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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

Walther and the Revival of Confessional Lutheranism

Martin R. Noland

I was a student at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, in the early 1980s. My classmates and I often talked about the Lutheran church and its future. It was an exciting, even invigorating time to be a conservative Lutheran. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) President J.A.O. Preus had accomplished significant things during his tenure. It was apparent that either of the main contenders for his office, Ralph Bohlmann or Walter A. Maier II, would steer the same course of conservatism. Ahead in our future we could see nothing but clear blue skies and fields of good soil in church and community, ripe for the seed of the gospel! Even though the LCMS in the 1970s survived its battles, we did not realize that the battle in world Lutheranism was raging on. What do we see in world Lutheranism today, thirty years later?

In 1999, the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church signed together the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." On the one hand, as Gottfried Martens recently argued, the signatures have been inconsequential in the life of the Roman and Lutheran churches.¹ On the other hand, the fact that the officials of the Lutheran church put so much effort into the Joint Declaration's acceptance certainly says something about them, if not the churches they serve.

Regarding the doctrine of justification, Luther said in the Smalcald Articles:

On this article rests *all* that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and *have no*

¹ For a recent review of the "Joint Declaration," see Gottfried Martens, "Inconsequential Signatures? The Decade after the Signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*," *Lutheran Quarterly* 24 no. 3 (Autumn 2010): 310-336. A magisterial review of the history and theology of the ecumenical discussions of the doctrine of justification that preceded the "Joint Declaration" may be found in Gottfried Martens, *Die Rechtfertigung des Sünders—Rettungshandeln Gottes oder historisches Interpretament? Grundentscheidungen lutherischer Theologie und Kirche bei der Behandlung des Themas 'Rechtfertigung' im ökumenischen Kontext*, *Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie* 64 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1992).

doubts about it. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and all our adversaries will gain the victory.²

So by this judgment of Luther against the "Joint Declaration," most of the worldwide Lutheran church is already dead.

More recently, in 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) infamously agreed to accept homosexual clergy and the marital blessing of homosexual couples. This has created a scene of incredible complexity for American Lutherans, as former "radicals" Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson help lead the pack out of the ELCA into various networks and small synods. Disintegration, which is what is happening in that part of American Lutheranism, is its own type of death.

Those of us in the LCMS, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and smaller Lutheran synods are not immune to the dangers of the slippery slope to the Stygian shore. So-called "church-growth" experts warn us that the Lutheran church is dying, that many congregations are dying, and that they need to be "revitalized." The 2007 LCMS convention even had a resolution about "revitalization,"³ a word which means "bringing back from the dead."

Do you get the mood . . . the *Angst*, as the Germans say? That morbid mood is what bothered C.F.W. Walther and his classmates at the University of Leipzig in the early 1830s. As believers planning to go into the pastoral ministry, they were up against the feeling that the Lutheran church was dead because the "rationalists" had killed it. How could they be pastors if the Lutheran church was dead?

I like to compare the German rationalist theologian Gotthold Ephraim Lessing to David Niven in the movie "Bridge on the River Kwai." The Lutheran church was the train rushing down the tracks, heedless of its impending danger. When the train began to cross the bridge, Lessing plunged the handle into the detonator, there was a great explosion, and the train went crashing into "Lessing's ditch." That happened in 1777,⁴ during the middle of the American Revolutionary War. The Lutheran church was

²SA II, I, 5. Emphasis mine.

³ See Resolution 1-01A "To Support Revitalization of LCMS Congregations," *Convention Proceedings 2007: 63rd Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Houston, TX, July 14–19, 2010* (St Louis: LCMS, 2007), 111.

⁴ The famous ditch of Lessing was explained in his essay, "The Proof of the Spirit and Power," published in 1777. For an English translation see Gotthold Lessing, *Lessing's Theological Writings*, ed. and tr. Henry Chadwick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956), 51–56.

still a train wreck mired in “Lessing’s ditch” in 1830 while Walther was at the university. And in many respects, it still is suffering from that train wreck today.

I. Who Was the Father of Confessional Lutheranism?

“Confessional Lutheranism” is a term that often befuddles. Theodore Tappert gave a definition with which I agree:

Ever since the Reformation, churches had been identified by their confessions—that is, by the statements of faith that set forth what they believed and taught. . . . [In nineteenth century “confessionalism”], authority was thought to reside not only in historic confessions of faith but also in the distinctive theological formulations, liturgical customs, and types of piety that had grown up since the Reformation . . . the “confessionalism” that now emerged was as a rule woven out of a combination of orthodoxist and pietist strands.⁵

If the “confessional Lutheranism” that arose in the nineteenth century was as a rule woven out of both orthodoxist and neo-pietist strands, this also means that there could be some brands of “confessionalism” that were an exception to that rule.

In the Lutheran sphere, there has been an “exception to the rule” woven out of only the orthodox strand and defined solely on the basis of its historic confessions of faith. This was the brand that became associated with C.F.W. Walther and his church, which we call today The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Although many in the LCMS might be tempted to say that C.F.W. Walther was the father of this sort of “confessional Lutheranism,” the real father of this type of confessional Lutheranism was someone chronologically much closer to Luther, namely, Martin Chemnitz.

In his book, *The Second Martin*, J.A.O. Preus explained how Chemnitz came to understand the importance of confessions for the unity of the church. Preus pointed to Chemnitz’s treatise *Iudicium*,⁶ written in March 1561, as the source for this idea of “confessions.” The treatise was written fifteen years before the Formula of Concord. In the *Iudicium*, Chemnitz asserted that there are two improper approaches to controversies. On the one side, some try to paper everything over, and on the other side, others try to overturn gradually even moderately helpful *corpora doctrinae* by starting new and unnecessary arguments. Chemnitz then stated:

⁵ Theodore Tappert, *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America 1840–1880*, A Library of Protestant Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 8.

⁶ Full title: *De Controversiis quibusdam quae superiori tempore circa quosdam Augustanae Confessionis articulos motae et agitatae sunt. Iudicium d. Martini Chemnitii.*

Neither side should be approved. Both for the sake of teachers as well as learners and also for the sake of our adversaries, there must be a correct form and systematic summary [*methodica summa*] of the divine teaching. . . . If any statements fail to measure up to this norm, they should not require some clever interpretation or some whitewashed reconciliation, but they should be clearly disapproved and rejected. . . . Therefore, just as the ancients had their symbols in which in opposition to the corruptions of heretics there was the form and pattern of sound words for the sake both of those who teach and those who learn, so for us is the *corpus doctrinae* of our churches, which we judge to be the true and unchangeable teaching of the prophetic and apostolic writings in the sense that is expressed in our approved symbols, that is, the Augsburg Confession and its Apology and the Smalcald Articles.⁷

These statements of Chemnitz find fuller expression in the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, in the section "Rule and Norm."

