



C.F.W. Walther - Model Preacher

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C.F.W. WALTHER--MODEL PREACHER

Last year when I was vicaring, it didn't take me very long to realize that my sermons were lacking. The extra efforts I put into making the text vivid did in some way pay off, I'm sure. It's not as though I don't know what's in Preaching the Gospel either. And, let me say up front: the principles we learn in our homiletics classes form a solid foundation for preaching sermons. Personally, I doubt if we could learn any better principles anywhere else. But, one can sense from a congregation when illustrations are entertainment more than they are educational helps. One can also sense from a congregation when applications are irrelevant, or what's worse, when either law or gospel has been applied incorrectly.

Probably most student preachers have the same or similar experiences. It is little comfort for a preacher to know that he is no worse than his peers. Nor is it much comfort to hear people say: making the text live, making applications relevant, preaching law and gospel correctly--all these come with experience. I will admit that in general experienced preachers do these things better. Too often, however, I have heard experienced preachers fail to penetrate my heart! So, the hope of experience is not much consolation either! If I'm going to be a preacher, I'm going to be speaking to my fellow Christians in behalf of God! I don't want to see looks of confusion. I don't want to see people's eyes wandering off in all directions out of boredom. I don't want to see either anger or smugness on a face because I said the wrong thing to the wrong person at the wrong time.--Not if I can help it! Waiting indifferently for experience is no help for the matter.

I think it is only natural for a student to ask: how does a good preacher do it? Of

course, before anyone can answer that question he has to ask: who do I know that is a good preacher? Listen to these commendations: "a very forceful and successful preacher;" "a preacher who commanded attention," (Fritz, 743,748). "His speech takes on a liveliness that is seldom seen in the Lutheran church;" "One listens from beginning to end with greatest joy;" "He is a deep inward preacher, living completely in Jesus. So his teaching is completely practical. It is moved by the needs of the congregation;" "He is as correct in form as a university preacher but as popular as Luther himself;" "a very modern man; in any time period he would have found the right word, according to the faith and love that are in him, to speak to the hearts and consciences of his listeners," (Broemel 137,138). Such commendations are backed also by fact: eight published sermon books! Finally, of all those who have written sermons resembling the type that we are taught to write, one name stands above the rest when it comes to the proper preaching of law and gospel. These commendations belong to C.F.W. Walther.

Of such a preacher I say with much historical backing: he is a model preacher. There are many model preachers, though. Stoeckhardt's sermons are models of penetrating thought. The sermons of Walter A. Maier, Sr. are models of timeliness and illustration. One might find a model for text division in Hoenecke's sermons. Many sermons have something to commend them. After reading many of Walther's sermons, however, I have come to the conviction that they are the model for beginning preachers. Why do I say this? What follows are three major advantages one will find in Walther's sermons.

I. Lively Exposition of the Text

Every preacher's goal in exposition is to make the text alive for the listener of today. To do this his exposition must be true, simple, and affective. In this area Walther is a model, for his way of expounding a text does all three.

In the first place, his exegesis of a text is very thorough. I say this, however, not because he presents to the congregation a thorough exegesis, but because he presents to the congregation a finished exegesis. There is a big difference.

The preacher who presents a verse by verse, thought by thought, or word by word rundown of a text has definitely studied his text. His presentation of it, however, often leaves the impression that he is not sure what it all means. He presents the text piece by piece because, lacking his own conclusion, or not knowing how to connect the thoughts of the text, he wants the congregation to make the conclusion or connect the thoughts for him. You will not see this approach in Walther's sermons. One knows that Walther has done his homework, and has done it thoroughly, because he presents the conclusion of that homework, and has elevated one thought to be expounded, while others have been put into the background in one relation or another to the main thought.

Because Walther does thorough study, his exposition of the text is, in the second place, simple. One main thought threads through each part.

Finally, his exposition is affective. He expounds the one remaining thought in a way that sounds not at all like a commentary. Walther strives to reach the heart at all times. You will not find Walther often answering the question: What does the text say? Instead you will find him answering the question: What does this concept mean in everyday, practical terms?

A typical Walther exposition, then, looks as follows:

1. Narrow the text, or narrow the concept. (This usually in some way involves a use or summarization of those parts of the text not in focus, and leads up to:)
2. Question, or aim of that part of the sermon (a question to be answered by that part of the text in focus). (What question is asked flows out of the relationship of the emphasized to the non-emphasized part of the text.)
3. Reading of that portion of the text to be used.
4. Simple conclusion which restates that part of the text on which Walther wishes to focus.
5. Explanation of what that portion of the text means to everyday life.

