

# Servant of the Word

The Life and Ministry  
of C. F. W. Walther



August R. Suelflow

**CPH.**  
SAINT LOUIS

To  
*Gladys Gierach Suelflow*  
for her consistent support and  
lifelong encouragement,  
unequaled excellence,  
and devotion as wife and mother.

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## PREFACE

[*Editor's note:* Our gracious Lord called August R. Suelflow to eternal sainthood on August 28, 1999 after he had finished writing the following preface.]

*Servant of the Word* is an account of the fascinating life and ministry of Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, founder and first President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. This great leader, whose influence was widespread both in America and in Europe, was a prime theological preceptor, seminary professor and administrator, essayist, lecturer, and organizer of American Lutheranism.

Walther was a devoted scholar of Martin Luther's writings and had mastered the Lutheran Confessions as well as or perhaps better than anyone in America during the 19th century. He initiated publication opportunities for the wider distribution of Luther's works, and for that reason frequently was referred to as "the Luther of America." In typical humility, however, Walther rejected that designation as inappropriate and insisted that he was merely "Luther's Archivist."<sup>1</sup>

Walther worked tirelessly in the biblical languages (Greek and Hebrew), never ceasing to encourage others in the study of the Scriptures, especially Pauline theology. He also had the gift of a marvelous memory and throughout his life delivered learned essays on doctrinal subjects, with ample quotations from the Scriptures and other documentation—all without the help of modern technology.

Initially Walther's theological writings were prepared in German. Over the past twenty years much of this material has been translated into English, a project significantly supported by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis. These sources especially demonstrate what a multi-faceted man Walther actually was: an outstanding theological professor, a sincere and effective parish pastor, a master teacher of doctrine and practical theology—in short, a devoted servant of God's Word and the church.

Writing about Walther, John Alden Singmaster (1852–1926), one-time professor at the Lutheran seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and President of the General Synod, stated:

Dr. Walther was a man of extraordinary energy and apostolic devotion. His zeal for the truth and his self-denial in its advocacy mark him as a heroic example worthy of study and emulation. His courage and constancy in trial in the Fatherland and in America must evoke the sincere admiration of all who read the story of his life. His achievements are quite as wonderful as his endowments and his character. . . . The future historians of the church of America will give him a very high place on the roll whose memories should be honored for what they were and what they did.<sup>2</sup>

The task of future generations is to study, critique, and learn God's message of forgiveness as revealed in His Son Jesus Christ, our Savior and Brother. In a day when there is much discussion about the doctrine of justification as the doctrine by which the church stands and falls, a study of Walther's life and writings should be of great help.

This biography is not intended to give detail to Walther's extensive theological writings. Rather, it is more concerned with depicting Walther as a human being who lived in mid-America at a time when St. Louis was becoming the center of westward travel and expansion, and when Lutherans in America were becoming more aware of their distinctive theology and their life in mission. This book also focuses on the institutions founded by Walther and on Walther's role as husband, father, and grandfather.

Two resources were especially helpful to me in writing this book. The author is most grateful for having had the privilege during a sabbatical leave to do research in Saxony and to walk in Walther's footsteps. This made it possible to personally see his birthplace, the schools he attended, and his first parish, all of which were extremely informative for learning about the young Walther.

A second major source of information came directly from Walther's own personal correspondence, which provides an intimate look into his theological stance, his thinking, and his emotions—indeed a unique means of “getting into Walther's head.” His correspondence was extensive. In a letter dated May 18, 1882, Walther wrote to Heinrich Stallmann:

Daily I must answer so many letters, sometimes big bundles, which have asked me for doctrinal and sometimes questions of conscience. Answering these, I rarely have enough time to write other letters that do not contain such questions. This is true because these people are waiting anxiously for an answer from me.

It is estimated that Walther wrote about 800 letters per year. Over a twenty-five year span, this may have added up to some 20,000 letters. However, only about 1200 letters have been preserved because once he had responded to a letter, he usually destroyed it. Apparently it never occurred to Walther that someday his letters might be published.

The author expresses deep gratitude and appreciation to several organizations and individuals: Aid Association for Lutherans of Appleton, Wisconsin provided a financial grant to Concordia Historical Institute in order to engage Rev. Werner K. Wadewitz to transcribe Walther's handwritten letters into type-written form; the Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation and Rev. Larry Burgdorf provided funding for this publication; and Concordia Seminary and Mr. James Waltke provided funding for a sabbatical leave. Special thanks are due to all those who at various times rendered most valuable assistance, including especially Rev. Kent J. Bureson, Mrs. Brigitte Conkling, Dr. Curtis P. Giese, Seminarian Thomas A. Egger, Roy Ledbetter, Dr. Thomas Manteufel, and James Ware.

