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GIVING OUT THE GIFTS:

Baptism and Catechesis

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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References in Walther: Articles 12–14, 27–29
[Walther's Titles: Baptism and Confirmation]

To the circuit visitor or discussion leader: The two themes of this two-part study are clearly connected by our Lord Himself in Matt. 28:18–20. They are also connected in the liturgical rites of the Church and in the pastoral care offered by the servants of the Word.

You are encouraged to affirm the complimentary relationship of Holy Baptism and catechesis/confirmation in the care of souls. This may mean

moving from 'Part One' to 'Part Two' of this study and back again.

Even though Walther addresses the “what” and the “how” of the baptismal service at length, you are also encouraged to guide the conversation and discussion so that the ultimate focus is on the “why” of God’s gracious action by simple water and strong Word.

There is 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 theses and/or questions will be prioritized for your discussion.

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest joys of a Lutheran pastor is to stand at the font to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. As I write this, in the 8:00 Divine Service yesterday at the congregation in which I serve, two children received God’s gifts by simple water and strong Word and the people of God spoke their “Amen!” This was the family’s joyful response to our Lord’s invitation and promise after I had spent significant time in conversation and Bible study re-catechizing the father and the grandmother of these nine- and four- year olds.

The over-arching theme of these circuit winkel studies is “What makes a pastor?” As that question is approached and pondered in your conversation, may it lead your gathering of brothers in more than discussion about your role

in baptizing infants and children, youth and adults. My prayer is that you will discover or re-discover that one of the first answers to the question, “What makes a pastor?” is an affirmation of the work of our gracious God in calling each one of you His beloved son in the cleansing water of Holy Baptism. May this be a strong and certain anchor in the ministry you are called to bring to people by “Receiving and Sharing the Gift of the Holy Bath.”

Using C.F.W. Walther’s outline, there are three concerns for pastors — in 1872 and in the early years of the 21st century — to consider. They are: 1) how to baptize; 2) who to baptize; and 3) how to decide regarding what baptismal customs to follow.

I. ARTICLE 12 — THE RITE OF BAPTISM

It may seem rather odd that the first issue addressed in the pastoral theology concerns the correct baptismal formula. With this beginning, Walther offers assurance that certain changes in the baptismal formula do not make a Baptism invalid.

1. Why was this a comfort to both pastor and people then?
2. Why is this a comfort to both pastor and people now?

However, Walther asserts, “the formula using the first-person (“I baptize you ...”) that is customary in our church is

without doubt more fitting, and it alone corresponds fully to Matthew 28:19 and 3:11.” (Comment 1, 133)

He also quotes Salomon Deyling (quoting Johannes Fecht) who cautions, “it is not fitting that we should want to be more clever than Christ, our Master.” (Comment 1, 133)

3. How can brothers in ministry encourage each other to resist the temptation to “be (more) clever?”

Walther continues in his guidance of his contemporaries with these words from Luther regarding the validity of a

Baptism using something other than Christ's own "Words of Institution": "... there is great comfort and a mighty aid to faith in the knowledge that one has been baptized, not by man, but by the Triune God Himself through a man acting among us in His name." (Comment 1, 134)

4. How does this both challenge you as a pastor and comfort the souls you serve?

The ancient maxim *Lex Orandi / Lex Credendi* ("The Law of Praying is the Law of Believing") certainly applies to the words and actions of the pastor at the font. While "certain differences in the form do not absolutely make Baptism invalid" (136), the preacher should not "act in this matter according to his own caprice." (136)

5. How do our words and actions in the baptismal liturgy convey what Scripture declares and what we believe is actually happening?
6. How can (and should) the brothers in your circuit(s) assist and support each other to speak and act faithfully — in accordance with Scripture — at the font?
7. How might you guide each other in consistent practice(s) for the sake of common witness?
8. How can (and should) this be approached and discussed to keep from incorrectly judging each other?

Leader: To keep the focus on the Word and not — only or simply — on the words of one of our Lutheran fathers, the following sections should be given certain priority in your mutual conversation.

