

# LOGIA

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εἴ τις λαλεῖ,  
ὡς λόγια Θεοῦ

LOGIA is a journal of Lutheran theology. As such it publishes articles on exegetical, historical, systematic, and liturgical theology that promote the orthodox theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. We cling to God's divinely instituted marks of the church: the gospel, preached purely in all its articles, and the sacraments, administered according to Christ's institution. This name expresses what this journal wants to be. In Greek, ΛΟΓΙΑ functions either as an adjective meaning "eloquent," "learned," or "cultured," or as a plural noun meaning "divine revelations," "words," or "messages." The word is found in 1 Peter 4:11, Acts 7:38, and Romans 3:2. Its compound forms include ὁμολογία (confession), ἀπολογία (defense), and ἀναλογία (right relationship). Each of these concepts and all of them together express the purpose and method of this journal. LOGIA considers itself a *free conference in print* and is committed to providing an independent theological forum normed by the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. At the heart of our journal we want our readers to find a love for the sacred Scriptures as the very Word of God, not merely as rule and norm, but especially as Spirit, truth, and life which reveals Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore, we confess the church, without apology and without rancor, only with a sincere and fervent love for the precious Bride of Christ, the holy Christian church, "the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God," as Martin Luther says in the Large Catechism (LC II, 42). We are animated by the conviction that the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession represents the true expression of the church which we confess as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

AC [CA]	Augsburg Confession
AE	Luther's Works, American Edition
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
BSLK	<i>Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche</i>
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
Tappert	<i>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</i> . Trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TLH	<i>The Lutheran Hymnal</i>
Tr	Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
Triglotta	<i>Concordia Triglotta</i>
WA	<i>Luthers Werke</i> , Weimarer Ausgabe [Weimar Edition]

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## *Ne Desperemus*



PROFESSOR SASSE WAS A THEOLOGIAN OF THE CHURCH IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE. FIRST, IT CAN BE SAID THAT HIS theological writings addressed the doctrine of the church more than any other; that included all subjects related to ecclesiology, especially the means of grace and the office of the ministry. He was a teacher about the church.

Sasse was also a theologian for the church, that is, a theologian who constantly had the life of the church in mind. He devoted himself in all his work to the everyday concerns of the church. He was even criticized by his colleagues on the theological faculty at Erlangen for devoting too much of his energies to such church matters rather than to the more purely academic or scholarly pursuits expected of a university professor. Whether acting as advisor to his bishop in Bavaria or as a member of the committee for inter-synodical union of his church in Australia, he expended much of his attention to the affairs of his church. His voluminous correspondence offered spiritual counsel to countless churchmen throughout the world.

It is perhaps because of his close involvement in the affairs of the church that he could, at times, seem so pessimistic about the church. One of his familiar refrains, both in the lectures for his students and in correspondence, was to speak about the “tragedies” of the church. In the words of the Apology: “We see the infinite dangers that threaten the church with ruin. There is an infinite number of ungodly within the church who oppress it” (Ap VII & VII, 9).

Yet Sasse also gave an answer to his own pessimism, his own despair for the church. It was expressed in various ways: “Remember,” he would say, “the Lord still prays for his church!” At the end of essays he often cited the hymn *Ach bleib bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ* (“Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide”).

But there was never a more pointed appeal to the promises of God than when he turned, again and again, to that dramatic phrase in the Apology, *ne desperemus* (*nicht zweifeln* in the German), that we may “not despair” (Ap VII & VIII, 9).

Here was a man who survived what was reckoned to be the worst battle of World War I, who somehow evaded the evil clutches of the Nazi authorities. He lived to see something in the church that was, by human calculation, impossible: the union of two churches in his adoptive country, Australia. In all these he was probably tempted with *desperatio*, but continued to sing, “*Ach bleib bei uns, Herr Jesus Christ!*”

Ronald R. Feuerhahn  
*St. Michael and All Angels 1995*

# Hermann Sasse in His Letters

TOM G. A. HARDT



THIS ARTICLE IS BASED ON A COLLECTION OF HERMANN SASSE'S letters in the possession of the author, copies of which are also found at the Sasse Institute in Saint Louis, Missouri. They are kept in two large files, carefully arranged in good order by Sasse scholar Dr. Ronald Feuerhahn. The letters are, with some exceptions, directed from Hermann Sasse to me. Some of them are to my wife, Karin Hardt, M.A., B.D. (Miss Karin Hassler in the beginning of the correspondence). Some letters are to me and/or my wife from Mrs. Charlotte Sasse, née Naumann, whose literary style and gift for correspondence were quite equal to those of her husband. The collection also includes a number of copies and original letters that Sasse had sent or received through correspondence with other people.

The letters cover the period 1955 to 1976, although regular correspondence did not start until 1958. The letters are either hand written in an easily-read hand—difficult to decipher only when they were written in bed—or typed, which was not one of Sasse's many gifts. Actually he regretted never having learned to type. A few letters are written by kind visitors to his sickbed who wrote according to his directions, at which occasions he would sign: *In tormentis scripsi vel potius dictavi*, "Written or rather dictated in torments" (June 14, 1972). The letters are almost all in English, German being necessitated when he used German secretarial help.

I had not reached the age of twenty-one when I wrote my first letter to Hermann Sasse, having read his *Vom Sakrament des Altar*, which raised some questions for me. I was at that time a student of history at the present Royal University of Stockholm, working for a B.A. in theological studies, which in Sweden in principle still presupposed a degree from the faculty of philosophy, in accord with the medieval scheme. Having no idea about the person of the author, I directed my letter to Erlangen, the address given in the preface. Due to the efficiency of modern mail, it was forwarded to Australia, where Sasse had meanwhile settled down. It was from Australia that the answer eventually came, an answer that in time would change not only my life, but the lives of others as well. He was greatly surprised that *Vom Sakrament* ever reached Sweden. In one of his last let-

ters to me, twenty-one years later, he gives a description of the fate of the book. The publishing house

does no longer exist. In one night of air-raids, the house with all the stock (including my book which had just appeared) were destroyed. The owner, Herr Goetze, a gentleman of profound Lutheran convictions, was buried under the ruin and has never been found (June 7, 1976).

The contents of Sasse's letters cover a great number of topics. They contain treatments of theological questions but also give frequent glimpses into his own life, both of his early and later years. Taken as a whole the letters give an extraordinarily good insight into the life and work of Hermann Sasse and into his personality. It seems to this writer that a chronological order, not of the letters, but of the events described in them, best serves the purpose of giving a genuine picture of Hermann Sasse.

Beginning with Sasse's family background, he once expressed in a conversation with me his pride in being a descendant of the great Lutheran theologian Valentin Loescher of the eighteenth century. About the name Sasse he reports (August 9, 1970), "There are Sasses also in England. It is an old Saxon word and means 'him who sits on his property' (cf. *Beisasse*, *Hintersasse*). So it appears wherever Saxons (i.e., Lower Saxony) lived."

About his childhood in Mecklenburg, where he was born in 1895 and where his father was a pharmacist, we hear nothing with the exception of the charming words "I was always a cat-lover as a child" (June 4, 1970), made in connection with best greetings to the Hardt family's cat Felix Athanasius. Yet there is a strong indication of happy childhood in the aged Sasse's many references to his still-living brother and sisters, who did their best to help him, especially with the expensive medicines that he needed. Gifts from Germany to the Hardt family were not infrequently arranged using them as intermediaries; the bonds between us are not yet broken.

A touching picture is one that is not given in the letters but conveyed to me personally in a meeting with Sasse. Together with his brother he walked in his old age through Berlin, the city to which the family moved from Mecklenburg, looking for the houses where they had lived as children. The houses were all there as they remembered them in spite of the war, and the

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two elderly gentlemen thought of a time that was no more. In [East] Berlin was their father's grave, "but my mother lies in Poland. She died in Silesia when the Russian armies approached" (August 24, 1964).

Sasse's study time in Berlin is well known as a time in which he came into contact with the great shining lights of that period. He appreciated very much the possibility of studying other subjects than those strictly theological, and he even says, "I always looked with contempt on students who only listen to theological lectures. In my student days, which were shortened by the war, I attended lectures with philologists and historians four times a week (Wilamowitz, E. Norden, . . . E Meyer) and was regularly examined" (November 29, 1972, translated from German letter to W. M. Oesch). The same ambition never to be cut off from the surrounding world but to receive information continued to be part of his personality. At the age of eighty, he could write: "We get the *Svenska Dagebladet*. I can read [it] in our State Library on the rare occasions I can reach it" (June 11, 1975). The Swedish conservative daily *Svenska Dagebladet* is the Swedish "Times," and Sasse, who mastered Swedish, studied it. Foreign papers were a must to him, and he also continually read several Swedish church papers.

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### **"What Lutheranism is, I learned in America 1925–26."**

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Sasse's military service during the first World War remained forever in his memory. He describes one of his experiences with the following words: "I was once in my life nearly dead, buried in sand and dirt in Flandern, 1917—but that was the happiest moment of my life" (March 17, 1964, two weeks after his wife's death on March 4, 1964). What he wanted to say was apparently that at this moment he gave up all human ambitions and rested in God's hands. At the same time it should be remembered that the war did not necessarily imply that his theological work ceased. We hear him say, "I had as a soldier always a note book in which I wrote the thoughts that came to me. This became the nucleus of my thesis in 1923 (*Aion exxomenos*) for Lic. theol. in Berlin" (December 6, 1961).

After the war when he was ordained in the church of the Old Prussian Union in 1920, he was confronted with a strange world that was still under the threat of a Communist revolution:

I remember such difficulties from my first years in the ministry in Berlin and Oranienburg when the teachers wilfully destroyed everything the children had learned of Christian faith and life. I remember even such scenes when one cannot hear one's own voice. My first confirmation class in Berlin was under Communist influence. After one lesson I found small Communist slogans in all chairs (December 10, 1962).

It is also during his time in Berlin that he becomes a *Sozialpfarrer*. He explains this title, which was even printed on his books:

I was in charge of observing the political and especially the socialist and communist movement and had to report to the church of Berlin. I had to teach Social Ethics to Christian labor leaders and to pastors, candidates and congregations, on matters such as Communist Manifesto, etc. The social ethics was for me given in CA 16 and Apology" (March 5, 1972).

The church that he served was of the Old Prussian Union. He was later to leave it for confessional reasons, but he could find the gospel in it: "I was fortunate to have a general superintendent [bishop] in the Kurmark, who in masterfully conducted pastoral holiday meetings taught us anew to understand what sin, forgiveness, and sanctification are. It was Axenfeldt, who came from the Berlin Mission" (August 8, 1970, to O. K. R. Klaper, translated from German). The conditions that regulated the relationship between Lutheran and non-Lutheran pastors within this Union church respected very much the conservative conscience: "When I was in Berlin, I was the only Lutheran pastor in my church with three extreme Liberals at my side. We pastors exercised no church fellowship [*communicatio in sacris*] which no one in Berlin expected us to do" (March 18, 1960, to Bishop Giertz, translated from German). If we ask where Sasse learned to stress the *nulla communicatio in sacris cum haereticis*, the answer must be in the Old Prussian Union!

The respect for conservatives, however, knew its limits. Sasse continued his studies:

I was Lic. Theol. of Berlin and was about to become Privatdozent for NT as assistant of Deissmann. When everything was ready, the OKR [Supreme Church Council] protested against a Lutheran in this position. Since no one else was available, a Baptist (Schneider) was appointed (June 18, 1958).

Life was, however, not only disappointments. This is the time when Sasse finds his wife, Charlotte, a highly intellectual woman. She tells Karin Hardt about her background: "I did my teacher's exams, too (like you), and was for some time educating the children of a Turkish prince who lived near Berlin in exile" (October 24, 1960). The year of their marriage was a time of inflation in Germany, about which Sasse writes, "When we were married we had one week in September at one of the beautiful lakes in the Mark Brandenburg. We were very rich at that time, having a salary of 40,000,000,000 Marks (equivalent to \$10 a month), but we were very happy" (April 29, 1961).

Sasse's foreign contacts, so essential to him, had already been established by this time and were to continue for the rest of his life: "In 1921 I was in Sweden and saw something of the glory of the Lutheran Church. However, what Lutheranism is, I learned in America 1925–26" (June 18, 1958). In Sweden he made the acquaintance of Archbishop Söderblom.

I knew him personally. To many he has been a good Samaritan after World War I. I belong to them. I would not have survived the breakdown after 1918 without his “ecumenical work.” Certainly his doctrine was heretical, but this was the destiny of his generation. He was not an Oxnam! I have had private talks with him in Lausanne and Eisenach which revealed the profound nostalgia for the lost faith of the fathers (August 4, 1959. Dr. G. Bromley Oxnam was a liberal Methodist bishop and preacher of the social gospel).

When I objected to Sasse about what I regarded as an exaggerated esteem for Söderblom, whom I knew to deny all supernatural elements in Christianity, and whose religion was summarized in his last words, “I know that there is a God, and I can derive it through the history of religions,” Sasse responded with careful wording:

I understand your opinion of Söderblom. I was shocked when I read his last words. I know his responsibility for the development in Sweden. He had moments when he saw that he had “gone too far” as he confessed to me at Lausanne and a few years later in Eisenach, shortly before his death. “*Sein Geist war zweier Seelen Schlachtfeld* [His spirit was the battlefield of two souls].” Thus I remember two sermons of his, one in Sweden (on 2 Cor 2:20) and one at an Ecumenical meeting where he preached in a really Lutheran way. *Homo duplex*. Just as with Harnack sometimes. Suddenly the Luth[eran] heritage could come out when he stood on a pulpit (August 29, 1959).

It seems that Sasse’s view of Söderblom became more critical as time went on:

What the old Archbishop Johansson [of Åbo, Finland] wrote before and after the conference [of Stockholm 1925] we did not all of us understand at that time. In his warnings against the Stockholm syncretism he was right. He has seen more clearly than all of us to what Söderblom’s relativism led (November 17, 1961, to Bishop Giertz, translated from German).

“Us” involves also Sasse, whose eyes had been opened by that time.

When Sasse moved to Erlangen as a professor, it was a step in a definitely more conservative direction. The church of Bavaria was consciously Lutheran, and Bishop Meiser of Munich was to become very much influenced by Sasse, who wrote many of Meiser’s public statements in the struggle with the German State. Yet it did not mean the end of Sasse’s troubles.

My salary at Erlangen was the lowest possible, corresponding to a country parson’s stipend. My criticisms of the party program in *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die evangelischen Landeskirche* in 1932 was the main reason for the disgrace in which I was with the Nazis. Repeat-

edly it was demanded in the press or by men like Rosenberg that I should be dismissed. But the particular situation in Bavaria delayed my dismissal until in 1939 Elert as a dean told me that he could no longer keep me since I had disregarded his frequent requests that I should publicly confess my loyalty to Hitler. — A few weeks later the war broke out which changed the situation, especially since I was in the service of the army as a chaplain (May 20, 1961).

While a man like Professor Althaus, who accepted the Hitler regime, could enjoy the advantage of having servants in his house, this was denied to the Sasse family, where Mrs. Sasse had to keep a large house in order herself.

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### *When Sasse moved to Erlangen as a professor, it was a step in a definitely more conservative direction.*

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The anti-Hitler position that Sasse took was to cause him problems also after the war, strange to say. He was not only granted full pay for his professorship by the American military authorities, but even made a pro-rector of the University of Erlangen. To this was added a task that Sasse later describes in the following way:

I had done what was expected from us who were appointed to administrative offices in the University by the Military Government—at that time the only lawful authority in the chaos of the complete breakdown—and given objective reports [on fellow professors] as also our colleagues of other faculties had done. There was nothing that could be regarded as unlawful or ungentlemanlike, as it was recognized by the university . . . (September 17, 1967).

Sasse’s description of his conduct has later been generally accepted and no shadow darkens his name. A careful survey is given by his colleague Walther von Loewenich in his memoirs, *Erlebe Theologie* (Munich, 1979), where it is pointed out that Sasse’s brilliant report was far above the intellectual level of the military government, which could hardly grasp the meaning of Sasse’s words. For example, Sasse reported as a defense that Althaus never could have been a Nazi being a typical *Melanch-tonnatur*, lacking the ability to reject or affirm anything.

Sasse has, however, something important to say here that seems to explain why the silly accusation of his being a “Denunziant” was so very widespread. In 1948 all the German national churches formed together what was called The Evangelical Church of Germany (EKiD), where the different confessions actually were no more than varieties of the same Protestant faith. Actually it meant the introduction of a *Union* all

over Germany. Sasse strongly opposed it and tried to get Bishop Meiser to follow him also on this point, but in vain. Sasse writes:

Then came the EKID. I explained to Meiser why I could not accept that and asked him to write to the Ministerium (state department for church affairs) that they should treat me as a member of a Catholic faculty was treated in the corresponding case of a doctrinal conflict with the Church: either being pensioned or transferred into the Philosophical Faculty. He refused to do that because he would not recognize that a Lutheran theologian could have justified scruples concerning the EKID. On the contrary, after my emigration, when I was no longer able to do anything, he wrote a letter to all sorts of church governments, denying that I had to leave for theological and conscientious reasons, and claiming that [I] had left for political reasons because I had denounced my colleagues [to] the Military Government. This was not true (September 17, 1967).

The formerly conservative Meiser turned away from his adviser Sasse and is thus the man who, in defense of the ecumenical EKID, had to find the “real” reason for Sasse’s departure from Germany. He seems to be the real source of the accusations directed against Sasse.

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### *All of Sasse’s work was done under great external difficulties.*

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The active role that Meiser played at the dramatic deposition of Sasse’s disciple and friend Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf from the ministry—Hopf refused to recognize EKID too—also left scars that were never healed. Hopf reminded Sasse how he had been present at “that never-to-be-forgotten December day in 1948, when Meiser practiced his evil deeds in the parish” (July 18, 1972, Hopf to Sasse, translated from German). Sasse was thus present when Hopf surrendered to Meiser under the threat of force his pastoral seal, the church keys, and the church records of his parish, although he still claimed to be the parish’s only lawful rector. This is part of the background behind those occasions when Sasse mentions his former friend with his episcopal title in quotation marks (July 20, 1967). Meiser’s behavior also led to the consequence that Sasse lost his right to a state pension earned over thirty-three years, a factor that darkened his old age until a settlement with the German state was reached.

Especially bitter to Sasse was the discovery that Missouri sided with the EKID.

Already in 1948 when I was in St. Louis and could teach in a non “uniert” faculty, I was told: We side with the national churches, and I was emphatically

admonished to recognize the EKID. Th. Graebner wrote in this sense to Lilje [Bishop of Hannover], and he read the letter aloud to the general synod of the church, when it rejected the EKID. Then he asked: Do you want to be more missourian than Missouri? (August 26, 1963, to A. Aijal Uppala Wegelius, Finland, translated from German).

Sasse found there [St. Louis] the same hatred with President Sieck of Concordia Seminary and most of his colleagues, who could never forgive the greatest of all sins, “to leave the *Landeskirche* [State Church] for the Free Church” (June 29, 1971). The treatment given Sasse was utterly humiliating: “No one was at the pier in New York, no one at the station at St. Louis” (September 17, 1967). Sasse was, however, aware of another Missouri! He speaks of “the great distress of Dr. Behnken who wanted me for St. Louis but was unable to resist the ‘liberals’” (May 20, 1961).

The result of these many disappointments was the choice of Adelaide. There were, no doubt, problems with this decision, especially for Mrs. Sasse, but they do not have their place in this connection.

In his later years, Sasse was once more to meet one of the greatest promoters of EKID, Bishop Dibelius of Berlin, who was actually its presiding bishop. The meeting, the report of which I have also heard from Sasse’s own lips in greater detail, took place when Sasse, together with Billy Graham and Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, took part in a religious conference in Berlin in 1966. The meeting did not lack dramatic features:

I do not know if I have told you how I met Dibelius the last time. It was in Berlin, at the World Conference for Evangelism, shortly before his death. He invited me to pay a visit to him, and I drove at a late evening hour to Dalhem, where he received me in his large study room. In the manner of elderly people he chatted about experiences in the active ministry. He told, e.g., about the written statement by which he, as the youngest member of the Evangelical Supreme Church Board, won his church order spurs. He had shown in it that the Prussian Church could not tolerate that Elert, who had been unanimously proposed (as a professor) by the faculty of Greifswald, should teach at a Prussian faculty. He was still proud of that. At that time it happened that he became unconscious and fell in my arms. I had to lift him back in his chair and thought at that moment: I hope that he will recover. Otherwise the whole world will know tomorrow that Sasse has killed his old General Superintendent. Fortunately he recovered. No one else seemed to be at home” (August 8, 1970, to O. K. R. Klaper, translated from German.)

It is now time to turn to some specific theological matters that appear in Sasse’s letters. A selection has to be made, and I wish to touch only two themes: the Sacrament of the Altar and the church of Rome. This final part of the article will not follow the chrono-



logical order used above. It will also be comparatively short and will concentrate on a few thoughts of more general importance.

It must first of all be pointed out that all of Sasse's work was done under great external difficulties. Those who have learned to appreciate Sasse's great work *This Is My Body* should also know something about its background:

I remember the time when I finalized *This Is My Body*, the weakness of which you have seen so well. I was misled by the edition in the *Bekennnisschriften*, which was made by an ardent Barthian. Once they found me collapsed at my typewriter. The doctor sent me to bed. As soon as my wife had left the house to do some shopping, I got up, packed what was ready of the manuscript, took a taxi for the GPO, sent everything off which was at that time very expensive, went home again by taxi, and went to bed bankrupt, but happy. A few minutes later my wife came back. I acted the obedient patient (September 5, 1971).

Bad health and poverty, as can be seen, were the two heavy crosses of his later years. The words about this writer having found weaknesses in Sasse's work only refer to some minor corrections, and should in no way obscure the fact that my work built on Sasse and was a continuation of what he had done.

Sasse's first letter to me was full of clarifications on the Sacrament of the Altar, which are of the greatest importance. Sasse confronted me with Luther's warnings to the Christians in Frankfurt am Main against receiving the Sacrament at an altar where there is no clear confession of the Real Presence, and the communicants accordingly only receive bread and wine.

If we recite the words [of institution] with the conviction that the bread is not the body [cp. Smalcald Articles III, 6] we dishonour Christ by our unbelief and destroy the institution of Christ. . . . But to say that it is not essential what a person believes and what a church teaches on the Lord's Supper, if only the 'creative Word' is spoken, means to put the sacraments of Christ on the level of mystery rite. The rites performed in the mystery religions need no interpretation. The sacraments of the Church are bound up with a clear doctrine without ceasing to be mysteries to our reason (June 8, 1955).

The greatness of this Sasse quote is to refute once and for all the reference to the "Word," that is, to the use of biblical texts, as a guarantee of the presence of the Sacrament. The accusation "mystery religion" actually makes the foundation of the national churches fall, because they are united only through the presence of common rites, the meaning of which remain open to any interpretation whatsoever. Personally, Sasse's words led me to re-examine the entire concept of "church" and "sacraments" and to ask for the true, biblical understanding connected with the words. What the "church" does or says was henceforth of no importance. The only thing that matters is whether biblical truth has been articulated.

The concern about the Sacrament, which he saw more and more threatened within formerly Lutheran churches, gradually developed also into a concern about the Sacrament of the Roman Church. It is important to stress that Sasse's connections with official Rome, which led to his invitation to the Vatican by Cardinal Bea, were never marked by the submissive attitude often found among the ecumenically-minded Protestant church leaders and theologians of today. There is a sentence that aptly summarizes the nature of Sasse's relationship to the Church of Rome: "The latest patient in my little hospital of sick churches is the Roman church here which has decided to remain Roman. Touching letters from Dominicans and Franciscans, visits by bishops reveal to me the sickness of all Christendom" (February 21, 1970). Sasse was not Romanizing. Rather, Dr. Sasse was consulted by Rome, the suffering patient.

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***Sasse sees the decline of the eucharistic doctrine within the Church of Rome as part of the dissolution of the Christian faith in general.***

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He could refer to the conservative protests of cardinals like Ottaviani and Bacci, whose book on the mass he sent to me with this comment about modern Rome:

In my opinion it is not only the sacrifice that is abandoned, though nominally maintained, but also the Real Presence. So it could be that St. Martin's in Stockholm will one day be the only church in the city to whom the sacrament of Christ is being preserved (August 21, 1974).

So the entire doctrine of the Real Presence falls. . . . The new liturgy understands the Eucharist in principle no more as a sacrifice but as a meal. Also on this point the Lutherans could show the Catholics that it is true that the Lord's Supper is not a propitiatory sacrifice but yet a sacrificial meal [*Opfermahl*], where we with our mouths receive what Christ has once for all sacrificed on the cross, his true body and his true blood (August 1971, to different German church leaders, translated from German).

The partial defense of the sacrificial aspects of the mass that Sasse consciously delivers thus builds on the connection between the sacrament and the *satisfactio vicaria*, a doctrine also denied by liberal Romans.

Sasse sees the decline of the eucharistic doctrine within the Church of Rome as part of the dissolution of the Christian faith in general. Sin is thought to exist no more.

This consoling discovery is in the Catholic Church due to Teilhard de Chardin. . . . It is to be attributed to that

man, when today in Catholic theology original sin can be denied, which still the Council of Trent tried to keep with such a seriousness. One book after the other appears, in which original sin is denied, the devil is demythologized and often it is said that not Augustine but Pelagius is the true doctor of grace (August, 1971, see above).

In correspondence with the secretary of Cardinal Bea, Sasse could write:

When I read theologians like Henri de Lubac, then I ask myself if Rome is not on its way from Augustine to Origen and if the great interest in the exegesis of the Greek fathers in present Catholicism is not an indication of this danger. As far as I know, I have already once written to his Eminence on this point. Behind this is not only the danger of universalism which has become a great temptation for modern Protestants but also another understanding of sin. It is understood as infirmity and disease but not as guilt. What Rome has to tell the brethren of the church of the East is that Augustine's doctrine is not his private opinion but that it contains an essential biblical doctrine, without which there is no gospel (April 6, 1968, to Stefano Schmidt, translated from German).

Sasse said such things also directly to Bea: "He [Bea] took it from me when I reminded him that his Christian name was Augustinus not Origen and when I quoted Anselm, *nondum considerasti, quanti ponderis sit peccatum* [You have not yet considered the weight of sin]" (December 10, 1968). As a matter of fact their conflict was so open that Sasse asked himself:

I wonder why he [Bea] continues [his correspondence]. I constantly emphasize the great apostasy of Rome from the doctrine of Trent on original sin. At the requiem mass for Cardinal N— [name not legible] the *Dies irae* was omitted and some other parts

which speak clearly of God's judgment and of hell" (December 23, 1967).

It is quite apparent that Sasse was not like those liberals whom he describes with the following words: "All these liberals sympathize with the liberals in Roman Catholicism and are convinced that the great union of all is just round the corner (November 8, 1967).


Sasse thought the opposite, namely, that we are facing an increase of heresy and denial:

but you are right that in all those fights in the early twentieth century inclusively, the church fight during the time of Hitler was merely a light prelude to that about which the fight now stands: the existence of the Christian faith in the world. The crisis of today goes quite further and deeper than we have experienced. The only real parallel is what Christendom experienced in the storm of Islam and in the fall of the old churches of Central and Eastern Asia (March 4, 1972, to Bishop Dietzfelbinger, translated from German).

This quotation may serve as an end to this survey of Sasse's correspondence during his last twenty-one years. It may not be an optimistic one, but it is a true one, conforming to the Bible's perspective. It can only be accepted in its devastating bitterness by faith, in the attitude expressed in the first two stanzas of the famous hymn "Ach bleib bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ," which so very often appeared in Sasse's letters:

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,  
For round us falls the eventide;  
Nor let Thy Word, that heav'nly light,  
For us be ever veiled in night.

In these last days of sore distress  
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness  
That pure we keep, till life is spent,  
Thy holy Word and Sacrament.

(*TLH*, 292:1, 2) 

# Hermann Sasse & North American Lutheranism

RONALD R. FEUERHAHN



It was in the United States that Hermann Sasse discovered confessional Lutheranism. For that he would be forever grateful. He stated this clearly in his Foreword to the American edition of *Was heißt lutherisch?*

Personally I must confess that it was in America that I first learned fully to appreciate what it means to be loyal to the Lutheran Confessions; but for what I learned from the Lutheran theologians and church bodies in the United States, I probably could never have written this book.<sup>1</sup>

To say that he “discovered” Lutheranism is explained in part in a letter to his dear friend Tom Hardt of Stockholm. “However, what Lutheranism is, I learned in America 1925–26. I was pastor in Oranienburg and Berlin, a Lutheran within the union.”<sup>2</sup> After that time he could no longer regard the Prussian “union” church a Lutheran church; it was as if it were only an *Ersatz* Lutheranism. More and more in his career he would look to North American Lutheranism to be the vanguard of world Lutheranism.

Sasse’s contacts with American Lutheranism were varied and numerous. He corresponded frequently with many churchmen from many different churches. He visited the United States a number of times. Even at that, he wrote about American Lutheranism with an authority that surprises many readers. Dr. E. Reim of the Wisconsin Synod wrote of the appreciation among American Lutherans for Sasse’s *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*, “Certainly we must all marvel at the author’s familiarity with the affairs of our Lutheran Church in America.”<sup>3</sup>

## FIRST ENCOUNTERS—1925–1926

### *Hartford Theological Seminary*

Pastor Sasse first visited the United States in 1925–26. In that year, from September 1925 until May 1926,<sup>4</sup> he took a study leave at Hartford Theological Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut. In a series of lectures soon after his return, he described Hartford Seminary and the American religious scene.

The most important schools of the East are almost all interdenominational. In the Seminary at Hartford . . . there were students representing twenty-five different denominations. They all leave the Seminary with the same theology. Circumstances determine their future church connection. I know Quakers, accordingly unbaptized persons, who are becoming ministers in the Congregational church. There they will baptize by immersion or by aspersion, adults or children, according to one’s preference . . . In these occurrences the longing for the unity of the church is expressed. Like a dream, this ideal of one American church hovers before the souls of the Americans.<sup>5</sup>

The circumstance that permitted his journey to the United States was a scholarship provided by the *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchausschuß* (German Evangelical Church Committee).<sup>6</sup> This committee had made contact with a group of American theological faculties through the German-American exchange of theologians suggested by Dr. Julius Richter.<sup>7</sup> Six German theologians were sent at that time to America, namely to the Eden Theological Seminary in Webster Groves, St. Louis (Evangelical Synod), Wittenberg College in Springfield (Lutheran), the theological seminary in Princeton (Presbyterian), Chicago (Congregationalist), Boston (Methodist) and in Hartford (non-denominational).<sup>8</sup> Sasse received one of two Jacobus Fellowships of \$500 each (an award named for Porter Ogden Jacobus and established in 1905 by Mrs. Clara Cooley Jacobus). His thesis was *Der Begriff des Aion in der Bibel*.<sup>9</sup>

Sasse acknowledged two teachers especially, Douglas Mackenzie and Duncan B. Macdonald.<sup>10</sup> William Douglas Mackenzie (1859–1936) was President and Professor of Systematic Theology from 1903 to 1930. Born in South Africa in 1859 where his father was a missionary, he was educated in Scotland, taking his professional course in Edinburgh in the Theological Hall, of which Dr. Lindsay Alexander was principal. He also studied in several German universities. When Chicago Seminary in 1895 was looking for a man of Scottish training, liberal mind, and evangelical spirit to fill the chair of Systematic Theology, Mr. Mackenzie was recommended by Scottish theological leaders. He was very active in preparations for and leadership in the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910.<sup>11</sup>

Duncan Black Macdonald (1863–1943) was professor in Semitic languages. He came to the seminary as a young man with

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a reputation as a scholar of great promise. He soon came to be recognized as one of the leading Arabic scholars of the country. He was, from the first, interested in missionary preparation, and the School of Missions at Hartford Seminary was largely indebted to him for its success.<sup>12</sup>

From the perspective of today, it may perhaps seem ironic that Sasse, who would later be identified with conservative, confessional Lutheranism, should have taken a degree at what was considered one of the more liberal seminaries in the United States. Of course, this is not so unusual if one takes into account that he had received his higher education at the University of Berlin. No, the irony is that, while enrolled at such a liberal institution, Sasse should have “discovered” confessional Lutheranism.

