

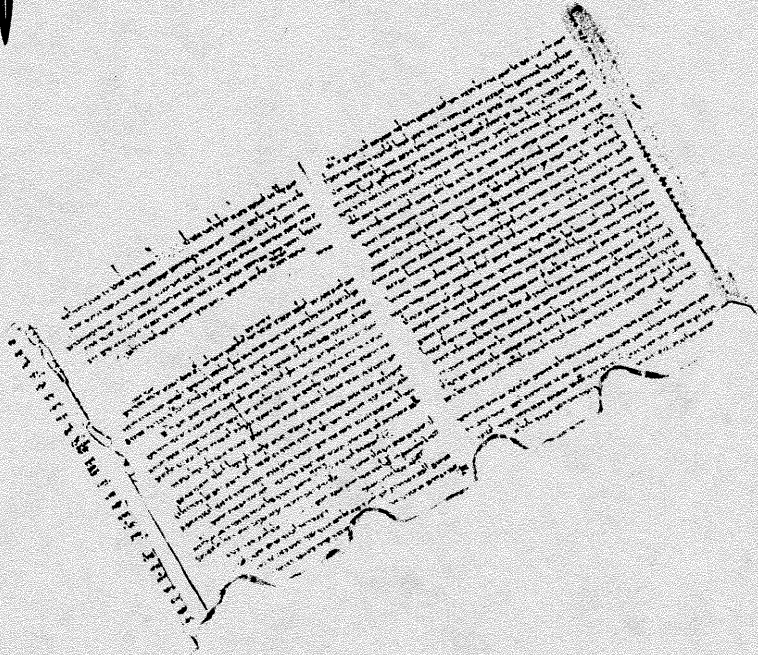
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FOREWORD

In this issue of the Quarterly we are pleased to share with our readers the 1987 annual Reformation lectures, delivered on October 28-29 in Mankato, Minnesota, and sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

The lectures commemorated the centenary of the death of Dr. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther. The lecturers were Dr. Robert Kolb, Professor of religion at Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota; Dr. August Suelflow, Director of Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri; and Professor Arnold Koelpin, who teaches religion and history at Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.

Lecture I reveals the profound influence which the writings of Dr. Martin Luther had on young Walther while a student in Germany and subsequently here in America. Lecture II describes his relationship with other Lutherans in America and his untiring efforts to unite these Lutherans into one church on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions. Lecture III shows how his leadership was instrumental in establishing the Synodical Conference in 1872.

We trust that these lectures will lead us to a renewed appreciation of the legacy which this confessional Lutheran theologian has left to the church.

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R E F O R M A T I O N L E C T U R E S

Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
and Bethany Lutheran College

October 28 & 29, 1987

In Honor of

DR. C. F. W. WALTHER

at the centenary of his death

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles.

2. The second part is a list of dates and times.

3. The third part is a list of locations and addresses.

4. The fourth part is a list of events and activities.

5. The fifth part is a list of organizations and institutions.

6. The sixth part is a list of individuals and their roles.

7. The seventh part is a list of committees and sub-committees.

8. The eighth part is a list of reports and documents.

9. The ninth part is a list of correspondence and letters.

10. The tenth part is a list of financial records and accounts.

11. The eleventh part is a list of legal proceedings and court cases.

12. The twelfth part is a list of public works and infrastructure projects.

13. The thirteenth part is a list of social and cultural activities.

14. The fourteenth part is a list of educational institutions and programs.

15. The fifteenth part is a list of health and medical services.

16. The sixteenth part is a list of religious and spiritual activities.

17. The seventeenth part is a list of sports and recreational activities.

18. The eighteenth part is a list of environmental and conservation efforts.

19. The nineteenth part is a list of international relations and diplomacy.

20. The twentieth part is a list of miscellaneous and other items.

LECTURE I

SINGING THE LORD'S SONG IN A NEW LAND

Luther's Influence on C. F. W. Walther's The Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel

by

Robert Kolb

Concordia College, Saint Paul

"By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.....How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:1,4). Exiles have often worried about the preservation of their faith in a foreign land. C. F. W. Walther did not. He fled his homeland because he found it increasingly difficult to confess and practice his faith there, as a parish pastor, and he hoped in the new world of the North American West to be able, as he remarked years later, to "use the glorious freedom of conscience, of confession, and of worship which God has given us here in a faithful manner."¹ Walther knew that nothing can guarantee the Gospel of Jesus Christ except its faithful proclamation and use, and he knew that the people of God are always by the waters of Babylon in this world, no matter how hospitable or how hostile the surrounding culture may be. Therefore, Walther proceeded to sing the Lord's song in the foreign land which had now become his new homeland.

With some difficulty Walther had learned the words and melody to the Lord's song as a young man in his homeland. He had struggled with Rationalism at the University of Leipzig, and a group of pietistic students led by Pastor Martin Stephan gave him a haven in those days. But perhaps the key factor in his theological development during his time at Leipzig was his extensive and intensive reading of Luther's works during a six-month-long illness in 1831-1832. Walther absorbed much of Luther's theology and formed a habit of reading the reformer which guided his own thought and life for more than fifty years. One of the most significant results of this engagement came in his lectures on the proper distinction of Law and Gospel, delivered in 1884-1885. In them Walther set down the ground work of his own theology and revealed the extent to which and the way in which Martin Luther had shaped the proclamation which Walther formulated for his new homeland on the American frontier.

On Friday, September 12, 1884, Walther once again gathered the students of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, around him to begin a new series of the informal lectures which he presented to his students on Friday evenings. On this occasion he had chosen a topic which would occupy him for over a year and which would be shared with a world far larger, far beyond the group which gathered in Saint Louis on those Friday evenings. He was initiating his lectures on the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. As he began, he observed that Luther wanted to place the Christian who is well versed in the art of dividing the Law from the Gospel ahead of all others and called him a doctor of Holy Writ. Walther then remarked, "But I would not have you believe that I intend to place myself ahead of everybody else and be regarded as a doctor of the Sacred Scriptures. That would be a great mistake. I admit that people sometimes call me a doctor of theology;

but for myself I rather wish to remain a humble disciple and sit at the feet of our Dr. Luther, to learn this doctrine from him as he learned it from the apostles and prophets."²

It is indeed the case that Ferdinand Walther wanted to remain Luther's humble disciple and sit at his feet. Nine years before he began these lectures he had written, "They do not know us who label our theology that of the seventeenth century. As highly as we treasure the immense accomplishments of the great Lutheran dogmaticians of this period, it is nevertheless not really to them that we return, but rather above all to our precious Book of Concord and to Luther, in whom we recognize the man whom God chose as the Moses of his church of the New Covenant, to lead his church, which had fallen into slavery to the Antichrist, out of that slavery. He is the column of smoke and fire of the Word of God, clear and pure as gold as it is."³ Franz Pieper confirmed his mentor's self-appraisal: "In Luther he saw not just one more theologian alongside others, but the reformer of the church whom God Himself had selected, the one who revealed the Antichrist."⁴

Walther worked tirelessly to promote an understanding of Luther's proclamation of the Biblical message in his own writings and in the periodicals which he edited. He inspired and supported the effort to make Luther's writings available in what came to be called the Saint Louis edition, the reworking of the eighteenth century edition of Luther's works produced by the Jena professor Johann Georg Walch (1693-1776). This nineteenth century revision was completed largely under the capable leadership of Albrecht Friedrich Hoppe (1828-1911), whom Walther persuaded to leave his congregation in New Orleans in 1886 to begin a twenty-four-year period of editing which brought

the project to a successful completion. Its twenty-three volumes became the standard reference for the working theologians in the parsonages of many German-American Lutheran congregations.⁵ Walther was always concerned about the daily life of the laity as well, and because he believed that Luther's words would give lay people rich consolation, he sponsored the organization of the Volksbibliothek, the thirty volumes of which were issued 1859-1876, making selected writings of Luther available for popular consumption.⁶

Many people have, of course, turned to Luther to help them achieve ends of their own. Even in his day Walther was familiar with the Luther of the Enlightenment, the Luther of American Protestant anti-Roman Catholic political doctrine, the Luther of anti-Napoleonic German national feeling, as well as the Luther of Lutheran Orthodoxy.⁷ But in his own reading of Luther, Walther had been led to cut through to the heart of Luther's structure for the practice of theology, to the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. He lived just before the dawn of the "Luther Renaissance," which was foreshadowed by the scholarship of his German contemporary, Theodosius von Harnack (1817-1889), and which began in the generation following his death with the work of Karl Holl and his students. Therefore, Walther did not know "the young Luther" of a later day, nor did he know anything of a "tower experience."⁸ Although he recognized the role of late medieval theology and of Luther's *Anfechtungen* in Luther's theological development, Walther paid relatively little attention to the historical course of the reformer's thought, both for better and for worse. For better since he did not have to deal with the mire and morass of argument over when Luther experienced his Evangelical breakthrough. For worse because he worked only with the categories into which the late sixteenth

century and early seventeenth century theologians had poured Luther's thought. Thus, he missed those principles and presuppositions which modern Luther students have reminded us formed the undergirding of his thought. I am thinking of concepts such as "the theology of the cross," "the two kinds of righteousness," and "the two governments." Indeed, the proper distinction of Law and Gospel is just such a guiding principle and presupposition for Luther's thought. Much of Lutheran Orthodoxy had treated it as one more doctrinal topic among the Loci, one more article of faith among the others. Walther broke out of that way of thinking, and although he did not label the proper distinction of Law and Gospel a "conceptual framework" or part of the "grammar of faith," he did, in these lectures, establish it as such. In so doing, he anticipated the approach of later Luther scholars in an important way.

"Since the days of the apostles there has not been a more glorious teacher of this art than Luther," Walther remarked.⁹ Demonstrating that he knew exactly what the distinction is all about, Walther continued, "Yet he confesses that in an effort to reduce his teaching to practice he was often defeated. In spite of the fact that he had led a decent life and was not guilty of gross sins, the devil often vexed him. He tormented him with the sins of his inner life. Nonplussed, Luther would often come to Bugenhagen, his confessor, with his worries and, kneeling, receive absolution, whereupon he would depart rejoicing."¹⁰ Not only the reformer's personal experiences but also his method of presentation inspired Walther. "We note that Luther does not develop this doctrine in scientific [wissenschaftlich = formal academic] fashion, but he proclaims it like a prophet. That is why he made such a great impression. If he had written a scientific treatise in Latin on this

subject with systematic divisions and subdivisions, the people would have marveled and said, 'That man is a great scholar,' but he would not by this method have made the impression which he did make."¹¹

Not only his historical example but also Luther's clear exposition of the Biblical message inspired and guided Walther's own formulation of that message for immigrant life on the American frontier. In his seventh lecture he stated,

it is, indeed, a delight to read Luther's sermons. One finds his own likeness on every page. At first they give one a terrible fright, a stunning and stupefying one. At first Luther hurls one into the abyss, but, when that has been done, he says, "Do you believe this?" Answer, "Yes." Then Luther says, "Very well, you may come up again." Luther's sermons are full of thunder and lightning, but these are speedily followed by the soft blowing of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel. It is impossible for the reader to resist; he cannot but admit that this is good, nourishing bread, the proper daily food for his soul. Luther does not point a long way; he does not propound many teachings how to get out of the abyss. As soon as he has made a person see that he is a poor sinner, he says to him: "Quit your despair; the grace of Christ is greater than the sins of the whole world." At all times Luther preaches the Law and the Gospel alongside of each other in such a manner that the Law is given an illumination by the Gospel which makes the former much more terrible, while the sweetness and the rich comfort of the Gospel is greatly increased by the Law, i.e., by contrast. That will make people listen to you. That will rouse their interest; they will get the

impression that you want to lift them out of perdition this very hour and send them away from church rejoicing.¹²

Not only Walther's ideas but also his delivery, with that familiar use of dialogue which Luther employs with such great effectiveness, echo his mentor.

Luther did more than influence Walther's style and content of thought, however, in these lectures on the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. The lectures depend heavily on direct citations from Luther's writings for both illustrative material and for significant parts of the burden of the points being made. Nearly twenty percent of the material in the first printed English translation of the lectures (the Dau translation) consists of direct quotations from Luther -- some sixty citations from more than thirty individual publications, sermons, or letters of the reformer.

Some of the citations cover hardly half a page, but several extend over several pages and carry an argument which Walther is making in considerable detail. With such longer quotations Walther might inject his own comments to sharpen a point and then return to Luther's text. In commenting on the preaching of the Law to those who are already in terror on account of their sins (thesis VIII) Walther reproduced the letter which Luther had written to his good friend, Georg Spalatin, in 1544, when Spalatin had fallen into a deep depression because of a mistake in pastoral care. The letter provided Walther with a good example of how the Gospel should be applied to the despairing.¹³ Walther also quoted extensively from Luther's comments on Galatians 3:11 to offer his readers an analysis of the nature of faith as defined Biblically in contrast to the medieval definition of faith. Walther interspersed comments as he

quoted, and in particular he pointed out how Roman Catholics have lost the comfort of trusting in salvation through faith alone.¹⁴

Walther turned to Luther at almost every point in his lectures. Of his twenty-five theses only two are not explicated with citations from the reformer: thesis thirteen deals with issuing an appeal which suggests that a person could make himself believe. Thesis fourteen treats requiring faith as a causative condition of justification and salvation. Neither of these two theses is supported or illustrated with material from Luther's pen, although Walther did call upon Leonhard Hutter, Johann Gerhard, and other orthodox Lutheran theologians for aid in these brief discussions.¹⁵ It should be noted that Walther did use at least one citation from Luther in illuminating others of his theses which he treated only briefly.

