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Dr. C. F. W. Walther as Theologian

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WHEN we try to depict Dr. Walther as theologian, we must, above all, discuss his doctrine of justification, for his attitude toward this doctrine supplies the clue to his whole line of action in his life so full of controversy.

Walther recognized the doctrine of justification, or the doctrine that a sinner is justified before God and saved by grace through faith in Christ, as the focal point of all Christian doctrines. All other doctrines serve this doctrine as premises, or they flow from it as conclusions. Uncompromisingly Walther attacked all errors, because he knew that by all of them this central doctrine was endangered. In this doctrine was centered also his controversy concerning the true doctrine of the church.¹ Walther points out that the doctrine of justification is annulled if, for example, men teach that there is a visible church outside which there is no salvation or that the efficacy of absolution depends on the ordination of the administrant. He made the same point also with regard to other false teachings which he refuted, as, for example, those of chiliasm, the physical operation of the Sacraments, synergism, and the like. "Only then," he wrote, "will the battle against false doctrine gain practical significance for the individual Christian when he realizes that this doctrine cannot be preserved in its purity while other teachings are being falsified."² Walther lived in this doctrine both as a Christian and as a theologian. Even his opponents conceded that he was able to present this doctrine convincingly. On this doctrine Walther delivered most of his lectures in his so-called Luther Hour. In our theological seminary he showed his students, above all, how to preach this doctrine rightly, pointing out to them both the right way and in graphic description

¹ *The Lutheran Doctrine of Justification*; an essay delivered at Addison, Ill., 1859. Hereafter referred to as *LDJ*.

² *Synodical Conference Report*, 1872, p. 23. Hereafter referred to as *SCR*.

also the usual aberrations. We believe that it is not saying too much when we declare that after Luther and Chemnitz no other teacher of our church has attested the doctrine of justification so impressively as did Walther. It was particularly in this doctrine that he followed Luther, and he united into one shining beam of light all other bright rays on this doctrine radiating from our later dogmaticians.

As we present Walther's position on justification, we shall first stress his general characterization of justification with regard to its importance and other points; and then we shall emphasize the special points that he stressed particularly in order to preserve the doctrine of justification in its purity against such errors as confronted him from time to time.

According to Walther, the doctrine of justification is the characteristic mark of the Christian religion, by which it distinguishes itself from all other so-called religions. He writes:

When we speak of justification, we speak of the *Christian religion*, for the doctrine of the Christian religion is none other than God's revelation concerning the way in which sinners are justified before God and saved through the redemption made by Christ Jesus. All other religions teach other ways which are supposed to lead to heaven; only the Christian religion points out a different way to heaven by its doctrine of justification. This indeed is a way the world has never heard nor known, namely, the counsel of salvation that was hidden in the mind of God before the foundation of the world was laid. (*SCR*, p. 21.)

Again he writes: "This doctrine is the heavenly sun of the Christian religion, by which it distinguishes itself from all other religions as light is distinguished from darkness" (*Gospel Sermons*, p. 278). Therefore, whoever attacks the doctrine of justification attacks the whole Christian doctrine, the whole Bible, and the whole Christian religion. Where this doctrine is perverted, there another way to salvation is taught, and this means another religion. To fight for the doctrine of justification and for Holy Scripture and the Christian religion amounts to one and the same thing. Without the doctrine of justification the Christian religion is like a watch without a spring. All other doctrines lose their value if the doctrine of justification is corrupted. When the founda-

tion gives way, the whole building caves in. When the doctrine of justification falls, then the whole Christian doctrine also collapses. In that case the church becomes a mere reform school. Furthermore, as regards the understanding of Scripture let me say: Theologians who err in regard to the doctrine of justification are sitting not in Scripture, but before a closed door, no matter how diligently they may study and quote the Bible. To those who do not understand the doctrine of justification the Bible is merely a book of moral instructions with all manner of strange side issues.

The doctrine of justification is therefore the "chief topic of Christian doctrine" (Ap. IV [(II)] 2).

