

An Evaluation of Walther's Theses on the Church and Ministry

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C.F.W. Walther's famous theses on the church and its ministry, on *Kirche and Amt*, were first published in 1852. The second edition appeared in 1865, the third in 1874, and the fourth and final edition in 1894. The theses themselves, nine on the church, ten on the ministry, cover only four pages at the beginning of the book of 448 pages (1894 edition). Then each thesis is individually printed anew in larger type, followed by three sections of proof to support it. The proof is of a threefold type; Section 1, Proof from the Word of God; Section 2, The Testimony of the Church in its Public Confessions; Section 3, Testimonies of the Church in the Private Writings of Its Teachers.

The final German edition of 1894 contains the prefaces of all the previous editions. According to its preface, the second edition of 1865 represented no substantial changes beyond the deletion of previous printing mistakes, the omission of a few repetitions, the inclusion of a few additional quotations, the listing of the authors cited and an alphabetical glossary of the subjects treated. The third edition of 1874, still prepared during Walther's lifetime, in the footnotes added the Greek text of the Greek church fathers quoted. The previous footnotes had given these writings only in a Latin translation in addition to the German translation in the text itself.

The final edition of 1894 was issued after Walther's death in 1887. Dr. Francis Pieper, who prepared it, merely pointed out that though forty years had passed since the initial appearance of this book, the truths concerning the church and its ministry set forth by Walther were still as relevant and worthy of study as they had ever been. The very same convictions have prompted the scheduling of these theses at a Pastors' Institute for study and discussion.

The title page of the fourth edition of 1894 presents the subject matter of the book under a very elaborate title: "The Voice of Our Church in the Question of Church and Ministry, a Collection of Testimonies Concerning This Question from the Confessional Writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and from the Private Writings of Its Orthodox Teachers; Presented by the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States as a Testimony of Its Defense Against the Attacks of the Reverend Mr. Grabau in Buffalo, New York, Offered Through C.F.W. Walther, Presently Professor of Theology at the Concordia Collegium at St. Louis and Pastor (Pfarrer) of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation at This Place." We assume that this was already the title page of the initial edition of 1852.

The reference in the title to the attacks of Pastor John A. A. Grabau alerts us that these theses were specifically written to settle points in bitter controversy. Each thesis is a bright blade carefully forged upon the anvil of controversy to foil a specific pernicious attack upon some basic truths pertaining to the doctrines of the church and ministry. The theses aim to set forth what Scripture itself asserts concerning these specific and basic matters. The reference to Grabau's attack is the only directly polemic note in this entire book of Walther. Otherwise the theses as well as the three types of testimony supporting them are simply presented in a very objective manner. The book was written upon request of the Missouri Synod. It was intended especially also for confessional Lutheran leaders in Germany like Loehe, Kahnis, Muenchmeyer, and others with whom Missouri was not in controversy but who also leaned strongly toward Grabau's view. The Missouri Synod still hoped to win these men with their testimony. A concerted effort was made to do so through a personal visit to Germany on the part of Pastors C.F.W. Walther and F.K.D. Wynecken. Yet this additional interest detracts nothing from the significance of the reference to Grabau's attacks in the title of this book. It is vital for the understanding of these theses to remember that they were aimed at refuting very specific points of doctrine that were in controversy.

Historical Background

Several very cogent reasons induce us to begin our study of Walther's theses with a detailed consideration of the historical background which caused them to be written.

This will help us to understand the specific points better to which Walther, with his synod, was

addressing himself. In the preface to the 1852 edition Walther himself states: "It could, of course, not lie within our intention to present the doctrine of our church in its entirety concerning the church and its ministry. Whoever wants this will find it in the larger dogmatical works of the teachers of our church, among others in the masterful works of a Chemnitz and Gerhard. It can only be our concern to set forth those points concerning which difference has arisen, and to carry along only as much of what is not controverted as becomes necessary to keep the matters in context." Of course, the points in controversy are neither minor points nor points on which the church heretofore had failed to reach clarity. Rather, they are basic truths which are a part of the treasure restored to the church through the battle of the Reformation. A careful study of the background will leave us in no doubt as to what the controverted points really were, to *which* the theses address themselves.

Furthermore, a study of the background of the theses will again deepen our own appreciation of the truths set forth in these theses. When we perceive the havoc and turmoil which the errors ruled out by the theses had created in the church and the heartache and the spiritual agony which they inflicted upon many individual Christians, we will realize fully how pernicious romanizing errors like those of Grabau really are. On the other hand, as we take note of the spiritual peace, comfort, and certainty which were again restored to Christian people when the truths set forth in Walther's theses were again taught and embraced, and observe how through them the growth and edification of the church were again fostered, we will appreciate these truths all the more fully. We will fully understand why Walther and the Saxons, because of what they had gone through, were moved to take such a firm and uncompromising stand over against Grabau's errors. We will not be surprised that they were led to alert the whole Lutheran church to the scriptural truths concerning these matters. Anything less would have been stark ungratefulness for God's mercy which they had just experienced.

Still a third reason may be adduced for a thorough study of the historical background which led to Walther's theses. It can keep one from misunderstanding and misusing these theses in expecting them to speak precisely to new points of controversy which have arisen since Walther's day concerning the doctrines of the church and the ministry. We will realize that these are points to which Walther was not addressing himself and to which he had no occasion to address himself. We will see that he had no inducement to endeavor settling them at the hand of Scripture, of the Confessions, and of the writings of orthodox teachers. It is quite possible that if he had had such an inducement he might in some instances have chosen a different wording. He might have amplified certain expressions. For while the expressions which Walther used were quite adequate in covering the scriptural truths under controversy, they can be misunderstood when used to settle a different controversy. We will have occasion to come back to this point in discussing the individual theses. We will then have an opportunity to show from Walther's other writings and from his own practice that he saw clearly also on the points that have been in controversy since his time. They were not elucidated in the theses at hand because he had no inducement to address himself to them.

The background to which we do well to devote our attention goes back much further than the Missouri Synod's controversy with Pastor John A. A. Grabau. It ought to include the tragedy of the Stephan emigration. In fact, it is probably well to start with a very brief biography of Walther himself.

Carl Ferdinand William Walther was born from a long line of Lutheran pastors October 25, 1811, at Langenchursdorf in Saxony. Here his father was pastor. As one of many children, he had to get along with meager means in his studies at the gymnasium at Schmeeberg, and later on at the University of Leipzig. Upon his graduation from the gymnasium he entertained the thought of pursuing the study of music. Realizing that this did not meet with his father's approval, he took up the study of theology at the University of Leipzig. Rationalism held sway at the university. Walther at this time was still wholly ignorant in spiritual matters. The spiritual food which he sought and did not get from his professors he did partly obtain in a pietistic circle gathered around a young candidate named Kuehn. This man led his associates in prayer and in the study of the Scriptures and of the pietistic writings of Arndt, Franke, Scriver, and Bogatsky. In this association Walther came to a deep sense of his own sinfulness and helplessness, and became aware of his great need for God's grace in Christ. But because of the pietistic stress upon a deep degree of contrition, he did not yet attain a certainty of salvation. Like so many disturbed souls of every level of society and walk of life in Saxony, also Walther now turned to Martin Stephan, the renowned confessional Lutheran pastor of the Bohemian

congregation at Dresden. In a letter, Stephan advised him to lay hold on the full, free, unconditional promises of the Gospel of Christ's full and complete redemption. Walther henceforth looked to him as the man who by God's grace had saved his soul.

In the meantime he had to leave the university for one semester on account of severe illness brought on in part by privations. Through the study of Luther's writings in his father's library during his convalescence he began to become thoroughly familiar with the works of the Reformer. After graduating from the university in 1833 he became a private tutor for a time, but in 1837 he was ordained to the ministry at Braeunsdorf, Saxony. The local church and the church authorities were steeped in rationalism. Since Walther's firm stand for the Lutheran confessions and for Lutheran practice met with opposition, Walther finally left the congregation in 1838.

Since at the time he equated the true Christian church with the visible fellowship of Pastor Martin Stephan's congregation and of those intimately associated with Stephan, Walther made ready to make himself available for joining the Saxon immigration to America under Pastor Stephan. Immigration had been under discussion for some time by Stephan as a possible necessity. At this time it seemed to be becoming more imminent.

Pastor Martin Stephan had had a very fruitful ministry in preaching the truth of man's total depravity and the gospel of God's free grace and forgiveness through Christ's vicarious atonement. He had stood firm and unwavering against rationalism as well as unionism. But as more and more people from other congregations and from every level of society sought out Stephan's ministrations and his counsel, their attachment to him gradually deteriorated into what almost amounted to a deification of his person. Amid such adulation his own character seemed to have deteriorated likewise. He became very imperious and succumbed to the temptation of binding people to his own person. He assumed a posture of infallibility regarding the counsel and advice which he gave. His romanizing views concerning the church, its ministry, and the authority of the ministry became increasingly evident.

We shall now break off our biographical remarks concerning Walther, and later on in a different context take up the subsequent course of events. In the meantime we shall consider some of the thoughts which Walther himself expressed concerning the historical background of his theses on the church and the ministry. We find them in his foreword to the first issue of the ninth volume of the *Lutheraner*, dated August 31, 1952. This was the year in which his book on *Kirche and Amt* was first published.

Walther comments that the first eight years of controversy which he had waged in the *Lutheraner*, begun in 1844, had in a way come to a close. They had been principally fought against the opponents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and its pure doctrine. These opponents were the sects, principally the Methodists of this land, also the neo-Lutherans, better called pseudo-Lutherans. The latter, though belonging to the Lutheran church, were consciously and admittedly not in agreement with orthodox Lutheran doctrine and practice. Walther, however, felt that his testimony against these opponents had not been in vain. It had under God's blessing brought many fruits and blessings. Not only had it opened the eyes of many Lutherans to pernicious Methodist teachings, but it had also awakened considerable appreciation of true Lutheran doctrine and practice among Lutherans in this country.

Now a new battle had begun for the true Lutheran church. The opposing party was of a peculiar nature. Actually it had also departed from the pattern of true Lutheran doctrine. Yet, strangely enough, it claimed to cling most faithfully and strictly to the pure doctrine of the Lutheran church. It virtually claimed to embody Lutheran orthodoxy, if not in the whole world, then at least in America. Walther was referring to Pastor John Grabau of Buffalo, New York, and his Buffalo Synod. Walther tied up the controversy with the romanizing doctrines of the Buffalo Synod with his own synod's earlier tragic experience with Pastor Stephan.

Walther recalled how in the fall of 1838 about 700 Lutherans from various parts of Saxony had left under the leadership of Pastor Martin Stephan. The immigration included five pastors, ten theological candidates and four teachers closely associated with Stephan. They had set out in five ships from Bremen, Germany, to emigrate to America and to settle at St. Louis and in Perry County, Missouri. These pastors, C.F.W. Walther and his older brother, Herman Walther, among them, thought themselves to be the most faithful

sons and ministers of the Lutheran church. Actually they had been misled by Pastor Stephan to harbor romanizing concepts of the church, of the ministry, and of the authority of the ministry. These errors and delusions had brought it about that they themselves had deserted their pastoral offices and the congregations to which they had been called in Germany. These errors had also caused them to mislead many souls who had been spiritually awakened through them. They made these people feel compelled in their consciences to emigrate with them. In some instances this broke up the relationships of husbands and wives, of children and parents, of foster parents and of the children legally entrusted to them. Pastor Stephan himself left in the middle of the night without taking leave of his wife and seven children; only one son accompanied him. The pastors underscored and endorsed Stephan's summoning to build up the saving church- *die wahre seligmachende Kirche*, here in America.

En route to America Pastor Stephan had himself installed as their bishop with the reading of a solemn document of investiture signed by all the pastors and candidates. Three days before his ship *Selma* arrived at St. Louis he had all on board pledge complete subjection to him as their bishop. We shall quote only one paragraph from the document (*Zion on the Mississippi*, p. 294):

We solemnly pledge ourselves, as we have already promised by signing the emigration code, paragraph 3, to submit with Christian willingness and sincerity to the ordinances, decrees, and measures of his reverence in respect to both ecclesiastical and community affairs, and not to regard them an irksome yoke, but as the means of promoting our temporal and eternal welfare.

In a common communal treasury, around 125,000 Thaler (ca. \$80,000) had been deposited to be administered under the supervision of Bishop Stephan. The money was to be used to buy land, to take care of the needs of the people until they were firmly established, and to offer capital from which loans might be made to the needy while they were establishing themselves. Yet Stephan had already squandered a considerable portion of these funds on board ship and during the stay at St. Louis, and wasted more later on at Perry County by living as he thought it to be fitting for a bishop.

