

C.F.W. Walther and the Missouri Synod Today

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Introduction

The shadow of C.F.W. Walther falls over the history of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod like that of Luther over Lutheranism: issues, ideas, institutions, and theology in the Missouri Synod - all are discussed and debated with reference to C.F.W. Walther: What was Walther's doctrine of church and ministry? What did Walther say about the Scriptures? What was Walther's attitude toward liturgy and hymnody? How did Walther get along with other Lutherans?

Questions like these dot the theological landscape when we do theology in Missouri. True enough, one may, in theory, disagree with Walther's theology and practice if one has adequate grounds for doing so, but in our synod that's usually not the case but instead and much more typically, when we do theology, we use Walther as an authority - under the Scriptures and the Confessions, to be sure - but nonetheless, for us Walther is always an important witness to the theological argument that one is advancing in the Missouri Synod.

But why is that the case? What makes Walther so important in Missouri Synod theology? And does he still have something to say to our church today? It's questions like these that I hope

we can pursue in our time together over the next two days. I have tried to choose topics from Walther's life and career that you will find interesting and relevant, and I certainly hope that you will feel comfortable asking questions or making comments at the conclusion to each of our four sessions together.

Part One: Walther's Life and Lutheranism

In order to take the full measure of the man, we need to view him in his context and to understand the church and culture in which he lived and did theology. Of course, we don't want to pretend that circumstances fully explain the man and his work, but they do help to define his achievement by providing a kind of measuring rod against which to place him, a kind of standard for evaluating his words and ideas. Indeed, just how great a theologian Walther actually was can only be seen when we also examine the milieu from which he emerged, the obstacles he overcame, the challenges he faced.

Of course, through the years, Walther has often been accused of lacking originality, of not standing out from the crowd, of promulgating simply a theology of repristination - an accusation that Walther would have taken as the supreme compliment, since, from his point of view, innovations in theology were inevitable signs of departure from the truth once revealed. Therefore, Walther's writings often consist more of quotations from Luther, the Confessions, and the orthodox Lutheran fathers - and oh, yes, also the Bible - than of original comments from Walther himself. Even so, Walther, in a very real sense, was a creative

theologian - not in what he taught - but in applying what he taught - in using old truths in a new situation, in assisting the voices of 16th and 17th centuries Lutheranism to speak in 19th century America.

Of course, one should never contend a priori that Walther was always right - either in his understanding of the past or in his application to the contemporary situation. His work, like ours, needs to be assessed carefully on the basis of his own self-imposed standards, the Word of God and the Confessions. However, I would argue that Walther is always worth listening to.

If theology is, among other things, a conversation, its value depends upon those who are conversing; and as a historian, I consider it a part of my task to bring worthy interlocutors from the past into the conversation of the present. And Walther is one whose voice deserves to be heard, especially in a church like ours - one still concerned about being faithful to the Scriptures and the Confessions; for we will find that C.F.W. Walther is usually insightful, sometimes brilliant, and always orthodox!

But now, let's get down to business and consider, first of all, Walther in his historical context. You see, there is always a reciprocal influence between the individual and his culture. The latter does not explain the former but neither is he independent of the world in which he lives and breathes. Therefore, to understand C.F.W. Walther we must also understand something of his world. Or should we say his two worlds - both Germany and America - since Walther spent the first 27 years of his life in

the land of his birth but the next 49 serving the Lord and His church right here in the United States. Both milieux are important, since the first period comprises Walther's formative years (his birth, education, conversion, and ordination) but the second his creative years as pastor, professor, church leader and theologian.

So let me describe briefly these two worlds, Germany and America, especially from a religious point of view as it concerned Walther, first of all the land of Walther's birth.

Walther was born in 1811, just a few short years before the fall of Napoleon. This period - that of the French Revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath - is a turning point in the history of western civilization, including the religion of the west, for to many people in that time the revolutionary era demonstrated the futility of desiccated rationalism with its reduction of all human experience to mathematics and logic. Indeed, the revolutionary period opened up an entire world of experience foreign to the intellect and demonstrated that man lives, breathes, fights, and dies for all sorts of reasons besides the logic of the situation.

In Prussia, for example, spiritual and religious rejuvenation coincided with the rising up of the people to throw off their French opponents. For instance, the father of liberal theology, Schleiermacher took hold of public opinion as a preacher of patriotism in occupied Berlin, calling upon people to resist their foes. And so, for the first time in many years,

people began to take religion seriously: to pray, to read their Bibles, and to sing the old hymns. And when at last Napoleon, defeated in Russia, began his great retreat from the heart of Europe, Prussians found courage in their old faith and, once again, took up arms against Napoleon, but this time to fight in a kind of national crusade: weapons were blessed in the churches and the old chorales rang out on the battlefield, so that when finally at Leipzig, Napoleon was defeated and so driven out of German lands, many interpreted this as the victory of God on behalf of His people.

What the Napoleonic wars did then to Germany was to usher in the age of Romanticism which, in the history of religion is known as the German Awakening, which lasted roughly until mid-century.

It was a pluralistic and heterogeneous phenomenon that cut across denominational lines and affected individuals in a variety of ways, but for our purposes one important strain within it was a Confessional Revival which ultimately captured the heart of C.F.W. Walther.

But what characterized Romantic religion, i.e., the German Awakening and the Confessional Revival? First and foremost was its anti-rationalism. Rationalism, which substituted the dictates of reason for the authoritative Word of God, was the prevailing "ism" of the previous period (the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment), but in the 19th century many were beginning to turn on rationalism as an enemy of true religion, since they no longer believed that true religion was simply a matter of clear

thinking but instead were open to the idea of supernatural revelation and the value of subjective experience. A religious press grew up that was hostile to rationalistic influences in the universities and the churches; and a new breed of preachers arose who found a receptive audience when they preached about sin and grace, God, and the soul and the inner life.

But if reason was out, what was in? First and foremost, of course, was the Bible. Proponents of the Awakening were also proponents of the Scriptures (and this was also the great era of Bible and tract societies) - they believed in miracles and prophecies, the virgin birth and the resurrection. But they also believed in authenticating personal experiences, i.e., the importance of an individual appropriation of religious truths. God's truth was not something that one just knew as true in his head; but it was a truth that made a difference in life - the way one felt, the way one lived. Piety involved the whole man - body, mind, and spirit - and a person's subjective experiences were central to the formation of one's own religious beliefs. Indeed, God gave to those whom He embraced with His love "conversion experiences" or "awakenings" - intense emotional apprehensions of sin and grace that stirred people deeply and led them along new directions in life.

And among those who had such life-changing experiences were many who became leaders of the Confessional Revival, i.e., that strain of the Awakening that found in historic Lutheranism the perfect expression of what they believed and experienced, as one

of them, Adolf von Harless, described it, "Only after I had experienced and personally learned what saving truth is did I turn to the Confessions of my church. I cannot describe the surprise and the emotion which I felt when I found that the contents of the Confessions corresponded to that of which I had become convinced through the experience of faith."¹

But what was the relationship of C.F.W. Walther to this Awakening and how much of its theology did he maintain when at last he came to America? Perhaps more than is usually thought, for without doubt Walther too was a product of the Awakening.

For one thing, one does not have to read very far in Walther's writings to discover that he was an enemy of Rationalism. "Crass rationalists," he writes, "turned the Bible into a mere book on ethics and labeled the specifically Christian teachings oriental pictures and fables that have some value only for the morals they inculcated...they [the Rationalists] have apparently had their day and are now bankrupt."²

Walther's attitude was at least based in part on personal experience with rationalism as a youngster. He writes, "I was 18 years old when I left the Gymnasium, and I never heard a sentence of the Word of God coming from a believing heart. I had never had a Bible, neither a Catechism, but only a miserable Leitfaden [guide], which contained heathen morality." Significantly, in view of these experiences, in his well-known lectures on Law and

¹Moving Frontiers 72-73.

²Boumann, L & G, p. 119.

Gospel, Walther argues that the "most grievous fault of rationalists" is not their rejection of special revelation and the Bible, but their moralism, "The essence of their religion is to teach men that they become different beings by putting away their vices and leading a virtuous life, while the Word of God teaches us that we must become different men first, and then we shall put away our particular sins and begin to exercise ourselves in good works."³

So as a young man, entering the University of Leipzig, Walther's spiritual upbringing from at least the age of 8 had been in the hands of Rationalists who had not yet, apparently, undermined his acceptance of special revelation but had, however, obscured his understanding of a gracious God, forgiveness, and the Gospel.

Of course, one could argue that Walther was still a Christian. After all, his father was a pastor, he had been baptized as an infant, and indeed, Walther assures us that in spite of rationalistic textbooks, he had never quite lost his historic faith. Nevertheless, he later viewed his situation then as very grave, "My knowledge of the Bible was miserable, to say nothing of the true faith."⁴

It was at this point in his life as a young man entering the university that Walther underwent a series of experiences that drew him away from Rationalism and into evangelical Christianity,

³L & G 299-300.

⁴L & G, Boumann, p. 83.

indeed Confessional Lutheranism, experiences similar to those around him and typical of the Awakening.

To begin with, under the influence of an older brother, also at the University of Leipzig, Walther began to associate with a group of "converted people," as he called them. Attracted first of all by their kind and friendly manner in contrast to the rough, crude behavior of students he had previously known, Walther attended the prayer meetings of these pious students and soon found himself believing in God and His grace, "Lo and behold! It was there that God began to work on my soul by means of His Word. In a short time I had really become a child of God, a believer, who trusted in His grace."⁵

That was experience number one, but two more were to come before Walther would really be Walther. First of all, there was an experience of the Law, under the tutelage of Johann Gottlieb Kuehn, a graduate of the university but not yet called into the ministry, who persuaded Walther and his friends that they were not yet really Christians. Walther calls him a Pietist and summarizes his message with these words, "You imagine you are converted Christians, don't you? But you are not. You have not yet passed through any real penitential agony."

In order for Walther and the rest to have the requisite experience, Kuehn prescribed books that stressed repentance; and upon reading them, Walther grew less and less certain that he really was a believer, "An increasing darkness settled on my soul

⁵L & G 141.

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."⁶

Not only did his spirit break, so did his body. A friend described Walther in these words, "During that period of struggle, he was wasted like a skeleton, coughed blood, suffered from insomnia, and experienced the terrors of hell. He was more dead than alive."⁷

So what was to be done? Where would Walther find an answer to his spiritual unhappiness? How would he discover the comfort of the Gospel? It is at this point that we move to experience number three. For one of Walther's fellow students and friends, Theodore Brohm, suggested that Walther write to a man who for many years had been developing a reputation for evangelical preaching and of true concern for souls. He was a pastor in Dresden in Saxony, and his name was Martin Stephan. Some years later, after Stephan's arrival in America, a Lutheran pastor and journalist by the name of Benjamin Kurtz would recall hearing Stephan preach on a visit to Dresden, "His sermon was plain, vigorous, and evangelic, and well calculated to enlighten the mind and affect the heart....[Stephan spoke] on the awful interests of the eternal destiny of man, holding up Jesus Christ as

⁶L & G 142.

⁷Notes

the only hope of a perishing world and demanding faith in him and obedience to his precepts."⁸

Stephan's was a leading voice in Saxony on behalf of the Awakening; and he did not disdain to answer the letter of an obscure university student who doubted his salvation. Unlike Candidate Kuehn who had pounded Walther with the Law, Pastor Stephan told him the Gospel. Later, Walther recalled this experience too, "When I read his reply, I felt as though I had been translated from hell to heaven. Tears of distress and sorrow were converted into tears of heavenly joy....Stephan directed me to the Good Samaritan and showed me what faith in Christ means....Peace and joy entered my heart....He applied the Gospel to my own soul."⁹

This was a conversion experience and typical of the Awakening - a personal appropriation of the Gospel - and it was something that Walther cherished all his life. No longer was the Gospel simply a truth acknowledged by the intellect; it was a truth that meant something for him personally - he felt its power and effect.

And Walther always believed that Law and Gospel when properly preached would continue to evoke the same experiences in others that he had felt in himself. In a passage that is sometimes overlooked in Law and Gospel, Walther spoke eloquently about the necessity of feelings, "There are those who consider

⁸L & G 132-33.

⁹Notes

themselves good Christians and yet are spiritually dead. They have never experienced any real terror because of their sins; they have never dreaded hell, which they have well deserved; they have never been on their knees making a tearful confession to God that they are horrible and condemned sinners; and much less have they ever wept sweet tears of joy and thanked God for having had mercy on them. They read and hear God's Word, but they experience nothing. They go to church and receive absolution, but they are not refreshed, and they come to Holy Communion but remain ice-cold and unfeeling."¹⁰

Walther goes on to cite the examples of Paul and David in the Scriptures and Luther in church history as those who felt the power of God's salvation, and he denounces those who would maintain that Lutheranism has no room for feelings, "Yet if they do feel ill at ease because they are so indifferent with regard to their salvation and have no taste for the Word of God, they seek to quiet their conscience by saying, 'Well, the Lutheran Church teaches that nothing depends on one's feelings. So if I have felt nothing, it does not matter. I can still be a good Christian for, after all, I believe.' However, that is a dreadful case of self-delusion. A person in such a state has nothing but a dead intellectual faith, only a sham faith, or, to put it bluntly, a mouth faith....He may say, 'I believe,' but his heart is uninvolved. No God's Word calls out to us: 'O taste and see that the Lord is good!' One who has never experienced this must

¹⁰L & G, Boumann, 102-103.

not think that he has true faith."¹¹

Walther's insistence on feelings and emotions as the proper effects of preaching Law and Gospel as well as his own personal conversion experience is testimony to the influence that his own times had upon him and his theology. He was clearly a product of the German Awakening.

But he was not only a product of the Awakening, for Walther, however much he insisted on experiencing God's truth, was even more insistent that feelings, even the most authentic of them, must not become the basis for faith, "It is a dreadful mingling of Law and Gospel to teach that if you want to become sure of the forgiveness of your sins you must keep on praying, struggling, and wrestling until you get a joyful feeling that whispers: 'Cheer up, your sins are forgiven.' 'Now,' they say, 'grace will be in you heart.'...No, first you must believe and then feel. The feeling arises from faith, not vice versa. One whose faith rises out of his feelings does not have the true faith, for faith requires a divine promise....Those who have the right faith...can say, 'I look at nothing in the whole world but the Gospel. On it I rest my faith.'¹²

This was the point at which Walther took issue with Pietists like Kuehn - not in their anthropology - that man is a feeling being - but in their soteriology - that man can base the certainty of his salvation on his feelings. That's where the danger

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., 105.

comes. It was not just that Candidate Kuehn had preached the need to feel sorrow for sin that Walther found so dangerous; but that he had preached anything at all in addition to Christ. For anything that leads us away from Jesus Christ as the sole and certain Savior is a corruption of the Gospel.

In fact, Walther's treatment of feelings is analogous to the Confessions' treatment of good works - they follow faith, they are the inevitable fruit of faith, they are necessary, but they never form the basis of faith; and even when they are apparently absent, one can still be sure of salvation because salvation rests upon God's promises in Christ, not at all upon our works - or feelings.

When Walther left Germany for America late in 1838, he did not, of course, leave emotional religion behind him. Quite the contrary. America too was in the throes of a revival, usually called the Second Great Awakening, really the heyday of frontier revivalism that brought to prominence in America the Methodist and Baptist denominations. Throughout his ministry in America, therefore, Walther expressed strong concerns also about these theological American kinsmen of old world German Pietists on account of their tying salvation to the experiences of man.

But let's also consider another issue in Walther's theology arising from his milieu but this time more in connection with his American context and also having some obvious relevance to the current situation of American Lutherans in our times, and that is the nature of true Lutheranism.

Both in the German lands and in the United States, Lutherans in Walther's day could hear a variety of answers to the question, what does it mean to be Lutheran? In fact, it was this question more than any other that led directly to the formation of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, so let's employ this particular issue as a way of recounting the story of Walther and the founding of our church.

One of the attractions of America for Walther and the others who followed Martin Stephan to America in 1838-39 was freedom of religion; and Walther always treasured it. When it came to religion, Americans were free of any state control or authority.

They had options, they had choices. But one result of this freedom then as now was a complicated tapestry of Christian denominations in America. Waves of immigrants from different parts of Europe brought different Christian traditions, often integrally related to their ethnic group and culture; but here in America those same denominations could also splinter and redefine themselves theologically. Thus, denominational proliferation has often been characteristic of American religion, including American Lutheranism.

