PRAISE FOR WALTHER’S WORKS: ALL GLORY TO GOD

C. F. W. Walther deserves more credit than any other man for the restoration of orthodox Lutheran dogmatics, which by the grace of God took place in America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unlike his student Francis Pieper and his younger contemporary Adolf Hoenecke, Walther did not produce a dogmatics textbook since he worked from the Walther-Baier compendium of quotations from the dogmaticians of the seventeenth century. Students of Lutheran dogmatics, therefore, will welcome this collection as the closest thing we have to a summary of Walther’s complete dogmatics.

—Prof. John Brug
Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Battling a fever and only months before his death, C. F. W. Walther concludes his straightforward defense of the major doctrines of the true Christian Church, consistently using the question, “Does this teaching give all glory to God alone?” as a sure and certain litmus test for theological truthfulness.

In this final apologetic, Walther makes the case for a conservative, confessional Lutheran approach to the major doctrines of Scripture. In deliberative and comprehensive fashion, he calls to the witness stand the testimony of his opponents, contrasting them with the clear words of the prophets and apostles, the Lutheran Confessions, Luther, and the Lutheran Church Fathers.

This presentation to the Western District over the course of eleven conventions (1873–1886), is C. F. W. Walther’s Smalcald Articles; it is a final legacy—a theological last will and testament—to his beloved church family. This volume is key to understanding the turbulent historical and religious context in which the first president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod presents the unchanging Word revealed by the Lord through Luther and the Reformation.

—Rev. Dr. Daniel N. Harmelink
Executive Director, Concordia Historical Institute

The essays in this book are a virtual dogmatics that include most of the essential doctrines of the Scripture. It is the dogmatics book that many desired C. F. W. Walther to write, but which he never was able to complete. Walther demonstrates that only teachings that give
all glory to God are scriptural. Only in the teachings of the Lutheran Church is God alone given all glory, and this is incontrovertible proof that its teaching is the only true one. The doctrines and applications presented, such as that of election, justification, Means of Grace, civil government, and family, are vital for the church today.

—Rev. Gaylin R. Schmeling
President, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary

Here the same question is continually asked about the discussion of doctrines and their practical applications: Does the treatment found here give all glory to God, as all theology should? It is a useful criterion for avoiding self-serving wrangling and finding reassurance. The over-arching claim throughout the series of essays is that this approach is a proof that the Lutheran Church’s teaching is the true doctrine. But the intent here is not to make the judgments of human reason the touchstone for distinguishing true doctrine from false. For the essays, from the outset, trace the approach of giving God the glory in all teaching to Scripture itself (Isaiah 42:8, etc.), so that it is proper for Christians to be so guided.

—Thomas Manteufel
Professor Emeritus, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

This new English edition of C. F. W. Walther’s dogmatics essays makes it easy to find what he believed and taught about classical Lutheran theology. These essays cover all the major topics of Lutheran theology, with a mind to Luther’s statement: “The doctrine of the Gospel takes away all glory, wisdom, righteousness, etc., from men and gives it solely to the Creator” (AE 26:66). Walther proves that only Lutheran theology gives God due honor by accepting what God says in Scripture as the truth, whether or not it makes sense to human reason or reason’s notions of goodness and righteousness.

—Rev. Dr. Martin R. Noland
Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana
Walther’s Works

ALL GLORY TO GOD
Walther’s Works

ALL GLORY TO GOD

C. F. W. WALTHER
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ABBREVIATIONS

AC  Augsburg Confession


Ap  Apology of the Augsburg Confession


Ep  Epitome of the Formula of Concord

FC  Formula of Concord

LC  Large Catechism


SA  Smalcald Articles

SC  Small Catechism

SD  Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord


TLH  The Lutheran Hymnal. St. Louis: Concordia, 1941.

Tr  Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope


All Glory to God

WA  D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe. 73 vols. in 85. Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883–.

INTRODUCTION

As the leading theologian of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,\(^1\) the Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther was regularly urged to write a contemporary dogmatics text on Lutheran theology to be used in the training of pastors and other church workers. For several reasons, this never materialized. His serial essay presentations at the Missouri Synod Western District conventions were as close as he came to this aspiration.\(^2\) Beginning in 1873 and finishing in 1886,\(^3\) Walther distinctly and unambiguously articulated and supported the chief teachings of the Christian faith under the title “The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All Glory to God, an Irrefutable Proof That Its Doctrine Alone Is True.” These essays, however, were intended not only for church workers; since the district conventions were made up of both church workers and lay representatives, here Walther masterfully addressed both, clearly delineating what is distinctive in Lutheran teaching.

