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**WHAT MAKES A PASTOR?**

# A Practical Disposition OF THE Soul

**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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DOXOLOGY: The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel, a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has assisted more than seven hundred pastors and the congregations and agencies they serve since its beginning in 2008. The DOXOLOGY program provides advanced training in pastoral care skills, combining the classic heritage of the cure of souls with the insights of contemporary Christian psychology. Information and resources can be accessed at [doxology.us](http://doxology.us).

**DOXOLOGY**  
The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel

## WHAT MAKES A PASTOR?

**H**ow does one become a pastor? Of course, there is the call of God, first in the sense that a man is moved by the Spirit to prepare for the ministry. This is followed by some form of training and examination through which the church assures itself that the man is “apt to teach” and possessing of the character necessary to be a pastor (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:1–7). There follows the specific call of God to a particular ministry, a call mediated through a congregation(s). Essentially this call of God through a congregation makes the man a pastor. The wider church recognizes and publicly confirms this call through the rite of ordination, whereby the man is pledged to the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions and consecrated to the ministry by the Word of God and prayer. This is the necessary doctrinal and Scriptural answer.

Ordination and installation of a man into pastoral office is just the beginning. What follows brings a necessary question: How does a man grow into the office of pastor? Writing in the mid-19th century, C.F.W. Walther, in his *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, called pastoral theology a “God-given, practical disposition of the soul, acquired by certain means, by which a minister is equipped to perform all the tasks that come to him”<sup>1</sup> It is a “disposition” — not simply facts that one knows, but a quality of the soul. It is “practical,” that is, a way of thinking and acting, the goal of which is leading lost sinners to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and the care of the faithful. As such, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit given by means of the Word of God in the school of experience: prayer, meditation on the Word, as well as testing, tension, struggle, temptations overcome by the Spirit’s power in the Word and even temptations lost in sin and forgiven through confession and absolution. As the pastor learns and grows throughout his ministry, we pray not only that his confidence in the promises of God increases, but also that his people grow in their confidence in his ministry because they have learned to hear in his voice the voice of their Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus.

Even though his *Pastoral Theology* was written 145 years ago, Walther’s reflections on the pastoral ministry are quite timeless, often instructive for us today. Some of the issues are different, superficially at least, but the biblical issues remain the same. People continue to be sinners, and sin and live in need of forgiveness and salvation in Christ. Pastors are divinely appointed to apply God’s saving Word of Law and Gospel that the Spirit might lead some to repentance and faith, to living as the baptized saints of God. You, dear pastor, will of course want to purchase the book from Concordia Publishing House yourself, if you have not done so already, to facilitate your full participation in these discussions.

We have asked a veteran pastor, the Rev. Dr. Harold Senkbeil, Executive Director for Spiritual Care of *DOXOLOGY: The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel*, and seven of the DOXOLOGY Collegium Fellows, to lead us into the meat of Walther’s pastoral reflections. The nine studies they have prepared are arranged topically, following in general the chapters of Walther’s book. May their work with you be blessed by God so that together we grow pastorally “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18).

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+ Herbert Mueller  
First Vice-President  
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

<sup>1</sup> Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, *American Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, ed. David W. Loy, trans. Christian Tiewes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 7. You will want to refer to your own copy of this work throughout our study.

# A Practical Disposition of the Soul

References in Walther: Articles 1–3, 48–49  
[Walther's Titles: Introduction/Definition of Pastoral Theology; The Life of the Preacher]

**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. In connection with question 9, point out 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. To maximize your study with the brothers, prioritize your questions and inform them in advance of those questions you will be focusing on for your discussion.

## PREFACE

Consider the following questions to gain a better understand Walther's book in its 19th-century setting and its application in our contemporary context.

**A group review of these questions would be a helpful way to launch your discussion of the first lesson.**

1. What were the influences on Walther's theological formation? (xii)
2. What difficulties did Walther and his fellow immigrants face in organizing church life in America in terms of: theology? Church governance? Church institutions? (xiv)
3. What part did media play in the formation of the Synod? (xiv–xv)

4. What new mission challenges were faced in America? (xv)
5. What competing theologies complicated pastoral care and mission on the frontier? (xv)
6. Was Walther a mere "restitution theologian"? Why or why not? (xv)
7. How can Walther's research and extensive citations assist us today? (xvi)
8. What is the purpose of the longer tradition of Lutheran casuistry guidance? (xvii)
9. What similar questions of doctrine and practice do we face today? (xviii)

## INTRODUCTION

The pastoral vocation in the chaotic 21st century world is often viewed exclusively in terms of duties, skills and activities. Dr. Walther lived in an environment that faced its own chaos (acculturation of immigrants into a new homeland, competition from false and heretical teachers, a torn and divided political system that would soon break out into a bloody civil war). Yet before he addresses pastoral responsibilities he addresses the person of the pastor. His conviction is that pastoral work is not simply a matter of doing, but of *being*. His is a uniquely *pastoral* concern that translates well into our radically different contemporary setting:

› How is a pastor to BE with His people?

