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Standard Abbreviations

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| AE | <i>Luther's Works</i> , American edition, 55 vols (St. Louis: Concordia, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958-). |
| | Bauer, Walter, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). |
| BAG | 1 st ed., ed. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 1957. |
| BAGD | 2 nd ed., ed. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, 1979. |
| BDAG | 3 rd ed., ed. by Frederick W. Danker, 2000. |
| BELK | <i>Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche</i> , 12 editions [cite edition used] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930-). |
| BHS | <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1984). |
| LSB | <i>Lutheran Service Book</i> (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006). |
| LW | <i>Lutheran Worship</i> (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982). |
| NA ²⁷ | <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , ed. Kurt and Barbara Aland, et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993). |
| TDNT | Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-). |
| TLH | <i>The Lutheran Hymnal</i> (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941). |
| W ² | Walch, Johann Georg, ed. <i>D. Martin Luthers sämtlichen Schriften</i> , 2 nd ["St. Louis"] ed., 23 vols (St. Louis: Concordia, 1880-1910). |
| WA | <i>D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> , Weimarer Ausgabe ["Weimar ed."] (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883-). |
| | WA DB Weimarer Ausgabe Deutsche Bibel [German Bible] |
| | WA Br Weimarer Ausgabe Briefe [Letters] |
| | WA Tr Weimarer Ausgabe Tischreden [Table talk] |
| | Abbreviations for the Lutheran confessional writings: |
| AC | Augsburg Confession |
| Ap | Apology of the Augsburg Confession |
| SA | Smalcald Articles |
| Tr | Tractate/Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope |
| SC | Small Catechism |
| LC | Large Catechism |
| FC Ep | Formula of Concord, Epitome |
| FC SD | Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration |

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Editorial Foreword

THIS ISSUE OF *LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW* puts its major focus on the leadership that C. F. W. Walther exercised in our mother synod, now known as The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Though Lutheran Church–Canada has been autonomous for over twenty years now, we still recognize our roots, and Walther’s leadership has impacted the LCMS and LCC for generations. It is appropriate that we acknowledge Walther’s theological contributions (indeed his genius), as we commemorate his 200th birthday. At the May 2010 East District Pastors’ and Deacons’ Conference, three papers were presented on Walther, covering the areas of church and ministry (literally, “church and office”), set forth in a paper by the undersigned; the form of the Christian congregation, as analysed by Rev. Timothy Teuscher; and the nature of the office of the holy ministry itself, presented by Rev. Paul Williams. These three papers, presented in this issue as they were given at the conference, describe (1) the historical situations that gave rise to his writings; (2) the excesses he fought against and the faithfulness to the Confessions he nurtured; and (3) the importance of his works for the development of the Missouri Synod as well as their continuing relevance for Lutheran Church–Canada. These papers present valuable contributions to the ongoing discussions concerning Walther.

In addition to these papers, there is a short study by Kenneth Voege on the concept of “luck”, noting that Luther was willing to use the term as long as it is understood as a synonym for God’s providential care. ABC District President Don Schiemann has also provided us with a study which traces the change in Canadian acceptance of homosexuality, beginning with decriminalization in 1969 to non-discrimination in 1996 to the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005. The astonishing shift both in public attitude and in law in such a short time demonstrates our continued need for vigilance and bold proclamation before Christendom and before the world, especially in view of the ELCA’s acceptance of homosexual clergy and same-sex relationships in 2009 and the expectation that other church bodies will follow this trend.

The issue concludes with two sermons. The first was preached by Juhana Pohjola in chapel at St. Catharines in the third week in Lent, and uses the text of Jesus’ meeting with the woman at Jacob’s well. The second, preached by Dr John Stephenson during the second week after Epiphany, juxtaposes the texts of God’s feeding of Elijah and that of the miraculous draught of fishes. This sermon was preached in chapel at St. Catharines on the occasion of the joint meeting of the Boards of Regents of the two seminaries, and it rejoices in the partnership that is being expressed as the two seminaries seek to work more closely together.

We pray that the material presented in this issue will prove spiritually edifying and intellectually stimulating.

EGK

The Sixth Sunday of Easter, 2011



Short Study

Luck or Blessing?

Kenneth Voege

I DON'T KNOW WHEN IT HAPPENED, but at some time during the last decade or two the word "luck" has become a "four letter word" among many Lutherans. So, instead of having "potluck suppers", we now have "pot blessing suppers". And instead of hearing, "Thanks!" in response to your well-meant "Good Luck!" you may just hear, "I don't believe in luck", spoken as if you had just suggested that Martin Luther was indeed a heretic.

The rationale behind the eschewing of luck is not hard to understand, and I would even go so far as to say that it is well intentioned. But I don't think that it is Lutheran.

Martin Luther used the word luck a great deal. At times he rails against the heathen because they ascribe the outcome of everything to luck. The heathen, he says, fail, in their unbelief, to see the directing hand of God in the affairs of men.¹ Thus, at times when he is speaking against heathen unbelief, Luther the polemicist will comment that there is no such thing as luck and that everything is under the direction of God. At other times, though, Luther will equate luck with the directing influence of God. For example, when commenting upon Ecclesiastes 2:15, Luther writes: "Eventually the affairs of both (the wise and the foolish) are decided by luck and fortune, that is, by God's determination of the outcome, and not by either our counsel or our temerity."²

Luther most frequently uses the word luck, however, to denote a chance occurrence. Here are but a few of the many examples of this usage of the word:

- In his Lectures on Isaiah, Luther writes: "When you notice that a gambler has great luck, it is time to stop gambling!"³
- At one point in "On Councils and the Church", Luther comments: "Grace and luck is wished to anyone who can do better. Amen."⁴ By

¹ AE 2:254.

² AE 15:40.

³ AE 17:152.

⁴ AE 4:53.

this Luther means that if anyone can put what he has just written any better, well, then, good luck to him!

- In a comment on Ecclesiastes 10, Luther writes: “The more unhoped-for your good luck is, the happier it makes you, just as the more foreseen your troubles are, the less they hurt you.”⁵

So it would seem that Luther would not get all bent out of shape if someone invited him to a potluck supper. Luther’s only concern was with those who would deny the active participation of God in our lives, ascribing everything that happens to chance. This then begs the question, “How much does God actively participate in our lives?”

The deists, like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, looked upon God as a “Supreme Being” who, once He had created the world, stepped back away from it—much like a clockmaker who makes a clock, winds it up, and then leaves it to run without any further attention. For the deist, chance or luck, along with what you do in life, is everything. While a deist will speak of something called “Divine Providence”, he does not mean by it that God intervenes in the lives of individuals, bestowing blessings upon them. Rather it refers to the general beneficence of God toward all creation, bestowed at the time of creation.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the deists are the Reformed Calvinists who look to everything that happens as being under the sovereignty of God. To them, there absolutely is no such thing as luck or chance or random circumstance, but God orders everything, causing everything to happen exactly as it happens. Thus, if a person goes to hell, it is because God wills the damnation of that person. Salvation was never a possibility for that person, for God had decided from eternity that the person would go to hell. I came across the following statement written by Luther that might seem to suggest that he was of the same mind: “[A transgressor of the First Commandment is] whoever ascribes any bad luck or unpleasantness to the devil or to evil persons and does not, in a spirit of love and praise, accept both evil and good as coming from God alone [Phil. 4:11], responding to God with gratitude and willing submission.”⁶ This comment is given purely to assure the Christian that when bad things happen to us we may trust that God is working to bring good to us from the bad. If it were only the devil involved, we would have no such assurance.

Lutherans, as in so many theological matters, find themselves in between the two extremes. We certainly will acknowledge that God works in mysterious ways, ways beyond our knowing or understanding. With regard to these “hidden” things we are not to speculate, but to believe firmly that

⁵ AE 15:161.

⁶ AE 43:17.

through all these unknown and unseen things God is working for our good, that is, for our eternal salvation. We also confess that God has given us certain means by which we may see and, to a point, understand how He is engaged directly in our lives. Those means are His holy Word, by which He reveals His good and gracious will to mankind, and the blessed sacraments of the Christian Church, through which He works forgiveness of our sins and gives life and salvation.

To speak of luck or coincidence or happenstance with regard to the unknown things of our lives is not wrong. It is merely a common way of speaking that expresses the fact that, for each person, some good things and some bad things will happen that are beyond our control, and that these things will happen to believers and unbelievers alike. Certainly the believer will acknowledge every good thing to be from the gracious hand of God and will also have faith that God is working good for us from the bad things.

Those Lutherans who say, "I don't believe in luck", or insist that church suppers should be "pot blessing" and not "potluck", are not telling us that they have abandoned their Lutheran confession of the faith to become Reformed Calvinists, but they are, I believe, indicating that they have adopted a certain view of the Christian life of faith that is more in keeping with the movement known as "evangelicalism", or, more properly, "new evangelicalism". New evangelicalism is a way of thinking that is very common these days in Pentecostal-type churches. Reflected in this movement is a lack of trust in what God reveals to us about ourselves in the Bible. In His Word He tells us that, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). You and I can point to our Baptism and to God's promise of salvation and say without doubt, "I am saved; I am going to heaven." New evangelical churches generally do not view Baptism or the other sacraments as anything more than mere symbols. As well, they look upon the Word merely as instruction and teaching from God instead of God's living Word to us that forgives and gives life and salvation. Oftentimes these new evangelical churches will seem very vibrant and alive, but that is based only on the fact that their members are working very hard to prove to themselves and to others that God really has chosen them to be saved. They have nothing to point to as proof other than their good works, because they don't believe the sure promises that God gives in His Word. Refusing to believe in luck is, in a way, a refusing to believe that God will rescue and save when unforeseen tragedy occurs, and instead believing that God plans out and directs every single step of life. The trust becomes a trust in God's good planning and not His mercy and grace.

The trust that we Lutherans have in the graciousness of our heavenly Father in the face of the unknown is beautifully expressed in a night-time prayer from the service of Compline: "Be present, merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of life may find our rest in You; through Jesus Christ,

our Lord. Amen.”⁷ Life does have changes and chances and I don’t think God minds if, in addition to praying for His gracious aid, we wish each other, “Good luck!”

Rev. Kenneth Voege is pastor of Our Saviour Lutheran Church, London, Ontario.

⁷ *LSB*, 257.

Responding to the Homosexual Challenge*

Don Schiemann

IT WAS IN MAY OF 1964 that I was confirmed at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Westmount, an old suburb of Montreal. Forty-five years ago is not a terribly long time. At the time of my confirmation, I had never heard of the term “homosexual”. I could not imagine that a person could have such an affection. Indeed, it seemed almost unfathomable among the rest of Canadian society at that time because it was considered a criminal code offence.

I am often amazed as I read the Book of Judges at how quickly the children of Israel would turn away from God to do evil. Witness, for example, Judges 8:33: “No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god and did not remember the Lord their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side.” This theme is repeated, almost as if it were a litany, throughout the Book of Judges and, later on, through other historical books of the Old Testament as the authors reflected on the reigns of Judah’s and Israel’s kings.

Amazed as I observed one society and civilization, it is hard to imagine that I would actually see in my lifetime such a dramatic transition from innocence and civil righteousness to perversion and civil unrighteousness. Permit me briefly to chronicle the dramatic shift that has taken place from homosexuality as criminal code offence to an acceptable foundation for legal marriage within society; and from a sin clearly condemned by the church as it proclaimed God’s Law, to an alternative sexual orientation which came from the Creator and which is entitled to all of the same rights, rites and blessings which the Church may confer on heterosexuals and heterosexual relationships.

Canadian Law and Culture

I begin with 1965, one year after I was confirmed. Everett Klippert acknowledged to police that he was gay, had had sex with men over a 24-year period, and was unlikely to change. In 1967, Klippert was sent to

* This essay was presented to the British Columbia Church Workers’ Conference in October 2009.

prison indefinitely as a “dangerous sex offender”, a sentence which was upheld up by the Supreme Court of Canada that same year.

On 22 December 1967, Canada’s centennial year, Justice Minister Pierre Trudeau proposed amendments to the Criminal Code which, among other things, would relax the laws against homosexuality. Discussing the amendments Trudeau said:

It’s certainly the most extensive revision of the Criminal Code since the 1950s and, in terms of the subject matter it deals with, I feel that it has knocked down a lot of totems and over-ridden a lot of taboos and I feel that in that sense it is new. It’s bringing the laws of the land up to contemporary society I think. Take this thing on homosexuality. I think the view we take here is that there’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation. I think that what’s done in private between adults doesn’t concern the Criminal Code. When it becomes public this is a different matter, or when it relates to minors this is a different matter.¹

In 1969, Trudeau’s amendments to the Criminal Code passed, decriminalizing homosexuality in Canada. On 20 July 1971, Everett Klippert was released from prison. On 16 December 1977, Quebec included sexual orientation in its Human Rights Code, making it the first province in Canada to pass a gay civil rights law. The law made it illegal to discriminate against gays in housing, public accommodation, and employment. By 2001, all provinces and territories had taken this step except Alberta, Prince Edward Island, and the Northwest Territories.

In June 1996, Parliament enacted Bill C-33, an act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act, to include sexual orientation among the Act’s prohibited grounds of discrimination. The amendment to the Canadian Human Rights Act also brought the federal act into line with existing provincial and territorial laws. Now human rights acts and codes explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in all jurisdictions except Alberta. The new Northwest Territories legislation, which took effect in July 2004, is the first human rights statute in Canada also to prohibit discrimination based on “gender identity”.

Canadian courts have ruled that sexual orientation is also a prohibited ground of discrimination in Alberta. In 1998, the Supreme Court of Canada found that the omission from the province’s human rights statute of the ground of discrimination to be of greatest significance to lesbian and gay individuals. It signified that they were denied substantive equality and denied access to the legislation’s remedial scheme. The court concluded that the most appropriate remedy for the section 15 violation was to “read in” sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination in the Alberta legislation (*Vriend v. Alberta*).

¹ http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/samesexrights/timeline_canada.html.

And what about marriage? On 18 March 1999 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that same-sex couples must have the same treatment in law as common-law heterosexual couples. However, the court said specifically that this ruling does not affect marriage. Subsequent to that ruling, on 8 June 1999, members of Parliament voted 216 to 55 in favour of a motion affirming that “marriage is and should remain the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, and that Parliament will take all necessary steps to preserve this definition of marriage in Canada.”²

Yet, by April of 2003, Ontario and British Columbia had ruled that the heterosexual definition of marriage was unconstitutional. The Ontario court, in particular, gave the federal government two years to change the law. On this basis, the House of Commons Justice Committee held cross-country hearings on marriage and the recognition of same-sex unions. The government then proposed a draft bill which suggested this definition of marriage: “Marriage, for civil purposes, is the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others.”³

The government posed four questions to the Supreme Court of Canada. Questions two and three are key for our consideration. Question two asked, was this new definition consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms? The Supreme Court answered “yes”. Question three asked if the freedom of religion guarantees in the Charter were sufficient to protect churches and religious groups from being compelled to perform a marriage between two persons of the same-sex that is contrary to their religious beliefs. Again, the Supreme Court answered “yes”.

I believe, however, that the Supreme Court’s response to the first question it was asked is most informative and most frightening. It seemed relatively minor in importance compared to the next questions. Basically, it asked that, although marriage was primarily within the jurisdiction of the provincial government, was not the question with regard to the legal capacity for marriage for civil purposes within the exclusive legislative authority of the Parliament of Canada? In other words, didn’t the federal government have the right to define marriage? The Supreme Court answered “yes”. In saying yes, the Supreme Court said that it was not bound by absolutes. It said “The ‘frozen concepts’ reasoning runs contrary to one of the most fundamental principles of Canadian constitutional interpretation: that our Constitution is a living tree which, by way of

² 36th Parliament, 1st Session, edited Hansard, Number 240, 1025.

³ From Bill C-38 which received Royal Assent 20 July 2005 and is now part of the Statutes of Canada S.C. 2005, c.35.

progressive interpretation, accommodates and addresses the realities of modern life.”⁴

This specious reasoning has great potential for harm. It rejects moral absolutes and could be used to defend any commonly-practised behaviour. It avers that the “realities of modern life” are foundational for moral guidance. The assumption that this is “one of the most fundamental principles of Canadian constitutional interpretation”⁵ is chilling and certainly not, I believe, what the framers of the constitution intended.

On 20 July 2005, Parliament passed Bill C-38:

NOW, THEREFORE, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:

1. This Act may be cited as the Civil Marriage Act.
2. Marriage, for civil purposes, is the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others.
3. It is recognized that officials of religious groups are free to refuse to perform marriages that are not in accordance with their religious beliefs.
- 3.1 For greater certainty, no person or organization shall be deprived of any benefit, or be subject to any obligation or sanction, under any law of the Parliament of Canada solely by reason of their exercise, in respect of marriage between persons of the same sex, of the freedom of conscience and religion guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms or the expression of their beliefs in respect of marriage as the union of a man and woman to the exclusion of all others based on that guaranteed freedom.
4. For greater certainty, a marriage is not void or voidable by reason only that the spouses are of the same sex.⁶

As much as the government has attempted to assure Canadians that religious rights will be protected, there is still much to make us uneasy that gay rights may be played as a “trump card”. In early 2004 the British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency mandated that “marriage commissioners who feel they cannot solemnize same-sex marriages (must) resign their appointments”⁷ effective 31 March of that year. I wrote to the Premier of British Columbia, Mr Gordon Campbell, to express my dismay at this directive. In his response, Mr Campbell indicated that the government was compelled to issue such a directive or face the prospect of human rights charges. I wrote back to him and said that denying an individual his

⁴ Supreme Court of Canada in its ruling regarding same-sex marriage, December 2004. <http://scc.lexum.umontreal.ca/en/2004/2004scc79/2004scc79.html>.

⁵ <http://scc.lexum.umontreal.ca/en/2004/2004scc79/2004scc79.html>.

⁶ <http://scc.lexum.umontreal.ca/en/2004/2004scc79/2004scc79.html>.

⁷ http://www.samesexmarriage.ca/legal/bc_case/marriage_commissioners.htm.

employment because of religious conviction may also open the government to a human rights charge. I received no response and, on 31 March, a number of marriage commissioners were dismissed.

There has been significant fear among our clergy that they may be confronted by a homosexual couple insisting on their right to be married by one of our pastors. Does Bill C-38 provide sufficient protection so that we will not be subject to human rights charges and civil suits which may jeopardize our church? Should we simply turn in our marriage certificates so that we will not have to face such a situation? What are the implications for pastoral practice as it relates to ministry to our own members at a significant time in their lives and mission to the unchurched who, through marriage preparation, hear the message of Law and Gospel?

The Canadian Religious Scene

The first major denomination to embrace the homosexual movement in Canada was the United Church of Canada. In 1984, its annual meeting of the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education approved the following recommendation: "That in and of itself, sexual orientation should not be a factor determining membership in the order of ministry of the United Church of Canada."⁸ It wasn't until 1988, at its 32nd General Council, that the United Church formally and officially "came out of the closet", so to speak. The council declared that all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, who profess faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to Him, are welcome to be or become full members of the church. It also affirmed that God's intention for all human relationships is that they be faithful, responsible, just, loving, health-giving, healing, and sustaining of community and self. The implication is that these standards apply to both heterosexual and homosexual couples. Finally, it affirmed that all persons who profess faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of their sexual orientation, are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry.

The Anglican Church of Canada danced and flirted with the issue over the decades. Conservative groups came out with position papers which made definitive statements on the issue. For example, the position paper of one such group in 1994 states:

Nowhere in the Bible is homosexual utility referred to in a favourable light. Traditional exegesis identified several texts which mention homosexual activity, all of which describe it negatively, variously as an abomination, against nature, and among a list of sins that, if consistently practised, bars

⁸ United Church of Canada Task Force Report, *Sexual Orientation and the Eligibility for the Order of Ministry*, Section E, Recommendation 7.1.2.

one from entering God's kingdom. Biblical teaching on homosexuality, however, has remained remarkably consistent in the entire millennium of its composition. In this respect it differs markedly with the evolving teaching on divorce within the Bible with which homosexual sins have been compared. It is our judgment that on the matter of sexuality the Bible has set a norm for chaste living: fidelity within marriage and continence outside it. Homosexual activity, together with all extra-marital activities, are inherent departures from God's order.⁹

Yet, in the same year, the General Council voted to "affirm the presence and contributions of gay men and lesbians in the life of the church."¹⁰

In 1998, the Diocese of New Westminster in British Columbia narrowly approved a motion to ask Bishop Michael Ingham to authorize the blessing of same-sex unions within the diocese. The vote was 51% in favour (179 to 170). He refused, citing the need for a greater agreement in the diocese. In 2002, the Diocese of New Westminster in British Columbia again approved a motion to ask Bishop Michael Ingham to authorize the blessing of same-sex unions within the diocese. The vote was 63% in favour (215 to 129). This time, he assented.

Apart from the impact on the Anglican Communion both in Canada and around the world, Lutherans can't ignore the impact of this decision. It was on 8 July 2002 that both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada declared their full communion agreement. The decision of the New Westminster diocese to bless same-sex unions placed the ELCIC in an awkward position. But that synod had not completely dismissed the idea of blessing same-sex unions either.

In its National Convention in 2003, the ELCIC voted to study the issues of blessing same-sex unions. Four theological papers were commissioned and a resolution was brought to the national church at its 10th biennial convention 21-24 July 2005 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The resolution read as follows:

That the ELCIC acknowledge the inadequacy of sections of Sex, Marriage and Family, A Social Statement of the Lutheran Church in America, 1970, referring to homosexuality and homosexual behaviour in light of developing theological, pastoral and sociological scholarship and that the ELCIC suspend the application of those references.

That the ELCIC allow pastors to perform blessings for same-sex couples who want to make a life-long commitment to one another in the presence of God and their community of faith. Authorization to perform such blessings shall require the consent of the pastor, the consent of the congregation or calling

⁹ http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_angl.htm.

¹⁰ Anglican Church of Canada General Synod, 1995 June 1-9, Act 57: "Affirm Presence of Gay/Lesbian Christians in Life of the Church."

agency as expressed by a 2/3 majority vote at a duly called meeting, and consultation with the synodical bishop. These blessings shall use a rite authorized by this church.

That the ELCIC's Program Committee for Worship be requested to develop a provisional rite for the blessing of same-sex couples in committed relationships.¹¹

The resolution was hotly debated and an amendment was proposed and approved that the resolution would require a 2/3 majority to pass. In the end, the vote was 183 (45%) for and 220 against (54%). The motion was defeated. We certainly rejoice at the results of the vote, but we are uneasy about the future (see appendix 1).

The issue of blessing same-sex unions and of ordaining practising homosexuals has continued to come before the ELCIC. In convention in 2005, the vote was much closer, with a similar result again in 2007. At its 2009 conventions, both the Anglican Church of Canada and the ELCIC refused to raise the issue. Speculation was that both these denominations were waiting to see how their counterparts would vote in the United States.

The US Episcopal Church gave its clergy the go-ahead to bless some same-sex unions, such as civil partnerships in states that legally recognize them, setting the stage for further conflict with the wider Anglican world. The resolution, passed on the final day of the church's triennial national convention, also directed church leaders to develop official rites, or liturgies, for the blessing of same-sex unions, a move that could see the church eventually change its definition of marriage. The 2 million member Episcopal Church also approved a resolution opening the doors to ordain gay men and women as clergy.

The ELCA, in preparation for its 2009 convention, produced a study titled, "Human Sexuality—Gift and Trust." With this study's recommendations the deck was stacked, so to speak. The church was encouraged to bless same-sex unions and ordain homosexuals. Dr Carl Braaten, an ELCA theologian of no small repute, spoke out against the study and its recommendations. He wrote,

The ELCA is at the crossroads. The Task Force has not helped to enlighten the church as to what is right or wrong. It makes a proposal to the church that takes one side of a controversial issue on which it does not expect that a consensus will emerge soon or ever. It flies in the face of the church's tradition, not only Lutheran but virtually that of all others. It offers no biblical warrant to reverse the magnum consensus that has prevailed in Lutheranism until recently. By recently we mean since the ELCA was born twenty years ago. Yet, the Task Force presents recommendations that it knows the majority of Lutherans do not favour, but which it believes the

¹¹ <http://notes.elcic.ca/convention/2005/resolved.html>.

ELCA might accept at its 2009 assembly in Minneapolis. It is a bold and risky move. No matter what is decided, the church will pay a heavy price. The issue of homosexuality will not go away. Whichever side loses will regroup and rise to fight another day. God help the ELCA! This is no way for the church of Jesus Christ to function. There is an authority crisis in the Lutheran Church glaringly exposed by the fiasco of having to deal with the report and recommendations of another theologically challenged Task Force.

...

The doctrine of the church reflected in this social statement is perhaps the worst that has ever appeared in the history of Lutheranism in America. Congregations and synods are invited to go their own way and to reach their own decisions with respect to the ordained ministry, based not on what is essential to the church's witness and proclamation as a whole, but on what seems relevant to the cultural vision of a new age. That kind of individualistic mindset puts the ELCA adrift in the ever-changing tides of culture. The people of the ELCA will then merit the epitaph applied to the people of Israel in the Book of Judges: "Every man did what was right in his own eyes."¹²

The 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voted to open the ministry of the church to gay and lesbian pastors and other professional workers living in committed relationships. Church delegates voted 619 to 402 to approve a resolution that allows churches that want to recognize same-sex unions to do so in the manner they see fit.

The proverbial writing seems to be on the wall for the Anglican Church of Canada and the ELCIC, particularly in light of the ordination of a gay pastor in the eastern Synod of the ELCIC in June 2008. A Lutheran church north of Toronto ordained an openly gay man who is legally married to another man under Canadian law. Lionel Ketola, 45, serves as associate pastor at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Newmarket, Ontario. It was the first Lutheran ordination of a non-celibate gay pastor in Canada, following at least 14 such ordinations in the United States.

On 18 September 2009, the National Office of the ELCIC announced in a news release that a task force study on human sexuality was to be released on 1 October for study and response. It appears that the ELCIC is learning its strategy from its US counterpart.

And what of LCC? Lutheran Church-Canada has expressed itself on the issues of homosexuality and same-sex marriage on many occasions in accord with the teachings of Scripture and with the historic church. In summary, we have said:

1. Homosexuality is an abomination which arouses the wrath of God (Gen. 19:5, 13; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; II Peter 2:6; Jude 7).

¹² <http://www.lutheranforum.org/sexuality/critique-of-the-social-statement-recommendations/>.

2. Homosexuality is sometimes the consequence of unbelief (Romans 1:21-27).
3. The continuing and unrepentant practice of homosexuality is utterly incompatible with salvation (I Cor. 6:9-10); note that there are other sins of which this is also affirmed (I John 3:15; Matt. 6:15).
4. Homosexuality is not so culpable as the sin of unbelief (Matt. 11:23-24).
5. The homosexual can be washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 6:11).

The report of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations on the topic of human sexuality is quite clear about our church's stand on homosexuality. In 1993, LCC in convention adopted a resolution stating that homosexuality "is a distortion of God's intention for the human race and that homosexual thoughts, desires, words and deeds are contrary to God's will."¹³ The resolution also encouraged our church to "exercise consistent but compassionate ministry to those affected by their own homosexuality or that of others"¹⁴ and also provided goals for ministry to homosexuals which serve as guidelines for pastoral care.

With the prospect of same-sex marriages on the horizon, LCC in convention reaffirmed "that 'marriage' is the union of one man and one woman as God has created and instituted it."¹⁵ Following the ruling of the Ontario Divisional Court that the traditional definition of marriage was discriminatory, the CTCR of LCC responded with an excellent statement and public witness to the biblical definition of marriage. Point 7 is well worth repeating here:

Our objections to the proposed amendment of Canada's legal code operate on two levels. The argument based on natural moral law arises from age-old human experience which is daily ratified by common-sense. We share this objection with people of good will and with the adherents of other religions. Our second argument, which derives from the unanimous testimony of Holy Scripture and Christian tradition, carries authority only within the bounds of Holy Christendom. We regret that Canada has undergone such extensive dechristianisation in the past several decades that the religion professed by the majority of our people could be so completely disregarded by the Divisional Court of Ontario. And we consider it unthinkable that our elected representatives could presume to override the universal and unanimous

¹³ 1993 Lutheran Church–Canada Synod Convention Resolution 93.1.05.

¹⁴ 1993 Lutheran Church–Canada Synod Convention Resolution 93.1.05.

¹⁵ 2002 Lutheran Church–Canada Synod Convention Resolution 02.1.08.

testimony of the natural moral law which Almighty God has written on the hearts of all our citizens.¹⁶

How Do We Respond?

The CTCR coined an interesting phrase: dechristianizing. Robert Weise, in an article in the July 2005 *Concordia Journal*, uses the phrase “normalization of homosexuality”.¹⁷ I believe that both terms are appropriate to describe what has taken place in these last 40 years.

In this same *Concordia Journal*, David Adams identifies four major areas that are at stake in this current lemming-like rush by so many to join the ranks of those who approve of homosexuality. The first area is biblical interpretation. He states:

If successful in their effort to undercut the authority of the biblical witness on this subject, the proponents of homosexuality in the church will have effectively deprived the church of the means to apply what the Bible says about virtually any moral issue to the life of the church today.¹⁸

Interestingly, of the four papers commissioned by the ELCIC, two deal specifically with hermeneutics. In the paper titled, “A Lutheran Hermeneutic of the Old Testament and The Blessing of Same-Sex Couples”, the author, Rev. Dr Sarah Dille, writes:

What is a “hermeneutic”? It is a filter that each of us has to help us interpret what we read—in this case, the Bible. There are, perhaps, as many hermeneutics as there are readers. But there are some common theological commitments we share, as Lutherans, that form and inform our “hermeneutical lens” as readers of the Bible.¹⁹

Dr Dille embraces a post-modern hermeneutic which is as far removed from biblical hermeneutics as one could imagine. Even the appeal to a “Lutheran hermeneutic” falls far short, for we do not determine first that we are Lutheran and then read Scripture; we read Scripture, which forms us as Lutheran. It appears that those who have embraced the homosexual position can only do so by abandoning what the Scriptures plainly teach.

¹⁶ <http://www.lutheranchurch.ca/marriage.php?s=opinion>.

¹⁷ ROBERT W. WEISE, “Christian Responses to the Culture’s Normalization of Homosexuality”, *Concordia Journal* 31 (July 2005): 231.

¹⁸ DAVID ADAMS, “The Challenge of Homosexuality—What Is at Stake?”, *Concordia Journal* 31 (July 2005): 228.

¹⁹ <http://www.elcic.ca/Same-Sex-Blessings/documents/dille.pdf>.

The second area which is at stake, according to Adams, is sexuality and human existence. We are embodied creatures, male or female, he points out. "At no point in our existence, from conception to eternity in heaven or hell are we anything less or anything more than male or female. ... To attempt to escape the fact of our sexuality is to attempt exactly the 'flight from creation.'"²⁰

The third area is the doctrine of marriage:

In law [Canadian society has gradually redefined marriage from] an especially privileged covenant to interpreting it as just another form of legal contract. In the popular mind this redefinition of marriage has taken the form of a shift from understanding marriage as a binding commitment to understanding it as a matter of personal convenience.²¹

The fourth area is the preaching of Law and Gospel. Adams asks the questions:

If, because of social pressure or legal intimidation, we are inhibited from preaching that homosexuality is sinful, how will those who are guilty of such acts be called to repentance? If they are not called to repentance, how shall they receive the forgiveness of sins? If they do not receive the forgiveness of sins shall they not be damned for eternity?²²

So how do we, as congregations and church workers respond? Referred to earlier, Resolution 93.1.05 of the 1993 synodical convention includes a resolution which addresses concerns of pastoral care:

1. To uphold the biblical model of loving, committed and lifelong heterosexual marriage as God's design for the human race;
2. To reaffirm that those not called into such an estate can still live full lives to the glory of God in a context of sexual celibacy;
3. To confront the homosexual with his/her sinfulness, and call him/her to repentance and faith in Christ;
4. To help the individual to recognize that God can and does rescue individuals from homosexual orientation and practice;
5. To assist the individual to rely on Christ's love and the power of the Holy Spirit to abstain from homophile behaviour;
6. To help the penitent homosexual to bear his/her burden in an atmosphere of love and encouragement from the church without fear of recrimination and rejection by his/her brothers and sisters in Christ;

²⁰ ADAMS, 228.

²¹ ADAMS, 228.

²² ADAMS, 229.