That was true in Walther's day. Lutherans too had options, so that different answers to the question, what does it mean to be Lutheran, took different institutional forms. At that time in America one rather widespread answer to this question was that Lutheranism was evangelical and Protestant - certainly not Roman Catholic or rationalist but also not very different from the

Reformed (the German Reformed especially but also the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, and the like). Perhaps the most prominent of spokesmen for this point of view in America in Walther's time was the leading theologian of English-speaking Lutheranism, the first professor at Gettysburg Seminary, a man by the name of Samuel Simon Schmucker.

One of Schmucker's claims to fame is that he is the first Lutheran to write an English language dogmatics or book of doctrine, his Elements of Popular Theology (1834). In this work, Schmucker describes his vision of American Lutheranism. It is very experiential and very evangelical but it also plays down anything in the Lutheran tradition that would distinguish it from American Protestantism, especially the sacraments. And in fact, in Schmucker's Lutheranism the issue of the Real Presence of the body and blood of our Lord in the sacrament was an open question - Lutherans could accept it or not. In his book, after describing four points of view on this question ranging from Luther's Real Presence to Zwingli's symbolic presence, Schmucker concludes, "After a protracted and unprofitable struggle, the Lutheran Church has long since settle down in the happy conviction, that on this, as on all other subjects not clearly determined by the inspired volume, her sons shall be left to follow the dictates of their own conscience, having none to molest them or make them afraid. In the Lutheran church in this country, each of the above views has some advocates."

Schmucker himself was closer to Zwingli than to Luther but

the main point is not his personal opinion regarding the Real Presence but his indifference to the question as it pertains to relations with other American Christians. For him, Lutheran meant Protestant and not much more.

And Schmucker spoke for many Lutherans in America in the first half of the 19th century, but not for all. One of those for whom he did not speak was F.C.D. Wyneken, a missionary pastor who had come from Germany in 1838 and had made his way to the midwest frontier where he had helped to found a host of congregations in Indiana and Ohio and from which he had sent back to Germany appeals for help, "Ever broader does the territory become that is being settled by members of our race [the Germans]; ever larger does the circle grow within which this spiritual need holds sway; ever more difficult does it become to survey this enormous field and to alleviate the misery, and so every more urgently the call comes to your hearts: 'Help, in the name of Jesus help!'"¹³

Among those whom Wyneken inspired with a desire to bring the gospel to Germans in America was a Lutheran pastor in Bavaria, Wilhelm Loehe, a man who never came himself to America but recruited and helped to train about 80 others in a ten year period, beginning in 1842. Many of these men came to the same part of America in which Wyneken had done his pioneering work and they too were soon at work preaching and teaching the gospel. But Loehe's answer to the question, what does it mean to be

¹³MF 97.

Lutheran was far different from Samuel Schmucker's; and indeed, one of the points upon which Loehe insisted when he sent someone to America was a commitment to Lutheranism defined theologically by the Lutheran Confessions. "You embrace with deep devotion the Confessions and doctrine of the Lutheran Church" was how he described his missionaries.

Furthermore, with respect to other Protestants, especially the Reformed, Loehe's men committed themselves to this standard:

"A German Lutheran candidate for the ministry seeks office with a church of his confession. Therefore for conscience sake you cannot accept a mixed [Lutheran and Reformed] congregation. You would rather choose only a small church which is devoted to your confession...than a large mixed congregation which would lay the claims of various confessions on you." Unlike Schmucker, these Lutherans would not agree that the Real Presence was a matter of indifference.

At first, Wyneken and the men whom Loehe sent had no idea of establishing a Lutheran church body in America. Loehe's instructions had directed his missionaries to affiliate with an already existing German Lutheran synod; and Wyneken had actually joined the group of which Schmucker was the leading theologian, the so-called General Synod. However, from a strictly Confessional standpoint, one that defined Lutheranism in terms of its doctrine and practice, all of these original affiliations proved unsatisfactory.

Wyneken, for example, who had accepted a call to become

pastor in Baltimore soon found himself embroiled in controversy on account of his insistence upon Lutheran doctrine especially regarding the Lord's Supper. At one point he challenged Schmucker and others in the General Synod to send their books back to Germany for review by Lutherans there to see if they were truly Lutheran. But when they refused (and of course, also refused to retract their position), Wyneken and his congregation were forced to withdraw from the General Synod.

In Michigan, Loehe's men were active and one of them had founded Frankenmuth as an Indian mission and German colony. Pursuant to their instructions from Loehe they had joined a small Lutheran church body, the Michigan Synod. But this group too proved unsatisfactory because it not only welcomed Loehe's men into membership, it also welcomed the Reformed.

Elsewhere, at first, the Ohio Synod seemed more promising. Many of Loehe's missionaries had joined, and Loehe was instructing them to complete their education at the seminary of the Ohio Synod located in Columbus, Ohio. But there turned out to be problems in this church body as well. At the seminary, a change was made to permit theological instruction in English at a time when just about the only Lutheran materials in English were those written by Samuel Simon Schmucker and others like him. Then at the synodical convention, not only did the Ohio men refuse to make subscription to the Lutheran Confessions a condition of membership, they also endorsed a communion liturgy that in parts was Reformed not Lutheran.

All this was too much for those to whom Lutheranism meant more than being German or Protestant, those to whom Lutheranism meant faithfulness to the Lutheran Confessions, so in the fall of 1845 they met in Cleveland and formally withdrew from the Ohio Synod. At the same time, they also began making plans to form a new Lutheran church body - one that would answer the question of what does it mean to be Lutheran in an unambiguous way as adherence to the Lutheran doctrine, the Lutheran theology, the Lutheran Confessions.

Significantly for our purposes, at this same meeting in Cleveland, these Confessional Lutherans made the decision to invite others to participate in the work of creating a new church body, among whom they included C.F.W. Walther. Although Walther was not present and was not personally known to any of them, he had come to their attention primarily through the publication a year previously (1844) of a new periodical, Der Lutheraner ("The Lutheran").

When Wyneken read the first issue, he is supposed to have exclaimed, "Thank God, there are still Lutherans in America!" And others too, also associated with the mission efforts of Wyneken and Loehe, were likewise pleased. But why? What was it about Der Lutheraner that so impressed them?

Quite simply, it was the view of Lutheranism that Walther expressed in this periodical, for as he outlined the purposes of Der Lutheraner in the very first issue he maintained that the Lutheran Church "does not belong in the category of the Christian

sects, and...is not a new, but rather the old, true church of Jesus Christ on earth" and he promised that the new periodical would "expose prevalent false and misleading doctrines,...refute and warn against them, and in particular...unmask those who falsely call themselves Lutheran."¹⁴ In sum, Walther identified Lutheranism - defined by her official teachings - with true and biblical Christianity; and, in so doing, he expressed the same conviction held by Wyneken and the rest with whom he would go on to found the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod a few years later in 1847.

What I am arguing therefore is simply this: the Missouri Synod came into being in order to express a theological conviction regarding Lutheranism, viz., that it is "the true visible church of God on earth" (which, incidentally, is another frequently used formulation by Walther). In other words, in the midst of the denominational pluralism of mid-19th century America, Walther and Missouri's other founders were willing to say, our church is the right one! And in spite of the eagerness, then, by a Lutheran leader much more prominent than they were to conform his Lutheranism to a generic American Christianity, Walther, Wyneken, and the others drew a sharp differentiation between themselves and the rest of American religion.

For the founders of our synod, freedom of religion in America was not an excuse for religious indifference but an opportunity for confessing the truth.

¹⁴MF 177.

But why did they take this stand and why were they so hostile toward Schmucker and other more tolerant Lutherans? The answer is simple. Because they were convinced that when Lutheranism is defined by the Confessions, one can be sure that the Lutheran Church teaches the Word of God in its truth and purity and administers the sacraments according to Christ's institution. It was that simple.

This is the conviction that lies behind Confessional subscription as condition of membership in the first synodical constitution as well as the prohibitions against unionism and syncretism of every sort - provisions that remain in place to this very day. For the founders, it was all a question of truth.

We subscribe because the Lutheran Confessions summarize and teach accurately what the Word of God teaches; and we refrain from joint church work with non-Lutherans so as to make sure that God's Word continues to be proclaimed faithfully.

But now as we bring to a close this first part of our presentation, you may well wonder what is the connection between the young Walther and his heart-felt longing for salvation and the mature Walther and his hard nosed convictions regarding the nature of Lutheranism. How do we go from one to the other?

We said before that for Walther his commitment to Lutheranism was all a question of truth. The Lutheran Confessions were correct. But why was this truth so important to Walther? If we refer once again to the first issue of Der Lutheraner, we find the answer when Walther describes yet another purpose of his

periodical, "[It will] serve to show how a person as a true Lutheran can have the right faith, life, suffer patiently, and die blissfully."

The truth for which Walther contended was nothing less than the truth which set him free when as a young university student he first read it in a letter from an old pastor, the truth of the Gospel. There are all kinds of truth in life - some interesting, some not so; some important and some less so - but the only truth that saves, that comforts, that forgives, that lifts up and that heals is the truth of God's Word, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because Walther experienced that truth first hand as a youth in Germany - as well as its absence and corruption - he was not willing to surrender it in America.

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod was born out of a conviction regarding the truth, and that conviction rested upon hearts that had experienced its saving power. Of course, we do not mean to say that they measured the truth by experience; no, they measured it by the Scriptures, God's revealed truth.

But, if we are going to be true to history, we cannot be blind to the importance that this truth had for them personally, as we have seen in Walther's case especially. They insisted on it because they knew first hand its power to save, just as Luther knew it and just as St. Paul knew it.

If then today, 150 years later, we sometimes find our Lutheran commitment at low ebb, is it possible that this merely reflects a shallow experience of the Gospel? And if we are

looking for renewal in Lutheranism, can there be any other way than by preaching and teaching law and gospel? I doubt that many of us are tempted to employ rationalism in our churches, but I suspect we are sometimes tempted by gimmicks - devices and programs that sound more like Madison Ave. than the Book of Concord. And sometimes they work - in the sense of increasing membership and activity and even a kind of vitality in our churches. But is that really what Lutheranism stands for? Business, hustle and bustle, activities of all sorts? I don't think so. If the example of Walther and his contemporaries tells us anything, it is that true Lutheranism stands for one thing, the only thing, the Gospel of Jesus Christ - the truth that saves.

The Gospel was God's power to save Walther; and it is God's power to save us as well.

End of Part One.

Part Two: The Church

One of the more extraordinary developments in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in our day is the existence of widespread uncertainty regarding the doctrines of church and ministry. Without question, regarding the doctrine of the ministry our synod is having problems; but also regarding the nature of the church our teaching has some fuzzy edges to it these days, especially when we get into questions of practice such as church fellowship and closed communion.

In other church bodies, variety of theological opinion on church and ministry might not matter; but for the Missouri Synod it does matter a great deal, since an integral part of what it means to be "Missouri Synod" has been from its founding to hold to a particular understanding of church and ministry. Having reached that understanding in the wake of Martin Stephan's dismissal from their colony, C. F. W. Walther and his Saxon colleagues maintained it in their meetings with Löhe's men that led to the formation of the Missouri Synod; and, on account of the controversy with J. A. A. Grabau and the Buffalo Synod, the Missouri Synod officially adopted Walther's theses on church and ministry already at the 1851 convention, just four years after synod's founding.¹⁵

¹⁵Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: CPH, 1947), pp. 163-98. See also C. F. W. Walther, Church and Ministry (St. Louis: CPH, 1987), pp. 7-12; and the 1851 Convention Proceedings, 1876 reprint ed. (St. Louis: Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten, 1876), p. 170.

That teaching has been repeated again and again throughout synod's history; and as recently as 1992, when synod directed the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to provide answers to questions regarding the theology and practice of "the divine call," they were told to do it "utilizing the writings of C. F. W. Walther," specifically his essay, "The Congregations's Right to Choose Its Pastor" and his book, Church and Ministry. To be Missourian, then, has meant to accept a specific teaching regarding this topic.¹⁶

Today, however, it is not always clear that we do all believe, teach, and confess the same things regarding church and ministry. With respect to the ministry, the variations are pretty clearly delineated. With respect to the church the situation is less precise. Nevertheless, I am convinced that one of the reasons for our present confusion over church fellowship is our prior confusion over the church.

Now, my purpose in this portion of my presentation is not to provide all the answers to the synod's problems but simply to recall our synodical position historically - and in so doing to shed some light on our situation by explaining how it is that the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod so early in her history came to

¹⁶1992 Convention Proceedings, Res. 3-09A; cf. also the Brief Statement which, with its paragraphs on church and ministry, was adopted in 1932, 1947, and 1959. 1932 Convention Proceedings, p. 155; 1947 Convention Proceedings, p. 476; and 1959 Convention Proceedings, Res. 3-9, p. 191. See also Franz Pieper's essay in The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States (Phil.: Lutheran Publication Society, 1893), pp. 130-36.

have an official position on the doctrine of the church and on the practice of fellowship. In none of this do I promise any great originality either in the research undertaken or in the conclusions reached. But I do hope that we can use history to clarify some of the issues that our synod faces in doctrine and practice.

To begin at the beginning, let's consider first of all the 1847 synodical constitution, synod's first, for what it tells us about how the synodical fathers understood church and ministry. This constitution was drafted by Walther and others at two meetings in 1846 and then formally adopted at the outset of the first synodical convention in 1847. Significantly, this constitution makes it clear that the members of synod are the congregations of synod who are represented at synodical conventions by their pastor and a lay delegate. It speaks of the "conditions under which a congregation may join Synod and remain a member" and designates the "synodical personnel" as "the ministers of the Church and the delegates of the congregation."¹⁷

That congregations make up the synodical membership rests upon the conviction - Walther's and the synod's - that a congregation is the church. In Walther's Church and Ministry, Thesis 6, synod would describe this conviction this way:

Scripture...also calls...the congregations that are found

¹⁷W. G. Polack, ed., "Our First Synodical Constitution," CHIQ 16(1943): 3, 4. For German original, see Die Verfassung der deutschen evangelisch-lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten (St Louis: Weber & Olshausen, 1846),

here and there, in which the Word of God is preached and the holy sacraments are administered, "churches" (Partikular-kirchen [particular or individual churches]). This it does especially because in this visible assembly the invisible, true, and properly so-called church of believers, saints, and children of God is hidden; outside this assembly of the called no elect are to be looked for [anywhere].

Years later, in the Brief Statement of 1932, synod would still contend that

Holy Scripture...does not speak merely of the one church, which embraces the believers of all places,...but also of churches in the plural, that is, of local churches....But this does not mean that there are two kinds of churches, for the local churches also, in as far as they are churches, consist solely of believers, as we see clearly from the addresses of the epistles to local churches [emphasis original].¹⁸

In developing a polity for the synod, therefore, Walther and his colleagues sought to reflect their convictions regarding the church by defining the synod as an assembly of churches. Thus, synod's polity may rightly be described as "congregational," and it was one of the early bones of contention between Walther and synod's "father from afar," Wilhelm Löhe, the Bavarian pastor, who, as we saw earlier, was so instrumental in sending men to America. Although he approved of his missionaries participating in the founding of the Missouri Synod, he expressed concerns regarding the democratic tendencies in the new synod and its potential for "mob rule."¹⁹

For his part, Walther could be flexible regarding forms of synodical polity, but not regarding the doctrine of the church

¹⁸Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 20; Brief Statement, p. 378.

¹⁹"Löhe's Heartbreaking Farewell," Moving Frontiers, p. 122.

which undergirded the polity. For him, the "church" in the truest sense of the term - as we confess it in the creed ("I believe in the holy, Christian church") - consists of believers, men, women, and children of God who are known only to Him. Nonetheless, we know where those believers are even if we do not know who they are, for God embraces them with His love and makes them a part of His people only through the means of grace, the Word and the sacraments. Where the gospel is preached and baptism and the Lord's Supper administered, the Holy Spirit is present and active and bringing people to faith. There - unquestionably - is the church.

But just where do we find these "marks of the church"? We find them in particular places, in particular assemblies, which in our vernacular we call "congregations." There, we can be sure, is the church. Moreover, we should make it clear that we are not talking about a group or meeting where the Word of God is present only incidentally, say, for example, a meeting of the Lions club that includes a devotional opening, but rather those assemblies that gather specifically to receive God's gifts in Christ in Word and sacrament, i.e., their very reason for being is to participate in the means of grace; for by these means God without doubt gives His gifts and, therefore, His church is truly present.

