

The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and the Public Square in the Era of C.F.W. Walther

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To discuss The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and the “public square” in any kind of comprehensive way would require a book, maybe more than one.¹ However, by investigating what the founders of the Synod thought about issues of church and state, we may discover in part why the Synod is so troubled today about appropriate ways of participating in the public life of the community. For the synodical forefathers expressed their convictions as the clear teachings of the permanent and unchanging Word of God. In so doing, they imposed a theological imprint upon the LCMS that continues to shape the thinking and behavior of many in the Synod today – but not everyone, since many believe that new situations require new answers. Nevertheless, because the synodical founders articulated their positions on the basis of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, it may be possible to discern the outline of an answer to the Synod’s problems today in their writings *if* the LCMS maintains the same commitments as its founding generation.

Of course, it will not do simply to assert that Walther and his synodical contemporaries were always correct and that one can solve everything simply by quoting them. No, one needs to test their statements by God’s Word just like any statement written today. Still, the synodical fathers are worth listening to. Contemporary theologians do not possess a monopoly on wisdom and insight. Therefore it is the height of arrogance to ignore

¹For example, Wayne W. Wilke, “Changing Understanding of the Church-State Relationship: The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, 1914-1969 (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1990) and Robert Nichols, “[Views on Church and State in The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1885 to 1919](#)” (M. Div. thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, 1972).

the voices of those who shared our Lutheran convictions and dealt with issues similar to our own, simply because they lived a long time ago.

In the early years of the LCMS, issues concerning church and state arose frequently because immigrant Lutherans had no prior experience with a country in which there was no state-supported Lutheran ecclesiastical establishment. Thus, there are abundant sources for investigating the question of how the church participates in the public square – or if it ought to participate at all.² C.F.W. Walther addressed church/state questions often during his long career³ and he was certainly not the only Missourian to do so;⁴

²Needless to say, others have already treated this topic. Particularly useful are Angelika Dörfler-Dierken, Luthertum und Demokratie: Deutsche und amerikanische Theologen des 19. Jahrhunderts zu Staat, Gesellschaft und Kirche (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 259-333, and August R. Suelflow, Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C.F.W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000). But see also Suelflow's "Walther the American" in Arthur H. Drevlow, John M. Drickamer, and Glenn E. Reichwald, eds., C.F.W. Walther: The American Luther (Mankato, MN: Walther Press, 1987), 13-35, and "The Two Kingdom Concept in 18th- and 19th-Century Lutheranism in America" in John R. Stephenson, ed., God and Caesar Revisited (N.p.: Luther Academy, 1995), 69-86. Also see James Heiser, "The Church-State Relationship and Augustana XVI in the Writings of C.F.W. Walther and S.S. Schmucker," Logia 5 (1996):5-13.

³See Dörfler-Dierken, 278-301, for a very thorough treatment of Walther's attitude toward church and state. For primary sources, see C.F.W. Walther, "3rd Sunday after Easter (2): 1 Peter 2, 11-20" in C.F.W. Walther, Standard Epistles, trans. Donald E. Heck (Livermore, IA: n.p.), 239-45. For the original, see Carl Ferd. Wilh. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille Predigten, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, n.d.), 232-38. As far as publication date is concerned, the Forward is dated 1882 (p. iv); but a footnote in the text (p. 233) gives 1854 as the year Walther preached THIS SERMON. Also, C.F.W. Walther, "23rd Sunday after Trinity: Matthew 22:15-22" in C.F.W. Walther, Old Standard Gospels, trans. Donald E. Heck (Livermore, IA: n.p.), 343-49. For the original, see Carl Ferd. Wilh. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Evangelien Postille (St. Louis: Druckerei und Stereotypie der Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. St., 1875), 339-44. Also, C.F.W. Walther, "A Fourth of July Address Made Before a Christian Young Men's Society (1853)," in The Word of His Grace: Occasional and Festival Sermons (Lake Mills, IA: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1978), 152-158. For original, see C.F.W. Walther, Lutherische Brosamen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1897), 362-69. Also, C.F.W. Walther, "Zehnte Predigt zur Eröffnung der Synode," in Lutherische Brosamen, 495-508.

⁴See, for example, "Referat über die Lehre von der Obrigkeit," Verhandlungen der Siebenten Jahres-Versammlung des Westlichen Districts...1861 (St. Louis: Synodal-Druckerei, 1861), 18-20; G. Schaller, "Synodalrede," in Verhandlungen der achten Jahresversammlung des Westlichen Districts...1862 (St. Louis: Synodal-Druckerei, 1862), 6-11; "Acht Thesen über das Verhältniss von Staat und Kirche in Rücksicht auf etliche Zeitfragen" in Fünfzehnter Synodal-Bericht des Mittleren Districts...1870 (St. Louis; Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und

but a good starting place for considering the views of the Synod's founding generation on such matters is an essay Walther delivered on the subject in 1885 as a part of a long series devoted to the theme, "The doctrine of the Lutheran Church alone gives all glory to God, an irrefutable proof that its doctrine alone is true."⁵

Walther's 1885 installment is particularly significant for at least two reasons. First, in preparing his convention essays Walther was always careful to elicit proof for his statements not only from the Scriptures but also from the Lutheran tradition, preeminently the Confessions and Luther himself. Therefore, the entire series of essays presents us with direct evidence of how Walther understood and *applied* his Lutheranism to the situation of the church in America. The applications are especially interesting since the church faced a different situation in Walther's day than it did in Luther's. Second, in this essay Walther was reflecting upon church/state questions after living in the United States for over 45 years. For a long time he had experienced first-hand what it meant for the Lutheran church to lack the status and support it had in the land of its birth, but to enjoy religious liberty instead.

On one hand, the main thesis of the 1885 essay is entirely unsurprising, for it reflects clear biblical theology: "The Lutheran church believes, teaches, and confesses according to God's Word that *secular authorities* do not have the right or the power to rule

anderen Staaten, 1870), 44-49; and F.C.D. Wyneken, "Besprechung der Thesen über das Recht, die Vorzüge und Pflichten der Freikirche" in Achtzehnter Synodal-Bericht des Mittleren Districts...1874 (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u.a. Staaten, 1874), 16-58.

⁵Walther delivered the entire series as convention essays before the Western District of the LCMS beginning in 1873 and concluding in 1886, less than a year before his death. Among the doctrines treated were, of course, the central topics of the Christian religion like justification, the means of grace, sanctification, and prayer. But at the end of the series he also presented eight theses devoted to the teaching of the Lutheran Church regarding *earthly* authorities; and in Thesis 7, he took up the topic of church and state and treated it at length in the convention essay of 1885. For an introduction to the entire series, see Suelflow, Servant, 155-60.