7. To extend the ministry of healing and restoration to the families of those afflicted with homosexuality.²³

But pastoral care must be extended to those members of our congregations who are daily confronted with the normalization of homosexuality and dechristianization of our culture and society. Our preaching and our teaching must be very direct. It must point out the clear teaching of God's Word that homosexuality is a sin. In spite of the sentimentality of the age, at times Christian witness must not only be cross-cultural, it may often be counter-cultural. St John writes, "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you" (I John 3:13). We do not strive to be hated. We seek to love as Christ loved us. Of course, in the proclamation of Law and Gospel, the result among some hearers may be that the old sinful nature lashes out. We have seen plenty of that in the realm of debate over the homosexual issue. Still we have an obligation to be clear in our witness as we speak the truth in love.

Secondly, we must value, develop, and support our Lutheran schools more than ever. Current public school curriculums supported and promoted by Alberta Teachers' Association and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation along with school boards in Alberta and British Columbia make no apologies for promoting gay lifestyles and encouraging children to explore their sexual identity (see appendix 2). As Lutherans, in recent years we have been blessed with a developing network of pre-schools, elementary schools and high schools, largely centred in our own ABC District. We actually enjoy these under a special provision of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is in our Lutheran schools that we are free to uphold what God says about human sexuality.

Where there is access to a Lutheran school, I would encourage you as church workers first of all to enrol your own children in a Lutheran school. Secondly, I plead with you to encourage Christian parents in your congregations to enrol their children. And thirdly, I would plead with you to encourage your congregation to provide all the support possible to your local Lutheran school. In this day and age, where you have the choice, not to enrol your child in a Lutheran school is like wanting them to learn to swim in shark-infested waters.

The gay lobby and influence in our society is like none I have ever seen before. It is powerful; its philosophy fits in our post-modern age; it appeals to sentimentality rather than truth; it marginalizes those who disagree; it falls under the protection of political correctness; and it has won rights and status accorded to few other groups. Politicians and educators fall over themselves trying to show who is the most supportive and tolerant of this movement. It has gone from criminal code offence to sacred cow in forty

²³ 1993 Lutheran Church–Canada Synod Convention Resolution 93.1.05.

years. Large elements of the church seek to sanctify it with new and strange interpretations of clear Scriptures.

We are on the front line. We are the watchmen and this is our watch. We have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. We are not “homophobic” or “racist”. We do not seek to kill and destroy. The Son of Man came to seek and save that which was lost. So we must be clear in our proclamation of the truth and pastoral in our proclamation of Law and Gospel. The joy of the angels is that a sinner should come to repentance and enter the Kingdom. That needs to be our goal in dealing with those caught up in homosexuality. We need to be clear that homosexuality in any and every iteration is sinful. And we need to be clear in our proclamation of the full and free forgiveness every repentant sinner has in our crucified and risen Saviour. So grant us grace, Lord, for the bold facing of this hour.

Appendix 1

In 2005, I wrote a personal letter to Bishop Schultz in which I said:

The problem is that this is calling for the blessing of a union based on a relationship that Scripture clearly states is sinful. Homosexuality comes under a categorical prohibition in the Old and New Testaments (Lev. 18:22, 24; 20:13; I Cor. 6:9-10; I Tim. 1:9-10). St. Paul writes in Romans 1 of the “dishonourable passions” to which God gives up those who worship the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:26-27). While our society and culture judges homosexual activity as acceptable, the Church, based on the clear testimony of Scripture, has historically recognized it as sin. It is, of course, sin for which Christ died. We, as a church, are to call all to repentance and to receive the forgiveness won for us at the cross.

The repercussions of blessing same-sex unions are serious. First of all, I believe that it will discredit our witness to the Gospel. I say “our” because what our respective churches do often reflects on the other. The general public does not understand that there are two major Lutheran bodies in Canada. Were the ELCIC to vote to bless same-sex unions, the media would not make the distinction that LCC does not support them.

Since the death of my son on March 3, I have had many opportunities to give public witness to the Christian hope. I am keenly aware that the hope I have is based on God’s sure Word and promise. I—we—need to be consistent in our witness, that we accept all of Scripture as God’s Word. That includes the prohibitions against homosexuality, along with the promises of forgiveness, life and salvation for the repentant sinner. Credibility in the public square is very much dependent upon our integrity and consistency as Christians.

Secondly, I am deeply concerned about the schisms that may develop. I have had a number of ELCIC pastors contact me and ask about how they go about joining LCC should their Synod choose to bless same-sex marriages. Some

may even choose to form another Lutheran Church body. This is not helpful for your church or for Lutheranism in general.

Thirdly, our church bodies have been separated by doctrinal disagreements. I believe that this issue could cause an irreparable rift.

Appendix 2

Resources for Gay-Positive and Anti-Homophobia Education

Professional Development Resources for School Staff Administrators, Teachers, Counsellors, Coaches, Support Staff.

Objectives:

- Establishing safety for lesbian, gay and bisexual students and staff.
- Redressing homophobia and heterosexism in the school.
- Promoting mutual respect among students and staff.
- Resolving identity issues for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth.
- Supporting professional development for staff.

Print Materials

ELLEN BASS and KATE LAUFMAN, *Free Your Mind: The book for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth—and their allies* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996).

Comprehensive, focused, readable handbook for adolescents and professionals, dealing with problems arising from daily lives in a variety of community contexts; provides sensitive, effective suggestions for what to do.

CLIFFORD CHASE, ed., *Queer 13: Lesbian and Gay Writers Recall Seventh Grade* (New York: Rob Weisbach Books, 1998).

Excellent writers recall the homerooms and hallways of their youth—a time of becoming who they truly were, a passage into adulthood as memorable as it was agonizing; funny and painful, reflective and literary.

Creating Safer Schools for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth: A Resource for Educators Concerned with Equity, (Toronto: Education Wife Assault, 1999).

A clear, focused and well-written resource for educators; laid-out in a pleasantly readable format; complete with lesson and activity suggestions and stories by students and teachers.²⁴

²⁴ http://courses.educ.queensu.ca/prof100-101/lectures/sexuality/resources_piker.shtml.

Rev. Don Schieman is president of the Alberta-British Columbia District of Lutheran Church-Canada.

“Church and Ministry” in Lutheran Church–Canada*

Edward G. Kettner

DEAR FRIENDS:

From the very time of the Reformation the Church of the Augsburg Confession has been compelled to deal with the issue of the articles of the faith (termed *loci* by our theologians) on church and ministry. What is the church? How does the One Holy Christian and Apostolic Church relate to the individual congregations on earth in which the Gospel is preached according to a pure understanding of it and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution? What is the nature and function of the Holy Ministry? Does the Office of the Keys (the right to forgive the sins of the penitent and retain the sins of the impenitent) belong to the church or to the ministry? Does ordination into the office of the ministry bestow an “indelible character”, giving the minister power to do things that no other Christian has the right to do, as Rome taught? Or is ordination simply the declaration that a person has been set aside by God, called by God through the church (the congregation) to exercise certain functions? What does the Augsburg Confession mean when it says that no one should publicly preach or teach in the church unless he has been “regularly called”?

There are certain aspects regarding church and ministry that Lutherans have agreed about from the beginning, which are enshrined in our Confessions and agreed to as fully in accord with Scripture. We agree that the church is God’s creation, brought into being and sustained by the preaching of the Gospel. Unlike Rome, which teaches that the true Church is a visible organization on earth with the Pope as its head, wherein gifts are given through the ordained priesthood to enable people to work out their own salvation (salvation won by what we do with “infused grace”, power from God poured into the individual to use to do those things which ultimately merit salvation), the Lutheran Church sees the true Church as the sum total of those who trust in Christ as their Saviour, who have been redeemed and now are sustained by the preaching of the Gospel and through the sacraments of Holy Absolution (the declaration of the forgiveness of sins, which the Augustana refers to as a sacrament) and the Lord’s Supper (the true body and blood of Christ given for the forgiveness of our sins). The church on earth, what we sometimes call the “visible church”, does contain hypocrites, those who participate in the rites of the church but

* This essay was presented to the East District Pastors’ and Deacons’ Conference, 4 May 2010.

in fact do not believe, but who are not members of the true church. It has been said that the true church, then, exists "in, with, and under" the visible church. While we do know that there are hypocrites in the church, we also know that where the Gospel is preached according to a pure understanding of it and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution, there the true church is, since God's Word does not return to Him void. All of this is laid out clearly in the Augustana and the Apology, articles VII and VIII.

Confessional Lutherans have also always agreed that the ministry exists for the sake of the Gospel. AC IV declares that we are justified for Christ's sake through faith. Faith that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven is justifying faith. How then is this faith obtained? AC V (German version) goes on to say, "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments." The Latin says, "So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted." Thus the holy ministry is given by God in order that the Gospel be preached and the sacraments administered so that people do obtain that faith. Does that mean that the Holy Spirit does not work through the Word when someone other than an ordained pastor speaks them? Of course not! The Word, we say, is self-authenticating. Where it is spoken the Holy Spirit is at work.

But at the same time we recognize that God has created an order in his church whereby this is to be done publicly. Early on, our spiritual fathers recognized this, and it is seen in the Small Catechism in the section that is labelled, "The Office of the Keys". All of our printed catechisms have this section, though it does not occur in the Book of Concord. Nevertheless, it was included in editions of the catechism during Luther's lifetime, and accurately reflects his teaching. The wording here is taken from the catechism section of *Lutheran Service Book*, page 326:

What is the Office of the Keys? The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent. [Note: I liked the early, almost archaic translation, referring to it as "that peculiar church power".]

Where is this written? This is what St. John the Evangelist writes in chapter twenty: The Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." *John 20:22-23*

What do you believe according to these words? I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.

So here we see it. The power belongs to the church, but it is exercised by the called ministers of the Word. This certainly shows itself in the public worship of the church as we hear in holy absolution the words, "I by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the word ..." and also when the same words are spoken during private confession before the pastor. This of course again does not mean that in the course of events in one's daily vocation that someone confesses their sins or sinfulness, or the burden of the law in their lives, that any Christian cannot tell them that Christ has died for them and that their sins are forgiven because of Christ.

The privilege of the members of the priesthood of the baptized to tell their fellow Christians and also their unbelieving neighbours of God's work for them in Christ is quite clearly presented in the Scriptures. St Peter in his letters and St John in Revelation quote the Old Testament in their references to the people of God as a priesthood. Just before God gives the Ten Words to Moses, he tells them, "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel" (Ex. 19:5-6). Peter calls these words to mind in I Peter 2:9 when he tells the church to which he is writing that they are a royal priesthood. That royal priesthood is called to live a life patterned after the life of Christ, namely a life of suffering. "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps" (I Pet. 2:21). So also John in his prologue to his visions in Revelation, writing to the seven churches in Asia Minor, begins by reminding them, "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Rev. 1:5-6). This is repeated again in Rev. 5:10, in the vision of the scroll and the Lamb.

This priestly work clearly is clearly delineated in I Peter 3:15: "In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." Speak your confidence in the faith before a hostile world! So also, the Scriptures declare, live a life worthy of your calling, and so put to shame your accusers.

Your holy lives are the way the door is opened to give you the opportunity to speak. There is plenty to do for members of the royal priesthood! Indeed, Luther with his catechism seeks to put words into the mouths of the people of God in order that they can confess that faith before the world and live lives that reflect Christ, as the image of God is in process of being restored in them.

These things are scriptural and confessional (the same thing!), and lay the foundation for church and for ministry. Now we need to move forward to the nineteenth century to see how these things were playing out among

Lutherans in Europe and in North America. On the one hand, there were Lutherans in some of the state churches who had moved to a view of ministry which saw it as an estate separate from the royal priesthood, founded by God to serve and to have authority over the people of God. In extreme cases it bordered upon asserting that the priesthood had no authority to speak the Word of God whatsoever. They were to hear it and receive it (which of course we are to do), but that was it. Also among the Pietists and the revivalists, who were present both in Europe and in North America, were those who viewed the ministry merely in functional terms, namely that someone has to make sure that things are kept in order, and so the congregation chooses or elects someone to do this. God wants the work done, so the people choose someone to do it. This may also manifest itself with the idea that the job of the minister is to train the people to do the "real" work of ministry, or service, based on a misunderstanding of Ephesians 4:12. (The true equipping that Paul has in mind of course is preaching the Gospel, which is the work that constitutes, knits together, or perfects the saints). At times this functionalist view is described as "the job of the pastor is to work himself out of a job." Over against this, the Confessions, as witness to the Scriptures, recognize that God has created the office for the express purpose of publicly exercising the Office of the Keys, preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments which God has given to the Church.

It was really in 19th-century Germany that three distinctive views of the office of public ministry were set forth within Lutheranism, which set the stage for controversy within Lutheranism in North America. James Pragman outlines these views in detail, and anyone interested in studying the matter should first look to chapter five of his book *Traditions in Ministry*, which sets these views forth in detail, and provides a large number of sources for further research.

The first of the views which Pragman documents is the view that the public ministry is a divine institution, and that the office is distinct from the priesthood of believers. This is the view held by Friedrich Julius Stahl and Wilhelm Löhe, and reinforced by A. F. C. Vilmar. Stahl (1802-61) declared that the universal priesthood was established through the death and resurrection of Christ and the conferring of the Holy Spirit, while the office of public ministry was conferred by the sending of the apostles. The universal priesthood pertains to the inner spirituality of the Church, but does not relate to the office of public ministry. It is not the principle upon which the church is built and governed.¹

¹ JAMES H. PRAGMAN, *Traditions of Ministry: A History of the Doctrine of the Ministry in Lutheran Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1983), 130.

For Stahl, as for the Lutheran Confessions, the call was necessary for the public administration of Word and Sacrament. One enters the order of public ministry through the call, but the call is seen to be from God. He rejected the idea that the congregation transferred the pastoral office to a member of the local Christian community.² Ordination, while not transferring an “indelible character” to the individual entering the pastoral office, was more than just the ratification of the first call. It is a divine command, and the call is not complete without it. It is itself the first full appointment to the order.³

Wilhelm Löhe (1808-72) also affirmed the God-ordained nature of the office of public ministry, and emphasized its distinction from the universal priesthood of believers. There is one office of presbyter-bishop, the only surviving order of ministry of those named in the New Testament, but since supervision is necessary, one or more of the presbyters is chosen to serve in that capacity. Thus the ranking of ministers is proper and productive.⁴ In other words, an episcopal structure of the church, rather than a congregational one, is to be preferred.

Since the ministry is of God, the congregation’s participation in his election and calling does not mean that the congregation has control over the one holding the office. And the laity do not participate in the ordination of pastors. In ordination, the office is conferred on qualified individuals by the presbyterate without the participation of the laity. Thus, the last word in the call, and then the ordination of the one called, rests with the presbyterate, not the laity. Löhe saw this to be the case in the New Testament Church. The laity did not participate in the election of Matthias in Acts 1,⁵ and Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys appointed elders in the congregations they visited (Acts 14:23).⁶ As did Stahl, Löhe saw ordination as a necessary part of the public ministry, an indication that the office comes directly from God, and not from the universal priesthood. A congregation may set an individual before God for ordination, but the office belongs to God and He alone establishes it. The congregation merely serves as God’s agent.⁷

A. F. C. Vilmar (1800-68) reinforced the ideas of Stahl and Löhe, emphasizing that the shepherd is the centre of the congregation, and gathers

² PRAGMAN, 130-31.

³ PRAGMAN, 139.

⁴ PRAGMAN, 132-33.

⁵ Note: that cannot be determined from the account in Acts 1, where it simply declares that two candidates were chosen and then lots were drawn in order that God might make the choice.

⁶ PRAGMAN, 133.

⁷ PRAGMAN, 133.

a flock around himself. It is the shepherd, not the flock, that has the mandate to preach the Gospel so that the Church can be gathered. The congregation has the mandate to hear the Word, not to preach it. By the same token, the shepherd alone has the mandate to administer the sacraments and the office of the keys. The shepherd alone determines the correctness of doctrine and the nature of the worship life of the congregation, and only shepherds can ordain other shepherds for the pastoral ministry.⁸ As did Stahl and Löhe, Vilmar emphasized the necessity of ordination for the pastoral office.⁹

In contrast to the view represented by Stahl, Löhe, and Vilmar, J. W. F. Höfling emphasized the unity between the universal priesthood and the office of public ministry. While the office is divinely instituted, it nevertheless derives from the universal priesthood. The public ministry is the means by which the means of grace, which belong to the whole church, are dispensed to the people of God in the name of God. It does not exist apart from the community. Ordination is simply the declaration of the fact that an individual has been identified as an occupant of the office of public ministry.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, Höfling's opponents accused him of seeing the office as deriving from the congregation rather than God.

Into the "middle ground" stepped G. Chr. Adolf von Harless in Germany and C. F. W. Walther in North America. Since Walther's work actually came earlier, and since it lays the foundation for the Missouri understanding of the nature of public ministry, his views alone will be set forth here today, highlighting certain of his theses on ministry (received by the Missouri Synod in 1851), and contrasting them with the "high" and "low" views set forth above.

As noted earlier, the issues that caused Walther to write his treatise on church and ministry were (1) the problems the Perry County congregations were having as a result of the deposition of Martin Stephan as their bishop; and (2) the views being promulgated by Pastor Grabau of the Buffalo Synod, which emphasized the duty of the laity to absolute obedience of the clergy. The views of Grabau were substantially the same as those of Stephan. From bitter experience the Perry County churches had discovered the abuses that could arise in the church from an authoritarian view of the ministry, and Walther set out to set forth a God-pleasing understanding of the office of public ministry from Scripture, the Confessions, and the Orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians. Even though these theses were presented as a reaction to abuses to two different directions, they are more than a mere

⁸ PRAGMAN, 136.

⁹ PRAGMAN, 137.

¹⁰ PRAGMAN, 137-39.

reaction. They synthesize the correct elements in the two extreme views into a coherent whole, while avoiding the unscriptural pitfalls of both as well.

In these theses, the high calling of the office of public ministry is maintained, as is the divine institution and its authority, while at the same time the nature of the ministry as servanthood, the fact that the office of the keys belongs to the whole Church, and the fact that the call, not the rite of ordination, is of the essence of the ministry are stressed as checks on any tendency to unbridled authoritarianism on the part of the occupant of the office. The proof that Walther's view is both scriptural and confessional may be seen in the liberal quotations from Scripture, the Confessions, and the Orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians by which he defends his theses. It must be sadly noted that, though Wilhelm Löhe was responsible for sending to North America many men who were instrumental in the founding of the Missouri Synod, Löhe and Missouri had a falling out precisely over the doctrine of ministry.

In North America this played itself out in the conflict between C. F. W. Walther, first president of the Missouri Synod, and J. A. A. Grabau, bishop of the Buffalo Synod. Grabau's position was that the pastor of a congregation had absolute authority over all aspects of the life of the congregation. He taught that the church was a visible community, made up of two estates, the ecclesiastical and the domestic, the first having the duty to teach and govern (the office of holy ministry) and the second to hear and obey the former (the members of the congregation). Obedience to authority meant obedience even in indifferent matters. This had also been the view of Martin Stephan and his followers, the flock that settled in Perry County, Missouri, who had fallen into spiritual crisis when they had been forced to depose Stephan. Beginning with the Altenburg debates in 1841, coming in the wake of Stephan's removal and the question whether without a bishop there was a church at all, Walther examined the Scriptures and the Confessions and assured the people (who would a few years later form one of the core groups that formed the Missouri Synod) that they were indeed church, and that they had the right to call their own pastors, and not wait for a bishop to appoint them. The Altenburg theses were later expanded into the theses on Church and Ministry.

Walther recognized that the office of ministry (the German title could literally be translated Church and Office) was an estate that stood over against the people, and that it did have authority, but he contended that the authority of the pastor was nothing other than the authority of the Word of God. He has the authority to preach and administer the sacraments and had "the authority of a spiritual tribunal" when it comes to the office of the keys, but that the church as the people of God, the royal priesthood of the baptized, also had rights and privileges when it comes to the Word of God. Because this issue continued to trouble the church, Walther prepared his treatise and submitted a draft of it to the fifth convention of the synod, held

in Milwaukee in 1851, just four years after the Missouri Synod was formed, then called The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. Discussing the treatise in eight sessions, the convention approved of it and ordered its publication. When it was published, he published it as not his own work, but as the testimony of the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the topic, something to which the synod did not object. So, is it the "official" position of the LCMS and hence LCC? Walther clearly was convinced that it was, and synod clearly recognized it as such down through the years. Walther and Synod stated simply that this was the confession of the church on this matter. But is it a "confessional" document on par with the Book of Concord? We certainly do not list it among the works pastors subscribe to in our handbook. Nevertheless, Walther and synod from the beginning saw it as an accurate summary of the scriptural and confessional view of the topic.

Also of importance was Grabau's insistence that membership in an orthodox Lutheran congregation was a prerequisite for salvation, rather than purely and simply faith in Christ. This view basically takes the view taught by Rome and by Eastern Orthodoxy and transfers it to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The true Church, then, is inherently visible, and membership in the proper visible body is a prerequisite for salvation. Walther of course was no fan of heterodoxy, and did rightly insist that the Evangelical Lutheran Church was and is the true visible Church on earth, that is, the Church in which the Gospel is preached in its purest form. (Note that he did not say it was confined to the German Evangelical Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, or to those church bodies to which she had established altar and pulpit fellowship.) However, he also recognized that faith is created and sustained also in heterodox churches, that when the Gospel is not completely excluded it does its work, even if it is not always fully comprehended. Hermann Sasse notes:

We are confident that the evangelical Lutheran Church which is faithful to its Confessions is truly the church of Jesus Christ; that its office of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments is an office instituted by Jesus Christ; and that it is effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, even if it is exercised by weak and sinful men; that Christ, the Lord, is really and personally present in the Word and Sacraments of our church, and that the communion of saints, the fellowship of justified sinners, is built up in our midst by this Word and Sacraments. And yet we know that the church of God is not limited to our confessional church, but rather embraces "men scattered throughout the whole world, from the rising to the setting of the sun, who agree concerning the Gospel, and have the *same*

Christ, the *same* Holy Ghost, and the *same* Sacraments, no matter whether they have human traditions that are the same or dissimilar”.¹¹

Sasse succinctly sums this up in this way: “Thus the two statements stand side by side: the Lutheran church which is faithful to its confession is the true church of Jesus Christ, and the church of Christ is not limited to the church of the Lutheran Confession.”¹²

Since the true Church, the body of believers, is one Church, in the end membership in one particular visible body is not absolutely necessary for salvation, though Walther does note that when one becomes aware of the full truth of the Gospel a Christian is obligated to join a Christian congregation that teaches that truth.

Thesis I declares, “The holy ministry, or the pastoral office, is an office distinct from the priestly office, which belongs to all believers.” Here we see agreement with the “high” view in the emphasis on the distinctiveness of the office, and a rejection of the idea that the office belongs to believers, who designate one man to fill it. Thesis II, “The ministry, or the pastoral office, is not a human ordinance, but an office established by God Himself”, agrees with both sides as far as it goes, as the advocates of both views emphasize the divine institution of the office. The difference comes in with the understanding as to how God fills the office and how he uses the office. It most certainly rejects any attempt by a congregation to circumscribe the role of the pastor within parameters narrower than Scripture gives the office, or any attempt by the holder of the office to make stronger claims than Scripture allows.

Thesis IV, which states, “The ministry of preaching is not a peculiar order, set up over and against the common estate of Christians, and holier than the latter, like the priesthood of the Levites, but is an office of service”; and thesis V, which declares, “The ministry of preaching has the authority to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments and the authority of a spiritual tribunal”, speak out against the extremes of the Roman view of ministry, which sees the public ministry as a holier estate than the laity, and whose authority derives from that holier estate, and the functionalist view which leaves all power in the hands of the congregation. Service clearly does not imply lack of authority when applied to the pastoral office.

Theses VI and VII emphasize the role of the congregation in the calling and ordination of the one filling the office, over against those who see the call as coming directly from God and who deny that the universal priesthood has the power of the keys. Thesis VI says,

¹¹ HERMANN SASSE, *Here We Stand*, trans. Theodore T. Tappert (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938; reprint ed. Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1979), 180-81.

¹² SASSE, 184.

The ministry of preaching is conferred by God through the congregation, as holder of all church power, or of the keys, and by its call, as prescribed by God. The ordination of those called, with the laying on of hands, is not by divine institution but is an apostolic church ordinance and merely a public, solemn confirmation of the call.

Thesis VII notes, "The holy ministry is the authority conferred by God through the congregation, as holder of the priesthood and of all church power, to administer in public office the common rights of the spiritual priesthood in behalf of all."

Theses IX and X speak to the question of obedience and doctrinal authority, and particularly attack the insistence by Grabau that the minister must be obeyed in all things. Thesis IX notes that they are to be obeyed in their ministry of the Word, but not necessarily in indifferent matters. It states:

Reverence and unconditional obedience is due to the ministry of preaching when the preacher is ministering the Word of God. However, the preacher may not dominate over the Church; he has, accordingly, no right to make new laws, to arrange indifferent matters and ceremonies arbitrarily, and to impose and execute excommunication *alone*, without a previous verdict of the entire congregation.

Thesis X emphasizes that the laity along with the clergy have the right to judge doctrine. It declares, "According to divine right the function of passing judgment on doctrine belongs indeed to the ministry of preaching. However, also the laymen have this right, and for this reason they also have a seat and vote with the preachers in church courts and councils."

We do need to note that there are many points at which there are agreements between Grabau and Walther. Both recognize that the office of holy ministry is divinely ordained, and that it is an estate which is divinely mandated. The key differences lie in the fact that for Grabau and for Stephan the ministry was an office that acted as lords over the flock and that the clergy alone that have the right to speak the word to anyone. When St Paul addresses the Colossians, writing to the congregation as a whole, not just to the pastors/overseers/elders, he says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom" All Christians have the right to judge the truth, following the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:10-11, who "received the Word in all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so."

A proper understanding of the priesthood of all believers is necessary for a proper understanding of the public ministry, which is public in the sense that it does publicly that which is the right of every Christian to do. Luther noted this throughout his own ministry. In 1523 when he wrote to the Christians in Bohemia "Concerning the Ministry", he listed seven functions of the office of ministry: (1) the ministry of the Word, (2) to baptize, (3) to administer or consecrate the sacred bread and wine, (4) to bind and loose

from sin, (5) to offer the sacrifice of a holy life, praise and thanksgiving, (6) to intercede for others, and (7) to judge doctrine (AE 40:21-31). These functions, he said, have been given to all Christians, and so it is the right of the congregation to bestow the public exercise of these functions upon a qualified individual. The public ministry in the congregation thus presupposes the priesthood of the baptized.

Part of the tension that arises in discussions of this subject comes from the fact that much of what our Lord says regarding these issues He says to the apostles, and it is not absolutely clear whether He is speaking to them as holders of the office of public ministry or as the Church. This certainly is the case with the foundational words regarding the office of the keys, spoken in John 20, or in a somewhat different form to Peter and the other apostles in Matthew 16. In any case, the power of the keys is clearly given to the Church in Matthew 18, where the issue of church discipline and excommunication is covered by the words “tell it to the Church”, and “where two or three are gathered together”. While it is clear from our Confessions that the right of excommunication is given to the public ministry (those who preside over the churches) (Treatise 60), this, Walther notes, is never to be done without informing the entire congregation (Ministry Thesis IX). The work needs to be done by pastor and people together, because both are sinners and there may be times when even the pastor needs the correction of the people.

There are some who suggest that Luther abandoned his view that the rights mentioned above belong to the entire priesthood at a later point, when the functionalism of the Calvinists and the Zwinglians threatened to destroy the significance of the office. At that point, it is said, he reasserted the power and privileges of the ministry and abandoned reference to the royal priesthood. Robert Rosin, Reformation scholar and professor of historical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, notes that this is not the case. In his keynote address at the world seminaries conference of the International Lutheran Council, held in Erfurt, Germany, at the *Augustinerkloster*, Luther's old monastery, in 2004, he noted that Luther appreciated the necessity of both, and that he would stress one or the other when he saw the work of the other pressed to extremes. Over against Rome he spoke of priesthood of believers. Over against the denigration of the called public servants promulgated by the enthusiasts he spoke of the necessity and importance of the office of the ministry. Indeed, the mature Luther in a sermon on Psalm 110, preached in 1535, says:

After we have become Christians through this Priest and His priestly office, incorporated in Him by Baptism and through faith, then each one, according to his calling and position, obtains the right and the power of teaching and confessing before others this Word which we have obtained from Him. Even though not everybody has the public office and calling, every Christian has the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his

neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever necessary. For example, father and mother should do this for their children and household; a brother, neighbor, citizen, or peasant for the other. Certainly one Christian may instruct and admonish another ignorant or weak Christian concerning the Ten Commandments, the Creed, or the Lord's Prayer. And he who receives such instruction is also under obligation to accept it as God's Word and publicly to confess it.¹³

The major confessional document that talks about these things is the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, particularly the section on the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops. Here Luther's colleague Philip Melancthon (professor of theology and a layman), who authored this document, notes that it is the priesthood who has the rights and therefore the right to elect and ordain ministers. This is in contrast to Rome, who insisted that only the bishops, who stood in apostolic succession by virtue of ordination, had the right to ordain pastors.

Walther's concern that those who occupy the office of ministry do not have the right to impose anything on the people that the Word of God does not impose reflects the teaching in *Apology 28:7-8*:

In the church we must keep this teaching, that we receive forgiveness of sins freely for Christ's sake by faith. We must also keep the teaching that human traditions are useless as acts of worship; and that therefore neither sin nor righteousness depends upon food, drink, clothing, and similar matters... . Thus bishops have no right to create traditions apart from the Gospel as though they merited the forgiveness of sins or were acts or worship that pleased God as righteousness. Nor do the bishops have the right to burden consciences with such traditions so that it would be a sin to omit them.

While certainly Grabau and others would never have said that the things outside of Scripture which they imposed somehow merited the forgiveness of sins, the fact that they imposed their views in all matters remained a problem, and that was the problem that Walther addressed.

The tension between the office and the priesthood also caused conflict between Walther and Wilhelm Löhe, the German pastor with the heart for missions who helped establish Lutheran work in North America. Walther and Löhe had a falling-out because Löhe, as he affirmed the God-ordained nature of the office, emphasized the distinction of the office from the priesthood to the extent that, even though congregations participate in the election of qualified individuals to the office, the final word, ordination, takes place in conjunction only with those in the ministry, with no lay involvement. He saw ordination as a necessary part of the office. Walther, in contrast, following the Confessions, saw ordination as an ancient rite established by the apostles which was the means by which the call of the

¹³ "Sermon on Psalm 110" (12 June 1535), AE 13:333.

individual was ratified. It is nothing other than the confirmation of the call. The Lutheran Church notes that from the beginnings of Christianity ordination, in terms of laying on of hands, was practised. However, this was not the bestowing of a power by the clergy on another who was entering its ranks, but was bestowed by the Church as a confirmation of the call. “Wherever the church exists, the right to administer the Gospel also exists. Wherefore it is necessary for the church to retain the right of calling, electing, and ordaining ministers” (Tr 67). Melancthon goes on to state in paragraph 70, “There was a time when the people elected pastors and bishops. Afterwards, a bishop, either of that church or of a neighbouring church, was brought in to confirm the election with the laying on of hands; nor was ordination anything more than such confirmation.” Certainly the Confessions do not see a special grace or a special character accompanying the office. The office is simply an office of service (Ministry Thesis IV).

Today even some Lutherans are stating that ordination is a sacrament, noting that even the Apology is willing to accept the term. But the words need to be noted in their proper context. The full statement is as follows:

If ordination is interpreted in relation to the ministry of the Word, we have no objection to calling ordination a sacrament If Ordination is interpreted in his way, we shall not object either to calling the laying on of hands a sacrament. The church has the command to appoint ministers; to this we must subscribe wholeheartedly, for we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it. It is good to extol the ministry of the Word with every possible kind of praise in opposition to the fanatics who dream that the Holy Spirit does not come through the word but because of their own preparations. (Ap 13:11-13)

On the other side of the issue was J. W. F. Höfling, who emphasized the unity between the universal priesthood and the office of public ministry. He recognized that the office is divinely instituted, but declared that it derives from the universal priesthood. The ministry is the means by which the means of grace, which belong to the whole church, are dispensed to the people of God in the name of God.