As the Saxon pastors were about to establish a church according to the false romanizing principles concerning the church and ministry which they held at the time, they quite suddenly were apprised of the fact that their pastor, teacher and leader had become a hypocrite, that secretly he had given way to gross sins of the flesh against the sixth commandment. Measures were taken whereby he was banished from the settlement.

Through this experience they came to the awful realization that to a considerable extent their faith had been based upon human authority and not altogether on the Word of God. When the Saxons thus lost their faith in Bishop Stephan, everything threatened to fall apart for them. They had held only those gathered around Pastor Martin Stephan to be the true church of God. They had considered only the pastors who had associated themselves with Stephan to be true ministers of the church who could effectively administer the means of grace. Now they experienced the sad consequences of their donatism. It raised troublesome questions for their consciences. Were they a Christian church at all? Were they only a presumptuous mob and rabble? Were the pastors who had deserted their congregations, in which they had been formally installed according to the established procedure of church government and ordination in Germany, really true Christian pastors? Did the means of grace, word and sacrament administered by them, really have validity? The leaders among the laity, the jurist Marbach and the archivist Vehse, who had also been misled to leave prominent positions to emigrate, raised these questions with special force and vigor.

Heavy accusations were hurled against the pastors. As a result, the preachers themselves began to doubt whether they had a right to continue their ministry. They were unclear whether they really still had a call. Thus they began to evaluate and examine the doctrinal positions which they had considered genuinely Lutheran. To their dismay and consternation they came to realize that they had thus far read the Bible and the symbolical books through colored glasses. They found this to be true especially with respect to the church, its ministry and the authority of the ministry. They had believed and taught romanizing and papistic instead of biblical Lutheran tenets in respect to these matters. They had misled their congregations, robbed them of their Christian freedom,

and led them into spiritual and physical misery. As a result, the pastors freely confessed their sins and errors privately and publicly. Some resigned from their positions as pastors. Others were rejected by their congregations.

Yet God again gave them grace to come to a true scriptural understanding of the truths of the church and its ministry, especially at the hand of Luther's writings, the confessions of the church and the private writings of orthodox 16th and 17th century teachers of the Lutheran church. Through Pastor C.F.W. Walther's Altenburg debate with Marbach also the laity were again led back to scriptural truths concerning the church and the ministry.

As a result of the Altenburg theses presented by Walther in April 1841, the members of the Saxon congregations in Perry County and in St. Louis became certain that as penitent sinners trusting in their Savior's forgiveness they were the church of God. They again realized that as believers they had the right to call pastors to serve them with word and sacrament. These pastors now claimed no other authority than that of God's Word, of law and Gospel, and now sought no other obedience than to the Word which they were proclaiming in Christ's name. As congregations they knew that in all other matters they had the freedom to conduct the affairs of the church in the interest of good order and love. They rejoiced in their Christian freedom to choose to do those things which were conducive to the growth and edification of the church. In exercising such judgment they still appreciated the advice of their faithful pastors. But they no longer felt compelled to follow them blindly in matters neither commanded nor forbidden by God.

All this had barely happened when Pastor Grabau on December 1, 1840, sent out his "famous" *Hirtenbrief* to the congregations associated with him. He did so because of some disorders that had arisen in them. At the same time he addressed this communication also to the Saxons, asking them to express themselves concerning it.

Pastor John Andrew August Grabau had come to Buffalo, New York, about eight months later than Stephan. Born near Magdeburg in 1804, he had become a pastor at Erfurt in 1834. At this time the region at Thuringia had become a part of Prussia, and the Prussian Union had been introduced also in these former Saxon lands. Because Grabau had re-introduced the old Lutheran agenda he was deposed from his ministry. After gathering together a separate Lutheran congregation, he was apprehended and imprisoned for a time. When released on bail he fled to Pomerania and then to Berlin. Upon his return to Erfurt he was imprisoned anew and subsequently released only upon his promise to emigrate to America.

Grabau emigrated with about 1,000 souls from Thuringia, the Prussian province of Saxony, Pomerania and Brandenburg. Captain Heinrich von Rohr was the lay leader of the group. Many settled down in Buffalo, New York. Others went to Wisconsin. Pastors Kindermann and Ehrenstroem came a little later. The latter, however, separated from Grabau before the Buffalo Synod was formed in 1845 with Pastors J. F. Krause, Adolph Kindermann and Heinrich van Rohr, who had in the meantime become a pastor. The new church body was called *The Synod of the Lutheran Church Immigrated from Prussia*. The name already indicated their romanizing concept of the church as the visible congregation of believers gathered around the pure word and sacrament. This they claimed to be.

The Saxon pastors were confounded when they read Pastor Grabau's *Hirtenbrief* of December 1, 1840. For they found in it the same pernicious romanizing views concerning the church and its ministry from which by God's grace they had been delivered. Had it come at a time when they still shared Stephan's views, they would have underscored it without ado; and on this basis they would have readily established bonds with the author and his congregation. But after God had forcefully opened their eyes, this was no longer possible. They read what they themselves had recognized amidst tribulation as terrible delusions. They had thanked God for their enlightenment in deep sorrow and contrition, and had humbly denounced their errors privately and publicly. In the *Hirtenbrief* submitted to them they now saw a test whether they would let themselves be overwhelmed once more, or whether by God's grace they would faithfully guard the light given to them by God.

At the time the Saxon pastors still felt so helpless, defamed and despised in their own midst that the temptation was very great to stay silent concerning the errors of Grabau and to enter in upon the proffered

church fellowship. Formerly they had harbored these errors in ignorance. But these errors had nevertheless brought them to the very edge of destruction. Thus they could never knowingly and willingly agree to them anew. Some of them came together in St. Louis for an oral discussion, at which they compared Grabau's *Hirtenbrief* with God's Word, with the confessional writings, especially with Luther's writings. They finally asked Pastor Loeber of Altenburg to write a critique on which they had agreed and which the rest of the Saxon preachers then signed. It was not sent to Grabau until July 1843. In it they expressed their criticism very mildly and brotherly. Nevertheless it aroused a reaction from Grabau which they had not at all expected.

Instead of acknowledging his errors because of their testimony, Pastor Grabau now vehemently accused them of seventeen errors in his reply. This ushered in a long and widespread controversy which raged for more than two decades. When in 1845 the Buffalo Synod, and in 1847 the Missouri Synod, were founded it became a controversy between these synods and their congregations.

In the founding of the Missouri Synod the emissaries of Pastor Johannes Konrad Wilhelm Loehe of Neuendettelsau in Germany actually far outnumbered the Saxon pastors. That the newly founded Missouri Synod nevertheless bore the stamp of the Saxons was due to this that C.F.W. Walther with his firm convictions, his solid theological knowledge and his extensive acquaintance with Luther and the orthodox Lutheran fathers, exerted the all-pervading influence. Through his testimony in the *Lutheraner* he had won the hearts of men like Pastor Friedrich Wyneken and Dr. William Sihler, who themselves were leaders and outstanding personalities. They thoroughly shared Walther's convictions. Through their testimony and their recommendation of the *Lutheraner* many of the Loehe emissaries were led to share Walther's theology.

Because of the hierarchical positions and principles held in the Buffalo Synod congregations, many of its people were improperly and erroneously excommunicated. Others who recognized the false doctrine and practice of their pastors relative to the church and the ministry were led by their own consciences to withdraw from Buffalo congregations. These people then appealed to Missouri Synod pastors for spiritual ministrations. The Missouri Synod continued to plead for a colloquy with Grabau and representatives of the Buffalo Synod in the firm hope of convincing them of their errors by their scriptural testimony at such a colloquy. The request for a colloquy was, however, repeatedly turned down by Grabau. He demanded a previous admission of guilt for receiving unjustly excommunicated Buffalo members. In 1848 he finally pronounced an excommunication upon the whole Missouri Synod. Missouri still continued to ask for a colloquy and did not rest until one was arranged in 1866. Then they actually succeeded in winning at least half of the pastors and congregations to share their own doctrinal convictions concerning the church and ministry.

In the meantime, however, Missouri Synod pastors could not refuse to act upon the appeals of those who had been falsely excommunicated in the Buffalo congregations or who had withdrawn for conscience' sake. They could not let them wait until the Buffalo pastors saw the light of the truth. For the sheep are not there for the sake of the shepherd, but the shepherd for the sake of the sheep. These people could not be asked to wait in protest until a colloquium would finally settle the controversy, for they were being deprived of absolution, being denied the benefits of the means of grace in the Buffalo congregations. Thus the Missouri Synod provided them with pastors and formed congregations with them. Grabau and the Buffalo pastors in turn decried such congregations as opposition altars and mobs, and defamed the pastors who served them. This made the controversy extremely bitter.

To understand this intense controversy, it is worth while to enter in upon the precise nature of some of the Grabau- Buffalo doctrinal aberrations:

1. Concerning the Church:

- a. Grabau and the Buffalo Synod taught that the one holy, Christian Church, outside of which there is no salvation, is the visible church of the pure Word and sacrament. "Our confessions teach and confess, that upon earth there must always be and remain a holy Christian church, which is really and truly the visible gathering of believers, among whom the Word of God is rightly taught and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution" (3rd Synodical Letter, p. 17).

This tenet is based on a misinterpretation of Augustana VII, which in the words alluded to defines the marks rather than the essence of the church. Note also the adjective “visible” which has been slipped in without warrant. The Buffalo Synod claimed to be this holy Christian church in America. It taught “that by it (the one holy church of God) not dispersed believers and saints are to be understood, but gatherings around word and sacrament” and “that these church gatherings are such as have the word and sacrament pure in the ministry” (5th Synodical Letter, p. 2).

b. The Buffalo Synod rejected the teaching “that also there; where the Word of God and the sacraments are not completely pure; a holy church of the elect is gathered; as long as word and sacrament are not entirely denied, but essentially, remain” (3rd Synodical Report, p. 20).

It rejected the teaching that “only the communion with the invisible church is unconditionally necessary for salvation.”

It taught “that St. Paul... says, Romans 10, that one is only then saved, when also out of faith he confesses with the mouth, also commits himself to the true visible church” (3rd Synodical Report, p. 10).

2. Concerning the Keys of Heaven: Grabau and the Buffalo Synod taught that Christ gave the keys of not to the believers collectively and individually, but exclusively and only to the ministry.

Buffalo called the teaching “that the ministry of the keys does not belong exclusively to the ministers but also to every congregational member” a “false pietistic doctrine.” It said: “We know that the congregational members have no power of the keys among and in themselves apart from the holy ministry and the rightful ministers who are at hand” (3rd Synodical Report, p. 14). That in controversial cases the congregation should have the decision in the use of the keys, either to bind or to loose, was decried as an Anabaptist- democratic folly.

Consequently Grabau and the Buffalo Synod taught that the authority of excommunication belonged entirely to the ministry. “The congregation is not to judge and to command or to declare that the sinner is to be held to be a heathen man and a publican” (2nd Synodical Report, p. 28). “It is likewise erroneous that the congregation in controversial cases has the decision concerning the use of the keys either to bind or to loose” (2nd Synodical Report, p. 16).

Not until the colloquy of 1866 did the majority of the Buffalo Synod pastors acknowledge these statements as unscriptural. At that time the majority acknowledged that what the congregation decides concerning the use of the keys in disciplinary cases is the voice of the church only when it makes a decision in accordance with the Word of God. Grabau and the Buffalo Synod had contended that even an erroneous and unwarranted excommunication duly proclaimed by the pastor was valid and that it should be respected by anyone on whom it was pronounced as well as by all others until it was revoked. Buffalo pastors, including Grabau himself, freely admitted that they had on occasion pronounced such erroneous excommunications. Pastor Heinrich von Rohr maintained the Grabau position even at the colloquy. Leaning on Luther’s *Sermon von der Kraft des Bannes* of 1518, he stated: “If you are excommunicated unjustly, give careful thought to whether it has been done by the true church or by the false church. The excommunication of the false church regard as nothing, but the unjust excommunication of your mother, the true church, despise by no means but bear it.” Luther, of course, had later disavowed the unclear thoughts on excommunication which he had still entertained in the sermon of 1518.

3. Concerning the Ministry

a. Re: Ordination Grabau and the Buffalo Synod taught that the call of a gathering of believers does not suffice to transmit the office of the public ministry, but that this also requires ordination.

Buffalo said: “Ordination is a part of the divine ordinance by which a person is legitimately taken into the ministry.” (3rd Synodical Report, p. 7). The Buffalo Synod held that “according to 2 Timothy 2:2, Titus 1:5, the

apostolic ordination, is a permanent precept of the Apostle for the entire church and in this sense is to be regarded as a precept of the Holy Ghost” (2nd Synodical Report, p 9f).

b. Re: The Ministerial Call Grabau and the Buffalo Synod taught that a congregation did not have the right to choose and call a man to be their pastor without the help and presence of the ministerium.