What should be noted here is that the Augustana, its Apology, and the Smalcald Articles were written as a defense of Lutheran teaching and practice for the sake of the Roman Catholic opponents. With Chemnitz's *ludicium* of 1561 and the Book of Concord in 1580, confessions took on a different role as normative "judges" in the internal disputes of the church. As Preus observed, Chemnitz's idea was that confessions should be the means to theological unity within the Lutheran church. This was in contrast to the Gnesio-Lutherans, such as Flacius, who thought that church conventions or synods could achieve concord by themselves.⁸ Chemnitz's idea of "confessional Lutheranism" was the dominant idea of the Lutheran church in Germany for a little over one hundred years, from 1580 until 1691.

Recent conflict within the Lutheran church has led those trained in the history of the Lutheran Confessions to go back to the process invented by Chemnitz. This is undoubtedly what led J.A.O. Preus and other LCMS theologians, most noticeably Ralph Bohlmann, to formulate "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles" in 1972 and what recently led Matthew Harrison to advocate a similar process in his 2009 essay "It's Time: LCMS Unity and Mission. The Real Problem We Face and How to Solve It."⁹

⁷ J. A. O. Preus, *The Second Martin: The Life and Thought of Martin Chemnitz* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), 118-119.

⁸ Preus, *The Second Martin*, 121-123.

⁹ http://www.itistime.org/index.php?option=com_rubberdoc&view=doc&id=2&format=raw (accessed December 2010).

II. Who Killed Confessional Lutheranism?

When you examine the demise of the confessional Lutheran church before the nineteenth century, it is like the rare “whodunit” novel where everyone implicated is actually guilty of the murder. Still, the church historian has some responsibility for pointing to the most significant factors, and that can be done in this case. The four most significant factors were Roman Catholicism, Calvinism, pietism, and rationalism.

Regarding the first factor, prior to the Peace of Westphalia, the Roman Catholic forces had reasserted their control by forcing the Lutherans out of Austria, Moravia, Bohemia, Bavaria, Salzburg, Upper Palatinate, Bamberg, Würzburg, Fulda, Paderborn, Westphalia, Osnabrück, and Cologne. Shortly thereafter, they also regained control of Poland. In these cases, confessional Lutheranism was killed in a territory by forcing its adherents to leave.

With respect to the second factor, Calvinists were responsible for the demise of the Lutheran church in the states over which they gained control in the Holy Roman Empire. The Electoral Palatinate became Reformed in 1561 under Elector Frederick III (1515–1576; Elector 1559–1576). The Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, commissioned by that elector, became the most widely accepted confession of the German Reformed faith. Other states in the Holy Roman Empire that fell to this brand of Calvinism included Nassau in 1578, Bremen in 1595, Anhalt in 1579, Hesse-Kassel in 1607, and Bentheim in 1613.¹⁰

More significant for the future of German Protestantism was the conversion of the Elector of Brandenburg to the Reformed faith.¹¹ In 1613, the Elector John Sigismund (1572–1619; Elector 1608–1619) announced his conversion to Calvinism, which made possible his acquisition of the lower Rhine states of Cleves, Jülich, Berg, Mark, and Ravensberg in the Treaty of Xanten (1614). These states were the foothold by which Brandenburg and

¹⁰ For a fuller discussion of the early German Reformed churches, see Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, tr. John Hoffmeyer, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 20–22.

¹¹ On the transformation of Brandenburg into a Calvinist state, see Bodo Nischan, *Prince, People, and Confession: The Second Reformation in Brandenburg* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994). Other studies that include a discussion on the growth of Calvinism in the Holy Roman Empire in this period include: Bodo Nischan, “Confessionalism and absolutism: the case of Brandenburg,” in Pettegree, Duke, and Lewis, eds. *Calvinism in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 181–204; Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 202–229; and the still useful work by John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 268–289.

its successor, Prussia, became the dominant power in the states of the Holy Roman Empire and later in the nation of Germany. Where Prussia ruled, its religious policy also ruled.

Electoral John Sigismund had hoped to convert all of his subjects to the Reformed faith, but he soon found out that Lutherans are a stubborn lot. He eventually resigned himself to a court full of Calvinists in a country full of Lutherans, with royal policies favoring the Reformed faith and unionistic practices. He commissioned the "Sigismund Confession" in 1614 which was more of a personal than a church-wide confession.¹² He included the Minutes of the Leipzig Colloquy (1631) and the Declaration of Thorn (1645) with his own confession in the *Corpus constitutionum marchicarum*, which became the Prussian equivalent of the Book of Concord.

The successors to Sigismund not only increased the territory of Brandenburg-Prussia, they also increased the power and influence of the Reformed faith over against the Lutheran church in their lands. Sigismund's grandson, the "Great Elector" Frederick William (1620-88; Elector 1640-88), distributed Calvinist "court preachers" throughout his lands. He encouraged the immigration of Calvinist refugees, notably from Scotland, Silesia, France (a.k.a. the "Huguenots"), the Palatinate, the upper Rhine region, and the Habsburg lands, as well as Waldensians and Bohemian Brethren.¹³ Perhaps more important for the long-term, the "Great Elector" bound the Lutheran clergy's judicial authority to the central bureaucracy ruled by Calvinists.¹⁴ This meant that in almost any disagreement between Lutherans and Calvinists, the Calvinists would win in a final appeal in the church court.

The Great Elector's son, King Frederick I of Prussia (1657-1713; Elector 1688-1713; King 1701-1713), continued his father's policies of beating back the Lutherans. But King Frederick I found a new weapon in pietism, the third significant factor in the demise of the confessional Lutheran church. The king found an ally in the pietist patriarch, Philip Jacob Spener, whom he warmly welcomed to the important Saint Nicholas Church in central Berlin in 1691. Spener's emphasis on a changed life in Christ, in place of the Lutheran emphasis on the correct teaching and understanding of the

¹² Rohls, *Reformed Confessions*, 21-22; see also the excellent discussion on Elector Sigismund and early Prussia in Richard L. Gawthrop, *Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth-Century Prussia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 42-53.

¹³ Gawthrop, *Pietism*, 45-46.

¹⁴ Gawthrop, *Pietism*, 51-52.

