

# CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS ON CHURCH AND MINISTRY IN C.F.W. WALTHER

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### Presentation

#### Part One: 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. Although some of you were perhaps unenthusiastic about seeing this topic on this year's program, I dare say that none of you were surprised. 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.

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 Loehe'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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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 here today and tomorrow is not to provide all the answers but simply to take part in our ongoing synodical conversation regarding these questions. First of all, as a church historian, I hope to shed some light on our situation especially by explaining how it is that the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod so early in her history came to have an official position on church and ministry and also to describe what it was; but in addition to that perhaps we can uncover some of the gray areas in our history, some ambiguities in our doctrine and practice, that make it difficult for us to arrive at a consensus today regarding some of the contentious issues before us.

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 our time together will be fruitful at least to the extent of removing sources of misunderstanding while also prompting a constructive exchange of views regarding the nature of the church and the office of the public ministry.

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. 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."<sup>3</sup>

That congregations make up the synodical membership rests upon the conviction 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 here and there, in which the Word of God is preached and the holy sacraments are administered, "churches" (*Partikularkirchen* [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, 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].<sup>4</sup>

Thus, synod's polity may rightly be described as "congregational," and it was one of the early bones of contention with synod's "father from afar," Wilhelm Loehe, who was concerned about democratic tendencies in the new synod and the potential of "mob rule."<sup>5</sup> Even so, this polity has a theological underpinning, the argument for which goes like this. 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* they 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 people are brought 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."<sup>6</sup>

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 the experiences of the Saxons in Missouri after the deposition of Martin Stephan. 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:

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]."<sup>7</sup> In short, every congregation is fully the church.

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 County, the real question for us now is whether his doctrine is Confessional and biblical.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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 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.<sup>10</sup>

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 Church is the congregation of saints [German, all believers, *Gla • bigen*], 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 our 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 congregation, sometimes in the interests of practicing church fellowship with churches not in fellowship with synod.<sup>11</sup>

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 St. Louis, Walther's "congregation" was by the end of his life 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).<sup>12</sup> In other words, we should not press Walther's congregationalism too far. 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 government.

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 "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."<sup>13</sup> In other words, Lutheran congregations have a positive obligation to join with others in the work of the church.

Furthermore, in describing the synod in his 1848 presidential address, Walther argued that the assembled delegates 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]."<sup>14</sup> In other words, by working together to accomplish the tasks of the church, local churches do not lose their churchly character but 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. 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 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 the 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 (government, ceremonies, and doctrine). Clearly, the synod is church.<sup>15</sup>

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:

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?<sup>16</sup>

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]").<sup>17</sup> Clearly, however, Walther's argument 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 but only came later by amendment,<sup>18</sup> 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].<sup>19</sup>

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."<sup>20</sup>

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 designed 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."<sup>21</sup>



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."<sup>22</sup>

For Walther, therefore, commitment to the Word of God in the synod was a commitment to preach and to practice that Word; and 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."<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup> 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 acceptable," because the General Council also included representatives from the Iowa Synod with whom the Missouri Synod could not reach agreement in doctrine.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, when the Missouri Synod participated in founding the Synodical Conference 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.<sup>26</sup>

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 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.<sup>27</sup>

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 synod's history 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 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 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 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."<sup>28</sup> 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). Communion practices were one of the "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.

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

Significantly, in view of our assignment, church and ministry, 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 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 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."<sup>29</sup> 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."<sup>30</sup> 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,

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].<sup>31</sup>

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."<sup>32</sup>

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 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].<sup>33</sup>

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 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.<sup>34</sup>

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 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 "to be 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."<sup>35</sup>

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.<sup>36</sup>

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."<sup>37</sup>

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.<sup>38</sup>

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.<sup>39</sup>

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 Christians. Therefore Communion should be administered to no one who has been revealed as a false [i.e., erring] Christian."<sup>40</sup>

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."<sup>41</sup>

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 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."<sup>42</sup>

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 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."<sup>43</sup>

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; and 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 our purposes because it too 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 external union without the internal unity of faith.<sup>44</sup>

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 on the church, 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 it.

End of Part One.

