see Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (New York: Harper, 1931), xiii, 88–122, and revisionists Stanley Coben, *Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

2. Richard W. Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America* (Minneapolis: Augs-

burg Publishing, 1985), 228; James S. Hamre, "Three Spokesmen for Norwegian Lutheran Academies: Schools for Church, Heritage, Society," *Norwegian-American Studies* 30 (1985): 237, 240–45; Deane L. Lagerquist, "As Sister, Wife, and Mother: Education for Young Norwegian-American Women," *Norwegian-American Studies* 33 (1992): 99–102, 111–13, 124, 129–31. Luther (1861) and Augsburg (1869) were founded to prepare men for the seminary, but financial exigency compelled broadening goals and admitting women (Augsburg, 1921; Luther, 1932).

3. Carroll Engelhardt, *On Firm Foundation Grounded: The First Century of Concordia College, 1891–1991* (Moorhead: Concordia College, 1991), 60–61; catalog, 1929–30, 92; *Lutheran Church Herald*, July 20, 1926, 908–09; Frida R. Nilsen, *Growing Up in the Old Parsonage* (Lake Mills, IA: Graphic Publishing Co., 1975), v–vi, 7, 19, 48; Earl Reitan, *Crossing the Bridge: Growing Up Norwegian-American in Depression and War, 1925–1946* (n.p.: Lone Oak Press, 1999), 2–3, 9–10, 21–22, 31–33, 37–38, 74; Coben, *Rebellion Against Victorianism*, 3, 24, 26–27. Concordia's last academy class graduated in 1927; *Concordian*, May 31, 1927.

4. Nelson, *Luther*, 185–87; Shaw, *St. Olaf*, 204–05, 263–65; Conrad Peterson, *Remember Thy Past: A History of Gustavus Adolphus College, 1862–1952* (St. Peter: Gustavus Adolphus College Press, 1952), 80; W. Bruce Leslie, *Gentlemen and Scholars: College and Community in the "Age of the University"* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1992), 251, 253; Erling N. Rolfsrud, *Cobber Chronicle: An Informal History of Concordia College*, 2nd ed. (Moorhead: Concordia College, 1976), 80–81; Engelhardt, *On Firm Foundation*, 69–70.

5. *Lutheran Church Herald*, Nov. 26, 1918, 760–61; April R. Schultz, *Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American Through Celebration* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 8–13, 18–20, 47–50, 72, 82, 84, 107, 124–26, 129–30; *Moorhead Daily News*, Apr. 12, 1924, May 16, June 18, Sept. 19, 1925; *Concordian*, June 1, 1925.

6. John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities*, 4th ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 356–59; Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education*, 286–88. St. Olaf and Gustavus were the first of Minnesota's Lutheran colleges to be accredited, both in 1915; Concordia followed in 1927.

7. *Concordian*, Jan. 19, 1923, Jan. 31, 1927, Jan. 18, 1929; *Moorhead Daily News*, Jan. 14 and 17, 1929. Brown also served as president and vice president of each organization.

8. Brubacher and Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition*, 330–46; Engelhardt, *On Firm Foundation*, 82–83, 98–99; catalog, 1921–22, 4, and 1927–28, 6–7; Board of Directors and Board of Trustees, Minutes, Jan. 25, 1928, Governing Bodies Papers, Concordia College Archives (repository of all board and corporation documents cited, unless otherwise indicated); *Concordian*,

Feb. 3, 1928; Leslie, *Gentlemen and Scholars*, 152, 154, 174. On corporate structures elsewhere, see Nelson, *Luther*, 188, 370–71; Shaw, *St. Olaf*, 235–39, 296–97.

9. Board of Trustees, Minutes, Apr. 8, Dec. 23, 1919, Aug. 6, 1921, Jan. 25, Dec. 19, 1922; brochure, Concordia College Papers, box 1, Norwegian-American Historical Assn. Archives (NAHA), St. Olaf College; Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education*, 288; Board of Directors, Minutes, Dec. 16, 1919, Dec. 21, 1920, Dec. 30, 1925. Pannkoke headed a joint Luther—St. Olaf campaign. See Nelson, *Luther*, 241; Shaw, *St. Olaf*, 298–99.

10. Brown to George Henriksen, Sept. 25, 1926, Concordia College Archives (repository of all correspondence cited, unless otherwise indicated); "The Story of Concordia College: Education, Religion, Business," pamphlet, 3, 8–9, Concordia College Papers, box 1, NAHA; *Concordian*, Mar. 4, 1926.

