

# Foreword to Volume 106: Recovering Walther

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I don't believe it is necessary to present evidence that the doctrine of the ministry has been the most debated and the least resolved of all of the controversies of American Lutheranism. That should be clear to anyone familiar with the history of American Lutheranism. In this article we are concerned in particular with the debate within the synods that made up the Synodical Conference. In recent years participants in the ministry debate have spent much time and energy on trying to enlist Luther and the church fathers of the early Missouri Synod and early Wisconsin Synod as their allies in the battle. For this reason, it is perhaps worthwhile to comment on the use of the fathers in this debate and on the way in which they (and Walther in particular) can help us find a way out of our present morass.

August Pieper, one of the protagonists in the middle phase of the long-lived controversy over ministry,<sup>1</sup> offered this suggestion to the churches:

Walther's chief work was that he purely "repristinated," or better "reproduced" both of these doctrines [justification and church and ministry] from Luther and the confessions and brought the majority of the Lutheran church in America to recognize them. That assures him of a place among the greatest theologians of the church and gives him a claim to the thanks of all who love Zion. ... The on-going discussion among us concerning church, synod, and discipline calls each one of us urgently to study the doctrine of church and ministry anew. For this study Walther's classic book [*Church and Ministry*] is the most convenient and best pre-school.<sup>2</sup>

Ten years later Pieper, who himself had been a student of Walther at St. Louis and was now an outspoken defender of what some called the "Wisconsin view," wrote:

We have that one man, Walther, to thank for the greater share by far of all that we have. Wisconsin contributed much less, though its contribution is not insignificant. And it is up to us of Wisconsin to point that out. ... In magnitude and importance Walther's work is less than Luther's only to the extent that Luther's was less than Paul's.<sup>3</sup>

The others were all directly or indirectly his students. Three years in St. Louis were enough to make one a Waltherian in doctrine and love.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear from these statements that the intersynodical controversy over ministry never involved being for or against Walther's view. It was about determining what his view really was. The assignment that Pieper suggested for the church in 1912 would be a very valuable undertaking today. To that end perhaps we can suggest both some guidelines for this study and some specific topics for exploration.

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<sup>1</sup> The first phase was the controversies raised by Stephan, Grabau, and Loehe in which Walther himself participated. The middle phase was the debate between professors of the St. Louis and Mequon (Thiensville) seminaries, which began in the early 1900s and was never fully resolved. The third phase is the present problem with a resurgence of romanizing views on the one hand and of views denigrating the divine institution of the pastoral ministry on the other hand (roughly corresponding to the views of Grabau and Hoefling respectively).

<sup>2</sup> *WLQ*, 1912, Review of Walther's *Church and Ministry*, p 36, 40.

<sup>3</sup> *WLQ*, 1923, "Anniversary Reflections," p 233-234.

<sup>4</sup> "Anniversary Reflections," p 245-246.

## Guidelines

1. *We cannot make the study of the fathers (including Luther and the Confessions) a substitute for the study of Scripture.*

As a thoroughly scriptural theologian Walther fully endorsed this principle. The accusation that he himself did not follow this principle is not fair. During the tumult that arose among the Saxons as a result of Stephan's departure, Walther went back *ad fontes* and on the basis of Scripture, Luther, and the Confessions, he underwent a rather drastic change in his position. It is true that in his dogmatic works he often briefly listed passages without fully expounding them, but he was assuming familiarity with them as the necessary starting point.

Although August Pieper and his colleagues offered some mild criticism of Walther's tendency to slight exegesis in favor of citations from the fathers, his former students and their successors, nevertheless, tried to explain and, in part, to justify Walther's practice of relying heavily on citations from the fathers in his controversies with Grabau.

In fairness to Walther it should be remembered that the Missouri Synod had been accused that its doctrinal position on the church and its ministry, and its church polity established on that position, were un-Lutheran. Thus Walther's book aimed to show that both Missouri's doctrinal position and its polity were indeed Lutheran and were in accordance with the Lutheran understanding of the Scriptures as set forth in its confessions and in the writing of its orthodox teachers.... Walther's book was to squelch the suspicion that the Missouri Synod was introducing American democratic ideas into church government....

