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Observing Two Anniversaries

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was born on October 25, 1811, in Langenchursdorf, Saxony, Germany. It is appropriate that this issue honor C.F.W. Walther on this 200th anniversary of his birth because of his significant influence as the first and third president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (1847–1850 and 1864–1878) and also president and professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (1850–1887). Most of the articles below, which were first presented at the 2011 Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions in Fort Wayne, reflect his influence in many areas of biblical teaching, confessional subscription, and the life of the church in mission. These historical and theological studies are offered here so that Walther may be understood in his context and continue to be a blessed voice in our synod as we face the future.

This issue also recognizes one other anniversary. The venerated King James Version of the Bible, first printed in 1611, is now 400 years old. The article below on the King James Version was originally given as a paper at the 2011 Symposium on Exegetical Theology in honor of this anniversary. The importance of this translation for the English-speaking world is widely acknowledged. Although many may think that its day has passed, this article demonstrates the ongoing influence of the King James Version through other translations.

The Editors

C.F.W. Walther's Use of Luther

Cameron A. MacKenzie

To state the obvious: C.F.W. Walther was an admirer of Martin Luther. It began early and lasted all his life. In fact, just months after Walther's death, the Missouri Synod's theological journal published his recommendations for a "fruitful reading of the writings of Luther,"¹ and references to Luther's writings appear frequently in Walther's theological work. This commitment to Luther went back a long way and is readily apparent in connection with two of the great crises in his early life—his inner turmoil as a university student² and his spiritual distress in the wake of Martin Stephan's fall.³ In both of these, Walther found solace and direction in the

¹ C.F.W. Walther, "The Fruitful Reading of the Writings of Luther," in Matthew C. Harrison, ed., *At Home in the House of My Fathers: Presidential Sermons, Essays, Letters and Addresses from the Missouri Synod's Great Era of Unity and Growth* (n.p.: Lutheran Legacy, 2009), 333–343. This work originally appeared as "Das fruchtbare Lesen der Schriften Luthers," in *Lehre und Wehre* [hereafter *LuW*] 33 (1887): 305–314. Walther had previously presented it to the Missouri District Conference. In Thesis 7, Walther states that "These theses [his recommendations] are based upon this essayist's own experience [*eigene Erfahrung*]." Both Robert Kolb, "C.F.W. Walther, Interpreter of Luther on the American Frontier," *Lutheran Quarterly* N.S. 1 (1987): 478–80, and Eugene Klug, "Walther and Luther," in Arthur H. Drevlow, John M. Drickamer, and Glenn E. Reichwald, eds., *C.F.W. Walther: The American Luther* (Mankato, MN: Walther Press, 1987), 6–9, discuss Walther's "Fruitful Reading."

² See one of Walther's first biographers and one of his most recent, Martin Günther, *Dr. C.F.W. Walther: Lebensbild* (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1890), 12, and August R. Suelflow, *Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C.F.W. Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 26. Much later, in his *Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, tr. W.H.T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), 188, Walther identified Luther's *The Keys* (*LW* 40: 325–77) as the writing from which he "first learned what the Gospel is."

³ William J. Schmelder, "Walther at Altenburg," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 34 (1961): 79. In a letter to Wilhelm Sihler, Walther explained, "Through the discovery of the Stephanite deception we were driven into the writings of Luther. All of us [Saxon pastors] have, next to the Word of God, studied almost exclusively the writings of Luther, and we believe that through the guiding of the Holy Spirit by means of this incomparable treasure we have now first come to proper clarity." C.F.W. Walther to Wm. Sihler (Pomeroy, OH), Jan. 2, 1845, in Roy A. Suelflow, tr., *Selected Writings of C.F.W. Walther: Selected Letters* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 89. For the original German, see L. Fürbringer, ed., *Briefe von C. F. W. Walther*, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1916), 1: 6–15.

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writings of Luther. In the first instance, while convalescing from illness, he read Luther and became convinced that the teachings of the Lutheran Church alone were scriptural. This was a conviction that never left him. And in the second, he found a theological justification for establishing a Lutheran Church in America, independent of the state. This was his life's work.

No matter the issue, no matter the time, Walther looked to Luther. On one occasion, a friend tried to call him "the American Luther"—a title that he rejected at once, preferring instead, "Luther's archivist (*sein Archivar*)" or record keeper.⁴ This title was appropriate enough if one thinks, for example, of the Missouri Synod's great project begun late in Walther's life and completed only many years after his death, viz., the St. Louis edition of Luther's works.⁵ But Walther was certainly much more than a promoter of reading the reformer—he was a theologian and church leader, committed not only to preserving Luther but also to appropriating Luther for a new time and place, for using Luther to address the challenges of 19th-century Lutheranism, especially in America. Examining and evaluating Walther's use of Luther in this context is the purpose of this essay.

To accomplish this end, this paper proceeds along two lines. First of all, it begins with an examination of Walther's attitude toward Luther's person, primarily on the basis of sermons that Walther preached over the course of a lifetime to commemorate the Reformation and Luther himself.⁶ The second line of investigation has to do with Walther's use of Luther in presenting Christian doctrine. Anyone who has read just a little bit of

⁴ Suelflow, *Seroant*, 7. See also C.F.W. Walther (St. Louis) to J. A. Ottesen, Feb. 8, 1870, in *Briefe* 2: 183.

⁵ J. G. Walch, ed. *Dr. Martin Luther Sämmtliche Schriften*, rev. ed., 23 vols. in 25 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1880–1910). The first volume appeared in 1880, the last in 1910. For background to this project and Walther's interest in it, see Robert Kolb, "Luther for German Americans: The Saint Louis Edition of Luther's Works, 1880–1910," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 56 (1983): 98–110.

⁶ Many of these are available now in English, thanks to the Rev. Joel Baseley, whose contributions to Lutheran scholarship as a translator of Walther and Luther are very impressive and much appreciated. For Walther's Reformation and Luther sermons especially, see Joel R. Baseley, tr., *Treasury of C.F.W. Walther*, vol. 4: *Festival Sermons and Prayers for Reformation and Luther Commemorations* (Dearborn, MI: Mark V Publications, 2008). Baseley has gathered Walther's sermons from *Lutherische Brosamen: Predigten und Reden...dargeboten* (St. Louis: M. C. Barthel, 1876) [hereafter LB]; *Ansprachen und Gebete...* (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1888) [hereafter AG]; *Casual-Predigten und -Reden* (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1889) [hereafter CPR]; and *Festklänge: Predigten über Festtexte des Kirchenjahrs* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1892) [hereafter FK].

Walther knows that his theological method routinely involved citations from Luther on doctrinal issues. But why? And was Walther true to Luther when he cited him?