Walther saw the problems and dangers of both views, and declared on the one hand that the ministry is an estate distinct from the priesthood (Ministry Thesis I), God ordained (Thesis II), and an office with authority (Thesis V). Thus I do not think that Walther would have a problem with the idea that the Church is composed of pastor and people. Nor would he have a problem with the concept that the pastor stands over against the congregation in the person of Christ, namely, speaking the Word to them in a way in which it is to be seen as coming from the mouth of Christ Himself. The words of absolution in divine service, seen in *The Lutheran Hymnal* of 1941 and in our more recent hymnals as well, note that the pastor speaks “in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ”.

Earlier we noted Luther's words on the rights of the priesthood from his sermon on Psalm 110. It is also important to see that Luther states that not everyone is to do everything. He says,

For although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach, and rule. Certain ones of the multitude must be selected and separated for such an office. And he who has such an office is not a priest because of his office but a servant of all the others, who are priests. (AE 13:332)

It's quite clear that Luther would have strong objection to the concept "everyone a minister". Everyone is a priest. But not everyone is called to a public office of teaching and oversight, which is what the ministry is. After extolling the work of the priesthood, he then goes on to say:

Every Christian has and practices such priestly works. But above these activities is the communal office of public teaching. For this preachers and pastors are necessary. This office cannot be attended to by all the members of a congregation. Neither is it fitting that each household do its own baptizing and celebrating of the Sacrament. Hence it is necessary to select and ordain those who can preach and teach, who study the Scriptures, and who are able to defend them. They deal with the Sacraments by the authority of the congregation, so that it is possible to know who is baptized and everything is done in an orderly fashion. If everyone were to preach to his neighbor or if they did things for one another without orderly procedure, it would take a long time indeed to establish a congregation. Such functions, however, do not pertain to the priesthood as such but belong to the public office which is performed in behalf of all those who are priests, that is Christians. (AE 13:334)

It is quite clear here that even as Luther sees the ministry instituted for the sake of the priesthood, and that the royal priesthood does have the right to exercise the office of the keys in their daily vocation in announcing the forgiveness of sins and teaching the faith, as well as in their daily sacrifice of prayer and praise, he does not see members of the priesthood taking over public acts. Though Luther does not cite it here (since it is a sermon and not a theological treatise there is no reason that he should), he is clearly in agreement with Augustana XIV on church order, where it simply says, "Concerning church order they [that is, our churches] teach that no one should teach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless properly called." This means called in a regular manner by a proper public authority. This stands against Rome who accused the Lutherans of allowing anyone and everyone to preach, thus violating church order, by noting that this is not the case. It also rejects Rome's insistence that a call in accordance with Rome's canon law is the only legitimate call, noting in the Apology that they would be more than happy to appoint ministers in accordance with established procedure. But, they say,

However, the bishops compel our priests either to reject and to condemn the kind of doctrine that we have confessed, or by new and unheard cruelty they

kill the unfortunate and innocent people. This prevents our priests from acknowledging such bishops. Thus the cruelty of the bishops is the reason for the abolition of canonical order in some places despite our earnest desire to retain it.

Regarding the issue of lay celebration of the Lord's Supper, Walther soundly rejects this. He says in his *Pastoral Theology*:

The great majority of our theologians, Luther in the forefront, believe that the holy Supper should never be administered privately by one who is not in the public preaching office, by a layman. That is partly because no such necessity can occur with the holy Supper, as with Baptism and Absolution, that would justify a departure from God's ordinance (1 Cor. 4:1; Rom. 10:15; Heb. 5:4); partly because the holy Supper "is a public confession and so should have a public minister"; partly because schisms can easily be brought about by such private Communion. ...

It is a different question whether it pertains to the reality and validity of the holy supper that the ministrant be legitimately called and ordained to the public preaching office; whether the "office" or the authorization to administer the public office makes the words of Institution powerful so that the essence of the Sacrament includes not only the Word and the elements along with the use but also a quality of the ministrant. That is the doctrine of the Roman church, which is rejected and opposed by all theologians generally recognized in our church as orthodox.

Most of the same [orthodox Lutheran theologians] state that the administration of the holy Supper by a layman is never *recta* and *legitima* [correct and legitimate]. But none denies that it can be done *rata* and *de facto* [with validity and in fact].

Walther then goes on to note that Luther in writing to the Bohemians in 1523 asserts that the Roman priesthood make a special claim to authority to bless and administer the bread and wine. He rejects this view and states that "this office is also common to all Christians as the priesthood". He also notes that Luther said much the same thing regarding private masses and the consecration of clerics in 1533. But Walther then goes on and declares,

Here Luther did not want to state that a layman would be doing right if he would arrogate to himself the administration of the holy Supper. ... Luther much rather declared himself to be against that with all earnestness. With that doctrine he only wanted to oppose the error that the preachers of the New Testament constituted a special, holier estate of priests, who alone could make real the means of grace of the New Testament by the power of their consecration.

Walther goes on to note that a number of orthodox Lutheran theologians have taught that, in an (assumed) case of necessity, the holy Supper could be validly administered by a layman not only *de facto* but also *de jure* (not only actually, but rightfully). But we have already seen that in Walther's mind

there is no case of necessity in which this should be done, and his quotes from Luther back this up.¹⁴

Walther said precisely the same thing in an essay in *Der Lutheraner* in 1861. He states:

Although almost all orthodox Lutheran theologians declare that no layman should administer holy communion, and we agree heartily with them, one must not think that a common Christian is not to administer holy communion because he could not bring it about, that this necessarily calls for an ordained pastor! By no means! The reason is that in the case of the Lord's Supper no genuine case of necessity can arise. For the Lord's Supper is the sacrament of confirmation or strengthening. Baptism, however is, the sacrament of initiation or consecration, and the proclamation of the gospel together with absolution the means by which faith is engendered. This alone is the reason why the orthodox teachers of our church were opposed to a layman ever administering holy communion.¹⁵

So, where are we? Walther notes the danger of Grabau's view, which denies the reality of the efficacy of the Word itself, and insists that only when it is taught and the sacraments administered by an ordained person are they valid. He notes:

It is unspeakable what a dreadful doctrine that is. One must by no means think the dreadful part lies only in this, that therefore those, who knowingly administer the means of grace or cause them to be administered contrary to the ordinance are robbed of the comfort, that the means of grace are nevertheless valid and efficacious. This would still be a small harm. However, the matter has a far wider significance. If one teaches that absolution, holy communion, etc., are valid and efficacious only when they are administered by a correctly ordained preacher: then a Christian can never know whether he is receiving a valid and efficacious absolution, and whether he is really receiving the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. For those who teach the former are at the same time also teaching, and must teach if they ordained, or a lay person, can ordain, but only a preacher who has been correctly ordained himself. From this it follows, however, that one can only know whether a preacher was rightly ordained, if one knows at the same time whether also the person who ordained him was correctly ordained; there one must necessarily know, whether all previous ordainers were themselves correctly and truly ordained, therefore whether the ordination of our present pastor goes back in uninterrupted succession to the apostles! For if at any time a gap had occurred, if at any time an unordained

¹⁴ For Walther's discussion of the issue, see C. F. W. WALTHER, *Walther's Pastoral Theology*, trans. and abridged by John M. Drickamer from the 5th edition, 1906 (New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, 1995), 134-36.

¹⁵ C. F. W. WALTHER, essay in *Der Lutheraner*, 17.14 (19 February 1861): 105; in *The Congregation's Right to Choose Its Pastor*, trans. Fred Kramer (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1987), 107.

person had ordained someone who is in the succession, namely the succession which ends with our pastor, then our pastor would not be rightly, i.e., not truly ordained, and everything he does would then, according to Grabau's teaching, be ineffective and invalid. This is the abyss to which this teaching leads!¹⁶

One of the dangers of the Grabau position is that it is easy for the pastor to see himself in an adversarial position against his congregation: the sheep need to be set straight, to shut up and listen, and that is it. Now of course there are times when the pastor must tell his congregation things they may not want to hear; but out of love he will tell them, and in accordance with the word of God they will listen, and repent. But since these people have received the Holy Spirit and are indeed members of a royal priesthood, and have called this pastor to feed them the Word and give them absolution and the body and blood of Christ, it is clear that they are on the same side; they are not adversaries. As Peter reminds the elders to whom he is writing, correction, when it is necessary, is to come with a spirit of gentleness. I Peter 5:1-3 states this admirably:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

Church and ministry: both are mandated by God. The Church calls pastors, and those pastors publicly administer God's gifts to the people. In that way, people are brought from death to life, nurtured in the faith, prepared for service to their neighbours in their daily vocation, and in the end brought into the presence of God for eternity. Such is God's love for us.

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¹⁶ WALTHER, essay in *Der Lutheraner*, 17.14 (19 February 1861): 104-5.

Overview of C. F. W. Walther's "The Right Form of a Lutheran Local Congregation"*

Timothy Teuscher

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE THE SHADOW OF C. F. W. WALTHER is still cast over our synod 123 years after his death. For better when Walther is actually read, instead of just talked about. For better when Walther is read within the context of his times and not read in a vacuum. For better when Walther's writings are not regarded as some kind of inerrant and infallible authority, but are received in the way in which he himself said in an essay at the 1884 synodical convention:

The writings left by the so-called church fathers, as well as those of pious teachers of our church, are treasures for which we cannot thank God enough. From time immemorial all faithful servants of the church have drawn their teaching from Holy Scripture, but they were not ashamed also to cite testimonies of pious teachers of the past and present them in their sermons and writings, partly to refute opponents, partly for their own strengthening in faith. And, finally, they added here and there small crumbs of their own, which they had not learned through the agency of any human being, but which were given them by the Holy Spirit in zealous study of Holy Scripture, through fervent prayer, and in the school of consecrated affliction. This is also what we have done. ... Our Lutheran Church, therefore, confesses not only that Scripture is the sole source and norm of all doctrines, but also that one should use human teachers for one's profit.¹

For worse, however, when Walther is reconstituted to fit into our preconceived ideas of what he said concerning the doctrine of the church and the ministry. For worse when we ignore how Walther actually put into practice that which he wrote about in *Church and Ministry*. For worse when Walther is dismissed by those who would champion instead the Missouri Synod's founding father from afar, Wilhelm Löhe, accusing Walther of succumbing to, as Löhe called it, "American mob rule",² and advocating, instead, the introduction of the historic episcopate as the magic bullet that

* This essay was presented to the East District Pastors' and Deacons' Conference, 4 May 2010.

¹ C. F. W. WALTHER, "Church Fathers and Doctrine", in *Essays for the Church*, vol. 2, trans. Bruce Cameron and Reinhold Stallman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 68, 71.

² Cited in CARL MUNDINGER, *Government in the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 200.

will fix all the problems facing our church today. For worse when others, in the name of supposedly reclaiming Walther for the church in our time, assert that only the supremacy of the voters' assembly in the congregation is divinely mandated, and that the people alone, and not the pastor, not a bishop, not a synod or district president, have the ultimate and final authority in the church.

In his first presidential address at the Missouri Synod convention in 1848, Walther makes the point that there is no one divinely instituted way for a congregation or a church body to govern itself. In such things there is freedom; and no one can claim, "Unless you do it this way, you are not Lutheran." So he says:

Perhaps there are times and conditions when it is profitable for the church to place the supreme deciding and regulating power into the hands of representatives. Who, for instance, would deny that at one time the consistories in our German fatherland were an inestimable blessing? Which person acquainted a bit with history would deny that the Swedish church grew splendidly under its episcopal constitution? ... If, however, we glance at the conditions in which the church finds itself here, we can hardly consider any other constitution as the most salutary except one under which the congregations are free to govern themselves but enter into a synodical organization such as the one existing among us with the help of God, for enjoying fraternal consultation, supervision, and aid to spread the kingdom of God jointly and to make possible and accomplish the aims of the church in general.

In our Evangelical Lutheran Church we must preach to our congregations that the choice of the form of government for a church is an inalienable part of their Christian liberty and that Christians as members of the church are subject to no power in the world except the clear Word of the living God. Otherwise, our chief battle would soon centre about the execution of manufactured, external human ordinances and institutions and would swallow up the true blessed battle for the real treasure of the church, for the purity and unity of doctrine. In a word, we would lose sight of our beautiful aim of building the true church, which is not an external scaffold, but the kingdom of God in the hearts of men, and at best ourselves bring about our early dissolution.³

Our focus on Walther has come about as a result of a resolution that was adopted at last year's district convention "that the next pastors' and deacons' conference be requested to address C. F. W. Walther's *Church and Ministry* with a presentation being made of our historic doctrinal stance to help bring about unity within our midst." Since, however, most of the lay delegates, let alone many pastors, had no idea what the original overture

³ C. F. W. WALTHER, "1848 Presidential Address", in CARL S. MEYER, ed., *Moving Frontiers*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 174-75.

that precipitated this resolution was even about, the convention also resolved "that the East District of Lutheran Church–Canada encourage our pastors, deacons and congregations to study *Church and Ministry* by C. F. W. Walther to better understand our practice and polity."⁴

What I intend, therefore, is to present an overview of another work by Walther, namely, "The Right Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent of the State", which began as a doctrinal essay at the Western District convention and was published a year later in 1863, highlighting only some of what he has written, along with a study guide that could perhaps be used by members of our congregations in Bible class or some other venue. In his preface to this work Walther says:

The book "The Voice of Our Church on the Question of the Church and the Ministry," published eleven years ago, set forth the doctrine on which the right form of a particular church is based. The present work is to demonstrate the practical application of that doctrine and to show that it is the firmest foundation on which a local congregation may be built.⁵

When we hear this expression, "the right form of an evangelical Lutheran local congregation", we probably think of such things like church government, polity, organization, and the like. Or, we think of the 21st-century popular buzz words like strategic planning, visions statements, core values, short-term and long-term goals, where nearly every incorporated entity from GM Canada to the Toronto Maple Leafs to many of our own congregations has developed its own unique mission statement and right form. Strategic planning, however, can never guarantee success or effectiveness. Just ask GM stockholders or Toronto Maple Leaf fans! And this is also true when it comes to the church; after all, as Article V of the Augsburg Confession states: "The Holy Spirit works faith when and where He pleases in those who hear the Gospel" (AC V).⁶ Organizing our congregations around the Great Commission or implementing visions and strategies for church growth is not going to be a panacea for the current ills and problems in our congregations, district, and synod. And if you don't believe that, then ask some of the older pastors who had to endure the Parish Leadership Seminars or the never-ending stewardship and church growth and evangelism programmes and workshops and materials that were peddled throughout the synod back in the 1980s by our own modern-day John Tetzels. Nor, in fact, is a vision or goal like that of being a vibrant,

⁴ Lutheran Church–Canada, East District, *2009 Convention Proceedings* (Resolution 09-4-3a), 50.

⁵ C. F. W. WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concorida Publishing House, 1961), vii.

⁶ All references to the Lutheran Confessions in this paper are from the Tappert edition.

growing, friendly congregation something that is uniquely Lutheran or even Christian for that matter.

No, this is not what Walther is talking about here in this work. And instead of spending countless hours and dollars in this mad rush of the Gadarenes at a time when aging and declining congregations have become the norm in our district, when many of our congregations are struggling financially, and when many are tempted to adopt a 21st-century version of the old 19th-century accommodation to American evangelical Protestantism that was promoted by the likes of Benjamin Kurtz and Samuel Schmucker, perhaps we would be better served by hearing and heeding what Walther has set forth in “The Right Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent Of The State”.

The Definition, Independence, and Rights of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation

The Definition of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation

Walther begins with a definition of a Lutheran local congregation, a definition that has not changed from the Altenburg Debate. It is still, as he says:

An Evangelical Lutheran local congregation is an assembly of believing Christians at a certain place among whom God’s Word is preached purely according to the Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the holy sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution as stated in the Gospel, in the midst of whom, however, there is always also an admixture of spurious Christians and hypocrites, and at times even public sinners.⁷

In spite of the presence in its midst of non-Christians and hypocrites, or even manifest public sinners when church discipline is rather lacking, this assembly of people at a certain place, “the church of God that is in Corinth” (I Cor. 1:2 ESV), “the churches of Asia send you greetings” (I Cor. 16:19 ESV), is really and truly church. It is so because the Holy Spirit is working through the Word and the Sacraments in that place to create and sustain faith in Christ in the hearts of people. What makes it a Lutheran congregation is that these means of grace are administered according to the Lutheran Confessions. On this last point Walther says:

The Confessions must be made familiar to congregations, as well as to pastors. ... It is not enough that the Lutheran Confessions be on paper in a congregation’s constitution or that pastors are pledged to them when they are

⁷ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 1.

installed into their office. No, this Confession must also be faithfully practiced. A church may have sworn to be faithful to the Lutheran Confessions and yet be a vile sect; for the Confession of the church must also sound forth from the pulpit. A congregation may be part of a large Lutheran synod, but if it has a pastor who preaches false doctrine and it likes his preaching very much and wants to keep him; then that is not a true Lutheran congregation, even if the right confessional statement is inscribed over the entrance to its building. No, the Lutheran Confessions must be proclaimed, and it dare not just say in a book somewhere that they should be proclaimed. ... The Book of Concord should be in every Lutheran home. For that reason synod should provide a copy, and pastors should see to it that every home has one. The Lord doesn't want us to remain children, who are blown to and fro by every wind of doctrine; instead of that, He wants us to grow in knowledge so that we can teach others and contradict heretics.⁸

When we see how little most of our congregations know about the Confessions, it must on the one hand humble us deeply, and on the other hand become for us a mighty incentive to familiarize the people with them.⁹

The Independence of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation

"A congregation is independent of the state when the latter allows it to rule itself in all things."¹⁰

In commenting on this thesis, Walther states that "church and state are altogether different powers and therefore must not be intermingled."¹¹ What he doesn't point out is what he and all who first read this book knew: namely, such independence of a congregation from the state and such freedom of self-rule is the exception rather than the norm in the history of the Church. Lutheran congregations in the various German states since the time of the Reformation did not have the freedom to order their own affairs but were regulated by government ministries or consistories. In the Scandinavian countries the Lutheran congregations were regulated by the crown. In North America, however, the situation was quite different. The government did not interfere in the life of a local congregation. Since most of us have grown up in this context of religious liberty and government non-interference, we probably take it for granted or assume that this is the normal situation. That, however, would overlook the situation in which the

⁸ WALTHER, "Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod", in *Essays for the Church*, 2:68, 71.

⁹ C. F. W. WALTHER, "Calling a Pastor", in *Essays for the Church*, vol. 1, trans. Everette Meier (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 78.

¹⁰ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 5.

¹¹ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 7.

Lutheran immigrants to North America found themselves, and the challenge that it posed for men like Walther.

This is also why, perhaps somewhat disturbing to our political and social sensitivities, Walther happened to be a “Southern-sympathizer” during the War Between the states. Coming from a background in Saxony where the government regulated the affairs of the church, Walther feared that the same could happen in the United States with a strong federal government. In addition, as he wrote in an 1862 editorial in *Der Lutheraner*, words directed particularly against the fanatical Christian abolitionists in the North:

Truly these are fearful times which God now permits also us to experience! By that we are thinking not so much about the terror of a civil war by which we are surrounded, which extends over nearly half of the continent. Rather it is the spirit awakened by this war, possessing and poisoning increasingly more hearts. ... This spirit, which confuses Christian liberty with civil equality, is blowing over the entire country as a hot wind by which even many of the few plants which Christ has planted in these last days through His Word and Spirit wither and dry up. ... Whoever does not want to join in worshipping and in pledging allegiance to the idol of this new spirit of the times, this spirit of subversion, is hated; they try to brand such a one as a revolutionist. No, they do not wish to have only the body, but also the soul; they do not want to rule only over body and possessions, but also over soul and conscience; they desire not only obedience in act, but complete assent to the newly found revolution principles.¹²

Following the Civil War things even turned personal for Walther, as he wrote in a letter to a pastor in Germany:

During the last half year I have been in great distress. The State of Missouri has received a new constitution through the work of the radicals who came into power during the war. According to it a so-called loyalty oath is required of every preacher, in which he must acknowledge the new constitution, which contains a notorious declaration of inherent, inalienable human rights, and must furthermore swear that he has never expressed sympathy for the Southerners. Whoever will not take this oath must lay down his office or, in case of violation, spend at least a half-year in prison, pay a \$500 fine, or suffer both penalties, and in either case lose his citizenship rights. Now I absolutely cannot take this oath without reservation, but the present court of law twice rejected a modified fulfilment and subscription. On that account I had already resolved to lay down my office and perhaps to enter the ministry in another state—you can imagine what distress. But look! the Lord helped because of my supplications and certainly those of many dear brothers so that an official turned up who permitted me to take the oath in such a way that I excluded what was contrary to the Word of God in the affidavit and what

¹² WALTHER, “War’s Woes”, in *Moving Frontiers*, 236.

out of sympathy I had expressed in private discussions; and the court closed its eye to this.¹³

A congregation being independent of the state and being allowed to rule itself in all things was obviously not for Walther a theoretical matter. What, therefore, are the principles on which a congregation properly develops its right form apart from outside interference, whether it is from the consistory in Saxony or the state of Missouri? In other words, what are the rights of a local congregation? Walther is not interested here in its legal or political rights over against some kind of larger ecclesiastical structure or as a recognized institution in the community. Rather, he goes on to talk about what the church is by nature, and that is a theological matter, not a political, social, or organizational issue.

The Rights of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation

"All the rights of an Evangelical Lutheran local congregation are embraced in the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which the Lord gave to His whole church originally and immediately and in such a way that they belong to every congregation in equal measure, the smallest as well as the largest."¹⁴

This, of course, is catechism stuff. So we recall these words from the Small Catechism: "The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent" (SC V). Or as the Large Catechism says: "Everything in the Christian church is so ordered that we may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and through signs appointed to comfort and revive our consciences as long as we live" (LC 2:55). When Walther thus talks about power and authority in the church, he is talking about the power and the authority to forgive sins, the power and the authority that is given to the church, not by some denominational structure or by an external ministerium, but by the Head of the church, our Lord Jesus Himself. Moreover, this power and authority to forgive sins is given to every congregation regardless of its external circumstances.

What, as such, makes for a vibrant, healthy congregation? Not the physical size of its building, not the number of members it has, not the variety of activities that might be going on in its midst, not the number of programs it has; but, rather, the proper exercise of the Office of the Keys, the pure preaching of God's Word and the right administration of the sacraments. And this is so whether that congregation is located up north in

¹³ WALTHER, "The Loyalty Oath", in *Moving Frontiers*, 238.

¹⁴ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 13.

Timmins or here in Waterloo, whether it is the 63 members at Trinity, Niagara-on-the-Lake, or the 500 or so members of First in Windsor.

Some more Walther in this regard:

What a blessing it is when Christians can freely assemble in a church where God's Word is purely and clearly proclaimed and where the holy sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution. Such a church, no matter how small and poor it may appear, is of more value than all of the splendid palaces of the world.¹⁵

And again:

Let everyone who is in a tiny little congregation take note and know that church matters are not like worldly matters. The smallest congregation is just as important as the largest one, and the largest is no more important than the smallest, because every congregation is great only because Christ is present in it.¹⁶

It was in light of this biblical truth that the Missouri Synod's constitution stipulated that, regardless of the size of the congregation, each congregation had two votes at meetings of the synod—pastor and people. “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” (Phil. 1:1). This is not the democratic principle of “one man-one vote” that, however, would be adopted when Lutheran Church–Canada was organized where the number of delegates from the circuit is based on the size of the circuit; giving, in effect, favoured voting status to larger congregations. This exercise of electoral power of larger circuits or congregations over smaller ones is found wanting in Walther and in the early history of the Missouri Synod.

The Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation

The First Duty of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation

Having set forth the definition of a Lutheran local congregation, Walther now proceeds to speak about its duties that are derived from this fundamental right and power and authority. After all, as our Lord says, “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required” (Lk. 12:48). So Walther begins: “In the first place the congregation should see to it that the Word of God dwells richly and has free course in its midst.”¹⁷

¹⁵ C. F. W. WALTHER cited in *God Grant It: Daily Devotions from C. F. W. Walther*, trans. Gerhard Grabenhofer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 219.

¹⁶ WALTHER, “Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod”, in *Essays for the Church*, 2:28.

¹⁷ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 30.

Elaborating on this duty he mentions the following: "The congregation exercises this duty especially by establishing and maintaining the public ministry in its midst."¹⁸

In spite of some in our synod who would ignore or set aside Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession, "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call" (AC XIV); the establishment and maintenance of the public ministry is not an option for a congregation, but is commanded in God's Word and is clearly attested to in our Lutheran Confessions. Walther goes on to quote these words from the Wittenberg Reformation Articles of 1545: "The ministry of the Word and the service of the sacraments are necessary, the church is bound to them, and there are no people of God or any elect except in the assembly in which the voice of the Gospel and the sacraments are in evidence."¹⁹

Now, in the minds of many of the people in our congregations there are a whole host of things that should be going on in a congregation; the preaching and teaching of God's Word, to be sure, but also social and charitable work in the community, activities for young and old, women's organizations, men's clubs, church suppers, and the list goes on and on. The proclamation of the Word of God by the pastor, however, is not just one thing among many, but the "one thing necessary" (Lk. 10:42).

And how exactly does a congregation go about establishing and maintaining the public ministry in its midst so that the voice of the Gospel and the sacraments are in evidence? Walther continues: "The first step in the appropriate care for the establishment and maintenance of the public ministry in a congregation is the election and calling of a pastor."²⁰ Walther mentions a couple things in this regard. First, in his 1863 essay at the Missouri Synod convention on this thesis, he states:

We need to convince our congregations that, if they act independently, on the basis of their limited knowledge and conscience and without regard for the welfare of the total church, this is wrong because they are thereby hindering the internal growth of our Synod and of the kingdom of God, of which our Synod also is a part, even though it is only a small part. ... There is no question that every ... member has the right to nominate and that the whole congregation has the right to call; but the congregation should not trust its own judgment, but should use the holy office of the ministry as a gift of God also in order to get sound advice in matters pertaining to the call process. For that reason the congregation should invite a faithful and insightful pastor to its meetings and tell him: 'We want you to lead us in

¹⁸ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 62.

¹⁹ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 62.

²⁰ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 63.

prayer and to instruct us as to how we should proceed in this sacred task, which men have the suitable gifts for our needs, and which men we could choose without causing harm to the church as a whole'.²¹

An anecdote as to how Walther himself put this into practice that involved one of the oldest congregations here in our East District, Trinity in Fisherville:

After a number of unsuccessful efforts to secure a faithful pastor, a layman from the United States, who occasionally visited in the community, advised the group to turn to the Missouri Synod for a pastor. In response to a request, Pastor C. Diehlmann of Buffalo and Pastor Adam Ernst of near-by Eden, New York served the congregation for a while. Eventually, Pastor Diehlmann was called as regular pastor. His pastorate, however, was of short duration (1854-1856). He received a call to St. Louis, Missouri. The members were reluctant to let their pastor go, but when Dr. Walther, then president of Synod, appeared in person and impressed upon the members the importance of the new field, where their pastor was to serve also as editor of the family magazine "Abendschule," they yielded. Dr. Walther had brought with him a young man who had recently graduated from the Seminary. He introduced him to the congregation and suggested that the members call him as their pastor. The young man was Pastor Hugo Hanser. During his pastorate an acre of land was purchased in the village and a parsonage built upon it. He also introduced regular church records and minutes of voters' meetings; and upon his suggestion the congregation made application for membership in Synod.²²

Secondly, regarding the election and calling of a pastor, Walther says, "The eligibility of every proposed candidate is discussed on the basis of 1 Timothy 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9; 2 Timothy 2:15, 24-26."²³ Is this actually being done anymore? Or, does the discussion at call meetings revolve around such questions as: Is he good with the youth? Does he have a heart for outreach? Is he a good administrator? How much will we have to pay him? Can his wife teach Sunday school, play the organ, or head up the ladies' group? Again, from his 1863 convention essay, Walther makes this interesting statement:

That under certain circumstances a congregation first wants to see, get to know, and hear a sermon from a man who might become their pastor is not wrong and should not be held against it. If he is already in office, it cannot ask him for a trial sermon. But it certainly may send several of its most gifted

²¹ WALTHER, "Calling a Pastor", *Essays for the Church*, 1:72-74.

²² *Grace and Blessing: A History of the Ontario District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 1954, 53-54.

²³ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 64.

and knowledgeable members to listen to him preach. That is by far the best approach, because then they get to see and hear how he normally functions.²⁴

The chief duty of the pastor is to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (I Tim. 4:13), to “preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (II Tim. 4:2). So Walther writes:

In order that the Word of God may dwell richly in a congregation it is necessary, moreover, to introduce, not legalistically, but earnestly, the observance of regular services on Sunday and the customary festive days as also of certain weekday services, especially during Advent and Lent, annual days of humiliation and prayer, harvest festivals, general or special thanksgiving, and other sacred feasts.²⁵

Why does Walther state here what might seem to be the obvious? It's because as he says in his *Pastoral Theology*, “The most important of all official functions of every pastor is public preaching. He should devote the greatest diligence to it.”²⁶ And if the pastor is going to do this, then it is incumbent upon the members of the congregation earnestly to observe and attend as often as possible “services on Sunday and the customary festive days as also of certain weekday services, especially during Advent and Lent.” On the other hand, when church meetings or church suppers or other church-related activities and functions have more people in attendance than at the Divine Service, this is not an indication of a congregation's vitality and strength; but, rather, of its great weakness, of despising preaching and the Word of God.

To be sure, pastors have other duties entrusted to them, as Walther continues:

In order that the Word of God may dwell richly in a congregation it is necessary also that the members permit their pastor, as the steward of the mysteries of God, to baptize their newborn infants without delay; that they allow him to prepare them for the full appreciation of the means of grace and in due time to confirm them publicly; that they often desire and receive the comfort of absolution and of the sacrament of the body and blood of Jesus Christ; and this indeed after a preceding examination and confession; that they permit their betrothed publicly to be blessed by God's Word and prayer at their marriage; that in sickness, death, and other tribulations and trials they

²⁴ WALTHER, “Calling a Pastor”, *Essays for the Church*, 1:75.

²⁵ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 75.

²⁶ C. F. W. WALTHER, *Pastoral Theology*, trans. John Drickamer (New Haven, Missouri: Lutheran News, Inc., 1995), 60.

let themselves be instructed and comforted by the pastor from God's Word; and finally that they permit him to give their dead a Christian burial.²⁷

What is rather interesting here is that Walther phrases all this in terms of the duties of the members of the congregation, not the pastor, namely, that they permit their pastor to baptize their newborn infants without delay and not, as Walther writes, quoting Johann Gerhard, "postpone Baptism for the sake of magnificent festive preparations"; that they allow him to prepare them for reception of the Lord's Supper through instruction "in the doctrine of the church according to a definite and intelligible Catechism"; that they avail themselves of the opportunity to go to private confession; that they commune frequently; that they inform the pastor when sickness and other tribulations come upon them so that he can bring them the comfort of God's Word; and that they permit him to conduct Christian funeral services, which means in our modern-day context no eulogizing by every Tom, Dick, or Mary and the other nonsense that one so often sees and hears these days at funerals, but, rather, as Walther says, quoting David Chytraeus, "that Christians by their godly hymns concerning the resurrection and eternal life and by other Christian rites should show that they differentiate between the death of pious believers and that of irrational creatures."²⁸

A sidebar concerning the pastoral care of souls from the proceedings of the 1855 Central District convention:

Making house calls the chief means for exercising pastoral care cannot be recognized by the Synod as the correct procedure. Such house calls not only require a great amount of time by the pastor, but the people also are very often hindered in their work; consequently they are not in a proper frame of mind to give proper attention to such pastoral talks. There is very great danger that on the occasion of such visits only secular conversation is carried on. It also often happens that there is no suitable opportunity for examining the condition of an individual's soul or for discussing particular questions. . . . The Synod deemed therefore that aside from special circumstances, inquiry at private confession or at the announcement for Holy Communion is the proper and chief means by which the pastor should obtain knowledge of the spiritual condition of individuals.²⁹

Further to this duty, Walther elaborates, "In order that the Word of God may dwell richly in a congregation it is necessary, moreover, that, if possible, the congregation establish an Evangelical Lutheran parish school and call and appoint for this purpose orthodox, pious, and competent

²⁷ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 78-79.

²⁸ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 79 80, 86.