As long as anyone has progressed no farther than to think that the doctrine of justification is just another important article of faith, he is still blind. If anyone does not know the true doctrine of justification, it does not mean a thing that he praises Christ or divine grace or the means of grace, for whatever is taught in the church must serve this doctrine. This does not mean that this doctrine should or could be treated exclusively, for all revealed doctrines must be taught with the greatest emphasis; but it does mean that even when we speak of hell it must be our aim to show our hearers how they may be delivered from hell.

It is absolutely necessary for everyone rightly to know the doctrine of justification in order that he may be saved. Christians are people who know the article of justification, that is, they believe that God forgives them their sins by grace, for Christ's sake. It is this knowledge, or rather this trust, which makes a person a Christian. Walther writes: "Upon this article our salvation rests, and therefore it is absolutely necessary for every Christian. If anyone would not rightly know and believe this doctrine, it would not do him any good if he knew correctly all other doctrines, as, for instance, those of the Holy Trinity, of the person of Christ, and the like." (*SCR*, p. 21.) This doctrine is therefore rightly called the article with which the church stands and falls.

For what is the church? It is the aggregate of believing Christians. The church is there where Christ governs by grace. But He rules man inwardly by offering and imparting to him His grace. Where He thus occupies the heart, there is His kingdom. Wherever therefore there are regenerated, quickened Christians, there is His church. But no one becomes a true, regenerated

Christian without the doctrine of justification. Every other kind of doctrine can indeed produce egregious Pharisees, but not Christians. A person becomes a Christian only when through the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart he learns to know that he has been truly redeemed by Christ and has the forgiveness of his sins, a reconciled heavenly Father, a righteousness that avails before God, and that therefore he may die in peace. (*SCR*, pp. 24 f.)

In another place he writes: "When Luther says that without the article of justification the church cannot exist even for an hour, he does not exaggerate; for the church is not an external organization, but the communion of believers. Wherever there are no believers, there also the church does not exist."

If therefore the church is to be established and preserved, it is necessary, above all, that the doctrine of justification be proclaimed. Through the preaching of this doctrine, the Reformation of the church was effected, while all other means that had been tried before to reform the church failed. It was this doctrine which also in other lands and at other times reformed the church. (*SCR*, pp. 25—27.) If we want to establish the church today, this can be accomplished only by the proclamation of the doctrine of justification. Congregations are established not by "eloquent" or "popular" or "dignified" parsons, but solely by pastors who preach justification. To know and be able to preach this doctrine makes up for what they may lack in talent and learning. (*SCR*, pp. 27 f.) If the church had the choice between pastors whose training is imperfect, but who preach and live the doctrine of justification, and eloquent preachers who do not understand the doctrine of justification and therefore also do not preach it, it would have to choose the former without hesitation. Walther says:

Although this doctrine is important, it can nevertheless be preached in its whole fullness, power, clarity, and rich comfort even by those who are less talented . . . indeed, even by the least gifted, if only they have learned to know that the grace of God has appeared in Christ Jesus to all men and is apprehended by faith; and they can preach it in such a way that their hearers become sure of their salvation. That knowledge outweighs all wisdom, talents, and treasures of the world. Such preachers, too, will never run out of material on which to preach. They will always know how to speak of the gracious deeds which God has

done for us, and that will always give them new joy to preach. What indeed is all learning, no matter how important it may be in its proper place, compared with the wisdom of God? This becomes apparent already when only the passage is expounded that "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son," etc. That message works joy in all penitent sinners; that is something in which the holy angels rejoice, and that is something at which the whole world should prostrate itself and cry out: "Glory, hallelujah!" If our young ministers preach that [doctrine], then they will be able to start a Reformation also in this country, toward which a small beginning has indeed been made by this message. That certainly makes live congregations, not indeed such as are vocal about their life and deeds, but such as, living in this doctrine, are willing to render offerings to God in the beauties of holiness. In short, let us learn from Luther that we cannot start a Reformation in this country unless we believe this doctrine of justification most firmly, preach it with divine assurance, and faithfully guard and keep it.