For the 1885 essay, see Sechszwanzigster Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts der deutschen evang.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten 1885 (St. Louis: Luth. Concordia-Verlag, 1885), 13-51. An English translation has been printed in C.F.W. Walther, Essays for the Church, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 2:270-89. In this article, quotations in the text are from the English translation. Parenthetical page numbers likewise refer to the English. References to the German are in the footnotes.

over their subjects in matters of faith and conscience” (270, emphasis original).⁶ As St. Peter put it, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

On the other hand, Walther’s development of this thesis is quite interesting in that he treats not only the question of whether the state can exercise authority over faith and conscience but also more broadly the relationship of church and state, including the obligations of Christians toward their government. In so doing, Walther interprets the Lutheran tradition in a way that is most congenial to his American context while actually dismissing the views of some of the orthodox Lutheran fathers.

With respect to relationships between church and state, Walther makes three basic points in his 1885 essay: 1.) the fundamental obligation of the Christian to obey his government whatever the form; 2.) the duty of the state to protect the church; and 3.) the necessity of separating church and state. Regarding the first point, Walther is simply a biblical theologian. Relying upon Romans 13, which he identifies as the *sedes doctrinae* (*der Sitz der Lehre*) on the subject of government, Walther points out that the obligation of obedience does not depend on the form of government but on the scriptural teaching that every form of government, *including tyranny*, exercises its authority only on account of the will of God.⁷

The United States, of course, owed its existence to a rebellion against constituted authority; and on more than one occasion during Walther’s lifetime Europe, including the German states, experienced uprisings on the part of those who espoused the same ideals of freedom and equality that animated Americans. But Walther will have none of it. In this essay, he insists that “one never hears of truly Lutheran citizens and countries being

⁶“Die lutherische Kirche glaubt, lehrt und bekennt nach Gottes Wort, ferner, dass die *weltliche Obrigkeit* weder Recht noch Macht habe, über Glauben und Gewissen ihrer Unterthanen zu herrschen” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 14).

⁷“Ob sie [die Obrigkeit] rechtmässig in’s Amt gekommen, oder ob sie fromm, oder ob sie unseres Glaubens ist, kann also hier nicht massgebend sein....Der Obrigkeit, die die Gewalt über uns hat, sollen wir unterthan sein; sonst versündigen wir uns nicht sowohl an einem Menschen, als an Gott selbst” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 15-16).

involved in revolution – except in countries where Lutheran churches no longer exist – even when Lutherans suffered extreme persecutions” (271).⁸

But if Lutherans reject revolution, how could Lutherans in America be loyal to a government that first came to power through rebellion against lawful authority? Walther’s answer is simple: “As soon as an invader establishes his power, a citizen is obliged to obey that government, because [the invader] has the power which, in the final analysis, makes it a valid government” (272).⁹ Governments rise and fall only because God so wills it. The government that exists, therefore, is the one that God would have us obey.

But even so, attaining power does not legitimate the act of revolution that preceded it; and Walther is very careful to distinguish the exercise of political power (which God has sanctioned) from the means employed to obtain power (which God may or may not sanction). In particular, Walther does not endorse the liberal, democratic revolutions of his day as a Christian way of replacing one political arrangement by another. In fact, in a sermon preached in 1854 but published only a few years before his 1885 convention essay, Walther repudiates such rebellions as thoroughly unchristian. Commenting on 2 Peter 2:10, 19 (“[they] despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.... While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption,” *KJV*), Walther characterizes the revolutionary era of his day as a sign of the last times:

If we compare the state of affairs in our day with this picture, we can see that also this prediction is being literally fulfilled before our very eyes. Now that the great apostasy has taken place,...the world wide battle against civil laws has begun.... That the government is God’s servant and substitute on earth, that those who resist the government resist God’s ordinance and fight against God, is now almost universally ridiculed as a teaching of the age of ignorance.... they are not afraid to revile heads of government; yes they pour upon them the vilest mockery

⁸“Man von wirklich lutherischen Staatsangehörigen und in wirklich lutherischen Ländern nie von Revolution gehört hat, es sei denn, dass die lutherische Kirche in denselben zu existieren aufgehört hatte, selbst in Zeiten der furchtbaren Bedrückungen” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 16).

⁹“Sobald sich aber ein solcher Eroberer festsetzt, so ist er die zum Gehorsam verbindende Obrigkeit, denn er hat die Gewalt, welche schliesslich zur gültigen Obrigkeit macht” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 19).

and ridicule in words and writing....To exterminate all kings and privileged groups and grant democratic freedom to all people has been called the goal toward which the world is moving.¹⁰

All this Walther finds abhorrent. Unlike the revolutionaries he believes that what makes a government legitimate is not the will of the people but God's establishment, no matter what the form of government. According to his 1885 essay, any rebellion against the "powers that be" – whether traditional forms of authority (kings or aristocrats still prevailing in Europe) or republican forms (elected officials as in the United States) – is a rebellion against God (271).¹¹ Thus, the form of the state does not matter and no one form is more Christian than any other.

So Walther acknowledges the legitimacy of a democratic republic like his own, but he has little use for the rhetoric of popular sovereignty that undergirds it. In his 1854 sermon he describes the goal of liberal revolutionaries, and mocks it: "The government should not be the government but the voters' stooge without a will of its own; it should ask only what the people want, give free rein to all who hate honor, chastity, and order,

¹⁰“Vergleichen wir nun mit diesem Bilde den Stand der Dinge in unseren Tagen, so sehen wir nur zu deutlich, dass auch diese Vorausverkündigungen von den letzten Zeiten jetzt vor aller Welt Augen buchstäblich in Erfüllung gehen. Nachdem fast überall in der ganzen Christenheit ein grosser Abfall vom Glauben erfolgt ist,...hat man nun den Kampf endlich auch gegen alle bürgerliche Ordnungen in der Welt begonnen....Dass die Obrigkeit Gottes Dienerin und Stellvertreterin auf Erden ist und dass daher diejenigen, welche sich wider die Obrigkeit setzen, Gottes Ordnung widerstreben und wider Gott selbst streiten, dass verlacht man jetzt fast allgemein als eine Lehre aus dem Zeitalter der Unwissenheit und Unmündigkeit....man...erzittert nicht, die Majestäten zu lästern, ja, übergiesst sie in Rede und Schrift mit dem gemeinsten Spott und Hohn....Vertilgung aller Könige und Bevorzugten und republikanische Freiheit für all Völker erklärt man für das Ziel der Welt, mit dessen Erreichung endlich das Zeitalter kommen werde” (Epistel Postille, 232-33; English: Standard Epistles, 239-40).