“This does not have the least validity before God but is a gross misdemeanor”. (*Hirtenbrief*). “We are convinced that a man arbitrarily raised by the congregation (to the ministry) can neither give absolution nor distribute the body and blood of Christ, but gives only mere bread and wine” (*Hirtenbrief*, p. 15).

c. Re: The Efficacy of Sacraments, it was taught that the efficacy of the sacraments lay not in the Word alone, but that for such efficacy also the properly established ministerial office is essential.

“The church confesses that for the administration of the holy sacraments a properly constituted call is required; if it takes place without it, it does not take place according to the command and order of God; consequently there is also no promise that Christ is present, or is pleased to be present, with His real (true) body and blood at such a celebration of the Lord’s Supper undertaken apart from His regulation.” Again it was maintained: “We believe and confess that this office (the ministry) as God’s own order in the church constitutes a special Christian station” (*Informatorium I*, p. 73).

4. Concerning Church Government

Grabau and the Buffalo Synod taught that according to the Augsburg Confession, Article 28, the congregations owe obedience to their pastors not only when they proclaim God’s Word, but in all church matters and affairs, with respect to everything that is not against the Word of God.

“Lutheran Christians know that when God’s Word says ‘obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves,’ this does not merely apply to preaching but to all good Christian things and affairs which are bound up with the Word of God and desired by it, which also belong to the good government of the churches and to Christian welfare in life and work, and that honor, love and obedience is demanded according to the third and fourth commandment... here the demanded obedience is throughout a matter of conscience” (2nd Synodical Report, p. 156).

Grabau and the Buffalo Synod held that all binding church government—which they did not restrict to the authority of the Word of God—belonged to the ministry, and that the Christian laity had only the right to listen, to ask questions, to be taught, and to obey.

Now that we have noted the nature of Grabau’s doctrinal aberrations with some detail, we want to return once more to Walther’s foreword to the ninth volume of the *Lutheraner*. We have previously noted that this volume began with August 1852, the year in which Walther’s book on the church and the ministry was first published. Walther made the comment that the battle which he and his synod were now waging against Grabau was not an easy one. He immediately followed up with the statement that in itself it was, of course, not difficult to expose the errors of their opponent. This could indeed be done with clear statements from Scripture, from the Lutheran Confessions and from the writings of Luther and orthodox teachers of the Lutheran church. Yet he listed four reasons why they nevertheless had to consider the battle confronting them to be a difficult one. These reasons are worthwhile noting. They are reasons which have made many a doctrinal controversy difficult.

The first reason adduced is this that their opponent did not carry on his polemics in a fair and honest manner. Instead of earnestly undertaking to refute Missouri’s actual doctrinal positions, he rather chose to discredit the person of his opponents. He likewise misrepresented their teachings, and thus set up straw men which he could readily knock down. The settlement of a controversy has often been made difficult

because of similar tactics on the part of opponents. Even in his own synod Grabau became more and more arbitrary, imperious and despotic. Other Buffalo pastors did gradually study Walther's objectively written book on the church and the ministry. As a result they were already basically convinced of the validity of its testimony before the colloquy of 1866 ever took place.

The second reason why Walther considered the controversy with Buffalo a difficult one was this that he was dealing with doctrinal points which, if they were to be judged properly, called for an earnestness and a spiritual understanding that all too many Lutherans of that day still lacked. Hence many considered the controversy to be nothing more than an idle squabbling and wrangling about insignificant matters. Many lacked sufficient understanding concerning the points in controversy to realize how much was really at stake for the welfare of their souls. This still makes faithful confessional insistence concerning various clearly revealed points of doctrine difficult to attain.

Walther saw a third difficulty in the fact that the erroneous positions of Grabau had already a long time ago slowly crept into the Lutheran church. The truth of the priesthood of all believers had indeed been set forth with great clarity from Scripture by Luther and by the Lutheran Reformation. Luther had clearly testified that all authority in the church is originally vested in the believers. He had stressed that this authority was solely that of the Word which Christ has entrusted to all believers. In the practical administration of the affairs of the church, the truths of the priesthood of all believers and of the authority belonging to believers was never really implemented in the Lutheran church in Germany. Philip of Hesse had on one occasion drawn up a church order which meant to reflect these truths. Luther, however, advised against implementing it. He did not deem the German laity of the Lutheran Reformation churches to be ready for this.

Luther turned instead to the Lutheran princes and to the Lutheran councils of the imperial cities to offer their services in the administration of the churches in their realms. In principle Luther carefully distinguished between their duties and authority as secular rulers, and the services which they were now asked to render in their church as its most prominent members. They were enlisted because they had the best qualifications, the expertise and above all the deepest spiritual knowledge and understanding for such service. As long as that distinction was understood and kept in mind there was nothing wrong in allowing poorly qualified Christians for a time to tacitly agree to let their more qualified and spiritually more enlightened fellow Christians carry out their churchly functions for them.

The situation was not too much different from that which obtains in many of our congregations. There, too, we go along with something similar, at least bear with it. The majority of the adult male members of the congregation remain content to let a minority, who out of a deeper spiritual understanding and interest attend the congregation's voters' meetings; do the work of the congregation. This minority calls the pastors and teachers, carries out the church discipline, makes all the decisions concerning the financial matters of the congregation and elects the congregational officers who, together with their pastor, administer the affairs of the congregation.

The distinction was soon forgotten between the functions of the Lutheran princes and of the councils of Lutheran imperial cities as temporal rulers on the one hand, and their service in the churches on the other hand as foremost members with respect to spiritual understanding and outward qualifications. The Lutheran church lost sight of it when in the peace of Augsburg of 1555 the *cuius regio, eius religio* principle was established as imperial law. It was in their capacity as secular rulers that the princes and the city councils of the imperial cities now appointed the church superintendents and consistories. These political appointees now regulated church affairs, carried out church discipline and appointed the pastors to the individual congregations.

The real trouble came when in the period of rationalistic enlightenment the ruling princes and the city councils of the imperial cities, as well as the superintendents and consistories appointed by them, ceased to be faithful Lutherans. The latter no longer adhered to the Holy Scriptures, and, ceased to be guided by its truths. Yet they still continued to govern the churches in their realm. They still directed all their affairs as governmental officers and agencies.

Around 1850, in the midst of the confessional awakening in Germany, some of the Lutheran territorial churches again had superintendents as well as men in their consistories who were staunch confessional

Lutherans. They again placed staunchly confessional pastors into the congregations under their jurisdiction. Yet generally also these men had little understanding for introducing a church polity into these congregations which expressed the scriptural truth of the priesthood of all believers. Thus they had little understanding for the congregational self government as it existed in the Missouri Synod. They feared that such a polity would be disastrous and lead to mob government. They accused Walther and the Missouri Synod of having been won over by American ideas of democracy. They failed to realize that their fears were due to the nature of their own congregations. For these were really not gatherings of confessing Christians but simply segments of the general population constituting a territorial parish. Its members were generally all baptized, but only a limited number were actually confessing and practicing Christians.

When Lutheran pastors from this background were sent to America, or came to America, to gather the German Lutheran immigrants into congregations, they quite naturally felt the lack of the various services which they were accustomed to have supplied by the state- appointed superintendents and consistories. They realized, of course, that since church and state were separated here, the European church polity could not simply be duplicated here. Yet these pastors endeavored to establish an approximation of such church government for their congregations by forming ministeriums with a *senior ministerii* at the head who functioned very much like a superintendent in Germany. The synods of the older Lutheran churches in the east were largely such ministeriums. A ministerium was composed of the ordained pastors of the congregations united as a church body. Also the Wisconsin Synod started out as such a ministerium under Muehlhaeuser.

In organizing the Buffalo Synod, Grabau and the pastors associated with him sought to establish a ministerium which would follow as closely as possible the old 16th century Pomeranian and Saxon *Kirchenordnungen*. Since the establishment of the latter went back to a time when the Lutheran church was scripturally orthodox, Grabau concluded that the regulations set up in them for church government must also have been truly Lutheran and scriptural.

It is vital to keep all this in mind in order to appreciate how new and different the truths set forth in Walther's theses on the church and ministry, when thought of as a practical basis for implementing church polity, appeared to most of Walther's contemporaries. Grabau's positions on church and ministry, on the other hand, appeared to be very traditional. The theses on the church and on the ministry which Dr. Adolf Hoenecke presented at various Wisconsin Synod conventions during the 1870s likewise had the antithesis of Grabau's erroneous positions very much in mind, as well as those of other Lutheran theologians of Germany with romanizing tendencies. This is also true of Hoenecke's treatment of the church and its ministry in his *Dogmatik*.

A final point which made the controversy difficult lay in the fact that Pastor Grabau's erroneous doctrines concerning the church and its ministry agree much more with what seems reasonable to human reason than does the true scriptural doctrine. When natural man hears that the holy Christian church is a visible association of people gathered around word and sacrament, in which some people are in authority and others subject to authority, he finds this very reasonable. It seems much more reasonable than hearing that the church is really an invisible spiritual kingdom in which Christ alone rules, in which all others are brethren, and in which the pastor has only the power of the Word, so that he may not force anyone to his human ordinances, no matter how good they may appear to him. It is very appealing also to the Old Adam of preachers to be told that a congregation owes him obedience in everything that is not against God's Word with respect to the things which he asks and requests of them in administering the affairs of the church.

So far we have had historical background for Dr. C.F.W. Walther's theses on the church and its ministry. It will undoubtedly help us in understanding the substance of Walther's individual theses as well as their particular wording. In some instances it may keep us from reading thoughts into the wording which Walther did not necessarily have in mind.

Theses on the Church

The first three theses constitute an initial unit. This is borne out by the fact that these three theses formed the initial thesis in those presented by Walther at the Altenburg debate of 1841. This thesis had the following wording:

The true Church, in the most real and most perfect sense, is the totality (*Gesamtheit*) of all true believers, who from the beginning to the end of the world from among all peoples and tongues have been called and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the Word. And since God alone knows these true believers (2 Tim. 2:19), the Church is also called invisible. No one belongs to this true Church who is not spiritually united with Christ, for it is the spiritual body of Jesus Christ.

The truths unfolded in the three sentences of the first Altenburg thesis are presented as three separate theses in Walther's theses of 1852 on the church and the ministry. We will not be able to discuss all the details of Walther's Scripture proof for them. Much less can we enter in upon the lengthier support for each thesis from the Lutheran Confessions, Luther's writings, and the private writings of the 16th and 17th century orthodox dogmaticians. We will principally use what Walther offers in his book as support where it helps us to understand the full import of his wording.

Some general remarks seem to be in place, however, concerning the method used throughout by Walther in supporting his nineteen theses on the church and the ministry. As already stated, he always begins with the Scripture proof, then follows with the support from the Lutheran Confessions, and finally with statements from Luther's writings and those of the orthodox 16th and 17th century Lutheran teachers. As we compare the use of these three types of support with reference to the first three theses, for example, we find the following: In Thesis I, the Scripture proof, including Walther's terse expository remarks, takes up one page, the support from the Confessions two pages, the quotations from Luther and the Lutheran teachers five and a half pages. In Thesis II the Scripture proof is presented in one-third of a page, that of the Lutheran Confessions in half a page, and that from Luther and Lutheran writers in three pages. In Thesis III, half a page is devoted to Scripture support, two pages to support from the Lutheran Confessions, and twelve pages to quotations from Luther and other orthodox Lutheran teachers.

In line with these observations the criticism has been voiced that while Walther always began with the support from the Scriptures themselves, Scripture doesn't actually form his main argumentation. It is true that Walther does not unfold the Scripture passages which he adduces at any length. He contents himself with very terse expository remarks. They often do little more than indicate the point in the thesis at hand to which the quoted Scripture passage speaks, and which it verifies. As a result, those not so fully acquainted with these Scripture passages and their context may not immediately recognize their full force as proof.

The elaboration of the various points made in the individual theses is given in the support offered from the Lutheran Confessions. Most fully this is done in the third type of support, especially in the rather elaborate quotations from Luther's writings. It is through Luther's writings that an extensive and incisive exposition of pertinent Bible passages is occasionally offered.

