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Issued by the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, the Concordia Journal is the successor of Lehr und Wehre (1855-1929), begun by C. F. W. Walther, a founder of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Lehr und Wehre was absorbed by the Concordia Theological Monthly (1930-1972) which was also published by the faculty of Concordia Seminary as the official theological periodical of the Synod.


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On the cover: Collage of images of the newly renovated C. F. W. Walther Mausoleum, which stands in historic Concordia Cemetery in south St. Louis. (Photo credits: David Fiedler)

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The life of Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811–1887) is quintessentially Lutheran—his deep reading of Luther; his keen commitment to the Lutheran confessions. But something about the life of Walther is also quintessentially American—the manifest destiny to pioneer frontier communities; the entrepreneurial spirit to launch a seminary, several churches, numerous books and publications, and an entire synod.

This is the year Walther would have turned 200. And we would be remiss not to mark the occasion in some tangible way. Of course, perhaps there is something quintessentially Lutheran and American about marking anniversaries like these. How to mark them is another question entirely. Sometimes these occasions are simply foils for pushing other agendas or propagating hyperbolic hagiography. A better alternative is to celebrate the memory of the man in a way that rings true to history and to the way his legacy resonates in the present and will continue in the future.

Thus this issue of *Concordia Journal* provokes reflection on the life and thought of C. F. W. Walther primarily by asking two questions. The first: Would Walther recognize everything that has been done in his name? Ken Schurb attempts to answer this question with the appropriately titled essay, “Was Walther Waltherian?”

The second: Where do we go from here? To answer this question, *Concordia Journal* publishes here resources to help leaders and scholars answer the question for their own contexts and purposes. Tom Egger interprets with depth and precision the contents of the Walther archives. And Tom Manteufel provides the most detailed bibliography of Walther’s works in English that we are aware of to-date. These two resources provide guidance to further research and scholarship for a generation to come.

On the other end of the scholarly spectrum, a word about what has been going on lately at *ConcordiaTheology.org*. Near the end of May, we posted a number of responses to Rob Bell’s provocative book, *Love Wins*, along with a review of Todd Burpo’s bestseller *Heaven is for Real*. The posts have provoked stimulating theological conversation online, and judging by the statistics, made quite an impact in the Google-sphere.

I mention it because it all got started by a pastor who emailed us looking for insight from the faculty who formed him for ministry.

Likewise, we will soon launch a new section of *ConcordiaTheology.org* called “The Pulpit.” It will bring together a plethora of resources for preaching, some new things and some old favorites like Lectionary at Lunch. All in one place. Because we know preachers are always looking for resources to strengthen their ministry.

We know because you told us.

Of course, if I may be so bold, I believe such responsiveness from scholars steeped in the confessionally Lutheran tradition would make Concordia Seminary’s founder proud. Were he alive, he might write about such things himself. On his blog, Called “Teach and Defend.”

Travis J. Scholl
Managing Editor of Theological Publications
Is Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, still in financial crisis? Oh, we were, worried and wringing our hands. In the Spring 2009 issue of the *Concordia Journal* I wrote, “The recession has turned into a stress test for the funding patterns of seminaries in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the verdict is in: Fail” (112). That was then. Now? Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, is in good financial shape. Hands raised to our donors and our gracious Lord!

Then: A debt of $28 million, unaddressed deferred maintenance, declining residential enrollments, a cap on scholarships, and bam, the Great Recession. Now: No debt. Now: Bit by bit, year by year, and for many years to come, the Seminary is addressing deferred maintenance. Now: A projected 10% increase in new residential students, while our Specific Ministry Pastor program is operating at capacity. Now: New scholarship procedures enable individuals, congregations, districts, circuits, other groups, and the Seminary to work together to meet our students’ demonstrated financial need. In hindsight, the Great Recession was a God-given opportunity for refining . . . and God graced us to do just that.

Why am I writing this? First, that you know we are not in “high clover,” but Seminary pastures are greener. Second, as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod struggles with the bleak financial condition of “corporate synod,” Concordia University System (CUS) schools and seminaries, the healthy ones included, are being scrutinized. Will the scrutiny be bane or blessing to these institutions which exist for the future of the church? People involved must address some fundamental questions.

What do we mean by “synod”? Does “synod” support its seminaries? Yes, 100%, if you mean all the baptized of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, but only about 2% if you mean subsidy from the national budget.

Will increased CUS and seminary efficiencies become more dollars for corporate synod? In the case of the seminaries, probably not. We depend upon donations and donors, younger donors especially, will not automatically redirect their giving to some remote denominational offices.

Can we compare college/university operations to seminary operations? Only to a point. For a host of reasons, CUS schools and seminaries are generically different entities. These differences led the LCMS years ago to divide the Board for Higher Education Services into separate boards for university and seminary education.

Does our culture regard institutions as highly as it did in the twentieth century? No, and today denominational structures are less loved, even by church-goers. What images do the words “institutional church” evoke? I bet a lot of younger adults think of a dinosaur. Denominational structures are important but even in the best-case scenario, less important than they used to be.

Without clarity on fundamental questions, we’ll end up looking like people bent over the synodical couch desperately hunting for loose change. Since higher education institutions are about the future, may God give unusual wisdom to his church so that our colleges and seminaries thrive for the sake of growing the Savior’s mission.
Today, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, is not what it was a few years ago and not what it will be in coming years. When I tell groups that we are out of debt, there is almost always spontaneous applause. Our people respect wise stewardship and applaud when they see it. God, help our Synod plan wisely!

Dale A. Meyer
President

Online Now! *Concordia Journal* and *CTM*

The full catalog of *Concordia Journal* (1975-present) and the available catalog of its predecessor *Concordia Theological Monthly* (1949-1974) are now digitized and fully searchable in the ATLASerials (ATLAS) database (http://search.ebscohost.com). Subscribers can access the journals through the log-in and password that will now be printed on the inside front cover of every *Concordia Journal*. Alumni of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, can obtain an exclusive alumni log-in to the full ATLAS catalog (nearly 200 journals and over 300,000 records) by contacting Eric Stancliff in the Seminary Library at stancliffe@csl.edu or 314-505-7033. The ATLAS database provides downloadable PDFs of everything in *Concordia Journal* and *Concordia Theological Monthly*, and is searchable by keyword, author, subject, biblical text, etc.
It had been three years since the passing of their pastor, yet the sorrow was still fresh in their minds. The parishioners sought a way to honor his memory and to show their praise and thanks to the Lord for all that he had been to them. A committee was formed and funds were raised, all for a special memorial that would recall what their pastor had meant to them.

This is a scene that has played out probably hundreds of times in Lutheran churches and schools across the country. My own congregation has a plaque in the gymnasium, dedicating it as Hagenmueller Hall. It honors a husband and wife who together served for 77 years as teachers in the school. You have probably been part of such efforts yourself. Gyms, fellowship halls, even trees and benches—all these are things dedicated in the memory of servants of Christ who have labored among us.

But this particular group of people did not settle on anything like that. It was 1890, and this group decided that the most fitting tribute for their pastor—who happened to be C. F. W. Walther—would be the construction of an elaborate mausoleum as his final place of rest here on earth.

In addition to serving as their parish pastor at historic Trinity in St. Louis from 1842–1887, Walther was the first president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the seminary president for over 45 years, and one of the central figures in the history of American Lutheranism. It was through Walther’s leadership, after all, that the 700 Saxon immigrants who settled in Perry County, Missouri in 1838–39 overcame both physical hardship and internal strife to become the church body that we know today as the LCMS. Walther presided over the young Synod from 1847–50, and again from 1864–78, leading its growth through the years of the great migration of German immigrants.

And so the historic Walther Mausoleum came about. Standing prominently in Concordia Cemetery, near the historic Bevo Mill in south St. Louis, the imposing structure ultimately attracts the attention of almost every visitor regardless of which grave initially prompted their visit.

Sculpted of black marble and gray granite, the mausoleum stands 33 feet high and features French-cut windows with inlaid stained glass depicting an angel and symbols of the four Evangelists. The remains of Walther and his wife, Emilie, lie at rest under a mosaic tile floor. A life-sized statue of Walther stands inside, visible through the windows from every angle of the mausoleum. He is posed with a small sheaf of notes in one hand, as if he is presiding over a synodical gathering. The other hand rests on a pedestal which contains the Holy Bible and the Book of Concord. His form suggests a man in his fifties, and his expression is calm yet earnestly intent.

As you might imagine, due to its association with the beloved Walther and as a point of prominence in the cemetery, the vicinity of the mausoleum has attracted a number of other well-known people of the church who desired to be buried nearby. The gravesites of Synod presidents John Behnken, who served the LCMS from 1935–1962, and J.A.O. Preus, president from 1969–1982, are located nearby. The tombstones of Theodore Graebner and Gerhard Bente stand also in close proximity. Graebner,
an influential presence in the Synod, was a seminary professor and editor of *Lutheran Witness* from 1913–1950, while Bente presided over the Canadian District—LCMS (now the Lutheran Church—Canada) and served as seminary professor where he was editor of the faculty journal, *Lehre und Wehre*, and author of a number of other works.

Due to the unique roots of its origin, the Synod itself has responsibility for care and maintenance of the Walther Mausoleum. The structure has experienced several phases of extensive restoration and repair over the years to counter the effects of weather and aging of the structure. Following substantial efforts taking place in 1956 and 1988, the most recent renovation occurred in the fall of 2010. This work included tuck pointing and masonry repair, cleaning and resetting of the protective Plexiglas over the mausoleum’s stained glass windows, extensive cleaning of the inside of the mausoleum, and the complete power-washing and resealing of the structure’s exterior.

Additionally, as part of the work this past fall an outside piece of ornamental granite was reseated. The hole that was opened after this large spire was knocked off by vandals some years ago had allowed moisture to enter the structure and cause problems by loosening interior mortar that held tiles and larger pieces of granite and marble in place. With the leak stopped, the tiles have been resecured, and it is expected that this particular point of concern has been remediated. One final activity that will help to both record the condition of the mausoleum and provide useful reference for future restoration efforts was the creation of both written and photographic documentation that details the current condition of the mausoleum and additional potential long term restoration needs.

In 2010, just like in 1956 and 1988—when it was discovered that repairs were needed—it was a bit of a scramble to put funds together to pay for this work. The annual ongoing maintenance costs are rather low, but about every thirty years a major repair and restoration effort is necessary. Because of this, the Synod has recently created a modest endowment to ensure that the mausoleum is properly maintained. By starting now with a relatively small pool of funds, approximately $20,000, the next time more significant repairs are needed, sufficient monies will be available from the accumulated interest to perform needed work without exhausting this fund. Additionally, this approach will leave the Synod with a base corpus of funds even after the repair is done. This allows the long-term growth process to begin anew so that the fund will again carry sufficient resources when next needed.

Creation of this endowment has been a partnership among the LCMS, Concordia Historical Institute, and members of the Walther family. It was established to mark the current bicentennial celebration of Walther’s birth observed this year.

According to Larry Lumpe, interim executive director of the Concordia Historical Institute, the endowment is a perfect tribute to Walther’s bicentennial birthday. “This endowment is key to preserving Walther’s final resting place,” said Lumpe. “I pray future generations may continue to give due honor and glory to God for the gifts and contributions of this central figure in the history of the Missouri Synod.”
Walther’s great granddaughter, Edna Walther Wolf, is pleased the LCMS has taken this step to preserve the heritage of Walther. “The mausoleum is an important part of the church’s and our family’s history,” said Wolf, whose family has contributed to the fund. “The creation of the endowment fund seems like a major commitment by the LCMS to me. I feel this important piece of our church’s history will be safe for a long, long time.”

So, having the Walther Mausoleum is perhaps a bit different than the typical practice these days that might have named a gymnasium or fellowship hall in his honor. But the intent behind the Walther Mausoleum is the same: to offer praise and thanks to God for this man and his service. Through his leadership and the Lord’s blessing, our church body was able to gain solid footing despite circumstances during those early years that were, at times, extraordinarily difficult.

And by remembering Walther ourselves, we too can praise and thank God for the way he uses ordinary people—bumblers and weaklings like you and me saddled with all sorts of human flaws and frailties—to carry out the work of his church. Like Walther, we are privileged indeed to be able to contribute in some small way, with his blessing, to help advance the work of his kingdom here on earth.

To support the ongoing preservation of the Walther Mausoleum, visit http://lfnd.org/walther or call 888-930-4438.

David Fiedler

David Fiedler is the executive director of the general services department of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod headquarters in St. Louis. In addition to his work for the LCMS, David is the author of several books, including a history of the WWII-era German and Italian prisoners of war held in Missouri.
Was there ever a man in the Missouri Synod more misunderstood than C. F. W. Walther? I rather doubt it. Walther has probably been the subject of more caricatures than anyone else in the history of the church body. People have had the opportunity to distort his views since before the Synod was founded. No matter what anyone thinks of Walther, or wants to make of him, sooner or later we must all recognize that some renditions of Walther turn out to be caricatures.

At the Theological Symposium of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in 2003, I noted that we in the Missouri Synod sometimes have problems identifying our genuine theological tradition. Ironically, at least some of these problems arise from our very close proximity to this tradition, of which Walther forms a big part. In 2008, I was invited back for another symposium and assigned the topic, “Was Walther Waltherian?” My basic goal was to examine and evaluate caricatures of Walther.

My dictionary defines the noun caricature as “a picture or description in which features are exaggerated or distorted so as to produce an absurd effect.” A related meaning is “a poor, inept, or badly distorted likeness or imitation.” Therefore, my present purview does not include simple misunderstandings of Walther, or even necessarily instances of disagreement with him. After all, it is possible to disagree with a position while stating it accurately. Likewise, not every faulty analysis becomes a caricature. What separates caricature from mere misinterpretation is a matter of degree. I have in mind mainly the degree of misrepresentation, but I am also thinking of how widely the misrepresentation is accepted. Rather than offering a laundry list of several different Walther caricatures with minimal commentary on each, I have chosen to focus on a couple of misconceptions of Walther that are both significantly distorting and widespread.

You never know what you may find when you examine things that you thought you knew very well. A kindergarten teacher was accepting gifts from her pupils at the end of the school year. The kids brought their gifts to her in big, brown paper bags. The teacher had no trouble guessing that there were flowers in the bag brought by the florist’s son, or a box of chocolates in the bag from the daughter of the candy store owner. But the bag given to her by the son of the liquor store owner presented a
challenge. It was leaking a yellowish liquid. She put her finger to the liquid, tasted it, and asked, “Is it wine? Champagne?” “No,” said the boy with a smile, “It’s a puppy.”

It pays to examine things that you think you know. Caricatures are the kind of thing that “everybody knows.”

**Position A**

The first caricature was brought to my attention all over again at a conference I attended less than a year before the 2008 symposium in St. Louis. A speaker posed the hypothetical case of a congregation having among its members a layman particularly gifted at public speaking. The conference speaker asserted that Walther would have had no problem with the pastor sometimes stepping aside so that this talented layman could hold forth and bring the sermonic message to the people. In other words, the speaker claimed that Walther would approve a layman preaching. For his part, the conference speaker approved of this sort of thing too. He was claiming to have the support of Walther for his judgment. On more than one occasion, he physically held up Fred Kramer’s book-length translation of Walther’s *Der Lutheraner* installments on “The Congregation’s Right to Choose its Pastor,” as if this source validated what the speaker had been saying about Walther. During the question and answer period, when this speaker was asked to show some substantiation for his assertion from the book, he read a couple of places where Walther upheld the priesthood of all believers.

I will content myself to designate this speaker’s position simply as “Position A.” Hearing him at the conference reminded me just how widespread this position is these days. It must be fairly common coin if it can be asserted in an official setting with the straight-faced assurance that it accurately reflects Walther. In reality, though, Position A caricatures Walther. If being “Waltherian” is somehow supposed to mean taking Position A, then C. F. W. Walther himself was not Waltherian.

It is common knowledge that Walther taught and wrote much about the priesthood of all believers. He was certainly “for” it. Permit me, however, to cite three distinct quotes from Walther. The sources are of three different kinds: a sermon, a letter, and an article. These span a period of some 18 to 19 years in his life, from the year after the Altenberg Debate to almost the time of the American Civil War. (That is just a chronological reference point. While the Altenberg Debate and its preparation had a deep impact on Walther’s theology of church and ministry, the Civil War did not.)

The first of these citations is an excerpt from a sermon preached by Walther in 1842. He said:

> Beside the spiritual priesthood of all Christians, God has also instituted, for the sake of order, the special office of pastor (*predigtamt*, literally “the preaching office”) to teach the Gospel publicly, administer the sacraments, and handle the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Of this, there is certainly no doubt among us. Pastors are the called public servants of Christ, stewards of the mysteries of God. It therefore follows that no one may despise or omit the public preaching office on the grounds that he himself
is a spiritual priest. A Christian abides by the statement of David, “What God establishes is excellent and worthy of praise.” Moreover, no one dare think, “I am a spiritual priest, therefore I am also a public preacher.” Not at all! For that you have to have a specific, regular call . . . Whoever then, intrudes himself and sets himself up as a public teacher is acting contrary to God. No one, on peril of God’s displeasure, should listen to him.³

The second citation speaks even more specifically to the sort of situation posited by Position A. In fact, it is almost eerie how precisely Walther addressed the very scenario that the speaker ended up describing almost 150 years later. Specifically, when Walther wrote a letter to J. A. Ottesen on December 29, 1858, he raised the question of whether such an arrangement might be encountered, in which the preacher would concede to the layman the occasional right to publicly teach in the pastor’s stead and to publicly lead in prayer. The arrangement assumes that this occurs “regularly”—that is, in good order. This is so diametrically opposed to the doctrine of the Office in Scripture (1 Cor 12:28 [29]; Acts 6:4; Ti 1:5), to Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession, to all witnesses of pure doctrine, and to the constant practice of our church, that one cannot fathom how a person who is otherwise fairly conversant with God’s Word and the orthodox church can be in uncertainty for a moment. To base such a matter on the spiritual priesthood of Christians is nonsense; if that were the case, no one has reason to wait for the calling of a pastor. Even less can the matter depend on a special call; for the church cannot make a call according to its whim but can give only that which God has established and which he alone recognizes (by this alone is a servant of God made, not through a human contract for a few hours or days).⁴

My final citation comes last in chronological order. I am lifting it from the very source displayed by the conference speaker, Walther’s serialized essay on The Congregation’s Right to Choose its Pastor. This excerpt comes at a point where Walther was asking what follows from the priesthood of believers. On account of their spiritual priesthood, could Christians in effect compete with the called preachers in the exercise of their ministerial office? Could they publicly teach beside their preachers, or publicly pray, or publicly absolve sins and retain them? Could they publicly baptize and celebrate Holy Communion, etc.? Walther answered all these questions with a strong negative. He added that “the opponents of the Lutheran doctrine say not only that this necessarily follows from the doctrine of the spiritual priesthood, but at times they go so far as to assert that we actually draw this conclusion! This is, however, a crass untruth.”⁵ (You see, Walther had to deal with caricatures in his own day!) A bit later he added:

. . . whoever troubles the public ministry [Predigtamt], interferes with it, abolishes it, resists it, [this person] troubles God’s ordinance [Ordnung], interferes with God’s office, abolishes God’s institution and resists God’s ordinance [Ordnung], and will have to give God a severe account . . . He will not be helped by the fact that he had “a good intention” in what he did, namely the intention to save souls; for whether a work is good or bad
is not judged by whether it was done with a good intention, but above all things by whether it was done according to God's Word and command.  