¹¹“Es ist nicht etwa nur eine Störung der öffentlichen Ruhe, wenn man sich der weltlichen Obrigkeit widersetzt, sondern recht eigentlich ein Kämpfen gegen die göttliche Majestät.” “In unserem Lande ist z. B. nicht der Präsident, Congress, sondern das Volk der Souverän. Aber widersetzen wir uns diesen vom Volk angestellten Beamten, so widersetzen wir uns der Souveränität des Volkes und damit Gott selbst” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 16, 16-17). See also Epistel Postille, 235.

and even place the seal of approval upon their lawless deeds.”¹² Clearly, for Walther, democracy *per se* has no intrinsic merit as a form of government.

It is no surprise then that Walther denounces especially those who identify political freedom with Christian liberty:

But the most frightening thing about all this is that many Christians have themselves drunk from the intoxicating cup of false thoughts of freedom. Even Scripture is not seldom misused to justify this bogus freedom. The reading of atheistic literature which preaches the overthrow of all divine and human laws is gradually bearing bitter, ruinous fruit even among Christians.¹³

As Walther understood it, contemporary advocates of political, social, and economic freedom who used the Gospel to justify their claims were actually corrupting the Gospel. In a lengthy Forward to the 1863 volume of *Lehre und Wehre*, which Walther as editor presumably wrote, he explores the nature of this theological aberration and summarizes the fundamental issue for orthodox believers with these words:

The question is whether the old rule, *Evangelium non abolet politias*, i.e., the Gospel does not abolish political arrangements, is false or whether instead the Gospel requires equality of political rights; whether freedom, i.e., the freedom with which Christ has made us free, makes us free in a bodily and civil way; whether therefore Christ was the sort of messiah that the Jews were waiting for, a liberator of his people from earthly oppression; *and whether therefore the Gospel brings with it a revolutionary element that overturns the outward arrangements in the world.* (emphasis original)¹⁴

¹²“Die Obrigkeit soll nicht mehr Obrigkeit sein, sondern eine willenslose Handlangerin ihrer Wähler, die nur fragt, was das Volk will, und die allen Gelüsten derjenigen, die Ehrbarkeit, Zucht und Ordnung hassen, Freiheit giebt and denselben noch das Siegel der Gesetzlichkeit aufdrückt” (*Epistel Postille*, 233; English: *Standard Epistles*, 240).

¹³“Unter allem das Erschrecklichste in unserer Zeit ist aber, dass selbst viele, welche Christen sein wollen, von dem Taumelkelch der falschen Freiheitsgedanken getrunken haben. Selbst die heilige Schrift missbraucht man nicht selten dazu, um den Freiheitsswindel, der jetzt über die Völker ausgegossen ist, zu rechtfertigen. Das Lesen atheistischer und den Umsturz aller göttlichen und menschlichen Ordnungen predigender Zeitungsblätter trägt mehr auch unter den Christen seine bitteren, verderblichen Früchte” (*Epistel Postille*, 233; English: *Standard Epistles*, 240).

¹⁴“Es handelt sich um die Frage, ob der alte Kanon: *Evangelium non abolet politias* d.i. das Evangelium hebt die politischen Ordnungen nicht auf, ein lügenhafter sei und ob vielmehr das Evangelium auch bürgerliche Gleichberechtigung verlange; ob die christliche Freiheit, d.h., die Freiheit, damit uns Christus befreiet hat, uns leiblich, bürgerlich frei mache, ob also Christus ein Messias war, wie die Juden ihn erwarteten, ein Befreier seines Volkes von irdischem Drucke;

Walther's answer to all this is a resounding no, because the Scriptures sanction all sorts of human inequalities and require those who are in subordinate positions to obey. Thus, the Christian *qua* Christian has no real interest in the distributions of temporal power that characterize the public square.

However, despite his affirmations of traditional political and social arrangements (including slavery) in this 1863 essay, Walther indicates that a Christian should be concerned that within any particular economic and political system relationships be carried out in ways that are Christian, just, and in conformity with love. With slavery especially in mind, Walther points to several Scriptural passages that show how masters are to treat their slaves. He then prescribes as "the true duty of every Christian" to see to it that "in a legal way through all possible means it should be brought about that masters observe those godly rules [regarding slaves] and that the government sees to it that they do."¹⁵ Not *who* has the power but *how* power is exercised is the question to which the Scriptures speak.

So at this point (1863) and regarding this particular issue (slavery), Walther opens the door for Christian participation in politics, working within the system to reform it but not overthrow it. However, by the time he writes his 1885 essay, this idea is missing, and his emphasis is entirely on obedience.¹⁶ In particular, he does not treat the obligations of citizenship in a free state, e.g., voting or running for public office. Perhaps one can un-

ob sonach das Evangelium ein revolutionäres, die äusserlichen Ordnungen in der Welt umstossendes Element in sich trage" ("Vorwort," Lehre und Wehre 9 [1863]:44).

¹⁵"Dafür nun auf gesetzlichem Wege mit allen möglichen Mitteln zu wirken, dass jene göttlichen Regeln von den Herren beobachtet und dass die Beobachtung derselben auch von der Obrigkeit überwacht werde, das achten wir daher für die wahre Aufgabe eines jeden Christen....Solche Bestrebungen, bei denen man zwar die Knechtschaft selbst stehen liesse..., aber für eine christliche, gerechte, *der Liebe gemässe Gestaltung dieses politischen und ökonomischen Verhältnisses Sorge trüge*, würden Gott zu Ehren and den Menschen zum Heil gereichen" ("Vorwort," 45).

¹⁶Of course, one may not obey the government when it commands something clearly against God's Word, and Walther gives as an example an unjust war. In such a case, Walther believes that the Scriptures recognize a right to flee a tyrannical government though one may not otherwise resist it. See Synodal-Bericht 1885, 17, 23 (English: "1885," 271, 274).

derstand this reticence as evidence of Walther's remaining as close as possible to the literal meaning of his sources, the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the orthodox Lutheran theologians -- none of which, for obvious reasons, discuss participation in democratic processes. It is also true that Walther's theme in this essay is more directed to what the government should do than it is to what citizens should do. Still, it is striking that after 45 years, he has virtually nothing to say about the Christian's obligations when living in a republic except, "Obey the law!"

