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The Altenburg Debate

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THE ALTENBURG DEBATE

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by

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CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

The Purpose of the Study

In 1839 a group of emigrants arrived in St. Louis from Saxony under the leadership of Martin Stephan. They had emigrated for religious reasons; they were convinced that they could not exercise their faith according to the dictates of their consciences in the land of their birth. However, shortly after they had settled in St. Louis and in Perry County, Missouri, Stephan was deposed from his position of leadership and expelled from the colony.

For two years the colonists were in a state of confusion and uncertainty. They were perplexed by a number of serious questions: Had they been wrong in their allegiance to Stephan? Was the emigration a sinful act on their part? Were they a church? Did their clergy have the authority to function? Were the official acts performed by their clergy valid? What was the solution to their many problems? It was not until 1841 that an acceptable solution was offered. This solution was presented by Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther in the form of eight theses which he successfully defended at the Altenburg Debate.

This study is an attempt to understand what the issues were which culminated in the Altenburg Debate of 1841. Why did it take two years to find a solution to the problems of the colonists? Were any other solutions attempted? If there were, why were they unacceptable? Against whom did Walther debate at Altenburg? What position did the opposition

advocate? What was the source of Walther's theses? These and many other questions enter the mind of the student of the early history of the Missouri Synod when he begins to evaluate the Altenburg Debate.

The purpose of this study is to find the answers to these questions, as far as this is possible on the basis of the evidence. It is an attempt to analyze the basic issue involved in the debate, the doctrine of the church. The focal point of the debate was not the polity, the structure, or the organization of the church, but the nature of the church. It is from this viewpoint, that of ecclesiology, that this study has been prepared.

The Scope of the Study

In order to understand the various solutions which were advocated during the two years before the Altenburg Debate, it is necessary to understand the theological climate in Germany prior to the emigration. The purpose of this discussion is not to pass judgment on the emigrants or to question the validity of the emigration, but this background is needed to evaluate some of the positions set forth, especially that of Franz Adolph Marbach, Walther's opponent at Altenburg.

Because of the importance which Walther assumed at and after the event under consideration, some space must be devoted to his background, his early ministry, the influence of Stephan on him, and his part in the emigration. To a certain extent the position which Walther advocated at Altenburg was influenced by his experiences with Pietism and Stephanism. Furthermore, Walther was influenced by his environment and by the times in which he lived. However, no attempt was made to arrive at an

exhaustive treatment; only those events and experiences which shed some light on the subject under discussion have been included.

The deposition of Stephan might be called the immediate cause of the chaos which was resolved in the Altenburg Debate. This event rocked the very foundations of the colony. The colonists were disillusioned and disheartened; the clergy confessed their guilt for their part in Stephan's activities; the people lost their respect for the pastors. These are important indications of the depth of the spiritual confusion which affected every member of the colony, and as such they had to be considered.

The two projected solutions, that of Carl Eduard Vehse and that of Franz Adolph Marbach, both of which were unacceptable, also needed to be discussed. Because Walther was indebted to Vehse's and confronted by Marbach's, the issues of the debate cannot be brought into their proper perspective unless these two solutions and their implications are understood.

Finally, the debate itself needed to be examined. The occasion, the climate, and the place of the debate are important for a comprehension of its results. Furthermore, the theses of Walther, their context, source, and theological implications needed to be considered.

The Limitations of the Study

Any student of history is faced with the problem of limitations in his examination of a single event, such as the Altenburg Debate. How much background ought to be included? Where does one draw the line? This problem was also faced in the preparation of this study. Since this

study is limited to the Altenburg Debate, only that which was considered necessary for an understanding and comprehension of the debate was included.

For this reason the details of the rise of Stephanism and the emigration have not been given. Since this has been exhaustively treated by other studies, it did not seem necessary to retrace those steps. Furthermore, such a task would have obliterated the event under discussion.

In the same manner the other events in the colony have not been given detailed discussion. Since the purpose of the study is to demonstrate the ecclesiological thinking which was prevalent in the colony, the other events have been included only where it was thought necessary.

In order to compensate for some of these limitations, references have been made to other works which the reader might consult for further study. By adopting this method, it is hoped that the subject has been kept to the point and at the same time that some helpful guides have been provided for the interested reader.

However, the limitations imposed by the lack of sources were more distressing than those described above. The Protokollbuch of the debate has not, at the time of this writing, been discovered. These official minutes would give much more information than is available at present. Secondly, the amount of material available from those who were present at the debate is very scanty. Walther's own manuscript which he prepared for the debate has not been discovered. Although Koestering in his Auswanderung der saechsischen Lutheraner im Jahre 1838, ihre Niederlassung in Perry-Co., Mo., und damit zusammenhaengende interessante Nachrichten includes some of Walther's material, it is by no means complete. Thirdly,

Walther did not do much reminiscing in his later years. It is unfortunate that he never wrote his memoirs. Such information would be invaluable.

Furthermore, most of the manuscript material which is deposited at Concordia Historical Institute was not consulted in the preparation of this study. Because of the difficulties inherent in working with manuscript evidence, and in view of the other limitations of this study, it seemed beyond the scope of this study to examine all of this material which has bearing on the subject under consideration.

The Conclusions of the Study

The last chapter of this study is a discussion of the effects which resulted from the Altenburg Debate. Although many results might have been cited, this study is limited to those three which seemed most important in the light of future developments.

In the first place, the debate marked the end of the two years of conflict which had threatened the very existence of the colony. The entire spiritual life and health of the colony was changed by the acceptance of the position which Walther advocated. To a group of people who were primarily motivated by religious concerns this was extremely important.

Secondly, the debate marked the emergence of Walther as the leader of the colony. In view of the role which Walther and the colonists were to play in the organization and growth of the Missouri Synod, his rise to the position of leadership through the debate is very important.

Thirdly, the theses which Walther set forth and defended at Altenburg had a profound effect on the future ecclesiology of the synod which

Walther was to lead. All of Walther's later writings on the doctrine of the church grew out of the Altenburg Theses. These formed the foundation on which he built. These later writings, which were adopted as the position of the Missouri Synod, cannot be viewed in their proper perspective unless one has an understanding of the Altenburg Debate.

In view of the importance of these developments the debate must be considered one of the great events in the history of the Missouri Synod, and as such it deserves to be studied. In this spirit this study was prepared.

CHAPTER II

THE THEOLOGICAL CLIMATE IN GERMANY PRIOR TO THE SAXON EMIGRATION

Introduction

One of the most often cited reasons for the Saxon emigration under the leadership of Martin Stephan in 1839 was that those who emigrated did so because they sincerely believed that they could no longer exercise their religion according to Lutheran doctrine and practice in the land of their birth. This is expressly stated in the codes which were drawn up for the emigration venture:

> After the calmest and most mature reflection they find themselves confronted with the impossibility, humanly speaking, of retaining this faith pure and unadulterated in their present homeland, of confessing it, and of transmitting it to their descendants. They are, therefore, constrained by their conscience to emigrate and to seek a land where this faith is not endangered, and where they consequently can serve God undisturbed, in the manner which He has graciously revealed and established, and enjoy undisturbed and unabridged and pure means of grace (which God has instituted for the salvation of all men), and preserve them thus unabridged and pure for themselves and their descendants.[1]

This very issue was to become a source of confusion and contention in the controversy which disrupted the colony of the emigrants from the deposition of Stephan until the solution offered by C. F. W. Walther at the Altenburg Debate was accepted by the colonists. Had the colonists been misled in the emigration? Was it necessary for them to emigrate in order to find the pure Lutheran Church? Had the church in Saxony been completely dead? Was the emigration sinful *per se*? Was the church present

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[1] Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 567.

among the emigrants? Did they have to return to Germany in order to be members of the church? These and similar questions troubled the colonists in those two years of crisis.

In order for one to properly understand and evaluate the conditions which led to the Altenburg Debate in 1841 and the solution which was offered at this time by Walther, it is necessary to have some appreciation of the theological climate in Germany prior to the Saxon emigration. The leaders of the emigration were convinced that the dominant force in theology at the time was Rationalism. Writing more than forty years after the emigration, Walther gives the following description of the religious conditions in Saxony:

> Just as in that time the binding oath upon the Book of Concord was only an empty comedy, so the most important regulations of the established Church were merely so many denials of the Confessions of the Church. Only by applying Jesuitical moral principles could one maintain that the Church of Saxony was Lutheran, because the Confessions of this Church still prevailed in it. Already in 1812 a Book of Forms, or Agende, had been introduced which a true Lutheran pastor could use only with a bad conscience, since it contained forms which, on the one hand, openly denied divine truth and, on the other hand, watered Christian doctrine. While nobody questioned or cared when the rationalistic, unbelieving clergyman, to whom it still sounded too Christian, merely guided himself by the Book of Forms, the confessional Lutheran pastor did not dare to deviate in the least from the prescribed forms. If he did and it came to the attention of his superiors, he was most severely called to account. . . . The confessional Lutheran pastor was more distressed in his conscience when he was expected to read from his pulpit the miserable prayers especially prepared by the consistory for special occasions. Furthermore, a hymnal beyond all measure rationalistic had been introduced. The schoolbooks were almost without exception completely leavened with modernism, so that the Lutheran clergyman, as the spiritual supervisor of the school, was constantly in dire distress of conscience.
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> Furthermore, it was in the highest degree offensive to the conscience of a confessional Lutheran pastor that by reason of his office he was compelled not only to maintain ecclesiastical, sacramental, and fraternal relations with errorists, yea with most notorious heretics, but to recognize them as his spiritual superiors, suffer himself to be examined, ordained, and installed into office by them, and to

> permit them to blaspheme divine truth before his own congregation. . . . Finally, it also caused the confessional Lutheran pastor no little trouble that the practice of announcement before Communion, the suspension of impenitent persons from the Lord's Supper, in short, every exercise of church discipline was denied him.
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> Confessional Lutheran laymen in Saxony at that time likewise were in much spiritual distress. They were required to recognize notorious false prophets as their shepherds and pastors, permit their children to be baptized and confirmed by them, suffer themselves to be absolved by them at confession and to receive Holy Communion from them. They were required to place their children into the charge of godless schoolmasters for their instruction in religion and Christian training, and for this purpose to purchase and themselves place into their hands schoolbooks containing false and blasphemous doctrine.
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> Hard as it was for many poor pious laymen to walk for miles if they desired to hear a Lutheran sermon, this was the least they had to bear. Many of them, after having labored the whole week from early dawn until late at night to earn their meager daily bread, set out at the approach of Sunday, soon after midnight, in order to refresh their famishing souls with the preaching of the pure Word of God in some distant church. When this was done, on Sunday evening they began the journey homeward with rejoicing and on Monday, refreshed spiritually, again took up the weekly task which barely supported them and their own.[2]

Since Rationalism was cited as the reason for the emigration, several important questions must be answered: What was Rationalism? How strong was Rationalism at this time in Saxony? Was this movement in its flower, or was it breathing its last? Was there any movement away from Rationalism, and if so, how effective was this reaction, and who were its outstanding leaders? These and other questions must be answered if the emigration and its succeeding events are to be viewed in their proper perspective.

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[2]Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), pp. 9-11, quoting from C[arl] F[erdinand] W[ilhelm] Walther, Kurzer Lebenslauf des weiland ehrwuerdigen Pastor Joh. Friedr. Buenger, treuverdienten Pastors der evangl.-lutherischen Immanuels-Gemeinde zu St. Louis, Mo., nebst bei seinem feierlichen Begraebniss gehalten Reden (St. Louis: Verlag von F. Dette, 1882), pp. 17-19.

The Decline of Rationalism

The most dominent intellectual influence in the late seventeenth century and all of the eighteenth century was the Aufklaerung. The basic assumption of this movement was that the universe was governed by immutable natural laws which could be discerned by reason and that the application of this principle could not but produce the progressive betterment of mankind. This movement effected every area of intellectual activity; in theology the application of the principles of this movement was called Rationalism.

In the earliest applications of the Aufklaerung to theology the aim was to demonstrate the reasonableness of religion. However, as Rationalism gained more and more of a hold on theological thought, many of the fundamental articles of the Christian faith were pronounced as irrational and absurd. Miracles were denied because they presumed the violation of natural laws; the power of God was limited to the beginning of the universe, and the doctrine of preservation was regarded as the operation of natural laws; the Scriptures were assailed by the tools of higher criticism, since Rationalism denied the concept of revelation; the atonement was denied, and Jesus was regarded as merely an ethical figure, a standard to be emulated.

Rationalism was late in coming to Germany, and even later to Saxony. In Saxony it never reached the extremes which it did elsewhere. Forster comments:

> In Saxony the same influences were felt as in the rest of Germany, but with different force and effect. These variations can be summed up by saying that extremes were the exception and changes were slower. Rationalism was present, but it was often tempered by one of the countless nuances of Supernaturalism. On the other hand,

it maintained itself longer.[3]

Mundinger's words are worth noting:

> Rationalism was late in coming to Germany, and in all the states of Germany it was perhaps least vital in Saxony. Mild in its methods and sober in its thought processes, it seldom went to extremes. It always retained at least a few grains of sober Lutheranism. The leaders of the movement (their number was not as large as is commonly supposed) professed a much-diluted orthodoxy and pursued a policy of denatured pietism. They were decidedly churchly; that is, they wished to see the Church and its forms maintained. In fact, the religion of many rationalists had degenerated into dead formalism. They clung to the old. They permitted pastors to be bound by the Augsburg Confession and the other confessional writings of the Lutheran Church.
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> That the rationalistic pastors were interested in the maintenance and progress of the Church is shown by their interest in so-called special undertakings of the Church. They are members of Bible societies. They join groups to promote Christian missions. They work hand in hand with men who are known to be confessionally conservative. In short, the rationalism of Saxony was middle-of-the-road rationalism, which on the whole and as a movement did not possess sufficient vitality to take an extreme stand on anything. The readiness to assume responsibility and to act which comes from deep religious experience was absent.[4]

However, it must not be overlooked that Rationalism was still very popular among the leaders of the church. This was especially true in Saxony, the home of the Stephanite emigrants. Forster describes this in the following words:

> Nevertheless, in the history of Stephanism one fact must be emphasized as of vital importance, namely, that, despite the changes beginning to take place as a result of the Erweckung, there still existed an unmistakably Rationalistic tendency in the Protestant Church of that day, and particularly in the Saxon Lutheran Church and among some of its leaders. The generalization of Lamprecht that "the atmosphere which pervaded the Protestant churches during the first decades of the nineteenth century was that of the old, individualistic Rationalism," and his similar remarks of a more specific

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[3] Forster, op. cit., p. 19.

[4] Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), pp. 19-20.

> nature about the year 1830, became more pointed in the words of L. Fischer, an opponent of Stephanism, who wrote in 1839: "The evangelical-Protestant Church has become in its scope the refuge of freethinkers." Fischer fortified his claim with quotations of extreme Rationalistic statements by leading churchmen in Saxony. Franz Delitzsch, a scholar in his own right and a Stephanite who broke away from the movement at the time of the emigration, stated in 1842 that the bulk of Rationalistic publications was appearing in Saxony.[5]

The binding character of the Lutheran Confessions also became a topic of considerable discussion and debate in Saxony in the years prior to the emigration of the Stephanites. There were some who contended that the Symbols ought to be revised in order that they would conform to the thought patterns of Rationalism. On the other hand, there were those who believed that the creedal basis of the Church of Saxony ought to be an amalgamation of the Lutheran and the Reformed Confessions. Either of these steps could be accomplished only by the formal action of the government; such action was too arduous to achieve. However, both of these viewpoints were prevalent in the State Church. Although neither could accomplish its purposes in full, both exerted their influence on the theological climate of the State Church.[6]

Orthodox groups in Saxony, especially the Stephanites, were opposed to both of these streams of theological thought. Although they fought Unionism in all of its forms and manifestations, it was Rationalism which they considered their arch-enemy. All liberal tendencies were grouped under the single designation of Neologie.[7] Rationalism struck at the

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[5] Forster, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

[6] Ibid., pp. 21-22.

[7] Ibid., p. 22.

very foundations of the faith to which they had sworn their allegiance; to give in to this force was tantamount to committing theological and spiritual suicide. At the time when Stephan began his Dresden pastorate in 1810 and after, the Rationalists were engaged in a bitter war against an orthodoxy which was branded as literalist, medieval, unenlightened, mystical, hypocritical, and a number of other things.[8]

From the above a number of conclusions can be drawn concerning the strength of Rationalism in Germany prior to the emigration of the Stephanites. In the first place, Rationalism was still exerting its influence on the doctrine and life of the Church of Saxony, it had advocates who held important positions in the church, and it was vocal in the expression of its point of view. Secondly, Rationalism was not unopposed; both those who desired a union of the Lutheran and the Reformed Confessions into a single creedal basis and those who advocated a strict, orthodox Lutheranism refused to concede defeat to the liberalism which was inherent in Rationalism. Thirdly, Rationalism was breathing its last; it was making a final, but futile, attempt to be the dominating theological force in Germany; its days were numbered, but it was not going to go down without a fight. Finally, a potent reaction to Rationalism was making its appearance on the theological scene in the form of a rise of confessionalism.

The Rise of Confessionalism

Conservative, confessional Lutheranism never died out during the

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[8] Ibid.

era when Rationalism held sway in Germany. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to trace the evidences of confessionalism in the age of Rationalism, it must be asserted that during this period there were many pastors and theologians who were loyal to the Lutheran Symbols and openly opposed all liberalism. To assume that Rationalism had completely obliterated confessionalism would be a gross distortion of the facts.

In 1817 confessional Lutheranism received a stimulus in the form of ninety-five theses prepared by Klaus Harms, the archdeacon of Kiel. These theses were published to celebrate the tercentenary observance of Luther's nailing of his theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg. However, the importance of these theses does not lie in the fact that they merely commemorated a great event. In 1817 the Prussian Union was consummated; the Lutheran and Reformed churches were merged into one State Church. The general principle which was followed in this union was that those things which were held in common were the essential elements and that things on which they differed were of relatively minor importance; these differences should be either sacrificed or permitted to exist side by side. The theses by Harms were a confessional reaction to the Prussian Union. Harms pointed out the deplorable conditions of the church and demonstrated the latitudinarianism of the current rationalizing, critical, and unionistic trends from the historic, confessional position of Lutheranism. This dramatic appeal brought forth a storm of protests; within a short time approximately two hundred pamphlets either for or against the theses of Harms made their appearance in Germany.[9]

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[9] Ibid., pp. 16-18.