August R. Suelflow  
June 23, 1999

With great determination, Dr. Suelflow studied and researched the life and teachings of C. F. W. Walther. In his quest for historical accuracy, Dr. Suelflow was captivated by the legacy left to God's people by this great American Lutheran father and sought to capture the countless indelible marks Walther left on life's highway in order to share them with others.

Both Dr. C. F. W. Walther and Dr. August R. Suelflow left their marks on God's people. Though divided by time, their kindred spirit drove Dr. Suelflow's desire to share the life story of this remarkable servant of the Word. The most prominent similarity between these two keepers of the faith was their shared gift of humility. Neither man sought glory for self nor viewed himself as standing in a light which others tried to shine upon them.

Dr. Walther refused to be known as the American Luther and instead considered himself as merely "Luther's Archivist." Though Dr. Suelflow disagreed with Walther's own humble self-view, he recognized himself as merely the keeper of historical Lutheran records. Both men seemed blind to the multi-faceted way that God, in His grace, utilized them as confessional Lutherans to keep the rich heritage of Luther alive in America.

Dr. Suelflow, in presenting this fresh account of Walther's life, sought to provide the reader with much more than the typical window into Walther's theology. Wading through reams of Walther's personal correspondence, Dr. Suelflow has provided the reader with insight into the life journey of this Servant of the Word. He provides a glimpse into Walther's life as more than a theologian or writer. Here we are able to see into Walther's home, his university studies, his marriage, children and grandchildren. Dr. Suelflow was able to bring us this wealth of insight into Walther's legacy because of his own remarkable memory and astute retention of historical facts.

With heartfelt gratitude, we express deep appreciation to the late Dr. August R. Suelflow for sharing this biography of the most influential person in our synod's history. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is deeply grateful for Dr. C. F. W. Walther and Dr. August R. Suelflow and their relentless homage to the truth of Christ. It is with heavy hearts of grief that we close this chapter in August R Suelflow's life. However, we rejoice with unending joy that he lives in the arms of Jesus forever.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

Craig A. Du Bois, son-in-law  
Epiphany 2000 A.D.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Walther's Norwegian Lutheran friend, J. A. Ottesen of Utica, Wisconsin, referred to him as the Luther of America. Walther responded to this in a letter dated Feb. 8, 1870. See Ludwig Fuerbringer, *Walthers Briefe*, vol. II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919), 183. For additional insight, see Paul Burgdorf, "Keeper of Luther's Archives," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, vol. XIII, no. 4 (Jan. 1941), 115.

<sup>2</sup> *Lutheran Quarterly*, 47 (July 1917), 454–55.

## IT BEGAN IN EUROPE

One of the greatest historians of American religion, Sydney Ahlstrom, wrote about Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther:

His private life became literally a part of the [Lutheran Church—Missouri] Synod's life and his thoughts very nearly came to be its thoughts. What these thoughts were, however, cannot be quickly stated, for he ranged over the entire field of Christian dogmatics and brought to his pronouncements a depth of historical erudition and type of theological acumen which no survey can convey.<sup>1</sup>

During Walther's lifetime, most American denominations had engaged in serious discussion and debates concerning their theological integrity. Many of them were involved in attempting to bring their theological heritage to bear upon the new social, cultural, and geographical changes that had been introduced into American life in the middle of the nineteenth century. Walther was well-aware of the situation.

What is particularly of interest to us is Ahlstrom's evaluation of Walther's role in the midst of all of this:

Walther's influence was especially significant in that he stood almost alone in the nineteenth-century American theological scene as one fully aware of the crucial importance of the problems of Law and Gospel to the Christian faith.<sup>2</sup>

Who was this man C. F. W. Walther? What kind of man was this leader of the church who, like Martin Luther, shaped the thinking of future generations, especially in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod?

### WALTHER'S FAMILY BACKGROUND

Conditions in the kingdom of Saxony (today a part of the Federal Republic of Germany but at that time a separate, independent kingdom) were chaotic and showed the ravages of war in the early 1800s. Napoleon had subdued Prussia in October 1806 and had fought victorious battles close to Walther's hometown of Langenchursdorf even before he was

born. At that time, his parents had only three young daughters, all under the age of four.