Walther’s plan was to pursue the following succession of topics: (1) the Word of God; (2) the origin of sin, death, hell, and damnation; (3) divine providence; (4) the universal grace of God; (5) the reconciliation and redemption of the human race; (6) the justification of the sinner by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ without any merit or works; (7) the necessity of regeneration and sanctification; (8) the institution, validity, power, and unchangeability of the means of grace; (9) conversion; (10) petitions and prayers to God; (11) obedience toward earthly authority in matters of faith and conscience; and (12) the election of grace. Topics one through nine were covered during the four district conventions held between 1873 and 1876. The following year should have covered the subject of prayer, then the theme of obedience to earthly authority. However, a new controversy was brewing between members of the Iowa and Missouri Synods over the doctrine of election. Therefore, Walther felt compelled to move his intended last topic ahead of the other two. Between 1876 and 1880, his essays were devoted exclusively to the teaching of eternal election. Prayer was then the topic of the 1882 convention followed by the topic of earthly authority, which was discussed during the 1883, 1885, and 1886 district conventions.

\(^1\) Founded in 1847, the original name was Die deutsche evangelisch-Lutherische Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten.

\(^2\) August R. Suelflow, *Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C. F. W. Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 106–7, 156. Walther did produce an enlarged edition of seventeenth-century theologian Johann Wilhelm Baier’s *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*. Walther interspersed valuable citations from Luther and other orthodox Lutheran theologians throughout. This was then used as the systematic theology textbook at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, for many years and served as the basis for Francis Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics*.

\(^3\) During that time, Walther was able to give presentations every year except 1878, 1881, and 1884, when the synodical conventions occurred and the Western District did not meet. October 13–19, 1886, just a few days before his seventy-fifth birthday (October 25) and six months prior to his death (May 7, 1887), Dr. Walther completed the series of essays.
The first four essays of the series that involved the initial nine themes were first published in English in 1981 by Concordia Publishing House (CPH) in *Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther: Convention Essays*. The remainder of the essays in the series appeared in the 1992 CPH publication *Essays for the Church*. Now the entire sequence of Walther’s essays given over the course of thirteen years appears together in one volume: *All Glory to God*. It is a volume that will greatly benefit church workers and lay people alike, showing the distinctive aspects of Lutheran doctrine and highlighting how in everything God is to be glorified.

In discussing Walther as theologian, Francis Pieper began by noting that his life was “so full of controversy”—and that it was. Yet, it was in the face of controversy that God shaped Walther as a theologian who recognized that God alone is to be given all glory. Out of the struggles of the Saxons’ tumultuous emigration in 1838 and the subsequent ousting of their leader Martin Stephan within months of their arrival in America (May 1839), Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther eventually emerged as the group’s theological leader. In the Altenburg Debate of April 1841, he showed the beleaguered colonists they were indeed a church, not because of their actions or in spite of their failures, but because of God’s work among them. Through His Means of Grace (also known as the marks of the church—God’s Word and Sacraments), God the Holy Spirit “calls, gathers, and enlightens” the Holy Christian Church on earth.

Even while God was working through Walther to unite confessional Lutherans through the pages of *Der Lutheraner* (first published in September 1844) and then the formation of the Missouri Synod (April 26, 1847), controversy was stirring over the doctrine of church and ministry. Through the Missouri Synod’s adoption (1851) and subsequent publication (1852) of his theses on church and ministry, Walther demonstrated to the leadership of the Buffalo Synod as well as to Wilhelm Loehe, a German pastor who was instrumental in starting and supporting the newly established Missouri Synod, that it is God alone who receives all glory in the church and in the ministry. God alone creates faith through His Word and Sacraments and thus establishes His church. Christ Himself established the public office of the ministry, and He calls pastors through His church so that His Word will be proclaimed and His Sacraments administered publicly. The efficacy of God’s Word is preeminent in both church and office.