However, we should also note that in passing Walther does mention Christian prayer on behalf of the state in his 1885 essay.¹⁷ His published sermons include some preached on "national days of humiliation and prayer" in which he stresses the obligation of prayer very strongly.¹⁸ Prayer, along with repentance, is Walther's prescription to the Christian community when the country is in trouble.¹⁹ What did Walther say about prayer in such circumstances?

First, in a sermon delivered in the midst of the American Civil War with all its horrors, Walther maintains that the first cause of everything, including the war, is God. Walther writes:

Surely it is easier to recognize that pestilence and famine resulting from crop failure come from God, since in the case of these calamities men are not the intermediate cause. Ungodly men may indeed always be the mediate cause of all wars; still, their ultimate cause is always God, who uses war as His chastening and punishing rod.

God is in charge, not man: "God is not only the Creator, but also the Ruler of the world....He is no idle spectator who allows the world to do what it pleases." And God's

¹⁷"1 Tim. 2,1. 2. werden die Christen ermahnt, für die Obrigkeit zu bitten, und zwar deshalb, 'dass wir ein ruhig und stilles Leben führen mögen in aller Gottseligkeit und Ehrbarkeit'" (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 28). English: "1885," 277.

¹⁸See, for example, his sermons for a Day of Humiliation during the Civil War in Evangeliën Postille, 398-404 (English: Standard Gospels, 391-97); in Lutherische Brosamen, 270-78 (English: The Word of His Grace, 144-51); and in Epistel Postille, 491-96 (English: Standard Epistles, 240). There is also such a sermon from 1849 in his Casual-Predigten und -Reden (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1892), 154-63.

¹⁹See Dörfler-Dierken, 292-96, for a discussion of the Christian's obligation to pray for his government.

sway extends even to the wicked. Like Luther in The Bondage of the Will, Walther insists that “God is never the cause of sin, but without God’s will no sinner can move and direct his heart, tongue, hand or foot....Everything must finally fall in line with His [God’s] ways, and everything must lead to His goal.”²⁰

But what is God’s goal in permitting war? Simply, to move men to repentance. And of what sins should they repent? Walther has plenty to say about the sins of America but basic to them all is pride. In the wake of many temporal blessings from God, including civil and religious liberty, Americans were not grateful but became proud. They “ascribed to themselves the glory that out of pure grace God has bestowed on them, robbed God of His glory, [and] assumed honor for themselves.” Such pride led to a host of other sins and Walther enumerates a long list, but the worst of all is that “thousands upon thousands have lost the last spark of faith and love that had been kindled in their hearts.” For Walther, this means that God is punishing sin with sin; so the love of many has grown cold.²¹

Moreover, Walther indicts especially his hearers, presumably the people of his own church, for not repenting of their sins. Instead of learning from the Civil War to return to the Lord, they have placed their trust in man while nourishing “hatred of the enemy and partisan frenzy” (“*Feindeshass und Parteiwuth*”). They have derived their view of the war from “ungodly, atheistic newspapers” (“*gottlosen atheistischen Zeitungen*”)

²⁰“Es ist wahr: dass Pestilenz und Hungersnoth in Folge von Missernte von Gott kommen, sind leichter erkannt, da bei diesen Landplagen die Menschen nicht die Mittelursachen sind. Allein mögen immerhin gottlose Menschen Mittelursachen aller Kriege sein, die letzte Ursache derselben ist immer Gott, der dieselben zur Ruthe seiner Zucht und Strafe gebraucht. Gott ist nicht nur der Schöpfer, sondern auch der Regierer der Welt....Er ist kein müßiger Zuschauer, der die Welt thun lässt, was ihr beliebt....Zwar ist Gott nie die Ursache der Sünde, aber ohne Gottes Willen kann kein Sünder Herz, Zunge, Hand noch Fuss regen und lenken....In seine Wege muss endlich alles einschlagen, zu seinem Endziel muss endlich alles führen” (Lutherische Brosamen, 273-74; English: The Word of His Grace, 146-47).

²¹“Unser Volk hat, was Gott ihm aus freier Gnade gegeben hatte, sich selbst zugeschrieben, Gott die Ehre genommen und sich die Ehre gegeben.” “Und, was das Erschrecklichste ist, Tausende und aber Tausende haben das Fünkeln des Glaubens und Liebe, das in ihrem Herzen angezündet war, in der reissenden Fluth der Kriegsleidenschaften verloren” (Lutherische Brosamen, 274-75; English: The Word of His Grace, 147-48).

which portrayed it as ushering in a “new age of complete freedom and equality” (“*eines neuen Zeitalters vollkommener Freiheit und Gleichheit*”) instead of listening to God’s Word about what war really means as a call to repentance. Rather than following a different way from the world, they have fallen right in with the world and so will embrace its fate – unless they repent!²²

According to Walther, then, repentance is the basis of prayer for the nation in times of calamity. Since God is in charge of what happens to a nation and because His purposes are good, the believer can know for sure that misfortunes come as divine warnings. Certainly, they are a form of punishment; but more importantly, God sends them to wake people from their sins and turn them back to God so that they do not lose their eternal salvation as well as their temporal well-being.

Besides the content of prayer when the nation is at risk, there is also the question of context. With whom do we pray when our country is in trouble? Although Walther himself does not address this question directly in materials regarding church and state, the topic does come up elsewhere in his writings. It is reasonable to conclude that Walther would not join in public prayer with representatives of heterodox churches or non-Christian religions.

For example, in his 1882 convention essay on prayer, Walther attacks Catholics for praying to saints, the Reformed for making prayer a means of grace, and *both* of them for teaching that “in prayer to Christ one must completely turn away from the person of our Redeemer and turn to His divinity.” Instead, Walther insists that in true prayer “Christ is to be called upon and worshiped as God and man in one person, not alone in respect to His divinity.”²³ He is hardly laying the groundwork for joint prayer.

²²Lutherische Brosamen, 277 (English: The Word of His Grace, 149-150).