11. Brown to *North Dakota American*, Feb. 20, 1926, and to Samuel Miller, Feb. 20, 27, 1926. *Fargo Forum*, Sept. 20, 1925, reported that 8,000 attended a Fargo rally at which 800 paraded in regalia. Revived in 1915, the Klan numbered five million nationwide by 1925. The North Dakota branch included many leaders with Norwegian names.

12. *Lutheran Church Herald*, Dec. 12, 1922, 1572; *North Dakota American*, Nov. 14, 1925; Coben, *Rebellion Against Victorianism*, 137–38, 140–41, 150–51; *Ulen Union*, Oct. 23, 1925.

13. Brown, Report to Board of Trustees, Dec. 29, 1926; *Concordian*, Feb. 5, 1926, Apr. 6, 1927.

14. George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Unbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3, 35, 265, 342–45; Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 13–14, 80–87, 124, 230.

15. Reuben, *Modern University*, 240; Leslie, *Gentlemen and Scholars*, 80, 181, 187–88; catalog, 1925–26, 3, 29–31; Fernanda Urberg Malmin interview, 1985, tape, side B, RG 31, Box 21, Concordia College Archives. All oral history cited is in this collection.

16. Kurt W. Peterson, "A Question of Conscience: Minnesota's Norwegian American Lutherans and the Teaching of Evolution," in *Norwegians and Swedes in the United States: Friends and Neighbors*, ed. Philip J. Anderson and Dag Blanck (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), 170–71, 173–76, 181, 183–86; Brown to J. A. O. Stub, Jan. 6, 1927; *Concordian*, May 26, 1926. The NLCA denounced evolution in 1923—the year that William Jennings Bryan brought his anti-evolution crusade to Minnesota.

17. Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 274–77; E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian Americans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1960), 2: 283–85, 283n, 285–86n; *Lutheran Church Herald*, Jan. 8, 1929, 60–62; Brown to



Lettermen standing tall on the steps of Main Auditorium

Oscar L. Olson, Feb. 21, 1927; *Concordian*, May 11, June 5, 1928.

18. Catalog, 1924–25, 23–24; *Concordian*, Mar. 31, May 19, 1922; 1930s Oral History Colloquium, session 1, July 22, 1985; Alfreda Sattre Torgerson interview, 1982; George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 112–16; Reuben, *Modern University*, 139, 193.

19. Catalog, 1924–25, 34, 1925–26, 29–31, 55, 1928–29, 33–34, 66–67; Reuben, *Modern University*, 111.

20. Brown to: S. Rindahl, Apr. 25, 1927, Harry L. Fevold, Dec. 23, 1927, Martin Hegland, Sept. 28, 1925; *The Scout*, 1923 (yearbook/triennial), 159–60; Engelhardt, *On Firm Foundation*, 76; Leslie, *Gentlemen and Scholars*, 112–13, 175. A new faculty generation did not challenge Brown on evolution and other matters until the 1940s.

21. Louise L. Stevenson, *Victorian Home Front: American Thought and Culture, 1860–1880* (New York: Twayne, 1991), 122, 136; *Lutheran Church Herald*, Oct. 5, 1920, 835, Mar. 27, 1923, 399, July 20, 1926, 901; *Concordian*, Nov. 28, 1925, Nov. 23, 1927, Mar. 2, 1928.

22. *The Scout*, 1923, 31–40, 1929, 37–51; Malmin interview; *Concordian*, Sept. 28, 1928.

23. *Concordian*, Nov. 11, 1921, Nov. 10, 1927, May 11, 1928; *The Scout*, 1929, 108.

24. Catalog, 1928–29, 59–60; *Concordian*, May 5, 1927; Reuben, *Modern University*, 158; Jeffrey P. Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 74, 89, 93.

25. *Concordian*, Mar. 16, Apr. 27, June 5, 1928; Frida R. Nilsen, *Eyes of Understanding: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1947), 38, 44.

26. Catalog, 1929–30, 105–07, 1941, 107–08. Concordia did not report the total number of alumni who had married or pursued graduate

study by 1941. It only reported the number of married homemakers.

27. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 118–19, 123, 127–28, 135; Reuben, *Modern University*, 243, 262–65.