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7 In his biography of Walther (*Doctor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther* [Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917], 370), D. H. Steffens places this discussion within Luther’s famous dictum *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio Faciunt Theologum* (prayer, meditation, and affliction or temptation make a theologian).
Disagreement with the eastern Lutherans of the General Synod came to the fore in the mid-1850s with the publication of the Definite Synodical Platform. This was a rationalistic attempt to overthrow the Unaltered Augsburg Confession by substituting for it an American recension that denied important Lutheran teachings, particularly baptismal regeneration and the real presence in the Lord’s Supper. In the pages of the newly established theological journal *Lehre und Wehre* (1855), editor Walther showed how God alone was glorified in the teachings of the Augsburg Confession, particularly the Lutheran understanding of the Sacraments as a means of God's grace. Additionally, he called for free conferences to further discuss the articles at issue. Even after Wilhelm Loehe broke away from the Missouri Synod and supported the establishment of the Iowa Synod, controversy continued, not only with respect to the doctrine of church and ministry, but over other teachings that the Iowans classified as “open questions.” Here, too, Walther addressed the controverted issues, demonstrating how they were clearly addressed in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and how God alone is glorified in each teaching.

In the midst of these doctrinal disagreements, the young Missouri Synod found itself engaged in an ambitious unity attempt with several other American Lutheran church bodies, joining together in 1872 to form “The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America.” The goal was to unite all Lutheran synods in America into one orthodox American Lutheran Church. C. F. W. Walther served as the first president of this new organization. Additionally, he continued to serve as essayist at various district and synodical conventions; thus, the following year, his series on the doctrine of the Lutheran church alone giving all glory to God began at the 1873 Western District Convention of the Missouri Synod.

Meanwhile, Pastor Johann Adam Huegli was delivering a serial essay at the conventions of the Missouri Synod’s Northern District (1868–1871) entitled “Twenty-four Theses concerning the Teachings of Good Works on the Grounds of the Doctrine of Free Will,

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11 The theologians of the Iowa Synod taught that not only church and ministry, but also teachings on eschatology (the Last Things) and the Antichrist were open questions or problem issues that they believed were not fully addressed in the Book of Concord. Therefore, they taught that agreement on such doctrines was not necessary for the establishment of church fellowship (Jgn H. C. Fritz, “Missouri and Iowa,” in *Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod during Three Quarters of a Century*, ed. W. H. T. Dau [St. Louis: Concordia, 1922], 160–73).

12 Constituting members of the Synodical Conference included the Joint Synod of Ohio, the Wisconsin Synod, the Minnesota Synod, the Norwegian Synod, the Illinois Synod, and the Missouri Synod.


14 Walther served as essayist for thirty-five Missouri Synod synodical and district conventions. In addition, he presented major papers for other Lutheran synods’ conventions as well as those of the Synodical Conference, totaling between forty-five and fifty major and minor essays. He did all of this while also serving as president and professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and pastor of the St. Louis Gesamtgemeinde (four congregations in St. Louis that functioned together with Walther as the senior pastor: Trinity, Immanuel, Holy Cross, and Zion). See Erich B. Allwardt, “The St. Louis Gesamtgemeinde—Its Demise,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 57 (Summer 1984): 60–80.
Election, and Justification.” In his essay, Huegli made specific statements about election and the phrase *intuitu fidei* (“in view of faith”), a concept later Lutheran dogmaticians had used, but which Walther and other Missourians did not favor. Huegli stated:

In God there are (fallen) no conditions; yet conditions are claimed for God when it is said that He elected in view of faith. . . . Faith is indeed the middle link; but when it is said that God elected in view of faith, then faith is not the middle link, but a condition. . . . Faith is a means, not a cause. Christ is the foundation of our salvation, even when He is not apprehended by faith.  

Conrad Sigmund Fritschel was said to have been present at these Northern District conventions of the Missouri Synod, and he made reports to his brother Gottfried. Both men taught at the Iowa Synod’s Wartburg Seminary. The Fritschel brothers proceeded to produce numerous articles, published primarily in Samuel Kistler Brobst’s *Theologische Monatshefte*, dealing with election and other related doctrines, attacking the position of the Missouri Synod. C. F. W. Walther was quick to respond under the pen name *Gottlieb Gnadekind* (God’s Dear Child of Grace). Before long, others joined in the debate. The arguments in the *Theologische Monatshefte* continued for several years and the language became so caustic that Brobst was losing subscribers. Eventually Brobst announced that henceforth all articles on election would be censored and personal remarks removed before publication. It was during this heated controversy that Walther decided to adjust the order of his presentations at the 1877 Western District Convention. Instead of addressing prayer, he presented “Also in Its Teaching of Election by Grace the Evangelical Lutheran Church Gives all Honor to God Alone.” As was usual in his essays, Walther divided the 1877 presentation into theses, and Thesis III stated:

It [the Evangelical Lutheran Church] teaches that “it is false and wrong when it is taught that not only God’s mercy and Christ’s most holy merit, but also something in us is a cause of God’s election, on account of which God has chosen us to eternal life” (FC SC XI 88). 