And so we begin at the beginning. In this first study of Walther's monumental text, we explore this foundational question. Together we will look at the pivotal scriptural texts that Walther cites, some of the authorities he quotes and engage in fraternal conversation to grasp more clearly our pastoral identity before we systematically and sequentially review various aspects of pastoral work in the months ahead.

## I. WALTHER'S FORMAT

Note that Walther's book is written in thesis/antithesis form. Its 11 chapters are divided into 50 different articles, each of which is introduced by a thesis statement that often includes an implied antithesis. Each statement is evaluated first on the basis of pertinent scripture texts, then pertinent selections from the writings of Martin Luther as well as supporting quotations from the period of Lutheran orthodoxy and, in some cases, the church fathers.

Modern writing and theological discourse does not use this format, and at first you may find it difficult. As you read and discuss, follow this procedure:

1. What is Walther's central point in each article?
2. What implied antithesis is he addressing?
3. How is his argument supported by the scriptural references he provides?
4. What insights do you glean from the secondary sources he cites in his comments?
5. What questions do these comments raise in your mind?

**Be sure to highlight questions 3 and 4 in your group discussion.**

## II. ARTICLE ONE: DEFINITION OF PASTORAL THEOLOGY

"Pastoral theology is the God-given practical disposition of the soul (orig.: *praktische Habitus der Seele*), acquired by certain means"

1. Why does Walther suggest the central definition of "pastoral theology" is a "disposition" (*habitus*) rather than a discipline or book? (Comment 1, 7)
2. What is the practical outcome of this disposition? (Comment 2, 7–8; 2 Tim. 3:17; 2 Cor. 3:5)
3. Why is this disposition more of an art than a science? (2 Tim. 3:16–17)
4. How is this disposition acquired? (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5–6)
5. What do sanctification and pastoral ministry have in common, according to Deyling? (9) How do they differ? What does this mean?

6. How does a pastor's personal faith impact his ministry, according to Luther? (11)
7. Walther comments that the apostles received their disposition (*habitus*) immediately from the Holy Spirit, but a pastor's disposition is given by the Holy Spirit "mediately." What therefore should be a priority in a pastor's life if he is to acquire and maintain a pastoral *habitus*? (12, 1 Tim. 4:13–16)

**Leader:** Walther's first thesis is central to his whole book; if your group thoroughly digests what he means by "disposition" (*habitus*) it will enrich every succeeding study session. A "practical *habitus*" for ministry is never completely mastered. This "practical disposition" is acquired through a life-long process by which the pastor himself goes on receiving what he brings to others.

## III. ARTICLE 2: ORATIO, MEDITATIO, TENTATIO MAKE THE THEOLOGIAN

Read Luther's famous instruction on the making of a theologian (13–15) and reflect on the following questions:

1. Why is prayer for the Holy Spirit's enlightenment the first step in meditation on the Word of God? (13)
2. Describe Luther's method of oral meditation. (14)
3. What is the crucial function of affliction in the Christian life? (14)

4. What happens when human pride disrupts this process? (15; 1 Peter 5:5)

**Leader:** Note that for Walther, the heart of pastoral theology is not mastery of a myriad of pastoral skills, but the pastor's own spiritual life framed by prayer, meditation and affliction. Point out Luther's practical argument for oral (outward or spoken) prayer and meditation in private devotion: it provides a sure foundation for faith in the external Word.

Reflect on the seamless link in Luther's sequence:  
*Prayer begins in a receptive posture, asking for the Spirit's guidance for oral mediation on God's Word. When God's Word takes root in the heart, Satan attacks, driving the soul to take refuge in the promises of God. But what Satan intends*

*for evil, God uses for good. By these assaults we move from mere intellectual comprehension of His grace to very personal and experiential enjoyment of the multifaceted dimensions of God's comforting mercy and love.*

## IV. ARTICLE 3: LITERATURE ABOUT PASTORAL THEOLOGY

1. How do secondary resources supplement the pastoral epistles of St. Paul as a course of study for pastors, according to Dr. Walther? (17)
2. Where can we find such resources today?
3. How could your Winkel discussions include more beneficial conversation about the care of souls?

**Leader:** This article, which, in essence, is an extended review of extant pastoral theology literature, does not easily lend itself to group discussion. It may be wise to ask several men in advance to each study a section and then report briefly to the group what Walther found to be the highlights in that text as well as how it may be applied (or adapted) in today's ministry setting.