## **Part Two: The Office of the Public Ministry**

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."<sup>45</sup> But another LCMS clergyman writes that the absolution 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.<sup>46</sup>

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.<sup>47</sup>

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 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.<sup>48</sup> 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 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 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!<sup>49</sup>

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?

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.<sup>50</sup>

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.<sup>51</sup> But in spite of this action, it is not yet clear 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 is to re-examine that doctrine from the standpoint of its original formulation in the history of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. 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.<sup>52</sup> Why? Because synod's founders were also convinced that the office of the ministry was a divine institution.

As in the case of the church, so too with respect to the ministry, the Missouri Synod inherited a doctrine from the 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 kept right on going after the formation of the Missouri Synod two years later and is a somewhat complicated affair, climaxing in the decision of the Buffalo Synod to excommunicate *en masse* the entire Missouri Synod in 1859.

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 Quarterly<sup>53</sup> - 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 Synod's adopting an official position on church and ministry in 1851 and of C. F. W. Walther 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."<sup>54</sup>

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].<sup>55</sup>

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.<sup>56</sup>

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."<sup>57</sup>

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."<sup>58</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup>

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 keys, by means of its call, which God Himself has prescribed."<sup>60</sup>

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 important to note that the synodical founders drew the conclusion from the God-given character of the ministry that calls into the 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]."<sup>61</sup> 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 confess that "the ministry is not a special or, in opposition to that of ordinary Christians, a more holy state ...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, we should remember who it is who has called us and before whom we will stand and give an account of the souls entrusted to our care (Heb. 13:17).

A second point to observe about our 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.<sup>62</sup>

In view of such clear statements, it is simply impossible to argue that Walther was a 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.

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 on the basis that 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.<sup>63</sup>

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."<sup>64</sup> Here we must remember what we saw 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.

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.<sup>65</sup>

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

It is necessary to acknowledge that the keys belong not to 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.<sup>66</sup>

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 certain persons, [Matt. 18:20], "Where two or three are gathered 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.<sup>67</sup>

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.<sup>68</sup>

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 behoves 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 veto power when the congregation is calling an assistant or associate pastor.<sup>69</sup>

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 demanded [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."<sup>70</sup>

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," 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."<sup>71</sup>

What then of ordination? This was a 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."<sup>72</sup>

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 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."<sup>73</sup>

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 F•rbringer, 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.<sup>74</sup>

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 with the ardent prayer of the church, based on the glorious promises given in particular to the office of the ministry."<sup>75</sup>

As far as the Confessions are concerned, once more Walther has recourse to the Treatise and cites Melancthon 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.<sup>76</sup>

Of course, Melancthon'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."<sup>77</sup>

In one sense, of course, the debate with Grabau is long since over - and not even the Buffalo Synod exists any more. But the issues raised by that debate persist, perhaps our day and age is even seeing a resurgence of them. As I suggested earlier, it may be that one reason for this resurgence has to do with a confusion in our church over "helping offices," i.e., offices other than that of pastor, and what is their relationship to the office of the public ministry. Here too a historical approach may prove helpful. However, in the case of helping, 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 once more goes right back to the beginning, since Synod's very first constitution makes provision for Lutheran school teachers to be *advisory* members of synod. 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"; but, significantly, the 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; whereas teachers are to be inducted into their office simply by the pastor of the congregation in which they serve.<sup>78</sup>

Obviously, 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."<sup>79</sup>

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.<sup>80</sup> However, in his explanation to this thesis, Walther 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*].<sup>81</sup>

Unfortunately, Mueller's translation once again creates some ambiguity regarding the nature of these supporting offices, since Walther's original 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 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*]."<sup>82</sup>

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 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, 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.<sup>83</sup>

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, published a set of theses and elaborations thereon, prepared by E. W. Koehler 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, Koehler, who would a few years later become Walther's secretary and editorial assistant, addressed the question of whether the offices of elder, sacristan, and schoolteacher, 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.<sup>84</sup>

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 nineteenth century, since synod treated male and female teachers differently - the former held an office in the church, the latter did not.<sup>85</sup> 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,<sup>86</sup> 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.<sup>87</sup>