²⁹ The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Central District, 1855 Convention Proceedings, in *Moving Frontiers*, 245-46.

teachers.”³⁰ Even though this has not been possible for most of our congregations here in our district, any Christian education agency established by the congregation is also included in this duty. At the same time, however, Walther makes the point, again quoting Luther, that this is necessary only because parents neglect this important matter. The reason being they “are not so pious and upright”, they “are unskilled and do not know how to rear and bring up children”, and “they have neither the place nor time to do it”.³¹

Finally, Walther mentions that “In order that the Word of God may richly and rightly dwell in a congregation it is finally necessary that the congregation shall tolerate no divisions by conventicles, that is, by meetings for doctrinal instruction or prayer conducted by persons not called and beyond the supervision of the divinely instituted public ministry.”³²

What is the background behind this statement? Two things come to mind. First, Walther's own experience during his student days at the University of Leipzig when he was part of a pietistic group that met for theological discussions, prayer meetings, and spiritual exercises; and of which he would later make this comment,

An increasing darkness settled on my soul as I tasted less and less of the sweetness of the Gospel. God knows I did not mean to work a delusion on myself; I wanted to be saved. In those days I regarded those as the best books which spoke a stern language to sinners and left them nothing of the grace of God.³³

And secondly, the nocturnal religious gatherings of people in Dresden under the leadership of Martin Stephan, the majority of whom were not members of his congregation. Quoting Luther, Walther states,

No one else, no stranger, without the pastor's knowledge and will, should dare teach his parishioners, either privately or publicly, and no one should by any means listen to him, but announce and tell it to the pastor. ... It is true, all Christians are priests, but not all are pastors; for in addition to his being a Christian and a priest, one must also have an office and an entrusted parish.³⁴

Now, while some of our congregations may have established small groups, cell groups, home Bible study groups, and the like, these do not necessarily fall under the prohibition that Walther mentions here, provided

³⁰ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 87.

³¹ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 89.

³² WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 91.

³³ C. F. W. WALTHER, *Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther: Law and Gospel*, trans. Herbert Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 83.

³⁴ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 92.

they are under the supervision of the pastor. In addition, when various church auxiliaries produce Bible studies, worship services, and sermons and send such to groups or individuals within a congregation with the caveat that they be used in the congregation, then that is presuming to teach the members of a congregation without the pastor's knowledge and consent. Another quote from Walther on this matter from an 1842 sermon:

Not everyone is a minister or bishop in the congregation. God is a God of order, and for the sake of order it is always required that only one or a few be chosen from the church to administer in the name and stead of all the rights of the spiritual priesthood publicly. No one is to despise or neglect the public office of preaching because he himself is a spiritual priest. Furthermore, no one may even conclude: "I am a spiritual priest and, thus, also a public preacher." On the contrary, for that to be true you must have a special office and be properly and orderly called; for whatever happens in the name of all must first be commissioned by all. Whoever, therefore, presumes to be and asserts himself as a public teacher, such a person acts against God Himself and no one should listen to him on pain of God's disapproval.³⁵

The Second Duty of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation

The second duty of an evangelical Lutheran local congregation is, "The congregation should see to it that purity of doctrine and life is preserved in its midst, and therefore it is to exercise church discipline in regard to both."³⁶

Elaborating on this duty Walther says,

All members of a congregation shall strive to grow and become enriched in all doctrine and all knowledge that they may not remain children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, but that they may examine and judge the doctrine proclaimed to them, according to God's Word.³⁷

Although the constitution of our synod provides a mechanism for preserving the purity of doctrine and life in our congregations, namely, regular visitations by the District President and Circuit Counsellor, it is the people of God, the members of the congregation, who have the ultimate responsibility in examining and judging the pastor's preaching and teaching. Not, however, on the basis of a majority vote; but only on the basis of God's

³⁵ C. F. W. WALTHER, "The Duty of All Christians to Lead Souls to Christ", trans. Donald Pohlens and included in *The Year Of Grace: Sermons on the Gospels of the Church Year Collected from His Written Legacy* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1890).

³⁶ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 31.

³⁷ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 97.

Word. "I bow to the humblest member coming with Scripture",³⁸ Walther once said.

A year prior to the organization of the Missouri Synod, the Löhe men, including the founding father of our district, Adam Ernst, met with Walther and the Saxon Lutherans in St. Louis. In his description of this meeting one of them, Friedrich Lochner, wrote:

At this time several meetings were held with the St. Louis congregation, in which their pastors presented the plan for consideration. I, being wholly inexperienced, occasionally opened my eyes wide in astonishment when I saw that the congregation did not at once acquiesce, but questioned this and that item; indeed, several members disputed sharply with the pastors. These men, however, entered into their doubts and objections with such calm and consideration as if the congregation were made up of none but scholarly theologians.³⁹

The whole congregation made up of scholarly theologians! That was the basis on which the synod was organized and why Walther had earlier written to Ernst, "I wish that the lay delegates ... would have seat and vote in the conventions, the same as the clergymen."⁴⁰ Is this, however, still the case in our synod today? Are members of our congregations enriched in all knowledge and doctrine so that they are really able to examine and judge what is preached and taught to them? A quote from Walther in this regard from his words of welcome to new members of his congregation concerning the motives and qualifications of a genuine church member:

There are three factors that are essential in the make-up of a genuine member of a Lutheran congregation. First, a genuine member of a Lutheran congregation must have a thorough understanding of pure Lutheran doctrine or at least must desire to grow in the knowledge of it. Such a one will imitate the Bereans in searching the Scriptures daily, he will not lay aside his Catechism when he has completed his elementary school training, but throughout his life continue to review it in order that he may understand it better and become more thoroughly grounded in it. He will read other good orthodox books and periodicals to become ever more firmly established in the pure doctrine. In Hebrews 5 those Christians who are neglectful in this point are censured. We read: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food."

³⁸ C. F. W. WALTHER, cited in *Walther and the Church*, ed. Wm. Dallmann, W. H. T. Dau, and Th. Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), 45.

³⁹ "Rev. F. Lochner's Report of His First Contacts with the Saxons", in *Moving Frontiers*, 147-148.

⁴⁰ C. F. W. Walther to A. Ernst, "Letter", in *Moving Frontiers*, 143.

Second, a member of a Lutheran congregation must be able to defend his faith and to prove its correctness from God's Word. St. Peter writes, I Peter 3:15: "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." A sad state of affairs is revealed when members of a Lutheran congregation, asked about their faith, say, "You will have to ask my pastor about that."

Third, a member of a Lutheran congregation should be able to distinguish pure doctrine from false doctrines. Only spineless Lutherans can say: "What do I care about doctrinal controversies! They do not concern me in the least. I'll let those who are more learned than I am bother their heads about such matters." They may even be offended when they observe that religious leaders engage in doctrinal disputes. A genuine Lutheran will not forget that in the Epistle of Jude also lay Christians are admonished "earnestly to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." What is more, Christ warns all Christians: "Beware of false prophets." And St. John writes in his first epistle: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world." It is a settled fact that whoever is indifferent to false doctrine is indifferent also to pure doctrine and his soul's salvation, and has no right to bear the name Lutheran and the name of Christ.⁴¹

A few more items related to this second duty. First, "A congregation shall also establish the office of such elders or overseers as do not labor in the Word and doctrine, but assist the incumbent of the office of the divine Word in ruling, disciplining, and keeping order in the congregation."⁴² Notice, contrary to the understanding and practice in many of our congregations, that the role and function of elders or deacons is not to exercise supervision over the pastor or be some kind of oversight board to which he must give an account, but, rather, to "assist the incumbent of the office of the divine Word."

Second, "The congregation shall see to it that only doctrinally pure books, approved by the orthodox church, are introduced and tolerated in church and school and that confessional ceremonies are not discontinued."⁴³

Let's go back to the 19th century when many Lutheran immigrants arrived in North America, bringing with them a variety of hymn books, many of which reflected the theological and liturgical poverty of Pietism and rationalism, including the Saxon Agenda of 1812 which the Saxon immigrants brought with them—the only exception being Löhe's Agenda that he prepared in 1844 for the Franconian congregations in Michigan.

⁴¹ C. F. W. WALTHER, *Church Membership: Addresses and Prayers at the meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Congregation of St. Louis, Missouri and Its Board of Elders* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1931).

⁴² WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 101.

⁴³ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 104.

Under the leadership of Walther, Trinity congregation in St. Louis published a hymnal in 1847 that was received that same year at the Missouri Synod's founding convention, to be followed in 1856 by an agenda or service book.

The synod's 1854 constitution, as such, stated, as one of the "conditions under which union with the synod may take place and fellowship with it can continue", the following:

The exclusive use of doctrinally pure church and school books (agendas, hymnbooks, catechisms, text books, etc.). If it is not feasible to replace the present unorthodox hymnbook with orthodox ones in some congregations, the pastor of such a congregation may become a member of Synod only on the condition that he promises that he will use the unorthodox hymnbook only under public protest and gives assurance that he in all seriousness desires to bring about the introduction of an orthodox one.⁴⁴

Walther's efforts in this matter, however, were not appreciated by all, especially by those who were not all that serious in using an orthodox hymnbook, by those who masked their pietistic leanings under the guise of the freedom of the congregation, and by those who had come to rather like singing those non-Lutheran hymns and songs from the Reformed hymnbooks of their day. To which he responded in an 1853 issue of *Der Lutheraner*:

Whenever the Divine Service once again follows the old Evangelical-Lutheran agendas, many raise a great cry that it is "Roman Catholic"—"Roman Catholic" when the pastor chants "The Lord be with you" and the congregation responds by chanting "And with thy spirit"; "Roman Catholic" when the pastor chants the Collect and the Blessing and the people respond with a chanted "Amen." Even the simplest Christian can respond to this outcry: "Prove to me that this chanting is contrary to the Word of God, then I too will call it 'Roman Catholic' and have nothing more to do with it. However, you cannot prove this to me." If you insist upon rejecting every element in the Divine Service that has been used by the Roman Catholic Church, then you must also reject the reading of the Epistle and Gospel. Indeed, it is then wrong to sing or preach in church, for the Roman Church does this also. Those who cry out like this should remember that such has been the practice in the Christian Church since the beginning. For more than 1,500 years orthodox Christians have participated joyfully in the Divine Service in this way. Should we, today, however, respond by saying that such is "Roman Catholic"? God forbid! Therefore, as we continue to hold on to and seek to restore our wonderful Divine Services in places where they have been forgotten, let us boldly confess that our worship forms do not tie us with the modern sects or with the church of Rome; rather, they join us to the one,

⁴⁴ "1854 Constitution of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States", in *Moving Frontiers*, 150.

holy Christian Church that is as old as the world and is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.⁴⁵

And to those congregations and pastors in our synod today who have succumbed to that “evangelical style, Lutheran substance” nonsense in justifying their abandonment of the Christ-centred and Bible-based liturgies, hymns, and confessional ceremonies of the orthodox church, Walther says in his 1871 convention essay:

Unfortunately, many of our Lutheran Christians are still without a true understanding of this matter, as demonstrated by their aversion to ceremonies. It is truly distressing that many find the difference between Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism in outward things. It is a pity and dreadful cowardice when a person sacrifices the good ancient church customs to please the deluded American denominations just so they won't accuse us of being Roman Catholic! Indeed! Am I to be afraid of a Methodist who perverts the saving Word, and not rather rejoice that they can tell by our ceremonies that I do not belong to them? ... It is too bad that such entirely different ceremonies prevail in our synod, and that no liturgy at all has yet been introduced in many congregations. But why should our congregations retain their prejudices? How foolish that is! For first of all it is clear from the words of St. Paul in 1 Cor. 14:16 that the congregations of his time had a similar custom. It has been the custom in the Lutheran Church for hundreds of years. It creates a solemn impression on the Christian mind when one is reminded by the solemnity of the Divine Service that one is in the house of God, and in childlike love to their heavenly Father, give expression to their joy in such a lovely manner.⁴⁶

Walther makes two points about church discipline. First,

The congregation shall in public assembly, according to God's Word, in Christian order, and with the employment of witnesses, examine those of its members who are reported as disobedient to God's Word in doctrine or life, and have already been reprovved in vain according Matt. 18:15, 16, privately as well as before witnesses, or whose false doctrine or sin is manifest and known to all.⁴⁷

And second,

Congregations shall not be so presumptuous as arbitrarily to depose their pastors and others who administer an ecclesiastical office. But if they fall into pernicious errors and are found guilty by lawful procedure and refuse to accept instruction from God's Word either by the congregation or by the

⁴⁵ C. F. W. WALTHER, *Der Lutheraner* 9.24 (1853), trans. by Paul McCain, in *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* 8.1 (1999): 63.

⁴⁶ WALTHER, “The True Visible Church: Adiaphora”, *Essays for the Church*, 1:194.

⁴⁷ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 111-112.

pastors called in for this purpose; or if they have become manifest as contumacious impenitent sinners; or if they have committed an offense by which they have lost their good report among those who are without and by which they cause the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, then Christian congregations in Christian order must remove them from office as such as God Himself has put out.⁴⁸

In connection with the above two matters relating to church discipline, here is some sound advice from Walther's 1879 convention essay:

You pastors, see to it that you don't expect too much from your people. You can't turn every piece of wood into a dowel. It simply can't be done; not all wood is suitable for dowels. Not every indiscretion is of the sort that necessitates the procedures of church discipline. But once the devil has created dislike and animosity in you toward a particular member, he sees to it that you deal far more sternly with his transgression than you do with a member who has always treated you with love and goodwill. "Divisions will also easily develop if the people immediately want to master and nitpick everything in the life and conduct of the bishops or pastors", says the Apology. Also our dear congregations should note this carefully. When a pastor makes an occasional mistake, they should not be too harsh in their judgment but should consider, "Did he do that out of weakness? Is it really serious enough to sound the alarm or not?" And if you determine that it was done in weakness and is a matter of little importance, then you should either ignore it or tell him in a friendly way, "You did not handle that correctly." Otherwise, if the congregation insists on nitpicking about every little thing, then the beautiful relationship of the spiritual father and his spiritual children will come to an end. Then the devil laughs up his sleeve, when the people no longer heed the pastor's word; then he has torn the members from their orthodox pastor. We must support one another! The pastor should not expect the members of his congregation to be nothing but angels, and the members should not demand that their pastor be an angel either, for that he cannot be. ... We cannot avoid offending one another, but we can let ourselves be reconciled, and then we can forget the whole incident.⁴⁹

"Lastly, the congregation shall also see to it that neither the congregation nor individual church members enter into any church union with unbelievers or heterodox communions and so become guilty of religious unionism in matters of faith and church."⁵⁰ To which Walther adds: "Here should be added common worship with the heterodox, serving as sponsors in heterodox churches, yielding church buildings to heterodox communions, participating in unionistic societies to obtain church objectives, and the

⁴⁸ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 128.

⁴⁹ WALTHER, "Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod", *Essays for the Church*, 2:56.

⁵⁰ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 136.

like.”⁵¹ And to which we could add today such things as participating in community World Day of Prayer services, pastors participating with clergy of congregations outside our fellowship in marriages or funerals, renting or allowing non-Lutheran congregations to use our church buildings for their worship services, members of our congregations communing at churches that are not part of our confessional fellowship, congregations promoting and participating in a Billy/Franklin Graham Crusade, or even, sadly, a National Youth Gathering of our synod that features non-Lutheran speakers and non-Lutheran worship services. Quoting Luther, Walther says:

Here a goodhearted person may say: “What harm would it do if we would adhere to God’s Word and would also let all these erroneous teachings remain, or at least some that may be tolerated?” I reply: “They may be called a goodhearted person, but they are errorhearted and deludedhearted, for, as you hear, it dare not be that besides the Word of God we teach something else, or serve someone else besides God, or light another light besides the one which God has placed into the darkness. It is indeed a will-o’-the-wisp and a delusion even though it were only a single doctrine; for the church neither should nor could teach lies and errors, not even a single one; if it teaches one lie, it is altogether wrong. ... Life may perhaps be sinful and wrong; indeed, it is unfortunately altogether too wrong. But the doctrine must be straight as a line and absolutely without any wrong. Therefore nothing must be preached in the church but only the sure, pure, and absolute divine Word. If it fails in this, it is no longer a church, but a synagogue of Satan.”⁵²

The Third Duty of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation

The third duty is “The congregation must make it its concern that all its members are well taken care of in their bodily needs and do not suffer want or are forsaken in any need.”⁵³

Under this topic, Walther mentions especially, “In the first place, the congregation should do everything in its power to see to it that its pastor has food, clothing, and a home for himself and his family.”⁵⁴ In our present-day circumstances when many a congregation is facing financial difficulties, with the result that the pastor’s salary is reduced and the payment of his benefit package is in arrears, one wonders whether the congregation has really done everything in its power to provide for him and his family. Or, to use Walther’s words from the previous section, is it perhaps the case that some congregations are using money, or the supposed lack of it, to

⁵¹ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 136.

⁵² WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 138.

⁵³ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 36-37.

⁵⁴ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 142.

"arbitrarily depose their pastors"? It is significant to note in this regard that our synod's constitution sets forth the following as one of the responsibilities of the Circuit Counsellor: he is to "inquire regarding ... the salaries of pastors and deacons."⁵⁵

The Fourth Duty of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation

The fourth duty is "The congregation must see to it that all things are done decently and in order, and this not only before the Lord but also before men."⁵⁶

Under this duty Walther lists a variety of things: church record books, a treasurer and other officers of the congregation, the church building and its upkeep, a parsonage, procurement of necessary supplies for Divine Services, congregational meetings, voters' assembly, a church constitution, financial contributions for the maintenance of the church, and the like. While today we take this for granted, this was a rather novel thing for those Lutherans in the 19th century who had grown up in the consistory system in the various German states. That is why Walther goes to great lengths on these matters. He prefaces all this by saying: "For the conscientious, salutary, and God-pleasing exercise of their rights and duties it is necessary for all independent local congregations to arrange regular orderly public meetings in which are discussed, resolved, and executed such actions as are necessary for its self-government."⁵⁷

All these organizational things, it should be noted, are set in place only for this reason, that the congregation can be and remain, as Walther says at the very beginning of this book, "an assembly of believing Christians at a certain place among whom God's Word is preached purely according to the Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the holy sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution as stated in the Gospel." The various things he mentions here, as such, are not to be regarded as some kind of "law of the Medes and the Persians" as to how congregations must be structured and ordered. While Walther's own congregation in St. Louis had adopted a constitution in 1843 and was organized in this manner, many of the congregations which had recently joined the Missouri Synod had no organization at all, or a very minimum one at best. What were some of the other available options to them besides that which Walther sets forth here?

They could have tried this one: "The chief management of all affairs of the entire (community) shall be exercised by its primate, who accordingly will combine in his person the supreme authority in spiritual and civil

⁵⁵ Lutheran Church–Canada, *2008 Handbook*, Synodical Bylaws 4.17c, 43.

⁵⁶ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 39.

⁵⁷ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 44.

matters.”⁵⁸ This one, however, from the “Regulations for the Lutheran ‘Gesellschaft’ Emigrating with Herr Pastor Stephan to the United States of America”, had not exactly worked out too well for them!

Another one stipulated in part that the “Revenue from the parish property together with all perquisites and the rights of the parsonage belong to the pastor from the day he enters upon his office. ... The church property is under the supervision of the pastor.” This comes from Löhe’s “Model Constitution for Saginaw Valley German Lutherans” and undoubtedly smacked a little too much of Stephanism, although there is, at the same time, an emphasis in it on the rights of the congregation:

All confirmed members of both sexes cast their vote for the election of the electoral committee” (which was made up of male members of the congregation and who would actually cast the vote for the election of a pastor). If the entire congregation agrees unanimously to call a certain pastor when a vacancy occurs, then no further election is necessary, but the unanimity of the congregation and the name of the man on whom it agrees are to be announced to the synodical president or his representative. ... In such case the synodical president is not to oppose the congregation so long as the pastor-elect is of the Lutheran confession and is qualified for the holy office.⁵⁹

Some words of wisdom from Walther in this whole matter: “A written church order (constitution) shall contain only what is most necessary and has been tried out in the practice of the congregation; and nothing in it that concerns what God’s Word has neither commanded nor forbidden (adiaphora) shall be regarded as unchangeable.”⁶⁰ He then quotes Luther’s comments on the 1526 proposed church order for Homberg and Hesse:

I know well and have experienced it myself that when laws are enacted too early and before they are tried out in practice, they rarely succeed. The people are not used to them, as those think who sit apart and picture to themselves in word or thought how things should proceed. To prescribe and to obey differ greatly from each other. Experience will show that many things in this order must be changed, while with others no one will bother about them. But if some things prevail and come into use, then it is easy to add to them and to arrange them in order. To make laws is indeed a great, glorious, and important thing, but without God’s Spirit nothing good will result from it. Therefore it is necessary to proceed with fear and humility before God and to observe these bounds: short and sweet, little and well, tender and

⁵⁸ “Emigration Codes”, in WALTER FORSTER, *Zion on the Mississippi* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 572.

⁵⁹ “Model Constitution for Saginaw Valley German Lutherans”, in *Moving Frontiers*, 112, 110-11.

⁶⁰ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 158.

always onward. After these things have become rooted, then more will be added as is necessary.⁶¹

Walther is not, as some claim, promoting here a kind of autonomy where the congregation is a law unto itself and where "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Jdg. 21:25). While the constitution of Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Louis emphasized that the "congregation in its entirety has the highest authority in the administration of the external and internal affairs of the church and the congregation", it also went on to state that "the congregation, however, has no authority to order or decide anything against God's Word and the Symbols of the pure Evangelical Lutheran Church. If it does that, then all such decisions and transactions are null and void."⁶²

Moreover, it is significant to remember that in 1847, when a new congregation, Immanuel, was formed, instead of organizing a separate or independent congregation, the *Gesamtgemeinde* or joint congregation was established. Later a third, Holy Cross, and a fourth, Zion, were added to the joint parish. While Walther remained the chief pastor of all four congregations, they also called their own pastors. Matters pertaining to all four congregations were conducted in joint meetings, while affairs pertaining to an individual congregation were handled by each separate group. The name of the congregation itself is rather intriguing: "The Trinity Church of the German Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of St. Louis, Missouri." How about this one and the unity of doctrine and practice that might result from such a re-organization of the congregations here in the Kitchener-Waterloo region: "The Messiah Church (the Redeemer Church, the Faith Church, the Holy Cross Church, the Grace Church, the Bethel Church, the Historic St. Paul's Church) of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario"?

In addition, we already heard Walther state that in matters pertaining to the call process "the congregation should invite a faithful and insightful pastor to its meetings" and that "only doctrinally pure books, approved by the orthodox church, are introduced and tolerated in church and school." But where do these "faithful and insightful pastors" come from? What exactly is this "orthodox church"? In another of his works, "The Evangelical Lutheran Church, The True Visible Church Of God Upon Earth", Walther gives this answer:

⁶¹ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 159-60.

⁶² "1843 Constitution of Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Louis, Missouri", in *Moving Frontiers*, 168.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the sum total of all who without reservation profess the doctrine which was restored by the Reformation of Luther and was summarily submitted in writing at Augsburg in 1530 to the emperor and the realm, and was treated and expounded in the other so-called Lutheran symbols, as the pure doctrine of the divine Word.⁶³

The Fifth Duty of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation

The fifth duty of an evangelical Lutheran local congregation is “The congregation has the duty to devote itself to the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and love also with the orthodox church beyond its area.”⁶⁴

Since a local Lutheran congregation is not the only place in the world “among whom God’s Word is preached purely according to the Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the holy sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution as stated in the Gospel”, this means that it also has a relationship with other local congregations who believe, teach, and confess the same. Besides the congregation offering joint prayer, such as we do, or should be doing, in the Divine Service for sister congregations and their pastors in our district and synod and for our partner churches and missions in Nicaragua, Haiti, Thailand, and so forth, the orderly transferring of members in good standing to congregations within our confessional fellowship, the refraining to accept as members those who have been “rightly excommunicated by orthodox congregations”,⁶⁵ and the relationship that is to be expressed between congregations at the time of the calling of one of its pastors, there are three things in particular that Walther mentions in connection with this duty that I would draw to your attention. First, “As every true Evangelical Lutheran local congregation has the same official confessions as the true Evangelical Lutheran Church, it should also diligently seek to be united with the latter in life and with it to speak the same thing, in the same mind and in the same judgment.”⁶⁶ So Walther elaborates in an 1859 editorial from *Lehre und Wehre*:

There are mainly two reasons why an orthodox Christian should not only believe together with the orthodox church but also choose to speak the same language. The first reason is that also in this way he might demonstrate his sincere oneness with his spiritual mother and also manifest his loyalty to her thereby, and conversely renounce all heretics, schismatics, and conceited eccentrics and withdraw from them. In truth, if there were no other reasons,

⁶³ C. F. W. WALTHER, *The True Visible Church*, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 42.

⁶⁴ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 40.

⁶⁵ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 170.

⁶⁶ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 165.

this alone should be enough to move every orthodox Christian to conform to the church also in this respect. ... The second reason why an orthodox Christian should not only believe together with the orthodox church but also speak the same language, is that he has the duty not to impede but to help advance, for his part, the important goals which the church is trying to achieve with its way of speaking about the revealed truths.⁶⁷

He then proceeds to "offer a little catalogue of expressions which ought to be avoided by one who desires to speak in concert with the orthodox church",⁶⁸ to which we might add such things as bulletin communion statements like "Jesus is really present in the Lord's Supper" rather than, as the Small Catechism says, "the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is present under the bread and wine of the Holy Supper" (SC 6:2); the various so-called "Confession of Sins and Absolution" forms found in *Creative Worship*; the word "missional"; the word "ablaze"; "contemporary or blended services"—not only the words but the doing thereof; after all, as Walther said earlier: "The congregation shall see to it that only doctrinally pure books, approved by the orthodox church, are introduced and tolerated in church and school and that confessional ceremonies are not discontinued." And why should expressions and things like these be avoided? Because as Walther here states: "As every true Evangelical Lutheran local congregation has the same official confessions as the true Evangelical Lutheran Church, it should also diligently seek to be united with the latter in life and with it to speak the same thing, in the same mind and in the same judgment."

Second, "Every congregation shall agree with its neighbouring sister congregation on their mutual local boundaries."⁶⁹ This duty, by the way, happens to also be in the bylaws of our synod's constitution which gives, among others, this reason why parish lines should be established: "Schisms and sects in a congregation should be avoided, and church members should not be given occasion to attach themselves to the person of one pastor in preference to that of another. This in itself is a sectarian tendency, which Paul condemns, 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:3-7."⁷⁰ Quoting an opinion of the 17th-century Wittenberg theological faculty, Walther elaborates: "The pastor is not permitted privately to perform official pastoral functions in another diocese without the permission of the regular pastor, ... for the call is limited not

⁶⁷ C. F. W. WALTHER, "On Church Language", *Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther: Editorials from "Lehre und Wehre"*, trans. Herbert Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 69.

⁶⁸ WALTHER, "On Church Language", 72.

⁶⁹ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 166.

⁷⁰ Lutheran Church–Canada, *2008 Handbook*, Synodical Bylaws 4.61, 45.

only to a certain number of parishioners but also to a definite place.”⁷¹ Or as he quotes from Salomon Deyling’s “Pastoral Theology”:

No one is permitted to roam about as he chooses and frivolously to change his pastor, which commonly stems from hatred or animosity and is very offensive, especially when a person seeks a pastor outside his parish. ... Nor can the one who turns his back on his pastor and leaves him with malicious intent be regarded as penitent and be admitted to absolution and the use of the Holy Supper. Where therefore there are distinct parishes and orthodox pastors, there the parishioners as a rule are not allowed to accept any official functions outside those of their own pastors and to choose for themselves another pastor who does not know the life of him who comes to confession and so can easily be deceived. Furthermore, an injustice is thereby done to the regular pastor, and in this way he is deprived of a part of his income. Therefore such fickle parishioners are to be refused if this can fittingly be done, and they are to be advised to see their own pastor, of if the case should be somewhat more complex, the matter is to be reported to the superintendent or the consistory.⁷²

But is this really going on in our midst today? Oh, yes it is, and in a number of different ways. It happens when members leave one congregation for another because of the personality of the pastor, the one down the road being an out-going, personable, friendly chap, while our pastor is rather cold, aloof, and rigid. It happens when retired pastors roam about as they choose, conducting baptisms of family members, officiating at funerals or weddings of former members. It happens when a number of members, often those individuals who are filled with anger and animosity toward their pastor, leave their congregation in order to start up a new congregation without the pastor’s knowledge or permission or the knowledge or permission of the congregation, request the service of other pastors, and not only receive that service but are sanctioned by the district itself, this, of course, being justified in the name of missions. It happens when a person leaves his or her congregation for a neighbouring one because there women are permitted to read the Scriptures in the worship services, because there my non-Lutheran relatives are allowed to go to Communion when they come to visit, because there they even serve grape juice for those who don’t like to drink wine, because there they sing praise songs and not those old, stuffy German hymns. These are not hypothetical scenarios, but actual things many of you have probably witnessed and experienced.

And why are things like these going on? Well, to use Walther’s words from his previous point, because some congregations and pastors in our synod are no longer united with one another “in life and speak the same

⁷¹ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 168.

⁷² WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 169.

thing, in the same mind and in the same judgment", because the people have little, if any, understanding of what constitutes "the right form of an Evangelical Lutheran local congregation independent of the state", because synod and district officials are somewhat negligent in exercising ecclesiastical supervision over these matters.

Third, "A congregation shall regard the need of its sister churches as its own and help them as much as it can."⁷³ There are a number of questions that come to mind in connection with this duty in our modern day context, such as: How are we doing here in our East District in assisting congregations in need? With seemingly ever more and more congregations struggling financially, are the people in our congregations being made aware of the needs of their sister congregations? How, if at all, are these needs being met? Is the district using responsibly the funds they receive from congregations that have been given for this purpose to help sister congregations? Are subsidies to congregations reduced, not only because of declining revenue, but also because of bureaucratic expenses? Do we make congregations grovel in the dust like beggars and jump through all kinds of administrative hoops before handing over to them a few loonies and toonies? Are congregations and pastors cognizant of the additional thing Walther mentions in this regard: "Wherever possible, a congregation should be willing to let its pastor serve as an affiliate or daughter church a neighbouring congregation which alone cannot establish the ministry of the Word for itself or become a self-sustaining congregation"⁷⁴

The Sixth Duty of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation

The sixth duty is, "It is also the duty of the congregation to do what it can in order that the whole church may be built up and promoted."⁷⁵

Here Walther moves beyond the duties one congregation has to another because they confess one and the same faith to the duty it has toward the whole church and toward the world. But, some would question, should not missions and outreach be the first and primary duty of the congregation? It would seem so when one peruses church periodicals and considers the preponderance of essays at district and synod conventions that have been given to this subject of missions. We will let Walther himself answer that in his sermon based on I Timothy 4:16 at the founding of the Synodical Conference in 1872 with the theme "Our Common Task: The Saving of Souls":

⁷³ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 178.

⁷⁴ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 179.

⁷⁵ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 42.

It is true, brethren, as you well know, that in our day it is common for people to say, “Emphasizing doctrine so much only harms and hinders the kingdom of God, yes, even destroys it.” Many say, “Instead of disputing over doctrine so much, we should much rather be concerned with souls and with leading them to Christ.” But all who speak in this way do not really know what they are saying or what they are doing. As foolish as it would be to scold a farmer for being concerned about sowing good seed and to demand of him simply to be concerned about a good harvest, so foolish it is to scold those who are concerned first and foremost with the doctrine, and to demand of them that they should rather seek to rescue souls. For just as the farmer who wants a good crop must first of all be concerned about good seed, so the church must above all be concerned about right doctrine if it would save souls.⁷⁶

Included in this last duty Walther proceeds to mention such things as: “A congregation shall see to it that gifted boys and young men are dedicated to the service of the church and that it is made possible for them to prepare themselves for this work”,⁷⁷ that is, sending young men to the seminary and supporting financially the training of future pastors. Instead of financial contributions for the seminary coming primarily from individual members of our congregations, would it not be in order for every congregation to include a yearly goal for seminary support and/or designate a portion of mission offerings received for the seminary?

“A congregation should see to it that the bread of life will be broken to such fellow believers as are in spiritual need of it; it should therefore support those who desire to do this work of love”⁷⁸—that is, the financial support of the missions of our synod in Ukraine and Thailand, Cambodia and Nicaragua; the sending of mission teams from our congregations to these places; our synod’s recent publication of the French version of the *Lutheran Service Book*; and the like.

“A congregation should be zealous to spread the written Word of God A congregation should do its share that the Gospel may be brought to those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, namely to the wretched heathen and Jews.”⁷⁹ Included in these theses would be such things as: prayers “For the mission of the Church”, “For those outside the Church”, “For our enemies”, “Return of the wayward and erring” (*LSB*, pp. 305-6); financial support of the various auxiliaries and listed service organizations of our synod, such as, Lutheran Hour Ministries, Lutheran Bible

⁷⁶ <http://cyberbrethren.com/2008/06/27/know-doctrine-know-mission-no-doctrine-no-mission/>.