²³“Reformierte und Papisten können sich also weder auf die Schrift, noch auf das christliche Altertum berufen, wenn sie sagen: beim Gebet zu Christo müsse man von der Person unseres Erlösers ganz absehen und nur zu seiner Gottheit sich wenden.” “Hieraus folgt nun...dass Christus als Gott und Mensch in einer Person, also nicht nur nach seiner Gottheit, sondern auch nach seiner Menschheit anzurufen und anzubeten sei” (C.F.W. Walther, “Dass nur durch die Lehre der lutherischen Kirche Gott allein alle Ehre gegeben wird, dies erhellt zehntens aus ihrer Lehre von der Anrufung und Anbetung Gottes,” Vierundzwanzigster Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Distrikts...1882 [St. Louis: Druckerei des Lutherischen Concordia-Verlags, 1882], 48, 45; English: C.F.W. Walther, “Prayer” in Essays, 2:233, 232).

In his Pastoral Theology, Walther offers a long quotation from the orthodox theologian J. K. Dannhauer to answer the question about what sins subject a person to church discipline. The fourth item in Dannhauer's list is "syncretism," identified as "communion with the heterodox [*Irrglauben*]," and as an example of syncretism he mentions prayer with heretics or schismatics.²⁴

Finally, in this connection there is an interesting set of theses that J.H. Fick presented to the 1870 and 1871 conventions of the Western District (at which Walther was also listed as present) on the relationship of evangelical Lutherans to the public schools of America. One of the dangers these theses list for Lutheran children attending public school is the prayers found there, almost always involving heterodox or non-believers. In the first case, prayer with the heterodox, the explanation to the theses argues that those who pray with each other should be one in the faith. However, Lutherans and Reformed are not one in faith, and therefore not one in prayer. Each prays for the conversion of the other, so it is impossible for them to pray together! Moreover, prayers and songs that are not orthodox are dangerous to salvation.

Of course, in some schools the prayers might not be Christian at all but based on "natural religion." This is Walther's second case. But such prayers are not real prayers, since true prayer must be directed to the Triune God and expressed in the name of Jesus. Participation in non-trinitarian prayer amounts to a denial of the true God.²⁵ Because of such prayers, parents should not send their children to public schools.

²⁴"4. Synkretismus, bestehe er nun in Gemeinschaft mit Irrglauben (welchen Synkretismus das Concil von Laodicäa dem Bann übergibt: dass man mit Ketzern oder Schismatikern nicht beten solle, siehe Canon 32. und 33...)" (C.F.W. Walther, Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie, 5th ed. [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1906], 342). For Dannhauer, see Erwin L. Lueker, ed., Lutheran Cyclopedia, rev. ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), s.v. "Dannhauer, Johann Konrad."

²⁵"Weit entfernt, dass das Beten, wenn es in den Freischulen gestattet ist, denselben einen Werth geben sollte, bringt gerade das Beten, da es zumeist von Falsch- und Ungläubigen geübt wird, grosse Gefahr für die Seelen der Kinder mit sich" (J.H. Fick, "Thesen über das rechte Verhältniss eines evangelisch-lutherischen Christen zu dem hiesigen Freischulwesen," Fünftehnter Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts...1870 [St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio, und anderen Staaten, 1870], 75 and Sechzehnter Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts...1871 [St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1871], 51-52).

Given this kind of thinking, it is virtually impossible to imagine the first generation of synodical leadership participating in prayer services with non-Lutherans and non-Christians, even at times of national emergency. Instead, Walther's principles would lead true Lutherans to pray with each other and call upon God in a spirit of repentance for forgiveness and help in their time of trial.

As mentioned previously, in Walther's 1885 essay on church and state the emphasis falls on Christian obedience. However, Walther does open the way for some very limited participation in the public square when he discusses the government's responsibilities toward the church. Walther maintains that "the secular government does have the responsibility of providing for the church protection against injustice, and insofar as 'government' is made up of individuals who are members of the church, the government must use its power to serve the church." (277)²⁶ Earlier in the essay, Walther had delineated the limitations of lawful government, that it "has no right to command its subjects to do what God has forbidden, or to prohibit what God has commanded" (270).²⁷ But now he turns to the obligations of government and insists that it take care of the church.

On the one hand, this has nothing to do with the nature of the church *per se*. Instead, Walther writes, "[the government] does...have a general duty to be concerned about the Church as *a social unit within the state*. Without demanding any special privileges for the church, we do want government to provide us with the same freedoms and rights which all other social units within the state enjoy" (277, emphasis original).²⁸ For

²⁶“Zwar die weltliche Obrigkeit die Kirche in ihrer Freiheit gegen Unrecht zu schützen und, sofern sie (die Obrigkeit) aus Personen besteht, welche Glieder der Kirche sind, derselben mit ihrer Macht zu dienen schuldig sei” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 27).

²⁷“...dass...die weltliche Obrigkeit kein Recht habe, ihren Unterthanen zu gebieten, was Gott verboten, oder zu verbieten, was Gott geboten hat” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 15).

²⁸“Obwohl nämlich nach Gottes Wort die Obrigkeit in der Kirche nicht regieren soll, so hat sie doch erstlich im Allgemeinen die Pflicht, sich der Kirche *als einer Gesellschaft im Staate* anzunehmen. Ohne von der Obrigkeit besondere Vorrechte für unsere Kirche zu beanspruchen, verlangen wir doch von derselben, dass sie unsern Freiheiten und Rechten denselben Schutz angedeihen lasse, den alle anderen Gesellschaften innerhalb des Staates genießen” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 27-28).

Walther, God has established the state “for the purpose of protecting life and property” (273)²⁹, a purpose equally applicable to the church as to any other entity in society. Therefore the government should carry out its duties as they apply to the church.

Potentially, these duties could include taking action “against those who err in the faith and establish or practice principles *that pose a danger to the state*” (284, emphasis added).³⁰ It is the danger to the state that justifies such action, not false religion. Again relying on his Reformation era sources, Walther mentions as examples the pope and the Anabaptists, but he also refers to a contemporary group, the Mormons: “Having been driven out of Missouri and Illinois on account of their thievery, they settled in Utah. If they refuse to give up their immoral polygamy, they will have to expect being chased out of there too.” (285)³¹ But to go against a group like the Mormons does not mean that the government applies the Scriptures in the interests of orthodoxy. Walther teaches that government “rules on the basis of reason,” not the Bible (273).³² Here Walther is discussing beliefs and practices that are subversive of the social order. For him, a state that does not protect property and marriage is cultivating self-destruction. So the state must take measures against any group – including religious ones – that threaten its existence or the well-being of its people.

So Walther’s first point has to do with the general obligation of the government to protect its people, including the church. On the other hand, he also insists that “government representatives...*when they are members of the church*” (emphasis mine) have a

²⁹“...den Staat, der keine Anstalt zur Seligmachung der Seelen, sondern zum Schutz Leibes und Gutes ist” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 21).