Walther's method of argumentation must therefore be recognized as being fully consistent with the goal which he had set for himself. According to the very title of his book of 1852, it was to set forth "the voice of *our church* on the question concerning the church and the ministry."<sup>5</sup>

The reason that we accept the views of Walther as correct and see those of Grabau, Loehe, and Hoefling as in part erroneous is not because we have any romantic attachment to Missouri's early history, but because we have compared Walther's position to Scripture, Luther, and the Confessions and found Walther's position in the debates to be correct in its essentials.

It obviously goes without saying, however, that any valid study of Walther has to be preceded and followed by study of Scripture as the only norm of doctrine.

2. *We must be careful that we do not rip either the fathers or their words out of their historical context.*

The writings of Walther were shaped by and addressed to the controversies occasioned by Stephan, Grabau, and Loehe. Walther emphasized the rights of the local congregation over against the authority of the German state-controlled churches and against the abuse of pastoral authority by Grabau and Stephan. We need to keep this historical context in mind so that we do not read ideas into Walther's theses on the church and ministry which Walther did not express. When we examine Walther's treatise in light of its historical setting, we can see that his treatise was not intended to be the final word on every aspect of the church and ministry question. The preface of the 1852 edition states:

It could, of course, not lie within our intention to present the doctrine of our church in its entirety concerning the church and its ministry. Whoever wants this will find it in the larger dogmatical works of the teachers of our church, among others in the masterful works of a Chemnitz and a Gerhard.<sup>6</sup> It can only be our concern to set forth those points concerning which difference has arisen and to carry along only as much of what is not controverted as becomes necessary to keep the matters in context.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> C. Lawrenz, *WLQ*, Spring 1982, p 105-106.

<sup>6</sup> Much of this material is in the ministry section of the Baier-Walther *Compendium*, which Walther used as his dogmatics text.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Lawrenz, *WLQ*, Spring 1982, p 87.

When we read the writings of Walther and his co-workers, we must be careful to keep in mind the specific historical circumstances in which they were writing and the specific questions which they were addressing, so that we do not misapply passages by using them to answer questions which the authors were not addressing.

3. *It is important to learn the view of Walther from his works in their entirety, not from brief statements apart from their supporting context. It is also important to consult the original German texts.*

Just as it is not sufficient for pastors to study isolated proof passages in the Catechism, it is not sufficient for us to rely on secondhand or third-hand quotations of parts of Walther's theses. Too often Walther's theses have been cited without a careful reading of all the supporting quotations and notes which follow. It is necessary to read sections in their entirety, not in abridgments.

The English versions of some of Walther's major writings are problematic at times due to inadequate or slanted translation. The most serious problem is the translation of *Predigtamt* as "pastoral ministry" even in passages in which it has a wider meaning.<sup>8</sup>

In J. T. Mueller's translation, which was widely used in the Missouri Synod, Walther's Thesis VIII reads, "The pastoral office (*Predigtamt*) is the highest office in the church, and from it stem all other offices in the church."<sup>9</sup> Mueller's translation of *Predigtamt* in this thesis as "pastoral office," which implies that the pastor of a congregation is the only one who really holds the office of the ministry, is wrong according to Walther's own explanation of the thesis. In his explanation to this thesis, Walther says that the *Predigtamt* that Christ instituted contains other offices besides the office of pastor. He also distinguishes between offices in the church that exercise a part of the ministry of the Word and those that do not use the Word but do support (stand at the side of) the ministry of the Word. Walther writes:

The highest office is that of the ministry of the Word (*Predigtamt*), with which all other offices are also conferred at the same time. Every other public office in the church accordingly is *part of the same or a helping office* that supports (stands beside) the ministry of the Word (*Predigtamt*), whether it be the elders who do not labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17) or the ruling office (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 added]<sup>10</sup>

Though Walther is sometimes inconsistent in his use of terms, he here distinguishes two kinds of auxiliary offices that stand beside the comprehensive office of pastor: those that are *part of* the ministry of the Word and those that *support* it but are not a part of it.

4. *We must not confine ourselves only to Walther's one work, Church and Ministry.*

His other works, such as his dogmatics textbook and his periodical articles, are seldom studied. Key to the understanding of his view is the Walther-Baier *Compendium* which he used as his dogmatics text. We hope to publish significant parts of this chapter in this volume of the *Quarterly* and make the rest available online.