Would Walther have approved a layman preaching as the conference speaker imagined? This question does not have to be posed strictly in the realm of the hypothetical. We do not have to guess what Walther would likely have said about this subject, for he directly addressed it. Walther did not approve of a layman preaching, contrary to the caricature in Position A.

**Position B**

Let us advert to a second position, which I will creatively identify as “Position B.” I am citing an expression of it from a journal article that dates from pre-walkout times in the Missouri Synod. (Thus, the article was written before 1974. Again, I am simply offering a chronological reference; the article was not written by a participant in the walkout.) This article said that “C. F. W. Walther’s doctrine of the ministry, which gives every baptized Christian the office of the ministry, carried to its logical conclusion does regretfully allow for the ordination of women pastors.”

This assertion should be examined closely. It contains two interrelated claims. First, Position B says that Walther’s doctrine of the ministry—perhaps it might as well say, the Missouri Synod’s stance on the ministry—gives every baptized Christian the office of the ministry. Second, it claims that Walther’s doctrine allows for women to be ordained as pastors.

**Office of the Ministry to Every Christian?**

There is an element of truth in saying that Walther recognized that the church, and so every Christian, has the office of the ministry—depending on what is meant by that term. For, as is widely recognized, the usage of words like office and ministry can be tricky. The October 1861 *Lehre und Wehre* carried an article on this subject from the *Erlanger Zeitschrift* without identifying the article’s author. It went into some detail on the meaning of the term *Amt* in German literature and in the Lutheran Confessions and *Predigtamt* in the Confessions. The article indicated that there is in the Confessions a divine institution of the *Predigtamt* in a double sense. More specifically, in article 5 of the Augsburg Confession, what is instituted by God is the *Predigtamt* in its “essential conception”—that is, the gospel is to be preached and the sacraments are to be administered. Article 14 has the divine institution of the office of the ministry in the sense that according to God’s revealed will, only rightly called men publicly preach or administer the sacraments. In the former sense, every Christian has the office of the ministry; in the latter sense he does not.

It would be interesting to do further research to try to determine whether the roots of any distinction between “ministry in the abstract” and “ministry in the concrete” lie here, or even to see—so far as it can be seen—whether the more extensive discussion of Augustana 5 contained in subsequent editions of *Kirche und Amt* was influenced by this Erlangen article. Walther certainly thought this piece was worthwhile,
although he did explicitly correct it at one place in a footnote where he insisted that there indeed are Bible passages that teach a divine command for the public ministry.\textsuperscript{9}

The point to be observed most at present, though, is that despite the fact that terminology can be fluid—and it can be debated precisely how fluid the terminology may be—Walther did not lose his fix on what the terms were talking about. In the section cited earlier from Walther’s long essay on *The Congregation’s Right to Choose its Pastor*, an installment that also appeared in 1861, Walther made very clear what he thought about the subject matter itself. He wrote:

It also by no means follows from the doctrine of the spiritual priesthood of all true Christians that therefore the special public ministry of preaching is merely a human, churchly institution, made by men in order to maintain good order in the church and to avoid confusion, that, namely, the public ministry is a creature, and in this sense flows naturally from the spiritual priesthood of Christians. Of course, also this is attributed falsely by papistical Lutherans to those who hold fast and confess Luther’s teaching of the spiritual priesthood of all Christians in order to make this doctrine hated . . .\textsuperscript{10}

The best way I know to state the crucial distinction that lies at the heart of the Waltherian and Missourian position on church and ministry is this: the divinely instituted ministry exercises the same keys that all Christians have. It exercises these keys publicly by God’s command.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, the full story is not conveyed if someone simply says that Walther gave every baptized Christian the office of the ministry. To leave the matter at that constitutes a caricature of Walther.

**Allowance for Women to be Pastors?**

The prospect of allowing women to be pastors was already pointed out by Wilhelm Loehe, who used it as a *reductio ad absurdum*. He wrote that women must have the spiritual office if it were identified with the spiritual priesthood. But, of course, Loehe went on; in 1 Corinthians 14, St. Paul directed that women should not speak in the church.\textsuperscript{12} Hence, Loehe concluded that the ministerial office was not to be identified with the priesthood of believers. As just noted, Walther did not identify the two, even though he maintained that the ministerial office administered the same keys that the priesthood has.

The Lord’s institution of the public preaching office lays the groundwork for him to determine who should hold this office and thus preach publicly. Regin Prenter noted some years ago that “the right of the office [of the ministry] draws the boundaries for the exercise of the priestly functions by the universal priesthood, and not vice versa.”\textsuperscript{13} Walther said as much himself. The church clearly has all power of the keys, he affirmed in an 1873 letter, “but the manner and way in which this is used in the public ministerial office originates only from the fact that the congregation or church has the command . . . to elect and appoint people for the exercise of that power in its stead . . .”\textsuperscript{14} And as to the call into the office, we have already noted that Walther wrote to Ottesen,
“The church cannot make a call according to its whim but can give only that which God has established and which He alone recognizes.”

The divine institution of the public ministry remained decisive for Walther. So far as I know, he did not speak very explicitly to the question of women’s ordination. Why should he, when he held that women should not vote in congregational meetings? Yet Walther was well aware that the divine institution of the ministry was being denied by various German Lutherans of his time, even if they were not calling for women to be pastors. In fact, while Walther was in Erlangen finishing his book *Church and Ministry* in 1851, he wrote to his wife about meeting several of the Erlangen University professors, including J. W. F. Hoefling. He was not communicating privately; he wanted her to share his letter with pastors and brethren in St. Louis. He wrote: “Although on the doctrine of the church and church authority they [the Erlangen theologians] agree with us, yet they all deny that the office of the ministry is of immediate divine establishment. They derive it much more from an ethical necessity and from a merely insinuated will of the Lord. I have already had many a hard brush with these learned gentlemen on that account.”

Clearly, Walther disagreed with the Erlangen view. On this trip the Missouri Synod had assigned Walther and Wyneken to conduct discussions with Loehe. By the time Walther wrote this particular letter to his wife, he had already met Loehe. He compared Loehe and his followers with the Hoefling group in Erlangen. He wrote: “What the Loehe people add to the Confessions, when they allege that they make the latter’s determinations more distinct and develop them further, that in almost the same measure the Erlangen people take away from the Confessions…” Indeed, reflecting on the European trip, Walther pointed out that Hoefling seemed to sound like a Socinian in his doctrine of the ministry. In a similar vein, much more recently Robert Kolb has written that without the office of the ministry, “...the Word can easily disappear into a swamp of cultural relativism.”

Against the Erlangen theologians and their denial of the divine institution of the preaching office stood Walther’s first two theses on the ministry. He had presented these theses, with elaboration, to the 1851 Missouri Synod convention. Needless to say, they appear in the book *Church and Ministry*. The two theses are:

I. The holy ministry or pastoral office is an office distinct from the priesthood of all believers.

II. The ministry of the Word or the pastoral office is not a human institution but an office that God Himself has established.

Since the Lord instituted this office, the church is bound to his determinations about who can or cannot occupy it. Walther was not paving the way for women to aspire to the pastoral office.

**A Common Caricature**

Despite differences between Positions A and B, there is a high degree of congruence between them as regards Walther. Position B waxes bolder than Position A in
offering a prediction about the future, yet both Positions A and B basically proceed as if Walther did not teach that the pastoral office is a divine institution. Each of them imputes to Walther a doctrine which more closely resembles that of Hoefling. In short, Positions A and B reflect the same caricature of Walther.

Of course, they react to it differently. The conference speaker who espoused Position A liked what he saw in this caricature, embraced it, and so tried to take his place under Walther’s wing. Position B rejects the thought that the pastoral office is not divinely instituted, for it rightly upholds this divine institution, yet it warns against what it calls “Walther’s doctrine of the ministry.” To adapt a line from Shakespeare, Position A comes to praise Walther, Position B to bury him.

Why the Persisting Caricature?

Neither position depicts him aright, though and the caricature persists. Why?

If there are instances in which Walther did not express himself as well as in others on a subject like church and ministry, the saving grace figures to take the form of sheer redundancy. After all, he discussed this topic a lot! So, Walther can be used to interpret Walther. One passage from his writings can explain another, yet I am impressed by the way in which claims are rather freely made about Walther, almost unbound by Walther’s own words.

Please note the extent to which this stands out as a matter of the will: people don’t want to look at the available evidence. Perhaps at an earlier time such as the mid-twentieth century—before many of the current English translations of Walther appeared—things were different. In introducing the 1981 Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther series, general editor August Suelflow wrote, “The stereotype of Walther heretofore imposed upon him by those who were unable to read his German writings will now be significantly altered.” But the more Walther is available in translation these days, the more some may prefer the mere snippets and sound bites with which English readers used to have to content themselves. When people don’t want to look any further, the issue is not ability. It is a matter of the will.

That is terrible, and we should recognize it as such. My late doctoral advisor, Jim Kittelson, used to say that the writing of history, when stripped to its core, constitutes a moral enterprise. For the historian must tell the truth about people who are no longer here to speak for themselves. This is the case with any historical work. The foray into historical theology that takes us through the writings of Walther, for example, stands out as still more crucial. To the extent that Walther was dealing with and reflecting God’s word, getting the history right becomes for us an act of proclamation as well as an act of worship—worship of the Lord, not Walther! Even if Walther or others got the theology wrong, we need first of all to represent their theological claims fairly and accurately. Caricatures will not do. Otherwise, we cannot get it right about anyone getting it wrong theologically. Without good history, historical theology cannot make good theological judgments. While settling for caricatures wrecks history as a moral enterprise, it wrecks historical theology as a theological enterprise. Then it threatens to do still wider damage in theology.
So why would people not want to look beneath the caricatures? It is not always easy to pinpoint reasons, but I will take a stab at answering this question—and try to avoid caricaturing anyone in so doing!

**Why the Caricature in Position A?**

First, the “theology of the laity” movement of the mid-twentieth century brought an increasing fuzziness to the distinction between the priesthood of all believers and the office of the ministry, to say the least. This influence came also into the Missouri Synod, where it was perhaps best exemplified in the book title, *Everyone a Minister.* More recently, so-called “missional” literature has included much the same theme, and this literature is finding an eager audience in the Missouri Synod as well. The seminal book *Missional Church,* produced outside of Lutheran circles in 1998, claims that “in the missional community all are ordained to ministry in their baptism; all receive the same vocation to mission; and all are gifted in various ways for that mission.”

A more recent ELCA attempt at a Lutheran adaptation of this approach tries to be more circumspect. The ELCA book *The Evangelizing Church* discusses what it calls “the ministry of the baptized,” but it emphasizes Christians speaking the gospel within their callings in life. It also says, “This does not mean that the ministry of the ordained is no longer necessary.” Yet the book dubiously casts pastors in the role of helping people discover their gifts. It asserts that “good order should never trump missional necessity.” (Remember what Walther said when the good intention to save souls comes into conflict with God’s word and command? Compare Luther: “If you could save the whole world by one sermon and yet have no command to preach, defer; for you would be breaking the true Sabbath, and it would not please God.”) The ELCA book even suggests public testimony in worship services. “Over a period of time,” it says, “regular public testimony promises to dramatically change church culture.” I think it will! But this will not be in a direction Walther wanted to see. If you favor these kinds of changes, perhaps you will not want to look too closely at Walther. Instead, you might content yourself with observations based on partial data, apparent affinities. You may come up with something like what we have been calling Position A.

Add to the mix a phenomenon that has a lengthy track record of setting in among American churches when the subject of evangelism comes up, namely, anti-intellectualism. In his 1964 Pulitzer Prize-winning book on the subject, Richard Hofstadter noted that already during the middle of the nineteenth century, theological discussion in most American church bodies took a back seat to practical objectives. Hofstadter wrote, “The peculiar view or practices of any denomination, if they were not considered good for the general welfare or the common mission enterprise, were sacrificed to this mission without excessive regret. And the mission itself was defined by evangelism.” Anti-intellectualism can foster caricatures, not from any overt intent to deceive, but simply by not thinking to dig beneath the surface and do one’s homework. For many, homework can take a back seat when there is real work to be done; souls to be won. I myself think it is hard to overstate how big a challenge this kind of thing presents us in the Missouri Synod today. Perhaps we can take a hint from a warn-
ing issued some years ago by the philosopher and diplomat Charles Malik at the dedication of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. He said, “The greatest danger besetting American Evangelical Christianity is the danger of anti-intellectualism.”

If at least some evangelicals are hearing this alarm, perhaps we will find reason to listen too.

**Why the Caricature in Position B?**

When so-called “missional” and evangelistic impetus exerts pressure to blur the distinction between the priesthood of all believers and the office of the public ministry—a distinction that Walther maintained—it is not surprising that a countervailing impetus arises. This one seeks to keep these categories separated as cleanly and completely as possible. This is hardly surprising to anyone who recalls history. Shortly before Walther wrote his book on *Church and Ministry*, he remarked on the churchmen of his time who wanted to be strictly Lutheran but who were carried by their zeal, even unsuspectingly, beyond what is truly Lutheran.

Today, the countervailing cast of mind will look at Walther and ask whether he adequately defended the divine institution of the public ministry. It might wonder, for example, whether Walther in part laid himself open to caricature by dabbling with talk about the divine institution of the *Predigtamt* in a double sense. These are fair questions, yet the questioning can turn unfair when Walther is deemed not to have said something unless he can be shown to have said it in precisely the terms that the inquirer wants to see. It turns grossly unfair for Walther to be held responsible not only for what he did say, but also for what he did not say. At times it seems that so long as there is anything in Walther that could potentially be caricatured in regard to church and ministry, there is for some a readiness to forsake his work completely in search of new ecclesiological expressions.

This expectation is unrealistic. Who can stand immune from caricature? Like any Lutheran theologian, Walther is, in fact, unusually susceptible to it, for Lutheran theology, with a fine sense for paradox, often holds biblical truths together in tension. It regularly walks the line between extreme positions. It lays itself open to attack from either side or perhaps from multiple sides. This attack can take the form of gross misrepresentation or caricature. On the subject at hand, Walther emphasized that the divinely instituted ministry exercises publicly, by God’s command, the same keys that all Christians have. With his strong affirmation that all Christians have the keys, Walther was not saying that they are all called to use these keys publicly. He was not asserting that every baptized Christian has the divinely instituted office of the public ministry. So far as I can see, Position B manifests no recognition that Walther was attempting to reflect a biblical and confessional paradox.

Nor does it acknowledge that Walther was mostly writing occasional pieces in the midst of controversy. In the preface to the first edition of *Kirche und Amt*, Walther disclaims any intention of trying to cover the waterfront on church and ministry. He notes that he was not trying to present these doctrines in their completeness. A few years later he wrote Ottesen, “While we chiefly must defend the rights of Christians against hierarchicalism and clericalism [Pfafferei], so perhaps it is allotted to you to guard
God’s order against Enthusiasm.” Walther knew where he stood, and he knew what he was emphasizing.

I will give Position B this much; if the caricature is widely accepted that Walther did not teach the divine institution of a distinct pastoral office, the result could indeed be the ordination of women as pastors. Going back to our first example, when the conference speaker espoused Position A, no one asked him what he would say about an unusually gifted lay woman preaching. It would have been interesting to see what rationale he might have deployed to oppose such a thing. In sum, Position B has a point in practice, as it were. It is right about where a common caricature of Walther could lead; it would do well, however, to correct this caricature rather than to perpetuate it.

Conclusion

Walther held that the divinely instituted ministry exercises publicly, by God’s command, the same keys all Christians have from God. Kurt Marquart was saying much the same thing in his “Preus Dogmatics” locus on the church when he wrote,

One must beware of a mechanical side-by-side of rigidly separated functions. The whole point is that office and priesthood fundamentally share the same functions—but in complementary and inter-penetrating modes or spheres . . . It is pointless to ask therefore: “Is it the church or the ministry doing this?”—as though two separate entities were acting. It is rather Christ’s church which baptizes, confesses, teaches, consecrates, prays, serves, and does everything else, including the appointment of ministers—and in so far as she acts publicly and officially, she does all this with and through her (and Christ’s) public, official ministry, without any competition between them.

Neither Position A nor Position B does very well at encompassing all that Marquart so eloquently described. I do not think either one tries. As much as anything, this is what makes them theological caricatures.

I might add that the position taken by Walther and Marquart is probably more complex than the desired alternatives of Positions A or B, yet it can be summarized rather simply in a few words. Here is a formulation I teach catechumens from the most recent Missouri Synod explanation to Luther’s Small Catechism.

Question: “How does the church publicly exercise the Office of the Keys?”

Answer: “The Christian congregation by the command of Christ calls pastors to carry out the Office of the Keys publicly in his name and on behalf of the congregation. The pastoral office is a divine institution.”

This formulation closely reflects what Luther wrote in his 1539 treatise On the Councils and the Church, “There must be bishops, pastors or preachers, who publicly and privately give, administer and use the aforementioned four things or holy possessions [namely: the Word, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the Office of the Keys] on
behalf and in the name of the church, moreover [viel mehr] by reason of the institution of the office by Christ.”

I close here, letting Luther have the last word. I think Walther would be pleased at this. And that, I dare say, is no caricature!