The 1878 convention of the Missouri Synod was important for many reasons. The chief concern, however, was the workload of the synodical president, seminary president, and chief theological editor: C. F. W. Walther. He had already suffered several breakdowns and was

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17 The minutes of the Western District containing this submission of Walther’s essay were published in December 1877. The following year, the Synodical Conference met and accepted the printed proceedings of the member conventions as doctrinally acceptable, including Walther’s essay (Carl S. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1965], 75).
being urged to write a new dogmatics text, so at this convention, Heinrich Christian Schwan was elected synodical president. In addition, the Synod sought to call a new systematics professor for Concordia Seminary who would be Walther’s understudy. There were several capable men available for this position, but the convention selected twenty-six-year-old Francis Pieper. Another former student of Walther who was serving as a professor at the seminary of the Norwegian Synod, Friedrich August Schmidt, had wanted the position and blamed Walther for not being selected. On January 2, 1879, Schmidt wrote to Walther to present his objections to the Western District essay of 1877 and his support of the intuitu fidei position. Soon several other men joined in supporting Schmidt from within the Norwegian Synod, the Ohio Synod, and even a few within the Missouri Synod. They accused Walther of holding a Calvinist position on predestination. When Schmidt threatened to go public, Synodical President Schwan attempted to coordinate a meeting of the disputing parties. But before a meeting could be held, Walther continued the presentation of his essay “Also in Its Teaching of Election by Grace the Evangelical Lutheran Church Gives All Honor to God Alone” at the 1879 meeting of the Western District of the Missouri Synod. Under Thesis V, Walther stated:

Our church rejects and condemns anyone who teaches that not only the grace of God in Christ is the basis for our election, but that there must also be some cause for it in man himself; if there weren’t such a cause in man, God could not have elected him.

That is what is generally taught and believed today. Modern theologians calling themselves “Lutheran” and “believers,” with few exceptions, teach: “Faith is man’s most personal deed.” And this they maintain because [they believe] that in the final analysis, a person’s salvation depends on his decision.

Even though Walther had mentioned no one by name in his presentation, Schmidt considered this 1879 essay at the Western District a personal affront and a declaration of war. The disputing parties went public, the controversy became quite caustic, and by 1882, the Norwegian and Ohio Synods withdrew from the Synodical Conference.

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18 Meyer, Log Cabin to Luther Tower, 66.
19 In a letter to C. F. Theodore Ruhland, Walther revealed his severe disappointment that Georg Stockhardt would not be called to the new professorship, while at the same time applying what could only be considered a somewhat derogatory term of “darling” to Francis Pieper, who was called instead. Roy Suelflow, ed., Correspondence of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1980), 69–70.
As was his usual method of addressing doctrinal issues, in the Western District serial essays “All Glory to God,” Walther used the theses form in his presentations. He substantiated each thesis with ample references to Scripture, often highlighting the original Hebrew or Greek to underscore the meaning. He also quoted the Lutheran Confessions, demonstrating that what he was saying was in agreement with the Lutheran Symbols. Additional support was then provided in the form of quotations from Martin Luther and other orthodox Lutheran theologians. Because this was Walther’s primary mode of conveying and defending Christian doctrine, he was called a repristinating citation theologian by his detractors, including some of his former students.\(^{23}\) Such attacks he bore patiently. Walther firmly believed that the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3) was unchanged and unchanging: “His greatest joy was to point to the harmony and continuity which existed between the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Lutheran church fathers.”\(^{24}\) Yet, Walther was not simply content to cite the Scriptures, Confessions, and orthodox Lutheran Fathers. He also remained informed on the state of theology in his day. He was well aware of what was put forth by the foremost theologians and articulated his agreement or disagreement with their teaching throughout his essays.\(^{25}\)