For an example, consider a sermon on Romans 12:1-6 for the first Sunday after Epiphany. Walther's theme is: Concerning A Few Important Duties, Which Christians Have As Spiritual Priests. Each part focuses on one duty of the Christian, as a spiritual priest. Part one, dealing with verse 1, states: In View of God, That They Sacrifice Themselves.

First, Walther takes the two concepts which he will not be emphasizing, "God's mercy" and "reasonable worship," and blends them together with the concept of a priest. He starts out by saying, "To be a priest of God Almighty is the greatest honor and blessing of which a created being can take part." After describing specific blessings, he moves on by saying, "As great as the honor and privilege to be a priest of God is, so great also are the duties which a priest of God has." A priest's chief duty is to offer sacrifices. In fact, there is no such thing as a priest who does not offer sacrifices.

From this point Walther easily transitions to the aim of part one which is a question about New Testament priests: "Of what, now, consists the offering which a Christian as a spiritual priest is bound to offer to God?"

The apostle shows us: "I urge you, dear brothers, through the mercy of God, that you offer your bodies as that sacrifice which is living, holy, and pleasing to God, which is your reasonable worship."

Then Walther restates that part of the text which he wishes to emphasize, the one which answers the question: "From this we see: Christians, unlike the priests of the Old Testament, do not have as offerings young bulls," etc. "The spiritual priests of the New Testament are to offer to God their 'bodies,' that is, themselves according to body and soul, with all that they have and are." This conclusion Walther feels no need to prove. He has just summarized what the concept of a living, holy, God-pleasing sacrifice is. Note: he does not explain or illustrate each adjective. Instead he summarizes. That takes work!

Now, Walther is ready to expound the text, i.e. that portion of the text which he has brought to focus. One cannot help but to notice that Walther has led his hearers away from the question, Are you sure that is what the text says? He has simply told them what the text says. He treats his hearers as Christians, as people who accept wholeheartedly what the Scriptures say. The important question which he wants to expound for his Christian hearers is this instead: What does this mean in every day terms? Therefore, after stating that his simple conclusion applies to all Christians, he asks, "But will you say, how can a Christian sacrifice himself?"

He first offers a summary of his answer (again, this took work). "I answer: This a

Christian does first when he daily and hourly by the power of the Holy Spirit strikes and kills, that is, fights against and suppresses, all evil which is in and near him; and when he lays at God's feet whatever good thing he has."

Walther then makes specific applications of this truth which further define what the text says, but in terms applicable to his hearers:

"When you, as often as you notice in yourself a lust of the eyes, that is, a dependence and love for the earthly, or greed and materialism, and seek hastily to free yourself from it; when you, as often as you notice in yourself a lust of the flesh, sensual pleasure, a craving for pleasure, a love for a life comfortable to the flesh, and you endeavour to root out this desire in you; when you, as often as you notice in yourself the pride of life, that is, a longing after your own honor, a desire for your own praise, pride, arrogance, haughtiness, self-pleasure, and you are diligent to rip this weed [Unkraut] out of your heart; in short, when you have daily been diligent to be free of all your sins, even if they were very dear and pleasing to you; when you strive also to become free from all sinful desires, activities, and thoughts: then, and only then, are you living before God as a spiritual priest, who sacrifices himself.

"Still it is not enough that a Christian only seeks to kill within himself the evil, he must also lay at God's feet the good things which he has. When you seek after this, that all you are and have serves God's honor; when you so live as though your body were not your own, but God's, and as though your soul were not your own, but God's; when you so live as though your members, your senses, and your powers of body and soul are not for you, but are given to you for God's sake; when you so live, that you look at all your goods as God's goods, which you must apply to his glory; when you are ready to hand over everything which is dear and pleasing to you, so that they may serve for God's honor--your honor and good name, your joy and rest, your friends and relatives, your wisdom and skill, yes, your blood and life, in short, everything; when your one last goal, your one last purpose, your one last wish in all your living and thinking, speaking and doing is that you bring something to the praise of God; when you wish, like the holy Augustine, to be a light which is consumed while shining in God's service: behold! then you have sacrificed yourself to God."

There is here, certainly, much exposition of the words, "a sacrifice which is living, holy, and pleasing to God." The exposition, however, does not consist of vague illustrations or abstract definitions, but of examples in a list which one is moved to feel is complete. All of

it, however, relates to the point, the one general conclusion which Walther drew from the text. At the same time, Walther related it to his own hearers; he layed it all on their hearts.

There are many, many such examples from Walther's sermons. And, almost always they follow this same pattern. Consider the following exposition of a gospel concept in a sermon for New Year's Day on Galatians 3:23-29. Walther's focus in this text for this special occasion is not the role of the Mosaic law in the Old Testament, nor Baptism, nor the unity of the faith, but a concept which runs through the whole text, the drastic difference in the life of unbeliever and believer. Theme:

Why Can and Should the Believing Christians among Us Today Enter Even the New Year with Praise of God?