The answers to such questions can be found for the most part in another important source for Walther studies, the well-known series of essays that Walther presented to the Western District of the Missouri Synod for 11 conventions in a row, 1873–1886, on the topic, “The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All Glory to God, an Irrefutable Proof That Its Doctrine Alone Is True.”⁷ Although Walther never wrote a dogmatics, this series of essays provided the mature theologian with an opportunity to discuss a wide array of theological loci, instead of concentrating on just one, presented either on account of controversy, e.g., *Church and Ministry*,⁸ or pedagogy, e.g., *Law and Gospel*.⁹ Admittedly, the Predestination Controversy hijacked the series for a few years in the 1870s and 1880s, but Walther returned to his original list of topics in 1883 and finished a few years later.¹⁰

Of course, one must recognize that Walther was not a historian, attempting to explain Luther in Luther's own times and terms. Instead, he was a churchman, trying to find material in Luther's life and doctrine that was directly relevant to Walther's own situation. Furthermore, he was hardly the first person to do so.¹¹ Already in the 16th century, as the first

⁷ “Dass nur durch die Lehre der lutherischen Kirche Gott allein alle Ehre gegeben werde, ein unwidersprechlicher Beweis, dass die Lehre derselben die allein wahre sei,” in *Siebzehnter Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts...1873* (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1873), 26. The entire set has been translated into English and is available in two collections: August R. Suelflow, tr., *Selected Writings of C.F.W. Walther: Convention Essays* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981) for the 1873–1876 essays, and C.F.W. Walther, *Essays for the Church*, vol. 2: 1877–1882 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), for the rest of the series.

⁸ C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, tr. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), translated from C.F.W. Walther, *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*, 3rd ed. (Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1875). For a very fine comparison of the theses presented by Walther in this book to the teaching of Martin Luther, see Eugene F. A. Klug, *Church and Ministry: The Role of Church, Pastor, and People from Luther to Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993).

⁹ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, tr. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), translated from C.F.W. Walther, *Die rechte Unterscheidung von Gesetz und Evangelium* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1897).

¹⁰ Suelflow, *Servant*, 155–160, offers a theological analysis of this series, especially the significance of the title.

¹¹ For a summary of Luther's treatment in history, see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 199–237. For Walther and two contemporaries in American Lutheranism, see E. Theodore

Lutherans attempted to pull themselves out of the morass into which they had fallen upon the death of Luther and in the aftermath of the Schmalkald War, they looked to the reformer's writings for guidance. In *their* search for a usable Luther, some advocated establishing all of Luther's works as a doctrinal standard for the Lutheran church, but by the time of the Book of Concord, Chemnitz and company had agreed upon a much more limited and specific commitment, viz., the two catechisms and the Schmalkald Articles.¹² There are also favorable references in the Formula of Concord to several of Luther's other works such as his *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*,¹³ his *Sermon at Torgau on the Descent into Hell*,¹⁴ his *Commentary on Galatians* (1535),¹⁵ and *The Bondage of the Will*.¹⁶ The fact remains, however, that only three of Luther's writings actually made it into the book.

Yet there is more to this story. From the standpoint of titles, the Concordia is evenly divided between Luther and Melanchthon, and the latter has the distinction of being chief penman of the Augsburg Confession (even though Walther could describe it as the confession of Luther, "expanded" by Melanchthon¹⁷). Nonetheless, the Formula of Concord points Lutherans to Luther as their teacher and not Melanchthon. In fact, the Formula does not cite Melanchthon by name even once,¹⁸ but it does cite Luther on several occasions—over 60 times in the Solid Declaration.¹⁹

Bachmann, "Walther, Schaff, and Krauth on Luther," in Jarolsav Pelikan, ed., *Interpreters of Luther: Essays in Honor of Wilhelm Pauck* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 187–230. Other, more specialized treatments include Ernst Walter Zeeden, *Luther's Legacy: Martin Luther and the Reformation in the Estimation of the German Lutherans from Luther's Death to the beginning of the age of Goethe* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1954), and Ottmar Hegemann, *Luther im katholischen Urteil: Eine Wanderung durch vier Jahrhunderte* (München: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1905).

¹² Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520–1620* (Grand Rapids: Paternoster, a division of Baker Books, 1999), 54–64.

¹³ SD VII, 28.

¹⁴ SD IX, 1.

¹⁵ SD III, 28.

¹⁶ SD II, 44.

¹⁷ Baseley, 119. "...ein durch Melanchthon erweitertes Glaubensbekenntnis Luthers." CPR 52. See also Baseley, 130, (CPR 89) where Walther describes the Augustana as a summary of Luther's doctrine without even mentioning Melanchthon's name.

¹⁸ F. Bente, "Historical Introductions to the Lutheran Symbols," in *Concordia or Book of Concord: A Reprint of the English Text of the Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), 244.

¹⁹ Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 65: "There are seventeen citations in the article on the person of Christ (VIII) and eleven each in the articles on freedom of the will (II) and the Lord's Supper (VII). Except for Article XII, on factions and sects which had never accepted the Augsburg Confession, each article cites Luther at least once."

This compares to only four for Augustine, three for Chrysostom, and two for Cyril of Alexandria.²⁰ So even if the formulators did not commit themselves to all of Luther's writings, they did commit themselves to Luther.

As a Confessional Lutheran, therefore, Walther identified himself with that first generation of post-Luther Lutherans who presented their doctrine as "the sum and pattern of the doctrine which Dr. Luther of blessed memory clearly set forth in his writings on the basis of God's Word" (FC SD Rule, 9) and who furthermore described the reformer as a prophet of the last times: "By a special grace our merciful God has in these last days brought to light the truth of his Word . . . through the faithful ministry of that illustrious man of God, Dr. Luther" (FC SD Rule, 5).

One of Walther's principal goals was the furtherance of true Lutheranism in America.²¹ But for Walther, true Lutheranism—as the Formula of Concord demonstrated—included a right appreciation of Martin Luther—his doctrine especially, but not only that. There was also Luther's place in the providence of God. In this respect also, Walther identified with his 16th-century predecessors. Robert Kolb has summarized the attitude of the first Lutherans to the reformer under three headings: Prophet, Teacher, and Hero.²² Each of these is also clearly evident in Walther. For example, in his recommendation of Luther's writings at the end of his life, Walther justified himself by maintaining that "Luther is the only theologian who is prophesied in the Holy Scriptures" and that "Luther is not to be reckoned among the common pure theologians. He was rather the reformer of the Church and the revealer and destroyer of the Antichrist . . . chosen by God Himself."²³ In fact, Walther could even describe the Reformation as a "second Pentecost."²⁴

This idea—that God raised up Luther especially and in fulfillment of prophecy to rescue the Church from Antichrist by recovering the Gospel—is prominent in Walther's sermons that commemorate Luther and the Reformation and that he delivered throughout his career. Not

²⁰ Based on the "Verzeichnis der Zitate aus kirchlichen und Profanschriststellern" in the *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche: Herausgegeben im Gedenkjahr der Augsbургischen Konfession 1930*, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), 1145–1155.