⁷⁷ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 179.

⁷⁸ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 184.

⁷⁹ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 185.

Translators—Canada, Concordia Lutheran Mission Society, Haiti Lutheran Mission Society, etc.; the financial support of other organizations like the Lutheran Heritage Foundation; and especially, as Walther says in an 1842 sermon:

All Christians are to shine as lights among the world. The Christian Church is a great mission-house. Each Christian is a missionary, sent out by God into his own circle of activity to convert others to Christ and to call them to the kingdom of God. ... The whole congregation shall be a holy people, a royal priesthood. Each Christian should bear the needs of the soul of his neighbour in his heart and do his part that the saving Gospel may win ever more victories and that the kingdom of God may be advanced. ... When we are with unbelievers, let us remember that as spiritual priests we are to confess Christ before them by word and deed that they also may come to the knowledge of the truth.⁸⁰

And finally: "A congregation should be ready to unite with other Evangelical Lutheran churches in the land if it has opportunity to do so and the union serves and promotes the glory of God and the spread of His kingdom."⁸¹

To be sure, Walther and the Missouri Synod, from its earliest constitution, ascribed a large degree of self-government to the local congregation, stating in the words of Article VII of our present synodical constitution:

The Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers, and with respect to an individual congregation's right of self-government, the Synod is advisory. Accordingly, no resolution of the Synod imposing anything upon the individual congregation is of binding force if it is not in accordance with the Word of God or if it appears to be inexpedient as far as the condition of a congregation is concerned.⁸²

On the other hand, a congregation's self-government did not mean for Walther that it was simply free to do its own thing apart from and without any consideration of other congregations which share the same orthodox confession of faith. No, in order to carry out its duties of the education of pastors, the spreading of the Word of God, the sharing of the Gospel with unbelievers, the support of fellow believers who are in need, the use of doctrinally pure hymn books and agendas, and so forth, the local congregation must join together with other like-minded congregations in

⁸⁰ C. F. W. WALTHER, "The Duty of All Christians to Lead Souls to Christ", trans. James Ware. in *A Lutheran Witness Reprint* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1989), 9.

⁸¹ WALTHER, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 191-92.

⁸² Lutheran Church—Canada, *2008 Handbook*, Constitution, 7.10-11.

this endeavour. In his 1848 presidential address at the synodical convention, Walther told the assembled delegates that they had come “as servants and members of the church in the name and on behalf of our congregations in order to deliberate in the fear of God on matters necessary for them and the church as a whole.”⁸³

With, for example, the influx of a large number of German immigrants who were scattered across North America, the Missouri Synod established already at its founding convention in 1847 the position of Visitor (*Besucher*) and later Travelling Missionary (*Reiseprediger*). The theological basis for doing so, as discussed at the convention of the Western District in 1865 concerning the call and position of a missionary at large, was that a congregation has the duty not only to call a pastor but also to send someone “where there are no Christians and the church must first be planted, to proclaim the Word of God and to baptize those who thereupon acknowledge the faith.”⁸⁴ These men were commissioned and sent out not by an individual congregation but by the synod, that is, by all the congregations of the synod through the St. Louis pastoral conference together with the seminary faculty and the president of the synod. This is a legacy that was inherited from Löhe’s *Sendlinge* like Adam Ernst and especially from Friedrich Wyneken, our synod’s “Father of Home Missions” who we happen to be commemorating today, 4 May.

By working together to accomplish the task of the Church, the Office of the Keys, local congregations do not become something other than the Church when they join and act together to do those things mandated of the Church: conserve and promote the unity of the true faith; provide for a united defence against schism, sectarianism, and heresy; extend the Gospel witness into all the world; recruit and train pastors; establish agencies of Christian education; provide for the welfare of pastors; and the like. There is not even the slightest indication of a congregation’s sovereignty in any of these matters. No, in doctrine and practice and worship there is to be uniformity and conformity by and among all the congregations of the synod. So Article VI of our synod’s constitution states:

Conditions for acquiring and holding membership in Lutheran Church–Canada are: 1. Acceptance of the confessional basis of Article II. 2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as: a. serving congregations of mixed confession, as such, by pastors; b. taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession; c. participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities. 3. Regular call of pastors and deacons and regular

⁸³ WALTHER, “1848 Presidential Address”, in *Moving Frontiers*, 170.

⁸⁴ The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, Western District, 1865 Convention Proceedings, “Theses about the Call and Position of a Missionary At Large”, in *Moving Frontiers*, 207.

election of lay delegates by the congregations, as also the blamelessness of the life of such. 4. Exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymn books, and catechisms in church and school. 5. Service of congregations by pastors who are members of Lutheran Church–Canada.⁸⁵

This does not mean, however, that the synod itself, or more precisely, the way the synod is organized and structured, is divinely instituted; after all, as we heard earlier in his 1848 presidential address, Walther makes it clear that the Lutheran Church has been organized very differently and profitably in the past. The best form of the church's organization depends upon the historical, geographical, political, and social circumstances in which it finds itself and lacks a "thus says the Lord". Whatever the form or structure, however, when local congregations join together to do that which the Lord of the church has divinely mandated, they remain the Church.

The question that every pastor and congregation needs to periodically consider in this regard is this: Does our union with other Evangelical Lutheran congregations as a synod "serve and promote the glory of God and the spread of His kingdom"? In his 1879 convention essay Walther makes this point:

We have always said that the dear congregations should not include in their constitutions this sentence: "We will always remain with the Missouri Synod." We don't want that. The name of the Missouri Synod should not even appear anywhere in the constitution of the congregations. Of course, it is not sin, but only if this is added: "so long as the Missouri Synod continues in the doctrinal purity it now has." Without this addition it is wrong. No one should chain himself to people; instead, reserve the freedom to withdraw from it again at any moment, so that no one can then say, "You are traitors if you withdraw." If a congregation joins today, it always has the freedom to withdraw tomorrow, and no one can make it a matter of conscience.⁸⁶

What, however, has happened since the days of Walther? Today it seems that we have turned this all around. A congregation now has autonomy in regards to doctrine and practice: to the calling and deposing of pastors, to Communion practices, to worship forms and liturgies and hymns, while, at the same time, it must implement the district's mandate concerning abuse prevention policies, privacy policies, appointing a liaison representative, and the like.

It was the late George Wollenburg, former president of the Montana District and vice-president of the Missouri Synod, and essayist at our district convention a number of years ago on that Bible passage which Walther used

⁸⁵ Lutheran Church–Canada, *2008 Handbook*, Constitution, 6.10.

⁸⁶ WALTHER, "Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod", *Essays for the Church*, 2:33.

when signing his name, “You are a royal priesthood” (I Pet. 2:9), who wrote the following:

It is only natural to look at the visible organization with its structure and in our thinking externalize the church and approach it from the institutional, statistical, and organizational point of view. Efforts are then directed toward perfecting the organization, making it operate smoothly and efficiently. ... This understanding of the church produces some, not only unfortunate, but also serious consequences. Stewardship and righteousness become intimately related to the question of quantity. ... In this view of the church, congregations have value because they are local “retail outlets” for the religious corporation. Their efficiency and effectiveness is subject to evaluation on the basis of measurable statistics. When one such “outlet” fails to “produce,” the management is examined to determine whether or not it is properly handled. Usually this means the pastor. To this end, the questions asked most about a pastor are not, “Does he faithfully teach and proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments in order to distribute the benefits of Christ’s redemption?” but, “Is he a good administrator-manager? Does he have the ability to get people involved in activities of the church? Can he get the congregation to produce for the Synod in terms of visible membership growth, but especially in terms of funds for the organizational treasury, in order to carry out the mission of the church?”⁸⁷

But all this is a subject for another paper. Perhaps Walther’s “On the Primary Duties Incumbent on a Synod That Wants Rightly to Be Considered an Evangelical Lutheran Synod” would be a good place to start!

A final word from Walther, this one from a letter dated 11 February 1856 to an unidentified pastor in Canada and, in sense, also to us pastors serving here in Canada some 154 years later:

Dear brother in the faith,

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and in love.

I am very happy to see that also in the far north in your area the Lord is beginning to arouse souls and that the pure Gospel, as God permitted it to be preached again through His precious servant Luther, is finding a place there. May God bless and further these God-pleasing undertakings. For it is certain that anyone who thinks only about having a church, without also asking and inquiring whether the unfalsified Gospel will be preached therein, will only help in the building up of the tower of Babel which here in America is being constructed so eagerly by a hundred different sects. All sects come and go like comets, but the star of our true orthodox church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession will continue to shine forth, even if the star here and there is clouded over somewhat. For “God’s Word and Luther’s doctrine

⁸⁷ GEORGE WOLLENBURG, “An Assessment of LCMS Polity and Practice on the Basis of the Treatise”, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 49.2&3 (April-July 1985), 100-1.

pure shall now and evermore endure." As much as our small Lutheran Catechism is despised, yet it is a fortress that cannot be conquered no matter how much the world assails the Bible fortification. For in all other catechisms of the sects there are all kinds of rationalistic propositions, yet in the treasury of our precious catechism there is nothing but pure gold. May God strengthen you to raise up high the pennant of our church there so that all the misled children of our church may again be gathered under this banner and many others also be attracted into the one faith confessed in one love and one hope.

Do not tire of planting the church of our pious fathers in your midst and do not fail to do what you can towards this purpose. For since this matter is most important and obviously displeasing to Satan, but pleasing only to God, therefore the flesh, the world, and the devil will thoroughly oppose it and will seek to weaken you in your undertaking and make you discouraged.

The enthusiasts and the religious syncretists have an easy go of it, for they yield here and there to the devil, the world, and the flesh. For such people to make a beginning in church work is therefore usually not very difficult. But they build on sand, and when the rainstorms come, the whole structure will collapse. The orthodox however have a difficult beginning, for they usually have only a few people, and sparse resources, and are despised by the proud children of the world and by the false saints. But pursue the right course, and your structure will stand firm, which no storm can blow down, because it is built on the rock, namely the rock of Jesus Christ and His eternal, pure, divine Word.

The Lord be with you and yours and all those in your church. Please greet everyone for me in a fraternal manner, those who love the Lord and love His undiluted Word.

Your friend and brother in the Lord,

C. F. W. Walther⁸⁸

Rev. Timothy Teuscher is the pastor of St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Stratford, Ontario.

⁸⁸ C. F. W. WALTHER, *Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther: Selected Letters*, trans. Roy Suelflow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 67-69.

Walther on the Office of the Holy Ministry*

Paul R. Williams

ALTHOUGH C. F. W. WALTHER CERTAINLY INTENDED to give a sure, clear and definite “voice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the question of ... the Ministry”,¹ it is nevertheless astounding how many contradictory views fly under the banner of a “Waltherian view” on this topic. On the one hand, Walther has been accused of being “guilty of exalting the clergy”, in fact, of “giving every Missouri Synod clergyman justification for being a kingfish”² in a way which might make Walther seem little different from Stephan himself. On the other hand, Walther is more often accused of being the chief cause of the worst of lay ministry excesses, which would ultimately erase any distinction between the office of the ministry and the common priesthood held by all Christians. Are any of these Walthers of Missouri Synod faith in fact, faithful to the real C. F. W. of history? More pointedly, is such confusion about Walther his own fault, because he did not speak clearly enough, or the fault of his readers, because they do not listen to him carefully enough?

Thinking clearly about Walther must begin, of course, by first letting him speak for himself in his own native tongue. In this way, one cuts through all the various contemporary translators, interpreters, and spin doctors who might seek to force their biases or prejudices upon Walther and make him say something different from what he actually said. When one listens to Walther speaking for himself, one cannot fail to see that he wishes to remain faithful to the Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions, and to be normed by them. In fact, Walther constantly invites his readers to test his works by such norms. In this way, Walther always points one back to the church’s proper norms, both *normans* and *normata*, and he wishes all that he says to be fitted into the context of the Scriptures and the Confessions, and not the other way around. But even more than this, Walther never wants the reader to stop testing him against such norms. Nothing could be more un-Waltherian than basing a question simply on the authority of what Walther

* This essay was presented to the East District Pastors’ and Deacons’ Conference, 4 May 2010.

¹ C. F. W. WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*. (Erlangen: C. A. Ph. Th. Blassing, 1852). This is the subtitle, translated into English, of this book. English translations of Walther’s theses will attempt to reproduce the original German as precisely as possible without necessarily attempting to follow any one particular English translation of Walther’s work.

² MARION R. WINKLER, *Church Polity: How Clergy Run the Church* (Phoenix: Marion R. Winkler, 1983), 219.

says.³ “In *Kirche und Amt*”, observes Norman Nagel, “his [Walther’s] procedure is to put down a thesis and then the evidence which produces it in order of magnitude: Scripture, Confessions and then the teachers of the church. Only Scripture is adduced as giving proof. After that comes witnesses of Confessions and teachers.”⁴ Indeed, “when you get the hang of Walther, you can do it, one-two-three, yourself: Scripture, Confessions, teachers of the church.”⁵

Walther in Context: The European Situation

In order to let Walther speak for himself, one must hear him speaking within his own historical context. As Nagel further notes when considering Walther’s later major work on church and ministry, “to abstract Walther from his specific setting is to lose what is best and most profound from him as a doctor of the church.”⁶ During Walther’s lifetime, the Office of the Ministry was a hotly debated topic throughout the Christian church at large. In the 19th century the church was threatened from without by such alien secular and political forces as rationalism and nationalism, and for many of that day the only solution seemed to be to strengthen the church’s internal authority. Therefore, in Roman Catholicism, Ultramontanism stressed the authority of the Pope, culminating in the declaration of his infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1870. Within the Church of England arose the Tractarians who emphasized the independence of the bishop from the state through his apostolic succession.

However, not everyone with concerns about secular influences in the church and her ministry found a more powerful church hierarchy to be the solution; indeed, for some, such a thing was precisely part of the problem.

³ In any discussion on the proper teaching of church and ministry, the ultimate objective must be, of course, to be guided by the indisputable norm for such doctrines, the Scriptures, and the Lutheran Confessions, to which all Lutherans are pledged. Walther is only as profitable as he is Scriptural and Confessional, and as he points one back to such norms. Therefore, it is quite unprofitable and fruitless, and indeed, unWaltherian, for any discussion of church and ministry to get bogged down on the question of the exact formal canonical authority of Walther’s *Kirche und Amt* in one’s synod!

⁴ NORMAN NAGEL, “The Doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry in the Confessions and in Walther’s *Kirche und Amt*”, *Concordia Journal* 15.4 (October 1989): 423.

⁵ NAGEL, “The Doctrine”, 442.

⁶ NORMAN NAGEL, “The Divine Call in *Die Rechte Gestalt* of C. F. W. Walther”, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 59.3 (July 1995): 162. Nagel further notes in this same article, on the same page, that “how we translate the title [of *Die rechte Gestalt*] may indicate whether it has told us what is in the book or whether we are insisting on what we want to find in the book, or, worse, we are making it say what we want it to say whether Dr. Walther is saying it or not.”

Friederich Schleiermacher, for example, believed just as strongly as Roman Ultramontanists and Anglican Tractarians that the church must be freed from alien secular and political domination: “As soon as a prince declared a church to be a community with special privileges, a distinguished member of the civil world”, wrote Schleiermacher, “the corruption of that church was begun and almost irrevocably decided.”⁷ So, Schleiermacher strongly criticized a “priestly government” which “falsely makes its ‘foundation stone ... the higher personal religious worth of the priests.’”⁸ Schleiermacher argued that such a thing runs counter to the key principle of the Reformation, that the “individual enjoys the privilege of an immediate relationship with Christ through the Spirit”, and is himself an “able discerner of truth” without the need for “mediating individuals or institutions”.⁹ For Schleiermacher, therefore, the church is freed from secularism when, as he states in his “utopia of church order”, there is the “free impulse of [the Christian’s] spirit, the feeling of heart-felt unanimity and completest equality, the common abolition of all first and last, of all earthly order.”¹⁰ The church is a self-created community, and it therefore follows that her ministry is also of human creation. Though Schleiermacher conceded that there must be an “ordered public ministry” so that the Church’s presence is not “isolated and sporadic in character”, he nevertheless gives “to every Christian the right of leadership”.¹¹ In order to protect such a right, Schleiermacher appears to stress a form of a “transference theory” where no individual or small group can represent Christ so that the transference of offices must be derived solely from the whole body. For Schleiermacher, the formation of the clergy into a self-contained and self-propagating corporation has no Scriptural basis of any kind. Only when the religious consciousness of the people is left unfettered can the ministry of the church flourish. Schleiermachian views on the ministry were later popularized in 19th century Germany by one of his students, Richard Rothe, in his work, *The Beginning of the Christian Church and its Constitution*, published in 1837, where he argued that originally there

⁷ FRIEDERICH SCHLEIERMACHER, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper, 1958), 167; cited in WALTER SUNDBERG, “Ministry in Nineteenth Century European Lutheranism”, in *Called and Ordained, Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*, ed. Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 80.

⁸ SCHLEIERMACHER, *Speeches*, 206.

⁹ SUNDBERG, “Ministry in Nineteenth Century European Lutheranism”, 79.

¹⁰ SCHLEIERMACHER, *Speeches*, 151.

¹¹ FRIEDERICH SCHLEIERMACHER, *The Christian Faith*, trans. and ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), 615.

had been no real church in early Christianity; it only gradually emerged later, as did the ministry, growing out the needs of the church.

Like Schleiermacher, the growing confessional Lutheran movement of 19th-century Germany was deeply concerned with rising secularism and liberalism, and also highly suspicious of government interference in church affairs. However, there was much division among confessional Lutherans concerning what the solution for such a problem should be. Frederick Julius Stahl in 1840 responded to Rothe with *The Correct Teaching of the Church Constitution of Protestantism*, where he argued that the pastoral office, *Predigerstand*, is a divinely instituted order of society, and came into existence apart from and separate from the church, and one enters this *Stand* through a call made not by the congregation but by the governing authorities and ordination, upon which the validity of the office depended. Stahl's battle cry was "No majority, but authority!" Likewise Theodore Kliefoth, August Vilmar, and Wilhelm Löhe also believed, in direct opposition to Schleiermacher, that in the church ordinary Christians could not be left to rule themselves, but must rather be ruled by clergy, or, as Löhe put it, "the strong princes of the church".¹² Like princes, clergy cannot simply grow out from the people, but rather, arise by succession to the ministerial office "person to person, by reason of God".¹³ The *Predigtamt* was a divinely-instituted, self-perpetuating class essential for the life of the church. "Not [that] the office originates from the congregation, but it is more accurate to say the congregation originates from the office", said Löhe.¹⁴ Indeed, Löhe believed that "if exclusive clerical control cannot be allowed—that is, if there must be leadership in the church directly from the laity—then it is better that the prince rules and not the member of the church; a tyrant is easier to endure, indeed one there must be, than the many."¹⁵ According to Löhe, the ministry was brought into existence not from the universal priesthood, but was rather constituted by Christ as a divinely-instituted autonomous order, and maintained by ministerial succession, existing parallel with the congregation which it served.

Directly opposed to Löhe were the views of Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann of Erlangen and Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Höfling.

¹² WILHELM Löhe, *Gasammelte Werke*, ed. Klaus Ganzert (Neuendettelsau: Fremund-Verlag, 1954), 5:274, cited in SUNDBERG, "Ministry in Nineteenth Century European Lutheranism", 85.

¹³ Löhe, 5:294, cited in SUNDBERG, "Ministry in Nineteenth Century European Lutheranism", no page number.

¹⁴ Löhe, 5:262, cited in SUNDBERG, "Ministry in Nineteenth Century European Lutheranism", no page number.

¹⁵ Löhe, 5:325, cited in SUNDBERG, "Ministry in Nineteenth Century European Lutheranism", 85.

Responding to Löhe's *Aphorisms Concerning New Testament Offices*, von Hofmann wrote, "after a long time fighting against those who made the office dependent on the congregation, those who make the church dependent on the office must now be debated."¹⁶ Von Hofmann objected especially to Löhe's view that the effectiveness of the Gospel is made dependent upon the office, making it, in effect, ecclesiastically bound. According to von Hoffman, "Löhe confuses gifts given to the entire church with the institution of the particular office."¹⁷ Though the ministry, to be sure, is distinct from the priesthood, and must have its independence guaranteed from individual congregations, it is not to be placed over the church. For Höfling the common priesthood is divinely instituted, and to it alone belongs *iure divino* the church's ministry. "The power of the clergy cannot be properly understood as being caused by a particular, individualized power of grace that resides within the office itself", but rather, resides in the Word itself. Therefore, for Höfling it is contrary to the essence of the Gospel to understand a ministry which is separately ordained by God apart from the common institution of the universal priesthood. For Höfling, the ministry emerges "by an inner necessity out of the priesthood itself, that is, by the latter's delegation (*Übertragung*) of its individual members' spiritual rights and powers to one of themselves, for the sake of good order."¹⁸ However, what is meant by Höfling in his use of the term "ministry" which is instituted is nothing more than the mere functions of proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments. For Höfling, ministers are chosen for the sake of order, by which he meant merely "human ecclesiastical and liturgical order."¹⁹ What is instituted is merely that they be done; there is no institution of any distinct office in which one is specifically called to do it.

Walther in Context: The American Situation

Even before the development of this debate over the ministry in Europe, Walther confronted forceful expressions of both sides of this issue in America. On the one hand, in the wake of the Stephan disaster, Carl Eduard

¹⁶ J. C. K. VON HOFMANN, "Das Amt und die Ämter in der apostolischen Kirche", *Zeitschrift für Protestantismus und Kirche* 18 (1849): 129, cited in SUNDBERG, "Ministry in Nineteenth Century European Lutheranism", 86.

¹⁷ SUNDBERG, "Ministry in Nineteenth Century European Lutheranism", 86.

¹⁸ SUNDBERG, "Ministry in Nineteenth Century European Lutheranism", 86.

¹⁹ KURT E. MARQUART, *The Church and Her fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* (Ft. Wayne, Ind.: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), 124.

Vehse in 1839 anticipated Höfling's views on the Ministry with 6 propositions.

1. All Christians are priests, by virtue of baptism and faith. In the New Testament priests are born, not made.
2. The office of priest belongs to all Christians and all have the same power. All are to teach the word of God.
3. The office of priest is given by God to the congregation.
4. To make a certain order a spiritual order as if it were so instituted by God is to build on the wall of the papacy.
5. It is a condemnable proposition to claim that a priest is more than a Christian.
6. The office of the ministry is no more than a public service where something is enjoined upon a person by the whole congregation.²⁰

To this the Saxon clergy, including Walther, responded with the warning that those “who would unfairly abuse this declaration in order to discredit our office, maliciously sow the seed of distrust against us, and bring about dissension and offense in the congregation.”²¹ On 19 September 1839, Vehse and two other laymen responded with a document simply called Protest, where they insisted upon not only a distinction but a firm juxtaposition of laity and clergy, with 10 rights of a congregation.

First Right: appointment, calling, installation, and dismissal of minister.

Second Right: supervision, judgment, and discipline of the minister.

Third Right: Supervision, judgment, and discipline of the members of the congregation.

Fourth Right: supervision and judgment of doctrine.

Fifth Right: final decision in all religious and ecclesiastical matters.

Sixth Right: final decision in all private quarrels coming to the attention of the congregation.

Seventh Right: authorization to appear at councils with the same rights as clergymen.

Eighth Right: The use of keys of the church in disputed cases and in those of the most serious nature, namely, where excommunication is involved.

Ninth Right: congregations have due power and authority to settle adiaphora, thus to regulate the entire liturgy and ritual and to devise their church constitutions.

Tenth Right: congregations, as congregations, have preference over the clergy.²²

²⁰ CONRAD BERGENDOFF, *The Doctrine of the Church in American Lutheranism* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), no page number.

²¹ WALTER O. FORSTER, *Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri 1839-1841* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 463.

²² Cited in JOHN C. WOHLRABE JR. “A Historical Perspective of Walther's Position on Church, Ministry, and Polity”, *Logia*, 9:1 (Epiphany 2000): 38.

Indeed, Vehse came to the conclusion that the emigration was wrong from the start and urged them all to return to Germany, which he himself, in fact, eventually did. Later these same arguments were taken up by Vehse's brother-in-law, Adolf Marbach at the Altenburg debate in April 1841.

On the other hand, on 1 December 1840, Grabau issued his *Hirtenbrief*, a document directed against a group of Lutherans from Wisconsin who wanted to know whether it was possible for the functions of the ministry to be exercised by a schoolteacher. Because the pastor of this congregation had to make a sudden return to Germany, the leading layman, Heinrich von Rohr, wrote to Grabau asking permission for a layman to be elected temporarily to lead services and administer the sacraments. Grabau wrote back that no one could exercise the office of the public ministry unless he had been publicly called, according to the practices of the old orthodox *Kirchenordnungen*. Grabau put special emphasis on *rite vocatus*, and that both call and ordination were indispensable for the proper administration of the sacraments. Although the sacraments would not be invalidated if dispensed by a wicked, hypocritical ordained pastor, it nevertheless **would** be if dispensed by one not ordained. Grabau insisted that a layman dispenses only bread and wine and not a proper sacrament.²³ Furthermore, a congregation must obey its pastor in all things, only an episcopal form of government was proper, and the *Una Sancta*, the only holy Christian church, is precisely the Lutheran church, the visible church of the pure Word and sacrament, and, indeed, perhaps even merely his own Buffalo Synod.

Walther's *Via Media*

In the midst of such an already raging controversy, Walther shaped his own views on the office of the ministry. Towards which of the two poles of this question would he lean? As we shall see, Walther cannot fully be understood from either of these two extreme positions, but rather, only from a new, careful middle ground between them. For instance, in the Altenburg debate itself, Walther already carefully steers clear of both positions. One, in fact, would be hard-pressed to say who Walther considered to be his chief opponent: Stephan, whose heavy-handed hierarchialism had almost destroyed the demoralized Saxon settlement, or Marbach, against whom

²³ WOHLRABE, footnote 30, 44. It must be noted, however, that Grabau softened this position somewhat by conceding that in the emergency of a pastor's illness a layman could administer the sacrament, although congregations without a pastor were to wait until one came before such could be done.

after all, Walther was debating.²⁴ Indeed, a careful look at the debate shows that Walther has two objectives, firstly, to refute Stephan's dangerous errors, and secondly, to develop an anti-Stephan position on the ministry which avoids and defends itself against the functionalism of Marbach and Vehse. Indeed, crucial is how Walther approached the debate to begin with. Marbach largely saw the entire problem as a moral issue of church polity. Walther saw that such an approach was pietistic; the central issue was actually a theological one regarding the doctrine of the church, and he therefore approached it drawing from 16th-century Lutheran orthodoxy.

Grabau's *Hirtenbrief*, in which Walther sees a "second, unrevised edition of Stephan" from which "we become not a little afraid",²⁵ gave Walther the occasion to develop clearly his middle view. The first response to Grabau in the name of the Saxons was made two years later in 1843 by Löber, who wrote:

It seems to us that, in the first place, with regard to the old church orders, that you emphasize so much, so that what is essential gets confused with what is non-essential, divine with human, so that Christian freedom is restricted. Secondly, however, it seems that you attribute more to the office of the ministry than is due, and that thereby the spiritual priesthood of the congregations is diminished.²⁶

One already notes the careful balance between two extremes. One the hand, Grabau is roundly criticized for his overemphasis on human externals and nonessentials. Only what is divinely ordained can be considered essential and therefore one cannot absolutely insist upon the traditional *Kirchenordnungen*. On the other hand, it cannot be overlooked that in the primary argument of the *Hirtenbrief* that one is not to preach or to administer the sacraments if he is not a minister, Löber actually expresses full agreement with Grabau. Löber's objection is not whether, but rather on how the minister is to be put into his office, and what relationship the minister has with those (the congregation) he is in his office to serve. Grabau responded to this on 12 July 1844, insisting that a call was not enough to make a man validly called, ordination was not an *adiaphoron*, to which the

²⁴ To be sure, Walther expresses a certain indebtedness to Marbach for helping him understand the errors of Stephanism, and Walther's mature views of the ministry certainly do incorporate many of Marbach's insights and concerns (see Wohlrahe, 39). Nevertheless, Walther finds himself opposed to Marbach's central response to Stephanism enough to actually oppose and debate his position at Altenburg.

²⁵ C. F. W. WALTHER, *Briefe von C. F. W. Walther*, ed. Ludwig Fuerbringer (St. Louis, 1915-16), 2:88. This is from a letter to Marbach on 4 January 1854.

²⁶ WILLIAM W. SCHUMACHER, trans. and ed., *The Hirtenbrief of J. A. A. Grabau and Its Evaluation by the Saxon Pastors of Missouri* (St. Louis, Missouri, 1998), 14.

Saxons responded again on 15 January 1845, sparking off a full-fledged controversy between them.

Within the ensuing debate between Walther and Grabau, and after the Missouri Synod was formed in 1847, Löhe entered the debate by expressing dissatisfaction with the constitution of the newly formed synod: “we have good reason to fear that the strong admixture of democratic, independent and congregational principles in your constitution will do greater damage than the interference of princes and governmental agencies in the Church of our homeland.”²⁷ Soon after, in 1849, he published *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices and their Relation to the Congregation*,²⁸ which Löhe amplified two years later by his *Church and Ministry: New Aphorisms*. Löhe argued that there is no clear text in Scripture which speaks of the office deriving from the congregation; rather the congregation derives from the office, and the two must be separated and distinguished. Furthermore, in the New Testament, the election of ministers rests not with the congregation but rather with the apostles, and so therefore it must also be today with the apostles’ successors, the ministers; indeed, the right to vote upon the selection of a pastor by the congregation was seen as unapostolic, and ordination was necessary for the public office because of apostolic practice; it was a part of *rite vocatus*, and a rite properly performed only by those in the office.

Walther was commissioned by the 1850 Missouri Synod convention to write a book on church and ministry, directed chiefly against Grabau, but also intended to respond to opposition found in Germany. Walther opened this convention by lamenting the diverging views on church and ministry, but also that it was not a matter of *adiaphora*, but concerned doctrine that was not in their power to compromise, dismiss, nor relax. By 1851, Walther prepared an outline for the book that was presented to the convention in the form of theses, and Walther was sent to Germany to research the book, where, incidentally, he visited with Löhe to discuss the issue at length. In an article in the *Der Lutheraner* on 31 August 1852, Walther gave an historical overview of the controversy, and expressed the battle he was waging with Grabau over church and ministry was not easy for four reasons.

1. Grabau is always discrediting the person his opponents with *ad hominem* comments and misrepresents their teaching.

²⁷ WILHELM Löhe, *Kirchliche Mittheilungen aus und ueber Nordamerika* 6 (8 September 1847): 44.

²⁸ WILHELM Löhe, *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices and Their Relation to the Congregation, on the Question of the Church's Polity*, trans. John R. Stephenson (Malone, Texas: Repristination Press, 2008).

2. This issue concerned doctrinal points which called for the earnest spiritual understanding which many in his day lacked. It is seen as idle squabbling and wrangling over insignificant matters.
3. Grabau's views had crept into the Lutheran Church a long time ago and would be difficult to change.
4. Grabau's views agree much more with what appeals to human reason than does the true scriptural doctrine.²⁹

At the following convention, Walther presented, *Die Stimme unsre Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*, which was the primary work of C. F. W. Walther on this topic.

Kirche und Amt: Thesis 1

A look at Walther's theses on the ministry might properly begin where Walther begins: the phrase of Thesis 1, *Das heilige Predigtamt*,³⁰ "The holy preaching office". We may first inquire why Walther uses such a term rather than the other terms very close to it in meaning, especially *Pfarramt*. Walther refers to himself as *Pfarrer* on the title page of *Kirche und Amt*, and while he uses both *Predigtamt* and *Pfarramt* as parallel terms in the first two theses on ministry, in Thesis 7, *Predigtamt* is used alone. We may assume that Walther viewed the two terms as virtual synonyms, although it is evident that there are slight, yet significantly different shades of meaning between the two. *Pfarramt* refers specifically to a particular person in the *Amt* with the heavy nuance on "its specific located reference (*Pfarre* parish)."³¹ *Predigtamt*, however, refers to one in the *Amt*, with heavy stress on what he does (*predigen* preach). Therefore, in Thesis 1, what Walther does by referring to *Das heilige Predigtamt* is to lay less stress on the particular man in the office and more on the duties which such office has him doing, namely, preaching.

