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Walther, as Christian Theologian

Theo. Engelder
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Walther, a Christian Theologian.[1)]

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Dr. C. F. W. Walther meant much to his generation. Shortly after his death Dr. F. W. Stellhorn wrote: "The Lutheran Church of our country, yes, I may say, of this whole century, owes more to Dr. Walther than to any other single person." (*Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, June 1, 1887.) The fifty years that have elapsed since his last illness ended his work at the Seminary, on November 3, 1886, have not diminished his influence among us. We have been living on his theology. And the present generation cannot afford to dispense with it. There is a great blessing in store for those who make Dr. Walther's theology their own.

What characterizes this theology? The two elements that form the essence of Christian theology shaped the teaching and work of Dr. Walther. God gave the Synodical Conference three great theologians, says the *Theologische Quartalschrift* (1931, p. 198), Walther, Hoenecke, Pieper, who infused into their pupils the spirit of the *sola Scriptura* and the *sola gratia*. These two things Dr. Walther himself named as the outstanding characteristic of the theology which he and his brethren stood for. He said at a synodical jubilee: "We have adhered, first, to the supreme principle of all Christianity, that the canonical books of the Old and the New Testament are, from the first to the last letter, the inspired Word of the great God, the only rule and norm of faith and life, of all doctrine and all teachers, and the supreme judge in all religious controversies. Next we have adhered to the second supreme principle of our truly evangelical Church, that the article of the justification of the poor sinner before God by grace alone, for the sake of Christ alone, and therefore through faith alone, is the chief fundamental article of the whole Christian religion, with which the Church stands and falls." (*Brosamen*, p. 556.)

First, then, Walther was a Bible theologian. That is the first reason why we call him a Christian theologian. The two terms are synonymous. No theology can claim to be Christian theology which is not drawn directly from Scripture. And a theologian who offers his own opinion as divine truth or who is not sure whether the teaching which he has drawn from the Bible is, because it is a Biblical teaching, God's truth, has no standing in the Christian Church. Dr. Walther was a Bible theologian. He stood for the Scripture principle, the *sola Scriptura* — the written Word of the Bible the supreme and sole authority in theology and in the Church — and for its complementary, the great doctrine of the verbal, plenary inspiration of Holy Scripture. He was raised up by God at a time

1) These remarks are the extension of an address delivered at the graduation exercises at Concordia Seminary, June 5, 1936.

when the majority of the theologians throughout the world were laboring to tear the Church from her moorings and set her adrift on the treacherous sea of human opinion and human authority. He was one of the few prophets of his day who raised the cry: "To the Law and to the Testimony!" Is. 8, 20; one of the few who reassured the wavering children of God: This is the Testimony; this is the Word of your God: the written word of Scripture.

From first to last he bore faithful witness to this fundamental truth. He was ever alive to the need of warning the Church of the disastrous results of the denial of the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture. In the very first volume of *Lehre und Wehre* (1855, p. 248) he uttered the warning. Turning against the prominent Lutheran theologian Kahnis, who had written: "Protestantism stands and falls with the principle of the sole authority of Scripture, but the dogma of the inspiration of Scripture as taught in the old dogmatics has nothing to do with this principle; you cannot revive this old dogma without hardening yourself against the truth," Walther declared: "We must confess that we were dismayed when we read these words. Who will want to aline himself with a new theology which claims to be a legitimate development of the old Lutheran theology, but departs from it in the fundamental doctrine of the principle of theology, in the doctrine of Scripture, of the *ratio formalis Scripturae*, of that which constitutes the essence of Scripture?" And the last article but one which he wrote for *Lehre und Wehre*, the foreword for the year 1886, dealt with this denial of the real inspiration of Scripture. It closed with the words: "*Wehe uns, wenn wir dazu schwiegen! Dann muessten die Steine schreien. Erbarme sich Gott seiner armen Christenheit in dieser letzten, betruebten und gefaehrlichen Zeit!*" Matters had grown worse in the Church. At that time even some of the more conservative theologians in Germany were ridiculing the verbal inspiration and the absolute inerrancy of Scripture, and their following in America was growing. Seeing the need of the times, Dr. Walther devoted the *Lutherstunde* from November 27, 1885, to June 4, 1886, to an exhaustive study of the doctrine of inspiration. The first sentence that fell from his lips was: "With the Biblical doctrine of the inspiration of Holy Scripture stands and falls the certainty, truth, and divine character of Scripture itself and of the entire Christian religion." He set out to discuss his subject under six heads, of which the first was: "What does Scripture itself say concerning its origin and authority?" and the last: "Why must we, as we value God's grace and our own salvation, adhere to the pure doctrine of the inspiration of Holy Scripture and refuse to yield one jot and tittle of it?" [2]

2) These lectures have been reproduced in two essays read at the meetings of the Iowa District in 1891 and 1892.