It is not only in our time that theologians and pastors debate the wording of the baptismal formula. What does Scripture say regarding Baptism "in the name" or "into the name" of the Triune God?

- › See for the first: Matt. 28:19 and 1 Cor. 1:13
 - › See for the second: Acts 2:38, 10:48 and 1 Cor. 12:13
9. Why is a consistent custom in the formula important? (137)

While there may be no dispute in our circles about the required physical element for a Baptism (Luther: "as long as he... does not use wine, beer, lye, or any other thing, but water along with the Word of God") [Comment 2, 137, footnote 9], pastors are compelled to practice and teach that

this sacrament is "a washing with water." (See Eph. 5:26, John 3:5, Acts 8:36; 10:47.)

10. Discuss Deyling's observation: "For it is no more permissible to fabricate a Baptism without water than the Lord's Supper without bread and wine." (Comment 2, 138)

Walther uses the rich descriptors of the Word to emphasize the images of how God is doing His work in Baptism.

11. What do each of the Scriptures say concerning the effect of Baptism?
- a. Romans 6:3–4
 - b. Acts 23:16
 - c. Titus 3:5–6
 - d. Hebrews 10:22

Walther also observes: "... immersion is not to be rejected" "... likewise pouring and continual sprinkling are also not to be rejected." (Comment 3, 139)

12. How might (or should) a pastor respond to a request for a Baptism by immersion?
13. How does a pastor speak to an individual or family of a Baptist or Church of Christ background who asks: "Can a Baptism by pouring be as valid as by immersion?"
14. Consider also the words of Cyprian (d. 258) who (in a letter to Magnus) wrote concerning "those who come to God's grace in sickness and lingering illness" and were not able to be washed "with the salutary water" (i.e. immersion): "When need is pressing and God grants His forgiveness, this *divine shortcut* [emphasis mine] ... gives the believer the whole." (Comment 3, 142)

Leader: There was, in the past generation, an assumption that everyone had received Baptism. Clearly, that wasn't true then. Certainly, that is not true now. You may wish to spark this portion of your conversation with a story from your pastoral experience of a young or not-so-young adult who came to you, having discovered that he or she had never been baptized.

II. ARTICLE 13 — WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED

Certain Lutheran pastors to whom Walther wrote were on the “frontier.” They were striving to serve people not yet connected to congregations. Other pastors in 1872 cared for the souls of people in their congregations. And yet, all were striving to share the Gospel with the unbelievers and the unchurched around them.

The situation is no different today. Some pastors are seeking to gather present and new Christians into congregations where they can be matured on the faith. Some pastors serve established congregations. And still, all are focused on sharing the Gospel with the unbelieving and the unchurched around them.

Walther’s counsel regarding who should be baptized is as relevant now as it was relevant to American-Lutheran pastors in the post-Civil War years. Discuss the contemporary implications of his advice to 19th century pastors:

1. What responsibility does a pastor have to discover if a person (an adult, a youth, or a child) has already received Holy Baptism? How can this “investigation” happen?
2. Why might someone conceal his/her (or his/her child’s) emergency Baptism? How should a pastor catechize and comfort regarding the efficacy and validity of such a Baptism due in accordance with Christ’s command?
3. What of those who were baptized by heretics? How is the distinction made between a heretical preacher and the Calvinist churches and the Papists? (Comment 2, 146)

Consider these words from the seventy-eighth letter of Basil: “We must be baptized in the same way as we have received it [from Christ’s institution]; but also believe in the same way as we have been baptized: but also praise whom we believed, namely, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” To this Paul Tarnov adds: “For Baptism belongs to the Church, not to the minister.” (Comment 2, 146–147)

4. What must we do when someone comes to our church from a public doctrinal confession which denies or confuses the doctrine of the Trinity (e.g. Sabellians and Socinians of earlier times; Jehovah’s Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints of current times) yet claiming to have been baptized?
5. On this point Deyling states: “He must still receive *the holy bath.*” [emphasis mine] (Comment 2, 147)

Walther also addresses “uncertain” Baptisms in Comment 2. While this may have been more of an issue when both record-keeping and communication were more challenging, it is still a situation any pastor may face today. (A good friend of mine, a fellow-LCMS pastor, discovered in searching for his baptismal date while he was at seminary, that there was no record of his Baptism in church or family archives. He received Holy Baptism during his vicarage!)