Endnotes
2 I thank participants at the 2008 symposium who raised questions, joined in discussion, and gave me encouragement about this presentation, particularly Professors Ronald Feuerhahn and James Voelz. My thanks also to Professor C. George Fry of Winebrenner Theological Seminary, Findlay, Ohio, for discussion on this theme as I was preparing the presentation.
6 Walther, Congregation’s Right, 113 (emphasis added to the translation to reflect the original). German in: Der Lutheraner Feb. 19, 1861, 105–106.
9 “Bemerkungen,” 303.
10 Walther, Congregation’s Right, 112 (emphasis added to the translation to reflect the original). German in: Der Lutheraner Feb. 19, 1861, 105.
15 Walther to Ottesen, 167 (Fuerbringer, ed., 117).
17 Walther to his wife, 11 October 1851, 23 (emphasis original). German in: Fuerbringer, ed., 1:80.
18 Der Lutheraner 8 (April 13, 1852):133; see Christian Hochstetter, The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Missouri Synod in North America, trans. by Walter J. Pischke and Fred Kramer, unpublished manuscript at Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri, 255.
21 August R. Suelflow, “Introduction” in Selected Letters, 8. The same two-page editorial introduction appeared in all six volumes of the series.
24 St.L. 3, 1090.
28 See Hochstetter, 222.
29 It should be noted, in any case, that usage of the word “Predigtamt” had not been as unvarying in 16th-century Lutheran lingo as might be thought. For example, in one of the catechetical sermons that provided the base for the _Large Catechism_, Luther said: “Every father of a family is a bishop in his house and the wife a bishopess. Therefore remember that you in your homes are to help us carry on the _ministry_ [predigampt] as we do in the church” (AE 51, 137, emphasis added; WA 301, 58).
30 _Church and Ministry, 9_, kirche und Amt, vii.
31 Walther to Ottesen, 167 (Fuerbringer, 117).
32 Marquart, 116–117, 149.
33 _Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation_ (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 223.
34 AE 41, 154 (WA 50, 632–633), translation altered.
Walther and His Manuscripts
Archiving Missouri’s Most Enduring Writer

Peering back into the life of C. F. W. Walther—immigrant pastor, first president of the Missouri Synod, and first president of Concordia Seminary—the amount of activity swirling around this one man is dizzying. In particular, Walther’s pen scratched out a body of writings, which in its breadth, quality, and sheer volume is almost unimaginable in view of the numerous leadership responsibilities which he bore.

Today, hundreds of Walther’s personal letters, lectures, manuscripts, pamphlets, and other literary artifacts are archived and available to researchers at the Concordia Historical Institute in Saint Louis. This article will first depict Walther as a belabored and self-giving theologian and writer, and then describe the contents, status, and value of the Walther manuscript collection archived at CHI.

“Eternal rest . . . that is my ardent wish”

In May of 1882, Walther wrote to his friend, Pastor E. A. Brauer of Crete, Illinois, declining an invitation to visit during the summer. Walther explained that his work revising and expanding Baier’s *Compendium* must be completed since many subscribers to this half-finished work had already submitted their payment.1 “While anyone could soon die, in my case, I must soon die,” Walther added, and he did not want to die a swindler, cheating his subscribers.2 Because he found it impossible to get significant writing done while lecturing at the seminary, he lamented being “banished along with my literary tasks completely to the vacation months.” He had already declined summer invitations from the South, Nebraska, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Canada, and Eastern Districts.3 Walther’s tone here is not heroic or self-important, but genuinely weary:

> You would not believe how gladly I would come. I am truly weary, and I long for respite . . . But I see that, at least by “treadmill labor” God will preserve me, so that my evil flesh does not get the best of me. May God soon grant me eternal rest. That is my ardent wish.4

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No one familiar with Walther’s life would accuse him of dramatizing or baseless complaining. From the early days of the Saxon immigrant settlement in Missouri to the end of his life, Walther’s responsibilities and his central role in confessional Lutheranism in America stacked up as such a towering load that it is almost incomprehensible that there was a single man treading underneath it all.

Positions and Publications

Walther was called in 1841 as pastor of Trinity Congregation in Saint Louis, which soon planted three sister congregations. Trinity, along with Immanuel (1847), Holy Cross (1858), and Zion (1860), functioned as a single “joint congregation” (Gesamtgemeinde), which Walther actively served as head pastor until his death. Like every pastor, when the festival seasons approached, Walther was “burdened with a double load of work.” Though many tasks beyond the pastorate would vie for Walther’s time and strength, Walther’s commitment to parish ministry was paramount. In the spring of 1849, a cholera outbreak in Saint Louis confronted Walther with competing duties of parish pastor and synod president. On May 10, Walther wrote to synod vice-president Wilhelm Sihler to inform him of a “very painful” dilemma:

It will most likely be completely impossible for me to take part in the forthcoming convention of our Synod. For more than a month we have had a cholera epidemic here, and every week it is more destructive . . . The sick usually retain consciousness to the last moment, and thus there is always a little hour of grace to hear God’s Word and to be fortified with the Holy Sacrament . . . Luther impresses it emphatically on pastors in his little work, Whether a Pastor May Flee from Dying (which I am thinking about republishing) that they above all dare not abandon the lambs in such need… You will see yourself that I cannot with good conscience sacrifice my immediate duties toward the congregation entrusted to me in favor of my love for our Synod.6

When the Missouri Synod was organized in 1847, Walther had been elected as its first president, serving until 1850 and again from 1864–1878. Unlike F. C. D. Wyneken who served in the interim and H. C. Schwan who served after him, Walther did not serve as a full-time synod president. In other words, he fulfilled the synod presidency alongside his many other continuing roles. August Suelflow notes that Walther also served “as an informal mission executive of the Synod,” responding to “countless letters asking him to propose candidates for a new situation or to evaluate pastors for a specific congregation.”7 Through his voluminous correspondence, Walther also fulfilled a role similar to the current LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations, responding to questions regarding doctrine and casuistry, either informally through private letters or formally through more than one hundred written faculty opinions (Gutachten).

When the “log cabin” seminary in Perry County, Missouri, moved to Saint Louis in 1850, Walther began his lifelong service as its president and leading profes-
sor. The 1853 *Synodical Proceedings* detail the teaching responsibilities of the three men (Prof. Walther, Prof. Biewend, and Rector Gönner) staffing the Concordia Seminary and *Gymnasium*. Walther lectured in all the “theological disciplines” at the seminary level, which included dogmatics, church history, the Synoptic Gospels, hermeneutics, Christian antiquity, catechetics and homiletics, both of these last subjects “combined with practical exercises.” Within the seminary “philosophical disciplines,” Walther taught logic. At the *Gymnasium* level, Walther covered religion, declamation, penmanship (*Schönschreiben*), and music and singing, together with prosody.\(^8\)

In addition to regular sermons, seminary lectures, convention addresses and essays, and thousands of personal missives, Walther’s ink also flowed steadily toward the printing press. With his congregation’s backing, Walther began editing and publishing a bi-weekly confessional Lutheran paper in 1844, *Der Lutheraner*. In its 1853 convention, the Synod resolved to launch an additional publication: a more academic (mehr wissenschaftlich) theological journal on a monthly basis. Two pastors were charged with this task. When the Synod assembled one year later, no progress had been made. The 1854 *Synodical Proceedings* report that Walther pressed the issue, insisting on the need for such a journal. The convention responded by transferring the editorship to Walther. (Ask and you shall receive.) Since Walther was already burdened with the editorship of *Der Lutheraner*, the convention considered moving responsibility for *Der Lutheraner* to Wilhelm Sihler. In the end, however, it was resolved that Walther be appointed editor of the new theological journal and be maintained as the editor of *Der Lutheraner*.\(^9\) Within six months, Walther had the first issue of *Lehre und Wehre* in print. Walther spearheaded this monthly effort as editor (1855–60), then as co-editor (1861–64), and as the “principal contributor”\(^10\) to *Lehre und Wehre* throughout his life.

Walther published a hymnal for the newly-formed Synod (the 1847 *Kirchengesangbuch*), a liturgical agenda (the 1856 *Kirchen-Agenda*), a version of Conrad Dietrich’s Catechism (1858), and a thoroughly reworked and supplemented edition of the four-volume Latin *Compendium* of J. W. Baier, which would serve as the basic dogmatics text for the LCMS until Franz Pieper published his *Christliche Dogmatik* in 1917–24.

As the German Lutherans charted their life together on American soil, Walther contributed three important volumes on the doctrine of the church: *The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Ministry* (1852),\(^{11}\) *The Proper Form of a Lutheran Congregation Independent from the State* (1863),\(^{12}\) and *The Lutheran Church as the True Visible Church of God on Earth* (1867).\(^{13}\) A series of articles in *Der Lutheraner* addressed “The Congregation’s Right to Choose Its Pastor” (1860–1).\(^{14}\)

Walther’s *Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie* (1872) shaped pastoral practice in the Missouri Synod for the remainder of its German-speaking period, and as the basis for the *Pastoral Theology* of J. H. C. Fritz (1932), it continued to shape LCMS pastors well into the last century. As a resource for Lutheran homes, especially in far-flung locations in the American West, Walther published hefty sermon postils on the Gospel and Epistle readings (1870 and 1882, respectively). For the 300th anniversary of the Formula of Concord, Walther was tasked by the Synodical Conference to publish a hist-
historical introduction to the formula, with a contemporary appreciation and the full text of the Epitome. This appeared as *The Formula of Concord: Core and Star (Concordienformel: Kern und Stern)* in 1877. Late in life, Walther penned brief biographies of two pastors: brother-in-law and life-long friend J. F. Bünger (1882) and C. J. H. Fick (1886). In addition, he published numerous other short books and pamphlets.

The magnitude and press of Walther’s work are ever-present themes in his personal correspondence, glimpsed in brief, off-hand remarks, usually as apologies for his delay or brevity in responding. 1845: “I am writing to you in the utmost haste, which I hope you will forgive me since I am at present sighing under an enormous work load.” 1846: “I wanted to write a real detailed response to you, but because of the great amount of official duties which constantly weigh upon me, I could not get to it.” 1861: “I . . . was waiting for such a time when it might be possible for me to answer in much greater detail . . . But I have not been able to find that kind of time, for I am constantly stuck in this crush of time schedules . . . I will now write you at least a few lines.” (Walther’s “few lines” fill four published pages!) 1867: “In these last days I have been so overwhelmed with work which cannot be postponed.” 1882: “Let this suffice. I have many letters awaiting my humble replies, so that I do not know how I can handle it all.”

The fullest example comes from Walther’s February 20, 1875 letter to missionary C. M. Zorn in India:

Finally I get to responding to your welcome letter of Sept. 20 last year. You are probably not awaiting an answer from me anymore, and I am practically ashamed to try to serve you with this response at this late date. If it were worthwhile, I would even give you a list of the duties which rest on me, provided that you would look on my miserable person, loaded with work—if this were conducive to arousing your forgiveness that I am only today responding to your request, and that in such a poor, inadequate manner. Every hour that I have apart from my official duties which cannot be delayed I have to steal, and even then I am almost always disturbed by people who want to speak to me if it is not yet a late night hour. Besides that, for a major part of each year I have to make trips for Synod. But enough of this. Let me just appeal to your considerate love.

Challenges Faced, Consequences Suffered

Walther undertook this litany of positions and publications in the midst of numerous challenges. His ministry in America began under the hardships of immigrant life. The German newspaper in Saint Louis was openly hostile to the “Old Lutherans.” The first decade in America brought the deaths of seven close family members, including Walther’s father, brother, sister, and four-year-old son (from a fall down the basement stairs). Saint Louis was visited by merciless cholera epidemics from 1849–55, and again in 1866–67. The tensions of the Civil War necessitated the closure of the Saint Louis seminary in the spring of 1861. After the war, Walther’s continuance
in Saint Louis was jeopardized by political pressures and a newly-required “Loyalty Oath.” As president of the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference, Walther’s travel schedule was heavy, the distances often great, and transportation slow, difficult, and dangerous. Walther was nearly drowned crossing rivers on more than one occasion. From 1874–79, the nation experienced a deep “secondary post-war depression,” leaving the Synod and the seminary in desperate financial danger. And after a lifetime of theological struggle and polemics, the 1880s thrust Walther into the most painful controversy of his life: the *Gnadenwahlstreit*, or Election Controversy. This was waged against former colleagues and allies and split Walther’s cherished Synodical Conference.

**First Crash: 1840–41**

With such a workload, pursued under such trying circumstances, it is no wonder that Walther experienced episodes in which his strength—physical, mental, and spiritual—simply failed him. Three of these are particularly notable. The first occurred in 1840–41, while the Saxon immigrant community was reeling from the scandal caused by the immorality of their bishop, Martin Stephan. Young pastor Walther became so sick in body and spirit that he sought rest and refuge in the home of Pastor E. G. W. Keyl in the Perry County in nearby Niederfrohna, sometimes for weeks at a time. Keyl was married to Walther’s sister Amalia. During this year-long illness, Walther devoted what strength he could muster to a study of Luther and the Lutheran dogmaticians, wrestling with the doctrine of the church and the will of God for the floundering Saxon Lutherans. This time of weakness, in the end, yielded significant benefits: Walther was distanced from the confused collaborations of his fellow clergy, he clarified his theology in the famous Altenburg Theses, which revived the wounded community’s sense of purpose (and Walther’s as well) and became the basis for his book *Church and Ministry*, and he emerged with prestige and credibility in the community which set the stage for all his future roles and contributions.

**Second Crash: 1860**

Twenty years later, Walther’s work had brought him again to the point of “breakdown,” as Matthew Harrison describes it. Wyneken, then serving as synod president, intervened, along with many others, and, in an outpouring of love and concern, the Synod funded Walther on a recuperative trip to Germany for much of 1860. Physically, Walther had been suffering a chronic, debilitating throat condition, which left him so weakened that he feared death. Walther wrote to Wyneken on the beginning leg of his travels: “I now see more and more that it was the right thing to do, if I am at all to continue living (which is very unnecessary), to get out of St. Louis. I notice that I am more exhausted in spirit than I thought.”

In a letter to his congregation, however, Walther reveals that the crisis went deeper than physical ailment:

> I may and must now reveal to you that the last half of the previous year [1859] has been one of the most difficult times of my life. I was physi-
cally incapable of attending to even half the office which I am dignified to carry out among you in unworthy fashion. Even more, the prospect that I would again be capable of the same became gloomier and darker month by month. I owe it to you to be transparent. I was tormented night and day . . . God placed before me, as never before, my entire past. He let me see my misery as I had never seen it before . . . It seemed as though he regarded me as a rejected instrument, as if I were not a worker but a stumbling stone in his vineyard, which he must finally cast aside. It appeared to me as though God desired to take away all the blessings which he had thus far brought about through my witness to his truth, and this through a horrid end of my effectiveness. My only hope was a blessed death.28

Anchored offshore from the German coast, Walther wrote to his wife: “After so much has been expended for me, I consider it my duty to return home in as robust a state as possible.”29 Considering Walther’s accomplishments in the years which followed, the 1860 trip to Germany did indeed refresh and renew him for further service, just as Walther had petitioned: “Pray that He grant that I again become strong to undertake His ministry for our poor American Zion, which is bleeding from a thousand wounds. Pray that I be given the strength to continue to lead, trowel and sword in hand.”30

**Third Crash: 1873**

A third episode descended on Walther suddenly in 1873, the cause of which again lay in his “extreme overwork.” Walther was in Milwaukee as the essayist at the Northern District convention. He was staying in the home of Pastor Friedrich Lochner, his brother-in-law. One evening, after a particularly hectic day, Lochner came into the room where Walther was sitting and found him “in a complete daze.”31 Walther himself recounts:

> I had exerted myself so hard intellectually at the last conventions that after the Northern District convention was ended and also the pastoral conference which followed thereupon, I suddenly lost my memory for the period of the past 20 years. Suddenly I no longer knew where I was or that Lochner, with whom I was staying, was pastor in Milwaukee, that I had attended a convention, etc., although otherwise I was fully conscious.32

By the next morning, Walther, still dizzy, had regained his senses. Doctors were consulted, and they concurred that the root cause was an excess of intense intellectual activity. They advised Walther to “put aside all work and go on a journey to rest and relax.”33 Lochner and another pastor escorted Walther back to Saint Louis. Walther agreed “to abandon my hope of participating in the [upcoming] Synodical Conference convention, even though . . . with a heavy heart.”34 He also took some time off for a riverboat excursion up the Mississippi.
The doctors’ threat of potential “softening of the brain” (severe dementia) had startled Walther into compliance—for a time. From his relaxation on board the riverboat The Belle of La Crosse, he wrote to Wilhelm Sihler:

It became clear to me that I had to take my condition seriously. As ready as I am, believe me, to devote the rest of my powers to the service of the church, yet I believe I have no right to continue in my previous manner after such a serious warning. The thought of an eventual softening of the brain with its tragic side effects is naturally a frightening one for me . . .

Nevertheless, Walther was soon working again at full throttle, either heedless of the doctors’ warnings or simply pressed to self-abandon by the needs of congregation, seminary, Synod, and American Lutheranism. It is interesting, however, that after this 1873 episode, he served as an essayist only for his home district (Western) conventions in the years 1874–78.

**Labor . . . until the Night Comes**

Walther’s work was all-consuming, and he bore the conviction that it should be. He once wrote to his brother-in-law and fellow synodical leader Ottomar Fürbringer: “Don’t let us forget that both of us have one foot in the grave. Let us therefore labor while it is day, for ‘night comes when no one can work.’” When Walther’s son Ferdinand entered the ministry in 1871, the proud father wrote:

You are now ordained to the service of Christ in His church by the old apostolic rite of laying on of hands. That means that the demand is made of you as one vowed to the Lord to have no other goal in this world until your death than to lead souls to the Savior (which He has bought so dearly with His blood), on your part to spread truth and holiness on the earth, and to help to edify the kingdom of God or the church.

His colleagues and friends pleaded in vain for him to take time off or to develop restful hobbies. It was the most they could do to convince him to take an occasional walk. Although Walther loved music and was an excellent pianist, it is doubtful that the piano in his home received much attention, from him at least. At meal time, his wife Emilie would call to him in his study, “Please be so kind.” But often, Walther continued his research and writing, and she would bring him a tray of food and coffee—doubtless with some disappointment.

Walther’s only consistent interest, alongside his theological labors, was his pipe. But even his devotion to tobacco sometimes yielded to his complete absorption in theology. Pastor C. Eissfeldt, who experienced Walther through the eyes of a child and later as a theological student, humorously recalls:

I can still see him standing before me in his study, in his gray dressing gown, his long German pipe in one hand and in the other a long Fidibus (a long strip of paper rolled together . . . used in place of matches). These
Dr. Walther used to light his long pipe. To watch this procedure was to me always an interesting amusement. After Walther had filled his pipe with tobacco, he took one of the *Fidibus*; but before lighting it at the stove or over the lamp, he used it to emphasize his remarks with lively gestures. When he had succeeded in lighting it, he frequently, in his lively conversation, forgot to light his pipe till the flame of the burning *Fidibus* came into too close proximity to his fingers. Discarding this *Fidibus*, he would pick up another, light it, and now, remembering that the *Fidibus* was to be used for lighting his pipe, he would hold it somewhere near the mouth of his pipe, but looking straight into the eyes of his companion, he would not notice that it was inches away from its object. So at times three or four *Fidibuses* were used before he finally succeeded in lighting his pipe.\(^{40}\)

Walther’s productivity continued unabated until the final year of his life. However, his writings and other labors during his last few years required enormous struggle and tenacity. In a 1883 letter to Sihler, Walther confides:

> Apparently you don’t know me in my great weaknesses. You would be witness to the energy it takes me to write a single article, including a sermon . . . I have to get down on my knees before God and thank Him for this sentence or paragraph that I’m planning to write. Usually, before I have finished writing, I am standing actually in fear of death. I can no longer recall anything from memory because that information is locked in. If there is something good in my sermons or in my essays, I can truly affirm that it is not mine, it is totally God’s grace and work.\(^{41}\)

By the fall of 1886, he had become so weak that he requested relief from his teaching duties at the seminary. In November, his daughter Magdalene, having heard reports of his decline, feared his imminent death and was considering a trip from New York. Walther wrote a letter, dissuading her.\(^{42}\) His last writing for publication was an essay on “The Fruitful Reading of the Writings of Luther.”\(^{43}\) Walther died in his home the following spring, on May 7, while the Synod was gathered in convention in Fort Wayne. At last, God gave him his much longed for rest.