³⁰“...dass...zwar die weltliche Obrigkeit das Recht habe, diejenigen Irrgläubigen, welche staatsgefährliche Grundsätze aufstellen oder doch befolgen, unschädlich zu machen und gegen dieselben einzuschreiten” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 42).

³¹“In Amerika gehören unter diese Rubrik die Mormonen, die, wegen ihrer Dieberei aus Missouri und Illinois vertrieben, in Utah sich niederliessen, aber auch da der Ausweisung gewärtig sein müssen, sie die unsittliche Vielweiberei nicht aufgeben wollen” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 43).

³²“Die Obrigkeit...soll auch den Staat...nicht eigentlich nach Gottes Wort regieren, sondern nach der Vernunft” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 21).

special interest in protecting it, for “every Christian should use his gifts in the service of Christ and His kingdom” (277).³³ To be sure, Walther is *not* suggesting that Christian politicians work to change the system in America by establishing confessional Lutheranism as the state religion. But what Walther *is* suggesting is that Christians in government use their positions to make sure that government carries out its duties with respect to the church. Walther writes:

At 1 Tim. 2:1-2, Christians are admonished to pray for the government for this reason: “that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” That points up beautifully the responsibility government has over against the church, and that when government officials are themselves members of the church, they have a double duty in this regard (277).³⁴

Along with all Christians these government officials are to pray for the state, but since they are officials, they also need to establish and maintain the temporal conditions under which Christians may indeed lead “peaceful and quiet lives.”

It is at this point that one could make a case for Christian politics in a limited sort of way. Although it is somewhat disappointing that Walther makes no note of it, his reasoning can apply not only to elected government officials but also to those who do the electing. An obvious corollary of his argument, then, is that the Christian *voter* should cast his ballot in such a way as to ensure the government’s carrying out its role with respect to the church. The church does not demand special privileges but it should enjoy the same privileges as others, and Christians who participate in government should protect those privileges.

The third and final point from Walther’s analysis in his 1885 essay with relevance for the contemporary situation is that he affirms American separation of church and state.

³³“Diese Verpflichtung [der Obrigkeit] haben aber nach unserer Ueberzeugung die obrigkeitlichen Personen in doppeltem Masse, wenn sie selbst Glieder der Kirche sind, weil ja jeder Christ seine Gaben in den Dienst Christi und seines Reiches stellen soll” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 28).

³⁴“1 Tim. 2, 1. 2. werden die Christen ermahnt, für die Obrigkeit zu bitten, und zwar deshalb, ‘dass wir ein ruhig und stilles Leben führen mögen in aller Gottseligkeit und Ehrbarkeit’; womit die Pflicht der Obrigkeit der Kirche gegenüber auf’s herlichste angedeutet wird, zwar nicht allein dann, wenn die obrigkeitlichen zugleich Glieder der Kirche sind, aber sonderlich dann” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 28).

Although Walther rejects any notion of “natural rights” and virtually ignores the obligations of citizenship in a free republic, he is enthusiastic about at least one feature of American life: freedom of religion.

We Lutherans in America can never sufficiently thank God that the federal Constitution [of the United States] makes it impossible for the government to favor one religion over another....Although in Germany people fear the fall of the church into sects, if the church would no longer be maintained by the use of governmental power, here [in America] such fears are put to shame by a freedom of religion that continues to benefit both state and church with the choicest and most precious blessings. (288-89)³⁵

This is hardly the first time that Walther had expressed himself this way regarding the American system. In 1862 in his well-known essay, *The Right Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent of the State*, he had contended that “the church’s independence of the state is not a defect or an abnormal condition, but the right and natural relation which ought always to obtain between church and state. According to God’s Word, church and state are two distinct kingdoms.”³⁶ At the same convention in which Walther gave that essay, G. Schaller delivered an address in which he made the same point: “State and church simply are two completely different kingdoms at the same time. One [kingdom] is spiritual, the other secular. One is maintained and ruled by the sword and force, the other without sword and force, through God’s Word alone. Every alliance between the two is unnatural and can only result in damage to the church.”³⁷

³⁵“Wir Lutheraner in Amerika können daher Gott nicht genug danken, dass es unsrer Obrigkeit durch die Bundesconstitution unmöglich gemacht ist, einer Religion vor einer andern den Vorzug zu geben....Während man in Deutschland den Zerfall der Kirche in lauter Secten fürchtet, wenn die Kirche von der obrigkeitlichen Zwangsgewalt nicht mehr zusammengehalten werden sollte, so bewährt sich hier zur Beschämung jener Furcht die Religionsfreiheit zum höchsten und reichsten Segen für Staat und Kirche” (*Synodal-Bericht 1885*, 50).

³⁶“...so ist doch Unabhängigkeit der Kirche vom Staat nicht ein Mangel oder ein regelwidriger Zustand, sondern das rechte, naturgemässe Verhältniss, in welchem die Kirche immer zum Staate stehen sollte” (C.F.W. Walther, *Die rechte Gestalt einer vom Staate unabhängigen evangelisch-lutherischen Ortsgemeinde* [St. Louis: Aug. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1864], 6; English: *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, trans. John T. Mueller [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963], 6).

³⁷“Staat und Kirche sind einmal zwei ganz verschiedene Reiche; das eine ist geistlich, das andere weltlich; das eine wird durch das Schwert und Gewalt, das andere ohne Schwert und Gewalt, allein durch Gottes Wort erhalten und regiert, und jedes Bündniss zwischen beiden is

Nine years earlier (1853), in a Fourth of July address to a young men's society, Walther talked extensively about the blessings of religious liberty in comparison to old-world arrangements, again proceeding from the axiom that church and state have two different functions and two different means for carrying them out. "The State," he argues, "is certainly not an institution of God by which its citizens are to be led to *eternal life*. The State...is rather an arrangement for *this* life, for order in the world,...that justice and righteousness be meted out" (emphasis original).³⁸ But while the state must resort to force to carry out its mission, the church relies upon immaterial means. "Her power is the faith that overcomes the world, her weapon the Word of the Almighty."³⁹

Therefore the only positive thing that the state can actually do for the church is to permit the church to do her work,

Not privileges, but *liberty*; not government regulations which enforce beliefs of religion but *freedom* of religion to proclaim these doctrines to the whole world; not the protections and spreading of religion with temporal power, but freedom of religion to defend itself and to reach out with the weapon of the persuasive Word; not control of the State, but *freedom* to live in the State, to have a hospitable reception, a place of refuge, a lodging-place (emphasis original).⁴⁰

nicht naturgemäss und kann nur zum Schaden der Kirche ausschlagen" (Schaller, 8). English: Essays, 1:66. This essay was wrongly attributed to Walther in that collection. I thank Robert E. Smith, the translator of the essay, for pointing this out to me.