Walther would not give up one tittle of the doctrine of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. Why? For one thing, the Bible plainly teaches it. It is an important doctrine because it is a Bible doctrine. But there is another consideration. The supreme importance of this doctrine lies in its relation to Scripture as the source and norm of all doctrine. If Scripture is not given by inspiration, if it is not, in the actual, plain meaning of the term, God's Word, it cannot serve as the source and norm of doctrine. If human weakness and fallibility inheres in the Bible in any form or degree, no man is going to submit to it unconditionally, no Christian will be able to base his faith upon it. As Walther pointed out in his first pronouncement in *Lehre und Wehre,* the denial of the inspiration of Scripture is destructive of the very *ratio formalis Scripturae;* it takes away that which makes Scripture what it is; for Scripture is the Word of God because of its being inspired of God. And a non-inspired or only partially inspired Bible is useless. You will need some other authority to tell you how much of what the Bible says is true. You will have to resort to reason for establishing and proving your teaching. Dr. L. S. Keyser pointed out the alternative of either accepting the Bible as the inspired Word of God or relying on reason as one's guide in the search for truth, in this way: "If the original Scriptures were not inerrant, the whole record is rendered untrustworthy; you do not know what to believe or what to reject; the feeling of uncertainty becomes at once so great that you lose your spiritual power and unction and can no longer look upon any portion of Scripture as the true and absolute Word of God. Then, instead of making God's Word the ultimate rule and standard, you must either make reason that standard, in which case you have rationalism, or else you make subjective experience the arbiter, in which case you open the floodgates of false mysticism." (*Lutheran Church Review,* Jan., 1905. See *Lehre und Wehre,* 51, p. 139.)[3] And in either case, in any case where the inspiration of Scripture is denied, the certainty of doctrine, the assurance of faith, is lost, and the "monster of uncertainty" rules. Christian certainty rests on the authority of Scripture, and the authority rests on its inspiration. "The Church of the Reformation stands on the rock of Holy Scripture, on the *sola Scriptura.* But she stands there, and can stand there, *only* because she identifies Scripture with God's Word. . . . The new president of the Lutheran

3) A good many theologians hesitate to appeal directly to reason. So we find that "modern theologians who deny that Scripture is the infallible Word of God make the 'pious self-consciousness,' 'the religious experience,' the source and norm of the Christian doctrine." (F. Pieper, *Chr. Dogm.,* I, 251.) However, reason is still their guide — reason masquerading in "Christian" dress. It is not: either reason or subjective experience, but: either reason bald or reason masked.

Seminary at Philadelphia declared at his inauguration, according to the *Lutheran* of May 5, 1927: 'With all the emphasis which we lay upon the Scriptures, we do not identify them with the Word of God. . . . For this view of the Word of God and the Scriptures the Seminary stands.' If the Lutheran Church in America is not minded to give admittance to the *monstrum incertitudinis,* she must repudiate this position." (Dr. F. Pieper, *Lehre und Wehre,* 1928, p. 14.) Walther emphasized these points again and again. "It is absolutely necessary that we maintain the doctrine of inspiration as taught by our orthodox dogmaticians. If the possibility that Scripture contained the least error were admitted, it would become the business of *man* to sift the truth from the error. That places man *over Scripture,* and Scripture is *no longer* the source and norm of doctrine. Human reason is made the *norma* of truth, and Scripture is degraded to the position of a *norma normata.* The least deviation from the old inspiration doctrine introduces a rationalistic germ into theology and infects the whole body of doctrine." (See *Lehre und Wehre,* 1888, p. 196.)