Kirche und Amt: Thesis 2

Are such "duties" referred to with *Predigtamt* in Walther's theses nothing more than mere abstract functions which are without concrete doers doing them? In the witnesses of Thesis 2, Walther cites with approval a distinction between office *in abstracto* and *in concreto* by the 17th-century theologian Ludwig Hartmann. Like Hartmann, Walther holds that AC 5 "does not

²⁹ C. F. W. WALTHER, "Vorwort des Redakteurs", *Der Lutheraner* 9 (31 August 1852): 1-3.

³⁰ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, 193.

³¹ NAGEL, "The Doctrine", 443.

speak of the *Predigtamt in concreto* or of *Pfarramt* but of the *Predigtamt in abstracto*.”³² In this way, Walther lays himself open to the charge that what is instituted by God in AC 5 and in Thesis 2 are nothing more than mere functions to be done without necessarily a specific concrete office of the ministry to do them, an argument increasingly heard in contemporary discussions of this topic.

However, Walther can be delivered from such a charge by noting that what he refers to in this way are not two *Predigtämter* but rather one *Predigtamt* considered from two perspectives: concretely, focusing upon its incumbents, the preaching officer; and abstractly, the preaching office. The *Predigtamt in abstracto* therefore does not refer merely to the means of grace as an activity alone, but rather also to the preaching office by which the activity of the means of grace is carried out. Walther clearly understood *Predigtamt in abstracto* in this way when he says that it is “when the state or the office itself is being considered”.³³ Therefore, even when Walther views the *Predigtamt* in abstraction, he is referring to the position by which the functions are being carried out. Reading on in the witnesses of Thesis 2 one discovers why Walther was compelled to emphasize that *Predigtamt* must at times be considered abstractly, rather than concretely: “because of those who desire to make the pastoral office a means of grace and co-ordinate it with the word and sacraments, as they assert that it is absolutely necessary for salvation.”³⁴ While, of course, for Walther, the gifts of Word and sacrament cannot save unless there is a giver to give them, and the *Predigtamt (in concreto, actual concrete giver!)* is the divinely ordained office to do just that, nevertheless, such means of grace do not derive their power or efficacy from the *Predigtamt*.

Thus, for Walther, the duties of the *Predigtamt* are therefore tied to the *Amt* which performs them. The term *Amt* has been noted to “embrace both functions of service to the people appropriate to each of society’s many offices, and the official positions that take shape in institutional form to ensure the proper carrying out of those functions.”³⁵ Here we see *Amt* also referring to activity and position. Sometimes, in fact, the meaning of *Amt* can strongly imply activity, such as the *Amt der Predigt* and distribution of the sacraments. Emphasized here are such activities which are done. Nevertheless, there is no *Amt* of preaching going on unless the mouth of the

³² C. F. W. WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, trans. John T. Mueller, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), 178.

³³ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 178.

³⁴ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 179.

³⁵ ROBERT KOLB, “Ministry in Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessions”, in *Called and Ordained, Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*, ed. Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), endnote 8, 65.

preacher does so, and no sacraments can distribute themselves, but only as there is a concrete one distributing them. Therefore, the term *Amt*, even when stressing activities, never does so without also implying the position of the one who is carrying out such activities of the *Amt*.

Bearing this in mind, we are now ready more fully to see what Walther says about the *Predigtamt*. One can be very clear what Walther intends to mean with this term, for indeed, each one of Walther's theses in *Kirche und Amt* begins with the phrase *Das Predigtamt*, or some direct reference to it, and then goes on to say something about it. In Thesis 1 Walther begins by noting that the *Predigtamt* is not merely synonymous with the *Priesteramt*, *welches alle Glaubige haben* "which all believers have", but is rather *verschiedenes Amt* "a distinct office".³⁶ Then Walther says that the *Predigtamt*, so distinguished from the *Priesteramt*, is *keine menschliche Ordnung* "no human institution", but is rather *von Gott selbst gestiftetes Amt* "an office established by God Himself".³⁷ The office of the ministry is distinctly ordained by God and is to be distinguished from the common priesthood of all Christians. By saying this Walther places himself squarely behind AC 14, and sets himself clearly apart from the views of Höfling.

It is therefore somewhat perplexing to see some scholars placing Walther within the same category as Höfling simply because of their common opposition to Löhe. It has been argued, for example, that the views of Walther, along with Höfling, have an anthropocentric doctrine of the church and the ministry, "in which the church is the sum total of people who have come together to constitute a church and who themselves call a pastor from their midst",³⁸ against which is a theocentric view, held by Löhe, in which the church "originates with Christ, who Himself founds it and calls its pastors and preachers".³⁹ Such distinctions, however, fail to identify the real differences between Löhe and Walther. In fact, according to these definitions, the views of **both** Walther and Löhe are at the same time **both** anthropocentric **and** theocentric. Löhe, of course, would agree that pastors do not become pastors by an immediate call from God but rather mediately through the instrument of some people who have come together to constitute a church and who themselves then call a pastor into their midst. Would not Löhe, therefore, be anthropocentric in exactly the same way as Walther? Walther explicitly states in Thesis 2, that the office of the ministry is one which "God Himself has established". In other words,

³⁶ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 1, 174.

³⁷ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 2, 193.

³⁸ LOWELL GREEN, "Grabau and Walther: Theocentric verse Anthropocentric Understanding of Church and Ministry", *Logia* 5.2 (Eastertide 1996): 25.

³⁹ GREEN, 25.

Walther also agrees that “the church originates with Christ, who Himself founds it and calls its pastors and preachers.” Would it not follow that Walther is every bit as theocentric as Löhe?

Kirche und Amt: Theses 4 and 5

For this reason, “general agreement seems to exist that the 19th century debate in Europe and America concerning the doctrine of the ministry” is best characterized not by a twofold, but rather a “threefold perspective”.⁴⁰ Walther represents a *via media*, a mediating position which is significantly different from the positions of both Löhe and Höfling. In Theses 4 and 5, Walther develops this carefully weighed mediating position. In Thesis 4 Walther differs from Löhe by declining to consider the *Predigtamt* as *ein besonderer ... heiligerer Stand* “an especially holier estate”. One might ask what Walther sees to be the difference between *besonderer ... heiligerer Stand* which the *Prediger* does not hold, and a distinct *Amt* which he does. It obviously does not mean that Walther is opposed to distinctions between clergy and laity; indeed, he has already defended such distinctions in Thesis 1. Clearly, for Walther, just because the *Predigtamt* is not a *Stand* does not mean that everyone’s a minister; they are to be distinguished. Nevertheless, such distinctions are made between those in the *Predigtamt* and those who are laity within the totality of the church in which both are together and to which Walther refers to as *Christenstand*.⁴¹ The pastor, for Walther, does not stand outside of this *Stand* as pastor, but rather within it. There is only one *Stand*, the church, and the pastor is a member of that one *Stand*, and therefore cannot belong to another *Stand* without himself being outside the *Christenstand*!

Only within the common *Stand* of all Christians does the *Prediger* have an *Amt*, and only when that *Amt* is clear and distinct do all Christians have a *Predigtamt*. Ironically, this careful distinction between *Predigtamt* and laity in one *Christenstand* is jeopardized by those like both Grabau and Höfling in two opposite, yet similar ways. By dissolving all distinctions between the *Predigtamt* and the laity, Höfling is a Eutychian. Without such distinctions, there is no divinely ordained *Amt des Dienstes* “office of the ministry” within the *Christenstand*. When however, the clergy are set above and outside the *Christenstand* in a separate *Stand*, there is the danger that they and the laity are Nestorianized, so that without such close intercommunion between

⁴⁰ JERALD C. JOERSZ, “Walther and the Ministry”, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, 63:3 (Fall 1990), 124.

⁴¹ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 4, 221.

them, the clergy cannot be an *Amt des Dienstes* “office of the **ministry**” for the laity. Between such extremes, Walther keeps a careful Chalcedonian balance between the *Predigtamt* and the laity, so that the two without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation exist together within one *Christenstand*.

Furthermore, though both Höfling and Grabau may appear to be polar opposites, there is a striking similarity between them, namely, the understanding of both concerning the ministry severely compromises and indeed jeopardizes the full efficacy of the words of institution for the sacraments. For Grabau, the efficacy of the sacrament of Absolution and the Lord’s Supper is dependent upon a proper minister doing them; thus the Lord’s institution for each of them cannot by itself be counted upon to make them what they are. Furthermore, if according to Höfling what is divinely instituted in the office of the ministry, as mentioned in AC 5, are merely matters of function, that such ministry of word and sacrament is to be done, then what is the institution of the ministry giving that is not already given in the specific institutions of Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord’s Supper? Would AC 5 in such a case, in fact, be thoroughly redundant? When the Lord institutes, something always happens. It is never redundant. If one supposes the institution spoken concerning the ministry in AC 5 to mandate nothing more than that Word and sacrament be done, and furthermore, that there **is**, in fact, something more given in this institution which is not already given in the specific institution of the sacraments, then one has landed in same quandary as Grabau, namely that something is lacking in the specific institutions of each of the sacraments which is made up in the institution of the office of the ministry.

For Walther, the *Christenstand* consists necessarily of a divinely ordained distinction of *Predigtamt* and laity; it is *wenn ... aus Predigern und Zuhörern besteht*⁴² “when properly organized, consists as both preachers and hearers”.⁴³ This is very critical, for it means that whenever Walther speaks of *Kirche* or *Gemeinde*, he is always speaking of both *Predigtamt* and laity together, each in their proper callings and vocation, and never one without the other. While both clergy and laity have the keys, they do not have them in one undifferentiated way. In the same way that the *Gemeinde* is divinely differentiated between clergy and laity, there is also a distinction between two different ways in which the laity and clergy have the church’s authority of the keys.

Such a distinction can be seen spelled out more clearly when one sees how Walther describes the position of both clergy and laity with respect to the office of the keys. Walther notes that the Catechism teaches “the Keys”

⁴² WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, 316.

⁴³ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 220.

to be “that special authority which Christ has given to His Church”. Since church refers to both laity and clergy together, this cannot mean for Walther that the keys are given exclusively to the clergy and not to the laity. Thus, Walther would criticise Löhe’s belief that the giving and receiving of the keys are essentially a clerical affair, not one of the whole *Gemeinde* together. The *Gemeinde* is *Inhaberin aller Kirchengewalt oder der Schlüssel*⁴⁴ “possessor of all ecclesiastical power”.⁴⁵ The clergy have the keys only along with and never separate from the laity. However, for Walther, neither does the term *Gemeinde*, which holds all churchly authority, refer to all the laity by themselves without the clergy. Walther’s *Kirche und Amt* cannot be construed as some lay charter of rights, or worse, as a statement that makes the laity in charge of the church without the clergy. The laity do not have the keys to the exclusion of the clergy, but only along with them within the *Gemeinde*.

Kirche und Amt: Thesis 6

Church Power

Walther describes the keys as *Gewalt* “power”. *Gewalt* is used for the first time in Thesis 5 where he says, *Das Predigtamt hat die Gewalt das Evangelium zu predigen und die heiligen Sacramente zu verwalten* “The preaching office has the power to preach the gospel and administer the holy sacraments”. The *Predigtamt*, thus, has a power, and that power is to preach and to administer the sacraments. Also, the *Predigtamt* has a second power, *die Gewalt eines geistlichen Gerichts*, the power to judge doctrine, teaching. Nevertheless, following immediately in Thesis 6, Walther connects the term *Gewalt* to *Kirche* and says:

*Das Predigtamt wird von Gott durch die Gemeinde, als Inhaberin aller Kirchengewalt oder Schlüssel, und durch deren von Gott vorgeschriebenen Beruf übertragen.*⁴⁶ “The preaching office is conferred by God through the congregation, as the possessor of all ecclesiastical power or keys, and through, that is, by means of, its call which is prescribed by God.”⁴⁷

It is clear that *Kirchengewalt* “church power” is synonymous with the keys, and that the keys, for Walther, must be considered not just with respect to the clergy alone but also with respect to the whole church together. In order

⁴⁴ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 6, 315.

⁴⁵ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 6, 219.

⁴⁶ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 6, 315.

⁴⁷ Thesis 6, author’s translation.

to press home this point even further, Walther says that the whole church together, or rather, *die Gemeinde* is *Inhaberin aller Kirchengewalt*. In this way Walther argues precisely in step with Luther in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope. “In addition it must be acknowledged that the keys belong and are given not merely to one man, but to the whole church For just as the promise of the Gospel belongs definitely and immediately [*ohne Mittel*] to the whole church” (Tr 24).⁴⁸ With the term *Inhaberin* Walther stresses that the church by its innermost nature and essence carries within her the keys. The keys are hardwired into the church. Unlike absent-minded pastors with their car keys, it is not possible for the holy church to lose her keys.

Nevertheless, since Walther insists from the start in Thesis 1 that the ministry and priesthood of all Christians are distinct, it would seem that it would have to follow that in order to sustain this distinction the keys which each has to exercise must be two different keys and offices, one given by God to the layman to be exercised only in private, the other given only to the minister for him to exercise in public. So, as Löhe and Grabau would argue, each have been given different and distinct keys, and even in an emergency when a layman must publicly exercise the keys properly given to the office, which Löhe, incidentally, would allow, he is nevertheless doing something which he has not actually been given to do, but out of love, must do anyway.

Walther, however, declines to put it in this way. The keys, for him, which are intrinsically carried within the church and which also the office of the ministry is instituted to publicly exercise are not two different keys but rather one and the same keys. It might seem inevitably to follow from this that the only way to envision the relationship of church and ministry with respect to the keys is that the ministry is nothing else but the work of the priesthood, lacking only a call to choose a particular person who will minister to all, and what he is therefore doing is publicly exercising his priestly duties which he already has as a Christian. The only difference from what each Christian does is that he is chosen to exercise his own particular priestly service publicly. This is the position of Höfling, but Walther also rejects this.

Walther opts, rather, for a very subtle third way between them. The priestly work of each Christian and the work of the keys given to the church are not the same thing but are rather two distinct and different, albeit closely interrelated things, the difference being that while priestly service flows out from faith, found in the life of sanctification for one’s neighbour, the keys create faith and are prior to it, flowing out from justification. Nevertheless,

⁴⁸ Cited in WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, under “Witnesses” for Thesis 6. WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 220.

the keys are inseparably united with priestly service for they are placed within the context of the priestly life and subsist within it. Every Christian has been given the keys, and they are placed within individual vocations which provide the shape of how the keys will be exercised by them to various specific individuals. So, for instance, the Christian who has the vocation of husband and father will find himself exercising his priestly service of the keys within these vocations specifically to his wife and children. He is an instrumentality through which such forgiveness can be declared to them. What is distinct about the office of the ministry is that it is not merely the exercise of the keys **privately** within various vocations but is essentially nothing but a divinely-instituted vocation within the church which has the calling to exercise the keys publicly for the whole church together. In this way Walther can say that all Christians in the church have the same keys, but it does not follow that all of them have been called to use them in the same way. Walther illustrates this subtle point with the striking imagery of the bridegroom who is Christ, giving His bride, the church, the keys to His household, with full unrestricted access to the whole house and everything in it. The bride in turn selects a servant, the pastor, giving him the keys and duties within the house. Though the servant has the keys and ordinarily uses them, they remain the possession of the bride, who had them before the servant, who, in turn only received them from the bride. In an emergency, she usurps nothing if she uses them herself.⁴⁹ Furthermore, according to Walther, such keys “are nothing other than the office [*Amt*] through which the promise is imparted” (Tr 24).⁵⁰ The church can never lose, nor be left without the office through which the promise is imparted. This was already anticipated in Thesis 3 where Walther said:

Das Predigtamt ist kein willkürliches Amt, sondern ein solches Amt, dessen Aufrichtung der Kirche geboten, und an das die Kirche bis an das Ende der Tage ordentlicherweise, gebunden ist. “The preaching Office is not an arbitrary office, but such an office that establishment has been mandated of the church, and to which until the end of time, the church in the ordered way is bound.”⁵¹

Fully hearing Walther can only take place when one is on guard against the misleading spin found on many levels in the poor translation of Mueller’s *Church and Ministry*. For instance, while Mueller speaks of the church ordinarily bound to the office of the ministry, with the implication that perhaps at times it can be done another way, such a translation does not do justice to Walther’s original German term, *ordentlich*, which is taken from

⁴⁹ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 268-9.

⁵⁰ Cited in WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, under “Witnesses” for Thesis 6. WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 220.

⁵¹ Thesis 3, author’s translation.

AC 14, which rather means according to the *Ordnung*, the way ordered by God to do things, from which one does not have the option to depart. Mueller's translation is exactly the kind of understanding of the *Amt* as *willkürliches* "arbitrary" which Walther is opposing in this very thesis! Mueller again does this under the scriptural proof of this thesis when he says "true" public ministry, when Walther again has *das ordentliche öffentliche Predigtamt*, "ordered", according the Lord's institution in Matthew 28:19-20 just quoted, which is suppressed and left out by Mueller.⁵² Indeed, Mueller again translates this term as "ordinarily" in the last sentence in witnesses of the Confessions on page 192, and before this the term *ordentlicher* in *dieser Guter ordentlicher Weise nur auf dieser Wege* is completely left untranslated: "these gifts can be obtained in no other way ..." probably because the text would be made nonsensical if Mueller translated the term as "ordinarily"! Furthermore, Mueller's continued translation of *Predigtamt* as "ministry" loses both the specific reference to the instituted office found in *Amt* and also the concreteness of *Prediger* "one who preaches", and in our time when the term ministry is often used to refer to any kind of church work without reference to the office of the ministry, such a translation is liable to serious misunderstanding.

Exercise of Power

In Thesis 6, we note that the *Kirchenwalt oder Schlüssel* "church power or keys", of which *die Gemeinde* "the congregation" is *Inhaberin* "possessor within", is not merely the keys but also the *Predigtamt* through which the keys are concretely given. Given originally to the church by God are keys not just abstractly considered, but keys which actually open and close, absolve and retain, and therefore a *Predigtamt* which is instituted so that such things may be done. To say that *Kirche* and *Gemeinde* have the power of the keys is for Walther to say that there is also a *Predigtamt* which has them to exercise. Therefore, *Das Predigtamt hat die Gewalt* "the office of the ministry has the power ...".⁵³ Indeed, Walther soon binds the two together even more closely: *Die Predigtamt ist die ... Gewalt*, "The office of the ministry is the power"⁵⁴ For Walther, not only were the keys given originally to the church but also the *Predigtamt* instituted by God in her midst.

For Walther, it is divinely ordained for the *Predigtamt* to have and to exercise such power, and the *Predigtamt* itself is divinely ordained for the church to have so that such power is concretely exercised. When Walther speaks of the keys as originally and inherently within the church, he is also

⁵² NAGEL, "The Doctrine", 428.

⁵³ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 5, 213.

⁵⁴ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 7, 268 (emphasis added).

speaking of the *Predigtamt* as originally and inherently instituted within the church for the keys to be exercised. The *Predigtamt* is not a human institution; it is established by God Himself. What Walther says is conferred in Thesis 6 are the keys upon particular individuals as they are put into the *Predigtamt*. He is not saying that the office itself has the keys conferred upon it. To the contrary, when Walther says the keys are originally given and immediately to the *Gemeinde*, he is, at the same time, saying that they are given originally and immediately to the *Predigtamt* within the *Gemeinde* to exercise, for the church cannot exist with keys apart from the *Predigtamt* ordained to publicly use them. The *Predigtamt* will only be exercising the keys when there are concrete persons within the *Amt* doing so. There must be real flesh and blood persons in the office, and they cannot put themselves there, for they must be placed there by another. In this way Walther says, *Die Predigtamt wird bei Gott durch die Gemeinde ... und durch deren Gott vorgeschriebenen Beruf übertragen.*⁵⁵ “The preaching office is conferred by God through the congregation ... and through means of its call, which God Himself has prescribed.”⁵⁶

It was Walther’s so-called *Übertragungslehre*, a term, incidentally, which he never used, that led to his eventual separation from Löhe, and many today find it to be the decisive expression of Walther’s entire theology of the ministry. In fact, *übertragen* is, perhaps, the single most contentious word in all of Walther’s *Kirche und Amt*. But it is quite strange that it should be so, since, understandably, only the most bizarre cultic leaders would claim that God personally and immediately chooses them as He did His original apostles. Walther’s view that there must be some human instrument of mediation found within the church by which such a conferral and bestowal of office can take place is one which should be quite uncontroversial. For instance, the position of both Höfling and Löhe on the conferral of the office of the ministry has been described by certain scholars as involving an *Übertragung*,⁵⁷ and even contemporary Roman Catholic scholars can be found to espouse a *Theologie der Amtsübertragung*.⁵⁸ The term *Übertragung* itself does not have any one uniform meaning, and the term by itself does not even indicate any particular theology of the ministry. “There is clearly nothing in the word *Übertragung* itself therefore to warrant any jumping to conclusion about a particular theory. A word is not yet a theory.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 6A, 245.

⁵⁶ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 6A, 219.

⁵⁷ MARQUART, 113.

⁵⁸ MARQUART, 113.

⁵⁹ MARQUART, 113.

What is critical here is not just that the term *Übertragung* is used but rather more precisely, who is doing the *Übertragung*, what is being *übertragt*, and what therefore, is meant by the term. Höfling used the terms *Priesteramt*, *Gemeinde*, *Kirche*, and *Laien*, all with virtually the same meaning, to refer, without distinctions, to the totality of all the believers, who together and individually possess originally the power of the keys by divine right. A specific ministry of Word and sacrament can only exist because it is created by the priesthood, and one can only hold such a position when the priesthood delegates the rights of the individual members and powers to one among themselves, for the sake of good order. According to Höfling, the *Übertragung* involves the individual priests actively transferring their spiritual powers to another, and in that very act, brings the *Predigtamt* itself, in which the *Prediger* serves, into existence and shapes it into whatever is thought best. For Höfling, therefore, the *Übertragung* is the creation of a ministry by an act of the priesthood, which transfers their powers of priesthood to one priest in particular, who acts for them, on their behalf, and at their pleasure.

Walther, however, uses the term *Übertragung* in a quite different way. Since, for Walther, the *Predigtamt* exists “ready made”⁶⁰ within the church by divine institution, no act of *übertragen* by anyone within the church needs to, nor indeed, can occur in order for it to be brought into existence. The *Amt* already exists within the church with the mandate to exercise the keys; Walther did not teach that the *Predigtamt* as an *Amt* is without the authority, power or mandate to exercise the keys until by some act of *übertragen* the church decides to deliver such powers to the *Amt*. The *Predigtamt* has such inherent power by virtue of its institution from God. The church has no *Predigtamt* except that which it already has from God Himself in His mandate to exercise the keys. What the Church does *übertragen* are not powers to the *Predigtamt*, but rather the *Predigtamt* with such powers to individual incumbents, and such individuals to the *Predigtamt*.

Walther expresses the *übertragen* of *das Predigtamt* with the most careful precision; it is done *von Gott durch die Gemeinde*. *Von* “by” clearly makes God the active agent in the *Übertragung*. God is the one who confers the *Predigtamt* upon the one to be a *Prediger* so that he has an *Amt* to exercise. For Walther, “the principal efficient cause of the ministry of the word of God is the sovereign Lord Himself.”⁶¹ As “an institution of the Triune God” a minister “has been placed at the head of the congregation by God Himself”.⁶²

⁶⁰ MARQUART, 114.

⁶¹ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 9, Scripture Proof, 303.

⁶² WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 303.

Nevertheless, for Walther the *Gemeinde* is not without a role in the *Übertragung* of the *Predigtamt*. The *Übertragung* of the *Predigtamt* which occurs *von Gott* only does so *durch die Gemeinde* “through the church”. *Durch die Gemeinde* clearly puts the *Gemeinde* in a purely instrumental role in the *Übertragung*. The *Gemeinde* can never initiate it nor cause it to happen; such, only God can do. On the other hand, neither does God’s *Übertragung* of the keys and *Amt* to the *Prediger* occur except through the human instrumentality of those in the church. No one in Walther’s time, therefore, doubted that an *Übertragung* is necessary. Controversial in 19th-century Lutheranism, however, was precisely who within the church may participate in such an *Übertragung*. Grabau and Löhe claimed that only the *Predigtamt* could do so. Höfling responded by saying only the *Priesteramt*, understanding the term to be synonymous with laity, since, indeed, there is no other divinely ordained category within *Gemeinde* than *Priesteramt*. Walther responded to both by saying *die Gemeinde*,⁶³ understanding this term to refer exclusively to neither laity nor clergy alone, but rather to all the *Priesteramt* together, both *Predigtamt* and laity.

Walther argues this quite forcefully in Scripture proof of Thesis 6. First, noting that Acts 6 specifically states *die ganze Menge*⁶⁴ “the entire multitude”⁶⁵ participated in the selection of deacons, and that “the apostle Matthias was chosen for his high office not merely by the eleven” but *von der ganzen Schar der versammelten Gläubigen*,⁶⁶ “by the whole band of gathered believers”.⁶⁷ Walther argues from the greater to the lesser that if such is the case with apostles, then surely also with ministers; the *Gemeinde* through which the keys are given can never have anyone within the church excluded. With the word *ganz* “whole” Walther repeatedly includes all the laity to be within the term *Gemeinde* which is the instrument through which God’s *Übertragung* takes place. However, immediately following this, Walther goes on to say just as forcefully that the *Predigtamt* cannot also be left out of the *Gemeinde* as instruments of the *Übertragung*. Indeed “if ministers who already administer the office belong to the calling congregation, they also of course belong to those calling; indeed, according to the office that they administer in the church, they above all.”⁶⁸ What Walther states here is that the *Gemeinde* which calls and serves as the instrument of the *übertragen*, is not to be considered by definition as merely

⁶³ Especially Theses 6 and 7.

⁶⁴ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, 273.

⁶⁵ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 219.

⁶⁶ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, 273.

⁶⁷ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 219.

⁶⁸ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 220.

synonymous with laity alone. In fact, Walther quite clearly states that if the laity in a *Gemeinde* with an incumbent clergyman makes a call without him, such call is null and void. “When their co-operation which behooves them on account of their office, is denied, *der Beruf der Menge in solchem Falle keine Giltigkeit hat* “the call of the multitude in such a case is invalid.⁶⁹ In Thesis 6, Walther did not intend to refer to specific inherent rights for laity alone. Walther’s *Übertragung* is not intended to place all authority with the laity alone, which only they alone may confer. Rather, it is the guarantee that the *Gemeinde* always has the inherent rights of the keys, which can never be taken from her by anyone outside of her. No matter who she may lack in her midst, she may never lose the capability of being an instrumentality of an *Übertragung*; for “even without them [ministers]” such a thing “is valid”.⁷⁰

Placing Ministers into the Office

A closer look at the role of clergy and laity in the call and ordination of pastors throws light on the understanding of Walther that the church “when properly organized consists of both preachers and hearers”.⁷¹ AC 14 confesses that pastors are to be *rite vocatus*, “rightly called”, and that nobody should publicly teach or administer the sacraments in the church unless they are. The question naturally follows, how does one become so, and who makes them so? One will inevitably fall into error unless one first begins with the Lord and that it is He who does so. The Lord instituted the office of the ministry, and it is He who puts a minister into His office, the only minister that can be there is one sent by Him, called by Him, ordained by Him, put to His office by Him, and placed into the place and congregation where he is by Him. But the Lord uses human instrumentalities to do His placing of ministers; however, who then, is, or is not, a necessary instrument through which He does? Three dimensions or components have always traditionally been seen in the placing of ministers: examination of a candidate’s fitness for the ministry, the election of the candidate, and public inauguration and installation of one thus elected.

⁶⁹ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 220. Mueller, it must be noted again, mistranslates things here by saying, “there is no longer any call of the ‘multitude.’” Walther, however, does say not that the multitude has not acted, but rather that it has acted, and that its action is invalid. MARQUART, 148.

⁷⁰ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 220.

⁷¹ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 220.

Election

We begin with the central and most important of these, the selection or solemn request of the candidate by a congregation to be pastor, which, for Walther and early Missouri was referred to as the “election”.⁷² A pastor must be called, the whole congregation are to take part, and that must include all the laity given their part; but considerably wide latitude can exist for Walther in what constitutes the proper lay and congregational involvement upon which a validity of a call would depend. Walther himself, for instance, was presented for ordination to serve the parish of Braunsdorf merely upon the selection of its patron, Count Detlev von Einsiedel, with virtually no formal involvement of the congregation whatsoever, and Walther never doubted the validity of such a call. “If a patron is acting representatively for the whole congregation, he does not infringe the principle that the right to elect belongs to the whole congregation and so naturally is to be done by those who represent it.”⁷³ Through the patron, the congregation has given their tacit approval through him, and what safeguards this right of consent is that the congregation still always retains the right to reject the choice of the patron if they would so choose, and in such a case the candidate cannot be forced upon them. Consent of the congregation is divinely mandated for a call, for one must have such in order for it to be freely received in the way of the Gospel; however, how this is to be done is not divinely mandated. Voters’ assemblies, as such, in order to elect a candidate may be considered, at the most, very wise and salutary, but they cannot, strictly speaking, be called divinely mandated.

Examination

Second is examination. This is also necessary and divinely mandated for the proper selection of a candidate for the pastoral office, for the Lord Himself commands that only those who are apt to teach are to be elected and allowed to serve in the office. The examination is a necessary part of the call. Quoting John Gerhard, Walther says that “it goes without saying that those who are in the ministry and profess the pure doctrine can best judge the qualities of such as are to be called into the ministry.”⁷⁴ The laity are to “concede to them [the *Predigern*] especially *die Prüfung und ordentliche*

⁷² It should be noted that for Walther, the “call” of a pastor to the ministry and to a specific place of ministry was not understood to be simply synonymous with such “election”. For Walther, the term “call” encompassed to some extent not merely the election but also the examination and ordination of the candidate, in other words, the church’s whole process together of putting a man into the *Amt*. NAGEL, “The Divine Call”.

⁷³ NAGEL, “The Divine Call”, 168.

⁷⁴ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 232.

*öffentliche feierliche Einsetzung des Gewählten überlasse*⁷⁵ “the examination and the proper, public, solemn installation of the called (pastor)”.⁷⁶ In the examination, the hearers let the pastors who lead and teach examine those who are to lead and teach in the church. But the hearers hear and attentively listen while all this is taking place and so have involvement in the examination, for they have the divine mandate to distinguish between the voice of the Good Shepherd in faithful pastors and false shepherds, and to flee from the latter. Although the Saxons concluded from Grabau’s *Hirtenbrief* that the latter allowed only the clergy to judge doctrine, it is possible on this point that they judged Grabau too severely; at one point Grabau does say that “every true Christian has and recognizes his general Christian calling to distinguish false and true teaching”.⁷⁷ Löhe believed that Grabau and the Saxons were talking past one another, emphasizing two sides of the same truth, but essentially in agreement with each other. For Walther, at any rate, it is the whole congregation together, both pastors and hearers, which has a part in the examination but each with their own vocation in doing so, the pastors leading and teaching, the lay hearers hearing and allowing themselves to be taught, but only by orthodox teachers, which they are to distinguish, but never apart from the orthodox pastors who teach them to do so.

Ordination

Third, then, is ordination. For Grabau, “ordination is a divine commissioning of the Office” and “is no *adiaphoron*” but an “essential part of the *vocatum esse*”.⁷⁸ He says this largely upon the basis of Paul’s particular mandate to Timothy and Titus; thus a valid office of the ministry requires it to be done likewise by others in the office. Löhe, on the other hand, while strongly leaning in this direction and perhaps also personally agreeing with it, nevertheless argues that since nowhere in the Scriptures is there a divine mandate for it and there are divergent views found in the old Lutheran teachers, and even within the Lutheran Symbols themselves, ordination, therefore, must remain an open question.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, 273.

⁷⁶ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 220.

⁷⁷ Cited in THOMAS M. WINGER, “The Relationship of Wilhelm Löhe to C. F. W. Walther and the Missouri Synod in the Debate concerning Church and Office”, *Lutheran Theological Review* 7.1&2 (Fall/Winter 1994 and Spring/Summer 1995), 119.

⁷⁸ WINGER, 126-27.

