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WALTHER THE LUTHERAN.

(Continued.)

When one surveys the work of Walther's first year as editor, one is constrained to say that the promises made before *Der Lutheraner* made its appearance were faithfully kept. Koesterling¹⁾ relates that before publishing his church-paper Walther had submitted the following prospectus to a few pastors with whom he was acquainted:—

The aim of this paper shall be, 1. to acquaint men with the doctrine, treasures, and history of the Lutheran Church; 2. to prove that the Lutheran Church is not a sect, but the true Church of Christ; 3. to arouse love for the Lutheran Church; 4. to warn against, uncover, and refute false doctrine, to reveal those who falsely employ the Lutheran name for the purpose of spreading unbelief, misbelief, and enthusiastic notions, to repel attacks upon Lutheran doctrine, and to remove existing prejudices against our Church; 5. to unite the isolated members of our Church, to bring back into our Church those who have fallen away from it, and to prove that our Church is not extinct, yea, that it never can become extinct; 6. to put into the hands of Lutheran ministers a means for making plain to their congregations certain issues which can be thoroughly explained and urgently presented to them in no other way; 7. to counteract separatistic tendencies, to comfort and strengthen those who are in doubt and saddened because of the ruin of the Church, and to show them that there is nothing to compel them to fly into the arms of the sects which seem to prosper so greatly; 8. to rebuke dead orthodoxism, every sinful and ruinous movement with which we are being threatened, especially avarice, worldliness, misapplication of liberty, etc.; 9. to offer information regarding the present condition of the Lutheran

1) *Auswanderung der sächsischen Lutheraner*, etc., p. 113 f.

Church. The guiding principle of this paper shall be, as follows: Every article must be submitted to a test by means of the Holy Scriptures as they are explained in the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and even such novel views as are not in direct contradiction to the Scriptures and the Confessions shall not be evolved in our paper, because they might easily excite strife and beget error among Lutherans. The character of this paper shall be as follows: 1. As far as possible every article shall be written in popular style, and the paper is not to contain learned stuff ("gelehrten Kram"); 2. it is to be edifying, not indulging in strife of words and offensive personalities; 3. it is to be of general interest to every lover of the Lutheran truth; 4. it is to be frank and firm, not inclined to make false concessions, nor sacrificing the least particle of truth for the sake of charity and peace; 5. it is not to meddle with political affairs, or such as do not concern the interest of the Lutheran Church; * possible advertisements from which Lutherans might derive a benefit shall be excepted; 6. it is to breathe the spirit of love and tolerance; it is to pity and instruct rather than to thunder and fulminate; it is to bear in mind that the invisible Church is everywhere; 7. when errorists are attacked, every charge must rest upon an unquestioned basis of fact and truth; opponents must never be given cause to say justly, We do not teach the doctrine for which you attack us.

From the financial point of view this program did not promise great results. As a business venture one would have to pronounce it a reckless undertaking. Walther at no time in his life was a rich man. His journalistic enterprise was badly secured in a commercial way. It was mainly backed by his spirit of boundless self-sacrifice and by the promise of aid from his congregation. That promise could not amount to very much in any great emergency; for, although the Saxon immigrants had been a fairly well-to-do society when they landed at St. Louis, their goods had been wasted by shocking mismanagement. The early days in the colony were days of penury and want. When one bears in mind these unfavorable premises, the act of publishing *Der Lutheraner* looms up as an act of spiritual heroism, and its success is another proof and illustration of the mighty power innate in the truth of God's Word, — a power which prevails over and against the most forbidding odds.

Opinions on Walther's paper were divided, and after the first year's work these opinions had crystallized into the form which they retain to this day. There were men who were heartily disgusted with the constant appeals of *Der Lutheraner* to the Lutheran Confessions, with its relentless criticism of un-Lutheran practices of individual pastors and congregations and entire church bodies, and with its continued exhibition of the superiority of former conditions in the Lutheran Church over those prevailing at the present time. To these people Walther's distinct Lutheran emphasis boded nothing but evil. It sounded to them like the speech of a bigot, to hear of the heritage of pure teaching that had been entrusted to the Lutheran Church, of the evil of false teaching, of the conscientious duty of every sincere believer in the truth of Scripture to resist error by word and act. They had for generations been accustomed to a *manus manum lavat* policy as regards their interdenominational relations. Insistence on any particular form of teaching as the only Scriptural one, to the exclusion of any other as false, seemed to augur conceit and arrogance to them, and some did not hesitate to say that these "Altlutheraner" were Crypto-Romanists, and their system of teaching and church-government contained a papistic leaven. The Stephan episode was being cited as evidence to show what fruits would be matured under this system.

