

**Zum Gedenken an Carl Ferdinand
Wilhelm Walther (1811-1887), den
Begründer der Lutherischen Kirche—
Missouri-Synode.**

**“To the remembrance of Carl
Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811-
1887), the founder of the Lutheran
Church-Missouri Synod.”**

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To the remembrance of Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811-1887), the founder of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Biographical background in the theological maturation process of the boy C.F.W. Walther.

1. The balanced biblical position

From September 12th until December 29th 1851 C.F.W. Walther visited Germany. In the commission of the Missouri Synod he should, together with his friend, the then generally present Friedrich Wyneken (1810-1876), recruit in Germany for understanding. This understanding is necessary, because the expanding Missouri Synod was further allowed the energetic support through the Lutheran Church of Germany. Their promoter (for further example Löhe) however advised considerable thought toward the Missouri Synod condition from 1847.

Between North Germany and Saxony, Walther arrived at Erlangen in October 1851. There he stayed in the only long lay over of this trip. From October 10th until November 10th he lived in the French university city. In this time, he finished his manuscript which he brought along from America about church and office. The book appears in the first half of the year 1852 in Erlangen with the theme trumpeting in print under the title: "The voice of our church in the question concerning church and office,... from the German Evangelical Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other states giving as testimony of their faith." In the middle of the dispute at that time, when high waves were beating against all Lutheran theologians concerning the right relationship of office and congregation, Walther took up a clear position. This insight had been won in the dispute with J.A. Grabaus of the Buffalo Synod. One can only agree what the sentence of Holsten of Fagerberg: "The test of Walther, to take up an intercessory attitude, is distinct. He would stand together on the claim of the office as on that of the congregation: the peculiarity of the office shall demonstrate, therefore without it all too difficult to differentiate from the congregation." Against all agreements, Walther pushed forward again to the balanced, biblical position, which Helmut Lieberg has called of Luther, "bi-polarness" of the office: both the universal priesthood of believers and the godly foundation of the preaching office. With this position Walther fixed his timely sight on the peak in German and foreign Lutherandom. No one had won before him this balanced quality throughout the decline on Luther. Other soon followed him: the Zeitzer high school teacher and theology Lic. Karl Ströbel (1806-1879) and the Munich president of High Consistory Adolf von Harless (1806-1879).

On the balanced position Walther had held on for his lifetime. Also another position is this insistence by him to observe. How did he come to it? I would like to answer with this thesis, which I will occupy in the following with examples: Walther's doctrinal position and his insistence therein goes hand in hand with his personal history. Indeed the personal experience for him has not been the source of knowledge—that was and (as about the practical theology of the Erlangen school, in particular with Hofmann) remains alone Scripture and knowledge of Scripture—however it has, in many places, let him

penetrate into the matter than others. Even that however amounts to a good part of his significance which indeed reaches out over the expanse of North American Lutherandom.

It would go beyond the limits of this contribution to present here Walther's complete detailed path through life. I will therefore limit myself to the first three decades of his life, in which the matrix for his many later decision have been laid.

2. Parents' house and school

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was born on October 25, 1811 in Langenchursdorf (north of Hohenstein-Ernstthal). His birthplace, the old parsonage, had been torn down in the beginning of the 20th Century due to a state of decay. Walther originated from an old Saxon minister family. Before him already were four generations of an uninterrupted sequence of pastors. His father, Gottlob Heinrich Wilhelm Walther, was born in 1770 likewise in Langenchursdorf, where his great-grandfather (Adolf Heinrich Walther, 1728-1802) was already pastor. C.F.W. Walther's father died on January 15, 1841. His mother, Johanna Wilhelmina (nee Zschenderlein) (1778-1851) originated from Zwickau. She was the daughter of the Zwickau restaurant proprietor Johann Friedrich Zschenderlein. The marriage of Walther's parents was performed on November 12, 1799 in the old church of Reinsdorf near Zwickau. The marriage produced twelve children: four sons and eight daughters. C.F.W. Walther was the youngest of the sons.

