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## Foreword

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Behnken: Foreword

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## Foreword

When at Langenchursdorf, Saxony, Germany, on Oct. 25, 1811, another boy, the fourth son and the eighth child in a large family of 12 children, was born to Pastor Gottlob Heinrich Walther and his wife Johanna Wilhelmina, née Zschenderlein, these God-fearing parents could not have imagined that someday this child would be a prominent pastor, a profound theologian, an outstanding church leader in America.

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was God's gift not merely to these Christian parents but also to His church, especially to The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod in the United States.

As we celebrate the sesquicentennial of his birth and make it the occasion to review the wonderful life, the outstanding activities, and the God-given accomplishments of this man of God, we cannot but be convinced that he was one of God's exceptionally precious gifts to the church. And the better we become acquainted with the important position which he occupied, the wisdom and ability which he manifested in meeting the challenges of his day, in solving his particular problems and in overcoming the barriers which sought to hinder him, the more will the memory of this great man thrill us and make us eager to profit from the story of his life.

God not only endowed Walther with the necessary talents and abilities but also provided the opportunities for their development by permitting him to graduate from the University of Leipzig. His professors, with perhaps two exceptions, were rationalists. As a result Walther passed through most disturbing experiences which

tried his soul and almost drove him to despair. God used a small group of students, who had organized to study God's Word, to comfort and strengthen him. Pastor Martin Stephan, whom he had consulted by letter, gave him the comforting and strengthening assurance of Holy Writ and his tears of bitter sadness were turned into tears of heavenly joy.

Thus God led the man whom He wanted to use for a great purpose in the United States through the dark valley of doubt into the bright light of God's holy Word. However, the young pastor had to pass through additional trials. Both the ministry and the congregations were saturated with rationalism. His *Superintendent* did not approve of his forthright preaching of God's Word and his insistence on the Lutheran Confessions, to which he had been pledged at his ordination. The textbooks in the schools, the hymnbooks, and the book of formularies in the church all breathed the spirit of rationalism. That is why Dr. Walther joined the group of Saxons who emigrated to the United States. With these devoted people he was eager to come to this country that he might worship God according to the dictates of his conscience.

Walther was a follower, not a leader, when he emigrated to the United States. However, the sad situation which developed in Perry County, Missouri, which caused the immigrants to doubt whether they were a Christian congregation and had the God-given authority to establish the ministry in their midst and call pastors, pressed young Walther into service as a leader. The "Altenburg Debate" marks



the beginning of his great leadership. He had to dig deep into God's Source Book and into the Lutheran Confessions to be thoroughly equipped for the challenging and difficult task of the debate with the attorney Franz Adolph Marbach. The very fact that he was able to convince the discouraged immigrants and strengthen their conviction on the basis of God's Word not merely directed the attention of the Saxons to his ability as a leader but also moved the congregations in Perry County and in St. Louis to call on him for other important tasks. Each new challenge drove him ever deeper into God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions and thus became a part in God's plan to train young Walther to become the great leader during those formative years of our beloved Synod and to exert the type of leadership which has guided our church for more than 114 years. We have every reason to thank God for it.

This special issue of CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, devoted exclusively to the memory of the sainted Dr. Walther, contains a number of articles which set forth the marvelous variety of gifts which

God bestowed on this great churchman. I am thankful that our attention is directed to this diversity of gifts. Not only men of our Synod but also other Lutheran church leaders have spoken of them in highest terms. Nor can there be any doubt that Dr. Walther, through the use of these talents, exerted a tremendous influence also on other Lutheran bodies. At the time of his death the following tribute was paid him by a member of another Lutheran body: "He was indeed an epoch-making personality, and from his activity impulses radiated to Lutherans in all parts of the world." All this moves us to thank the Lord of the church the more fervently for granting our church this great man of God.

The greatest blessing which God bestowed on our church through this great leader undoubtedly is the great heritage of pure Scriptural doctrine. What a heritage! May the following articles move every one of us to manifest our sincere gratitude to God by an ever greater appreciation and an ever more diligent use of this marvelous legacy as well as by the firm determination earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.

J. W. BEHNKEN