This matter is of such vital importance that we feel warranted in repeating it. In an article entitled *Die Inspirationslehre in der lutherischen Kirche Amerikas* Dr. F. Bente declared — and let the reader weigh his words and judge whether he is using extreme language —: "It may at first sight look like an unwarranted statement, but it is actually so: the denial of the doctrine of inspiration overthrows the Christian theology. The Christian doctrines may indeed still stand for a time; but the entire theological edifice is undermined and hollowed out if it is no longer borne by the inspired, infallible word of Scripture. . . . If theology gives up the inspiration of Scripture, if the Bible is no longer the infallible Word of God, but a human, fallible record of the things of which it treats, the *loci classici* and *dicta probantia* are no longer of any avail. A veritable deluge of all manner of skeptical questions concerning the origin and content of Scripture is unloosed which cannot be checked and controlled." (*Lehre und Wehre,* 1902, p. 130.) Dr. B. B. Warfield writes — and let the reader weigh his words and judge whether he is using extreme language —: "But, we may be reminded, the Church has not held with such tenacity to all doctrines taught in the Bible. How are we to account, then, for the singular constancy of its confession of the Bible's doctrine of inspiration? The account to be given is again simple and capable of being expressed in a single sentence. It is due to an instinctive feeling in the Church that the trustworthiness of the Scriptures lies at the foundation of trust in the Christian system of doctrine and is therefore fundamental to the Christian hope and life. It is due to the Church's instinct that the validity of her teaching of doctrine as the truth of God, to the

Christian's instinct" (we might prefer a different word here) "that the validity of his hope in the several promises of the Gospel, rests on the trustworthiness of the Bible as a record of God's dealings and purposes with men. . . . Such a Word of God, Christ and His apostles offer us when they give us the Scriptures, not as man's report to us of what God says, but as the very Word of God itself, spoken by God himself through human lips and pens. Of such a precious possession, given to her by such hands, the Church will not lightly permit herself to be deprived. Thus the Church's sense of her need of an absolutely infallible Bible has cooperated with her reverence for the teaching of the Bible to keep her true, in all ages, to the Bible doctrine of plenary inspiration." (*Revelation and Inspiration*, pp. 61. 71.) And now hear Dr. Walther once more — is he using extreme language? "Dr. Luther writes in his *Large Confession concerning the Lord's Supper* with reference to Zwingli's *alloeosis*: 'Beware, beware, I say, of the alloeosis! For it is a devil's mask; for at last it manufactures such a Christ after whom I certainly would not be a Christian; namely, that henceforth Christ should be no more and do no more with His sufferings and life than any other mere saint. For if I believe this, that only the human nature has suffered for me, then Christ is to me a poor Savior; then He Himself indeed needs a Savior. In a word, it is unspeakable what the devil seeks by the alloeosis.' (Quoted in the Formula of Concord, VIII, § 40.) We must apply this to the so-called *'Gottmenschlichkeit der Schrift'*" (the divine-human nature of Scripture) "as the term is used by the modern-conservative theology: Beware, beware, I say, of this 'divine-human Scripture'! It is a devil's mask; for at last it manufactures such a Bible after which I certainly would not care to be a Bible Christian, namely, that the Bible should henceforth be no more than any other good book, a book which I would have to read with constant sharp discrimination in order not to be led into error. For if I believe this, that the Bible contains also errors, it is to me no longer a touchstone, but itself stands in need of one. In a word, it is unspeakable what the devil seeks by this 'divine-human Scripture.' . . . *Erbarme sich Gott seiner armen Christenheit in dieser letzten, betruebten und gefaehrlichen Zeit!*" (*Lehre und Wehre*. Foreword. 1886, p. 76.)

And this Scripture, given by inspiration of God, is the sole source and norm of Christian doctrine. Dr. Walther and those of a like mind were raised up by God to keep the Church on the *sola Scriptura*. Dr. Walther reaffirmed, and insisted on, the sole authority of Scripture. He ruled out the appeal to any other authority. At the dedication of Concordia Seminary, in 1883, he said: "In this house the subject of our incessant study shall not be the word and wisdom of man, but the Word of God, nothing but the Word of

God and the whole Word of God." (See entire address in Hochstetter's *Die Geschichte der Missourisynode*, p. 447 ff.) All human authority, the authority even of the revered Church Fathers, is ruled out. Read the essay Walther read at the meeting of the Synodical Conference in 1884: *"Wie verwerflich es sei, Sachen des Glaubens aus den Schriften der Vaeter begruenden und die Gewissen an die Lehrentscheidungen derselben binden zu wollen."*

Scripture is the sole source of doctrine, consequently there must be no development of doctrine in Christian theology. Science is progressive, and when God raises up great men in this field, new truths are discovered. But no new truths are being discovered in theology. God raises up great men in this field in order to restore to the Church, or to maintain, the old truths revealed in Scripture once for all. Walther says: "It is not true that the Church accumulates, from century to century, an ever-increasing store of divine doctrines. It is true that, since at all times men arise in her midst who 'speak perverse things to draw away disciples after them,' Acts 20, 30, she is compelled to *formulate* the pure doctrine ever more precisely in order to unmask the deceiving spirits and keep them from smuggling, by means of deceptive phrases, false doctrines into the Church; however, that does not increase the number of dogmas, but only preserves them against perversion." (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1868, p. 137.)