Carl S. Mundinger in his book, *Government in the Missouri Synod*, points out that in the troubled times of the Altenburg debate C.F.W. Walther indeed encouraged his colleagues and their Saxon people to turn to Luther's writings and those of the orthodox Lutheran teachers to get clarity concerning the doctrines of the church and the ministry. In that connection Mundinger quotes a criticism which Professor J. P. Koehler voiced concerning the Old Testament movement both in Europe and North America in his *Geschichte der Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Wis. and Anderen Staaten*. He stated on page 158: "The weapons of their warfare differed from those of Martin Luther. He stood on the Scriptures alone and made them the sole norm of doctrine which everybody acknowledged. He expounded the Scriptures and led the people back to the source from which they could obtain spiritual strength for the battles which beset them. In the 19th century Luther and the Lutheran fathers supplied the weapons with which theologians fought. It was an entirely different approach ... Luther enjoyed a greater freedom and abandon because he worked directly with the facts of the Gospel. In the 19th century there was a cramping of the spirit on both sides."

Mundinger even quotes Grabau as having voiced this criticism: "Speaking generally, in their criticism of my *'Hirtenbrief,'* I missed the principle that the Word of God must first be used exhaustively in the defense and criticism of Christian doctrine. In fact, they used nothing but quotations from Luther's writings and no

statements from the Word of God.”

In fairness to Walther it should be remembered that the Missouri Synod had been accused that its doctrinal position on the church and its ministry, and its church polity established on that position, were un-Lutheran. Thus Walther’s book aimed to show that both Missouri’s doctrinal position and its polity were indeed Lutheran, were in accordance with the Lutheran understanding of the Scriptures as set forth in its confessions and in the writing of its orthodox teachers. Indirectly Walther’s theses were to reveal that the traditional church polity which had developed in Lutheran territorial churches and which was defended even by most of the confessional Lutherans was unscriptural and un-Lutheran. Walther’s book was to squelch the suspicion that the Missouri Synod was introducing American democratic ideas into church government. This seemed a very vital matter for the Missouri Synod in the 1850s in order to regain and retain the understanding of confessional Lutheran leaders in Germany. They generally associated democratic ideas with religious liberalism and with anti-religious socialism. Yet the Missouri Synod was still seeking and cherishing the help and encouragement given by these confessional German Lutheran leaders. They supplied recruits for Missouri’s seminaries and financial aid in erecting necessary educational buildings.

Walther’s method of argumentation must therefore be recognized as being fully consistent with the goal which he had set for himself. According to the very title of his book of 1852, it was to set forth “the voice of our (i.e. the Lutheran) church on the question concerning the church and the ministry.”

What we find regrettable, however, is this that Walther’s method of argumentation became a model frequently followed for doctrinal presentations within the Missouri Synod. His method of argumentation ought not to be followed generally as a model when new doctrinal questions and issues arise and call for a thorough study. As a rule such studies ought to be carried out by working first and foremostly with the Holy Scriptures, the only normative source of scriptural doctrine. When the scriptural answers to a doctrinal issue have been carefully won by a thorough study of all the pertinent portions of Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions can serve well to show that the position presented has always been the position of the Lutheran church in its understanding of the Holy Scriptures. This should also be the purpose of quoting Luther and other orthodox Lutheran teachers. As gifted and faithful students of the Bible from the past, they can with their testimony likewise keep us from wresting Scripture, from forcing it to say what we might want to have it say, rather than what it actually says. Let us now begin to look at Walther’s theses themselves.

Thesis I

The Church, in the proper sense of the term, is the communion of saints, that is, the sum total of all those who have been called by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel from out of the lost and condemned human race, who truly believe in Christ, and who have been, sanctified by this faith and incorporated into Christ.

Dr. Walther adduces six Bible passages for the truths set forth in this first thesis: Ephesians 22,23; 5:23 - 27; 1 Corinthians 3:16,17; Matthew 16:18; John 11:51,52. As we study these passages in their context and note all that they state and imply, we will be ready to say that they establish all the truths set forth in Thesis I. That they do not exhaust Scripture’s clear testimony to these truths should be just as evident. An abundance of additional Scripture passages could be supplied. In comparing Walther’s six Scripture passages with the seven which our WELS Commission *on Inter-Church Relations* lists in its very similar first thesis in its *Statement on the Church and Ministry*, we find that only one common passage is adduced, namely, Matthew 16:16- 18.

In this passage we have our Savior’s first express mention of his church in the Gospels. Like Walther, so also our CICR puts the emphasis on verse 18: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Here where Jesus speaks of his church, he compares it to a building which is being built upon a firm foundation. He says: “Upon this rock I will build my church.” Who is this rock? It is not the person of Peter, whose own spiritual inability Jesus had clearly pointed out. Neither is it any

special office of Peter which he was later to pass on to others to form an unbroken succession of popes, as Roman Catholicism vainly claims. Such thoughts are excluded by the wording which Jesus uses. He indeed says of Simon, the son of Jonas, that by virtue of the faith that he had confessed he is Peter, *petros*, a rock, a building stone.

Yet Jesus uses a slightly different word when he speaks of the rock on which he will build his church; he uses *petra*, a foundation rock. This foundation rock is none other than the one on which Peter had confessed that he and his fellow disciples were already grounded in faith, namely, Jesus, the Christ, the promised divine Redeemer. This entire discourse centers in Jesus, his true person, office, and work. Through his God-given faith in Jesus as his divine Redeemer, Simon had become Peter, a building block grounded on Christ the foundation rock to form a part of the growing edifice of Christ's church. Such building stones were also the other disciples, whose faith Peter had likewise voiced as their spokesman. Such building stones are all who believe in Christ as their divine, vicarious Savior, whose faith Peter had likewise voiced.

Keeping Grabau's definition of the holy Christian church in mind, we immediately realize why this thesis heads the list of nine on the church. We can also say that this scriptural definition of the church must head any presentation of the scriptural doctrine of the church. As long as we keep the truth that the church is the communion of saints in mind, everything that Scripture tells us about the church will fall into its proper place and can be readily understood. At the same time, all the false notions which men have entertained and still entertain concerning the church are readily exposed.

From our whole biblical training and instruction the precious truths enunciated in this first thesis of Walther may appear so basic and self-evident that we may wonder whether there is still much need of refuting the concept of the holy Christian church as a visible institution.

Yet the recent featuring of the visits of Pope John Paul II in Poland and in the United States should let us realize how rationally appealing the visible Roman Catholic church's claim of being the one holy Christian church still becomes for many. Many outside of the Catholic church halfway accede to its claim when it can parade its visible papal head, give visible evidence of having millions of adherents, and can point to the lengthy existence of its structure and its traditions. When on the other hand WELS points to justifying faith in Christ as the one thing which really binds and the members of the one true Christian church together and unites them all as one spiritual body with Christ, and consequently stamps the papacy as anti-Christian because it continues to damn this bond of justifying faith, such a conviction is not even considered respectable any more by the public media. Ecumenical Christianity, including ecumenical Lutheranism, likewise thinks of the holy Christian church in terms of a united visible Christendom.

Thesis II

To the Church in the proper sense of the term belongs no godless person, no hypocrite, no one who has not been regenerated, no heretic.

The substance of the second thesis is really the antithesis of the first one. Quite properly Dr. Walther, however, adduces clear Scripture passages for its assertions: Romans 8:9; 1 John 2:19; John 15:6. All Christian doctrine ought to rest on specific statements of Scripture. The only logical conclusion that is legitimate in the establishment of Christian doctrine is the analytical kind which merely unfolds the fullness of truth itself from which such a conclusion is drawn. It is not always permissible to draw negative doctrinal conclusions from positive scriptural statements. From the positive statements that certain people have been elected in Christ unto faith and unto eternal life, we are not permitted to conclude that all the rest have been elected unto eternal damnation. Neither can we draw positive doctrinal conclusions from a negative doctrinal statement. The earnest scriptural warning that willful sins against conscience may cause us to lose our salvation does not permit us to draw the conclusion that through good works we can preserve our salvation.

Since Walther includes the heretic in Thesis II, we conclude that he defines a heretic as a false teacher who either denies a fundamental Christian doctrine without which Christian faith is impossible, or one who

reveals manifest impenitence as he persistently clings to a false doctrine.

Thesis III

The Church, in the proper sense of the term, is invisible.

Much has been said and written about the adequacy of the term “invisible” as it is applied to the holy Christian church. “Invisible” is here used in a very special meaning. Yet it isn’t a term of Walther’s own coinage. He shows that it goes back all the way to Luther in the Lutheran church and that it was subsequently used by a long line of orthodox Lutheran teachers, including Martin Kemnitz, John Gerhard, Balthazar Meisner, Balthazar Menzer, Joh. Conrad Dannhauer, Abraham Calov, Joh. Andrew Quenstedt. There is nothing unusual about using words in a very special meaning in a specialized context. As employed by Walther in Theses II, “invisible” expresses three scriptural truths about the church: 1) that the bond of faith that unites people with Christ and with one another to form his body, the holy Christian church, is a spiritual bond; 2) that God alone, who searches the hearts of human beings, knows who all the individual members are; 3) that during this time of grace we can apprehend the holy Christian church as a precious reality only by faith on the basis of God’s Word.

When used to express these truths, the term “invisible” helps us to hold on to some vital scriptural truths concerning the church. These scriptural truths can indeed be drawn from the three Scripture passages which Walther adduces. As Walther states, 1 Peter 2:5 shows that the true church is a spiritual building, hence not a visible one. In 2 Timothy 2:19 we hear that it is the Lord who knows them that are his. God alone can discern and evaluate the things that are found in the heart. Since faith in Christ, which alone makes sinful human beings members of the church, is a matter of the heart, God alone can and does discern all those who are really his. He has set his heart upon them and hence made them his own and now also keeps them as his own.. Therefore it is also true that the Lord, and he alone, knows who his own, the members of his church, really are.

In another sense, the holy Christian church is not invisible. It is not a mere platonic idea. The holy Christian church is people, and they as such are visible. We can see the people as persons who profess to be believers in Christ; but we cannot identify them with certainty as being actual believers. Only God can do this. The members of the holy Christian church will not be invisible in heaven when we will know who they are. Even then we will not be able to look into their hearts, but because the Lord has taken all of them with us to himself in heaven, we will know that they constitute the church triumphant, and we will see them with our own eyes even as we will see our Lord.

In the quotation from Meisner, we are reminded that the truth that the church is invisible is of special comfort in times when orthodox Christians cannot find a completely orthodox church. Like Elijah, they may have to stand alone; yet they are nevertheless comforted in their faith by the realization that they are spiritually united with a host of other true Christians who still constitute the church militant here on earth. They can find joy in knowing that they are blessedly united also with all those members of the church who have already triumphantly entered God’s heavenly presence.

It is vital to remember that it is the invisible church which is the body of Christ. The body of Christ as the invisible church, the *una sancta*, is not rent asunder by all the outward divisions in the church which are brought about by sinful schism and persistent false doctrine. It gives us strength to bear with these divisions in this life when we cannot overcome them with a faithful testimony to the truths of God’s Word.

That also the ancient church taught that the only holy Christian church is invisible is made evident from the fact that both the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed include it among the articles of faith, among the things that we believe.

Thesis IV

The true Church of believers and saints it is to which Christ has given the keys of the kingdom of

heaven. Therefore this Church is the real and sole holder and bearer of the spiritual, divine, and heavenly blessings, rights, powers, offices, etc., which Christ has gained and which are available in His Church.

It is very significant that Walther has placed Thesis IV, which speaks of the power of the keys, before Thesis V, VI and VII, that is, before he ever speaks of the church *late dicta*, which includes the local congregation. Walther clearly points out that it is to the true believers individually and collectively that the keys of heaven are given. Matthew 16:15- 19 is again quoted in which Jesus says to Peter: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." To this Walther comments: "Here Christ testifies what power those possess who with Peter are built upon the rock, namely, those who believe in Him and with their mouths profess this faith of their hearts; hence, in a word, his true church, his holy believing congregation, which is his body, that is, 'the fullness of him that filleth all in all.'"

In adducing Matthew 18:18: "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," Walther makes the comment: "Here Christ testifies that what he had just addressed to Peter applies to all his disciples." For the same purpose, John 20:22- 23 is adduced. It reads: "And when he had said this, he breathed on them and saith unto them, receive ye the Holy Ghost; whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain they are retained." Walther comments: "Here Christ testifies that only the communion of those who have the Holy Spirit, hence the holy Christian church, can open or close heaven." To the Savior's promise in Matthew 28:20: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," Walther adds the comment: "Now, if Christ is with his people, they have with him all things." It is this passage which, under Thesis V, is also adduced as basis for the confession that one holy church is to continue forever, unto the end of time.

