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WHAT MAKES A PASTOR?

The Precious Nature of the Call

2017–18 LCMS Circuit Bible Studies

Studies in pastoral theology using C.F.W. Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

LEADER'S GUIDE

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The Precious Nature of the Call

References in Walther: Articles 4–10 (pp. 41–93)

[*Walther's Title: The Call and Entry into the Ministry*]

Participants are encouraged to review the introduction of the book (vii–ix) to better grasp the context in which Dr. Walther wrote, his intent, methodology and how his extensive quotations illustrated how earlier generations applied Lutheran doctrine in their contemporary context.

To the circuit visitor or discussion leader: Please impress on the pastors the necessity of reviewing the introduction to the book (vii–ix) in advance. Your discussion will be more fruitful if the group has a better

grasp of the original setting of the book, Dr. Walther's intent and methodology, and how his extensive quotations illustrated how earlier generations applied Lutheran doctrine in their contemporary context. Help the pastors see the link between doctrine and practice (i.e., doctrine implies pastoral practice and practice is doctrine pastorally applied).

There is likely more material in this study than can be reasonably covered in the average circuit meeting. You may wish to indicate in advance which of these questions will be prioritized for your discussion.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON: THE CALL

The work of the pastor does not begin with himself, but with the desire of the Lord Jesus to save sinners. To fulfill this desire, our Lord calls sinners to repentance and life in the Gospel. To accomplish this calling of the Gospel, Jesus calls pastors to preach, teach and administer His Sacraments. Walther's discussion of Pastoral Theology rightly begins here, with a discussion of the precious nature of the call to the pastoral office.

We will encounter a lot of Scripture, Luther and orthodox fathers in these seven articles, but before we begin, consider these questions:

1. How often do you reflect on the theology of the call?
2. Is the theology of the call a source of comfort and confidence for you? In what ways?

Leader: As noted in the first study, Walther follows a particular format. Each article begins with a thesis. The parts of the thesis are supported in the comments, first from Scripture and then from the witness of faithful pastors. Reviewing this structure again will help pastors get into the argument of the text and the flow of the book.

ARTICLE 4: NECESSITY OF THE CALL (33–40)

"The first requirement for conducting the ministry in a God-pleasing and blessed manner ... is thus for the preacher to be regularly called and to be certain of it." —Walther

Leader: This first article is the most theologically rich and biblically important. Please consider reading the Scriptures quoted here and making this study a "Bible" study more than a "Walther" study. These Scripture passages are full of comfort and wisdom.

1. Walther leads this discussion with the 14th Article of the Augsburg Confession and the supporting Scriptures. (Read Augsburg 14; Rom. 10:15; Jer. 23:21; James 3:1; and Heb. 5:4–5.) How does the Augsburg Confession confess the Scriptures' teaching about the necessity of the call?
2. **Comment 1**, concerning the "God-pleasing" nature of the call, begins with the testimony of Luther. What did Luther think of those who seek to do a good work without a call?
3. In Greater Galatians, Luther says, "Our Lord God never gives blessing, happiness, and salvation to teachers who come on their own without a well-ordered call and command" (34). How does this apply to the pastor's call? What is the warning in Luther's teaching? Where is the comfort?
4. What three things does Luther indicate that the call serves (35)?

5. Walther is piling up Luther quotations to support his theses. What does Luther say regarding those who endeavored to preach or teach without a call (36)?
6. Consider this Luther quotation: “If you notice a work within you that God is not effecting, kick it with your feet and ask God to destroy everything in you that He Himself does not effect. And even if you could save the whole world with one sermon but do not have the command, let it be, for you will break the rightful Sabbath and God will not be pleased” (37). What is Luther getting at? How might we better follow his wisdom?
7. The witness of Dr. Martin Chemnitz (38–39) is gold. He teaches the necessity of the call under four topics and lists the Scriptures from which the teaching comes. This quotation is well worth the time spent unfolding it.
 - a. Read Luke 1:70; Heb. 1:1; and 2 Cor. 5:20. How do these texts teach that the ministry comes from God? How, then, does the pastor apply these texts to himself: Is. 59:21; 2 Cor. 13:3; Luke 10:16; and John 1:25?
 - b. Read 2 Cor. 3:2 and 1 Tim. 4:14. How do these texts teach that the Lord’s divine protection is needed in the office?
 - c. Read Is. 49:2; Is. 51:16; Luke 1:76; 1 Tim. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:58; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; and John 10:3. How do these texts teach that the Holy Spirit works efficaciously through the ministry?
 - d. How does the necessity and divine origin of the call support the “care, faithfulness, and readiness” of the pastors? How does it encourage “true reverence and obedience” in the hearers of the Word?
8. **Comment 2** concerns the necessity of the call for a blessed administration of the ministry. Luther distinguishes between the person and the office (39). What is this distinction? Why is it important?