**Walther Manuscripts at the Concordia Historical Institute (CHI)**

At Walther’s death, the *Lutheran Observer* praised him:

> The work Walther accomplished in these forty-seven years [in America] has had a long range and lasting effect. In the history of our country, not one solitary man was like him for the cause of Christ. Whether we speak of the Missouri Synod, or of the Fort Wayne College, of Concordia Seminary, of the great Publishing House, of literature in our church body, or of many church workers who were sent out by Walther to preach the gospel, the name and influence of this divinely gifted man cannot go
unmentioned. Whoever attempts to write the life of Dr. Walther, writes the history of the Missouri Synod with the same strokes of the pen . . .

Without question, Walther’s legacy reaches down to the present. Yet many of the physical markers of Walther’s life have vanished. The site of his family’s first Saint Louis home (1841–50) today houses the footings and piers of an Interstate overpass, as does the site of Trinity congregation’s first church building. From 1850–70 the Walthers resided in the first floor of the seminary on South Jefferson. This was demolished in 1882, and a new seminary edifice was constructed on the same site. Even this grand second seminary, dedicated in 1883 and the jewel of Walther’s later years, is all but gone today. The large home on Texas Ave. which Walther and Emilie occupied in 1870 and where they lived out their years was razed in 1906.

Alongside the log cabin seminary in Perry County, the 1865 Trinity church building in St. Louis, and his mausoleum in Concordia Cemetery, one of the vital physical remnants of Walther’s life is the collection of C. F. W. Walther literary artifacts at Concordia Historical Institute, located on the campus of the Saint Louis seminary. Archived there are page after page filled with Walther’s purposeful yet hasty (and sometimes nearly illegible) handwriting. For most researchers, working with these writings requires prior transcription, by a specialist, from Walther’s old German Fraktur or Sütterlin handwriting into more accessible typed German. CHI also houses editions of Walther’s published books, journals, and pamphlets, but the manuscripts are the most prized and most interesting of the Walther holdings.

**Correspondence**

Nearly every day Walther dashed off multiple letters to family members, synod officials, former students, pastors, missionaries, congregations, and friends and acquaintances back in Germany. These letters open a window to Walther as a man, allowing the reader to eavesdrop on a broad spectrum of his private conversations. They offer both a wealth of biographical insights as well as an unvarnished and, at times, unguarded perspective on the history and development of the Missouri Synod.

Walther once estimated that he wrote 800 letters per year. Throughout his ministry, this would yield perhaps 35,000 documents, an astounding number. Currently, CHI has about 1200 of these, filed chronologically. No other significant collections are known. CHI also holds a large number of letters to Walther, filed alphabetically by sender. While Walther maintained copies of some of his letters, others he apparently disposed of by burning. Some of the letters came to CHI from Walther’s own collection of papers. Others have found their way into the Synod archives over the years from various sources, most notably through the efforts of Walther’s nephew, Ludwig Fürbringer, who devoted himself to gathering Walther’s correspondence and publishing it for the church in two volumes (1915, 1916).

In the 1960s, Professor Werner K. Wadewitz transcribed the entire CHI corpus of correspondence to and from Walther into typed German. These transcriptions are available in the public reference room at CHI. Since Wadewitz’s transcription work,
CHI has occasionally discovered or received additional Walther letters. Several of these were transcribed by Jobst Schöne, translated into English by William Carr, and published with historical introductions in an essay by Daniel Preus (2000). Of the hundreds of Wadewitz transcriptions, only about one-third have been translated. These appear in the two short English volumes edited by Carl S. Meyer (1969, 1973) and one edited by Roy A. Suelflow (1981).

Six unique letters from Walther to his brother-in-law O. Fürbringer have never been transcribed. While nearly all of Walther’s letters are in German, these were written in Latin and clustered in the period between May 6 and July 28, 1842.

### Faculty Opinions (Gutachten)

Walther’s Gutachten are handwritten but official replies issued as a member of the seminary theological faculty. They are not theoretical treatises; rather, they bring theology to bear on very specific, and wide-ranging, questions of practice, answering queries submitted by pastors or congregations. Examples include: “Breaking off an engagement is a sin;” “Marriage with someone who believes differently is not to be permitted;” “A widow should hand her criminal son over to the authorities;” “A converted Jewish boy does not have to confess his faith in front of other Jews right away;” “A Baptism by a Rationalist pastor remains valid;” “Concerning pastors singing in public worship;” “In spite of great affliction, a pastor should not lay aside his Office;” “Concerns about the unjust decision of a District President should be addressed to the Synod;” and “Even if life insurance is a sin, an entire sermon should not therefore be devoted to it!”

The topics addressed highlight those matters of theology and practice which were being questioned and debated in the early years of the Synod. Few of these faculty Gutachten have been translated, and only a small handful published. Of those at CHI, Walther’s signature appears on 138, often along with signatures of other faculty members. Of these, Walther himself penned at least 90.

### Evening Lectures (Lutherstunden)

The work of Walther best known to his English-speaking posterity is The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel. This classic book of American Lutheranism contains a series of Walther’s beloved “Luther Hour” (Lutherstunden) sessions, held with seminarians on Friday evenings.

What is less well known is that Walther’s Law and Gospel represents merely one season (1884–85) and one topic of a Friday evening lecture tradition that ran from at least 1873 through 1886. The CHI archives contains manuscripts—many written by Walther and many taken down by his hearers—which preserve several other evening lecture series. The topics include Luther’s Great Confession on the Lord’s Supper (1874–75), Justification (1876–77), Secret Societies (1877–78), Law and Gospel (1878), the Truth and Origin of the Christian Religion (1878–79), Justification and Election (1880–81), the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures (1885–86), and Justification (September 1886, with his last mustering of health and strength).
Significant transcription, editing, and translation work will be required to provide the contemporary church a Friday evening seat with Walther at these additional lectures. Recently, Thomas Manteufel translated the lectures on Inspiration, presenting them to the annual Walther Round Table in Saint Louis from 2005–07. His translation of these *Lutherstunden* lectures is available on the CHI website.\(^{59}\)

Another interesting development in the archival history of the *Lutherstunden* came in 2007. Part-time CHI employee and then-seminarian Bill Wangelin was sifting through mysterious boxes labeled “Unidentified Manuscript Collection” and filled with pages of handwritten German text. He quickly recognized Walther’s penmanship. As Wangelin notes, “His handwriting is, in a word, sloppy.”\(^{60}\) This new discovery consisted of Walther’s notes for 132 sessions of the evening lectures, spanning the years 1873, 1876–78, 1879–84, and 1886. Most of them belong to his lectures on Justification and Election. Each is neatly labeled with the date, number, and topic of the lecture. They are now archived with the other *Lutherstunden* documents, awaiting scholarly attention.

**Sermon Manuscripts**

Nearly one thousand Walther sermons survive. For about half of these, Walther’s original manuscript is preserved in the CHI archives. Unlike his correspondence, Walther seems to have been conscientious about preserving his sermon manuscripts. August Suelflow once mentioned reading in Walther’s correspondence from late in his life that all his sermons were neatly arranged in files. This is believable, considering the existence of a careful, numbered sermon inventory—in Walther’s own hand—of the sermons preached even while a pastor in Bräunsdorf, Germany in 1837–38.\(^{61}\)

Unfortunately, such careful organization did not long outlive Walther. The flurry of the publication of his sermons after his death must have sent these manuscripts in several directions and through multiple hands. Other sermon manuscripts were apparently given or loaned by Walther to others during his lifetime. Thus, small batches of sermons by Walther from time to time found their way to CHI, where they were accessioned and boxed. In addition to original Walther manuscripts, a few sets of good transcriptions (handwritten copies) were also deposited at CHI. Some of these contain the only surviving copy of particular Walther sermons.

Because of modern unfamiliarity with the old German *Sütterlin* script in which Walther wrote, little could be done to utilize, or even sort, his sermons. As a result, they remained jumbled together, boxed, and all but untouched for decades. In 1997, Brigitte Conkling, a native German employee at CHI, was assigned to re-organize and re-archive the collection of Walther’s papers, including the sermons. In 1998, while a graduate student at Concordia Seminary, the present author was tasked with producing an inventory and description of the extant corpus of the writings of Walther—including both published works and archived manuscripts. The goal was to lay the groundwork for an eventual publication of Walther’s collected writings in English. In addition to the general inventory,\(^{62}\) one fruit of this work was an exhaustive sermon inventory, which provides a detailed description of the thousand-sermon corpus and a means of identifying and locating individual sermons within the corpus by year, liturgical date, or Biblical text.\(^{63}\)
The hundreds of sermon manuscripts in the Walther collection bear a consistent form: small sheets of paper, folded as a booklet, with small writing—even in his last years—and usually in faint pencil. This probably suggests that Walther did not read his sermons when delivering them, but rather used his manuscripts primarily in preparation for preaching.

Walther was a great preacher. In addition to preaching nearly every Sunday morning and many Sunday afternoons, he was constantly in demand to preach at synodical and other special occasions. And his reputation did not die with him. In the years after his death, the Missouri Synod’s publishing house churned out volume after volume of Walther sermon collections. Within twenty years after his death, over 2800 published pages of his sermons had appeared (in German). In Missouri Synod homes, one could expect to find a Luther Bible and a volume of Walther sermons.

For the English-speaking Missouri Synod, however, the Walther sermon pickings have been much slimmer. The last decade has seen two important new efforts with the Walther sermons. First, the Rev. Joel Baseley of Dearborn, Michigan, has translated and independently published a significant body of Walther’s previously published (German) sermons. Second, Christoph Barnbrock, a Ph.D. student from Göttingen, completed a dissertation on Walther’s sermons, published in 2003 under the title (translated), “The Sermons of C. F. W. Walther in the Context of the German Emigrant Communities in the U.S.A.” Barnbrock’s research in the CHI archives sparked further work on his part to transcribe twelve “new” Walther sermons which had previously existed only in manuscript form. These will be published in Germany (and in German) this year.

Much work remains to be done. Over 50 Walther sermons still require transcription, including 17 sermons preached as a young pastor in Germany, prior to the Saxon Emigration. Many more sermons await translation into English.

Seminary Lectures

The Walther manuscript archives at CHI include Walther’s handwritten lecture notes for four seminary courses. None of these manuscripts have been transcribed. *Hermeneutica Sacra* consists of 95 pages of handwritten Latin lectures. Corresponding to this, the archive contains a very complete student notebook with notes from Walther’s sacred hermeneutics lectures in very neat handwriting. This might be useful as an aid in transcribing Walther’s text. A 29 page manuscript exists of Walther’s lectures on Catechetics. These are in German. A third document is entitled *Zu die precepta homiletica J. J. Rambach’s* and is dated September 1880. These lectures on Rambach’s homiletic principles consist of 44 pages in both Latin and German. Finally, the archives contain 30 pages of Walther’s lecture notes on Dietrich’s Catechism, which was widely used in Missouri Synod congregations. These notes comment on specific questions and answers in the Dietrich Catechism, referencing them by number.

Other Manuscripts and Holdings

Filling out the Walther collection at CHI are a number of miscellaneous manuscripts. Walther’s personal diary (1828–31) contains entries beginning in his student
days at the Latin School in Schneeburg and reaching into his time at the University of Leipzig. Biographers from Martin Günther to August Suelflow have related material from this diary, but it has never been fully transcribed and translated. Another item from Walther’s university days at Leipzig is an “Index Rerum.” This is a leather-bound volume, organized alphabetically. It is filled with Walther’s handwritten entries of the names of various theologians, thinkers, and topics, together with summary and evaluative comments. While this material may not be of broad interest, it promises insight into Walther’s university formation and his early thought. This document, too, still requires transcription.

Existing only in Walther’s handwriting are a number of other texts, of various levels of importance, interest, or even identifiable purpose (Sitz im Leben!). There are a half dozen documents labeled “Examen mit...” which contain a listing of questions. These date from 1852 to 1874 and may represent examinations of candidates for ordination or colloquy examinations of pastors seeking entry into the Synod.

Another manuscript is titled (in translation), “Why Christian Parents Should Not Send Their Unconfirmed Children to the Religionless Public Schools.” Walther gave this lecture to his congregation over at least two Sunday afternoons. The manuscript is only four pages long, framed around five theses. Filed with it are two prayers, written out by Walther, for the openings of these afternoon lectures.

Summary

C. F. W. Walther poured himself out in selfless and self-sacrificing devotion to his Savior and his Synod. At the heart of his contribution, then and now, stands his tireless labor with pen and ink. Today, at the 200th Walther anniversary, there remains a rich body of Walther’s work which is unavailable to English readers—published only in German or tucked away in handwritten manuscripts in the CHI archives.

On the 150th anniversary of Walther’s birth in 1961, Authur Carl Piepkorn offered this assessment of Walther: “To his limitless faith in God and His Word and to his valiant confessionalism the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod gratefully owes her present commitment to the Luther-Symbols, and from his example she can still learn.” 69 Fifty years later, the same holds true. From Walther’s life and from Walther’s teaching, there remains much to be learned (1 Tim 4:16; Heb 13:7).

Endnotes

1 This four-volume Lutheran dogmatics in Latin was sold to initial subscribers for $3.50.
2 This quotation comes from a May 13, 1882 letter from C. F. W. Walther to E. A. Brauer. Original manuscript and German transcription by Werner K. Wadewitz (1965), Concordia Historical institute. Translation is mine. This 1882 letter is written at age 70, five years before Walther’s death. Walther had a keen sense of death’s imminence throughout his life, even as a young man. “When I was younger, I was always somewhat sickly and weak, and I thought that I would never reach my fortieth birthday.” Letter to Magdalene Keyl, November 18, 1882, translated in August R. Suelflow, Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 270.
3 Walther had been declining summer invitations to devote himself to the Baier Compendium work since at least 1879, when he had accepted only one: that of the newly formed Iowa District.
4 May 13, 1882 letter to E. A. Brauer, cited above.
to daughter Magdalene, dated April 18, 1867, Walther was speaking of the “approach of the beloved Easter festi-
val.”
8 1853 Synodalbericht in Synodalberichte 1–10 (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio, und andern Staaten, 1876), 265–6.
9 1854 Synodalbericht in Synodalberichte 1–10 (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio, und andern Staaten, 1876), 286, under the heading “Der ‘Lutheraner; — die theologische Zeitschrift.”
10 This is Herbert Bouman’s assessment in C. F. W. Walther, Editorials from ‘Lehre und Wehre,’ trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia, 1981), 8 (Translator’s Preface). Bouman notes, “More than half of the 32 [Lehre und Wehre] volumes published in his lifetime contain Forewords from Walther’s pen, although he was the sole editor for only the first six years. In addition to his Forewords, often spread over several issues, he contributed various other articles.”


16 Walther, Kurzer Lebenslauf des weiland ehrwürdigen Pastor Joh. Friedr. Bünger, treuverdienten Pastor der evang.-lutherischen Immanuels-Gemeinde zu St. Louis, Mo. (St. Louis: F. Dette, 1882). Walther’s account has an autobiographical edge, since Bünner was Walther’s close friend from university days in Leipzig, companion in the emigration to America, brother to Walther’s wife, Emilie, and pastor of the Immanuel District of the St. Louis Gesamtgemeinde from 1847 until his death, serving alongside Walther, the head pastor.
17 Published serially in Der Lutheraner 42:14 (July 15, 1886) to 42:18 (September 15, 1886).
19 R. A. Suelflow, Selected Letters, 131.
20 His father, Gottlob Heinrich Walther, died January 13, 1841, in Germany. His brother and fellow pastor, Otto Hermann Walther, died two weeks later on January 27, 1841 in St. Louis (age 31). His sister Amalia, wife of Pastor E. G. W. Keyl, died in 1842 in Perry County (age 27). His son Hermann Christoph, died in July 1848. In June of the next year, in a span of 18 days, cholera swept away Walther’s mother-in-law, Christiane Bünner, his sister-in-law, Mrs. J. F. Bünner (age 26), and his nephew, Gottthilf Nathaniel Bünner (age 1)—all in St. Louis. See A. R. Suelflow, Servant, 12–14, 61, 79, 229–31.
21 In a July 8, 1865 letter to Ottomar Fürbringer, Walther pleads for the counsel of “synodical representa-
tives.” Walther is concerned that he may not, for conscience’s sake, be able to take the oath of loyalty required by the new (post-Civil War) Missouri constitution. His deliberations include the possibility of resigning his positions as pastor and seminary president or even moving the seminary to a location outside of Missouri. “If I do not get any advice on this, then there is no other recourse but to resign my office, for if I cannot take that oath in good faith, then I will not take it at all, and if I do not have any directives to move the institution, then I must resign my work here.” R. A. Suelflow, Selected Letters, 114–5. See also A. R. Suelflow, Servant, 115–6.
24 Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri 1839–1841 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), 519.


28 Harrison, House of My Fathers, 143.

29 Letter to his wife, Emilie, dated May 3, 1860 on board the ship Oder, in R. A. Suelflow, Selected Letters, 32–3.

30 Harrison, House of My Fathers, 145.

31 A. R. Suelflow, Servant, 270–3, describes this episode in detail, including Lochner’s recollections.


33 A. R. Suelflow, Servant, 271.

34 Letter to Wilhelm Sihler, July 11, 1873, cited above, 130.

35 Ibid., 130.


38 When Emilie died in 1885, Walther wrote a long and tender letter to his daughter Magdalene and her husband Stephanus Keyl in New York: “My tears naturally flowed freely, because it is inexpressible how much I have lost in this my faithful helpmeet. But the more I think of it that next to God she lived and labored for me night and day, the less I have to begrudge her that she has now found her rest and her works indeed follow her. Oh, if I had only honored her more than I did in all the pressures of my official duties! This humbles me greatly, but her gracious glances to me have been a comforting absolution to me. Oh, how I rejoice that I shall soon see her again!” Letter dated August 30, 1885. R. A. Suelflow, Selected Letters, 53.