1. Because today in looking back on the past year they find nothing but reasons to praise God.
2. Because also in looking forward to the coming year they have nothing else to expect but subjects of God's praise

Part one spoke of the reasons to praise God for the past year. The exposition of part two is as follows:

"Yet, my beloved, the believing Christians among us can and should today enter also the New Year with praise of God, because also in looking forward to the coming year they have nothing else to expect but subjects for God's praise.---

"Men, in whose hearts is no faith, are already amazed when it is demanded of them to praise God for a year already past, since they are simply glad that, with its troubles and deceptive hopes, they have overcome it; but they are even more amazed, yes, it seems to be foolishness to them, when one desires from them that already beforehand they should praise God for a coming year. Then they say: Why should I praise God when I do not know what will happen to me? Who can know, whether I will be more ill or more healthy in the new year? whether I will become richer or poorer, whether I will come upon more good or more evil, whether I will experience more suffering or more joy, whether I will live or die? See from this how unhappy a man is who has no faith. He is, in the midst of his outward blessings, like that man who sat down, to be sure, at a full table, but over whose head an unsheathed sword hung by a

hair. He goes through the world as with blindfolded eyes and is not for a moment sure whether or not he with the next step will be thrust into a grave of temporal or eternal misery. He is glad at New Year's to enjoy the moment which he has, for his insides tell him that the next moment may not be his. The creed of such an unhappy man sounds like this:

I live and know not how long,
I die and know not when
I go and know not where:
It is a wonder that I am happy.

How blessed, on the contrary, are you believing Christians! You can turn this creed around and say:

I live and know well how long,
I die and know well when,
I go and know, praise God!, where:
It is a wonder that I am still sad.

For every glorious thing which our New Year's text promises to the believing Christians, and what you have already experienced among yourselves in the old year to be divine truth--that is the golden, never wavering basis of your hope also for the new year.

Yes, you believing Christians, you can, to be sure, look into the future only as little as the children of this world, but if you only look into the Word of God, then you are looking with this heavenly telescope into the heart of your heavenly Father and there you also read your future. What do you read there? Nothing, except what invites you to praise God.

In the first place, you surely do not know whether in the new year you will become poorer or richer; but this you do know: in times of need you will not be lacking, for God says in his Word: "Therefore you should not worry and say, 'What will we eat? what will we drink? what will we wear? After all these things the heathen strive. For your heavenly Father knows that you are in need of all that. Strive first after the kingdom of God and after his righteousness; then will all these come to you."

Furthermore, you surely do not know whether in the new year you will experience more suffering than joy; but you know this: you have a God who is your Father, without whose will nothing can happen to you, who already from eternity has weighed out all your sufferings and joys; who is the guide, who holds you by your right hand and will guide you according to his counsel; who is the watchman of his believing Israel, who, when you sleep, will neither sleep nor slumber, and whose eyes, when you have closed your own, will remain open over you; and what is the greatest, your God is at the same time your merciful Savior, who wants to save you. Whatever may come against you in the new year therefore, in everything will God have thoughts of peace concerning you; never will God intend it for evil with you; all will be a road on which God wants to lead you to salvation; everything, be it health or illness, be it honor or shame, be it suffering or joy, everything, everything will serve you.

for the best, and however great the burden is which God will lay upon you, he will also help you carry it.

Furthermore, you surely do not know what temptations and trials to your faith and to your love await you; but you know this: although your faith is weak, yet God does not want to extinguish the flickering wick, nor break the bruised reed; although your heart is vacillating, yet God's covenant of grace stands firm forever, for he has said, "Mountains shall indeed give way and hills fall, but my grace shall not give way from you, and the covenant of my peace shall not fall." Yes, although you, looking entirely to yourself, must completely despair of your stability, yet you know: God wants to carry out to the last day the good work which he has begun in you; and your Savior says: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give to them eternal life; and they will never perish, and no one will tear them out of my hand."

Finally, you also surely do not know whether you will end the new year as you did the past year or whether you will die; but you know this: "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord; if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, if we live or die, we are the Lord's." If you live, you will live in the faith and see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living; if you die, you will die reconciled with God and your death will be an end to all need and a beginning of eternal glory."