The Rationalists reacted violently, but the conservative Lutherans were attracted to Harms. G. H. Loeber, one of the pastors who emigrated with the Stephanites, thought very highly of Harms and carried on a correspondence with him.[10]

Harms was not the only one who raised the banner of confessionalism in Germany against the advocates of Rationalism. There were a number of antirationalistic groups, and they were known by a variety of names: Old-Lutherans, Orthodoxists, New Orthodoxists, or by some personal designation, such as Stephanites. There were many who were beginning to raise their voices in an ardent plea for confessional Lutheranism. Mundinger gives the following description of those who were active in this cause:

> Summing up, we get the following picture of spiritual conditions during the 1830's in Saxony: Two opposing sets of ideas are striving for the mastery. In this "battle that is now raging in the entire Christian world," there is general confusion and a ferment of ideas. However, Lutheran confessionalism is steadily but surely advancing and gaining the upper hand. Since 1827 the young and spirited Hengstenberg is gaining fame by whacking away with telling effect at rationalism in his Evangelische Kirchenzeitung; Hase is writing his devastating books that put an end to the scientific reputation of Roehr and Wegscheider. As a member of the theological faculty at Leipzig, August Hahn is attacking rationalism as anti-Christian and demanding that every rationalist be put out of the Church. In Dresden, pamphlets are being handed out (February 2, 1832) stating that Dame Rationalism is dead and giving glory for her demise to the Erweckungsbewegung. Rudelbach, the great Danish Lutheran theologian, who has just (1829) been called by Prince von Schoenburg as superintendent and Consistorialrat in Glauchau, Saxony, is writing his masterpieces of Lutheran theology, first in Grundtvig's Theologisk Maanedskrift, then in Hengstenberg's Evangelische Kirchenzeitung, and finally in a Zeitschrift which he is editing together with another outstanding superintendent in Saxony, H. E. F. Guericke of Halle. Young and staunch Adolf Harless is writing and speaking in behalf of confessional Lutheranism, first at Erlangen (1829) in near-by Bavaria, then at Leipzig, and finally

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[10] Ibid., p. 18.

in Munich. What a productive decade for Lutheran theology![11] These gifted men were doing much for the cause of conservative Lutheranism, and their labors were to supply the death-blow to Rationalism in Germany.

J. K. Wilhelm Loehe, who was to play a prominent role in the history of the formation of the Missouri Synod, was a staunch leader in the ranks of confessional Lutheranism. When he was a student at Berlin in 1828, he was made acquainted with the works of some of the outstanding theologians of the period of orthodoxy, and he was particularly influenced by David Hollaz.[12] Throughout his life Loehe remained a conservative theologian; he upheld the Scriptures against the Rationalists; he defended the Lutheran Symbols against the Unionists. His powerful influence is evidence of the rise of confessionalism during this period.

Martin Stephan, whose position and person will be discussed at some length in subsequent portions of this study, also emerged as a confessional leader during this period. Those who became his ardent followers, such as O. H. Walther, G. H. Loeber, C. F. W. Walther, Carl Vehse, Adolph Marbach, and many others, were attracted to him primarily because they believed that he was a conservative, confessional Lutheran.

E. G. W. Keyl, one of the pastors who emigrated with Stephan, also testified to the fact that confessionalism was on the ascendancy in Germany at the time of the emigration. After the controversy which raged in the colony in Perry County had been resolved through the medium of

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[11] Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 23-25.

[12] Theodore Graebner, Church Bells in the Forest (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), p. 16.

the Altenburg Debate, Keyl wrote to Rudelbach in Germany:

> What an impudent lie to claim that there was no hope for the Lutheran Church, none in Saxony, none in Germany, none in all Europe! Incontrovertible facts show the very opposite to be true. What an assumption to pass judgment and condemn pastors and congregation members who still uphold the Confessions of our Lutheran Church![13]

Wilhelm Sihler, one of the leaders in the formation of the Missouri Synod, described the conditions in Germany in the following words:

> It was a period of spiritual springtime. After a long and dreary winter, during which rationalism dominated the pulpit, the lecture hall, and the press, the Lord raised up men of valor, equipped with mental and spiritual power, who were happy to bear testimony on the platform and in the press. The hoarse cawing of the crows was gradually silenced. The voice of the turtledove was heard in the land. The lark and the nightingale were sending their sweet songs of praise upward to the throne of God's grace.[14]

From the above evidences it can be seen that conservative Lutheranism was not dead in Germany in the decades prior to the emigration of the Saxons under the leadership of Martin Stephan. Indeed, there is much to show that confessionalism was on the verge of destroying the last vestiges of Rationalism. Rationalism had run its course, and the new day was dawning for conservative Lutheranism. The shallowness of Rationalism was being exposed and negated by competent theologians. These theologians turned to the Lutheran Symbols and to the giants of the period of Lutheran orthodoxy for their doctrinal formulations. With clarity of thought and boldness of courage they were willing to suffer the taunts of their opponents who charged that they were repristinating theologians, stenographers of orthodoxy, and parrots of other men's thoughts. They

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[13] Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

[14] Ibid., p. 25.

knew that a new day was dawning for the Lutheran Church in Germany, and they devoted their energies to the rise of confessionalism.

CHAPTER III

CARL FERDINAND WILHELM WALTHER

Walther's Background and Early Ministry

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther emerged from the Altenburg Debate in 1841 to become the unquestioned theological leader of the colony of Saxons who had emigrated from Germany to Perry County. In subsequent years he was to assume the same role in the organization and development of the Missouri Synod. If one is to correctly evaluate and appreciate the contribution which Walther made to the colony, the Missouri Synod, and Lutheranism in America, one must be acquainted with the formative years of his development. Walther's experiences with Pietism and Stephanism did much to shape his theological thought. Without a knowledge of these experiences the position which Walther presented and defended at Altenburg cannot be brought into its proper perspective. Therefore, some consideration must be given to the influences which affected the early life and ministry of Walther.

Walther was born on October 25, 1811, at Langenschursdorf in Saxony. He came from a long line of Lutheran clergymen; both his father and his grandfather were pastors of the congregation at Langenschursdorf.[1] Until Walther was eight years old, he received his training from his father and from the local schools. From 1819 to 1821 he studied at the city

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[1]Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 41. For further information on Walther's family and early life the reader is referred to Martin Guenther, Dr. C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1890), pp. 1-6;

school in Hohenstein. From Hohenstein he went to the Gymnasium at Schneeberg, where he remained until 1829. On February 8, 1829, Walther wrote in his diary that he felt himself "born for music." Walther was a capable musician and loved music, but his father's opposition and the impetus given his religious interests at the time dissuaded him from adopting a musical career.[2] His father told him, "If you wish to become a musician, you will have to shift for yourself; but if you will study theology, I shall give you a thaler a week."[3]

Although Rationalism was on the wane and was breathing its last in Germany at the time when Walther was a student, his education was not unaffected by this movement. Walther describes this in his own words:

> I was eighteen years old when I left the Gymnasium, and I never heard a sentence of the Word of God coming from a believing heart. I had never had a Bible, neither a Catechism, but only a miserable Leitfaden (guide), which contained heathen morality.[4]

Walther never forgot this experience; it remained a force which helped to shape his thinking. In 1878 he spoke the following words concerning the historical faith which holds to the Bible as the Word of God, and in these words he reveals the type of surroundings in which he received his

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D. H. Steffens, Doctor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917), pp. 9-23; W. G. Polack, The Story of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), pp. 1-6; and C. L. Janzow, Life of Rev. Prof. C. F. W. Walther, edited by the Revision Board, English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri a. o. States (Pittsburg: American Lutheran Publication Board, 1899), pp. 9-12.

[2]Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 46.

[3]Polack, op. cit., p. 6.

[4]Baepler, op. cit., p. 41; Steffens, op. cit., p. 20; Janzow, op. cit., p. 11.

education and the influence which this environment had on him:

> Through this, that a man holds the Holy Scriptures to be God's word merely because he was so taught by his parents, namely, through a purely human faith in the same, certainly no man can become righteous before God and saved. Nevertheless, such a purely human faith is an inexpressibly great treasure, yea, a precious, costly gift of the prevenient grace of God. I may in this respect present myself to you as an example. My dear, God-fearing father taught me from childhood that the Bible is God's word. But I soon left my parental home--in my eighth year--to live in unbelieving circles. I did not lose this historical faith. It accompanied me through my life like an angel of God. But I spent my more than eight years of gymnasium life unconverted.[5]

In October, 1829, Walther began his studies at the University of Leipzig. Soon after he entered the university, he joined a pietistic circle of friends who met regularly for prayer and Scripture reading.[6] The leader of this group was Candidate Kuehn, who had come to the full assurance of his salvation only after a long period of struggling with the agony of sin and the terror of the Law. Although the first name of this individual has not been given in any of the writings of his former associates, he had a profound influence on this group. E. G. W. Keyl, who later joined in the Stephanite emigration, broke into tears when he was informed of the death of Kuehn in August of 1832 and said, "Oh, the mighty in Israel are fallen!"[7] Undoubtedly, Keyl was expressing the sentiments of the other members of the group, which included O. H. Walther, C. F. W. Walther, Ottomar Fuerbringer, J. F. Buenger, and Theodore Brohm, all of whom played important roles in the future of the Stephanite emigration.

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[5]Steffens, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

[6]Baepler, op. cit., p. 42.

[7]Steffens, op. cit., p. 37.

Kuehn attempted to lead the students who joined his group down the same path which he had traveled; in this way he sought to bring them to the surety of their salvation. Baepler comments on Kuehn's position:

> He insisted that a person's Christianity did not rest upon a firm foundation unless, like himself, one had experienced the keenest sorrow for sin and had known the very terrors of hell in agonizing struggles of repentance. Consequently, a joyful, evangelical Christianity developed into one of gloom and legalism in these young hearts.[8]

As an aid to find this personal assurance, Kuehn suggested various books to the students. Concerning the type of books read by this group, Baepler writes:

> The books chiefly read by this circle were of the pietistic school, whose weakness consisted in disregarding pure doctrine and espousing a religion of emotion and practical benevolence. "The less a book invited to faith," says Walther, "and the more legalistically it insisted upon contrite brokenness of heart and upon a complete mortification of the old man, the better we held it to be. Even such writings we read only so far as they described the griefs and exercises of remorse; when a description of faith and comfort followed, we usually closed the book, for, so we thought, this is as yet nothing for us."[9]

In his biography of Buenger Walther comments on the futility of the method employed by the members of this group to find spiritual solace. He says of Buenger:

> He also not only gave himself, body and soul, to his Lord and Saviour, but he soon after also fell into dire distress of conscience, like several others of his student companions and fellows in faith. Like these he now tortured himself day and night to reach the highest possible degree of penitence and contrition, without, however, being able to attain that for which he strove.[10]

Without a doubt Walther has injected a strong element of the personal

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[8] Baepler, op. cit., p. 42.

[9] Ibid., pp. 42-43.

[10] Steffens, op. cit., p. 43.

and the autobiographical in these words.

Walther struggled under the severe discipline of Kuehn in an effort to gain the surety of his salvation and solace for his distressed conscience. The effects of this strict behavior and consumption forced Walther to suspend his studies during the winter of 1831-1832.[11] During this period of rest he devoted himself to a study of the writings of Luther which he found in his father's library.[12] By Easter of 1832 he had sufficiently recuperated so that he returned to the university and completed his courses. Returning home once more, he prepared for his first examination, which he passed at Leipzig in September, 1833.[13] An insight into the kind of individual Walther was at this time can be gained from the following account by Janzow of Walther's examination:

> In the course of the oral examination, conducted by the learned Dr. G. B. Winer, he was asked to explain Romans 3:28, and whether Luther was correct in inserting the word "allein" (alone)--allein durch den Glauben: by faith alone--which is not found in the Greek text. Walther replied in the affirmative. The professors and students present derided the "pietist and mystic" for his ignorance. Winer, however, continued the examination, and, after Walther had borne out his assertion with striking proofs, turned to the learned audience with the remark: "Gentlemen, this young mystic understands St. Paul better than any one of you."[14]

In 1834 Walther accepted the position offered him to serve as private tutor at the home of Friedmann Loeber in Kahla; he remained there until November, 1836. On January 15, 1837, he was ordained and installed as pastor of the church at Braeunsdorf, where he served until the

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[11] Forster, op. cit., p. 46.

[12] Guenther, op. cit., p. 12.

[13] Forster, op. cit., p. 47.

[14] Janzow, op. cit., p. 16.

emigration to America.[15]

The Influence of Martin Stephan

Martin Stephan[16] had a profound influence on Walther. As pastor of St. John's Church in Dresden Stephan became famous throughout Germany for his stand on the Lutheran Confessions[17] and for powerful preaching and his pastoral advice which many sought.[18] Walther's connection with Stephan dates from the early thirties. On the advice of Theodore Brohm he wrote to Stephan seeking advice. The reply gave him, at least for the time being, the peace and assurance he had been seeking.[19] Steffens cites the following incident to show Walther's attitude toward Stephan:

> That Walther was inexpressibly grateful to Stephan appears from an incident also related by himself. About half a year later Konsistorialrath and Superintendent, Doctor Rudelbach, asked Walther to call on him at Glauchau, and informed him that he intended to propose him as tutor for his godly count. Doctor Rudelbach demanded that he break off all relations with Stephan. Walther told him at length what had led him to Stephan and what he owed him, asking, "Shall I forsake a man who, by God's grace, has saved my soul?" Deeply moved, Doctor Rudelbach replied, "No, my dear Walther, you must not forsake him; in God's name maintain your relations with him, but guard against all worship of man."[20]

Forster demonstrates the reasons for the rise of Stephanism very

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[15] Forster, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

[16] For a complete history of Stephan's activities from 1810 to 1837 the reader is referred to Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), pp. 41-60; and Forster, op. cit., pp. 27-59.

[17] Forster, op. cit., p. 31.

[18] Ibid., p. 34.

[19] Ibid., p. 47.

[20] Steffens, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

pointedly in the following words:

> It may quite plausibly be argued that the first impulse in the wrong direction came not from Stephan himself, but from the more enthusiastic of his adherents, some of whom elevated his personality over his teaching and practice. People as deeply and emotionally religious as, for instance, C. F. W. Walther, who felt himself transported "from hell to heaven" through Stephan's instrumentality, naturally had an extremely high regard for him and were submissive to him without any effort on his part to produce such an effect.
>
> Yet the primary responsibility remains with Stephan. His mistake, of course, if he really did not desire such a relationship as developed, and if he was "innately modest," lay in his failure to make known his aversion for the adulation heaped upon him and effectively to discourage it. In fact, such speculation is hypothetical in the extreme. It requires unusual credulity to think that Stephan attained the position he did against his wishes. On the contrary only people who were subservient to Stephan succeeded in getting along with him. At least all the people who were allowed to advance in the Stephanite hierarchy and to play important roles stood in an intimate relationship of this kind to him. Later, during the emigration, there were many in the group who were unacquainted with Stephan. But such people seldom attained any prominence; in any event they usually came from the congregations of men implicitly devoted to him. Their relation to their pastors resembled their pastors' relation to Stephan; hence the general effect was much the same.
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> In the eyes of his followers Stephan became the champion of orthodoxy, the defender of the faith. They firmly asserted that the means of grace were dependent upon his person and that, if he were silenced, the Lutheran Church would cease to exist in Saxony. Stephan's doctrine was unerringly true, his solution of a question inevitably correct. Any criticism of or opposition to the Dresden pastor was condemned in the harshest terms. Stephan became an oracle, and all who disagreed with him, or with whom he disagreed, were wrong. Since Stephan eventually disagreed with almost everyone, the simple conclusion was that all other views represented in the Church were false; only Stephanism was right. In fact the claim was finally made not only that Stephanism was the only right Church ("die wahre Kirche im Extracte," as Marbach phrased it), but that it alone was a Church. The Stephanites were the Church![21]

Walther was a part of this group which gave their allegiance to Stephan; he remained a loyal member until after the emigration to America.

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[21] Forster, op. cit., pp. 62-64.

Under the leadership of Stephan an emigration plan was drawn up by his followers. A complete discussion of the emigration is beyond the scope of this study. For the purposes of this study only the essential features need to be noted. The followers of Stephan were convinced that they could not remain in Germany and continue to practice their faith as they conscientiously desired. The only conclusion that they could draw was that they must emigrate to another land in order to have the free exercise of their religion. In order to accomplish this, they invited others who shared their convictions to join them in the emigration, they drew up an elaborate set of codes to govern their undertaking, they decided to settle in one of the Western States of the United States of America, they established a credit fund for the financial organization of the project, and they provided for individual freedom in the participation in the emigration. After all the preparations had been made, the emigrants left Germany for their new home in America in November of 1838.[22]

Under the influence of Stephan, Walther joined the group which planned to emigrate to America. Walther resigned his pastorate at Braeunsdorf and with nineteen members of his parish left for America.[23] In his farewell sermon he decried the conditions existing in the church in Germany and castigated all who did not join the emigration. He held forth "in such a legalistic manner that some people ran out of the

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[22]For the details of the planning of the emigration and the reasons given for such a move the reader should consult Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 60-84; and Forster, op. cit., pp. 83-170.