²¹ Bachmann, 194–196, 199–200, 209–211.

²² Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 9–13. For Lutheran attitudes toward Luther in the 16th century, see also Zeeden, 3–35. Robert Kolb has also commented on Walther's treatment of Luther's biography, calling it "sacred history." See Kolb, "Interpreter of Luther," 472–475.

²³ "Fruitful Reading," 333 (*LuW* 33: 305).

²⁴ Baseley, 131 (*CPR* 90).

surprisingly, Walther maintained that Luther was the fulfillment of Revelation 14:6, "Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people." This identification went back at least to Bugenhagen's statement at Luther's funeral²⁵ and Lutherans had been repeating it ever since. So, in his 1845 sermon on the Reformation, Walther said bluntly, "The angel, the one sent by God, who flew through the midst of heaven, is Luther."²⁶ In 1872, he declared, "according to Revelation, Luther must . . . fly . . . 'in the midst of heaven.'"²⁷ He was still preaching this in 1881, "Our text [Revelation 14] is obviously a prophecy concerning the work of the Reformation."²⁸ In one of his convention essays (1873), Walther made an interesting concession regarding this passage, "Being a prophecy, we cannot absolutely require that others believe this. It does not belong to the articles of faith." Nevertheless, he went on to maintain that no one could deny that the terms of the prophecy had been fulfilled in Luther and the Reformation.²⁹

But Luther was not only prophesied by Scripture, he himself also prophesied, at least according to some of his followers. Kolb recounts 16th-century Lutherans who published collections of Luther's "predictions,"³⁰ and in a sermon marking the 300th anniversary of Luther's death, Walther pointed out the fulfillment of Luther's prediction that after his death there would be a falling away from truth and that not even the Wittenberg faculty would not remain faithful.³¹ But predictive prophecy is hardly the

²⁵ Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 35.

²⁶ Baseley, 112 (*CPR* 44).

²⁷ Baseley, 14 (*LB* 227).

²⁸ Baseley, 102 (*CPR* 586). See also Baseley, 81–82 (*CPR* 581), 117 (*CPR* 49), and 128 (*CPR* 87). Walther also calls Luther "the Moses of the Church of the New Testament" (Baseley, 128; *CPR* 87) and Elijah (Baseley, 47; *CPR* 98–99), although Luther never became as discouraged as Elijah! In 1872, Walther preached on the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 8: 8–13) as "a likeness of the construction of the church of the Reformation in a prophetic image" (Baseley, 9; *LB* 223).

²⁹ *Convention Essays*, 20. *1873 Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 35.

³⁰ Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 178–183.

³¹ A major theme in this sermon (Baseley, 170–179; *CPR* 115–124) is the collapse of Lutheran orthodoxy. Walther contended that it began, as Luther had predicted, right after his death and was being accomplished in Walther's own times. For Luther's predictions, see especially pp. 171, 172, and 174 (*CPR* 116, 117, 119). Walther expressed somewhat the same insight in a Reformation sermon from 1843 (Baseley, 51–52; *CPR* 29–30). In an 1846 sermon Walther cited Luther's confidence that he would die in peace before turmoil broke out in Germany. Walther actually calls Luther a "prophet" [*Prophet*] in this sermon (Baseley, 168; *CPR* 112–113).

most prominent characteristic of Walther's admiration for Luther. Instead, it is Luther's commitment to the word of God.

Over and over again, Walther described the Reformation as a recovery of true scriptural doctrine and Luther as God's agent in effecting that recovery. Of course, the Middle Ages were a period of immense spiritual darkness. In 1845 Walther preached, "The Holy Scriptures lay in the dust. . . Christians were warned that this book was off limits to them, a dangerous book, so that they were barred from accessing the fountain of the water of eternal life." But, Walther added, God "led [Luther] to find the Holy Bible," authorized him to preach it as a doctor of the Church, and equipped him by experience, talent, and character both to understand and to expound God's Word:

A man who serves as an instrument of true Reformation must . . . [have] a living, more than common, knowledge of the saving doctrine, compelling rhetoric, ready knowledge of salient passages of Scripture, heroic faith and a most uncommon denial of himself. We meet all of these in Luther.³²

Walther expressed these convictions early in his ministry, they remained with him for the rest of his life, and he regularly returned to them as pastor and teacher. Here are a few additional pieces of evidence—this one from the end of Walther's life:

Luther had behind him nothing but hellish error. He could only go to the Scriptures and mine the truth. No man can comprehend how that was possible. It may appear to have been quite an easy thing, but it could not have happened without a completely unique enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.³³

In 1854, Walther began a Reformation sermon by thanking God: "You sent your servant, Luther, and used him to place the light of your Word upon its lamp."³⁴ In 1867, he proclaimed the same idea, "God finally heard the thousand-year groans of his elect, awakened a poor defenseless monk, and he with nothing but the light of the Bible . . . now revealed . . . the horrible hidden evil."³⁵ In 1872, he preached that on the first Reformation day, "It was not the temporal light of reason, but the heavenly light of the

³² Baseley, 110, 114–115 (*CPR* 42, 46–47).

³³ "Fruitful Reading," 334 (*Luther* 33: 306).

³⁴ Baseley, 31 (*CPR* 68).

³⁵ Baseley 128 (*CPR* 87).

Word of the prophets and the apostles, that was the sun breaking through the darkness of Christian people on this day, long ago."³⁶

What was it that God moved Luther to discover in the Scriptures? The gospel, of course. The message of God's free grace in Christ was yet another theme in Luther's ministry that Walther highlighted in his presentation of the Reformation. Again, we see this very early (1843) in Walther's preaching:

Luther was not ashamed of this Gospel. . . . As soon as he had himself experienced in his heart its power to save, the aim and goal of all his preaching, speaking and writing, beginning, middle and end, was now the Gospel of Christ. . . . He proclaimed the great joy of God's grace in Christ Jesus. He showed how poor sinners could be helped.

We also see this emphasis late in Walther's career when in 1881 he divided his Reformation sermon into two parts: "The work of the Reformation rests . . . 1. upon the principle that only God's written Word is the saving truth and 2. upon the principle that only God's free grace in Christ is the way to eternal salvation."³⁷

The emphasis upon Luther's recovery of true doctrine, especially the doctrine of salvation, reveals Luther as a teacher of the church without equal since the days of the apostles. Because of Luther's strict biblicism, Walther maintained (1845) what the banner of *Der Lutheraner* always affirmed, "God's Word and Luther's doctrine will never pass away."³⁸ He also insisted that "if we were ashamed of Luther and his doctrine . . . we would also be ashamed of Christ and his eternal Gospel."³⁹ Walther admitted [1858] that Luther was "no prophet, no apostle, who, being infallible, had the truth given *directly* into the shrine of his heart";⁴⁰ but by

³⁶ Baseley 9 (LB 222).