### *The ULCA, Dr. Knubel, and Others*

Sasse’s time in the States was not limited to Hartford. He traveled and delivered lectures and sermons in the Lutheran churches of America.<sup>13</sup> In the preface to his lectures on the American churches, he expresses thanks to “friends in the United Lutheran Church.”<sup>14</sup> He often recalled these contacts with the United Lutheran Church of America and its president, Dr. F. Knubel. “As a matter of fact,” he observed in a 1961 letter to E. Theodore Bachmann, “I have become a conscious Lutheran in your church.” He explained:

I came from the theology of Berlin as it was taught before World War I and from the Church of the Prussian Union in which I was a pastor. In Sweden [summer 1921] I had for the first time seen a Lutheran Church. In America I understood that the Lutheran Church cannot exist unless it takes seriously the borderline drawn by our confession over against other Christian denominations. This I have learnt from Dr. Knubel and from your men in Mount Airy.<sup>15</sup>

It appears that Sasse met Knubel during that year in the States. When, years later, the two met in Nürnberg, they renewed memories of those earlier days.<sup>16</sup>

His contact with the ULCA was renewed soon after his return to Germany. At Lausanne in 1927 he met the delegates for the first Faith and Order World Conference. He later recalled that they distributed copies of the Jacobs Edition of the Confessions.<sup>17</sup>

Over the next decade, before the outbreak of World War II, American Lutheran churchmen took note of Sasse’s writings. The Lutheran historian and ecumenist Abdel Ross Wentz of Gettysburg wrote in appreciation of Sasse’s book on American Christianity<sup>18</sup> and his article “Die deutsche Union von 1933.” By 1938 Sasse would be published in the United States. The National Lutheran Council sponsored the publication of his book *Was heißt lutherische*; the translation by Theodore Tappert appeared as *Here We Stand: Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith*. Ralph Long, Executive Director of the National Lutheran Council, offered the judgment that “this is a contribution not only to the Lutheran Church of America but to the whole English-speaking Protestant Church.”<sup>19</sup>

### *American Churches Observed*

This year in the United States indeed had a great influence on Sasse. He once recalled, “I had learned in America, where I spent

a year at Hartford (1925–26), what undogmatic Christianity is and where it ends.”<sup>20</sup> Because of this “I believed strongly that the future of Christianity depended in Germany and in the world on those churches which still dare to confess their dogma.” He saw the heyday of the Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch and others.<sup>21</sup> He had also met Wilhelm Pauck in 1925.<sup>22</sup>

Sasse would later describe the importance of this study exchange for his theological development. Of particular impact during this time was reading Wilhelm Löhe’s (1808–1872) *Drei Bücher von der Kirche*<sup>23</sup> and his exposure to the liberalism and pluralism of American Christianity. During this period he was also reading Luther and the Lutheran Confessions.

A literary fruit of his stay in America was a series of lectures on his observations given at Frankfurt an der Oder in August 1926. These were published as *Amerikanisches Kirchentum*.<sup>24</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer read the book in preparation for his own study at Union Theological Seminary, New York.<sup>25</sup>

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## *“In America, living history begins with the excursion of the Mayflower.”*

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Even while in Hartford, Sasse submitted an article for a Berlin newspaper about the American religious scene. Here he noted the identification of religion and culture: “The great program of American Christianity is the application of the principles of the gospel to the practical questions of civilization.” While in Europe history still has a living force, for the Americans it is merely legend. In America, “living history begins with the excursion the Mayflower, the first event about which the first American thinks with deep emotion.” Then it proceeds to the development of the continent. But religion has a firm place in this. Since religious motives drove the first settlers across the ocean, religion has cooperated positively in the construction of the culture, of the new nation. This is in contrast to Europe, particularly Germany, where religion and culture are in intolerable discord.<sup>26</sup> He also noted a superficiality of American church life “which repulses us Germans.”<sup>27</sup>

Sasse’s correspondence often recalls that year in the United States. In 1935 he wrote his friend Professor Leonard Hodgson in Oxford about the precarious political situation in Europe and of the seemingly futile effort of humans to create a stable peace.

What a change since 1925! I remember a sermon preached by Dr. Cadman<sup>28</sup> in Brooklyn on Sunday before Christmas of that year which began: Through the glorious gate of Locarno<sup>29</sup> we entered this year, by the grace of God, the holy season of Advent. Then the preacher told that now the message of the angels was fulfilled: peace on earth! What disappointments have come over all of us! We are just experiencing anew such disappointment with regard to our churches. But we must pray the Lord *“für den Frieden der ganzen Welt und die Dauer Seiner heiligen Kirche”* as it is done in our liturgy.<sup>30</sup>

He spoke too about the liturgy in America. Can Sasse, who has been described as prescient, really have foreseen what we have today?

Why should the church not offer what a secular club offers? And these things progressively force their way into religious life itself. Worship has been, as we say, “developed.” There must always be something new, and everything must be effective: Lighting-effects, musical-effects, and effective liturgy.<sup>31</sup>

### LWC CONTACTS

Dr. Sasse’s ecumenical involvements were extensive. He had been selected a member of the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order by 1930 and even of its Executive Committee. He was also its continental secretary. His participation in the Lutheran World Convention, on the other hand, was stillborn. He was scheduled to attend the LWC assembly in Paris on October 13–20, 1935, to give a supplementary paper (*Korreferent*) on the theme “Lutheranism in the Political Crisis of the Present.” His application for approval to travel to the meeting, however, was denied by the Nazi authorities.<sup>32</sup>

The outbreak of the war denied him another chance of participation. Sasse described this in a letter in 1964:

kindly allow a man of the older generation who was still active in the Luth. World Convention—my paper for Paris could not be delivered because I could not get the permission to leave Germany at that time, and the preparatory work of the Commission on “Church and churches” which I did with Drs. Reu and Moe for Philadelphia 1940 came to nothing on account of the war.<sup>33</sup>

### J. Michael Reu

Nevertheless, this brief participation fostered contacts that were important to Sasse. Not least was that with Dr. M. Reu, professor at Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. Reu was arguably one of the most respected scholars among Lutherans in America; even German churchman were impressed by his paper at the 1929 Copenhagen Assembly of the Convention.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, he was one of the most conservative churchmen in the National Lutheran Council (U.S.A.) or the LWC.<sup>35</sup>

Sasse never met Reu.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the rapport between the two of them was such that Sasse could refer to Reu as “my fatherly friend,”<sup>37</sup> and Reu would publish a number of Sasse’s essays in the journal that he edited.<sup>38</sup> They shared a concern over the future of American Lutheranism; that which had undermined Lutheranism in Europe was evident also in America. Sasse wrote his book *This Is My Body* for America in an attempt to warn his brethren “before it is too late.” He explained: “When I was working at my book I had before me his picture and was constantly reminded of the grave concern about the future of the Lutheran Church in America which he confided me [*sic*] for years in his letters until the war stopped our correspondence.”<sup>39</sup> They had corresponded regularly between 1935 and 1939.

### CALL TO MT. AIRY

By 1939, Sasse’s relation with United States Lutheran Churches would change. Now he turned to his American friends for help. Ever since he had so thoroughly—and so publicly—condemned the spirit of the Nazis in 1932, the party seemed determined to dismiss him from his post as a university lecturer, which was also a civil service post. The pressure had been mounting: by 1935 he was denied permission to travel abroad. In 1937 he was attacked by at least two party papers, *Das Schwarze Korps*, official weekly newspaper of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), and the *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte*.

In the summer of 1939 the issue became critical. It was a meeting with his Dean, Werner Elert, on June 20 at which he was informed that his position was in jeopardy. The following day Sasse wrote to President Knubel of the United Lutheran Church. He wrote again on June 25 giving further clarification of his situation.<sup>40</sup>

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### *Now he turned to his American friends for help.*

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During the remainder of that summer, Sasse was in regular contact with either Knubel or with Theodore Tappert, professor of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Tappert was in Germany that summer. In his first post-war letter to his friend Hermann Preus, Sasse related something of the trials he faced during the years of the struggle.

You ask about our condition. When the war broke out, on 1st September 1939, my wife and I were in the darkened [blackout] Bremen at a reunion with colleague Tappert of Mt. Airy [Philadelphia] and his wife. He had spoken at the Luther-Academy in Sondershausen and now pleaded with me on behalf of President Knubel concerning my emigration to Philadelphia, where I should accept a teaching position after my position in Erlangen had become untenable on political grounds. My own Dean, Elert, had explained to me that I would no longer be bearable as an official in the National Socialist State because of my critique of the party and my participation in the Church struggle. For me came additionally the complete isolation in my own faculty, and thus we agreed with colleague Tappert concerning everything. Then however war broke out with England and France and the door to America was closed.<sup>41</sup>

Here there is cause to question the details of Sasse’s recollection. What, for instance, was the meaning of the reference to his “emigration to Philadelphia”? We know that during 1939 Sasse had discussed his precarious situation with Knubel; he had also sought advice about the matter from Dr. Reu of Dubuque. The nature of the reference to Philadelphia is made a little clearer in

another post-war document. In a questionnaire for the United States Military Government in occupied Germany, Sasse made the following declaration.

When, then, in the summer of 1939 my Dean of that time declared, after repeated requests to acknowledge in writing to the National Socialist state that I no longer find it bearable to be a civil servant, I drew the consequence and looked into an offer of a chair in Philadelphia issued at that time. Only the outbreak of the war prevented my departure.<sup>42</sup>

Among the references he gave in the questionnaire are the names of Knubel and Tappert.<sup>43</sup>

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***“I hold the Missouri Synod as one of the pillars of the antiquity of the world.”***

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By implication, to be sure, Sasse indicated that he was called, or at least a call was considered, to the seminary in Mt. Airy, Philadelphia. After Professor Tappert returned to the States, he wrote to Knubel. The letter begins: “When I sailed for Europe on July 24 you asked me to learn what I could . . . about Professor Sasse’s plans.”<sup>44</sup> His observations are very helpful for us not only with regard to clarification of the matter of the teaching position, but also about Sasse’s general situation at the time.

We met in Bremen the day before war broke out between Germany and England. We spent a full evening together in the darkened city, and then had another hour of conference on the following morning before he entrained for Erlangen. What you told me was no exaggeration: Professor Sasse was one of the most pessimistic men I had met in Germany. One is that he cannot reconcile his faith with present conditions in church and state. The other is that, as a consequence, he is convinced that his usefulness is over and that he will be put on an academic shelf. I reminded him that emigration would present new difficulties: an adjustment to American church life which is not ideal either, an accomodation [*sic*] to lower academic standards, the gradual breaking of cherished linguistic and cultural ties for his family as well as for himself, etc. He said that he was aware of these difficulties, but that such sacrifices would be worth the freedom and the opportunity to have a part in the development of an American Lutheran theology. His final word was that he would give favorable consideration to any call which came to him from you, but that, if such a call should be forthcoming, no mention should be made in it to any previous conversations.<sup>45</sup>

The letter confirms several details of the meeting between the two men. It also indicates that a call had not as yet been, and, given the circumstance, probably never was extended. Finally, we have a better notion of what Sasse meant in his letter to Herman Preus when he says that Tappert “now pleaded with me” concerning this matter. In Tappert’s words, that pleading was, “I reminded him that emigration would present new difficulties.”

### POST-WAR CONTACTS WITH THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

*Drs. Behnken, Mayer, Meyer*

Sasse would doubtless have been aware of the Missouri Synod during his study visit to the States in 1925–26. In a letter to President P. H. Petersen of *Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche* in 1933 he wrote, “On basis of personal experiences in America, I hold the Missouri Synod as one of the pillars of the antiquity of the world.”<sup>46</sup> By the time he came to Erlangen in 1933, at least, he was known by some Missourians. In the mid-1930s, there was a correspondence with Ludwig Fuerbringer, President of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.<sup>47</sup>

But it was not until after the war that there would be opportunity for a close and sustained contact with the synod. On November 18, 1945, President John Behnken and Dr. Lawrence Meyer of the Missouri Synod visited Sasse in Erlangen. Sasse’s response to this meeting was immediate, positive, and enduring; from this point onward the closest bonds were developed with the Missouri Synod, most especially with her president, John W. Behnken. The respect between these men seems to have been mutual. In a report to his church about this their first meeting, Behnken observed that “Dr. Sasse is probably closer to us in doctrine than any other leader in Germany.”<sup>48</sup> At the other end, on the occasion of Behnken’s death in 1968, Sasse gave a very personal testimony of his high respect:

I hear just from St. Louis that our beloved Dr. Behnken has been called home . . . I cannot say how deeply I am moved by this news though from his last letters I concluded that he was taking leave from his children. I shall never forget what this great and humble churchman has meant to me since we first met in 1945. I feel as if I have lost a father again. He stood by me in years of utter loneliness, and we both knew that we, each in his way, were trying to save the Lutheran Church from being absorbed by the anti-Lutheran tendencies which have been sweeping through the Lutheran churches of the world. In some way he may have been the last Church Father of the Lutheran Church in your country.<sup>49</sup>

Next to Dr. Behnken, Sasse’s closest contacts with Missouri were through Dr. Lawrence Meyer, director of the synod’s Emergency Planning Council,<sup>50</sup> and Dr. F. E. Mayer of Concordia Seminary. Mayer, like Meyer, traveled extensively in Europe in the immediate post-war period.

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

Sasse's relations with the Missouri Synod would take a sudden—and strange—turn in 1948. These events say as much about the synod at that time as about its relations to Sasse. Dr. Behnken proposed that Dr. Sasse be invited to the synod's seminary in St. Louis to give some lectures. The faculty were less than willing to accede to the request. In a letter to his family in November of 1947, Dr. Behnken described the genesis of the proposal.

In Berlin we had discussed Dr. Sasse's situation with the heads of Religious Affairs. This led us to the conclusion that we should invite Dr. Sasse to come to St. Louis for a number of months to become the more thoroughly acquainted with the Missouri Synod, to deliver a few lectures if he feels able to do so and also to regain his strength.<sup>51</sup>

The offer came at a critical time for Sasse. He was suffering a serious illness, as Behnken also reported in his letter. Even more distressing was the deterioration of his relations with his colleagues and even his church. In his first letter to Behnken, in 1945, Sasse explained:

My situation here in Erlangen is often hopeless, as you can imagine. For years I am completely isolated; recently there has even been a boycott movement against me since the military government in Frankfurt made me Prorector.<sup>52</sup>

Good fortune brought distress. Sasse had not only been elevated to a full professorship (*Ordinarius*) by the Bavarian state and the university authorities,<sup>53</sup> but the U.S. Military Government had also selected him as the Prorector (vice-chancellor) of the university of Erlangen.<sup>54</sup> In October 1945, the theological faculty was allowed to open, the first faculty given permission by the military government. Sasse's subsequent attempt to resign the prorectorship was denied by the U.S. authorities.

Given these circumstances, we can appreciate the response to the offer to visit St. Louis. Behnken's letter described the occasion:

Mrs. Sasse was in the room when we told him about this invitation. He was overwhelmed. She immediately brightened up with great joy and happiness. The doctor then collected himself and said that this was the greatest and noblest offer ever made to him and that he was deeply grateful. Later Mrs. Sasse told me that she could not express her thanks adequately, but she wanted us to know that this was the very best thing that could happen for the well-being of Dr. Sasse. May God grant success and graciously bless this endeavor!<sup>55</sup>

Dr. Behnken's was not the first proposal for such a visit. In July 1947, Professor Mayer had already suggested that Sasse be invited as "guest of Missouri Synod for a period of one year in an undetermined capacity." In making the proposal, Mayer had described Sasse as "probably the most conservative and ortho-

dox Lutheran theologian in the world outside of those organizations which are in pulpit and altar fellowship with us." Now the Behnken proposal was put to the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, for "favorable consideration."<sup>56</sup>

It is noteworthy therefore that we learn of reservations about this plan in the interim between Mayer's July and Behnken's November proposals. In a letter from Dr. Behnken to the faculty, written from Frankfurt in October 1947, this is recorded.

Dr. F. Mayer is well acquainted with the situation. After his return from Europe he expressed some misgivings regarding the advisability of asking Dr. Sasse to come over as an exchange professor to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Both Dr. L. Meyer and I shared his misgivings at that time.<sup>57</sup>

The next sentence of that letter is very informative.

However, after discussing the whole situation with Dr. Olsen<sup>58</sup> in Berlin, and members of his staff, we are of the opinion that Dr. Sasse's coming to the United States under our auspices would in no wise negatively effect our influence in Germany.

When, later, we ask about the likely reasons for the faculty's hesitation to offer the invitation made so urgently and forcefully by President Behnken, we may have a possible indication in this letter. We note especially those words that it "would in no wise negatively effect our influence in Germany."

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***Sasse's relations with the Missouri Synod would take a sudden—and strange—turn in 1948.***

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The faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, was at this time very interested in pursuing contacts with German churchmen, including, and perhaps even especially, churchmen not of the Free churches in fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.<sup>59</sup> By Sasse's own admission, he was not in favor with many of these churchmen. Already in 1945 he observed that, while he was consulted for advice by his *Landesbischof*, Hans Meiser of Bavaria, it was necessary to do so privately. He explained:

My name can never be prominent in public. As an opponent of the [EKiD] Union I am intolerable among the ecclesiastical public. Even a man such as the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Convention, Dr. Lilje, the presumed successor of [Bishop] Marahrens, considers me as ultra-confessional—I see no longer any possibility of influence. It would not be considered that I have a say at a Lutheran meeting.<sup>60</sup>

On the day Behnken's letter of October 22 was received at the seminary, there was a meeting of the Administrative Council of the faculty in President Sieck's office. The Council appointed a committee to consider the request in preparation for a faculty meeting of November 6. The committee members were President Sieck and professors G. Polack and F. Mayer. In a memo of the meeting,<sup>61</sup> a draft letter,<sup>62</sup> and Sieck's letter to Behnken<sup>63</sup> the reasons against an invitation to Sasse are outlined:

1. Question of fellowship: the chief concern is that we engage only such men as guest professors as are in fellowship with us. Other specific concerns include:
  - a. his approach to dogma is historical
  - b. his approach to inspiration differs<sup>64</sup>
  - c. he does not agree with Walther on Church
  - d. he differs on purpose of Lord's Supper
  - e. see his CTM article w. footnotes<sup>65</sup>
2. Doubts about the man:
  - a. physical condition—amnesia
  - b. he is *Rechthaberish* [disputatious], irritable, rather pessimistic, difficult to get along with
  - c. invitation construed as taking sides<sup>66</sup>
  - d. he caused consternation at Lund<sup>67</sup>
  - e. his role in Bavarian Church; confer with Bishop Meiser
  - f. question reaction of American Lutherans

As a "positive side" to the reply, the faculty "agree to have visiting professors to lecture to Graduate Students and Pastoral Conferences and also visit other Synods. If this is favored, we prefer Sasse as second man of a team of two."<sup>68</sup> In fact, the faculty did not look with disfavor upon having leading churchmen from Europe visit here: "We are heartily in favor of inviting visiting professors to lecture to the graduate students, to pastoral conferences, and upon invitation of seminaries outside of the Synodical Conference."<sup>69</sup> Such visits evidently were already planned; within a fortnight of the letter to Behnken, on November 19, Otto Dibelius, bishop of the Prussian Union Church, visited the seminary. Over the next few months other visitors included Dr. Hans Asmussen of the foreign affairs department (*Kirchliches Aussenamt*) of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKiD) on January 15, 1948; Bishop Anders Nygren of Lund, president of the Lutheran World Federation on May 27; Bishop Hanns Lilje of Hanover, who would succeed Nygren as president of the LWF in 1952, on June 1; and Bishop Hans Meiser of Bavaria on October 25.

The faculty's letter to Dr. Behnken consequently reported: "The faculty, therefore, respectfully requests you not to urge this invitation upon us, especially not until you personally have had opportunity to confer with the Bavarian Church authorities."<sup>70</sup> The faculty discussion at its meeting of November 4, 1947, is thoroughly minuted.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the faculty's reservations and conditions, Dr. Behnken, perhaps anticipating a "favorable consideration," wrote Sasse already on November 18 (from Stuttgart) "extending to you an official invitation for our church."<sup>72</sup> Sasse had received that letter when he wrote the faculty about being honored with the invitation.<sup>73</sup> The official paperwork was certainly progressing; there is a memo dated November 20 from the Military Govern-

ment Liaison and Security Office to the Sub-Region Nuernberg Counter Intelligence Corps (U.S. Army) re: Screening of Application for Exit Permit for Sasse to travel to the United States.<sup>74</sup> Included is the "Political Questionnaire."<sup>75</sup> This was followed by a further memo on December 3 from the Liaison and Security Office to the Combined Travel Board (U.S. Army) with an application for military exit permit for Sasse with a list of supporting documents including an "Invitation from the Emergency Planning Council" [LCMS].<sup>76</sup> Dr. Brenner, rector of Erlangen University, wrote to the Bavarian Ministry of Education on December 1 recommending that Sasse be allowed to go to the U.S.A. to lecture at Concordia Seminary.<sup>77</sup> On the 12th came a favorable reply from Dr. Rheinfelder of the ministry.<sup>78</sup>

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### *"As an opponent of the [EKiD] Union I am intolerable among the ecclesiastical public."*

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On that same day, December 12, Dr. Sieck wrote a letter to the Civil Affairs Division of the War Department in Washington commencing the application for Sasse's visit to the seminary.<sup>79</sup> Documents have not been found that would inform us of how and when the faculty's consideration of Dr. Behnken's appeal became "favorable." President Sieck reported to the seminary Board of Control at its meeting on December 12:

At the request of Dr. J. W. Behnken the Faculty has invited Dr. Hermann Sasse to be at the Seminary during the next semester as an exchange professor to offer two two-hour elective courses in "Theological Trends in Europe in the 19th Century" and "The Theological Scene in Europe in the 20th Century." All expenses for this arrangement will be borne by the Emergency Planning Council of Synod.<sup>80</sup>

On the same day, Dr. F. E. Mayer read a letter from Dr. Sasse at the faculty meeting.<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile the paperwork had been delayed. The request was for Sasse to commence teaching in the next semester, on February 4, 1948. Approval for a visa, however, was not confirmed until March 1948.<sup>82</sup> At the time that Sasse was supposed to have started in the new semester, the Army reports that papers had been sent to the wrong office.<sup>83</sup> He finally arrived on June 5, 1948, the day after commencement ceremonies.

Once in St. Louis, the discomfort with Sasse's views continued. His "pessimistic" view of things, noted in the faculty concerns earlier, stood in contrast to the optimism of the St. Louis theologians.<sup>84</sup> This was expressed clearly by L. Meyer, writing to President Sieck from Germany.

The real purpose of this note is to encourage you to use your influence on Sasse, so that his reports on the



church situation here [Germany] do not create too negative an impression . . . True, there are many things much to be desired in the progress of the rebuilding of the Lutheran Church here in Germany. On the other hand, we must guard against saying which will discourage those Lutheran leaders who are sincerely endeavoring to found a confessional Lutheran Church.<sup>85</sup>

Clearly the American churchmen viewed the situation in a different light than did those of the Lutheran Free Churches in Germany and the members of the Schwabach Konvent, including Sasse.<sup>86</sup>

Dr. F. E. Mayer's position on this is not so clear. That is, there are evidences that he did not always, or perhaps even ever, agree with the faculty colleagues about Sasse's pessimism. In a letter of appreciation to Herman Preus for his article "Clouding the Issue," Mayer clearly expressed his own misgivings about the ecclesiastical conditions in Germany: "I am deeply concerned about the future of Lutheranism in Germany."<sup>87</sup>

Given the faculty view of Sasse's visit, it is not surprising that he was invited to speak off-campus—indeed, far more outside than within the Missouri Synod. Doubtless, the fact that his visit was in the summer also was a consideration. Nevertheless, it was a busy summer for him. In early July he was guest of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod at its seminary in Thiensville, Wisconsin; he addressed the faculty on Germany, including the EKID and VELKD.<sup>88</sup> After less than a week back in St. Louis, he left again for a schedule of lectures and visits that occupied the remainder of the summer. He first traveled to Columbus, Ohio, where he was "on faculty of the summer school for pastors at Capital University . . . under the joint auspices of Capital University Theological Seminary and Hamma Divinity School of Springfield, Ohio."<sup>89</sup> This was July 19–30. The invitation to Ohio was likely at the urging of Dr. Stewart Herman; he was at the time associate director of the World Council of Churches Department of Reconstruction, which took him often to Germany.<sup>90</sup> Sasse wrote to Herman Preus that "For some time Rev. Dr. Stewart Herman has asked me whether I am willing to lecture for one or two semesters at the Hamma Divinity School in Springfield [Ohio]."<sup>91</sup> Of course, Dean Flack had met Sasse before, or so Sasse intimates in a letter to Stewart Herman.<sup>92</sup>

Already on August 1 Sasse wrote to the rector of Erlangen university requesting an extension of his leave, a request he did not expect to be granted.<sup>93</sup>

Sasse had been invited as a special guest to the meeting of the Synodical Conference in Milwaukee at the suggestion of Drs. J. T. Mueller and George Schick, professors at Concordia Seminary.<sup>94</sup> On the way there from Columbus he called at Valparaiso and Chicago; in Chicago he visited with a former student, Professor E. Theodore Bachmann.<sup>95</sup> At the Milwaukee meeting on August 3–6, he spoke on Lutheranism and Calvinism in Germany.<sup>96</sup> Before his next lecturing engagement there was a week for visits with pastors and friends of the Missouri and Wisconsin synods in Wisconsin. Among these was a visit at the home of Dr. H. A. Koch, Greenleaf, Wisconsin.<sup>97</sup> On August 12 he visited his friend Herman Preus in St. Paul.<sup>98</sup>

A former student of Sasse in Erlangen, Rev. Casper Nervig, Williston, North Dakota, arranged for Sasse to address the Lutheran Seminar, sponsored by Pastors of the American Lutheran Conference of the Upper Mid-West.<sup>99</sup> The conference, August 16–21, was held at the University of North Dakota. The program featured four speakers: Professor G. M. Bruce of Luther Seminary on "Hebrews"; Professor Edgar M. Carlson, President of Gustavus Adolphus College, on "Luther's Theology"; and Dr. A. R. Kretzmann, Pastor, St. Luke, Chicago, on "Pastoral Theology." Sasse's contribution was titled "Crisis of Western Civilization and the Lutheran Church."<sup>100</sup>

From here Sasse traveled to Buffalo, New York, to join Dr. Walter A. Maier, the Lutheran Hour speaker, at his summer home.<sup>101</sup> On September 29, 1948, he left St. Louis on his way back to Erlangen. He called at Springfield, Ohio for a few days at the invitation of Dean Flack. He had outlined for himself a very busy itinerary for those last few days in the United States: leaving Springfield on October 1, he planned to travel to Buffalo and New York, then on to Philadelphia and Washington before returning to New York in preparation for sailing. Cunard's Queen Elizabeth sailed on October 8.<sup>102</sup> We even know that he shared a cabin with a baker on that crossing.<sup>103</sup> He officially notified the rector of the university of his return in a letter of October 16.<sup>104</sup>

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### *Once in St. Louis, the discomfort with Sasse's views continued.*

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Before leaving St. Louis, Sasse wrote one more time to his friend Herman Preus. He answered the question that was perhaps put to him by many at the end of his stay.

If you ask me for my impressions as to the Lutheran Church, I must confess that I am deeply disappointed by the development of the Lutheran churches as far as the official governments are concerned, but that, at the same time, I am encouraged by the fact that among the younger generation—which, as in Germany, reaches into the age of 55!!—there are very hopeful signs of an awakening of new Lutheran consciousness. May God bless these men for the forthcoming struggles for the maintenance of a true Lutheran Church. I think, after Amsterdam many Lutherans will see what this modern Calvinism with its great ecumenical program means to our church.<sup>105</sup>

He gave a somewhat less guarded expression of his impressions years later.

I was in U.S.A. in 1948 as a guest of Dr. Behnken. But the Faculty of St. Louis prevented my lecturing before their students—I arrived the day after "commencement," because they were at that time for the *Landeskirchen*

against the Free Churches. When Behnken invited me to go to Oberursel, it was too late. I could not have possibly eaten the bread of Missouri there after such treatment.<sup>106</sup>

The strongest indication of his feelings about that time were expressed in a letter from St. Louis to a teacher at the seminary in Oberursel.

The most shattering [experience] for me is St. Louis. It is a chain of humiliations and deliberate unkindnesses which I here experience at the hands of the leadership of the seminary, aside from the many kindnesses and the human goodness of individuals. But Sieck, L. Meyer, and Fred Mayer are, with others, determined to go the way “out of the ghetto,” that is, into unionism.<sup>107</sup>

The fact that he would return later to the Springfield Seminary, and indeed, the St. Louis Seminary also, and would even seriously consider a proposed call to the Missouri Synod, indicates that he did not always harbor this impression.

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### ***“But the Faculty of St. Louis prevented my lecturing before their students.”***

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It may be indicative of the reception that Sasse received that the *Concordia Theological Monthly* of the St. Louis faculty published three Sasse essays in this period, one a reprint from the Wisconsin Synod’s *Quartalschrift*; the Wisconsin journal on the other hand published twelve essays over fourteen issues.<sup>108</sup>

#### ***Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield***

It was to be the seminary at Springfield, not St. Louis, which would invite Sasse to give a regular course of lectures. He was invited to lecture at Concordia Theological Seminary in January and February 1962.<sup>109</sup> He was invited back for the Winter quarter in 1964–65. It was this seminary that would always hold a special place in his regard and affections, not least because it honored him with the Doctor of Divinity degree on Friday, January 20, 1967.<sup>110</sup> The very next day he wrote to Dr. Behnken:

That 20th of January 1967 will remain one of the great days of my life. As often as I remember it, I shall also remember you and all your kindness shown to me in the course of so many years.

The degree Concordia, Springfield, has conferred upon me I regard as the highest honour which I possibly could receive. For in it the old ecclesiastical meaning of the doctorate has been fully preserved which has vanished in so many quarters of the academic “world.” I had to think of the great Walther’s attitude to European theological degrees. I regard this as an encouragement to continue, as long as God spares me, my work for the Lutheran Church.<sup>111</sup>

It was already in 1961 that Sasse had made the decision to sell his library to the Springfield Seminary;<sup>112</sup> today it is incorporated into the library on the campus of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

#### ***“Calls” to Missouri***

It seems clear that Sasse desired a call to a new ministry after the war. His service both at Erlangen and in his church were now marginalized. In his correspondence from time to time there is an indication that the Missouri Synod considered him for a call to one of its seminaries. In letters to Tom Hardt, for instance, Sasse mentions such calls: “A call to America I had to decline because my wife would not stand another migration.”<sup>113</sup> Later he mentioned two calls: “I had twice a call to America, but my wife would not stand another migration. The doctors have strictly forbidden that.”<sup>114</sup> A particularly noteworthy statement declared: “Missouri was [in] 1948 under the influence of the liberal wing. So they did not take me.”<sup>115</sup>

It is difficult to ascertain the actual circumstances of these statements. One such “call” seems to have been discussed by Dr. Behnken on a visit to Australia in August 1956. While it is not mentioned in any correspondence we have between Sasse and Behnken (or any other Missouri Synod churchman), it is nevertheless mentioned elsewhere. Dr. Max Lohe, president of the UELCA, the church of which Sasse was a member at the time, wrote to Dr. H. Schuh, president of the ALC, giving a rather detailed description.<sup>116</sup> There seems, however, to be no mention of a call in the correspondence between Behnken and Sasse in this period, assuming that we have all that correspondence. Furthermore there is no mention of a call in the *Lutheran Witness*, where such calls were chronicled, nor in the minutes of the Concordia Seminary Board of Control. All these might leave us in doubt about the time and nature of this “call” were it not for the entry in the minutes of the faculty meeting of Immanuel Seminary, Adelaide, where Sasse taught.

Br. Sasse reported that he had received a Call to join the Faculty of Concordia Seminary St. Louis U.S.A. Because of his wife’s health he felt compelled to decline the Call.<sup>117</sup>

#### **OTHER CONTACTS—DR. HERMAN PREUS**

Next to the Missouri brethren, Sasse’s most frequent and sustained contact in North American Lutheranism was with Professor Herman Preus at Luther Seminary in St. Paul. The churchmen of Missouri were colleagues; Preus was also a friend. Their meeting in Erlangen in the summer of 1937 predated, for instance, Sasse’s contacts with Missouri brothers, save for his correspondence with Ludwig Fuerbringer.

In fact, Sasse on more than one occasion recalled their walk along the *Kanal* in Erlangen. Their conversation on that occasion was significant. It stuck with him. They had talked about the inspiration of Scripture. In a most revealing statement, Sasse wrote Preus:

I remember the day when we walked along the “Kanal” at Erlangen and spoke of the inspiration of Scripture. I have never forgotten that conversation. You wondered, and rightly so, of our inability to understand the doc-

trine of Inspiration. No one in German Lutheranism understood any longer this dogma of the church. You have only to look into Elert's Dogmatics to understand how right you were. Historism [*sic*] had simply destroyed, also among conservative Lutherans, the understanding of that aspect of the Scriptures which cannot be understood only historically. It was only when I came to Australia that I saw that problem. If I have learned one thing in the English-speaking Lutheran world, then it is this issue. It was to the honour of your churches that you have preserved the doctrine.<sup>118</sup>

Dr. Preus was likewise fond of recalling that meeting; he wrote Sasse soon afterwards:

I wanted you to know that there are Lutherans in this country, and many of them, who are intensely interested in your fight for confessional Lutheranism. We regard it as a fight for truth which concerns vitally the Lutheranism not only of Germany but of the whole world.

It was an inspiration to me to be with you those few days last June [1937] and to make the acquaintance of Erlangen and its faculty.<sup>119</sup>

Not so long afterward, Sasse returned to a subject that would grow in importance in his work; the latter years of his life would be dominated by the subject of *Sacra Scriptura*.<sup>120</sup>

I still think often about our unfinished conversation in Erlangen concerning the question of inspiration. I have until now not yet written on the subject because I myself, as with the whole of Lutheran theology in Germany, have not yet come to a conclusive result.<sup>121</sup>

#### SASSE AND THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE

In the United States, Sasse's contacts were as much with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod as they were with the Missouri Synod or other churches. At least this was the case in the immediate post-World-War-II years. As we have already noted, it was the journal of the WELS that did more than anyone to publish Sasse's writings in this period. From at least 1960 Sasse had been in regular contact with churchmen of the ELS. In one letter Sasse described a meeting with representatives of the ELS on March 3, 1962.

At Minneapolis I met also representatives of the small Norwegian synod. Teigen from Mankato and his brother had arranged a meeting which was well attended though it was on a Saturday. We knew on either side of the theological difference, but it was a fine meeting.<sup>122</sup> Here seemed to be a church that was quite unaffected by church politics. Something of the old Norwegian piety was there.<sup>123</sup>

In 1965 he was invited to give lectures in Mankato, Minnesota for the ELS. These lectures would inaugurate the annual Reformation lectures of Bethany College.