Two subsequent leading theologians of the Missouri Synod have summarized those things that made Dr. C. F. W. Walther an exceptional theologian. Dr. Francis Pieper noted that the following are found in Walther’s teaching:

1. True Biblical Doctrine of the Perfect Redemption of All Men by Christ;
2. The Biblical Doctrine of the Means of Grace;
3. The Doctrine of Faith (Walther was concerned to ward off the error of changing in any way the faith by which a person is justified into a work or of mixing into a person’s faith his own work, worthiness, or merit).\(^{26}\)

Dr. Robert Preus acknowledged that he in no way could improve upon the analysis and evaluation of Walther’s student and understudy, Francis Pieper. However, Robert Preus also made three very astute observations regarding Walther as a theologian:

1. A good dogmatician is one who is able to reduce all Christian theology to a meaningful and practical pattern of doctrine.
2. A good dogmatician is one whose pattern of doctrine is orthodox, that is, biblical.

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\(^{23}\) This involved not only those who attacked Walther during the Predestinarian Controversy (F. A. Schmidt, Frederick Stellhorn, and others), but later some of his former students from within the Wisconsin Synod (what became known as the Wauwatosa theologians, including August Pieper [brother of Francis], John Schaller, and J. P. Koehler).


\(^{25}\) August Suelflow, Servant of the Word, 156.

3. A good dogmatician is one whose pattern of doctrine represents a proper distinction between Law and Gospel and upholds the doctrine of justification by grace as the praeципuus locus of the biblical doctrine. As you read through *All Glory to God*, I think that these observations will become evident to you as well.

When Walther concluded this serial essay in 1886, he was in failing health and had only a few months to live. Therefore, his closing words served as a farewell, a summary of his ministry, and an expression of the sure and certain hope for what lies ahead through faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

Our life’s motto must be: *Soli Deo Gloria*! [To God alone the glory!] . . . God help us, dear brothers, that someday we, too, may be among that [heavenly] host and then, from our entire heart, really give all glory to our loving God. Here we cannot do this, since our shameful flesh clings to us. But yonder, when God has removed the old flesh from us, our doctrine will not be mere theory, but we will also practice it. O Lord Jesus, to that end help us all. Amen! 

*Soli Deo Gloria*

John C. Wohlrabe Jr., Th.D.
Second Vice President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
Editor-in-Chief, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*

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28 See below, p. 542.
RELIGION

As the subject for the doctrinal discussions, the convention\(^1\) selected the theses previously published in the *Lutheraner*. These theses, here following, include additional clarifications and remarks by the convention.

The topic is:

**The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All Glory to God, an Irrefutable Proof That Its Doctrine Alone Is True.**

The present task consists in this: to demonstrate that the Lutheran religion is the only true one, and this is shown from the fact that in all its teachings, all glory is given to God alone. Namely, when we first of all consider what a religion is, also what a visible church is, and bring into focus the chief teachings of the Lutheran church, it will become evident that the doctrine of this church is the only true one, since in all these teachings it gives all glory to God alone.

**Thesis I**

*Since religion is the act and mode of honoring God, only that is the true religion which in all its teachings exclusively gives all glory to God.*

In our world, there are a variety of teachings; but religion pertains to the relationship of man with God and deals with the kind of relationship that exists between man and God. Science, for example, deals with the workings of nature; the study of medicine with the nature of bodily illnesses and the means of healing them. Ask any person what religion is, and the answer invariably will be: it deals with the relationship of man with God.

This is mentioned at the beginning, since the term *religion* itself does not appear in the [German] Bible. The term, however, that is used instead in Scripture is “service to God” (*Gottesdienst*). Paul says in Acts 26:5: “According to the strictest party of our religion [in the Greek: *threeskeia*] I have lived as a Pharisee”; that is, the party of the Pharisees is the strictest among those of the Jewish religion. Here we have the scriptural basis that religion deals with what the relationship of man to God must be.

The following texts from Holy Scripture will support this thesis:

Isaiah 42:8: “I am the LORD, that is My name; My glory I give to no other, nor My praise to carved idols.” Therefore, God alone wants to have all glory. He wants to be honored only when one gives all glory to Him alone; to the degree, therefore, that anyone gives this honor to man, he preempts, as far as he is concerned, the glory belonging to God and thus casts Him from His throne.

Romans 1:21, 25: “For although they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were

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\(^1\) Western District Convention, 1873; St. Peter’s Church, Schaumburg, IL, May 7–13 (*Proceedings*, pp. 26–80).
darkened . . . because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!” Here Paul testifies that the first departure from [true] religion on the part of the heathen consisted in this, that they did not praise God, did not thank Him, did not give all honor to Him but rather to His creatures. Also the initial departure from the true religion in Paradise consisted of this, that human beings wanted to be equal with God and so robbed Him of His glory.

John 7:18: “The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him is true, and in Him there is no falsehood.” According to Scripture, therefore, one who claims to be God’s representative, but offers a kind of religion in which God is not honored, is a leader of a false religion. What a cursed religion it therefore is when a human being through any teaching of his religion ascribes glory to himself. This passage—note carefully—is preceded by the words: “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God,” and then concludes, “or whether I am speaking on my own authority.”

John 8:49: “Jesus answered, ‘I do not have a demon, but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.’ ” Christ thus proves that He has nothing to do with the devil and that His religion is true; for He honors the Father. What a profound implication: should you have formulated a teaching that does not honor God, this is an accursed devil’s doctrine; when you advocate a moral life and consequently seek the praise of men, such a doctrine should be stomped on as a satanic concoction. This is what Christ wants to underscore in this passage: How can I be of the devil, and teach Satan’s doctrine? For whoever honors God through his teaching, that person’s teaching is assuredly correct; in contrast, any teaching that does not honor God, and robs Him of His glory, is of the devil.—We can clearly see that the Christian religion is the true religion from the hymn of praise sung by the holy angels at the birth of Christ.

Luke 2:14: “Glory to God in the highest.” Here is the declaration that, through Christ, God is given all glory, the glory of which Adam had once robbed Him. Thus, this is the touchstone of any religion, whether it strips man of all his glory and ascribes all glory to God alone.

Romans 3:27: “Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.” After Paul has set forth the basic Christian doctrine of justification, he asks: what remains of the glory and honor of man? He answers: it is excluded on the principle of faith. For the principle of faith or, what is the same thing, the Gospel, the Christian religion, divests man of all glory and gives it to God. Thus, he [Paul] says of the father of all believers:

Romans 4:20: “No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.” Wherever works are emphasized, there God is blasphemed and demeaned; hence all religions except Christianity are nothing but sheer blasphemy. All other religions tell us: if you desire to go to heaven, then you must be pious and good, do good, become holy, etc. Such religion we all bring with us into the world; we are attracted by it, as we are constituted by nature; and our old Adam confirms it. But it is the
devil’s lie. Certainly in his state of innocence Adam was to be saved by good works; but this salvation was not to be of his own doing. He was not informed: if you serve Me, remain faithful, you will thereby earn salvation and get to heaven. Rather, he had a perfect created righteousness and holiness, a salvation already bestowed upon him, as a gift from the hand of God. But he could lose this salvation, which indeed he did.

Thus it is today. God desires to make us holy and righteous through faith in Jesus Christ; in the Christian religion, salvation itself is inherent. This is at the same time also a proof that the Christian religion is true, since in regard to salvation, it gives glory to God alone. It builds salvation not on human works but on Christ, since human beings are nothing and are totally dependent on God’s gifts. Then God becomes great! Then God becomes All in all.

God created us without our help and has given us temporal life. If we desire eternal life, we [are inclined to] say: “We need to acquire this ourselves. We do not want to let God create eternal life for us.” However, as God grants us temporal life without our help, just so we proceed from God’s hand into eternal life. And when once we have attained eternal life, we will have nothing to boast of except God’s mercy. Therefore, now after the fall, only that is the true religion which gives God alone the glory and man only shame.

This thesis has been formulated without regard to atheists, who claim: “There is no God; therefore we do not need to honor Him.” But whoever believes there is an almighty God, from whom everything originates, will agree with this thesis. We disregard those who say: “Do right; fear no one,” because they ignore the main point. If there were no God, they would be correct. But since God does indeed exist, one needs to fear, love, and trust Him above all things. One like that may well say: “I don’t go to church.” Our reply ought to be: You are neglecting the most important duty, namely, your duty toward God. Someday, when you enter eternity, God will ask: “What did you believe?” You will reply: “My basic principle was: ‘Do right; fear no one.’” The verdict will be: “But you did not do right,” and you will have to sink eternally into the depths of hell.