Scriptures, was appreciated by the king.¹⁵ The king realized that pietism had utility as a means for the ideological and organizational support of Prussian absolutism. Subsequent Prussian kings understood the political utility of pietism.¹⁶

In 1692, the king founded the University of Halle as a pietist institution in cooperation with the grand master of pietism, August Hermann Francke.¹⁷ The University of Halle was intended by the king to compete for religious allegiance with the older Lutheran universities, such as Wittenberg and Jena.¹⁸ It far surpassed that plan, due to the genius of Francke, who attracted zealous students from all over Europe and who expanded his work into missionary and charitable institutions. Francke obtained the vital support of the next Prussian monarch, King Frederick William I (1688–1740; King 1713–1740), when in 1713 Francke implicitly agreed to support the king's militaristic ventures.¹⁹ As Frederick Herzog observes, "Pietism at Halle gave a blank check to the absolutist aspirations of the Prussian Elector. It became a key part of the establishment [of the Prussian state] in no uncertain terms."²⁰

To be fair to the Prussian kings who struggled against the Lutheran church, we should note that the Saxon kings also had abandoned the Lutheran church. Frederick Augustus I of Saxony (1670–1733; Elector 1694–1733; King 1697–1704, 1709–1733) adopted the Roman Catholic faith in 1697 in order to become King of Poland. The rulers of Saxony continued to be Roman Catholic until the monarchy was abolished in 1918. Furthermore, Elector George I of Hanover (1660–1727; Elector 1698–1727; King 1714–27) became Anglican when he accepted the royal throne over Great Britain and Ireland in 1714. Although the Lutheran church survived into the eighteenth century, it did so without support from royalty in the largest and most significant states of the Holy Roman Empire.

¹⁵ See K. James Stein, *Philipp Jakob Spener: Pietist Patriarch* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1986), 128. Spener's most famous writing is available in English; see *Pia Desideria*, tr. and ed. Theodore Tappert, Seminar Editions (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

¹⁶ See Mary Fulbrook, *Piety and Politics: Religion and the Rise of Absolutism in England, Württemberg, and Prussia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 9. This point was made originally by Carl Hinrichs, *Preussentum und Pietismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1971), 254ff. and 173.

¹⁷ Gawthrop, *Pietism*, 60–63.

¹⁸ Gawthrop, *Pietism*, 61.

¹⁹ Fulbrook, 164–166.

²⁰ Frederick Herzog, *European Pietism Reviewed* (San Jose, CA: Pickwick Publications, 2003), 29.

When Prussian King Frederick William III (1770–1840; King 1797–1840) issued orders for a common Lutheran and Reformed agenda in 1798 and then announced the “Prussian Union” on September 27, 1817, he was not doing something new. He was simply continuing the policies of his Brandenburg-Prussian predecessors, stretching all the way back to Elector John Sigismund in 1614. The Prussian Union united the Lutherans and Reformed Protestants in the court and military, and asked for the voluntary union of all Lutherans and Reformed in Prussia and other places in the states of the German Confederation. The Prussian Union was not enforced immediately at the congregational level. The king waited until April 1830 to enforce the union of congregations in Prussia, and this act met with significant resistance.²¹

The final factor in the demise of the confessional Lutheran church was rationalism. The famous German journalist, Heinrich Heine, properly defined rationalists in 1852 as those “theologians who removed everything historical from Christianity.”²² In Germany, this began in the eighteenth century with Johann Semler (1725–1791) and his major work, *A Free Investigation of the Canon* (1771–1775).²³ In this work, Semler was the first Lutheran theologian to make a radical distinction between the Scriptures and the Word of God.²⁴

The rationalist approach to the Bible and theology received powerful support from the Prussian king, Frederick II “The Great” (1712–1786; King 1740–1786).²⁵ During the latter part of his reign, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing published in series from 1774–1779 portions of an enormous unpublished work by Hermann Samuel Reimarus, titled *Apology for the Rational Worshipers of God*, which series are also known as the *Wolfenbüttel Fragments*. These publications of Reimarus caused great controversy, as well as consternation among traditionalist clergy and laymen.

²¹ See Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 57–61.

²² Heinrich Heine, “On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany,” 2nd ed., in *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany and Other Writings*, ed. Terry Pinkard, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 65.

²³ Johann Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon* (Halle: 1771). The previous development of these ideas in England, in Deism and Latitudinarianism, is explored in depth in the magisterial work: Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, tr. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

²⁴ See Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 90.

²⁵ Heine, *History of Religion*, 65–71.

Concurrent with the publication of these fragments, Lessing published his essay "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power" in 1777, the essay that carved out his famous "ditch." He wrote:

Who will deny (not I) that the reports of these [biblical] miracles and prophecies are as reliable as historical truths ever can be? But if they are only as reliable as this, why are they treated as if they were infinitely more reliable? And in what way? In this way, that some-thing quite different and much greater is founded upon them than it is legitimate to found upon truths historically proved. If no historical truth can be demonstrated [by the proofs of reason], then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truth. That is: accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason.²⁶

Here Lessing had created a problem in Protestant theology of no mean significance. He had uncovered the epistemological roots of scriptural theology and poured in the acid of Cartesian certainty, poisoning the whole tree of Protestant theology.

Lessing was espousing the basic principle of rationalist philosophy, explained earlier by Rene Descartes (1596-1650): "We reject all modes of knowledge that are merely probable (*tantum probabiles*), and resolve to believe only that which is perfectly known, and in respect of which doubt is not possible."²⁷ In other words, Lessing argued that since humans cannot obtain historical knowledge with absolute certainty—history always being plagued by doubts, both real and potential—therefore, the knowledge of God and his revelation cannot depend on the historical accounts in the Bible. This is Lessing's ditch and a train wreck for the Protestant church if there ever was one! Many, however, embraced rationalism and Lessing. Heinrich Heine even compared Lessing's accomplishments to those of Luther with these words in 1852:

After Luther freed us from tradition and made the Bible into the sole source of Christianity, there arose . . . a rigid worship of the word, and the letter of the Bible ruled just as tyrannically as once tradition had. Lessing was the one who contributed most to our liberation from the tyranny of the letter [of Scripture]. . . . Lessing, too, had his allies, but he was the most forceful in the fight against the letter [of Scripture].²⁸

²⁶ Lessing, *Theological Writings*, 53.

²⁷ Rule II in *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*. Quotation from Rene Descartes, "Rules for the Guidance of our Native Powers," in *Descartes Philosophical Writings*, ed. and tr. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Modern Library, 1958), 4.