[23]Forster, op. cit., p. 200.

church in terror and tears."[24]

Because Walther was involved with illegally taking the orphaned Schubert children, he had to sail earlier than he had planned.[25] His departure has been the subject of many pious, but unhistorical tales. Forster's careful research has done much to dispel these tales. He says:

> It is on this point, the departure of C. F. W. Walther, that fancy has at times run wild. Martin Guenther, in his biography of C. F. W. Walther, said:
>
> (Walther) was supposed to go on the Amalia; but--O wonderful dispensation of God!--when he arrives in Bremen, he is no longer admitted. On the ship Johann Georg, to which he then goes, there is no room either (!); so a young man (a footnote implies it was Goenner) offers to make room for him and goes on another ship, while Walther remains under his (Goenner's) name.
>
> Janzow, another of Walther's biographers, gave a different version of the story. He erroneously stated that the Amalia left before the Johann Georg and that Walther, "not arriving in time" to take the former vessel, sailed on the Johann Georg. J. A. Friedrich, in Ebenezer, gave the following explanation:
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> He (C. F. W. Walther) had been booked to sail on the ship Amalia; but when he arrived in Bremen, he was refused passage on that vessel and was forced to take the Johann Georg. The Amalia never reached port, and nothing was ever heard of her again. Truly, "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."
>
> If C. F. W. Walther was ever "booked to sail on the ship Amalia," there was no possible reason for his not finding "room" or being "refused," because only fifty-eight or fifty-nine of the seventy places on the Amalia were ever taken. But it is rather unlikely that any portion of the Amalia phase of the legend is true. C. F. W. Walther was probably supposed to go on the Olbers with his brother and Stephan. As late as October 29 E. F. A. Froehlich was scheduled to go on the Johann Georg. Between that date and November 3 he was shifted to the Olbers, on which he finally sailed. It was Froehlich's place which C. F. W. Walther took, and Froehlich was transferred not to the Amalia, but to the Olbers. That Walther sailed under an assumed name, as Guenther implies, is doubtful but possible. At any rate, his right name was used at the port of

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[24] Ibid., p. 178.

[25] Ibid., pp. 194-95.

> entry, New Orleans. Finally, Walther could not have missed the Amalia, which sailed a fortnight after his departure on the Johann Georg. His brother stated the reason for a change correctly when he wrote of the danger of Ferdinand's arrest. By the maneuver C. F. W. Walther was spirited out of the country fifteen days sooner than if he had waited for the Olbers (or, for that matter, the Amalia), as originally planned.[26]

When Walther left Germany for America, he was an ardent Stephanite. He seriously believed that the emigrants were adopting the only course of action which was open to them. The Altenburg Debate cannot be properly evaluated unless the position of Walther at the time of the emigration is viewed in its true perspective. When Walther reacted against those who found only a moral issue in the emigration, he was repudiating his former adherence to Pietism. When he pointed the way to a solution to the problems which beset the colony after the deposition of Stephan, he was repudiating his former allegiance to Stephanism. The greatness of Walther lies in the fact that he was able to push aside these two influences in order to arrive at the truth of the Scripture. To deny these two influences amounts to the negation of any growth or development in Walther's theology. Furthermore, it fails to take into consideration the true stature of the man, that he was able to clearly define the issues amidst the chaos and confusion that characterized the colony of the Saxons in Perry County.

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[26] Ibid., pp. 195-96.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRISIS IN STEPHANISM

The Submission of the Clergy to Stephan

The episcopal form of church polity was an integral and an important aspect of the entire emigration plan as it was conceived in the mind of Martin Stephan. In his sermons there is no mention of episcopal polity, unless one is to take his references to the office of the ministry as an indication of what was to follow. However, by December of 1837 this form of church polity is taken for granted in the discussions prior to the emigration. In September of 1838 he was recognized by the Berathungs-Comite as the bishop of the entire Lutheran Church, and the discussion of one of the meetings of this group was devoted completely to establishing the amount of money to be set aside for the bishop's personal needs for the emigration to America. In November of the same year he complained that his followers were not showing him the honor due his office.[1]

An indication of the kind of obedience and submission that Stephan demanded of his followers can be seen from the following harangue which he delivered on New Year's Eve of 1838 to a group of his intimates on board the Olbers:

> You are young. I have little to seek in this world any more, but I do wish that the evening of my life might be more quiet than was the day. I ask little for myself, but of you I ask much. I must

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[1]Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), pp. 71-72.

> concern myself with lice and bedbugs--tormented and downtrodden man that I am--must concern myself with chamber pots. At the close of the year I assure you I am weary. I do not desire to lead the Gesellschaft, I seek nothing for myself. An old man like me, sixty years of age, ought not to be caused so much worry and trouble. Would to God some one else would lead you, I should be the first to extend my hand to him--but so long as I am the one to do it, I demand obedience. When I frequently told you that I should rather be a bee master, I was in dead earnest. But if I am to act as your leader, then follow me, otherwise I will not lead you! Otherwise I will not lead you! Remember this, so that later on you do not say: He is a hard man. I have forsaken my children, I would also forsake you, although I love you. Do you want this to happen? I was not obliged to go along to America. I have no temporal aims, I do not wish to rule, but also do not wish to permit another to rule.[2]

The egocentricity which is very evident in this address culminated in the investiture of Stephan. The document which was to request Stephan to become the bishop of the colony was drawn up by Otto Herman Walther. In this document Stephan was urged to accept the office of bishop for the sake of the spiritual health of the new colony. The signers of the document confessed that Stephan was already bishop without the title, that their request grew out of his instructions, that episcopal polity was indispensable on the basis of the Word of God and the Lutheran Symbols, and that the real purpose of the emigration could be attained only under the episcopal form of polity. Furthermore, they pledged their unwavering loyalty to the bishop and their childlike obedience to him.[3] Stephan earnestly desired to be bishop before the colonists arrived in America. On the evening of January 14, 1839, when this document was signed by Otto Hermann Walther for himself and for the other clergy, Gotthold Heinrich Loeber, Ernst Gerhard Wilhelm Keyl, and Carl Ferdinand

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[2]Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), pp. 281-82.

[3]The complete text of this document is given in ibid., pp. 288-90.

Wilhelm Walther, Stephan is reported to have said to Carl Vehse:

> It is necessary that I step on American soil as a bishop. You know me, and you know that I have no ulterior motives. Our whole debarkation would be a lame affair if I would not step on American soil as a bishop.[4]

After dinner on the same day O. H. Walther preached a sermon in which he portrayed the servitude of the church in Germany as one of the major factors for the necessity of the episcopal form of government in the new colony. On the next day, January 15, the delegates for the emigrants signed the document.[5] Stephan's position was now secure; he would be bishop when he set foot on American soil.

All seemed to be going well for the bishop until the Selma was on the way to St. Louis. Stephan became aware of the growing dissatisfaction among the people and of the objections of Barthel and others toward his financial undertakings. On February 9, 1839, Stephan lectured on the errors of Barthel and Marbach and on the influence that these men had on the other colonists. On February 19 a reaffirmation of Stephan's authority was secured in the form of the "Pledge of Subjection."[6]

In the formulation of this document O. H. Walther, as he was in the investiture issue, was the chief initiator. No doubt he was guided by Stephan, but it was Walther who preached the sermon to the people prior to the signing of the document. In this sermon he upbraided the people for their opposition to the bishop and informed them that if they did not wish to follow Stephan according to the terms which had been proposed,

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[4]Mundinger, op. cit., p. 72.

[5]Forster, op. cit., p. 291; Mundinger, op. cit., p. 72.

[6]Forster, op. cit., pp. 291-92; Mundinger, op. cit., p. 86.

they could leave the Gesellschaft. The people submitted to the demands of the faithful vicar of Stephan by pledging obedience to the bishop in all spiritual and temporal matters. In the document they confessed their complete confidence in Stephan's leadership and denounced all who held opinions to the contrary.[7]

The action described was taken only by those who were of the Olbers-Selma group of the emigrants. The news of the adoption of the "Pledge of Subjection" reached St. Louis before the Selma.[8] However, there was no objection to the action from the clergy already in St. Louis. Again, it was O. H. Walther who took the initiative to have these men, Loeber, Keyl, Buerger, and C. F. W. Walther, give their assent to the election of Stephan. Forster gives the following reaction to the appeal of O. H. Walther:

> The four other clergymen--Loeber, Keyl, Buerger, and Ferdinand Walther--responded nobly to O. H. Walther's appeal. February 24 was a Sunday. Unleashing a barrage of sermons to their people on the question of the episcopacy and the necessity for electing Stephan, they upbraided the people for their thanklessness and sinfulness, reproved their disobedience to Stephan and the other pastors, and held forth on Stephan's great saintliness, great service to the Gesellschaft, and his eminent qualifications for the office. The pastors expressed discouragement in extremely harsh terms; leaving the Gesellschaft they denounced as a great wrong. From their remarks it was easy to reach the conclusion that some of the people were not even Christians. Only one example of such an address is still extant, and it appears to be in C. F. W. Walther's handwriting. Its closing words are: "I will now read to you . . .," and then there evidently followed one of the various documents the people were expected to sign, although in this case the specific document was not included in the manuscript.[9]

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[7] Forster, op. cit., pp. 292-96.

[8] Ibid., p. 296.

[9] Ibid., p. 298.

These activities on the part of the clergy resulted in the confirmation of Stephan's investiture by the group. This document was formally presented to Stephan on February 26, 1839, less than a week after the arrival of the bishop in St. Louis.[10]

The role which C. F. W. Walther played in this entire matter has been the subject of much discussion and many pious tales. Many defenders of Walther have tried to exonerate him from any blame for the establishment of the episcopacy. Steffens is an example of these biographers. He comments:

> Ferdinand Walther was not greatly impressed by these strange doings. He refused, for reasons of conscience, to subscribe to this act of allegiance and homage which Keyl, who had subscribed to it, afterwards very correctly declared to have been a piece of blasphemous folly. He also stood ready to openly oppose Stephan the moment he set up the claim that he held his episcopal office by divine right, and was, therefore, the occupant of a higher order of the ministry than the other pastors.[11]

However, Walther was still very much under the influence of Stephan. Forster comments:

> One indisputable fact remains--C. F. W. Walther did sign the document cited above as the Confirmation of Stephan's Investiture. This act alone is sufficient to deprive him of any serious claim to a special independence of Stephan or to a clarity of perception not enjoyed by the others.[12]

Any attempt to deny the influence of Stephan at this point is meaningless. With Forster one must admit, "In any case, however, the emphasis upon Walther at this point is misplaced. It was not yet his day. The

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[10] Ibid., pp. 298-301.

[11] D. H. Steffens, Dr. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917), p. 115.

[12] Forster, op. cit., p. 303.

bishop was now in complete control of the group."[13]

Stephan's Developing Egoism

After the establishment of the episcopacy Stephan grew more and more aloof. Mundinger is of the conviction that the disintegration of Stephan's personality can be traced to his Dresden pastorate, to his inferiority complex, to the general conditions in Europe which followed the era of Napoleon, to his intense social longings, and to the sex instinct.[14] Whatever one may think of the researches of Mundinger, this much is certain: when Stephan left Germany, the process of disintegration was accelerated. He received the adulation of the people by law; he demanded obedience in the slightest details. Mundinger comments:

> Neither in Oriental literature nor in comic opera has the present writer met with anything that surpasses this "Erklaerung" in submissiveness and servility. The immigrants promise to submit themselves absolutely to every ordinance of the Bishop, whether it concern an ecclesiastic or a secular matter ("in kirchlicher sowie in communlicher Hinsicht"), and to do so in the conviction that such ordinance and command on the part of the Bishop would promote their temporal and eternal welfare. Everyone signed this solemn document under oath. After the formalities of landing in St. Louis had been completed, Stephan's first concern was to get proper signatures from the men who had sailed on the Republik, the Johann Georg, and the Copernicus, to the document legitimizing the episcopacy. Next in importance was the completion of the ecclesiastical millinery, and finally the purchase of land down in Perry County. In all these movements there was an accentuation of autocracy and an absence of plain common sense on the part of the "Ehrwuerdiger Herr." Emotional motivation was taking the place of reason. In other words, his personality was disintegrating.[15]

Stephan believed that he must personally supervise every activity

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[13] Ibid., p. 304.

[14] Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 75-84.

[15] Ibid., pp. 85-86.

in the colony. He had his own scheme for the development of the colony, and he insisted that his ambitious plans receive priority. Instead of building log cabins for themselves and their families and planting crops for their sustenance, the colonists were directed to make roads, build bridges, and clear meadows in an attempt to make the new colony resemble their former homeland in Germany. They lived and kept their possessions in camps which offered little protection from the elements. Their belongings spoiled and rotted because of the dampness; their wives and children became ill; the many discouragements destroyed the morale of the colonists. In the face of all these difficulties Stephan acted as if the treasury was inexhaustible. In seven months he used four thousand thalers for his own household and personal expenses. He spent his time designing his episcopal vestments and planning his episcopal palace. The colonists worshiped in a camp or bower, and on one occasion Stephan told them from the pulpit, "Your laziness and idleness is the cause of the Church of God still being under a bower. And, what is worse, your bishop is compelled to live in a hog pen."[16] In response to this verbal castigation the colonists began the erection of the episcopal residence for the bishop. The many financial difficulties which faced the colonists could also be traced in part to the extravagent living of the bishop.[17]

In all of this Stephan became more and more egocentric. The success or failure of the colony was contingent on obedience to the bishop. His needs came first; the needs of others were of secondary importance. In

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[16] Steffens, op. cit., p. 124.

[17] A discussion of these difficulties is given by Forster, op. cit., pp. 352-59.

his egocentricity Stephan refused to trust anyone; he charged his enemies with trying to turn the hearts of the people against him.[18] Without denying the many other factors which led to the discrediting of Stephan by the colonists, certainly his developing egoism must be considered a factor which led to his expulsion from the colony.

The Suspicion of Stephan

Stephan's domination of the colony was to be short lived. On April 26, 1839, Stephan left St. Louis for the colony in Perry County. On May 5 Pastor Loeber preached a sermon to the St. Louis group in the basement of Christ Church Cathedral, where the Saxons had been given permission to hold services until they could acquire their own house of worship. Shortly after the service a young woman confessed to Pastor Loeber that she had had illicit relations with Stephan. On the same day two others followed her example; during the same week several more made the same confession.[19]

After Loeber had recovered from the initial shock of these confessions, he called together his fellow pastors to discuss with them the entire affair. For the time being the laymen were uninformed of Stephan's conduct. After considerable deliberation the clergy decided to send C. F. W. Walther to Perry County to prepare for the removal of Stephan.[20]

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[18] Ibid., p. 388.

[19] Ibid., pp. 392-93; Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 86-87; Steffens, op. cit., pp. 125-26.

[20] Forster, op. cit., p. 393; Mundinger, op. cit., p. 87; Steffens, op. cit., pp. 126-27.

The matter of these confessions deserves some consideration, especially in view of the fact that they were to be the immediate cause for the expulsion of the bishop. The sermon which Loeber delivered on that eventful day in May seems to have been one which was rather searching. The two women who confessed on May 5 disclaimed any knowledge of the other's action. Two were confessions of adultery with Stephan; several were accusations that Stephan had unsuccessfully attempted to seduce the women who made the confessions. Some of the women were willing to repeat the charges under oath.[21] In view of all this Forster is unable to explain why these confessions were made when they were, but he gives the following conjectures:

> No contemporary narrative undertook to explain how this epidemic of confessions came about, that is, whether the pastors sought substantiation for the original accusations made against Stephan, or whether, after the developments began to be whispered about among the Saxons in St. Louis, the power of suggestion or example produced spontaneous results among the other women.[22]

Whatever else may be said about these confessions, they were the occasions for a chain of events which were to change the entire course of the Saxons in Missouri.

The Expulsion of Stephan

When the clergy of St. Louis selected C. F. W. Walther for the task of preparing for the removal of Stephan and sent him to Perry County for that purpose, they were aware of the fact that more was at stake than the person of the bishop. Mundinger cites some of the implications of

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[21] Forster, op. cit., p. 392.

[22] Ibid., p. 393.

this drastic step in the following words:

> Every precaution had to be taken to safeguard the title to the 4,472.66 acres of land that had just been purchased by the company in Perry County. At that time the title of ownership was still in the name of the trustees; and they, together with other leaders in the colony, had to be won over completely for energetic action against Stephan. There must be no uncertainty, nor must factions develop. The young emissary of the St. Louis clergymen, beginning his first big assignment, spent the week of the nineteenth of May fixing the fences in Perry County. All information was kept from Stephan, although he seems to have sensed something. He had reason to talk of a conspiracy. Finally, when all the leaders had been lined up in favor of drastic action against their onetime lord and master, the young theologian returned to St. Louis.[23]

By May 29, 1839, everyone who could possibly make it journeyed to Perry County for the big event. The entire act of excommunication, however, was carried out by the clergy. The pastors did everything; they were the final court of appeal. Mundinger says:

> The whole procedure was based upon the medieval assumption that the Church consists of the clergy and that the laymen have no part in the government of the Church. So completely had Stephan schooled these men in centralized church government that the simple principles enunciated by Luther in the early fifteen hundred and twenties were completely ignored. When some laymen talked about getting the entire group together and investigating the affair, they were severely criticized and roundly condemned by the clerical leaders. The first thing that had to be done, so they said, was to excommunicate Stephan. This could be done only by the clergy, since they only had the power of excommunication. Thus did the Saxon fathers demonstrate their utter obedience to hierarchical beliefs and their profound confusion on the most simple procedures of Lutheran church government.[24]

By the unanimous vote of the clergy Stephan was excommunicated, deposed, and removed from the colony all on that eventful day of May 30, 1839.[25] The whole procedure seems a bit hasty and almost unnatural in view of the

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[23] Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

[24] Ibid., p. 88.

[25] Ibid., p. 89.

previous submission to the bishop. Although most of Stephan's followers were shocked by the charges against him, yet not a single person seems to be convinced of his innocence.[26] Forster's comments are worth noting:

> In fine, all immediately assumed Stephan's guilt, and almost every one of any consequence was anxiously employed in making assertions in some form or other that he--the individual in question--certainly knew nothing of all this in Germany. The practice quickly took hold among both leaders and people, especially the former, of blaming Stephan for everything possible--and impossible--by shouldering upon him responsibility for all the ills that had, did now, and would in the future beset the Gesellschaft. Everyone, without exception, of course, claimed that he had been duped. All were now quite clear that they had not really approved of the very policies and measures which virtually all had countenanced, voted for, helped to execute, and sealed with their signatures. Later numerous "confessions" and admissions were made, but at first the tendency was toward an effort to avoid as much blame as possible.[27]

The crisis in Stephanism had occurred. The bishop had been discredited. The first step had been taken in the attempt to save the colony from disaster, both spiritual and physical. However, it was to be some time before the new leaders would arrive at a solution to the crisis which had shaken the very foundations of their colony in America.

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[26] Forster, op. cit., p. 395.

[27] Ibid., pp. 395-96.