A living knowledge of the doctrine of justification therefore is essential to the right preparation for the pastoral ministry. Walther writes: "The most essential requisite that students of theology should take with them from their theological seminary, and without which everything else would be worthless, is a clear, thorough insight, based above all on personal experience, into this exalted doctrine of justification of a penitent sinner before God." Likewise the public and private proclamation of the doctrine of justification is necessary, above all, for the proper discharge of the office of the ministry. The fact that he is privileged to proclaim this message should cause a person to be glad to be a minister. And as the true joy of the pastor in the holy ministry flows from this doctrine, so also does his hope of accomplishing anything worthwhile. It will keep the pastor away from legalism. (*LDJ*, pp. 95 f.) The doctrine of justification, moreover, is the means by which we are kept in purity of doctrine. Walther writes: "As long as this doctrine remains entirely pure, no error will cleave to us in other doctrines. It is just as Luther said: 'This doctrine does not tolerate any error.' It is the sun brightening the sky of the church: when it rises, then all darkness must recede."

The doctrine of justification is a standard which makes it impossible for us to accept any error as long as we are guided by it. Whoever has learned to know the doctrine of justification derides all those learned professors who are either altogether unbelieving or semibelieving, whenever they teach what is false, no matter how eloquent or learned they may be. If what they propose and say does not agree with the Bible verse that little children pray: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin," then even the humblest Christian will reject it, no matter how profound or pious it may appear. (*SCR*, p. 27.)

He, however, who errs with regard to the doctrine of justification, can neither know nor show how dangerous another error is. He who does not know this chief doctrine of the Christian religion is like a child that does not know the purpose of a watch and therefore regards this little wheel or that little pin as unnecessary. To him who does not truly understand the doctrine of justification, the several doctrines of the Word of God are like a pile of loose stones from which he may take away some, without greatly disturbing the whole pile. Without the true knowledge of this doctrine there will forever remain doubts as to where the true church is, especially in view of its humble appearance, its small size, and the offenses which occur in it. But when we adhere to the doctrine of justification, we shall not be impressed with the crowds, the altars, the pomp, the strict discipline, and the great works of the false church. Nor shall we be impressed by the learned apologetic contributions of the moderns, for all this can neither be profitable nor valid for the church without the doctrine of justification.

We shall now consider some teachings which, according to Walther, are essential today if we are to preserve the doctrine of justification in its purity. Walther writes: "When considering the pure doctrine of justification, as our Lutheran Church has again set it forth on the basis of God's Word in its full radiant brilliancy, we must keep in mind three doctrines, namely, (1) that of the general and perfect redemption of the world by Christ; (2) that of the power and the efficacy of the means of grace, and (3) that of faith. (*SCR*, p. 20.)" Where there is full agreement on these doctrines, there is full agreement also on the doctrine of justification and, in fact, on the whole Christian doctrine. On the other hand, where errors are being taught with respect to one or more

of these teachings, as this is the case among some Protestant denominations and modern rationalistic and synergistic Lutherans, there the doctrine of justification is bound to be perverted, even if the formal terminology be in agreement with the true church, as, for example, when synergists state that man is justified before God solely by grace through faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law.³ We shall, first of all, offer a brief summary of Walther's statements on these three points.

Should, for instance, anyone deny the universality of Christ's redemption, negating with Calvin the Scripture truth that Christ has redeemed all mankind and that in the Gospel God seriously offers to all men His grace without any discrimination, then he subverts the doctrine of justification. If that error is maintained, then the individual sinner cannot become personally sure of his salvation unless he receives an extraordinary, immediate revelation to that effect. Again, should anyone teach that Christ has indeed redeemed all men, but not completely, in other words, that Christ has indeed made forgiveness of sins possible for all men, but that this forgiveness of sins or justification does not yet actually exist for every sinner, then he makes faith and conversion a meritorious cause of the forgiveness of sins and invalidates the doctrine of justification by grace for Christ's sake. Or, should anyone pervert the doctrine of the means of grace by denying that God offers the sinner His grace in Word and Sacrament so that the sinner must seek grace in Word and Sacrament, then he bids the sinner seek grace in his own subjective condition, in conversion and regeneration, and so in his own good works. Finally, should anyone pervert the doctrine of faith by denying that faith is essentially trust in the grace offered in the Gospel and by identifying faith with the feeling of grace, then he will put in place of divine grace the condition of the human heart as the basis of justification and salvation. Or should anyone teach wrongly concerning faith by ascribing the creation of faith to human co-operation or to man's good conduct, then again he surrenders the Scriptural doctrine of justification despite the fact that he may use the expressions "by faith alone" or "by grace for Christ's sake." This subject seems