39 Students recall delivering practice sermons in his study to a barely visible Walther, shrouded in smoke. See also Walther, “Für Tobacksraucher” [“On Behalf of Tobacco Smoking”], Lehre und Wehre 22 (1876): 381.

40 Lewis W. Spitz, The Life of Dr. C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 109–10; this and other of Eissfeldt’s reminiscences of Walther are found in Johann L. Gruber, Erinnerungen an Professor C. F. W. Walther und Seine Zeit (Burlington, IA: Lutheran Literary Board, 1930).

41 Letter to Wilhelm Sihler, dated November 19, 1883; translation by A. R. Suelflow, Servant, 274.

42 Letter to Magdalene Keyl, dated November 18, 1886; translation by William Carr; in Daniel Preus, “C. F. W. Walther: His Life in His Letters,” in Soli Deo Gloria, ed. Kolb and Manteufel, cited above, 125. Walther wrote: “God . . . has performed a true wonder for me. The other day the doctor said, ‘There is hope;’ and when he came to examine me the next day, he exclaimed in amazement, ‘What has happened? All the danger lies behind us.’ He didn’t know that all our church has been praying for me daily.” Despite his protest, Magdalena came and stayed with him in December.


45 This home, located between 1st and 2nd Streets on Poplar Street, was owned by and shared with his mother-in-law, Christiane Bünger. A. R. Suelflow, Servant, 229.


49 C. F. W. Walther Finding Aid, CHI, at website previously cited.

50 Sometimes Walther himself or a secretary would make a copy of a letter before sending it. On at least one occasion, when pressed for time, Walther requests that the addressee make a copy and mail it back to him, so that he can “keep in mind what I have written.” See R. A. Suelflow, Selected Letters, 81: Letter to Board of Elders, Trinity, Detroit, dated Jan. 13, 1878. At other times, Walther’s addressees returned the originals to Walther.

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summarize the sermon. The sermon has never been transcribed, however, or published in German or in English. 


Both Günther and Suelflow

C. F. W. Walther: Lebensbild

“What Comforts and Gives Delight to a Christian Preacher at the Assuming of His Office.” Martin Günther,

mon on Jeremiah 1:6–9 which he preached at his ordination/installation on January 15, 1837. The theme was

Concordia Historical Institute, 1999, 40–5.

See Thomas Egger, Gutachten Signed by Walther: Concordia Seminary Faculty Opinions, unpublished index, Concordia Historical Institute, revised 1999.

This has been published in different formats in English. The classic version was the 1928 translation by W. H. T. Dau. Most recently, Concordia Publishing House has released a fresh translation by Christian Tiews, edited by Charles Schaum: C. F. W. Walther, How to Read and Apply the Gospel: A Reader’s Edition (St. Louis: Concordia, 2010).

These 1878 lectures on Law and Gospel are organized around 13 theses (versus the 25 theses of the

1884–1885 lectures in The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel). CPH published these shorter 1878 lectures in 1893. This version was supplanted by the publication of the longer 1884–1885 lectures in 1897. Both were in German. The 1878 lectures have never appeared in English; however, their 13 theses formed the basis not only for Walther’s evening lectures at the seminary, but also for his lecture on Law and Gospel at the Southeastern Missouri Pastor’s Conference in 1878 and for Franz Pieper’s essay on Law and Gospel to the Iowa District Convention in 1880.


The CHI archives contain a number of Walther’s Bräunsdorf sermon manuscripts, including the sermon on Jeremiah 1:6–9 which he preached at his ordination/installation on January 15, 1837. The theme was “What Comforts and Gives Delight to a Christian Preacher at the Assuming of His Office.” Martin Günther, Dr. C. F. W. Walther: Lebensbild (St. Louis, 1890), 21ff; A. R. Suelflow, Servant, 32–3. Both Günther and Suelflow summarize the sermon. The sermon has never been transcribed, however, or published in German or in English.


These include: Amerikanisch-Lutherische Evangelien Postille (1870), Luthерische Brosamen (1876), Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille (1882), Casual-Predigten und -Reden (1889), Gnadenjahr (1890), Predigtwürfe und nicht ganz ausgeführte Predigten und Casualreden (1891), Festklänge: Predigten über Festtexte des Kirchenjahres (1892), and Licht des Lebens (1905).


Baseley has translated Luthерische Brosamen (1876) as From Our Master’s Table; Casual-Predigten und -Reden (1889) as Occasional Sermons and Addresses; and Festklänge (1892) as Festive Sounds, trans. Joel R. Baseley (Dearborn, MI: Mark V Publications, 2008). In the 1960s, Donald Heck translated Walther’s Gospel Postil and the Gnadenjahr collection, making them available in bound, mimeographed form, with the titles Old Standard Gospels and Year of Grace.


Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther: Frübrgen und Spätregen. Predigten, Herausgegeben und um eine biografische Skizze ergänzt von Christoph Barnbrock (Groß Oesingen: Verlag der Luthерischen Buchhandlung Heinrich Harms, 2011). Barnbrock includes paired sermons on six Biblical texts. For example, two Easter sermons on Mark 6:1–8: one from 1846 and one from 1885.

A Bibliography of C. F. W. Walther’s Works in English

Thomas Manteufel

All who find it helpful to learn from and with Dr. Walther will be gratified to know that his writings continue to be translated into English. This list is not exhaustive. While many translated articles, sermons, and letters are included in collections on the general list, special sections have been made for drawing attention to some individual documents. Some alternative versions (translations) have been noted.

General List


*Addresses and Prayers of Dr. C. F. W. Walther.* Translated by Joel R. Baseley from *Ansprachen und Gebete.* 2nd ed. Dearborn, MI: Mark V Publications, 2008. See also *Church Membership.*


*Church Membership: Addresses and Prayers at the Meetings of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Congregation of St. Louis, MO, and its Board of Elders.* Translated by Rudoph Prange from *Ansprachen und Gebete.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1931. See also *Addresses and Prayers of Dr. C. F. W. Walther.*


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HOMILETICAL HELPS
Proper 15 • Matthew 15:21–28 • August 14, 2011

Liturgical Context: This week’s readings answer a question, “Do Gentiles have a part in God’s plan of salvation?” For example, Psalm 67 never tires of announcing YHWH’s blessings upon his people. But this Psalm also proclaims that all nations should recognize him as their judge, provider, and their way of governance as YHWH leads them.

The community of God also learns to break away from all narrow thinking when it comes to the reception of salvation. God’s plan is not exclusive for one ethnic group, but rather his plan includes all the peoples of the earth. YHWH makes just such an announcement in the Old Testament reading for the day as well. He says that foreigners will join themselves to the LORD, and the Lord GOD will gather the outcasts of Israel besides those that he has gathered already (Is 56:1, 6–8).

We will see whether or not Psalm 67 and Isaiah 56 are true as we go through today’s assigned Gospel reading. Will God hold to an exclusive, ethnic view regarding his plan for salvation? If God truly includes “foreigners,” then, when it comes right down to it, will he be gracious enough to include an Old Testament enemy of his and his people—a Canaanite—in his plan of grace?

Biblical context: Matthew 13 contains parables of our Lord, including the parable of the sower and the seed. Through this parable, Jesus teaches that there is nothing wrong with the seed—the word of God—at all. The seed is good seed. It is the soil that will determine the seed’s growth. The sower simply sows the word. We can ask how the Canaanite woman came to faith. After all, she lived in Gentile territory. How would a Canaanite woman hear about Israel’s Messiah and come to believe in him? Well, God revealed it to her. The word was carried there, she received it, and the seed took root in her life.

The other contextual event to consider when working through this text is the feeding of the 5,000 in chapter 14. Jesus will also feed the 4,000 in chapter 15. These miracles bracket today’s Gospel reading. The bread of life from heaven feeds the multitudes of God’s people in these miracle events. The question in the woman’s heart is, “Can there be any bread of life for me as an outsider?”

Verses 21–22: Jesus heads toward Gentile territory. Whether he actually enters it or not is not entirely clear from the text. What is known, however, is that a resident from the area came out to meet Jesus. “It’s difficult to overstate the drama here. . . . This encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman is situated in every way ‘on the border’—on the boundary between the old and the new, between male and female, between Jew and Gentile, between friend and enemy, between the holy and the demonic.”1
The Canaanite woman has a major problem in that her daughter is oppressed by a demon. She cries out and continues to cry out over and over again to Jesus for mercy. The language she uses is that of a believing Israelite. She seems to be using the right “faith talk,” but is it simply all talk in order to manipulate Jesus into giving her what she seeks, or is it that she truly believes? The text does not tell us how she heard about Jesus at all. All we know is that in some way the word was sown in Gentile territory, and it grew in her life. We also know that her daughter is severely oppressed by a demon, and she has nowhere else to turn. At this point, we know that she has heard about Jesus as Israel’s Messiah, which is why she went to him for help.

Verses 23–24: We’re not told why Jesus didn’t say anything to the woman at this point. Was he teasing her, or was he testing her faith? Was Jesus acting cruelly in not answering her, or was he giving her the impression that he might actually give her a hearing? We don’t know because the text doesn’t tell us anything about the silence. Therefore, as preachers, we shouldn’t try to psychologize Jesus.

The disciples, in contrast to Jesus, were not at a loss for words. They certainly didn’t remain silent. They wanted this Canaanite woman to go away and leave them alone. Their way of getting rid of her was for Jesus to simply grant her request as soon as possible, or heal the daughter. Were they in the position to tell the Messiah to whom he should or should not grant blessings? They may have thought so, but he puts them in their place with his response that he was “sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Yes, he was sent for the lost sheep, but would the Messiah exclude a lost sheep crying out for help simply because of her ethnicity?

Verse 25: The woman—the mother—is at the end of her rope. She needs help. Her daughter needs help, and she believes and trusts that Israel’s Messiah can give her aid.

Verse 26: The “bread of the children” points to the messianic fulfillment that is promised to Israel. Jesus said that it is not kalon (good), or “according to God’s plan” to take what belongs to the children and throw it to unclean dogs. (“Dogs” cannot be understood in a modern American sense—that they’re on the same par as a family member. Certainly, most people love their pets, and many will include them on the same level as they would a child.) In the biblical context, Jesus was calling this woman unclean. Jews insulted Gentiles by calling them “dogs.” Her position was not that of one of the children who would be privileged to sit at the table. Rather, hers was an inferior one compared to the children. In other words, it is not good to take God’s promises and eschatological blessings and throw them all to the unclean people.

Verse 27: The Canaanite woman recognized the priority of the children. She knew that they were the ones to receive and be fed the bread. However, the woman also knew of God’s abundance. After all, Jesus previously fed 5,000 men, plus the women and children who were present. He would do the same thing again soon with another 4,000. In both events, there were plenty of leftovers. The woman wasn’t asking for the main course. She simply wanted to be included somewhere near, or under, the table of blessing. She trusted that the falling crumbs of abundance would be plenty enough for a person of her position.
**Congregational context:** There will probably be hearers in the pew who may wonder why they or someone they love is in a particular circumstance even though they trust in Jesus. After hearing this reading, they may wonder all the more why the woman’s daughter was granted healing, but they or their loved one hasn’t been granted the same answer to their pleas. It is important to remind Christians that God always hears their prayers, and he answers them with “yes,” “no,” or “wait.”

The focus of this reading is not on the healing, but rather on the faith of the woman. She trusted that his abundance could extend far enough to include a repentant enemy of God. His crumbs would be enough for her. The preacher could emphasize a couple of things through this reading. For instance, one of the applications can address any malady where people of the congregation might get a little territorial or inward-focused about “their church.” Jesus’s response to the disciples in verse 24 reminded them that they were not in a position to tell him what he should or should not do or to whom he should do it. This is a good reminder that Christianity is not “our” religion either. The congregations where we worship don’t really “belong” to us, but rather they belong to Christ. Thus, we are not free to tell the Messiah whom he should or should not let in. Jesus is the compassionate Messiah for all people regardless of their circumstances.

Another application can address any person who may believe that Jesus is for all people, but when it comes to applying God’s love to them individually, they have doubts because of their past or current circumstances. The Canaanite woman knew her position (sinful and unclean—very Lutheran!), but she also trusted in his abundance; your faith makes you part of the household of God.

Michael J. Redeker

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**Endnote**


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**Proper 16 • Matthew 16:13–20 • August 21, 2011**

**Who? What?**

Have you ever tried to work yourself into a story? In this morning’s Gospel text, Jesus asks the disciples a very powerful question: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” The disciples offer a variety of answers heard from the people. Some say John the Baptist. Some say Elijah. Some say Jeremiah. Some say one of the prophets. Yes, these are the things some say. Herod Antipas himself believed Jesus to be John the Baptist raised from the dead. So this is the report from the masses.

Then Jesus turns the question on the disciples. He makes it quite personal. “But who do you say that I am?” It is here, right here, that I would desire to work myself into the story. Which character? Simon, of course! Look how quickly he answers the Lord’s question: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Wow, now that’s a mouthful of salvific confession. Not one of the prophets, not Jeremiah, not Elijah, not John...
the Baptist, but the one whom all of these announced—the Christ. The Christ, the Anointed One of God who has come to “bring good news to the poor; to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to open the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance to our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called the oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified” (Is 61:1–3). Here, standing before the disciples is the Christ who is also God’s own Son! What an amazing statement to come from the mouth of man.

Jesus responds to Simon’s confession with another blessed dose of reality. “Blessed are you, Simon bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 16:17). Certainly this confession did not originate within Simon. It is nothing Simon concocted; it is not a fleshly rumor, but it is what God himself reveals. Yes, if one would insert himself into this story, Simon seems like a great candidate.

However, if you take on Simon, you must take on all of him. In verse 17 we hear Simon make this firm confession that comes not from his flesh and blood, but from God. However, in verse 22 Peter is quick to set his mind on the things of man and not the things of God (23). Peter makes the confession of who Jesus is—the Christ. Now, it comes to what the Christ is. The Christ is the one who “must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’” Confessing Simon quickly becomes rebuking Peter. He does fine with who the Christ is, but struggles with what the Christ is.

Now, is this really the character you would want to take on? Might as well because he does well to represent you! To admit that the Christ must suffer and die requires one to admit there is a reason for this suffering and death. God’s law shows to you clearly and powerfully that the reason is you. God’s Word shows that the penalty is severe. You have certainly sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. You are dead in your trespasses. You have not lived this week according to the good and gracious will of God. You have not delighted fully in the gifts God offers. You have sought to find your own misguided solutions to that which troubles your soul. The truth that must treat your condition comes down to this: the Son of Man must suffer and die. This is the Christ!

The Christ has come that the things of God will be fulfilled. Peter may not have had the things of God in mind, but Jesus the Christ always does. The things of God define the Christ. Remember as Jesus walked with the two disciples after his resurrection. They were discussing the things that had happened in Jerusalem. Jesus asked them about their conversation. They responded by saying, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days” (Lk 24:18). Jesus says, “What things?” They continue by describing the arrest, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
Jesus responds to them as if to say, “Do you hear the words coming out of your mouths? Do you not recognize that the things you mention describe what the Christ has come to do? Do you not recognize that the things you describe sound familiar as it is these things that I said the Christ must do?” “And beginning with Moses and all of the prophets, he interpreted to them in all of Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk 24:27).

So who is Jesus? He is the Christ, the Son of God. What does that mean? It means cross and crucifixion. It means resurrection and redemption. It means the things of God given to you so that you might have life and have it to the full (Jn 10:10).

To Simon’s confession, Jesus says, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail over it” (18). Jesus will not build his church on just anything, but he will build it here. He will build it on “this rock” that is Peter. He will build it on disciples to whom Jesus gives the charge “to tell no one he is the Christ” (20). Peter confesses, the disciples confess, and it is on this rock, it is on them, that the Lord will build his church. As Paul says, it is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph 2:20–21).

So how would you work yourself into this story? Well, there is really no need to worry about that. God himself has worked you into this story, which is both his story and your story. He has made you a major character as one who is the recipient of the things of God by the action of the crucified Christ. He has brought you into the body of his own Son, the church, which has as its very foundation Peter, all the apostles, the prophets, and as its cornerstone, Christ.

So who do we say that Jesus is? He is the Christ, the crucified, the Savior, the author and perfecter, the foundation of the household in which we now dwell. That is what God has given us; that is what God has revealed.

Kyle Castens

Proper 17 • Matthew 16:21–28 • August 28, 2011

Don’t Cross Out the Cross!

Both the Old Testament and the Gospel lessons for this day show some startling, unsettling pictures of well-known people of God: (1) the prophet Jeremiah questioning the trustworthiness of the word of God, wondering whether it is “like a deceptive brook” (Jer 15:18), sometimes plentiful with water, sometimes dried up when needed, and (2) Peter, rebuking Jesus’s intention to suffer and die (Mt 16:21–22). Both were reprimanded (Jer 16:19; Mt 16:23). The episodes illustrate the fact that freedom from misbelief and serious sin is never completely attained in this life, yet God calls His people to repentance and forgives and strengthens them. What can we learn from the text today for our up-building? We can put it this way:
Jesus’s cross = his saving work

The temptation to cross out this cross—Jesus at this time began to announce that he must suffer many evil things from his enemies, adding later that it would mean dying on a cross (Mt 20:18–19). But Simon Peter thought he needed to be “straightened out” on this point (v. 22). What he wanted was the Messiah to go on preaching and teaching goodness and love, healing and doing miracles, in order to set up a glorious world government, establishing justice everywhere forever. Jesus recognized this attractive program as a temptation from the devil to divert him from what he had been sent to do (v.23), and Satan has been using it as a temptation for all who would be followers of Jesus ever since he moved Peter to urge it. It is the temptation to seek a false, worldly greatness for Jesus himself and for all whom he might appoint as leaders, reformers, and deputy rulers under him. It is the “honoring paradox”—dishonoring Christ by honoring him in the wrong way. It is a plan for a Messianic program which leaves out the Messiah’s gospel purpose. It is the error of the Muslims, who think as Peter did here: “Far be it” from the sinless Messiah (Qur’an 19:19; 3:45) to die a painful death, and so he never did die (Qur’an 4:157). It is from Satan that the teaching of the necessity of redemption by a suffering Savior is unworthy of God and ignores man’s dignity. That thought was expressed, for example, by an early president of the World Council of Churches who lamented that such an atonement teaching makes God the Father look like a “dirty bully,” and by The Interpreter’s Bible when it asserted (I:204) that it is “an ancient superstition” added to “a delight in gore.” There has indeed always been a pervasive temptation to cross out the bloody cross from our life and our thinking about the way of salvation.