²⁸ Heine, *History of Religion*, 74-75.

III. Who Revived Confessional Lutheranism?

Confessional Lutheranism revived from the quadruple attacks of Roman Catholicism, Calvinism, pietism, and rationalism with some difficulty in two stages. The first stage was a conservative religious revival in the German states in the early nineteenth century known as the *Erweckungsbewegung* (the “Awakening Movement”). It parallels and shares some aspects with what is called the “Second Great Awakening” of Protestantism in America. It also shares many aspects with pietism, which has led some scholars to call it “neo-pietism.”

I think that our Missouri Synod historians have not paid enough attention to the *Erweckungsbewegung*. Referring to this movement, C. S. Meyer stated in *Moving Frontiers*, “The processes by which this happened have not yet been definitively studied.”²⁹ Meyer wrote that in 1964. Since that time a number of studies on the *Erweckungsbewegung*, or neo-pietism, have appeared in English.³⁰ In one of these studies, Walter Conser explained that the *Erweckungsbewegung* had its roots in the older pietist tradition, but was transformed by its encounter with romanticism.³¹ Conser wrote, “Above all else, German romanticism was a break from rationalism and a critique of the Enlightenment.”³² Describing the romanticists, Conser stated, “Their celebration of creative expression, their apotheosis of artistic insight . . . and their endorsement of imagination and intuition again signified a break with the Enlightenment.”³³ Conser observed, “This romantic sense for the mysterious contained a renewed historical consciousness, one having implications for politics as well as religion.”³⁴ Conser described the regional variations of the *Erweckungsbewegung* and then concluded:

Scriptural study and personal piety, Christian unity and confessional differences, the appeal to tradition and the experience of faith, the

²⁹ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 61.

³⁰ Walter H. Conser, Jr., *Church and Confession: Conservative Theologians in Germany, England, and America, 1815–1866*, Mercer Classroom Series (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984); Robert M. Bigler, *The Politics of German Protestantism: The Rise of the Protestant Church Elite in Prussia, 1815–1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); and Crouner and Christianson, eds. *The Spirituality of the German Awakening, The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003).

³¹ On the influence of 19th-century romanticism on religion, see also Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism, Studies in Early Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³² Conser, *Church and Confession*, 28.

³³ Conser, *Church and Confession*, 29.

³⁴ Conser, *Church and Confession*, 29.

claims of authority and the politics of conscience—all these features were present . . . and all would again come into play between the years 1830 and 1866. The *Erweckungsbewegung* had a strong but complex effect on religious life in Germany.³⁵

Some of the leaders of this conservative revival of the Christian religion included Johann Ursperger of Basel, Gottfried Krummacher of Wuppertal, Theodor Fliedner of Kaiserswerth, and Baron von Kottwitz of Berlin with his circle of friends, including August Tholuck, August Neander, Ludwig von Gerlach, and Ernst Hengstenberg.³⁶ We should observe that the *Erweckungsbewegung* was, for the most part, ecumenical in extent, if not by intent. Remembering the early days of this revival, Gottfried Thomasius wrote:

We were then all one. Herrnhutter, pietist, Lutheran, Reformed, Catholic were unanimously together and rejoiced in their Lord and Savior. One knew nothing of confessional differences. It was really a beautiful age of revitalized faith.³⁷

What happened to the “beautiful age of revitalized faith” and harmony between Christians of all types? It led to the second stage in the revival of a specifically Lutheran faith. Thomasius continued, referring to his experience in Bavaria:

As soon as we began to investigate the road along which God had led us, about the testimonies out of which our faith had arisen, and about the historical roots of our church’s past and present condition, we became aware of standing in the very middle of Lutheranism. Our Christian faith was the Lutheran faith, exactly as the Lutheran church is and aspires to be. . . . In this way we became Lutherans voluntarily, from the inside out.³⁸

Some scholars have noted how the observance between 1817 and 1846 of a series of tercentenary celebrations connected to Luther and the Reformation contributed to the revival of the Lutheran church as a distinct

³⁵ Conser, *Church and Confession*, 38.

³⁶ These are the leaders mentioned in Crowner and Christianson, 16–19; this reader includes writings by August Tholuck, Theodor Fliedner, Johann Wichern, and Friedrich von Bodelschwingh.

³⁷ Quote from Conser, *Church and Confession*, 32; from Gottfried Thomasius, *Die Wiedererwachen des evangelischen Lebens in der lutherische Kirche Bayerns. Ein süddeutscher Kirchengeschichte, 1800–1840* (Erlangen: Deichert, 1867), 144.

³⁸ Quote from Conser, 38; from Thomasius, 244–245.

confession in Germany.³⁹ This is a point that should be remembered as the quinquacentenary of the Reformation approaches us in 2017. The leaders of the nineteenth-century confessional Lutheran revival included Johann Scheibel of Breslau,⁴⁰ Wilhelm Löhe of Bavaria, Theodore Kliefoth of Mecklenburg, Adolf Harless and other members of the University of Erlangen faculty, August Vilmar of Hesse, Andreas Rudelbach of Saxony, Heinrich Guericke at Halle, Ludwig Petri of Hanover, Claus Harms of Kiel, and Franz Delitzsch of Erlangen.⁴¹

A few Lutheran leaders decided that an exodus with their disciples was a better approach than confessional revival, namely, Martin Stephan of Saxony, and the Prussian pastors Johann Grabau, Johann Kilian, and August Kavel.⁴² Stephan went to Missouri, Kilian to Texas, Grabau to New York, and Kavel went to Australia.

IV. Walther as a Father of Confessional Lutheranism

C.F.W. Walther was a product of the revival of confessional Lutheranism in Germany, not its progenitor. His spiritual development followed the two-stage pattern I have just outlined. While studying at the University of Leipzig, Walther joined a group of the "Awakened" who met for group Bible study and prayer, patterned after similar groups started by

³⁹ See Tappert, *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America 1840-1880*, 9; and Martin Schmidt, "Die innere Einheit der Erweckungsfrömmigkeit im Uebergangsstadium zum lutherischen Konfessionalismus," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 74 (1949), 17-28.