Walther had not yet attained his second year of life when the Napoleonic battles came near to Langenchursdorf once again. By 1812 and 1813, Napoleon was making his way back to France from the charred ruins of Moscow. As Napoleon left Russian territory, the Austrian and Prussian troops joined the Russians and pursued him into Saxony. At the battles of Lützen on May 2, 1813, and Bautzen on May 20, 1813, Napoleon's spirits seemed to have been lifted temporarily when he rallied his troops until he suffered one of the greatest defeats since the occupation of Moscow. Even though Napoleon was victorious in the battle of Dresden on August 26–27, 60,000 men lost their lives, and the tide had turned. In another battle fought on October 16–18, 1813, with a loss of 15,000, Napoleon's victories turned into defeat. By March 1814, the victorious allies who had invaded Paris crushed Napoleon Bonaparte.

In the midst of such blood, warfare, and uncertainty, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was born on October 25, 1811. His father, Gottlob Heinrich Walther, and his mother, Johanna Wilhelmina Zschenderlein, were the parents of twelve children, only a few of whom reached adulthood. Young Ferdinand was the eighth child and the fourth son.

The twelve children of Gottlob Heinrich and Johanna were:

1. Moritz Wilhelm, born January 11, 1801; died March 5, 1803.
2. Theresa Wilhelmina, born February 23, 1802, and died February 15, 1832, eight days before her thirtieth birthday. She was married to Arch Deacon Magister H. W. F. Schubert who was the Associate Director of the *Gymnasium* at Schneeberg. They had two children, Maria born in 1823 and Theodor born in 1828. (See also Mariane Louisa.) These two children would play an important role in the 1838 immigration.
3. Augusta Constantine, born on May 9, 1803, and died on May 28, 1881. She married Johann Gottlieb Engel. It was Engel who objected to bringing the Schubert children to America in 1838. They were the parents of Robert Engel, who served at one time as Walther's secretary and later as language teacher at Concordia College, Ft. Wayne, Indiana. He returned to Germany after that.
4. Henrietta Juliana, born August 21, 1804, and died on February 10, 1868. She married Pastor Franz Adolph Wilhelmi (born 1791) on July 4, 1824. Walther's widowed mother spent her last years in the Wilhelmi home at Hartmannsdorf, Saxony.

5. Julius Theodor, born October 18, 1807, and died on September 10, 1813.
6. Otto Hermann, born September 23, 1809, and died on January 27, 1841. He participated in the immigration to America in 1838. In America, he married Agnes Buenger and had one son, Johannes, before his premature death at age 31.
7. Mariane Louisa, born October 3, 1810, and died October 20, 1834. After her older sister Theresa died, she married Theresa's widower, Heinrich Wilhelm Friedrich Schubert (born in 1796). He taught at Schneeberg. Young C. F. W. Walther attended the *Lateinschule* at Schneeberg and stayed with Theresa and H. W. F. Schubert from 1821 to 1829. Schubert buried his first wife in 1832 and his second in 1834. That same year he also died, leaving two orphans.
8. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm, born October 25, 1811, baptized on October 30, 1811. His sponsors were the Rev. August Theophilus Niedner, a pastor at Braeunsdorf, Miss Friedericke Wilhelmine Friedrich of Zwickau, and Wilhelm Benjamin Walther of Waldenburg. Interestingly, Pastor Niedner was Walther's predecessor at Braeunsdorf, having served there from 1804 to the time of his death in 1836. It is very likely that Miss Friedrich was related to Walther's mother. W. B. Walther may have been an uncle of Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm, who died on May 7, 1887, having lived to a much riper age than any of his siblings.
9. Anna Natalia born November 2, 1812, and died on July 15, 1813.
10. Amalia Ernestina, born July 7, 1815, and died in 1842 in Frohna, Missouri. She married E. G. W. Keyl (May 22, 1804– August 4, 1872). Together with their infant son Stephanus, they immigrated to America in 1838.
11. Marie Rosalie born June 27, 1816; died seven days later on July 3, 1816.
12. Klara Philistiana born June 11 1817; died three months later on September 12, 1817.

Walther only got to know six of these eleven siblings. The infant mortality rate was very high in those days. The cause of the deaths is simply mentioned in the church records at Langenchursdorf as *Stickfluss* (suffocating catarrh) and diarrhea.<sup>3</sup>

## LIFE IN LANGENCHURSDORF

Walther was born in Langenchursdorf, a small village northwest of Hohenstein near Langenberg in Saxony. The homes were built very close to the brook that quietly flows through the lengthy village. Most of the inhabitants were farmers and weavers. Historians surmise that the town had its beginning around the twelfth century and originally may have been called Konradsdorf.