³⁷ Baseley, 57 (CPR 35–36), 102 (CPR 586).

³⁸ "Gottes Wort und Luthers Lehr vergehet nun und nimmermehr." Baseley, 121 (CPR 53). Cf. *Der Lutheraner*, September 1, 1844. The phrase is not original to Walther. Zeeden, 32, cites the inscription on a coin from 1564 that is very close to the motto of *Der Lutheraner*, "Gottes Wort und Luthers Lehr wird vergehen nimmermehr." The phrase was subsequently repeated with variations in the 17th century. See Zeeden, 37, and Eric W. Gritsch, *A History of Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 288n. 9. Zeeden, 39–45, also shows that John Gerhard (d. 1637) maintained the same conviction as *Der Lutheraner's* motto that "Luther's doctrine is identical with God's word."

³⁹ Baseley, 121 (CPR 53).

⁴⁰ Baseley, 81 (CPR 581); emphasis mine. Likewise, in discussing the doctrine of the word of God before the Western District in 1873 (*Convention Essays*, 33; 1873 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 48), Walther admitted that "Luther was neither a prophet

God's grace, Luther did confess the Scriptures correctly, "God's Word is nothing other than Luther's doctrine and Luther's doctrine nothing other than God's Word."⁴¹

Besides being a prophet and teacher in Walther's presentations, Luther was also a hero. His life and character matched his message and further demonstrated his unique role in history under the providence of God. Even though Walther confessed the sinfulness of all men, he did not really present Luther as a sinner in his Reformation sermons, not even in Luther's early years. Instead, Walther portrayed him as a victim of the medieval church. Walther described him as an "honest, pious lad" who nevertheless was spiritually restless, "He had no peace in his soul. He wanted to be saved but his conscience told him that he could not yet stand before God with all his piety." So, scared by the death of a close friend, Luther entered the monastery, "but even here . . . this precious man could not find what his terrified conscience sought."⁴²

Walther went on to describe Luther's wrestling with Romans 1:16, 17, and his repeated failures to find peace with God through his own efforts until, finally, God led him to the conviction that it was the righteousness of Christ that the gospel revealed, a righteousness "by which everyone who believes is now justified." And from this fundamental insight proceeded the Reformation, for Luther, once he had experienced the gospel, was not about to give it up: "He would not allow his soul to let go of this great anchor, but would grasp it tightly with both hands. So, naturally, he also had to immediately confess and give a clear witness to it."⁴³ From this conviction therefore proceeded the Indulgence Controversy and all the rest of the Reformation.

This is the narrative of Luther's life that Walther presented in 1843 and it remained with him the rest of his ministry. In 1881, for instance, Walther was still describing the young Luther this way, "Already as a boy, God had moved Luther to take his salvation very seriously. Therefore, his efforts to obtain salvation by his works knew no bounds." Again, circumstances led Luther into the monastery but with negative results until he

nor an apostle, who could not err" and agreed to subject Luther's German Bible to the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures.

⁴¹ "Gottes Wort ist nichts Anderes als Luthers Lehre und Luthers Lehre nichts Anderes als Gottes Wort," Baseley 84 (CPR 584). Bachmann, 195, quotes Walther at the dedication of Concordia Seminary's new buildings in 1883 to the effect that after Christ and the apostles, Luther would be the chief teacher at the school.

⁴² Baseley, 54 (CPR 32).

⁴³ Baseley, 55 (CPR 33, 34).

came upon Romans 1:16, 17, and finally, “like a terrifying bolt of lightning,” he realized that “everyone who believes in Christ . . . will be . . . saved.” Combined with his scriptural principle, Luther’s gospel principle undergirded “the whole work of the Lutheran church Reformation.”⁴⁴

Moreover, Luther was the man whom God had perfectly equipped to carry out the Reformation. On a couple of occasions in these sermons, Walther described Luther’s character. Again, he carefully avoided any reference to sinful indulgence or weakness. In 1867, Walther insisted that Lutherans have every reason to praise the person of Luther in response to the slanders of the papists and then went on to offer a description of someone who was virtually flawless. This is a long quotation but deserves consideration since it demonstrates clearly the heroic nature of Walther’s Luther:

Luther’s piety with no hypocrisy, his irrepressible faithfulness, his unflappable courage in all dangers, his tireless zeal in prayer and intercession, his deep humility and singleness in heart, his fine unselfishness, lack of greed and avarice, his tender mercy towards all who were suffering and his sacrificial generosity towards all the poor, his honesty and openness, that was never hypocritical nor manipulative towards those of high or low estate, his strict moderation, soberness and chastity, his self effacing industriousness, his conscientious faithfulness as a son, as husband, as father, as preacher, as university professor, as friend, advisor, citizen, in short, his exemplary Christianity, by which he established for all times a wondrous model of a true Christian, is worthy of imitation. Further, it is also good that we have reason enough to highly boast of Luther’s great gifts and service, his deep knowledge, his rare scholarship, his thorough going understanding, his powerful oration, his rare writing skills, his incomparable service to church, state and all stations of life, to arts and science, to our German name and our wonderful language, for all the gigantic work of the Reformation for which the church, after God, has Luther to thank.⁴⁵

That is really extraordinary. There is not a hint of any weakness or character flaw in this description—nor is this statement unique in this series of sermons. Luther is extraordinarily brave, talented, and faithful—a real hero in Church history.⁴⁶ For the sake of the word, he defies pope and

⁴⁴ Baseley, 105–106, 107 (CPR 590–591, 586).

⁴⁵ Baseley, 140–141 (LB 252).

⁴⁶ Cf. also *Convention Essays*, 172 [Zwanzigster Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts . . . 1876 (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1876), 60–61].

emperor.⁴⁷ For the sake of the word, he refuses to accommodate Zwingli and the Reformed.⁴⁸ And by the power of the gospel, he dies confessing the faith.⁴⁹ Walther elaborated on all of these and not once did he comment adversely on Luther's behavior. I suppose that when preaching on the Reformation, one is always going to comment on Luther's achievements, but it seems reasonable also at least to acknowledge Luther's sinfulness. Luther did,⁵⁰ but not Walther.