In supporting Thesis IV with the Lutheran Confessions, Walther quotes extensively from the Appendix to the Smalcald Articles..*Of the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops*. This includes the paragraph: "Here belong the statements of Christ which testify that the keys have been given to the church, and not merely to certain persons, Matthew 18:20: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them." Lastly, the statement of Peter also confirms this, 1 Peter: 2:9: "Ye are a royal priesthood." To this Walther adds the comment: "From this we see: our church teaches according to the Word of God that God has bidden the entire true holy Christian church to preach his dear Gospel and to make it known. Where therefore a little group of believing Christians, or a true church, is found, there also this church has the command to preach the Gospel; but if it has the command, it has therewith naturally also the authority, yes, the obligation to order preachers of the Gospel. Whence it is to take such preachers is something concerning which the church cannot be at a loss, since pastors (*Pfarrherrn*) and teachers are a gift, belonging to the church; for the church does not consist only of spiritual priests, but the Lord continually gives her also men whom he specially equips with the necessary gifts for the conduct of the office, and thus offers to the church for service."

Significant in Walther's support of Thesis IV is also his quotation of Luther's interpretation of Matthew 18:17: "Christ gives both the power and the use of the keys to each Christian, when He says, 'Let him be to you as a heathen man' (Matt. 18:18), for who is this 'you' to whom Christ refers when He says 'Let him be to you'? The pope? Indeed, He refers to each and every Christian. And in saying 'Let him be to you,' he gives not only the authority, but also commands its use and exercise. For what else does the phrase 'Let him be to you as a heathen man' mean than to have nothing to do with him, to have no fellowship with him? This truly is to excommunicate, to bind, and to close the door of heaven. This is confirmed by what follows: 'Whatever you bind ... shall be bound.' Who are those addressed? Are they not all Christians? Is it not the church? If here the giving of the keys to the church means not the use but only the authority, we would by the same source claim that its use has never been given to anyone, even to Peter (Matt. 16:19). For clearly the words of Christ are everywhere the same when He bestows the office of binding and loosing. If in one place or with reference to one person they signify a conferring of authority, they signify a conferring of authority everywhere. If they signify the conferring of the use in one place, they everywhere the same and we are not permitted to give them one meaning in one place and another meaning elsewhere, though these masks make bold to ridicule the

mysteries of God with their fiction.” This is from Luther’s letter of 1523 concerning the Ministry to the Senate and People of Prague.

It would be difficult to harmonize this quotation used by Walther with the position that the ministry of the keys with reference to excommunication: is entrusted solely to the local congregation. It would also not allow a position that questions that Christians assembled as a synod lack the power of the keys.

Thesis V

Although the true Church, in the proper sense of the term, is invisible as to its essence, yet its presence is perceivable, its marks being the pure preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the holy Sacraments in accordance with their institution by Christ.

This thesis, though it sets forth the very important truth of the marks by which the presence of the invisible church is apprehended, really needs little comment. What this thesis V asserts is well established by the passages adduced as Scripture proof.

Quoting verse 14 from Mark’s account of the parable of the sower: “The sower soweth the word,” Walther states: “Hence according to Scripture the Word of God is the seed from which the members of the church, or in the language of Scripture, ‘the children of the kingdom,’ Matthew 13:38, sprout forth and are generated.” Adding the promise of Isaiah 55:10- 11, he adds: “We see from this, not only that the Word of God is the seed from which alone the members of the church are born, but also that from it there certainly bud forth always, whensoever this heavenly seed is sown, some ‘children of the kingdom,’ ‘without man’s knowing how’ in accordance with the divine, undeceivable, and infallible promise.”

To this Walther adds: “According to Holy Scripture, however, also the holy sacraments, besides the Word of God, are the means by which the church, the holy congregation of God is to be founded, gathered, preserved, and is to spread.” This is established on the basis of Matthew 28:18- 20, Mark 16:16 and 1 Corinthians 10:17. Where therefore the Gospel Word and the sacraments are in use, we have undeceivable marks that the church exists in that place.

Luther says: “When you hear such word or see it preached, believed, confessed, and followed, there have no doubt that there must be a true holy catholic church and Christian holy people (1 Peter 2:9), even if they are very few. Isaiah 55:11. God’s Word does not proceed in vain. It must get at least a fourth part of the acre ... for God’s Word cannot be without God’s people; again God’s people cannot be without God’s Word. Who would otherwise want to preach it or have it preached?”

In Walther’s first five theses on the church we have now heard that the church in the strict and proper sense is the sum total of all believers in Christ united with him and with one another; that no godless person is excluded; that the church therefore is invisible; that it is to this church of believers that the keys of heaven are given; and that the presence of this church is perceivable through its marks, the pure preaching of the Gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments. These five vital truths prepare us for

Thesis VI

In an improper sense the term “Church,” according to Holy Scripture, is applied also to the visible sum total of all who have been called, that is, to all who profess allegiance to the Word of God that is preached and make use of the holy Sacraments. This Church (the universal [catholic] Church) is made up of good and evil persons. Particular divisions of it, namely, the congregations found here and there, in which the Word of God is preached and the holy Sacraments are administered, are called churches (particular churches), for the reason, namely, that in these visible groups the invisible, true Church of the believers, saints, and children of God is concealed, and because no elect persons are to be looked for outside of the group of those who have been called.

This is a rather comprehensive and elaborate thesis. Thus it calls for an analysis of its content.

In keeping with what we have already heard in Thesis V, that the believers are found only there where the Word of God is preached and where the holy sacraments are in use, Thesis VI now points out that the term church, according to Scripture, is applied also to the visible sum total of all who have been called. This means to all who profess allegiance to the Gospel Word that is preached to them and who make use of the holy sacraments. This is the universal visible church; or, taken in the same sense, the visible catholic church.

Of this universal visible church Thesis VI says that it is made up of good and bad. We would probably prefer to say that in this universal visible church also bad, i.e. hypocrites and such as are really unbelievers adhere to the sum total of true believers in its midst. For it is because of the believers that this visible gathering of those who are called is designated the church universal. Yet Walther himself acknowledges this truth.. He does so when he designates this use of the term church as a *synechoche*, whereby the whole gets the name which really belongs only to a part.

Thesis VI goes on to state that particular divisions of this universal visible church are called churches. By way of clarification it adds that these particular divisions are the congregations found here and there, in which the Word of God is preached and the holy sacraments are administered. Here it is expressly said that they are called churches because “in these visible groups the invisible, true church of the believers, saints and children of God is concealed, and because no elect persons, who constitute the true church, are to be looked for outside of the group of those who have been called.”

As Scripture basis for these assertions, Walther adduces Christ’s parables which compare the kingdom of heaven to a net cast into the sea and gathering up good and bad fish; to the preparation of the marriage feast of the king’s son, at which not all wear a suitable wedding garment; and to the ten virgins, who at the arrival of the bridegroom do not all have their lamps filled with oil (Mt 13:47- 48; Mt 25:1,2; Mt 22:2,11). With Walther we are not willing to equate the term “kingdom of heaven” in these parables with the church. We take the kingdom of heaven to be God’s saving activity during this time of grace, this that through the Gospel in word and sacrament he calls sinners to faith and salvation. These parables all point out that of those thus called not all are really brought to faith and actually become members of his church. Many only respond outwardly to the Gospel call and associate themselves only outwardly in this life with the church of believers. On the last day when God gathers his true church to himself in heaven these will therefore be revealed as not having been his own and will be cast away from his presence. Yet also with this understanding, these parables offer a firm basis for the truths of Thesis VI.

Very properly Walther adduces also Matthew 18:17: “Tell it unto the church” as Scripture proof. The only church to which we can turn in the final stage of admonishing a brother in order to rescue him from his sin is a visible gathering of professing Christians. Walther also points to the fact that St. Paul addressed epistles “to the church of God which is at Corinth” and “to the churches in Galatia.” Yet the earnest warnings set forth in these epistles do not preclude that some in these churches had fallen from grace and salvation through the errors with which these churches were assailed.

Scripture indeed tells us to look for the church there where the Gospel is in use, where people are gathered together both to receive its blessings and to bring them to others (Mt 18:20). Scripture designates such gatherings of people who profess faith in Christ and manifest it in the use of word and sacrament as churches. It does so, however, because of the believers in their midst. Hypocrites are like chaff among the wheat, outwardly adhering to the company of believers but not a part of them. Until God exposes them they, too, will be the outward recipients of the expressions of fellowship of the believers (Ac 5:1- 11, 1 Cor 5:13). Hence, when the New Testament speaks of the church or of churches, the reference is either to such as are known to God as believers, namely, the *ecclesia stricte dicta*, the communion of saints or a part of it present at any locality; or it is to such as are to be acknowledged as believers by us on the basis of their confession, the *ecclesia late dicta*, the empirical church as we encounter it. This includes Christians in all their weaknesses. Those who reveal their manifest impenitence and unbelief are to be excommunicated; fellowship is also to be terminated with those who in spite of brotherly admonition demand recognition for the errors in which they persist and for which they make propaganda. Yet until they are manifest as impenitent or as persistent errorists they, too, enjoy the

fellowship of the true visible church. The invisible and visible church are not really two different churches. Rather, the visible church is the invisible church imperfectly apprehended.

Thesis VII

Even as the visible communions in which the Word and the Sacraments still exist in their essence bear, according to God's Word, the name churches because of the true invisible Church of the true believers contained in them, so likewise they, because of the true, invisible Church concealed in them, though there be but two or three, possess the power which Christ has given to His entire Church.

As proof from the Word of God, Walther here again cites Matthew 18:17: "Tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." To this he makes the comment: "No proof is needed to show that the Lord in this passage is speaking of a visible particular local church. However; when immediately after those words the Lord proceeds thus: 'Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,' (v. 18), he manifestly delegates with these words also to each visible local church the keys of heaven, or that church power which, in Peter, he had given to his entire holy Church in Matthew 16:19. However, lest we imagine that this great power were given only to great, populous congregations, he adds (vv. 19 and 20): 'Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' Accordingly, if in a local congregation there were only two or three believers, true children of God, true members of the spiritual body of Jesus Christ, the congregation would on account of them be a congregation of God and in legitimate possession of all rights and powers which Christ has acquired for, and given to His Church." In the extensive Luther quotations which he adduces and also in some of the quotations from other Lutheran leaders, Matthew 16:20 is the Bible passage that is again and again unfolded and stressed.

Note on what basis Walther claims the power of the keys for a local congregation. He says nothing about this that it is a special divine institution to which for that reason the power of the keys have been bestowed. No, it is because of the believers in its midst, even if there be but two or three. It is also because of these believers in its midst that the local congregation is called a church. Nowhere in his entire book on the church and its ministry does Walther adduce any other reason for the local congregation's being a church and having the power of the keys. He does not attempt to define a local congregation beyond this that in it believers are gathered in his name. He says nothing about its form.

We note, however, that when Walther both in Thesis VI and Thesis VII unfolds the term "particular church or churches" he makes direct reference only to local churches. In neither thesis does he exemplify particular churches, and the power of the keys which they possess, by mentioning church bodies or synods. Was he not ready to grant that also a synod, a church body comprised of a great number of congregations, is a church and possesses the power of the keys?

In answer we can say that the reason that Thesis VII restricts itself to speaking of particular churches in terms of local congregations undoubtedly lies in the immediate purpose of Walther's book. It was to refute the contentions of Pastor Grabau. Grabau contended that the power of the keys originally belonged to the pastor by virtue of his ordination through an already ordained pastor; and that a congregation on the other hand had the power of the keys only through its ordained pastor. Thus it was the very specific interest of Walther to show on the basis of Scripture and from the testimony of our Lutheran Confessions, of Luther and of the orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians that the power of the keys has been given by Christ originally not to the pastors, but to the believers.

It is the congregation, which because of the believers in its midst originally possesses the keys, that then transmits the public use of these keys to its pastor, not vice versa. It is Walther's specific interest of pointing this out that is reflected in the wording of Thesis VII. This was Walther's specific interest also over against

another group to whom he and the Missouri Synod were specifically addressing themselves in this book on the church and ministry, namely the confessional Lutheran leaders in Germany. Many of these held views concerning the possession of the power of the keys very similar to those of Grabau.

That Walther also thought of congregational delegates assembled in a synodical convention as a church possessing the power of the keys by virtue of their Christian faith, and insofar as they were Christian believers, is evident from his first presidential address at the Missouri Synod convention of 1848. It is evident from the very theme of his address: *Why Should and Can We Carry on Our Work Joyfully Although We Have No Power But the Power of the Word?* With this question he is already asserting that a synodical convention has the power of the word. In the exposition he sums it up in these words: "Accordingly there can be no doubt, venerable brethren in office and respected delegates, that we are not renouncing any right belonging to us if we as servants of the church and as members of an ecclesiastical synod claim no other power than the power of the Word; for in, the church where Christ alone rules there dare and can be no other power to which all must submit." Then Walther adds: "To be sure, there are matters which the Word of God does not regulate, but which must be arranged in the church; but all such matters are not to be arranged by any power above the congregation, but the congregation, that is, pastors and hearers, arranges them, free of every compulsion, as it is necessary and appears salutary." Concerning the latter matter he also says: "But it is, of course, not to be denied, that the congregations have the freedom to relinquish their freedoms and rights in many things, to let themselves be represented and therefore to arrange for a church government through representatives, to which they transmit their rights; as this was and is the case among other things in our German fatherland." He is here speaking of the church government carried on over the congregations by the Lutheran consistories.