The heart of Walther's exposition of the proper distinction of Law and Gospel falls, as he himself observed,¹⁶ in his ninth thesis, "the Word of God is not rightly divided when sinners who have been struck down and terrified by the Law are directed, not to the Word and the Sacraments, but to their own prayers and wrestlings with God in order that they may win their way into a state of grace; in other words, when they are told to keep on praying and struggling until they feel that God has received them into grace." It may be that Walther felt it necessary to deal with this point extensively since he knew that his students would often encounter problems along these lines on the American frontier because of the predominance of what he labeled "Reformed" thought among, as he stated, "the Baptists, the Methodists, the Evangelical Alliance, the Episcopalians, the Presbyterians . . . branches of the great tree of the

Reformed Church."¹⁷ Twenty percent of the printed translation of lectures is taken up with a discussion of the thesis, and Luther provided support from twelve passages, drawn from his postils, his confessional writings, his treatise On the Keys, his lectures on Isaiah, and a sermon delivered at Marburg in 1529. Four citations from Luther provided key material for Walther's introduction and initial definition of his subject. Six quotations helped explicate thesis three, that the proper distinction of Law and Gospel is the "most difficult and the highest art of Christians in general and of theologians in particular." Three other theses were explained with the aid of five Luther citations apiece.

Walther's choice of citations demonstrates how broad his knowledge of the corpus of Luther's writings was. He was largely innocent of the significance of chronology in evaluating Luther's writings; of course he recognized, as had his predecessors since the 1550s, that Luther's earliest writings still betrayed traces of medieval influences. But for the most part Walther simply proceeded to use passages from whatever work could provide what he needed. Not surprisingly, Luther's great exposition of the proper distinction of Law and Gospel, his 1535 Galatians commentary, provided nearly a quarter of Walther's citations. Another nine come from the postils. Four brief quotations come from the Smalcald Articles; the catechisms provided one each. Luther's "Sermon on Law and Gospel" from 1531 was drawn on for important background to support the first three theses, and Luther's sermons on John also offered three separate citations. Beyond these, Walther chose a wide variety of sources within the Luther corpus for single quotations where appropriate. From the heady days of the Reformation's beginning, Walther cited Luther's

theses on indulgences and On Christian Liberty. He cited two letters, one to an Augustinian brother and priest, Georg Spenlein, from 1516, the other to Spalatin. From Luther's Biblical work, in the lecture hall and in the pulpit, came the majority of quotations: in addition to the Galatians commentary, the postils, and the sermon on John's gospel, Walther turned to the reformer's treatments of Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Matthew, and 1 John. Once he cited the Table Talk, as well as the Appeal to the Counselors of All Cities of Germany in Behalf of the Establishment and Maintenance of Christian Schools, On the Councils and the Church, Against the Antinomians, the Instruction to the Saxon Visitors, and On the Keys.

What did Walther draw from Luther? The reformer provided Walther with illustrations of his chief concerns, for instance in the letter to the despairing Spalatin, but above all, Luther gave his latter-day student good summaries of the leit-motifs of his topic. As he closed his second lecture, Walther turned to Luther's sermon on Law and Gospel for a summary definition.

Law is to be called, and to be, anything that refers to what we are to do. On the other hand, the Gospel, or the Creed, is any doctrine or word of God which does not require works from us and does not command us to do something, but bids us simply accept as a gift the gracious forgiveness of our sins and everlasting bliss offered us. In accepting these gifts, we surely are not doing anything; we merely receive, we merely suffer to be given to us, what is given and presented to us by means of the Word, as when God gives you a promise like this: I make thee a present of this or that, etc.

For instance, in Holy Baptism, which I have not ordained and which is not my work, but the word and work of God, He says to me: Come hither; I baptize thee and wash thee from all thy sins. Accept this gift, and it shall be thine. Now, when you are thus baptized, what else do you do than receive and accept a gracious gift? The difference then between the Law and the Gospel is this: The Law makes demands of things that we are to do; it insists on works that we are to perform in the service of God and our fellow-men. In the Gospel, however, we are summoned to a distribution of rich alms which we are to receive and take: the loving-kindness of God and eternal salvation. Here is an easy way of illustrating the difference between the two: In offering us help and salvation as a gift and donation of God, the Gospel bids us hold the sack open and have something given us. The Law, however, gives nothing, but only takes and demands things from us. Now, these two, giving and taking, are surely far apart. For when something is given me, I am not doing anything towards that: I only receive and take; I have something given me. Again, when in my profession I carry out commands, likewise when I advise and assist my fellow-man, I receive nothing, but give to another whom I am serving. Thus the Law and the Gospel are distinguished as to their formal statements: the one promises, the other commands. The Gospel gives and bids us take; the Law demands and says, This you are to do.¹⁸

As Walther continued his introduction in the next lecture, he noted that Luther had not limited himself to commenting on the proper distinction of

Law and Gospel only where these terms themselves occur in a text but rather wherever he found the opportunity to employ this conceptual framework for the task of proclaiming and teaching the Word.¹⁹ Luther thus offered help in the practical identification and use of the Law. His comment on Psalm 23:3 pointed out that

the Law cannot restore the soul, for it is a word that makes demands upon us and commands us to love God with our whole heart, etc., and our neighbor as ourselves. The Law condemns every person who fails to do this and pronounces this sentence upon him: Cursed is every one that doeth not all that is written in the book of the Law. Now, it is certain that no man on earth is doing this. Therefore, in due time the Law approaches the sinner, filling his soul with sadness and fear. If no respite is provided from its smiting, it continues its onslaught, forcing the sinner into despair and eternal damnation.²⁰

In reminding his hearers that "he who has never been athirst has not tasted. Thirst is a good hostler, and hunger is a good cook. But where there is not thirst, even the best drink is not relished," Walther turned to Luther's comments on John 7.

The doctrine of the Law, then, was given for this purpose, that a person be given a sweat-bath of anguish and sorrow under the teaching of the Law. Otherwise, men become sated and surfeited and lose all relish of the Gospel. If you meet with such people, pass them by; we are not preaching to them. This preaching is for the thirsty; to them the message is brought: "Let them

come to me; I will give them to drink and refresh them."21

Walther immediately reinforced his drawing of the distinction between Law and Gospel with a longer citation from the reformer's comment on Galatians 2:3 and 4. There he carefully distinguished the time or the situation in which each is appropriate.

When we are speaking of faith and are ministering to men's consciences, the Law is to be utterly excluded; it must remain on earth. When you treat of what men are to do, light the night-lamp of works, or of the righteousness that is by way of the Law. Thus the sun and the unmeasured light of the Gospel and of grace is to shine during the day; the lamp of the Law, however, at night. A conscience, then, that has been thrown into terror by feeling its sin should argue thus: I am now engaged in earthly tasks. Here let the donkey labor, slave, and carry the burden that is laid upon him. That is to say, Let the body with its members be subject to the Law. But when you ascend to heaven, leave the donkey with its burden on earth. . . in affliction you will realize that the Gospel is a rare guest in men's consciences, while the Law is their daily and familiar companion. . . . when the conscience is terrified by sin, which the Law points out and magnifies, you are to speak thus: There is a time to die, and there is a time to live; there is a time for hearing the Law, and there is a time to be unconcerned about the Law; there is a time to hear the Gospel, and there is a time for acting as if you were ignorant of the Gospel. At this moment let

the Law be gone and let the Gospel come; for now is not the time to hear the Law, but the Gospel. But how about this? You have not done any good; on the contrary, you have committed grievous sins. I admit that, but I have found the forgiveness of sins through Christ, for whose sake all my sins have been remitted. However, while the conscience is not engaged in this conflict, you are obliged to discharge the ordinary functions of your office; at a time when you must act as a minister of the Word, a magistrate, a husband, a teacher, a pupil, etc., it is not in season to hear the Gospel, but the Law. At such a time you are to perform the duties of your profession.²²

Walther liked this passage and used shorter parts of it later in reiterating the necessity of distinguishing the situations in which each word from God should be applied. Luther was employing the conceptual framework of the two kinds of righteousness at this point; in his preface to the Galatians commentary he had stressed that the knowledge of the two kinds of righteousness was the key basis for an understanding of Paul's theology. Although Walther did not specifically label that concept of two kinds of righteousness in his discussion, he did recognize its importance as he selected this passage for use in his own lecture.

Walther emphasized the difficulty of distinguishing Law and Gospel and stressed the fact that only the Holy Spirit can direct the proper use of each by calling on Luther to support the contention of his third thesis, that this distinction is the "most difficult and highest art of Christians in general and of theologians in particular,

taught only by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience." After reminding his students of Luther's bestowal of the doctorate upon those who divide the Law from the Gospel, he cited words from the Table Talk: "There is not a man on earth who knows how properly to divide the Law from the Gospel. When we hear about it in a sermon, we imagine that we know how to do it, but we are greatly mistaken. The Holy Ghost alone knows this art. There have been times when I imagined I understood it because during so long a time I had written a great deal about it; but believe me, when I come to a pinch, I perceive that I have widely missed the mark. Accordingly, God the Holy Ghost alone must be regarded as Master of, and Instructor in, this art." Walther observed to his students, "Mark this confession of Luther, the man who had written large tomes on this subject in many years. Let me remark, in passing, that we are always more inclined to give ear to the Law than to the Gospel."²³ He might have added, "and also to give voice to the Law than to the Gospel, for he found it easier to admonish the prospective pastors before him than to use Luther's confession of his own failures to divide Law and Gospel -- or a confession of his own -- to offer a word of comfort for his hearers. More frequently his students heard Walther's word of Law regarding their preaching: "Read your sermon over and see whether you have rightly divided Law and Gospel; for then you may often discover that there is where you made a mistake. In that case, your sermon is wrong although it contains no false doctrine;" or "A preacher must exercise great care lest he say something wrong."²⁴ Even in expressing the impossibility of always preaching correctly, Walther fails to give instruction on how the preacher should repent and find comfort in the very Gospel which he may have failed to proclaim properly to his people; for instance, in this passage: "To

divide Law and Gospel properly is a very, very difficult task. As Luther says, all preachers cannot but remain mere apprentices in this art until death. Nevertheless, a young theologian must be able to recite at least this first lesson in this curriculum. He must know the goal that he is to reach, and he must have made a start in reaching the goal."²⁵

Walther believed it was of utmost importance to stress the unconditional nature of both the demands of the Law and the comfort of the Gospel. In explaining that the Word of God is not rightly divided when the Law is preached to those who are already in terror on account of their sins, or the Gospel to those who live securely in their sins (thesis VIII), he used not only Luther's letter of comfort to Spalatin, from late in the reformer's life, but also one of the letters which we have from his hand, one addressed to a priest in Memmingen, Georg Spenlein, whom Luther had met when they were both living at the Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg. Walther comments, "In the judgment of all who are familiar with Luther's writings, this letter is most excellent." Walther's rudimentary sense of Luther's historical development expressed itself on this letter: "One marvels that Luther could write such a letter even at that early date. It is sterling gold and pure honey." It is indeed a model of properly distinguishing Law and Gospel as well:

I wish to know the condition of your heart, whether you have at least come to loathe your own righteousness and desire to rejoice in the righteousness of Christ and to be of good cheer because of it. For in these days the temptation to presumptuousness is very strong, particularly in those who strive with might and main to be righteous

and godly and do not know of the altogether immaculate righteousness of God which is freely given us in Christ. As a result of this they are searching for something which is freely given us in Christ. As a result of this they are searching for something good in themselves until they become confident that they can pass muster before God as people who are properly adorned with virtuous and meritorious deeds -- all of which is impossible. While you were with us, you held this opinion, or rather this error, and are not quite rid of it yet. Therefore, my dear brother, learn Christ -- Christ Crucified. Learn to sing praises to Him and to despair utterly of your own works. Say to Him: Thou, my Lord Jesus, art my Righteousness; I am Thy sin. Thou hast taken from me what is mine and hast given me what is Thine. Thou didst become what Thou were not and madest me to be what I was not. Beware of your ceaseless striving after a righteousness so great that you no longer appear as a sinner in your own eyes and do not want to be a sinner. For Christ dwells only in sinners. He came down from heaven, where He dwelt in the righteous, for the very purpose of dwelling in sinners also. Ponder this love of His, and you will realize His sweetest consolation. For if we must achieve rest of conscience by our own toil and worry, for what purpose did He die? Therefore, you are to find peace in Him by a hearty despair of yourself and your own works. And now that He has received you, made your sins His and His righteousness yours, learn also from Him firmly to believe this, as behooves you; for cursed is every one who does not believe this.

Luther's beautiful expression of what is generally called his "joyous exchange" is indeed an expression of the Gospel as precious as gold and as sweet as honey. Walther balanced this insistence of the unconditional pronouncement of the Gospel with an equally strong insistence that the secure sinner must hear only the unadulterated condemnation of the Law, and he reinforced this point with quotations from Luther.²⁶

Among the many challenges Walther encountered in trying to sing the Lord's song in his new homeland was that of faithfully representing the Biblical understanding of how God works through those elements of the created order which He has selected to be the instruments of His forgiving and recreating power: human language, and water, and bread-body and wine-blood. For his day and ours Walther could hardly have said enough about directing "sinners who have been struck down and terrified by the Law" to the Word and the Sacraments, not "to their own prayers and wrestlings with God in order that they may win their way into a state of grace" (thesis IX). Luther's theology is, of course, first of all a theology of the Word, and the central concern of his Reformation, to assure sinners that nothing can snatch them out of the hands of their loving God, even though those hands have nail holes in them, rests upon the assurance given in the verbal and sacramental promise of God. Walther used twelve citations from Luther to help his students understand this thesis.