Fighting this temptation with the truth about Jesus’s cross—Jesus committed himself to bearing the cross by his knowledge of the will of his Father, who had sent him to suffer and die as the world’s Savior—a holy, wise, and just plan. He knew the reason for this gruesome necessity: all have sinned, and none are able to pay the ransom price for their salvation. Therefore, he came to give his life as a ransom (Mt 20:28). He was wounded for our transgressions, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all (Is 53:5–6). The vicarious atonement was an act of boundless love (Gal 2:20; Rom 5:8). Jesus did not cross out the cross; nor will human beings who see their lost condition without his cross and live in faith and love toward Christ crucified. It is no wonder that he appealed to Peter—and to all he came to save—to set their minds on the things of God (v.23). In his love, he gives light to see that there is no other way of salvation than his cross and resurrection, no matter what Satan’s lies and man-centered schemes may say. We hope and pray that Muslims will come to see the true Messianic significance of Jesus’s sinlessness (which they do recognize).

The Christians’ cross = our faithfulness to Christ

The temptation to cross out this cross—Jesus made his cross the pattern for the whole life of his followers. He gives us crosses to bear (vv. 24–26). Our cross is all suffering, trouble, and hardship that come to us because we believe in the crucified and risen Savior. The faith (in Christ and his cross) by which we are justified gives
rise to faithfulness of life. If this is hindered by impenitent sinning, faith is choked to
death, and the blessings of Calvary’s cross can only be received by faith. When faith is
lost, salvation is lost (vv. 25–26). Jesus lovingly warned about this in the parable of the
sower (Mt 13:14–23) and elsewhere. When the early Christians were imprisoned, tor-
tured, or persecuted for the gospel’s sake, those were their crosses. If you are ridiculed
or unpopular for your Christian convictions, must sacrifice money or time to do God’s
will, must fight earnestly against pressure to disobey Christ’s Word, are heart-broken if
your children lose their Christian faith; whatever your crosses are, none of them would
come upon you if you were not a follower of Christ. The devil’s advice here, like in his
scheme with Peter, is: “Spare yourself the trouble of being a loyal Christian. Cross out
the cross,” (Lk 22:31, 61; Eph 6:11).

Fighting the temptation with the truth about Jesus’s cross—Jesus’s will to suf-
ffer and die manifests his deep love for those whom he urges to follow him, taking up
any cross necessary for doing so and finally receiving his riches. To strengthen them for
this, he assures them of the coming of his kingdom (v.28), into which all believers in
him will be gathered, beginning with his present hearers, to receive redemption through
his blood (Col 1:13–14). Very soon he will begin giving his Holy Spirit to all his people
to help them live a life of faith in him (Jn 7:37–39; Rom 8:13–17). This is the faith
which trusts and loves the king of this kingdom with a kiss (Ps 2:2, 6, 12). To buoy his
people up in faith, he sets before them the wondrous hope of his coming in glory to
pour out the fullness of the gift of eternal life and of his kingdom, richly compensating
us for all suffering and loss for his sake (v. 27).

Thomas Manteufel

Proper 18 • Matthew 18:1–20 • September 4, 2011

Caring for the Kingdom’s Greatest

Is this reading to be handled as a single insight into the kingdom or is one sec-
tion of it going to be the subject of a sermon? Each section can be seen as a distinct
topic: the greatest in the kingdom, when temptations come, the lost sheep, what is
bound on earth is bound in heaven. Each would be worthy of homiletical explora-
tion. But considering the flow of Matthew’s chapters (chapter 14 asks who Jesus is and
describes how Peter, after seeing him walk on the water, admits that he is the Son of
God, chapter 15 tells of the great faith of the Canaanite woman, chapter 16 has Peter’s
confession, “You are the Christ,” and chapter 17 tells of Jesus’s transfiguration), the
preacher can see that in chapter 18, Jesus’s teaching is overturning misunderstandings
about the kingdom. The whole chapter will be read over two Sundays.

Here let us explore how a central insight might hold the reading together under
one topic. It begins with a key question, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of
heaven?” It is the one who “humbles himself like this child,” a needy and dependent
individual. Note the accent on faith in verse 6, “little ones who believe in me.” How
important could such a person be? A “little one” should be received in Jesus’s name, as if Jesus were that person. What behavior should one exhibit in this receiving? No one should cause such a child to sin, but the world will provide temptations, and woe to the one by whom they come. To wound the one for whom Christ died is to sin against Christ (1 Cor 8:12). How precious is this “little one”? No “little one” is to be despised or looked down upon. Any shepherd rejoices over one stray sheep who wanders from the flock and is brought back, and so the Father rejoices over this one “more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.” Not one should be allowed to perish. How do you deal with a brother who sins against you—who strays? You tell him his fault, and if he listens, he is gained—even if this process of confronting the sin and listening to two or three witnesses or to the church is needed to gain him back. In the event that he won’t listen, let him be considered as one who is outside the kingdom (as a Gentile and a tax collector); he can no longer be treated as a “little one.”

This sequence of thought has a unity. The “child” who believes is the most precious (greatest) in the kingdom of heaven, should not be led into sin, should be found when he strays, and should be led back “by listening.” That listening, a preacher will point out, is to hear again that Jesus is the Savior and has rescued all from the power of sin. Our Father rejoices over a sinner who repents and returns to the fold. What holds these paragraphs together can be seen in verse 5 (“whoever receives one such child in my name receives me”) and verse 20 (“where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them”). Jesus is one with the believer and is among believers who gather “in [his] name.” He continually cares for—protects, returns and restores—each one. Indeed, next Sunday’s Gospel will explore forgiving from the heart, how a believer treats a brother.

What is revealed in chapter 18, is how to take care of the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, namely, the dependent and needy “child” of the heavenly Father. Dependence on the Lord is accented in an Old Testament name for the “sons of Jacob” (Gn 49:2) who became “the twelve tribes of Israel” (49:28). In their dependency on Yahweh, they were regularly called the “children” (or people) of Israel (Ex 1:9). Jeffrey Gibbs’ recent commentary suggests that the “child” is the unifying theme for chapter 18. ¹ Truly, we are all dependents of our heavenly Father.

James L. Brauer

Endnote

Proper 19 • Matthew 18:21–35 • September 11, 2011

“In this Christian church, he…” Though not our usual style, this text invites an expository approach. The familiar subsections of this reading could lead you to preach a sermon narrowly focused on one aspect of repentance, but neglect the depth of care that Jesus shows for sinners throughout the whole lesson. This text comes at a most opportune time, the tenth anniversary of 9/11. The following notes are offered as a homiletical help, but can also be used for a Bible class.
Introduction: Ten years ago people had reasons to come to church. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, people sought caring community. Today’s Gospel talks about our community, a community bound together by the forgiveness of sins. Dr. Luther summarizes today’s text very nicely: “In this Christian church, he daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.” Do we see ourselves as a caring community of forgiven sinners?

Verses 12–13: “If a man has a hundred sheep . . .” Jesus begins with an example from daily life. While our piety likes to think of this man as the Good Shepherd, that’s not in these verses. In v. 14 Jesus shifts from a plain old shepherd to show how God cares for the lost through his church.

Verses 15–17: As the government began to fight the war on terror, many people sought out the solace of community in the church. God established government and church to deal with wrong in two different ways. How should the church act when someone does wrong? Jesus teaches us in the next verses. We should proactively seek someone wandering from our fellowship (v. 15). That should happen at the most personal level. Not every issue is everyone’s issue. We should be a community where we trust that each of us in our private lives will seek after anyone wandering (vv. 18–19). We should not be a community of “enquiring minds” who want to know the details of what someone has allegedly done, but we should instead be a community that is considerate of the reputation of the brother or sister gone astray (eighth commandment). Only when private efforts fail should the church learn about a brother or sister’s sin, and even then we remain a community considerate of the person wandering away. Our talk about that person should be bathed in prayer (v. 19). Why? Because we know that Jesus our Savior and helper is present among us (v. 20). All this is his way with and through us. Through this caring process, the Spirit of Jesus strives through community to “forgive all my sins and the sins of all believers.” Finally, it is interesting to note, the earthly process laid out by Jesus ends with apparent failure (v. 17).

Verse 21: After 9/11, many sought out churches for a time but eventually decided to leave. Like many Americans, Peter sees the church as a voluntary association of individuals, thereby diminishing the lordship of Jesus over his church. Jesus seizes Peter’s question as an opportunity to show that the Spirit works differently among us than our surrounding cultural models might dictate.

Verses 23–35: Verse 12 started the whole lesson with a secular shepherd. Now v. 23, a parable about “the kingdom of heaven,” starts with “a king who wished to settle accounts.” This parable is not just about the king but about how God’s kingdom works, the heavenly king and his people together. When the forgiven debtor did not forgive another, “His fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.” Here Jesus picks up what he left hanging in v. 17. When the church’s efforts seem to have failed, the earthly church is not relieved of continuing to care for the wayward brother or sister. Like Jesus, we continue to show concern for “a Gentile and a tax collector.” About our apparent failures on this side of eternity, we leave it to the king who will settle accounts.
Conclusion: So God made government and church to respond to wrong in different ways. We’ve studied what Jesus says about the church’s response when someone wanders from the ways of God. Luther: “In this Christian church, he daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.” “In this Christian church . . .” Are we this kind of church?

Dale A. Meyer

Proper 20 • Matthew 20:1–16 • September 18, 2011

Introduction: Today’s Gospel reading contains a parable that is unique to Matthew’s Gospel, the so-called parable of the workers in the vineyard. A title that better reflects the pragmatics of this parable might be, “Jesus’s parable of warning to his disciples against focusing upon the rewards for discipleship and then making sinful comparisons between themselves and other disciples.” Or, more simply put, this could be called “the parable about how the first can become last.” It falls to the preacher, then, to put this parable into its proper narrative context so that it makes sense for his hearers.

Narrative Context: This reading is part of a larger section of narrative related in 19:16–20:16. This narrative begins when the young man with great possessions rejects Jesus’s call and then Jesus warns his disciples about the dangers of wealth because it is this man’s wealth (and not his reliance on keeping the Torah) that is the cause for his rejection of Jesus. This prompts an observation and question from Peter: “Look, we left everything and followed you. What then will there be for us?” That Peter’s comment does not show (complete) misunderstanding is evident from the straightforward reply of Jesus. Jesus gives a great promise to both the twelve (19:28) and then to “any man” who might leave everything for him (19:29). But with these promises comes the dire warning in 19:30: “But many of the people who are first will be last and many of the last will be first.”

Today’s lesson then follows. The conjunction γὰρ that introduces the parable in 20:1 shows that the parable will provide explanation for the warning in 19:30. Note then how in 20:16 the explanation/punch line that Jesus gives to this parable recalls once again this warning. Introduced by the adverb ὧντως in 20:16 it reads “in this way the last will be first and the first will be last.” So the parable, framed by the parallel (and chiastic) statements in 19:30 and 20:16, tells how the warning of 19:30 could become true. The entire parable then serves the function of warning against attitudes and behaviors that could result in a disciple of Jesus losing out on the promises of 19:29—in particular the promise of eternal life, i.e., how the first can become last.

The Parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.” Note that the comparison is to this householder and his actions. These actions include his looking first for these and then for other workers throughout the day and later his choosing to pay all of his workers exactly the same wage at the end of the day.
The first section of the story (20:1–7) relates how this householder throughout the day goes out to hire workers for his vineyard. He begins early in the morning. Then he goes out again at the third (9 am), sixth (12 pm), and ninth (3 pm) hours. Finally, in an element of the story that the original hearers would probably have found to be utterly ridiculous, this man goes out at the eleventh hour (5 pm) to hire workers for only one hour. The workers can be divided into three groups: There is the first group of workers who have agreed with the householder to work a full twelve-hour day for a denarius (a day’s wage). There are the workers hired at the third, sixth, and ninth hours who will work less than a full day and are promised to be paid “whatever is fair” (20:4). Then there are the workers hired at the eleventh hour who are simply told (emphatically) to go to the vineyard and are not promised any wage (though it may be assumed that there will be some pay).

The contrast set up is especially between those working in the vineyard all day (the first) and those who have been standing idle in the marketplace most of the day and who have worked for only one hour (the last). With this contrast established, the hearers then may begin to consider this question: We know the householder will pay the first workers a denarius, but it is not said what he will pay these others. What wage, then, will these others receive—in particular the last group that worked for only one hour?

The second section of the story (20:8–15) tells of how the householder pays his workers at the end of the day. When the householder begins with those hired last and pays them a denarius, the question created by the earlier sequence is now reversed: If he pays the eleventh-hour workers a denarius, then how much will he pay those men whom he hired first? Will they now receive more than a denarius? The great surprise—which really should not be a surprise—is that he also pays them a denarius.

That all are paid the same leads to the conflict through which this parable makes its point; the members of the first group of workers now complain against the householder because he made the men who worked for only one hour equal to them who worked the entire day. The householder then responds to one of these complainers—this one man is perhaps representative of the whole group. This response is central to understanding the story:

“Hey buddy, I am not treating you unfairly. You agreed with me to work for a denarius, didn’t you? Take what is yours and go! I want to pay this last guy a denarius just as I also paid you. Certainly it is lawful for me to do what I want with what is mine, isn’t it? Or is your eye evil because I am good?”

The householder’s point is that he paid this worker what they agreed upon and that he can pay the others whatever he wants to pay them because it is his money. Why has his generosity and goodness caused this one complainer (and the others) to become greedy and contentious? Well, this has happened because these workers have made comparisons between themselves and the others, and now they are more fixated on the wage paid to these others than upon their initial agreement with their employer. Now their eyes have become evil and they are greedy for more than they are to lawfully receive.

The reader is now confronted with a quandary. On the one hand, it is natural for us to identify with the complainers as it indeed may not seem fair that the men who worked the longest and the hardest do not receive anything more than those who
worked less—in particular those eleventh-hour workers. On the other hand, the householder has paid these workers what they agreed upon, and they neither have the right to expect more nor do they have the right to complain about whatever he chooses to pay the other workers. With whom will the hearer identify—with the householder or with the complaining workers? The answer to this question will reveal the hearer’s own attitudes.

Decoding and Explaining the Parable: The αὐτὸς ἡμῶν householder is Jesus. The workers called at various times throughout the day are the disciples whom Jesus calls. In the context of Matthew’s narrative, Peter and the other apostles would probably stand for the first workers hired. In addition to these first disciples, other disciples will be called. I don’t think we should make too much of the various hours in which workers are hired and the order in which the workers are paid at the end of the day. These elements of the parable function more to make sense of the story. The workers hired first must be paid last in order to set up the conflict between them and the householder—and so for this parable to make its point.

Again, the purpose of this parable is to explain and amplify the warning of 19:30: “But many people who are first will be last . . .” The parable shows how this can happen. The members of the first group of workers are discontented not because they were cheated, but because the householder paid the other workers the same as them. In this same way, the disciples of Jesus could make sinful comparisons between themselves and other disciples when it comes to the subject of rewards, and so lose focus upon their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ who graciously called them and promises to reward them—and who will also graciously call others and reward them as well. As I understand “the first being last” in this parable to mean the exclusion of these people from eternal life (as happens to Judas Iscariot), then this danger is very dire indeed. He who has ears to hear would heed our Lord’s warning.

Considerations for preaching

As this parable functions as warning, this should be reflected in the sermon as well: The pastor will warn his hearers of the dangers of fixating on rewards and of comparing themselves to other disciples instead of focusing upon their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ who called them and promises rewards. Let the hearers beware of any attitude that would respond to Jesus’s goodness and generosity with “an evil eye” that is greedy and may even contend with the Lord regarding his grace when this grace is shown to others.

Note that Jesus does not accuse Peter and the others of displaying the attitude of the first group of workers. He warns them against this attitude. The preacher, therefore, should not necessarily accuse his hearers of having this attitude. Nevertheless, this parable (as do others) may leave the hearers considering this question: “That worker who complains—is it I?” Thus, this warning could bring the hearers to consider their own attitudes and behavior, and it could result in genuine conviction of sin.

Our Lord Jesus Christ chooses to give eternal life to all of his disciples and in this way, treats them all the same. In the parable, the householder’s generosity brings about conflict between him and the first group of workers; our Lord’s generosity to each of us and to our fellow disciples should be a cause for joy and faithfulness.
Remind your hearers of how their Lord graciously called them through the gospel into eternal life and how their relationship with Jesus should remain most important as they follow him today.

David I. Lewis

Proper 21 • Matthew 21:23–27 (28–32) • September 25, 2011

Why the Question about Jesus’s Authority?

The events in this account from Matthew 21 take place on the Monday before Jesus’s crucifixion. The context of this pericope is important to note, especially since the text includes the first in a series of challenges by Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to Jesus’s authority. One day earlier Jesus had entered the city amid great celebration. He had cleansed the temple and then healed the blind and lame in the temple courts while children proclaimed, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Already at this point, the chief priests and the scribes were indignant with Jesus and with the whole scene in the temple. The next day, after Jesus had cursed the fig tree, he returned to the temple courts to teach the people. Again the chief priests—this time with the people’s elders—came up to Jesus, interrupted his teaching, and asked by what authority he did these things and who gave him this authority. Likely they were still upset by Jesus’s disruption of the temple business the day before. Perhaps they were trying to exert their own authority in the temple courts. More likely, the question was a trap. Clearly, Jesus had no authorization from the temple leaders to drive out the moneychangers, heal the sick, and teach. (Clearly, Jesus had little regard for the authority of the temple leaders.) If in his answer to their question Jesus claimed a human authority, the chief priests could trump it and accuse him of subversion; if he claimed divine authority, he was guilty of blasphemy. Whatever the reason for their question, the chief priests and elders revealed their lack of faith.

Jesus’s Answer to the Question

Jesus gave a response to the question of the chief priests and elders, but it was not one to satisfy them. He turned the question back on them and in doing so, got right to the heart of their problem. The point of reference was John the Baptist. What did they think of him and his message? With whose authority did John do what he did? Weighing their options, the chief priests and elders realized that they had fallen hopelessly into their own trap and pleaded ignorance. Because of this, Jesus replied that he would not tell them by what authority he does these things. Nevertheless, he did tell them a parable illustrating their error (21:28–32).

The parable of the two sons is, in part, about the Word of God and how people respond to it. The first son hears his father’s command to go and work in the vineyard but first rejects it; later, he changes his mind—and his direction—and obeys. The second son hears his father’s word and promises to obey, but in the end does not. Jesus’s next question—“Which of the two did the will of his father?”—was an easy one for the
chief priests and elders, but they quickly found themselves in another trap as Jesus went on to identify them with the second son in the parable. They did not listen to John the Baptist—a true prophet of God—when he came preaching the Word of God and calling for repentance. Instead, notorious sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes—ones who had previously disobeyed God's commands—now listened to John and believed his preaching. Like the first son in the parable, they changed their minds—and their direction—and they repented of their sins. The chief priests and elders did not believe John even when they saw former sinners repent and believe. As a result, chief sinners—tax collectors and prostitutes—were going into the kingdom of God before them.

