

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

Bachelor of Divinity

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

5-1-1924

A Comparison of Dr. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther and Dr. Joseph Augustus Seiss as Preachers

E H. Buchheimer

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_buchheimere@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Buchheimer, E H., "A Comparison of Dr. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther and Dr. Joseph Augustus Seiss as Preachers" (1924). *Bachelor of Divinity*. 733.

<https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv/733>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bachelor of Divinity by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

A COMPARISON OF
DR. CARL FERDINAND WILHELM WALTHER
AND
DR. JOSEPH AUGUSTUS SEISS
AS PREACHERS

E. H. BUCHHEIMER.

24

In making a comparison between Dr. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, (1811 - 1887) and Dr. Joseph Augustus Seiss, (1823 - 1904) as masters of sacred rhetoric in the American Lutheran pulpit, we must, in order to come to a clear understanding of these men as preachers, take into consideration their early training and the times in which they lived, when the Lutheran Church was just beginning to take root in this country and when preachers and sermons played a different part in congregational life, than they do today.

A study of the early years of their lives shows that a divine Providence carefully guided their foot-steps and removed obstacles from their paths. God has chosen these men for the upbuilding of His Kingdom in this grand country and He had mapped out a definite work which they were to do in a most unique time.

If heredity, environment, and traditions make for character, there was no lack of them in the case of Dr. Walther. He was a descendant of an old family of ministers. His father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather were ministers of the Gospel in the Lutheran Church of Saxony, the home of Luther and the cradle of the Reformation. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm could hardly have been anything else than a minister of the Gospel, although his first youthful ambition was to become a great musician.

Dr. Seiss, on the other hand, was not the son of a prophet, nor was he born in any line of succession to such distinction. His birthplace was an obscure country farm, where he was reared under the ordinary conditions of a plain farmer's son. One cannot but wonder at the ways of Providence by which he was brought across the gulf that lay between his early life and the holy office of the ministry. Beyond a doubt the young Dr. Walther enjoyed better educational facilities than did this plain farmer boy, who like Amos of Thekoa, came from the cow-herd and sycamore trees to bring a powerful message to the people of his land. Books he did not have, not even a newspaper then visited his secluded home.

although Dr. Walther completed his studies at the gymnasium and then entered the university, his was by no means an easy student-life. Money and books were very scarce. It was not until he had been at the university some time that he purchased a Bible from his meagre allowance. As in the case of Dr. Seiss, we must wonder at the Providence which guided Dr. Walther during his student-years, amid surroundings full of the so-called "common rationalism" and dominated by the thought of Kant, Fichte, Jacobi, Schelling, and Hegel. It was at this time that he went through severe "vexations of spirit" before he came to a full knowledge of his Savior. The words of Jeremiah are applicable in his case, "It is good for a man that he bear his yoke in his youth." Later in life this storm-period helped to make him the tender and understanding pastor that he was.

No man can altogether escape the influences of his environment. No man can rise superior to it, taking and assimilating what it may have to offer for his development, unless the grace of God guides and directs his footsteps. Lacking such gracious guidance, Walther might have become a famous pulpit orator in the State Church of Germany. But God had another and different work for him to do, and He chose His own means to make him fit for this work.

During the time Dr. Walther spent at home seeking his health, the works of Luther, which were in his father's library, fell into his hands. The inevitable result followed. From that time on dates his living conviction of the sole scriptural character of the doctrines of the Lutheran Church and the necessity of its positive confession, which never left him. Comparing him with Dr. Seiss on the point of knowledge and application of the works of Luther and the confessions of the Lutheran Church, it is quite apparent that Dr. Walther was better acquainted with these works. They were as well known to him as the Bible itself. Although Dr. Seiss was handicapped because of the German language, he knows his Luther and the Confessions, and he know them well, as his sermons give ample testimony. Nor, in general, did he have the advantages of education that Dr. Walther had.