Luther criticized those who failed to understand that the power of God is lodged in the proclamation of the Gospel and its dispensation through baptism and the Lord's Supper because they were taking away the great comfort which God had given in the means of grace. We should not forget that

even though the fourth article of the third part of the Smalcald Articles was labeled simply "the Gospel" when the document was printed, it, in fact, deals with the means of grace. For it begins with the affirmation that the Gospel "offers us its resources and aid against sin and not just in one way, for God is plenteous in His grace," and then it continues with a list of the several ways in which God does convey His grace to us, through the preaching of the Word, baptism, absolution, the Lord's Supper, and the mutual conversation and consolation of Christians with one another -- "sharing" as we would call it today. There can be no separation of the Gospel of the cross and the resurrection from the means by which it becomes effective in our lives.

That is why Luther reacted so harshly against both Sacramentarians and Anabaptists:

True, they confess Christ who was crucified and died for us and thus saved us; but they renounce the means by which we obtain Him; they demolish the way, the bridge, and path leading to Christ. . . They refused Christ and any sacraments by which a person obtains grace. They act just like people to whom a preacher says, "Here I have a treasure," but who does not put the treasure plainly before them or give them the key to unlock it. Of what benefit would the treasure be to them? They lock up the treasure from us, which they ought to lay plainly before us, and lead us upon a monkey's tail. They deny me access to the treasure and refuse to hand it over to me that I may have and use it.²⁷

Luther had frequently woven baptism into his discussion of the Christian life in his writings.

Joined to his understanding of the vital significance of baptism for daily Christian living was his emphasis on the importance of confession and absolution, which reenacts the drowning and raising of the believer on a daily basis. This baptismal understanding of the life of the believer receded in the period of Orthodoxy, in part because the theology of the period was shaped to a great extent by polemics, which did not give as much attention to Anabaptists as to the Sacramentarians who erred on the Lord's Supper,²⁸ in part because of the pastoral difficulties which resulted from trying to practice private confession in a situation in which Lutheranism had to function as the cultural religion of much of northern Europe. Walther's own resolve to revitalize confession and absolution in his church was undercut by a certain individualizing tendency which kept him from emphasizing its benefits and blessings. Whether from the Kantian philosophy of the German academic scene of his youth or -- less likely -- from his American environment or from some other source, this tendency to permit the short circuiting of the work of members of the body of Christ resulted in his not promoting private confession and absolution in a more dynamic way. Because of this Walther did not succeed in institutionalizing the practice of private confession and absolution in the Missouri Synod. Nonetheless, he certainly did recognize its importance and argued for its use, on an informal basis also by the laity, in part on the basis of Luther's statement in the Small Catechism that the Keys had been given "not to the preachers, but to the church."²⁹

Walther turned to Luther's postil, commenting on John 20:22 and 23:

Christ means to say: Whenever you pronounce a word of absolution upon a sinner, that

shall have been spoken in heaven and shall be as valid as if God himself had uttered it. For He is in your mouth; therefore your speaking amounts to His speaking. Now, it is certainly true that when Christ, the Lord over sin and hell, speaks these words over you: "Thy sins shall be removed," they must be removed, and nothing shall hinder it. Again, when He says: "Thy sins shall not be forgiven thee," they remain unforgiven; and though you should exhaust your utmost strength in the effort, neither yourself nor an angel nor a saint nor any creature could forgive your sin. The power to do this, however, is vested in every Christian. . . . It is a power which we derive from the resurrection of Christ.³⁰

We use this power to create that peace which passes all understanding in the lives of fellow believers. Walther turned again to Luther's Church Postil, to his sermon on the epistle for the Sunday after Christmas, for an extended comment on the goal of absolution:

This crying [of "Abba, Father"] is felt when one's conscience, without wavering and questioning, conceives a staunch boldness to be quite certain, not only that his sins have been forgiven, but also that he is a child of God, assured of his salvation, and may with a cheerful and assured heart and with all confidence call God his dear Father and cry to Him. Of these things he must be more certain than of his very life and must be ready to suffer every kind of death, and hell in addition, rather than allow this assurance to be taken from him by yielding to doubt. It would be an

offense to the rich life of Christ and to His suffering if we were not to believe that the superabundance of all His merits has been acquired for us and if we were not to allow His great living and dying to incite us, and confirm us in, this confidence with the same force as sin and afflictions are deterring us from it and make us despondent. True, there may come a strife in a Christian causing him an anxious feeling, leading him to think he is not a child of God, and to imagine and feel that God is an angry, stern judge, as happened to Job and many others. But in a conflict of this kind childlike confidence, though trembling and quaking, must conquer in the end, or everything is lost. Were Cain to hear this, he would cross himself with hands and feet and say with great humility: God keep me from this awful heresy and temerity! Am I, poor sinner, to be so conceited as to call myself a child of God? No, no; I shall humble myself, acknowledge that I am a poor sinner, etc. People of this kind you must shun and beware of them as of the greatest enemies of the Christian faith and your salvation. We know, indeed, that we are poor sinners; but in this business we are not to consider what we are and what we do, but what Christ is, has done, and is still doing for us. We are not talking about our human nature, but about the mercy of God . . . Do you consider it something to be a child of God? Then do not consider it a trifling matter that the Son of God is come, made of a woman and placed under the Law, for the purpose of making you such a child of God. Everything that God does is great. That is the reason

why it produces great joy and courage and intrepid spirits, who are not afraid of anything and able to do all things. Cain's attitude is narrow and produces nothing but despondent hearts, full of anguish, who are not fit either to suffer or to be active and get afraid at the sound of a shaking leaf Also your sin will cry, causing abject despondency in your conscience. But the Spirit of Christ must drown these cries, that is, produce in you a stronger confidence than your despondency. . . . This calling and crying of the Spirit within us, then, is nothing else than a strong, unwavering, trustful crying with our whole heart to God, as our dear Father, from us, as His dear children.³¹

Walther continued by observing:

The misery of our times is caused by the fact that the faith of which Luther speaks is rare. Either men are spiritually dead and therefore are unconcerned about their soul's welfare, imagining that they will get to heaven anyway, or they are filled with anguish and uncertainty. Many who have spent their lives in their horrible "faith," which looks like faith, but is not, die with the thought in their hearts: what will become of me now?³²

These are words which echo across the centuries into our time with an acute relevance.

The nature of that faith Walther described by resorting to Luther's sermon on the Gospel lesson for the fourteenth Sunday after Trinity in the Church Postil. True faith, the reformer insisted, waives previous knowledge and assurance of

its worthiness to receive the grace of God and to be heard by Him. That is what doubters do who reach out after God and try Him. They are groping after God similarly to a blind man groping along a wall; they first of all want to feel and be certified that He cannot escape them. The epistle to the Hebrews, in Chap. 11, says: Faith is a sure confidence in things hoped for, not judging things by what they appear to be. That means, faith clings to things that it does not see, feel, or apprehend by means of the senses. It is rather a trusting reliance on God, on whom it is willing to risk and stake anything, not doubting that it will come out winner. The outcome really certifies the correctness of such trust, and the feeling and sensation will come to him unsought and undesired in and by his relying upon it and believing it.

True faith, Walther affirms, "declines to know and to be assured before it will give credence, but it gives credence the moment God's Word is spoken."³³

That Word speaks Christ to us. From Luther's sermon on the Gospel lesson for the first Sunday after the Epiphany in the Church Postil, Walther quoted:

God will not permit us to rely on anything or to cling with our hearts to anything that is not Christ as revealed in His Word, no matter how holy and full of the Spirit it may seem. Faith has no other ground on which to take its stand. . . . We should remember that we must seek Christ in His Father's house and business; we must simply cling to the Word of the Gospel alone, which shows us Christ aright and teaches

us to know Him. Learn, then, from this and any other spiritual affliction that, whenever you wish to convey genuine comfort to others or to yourself, you must say with Christ: what does it mean that you are running hither and thither, that you torment yourselves with anxious and sad thoughts, imagining that God will not keep you in His grace and there is no longer any Christ for you? Why do you refuse to be satisfied unless you find Him in yourselves and have the feeling of being holy and without sin? You will never succeed; all your toil will be labor lost. Do you not know that Christ will be nowhere nor permit Himself to be found anywhere except in that which is His Father's, not in anything that is yours or other people's? There is no fault in Christ or His mercy; He is never lost and can always be found. But the fault is in you, because you are not seeking Him where you ought to, namely, in the place where He is to be sought. You are being guided by your feeling and think you can apprehend Him with your thoughts. You must come to the place where there is neither your own nor any man's business, but God's business and government, namely to His Word. There you will find Him and hear and see that there is no wrath and disfavor against you in Him, as you fear in your despondency, but nothing else than grace and cordial love towards you, and that He is acting as your kind and loving Mediator with the Father, speaking the kindest and best words in your behalf. Nor does He send you trials with the intention of casting you off, but in order that you may learn to know Him better and cling more firmly to His Word and in order to rebuke your unreasonableness,

thus forcing you to learn by experience how cordially and faithfully he cherishes you.³⁴

Such sweet comfort of the Gospel has to be held in tension with the Law, Walther believed, and so he condemned the concept that a person living in mortal sins can have faith through the acceptance of Biblical truth. He found support for this unconditional proclamation of the Law in the Smalcald Articles (III,III) and in a 1536 memorandum which Luther and his colleagues had written. It stated:

When a person sins against his conscience, that is, when he knowingly and intentionally acts contrary to God, as, for instance, an adulterer or any other criminal who knowingly does wrong, he is, while consciously persisting in his intention, without repentance and faith and does not please God. . . . It is absolutely impossible for these two things to coexist in a person, faith that trusts in God and a wicked purpose, or, as it is called, an evil conscience. Faith and the worship of God are delicate affairs; a very slight wound inflicted on the conscience may drive out faith and prayer. Every tried Christian is frequently put through this experience.³⁵

In this same thesis Walther rejected the contention that faith saves because it produces love and a reformation of one's mode of living. That part of the thesis he also bolstered with Luther's arguments, from his commentary on Galatians, in sections in which he criticized the medieval understanding of the relationship of faith and works.³⁶ Anything which might suggest that human effort, even religious effort, could save sinners earned Walther's wrath. He cited the third article of the third part of the Smalcald Articles at some length

to support his assertion that contrition dare never be presented alongside of faith as a cause of the forgiveness of sin.³⁷ Heavily influenced by Pietism himself, both positively and negatively, Walther warned against its focus on the human creature in assessing godly living. He condemned the practice of making "people believe that they are truly converted as soon as they have become rid of certain vices and engage in certain works of piety and virtuous practices" (thesis XVI). Luther provided him with effective support. In preaching on John 3:3 he had said,

The fact that you are an honorable citizen of Jerusalem secures your life, honor, and distinction in this city. But if you wish to get to heaven and into the Church and kingdom of Christ, you must understand that you will have to become a new man. You must consider yourself an unborn infant, who is not only unable to do a single good work, but has not even attained to life and being as yet. That is what Christians preach. The Christian doctrine teaches us that we must first become different people, that is, we must be born again. How is this done? By the Holy Spirit and by the water of Baptism. After I have been born again and have been made godly and God-fearing, I begin a new life, and what I do now, in my regenerate state, is good.³⁸

In rejecting the excesses of Pietism, Walther also rejected the distinction made by many prominent Pietist theologians between a person's being awakened and being converted, which he connected with the idea that the inability to believe is due to the person's not being permitted to believe. At issue here was the pietistic attempt to preserve the doctrine of grace yet concede a role to

the human psyche and experience by distinguishing God's initial stage of awakening faith from the completion of conversion with the addition of acts of love. From Luther's On the Bondage of the Will, Walther quoted:

As long as a person is convinced that he has some ability, even if it is altogether trifling, to work out his salvation, he continues to trust in himself and does not at all despair of his own efforts. Accordingly, he does not humble himself before God, and he selects a certain place, time, and work by which he hopes, or at least desires, ultimately to obtain salvation. But a person who entertains no doubt whatever that everything depends on the will of God, utterly despairs of his own effort, does not do any choosing, but expects God to work in him, such a person is closest to divine grace and salvation. Therefore these things are publicly taught for the sake of the elect, in order that they may be saved after having been humbled and crushed in the manner aforestated. The rest resist this humbling; yea, they reject the teaching that a person must despair of his own efforts and demand that some ability be left them, even though it be quite paltry. These remain secretly proud and enemies of the grace of God. This, I say, is the one reason for teaching the godly who have been humbled to know, to pray for, and to accept the promise of mercy.³⁹

Awakening and conversion both take place because of God's will and power; He does not start a conversion process which the person whom He has awakened then completes. Walther had grasped the heart of The Bondage of the Will very effectively, and this

treatise was one which Luther regarded as a key to his understanding his theology.