6. What does Luther offer as counsel and as a pastoral practice in the situation of a mother baptizing her own child born prematurely? (148)
7. Why does Luther reject the conditional Baptism of “the papists?” (148–149)

Comment 3: Parental Authority and Baptism

Once again, in his presentation of pastoral theology regarding the question of who has authority to bring a child to Baptism (Comment 3, 149–151), Walther may seem to be addressing a point that is no longer pertinent. I suggest that just the opposite is true. As many in our society move frequently from place to place, and as many families are broken and then blended, many children (even children in adulthood) are separated from those who should have spiritual authority over them.

1. How do the following texts provide some perspective on this issue and on our pastoral practice?
 - a. Mark 10:13–16 — Who are “they” in this account? Though this is not specifically about Baptism, this passage is always read in the Divine Service when the Sacrament involves an infant or a young child.
 - b. Acts 2:37–39 — The response to Peter’s proclamation on Pentecost
 - c. Acts 16:25–34 — The conversion of the jailer at Philippi and “his entire household”

Walther quotes Johann Hartmann as he discusses under what circumstances a pastor might (and should) baptize the child of unbelievers and of heretics. Discuss the implications of these two points for your pastoral practice:

2. If children of unbelievers are still living with their parents, they may not be baptized against the parents’ will. (149)

3. When children of unbelieving parents are baptized into the Christian faith they “become in a way member(s) and property of the believers under whose cure (as their new parents) they stand.” (149)

Pastor Walther also addresses the issue of baptizing the children of an apostate “still living in the parish” (the geographic area) and the children of one excommunicated from the congregation. (151)

4. How would you (how have you) dealt with such a situation?

At this point in his challenging but helpful article on Baptism, Walther raises the question of baptizing Jewish children who desire to be baptized in the Body of Christ. Already in 1623, the theological faculty of Wittenberg offered this opinion: “... if the children came themselves and desire instruction in the Christian faith, even though their parents object to it, we should still receive them, instruct them, and make every effort to see them brought to Holy Baptism.” (Comment 3, 151)

5. Would this same principle apply to children of other non-Christian religions?

At the risk of distracting your thoughtful conversation about the care of souls and Holy Baptism, you may choose to consider Walther’s comment/advice regarding deformed babies.

6. “Living, deformed infants should also be baptized if they have a human head; conjoined children, twice.” (Comment 4)

Finally, Walther asks: “Up to what age should children be baptized?” (Comment 5, 152) His own words clarify the question: “... it is especially important to answer the question of what age a child may reach *and still be baptized without prior, complete instruction* [emphasis mine] as is necessary for adults” (152)

7. How does Walther answer his own question?

8. How have you answered this question in your pastoral practice?

Leader: The following section may elicit strong convictions or viewpoints regarding the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the customs of any pastor or congregation. Be pastor to the other pastors in listening and in helping them listen to each other in this discussion. (See the note to all after #9 below.)

II. ARTICLE 14 — BAPTISMAL CUSTOMS

As you approach this portion of Walther’s pastoral theology, I suggest that you ponder this: as edifying, even valuable, as these customs might be, and as meaningful as certain ones may have become for you, they are not essential in the command or for the efficacy and validity of Holy Baptism. Therefore, be careful that you:

- › Do not over-emphasize them;
- › Properly teach and explain them;
- › Do not judge your brother pastors who omit one or some of these customs or do them differently than you do.

Johann Gerhard offers helpful clarity regarding baptismal customs. (Comment 1, 155)

1. What do you find most insightful in his three divisions and in the “rules,” which Gerhard asserts should be followed? (155–156)

In total, Walther lists thirteen customs which may be included in the liturgy for Holy Baptism.