And if the church is present, then such assemblies also have churchly authority, as Walther's Church and Ministry also makes clear, "As visible congregations that still have the Word and the

sacraments essentially according to God's Word bear the name 'church' because of the true invisible church of sincere believers that is found in them, so also they possess the power [authority] that Christ has given to His whole church."²⁰

Although there may be other forms of the church besides the congregation through which the church does her work, there is no institution or form which is any more church than the congregation, the essence of which is an assembly gathered about the means of grace.

As is well known, this understanding of the church came into the Missouri Synod as a result of what happened to C.F.W. Walther and the other Lutherans who had emigrated from Germany to America under the leadership of Martin Stephan. Their story is a sad one. Back in Germany they had been convinced that when the authorities had removed Pastor Stephan from his pulpit on charges of "improprieties," that these charges were simply excuses for an unbelieving state church to silence a Confessional Lutheran preacher. Several hundred good Lutherans, including Walther, had followed Pastor Stephan into the American wilderness in order to form a pure Lutheran church. They had even made him their bishop.

Imagine their shock and horror when within a few short months of their arrival in the new world, they discovered that their bishop was indeed a moral hypocrite and that he had actually seduced some of the women in his own flock. Although Stephan

²⁰Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 20.

was quickly expelled from their colony, there followed a long period of intense soul-searching. On account of the guilt that they felt in following a false prophet, they began to raise questions about their whole enterprise, including whether they were still a part of the church and whether they still had an authentic ministry in their midst.

In this vexing situation, none other than C. F. W. Walther emerged as the theologian of the hour by answering the doubts of his community at the Altenburg Debate in the spring of 1841. Yes, they were the church, he contended, in spite of all that had gone wrong, including their participation in another man's sins, for they still had the "marks of the church" and therefore they could be confident of the Spirit's presence and of their own salvation. Walther wrote at the time:

The name church, and, in a certain sense, the name true church, belongs also to those visible companies of men who have united under the confession of a falsified faith and therefore have incurred the guilt of a partial departure from the truth; provided that they possess so much of God's Word and the holy sacraments in purity that children of God may thereby be born.

Furthermore, such an erring group - as they thought they were in Perry County in those days - possessed all the rights and responsibilities of the church, not because of their errors but because of the means of grace and the Holy Spirit. "Even heterodox companies," argued Walther, "have church power; even among them the goods of the church may be validly administered, the ministry established, the sacraments validly administered, and

the keys of the kingdom of heaven exercised [emphasis mine]."²¹
In short, every congregation is fully the church.

On account of their experiences in Perry County, therefore, Walther and his fellow Lutheran pastors from Saxony insisted on bringing this understanding of the church into the Missouri Synod when they helped to form it a few years later. Of course, it has been suggested that however much Walther's understanding of the church may have saved the day for the Saxons of Perry Country, the real question for us now is whether his doctrine is Confessional and biblical.²² As far as the latter is concerned, my colleague, Prof. Kurt Marquart, has summarized the evidence this way:

It is a well-known fact that the term ekklesia in the New Testament designates both the local church and the church universal.... Qualitatively the same reality is meant in each case. Any distinction between "congregation" and "church" is purely verbal, without either linguistic or theological basis in Holy Writ.²³

Accordingly, the Bible uses the term "church" in a universal sense in such passages as Eph. 1:22-23, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way," and Eph. 5:25-27, "Christ loved

²¹C. F. W. Walther, "Altenburg Theses," in Lewis W. Spitz, Sr., The Life of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: CPH, 1961), pp. 56-57.

²²Green, p. 32.

²³Kurt E. Marquart, The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance (Ft. Wayne: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), p. 195.

the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

But in addition to the universal church, we also find the Scriptures referring to particular or local churches as, for example, our Lord Himself, who instructs those involved with church discipline at last to "tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17), and the apostle St. Paul who addresses many of his epistles to the church or churches in a particular place.

Walther found this Pauline usage especially significant in view of the fact that the apostle often goes on in the body of the epistle to scold rather severely the group that he had early called "church." Walther writes:

The holy apostle Paul calls those who were called in Galatia and in Corinth "congregations" [Luther's translation] or churches. In fact, in the latter case he calls them "the church of God, them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints" [Luther's translation] or churches. Despite this, the holy apostle attests that most of the Galatians [church members] had lost Christ and that the church at Corinth had many members who had fallen into grievous sins and had besmirched themselves in both doctrine and life.²⁴

It was from biblical evidence like this that Walther argued that the congregation is the church and that even erring churches are still churches with churchly authority and power.

Regarding the doctrine of the church in the Lutheran Confessions, we can begin with the Augsburg Confession, Article 7, "The

²⁴Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 78.

Church is the congregation of saints [German, all believers, Gläubigen], in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered." There we have both the definition and the marks in a single statement - and appropriately so, for although church and marks may be distinguished, they really cannot be separated.

Article 8 of the Augsburg Confession is also important in delineating synod's doctrine of the church in that it recognizes the possibility of unbelievers among those who are called Christian, "The Church properly is the congregation of saints and true believers, nevertheless, ...many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith." This is, of course, the origin of our distinction between the church in its proper sense and in its improper sense, or again, between the invisible and visible church.

As far as identifying the church with the congregation is concerned, in addition to those passages that link the church with the marks, which, obviously, are present only in particular places, our Confessions also make explicit use of Matthew 18 in arguing that the keys belong to the church - a passage in which church is clearly a local assembly. Specifically, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (par. 24), says the following:

The keys belong not to the person of one particular man, but to the Church, as many most clear and firm arguments testify. For Christ, speaking concerning the keys, Matt. 18:19, adds, "If two or three of you shall agree on earth, etc." Therefore he grants the keys principally and immediately to

the Church.

Clearly, the Treatise has in mind a local assembly (the two or three) where the keys are being exercised, as the later German translation by Veit Dietrich makes even clearer:

Christ...indicates to whom He has given the keys, namely, to the Church: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name." Likewise Christ gives supreme and final jurisdiction to the Church when He says: "Tell it unto the Church."

Now sometimes people become a little queasy regarding what I am calling "congregationalism" in our synod's official doctrine, perhaps because they identify it with a kind of ecclesiastical sovereignty and independence that was characteristic of New England Puritanism in the 17th century. Indeed, in our own church body, there have been some who have attempted to limit the concept of church to the congregation only, sometimes in the interests of practicing church fellowship with churches not in fellowship with synod.²⁵

But such a doctrine of the church is not Lutheran; and in our synod and specifically in Walther, the congregation does not exhaust the category of church nor should it. First of all, "congregation" is a somewhat misleading term for the reality that Walther has in mind. Although Walther does use Gemeinde, the usual German term for the English "congregation," in thesis six of Church and Ministry, he also uses, in thesis seven, Gemeinschaft, communion or society. And, in point of fact, in

²⁵Kurt E. Marquart, Anatomy of an Explosion (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), pp. 54-56.

St. Louis, to which Walther came in 1841 as pastor, his "congregation" grew over the next decades to such an extent that by the time of his death in 1887, it had become what we would actually think of as four congregations - four different groups who worshipped at four different locations and yet came together for congregational meetings and who also recognized the same pastors (Walther and his assistants).²⁶ In other words, we cannot press Walther's congregationalism into a New England mold. His concern was to insist upon the means of grace as the marks of the church and not to restrict the church to some outward form of church organization.

Furthermore, and this is probably more relevant for our situation today, Walther did not believe in congregational "sovereignty," i.e., that the local church was a law unto itself and free to determine its own doctrine or even its own liturgical forms and governance. In fact, in his treatise devoted to applying the doctrine of the church to the American situation, entitled, "the right form of an Evangelical Lutheran local congregation independent of the state," his final thesis is that such a congregation "should be ready to unite with other Evangelical Lutheran churches in the land if it has the opportunity to do so and the union serves and promotes the glory of God and the spread of His kingdom."²⁷ In other words, Lutheran congregations

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²⁷C. F. W. Walther, The Form of a Christian Congregation, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: CPH, 1963), pp. 191-92.

have a positive obligation to join with others in the work of the church.

And when they do so, they do not lose their churchly character simply because they are acting together instead of individually. At the first convention of the Missouri Synod, Walther was chosen as the first president. One year later, in his 1848 presidential address, Walther had the opportunity to reflect upon the synod and the church. He told the assembled delegates of pastors and laymen 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 [emphasis mine]," and again, "we [the synod] are not above [emphasis original] our congregations, but in them and at their side [emphasis mine]."²⁸ In other words, by working together to accomplish the tasks of the church, local churches do not become something other than the church. No, just the opposite, they express their common commitment to the Lord, His word, and their work as the church in this world.

That our synodical fathers were not "congregationalists" in the usual sense of the term is also evident in the purposes for which they came together according to the synodical constitution.

Not only are these purposes strictly ecclesiastical, i.e., things that only the church can do, such as "to stand guard over the purity and unity of doctrine," the "common protection and

²⁸C. F. W. Walther, "Walther's 1848 Presidential Address," in C. S. Meyer, ed., Moving Frontiers (St. Louis: CPH, 1964), p. 170.

extension of the church," "to provide for ecclesiastical ordination and induction into office," "to provide for congregations without pastors," and "to give theological opinions"; but it is also clear that the constitution envisions a kind of unity among its members that is the opposite of what we would think of as "congregational."

In this 1847 constitution, one of the reasons for forming a synod is described as "the establishment of the largest possible conformity in church government"; one item of the business of the synod is "to strive after the greatest possible uniformity in ceremonies"; and every member of synod is required "to strive, in all seriousness, according to his calling, powers, and means, for the reaching of the synodical goal, namely, the very necessary preservation of the purity and unity of the doctrine and the support and spread of the Church [emphasis mine]." There is not even the slightest hint of congregational sovereignty in any of these matters. In church government and liturgy as well as doctrine, there is to be conformity, uniformity, and unity. Clearly, the synod is church.²⁹

Of course, such a conclusion does not mean that Walther and company considered the new synod divinely instituted. To the contrary, Walther makes it clear once again in his 1848 speech that the Lutheran Church has been organized very differently but profitably in the past:

²⁹Constitution, pp. 2, 3, 5, 17. See also Marquart, Anatomy, pp. 56-57.

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?³⁰

True, Walther goes on immediately to argue that the organizational arrangements of the new synod are the best for that time and place ("If...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 [emphasis original]").³¹ But clearly Walther's argument regarding the best form of ecclesiastical organization depends upon historical circumstances and lacks a "Thus saith the Lord." The Bible does not mandate a particular synodical form; but whatever the form, when churches join together for the church's work they remain the church.

As a matter of fact, the original form of our Lutheran Church Missouri Synod was a relatively weak institution in its authority over the member congregations. Even though the well-known constitutional limitation of the synod to being an "advisory body" with respect to the "self-government of the individual congregations" was not a part of the original 1847 constitution

³⁰Walther, "1848 Address," p. 174.

³¹Ibid.

but only came later by amendment,³² nevertheless that is what synod was any way, i.e., advisory, at least according to her first president:

According to the constitution under which our synodical union exists, we have merely the power to advise one another, that we have only the power of the Word, of convincing.

According to our constitution we have no right to formulate decrees, to pass laws and regulations, and to make a judicial decision, to which our congregations would have to submit unconditionally in any matter involving the imposing of something upon them. Our constitution by no means makes us a consistory, by no means a supreme court of our congregations. It rather grants them the most perfect liberty in everything, excepting nothing but the Word of God, faith, and charity [emphasis original].³³

Clearly, synod was powerless to lord it over the member congregations. However, as this quotation also makes clear, the members of the synod did bind themselves to the Word of God; and when synod spoke the Word of God, there was no question of its being merely advisory - something the members could either adopt or not as the case may be. So, for example, the first constitution specifies that "matters of doctrine and of conscience will be decided by the Word of God alone. All other decisions will be made by a majority of votes."³⁴

The assumption of the founding fathers was that membership in the synod signified unity in the Word - real unity in practice as well as on paper and certainly not a perfunctory unity de-

³²"The 1854 Constitution of the Missouri Synod," Moving Frontiers, p. 151.

³³Walther, "1848 Address," pp. 170-71.

³⁴"First Synodical Constitution," p. 4.

signed to cover up differences. Therefore, conditions of membership in the new synod included not only verbal acceptance of the Scriptures and the Confessions but also actual separation from all "heretical or mixed congregations" and "the exclusive use of doctrinally pure church books and schoolbooks." Furthermore, maintaining this unity in the word was one of the chief reasons for organizing a synod, "The preservation and furthering of the unity of pure confession...and to provide common defense against separatism and sectarianism"; and the first item of synodical business specified in the constitution was "to stand guard over the purity and unity of doctrine within the synodical circle, and to oppose false doctrine."³⁵

To this end therefore of continued unity in the Word, the Synod required the President

...to supervise the pastors and teachers [of the synod] in respect to their doctrine, life, and performance of their duties....If it should happen that the President reports a pastor who after having been reprimanded several times by the President, by the particular congregation, and by the ministerium, yet continues in wrong doctrine or in an offensive life, then Synod in its entirety shall make the last attempt to turn him from the error of his ways. If, having been thus reprimanded, he does not listen to Synod, he shall be expelled, and his congregation is to carry out the command of Christ in Matt. 18,17: "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."³⁶

For Walther, therefore, commitment to the Word of God in the synod was a commitment to preach and to practice that Word; and

³⁵Ibid., pp. 2, 4.

³⁶Ibid., p. 6.

the congregational polity of the synod could not be an excuse for doctrinal aberrations. Indeed, Walther says explicitly that this commitment to the Word obviates the possibility of problems arising from synod's congregational basis. Walther writes:

We ask nothing unconditionally of our congregations except submission to the Word....We need not fear that the secular element of a political democracy will invade the church,...a popular government, a papacy of the people....No, a disgraceful popular government occurs only where the people presume to prescribe to the preacher what he may and may not preach of God's Word; where the people make bold to contradict the Word of God and to interfere in any respect with the conduct of the office according to the Word.

So in the Missouri Synod, according to her first president, problems might arise from failures to follow the Word, but not from her polity:

We must expect battles, but they will not be the mean, depressing battles for obedience to human laws, but the holy battles of God's Word, for God's honor and kingdom. And the more our congregations will realize we do not desire to employ any other power over them than the divine power of the Word...the more will also our counsel find an open door among them.

The synod was not supposed to represent a fellowship of those who differed on the Word but of those who were united in it, "To be sure, those who do not love the Word will separate from us, but for those who love it, our fellowship will be a comforting refuge; and if they adopt our resolutions, they will not consider them a foreign burden...but as a benefit and a gift of brotherly love, and will champion, defend, and preserve them as their own."³⁷

³⁷Walther, "1848 Presidential Address," p. 176.

But why was this doctrinal unity, this unity in the Word, so important to the founders of the Missouri Synod? It was precisely because of the churchly character of the synod. You will recall that in describing the church, we have remarked more than once upon the marks of the church, the Word and the sacraments. According to the Lutheran Confessions, the Word of God and the sacraments are the marks of the Church because they are the only means by which the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith.³⁸

Synod's commitment to maintaining the right preaching of the gospel and the correct administration of the sacraments arises, therefore, out of a concern for the salvation of those for whom the means of grace are intended. For false doctrine dishonors God's name and endangers salvation by leading people away from God's grace in Christ. Our Lord Himself said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

On the basis of this conviction, therefore, early in her history, the Missouri Synod made agreement in doctrine and practice the touchstone for church fellowship. Synodical leaders were eager to talk doctrine and to work for agreement as a basis for fellowship, but were not willing to establish fellowship without that prior agreement. This was one of the reasons why in 1867, the Missouri Synod did not join Charles Porterfield Krauth's General Council, in spite of Walther's recognition that its positions on paper were "for the most part fairly accept-

³⁸AC 5, 7.

able," because the General Council also included representatives from the Iowa Synod with whom the Missouri Synod could not reach agreement in doctrine.³⁹

On the other hand, when the Missouri Synod did participate in founding the Synodical Conference in 1872 along with representatives of the Ohio, Wisconsin, and Minnesota Synods among others, it was only after there had been formal conversations between representatives of the synods to demonstrate agreement in doctrine that the new church body came into being in 1872. The point, of course, is that purity of doctrine was basic to her interchurch relationships, because the Missouri Synod was committed to the integrity of the marks of the church.⁴⁰

A few years after the founding of the Synodical Conference, there occurred one of those battles that Walther had previously spoken about in his 1848 address - one of the most traumatic in the entire history of the Lutheranism in America - the Predestination Controversy. Although the particular subject matter of that debate is beyond the scope of this essay, there is one aspect of it that is pertinent, because it shows the concern that that generation had that the congregations of synod be united in doctrine. For after the great debates over Predestination had taken place and synod had agreed to express herself on those issues by adopting Walther's 13 Theses as doctrine taught by the Word of God, it was not sufficient for the synod merely to adopt

³⁹Walther correspondence, my notes.