5. *We must recognize the development in Walther's thought.*

In the earliest phases of the controversies Walther was re-exploring *terra incognita*. Luther had walked this path before, but Luther's clear scriptural understanding of church and ministry had largely been clouded by the state church mentality in Europe. Walther had to work his way through the issues afresh as they arose. We have the advantage of standing on his shoulders.

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<sup>8</sup> A fuller treatment of this topic can be found in Lawrenz, *WLQ*, Spring 1982, or *WELS Compendium* II, p 465-520.

<sup>9</sup> "Das Predigtamt ist das höchste Amt in der Kirche, aus welchem alle anderen Kirchenämter fließen."

<sup>10</sup> Walther, *Church and Ministry*, trans. by J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: CPH, 1987), p 289-290. For German original, see Zwickau edition, p 342-343. Regarding this translation, see Marquart, *The Church*, p 143, notes 72 and 73; and Wilbert P. Gawrisch, review of the Mueller translation in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 90 (1993), p 313-314.

A second problem is that Walther's writings do not always speak consistently on the issues at hand, at least in the terminology. He does not always use terms consistently. In light of subsequent controversies and misunderstanding we can see the need to distinguish terms more clearly. (We should reiterate, however, that most of this unclarity is due to his statements being taken out of their context.)

6. *We must recognize that Walther delegated much of the writing of key responses to co-workers. The Missouri ministry was a team, though there was no doubt who the captain was.*

Here we note an important fact for anyone who wants to get an understanding of Walther's doctrine of the ministry. Walther often had one of his associates write the key article on a topic on behalf of the group. Walther then endorsed the article. The initial response to Grabau was written by Loeber, the key articles on forms of ministry by Kaehler and Stelhorn, and the key article on the ministry of teachers by Selle. There are also many unsigned articles that are probably by Walther. Virtually all of *Lehre und Wehre* and *Der Lutheraner* must be searched for evidence of Walther's position.<sup>11</sup>

7. *We must be careful that we do not get bogged down in terminological confusion.*

New controversies often require clarification of terms that had been adequate during previous discussions but are now misunderstood. The chief terminological problem in Walther's writing is that though he sometimes uses *Predigtamt* in a wide sense to refer to all ministry of the Word, at other times he uses *Predigtamt* as a synonym for *Pfarramt*, pastoral ministry. There is no confusion of thought about this in his writings, but misunderstandings may arise if we read sentences out of context. *Predigtamt* is first of all the activity of proclaiming God's Word.

The German word *Amt* is not limited to an office or position held by an incumbent. It often refers to a task or action, or, if you will, a function. It appears that confusion about this word *Amt* had developed already in Walther's day even among native speakers of German since Walther warned against misreading the Confessions on the basis of this confusion. This tension was present in everyday German where *Amt* often means *Werk* rather than *Posten*. In commenting on the word *Amt* Walther says,

I hope these comments on language will convince the kind reader or strengthen him in the conviction that great caution is necessary in coming to conclusions concerning the doctrine of the Lutheran church on the ministry as found in the Confessions when looking at our individual symbols in which the words *Amt* (office), *Predigtamt* (preaching office), and *Schlisselamt* (office of the keys), etc., are found. And I will add (I hope it will convince him) that the presumption must be that where the word "office" occurs in such texts, it is being used in the simple sense of a "commissioned work" (*aufgetragenen Tuns*) without any other additional meaning because this alone is the essential idea of office in the use of the German language as we have proven above.<sup>12</sup>

In "Church and Ministry" he states that *Predigtamt* in Augsburg Confession V is not concerned with ministry in the concrete or the *Pfarramt*, but rather in AC V the topic is the *Amt in abstracto* through which God gives the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup> After presenting further citations from the confessions, Walther concludes as follows:

This is an important matter, because of those who make the *Pfarramt* into a means of grace and equate it with the Word and sacraments, and who assert that this office would be absolutely essential to each person for salvation, so that a person without the service of an ordained *Pfarrer* can neither come to faith, nor can receive absolution for his sins. But our church teaches this necessity only in regard to the spoken or physical (*mundlich und leiblich*) Word in opposition to a supposed inner Word and to every type of enthusiasm. Nevertheless, our *Grundbekenntnis* in the 5<sup>th</sup> article gives testimony for the divine institution

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<sup>11</sup> See the bibliography.

<sup>12</sup> *Lehre und Wehre* 7 (1861), p 295-296. English in Nispel, p 10.