Walther was convinced that Luther's life validated his ministry. Walther made this point in a rhetorical question in 1845, "So tell me, how do you explain Luther's zealous, heroic faith [*Heldenglauben*] if you do not conclude that God armed him by it so that he was able to carry out the work for which God had chosen him?" And from this conviction Walther drew the conclusion for his own times, "Is it not a terrible contradiction to admit that Luther was the man chosen by God which cannot be denied, and to surrender his doctrine . . . ?" When all is said and done, Luther's doctrine is Walther's bottom line. He wrote (1867), "So highly as we might praise Luther's person, life and works, we would yet be putting him to shame if, along with all that, we were ashamed of the Gospel that he preached; if we, along with all that, were ashamed of his doctrine [*uns seiner Lehre schämten*]" (emphasis original).⁵¹

It is Luther's doctrine to which we now turn—at least Walther's version of it in his series of convention essays on the theme, "The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All Glory to God." But what exactly is "the doctrine of the Lutheran Church"? In an earlier essay (1866) on "the true visible Church," Walther had answered this question very precisely: "the doctrine which was restored by the Reformation of Luther and was summarily submitted in writing at Augsburg in 1530 to the emperor and the realm, and was treated and expounded in the other so-called Lutheran symbols, as the pure doctrine of the divine Word."⁵² Walther recognized three constituent elements in this description: Scripture, the Book of Concord, and Luther.

⁴⁷ Baseley, 23 (CPR 59), 78 (CPR 577-578), 91-92 (LB 210-212), 119 (CPR 51-52), 128-130 (CPR 87-89), 162 (CPR 105).

⁴⁸ Baseley, 78-79 (CPR 578), 120 (CPR 52).

⁴⁹ Baseley, 161-166 (CPR 105-110).

⁵⁰ E.g., "Although we sin daily and deserve nothing but punishment . . ." SC III, 5.

⁵¹ Baseley, 117 (CPR 49), 118-19 (CPR 51), 141 (LB 252).

⁵² C.F.W. Walther, *The True Visible Church*, tr. John T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 42. For the original, see C.F.W. Walther, *Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche: die wahre sichtbare Kirche Gottes auf Erden* (St. Louis: Aug. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1867) [hereafter *ELK*], 50-51.

Of course, Walther's essay goes on to distinguish between these three and gives primacy of place to the Scriptures,⁵³ but Luther is definitely in the mix. Even though his doctrine derives from the Scriptures or, better, precisely because it derives from the Scriptures, Walther routinely quoted him when setting forth the doctrine of the Lutheran Church. According to Walther's own statements, Luther could have gotten something wrong: "The Evangelical Lutheran Church recognizes *no human interpreter* of Holy Scripture whose *ex officio* interpretation must be regarded as infallible and binding."⁵⁴ However, convinced as he was about Luther's place in the providence of God, Walther did not conceive that Luther ever actually *did* get it wrong—at least once the Reformation got rolling.⁵⁵ Indeed, with respect to Luther's earliest writings, Walther could admit in his "Fruitful Reading" (1887) that "there is still much that is unclear" and went on to write of the 95 Theses, "we marvel at how they could cause such a great stir. There is so much darkness [*Dunkelheit*] ruling in them." Even so, however, Walther claimed that they contained "the doctrine of justification [*die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung*]."⁵⁶

More importantly, however, Walther maintained that "after the apostles and prophets, Luther had no one in the Church to compare with him" and he issued this challenge, "Let someone name just one single doctrine, that Luther did not interpret most clearly and gloriously." For Walther, that was impossible; and so, of course, he quoted Luther all the time.⁵⁷

⁵³ Walther, *True Visible Church*, 43–44 (*ELK*, 51–52), quotes the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, to describe the role of the Confessions. In Thesis 13 (p. 50; *ELK*, 59), Walther reiterates the primacy of the Scriptures: "The Evangelical Lutheran Church recognizes the written Word of the apostles and prophets as the sole and perfect source, rule, and norm, and the judge of all doctrine; (a) not reason; (b) not tradition; and (c) not new revelations." True to his convictions, Walther's method in this treatise is to quote Scripture and then witnesses in support of his theses, and among the witnesses first come the Confessions and then Luther.

⁵⁴ "True Visible Church," 61 (*ELK*, 70); emphasis mine. See also *Convention Essays*, 33 (1873 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 48).

⁵⁵ In Thesis 16 of his "Fruitful Reading," 342 (*LuW* 33: 313), Walther undertakes to defend Luther's "plainspoken style, tautologies, or apparent contradictions [*scheinbaren Widersprüchen*]" but admits to some real contradictions on account of the fact that "Luther did not achieve the full truth at once, as through the wave of a magic wand."

⁵⁶ "Fruitful Reading," 338 (*LuW* 33: 309).

⁵⁷ "Fruitful Reading," 334. In the German, Walther's rhetoric is a little different from the translation since he frames his conviction as a challenge rather than a rhetorical question, "Mann nenne nur eine einzige Lehre, welche Luther nicht auf das allerklarste und herrliche dargelegt hätte." Hence, the translation of this sentence in the essay is mine. Cf. *LuW* 33: 305.

In nine essays⁵⁸ devoted to the theme, "The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All Glory to God," Walther cited Luther 183⁵⁹ times from 72 different works,⁶⁰ although there were several citations whose sources Walther did not indicate.⁶¹ This amounted to about one citation for every 2.5 pages of text in the district proceedings, but the essays varied widely in the frequency of citations. The 1885 essay on the proper scope of temporal authority had the most citations (one for every 1.3 pages) while the 1877 essay dealing with predestination had the least (one for every 5.0 pages). The citations could be short (just a line or two) or quite long (a page or more), but usually they were somewhere in between, a paragraph or so. The sources were of various kinds⁶²—exegetical works (e.g., *The Great Galatians Commentary* or *The Genesis Commentary*, also Luther's "Preface to Romans" and his "Preface to the Old Testament"), treatises (e.g., *Treatise on Good Works*, *Freedom of a Christian*, and *On the Councils and the Church*), polemical works (e.g., *Against the Bull of Antichrist*, *Great Confession Concerning the Lord's Supper*, and *Against the Heavenly Prophets*), programmatic works (e.g., *Address to the Christian Nobility* and *Instructions to the Visitors*), pastoral works (e.g., the Catechisms, *Warning to His Dear German People*, and *On War Against the Turks*), sermons (e.g., *The House Postils*, *Sermons on John*, and *Sermons on Matthew*), letters (to Amsdorf,

Walther, *Essays* 2: 139 [*Einundzwanzigster Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts ...1877* (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio, und anderen Staaten, 1877), 91], did concede with respect to Luther's German Bible, "At times Luther has translated . . . in a way that a heretic with his false teaching can find a loophole in this simple translation—although he is caught when faced with the original." But even in this case, Walther maintained that "Luther has translated in such a way that he has rightly captured the sense of the original text."