⁴⁰Baepler, Century of Grace, pp.

a doctrinal position by majority vote. Those who did not agree with the doctrine would have to sever their ties with the synod or else be dealt with as false teachers.⁴¹

Clearly, the advisory character of the synod had no relevance to the binding character of the Word of God. All members of synod were supposed to agree with synod's public doctrine and to avoid those who taught otherwise - not because it was synodical policy but because it was biblically correct.

Increasingly, in our day, this is a practice from our past that we find it difficult to maintain. In an era that places a premium upon "tolerance," including tolerance of all sorts of immoral behavior and of false religious views and in an age that is all too skeptical of authority, especially in large institutions, pastors and congregations of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod may find it difficult or undesirable to follow through on the fellowship decisions of synodical conventions that arise, in part, from "marking and avoiding" those who teach "contrary to the doctrine" that we have learned (Rom. 16:17). Nevertheless, we should follow through - not because synod says so but because God's Word says so. Our unity is in the Word, not in the institution, but the institution is supposed to express that unity in the Word.

Pastors, especially, should realize that when they are faithful in their practice of fellowship and urge their members

⁴¹E. Clifford Nelson, ed., Lutherans in North America, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), p. 319; Baepler, p. 202.

to be so also, they have an opportunity to instruct their own people regarding the doctrinal differences in Christendom that threaten the gospel and to offer a witness to pastors and congregations of other church bodies about those matters in which they teach falsely. Of course, it goes without saying that such instruction and witness must not proceed from a spirit of arrogance but out of sincere concern for the spiritual well-being of members and non-members alike.

Unfortunately, it can be very difficult to avoid being labeled arrogant or mean or unloving in an age that has no use for the uncomfortable truths of religion. Attitude is everything today and truth is nothing. But as members of a Confessional church, we need to maintain the truth and to support one another in that task, if we still believe, really and truly, that God has communicated personally and also propositionally in His Word - and that that communication matters. If we do, then we will not want to confuse our people by inviting into our pulpits - even for weddings or funerals - representatives of churches that do not teach correctly.

In fact, out of concern for the church - which the Spirit brings into being by the Word - we need to avoid all sorts of projects that involve proclaiming the gospel, when there is no agreement in the gospel, i.e., "in doctrine and all its articles" as the Formula of Concord puts it (FC Ep. X.5). As the first constitution of synod demonstrates, the synodical fathers believed that Christian education, the publication of religious

materials (hymnals, tracts, Bible studies, and the like), and mission work were all a part of the church's task to "preach the Word," so synod was organized to do these things together in doctrinal unity. But when we engage in these sorts of activities with other churches, even at a local level, and there is no agreement in doctrine and practice, we make it possible, indeed, likely for error to intrude into the proclamation of God's Word.

Besides the right teaching of the Word, however, our Confessions also commit us to the right administration of the sacraments as a mark of the church - a commitment that is the basis for our practice of close (or closed) communion. In recent years, closed communion has become an issue for some in our synod; so it is probably valuable for us also to explore the connection between our communion practice and our doctrine of the church.

Here again, we do not really have to plow new ground, for Walther and the synodical founders also had to address this question, because even in their day, there were many in America, including many American Lutherans, for whom closed communion represented the "epitome of an intolerant and unevangelical Christianity."⁴² In particular, the issue of closed communion was hotly debated in the years that saw the formation, first of all, of Krauth's General Council (1867) and then of the Synodical Conference (1872).

⁴²"Introduction," to C. F. W. Walther, "Communion Fellowship," in Essays for the Church (St. Louis: CPH, 1992) 1:202.

The General Council was a national fellowship of Lutheran synods all committed to the Lutheran Confessions but not united in their understanding of those Confessions on doctrinal questions like the millennium or on the practical implications of their Confessional commitment. In particular, communion practices were one of "Four Points" raised by the Ohio Synod in her decision not to join the General Council, and they also contributed to the decision of the Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois Synods to leave the General Council shortly after joining it. All of these groups along with the Missouri Synod were founding members of the Synodical Conference, formed in 1872 as federation of synods united in both doctrine and practice.

No wonder, then, that C. F. W. Walther decided to speak on the question of closed communion at a convention of the Western District in 1870, "Theses on Communion Fellowship with Those Who Believe Differently." In view of what was going on in American Lutheranism at the time, it was a timely topic. It is equally timely today.

First of all, it is important to note that Walther's discussion of closed communion proceeds from his doctrine of the church, in particular, his doctrine of the true visible church. Only after six theses on the church in this essay does Walther introduce the sacraments and communion practice. Once again, however, in perusing these theses, we discover positions from our synodical past that do not fit comfortably into contemporary society, for, as we noted earlier, when Walther speaks of "the

true visible church," he means precisely the Evangelical Lutheran Church, i.e., that church which believes, teaches, and confesses according the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions.

That church is the true one, not because it is sinless, but because its doctrine and practice are correct, i.e., in accordance with the Holy Scriptures. Walther writes: "The true visible church...is the one in which the Word of God is preached purely and the holy sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution."⁴³ Once more we note the importance of the marks of the church.

However, we should also observe the clear implication of Walther's thesis that if there is a true church, there can also be a false one, i.e., as Walther defines it, "a fellowship in which the Word of God is fundamentally falsified, or in which a fundamental falsification of it is tolerated."⁴⁴ As we have already seen, Walther was quite willing to acknowledge the authentic churchly character of heterodox bodies. They were "true" in the sense of still being churches because the Word of God was present in them; but they were not "true" in the sense of being orthodox or correct teaching.

On the one hand, therefore, Walther readily acknowledges that "true Christians are also found in heterodox fellowships"; and he says very explicitly,

⁴³Walther, "Communion Fellowship," p. 203.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 207.

that although our church [i.e., the Ev. Lutheran Church] is the only one that stands on the Word of God and not on human doctrines, it is not to be considered as the only saving [church], outside of which there can be no salvation, but ...there are Christians also in other churches and that we do condemn not them but only the false doctrine and its stubborn teachers and defenders [emphasis mine].⁴⁵

In other words, the practice of church fellowship, including closed communion, that follows from our conviction regarding the true visible church must not be interpreted as a statement that only Missouri Synod Lutherans can be saved.

On the other hand, however, if on the basis of God's Word, it is possible for Walther to determine what is orthodox and what is not, then it is possible for others as well; and so he also maintains that "everyone is obligated to avoid heterodox churches, and if one belongs to one like that, he is obligated to renounce it and leave it."⁴⁶

Without question, this is the point in the argument at which most of us feel most uncomfortable in contemporary America. Walther's first point - that there are true Christians in heterodox churches is not only comforting but comfortable, for, at first, this seems to permit us to be content with our own orthodoxy without being noticeably intolerant of other Christians. But the subsequent thesis - that members of heterodox churches should actually renounce those churches and leave them or, to put it even more bluntly, that everyone should join the Lutheran Church - really flies in the face of how we treat religion in

⁴⁵Ibid., 212-13.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 210.

America. "I'm 'ok,' you're 'ok'" would be more like it.

So maybe, just maybe, we wonder if Walther hasn't slipped a bit at this point. Maybe he's going beyond the Scriptures. Maybe - but not likely, since Walther does not simply assert his position but returns to the Scripture and cites passage after passage from both the Old and New Testaments warning against false prophets and teachers, among them the passage that the synodical constitution from 1847 to this very day uses to condemn sectarianism, Rom. 16:17, "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them."

Walther comments,

We see that it is not we - when we break with and keep our distance from the heterodox - that disturb and splinter the unity of the church...but they themselves who cause division and offense contrary to the pure, saving doctrine of the Word of God [emphasis original].⁴⁷

Even in 1870, there were many in the visible church who believed Walther's attitude to be intolerable, an expression of unmitigated arrogance; and Walther realized this, so in commenting on Luke 14:26 ("If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple"), he answered his critics this way:

A true Lutheran may have a loving father who is deluded in heterodoxy, who beseeches him with many urgent words and pleas, even with tears and entreaties, that he not belong to

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 210.

the Lutherans that (in his view) stubborn, noxious sect, [and] not by the adoption and defense of the Lutheran name and confession cover his gray head with disgrace and bring [it] to the grave with grief. And yet, in this case, such a Lutheran Christian must not yield and give way, nor consider his father's grief and woe, but only the Word of his God. But how will the blind world regard this obedience to Scripture? It will condemn his action as the most disgraceful hatred and wickedness against his earthly father. To endure that is not easy, but it is necessary.⁴⁸

But is it necessary? That really is our question today when we wrestle with the issue of closed communion. Do we really believe that ours is the true visible church and that those who do not belong to it should? Do we really think that the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Catholics, Episcopalians, and ELCA Lutherans who visit our churches should leave their own and join ours? Or to put it more bluntly yet, do we think that it is a sin to belong to such churches - perhaps a sin of ignorance but nonetheless a sin against the second commandment to support those who deceive in God's name by their false teaching in these various denominations. If we do believe these things, then Walther's subsequent argument for closed communion makes very good sense; but if we do not, then closed communion makes no sense at all.

I want to emphasize this as one of the critical issues for the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod today - not so much closed communion but this basic and prior question: Is our church the true one and are others false? Militating against our tradition today is the whole climate of our times, and perhaps it is the

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 211.

case that a pluralistic society like ours cannot really work unless there is a good measure of tolerance for other viewpoints.

But for us, a problem occurs when tolerance as a question of good social manners evolves into a philosophical position regarding the relativity of truth. It is one thing to listen politely and to refrain from striking your opponent; and it is quite another to reduce differing truth claims to personal opinions. Unfortunately, as the abortion debate in our political discourse demonstrates the former often becomes the latter, so that Pilate's skepticism embodied in his question, "What is truth?" receives the even more skeptical answer, "There isn't any."

As a result of these cultural currents, it is very difficult for any of us to maintain that we are right and that others are wrong, in spite of the exclusivist claims of Jesus Himself, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). You can't get any more exclusive than that!

So, if we can still agree with Walther that ours is the true visible church on earth, his argument for closed communion follows easily. Otherwise, it does not. In Thesis 7 of his essay to the Western District Walther finally introduces the subject of the sacrament and contends that the sacraments have as an authentic, though secondary, purpose as "distinctive signs of confession and bonds of fellowship in worship. Communion fellowship," he argues, "is therefore church fellowship."

As in our own day, there were some who thought of the

sacrament primarily in individualistic terms or - as one of my colleagues Prof. Eugene Bunkowske puts it in describing this viewpoint - as "spiritual vitamin pills," something to make the weak strong. But he also suggests a more appropriate metaphor that takes in the communal or ecclesiastical nature of the sacrament as well, viz., describing the sacrament as a family meal. So too Walther, in response to those who argue that since we acknowledge that there are Christians in other churches, we should also admit them to the sacrament because it is a means of grace, answers, "It is true that the holy sacraments are this, and indeed first and foremost, and you would be right if they were nothing else than this. But they are also distinctive signs of confession and bonds of fellowship in worship."⁴⁹

What Walther is arguing is that the sacraments signify not only one's relationship with God but also with his fellow Christians, and he differentiates them from preaching which is not a bond of fellowship but the instrument that creates the bond of fellowship:

We...allow Catholics or outright heathen to hear the Word of God with us; but one who is allowed to participate in the sacraments must be recognized as standing in proper Christian faith, for one thereby marks him as it were with a seal of fraternal fellowship in faith....For the Gospel is not a philosophical system but a productive power of God. It is preached so that there might be a church in which believers find association in unity. And the sacraments are...the holy bonds and bounds within which Christians stand over against the world.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 213.

⁵⁰Ibid.

The Word of God is what brings us into the church; but the sacraments in that they are the visible Word do more. Not only do they create and sustain faith (and in the case of the eucharist exclusively the latter), they also mark us off visibly as the church. We cannot see the Word of God at work in the heart; but we can see the visible Word, the sacraments, at work in our lives. They are what make us and mark us as the church.

Commenting on the sacrament of holy baptism on the basis of 1 Cor. 12:13, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body," Walther writes, "One who is baptized is thereby declared to be a member of the same mystical body to which I belong as a Christian, and precisely through Baptism I give to one who is baptized the testimony: You are my dear fellow Christian, my brother in Christ."⁵¹

And so too with respect to the holy eucharist. St. Paul writes, "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor. 10:17); and Walther remarks,

Accordingly, in that Christians eat of the one bread of the Sacrament, all become mystically, that is, in a spiritual, moral, or figurative way, one body, and by the act of eating together a person is declared to be one in Christ with all Christians....All Christians [are] one in Christ through Communion and many thousand times more intimately bound together than even body and soul into one organism. They are actually one. One God dwells in them. One Spirit rules in them. They all have one Savior in them, and one Lord Jesus speaks from them.⁵²

⁵¹Ibid., p. 215.

⁵²Ibid.

Of course, the question immediately arises that if, as Walther says, the sacraments are the bonds between Christians and not just Lutherans, how is that we refuse to commune any except those in our fellowship? The answer lies, as I indicated earlier, in Walther's understanding of the true visible church, since to commune those who do not belong to that church is to confirm them in the errors of the churches to which they do belong. Against those Lutherans who in his own day did not practice closed communion, Walther writes:

If the leaders of the Church Council [i.e., General Council] would accept [these Scripture passages], they would have to give up their false principles and practices; but they will not accept them until they have recognized that there actually is a true, visible church of God in an unqualified sense. They do not say to their heterodox communicants that through partaking of Communion with us they hold to our doctrine and our church. They allow them to remain stuck in error and plunge them and themselves into the sin of hypocrisy.⁵³

Since in Walther's view, it is a grievous sin to belong to a non-Lutheran church, we should not comfort the non-Lutheran or even the unionistic Lutheran in his error by communing him at our altars.

But doesn't this mean that we are withholding the consolations of the gospel from such a person? Walther answers no, because, of course, he can still hear the preaching. Furthermore, Walther reminds us that the eucharist is not an evangelistic tool to convert the unbeliever but was instead "instituted to strengthen the faith of those who are already true Chris-

⁵³Ibid.

tians. Therefore Communion should be administered to no one who has been revealed as a false [i.e., erring] Christian."⁵⁴

Far from being a loveless approach to members of other churches, Walther contends that closed communion is actually an act of love. Referring to Lev. 19:17, "Do not hate your brother in you heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt," Walther writes, "Rebuking is so often presented as lovelessness; but unjustly, for we hear here: If you do not love someone you will not rebuke him. So then, to warn your fellowman against a false and destructive way is certainly true love."⁵⁵

Significantly, Walther's concern in closed communion is not only for those of other churches who may not come to the sacrament but also for those of our own fellowship who may be disturbed in their faith by the practice of open communion. Quoting the Wittenberg faculty of 1568, Walther writes:

Also many pious, good-hearted people would necessarily be highly angered, saddened, and led into manifold doubt whether they are in the right faith with this church, for they see that also those who hold another, disagreeing view are publicly received and admitted to the fellowship of these churches [emphasis original].

How confusing it must be if, on the one hand, in our catechetical instructions we insist on correct doctrine and in confirmation we pledge our members to Lutheran doctrine in the Small Catechism, but in our communion practice we welcome Christians of all denominations as if the doctrinal differences or aberrations from

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 217.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 223.

that same catechism do not, after all, matter. No wonder then that Walther describes this practice as being in conflict with "our love for our own fellow believers, especially the weak, who by this action would be given grievous offense."⁵⁶

If we truly believe that doctrinal error is dangerous to one's salvation, then we want to take those steps that lead one away from that error; and closed communion is one of those steps. My guess is that we have less trouble today with closing our altars to those who persist stubbornly in sins against the fifth, sixth, and seventh commandments than we do in saying no to those who violate the second and third by a false faith and fellowship; nonetheless, true love and concern includes faithful application of all ten - at least, that is Walther's viewpoint in so far as it applies to closed communion.

Walther's essay on communion practices concludes with two additional theses that are also relevant to our own day and age.