CHAPTER V

THE EFFECT OF THE EXPULSION ON THE COLONY

The Defeatist Attitude of the Colonists

It is almost impossible for one who did not live through those trying days in the Perry County Colony to imagine the effect which the expulsion of Martin Stephan had on the emigrants. These people had sacrificed everything which they possessed for the success of the emigration. Many had left substantial homes and businesses in Germany, only to find themselves living in shacks in a strange and humid land. They had bidden farewell to their relatives and friends in order to find freedom of religion in America. All of these hopes were centered in Martin Stephan, who had urged them to leave Germany as one would flee from Sodom and Gomorrah and who had convinced them that he was a vital factor in the success of the emigration. Now Stephan had been discredited, deposed, and excommunicated. This action was bound to result in a defeatist attitude among the colonists.

One of the major difficulties which confronted the colonists was financial in nature. Mundinger describes the basic organization of the colony correctly when he says, "The structure of the colony was based upon a benign economic paternalism, with Martin Stephan as the all-wise and benevolent father in the center of things."[1] With Stephan no longer a part of the picture the economic structure of the colony seemed to be

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[1]Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 90.

undermined. Most of the emigrants had put their life's savings into the enterprise. All of the funds were placed into the Credit-Casse, which was administered by Stephan and Adolph Marbach. Mundinger describes the plight of the colony in the following words:

> The investigation made by the clergy in connection with the removal of Stephan revealed the fact that the funds of the "Credit-Casse" had been exhausted by purchases of costly episcopal equipment; by the personal needs of the Bishop, which were rather extensive; by the loans which were made to the large number of Unbemittelte who emigrated in spite of the fact that they did not have the wherewithal to pay for their transportation; and by the purchase of the 4,472.66 acres of land in Perry County, none of which had been resold by May 30.[2]

The shock which the emigrants experienced when the condition of the treasury was discovered was appaling. Another source of financial difficulty was due to the loss of the Amalia at sea; this vessel carried much of the valuable equipment purchased by the Gesellschaft, a considerable amount of money, and the baggage of some of the emigrants.[3]

A second major factor which contributed to the defeatist attitude of the colonists was the reaction of the other Germans in St. Louis to the expulsion of Stephan. The major medium for the expression of such views was the St. Louis newspaper, Der Anzeiger des Westens. Its editor and correspondents insisted on applying the term "Stephanite" to all the members of the colony. The term thus became one of reproach for the colonists who already had experienced severe hardships in their new homeland. Because of the aggressive policy of this newspaper, even people who might have aided the colonists shunned them, fearing that they

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[2] Ibid., p. 91.

[3] Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952), pp. 498-99.

would have to share their reproach.[4] Only one of the English newspapers of St. Louis, the Daily Evening Gazette, took notice of the developments in Perry County. It requested the German newspaper to publish "a full and impartial statement of facts, in order that the public mind may be spared from the effects of misrepresentation and abuse."[5] This request appeared on May 29, 1839. Already on May 27 the pastors drew up a statement for publication; this appeared on June 1, 1839, in Der Anzeiger des Westens. In this statement the pastors confessed that they had been duped by Stephan, that Stephan was guilty of the charges brought against him, that they publicly renounced Stephan, and that they hoped to be spared from further harmful effects of the offense. This was signed by Gotthold Heinrich Loeber, Ernst Gerhard Wilhelm Keyl, Ernst Moritz Buerger, and Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther; the names of Otto Hermann Walther and Maximilian Oertel were affixed although they were absent when the statement was prepared for publication.[6] It is doubtful that this statement produced the desired effect. In fact, in 1841, C. F. W. Walther and Trinity Congregation of St. Louis published a similar statement in Der Anzeiger des Westens. After pointing to the statement published in 1839, they declared:

> It is not becoming for us to judge whether or not we now, as we profess, are striving in doctrine and life to reach the high goal set for us by the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Let him who desires to convince himself come and see and hear; our church, our congregational meetings and our homes are open to every man. We are not

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[4] D. H. Steffens, Dr. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917), p. 134.

[5] Forster, op. cit., p. 412.

[6] Ibid., p. 413.

> sneaking about in corners, but we are acting openly before all the world.[7]

The demoralizing effect of such statements in the press could not but add to the defeatist attitude of the colonists.

Far more important than these two difficulties which faced the colonists was the spiritual chaos which resulted from the expulsion of Stephan from the colony. The emigrants were a deeply religious group of people. They had left Germany for theological reasons. Mundinger's comments are worth noting:

> They had emigrated because they believed that their faith could no longer be maintained in the Sodom of Saxony. To them purity of Lutheran doctrine and Christian living meant everything. Luther's teaching concerning the means of grace had taught them to honor those who proclaimed the Gospel and administered the Sacraments. For years Stephan had adroitly manipulated this doctrine so that very many of the colonists were of the firm conviction that Stephan was their chief means of grace ("Hauptgnadenmittel") and that outside, and apart from, him there was no hope. He and, to a lesser degree, die Herrn Amtsbrueder were the basis of their spiritual life. Though misguided and utterly unscriptural, the respect which these people entertained over against the Amt was sincere. Overnight this Amt fell into disrepute, yea, stank to the highest heavens. The "hochwuerdigster Erzbischof," stripped of the last thread of his glory, had been put aboard a boat and, together with his concubine, had been shipped across the Mississippi, to a point near Kaskaskia, Illinois, there to shift for himself as well as he could. That men and women who had been so suddenly disillusioned should lose all confidence in the Church and in the clergy, yea, that they should make nasty accusations against the clergy, was but natural.[8]

Because these people regarded their faith as their most treasured possession, and because the very purpose for the emigration was to grant them pure exercise of this faith, the expulsion of the leader, both spiritual and temporal, had an immeasurable effect on the colonists.

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[7] Steffens, op. cit., p. 136.

[8] Mundinger, op. cit., p. 94.

The Confessions of Guilt

Within months after the expulsion of Stephan from the colony a veritable flurry of confessions of guilt appeared. Although C. F. W. Walther stubbornly refused to sanction a public confession of guilt on the part of the entire emigration group,[9] he does not seem to have attempted to deter others from making such statements.[10] The candidates seemed to be the first to react in this manner. Theodore Brohm set forth his personal scruples.[11] Buerger produced a number of statements in which he confessed his guilt and asked for forgiveness.[12] When the St. Louis congregation observed days of humiliation and repentance in 1839 and 1840, O. H. Walther utilized these occasions to remind the congregation of its action and status; these sermons were considered confessions; the one delivered in 1839 was sent to Germany and appeared in Der Pilger aus Sachsen.[13] Ottomar Fuerbringer made a confession.[14] In April of 1840 the candidates issued a joint statement of their guilt and pledged themselves to refrain from preaching.[15]

However, the candidates were soon joined by some of the pastors in

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[9] The reason for Walther's position was a reaction against the position of Vehse. This is discussed infra, pp. 53-59.

[10] Mundinger, op. cit., p. 102.

[11] Forster, op. cit., p. 511; Mundinger, op. cit., p. 103.

[12] Forster, op. cit., p. 511; Mundinger, op. cit., p. 103.

[13] Forster, op. cit., p. 511; Mundinger, op. cit., p. 102.

[14] Forster, op. cit., p. 511.

[15] Ibid., p. 512.

the confession of guilt. One of the most remarkable examples is the Lossagung vom Stephanismus written by G. H. Loeber. This work was completed by December 16, 1839; in it the author recognizes his guilt more than ever. Forster comments:

> He [Loeber] asked forgiveness of his brother, G. F. Loeber, and of his former congregation, which he had left. He also sent a letter of apology to Duke Joseph, in which he even expressed his willingness to re-enter the service of the Church in Saxe-Altenburg. The "Lossagung" was originally written by Loeber alone for the benefit of the Perry County colonies only. A joint statement by all the pastors was to be sent to Germany, and O. H. Walther was commissioned by his colleagues to discharge this distasteful duty. Later, when O. H. Walther died without having produced a satisfactory document and it seemed desirable to make some statement, Loeber's Lossagung was circulated and signed by the other pastors and by most members of Loeber's congregation.[16]

Buerger apologized to his congregation in Perry County on three separate occasions. In November of 1840 he resigned from his pastorate because he felt that he was unworthy of the office of the ministry. His congregation refused to accept his resignation, and he resumed preaching. By December 5 he ceased his preaching, his pastoral work was terminated, and he sent his parishioners to other congregations. In February of the next year he gathered his congregation again. Forster describes Buerger's plight thus:

> By February 28, 1841, Buerger again assembled his congregation, preached a penitential sermon, and read two documents to them, which denounced Stephan and the emigration, and called on others to admit the correctness of his charges publicly. To this outburst the congregation agreed to reply in a fortnight, but when it failed to do so, Buerger, who was now living with an English family near Dresden, two miles from his former parish (his wife had died), found it difficult to serve the five members who requested him to do so.[17]

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[16] Ibid., pp. 513-14.

[17] Ibid., p. 514.

C. F. W. Walther, in a letter to his brother, O. H. Walther, expressed his own concern and his feeling of guilt. While he did not join the others in making confessions, he was conscious of the errors of the emigration.[18] Keyl also penned his Bekenntnis.

These numerous confessions of guilt on the part of those who had played such an important role in the emigration were a direct result of the expulsion of Stephan. They were faced with major questions to which they at present had no satisfactory answers. Before they could find the answers to these questions, they had to purge themselves of the guilt of their actions.

The Resignation of Pastorates

Confessions of guilt for their part in the emigration were not sufficient to quiet the consciences of the pastors. They were disturbed because they had left their parishes in Germany, many without the consent of the government. Did they have a call to serve the people in the colony? Should they return to Germany? Had the emigration deprived the colonists of their claim to be Christians? Were they a church or not? Were they the Lutheran Church or a group of Stephanites? Did the congregations have the right to call pastors? Did they have the right to depose the pastors now in office? These and many other questions were disturbing the pastors and the people alike.

Because the pastors had been so intimate with Stephan, they lost the confidence of the people. The colonists had not forgotten that the

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[18] Ibid., pp. 515-16; Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 98-99.

pastors received their salaries from the Credit-Casse, the source of so much of the financial difficulty of the colony. Nor had they forgotten that the pastors attempted to carry on the program of Stephan after the latter was expelled from the colony.[19] These and other factors contributed to the caution which the people exercised over against the pastors.

Because of the uncertainty which plagued the pastors and the lack of confidence which the colonists had in the members of the clergy, many of the pastors either resigned from their office or offered to resign. Buerger's vacillating position has been cited above.[20] C. F. W. Walther lost his congregation and was forced to resign.[21] Loeber offered to resign his pastorate, but his congregation would not accept his offer.[22] Keyl remained in office, but he did so with serious doubts as to the validity of his call.[23] On January 20, 1841, O. H. Walther died "of a broken heart."[24]

Another effect of the expulsion of Stephan can be seen in the curious attitude of O. Fuerbringer and G. Schieferdecker. Fuerbringer accepted a call to Elkhorn Prairie, Illinois. He was not ordained, although

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[19] Forster, op. cit., p. 431; Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

[20] Supra, p. 45.

[21] Mundinger, op. cit., p. 94.

[22] Chr. Hochstetter, Die Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Missouri-Synode (Dresden: Heinrich J. Naumann, 1885), p. 29.

[23] Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

[24] Ibid., p. 95. The view that O. H. Walther died of a broken heart is one which has been widely held. Mundinger bases his conclusion on reports published in Germany at the time of Walther's death and on the conviction of Walther's widow.

he considered ordination so important that he wished Rudelbach, a superintendent of the State Church in Saxony, to authorize O. H. Walther to perform the ordination. He was not ordained, but he took office on August 23, 1840, and served until 1843 without ordination. He concluded that it was better to serve without ordination, than to serve the congregation ordained by the wrong people. Schieferdecker, on the other hand, was ordained in June of 1841 and served a congregation in Monroe, Illinois.[25] These two examples serve to indicate the confusion of thinking on the doctrine of the call and the ministry.

The effects of Stephan's expulsion were most acutely felt in the spiritual life of the community. Pastors and people were thrown into a state of religious chaos. The spiritual misery and the bitterness of soul which they experienced were directly linked to the expulsion of their former spiritual leader.

Walther's Withdrawal

Allusion has been made to the reaction of C. F. W. Walther to the expulsion of Stephan from the colony. In view of the fact that Walther was to play a major role in the history of the colony and in the history of the Missouri Synod, some further consideration must be given to this phase of his life. This is also important because the historians of this period are not in agreement in their discussions of Walther's position.

In the first place, some of the writers of this period have tried to picture Walther as the serene student, calmly and quietly searching

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[25] Forster, op. cit., pp. 512-13.

for a solution to the problems which faced the colony; Koestering[26] and Hochstetter[27] seem to convey this picture to the reader. However, in a letter to his brother Walther shows that he was disturbed and troubled:

> Of primary importance is our unfaithfulness toward the first congregations which we left contrary to God, His will, and His Word, and our oaths to which (the congregations) we broke. Thereupon follow the horrible ruptures of marital relations, the shameful abandonment by children of old, sick, weak parents who required care. Thereupon follow the shameful idolatry with Stephan, the sectarian exclusiveness, the condemnation of other upright people, the departure from many essentials of the Lutheran Church, and who will name it all? Every sad look of a member from our congregations is to me like an accuser before God; my conscience blames me for all the broken marriages which occurred among us; it calls me a kidnapper, a robber of the wealthy among us, a murderer of those who lie buried in the sea and the many who were stricken down here, a member of a mob, a mercenary, an idolater, etc. I now no longer dare to say: our emigration was premature; it is a big question whether we pastors should ever have emigrated, whether we should not perhaps have tolerated all restrictions, so long as they did not require something plainly sinful, in order that we might at least as faithful shepherds have cared for, protected, and watched over the little good which was still present in the German congregation.[28]

Even Steffens, who can be a somewhat prejudiced biographer, must admit:

> Walther signs: "Your God's deserved wrath-bearing Walther." The letter is dated "Johnson's Farm, April 14, 1840," almost a year after Stephan's expulsion from the colony. But his doubts and spiritual trials continue, for in November of the same year his brother writes him a beautiful letter of comfort, in which this sentence occurs: "One thing is needful. This also applies to you. You lack only this one thing in which all else is given. Your excerpts concerning the call avail you nothing if you do not first assure yourself of your call in Him unto His everlasting kingdom of grace. In Him all is then right and all that is crooked straight."

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[26] J. F. Koestering, Auswanderung der saechsischen Lutheraner im Jahre 1838, ihre Niederlassung in Perry-Co., Mo., und damit zusammenhaengende interessante Nachrichten (Zweite Auflage; St. Louis: A. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1867), pp. 39-40.

[27] Hochstetter, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

[28] Forster, op. cit., pp. 515-16, quoting from Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, "Letter to his brother Otto Hermann Walther," dated May 4, 1840, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri.

> He also speaks of Ferdinand Walther's long and serious illness and his present weakness of body and soul. This illness was in no small part a result of the bitter self-accusation and self-reproach with which he, together with the other pastors, harassed themselves and each other. That the people should reproach them for having failed to sooner discover Stephan's sin and blindly following him, led them into their present distress was to be expected. But the pastors and candidates by far outdid the people. In a letter to his brother, Ferdinand Walther exclaims: "Poor congregation which has such defiled shepherds!" In his letter to Fuerbringer, quoted above, he speaks of "the fearful stains which certainly attach to me." He means his doubt, his uncertainty, his former adherence to Stephan, his following of his leadership, his disquiet, his helplessness, his servitude to man, his having departed from God's word, his having been unfaithful, etc.[29]

From this it can be seen that Walther was deeply moved by the chain of events. While he does not say that the emigration was sinful per se, yet he was convinced that certain aspects of the movement were.

Secondly, the question as to why Walther resigned from his congregation has been the subject of various treatments. Steffens seems to attribute it entirely to Walther's sickness:

> Walther was sick, sick unto death. Hochstetter talks about a malignant nervous gall fever and a persistent intermittent fever. Koestering speaks of "lucid intervals," which can only mean comparative freedom from periods of deep care and despondency. Walther was sick in soul as well as in body.[30]

It is no doubt true that Walther was a sick man during these months, but to attribute everything to this cause overlooks the fact that the colony was in the throes of economic disaster and the fact that the people had lost confidence in their pastors. Loeber correctly evaluated the situation when he wrote on April 28, 1841:

> The congregation in St. Louis had lost its Pastor Walther, Sen., through an untimely but blessed death. The younger Walther, who

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[29] Steffens, op. cit., pp. 143-44.

[30] Ibid., p. 162.

> has been sick almost continuously for a whole year and who has been released from office by his congregation, which has been dissolved for economic reasons and because they have lost confidence in the ministry ("Misstrauen gegen das Amt"), has been called as his brother's successor.[31]

These three factors, his sickness, the economic condition of the colony, and the lack of confidence of the people in the pastors, must be taken into consideration if one is to understand the reasons for Walther's withdrawal from the work of the ministry.

In the third place, opinions are varied as to what Walther did during these months of sickness and retirement. Walther remained at the home of his brother-in-law, Pastor Keyl, after he had been forced to vacate the home on Johnson's Farm.[32] Here he had access to the library of Keyl. It is generally assumed that Walther occupied his time with study; Luther's writings are placed high on the list of his interests. Forster seems a bit hesitant in his remarks:

> When Walther received the impetus toward his distinctive theories is not entirely clear. Usually it is said that he arrived at his convictions as a result of an intensive study of Luther during the months of his convalescence at Keyl's. This case constitutes the second time in Walther's life that Luther's writings are introduced by his biographers at a crucial moment to help him out of some spiritual dilemma. Marbach, Buerger and others were studying Luther; it is entirely possible that Walther was doing the same.[33]

Koestering, whose account is generally accepted as accurate,[34] states that Walther spent his time studying the teaching of the Reformation fathers, especially Luther, in an effort to gather the testimonies of

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[31] Mundinger, op. cit., p. 94.

[32] Forster, op. cit., p. 518.

[33] Ibid., p. 521.

[34] Mundinger, op. cit., p. 114.

the great teachers of the church which spoke to the particular needs of the colony.[35] Guenther, another of Walther's biographers, expresses the same conviction.[36] The influence which Luther had on the theological thinking of Walther cannot be denied; anyone who has read much in the writings of Walther knows how much he is at home in the writings of the Reformer; it does not seem improbable that Walther spent his time at Keyl's in this fashion; to the contrary, the evidence seems to point to the fact that he spent a great deal of his time with Luther's works.