The Christian theologian is determined to teach *nothing but* what is written, and he is equally determined that *all that is thus written* must be accepted. He recognizes no "open questions" in the sense that, though certain doctrines are clearly revealed in Scripture, the Church is at liberty to accept or reject them. Read the series of articles Walther published in *Lehre und Wehre*, 1868, p. 100 ff.: *"Die falschen Stuetzen der modernen Theologie von den offenen Fragen."* No, all that is written, must be accepted.

And it must be accepted on the bare word of Scripture. Dr. Walther insisted that, when Scripture had spoken, the matter was no longer debatable. Dealing with the doctrine of inspiration, he asked, What does Scripture say on this point? And adducing the pertinent proof-texts, he said: "'It is written!' *Damit ist die Sache abgemacht.*" (*Lutherstunde*, Febr. 12, 1886.) And dealing with any other doctrine, he would quote you the pertinent statement of Scripture, quote it again and again if you were hard of hearing, and conclude: "It is written" — *damit ist die Sache abgemacht.* Will you raise any objection to what the inspired Word of your God says? [4])

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4) Some accuse the Bible theologian of arguing in a circle here. First he proves, *by the Scriptures*, that all Scripture is inspired, and then he says: Because Scripture is inspired, its every statement is true.

All that is written must be accepted and maintained; not one jot or tittle of it can be yielded. Not one tittle of the doctrine of inspiration did Walther yield; he would not admit even the *possibility* of any error in any part, even the relatively most insignificant part, of the Bible. And he would not yield any doctrine or any part of any doctrine drawn from the inspired infallible Word of God. "Our Church has taken for the foundation on which she stands the Holy Scriptures, and on it she stands honestly and squarely; from this foundation she will not depart one finger's breadth (*'vel transversum, ut aiunt, unguem'*); that is her character, that is her charge, that makes her a blessing to all Christendom, that is her crown, of which she will not and cannot let herself be robbed." (*Lehre und Wehre, Foreword,* 1871, p. 11)[5]

"The Scriptures cannot be broken," said the Christian mind and heart of Walther when pressure was brought to bear upon him to yield a word or letter of Scripture. The great majority of the theologians might oppose him. They might quote Father after Father against him. They might ridicule his teaching as conflicting with reason. His own flesh and blood might implore him to yield up parts of his teaching for the sake of harmony in the Church or in the interest of harmonizing the doctrines of Scripture. All that did not move him. He would write an article of this sort: *"Was soll ein Christ tun, wenn er findet, dass zwei Lehren, die sich zu widersprechen scheinen, beiderseits klar und deutlich in der Schrift gelehrt werden?"* (*Lehre und Wehre,* 1880, p. 257 ff.) and define his position thus: "Luther therefore writes: 'If harmonizing were in order, we could not retain a single article of the faith'; and the Formula of Concord declares with reference to the doctrine of the election of grace: 'Our curiosity has always much more pleasure in concerning itself with these matters than with what God has revealed to us concerning this in His Word, because we cannot harmonize it, which, moreover, we have not been commanded to do.' (XI, § 53.)" Walther would

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This objection does not bother the Bible theologian. All he knows is the *sola Scriptura*. He does not depend on logical demonstrations to establish his position. Is the Bible true, inspired? Philosophical arguments and logical skill cannot help us much here. The Bible itself, and the Bible alone, solves the problem. The Bible, the instrument of the Holy Spirit, creates faith — this faith also, that the Bible is God's Word. When a man says to the Bible Christian: Prove to me by logical processes that the Bible is inspired, the Bible Christian answers: That is not my business. I stand on the *sola Scriptura*. To me, as a Bible Christian, the bare word of Scripture is sufficient. The Bible itself has convinced me of its divine character.