Authority, Word, Repenting and Believing

In rejecting John the Baptist, the Jewish leaders also rejected his message. John’s message was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 3:2). The chief priests and elders had no use for John’s way of righteousness, which pointed to the way of the coming Savior. Convinced of themselves and their own righteousness, they thought they needed neither repentance nor the kingdom of God. They ignored the Father’s command and did not do his will. In the same way, the chief priests and elders of the people did not recognize Jesus’s authority. They heard what he said but did not change their minds. They saw what he did but did not believe. They would accept only their own authority, and in doing so, they rejected Jesus’s authority, which comes from God the Father who sent him.

As the Son of God, Jesus had divine authority over all creation and over all powers on earth; nevertheless, within days he would submit to the authorities that sought to kill him. Yet ultimately his divine authority would be revealed in his glorious resurrection from the dead. Jesus’s victory over sin and death throws open the doors of the kingdom of God to believers repenting of even the greatest sins.

Gerhard Bode

Proper 22 • Matthew 21:33–46 • October 2, 2011

Context

Matthew 21 begins with the “Palm Sunday” entry to Jerusalem. For the moment, Jesus is “riding high,” even if on a lowly donkey and its colt. Who is this guy? Here’s the “buzz”: “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee” (21:10). The chapter ends with an emphasis on the same fact: the chief priests and the Pharisees refrain from any overt action, because they fear the crowds, who were holding [imperfect] Jesus to be a prophet (21:46). So, what does this prophet do? Prophetic stuff, to be sure! He throws out the marketeers in the temple (21:12–13), and in the same episode he receives the blind and the lame and heals them (21:14). Then comes an act that we too may find scandalous; Jesus curses the fig tree that isn’t bearing (21:18–19). When he
returns to the temple the next day, the chief priests and the elders confront him about the nature and source of his authority to do what he’s done (21:23). Jesus replies with his own question, which puts the leaders between the proverbial rock and a hard place. Since they won’t answer his question, Jesus determines that he won’t answer theirs (21:27). Jesus tells the parable of two sons—one who initially resists, then repents; the other says at first, “Yes, Father,” but as soon as he is out of sight, does his own thing. Then Jesus invites/directs the crowd to hear another parable.

Text

The parable is familiar. It resonates with echoes of the parabolic “song of the vineyard” in Isaiah 5:1–7 (the OT reading for the day). There is not a one-to-one correspondence, but several details match: fence/hedge, winepress, and tower. They are different, however, in the role of the tenants. In Jesus’s parable, the landowner rents the vineyard to tenants, and then he goes away (the idea that he went to “another country” is not a necessary element of the verb ἀποδημέω). All the verbs are aorist; all these actions set up the rest of the parable. There is one more feature to note since it will come into play later—the parable’s first character is identified as an ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης.

Time organizes the parable. With the background in place, “then” (ὅτε), that is, after an indefinite period of time, the season for fruit arrives. Luke’s version of the parable might help us understand the difference between χρόνος and καιρός. The man who planted the vineyard goes away χρόνους ἱκανούς, that is, for enough “clock time” for the next set of circumstances to arrive. The καιρός, then, is the right time for fruit to be available, so it is entirely reasonable for the owner to send servants “to get” (aor. infin. of λαμβάνω) his fruit. Instead, the tenants “got” (aor. ptc. of λαμβάνω) them, and beat, killed, or stoned them. So he tried again with the same results.

The next “time” arrives; ὕστερον, “at last (or finally),” the landowner sent his son. But the tenants saw this as an opportunity to obtain the inheritance for themselves by eliminating the heir. So they “got” him (again, the aor. ptc. of lambanw), threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

The parable is done; it’s time for the quiz, and it begins with another indication of time. ὅταν—“When(ever) the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do?” Notice, first of all, the deliberate shift; at the beginning of the parable he was an ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης, but now he is ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος, the “lord of the vineyard.” In Isaiah 5, when the rhetorical question, “What else is there to do?” was posed, it was the “beloved,” to whom the vineyard belonged, who asked it (Is 5:4). Then he declared, “I will make known to you what I will do,” and proceeded to describe how he would raze the vineyard (Is 5:5ff.). Finally, the true identities of the vineyard and of its owner were made known: the vineyard belonged to Yahweh, and the vineyard was the house of Israel (Is 5:7).

In this case, there is nothing wrong with the vineyard as such; it is the tenants who have been unreliable, so they will be killed, and new, reliable tenants contracted. The verse from Psalm 118 underscores that it is the Lord (Heb. Yahweh) who is the landowner and who controls the disposition of the vineyard/kingdom, not those who are only tenants.
Connections

The parable is a concise picture of Old Testament salvation history. It makes sense, of course, to interpret the parable’s features in terms of Israel’s tenancy in the land. At the same time, however, we need to recognize that, ultimately, the planting of God is the whole of creation—“the earth is the LORD’s” (Ps 24). Therefore, we also are tenants.

The incidents in Matthew 21 echo the chronicler’s brief summary of conditions in Judah and Jerusalem as defeat and exile drew nearer (2 Chr 36:14–16). Unfaithfulness caused the nation’s demise (36:14), which is also to say “unfruitfulness.” Jesus cursed the fig tree (a symbol for Israel) because it was unfruitful, which is also to say it was unfaithful. Judah and Jerusalem had “polluted the house of the LORD” (36:14). In Matthew 21, Jesus cleanses it and, by his teaching and healing activities, produces its proper fruit. The tenants mistreated the landowner’s servants and, finally, his son in the parable; the people of Judah had mocked God’s messengers, despised God’s words, and scoffed at his prophets (36:16). The land and the Davidic kingship were taken away from Israel in the early sixth century BC, but the warning and threat are renewed in the prophetic word of Jesus. The loss is not simply of national place and status, but of the reign of God—his rule of grace in the lives of the people who are his.

The warning and threat pertain as much today as at any other time in the history of the church. When we think that the fruit of our lives, even of our churches, is our own, we rob God (see Mal 4:8ff.). When we treat creation (air, water, land, animal and plant and human life) as if it belongs to us and not to God, we are guilty tenants.

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” Psalm 118 is about trusting Yahweh and not relying on worldly strength. The psalmist himself fits the description of the one who was beset by enemies, but Yahweh delivered him, even exalted him—the stone that everyone else wanted to discard, God saved and put in a place of honor. How much more does this describe the Son, who was about to be rejected and taken out of the city and killed! Despite the builders’ rejection—our rejection—God made him the cornerstone. This Jesus, whom we crucified, God raised up (Acts 2:23–24). “This is the LORD’s doing.”

The invitation is implicit, but quite clear. Repent and believe the gospel. Submit to the reign of God, and the one who brings it, Jesus the Son.

William Carr

Proper 23 • Matthew 22:1–14 • October 9, 2011

The Parable of the Great Banquet

This text can be challenging because it not only presents the issues of the place of God’s work and our own works in the lives of believers, and the right and wrong ways of attempting to enter the kingdom, but also because the text has been frequently misused to blame certain groups (Jewish religious leaders) while missing the more general application to all who ignore the Christ.
Jesus introduces this parable as one about the kingdom of heaven, probably meaning the judgment and afterlife, but also referring to the way people act in this life. One would do well to mention the possible separation within the parable of parts having to do with what happens in this life (the ability to not respond to the message and the messengers of God who are ignored), from the section on the banquet where people are already in the kingdom—largely about the time following the judgment.

The antagonist in the first part of the parable is often taken for granted and frequently presented as either the Jews or the Pharisees, and the chief priests representing those invited and those rejected. This is a limited interpretation of the immediate issue, and not at the depth Jesus is really proposing. While it is certain that the Pharisees and chief priests are the most recently mentioned people (Mt 21:45) who also perceived that he was referring to them, it is their rejection of the teaching of the Christ that is at the core of the issue here, not their specific status among the people of Israel. It is the fact that they thought of themselves as the elect, as the righteous and holy, as too good to be damned, and yet had little love for those “worse” than them, nor any ability to listen to Christ that provides motive for our current parable. It is also the fact that they were too right to listen to the Christ that placed them in the line of their fathers and ancestors, as Jesus would also later indict them for building the tombs of the prophets and so consenting to their murders (Mt 23:29–36). So the law in this first part refers to those who know better (whoever they are), but refuse the emissaries of God, be they prophets (the ones ignored) or the Christ, who in this case places himself among the prophets.

It is equally noteworthy that the excuses given by the subjects actually carry some weight according to the law of Moses, as they were similar to the four reasons that allowed a soldier not to go to war (recently married, yoke of oxen, new vineyard, afraid to fight, [Dt 20:1–9]). Here field is substituted for vineyard and yoke of oxen for business, but it was about the same thing (see also Luke 14:16–24 for a clearer parallel). These excuses do not, however, carry any weight when it comes to ignoring the Christ, and the result for all who ignore him is the same: “The king destroyed those murderers and burned their city.” So the law of the judgment of the kingdom is one that cannot be ignored, any more than death can be ignored, for the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23).

Moving on to the second part of the text, the invitation of the king is extended to anyone his inviters could find, the not “special people” if you will. The text is clear that this invitation had nothing to do with the goodness of the recipients of the invitation for they were “both bad and good.” This is also highlighted in the reason for the change of invitation—for “those invited were not worthy.” The worthiness, therefore, is not in the hands of the recipients, but is due to the invitation itself. It is the king that makes one worthy by his invitation whether one is “good or bad.” All are invited to the feast, but not all have faith. To put it in Jesus’s own words, “Many are called, but few are chosen.”

Now we come to the most difficult part of the parable because it is easy to miss the point. Jesus is clear that this man has no wedding garment, and many commentators have tried to make something out of this text by suggesting that the king himself provided the wedding clothes. There is no specific indication of this from the text,
although it remains a cultural possibility. In fact, the text says that the question asked of the man is, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?” implying that the man should have been stopped at the gate. One possible explanation for this part of the text then is that it has to do with whether the person has not only put on Christ in terms of words, but also in terms of works. The man who is underdressed knew the password (the proper words). He came in with the invited crowd, but he either willfully ignored the dress code (representing following the Christ in deed and in truth) or was simply ignorant of it. Another possibility, which the question itself implies, is that he did not come in by the gate at all, and so he was not inspected. This would imply that he was like the one who did not enter through the gate but climbed over the wall. If you will, he crashed the party (see also John 10). In either case, that he was “cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” speaks to us about the severity of the matter. This is not simply a matter of proper dress but of having the wrong kind of righteousness before God. It is about being actually unclean, entering the kingdom in one’s own garments or by one’s own route, rather than in the garments of and by way of Christ. Perhaps this text provides a clue to the meaning of another difficult text where Jesus talks about men taking the kingdom of God by force (Mt 11:12).

This appears terribly confusing, and I know someone out there will be thinking about the Majoristic Controversy in the Formula of Concord, and its teaching that good works are not necessary for salvation. We must be careful what we mean by “necessary,” and Jesus (whose words and person define such matters anyway, as he is the very word) answers that question here. Although works are not necessary to become saved, and actually often stand in the way, by making one feel righteous and not in need of salvation, they are the absolute and necessary consequence of being saved. In other words, although we can contribute nothing to our salvation and must depend on Christ’s merits alone, once we have his salvation and enjoy his merits we cannot merely live in the unloving ways of our sinful nature. As a necessary consequence of that salvation, we live out his love and forgiveness in spirit and in truth (simul iustus et peccator). While we are not perfect in ourselves (both good and bad are saved), the king comes and sees Christ’s righteousness on us and loves us, and the world sees this as well and hates the Christian for it, just as the Pharisees and chief priests hated the Christ. Those, who by God’s gift of faith receive the invitation and come, are clothed in that new righteousness of Christ. And those who God has chosen out of the world see both the Christ and the Christian and rejoice in the coming wedding banquet. So “many are called, but few are chosen,” refers not only to the immediate problem of the person without the proper dress, who also enters by the improper way (I’m good enough), but also to those who were too good for the banquet and kept themselves busy doing their own things. Finally, it refers to all who will, by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, enjoy eternal forgiveness and love, both here in time, and in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Timothy Dost
**Proper 24 • Matthew 22:15–22 • October 16, 2011**

*Textual Study:* At the heart of this text lies an aphorism (v. 21), the saying of Jesus that the Pharisees had hoped to use to entrap him (v.15), but through which he entrapped them in their answer (“Caesar’s”) and in their fear of the crowd that marveled at him (v. 22).

*Preaching the Saying:* As is characteristic of aphorisms, the saying invites reflection. It tends to stop the flow of the narrative and invite the preacher to meditate on relations between church and state.

This certainly can be done with this text, joining it to other texts of Scripture (e.g., Romans 13) to clarify Christian living in the realms of church and state. To do so, one might point out the difference between those who erroneously act as if what we possess is ours from which we freely choose to give to others (the use of δίδωμι in the question, v. 17) and those who faithfully recognize that all of life, including governing authorities, is given by God, and our response is a matter of giving back in recognition of that which we have received (the use of ἀποδίδωμι in Jesus’s answer, v. 21).

*Preaching the Story:* But that is not the only way of reading this text. Instead, one might consider this text in the flow of the narrative. Here, Matthew invites us to enter more deeply into the saving sufferings of Christ. He reveals the tension between the spiritual bankruptcy of God’s people and the priceless love of Jesus.

The text is set in the midst of the irony of Passion week. In this time of Passover, when Israel celebrates God’s redemption, Matthew reveals God’s rejection. God has come to his temple, and his people respond to his presence not by worship but by rejection. Such rejection leads to the divine abandonment of the temple (23:38) and its ultimate destruction (24:2).

Having entered the temple (21:23), Jesus is disputing with Israel’s religious leaders in a series of controversial dialogues and inviting them to repentance through a series of withering parables. Jesus has just told the chief priests and the Pharisees that the kingdom of God will be taken away from them and given to the nations (21:43). In response to this judgment of God, they seek to rid themselves of Jesus, yet fear the people who consider him a prophet. Our text records the perfect question to answer their dilemma: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” (22:17). If Jesus supports paying taxes to Caesar, he risks losing favor with the crowds; if he denies paying taxes to Caesar, he risks being accused of insurrection.

Instead of revealing their ingenuity, however, this dialog reveals the spiritual bankruptcy of Israel’s leaders and of the temple itself. Ironically, the religious leaders feign interest in keeping God’s law even while they are breaking it, denying love to both God and neighbor (22:37–40). Their mouths attend to the lawfulness of paying the census tax while their hearts neglect the weightier matters, such as “justice and mercy and faithfulness” (22:23). When God comes to his temple, he finds it filled not with mercy but with malice, not with the blood of sacrifice but with all of the blood of the righteous shed upon the earth (22:35–36). It is fitting that God abandons the temple (23:38), even as he mercifully continues his mission to bring salvation to all people.
The last time we are in the temple, before the death of Jesus, we see it abandoned: the religious leaders stand there, with money in their hands and questions about lawfulness in their mouths, and yet they are completely oblivious to the things of God in their midst.

In 27:1–14, the religious leaders are caught in their inability to discern what to render to Caesar or to God. They have taken Jesus, the one God gave them as Israel’s king (22:41–46), and turned him over to Caesar (27:1–2). They are then given one of Jesus’s disciples: Judas comes to them in remorse, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” These shepherds of God, now facing a sheep that has strayed, neglect matters of “justice and mercy” and reply “What is that to us?” Having turned away God and having turned away man, immediately they take counsel with what to do with the blood money and whether it was lawful to put it in the treasury (27:6–7). Here, they are not able to discern the true treasure of God—Israel’s king come to bring salvation and a person caught in sin and in need of forgiveness—even as they ironically revisit their earlier question, now trapped by matters of blood money and lawfulness before God.

The artful irony of Matthew’s retelling of the passion narrative invites reflection not only on matters of church and state but also on the reign of God come into our midst in Christ Jesus.

David Schmitt

Proper 25 • Matthew 22:34–46 • October 23, 2011

At the Jerusalem temple (Mt 21:23), as the great feast approaches, a high-profile religious confrontation takes place. Jesus has entered the city amidst shouts of “Hosanna,” hailed by the throngs as the son of David (21:1–9). Now the religious leaders lock horns with Jesus, challenging his authority, attempting to trap him in his words, and interrogating him with loaded questions. The full panoply of experts and officials are involved: the chief priests and elders of the people (21:23), the Pharisees (21:45; 22:15, 34, 41), the Sadducees (21:23), and an expert in the law (Nomikoj, 22:35).

C. Talbert provides a helpful outline of Matthew 21:23–22:46,1 which focuses on Jesus’s authority:

(A) Jesus’s question (21:23–27)
(B) Three parables of judgment (21:28–22:14)
   Two sons (21:28–32)
   Tenants (21:33–46)
   Marriage feast (22:1–14)
(B') Three Controversies (22:15–22:40)
   Taxes (22:15–22)
   Resurrection (22:23–33)
   Great commandment (22:34–40)
(A') Jesus’s question (22:41–46)
A careful reading of this section of Matthew will be important in preparing to preach on 22:34–46, a pericope which brings this series of confrontations to its climax. In particular, linking Talbert’s (A) and (A’) suggests that Jesus’s assertion of the “lordly” status of the Davidic Messiah has implications for the questions, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” (21:23) Also, after the three parables of 21:28–22:14, parables of judgment and divine rejection aimed squarely at the religious leaders (21:45), Jesus’s interrogators in 21:15–22:40 have been unmasked. They do not stand or speak for the ways of God. Instead, they are the sons of God who have refused him due obedience, they are tenants in God’s vineyard who have not yielded to him its proper fruit, and they are the graciously invited guests to God’s (messianic! 22:2) banquet who have spurned his hospitality and forsaken their places.

Yet Matthew goes further in characterizing the religious leaders. Not only is their questioning of Jesus malicious (22:15), it is demonic. Just as Satan tempts (πειράζω) Jesus in the wilderness, so also the leaders publicly pepper Jesus with questions to “test” (= “tempt,” πειράζω) him, here in 22:35 and previously in 16:1; 19:3; 22:18. Jack Dean Kingsbury observes, “They are repeatedly putting him to the test in ways that, ironically, place them in the service of Satan, the fountainhead of all temptation.”2 Jesus resisted the devil by quoting the Scripture, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test” (4:7); here, Jesus implies that the one whom the leaders are testing with questions is not merely David’s son, but also David’s κύριος. In contrast to obedient Jesus, the leaders are putting the Lord to the test (see also 21:18!).

Verse 34: The Pharisees “gathering together” (συνάγω), here and again in v. 41, foreshadows the frequent repetition of συναγω in Matthew 26–27, as the leaders gather, seeking to put Jesus to death. R.T. France and R. Gundry agree that this “echoes deliberately the plotting of the heathen against God’s anointed in Psalm 2:2.”3 Jesus has silenced (Φιμώδω) the Sadducees, just as the impertinent wedding guest was silenced in 22:12, by the end of this interchange, the Pharisees will be silenced as well.

Verse 35: On the importance of “to test him” (πειράζω), see above.