Much of this criticism, indeed, emanated from sheer ignorance of the teachings and principles of Lutheranism. The Lutheran Confessions had not been studied. There were Lutheran ministers who had not even seen a copy of the Book of Concord, much less had read and pondered its contents. Add to this that Walther had but recently arrived in this country, whose citizens have ever prided themselves on their freedom and independence in thought and action, and that, hence, Walther's doctrinal determination was regarded as a German trait, and it is not surprising to hear his earnest effort in behalf of genuine Lutheranism denounced as "foreign," "un-American."

But there were others—and their number was rapidly increasing with every issue of *Der Lutheraner*—who were just

as outspoken in their praises of Walther's journal. Many of them had not been heard of before in any prominent connection in the affairs of the American Lutheran Church. They seem to have been quiet persons who were doing the Church's work in a quiet way, saddened perhaps by the gloomy prospects ahead for Lutheranism as they viewed them, submitting resignedly to conditions which they felt themselves unable to alter, or hoping against hope for a better day. These were now seen coming out of their retirement. It is said Wyneken actually leaped for joy when he received his first copy of *Der Lutheraner* and exclaimed, "God be praised, there are still Lutherans in America!" (Wyneken was making a hopeless fight for Lutheran teaching in the General Synod. At one time he presented a resolution to that effect; it was listened to with great amusement, and in the printed report of the meeting at which this occurred his resolution was called "funny.") Walther received encouraging communications from all parts of the country. It became customary to report deviations from Lutheran teaching and practice by Lutherans in his paper, and men who were dissatisfied with un-Lutheran conditions in their own body published their complaints in *Der Lutheraner*. Congregations whose faithful pastors were being maligned appealed to Walther for protection, and he published their statements in his paper. *Der Lutheraner* became the rallying center for the quickened Lutheran conscience in America and the unofficial organ of little bands of men scattered through Missouri, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, New York, and Maryland. The early volumes of *Der Lutheraner* are intensely interesting literature, whether they are studied from the view-point of the Lutheran church-historian or the Lutheran confessionalist. Walther's paper was proving a mighty precipitant: wherever it was thrown into muddied Lutheran waters, impurities began to settle, and the waters were being clarified.

It is worth while to hear Walther relate his experience as an editor. In his "Foreword" to the second volume of *Der Lutheraner*, on September 6, 1845, he writes as follows:—

When we assumed the publication of this journal a year ago, we did not by any means do so from a consciousness of our qualification for such an enterprise. We rather felt as one feels when a conflagration starts somewhere: if there are no strong men on the spot, even the weakest feels himself called upon to hurry and render such aid as he can. Thus the stress in which we found our dear Evangelical Lutheran Church also in this country emboldened us to come out publicly with our feeble testimony in her behalf. In so doing, we relied upon the gracious assistance of Him who regards those of low estate; and we were not only fully assured of the energetic cooperation which a few brethren in the faith had promised us, but we were also hoping quietly that it would not be a long time that we would have to conduct, with our unskilled arm, this battle in behalf of the most momentous and sacred affair, the pure, divine truth, and that soon some one better qualified and trained for this work would feel himself urged to take our place and to show that what we had so feebly defended is nevertheless, and will remain, the unconquerable truth.

As regards the first two reasons for our confidence at the beginning of our little enterprise, our hope has not been deceived. God has graciously assisted us, and we have not been put to shame with our feeble testimony. For this His holy name be praised and blessed for evermore! Our esteemed coworkers, too, have fulfilled their promises, and the prompt issuance of our paper is primarily due to their contributions. Nor must we fail to mention to the glory of God that the members of our local Evangelical Lutheran congregation have gladly made sacrifices, thus enabling us, in spite of the small number of subscribers at the beginning, to continue our paper as a means for professing our common faith. But while we should gladly have turned our *Lutheraner* over to an abler editor, and while we should certainly expect an increase of subscribers and greater efficiency for our paper under a new editor, still our endeavors to obtain one have proved fruitless. On the contrary, esteemed friends have encouraged us to continue our paper under our editorial signature. Accordingly, as long as the Lord is pleased to grant us His grace, we shall not refuse to conduct the management of this little enterprise. We commend it to His care, for whose glory it was undertaken.