The first of them (Thesis 11) answers an obvious objection that Walther summarizes this way, "How can you dare to excommunicate a child of God from another church by rejection at your Communion, call him a heretic, cut him off from the body of Christ, and so, as it were, wound Jesus Himself?" People may suppose this is what we are doing, but, Walther argues, that is not what we intend by closed communion at all. Walther explains:

We [do not] excommunicate, reject, accuse of heresy, and condemn that heterodox Christian if we say to him: "We

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 220, 224.

would be glad to have you receive Holy Communion with us. But there is still a barrier in the way. That is the sin of your error in doctrine, which you have not yet recognized. First acknowledge and abandon this [sin] and join the orthodox church. Then you will be to us a dear, welcome guest at Communion."⁵⁷

The sin of the one being refused admission is one of error, perhaps even ignorance, forgiven by God just as all of ours are.

But that does not mean that either he or we should be indifferent to it. Our practice of closed communion is designed to help our visitors rethink their church membership. Once again, the practice is based upon the conviction that Lutheranism is the correct expression of Christianity; but if it is, then non-Lutherans should be encouraged to acknowledge the differences and not be lulled into believing that the differences do not matter. The alternative is misleading and dishonest, unless one really believes that the differences do not matter. Then by all means open the communion table to a variety of beliefs and practices, but do not maintain that your church is any more Lutheran, at least from the standpoint of the marks of the church.

Walther's final thesis in his 1870 essay is also an important one for us today, because it reminds us that the purpose of closed communion is to preserve the purity of the marks of the church. Walther writes:

The more unionism and syncretism are the sin and corruption of our time, the more the loyalty of the orthodox church now demands that the Lord's Supper not be misused as a means of

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 225.

external union without the internal unity of faith.⁵⁸ Once again, and it bears repeating, we can know of no internal unity of faith apart from one's confession of faith. That confession includes one's church membership. We simply cannot say that a member is in no way responsible for the teachings and practices of his church. After all, this is America. If he does not like what his church does, he can leave it. And should, according to Walther, if his church is heterodox. Then - and only then - can we express our unity in the sacrament - when there is also unity of confession.

In conclusion to this part of my presentation, let me say simply that at the founding of our synod, it was a basic premise that the synod expressed a unity of confession and practice among the congregations that belonged to the synod as members of the Ev. Lutheran Church. Moreover, a primary purpose of the new group was to maintain that unity in the doctrine. This in turn was important to them because they were convinced that true doctrine was basic to proclaiming the gospel while false doctrine got in its way and hindered the gospel. Finally, this concern was not only a matter of what they said but also what they did, including communion practices. Word and sacraments were the means of grace; therefore, they were the marks of the church; and therefore, they had to be kept pure. Our problem today is not so much whether we understand all this, but whether we still believe

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 227.

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it.

End of Part Two.

Part Three: The Office of the Public Ministry

Church history is something like the attic in a Seminary curriculum. All kinds of interesting stuff is stored there; but only sometimes does it seem particularly useful. As you can see, for our time together here, I have rummaged through the synodical attic of church history in order to find what I hope are both interesting and relevant items. Yesterday's topics included questions of church and church fellowship. This morning, I hope to look more closely at questions involving the ministry.

Today, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is in a state of crisis regarding the office of the public ministry. This may be an overstatement, but I don't think so - too many voices are saying too many different things for us to pretend that there is still a unity of teaching in our church regarding this office. One Concordia Publishing House publication, for example, describes pastors primarily as enablers and equippers of the laity for ministry and insists, "To be sure, pastors are to be honored because they are our spiritual leaders (1 Tim. 5:17). But Christian service is as sacred when performed by a layman as when performed by a seminary graduate or a properly called pastor of a parish."⁵⁹ But another LCMS clergyman writes that the absolution

⁵⁹Oscar E. Feucht, Everyone a Minister (St. Louis: CPH, 1974), pp. 54-55. Describing the pastor, Feucht writes, "...in the remaining chapters of this book...the emphasis will be on his role as an enabler, teacher, and shepherd of all his members" (pp. 64-46) and "the pastor is a mission director and enabler. His team is as large as his congregation" (p. 136).

when pronounced by a pastor has a validity that it lacks when pronounced by a layman:

The pastor...is able to deliver 'indicative-operative absolution'....Christ is here personally addressing the penitent through the instrument of the pastor....If a member of the laity should speak in this manner, the offered forgiveness would be considered as coming from the absolving individual rather than from the only begotten Son of the Father.⁶⁰

And even more recently, still another of our brethren has charged C. F. W. Walther with presenting an anthropocentric explanation of the ministry, as opposed to the theocentric (and therefore, presumably, the correct) understanding of J. A. A. Grabau.⁶¹

What is going on here? Why is there so much difference of opinion regarding what was once established among us? Certainly, part of the explanation lies in the fact that even though many of us still hold to the official teaching of our church, new issues have arisen which call that teaching into question or, at least, compel a reexamination of our doctrine. The most obvious such novelty is women's ordination. Although one might argue that the burden of proof rests upon those who innovate against the practice not only of the Missouri Synod but of virtually all of orthodox Christendom for 1900 years, in the West, especially the

⁶⁰Douglas Fusselman, "Only Playing Church? The Lay Minister and the Lord's Supper" Logia 3(1994): 45.

⁶¹"In a genuinely theocentric definition [of the church], Christ would be the chief member of the church with the other members called his body. Walther presents an anthropocentric concept when the church is only a sum." Lowell C. Green, "Grabau and Walther: Theocentric versus Anthropocentric Understanding of Church and Ministry," Logia 5(1996): 32.

United States, the capitulation of one denomination after another to the forces of feminism, including the ELCA and its predecessor bodies, has shifted the burden to those who would resist the tide: Why don't you Missourians ordain women? What do you have against women? Are you misogynists or only old sticks in the mud?

Theologians of previous eras were more ready to answer the advocates of women's ordination in terms of the nature of men and women - men are leaders, women are nurturers; men are thinkers, women are emotional, etc. But that simply won't do in modern America; and so, defenders of the old position have felt themselves under pressure to re-examine the office itself and to demonstrate what it is in the nature of the ministry that necessitates a male-only clergy.⁶² Such explorations have been useful and sometimes persuasive; but one unintended consequence has also been, in part, a greater sense of insecurity among some Missourians about our own long-standing doctrine of the ministry and its capacity for answering the feminists.

For example, if we hold that God has instituted the office of the public ministry for the sake of preaching and administering the sacraments - a responsibility which in some sense already belongs to the individual Christian - and if we also agree with

⁶²See, for example, David P. Scaer, "The Integrity of the Christological Character of the Office of the Ministry," *Logia* 2(1993): 15-18; and Jobst Schöne, "Pastoral Letter on the Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Office of the Church," *CTQ* 59(1995): 301-16.

our critics that women are as capable of preaching and teaching as are men, then what is to keep us from ordaining them?

It is questions like this that prompt new ways of describing the office of the ministry. A goodly number of Missourians are still content with simply saying no to the advocates of women's ordination in the way of Walther, simply on the basis of clear Scripture passages regarding authority in the church, e.g., I Tim. 2:11-12, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." If it was good enough for St. Paul, we say, it should also be good enough for us. And so we reject women's ordination. Even so, however, the questions regarding the nature of the ministry that the issue of women's ordination has raised in our circles are not so easily dismissed.

Furthermore, besides the changing role of women in society and church, our crisis over the doctrine of the ministry arises for other reasons as well. In particular, there is also the multiplication of "helping offices" in the church. In the current Lutheran Annual, under the listing of "Ministers of Religion - Ordained," we find 17 categories besides pastors of various kinds; and under "Ministers of Religion - Commissioned," besides 4 major subdivisions (certified teachers, directors of Christian education, deaconesses, and directors of Christian outreach), there are a host of additional subcategories. The third major division, "Certified Church Workers, Lay," includes lay ministers, lay teachers, parish assistants, parish musicians,

and parish workers. And these are only those offices which are recognized at the synodical level!⁶³

Such offices are usually full time positions and one or more of our synodical schools often has a program preparing men and women for such vocations. Entering such a position is often described as a call, and there are special services of induction and installation when one begins his work. In addition, the duties of such positions often include responsibilities for some sort of teaching God's Word. No wonder, then, that the existence and the proliferation of these positions within the church have provoked questions about the ministry of the church - questions, such as, who precisely is in the office of the public ministry? Are teachers? DCE's? High school religion teachers? Seminary professors? Who? Or again, what is unique about the office of the pastor in a congregation? What responsibility does he have for those aspects of ministry that have been given to others, and what parts of ministry are his alone?

Complicating matters even more, in almost all of our congregations, there are there are a multitude of congregational members - laymen - who also are involved on an occasional basis in proclaiming the Word of God - the Sunday School teachers, the evangelism team members, the Sunday morning lectors, and the like. What is the nature of these positions in the church and what is what is their relationship to the office of the ministry?

⁶³The Lutheran Annual 1996 of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (St. Louis: CPH, 1995), pp. 185, 365, 552.

Although such developments have been a long time in the making, the catalyst for our present crisis occurred only in 1989, when synod took an action that many really could not figure out in terms of our theology by creating yet another "helping office" in the church, that of licensed lay minister to preach and to administer the sacraments "in exceptional circumstances or in emergencies." Those who participate in this particular office do so under the supervision of a pastor and with an annual, renewable license from their district president; nevertheless, what they are licensed to do is unmistakably and admittedly pastoral as the synodical resolution indicated when it described its purpose as "providing for an orderly way of carrying out distinctive functions of the pastoral office in the absence of an ordained clergyman." In others words, the synod authorized certain laymen to do what pastors are supposed to do.⁶⁴

More than any other episode in our recent history, this decision forced Missourians once again to reexamine what the Bible and the Confessions teach about the office of the public ministry, especially in relation to the helping offices that the church creates. And one result of this reexamination has been the action of the 1995 synodical convention designed to minimize the use of this new office and basically to make it a step toward ordination.⁶⁵ But in spite of this action, it is not yet clear

⁶⁴1989 Convention Proceedings, Res. 3-05B, p. 112.

⁶⁵1995 Convention Proceedings, Res. 3-07A, pp. 120-21.

whether synod has reached a consensus among its members about what makes the office of the public ministry distinct from auxiliary offices like that of the licensed lay minister.

As a result, then, of women's ordination outside of the Missouri Synod and the multiplication of auxiliary offices within the synod, many of us are asking today, Is it still possible to make sense of all this within the confines of biblical and Confessional theology as we have come to understand it in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod? I think so; I hope so. But I would be less than candid if I were to say that I was absolutely certain.

As we did with the doctrine of the church yesterday, what I propose for the doctrine of the ministry today is to re-examine that doctrine from the standpoint of its original formulation in the history of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and in the theology of C.F.W. Walther. Here again synod's first constitution of 1847 is a good place to start.

As indicated previously, the synod was made up of congregations because of a theological conviction that every congregation was a local expression of the universal church. But who represented the congregation in synod - not only an elected delegate but also the pastor of the congregation.⁶⁶ Why? Because synod's founders were also convinced that the office of the ministry was a divine institution.

⁶⁶"First Synodical Constitution," p. 4.

As in the case of the church, so too with respect to the ministry, at its founding the Missouri Synod inherited a doctrine from recent past experience, especially of the Saxon clergy, Walther included, and not only a doctrine but a controversy as well with Johannes Andreas August Grabau (1804-79), founder of the Buffalo Synod in 1845.

The controversy was both theoretical and practical - a question not only of what was taught but also of what was done. Let me explain.

Back in Germany, J.A.A. Grabau was an important voice for Confessional Lutheranism in the state of Prussia. Although the situation of Lutheranism there was similar to that of Saxony, there was one major difference - in Prussia, the king decreed that Lutherans and Calvinists must join together in one church and use common liturgy. This Grabau refused to do, as a result of which he was forced from his pulpit; and when he continued to preach to his people in his home, he was actually imprisoned for his faith.

With the help of a pious layman, a former officer in the Prussian army by the name of Heinrich Von Rohr, Grabau escaped from prison and went into hiding. Recaptured after nine months of trying to stay away from the authorities, Grabau and Von Rohr decided to emigrate, to leave for America. As in the case of Stephan, many good laymen were willing to follow; but unlike Stephan, not so many clergymen.

They did link up with another pastor and his flock who had

also decided to leave. This was L.F.E. Krause. All told, there were about 1000 Lutherans who left with Grabau in the summer of 1839 to settle in America. Because there were two pastors, they decided to settle in two different areas - Wisconsin (near Milwaukee) and Buffalo, New York. Unfortunately for their plans, however, Pastor Krause did not stay long in America. Within weeks of his congregation's arrival in Buffalo, Krause returned to Germany. This left one pastor, Grabau, for two congregations - one in Wisconsin and one in New York.

Since Grabau settled in Buffalo, the group in Wisconsin made arrangements for temporary pastoral care through a pious layman and so informed Pastor Grabau. But this development alarmed Grabau very much, because he believed that the validity of the means of grace, particularly absolution and the Lord's Supper, depended upon their being administered by called and ordained clergymen. So he wrote up a "pastoral letter" and circulated it not only among his own people but also among the Saxon Lutherans who had settled in Missouri. This was in 1840.

To Walther and his colleagues, Grabau's pastoral letter was bad news - not because they did not treasure the office of the ministry but because they believed Grabau was claiming too much for this office. For one thing, he was insisting that ordination - the rite of laying on of hands - was essential to making a man a pastor; and secondly, he was claiming for the clergy the exclusive right to excommunicate.

Nor was the question of excommunication purely an academic

one. In fact, even before the departure from Germany, Grabau had suspended from communion a part of his flock (actually Krause's congregation transferred to Grabau's care) on account of some questionable dealings with a ship captain. And in America when no reconciliation proved possible, Grabau issued a bull of excommunication against the group who responded in good Lutheran fashion by burning it.

Accordingly, when Grabau addressed the issue of excommunication in his "pastoral letter," he was writing about a power that he certainly intended to use. In fact, not only Grabau but also Krause unilaterally excommunicated a large part of his congregation. After only a short time back in Germany, Krause had returned to America and by 1841 he had settled in Wisconsin to pastor the Lutherans there. Soon, however, he found himself embroiled in a major controversy with his people over a horse and buggy - whether to rent or purchase one for the pastor - and when he accused some of his members of having reneged on their promise to buy the horse and buggy and they refused to repent, Krause excommunicated them.

In both situations, therefore, Buffalo and Wisconsin, Grabau and Krause had acted on the doctrine set forth in Grabau's pastoral letter. But also in both places complications set in when the excommunicated groups refused to repent but instead to search for a pastor and found one among the Saxon Lutherans, colleagues and associates of Walther, who were willing to accept their call because they believed that these people had been

wrongfully excommunicated. In fact, one of these congregations - the one in Buffalo - became a charter member of the Missouri Synod; and the other in Freistadt, WI, had its case adjudicated in its favor at the first synodical convention.

As you can see, therefore, the controversy between Walther and Grabau involved a great deal more than just doctrine; and once it had begun, it became almost impossible to end it. In fact, it even involved both sides - Walther and Wyneken from the Missouri Synod and Grabau and Von Rohr from the Buffalo Synod - returning to Germany in the 1850's in order to make their case before Lutherans there.

Obviously, the controversy kept right on going after the formation of the Missouri Synod in 1847. Each side traded accusations and sometimes members (at one point, for example, Pastor Krause switched sides and joined the Missouri Synod). Perhaps, however, the climax was reached in 1859, when Grabau's group, the Buffalo Synod, decided to excommunicate en masse the entire Missouri Synod.

Fascinating thought they are, we will not review the details of this controversy which have been recorded elsewhere at length, most notably by Roy Suelflow in the Concordia Historical Quarterly⁶⁷ - and much of my own understanding of all that took place is based on his work. Nevertheless, we need to recognize the dispute with Grabau as the immediate cause of the Missouri

⁶⁷Roy A. Suelflow, "The Relations of the Missouri Synod with the Buffalo Synod up to 1866," *CHIQ* 27(1954): 1-19, 57-73, 97-132.

Synod's adopting an official position on the doctrines of church and ministry in 1851 and of C. F. W. Walther's elaborating that position in his Church and Ministry. As Walther points out in his preface to that work,

We regarded ourselves as compelled to do this especially since Pastor Grabau of Buffalo, New York...has grievously slandered us before the whole church on account of our doctrines of the church and the ministry...Hence, the synodical convention held in...1850 asked this writer to compose the present book. Its contents were presented to the synodical convention, held the next year...either literally or substantially, and after they had been examined and respectively revised, it was resolved to publish the manuscript "in our name and as our unanimous confession."⁶⁸

But what were the particular points at issue in this great debate especially regarding the ministry? For our purposes today, let us single out only two - the relationship between the priesthood of all believers and the ministry and the necessity of ordination. With respect to the first of these, Grabau drew a very sharp line. According to William Cwirla in a recent issue of the Concordia Historical Quarterly,

Grabau distinguished the Office [of the public ministry] from the spiritual priesthood of believers in terms of function. "While the spiritual priesthood of a person is his relationship to the reconciled God, the holy preaching office...is a Stand [i.e., a special rank or class] instituted by God that has to do with the congregation." The spiritual priesthood concerns one's relationship toward God and involves every believer who offers his spiritual sacrifices [to God].⁶⁹

⁶⁸Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 9.