5) The article in which this statement occurs is an arraignment of unionism. Indifference to the doctrines taught in Scripture is a characteristic of unionism, the spirit of compromise between truth and error its breath of life. Unionism therefore never flourishes where the *sola Scriptura* rules.

not yield one tittle of Scripture. He stood as a rock. For he stood on a rock. And he became as a rock. "It is written," he said, and nothing could move him.[6])

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6) In this connection a few words should be said on the charge that Walther was addicted to a "theology of repristination." The charge implies, partly, that he leaned too heavily on the Fathers, giving them a place of authority beside Scripture, and, chiefly, that he erred in repudiating other alleged authorities, science, experience, and the like, and consequently refusing to take part in the work of developing the Christian doctrine. Up to the present day Walther and those who adopted his theological method have been stigmatized as "repristinating theologians." Recently Dr. T. A. Kantonen repristinated the old charge. In his notorious "Canned Theology" articles (*The Lutheran*, Dec. 12, 1935, to Jan. 2, 1936) he says: "The value of men like C. P. Krauth, H. E. Jacobs, Pieper, and Lindberg, to mention but a few, must not be underestimated. But their theology was either that of scholastic orthodoxy or of 'repristination,' approaches which served well in the period of *ecclesia plantanda*, where the chief concern was to preserve intact and immune the heritage of the Fathers. It was more or less an immigrant theology, quite in keeping with the rest of the immigrant outlook. . . . If a Church holds to an erroneous pre-Kantian conception of truth as a static quantum, it will soon find the precious 'heritage of sound, pure doctrine' becoming moldy in its hands. It needs to interpret the eternal verities of God in terms of the age," etc. (See Conc. Theol. Mthly., 7, p. 222 ff.) We offer the following remarks on this matter.

1. Walther cheerfully pleaded guilty to the charge that he reproduced the old orthodox theology. He never disguised his disposition to lean heavily on the Fathers. It did not go against his grain to write articles and books made up chiefly of quotations from the Fathers, from the Confessions, Luther, the dogmaticians. You could not insult him by calling him a *"Zitatentheolog."* He would say: Yes; read, for instance, my article *"Was soll ein Christ tun,"* etc. (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1880, p. 257 ff.), — mostly quotations; and read my book *Kirche und Amt*, — mostly quotations. He said in the presidential address at the synodical convention of 1869: "A pupil, and I hope to God, a faithful pupil, of Luther, I have, in all that I have publicly spoken and written in the past, simply repeated in a stammering way the words of this last prophet." (*Proceedings*, p. 22.) Again: "The peculiar conditions surrounding us here in America, which hinder us, on the one hand, from keeping pace with the mother Church, have, on the other hand, proved a blessing. Unable to share as fully as our brethren overseas in certain gains produced by recent labors, we are driven to study the more eagerly the words of our old teachers, to explore the treasures which our Church has won and stored up for us, and, since we can add but little or nothing to these treasures, to guard and preserve them the more faithfully." (*Die Stimme unserer Kirche*, etc.; *Vorerinnerung.*)

2. Walther, leaning so heavily on the Fathers, did not stand solely on the Scriptures! That is a false charge. At the corner-stone laying of Concordia Seminary, in 1882, he declared: "In this new Concordia the instructors and students will indeed humbly sit at the feet of those blessed teachers of the Church who have mined priceless treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge from the rich vein of Holy Scripture . . .; but deeply will the great word of the Lord be impressed on our eager youth: 'One is your Master, even Christ.'" (See entire address in Hochstetter, *op. cit.*, p. 439 ff.) Read *Kirche u. Amt* and see whether Scripture or the writings of the Fathers are adduced as proof. Read the essay mentioned above: On the crime of establishing doctrines by the writings of the Fathers and binding the conscience to their doctrinal decisions. Do not men know that Walther refused to follow the dogmaticians when they

erred? Says Dr. Pieper: "Thus Walther, too, in spite of his many quotations from the old theologians, in his heart and conscience took his stand on the Word unmodified by interpretation. . . . He insisted that never an exegesis, but always the *naked* text, without exegesis, must be the determinative factor in the heart and conscience of the theologian. Such was Walther, the 'theologian of repristination,' the *'Zitatentheolog.'*" (*Conversion and Election*, p. 96 f.)