³ LDR, p. 35. *Report of the Western District*, 1875, pp. 32—40. Hereafter referred to as *RWD*.

to us so very important that we shall develop more fully the three points on the basis of many statements made by Walther. To keep the doctrine of justification pure, we must hold the

TRUE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF THE PERFECT REDEMPTION
OF ALL MEN BY CHRIST

In order to present the perfect redemption of all men by Christ in its full clarity, Walther is concerned to insist that there exists for every person grace, righteousness, and salvation even before faith is engendered, that every sinner is righteous before God, even before he believes, so far as this righteousness has been procured and God has purposed to bestow it (*SCR*, p. 68), that is to say, according to God's declaration which He pronounced upon all men by raising Christ from the dead (*SCR*, p. 31). "It is a righteousness not merely made possible [for all men], but one that is already procured or effected" (*SCR*, p. 61). It was of great concern to Walther to repudiate the view that a person by his faith or by his conversion must first render God perfectly favorable or that he must first complete his redemption and righteousness. True, a person, to be saved, must first be converted, but his conversion is not the cause why God saves him, but merely the way by which he comes to that faith which does nothing but accept the perfect redemption which already has been achieved for him. (*SCR*, p. 34.) The enthusiasts hold the view that Christ has effected what Scripture calls redemption in order that God may now receive sinners into heaven because of their conversion. They do not believe that Christ has accomplished absolutely everything that had to be done in order that God could save us by granting us everlasting life. They imagine that to be saved something still remains for a person to do and that this something is his conversion. Scripture, however, teaches that Christ has done everything. He has already secured for all men reconciliation with God, together with righteousness and all other gifts of salvation. These blessings are already perfectly prepared and are imparted in the holy Christian Church through the Gospel. So there remains nothing that man can do but to accept salvation. It is this truth that we mean to emphasize when we speak of a perfect redemption. It is not true that man already has contributed something

and that God adds what is still lacking. Nor is it true that God already has done something and that man completes what is wanting. But the truth is that God alone has already accomplished everything. (*SCR*, p. 34.)

This doctrine, as Walther declares again and again, is the one that characterizes the Christian religion and distinguishes it from paganism, so that whoever denies this doctrine denies also the whole Christian religion. Walther writes: "Also the heathen believed that they must secure grace and the forgiveness of their sins, but they have never known that forgiveness of sins has already been procured by another and that it already exists." In another place he declares:

While all religions, except the Christian, teach that man himself must do that by which he is delivered and saved, the Christian religion teaches not merely that all men should be eternally saved but also that they already have been saved. According to the Christian faith, man is already redeemed. He is already delivered and freed from his sin and all its evil consequences. He is already reconciled unto God. The Christian religion proclaims: "You need not redeem yourself nor secure reconciliation between God and yourself, for all this Christ has already accomplished for you. Nor has He left anything for you to do but to believe this, i. e., to accept it!" Here indeed is the point of distinction between Christianity and all other religions. The Jews say: "If you want to be saved, you must keep the Law of Moses." The Turks say: "If you want to be saved, you must follow the Koran." The Papists say: "If you want to be saved, you must do good works, repent of your sins, and make satisfaction for them; and if you want to climb especially high, you must enter a monastery." Similarly, all sects that pervert the Christian religion impose something on man which he must do to make himself righteous and thus save himself. The Lutheran Church, on the other hand, tells man: "Everything is already accomplished. You have been redeemed. You have been justified before God. You are already saved. You need not do a thing to redeem yourself, to reconcile God, and to earn salvation. All you are asked to do is to believe that Christ, the Son of God, has already done all this for you. Believe this, and you actually are in possession of salvation. You will surely be saved." (*RWD*, 1874, p. 43.)