Moritz Heinrich, Walther's great-grandfather had been pastor at Oberlungwitz. Walther's grandfather and father both served as pastors at Langenchursdorf. The grandfather, Adolf Heinrich Walther (1728–1802) served from 1763 to 1802. C. F. W. Walther's father, Gottlob Heinrich, was born in Langenchursdorf and became his father's assistant on April 8, 1799. Walther's brother Otto Hermann, born there in 1809, became his father's vicar or assistant on November 9, 1834, but in 1838, he immigrated to America along with sixteen members of the church.

Thus, Langenchursdorf had been the center for the Walther family. C. F. W.'s father was born there on November 15, 1770, and died there on January 13, 1841. He lies buried next to the church in the old cemetery. Strangely enough, his son, Otto Hermann, died just a few days later on January 27, 1841, but across the Atlantic in St. Louis, Missouri.

The first church in Langenchursdorf was built in 1201 and was enlarged several times. The last additions were made in 1764 under the pastorate of Adolf Heinrich Walther, the grandfather of C. F. W. Walther. The church, barn, parsonage, and school form a little village by themselves. The barn for the pastor's horse and other animals was built in 1763. The present parsonage was built in 1844–45 and is constructed very similarly to the previous parsonage, in which Walther lived as a child.<sup>4</sup> Thus, all of the present church buildings, except the parsonage, were standing at the time Walther grew up.

The church itself still stands on a prominent spot in the village and has its steeple in the center of the roof, a style that is quite rare. The parsonage had a wide front entrance with a long hall running the width of the house. The house also contained a stairway to the second floor. Usually these homes had four rooms downstairs and four upstairs. Such parsonages were adequate and comfortable.

Walther's parents lived comfortably here, but by 1834 had mourned the early death of six of their twelve children. Just four years later, their only two living sons and one daughter sailed for America.

The home of young Walther was a typical Lutheran parsonage of that time. It was marked both by an upper-middle class culture and by parsonage discipline. Two interesting stories about Walther's youth have come down to us. When he was only three years old, he experienced his first pre-Christmas visit by St. Nicholas, who came to the Walther home on December 6. Also known as "*Pelznickel*," the saint inquired about the progress the children had made in studying the Bible and the Catechism. Children were asked to give an account of themselves and recite a poem or a prayer of some kind. The little three-year-old, standing in awe before St. Nicholas, shyly said:

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress  
Wherein before my God I'll stand  
When I shall reach the heavenly land.

Quite a memory feat for a three year old! So thought Walther's father who was so overjoyed and proud of his little boy that he gave him a three-penny piece. Ferdinand (as C. F. W. went by) concluded this must be a very special verse to be worth such a generous response from his father. The youthful mind had been indelibly impressed with this theology, which was to become the center of his entire life.

Martin Guenther, Walther's first biographer,<sup>5</sup> wrote that Walther's father was stern in bringing up the boys and wanted his sons to grow up strong and masculine. Discipline and character building were part of the home training. The father used a little ditty to impress them:

A youth must many trials endure  
before he can become a sir.

(*"Ein junger Mann viel leiden muss Eh' aus ihm wird ein dominus."*)

The parlor in the Walther parsonage was rarely entered by the family, used only for the family Christmas celebration and when company came. It had a special sofa that was a seat of honor reserved only for guests. But on one occasion little Walther sat down on that soft seat and was promptly punished. Both parents loved all of their children dearly, and such strictness was an expression of their concern that the children learn discipline and respect.

Walther's brother, Otto Hermann, has left an interesting glimpse into the Walther home. Preparing for his own ordination, he wrote in a biographical sketch about his parents:

Exhausting themselves with solicitous care, they left nothing undone till the end that I might begin from infancy to be instructed most dili-

gently in our most holy religion. Already then (if I may speak thus) I had been destined by my parents for the holy office, but since my father was hindered by his pastoral duties, so that for that reason he was unable to instruct his little boy in the first elements of a proper education, he entrusted my education to his close friend Vollmar, whose ministry as pastor at Waldenburg was ended by his recent death.<sup>6</sup>

Clergymen had become part of the upper middle class in Saxony. Clergy families intermarried and very often the sons of clergymen studied for the holy ministry, while the daughters married pastors. They almost constituted a class by themselves and a class that could rather easily move either horizontally or vertically in society through marriage, their status, and friendships.