Walther reiterated the importance of preaching the Gospel in its fulness and thus overwhelming hearers with God's love, rather than giving them little tidbits which tend to turn them to their own works. Furthermore, he reminded his students that it is not a matter of being permitted to believe but rather simply a matter of trusting God's gracious promise. Luther, too, had said, in his sermon on the gospel lesson for the Sunday after Easter in the Church Postil, "Unbelief is nothing else than blasphemy and brands God a liar. For when I say to you: 'Thy sins are forgiven thee in the name of God,' and you do not believe it, your action is tantamount to saying: 'Who knows whether it is true, whether God really means what He says?' If you do not believe, it would be better for you to be far removed from the Word of God. For God wants to have the preaching of His Word to be regarded as nothing less than His own preaching."⁴⁰

Walther ends his discussion of the proper distinction of Law and Gospel with the magnificent blast of the Lord's trumpet, "the Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching" (thesis XXV). The descant comes from Luther's preface to the epistle to the Galatians, "In my heart there reigns, and shall ever reign, this one article; namely, faith in my dear Lord Christ, which is the sole beginning, middle, and end of all spiritual and godly thoughts which I may have at any time, day or night."⁴¹

Walther went on to read the reformer's comments on Psalm 68:18 from the House Postil: "While on earth [this King] was not engaged in child's play

and worthless things, but captured an everlasting enemy and a greater prisoner: He made captives of sin and the devil, who had made captives of the entire world. Hence sin and the devil, though they are my adversaries and want to torment me, yet cannot harm me in the least if I hold fast to Christ." Walther commented, "How foolish are ministers who, after preaching a long time without having any success, decide to preach nothing but the Law for a while in order to rouse their people from their spiritual sleep! By that method they will accomplish nothing. . . . Luther is willing to bear the reproach of being called a 'sweet,' that is, a comforting, preacher. He will regard that as a very trifling charge when people say that his preaching prevents men from doing good works, because he is sure that by his preaching he is changing men's hearts, so that they will do good works."⁴² The most ridiculous comment a Lutheran preacher can hear from parishioners is, "Pastor, you preach too much Gospel." It may be possible for us to preach too little Law, or to preach Gospel at inappropriate times, but it is impossible for the heirs of Luther to preach "too much" Gospel.

In discussing his final thesis, Walther returned to the Luther text:

They would talk in a different strain if they had ever been in this prison. When they shall be placed at the left hand of the Judge and anguish and terror lay hold on them, they shall experience what this prison means. Accordingly, this is not a subject that may be preached to men's flesh and blood, as if they were given liberty to do according to their lust. But the story of Christ's ascension and His rule is to the end that sin may be made captive and eternal death

may not shackle us and keep us in bondage. Now, if sin is to be made captive, I, who believe in Christ, must so live that I am not overcome by hatred and envy of my fellow men or by other sins, but must fight against sin and say: Listen, sin! You want to incite me to become angry, to envy, to commit adultery, to steal, to be unfaithful, etc. I will not do it. Likewise, if sin wants to assail me from the other side and fill me with terror, I must say: No, sin; you are my servant, and I am your lord. Have you never heard the pretty song about my Lord Jesus Christ which David sang . . .? Hitherto you have been hangman and a devil to me; you have held me captive, but now that I believe in Christ you shall be my hangman no longer. I shall not permit you to accuse me, for you are a captive of my Lord and King, who has put you in the stocks and cast you beneath my feet. Understand this matter right: By His ascension and by the preaching of faith, Christ does not purpose to rear lazy and sluggish Christians, who say: We shall not live according to our pleasure, not doing good works, remaining sinners, and following sin like captive slaves. Those who talk thus have never had a right understanding of the preaching of faith. Christ and His mercy are not preached to the end that men should remain in their sins. On the contrary, this is what the Christian doctrine proclaims: The captivity is to leave you go free, not that you may do whatever you desire, but that you sin no more.⁴³

In the last five hundred years, thousands of people have tried to interpret Luther anew for their contemporaries. It is likely that Luther

would find all their (our) interpretations flawed and faulty in one way or another. But this Saxon who lived three hundred years later, and who dedicated his life to making Luther's message come alive on a continent which Luther hardly knew existed, got it largely right. Most important, he got the heart of it right. Luther influenced Walther's theology at every point of his public teaching, but above all he shaped the governing and guiding principle of Walther's scoring of the song of the Lord for his new land. He scored it in the key of Christ and in the mode of the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. Walther closed his lectures on the subject on November 6, 1885, with these words from the House Postil's treatment of Matthew 7, the gospel lesson for the eighteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Now the Lord in this passage speaks, in particular, of preachers or prophets, whose real and proper fruit is nothing else than this, they diligently proclaim this will of God to people [that everyone who sees the Son and believes on Him may have everlasting life] and teach them that God is gracious and merciful and has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but wants him to live, moreover, that God has manifested His mercy by having His only-begotten Son become man. Whoever, now, received Him and believes in Him, that is, whoever takes comfort in the fact that for the sake of His Son, God will be merciful to him, will forgive his sins, and grant him eternal salvation, etc., -- whoever is engaged in this preaching of the pure Gospel and thus directs men to Christ, the only Mediator between God and men, he as a preacher, is doing the will of God. That is the genuine fruit by which no one is

deceived or duped. For if it were possible that the devil were to preach this truth, the preaching would not be false or made up of lies and a person believing it would have what it promises. -- After this fruit, which is the principal and most reliable one and cannot deceive, there follow in the course of time other fruits, namely, a life in beautiful harmony with this doctrine and in no way contrary to it. But these fruits are to be regarded as genuine fruits only where the first fruit, namely, the doctrine of Christ, already exists.⁴⁴

For the same reason that Walther found Luther worth listening to, we listen to Walther, and in his words we hear the voice of Luther, and of his word.

End Notes

1. C. F. W. Walther, Casual-Predigten (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1889), 123-24.

2. C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, trans. W. H. T. Dau (Saint Louis: Concordia, n.d.), 5-6. I have used the Dau translation in spite of its inadequacies as a translation because it includes the full citations from Luther, which are sometimes abridged or omitted in the superior translation of Herbert J. A. Bouman, Law and Gospel, in Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther, edited by August R. Suelflow (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1981).

3. Lehre und Wehre 21 (1875): 67. On Luther's influence on Walther, see Eugene F. Klug, "Walther and Luther," in C. F. W. Walther: The American Luther, edited by Arthur H. Drevlow (Mankato: Walther Press, 1987), and Robert Kolb, "Luther's Significance in Nineteenth Century American Lutheranism, The Case of C. F. W. Walther," The Lutheran Quarterly, New Series, 1 (1987).

4. "Dr. C. F. W. Walther als Theologe," Lehre und Wehre 34 (1888): 267.

5. Robert Kolb, "Luther for German Americans, The Saint Louis Edition of Luther's Works, 1880-1910," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly 56 (1983): 98-110.

6. Luthers Volksbibliothek: zu Nutz und Frommen des Lutherischen Christenvolks ausgewählte vollständige Schriften Dr. Martin Luthers (Saint Louis: [various volumes with no publisher given, with August Wiebusch and son as publisher, and with the press of the Synod as publisher], 1859-1876, 30 volumes in 15.

7. E. Theodore Bachmann, "Walther, Schaff, and Krauth on Luther," in Interpreters of Luther, Essays in Honor of Wilhelm Pauck, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 187-230, esp. 188-92.

8. On the twentieth century discussion of the "tower experience," see W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, "The Problem of Luther's 'Tower Experience' and its Place in His Intellectual Development," Studies in the Reformation, Luther to Hooker, edited by C. W. Dugmore (London: Athlone, 1980), 60-80.

9. The Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel, 62.

10. Ibid., 45-46.

11. Ibid., 20.

12. Ibid., 53-54.

13. Ibid., 104-109.

14. Ibid., 229-32.

15. On Walther's use of and treatment of the Orthodox fathers, particularly Johann Wilhelm Baier, see Henry W. Reimann, "C. F. W. Walther's 1879 Edition of Baier's Compendium," in The Symposium on Seventeenth Century Lutheranism, Selected Papers, Volume I (Saint Louis: The Symposium on Seventeenth Century Lutheranism, 1962), 106-117.

16. The Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel, 170

17. Ibid., 127.

18. Ibid., 19.

19. Ibid., 22.

20. Ibid., 25-26.

21. Ibid., 24-25.

22. Ibid., 27-28.

23. Ibid., 47-48.

24. Ibid., 32.

25. Ibid., 109-110, 54, 248-49.

26. Ibid., 120-24.

27. Ibid., 160-61; cf. 182-84.

28. See Robert Kolb, 'Perilous Events and Troublesome Disturbances,' The Place of Controversy in the Tradition of Luther to Lutheran Orthodoxy," in Pietas et Societas, New Trends in Reformation Social History, Essays in Memory of Harold J. Grimm, edited by Kyle C. Sessions and Phillip N. Bebb (Kirkville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1985), 181-201.

29. The Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel, 167-68, cf. 187. See the strong emphasis which Walther placed on confession and absolution, and the practice of private confession and absolution, in his Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie (5. ed., Saint Louis: Concordia, 1906), 155-68.

30. The Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel, 186.

31. Ibid., 197-99.

32. Ibid., 199.

33. Ibid., 203-204.

34. Ibid., 205-207.

35. Ibid., 217.

36. Ibid., 232-233.

37. Ibid., 255-259.

38. Ibid., 304.

39. Ibid., 369-370.

40. Ibid., 378-379.

41. Ibid., 408.

42. Ibid., 410.

43. Ibid., 410-411.

44. Ibid., 413.

LECTURE II

WALTHER AND OTHER LUTHERANS

by

Aug. R. Suelflow ©

In this presentation permit me to convey especially three extremely important factors which had a bearing on Dr. C. F. W. Walther's relationship to other Lutherans:

1. A concern to unite all Lutherans in America in a single organization;
2. A determination to do this solely on the basis of a common agreement to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions; and
3. The effects of the tragedy of the Predestination controversy.

Walther fervently desired that all Lutherans in America be united, and that this union be accomplished on a complete and total subscription to the historic Lutheran Confessions. Strange, therefore, isn't it, that some Lutherans considered Walther exclusive, sometimes even sectarian, and often dictatorial or authoritarian? But thereby hangs a tale. How could an individual be seen by some as favoring Lutheran unity, and by others as being exclusivistic? Writers have been debating that issue even during Walther's lifetime.

To understand Walther's attitude toward other Lutherans it is most important that we briefly view the experiences which he had with other Lutherans since his early youth.

Walther grew up in a Lutheran parsonage at Langenchursdorf in the Kingdom of Saxony during the Napoleonic era. Today this is in the DDR.

Napoleon's battle with the Prussians at Lutzen on May 2, 1813, and at Bautzen on May 20, 1813, partially overcame the great defeat which he had suffered in his attempted occupation of Moscow. But then Prussia, Russia, and the Austrians began a new campaign against Napoleon and in a three-day battle at Leipzig, October 16-18, 1813, Napoleon was crushed. Thereafter the allies invaded Paris in March 1814. These major battles not too far from Walther's home occurred at the time Walther was not quite three years old.

Walther grew up in a typical Lutheran parsonage of that time. He was the eighth child of the Reverend and Mrs. Gotthold Heinrich Walther and his wife Johanna Wilhelmina, nee Zschenderlein of Zwickau. Discipline and culture marked the home, together with a large number of deaths in the family (of the 12 Walther children, six died in infancy). Both Walther's paternal grandfather and great-grandfather were Lutheran pastors.

At the early age of eight he left home to attend a boys' school at Hohenstein, and was taught by his father's brother, Franz Friederich Wilhelm Walther, who was Rektor (Director and Chief Teacher). Walther remained at Hohenstein near the present Karl Marx Stadt for two years.

From 1821 to 1829 he studied at the Lateinschule at Schneeberg, located at a considerable distance from his home. The Schneeberg education gave him a strong and fundamental knowledge of the languages, especially Latin. At Schneeberg he experienced a close relationship with his sister Therese Wilhelmina, the young wife of the Conrektor of the school, H. F. W. Schubert.

Walther studied at what today is Karl Marx University in Leipzig from 1829 to 1833. The university was established in 1409, and consequently already at that time had quite a history. Walther's older brother, Otto Hermann, also studied there. At the university, Walther was thoroughly exposed to the prevalent rationalism which had invaded every "nook and cranny" of life; it has been estimated that by 1819 four-fifths of the educated people, one-half of the merchant class and even one-third of the peasants had become rationalists. (Rudolf Hermann, Thuringische Kirchengeschichte Jena und Weimar, 1937, Vol. I and 1947, Vol. II, p. 388) Sometimes historians have attempted to minimize the pervasiveness and the destructive subtleness of rationalism within the churches of Saxony and other Lutheran provinces. Nevertheless, an estimate such as that of Hermann seems to describe clearly the effects that rationalism had on young Walther in his university studies. Only about two of Walther's professors at Leipzig still professed their faith in the Gospel.

Because of this an older university student, H. Johann Gottlieb Kuehn, who had already discovered the blessedness of a life lived in Christ through daily forgiveness, gathered like-minded students around himself. Walther, in the biography of Buenger published in 1882, reflects upon the impact that this "holy club" had made. With pietistic fervor the members of the club were striving together to seek certainty of salvation. They assumed that this certainty could be developed by themselves. Avidly they read works such as those of Arndt, Francke, Spener, Bogatzky, and Rambach. Walther reflected:

"The less a book invited to faith, and the more legalistically it urged contrition of

the heart and total mortification of the old man preceding conversion, the better a book we held it to be. And even those books we read only so far as they described the sorrows and exercises of repentance; when this was followed by a description of faith and comfort for the penitent, we usually closed such a book, for we thought this did not as yet concern us. (Lebenslauf, St. Louis, Dette, 1882, pp. 17-18.)

Fear, apprehension, and anxiety enveloped their lives. This reminds one of Martin Luther's struggles to find a loving Heavenly Father in his cell at Erfurt, torturing himself with condemnation and hopelessness. It was John Staupitz who referred him to the "wounds of Jesus Christ, the blood that He has shed for you; it is there that the grace of God will appear to you...throw yourself into the Redeemer's arms. Trust in Him..."