ARTICLE 5: THE CALL (41–58)

What makes a valid and legitimate call?

Leader: Reading this article, it might become apparent that we do not think of the call as highly as our Lutheran fathers did. These passages, which are meant to comfort us, might be heard as a rebuke. Rightly and humbly heard, this is a good thing. We can only be blessed by humbly listening to Walther extol the great gift of the call for us, as we find ourselves the unworthy recipients of this great gift. Because it is the Lord who has called us to the pastoral office, we may rightly rejoice and give thanks that the Lord has put us into His preaching office.

1. **Comment 1:** Walther first takes up the validity of the call, and notes that a call “is valid when it is issued by those who have the right and authority from God to do so.” The first witness is the Power and Primacy of the Pope, paragraph 67 (see 41–42) and the Scriptures found there (Eph. 4:8; Matt. 18:20; and 1 Peter 2:9). According to the Lutheran Confessions, who has the authority to issue a valid call?
2. Luther writes, “For it is one thing to exercise a right publicly; another to use it in time of emergency” (42). What is he talking about? How is the distinction between order and emergency helpful to us today? If you ask a hundred congregants what qualifies as a “time of emergency,” you’ll likely get a hundred different answers. What should a pastor rightly consider in determining a “time of emergency”?
3. Note Luther’s discussion about preaching among pagans where no call is needed (43) and the other points of casuistry on Pages 43–47. What helpful points or applicable assertions did you find?
4. **Comment 2:** Walther’s second concern is the *legitimacy* of the call, which concerns the right reception of the call on behalf of the pastor. Concerning the Luther quotation on Pages 47–49, what destroys the legitimacy of the call?
5. Note Luther’s distinction between the two types of calls: “One is done without means by God; the other, through man and also by God.” How is this distinction helpful in teaching about the office of pastor?
6. What do you think about this bold bit of Luther: “Believe me, no one will accomplish anything useful by preaching except he who is commanded and forced to preach and to teach apart from his will and desire” (49)? As you reflect on what Luther has said here, read and temper your thoughts with the Luther quote on the bottom of Page 50.

7. **Comment 3:** Call to repentance to those called illegitimately. What is Walther’s instruction to those who find themselves in the office with an illegitimate call?
8. **Comment 4:** Temporary calls. Walther is not too hot on temporary calls. “Such a call is neither valid nor legitimate before God. It is a deplorable custom” (52). “Such a call is absolutely not what God ordained with respect to the holy preaching office but an entirely different matter that has nothing to do with it. It is precisely not a mediate call of God through the Church, but rather a human contract; it is not a lifelong calling, but a temporary function outside the divine order, an ecclesiastical — and thus human — ordinance made contrary to the order of God, or, rather, a dreadful disorder” (52–53). How are Walther’s words a rebuke and a comfort to us?
9. **Comment 5:** Rejecting a call. Walther points to the danger of a man rejecting a valid and legitimate call. This is a stunning quotation from Luther regarding Moses’ hesitancy to accept his call from God: “If God were as clever as we were He would have begun all things better than actually happened. For here He takes for this difficult, esteemed task one who cannot speak well, as Moses himself admits. Yet God says to him: ‘Go and do it well,’ which sounds like my saying to a blind man that he should see well... But this is written so that we should know how God thinks. Whatever has value before the world, that He does not regard; He rejects and casts away what others wrestle to themselves; what others love and pick up, that He throws away; and what the devil does not like, that He accepts” (56–57). What wisdom and instruction is here for us? What does Luther’s wisdom imply about every pastor’s current and ongoing dependence upon the Lord for fulfilling of his calling?

ARTICLE 6: REQUIREMENTS FOR A CONGREGATION BEFORE ITS CALL IS ACCEPTED (59–70)

What is required of a congregation before it can call an evangelical pastor?

Leader: The remaining five articles in this section get deeper into the weeds of Pastoral Theology, and we might find some of the discussion less applicable. Nevertheless, it is good for us to hear Walther on the topics, not only to know what he thinks, but also to understand how he thinks as a biblical and Lutheran theologian. We have here not only his wisdom to learn, but also his pastoral example to follow.