Economically the clergy may not always have been a match to others of equal standing, yet their real strength lay in their superior education. Walther's father, who had studied at Leipzig University, insisted that his sons be well-educated. Walther received his earliest education at home in the two-story building which had been erected as an educational unit by the Langenchursdorf congregation. The school was located right next to the parsonage, and the deacon of the congregation gave instruction there.

## HOHENSTEIN

Even though the congregation still had a deacon (Johann Christian August Grosse), when young Walther was seven years old he was sent to Hohenstein near Chemnitz.<sup>7</sup> This may well have been the closest Christian community school.

The question has been asked whether Walther walked the six miles daily or how he commuted, if he was staying at home. This riddle can be resolved. Walther's uncle (his father's brother), Franz Friedrich Wilhelm Walther, was a teacher at the *Knabenschule* (boy's school) there from approximately 1806 to 1830. What a convenient opportunity to board at his uncle's home during this time!

The huge St. Christophorus Church in Hohenstein dominates the village. In 1817, a year before Walther's arrival, it celebrated the 300th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation and placed a bust of Luther and Melancthon in the church. Behind the church is a large four-story building in which Uncle Walther and his nephew lived on the second floor. The school is a bit down the hill; part of it is still standing, although a number of additions have been made over time.

There is another facet to this story. The village consisted almost entirely of weavers. Many of the children of the weavers began working at home at this trade when they were five or six years old. The pastor, Karl Friedrich Wagner, who had begun his service in 1806, became embroiled in a controversy with Kantor or Rector Walther over the so-called "factory children." These children were to receive special education during the lunch hour in school. Uncle Walther demurred, saying he was unable to conduct these classes because he was too exhausted from all his teaching responsibilities. Not surprisingly, some ill will resulted.<sup>8</sup>

Walther always appreciated and enjoyed music. It is quite possible that the noted composer Christian Gotthilf Tag, choirmaster at the church in Hohenstein from 1755 to 1808, influenced Walther's interest in music. The impact of Tag undoubtedly was still alive at Hohenstein when Walther arrived there at the age of eight; the choirmaster during Walther's time at the school was Johann Gottlieb Werner, Tag's successor who served from 1808 to 1818. Tag has been characterized as a second-generation musician in the tradition of the great Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750).<sup>9</sup> His life also indicates that sacred music in Saxony had never really deteriorated. Yet it seems to be reasonably certain that, in spite of Tag, Walther did not become acquainted with Bach music itself.

The educational system Walther experienced in his youth was one of the best. There were village schools which Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon had established early in the Reformation period. Because of the assumption that the study of Latin grammar was the best means by which to arrive at an understanding of Holy Scriptures and hence religion, the Latin school was emphasized in Saxony. Here promising children from any part of the state, generally supported by public funds, could attend.

Any school which taught at least two ancient languages was called a *Gymnasium*.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the *Gymnasium*, the Latin school put an even heavier emphasis on languages and grammar. The school system was somewhat modified under the influence of pietism. The pietists placed a much greater stress on the meaning and understanding of Luther's Small Catechism, rather than on memorization. Under this influence, the *Spruchbuch* or collection of Bible verses for use in school became very popular. Schools came to be seen not only as a place of preparation for civilized life, but also as the workshop of the Holy Spirit.

Walther attended the schools just as the influence of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) was being felt. Pestalozzi was no friend of the Catechism and contended that the study of Bible history had but little edu-

cational value. "The general effect of his philosophy was to maintain classes in religion in the schools, but to use them for ethical and moral, not doctrinal purposes."<sup>11</sup> Later, under the influence of Friedrich Adolf Wilhelm Diesterweg (1790–1866), schools became secular institutions as they were separated from the supervision of the clergy.<sup>12</sup>

## STUDENT DAYS IN SCHNEEBERG

In 1821, at the age of ten, Walther began his studies at the *Lateinschule* (not a *Gymnasium*) in Schneeberg. The city of Schneeberg, together with its church, St. Wolfgang, sits at the highest point in the Erzgebirge. The eleventh century church is enormous. As a result of World War II, the entire church interior has been gutted because of extensive fire and damages. Prior to that time, the village had already faced various fires. In fact, in a 1719 conflagration, only three houses were saved in addition to the church and some other buildings.<sup>13</sup>

The community was famous for its silver mining. It is said that in 1416 the largest piece of silver known in Europe up until that time had been discovered right across from the church. Even though the coal, silver, and other minerals except uranium have all been depleted, since the 1670s the city has continued to celebrate an annual *Bergmannfest* (miners' festival) to commemorate the extensive coal mines found everywhere in the area. A festival service is conducted in the church each year. Walther was a witness to these festivities.