³⁸"Ein Staat ist ja nicht eine göttliche Anstalt, durch welche die Glieder desselben zum *ewigen* Leben geführt werden sollen! Der Staat...ist vielmehr eine Ordnung Gottes für *dieses* Leben, die nemlich darum bestehen soll, damit es ordentlich in dieser Welt hergehe,...Recht und Gerechtigkeit gehandhabt werde" (C.F.W. Walther, "Rede am 4.Juli gehalten vor einem christlichen Jünglingsverein," Lutherische Brosamen, 364; English: The Word of His Grace, 154).

³⁹"Ihre Kraft ist der weltüberwindende Glaube, ihre Waffe das Wort des Allmächtigen" (Lutherische Brosamen, 368; my translation. For another English rendering see The Word of His Grace, 157).

⁴⁰"Nicht Privilegien, sondern *Freiheit*; nicht Staatsgesetze, welche den Glauben an die Lehren der Religion gebieten, sondern *Freiheit* der Religion, diese Lehren vor aller Welt zu predigen; nicht Vertheidigung und Ausbreitung der Religion mit leiblicher Gewalt, sondern Freiheit der Religion, sich mit den Waffen des überzeugenden Wortes selbst zu vertheidigen und auszubreiten; nicht Herrschaft im Staate, sondern *Freiheit*, darin zu wohnen, eine gastliche Aufnahme, ein Hospitium, eine Herberge" (Lutherische Brosamen, 368-69; English: The Word of His Grace, 157).

More than 30 years later, in his 1885 convention essay, Walther was still making the same point. “Government has neither the right nor the power to arrogate to itself control over church government, nor to force people to conform to the true faith, or what it may consider to be true faith” (277).⁴¹ In support of this, Walther argues first from the Scriptures. From Acts 18:12-16 (the apostle Paul before Gallio), he concludes that “the Holy Spirit...wanted us to know that the secular government as such has no business making decisions in matters of doctrine” and from John 18:36-37 (Christ before Pilate) that “Christ, the King of Truth, has a kingdom that is not of this world, and for that reason He does not allow His kingdom to be defended with secular power and weapons...It is contrary to the kingdom and spirit of Christ to try to force people to conform to ‘true faith’” (278).⁴² Walther also cites the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares to show that the government “has neither the right nor the power to employ force in opposing heretical faith and worship” (285).⁴³

In short, both institutions, church and government, have God-given responsibilities, but they are radically different responsibilities and employ radically different means to carry them out. Therefore, neither should attempt to discharge the tasks of the other. In particular, the church should *not* rely on the coercive powers of the state to maintain true Christianity. The church and the public square are two different things.

Interestingly, Walther’s insistence on separation of church and state does not mean that the state must be atheistic or even agnostic. According to Walther’s reading of

⁴¹“...dass [die weltliche Obrigkeit] weder Recht noch Macht habe, die Regierung der Kirche an sich zu reissen und zum wahren Glauben, oder was sie dafür hält, zwingen zu wollen” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 27).

⁴²“Der Heilige Geist hat diese Geschichte ohne Zweifel unter Anderem auch darum aufzeichnen lassen, dass man wisse, in Sachen der Lehre habe die weltliche Obrigkeit als solche kein Urtheil zu fällen.” “Christus, der König der Wahrheit, hat hiernach nicht ein Reich von dieser Welt und will daher sein Reich auch nicht mit weltlichen Waffen vertheidigt haben...Es ist also gegen Christi Reich und Geist, Leute zum rechten Glauben mit äusserlicher Gewalt zwingen zu wollen” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 30, 30-31).

⁴³“...gewiss ist es...dass die weltliche Obrigkeit...weder Recht noch Macht habe, gegen falschen Glauben und falschen Gottesdienst, oder was sie doch dafür hält, ihre Zwangsgewalt in Anwendung zu bringen” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 44).

American history, the founders of the United States meant for it to be Christian.⁴⁴ He had no problem with the government's requesting (not commanding) the churches to observe special days of thanksgiving or humiliation⁴⁵, with Bible-reading in the public schools⁴⁶, or even with the state's denying citizenship rights to atheists and other non-Christians.⁴⁷ For Walther, freedom of religion meant freedom for the church to carry out its God-given tasks free from state interference. It did not mean state hostility or even neutrality with respect to Christianity.⁴⁸

Besides his reading of U.S. history, Walther was very much influenced in his position by his understanding of church history; and in his 1885 essay, he deals with the history of church/state relationships especially in the era of the Reformation. Of course, he is fully aware of how important the Lutheran princes were to the success of the Reformation. He willingly acknowledges their contribution: "The value of the services which the Lutheran government officials rendered to the church at the time of the Reformation simply cannot be overestimated!" (278).⁴⁹

But how does he square their involvement in the church with his insistence on the independence of the church from the state as the biblically correct position? He does this by presenting a nuanced interpretation of Lutheran church history supported by a careful if selective reading of the documents even though this necessitated his repudiating the

⁴⁴C.F.W. Walther, St. Louis, to J.C.W. Lindemann, Addison, Ill., 26 April 1870, in C.F.W. Walther, Briefe von C.F.W. Walther, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1916), 2:193.

⁴⁵Synodal-Bericht 1885, 32 (English: "1885," 279); Evangelien Postille, 398 (English: Standard Gospels, 391).

⁴⁶Walther to Lindemann, 192-93.

⁴⁷Walther to Lindemann, 192; Lutherische Brosamen, 366.

⁴⁸See Dörfler-Dierken, 287-292, for Walther's conception of "*Christliche Obrigkeit*."