Though an hundred years in this country, the Lutheran Church was not at this time conspicuous among American churches. It was not strong in numbers and its social influence was weak. But it had behind it a grand history and a mighty population in the Old World. Though long renowned for its great universities in Europe, its educational facilities in this country were feeble and just beginning to come into efficiency. This mother church of the Reformation had indeed taken root in this country, but whether it was ever to grow into a permanent importance many questioned and some considered impossible.

Such was the state of affairs in this country when Joseph Seiss pursued a somewhat irregular course of study at Gettysburg in the years 1840 to 1841. Here he was advised not to enter the ministry. With characteristic determination and self-assertiveness, he assured his advisers that some day they would hear from him - and they did. This incident reveals the key-note of his character - an unbending will. "Every word he uttered in the pulpit, on the floor of synod, or in meetings of committees or boards, had the ring of finality about it. When he laid his hands to a certain task, things had to go his way. Not that he would not be influenced by what others suggested or originated, but when a certain course seemed to him to be the correct one, he pursued it to the end, regardless of obstacles and defeats that stood in the way. His aids and advisers were but satellites moving about a fixed star. His church council, his congregation, his committee or board was as clay in the hands of a potter." #

Yet, while these men were of different stock and had grown up among widely separated environments, they were both GREAT PREACHERS. The words of Kipling are certainly apposite:

Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
 Till heaven and earth stand presently at God's great judgment-seat.
 But there is neither East nor West, border, nor breed, nor birth,
 When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the
 ends of the earth.

#Evangelical Review, for 1918, p.201.

Who ever thought of "border, breed, or birth" while reading the models of sacred rhetoric that these "strong men" have given as permanent legacies to the Lutheran Church. Walther speaking in the German language and trained in the Old World; Seiss, an American farmer boy, using a matchless English.

What had they in common to make them great preachers? It was an indomitable will that did much to make them the orators and preachers that they were. A great preacher must have a great will, that is to say, there must be a fixed purpose in the preacher to compel his hearers to move toward a fixed goal. To enforce assent and conviction, to drive the truth home until it brings submission or surrender, to brush aside whatever opposition the mind and the heart might offer to the message of the preacher - that must be the end and aim of every sermon, and no one can be great as a preacher who does not have a great will. "A great preacher is not a mere artist, and not a feeble suppliant, he is a conquering soul, a monarch, a born ruler of mankind. He wills and men bow."

It is seen from Dr. Walther's emigration to this country and the important part he played in the founding of the Lutheran Church in this country that he was, indeed, a man of forceful character, an energetic nature, an unbending will. Dr. Jacobs correctly says: "His life is so closely connected with that of the powerful Synod which he organized and which was the expression of his own spirit, that even the details of his private biography belong to the history of the Church." Neither did Dr. Seiss need any school in which to train his will. When he preached his sermons on the "Gospel in the Stars," these were criticised as flights of finely-spun imagination. He thereupon assailed his critics with vigor and built a seemingly impenetrable fortress around the main positions he had taken. Speaking of the compelling force of Dr. Seiss' preaching, Dr. Krauth has said: "Dr. Seiss always sweeps one with him by the strong current of his eloquence, but when he is through, I leave his boat and swim to land." Dr. Krauth and Seiss were not always of the same mind.

#Broadus "History of Preaching."

Drs. Walther and Seiss spent their days of ripest vigor in a time when the press had not yet come into full competition with the pulpit to overshadow it, when physical, mental and spiritual energy was less dissipated than it is now, and when the interests and relationships of life were less distressingly complex. Congregation life was simpler and revolved more around the preacher's personality than around multifarious church agencies. The magnetic center of that life was the pulpit, and all that seemed necessary was a preacher with a message. It was a day when men were drawn to the House of God as naturally and inevitably as they were drawn elsewhere. A preacher could then remain invisible for six days in the week, enter his pulpit on the seventh with something of the unction of a John the Baptist fresh from the wilderness, and be sure of a large and appreciative congregation. He could say with Paul, "This one thing I do," and forgetting even important pastoral calls, concentrate the bulk of his time and energy on that one thing and be in a position to do it well. The preacher's workshop was his study and that is where he forged the weapons with which he did battle.