⁶⁹William M. Cwirla, "Grabau and the Saxon Pastors: The Doctrine of the Holy Ministry, 1840-1845" Concordia Historical Quarterly 62(1995): 93.

But the duties of the pastor were a commission from God to the congregation. In other words God had established an office in His church to do certain things for his church, viz., preach the Word and administer the sacraments, and only the clergy were supposed to such things. For Grabau, office and word went together,

The church has since the earliest days believed that for a right distribution of the Sacraments, administration of Absolution, there belongs not only the Word of institution, but also the right divine call and command and institution, so that even if the officiant is evil, nevertheless is the Word of institution powerful because of the office to which the Lord has pledged himself.⁷⁰

Given such a close connection between the means of grace and the office of the ministry in his theology, it is not surprising that Grabau drew the conclusion that if an unordained man should celebrate the eucharist, he would distribute only bread and wine, "In this we are convinced that a man arbitrarily thrown forth by the congregation cannot give either Absolution or the Body and Blood of Christ, but rather gives simple bread and wine, for Christ has pledge Himself to His divine unalterable order and not to our arbitrariness and chaos."⁷¹

⁷⁰Heidt, *Hirtenbrief*, p. 3; Grabau, *Hirtenbrief*, p. 15: "Daher hat auch die Kirche seit den aeltesten Zeiten geglaubt, dass zur rechten Verwaltung der Heil. Sakramente, zur Ertheilung der Absolution, nicht allein das Wort der Einsetzung an sich gehoere, sondern auch der rechte goettliche Beruf und Befehl; und gesetzt auch, die Amtsperson waere boese, so sind die Worte der Einsetzung doch kraeftig wegen des Amtes, zu welchem der Herr sich noch bekennt."

⁷¹Ibid. "Mithin sind wir ueberzeugt, dass ein von der Gemeinde willkuehrlich aufgeworfener Mann weder die Absolution geben, noch den Leib und das Blut Christi austheilen koenne, sondern dass er

If, then, the church is going to avoid ambiguity and doubt or even worse, blasphemy, in her administration of the means of grace, she must, according to Grabau, do so by a properly constituted ministry in her midst. And in connection with constituting that ministry, Grabau insisted upon ordination, i.e., the laying on of hands by those already ordained, an act by which they "hand over to him the office of the church in the name of the Triune God."⁷² This is not to say that Grabau believed in ordination without the call of the congregation. He did not, for the premise of ordination was the election by the congregation of a pastor. However, for Grabau, ordination had to follow as an essential part of the divine institution.⁷³

But now, what about Walther and the Missouri Synod? How did they react to Grabau's contention and what precisely did they find objectionable? Let's consider, first of all, the relationship between the office and the congregation. Walther addresses this in Thesis 6 of his Church and Ministry, "The ministry of the Word [Predigtamt] is conferred by God through the congregation as the possessor of all ecclesiastical power, or the power of the

eitel Brod und Wein gibt; denn Christus bekennt sich zu seiner goettlichen unumstoesslichen Ordnung, nicht zu unserer Willkuehr und Unordnung."

⁷²Heidt, Hirtenbrief, p. 2; Grabau, Hirtenbrief, p. 14: "die...Kirchendiener ...ueberantworten ihm das Kirchenamt in Namen des dreieinigen Gottes, wie der Herr Christus selbst seine Juenger...ordinirt hat."

⁷³Cwirla, p. 95.

keys, by means of its call, which God Himself has prescribed."⁷⁴

There are a number of points to observe about this thesis, the first of them being that God confers this office, not the clergy and not the congregation. Grabau, of course, would not dispute this either; it is, however, a part of our doctrine today that sometimes gets lost, especially when we talk about removing men from office; and in this connection, it is also interesting to note that the synodical founders drew the conclusion from the God-given character of the ministry that calls into this ministry were not to be limited in tenure. In fact, the 1847 constitution specifies as a condition for membership in the Missouri Synod that a congregation agree to "proper (not temporary) calling of the pastors" and also comments that "the so-called licenses which are in use in this country are not given by Synod, because they are against Scripture and proper church practice [emphasis mine]."⁷⁵ What God gives, only God can take away.

Of course, the God-given nature of the ministry cannot be an excuse for incompetent, uncaring, arrogant, or lazy pastors. Quite the contrary, for if God has appointed us to our calling, then it is all the more important that we carry it out in a God-pleasing way. Also in Church and Ministry, Walther and the Missouri Synod maintained that "the ministry is not a special or, in opposition to that of ordinary Christians, a more holy state

⁷⁴Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 22.

⁷⁵"First Synodical Constitution." pp. 3, 10.

...but it is a ministry of service" - service to the congregation, a God-given obligation to bring Word and sacrament to them in season and out. Instead of using a divine call to protect our failings and faults from criticism, pastors need to remember who it is who has called them and before whom they will stand and give an account of the souls entrusted to their care (Heb. 13:17).

A second point to observe about our synod's official doctrine of the ministry is that we do believe that it is a divine institution. Indeed, in Church and Ministry, Walther's first three theses on the ministry emphasize this fact:

1. The holy ministry or pastoral office is an office distinct from the priesthood of all believers.

2. The ministry of the Word or the pastoral office is not a human institution but an office that God Himself has established.

3. The ministry is not an arbitrary office but one whose establishment has been commanded to the church and to which the church is ordinarily bound till the end of time.⁷⁶

In view of such clear statements, it is simply impossible to argue that Walther was a so-called functionalist in his view of the ministry, i.e., that God told the church to do something, viz., preach the Word and administer the sacraments, and that the ministry has simply developed out of this general command to the church. No, there is an office; it is distinct from the priesthood of all believers; and God has established it.

⁷⁶Walther, Church and Ministry, pp. 21-22.

In this regard, Walther's Scriptural proof is interesting, for it includes both Old Testament prophecies of the New Testament ministry, e.g., Jer. 3:15, "Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding," and also New Testament passages that demonstrate "the call of the holy apostles into the ministry of the Word by the Son of God" (Matt. 10; Matt. 28:18-20; and John 20:21-23, among others).

In connection with the call of the apostles, Walther also argues for the divine institution of the ministry since those same apostles "place themselves on an equal footing with the servants of the church who were called mediately as their co-laborers in the ministry." For example, Peter calls himself a fellow-elder to those elders in the congregation to which he writes (1 Peter 5:1) and Paul refers to his co-workers as fellow workers, fellow servants, and fellow soldiers. Clearly, then, Walther views the office of the public ministry as being rooted in our Lord's institution of the apostles.⁷⁷

However, and this too is basic to Walther's thinking, God appoints men to the office of the public ministry today through the congregation "as the possessor of all ecclesiastical power, or the power of the keys."⁷⁸ Here we must remember what we saw

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 177-78.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 219. See also Thesis 4 on the Church (p. 49) in which Walther writes, "It is to this true church of believers and saints that Christ give the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and it is the proper and only possessor and bearer of the spiritual,

yesterday about Walther's doctrine of the church - that he locates the church by the marks, i.e., only where the means of grace are in use, and that means in local assemblies or what we call "congregations." It is Walther's conviction, therefore, that when the Confessions speak of church they mean such local assemblies - not the clergy or some hierarchy apart from the congregation.

And so, Walther cites both the Apology and the Treatise to support this thesis. Significantly, in his citation from the Apology, he cites a passage just following one in which Melancthon has described the church in terms of the faithful, "as the congregation of saints who truly believe the Gospel of Christ and have the Holy Ghost." Melancthon then says (and this is the part Walther quotes), "Neither does the fact that the Sacraments are administered by the unworthy detract from their efficacy, because, on account of the call of the Church, they represent the person of Christ and do not represent their own persons." God's call into the ministry comes through the Church - the believers - not through the clergy per se, at least according to this statement from the Confessions.⁷⁹

Similarly in the Treatise, we read (and Walther cites),

It is necessary to acknowledge that the keys belong not to

divine, and heavenly gifts, rights, powers, offices, and the like that Christ has procured and are found in His church."

⁷⁹Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 220; Ap VII. VIII [IV] (Triglotta, p. 237).

the person of one particular man, but to the Church
[Christ] grants the keys principally and immediately to
 the Church, just as also for this reason the Church has
 principally the right of calling [emphasis mine].

And again,

Wherever the Church is, there is the authority to administer
 the Gospel. Therefore it is necessary for the Church to
 retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers.
 And this authority is a gift which in reality is given to
 the Church, which no human power can wrest from the
 Church....Hence, wherever there is a true church, the right
 to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists....The keys
 have been given to the Church and not merely to certain
 persons.⁸⁰

Finally, in connection with the instrumentality of the
 congregation for God's call into the public ministry, it is
 interesting to note Walther's biblical basis, for in Thesis 6 on
 the Ministry, Walther cites Matt. 18:15-20 and 1 Peter 2:5-10,
 both of which are also cited in the Confessional writings to
 which we referred above. In other words, Walther's understanding
 of the Scriptures comes, at least in part, from the way the
 Confessions use those same Scriptures.

Thus, in the Treatise Melancthon writes

Here belong the statements of Christ which testify that the
 keys have been given to the Church, and not merely to cer-
 tain persons, [Matt. 18:20], "Where two or three are gath-
 ered together in my name, etc."

Lastly, the statement of Peter also confirms this, [1
 Pet. 2:9], "Ye are a royal priesthood." These words pertain
 to the true Church, which certainly has the right to elect
 and ordain ministers since it alone has the priesthood.⁸¹

⁸⁰Walther, Church and Ministry, pp. 221-23; Treatise (Triglotta, pp. 523-27).

⁸¹Triglotta, pp. 523-525.

Is it any surprise, therefore, that Walther uses the same two passages to prove that

Since the congregation or church of Christ, that is, the communion of believers, has the power of the keys and the priesthood immediately..., it also and it alone can entrust the office of the ministry, which publicly administers the office of the keys and all ministerial [priesterliche] functions in the congregation, to certain competent persons by electing, calling, and commissioning.⁸²

But does the congregational character of the call mean then for Walther that every member of the congregation is a pastor? Not at all, for it is through the pastor that the congregation exercises the power of the keys. As we have already observed, Walther's point was not to denigrate the office of the ministry as the means by which the Word is preached and the sacraments administered but instead to demonstrate that when it came to filling that office, the call of the congregation should be decisive.

But even here - in respect to the call - we cannot accuse Walther of pure congregationalism, for he qualifies his teaching in two ways. First, if a congregation already has one or more pastors and is calling another, those incumbents

also of course belong to those calling....Hence, when their cooperation, which behooves them on account of their office, is denied, then there is no longer any call of the "multitude," for then the call is extended not by the [whole] congregation...which, when properly organized, consists of both preachers and hearers.

In other words, Walther seems to be granting to pastors a kind of

⁸²Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 219.

veto power when the congregation is calling an assistant or associate pastor.⁸³

Even more interesting in view of his attitude toward ordination, is Walther's second qualification regarding the right of a congregation to call its pastor. Although he continues to maintain that their call is valid without the consent of other clergy, he insists that a calling congregation "not act alone and according to its own opinion" - which would be pure congregationalism - "but seek the counsel of ministers in office. It should listen to their advice and instruction and concede to them especially the examination and the proper, public, solemn installation of the called [pastor]." Such a procedure, in which vacant congregations act under the advice of other clergy, is demande [erfordert es], Walther says, "(1) by the love and unity that...should exist and manifest itself among all members of His body" - again, notice the absence of a congregationalist spirit - "(2) by the honor that believers owe to the incumbents of the office, and (3) by the sacred character and importance of the matter itself."⁸⁴

Such considerations were built into the first synodical constitution. The business of synod includes "the preparation of future preachers...for service in the church," "to provide for congregations without pastors, if the former apply to the Synod,"

⁸³Ibid., p. 220.

⁸⁴Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 220; German, p. 246.

and "to support indigent congregations who are members of Synod, that they may obtain the regular service of a pastor." Furthermore, the constitution specifies a lengthy procedure for the examination of prospective candidates for the ministry by the "best theologians" of the synod. Clearly, in the minds of its founders, even if the call to the ministry comes through the congregation, other congregations and their pastors have a responsibility to see that the man called "has a thorough understanding of the correct division of Law and Gospel...; also ...is apt to teach; and...is sound in and convinced of the pure confession."⁸⁵

What then of ordination? This was another point at which the Walther disagreed with Grabau, and it is the former's position that became a part of our synod's publica doctrina, "The ordination of the called [persons] with the laying on of hands is not a divine institution but merely an ecclesiastical rite [Ordnung] established by the apostles; it is no more than a solemn public confirmation of the call."⁸⁶

Because this thesis is directed against Grabau who, as Walther saw it, overstated the case for ordination, the thesis is phrased somewhat negatively and so obscures the positive valuation that Walther and his colleagues actually placed on ordination. An apostolic custom that confirms God's call into the

⁸⁵"First Synodical Constitution," pp. 5, 8.

⁸⁶Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 247.

public ministry was no light thing. Accordingly, the 1847 constitution makes ordination a presidential responsibility to be carried out only when the synodical president has determined that the candidate has "received a legitimate call from and to a particular congregation and...has by a previous examination been found to be sound in faith, fit to teach, and beyond reproof in his life."⁸⁷

Furthermore, as William Cwirla points out, Walther and the Saxons did not exactly treat ordination as a pure adiapheron in their debate with Grabau since, when the latter in their view made too much of the ceremony, they did not deliberately avoid ordination but instead continued to insist on it in their midst.

And even in the one case where one of their own, Ottomar Fürbringer, served as a pastor for three years without ordination, they explained it as a case of necessity ("unbaptized children and the like") and not as a matter of indifference.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, in spite of their high regard for ordination, they were unwilling to make it a sine qua non of a valid ministry, and so in Church and Ministry Walther contends that "Scripture does not tell us of any divine institution of ordination; it merely attests that it was used by the apostles," but also Walther freely admits, "Of course, there is no doubt that even today ordination is not a meaningless ceremony if it is connected

⁸⁷"First Synodical Constitution," p. 10.

⁸⁸Cwirla, pp. 95-96.

with the ardent prayer of the church, based on the glorious promises given in particular to the office of the ministry."⁸⁹

As far as the Confessions are concerned, once more Walther has recourse to the Treatise and cites Melanchthon on the origin of ordination, "Formerly the people elected pastors and bishops. Then came a bishop, either of that church or a neighboring one, who confirmed the one elected by the laying on of hands; and ordination was nothing else than such a ratification." Walther even cites that passage from the Apology which permits one to call ordination a sacrament,

If ordination is to be understood as applying to the ministry of the Word, we are not unwilling to call ordination a sacrament. For the ministry of the Word has God's command and glorious promises....Neither will we refuse to call the imposition of hands a sacrament. For the Church has the command to appoint ministers, which should be most pleasing to us, because we know that God approves this ministry, and is present in the ministry. And it is of advantage, so far as can be done, to adorn the ministry of the Word with every kind of praise against fanatical men.⁹⁰

Of course, Melanchthon's point is not that the ceremony is of divine origin but that the office is and so ordination does not create the ministry but, as Walther contends, "acknowledges, attests, and confirms publicly where it has already taken place."⁹¹

In one sense, of course, the debate with Grabau is long

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 248.

⁹⁰Triglotta, pp. 525, 311.

⁹¹Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 248.

since over - and not even the Buffalo Synod exists any more. But the issues raised by that debate persist and perhaps our day and age is even seeing a resurgence of them. Nevertheless, I believe that the historic position of our church as first formulated by C.F.W. Walther still gets it right. The office of the public ministry is God's office to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments for the salvation of sinners. God fills this office through the call of the congregation, and the church as a whole confirms the call by the rite of ordination. What more needs to be said?

We'll find out in Part IV.

Part IV: Helping Offices in the Church

At the beginning of my remarks this morning, I suggested that one reason for a resurgence of debate in our circles regarding the office of the ministry has to do with a confusion in our church over "helping offices," i.e., offices other than that of pastor, and over the correct relationship of these offices to the office of the public ministry. Here too a historical approach may prove helpful. However, one of the things that history shows is that our present confusion goes back a long, long way. So that in the case of helping offices, unlike our doctrine of church and ministry, the synodical history is not quite so clear.