As Walther shows, the very concept of faith demands that we regard grace, redemption, righteousness, and salvation as already existing. He who denies this fact must also deny that man is justified and saved by faith. Walther says that if we are to be saved by believing that we are redeemed, reconciled to God, and in possession of pardon, then all these gifts must exist already before we believe. Now, as surely as the Word of God tells us that we are to be justified by faith, be reconciled to God and saved, so surely all these blessings must exist before we believe; they are only waiting for us to be accepted. The fact that a person is saved by faith alone is possible only for the reason that everything that is necessary to salvation has already been accomplished and exists so that all we need to do is take it. This taking Scripture calls believing. Since God receives into heaven all who believe, righteousness and reconciliation must already have been procured and made ready. All those who do not teach that reconciliation and righteousness exist already prior to faith do not regard faith as the mere hand which receives what has been procured by Christ. They rather regard it as a work by which man co-operates toward his redemption and justification as a condition which he must fulfill and because of which God receives him into heaven. (*SCR*, p. 35.)

It is only when we maintain this perfect redemption that we can maintain also the concept of the Gospel. Why is Christ's doctrine called a Gospel, or a joyous message? For the simple reason that when we preach the Gospel, we proclaim nothing else than what already has been secured for men and granted to them and what they therefore should accept with heartfelt joy. The Gospel is the glad tidings that Christ has accomplished what we should have done but could not accomplish, and that our heavenly Father has attested this when, as by a sign from heaven, He raised from the dead our Redeemer to show us that He is perfectly appeased. (*SCR*, p. 39.) In the Gospel that peace is proclaimed which God has established with man (*RWD*, 1868, p. 31). We must stress the fact most emphatically that God's wrath has been averted from all men by Christ's obedience and that in the Gospel everyone is invited to come and receive His grace. If a preacher had to approach his hearers with the thought that the wrath of God is still resting upon them and that they will have to be per-

sueded to reconcile Him, that indeed would be a dreadful situation. But because he knows that satisfaction has been made for all men and that God's wrath has been removed, he can exhort them with the greatest assurance: "Be ye reconciled to God by accepting the hand of His grace." (*SCR*, p. 36.) He who does not care to preach the Gospel in this manner will talk on the Koran or the Talmud or the decretals of the Pope or whatever else may suit him. But if he desires to preach the Gospel and convert men to become rejoicing Christians, then he must proclaim this Gospel message of joy. (*SCR*, p. 39.) Again: "Since the message of this reconciliation is that all men are reconciled to God and the Gospel, it is ineffable grace to hear this good news proclaimed." The enthusiasts have the idea of Christ's work that by His obedience He only made it possible for men to obtain grace by their efforts. It is also the doctrine of the Pope that a person must secure for himself the salvation which Christ has made possible, by penance, expiation, and other good deeds. But to teach this is to deny the Gospel which Christ has commanded His church to preach.

But there is another doctrine which, according to Walther, belongs to the Scriptural presentation of the perfect redemption of Christ as the presupposition of the true doctrine of justification, namely, the doctrine that with Christ's death and resurrection the justification of the whole sinful world is accomplished. Walther writes: "As by the vicarious death of Christ the guilt of the whole world has been blotted out and its punishment has been removed, so by Christ's resurrection righteousness, life, and salvation have been restored to the whole world and have come upon all men in Christ as the Substitute of all mankind." Again: "Christ's glorious resurrection from the dead is the actual absolution of the whole sinful world." Walther's Easter sermons have themes such as the following: "Christ's Glorious Resurrection the Fully Valid Justification of All Men."⁴ Many people, even ministers, hardly know what to make of the resurrection of Christ. They read in some passages that Christ rose from the dead, and then again, that the Father raised Him from the dead, and they do not know how to

⁴ *Brosamen*, p. 138; *Epistle Sermons*, p. 211.