⁴⁰ See Martin Kiunke, *Johann Gottfried Scheibel und sein Ringen um die Kirche der lutherischen Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985); Manfred Roensch, *Zeugen der Ersten Stunde: Johann Gottfried Scheibel, Eduard Kellner, & Friedrich Brunn* (Oberursel, Taunus: Inge Hartmann und Sohn, 1980); and Peter Hauptmann, ed., *Gerettete Kirche: Studien zum Anliegen des Breslauer Lutheraners Johann Gottfried Scheibel (1783-1843)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1987). An older work dealing with the Breslau Lutherans is Georg Froböss, *Drei Lutheraner an der Universität Breslau: Die Professoren Scheibel, Steffens, Huschke . . .* (Breslau: Evangelische Buchhandlung Gerhard Kaufmann, 1911). An important work on the development of the Breslau church polity, which was the first free Lutheran church in 19th century Germany, is Jobst Schöne, *Kirche und Kirchenregiment im Wirken und Denken George Philipp Eduard Huschkes* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1969), which was Schöne's dissertation at the University of Münster.

⁴¹ See Conser, *Church and Confession*, 54-55, and Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 65-86.

⁴² For a useful study of the migrations to North America, see Historical Research Team of the Eastern District of the LCMS, *Confessional Lutheran Migrations to America* (n.p., 1988). Regarding Kavel's migration to Australia, see David Schubert, *Kavel's People: From Prussia to South Australia* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1985); also see Everard Leske, *For Faith and Freedom: The Story of Lutherans and Lutheranism in Australia 1838-1996* (Adelaide: Open Book Publishers, 1996).

Francke.⁴³ Members of this group who would play a role in LCMS history included, besides C.F.W. Walther, Ernst G.W. Keyl, Ernst M. Bürger, Theodor Julius Brohm, Ottomar Fürbringer, Johann F. Bünger, Otto Hermann Walther (Carl's older brother), Georg A. Schieferdecker, Carl L. Geyer, and Johann Gönner. Of this group, Walter Forster observed:

As for doctrinal position, the group, in the true spirit of the *Erweckung*, had none for a long time. Then, in the course of their private discussions, the question came up: What are we? Lutheran, Reformed, or something quite different? The majority reached the *questionable* conclusion that they were Lutherans.⁴⁴

As Walther's biographers have demonstrated, Martin Stephan should get a great deal of credit for converting the "Awakened" Walther into a follower of Luther and a firm defender of the Lutheran Confessions.⁴⁵ Walther himself later attested to Stephan's loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions. After quoting Stephan's personal confession of faith, Walther noted that Stephan's Dresden congregation had in 1833 made "the same simple conservative Lutheran confession; by appealing, and that by name, to all recognized faithful teachers of our Church from Luther down to the most recent times."⁴⁶ Here we can see the origin of the seemingly artless method of Walther's theology. When there was a disagreement or debate, Walther would craft a simple thesis, and then appeal by name with quotations to all recognized faithful teachers of the Lutheran church from Luther down to recent times.

Although Walther was not the father of the confessional Lutheran revival in Germany, he, along with Stephan, Grabau, and Löhe, et al., should receive credit for introducing this type of Lutheranism to North America. More significantly, Walther could lay claim to inventing a specific type of confessional Lutheranism that elevated the Lutheran Confessions into the chief church authority, after the pattern of Chemnitz's *Iudicium* and the Formula of Concord. This is how it happened. Let me warn you that I am now going to upset some historical "apple carts."

⁴³ D. H. Steffens, *Doctor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther* (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917), 36-44; see also Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri 1839-1841* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 36-53, and August R. Suelflow, *Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C.F.W. Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 22-25.

⁴⁴ Forster, *Zion*, 39 (emphasis mine); cf. Steffens, *Doctor Walther*, 51.

⁴⁵ Steffens, *Doctor Walther*, 47-50, 95-99; cf. Forster, *Zion*, 27-36.

⁴⁶ Steffens, *Doctor Walther* 98; Steffens quotes here from C.F.W. Walther, *Kurzer Lebenslauf des weiland ehrwürdigen pastor Joh. Frieder. Bünger* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1882), about page 22.

After Martin Stephan was removed from his office of bishop over the Saxon congregations on May 30, 1839,⁴⁷ Pastor Gotthold Loeber of Altenburg, Missouri, wrote to Heinrich von Rohr of Freistadt, Wisconsin, informing him of Stephan's deposal.⁴⁸ Von Rohr was the leader of the Prussian emigrant society that had emigrated with Grabau to Wisconsin and Buffalo. Loeber and the other Saxon pastors had met with von Rohr in the fall of 1838 as they were on their way to Bremerhaven, in order to see if the two groups could merge or cooperate.⁴⁹ Cooperation was not possible in 1838, but since Stephan was gone by June 1839, Loeber wondered whether it made sense for the two groups to reconsider cooperation.

As part of the negotiations for cooperation, Pastor Loeber sent to von Rohr or Grabau a copy of the "Church Principles and Parish Order," which the Saxons in Missouri had accepted as their church constitution in 1839 and 1840.⁵⁰ The contents of this church order are explained, for the first time in English, by Charles Schaum in the introductory chapter to the latest edition of Walther's *Law and Gospel*.⁵¹

This church order is significant for LCMS history because it was the "first shot fired" in what was to become the battle between the Missouri Synod and the Buffalo Synod over the doctrine of church and ministry, with Buffalo eventually being the "loser." What is very odd is that none of

⁴⁷ Forster, *Zion*, 418.

⁴⁸ This story is told in a three-part series by Roy Suelflow, "The Relations of the Missouri Synod with the Buffalo Synod up to 1866," Pts. 1-3 *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 27 no. 1 (April 1954): 1-19; 27 no. 2 (July 1954): 57-73; 27 no. 3 (October 1954): 97-132. Hereafter *Concordia Historical Institute* will be abbreviated with *CHIQ*.

⁴⁹ Historical Research Team of the Eastern District of the LCMS, *Confessional Lutheran Migrations to America*, 22. Wilhelm Iwan notes that the meeting between Heinrich von Rohr and the Saxon pastors took place in Magdeburg, see: Wilhelm Iwan, *Die altlutherische Auswanderung um die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols., Johann-Hess Institute, Breslau (Ludwigsburg: Eichhorn Verlag Lothar Kallenberg, 1943); in English: Wilhelm Iwan, *The Old Lutheran Emigration of the Mid-19th Century . . .*, 3 vols. (Mequon, WI: Freistadt Historical Society, 2003).