To begin with, we should observe that helping offices, or auxiliary offices as they have usually been known, have a history in the Missouri Synod that also goes right back to the beginning, since Synod's very first constitution makes provision for Lutheran school teachers to be advisory members of synod as were also pastors of congregations that did not belong to synod and candidates, seminary graduates awaiting a call. Both pastors and teachers who were members of synod were required "to pay at least one dollar annually into the synodical treasury." They were dues-paying members. The constitution also indicates that synod would be responsible for maintaining institutions to prepare such teachers as well as pastors and specifies the subjects in which teachers must demonstrate proficiency, including the Scriptures

and the Confessions, "especially the two catechisms of Luther."⁹²

Clearly, the synodical founders valued the office of teacher very highly and viewed it as closely related to the office of the pastor. This is not surprising in view of their experience and practice. Back in Germany, for example, it was typical for a university graduate in theology to teach school or tutor for a couple of years after graduation and before being placed into the pastoral office. This had been almost the universal experience of those who founded the synod. Walther, for example, tutored for a couple of years prior to his ordination; likewise Wyneken before coming to America as a missionary.

And here in America, there were some instances of the same pattern. So, for example, when the institution that today is Concordia Seminary in St. Louis began in 1839, it was as a school for children of all ages and the first teachers were candidates for the ministry, who subsequently were called to be pastors of congregations. Likewise, in Ft Wayne, where Wilhelm Loehe and the Lutheran pastor of that place, Wilhelm Sihler, founded another seminary, my own institution, Concordia Theological Seminary, besides pastor Sihler the first two instructors were "candidates." The first of them left the seminary to become a pastor; the second died of cholera only a few years after arriv-

⁹²W. G. Polack, ed., "Our First Synodical Constitution," *CHIQ* 16(1943): 4, 7, 9-10, 17. For German original, see Die Verfassung der deutschen evangelisch-lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten (St Louis: Weber & Olshausen, 1846), pp. 5-8.

ing in America; but he did attend the first synodical convention where he is listed as a teacher and advisory member. In fact he is the only teacher listed in attendance at the first convention.

But spending a couple of years in the classroom before ordination turned out to be something of a luxury in America in the 19th century. When Wilhelm Loehe first began to train men for the American mission, his plan was to train them as teachers to assist the pastors; but that very quickly changed when the first missionaries reported back that on the frontier what was needed above all was pastors, and so that was what Loehe began to send. There is no evidence that he changed his curriculum very much.⁹³

But frontier conditions did not mean that the church would entirely neglect Christian education, so another pattern quickly developed, one which lasted well into the 20th century and one which continued to bind the teaching office very close to the preaching office; because in many, many congregations pastors also taught in the parochial school. Since it was a condition of membership that congregations make "provision of a Christian education for the children of the congregations" and since among the duties of the ministry "sound catechumen instruction above all" was listed, pastors taught school.⁹⁴

But this situation - that pastors also serve as teachers -

⁹³Heintzen, 25-26.

⁹⁴Dau, Ebenezer, 214.

was never the ideal, and the two offices were always thought of as distinct ones. In 1856, for example, F.C.D. Wyneken, by that time president of the synod, expressed his concerns about the schools in his annual report to the church, "It is unnecessary for me to say that our schools are in need of improvement. Where there are separate teachers, the schools are improving from year to year....[But] it is to be lamented that in most congregations the pastors still have to teach school; and as long as our Synod does not cease to supply every congregation, be it ever so small, with a separate pastor, rather than establish larger congregations with more schools, both the office of the ministry and of the schools will have to suffer."⁹⁵

In order to fill the demand for teachers, some were recruited from Germany, some were privately trained and certified, and some were educated along side the prospective pastors at the two seminaries. By 1855, the Ft. Wayne seminary had graduated 15 teachers. Although a separate teachers seminary was established by Lutheran pastors in Milwaukee in 1854, when the synod adopted this institution as its own in 1857 they relocated it to Ft. Wayne and united it with the pastors seminary, so that the first director of the teachers training program was also a seminary professor. In its first full year of operation, 24 of the 75 students in Ft. Wayne were in training for teaching.⁹⁶

⁹⁵Dau, 213-14.

⁹⁶Freitag, 24-32.

In 1861, however, Synod moved the seminary prep school from St. Louis to Ft. Wayne and the seminary from Ft. Wayne to St. Louis. One result was overcrowding in Ft. Wayne, as a result of which the education program and students had to find other quarters - at first, the attic of a bookstore, which at least sounds somewhat appropriate, but afterwards and for a couple of years an abandoned barn and tavern, which does not sound quite so appropriate. Therefore, in 1864, synod accepted an offer from Zion Lutheran Church in Addison, IL, for property and financial support and moved the teachers training program into their own facilities in Addison, where they remained until 1913 when they moved again, this time to River Forest, IL, where it has evolved into today's Concordia University.⁹⁷

Quite clearly, then, right from the beginning, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod viewed the office of the teacher as being closely related to the office of the pastor and as a necessary one for the well-being of the Lutheran church in America. But it is also true that in minds of Walther and the others there was an important difference between pastors and teachers in the nature of their offices. Significantly, the first synodical constitution is silent regarding calling teachers whereas it is quite explicit about calling pastors. Furthermore, as we have already seen, pastors are to be ordained by other pastors, including the president of synod; but teachers are only to be inducted into

⁹⁷Freitag, 27f.

their office by the pastor of the congregation in which they serve.⁹⁸

Quite simply, the synodical founders considered the office of school teacher different from that of pastor. The latter was a divine institution, established by God in His church; but the former was a Hilfsamt, a helping office, a creation of the church. Once again, synod made clear the implications of her constitution regarding helping offices a few years later when Walther prepared his theses on "church and ministry," since he addresses the question of helping offices in Thesis VIII of the second part (regarding the ministry). In J. T. Mueller's translation, which is the standard one in our synod today, we read, "The pastoral office [Predigtamt] is the highest office in the church, and from it stem all other offices in the church."⁹⁹

One of the not-so-minor controversies today revolves about the adequacy of Mueller's translation of Predigtamt in this thesis as "pastoral office" because it seems to suggest that the pastor of a congregation is the only one who really holds the office.¹⁰⁰ However, in his explanation to this thesis, Walther

⁹⁸Constitution, p. 9.

⁹⁹C. F. W. Walther, Church and Ministry, trans. by J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: CPH, 1987), p. 289. For German original, see C. F. W. Walther, Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt, 4th ed. (Zwickau: Verlag des Schriftenvereins der sep. evang.-luth. Gemeinden in Sachsen, 1894), p. 342. "Das Predigtamt ist das höchste Amt in der Kirche, aus welchem alle anderen Kirchenämter fließen."

¹⁰⁰Regarding this translation, see Kurt E. Marquart, The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance (Ft. Wayne:

identifies the Predigtamt with the office that Christ instituted with the apostles and distinguishes between offices in the church that partake of the ministry of the Word and those that do not but rather support the ministry. Walther writes:

The highest office is that of the ministry of the Word, with which all other offices are also conferred at the same time.

Every other public office in the church is part of the ministry of the Word or an auxiliary office that supports the ministry, whether it be the elders who do not labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17) or the rulers (Rom. 12:8) or the deacons (the office of service in a narrow sense) or whatever other offices the church may entrust to particular persons for special administration [emphasis mine].

Walther then goes on to give examples of such supporting or auxiliary offices:

The offices of Christian day school teachers, almoners, sextons, precentors at public worship, and others are all to be regarded as ecclesiastical and sacred, for they take over a part of the one ministry of the Word [Kirchenamt] and support the pastoral office [Predigtamt].¹⁰¹

Unfortunately, Mueller's translation once again creates some ambiguity regarding the nature of these supporting offices in the theology of C.F.W. Walther, since Walther's original statement in the German language does not say that school teachers, almoners, and sextons take a part of the "one ministry of the Word" - that's Mueller's formulation. Walther says that they

International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), p. 143, notes 72 and 73; and Wilbert P. Gawrisch, review of C. F. W. Walther, Church and Ministry, trans. by J. T. Mueller, in Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly 90(1993): 313-14.

¹⁰¹Walther (Mueller translation), pp. 289-90; original, pp. 342-43.

take a part of the "one ministry of the church [einen Teil des Einen Kirchenamtes]" - and that ministry, "the one ministry of the church," is the subject of the entire thesis about which Walther writes, "When the Lord instituted the apostolate, He instituted only one office in the church, which embraces all others."

Mueller's translation, therefore, obscures the fact that Walther's "all other" church offices fall into two categories - not only those whom the Scripture calls bishops, elders, and stewards, i.e., the ones who have the office of the public ministry, but also "the incumbents of subordinate offices ...called, deacons, that is servants, not only of God but also of the congregation and the bishop." This second category does not include those who have "a part of the ministry of the Word" but rather those offices which "support the ministry of the Word [ein Hilfsamt, das dem Predigtamt zur Seite steht]." ¹⁰²

That Walther intends so to distinguish between offices of the public ministry and offices that support the public ministry is further demonstrated by his citation of the apostolic example in Acts 6. To the apostles God had transmitted the one office of the Church. Its essence was the ministry of the Word but it also included works of Christian love and service toward the widows of the congregation. But when the latter became too much for the apostles, they entrusted that work to others and so established

¹⁰²Ibid.

the office of deacon, not as a part of the ministry of the Word but as an office of service to the congregation and the apostles.

This is Walther's basis, therefore, for concluding that the church can create offices that assist, serve, or help the office of the public ministry so that the Word may have "free course" throughout the church. In other words, God has established the office of the public ministry and God places men into that office through the call of the church, but the church herself may create additional offices to assist that ministry, just as the apostles did in Acts 6.

Right from the beginning, therefore, the Missouri Synod recognized the existence of helping offices in the church. In synod's subsequent history, however, it has not always been so clear as to which offices are "helping" in the strict sense after the example of the Seven in Acts 6 and which are offices of the public ministry. Or to put it another way, which positions in the church belong to the office that God Himself has instituted and fills and which positions are simply and solely the creation of the church?

Consider again the office of Lutheran school teacher in relation to the office of the public ministry. Is it a "helping" office like that of the seven deacons or does it partake of the one ministry of the word? After all, teachers do teach children of the congregation the Word of God; nonetheless, it is also obvious that teachers are not pastors and that their responsibility is strictly limited. Their office is an auxiliary one,

but of what kind?

Quite frankly, the historical record is ambiguous in this regard. John Wohlrabe describes it as "confusion" in his fine study of ministry in the Missouri Synod. On the one hand, as Wohlrabe points out, in 1874 at the synodical convention (and during Walther's second stint as president of the synod), when the question arose whether a teacher could be a lay representative for a congregation, the answer was "no" - which, of course, is still the situation today.

Later, in 1896, synod took steps to obtain a discount for teachers from railroads that offered half-fares to clergymen. After receiving a report that argued that "our teachers are servants of the church and assistants in the preaching office, and as such are entitled to half-fare permits," the convention appointed a committee to negotiate with the railroads and obtain such permits for teachers - which they did for a period of 20 years. In 1920 the issue of discounted fares arose again and several teachers' conferences memorialized synod to list teachers as "assistant pastors" so as once again to persuade the railroads to give teachers reduced rates. Told that it would do no good, synod declined to change the listing; but clearly there was widespread conviction that teachers held an office of the public ministry.¹⁰³

¹⁰³John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., Ministry in Missouri until 1962 (N.p., 1992), pp. 19-20; 1874 Convention Proceedings, p. 79; 1896 Convention Proceedings, p. 133 ("Diener der Kirche und Gehülpen in Predigtamt sind"); and 1920 Convention Proceedings, p. 242.

On the other hand, however, Walther's Church and Ministry lists the school teacher's office as one that supports the ministry of the Word and not one that has it; and in 1874, the official theological journal of the Missouri Synod, Lehre und Wehre, edited of course by Walther, published a set of theses and elaborations thereon, prepared by E. W. Kähler for a joint conference of Ohio and Missouri Synod men, on the nature of the call to carry out specific functions of the pastoral office. In this treatise, Kähler, who would a few years later become Walther's secretary and editorial assistant, addressed the question of whether the offices of elder, sacristan, and school-teacher, among others, "include the carrying out of the ministry of the Word [Predigtamt] in its strict sense." His answer is "not at all [keineswegs]." Such offices are sacred church offices and support the preaching office but are not a part of it.¹⁰⁴

For most of her history, Synod has been able to live with an ambiguous understanding of the school teacher's office, even after the introduction of female teachers at the end of the

¹⁰⁴E. W. Kähler, "Hat die Gemeinde das Recht, ordentlicher Weise einen wesentlichen Theil des heiligen Predigtamtes irgend einem Laien temporär zu übertragen?" Lehre und Wehre 20(1874): 336. Basically, Kähler's argument is that only those offices that exercise the key that opens and shuts heaven, those who preach, hear confessions, baptize, and commune; those who watch over the souls of the whole congregation have the office. The service of teachers is limited to children and assists the parents in educating children. See also Lutheran Standard March 14, 1874, p. 85. For Kähler and Walther, see Carl S. Meyer, From Log Cabin to Luther Tower, p. 66.

nineteenth century, since synod treated male and female teachers differently - the former held an office in the church, the latter did not.¹⁰⁵ However, in more recent years, when offices in the church have begun to proliferate and distinctions between men and women in the teaching ministry have been obliterated,¹⁰⁶ questions have arisen anew about the precise relationship between these offices and the pastor, questions about whether such offices were or were not a part of the one, divinely established office of the public ministry.

One solution to these questions is, of course, simply to obliterate the distinction between helping offices and the office. As long as one represents the Church in preaching, teaching, or sharing the Word with others in some way, shape, or form, he is in the public ministry. Pastor and Sunday School teacher are both in the ministry. Actually, this is the position of the Wisconsin Synod.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵In 1953, for example, synod distinguished between the two this way, "A male teacher is 'called.' He is a 'minister of education.' He is received into the calling congregation by 'rite of installation.' He is an official 'advisory member of the synod.' A woman teacher is 'appointed,' and subject to the conditions of scripture. Her calling differs from that of the male teacher in tenure since 'she is free to withdraw from her professional responsibilities to enter into matrimony.' She is not an 'advisory member of synod.'" Paul Nielsen, "The Role of Women in the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod" (unpublished M. Div. thesis, Concordia Seminary, Ft. Wayne, 1993), p.23.

¹⁰⁶In 1973, synod removed the distinction between men and women teachers as far as synodical membership was concerned. 1973 Proceedings, p. 190. Nielsen, p. 25.

¹⁰⁷Erwin Scharf, "The Call to the Public Use of the Keys" in Lyle W. Lange, ed. Our Great Heritage, 3 vols. (Milwaukee:

Wisconsin and Missouri, though sister synods of the Synodical Conference for about ninety years, long irritated each other prior to the demise of their fellowship over the question of church and ministry;¹⁰⁸ and since the time of the breakup of that Conference, Wisconsin has very clearly articulated a theology of ministry that accommodates itself very well to the contemporary complicated situation. Indeed, it has also proved attractive to some Missouri Synod Lutherans.

Basically, what the Wisconsin Synod teaches is that while God has indeed "instituted the public ministry of the gospel," He has not instituted "any particular form of this ministry, such as the pastorate in a local congregation. Teachers, professors, synod and district presidents, administrators, etc. also receive a divine call into the public ministry no less than pastors. These are all God-pleasing forms of the divinely instituted public ministry." Anyone who represents the church in sharing the Word of God is in this ministry that God has instituted. The Christian day school teacher, even the Sunday School teacher, carry out a "form of the ministry of the Word." In short, the church herself determines the form of the office whereby God's Word is taught and the sacraments administered; and since the form is fluid, the question of "helping" offices becomes far less

Northwestern Publishing House, 1991) 3: 504.