⁵⁸ There were actually 11, but Walther presented the essays for 1879 and 1880 after the Predestination Controversy in the Synodical Conference had begun, so I omitted them from this study so as not to skew the results toward that particular doctrine. See Suelflow, *Servant*, 167–173, for Walther's role in the controversy.

⁵⁹ Counting citations is somewhat arbitrary. If Walther referred to something Luther said or wrote, I counted it as a citation. In many of the longer passages, Walther might interrupt his quotation with a few words, e.g., "Luther further writes." On the other hand, he might go on at some length before quoting again. In the former case, I ignored Walther's brief remarks and counted the entire quotation as one citation. In the latter case where there was a significant interruption, I counted the citations separately.

⁶⁰ On many occasions, Walther did not mention the source by name but did include a reference to Luther's works (usually the Walch edition) so that one could discover the specific title.

⁶¹ There were 29 of these, usually just brief quotations.

⁶² Identifying genres can also be arbitrary. I have combined considerations of content (e.g., polemical works) along with literary form (e.g., letters), but there is a lot of overlap between the categories (e.g., treatises and polemical works).

Melanchthon, and several others), and the “Table Talk.” The citations range from early in Luther’s career (e.g., *Ninety-five Theses*, 1517) to rather late (e.g., *Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil*, 1545). The two most cited sources were *Bondage of the Will* and the *Church Postils*; each of them were cited eight times.

More important than the numbers, however, is accuracy. Did Walther understand Luther correctly and apply him fairly? The answer is overwhelmingly yes, but not always to both of those questions—understanding and application. The doctrinal scope of Walther’s nine essays is considerable. He identifies twelve distinct teachings of the Lutheran church at the outset of this series,⁶³ and each of these doctrines has numerous subpoints. Walther’s topics range all the way from “the Word of God”⁶⁴ to relations between domestic servants and their employers.⁶⁵ Of course, he does not cite Luther for every subdivision, but certainly for all the main points, and anyone who knows Luther’s theology at all will recognize that Walther’s use of Luther is both fair and accurate.

So, for example, in his treatment of regeneration, Walther maintains that “where there is faith a person becomes a new creature, born again in regeneration” and proceeds to cite Luther, “What we Lutherans understand by true faith Luther stated in his *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*.” Walther provides five paragraphs of quotation—no problem with citing Luther out of context here. All of them are right on target, so Walther concludes, “Not only enthusiasts know that man must be born again. Luther also experienced it and taught it.”⁶⁶ The citation is apt. Walther understood Luther and quoted him appropriately.

To spend a lot of time on Walther’s appropriate citations would be tedious. Of course, one must readily acknowledge that Walther did not

⁶³ Walther presents the list at the beginning of the series and it is repeated at some of the conventions thereafter. Here is the list from the 1873 Convention (*Convention Essays*, 22; 1873 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 37): “(1) On the Word of God; (2) On the origin of sin, death, hell, and damnation; (3) On divine providence; (4) On the universal grace of God; (5) On the reconciliation and redemption of the human race; (6) On the justification of the sinner by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ without any merit of works; (7) On the necessity of regeneration and sanctification; (8) On the institution, validity, power, and unchangeability of the means of grace; (9) On conversion; (10) On petitions and prayers to God; (11) On obedience toward men in matters of faith and conscience; [and] (12) On the election of grace.”

⁶⁴ *Convention Essays*, 26–37 (1873 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 41–52).

⁶⁵ *Essays 2*: 310–313 [*Siebenundzwanzigster Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts* ...1886 (St. Louis: Luth. Concordia-Verlag, 1886), 52–58].

⁶⁶ *Convention Essays*, 113–115 (1877 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 91).

always raise the same questions regarding Luther as our contemporaries do. For example, in his discussion of justification by faith, Walther does not consider whether Luther believed that faith effected a "union with Christ."⁶⁷ Instead, he quotes three of Luther's works, his *Sermon on the Mount*, his *Commentary on Galatians*, and his *Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses*, in order to make the case that Lutheranism rejects justification by works.⁶⁸ Here again, of course, he has understood Luther correctly, even if he has not probed into Luther's doctrine as deeply as we might like today.

Instead of demonstrating that Walther was not aware of *our* concerns in his use of Luther, it is more interesting to analyze the instances in which Walther was wrong about Luther. These are not numerous but they are instructive. One of them involves the Ninety-five Theses. As noted above, in "The Fruitful Reading," Walther maintains that one can find "justification by faith" in the Ninety-five Theses. Not surprisingly, therefore, Walther quotes them in support of what we would call objective justification.⁶⁹ He uses two other, more appropriate quotations and then says, "Christ has granted them [all these glorious gifts—righteousness, life, salvation] to mankind through His gospel, as Luther so well confessed in the 95 Theses: 'The true treasure of the church . . . is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.'" Then, Walther draws the conclusion:

It is of primary concern . . . that we make use of these marvelous gifts. . . . They have already been *given* us, are always available for our benefit, even though we do not have faith. . . . Therefore Luther here says [Walther is paraphrasing]: "Do you want to use these great blessings? Very well! He has already given them to you."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ This interpretation has been advanced recently by scholars associated with Tuomo Mannermaa. See Carl E. Braaaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998). But see also Carl R. Trueman, "Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning? A Critical Assessment of the Reading of Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 231–44.

⁶⁸ *Convention Essays*, 103–104 [*Neunzehnter Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts . . . 1875* (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1875), 30–31].

⁶⁹ "Subjective justification, Rom 4, 6 [is] . . . the personal application, through faith, of the merits which Christ has secured for the whole world by his substitutionary atonement (*objective justification*)." John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics: A Handbook of Doctrinal Theology for Pastors, Teachers and Laymen* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 367.

⁷⁰ *Convention Essays*, 78–79 [*Achtzehnter Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts . . . 1874* (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. Staaten, 1874), 47]. The Luther quotation is from LW 31: 31.

Clearly, Walther understands “gospel” in the Ninety-five Theses as Luther and Lutherans later defined it; many of us today would be hesitant to understand the theses in a similar manner.⁷¹ But Walther’s “mistake”—if we can call it that—arose out of a misunderstanding of Luther’s biography. For Walther, Luther had come to a correct understanding of justification by faith before the Indulgence Controversy. Already at the time of his pilgrimage to Rome when he climbed to the top of Pilate’s stairway, he heard a voice resounding in his head, “The just shall live by faith.”⁷² That Luther came to his new understanding of the gospel at that time or shortly thereafter was a commonplace in Luther biographies at the time⁷³ and it shaped

⁷¹ For example, Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 198, characterizes the 95 Theses this way: “The spirit in which they were written is not yet the later evangelical and reformatory one, no matter how much they attack the current ecclesiastical practice and its problematical foundations. All of this was still happening from the basis of the theology and piety of humility.”