harmonize these statements. So they say, on the one hand, that Christ rose from the dead to prove His deity, and again, He was raised from the dead in order that the possibility and certainty of our own resurrection might be demonstrated. Both of these statements are true, but both do not yet express what is most important. Christ certainly would not have died and risen from the dead merely to prove His deity, and the possibility of our own resurrection was already proved by the resurrection of persons prior to that of Christ. The chief thing regarding Christ's resurrection is that God by raising Christ from the dead declared that our Lord has paid the debt of sin for the whole world and that the entire world is now delivered from its guilt. Therefore the whole world should rejoice in its victory, for both its freedom from sin and its righteousness have been secured. Again, when God raised His Son from the dead, He did not forgive Him His own sins. Christ was not absolved from His own guilt. But He was declared absolved from our guilt, which had been imputed to Him. Therefore the whole world has been justified by the resurrection of Christ. (*RWD*, 1875, p. 33.)

This truth is not at variance with the doctrine that man is justified by faith, for the expression "by faith" stresses the personal appropriation of Christ's righteousness on the part of man and the imputation of the procured righteousness on the part of God. But this appropriation and imputation would not be possible if the world had not been declared righteous by Christ's resurrection, or if its condemnation in Christ's death had not been followed by its absolution by His resurrection. (*SCR*, pp. 41 f.) This justification pertains to all individuals, or to the whole world. "If the question is raised whether or not it is right to say that the whole world has been absolved but not all individual persons, we must reply: Through Christ, God has been reconciled with all men and with every individual person." (*SCR*, p. 32.) This doctrine of the general justification of all men before they believe is not a theological construction but a Biblical doctrine. It is Biblical not only in content, which would fully suffice, but also in its terminology. Walther writes: "This doctrine is expressly stated in Rom. 5:18: 'Therefore, as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came

upon all men unto justification of life.' The Bible therefore not only teaches this truth but also uses the expression that the justification of life has come upon all men. It is only by a Calvinistic interpretation that these words can be made to declare that none but the elect are justified." Although Holy Scripture in most passages speaks of the justification which occurs in the moment when a person comes to faith, and accordingly ecclesiastical terminology by "justification by faith" usually means the justification of a penitent sinner (*SCR*, p. 68), nevertheless the general justification of all men prior to faith, which Scripture clearly attests in several passages, is of the greatest importance. Let no one think that we are engaging in logomachy, for here we are defending a most important truth against errors and enemies. We must earnestly stress the doctrine of the universal justification of mankind especially in this land of sects and enthusiasts who, while teaching that man is justified by faith, nevertheless speak of faith in such a way that it is obvious that they regard faith as an efficient cause of justification and so rob Christ of His glory. (*SCR*, p. 46.) Without universal justification prior to faith there would be no justification by faith. Walther shows also (*SCR*, pp. 43 ff.) that in that case we could not speak of a sinner's justification by faith, since to believe means to accept what already exists. If the world were not already justified, then "to believe" would mean doing something to achieve justification. The whole Gospel is nothing but God's message of the righteousness which already has been procured and which already exists for all men. (*Brosamen*, pp. 142 ff.) Those who teach that God indeed makes the world righteous, but that He has not declared the world righteous, actually deny justification in its entirety. Indeed, had not God already written and sealed His letter of pardon, we ministers would be liars and deceivers of the people were we to tell them: "Only believe, and then you are justified." But since God by the resurrection of His Son has signed and divinely sealed His document of grace for all sinners, we may preach without fear: "The world is justified. The world is reconciled unto God." Were the first statement not true, then we could not proclaim the second.

Our Lutheran Confessions repeatedly say that righteousness is apprehended by faith. But also these statements express the fact

that there is a righteousness which faith can apprehend, so that faith does not first have to effect it, but merely lays hold of that which already exists. Should anyone say that forgiveness of sins indeed exists, but not [the world's] justification, then it is obvious that he does not understand our Confessions, which teach expressly that forgiveness of sins and justification are one and the same thing; for so they declare: "We believe, teach, and confess that according to the usage of Holy Scripture the word *justify* in this article means to absolve, that is, to declare free from sins" (FC Ep. III 7; *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 793). (SCR, p. 46.)