Thus, Walther, forced to resign from his pastorate and confronted with the expulsion of Stephan and its results, searched for an answer. The answer which he found was to have a profound effect on the future of the Missouri Synod, to say nothing of the immediate effect which it had on the colonists.

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[35] Koestering, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

[36] Martin Guenther, Dr. C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1890), p. 44.

CHAPTER VI

TWO ATTEMPTED SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE COLONY

The Solution Offered by Vehse

In the midst of the financial and physical confusion which the expulsion of Martin Stephan had brought upon the colony, the primary concern of the emigrants was to find spiritual solace and comfort. They were disturbed because they were unsure of their theological position. Had they been right in their leaving Germany? Had their personal allegiance to Stephan deprived them of their faith? Were they the church? Were the pastors legitimate? Did they as congregations have the right to call pastors? These and similar questions plagued the distraught colonists. However, these questions were bound to call forth more fundamental ones. What is the church? What is the ministry? The colonists needed correct answers to these theological questions before they could find peace and security.

The first attempt to find answers to these questions was made by Dr. Carl Eduard Vehse. Vehse was one of the most prominent men who joined the emigration. He was well-educated and highly trained. In 1833, at the age of thirty-one, he became curator of the Saxon State Archives. He was attached to Stephan in a very personal manner.[1] When Stephan was arrested by the authorities in Dresden as a result of his

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[1]Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 58; Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 56.

activities, Vehse was one of the first to rise to his defense.[2] His signature appeared on the document which declared Stephan to be the bishop of the colony.[3] He was one of the first to disagree with Stephan after the emigrants arrived in America.[4] He also signed the sentence of deposition pronounced upon Stephan on May 30, 1839.[5] As long as he remained in the colony, he was one of the most prominent figures.[6] Mundinger is probably correct when he refers to Vehse as "perhaps the most learned of the entire group."[7]

Vehse's first attempt at offering a solution to the problems which beset the colony appeared in the form of six theses which dealt with the office of the ministry; these were submitted to O. H. Walther on August 5, 1839.[8] In these theses Vehse asserted the Lutheran doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers. The application of this theological principle to the problems of the colony was made particularly in the last thesis, in which Vehse argued that the office of the ministry was only a public service, and that only when it was committed to the individual by

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[2]Forster, op. cit., p. 93.

[3]Ibid., pp. 288-90.

[4]Ibid., p. 390.

[5]Ibid., p. 418.

[6]Ibid., p. 437.

[7]Mundinger, op. cit., p. 95.

[8]Carl E. Vehse, Die Stephan'sche Auswanderung nach Amerika. Mit Actenstuecken (Dresden: Verlagsexpedition des Dresdner Wochenblattes, 1840), pp. 103-105; Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

the entire congregation.[9] On the same day O. H. Walther replied that he was in agreement with the theses, and he agreed to submit them to the other members of the clergy.[10]

It was not until September 9, 1839, that the clergy made an answer. It did so in a letter to the St. Louis congregation which warned the members against those "who would unfairly abuse this declaration in order to discredit our office, maliciously sow the seeds of distrust against us, and bring about dissension and offense in the congregation."[11] It was quite evident that the members of the clergy who signed this letter were not ready to meet the issues raised by Vehse nor to completely abandon what they had learned from Stephan.

This was not sufficient to silence Vehse. Forster gives the following description of the next move on the part of the learned doctor:

> Meanwhile Vehse himself had not been idle. H. F. Fischer and Jaeckel, who had joined him in resigning on June 22, had been won over to the lone dissident's position; and a more complete statement of their views, embellished with frequent and lengthy quotations, especially from Luther, Spener, and Seckendorf, had been drawn up. This document, the one which ought actually be called "the Protest," was completed and signed by Vehse, H. F. Fischer, and Jaeckel, September 19, 1839. A preliminary address to their fellow immigrants made the same request as that directed to the pastors, namely, that careful consideration be given the Protest for the sake of sound doctrine. This plea was followed by a detailed outline of the document being submitted, as laid down in three points, or "chapters":
>
> I Evidence concerning the rights of the congregation in relation to the clergy in religious and ecclesiastical matters.
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> II Evidence against the wrong Stephanite system, in which the

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[9] Vehse, op. cit., p. 105.

[10] Forster, op. cit., p. 463; Mundinger, op. cit., p. 97.

[11] Forster, op. cit., p. 463.

rights of the congregation are not respected, but suppressed.

III Evidence from Luther and (a statement of) our private opinion on the justifiability of the emigration.

This outline reflects the main subjects of argument.[12]

The first point which this document wished to establish was that in the sight of God all men are priests; they are the church. The second point was that the entire system of Stephanism was based on an incorrect theological premise; the church, Vehse and his associates insisted, could establish the office of the ministry at will, without ordination. Quite naturally, the pastors were severely criticized in the discussion of this second point. Thirdly, the framers of this document came to the conclusion that the emigration was not necessary for the preservation of pure doctrine; in fact, they concluded that the emigration had been wrong from the very start.[13]

The solution which Vehse and his associates offered to the problems which beset the community was a drastic one. It demanded that everyone change his entire opinion of the emigration. The complete structure of the movement was called into question on theological grounds. The emigration idea was based on the hierarchical theory of the church. This very premise was repudiated. The church was conceived as the sum total of all believers; the pastoral office was conferred upon the candidate by the congregation. Not only was Stephan wrong, but his entire system was in error. The emigrants had left Germany because they had been convinced by their leaders, Stephan and the other members of the clergy,

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[12] Ibid., p. 464.

[13] Vehse, op. cit., pp. 54-141.

that they could not remain in Germany and enjoy the free exercise of their faith in pure doctrine. As Vehse and his associates viewed the situation, they were convinced that, although the theological climate in Germany was not the most conducive, yet it was not as the clergy had pictured it to them. The colonists had been wrong in emigrating for the sake of religious liberty.

On November 9 the pastors issued a reply to the Protest of Vehse, Fischer, and Jaeckel. They declared that they were ashamed of the part which they had played, but they claimed that they had been duped by Stephan. They asserted that they had repudiated Stephanism in all its ramifications. They promised that they would correct the errors which might occur in the future. Finally, for the sake of peace they would give up episcopal polity.[14] To this last concession on the part of the clergy, Vehse remarked that one could only give up what one possessed; the pastors could not give up episcopal polity because it had never been given to them by the people.[15] However, the members of the clergy made no attempt to answer the specific charges leveled against them for their misuse of their authority.[16] Forster comments:

> The fatuous assertion that all these things had vanished into thin air with Stephan's departure was not sufficient to neutralize the force of the specific cases adduced in the Protest and its Supplement. These charges could not simply be brushed aside. The clergymen owed both their opponents and their people either a frank admission of error or a defense worthy of the issues involved.[17]

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[14] Forster, op. cit., pp. 468-69.

[15] Vehse, op. cit., p. 153.

[16] Forster, op. cit., p. 469.

[17] Ibid.

Although only three men were involved in the preparation of the Protest, the questions which it raised were bound to effect every member of the colony. Soon after the controversy broke, the communal lands were distributed.[18] The St. Louis congregation officially reprimanded its pastor, O. H. Walther, for his Stephanism and insisted that he adhere to the Holy Scriptures and the Symbols of the Lutheran Church.[19]

However, the colonists were not prepared to accept the solution offered by Vehse. Most of the influential members of the group had not made up their minds; even Dr. Adolph Marbach, Vehse's brother-in-law and the man who was to lead the next move for the solution of the colony's difficulties, was not prepared to share Vehse's views.[20]

There was little left for Vehse to do but to leave the colony. He was intelligent enough to see the apparent hopelessness of the situation. In disgust, he decided to return to Germany. There is evidence that he had had this in mind ever since Stephan was discredited. As soon as he was able to overcome the financial difficulties which stood in his way, Vehse departed for Germany on the Johann Georg. On the voyage he wrote his Die Stephan'sche Auswanderung, which was published on his return to Dresden.[21]

With the departure of Vehse the first attempt to come to grips with the problems of the colony ended in failure. Forster is probably correct

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[18] For a discussion of this the reader should consult ibid., pp. 443-57.

[19] Ibid., p. 469.

[20] Ibid., p. 470.

[21] Ibid., p. 471; Mundinger, op. cit., p. 109.

in his summary of Vehse's contribution:

> It was obvious that Vehse, H. F. Fischer, and Jaeckel had stood alone--not in their disenchantment with Stephanism, but in their ability to see where the root of their problem lay and in the courage of their convictions. The shabby treatment they received from the pastors, the evasion practiced by the ministers in their one meager reply, and the continuance of the system favored by the clergymen, met with not a single formal protest from the other colonists. Criticism of Vehse was easy, criticism of the pastors called for more independence of spirit than most as yet possessed. Opposition to the clergymen and their supporters was to become general, but not until later.[22]

The Solution Offered by Marbach

The departure of Vehse from St. Louis on December 16, 1839, marked the end of the first major period of the crisis which followed on the heels of the expulsion of Stephan from the colony. Until this time both the clergy and the laity had adopted a relative complacency toward the theological issues which were raised by Vehse. Now the calm was broken by the storm. The appearance of numerous confessions of guilt on the part of the pastors has been sketched above.[23] But Vehse's importance lies more than in the mere fact that his work elicited confessions of guilt. Forster comments:

> Vehse's ideas were important for the eventual reconstruction of the religious life of the Saxons. But both Vehse's actions and his writings had an even more fundamental and far-reaching effect in the stimulus they gave to the critical line of thought in the colony than in the positive statements made and the conclusions drawn from them. For Vehse's written "Protest" and the implied protest of his withdrawal were the spurs which roused the people and the pastors from their lethargy into a less smug and more analytical attitude. Soon everything connected with their religious status was being questioned: not only the position and action of the

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[22] Forster, op. cit., p. 472.

[23] Supra, pp. 44-46.

> pastors and the relation of the people to them, but the actions and beliefs of the people themselves as well. In fact, the people spared themselves less than did the pastors; it was not merely the desire to shift blame upon the clergymen which occasioned all the furore, but an honest search for truth. The problems raised dealt largely with the collective and individual culpability in the immigration, the justifiability of leaving Germany, the correctness or error in Stephanism, the relation of the people to their former leader, the question of personal faith of individuals, and the nature of the Church and the ministry. The development of an attitude which was both predicated upon and strengthened by examination and criticism of such vital matters, meant that the hierarchical system was doomed, if not already destroyed.[24]

To the many questions which plagued the colonists only two extreme answers were possible; either the entire venture was justifiable, or it was entirely wrong. There was no compromise which seemed satisfactory; it seemed to be a matter of choosing between two untenable alternatives, neither of which correctly evaluated the situation.

One of the most extreme advocates of the position that the emigration had been entirely wrong was Dr. Adolph Marbach, the brother-in-law of Vehse. Although there were others who shared his conviction, especially Ferdinand Sproede, it was Marbach who was to be the leading spokesman for the lay party in the attempts to find a solution to the problems which beset the colony.

Franz Adolph Marbach was another of the prominent individuals who became attracted to Stephan and the emigration idea and came to America. By profession he was a lawyer, and as such was at one time in the Saxon civil service.[25] He was a capable, energetic, learned individual. In his loyalty to Stephan he went so far as to claim that Stephanism was

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[24] Forster, op. cit., pp. 507-508.

[25] Ibid., p. 58.

the only right church.[26] With Vehse he came to Stephan's defense when the latter was arrested by the government.[27] From December of 1837 to December of 1838 he was Stephan's right hand man.[28] It was Marbach who petitioned the vestry of Christ Church Cathedral for permission to use the facilities of that congregation for the place of worship of the Saxon settlement in St. Louis.[29] When the time for discrediting Stephan's leadership came, it was Marbach who consulted a St. Louis lawyer for advice on the proper manner of dealing with Stephan.[30] Marbach was certainly one of the most influential members of the colony, and one who had been deeply involved in the affairs of the emigration.

The characterization of Marbach given by Forster is most likely a correct one. He writes:

> In the case of Marbach, there is no evidence of such personal issues. He was in all probability a conscientious objector to the existing state of affairs. His spirit was crushed by a sense of guilt, doubts as to his spiritual life, and the shattering of his dreams and ambitions. Marbach was deeply disturbed, groping for security and certainty, trying to regain confidence in himself and in some form of religious system. His extremism in some points was mainly a reflection of his own remorse. Meanwhile, he confined his attacks, however sharp, to doctrinal questions and to matters of polity. In such legitimate criticism he enjoyed the substantial agreement of Buerger and the more qualified support of Barthel. These three men finally became the nucleus of that group in the colonies which generally adopted the more extreme views on the evils of the emigration and its consequences, and gradually began to organize and formulate such

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[26] Ibid., p. 64.

[27] Ibid., p. 93; Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 21.

[28] Forster, op. cit., pp. 113-38; Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 68-72.

[29] Forster, op. cit., p. 320.

[30] Ibid., p. 400.

views into reasonably clear statements.[31]

For some time the group headed by Marbach encountered no effective opposition. One would have expected the pastors to have reacted to this agitation, but they were too insecure and confused to offer much in the line of constructive thought. Loeber, Keyl, and Gruber reached a certain measure of agreement. In general, they adopted a policy of passive resistance, admitting only that which was absolutely necessary.[32] The Marbach faction refused to take part in any of the worship services in the colony, and instead conducted their own devotional meetings at the homes of those who agreed with them.[33] The pastors were unable to rise to the need of the hour, and many of the colonists entertained the doubts which were raised by the Marbach faction.

On March 3, 1841, the storm broke in all its fury. Marbach issued a manifesto in which he charged that the entire foundation on which the church polity had been erected was sinful and that the blessings of God could not be expected until the old edifice had been completely destroyed. What Marbach meant was that a confession of guilt must be made on the part of the entire colony, and that they must all return to Germany.[34]

The manifesto of Marbach seems to have caused considerable disturbance among the colonists. This was, of course, quite natural. What Marbach proposed was that they were not a church, that they had been in

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[31] Ibid., p. 518.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p. 519.

[34] Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 110-11.

error in emigrating from Saxony, and that the emigration was sinful per se. The only solution for the ills of the colony that Marbach offered was a confession of guilt and the return to the homeland. Marbach asserted that only a moral issue was involved. From the financial standpoint a return to Germany was impossible; the colonists hardly had enough to make ends meet, let alone to return to Germany.

Shortly after Marbach issued his manifesto, a conference was held in Dresden, one of the settlements in Perry County. Present at this meeting were Pastors Loeber, Keyl, Gruber, and Buerger; Candidate Brohm; Magister Wege; and Marbach.[35] At this meeting Marbach reiterated the assertions which he had made in the manifesto. Buerger, Brohm, and Wege were in agreement with Marbach. Neither Loeber nor Keyl were able to disprove the claims of Marbach. Mundinger states that one of the reasons for this was that these two pastors also made a moral issue of the problem.[36] His comments are worth noting:

> Two years after their landing in America, almost twenty months after Stephan had been ousted, Keyl and Loeber were still speaking of their support of Stephan and Stephanism as "the abominations that are present among us" ("die vorhandenen Greuel"). They spoke thus for three reasons: First, the leaven of Stephanism had not been entirely removed from the thinking of the Stephanistic clerics even at this late date; secondly, it was simpler to make a collective confession for the whole group; and, thirdly, they believed in the purging effect which a collective confession would have upon their souls ("Reinigung durch ein Bekenntnis"). In their estimation they had not cleansed ("gereinigt") themselves. There was much talk back and forth, but the clerics were getting nowhere fast, simply because they did not know what they wanted. (Marbach's minutes: "Nach langem Hinundherreden erklaerten die Pastoren Keyl, Loeber und Gruber, dass sie zwar zur Zeit diesen Punkt (a collective confession, coupled with a return to Germany) nicht widerlegen, aber auch nicht

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[35] Ibid., p. 110; Forster, op. cit., pp. 519-20.

[36] Mundinger, op. cit., p. 111.

> zugeben koennten"). Evidences of accelerated disintegration were piling up on all sides. At the end of March, 1841, the whole colony was fast approaching a state of complete disintegration. The spirit and influence of the clerics seems to have reached its lowest mark. Something had to be done, and that something had to be drastic and dramatic.[37]

In the midst of all this confusion Buerger announced that he was "formally severing all relations with the ecclesiastical life of the community."[38] It was evident from this conference that the dissension which was disrupting the colony was in need of a better solution to the problems which it faced than the ones which had been offered up to this time. This solution was to come as a result of the Altenburg Debate.

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Forster, op. cit., p. 520.

CHAPTER VII

AN ACCEPTABLE SOLUTION, THE ALTENBURG DEBATE

The Occasion of the Debate

The solution to the problems which beset the colony which was offered by Adolph Marbach, the astute and learned lawyer, demanded an answer. The pastors who had met with Marbach and his associates demonstrated that they had nothing better to offer. If spiritual peace were ever to come to the colony, an acceptable solution had to be brought forth.

There were a number of reasons why the solution offered by Marbach was unacceptable. In the first place, Marbach and his associates saw only a moral issue in the emigration and in the difficulties which the colony faced; in this respect many of the pastors agreed with Marbach. Secondly, the return to Germany which was an integral part of Marbach's proposal was financially impossible; the cost of the emigration, the purchase of the Perry County land, and the extravagances of the deposed Martin Stephan had sapped the economic resources of the colonists. Thirdly, many of the colonists would have found it virtually impossible to return to Germany, even if the funds for the journey were available.

An example of this third objection to Marbach's plan can be seen in the case of C. F. W. Walther. Walther's attraction to Stephanism in his early ministry in Germany had been the source of much difficulty for him with the Saxon civil and ecclesiastical authorities. At the time of the emigration Walther was accused of kidnapping two of the Schubert children

and taking them along. A warrant for Walther's arrest had been issued in Saxony. It is for this reason that Walther booked passage on the Johann Georg, and not on the Olbers as had been originally planned. Besides being involved in this legal matter, Walther's release from his former parish had not been "entirely clean."[1] The consistory questioned Walther's request for a release because of his methods, or at least his alleged methods, of inducing people to take part in the emigration; he was also formally charged with breaking up several families.[2] However, he was granted a formal release by the consistory, even though his Stephanism prevented him from receiving one which was completely clean. In the face of these two facts it would have been extremely difficult for Walther to return to Germany permanently.