<sup>13</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt* (4. Aufl.), Erlangen 1862, p 198. Page numbers will be different in different printings, for example, in the 1911 Zwickau edition, it is p 194.

of the *Pfarramt*, even if only indirectly, as all of the commentaries of our orthodox theologians concerning this article clearly show.<sup>14</sup>

Walther found this abstract use of *Predigtamt* in other passages of the Confessions as well.

In this passage of the Apology it was remarked in passing that one can also recognize very clearly what those of old frequently understood by office of the ministry (*Predigtamt*), namely, that they often took "office of the ministry" as entirely synonymous with "gospel." The Apology does not have Grabau's understanding according to which the office of the ministry (*Predigtamt*) is always equivalent to the office of pastor (*Pfarramt*). ...No, when our old teachers ascribe such great things to the office of the ministry, they thereby mean nothing else than the service of the Word (*den Dienst des Wortes*) in whatever way (*Weise*) it may come to us.<sup>15</sup>

The Lutheran church could have been spared much grief and frustration if people had remembered and heeded Walther's advice about *Predigtamt*.

### Topics for Discussion

What are some important topics that could serve as starting points in recovering Walther?

1. *Perhaps the most important task is to clarify the understanding of the terms Amt and Predigtamt in Walther's writings, as suggested above.*
2. *Another key task would be clarifying Walther's understanding of various forms of ministry and auxiliary offices.*

Here the most important issue is his distinction of two kinds of auxiliary offices: those that are part of the ministry of the Word and those that are not a part of it but support it. Of those offices which are part of the ministry of the Word, consideration should be given especially to three forms of ministry: ruling elders, preaching deacons, and teachers.

### Ruling Elders

The role of lay elders or ruling elders (we might call them councilmen) became a matter of controversy when Walther re-established the office of lay elder in the Lutheran congregation after it had largely disappeared in Europe because of the state church system. Walther was accused of adopting Reformed (i.e., Presbyterian) practice and opposed by C. P. Krauth<sup>16</sup> among others. Walther defended lay elders as sound biblical and Lutheran practice in a series of articles in *Lehre und Wehre* in 1858.<sup>17</sup>

In this dispute, Walther distinguished such "lay elders" or "ruling elders" from pastors and taught that they should not take up pastoral duties under normal circumstances. By calling some elders "lay elders" Walther was acting on the assumption that there are some other elders who are not laity (that is, the pastors) who also may be called "elders" on the basis of scriptural terminology. Walther produces citations from the Lutheran dogmaticians in support of his position that there are two kinds of elders in Scripture, teaching elders and ruling elders.

The task of responding more fully to Krauth's statement against Missouri's position fell not to Walther but to F. W. Stellhorn. Stellhorn argues that all pastors are elders, but not all elders are pastors.<sup>18</sup> The defense was developed at length by E. W. Kahler in *Lehre und Wehre* Volume 20.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Walther, p 199. Zwickau edition, P 195.

<sup>15</sup> "The True Visible Church," in *Essays for the Church*, I, p 102.

<sup>16</sup> A summary of this debate is provided by Albert Collver, "Lay Elders: A Brief Overview of Their Origin in the Missouri Synod, Implications for Elders Today," *Concordia Journal* January 2006, p 38-53. The history in this article seems to be a fair summary, but some of the conclusions of the author are questionable.

<sup>17</sup> "Über Laienälteste oder Gemeindevorsteher," *L&W* 4-2, p 54-57, *L&W* 4-3, p 82-89, *L&W* 4-4, p 110-113.

<sup>18</sup> "Dr Krauth und Laienälteste," *L&W* 21-4, April 1875, p 104-112.

The most important verse in question here, however, is 1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially [μάλιστα] those who labor in word and doctrine." Here two classes of elders are put forth. There are those who labor in word and doctrine and occupy the ministry of the word in the narrow sense. There are also those with whom this is not the case whose ministry was different, namely, which was for the ruling of the congregation introduced for the censure of morals and the preservation of discipline in the church, Romans 12:8.<sup>20</sup>