The power, logic, and depth of Walther's exposition is impressive. It is easy to see, however, why Fritz feels compelled to offer the one criticism of Walther that he does. He writes: "No preacher has been perfect and beyond improvement, neither was Walther. A fault that must be found with Walther's preaching is that his sermons were not always textual," (748). Fritz says that part of the blame may be due to the pericopal system. And, one can certainly understand how the constant use of the same text would lead a preacher to look for new ways to preach it. I'm not so sure, however, that one should so freely criticize Walther's sermons for not being textual. At least, when I looked at the one example that Fritz cites, a sermon on John 2:1-11, it seemed to me that Walther simply had a narrow emphasis in mind that he wanted to show in this text on that certain day to that certain group of people. I didn't

find anything in the sermon that wasn't true. Walther preached about the honor of marriage from a text that mainly concerns a miracle of Jesus. Nevertheless, marriage is in the text, and Jesus honors it with his presence and his miracle. I can't conclude from this that Walther's sermon wasn't textual. It simply brought out from the text a point which is less significant. Perhaps the situation at the time called for such an emphasis from that text. If so, it simply points to Walther's pastoral heart, a point which leads us to the next reason why Walther is for students a model preacher.

II. Relevant Application

Exposition of God's Word forms the basis for all application. Without solid exposition a preacher really offers little reason for his hearers to do whatever he is calling upon them to do. Finally, though, the purpose of a sermon is to apply the Word to people today. It seeks to give them what is most needed at the time.

There is a superabundance of material in the Bible for a preacher to apply, all of which is beneficial for one purpose or another. Pericopes help narrow the field of what a preacher will apply to his people on a certain day. But, still a preacher is faced with choices. What do I emphasize? What do my people need?

The Reformed preachers of our day like to preach how-to sermons. The pietists and revivalists of Walther's day also liked to preach sanctification sermons. Walther, in stark contrast to these, preached predominantly God's grace. No doubt, he preached God's law

strictly and powerfully. But, he preached with the aim of moving hearts, and to do that he knew he had to marvel his people with one thought--how gracious God is. Rarely, it seems, did Walther preach a predominantly didactic sermon, i.e how-to. When Walther preached sanctification, it usually was based on the question: what does God's grace call us to do? In other words, his aim was not so much to teach how to do God's will, in the sense of programmed sanctification, though he necessarily had to teach the principles, but his aim was to move people to do God's will. Nor was his aim to teach people how to be blessed, but in telling people who is blessed and who isn't, his aim was to spark desire for the blessings God gives. Walther always preached to the heart. In this way he shows us today what people really need in sermons--not so much food for the head, but food for the heart. How then does one preach to the heart, to the soul's need?

If one is preaching through a pericope, as most or all of our students will, one begins with choice of topic. In our way of preparing sermons I would say that this first comes in when we decide on the preaching values of a text. Beginning there one moves eventually to theme and parts. It is interesting to look through Walther's sermons at the themes. For our day they are often too long and too often framed in the form of a question. One gets an idea, however, of the preaching values Walther saw in his texts. Walther consistently looked for things that moved Christians to hold firm to the faith, whether that be saving faith or saving doctrine. So, for example, in a sermon on John the Baptist's confession concerning Christ, John 1:19-28, for the fourth Sunday in Advent, Walther chooses the theme:
Concerning the Denial of Christ
1. In what ways one can deny Christ
2. Why one should not let anything move him to do such things

Or compare this theme on Matthew 8:23-27 for the fourth Sunday after Epiphany, especially

parts one and three:

Christ's Boat on the Galilean Sea--A Picture of the Church of Our Time

1. A picture of the dangers in which she floats
2. A picture of the members which she has
3. A picture of the shelter under which she stands

Likewise, this theme on Matthew 20:1-16 for Septuagesima Sunday:

To What Must We Above All Hold Firm, If We in the Doctrine of the Election of Grace Want to Stray Neither to the Right nor to the Left

1. That, according to the Scriptures, whoever is lost is not ordained by God for this, but is lost through his own fault
2. That, according to the Scriptures, whoever is saved, is saved not through any merit of his own, but from pure grace

And, this theme on John 15:26-16:4 for the Sunday after Ascension:

How Perverse and Sinful It Is When One Relies on His Mere Good Intention

1. With good intention the greatest sins are committed
2. Through the good intention which one has are these sins in no way excused or at all justified

When Walther was not looking for things to bolster firmness, he was searching for things to arouse a true Christian joy, or praise of God. Compare first of all the theme on Galatians 3:23-29 for New Year's Day, found above. But, also this one for Isaiah 62:10-12 for Midweek Advent:

What Should Arouse Us to a True Christian Advent Joy?

1. That Jesus even now comes to us all
2. That he comes to us in grace

At other times Walther was looking for things to arouse true Christian virtues. For example, his theme on Luke 6:36-42 for the fourth Sunday after Trinity:

What Should Move Christians to Mercy toward Their Erring, Sinning, and Thirsty

Neighbors?