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;<sup>88</sup> 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 acute than in other circumstances.<sup>89</sup>

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.<sup>90</sup>

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 proclaim the Word of God.<sup>91</sup>

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.<sup>92</sup>

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 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].<sup>93</sup>

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 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.<sup>94</sup>

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 office proper is responsible for every soul in the congregation, in teaching, in admonishing, in reproving, 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]."<sup>95</sup>

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.<sup>96</sup>

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. 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.<sup>97</sup>

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]."<sup>98</sup>

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 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.<sup>99</sup>

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 Thesis VIII in Church and Ministry; and the Koehler 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.<sup>100</sup>

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 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.<sup>101</sup>

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. Stellhorn 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.<sup>102</sup>

One could argue, however, that what actually has happened over the last generation is that of the status of the pastor has declined to the level of the teacher and that both of them have gone down together. Of course, we can hardly attribute this decline exclusively to the 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 positions 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 can be answered by referring to the past. But I suppose that that is really a form of romanticism on my part - a kind of occupational hazard for church historians, I guess. More realistically, what I hope is that this presentation 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.

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 and ministry. We owe it to them as well as to ourselves to hear their voices as well as our own, since, after all, they really do have something to say.

End of Part Two. Thank you very much.

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## **ENDNOTES**

1. 1 Carl S. Munding, 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.
2. 1992 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.
3. W. 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),
4. Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 20; Brief Statement, p. 378.
5. "Loehe's Heartbreaking Farewell," Moving Frontiers, p. 122.
6. Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 20.

7. C. F. W. Walther, "Altenburg Theses," in Lewis W. Spitz, Sr., The Life of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: CPH, 1961), pp. 56-57.
8. Green, p. 32.
9. Kurt E. Marquart, The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance (Ft. Wayne: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), p. 195.
10. Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 78.
11. Kurt E. Marquart, Anatomy of an Explosion (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), pp. 54-56.
12. *(left blank on the submitted manuscript)*
13. C. F. W. Walther, The Form of a Christian Congregation, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: CPH, 1963), pp. 191-92.
14. C. F. W. Walther, "Walther's 1848 Presidential Address," in C. S. Meyer, ed., Moving Frontiers (St. Louis: CPH, 1964), p. 170.
15. Constitution, pp. 2, 3, 5, 17. See also Marquart, Anatomy, pp. 56-57.
16. Walther, "1848 Address," p. 174.
17. Ibid.
18. "The 1854 Constitution of the Missouri Synod," Moving Frontiers, p. 151.
19. Walther, "1848 Address," pp. 170-71.
20. "First Synodical Constitution," p. 4.
21. Ibid., pp. 2, 4.
22. Ibid., p. 6.
23. Walther, "1848 Presidential Address," p. 176.
24. AC 5, 7.
25. Walther correspondence, my notes.
26. Baepler, Century of Grace, pp.
27. E. Clifford Nelson, ed., Lutherans in North America, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), p. 319; Baepler, p. 202.
28. "Introduction," to C. F. W. Walther, "Communion Fellowship," in Essays for the Church (St. Louis: CPH, 1992) 1:202.
29. Walther, "Communion Fellowship," p. 203.
30. Ibid., p. 207.
31. Ibid., 212-13.
32. Ibid., p. 210.
33. Ibid., p. 210.
34. Ibid., p. 211.
35. Ibid., p. 213.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p. 215.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., p. 217.
41. Ibid., p. 223.
42. Ibid., pp. 220, 224.
43. Ibid., p. 225.
44. Ibid., p. 227.