From his mother, Walther inherited his kindness and affability; from his father the ready wit. His father was valid as a representative for the then Saxon pastor: despite rationalistic teaching of the theological faculty of the state university in Leipzig, he kept throughout his lifetime his personal faith. He secured in his children the knowledge that the Bible was God's Word. C.F.W. Walther has later said about himself that this "historic faith" has accompanied him as an "angel of God" his whole life long.

Walther first attended the village school in Langenchursdorf and then since 1819, the city school in Hohenstien, eight kilometers away. Finally, he came as a ten-year-old in July 1821 to the secondary school in Schneeberg (20 km southwest from Zwickau). Apparently his parents tried to always house their children in the proximity of relatives. Walther's brother, Hermann (1809-1841), two years his elder, successfully completed the rich in tradition secondary school in Zwickau, where his mother's family lived. The parents sent their youngest son Ferdinand to Schneeberg, because the husband of his oldest sister, Mag. Heinrich Friedrich Wilhelm Schubert, was employed as the deputy headmaster of the secondary school there. Schubert had come to Schneeberg as the third teacher and a year later became a second teacher (deputy headmaster). In 1830 he went as the archdeacon to Waldenburg, where in 1834 he died already (at 38 years old).

In those years roughly 140 students were trained at the Schneeberg secondary school, some of which originated from outside of Schneeberg. The training included—as was at that time customary—the three classical languages: Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Five students received the delegation to the state university in that year. C.F.W. Walther belonged to these. He completed the secondary school in September 1829 with distinguished accomplishments and was recommended as "especially worthy" to the

academic university. Also the qualified superintendent, Conrad Benjamin Meissner (1782-1860), set out for him a written recommendation on November 21, 1829. In view of the early deceased Rector Voigtländer, Walther recited at the student dismissal ceremony on April 28, 1829 a self-penned poem with the title "Over the Death of our Life in the Spring." At that time, rationalism had been fully imprinted on the secondary school training in Saxony. What his parents' house had given to the boy Walther, at least in faithfulness to the Bible, soon in Schneeberg went into the breach. Walther later admitted, that he, as the other secondary schools at that time, got to know either the Bible or the Catechism. The religious schooling resulted in a rationalistic textbook of Christian morals. This should soon change.

3. *Studies and Tutoring*

In October, 1829, when he was barely 18 years old, Walther applied to the Leipzig University, where his brother had already studied two years of theology. C.F.W. Walther decided on theological studies, although his musical aptitude would have induced nearly all others. The lectures of currently well-read Oberlin-life pictures by G.H Schubert became the turning point on the advice of his father. Walther came to Leipzig to a theological faculty which still stood completely in the marks of rationalism and supernaturalism. Only two years beforehand (1827) was the successful Saxon enlightenment movement, which resulted in the accommodation of August Hahn (1792-1863), a man of the uniformed students association, as a professor there. At the time when it succeeded, the sitting Saxon Cabinet minister, Detlev von Einsiedel, was steady in his decision to put through Hahn's appointment against all opposition. In his inaugural dissertation, "De rationalismi," Hahn had made a frontal attack against rationalism and induced a flood of refutations. Hahn carried weight as *the* representative of the enlightenment movement on the Leipzig faculty. As such (at least at the present moment) the confessional passivity dominated in the Saxon enlightenment circles which was exhibited in Hahn's continued way of life. In 1833 he accepted a call to Breslau, where, as deputy of the consistorium, he played a shameful role in the famed "Dragoon from Hönigern" at Christmas, 1834. For his merits in the struggle against the Silesian old Lutheranism, the Prussian king honored him with the call to be General-superintendent of Silesia in 1844.