1. The mercy of God which they enjoy
2. The severe retaliation which they expect
3. Their own shortcomings with which they are afflicted

Or, this one on 2 Corinthians 12:20-21 for the Annual Common Day of Repentance:

Why Do We Also Have Good Reasons Today on Our Annual Day of Repentance to Humble Ourselves Most Deeply in True Heartfelt Repentance

1. Because also our congregation in every good thing which God has worked in it is still always spotted with so many sins before God
2. Because also we must fear that there are still many members among us who still have not always truly repented for their old sins

Still, Walther did in the final analysis also seek to educate his people, when he felt

they needed it. On the twelfth Sunday after Trinity for 2 Corinthians 3:4-11 he has this theme:

Concerning the Distinction of the Law and of the Gospel

1. We want to meditate on this distinction according to the guidance of our text
2. We want to consider what this meditation calls us to do

Notice that even here Walther wants to arouse his people to Christian duty.

Always Walther's themes are powerful calls either to faith or Christian virtue. Always his themes seek to give Christians solid reasons to be active in the faith.

Because Walther wants to speak to the heart he always avoids subjects which are too intellectual. Everything he says is designed to be practical. This does not mean that he therefore avoids doctrine; this means rather that he preaches doctrine--not dogmatics, but doctrine as one would find it in Luther's catechism. One would have an easy time fitting almost every conclusion Walther draws from a text somewhere into the catechism. I will point first of all again to the sermon on Galatians 3:23-29, where Walther, to arouse praise,

holds up the basic teachings of the three articles of the Apostles' Creed. Also consider the sermon on Isaiah 62:10-12. What are the doctrines he teaches there?--the simple doctrines of universal justification and the declaratory nature of justification. The first is evident from the basic outline. Here is what you will find in part two of that sermon:

Yet, my beloved, even more will our Advent joy be aroused when we consider that Jesus comes not only to us all, but also comes to us in grace; for Isaiah continues: 'His reward is with him, and his recompense is before him. They will be called the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord; and you will be named the sought and unabandoned city.'

This especially doesn't seem necessary to be considered; for isn't it self understood that Jesus, when he comes into the heart, comes in grace? Yes, so it is; but in life we have experiences which often want to lead us astray.

Namely, if we hear the word of the Gospel and accept it with our weak faith, then Jesus surely comes into our heart, but so often we feel the opposite of that, or the joyful perception of the Savior's nearness very soon disappears. We often perceive thereby nothing else except that Jesus is far, far from us; it is nothing else to us except that God's wrath always rests upon us.

Therefore we should know: if we only with heartfelt longing receive the word of Jesus' grace, then he certainly is in us in grace, even if we were not at all to perceive this grace.

See, in this way Isaiah speaks about it in our text: 'His reward is with him and his recompense before him'; we should be satisfied with this, that Jesus has the reward and the recompense with him, even if it seems as though it is not with us. Furthermore Isaiah says: "They will be called the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord; and you will be named the sought and unabandoned city"; therefore even if we experience nothing of the holiness and redemption given to us and also do not feel the gracious indwelling of our Savior, yet we should be comforted in faith with this, that we are by God called holy and redeemed and are by God graciously named visited; for the gracious justification is not an infusion of righteousness, but a divine speaking or declaration of righteousness.

Of course, as straightforward as these doctrines are, they mean nothing unless they are applied to people who need to hear them. Walther had a way of finding just the right malady for these teachings, and so finding and pointing out just the right people to whom to apply them. In part one of this same Isaiah sermon in which he emphasizes the doctrine of universal

justification, he divides his appropriation into three parts:

'Behold, your salvation comes.' This I should now call out to every one of you. O, what a powerful invitation to joy for each one of us! For, look, according to this you may be whoever you want; if you hear God's Word, then you are called; also to you therefore comes your Savior. Rejoice, therefore, you in poverty! Think not that you are too insignificant, too lowly, too despised; among men there is indeed a respect of persons; men indeed think of you as insignificant when you have a low rank, and are poor and miserable; there you lose your human joy soon, and hardly a great, rich, or esteemed man wants to cross your threshold or be your house guest; but your Jesus is not so minded; the house of your heart is just as dear to him as the heart of a king; your simplicity is just as dear to him as another's cleverness, your poverty as dear as another's wealth, your misery just as dear as another's happiness, your lowliness as dear as another's greatness; yes, the lower you appear in your own eyes, the more dearly Jesus wants to come and stay with you. For so it says in the 57th chapter of our prophet: 'This is what the great and exalted one, who dwells eternally, whose name is holy, says: I am he who dwells in the heights and in the holy place, and among those who have a shattered and humble spirit, so that I might quicken the spirit of the humbled and the heart of the shattered.' Therefore, you who are poor, be glad this day: 'Behold, your salvation comes!'