2. Is it “good, right, and salutary” to call these “customs?”
3. How does this help pastors (and the people we serve) to understand and assert what is the very heart of Baptism: applying water while speaking the Triune Name of God?

Walther expresses a concern that these customs can — and should only be — abolished and changed with the command and consent of the church. (Comment 14, 156)

4. Why does he say this?
5. How would this happen among us?
6. What happens when Walther’s words are not heeded among us?

Conversation with brother pastors about these customs could be informative and instructive. Such conversation also has the potential to be either edifying and encouraging or disappointing and divisive. Please listen to one another carefully and discuss these customs collegially in light of the prompts which follow each:

7. The sign of the cross
Rather than debate the nuances of how this gesture might be made, consider this insight from Gerhard: the signing with the cross is a demonstration that the one baptized is born anew into the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:3–5) but it also witnesses “that he will be subject to the cross in this life.” (158)
8. The blessing (Ps. 121:8)
The use of this verse is attested to in almost every baptismal liturgy from a very early time. However, its placement has varied (witness the orders in LCMS agendas and hymnals). Walther quotes Andreas Rudelbach in placing these words of Scripture at the threshold between the narthex and the nave. For, as he states: “We must admit that this is the only appropriate point at which this blessing can be included, but it is also at exactly the right place, where the church opens itself up with the baptismal covenant to the baptismal candidate ...” (Comment 4, 158)
9. The exorcism and/or renunciation
A single or a triple renunciation of “the devil and all his works and all his ways” precedes the Confession of the Apostolic Creed in our contemporary rite for Holy Baptism. Discuss its theological and practical

importance, considering Scriptural teaching and the increasing influence of paganism in western society. (Comments 5 and 7)

10. Posture for the renunciation
In a lengthy quotation from Rudelbach we learn of a practice of the early Church in which baptismal candidates “first turned toward the west during the renunciation and then, after they had renounced and come to the confession, turned toward the east — the former a sign of the prince of darkness; the latter, of the Son of Righteousness.” Discuss how this custom could enhance or detract from the meaning of Baptism among Christians today. (Comment 7, 166)

Leader: This is the conclusion of ‘Part One’ of this study — directly focused on Holy Baptism according to the command of Christ. Below is ‘Part Two,’ dealing with a custom followed by many within the Christian Church (i.e. Confirmation). However, this point must be made: Catechesis is not an option. It is included in the Great Commission and part of our Lord’s desire for His Church. The section following Question 1 may help all of you affirm this — and so, to be better prepared to serve your people by helping them to receive catechesis as youth and adults.

III. ARTICLE 27 — CONFIRMATION

Walther begins this portion of his pastoral teaching with this single and strong statement: “...So-called confirmation is an adiaphoron.” But, he continues, “nevertheless [it is] the kind of ecclesiastical institution that, if used rightly, can be accompanied by great blessing.” (Article 27, 303)

Quoting Deyling, pastor Walther notes that this ancient tradition “was customarily given immediately after Baptism ...” and that Tertullian (in the late second or early third century) wrote, “Having come out of Baptism, we receive the holy anointing.” (Comment 1, 303)

1. Consider this interesting and insightful comment (a quotation from Heinrich Guericke) found in a footnote: “...the neophytes were anointed immediately after the Baptism with consecrated oil of chrism as a symbol of the spiritual priesthood of all Christians.” (303)

But, before considering at greater length this “ecclesiastical institution” and ancient tradition of confirmation, I encourage you to reflect on the Scriptures which provide the framework for a valuable practice which is,

none-the-less, an adiaphoron. Within your “band of brothers” ponder these portions of God’s Word and discuss how they relate to confirmation.

- › Deuteronomy 6:6–9
- › Matthew 28:19–20
- › 2 Peter 3:18a
- › John 6:68–69
- › John 21:15–16
- › Psalm 119:97–99
- › John 8:51
- › Luke 11:28
- › Colossians 3:16
- › Luke 10:38–42

Leader: You may wish to send out and assign these Scriptures before your circuit conference.

