

Walther (at 200), Reformation and Where Lutheranism Needs to Be Today

October 25 marks the 200th birthday of the Reverend Doctor C. F. W. Walther, the first president of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Lest you think life has changed or that there is something new under the sun with all that goes on under the name “Lutheran” in our country today, consider Dr. Walther’s words. They were written in 1846, the year before the formation of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. As the true “evangelicals”—those who hold to and proclaim the pure Gospel of forgiveness, we at Trinity and in the LC-MS have much for which to fight in our own day. Let us take up the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17) and use it mightily by the power of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ and of God our Father!

“In America no denomination has suffered any deeper fall than this fellowship that is called ‘Lutheran.’ All the sects of this land are more zealous to preserve the false doctrines upon which they’ve been founded, and that give them their unique character, than the present so-called Lutherans intend to hold fast to the holy and pure doctrine which is founded upon the clear Word of God, that was entrusted to her through God’s unspeakable grace. Yes, we see the American Lutheran Church is not only dominated by negligence and indifference, but even by enmity against the true Lutheran Church. [How true of the ELCA today.] She has retained nothing but the name. She has lost the ancient truth and the ancient spirit of witness. Yet we also see that we have no reason to despair over the condition of the Lutheran Church in America. God has obviously once again picked up His winnowing fork to beat His threshing floor and to sift His wheat. God has obviously resolved to no longer sit back and watch the hidden mice, those false saints, those fish in muddy waters. God has once again begun to open eyes here and there, who fearfully acknowledge the apostasy of which the Lutherans have become guilty. Here and there God is awakening men who are loudly demanding those who have abandoned their first love to return. God be praised! After a long winter the turtledoves are again heard in our land.

“For behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.”
Song of Solomon 2:11-13

“Rise, get up then dear brothers! Let us not idly watch as false brothers band together ever more tightly to bury the foundation of our church and create another beside it. Since these do all this while still fraudulently fighting under our name, they are more dangerous than our declared enemies. They are their compatriots even while they bunk in our camp. He who dwells in heaven surely laughs at them and the LORD mocks them, for ‘even if the sea billows and rages, and the mountains erode in their storm, yet the city of God remains vibrant and well with her fountains, where are the holy dwellings of the Highest. God is with her, so she will remain well. God will help her early.’ [Ps 46] But as **impossible** as it is for Luther’s doctrine, that is, God’s Word to be driven out of the world, **yet it is just that easily possible**, if we do not hold on tightly to it and fight for it, to lose this gem and someday be rejected as unfaithful stewards.

“hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he [God’s steward] will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the

circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. *Titus 1:9-11*

and fight for it,

“Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” *Jude 3*

to lose this gem

“Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.” *2 John 8-9*

and someday be rejected as unfaithful stewards.

“Therefore, if we do not wish to be called hypocritical Lutherans, but want to be and remain Lutherans in deed and truth, let us walk together and again gather around the banner of the ancient, unchangeable doctrine of our church; pleading together that the LORD awaken and create help that comfort again be taught; together fighting against all deceptions with the sword of the Spirit and together bearing the shame by which the LORD strives to designate His servants. We dare not hope that the church in these latter, horrible times will be established again in a condition of glorious bloom, yet we may also not abandon hope that our witness and our battle will not be completely in vain, but rather will give way to praise of the LORD and convert many souls from the errors of their way.” [Bold emphasis added.]

Source: C.F.W. Walther, *Der Lutheraner*, Volume 2, Number 11, January 1846, pg. 42-43
Translated by Joel Baseley.

What more need be said this Reformation time than Walther says to us here! How blessed we are at this moment in history to have as the president of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod a leader who not only has read and translated Walther, but knows and believes what we as the “Evangelical” [Gospel] Lutheran Church have always taught and confessed. God bless Pastor Matthew Harrison and the Missouri Synod as we in our day and in this place “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints”: Jesus Christ God’s Son is man’s only Savior from sin, death and hell. For He who existed from eternity was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. This Man offered His holy life as the payment for your sins and the sins of the whole world. He died on the cross for you and to cleanse your heart and set you free from guilt, punishment and hell, Jesus washed you in the water of Baptism and filled you with His Spirit. God became a “flesh-bearer” in order that “in Christ” we might be made “Spirit-bearers” or little Christ’s. [Weinrich from Athanasius.]

We find refuge in Jesus, our mighty Fortress. As Professor William Weinrich writes,

He [Jesus] is Himself the reality and substance of our salvation. Salvation is not simply to be with Christ or to be close to Him. Salvation is to be “in Christ” (en Xpistw), to use a Pauline phrase. Christ may be our friend, but the fathers of the Nicene Council never used the category. “Friend” is not sufficient to indicate the central and eternal significance of Jesus. I want to emphasize this point. Christ is not merely the instrument of God’s will toward us, although He is also that. Christ is the instrument of God’s will to save because He is Himself the incarnation of that will. . . . God’s will to save is itself enfleshed, so that the life of the Christ, His words and His works, reveals and effects and is itself God’s will to save, that is, God’s will to make man new. [William Weinrich, “*Father, Son and Spirit Is God*,” CTQ 75.1-2 January/April 2011]

You, dearly beloved, are God's new creatures. You exist for Him in Christ Jesus your Lord and by your faith in Jesus you show forth the glory of God Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For as Dr. Martin Luther writes on John's Gospel, "Outside this Man Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary and who suffered, you must not seek God or any salvation and help; for He is God Himself." [LW 22.494]

Tell the world. They find it unbelievable, even Jews, Muslims and with them many liberal so-called Christians. "The fact is we do worship a human being, namely, Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Mary, Word incarnate." [Weinrich, p. 33] That is what the Scriptures are all about, the Creeds and Confessions of Christ's Church, and it is what it is to be a Christian, indeed, a Lutheran in a world of doubt. I believe God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Jesus God's Son, who is now risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily on earth and continues to dwell bodily forever in heaven, so that He with His body is present in all places, and—particularly for you—in the bread and wine of the Sacrament of the Altar. Come to Jesus Christ, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and He Himself will give you rest!

Pastor Thomas Olson