Under such conditions, with an indomitable will, a massiveness of intellect and spiritual force, Dr. Walther and Seiss could not but become what they were - the most powerful preachers of their day. The range of Dr. Walther's influence was limited in this country, though not so greatly then as now, because of the German language, and so he was not tempted as was Dr. Seiss, with offers and solicitations to make other ecclesiastical connections which held out promises for greater emolument. Of the two, Dr. Seiss had a more commanding physique and an equally more commanding voice. Had he aimed at wide popularity, fellowshipped with men of other faiths by compromising his own, fallen in line with unionistic movements neither distinctly evangelical nor Lutheran, America would revere the memory of Dr. Seiss no less than that of Philipps Brooks, Dr. Storr and others of like commanding mould. But his lot was cast with the Lutheran Church, which lay foundations deep and strong and was less concerned with imposing and transient superstructures.

Especially in the latter years of their lives, when the tide of a less stable religious life was beating in upon the church, Walther and Seiss stood forth all the more grandly and impressively, as among the last of a giant race of preachers that had seen their day. The times produce the preachers and Drs. Walther and Seiss were distinctly preachers of their times.

Besides having a great will-power and self-confidence, they were full of an humble reliance on God. Both were autocrats, in their way, but Seiss more so than Walther. To be sure, Dr. Seiss was sincere in his calling and was upborne by simple, humble, child-like faith in God, but on this point Dr. Walther goes beyond him. All of Dr. Walther's sermons, and especially the prayers which he was wont to offer before each sermon, are predominantly humble and sincere in their tone. For this reason he did not attain to the dizzy loftiness of presentation as did Dr. Seiss at times.

It should be noticed, too, that both Walther and Seiss were much drawn into connection with practical affairs. This tended to render their preaching more vigorous as well as better suited to the common mind. However, despite this fact, we would find it difficult to picture Dr. Seiss, as we can learn him in his sermons, instructing a class of catechumens. It is far easier to picture the preacher Walther in this position.

Dr. Walther was, first of all, a theologian. What he preached was nothing else than the old, well-known Lutheran orthodoxy, to which he neither added nor subtracted. In regard to doctrine he is standing in exactly the same place where the old Lutheran dogmaticians and homileticians stood. Having his eyes trained back to these teachers, he would have nothing to do with any "development" in theology. To him Luther and the old theologians had expressed themselves for their age and for all times, because they taught what the immutable Word of God teaches. Dr. Walther knew his Luther as a son does his father, and like the Great Reformer, deserved that most worthy degree a minister can earn, Doctor Biblicus.

But it must be expressly said that he looked backwards only as a theologian, not as a preacher. If he was thoroughly orthodox in all his teachings as a preacher, it must not be imagined that his sermons were mere repetitions of the teachings of the 16th and 17th centuries. Dr. Walther's was a living faith, he detested dead orthodoxy. He had come to believe what he believed through bitter struggles with himself, while still a student at the university. For this reason we find Dr. Walther, the preacher a "modern man," who was a master in making instant and pertinent application of his faith at all times.

In reading the sermons of Dr. Walther, we at once notice that we are speaking with a learned theologian. His learning, however, is never flaunted in the face of his hearers, but kept completely in the back-ground. Dr. Walther is as well acquainted with the Church Fathers and with Luther as with the Bible itself. He quotes frequently from Eusebius, especially Luther, Bucer, Melancton, and the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church. Because of the intimate relationship that existed between him and his congregation, he always makes practical applications of these references.