And you sinner, you who until now have loved your sin more than Christ and his Word, think not that Jesus goes past you. Do not anymore add to your sins this one, that you lose heart and despair. Do not yourself sidestep your Savior, for see!, as I speak to you the Word of the living God, 'Your Savior comes!', then Jesus truly comes to you, yes, he now stands before the door of your heart. Your sins do not hinder Jesus in any way from coming to you, but your sins even entice him to also come and stay with you, for he is a Savior and friend of sinners. It is sinners who he seeks out, sins he goes after. For their hearts his faithful heart longs most seriously. He abandons the ninety nine safe ones and seeks the lost. He therefore also seeks you, yes even you who know that you are entirely lost; believe it and rejoice.

But also you, listener, you who perhaps now think in silence: Jesus was already once in my heart, but I have lost him again, I have driven him away from me by my sins; I have thrown his sweet bonds away from me; I have sunk into the cares of subsistence and the desires of the earth; oh, I must simply admit it: Jesus has already often turned back for me, but I have always told him again to go and have not let this precious guest into my soul, and now I cry often in silence that he has left me forever.--Poor man, know that Jesus does not grow tired of returning to the house of your heart, if only you are not tired of taking him in. Only speak a word; only sigh in your heart: 'Come, come again to me, my Jesus; see, my heart is open for you!' O, how hastily he will answer your sighing! Yes, 'Behold,' Isaiah says to you, 'Behold, your Savior comes.' Be glad and rejoice with all Christians: He is here again; he again

reigns in my heart with the power of his grace; now I will grab him and hold him firmly, that he may be with me eternally.

Note again how Walther perfectly matches each detail of the Good Friday text, Matthew 27:31-54, with its corresponding malady:

After God shed his own Son's blood on the cross for our sins and let him die, so can and may no man anymore doubt that God wants and will receive him, if he returns to him. Or what could there be which could or might still fill him with fear? His sins? They are paid through an immeasurable price, through the blood of God's Son. Or God's wrath? He is indeed reconciled through the blood of his own Son. Or God's threats in the law? They indeed in the cross on Golgotha are lifted up and changed into pure promises of grace and salvation. As surely as in Christ's death the earthly sun lost its light, so surely has thereby the true Sun, the Sun of grace and righteousness risen over all men. As surely as after Christ's death the graves opened up and the dead came forth, so surely was Christ's death our death's death and the source of eternal life now streaming toward us. As surely as in Christ's departure the rocks trembled, so surely in this moment was the manuscript of all men's guilt torn to shreds by the hand of God himself. As surely as in Christ's death the curtain in the temple ripped and the holy of holies with the mercy seat was made public, so surely is the entrance to the mercy seat of God, yes, in the heavenly holy of holies, now for all men wide open. Now can and should all messengers of God call to all men: Come, come, be reconciled with God! You should not first ask: how shall I reconcile him, the most Holy One, whom I have offended?--It has already happened! God is reconciled, gloriously, perfectly, forever, for all reconciled. Oh, now you also be reconciled with God!

What a beneficial exercise it would be for a student preacher to find the malady-remedy pairs in Walther sermons! He would not only find a ton of them, but would also in the process learn how to apply specific gospel, and how to distinguish one aspect of justification from another in sermon writing.

A preacher may present the clearest, most interesting exposition of a text, and may find just the right subjects to speak about, and still ruin a sermon's effect or turn away listeners

if he does not know how to apply law and gospel in their proper place. At this Walther was the master, and so I offer what is the greatest reason for the thesis that Walther is a model preacher for students:

III. Proper Application of Law and Gospel

Walther's lectures, The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel, is a popular book among us. I would venture to say that most students are very familiar with at least the concept of each of the twenty-five theses. Already in my first year at Northwestern College, in a Basic Doctrines course, I remember Prof. Sellnow giving us a handout which addressed the problem of accusing Christians of sins they have not committed.

Unfortunately, thesis III of Walther's lectures is all too true: "Rightly distinguishing the Law and the Gospel is the most difficult and the highest art of Christians in general and of theologians in particular. It is taught only by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience."

This statement seems a bit negative to me, but I believe it wholeheartedly! Only God can train a preacher to be truly evangelical. However, Walther gave his lectures for a reason, and they have produced their fruit. They have been a gift of God to us. In the same way Walther's sermons are a gift of God to us, because there he illustrates vividly, he gives a concrete presentation of what it means to preach evangelically.

I would like to point out three things from Walther's sermons which I think are not so obviously stated in his lectures. This by no means is meant to be a complete list of

evangelical principles derived from Walther's sermons. That list would take a lifetime, I believe.