⁷⁹ WINGER, 127. Löhe writes, “The older teachers are not one, the Symbols have no complete, thoroughgoing unanimity, the Scriptures are not understood with complete concord in the respective passages,—and the teaching of ordination is one of those over which people within the Lutheran church have had varying opinions forever and ever,

Walther observes the same data as Löhe, but comes to diametrically opposite conclusions. Precisely because the Scriptures give no divine mandate for ordination with the laying on of hands, the case is closed; it **cannot** be an open question. Even if ordination is a *adiaphoron*, a clear mandate from the Lord is necessary for anything to be considered divinely mandated; the data of Scripture give no such thing, and therefore such an issue cannot be left open for further resolution because there will never be any other Scripture with more data in the future which could form the only basis for such further resolution. Therefore, for Walther, ordination with the laying on of hands does not have a divine institution, but is *eine apostolische kirchliche Ordnung*.⁸⁰ Mueller inadequately translates *Ordnung* as rite;⁸¹ more accurate is solemn “order”. Indeed, regrettably, much of the witness of Walther and indeed the Confessions is obscured by Mueller in the witnesses section of Thesis 3 where into the Apology’s assertion of the “sacrament of ordination”, he inserts out of nowhere the comment, “so called by the papists”.⁸² This is simply a distortion of Walther’s text since it was not a mere misunderstanding of the papists, but also clearly the understanding of both Apology and also Walther that ordination can in a certain definite sense be understood as a sacrament, and Walther’s comments following the quotation of the Apology tells how it can:

Here our church confesses that ordination is to be regarded as divine only if it is understood election into the ministry per *synecdochen* and not, as it is commonly understood, as a divine act that makes the call valid. Of this passage in the Apology Gerhard says: “Everyone understands that the Apology does not so much treat of the rite of ordination as rather of the office of the word and the sacraments itself.”⁸³

What Walther specifically calls *adiaphoron* is how ordination is to be done. One cannot say that it is divinely mandated that it be done with the laying on of hands. Nevertheless, it does not follow from this that for Walther ordination as an *adiaphoron* is something which anyone is free to leave out as he pleases. Indeed, Walther notes in his commentary concerning the Scripture proof of Thesis 6A that

If no officiating ministers belong to the calling congregation, the call is valid, but it is demanded that such a congregation should not act alone and

concerning which a unanimous understanding will only be worked out through proposal and counter-proposal.”

⁸⁰ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 6B, 289.

⁸¹ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 247.

⁸² WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 191. NAGEL, “The Doctrine”, 429.

⁸³ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Witnesses, Thesis 6B, 249.

according to its own opinion, but seek the counsel of ministers in office, and listen to their advice and instruction and concede to them proper, public, solemn installation—and that this is to be the way of the church for all times.⁸⁴

Walther gives three reasons for this: “1. love and unity of the church, 2. honor believers owe their pastor, 3. sacred importance of the matter itself.”⁸⁵ Indeed, ordination is not a “meaningless ceremony if it is connected with ardent prayer of the church, based upon the glorious promises given in particular to the office of the ministry, it is accompanied with the outpouring of heavenly gifts on the person ordained.”⁸⁶ Walther quotes Gerhard that ordination “should by no means be omitted, but it should always be observed when the ministry of the church is to be established, except in emergency.”⁸⁷ Indeed, quoting Dannhauer, Walther goes as far as to say that ordination “certainly is necessary” although

not because of any necessity of purpose or means, but rather that necessity which accrues from the benefit that the examined and unexamined teachers of the church may be distinguished so that no one may raise an accusation that the Lutherans use those who are not ordained for the laying on of hands, permitting to hear confession, feed the sick, or administer Holy Communion.⁸⁸

Echoing this in an article in *Lehre und Wehre*, Walther says:

Along with the entire orthodox church we recognize ordination as an *adiaphoron*. ... [A]lso in agreement with the church of God we hold it to be relatively necessary [T]he call to the office of the word must have some public witness on account of those who run and are not sent, and ordination gives this witness. Whoever omits ordination without need is a schismatic who has separates himself from the orthodox church of all time.⁸⁹

Or, again quoting Dannhauer, “Who then is the opponent of good order who superciliously despises this custom [of ordination]? He is an obstinate

⁸⁴ Thesis 6A, Scripture Proof. Note that we generally follow here the translation of *Church and Ministry*, leaving out, however, Mueller’s “action of the believers”, a phrase which does not exist at all in the original *Kirche und Amt* and has been inserted by Mueller into the text of his translation. *Kirche und Amt* simply has “für alle Zeiten der Kirche vorgestellte Beispiel.” WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, 246.

⁸⁵ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 6A, Scripture Proof, 220.

⁸⁶ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 6B Scripture Proof, 248.

⁸⁷ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis VI-B, Witnesses, 263.

⁸⁸ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis VI-B, Witnesses, 266.

⁸⁹ *Lehre und Wehre*, 20.12 (Dec. 1874): 364.

ass.”⁹⁰ For Walther, ordination and call are not to be separated or isolated from each other. Nevertheless, for Walther, “when the bishops are heretics or refuse to administer ordination, the churches are by divine right compelled [with the co-operation of their pastors] to ordain pastors and ministers by themselves” (Tr 72).⁹¹

Therefore, both clergy and laity participate as the one *Gemeinde* in the *Übertragung*, but according to Walther, they do so in two different and specific ways. In the calling of pastors, and in the *Übertragung*, the clergy lead the laity, and the laity allow themselves to be led by them. Walther notes that if there are no officiating ministers in a particular congregation, the laity of such a “vacant congregation should not act alone and according to its own opinion”. They are to “seek the counsel of ministers in office”, and “listen to their advice and instruction”.⁹² Nevertheless, Walther quotes with approval a quotation of the Wittenberg Faculty *consilium*, a quote which, incidentally, Mueller without comment leaves entirely out of his translation,⁹³ that priests simply ordained in the old Roman way with a bishop are simply to carry on in such a call as ministers, now in the service of orthodox teaching rather than Roman errors.⁹⁴

Authority in the Church

Does the *übertragen* of the *Predigtamt von Gott durch die Gemeinde* put the *Predigtamt* in authority over the *Gemeinde* or the *Gemeinde* in authority over the *Predigtamt*? Before answering such a question, one must first point out that Walther’s understanding of the relationship between clergy and laity cannot but be misunderstood when one attempts to use him to answer the law orientated question, “Who’s in charge?” In both Grabau and Höfling one does sense a framing of the question in such a way. Höfling fears for the church if it were to be under the authority of the clergy. Grabau argues quite strongly for the church to be under exclusive clerical control. Walther, to be

⁹⁰ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 266.

⁹¹ MARQUART, footnote 7, 147, observes, “The bracketed words are omitted by Tappert, the *Book of Concord*, 332, but are a part of the authoritative Latin text: ‘*adhibitibus suis pastoribus*’” (BKS, 492). The Concordia Triglotta also omits these words from its Latin text.”

⁹² WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 6A, Commentary on Scriptural Proof, 220.

⁹³ NAGEL, “The Doctrine”, 437 notes, “Church and Ministry simply suppresses it (no three dots). That is a hanging offence—in theology double hanging. If some one does this in a poker game, you whip out your gun and shoot him. On the other hand it may not have been the butler who did it, but the editor (cf. The Case of the Severed Sentence).”

⁹⁴ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, 255. Cited in NAGEL, “The Doctrine”, 437, also footnote 9, 444.

sure, would completely agree with Grabau that the clergy are to exercise a definite position of headship over the church. In fact, Walther notes in Thesis 5 that the clergy have *die Gewalt eines geistlichen Gerichts*,⁹⁵ “the power of spiritual judgment”. The terms which Walther uses here are obviously directly taken from the Apology, the *geistlichem Gerichtszwang* (Ap 28:13),⁹⁶ spiritual authority or jurisdiction, which “every bishop has” to “exclude from the Christian congregation those who are found guilty of open crimes and again to receive and absolve them when they are converted”.⁹⁷ Such spiritual authority, therefore, refers to nothing more and nothing less than the power of the office of the keys. Walther follows the Apology quite closely and faithfully when he links together the power of jurisdiction in Thesis 5 with *Gewalt das Evangelium zu predigen und die heiligen Sacramente zu verwalten*⁹⁸ “power to preach the gospel to administer the holy sacraments”. This is the exact explanation which the Apology gives to the *potestatem ordinis*.⁹⁹ As with the Apology, these are the two powers which for Walther define the office of the *Predigtamt*. Therefore, for the Confessions and for Walther, the *Gewalt*/power exercised by the minister always has reference neither to matters of church polity or control of external administrative structures, nor to the ability to coerce the behaviour of others, but rather to the means of grace, and such means, of necessity, always involve Gospel-giving, rather than the compulsion of the Law.

Spiritual Judgement

But would Walther agree with Grabau that such spiritual judgement is exclusive to the clergy? In Theses 10 Walther writes that “judging doctrine”, *Lehre zu urteilen*, which the *Predigtamt* do by divine right, is something which the laity also have the right to do.¹⁰⁰ Walther goes on to say that “the right to judge doctrine has not been taken away from the laymen by the establishment of the ministry”, and indeed, such a right they still have as a “sacred duty”.¹⁰¹ Therefore, according to Walther, “in the ecclesiastical

⁹⁵ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 5, 264.

⁹⁶ Quoted by Walther under “*Zeugnisse der Kirche in ihren öffentlichen Bekenntnissen*”, for Thesis 5, 266.

⁹⁷ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 214.

⁹⁸ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 5, 264.

⁹⁹ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, 266.

¹⁰⁰ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 10, 332.

¹⁰¹ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 10, Scriptural Proof, 332.

courts and councils they (the laity) are accorded both a seat and vote together with the clergy.”¹⁰²

One must pay special attention to what Walther is saying here. Firstly, Walther is not saying that with the right to judge doctrine and a seat and vote that the laity therefore have control over the clergy. To the contrary, all rights given to the laity are carefully expressed as with the clergy and not over them. Secondly, neither would it be accurate to say that Walther is making a direct response to Grabau’s exclusive clerical control by saying something like no, clergy and laity control together for the simple reason that Law-oriented control is never Walther’s concern when he discusses the ministry and laity of the church. For Walther, not even Christ controls the church, any more than any bridegroom would his bride; He is rather her self-sacrificing and serving Lord, and her gracious life-giving and protecting head. As representatives of Christ, it is the vocation of the clergy to bring such a Christ to the laity. They have a divinely-ordained position of authority over the laity in the same way which Christ does, in order to serve them. In their service to the laity the clergy have the solemn call to judge doctrine in the same way that a doctor judges the medicine which he gives to the patient. He must judge and distinguish between poison and the good medicine which he is to dispense. In order to be served by his doctor, the patient must listen to him, do what he says, and indeed, obey his instructions. So likewise, the pastor, as a physician of souls, serves the laity. But in order for him to be able to do so, the laity must listen to their pastor, do what he says, and, indeed obey him in the teaching that he gives to them; only in this way can the pastor be their servant. The pastor serves the laity by faithfully exercising his fatherly authority over them. The laity let the pastor serve them by submitting to this authority and obeying him.

Thus, in the church, Walther quite explicitly says that *dem Predigtamt gebührt Ehrfurcht undo unbedingter Gehorsam, wenn der Prediger Gottes Wort führt*,¹⁰³ “to the ministry there is due respect as well as unconditional obedience when the pastor comes with God’s Word.”¹⁰⁴ By saying this, Walther faithfully follows the Scriptures: “Obey those who rule over you” (Heb. 13:17), as, indeed, is also quoted in the Table of Duties of Luther’s Catechism. For Walther, the pastor has a solemn and divinely-ordained role to serve his congregation and he does so by being her head, having authority and in fact, ruling over her in the stead and by the command of Christ, whose authority he actually exercises. The congregation, in turn, receives the service of the pastor by gladly submitting to their pastor’s headship. They do so by hearing the word which he preaches, and rendering him

¹⁰² WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 10, 332.

¹⁰³ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 9, 404.

¹⁰⁴ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 9, 303.

unconditional obedience as he does. In this way, they are hearing and obeying God Himself. What Walther says about the obedience, dignity and esteem due to the pastoral office, “the highest office in the church”,¹⁰⁵ quite simply equals and outdoes anything that can be found said by Grabau, Löhe and in fact by any other 19th-century Lutheran.

Walther dramatically distances himself from Grabau and Höfling, both of whom at times can describe “power” in the church apart from the means of grace as a matter of administrative control. Walther especially differed from Höfling, who attempted to thwart power-hungry clerics by setting them under the firm control of a lay-dominated church polity. To be sure, Walther believed strongly that the laity, and not just the clergy, “also possess [the] right ... to judge doctrine”, and “therefore in the ecclesiastical courts and councils they are accorded both a seat and vote together with the clergy.”¹⁰⁶ Even so, it is crucial to recognize that Walther did not regard this right of the laity to focus primarily on matters of polity in the outward structures of the church. Walther is not saying that the laity has power over the clergy! Indeed, it must be remembered that for Walther, matters of church polity were completely *adiaphora*, and one could not make any particular form of church polity a matter of doctrine. Indeed, anyone who would have the grave misunderstanding that the essence of Walther’s ecclesiology and the Missouri Synod’s identity to be one of anti-episcopalism or to be against bishops should ponder Walther’s statements at the second synodical convention of the Missouri Synod in 1848, where he says:

Perhaps there are times and conditions when it is profitable for the church to place the supreme deciding and regulating power into the hands of representatives. Who, for instance would deny that the consistories in our German fatherland were an inestimable blessing? And anyone knowing a little history could not possibly deny that the Swedish church under its episcopal structure was gloriously edifying.¹⁰⁷

For Walther, the problem with Stephan was not that he was a bishop, but rather that he was **not** a bishop as he was to be, a servant of the Word, for as Walther says at this same convention, “Christ not only declares that he is the only one who has the power in the church, exercised by His word, but he denied to everyone any other power, rule, or imperative in His church but the word.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 8, 289.

¹⁰⁶ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 10, 332.

¹⁰⁷ WOHLRABE, 41.

¹⁰⁸ WOHLRABE, 41.

The Church Liturgical

So rather, with Thesis 10, Walther is speaking of things far more essential than mere adiaphoristic matters of church polity. He speaks, indeed, of the church liturgically, the hearing and confessing of the proclaimed Word of God. This is already expressly indicated by Walther in Thesis 7, although it is completely obscured by another serious mistranslation in Mueller. Mueller's Thesis 7 expresses the holy ministry to "exercise the rights of the spiritual priesthood in public office in the name of the congregation."¹⁰⁹ However, what Walther actually did say in Thesis 7 is not *im Namen der Gemeinde*, even though interestingly enough, he does use this phrase later on in the supporting evidence, and Mueller does rightly translate this as "in the name of the congregation",¹¹⁰ so that it is, indeed, Walther's belief that what the pastor does he does representing the congregation on their behalf. However, what Walther says in Thesis 7 is rather *in öffentlichem Amte von Gemeinschafts wegen*,¹¹¹ and while it could be argued that since Walther expresses and describes the pastor acting in the name of the congregation from the supporting evidence and that such must be what he meant by this phrase, it is more persuasive to consider that precisely by **not** using this phrase in a context where soon after he did would make it follow that he therefore means something different by this phrase. *Wegen* means "for the sake of" and the abstract of *Gemeinde*, *Gemeinschaft*, is "fellowship", and of course, for Lutherans, not some Schleiermacherian chumminess between people, but rather that which binds the church together in fellowship, the means of grace.¹¹² So, what Walther is actually saying in Thesis 7 is that "The holy preaching office is the power ... to exercise the rights of the spiritual priesthood in the public office" not "in the name of the congregation", but rather "for the sake of the means of grace". In this way Walther proceeds in the manner of the AC, where Article 4, confessing justification, is followed by Article 5's confession of the office of the ministry as the means by which God delivers justification to His church, "to obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is provided the Gospel and the sacrament, through these, as through means ..." (AC 5). Indeed, in the support of thesis 10, Walther continues this line of thought; as AC 8 defines the church liturgically, so also Walther explains the relationship of ministry and church within a liturgical context of the ongoing means of grace. For instance, in his Scripture proof for Thesis 10,

¹⁰⁹ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 7, 268.

¹¹⁰ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 268 and following.

¹¹¹ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 7, 315.

¹¹² NAGEL, "The Doctrine", 438.

when Walther goes on to explain what he means by “judge doctrine”, he appeals first to Paul’s reference to the Lord’s Supper, in I Corinthians 10:15-16 which the laity would hear and receive in the church’s liturgy, asking them to judge for themselves about its meaning. Four things are to be noticed here. First, Walther, along with St Paul, defines “judge doctrine” not simply according to anything the laity may think, but rather to what they concretely hear in the proclaimed Word of God. Secondly, by “judge doctrine” the laity are called upon to hear this word and to discern what it means. Thirdly, by “testing the spirits, whether they are from God”, the laity, when they judge doctrine, are to distinguish what is true in the Word of God and distinguish it from what is from false prophets (Mt. 7:15-16; Jn 10:5).¹¹³ In every way, Walther’s purpose in Thesis 10 is to point the laity away from their own thoughts to the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). And fourthly, “judge doctrine” enjoins them to confess this openly before others in the church. Therefore, when Walther expresses the right of laity to judge doctrine, he is putting the laity under the Word of God, and thus under pastors through whom the Word is faithfully preached. Walther is underscoring the laity’s right to make sure they are under the preached Word of God, as opposed to being under the influence of false teachers. Therefore, layman and pastor, united together in one *Christenstand*, in their respective vocations as hearers and proclaimers of God’s Word, are both servants of the Word of God. Walther’s greatness was that he always declined to discuss the *Gewalt* and *Rechte* of the *Gemeinde*, *Kirche* and the *Predigtamt* with regard to external matters of law, but rather only in terms of Gospel matters of the means of grace and the proclaiming and hearing of the Word of God. The power of the *Predigtamt* is to preach the Gospel and to administer the sacraments, and its authority is nothing but the mandate from God Himself to give such gifts, while the *Rechte* of the *Gemeinde* is nothing but to receive and hear it.

Just as God uses the instrumentality of the means of grace (audible word, water, bread and wine) to convey forgiveness and life, so also He uses the instrumentality of the *Predigtamt* to do the distributing of *Predigt* “preaching” and the means of grace, so that the laity may receive them *extra nos*. Likewise, the *Prediger* cannot give the *Predigtamt* to himself, but also must receive it through an instrumentality. Therefore, the *Gemeinde*, through its call is the instrument through which the keys are conferred to the particular *Prediger*. The calling and vocation of the *Priesteramt* is to hear, and the calling of the *Predigtamt* is to serve the *Priesteramt* by preaching to them, for they can only hear when they have something to hear. In each of these ways, the instrument is the divinely appointed *extra nos* place through which and where God does what He does. The vocation of the *Predigtamt* is to be an

¹¹³ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Scripture Proof, Thesis 10, 332.

instrument through which God gives His gifts, and the vocation of the *Gemeinde* is to receive them from the *Prediger* as from God Himself.

For Walther, the *Predigtamt ... Amt des Dienstes ist*,¹¹⁴ a ministry of service,¹¹⁵ both of God and the *Gemeinde*, but not in one and the same way. The differences between the two can be hinted at by the fact that while the pastor is called by God, he is called through, to, and for the congregation. Firstly, the pastor is a *Diener Gottes* “servant of God” because he is sent by Him and acts as a *Botschafter an Christus Statt*,¹¹⁶ “ambassador of Christ”.¹¹⁷ What he is to do is defined by God Himself in the divine institution of the *Predigtamt*. Only from God can a specific *Prediger* receive the authority to act with the powers of the *Predigtamt*. It cannot be enough that the pastor is merely sent by a congregation; he must be sent by God Himself, and it must be none other than God Himself who puts *Prediger* into the *Predigtamt*, for only then can he speak on His behalf. The pastor speaks and acts on behalf of God, and in fact Walther can say that “when a *Prediger* uses God’s Word in his *Gemeinde*, whether by teaching, admonishing, reproving, or comforting, either publicly or privately”,¹¹⁸ *so hört die Gemeinde aus seinem Munde Jesum Christum selbst*¹¹⁹ “so the congregation hears from his mouth Jesus Christ Himself”.¹²⁰

Secondly, Walther explicitly calls the *Eingesetzte* “installed one” a *Diener der Gemeinde* “servant of the congregation”.¹²¹ Since what God does on behalf of the congregation is to serve them, it follows that as an instrument of the Lord, the pastor also serves the church. However, the pastor is not the servant of their desires, wants, or will, but rather of God’s desire, wants, and will for them, which is expressed in the Word of God which the pastor is called to faithfully preach and proclaim.

Giving the pastor such authority to speak as a servant of God in His behalf actually keeps ultimate authority with God Himself, and keeps the pastor as His stewards. Ministers are not “proprietors of the salvific treasures of the church but are rather stewards of them”.¹²² They can only exercise the power given to them by God to be His instruments. Here

¹¹⁴ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 7, Scripture Proof, 354-5.

¹¹⁵ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 7, Scripture Proof, 268.

¹¹⁶ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, 404.

¹¹⁷ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 303.

¹¹⁸ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 303-4.

¹¹⁹ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, 405.

¹²⁰ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 304.

¹²¹ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 9, 303.

¹²² MARQUART, 108.

Walther argues directly against Grabau's contention that layman owe "fidelity and obedience is their teachers which are not contrary to God's Word".¹²³ This, indeed, was one point where Löhe parted company with Grabau and sided with Walther and the Saxons; the pastor of Neundettelsau observes that on the basis of this a pastor could claim that all things fall under the compass of God's Word. God's Word is boundless, but the application which the pastor makes in his human wisdom has limitations. Löhe says, in agreement with Walther, "It would on the whole be better to require obedience of the congregation to the pastor [*Seelsorger*] in all which is *according to* God's word rather than in all which is not contrary to it."¹²⁴ For Walther, the *Gewalt* of the *Predigtamt* is strictly circumvented by the Word of God; he is authorised to speak God's word, no more, and no less. For this reason, the *Prediger* has "no authority to introduce new laws or arbitrarily to establish adiaphora or ceremonies",¹²⁵ and therefore to "demand absolute obedience to what merely appears to him to be best".¹²⁶

But neither do the laity, in turn, have the right to demand absolute obedience from the clergy to what merely appears to them to be best. With this statement from the Scripture proof of Thesis 9-B, it is not Walther's intention to grant the laity unbridled freedom from the clergy to do whatever they want, much less to lord it over the clergy. Rather, Walther is again chiefly concerned with *der ganzen Gemeinde*¹²⁷ "the whole congregation",¹²⁸ and that *des Predigers mit den Zuhörern* "pastors with the hearers",¹²⁹ indeed, to act harmoniously with one another without Law-orientated compulsion. In fact, the laity can only exercise their freedom with regard to adiaphora, as Thesis 9-B describes it, when they are under the pastor's teaching authority, and therefore under the Word of God. It is the whole church together which is to "decide on what should be accepted or rejected"¹³⁰ on matters adiaphora, and the laity do, indeed, have full participation in such deliberations, but only according to their vocation within the church as "hearers"¹³¹ under the pastor's vocation as *Lehr*,

¹²³ WINGER, 125.

¹²⁴ WINGER, 125, emphasis in the original.

¹²⁵ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 9-B, 311.

¹²⁶ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 9, Scripture Proof, 312.

¹²⁷ WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, Thesis 9-B, 416.

¹²⁸ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 9-B, Scripture Proof, 312.

¹²⁹ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 416.

¹³⁰ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, Thesis 9-B, Scripture Proof, 312.

¹³¹ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 312.

*Aussichts, und Wachteramt*¹³² “teacher, supervisor, and watchman”.¹³³ In such a vocation, the pastor is to direct the deliberations of the whole church, and he must instruct the congregation (*die Gemeinde zu unterrichten*) and see to it that also in the determination of adiaphora and the establishment of ecclesiastical regulations and ceremonies the congregation does not act frivolously or establish something that is hurtful.¹³⁴ In this way the vocations of both pastor and laity in the *Gemeinde* are centred and defined by the Word of God; it is what the *Prediger* preaches and what the hearer hears, and in this way they are *des Predigers mit den Zuhörern*,¹³⁵ where matters adiaphora are established evangelically “by way of advice [from the pastors] and with the consent of the whole congregation”.¹³⁶

The greatness of Walther’s view on church and ministry was to order both pastor and laity harmoniously together in the church around the means of grace under the Word of God. Both Höfling and Grabau, in opposite yet similar ways, inclined toward defining the place of clergy and laity in terms of how each is to be free to act unfettered from the other. Contrary to both, Walther defined clergy and laity liturgically, by the mutual God-given vocations which bind each to one another around the ongoing means of grace, pastors faithfully preaching only God’s Word to their hearers, and the hearers hearing only this word from their pastors and obeying their word as a word from the Lord Himself, all within the one *Gemeinde*, as *Predigern mit den Zuhörern*, “preachers **with** the hearers” together.

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¹³² WALTHER, *Kirche und Amt*, 417.

¹³³ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 312.

¹³⁴ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 312.

¹³⁵ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 312.

¹³⁶ WALTHER, *Church and Ministry*, 313.

The Doctrinal Authority of C. F. W. Walther's *Kirche und Amt* (Church and Ministry) in Lutheran Church–Canada

Commission on Theology and Church Relations
Lutheran Church–Canada

This document is published in LTR at the request of the CTCR as part of this Walther-themed issue.

IN HER FIRST CONVENTION Lutheran Church–Canada [LCC] committed herself to the doctrinal position of her mother synod by including article II in her constitution. This article binds the synod and every member thereof to accept without reservation the Holy Scriptures as the only rule and norm of faith and practice, and the writings in the Book of Concord as a true and unadulterated exposition of the same. The convention made no express commitment to any doctrinal writings, resolutions, or statements of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod [LCMS], though it has been assumed that the historical actions of the mother synod would continue to carry weight in the daughter. In order to clarify the status of existing LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations [CTCR] documents, for example, LCC passed resolution 90:1.02, which explained that they were to be received “as part of its heritage” and referred to “for reference and guidance”.

The present confusion in LCC over the authority of C. F. W. Walther's writing, *Kirche und Amt* (*Church and Ministry*), can be adequately addressed on the basis of the preceding paragraph. Although no CTCR existed in 19th-century Missouri, Walther's book served a similar purpose to such documents in that it provided a unified response to a theological issue that stood behind a church relations problem (see the history below). Although it cannot be placed on the level of the doctrinal authorities in Article II, it ought to be received and honoured by LCC “as part of its heritage” and referred to “for reference and guidance”. However, in light of recent action in the LCMS, the popular belief that *Kirche und Amt* was officially adopted as a binding doctrinal statement needs further examination.

In her 2001 synodical convention, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod passed resolution 7-17A “to reaffirm” that Walther's book *Kirche und Amt* [*KuA*] is “the official position of the LCMS”. The convention did not claim

to be adopting *KuA* but to be “reaffirming” its status. The historical basis was presented in the second and third “whereas” of the resolutions:

WHEREAS, Dr. C. F. W. Walther addressed this confusion [with regard to the doctrine of church and ministry] in 1851 through his *Theses on Church and Ministry*, which were subsequently declared to be the position of the LCMS in 1851; and

WHEREAS, The book *The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Ministry*, by Dr. C. F. W. Walther, was published in 1852. The LCMS in convention declared this book to be the pure doctrine (*reine Lehre*) of church and ministry;

It is in the very nature of a “whereas” that what it states must be incontrovertibly and demonstrably true. Unfortunately, the resolution does not cite explicit text from the 1851 and 1852 conventions to which it broadly refers (with the exception of the two German words). In order to understand precisely what occurred, it is necessary to examine closely the published *Synodal-Berichte* (convention records).

The Origins of *Kirche und Amt* in the LCMS (1850-52)

The genesis of Walther’s writing can be found in the minutes of the 1850 synodical convention in St. Louis. The synod discussed at length their ongoing pastoral and doctrinal conflict with Pastor Grabau and the Buffalo synod, dating back to his *Hirtenbrief* “Pastoral Letter” (1840)¹ and perpetuated in disputes over the right of excommunication.² At the heart of the debate was the source and nature of pastoral authority. Grabau was understood to be the aggressor, against whom the synod felt compelled to defend herself. Having heard Pastors Walther, Sihler, and Brohm present a series of theses on the basis of the Book of Concord, the convention

¹ This pastoral letter was addressed to a group of Prussian Lutherans in Wisconsin, whose pastor had turned back to Germany. The congregation wished to choose a suitable man from their midst and ordain him as their pastor. Grabau argued that such an ordination and any subsequent sacramental acts would be invalid, as the ministry can only be conferred by those who already possess it. Grabau, in a friendly gesture, sent his letter to the Missourians for their advice and approval of his position. He was surprised to discover that they disagreed, as they had emerged from the Altenburg debate with the view that the ministry—in an emergency—can arise from the congregation on the basis of the Word of God alone. Thus, at the heart of the debate on the office of the ministry between Missouri and Grabau (Buffalo) was the question of from where the ministry derives its authority.

² Grabau complained that Missouri congregations had received as members people who had been rightly excommunicated from Buffalo Synod churches. Some Missourians argued that their congregation had the right to overrule the judgement of the Buffalo Synod pastor. Grabau disagreed.

commissioned Walther to develop the work into a book, a draft of which was to be presented to the synod the following year.

At the 1851 convention (Milwaukee), Walther presented the completed theses on church and office, including a sketch of the supplementary material from Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the church fathers that would be marshalled in their defence. The published convention minutes are worth reading at length:

When, at the last Synodical convention, Grabau's second Synodical letter, that included false accusations and charges, was discussed, it was thought best to publish a paper as a justification for our teaching on Church and Ministry. We were not only accused, on these parts, of false teaching by Pastor Grabau, but also among our brothers in Germany, with whom we are in faith fellowship, there is a growing disapproval. Prof. Walther had taken over the preparation of the paper on behalf of the Synod, and now he presented the draft of the paper to the present convention for examination. According to his presented plan the paper is divided into three parts: a preface, historical presentation of the conditions under which the paper arose; a number of theses that present our teaching on the Church as well as the Preaching Office in a short and precise fashion; it ends with an epilogue that focuses on the application of the theses on the present doctrinal differences. As proof for the theses the author cites from a) Scripture, b) the Symbolical Books, c) the acknowledged most reliable teachers of our and of the early church, in order to, in the strongest sense, dispel the appearance of an innovation in the teaching; to show the agreement between the whole Church from the beginning and our church, and to put this agreement, with a systematic compilation of many witnesses, in the clearest light. The character of the whole paper should be more apologetic than polemic in order to invite a more relaxed examination and to heal the impending split in love. The Synod declared itself in full agreement with this plan, and approved the apologetic way of teaching of the author in so far as that through it the necessary proof of the untenability [*sic*] of the opposing errors are given.

The honorable author now presented the specific theses to which the Synod gave its agreement [*ihre Beistimmung*]. Since, however, the book will be published soon, it would be superfluous to go into the specifics of the theses here. The reading itself, and the discussion that followed on the doctrine and practice of the Church, was held, with very little interruption, in eight sittings. This was unquestionably the part of the proceedings that was proven to be the most fruitful. It filled the hearts of everyone with great rejoicing over the Scripturality, the clearness, and the loveliness of our teaching. It was also experienced that the peace of the Spirit of God is a sweet, well tasting fruit of the true unity and confidence of faith.³

³ *Synodal-Bericht 1851* (convention minutes), 169-70. Translation from Todd Peperkorn, *The Use of C. F. W. Walther's "Kirche und Amt" in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to 1947* (Ft. Wayne: unpublished S.T.M. thesis, 1999), 139, with minor editing of the final sentence.

The following noteworthy points arise from a careful reading of this report:

1. The historical context and purpose of *Kirche und Amt* is apparent: it was a defence against the accusations of Pastor Grabau, and an attempt to avoid a breach with the German churches.⁴ It did not arise from internal disputes among the Missourians, nor was it intended to settle an internal dispute. Nor, additionally, was it directed against Pastor Wilhelm Löhe, with whom the Missourians were still in fellowship.⁵
2. The intention of *KuA* was to be “apologetic” (defensive and explanatory) not “polemic” (aggressive or condemnatory).
3. Although Walther is presented as the “author”, it is apparent that *KuA* is viewed mainly as a collection of sources that can be used to defend the Missourians’ teachings. It is for this reason that Walther will later appear on the title page as “editor” (not author).⁶

⁴ In the preface to *Kirche und Amt*, Walther recognises that the North American disputes on church and office were only on the fringe of a much larger debate going on in Germany, “the great battle being fought in our old German fatherland on the field of theological science”. He was referring to the German territorial churches’ attempts to free themselves from the dominance of the state and establish a churchly governance, a battle in which Löhe was a major player. Walther hoped by his written contribution to persuade the Germans not to adopt a hierarchical system of church governance. See Holsten Fagerberg, *Bekenntnis, Kirche, und Amt in der deutschen konfessionellen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1952).