⁷² Baseley, 55–57 (CPR 33), 110–111 (CPR 42).

⁷³ An excellent example of this is the biography by one of Walther’s fellow synodical founders, Hermann Fick. According to Carl S. Meyer, “Walther’s Biographies of Buenger and Fick,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 45 (1972): 197, Fick’s *Das Lutherbuch* was published by the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Druckerei der evang.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. St., 1855) and had reached 20 printings by 1885. Matthias Loy of the Ohio Synod prepared an English language version, *Life and Deeds of Dr. Martin Luther* (3rd ed., Columbus, O.: J. A. Schulze, 1869). According to Fick (16th German ed., 1877, pp. 49, 53–54; 3rd English ed., pp. 57, 62–63), Luther heard the words, “The just shall live by faith,” on the stairs in Rome and came to a full realization of their import on his way back to Germany and then finally in Wittenberg. Another biography known to Walther was Moritz Meurer’s *Luthers Leben*. In his 1882 doctrinal essay, *Essays*, 230 [*Vierundzwanzigster Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts...1882* (St. Louis: Druckerei des Lutherischen Concordia-Verlags, 1874), 42], Walther refers to an 1878 edition of this work, the “Jugend und Volksausgabe.” In the 1870 edition, *Luther’s Leben aus den Quellen erzählt*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Justus Naumann’s Buchhandlung, 1870), Meurer, p. 39, also refers to Luther’s hearing Paul’s words on the stairway in Rome and continuing to ponder them upon his return to Wittenberg. Although Meurer offers no specific date for Luther’s breakthrough, he clearly suggests that it was some time before the Indulgence Controversy.

Another author of a popular biography from that period, Jules Köstlin, *Luthers Leben*, 10th ed. (Leipzig: D. R. Reiland, 1892), 62, 67–68, says that already at the time of his pilgrimage Luther knew about justification by faith. E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 175, explains that the story about the stairway and the voice goes back to two late 16th-century historians who depended on Luther’s son, Paul. However, Paul was only 11 when his father died. Neither Melancthon nor Mathesius includes this story in his account of Luther’s pilgrimage. According to Schwiebert, 187, Luther mentioned the episode in a sermon preached in 1545 and described the skepticism he experienced on the stairway about releasing someone from purgatory but did not mention the voice or Bible passage.

Walther's understanding of the Ninety-five Theses and the origins of the Reformation.⁷⁴

A second error in Walther's citing of Luther is more serious but quite understandable also. Walther is concerned to shield Luther from the charge of Calvinism, especially with respect to the *Bondage of the Will*. On the one hand, Walther knows that Luther thought this one of his best works.⁷⁵ On the other hand, Walther also admits that "on occasion he [Luther] speaks in terms similar to Calvin"; he insists, however, that Luther's purpose was not to teach absolute predestination but "to deny the existence of man's free will in spiritual matters." Walther then cites the Augustana and the Formula in order to make the point that the Lutheran Church teaches that "man's salvation is exclusively a gift of God; in the case of damnation he is exclusively on his own."⁷⁶

So far so good. Walther, however, wants specifically to rescue Luther from the accusation by others (Walther mentions the Iowa Synod⁷⁷) that he, like Calvin, taught that God did not intend all people to be saved. Walther roars back with what appears to be an unanswerable quotation from *Bondage*,

God does not deplore the death of his people which he works in them, but he deplores the death which he finds in his people and desires to remove from them. . . . For he wills all men to be saved [1 Tim. 2:4], seeing that he comes with the word of salvation to all, and the fault is in the will that does not admit him, as he says in Matthew 23[:37]: "How often would I have gathered your children, and you would not!"⁷⁸

⁷⁴ In his 1843 Reformation sermon (Baseley, 55; CPR 33), Walther seems to entertain a later date for Luther's Gospel discovery, but even so, Walther states regarding this experience, "Now Luther rejoiced and his soul was at rest. That was the situation when Tetzel...came to Saxony . . ."

⁷⁵ *Convention Essays*, 38–39 (1873 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 54).

⁷⁶ *Convention Essays*, 39–40 (1873 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 54–55, 56).

⁷⁷ According to Peter J. Thuesen, *Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* (Oxford: University Press, 2009), 156, Gottfried Fritschel accused the Missouri Synod in 1870 of "slavish dependence" on Martin Luther even though he had "obviously erred" in his *Bondage of the Will*. Thus began a preliminary battle regarding predestination between the Missouri and Iowa Synods even before the formation of the Synodical Conference which would shatter over the same subject just a few years after its founding (1872). For details regarding the Missouri/Iowa skirmish, see Hans R. Haug, "The Predestination Controversy in the Lutheran Church in North America" (Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1968), 109–235.

⁷⁸ *Convention Essays*, 40–41 (1873 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 56).

This is a great quotation for Walther's position.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, it is also somewhat misleading, for it contains an ellipsis of over 40 lines (in the Walch edition to which the Proceedings refer⁸⁰) that qualifies greatly what Luther is saying. Walther has omitted the reformer's statements regarding the hidden will of God that is very different from the revealed will. So, for example, Walther has omitted this statement, "But God hidden in his majesty neither deplores nor takes away death, but works life, death, and all in all,"⁸¹ and this one, "God does many things that he does not disclose to us in his word; he also wills many things which he does not disclose himself as willing in his word. Thus, he does not will the death of a sinner, according to his word, but he wills it according to that inscrutable will of his."⁸²

Now it may be that one can actually rescue *Bondage of the Will* from the charge of Calvinism—and Walther returns to this task a couple more times in his essays to the Western District⁸³—but Walther's citation from Luther in this instance is not a sufficient representation of what the reformer

⁷⁹ And it brings Luther right into line with the Formula. This was basic to Walther's thinking about Luther—the reformer and the Lutheran Confessions spoke with one voice. Cf. *LuW* 21 (1875): 67, in which Walther equates Luther with the Book of Concord, "They do not know us who label our theology that of the seventeenth century. As highly as we treasure the immense accomplishments of the great Lutheran dogmaticians of this period, it is nevertheless not really to them that we return, but rather above all to our precious Book of Concord and to Luther, in whom we recognize the man whom God chose as the Moses of his church of the New Covenant, to lead his church, which had fallen into slavery to the Antichrist, out of that slavery. He is the column of smoke and fire of the Word of God, clear and pure as gold as it is." Quoted and translated in Kolb, "Luther for German Americans," 99.

⁸⁰ Johann Georg Walch, ed., *D. Martin Luthers sowol in deutsche als lateinischer Sprache gefertigte und aus der letztern in die erstere übersetzte sämtliche Schriften*, 24 vols. (Salle im Magdeburgischen: Druckts und verlegt's Johann Justinus Gebauer, 1739–53).