Before closing this foreword, we deem it necessary to explain the aim and character of *Der Lutheraner*, that is, its real purpose and the principles by which we are guided in editing it. It appears that not a few persons have been offended because *Der Lutheraner* contains not many contributions of a purely devotional character, and publishes chiefly polemical articles. For this reason some have not

hesitated to charge us publicly with quarrelsome ness and to actually oppose us as an enemy of practical Christianity. Accordingly, we make the following statement once for all time.

While we do not assume to pass judgment on the editors of Christian journals who pursue as their chief aim that of devotion, and while we cordially rejoice at every good result attained by such efforts, still for our part we are convinced that we ought not to habituate Christians to devote that time which should be given to the daily edification of their souls chiefly to the reading of a newspaper, often quite a voluminous one. Even when we leave out of the account the unedifying character of many contributions purporting to be edifying, we hold nevertheless that, upon the whole, the multitude of purely devotional articles, mostly small as to size, which are published by many religious journals, cannot but dissipate the mind of the reader and create in him a certain spiritual fastidiousness; it is not possible that these articles could serve the purpose of giving to any soul a connected account of the entire counsel of God for our salvation, and thus to advance a person in knowledge step by step. Must not Christian journalists rather consider it their duty to guide their readers chiefly to a daily and diligent use of the Bible, and thus to draw the water of life from the fountain-head?—Moreover, the Christian Church possesses such an abundant supply of old books of devotion, full of substance, thorough, complete, spiritedly written, and revealing a high degree of experience, that one is inclined in our day, when such fathers in Christ as the authors of those books were are vainly sought, to remind every one of what is said in Eccl. 12, 12: “My son, be admonished: of making of books there is no end.” As regards the promotion of devotional interests by means of books, we for our part believe that the best we could do would be to republish and urgently recommend to all Christians such excellent works, before others, as those of Luther, Brentius, Jerome Weller, Martin Chemnitz, Johann Gerhard, J. Arnd, Heinrich Mueller, Scriver, and others.²⁾ It is our humble

2) It is to be regretted that Luther's writings are least in the hands of the common people, because after their first publication they have usually been published in entire editions and not in selections. Accordingly, the entire works of Luther were bought only by professional men, and, as a rule, are now decaying in their libraries. Of America it is needless to speak in this connection. It is manifest that in America there prevails an ignorance, even among Lutherans, of the writings of Luther that cannot be sufficiently bewailed. For in America it is not a startling occurrence at all when even “Lutheran” writers, in their ignorance of what Luther has written, proclaim him now a rationalist, now a sacramentarian, now a half-fledged semi-papist. Unless, therefore, the writings

opinion that, while we have these precious guides to genuine, vital Christianity, there is no need of our publishing books for general devotion, yea, that we ought to put forth strenuous endeavors that the sterling books afore-named, and others like them, may not be forgotten, or supplanted by modern books composed in a spirit of self-elected piety and not emanating from a profound spiritual experience.

As regards *doctrine*, the case is different. New defenses for doctrine must be provided because new attacks are ever and again made upon it, new adulterations of it are being attempted, or ancient heresies are dressed out in a new garb and paraded. Accordingly, in future issues of *Der Lutheraner* we shall continue to keep this as our chief aim before our eyes, *viz.*, to promote the knowledge of the true *doctrine*, and to serve our readers in these days so full of pitfalls as a guide that is constantly at their side, warning them against unbelief and misbelief, such as numerous false prophets in our day are proclaiming in speech and writing. All the uncharitable judgments to which we have had to submit in the past, and may have to submit in the future, shall not swerve us from our purpose. By the grace of God we know, on the one hand, what a precious treasure pure, unadulterated teaching is, and that nothing but such teaching can be the true foundation for genuine unfeigned godliness; on the other hand, we are conscious of having written nothing from quarrelsomeness or vainglory, nor in a vindictive spirit, but from pure love of the truth which God has kindled in us, and for the salvation of our erring brethren. Finally, we are comforted by the reflection that we are not alone, but in our battling we have for our guides and patterns all the holy prophets and apostles, yea, Christ, the most holy

of Luther are again placed into the hands of the common people, there is reason to fear that ultimately the poor people in our country will in good faith accept as Lutheran anything that is being offered them under that name, even if it is something which Luther in his day with holy zeal has combated as a fatal error. Accordingly, we cannot pass by this opportunity to call the attention of our readers, and especially of our brethren in the ministry, to the call for subscriptions, herewith renewed, for a reprint of Luther's House Postil. This call appeals to all who are concerned about the dissemination of Lutheran teaching, and reminds them what a treasure they would bring into their congregations if they were to induce their members to purchase this valuable book. — Two years ago both the Church Postil and the House Postil were to have been published at Buffalo, but the noble enterprise, we regret to state, was wrecked upon the rock of Lutheran indifference, both among laymen and ministers. God grant that this new endeavor at New York may not prove abortive, for our humiliation.