First, from reading Walther's sermons, a preacher sees how much he can expect from believers or unbelievers. An example of this has already been given in the sermon on Galatians 3:23-29, pp. 5-6. There Christians are described as people who believe God's Word. Walther always assumed this when referring to a Scripture passage and when expounding his text. What is notable, however, is how Walther so quickly addresses his congregation as blessed Christians, and without any hesitation completely separates them from the unbelieving world. An unbeliever questions whether or not God should be praised. A believer not only has every reason to praise God, but knows that he does. Part one of that sermon makes this clear: "What then? Should also you believing Christians think to have no reason to praise God when you look back on the past year? O, that is impossible! You rather in your looking back find nothing except pure reasons to praise God." A preacher is to address Christians always as people who already have God's blessings, and have the ability to enjoy God's blessings. I haven't seen in any sermons where Walther treated faith or the life of faith as something which is difficult. Instead, he immediately opposes any trial that might come up in a Christian's life with a sure promise of God. He trusts that the Word has the power to strengthen a Christian, no matter what trial he may be facing. Yet, Walther does not generally admonish his Christians because they struggle. He asks them if they are struggling, if they are in need, then he applies to them the gospel medicine.

Similarly, Walther never treats a Christian as if he is not able to obey God's law. In

fact he calls them to a strict obedience. In the sermon on Romans 12:1-6 (see p. 6), he portrays the Christian's life as a spiritual priest as one demanding a sacrifice of everything that one is and has. The difference, however, between Walther and a Pharisee is that Walther demands that the heart be given to God. This is how he continues that Romans sermon after having defined the strict duty of the spiritual priest of the New Testament:

You will surely say: Oh, who can ever in this life do so much! Who will not often be overcome by his evil heart! I answer: It is very true: a Christian never in this life does so much that he is entirely offered to God. Until his death he has his flesh and blood to fight. But just this is a sign that a man is a Christian, a spiritual priest, that he strives after it; he chases after it without ceasing; therefore with prayer and God's Word he daily wrestles and fights to become always more a complete offering to his God. Such a one is a Christian, although not perfect, yet not dead, and the sacrifice which he offers to God is therefore a living and holy and for Christ's sake a God-pleasing sacrifice. Such a Christian has the earnest, sincere will to sacrifice himself completely to God, therefore God accepts this will of his in Christ as though it were the deed itself.

Similarly, when Walther describes the life of unbelievers he again goes after the heart, the attitude. Here is an example from a free text sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: "All therefore, who strive to become rich or to become famous, or to acquire a comfortable, carefree life, they all without exception still live for themselves in this world."

The second thing I have gleaned from Walther's sermons is how to deal with the dual nature of a Christian. Despite the stark contrast Walther paints between unbelievers and believers, he still knew that believers have an old Adam. Sometimes preachers, in order to provide a reason to preach the gospel, will cast everyone under one big blanket of condemnation. "We are all sinners through and through," etc. Walther, however, was very

careful to keep the old man and the new man in a Christian separate. To solve the dilemma of speaking to a person with a dual nature Walther would use the third person when describing sins. (Compare the quote just mentioned from the 2 Corinthians sermon.) In a similar manner when he was getting ready to apply remedy to malady during applications, he would use the second person pronoun, but would qualify it with a description of the particular malady in mind, "You who," etc. (Compare the sermon on Isaiah 62:10-12, p.14). In general, Walther tended to use the third person until he had shown that a conclusion applied completely to a certain group of people.

This leads me now to my third observation: one of Walther's most basic rules of evangelical preaching, and perhaps the very first rule, was that a preacher must either teach or motivate before he can expect the appropriate response. He says as much in his Pastoraltheologie, p. 81:

a. The didactic or the use [of Scripture] for teaching is the very one which the holy apostle placed before all others. It is also the most important of all. It is the foundation of the other four uses. A sermon may be ever so rich in admonitions, rebukes and comforts, if it is thereby without teaching, then it is yet an empty, scrawny sermon, of which the admonitions, rebukes and comforts float as if in the air. There is not enough evidence to say how many preachers or how much there is sin in this connection. Hardly has the preacher touched his text and subject when already he begins to admonish or to rebuke or to comfort. His sermon consists almost of nothing but questions and exclamations, beatitudes and woes, invitations to the testing and preparing of mind and conscience, so that the hearer, always gripped in mind and conscience, can come to no restful deliberation at all.