Walther had not been present at the conference which had been arranged between Marbach's group and the other pastors after Marbach had issued his manifesto. It is difficult to ascertain how much influence Walther was exerting at this meeting. Mundinger is of the opinion that Walther did influence the meeting to a certain extent:

> Just how much influence he had been exercising from behind the scenes during the previous months is not known. The behavior of Keyl and Loeber at the conference with Marbach indicates that they were under some pressure from Walther, who was beginning to feel the necessity of offering himself as the savior of the day.[3]

However, it is known that Walther had given much care to the problems

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[1]Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), pp. 112-13.

[2]Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 179.

[3]Mundinger, op. cit., p. 111.

of the colony, and he did have access to the library of Pastor Keyl. Walther himself admits that he had given the document prepared by Carl Vehse considerable thought, and he confesses his debt to the work of this individual.[4] Furthermore, Walther could not have lived in the same house with Keyl without having discussed the situation, the manifesto of Marbach, and the conference which was held.

Who actually initiated the set of circumstances which resulted in the Altenburg Debate cannot be determined with any degree of accuracy. Forster does not discuss the question; he writes:

> Walther was aided in securing the acceptance of his views by the fact that he had the opportunity of stating them under rather dramatic circumstances. The occasion was a formal discussion arranged between the opposing groups. Walther was chosen to represent the moderates, Marbach the extreme faction. Neither of these two men could reflect all shadings of opinion prevalent among those who regarded them as their spokesmen, but views in the colonies tended more and more to focus upon a moderate and a radical position, with Walther and Marbach carrying the burden of the debate.[5]

Baepler gives the credit to Pastor Buerger:

> At the suggestion of Pastor Buerger a public debate was arranged for April 15 and 20, 1841, in Altenburg. Pastor Walther, assisted by Pastors Loeber and Keyl, presented and defended the Scriptural views of the doctrine of the Church and the ministry, while Dr. Marbach and Pastor Buerger represented the opposing side.[6]

Polack believes that Walther, Keyl and Loeber arranged for the debate.[7]

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[4] J. F. Koestering, Auswanderung der saechsischen Lutheraner im Jahre 1838, ihre Niederlassung in Perry-Co., Mo., und damit zusammenhaengende interessante Nachrichten (St. Louis: A. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1867), p. 43.

[5] Forster, op. cit., p. 523.

[6] Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 47.

[7] W. G. Polack, The Story of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), p. 47.

Mundinger is probably correct in his evaluation:

> To what extent Walther promoted the rising clamor for a full and free public debate of all the issues involved in the lay-clerical controversy cannot be ascertained with any degree of certainty from the documents at hand; but we do know that he had been sweating over the problems of the colony for over a year and that he had very good reasons for being unalterably opposed to a return to Germany.[8]

From the standpoint of the preparation which he had done, it is not improbable that Walther was in favor of such a meeting. That he was eminently prepared for the debate cannot be disputed. Whether or not he actually brought forth the suggestion for such a disputation cannot be determined.

The Place of the Debate

In order to arrive at an acceptable solution to the problems which faced the colonists, a public disputation was arranged for April 15 and 20, 1841, in Altenburg, one of the settlements of the colonists in Perry County. The site which was chosen for the debate was the college which had been founded in December of 1839.

Amid the severe spiritual and physical handicaps which followed the expulsion of Martin Stephan from the colony, the plans for an institution of higher learning among the colonists were being worked out by four of the young theologians of the group, C. F. W. Walther, Ottomar Fuerbringer, Theodore Brohm, and J. F. Buenger. On August 13, 1839, they prepared an advertisement for insertion in Der Anzeiger des Westens, the St. Louis German newspaper, which stated the purpose of the institution, the

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[8] Mundinger, op. cit., p. 112.

subjects which would be offered, and invited interested parents to contact O. H. Walther, the pastor of the St. Louis congregation.[9]

Actually, the building which housed this institution was only a log cabin. The construction of the cabin was done primarily by the four men who had issued the announcement. In spite of the fact that all of these men were university-trained and quite unaccustomed to the hardships of constructing a log cabin in the wilderness, felling trees, shaping them for the walls, and digging a well, the college was dedicated on December 9, 1839. On the occasion of the dedication of the new Concordia Seminary building on September 9, 1883, Walther remembered the first college with the following words:

> We cannot and will not deny that today our hearts are surging with joy when we reflect that the institution which was begun forty-four years ago in a miserable block hut amidst a forest, is today moving into a palace in the midst of a metropole. However, as a living eye- and ear-witness I can here testify that our little block hut, too, seemed to us a palace, which we entered at that time not less joyfully than we enter this magnificent edifice today. Our poverty in those days was so great that even that little block hut rose before our eyes like a miracle, for which we could thank God only with tears of joy.[10]

In this crude log cabin college building one of the most important debates in the history of the Missouri Synod was about to take place. The outcome of the discussions held within its rude walls would greatly effect the ecclesiology of that body. The poverty of the surroundings must have stood in sharp contrast to the wealth and riches of the theology in Walther's theses for the debate.

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[9]Forster, op. cit., p. 502; Baepler, op. cit., p. 37.

[10]W. H. T. Dau, "Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, D.D. An Appraisal," Walther and the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p. 8.

The Climate of the Debate

The debate took place in the college on April 15 and 20, 1841. As many people as could be crowded into the one room building were on hand for the discussions. On the basis of the available evidence it cannot be determined who presided at the debate; none of the authorities hazard a conjecture as to who this individual might have been. At times the sessions became a bit stormy. Pastor Buerger seems to have been the center of such outbursts. At one point in the discussion he was accused of calling the Sacrament of the Altar a "comedy." Although he denied the charge, it was sustained by the pastors on the statement of two laymen. In the confusion that followed Buerger could not succeed in gaining the floor. By the time he did, he was unable to change the impression which had been made.[11]

Outside of such outbursts as this, the debate was carried on in relatively calm theological discussion. Both Walther and Marbach were heard. Each of these men attempted to push personalities into the background and discuss the real issues at stake. Marbach, who viewed the whole matter in a moral fashion, was not as successful in this endeavor as was Walther. However, in fairness it must be said that Marbach does not belong into the same class as his associate, Buerger.

Marbach's solution to the problems which he offered at Altenburg was essentially the same which had appeared in his manifesto of the previous month. He was convinced that the emigration had been a sinful act, that the colonists did not have the church among them, and that the only

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[11] Forster, op. cit., p. 523.

solution was to confess their guilt and return to Germany. At the outset of the discussion he wanted to impress upon those present that he was not a professional theologian. He considered it a sin for a person to enter into the field for which God had not called him; in this respect he reflected Luther's view on the calling. However, as a layman he insisted that it was his right and duty to investigate the doctrines and polity of the church. His major concern was an answer to the question whether or not this group has the right to call pastors and to function as the church. He was seeking security for himself and for the rest of the colonists. It was for this reason that he was participating in the debate. A number of times Marbach expressed his disapproval of the theological formality which had begun to characterize the debate; no doubt he had particular reference to the theses which Walther had formulated. Marbach had separated himself from the worship life of the colony. During the course of the debate he explained that he had done this because Stephanism had not been completely rooted out of the colony, because the great public offenses had not been acknowledged and removed, because the ecclesiastical polity of the group was founded on an insecure foundation, because he doubted that the true Christian church existed among them, and because he doubted that the office of the ministry as it existed among them was the command and work of God.[12]

Marbach was guilty of simply making a moral issue of the problem. This is very evident from the way he proceeded at Altenburg. His first major point centered on the definition of a false church. He concluded

Marbach Point 1

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[12]Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 115-17.

that every church which has adulterated the foundation of the church, meaning Jesus Christ, is a false church. The emigration group had done just this; therefore, they were a false church. Until the false foundation of the colony was completely destroyed, it was under the wrath of God. There could be no salvation in such a church.[13] The only solution which Marbach could offer was a confession of guilt and a return to Germany. The position which Marbach defended in the Altenburg Debate was the same which he had put forth in his manifesto.

The Position of Walther

Walther attacked the position of Marbach at its root, the moral question. Mundinger's summary of Walther's reaction to this line of argumentation is worth noting:

> Walther was violently opposed to those who saw only a moral issue in their problem and who made the intensity of their own contrition a yardstick with which to measure the sincerity of other people's confession. He called such men conscience pounders ("Gewissensdraenger"). He spoke of tyranny of the conscience ("Gewissensbeherrscherei"), of making things to be sin which are not sin ("die neue Pest der Suendenmacherei"), of calling into question the grace of God which many of us believe we have received ("die Verdaechtigmachung der von vielen unter uns schon vorher gemachten wahrhaften Gnadenerfahrungen"). He spoke of a conscience whip ("Gewissensgeissel"), of people who made the grace of God depend upon the intensity of their contrition and who insisted that other people do likewise. Why should men, Walther asks, who were private secretaries of Stephan and initiated into all the secrets of Stephan, who knew what was going on--why should they make the amount of their guilt and the intensity of their confession the yardstick with which to measure the amount of guilt to be assessed against the simple, uninitiated layman? Many followed Stephan, Walther says, who had neither the ability nor the opportunity to judge. They did it in their ignorance. They were not wicked; they were misled. Would it be fair and just to hold them equally responsible with the private secretaries of Stephan? Besides, what good could come from a

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[13] Ibid., pp. 118-19.

> collective public confession? Walther sensed in Marbach's position the effects of early-nineteenth-century Pietism, the movement which laid so much stress on the intensity and depth of the acknowledgment of sin and which tried to externalize the Church. The habit of identifying the invisible Church with the visible had been the source of much confusion and much unnecessary heartache among the Pietists. Walther would have none of it.[14]

In order to bring the problems of the colony into their proper perspective, Walther pushed personality and morals into the background and attacked the issue from the viewpoint of sixteenth century Lutheran theology. The questions for Walther were not ones of guilt and confession, but of the nature of the church, the call into the ministry, and the validity of such a call.[15]

In order to find answers to these questions, Walther brought forth a set of theses which he was prepared to defend. These theses are so important for an understanding of Walther's position that they are quoted in full:

> I
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> The true Church, in the most real and most perfect sense, is the totality (Gesamtheit) of all true believers, who from the beginning to the end of the world from among all peoples and tongues have been called and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the Word. And since God alone knows these true believers (2 Tim. 2:19), the Church is also called invisible. No one belongs to this true Church who is not spiritually united with Christ, for it is the spiritual body of Jesus Christ.
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> II
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> The name of the true Church belongs also to all those visible companies of men among whom God's Word is purely taught and the holy Sacraments are administered according to the institution of Christ. True, in this Church there are godless men, hypocrites, and heretics, but they are not true members of it, nor do they constitute the Church.
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> III
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> The name Church, and, in a certain sense, the name true Church,

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[14] Ibid., pp. 119-20.

[15] Ibid., p. 120.

belongs also to those visible companies of men who have united under the confession of a falsified faith and therefore have incurred the guilt of a partial departure from the truth; provided they possess so much of God's Word and the holy Sacraments in purity that children of God may thereby be born. When such companies are called true churches, it is not the intention to state that they are faithful, but only that they are real churches as opposed to all worldly organizations (Gemeinschaften).

IV

The name Church is not improperly applied to heterodox companies, but according to the manner of speech of the Word of God itself. It is also not immaterial that this high name is allowed to such communions, for out of this follows:--

1. That members also of such companies may be saved; for without the Church there is no salvation.

V

2. The outward separation of a heterodox company from an orthodox Church is not necessarily a separation from the universal Christian Church nor a relapse into heathenism and does not yet deprive that company of the name Church.

VI

3. Even heterodox companies have church power; even among them the goods of the Church may be validly administered, the ministry established, the Sacraments validly administered, and the keys of the kingdom of heaven exercised.

VII

4. Even heterodox companies are not to be dissolved, but reformed.

VIII

The orthodox Church is chiefly to be judged by the common, orthodox, public confession to which its members acknowledge and confess themselves to be pledged.[16]

Walther proceeded to prove the correctness of his theses in an impersonal manner. So far as it is known, he never mentioned his opponents by name.[17] In a quiet, tactful manner he proceeded to show that the colonists were indeed a church, that they could call pastors, and that they could function as the church. Walther based his conclusions on the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, Luther, and other great Lutheran theologians, especially Gerhard. Walther's method

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[16] Forster, op. cit., pp. 523-25.

[17] Mundinger, op. cit., p. 122.

was pastoral in its approach and theological in its content. His assessment of the problems is stated in his own words:

> It is a question of quieting of conscience, of the rejection of false teaching, seeking to insinuate itself under the guise of humility, of the firm holding of the true doctrine of the Church, Church power, office, call, fellowship, power of the word and the divine order. It is not a question of any man's honor or justification, but of the honor of God.[18]

It was from this standpoint that Walther viewed the questions which plagued the colonists, and it was for this reason that Walther set down his theses and defended them at Altenburg.

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[18] D. H. Steffens, Dr. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917), pp. 168-69, quoting from Koestering, op. cit., p. 50.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ANALYSIS OF WALTHER'S ALTENBURG THESES

The Influence of Vehse on Walther

On August 5, 1839, Dr. Carl Eduard Vehse had come forth with a set of theses which he offered as a solution to the problems of the colony. In these theses he had asserted the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers and had come to the conclusion that on the basis of this doctrine the members of the colony constituted a church. Because they were a church, the colonists had the right and the privilege to function as a church, to organize congregations, to call pastors, and to administer the sacraments.[1]

At the Altenburg Debate in April of 1841 C. F. W. Walther successfully defended a set of theses which posited a similar solution to the chaos which plagued the colonists since the deposition of Martin Stephan. Walther asserted that the colonists were a church; that the church was in reality the sum total of all true believers; that since the colonists were a church, they could function as the church; and that the false doctrine inherent in the Stephanite system was not sufficient to deprive the group of its character as a church.

Because there was a great deal of similarity between the theses of Vehse and the theses of Walther, it is quite natural to ask how much influence Vehse exerted on the ecclesiological thinking of Walther as he

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[1] Supra, pp. 53-59.

formulated it at Altenburg. In the notes which Walther prepared for the debate, which have been preserved in Koestering's work,[2] Walther acknowledges his indebtedness to Vehse:

> God removed a great oppressor from our midst, to whom we, contrary to the will of God, had entrusted ourselves as to a leader from heaven. What would have become of us if God had not continued to have compassion on us? But God did not yet weary of being merciful to us; He awakened men among us who gave public testimony of what they recognized as a remaining corruption. With deep gratitude I must here recall that document which, now almost a year and a half ago, Doctor Vehse, Mr. Fischer, and Mr. Jaeckel addressed to us. It was this document, in particular, which gave us a powerful impulse to recognize the remaining corruption more and more, and to endeavor to remove it. Without this document--I now confess it with a living conviction--we might have for a long time pursued our way of error, from which we now have made our escape. I confess this with an even greater sense of shame, because I at first appeared so ungrateful towards this precious gift of God. But although many with me handled with great unfaithfulness the light which was granted to us, yet God did not cease to cause ever more beams of truth to fall into our darkness; to tear us away from many a point which we, in our perverseness, sought to hold; to uncover to us great and perilous spiritual injuries, and to lead our hearts more and more in the way of truth.[3]

From this it can be seen that Walther was not blind to the contribution which Vehse and his associates had made. On the contrary, the work of these men helped Walther to see the issues at stake more clearly and aided him in the formulation of his own position.

However, it must not be assumed that Walther merely adopted the same line of argumentation which Vehse had used. Walther's approach to the problem was quite different from the approach of Vehse. Vehse had

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[2] J. F. Koestering, Auswanderung der saechsischen Lutheraner im Jahre 1838, ihre Niederlassung in Perry-Co., Mo., und damit zusammenhaengende interessante Nachrichten (St. Louis: A. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1867), pp. 42-52.

[3] Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), pp. 47-48, quoting from Koestering, op. cit., pp. 43-45.

advocated an extreme form of congregationalism, and in doing so he was plainly leveling his attack on the members of the clergy. Walther began with the same premise as Vehse, the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers, but his aim was constructive, rather than destructive. Forster correctly evaluates the distinctions between these two fundamental approaches when he says:

> Theologically, Walther's position was based upon an elaboration of Vehse's position that the immigrants were a group of Christians and by that simple fact "a church." Vehse had used his thesis chiefly as an offensive weapon against the pretensions of the episcopacy and its clergy. Walther, while agreeing with Vehse, stressed rather the constructive effect of the conclusions to be drawn. His aim was not annihilation--either of his opponents, as it had been Vehse's, or of the colonies, as it now was Marbach's--but pacification. Vehse's program had failed. Marbach's (and Sproede's), however, was well on the way toward success. It was abundantly clear to the young pastor that by adopting hierarchical ideas of the nature of the Church, insisting upon theories of the episcopal succession, overemphasizing the office of the ministry, or indulging a spiritual hypochondria to the point where it induced a verbal flagellantism in the group, it was possible to produce a spasm of ecclesiastical nihilism during which the Saxon colonies would, in fact, die a convulsive death.
>
> Walther was not interested in helping to produce such an outcome; he sought just the opposite--a set of ideas which would reunite and stabilize the colonies. Therefore he argued that even when all the faults of the emigration were granted, such error did not per se demonstrate the absence (although admittedly the adulteration) of Christianity. Indeed, the evidence was all to the contrary; it seemed demonstrable that there were many sincere Christians among the colonists. It was vital to remember, furthermore, that belonging to an organized church body did not constitute one a Christian, but that a body of Christians could organize at any time to constitute a church. "A church," the word which seemed to have become the shibboleth of the controversy--"a church" was still extant among them. If this were so, they must possess all the rights of such a body and could exercise all its functions; specifically, they could call pastors and teachers and provide for the administration of the Sacraments and other rites normally connected with the existence of an organized congregation, or a "church." In practical application it meant the identification of the characteristics and powers of a congregation and "the church." This was a modest platform when contrasted with the bombastic claims of being "the church" which characterized the period of the emigration. But it was an ambitious platform when contrasted with the claims of those who said the

Gesellschaft was nothing.[4]

Furthermore, it is only in the first three of the eight Altenburg Theses that Walther follows the line of thought as it had been laid down by Vehse.[5] In these Walther discusses the nature of the church as the totality of all believers, the distinction between the visible and the invisible church, the definition of the visible church as that group of individuals among whom the Word of God is rightly taught and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution, and the application of the name church to those who have followed a falsified faith. In the assertion of these principles Walther is reiterating the thoughts of Vehse, although he has approached the material from a somewhat different perspective.