Thus Luther discovered the Gospel. Even so Walther also had a man who directed him to the Gospel, namely, Martin Stephan, a successful parish pastor in Dresden. Surrounded with professional jealousy from rationalistic pastors, Stephan had preached the Gospel to a people who were searching and thirsting for it instead of rationalistic sawdust. In an age of faithlessness Martin Stephan "preached the Gospel, having experienced its power in his own soul." People flocked to him, while church attendance in other churches declined.

In a state of spiritual hopelessness Walther was urged by an advisor to consult Martin Stephan. Walther describes his own personal experiences and admits that he did not open the letter until he prayed fervently to God that he would not receive any false comfort.

"When I read his reply, I felt that I had been suddenly snatched from hell and placed into heaven. The long tears of fear and suffering were now converted into tears of true heavenly joy... So the peace of God came to my own soul. Stephan had applied the Gospel to his own soul."

Walther had rediscovered the Gospel.

After a period of serving as a tutor, Walther received a call to his first parish, "Zum guten Hirten" in Braeunsdorf, not too far from Penig and from his ancestral home.

I had the great privilege to visit Braeunsdorf last spring. It's a quiet little community and apparently was that also during Walther's ministry (January 15, 1837 to September 1838). It was a brief ministry, one which was marked with extreme pressures from Superintendent Siebenhaar of Penig coercing him to use the rationalistic agenda which had been prepared for the Saxon church in 1812. Even though it contained a variety of formulas for various official acts, Walther and others objected strenuously to its use. As the official "inspector" of his parish/village school, Walther also ran into difficulties when rationalistic school books were introduced. Rationalism and political despotism held sway.

Walther finally resigned from his parish, agreeing with six pastors, ten theological candidates and about 700 people to forsake all and to follow Martin Stephan to America. All had hoped that by leaving the "Babylon of Unbelief" they would be able to establish a new Zion in America. However, because of the difficulties encountered with the self-appointed Bishop, Martin Stephan, that was not to happen immediately. After Stephan had been

expelled from the colony, spiritual, doctrinal, and physical crises faced the immigrants. Virtual starvation, suffering from the elements, spiritual and doctrinal questions once more arose. This time they were not so much concerned with an escape from rationalism, but rather with the challenge whether the entire immigration venture ought to be abandoned and its diseased and spiritually empty people ought to return to Saxony to seek forgiveness. Could there be a church under those circumstances? It was not until the "Altenburg Debate" in April 1841 that the issue of the church was reaffirmed by Walther. Lawyer F. A. Marbach, who had long agitated that the immigrants pack up their soggy, moldy, and destroyed belongings and return to their homeland, yielded.

For a second time Walther had thoroughly researched Scripture and Luther's writings in order to obtain certainty. The church did, indeed, exist in Perry County and St. Louis, Missouri, because it consists of the totality of all true believers. Godless men, hypocrites, and heretics have been found in this church and the confession of faith falsified. Nevertheless--and this applied especially to the disastrous situation which had developed in Perry County, Missouri--Walther concluded his thesis with the following: "Heterodox" societies or companies may be referred to as churches as is done by the Word of God itself. From this it follows:

- "1. That members also of such companies may be saved; for without the Church there is no salvation.
- "2. That the outward separation of a heterodox society from the universal Christian church or a relapse into heathenism does not yet deprive that society of the name Church;

- "3. Even heterodox societies have church power; even among them the treasures of the Church may be validly dispensed, the ministry established, the sacraments validly administered, and the keys of the kingdom of heaven exercised.
- "4. Even heterodox societies are not to be dissolved, but reformed."

There was the key. The group of immigrant Lutherans need not dissolve, but seek reformation.

Here is one of the first clues that we see of Walther's position on the church with respect to his own group and later with respect to others. These views were to be reviewed especially as the critical dialogue continued with Grabau of the Buffalo Synod and Loehe of Neuendettelsau.

The Formation of The Missouri Synod

It is difficult for us today to understand the milieu in which the Missouri Synod was organized.

1. The Saxons had permanently turned their backs and separated from the church in their homeland because of the pervasive rationalism and authoritarianism.
2. They had rediscovered the Gospel under the spiritual leadership of Martin Stephan, who had become despotic and authoritarian and as a result had been expelled from the community. Abject chaos followed.
3. Increasingly Walther discovered that Scripture, the Word of God as confessed in the historic Lutheran Confessions, was the only basis of certainty of the

Gospel, both with respect to faith and life--not outward forms of the church, nor office of the bishop, nor anything else.

4. During this time Lutheranism in America (perhaps belatedly in comparison to Europe) seriously affected by rationalism as well as by the Americanization and Anglicanization of the church, abandoned the subscription to the Lutheran Confessions.

Walther and his friends were not yet identified with any Synod. Thus one of the fellow immigrants, George Albert Schieferdecker, applied for membership in the Pennsylvania Ministerium. Schieferdecker related the grave difficulties which the Saxons had experienced in Germany with the rationalistic state church. He related also the reasons for immigrating and the difficulties encountered with the collapse of Stephan's leadership. What would have happened if the president of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, Dr. C. R. Demme (1756-1863), had welcomed him into membership? Would other Saxons have joined later? Was this a "feeler"? Dr. Demme's reply is quite significant. (The Schieferdecker letter is on file in the archives of the Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.) In his presidential report in 1841 Dr. Demme reported:

"He renders a most interesting account of his spiritual experiences and development. In my answer, I informed him that, in order to accede to his wishes, it would be necessary for him to appear personally before this body, and encouraged him that he join one of the western synods of our church."
(Pennsylvania Ministerium Proceedings, 1841, p. 7.)

Though not at Walther's initiative, the very formation of the Missouri Synod was, in itself, a union movement. The pastors, teachers, and congregations which joined the Synod in 1847 had hardly known each other two years prior. But what brought them together was desire for fellowship with others of the same confessional stance. The unity of the faith as expressed in the Lutheran Confessions was to supply the bonding for them.

One large segment that was forged into the Missouri Synod was supplied by Loehe's work. Wilhelm Loehe had been directed to the sad plight of the German Lutheran colonists in America through a most gripping and heartrending appeal issued by F. C. D. Wyneken. (Friedrich Wyneken, Die Not Der Deutschen Lutheraner In Nordamerika, Pittsburgh: Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, 1844.) The masterful presentation depicting the hopeless spiritual plight of the German immigrant appears in an English translation in Moving Frontiers (St. Louis: CPH, 1964, pp. 90-97.) As a traveling missionary and member of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, Wyneken had seen the spiritual hopelessness of large numbers of the scattered German immigrants. By this time he had also become acquainted with Walther through Der Lutheraner. Lutherans were beginning to take note of the voice of Confessional Lutheranism emanating from St. Louis.

But when the Loehe missionaries who joined the Ohio and Michigan Synods did not meet their confessional expectations, they decided to take steps to sever their connections with both of these bodies. The men in the Ohio Synod took this decisive action when they met in Cleveland, Ohio, in September 1845. Criticisms against the Ohio Synod were lodged on two aspects, namely its confessional laxity and its use of the English language with all of its sacramental implications, such as "Jesus said: 'this

is my body..." At the Cleveland September meeting the Loehe men of the Ohio Synod resolved to seek a closer relationship with the Saxons in Missouri. Thus the second conference preliminary to the formation of the Missouri Synod was held.

Even prior to the first meeting John Adam Ernst, a Loehe missionary, inquired of Walther what he considered essential principles of a synodical organization. Walther replied at length in a letter of 21 August 1845 in which he emphasized especially:

- "1. That the Synod organize itself on the basis of the Word of God and the symbols of our church and, if possible, include also the Saxon Visitation Articles. However, I shall not insist upon the acceptance and the binding nature of the latter.
- "2. I wish that all syncretistic activity by synodical members be prohibited and banned by a special paragraph in the constitution.
- "3. That the chief function of the Synod be directed toward the maintenance (Erhaltung) and furtherance (Forderung) and guarding (Bewachung) of the unity and purity of Lutheran doctrine."

Walther had already expressed himself as being vitally interested in Lutheran unity, but a unity on the basis of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions, had voiced his opposition to syncretism, and held that the chief function of the Synod was to be concerned with the unity and purity of Lutheran doctrine.

The second meeting preliminary to the formation

of the Missouri Synod was held in St. Louis, where the first draft of the synodical constitution was reviewed. It is also interesting to note that the three Ohio delegates all were invited to preach at the Saxon churches in St. Louis as a "testimony to the unity of faith," as Lochner expressed it. (Moving Frontiers, p. 148.) The third preliminary meeting, with Michigan Synod members present, was held in Fort Wayne. The formerly heterogeneous group found a complete meeting of the minds and confirmed its confessional stance, accepting Holy Scripture "as the written Word of God and as the only rule and norm of faith and life."

When the April 1847 constituting convention took place, all the pieces fit together firmly. C. F. W. Walther served as its first president, from 1847 to 1850, and served another 14 years thereafter, from 1864 to 1878.

The very organization of the Missouri Synod under Walther's guidance consequently serves as the "first major thread" in the entire fabric of Walther's relationship to other Lutherans.

Another major initiative striving for Lutheran unity came from the newly organized Norwegian Synod. In 1855 it had sent visitors to three seminaries to ascertain whether it could work out an agreement for joint seminary training. By 1857 an arrangement was worked out between the Missouri and Norwegian synods to have the latter provide one professor on the faculty in St. Louis and to have its students enroll in all classes. Two years later this momentous plan was implemented when Professor Laur. Larsen joined the St. Louis faculty. The seminary arrangement continued until the Civil War temporarily closed the institution in 1861.

American Lutheranism

Because of the disastrous effects of the Schumacker-Sprecher-Kurtz revisions of the Augsburg Confession in 1855, Walther issued a trumpet call to all Lutherans in America to rally behind the Augsburg Confession and to initiate efforts toward the final establishment of one single Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In the January 1856 issue of Lehre Und Wehre, a theological journal which he had just founded a year earlier, Walther issued the following appeal:

"So we venture openly to inquire: Would not periodic meetings by such members of churches as call themselves Lutheran and acknowledge and confess without reservation that the unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530 is the pure and true statement of the doctrine of Sacred Scripture and is also their own belief promote and advance the efforts towards the final establishment of one single Evangelical Lutheran Church of America? We for our part would be ready with all our heart to take part in such a conference of truly believing Lutherans wherever and whenever such a conference would be held, pursuant to the wishes of the majority of the participants; at the same time we can promise in advance the support of numerous theologians and laymen to whom the welfare of our precious Evangelical Lutheran Church in this new fatherland is equally a matter of deepest heartfelt yearning, and with whom we have discussed the thoughts here expressed." (Lehre and Wehre II, January 1856 3-6.)

The appeal met with success, and four conferences were conducted between 1856 and 1859. The conditions for attendance were that individuals represent

only themselves and not ecclesiastical organizations, and that they pledge subscription to the Augsburg Confession. (Moving Frontiers, p. 249ff.)

Already at the first conference (Columbus, Ohio, on 1-7 October 1856) it was determined after some debate that the Augsburg Confession itself, article by article, would serve as basis of the discussion.

It is interesting to note an additional resolution establishing the procedure:

"All questions pertaining to faith and conscience shall be considered; but all others resting upon mere consequences drawn from the words, or belonging to the domain of practice without involving a question of conscience, shall be excluded;"

"And finally after each article has been discussed the members shall express their agreement as to the meaning by rising and affirming."

Walther reported enthusiastically on the first conference:

"Yes, even now the Lord, who reigns omnipotently at the right hand of God, has opened new doors for us. In prospect is nothing less than a union of the whole American Lutheran Church under the banner of genuine, uncorrupted Confessions. The effort, as foolish as it was presumptuous, of several parties within the General Synod to set aside the old, trustworthy confessional basis, the Augsburg Confession, has opened the eyes of other synods heretofore connected with them and has called them to arms for the protection and preservation of the old,

unadulterated confession... (Moving Frontiers, p. 250.)

All four "Free Conferences" were opened and closed with the singing of a hymn, prayer, recitation of the Apostles Creed, and the benediction. Truly these sessions were of an "intersynodical" nature, seeking, on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions, a single, united Lutheranism in America.

The first conference attracted 73 persons, 19 of them were laymen. The second had 43 and the third had 45 in attendance. (We don't know how many were in attendance at the fourth.)

Even though a fifth conference had been scheduled for June 1860 in Cleveland, Ohio (notices to this effect had been issued in the Lutheran periodicals), the conference was never held. Professor W. F. Lehmann had chaired the first three conferences, and in 1859 both he and Dr. Walther were absent. This was at the time when Walther had throat trouble and later (February 1860) was on his way to Europe. Consequently he could not push for the June 1860 meeting. Strained relationships between the Ohio and Missouri Synods over communion attendance and acceptance by the Ohio Synod of a Missouri clergyman who was under church discipline aggravated tension over the fact that neither of the two leading personalities was present.

Even though no further conferences were held, we may assume that the Synodical Conference, organized in 1872, was a result of the important groundwork which had here been laid.

Formation of the General Council

Lutheranism in the first half of the 19th century was in turmoil, theological uncertainty, and doubt. The effects of the transition from German to English, the vast geographical expansion following upon the heels of the Revolutionary War, the inaccessibility of English translations of the Book of Concord until 1851 virtually deprived eastern English-speaking Lutherans of any acquaintance with the historic symbols of the Lutheran Church. Only four years before the publication of the Schmucker Recension of the Augsburg Confession the Tennessee Synod published the first English edition of the Book of Concord.