Like Luther's sermons, so are Dr. Walther's everywhere pervaded by One idea, that of justification by faith, around which he reorganizes all Christian thoughts. His favorite topics were the great deeds of God and the working of His grace for the reconciliation of the world and the salvation of the fallen sons of Adam. On the basis of festival texts, he rose to his full height on these topics, wherein he lived and moved. His sermons became most powerful and penetrating, and his words real festival tones, when he pictured to his congregation a heaven opened to them by the Word, and drew them on with tenderest notes to enter in, when he portrayed to them the heart of God thrown open wide and praised the Word and Sacraments as springs of living water, out of which there wells up toward the sinner, grace, forgiveness, comfort and salvation. Dr. Walther was a good deal more popular in the presentation of his topic than was Dr. Seiss and could, therefore, preach a clearer Gospel-

message, than did the soaring preacher of the General Council.

Taking up the contents of Dr. Seiss' sermons, it is at once apparent that he, too, as a Lutheran preacher followed the underlying principle of Lutheran sermon-making, namely, a presentation not for excitement of emotion, but for instruction. His way to the heart of his congregation was through the intellect. Dr. Seiss is proof conclusive that the American Lutheran pulpit may be built up in doctrinal preaching according to the old Lutheran lines and at the same time avail itself to the full extent of the native idioms of English speech. We find in his sermons an English, which in all its strength and splendor, and in all its most flexible grace and delicate beauty, moves with perfect freedom in the thoughts of Scripture, stated for the instruction, admonition and edification of the Christian congregations.

Speaking of the language which Dr. Seiss used in his sermons, consensus of opinion in this day, when a directness and a down-rightness of expression is demanded, puts it into the class with the resounding and ornate pomposity of the old English preachers. This criticism is extreme, for Dr. Seiss has written some very popular sermons also. However, it must be maintained that the simplicity of his sermons was in the main sacrificed by the highly wrought splendor and ornamentation of his rhetoric. Dr. Walther was a "popular" preacher compared to Dr. Seiss.

Here is Dr. Seiss' view on what a sermon must contain. He says, "The beginning, middle and end is Christ - Christ the incarnate and only-begotten Son of God - Christ delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification - Christ our true Lord and enthroned Savior - Christ our wisdom, sanctification, and redemption - Christ the sun and centre around which everything pertaining to our holy religion revolves - Christ that was, and is, and is to come - Christ the Savior of all men, and especially of them that believe." He said, "This Paul preached alike to Jew and Gentile as the core and kernel of all sacred prophecy, the sum of the Gospel and the only hope of the world. And

in this I have ever sought to follow his example. More than five thousand times, I, in these fifty years, have stood up to address my fellow-men as a preacher of the Word; and this has been the main-spring of all my efforts and the continuing spirit of all my sermons. I know no other Gospel. Our Church confesses none other. And, by the help of God, so long as this tongue can articulate or these fingers write, my testimony shall be for this as the greatest joy on earth, and that on which all my hopes for eternity rest.##

What an inspiring and wonderful testimony by the aged Doctor, that once obscure country lad. The Lord's ways are, indeed, past finding out! This paragraph taken from one of his sermons is a good example of the intense personality in Dr. Seiss' preaching. He was surely an imperial personage, of rich endowments, varied sympathies and manifold experiences. They who heard him were not only listening to the Truth but they felt the man. Dr. Seiss injected more of his personality into his sermons than Dr. Walther did in his. "There are conflicting opinions as to what is best in regard to the preacher's personality. Some offensively obtrude themselves, and push the Gospel into the background. Others think the ideal is to put the Gospel alone before the mind, and let the preacher be entirely forgotten." "Hide yourself behind the cross," is the phrase. What is here intended is well enough, but the statement is extreme, if not misleading. What is the use of a living preacher, if he is to be really hidden, even by the cross?##

As Dr. Walther, so is Dr. Seiss also a wide-read man. But unlike Dr. Walther does not always keep his learning in the background. He makes frequent reference to Aesop's Fables, to the heroes of Greek and Roman mythology, Hercules, Romulus, and others. He lets his congregation know when he is quoting Hesiod, Socrates, Virgil, Tacitus, Josephus, Milton, Jeremy Taylor, Tranch and many

#--In a sermon preached by Dr. Seiss, May 10, 1892, on the occasion of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary on his entry into the ministry.