Founded in 1485, the school Walther attended in Schneeberg had gone through various phases. Some of these changes were caused by fire, others by changes in the philosophy of education by the time young Walther enrolled. The building in which Walther studied still stands except that it has been enlarged on several occasions. This school is approximately one block away from the church, St. Wolfgang Church, which stands on the hill.

The names of most teachers and instructors throughout the years have been lost. Whoever they were, the teachers had a reputation of being extremely strict and applying corporal punishment. A deeply revered Rektor by the name of Gottlob August Voigtländer served the school from 1820 to 1828, Walther's years as a student. Although he was only twenty years old when he came to head the institution, educated people and the instructors held him in great respect. The school chronicle indicates that he had great organizational talents and was always deeply con-

cerned about his teachers and students. Unfortunately, Voigtlaender died when only twenty-nine years old.<sup>14</sup>

It was during this time that Walther's brother-in-law, Magister Heinrich Wilhelm Friedrich Schubert, served as "Con-Rektor, *auf Probe*." This means he was an associate principal while still a trial teacher. At the time Walther was at Schneeberg, Schubert was married to Walther's older sister, Theresa Wilhelmina, and during this time the two Schubert children whom Walther tried to bring to America in 1838 were born. However, Theresa died in 1832, after which Schubert married another of Walther's sisters, Mariane Louisa. Both the second wife and Schubert died of an unknown cause in 1834. (Schubert lived to be only thirty-eight years old, his first wife only thirty, and his second wife only twenty-four.)

It is regrettable that none of the records including the curricula, the names of the instructors or the students have survived. At the time Walther attended the school, there were over 200 students. Shortly after Walther graduated, it was converted into a *Bürgerschule* (a citizen's school). Histories of the institution indicate that the majority of the teachers were theologians.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, rationalism had taken over. Walther later recalled in an 1872 address to the Synod: "I was eighteen years old when I left the *Gymnasium*, and I had never heard a sentence taken from the Word of God out of a believing mouth. I had never had a Bible, neither a Catechism, but a miserable '*Leitfaden*' [a manual or guide] which only contained morality."<sup>16</sup>

Historian Kurt Krauss reports that the curriculum included French, English, Italian, arithmetic, and Latin. At one time, the old records state, even Syriac and Arabic had been taught. The Schneeberg pastor gave six hours of instruction on the introduction to the biblical books.

While attending the school, Walther entered an interesting item in his diary on February 8, 1829:

Today my parents came and surprised me, which was most welcome. I can honestly admit that I am more pleasantly satisfied in the midst of my own family, even though I have been trying to tell myself that I like it best in the midst of my fellow students.<sup>17</sup>

Introspectively he wondered why he was no longer pleased to be in Schneeberg when only a few weeks before he had thought of leaving only with the deepest pains because of the separation. He continued:

I am counting the minutes that are still left before I will be departing from here. I reached a real understanding today—I am going to

bother my father until he will finally give me permission to leave here at Easter.

The young Walther also recorded that he was frequently saddened because he recognized how superficial his thoughts often were, even when his father as well as his fellow students and teachers assured him that he was a very optimistic person. But he had discovered that he was miserable, without end! Later in that same diary entry he recorded:

I feel that I am born for nothing but music, within which I don't see myself making enough headway. Perhaps I could contribute something if I would study the doctrine of pure composition. But where is there an opportunity? Where are the means for that? Besides, the only instrument that I can play is the piano and that is certainly most pitiful. May God lead me out of this labyrinth. A dark veil seems to be covering my future and I am looking at it as though mesmerized. ... But who knows, who knows, what the dice that will be cast from the urn will hold for my future.

In his diary entry of January 30, 1829, Walther showed both his understanding of music and his highly developed tastes. He had attended a concert in the Liebhaber Theater in Schneeberg, which he admitted was well worth a *Groschen* (a sum of money). But how critical he was of the composer, the chorus, the overture, and the adagio!

At about the same time he recorded his attendance at a "ball" and admitted secretly in his diary: "I must admit it, I found it extremely difficult at first not to participate [in the dance] but I got a hold of myself and gradually I became accustomed to withdrawing from the number of dancers."

He noted further in his diary on February 2 that he had not intended to engage in dancing, but simply wanted to have some entertainment with his evening meal. The next day, February 3, he recorded that he had attended another dramatic presentation. It was entitled "*Die Sucht zu Glänzen*," which literally means "the craze for glitter." This time Walther said that he was deeply affected by the presentation and totally identified with the writer.