28. Leslie, *Gentlemen and Scholars*, 195, 241; *Concordian*, Mar. 27, 1930; *The Scout*, 1926, 97, 99–104, 125; Aasgaard Reports in Board of Directors Minutes, Dec. 12, 1924, and Board of Trustees Minutes, Dec. 16, 1924. On ethnicity, see 1920s Oral History Colloquium, 1984, Monday, tape 2B, 3B; *Concordian*, Nov. 24, 1920, Apr. 11, Dec. 17, 1924, Oct. 31, 1925, Dec. 20, 1927.

29. Rolfsrud, *Cobber Chronicle*, 87, 92, 189–92, 204–09; *Concordian*, June 6, 1923, Apr. 22, 1927, May 24, June 4, 1929; catalog, 1921–22, 13–14. On athletics and muscular Christianity, see *Lutheran Church Herald*, Nov. 16, 1920, 1028; Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 76, 86–88, 91–93.

30. Leslie, *Gentlemen and Scholars*, 199–200. On gendered leadership, see *Concordian*, June 2, 1924 and subsequent years; *The Scout*, 1926, 30, 48, 64, 80, and 1929, 104. On editors, see *Concordian*, Nov. 24, 1920 and subsequent years; *The Scout*, 1920, 9 and subsequent editions. On women debaters, *Concordian*, Apr. 22, 1927, Dec. 5, 1929.

31. *The Scout* 1926, 106, 1929, 37–51, 57–67, 73–86, 114–21; *Concordian*, Dec. 8, 1926, Feb. 16, 1928, Oct. 3, 1929, and many other issues. Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 14–15, 151–52, 174, and 179 discusses outsiders, the bulk of students on most campuses, and rebels, who were more concerned with ideas than grades and often competed for editorships of campus publications.

32. Joan Grace Zimmerman, “College Culture in the Midwest, 1890–1930” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1978), 12–13, 43; Reitan, *Crossing*

the Bridge, 115; *Concordian*, Feb. 9, 1921, Dec. 7, 1928, Dec. 5, 1929; *Crescent* (monthly student publication that preceded *Concordian*), May 1919, 8–9, May 1920, 15–16; catalog, 1925–26, 19; *The Scout*, 1923, 68.

33. Rules and Regulations Governing Those Rooming in Men’s Dormitory; *Concordian*, Nov. 24, 1920; 1920s Oral History Colloquium, 1984, Tuesday, tape 1B, side A, and tape 7, transcript. Dormitories accommodated about half the student body. The rest lodged at college-approved off-campus housing.

34. Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 20–21, 292, 294, 300–04, 310, 324; Brown to E. G. Lockhart, May 20, 1926, and Mr. and Mrs. A. Swensrud, Apr. 1, 1926; *Concordian*, June 2, 1924, Mar. 30, 1928.

35. *The Scout* listed nicknames that usually referenced behaviors or physical traits. *Concordian*, its predecessor, *Crescent*, and *The Scout* had humor sections. *Concordian*, Jan. 20, 1921, Dec. 15, 1922, May 9, 1924, Oct. 10, 1930; Aasgaard Report in Board of Trustees Minutes, Dec. 20, 1922; Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 9–20.

36. *Lutheran Church Herald*, Feb. 15, 1921, 195–96, Feb. 26, 1924, 260–61, Jan. 19, 1926, 67, Apr. 22, 1930, 548–49; *Concordian*, Feb. 17, Dec. 15, 1922, Jan. 19, 1923, Nov. 28, 1925, Dec. 8, 1926; Oswald B. Overn, *History of Concordia College* (St. Paul: Concordia College, 1967), 122; Lund, *Gustavus*, 137–38, Nelson, *Luther*, 220.

37. Malmin interview; *Crescent*, May 1915, 160–62; *Concordian*, June 2, 1924, Mar. 2, 1925, May 25, 1926, May 31, 1927, May 24, 1928, Nov. 7, 1929, Mar. 13, 1930.

38. *Crescent*, Feb.—Mar. 1918, 202; Borghild Mehlen, scrapbook, 1926–27, Concordia College Archives; An Orphan’s Saga: *The Autobiography of Carl Robert Narveson* (privately printed, 1982), 76–78, 81–82, 84–85; Carl Narveson interview, 1981.

39. Leslie, *Gentlemen and Scholars*, 1–2, 28, 54, 241 (quote), 255–60; Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education*, 158, 291–94; Alan Graebner, *Uncertain Saints: The Laity in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1900–1970* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 14–15, 94–95; Overn, *History of Concordia*, 69–71, 110–15. Concordia—St. Paul gained North Central accreditation in 1967.

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