##--Broadus, p.125. "The History of Preaching."

others. We can safely say that Dr. Walther would not have considered these quotations from heathen authors in keeping with the principles that govern the Lutheran preacher. There are no quotations from Goethe and Schiller in Dr. Walther's sermons. It certainly cannot be that a man educated in the Old World as he was, had not a knowledge of the world's leading writers and thinkers.

Another minor point in the sermons of Dr. Seiss, which must be frowned down upon, is his use of sarcasm. Dr. Walther certainly made good use of polemics in his sermons, but he never resorted to bitter sarcasm, especially not when discussing other Lutheran bodies in this country. Referring to the formation of a Lutheran Synod along the Hudson in the year 1735, Dr. Seiss designates the principal of the movement as "zealous enough, but in temper and egotistic claims to superior orthodoxy, he was a Missourian before his time."⁴ Again, in a discussion on the Lutheran Church in America, he says, "There crept in a creedless rationalism; then a fanatical pietism; then a pressure for a supraconfessional and harsh exclusivism."⁴ These words show one of the minor differences in the characters of the two preachers. In Dr. Walther's addresses and sermons we look in vain for such expressions of ridicule.

An estimate of Dr. Seiss as a preacher would not be complete without according him a unique place as a student of eschatology, a subject which he investigated intensively and thoroughly. He was not willing to permit the Prophets and the Apocalypse to be sealed books in God's Revelation. He insisted that they had a message for every age, and particularly for the scientific and materialistic age in which he was living. He believed that men's eyes should be lifted above their more directly spiritual and mundane interests and far beyond the limited horizon within which their spiritual life was pent. He dwelt much on the mountain tops with Daniel and kept company with John on Patmos.

They opened to him a grand panorama of glad hope and expectations and brought the eternal world and God's plan and purposes very near to his own. As early as 1856 appeared in three volumes what must be regarded as the crowning literary effort of his life - "The Apocalypse" which has appeared in several translations in Germany and Holland. Filled with seer-like hopes and visions, it is not to be wondered at that he could find the Gospel not only in Leviticus but also in the pyramids of Egypt and in the stars, as his sermons on these subjects testify. Even though his views were Chiliastic, it must be said that later in his life they became modified with a saneness and soberness that is not characteristic of less able and well-balanced students in this field. He became aware of the limitations to which he was subject, and his strong grasp on the Gospel in all its breadth and fullness prevented him from drifting into the millenarism of little-minded enthusiasts, who look at God's Revelation through the key-hole of a few pet passages of Scripture. #

Note. #--Dr. Seiss was a so-called "post-millenarianist." He believed that after the Judgment came the millenium. In "The Last Times" p.59, he says, "Watch, for ye know not what hour the Son of Man cometh," shows us that we have no right to expect a millenium FIRST." In his lectures on the Day of the Lord in "Uriel" p.193, we read, "Nor do I hesitate to say that in those glorious heavens and earth shall all the ransomed have their happy home, with Jesus, their Master, dwelling in His tabernacle among them (Rev.xxi,34.) and filling out, by His grand and beneficent administrations there, the reality of the Golden Age, which has been flitting up and down in the imaginations of good men, prophets and poets of every period and every clime."

From the same lecture (p.173) shows where his speculations sometimes led him. "We may accordingly take this text as an intimation that a great Sabbath rest and glory is in reserve for this world, and that, if no special providence shall come and shorten the time, we may expect it to commence at the conclusion of the six thousandth year from the creation which cannot be any longer off."

Eschatology was only one of the many-sided interests, which Dr. Seiss had. He was a student in more than one field as his books on devotional, exegetical, apologetical, controversial, historic and hymnological subjects disclose. But he will ever be known as an outstanding pulpit orator. His lectures on the Gospels and Epistles are the fruit of many years of careful sermonizing and study, and must still be regarded as some of the best of their kind in the English language.