As was indicated in Sasse's letter, there was a mutual awareness that he was not in full agreement with his friends of the WELS or ELS. This would become more evident. The Wisconsin Synod's journal ceased publishing Sasse's essays after it had generously given space for so many after the war. In fact, an explanation for this was given in the journal.

For some time we have been publishing translations of the well known *Letters to Lutheran Pastors* in which our esteemed friend, Dr. Hermann Sasse, has been discussing a wide variety of problems confronting the Lutheran Church of our day . . . We have found these articles highly informative and stimulating, and sincerely hope that our readers are sharing this opinion.

Those who have been following these *Letters* in their German originals will have noticed, however, that we have not touched upon some of the most important in the series, XIV and XVI on Inspiration and the Inerrancy of Scripture, and No. XX on the Confession and Theology of the Missouri Synod. Since these topics are certainly of more than ordinary interest, an explanation of their omission is perhaps in order.<sup>124</sup>

The explanation follows: while Dr. Sasse is commended for his attempts to preserve the Lutheran Church from falling victim to a Reformed fundamentalism, in this instance, with reference to a subordination of the *sola fide* to the *sola Scriptura*, he fails to see that a faithful Lutheran approach can make the *sola fide* the source of the *sola Scriptura* and yet arrive at the same conclusions as those whom Sasse calls "fundamentalists."

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### *The latter years of his life would be dominated by the subject of Sacra Scriptura.*

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Another point of difference, one to which Sasse referred on more than one occasion, was about fellowship.

What separates us Australians from these groups [WELS, ELS] is the understanding of Rom. 16:17 f. I do not know whether or not a different understanding of the New Testament looms behind that.<sup>125</sup>

Or he might have said, "whether or not a different understanding of the Confessions looms behind that." That is how he expressed the issue on another occasion: it was a problem facing all of American Lutheranism, not only the WELS and ELS or the Synodical Conference Churches.

But what about America? Your churches have kept for generations the confessional heritage or tried to do so. What surprised us most when the first contacts were

established between Germany and America after the war was the fact that these churches did no longer understand their own origin, the *ratio* of their own existence as Churches of the Augsburg Confession. It was astonishing to see how even the bodies of the Synodical Conference seemed no longer to be able to understand the meaning of the Lutheran Confessions. Where the question of the unity of the church was at stake, Bible quotations like Rom. 16 were quoted instead of consulting the 7th article of the CA and to examine its biblical foundation. The greatest mistake ever made by the American Churches was that they did not develop serious theological research on a large scale. There were and there are real scholars, but how many?<sup>126</sup>

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### ***For Sasse, the root danger for American Lutheranism was its inertia-like movement toward Reformed theology.***

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Nevertheless, Sasse placed great hope in the Synodical Conference as “the last possibility of bringing together the conservative Lutherans.”<sup>127</sup> Indeed, he saw it as an alternative to the Lutheran World Federation. As the rest of world Lutheranism was forsaking the doctrine of the Real Presence, for instance, here was the occasion, he thought, for

the Synodical Conference to speak to the Lutheran churches of the world and to all Christendom a clear word about the Sacrament of the Altar and to reaffirm the biblical doctrine on the Real Presence. The LWF cannot speak in this matter, as the theses of Minneapolis show. There is no consensus. But the Synodical Conference or Missouri can. There is still the consensus.<sup>128</sup>

#### **THE DEMISE OF LUTHERANISM**

For Sasse, the root danger for American Lutheranism was its inertia-like movement toward Reformed theology. He expressed that concern from the time of his book *Here We Stand* in 1938 until the end of his life. This, he noted, had already occurred in Germany. Would it, he asked, have to follow in America?

Thus Lutheranism in your country seems to go the way of the other denominations, drawn into the melting pot of American Protestantism. While the Roman Church has succeeded in overcoming “Americanism,” Lutheranism seems to have relapsed into the “American Lutheranism” of Schmucker.<sup>129</sup>

More and more he became critical of the trend among most Lutherans in America toward ecumenical and liberal theology. That liberal Lutheranism was unable to see the encroachment of Reformed theology and practice. The production of the documents of *Marburg Revisited* clearly indicated that to him.<sup>130</sup> Ecu-

menism became more driven by sociology than by theology. In American Lutheranism it was epitomized by the ULCA and Augustana churches.<sup>131</sup>

Even the church leadership had become less and less theological; the organization of the church had become separated from its theology. “The tragedy of American Lutheranism and perhaps world Lutheranism becomes here obvious: the cleavage between church administration and theology.”<sup>132</sup>

Perhaps the most grievous flaw in American Lutheranism—all of American Lutheranism—was its silence—for instance, its failure to speak out when German Lutheranism was being abandoned to the formation of the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* in 1948: “The great mistake of Missouri was made in 1948 when they refused to say a word about the EKID and the LWF.”<sup>133</sup> He declared this charge in one of those Sassesque passages: it is the voice of a prophet, lonely, radical, authoritative.

And what about Lutheranism? What gives me the greatest concern for the Lutheran Church in America is its complete silence in all questions which vitally concern the existence of a Lutheran Church. From the ULC to Missouri, everybody is silent about the scandalous ordinations of women in Sweden, about the unionism in Germany and all European countries, about the growing neo-Liberalism in our churches. To be silent and to accept uncritically the biased informations of the official news services is not Christian love. The deepest reason for this seems to be that we are no longer sure of our own doctrine. We sign the Book of Concord just as an Anglican signs the 39 Articles. The Augsburg Confession is no longer our *confession*. You Americans have in former times criticized the European attitude towards the confession of the church, that attitude which was satisfied with the legal aspect of the confessions. Now you are in the same situation, probably all Lutheran churches. Our fathers could speak to Rome. Today only private men, but no church could take issue with Rome. Holy Scripture has actually a higher place in the Roman than in these Lutheran churches which do no longer dare to say that the Bible *is* the Word of God. No one knows today what Lutherans believe, actually believe, e.g., concerning the Lord’s Supper. If there could be any doubt about this, it has been dispelled by the Theses of the LWF assembly of Minneapolis. All dogmas of our church have become open questions. Who can speak today for the Lutheran Church???

#### **LAST HOPE FOR WORLD LUTHERANISM**

In a letter to John Behnken in 1964, Sasse spoke quite “frankly” about the situation of American Lutheranism. It was not an optimistic assessment. There he wondered whether the formation of the new Lutheran Council U.S.A. would correct the situation. “Otherwise with the Missouri Synod the last remnants of confessional Lutheranism will be absorbed in the ecumenical chaos.”<sup>135</sup> This assessment of Missouri’s role was now, by this time, a regular feature of his correspondence. He was, nevertheless, even doubtful about Missouri.

Here your theologians will have a tremendous job. I for one do not think that your church will be able to draw the Lutheran Church of America out of the NCCUSA and the ALC out of the WCC.<sup>136</sup>

His pessimism remained: “I fear that the opposite will happen.” In the end, however, he dared to hope:

Here are the problems which Missouri has to face. Is

there still a Church which believes, teaches and confesses what the Lutheran Reformation has confessed in the Book of Concord? I think there is. I know that there is so much Lutheran faith and faithful confession in your church that this church could become the nucleus of a confessing Lutheranism throughout the world. But Missouri must know that the great opportunity will not last forever.<sup>137</sup> LOGIA

## NOTES

1. Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand: Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938; reprint Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), x–xi; (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1979), 10–11.
2. Hermann Sasse to Tom Hardt, 18 June 1958, Hardt Collection.
3. E. Reim, “Dr. Sasse on Inspiration and the New Missouri” (News and Comments), *Quartalschrift Theological Quarterly* 49 (January 1952): 60. During the period of this study, this journal changed name three times: originally it was the *Theologische Quartalschrift*; in 1947 it became the *Quartalschrift Theological Quarterly*; in 1960 the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly Theologische Quartalschrift*; and finally in 1968 the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. In this paper it will be identified as *Quartalschrift*.
4. See *Curriculum Vitae* on file in the Erlangen University Faculty Archive [015].
5. Hermann Sasse, *Amerikanisches Kirchentum* (Berlin-Dahlem: Wichern Verlag, 1927), 48 S. English translation by Matthew Harrison, “American Christianity and Its Concept of the Church” (Manuscript, 1995).
6. There is no evidence in the archives of the World Council of Churches, Geneva, to support the statement by Gordon Gerhardy that Sasse’s study was sponsored by the International Missionary Council. See Gerhardy, “Hermann Sasse on Confession and Culture for a Younger Church” (M.Th. Thesis, Luther-Northwestern Seminaries, St. Paul, MN, 1981), 44.
7. Sasse expressed thanks to Richter in the preface to his lectures on his American visit. The lectures were published in *Amerikanisches Kirchentum*. See note 5 above.
8. *Verhandlungen des zweiten Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentages 1927* (Königsberg i. Pr. 17.–21. Juni 1927, hrsg. v. Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchausschuß, Berlin-Steglitz: Im Evangelischen Preßverband für Deutschland, o.J. [1927?]), 59.
9. Letter of William Peters, Librarian, Hartford Seminary, 14 March 1989. Mr. Peters also notes in his letter that there is no copy of Sasse’s dissertation in the seminary collection.
10. “Anlage zum Personalfragebogen für Prof. Sasse,” probably for the U.S. Military Government in 1945 or 1946. In the Collection of Pfarrer Hans-Siegfried Huss, Würzburg. Sasse also acknowledges Mackenzie in his preface to *Amerikanisches Kirchentum*.
11. Curtis Manning Geer, *The Hartford Theological Seminary 1834–1934* (Hartford, 1934), 202–203, 209.
12. Geer., 170.
13. “Anlage zum Personalfragebogen für Prof. Sasse.”
14. *Amerikanisches Kirchentum*.
15. Hermann Sasse to E. Theodore Bachmann, 2 May 1961, J. W. Behnken Collection, Concordia Historical Institute (hereafter, CHI), 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 2, File 13 [52323]. See for instance Sasse’s brief but favorable review of Knubel’s book *Church Unity: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *Lutherische Kirche* 19, no. 14 (1 October 1937): 208.
16. Knubel to Sasse, 25 July 1939, Huss Collection.
17. Sasse to Bachmann, 2 May 1961.
18. Abdel Ross Wentz to Sasse, 18 November 1933, Huss Collection. Wentz and his wife had translated the book with the intention of publication. Since it was covered so thoroughly in a review article, this was not done. See Paul J. Hoh, “The American Church,” *Lutheran Church Review* [Philadelphia] 46 (April 1927): 162–70.
19. Ralph Long to Theodore G. Tappert, 7 April 1938, Tappert Collection, Lutheran Archives Center, Philadelphia.
20. Hermann Sasse to Klaas Runia, in idem. “Dr. Hermann Sasse In Statu Confessionis,” *Reformed Theological Review* 27 (January–April 1968): 1–2.
21. Hermann Sasse to Kurt Marquart, 10 September 1967, Marquart Collection [031].
22. Hermann Sasse to Herman Preus, 22 March 1956, Preus Collection, American Lutheran Church Archives, Luther Seminary (hereafter, STP) [250].
23. Wilhelm Löhe, *Drei Bücher von der Kirche, Gesammelte Werke*, 7 vols., ed. Klaus Ganzert (Neuendettelsau, 1951–) V/1:85–179; English translation, *Three Books About the Church*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969).
24. See note 5.
25. Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision, Man of Courage* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 105.
26. “Das Kreuz über dem Broadway, Brief für den Tag,” *Der Tag* (Berlin) 4 (5 Jan 1926) 1, Beiblatt.
27. *Amerikanisches Kirchentum*, Harrison translation, 6.
28. Samuel Parkes Cadman, pastor of Central Congregational Church, Brooklyn, President of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America.
29. Doubtless a reference to the Locarno Pacts of 1925, a series of non-aggression agreements formulated at Locarno, Switzerland that guaranteed the post-Versailles Treaty frontiers between Germany and France as well as Belgium and Germany. They appeared to herald a new era of international peace and security, the so-called “Locarno Spirit.” In March 1936, Germany renounced Locarno and marched into the Rhineland. *Brewer’s Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Phrase and Fable* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 362.
30. Sasse to Hodgson (23 Dec 1935), WCC Archives, Faith and Order, Box 123, File SASSE [162].
31. *Amerikanisches Kirchentum*, Harrison translation, 7.
32. The application (30 Jun 1935), Erlangen University Archives (hereafter, E-UA) [043]; the letter or response from Dr. Molitoris, *Dozentenführer*, to the Rector of the University (24 Jul 1935), E-UA [045]. Given the title of the assigned paper, there can be little surprise that Dr. Molitoris remarks about this “political event” or “organization.” When the Bavarian State Minister for Education later confirmed the refusal, he added the sentence: “I request information about Professor Dr. Sasse.” (24 Sep 1935), E-UA [046].
33. Letter, Sasse to F. Schiotz, ALC Archives, Wartburg, Dubuque, IA. On Dr. M. Reu, see later. Professor Olaf Moe was a member of the Free Faculty (*Menighetsfakultetet*) in Oslo and chairman of the Norwegian Committee of the LWC.
34. E. Clifford Nelson, *The Rise of World Lutheranism: An American Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 239.
35. See Nelson’s description, for example, of Reu’s criticism of the NLC (p. 96) and of the “unionistic” atmosphere at the Paris Convention in 1935 (p. 281).
36. Sasse relates the nature of their mutual respect in a letter to H. Preus (22 Mar 1956), STP [249–253].

37. Letter, Sasse to Behnken (21 Nov 1945), CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 20 [56243].

38. *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*. Between 1933 and 1939, at least eight articles by Sasse were reprinted for the American readers, plus one that was extensively cited in an article by Reu.

39. Letter, Sasse to H. Preus (22 Mar 1956), STP [249–253].

40. Letters in Huss Collection.

41. (13 Jan 1946), STP [10]; translated by author. See also letter of Sasse to Tom Hardt (8 Mar 60), Hardt Collection.

42. “Anlage zu dem Fragebogen des Military Government für Prof. Sasse” (n.d., presumably 1945 or 1946), Huss Collection.

43. President Knubel died on 16 October 1945.

44. (7 Oct 1939), Lutheran Archive Center, Philadelphia.

45. (7 Oct 1939), Lutheran Archive Center, Philadelphia.

46. Typed excerpt (?) from letter and titled: “Aus einem Brief Professor Sasses vom 16. Oktober an Praeses Petersen.” CHI, 200-SAS, Box, File 4 [022–024]; translated by author.

47. There are at least four letters in the CHI from Sasse to Fuerbringer from 1933 to 1936. It appears that Martin Scharlemann was unaware of this contact with Sasse when he wrote that until the faculty discovered his *Was heißt lutherisch?* after World War II, “no professor at Concordia Seminary had ever heard of Hermann Sasse!” “Along the Horizon,” *Concordia Journal* 2 (Nov 1976): 235.

48. Behnken’s report is dated 28 Dec 1945. See especially items 21 and 30. CHI, 200-MEY, Suppl. I, Box 1, File 1.

49. Letter, Sasse to Lawrence Wunderlich (11 Mar 1968). I am grateful to William Schmelder for a copy of this letter.

50. See “The Emergency Planning Council,” in Lawrence B. Meyer, *Missouri in Motion* (n.p. [St. Louis], 1970), 81–83.

51. (6 Nov 1947), CHI, 200-Graebner, Box 45, File 7.

52. (21 Nov 1945), CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 20 [56243]; translated by author.

53. See letter (22 Nov 1945), Bayer. *Staatsminister* (Franz Fendt) to the *Rektor*. The promotion would take effect upon the retirement of Hans Preuss, 25 Feb 1946. The letter also notes that the *Ev-Landes Kirchenrat* agreed with the promotion. E-UA [064].

54. The announcement was made on 29 September 1945, effective 1 October. E-UA [062].

55. Letter (6 Nov 1947).

56. Letter, L. Meyer to L. Sieck (23 Jul 1947), CHI, 200, SAS, BF19 [P078–9].

57. (22 Oct 1947), original: CHI, 200-SAS, BF20 [P080–1]; copy: CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, B20, Fo6 [56265]. The letter was actually written by L. Meyer on Behnken’s behalf.

58. Dr. C. Arild Olsen of Military Government, Religious Affairs Department, whom Dr. Behnken had met in Berlin on 17 October 1947.

59. This has been illustrated, for instance, in an unpublished paper by Edward Engelbrecht, “Lutheran Confessional Optimism after World War II: Hanns Lilje and Theodore Graebner,” July 1992, 50 pp. See also Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, Concordia Seminary Monograph Series 3 (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), pp. 53 ff.; see especially about the “overly optimistic evaluation . . . of the German church scene” by Missouri theologians, p. 54.

60. Letter to Behnken (21 Nov 1945), CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 20 [56243]; translated by author.

61. Dated 29 Oct 1947, CHI, 200-SAS, BF21a [084].

62. Dated 30 Oct 1947, CHI, 200-SAS, BF21a [082–083].

63. Dated 5 Nov 1947, CHI, 200-SAS, BF21a [085–086].

64. The draft letter explains: “His *approach* to the doctrine of inspiration differs from ours, though he is convinced of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures” [emphasis original].

65. A reference to “Concerning the Lutheran Free Churches in Germany,” trans. (condensed) by F. E. Mayer, *Concordia Theological Monthly* 18 (Jan 1947): 39–46 [hereafter *CTM*]. In the draft letter particular attention is called to p. 44 where the opening sentence may indicate the concerns: “There are primarily two theological questions which separate the two trends of the free Churches: the office of the ministry and the inspiration of the Scriptures.”

66. The draft letter explains: “Whether or not such a step would seriously interfere with the effectiveness of our work in Europe would have to be given serious consideration.”

67. The reference to Lund is to the First Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, June 30–July 6, 1947. Although Sasse was not at Lund, he sent an open letter, which was read: “Offener Brief an die Brüder in Christo, versammelt in Lund zur Luth. Weltföderation 1947 (17 Jun 1947),” *Vervielfältigung*, 7 S. It was later published in *Lutherische Blätter*, 30.115 (9 Aug 1978): 4–10.

It is noted in the draft letter: “His open letter to the Lund meeting caused considerable consternation, not only among the German delegation but also among all Lutherans present at Lund.” In the letter to Behnken it is further noted that “the men of our faculty who were at Lund and some others are averse to having Sasse come.”

Representatives of the Missouri Synod at Lund were Drs. William Arndt, F. E. Mayer, and W. A. Maier of the seminary, and Dr. Martin Graebner. (See Report on LWF, Lund, in Faculty Minutes for 2 Dec 1947.)

According to Sasse, it was F. E. Mayer who read his open letter at Lund. (Letter, Sasse to J. Preus, 31 Oct 1968, Concordia Theological Seminary Collection, Fort Wayne [418].

68. Memorandum (29 Oct 1947) [084]; similarly in the draft letter (30 Oct 1947) [082–083].

69. Letter to Behnken (5 Nov 1947) [085–086].

70. Letter to Behnken (5 Nov 1947) [085–086].

71. Faculty Proceedings 1947, November, p. 15, CHI.

72. CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 20, File 06 [56267].

73. Letter to the Faculty (22 Nov 1947), CHI, 200-SAS, BF15 [065].

74. National Archives and Records Administration (Suitland, MD) [hereafter, NARA] RG260, 7, 55, 46, 4–5, Box 1256, File (9 93–2 13)–Exit Permits 1948-S [2].

75. NARA RG260, 7, 55, 46, 4–5, Box 1256, File (9 93–1 9) [6]. See also the fuller *Fragebogen* in the Huss Collection.

76. NARA RG260, 7, 55, 46, 4–5, Box 1256, File (9 93–2 13)–Exit Permits 1948-S [2].

77. E-UA [094]. Dr. Brenner notes that it is as a result of Sasse’s work that negative criticism of Erlangen has halted and his residence in the U.S.A. could only be an advantage for the university and vice versa. I conjecture that the “negative criticism” is a reference to suspicions that the Erlangen faculties were less than critical of the Nazi government; it was known that Sasse was one of the first to condemn the party’s official program.

78. E-UA [095].

79. CHI, 200-SAS, BF23 [P087].

80. Minutes, Board of Control, p. 2, item 6 (15 Dec 1947).

81. Faculty Proceedings, Concordia Theological Seminary, 1947, December, p. 25, item II. c. (CHI).

82. Letter, Col. Laux of the Civil Affairs Division to Sieck (8 Mar 1948). CHI, 200-SAS, BF23 [P091].

83. Memo (5 Feb 1948), Mil. Gov. Liaison and Security Office to the Combined Travel Board (U.S. Army), re: temporary travel document and military exit permit for Sasse sent to wrong office. NARA RG260, 7, 55, 46, 4–5, Box 1256, File (9 93–2 13)–Exit Permits 1948-S [1].

84. See for instance Theodore Graebner, “Some Impressions of Germany,” *The Cresset* 11 (September 1948) 18–22, especially 20–21; also Engelbrecht, “Lutheran Confessional Optimism,” note 9.

85. (16 Jun 1948) from Stuttgart. CHI, 200-SAS, BF34 [P098–9] Dr. Meyer mentions Dr. Asmussen and Dr. Meiser, Sasse’s bishop, as examples.

86. These were all mentioned by Dr. Meyer in his letter.

87. (8 Apr 1947), STP [109–110].

88. *Quartalschrift* 45 (July 1948): 208.

89. *Lutheran Herald* [UELCA Australia] 28, no. 14 (3 July 1948). Dean E. Flack listed Sasse under “Foreign Visitors” in the “Report of Hamma Divinity School” to the Synod of Ohio. Synod 1949 *Minutes*, p. 125.

90. Nelson, *Rise of World Lutheranism*, 360.

91. (3 Jul 1946), STP [004].

92. Letter, Sasse to Herman (18 Sep 1947?), WCC Archives, General Secretariat, General Correspondence, Box 99, File “Sarto–Scaife” [193].

93. E-UA [114].

94. Letter, Sasse to Sieck (17 Jul 1948), CHI, 200-SAS, BF09 [P050-1].
95. Letter, Sasse to Sieck (13 Jul 1948), CHI, 200-SAS, BF10 [P052-6].
96. *Proceedings of the Fortieth Convention of the Ev. Luth. Synodical Conference of North America Assembled at Concordia College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin August 3-6, 1948* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1949), 158; see also p. 5.
97. Letter, Sasse to Herman Preus (30 Jul 1948), STP [171-172]. Koch was a Pastor of the Wisconsin Synod (*Lutheran Annual* 1948, 155).
98. STP [167-170].
99. See for instance the exchange of letters between Nervig and Sieck (Mar and Jul 1948), CHI, 200-SAS, BF35 [P100-3], and between Pastor Loyal Tallakson, Grand Forks, ND, and H. Preus (Apr and May 1948), STP [155-162]. Nervig described the Seminar as under the sponsorship of the North Dakota District pastoral conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.
100. Seminar Program, STP [178-179] Elsewhere (Letter to Pastor Tallakson [26 Apr 1948], STP [155]). Sasse gave the following as a proposed outline for his lectures:
- The Decline of the Western World and the Quest for the Church  
The Answer of the Lutheran Church as the Church of the Justification and of the Real Presence:
1. The Gospel
  2. Word and Sacrament, The Holy Baptism [emphasis original]
  3. The Holy Supper and the Worship of the Church
  4. *Credo Ecclesiam* (The Church as article of the Creed)
  5. The Church of Christ and the Churches of Christendom
  6. The Church and the World
101. Letter, Sasse to Sieck (13 Jul 1948), CHI, 200-SAS, BF10 [P052-6].
102. Letter, Sasse to H. Preus (26 Sep 1948), STP [173-5].
103. Recorded in a brief essay, "Migrants or Immigrants?" (Wolfgang Sasse Collection).
104. Sasse to Prof. D. Fr. Baumgärtel (*Rektor*), E-UA [117].
105. Letter, Sasse to H. Preus (26 Sep 1948), STP [173-175]. "Amsterdam" is doubtless a reference to the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, which met in August, 1948.
106. Letter, Sasse to Hardt (1 Aug 1960), Hardt Collection. This is a reference to the *Hochschule* or seminary of the Lutheran Free Churches at Oberursel, near Frankfurt.
107. Letter, Sasse to Hans Kirsten (10 Sep 1948), CHI; cited in Marquart, *Anatomy*, 55.
108. By "this period" is meant 1947 to 1953. *CTM* published two more in 1959 and 1960. See also Marquart, *Anatomy*, 54.
109. President George Beto to Sasse (9 Oct 1961) [Document not available].
110. Program: Convocation conferring DD, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (hereafter, CTS) [471s].
111. (21 Jan 1967), CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 21, File 04 [56561].
112. See for instance letter of George Beto to Sasse (30 Oct 1960), CTS [464s].
113. (18 Jun 1958) Hardt Collection.
114. (4 Aug 1959), Hardt Collection.
115. (18 Jun 1958) Letter 1, Hardt Collection.
116. (19 Sep 1956), Wartburg Archives, Dubuque, Iowa.
117. Minutes of Meeting of 25 Sep 1956. Lohe, in his letter to Schuh, also states: "The only reason why he will not go to St. Louis is the state of health of his wife."
118. Letter, Sasse to H. Preus (27 Mar 1963), STP [417]; also CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 21, File 4 [56547].
119. Letter, H. Preus to Sasse (15 Feb 1938), copy: STP [003] and original: Huss Collection. It is interesting that this letter is found in the collection of Pfarrer Huss, for in his collection are saved the only letters that Sasse took to Australia with him from Germany in 1949. Huss recalls how only the most important papers were saved and his own attempts to rescue a vast collection of documents which Sasse threw out. (Taped interview, September 1988, Würzburg, I-1A.1).
120. For an excellent study of the historical development of Sasse on Scripture, see the essay by Jeffrey Kloha, "Hermann Sasse Confesses the Doctrine *de Scriptura Sacra*," in Jeffrey Kloha and Ronald R. Feuerhahn, eds., *Scripture and the Church: Selected Essays of Hermann Sasse*, Concordia Seminary Monograph Series 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1995), Appendix.
121. Letter, Sasse to H. Preus (2 Apr 1940), STP [007-008].
122. This incomplete sentence seems to indicate the awareness that there was not full agreement in theology and practice. See for instance on Romans 16 below.
123. Letter to J. Preus (7 Apr 1962), CTS [298].
124. E. Reim, "Dr. Sasse on Inspiration and the New Missouri," (News and Comments) *Quartalschrift* 49 (January. 52) 59-61. This notice is published in the same issue in which Sasse's article on the 1500th anniversary of the Creed of Chalcedon is printed.
125. Letter, Sasse to J. Preus (7 Apr 1962), CTS [298]. See further on this below.
126. Letter, Sasse to H. Preus (22 Mar 1956), STP [249-253]; italics added. See also Sasse to "Participants" (24 Jun 1964), CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 2, File 13a [52345].
127. Letter, Sasse to Gehrke (5 Nov 54), Gehrke Collection [009].
128. Letter, Sasse to Behnken (23 Oct 1958), CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 2, File 13 [52313].
129. Letter, Sasse to Behnken (23 Oct 1958), CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 2, File 13 [52313].
130. Letter, Sasse to [a Missourian?] (n.d.), Lutheran Church of Australia Archives, Box 2, File 2 [Partial letters, page 2 only].
131. Letter, Sasse to H. Preus (22 Mar 1956), STP [249-253].
132. Letter, Sasse to J. Preus (7 Apr 1962), CTS [298].
133. Letter, Sasse to Gehrke (5 Nov 1954), Gehrke Collection [009]. See also, for instance, Sasse to Behnken (26 Feb 1964), CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 2, File 13a [52339].
134. Letter, Sasse to E. Theodore Bachmann (2 May 1961), CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 2, File 13 [52323]. Emphases original. The matter of the formation of the EKID was often mentioned, as in a letter to Behnken (19 Oct 1958): "But *Concordia [Theological] Monthly* should have given a theological evaluation of the constitution of the EKID. That's what we were asking for in vain." CHI, 200-BEH, Suppl. II, Box 2, File 13 [52312].
135. (26 Feb 1964), CHI, 200-BEH, J. W. Behnken Suppl. II, Box 2, File 13a [52339].
136. (26 Feb 1964), CHI, 200-BEH, J. W. Behnken Suppl. II, Box 2, File 13a [52339].
137. (26 Feb 1964), CHI, 200-BEH, J. W. Behnken Suppl. II, Box 2, File 13a [52339].

# Law & Gospel in Hermann Sasse

JOBST SCHÖNE



*Nisi enim diserte discernatur Evangelium a lege, non potest salva retineri doctrina Christiana.* (If the gospel is not clearly distinguished from the law, Christian doctrine cannot be retained undamaged.)

WHEN MARTIN LUTHER MADE THIS STATEMENT IN HIS GREAT Galatians commentary of 1530, he knew what he was talking about. At about the same time, he wrote that he would like “to place someone in the top position and call him a doctor of the Holy Scriptures, who can master this skill of distinguishing the law from gospel.”<sup>1</sup> In Luther’s view this was

the highest art in Christendom that we should know. Wherever this knowledge is lacking, one cannot be thoroughly certain about who is a Christian or a heathen or a Jew, because it depends altogether on this distinction.<sup>2</sup>

Why did Luther so emphasize the distinction between law and gospel? Why did Luther fear that Christian doctrine would be destroyed altogether if this distinction were not understood and applied? Why did he call it “the highest art”? The answers to these questions are deeply connected with the question regarding how sinful man can be righteous before God, for this theme of the sinner’s justification had determined the theological thinking in the West already before the Reformation took it up and focused attention on it.

Neither justification of the sinner by grace through faith for Christ’s sake nor the proper distinction between law and gospel are essentially teachings that belong solely to Luther and the Reformers. Their understanding of the gospel and the necessary distinctions they made to safeguard it from falsification were not merely personal convictions having equal rights with differing convictions—not mere matters of private judgment and opinion. Recalling his appearance at the Diet of Worms in 1521, Luther made it clear: *Tunc eram ecclesia*—“At that time, I was the church.” The same may be said about his confession of the doctrine of justification and the proper distinction between law and gospel: he spoke for the church, not for himself, proclaiming and defending the truth of the Scriptures and the doctrine of the church catholic against all error and false doctrine.

## NO OTHER GOSPEL

In his essay “Luther and the Teaching of the Reformation,”<sup>3</sup> Hermann Sasse presented an excellent summary of Luther’s position. He raised the question: what did Luther understand by the “gospel,” and how was his understanding different from the predominant understanding in the church of his day? Sasse finds that Luther returned to the living God portrayed in the Scriptures instead of following philosophical conceptions. Luther recognized man’s total corruption by original sin, which makes him completely unable to contribute to his own salvation. There is no righteousness that human beings can achieve by their own capabilities or activities. That is what Luther found in the Scriptures. There is no righteousness created by our own obedience or fulfillment of the divine law. We are not justified and are not saved by a righteousness that rises to human standards as we may lay them down. A better righteousness is needed, one that rises to God’s own standards. It must be a righteousness given exclusively to us by God’s mercy, without any contribution from us. It is the righteousness of Christ, transferred to sinners who are baptized and believe. Without Christ and apart from Christ, God will always remain a God of law and wrath, who judges and executes. In Christ, however, he reveals to us his heart—his love, his mercy, and his intention to save and to bring us back to him.

For Luther this is the gospel—a joyful message that God forgives all sin and regards the sinner as justified and holy, regardless of his shortcomings and transgressions. It applies to the sinner who has learned to despair of himself, who longs for salvation, and who hopes in Christ to be free from sin and from eternal punishment. This gospel turns out to be no mere theory or teaching about the possibility of forgiveness. Rather, it is the concrete offer of God, proclaimed and thereby made effective. What the gospel promises and announces becomes a reality for the believer.

This gospel is abandoned wherever any form of human righteousness replaces Christ’s righteousness or adds to it. According to Hermann Sasse, the Lutheran doctrine of justification, though formulated in the sixteenth century, is much more directed against modern Protestantism and its overestimation of human abilities than against medieval theology or Roman Catholicism of the sixteenth century. At least medieval Christianity knew of Christ’s merit, though relying on human merits as well. For modern Protestantism, however, fashioned by the Enlightenment, there exists no more the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Instead, Christ has been made into a new legislator—a second Moses, who left us a system of morals and religion. To

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observe or not observe his rules determines man's salvation or disaster. Luther found this kind of thinking, which is totally alien to the gospel and, in fact, contrary and incompatible with it, already among the Enthusiasts of his time.

### A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

When Article V of the Formula of Concord warns us against a fatal mixing of the law and the gospel and against changing the gospel into a new law, it points to the merit of Christ. When the law is not distinguished from the gospel, the merit of Christ is almost automatically put in the dark, and afflicted consciences are deprived of the comfort they can take from the pure gospel. This last great Lutheran confessional statement of the sixteenth century makes perfectly clear how important it is for the church and for the Christian individual to distinguish clearly between the two. Literally, every aspect of Christian life and doctrine is affected by it: the understanding of the Holy Scriptures, the pure preaching of the gospel, the merit of Christ, and comfort for afflicted consciences. The proper distinction between law and gospel clearly proves to be a precondition for understanding the justification of sinners.

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*According to Sasse, the Lutheran doctrine of justification is much more directed against modern Protestantism than against medieval theology or Roman Catholicism of the sixteenth century.*

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For Luther and the Lutheran Church of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the question of the relationship between law and gospel aimed at much more than merely expressing doctrine in a theologically correct way. It was truly a question of life and death for the entire church, a question bound up with all other questions of the Reformation. In the end, it turned out to be a decisive issue that divided theologians and churches in the sixteenth century. All the differences between Lutherans and Roman Catholics, between Lutheranism, Enthusiasm, and Calvinism depended on the different answers given to the question of law and gospel. Even today, no one can fully understand the tensions and differences between the various confessions and denominations in Christendom unless he is aware of this basic distinction.

For this reason, the proper distinction between law and gospel is not merely a matter of theological speculation or of the history of dogma, even though other more burning issues have arisen and determined the course of present-day discussions. Rather, we are still confronted with the same problem from the sixteenth century, as with Christianity around the world: how do we understand the gospel of God's glory and grace, which is, according to Luther's 62d Thesis, the true treasure of the church?<sup>24</sup> Do we accept it as the message of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, bringing to an end our fatal separation from God? Or is it more than that, perhaps something entirely different? Is it, as some theologians have understood it, the message of the com-

ing kingdom of God, of which the message of forgiveness is only one small part? Does the gospel, apart from whatever else it may be, give us guidelines and standards for transforming our society and for providing for better conditions in our community? Is the gospel, as such, a "new law"? Liberation theology in Latin America is an example of such a notion. It is not much different from what Karl Barth and his followers made of law and gospel. They deliberately chose the sequence "gospel and law." Are they right when they insist that the gospel contains and includes the law, just as the Ark of the Covenant contained the Tables of Testimony? Is Christ as Lord and King of the universe, to whom all power in heaven and on earth is given, not also a legislator?

### LAW AND GOSPEL TODAY

To raise these questions stirs up the whole multitude of contrasts and tensions existing in Christianity today. If one studies the various documents of bilateral or multilateral negotiations between denominations of our time, the term "gospel" will appear frequently, but we are far from a consensus as to what it actually means and how it relates to the law. Existing dissent is carefully screened. A typical and prominent example of this is the *Leuenberg Concord* of 1973, by which the Reformed, United, and Lutheran Churches in Europe tried to give expression to their "consensus in understanding the gospel"<sup>25</sup> and to make church fellowship among them possible. In this document, the question of law and gospel was deliberately left for further discussion, thereby making it perfectly clear that no consensus in understanding the gospel really existed, in spite of boastful declarations to the contrary.

In this respect, the Lutheran Confessions speak a different language. They give expression to a consensus on the doctrine of the gospel.<sup>6</sup> They do not appoint a study group to develop principles for making the world a better place (something it certainly stands in great need of). Rather, they constitute a fellowship of faith and confession. Whenever modern ecumenical statements and declarations of doctrine are considered to be a decisive interpretation of the confessional writings of the sixteenth century, we should be very careful. What was confessed in the Reformation period should rather be interpreted by itself and be taken as a norm to judge doctrinal documents written in our own time. And if we compare the clear language of the fathers with the often indistinct and vague expressions used today, we will find that the Christianity of today seems unable to teach the world what the gospel really is. Whether we like it or not, there is no consensus, and since there is no consensus on the gospel, Christianity likewise is unable to explain to the world what the law of God is.

This very fact confronts us with the existing divisions in Christendom today. No doubt, these divisions are altogether rooted in the deplorable fact that Christians, to a much larger extent than they want to admit, are unable to speak with one voice and to proclaim the gospel. This lack of unanimity deeply affects all of Christendom. After all, in the age of the Reformation and Counter-reformation a new period of expansion began for the Christian church. The church was spread into all the world by emigration from already Christianized countries and by mission work. This began the third epoch of mission activity in church history. The first was the Christianizing of the ancient world. The second was directed predominantly to the Germanic and Slavic

nations. Thus the third period has been characterized by confessional differences and divisions. Missionaries from all denominations come to “Third World” countries, bringing the message that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of the world. And yet, what does this mean? Is Jesus Christ the Redeemer because he is the eternal Son of God “who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was made man,” as those churches who still confess the Nicene Creed proclaim? Or is Jesus the Redeemer because he was a most noble-minded and virtuous individual, a great teacher of religion and ethics?

And what about the meaning of “grace”? Is it the forgiveness of sins, as Lutherans teach, or does it mean that we gain new strength and courage to follow and accomplish God’s will? And what about man? Is he a poor, sinful being, totally deprived of the knowledge of God, without fear of God and without faith in him, completely inclined to evil? Or is he just a weak and somehow defective creature needing improvement and correction, in the end able to achieve by his own gifts and talents something of what God wants him to do? The way in which we answer these questions automatically determines our understanding of the gospel, and it reveals an almost hopeless dilemma: in trying to bring the gospel to all nations, races, cultures, and religions of this world, Christians do not agree in what they are bringing, in what the gospel essentially is about. Using the same term, they often mean something completely different from each other.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the vast array of contradictory confessional statements and documents in our times. In many cases, these statements use a language in which each tradition and confession may find itself quoted, reproduced, or accepted. And yet it becomes a compromising language, not a clarifying one—perhaps even deliberately ambiguous.

The sixteenth century spoke a much clearer and more precise language. These Lutherans clearly defined the gospel as the promise and gift of forgiveness for Christ’s sake. Nothing else. The Calvinists clearly said that they agreed with the forgiveness part, but forgiveness for them was never without sanctification.<sup>7</sup> In our century, Karl Barth insisted on grace as always including both justification *and* sanctification. By grace, he asserted, we belong to Jesus Christ. In him we are justified by faith that receives the forgiveness of sins. In Christ, however, we are sanctified as well by *obedience* that places us under the direction and commandments he gave us. Such a teaching leaves no doubt that the gospel is understood as essentially being more than and different from the mere forgiveness of sins. Roman Catholicism on the other side also still teaches that justification has a twofold aspect in the remission of sins and renovation of the sinner, not an absolute and unconditional promise and gift of life and salvation.

### ANOTHER GOSPEL

Today the meaning of sanctification and how it is connected with justification is often not clear at all, especially when combined with social ethics. We are told that the gospel is a source of power for social renewal, and that it shows us how we can be freed from the evils of racial discrimination, economic injustice, military armament, environmental destruction, and the like—problems that could undoubtedly become fatal threats to mankind and ought to be resisted. But if we take man’s sinfulness seriously, can

we ever really expect to make this world a better place or achieve any essential change? There is no question that human reason and good will can achieve a lot in eliminating problems, trouble, danger, difficulties, and tensions among people and nations, but they cannot achieve salvation or any fundamental renewal of mankind. We have to live with sin and exist in a sinful, evil world determined to find its own end. “We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Pt 3:13); but we are not able to build it ourselves. “The best and holiest deeds must fail / To break sin’s dread oppression” (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 329:2). To some Christians this sounds like blasphemy since they believe in a Christian obligation to erect the kingdom of God on earth. And a position that does not follow this ideology and that does not teach that it is we who should contribute to making this world more pleasing to God is widely regarded as no longer in accord with the gospel. To proclaim salvation through the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake through faith is considered to be an outdated theology, far from what the world really needs today.

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### *Forgiveness for the Calvinists was never without sanctification.*

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“Mission outreach,” “evangelism,” “Church Growth”—all are catchwords discussed almost everywhere in Christianity. Is it not our task to respond to the needs of this world, to meet its expectations? Does it not expect a general improvement to which Christians can contribute? We are called to participate in bringing unbelievers to repentance, in proclaiming the message of redemption, and no one will deny that it is a redemption for Christ’s sake. But do we still know from what Christ has redeemed us? Are we not tempted to tell only the purpose for which we believe we are redeemed, namely, to cooperate in establishing the kingdom of God, in fulfilling God’s divine will, in bringing about what Christ began when he started sending his apostles? We are told that we are the ones who can do it, at least who can cooperate in it once we are in God’s service and renewed by his grace. Of course, we are still convinced that we cannot do anything by ourselves. We still sing: “With might of ours can naught be done.” But then we think, “With God, we *can* do it!” At first sight, this looks very much like a genuine biblical truth, but we should consider such truth in its context, not as an isolated statement. It must be understood along with its indissoluble connection with biblical anthropology, with the doctrine of original sin, the doctrine of Christ’s vicarious sacrifice and the wrath of God that condemns us to hell unless we are saved. All these biblical truths are linked with each other and safeguard each other. If we speak of Christ freeing men to serve him, we must keep this context in mind in order to find the correct ranking of any statement.

Today, however, all negative statements are widely disregarded and viewed as unpopular. We are told that modern man will only accept a message that gives hope to society and offers redemption and healing for all the evils and defects with which our world is confronted. When we speak of sin, we are told to look not so much

to the life of the individual, but rather to society in general, which is thought to have made societal structures and living conditions inhumane. This understanding of sin is not determined so much according to the criterion of *God's* will, but according to standards of *human* dignity, rights, and claims. Man is placed in the center and is made the measure of everything. And the gospel? It is considered to be merely a teaching as to how this world can once again be put under God's claim and rules. This is thought to be in accord with the beginning God himself made by sending Jesus Christ into this world. He started it, and now we must continue and finish it.

Such a position is, to a large extent, merely a variation of the old "social gospel," as proclaimed by Rauschenbusch and his followers at the beginning of this century. This social gospel of old is by no means outdated or dead. Instead, it comes up again and again and seems to be the most widespread interpretation of the "gospel" in our times. The Lutheran Church, however, cannot but resist this "social" interpretation of the gospel by declaring an unconditional "No!" It is not the gospel of the New Testament. It is a misunderstanding and a misinterpretation. And so we are confronted with a great and profound contrast in the teaching of the gospel, with far-reaching implications among Christians. The old question as to how the law and the gospel are related to each other is indeed a pressing and undeniable reality.

Wolfhart Pannenberg, one of Germany's best-known systematicians, only recently presented the notion that the traditional Lutheran distinction between law and gospel is not to be found with St. Paul in the New Testament. Pannenberg says that we should not treat the law-gospel distinction as some kind of a "holy vessel," never to be touched. To do so could be a violation of the principle of *sola Scriptura*.

Such a statement is nothing new. It goes along with the traditional warning from Karl Barth that we should not follow the Lutheran distinction but rather view the law as a divine word of eternal kindness—on the same level as the gospel and not in competition with the gospel. According to Barth, it is the same process of revelation and reconciliation that confronts us with gospel and law, with absolution and the challenge of repentance, with justification and sanctification. Barth wants to connect the two. We should hear the law together with the gospel, as of one and the same origin and intention. Otherwise, sanctification will come off badly. He who says "faith" must also say "obedience," according to Barth. He who says "gospel" must also say "law."<sup>8</sup>

Is Pannenberg right? Is Karl Barth right? Are we in danger of misunderstanding the Scriptures and short-changing obedience and sanctification? Indeed, there exists a danger. But we will never master it by mixing and exchanging law and gospel, making the gospel into a new law and obscuring the article of justification. Otherwise we will end up in Nomism, a kind of religion in which man attempts to reach salvation by his own doings and conduct—by obeying the law and preparing his own righteousness.

### **"AND THEY'LL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS. . ."**

People who try to earn their salvation by their own merits are found everywhere because it belongs to natural man to think and operate this way. You can find such an attitude among the heathen, in Judaism, and among Christians. At first sight, it is always impressive to see their "holy" lives. But we should know that we

can never recognize a Christian by his visible sanctity, by the extent to which he obeys the commandments. Jews know the commandments just as well; even the pagans do. If Christian sanctity consists in keeping the commandments and doing good works, why should only Christians be regarded as holy? Why not pious Jews and noble pagans as well?<sup>9</sup>

A Christian can never rely on his own righteousness nor base his salvation on what he is able to do. Rather, he is founded on the righteousness of Christ alone. This is the soteriological point derived from New Testament Christology. A Christian whose faith looks up to the Lamb of Calvary will know that he is always in a position before God of receiving and never in a position of giving him anything. For human piety, even in its best form, will always be penetrated by the natural *amor sui*, by subtle egoism. What then is the difference between a Christian and a pious non-Christian? A Christian does not believe in himself nor in his doings but in Christ alone. That's what makes the difference. There is no other criterion but such a faith.

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### ***Man is placed in the center and is made the measure of everything.***

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When the New Testament speaks about fruits of the Spirit and teaches sanctification, we should not distort and pervert such teaching. We do so when we maintain that the distinction between Christians and non-Christians can be determined by their works, by the fruits of a good or a bad tree. No doubt, a true faith in Christ is reflected in a Christian's life; it produces good works. We should rejoice in this fruit that comes from the Word of God. The Holy Spirit does things that we may consider completely impossible. Indeed, he creates faith, and from faith flows new obedience, according to Article VI of the Augsburg Confession. On the other hand, we must contest the opinion that on the basis of some factual findings one can state that such and such a good work has been caused by the Holy Spirit and by nothing else. We may make such a statement only by faith; we cannot prove it or demonstrate it.

Certainly, whenever the Holy Spirit is working, he is going to free people from all kinds of bondage and passions. But it is a fallacy to conclude from such a fact that it is always the Spirit who does so and not any other influence. If you give up smoking, it is probably not primarily the Holy Spirit. Your doctor may have convinced you, or you might have learned it in a Buddhist monastery. If you fast, you may be motivated by love for Christ or for the sake of the least of his brothers, to whom you give your food. But it may just as well be that you do it for health reasons because you feel that it would be better to lose some weight. If you care for the poor and the needy, if you work with the Peace Corps or Amnesty International, it may all be for Christ, or it may be for your own happiness and satisfaction. From what you are doing, nobody can tell what is motivating you. And so, to be honest, we cannot observe much of a difference between a Christian's holiness and that of a Jew or a Muslim. There is no visible Christian holiness different from any other. We do not see it. For

the holiness of God's children is only seen by God himself, and it remains hidden from human eyes. In fact, our Christian holiness and sanctity exists in being accepted by God in Christ Jesus so that his righteousness becomes ours. And in the same manner, a Christian congregation is recognized not by its activity, its social work, its good works, or its efforts, but only by its faith and what creates this faith, namely, God's word and sacraments.<sup>10</sup> We are not Christians because we do mission work. It is the other way around. We do it because we are members of the body of Christ and are his instruments. Others do the same kind of work—Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons, for instance. But they come with another message that makes their efforts unacceptable to God, regardless of how "effective" they may be.

Certainly, a Christian congregation is to be active in Christian love. But can we be sure that it is a greater and better love than in a synagogue or mosque? Social welfare, organized by secular institutions or state agencies, can produce equally as impressive results. The Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12, "Do to others what you would have them do to you," is known just as well by non-Christians. And if we are told, "Indeed, such noble principles exist also outside the church, but Jesus gives us the power to fulfill them," then we had also better take into consideration the ethical standards of so-called Christian nations. If we do so honestly, we will feel ashamed. Are these standards any higher than those of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, or even Communists? At least the Communist countries banned pornography. Even the Nazis organized a perfect welfare system. And what about today's crime rate in Western countries? What about abortion, human exploitation, war, and other evils? Do they not exist at least to the same extent (if not higher) among people deeply and traditionally influenced by Christianity? What are we going to answer if we are asked about the ethical results of the Christian faith? Can we say anything other than "Kyrie eleison"?

In reality, we have hardly anything of which we can be proud. And even more, if we have truly experienced what the Holy Spirit can do to man and through man, we will no longer speak of our own abilities. Rather, we will know that we cannot trust in what we may achieve but must put all our hope in Christ.

Is there any church or Christian group in this world that could present itself to the Lord on the Last Day and say: "You were hungry and we gave you something to eat; you were thirsty and we gave you something to drink; you were a stranger and we invited you in?" Such a church would get the answer: "I don't know you." It is indeed a profound mystery that in this great parable of the last judgment (Mt 25:31–46), all those who gave something to eat and to drink, who invited in and clothed and looked after him and

came to visit and served the Lord in doing so to the least of his brothers, did not know at all what they were doing and to whom.

### THE FINAL DISTINCTION

This makes it clear again why Luther fought Nomism so vigorously—that mixture and exchange of law and gospel that tries to make the law a kind of gospel and ends up turning the gospel into a law. The two must be properly distinguished because the gospel's uniqueness cannot be understood otherwise. The gospel is the message of forgiveness for Christ's sake. This is not just one theological concept among others; this is not a meaning developed by men that can easily be exchanged for a different opinion. It is, in fact, the utter *reality* of forgiveness in Christ.

It was Christ's *opus proprium* to call sinful men, to die for them on the cross, and to reconcile the world with God. It is the church's *opus proprium* to proclaim Christ as the reconciler to all the world: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:19–21).

That is the gospel, and saving faith means to trust this gospel and no other. Luther discovered and proclaimed again this gospel, which declares that God justifies the sinner and that an alien righteousness alone shall be man's righteousness. To understand this gospel, one must give up all patterns of thinking in terms of self-righteousness achieved by one's own merits and good works. Nobody can understand the gospel who does not distinguish it from the law. For the law tells me what I should do; the gospel tells me what God has done and is still doing. The law says what God demands from me; the gospel tells me about God's gift. The law states: the righteous is justified; the gospel states: the sinner is justified. The law reveals God's wrath; the gospel shows his mercy. The law kills; the gospel makes alive. The law closes the door to heaven and condemns to eternal death; the gospel opens the door to heaven for the sinner and grants him eternal life.

No other religion has this to offer. It is a unique message. If we lose this understanding of the gospel, Christianity will again become a religion of the law, not essentially different from any other human religion.

Hermann Sasse confessed this gospel. He gave witness to it in all of his writings. And it was this gospel that opened for him the door to heaven when his Lord called him home on August 9, 1976. LOGIA

### NOTES

1. New Year Sermon on Galatians 3:23–24. WA 36:29, 13–14.
2. WA 36:25, 5–8.
3. See Edward Gordon Selwyn, ed., *History of Christian Thought* (London: John Heritage, the Unicorn Press; later the Centenary Press, 1937), 106–124.
4. AE 31:31.
5. The official English translation by Martin Cressy has "common understanding of the gospel." See the opening paragraph and Section II in *Lutheran World* 20 (1973): 347 ff. Similarly the superior translation by John Drickamer in *The Springfielder* 35 (March 1972): 241–249.
6. The Preface to the *Book of Concord* (Tappert, 3) and the opening section of the Epitome of the Formula (Tappert, 464).

7. Hermann Sasse examined this difference especially in *Here We Stand*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (New York: Harper and Bros., 1938; reprint Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), 110–122 [hereafter, 1st. ed.]. A reprint from Lutheran Publishing House (now Open Door Books), Adelaide, South Australia [hereafter, 2nd ed.] has different pagination: 118–130.

8. See Sasse, *Here We Stand*, 1st ed., especially 112–113, 163–166; 2nd ed., 120–121., 171–174.

9. See AE 31:335 and also AE 54:110, no. 624.

10. For the same reason we decline to sing: "And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love."

# Medicine of Immortality & Antidote against Death

NORMAN E. NAGEL



FROM ANTIOCH TO ADELAIDE BY WAY OF EPHESUS. IN THE *Lutheran Hymnal* of the Lutheran Church of Australia of 1973 the Dismissal reads: “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ and His precious blood strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life eternal. Go in peace.” This took the place of “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ and his precious blood strengthen and preserve you in true faith unto everlasting life.”<sup>1</sup> In the *Missale Romanum* at the time of the Reformation the priest prayed for himself, “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve my soul to eternal life. Amen . . . The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve my soul to eternal life. Amen.”<sup>2</sup> As a result of the Reformation this became a blessing bestowed upon the people, and continued in Australia until replaced in 1973 with the formula that included the addition of “in body and soul.” The “my soul” of the priest’s prayer in the *Missale Romanum* was a replacement for the priest’s personal pronoun. In Italian mass arrangements of the eleventh and twelfth centuries we have, “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ be to me an everlasting remedy to life eternal. Amen.” And, “The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve me to life eternal. Amen.”<sup>3</sup> The Reformation replaced the priest’s “my soul” with the personal pronoun, second person, to whom the gift is given, one of the two chief things in the Sacrament, as the Small Catechism confesses (VI, 8). In 1973 to the second person statement the Lutheran Church of Australia added “in body and soul.” Personal pronoun of the priest, then the priest’s “my soul,” then second person “you” to whom the blessing, and then in 1973 in Adelaide it continues with the second person, with “soul” back in again, and with the addition of “body”—not the one without the other.

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ and His precious blood strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life eternal. Go in peace.

At first glimpse this would appear to be a return to scriptural anthropology, recovering the scriptural way of speaking of man as one whole lump, and not divided up according to some other than scriptural notions of man (Platonic three parts, Aristotelian two parts, with Stoicism inimical to transcendence).<sup>4</sup> The inclusion of “in body and soul” would then be the result of exegetical faithfulness, and be welcome also as a helpful bulwark against the

view of man outside the church as nothing more than one of the primates, a view then prompting some gnosticizing reaction.

For inciting such exegetical faithfulness Dr. Sasse is surely the prime suspect. His doctorate was done with Deissmann in New Testament exegesis. He had the means, the opportunity, and the motive. In the circumstantial evidence there is no dearth of fingerprints. What may give us pause, however, along this line of inquiry is that his associate P. D. Pahl casts not the slightest suggestion of suspicion on Sasse in his testimony referred to above. His evidence is all the more persuasive since “it takes a thief to catch a thief.” Pahl was himself also a man who began exegetically in the New Testament, and then went on to spend much more of his time in church history. He writes as an honest historian deeply influenced by Sasse. He does not approach it as, “Since this is what we want to do, can we manage some evidence to support it?” but rather, “Where did this start from?”

Sasse had already answered, “Antioch.”<sup>5</sup> It was Ignatius of Antioch who confessed the scriptural anthropology that the whole of a man is benefited by what he is given to eat and to drink in the Eucharist. In his letter to the Ephesians:

At these meetings you should heed the bishop and presbytery attentively with nothing disturbing your harmony, in breaking one bread, which is the medicine of immortality, an antidote that one does not die, but lives in Jesus Christ for ever.<sup>6</sup>

This in summary, for he planned to write a second letter to them expounding more of God’s saving plan.

I have only touched on this plan in reference to the New Man Jesus Christ, and how it involves believing in him and loving him and in his passion and resurrection.<sup>7</sup>

He speaks to them as the ones gathered in the liturgy, appealing to what is theirs from the name in one faith and in Jesus Christ who “according to the flesh is descended from David,” and is the Son of Man and the Son of God. At these meetings he then speaks of the Eucharist, “the one bread.” The passage rings with Scripture and thus also with liturgy and the creed.

[Before Nicaea and] until the rise of Constantinople there were only two cities of first-class importance in the Christian East, Antioch and Alexandria; and their influ-

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ence on their neighbourhood and beyond it was necessarily great. . . . Antiochene Christianity, as we can see from the New Testament, had a strong missionary interest (Acts XV), and Theodoret's statement that it was at Antioch that the ancient antiphonal singing was first introduced, witnesses to a widespread liturgical and therefore creedal influence on the part of this great centre of Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

From Antioch Ignatius was taken to Rome, where he was martyred at some time during the reign of Trajan (98–117). At Smyrna he was embraced by four representatives of the church in Ephesus, one of whom was the bishop, the gentle Onesimus, and another a deacon, Burrhus, who “accompanied Ignatius as far as Troas, and perhaps acted as his amanuensis.”<sup>9</sup>

There have been those who regarded “the medicine of immortality” as the product of Ignatius's personal devotional piety—a notion he would hardly have welcomed, and which was laid to rest by Lietzmann, followed in this by Sasse, who acknowledges his indebtedness to Lietzmann's *Messe und Herrenmahl* of 1926. It was something “which Ignatius already at the beginning of the second century quoted from the liturgy of Antioch.”<sup>10</sup>

Lietzmann points to the anaphora of Sarapion 13, 15, and observes “Syro-Byzantine influence in this Egyptian text of c. 359.”<sup>11</sup>

Let your holy Word come on this bread, O God of truth, that the bread may become body of the Word; and on this cup, that the cup may become blood of the Truth; and make all who partake to receive a medicine of life for the healing of every disease.<sup>12</sup>

He also points to the petition *sit summentibus medicina* in the “Masses of Mone.”<sup>13</sup> Richardson adds in a note the reference to a Berlin Papyrus 13918, from the time of Justinian (483–565). Lietzmann gave an exposition of this in 1927. Here we have:

for a medicine of immortality, an antidote of life overcoming everything that might bring us to die, instead of which to live in you through your beloved Son.<sup>14</sup>

Lietzmann rehearses the parallels in the liturgies of the Apostolic Constitutions, of Basil and of Chrysostom, and of James and Mark. In them he finds the same basic type. The texts do not provide solid clues for concluding what went to which. The Liturgy of St. Mark did become dominant in Egypt, but not so dominant as to eliminate older versions of the liturgy, especially not those removed by distance from the influential centers. We are indebted, it would seem, to the sands of some remote village for preserving for us the Berlin Papyrus 13918 with its remarkable quotation of Ignatius's letter to the Ephesians. His letters were valued highly in Egypt and were translated into the vernacular.

Lietzmann, however, is far too much at home in the liturgies as to imagine that a liturgy might quote a church father. As Richardson puts it, “Since when have the liturgies cited Fathers of the Church?”<sup>15</sup> It goes the other way. Most likely then the words came to Egypt by liturgical tradition, a tradition that antedates Ignatius, a liturgy from which he quotes, and which he expects

the Ephesians to be familiar with, and which lived on in Sarapion and in Gaul.

Yet in what came to be the dominant liturgies this way of speaking no longer has a place. This is also the case with  $\pi\alpha\lambda\varsigma$ , which is then also a clue toward an older liturgy.  $\Pi\alpha\lambda\varsigma$  is used of Jesus in the liturgy quoted by Ignatius, and in the Didache 9, 2–3, 10, 2–3, and in the Berlin Papyrus 13918. Is there a clue here? Did  $\pi\alpha\lambda\varsigma$  drop out for reasons that might also help to explain why the medicine of immortality dropped out?  $\Pi\alpha\lambda\varsigma$  was too lowly, Jeremias observes. “This is why  $\pi\alpha\lambda\varsigma$   $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  was unable to establish itself in spite of the change of meaning from ‘servant of God’ to son of God.”<sup>16</sup> Was there similar “offence at the lowly character of the term” in Ignatius's use of *medicine* and *antidote*? The passages in the Didache that Wehr finds most closely akin to Ign. Eph. 20, 2 have  $\pi\alpha\lambda\varsigma$   $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ , although in Ignatius the transition has been made to  $\upsilon\iota\omicron\varsigma$   $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ , and Son of Man confesses he is truly a man. Son of Man appears in Ignatius only in Ign. Eph. 20, 2, and this may then also indicate a liturgical quotation. Jeremias points also to the liturgy of Antioch as background here.<sup>17</sup> He also quotes Dalman's variation of *lectio ardua praestat*: the more embarrassing the more likely historically original.<sup>18</sup> To the more upward, transcendent-minded, talk of medicine and antidote would surely be an embarrassment.

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***There have been those who regarded “the medicine of immortality” as the product of Ignatius's personal devotional piety.***

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Medicine of immortality did not have very estimable credentials for such use. In medical parlance it was a salve or an elixir, and like most things medical it sported a supernatural connection (Isis). An antidote was taken internally.<sup>19</sup> Wehr gives an account of what the History of Religions School has discovered to answer the question “Where did this start from?” and then observes that the more we learn of what the History of Religions School discovered as sources for what Ignatius says here, the more clear it becomes that those sources cannot be the sources for what he says.<sup>20</sup>

Tendencies up and away from too physical and earthly toward more exalted heavenly, spiritual, transcendent, would be embarrassed by such terms—the very tendencies Ignatius was intent on combating in his letters. This may be seen in his hearty use of  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$ , following John and discomforting any Docetism. Most clearly in Smyrnians 7, 1, “the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which in goodness the Father raised up.” It is the flesh of John 6:58, which G. Bornkamm recognizes as

very clearly that of the Ignatian letters. In these repeatedly we have the same pair of expressions  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi/\alpha\acute{\iota}\mu\alpha$  (not  $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha/\alpha\acute{\iota}\mu\alpha$ ) as the term for the element. (Ign. Rom. 7:3; Phil. 4:1;  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$  by itself Smyrnians 7,1) but also what

became the classic formulations of what is expressed in John 6:53 ff. the Lord's Supper as φάρμακον ἀθανασίας, ἀντίδοτος τοῦ μὴ ἀποθανεῖν ἀλλὰ ζῆν ἐν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ διὰ παντός. Eph 20, 2.<sup>21</sup>

And not only in John as Sasse concludes.

If one asks how John relates to Paul at this point, a real agreement is discovered here also. For Paul naturally did not teach a physical effect of the Lord's Supper only for the unworthy, even if in 1 Cor. 11:27 ff. he happens to speak only about them. Both Paul and John would accept the expression with which the Antiochene liturgy about the turn of the first century describes the gifts of the Eucharist.<sup>22</sup>

In the East, Platonizing tendencies were strong, and in the West there was Augustine. There were impoverishments wrought upon the liturgy that were made good again at the Reformation. Johannine Christology, so strong in Ignatius, coupled with a rejoicing in the utter incarnation of the one who is Son of Man and Son of God, according to the flesh descended from David. Here the new man created to believe and love is to believe and love the one who suffered and rose again.

The Large Catechism exhorts to the delight and love (*Lust und Liebe*) of the Sacrament.

It is a medicine which does nothing but heal and comfort, it helps and gives life to both soul and body. Where the soul is saved, there the body also benefits. Why then do we act as if it were a poison, by eating which we would eat our death? . . .

Those who feel their weakness, would be glad to be rid of it, and long for help, should regard and use the Sacrament as a precious antidote against the poison which they have in them.

He bids me eat and drink so that it may be mine, be good for me, guaranteed, there it is [*Pfand und Zeichen, pignus et arrabo*], the very same gift that is put there for me against my sin, death and all evils [*alle Unglück*].<sup>23</sup>

The Formula of Concord confesses what can only be confessed of flesh when it is the flesh of Christ.

His flesh is truly a life-giving food and his blood a truly life-giving drink, as the 200 Fathers of the Council of Ephesus have confessed. "The flesh of Christ is life giving or enlivening." That is to say the flesh of Christ is life-giving flesh (SD VIII, 76).<sup>24</sup>

He who made the promises of Matthew 18:20 and 28:20 is the same one who keeps them.

He is with his church and communion on earth [*bei seiner Kirchen und Gemein auf Erden*] as Mediator, Head, King and High Priest. Not just a part or only half of him, but the whole Person of Christ is present . . .

also according to and with his human nature which he made his own, and according to which he is our brother and we flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. Of this he left no doubt or uncertainty when he instituted his Holy Supper wherein also according to the nature by which he has flesh and blood, he is with us, dwells in us, and lively works in us (SD VIII, 78).

In John 6:48–58 the flesh of Christ is a quickening food, and accordingly the Council of Ephesus concluded that the flesh of Christ has the power to enliven. (SD VIII, 59).

It all inheres in the enfleshed and enblooded Jesus Christ. Reluctance to confess him as πᾶς is the same reluctance to confess the medicine of immortality.

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***Luther also rejoiced to confess the medicine of immortality together with John 6 and the ancient fathers.***

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As Ignatius recognized the threat of Gnosticism, Luther recognized the threat of Enthusiasm, and so he also rejoiced to confess the medicine of immortality together with John 6 and the ancient fathers.<sup>25</sup>

Irenaeus says that our bodies even now are no longer corruptible when they receive the sacrament, but have thereby the hope of the resurrection. For we see that the ancient doctors spoke of the sacrament in such a way that it even bestowed upon the body an immortal nature [*ein unsterblich Wesen*], though hidden in faith and hope until the Last Day . . . [the body of which Irenaeus speaks] can be none other than the body of Christ who says of it in John 6, "My flesh is food indeed. He who eats my flesh will live forever" (AE 37:118, 101).

Irenaeus and the ancient fathers pointed out the benefit that our body is fed with the body of Christ, in order that our faith and hope may abide and that our body also may live eternally from the same eternal food of the body which it eats physically. This is a bodily benefit, nevertheless an extraordinarily great one . . . He wills to be "in us by nature," says Hilary, in both our soul and body, according to the word in John 6, "He who eats me abides in me and I in him." . . . He is not digested or transformed but ceaselessly he transforms us, our soul into righteousness, our body into immortality. So the ancient fathers spoke of the physical eating (AE 37:132).

The mouth, the throat, the body, which eats Christ's body will also have its benefit in that it will live forever and arise on the Last Day to eternal salvation. This is the secret power and benefit which flows from the body of Christ in the Supper into our body, for it must be useful, and can-

not be present in vain. Therefore it must bestow life and salvation upon our bodies, and is its nature (AE 37:134).

The theme of the medicine of immortality appears not only in the polemical writings of 1527, but in the Large Catechism and repeatedly, and for the last time in the *Hauspostille* of 1544.<sup>26</sup>

The Catalog of Testimonies gives the quotation from the Council of Ephesus, and naturally Chemnitz confesses the same.<sup>27</sup> “The Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth century fully agree with Luther in this respect, notably Matthesius, Chemnitz, and Selnecker. The devotional literature of that time makes frequent use of the idea in describing the fruit of the Sacrament.”<sup>28</sup> Sasse quotes Gerhard, who maintains

that this body in which sin and death are dwelling in this life will be resuscitated from the dust of the earth to eternal life because it has been nourished with the vivifying body of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

This is also to be found in Calov, but in the seventeenth-century theologians Sasse diagnoses “the influence of the renewed Aristotelian philosophy (which at one time also prevented Aquinas from accepting the Eucharist as ‘medicine of immortality, the antidote against death’). By the time we come to Hollaz all that is left is what ‘every Calvinist could accept.’”<sup>30</sup> The Confessional Revival brought recovery. Sasse points to Vilmar and Rocholl, where there was speculation that attempted to say more than we have been given to confess—we may detect the influence of the Romantic Movement.<sup>31</sup> Sasse names Sommerlath of Leipzig and Elert of Erlangen as heirs of the Confessional Revival, who again rejoiced in the medicine of immortality, while Althaus and Aulen are identified as delinquents.

Such rejoicing rings on in our hymnody, as Schoessow has shown, though here there is also some evidence of embarrassment. Pieper is cautioning, and Braaten-Jenson give it no mention.<sup>32</sup>

In summary then, and not working backwards from Adelaide, we may, in the light of the foregoing, do best if we start with John. “Ignatius has inherited the Johannine idea of Christ as the living bread that came down from heaven, of which if a man partake he shall live forever, and has understood it as related in particular to a eucharistic feast in Christ’s flesh and blood.”<sup>33</sup>

Ignatius is the bridge to Justin. “Ur-Sarapion and Didache are strongly influenced by the Fourth Gospel, thus resembling Justin . . . who came from Samaria and taught in Ephesus,”<sup>34</sup> where he wrote the Dialogue with Trypto c. 135. In the First Apology, written in Rome around 150, we read in a passage quoted in VII, 39:

For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior having been made flesh by the word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the word of prayer transmitted from him, and by which our blood and flesh by assimilation are nourished [κατὰ μεταβολὴν τρέφονται], is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made of flesh.<sup>35</sup>

“Justin is in the main clear line of liturgy.”<sup>36</sup> That line may take us on to Irenaeus, whom Dr. Luther delighted to quote. Then the Large Catechism, the Formula of Concord,<sup>37</sup> and the 1539 Saxon liturgy:

The body of Lord Jesus Christ, given into death for you, strengthen and preserve you in the faith to eternal life, amen.

The blood of our dear Lord Jesus Christ shed for your sin, strengthen and preserve you in true [*recht*] faith to eternal life, amen.<sup>38</sup>

Which brings us up to 1973 in Adelaide. It all goes surely incarnationally. The Lord does not leave us in doubt where and when and by what instruments he gives out his gifts, administers them in the Divine Service, ἡ ἅγια λατρεία, *Gottestienst*. It all hangs on him. As with Christology, so too with the liturgy. That Jesus was truly man came to matter less in the West. The Reformation rejoiced again in the incarnation, which had been central in the apostolic liturgy. Maurer has observed that the Reformation happened by recovering Chalcedonian Christology, which

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***The Lord does not leave us in doubt where and when and by what instruments he gives out his gifts.***

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denies any pulling of him apart into lower and higher and which confesses the one person.<sup>39</sup> The core question “What of Jesus?” addressed to the liturgy discloses its core worth. The flesh-and-blood Jesus saves us altogether, body and soul, not the one without the other. From over the remote sands of Australia we hear again the confession “in body and soul,” the vivifying blessing of the ‘body/flesh and blood,’ evoking “the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death.” What rings on from an early second-century liturgy, informed by John, surely has its own vitality, when that vitality is “from the Lord,” “that tradition goes back to Jesus himself” as apostolically witnessed by John and by Paul.<sup>40</sup> Only those who have ears hear, for the ear is the organ of faith. In the liturgy Sasse betrays perfect pitch.

Pressing the who-done-it question could never hope to get an admission of guilt from Sasse. He would point to where it started, tell of its history, and extol the extolling of the gift. We honor best what use our Lord had of him by looking to what he points us to, to whom he points us, along with Ignatius quoting the liturgy extolling “his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth,” “to the new man Jesus Christ, by faith in him and love in him, in his passion and resurrection . . . in one faith and in Jesus Christ, according to the flesh of the stock of David, the Son of Man, the Son of God . . . to break one bread, which is the medicine of immortality, antidote so that we do not die but live in Jesus Christ forever”—in body and soul.” LOGIA



NOTES

1. *Lutheran Hymnal: Authorized by the Lutheran Church of Australia* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1973), 21. See P. D. Pahl, "A Bodily Influence in the Sacrament—In the Fathers, in Modern Lutheranism," in *Theologia Crucis: Studies in honour of Hermann Sasse*, ed. H. P. Hamann (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1975), 61. Also D. G. Schoessow, "Medicine of Immortality," *LOGIA* 4 (Eastertide/April 1995), 37–47. Pahl and Schoessow deal with the matter more doctrinally; what is attempted here as something a bit more liturgical—a distinction that would simply appall Dr. Sasse. "Liturgie gebetetes Dogma." *Vom Sakrament des Altars* (Leipzig: Dörffling and Franke, 1941), 84. Brandenburg-Nuremberg 1533: *ein ewigs erznei*, in *Coena Domini I*, ed. I. Pahl (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1983), 83. *Liturgische Texte 8: Die Sächsische Agende*, ed. H. Lietzmann (Bonn: Marcus and Weber, 1911), 11–12. *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, ed. F. Precht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 312.
2. Parallel texts in F. Schmidt-Clausing, *Zwingli als Liturgiker* (Göttingen: Vandernhoeck and Ruprecht, 1952), 126. Tridentine text in J. Beckmann *Quellen zur Geschichte des christlichen Gottesdienstes* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1956), 119. *Formula Missae* vi, AE 53:29.
3. J. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*, 2 vols. (New York: Benziger, 1955), 2:359. R. Cabié, "Private Prayers of Celebrant and Ministers," in *The Eucharist*, vol. 2 of *The Church at Prayer*, ed. A. G. Martimort (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1986), 130–131.
4. Exemplary diagnosis is given by G. C. Stead in his "The Platonism of Arius," *Journal of Theological Studies* 15 (1964): 16–31. Also A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 1:225. H. Sasse, *This Is My Body* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), 316.
5. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, 148, note 127; Hermann Sasse, "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament," 1941, in *We Confess the Sacraments*, trans. Norman E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 80–81.
6. Ign. *ad Eph.* 20, 2. συνέργησθε; εἰς τὸ ὑπακούειν τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ καὶ τῷ πρεσβυτερίῳ διανοία, ἕνα ἄρτον κλώντες, ὅς ἐστιν φάρμακον ἀθανασίας, ἀντίδοτος, τοῦ μὴ ἀποθαιεῖν ἀλλὰ ἦν ἐν Ἰησοῦ χριστῷ διὰ παντός.
- Die Apostolischen Väter*, ed. J. A. Fischer (Darmstadt: W. B., 1956), 158. *Early Christian Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 1, ed. C. C. Richardson (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 93 [hereafter LCC 1].
7. Placed in the liturgy we hear the words of Scripture and their reverberations. Ephesians 2:15; 4:5; 24 Romans 1:3; cf. 2 Tim. 2:8; John 7:42. 1 Cor. 10:16–17; 11:24; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 27:35. Didache 14, 1; 9, 3. The bread of God, John 6:33 and Ign. *ad Eph.* 5, 2. Cf. J. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (New York: Longman, 1993), 68: "single-clause confessions." Fischer, 179, note 37: "Sicherlich wurden derartige Bekenntnisformeln auch in der Liturgie . . ." For O. Michel on οἰκονομία see TDNT 5:152.
8. T. H. Bindley, *The Oecumenical Documents of the Faith* (Westport: Greenwood, 1950), 58. Here an account of the "Creeds of Antioch." A Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der alten Kirche* (Hildersheim: Olms, 1962), 1 and 141–142. Pliny the Younger from eastern Bithynia to Trajan c. 112: "meet before daybreak and to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ, as to a god." *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. H. Bettenson (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 6.
9. LCC 1:87 (Philad. 11, 2).
10. See note 5. L. Wehr, "Arznei der Unsterblichkeit," *Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen* NF, XVIII, 107: "Ignatius hier auf vorgegebenes Gut zurückgreift."
11. H. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, ed. R. D. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 210, note 2.
12. *Prayers of the Eucharist* ed. R. Jasper and G. Cuming (New York: Pueblo, 1987), 77–78. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper* 63: Ἐπιδημησάτω. Θεέ τῆς ἀληθείας, ὁ ἅγιός σου λόγος ἐπὶ τὸν ἄρτον τοῦ τοῦ, ἵνα γένηται ὁ ἄρτος σῶμα τοῦ λόγου, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο, ἵνα γένηται τὸ ποτήριον αἷμα τῆς ἀληθείας· καὶ ποιήσων πάντας τοὺς κοινωνοῦντας φάρμακον ζωῆς λαβεῖν εἰς θεραπείαν παντὸς νοσήματος.
- J. Wordsworth gives this prayer the title "Invocation of the Logos." *Bishop Sarapion's Prayer-Book* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1964), 63.
13. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, 79. *Prex Eucharistica*, ed. A.

- Hänggi and I. Pahl (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1968), 493. See also Beckmann, 82, from the *Missale Gothicum*. "Sit nobis domine quaesomus medicina mentis et corporis quod de sancti altaris tui benedictione percipimus ut nullis adversitatibus oppremamur qui tanti remedii participatione munimur per dominum nostrum iesum christum filium tuum."
14. "Ein liturgischer Papyrus des Berliner Museums," in *Festgabe für Adolf Jülicher*, ed. R. Bultmann and H. Soden (Tübingen: Mohr, 1927), 213–228.
15. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, 210.
16. TDNT 5:705. Hippolytus, in Jasper and Cuming, 35.
17. TDNT 5:716, note 483.
18. Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 170–171.
19. K. T. Schäfer on *antidotum* in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950), 1:457–461. On the basis of usage and context Schäfer rejects an awareness of this distinction in Ign. Eph. 20:2. Contra T. Schermann, "Zur Erklärung der Stelle *epist. ad Ephes* 20, 2 des Ignatius von Antiocheia," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 21 (1910): 10. Ignatius's interest is not in pharmacology.
20. Wehr, 107.
21. "Vorjohanneische Tradition oder nachjohanneische Bearbeitung in der eucharistischen Rede Joh. 6?" *Geschichte und Glaube II* [= *Gesammelte Aufsätze IV*] (Munich: Kaiser, 1971), 51–64. Quoted by Wehr in his *Forschungs überblick*, 1–24. His own demonstration is given in his chapter 3. Cf. T. Zahn, *Patrum Apostolorum Opera*, Fascicle 2 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1876), 27, note 2: "Haec de eucharistia doctrina, orta e sermone domini (Ioann. 6, 27–58), ab Irenaeo repetitur IV, 18, 5. V, 2, 2 sq." *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. H. Bettenson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 96–97. LCC 1:387–388. Wehr, 108, note 420. *The Eucharist of the Early Christians* ed. W. Rordorf (New York: Pueblo, 1978), 91.
22. Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, 80–81. P. Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 193–194.
23. LC V, 68, 70, 22 and 28. AE 51, 192; WA 30<sup>1</sup>:25, 20. Visitation Articles of 1592 I, 6 (*Concordia Triglotta* 1150).
24. Canon 11. *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. H. Jedin (Bologna: Instituto per le Scienze Religiose, 1972), 61. The Council of Ephesus rejected Nestorius! Bindley, 138–139. Apology XIV, 72: *ut per ea (beneficia Christi) vivificemur*. BSLK 370, 18.
25. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, 148.
26. WA 52:231, 34–36; 232, 7–10.
27. M. Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 61, 163–171, 250. *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 4 vols., trans. F. Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 2:233–236. *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments*, trans. L. Poellet (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 131–132. *The Two Natures in Christ* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 331, 473–474. B. Teigen, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz* (Brewster, MA: Trinity, 1986), 156–159.
28. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, 313.
29. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, 314.
30. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, 314.
31. A. Peters, *Realpräsenz* (Berlin: LVH, 1960), 12–16. He draws attention to R. Koch, who opposes the proprium of the Sacrament as confessed by the *Konfessionslutheraner*, and who ends up with Tillich. *Erbe und Auftrag* (Munich: Kaiser, 1957), 55ff.
32. Schoessow, 43. F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3:113. *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. C. Braaten and R. Jenson, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 2:337–366.
33. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, 421.
34. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, 420–421.
35. Apology I, 66, 2. J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius*, revised W. Friend (London: SPCK, 1987), 64. Beckmann, 5. Hänggi and Pahl, 70–71. Schoessow, 47, note 42.
36. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, 421.
37. E. Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. P. Koehnke and H. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 163–166. E.

Sommerlath, *Die Sinn des Abendmahls* (Leipzig: Dörffling and Franke, 1930), 81–90.

38. *Die Evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts I* (Leipzig: Reisland, 1902), 271. Cf. N. Nagel, “Holy Baptism and Pastor Walther,” in *Light for our World*, ed. J. Klotz (St. Louis: Concordia Semi-

nary, 1989), 79, note 1.

39. W. Maurer, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1949), 136.

40. John 14:26; 15:26; 16:14; 17:20. Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 101, 202–203.

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## A CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

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# Hermann Sasse & the Australian Lutheran Scene

J. T. E. RENNER



**H**ERMANN SASSE CAME TO THE ANTIPODES AFTER THE SECOND World War to find an Australia trying to establish its identity and footing in a world that had been devastatingly torn apart by the effects of a totalitarian war, in which it had discovered that it no longer could rely on Great Britain for protection and support in dangerous times. It was a land that had become the recipient of many refugees and migrants, uprooted and soulless, seeking a goodly land of opportunities far away from the European turmoil and unsettledness that many of them had painfully experienced.

Dr. Sasse and his wife were able to identify readily and willingly with the latter, especially those who came to Australian shores from his own homeland, Germany. Early in his stay in Australia, he showed deep interest and concern for German people, primarily for those who had a Lutheran upbringing. In his pastoral and fatherly mode he often ably attended to their spiritual needs by visiting them and preaching to them in the German tongue, even holding Bible studies for them as time permitted. He who had been a pastor and chaplain in Berlin remained to his tragic death-day in 1976 a pastor and a *Seelsorger* at heart. If theology has its test of authenticity, value, and validity in the pulpit, then it can safely be asserted that Sasse's theology was essentially ecclesiastically oriented; this was also a notable feature of his lecture-room work.

When Sasse arrived in Australia, after having accepted the call as lecturer to the Immanuel Seminary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia (UELCA), the church scene in Australia had all the hallmarks of pluralism and sectarianism. With his own eyes he had witnessed how diverse and irreconcilable church communities in the U.S.A. could become during his stay in Hartford, Connecticut as a young theologian. In many ways the Australian church scene was a small duplicate of the latter and, as he was to learn, was often fueled theologically by American influences.

Lutheranism in Australia was divided into two major churches, one the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (ELCA) and the other the UELCA. The latter had had strong theological ties with the German Lutheran churches and theological scene. These had begun to loosen due to the war years, at which time some English citizens looked upon anything too Germanic

with suspicion. The seminary of the UELCA (Immanuel) gave up German as the lecturing language during those years. The ELCA, on the other hand, had taken its language cue from the United States much earlier, and so its theological thrusts came from the American Lutheran Missourian scene. It is clear that while the UELCA also had links with the United States, notably Wartburg Seminary, it had taken on a much more Germanic coloring, and hence its theological accents were different from those in the ELCA.

Sasse was deeply aware of these when he arrived and at the same time saw the folly of two Lutheran churches, very small indeed, scattered on a vast continent, living in schismatic separation from one another to the utter confusion and sometimes disdain of many newcomers to postwar Australia. This lamentable state of ecclesiastical affairs encouraged Sasse to work to overcome the division in Australian Lutheranism. This essay will address the theological areas in which Sasse was especially active and productive in his enduring contribution to the union between these two confessional churches, a union that finally was consummated in the year 1966. The new church was given the name Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA).

Already at his first meeting of the UELCA committee on intersynodical affairs on October 20, 1949 (he had been inducted on October 12 of that year as lecturer), he was already active. As the minutes of that meeting show, he was not only warmly welcomed as a member of that body but had prepared impressive remarks on "Church and Congregation." The committee recommended that this paper be read at the joint meetings. His theses on the church were first to be discussed at a full day's session on November 30. Furthermore, the president of the ELCA, Dr. Hoopmann, concurred with the suggestion that Dr. Sasse might become a member of the subcommittee that prepared theses and papers for the joint meetings. Thus from the outset of his sojourn in Australia, Sasse was clearly to play a major role in the negotiations between the two separated churches.

It is not difficult to conclude from his many essays, papers, and his last work, *Sacra Scriptura*, which appeared in 1981 and was but a torso of what he had planned to produce, that much of his interest lay in the doctrine concerning the Scriptures. He was, of course, a champion of the Reformation *sola Scriptura* principle, but it was just this *sola* that he strongly contended should not be seen in isolation from the other principles lest the church fall into the dangers of fundamentalistic sectarianism. Just as the *sola fidei* principle by itself can lead to Bultmannism—which he rejected fiercely and even sarcastically on occasion—he warned against a

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*sola Scriptura* in the church that could end up in literalism and legalism, which cuts itself adrift from the catholic church.

It can be noted from the Theses of Agreement adopted by the two Lutheran churches for union purposes how often the right understanding of the Scriptures came to the forefront in the debates and discussions on many issues dividing the two churches. Even after the union had been established, subjects like the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures and the right understanding of Genesis 1–3 surfaced, and as late as 1984 a set of theses on the Scriptures was adopted at a General Synod of the Lutheran Church in Australia (LCA) to allay fears that some in the church were still undermining its foundations by what was considered loose and dangerous notions concerning the Scriptures.

Another vital matter in the mind of Sasse when it came to debates on Scripture was the influence that philosophy had on the teachings of this crucial tenet. He was clearly willing to concede that there were some things from both his public and private utterances made in his early days on the negotiation committee that he had perhaps overstated and was happy to amend or break down considerably: for example, the pagan influences on the inspiration teachings of the church. One thing he insisted on with enduring strength, however, was that some of the orthodox tenets concerning this subject were infiltrated with Aristotelian, philosophical logic.

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***Sasse claimed emphatically that it was the enormous weakness of Protestant Orthodoxy that it allowed Aristotle to become “the patron saint” of theology.***

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Without discussing the merits or demerits of this contention, it can be safely shown that Sasse was an opponent of the intellectualism inherent in Aristotle’s philosophical thought. In a paper entitled “Defining of the Basic Issues Arising Out of Genesis Chapters 1–3: Comments by Dr. H. Sasse” (unpublished), strongly influenced by Luther’s Heidelberg theses, he wrote in the opening paragraphs:

A perfect theological statement, based on Holy Scripture, can be quite illogical, if measured by the standards of a human logic, e.g., Aristotle. Here we find one of the great discoveries of Luther, a real achievement of the Reformation that should never be lost. Luther’s opposition to Aristotle, (e.g., Heidelberg thesis 29: “He who wishes to philosophize in Aristotle without danger must first become a good fool in Christ”) is not only directed against Aristotle’s ethics of the free will, not only against his metaphysical errors, but first of all against the application of Aristotle’s logic to the content of God’s revelation in Scripture. So Luther says in his theses “Against Scholastic Philosophy” of 1517: “It is an error to say that no man can become a theologian without Aristotle. . . .

to state that a theologian, who is not a logician is a monstrous heretic [*Theologus non logicus est monstrous haereticus*] is a monstrous and heretical sentence. This in opposition to common opinion” (WA 1, 226; AE 31, 12).

This lengthy quotation demonstrates some of the presuppositions Sasse came with when he wrote and debated matters *de Scriptura*. Sasse claimed emphatically again and again that it was not only the enormous weakness of Thomas Aquinas but also of Protestant Orthodoxy of the seventeenth century that they allowed Aristotle to become “the patron saint” of theology. Sasse did not plead for any other modern philosophy to be accepted by the church instead of Aristotle, but it was his concern that the church should use philosophy critically and should “never marry a philosopher, how great his name may ever be.”

The issue that caused a great deal of discussion between the two Lutheran churches was the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Scriptures. Both churches were committed to teach that the Scripture is inspired and infallible and is the only norm and guide for all doctrine and behavior in the church. But the crucial question that had to be answered for the sake of union was how inerrancy was to be understood in reference to the Scriptures. (As is well known, the Roman Catholic Church had great problems with the infallibility terminology when it came to analyze its usage and meaning in the context of the papacy.) Dr. Sasse gave much time and theological energy to this concept, which continued to be a bone of contention later in spite of the Theses of Agreement.

In the context of this subject Luther’s statements about the Scriptures were carefully and fully analyzed. In an article appearing in January, 1951 (vol. 4, no. 1 of the *Lutheran Quarterly*), “Luther and the Inerrancy of the Scriptures,” Sasse tried desperately to come to grips with the so-called grammatical and historical shortcomings of the Scriptures in relationship to their inerrancy and opposed the *theologoumenon* (which was made into a dogma) that the Scriptures were logically *absolutely* inerrant.

Luther’s doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, so Sasse rightly maintained and constantly taught the students and pastors of the Lutheran Church of Australia, “is inseparably bound up with the doctrine on the incarnation of Him who is the Eternal Word of God and with the doctrine of the justification of the sinner by faith alone, and that, therefore, also this doctrine is a part of Luther’s great *theologia crucis*, the theology which speaks of God as One who reveals Himself by hiding His glory behind the cross.”

One of the invaluable features of Sasse’s work as theologian in Australia was undoubtedly to show Lutherans and others in the land that theology dare never degenerate into a mere regurgitation of dogmas of the church of the past. He was intent to demonstrate the dynamics of the Lutheran Confessions, and in this regard his ability to apply church history and most particularly the history of church dogma to them (and for that matter to all areas of theology) made him such a stimulating lecturer and also member of intersynodical and ecumenical discussions.

He was not afraid to modify a position he held on matters such as the dogma of the Scriptures. That became evident in the Theses of Agreement on the Scriptures and Inspiration. Many pastors and teachers on the Lutheran scene in Australia and, of course, elsewhere greatly appreciated his willingness and capacity to

rethink and rework what he may have stated too strongly, in the light of fresh research and thorough investigation especially of the writings of the Reformation. Nevertheless, once he had reached a firm belief and conviction of the correctness of his position, he could defend and attach with such fine theological acumen and verve that many a theologian who opposed him had finally to agree with him. Although his polemics were sometimes too sharp, as he admitted himself, he always had the church in mind in love, frequently evidenced at the negotiating table of the two churches mentioned before. He was the one who insisted that faith needs to be expressed and formulated in words, but not in such a way that it becomes a prey of frigid doctrinal formularies and formulas.

The question whether the younger churches should be required to subscribe to the *Book of Concord* as their confession had surfaced strongly when the Theses on the Lutheran Confessions (ix, A19) of the *Book of Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia* were discussed. Under Dr. Sasse's influence one of the paragraphs adopted by both committees was formulated as follows: "The young Churches on the mission field may find it necessary to make a new formulation of the Lutheran doctrine. This is possible, provided that the doctrine remains the doctrine contained in the Confessions of the sixteenth century."

Perhaps one of his chief contributions at the intersynodical table was his theological input on the doctrine of the church and its ministry. As indicated earlier, there were two strong accents coming through the two Lutheran churches in Australia, one of which tended to be influenced by the Löhe-Vilmar school of thought while the other had received strong impetus from Walther-Pieper theological emphases. Both churches were possibly guilty of over-emphasis of their positions and in some cases of distortions of their mentors. Sasse was able to correct this imbalance by a vigorous attempt to bring both churches back to the Reformation and confessional writings, to which, of course, both churches subscribed. It was to the lasting good of many in the Lutheran churches in Australia that he led them to the importance of the church being an article of faith that cannot be visibly seen, although certainly not a platonic state. He avoided the terms "visible" and "invisible" church, emphasizing instead the "hiddenness" of the true church because the doctrine of the church and its ministry belong essentially to the *theologia crucis*, which must be believed.

It may be safely contended that Sasse had a fine theological sense for the *una sancta*. While he could often be critical of many churches inside and outside the Lutheran context for their aberrations and false accents, he nevertheless taught pastors, teachers, and students that the true church of Jesus Christ is in essence one. With Ephesians 4, which says that there is only "one body, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism," he could stress the church's unity despite its diversity and show that the weaknesses, problems, and sins of one church community were and could become the same in the others, because they were all one in Christ. So he taught the new Lutheran church to look beyond itself and recommended much that came from Roman Catholic sources, encyclicals, and decrees, which he himself knew so intimately. That is why he took up correspondence with the Vatican and when the opportunity presented itself did not fail to give advice on ecclesiological issues.

In the new church, there can be no doubt, he strongly contended for the doctrine of the Real Presence in Holy Communion. The Leuenberg Concord was most assuredly not for him. Already in the thirties he had written a gem-like study called *Kirche und Herrenmahl (Church and Lord's Supper)* that in a sense was programmatic for his later theological studies. Sasse's deep and rich scarifying of the Scriptures and the liturgies of the ancient and the modern churches helped him to become a courageous confessor of the ecclesiastical significance of the Lord's Supper. He was one who could absorb the mystery of the Orthodox churches, the realism of the Western Catholic Church, and thus fructify for Lutherans, not only in Australia but elsewhere, the heritage concerning this sacrament. It was, therefore, not by chance then that in Australia Lutherans again celebrated the Eucharist with greater frequency and regarded it with reverence and joy as belonging to the lifeblood of the church.

Writing on *Sanctorum Communio* in *Lutheran Theological Journal* (vol. 8, no. 2, August 1974) he stated that the early church (Acts 2:46–47) and those who were members of this *koinonia* founded no mission society, organized no inner mission venture, and wrote no books on "dynamic evangelism." Instead they celebrated the Sacrament and prayed without ceasing. He was not one who saw church growth as emanating from new methods of evangelism and immature strategies, but alone from the gospel, both oral and visible, as in Holy Communion.

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***The pastors of the church profited from his private letters to them answering many of their personal and theological problems.***

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The pastors of the church not only profited from his books and many articles that he wrote on many topics including church history, dogmatics, New Testament, current issues in pastoral practice, and ethics, but also from his private letters to them answering many of their personal and theological problems. Some of these missives were more dissertations in themselves, extending over more than ten pages. Thus, for example, in answer to one of the pastors of the Queensland District of the LCA who was asked to prepare a paper on the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* for the Faith and Order Commission of the Australian Council of Churches, Sasse produced a masterly summary of the contents of *Sessio VI* of Trent in which he showed that Rome's doctrine of Justification "can in a way be expressed by *sola gratia*, God's grace alone saves me. God's grace alone makes it possible for me to prepare myself for the reception of the justifying grace and to live a life of sanctification. God's grace alone makes my poor works meritorious." He then continues with his keen analysis: "It is a great misunderstanding if today even Lutherans regard the *sola gratia* as a mark of the Reformation. Elert had called our attention to the fact that even pagans know of the *sola gratia*. Side by side with the strict rejec-

tion of the possibility of forgiveness in the law of Karma stands in Hinduism the religion of Bhakti with its strong belief in divine grace.” All this is clear evidence of Sasse’s attempt to educate the pastorate of his church and his untiring desire that when dealing with theological matters it should go back to the fountains and original texts. His was indeed a deep concern for thorough, ecclesiastical research, keeping our times and its vagaries ever in mind.

Enough has been submitted to convince readers (if they needed this) that Sasse was an invaluable contributor to the theological scene in Australia. His impact was richly felt not only in Lutheran circles, but also in the ecumenical arena, which profited

by his presence and many presentations. But this issue would require another article.

The Lutheran Church of Australia thanks God for this gifted mentor, scholar, prophet, and pastor. Many in it are concerned that his influences both positive and controversial will not be lost, especially his constant call to repentance, his passionate plea for study of the Holy Scriptures and the great creeds of the church, and the right use of the sacred sacraments. In his introduction to August Vilmar’s *Dogmatik*, reprinted in 1937, Sasse quoted the words of Augustine, which were always in the forefront of his theology: *In ecclesia non valet: hoc ego dico, hoc tu dicis, hoc ille dicit, sed: haec dixit Dominus.* LOGIA

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# Hermann Sasse and EKID — 1948

## The Death of the Lutheran Church

MATTHEW HARRISON



THE HISTORY OF THE EVENTS SURROUNDING THE FORMATION OF the EKID (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany) and the involvement of Hermann Sasse in the matter might seem terribly remote from the vantage point of an American Lutheran pastor. But Hermann Sasse rightly realized that 1948 was a crucial year for the future of world Lutheranism, certainly the most fateful year for Lutheranism in this century. What follows is the story of how the bulk of world Lutheranism lost its will to confess the Formula of Concord, with the help of theologians of the Missouri Synod at a crucial point. It is a dire warning against annulling the Formula of Concord in our ecumenical endeavors as Lutherans, or in our practice of church fellowship at the congregational level. It was just this that Lutherans failed to do in 1948. The result has been disastrous.

### THE “CALVINIZATION” OF LUTHERANISM

Hermann Sasse wrote to his long-time associate Bishop H. Meiser of the Bavarian Territorial Lutheran Church on July 17, 1946:

From the standpoint of the Lutheran confession it is to be said that fundamentally altar fellowship is always church fellowship, since both accord with the NT. *Koinonia tou somatos Christou*. If the VELKD [United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany] fundamentally acknowledges altar fellowship with the Reformed as it was proclaimed in the declaration of the Prussian Confessing Synod of Halle cited by Württemberg, then the church fellowship has been realized which Calvin and the Reformed Church have desired from the start. Then we are still Lutheran Church only in the sense which Calvinism has always tolerated it. For then the doctrine of the Sacrament has lost its church-dividing force. Therefore we must grant no more than that in particular cases of emergency non-Lutherans may be allowed to come to the Lutheran Supper.<sup>1</sup>

Hermann Sasse wrote to Herman Preus on November 20, 1946:

I plead with you: use every opportunity to tell your brothers in the faith that they should not cease to think also of this need. For it cannot fail to have a reverse effect upon American Lutheranism, if the Lutheran Church among us collapses as church and becomes a tolerated point of view within a syncretistic Protestantism.

Sasse was convinced that the fall of confessional Lutheranism once and for all in the territorial churches of Germany would be the beginning of the end of confessional Lutheranism throughout the world. The issue would be the proposition: altar fellowship is church fellowship. A rejection of the church-dividing *damnamus* of the Formula of Concord over against the dogmas of the Reformed Church by the German Lutheran churches would affect the joint ecumenical endeavors of the Lutheran churches of the world (Lutheran World Federation), the Scandinavian churches, and finally the American Lutheran churches. Lutheranism would increasingly be “Calvinized” and reduced to a school of thought within a larger Protestant Church. As Sasse often stated: “one may be a Lutheran without the Formula of Concord, but one cannot be a Lutheran in opposition to it.”<sup>2</sup> Sasse was exactly right.

### “TWO MISSOURIS”

When a tiny and rather emaciated German professor sat somewhere on the campus at 801 De Mun in September of 1948, writing of the formation of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKID) as the “death” of the Lutheran Church in Germany, he did so as a lonely man. His four-month stay in St. Louis only brought further isolation. Not even the Missourians were sympathetic to his plight. In fact, the night before he departed St. Louis, Drs. Mayer and Graebner (who had done what they could to keep Sasse from coming to St. Louis) pleaded with him not to leave the Bavarian State Church that had just joined the EKID.

Already in the twenties, Sasse had seen the strength of Missouri among the Lutheran churches in America (“the dogmatically strongest of the American Lutheran churches,” he later wrote).<sup>3</sup> Over the course of the next decade and a half, as he saw in Germany the rise of Lutheran theological consciousness reach its apex and then descend to the formation of EKID, he increasingly looked to America and the Missouri Synod as “our last hope” for confessional Lutheranism. But while President John Behnken was eager to have Sasse’s insight come to bear on Missouri, Sasse was met with opposition from “subversive elements”

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in Missouri, and found a cool reception at 801 De Mun. “Fresh winds” were blowing through the institution. Sasse later wrote, “Already in 1948 it was quite obvious at St. Louis that there were two Missouris, one presided over by Dr. Behnken, the other under the leadership of the president of Concordia, St. Louis.”<sup>4</sup>

### REBIRTH

Sasse’s exodus from the Bavarian State Church was the culmination of a long series of events. During the First World War (1913–1917) Sasse had studied theology under the shining lights of optimistic nineteenth-century German liberalism and idealism (Harnack, Holl, Deissmann, Gressmann, Baudissin, Eissfeldt, E. Norden, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, H. Scholz) while at the University of Berlin. The religion-without-dogma that the likes of Harnack had been teaching for years had left the German church in very sad shape. Years later Sasse recounted an incident from his own years in the army:

When I was drafted, the Catholics were separated from the Lutherans by a Silesian officer. There were some left. “What are you?” [the officer asked.] “An atheist” [came the reply]. “So, you believe nothing? You are a Protestant!”<sup>5</sup>

But a radical shift occurred in the wake of war. There had come a rebirth of biblical, reformational, and to a lesser extent, even confessional studies, and Sasse had been a full participant. As he so often stated later, the war had taught theologians once again the truth of Luther’s last written words: “We are beggars; this is true.” Such serious contemplation of human depravity led once again to taking the gospel of Christ and his word and sacraments seriously. Sasse and others came to see that the non-dogmatic religion of Harnack, Schweitzer, and Troeltsch “all end in bankruptcy.” Thus these years were also rich years of biblical, sacramental, Christological, and confessional growth for Sasse. From 1920 to 1933, this growth occurred while Sasse served as a pastor. A trip to America (1924–1925) further solidified his commitment to dogmatic Christianity, and it was there that he also had his eyes opened to the strength of confessional Lutheranism.

### PRELUDE TO 1948: DEK

But the rebirth was not nearly as momentous as it had been a century earlier in Germany. Worse, now National Socialism pressed its agenda even into the German churches, most notably through the “German Christians,” a group of Nazified, anti-Jewish nationalists. In 1933, under nationalistic pressure, the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK) was formed as a national church encompassing all the various Protestant “territorial” churches. These churches had developed with various confessional pedigrees. This was due particularly to the fact that the local prince has been the *Summus Episcopus* of each provincial church until just after the First World War, an unfortunate outgrowth of the office of “Emergency Bishop” taken over by the Lutheran princes when the Roman bishops were deposed at the time of the Reformation. Several were “Union” churches where Lutheran and Reformed confessions had equal legitimacy and shared altar and pulpit (the Old Prussian Union, for one). A few others were quite strongly Reformed (for example, the Palatinate), and some were still surprisingly Lutheran (for example,

Bavaria). The age-old problem of the relationship between these various bodies was “solved” by the DEK. Sasse viewed this “national church” as the fulfillment of the attempted union begun by the Prussian Union in 1817. He offered his written protest under the title “The German Union of 1933: Remarks on the ‘Constitution of the German Evangelical Church,’” and this protest was passed out to the participants of the “National Synod” where the DEK was constituted on September 27, 1933. Sasse viewed the formation of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKiD) in 1948 as a repetition of the formation of DEK in 1933. But 1948 was more tragic; it occurred voluntarily.

### BARMEN

The Synod at Barmen (1934), one of a number of “Confessing Church”<sup>6</sup> synods, decisively and heroically rejected the “German Christian” movement, but the Reformed and unionistic Lutherans (Barth, Asmussen, Bonhoeffer, Niemoeller, and others) took advantage of the moment of crisis to proclaim that through the *Barmen Declaration* the separation of Lutheran and Reformed Churches had been overcome. Thus Sasse, who had been directly involved in the “Confessing Church” from its inception, protested the Barmen agreement. It was not so much the content of the *Declaration* to which Sasse objected (though he later repeatedly noted that several articles were written ambiguously and thus could be

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understood in either a Reformed or Lutheran sense), but that a “mixed” synod should arrogate to itself the authority to make a binding doctrinal confession for Lutherans. This was *de facto* union. On this vital point Barmen was no different from the DEK. Such an act of “confessing” set aside the Formula of Concord. Sasse left Barmen in protest. Karl Barth’s view of confession won the day at Barmen.<sup>7</sup> It was a fateful victory. In Barth’s view Lutheranism was but one “school of thought” within larger Protestantism. The confessions of the respective Lutheran and Reformed churches were not to be set aside; tolerance was merely to be granted to opposing viewpoints. In other words, the differences between Lutheran and Reformed were not church-divisive. Intercommunion was the *de jure* norm for the “Confessing Church.”

Sasse, however, being a keen student of the movements for union in the history of German Lutheranism, was convinced that such a union was simply what similar unions had always been: “confessionlessness” and an end to the genuine Lutheran Church as church. The union was an explicit renunciation of the churchly and biblical requirements for unity set down in Augustana VII and correctly expounded by the Formula of Concord. It set aside the Formula of Concord and its explicit church-dividing condemnations of the Reformed doctrine of the “real absence” of



Christ in the Sacrament, and other doctrines. It meant the death knell for the Lutheran Church in Germany. Sasse did not tire of pointing out that the “Confessing Church,” while its proponents spoke eloquently of the act of confessing, finally could not say what it confessed. He worked tirelessly to educate his contemporaries of the dangers of such a union. For such union finally always leads to “confessionlessness” and the loss of dogma, and thus the gospel itself.

That Sasse, the only Erlangen professor who had participated at Barmen, should level such criticism, was stiff medicine for members of the “Confessing Church.” Sasse, after all, had gone on record early and publicly against the Nazi Party. He had taken over the editorship of the *Kirchliches Jahrbuch* or “annual” for the German Evangelical Churches. In the preface to the 1932 *Jahrbuch*, he leveled a daring and direct attack upon Article 24 of the Nazi Party platform and its rejection of the “Jewish materialistic spirit.” (How Sasse survived the Nazi regime is a mystery of divine providence and grace.) And after all, Sasse was no narrow “confessionalist.” Quite to the contrary, from the mid-twenties on he had been intensely involved in the international ecumenical movement. In fact, he was one of the most, perhaps *the* most active of German participants in the Faith and Order Movement. In 1927 Sasse produced the official German record of the Lausanne meeting of Faith and Order, a six-hundred-page tome that included a significant and recognized history of the movement. He worked tirelessly to assert the principle that the unity of the church must be based upon unity in dogma, and he championed efforts toward unity through doctrinal discussion, based upon a mutual recognition of the ancient ecumenical creeds in his work in the Faith and Order Movement, until the Nazis prevented his travel abroad in the mid-thirties.

Sasse had for years worked feverishly under the worst possible circumstances to make plain that the DEK, formed under pressure from the Nazi state, had been a new union. More significantly, the “Confessing Church” that “confessed” at Barmen was a joint synod of churchmen from Lutheran, Reformed, and United territorial churches in Germany, and though Barmen put forth a valiant witness against the Nazi “German Christians,” it did so in a way that would later guarantee the loss of the Lutheran Church as church. When Sasse was not allowed “five minutes” to address the synod, he left in protest. Sure enough, Karl Barth and unionizing Lutherans proclaimed that the old breach between Lutheran and Reformed had been overcome by the *Barmen Declaration* of 1934. Bonhoeffer proclaimed that Barmen was the voice of the Spirit of God. Sasse cried, “*Schwarmgeisterei!*”<sup>8</sup>

From 1933 to 1945 Sasse produced some of the most stirring insightful and profound literature on the nature of the church’s unity, the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament, the ecumenical task of the Lutheran Church, the nature of confessional Lutheranism, church governance, the two kingdoms, the Prussian Union, and other topics.

#### FROM TREYSA TO EISENACH: 1945–1948

When the “millennium” of Hitler ended in 1945, all agreed that the Nazi-run *Reichskirche*, the DEK of 1933, was done. Sasse and others saw an opportunity to re-establish a genuine Lutheran Church in Germany that would exist independently alongside the Reformed

and United Churches in a “federation” and not a “church.” But the unionistic (“Confessing Church”) and nationalist voices for one united German Church pushed forward intensely. The Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany met in Treysa just before a larger gathering of church leaders of all the territorial churches in the same city. The Council, presided over by Sasse’s bishop, H. Meiser, issued a pronouncement on August 27 that asserted its intention to present a plan for a constitution for the Lutheran Church in Germany, as it worked toward the “re-ordering of the DEK.”<sup>9</sup> An inherent contradiction between both such efforts is evident. Treysa I immediately followed. Bishop Wurm (later president of the Council of the EKID) spoke an emotional opening address, mentioning Bonhoeffer. Wurm asserted that the fragile status of the German people demanded leadership by the church. The people were looking to the church, but it had to learn how to deal with questions such as “Union or Confession” in a way that would not mean the complete loss of the church’s credibility among the devastated populous.<sup>10</sup> The final goal of the meeting, said Wurm, was to establish a provisional leadership for

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### *Sasse and others saw an opportunity to re-establish a genuine Lutheran Church in Germany.*

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the German Church and begin preparatory work on a new constitution. Niemöller, the courageous leader of the “Confessing Church,” spoke next, and clearly showed he was intent on “the unity of the Evangelical Church in Germany.” In the first paragraph of the “Provisional Ordering of the EKID,” prominently mentioned is the “inner unity” “first made visible at the Confessing Synods of Barmen, Dahlem, and Augsburg.”<sup>11</sup> The course had been set by Barmen. “Thus the decisive step into the future was taken. The intent of church fellowship of all Evangelical churches in Germany was pronounced . . .”<sup>12</sup>

A struggle immediately ensued. Many of those who had been active in the “Confessing Church” and proponents of Barmen of course advocated EKID as church “in the sense of Scripture and the Reformational confessions.”<sup>13</sup> Confessionally concerned Lutherans knew that the confessions demanded full doctrinal agreement for church fellowship, and so worked to establish EKID as a “federation.” Beckmann notes that Hans Asmussen attempted a “third way,” particularly advocated by those Lutherans in Union churches, that would grant altar fellowship to all (“We hold that the Lord’s Table must be kept open to all adherents of Protestant communions”), but retain certain options for Lutheran associations. “Essential for the unity of the church is, according to Lutheranism, freedom in diversity” (familiar language to twentieth-century unionizing Lutherans!). Asmussen’s was finally no third way at all. It failed at just the point of intercommunion, which prevailed in the EKID.

The Church Assembly of the EKID met in Eisenach on July 10–13, 1948. There it accepted the “Fundamental Ordering of the

Evangelical Church in Germany.” Beckmann noted the three important issues decided by this “Ordering”: (1) EKID as Federation or Church? Answer: Yes! Article 1 states in oxymoronic fashion: “The Evangelical Church in Germany is a Federation of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches.” (2) Barmen is completely acknowledged. “In the Evangelical Church in Germany the standing fellowship of German Evangelical Christianity is visible. With its member churches the Evangelical Church in Germany affirms the decisions of the first confessing synod at Barmen.” (3) Fellowship between Lutherans and Reformed is asserted: “In no member church will a member of a confession recognized in the Evangelical Church in Germany be denied admission to the Table of the Lord.”<sup>14</sup>

Hans Kirsten noted in 1976 that “No one up to the present has dared to change this statement.” And he noted that though territorial church Lutherans love to point out other bits of the constitution that imply *de jure* independence of Lutheran practice regarding the Supper, this statement from Article 4 has become the “order of the day.”<sup>15</sup> Sasse had long seen this coming, and had specifically mentioned that just these three points would cause his exodus from the Bavarian State Church should it join EKID. Meiser succeeded in forming an “Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany” (VELKD), but only as an association within EKID. “Inclusive” Lutheranism (that is, without the Formula of Concord, and thus without the genuine intent of the Augsburg Confession) won the day in Germany, even though many in the press were trumpeting a conservative victory for Lutherans seeking a federation. Sasse contended that on July 13, 1948, the Lutheran Church of Germany was “buried at Eisenach” at the foot of the Wartburg Castle. All of world Lutheranism was affected in the wake, even Missouri, several of whose theologians had helped it happen.

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### “Inclusive” Lutheranism won the day in Germany.

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Already by 1946, Sasse’s efforts at establishing a “federation” of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches that would cooperate *in externis* but maintain their own church governments (and thus legitimate Lutheran ordination and doctrinal discipline) were clearly coming to naught. Easter of 1946 brought a complete breakdown. Sasse had lost eighty pounds in eight years. He was hospitalized for weeks. As he recovered, he pleaded with Herman Preus and others in America to do everything possible to give a factual accounting of the situation the Lutheran Church faced in Germany after the Second World War. The future of world Lutheranism was in the balance.

Preus responded with an article entitled “Clouding the Issue.”<sup>16</sup> This lucid account clearly sets out the issue at hand. “Here is the issue: do we want to preserve the Lutheran Church in Germany, or are we ready to give it up in favor of one large Protestant Church? This is the issue we feel is being clouded.” All the propaganda is one-sided, argues Preus, with everyone from

the World Council of Churches to Martin Niemoeller (anti-Nazi hero), Hans Asmussen, and others making the case for one German Church. Sasse on the other hand was being falsely smeared. (Strathman, an Erlangen colleague forcibly retired in the “De-Nazification” process at Erlangen, charged that Sasse was responsible for the firing and vilification of several in the theology faculty. Sasse denied the charges, but the matter was picked up in the American press.) Preus concludes his article by quoting a letter from Sasse of November 20, 1946, in which Sasse states that while it is worthy that the American Lutherans do not wish to interfere in internal German religious matters,

Calvinism, entrenched in Geneva [i.e., WCC], and Methodism [are] now interfering militantly . . . They demand vocally and clearly altar and pulpit fellowship within the “Evangelical Church in Germany” between Lutherans, Reformed, and United.

Sasse notes the silence of the American Lutherans and then warns prophetically: “For it cannot help but react on American Lutheranism if our Lutheran Church is destroyed as Church, to remain only a tolerated tendency within a syncretistic Protestantism.”<sup>17</sup> Why the silence in America?

#### SASSE IN ST. LOUIS: 1948

Ludwig Fuerbringer, C. F. W. Walther’s nephew and student, who later followed in the footsteps of his uncle as president of Concordia Seminary (1931–1943), had become editor of *Der Lutheraner* in his retirement. Just a month before his death he wrote to H. Preus stating his full agreement with Preus’s assessment of the German situation. In fact, he had been corresponding with Sasse for some time, even before the war.<sup>18</sup> While the *Concordia Theological Monthly* had been referring very positively to Sasse’s struggle for genuine Lutheranism in Germany in the 1930s,<sup>19</sup> now, after the war, the leadership of the institution was moving in a more ecumenical direction. Particularly after 1947 there was increasingly less interest in what Sasse has to say. This has been documented elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> Sasse wrote his famous “The End of the Lutheran Territorial Churches of Germany” in September of 1948 while in St. Louis, and it is worthwhile briefly to note events in this regard.

The LCMS “Emergency Planning Council” (a committee to oversee German aid) met on July 22, 1947. F. E. Mayer, who had been spending considerable time in Germany, suggested the committee recommend that Sasse be brought to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, “as a guest of the Missouri Synod for a period of one year in an undetermined capacity.” After becoming familiar with the Missouri Synod, Sasse would then return to Europe “as a teacher and preacher of orthodox Lutheranism in the struggle for the preservation of an Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany.”<sup>21</sup> In October, Behnken wrote Sieck from Germany that the LCMS could make its influence felt in Germany most through the *Lutheraner*. “This literary work can best be done by someone who is intimately acquainted with the situation here and understands all the pitfalls of the EKID. I believe that man to be Dr. Sasse.” Behnken proposed that Sasse begin teaching the second semester in St. Louis in February, 1948. Behnken wrote:

I also know that there will be many questions in your mind. But please be assured that we have given them all serious consideration and are of the conviction that Dr. Sasse's attendance at our seminary would be of invaluable help to the work of our church in Germany and at the same time would equip Dr. Sasse for work in Germany upon his return.<sup>22</sup>

Sieck did indeed have questions. The "Administrative Council" of the faculty met in Sieck's office on Wednesday, October 29, 1947. The Council appointed "[F. E.] Mayer, Polack and myself [Sieck] to make recommendations." The committee noted several concerns, including the appropriateness of having a non-Synodical Conference lecturer at the seminary; Sasse's poor health, which the committee alleged had made him "highly irritable and rather pessimistic in his outlook"; and Sasse's approach to the doctrine of inspiration, which "differs from ours, though he is convinced of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures." But the final reason is no doubt the heart of the issue:

Inviting Dr. Sasse to come to Concordia Seminary would be construed by the Lutherans in the United States as well as by the German Church as our taking sides with one group. Whether or not such a step would seriously interfere with the effectiveness of our work in Europe would have to be given serious consideration. His open letter to the Lund meeting caused considerable consternation, not only among the German delegation but also among all Lutherans present at Lund.

The letter then proceeds to "request you not to urge this invitation upon us, especially not until you personally have had opportunity to confer with the Bavarian Church authorities." The faculty does not desire an exchange professor arrangement, but is not averse to having "leading churchmen" visit to give series of lectures. The critique concludes, "The men of our faculty who were at Lund [Lutheran World Federation, 1947] and some others are averse to having Sasse come." This point dare not be lost. The constituting meeting of the LWF had nothing to say against EKID. This and its mild constitution and reports (including very weak and ambiguous statements on the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament and the unity of the church in the sectional reports<sup>23</sup>) insured the LWF as a tool for the broad expansion of Calvinized "inclusive Lutheranism," in other words, Lutheranism that fails to take the Formula of Concord seriously. Sasse had delivered an impassioned plea to Lund regarding EKID and warned against its Calvinism and crypto-Calvinism. It went completely unheeded. And worse, the Missourians present, no doubt enamored of the "great men" of world Lutheranism and enjoying the "fresh air outside the ghetto," found Sasse's letter utterly distasteful. As a result they wanted nothing to do with Sasse.<sup>24</sup>

#### **"I SEE BLACK FOR THIS CHURCH"**

It is not clear how the invitation was finally carried out, but it was. The military authorities were slow in responding to the request. The War Department wrote Sieck on March 8 that Sasse's visa was approved. April had come and Sasse was still waiting

(the semester had begun in February!). Sasse was wondering whether "subversive elements in the States are objecting to his trip."<sup>25</sup> A rather pointed letter from the synod president to one possible "subversive element" seemed to get things rolling.

While waiting, Sasse learned that Erlangen University had called a Reformed New Testament man to the theological faculty. Sasse wrote Behnken in February informing him that this meant a *status confessionis* for him. It was a breach of the faculty's own confession. Circumstances (no doubt family) meant Sasse would not immediately leave the Bavarian Church, but he informed Behnken that he had requested altar fellowship with the Breslau Synod of the free church. He would no longer commune at his territorial church altar.<sup>26</sup>

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### ***The Missourians naïvely thought they were having real and lasting influence upon the German state churches.***

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There is no need to delve into the various meetings and conferences Sasse attended while in the U.S. in the summer of 1948. L. Meyer wrote to Sieck encouraging him to use his influence on Sasse, lest Sasse paint too negative a picture of matters in Germany. Sieck complied and also directed a warning to Sasse that he keep his nose out of Synodical Conference "dissonances." Sasse received it graciously.<sup>27</sup>

While Sasse was in the U.S., Th. Graebner, P. Bretscher, F. E. Mayer, W. Baepler, A. O. Fuerbringer, and L. Meyer were at the first meeting at Bad Boll in June and July, 1948, being bedazzled by the likes of Elert, Kinder, Koeberle, Schlink, Sommerlath, Thielicke, and others.<sup>28</sup> The Missourians naïvely thought they were having real and lasting influence upon the German state churches, and hence were very reticent to criticize EKID out of hand. F. E. Mayer was presenting rather pointed critiques of the events that went into the formation of EKID for the *Concordia Theological Monthly*. But he and the rest of the faculty in St. Louis finally could not see what Sasse (and the free church brethren) saw so clearly: EKID was a new union church; altar fellowship is church fellowship.

Meiser responded to a letter from Th. Graebner confirming the latter's view of Sasse. "Excess," "pathological," "thoroughly enslaved man," says Meiser of Sasse. Then the bishop, whom Sasse had so resolutely supported, aided, and counseled through the *Kirchenkampf*, stated to Graebner:

You are completely right, that one can speak with us plainly, unlike Sasse, who already issues for us the death certificate, of a new self consciousness of Lutheranism, which extends far into the union churches. Lately a church like the Berlin-Brandenburg Provincial Church has denoted itself in its new constitution as a church of the Lutheran Reformation. That is in this church certainly, measured by the standards of genuine Lutheran

denomination, only a weak beginning; however it is exactly that, a beginning . . . so however, it creates the basis for a new development.<sup>29</sup>

Beginning or end? What Graebner (and the St. Louis faculty) and Meiser believed to be a new beginning, Sasse saw as the death of the Lutheran Church. The German men who took part in the Bad Boll discussions quickly began fading from the scene and the “Lutheranism” of Bultmann and like-minded compatriots (who had existed quite happily in the “Confessing Church” all along) continued and broadened its confession and church-destroying dominance of modern German theological study. And the infection spread around the Lutheran world, just as Sasse had warned.

In July 1948, the *Grundordnung* of the EKID was accepted. In September, the Bavarian Church voted to join EKID. For Sasse the end had come. Sasse had written to Leiv Aalen just before leaving for St. Louis:

It is of course too late to still explain to the Lutheranism of the world regarding EKID. . . . what has happened in Germany since 1945 is the conscious setting aside of the remnant of the Lutheran Church . . . I will use the rest of my strength in America to call conservative Lutheranism to its senses, after I have done so without effect in Europe . . . My address is Concordia Theological [*sic*] Seminary, 801 De Mun . . . If the EKID comes into existence, then I will leave the Territorial Church and go to the Free Church. No other choice remains for me and my friends if we are not to deny our confession.<sup>30</sup>

To his horror he found that Missourians were assisting in the demise of the German Lutheran Church.<sup>31</sup> It was one of the most bitter disappointments of his life. As mentioned, Mayer and Graebner tried to convince Sasse to remain in the Bavarian Church the night before he left St. Louis. But he knew what he was doing. And he had a call in hand to the seminary of one of the Australian churches. His “Letters to Lutheran Pastors” began in December.

The year 1949 was terribly traumatic for Sasse. His student and friend Pastor F. W. Hopf refused to be subject to the Bavarian Church’s decision to join EKID. Back in Germany, Sasse had to suffer through indignities as his close friend was finally removed from office by Meiser. Kirsten describes that tragic event as the end of the Bavarian Church’s history as a church of the Formula of Concord.<sup>32</sup>

The story becomes even more troubling. Sasse related years later how the Synod of Hannover had voted against joining EKID. The chair, Bishop Lilje, then called for a closed session. When all but the delegates were out, he read a letter from an “older Missourian”<sup>33</sup> stating that there were no theological grounds against

joining EKID (or the WCC, for that matter). Then the bishop asked: “Do you want to be more Lutheran than Missouri?” Another vote was taken. The decision was reversed.<sup>34</sup> Back home in Germany, fresh from his stay in St. Louis, Sasse wrote again to Aalen in reference to the Missouri Synod: “Young capabilities do not amount to much, and I see black for the future of this church. I could accomplish nothing there.”<sup>35</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The fateful events surrounding 1948 have been devastating for the Lutheran Church. Aside from the confessional bodies in America (LCMS, WELS, ELS) and their small sister churches around the globe, Lutheranism has completely fallen to the ecumenical vision of Calvin and that of Karl Barth. Lutheranism is but one viewpoint within larger Protestantism. Intercommunion with Reformed denominations is the accepted norm. Increasingly it has become a church without dogma. And a church without dogma is finally a church without the gospel. Sasse clearly saw it coming.

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*A church that cannot confess the truth clearly at its altar will finally confess the truth nowhere.*

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The controversy in Missouri in the seventies was but an effect of Missouri’s post-war reorientation. In the course of the controversy the Synodical Conference was lost, the Australian church was weakened, and several daughter churches of Missouri were brought into the orbit of the “inclusive” Lutheranism of the LWF. Missouri was able to discern the heretical aspects of the historicism that wafted into its midst on “fresh winds.” But it has had much more difficulty discerning the issues of the nature of the church and her fellowship that brought openness to the historicism in the first place. Today in Missouri “selective fellowship” is very common.

We must heed the warnings of the history of the Lutheran Church in this century, especially the warning provided by EKID and its influence on formerly confessional Lutheran bodies throughout the world. A church that cannot confess the truth clearly at its altar will finally confess the truth nowhere. Should the smaller confessional bodies lose strict adherence to the Formula of Concord and its church-dividing condemnations, they can expect the same fate. Finally, altar fellowship is church fellowship. That is the oft-repeated fact of history of which Sasse so tirelessly tried to make us aware. We dare not fail to heed his voice. Sasse was right about 1948. LOGIA

## NOTES

1. H. Sasse to H. Meiser, 27 Jul 1946. (Original in Hannover Landeskirchenarchiv/Bestand D15/V/Nr. 27/ Lutherrat/Stoll File).
2. Hermann Sasse, "Concerning the Status of the Lutheran Churches in the World," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 20 (August 1949): 621 [hereafter *CTM*].
3. *Amerikanisches Kirchtum von Pfarrer Lic. Hermann Sasse* (Berlin=Dahlem: Wichern=Verlag G.m.b.H., 1927).
4. H. Sasse to R. Preus, 19 Jan 1975 (copy in the author's collection). On 11 July 1975 he again wrote Preus: "ELIM and SEMINEX did not represent a real programme beyond what had been the programme of the late Lou Sieck: Making Concordia one of the great seminaries of American Protestantism . . ."
5. Sasse lectured on "The Church in the Twentieth Century" at Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, in 1965. The comment is recorded in the class notes taken by Professor O. Stahlke, in the possession of the author.
6. The "Confessing Church" represented those Christians who valiantly rejected the Nazified leadership of the DEK, and formed their own "provisional" church governments.
7. That is, confessions are of local and temporally determined authority, and that the act of "confessing" finally is more significant than confessions themselves. See Herman Sasse, *Here We Stand* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938; reprint Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), 85ff. and 166ff.
8. "After the Barmen Synod Barth and Asmussen trumpeted this declaration as a new "Confession" and the basis for a new Union, though they knew what Bonhoeffer (Ev. Theologie 1938, Heft 6: 227) says today in plain language, namely that with this view of the synod and its declaration 'the Augustana has already been decisively abandoned.' Here Bonhoeffer was as imprudent as Asmussen. He, shall we say, let the cat out of the bag a little early; and he did this also by openly declaring that the Barmen Confession is God's Word! 'If we take this message of the synod with absolute earnestness, we must then confess that God the Lord Himself is responsible for this message.' Then he asks: 'What has God said regarding His church and the way it is to go, if He has spoken through Barmen and Dahlem?' This is pure *Schwärmertum*, which ends in blasphemy. This is the result if the Barmen Confession is declared a binding doctrinal decision. We can only declare to the 'Provisional Leadership' that what they understand by 'Confessing Church,' namely, a church comprising Lutheran, Reformed, and United [Christians] based upon the Barmen Confession, which appeared in Barmen as a result of a divine miracle, is a sect, and indeed, one of the worst we have experienced in Germany. We understand something different when we speak of the Confessing Church." "Wider die Schwarmgeister," in *Lutherische Kirche*, 1936, 15 (August 1), 237ff.
9. Beckmann, *Kirchliches Jahrbuch*, 8–9. Sasse had privately expressed his desire to begin the *Jahrbuch* again in 1945, but the editorship went to Beckmann apparently because of Sasse's poor health.
10. Beckmann, *Jahrbuch*, 9–10.
11. Beckmann, *Jahrbuch*, 15.
12. Comment of Beckmann, *Jahrbuch*, 17. Sasse had seen it coming, of course. He wrote to F. E. Mayer on 1 January 1947: "It is clear what direction our Landeskirchen are now going, the United Evan. Luth. Church [VELKD], but in such a way that the unity of the first will not be endangered, that an 'inclusive,' not 'exclusive' confessionalism will be allowed, i.e., a Lutheranism without the Formula of Concord, a Lutheranism that is on principle in communion fellowship with the Reformed and acknowledges the Barmen Theological Declaration as

- [the] orthodox interpretation of the Augustana instead of the Formula of Concord. The Reformed since Calvin have certainly wanted nothing more . . ." (CHI, F. E. Mayer file [071–072]).
13. Beckmann, *Jahrbuch*, 67.
  14. Beckmann, *Jahrbuch*, 95ff.
  15. Hans Kirsten, *Einigkeit im Glauben und in der Lehre: Der Weg der lutherische Freikirchen in Deutschland nach dem letzten Kriege* (Gross Oesingen: Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung Heinrich Harms), 96–97.
  16. Herman Preus, "Clouding the Issue," *Lutheran Outlook* (March 1947): 70ff.
  17. Preus, "Clouding the Issue," 72.
  18. L. Fuerbringer to H. Preus, 9 April 1947: "With very much interest I read your article in the last issue of the 'Lutheran Outlook' about church conditions in Germany. Please pardon me if I take the liberty of sending you the issues of the 'Lutheraner' which have appeared this year. If you consult particularly No. 2, p. 22; No. 3, p. 41; and No. 7, p. 102, you will find that I take the same position as you do, only in a briefer way, because the 'Lutheraner' is a family paper. I know that you are well acquainted with Prof. Sasse. I have also corresponded with him, even in the years before the war, and have received several letters since the close of the war . . ."
  19. "God bless his powerful witness!" writes Engelder of Sasse's book *Kirche und Herrenmahl* in *CTM* 10 (February 1939): 155–56; J. T. Mueller quotes extensively without comment from Sasse's article "Warum müssen wir an der lutherischen Abendmahlslehre festhalten?" in *CTM* 9 (April 1938), 310–11; Engelder quotes extensively without comment Sasse's "Die Aufgabe der lutherischen Kirche" in *CTM* 10 (October 1938): 783–784; J. T. Mueller extensively quotes Sasse's article "Quia" in *CTM* 9 (May 1938): 391–392. There are other references.
  20. See Kurt Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press), 1977, 49ff.
  21. L. Meyer to L. Sieck, 23 July 1947, CHI, Sasse Bib. file.
  22. J. Behnken to L. Sieck, 22 Oct 1947, CHI, Sasse file.
  23. See *Proceedings of The Lutheran World Federation Assembly, Lund, Sweden June 30–July 6, 1947* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1948), 54ff.
  24. See *Zwei 'Offene Briefe' (1947 und 1948)*, *Lutherische Blätter* 30, 115 (9 August 1978).
  25. Chaplain Erhard Harms to J. Behnken, 1 Apr 1948, CHI, Sasse file. J. Behnken to L. B. Meyer, 10 Apr 1948, CHI, Sasse file.
  26. H. Sasse to J. Behnken, 11 Feb 1948, CHI, Sasse file.
  27. H. Sasse to L. Sieck 17 July 1948, CHI, Sasse file.
  28. On the partially heartening and partially pathetic meetings at Bad Boll between Missourians and German State Church theologians, see Hans Kirsten, *Einigkeit*, 100ff.
  29. H. Meiser to Th. Graebner, 14 Mar 1949, CHI, Th. Graebner, 200-G, Box 45, file B).
  30. H. Sasse to L. Aalen, 22 May 1948. Copy in the author's possession.
  31. H. Sasse to H. Kirsten, 10 Sep 1948; quoted in Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, 55.
  32. Kirsten, *Einigkeit*, 113.
  33. Theodore Graebner.
  34. H. Sasse to R. Preus, 19 Jan 1975. Copy in the author's possession. On Graebner's "dogmatic compass," see Marquart *Anatomy*, 54–55.
  35. H. Sasse to L. Aalen, 20 Dec 1948, Sasse-Aalen correspondence, Walther Memorial Library, Fort Wayne.

# On American Lutheranism

HERMANN SASSE



H. Sasse.  
63 Clifton Street,  
Prospect, (Adelaide), S.A.  
June 24, 1964

To the participants in the "Interview"  
(The *Lutheran Witness*, June 9 and 23, 1964),  
Dr. Oliver R. Harms, Dr. Roland P. Wiederaenders,  
Dr. Theodore F. Nickel, Dr. Alfred O. Fuerbringer,  
Dr. J. A. O. Preus, Dr. Martin H. Franzmann,  
Dr. Herbert J. A. Bouman,  
C/- Office, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,  
St. Louis 2, Missouri, U.S.A.

Venerable and dear Brethren:

THE *LUTHERAN WITNESS* OF JUNE 9 AND 23, 1964, CONTAINS THE most interesting Interview "We must all grow . . . theologically" on the work of the "Commission on Theology and Church Relations." It is not the purpose of these pages to add to the avalanche of roughly two hundred reactions to your first progress report ("Revelation, Inspiration, and Inerrancy") under which you are buried. Nor is it my intention to start further avalanches which are to be expected with the appearance of new reports as they are announced in the Interview. This is rather a personal letter addressed to each of the participants of the "Interview." As you know me and I know you personally, I speak to you as friend to friends, as brother to brethren. If I say something foolish, please bear with me. But speak I must as a representative of a generation which is now slowly dying out. It is the generation of Lutheran pastors who after the First World War when the churches in Germany were reorganized tried, under the leadership of the great churchmen like Wilhelm Zoellner, to restore the Lutheran Church in Prussia; who later started, over against the claims of secular political powers on the Church that movement which has become known as the "Confessing Church" in Germany. It is the generation of those who in the Lutheran World Convention under the leadership of men such as Moorhead, Ihmels, Ralph Long, Michael Reu, tied together the Lutherans of the world against the rising

world unionism, and who did what they could, in the old World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne, 1928 [*sic*], and later to build up the coming "Oikumene" as a federation of the great confessional churches. We failed because the doctrinal substance of the Protestant churches, including those who claimed the Augsburg Confession had vanished to such a degree that they could not resist the raging currents of a world syncretism in which the substance of the Christian faith will vanish and in which the Church of the Gospel will perhaps exist "as a cottage in a vineyard . . . as a besieged city" (Is 1:8), as small minority groups comparable to the remnants of the old Christian churches in the post-Christian, Mohammedan era of the Orient, or as the oppressed churches in the Communist world today. For this will be the destiny of the true Church of Christ even if the phantastic plans of the "One World Church" under the leadership of Rome should be realized.

It is from personal experiences in Germany and other European countries, from studies in the U.S.A. and from many years of ecumenical studies that I look upon your situation and ask for your forbearance in putting before you some thoughts.

## 1.

It seems to me that one of the things which your people must learn is to think of the worldwide consequences of all your decisions. Everybody understands that a Commission of your Church, established by your Convention, has to carry out its specific tasks, and that your reports have to give account of what has been done. But already the fact that you have consulted your sister churches in Europe, South America and Australia, makes it clear to your congregations that other churches are involved. One may regret that the wider fellowship in which your Church stood in the Synodical Conference has been narrowed through the unfortunate events of the last years. But the fellowship with other churches still exists, whether these are big or small. Our Lord has always shown a remarkable predilection for small numbers and little flocks. Instead of organizing vast evangelistic campaigns He has, in the terms of modern missiology, wasted His time by seeking the individual, leaving the ninety-nine in the desert for the one last sheep. We modern Christians seem sometimes to think and act as if He said: "Where two or three millions are gathered in my name. . . ." Besides, the small Free Churches represent in all weakness the faith for which the Fathers of Missouri left their old country. We should be very careful not to condemn our own fathers and so to destroy the very foundations of our Church. Moreover, what Missouri's

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HERMANN SASSE wrote a number of letters to American churchmen, of which this is one example, that reveal his extraordinary grasp of the American Lutheran scene.

commission may teach on such questions as Revelation and Inspiration does not only concern its sister churches, but all Christendom. For up to this day Christians of all denominations have looked at Missouri as the stronghold of Orthodox Lutheranism. The repercussions of a false decision may have a detrimental effect on the churches that claim to be still churches of the Reformation, as, on the other hand, a sound, Biblical decision may be a blessing for many churches, even outside the Lutheran orbit. It belongs to the very nature of any true confession that it is made “in the presence of God and of all Christendom before both our contemporaries and our posterity” (Form. Conc., Conclusion).<sup>1</sup>

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***It seems to me that one of the things which your people must learn is to think of the worldwide consequences of all your decisions.***

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This, then, would be my first wish for your future work that you educate your people to think of the world-wide implications of your actions, not in terms of a denominational parochialism as if Missouri had to solve the great theological problems of our day only for itself, and not in terms of a false ecumenicity, as if we would find the solution by means of a “Dialog” with all kinds of Christians irrespective of their faith, but in terms of that Lutheran ecumenicity which combines the belief in the *Una Sancta* as an existing reality with the faithful adherence to the confessions of the unchangeable truth of the Gospel of which nothing can be yielded or compromised.

## 2.

If we realize that the solution of the problems at issue must be based on that understanding of Holy Scripture which the entire Lutheran Church—we mean the Church which has remained faithful to the Book of Concord—*magna consensu* confesses, then it becomes necessary to define what you are seeking. Modern Protestantism has lost almost entirely with the confessions of the Fathers also the understanding of what a confession of the Church is. This is true of the Anglicans, the vast majority of the Presbyterian and Reformed (Switzerland, Holland) Churches, the Congregationalists, the majority of the Baptists, the Methodists. With the loss of their confessions, these churches are disappearing in the great union churches of our age. Only remnants of them will survive. The old confessions are being replaced everywhere by new “confessions” or doctrinal statements. It is significant that all these new documents follow the pattern which, as a spokesman for modern Reformed theology, Karl Barth, has established in his opinion for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Cardiff 1925) on the possibility and desirability of a new Reformed confession of faith (*Ges. Vorträge* Bd. 2, 1928, pp. 76–105).<sup>2</sup> The confession can only have a locally limited validity; it must be regarded as something preliminary which may be replaced at any time by a

better insight into the truth of Holy Scripture; it must never claim catholicity in space and time, as the Lutheran confession does which claims to express the truth of God’s Word which is the same everywhere and at all times. This view of modern Reformed theology has found its practical expression in the union movements in Europe (Germany, Holland, France), in the Ecumenical Movement (see the definition of the nature of unity by the WCC) and especially in the “younger churches” throughout the world. Everywhere we find the new confessional formulas, different according to the local needs, in Canada, U.S.A., India, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, (“Barmen” and the EKID) and in many other churches throughout Christendom.

And the Lutheran Churches? As usual, they said neither Yes nor No. Even where a better theological insight was present, the practical necessities of what was regarded as such determined the policy of the churches. Halfheartedly they followed the Reformed leadership, quietly protesting, as Bishop Meiser did in a famous conversation with Barth: “Nicht wahr, Herr Professor, Barmen war doch nur eine Theologische Erklärung, kein Bekenntnis?” Whereupon Barth replied: “Nicht wahr, Herr Landesbischof, Sie haben doch damals bekannt?” This is the situation everywhere in the churches of the Lutheran World Federation. They all follow the lead of the modern Reformed Churches into the great syncretism of the outgoing twentieth century. Some do it reluctantly, others jubilantly under the influence of the ecumenical enthusiasm of our time. But they all go the same way, under the guidance of the Spirit, as they say. But what is that Spirit which leads in South India already to a “dialog” with Paganism?

And Missouri? Why is it that so many faithful Lutherans in the whole world have been waiting in vain for a clear testimony in South India, for a rejection of the unionism of the WCC and its national and local councils? We understand the great difficulties in which a Church like Missouri finds itself in this time of transition. But should not one of the reasons for the failure to give a clear lead lie in the fact that also this great church does no longer fully understand the Lutheran confession? It is certainly not fair to judge a great church from mistakes or errors of an individual. But sometimes such mistake may shed light on the situation of this church. It is with deep consternation that friends of your Church have read the article in *The American Lutheran* (Febr. 1964)<sup>3</sup> in which Melancthon, and the late Melancthon at that, and not Luther is presented as the true and normative teacher of the churches of the Augsburg Confession and we are informed that the nature of Lutheranism is no longer to be found in the *Sola Fide*, but in the doctrinal heritage we have in common with the Catholic Church before the Reformation. Why has this not been rectified? And if this can be taught in one of your faculties, what, then, has become of the great consensus in the Lutheran faith which once was the strength of Missouri? And how will you reach a true consensus on the doctrine of Holy Scripture and on all the topics mentioned in your rich program if you are no longer on in the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*? I do not want to be misunderstood. The consensus in the Lutheran faith exists still in your ministry, at least among the majority of your pastors, who faithfully preach and teach the article with which the Church stands and falls. It exists in your congregations which live in the faith of the Catechism. But it is in danger in your theology.

## 3.

This is not—I want to emphasize this as strongly as possible—the fault of your present generation of professors, least of all of the youngest among them who have partly been trained in a totally un-Lutheran environment and have not always been given the opportunity to adapt their highly specialised knowledge to the doctrine of their church. I do not know of one man in St. Louis and Springfield who does not want wholeheartedly to be a faithful member of the ministry of your Church, loyal to his ordination vow. What your theology—as perhaps the theology of all Lutheran churches—is suffering from are partly the shortcomings and mistakes of the past. It is astonishing what the Lutheran Churches of America have built up in a few generations. No European church would have been able to do that. For almost all Theological Faculties in Europe with the exception of the few free institutions (e.g., The Menighetsfakulteten Oslo<sup>4</sup>) are institutions of the state, entirely financed by the Government. Your institutions had necessarily to be training schools for pastors. The

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***A confession is for the Lutheran Church never simply a set of propositions in which the Church or several churches do agree.***

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necessity of a special training for professors was recognized only too late. “We want to [be] training pastors and not professors.” This I heard with almost the same words stated at Thiensville and Mount Airy still after the Second World War when I asked about post-graduate training. You will not have pastors unless you have the professors to train them, was my answer. So young scholars went to other churches or to Europe for training. They came back with ideas and ideals which did not fit in the Lutheran Churches at home. These churches had an older generation of professors, some of whom developed into great scholars, but the majority had to be satisfied with the faithful *paradosis* of the theological school which was regarded as normative in the individual church. It was a churchly theology in contrast to the unchurchly and individualistic theology of Europe. A consensus was kept which in no European faculty existed, except for very short periods in some places. For the succession of professors was determined by the state upon the suggestion of names by the faculty. Your Church was blessed by a whole series of great scholars. Many came from Europe and brought with them the theology of the Lutheran Awakening. This theology, based on the thorough studies in classics, had developed before in Germany the new study of history (Ranke<sup>5</sup>) and the natural sciences had been accepted by the German Gymnasium. Hence historical theology was for you an auxiliary discipline, and natural science was regarded with distrust. It was the same with us in Australia. When Kavel established with Fritzsche<sup>6</sup> the Lutheran Church he was looking for a text-book on science in Germany, for the school he was planning, in which the Copernican view of the world was rejected. He did not find

any. Too late the problems were seen. The clause on the full scientific knowledge of Adam which is found in the Brief Statement, a late reflection of the Patristic picture of Adam as the perfect philosopher, is the monument of the great embarrassment in which your Church found itself even after the First World War. You were in a position similar to that of the Roman Church at the eve of the Modernist controversy. It took Rome fifty years, from 1893 to 1943,<sup>7</sup> to assimilate theologically the established facts of the history and natural science (as distinguished from mere theories). Step by step the old positions concerning the Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuch, the authorship of the Psalms and of the book of Isaiah, the historicity of the book of Jonah, etc. were given up, the decisions of the Bible Commission or the Holy Office rescinded. A similar development is going on with you. Discipline demands that you not write against the Brief Statement. But the Brief Statement is not dogma. It is an expression of what your Church officially stands or stood for, but it has not the status of the Book of Concord. The Confession of the Church is not an object of legislation. It is *extra controversiam*—even Dr. Franklin Fry “takes it for granted,” whatever that may mean. But doctrinal declarations are object of the ecclesiastical legislation. This is a very important point of view for your discussion of the question: “What is a doctrine?” If you try to translate this into another European or an ancient language, you will find that the question cannot be understood outside the Lutheran Churches of America. “*Quid est dogma?*” is the meaning of the question. What is *dogma*, a doctrine which must be accepted because it is taught in Scripture? What is to be regarded as theological theory, *theologoumenon*, because it is not clearly taught in Scripture?<sup>†8</sup> Here again we meet with the problem what the nature of the confession of the Church is.

## 4.

A confession is for the Lutheran Church never simply a set of propositions in which the Church or several churches do agree. This is the great misunderstanding of modern Protestantism which has crept also into the Lutheran Church. The idea of such modern “confession” is that some Christians or whole churches try to find out what their common convictions are, how each of them understands the Scriptures and whether they can agree on a common understanding. This leads always to “confessions of a minimum,” to the discovery and expression of the least common denominator. The careless interpretation of the Latin text of CA VII has lead [*sic*] even Lutherans to this view of the Confession of the Church. Many individuals agree in a certain common doctrine whatever that may be and ascribe the discovery of this common possession to the “guidance of the Spirit.” But the consensus of which CA VII speaks is the consent in the maximum, in the true Gospel, as the German text shows: “*dass da einträchtiglich nach reinem Verstand das Evangelium predigt und die Sakrament laut der Einsetzung Christi gereicht werden.*” The word “*einträchtiglich*” appears already in the first sentence of CA I and is rendered by the Latin “*magno consensu.*”

It seems to me that the theologians of Missouri, before defining what a doctrine is, must try to understand anew the deepest nature of our confession. One of the reasons why there are so many misunderstandings among theologians and lay-



men in America is the fact that you never had to fight for the confession against those who tried to take it away from you. The confession “was taken for granted.” You had not to defend it, to suffer for it, as your Fathers had to. The same situation exists in Australia. Thus we as you had the time to fight each other for real or alleged deviations from the Lutheran doctrine. So it was in Europe until the totalitarian state of this or that colour made the confession of faith, the confession of the pure doctrine, compulsory, dangerous and costly. It should not be forgotten that also our faith was weak. There were many who denied the faith. We do not judge them. We shall never forget that the first confessor of the Church whom Christ honoured with the name of *kepha* became the first to deny Him and was saved only by the prayer of his Savior (Luke 22:32) and by His grace. Much of this experience has been forgotten. As all church history also this chapter was and is a sad chapter, full of sin and error. But in these years the Augsburg Confession and the Tenth Article of the Formula of Concord<sup>9</sup> have gained a vital importance. Some of the great insights of those years have found an expression in Edmund Schlink’s *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*,<sup>10</sup> though we must never forget that Schlink himself, as a theologian within the Union, does not accept the Formula of Concord and accepts Bucer’s interpretation of the Wittenberg Concord as the sufficient basis of intercommunion between the adherents of the Lutheran and the Heidelberg Catechism, contrary to the Lutheran interpretation of that document in Form. Conc. where it has become, in Luther’s understanding, part and parcel of our confession.

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***We have to know a lot more than our Fathers did if we are to answer the questions of our time.***

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If it is your aim “to involve the whole church in the proper study of theology” there is no other way open but to teach in all congregations the Augsburg Confession and the Large Catechism as a minimum requirement. I can assure you that this is a great spiritual experience for all involved if it is done in the right way. It presupposes a careful preparation on the part of the pastor. “Bekennnisstunden” have been a great enrichment for our Churches, especially if our congregations learn that each article of the CA as each part of the Catechism teaches in its way the great central *articulua stantis ecclesiae*. Booklets must be written for that purpose. And before all, we must fight that “hurry up” spirit which destroys not only theology, but also the spiritual life.

**5.**

If I may be allowed to say a critical word on the Interview, I must say that what I missed in it is the spirit of repentance. I understand that in a document in which you had to defend your work you could not possibly make a confession of sins. But if you

speak of the tasks before you, you cannot fail to recognize the sins of omission and the urgency to make amend for them. It is easy for us theologians to make the proud confession that we believe the world to be about six thousand years old and the days of creation to be days of twenty-four hours. This may be an heroic act of faith if we know what we say. As a rule, we have not given much thought even to the epistemological problems of such statements, let alone to the physical and metaphysical questions involved. Have we ever thought of the question why the Church has abstained from dogmatizing on the days of creation and the extension of the world in space and time? The Fathers of the fourth century who had to defend the Christian faith in a world of a high scientific culture, men like Basil, Ambrose and Augustine, have unceasingly warned the Church against the dangers of a false apologetics. And we who live in a world in which the views of the world of Aristotle, Newton, Kant are completely refuted and even the axioms of the geometries which we have learnt are proved to be mere assumptions and not absolute truth, should be very careful in criticizing modern physics and astro-physics which none of us understands but which present to us realities of a terrible nature if we only think of the practical application of nuclear physics. But even if we theologians would indulge in the luxury of denying the existence or realities only because we do not understand them, with what right do we excommunicate the members of the Church who as faithful Christians serve God in their vocation which is based on God’s command, Gen. 1:28? For that is what we are doing if we lay upon man’s shoulders unbearable burdens (Matth. 23:4), demanding to believe as word of God what actually may be only an old human tradition about the understanding of that Word. How many sons of our Church may have lost their faith because we were so proud of our orthodoxy, so selfish in our refusal to take cognizance of the facts of history and nature that we let them end in despair of the Christian faith. Rome has learned from the errors of the past. “Never again a Galileo case.” The same warning do we hear from the great leader of Dutch Reformed theology, Berkouwer<sup>11</sup> in Amsterdam. On the other hand, what a lack of feeling of responsibility manifests itself in the easy way in which modern Protestant theologians abandon with old philosophical errors and false interpretation of the Bible the eternal Word of God, the Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word of God and its inerrancy in the sense of Luther’s definition: “Gottes Wort lügt nicht.”<sup>12</sup> Theology is not an easy science. We have to know a lot more than our Fathers did if we are to answer the questions of our time.

In this sense we all should not be afraid to admit the failures of our Church and to take our share in the judgment of God in patience and faith, in the faith in Him who is the Saviour of all men and also the Saviour of His body. This should determine our view of the history of the Church and its theology. Certainly, there is “a cumulative experience of Christian theology. Theologians of the Reformation stood on the shoulders of the church fathers’ contemporary witness to the Scriptures.” Yes, but why is nothing said about the great doctors of the Middle Ages? And obviously are not all church fathers of the same dignity. The history of theology is also a history of error and heresy. The seventeenth-century dogmaticians “stood on the shoulders of the

Reformers but had additional insights.” Quite right, but some of the additional insights were doubtful, e.g., the reception of certain thoughts of Thomas Aquinas. And so we shall find the entire history of the Church and its theology to be a history of progress in the truth and of the rise of error after error. Otherwise our generation would represent the climax of history, the highest summit at least reached so far.

This is *theologia gloriae* which Luther rejected. For him the world, including the outward, visible church, was a battlefield on which the great fight goes on between God and Satan, Christ and Antichrist (in his various forms). He saw the seriousness of the attacks of the old evil foe. Let us believe what we sing. Do we really believe that our poor theology will overcome the might of heresy in the world? The *theologia gloriae* does not take quite seriously error and heresy. Arianism was not conquered by theological discussions. It is not true that it was dead in 381. On the contrary. It hid itself in the sheep’s clothes of Orthodoxy. It is true that the Creed of the 150 Fathers in 381 assembled at Constantinople had no longer to repeat the specific formulas of condemnation. but since this synod was not regarded as Ecumenical before the sixth century—it was merely a synod of the East—they could not abolish the Creed of “the great Synod” of 325. This remained the official Creed of the Church until we find in the decision of Chalcedon the three formulas side by side: the old Nicene Creed, the Creed of 381 and the declaration of Chalcedon. I mention this only because it illustrates the fact that no condemnation of any heresy is ever withdrawn. Heretics can return to the truth, as the last Germanic Arian church in 589 accepted the Catholic Faith. But the anathema against the heresy remains because every great heresy returns again and again in the Church. Hence the express condemnation of the old and new Arians in the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord.

I mention this as an example for the seriousness with which the Church at all times was to fight error and heresy. In this respect there cannot be any latitude in the Church. The old Missouri Synod—and I hope in this respect it will never change in spite of all legitimate theological growth—has been for all churches in America the great example of a church that cares for purity of doctrine. In spite of all mistakes and shortcomings it has shown to other churches that the Gospel of the saving grace of God in Christ, the proclamation of the love of God is inseparably linked up with the never ceasing fight against the heresies with which the old evil foe tries to destroy it. But this fight must begin in ourselves with the daily prayer that God may keep us in His Word. We ourselves cannot do that.

I am sending this to the office of the President, St. Louis, asking Dr. Oliver Harms, or in his absence, Dr. R. Wiederaenders, to have it copied for you and to send also a copy to Dr. Behnken. I should be very grateful for this favour, since there is no other possibility to have it sent to you all. Please accept it not as a “paper,” but as a personal letter, an expression of my deep interest in, and concern for, the work you are doing.

With best regards,  
Yours sincerely in Christ,  
Hermann Sasse.

## NOTES

1. Tappert, 636, 40
2. A reference to Barth’s famous definition of the Reformed conception of confessions given in an address at the World Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System in Cardiff.  
A Reformed confession is a setting forth of the understanding that *for the time being* has been given to the universal Christian church concerning that revelation of God in Jesus Christ which is given only in Scripture, an understanding that has been formulated spontaneously and publicly by a *locally circumscribed* communion of Christians [von einer örtlich umschriebenen christlichen Gemeinschaft], which *until further developments* is definitive for its external relations and which *until further developments* guides its doctrine and life.  
“Wünschbarkeit und Möglichkeit eines allgemeinen reformierten Glaubensbekenntnisses,” reprinted in *Die Theologie und die Kirche. Gesammelte Vorträge*, 2. Band, 1928. An English translation is published in Karl Barth, *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920–1928*, chapter 3 “The Desirability and Possibility of a Universal Reformed Creed (1925)” (London: 1962), 112. Quoted here with emphases added from Sasse in “Concerning the Nature of Confession in the Church,” *Quartalschrift* 46 (July 1949): 178. Also cited in Hopf 148, “Church and Confession 1941,” in *We Confess Jesus Christ*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 80.
3. Arthur Carl Piepkorn, “What Is The Lutheran Church?” *American Lutheran* 47 (February 1964): 8–11.
4. The “free faculty,” founded in 1908 as an alternative to the more liberal university faculty of theology. Among its leading teachers was Leiv Aalen, who did his doctoral research under Sasse in Erlangen.
5. Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), celebrated historian and founder of a school of historians, professor at Berlin (*Lutheran Cyclopaedia*, ed. E. L. Lueker [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954], 881).
6. August Kavel (1796–1860) and Gotthold Fritzsche (1797–1863) each led immigrant groups to South Australia in flight from the Prussian Union. Kavel’s group landed in 1838 and Fritzsche’s in 1841. A rupture between the two groups in 1846 was not healed until the union of the UELCA and ELCA in 1966 (See *Lutheran Cyclopaedia*, 74–75).
7. By these dates Sasse likely makes reference to two of the most noted papal encyclicals on biblical study: *Providentissimus Deus* (18 Nov 1893) of Leo XIII and *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (30 Sep 1943) of Pius XII. While the first encouraged the study of the Bible among Roman Catholic scholars, it also condemned “modernist” uses of literary criticism. The latter opened the way for more modern studies. It “stressed the need to follow the literal meaning of Scripture whenever possible, but, by also admitting the legitimacy of the study of literary forms, the encyclical opened the way for a more liberal approach to biblical criticism by Catholic scholars.” The latter was authored by Augustin Cardinal Bea, with whom Sasse had considerable correspondence (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 1099; see also 813 and 1137).
8. The “f” marks a footnote on this page (6) at bottom: “e.g., the doctrine of the nature and the number of the sacraments.”
9. *De Ceremoniis Ecclesiasticis, quae vulgo adiaphora seu res mediae et indifferentes vocantur* (see *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche [BSLK]* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1986), 1053 ff.) “The Ecclesiastical rites that are Called Adiaphora or Things Indifferent” (Tappert, 610ff.). Sasse probably refers especially to the “time of confession” (Tappert, 612, 10), the “*Zeit der Bekanntnus*” (*BSLK* 1057).
10. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg [Fortress], 1961). Sasse reviewed all three German editions of Schlink’s book: see, for instance, *Reformed Theological Review* 13 (Oct 1954): 88–89.
11. Gerrit C. Berkouwer (1903–), professor at the Free University of Amsterdam until his retirement in 1973. His *Studies in Dogmatics* reached fourteen volumes (1952–76). “The importance of Berkouwer lies in his refusal to accept simplistic either-or’s . . . in which the fullness of truth is torn apart” (from Berkouwer, *A Half Century of Theology* [1977], 208).
12. “God’s Word does not lie.”

# Dr. Herman A. Preus

## In Memoriam



PROFESSOR HERMAN AMBERG PREUS DIED ON MAY 17, 1995, IN HIS NINETY-NINTH YEAR. I AM HONORED AND I appreciated deeply being asked by the editors *LOGIA* to comment in its pages in grateful memory of Herman Preus.

Herman Preus was not only my uncle, but my teacher, my mentor, and my friend. He was a cultured gentleman, humble and self-effacing, a pious and loving husband and father and uncle and friend. *LOGIA*, however, has not asked me to offer personal comments about Herman Preus the man, but rather to say something *in memoriam* about Herman Preus as a theologian and teacher of the church.

For that is what he was and what God called him to be: a theologian and teacher. My first day at Luther Seminary I sat at his feet, and he opened the course—I don't remember what course it was—with the words, "From this day on, brethren, you are to think, speak, study, eat and drink theology." Herman loved theology, and he taught me and countless others to love it too. Such love sprang from his deep love for his Savior. There was never a time when I or any student could not walk into his office or go to his home to engage him in conversation on any theological topic or question. He was the best professor at the seminary, a fact recognized even by many students from pietistic and "anti-Missourian" backgrounds who did not like his confessional doctrinal position.

Herman was the most knowledgeable professor on campus, except for the redoubtable and amazing Professor G. M. Bruce, a Haugean, who had several doctor's degrees and a photographic memory. But Herman had a broad theological horizon and possessed the rare ability to synthesize his vast theological knowledge. He was able to teach effectively in all departments of theology. I took courses from him in homiletics, liturgics—where, although I thought I was a pretty good musician, he gave me a D in chanting—symbolics (there was only one semester course offered in the Lutheran Confessions, and Herman taught that course exclusively), and two semester courses in the Gospel of John, unquestionably his best course. Unlike most professors fifty years ago who taught exclusively by lecturing, Herman taught his students how to do exegesis.

Herman Preus was a Luther scholar, but not a pedantic one. He identified with Luther's cause and his theology and with the Lutheran Confessions which so consummately portrayed Luther's theology and understanding of the gospel. When Herman was called to Luther Seminary in 1936 he immediately became involved in a doctrinal controversy that centered in the principle of *sola gratia*. The controversy was greatly aggravated by the advent to the seminary of Dr. George Aus, who was called to the chair of systematic theology and for many years was the only professor to teach dogmatics. Aus was a pietist who had done his post-graduate work at Biblical Seminary, which, with its aversion to formal confessions, was hardly conducive to preparing a man to teach Lutheran dogmatics. Aus's dogmatics courses were classes in biblical theology. As one might expect, Aus was a "subtle synergist," in the pattern of Victorin Strigel. He taught emphatically that conversion is not exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. In conversion, the will of man is not inactive—like an inanimate stick or stone—but cooperates with the Spirit. He did not hesitate to say in class that "man converts himself." When confronted with Article II of the Formula of Concord with its affirmation that the will of unregenerate man was bound and he was dead in his sin, Aus responded that the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, later the Evangelical Lutheran Church, had never required subscription to the Formula of Concord or the whole *Book of Concord*, and that according to Cremer's *Lexikon* the term *nekros* in Ephesians 2:1 and Colossians 2:13 meant "under the condemnation of death," not spiritually dead, as confessed in FC II. Aus was certain that man cooperated in his conversion because he himself had "experienced" it.

Herman was committed to the theology of FC II and Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*, which he assigned to every student at the seminary in his symbolics class. He saw that the theology of Luther's substantive treatise was the obverse counterpart to Luther's doctrine of justification by grace. He saw, as did Luther, that synergistic anthropology or hamartology was bound to affect the doctrine of salvation, obscuring the *sola gratia*, and undermining the sinner's assurance of salvation, and often turning sermons into harangues on personal holiness and spirituality without real evangelical content. Again and again he pointed out that this diminution of the gospel of grace was a very real threat not merely to the confessional integrity of the academic community at a Lutheran seminary, but to pastors and lay people all over the church. He had seen the deleterious effect of synergism, which almost invariably accompanied pietism, at the seminary and in church life.

In temperament Herman was a humble and irenic man, not given to controversy. But when the gospel was at stake he met the challenge and was drawn into a prolonged and intense doctrinal conflict with Professor Aus and the rest of the faculty over the fundamental issue of the *sola gratia*. Herman had to fight the battle alone. The officials of the church for the most part took the other side and did not want to become involved. President J. A. Aasgaard was a cordial leader, but had been brought up and trained in the old United Norwegian Lutheran Church, which rejected the theology of the Formula of Concord on the doctrine of conversion and election. Aasgaard (with whom I talked several times about the issue) agreed with Aas that teachers and pastors in the NLCA (ELC) were not constitutionally bound to the doctrine of the Formula of Concord, and in that regard he was technically correct. His policy was to do nothing and hope that the controversy, like a prairie fire, would sooner or later burn out. He was sure it would never get settled by dialog or debate. After all, the three Norwegian Lutheran church bodies merging in 1917 to form the NLCA had agreed to disagree on the articles of conversion and election when they entered their union. With one exception all the faculty opposed the position of the Formula of Concord and of Herman. The one exception was President Thaddeus Gullixson, who, like Aasgaard, assumed a posture of benign neglect in respect to doctrinal differences. Except for the support of many students who over the years appreciated the importance of the correct understanding of man's state of depravity for

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***One who believes that faith and justification are entirely a gift of God's grace easily perceives the fundamental error underlying the historical-critical method.***

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the effective proclamation of the gospel, Herman stood alone throughout the tedious and trying controversy. And the controversy took its toll on his health. But he never wavered. And under great stress he remained always a Christian gentleman. This was true, I think, also of Professor Aus and the other faculty members who disagreed, sometimes profoundly, with Herman on the articles of conversion and election. The students, however, were not always so refined. I remember a classmate, who later joined the United Lutheran Church in America, yelling at the top of his lungs in the hall: "Herman Preus is a sixteenth-century heretic." Herman had to put up with a lot of that kind of insult, but very likely Aus did too.

In a festschrift entitled *Striving for Ministry: Centennial Essays Interpreting the Heritage of Luther Theological Seminary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), Warren Quanbeck, the editor of the book, who was called to the seminary in the early fifties to teach dogmatics, comments on Herman's work and activity and contribution to the seminary (p.152). His comments misrepresent Herman's theology consistently, and therefore misrepresent Herman. Quanbeck avers that Herman derived his doctrine of conversion and *sola gratia* not from the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, but from a "view of the Reformation and the confessions articulated by theologians such as C. F. W. Walther and the editors of the *Concordia Triglotta*." Every student who studied at the feet of Herman Preus (Quanbeck did not) knew better than that. As I recall, Herman never mentioned Walther in symbolics classes, and we students did not use the *Triglotta* and were not assigned Bente's introduction to it. Quanbeck credits Herman with responsibility for the intense controversy on conversion and election, whereas Aus "probably did more than anyone else to help the church maintain its Lutheran confession." Translated into plain language, that means that synergism helped the church to move out of an immigrant enclave into a "new self-awareness as an American Lutheran community." Herman's only contribution by defending the doctrine of the Formula of Concord was to create a climate, which often happens to narrow the scope of theological reflection and obscure some important

connections between theology and practice. Not much of a legacy to leave after over forty years of service as a teacher of the church. But such a lampoon is the meat and drink of a confessional Lutheran. Herman's theology was often trivialized and distorted.

Beginning in the early fifties another controversy replaced the unresolved dispute at the seminary and in the ELC on the article of the divine monergism of grace. It had to do with the authority of Scripture. As synergism had attacked the *sola gratia* principle, so the principle of *sola Scriptura* was attacked by a different kind of synergism. I recall reading in an old issue of *Lehre und Wehre* an interesting article by Francis Pieper criticizing a synergistic theory of biblical inspiration much in vogue in his day. The theory went back to Johann Salomo Semler and other early protagonists of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation. The theory hypothesized that the Bible was a divine-human book (in a kind of Nestorian sense) containing a divine word and a human word, the result of some kind of divine-human cooperation. There was much speculation about what was divine and what was human in the Bible and how the interpreter makes his decisions about what in fact was God's word and what was merely human dross; but one thing was certain, both God and the human authors cooperated in the production of the Bible. The mistakes, contradictions, and doctrinal differences and errors were contributed by the human authors. The historical-critical method of biblical interpretation as well as the recent movement called Neo-orthodoxy (Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and many others) both build squarely on this synergistic premise regarding the origin of Scripture.

One cannot fail to see the parallel between this synergistic theory of the origin the Bible and the synergistic doctrine of conversion that prevailed at the seminary. As faith has its origin in the cooperation of the human will with the Holy Spirit working through the gospel, so the Scriptures are the result of a collaboration of the will of the human authors and the Spirit of God. Herman saw all this in a moment. One who believes that faith and justification are entirely a gift of God's grace easily perceives the fundamental error underlying the historical-critical method.

Not so with Herman's colleagues, however. When the method was introduced into the seminary by Professor Quanbeck and other younger professors, the convinced synergists on the faculty had little trouble adjusting to it or adopting it outright. And the older professors who had closed their eyes to the dangers of synergism in the doctrine of conversion had little trouble closing their eyes to this new intrusion. Once the historical-critical method controlled the theological curriculum at the seminary, the doctrine of the authority, verbal inspiration, and inerrancy of Scripture, held so firmly just a few years before when I was at the seminary, was abandoned. When a number of concerned district presidents on the Church Council complained to the faculty about what was happening, they were told by a large number of the younger professors that they would leave the school before they would affirm the impossible doctrine of biblical inerrancy. The Church Council backed down. Again Herman Preus stood virtually alone in defense of the confessional Lutheran principle of *sola Scriptura*, just as he had been virtually alone so many years contending for the *sola gratia*. A confessional Lutheran often becomes a "lonely Lutheran," as Herman's dear friend, Hermann Sasse, often said.

I relate these animadversions relative to Herman Preus's career not just because they are true and interesting and no one else will probably write them, certainly not just to be contentious, but because only in the context of doctrinal controversy will this peace-loving, humble man's great contribution to the Lutheran Church be understood and appreciated. He was a witness for the truth, the truth of the biblical gospel, a real teacher of the church. He was a confessional Lutheran who confessed that faith all through his life. He did not waver; he did not compromise the Lutheran Confessions. He followed his mentor, Luther, and taught the theology of the cross. And he lived the theology of the cross, which is never easy. That was his accomplishment in life, the glory of his ministry, and his legacy to the church, all by grace alone. ✠

*Robert D. Preus*

# COLLOQUIUM FRATRUM

“Through the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren . . .”

Smalcald Articles III/IV



## The LWML Pledge

I think you're a tad too hard on the pledge, and consequently the sanctified intention(s) of the pledgers. I do not argue that your substitute suggestion is worthy and perhaps an improvement.

Maybe the ladies, with pastoral encouragement and participation, need to study the LWML pledge and do some self-examination. This would not necessarily require eliminating or changing pledge wording. Cannot an organization sincerely adopt such a pledge, recognizing itself to be a group of sinners, and strive to live up to the pledge? While not wanting to elevate the LWML pledge to the level of the baptismal vow, nevertheless, we do promise to renounce the devil, etc., and fail miserably, yea and verily, daily (Luther, Fifth Petition explanation) to do this. Should we reword, eliminate the confirmation vows to “suffer all” and to “conform our lives . . .” because many (often ourselves) do not keep the vows?

I don't mean to be contentious. I think my reaction to your observations is based on a touchy-feely church growth gal of memory who at our local LWML meeting in virtual hysteria denounced the LWML pledge for almost identical reasons you offer. It's sort of overkill. Now, having said all this, I think there are bigger fish to fry than the LWML pledge. How about LWML topics in the *Quarterly*, many of which are dreadful?

Finally, thank you for *LOGIA*. It has become the finest Lutheran periodical I have read or subscribed to. It is very encouraging to an old bull to see the next generation produce such outstanding material to hold our synod to its moorings and shore us up in our weak spots. Especially to those ends, God bless your labors.

In Christ, fraternally,  
J. Barclay Brown  
Jackson, Wyoming

## MORE ON THE LWML PLEDGE

“The LWML Pledge” by JAB (*LOGIA* 4, Holy Trinity 1995) is a signal example of the doctrinal mote-finding that seems to provide such excitement for so-called defenders of the faith. Was it the old “damn-with-faint-praise” ploy? There's always a *but*, isn't there? Or in this case, a *yet*: “Yet we pray that [the LWML] is not given over to beliefs that are at odds with the faith.” There is a presumption of doubt, if not guilt.

Why examine the LWML Pledge? Why not scrutinize the “pledge” that has been part and parcel of the Rite of Confirmation for at least several generations: “Do you intend to continue steadfast and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it [this confession and Church, in other words, the faith]?” Because even though the response is qualified by “with the help of God,” it remains a pledge. Or does “intend” weigh less on the scales than “dedicate” or “consecrate”? Does “intend” mean to pledge only *quatenus*-ly? “I intend, but only *insofar* as God helps me.” Or “I didn't *promise*, I only *intended!*”

A more constructive, and a more honest, look at the LWML Pledge begins with the recognition that its starting point is the work of Christ, not ours: his “dying love and his blood-bought gift of redemption.” In Romans 5, St. Paul drives home the centrality of the gracious work of Christ. It is the *sine qua non*. And on the basis of that work—the Gospel of the forgiveness of sin and of reconciliation with God (dead to sin, alive to God in Christ)—the apostle instructs and exhorts his readers not to go on sinning, but to live the new life created in Baptism. And he unpacks that exhortation in greater detail by urging: “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin . . . but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness” (Rom 6:13–14, NIV). And what does the LWML Pledge say? “We consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go . . .” Its confessors offer the parts of their bodies to God. Or what about the “classic”: “I appeal to you, brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as living sacrifices . . .” (Rom 12:1).