¹⁰⁸Harold Romoser, "The Church and the Ministry" Faithful Word 7, nos. 3 and 4 (Aug. - Nov., 1970): 30-68.

acute than in other circumstances.¹⁰⁹

Very similar in content to the Wisconsin position, if not using precisely the same language, are statements coming from some Missouri Synod sources. In 1981, for example, Paul Zimmerman, former president of Concordia River Forest, concluded that in the New Testament and early church:

There is no evidence that there were exact counterparts to our present parish pastors and Christian teachers....Many kinds of ministerial functions are evident without much said about structure....The emphasis is on getting the Word of God out so it may grow in the hearts of men. There is the necessity of providing the sacraments and of aiding the brothers and sisters in the Christian community. This is the 'ministry.,' This is what is mandated, both in word and by example. Whoever engages in these activities is in the holy ministry.¹¹⁰

What Zimmerman is contending for is very similar to the Wisconsin Synod's viewpoint. God has commissioned His Church to proclaim the Word, but has not mandated any specific form for how that is done. The ministry is really much more "an activity of proclaiming the Word" than it is an office like that of pastor. Teachers, DCE's, youth workers are all in the ministry since the church has commissioned them all in one way or another to pro-

¹⁰⁹John F. Brug, Edward C. Fredrich II, and Armin W. Schuetze, WELS and Other Lutherans (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995), p. 18, and John F. Brug, "Current Debate Concerning the Doctrine of the Ministry," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly 91(1994): 38, 40.

¹¹⁰ Paul A. Zimmerman, "The Lutheran Teacher - Minister of the Church," in W. Theophil Janzow, ed., Perspective on Ministry (n.p.: Lutheran Education Association, 1981), p. 16.

claim the Word of God.¹¹¹

Zimmerman's position is not a new one in the Missouri Synod. According to Wohlrabe again, some of synod's educational leaders had developed this position already in the 1940's under pressure from the government regarding the draft status of male teachers.

Arnold C. Mueller, synod's editor of Sunday School materials from 1933 to 1966, and August C. Stellhorn, synodical executive for Christian day schools from 1921 to 1960, repudiated the concept of auxiliary offices, at least as it applied to teachers.

In 1948, Mueller wrote:

Nowhere in the New Testament is there any mention of auxiliary offices. We might consider the office of the deacons whose appointment is mentioned in Acts 6 as an auxiliary office, but this office was strictly something apart from the ministry of the Word. I am ready to accept the term "auxiliary" for church functions which are an aid to the pastor but do not require proficiency in teaching the Word, but I refuse to apply this term to any servants of the Church who teach the Word, because the very concept is unscriptural....Therefore, to avoid confusion, we should discard the term 'auxiliary office' altogether and speak only of the office of the teacher, just as we speak of the office of the pastor.¹¹²

More than 15 years later in his The Ministry of the Lutheran Teacher, Mueller made the same point and indicated his clear awareness that he was differing with others in the church:

Two views of the ministry have been propounded among us, and they are mutually exclusive; it is an either-or. According to one view, the pastorate is the one divinely instituted

¹¹¹Ibid., pp. 18-19.

¹¹²Arnold C. Mueller, "The Status of the Parochial School Teacher" as quoted in Wohlrabe, pp. 41-42.

office; all other positions in the ministry stem from the pastorate and are auxiliary offices to the pastorate. According to the other view, which I believe is the Biblical one, God has instituted the office of the ministry, that is, He has commissioned His church to proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments, but He has not prescribed the forms in which the church is to fulfill the commission. All forms of the ministry, including the pastorate, stem from the one divinely instituted and all-embracing office of the ministry [emphasis mine].¹¹³

Obviously, A. C. Mueller, an ecclesiastical executive of the Missouri Synod, was championing what we have called the "Wisconsin" position; but as Mueller himself realized, he was taking issue with another point of view, the one usually described as the Missouri position. Over against the fluidity of Wisconsin's "forms" of the office, Missouri's theologians have emphasized the connection of the office of the public ministry to the actual administration of the means of grace in a Christian congregation and have relegated everything else to the category of "auxiliary" or "helping offices."

The Brief Statement of 1932 describes the Missouri position on the doctrine of the ministry this way:

By the public ministry we mean the office by which the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are administered by order and in the name of a Christian congregation. Concerning this office we teach that it is a divine ordinance; that is, the Christians of a certain locality must apply the means of grace not only privately and within the circle of their families nor merely in their common intercourse with

¹¹³Arnold C. Mueller, The Ministry of the Lutheran Teacher (St. Louis: CPH, 1964), pp. 11-12. See Wohlrabe for the development and consequences of Mueller's formulations, pp. as quoted in Wohlrabe, pp. 39-47. James H. Pragman, Traditions of Ministry (St. Louis: CPH, 1983), pp. 170-76, also describes the two points of view in the Missouri Synod.

fellow Christians...but they are also required, by the divine order to make provision that the Word of God be publicly preached in their midst and the Sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, by persons qualified for such work, whose qualifications and official functions are exactly defined in Scripture.¹¹⁴

Although it does not use the term "pastor," the Brief Statement is certainly describing the office of pastor as we experience it in the congregations of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. While it may not be absolutely clear at first whether there are others besides the pastor who are likewise in this one divinely instituted office or whether the category of "pastor" exhausts the office of the public ministry, nearly contemporaneous synodical publications indicate that in the "Missouri" position, the pastoral office is the office of the public ministry.

For example, P. E. Kretzmann of Popular Commentary fame, writing just two years after the Brief Statement was adopted, contended that "the office of the Christian ministry is the only office instituted by God...and that the one office thus established includes all functions of the ministry (also those commonly delegated to auxiliary offices) [emphasis original]" and then went on to discuss those functions in connection with the "scope of the pastor's responsibilities and duties [emphasis mine]." To make it even clearer that what he has in mind is what we think of as the pastor, Kretzmann writes, "A man holding the ministerial

¹¹⁴Brief Statement, par. 31, 1947 Convention Proceedings, p. 486.

office proper is responsible for every soul in the congregation, in teaching, in admonishing, in reproof, in applying the Word to every condition and circumstance of life. In short, the office of the ministry (DAS PFARRAMT) is established by God [emphasis original]." Or again, "the pastor of the congregation is responsible for all the souls of the parish...is in charge of the public administration of the means of grace...is the watchman of the congregation in the Lord's stead [emphasis original]."¹¹⁵

In Kretzmann's formulation, therefore, "the duties [of this one office] are plainly fixed in Holy Scriptures"; but Kretzmann also argues that the church has the freedom to create auxiliary offices, the duties of which are determined by the congregation or synod that has created them; and as examples of these offices, Kretzmann lists the following positions often found in a congregation: Christian day school teacher (male or female), Sunday School teacher, elder or deacon, deaconess, and even assistant pastor. He also lists extra-congregational positions: professors in church institutions, presidents of synods or districts, missionaries and directors of missions, chaplains and spiritual heads of hospitals, superintendents of church societies, and students acting as supply preachers.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵P. E. Kretzmann, The Doctrine of the Call with Special Reference to the Auxiliary Offices in the Church, Paper presented at the Arlington Convention of the Northern Nebraska District of the Missouri Synod, August 20-24 (N.P.), pp. 5, 6, 8, 13.

¹¹⁶Ibid., pp. 10, 12.

Kretzmann's attitude toward auxiliary offices is almost as fluid as Wisconsin's "forms of ministry"; however, in contrast to the Wisconsin position, the Missouri position, as Kretzmann expresses it, insists upon the divine institution of the pastoral office and none other. New Testament passages refer specifically to God's giving pastors to the church (Acts 20:28 and Eph. 4:11), indicate the spiritual oversight that is entrusted to them (Acts 20:28 and Heb. 13:17), prohibit anyone from serving as a public minister without a call (Rom. 10:15), and indicate specific qualifications for their ministry (I Tim. 3). From this perspective, the pastoral office is not simply one form among many, but the form that God has instituted.

Kretzmann's understanding of the synodical position was hardly unique. John H. C. Fritz, in his Pastoral Theology, equates the office of the ministry with the pastoral office and contends that "according to Scripture the Christian congregation is completely constituted when it has established the office of the ministry by having called and gotten its pastor." Similarly, J. T. Mueller, in his Christian Dogmatics, contends that "the public ministry is a divine appointment or ordinance" and equates it with the "pastoral office" which is supreme in the church and, quoting Luther, argues that it lays the foundation for other offices, including that of teachers.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷John H. C. Fritz, Pastoral Theology (St. Louis: CPH, 1932), pp. 28-32, 309; and John T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: CPH, 1934), pp. 566-69, 580.

Finally, it is also worth noting that the Missouri position still has its advocates. Just a couple of years ago, my own colleague at Ft. Wayne, Prof. Eugene Klug, investigated this question once again on the basis of Walther and Luther and concluded "that the office of the called pastor is the distinctive office God has instituted for the sake of the church's continuance in the world [emphasis mine]." Like Kretzmann, Klug argues that all other offices of the church are auxiliary offices which the church herself creates, "They devolve from a felt existential need, and are created in Christian liberty to be of assistance to the pastoral office." As examples, Klug offers "the assistant pastor, vicar, parochial school teacher, elders, deacons, professors at synodical institutions, district and synodical presidents and other officers." Such offices may carry out "divinely ordained or instituted functions....But the particular form, structure, or polity under which the congregation or group of congregations employs or structures them is a matter of Christian liberty [emphasis original]."¹¹⁸

Significantly, in order to bridge the gap between the two sides in the Missouri Synod, there have been efforts to broaden the concept of the office of the public ministry beyond simply that of parish pastor. For example, another of my colleagues, Prof. Kurt Marquart, in his contribution to the Preus dogmatics

¹¹⁸Eugene F. A. Klug, Church and Ministry: The Role of Church, Pastor, and People from Luther to Walther (St. Louis: CPH, 1993), pp. 268-69.

series leaves room for others besides pastors to hold the office of the public ministry, such as professors of theological faculties and perhaps even congregational catechists but not parochial school teachers. The late Dr. Robert Preus himself also argued persuasively on historical grounds that theological professors were in the public ministry, since they were called to be teachers of God's Word to the entire church. And in 1981, Synod's Commission on Theology argued in its "The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature" that district presidents, seminary professors, campus pastors, and military chaplains are all "properly said to be serving in the office of the public ministry of the church." In this connection it is interesting to note that in the proceedings of synod's very first convention, the professor of the Ft. Wayne seminary, August Wolter, is listed as an advisory member along with the pastors of congregations that did not at first join synod.¹¹⁹

Clearly, there is some sentiment in the Missouri Synod today for distinguishing between auxiliary offices that are strictly "helping" offices and do not exercise an essential part of the office of the public ministry and those offices that do exercise an essential part of the ministry even if they are not the office of pastor. This may well be what Walther had in mind in his

¹¹⁹Marquart, pp. 122, 141-44; Robert D. Preus, The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy (N.p.: Luther Academy, 1991), p. 16-17; and The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature (N.p.: Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LCMS, 1981), pp. 21-22; and 1847 Convention Proceedings, p. 6.

Thesis VIII in Church and Ministry; and the Kähler theses of 1874 do seem to make use of this distinction, but still in a congregational setting, to argue that an assistant pastor has the full office but a school teacher, a sexton, and the like do not.¹²⁰

Of course, by this time, if there is really anything at stake in this matter of helping offices - besides doctrinal clarity that is, which of course is not an incidental consideration in and of itself. In addition, however, there are some very practical concerns involved in this matter as well. On the one hand, if we insist upon the strict Missouri position that only pastors have the office of the public ministry, how is it that we permit, indeed, expect, all kinds of non-pastors to preach and to administer the sacraments in our congregations. Synodical officials, theology professors, missionaries - what are any of these doing in the pulpits of our churches if they do not have the preaching office? How is it that they can be asked routinely to substitute at a communion service or visit and commune the sick if they are not in the office of the ministry?

Many of you are, I am sure, familiar with the principle, "Lex orandi, lex credendi" - the way we worship determines our faith and doctrine; but this in turn is simply a specific application of a broader principle, "Lex agendi, lex credendi" - what we do in the church generally determines our faith and doctrine. By the Augsburg Confession, we agree "that no one should

¹²⁰Kähler, pp. 267, 336.

publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called." In the light of Augustana XIV, our common practice of permitting any ordained clergyman on the roster of synod to preach and to administer indicates an implicit belief that all such are "regularly called" to do so. They may hold "auxiliary offices" in the sense that they are not parish pastors, but nonetheless to carry out these sacred tasks, they must also be in the office of the public ministry if we are following our Confessions.

On the other hand, since our practice is not consistent, neither will our doctrine be consistent. For we also act as if such offices were simply the creation of the church. Temporary calls, contracts, hiring and firing, resignations, term limits, none of which practices are appropriate for a divine institution, are commonplace with respect to all of these offices. But if an office is truly a divine institution, we believe that God places men into it as the Scriptures attest in Acts 20:28 ("the Holy Ghost has made you overseers") and Eph. 4:11 ("And He gave some pastors and teachers"). This, in turn, means, really, that only God can remove those who hold the office from their offices. What He gives He must take away.

As we have already seen, the synodical fathers insisted, as a condition of membership in the Missouri Synod, that calls into the ministry "be proper, not temporary ones." In his Pastoral Theology, Walther explained:

For if God is really the One Who calls preachers, the congregations are only the instruments for separating the persons for the work to which the Lord has called them (Acts 13:1). The preacher stands in God's service and office, and no creature can dismiss God's servant from God's office unless it can be proven that God Himself has dismissed him from office (Jer. 15:19; see Hos. 4:6), in which case the congregation is not really dismissing the preacher but is only carrying out God's clear dismissal.¹²¹

But besides pastors, who in the Missouri Synod has a permanent call? Certainly not theology professors or synodical officials. But is this correct? Are we accepting the consequences of our theology (lex credendi, lex agendi) or is expediency the order of the day? And by being expedient, can we expect any other result than a change in our doctrine (lex agendi, lex credendi)?

One of the ironies of this whole discussion is that, according to Wohlrabe, A. C. Mueller and A. C. Stelhorn initiated their attack on the old Missouri view of the ministry in order to elevate the status of the Lutheran school teachers. By obliterating the distinction between auxiliary offices and the office of the ministry, they hoped to give the teacher a status more comparable to that of the pastor.¹²²

One could argue, however, that what actually has happened

¹²¹C. F. W. Walther, Walther's Pastoral Theology that is American Lutheran Pastoral Theology, trans. by John M. Drickamer (New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, Inc., 1995), pp. 26-27. For Walther's original, see C. F. W. Walther, Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie, 5th ed. (St. Louis: CPH, 1906), p. 41. For the constitutional requirement, see Die Verfassung, p. 5, and Pollack's translation, p. 3.

¹²²Wohlrabe, p. 40.

over the last generation is that of the status of the teacher has not gone up but the status of the pastor has certainly gone down; indeed, both offices seem to receive much less respect than they did at first. Of course, we can hardly attribute this decline exclusively to our confusion over "helping offices" in the church; but discussions that treat pastors and Sunday School teachers as having but different forms of the same office certainly have not helped the situation any more than have ecclesiastical policies that permit parish preachers, theological teachers, eucharistic ministers, and ecclesiastical supervisors to be summarily dismissed from their posts, whether by mandatory retirement, refusing to renew contracts, or by being voted out of office.

But prestige and status are ultimately rather minor considerations in the Church, since what we are after is faithfulness to our Confession, faithfulness to the Word of God. In terms of the present situation regarding helping offices, that will mean carefully analyzing what it is that we are asking office holders actually to do and then creating policies that fit the theological reality. It may very well be that some of the unordained offices, as for example, Director of Christian Education, more properly belong with the ordained clergy because of their responsibility for one or more of the essential elements of the public ministry. The opposite may also be true. But in any case, we need to apply biblical principles that maintain the office God has instituted and that permit the Church to create other posi-

tions that assist that one Gospel ministry.

As much of my presentation yesterday and today suggests, I like to think that many of our problems today in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod can be answered by referring to the past and especially to the theology of C.F.W. Walther. But I suppose that that is really a form of romanticism on my part - a kind of occupational hazard for church historians, I guess - since it is also abundantly clear that Walther developed his ideas in particular concrete situations that are not the same as our own. Thus, history can take us only so far. On the one hand, I certainly hope is that our time together these past two days has helped to clarify the issues regarding church and ministry that are present in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod today and to indicate either their origins in the past or, better, how it is that our founders, especially C. F. W. Walther, dealt with them. In other words - and this, I believe, is what church historians are actually supposed to do - as we address these issues today we can do so in the light of the past experience.

Theology, of course, is a kind of conversation between fellow Christians as we try to understand and apply God's Word. What I hope we are now better able to do is to include in our theological conversation not only our contemporaries but also our forefathers, for they too have wrestled with issues of church, church fellowship, the office of the public ministry, and the nature of Lutheranism, all of which are on the ecclesiastical agenda again today. We owe it to them as well as to ourselves to

hear their voices as well as our own, for when they speak from the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions to these or any other issue, they really do have something to say.

Thank you very much.