Unter his brother's influence, C.F.W. Walther had gotten connected with a circle of enlightened students in Leipzig, which had formed around the candidate Johann Karl Gottlob Kühn (1801-1832). Besides Walther's brother, Hermann, the later Missourian pastors Theodor Brohm (d. 1881), Johann Friedrich Büniger (1810-1882), Ottomar Fürbringer (1803-1892) and Johann Jakob Gönner (d. 1864), as well as the subsequent accomplished men, for example, Leipzig Professor Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890). The circle gathered in the houses of the believing Leipzig families. Here Walther had gotten to know and value above all the later synod cashiers of the Missouri Synod, tax examiner Friedrich Wilhelm Barthel (1791-1858). Walther could say about him: "At least *we* have never gotten to know a greater lover of God's Word."

The Leipzig professor of practical theology, Prof. Friedrich Wilhelm Lindner (1779-1864), stood in more intimate contact with the daring student circles from time to time.

For a while, Lindner undertook the effort to revive the “collegium philobiblicum” in the sense of A.H. Franckes. In private circles, he laid out the edifying Holy Scriptures and gave homiletical applications for the enlightened students. However, Lindner was also remarkable in the confessional passivity. On the one hand, he turned against the Prussian Union, but on the other he vocalized in the same year (1831) in a greater publication for the reformed doctrine of Holy Communion.

The enlightened students visited faithfully the worship services of the valid pastors Dr. Friedrich August Wolf (1784-1841) of St. Peter Church and Mag. Lic. Friedrich Moritz Hänsel (1792-1861) in the orphan and prison church, St. George.

It was almost understood about himself, that C.F.W. Walther, following the years of narrow, rationalistic food in Schneeberg, now fell completely under the influence of the enlightenment movement in Leipzig. With student-like enthusiasm he joined in the enlightenment protest against the complete atrophy of the Biblical message within rationalism. At the same time he ran through the usual stations in the faith life of a newly enlightened person. He had to survive all of the heights of enthusiasm and depths of temptation. Gospel gladness quickly gave way to more gloomy law. Candidate Kühn challenged the students over and over with the heated penance debate, which he himself had undergone. The one who can not find the challenged rank of repentance on himself, tempts himself to achieve it himself and falls so quickly to the brink of despair. So it also happened to C.F.W. Walther. For the inner, spiritual need arrived with him still the bodily weakness. In the winter semester 1831-32, he had to discontinue a half-year from his studies because he suffered from tuberculosis. Medical treatment and a recovery break at his parents' house – after God's help – got him up on his feet again, so that at Easter, 1832 he could continue his studies. During his stay in his parents' house, Luther's Works from his father's library fell into his hands for the first time. This would remain with significance for his later development.

The inner need led him to always seek after more intensive pastoral advice. As no one could advise him more, other enlightened friends directed him to the pastor of the Dresden Bohemian Exulanten congregation, Martin Stephan (1777-1845). Walther related himself concerning it in the Büniger-Nachruf (therefore spoken in the third person singular):

“First of all, he (= Walther) applied himself to write to Stephan, making the same request for advice about God's Word. He did this without particular hope to find what it was that he sought. When the same preaching book appeared to him at this time, it was not sharp enough, not pressing deeply enough upon repentance and penance due to the state of his soul. When the writer of this (=Walther) at last received the answer he did not break open the letter until he had appealed ardently to God to preserve him, that he might not embrace false comfort if such false comfort should be enclosed in the reply letter he had just received. However when he had read this same letter, it was to him like no other, as if suddenly moved out of hell to heaven. The tears he had wept for so long out of fear and need were transformed now into tears of truthful, heavenly joy. He could not resist: he *must* go to Jesus. Stephan showed him that the penance out of the law, which he

sought, he had already learned long ago; that nothing was missing for him, as to his faith, that he now leave among the murderer of kindness to the heavenly, merciful Samaritan. So he then searched his soul for the peace of God. There he learned what *private absolution* was for the heart of a terrified sinner--life. Stephan had certainly spoken about a formal absolution in his writing however he had the Gospel *personally used upon him*, which is where the actual essence of private absolution stood firm.

Here all the warmth of the personal comfort remained to hold him tight: Stephan's advice tore Walther out of his enlightened subjectivism. Stephan placed pietistic self-admirers on the spot of the objectivity of the spoken salvation: justification alone out of faith on the reconciliation through Christ's blood. Salvation of the Christian's life is not a presupposition but a consequence of justification. This is what distinguished Stephan's preaching above all of his rationalistic contemporaries. In it he also pointed for the boy Walther the way to the Lutheran Church. For this reason Walther had never forgotten Stephan. When a little later the Glauchauer superintendent, G.A. Rudelbach (1792-1862) offered to him a lucrative private tutor position under the conditions that contact with Stephan's stop, Walther rejected under the pretense of his debt of thanks.

Walther first completed in Leipzig his theological studies. In Easter 1833 he left the university to prepare himself in his parents house for his first theological examination. In September 1833 he turned back to Leipzig. On September 13th-14th and 19th he took the required examination "Examen pro licentia concionandi." The week before his examination dated for him his first misgivings against an appointment into the Church of Saxony. Out of a news item he had learned that the spiritual college in Dresden planned a revision of the teacher obligations in the Church of Saxony.

After the examination, Walther remained at first in his parents' house. Still he let his weakened health reemerge and was advised with considerations in regards to his health. Yet even more and more stress arose at the house of his aging father. So it must have appeared to him as a welcome way out when a private tutor position was offered to him in the spring of 1834. At Easter 1834 he took up the position in Kahla (near Ronneburg/Thuringia). His employer was Friedemann Löber, the brother of the enlightened preacher in Eichenberg and later Missourian Heinrich Löber (1797-1849). In this region he belonged to the Church of Altenburg, which lay in the pietistic, aristocratic courts of the Earl of Hankel-Donnersmark and of Köstritz, which was already associated with Heinrich Melchior Mühlenberg (1711-1787). According to his own statements, Walther frequently led his "principle" in theological conversations in which he critically explained rationalism. In the fall of 1836 Walther finished his personal tutoring occupation in Kahla and took in the same year in Dresden his second theological examination.

4. *First pastoral position in Bräundorf*

After his second examination, the Saxon alumnus Cabinet-minister Detlev von Einsiedel commissioned Walther upon his patron pastor's position at Bräunsdorf near Pennig. Walther held the position there of probationary preacher until the third Sunday in Advent

1836. On January 15, 1836 he was ordained by the Pennig supervisor Friedrich Otto Siebenhaar (1804-1876) before the gathered congregation in Bräunsdorf and was installed into his office. Assisting there were his father, his brother Hermann, and his brother-in-law Wilhelm Keyl (1804-1872). According to his own statement it was for Walther a greater comfort that despite the rationalistic ordination speech, at least he was obligated according to the traditional Lutheran formula from Scripture and the Confessions. He himself preached on this day on Jeremiah 1:6-8.

A little later Walther wrote in his letter to his church patron about the situation in his congregation. With all outward respect for the Word of God and for the preaching he governed boundless ignorance in the Word of God connected with complete carnal security. He saw his problem, therefore, above all to lead his divided congregation to knowledge of their depravity through the instrument of teaching the foundations of the Word of God and to administer the grace of Christ and to induce vital Christian faith and God-fearing lives. However, with his repentance preaching, which he specifically aimed his remarks at widespread sins; he made himself not popular in his congregation. This caused him—as also many other young pastors even until today—much tribulation.

Also in his care for souls, Walther had (as did his friends) his hands tied through the Saxon church law. He did not give confession or Holy Communion anymore in his congregation. Church discipline allowed this only to be practiced with the approval of the consistory. The suspension of *manifest* sinners from Holy Communion was not allowed for a particular pastor.

Walther was to expect no help in such instances on the part of the most rationalistic superintendent. Walther's superintendent criticized about something in a preaching circular, in which Walther had spoken thereof that death of the first man had come into the world through the fall into sin. The superintendent admonished the young pastor to drop such "obsolete ideas." Walther replied that he had become obligated to the Luther Confessions, which were the same as the doctrines, to which the superintendent fired back with the observation: "They were not obligated to the letters, but to the spirit of the symbols."

The rationalistic superior, respectively, and colleague frequently denied himself fundamental biblical truth. Particularly, Holy Baptism was not performed anymore with the Trinitarian formula. Usually the schoolmaster belonged to the most eager advocate of rationalism, with frequent arguments occurring between him and the enlightened pastors. Walther's brother-in-law Keyl (in Niederfrohna) took away from his schoolmaster the traditional privilege to perform emergency baptism in the absence of the pastor because the Trinitarian executive power was not guaranteed. – Walther himself waded into the fight with his village school teacher because he resisted the introduction of rationalistic schoolbooks. Even the support through his church patron in these questions could not prevent that a criminal case was introduced against Walther and the costs for it were imposed upon him. A notice concerning the use of the old, Lutheran absolution formula in the church service led to a proceeding before the consistory. The church authority

admonished Walther in the future to use the prescribed absolution formula from the rationalistic liturgy of 1812. Again, he had to bear the costs.

5. *In the wake of the Stephanist emigration*

All of these needs and afflictions strengthened in the enlightened pastors of the narrow valley their conviction that rationalism, with its unbiblical teachings, had become dominant in the Church of Saxony and no reform was to be expected. At that time, the possibility was not yet raised for a departure from that Church and the formation of a Lutheran free church. The change was provided for by the state's legislator only in one of the recognized religious communities (Roman Catholic Church, Reformed Church, Jewish religious community). The dissident laws herein started new ways 30 years later. Opposition against the Church by the state generally did not come into question for Lutheran pastors (at least at that time) according to Romans 13. So there remained only one way out: emigration. Indeed, this way out lay in the air, so to speak. It was still some time before the large emigration group from the circles of the Prussian old-Lutherans left Germany in order to settle down in Australia (August Kavel) and North America (Johann Andreas Grabau).

In view of the thought of emigration, the pastors of the narrow valley met with Martin Stephan, and from him originated the actual initiative. The thought started with Stephan that on account of his faith perhaps one actually had to emigrate for the first time was the auxiliary observation in a sermon in 1824. The tendency was intensified in 1830 through the visit of the American pastor Benjamin Kurtz (1795-1865) with Stephan in Dresden. The appropriate recommendation by Kurtz for the emigration leader suggested America as their destination and specifically the state of Missouri. The final decision for the emigration fell on the occasion of a meeting of the first supporters of Stephan on Pentecost, 1836, in Dresden. From then on still an ample two years lasted until the actual emigration date. This time was necessary, on the one hand to make the expensive preparations and on the other hand in order for the narrow valley movement to win a decision for Stephan.

In this position a few might, out of good course, bear a grudge against Martin Stephan. He was born in 1777 in Stramberg/Mähren as the son of a poor linen weaver. He came to Breslau at 21 years old. He descended from the influence of pietistic circumstances. He recognized there that it was lacking for pietism above all in the power struggle against the unfaithful, because he stood unclear in doctrinal questions. After 25 years Stephan decided his late calling was to theological studies. He studied in Halle and Leipzig and remained a lone wolf with his stance among the students. In 1809 he was called as pastor in Haber/Bohemia and one year later to the Bohemian Exulanten congregation in Dresden. This congregation went back to the Bohemian Exulanten located in Dresden from 1639 and 1649. The greater German Church of Johannes was provided with the personal union of pastors. The Bohemian Exulanten congregation had the right to choose their own pastor, to hold worship services in their mother tongue and to congregate outside of the worship service in the parsonage.

In Dresden Stephan became more and more the pioneer of a renewed Lutherandom. He had to struggle on two fronts: on one side against rationalism and his moralizing of Christendom and the other against the late pietistic Spangenberg influence, as represented above all in the Dresden Moravians. He placed for them in his biblical-orientation straight-forward preaching against objective salvation declaration: the complete sinfulness of men before God and justification alone through faith in the reconciliation through Christ. C.F.W. Walther gave his opinion later about Stephan's preaching:

“Stephan possesses none of the skills of worldly eloquence; at least none that the otherwise richly talented man applied. Barely moving one hand, seldom varying his voice, lacking all energy in his expression he rendered soberly and straight-forward the advice of God for the blessedness of men, in which he showed both the spirituality and severity of the Law and the complete sinfulness of every man by nature and the grace filled Gospel and the certain help which each sinner could find in Christ.”

Stephan later was kicking against the hierarchic appetites which apparently had not yet been present in his former years. It seemed to be a sequence of year-long lonely struggles. Similarly as it was a heavy tribulation for Luther, it was also for Stephan to stand alone against all in the more grueling struggles. His respectable call and his ordination vow became for him in his tribulation as a rock in the surf.

Stephan discovered a considerable crowd of listeners as a lonelier cry to the Lutheran faith. This personal congregation rallied around him and rose up. This led to tensions with other Dresden pastors and with his own congregation, which was found neglected. In addition, repeated complaints and notices came on account of the illegal assembly. Karl Hennig had rightly pointed out that these complaints were a product of the overanxious restoration period, which smelled subversive activities after each harmless gathering. Stephan had indeed furthered the thriving rumor himself in a criminal way for a cause, in which he recklessly continued nightly assemblies with his closest disciples in the vineyards of the Radebeuler Löbnitz valley. He continued the assemblies even still after the Saxon Landtag decided in 1837 to ban *all* conventions. This led to his imprisonment on November 8, 1837 after being caught in the act, which was followed on November 16 by the suspension from his office. A pending case was brought against Stephan. From then on he pursued more intensive preparations for emigration. None of the facts correspond to the often voiced suspicion that he had left Dresden in full flight on account of the proceedings. Firmly stand only the following: on October 25, 1838, the Saxon king let the whole proceeding against Stephan be dismissed. The dismissal of the proceedings brought along with it the fact that many of the charges (for example a financial and moral variety) could never be cleared up. The rumors have been held within the contemporary literature, the more so as through the later derailment of Stephan they received only overly light nutrition. However, it has not been proven that his moral offenses already date back to his Dresden days.

In the course of October 1838 the emigrants left Saxony. They were met with no opposition from the state – as others had in Prussia. More than 700 people had been registered on the list. Among them was C.F.W. Walther, as well as his brother, Hermann,

and his brother-in-law, Wilhelm Keyl. For the record, Ferdinand Walther's relationship with Stephan seems to have been already somewhat problematic in Germany when his brother, Hermann, was the most trusted supporter of Stephan. Keyl resigned his office in Niederfrohna on August 18, 1838. C.F.W. Walther followed the example of his brother-in-law on September 30, 1838. In a short, unexpected sermon before the departure in Bremen he pointed out that with the emigration one has a "testament of God to fulfill." One proves this legacy worthy only when one "strips themselves of all unholiness and [becomes] a pure vessel for holy contents." Between November 3 and 18, 1838 altogether five emigration ships left Bremen harbor. One of the ships was lost in the crossing. Eyewitnesses report that Walther originally should have traveled with the missing ship. On Pentecost 1839 the emigrated Saxons obtained their settlement territory in Perry County (south of St. Louis).

6. *The fiasco on the Mississippi and his overcoming*

Already during the crossing there were differences coming out from among the emigrants. In the center of the criticism stood Martin Stephan's leadership style. While they were still on the ships he had begun to allow all of the independent men among the emigrants to sign an "emigration order." With this order Stephan would give the emigrant congregation an episcopal structure. It was out of the question for him that only he be worthy of consideration for the office of bishop. Each one had to promise obedience to the bishop in all spiritual and worldly issues. Against him stood opposition, which became reinforced when the settlement territory proved to have an adverse climate and Stephan, through inappropriate ordinances, quickly exhausted the financial means of the congregational cash box. Moreover, it came out that he fell into a collision with the 6th Commandment. When this was disclosed to the other pastors, one called the whole congregation together and deposed Stephan of his office in the beginning of May 1839. He did not show any sorrow at all and a short time later he became as an impenitent sinner and was excommunicated from the congregation. This brought him onto the other side of the Mississippi where he later took care of a congregation in the state of Illinois. All attempts to later move him to an acknowledgement of guilt remained unsuccessful. He died a few years later on February 22, 1846 in Red Bud, Illinois. A grandson of Stephan's later belonged again to the pastorate of the Missouri Synod.

The emigrant congregation was deeply shocked by the "fall" of their up until now uncontested and venerated leader. His former colleagues published in the "Report of the West" on May 27, 1839 a "public renunciation" of Stephan. This one looked inevitable when Stephan had taken shelter before the public against all accusations. The emigrants stood inwardly and outwardly before the fiasco. On the one hand the financial means were nearly completely exhausted. Also taken for granted were the unfamiliar climate and the lacking sturdy accommodations to their tribute. However, the inner disruption and despondence weighed much heavier.

Each recognized self-critically that they had followed in blind trust a debaucher. Another piercing question followed: had each one not been frivolously disconnected from their

home church? Still thirty years later, the deep shock swings in a written statement by C.F.W. Walther. He wrote to the chairman of the Dresden Lutheran Union in 1866:

“As Luther was glad that he himself did not (have to) leave the church of the papists, but had to be thrown out. God wanted we would have waited as Stephanists but we must not carry such deserved disgrace which haunts us until we die.”

Had each one not been proven with this debt as a false church? Yet was each one anyway still “a church?” Had not the criminal pastors neglected their responsibility for the entrusted souls? Must they now abdicate their offices? Could they now still perform valid, official acts? Would it not be better if all of the penitent return to Germany? Some of the so called laymen did this, for example, the renowned lawyer and historian Carl Vehse who in his book “The Stephanist Emigration to America” (1839) critically settled accounts with Stephan. Many pastors and candidates were not ready to preach. The congregational structure was held particularly far from the worship service. All previous sermons became legalistic criticisms.

C.F.W. Walther also published it as all other pastors. He recognized self-criticism that many applied what the critic blamed on him. In this situation the legitimacy of his call in his office became questionable and offered no more stability. The employment with questions of the call and their treatment led the fathers of the Lutheran Orthodoxy again into despair. Was the congregation not qualified to again dismiss a pastor if they had called “without necessary knowledge of his person” and without knowledge of his error?

In the fall of 1840 Walther was forced on account of illness to occasionally pause in the work of his office. He had not resigned his office—as also many others. During the illness, Walther traveled to his brother-in-law Wilhelm Keyl in Frohna, Missouri. Keyl’s voluminous pastoral library offered to him opportunities to deepen his knowledge in the study of Luther and the orthodox fathers. He could now join that with what he had already begun to learn during the study in his father’s house. Doubtlessly, this intensive work on Luther and the orthodoxy, laid the matrix for Walther’s later profound knowledge in this field.

First of all he pursued his studies for a completely practical goal. He sought clarity in the raised questions concerning the call and the church. And he found it. From CA VII and VIII it became clear to him that the name “church” stood for each visible community of Christians which taught God’s Word purely and administered the sacraments according to the institution. Hypocrites and pseudo-Christians always belonged to the visible church. Also then each one led the name “church” still to the right if one has been made guilty of a particular “apostasy.” It is not handled anymore as an “orthodox” ,however it is still a “real” church. Also the “unbelieving” congregation would have the right to set up the preaching office among itself.

The gained knowledge defended Walther in April 1841 publicly at a disputation before the gathered together emigrant congregation in Altenburg, Missouri. His opponent at this disputation was the renowned jurist Adolph Marbach (d. 1860), who thereafter returned

again to Germany. Walther succeeded in Altenburg to convince the large majority of the emigrants there what Scripture and knowledge taught and did not teach in the controversial questions about church and office. Only a few returned to Germany. The rest dedicated themselves with fresh zeal, taking charge of the building work.