⁵⁰ A copy of this "Church Principles and Parish Order" was published in the published minutes of the Buffalo Synod: *Fünfter Synodal-Brief von der Synode der aus Preussen ausgewanderten evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, versammelte zu Buffalo, N.Y. von 23. Juni bis 5. Juli 1856* (Buffalo: Druck von Friedrich Reienecke, Eck von Main- und Geneseestrasse, 1856), 49-52. Reference to the role played by this document can be found in Roy Suelflow, 7-8, and Wilhelm Iwan, *Die altlutherische Auswanderung um die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*.

⁵¹ C. F. W. Walther, *Law and Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible*, ed. Charles P. Schaum, tr. Christian C. Tiews (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), xxiii-xxiv. Schaum has also translated the 1839-1840 "Church Principles and Parish Order" into English, and I have encouraged him to seek its publication in the near future.

the Missouri Synod historians mention this church order, except for one article by Roy Suelflow in 1954.⁵² Perhaps Missouri Synod historians have not been willing to admit that on the basis of the 1839–1840 church order Grabau had grounds for complaint against the Saxons. After receiving this “Church Principles and Parish Order,” Grabau drafted his reply, dated December 1, 1840. It was titled *Hirtenbrief* and was received both by the Saxon pastors in Perry County and Trinity congregation in Saint Louis.⁵³ Trinity congregation took up the letter at its meeting of February 22, 1841, but did not respond to Grabau, probably because it had no pastor at the time.

The Perry County pastors did not reply by letter to Grabau immediately, waiting until July 3, 1843, to send a response. Before they sent their letter of reply, they had to work out the theological challenges in Grabau’s *Hirtenbrief*. Thus the first response to Grabau’s *Hirtenbrief* was not two years later, but four months later, on April 15 and 21, 1841, when Walther debated his “Eight Theses on the Church” in the log cabin at Altenburg.

There are several points in Walther’s Altenburg Theses that are a direct answer to Grabau’s *Hirtenbrief*. First, there was Grabau’s assertion that the Lutheran fathers would never allow the practice that:

Every congregation, or even every group that falls away from the true church and honors itself with the name “congregation,” could appoint someone in its midst to the spiritual office as it wishes.⁵⁴

If anything was offensive to the Saxons *sans episcopus*, this was it! It implied that the Saxons were no longer part of the “true church”! So in Altenburg Theses I–VI, Walther defended the Saxons as being part of the “true church” and that “even heterodox companies have church power; even among them the goods of the Church may be validly administered, [and] the ministry established.”⁵⁵

⁵² Roy Suelflow, “Missouri and Buffalo”, 7–8.

⁵³ Carl S. Munding, *Government in the Missouri Synod: The Genesis of Decentralized Government in the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 123 n. 16. The *Hirtenbrief* can be found in English translation in Johannes A. A. Grabau, “*Hirtenbrief*,” tr. William Schumacher, in Kolb and Manteufel, eds., *Soli Deo Gloria: Essays on C.F.W. Walther in Memory of August Sueflow* (n.p., n.d.), 141–154. The Saxon pastor’s reply can be found *ibid.*, 155–176; an introductory essay to the exchange of letters can be found *ibid.*, 133–140.

⁵⁴ Grabau, “*Hirtenbrief*,” 150, under Section III.

⁵⁵ Forster, *Zion*, 523–524.

The second assertion of Grabau was the matter of authority in the church. Grabau stated:

What is and is not opposed to God's Word is not decided by any single member of the church but by the church itself in its symbols, church orders, and synods.⁵⁶

Walther's response was his Eighth Thesis in the Altenburg Debate, which stated:

The orthodox Church is chiefly to be judged by the common, orthodox, public confession to which its members acknowledge and confess themselves to be pledged.⁵⁷

So instead of Grabau's lineup of "symbols, church orders, and synodical decrees," Walther posited only the "common, orthodox, public confession" by which the church is to be chiefly judged. This principle of doctrinal authority in the church agrees with the intent of the authors of the Book of Concord, who stated:

Our intention was only to have a *single, universally accepted, certain, and common* form of doctrine which all our Evangelical churches subscribe and from which and according to which, *because it is drawn from the Word of God, all other writings* are to be approved and accepted, judged and regulated.⁵⁸

Walther's brand of "confessional Lutheranism" was not a confusing mixture of Lutheran confessions and "theological formulations, liturgical customs, and types of piety" "woven out of a combination of orthodoxist and pietist strands."⁵⁹ Walther's Altenburg Thesis Eight was plain and simple, easy to grasp, easy to use, and ready-made for the layman in the pew and the prairie pastors who had gotten by without a university education. The primary historical significance of the log cabin debate at Altenburg in 1841 was not the doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers" or the survival of the Perry County colony.⁶⁰ Its primary significance was the

⁵⁶ Grabau, "Hirtenbrief," 145; this is point 8 under Section One.

⁵⁷ Forster, *Zion*, 525.

⁵⁸ *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, tr. & ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 506 (FC SD Rule and Norm, 10) [hereafter Tappert]. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁹ Theodore Tappert, *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America 1840-1880*, 8.

⁶⁰ I do not intend to discredit previous discussions in the literature about the role of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and the Perry County colonists' unhappiness with their new home and thoughts about returning to Germany. This undoubtedly played some part in the discussions leading up to, and the actual discussion at, the Altenburg Debate. My point is that the Altenburg Theses themselves,

establishment of the Lutheran Confessions as the chief theological authority among the Saxon emigrants, in the sense in which that was understood by the authors of the Book of Concord.

After Altenburg, Walther was consistent in his confessional method. When Gotthold Loeber and Walther replied to Grabau's letter in July 1843, they quoted the Apology of the Augsburg Confession against Grabau's use of the old German church orders.⁶¹ When asked by Löhe's *Sendlinge*, Adam Ernst, about what he would require of a new church body, Walther replied on August 21, 1845: "1. That the Synod organize itself, in addition to the Word of God, on the basis of all the Symbols of our church."⁶² The constitution adopted by the Missouri Synod in 1847 included several provisions that pertained to the Lutheran Confessions. Walther's influence here is obvious. The most important provision was Article II, part 2 under "Conditions under which a congregation may join Synod and remain a member":

Acceptance of all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church . . . as the pure and unadulterated explanation and presentation of the Word of God.⁶³

Other provisions included: that a purpose of the synod was to "make possible the promotion of special church projects" such as the publication of the Book of Concord (Article I.6);⁶⁴ that one condition of membership was "exclusive use of doctrinally pure church books and schoolbooks (agendas, hymnals, readers, etc.)," (Article II.4)⁶⁵ whose doctrine was presumably to be judged by the Lutheran Confessions; that candidates both for the pastoral and teaching offices were to be examined orally regarding their knowledge of the Lutheran Confessions (Articles IV.10b and

authored by Walther, are primarily a response to Grabau's *Hirtenbrief* and that, in the process of developing them, Walther discovered, explicated, and/or applied the theological method of confessional authority that was characteristic of his type of "confessional Lutheranism."