Yet Walther adds: "Undoubtedly our congregations were free to follow this example and to invest the synod meeting in their name with a power besides the power of the Word; but it is a different question whether it would have been wise if they had done so. I say no, because under the prevailing circumstances we can confidently hope for auspicious success of our work, or rather of God's work which we are promoting, if we use only the power of God. This is the second reason why we should and can carry on our work with joy, although we have no power but the power of the Word."

Here we gain an understanding for what is meant when it is said that according to Walther the Missouri Synod was constituted to be an advisory body. He did not mean this with respect to the power of the Word which the synod in its nature as a church, as a gathering of believers, shared with its local congregations. When a synod wields the power of the word, its decisions are therefore as binding upon Christians as are those of the local congregation in exercising the power of the Word.

In respect to those matters not decided by the Word of God, Article IV of the Missouri Synod's 1853 constitution stated: "Synod is in, respect to the self- government of the individual congregations only an advisory body." Because of their sad experiences with Stephan and with the consistories of the German territorial churches Dr. Walther and the other fathers of the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod were very much concerned about safeguarding the self-government of the congregations in those matters which clearly belonged in their jurisdiction.

Yet Walther agreed with the congregations in feeling constrained to form a synod to perform other duties belonging to the mission of the church which are impossible or very difficult to carry out as individual congregations. Synodical resolutions concerning the very functions which had been formally and voluntarily assigned by the congregations themselves to the synodical body as its business were thought to deserve the same conscientious consideration by the congregations as did the resolutions passed in their own midst to foster the Lord's work though it pertained to matters which in themselves are neither commanded nor forbidden by God.

Thesis VIII

While God gathers for Himself a holy Church of the elect in places where the Word of God is not preached in entire purity and the holy Sacraments are not administered altogether in accordance with

their institution by Jesus Christ, - - provided the Word of God and the Sacraments are not utterly denied but essentially remain in those places, - - still every one is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to flee from all false teachers and to avoid all heterodox churches, or sects and, on the other hand, to profess allegiance, and adhere, to orthodox congregations and their orthodox preachers wherever he finds such.

After presenting the three thoughts of this thesis as a unit, Dr. Walther repeats them individually as points A, B, C, supplying each with the proper support.

A. Also in erring, heretical congregations there are children of God; also in them the true Church becomes manifest by means of the remnants of the pure Word of God and the Sacraments that still remain in them.

As proof from God's Word Walther points to the fact that the Galatians whom St. Paul through the Gospel had called together into congregations are addressed by him as churches. But in the body of this epistle to the Galatians we hear that a perversion of the fundamental doctrine of justification had made serious inroads in these congregations and bewitched them. Nevertheless, St. Paul still addressed these Galatian congregations as churches because in them there still remained a hidden seed of a church of true believers. As an Old Testament illustration of the truth set forth Walther points to the situation in the northern kingdom of Israel during the time of Elijah's ministry when the priests of Baal were dominant. Through the lone testimony of Elijah God, however, still preserved a holy church of 7,000 elect, though they were unknown even to the Prophet Elijah.

We, too, joyfully acknowledge the truth that God in his grace and mercy can and does awaken, sustain and preserve believers also in the midst of erring congregations and church bodies. We remember, however, that he does so not through the errors that are taught and condoned there, but only through the true gospel message that is still heard in erring churches.

We treasure the scriptural teaching that the presence of believers, the presence of the church, must be concluded and apprehended by us on the basis of the marks of the church. On this basis Lutherans from Luther down have not been ready to question altogether even in the case of the Roman Catholic church its character as a church, though it is the church of the antichrist. Even this church, in spite of its horrendous doctrinal errors, still adheres to the three ecumenical creeds, uses them in its services, still acknowledges the triune God and Christ as the divine Redeemer, still reads the Gospels and Epistles in its services as God's Word, now more and more in the vernacular, and above all still has and performs holy baptism as instituted by the Lord. It can happen that the ear of the hearer perceives better things, and more things in keeping with saving truth, from that which is presented than was meant by those doing the teaching. We are therefore incited to proclaim the pure Word of God with great zeal and faithfulness, and also with meekness and love, at every God-given opportunity. We do this in the hope that our testimony may perchance be heard also by those who are still God's children in erring churches and help them in overcoming the errors with which they are surrounded. Everyone is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to flee all false prophets and to avoid fellowship with heterodox churches, or sects. Noteworthy is the great abundance of Scripture passages which Walther adduces for this point, twelve in all. Among them are the familiar ones like Matthew 7:15: "Beware of false prophets"; Romans 16:17,18: "Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them"; 2 Corinthians 6:14- 18: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers"; Galatians 5:19: "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump"; and 2 John 10:11: "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeak is partaker of his evil deeds."

Noteworthy are also the comments with which Walther introduces these passages. "Not a few, when they hear that the Church is wherever there are still essentials of the Word of God and the Sacraments, draw this conclusion: It is a matter of indifference whether one attaches himself to an orthodox or to a heterodox

communion; for even if one joins a heterodox congregation, one is still in the Church and can still be saved. However, this is an error. True, the reason why one must sever his connection with a communion of erring people is not this, that otherwise one cannot be in the Church. It is also true that many are saved who from a lack of knowledge adhere outwardly to sects and yet abide in the true faith. But what is gained by being in the Church if one is not of the Church, does one belong to it? Now, a person who has learned to know the false doctrine of the sects and of their teachers and still adheres to them is indeed still in the Church but not of the Church. He does not belong to the divine seed that lies concealed among the sects. His fellowshiping the sects is not a sin of weakness which can coexist with a state of grace. Such a person wantonly acts contrary to the Word of God; for God commands us in His holy Word to flee and avoid false teachers and their counterfeit worship. As little as the doctrine that Christians in a state of grace still have sins of weakness justifies those who for this reason imagine that they may knowingly and willfully continue to sin, as surely as those who sin trusting in grace are rather children of perdition, so little does the doctrine that even among the sects there are children of God justify those who, contrary to God's command, knowingly remain with them, and so surely such wanton participants in the corruption of the Word of Truth are children of perdition."

He who deliberately and willfully continues to fellowship persistent errorists is indeed living in sin. He sins against the Lord, being indifferent to his Word. He sins against the church, for he gives offense to its members by leading them to believe that one doctrine is as good as another, thus making them indifferent. He sins against the errorists by strengthening them in their convictions that they possess the truth, instead of helping them by testifying against their error in all meekness. He sins against his own soul, exposing himself to the corrupting influence of error.

The twelve pages of testimony adduced from Luther's writings concerning point B of Thesis VIII also offer many gems. Luther points out, for example, that a teacher who remains silent over against error and still wants to be a sound teacher is really worse than an enthusiast and heretic, and cannot be trusted. He exhorts us to distinguish between doctrine and life. Scriptural doctrine does not belong to us, but to God. God has only made us servants of his Word, not lords over it. That is why we cannot concede a letter or tittle of it. Christian life is ours. Hence we can bear with a lot of weakness in the life of others, and let love and forgiveness rule here, as long as such sins and deviations are not defended.

C. Every Christian is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to profess allegiance, and adhere, to orthodox congregations and their orthodox preachers wherever he finds such.

This truth, as Walther points out, is richly supported by scriptural exhortations. We will content ourselves with mentioning only two. Our Savior himself says: "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Mt 10:32,33). St. Paul writes (Ro 10:9- 10): "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Such profession of allegiance to Christ is not a condition of salvation which we fulfill, but a fruit of faith. The Holy Spirit who through the gospel brings us to faith in Christ, also incites us in such faith to confess Christ. The Holy Spirit who through faith in Christ unites us with our fellow Christians also leads us to express and manifest our faith jointly with fellow Christians in joint use of the means of grace, in joint prayer and praise and in joint proclamation of the gospel to others. Complete unwillingness to confess Christ before others and with others would be a denial of faith and manifest the fruit of unbelief.

Thesis IX

The only indispensable requisite for obtaining salvation is fellowship with the invisible Church, to which all those glorious promises that concern the Church were originally given.

Walther correctly points out that the maxim: “Outside the church there is no salvation” is true only in this sense, that outside of the invisible church there is no salvation. This has no other meaning than that there is no salvation outside of Christ. For whoever is not in spiritual fellowship with the believers is also not in fellowship with Christ. On the other hand, whoever is in fellowship with Christ is in fellowship also with all those in whom Christ dwells, that is, with the invisible church.

Grabau and the Buffalo Synod had, as we previously noted, taught that the one holy Christian church, outside of which there is no salvation, is the visible church of the pure word and sacraments. This assertion Thesis IX properly rules out. Anyone who restricts salvation to fellowship with any particular visible church therewith overthrows the fundamental article of the sinner’s justification in the sight of God alone through faith in Christ. Only when we define the visible church as the gathering of all those who have been called by the gospel is the statement true that there is no salvation outside of the visible church. For without the gospel in word and sacrament there is no saving faith, and hence also neither Christ nor salvation (Ro 10:13;14,17).

Thesis on the Ministry

Thesis I

The holy ministry (*das heilige Predigtamt*), or the pastoral office (*Pfarramt*) is an office distinct from the priestly office, which belongs to all believers.

This thesis distinguishes the office of the public ministry from the priestly office which belongs to all believers. As Scripture *basis* for such a distinction Walther properly quotes 1 Corinthians 12:29: “Are all apostles? are all teachers?, etc.” and Romans 10:15: “How shall they preach, except they be sent? These are offered in contrast to 1 Peter 2:9: “But ye are a chosen generation; a royal priesthood, a holy nation, etc.” addressed to all Christians.

As far as the wording of the thesis is concerned we feel constrained to repeat two comments made by Professor August Pieper with reference to this thesis in the April 1918 issue of the *Quartalschrift*. They are incidental remarks in the final instalment of his essay on Luther’s doctrine of the church and ministry. Pieper states that when Dr. Walther says that the holy ministry is an office distinct from the priestly office, which belongs to all believers, this dare not be misunderstood as though it had other functions than the spiritual priesthood. Pieper deems it vital to realize that its distinctiveness lies solely in a different use of the same priestly office, namely solely in this, that the public ministry is administered in the name and with the consent of all the spiritual priests which come into consideration.

That Walther is not in disagreement with these truths themselves is evident from Thesis VII, in which he himself states that “the holy ministry is the authority... to administer in public office the common rights of the spiritual priesthood in behalf of all.” Yet when Thesis I is read or quoted by itself a different understanding can readily arise. Instead of speaking of two distinct offices we therefore prefer, with August Pieper, to say that Christ instituted one office in his church, the ministry of the gospel, given to all believers individually and collectively. The public ministry is not generically different from that of the common priesthood of all Christians. It rather constitutes a special God-ordained way of practicing the one ministry of the church.

Under Thesis I Walther himself offers a lengthy quotation in which Luther presents the relation of the public ministry as a special God-ordained way of practicing the one ministry of the gospel. It is taken from his Treatise of 1522: *That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven from Scripture*. Luther says: “For no one can deny that every Christian possesses the word of God and is taught and anointed by God to be priest, as Christ says, John 6 [:45] ‘They shall all be taught by God,’ and Psalm 45 [:7], ‘God. has anointed you with the oil of gladness on account of your fellows.’ These fellows are the Christians, Christ’s brethren, who with him are consecrated priests, as Peter says too, I Peter [9], ‘You are a royal priesthood so that you may declare the

virtue of him who called you into his marvelous light.’

“But if it is true that they have God’s Word and are anointed by him, then it is their duty to confess, to teach, and to spread his word], as Paul says, I Corinthians 4 [II Cor. 4:133], ‘Since we have the same spirit of faith, so we speak,’ and the prophet says in Psalm 116 [10.1, I came to believe, therefore I speak.’ And in Psalm 51 [131, he [God] says of all Christians, ‘I will teach the ungodly your ways, and sinners will return to you.’ Here again it is certain that a Christian not only has the right and power to teach God’s word but has the duty to do so on pain of losing his soul and of God’s disfavor.

“If you say, ‘How can this be? If he is not called to do so he may indeed not preach, as you yourself have frequently taught,” I answer that here you should put the Christian into two places. First, if he is in a place where there are no Christians he needs no other call than to be a Christian, called and anointed by God from within. Here it is his duty to preach and to teach the gospel to erring heathen or non-Christians, because of the duty of brotherly love, even though no man calls him to do so. This is what Stephen did, Acts 6-7, even though he had not been ordered into any office by the apostles. Yet he still preached and did great signs among the people. Again, Philip, the deacon and Stephen’s comrade, Acts 8 t:5.3, did the same thing even though the office of preaching was not commanded to him either. Again, Apollos did so too, Acts 18 [251. In such a case a Christian looks with brotherly love at the need of the poor and perishing souls and does not wait until he is given a command or letter from a prince or bishop. For need breaks all laws and has none. Thus it is the duty of love to help if there is no one else who could or should help.

“Second, if he is at a place where there are Christians who have the same power and right as he, he should not draw attention to himself. Instead he should let himself be called and chosen to preach and to teach in the place of and by the command of the others.”

The other comment of Professor Pieper concerning the wording of Thesis I which we feel constrained to repeat has to do with Walther’s seeming identification of the holy ministry with the pastoral office (“*das heilige Predigtamt oder Pfarramt*”). This seeming identification occurs again in Thesis II. Since our comments on this matter will therefore also apply to that thesis we might proceed to it at this time.

Thesis II

The ministry, or the pastoral office, is not a human ordinance, but an office established by God himself.

August Pieper points out that also Luther frequently uses *Pfarramt* and *Predigtamt* as interchangeable terms, in other words, that he employs *Pfarramt* at times as a general term for the ministry of the word. But he likewise notes that Luther again and again makes it quite clear that with this terminology he is using an important species for the genus, that in mentioning this main species he has every form and phase of the public ministry of the gospel in mind.

In his *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, for example, Luther says: “All who are engaged in the clerical office (*Pfarramt*) or ministry of the word are in a holy, proper, good and God-pleasing order and estate.” That the public ministry was a very wide and comprehensive concept for Luther, covering every form and phase of the ministry of the word can be exemplified from a quotation from his *Sermon on Keeping Children in School*. There Luther says: “The estate I am thinking of is rather one which has the office of preaching and the service of the word and sacrament and which imparts the Spirit and salvation, blessings that cannot be attained by any amount of pomp and pageantry. It includes the work of pastors (*Pfarramt*), teachers, preachers, lectors, priests (whom men call chaplains), sacristans, schoolmasters, and whatever other work belongs to these offices and persons.”

It is significant that Walther offers also this quotation as he supplies support from Luther’s writings for Thesis I. Here Luther uses *Pfarramt* as a species of the genus public ministry. This gives us reason to conclude that Walther was not unaware of Luther’s understanding of the wide scope of the public ministry nor in disagreement with it.

Nevertheless, following Luther’s terminology Walther was content in the theses which we are discussing

to assert the scriptural truths concerning the public ministry in terms of the primary and basic form of the pastoral office. For in these theses he was addressing himself against erroneous positions most specifically affecting the proper understanding of the pastoral or congregational ministry. Moreover, we need to remember that at this time, at least in America, the phases of the public ministry beyond the congregational ministry were most generally carried out as supplementary tasks in addition to a pastorate. Until his death Walther himself performed his duties as theological professor and seminary president, and also served a total of 17 years as synodical president, without completely giving up his pastoral duties as *Pfarrer* of the combined congregation at St. Louis.

Nevertheless, the bare wording of Theses I and II does present an unclarity which has given occasion for misunderstandings. As August Pieper says, people who neither think independently nor study the matter thoroughly draw the conclusion from Walther's wording that the public ministry, i.e. the ministry of the word conferred by the church upon individuals, and the parish pastorate (*Pfarramt*) are identical and interchangeable concepts, and that therefore only this form of the public ministry is divinely instituted. It would be false, of course, to declare the species parish pastorate (*Pfarramt*) to be a mere human arrangement. Human concerning every species of the public ministry is only the form. The substance of every species of the public ministry, the commission and authority given to capable men by the church to preach the gospel for its edification, to administer the means of grace, is in every case divine.

August Pieper came to speak of this matter once more in his article, *What do we teach in the Article concerning the Church and its Office?* There he states: "When one also considers that Walther says: 'the holy ministry or the pastoral office is an office distinct from the priestly office,' while Luther merely calls it 'another use,' it is understandable, how in the heads of the masses the erroneous opinion could arise, that the parish ministry (*Pfarramt*) was the only office instituted by God and that all the other forms of the public ministry (*oeffentliche Predigtamt*) such as the office of professors, day school teachers, conference visitors, presidents, etc., are divine only insofar as they can be derived from the parish ministry (*Pfarramt*), though Walther himself declares the office of a college professor to be a divine arrangement."

We notice that in this quotation August Pieper alludes to an address, which Dr. Walther gave at the installation of two professors at a Missouri Synod worker training college, men who were at the same time called to serve as director and vice-director of the college.

As the theme for the address Walther offers this question: *What can comfort us, when men, who have prepared themselves for the office of rescuing souls, yes, who have already administered this office with blessing, assume the office of teaching at our scientific institution.?* To this question Walther then gives the following two answers and unfolds them as the parts of his address: This shall comfort us: 1) that also their office is the office of our God; 2) that also their work is the work of our Lord.

We consider it worthwhile to offer some extensive quotations from both of these parts because of the aid that they give in understanding the theses which we are studying. These quotations let us see with what scriptural and evangelical understanding Walther handles the concepts of church, congregation and ministry (*Kirche, Gemeinde, Amt*), and in which way he sees them as divine institutions.

In the first part Walther says: "God has actually instituted only one office, namely the office, in his name to gather his church on earth, to rule over it, provide for it, and preserve it. This office the Lord has ordained and given to his church when he gave Peter the keys to heaven and finally said to all his disciples: 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'

"Now this office accordingly has such a sphere of duties and tasks of such a diverse variety, also calls for so many different outstanding gifts, that no man is in the position, even in a small sphere to fulfill all its tasks. As the Messiah's office as mediator falls into three different offices, that of prophet, high priest, and king, so also the office of the church falls into the most diverse offices, demanding manifold gifts of the Spirit. Fully carrying out the office of the church requires among other things not only that those filling this office feed the flock of Christ in every way and to do battle for it, but above all also this, that they take care that after them

there will always be new faithful shepherds and well- equipped warriors, who will take up the lead with the shepherd staff when it has fallen from them and who will wield the sword which death has wrenched from their hand...

“It is therefore not a human arrangement, that there are men in the church, who train and instruct young boys so that they may some day carry out the office which preaches reconciliation. Their office is a holy, godly office, a branch of the office which Christ instituted and established in presenting the keys of heaven. Even not merely the gifts which are necessary to ground a young boy in a deeper understanding of the divine truths, but also the gifts that are necessary to educate the mind of a young boy in general and to teach him the different dead and living languages of the nations: also these gifts are gifts of the Holy Spirit, which the Savior who ascended to heaven has poured out upon his church for the establishment and preservation of holy offices. ‘This is why it says: When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men ... It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...’ (Eph 4:8,11, 11. NIV). “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord... Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom... to another the ability to speak. in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretations of tongues” (1 cor 12:4,5,8a,10b NIV).

In part two Walther assures the professors who were being installed that by accepting a teaching position at a worker training institution for the ministry they “were not stepping out of a spiritual office into a secular one, out of a divine office into a human one.” Concerning their office he then gave them the assurance: “Not only is it a divine institution, but all its tasks have also no other goal, no other final objective, than the glorification of God’s name and the salvation of lost souls.

“Not only are particularly you, esteemed Director, from now on in the real sense the guardian, the spiritual father and house-pastor of the boys and young men in our college; not only are they in a real sense a house church and house congregation of precious, immortal souls, purchased at a high price, who have been laid as a trust upon your soul. from this day on, who are here not only to be educated, but also to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and to be trained for heaven; but whatsoever we may pursue here, apart from the word of God itself, be it the original languages of the Holy Scriptures or those of profane authors, be it the history of the church or of the world, be it geography, or the mathematical or natural sciences, or the fine arts, music and painting... everything is to be pursued here for the purpose and with the objective that men are to be trained here who will have the general education and the required abilities, the proper spirit, the necessary love, self- effacement, and self sacrifice to call people from all classes, all vocations of life, all cultural levels into Christ’s kingdom, to feed the flock of Christ, and to wage the Lord’s battles.”

Hearing these quotations from Walther enables us to understand what Walther really wants to say when in Thesis II he states: “The ministry... is not a human ordinance but an office established by God himself.” Walther does not claim a direct word of institution for any particular form of the public ministry. He grants that the one public ministry of the Gospel may assume various forms, as circumstances demand. He rather wants to assert that according to his word it is God’s will that special persons in the church be set aside for this office and that they be looked upon as placed by God into their office and as carrying out their office in his name and in his stead. That is what he means when he speaks of a divinely instituted office.

Walther emphasizes that God’s will in this matter is evident from the fact that already in the Old Testament God prophesied that he would give his church of the New Testament shepherds and teachers (Ps 68:11; Jr 3:15). Christ himself called the apostles into the public ministry. Those mediately called into the public ministry of the apostolic church are coordinated with the apostles as colleagues in office and are spoken of as having been called by God (Ac 20:29). The various forms of the ministry and the men exercising them are spoken of as gifts of the ascended and victorious Savior, as a part of the gospel, of the treasure of salvation which our divine Redeemer has won with his redemptive work for all and which he showers upon his church for its edification unto eternal life. Moreover, the Lord in his word sets forth the needed qualifications of those who are to perform publicly the functions of the ministry (1 Tm 3:1- 13; Tt 1:5- 11). God gives to the church

men qualified for the various forms of its work. He does so today and will do so until he returns (Eph 4:7- 16; Ro 2:6- 8; 1 Cor 12:4- 11,28,31. These gifts of the ministry his church of believers should gratefully receive and develop. Not to do so would mean despising God's gifts and therewith God himself.

Thesis III

The ministry of preaching is not an arbitrary office, but its character is such that the Church has been commanded to establish it and is ordinarily bound to it till the end of days.

Quoting Matthew 28:19- 20, Walther rightly states: "From this it is evident that by the command of Christ the apostles' ministry of preaching was to endure to the end of days. Now, if this is to be the case, the Church must continually to the end of days establish the orderly public ministry of preaching and in this ordinance administer to its members the means of grace."

Already Thesis II, inasmuch as it established the proper understanding of a divine institution of the public ministry, rejects the erroneous view of Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling, professor at Erlangen (d. 1853) in this matter. We can say that the entire thrust of Thesis III is against Hoefling's erroneous theory, in which he denied a divine institution of the public ministry and traced its origin to mere expediency. In a footnote to his article on *Kraussold and the Doctrine of the Ministry*, Walther writes: "Regrettably it has come to this, that now everyone who rejects the romanizing doctrine of the ministry is reckoned to be a Hoeflingianer in this doctrine and is held under suspicion as being such, while Hoefling's doctrine of the ministry and that of the romanizing Lutherans are the opposite extremes, between which in the middle lies the pure Lutheran doctrine, to which alone our Synod has confessed itself and still confesses itself." Thus we can see why Walther was induced to offer Thesis III in the above wording. Like Walther we in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, too, have had to defend ourselves against the suspicion of being adherents of Hoefling.

To quote Hoefling from his own writings he contended "that the regularly filled public (*gemeine*) office arises in a God- desired and God- directed manner with inner necessity without the need of our assuming an external necessity due to a ceremonial legal precept or a special divine institution different from that of the general office of all Christians."

Hoefling recognized only the rights and the commission of the universal priesthood of all believers as divinely bestowed and instituted and held that the church of itself developed the public ministry to satisfy a need that always arises when all members of a group share common rights and obligations which they cannot under certain circumstances all exercise and carry out at one and the same time. In such circumstances a group out of expediency generally solves the problem by delegating individuals in its midst who are best qualified to do so to exercise the common rights and to carry out the common obligations for them and in their behalf so that everything will be done decently and in order.

As pointed out in our previous presentation we, too, with Walther and Luther, on the basis of Scripture, recognize that the public ministry serves such a need. Yet in contrast to Hoefling we hold on the basis of Scripture, that it is not the church but our divine Lord himself, who before the New Testament church was ever called into existence, took note of its future need, prophesying in advance that he would take care of it through the gift of the public ministry, that he has set forth the qualifications for this public ministry for us in his New Testament word and continues to give to his church men with all the needed talents required to carry out all the tasks of the public ministry.

Thesis IV

The ministry of preaching is not a peculiar order, set up over and against the common estate of Christians, and holier than the latter, like the priesthood of the Levites, but it is an office of service.

Thesis IV is specifically directed against Grabau's position of the public ministry and that of all

romanizing Lutherans. They taught, as we have heard, that the public ministry is a special self-perpetuating caste or order in the church. They also taught that those in the public ministry are the original and immediate possessors of the keys of heaven. According to this view no one can enter the public ministry except through ordination by a previously ordained minister. The congregation receives the keys of heaven through their ordained pastor. This is called a romanizing position of the ministry because it is an adaptation of the position of the Roman Catholic church. According to this position the keys of heaven belong to the pope as the successor of Peter. The pope transmits the keys through the bishops to the priests by holy orders, through the rite of ordination to the ministry.

This romanizing position of the ministry establishes binding legal precepts for the New Testament church beyond the moral law, the immutable holy will of God for all men and for all time. In the Old Testament there were such additional binding legal precepts concerning the worship life of the Israelites. The sacrifices were effective as worship only if they were performed by somebody from the house of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi.

Also those establish a legally-binding ceremonial law for the New Testament church who teach that the parish pastorate is a special divinely-instituted form of the public ministry. Walther saw very clearly in the matter of the outward abrogation of the Mosaic Law Code through Christ's finished work. He saw also very clearly in the matter of the total absence of binding ceremonial legal regulations in the New Testament church.

Thesis V

The ministry of preaching has the authority to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments and the authority of a spiritual tribunal.

Thesis VI

The ministry of preaching is conferred by God through the congregation, as holder of all church power, or of the keys, and by its call, as prescribed by God. The ordination of those called, with the laying on of hands, is not by divine institution but is an apostolic church ordinance and merely a public, solemn confirmation of the call.

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- B. The ordination of those called, with the laying on of hands, is not by divine institution but is an apostolic church ordinance and merely a public, solemn confirmation of the call.

Thesis VII

The holy ministry is the authority conferred by God through the congregation, as holder of the priesthood and of all church power, to administer in public office the common rights of the spiritual, priesthood in behalf of all.

With Theses V, VI and VII Walther is setting forth the scriptural doctrine of the public ministry over against the erroneous view of Hoefling rejected in Thesis III and the equally erroneous doctrine of the romanizing Lutherans in Thesis IV. These theses need no elaborate discussion, since they rest on what has been established in all the previous theses, both those on the church and those on the ministry.

Our only comment would be concerning the English translation of the concept "*Predigtamt*" in Theses III, IV, V and VI and of *heiliges Predigtamt* in Thesis VII. The English translation of the theses which we have been using is taken from *Walther and the Church*. *Predigtamt* is translated "minister of preaching" (in Theses III, IV, V and VI); *heiliges Predigtamt* is translated "holy ministry" (in Theses I and III). The translation of

“ministry of preaching” is not too happy a rendition. It tends to have one think of a very specific and restrictive form of the public ministry. In all these theses Walther uses *Predigtamt* simply as a synonym for the public ministry. This seems to be evident in Thesis VII where he defined “*heiliges Predigtamt*,” “holy ministry,” as the authority... to administer in public office the common rights of the spiritual priesthood in behalf of all.

In Prof. Chr. Kraushaar’s *Verfassungsformen der Lutherischen Kirche Amerikas* we find the constitutional details of the unique congregational form and the unique forms of the ministry which obtained in St. Louis from 1848 to 1887 under Walther’s leadership. In this arrangement of a combined congregation and four district congregations Walther was the *Pfarrer* of the combined congregation, and each of the district congregations had individual pastors (*Pastoren*). I am sure that Walther considered the *Pfarrer* as well as the four *Pastoren* to be in the exercise of the “*Predigtamt*.” All of them exercised the authority of administering in public office the common rights of the spiritual priesthood in behalf of all. The *Pfarrer* did so in the combined congregation, the *Pastoren* in the district congregations.

Those who consider the local congregation to be the only divinely instituted form of the church will have difficulty in deciding whether the combined congregation or the individual district congregation was that form. The individual district congregations carried out the election of their pastors and teachers. But the combined congregations carried out the suspension and removal of preachers and school teachers from their office. The reception of new congregational members and of their exclusion were matters of the combined congregation alone. Those who consider the congregational pastorate to be the only divinely instituted form of the public ministry will have a similar problem. Was the office of the *Pfarrer* of the combined congregation that form? Or was it the office of the pastors of the district congregations? See the full details of the arrangement in the appendix.

It presented no problem for Walther who served according to this arrangement. For Walther the essence and substance of the public ministry was the important matter, not the particular form. Similarly, not the particular form of the church, but its essence as a gathering of believers was the important thing for him. Apprehended as a gathering of believers on the basis of the marks of the church, a group of confessing Christians gathered in Jesus’ name possessed all the rights and blessings of the royal priesthood: Thus the Lutherans at St. Louis under Walther could devise a *novum*, a unique form both of the church and the ministry. With the same Christian liberty they terminated these forms after Walther’s death. The four district congregations became independent congregations. The four *Pastoren* became their individual pastors. The office of the *Pfarrer* and the arrangement of a combined congregation were discontinued.

Thesis VIII

The ministry is the highest office in the Church, from which, as its stem, all other offices of the Church issue.

If we were correct in our comments on the previous four theses, the understanding of Thesis VIII will likewise cause no difficulty. If we take “the ministry,” (*Predigtamt*) also in Thesis VIII to be a generic term, it is simply the public ministry, having the authority of administering the common rights of the spiritual priesthood in behalf of all. In their spiritual priesthood the believers are entrusted with the keys of heaven, the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacrament. This includes proclaiming the entire Word of God, the preaching of the law to prepare sinners for the message of the gospel, the preaching of the sinners’ justification in pure grace on the basis of Christ’s vicarious atonement to be apprehended in God-given faith; it also includes the message of the believers’ sanctification and the application of the third use of the law to help the Christian in his warfare against his Old Adam. All this is evident from the great commission in which we hear “teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.” The ministry as the authority “to administer in public office the common rights of the spiritual priesthood in behalf of all” has the same scope as that of spiritual priesthood: The scope of its message is neither less nor greater. Hence the ministry must of necessity be the highest office in the church. A lesser office would be one that administers only the outward

affairs of a congregation, such as a church treasurer, a church custodian. Since the power and authority of the priesthood of believers is restricted to the power of the word, the believers in establishing the public ministry cannot confer binding powers beyond the powers that the word itself possesses.

Thesis VIII, of course, speaks against the contention of the Buffalo Synod and other romanizing Lutherans that the office of church government was the highest office in the church. Church government carried out with the Word of God and according to the Word of God is a form of the public ministry, carrying out one of its functions. Church government which presumes to impose binding laws and ceremonies upon the church which go beyond that which God's Word commands and forbids infringes upon Christian liberty. Of course, as the church carries out its entrusted task of preaching the gospel and administering it, it will for the sake of propriety and good order have to set up many outward ceremonies and arrangements which lie in the field of indifferent things, of adiaphora. As we confess in the 10th article of the Formula of Concord, they are in themselves not worship or a part of worship. These regulations will never be binding but will always remain advisory, whether a local congregation or a synod makes them. In the interest of good order and out of Christian love Christians will be ready to observe that which has been considered most useful by the majority.

Thesis IX

Reverence and unconditional obedience is due to the ministry of preaching when the preacher is ministering the Word of God. However, the preacher may not dominate over the Church; he has, accordingly, no right to make new laws, to arrange indifferent matters and ceremonies arbitrarily, and to impose and execute excommunication ALONE, without a previous verdict of the entire congregation.

- A. Reverence and unconditional obedience is due to the ministry of preaching when the preacher is ministering the Word of God.
- B. The preacher may not dominate over the Church; he has accordingly no right to make new laws and to arrange indifferent matters and ceremonies arbitrarily.
- C. The preacher has no right to impose and execute excommunication ALONE, without a previous verdict of the entire congregation.

In this thesis Walther correctly points out the obedience that is due to the public office, and the authority which those called into the public office exercise on the basis of Thesis VIII. At the same time, this thesis also points to presumptuous exercises of authority which have not been conferred upon those who are active in the public ministry. They are of the kind claimed in principle by Stephan and Grabau. Those serving in the pastoral office still need to be on guard lest they seek unwarranted authority in the weakness of their flesh.

Thesis X

According to divine right the function of passing judgment on doctrine belongs indeed to the ministry of preaching. However, also the laymen have this right, and for this reason they also have a seat and vote with the preachers in church courts and councils.

It has already been pointed out that the authority conferred upon the ministry to exercise in public office in the name and in behalf of the church is the authority that the believers themselves possess originally as spiritual priests. That is true also concerning the ministry's function of passing judgment on doctrine. It can therefore of necessity not be one that all the members of the church do not already possess by divine right as believers. The individual Christian's ability to exercise that authority properly depends, of course, upon the spiritual understanding that he or she has gained from God's Word. To qualify for the task of judging doctrine Christians will cherish God's gift of the public ministry so that they may grow through its ministrations of God's Word, grow in Christian judgment and understanding.

Appendix: From Verfassungsformen der Lutherischen Kirche Amerikas by Prof. Ch. Otto Kraushaar

(A translated excerpt from “III Constitution of Trinity Congregation, St. Louis)

2. Combined Congregation and District Congregations

When in 1848 Immanuel Congregation was added to Trinity Congregation, a § was added to the previous constitution as an addendum.

§ 22. Since at the drafting of the congregational constitution only Trinity Church existed, but a new church, called “Immanuel Church, was added in 1848, §9 2 and 14 are applicable and to be applied also to this church, as well as to all churches which the congregation may establish (*bauen*) in the future. The present paragraph shall likewise be unalterable.

Soon there were four churches, and therewith a division into four congregations resulted as a matter of course. Nevertheless, one was not minded to give up the unity and created the novum of a combined congregation consisting of pastoral district congregations. This, however, involved the necessity of a change, in part a reconstruction of the congregational constitution, in the execution of which, as this often happens otherwise in similar cases, the so-called “unalterable” paragraphs became implicated, e.g. §§ 3, 14, 21, 22.

Of the less important changes in §§ 1, 3, 14, 17, 20, and the shift from § 6 on, are to be noted the change of name to “First German Ev. Lutheran Congregation, etc.” and the addition to § 1 “g) is not a member of a secret society.”

What is most important is the regulation of the relation of the combined congregation to its districts in §§ 13- 21, 23- 29.

The combined congregation has a “*Pfarrer*” and the District Congregations their “*Pastoren*,” which are to preach in rotation on Sundays and festivals in all the churches.

The church boards of the district congregations together constitute the church board of the combined congregation.

The combined congregation has a regular meeting every other month and upon necessity special meetings. The district can likewise conduct regular and special meetings. Each district congregation has its special funds (*Kassen*) and the administration of them.

All the existing church property within a district congregation belongs to the district congregation under the conditions a) that this property shall never be used for other than church purposes; b) that the district congregation continues to adhere to the pure doctrine of the Ev. Lutheran Church, as it is contained in the Word of God and set forth in the Book of Concord; c) that the district congregation remains a part of the combined congregation. If a district congregation leaves the association of the combined congregation, it loses all title to the moveable or immovable church-, school-, and other property existing in its district, which then accrues to the other districts, which shall, however, turn it over to those members of the withdrawing district congregation, who did not approve of the withdrawal, for church and school purposes in the district.

That the district congregation, because it was part of a larger unit, did not have full independence becomes even more evident in the stipulations concerning the calling and discharge of pastors and teachers, church discipline, reception of new members, and the termination of district boundaries.

1. The calling and election of the *Pfarrer* of the combined congregation, including the drawing up of the list of candidates, will be carried out by the combined congregation.
2. For the purpose of filling vacant pastor and school teacher positions the combined congregation first of all comes to an accord concerning the candidates to be proposed; from the candidates unanimously proposed by the congregation the district in question then carries out the actual election. School teachers, which as such are already members of the synod, can be elected, called,

and installed forthwith by the district congregation.

3. All other offices of the district congregations, such as trustees, school visitors, elders, almoners, sextons, bellow-blowers, etc, are elected by the district congregation alone.
4. Suspension and removal of preachers and school teachers from their office, as well as the execution of the reception of new congregational members and of [their] exclusion are matters of the combined congregation alone, while it behooves the district congregations to begin the necessary proceedings in a church discipline case and, when they are fruitless, to indicate this to the combined congregation, which in this case is to continue the proceedings and decide.
5. The combined congregation determines the boundary limits of the individual districts.

3. Dissolution of the Combined Congregation

After Walther's death (1887) the combined congregation effected a dissolution, so that the previous districts became independent congregations.

After the deletion from the constitution of all the parts pertaining to the distinction of combined congregations and district congregations an almost complete restitution of the old constitution of 1843 took place as a matter of course. To what extent this was the case can be seen by placing the new constitution next to the old one of 1843.