In the last five of the theses Walther is supplementing the thoughts of Vehse, and these theses constitute Walther's major contribution at Altenburg.[6] In the last five theses Walther shows the real issues which existed between him and Adolph Marbach.[7] In these Walther argues that the application of the term church to heterodox societies is of the utmost importance because of the implications which this usage demands: first, that members of such groups can be saved; secondly, that outward separation of such a society from the orthodox church does not necessarily

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[4]Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), pp. 521-23.

[5]Supra, pp. 73-74.

[6]Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 121.

[7]Supra, p. 74.

imply separation from the universal church; thirdly, that heterodox churches have all of the rights of the church; and, finally, that such churches are in need of reform, and not of dissolution. These principles were necessary to combat the position taken by Marbach. These were developed by Walther independently; they were not a part of Vehse's argumentation; any influence which Vehse may have had on Walther in the working out of these theses must be considered only secondary.

However, Walther did take his cue from the methodology employed by Vehse. Vehse had gone back to the writings of Martin Luther and John Gerhard in order to establish the correctness of his principles. Walther advocated the use of this methodology, and in this respect was probably influenced by the work of Vehse.[8]

By way of summary it may be said that the work of Vehse did make a profound impression on the thinking of Walther, that he incorporated some of Vehse's ideas in his theses, and that he followed the same methodology as Vehse had; however, at the same time, it must be added that Walther's approach, his application of the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers to the specific needs of the community, his use of the distinction between the visible and the invisible church, and his assertion of the particular implications of the doctrine of the church to the problems which faced the colonists were distinctly his own contribution.

The Source of Walther's Ecclesiology

It is evident that Walther owed a debt to the work of Vehse in the

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[8] Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 120-21.

preparation of his theses at Altenburg, but it would be an incorrect conclusion to assert that Vehse was the source of Walther's ecclesiology. From what sources, then, did Walther derive his doctrine of the church as he presented it at Altenburg?

It had become a common practice for those who attempted to find solutions to the ills of the colony to study the writings of Luther and the other giants of Lutheran theology. Vehse had done this in the preparation of his work. Furthermore, while Walther was living at the home of his brother-in-law, Pastor Keyl, he had access to the fine library which Keyl possessed, and he spent a great amount of time studying the theological writings of Luther and the sixteenth century theologians.

The distinction between the invisible and the visible church, which is very important in the theses of Walther, had been made and defended by John Gerhard. Gerhard defined the invisible church as that which consists alone of true believers; it is the communion of saints which is found everywhere in the world. The visible church contains both true believers and hypocrites.[9] Undoubtedly, Walther was indebted to Gerhard for this distinction.

In the manuscript which Walther prepared for the debate he cites only two quotations from Luther. Both of these quotations are from Luther's Briefe von der Wiedertaufe; both of them are brief; taken together, they are not enough to indicate that Walther relied heavily on Luther and his ecclesiology.[10] How many quotations from Luther, Gerhard,

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[9] Ibid., p. 121.

[10] Koestering, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

and the other theologians were used by Walther in the course of the Altenburg Debate cannot be determined; it simply is not known.[11]

However, this does not mean that it is impossible to trace the sources of Walther's ecclesiology. In 1851 Walther published his monumental work, Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt,[12] as an answer to the charges which were brought against Missouri Synod by Pastor J. A. A. Grabau of the Buffalo Synod.[13] Although this work appeared ten years after the Altenburg Debate, the major propositions which Walther defended were essentially the same. Without denying the fact that Walther developed considerably in his theological acumen and stature in the decade that followed the Altenburg Debate, it is possible to trace the source of his ecclesiology from his Kirche und Amt. Mundinger is convinced that this work is an expansion of the Altenburg Theses.[14]

In order to trace to a certain degree the source of Walther's ecclesiology as it was presented at Altenburg, it is necessary to review the basic structure of Kirche und Amt. Kirche und Amt is a polemical essay,

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[11] Mundinger, op. cit., p. 123.

[12] C. F. W. Walther, Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt (Dritte Auflage; Erlangen: Verlag von Andreas Deichert, 1875). Hereafter this work will be cited as Kirche und Amt. This work has been translated into English by W. H. T. Dau and appeared in Wm. Dallmann, W. H. T. Dau, and Theo. Engelder, Walther and the Church, edited by Theo. Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), pp. 47-86. Hereafter this work will be cited as Walther and the Church. The translations will be given from this edition.

[13] For a discussion of the controversy between the Missouri Synod and the Buffalo Synod the reader should consult Roy A. Suelflow, "The Relations of the Missouri Synod with the Buffalo Synod up to 1866," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXVII (April - October, 1954), passim.

[14] Mundinger, op. cit., p. 123.

but Walther only once refers to his immediate opponent, Grabau, and that reference is on the title page. Throughout the work Walther moves in a spirit of love and concern. He displays a remarkable knowledge of the New Testament; he is thoroughly at home in the Lutheran Confessions; he amazes the reader with his numerous citations from Luther and the great teachers of the Lutheran Church.[15] He discusses the doctrine of the church on the basis of nine theses. After each thesis he gives proof from the Scriptures, proof from the Lutheran Confessions, and proof from the private writings of the teachers of the Lutheran Church.

Thesis 1

In the first thesis Walther defends the view that the church is the congregation of saints, the sum total of believers in Christ:

> The Church, in the proper sense of the term, is the communion of saints, that is, the sum total of all those who have been called by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel from out of the lost and condemned human race, who truly believe in Christ, and who have been sanctified by this faith and incorporated into Christ.[16]

For his proof Walther quotes from St. Paul, St. Matthew, St. John, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.[17] He argues that the Lutheran Confessions have also held that the church was the communion of saints. He quotes from the Apostles' Creed, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology and the Smalcald Articles.[18] To prove that this is the view held by the great teachers of the Lutheran Church, he cites quotations from Luther,

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[15] For a listing of the number of quotations from Luther and the great teachers of the Lutheran Church see Walther and the Church, p. 54; and Kirche und Amt, pp. xvii-xx.

[16] Walther and the Church, p. 56.

[17] Kirche und Amt, pp. 1-2.

[18] Ibid., pp. 2-4.

Gerhard, Quenstedt, Baier and several of the ancient church fathers.[19]

Thesis 2

In the second thesis Walther shows that the church is made up of believers and only of believers, "To the church in the proper sense of the term belongs no godless person, no hypocrite, no one who has not been regenerated, no heretic."[20] For the Scriptural proof of this statement he depends upon St. Paul and St. John.[21] This truth is also taught in the Apology.[22] Luther, Gerhard, Quenstedt, Calov, Augustine and Jerome also contended for the same truth.[23]

Thesis 3

Because the church is composed only of the true believers, Walther maintains in the third thesis that in the proper sense of the term the church is invisible.[24] On the basis of the Scriptures, especially St. Paul and St. Peter, Walther maintains that because only the Lord knew who constituted the church and because only true believers are members of the church, therefore no man can see the church.[25] Quoting from the Apology, he argues that the Lutheran Church has always taught the same thing.[26] In order to show that this doctrine has always been upheld by true Lutherans, he cites quotations from Luther, Chemnitz, Gerhard,

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[19] Ibid., pp. 4-10.

[20] Walther and the Church, p. 57.

[21] Kirche und Amt, p. 10.

[22] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[23] Ibid., pp. 11-14.

[24] Ibid., p. 14.

[25] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[26] Ibid., pp. 15-17.

Meisner, Menzer, Huelsemann, Dannhauer, Calov and Quenstedt.[27]

In the fourth thesis Walther maintains that only the true church of believers and saints possess the rights which Christ has given to the church:

> This true Church of believers and saints it is to which Christ has given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore this Church is the real and sole holder and bearer of the spiritual, divine, and heavenly blessings, rights, powers, offices, etc., which Christ has gained and which are available in His Church.[28]

This thesis is of particular importance since here Walther is laying down the principle of congregational rights. He demonstrates conclusively from numerous quotations from the Scriptures that the power of the church rests with the congregation.[29] He further maintains that this same truth was confessed by the Lutheran Church; for his proof he cites from the Augsburg Confession and from the Smalcald Articles.[30] Since many had maintained that this view was only advocated by Luther and not by the rest of the Lutheran Church, Walther not only quotes from Luther,[31] but also from Chemnitz, Heshusius, Menzer, Balduin, Gerhard, Dannhauer, Quenstedt, Meisner and from the ancient church fathers.[32] Without a doubt Walther marshals a host of authorities to prove his point.

In the fifth thesis Walther argues that the invisible church is

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[27] Ibid., pp. 17-29.

[28] Walther and the Church, p. 58.

[29] Kirche und Amt, pp. 29-31.

[30] Ibid., pp. 31-33.

[31] Ibid., pp. 34-38.

[32] Ibid., pp. 38-52.

perceivable by the marks of the church, the Word and the Sacraments:

> Although the true Church, in the proper sense of the term, is invisible as to its essence, yet its presence is perceivable, its marks being the pure preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the holy Sacraments in accordance with their institution by Christ.[33]

After citing the passages from Holy Scripture which describe the marks of the church, Walther concludes that the church exists where the Word is preached and the Sacraments are administered.[34] This the Lutheran Church has always believed according to the Augsburg Confession and the Apology.[35] Luther and the ancient church fathers also upheld the same view.[36] Without the Word of God and the Sacraments there can be no church; accordingly, Walther argues, where you see the marks, there you see the church.

Walther vigorously maintains that the term "church" can be applied to the sum total of all believers, but with the same vigor he defends the invisibility of the church, as well as the visibility of the church. This is the subject of the sixth thesis:

> In an improper sense the term "Church," according to Holy Scripture, is applied also to the visible sum total of all who have been called, that is, to all who profess allegiance to the Word of God that is preached and make use of the holy Sacraments. This Church (the universal [catholic] Church) is made up of good and evil persons. Particular divisions of it, namely, the congregations found here and there, in which the Word of God is preached and the holy Sacraments are administered, are called churches (particular churches), for the reason, namely, that in these visible groups the invisible, true Church of the believers, saints, and children of

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[33] Walther and the Church, p. 60.

[34] Kirche und Amt, pp. 53-54.

[35] Ibid., pp. 54-56.

[36] Ibid., pp. 56-63.

> God is concealed, and because no elect persons are to be looked for outside of the group of those who have been called.[37]

The distinction which Walther makes between the visibility and the invisibility of the church can best be illustrated from his comments on portions of the Gospel According to St. Matthew. He writes:

> Hence to the visible Church, which comprises good and evil persons, true and false Christians, orthodox and such as are erring in faith, the name "Church" can belong, and can be accorded, only in an improper, synecdochical sense; that is to say, the whole bears this glorious name merely on account of a part of it, to which alone this name belongs in the proper sense. Accordingly, the entire visible group of all who have been called bears the name of "the universal Church" and the individual parts of this group the name of "churches," or "particular churches," on account of the true members of the true Church who are found among them, even though they were only baptized infants.
>
> However, to the entire visible group who have among them the Word of God and the Sacraments the name "Church" is accorded, not by a misuse of the term but by right. That it must be accorded to them is shown by Holy Scripture, which clearly teaches that only the true believers are real members of the Church; and yet it accords the name "church" also to such mixed visible groups. Thus we read in Matt. 18:17: "Tell it unto the church." Manifestly the reference in this passage is to a visible particular church, consisting of true and false Christians.[38]

The same view is upheld by the Augsburg Confession and the Apology[39] and by Luther, Hunnius, Gerhard, Zeaemann, Dannhauer, Carpzov, Baier and the ancient fathers.[40]

The power which Christ has given to His church is the possession of the particular churches by virtue of the true believers in those churches, even though the number of true believers is very small. Walther defends

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[37] Walther and the Church, p. 62.

[38] Ibid., p. 63.

[39] Kirche und Amt, pp. 65-66.

[40] Ibid., pp. 66-77.

this in the seventh thesis:

> Even as the visible communions in which the Word and the Sacraments still exist in their essence bear, according to God's Word, the name of CHURCHES because of the true invisible Church of the true believers contained in them, so likewise they, because of the true, invisible Church concealed in them, though there be but two or three, possess the POWER which Christ has given to His entire Church.[41]

Walther argues that this is taught in the Scriptures,[42] the Lutheran Confessions,[43] and by the orthodox teachers of the Lutheran Church.[44]

The eighth thesis is the one which received the greatest development from Walther. The discussion of this thesis covers some sixty-five pages of Kirche und Amt. For the sake of completeness the thesis is quoted in full:

> While God gathers for Himself a holy Church of the elect in places where the Word of God is not preached in entire purity and the holy Sacraments are not administered altogether in accordance with their institution by Jesus Christ,--provided the Word of God and the Sacraments are not utterly denied but essentially remain in those places,--still every one is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to flee from all false teachers and to avoid all heterodox churches, or sects and, on the other hand, to profess allegiance, and adhere, to orthodox congregations and their orthodox preachers wherever he finds such.
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> A. Also in erring, heretical congregations there are children of God; also in them the true Church becomes manifest by means of the remnants of the pure Word of God and the Sacraments that still remain in them.
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> B. Every one is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to flee all false prophets and to avoid fellowship with heterodox churches, or sects.

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[41] Walther and the Church, p. 64.

[42] Kirche und Amt, p. 78.

[43] Ibid., pp. 78-80.

[44] Ibid., pp. 80-95.

> C. Every Christian is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to profess allegiance, and adhere, to orthodox congregations and their orthodox preachers wherever he finds such.[45]

For his Scriptural proof Walther quotes a host of passages.[46] His references to the Lutheran Confessions show his profound knowledge of these writings, as well as his complete comprehension of their content on this important issue.[47] However, it is his knowledge of the great teachers of Lutheranism which fills the reader with amazement.[48] That Walther was completely at home in the writings of these men is ably demonstrated in this thesis.

In the ninth and last thesis on the doctrine of the church Walther concludes that salvation can be procured only through membership in the invisible church. He writes, "The only indispensable requisite for obtaining salvation is fellowship with the invisible Church, to which all those glorious promises that concern the Church were originally given."[49] Walther's own interpretation can be seen from his comments on Romans 3:28 and Acts 4:12:

> According to these texts the unconditional and sole requirement for salvation is fellowship with Christ through faith. The maxim "Outside of the Church there is no salvation," "Whoever has not the Church on earth for his mother has not God in heaven for his Father," is true only in this sense, that outside of the invisible Church there is no salvation and no state of grace for a child of God. For this has no other meaning than that "there is no salvation outside of Christ"; for whoever is not in inward fellowship

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[45] Walther and the Church, pp. 64-65, 68.

[46] Kirche und Amt, pp. 95-96, 113-15, 144-46.

[47] Ibid., pp. 96-97, 115-16, 146-47.

[48] Ibid., pp. 97-113, 117-44, 147-60.

[49] Walther and the Church, p. 70.

> with the believers and saints is neither in fellowship with Christ. On the other hand, whoever is in fellowship with Christ is in fellowship also with all those in whom Christ dwells, that is, with the invisible Church. Accordingly, he who restricts salvation to fellowship with any visible Church therewith overthrows the article of the justification of a poor sinner in the sight of God by faith alone in Jesus Christ; although this also is true, that outside of the visible Church there is no salvation if by visible Church is understood not any particular church but the gathering of all those who have been called. For outside of the group of those who have been called we are not to look for any elect, since without the Word of God, which is only among the group of those who have been called, there is no faith, hence neither Christ nor salvation.[50]

For further proof of this principle he cites the Apology, the Large Catechism and the Smalcald Articles.[51] Of the great Lutheran teachers he quotes from Luther, Chemnitz, Gerhard, Quenstedt, Baier and Hollaz.[52]

The purpose for this discussion of Kirche und Amt serves to show that the basic principles which Walther laid down at Altenburg and which he later developed in this work were based on the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the great theologians of the Lutheran Church, primarily Luther and Gerhard.

The Essential Features of Walther's Ecclesiology

Walther's ecclesiology is based on his conception of the church as the communion of saints. The reason for the stress which this receives in his treatment is Walther's soteriological approach to ecclesiology. He cannot conceive of the church on an institutionalized force; for him the church is always the sum total of all true believers in Christ as

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[50] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[51] Kirche und Amt, pp. 161-62.

[52] Ibid., pp. 163-72.

their Savior and Redeemer.

Because the true church consists only of those who have true faith in Christ, it is invisible to the eyes of the world. Members of the visible church may be hypocrites and heretics, but they are not part of the invisible. Walther had experienced the effects of the externalization of the church under Pietism, and for this reason the distinction between the visible and the invisible was a fundamental principle of ecclesiology.

The church comes into being only through the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Word. Therefore, the church exists wherever the Word is purely taught and the sacraments are administered according to the institution of Christ. These are the marks of the church. In asserting this principle Walther is denying the necessity of a given church polity, which had been such a vital part of Stephanism, for the existence of the church.

Furthermore, Walther maintains that members of the groups which have a false confession of faith are also members of the church. However, these groups must have preserved enough of the saving truth of the Gospel so that faith could be born and nurtured. A group which has denied a portion of the truth has not ceased to be a church. This point was very important to Walther, since it applied directly to the situation at hand. The colonists had been guilty of a false confession in their adherence to Stephan. However, this did not deprive them of being the church. They did not have to return to Germany in order to have membership in the church; they were the church.

In the church as it was constituted among the colonists one could

be saved. Because they had separated themselves from the orthodox church, they had not lapsed into heathenism. They had not separated themselves from the invisible church. Even in such a church the power which Christ has given to His church is present. For the colonists this was very important. They could establish congregations; they could call pastors; they could administer the means of grace; they could receive absolution.

Walther maintains that heterodox churches are not to be dissolved, but reformed. This is an important principle. Reformation of the church, the purging of the false excresances of its confession, was more important than the dissolution of the heterodox group.

Finally, Walther asserts that one is to judge the church by its public confession of faith. One does not judge it by its polity, by the piety of its members, by its influence, or by any such thing. The church is to be judged by its confession. This principle pushes personality and outward appearances aside and strikes at the very heart of the church, its soteriological concern for the welfare of its members.