⁶¹ Kolb and Manteufel, eds., *Soli Deo Gloria: Essays on C.F.W. Walther in Memory of August Sueflow*, 160.

⁶² Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 143; cf. Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod 1847-1947* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 86.

⁶³ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 149-150, which is the 1854 version; cf. William Gustave Polack, "Our First Synodical Constitution," *CHIQ* 16 no. 1 (April 1943): 3, which is the 1847 version.

⁶⁴ Polack, "First Constitution", 3; cf. Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 150, where this clause became part of Article I.3.

⁶⁵ Polack, "First Constitution", 3; cf. Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 150.

IV.10f);⁶⁶ and that both pastors and teachers were to be installed with a solemn pledge to all of the Lutheran Confessions (Articles IV.10f and IV.11).⁶⁷

Walther later wrote two essays in which he forcefully argued that subscription to the Lutheran Confessions was necessary for all Lutherans. The first was an article in 1849 titled "Why Should We, Even in This Day, Hold Unflinchingly to the Confessional Writings of Our Evangelical Lutheran Church?"⁶⁸ The second was an essay in 1858 titled "Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers, and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of Our Church?"⁶⁹

Finally, in the battle that defined the end of his career, Walther fought for the doctrine of election found in the Formula of Concord, Article XI against the teaching of many of the old orthodox Lutheran theologians. This was an unusual stance for a theologian so well-versed in these theologians, who had taught dogmatics from Baier's *Compendium*, and who had been accused of being a "citation theologian" because of his seemingly artless use of citations from the orthodox Lutheran fathers.⁷⁰ But when "push came to shove" between the Book of Concord and the orthodox theologians, the latter got the "shove."

Walther's theological method was summed up in these words in 1881 in one of his essays on predestination:

Whenever a controversy arises concerning the question, whether a doctrine is Lutheran, we must not ask: "What does this or that *father* of

⁶⁶ Polack, "First Constitution", 8-9; cf. Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 154-155, where these clauses became part of Articles V.A.13 and V.B.2.

⁶⁷ Polack, "First Constitution", 9-10; Cf. Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 154, where these clauses became part of Articles V.A.13 and V.A.14.

⁶⁸ C.F.W. Walther, "Warum sollen wir an den Bekenntnisschriften unserer evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche auch und noch jetzt unerschütterlich festhalten?" *Der Lutheraner* 5:11 (January 23, 1849): 81-84.

⁶⁹ *Concordia Theological Monthly* 18 no. 4 (April 1947): 241-253; cf. other translations in Theodore Tappert, *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America 1840-1880*, 55-77; and C. F. W. Walther, "Confessional Subscription," in C.F.W. Walther, *Essays for the Church*, 2 vols., ed. August R. Suelflow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 19-29.

⁷⁰ The dogmatics used by Walther in his classroom was J. W. Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, ed. C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1879). Robert Preus addresses the issue of Walther's "citation method" in "Walther the Dogmatician," *C.F.W. Walther: The American Luther*, ed. Arthur Drevlow (Mankato, MN: Walther Press, 1987), 149-160. Walther himself addressed this issue in "Foreword to the 1862 Volume: Do We Lack Creative Activity?," *Editorials from Lehre und Wehre*, tr. H. A. Bouman, *Selected Writings of C.F.W. Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 102-114; original in *Lehre und Wehre* 8 no. 1 (January 1862): 1-6.

the Lutheran church teach in his private writings?" for he also may have fallen into error; on the contrary, we must ask: "What does the public Confession of the Lutheran Church teach concerning the controverted point?" for in her confession our Church has recorded *for all times* what she believes, teaches, and confesses.⁷¹

V. Was Walther Right?

Walther believed that the Lutheran church had found its perennial theology in the Book of Concord. Was he right? Or are the Lutheran Confessions just a time-bound expression of a branch of the Christian church—a church whose provisional job is to heal the breach of the 16th century and be the agent for the visible unity of the whole church, as some "Evangelical-Catholic" Lutherans have argued?⁷²

One answer comes from the *Bethel Confession* of August 1933, whose chief authors were Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hermann Sasse. In response to the question "What is Reformation?" the Bethel Confession replied:

The Reformation is essentially a return to Holy Scripture, *a bowing under Holy Scripture*. In it, Martin Luther is the teacher of Holy Scripture that is *obedient* to the word.⁷³

Those of us who have studied the Book of Concord for years know that Luther and the other Lutheran confessors did indeed bow to the authority of Scriptures. Luther and the confessors did not add to, remove, twist, topologically modify, explain away, or evade the intent of any doctrine in the canonical Scriptures. Furthermore, Luther and the confessors faithfully observed the relationships between those doctrines and their relative emphases in the Bible.

The obedience of Luther and the Lutheran confessors to the Scriptures is perhaps the most repulsive thing about them to the modern man and

⁷¹ C.F.W. Walther, *The Controversy Concerning Predestination*, tr. August Crull (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1881; reprint, Concordia Seminary Press, Fort Wayne, IN, 1993), 5–6 (emphasis mine). Walther's full discussion of the predestination doctrine, with reference to Formula of Concord XI, may be found in: C.F.W. Walther, *Essays for the Church*, 2:106–219.

⁷² See for example Richard John Neuhaus, "On the Occasion of the First Awarding of the Arthur Carl Piepkorn Prize," October 1984, in Plekon and Wiecher, *The Church: Selected Writings of Arthur Carl Piepkorn*, 2nd ed., 2 vol. (Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 2006), 1: 337.

⁷³ See German text in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Kirchenkampf und Finkenwalde: Resolutionen, Aufsätze, Rundbriefe*, ed. E. Bethge, 2nd ed. (Munich: Kaiser, 1965), 95 (emphasis mine). An English summary with some translated quotes is available online. See http://www.lutheranwiki.org/Bethel_Confession (accessed December 2010).

woman.⁷⁴ Because of their obedience to the Scriptures, modern man sees Luther and the Lutheran Confessions as medieval, not modern. This, at least, was the judgment of Adolf von Harnack.⁷⁵ Whether medieval or modern, the Lutheran Confessions are the product of a "conscience bound by Scripture," to use Luther's battle-cry at Worms. If your conscience is bound by Scripture, like Luther, then you will agree that Walther was right to uphold the Book of Concord as the church's perennial theology.