⁸¹ *LW* 33: 140. "Gott aber, wie er verborgen ist in der Majestät, trauert nicht, nimmt den Tod nicht weg, sondern wirket Tod, Leben, etc., alles in allen." Walch 18: col. 2235.

⁸² *LW* 33: 140. "Es thut Gott viel Dinges, das er uns durchs Wort nicht zeigt; er will auch viel Dinges, das er uns durchs Wort nicht zeigt, dass ers will. Also will er den Tod des Sünders nicht nach dem Willen, den er durchs Wort offenbaret hat; er will aber nach dem verborgenen, unerforschlichen Willen." Walch 18: col. 2236.

⁸³ 1874, *Convention Essays*, 67–68 (1874 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 33–36); and 1877, *Essays* 2: 142–143 (1877 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 97–100). In the latter case, Predestination, Walther admits that "contrary to our usual practice," he has cited Luther rarely and undertakes to produce only passages that show he was not a Calvinist. Presumably, there were other passages not so clear. Walther also includes (p. 143) the same misleading quotation from *Bondage of the Will* that he had used in 1873.

actually said. Walther omitted the evidence that did not immediately confirm Walther's own position.⁸⁴

In one other matter, Walther also skews evidence from Luther in order to draw a conclusion that Walther prefers but that is not exactly the same as Luther's position, and that has to do with the separation of church and state. Walther viewed the American arrangement as a great blessing. In his 1885 essay, he writes, "We Lutherans in America can never sufficiently thank God that the federal Constitution makes it impossible for the government to favor one religion over another" and "freedom of religion . . . continues to benefit both state and church with the choicest and most precious benefits."⁸⁵

For someone who otherwise had no use for American notions of natural rights and liberties, this is a remarkable position,⁸⁶ especially since the first Lutherans had relied so heavily on the temporal authorities to protect them and to promote their faith. The result had been Lutheran state churches. But Walther isn't buying it. For him, the correct position is to limit the state to temporal matters only. This is how he put it in his 1885 essay, "Government has neither the right nor the power to arrogate to itself control over church government, nor to force people to conform to the true faith, or what it may consider to be true faith."⁸⁷ Therefore, the later Lutherans were wrong in their defense of the state church system. He states bluntly, "The dogmaticians of the 17th century strayed from Scripture and the Confessions by favoring state churches." But what about Luther and the first Lutherans? Walther insists that "during its initial period . . . the Lutheran Church held firmly to the doctrine that the government has neither the right nor the power to assume control of the church."⁸⁸ And who better to cite as proof of this position than Martin Luther?

⁸⁴ Another part of the problem may be that Walther read Luther in the context of later Lutheranism. As Robert Kolb, "Interpreter of Luther," 482, suggests, "[Walther's] knowledge of Luther came from his own reading of the sources, but that reading has been poured into forms and categories dictated by later generations."

⁸⁵ *Essays 2*: 288–289 [*Sechszundzwanzigster Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts...1885* (St. Louis: Luth. Concordia-Verlag, 1885), 50].

⁸⁶ Cf. my essay, "The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Public Square in the Era of C.F.W. Walther," in *The Anonymous God: The Church Confronts Civil Religion and American Society*, eds. David L. Adams and Ken Schurb (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 93–119.

⁸⁷ *Essays 2*: 277 (1885 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 27).

⁸⁸ *Essays 2*: 278, 281 (1885 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 30, 35). Bachmann, 189, asserts that a common view of Protestant America in 1883 regarding the long-range

Walther produces many passages from Luther to the effect that government has authority in temporal matters only, not spiritual. The only problem with this approach is that Walther suppresses the evidence that shows just how broad was Luther's understanding of "temporal." For example, Walther cites Luther's statement in his Commentary on Psalm 82 that the government has the right to prosecute heretics who are also revolutionaries but fails to mention that in that same commentary, Luther also envisions the government's repressing false teachers, settling doctrinal disputes between rival preachers, and silencing preachers who try to bind men's consciences to ceremonies.⁸⁹ Similarly, Walther cites Luther's preface to the Small Catechism that "we cannot and should not compel anyone to believe" but does not go on to cite what follows, "Parents and employers should refuse to furnish them [those who refuse to accept instructions in the catechism] with food and drink and should notify them that the prince is disposed to banish such rude people from his land" (SC Preface 12).⁹⁰

Walther could also have known that in Luther's Commentary on Psalm 101,⁹¹ Luther praises David for his management of his kingdom in both spiritual and secular affairs, and in answer to those who object that David is mingling the two kingdoms, Luther insists that "they [the two kinds of authority] should even be mixed into one another like one cake, everyone of them helping the other to be obedient." Luther says explicitly that "if David or a prince teaches or gives orders to fear God and to listen to His Word, he is not acting as a lord of that Word but as an obedient servant." A ruler crosses the line when he commands something contrary to the Word of God. "That," says Luther, "could truly have been called a mingling of spiritual and secular, or of divine and human authority."⁹²

Of course, we do not know if Walther was familiar with this particular work. At least, he does not cite it in this series of essays. In any case, he should have known that Luther's position on the role of the godly prince in the affairs of the Church was considerably greater than he made it seem in his essay. Obviously, Walther was willing to see errors in later

political consequences of the Lutheran Reformation was "the full separation of church and state and . . . unprecedented individual freedom."

⁸⁹ *Essays* 2: 285 (1885 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 43). But cf. Walch 5: cols. 1055–59 (LW 13: 61–63).

⁹⁰ *Essays* 2: 282 (1885 *Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts*, 37).

⁹¹ Walther should have known this because it was a part of the Walch edition of Luther's works (5: 1172–1295) to which he routinely appeals and which was the basis for the St. Louis edition, already underway.

⁹² LW 13: 195–197 (Walch 5: cols. 1250–1253).

Lutherans, but not in Luther himself—if in fact, it was Luther who was wrong and not Walther.

In instances like this one and the other two cited above, we can see the weaknesses of Walther's approach to Luther's doctrine. By equating it with the Scriptures, it can never be wrong. Walther typically interprets it as "orthodox" even if that means glossing over some of the counter-evidence. Similarly, with respect to Luther's biography, the life validates the doctrine. Therefore, Walther overlooks or explains away what others might see as sinful.

We do not do either of these things today. We expect our heroes both to have weaknesses and to make mistakes—and they do. Martin Luther and oh, yes, C.F.W. Walther. But Walther is long gone and so is his whole approach to Martin Luther as hero and infallible teacher. Nonetheless, Walther remains correct in the main things: Luther's doctrine is true because it is scriptural, and God used Luther mightily to recover the gospel. And also with Walther, I find it hard to comprehend how the Lutheran church can really remain Lutheran without a hearty dose of Martin Luther.