3. But he was not a progressive theologian; did not take into account the development of scientific truth; did not utilize it for developing the Christian doctrine! Admitted. He was a *sola-Scriptura* theologian. He thus failed indeed to become a "great theologian." His simple old theology failed to impress those to whom greatness consists in newness. "Indeed, Walther did not possess that which in our modern days is held to make a great theologian; he did not aim to produce new thoughts, to establish a new theological system, to found a new school; he did not indulge in the seemingly humble bragging that we Christians must never be sure that we have the truth, but must always seek for it. He was far beyond such a position of inner uncertainty and confusion. God's Word had given him an unshaken hold of the truth. Few have had such a glorious success as he." (*Allg. Ev.-Luth. K. Z.*, June 22, 1887. See *M. Guenther, Dr. C. F. W. Walther*, p. 194. — Just now we read in the *Journal of the American Lutheran Conference*, 1936, p. 50, a similar statement by the *Ansgar Lutheran*, which, however, takes on an aggrieved tone: "Paradoxical as it may sound, nevertheless it is a fact that in a Lutheran Free Church in America a professor of theology is not permitted to be 'free' to do original thinking and present views that are contrary to the accepted views of the Church. If he does, he will be shelved or compelled to close his mouth. We stifle theological thought development. Due to this method the Lutheran Church of America has not produced big theologians around whom have flourished 'theological schools.' Those that came nearest to do so were Walther of St. Louis and Sverdrup of Minneapolis; and the greater of these two is Walther. But both were products of the European system." — Take this for what it is worth.) Walther did not aim to enrich the Church with new doctrines. We thank God for that. The Church does not need new doctrines, nor does she need to have the old doctrines adjusted to new views, which amounts to the same thing. Let Dr. J. G. Machen say what is in our mind: "There is truth, the modern attitude says, for this generation and truth for that generation, but no truth for all generations, there is truth for this race and truth for that race, but no truth for all races. Every generation has its own thought forms and cannot by any means use the thought forms of any other generation. Do you know what I think of this notion? I think it comes very near being nonsense. If it were true, then books produced in past generations ought to be pure gibberish to us. . . . The Oriental mind, they say, ought to be allowed to go its own way and give its own expressions to the Christian faith. . . . Frankly, I do not believe in the separate existence of an Oriental mind, or an Occidental mind, or an ancient mind, or a medieval mind, or a modern mind. . . . I think that we may safely resist the skepticism which holds that the convictions of one generation can never by any chance be the convictions of another." (*Christian Faith in the Modern World*, pp. 90—95.) What men in the days of the apostles needed and what saved them is the very thing we moderns need, the very same doctrine, the very same thought forms. The modern mind is able to form certain new thoughts, plenty of them; but it cannot produce a new thought which is fit to take the place, for instance, of the old thought, expressed in the old thought form: justification without works, by faith alone. The most modern mind *must* adjust itself to this old formula. And so, said Dr. Walther, addressing the convention of 1866, we have proceeded on the assumption that "the teaching of the sixteenth century will also in our nineteenth century edify the souls unto salvation; that the tree of our old Lutheran Church, which for centuries bore such blessed fruit for the salvation of millions, will to-day blossom and burst forth in fruit with

the same fecundity as of yore, — and, behold, our hope has not been confounded." (*Brosamen*, p. 540.) We thank God that Walther did not attempt to change, modify, adjust, make over, the old doctrine. Do you know what happens when the modern theologians, in their youthful itch to go beyond the Fathers, set about developing the Christian doctrine? Read the series of articles by Walther in volumes 21—23 of *Lehre und Wehre: "Was ist es um den Fortschritt der modernen lutherischen Theologie in der Lehre?"* What these men called development of doctrine resulted in the abridgment or total loss of it.

4. Walther did well in making copious use of the writings of the Fathers. That helped to make him the great theologian he was. One who lightly casts aside the wisdom of the Fathers, relying altogether on his own wisdom, will never amount to much in the Church. It is theoretically possible that a man might arrive at the full understanding of Christian theology without having recourse to the writings of the orthodox teachers of old — if God is willing to perform a miracle in his case. But as things have been ordered by God, it becomes our sacred duty to utilize faithfully what God has set before us by the hands of the Fathers — seeing, too, that at bottom they were dealing precisely with the very same problems that are confronting us. God's blessing cannot rest upon the young theologian who casts away the heritage the Fathers acquired for him. "Let no man despise," says Walther, "the gifts which God bestowed during these 1800 years upon our godly teachers, the treasures stored up for us by God's great goodness in their books. He that does so disobeys God, God's explicit command laid down in Scripture. Such a man will not grow in knowledge, but becomes increasingly blind." (*Proceedings, Syn. Conf.*, 1884, p. 11.) And so we shall go on repristinating the theology of the Fathers, of Luther, of the orthodox dogmaticians, and now, too, that of Walther. That will not take us away from the *sola Scriptura*. For it so happens, by the grace of God, that their theology was the theology of the Word.