More difficult to answer is the question whether or not Walther was right to uphold the Book of Concord in light of its challenges from rationalism and modern thought. After Lessing's ditch, it would seem that all historical assertions in the Scriptures, including miracles, prophecies, and the resurrection, have to be relegated to the dustbin of "uncertainty" or "open questions." Modern theology has proceeded under this assumption and scuttled not only the Book of Concord, but all Protestant confessions.

Francis Pieper answered the rationalist problem of certainty by appealing to the doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*⁷⁶ and by asserting that "theology is the perfect science, the only reliable science on earth."⁷⁷ Frankly, these answers of Pieper did not solve the problems posed by

⁷⁴ For Walther's defense of his obedience to Scripture, see "Foreword to the 1875 Volume: Are We Guilty of Despising Scholarship?" *Editorials from Lehre und Wehre*, 122-142.

⁷⁵ This was the conclusion of Adolf von Harnack in his magisterial *History of Dogma*; see *Adolf von Harnack: Liberal Theology at Its Height*, ed. Martin Rumscheidt, *The Making of Modern Theology*, gen. ed. John de Gruchy (London: Collins Publishers, 1989), 251-268. Harnack saw Luther's "religion" as new, but his attachment to "dogma," with its authority and obedience, as medieval and an "Old Catholic" phenomenon. Harnack's peer, Ernst Troeltsch, made a more complex assessment of Luther, with specific application to his social teachings. See Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress: The Significance of Protestantism for the Rise of the Modern World*, Fortress Texts in Modern Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); and Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols., tr. Olive Wyon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 2:461-575. Troeltsch's assessment was that both Lutheranism and Calvinism perpetuated the medieval idea of authority, but removed many obstacles for the rise of the modern world and, in this respect, Calvinism was more progressive than Lutheranism; see Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress*, 10-11.

⁷⁶ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 1:106-129, 307-317. I attempted to examine the problems of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum* in Francis Pieper's theology in my thesis: "The doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum* as a Calvinistic element in Lutheran theology," Concordia Theological Seminary, M.Div. thesis, 1983. David P. Scaer comments on the role of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum* in Robert Preus' theology in "The Theology of Robert David Preus," *CTQ* 74 (January/April 2010): 75-92.

⁷⁷ Pieper, 1:107.

rationalism. Although that defect does not affect the rest of his theology, which is perfectly orthodox, his approach is not persuasive to anyone who has imbibed from the fountains of modern theology or philosophy. A more useful response to rationalism and modern thought is found in Kurt Marquart's essay, "The Sacramentality of Truth":

In mathematics and logic . . . we can often "prove" things with a deductive certainty which is the envy of other disciplines. Certainly the wranglings over historical interpretations, not to mention theological dogmas, are quite untidy by comparison. Yet the apparent superiority of mathematics and logic rests on a sort of conjurer's trick . . . Nothing can appear in the conclusions which we have not first put into the premises. Empirical natural science, though not quite as tidy as mathematics, is not nearly as "messy" as the humanities. It is simply incomparably easier to describe the "behavior" of hydrogen and oxygen atoms, than to describe that of Julius Caesar or Marie Antoinette, especially when they are dead and gone. The decreasing rigor of proof possible as we ascend the scale of human relevance and value attests [to] the complexity and importance of the human reality, not its triviality.⁷⁸

In non-philosophical terms this means that the most important decisions you have to make in life are the most complex and the most freighted with uncertainty. There is the decision to buy a particular house or car, whose problems become evident only after you have made a purchase. There is the decision to buy particular stocks, bonds, or other investments, whose problems become evident only after you have made the purchase. There is the decision to get married to a particular person, whom you know to some degree, but hardly to the extent required to have absolute certainty about the choice. The decision to believe, i.e., to have faith in God's Word and promises, is comparable to the marriage decision. You accept and weigh all the evidence that you can get and then choose. Not to choose is to choose.

Descartes and Lessing, in setting up the criterion of absolute certainty, were arguing for an epistemological position that philosophers today call

⁷⁸ Kurt Marquart, "The Sacramentality of Truth," in *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Krispin, and Vieker (Dearborn, MI: Nagel Festschrift Committee, 1990), 89-90. In this essay, Marquart shows his appreciation for Karl Popper's "critical rationalism" and Tarski's rehabilitation of the correspondence theory of truth. For an accessible collection of essays on these subjects, see Karl Popper, *Popper Selections*, ed. David Miller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

"infallibilism."⁷⁹ Amateur philosophers and students new to philosophy often fall prey to "infallibilist" arguments. Clergy and theologians are amateur philosophers and we have been fooled by Lessing's Ditch for over two hundred years.

A better way out of Lessing's Ditch is suggested by American philosopher Alvin Goldman, professor of philosophy at Rutgers University. Goldman is a leading proponent of "reliabilism," which posits "degrees of reasonableness" instead of the false dilemma of either certainty or uncertainty.⁸⁰ Also useful is the work of Richard Swinburne, professor of philosophy at Oxford, who has demonstrated that the existence of God is the most "reasonable" explanation for the universe, though it cannot be "proven" by traditional logic or scientific means.⁸¹

Before his passing, Kurt Marquart told me that he sincerely regretted not having completed the first volume in the *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* dealing with *prolegomena*. In his introductory paragraph to his proposal for that book, Marquart stated:

The two great creed-and-confession-making periods of antiquity and the Reformation dealt with "the highest Mystery in heaven and earth" (Trinity/Christology) and Soteriology, respectively. Today the main battle is about prolegomena—the apostolic-prophetic foundation of the Christian faith and church (Eph. 2:20). At stake are not technical details, but the very possibility of truth, doctrine, and revelation.⁸²

I agree with Marquart. The heirs of Walther still have their work cut out for them in the field of *prolegomena*. The fact that we can still work on these problems, and make progress on them, proves that confessional Lutheranism is not dead—yet.

⁷⁹ See the brief and accessible discussion of "infallibilism" in Stephen Law, *Philosophy* (London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd., 2007), 58–59.

⁸⁰ For a technical discussion of these problems in philosophy, see George Pappas, ed., *Justification and Knowledge* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1979). A paper by Alvin Goldman is included, pp. 1–24, titled "What is Justified Belief?"

⁸¹ See, e.g., Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1993); Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁸² Kurt Marquart, "Proposed Outline for *Confessional Dogmatics* volume on Prolegomena" (unpublished paper dated March 28, 2000).