45. Oscar 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).
46. Douglas Fusselman, "Only Playing Church? The Lay Minister and the Lord's Supper" Logia 3(1994): 45.
47. "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.
48. See, for example, David P. Scaer, "The Integrity of the Christological Character of the Office of the Ministry," Logia 2(1993): 15-18; and Jobst Schoene, "Pastoral Letter on the Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Office of the Church," CTQ 59(1995): 301-16.
49. The Lutheran Annual 1996 of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (St. Louis: CPH, 1995), pp. 185, 365, 552.
50. 1989 Convention Proceedings, Res. 3-05B, p. 112.
51. 1995 Convention Proceedings, Res. 3-07A, pp. 120-21.
52. "First Synodical Constitution," p. 4.
53. Roy A. Suelflow, "The Relations of the Missouri Synod with the Buffalo Synod up to 1866," CHIQ 27(1954): 1-19, 57-73, 97-132.
54. Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 9.
55. William M. Cwirla, "Grabau and the Saxon Pastors: The Doctrine of the Holy Ministry, 1840-1845" Concordia Historical Quarterly 62(1995): 93.
56. Heidt, 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.*"
57. *Ibid.* "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 eitel Brod und Wein gibt; denn Christus bekennt sich zu seiner goettlichen unumstoesslichen Ordnung, nicht zu unserer Willkuehr und Unordnung."
58. Heidt, Hirtenbrief, p. 2; Grabau, Hirtenbrief, p. 14: "*die...Kirchendiener ...ueberantworten ihm das Kierchenamt in Namen des dreieinigen Gottes, wie der Herr Christus selbst seine Juenger...ordinirt hat.*"
59. Cwirla, p. 95.
60. Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 22.
61. "First Synodical Constitution." pp. 3, 10.
62. Walther, Church and Ministry, pp. 21-22.
63. *Ibid.*, pp. 177-78.
64. *Ibid.*, 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, divine, and

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

65. Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 220; Ap VII. VIII [IV] (Triglotta, p. 237).
66. Walther, Church and Ministry, pp. 221-23; Treatise (Triglotta, pp. 523-27).
67. Triglotta, pp. 523-525.
68. Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 219.
69. Ibid., p. 220.
70. Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 220; German, p. 246.
71. "First Synodical Constitution," pp. 5, 8.
72. Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 247.
73. "First Synodical Constitution," p. 10.
74. Cwirla, pp. 95-96.
75. Ibid., p. 248.
76. Triglotta, pp. 525, 311.
77. Walther, Church and Ministry, p. 248.
78. W. G. Polack, ed., "Our First Synodical Constitution," *CHIQ* 16(1943): 4, 7, 9-10. 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.
79. C. 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 hoechste Amt in der Kirche, aus welchem alle anderen Kirchenoemter fluessen.*"
80. Regarding this translation, see Kurt E. Marquart, The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance (Ft. Wayne: 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.
81. Walther (Mueller translation), pp. 289-90; original, pp. 342-43.
82. Ibid.
83. John 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 Geh • lfen in Predigtamt sind*"); and 1920 Convention Proceedings, p. 242.
84. E. W. Koehler, "*Hat die Gemeinde das Recht, ordentlicher Weise einen wesentlichen Theil des heiligen Predigtamtes irgend einem Laien temporoer zu • bertragen?*" Lehre und Wehre 20(1874): 336. Basically, Koehler'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 VLutheran Standard March 14, 1874, p. 85. For Koehler and Walther, see Carl S. Meyer, From Log Cabin to Luther Tower, p. 66.
85. In 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.
86. In 1973, synod removed the distinction between men and women teachers as far as synodical membership was concerned. 1973 Proceedings, p. 190. Nielsen, p. 25.
  87. Erwin Scharf, "The Call to the Public Use of the Keys" in Lyle W. Lange, ed. Our Great Heritage, 3 vols. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991) 3: 504.
  88. Harold Romoser, "The Church and the Ministry" Faithful Word 7, nos. 3 and 4 (Aug. - Nov., 1970): 30-68.
  89. John 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.
  90. 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.
  91. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
  92. Arnold C. Mueller, "The Status of the Parochial School Teacher" as quoted in Wohlrabe, pp. 41-42.
  93. Arnold 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.
  94. Brief Statement, par. 31, 1947 Convention Proceedings, p. 486.
  95. P. 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.
  96. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 12.
  97. John 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.
  98. Eugene F. A. Klug, Church and Ministry; The Role of Church, Pastor, and People from Luther to Walther (St. Louis: CPH, 1993), pp. 268-69.
  99. Marquart, 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.
  100. Koehler, pp. 267, 336.
  101. C. F. W. Walther, Walther's Pastorale 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.
  102. Wohlrabe, p. 40.