Verse 39: Jesus goes to the heart of the Law, focusing on love—for God and for neighbor. While love for God is the “greatest and first” commandment, love for neighbor is “like unto it” (ὁμοία αὐτή). This latter phrase indicates equal importance. Jesus’s reply stands as an enduring teaching regarding the heart and essence of God’s will for man. In light of the preceding judgment parables (21:28–22:14), it also functions as an implied rebuke of his opponents’ failure to love God. (Elsewhere in Matthew, Jesus rebukes the leaders’ failure to love their fellow man.) By contrast, Jesus himself will stand as the very embodiment and fulfillment of love. Kingsbury writes: “Jesus freely submits to suffering and death because he is, on the one hand, perfect in his devotion to God and, on the other hand, perfect in his service to humankind.”4

Verses 41–46: Here the tables turn decisively and with finality. It has been the religious leaders who have been cornering Jesus with questions, interrogating him (ἐπερωτάω). Now Jesus puts their public questioning to an end by asking a question of his own: “What do you think about the Christ?” Here Jesus challenges their shrunken framework of messianic expectation. The Messiah will not be a mere reprise of David’s political and military glory. The Messiah will be David’s lord, and his throne...
will be at the right hand of God himself. Jesus opens the path to this claim with the initial query, “Whose son is [the Christ]?” He does not return to that precise question. The Matthean context leads the reader to answer it for himself: the Christ is the Son of the living God (see 16:16, 20 and 26:63). The final verse (v. 46), along with the first verse of the pericope (v. 34), bracket this reading with the themes of questioning and silencing. No one now dares to ask further questions. Their plan to silence Jesus now turns murderous, as Jesus has predicted all along.

Endnotes
2 Jack Dean Kingsbury, Matthew as Story, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), 22.
4 Kingsbury, Matthew as Story, 84.
utilized in the *LSB* Luther mass, divine service setting 5: “Salvation for all you came to bring . . . Hear our cry and grant our supplication” (*LSB* 942). While God’s call in the past is not mute today, the call today must help the baptized to see that they did not enter the reign of heaven manifested in the church’s life on earth to see people dressed in soft clothing. Life as part of the people of God can bring violent consequences spiritually, relationally, materially, and physically. Death to the old ways, life in the new.

True wisdom resides in the Father through his Son and Spirit and in his mighty acts of salvation. The people of God, by the Spirit, see God’s wisdom that “Christ is the hope and saving light” (*LSB* 938). Preaching of this gospel on Reformation should help the church to see itself rightly through God’s wisdom. This entails two things in terms of this text. First, it entails the wisdom to recognize that the church remains under attack and “that violent men are trying to snatch it away” (v. 12). Second, it entails the wisdom not to declare “wisdom innocent of her own works” (v. 19) and to lead the world not to condemn God for doing the very saving acts he seeks to do.1

Preaching should help the church to envision itself as associated with John the Baptist, one who soberly awaits the establishment of God’s reign by seeking to follow God’s will. Preaching should help the church to envision itself as united to Christ Jesus the Lord, the one who reveals God’s wisdom by befriending (having mercy on) sinners. The church should be accused of living soberly according to God’s will and forgiving without reservation in God’s name. The mighty deeds of God—preaching and speaking forgiveness and peace in the body of Christ, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper—should be the way that those who have ears hear. In living this way, the church will witness to the wisdom of God implicated in God’s mighty deeds. That is why people come together on Reformation Sunday.

Kent Burreson

**Endnote**

1 The interpretation of v. 19 reflects that advocated by my colleague Jeff Gibbs in his *Concordia Commentary* on Matthew 11:2–20:34, Concordia Publishing House, 573–4, 578–9.

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**All Saints’ Day • Matthew 5:1–12 • November 6, 2011**

Edward Blair suggested that Matthew’s understanding of salvation centered on “knowing, believing, being, and doing.”1 I have found that center point to be very helpful in meditating on, studying, and preaching on Matthean texts.

Expounding on this, Blair states, “The disciple must be inwardly good, not externally correct . . . But inner goodness is not enough. It must lead to loving acts of service.”2 Furthermore, “The higher righteousness and perfection, about which Matthew talks, mean simply being and acting like Jesus.”3

In the case of the Sermon on the Mount, the gift Christ brings is salvation; the challenge is that the gift is received and made the central core and basis of the life that is lived. As disciples of Christ, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we work to orient our lives more to the life of Christ, our faith more to a lived faith patterned in the life of Christ, our inner hearts molded more and more by the heart of Christ and evidenced in ways-of-being
that are, in fact, different from that experienced in the ordinary of life apart from Christ. Thus, these represent Jesus’s teachings about what a faith that is alive looks like, or, perhaps better said, what the follower of Christ looks like. A follower of Christ looks like this because this is what Christ looks like, and a believer conforms his or her life to his.

Moving in this direction avoids a number of other possible directions for a sermon. One of them is that the Sermon on the Mount is law in the law and gospel sense, and as such, it shows us how much we are in need of a Savior. That is, it is an impossible picture to fulfill, and therefore its function is to drive us to the foot of the cross. This is true, at least in part. The gospel of Christ’s forgiveness should be proclaimed as people look at this and understand that they fall short. But this may not be the central reason for and context in which Jesus spoke these words.

Another direction is that this is Jesus’s Torah and, thus, is what he requires of any disciple. This is why some interpreters stretch to find ten beatitudes as Jesus’s new ten commandments. This may be a vision of Jesus’s picture of a disciple that beckons us, but to set the Sermon on the Mount as the condition for being a follower of Jesus would likely mean that there would be few followers. I, for instance, could not fully live up to this picture.

Another direction is that each saying represents one kind or type of person. In this direction, a sermon would encourage people to discern their gift from among the list and point to the list as a catalogue of talents and attitudes that together should make up the corporate diversity of all those who follow Christ. In this direction, the “happy (blessed) are you who . . .” becomes a call to identify which of the many characteristics are spiritual gifts given and therefore in need of strengthening. The assumption is not a holistic one, but rather an individual descriptive one. In the light of the teachings that follow—“you are the salt of the earth” and “your light must shine before others” (see Mt 5:13, 16)—this direction would seem quite a stretch.

The direction suggested here is to orient all the sayings in Matthew 5:1–12 to the life of Christ. There is, therefore, little polemic here against an opponent, even though the Pharisees and Sadducees may have taken considerable offense at some of these sayings. Rather, Jesus was not only drawing a picture of what one of his disciples would look like (imperfectly, of course), but was also drawing all things to himself. He was challenging his disciples and all his hearers to live life as he did.

The preacher would then develop the nine beatitudes with how Christ was in his ministry, life, and teachings. In this way, it is Christ who leads the way, and we mold ourselves to him as his followers. The ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, therefore, are rooted in the life of Christ rather than simply teachings from Christ about how to live life. A theme of Christ walking the talk so that we can walk it as well could help capture this.

The focus of the sermon becomes the life of Christ as perfectly embodying the characteristics expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, and we, as his baptized disciples, conform our life, empowered by God’s Holy Spirit, more and more closely with his.

Bruce M. Hartung

Endnotes

2 Ibid., 136.
3 Ibid., 137.
BOOK REVIEWS

Pastors and other congregational leaders in Christian education searching for effective tools for educating their people in the biblical faith will welcome Stephen Stohlmann’s two new programs for teaching the faith. Stohlmann, more than thirty years a professor of Hebrew, Old Testament, and Doctrine at Concordia University, Saint Paul, has brought his own sense of the excitement and relevance of a Lutheran approach to Christian living through the study of the Scripture to his students on campus and to many congregations in the Twin Cities area and well beyond. A decade ago his materials for basic catechetical instruction for both adolescents and adults, entitled ‘Having Ears that Hear,’ Bible Studies for Adults and Confirmation Youth on the Nature and Functions of the Word of God, developed with the assistance of Cynthia Twillman, provided many congregations with a valuable instrument for catechetization. His new studies have transformed his approach for twenty-first century use.

This CD-ROM provides users with two sets of studies, “Having Ears that Hear,” a seven lesson Bible study built upon his previous work but cast in quite a different form, and “Accusation: Demonic or Divine?”, an eight chapter study of the paradox, “In every accusation of the Law of God, both God and Satan are at work, each for their own purpose. God seeks to prepare us for the Gospel: Satan seeks to prevent us from hearing and believing the Gospel.” This paradox summarizes what Stohlmann has long called “the fourth use of the law,” Satan’s use of its accusation to keep Christians focused on their own guilt and, thus, themselves in order to immobilize their trust in God and their confidence in the Holy Spirit’s ability to use them in Christian service. Christian caregivers will find this a most helpful tool in dealing with struggling and despairing consciences. This weapon against one of the devil’s most powerful and destructive lies, his denial of the efficacy of God’s restoration of our relationship with him through the means of grace, has proven effective time and time again as an aid in hearing the gospel afresh.

“‘Having Ears to Hear’” employs a fictional narrative of Milan Ebeling and his family through various stages of an all too familiar version of contemporary American family life. A life, in Milan’s case, marred by divorce and some disinterest in the church but interrupted by the presence of God from time to time. Stohlmann uses this story to pose problems facing members and acquaintances of members in every congregation in order to lead those using the lessons into Scripture and, through Scripture, into the heart of the Lutheran tradition. Sensitive to how the Lutheran framework of thinking about God’s reality actually can and should function in the lives of the faithful, Stohlmann teaches the Lutheran distinctions of law and gospel and two kinds of righteousness in a light-handed, insightful way that makes our teaching make sense in the midst of modern society. His lessons provide questions that carry those participating in a Bible class from their own lives into the biblical narrative and then back into our own time.

The CD-ROM Studies in Law and Gospel for the Laity may be ordered from Professor S. Stohlmann, Concordia
University, 275 North Syndicate, St. Paul, MN 55104, for $35.00, payable to the Concordia University–Stohlmann Scholarship Fund. This investment will greatly enrich congregational study of Scripture and the daily practice of the faith of all those who use it.

Robert Kolb


Augustana Lutheranism is no more . . . at least in a technical sense. Maria Erling and Mark Granquist have co-authored this loving eulogy in order to perpetuate the memory of Swedish influences on American Lutheranism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Erling is professor of history at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and Granquist teaches church history at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Their book of twenty chapters, arranged in four parts, provides a Swedish “swan song” for this branch of American Lutherans. Each part includes a thematic essay on a topic that has some significance for that era—an early doctrinal controversy, the power of music, the desire for assimilation, and the Swedish Lutheran artist, Birger Sandzen.

Several themes flow throughout this book, creating a patchwork of pioneering portraits and perplexing progress. A general narrative on the structural history of the synod introduces each section of this history. The missional and educational emphases of these Swedish Lutherans are explored through detailed examination of their establishment and growth as a denomination. Starting with the decisive years of the 1840s through 1885, the strong faith and commitment to evangelism with doctrinal integrity shows the initial strength of these new immigrants to America. The ever-changing relationship with the Church of Sweden offers an opportunity to see the gradual maturing of this body over its formative years. Finally, the ministry by, for, and with women and the youth offers an intriguing perspective of those elements that the authors consider significant for their history.

Augustana was officially formed as a synod in 1860 by almost two-dozen midwestern Swedish laymen and about a dozen Norwegian pastors. Named the Scandinavian Evangelical Augustana Lutheran Synod, these founders were inspired by and responding to a spiritual revival (Awakening) in Sweden. The early clergy leaders assumed more than pastoral authority over the notably pious yet freedom-loving laity through regular contact by means of newspapers and pastoral letters. A Norwegian contingent separated from the Swedish group because of a perceived Americanizing tendency among the Swedes at the end of the nineteenth century. Significantly, Swedish nationalistic interests and concern for identity later morphed into a generalized ecumenical inclination in contrast to their original doctrinal integrity. At this juncture, their historically strong influence began to wane.

Diversity in “liturgy, mission, devotional piety, the Lutheran Confessions, the role of the pastor, the role of laity, the integrity of the congregations, and the importance of the wider church” (1–2) marks the history of Augustana throughout its more than century-long tenure. The first chapters of this book
(Part 1) give a fairly detailed description of the early struggles of Augustana’s founders and their strongly mission-oriented pietism. Transatlantic support for New World missions as well as for the gathering of Midwestern Scandinavian immigrants produced both spiritual and numerical growth. At the same time, colleges and seminaries provided the needed manpower and womanpower for the expanding body of believers who associated with the Swedish culture.

Swedish influences on a developing American identity serve as guiding themes for Part 2, which covers the next fifty years, through 1910. Youth work was one important way that they found to retain their Swedish influence on their increasingly Americanized population. Numerous colleges and academies were organized to bring a greater desire to influence the young, particularly through the obligatory Swedish language requirements. As the number of such colleges increased to over a dozen institutions, cultural and theological unity became increasingly elusive. Their Swedish pietistic morality, for a time, coincided with an increasing temperance movement in America. However, such engagement with American culture and society brought increased expansion beyond the Midwest, and an attitude of adaptation to North American life became the norm.

Telling the story of Augustana continues in Part 3 with the growth of the educational and missionary endeavors of the synod. Five colleges—Augustana, Gustavus Adolphus, Bethany, Luther, and Upsala—survived some difficult financial times and became leaders in integrating the Augustana Synod into the wider American scene through the use of the English language and the growth of theological diversity. Mission efforts expanded both at home through social ministries such as children’s homes and hospitals as well as through a major mission program in Tanganyika (chapter 11). With the election of the ecumenically-minded Nathan Söderblom as bishop of Sweden, Augustana reconnected with its Swedish roots and adopted the ecumenical stance of their homeland’s charismatic leader. During these years, Erling and Granquist note a gradual distancing from Scripture’s sole authority and the adoption of the American dependence upon human reason.

Optimistic observations for the future of Lutheranism mark the concluding section of this emotive narrative. Part 4 begins with a telling turn of phraseology—instead of speaking of Augustana, the synod is described as “becoming an American religious denomination” (255). Again, the authors note that strong youth programs and women’s organizations helped maintain the stability of the synod for another generation. The ecumenical vision of the previous generation saw fruition during the final decades of Augustana. Struggling between a desire to retain some kind of a confessional tradition and an aspiration to be perceived as an influential force in global Lutheranism, a cooperative ecumenical spirit became a distinguishing feature for the final years of Augustana’s existence. The authors point out that “in the shifting winds of merger activity, Augustana would often find itself caught in the middle” (323), a position which ultimately crushed it out of existence.

Readers from a non-Augustana perspective will recognize how the ecumenical focus of the Augustana leaders, especially in the twentieth century, created a
sharp shift away from the solidly confessional Lutheranism of its early existence and led to the subsequent demise of this distinct denomination. A telling undercurrent is the negative perspective on the Missouri Synod. For example, in Part 1, C. F. W. Walther’s overtures to these Swedes for possible doctrinal discussions are dismissed by the authors as Walther’s laying “down the gauntlet” (22) and challenging the orthodoxy of these fellow Lutherans. Such a perspective continues in later sections, as the Missouri Synod is labeled “the self-appointed guardian of Lutheran purity” (206).

Yearning to sustain the lost legacy of Swedish Lutheranism, Erling and Granquist provide many helpful insights and nuanced observations for future scholars of American Lutheran history. In spite of some inconsistencies in the flow of several chapters and numerous replications of the same information (probably because of the dual authorship), this work will be cherished by those congregations who wish to recognize and affirm their Swedish heritage. The contribution of the Augustana Synod to the American scene in general and American Lutheranism in particular will be long remembered, thanks to this work.

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For me, reading through Religion and Resistance in Early Judaism: Greek Readings in 1 Maccabees and Josephus (hereafter R&R) was like going to my high school reunion and seeing my old friends dancing around me attired in dress that made them look young again. The texts, like good friends, have not changed, but the grammatical notes and summary explanations with which Nordling has clothed them give the old Greek texts a new glow that invites readers to get acquainted as soon as possible.

Nordling, an accomplished classicist, has aimed R&R at college and seminary students who have had a year of Greek grammar and at least one semester of a reading class in Greek narrative (i.e., Herodotus, Xenophon, or St. Paul). After a brief historical introduction, Nordling begins his selection of texts with a lengthy reading from 1 Maccabees (1:1–4:61). He then moves to shorter excerpts from Josephus’s works (mainly Jewish War and Antiquities of the Jews). The arrangement moves readers from Greek that resembles the LXX and NT to the more sophisticated style of Josephus (xiii). The arrangement also moves readers through history from the time of Alexander the Great through the Maccabean Revolt to the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome and the final days of the war at Masada (AD 73).

Each of the selections is preceded by a concise paragraph summarizing the contents of the selection. These summaries provide important context for understanding the excerpt that follows. Each of the selections is then backed up by extensive lexical, grammatical, and historical notes which help readers at every level as they work through the Greek text. The notes are clear, brief, coherent, and illuminating. Wherever students might have a problem understanding the text, you can be sure that the notes
will cast the needed light. They provide an invaluable key to help students open these important texts. A Greek-English vocabulary at the end of R&R glosses all but the simplest words and also provides parsing of unusual verb forms, so students can read the texts and leave their Liddell & Scott at home!

Readers who work through these texts will improve their Greek skills immensely, but Nordling has provided us with more than just a book of Greek texts for improving language skill. As Paul Maier says in the forward he wrote for this book: “John G. Nordling has chosen some of the most interesting or exciting passages from the history of the great Jewish war of liberation from Syrian rule that immediately preceded Jesus, as well as key passages from the works of Josephus for the benefit of both secular and religious students of Greek. These can now learn not only the language but also the history of the times . . .” (8).

This choice of texts is a real strength of R&R. Students are not deciphering obscure passages. Nordling has selected texts that work to increase the reader’s understanding of the history and theology of the age they cover. He has also chosen passages that every Christian and student of the NT will want to read. For example, he excerpts the famous passages from Antiq that discuss John the Baptist, Jesus, and James, the brother of Jesus (74–77). He has us read the heart-rending account (popular in the Middle Ages) about the Jewish woman who ate her infant son at the end of Titus’s siege of Jerusalem (BJ 6.201–213; 86–87). It is a powerful and moving story. The lengthy selection from 1 Maccabees supplies readers with some context for all those names and places that they have heard about: Alexander the Great, Antiochus Epiphanes, the “Abomination of Desolation,” the Masada and so on.

By writing such comprehensive grammatical notes and selecting such interesting texts, Nordling encourages even beginning students to read more Greek on their own. R&R contains enough excerpts with beautiful grammatical and historical dress that it can be the main textbook for a college or seminar level Greek readings class. Pastors who want to keep pressing forward with their Greek skills and at the same time strengthen their understanding of the NT’s background will benefit greatly by reading it. When finished, students will be able to handle a wide variety of difficult Greek texts much more easily, and they will be encouraged to delve more deeply into the rich history of the period. Greek students everywhere owe Nordling their thanks.

Tim Saleska

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