Walther lists seven requirements for a congregation:

1. It desires to be an evangelical Lutheran congregation;
2. It wishes to bind itself to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament;
3. It wishes to bind itself to the symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (the Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession);
4. That it wishes to conform to evangelical standards in regard to church ceremonies;
5. That it will use pure church and school books;
6. That the people will announce for communion beforehand; and

7. That it will allow the Scriptures to have free course, and will be subject to the Word of God.

Do you agree with everything on Walther’s list? If not, what would you add or delete, and why?

1. **Comment 1:** Walther gives instructions regarding the pastor’s response to a call. What wisdom have you heard about handling these situations?
2. **Comment 2:** Regarding mixed congregations, Walther notes that while an orthodox pastor might, without sin, preach in a non-Lutheran congregation, to serve as their pastor would be a sin. Read a few of the passages Walther mentions (2 Cor. 6:14ff; 1 Cor. 1:10; Rom. 16:17; 2 John 10–11; Rom. 4:11). How does the text inform our interaction with heterodox congregations?
3. **Comment 3:** On the name Lutheran. This is a particularly interesting section. How do you normally respond to the claim “I’m not a Lutheran, I’m a Christian”? How did this section help you craft a response?

Don’t miss the Luther quotation in Footnote 8. It is not the man Luther that matters, but his teaching. Do you think most people think of the man or the teaching when they hear “Lutheran”? What can we do to associate the name Lutheran with the doctrine?

4. **Comment 4:** The confessional subscription of the congregation. Walther makes the minimum requirement of the congregation a subscription to the Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession. While most congregation members have a basic familiarity with Luther's Small Catechism, how familiar are the members of your congregation with the Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession? What practically could be done to familiarize the members of your congregation with both?
5. **Comment 5:** *Adiaphora*. Walther, in this section, applies the teaching of the Formula of Concord regarding *adiaphora* to the discussions. "It is enough for the true unity of the Christian Church that the Gospel is preached in it with unity according to a pure understanding and the Sacraments are administered according to the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian Church that similar traditions, instituted by men, be observed everywhere.' The tenth article of the Formula of Concord says further: 'Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has, according to its circumstances, the good right, power, and authority to change, to diminish, and to increase them' (indifferent matters) 'without thoughtlessness and offense, in an orderly and becoming way, as at

any time it may be regarded most profitable, most beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline and evangelical well-being, and the edification of the Church. Moreover, how we can yield and give way with a good conscience to the weak in faith in such external, indifferent matters Paul teaches (Rom. 14:21) and proves it by his example (Acts 16:3; 21:26; 1 Cor. 9:19).' It would therefore be thoroughly unevangelical and un-Lutheran if a candidate wanted to accept a call to a congregation only on the condition that it accept all of the ceremonies and institutions that have ever come into use in the Evangelical Lutheran Church." How can we use his wisdom to sort out matters of *adiaphora* regarding the call in our day?

Consider the Luther quotation on the top of Page 66. What theological truths is Luther using in his thinking? What is the result?

6. **Comment 6:** Regarding pure books, how do we see Walther's concern for true doctrine as an extension of his pastoral concern for the congregation?
7. **Comment 7:** Regarding announcing for communion, what happened to this custom? Are there things we could do to recover a more regular theological conversation between pastors and the members of the congregation?

ARTICLE 7: MATTERS OF COMPENSATION (71–74)

"The Lord, whose servant [the pastor] is, cares for his poor life and that of his family members and that the smaller his reward in this world is, the more beautiful the crown laid up for him there is, if he keeps the faith until the end."

Leader: Worry about finances is the worship of money. We see this worry both in pastors and in congregations. In this section, consider how the Scriptures teach us to consider money, payment and work with a good and godly attitude. Instead of griping and complaining, we should pray.

While matters of compensation can be difficult and even distasteful for us, they are important. The Lord has determined to give out the free Gospel through the mouths of men, who have to eat. The teaching in this section helps balance a number of concerns. Should a pastor be paid? How much? By whom? Should there be fees for pastoral services? Should honoraria be accepted?

1. Consider the Luther quotation in Footnote 2 (72). How does Luther interpret Matt. 10:8? How do we understand the pastor's pay?
2. The vices of the Seventh Commandment are laziness and greed. The virtue is generosity. How does meditating on the Seventh Commandment teach the pastor to think of his work and pay? How does it inform the congregation?
3. Compensation has the potential to be a matter of bitterness and frustration between the pastor and the congregation. Have you experienced this? What help is there for pastors and congregations in this section?