This, I'm sure, is why Walther speaks in the third person in the way that he does. Then again, this principle seems to run through everything that Walther does in his preaching. This is why

one finds so many sermons answering the question why. Walther wants to fill his listeners with reasons or motives for living to God. He wants to fill them with reasons for rejoicing in God. This evangelical principle is also why Walther expounds the text the way he does. He doesn't want to bore his people. He wants to give them a reason to listen. Therefore, as in application he is always striving to answer the question, who cares?, in exposition he is always striving to answer the question, so what? The evangelical preacher always strives to provide a basis or a reason for everything he asks his listeners to do.

Conclusion

Because of his evangelical attitude toward his listeners, and because of his painstaking labor at both studying and preaching Scripture, Walther may be the most powerful preacher that our day and age may ever have the opportunity to meet. I'll admit that he is not as popular as a Spurgeon or a Billy Graham. For that matter, as a preacher he may not even be as popular today in our circles as Walter Maier or even Stoeckhardt. But, I'd be willing to match his sermons against anyone's for overall fundamental quality. Student preachers who still need to be grounded in the basics can especially find value in Walther's sermons.

It is a pity then that hardly anyone today is able to read him in German. His diction, and the beauty of his language, as Fritz says, cannot be fully appreciated otherwise (748), and this is what would motivate a student to write out his sermons in full as Walther always did. It might be even more a pity, however, that so few know of his works in English. One may find

in our library a complete translation of both the Old Standard Gospels and the Standard Epistles, translated by Donald E. Heck and published by Concordia Theological Seminary Press in Ft. Wayne.

Yes, there are some areas of Walther's preaching which are not so exemplary. His introductions, conclusions, and wording of basic outlines are not good for our day and age. One cannot always rely on him to have the most fitting emphasis, even if one does happen to find that he is preaching on a text that Walther preached on. There are times too when Walther seems to be repetitious in the use of wording. Perhaps he even falls into a rut when it comes to form. Then again, our catechism uses a pattern when it comes to presenting doctrine. Maybe Walther's patterns are necessary in order to teach doctrine correctly or apply law and gospel appropriately.

Given whatever defects his sermons might have, Walther I believe is still the best preacher from whom to learn the fundamentals of how to preach. Once a preacher has learned the fundamentals, and only then, he will do well to learn other specifics from preachers who specialize in various arts. It is from Walther, however, that one may best learn the art of preaching law and gospel, and preaching them with power.

WALTHER'S SERMON BOOKS

Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille (1882) Epistles

Amerikanisch-Lutherische Evangelien Postille (1870) Gospels

Casual-Predigten und -Reden (1892) Free texts

Das Walte Gott!--Ein Handbuch zur Taeglichen Hausandacht (1900)
Devotions extracted from sermons

Festklaenge (1892) Festival texts

Gnadenjahr (1890) Gospels

Licht des Lebens (1905) Gospels

Lutherische Brosamen (1897) Festival & Free text sermons and
speeches

Predigentwuerfte (1891) Festival & Free text sermons, speeches,
and outlines

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Fritz, J.H.C. "Walther the Preacher," in Concordia Theological Monthly 7:743-748 (1936)

Walther, C.F.W. Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille. St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1882

----- Amerikanisch-Lutherische Evangelien Postille. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1870

----- Amerikanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie. St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u.a. Staaten, 1872

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----- Lutherische Brosamen. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1897

SERMONS SURVEYED

Isaiah 60:1-6	(1878)	Epiphany	<u>Epistel</u>
Isaiah 62:10-12	(1844)	Midweek Advent	<u>Casual Predigten</u>
Matthew 21:1-9		Advent 1	<u>Evangelien</u>
Matthew 22:15-22		Trinity 23	<u>Evangelien</u>
Matthew 27:31-54		Good Friday	<u>Evangelien</u>
Luke 2:1-14		Christmas Day	<u>Evangelien</u>
Luke 7:11-17		Trinity 16	<u>Evangelien</u>
Luke 16:19-31		Trinity 1	<u>Evangelien</u>
Luke 23:27-48	(1846)	Good Friday	<u>Epistel</u>
John 16:23-30		Rogate	<u>Evangelien</u>
Acts 2:1-13	(1852)	Pentecost	<u>Epistel</u>
Romans 12:1-6	(1850)	Epiphany 1	<u>Epistel</u>
2 Corinthians 5:14-15		Free text	<u>Brosamen</u>
Galatians 3:23-29	(1850)	New Year's Day	<u>Epistel</u>
Ephesians 4:22-28	(1841)	Trinity 19	<u>Epistel</u>
Philippians 4:4-7	(1881)	Advent 4	<u>Epistel</u>
Revelation 21:1-5	(1845)	Kirchweih	<u>Casual Predigten</u>
Revelation 21:1-5	(1856)	Kirchweih	<u>Casual Predigten</u>