-12-

As great preachers of the American Lutheran Church, Drs. Walther and Seiss had many ideas in common. Both had a high opinion of the value of the old pericopal system. As a result we have Dr. Walther's "Evangelienpostille" and "Epistelprodigten," and Dr. Seiss' "Lectures on the Gospels" and "Lectures on the Epistles." We should expect this attitude in the case of Dr. Walther, trained as he was in the Old World, and deeply imbedded in all Lutheran customs, but it is exceptional that we find such an opinion of the pericopes, here in America at this time. Dr. Seiss said of the pericopes, "They are among the richest selections that can possibly be made from the New Testament. --- The neglect which they have received, in the English pulpits of this country, is without excuse; and the disadvantages of such neglect has been great, to both ministers and people."#

Although Drs. Walther and Seiss use the time-honored texts appointed for each Sunday, they never repeat. They preach on the practical topics of justification, sanctification, prayer, matrimony, the resurrection and ascension of Christ, but always from a new and different angle. It is possible for them to do this, chiefly, because of their usual method in treating the texts - the analytical topical method.

Dr. Walther is a master of briefs and outlines, order and divisions. But unlike the older Lutheran preachers there is nothing heavy or artificial about his sermons. He carries out his divisions to perfection. His arrangement is lucid, his statements precisé. This is one of the reasons that prompted Dr. A. Broemel in his "Homiletische Charakterbilder" to begin with the golden-tongued Chrysostom and end with Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther. Dr. Broemel says of Dr. Walther, "His thoughts are poured into a fixed vessel, which he fills to the brim, the vessel holding all his thoughts together. Within the form, however, he moves about with a great freedom. He can pray most devoutly, he quotes choice and apposite stanzas from the Lutheran hymnal, he speaks from heart to heart, he keeps ever in mind the consolation of the forgiveness of sins as the core of all his preaching. It is most delightful to listen to him. He is as orthodox as John Gerhard, as fervent as a pietist, as correct in his form as a university or #--The preface to his "Lectures on the Gospel," volume 1.

court preacher, and yet as popular as Luther himself."[#]

It so happened that especially on festival occasions that many educated unchurched from the surrounding country would visit Dr. Walther's church to hear him, not to note and receive benefit from the contents of the sermon, but to enjoy its perfect form. And yet, in these sermons it was the contents and not the form through which he wielded such a far-reaching influence. His prime purpose was to win souls with the one thing needful. Diligence with regard to form was to him an incidental matter.

Because of the expository method in which they treat their texts, the sermons of Walther and Seiss present an ever new Gospel in a great variety of ways, both with regard to form and contents. They have no idiosyncracies and never use the same extra-Biblical illustration twice. "We cannot imagine Dr. Seiss to have used twice in all his preaching the allegory of the Alpine climbers, as an image of the Christian's heavenward journey."^{##} As it is to be expected, both were master in description. Dr. Walther has preached sermons in which he has fantastically pictured persons and scenes even to the minutest detail. He had a knack of making use of the most unpretentious words to bring out a point. His sermon at the dedication of his church is merely a description of Zachæus with a short application. But he never forgets himself in his descriptions, nor does he describe a scene merely for the sake of the description, the practical lesson is always the main point.

Two sermons preached on the same text, Luke 1,57 - 80, at the same festival occasion, are representative of both preachers in constructions, diction and style and enable us to make a fair sort of a comparison.^{###}

As was their custom in all sermons, both have a beautiful, specially prepared prayer at the outset. Dr. Walther then leads up to the text with

[#]—op.cit., p.307, vol.2.

^{##}—Graebner's "The Expository Preacher" p.113.