Instead of leaving at Easter time, as he had hoped, Walther left the academic institution at Schneeberg on September 23, 1829. He received an excellent report card and his instructors acknowledged him as being "deeply honorable, with excellent knowledge." He was described on his dismissal report as "*Imprimis dignus*," especially worthy.<sup>18</sup> This meant that he was exceedingly well-qualified for academic studies and that he had

never become guilty of any offenses while he was a student. The “Pastor Primarius,” the head pastor who was also the superintendent at Waldenburg, wrote on November 21, 1829, to the University of Leipzig that he was commending the promising youth, Carl Ferdinand Walther, to be totally worthy, deserving, and honorable (“*Würdig*” and “*Bedürftig*”). He further stated that the letter was being written with the permission of his honorable academic teachers as well as other high patrons and sponsors of knowledge and academia of the school.<sup>19</sup>

While Walther was in Schneeberg the village suffered another fire, which broke out very suddenly. Walther ran to the house as it was being destroyed in the dead of winter. He wrote that he was not physically able to work hard in extinguishing the fire, but finally joined the bucket brigade. The buckets were frozen with ice outside and inside! This made any effort far less effective, since the amount of water transferred from one person to the next was limited.

In typical fashion, even until late in life, Walther denigrated himself because of his inadequate academic training. He wrote in his journal:

This is exactly what makes my soul depressed, that I know, even though my knowledge is still very superficial in every respect; nevertheless, my father reminds me, yes, my teachers and especially also my fellow students, that I do have the knowledge, yes, even more that I am a promising student. I am very much afraid of the moment when that error will be discovered. I am miserable and without any limits or parameters to hang onto.<sup>20</sup>

On October 15, 1829, he recorded in his diary a moving departure from Schneeberg on his way back to his hometown of Langenchursdorf. It was difficult, he wrote, to separate himself from his fellow students and teachers. It was particularly hard for him to leave behind his “good Theresa,” perhaps a high school friend. He stated:

Such a parting I have not expected—such large and emphatic signs of loving well wishes. All of this, I became aware, humbled me very much because I realized that I was not worthy of any of them. But it engendered in me the conviction and goal that I should become worthy of them. So we departed and sixteen students accompanied me to Hasel [about two and one-half hours from Schneeberg] and thereafter four students followed me and stayed overnight with me [Zoffel, Stuebe, and two Guenthers]. The next day I left for Zwickau where I was received in a very friendly manner and showered with gifts. Soon I was on my way back to Chursdorf [as he recorded the name of the

village]. At Lichtenstein my brother [Otto Hermann] came with the red horse to pick me up. [It is humorous that some have looked at this part of the diary and saw that Walther referred to a *Fuchs*. Literally translated this would be a fox. Some have translated this section that his brother came to pick him up with a fox!]

Soon my brother and I were engaged in extremely interesting conversation, especially about the blessings that together we had experienced. He had given me a copy of Schubert's biography of Oberlin.<sup>21</sup> This filled my entire spirit and demonstrated to me that the possibilities a theologian has are the best ... The noisy doubts whether one could earn enough money [in the ministry] were completely overcome, since it was confidence in God, a firm faith in God's care and preservation that "provides the foundation to live."

He continued in his diary that he had been significantly encouraged by his "dear good brother" and prays that God will give him the grace to keep him in that faith, which has made him so blessed at this moment of his life.

During his Schneeberg days he was interested in nothing but music, but Walther was transformed by the biography of Oberlin. In addition, his brother Otto Hermann must certainly have been a strong factor in inclining Walther toward the study of theology.

Having left Schneeberg with a visit to Zwickau<sup>22</sup> and deep discussions with his brother, Walther arrived in Leipzig to enroll in the University on October 21, 1829. On December 5, he entered in his diary his arrival and praised and thanked God for unending love and protection.