Thus, with the Lutheran moorings at best relegated to the past, and often preoccupied with other issues, Lutherans tended to become culturally and religiously integrated in the community.

The Schmucker "Recension" caused divisions and schisms of major proportion among America's Lutherans and particularly within the old General Synod which organized as a federation of synods in 1821.

Could one assume that the "Free Conferences" of the 1850s contributed to the formation of the General Council in 1866? The Pennsylvania Ministerium issued a call to Lutheran synods, pastors and congregations "which confessed the Unaltered Augsburg Confession" to attend a meeting (Reading, Pennsylvania, 1866) "for the purpose of forming a union of Lutheran Synods." (Wolfe, p. 141ff; Moving Frontiers, p. 255.)

Missouri appointed Professor Walther, Dr. Sihler, and Pastor J. A. F. W. Mueller, the first graduate

of the St. Louis Seminary. Mueller conducted an opening devotion at this meeting. However, neither Walther nor Sihler attended. Why not? This seemed to be a fulfillment of Walther's dream for a single Lutheran church in America.

Walther attended the Missouri-Buffalo colloquy from 20 November to 5 December 1866 in Buffalo, New York. A week later the exploratory meeting of the General Council was held in Reading, Pennsylvania, 12-14 December 1866. Thus Mueller was the only one to attend.

Walther sheds some light on his absence, as well as on the scheduling difficulties, in a letter of 14 December 1866:

"If the Pennsylvania Convention, as originally planned, had been held in Pittsburg, I would have undoubtedly personally participated; since, however, it was held in Reading, eight days later than originally scheduled, we submitted our vote in writing and requested Pastor Mueller, our third synodical commissioner, to attend. This he did, as we have been informed in writing. I am living in deepest anticipation of the results." (Walther to Pastor and Mrs. Stephanus Keyl, Fuerbringer, Walther's Briefe, II, 62.)

A few weeks later, however, apparently after having received the report from Mueller, Walther confided on 18 December 1866:

"I do not regret that I did not go to Reading. It would have been extremely painful for me to meet with such false spirits as the people from the Iowa and Canada Synods. My witness would have been

lost even as that of our dear Mueller. It is true, the resolutions are for the most part fairly acceptable, but one becomes alarmed when thinking of all those who have subscribed to them, people who are in part open hypocrites, or who do not fully realize what they have done. I feel profoundly sorry for people such as Krauth, Krotel, Schaeffer, and others, because they were so weak and have sought strength in the union of such elements."

It is, indeed, unfortunate that Dr. Charles Porterfield Krauth, the leading proponent in the confessional struggle among English-speaking Lutherans in America, and Walther were unable to unite their efforts in opposing "American Lutheranism" and establishing a confessional Lutheran church in America. Walther spoke of Krauth as a man "wholeheartedly devoted to the pure doctrine of our church." Perhaps the language barrier may have been a factor in the failure.

After the constituting convention of the General Council had been completed, in the absence of a synodical convention the Missouri Synod responded via two district conventions. The primary gist of the General Council had been too hasty and was premature. Rather, it recommended a series of "free conferences" by which the participants would be strengthened and convinced that "unity of spirit must first be sought and attained before external union can follow...." (Moving Frontiers, p. 255) A formal reply by the officers of the four Missouri Synod districts underscored the necessity of free conferences and insisted that they must be separated from officially organized conventions of ecclesiastical bodies."

When such free conferences did not materialize,

it virtually terminated Missouri's dialog with the General Council. This situation was further aggravated when the question was raised concerning the "Four Points": the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth, non-Lutherans permitted to commune at Lutheran altars, non-Lutheran pastors permitted to preach in Lutheran pulpits, and membership in secret societies. (Wolf, pp. 162-165)

In spite of several attempts at resolving these matters, such as the "Akron Rule," these issues continued to plague the General Council with almost disastrous results. The Wisconsin Synod withdrew from membership in 1869, the Iowa Synod decided it could not enter into full membership in that body, and the Minnesota and Illinois Synods withdrew in 1870.

Colloquies

While the General Council was engaging in solving its own problems between 1866 and 1872, the Missouri Synod engaged in a series of eight "colloquies" with synods with whom it was not in fellowship. Time will allow us merely to list them. Each colloquy had a heavy doctrinal agenda which usually covered the issues of church and ministry, confessional subscription, open questions, chiliasm, pulpit and altar fellowship, the Word of God and secret societies, etc.

In rapid, almost breathtaking order, the following colloquies were held:

1. With the Buffalo Synod November 20 to December 5, 1866, at Buffalo with the result that the Buffalo Synod split in two and about half of the pastors, teachers, and congregations joined the Missouri Synod.

2. With the Iowa Synod, November 13-19, 1867, in Milwaukee. It needs to be observed that George Albert Schieferdecker, President of the Western District and member of the Board of Control of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, was expelled from the Missouri Synod in 1857 because of the chiliastic views including the hope for a universal conversion of Jews and Christ's return to earth prior to Judgment Day to organize the millennial reign. Schieferdecker joined the Iowa Synod but in 1875 recanted his views and returned to Missouri. In spite of that, the Iowa colloquy could chalk up a few areas of progress. However, the Iowa colloquents were forced to terminate the discussions on 19 November, so that they might attend the November 20-26, 1867, meeting of the General Council in Fort Wayne, Indiana. As a result, little became of these efforts.
3. With the Ohio Synod, March 4-6, 1868, at Columbus, Ohio. The request for a colloquy had come from Ohio itself, and participation in the discussions was limited to the district presidents--an innovation, because Walther had always insisted that lay people be involved in doctrinal discussions. Church and ministry were the primary issues, and after three days agreement was reached.
4. With the Wisconsin Synod, October 21-22, 1868, at Milwaukee. We need not review the early history of the Wisconsin Synod and its relationship to Missouri because this is already well known. But what is so inspiring is the fact that this two-day colloquy provided complete agreement between these two church bodies on "open

questions, church and ministry, inspiration of Scripture, subscription to the Confessions, millennium, and the Anti-Christ."

5. With the Illinois Synod, August 4-5, 1869, in St. Louis. This synod had been organized in 1846 and briefly had been a member of the old General Synod. It also participated in the formation of the General Council in 1866, but then left in 1870 when it was highly dissatisfied with the Council's position on the "Four Points." Hence the colloquy discussed chiefly the matter of open questions, pulpit and altar fellowship, chiliasm, and secret societies. The result of this colloquy was that the Illinois Synod merged with the Illinois District of the Missouri Synod.
6. With the Minnesota Synod, June 1872. The work of this synod was largely begun through Father Heyer in 1856. This synod was organized in 1860 and joined the General Council in 1866 but withdrew in 1870. At the colloquy it was reported that agreement in doctrine had already existed prior to the meeting, as was evidenced from the convention reports. Minnesota entered into a union with Wisconsin in 1893.
7. With the English Conference of Missouri, August 1872 at Gravelton, Missouri. This group had been an extension of Eastern English Lutherans, to a large extent, from Tennessee. F. A. Schmidt preached at the divine service which preceded the colloquy. Points of discussion centered on the Word of God, total depravity, the work of Christ,

faith and good works, the Sacraments,
Christian liberty, church and minis-
try, and the Anti-Christ.

Unanimity was reached and the English Confer-
ence was closely affiliated with the Missouri
Synod until it became the English District of
the LCMS in 1911.

The Synodical Conference

There is yet a third area in which a tremendous amount of activity was taking place concurrently with the disappointments of the General Council and the strong encouragement of the successes of the "colloquies," namely, the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference in 1872. Two preliminary sessions were held, one in January and the other in November 1871, with the formation of the Synodical Conference culminating the Milwaukee session in July 1872. However, Dr. Koelpin has treated this particular account, so we need not enter in upon this.

But in viewing Walther and other Lutherans, we need to deal with the predestinarian controversy. In Walther's marvelous series of essays delivered at the Western District conventions from 1873 to 1886 we see a masterful overview of his doctrinal position. His theme throughout the series of essays is:

"The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All Glory to God, an Irrefutable Proof that its Doctrine Alone is True."

In Walther's essay at the 1877 convention he dealt at great length with the doctrine of predestination (Gnadenwahl). By 1879 F. A. Schmidt

accused Walther of false doctrine and the controversy raged within all the synods of the Synodical Conference.

However, the animosity created, the bitterness among fellow Lutherans, and deep-seated antagonisms which resulted from the predestinarian controversy modified and radically altered not only Walther's but also the Missouri Synod's position on its relationship to other Lutherans. This is a tragic chapter from which few have recovered.

Even though Walther had anticipated that the Synodical Conference would become the ecclesiastical connection which would ultimately unite all Lutherans in America, his dream was severely shattered. I think it is interesting to observe that the fifth objective of the Synodical Conference was:

"To unite all Lutheran synods in America in one orthodox American Lutheran Church."
(Denkschrift, Columbus, 1871, p. 5)

In 1933 the Synodical Conference modified this statement in its constitution and listed as one of its objectives:

"To strive for true unity in doctrine and practice among Lutheran church bodies."
(Synodical Conference Constitution, 1944, Article 42)

It is apparent that a radical change in Walther's and the entire Missouri Synod's attitude toward other Lutherans resulted from the Predestinarian Controversy. The bitterness which unfolded in its wake cut most deeply. Whereas, prior to this time, Walther had extended open invitations to discuss

doctrine with all who subscribed to the Augsburg Confession, there was now an abrupt reversal when F. A. Schmidt accused Walther of false doctrine. This accusation cut so deeply that Walther may never have recovered from it.

In a letter to G. A. Barth of Pella, Wisconsin, on May 9, 1880, Walther states:

"Instead of coming to us in a brotherly manner to seek to correct us, they have branded us as heretics before the entire world. They have given us the worst name they could find, namely, cryptoc Calvinists, who as is well known, did not only harbor false doctrine, but tried to hide this and mischievously mislead by using words with a double meaning. Thereby they tried to smuggle their error into our church while we were frank and open with our doctrinal position. These lords have severed themselves from us and have appealed to our enemies. If they now want to discuss these matters in our Synod, it is too late. They have brought these matters before the public masses; before this tribunal the matter must also now be wrestled through."
(Walther to Barth, 9 May 1880, Wadewitz, pp. 2-3)

Walther also insisted that Schmidt not be permitted to dispute or defend his position in an open synodical assembly, since he himself had given up the right or privilege of brotherly discussion because he went public against the Synod and branded it a heretic. (Walther to Barth, 9 May 1880, p. 6 of Wadewitz.)

The position on prayer at meetings to discuss

doctrine apparently was initiated during the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, colloquy of January 1881. This colloquy was held under the auspices of the Synodical Conference. Theological professors and synodical and district presidents were in attendance. Among those from the Norwegian Synod was F. A. Schmidt. This meeting of representatives, however, became quite acrid and no agreement was reached. Up to that time the session of the colloquy regularly opened and closed with prayer. The last session was an exception. One of the Missouri Synod representatives, an accused heretic, refused to pray with the "accusers," and consequently the meeting was closed with silent prayer. (Altes und Neues, Vol. II, p. 27; Suelflow, Th.D., p. 158) This may well be the first time in the history of the Missouri Synod that a member of the Synod refused to pray with another Lutheran with whom he was debating theological issues.

At its 1881 Convention (11-21 May) at Fort Wayne, Indiana, the Missouri Synod confirmed the stance and elaborated on it thus in instructing its delegates to the meeting of the Synodical Conference:

"1. You are not to meet in an ecclesiastical consultation (Berathung) with any person who has publicly accused us of Calvinism.

"2. You are not to recognize as a member of the Synodical Conference any Synod, which as such raises the charge of Calvinism against us." (Convention Proceedings, LCMS, St. Louis, CPH, 1881, p. 46)

The pattern and policy was now entrenched. Amazing, isn't it, that less than ten years after the Synodical Conference was organized with the grandiose idea of ultimately uniting all Lutherans in America on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions

it was disrupted so quickly and schismatically?
What a tragedy!

Perhaps we can sum up this presentation best by quoting Walther in his report on the first Free Conference in 1856:

"For acceptance of the Augsburg Confession with reservations is no acceptance of the Confession but a relinquishment of it. Because of this we cannot expect the salvation of our church (in America) to come from the General Synod. An outward union, provided for by a constitution, is not at all what we need. If one single Evangelical Lutheran Church, strong in unity, is to arise, this will occur only through the unity of faith, through the awakening of a consciousness of the presence of such unity and through a rallying around a single confession, as around a treasure which must be mutually adhered to and defended."
(Der Lutheraner, XIII [21 October 1856], p. 34 in a report entitled "Die Allgemeine Conferenz.")

Walther viewed his fellow Lutherans in America as friends and when some of them publicly declared him to be a heretic and violated Matthew 18, his direction, indeed, changed.

We would do well today to build on the foundation which Walther and his generation have laid for us, namely, to reconfirm our complete and total commitment to the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God--God's love letter to the entire human race, and the Lutheran Confessions as man's response and acceptance of that message of love through Christ.

LECTURE III

WALTHER AND THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE

by

Professor Arnold Koelpin

When the first official meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America convened at "Bading's church" in Milwaukee in midsummer 1872, the delegates recognized from the outset the place of Carl F. W. Walther in the assembly. Walther was accorded the honor of preaching the inaugural sermon; he was also elected president.