^{###}—St. John the Baptist's Day - Fest-klänge, pp.380-389 - Minor Festivals, pp. 268-280.

what today would be considered a lengthy introduction, usually as long as any of the parts themselves. In his introduction there is usually some polemical element, worked in by means of his flowing German with its "dochs" and "zwar" and "dennoch," and leads the congregation up to the text. The introductions of Dr. Seiss are shorter and come after the text has been read. Dr. Walther always has a special greeting for his hearers and oftentimes strikes the key-note of his sermon in this salutation. In true Lutheran style, he never failed in all his sermons to announce the parts beforehand. Although Dr. Seiss as a rule does not do this, his divisions are clearly emphasized and lie on the surface, so that his hearers could follow with ease. In both sermons we find many references to Old Testament Bible History and are not surprised to find in Dr. Seiss a quotation from "The Merchant of Venice." Both show themselves to be master rhetoricians and make use of every device known in that art. Beautiful triads arranged so that the longest and most important is last, are woven in almost every paragraph. A great variety of sentence structure, simple and complex, periodic and loose, rhetorical questions and short sentences, which fall like the blows of a hammer, give the sermons a force and energy. We see in this sermon that Walther loved to make use of sacred poetry, usually taken from the hymnal, which was well known to the congregation. The climax is in every respect real, not merely such because it comes at the end of the sermon.

A portion from the sermon of Dr. Walther shows us the secret of his great powers as a preacher. "Viele meinen, je mehr ein Christ in der Schule Gottes lerne, je weiter er in seinem Christenthum komme, desto stummer und stiller werde seine Vernunft und sein Herz, desto weniger widerspreche naemlich seine Vernunft und sein Herz seinem Glauben, eine desto suezere ununterbrochene Ruhe, ein desto suezterer ungestoerter Friede wohne dann in seiner Seele, desto freier sei er dann von allen innern Anfechtungen und Versuchungen. Aber den

ist nicht so! Ein Anfänger im Christenthum macht meist viel süßere Erfahrungen, als ein geförderter Christ. Dass aber ein Christ Gott nicht vergeblich an ihm hat arbeiten lassen, offenbart sich vor allem darin, dass er immer besser sich daran festzuhalten versteht und vermag: Aber es steht geschrieben! Aber so sagt Gott in seinem Wort! Wer dahin gekommen ist, dass er, wenn er Gottes Zorn im Herzen fühlt, doch spricht: Es steht geschrieben!

"Aus Gnaden! - hierauf will ich sterben;
Ich fühle nichts, doch mir ist wohl;
Ich kenn mein suendliches Verderben,
Doch auch den, der mir helfen soll.
Ich glaub', was Jesu Wort verspricht,
Ich fühl' es, oder fühl es nicht."

Wer dahin gekommen ist, dass er, wenn es ihm trübselig geht und er keine irdische Aussicht auf Hülfe und Errettung mehr hat, doch spricht:

"Und ob gleich alle Teufel
Hie wollten widerstehen,
So wird doch ohne Zweifel
Gott nicht zurücker geh'n."

Wer dahin gekommen ist, dass er, wenn alle von der Welt als Gelehrte und Heilige Gepriesenen seinen Glauben verwerfen, sagen kann:

"Vernunft und Sinn
Mag immerhin,
Was moeglich scheint, vergleichen;
Ich will nun und nimmermehr
Von dem Buchstab' wlecken.
Dein Wort steht wie ein' Mauer fest,
Welch's sich niemand verkehren laeszt,
Er sei so klug er wolle."

Wer dahin gekommen ist, dass er, wenn er ein Wort Gottes fuer seinen Glauben, fuer sein Werk, fuer seine Hoffnung hat, dann trotz des Bewusstseins seiner Schwachheit wie ein Held lächt, der von einer hohen Felsenburg herab das ohnmächtige Stuermen seiner Feinde sieht. Wer dahin gekommen ist, dass ihm ein Wort der Verheissung mehr hoffnung, Muth und Trost gibt, als alle Weisheit, alle Macht, und alles Gut der Welt. Wer dahin gekommen ist, dass er, wenn er ein klares Wort fuer sich hat, jeden Augenblick bereit ist, sein Leben dafuer zum Pfande einzusetzen - an dem, ja, an dem wird es offenbar, dass Gottes Arbeit an ihm nichtvergeblich gewesen, dass er immer mehr vom seinem natuerlichen Unglauben geheilt und auf Christo, dem Felsen des Heils, fest gegrundet und gewürzelt steht."#