### Preaching Deacons

Walther taught that offices that assist the pastor with the ministry of the Word are *part* of the one ministry of the Word. They are *within* the ministry of the Word. They are not auxiliary offices in the same sense, for example, that the office of deacon in Acts 6 was. This is best illustrated in an article from *Der Lutheraner* in which Walther castigates Grabau for arbitrarily dismissing a preaching deacon from his church.<sup>21</sup> Grabau defended his action by claiming this was really no big deal since the deacon was not part of the ministry of the Word. Walther sharply rejects this claim by pointing out that there are two kinds of deacons: 1) those who are not part of the ministry of the Word but only in a helping office like those deacons in Acts 6, and 2) those deacons who have taken up a part of the ministry of the Word. Walther says:

The so-called deacons and lay elders of the apostles' time were, as was already suggested, in no way preachers and overseers of souls. They were rather only their helpers for functions of the preaching office which do not make up the essence of the office. Indeed, their functions too were commanded by God. But that these should be carried out only by particular people in an office is not based on God's express command. Their office as a special and separate office from the preaching office was also not a divine order and institution but rather an office ordered by the church (*kirchlicher Ordnung*). ...

It was an entirely different circumstance however when in a congregation more than one were installed who in every way (*allerseits*) had the office of the Word. In this instance they all had the same divine office established by Christ, the same spiritual and ecclesiastical authority. It was only a matter of human order (*Ordnung*), when they either divided certain functions of the office or the care for certain parts of the people among themselves. Likewise when they chose one from among themselves to whom the others submit themselves freely and according to human right or also when a whole group of ministers of the church (*Kirchendiener*) labor in the word in one congregation and continuously submit themselves one to another. ...

This also applies then to the distinction between a pastor and a senior of ministers, a president, a superintendent, a dean, a head pastor (*Oberpfarrer*), or whatever they may be called who are set over one or more preachers.

### Teachers

Walther and the majority in the Missouri Synod believed that the teacher was serving in the ministry of the Word in a way analogous to that of a preaching deacon. This position was summarized in an article by E. W. Kaehler, in *Lehre und Wehre*, Volume 20.

The school diaconate takes a middle position between the teaching ministry of the teaching elder and the above diaconate insofar as laboring in doctrine is one of its chief duties. But its ministry is confined only to a part of the congregation even if it is the most precious part. On the other hand the teaching presbyter is a bishop, that is, an overseer of the adults as well as the young. And when the preaching office and the

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<sup>19</sup> This very important article appeared in translation in *Logia*, Trinity 1997, p 37-46. This is a must-read article for understanding the nuances of early Missouri's position.

<sup>20</sup> E. W. Kähler, "Does a Congregation...?" *Logia*, Trinity 1997, p 43. Online p 13.

<sup>21</sup> Translated from *Der Lutheraner*, Jan. 1, 1867, v. 23, n. 9, p. 65-68 by Mark Nispel.

teaching-diaconate coincide in one office,<sup>22</sup> still the essential part of the latter is to lend parents assistance in training their children and to take care of the children personally in every detail. Its ruling side consists in school discipline. But this must remain the least important element. The personal ministry to every individual child is the most important matter. To watch over discipline must remain the matter of the bishop. The schoolteacher is placed under him not only in matters of office but also as the caregiver of his soul.<sup>23</sup>

The teacher serves in the ministry of the Word even though part of the teacher's work relates to secular subjects. The secular aspects of the teacher's work does not make the teacher only an auxiliary to the ministry of the Word. The spiritual aspects of his work do not make him a pastor. The teacher has responsibility for only a part of the ministry of the Word. He does not interfere with the work of the pastor, but supports it.

J. C. W. Lindemann, instructor at Missouri's teachers seminary at Addison Illinois, was an advocate of women teachers, but he did not agree with Walther's view that the school teacher was part of the ministry of the church. Lindemann submitted an article to *Der Lutheraner* which Walther sent back for correction because Lindemann had derived the office of the teacher from the parent. Walther insisted that it belonged to the *Predigtamt*. Walther instructed Lindemann not to polemicize against the view that the teacher is part of the ministry, but he said Lindemann should not quit his position at the college. Walther commented that the great majority of the synod disagreed with Lindemann, and Lindemann should not make issue of it.

The only thing that strikes me is that you yourself lay so much weight on this point. Besides that I am convinced that an oral discussion would soon cause you to agree with us. Only do everything you can to be sure that a fire will not grow out of a little spark. For Satan has at times begun with less significant matters when he wanted to plunge the church into unnecessary struggle.<sup>24</sup>

It is unfortunate that some disciples of Walther today have not heeded Walther's advice on this issue.