The invitation to form the conference, however, had not originated with Walther nor in the Missouri Synod. The incentive initially (in 1870) came from the Ohio Synod's Eastern District, which had simply requested that the Ohio and Missouri Synods recognize one another as "orthodox evangelical Lutheran" church bodies.¹ The Ohio Synod in convention broadened the request to include the Wisconsin, Illinois, and Norwegian Synods. Two meetings in 1871 -- one in Chicago and one in Fort Wayne -- laid the bases for founding the Conference by drafting a proposed constitution. By this time the Minnesota Synod had joined in the efforts of the other five synods.²

A New Springtime

Although the immediate initiative to found the Synodical Conference came from elsewhere, the groundwork for the organization of the Conference

had been prepared to a large extent by Walther. The idea for the Synodical Conference can be traced to an editorial printed by Walther in 1856, sixteen years before the first official meeting. In the second volume of Lehre und Wehre Walther proposed "a general Lutheran conference of all those Lutherans in the country who acknowledge and confess without reservation the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530 as the pure and faithful expression of the teaching of Scripture and of their own faith."³

Walther admittedly had taken the model for such a conference from the action of the Lutheran "free churches" in Germany. "Our brothers in Germany, working apart in various free churches, have utilized free conferences . . . as a means toward the promotion of their unity in faith and confession," he observed. But here was a device with a difference. "Since we are living under different circumstances," he concluded, "may we not hope that similar general conferences would be more productive here, in proportion to the extent that the church is free from the bonds of the state, and mere theories alone militate against church life in this land." A free conference in the free atmosphere guaranteed by the U. S. Constitution gave reason for optimism in achieving the goal of "the final establishment of one single Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."⁴

The optimism of Walther for the success of free conferences in America did not blind him to contrary forces within the American Lutheran church nor to the tangled history of Lutheran controversy in this land. In fact, the 1856 proposal to hold "free conferences" was Walther's answer to the confessional crisis of 1855. In that year President Schmucker of the General Synod dropped his bombshell on American Lutheranism by advocating

a recension of the Augsburg Confession, the chief standard of the Lutheran church. The Schmucker resolution served as a lightning rod; it took the hit of criticism and cleared the confessional air for many.⁵ Walther seized this opportunity to invite all concerned parties to address the question at issue: What does it mean to be a Lutheran?

How muddled the answer to Lutheran identity had become by the 1850s was obvious to an outsider, the renowned historian and editor Philip Schaff. In an address to a Berlin mission society in 1854, the Reformed professor attempted to classify American Lutheranism in three groups. Using designations familiar to the European mind, he labeled them simply: Neo-Lutheran, Old Lutheran, and Moderate Lutheran (or Melancthonian).⁶ He split the differences in this way:

The Neo-Lutheran party, originating out of an amalgamation of Lutheranism with American Puritanism and Methodistic elements, was so integrated into the American way of life that it was the most practical and progressive and best acquainted with the English spirit. What Neo-Lutherans lacked in theological training they offset with "mostly superficial American routine sophistication, gift of eloquence, knowledge of parliamentary order, and businessmanship."

By contrast, Old Lutherans like Walther, as recent immigrants, had not yet blended in the least with the English and the American spirit. Although they were well indoctrinated in the Lutheran faith, they still lacked the blending influence of the American melting-pot in their practice of fellowship. They "would not at any price partake of the Lord's Holy Supper" with the Reformed.

Between these extremes Moderate Lutherans, descendants of the old American Lutheran tradition of Pietism, had adapted to the American denominational scene by following the middle of the road. They clung to their Lutheran identity, but refrained from the exclusive spirit of the Old Lutherans. The Moderate leaders had become too Americanized to outrightly condemn the English Reformed Church. A practical sense led many of the pastors to be "more concerned about building programs and politics than theology and church affairs."⁷

In attempting to clarify the question of Lutheran identity, Walther was by no means insensitive to the cultural and linguistic gap between Old Lutherans and other people on American soil. As president of the Synodical Conference, he gave the question "What is our duty with regard to the English [-speaking] population of our country" top priority on the agenda of the first meeting.⁸ One month later, in August of 1872, he attended a Lutheran conference at Gravelton, Missouri, to encourage work in the English language.⁹

But to Walther the question "What does it mean to be a Lutheran" transcended Schaff's sociological analyses, as important as such external considerations were for carrying out the church's purposes. The question of Lutheran identity was a far more modest one. It was a theological question; it was God's own question, addressed to faith and confession and applied to the church in general.¹⁰ If the question involved the Lutheran church and its confession, it was not because the confession was Lutheran, but because the Lutheran confession was drawn from God's Word and therefore belonged to the church catholic.

In the initial call for a free conference, Walther expressed these sentiments. He outlined the purposes of such a conference as twofold: to foster unity by discussing Christian doctrine, and to oppose the sectarian spirit inspired by Satan. "These are very simple matters," he stated, "but matters commanded by God. In this way, of course, one does not build upwards to great heights so that the world can see and admire the building, but one builds downward in depth, ... leaving it up to God whether He wants to erect anything on the deep divine foundation that has been laid."¹¹

The question of Lutheran identity in the conference, therefore, was not meant to be self-serving or a measure taken from human wisdom. "God will not tolerate it when men try to preserve and govern the church by their wisdom," Walther wrote, "for He wants to do that Himself by His Word and His Spirit. These are not new experiments employed through such a meeting because people had lost confidence in the old means for building a church. ...In matters of the kingdom of God all action must be done in faith, or God will not acknowledge them and will not seal them with His blessing."¹²

"Participants in the conference," he insisted, were not aiming to form "an externally grand Lutheran union in spite of inner disunity. Such an endeavor, even though successful, would have no other outcome than that [of the tower of Babel] in the land of Shinar, for God abominates such building projects that have become quite fashionable but are hollow and designed by men to erect monuments to themselves."¹³

If Walther's outlook represented Old Lutheran ways, then his excitement over the potential for

a renewal of the Lutheran church on American soil led to the charge of re-pristination against him. Re-pristination, in a churchly context, meant turning the clock back. In a Lutheran context, it meant a return to Luther's day and living in the forms and expressions of theology as they existed in the 16th century. Re-pristination meant a renewal, rebirth, or renaissance rather than a reformation of the church.

In a recently published book, C.F.W. Walther, The American Luther, Arthur Drevlow documents the charges against Walther:

"The charge was frequently heard that Walther's theology was nothing but a 'theology of re-pristination.' By impli-cation, Walther was criticized for leaning too heavily upon the fathers, giving them a place of authority beside Scripture. Voices were raised deploring Walther's 'canned theology' which brought forth nothing new, and that he stifled 'theol-ogy' which they felt would soon 'find the precious heritage of sound, pure doctrine becoming mouldy in its hands.' Walther, critics insisted, did not interpret the eternal verities of God in terms of the age."¹⁴

Undoubtedly the Professor's habit of using frequent quotations from Lutheran fathers to support his theses opened the door to such criti-cism -- even though the method was an old one. Then, too, Walther's rhetoric added fuel to the charge of re-pristination. He spoke of "rejuv-enating our church in America on the old tried foundation."¹⁵ He envisioned "a new springtime" of American Lutheranism in the manner of the old Reformation. "But just as three hundred years

ago the gracious visitation which the church experienced through the Reformation was nothing else than a renewal of the apostolic church," he stated in 1858, "so we now hope for no other visitation than that the church of the Reformation may experience a new springtime."¹⁶

The Matrix

One must understand Walther's rhetoric in the light of his experiences as a youth in Europe. His early life and training came in the aftermath of Napoleon's devastation of the German Empire and its institutions. When the French emperor smashed and laid to rest the thousand-year empire, the German people sought to renew their fatherland by searching out their roots. A cultural nationalism swept the countryside and paved the way for political unity a generation later. During these years the brothers Grimm researched German linguistic roots by gathering fairy tales, and the newly founded University of Berlin emerged as a national institution.

Renewal of the German fatherland was accompanied by a resurgence of Lutheran confessional consciousness. The "Erweckungsbewegung," as the Lutheran Awakening was called, also searched for roots and found them in the Scriptures and in the historic confessions of the Lutheran church as contained in the Book of Concord. Political developments in Prussia, as we shall see, fostered the quest.

The case of Adolph von Harless can serve to illustrate the impact of the Lutheran renewal. Together with other Lutherans who were taught that the church had long ago outgrown all dogma, von Harless suddenly, from a study of the Holy Scriptures, regained an understanding of what the confessions of the Lutheran church taught about

the depths of sin, the greatness of God's grace, and the power of God's Word. The experience caused the young man to exclaim, "After I had learned from Scriptures what saving truth is, I turned to the Symbolical Books of my church. I cannot describe how surprised and how moved I was to discover that their content conformed with the convictions I had gained from Scripture."¹⁷

What is particularly interesting in Von Harless' reaction is not his surprised joy in finding the lost heritage of the fathers, but his discovery that their confessions measured up to God's Word. Young Walther was poured into the same historical mold during the Awakening.

The reawakening of Lutheran confessional consciousness was the matrix out of which the Synodical Conference under Walther's guidance was ultimately born. It had nothing to do, therefore, with the awakenings of Reformed revival theology nor with the repristination theology of the Anabaptist sects of the 16th century. Such a reading of church history falsifies the Lutheran concerns. The Lutheran Awakening was another stripe.

The Awakening originated historically as a response to unionism. Specifically it was a reaction to pressures by the Prussian government to force Lutheran and Reformed churches into one Prussian Evangelical Church despite their confessional differences. To achieve religious unity the Prussian king had selected the 300th anniversary of Luther's Ninety-five Theses in 1817 for replacing the old service books of both churches with a new union Agenda. Thirteen years later in 1830, on the 300th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, the king announced his intention to employ state power to force the union.

Such tactics aroused Lutheran consciences. To "awakened" Lutherans unionism appeared as a logical counterpart to the careless rationalism that had run rampant in the land over the last century. From university to elementary school, in church and in family life, rationalist attitude undermined both the Scriptures and the Confessions.

Walther tells how, up to age 18, he had never owned a Bible or catechism, but was taught from a miserable manual filled with nothing but heathen morality. In the "Gymnasium," all his teachers with one exception were rationalists who knew little of the Gospel and relied solely on human reason in the pursuit of truth. Only his upbringing in a Lutheran parsonage carried him through the years of trial. There at home, he said, "my dear God-fearing father had taught me from earliest childhood that the Bible is God's Word."¹⁸

But Walther's personal awakening to Lutheran confessional consciousness came from another direction, from the preaching of Martin Stephan. The Dresden pastor, in his battle against rationalism, had become an avid reader of Luther's writings and found in them the path to the Scriptures. "I am firmly convinced only the Bible can be a foundation of pure Christian doctrine," Stephan confessed, and then Stephan added with equal conviction, "Out of this our pious forefathers have drawn and preserved the pure doctrine in the Confessional Writings of our Evangelical Lutheran Church for us."¹⁹

Pastor Stephan led Carl F. W. Walther to the same conviction. Young Walther now found occasion to read the Reformer's writings in his father's library and was won by them to appreciate God's message in the Scriptures. One Walther biographer puts it this way: "It was the reading of the great

reformer's writings that convinced him fully of the scripturalness of Lutheran doctrine and the necessity of a firm confessional position. He never lost that conviction."²⁰ For young Walther, as for the young Harless, the Lutheran awakening did not amount to a mere formal adherence to the historic Lutheran church and its confessions, but was a conviction of the heart. He was willing to stand in the judgment on the foundation of that faith.

On the day after his ordination into the ministry, Walther said as much. "Praise be to God in eternity," the inductee said out loud, "that I . . . am not compelled to look upon this oath as a shackle of conscience, but rather that through it the conviction . . . has come to life, and I now have liberty to teach . . . the pure Word of God, to which my poor heart clings as . . . my hope for the present and for the world to come."²¹

When at a later date in America Walther had to face the charge of reprobation, the convictions won in the Awakening bore fruit. He defended his adherence to the historic church and its confessions by insisting that there could no be children without fathers, that the church must remain the church of the apostles and prophets. (No wonder the motto of Walther's Missouri Synod became "Verbum dei manet in aeternum!") As with the Lutheran Awakening and the Reformation itself, the rallying point for Walther must remain: Back to the roots of the Christian faith in the Scriptures! Walther said as much in 1866:

"Let other churches have the fame of not being the children but the fathers of the church of the past; let their's (sic!) be the glory of not having inherited the truth but of having done independent research and

having acquired the truth for themselves; let them have the zeal to transform the church of the Reformation in accordance with the demands of a new and more enlightened age, to enrich it with newly discovered truths, to guide it toward a nobler consummation, to reconcile it with the spirit of the times, and thus to speed ahead of us and leave us far behind: We will stay on our good old path! On this day (Oct. 31) 349 years ago Luther made his motto not 'Forward!' but 'Backward!' namely by returning to the apostolic church. Even so, let us this day . . . pledge to each other: We want to return to Luther and with him in the church of the apostles and prophets, to their doctrine and practice."²²

But Walther did not take his Lutheran identity won during the Lutheran Awakening uncritically. He recognized that the name "Lutheran" had recently become more respected in his homeland. But his joy was tempered by the knowledge that many, even among the Old Lutherans, had bought Lutheranism too cheaply, without a thorough study of the church's doctrine. What such nominal Lutherans failed to realize is that true doctrine is "not something you find on the street like a stone you put into your pocket and then carry around with you, but Scripture says: 'Men of violence take it by force,' (Matthew 11:12)."²³ There were indeed those, like Professor von Hofmann at Erlangen University and Pastor Loehe in Bavaria, who were firmly committed to the Lutheran church in a formal way. But they did not consistently follow the Lutheran confession and adhered to it with reservation.²⁴

America offered a different scene. In Walther's eyes a new springtime for Lutheranism was possible in America because the new world provided a fresh

opportunity for the church to flourish unburdened by state interference. In a letter to his wife from Europe Walther bared his soul on the matter: "I do not have to reassure you how much I yearn for America . . . As much as God has done here for improvement, yet I have to say after observing many things in Germany that induce me to praise God: The greatest thing God has done for us is in America."²⁵

In America, the great and praiseworthy benefits to which Walther refers were the guarantees of religious freedom and freedom of conscience. But these freedoms also put Christians under a solemn obligation faithfully to use this freedom, for "God will someday demand a serious account of the use of the inexpressible benefit."²⁶ Thus, in his own way, Walther had come to appreciate that the maxim "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty" applied to the church as well as to politics.