## V. ARTICLE 48: [THE PREACHER AS EXAMPLE]

1. What is surprising about St. Paul's instructions to the pastors at Ephesus (Acts 20:28) and to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:16)?
2. Why do you think contemporary pastors are prone to neglect these instructions?
3. What is meant by a "blameless life" (1 Tim. 3:2) according to Dr. Walther? (453)
4. Review Walther's extensive footnote from the writings of Gerhard regarding reinstatement of pastors who have committed crimes and/or sinned publicly? (455–56)
  - a. How do distinctions between the right- and left-hand kingdoms pertain to this question?
  - b. How are a pastor's repentance and his qualifications for office properly distinguished and applied?
5. A pastor's life and doctrine are a seamless whole; according to Luther how does each apply: To his enemies? To his friends? (456)
6. How does the pastor's life impact his preaching, according to Luther? (456)
7. Discuss Walther's extensive treatment of avoiding the appearance of evil: (458–59)

- a. What is his pastoral concern?
  - b. What are his specific directives?
  - c. Evaluate those directives in our current social milieu:
    - › How many still apply?
    - › How would his pastoral concern apply to the use of the Internet and social media?
8. The preacher's petitionary prayer and family devotions: (460)
    - a. What have you found most helpful in developing habitual personal prayer and meditation?
    - b. What have you found most helpful in developing and maintain family devotions? (note Walther's terminology: *Hausgottesdienst* "household worship" [or Divine Service])

Reflect on the proper connection between a pastor's life and his preaching. George Herbert provided a helpful analogy: the pastor's life as a stained-glass window through which God's Word shines:

*Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one  
 When they combine and mingle, bring  
 A strong regard and awe: but speech alone  
 Doth vanish like a flaring thing,  
 And in the ear, not conscience ring.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> George Herbert, *The Poetical Works of George Herbert* (New York: Appleton, 1857), 84.



**Leader:** Be sure to spend a fair amount of time with question #1 and the necessity of self-care for pastors. Question #4 deserves careful review; how can Gerhard's insights enhance our ethical, pastoral and professional responsibilities to brothers in office?

Question #8 is central; why is professional use of God's Word (sermon and Bible study prep, etc.) not

the same as personal meditation? Brainstorm some ways in which contemporary pastors can reprioritize their lives to ensure time for both personal prayer and family devotions.

Question #6: What is the proper connection between a pastor's life and his preaching?

## VI. ARTICLE 49: THE PREACHER'S DUTY TO CULTIVATE UNITY

1. Note Walther's favorable citation of Basil's dictum: "The right hand is not as necessary to the left as harmony is to the church." (461)
  - a. In your mind, what are the major factors (both social and theological) that breed divisiveness among pastors today?
  - b. What can you do to cultivate unity among colleagues in ministry?
2. In what way does Walther consider the Lutheran schoolteacher to be a "minister of the Church?" (463) How can a pastor build collegial relationships with teachers in his parish school?
3. Walther includes an extensive quote from Johannes Freder, a 16th century Lutheran Superintendent (463–65)
  - a. What important role should pastoral conferences play in equipping pastors for faithful ministry?
  - b. How can we better encourage that role today?
  - c. What is the danger when pastors refuse ongoing professional instruction? (465)
4. Keeping in mind Dr. Walther's pivotal role in the development of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, review his extensive discussion of the congregation and how it relates to a larger church body. (466–72)
  - a. Which is by "divine right"? By "human right"?
  - b. How does Luther view distinctions between clergy? (466–67)
  - c. What role does Luther see for human jurisdictions in the church in terms of visitation? (467)
  - d. What is the relationship of call and ordination according to Seckendorf? (467–68)
  - e. Having cited favorably many authorities stressing the independence of each local congregation, why does Walther label a pastor who wants to keep his congregation independent a "separatist?" (469) What is the spiritual danger he foresees?
  - f. What is the positive purpose of human distinctions among clergy and the evangelical role of "bishops," "superintendents" (presidents) in maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?
  - g. Read the selection from Luther's *Instructions for Visitors*. (471–72) Note the many biblical examples he cites, including our Lord's visit *in utero* to his unborn cousin John.
    - › How can ecclesiastical visitation best be restored (or enhanced) among us today?
    - › What is the danger to both faith and love in the church when visitation is neglected or omitted?
  - h. What are some practical ways we can help our congregations grow in their appreciation for the work of our Synod, and how it positively impacts each local church? (473)

**Leader:** Walther was no stranger to factions, conflict and theological debate. This Article can best be used as a catalyst for positive discussion on what makes for greater unity within the ministerium and Synod. Before taking up any of the discussion questions, lead the group through Walther's extensive thesis: list all the areas where a pastor can encourage and build constructive unity personally and professionally. Which of these are often neglected today — and why?

Walther's sources shed light on topics still under discussion among us today: the relationship between church and office, call and ordination, congregation and Synod, the role of the District President, etc. As you take up specific questions in this section, encourage collegial conversation, moving beyond generalities to specifics. How concretely can each of us foster genuine harmony by speaking the truth in love?