Dr. Walther's insistence on the *sola Scriptura* accounts for his great influence. He was endowed with great gifts. He was a man of eminent learning, learned in the Scriptures. He was a teacher, knowing how to impart knowledge to others. He was of a determined character, utterly unable to go against his convictions. But these great gifts served their purpose only because they were put in the service of Scripture itself. Walther had learned that greatest of all theological arts — to let Scripture speak for itself. He never asked men to accept any teaching except on the authority of Scripture. He did not presume on his own authority and standing.[7] He did not resort to philosophical argumentation. He let Scripture speak for itself, insisting of course, as Scripture insists, that every word of it, as the inspired Word of God, must be accepted. What could men do in such a case? They might be inclined to dispute the word of Dr. Walther, and they had a perfect right to do so; but what could men, Christian men, do when Walther confronted them with the written Word of their God? That carries an irresistible appeal to the Christians. They are not interested in hearing learned men tell of

7) See Guenther's *Walther*, p. 170, for the story of the incident that caused Walther to declare: *"Er sei ein Mensch wie der Geringste in der Versammlung, und dieser Geringste sei so viel hoeher denn er, so er Gottes Wort gegen ihn fuehre, als Gott hoeher sei denn ein Mensch."*

their thoughts about God and His ways. But let a man call their attention to God's thoughts and God's words, and their hearts are won. And so Dr. Walther wielded a blessed influence on thousands and hundreds of thousands throughout the world. That is to say, the Word of God, voiced by Walther and his comrades, spread and grew, and a great host gave willing allegiance to it as the inspired Word of God.[8])

And this influence is still a mighty power in the land. God has been very good to us. He has kept us, by means of it, in glad allegiance to the Scriptures. Portions of the Lutheran Church have passed through a sad experience during the past fifty years. In 1927 a leader of one of the larger Lutheran bodies spoke of this sad development as of a praiseworthy progress. Speaking at the inauguration of three professors at the Gettysburg Seminary (U. L. C.), Dr. E. H. Delk said: "When I came to the seminary years ago, I fully believed in the verbal inspiration of every book in the Bible. . . . I believed that, inspired and controlled by an indwelling divine Spirit, the books were made free from all error from cover to cover. To think of myth or legend in connection with the Bible seemed destructive and morally reprehensible. The Bible was to me an infallible authority in its statements concerning astronomy, geology, anthropology, history, ethics, and religion. I do not say that our professors held or taught a verbal-dictation theory of inspiration, but I fancy I had plenty of company in my jejune conception and belief that the Bible in all its statements was inerrant. — What a change has been wrought in the sphere of New Testament scholarship during the last fifty years! . . ." (See *Theol. Mthly.*, 1927, p. 172.) And since 1927 the denial of the inspiration of Scripture has become still more vehement and general in the United Lutheran Church. (See Conc. Theol. Mthly., 1935, p. 825 f.; 1936, pp. 148. 221. 300, etc.) When we came

8) W. Rohnert says: "In our days the American Missouri Synod (Prof. Walther, † 1887) has been the most outspoken and consistent champion of the old doctrine of the verbal inspiration." (*Dogmatik*, p. 105.) Dr. Bente quotes a German periodical: "Missouri alone of all church-bodies still maintains the inerrancy of Scripture and thus forms the last strong bulwark against Biblical criticism which is undermining the Christian faith all along the line"; but he adds: "The synods of Iowa, Ohio, Buffalo, and others have always, like Missouri, openly declared for the absolute inerrability of the entire Holy Scriptures. Yea, we are glad to note that the Lutherans have in this battle many comrades even in the Reformed bodies of our country, particularly in the ranks of the so-called Fundamentalists. (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1923, p. 363.) Just how much did those men within and without the Lutheran Church, who stood for the inspiration and sole authority of Scripture, owe to Walther? And just to what degree was Walther helped and heartened by their testimony? These are futile questions. But there is a pretty general agreement that within the Lutheran Church Dr. Walther was the leader in the holy war.

to the seminary fifty years ago, the Bible was to us an infallible authority in all its statements, and our professors made us see still more clearly the sacred majesty of its inviolable authority as the inspired Word of God. And as you leave the Seminary to-day, your hearts, I trust, are filled with the same awe, and you are determined to preach nothing but what is written, to yield not one word or letter of what is thus written. God has been very good to His Church in keeping us under the influence of His servant Walther.[9])