The Middle Way

Upon returning to the free atmosphere of America, Walther set himself the task of spelling out the answer to the question: What does it mean to be a Lutheran? He was convinced that, under God's blessing, the free conferences were the best means to lead Lutherans to unity and eventual union. In the initial invitation he set an agenda that aimed to clear the way for the "formation of an Evangelical Lutheran Church of North America" by rescuing it from the twin dangers that would destroy true unity: unionism and separatism.²⁷

"Our church in America stood among others in a twofold danger, either of being splintered into hostile armies, or of falling prey to the lust for conquest that might be entertained by any synodical

coalition with its specific slant, swelling in number and influence and swallowing up everything," Walther wrote in the martial tones of the church militant. He was pleased at the direction taken at the first meeting, for "the conference marked the blessed beginning of stemming this twofold danger with a mighty dike."²⁸

Steering the middle course to unity between unionism and separatism was no easy task, and Walther recognized the need for a firm stand and an evangelical heart. Unionism, as the experience in Europe demonstrated, played fast and loose with Christian doctrine and strained the bonds of fraternal love to the breaking point. For that reason, "mutual confidence prevents us from disregarding those differences in doctrine which become evident . . . to cover them up and to [bury] them," Walther indicated, as a matter of principle.²⁹ Instead of declaring points of doctrine "open questions" and entering into mutual compromise in order to remain outwardly united, Walther brought them "out into the open" as mutual differences.

But openness with regard to doctrinal differences was not an end in itself for Walther. Instead, it opened the door to unity by exposing the matter in question to the scrutiny of God's Word and the heritage of the church. "We do not desist from seeking and searching in the Word of God and in the testimonies of the church and the teachings of the church, by colloquies and disputations, privately and publicly," Walther explained, "until unity has been attained also in those points in which it might have suffered loss."³⁰

By this patient and charitable dealing, Walther intended to avoid the danger of a sectarian spirit. He explains at length how charity and firmness in the pursuit of unity go hand in hand: (Permit a

reading of the entire passage)

"We subscribe wholeheartedly to the well-known maxim 'In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas' (in essentials, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity). We do so, however, not in a unionistic sense, which places even the doctrine of the means of grace into the category of doubtful things. We do so in the sense that we gladly permit anyone to harbor his private opinions in matters which are not contrary to the Word of God, as long as he does not attempt to subject anyone else's conscience to his.

So little is unity in the form and method of doctrine the goal of our endeavors that we rather heartily rejoice in the multiplicity of spiritual gifts, which in this respect are given free play for their development.

Our union stipulates agreement in ceremonies only insofar as this unity is required by the confessional rites of our church. Unity in practice is of great value to us, to be sure, but only insofar as the unhindered edification of the church depends upon a common foundation and as faithfulness to the Confessions requires it.

Our unity is not, however, a sectarian one. On the contrary, an inner longing for unity with all other denominations enlivens and inspires us. The less this unity among us is cold and abstract, but rather a unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, a unity of sentiments and cordial love, so much the more it urges us to pursue unity with all Christians, especially with those who carry before them the same confessional banner."³¹

The sin of separatism weighed especially heavy on Walther's mind because the free atmosphere in America permitted such individualistic and sectarian attitudes to mushroom.

"Just consider the relationship which existed before in this land between the synods which called themselves Lutheran," Walther wrote in review of the first free conference. "Each one followed, according to the measure of its knowledge and according to its opinions and local environments, its own peculiar direction. Instead of emphasizing their common relationship and serving one another with the special gifts which each possessed, they separated, step by step, farther and farther from each other, and thus fell into a divided state of jealousy. It appeared as though in the end as many divisions, yes, and in part, sects, would arise in the Church as there were synods."³²

Would it not, however, be equally dangerous and divisive for members of those synods who embraced all the Lutheran Confessions to participate in a conference whose basis was the Augsburg Confession alone, as the invitation to the conference suggested? Could not Satan use the device to rob them of the great treasure that united them? Walther admitted the danger was real. And his answer to the dilemma was forthright. "When an action does not injure the faith but is called for by love for the brethren as individuals and for the church as a whole, it would be an act of both unbelief and lovelessness to omit such an action because of the possible danger."³³

Even more serious, as far as Walther was concerned, not to act meant flight from responsibility. After all, those who held to the truth in their confession had nothing to hide when others, with them, were willing to listen to God's Word. "If

those who by God's grace have come to recognize the glory of all our churchly confessions timidly withdraw from all those who have the same faith but not the same knowledge, an equally dreadful danger would threaten, namely, that one part would become guilty of a pharisaic, carnal, spiritually proud, loveless insistence on its strict confessionalism, while the other part, instead of being filled with confidence and love for the continued building and further fortification of our confessional castle, would more and more be scared off as from a prison tower of spirit and of faith."³⁴

Thus a Lutheran must remain a fighter for the truth, not a sectarian who leaves in the midst of the struggle for the truth. He must contend for the truth as long as God and conscience allow.

To a European friend who asked about staying in the German State Church, Walther advised: "A Lutheran is, so to say, conservative by nature and can be moved to break with the conditions in which God has placed him only if one forces him to act against his conscience. There is a great difference between an originally false churchly fellowship and an originally orthodox but degenerate [fellowship]. . . . One must leave a heretical or schismatic fellowship, without consulting flesh and blood, or even a syncretistically constituted sect. This is not the case with a church that originally was orthodox but in which untruth and heresy cause struggles. One abandons a sinking ship, not a leaky [one]."³⁵

Until the time when error so persists that it is no longer correctable, therefore, love dictates a firm and gentle course. To a troubled parishioner in the Breslau Synod in Germany who requested the services of a minister, Walther counseled: "From our point of view you must necessarily have

exhausted every means to lead your present communion to the truth--and thereby yourselves back to it also--and gotten no result before we could send you a pastor, or we would be making ourselves guilty of the sin of schism."³⁶

What then, according to Walther, does it mean to be a Lutheran? He answered both positively and negatively. Positively, it meant the promotion of the church's catholicity; negatively, it meant avoiding the twin dangers of unionism and separatism. Early in his American labors, Walther expressed himself in this way: "The more fatal and destructive [our stubborn isolation] got for us, the more we now yearn for the most painstaking preservation of the church's catholicity and for the avoidance of separatism in every form."³⁷

For the first president of the Synodical Conference the middle course between unionism and separatism lay not in church union, but in the promotion of true unity. He clearly stated this view in the year following the first free conference: "An externally grand Lutheran union in spite of inner disunity" would be an abomination in God's eyes.³⁸ But at the same time the question needed to be raised: "How dare we to be preserved in the fellowship of one faith, one mind, and one voice if we despise external union with those who now share our same confession before the world when such union is possible?"³⁹

The answer to that question led to the formation of the Synodical Conference. Walther's middle road to church union in the Conference was not to be confused with the middle course which Schaff attributed to the Moderate Lutherans--which put the Neo and Old Lutherans at the extremes. In Schaff's eyes the middle course of the Moderates was willing to tolerate doctrinal differences on the way to

union, in the spirit of English and American toleration. For Walther the middle way to union lay in a unity grounded in Scripture and faithful to the Lutheran Confessions.

A True Lutheran

Walther unmistakably held Scripture and the Lutheran confessional writings in highest regard. They were in his eyes normative for faith and life. They remained standards in the church militant to which Christians pledged themselves to keep the peace in the battle against the devil, world, and one's own flesh. In Scripture and the Confessions can be found Walther's answer to the question: What does it mean to be a Lutheran?

The great value Walther placed on the Lutheran Confessions is spelled out in a letter to the Tennessee Synod. "Now there is, of course, no question that all the Symbolical Books of our orthodox church are acknowledged as her public confession of faith, although in certain Lutheran particular [territorial] churches for various reasons only the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is specifically named when its teachers make their confessional oath or pledge. No Lutheran will deny that the Book of Concord contains the Symbols of the Lutheran Church; a church symbol and the confession of a church are of course identical."⁴⁰

If a pastor or congregation happened to hold only to the Augsburg Confession, Walther was willing to grant that the church was truly Lutheran. But the principle still remained: "A genuinely Lutheran church will obviously not contradict any of the Symbols contained in the Book of Concord."⁴¹

For this reason, Walther regarded any attempt at confessional reductionism as deceptive and a

weakening of the bond of faith. "We think that anyone who is so dishonest and unscrupulous as to allow himself to be pledged to the Augsburg Confession and to swear adherence to it even though he rejects in part the Biblical faith expressed there--such a person has a conscience so broad and dulled and branded that, if it is to his advantage, he will subscribe to the whole Book of Concord, containing all the Lutheran Symbols, even though he does not believe their teaching and has no intention of conducting his office in accord with them."⁴²

The Confessions were reflective of Biblical teaching in all their parts precisely because of the center out of which the testimony grew. That center, Walther never failed to point out, was grace. As simply as it may sound, what it means to be a Lutheran is to proclaim the grace of God in Christ as the core of God's message.

"The Lutheran Church tells the sinner, as the Word of God tells him," Walther said, "Es ist schon alles getan [Everything has already been done]; you are already redeemed, you are already justified before God; you need not therefore do anything to redeem yourself, to reconcile God to you, to earn your salvation. All that has already been accomplished. Only believe! Believe that Christ, the Son of God, has already gained all this for you; through this faith you obtain all this and are saved."⁴³

If grace shaped the Lutheran Confession, then Scripture was its basis. Walther warned against departing from this foundation: "Who will want to aline himself with a new theology which claims to be a legitimate development of the old Lutheran theology, but departs from it in the doctrine of Scripture, of the 'ratio formalis Scripturae,'

of that which constitutes the essence of Scripture [namely, its inspiration]."⁴⁴

"We have adhered," he said in summary, "first, to the supreme principle of all Christianity, that the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments are, from the first to the last letter, the inspired Word of the great God, the only rule and norm of faith and life, of all doctrine and all teachers, and the supreme judge of all religious controversies. Next, we have adhered to the second supreme principle of our truly evangelical Church, that the article of the justification of the poor sinner before God by grace alone, for the sake of Christ alone, and therefore through faith alone, is the chief fundamental article of the whole Christian religion, with which the Church stands and falls."⁴⁵

Under Walther's guidance, the Synodical Conference took the same stand in its constitution. Article II stated simply and concisely: "The Synodical Conference acknowledges the canonical writings of the Old and New Testaments as God's Word, and the confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of 1580, called the 'Concordia,' as her own."⁴⁶

After the Conference had formed, Walther had no grandiose expectations for the Synodical Conference. The battle, after all, was the Lord's and He would either prosper or prevent the cause. Walther understood that being a Lutheran was to live with the wisdom of the cross, so foolish to human wisdom, such a folly to sign-seekers.

"True Lutheranism," he remarked with a perception born of experience, "does not come overnight but is born through travail and the waves of difficult anxieties of conscience and difficult struggles. And above all, only he can seek to be a

Lutheran in the true sense of the word who no longer seeks honor before men (John 5:44), for whom it is enough to have God's approval, then leaves it up to God whether He wants to push us forward or whether He wants to leave us small, unnoticed, and forgotten. . . . But it cannot be otherwise, God's matters always begin disdainfully in human eyes, also a self-renewing church."⁴⁷

This insight was especially important because the communion of saints was never to be confused with the community of the orthodox, as important as true teaching was for the building of the church.

"O my dear friend," Walther wrote passionately, "how then can you not see that the concept of the church as the communion of the regenerate and renewed who are gathered in the Spirit conforms to the essence of living Christianity while the mechanical conception of the church as a community of the orthodox (be they converted or unconverted) leads necessarily to a dead Christianity, that is, to no Christianity at all, and to carnal boasting: 'Here is the Lord's temple. Here is the Lord's Temple.' This concept makes people into Pharisees."⁴⁸

Contending for the truth leaves a true Lutheran instead in the humble position of a beggar. Just when the Synodical Conference was getting off the ground, Walther summoned the church to recognize such beggary: "Whoever ascribes all glory to God and seeks to have people do likewise; and whoever recognizes that man is less than nothing; whoever brings man to the point where he prostrates himself before the Almighty, and as a poor sinful beggar pleads for and awaits all things from God's hand -- he builds the church! For the church is the place where God's glory dwells."⁴⁹

Walther's principles, set down in the Synodical Conference, reflected this attitude of faith. He was firmly convinced that the church's confession was not there to mold God's Word, but to be molded by it; nor was the confession to be taken lightly, because God cared.

"If someone is seeking worldly honor because of his religion," Walther announced to a convention in 1876, "he should by no means be a Lutheran! Because the Lutheran religion will not bring worldly honor; it gives all honor to God alone and gives man nothing except shame."⁵⁰ The disciple is not above the Master. Walther did not expect life for himself or for the Conference to be any different.

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