Walther argues that, as the Roman Catholic Church elevated confirmation to a sacrament (hence, a conferring

of divine grace), this effectively devalued Baptism for, as Deyling observes, it is then, “in a certain respect greater than the grace of Baptism.” (Comment 1, 304)

The reformers spoke clearly when, in reply to the Colloquy of Regensburg (1541), they wrote: “Concerning confirmation and anointing there is neither divine command nor promise ...” (304–305)

Note also the denunciation of Martin Luther in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* as well as his language in a Christmas season sermon. He calls papal confirmation “monkey business” and “deceitful mumbo-jumbo.” (304)

2. How can Lutheran pastors help people — and, in particular, Christian parents — see the value of both catechesis and confirmation?

The truth is, as Walther honestly admits, that there was an ambivalent and inconsistent attitude towards the practice of confirmation in the churches and regions of the Reformation. (305) Though many Reformers “wished for

the catechism to be used faithfully... [and for] prayer to be said over the children after they are [taught and] examined and confess their faith,” confirmation was not embraced or practiced universally.

3. Discuss why this ambivalence may have been a healthy attitude.
4. How and why have uncertain and even contradictory attitudes toward catechesis and confirmation developed in the modern Lutheran church in America?

Walther quotes Johann Quistorp who addressed “the confirmation of catechumens” in 1659. He stated, “If this thoroughly laudable church discipline were still practiced today, then...the unity of faith in Christendom would increase, and...not as many would be easily seduced by false teaching.” (Comment 1, 305)

5. How could strong catechesis and a positive practice of confirmation reduce “easy seduction” in your congregation, in your circuit, and in our Synod?

IV. ARTICLE 28 — CONFIRMATION INSTRUCTION AND THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION

In Article 28, pastor Walther offers practical advice on the content of catechesis and the purpose of confirmation, the length of time devoted to instruction, the age of catechumens, the placement of the Rite of Confirmation within the Church Year, and — among other matters — the decision to not confirm “notoriously wicked children.” (307–309)

1. Which of these matters most resonates with your ministry of catechesis, and with how members of your congregation (the active and the inactive) perceive confirmation?

It should come as no surprise that Walther addresses the care of a pastor for the youth — these young souls under his care — after instruction, examination and confirmation. This, after all, is the man whose name was chosen as the moniker for the “Walther League,” the youth ministry of the LCMS for many years!

Walther is a pastor, and a pastor is a shepherd. He knows, by experience, that some youth will be inclined to “evade the oversight of their pastor after confirmation” ... and may flee the church and “become the world’s prey.” (311) Therefore, he must “concern himself especially seriously with this flock of Christ’s sheep.” (Article 29, 310)

Leader: You may be leading or participating in this study long before “confirmation season.” I encourage you to pause for a corporate prayer for all involved in the catechesis of each pastor’s parish represented in your gathering: parents, children, baptismal sponsors, pastors, DCEs, Sunday school teachers, etc.

2. Even though (as every pastor knows and grieves) many youth disappear after the white robe and the red carnation — and the promises! — how can we pastors encourage each other to continue to have a “special fatherly interest” in these young disciples?
3. Discuss what this “fatherly interest” can look like as you continue to support youth (and their parents) on their journey of faith.
4. How does a pastoral role and responsibility toward the confirmed youth differ from a director of Christian Education, a youth worker, a Sunday school teacher or an elder?
5. How does a pastor maintain — and help others maintain — the primary role of Christian parents to be teachers of the faith?

Comment 3 — CHURCH EXAMINATIONS

Walther is concerned that the pastor-catechist is well-prepared for his task and that he can carry out this duty with (borrowing from Christoph Seidel) “pleasure and delight.” (Comment 3, 315)

6. How does catechesis/examination relate to the faithful care of souls?
7. How can pastors encourage each other as they approach the important work of instructing youth in the Christian faith and in Lutheran doctrine?
8. Why does it often seem to be easier and a greater “pleasure and delight” to teach and catechize adults?
9. What have you found most effective in the instruction of children and teens?