Will this situation continue? Dr. Walther spoke these earnest words in a *Lutherstunde,* and he is saying it to-day: "'Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken.' That is and must remain our battle-cry. That is the device emblazoned on our banner. If ever our Synod should no longer hold this banner aloft, her fall would not be imminent, but would already have set in, and she would be fit only to be cast away as insipid salt that no longer serves, but only deserves to be trodden under foot." (See *Lehre u. Wehre,* 1911, p. 158.) Let us take heed! Let us guard our heritage! The foe that Dr. Walther met fifty years ago has increased his strength. He has enlisted many more Lutherans than before in his ranks. His assaults are growing more determined. You are summoned and privileged to take up arms in a holy war, and taking up the battle-cry γέγραπται, as Walther sounded it, as Luther sounded it against Rome and rationalism, as Jesus Christ sounded it against

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9) In 1915 a writer in the *Lutheran Observer* said: "The principles of pure Lutheranism were from the first insisted upon by Walther and his *confrères,* and to this day the Missouri Synod stands for the most conservative type of Lutheranism to be found in the United States." (See *Lehre u. Wehre,* 1915, p. 132.) Abdel Ross Wentz agrees with that judgment. In *The Lutheran Church in American History* (second edition, 1932) he writes: "Such were the beginnings and the characteristics of the great body of Lutheran immigrants in the nineteenth century. . . . These new Lutherans came without pomp or circumstance and took their places quietly in the land. . . . Their unflinching loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions made them impervious to the religious whims that blew over most of the other churches from time to time. . . . This strong infusion of confessional elements into the body of the Lutheran Church in America not only stimulated the confessional reaction in the older organizations of American Lutherans, but it also stamped the Lutheran Church as a whole in the eyes of all other churches in this country as indelibly evangelical and forever doctrinally conservative." (P. 193 f.) "This new spirit of enterprise among the Missourians . . ., their contagious enthusiasm for purity of doctrine, their constant emphasis on thorough educational methods, . . . make this branch of the Lutheran Church in our country one of the most vigorous elements in American Christianity." (P. 302.) And here is high praise: Among these Lutherans "superconfessional ground was taken from the beginning and kept" (we shall not quarrel about the term "*super*confessional"). "There was no progress either in the doctrinal positions occupied or in the interpretation of their positions. . . . Confessionally there was no progress and doctrinally very little." (P. 334. — We interpret the last statement *in bonam partem* and in the light of the previous statement: *no* progress in the doctrinal position.)

Satan: "It is written," you will be fit leaders of the Church in her fight for her dearest treasures.[10])

One great treasure of the Church which Walther faithfully guarded is the inspired Word of God. Just as faithfully he guarded the other great treasure of the Church: the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ. *(To be concluded.)* TH. ENGELDER.

Walther the Preacher.

One hundred twenty-five years ago, October 25, 1811, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was born at Langenchursdorf, Saxony. His father was a minister. His grandfather and great-grandfather also had been ministers in the Lutheran Church. According to his own confession, Walther, living in a rationalistic age, did not learn to know his Savior until he was eighteen years of age. He studied theology at the University of Leipzig, was graduated there in 1833 and, after having been a private tutor, was ordained in 1837 at Braeunsdorf. Joining the Saxon emigrants under Stephan, Walther arrived in St. Louis in 1839. Shortly afterwards he became the pastor of the congregations at Dresden and Johannisberg in Perry County, Mo. In April, 1841, he became the successor of his older brother, Otto Hermann, as pastor of Trinity Church in St. Louis. From 1850 until his death in 1887 he was a member of the faculty of Concordia Seminary and president of the institution. In the mean time Walther retained his office in the congregation and subsequently in three other congregations, which four churches constituted one parish, with Walther as their *Hauptpastor* and four ministers as associate pastors taking care of all the parish work in their respective districts.

During this time Walther did not preach every Sunday, but, as a rule, only on the church-festival days. Walther was not only an eminent theologian, but also a very forceful and successful preacher. Dr. Broemel said, "Walther is a model preacher in the Lutheran Church." (See *Concordia Cyclopedia;* article "Walther.")

In judging Walther as a preacher, we are very fortunate in having some of the fundamental laws of sermonizing set forth by

10) "How gloriously would the American Lutheran Church fulfil its mission here in America, standing like an unshaken rock in the midst of the billows of sectarianism, if it took its stand as one man on the clear Word and bore witness to the clear Word! There Luther's strength lay. There must remain the strength of Lutheranism over against all sectarian formations, until Judgment Day." (F. Pieper, *Conversion and Election*, p. 103.)