⁴⁹"Wie wichtig waren die Dienste, welche die lutherischen Fürsten der Reformationszeit der Kirche leisteten!" (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 30).

position of later Lutheran dogmaticians, especially J.W. Baier, whose dogmatics Walther edited and used as a textbook at Concordia Seminary.⁵⁰

Of course, Walther can cite statements from the Lutheran Confessions in support of distinguishing church and state, and he does – from the Augsburg Confession (AC 28) and the Apology (Ap 16). But he also has to deal with the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope which says, “Especially does it behoove the chief members of the church, the kings and the princes, to have regard for the interests of the church and to see to it that errors are removed and consciences are healed” (Tr 54).⁵¹

On the face of it, one could understand this statement as saying that government should use its power to suppress heresy and promote the Gospel; but Walther insists that Melancthon is not addressing the responsibilities of government *per se* but of all Christians, “especially” (“fürnehmlich”) – as the text itself indicates – those who can do something about them, “We are here speaking of a general Christian duty, a duty which Christian government officials are in a better position to discharge, simply because of their influential position. For that reason this passage speaks of them not as rulers but as members of the church” (277-78).⁵²

Similarly, when Walther reviews the activities of the princes on behalf of the Lutheran church in the 16th century, he insists either that they were carrying out the “general duty [of the government] to be concerned about the Church as *a social unit within the state*” (emphasis original) (277)⁵³ or that they were acting as concerned members of the

⁵⁰Suelflow, Servant, 106-107.

⁵¹Theodore G. Tappert, ed., The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959). Walther quotes the German text with modernized spelling. For the original, see Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, 4th ed. (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959).

⁵²“...dass hier von einer allgemeinen Christenpflicht die Rede ist, welche christliche Fürsten in ihrer hohen Stellung auszuüben nur mehr befähigt sind. Darum wird hier von ihnen auch nicht geredet, insofern sie Fürsten, sondern insofern sie Glieder der Kirche sind” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 29). See also Schaller, 8 (English: Essays, 1:66).

⁵³“...im Allgemeinen die Pflicht, sich der Kirche als einer Gesellschaft im Staate anzunehmen” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 27).

church, not government officials. So, for example, when John the Constant authorized a visitation of the churches in Saxony and then later established a consistory for the church in his realm, Walther maintains that “the Elector was not acting in this matter in his capacity as a government official; rather, he was merely fulfilling his duty of love as the man best qualified for the job” (280).⁵⁴

In view of the rather rapid development of Lutheran state churches at the time of the Reformation, it is not self-evident that the princes at any rate understood that they were acting simply as church members and not as government officials. Nevertheless, in support of his argument, Walther finds passages in Luther’s writings that seem to make this distinction. For example, one passage describes the elector’s decision to authorize the visitation as an exercise of Christian love but a later one complains that the civil authorities were becoming too powerful in the church (280).⁵⁵ However, Walther does not cite the orthodox Lutheran theologians of the 17th century to support his thesis that the authentic position of Lutheranism is “the doctrine that the government has neither the right nor the power to assume control of the church.” Instead, he contends that in this

⁵⁴“Der Kurfürst handelte hierbei aber nicht in seinem obrigkeitlichen Amte, sondern nach der Pflicht der Liebe als der dazu am besten geeignete Mann” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 33). For Luther’s position on this issue, see Lewis W. Spitz, Jr. “Luther’s Ecclesiology and His Concept of the Prince as *Notbischof*,” Church History 22 (1953):113-141.

⁵⁵Unterricht der Visitatoren an die Pfarhern ym Kurfurstenthum zu Sachssen, WA 26:197 (English: *Instruction to the Visitors*, AE 40:271); Auslegung des ersten und zweiten Kapitels Johannis in Predigten 1537 und 1538, WA 46:737-738 (English: *Sermons on the Gospel of John*, AE 22, 227-228).

Walther also cites the following relevant comment from Luther, “Die Berufung und Wahl der rechthläubigen Kirchendiener ist eigentlich und ursprünglich nicht Sache der Obrigkeit, sondern der Kirche. Wenn aber die Obrigkeit gläubig und ein Mitglied der Kirche ist, so beruft sie, nicht weil sie Obrigkeit ist, sondern weil sie ein Mitglied der Kirche ist.” Walther identifies his source as the periodical, Unschuldige Nachrichten (1715):383. However, the Weimar Edition of Luther’s works does not include it since the editors concluded that the document from which the quotation comes, Bedenken Luthers, Melanchthons, Bugenhagens, Jonas’ und Myconius’, ob in Erfurt die wahre Kirche Christi sei, was probably written by Fr. Myconius and then later assented to by Luther. See WA Br 7, 509. However, E. L. Enders included it in his edition of Luther’s correspondence, Dr. Martin Luther’s Briefwechsel (Calw & Stuttgart: Verlag der Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1907), 11:40-49.

case, the “later Lutheran dogmaticians strayed far afield from the original Lutheran position” (281).⁵⁶

In other words, Walther’s commitment to religious liberty is so great that he is willing to part company with those whom he otherwise routinely quotes as the best representatives of true Christianity. On the one hand, this demonstrates the intensity of his conviction that the Scriptures and Confessions teach the separation of church and state. But on the other hand, it also shows the depth of his appreciation for the American system. For Walther, freedom of religion, as he experienced it in the United States, was an inestimable blessing from God to His church.

As we have seen, in most other respects, Walther displays little use for American democracy. He rejects its political rhetoric, has virtually nothing to say about voting, and thinks that the Civil War is punishment for sin. He urges his people to repent and pray in order to rescue their country from its troubles but otherwise simply to obey, not because the United States is a good country but because it exercises political power under the authority of God, just like any other state regardless of its political form. Indeed, for Walther, there is no specifically Christian form of government.

Accordingly, when we look to Walther and our synodical forebears for advice on the question of the church and the public square, we find little encouragement for political activism on the part of the church. Although there is room in Walther’s theology for such activism on the part of government officials and perhaps even voters who are Christian, there is none at all for the church *per se*, for God has established two separate institutions, church and state, each with its own purpose and role. The task of government is to look after man’s temporal well-being; the task of the church is to preach the Word of

⁵⁶“Die lutherische Kirche der ersten Zeit...an der Lehre festhielt, dass die Obrigkeit weder Recht noch Macht habe, die Regierung der Kirche an sich zu reißen....Aber leider! sind die späteren lutherischen Dogmatiker in diesem Stücke von der Lehre unserer Kirche weit abgewichen.” Walther offers a long quotation from Baier, to show at least one possible source of the error, the misapplication of Old Testament passages to New Testament realities before concluding, “Aerger kann kaum das Welt- und Kirchenregiment wider das klare Zeugniß unserer Kirche in ihrem Grundbekenntniß mit einander vermengt und vermischt werden, als es hier unser lieber Baier thut” (Synodal-Bericht 1885, 35, 37).

God in its truth and purity for the salvation of souls. Clearly, each has more than enough to do without entering into the work of the other.