⁵ Certainly there were already public disagreements between the Missourians and Löhe on some aspects of church and ministry (see 1850 convention minutes), though Löhe considered himself a mediating party between Walther and Grabau. The same 1851 convention commissioned Walther and Wyneken to visit Löhe in Germany to try to heal the impending breach, as well as to visit the various theological faculties and church conferences to avoid a split with the German mother churches. Walther reported that their meetings with Löhe were cordial, though little substantial progress was made on points of theological disagreement. At the 1852 convention Walther hailed Löhe as a founding father of the Missouri Synod. The ultimate cause of Missouri’s break with Löhe was the latter’s upset over what he called “papistic territorialism” when the Missourians tried to assume control of his *Pilgerhaus* and teacher’s college in Michigan. In his black-edged “farewell letter” in 1853 Löhe specifically noted that he did not believe the differences over church and ministry were divisive. See Thomas M. Winger, “The Relationship of Wilhelm Löhe to C. F. W. Walther and the Missouri Synod in the Debate Concerning Church and Office”, *Lutheran Theological Review* 7 (Fall/Winter 1994 and Spring/Summer 1995): 107-32.

⁶ The full title is highly significant: *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt: Eine Sammlung von Zeugnissen über diese Frage aus den Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche und aus den Privatschriften rechtgläubiger Lehrer derselben. Von der deutschen evang.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten als ein Zeugnis ihres Glaubens, zur Abwehr der Angriffe des Herrn P. Grabau in Buffalo, N. Y., vorgelegt durch C. F. W. Walther* [The Voice of our Church in the Question of Church and Office: A Collection of Witnesses

4. As each thesis was presented to the synod and discussed at length, the convention pastors and lay delegates gave their “agreement [*Beistimmung*]”. The meaning is clearly that they agreed with the teaching of the theses and concurred with Walther’s marshalling of evidence to be presented to and against Grabau.

Most significantly, however, there is no evidence that the convention “adopted” the theses as a confessional document to which the members of synod would be bound, as is frequently asserted.⁷

What the 1851 convention did was to agree that Walther’s theses and proof material from Scripture and historic Lutheranism formed a magnificent reply to Grabau. The convention therefore commissioned Walther to complete the book (which was published the following year by a printer in Erlangen, whom Walther had visited while in Germany). In the preface to the first edition of *Kirche und Amt*, Walther rehearsed this history, noting the resolve of the 1851 Milwaukee convention “to publish the manuscript as our unanimous confession in our name.”⁸ As Walther

concerning this Question from the Confessional Writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and from the Private Writings of Orthodox Teachers of the Same. By the German Evang.-Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States, as a Witness of Her Faith, in Defence against the Attacks of Pastor Grabau in Buffalo, N.Y., Presented by C. F. W. Walther].

⁷ When the synod did wish to solve an internal dispute by adopting a decisive doctrinal position, they clearly knew how to do so. Consider the following declaration from the minutes of the 1881 convention at which Walther’s *Thirteen Theses on Election* were declared to be the truth of Scripture from which the members of synod were not expected to deviate:

We are assembled here by the authority of all our congregations. Every one of our congregations is decidedly represented here (in spite of the delegate system established in 1872) and this includes also each one’s confessional position. No one has the right to insist on the contrary unless he can produce uncontroverted facts in his favor. No individual members of the Synod or their persons have rendered a confession, but the Synod itself has rendered its confession. If later on it should appear that the confession of this or that delegate in this or that matter is not the confession of this or that parish which he represented, that still does not alter the circumstances in the least that here the Missouri Synod as such was assembled and rendered a confession. All the congregations of our synodical fellowship knew what the doctrine of Synod on predestination was. If our congregations did not acknowledge this, then, through their properly constituted boards, they would have stepped into the matter and would have expelled those, who, according to their convictions, had publicly been defending false doctrine. Our congregations will neither tolerate nor retain false teachers in their institutions. (*Synodal-Bericht 1881*, 43; trans. August Suelflow, “Congregational Autonomy”, *Concordia Journal* 3 [Nov. 1977]: 268.)

⁸ In J. T. Mueller’s 1987 translation of the preface, the final words are rendered “ ‘in our name and as our unanimous confession’ [that of Missouri Synod]” (9). The quotation marks imply (quite misleadingly) that Walther is quoting words from the convention

appears to be referring to the above-cited section of the 1851 *Synodal-Bericht*, “our unanimous confession” would seem to be his paraphrase of the fact that the convention gave its *Beistimmung* “agreement” to each of the theses. Walther does not mean that the synod adopted his writing as a new confession, but that they wholeheartedly agreed with his theological presentation against Grabau.

The following year, at the 1852 convention (held again in Milwaukee), the delegates again discussed the ongoing dispute with Pastor Grabau, at the personal request of pastors Brohm and Gruber. The minutes record the convention’s decision:

The synod expressed herself in the matter this way: “Since it is important above all things to become one in doctrine with the Buffalo Synod, specifically with Pastor Grabau, her [the synod’s] response [consisting] of the pure teaching on church and office, edited by Prof. Walther under her commission, ought to be sent to the latter [Grabau] through the Secretary, with the request to read through this book in as impartial a manner as possible, and thereby to be persuaded that our apology is nothing other than the voice of the Lutheran Church.”⁹

The minutes then record that, should Grabau not be fully persuaded by reading the book, a delegation should be sent to meet with him. In the meantime, no one in Missouri was to write against him. (Unfortunately, Grabau was not persuaded by *KuA* that the Missourians were right, nor did the planned meetings take place.) From these minutes it is clear that the synod believed *KuA* contained the “pure teaching” of historic Lutheranism, but the word “edited” reminds us that *KuA* was viewed chiefly as a collection of sources. The convention took no action other than sending the book to Grabau. It did not officially adopt *KuA* or elevate it to the status of a doctrinal norm.

The phrase “the voice of the Lutheran Church” found in those minutes echoes the opening words of Walther’s title page, *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt: Eine Sammlung von Zeugnissen ...* [“The Voice of Our Church in the Question of Church and Office: A Collection of Witnesses ...”]. This title and the words of the 1852 convention have sometimes been subtly but significantly misinterpreted. “The Voice of Our Church”, as interpreted by Walther’s own subtitle, clearly does not mean “The Voice of the Missouri Synod” but “The Voice of Historic

minutes; in fact, the original German text of Walther’s preface contains no quotation marks, nor the name of the Missouri Synod (which Mueller adds in brackets).

⁹ *Synodal-Bericht 1852*, 212; trans. T. Winger.

Lutheranism”—for Walther considered the material that he “edited”¹⁰ merely to be a collection of sources from the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the church fathers. Walther clarifies this meaning in his preface:

hardly anyone, so far as we know, has thought of letting the church of our fathers also express its opinion, and since the opinion is becoming ever more general that our church has left the doctrines in question unanswered, we therefore do not consider it superfluous if in this present book, according to the humble talent entrusted to us, we seek to make a contribution so that in the present important controverted question concerning the church and the ministry also our official confessions and the private writings of its teachers may be heard and considered.¹¹

It is quite likely that the common misinterpretation of Walther's title as “the voice of the LCMS” fuelled the belief that *KuA* had been officially adopted as a doctrinal statement.

Walther's own actions belie this interpretation, as he took upon himself personally to revise and reissue the volume in a second and third edition (1865, 1875) without any commission from or approval of the synod. A fourth edition appeared after his death (1894), revised by Walther's student, Franz Pieper. This is not the expected behaviour of men who believed the first edition was an official synodical document.¹² Nor does Walther refer back to *KuA* in his later writings or published convention essays; there is, at least, no evidence that Walther held *KuA* in higher esteem than any other of his writings.

The Reception of *Kirche und Amt* in Later LCMS History

The same conclusion must be drawn from examining synodical literature on church and office in the generation after Walther's death. Franz Pieper's “A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod” (1897) is consistent with *KuA* but does not cite its theses or contents. Pieper's three

¹⁰ It has been suggested that Walther considered himself merely an “editor” because *Kirche und Amt* was published in the name of the synod, the LCMS being the true author (see Dau, below). In light of Walther's own explanation in the preface, this interpretation is surely wrong.

¹¹ C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry (Kirche und Amt): Witnesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the Question of the Church and the Ministry*, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), 8-9.

¹² It is also noteworthy that, though an abridgement was produced in 1938, Concordia Publishing House did not produce a complete English translation until 1987, after many other writings of Walther had previously been rendered into the synod's new language. It is apparent that in the early- to mid- 20th century *Kirche und Amt* held no higher rank among Walther's writings.

volume *Christian Dogmatics* certainly cites *KuA*, but accords it no more prominence than any other writing of Walther; Pieper, in fact, cites Walther's *Pastoral Theology* more frequently than *KuA* in his sections on church and office. As Todd Peperkorn concludes about this period in a significant recent study of the question:

In the first seventy-five years of the history of the Missouri Synod, there was little distinction made between any of the writings of Walther as to their authority. *Kirche und Amt* was understood as authoritative because it contained the doctrines which the Missouri Synod stood by and for. It was an anthology of what the Lutheran Church has always taught, and not a new confession as such. This was also true of *Die rechte Gestalt*, the *Pastoraltheologie*, and many other writings of Walther. Walther and the early Missouri Synod were not asking the question of whether or not they were creating a new confession.¹³

What changed at the end of this 75-year period, according to Peperkorn, is that *KuA* took on a new prominence in the growing debate between Missouri and Wisconsin on church and office.¹⁴ It was at the height of this debate that CPH published the English-language abridgement of *KuA* in the little volume *Walther and the Church* (1938). In the translator's preface W. H. T. Dau refers to *KuA* as "an official manifesto of the Missouri Synod".¹⁵ The page headers for this section of the volume repeat the assertion: "Church and Ministry—Our Church's Doctrine". According to Peperkorn, "This is the first instance where *Kirche und Amt* is specifically and emphatically placed on a different level than the other writings of

¹³ Peperkorn, S.T.M. thesis, 141.

¹⁴ See Todd Peperkorn, "C. F. W. Walther's *Kirche und Amt* and the Church and Office Debate Between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods in the Early Twentieth Century", *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 65.4 (Oct. 2001): 299-322.

¹⁵ *Walther and the Church*, ed. Wm. Dallmann, W. H. T. Dau, and Th. Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia, 1938), 50. The full context of the statement is even stronger:

The treatise is evidently regarded by him no longer as his own, to promulgate his private opinions, but it is an official manifesto of the Missouri Synod, which here offers to its Christian brethren everywhere and forever its humble witness to the truth which it has joyously embraced on these great basic questions: What is the Church? and, What is the Ministry of the Church? Let Walther's synodical posterity take notice of this fact: In Walther's *Kirche und Amt* spoke—and still speaks!—not a single, deservedly revered individual but the entire God-blest Missouri Synod, whom this treatise of Walther helped to make into a sound, staunch, faithful herald of genuine Lutheranism. (50-51)

Dau's revisionism is apparent in the first sentence of the next section: "*Church and the Ministry* is a polemical essay"—precisely the opposite of what the 1851 minutes actually report, that it was apologetic, not polemical.

Walther.”¹⁶ The fact that a new generation of LCMS pastors was arising who could not read German meant that Dau's translation would be their only point of contact with *KuA*, and the words of his introduction were most likely responsible for perpetuating the belief that the synod had officially adopted it. But the evidence cited thus far suggests Dau's judgment that it was “an official manifesto” cannot be substantiated. Dau's abridgement dealt a further disservice to a new generation of Walther students by reproducing only the theses and scriptural proofs, while neglecting the citations from the Confessions and the Lutheran fathers that Walther believed were the unique strength of his argument.

It is intriguing to follow the fortunes of *Kirche und Amt* through the intervening decades of the twentieth century. Todd Peperkorn has performed a remarkably-thorough investigation of LCMS publications in the hope of discerning the role that *KuA* played. Walter Baepler's *A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod 1847-1947* (1947) does not mention *KuA* in its 11-page history of the Grabau/Löhe debates. The first two volumes of doctrinal essays, *The Abiding Word* (1946-47), likewise published in honour of the synod's 100th anniversary, display a distinct ambivalence towards *KuA*. Of five essays touching on church and office, three make no reference to *KuA*, and two cite it only occasionally.¹⁷ When the 44 “Statementarians” of 1945 criticise the growing use of synodical resolutions as “canon law” they do not mention *KuA*.

In response to the latter crisis, and in the successive years leading up to the seminary walkout, the precise nature of doctrinal resolutions made by synod became the subject of intense debate. In 1959 resolution 3-09 bound all pastors of synod to teach and act in harmony with “every doctrinal statement of a confessional nature adopted by Synod”, which were “to be regarded as public doctrine (*publica doctrina*) in Synod”; three years later the 1962 resolution 6-01 rescinded this action as unconstitutional, in violation of the doctrinal norm expressed in article II. At the same time, resolution 3-17 affirmed the use of doctrinal statements in subordination to Scripture and Confessions, and asked members of synod to honour and uphold them. In successive years, this view of the synod's doctrinal resolutions was generally upheld, though every resolution passed was fiercely contested.¹⁸ The two decades of discussion culminated in the formulation of a procedure for producing doctrinal resolutions and statements (1977:3-07), contained also in LCC's by-laws (1.03). It is significant to note that since the creation of the distinction between “doctrinal resolutions” and “doctrinal statements”, no

¹⁶ Peperkorn, S.T.M. thesis, 116.

¹⁷ See Peperkorn, S.T.M. thesis, 130-38.

¹⁸ See resolutions 1969:2-27; 1971:2-21; 1971:5-24; 1973:2-12; 1975:3-04; 1977:3-07; 1986:5-02A.

document has been put through the procedure to elevate it to the latter status.

Likewise, it is remarkable in this era that the aforementioned synodical resolutions do not formulate a list of doctrinal resolutions or documents they believed the synod had previously accepted and might be placed at the level of a “doctrinal statement”. Contrary to popular belief, no such list can be found in the synodical minutes. The lengthy Preamble to resolution 1973:2-12 comes closest as it includes a paragraph giving the history of Walther’s theses on church and ministry, and quotes Dau’s 1938 preface to the effect that they are “an official manifesto” of the LCMS. Significantly, however, they do not quote a convention of synod in support of Dau’s belief. The Preamble goes on to cite the 1881 theses on election, which might more legitimately be labelled synod’s official position, inasmuch as they were explicitly adopted. When the 1973 convention proceeded to propose “A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles” for adoption by synod (3-01),¹⁹ the Preamble cited the Thirteen Theses on Election as precedent, but did not mention *KuA*. Thus, not until 2001 did the LCMS directly address the doctrinal status of Walther’s work.

Summary

This lengthy historical investigation has resulted in a complex picture of *Kirche und Amt*’s role in the LCMS. On the one hand:

1. *Kirche und Amt* was commissioned by synod in convention (1850) as a defence of her teaching in response to Grabau.
2. At the 1851 convention, Walther presented the 19 theses and a summary of the book. The convention delegates gave their unanimous agreement to the contents as the appropriate way to respond to Grabau.

¹⁹ This document was adopted by simple convention majority (562-455), and therefore, contrary to popular belief, stands at the level of “doctrinal resolution”, not “doctrinal statement” (according to the 1977 terminology). The language of the next convention, 1975:3-05, clarifies this:

A Statement is not to be used mechanically or legalistically to discipline members of the Synod, but it is to be honored, upheld, and used fraternally and evangelically throughout the Synod in an effort to assist the Synod in remaining faithful to its confessional position. ... [T]he Synod cannot make *A Statement* binding upon its members in the same sense in which the Scripture is binding. Nor can it ask its members to bind themselves to *A Statement* in the same manner in which they freely bind themselves to the Lutheran Confessions.

3. The 1852 convention resolved to send the book to Grabau in the hope of achieving unity in teaching. They spoke of the book as containing “pure teaching” on the matter, and representing the voice of historic Lutheranism.
4. *KuA* was understood as an apologetic writing explaining the Missourians’ understanding of church and office, and was never intended to be used in a disciplinary manner within the synod.
5. Prior to the 2001, no subsequent LCMS convention adopted *KuA* or referred to it as Missouri’s official position.

Thus, the early LCMS conventions give no evidence that *KuA* was “adopted” by synod, nor that it was intended to resolve internal disputes or to be used in a disciplinary manner. The popular belief that *KuA* was adopted may have arisen from the following factors:

1. The initial words of the title “The Voice of Our Church ...” may have been misunderstood as if it were “The Voice of the LCMS”. Walther’s preface, however, makes it clear that it is “The Voice of Historic Lutheranism”, meaning that it was chiefly a collection of sources.
2. Dau’s preface to the 1938 abridgement of *Kirche und Amt* calls it “an official manifesto”, but such words are not supported by the actual language of the 1851 convention.
3. J. T. Mueller’s 1987 translation of the preface places the words “our unanimous confession” into quotation marks, implying that these words are quoted from the convention minutes, which they are not.
4. The synodical controversies of the 20th century led the synod into lengthy debates on the authority of synod to take decisive action on doctrinal matters. As doctrinal resolutions were passed on a raft of theological issues in order to deal with internal disputes, the belief (mistakenly) arose that *KuA* had arisen in the same circumstances and had the same purpose.

This historical survey has nonetheless demonstrated the enormous significance that *Kirche und Amt* holds in the common history of the LCMS and LCC. Walther’s theses and his collection of Lutheran sources in defence of the same were received unanimously by the synod for the purpose of responding to Grabau’s errors. Thus, *KuA* was “official” in the sense that it was produced at synod’s request and had her approval.²⁰ The oft-asserted

²⁰ Thus it holds the kind of official status given to the synod’s hymnals and explanation of the catechism.

distinction between the theses and the rest of the book is perhaps overdrawn, inasmuch as Walther himself placed far more weight on the Lutheran authorities he cited than on his own contribution in the theses and introductions. Walther believed, and the synod concurred, that the volume contained the voice of historic Lutheranism, and as such must be taken with utter seriousness by any church that professes to be truly Lutheran. His theses represent the LCMS's historic response to Grabau's errors and illustrate how Missouri theologians have spoken about church and office.²¹ The language of LCC's resolution 1990:1.02, though written about CTCR documents, provides a helpful pattern of thinking also for *KuA*:

RESOLVED that the Lutheran Church–Canada receive the documents of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod as part of its heritage; and be it further

RESOLVED that the Lutheran Church–Canada continue to refer to these documents for reference and guidance and/or for study in accord with their mode of adoption by The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, in regard to matters of doctrinal content, and in practice insofar as they are applicable to the Canadian scene;

Most importantly, Walther would have his beloved synod follow his own method: that in addressing theological controversy we begin with the teachings of Holy Scripture, follow them through into the Lutheran Church's confessional writings, and confirm them with the wisdom of the church fathers' private writings (among whom Walther himself must surely be numbered).

In the end, however, the synod which understands herself to be "Waltherian" ought not ignore the profoundly confessional perspective of her founding president. In his own lifetime C. F. W. Walther discerned and fought against a growing tendency to turn his own writings and the public words of the synod into a new confession. Walther's thoroughgoing commitment to Holy Scripture and the Book of Concord led him to warn sternly against this development in his own church:

Unfortunately there has constantly been among certain individuals also in the orthodox church a wrong, "parrot" mind-set. One would follow this or that great teacher. Now, as long as this had reference only to what is right, it may indeed not have caused particularly great harm, although, considering its character and nature, it always was and is something extremely dangerous.

²¹ The 1981 CTCR document, "The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature", included Walther's 10 theses on the ministry in an appendix, to which it appended this measured comment: "We append 'The Theses on the Ministry' prepared by C. F. W. Walther and approved by the Synod in 1851 not merely as a matter of historical interest, but as a testimony to the theological and practical consistency of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in its view of the ministry" (45).

Furthermore, we do not deny that also among us there have been and perhaps still are people, and in fact good, guileless people, who simply say in their defense, "You see, it says so in the *Proceedings* of the Western District." Or if one asks that this or that point of doctrine might be proven, one can perhaps also sometimes hear, "You see, it says so in Walther's *Pastorale*." This indeed happens as a rule in pure simplicity, without any intent to place human writings next to Scripture or even above Scripture. Yet it is and remains papistic, dangerous, and harmful to faith; therefore we cannot among ourselves oppose this tendency earnestly enough.²²

²² C. F. W. Walther, "Church Fathers and Doctrine: Synodical Conference Essay, Cleveland, Ohio, Aug. 13-19, 1884", in *Essays for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 2:83-84.

Sermon

John 4:1-15*

Juhana Pohjola

GIVE ME A DRINK! With these words Jesus breaks the silence. And what kind of a silence? Is it peaceful and calm silence when one is relaxed and listens with easiness to the sound silence. No, that silence was different. Can you see the face of the woman who came to the well where Jesus was? Can you read her body language? She is not rushing to the well, she is not cheerfully greeting, not smiling, not waiving her hand; no, she is nervous. Maybe she is standing at a distance waiting her turn, hesitant even to look at the direction where the man is sitting. There is tension and uneasiness in the silence. For what does the woman see? She sees a man. There is no one else present, only a man, a man not from her village nor from her people. Not only a man, but a Jew. A Jewish man on the way to Jerusalem. A pious Jewish man on pilgrimage. And you know what the proper conduct was between a man and a woman in such a situation, and you know how Jews saw Samaritans. So you can hear how loud is the sound of this silence.

“Give Me a drink!” What kind of words are these? Is Jesus saying, “I’m a man, I’m a Jew, I’m a rabbi; serve me! Know your place and bring me water and bring it now!” No, this request is not a command from a master to a slave. “Give Me a drink!” How does the woman hear these words? This man sees me, this Jew speaks to me, this tired and dusty looking rabbi asks my help! He asks permission to drink from my cup. He invites me, a Samaritan woman, to His fellowship! Do you see how Jesus breaks the wall of hostility with this simple request? How He draws near that woman who was so far from Him? These words are full of acceptance; it’s a gracious invitation. It is what the incarnation is all about: to drink our cup, with us, where we are.

I wonder what I would have done if I had been in the same situation and had known the things that Jesus knew about the woman. Maybe if had had the courage I would have applied first the Law, in good Lutheran fashion, and said: “Good to see you, but there are certain issues: **Five husbands you have had and the one you now have is not yours.**” Well we know what would had happened after that kind of truthful approach. I guess we wouldn’t have heard about the woman a second time. Most probably I would have been quiet. I mean, what can you say when you know that the

* Preached in CLTS’s Martin Luther chapel on 30 March 2011, Wednesday of Lent III.

woman has had not two, not three, not four, but five men, and is living now again with a man, and what about children? This is something that never came up in the pastoral theology class. Her life is a mess, and now she is bringing it to my church. “Give me a drink”—a strong one! Of course, it is nice that we get sinners, but I cannot commune her. I cannot conduct a sixth wedding, but she cannot live in sin any longer with that man. What am I going to do with her? She is too much work, too much time, just too much! Why cannot God send here normal people with normal problems, and rather with German last names! So I’ll be nice and explain about our policies. The only problem is that she can read my body language, my silence, and she understands she’s a problem for me and for my congregation! And who wants to be regarded as a walking problem! So she will be gone, but I’ll pray that she will find a good congregation somewhere else, maybe

But do you see what Jesus does? He is not silent, not letting the woman go past Him with her problems. Jesus does not start with the plain truth about the woman’s life and what Moses had written in Genesis about marriage. No He starts with the woman. She is not a problem for Him. Not a difficult pastoral case. Not an object that must be taught. Not a heretic that must be corrected. Jesus sees a woman, an image of God, a person who is lost and hurt. Maybe, after, all there is some truth to this well known, and a bit too sweet for my taste, slogan: **People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.** So I ask, what is your temptation as an ambassador of Christ? Are you tempted to be silent and from a little distance watch and let the woman with her problems go by? Or are you so eager to correct and fast to teach that you do not have time nor interest to meet the person? Or are you so emphatic, so understanding, so pastoral that when the time comes to confront her and take up the difficult issues you will keep quiet? And to make it easier to answer, think first—not a Samaritan woman with 6 men from Jesus’ time, but a person near you. A Samaritan—that is, not believing the same way we do—liberal, charismatic, fundamentalist, syncretistic Six men—that is, living and behaving neither godly nor in responsible manner. A woman—that is, a person with whom you have a sociological gap in between, as well as political and cultural. Can you give a name, a face, to this Samaritan woman in your life? If you cannot today, I guess you will one day by the well!

So what is Christ asking from you, when He said, “Give Me a drink”? Is He saying, prepare yourself that you can give a truthful drink in My name to whoever needs it, whatever the problem might be? Is He requesting, pour true love to drink, so that everybody will know that you are My disciple? Yes He is! Because in Him it’s all about love and it’s all about truth! Give Me a drink! Go and call your husband! Not either-or, but both-and!

But can you really say to Jesus, “Yes I’ll give you that kind of drink, a drink full of love and truth”? “I’ll give today, I’ll give to tomorrow, and in

all the days of my ministry”? Have you really passed the “love in truth and truth in love” class? I’m not talking about preaching. It is often much easier to preach to multitudes about truth and love, teach them the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. But Jesus is not delivering a sermon, not addressing crowds here, but meeting one person, face to face! Multitudes are nice, a congregation is nice, because the people are silent in their pews listening to your sermon; but individual persons, they can be difficult, they can have strong opinions, big problems, bad attitudes Can you give the drink that Jesus is asking for you to give Him when it comes to individual persons, difficult persons?

Why then did Jesus ask a woman to give Him a drink? Yes, He was thirsty. Yes, He wanted to break the wall of hostility. But there is more. **“If you knew the Gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”** Did Jesus really invite the woman in order to receive from her? No, he invited her in order to give her the living water. He invited her in order to give her that love that she had been looking for so long from wrong places. He invited her in order to give her Himself, the heavenly bridegroom!

So when Jesus says to you: “Give Me a drink”, He does it with one purpose: in order to give you the gift of God. To fill you with His Spirit. It is not about your love for truth, it’s not about your ability to love, it is not about your having to draw from your well’s water for Him! No, you are not called to bring your own drinks. It is already here, it is prepared, it is fresh, life-giving, again and again. Because of God’s truth, His love, the living waters came out from Christ’s side. Because He drank the cup of wrath, the cup of truth of you and me, He drank it out of love in your place, for your sake. So you are called to receive the cup of grace from Him. You are called to drink first, receive the gift of His love and truth again and again. And then to deliver His living waters, to give out His life giving drink, to share His chalice of forgiveness in His love and in His truth with those whom God will send to you! So go out and break the deadly silence in His love and truth!

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Sermon

Thursday in the Week of Epiphany II, 2011 (1 Kings 19:19-21 & St Luke 5:1-11)*

John R. Stephenson

SOME TEXTS ARE AGONISINGLY DIFFICULT TO PREACH ON; they're inspired and they're true, but unless you're a preacher of genius, they're next to impossible to relate to the people sitting in front of you. This morning, though, as we consecrate a new semester of worship and study and life together through the Word and prayer, there's a perfect match between the readings we just heard and the life situation of all of us.

A local artist has offered to paint a scene from the Gospels on one of the bare walls of this chapel. I know this fellow, and I'm impressed by his skill for rapidly producing murals made up of realistic and recognisable figures. With some explanation of this morning's readings, I think it would take our local artist no time at all to paint two panels of a triptych behind the altar.

In the panel on the pulpit side you would have Elisha working in the field, caught by surprise as Elijah throws his mantle on him. There's a time for Elijah to do spiritual battle against Ahab and Jezebel and the prophets of Baal, a time for his nerves to be frayed with mortal fear one moment and for him to be refreshed by holy food from the hand of angels the next; and there'll be a time for him to pass from the scene. So it makes sense that Elisha should serve as an apprentice prophet before the hour comes for him to take Elijah's place.

In the centre panel would stand our Lord fresh from a teaching session, supervising a tremendous catch of fish on Peter's boat. Jesus will only be on earth in that particular way for three more years, and after that, from the Right Hand of the Father, He will need authorised agents to work through as He goes about His task of catching not fish but men, men in the use of the word that encompasses both sexes and all ages and races and conditions.

A triptych, of course, is made up of three panels, and the panel on the lectern side of the altar would set forth the process that began in the Acts and the Epistles; it would be a panel that never stops growing and developing; it would be a panel that in some way or other depicts all of you as you undergo or supervise or enable or deliver seminary education, as you join in the preparation of new Elishas, of a fresh supply of partners for the

* Preached in CLTS's Martin Luther chapel on 20 January 2011, on the occasion of a joint meeting of the regents of CLTS and CLS.

apostles. I wouldn't ask our local artist to take the third panel in hand, because it's being painted by the finger of God.

The little word **partners** is very important, somehow three-dimensional. The Lord sent so many fish into Peter's net that his crew couldn't handle the whole catch, but had to appeal for urgent help to their partners in the other boat. James and John were Peter's business partners, but as they became apostles and then after Pentecost discharged the ministry Christ committed to them, they were partners in a deeper sense, *koinonoi* who enjoyed *koinonia* with each other, men who shared Jesus in the spoken and sacramental Gospel, who shared the office He conferred on them, who shared earthly resources with each other. If we're going to be partners/*koinonoi* with each other in the service of the Gospel, then regents and faculty and staff and students and layfolk need to be partners working together and not rivals working in competition; there's a God-wrought bond between us that goes much deeper than mere partnership in business or any other form of human association for a specific purpose.

The turnover of the generations makes the preparation of new Elijahs and the formation of new partners of the apostles an ongoing process. Paul shaped Timothy over a period of years, and as the time approached for Paul to leave the scene, he charged Timothy to prepare further series of fellow workers for the kingdom of God. I shan't forget how, when the sainted Professor Marquart preached for my installation here more than two decades ago, he expounded II Timothy 2:2: "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, that they may teach others also."

The word **formation** is also very important, even though, to my best knowledge, it's not biblical like *koinonoi*/partners. I was just reading in an ATS [Association of Theological Schools] publication how one seminary acknowledges four facets in the formation of a seminarian: there's personal formation, spiritual formation, intellectual formation, and pastoral formation.

What Jesus did with the apostles, and what the apostles did with the presbyters who followed them, couldn't get anywhere if you didn't have suitable human material to work with. Elisha knew how to farm, and the two sets of brothers among the apostles were competent to run a fishing business. If the Church is going to trust human souls to a man, she must be sure he can handle the regular stuff of life. So a certain prior human formation must be a prerequisite around here.

If you're going to preach, you have to be able to use words, and if you are going to communicate content, you have to be able to take it on board. So the whole process that is distilled in a transcript has a certain importance, because, as Paul says, you need to "hold firm to the sure Word according to doctrine, to be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and to refute those

who contradict it" (Titus 1:9). Intellectual formation, then, cannot be discounted in our seminary setting.

Elijah faced great peril from Ahab and Jezebel, and he called Elisha to share in this danger. The two sets of brothers among the apostles left their livelihood and somehow related differently to their families back home as they went forward into uncertainty and insecurity and towards their own share in the destiny of their, our Lord. Our Canadian culture is nowadays somehow under the aegis of Ahab and Jezebel, there aren't that many who haven't bowed their knees to Baal, the future looks distinctly threatening, and our seminaries even face a certain institutional insecurity.

At this point the bottom line of spiritual formation, which applies as much to lay people as to pastors, becomes more relevant than ever. The God of Israel gave sustaining food and drink to Elijah through the hand of an angel, and He spoke to him in the still small voice. Our Lord Jesus, the enfleshed God of Israel, gave an enduring sign of promise and reassurance as He filled Peter's net. If the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church, neither will the Ahabs and Jezebels of the modern world win in the end, but Christ will uphold and vindicate His Church and the partners/*koinonoi* of the apostles who catch the human fish.

An indispensable ingredient of spiritual formation consists in Peter bending his knee before Jesus, acknowledging His divinity and His holiness, and being utterly amazed that our Lord would make him, in all his sinful weakness, His fellow worker, His partner/*koinonos*. It's no accident that, unless we are physically frail or a particular church has no altar rail, we receive Holy Communion on our knees, in an attitude of adoration before Jesus present in His body and blood. We too are kept going by manna food and drink which, if not delivered by an angel, is given through an authorised messenger. ... Spiritual formation renders us unique among all the other academic departments and faculties on this Brock campus.

Here and at our Edmonton sister institution, personal, intellectual, and spiritual formation take place in the overall context of pastoral formation, with not only professors but also supervising clergy, regents, staff, and layfolk also playing a vital role. In the portraits on the walls of wizards' houses in the Harry Potter novels, the figures of days gone by are alive and continue to speak. Much more so in the communion of saints do the figures on the left and central panels of our triptych remain alive and in communication with us struggling and in many ways so inadequate folk in the right-hand, still growing, still developing panel. May the Lord grant His blessing as here, and in Edmonton, we continue as *koinonoi*/partners of the apostles as together we discharge and benefit from the mandates of the Lord.

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