## CHARACTER BUILDING AT LEIPZIG

Walther was only eighteen years old when he matriculated at Leipzig University,<sup>23</sup> and he was a student there from 1829 to 1833. After arriving, Walther moved in with his older brother on Seidel Street. He received a cord of wood from a foundation because of his academic accomplishments. His father generously gave him a Thaler (perhaps a dollar) each week. We have a good glimpse of his university life from the biography which Walther wrote of his brother-in-law, Johann Friedrich Buenger.<sup>24</sup>

As our Buenger at Easter 1829 entered the University of Leipzig, conditions as concerned the true Christian faith, were as dismal at the highest school of the land as they were in all of Saxony. Precisely from this university for many years already there had flowed, as a living spring, the poisonous stream of rationalism, of unbelief, of sham enlightenment and the most frightful distortion of Scripture upon all

the congregations of Saxony. The preachers whose misfortune it was to be prepared at that time to serve the church in Leipzig, proclaimed from their pulpits in the congregation that, naturally, which their professors had given them as the great new wisdom. At the very top of the whole church there stood at that time the Chief Court Chaplain and Vice President of the Chief Consistory, Christoph Friederich von Ammon, who had written a book with the title *Continuation of the Building of Christianity Toward a World Religion* [*Fortbildung des Christentums zur Weltreligion*].

The brother of this biographer rightly declared concerning this book that the title ought really to have been “The Perversion of Christianity Toward a Worldly Religion.” Indeed, rationalism had perverted and watered down Christianity into “a different Gospel—which is really no Gospel at all,” against which the Apostle Paul had warned (Galatians 1:6–9).

The called professors of theology at Leipzig at that time were August Hahn, Friedrich Wilhelm Lindner, Johann August Heinrich Tittmann, Karl Gottfried Wilhelm Theile, Christian Friedrich J. Illgen, Julius Friedrich Winzer, and Johann David Goldhorn, who were later followed by Christian Wilhelm Niedner, Georg Benedict Winer, and others.

According to Walther, the best of these professors were the first two mentioned. Hahn had fought against rationalism and carried forward no less than the pure Christian doctrine, but Lindner, although he appeared resolute, published a massive book against the Lutheran doctrine of Holy Communion in the year 1831. The other professors, Tittmann excepted, were outspoken rationalists. Walther continued, “There was then great danger for our Buenger, that he might yet lose even the little that he had brought away with him from his father’s house and that had been saved during his school years.”<sup>25</sup>

Yet Buenger came to Leipzig exactly at that time when a small group of students found themselves together. They had come to faith in the divine authorship of the Holy Scriptures and in the grace of God in Christ, the Savior of sinners, not so much through the lectures of the better professors as through the witness of believing laity, so called, and particularly through one old candidate [H. Johann Gottlieb] Kuehn, who lived in his own house in Leipzig. From the very beginning he had been a dedicated Christian. Although he had graduated from the university, Kuehn served a deaconite in Rochsburg and Lünzenau when he died prematurely on August 24, 1832 after a brief illness with fever. The pious Graf [von Einsiedel], who was the patron of the church of that place, then called Ernst Moritz Buerger who

married Kuehn's widow and later immigrated to America with the Stephanites.

This handful of awakened students gathered on specific dates of every week for common prayer and for the common reading of Holy Scriptures to their edification and for a mutual exchange with respect to the one thing needful. For a while (at the invitation of August Hermann Francke), Professor Lindner also privately conducted a so-called Collegium Philobiblicum, in which he applied the Scriptures in an edifying manner and gave instruction in the derivation of servant themes from biblical texts. The students, who had come to faith and had withdrawn completely from the world, naturally had to submit to much ridicule and derision.

Mystics, as one tended to call these believers in Saxony, pietists, hypocrites, obscurantists, bigots, were not the worst names that men gave them. In part hated as contemptible deceivers, and in part sympathized as unfortunately misguided religious enthusiasts, they were ostracized by the living world and to some extent by their own closest blood relatives. But despite this, they remained inwardly joyful in their God and Savior. All who remained loyal among them looked back in future years to this time of their first love as the most blessed time of their entire life.<sup>26</sup>

Also in that small group, sometimes referred to as the "Holy Club," was Walther's older brother Otto Hermann, who had taken him along to the first meetings and introduced him to this New World. Thus Walther experienced a strong emphasis on the pietistic life. It was a legalistic mindset that kept goading the young men to lead a more acceptable life in the eyes of God. One is reminded of Luther, whose concern was to seek a loving and forgiving Father in heaven. Walther could not find him either because of all the pietistic legalism he had absorbed.

For Walther the dilemma was intense. On the one hand, the majority of his professors were rationalists, accepting only what was reasonable in the Bible. What was not, they totally rejected. On the other hand, he was deeply involved with the "Holy Club" pietism, which emphasized that the person must be engaged in self-denial, mortification of the flesh and a conscious avoidance of everything that was evil in the world. Regardless of what exercises Walther tried, he was unable to find a forgiving, loving God.

In Walther's biography of Buenger, he described the reading habits of the group of theological students as they tried to make themselves more holy: