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## A FREE CHURCH IN A FREE COUNTRY.

Address at the Walther Centennial Celebration at the Light Guard Armory  
at Detroit, Mich.<sup>1)</sup>

FELLOW LUTHERANS:—

We are met to celebrate the dawn, a century ago, of a life that has proved eminently useful, chiefly to the American Lutheran Church, but in a larger view to the Church of Christ in all lands. Walther's uncompromising loyalty to the Holy Scriptures, which he accepted as verbally inspired; his clear and thoroughgoing distinction between man's estate by nature and by grace, under the Law and under the Gospel, through faith and through works; his powerful presentation of that article of the Christian religion with which the Church either stands or falls, the justification of a sinner before the tribunal of divine justice by grace through faith; his equally strong emphasis on the necessary sequel to justification, the sanctification of the justified sinner by daily repentance and renewal, and by holiness of life and conduct; his fearless application of the Word of God to the lives of Christians in all sorts of callings, avocations, and pursuits,—all these things surely merit the approbation of the entire Church.

There is, however, one feature that rises mountainlike out of the level plain of Walther's great life-work, and at the same time is so unique that I believe it deserves special consideration during these commemorative exercises. To this feature I shall, with your permission, limit my remarks.

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1) Published by request of Pastoral Conference of Detroit.

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## ADDRESS AT THE WALTHER ANNIVERSARY.

We have met to-day to praise God for a great gift to our Church, by commemorating the life and work of a Lutheran pilgrim father, a great theologian, a leader and organizer of the Church, and a true American.

From the days of our childhood, we have heard and learned, spoken and sung, about those pilgrim fathers who, three centuries ago, fled from religious oppression and landed on the shores of New England, there to serve God according to the dictates of their conscience.

Three fourths of a century ago, a similar band of pilgrims landed at New Orleans and, amid similar hardships, sought a new home in this land of freedom, escaping from religious op-

pression and persecution, looking for the same liberty to edify themselves and worship God without interference from any civil authority,—the fathers of your synod, among them a young man less than thirty years old: Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther.

In a short time, this young man was to become the leader, the spiritual father, of those pilgrim fathers.

You know their history. In the new home, new oppression and tyranny, worse than the persecutions by the government of the old Fatherland, were their lot. The man at the head, on whom they looked as their “bishop,” attempted to bind the colonists to obey his dictates as divine even beyond and contrary to the Word of God, robbing them of that freedom of conscience vouchsafed to all believers by the evangel of God.

However, by the strong hand of God, who bringeth to light the things that are hidden in darkness, the hierarchy of Stephan was overthrown. But what, now, was to take its place? The pilgrims, Walther with them, were sorely puzzled and troubled. “What is our position before God? Are we still His children? still Christians? Lutherans? still a Church of God? Have we a rightful ministry amongst us?” These and similar questions arose. But the pilgrims went to the fountain of all divine truth. Walther came to the front, and, with convincing clearness, gave answer to those questions from the Word of God, at the same time showing that the testimony of the Lutheran Church and its confessions is in full accord with that Word.

The great theologian had been developed. His early training had been such that he was a master in clearness of diction. And his own spiritual experience made his words a personal testimony to what he expounded as divine truth.

Clearly and convincingly he showed that the grace of God in Christ Jesus, and that alone, is our salvation and comfort; that on it only our faith may and must rest, and never, not in the least part, on any man or any thing we can do. He showed that the Bible, because it is the Word of God and the only message of God to mankind, is and must be the supreme

authority deciding all questions of faith and Christian living; that the teachings of the Bible are for all time the settled truth of God; that doctrines, theories, evolutions of dogmas, church laws, and constitutions made by bishops, synods, general assemblies, ecclesiastical councils going beyond that Word are only human, and can never rightfully be of binding authority over our conscience. He brought out that truth of the Bible and the Augsburg Confession, that "the Church is the congregation of saints and true believers," that, therefore, every local congregation gathering about the Word and sacraments is truly God's Church, having authority over all its spiritual and temporal affairs, especially that, to call and install its own ministers and preachers; that Christians as such have no lord over them, and no mediator before God, but Christ.

These and other forgotten truths Walther again brought forward, taught, and defended them to the end of his days, thus proving himself a great theologian in the best sense of that title: a man taught of God and able to teach and convince others.

But there were others besides Walther. I shall only mention some of the fathers of your own Missouri Synod. It would be an injustice to the memory of such names as Fuerbringer, Brohm, Buenger, Loeber, Keyl, Wyneken, Guenther, Schaller, and others, to call Walther, without restriction, the greatest theologian, *the* theologian of the nineteenth century.

What made his life so important, gave him that prominent place in the history of the Lutheran Church in our country, and must make his memory especially precious to true Lutherans, was, that God not only made him a great theologian, giving him a clear knowledge of divine truth, and not only placed him as a teacher for his own small flock, but set him to be a leader and organizer in the Church at large, a champion of Lutheran doctrine and practice, whose voice was heard throughout the land, a victorious defender of the faith delivered to the saints.

There was a Lutheran Church in this country before Wal-

ther's time. Its beginnings reach back to the days of the very first settlements. Exactly a century ahead of Walther, the patriarch Heinrich Melchior Muehlenberg had gathered the scattered Lutherans in the East, strengthened, taught, organized, and defended them, and had become a tower of strength for the Lutheran Church of the Colonies.

But the War of the Revolution, the so-called age of reason, the influence of European rationalism, the neglect of sound doctrine, of carefully training ministers and teachers for the Church, of thorough indoctrination of the rising generations, the adoption of "new methods" considered better than the old and plain teaching and preaching of God's Word, — all these had wrought sad havoc in the Lutheran Church of the United States. With the exception of a few, scattered men and settlements, the Church was Lutheran in name only.

And here the great life-work of Walther was to be done. His church at St. Louis, to which he had recently been called, helped him to start a periodical which was to expound and defend Lutheran doctrine, and it became the means of rallying faithful Lutherans beyond the confines of St. Louis; of arousing Lutheran consciousness in the hearts of those bearing this honored name throughout the country; of strengthening the weak; of showing what genuine Lutheranism is and stands for. When that great, truly evangelical missionary Wyneken at Baltimore received the first copy, he exclaimed, "Thank God! There are still some Lutherans in America." New hopes for our Church were kindled. The night of rationalism, indifference, and weakness was passing, and a new day dawned.

Through the medium of Walther's publications, men who desired to remain true to the Lutheran Confessions became acquainted with each other. They met. They strengthened one another. And others followed their example. You know the result: a strong, self-conscious Lutheran Church in the United States gathered in your own and other synods.

And Walther was a chief and most energetic organizer and builder for the future of the Church. The colleges and

seminaries for training our own ministers and teachers; the system of Christian schools for our children, looking to the future, so that the coming generations may be both good citizens and loyal, intelligent members and lovers of their Church; the efficient handling of the problems of home missions; the publication of Lutheran books and periodicals, including that splendid and only American edition of Luther's complete works, were largely brought about through Walther's untiring zeal and the inspiring testimony of his tongue and pen.

Time does not permit me to enlarge on these points, or to speak about what our older brethren who knew Walther personally tell us of his ability as a public speaker; of his personal fervor, which communicated his enthusiasm to his pupils, students, and hearers; of his kindness and humility joined with decisiveness and determination to uphold the truth of God and maintain His glory amongst men.

I shall only, and very briefly, add one point which often is, but ought not to be, forgotten. Walther, while his influence gradually grew world-wide, was a true, enthusiastic, patriotic American. Indeed, he was not born in our country. As stated at the beginning, he came here a stranger and a pilgrim like the pilgrim fathers of Massachusetts. But he understood what those New England fathers did not understand. We sing of this "sweet land of liberty" as the "land of the pilgrims' pride." Alas, those older pilgrims did not know what a land of real liberty is. They set up a form of government under the laws of which every citizen was to believe and practice religion and live according to *their* views. The same persecution they had escaped from they made others feel.

It was different with Walther. His and his fellow pilgrims' protest was that no civil government should have any authority to interfere in religious and ecclesiastical affairs. And he prized our country above all in the world because of the religious liberty guaranteed to its citizens. He called this the golden crown of all our liberties, the brightest star in the banner of our country. Read his fourth of July oration pub-

lished in one of the collections of his addresses, and you cannot but be inflamed with a holy fire of true patriotism and love for our country. Walther may have made mistakes according to the views of some of us; but he had become a true American of the best type.

We hear much in these days about great Americans and great German-Americans; the names of some of them are known to everybody. Most of those men are only results; but men like Walther are moving causes. Those men represent ripe fruits of patriotism which our nation enjoys; but the deep roots from which the fruit-bearing trees grow are, though hardly noticed by the multitude, in the hearts of such men as understand and fully appreciate what God in His goodness has given our country as His best gift: religious freedom.

Hence we all have just cause to celebrate this day, both as Lutherans and as Americans. And I wish to state at this point that I have been instructed by unanimous vote of the Milwaukee Conference of the Wisconsin Synod to say to you, our brethren in the faith, that we rejoice with you. We thank God with you that He gave to the Church the services of such a man as Walther was, a staunch Lutheran, a spiritual leader and builder, a true American.

And now, as we look to the future, we can see two possibilities. One is, that we forget to appreciate the heritage of our Lutheran fathers, and become indifferent toward the peculiarly precious gifts bestowed on our Church by the mercy of God; that we gradually lose the way of truth in the maze of unbelief, false doctrine, and religious indifference abroad in our land and time, becoming like a ship without compass and rudder, deprived of our identity and distinctive character as the Church of the Reformation, at last swallowed up by the powers of darkness. The other possibility is, that we continue in the Word of Truth, in the living faith in, and strict adherence to the doctrine of, the grace of God, — a free Church proclaiming the truth in a free country, a growing blessing to this beloved land of ours.

Briefly, the one possibility is, that we forget, the other, that we remember, the benefits God bestowed on us by giving our Church such men as Walther.

My brethren, it is for us to say, — and God grant according to His grace that we all, young and old, rich and poor, laymen and ministers, answer aright, — What shall the future be?

Milwaukee, October 22, 1911.

C. GAUSEWITZ.

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