Son of God Himself; for these, while they were actuated by the greatest love, have nevertheless manifested a most solemn zeal in opposing errorists and every deviation from the revealed truths, and have unto their death fought against them in their sermons and writings. We shall gladly continue to follow them, not heeding the unfavorable judgments which are being passed on our endeavor by the world and such as are its kith, and striving only for this that we may be found a faithful steward.

We repeat, however, that we shall never fail to remember that it behooves us more than others to appear before the public in unfeigned humility and modesty, because we were formerly walking errors' ways ourselves. But our personal experience of the pernicious influence which even such an error as had been joined with self-elected humility and self-denial can exert on our whole life in time and eternity, obligates us all the more to testify against error wherever we may find it, and wherever there is the least prospect that our testimony may produce a good result.

We shall consider our humble labor abundantly rewarded if God continues to bless *Der Lutheraner*, to the end that by its contents here or there some one may have the conviction quickened in him that purity of teaching is an important matter, or that some one may be strengthened in this conviction.

A year later, on September 5, 1846, Walther writes in the same place as follows:—

With the present number we begin the third volume of our journal. We confess that we do this with a joy such as we did not experience at the beginning of the two previous volumes. Not as though our reliance upon our own efficiency had waxed stronger; the cause of our joy is rather this, that we are plainly beholding how the Lord Himself is prospering the cause which this little paper of ours would like to serve in its humble way.

For there is no doubt that God has arisen to remove the rubbish under which our dear Evangelical Lutheran Church in America lay buried a long time. What was the state of affairs in our country a few years ago, and what is it now? There were but a few calling themselves Lutheran, who knew the true Lutheran doctrine, and still less there were who professed and defended it. The Book of Concord, which contains the public confessions of our Church, was not even known by name, much less by its contents, among most of the Lutherans in our country. Very few persons possessed any of the writings of Luther. The majority of the ministers still calling themselves Lutheran had adopted the Zwinglian-Reformed errors (for example, regarding the Lord's Supper, Baptism, Absolution, Original Sin, etc.), and many of these had also adopted the practice of the

Methodists, the so-called "new measures." Accordingly, the majority of our congregations were not united in the one Lutheran faith, but they were mixed societies, composed of Lutherans and Reformed. In these congregations Books of Forms (Agenden) and hymn-books had been introduced that were made to suit an unbeliever or a follower of a false faith as much as a believer. Briefly, while the Lutheran Church in America had not lapsed into such crass infidelity and such plain paganism as it had nearly everywhere in Germany, still it had fallen away from the faith, had faithlessly deserted the banner of the Confessions under which the fathers had fought, had cast away the precious legacy of the pure doctrine confided to her, had contaminated itself by spiritual adultery, by fellowship with all the sects, and had not retained anything Lutheran but — the name. In spite of this awful state of affairs most Lutherans in America cherished the belief that all was quite well with them. For, they said, our ministers are not rationalists; we are conducting many prayer-meetings; occasionally we effect conversions, and so on. Like the Laodiceans of old, the Lutherans in America were in the habit of saying: "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," Rev. 3, 14—19. And although the most varying shades of teaching and belief prevailed among those who called themselves Lutheran, still they were living in mutual peace as profound as among the dead in a graveyard. (1 Thess. 5, 3; comp. Ezek. 13.) Nobody interfered with another; a person might hold whatever views he pleased, he was accounted a brother beloved, provided he sang the common song of all.

In a general view, such was the condition of the Lutheran Church in our country a few years ago. If any one thinks this sketch overdrawn, let him read the epistle recently sent to Germany by the so-called General Synod of the American Lutheran Church in the name of 320 Lutheran ministers and 726 Lutheran congregations, and he will there find the defection which we have portrayed shamelessly professed and heralded as a progressive achievement.³⁾

3) In connection with the above the acknowledgment which the *Lutheran Standard* has made may be compared. See *Lutheraner*, vol. 2, No. 14. (This is the statement of Editor Spielmann to which we referred in the April issue at the end of the first article.) Also the treatise by B. Kurz, "Why are you a Lutheran?" the "Portraiture of Lutheranism" by S. Schmucker, and lastly, the "Lutherische Hirtenstimme." (This was a rationalistic publication of Rev. Weyl, of Baltimore.) This paper has, under its Lutheran signature, incessantly expectorated its venomous froth against the true Lutheran doctrine, and yet is regarded as the organ of a considerable part of the Lutheran Church, — thus evidencing the awful defection of the American Lutheran Church.