That the Christian religion is the true one, because it gives God alone all glory, can be seen from the words of Paul: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). The primary purpose for which man exists is to glorify God. The second purpose is indeed that he serve his neighbor, but the objective of this should be the glory of God. The human heart, after the fall, is so inclined that it asks: “Why does God so strongly demand that He receive all honor, a demand He punishes if made by men?” But this attitude has its origin in the sinful depravity of man. Human beings, after the fall, seek an honor that is not theirs. God punishes this, because they are thereby deifying themselves.

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and clarification of this name is found in Revelation 1:8: “‘I am the Alpha and Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”

There is also proof for the veracity of the Christian religion in the fact that the chief service of Christians consists of praying, praising, and thanking; that they will laud and praise God in eternal life; and that the angels praised God at the birth of Christ.

We take no cognizance of atheists in this thesis, because they say: “We prove that there is no God; you, on the other hand, that He does exist; consequently we are equally justified.” Such talk reveals that they do not even have what the heathen possess. In no way can we agree to such an argument. Whoever does not know that there is a God no longer has the essential qualities of a human being.

We could prove the existence of God also from reason. Now, however, it is our purpose to carry on a discussion only with those who admit the existence of God; for whoever admits this thereby realizes that he must have a religion.

All heathen, philosophic, Muslim, and Mormon religions are false because according to all of them, man must do this or that in order to earn salvation. Only the Christian religion says the contrary, stands in opposition to all other religions in the world, and has human nature as its enemy. This nature is blind in its understanding, an enemy of God in its will, and a rebel against God in its desires. People listen approvingly when they are told the following: By nature you are good, your inner being is good. Follow the basic principles of good conduct, love and help your neighbor, in order to become acceptable before God. We Christians do not believe that. Only hypocrites believe, for example, that they attend church in order to be pious. We attend church not really to serve God, but rather that He may serve us there; not to create righteousness but to receive it from God. Three hundred fifty years ago, this light was restored through that precious chosen vessel Dr. Martin Luther, and where this light is removed, there a segment of Christianity is torn away.

The sectarians aver: “We do indeed honor God; but you must work out your salvation, pray, battle, and contend for it”; and they despise us who enter heaven slumbering. But their “glory” about which they prattle is a glory of their own. Roman churches also display the words Soli Deo gloria (To God alone the glory), but the very opposite of what furthers God’s glory is taught in the Roman church.

The question hereby raised, whether Christianity as a whole merely goes beyond reason or whether it is opposed to reason, may be answered in this way: Christianity, in the main, has been contrary to reason since the fall. It outrages all those whom the Holy Spirit has not enlightened to recognize that they need do nothing to earn salvation, nor should they share in any honor. Obviously, Christianity embraces facets that are not contrary to reason; but the basic essence of Christianity is always foolishness to human reason.

Hieronymus Kromayer (d. 1670) wrote:

The final purpose of religion is God’s glory. For this is not only the goal of all Christian endeavors (1 Corinthians 10:31), but also the highest aspiration of faith and religion, whereby one can test, as the touchstone, the teachings of all religions, so that a religion which through its corruptions attacks the glory of God
the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, who is coequal with Him in essence and majesty, and the honor of the Holy Spirit, is not to be recognized as true, pure, and unadulterated. For true religion directs everything to the glory of God as its final purpose. During the sharp debate between Christ and the Jewish leaders regarding the veracity of teaching and religion, as to which of the two positions could claim to be right, Christ directed attention, among other things, to this aspect of His teaching, that it was bent on the glory of His heavenly Father, thus demolishing the Jewish speculations (John 8:49).²

² Scrutinium religionum tum falsarum tum unice verae et orthodoxae (Leipzig, 1673), pp. 327f. This volume here paraphrased by Walther is a critique of existing religion, dealing with all earlier and potentially arising sects, and emphasizes the Lutheran as the only true and correct faith. Hieronymous Kromayer (1610–70) was professor of history and rhetoric at the University of Leipzig, 1645–70. His Theologia positivo-polemica (1668) was written against Romanism, Calvinism, and syncretism. He also wrote a history of the church, Polilia, i.e., Historiae ecclesiasticae centuriae . . . (1673).