These essential features of Walther's ecclesiology were all contained in the crisp and lucid phrases of his theses which he presented at Altenburg. From the theological formality and precision of their formulation one receives a glimpse of the pastoral concern which dominated the thinking of Walther. He was not so much intent on proving his point, as he was in bringing peace and solace to the disturbed consciences of the colonists. He did not want to merely conquer his opponents in a battle of words, but he desired to show that the doctrine of the church can never be separated from soteriology.

CHAPTER IX

THE EFFECT OF THE ALTENBURG DEBATE

The Effect on the Colony

The controversy which disturbed and plagued the Saxon colonists in Perry County was brought to a head in the Altenburg Debate. At this time C. F. W. Walther brought forth his theses on the church which formed an acceptable solution to the problems which beset the colonists. Adolph Marbach, Walther's opponent in the debate, had insisted that the church was not present among the colonists and had called for a return to Germany. Walther, on the other hand, demonstrated that the church and the powers of the church were indeed present, and his position won the day.

Out of the confusion and chaos which had characterized the thinking of the colonists, Walther had pointed the way to an acceptable solution. Basing his conclusions on the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the representative theologians of the Lutheran Church, Walther brought light to bear on the problems of the community. The effect which this debate had on the colonists can hardly be under-estimated. Forster is correct in his evaluation, "If there was any single factor which saved the colonies from complete dissolution and from the corrosive forces of further internal controversy, it was the Altenburg Debate."[1]

The victory which Walther won at Altenburg was primarily a

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[1]Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 525.

theological one. He demonstrated that the colonists were a part of the church, that the errors of Stephanism which still existed among them were not sufficient to destroy faith, that enough of the Word of God was present to create saving faith in their hearts, that the colonists had both the right and the privilege to call pastors, and that the official acts of these pastors were valid in the sight of God. Furthermore, he was successful in that he was able to convince the majority of the colonists, including some of the theologians, that a thorough reformation of the doctrine and life of the group was the immediate objective of the colonists.[2]

It is noteworthy that even Marbach became convinced that Walther was correct. He wrote a personal confession in which he spoke only of his own personal sins and not of the sins of the entire group, which had been one of his original contentions. He recognized that the church existed among the colonists; he gave up his basic conception because it was false; he acknowledged that the genuine Lord's Supper was celebrated among the group; however, he was not convinced that he ought to participate in its celebration. Teacher Johann F. Winter commented that Walther continued to instruct Marbach on this last point and that Marbach was open to conviction.[3]

Shortly after the Altenburg Debate Marbach and his family returned to Germany. In part, this decision was a result of the fact that Marbach

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[2]Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 124.

[3]Ibid., quoting from J. F. Winter, "Letter," Zeitschrift fuer die gesamte lutherische Theologie und Kirche, II, No. 3 (1841), 130.

was not able to convince himself of the correctness of the position which he had advocated at Altenburg. However, for some time Marbach had entertained the idea of a return to Germany. Forster comments:

> For some time before he actually did so in 1841, Marbach had been turning over in his mind the idea of returning to Germany. At first, after the deposition of Stephan and the abysmal failure of the emigration, in which Marbach had placed his highest hopes for a brilliant career, the thought of facing his former associates was unbearable to him. Only in the late months of 1839 and in 1840 was he persuaded by his wife's urgings to write to some of his friends in Germany again. During the next year and a half he gradually resumed his contacts in Saxony and made cautious overtures to government officials to determine what he might expect his political and professional status to be when he returned--a wise precaution in view of the difficulties he later experienced on this score. Finally, Marbach appealed directly to the king and evidently felt sufficiently encouraged to venture back into his former sphere of activity.[4]

Already in January of 1841, some three months before the debate, the Marbachs began to sell some of their effects which they did not wish to take back to Germany. Within a few months they had managed to wind up their financial affairs, and by the end of August they departed from Perry County. In the middle of September the Marbachs began their homeward journey.[5]

A word is also in place here concerning the further relations between Walther and Marbach. When Walther made a trip to Germany in the fall of 1851 to the spring of 1852, the purpose of which was to iron out difficulties with Wilhelm Loehe, he had occasion to renew his friendship with Marbach. The two opponents at Altenburg remained close friends for the remainder of their lives. In 1860 Walther was present at the death

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[4] Forster, op. cit., p. 529.

[5] Ibid., pp. 529-30.

and burial of Marbach. Of Marbach Walther said that he was his "dearest friend in Germany" and "one in his lifetime frequently misunderstood."[6] This is evidence of the type of men who were opponents at Altenburg; it also shows that hard feelings and bitterness were not among the results of this controversy.

The effect which the debate had on the colonists is evidenced by the remark of Teacher Winter, who wrote, "God be praised that these controversial issues have come up for public discussion, for through this debate many a soul has been put back on the right path."[7] In a letter written eight days after the second session of the debate Loeber called it a remarkable discussion through which many became more convinced and by means of which many doubts vanished.[8]

Mundinger assesses the results of the debate in the following words:

> The conviction grew generally that they were a part of the invisible Christian Church (una sancta ecclesia), that as such they had the power to call ministers, and that ministerial acts of such properly called ministers were valid also in the sight of God. A few individuals, including Pastor E. M. Buerger, were still confused. A few of the laymen were tired of strife and occupied themselves with the hard task of making a living in the backwoods of Missouri or in the frontier town of St. Louis rather than engage in theological discussions. The individual congregations did not hesitate to call pastors, and a healthy church life began to develop.[9]

In 1856 G. Schieferdecker, then president of the Western District,

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[6] Ibid., p. 530.

[7] Mundinger, op. cit., p. 124, quoting from Winter, "Letter," op. cit., II, No. 3 (1841), 130.

[8] Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 124-25, quoting from G. H. Loeber, "Letter," Zeitschrift fuer die gesamte lutherische Theologie und Kirche, II, No. 3 (1841), 112.

[9] Mundinger, op. cit., p. 125.

addressed the following words to the delegates assembled for the second meeting of the district:

> The testimonies of the Holy Scriptures and of the fathers of the Church, particularly of Luther and Gerhard, were the arbiters. With convincing clarity it was demonstrated that in spite of all our errors we still had the Lord Jesus, His Word, the blessed Sacrament, and the Office of the Keys, and that the Lord had His Church, His people, among us. Nothing more was necessary to free the hearts of men from the terrible pressure of anxiety that weighed so heavily upon them. It was the Easter Day of our sorely tried congregations. Like the disciples on their way to Emmaus, we beheld the light and power of God's grace and were filled with new hope. There are still many present today who recall that day with tears of gratitude to the merciful God. Several of the faithful champions of the cause of Jesus and of His woefully disrupted flock are living today. The dear brother whom the Lord used as His foremost instrument in the battle is here. I do not hesitate to say that as important as the Leipzig Debate of 1519 was for the cause of the Reformation, so important was the Altenburg Debate for the development of the polity of the Lutheran Church of the West. It saved us from spiritual pride. We no longer regarded our Church--nor any denomination for that matter--as the only saving Church. It also saved us from denying the existence of the Church in those organizations in which the Word of God is mixed with error.[10]

The Altenburg Debate helped to clear the air for greater activities on the part of the colonists. It brought peace after two years of strife. It provided acceptable answers to the questions which disturbed all the colonists. Mundinger correctly evaluates the effects of this event when he states:

> This public debate is a definite milestone in that it marks a turning point in the development of church polity in the colony. At all events, from that time on the colonists knew where they were headed. Whether it was really the "Easter Day" of the bedeviled colony, as one of the participants, the exuberant Schieferdecker, later called it, may be questioned. This much is certain: it did help to clarify the people's thinking, and it was definitely the

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[10] Ibid., pp. 113-14. This is also given in J. F. Koestering, Auswanderung der saechsischen Lutheraner im Jahre 1838, ihre Niederlassung in Perry-Co., Mo., und damit zusammenhaengende interessante Nachrichten (St. Louis: A. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1867), pp. 52-54.

making of C. F. W. Walther.[11]

The Altenburg Debate marked the definite end of Stephanism in the colony. It cleared away the dark clouds which had hung over the colonists like a pall. It re-established the confidence of the people in their pastors, and it made the pastors sure of their office. For a religious group of people, motivated as they were by spiritual and theological concerns, these fruits of the debate were of tremendous importance.

The Emergence of Walther as the Leader of the Colony

The debate not only had an effect on the colony, but it also radically changed the position of Walther in the colony. When Walther entered the log cabin College which he had helped to found in Altenburg for the purpose of holding a theological discussion with Adolph Marbach, he was a young man of twenty-nine years of age. He had been without a parish for some months; in part this was due to his illness, and in part it was a result of the lack of confidence which the colonists had in the members of the clergy. He was not the most influential pastor in the colony at this time. While it is true that he had been selected to confront Martin Stephan with the charges leveled against him in 1839, in all probability this task was not assigned to him because he was the leading spokesman for the clergy. He had been an ardent advocate of the emigration, but he never enjoyed the position of honor accorded to his brother, O. H. Walther. Although it is impossible to measure his influence up to this time, he was not present at the meeting held in Dresden one month before

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[11] Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 113-14.

between the pastors and the Marbach group.

However, after the victory at Altenburg Walther emerged as the unquestioned spiritual and theological leader of the colony. His clarity of thought, his ability to come to grips with the real issues at hand, his keen theological insight, and his persuasive manner raised him immeasurably in the estimation of pastors and people alike. From the Altenburg Debate in 1841 until his death in 1887 Walther remained the outstanding theologian and leader of the colonists and of the church body which they helped to organize. The comments of Forster are not exaggerated:

> The victory in the Altenburg Debate laid the foundations for the ecclesiastical edifice which Walther was to spend his life in building. And while superlatives must be used with caution in the life of the man who has been called "the outstanding figure in the history of American Lutheranism," this contribution may well be called his greatest, insofar as it was the sine qua non of all that was to follow in his eventful life as leader of the Saxons and of the Missouri Synod. For this was what he now became, the leader of the clergy and of the colonists in their subsequent development. Other factors, such as his transfer to St. Louis, were also instrumental in changing his station. But his prestige rested upon the fact that he emerged from the chaos of two years of controversy with the most lucid presentation of what the majority of the people felt to be a Scriptural solution for their emotional-doctrinal dilemma and the only plan for a church polity which was workable under the circumstances. These achievements raised him immeasurably in the eyes of all of his associates.[12]

Walther's victory at the Altenburg Debate not only raised him in the minds of the colonists, but it also produced a profound effect on the person of Walther. This change can be seen from an examination of Walther's attitude toward the call which he had received to Trinity congregation in St. Louis. O. H. Walther had been the pastor of the

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[12] Forster, op. cit., pp. 525-26.

congregation until his untimely death on January 21, 1841. On February 8, 1841, the congregation extended a call to C. F. W. Walther. The congregation decided to prepare a document setting forth the relationship of the pastor to the congregation, and one of the members, Mr. Quast, was delegated to deliver the call to Walther in Perry County. The representative of the congregation also had money for Walther's traveling expenses; undoubtedly, the members of Trinity believed that Walther, who was without a charge at this time, would accept their call.[13]

On February 22, 1841, a letter from Walther was read to the members of the congregation. In this letter Walther thanked them for the confidence which they expressed in him, but he asked that they grant him additional time for the consideration of the call. He said that there were reasons beyond his control which did not permit him to accept the call at that time. His health was one factor, but there were other reasons which he did not wish to mention. The congregation decided to wait for his final decision. By March 8, 1841, some of the members wanted to send a messenger to Walther for his decision; however, the majority decided to wait for Walther to give his answer.[14]

The day after the Altenburg Debate Walther left Perry County for St. Louis to accept the call from that congregation. Mundinger writes:

> Finally, on April 26, 1841, six days after his big victory over Marbach, Pastor Walther appeared in person before the congregation. It is a new Pastor Walther. He is sure of himself. He knows what he wants. The effects of the victory are written all over his actions. The congregation was hurriedly called together, since Pastor Walther was anxious to give them a definite statement ("eine

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[13] Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 126-28.

[14] Ibid., p. 128.

> bestimmte Erklaerung"). He told them that four factors had prevented him from giving them an immediate answer. The first was his sickness, which had lasted for a good year. The second was his feeling of unfitness for the office of the holy ministry ("das Gefuehl der Untuechtigkeit zum geistlichen Amt"). The third was a sense of unworthiness, which developed particularly during his sickness. And finally, the confusion concerning church polity, more specifically the right to call a minister and to administer the blessed Sacrament, caused him to postpone his final answer to the congregation.[15]

After enumerating the reason why he had delayed in answering the call, Walther proceeded to explain that all the obstacles had been removed. His health had been restored. His feeling of unfitness for the office of the ministry had been removed by his study in the writings of the Lutheran theologians. As far as his unworthiness was concerned, he stated that the congregation had called him in full knowledge of any wrong he had committed in the past, and for this reason he could accept their call without any scruples of conscience. The confusion regarding church polity had been settled by the Altenburg Debate.[16] The congregation accepted Walther's explanation, and resolved that he should preach his initial sermon on the following Sunday.

From the Altenburg Debate Walther emerged as the leader of the colony. The victory also restored Walther's confidence in himself, and this factor cannot be overlooked. Walther was mature, both emotionally and theologically, beyond his years. The two years of struggle and study which began with the deposition of Stephan and ended in the Altenburg Debate left their mark on Walther. He knew where he stood; he was convinced that his position was Scriptural and Lutheran; he had laid the

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[15] Ibid., p. 129.

[16] Ibid., pp. 129-31.

foundation for his future work, and on this foundation he was to build.

The Effect on the Future Ecclesiology of the Missouri Synod

The principles which Walther set forth and which he defended at Altenburg were to become the foundation for the ecclesiology of the Missouri Synod. Throughout his lifetime Walther continually expanded and defended the position which he had embodied in the Altenburg Theses. Within the scope of this study it is impossible to trace in detail the various ecclesiological controversies in which Walther was engaged with other theologians. However, some of Walther's major ecclesiological writings must be cited to demonstrate the profound effect which the Altenburg Debate had on the future ecclesiological thinking of the Missouri Synod.

When the Missouri Synod was organized in 1847, the principles which Walther defended at Altenburg were embodied in its constitution.[17] The importance which this has had for the growth and work of the Missouri Synod cannot be under-estimated. Well over a century later these principles remain the polity of the Missouri Synod.

In answer to the position held by J. A. A. Grabau on the church and the ministry Walther wrote his monumental Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt.[18] The theses and the argumentation employed in this work, which was an expansion of the Altenburg Theses, has

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[17] For a discussion of the organization of the Missouri Synod the reader should see ibid., pp. 163-98.

[18] C[arl] F[erdinand] W[ilhelm] Walther, Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt (Dritte Auflage; Erlangen: Andreas Deichter, 1875).

been discussed in another part of this study.[19] This work was adopted by the delegates assembled at the convention of the Missouri Synod in 1851. As such, then, it was not considered merely as the work of Walther, but it was the position of the entire church body.

In the controversy with Wilhelm Loehe Walther maintained the position which he had taken at Altenburg. The result of this controversy was that Loehe, one of the founders of the Missouri Synod, shifted his emphasis to another field and was instrumental in organizing the Iowa Synod.

Walther's second major work on the doctrine of the church, Die rechte Gestalt einer vom Staat unabhaengigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Ortsgemeinde,[20] was submitted to the Western District convention of 1862. In this work, building on the foundation which he had laid at Altenburg, Walther describes the ideal Christian congregation as one which adheres to pure doctrine, which adopts a form of polity which is in harmony with its confession of faith, which is independent of the State, and which fully understands its rights and duties. The influence of Altenburg is clearly traceable in this volume.

The third major work which was to come from Walther's pen on the subject of ecclesiology was Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche die wahre sichtbare Kirche Gottes auf Erden.[21] This was presented to the convention

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[19] Supra, pp. 82-90.

[20] C[arl] F[erdinand] W[ilhelm] Walther, Die rechte Gestalt einer vom Staat unabhaengigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Ortsgemeinde (Zweite Auflage; St. Louis: A. Wiebusch und Sohn, 1864).

[21] C[arl] F[erdinand] W[ilhelm] Walther, Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche die wahre sichtbare Kirche Gottes auf Erden (St. Louis: A. Wiebusch, 1867).

of the Missouri Synod which met in St. Louis in 1866, and it was published by the resolution of that body. Once again, Walther's position was accepted as the position of the Missouri Synod. On the basis of twenty-five theses Walther defines the Scriptural concept of the church and shows that the Lutheran Church is the purest expression of the Scriptural doctrine. Many of the theses are almost literally the same as those presented at Altenburg.

From these three works it can be seen that the effect which the Altenburg Debate had on the future ecclesiology of the Missouri Synod is unmistakably great. The position which Walther set forth in the Altenburg Theses became the foundation upon which the ecclesiology of the Missouri Synod was built. Mundinger concludes his study of the polity of the Missouri Synod with the following significant words:

> By putting real power into the laymen's hands the founders of the Missouri Synod nurtured and developed a sturdy and informed laity. The laymen learned by doing. The difficult problem of teaching men and women who had been brought up in the State Church of Germany the task of paying for the maintenance of the Church was solved by giving laymen the privilege and the duty of making important decisions in the Church. The problem of getting laymen interested in the education of ministers was solved by giving laymen something to say about the institutions in which an indigenous ministry was trained. The problem of generating interest in the well-being of the Church at home and abroad was brought nearer to solution by giving the laymen a voice in making decisions which affected this well-being. The zeal which the early Missouri Synod laymen showed for their Church in that they attended meeting after meeting was produced, no doubt, in part by the fact that these men knew that their decisions were final.
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> The power and authority given to the laymen, on the other hand, was not permitted in any way to undermine or affect adversely the authority and dignity of the holy ministry. The principle of pastoral leadership was honored. The provisions of congregational and synodical polity not only made effective leadership on the part of the pastor possible, but probable. Thus, the polity initiated by the Saxon laymen in the isolation of the frontier amidst trial and struggle a few months after their arrival on American soil was an

important factor in the growth of the immigrant Church.[22]

It must not be forgotten that the major factor which enabled the colonists to begin the building of a great church body was the solid ecclesiological foundation that had been laid by C. F. W. Walther. This he did at the Altenburg Debate, and this makes the Altenburg Debate one of the most important events in the history of the Missouri Synod.

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[22]Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 218-19.

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