ARTICLE 8: EXAMINATION, ORDINATION, AND INSTALLATION (75–83)

While Walther’s emphasis is on the call, he sees the great benefit of the two accompanying practices of examination and ordination. “Therefore, whoever omits one or the other, except in case of necessity, is acting schismatically and reveals that he is one of those whom congregations accumulate for themselves according to their own passions, for how their ears itch (2 Timothy 4:3)” (74).

Leader: Even though most participants in this study will be past their examination, first call and ordination, this section is still a profound call to action. All pastors are always fervent students of God’s Word, and we can never exhaust the treasures of the Scriptures, nor can we ever master their application. Consider, as you study through this section, how the Holy Spirit might provide practical ways to grow in our wisdom and knowledge of the Lord’s Word.

1. **Comment 1:** Regarding examination, Walther has some particularly important things to say. Read 1 Tim. 3:10 and 2 Tim. 2:2. What does St. Paul teach us about theological competency and the office?

On Pages 76–77, we have Walther quoting Hartmann quoting Tarnov! He has a nice list, drawn from the Pastoral Epistles, regarding fitness of a pastor:

- a. Ability
 - i. Knowledge of doctrine
 - ii. Skill to teach
 - iii. A blameless and irreproachable life
- b. Intention
 - i. A desire to serve the church
 - ii. Perseverance

How does this outline of pastoral fitness match our own practice of examining candidates? How might we better serve one another to attain the requirements of our office?

2. Another list is found on Page 77. The Danish theologian Brochmand lists three theological aptitudes necessary for the pastor:

- a. “The entire Word of God should be thoroughly familiar to a true minister of the divine Word”;
- b. The pastor should know “how to apply [the Word of God] to his hearers wisely”; and
- c. He must “give an account of what he teaches ... and silence those who contradict.”

Does this describe us? What might we do as pastors, as congregations and as a circuit to continue to grow in our knowledge of the Word of God?

The devil often tempts pastors and people to become bored with the Lord’s Word. What are the symptoms of this problem? What is the treatment?

3. **Comment 2:** Ordination. Walther is intent to exalt the importance of ordination while maintaining its status as an adiaphoron. Does he succeed?

Consider the quotation from Johann Fecht on Page 79. What are the three purposes of ordination?

Note also the practical discussion of ordination on the top of Page 80. Are there ways we could adjust our practice of ordination to reflect the pastoral concerns raised by Walther here?

4. **Comment 3:** Regarding installation, Walther offers some brief theological and practical points. What surprised you here? What wisdom should help shape our practice?

5. **Comment 4:** The pledge of the pastor to the symbols of the Lutheran church is near to Walther’s heart. He writes about it extensively in other places. We see a summary of his thoughts and concerns here. How does Walther discuss being free and bound to a confession?

ARTICLE 9: THE INAUGURAL SERMON (84–87)

“The special purpose of the inaugural sermon is for a newly beginning preacher to gain a hearing with his congregation and to awaken his hearers to love and trust toward his person.”

1. While most pastors are long past their inaugural sermon, there are still a number of things for us to consider here. What are the people’s expectations of their pastor? Are they the right expectations?
2. What are the pastor’s expectations of the people? Are they biblical?
3. Has the pastor learned how his people hear so as to better articulate both the Law and the Gospel for their ears and hearts?
4. Consider the excerpt from the inaugural sermon of Pastor Goeze in Magdeburg (86–87). What does he teach us about the proper distinction between Law and Gospel?

ARTICLE 10: BEGINNING A NEW MINISTRY (88–92)

“Well begun is half done.”

Leader: It might be tempting for experienced pastors to skip this section, but this would be a mistake. There is much pastoral wisdom here. And if nothing else, the older pastors can help new, inexperienced and always overwhelmed pastors to begin their ministry in a place in a blessed way.

1. Walther’s emphasis, when beginning at a new station, focuses on visitation. Consider the Scriptures cited: Acts 20:20; 1 Thess. 2:11; John 10:3; Ezek. 34:16; 1 Tim. 5:1–3; Eph. 4:11; Matt. 25:36; and James 5:14. What do these texts teach us about pastoral visitation?
2. According to Walther, what is the purpose of these inaugural visits? How do we see Walther’s advice as sound pastoral wisdom? What are the best customs for home visitation you use?
3. **Comments 2–3:** Regarding gossip and the temptation to outshine your predecessor, Walther puts his finger on a few of the temptations faced by new pastors. How might we heed these warnings? What other temptations do new pastors face? How could we help new pastors joining our circuit?

FINAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the theology of the call give us comfort and confidence in our pastoral work?
2. How does Walther teach us to apply our theology to our practice?
3. What opportunities do we have to teach and preach the biblical teaching regarding the Office of the Holy Ministry?