7. *Personal experience and Bible faithfulness*

It is always been stressed that C.F.W. Walther was to thank especially the grace of God for the gained clarity and the subsequent stabilization of the emigrant congregation. Undoubtedly, Walther had—though he was one of the youngest and most inexperienced among the emigrated pastors—grown into a role through the success of the Altenburg disputation which had made him later the undisputed leader of the Missouri Synod. One should however (on occasion of a Jubilee) not overlook that he himself in the context with the turning point of 1841 had exposed the obvious pioneering and merits of the so-called laymen. From this he had received more decisive impulses. This showed a certain peace why Walther later had so obviously stressed the shared responsibility of the congregation for the ways of the church. A few painful experiences had preserved for him—as also other Missourian fathers—a renewal of the church *alone* to await from the preaching office or from the taken over old liturgy (compare A. Eilmar, J.A. Grabau and others).

And yet it is not all explained by Walther with the hints of his personal experiences (-- also if one had lived mostly today, to bring all of experiences and traditions on the distinctly easy denominator). Surely Walther's personal history is an essential information source to better understand the background for his theological decisions. This should be shown in the above words. And yet: one takes Walther's own utterances seriously and looks at his later theological and church related decisions in that light and then it becomes clear that he had always alone met the unconditional bending of his decisions under God's Word and the Lutheran confessions. This led to the astonishing balance of his theological thesis, about which I spoke in the beginning in a look of the relationship of church and office. That preserved him before the indefensible accommodation of the environment and time relationship. This gave him also a free hand for "unconventional" decisions, which was thought about the traditional Church-oriented Lutherandom of Germany considerable influencing of the Missouri churches and congregation orders (congregational principles).

Walther's personal history led him to more important theological discernments (for example, in the doctrine of church and office). The same living errors and detours preserved him to set his personal experience absolutely or to place over the divine revelation in the Scriptures. The contemporaries praise his exemplary concern and clemency in his dealings with errors and quests. As long as he did not deviate from the clear wording of the Holy Scriptures, he could overcome his own "personal trauma" of his emigration. So he has, for instance, in later years improved the appearance in the German Church by all means canonical and honored. During his travel of Germany in 1851 he advised Löhe to hold out in the Bavarian Church and wrote to America the situation in Germany was now a different one than at the time of Stephan. Now it would

fight against his conscience continuing to remain in the Church. Also he advised the Saxon Lutheran Union during the first sixty years to remain *in* the Church and not to withdraw on account of the lacking church discipline. One might ascribe to his “trauma” according to his own words the premature emigration. Yet how far removed! In 1871 he the leaf was turned over. Walther jumped past the “shadow of his own experience.” After the change of the oath of religion through the Saxon Church Walther wrote on December 7, 1871 to Dresden:

“The separation is not currently *rectified* at all events because the oath has been transformed into a vow but because the vow is restated that also a non-Lutheran with good conscience can remain in the church and must suffer according to it.

One such church is no more Lutheran which makes even an orthodox church to it that in it only the orthodox have the right. Where the opposite is the fall there is a church united, it is a name that should be wanted.”

For Walther stood irrevocably firm: where God’s Word commanded separation, his own experience cannot dispense of it.

Similarly, a right astonishing decision which did not overemphasize his own bad experience but through the Holy Scriptures corrected and cut back on the right measure, and let Walther show also upon other fields. It is thought to be about his decisive holding on to the Godly foundation of the preaching office in spite of his own negative experiences with the episcopal constitution. Or that he has never lost all emphasis of the congregation’s place (which alone is also completely “ekklesia”), the look for the synodical association or the church body. In a similar way he has maintained the aim of his personal decisions in spite of his lifetime, decided to repel the enlightened preaching ways in the predestination struggle of each variety of synergism. Finally Walther, in spite of his own sorrowful experiences with legalism in his enlightenment phase later did not arrived at antinomian tendency, but arrived at his own much vaunted balance between law and gospel.

All these examples like to indicate as to C.F.W. Walther’s personal experiences and Scripture, respectively faithfulness to the Confessions, not mutual exclusive, but corresponding to each other. This well accounts for his balanced theological position.