Over and against this, what has come to pass? Since a few years ago voices have been raised, now here, now there, in defense of the truth that had been surrendered, and in opposition to the error that had been espoused. To begin with, Prof. Schmidt, in his *Kirchenzeitung*, raised his voice to denounce the defection which had taken place, and called attention to the Confessions of our Church and to the most important of the polemical writings of Luther against the Reformed, from which he published excerpts. He was soon followed by others who made use of the *Kirchenzeitung* to witness against the pernicious evils which had arisen, and to summon men to purge our Church from her errors. These were joined two years ago by *Der Lutheraner*, which paper likewise made it its task to reveal departures in teaching and practice which had occurred, and to point out the necessity of a sincere return to the principles of the Reformation. Pastor Wyneken was moved by the misery of the German Lutherans in America to go to Germany and present the condition of our Church to brethren of the faith orally and in writing, appealing to them for aid. Lo and behold! all these efforts have not been in vain. The former lethargy is a thing of the past; a healthy movement has arisen. Many upright persons who for a long time had secretly mourned the ruin of the Church which they had recognized, but had despaired of a general improvement of existing conditions, now conceived courage and came forward. Others, who had heretofore regarded the prevailing state of affairs as a desirable one, have had their eyes opened and are horrified, and now are gladly joining the ranks of those who desire a reformation. Others have been convicted by the testimony of the truth, and now begin to feel ashamed of the position which they have occupied. True, they still are viewing the witnesses that have arisen with suspicion; however, they are quietly beginning to put away the error with which they have been charged. Others are still standing undecided at the parting of the ways, but they are at variance with themselves and roused out of their former security. A general interest in doctrinal matters, which had become nearly extinct, has been aroused again. Luther's writings are being dug up from the dust in which they have lain moldering; they are being republished and put into the hands of the laity.⁴⁾ The confessional writings of our Church are emerging from the night which covered them into

4) Our readers are aware that Luther's House Postil has been published in an excellent edition this year by Mr. Ludwig in New York City. A hopeful sign, too, amongst others, is this, that the English Lutheran Tennessee Synod has had the important letter of Luther, "Of the Anabaptists," reprinted, and issues the same as an appendix to its latest annual report.

the light of day; people cease more and more being ashamed of them; they are read again, readers of church-papers are having their attention called to them, they are partly republished, and appeals are made to them.⁵⁾ It seems as if the carnal peace in which men have been slumbering so sweetly can no longer be maintained. A great war has broken out, which is becoming more general day by day. Everywhere divisions are taking place; at the same time there is manifested among the orthodox a determined desire for most intimate union. Evidently we are on the threshold of a most important and, we firmly trust to God, most salutary crisis for our Church.

True, the men who are now battling to restore the Lutheran Church to her original form, especially as regards doctrine, still are as a drop in the bucket compared with the men who are fighting against them. But no matter how few they are in number, no matter what sneers, derision, and persecution their society may have to suffer, no matter what efforts are being made to render them suspected to the people and to represent them, against better knowledge and conviction, as a new sect that is secretly planning to lead the Lutherans back to Rome, no matter if men call them Old Lutherans, Puseyites, or even secret Jesuits,—we are not afraid. The Spirit of Lies may rave ever so much, the *Lord* has nevertheless arisen for the defense of His Church. Neither numbers, nor might, nor cunning, nor lies, nor calumnies, can check Him. He will accomplish His work with His almighty power. Truth will conquer, and the *enemies* of the truth will be confounded. Amen.

It is truly refreshing to observe the modesty of Walther in his willingness to share with others whatever credit there was due to men for the remarkable change that was gradually, but surely coming over the American Lutheran Church. His, after all, had been yeoman's service in the cause of restoring Lutheranism to its former glory. He continued the work when others laid down their weapons; yea, he increased his efficiency as a warrior for the truth with the advance of years and the increase of his followers. Greater results than those indicated in this article were to follow from his unflinching and ever-consistent testimony for the righteous cause of God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure.

(To be continued.)

5) This is done in the *Lutheran Standard*. This paper reports that the Ohio Synod will unite with the Tennessee Synod in an effort to publish the entire Book of Concord in English.