Walther's claim that most in Missouri disagreed with Lindemann's view is demonstrated by an article by C. A. T. Selle which appeared in *Evang.-Luth. Schulblatt* (January 1869).<sup>25</sup> Selle supports his theses with quotations from confessional theologians of the Lutheran church in Germany. Walther published this article and gave it a warm endorsement. Both in his comments to Lindemann and in this endorsement, he indicates that he realized that all in Missouri were not on the same page on this issue.

We consider this lecture to be a work of truly reformatory character. No preacher, no schoolteacher, no elder of a congregation and above all no congregational member who has an interest for the right form of our church in America should leave this lecture unread and untested. We are convinced that only when the principles presented here concerning the mutual relationship of school and church, of the school teacher and the preacher, come into play will school and church remain here in indissoluble association and bring the first of the other gifts which this association should bring according to God's will and order.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. *Another interesting study would be the relationship of Walther's views with those of Johann Hoefling (1802-1853).*

Hoefling is regarded as holding the other extreme from Grabau and Loehe, that is, that he did not recognize the divine institution of the pastoral ministry. WELS has sometimes been accused of holding the view of Hoefling. What is of interest to us here it that Walther too had been accused of being a Hoeflingite by the

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<sup>22</sup> As they often did in frontier congregations when the same man was pastor and teacher.

<sup>23</sup> E. W. Kähler, "Does a Congregation...?" *Logia*, Trinity 1997, p 43.

<sup>24</sup> Letter in C. Meyer, *Walther Speaks to the Church*, p 56-57.

<sup>25</sup> Das Amt des Pastors als Schulaufseher," *Evang.-Luth. Schulblatt* 4 (January 1869). English: "The Office of a Pastor as School Overseer" translated by Mark Nispel. Online. This is an extremely important article that should be read in its entirety by anyone interested in this topic.

<sup>26</sup> *Der Lutheraner* 25 (February 1, 1869) no. 11. Cited in Nispel.

romanizing Lutherans. In a footnote to his article on "Kraussold and the Doctrine of the Ministry," Walther writes:

Regrettably it has come to this, that now everyone who rejects the romanizing doctrine of the ministry is reckoned to be a Hoeflingianer in this doctrine and is held under suspicion as being such, but Hoefling's doctrine of the ministry and that of the romanizing Lutherans are the opposite extremes, between which in the middle lies the pure Lutheran doctrine, to which alone our Synod has confessed itself and still confesses itself.<sup>27</sup>

Since Hoefling's name is often mentioned but his views are seldom studied or even summarized, we plan to present a series of articles on Hoefling, his position, and his relationship to the men of the Synodical Conference in this volume of the *Quarterly*.

4. *Another topic worthy of study is Walther's view on the administration of the Lord's Supper by laymen in emergency situations.*

Though Walther and the Missourians' rejected Grabau's insistence on ordination as a necessary condition for a valid celebration of the Lord's Supper, they were just as opposed to celebration of Communion by laypeople as Grabau was. In his *Pastoral Theology* (1872) Walther says,

The great majority of Lutheran theologians, Luther in the forefront, believe that the Holy Supper should never be administered privately by one who is not in the public preaching office or by a so-called layman. That is partly because no such necessity can occur with the Holy Supper as with baptism and absolution that would justify a departure from God's order; partly because the Holy Supper is a public confession and so should have a public minister; partly because schisms can easily be brought about by such private (*heimliche*) communion. ... Most of the orthodox Lutheran theologians state that the administration of the Holy Supper by a layman is never *recta* and *legitima*, but none denies that it can be done *rata* and *de facto*.<sup>28</sup>

To this point Walther's discussion is about laypeople taking up private administration of the Lord's Supper on their own initiative. On the subject of orderly calling of emergency, unordained "pastors" Walther comments:

A whole series of our unquestioned, strictly orthodox theologians have taught that in an (assumed) case of necessity, the Holy Supper could be validly administered by a layman not only *de facto* but also *de jure*.<sup>29</sup>

Walther supports this statement with more than three pages of quotations from these orthodox theologians, including Martin Chemnitz. He then offers his own conclusion.

No one doubts that the administration of the Holy Supper by a layman who has been temporarily called by a whole congregation in an emergency, though not ordained, would be valid and legitimate. Grapius writes, "...But in this way the layman is administering it not as a layman but as a minister who has been validly called for a time."<sup>30</sup>

This principle of a "pastor pro-tem" was affirmed in *Lehre und Wehre* Volume 20.