Especially in his exposition of *absolution* as used in "preaching the Gospel to one or more individuals who desire the comfort of the Gospel," Walther shows that the perfect redemption of all men by Christ was very much alive in his heart. He writes that absolution is based upon the perfect redemption or the universal justification. "When the minister absolves you, he imparts to you a treasure that already exists, namely, the forgiveness of sins, which already has been procured." (SCR, p. 43.) Walther regarded as true Lutheran ministers only such as believe that they absolve all who confess their sins, when they pronounce upon them the absolution. Likewise he regarded as true Lutheran Christians only such as believe that they are absolved by God through the absolution pronounced upon them by their pastor. He adds: "But this we can believe only if we believe that the world has been redeemed. If we believe that, then the absolution is only the communication of the fact to those who confess that they were redeemed over 1,900 years ago, with the added admonition: Only believe that, and you are saved!" The offense that many take at the absolution as it is used in the Lutheran Church is due to the fact that they do not believe in the perfect redemption of all men through Christ. Therefore they think that Lutherans ascribe to their pastors, as to "ordained lords," a special authority and a mysterious power. "But we say: 'It is no special art to absolve anyone. That is something every Christian can do, indeed, every woman and every child, even if the child can only say that the Lord Jesus Christ died for all men and that whoever believes on Him has forgiveness of sins. Absolution does not rest upon any quality in

the administrant, but on the word of the Gospel which proclaims the redemption which has been procured.’”

In this connection Walther always stresses the fact that we must not make the essence of the Gospel dependent on faith, but that it is to be regarded per se as a valid offering of grace on God's part. "The glorious blessings of Christ have already been given to us. Let us well note that they are already granted to us in the Gospel and that they are always extant for us even if we do not believe." (*RWD*, 1874, p. 47.) If we make the essence of the Gospel dependent on the fact that a person believes; in other words, if we speak as if faith must be present before the Gospel can be valid and efficacious per se, or that the gift of pardon exists for the sinner only when he believes, then Christ's perfect merit is denied together with His redemption and salvation of the world. Then indeed faith is regarded as something entirely different from what it really is. Then it is no longer the receiving or accepting of the forgiveness of sins, which already exists, but it is a work which we must add in order that there may be forgiveness in the Gospel. Finally, in that case faith has nothing to which it may cling. "If the Gospel is not valid until a person believes, what, then, are we to believe?" In that case faith is based upon itself, and not upon the Gospel. "This is putting those who are in doubt and distress about their salvation into a torture chamber." (*RWD*, pp. 57—64.) Again and again Walther makes the point that any doctrine or practice which first demands faith in order that there may be forgiveness of sins is unable to comfort those who are troubled about their salvation. "The reason why people are so troubled is that they imagine they cannot believe. What else can they do but despair when they are taught that they must believe to merit forgiveness? They should rather be persuaded to believe that the Savior is already present with His forgiveness of sins and is ready to receive them." (*RWD*, 1875, p. 38.)

In this connection Walther replies also to the objection: "How can the doctrine of perfect redemption, universal justification, the Gospel as the absolution of the whole world of sinners, be harmonized with those passages that speak of God's wrath upon the

world lying in wickedness, especially upon the unbelievers?" Walther's answer to this objection is the right application of Law and Gospel. Inasmuch as God views the world in Christ Jesus, He is "pure love, pure favor, pure grace," which in His heart He cherishes toward the whole sinful world. But inasmuch as He views the world as being outside Christ and lying in wickedness, in particular, as rejecting the Gospel, it does lie under His wrath. Although there is no contradiction at this point, since divine grace and wrath in God's relation to the world are predicated of Him from different points of view, nevertheless, we here must acknowledge a mystery that we can neither describe nor fathom. But since Scripture teaches both truths, we allow them to stand side by side. "It is the Lutheran way that if the Word of God states two things that cannot be harmonized with each other, both should be allowed to stand and be believed as they read." (*SCR*, pp. 31f., 36f.)

(To be concluded)