Dr. Walther confesses his faith like a bird sings his song - spontaneously, jubilantly. Note the effect of the parallels, the repetition of "Wer dahin gekommen ist," the frequent and pertinent use of familiar sacred poetry and the intimacy of the short exclamatory sentences.

The following taken from the sermon of Dr. Seiss shows his mastery of the rules of rhetoric and the English language. Here is a model paragraph:

Many go dumb and silent through this world. They have never a word of acknowledgment and praise of the goodness and mercy of God. Their unbelief has sealed their lips and tied their tongues. Anxious care presses; what they desire is not realized; burdens multiply; courage and confidence falter; secret doubt and desponding questionings drive into unsavory feelings; discontent clouds the soul; the heart grows weary; words of cheer die out; the tongue is lamed; no joyous confession, no fire of love, no strength of prayer, no glad hosannas, any more escape from their lips. They have complaints, but no grateful praises. Like Zacharias, they are dumb, because of

their unbelief. Their strength is dried up like a potsherd, and their tongues cleave to their jaws. They can see nothing glad or good in life. Such are the weakness and folly of poor human nature even where we should expect better things."#

Note the topic sentence, the swing to the rhetoric, its triads and parallels, and the biblical language which gives force and simplicity to the well-rounded paragraph.

Dr. Seiss proved that English preaching need not in any manner depart from the general style of preaching traditional with the German-Lutheran pulpit, if it is to be truly English in language and American in style. He showed that it was not necessary for English sacred rhetoric to conform to the standards of the present day Reformed pulpit, in order to be truly English. The great bulk of his sermons, like those of Dr. Walther, follow the topical-analytical method. Rarely does he build up sermons on purely subjective or synthetical lines. He followed the old canon of Bengel, "Apply thy whole self to the text and apply the whole text to thyself."

There were four chief elements of power in Dr. Seiss' preaching. It was a positive spiritual Gospel that he preached; it was the Gospel preached with all the power of a strong personality behind it; it was a Gospel with the added force that logic, art, delivery, and language could give it, for he spoke of an ideal sermon as being the highest possible product of art; and it was a Gospel that was lighted up with the glow of a seer-like vision of Christ's second coming. At conventions and on special occasions it was taken for granted that the important message must be delivered by Dr. Seiss, and it was then that he usually rose to his greatest heights in pulpit oratory. He fully met the requirements that a sermon

#--op.cit.p.275.

must have a beginning, a middle and an end, that it must move with culmina-
tive force toward a definite goal, and when that goal was reached, his hearers
could go away, feeling that they had heard a sermon. There was a strength, a
stateliness, a dignity, and an artistic finish to all of his greatest pulpit
efforts that compelled a hearing. If the sermon was commanding and convincing,
rather than entreating and persuasive, it was because art spoke louder than
nature. His was the eloquence of logic and will rather than eloquence of
emotion and love. If we can call Dr. Seiss the Everett of the Lutheran pulpit,
Dr. Walther was the Lincoln.

In this sphere they deserve to be classed among the great leaders
of our American Church. They remind us of a more sturdy and less fitful and
distracted age, an age in which principle and personality counted more than
sentimentalism and expediency. Times have changed. God is creating a new
sort of instrument, less deep and strong, but more soft and mellow in tone,
with which to waft the music of His Gospel into the hearts of men. A new
race of preachers is in the making, preachers who will rely less on art and
oratory, and more on the simple, direct, and heart-to-heart message that meets
the needs of every-day man in his every-day life. The message will breath
the pastor rather than that of ^{the} student and orator.