Walther clearly allows the possibility of unordained laymen administering the Lord's Supper as "temporary pastors" in cases where no pastors were available, but there is a lot of evidence that early Missouri

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<sup>27</sup> *Lehre und Wehre*, 1858, p 354.

<sup>28</sup> *Pastoral Theology*, p 134-135 English, p 175 German. Among the sources Walther cites are Luther's letter to Wolfgang Brauer (Walch X 2735; and Walch XX 219) and Gerhard's *Loci*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* Page 136 English; p 177 German. In the German text this point is highlighted as a major point.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Page 138-139 English; p 180-181 German.



was very reluctant to adopt such a practice or to license lay preachers of any sort.<sup>31</sup> This issue has taken on new interest because of the contemporary dispute in the LCMS about the training of so-called lay preachers.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

Walther and his contemporaries placed Missouri in the scriptural middle between Grabau and Hoefling. After Walther, in the first half of the 20th century, there was a narrowing of Walther's view that lost some of the balance of Walther's position and focused too narrowly on the pastor as the only divinely established form. Some in Missouri and offshoot groups who are trying to be sound confessional Lutherans defend this narrower view as sort of a litmus test of being true to Walther and Old Missouri (mistakenly so in my view). In the second half of the 20th century there was a counter-action in Missouri which tried to move back to the more nuanced view of Walther, but in some cases moved too much away from a strong affirmation of the pastoral ministry toward a minimalist view of the pastorate. Now some (but not all) in both what I will call "the wider view" and "narrower view" are being pulled out closer to the Hoefling and Grabau fringes. Some have openly repudiated Walther, at least in part. Sometimes this is portrayed as a struggle of Old Missouri v. Neo-Wisconsin influences, but this analysis is, for the most part, wrong, since the two tendencies were always present in Missouri itself. Very little if any of this conflict is due to WELS influences, though the same currents run in WELS.

All parties need to get back to the scriptural, Lutheran position recovered by Walther. All of the following steps would be helpful to that goal.

1. Initially, the discussion should focus on thorough exegesis of all of the pertinent passages of Scripture. Unless there is agreement on what Scripture says about the matter, little progress can be made by debating interpretations of confessions, historical precedents, and contemporary practice. We must do a thorough study of the *norma normans* before we are ready to discuss our understanding of the *norma normata*.
2. Terms must be defined clearly, so that people are not speaking past each other. In what sense is the term "ministry" being used? Unless there is clarification and understanding of the terms which are being used by various parties, there will be continual confusion.
3. Recovering a clear understanding of the position of Walther based on the whole corpus of his works would also be a helpful step.

The key factor in the restoration of harmony in early Missouri in the aftermath of the Stephan debacle and in the development of the "Wisconsin Synod position" in the early 20th century was the willingness of the participants to set aside for the moment their preconceptions and even the works of their teachers and to go back *ad fontes*, back to the Scriptures. They were willing to reexamine every detail of their position in the light of Scripture alone. If this study revealed areas in which they had been operating with assumptions or interpretations not supported by Scripture, they were ready to correct their view.

The LCMS convention in 2001 affirmed the synod's acceptance of Walther's *Church and Ministry* as "the definitive statement under the Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions of the Synod's understanding on the subject of Church and Ministry; and... as the official position of the LCMS" and resolved that "all pastors, professors, teachers of the Church and congregations honor and uphold the resolutions of the Synod as regards the official position of our Synod on Church and Ministry and teach in accordance with them" (Resolution 7-17A). Now we must answer the Lutheran question, "What does this mean?"

The *ad fontes* method of Walther in the 1840s and of the Wauwatosa men in the early 1900s provide a good model for us in the early 21st century.

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<sup>31</sup> Walther, "Congregation's Right," p 107. *Proceedings of the Western District, 1875*, p 60-63.

<sup>32</sup> See Weinrich, "Should A Layman Discharge the Duties of the Holy Ministry?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, July/October 2004, p 207-230.

## For Further Reading

### Walther's Writings

Walther, C. F. W., *Church and Ministry*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1987 edition. *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*, Erlangen. 1865. Other editions appeared in 1852, 1875, 1894, and 1911. The English translations are based on the 1875 edition.

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### Walther's Associates

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### Recent Studies

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