If the LWML Pledge is so suspect, then we cannot stop there. In order to guard fully against the danger of a Reformed “accent [that] falls more on what we are to do for God than [on] what God has done for us in Christ,” then we must remove “Take My Life, and Let It Be” (together with the rest of its body parts) from our hymnals. We must delete all of the “pledges” and promises from our Confirmation and membership rites, because the “confessors” might not be “taking the words of the pledge literally.” And while we're at it, we can no longer require confessional subscription, because, according to JAB's exegetical and logical treatment of the Israelites, Jephthah, and Peter, those who are most “zealous,” most “grandiose” in their pledges, including subscription to the Confessions, are, *causally*, bound to fail.

The “might-be-heterodox,” “could-be-a-problem” scrutiny of the LWML Pledge by JAB serves no other purpose than to perpetuate the spirit of distrust that infects the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod today. It’s like the “Red scare” of the 1950s. Everyone is potentially a “crypto-liberal” or a “Klan-like conservative.”

For more than fifty years, the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League has gathered *mites*, not *motes*. The people of Galilee marveled at Jesus, because he taught as one having authority and not as the scribes and teachers of the law (Mk 1:72). Jesus led without insisting that he was the leader. People knew he had authority without his having to declare and define it. As the work of proclaiming the kingdom of God continues today, and as that kingdom-work is being played out in our synodical scene, the women of the LWML are exhibiting authority and leadership in a manner that is much more reminiscent of Jesus than the men of the LCMS who, officially or behind the scenes, are constantly vying for it.

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### **The Editor Responds:**

1. *The Forum article did not mean to imply that the taking of pledges and vows is by any means inherently sinful. If Christians choose to take them—as in this case with the LWML Pledge—they are certainly free to do so. Scripture does note other vows, both proper and improper, that were taken but not mentioned in the article (Nm 6:1–21; Acts 18:18; Acts 21:23; Mt 26:72; Mk 6:26). Perhaps the registered concern over this article should give rise to a full discussion on the distinction between pledges, vows, oaths, and swearing. We could examine everything from ordination and marriage vows to “stewardship” pledges. Pledges would then be distinguished from confessions of faith. In any case, each person is responsible for what comes out of his or her mouth (Mt 12:33–37; Mt 12:36–37; Jas 5:12). In a society replete with the anthropocentric American Protestant mindset of “giving our hearts to Jesus,” it is not out of place to question whether our own pledges have become tainted with the same.*

2. *It is not inherently a spiteful thing to scrutinize particular practices among us. In the Forum piece, one desired outcome was to realize that since these pledges are by no means frivolous, we do well to point out the gravity of taking them before the Lord. For this reason, such pledges should not be made mandatory. They remain a matter of freedom. Is the pledge a mandatory initiation rite for every woman who wishes to join the LWML? What if it has become a matter of conscience for a Christian woman not to take the pledge? Would she be disdained by the organization for that reason? And when pledges are put into the divine service for all members of the congregation to take (as some insist on doing on LWML Sundays), is it not implied that each person ought to be taking such a pledge—even as they may be reading through the liturgy without thoughtful regard for these words?*

3. *Investigations calling into question a “confirmation vow” have indeed been made over the years as has the entire rite itself. The confirmation vow is not any more indispensable than the LWML Pledge as a matter of adiaphoron. This editor prefers the general practice on all occasions of recognizing Christ not merely as a “starting point,” but rather as both author and finisher, as we*

*pray: “all our works begun, continued, and ended in you . . . .” This preference—as worked out in relation to the LWML Pledge—need not be fraught with controversy when it stands in contrast to fellow Christians who choose to consecrate themselves with vows and pledges. And what misguided judgment would infer that this examination of the pledge is to be regarded as an implicit condemnation of the LWML as a whole? Such reactions may be the reason why babies are reluctant to go anywhere near bathwater.*

4. *To be sure, the editorial was neither to “damn” the LWML with faint praise nor to provide excitement for “so-called defenders of the faith” as if the editors and subscribers of LOGIA are on some sort of hypocritical joy ride. Even though praise for the thoughtful, generous, and faithful LWML accomplishments should be neither faint nor feint, the LWML ought not be considered too sacred a subject for pointed reflection and examination. Such investigations need not give rise to charges that a “spirit of distrust infects the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.” Nor need they be identified with McCarthian “Red scares,” Ku Klux Klan cross-burning, or with a tenuous suggestion that “the women of the LWML are exhibiting authority and leadership in a manner that is much more reminiscent of Jesus than the men of the LCMS who . . . are vying for it.” This kind of rhetoric threatens to take us even farther afield. To be preferred is the fraternal response that offers Romans 6 and 12. Received and noted. Thank you.*

*Pledges are not essential to the faith, nor are they necessarily true indicators of godly zeal. On some occasions they may be appropriate—and in each case we are to be reminded about the solemn nature of the pledges that are made. While we may be free to take pledges, we are not free to pursue them indifferently or half-heartedly. The LWML Pledge was only a case in point. It may be a foolhardy thing to call into question certain subjects. The real issue, however, is not whether the Forum article is too hard on the LWML. It is rather a call for each of us to consider soberly whatever pledges come out of our mouths and to respect those who may not want to take such pledges as a matter of conscience. The opinion of this editor continues to be that, as regards pledges, fewer is better (Eccl 5:2), especially where one’s breath could instead be expended to extol Christ’s pledges to us.*

### **A FURTHER CONCERN**

I read with interest the piece on the LWML pledge in the July/Holy Trinity 1995 LOGIA Forum. It mirrors some of my own concerns. One further concern I have is what is being pledged. There is that troubling phrase “and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields.” This phrase stems from Matthew 9:37–38 and Luke 10:2, where Jesus, in sending out the Twelve and the Seventy-Two, says, “therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” This is not a call to work, but rather a call to pray that the Lord would send ministers—preachers of the Gospel. Not every Christian is this kind of worker, for as Romans 10:14–15 makes clear, it is those who are “sent” (Scriptural parlance for our “called and ordained”) who are to preach the faith-generating gospel. The phrase “workers in the harvest fields” describes the Office of the Holy Ministry, not the royal priesthood, as 1 Corinthians 9:7–11, 2 Timothy 2:6, and other texts also under-

score. The parable of the workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20, which seems to underlie the LWML Pledge's language about "His call for workers," does not apply; it is not about evangelization, but rather is given to illustrate that the first will be last and the last first (Mt 20:16).

Granted, the LWML Pledge develops in an acceptable way, a way that pertains to the task shared by the whole royal priesthood in evangelizing the world. Hands to work, voices to praise, silver and gold to extend his kingdom are means through which the whole church shares in proclaiming the gospel of Christ. Still, the "harvest fields" language ought to be reconsidered, for it reflects and perpetuates what is at best a hazy distinction between the priesthood of all the baptized and the Office of the Holy Ministry filled only by those men who are "sent" by the Lord through his church.

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### ON PROMISE-MAKING

I profit greatly from your publication, and would like to add something that occurred to me about promise-making in general. It is a quotation of Luther and worthy of all acceptance.

I remember that Staupitz used to say: "More than a thousand times I have vowed to God that I would improve,

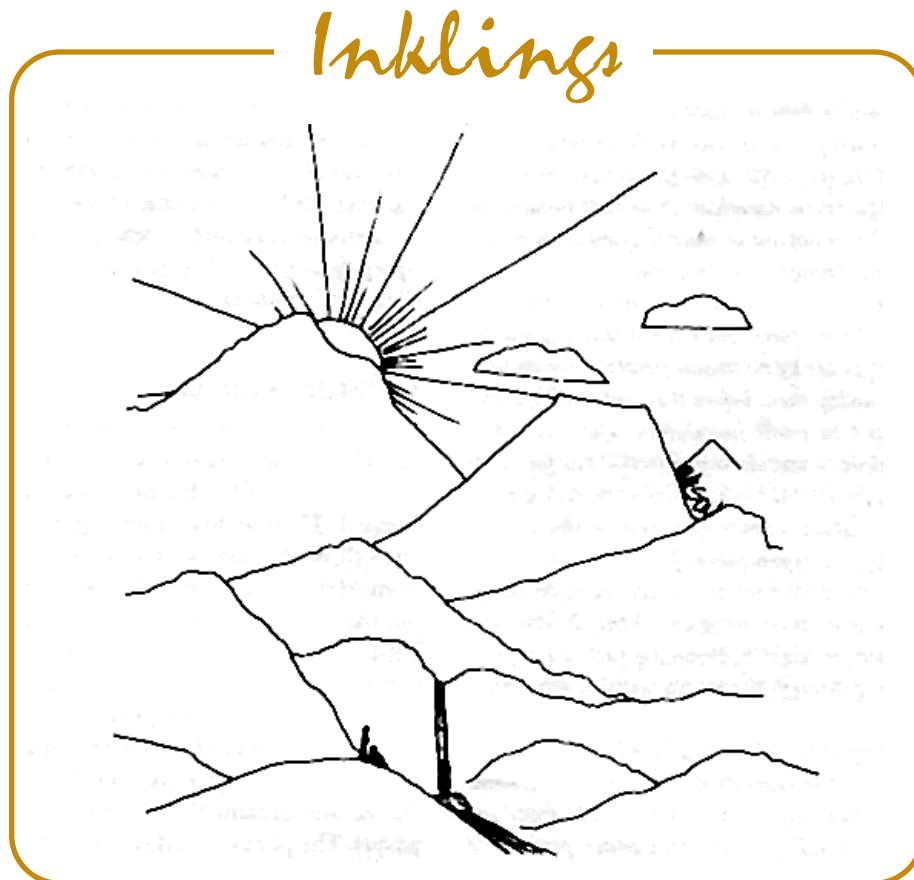
but I have never performed what I have vowed. Hereafter I shall not make such vows, because I know perfectly well that I shall not live up to them. Unless God is gracious and merciful to me for the sake of Christ and grants me a blessed final hour when the time comes for me to depart this miserable life, I shall not be able to stand before Him with all my vows and good works."

Then Luther makes this comment:

This despair is not only truthful but is godly and holy. Whoever wants to be saved must make this confession with his mouth and with his heart. The saints do not rely on their own righteousness; they sing with David (Ps 143:2): "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for no man living is justified before Thee"; and (Ps 130:3): "If Thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?"

The above reference, from Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* (AE 27:73–74), shows the satanic subtlety with which we are conned into harboring delusive beliefs that magnify the ego and leave God in the shade.

Yours in Christ,  
*E. L. Eckhardt  
Freemont, Nebraska*



It is nice, but I still prefer worshipping God in church.



# REVIEWS

*“It is not many books that make men learned . . . but it is a good book frequently read.”*

Martin Luther

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## Review Essay

*God’s Word: Today’s Bible Translation that Says What It Means.*  
Grand Rapids: World Publishing, 1995. Hardcover. 1,577 pages.

■ Translation is perhaps one of the more difficult tasks of human communication. Bible translation for publication is most difficult. The finished product is scrutinized from the perspective of many different backgrounds. Different groups (such as doctrinal, educational, cultural) all come at the finished product with their own interests and prejudices and, since it is the Bible, look for even the slightest of flaws, which can be shouted from the housetops. Emser’s criticism of Luther’s translation is a prime example. History has, of course, shown Luther’s work to have been a monument to the art of translation and Emser to be the goat. It is with a great deal of caution that I set out to play Emser to the translators of *God’s Word* (hereafter GW). This article will evaluate the translation primarily on its own terms. It will, by examples from the text, evaluate how well the final product achieves what the introduction claims for this translation. For the sake of time and space, the New Testament only will be considered.

GW is a translation with a goal as high as its name implies: “the ultimate goal of the Bible Society has been to bring the readers of God’s Word into a new or closer relationship with Jesus Christ” (xiv). It also makes claims for itself that, if true, make it inestimably valuable and long overdue on the scene of American Christianity. In the Introduction we are told that GW “fills a need that has remained unmet by English Bibles: to communicate clearly to contemporary Americans without compromising the Bible’s message” (xi).

GW is a new translation. It bears almost no resemblance to *God’s Word to the Nations* New Testament, which is its forerunner. Those familiar with the earlier translation will be hard-pressed to find any resemblance.

GW claims to be not merely a new translation, but also the product of a new theory of translation. “Unlike Bibles before it, however, the translation theory used to produce *God’s Word* is different because the theory and practice of translation has advanced through the years” (xi).

The theory followed by the Bible Society’s translators is closest natural equivalent translation.

The first consideration for the translators of *God’s Word* was to find equivalent English ways of expressing the meaning

of the original text. This procedure ensures that the translation is faithful to the meaning intended by the original writer. The next consideration was readability . . . This translation theory is designed to avoid the awkwardness and inaccuracy associated with form-equivalent translation, and it avoids the loss of meaning and oversimplification associated with function-equivalent translation” (xii).

The two primary considerations of GW are faithfulness to the intent of the authors of Scripture and readability. This review will evaluate the finished product on those terms and in that order.

## FAITHFULNESS TO THE MEANING INTENDED BY THE ORIGINAL WRITER

The following are examples of a number of different categories that show how successful GW has been in achieving the goal of faithfulness to the original text.

### Words in Half Brackets

GW uses half brackets to “enclose words that the translation team supplied because the context contains meaning that is not explicitly stated in the original language” (xv). The reader might assume that the words in the GW translation that are not enclosed in half brackets are explicitly stated in the original. This does not prove to be the case, however. Half brackets do not occur frequently in the text, but words, thoughts, and whole phrases that are not explicitly stated in the original do.

A rather benign example is Matthew 22:14, “Therefore, many are invited, but few of those are chosen to stay” in rendition of πολλοὶ γὰρ εἰσιν κλητοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί. It could well be argued that while “to stay” is not explicitly stated in the original, the context contains that meaning. But then where are the half brackets?

At John 12:27 GW has Jesus saying, “I am too deeply troubled now to know how to express my feelings.” The Greek has Νῦν ἡ ψυχὴ μου τετάρακται (“Now my soul is troubled”). Three thoughts are added here that are not explicitly stated in the original and whose support from the context is at least questionable. Jesus is deeply troubled, yes, but that he is *too* deeply troubled for anything is simply invention. Where the concept of expressing his feelings comes from can only be guessed. His not knowing *how* to express his feelings seems to be not only pure invention but highly questionable Christology as well, especially in John’s Gospel about the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

All of this is done without any half brackets to indicate that it is not “explicitly stated in the original.”

Many more examples could be given, but let these suffice to show that words and phrases “not explicitly stated in the original” are added often in this translation, and that the use of half brackets is inconsistent and misleading.

### Rendering the Greek Text

At some points GW portrays the subtleties of the Greek tenses quite effectively. In Luke’s account of the crucifixion, at 23:36–37, for example, GW has: “The soldiers also made fun of him. They would go up to him, offer him some vinegar, and say, ‘If you’re the king of the Jews, save yourself!’” Expressing the continuing action of the present participle (προσερχόμενοι) with “They would go up to him” presents a sort of “video clip,” a motion-picture image of the crucifixion that is often lost in translation, but that is present in the original and is effective in drawing the reader into the event. “In the beginning the Word already existed” for Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος at John 1:1 is a nice expression of the imperfect of εἶμι, a verb that denotes continuing existence without thought of origin. (Compare John’s use of γίνομαι at 1:14 to express the beginning of the incarnation.) At John 1:39 (Ἐρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε), the future indicative is translated as such rather than treated as if it were an imperative. GW has Jesus issuing an invitation and a promise (“Come, and you will see”) rather than a double command (“Come and see”), as many translations do.

We do not need a new theory of translation to tell us that there is no virtue in sticking to the actual wording of the original when to do so would be to lose the meaning of the text, or to make it harder to understand in translation than it was for the first readers to understand the original. In a similar vein Dr. Luther wrote: “I must let the literal words go and try to learn how the German says that which the Hebrew expresses.”<sup>21</sup> GW lets the literal words go, often with results that are perhaps less than beneficial. There is one example of this, however, that seems to be well done, a troublesome passage in John’s account of the discussion in the upper room. The Greek of John 13:23 has: ἦν ἀνακείμενος εἷς ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς. The NKJV renders this: “Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.” Readers who are not familiar with first-century Jewish dining habits would be hard-pressed to form a meaningful mental image from this translation. The danger of misunderstanding is inherent. GW renders this: “One disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, was near him at the table.” Good, simple, English, and it conveys the essence of John’s Greek. The beauty of this rendering is that although it does not convey the specifics of John’s image, it does not exclude them either. If the reader does understand that the diners were reclining at their meal or comes to that knowledge later, the GW translation still fits the image.

### Meaning Changed

Unfortunately, there are many instances in GW where the literal words are let go and the meaning is let go with them. A few selected examples follow.

In 1 Corinthians 9:5 Paul defends the right of those who preach the gospel to make a living from the gospel. GW translates

μὴ οὖν ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα περιάγειν ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπόστολοι with “Don’t we have the right to take our wives along with us like the other apostles . . . ?” The first and obvious problem here is, of course, that to the common English reader this implies that Paul had a wife. Not only is this misleading, but ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα finds no expression here at all. Admittedly this is difficult. Both literal words must be let go. “Sister woman” would be ridiculous if not meaningless. But what the original conveys, namely, that this is a wife who is one of the family of believers, ought not to be totally ignored.

In John 7:52 the Pharisees deride Nicodemus for his defense of Jesus, whom they have prejudged: Μὴ καὶ σὺ ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας εἶ; A question introduced by μὴ is a question expecting a negative answer. But GW renders this one: “They asked Nicodemus, ‘Are you saying this because you’re from Galilee?’” This is misleading in several ways. It implies that he *is* from Galilee. But more importantly, it turns their arrogant derision (“You’re not also from Galilee, are you?”) into an inquiry about Nicodemus’s motivation for speaking up against their injustice.

The “deceitfulness of riches” (ἡ ἀπάτη τοῦ πλούτου) becomes the “deceitful pleasures” of riches in Mark 4:19. The primary noun *deceitfulness* has been replaced by a noun (*pleasures*) that is not in the text at all. The statement that Jesus is making at this point in the parable of the sower has nothing to do with the pleasures of riches at all. Nor is his point about riches as such. It is the deceitfulness of riches that is the problem. The deceitfulness of riches is that they promise all sorts of things only God can provide—security, happiness, the “good life”—and so draw people into idolatry. To turn this into the “deceitful pleasures of riches” is to place the main emphasis on a word that is not even there in the Greek. It misses Jesus’ main point and turns a profound theological insight into a comparatively weak warning that might be mistaken to mean that pleasure is the problem and is to be frowned upon and avoided.

Another example, with less theological significance perhaps, is Matthew 8:26. Jesus has been awakened by the frightened disciples from his sleep in the stern of the boat. Before calming the storm he addresses them with the question Τί δειλοί ἐστε, ὀλιγόπιστοι; (“Why so fearful, you with little faith?”). GW has, “Why do you cowards have so little faith?” Jesus addresses them as faithless and asks why they are cowardly. GW has him address them as cowards and ask why they are so faithless. What possible reason is there for such a reversal?

Another such reversal occurs in Matthew 19:14, where Jesus says, τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (“for the kingdom of heaven is of this sort”). GW has, “Children like these are part of the kingdom of God.” Again, for reasons that are a mystery, the translators have done a flip-flop. The point of the Greek is not that children like these are part of the kingdom of God, but that the kingdom consists of this type of people. The children are held up as an example, not simply as part of the kingdom.

### Meaning Added

In some cases GW “lets the literal words go” and finds expanded meanings that are not in the text at all. In John 6, during Jesus’ discussion with those who had eaten of the loaves and fishes, the crowd begins to express their growing disenchantment. In

verse 43 Jesus responds, Μὴ γογγύζετε μετ' ἀλλήλων (“stop grumbling among yourselves”). GW has, “Stop criticizing me!” which does not at all portray their grumbling among themselves. Instead, Jesus sounds weak and defensive, like the child telling the bully, “Stop picking on me!”

### Meaning Restricted

Sometimes, by deviating from the actual wording, GW precludes meaning that is in the original. After Paul has been driven out of Thessalonica and gone to the Bereans, Luke writes in Acts 17:11, οἱ τοὶ δὲ ἦσαν εὐγενέστεροι τῶν ἐν Θεσσαλονίκῃ, οἵτινες ἐδέξαντο τὸν λόγον μετὰ πάσης προθυμίας (“These were nobler than those in Thessalonica . . .”). GW has “The people of Berea were more open-minded than the people of Thessalonica. They were very willing to receive God’s message.” εὐγενέστεροι means “of better breeding,” “nobler,” with all the connotations of these. While open-mindedness might be a characteristic of being well bred, it is hardly the first to come to mind for most people and might not be included at all for some people. Here it results in a redundancy. “Open minded” and “very willing to receive [a] message” mean the same thing.

At too many points to count, the GW New Testament loses the depth and power of the text. Jesus says, “If someone wants to come after me, let him deny himself” (ἀρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν, Lk 9:23).” GW gives us: “Those who want to come with me must say no to the things they want.” How superficial! How weak! How far from the point! Denying self is not saying no to *things*. It is not even saying no to my will (if that is what GW is trying to express). Denying my endemic self, inherited from Adam and passed on to my children, is saying no to me, to who and what I am apart from Christ. The things I *want* are not in the same league with the denial of self. They are in a whole different game.

Only one example of the treatment of σπλαγχνίζομαι need be given, for GW’s treatment of this verb is consistent. As a rendering of καὶ ἐξελθὼν εἶδεν πολλὸν ὄχλον καὶ ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς (“and when he had gotten out, he saw a large crowd and was moved with compassion for them”), we get: “When Jesus got out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. He felt sorry for them” (Mk 6:34). To be fair, we must recognize the difficulty of rendering this verb into smooth, flowing, easy-reading English. It seems, however, that the gut-wrenching compassion of our Lord for suffering people, or of the father toward the prodigal son, deserves something with a bit more “oomph” than “felt sorry.”

### Change Of Imagery

Often GW seems to feel the need to change the imagery presented by the text. Luke 13:1 speaks about Γαλιλαίων ὧν τὸ αἷμα Πιλάτος ἔμιξε μετὰ τῶν θυσιῶν αὐτῶν (“Galileans whose blood Pilate mixed with that of their sacrifices”). This powerful imagery of slaughter is greatly diluted, if not lost, in GW’s “Galileans whom Pilate had executed while they were sacrificing animals.”

Matthew 22:44 quotes Psalm 110:1, which GW renders: “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Take the highest position in heaven until I put your enemies under your control.’” Both images presented by the Greek text, Κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου (“sit at my right”) and θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν σου (“I place your enemies under your feet”) are lost. Imagery, like symbolism, can

convey a variety of meanings. “A picture is worth a thousand words,” goes the cliché. When images are replaced by what someone understands to be the meaning of the image, the reader is restricted to only that interpretation. This is not translation but commentary. As with all commentary it may be too narrow, misleading, or just plain wrong. In what sense is the reader to understand “highest?” Is it physical? Does it refer to honor, authority, power? Is it one or all of these? “Highest position in heaven” would be very confusing to anyone who was not already familiar with the “at my right” imagery of the text. In any case the reader will be misled because “at my right” is not the superlative position. It is not “higher” than the one at whose right the person is to sit. The loss of the second image is arguably less serious. “Put your enemies under your control” is simply flat, insipid. It lacks the exultant victorious power of the picture presented by the text. Notably, at Psalm 110:1 GW jettisons only the first image: “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit in the highest position in heaven until I make your enemies your footstool.’”

Similar imagery gets different treatment in Luke’s account of the stoning of Stephen. Here, at Acts 7:55, ἐστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ (“standing at God’s right”) has been interpreted “the position of authority that God gives.” This is Stephen’s vision. The visual imagery has been removed from the report of a *vision!* Luke tells what Stephen saw. But GW tells us not what he saw, but what somebody thinks the thing he saw meant. The power of the imagery is replaced with some abstract organizational idea. Again there is the possibility of misinterpretation. It is doubtful whether authority was the primary thing on Stephen’s mind at the moment of his execution. There are a number of possible interpretations of this vision, including that standing at the right was the position of Jesus the advocate defending Stephen before the throne of God, which would have been very meaningful to Stephen. But “in the position of authority that God gives” blocks that possibility from the perception of GW’s reader.

Visual imagery is critical in the question of responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ. Pilate literally washes his hands of any responsibility. In Matthew 27:25 the crowd takes responsibility using a vivid image: Τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τέκνα ἡμῶν (“His blood upon us and our children”). GW again muffles the impact of the text by replacing the concrete image of a people covered in the blood of the innocent Christ with an abstract concept: “The responsibility for killing him will rest on us and our children.” Shakespeare knew the power of the blood imagery when he borrowed it for Lady MacBeth (“Out, damned spot!”). More sad than the loss of the power of the image is the loss of its divine irony. The image of a people covered in the blood of the innocent Christ is not only a powerful picture of the guilt of us all because of sin; it is a powerful picture of our only hope. “The blood of Jesus, his son, cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7).

The loss of biblical imagery is one of the serious shortcomings of this translation, and the examples are legion. One more must suffice. In 2 Corinthians 12:7 we read of Paul’s well-known thorn in the flesh. Here we have an image that is, at least, two-dimensional. It is not merely visual but tactile imagery. Anyone who has had a sliver that he was unable to remove knows the kind of continual, painful irritation Paul is describing. The misery Paul describes as a thorn in the flesh would hardly be so well

known were GW's "a recurring problem" the only available translation of the Greek text. There are scarcely words to describe the insipidness of this rendering.

### Strange Interpretation and Translation

There are some points at which GW's renderings seem strange to the brink of weirdness. In the parable of the good Samaritan, GW presents an interpretation that does not fit the context and that seems not to be supported by other translations. The lawyer (νομικός) asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Lk 10:25). Jesus asks this lawyer what he reads in the law. He answers, "Love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole strength and with your whole mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus replies, "You have answered rightly. Do this and you will live." In 10:29 Luke then tells us the lawyer's motivation for asking, "Who is my neighbor?" ὁ δὲ θέλων δικαιῶσαι ἑαυτὸν ("But he, wishing to justify himself"). GW renders this, "But the man wanted to justify his question." The plain sense of the grammar says it was *himself* he wanted to justify, not his question. The context too supports this. Being justified is a more specific follow-up to the original question about how to inherit eternal life. To this νομικός, who is fully convinced that he can justify himself by keeping the law and in so doing inherit eternal life, Jesus tells a story showing that neither he nor anyone is capable of the law's simple requirement of loving the neighbor as yourself. If he has not gotten the message, he soon will if he attempts to follow Jesus' admonition to go and do as the good Samaritan did.

### READABILITY

GW has employed English reviewers to ensure that it looks and reads like contemporary American literature. The translation is quite successful in achieving that goal. With its page layout and bold print topic headings it looks much like a college textbook. It reads easily and smoothly for the most part and leaves the reader little to wonder at and ponder about. Even its seeming compulsion to interpret is sometimes effective and helpful without distorting the meaning of the text. For example, in GW the man with dropsy (ἀνθρωπὸς τις ἦν ὑδρωπικός) is "a man whose body was swollen with fluid" at Luke 14:2.

Examples of poor readability are not common, but there are some. At Galatians 5:25 GW reads, "If we live by our spiritual nature, then our lives need to conform to our spiritual nature." This English sentence, while fine grammatically, seems to be redundant nonsense. The second clause of the sentence appears to be simply a restatement of the first clause: "If we live by our spiritual nature, then we should live by our spiritual nature." A more serious problem here is the interpretive rendering "spiritual nature" for πνεύματι. (This problem will be addressed below under "Emphasis on Human Response or Effort rather than God.")

The GW rendering of Paul's discussion of Abraham in Galatians 3:6 could be covered under a number of the headings of this article. It is dealt with here as an example of a passage that does not "communicate clearly to contemporary Americans." GW has, "He believed God, and that faith was regarded by God to be his

approval of Abraham." Here again we have a sentence that is grammatically correct. The words are simple. The logic and theology of this creation are so contorted, however, that it is almost impossible to describe clearly what is wrong with it. The real problem is the rendering of δικαιούσιν with "God's approval," which the GW New Testament does with religious consistency. "God's approval" describes an attitude in God. Righteousness is a characteristic of the individual to whom it is ascribed. It is that difference which has led to logical nonsense at Galatians 3:6. Both faith and righteousness are characteristics of Abraham, one of which he has and the other of which he does not. God credits Abraham's faith as if it were Abraham's righteousness.

God can be, and is, described as a righteous God. What great depths of theological insight do we convey if we "communicate clearly to contemporary Americans" that God is a God who has God's approval?<sup>22</sup>

### Avoidance of Theological Terms

GW finds it necessary to avoid what it calls "traditional theological words." "Many Bible translations contain theological terms that have little if any meaning for most non-theologically-trained readers. *God's Word* avoids using these terms and substitutes words that carry the same meaning in common English" (xiv). Some words that are studiously avoided are *covenant*, *grace*, *justify*, *repent*, *righteousness*, and *resurrection*. *Grace* becomes "God's kindness"; *repent*, "turn to God and change the way you think and act," and so on. Some problems caused by rendering *righteousness* as "God's favor" have already been discussed. The problems caused by avoiding "traditional theological words" can be illustrated by using the resurrection as an example.

For GW *resurrection* and related terms become "came back to life" or variations of that theme. The problems this creates are not so apparent in most passages when considered singly. But when Scripture as a whole speaks on the subject, dogged adherence to the idea of "came back to life" results in some strange and even contradictory notions.

While "he has been brought back to life" might be considered an acceptable rendering of ἠγέρθη in the angel's announcement to the women at the tomb, the simple "he got up"<sup>23</sup> ἠγέρθη allows for a broader understanding which, while not apparent just here, is made apparent elsewhere in the Scriptures. Jesus was not resuscitated. He was not brought *back* to life. He was raised to new, glorious, eternal life.

In Paul's powerful argument against those who deny the resurrection, GW has, "But now Christ has come back from the dead. He is the very first person of those who have died to come back to life" (1 Cor 15:20). Now, anyone who is familiar with the Scriptures must be struck by the fact that this is literally not true! Did not God bring the widow's son "back to life" while Elijah prayed (1 Kgs 17:22)? Did not Jesus bring the widow of Nain's son, Jarius's daughter, and Lazarus back to life? Had they not died? Lazarus had begun to stink, but Jesus resuscitated him. Yet these are now all long since dead and decayed. Jesus did not "come *back* to life." He is the first of the dead to rise to eternal life.

In Paul's second letter to Timothy he warns against false teachers who claim that the resurrection is already past (ἀναστασις ἤδη γεγενῆσθαι, 2 Tim 2:18). GW gives us: "They are

destroying the faith of others by saying that people who have died have already come back to life.” The doctrine of the general resurrection of the dead is obscured. And the false teaching that Paul is combating is rendered in a statement that is literally true. We have just reviewed a list of people who *have* died and “already come back to life.”

Theological confusion about the doctrine of conversion is introduced by this terminology of resurrection. Paul speaks of us humans before conversion as dead. At Ephesians 2:5 GW has, “We were dead because of our failures, but he made us alive together with Christ”—a nice, clear rendering of *συνεζωοποίησεν*. But in the next verse when Paul uses *συνήγειρεν* (“raised together”), GW introduces confusion, if not false doctrine, by adhering to its concept of resurrection as being brought *back* to life when it says, “God has brought us back to life together with Christ Jesus.” Brought us *back* to life? One cannot be brought back to the life one has never had. If humans are by nature spiritually blind, dead, and enemies of God, how can they be brought *back* to life?

We cannot leave the discussion of the resurrection without a look at Jesus’ claim in John 11:25: *Εγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ* (“I am the resurrection and the life”). The reader is left to make his own evaluation of GW’s translation: “I am the one who brings people back to life, and I am life itself.”

### General Observations and Evaluation

A careful reading of GW’s New Testament makes it apparent that, contrary to the priorities stated in the introduction, fidelity to the text has been sacrificed in an attempt to communicate clearly to contemporary American readers. There is one tendency of the overall work that cannot be explained by the attempt at clear, simple communication, however.

### Emphasis on Human Response or Effort Rather than God

If GW is the product of a new translation theory, it seems to be the result of a different theology as well. To make a point by oversimplification: the GW New Testament is not primarily about God and what he has done for mankind; it is primarily about what men can and should do to please God. It emphasizes the human side of the relationship between God and men whenever possible, and to the greatest possible extent.

In Galatians 5:16–26 Paul discusses at some length the war between the Spirit (*πνεύματος*) and the flesh (*σαρκός*). Although many translations have “Spirit” for *πνεύματος* in this section, GW consistently renders it “spiritual nature,” presenting a struggle between our “spiritual nature” and our “corrupt nature.” This results in the nonsense mentioned above. “If we live by the Spirit, let us also direct our lives by the Spirit” makes sense. “If we live by our spiritual nature, then our lives need to conform to our spiritual nature” does not. But the real problem here is the idea of a “spiritual nature” at all. Talk of a spiritual *nature* implies that humans naturally have some higher spiritual side, and that all we need do is live by it instead of by our lower, corrupt nature. But, “The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit!” (1 Cor 2:14).<sup>4</sup>

As this section of Galatians 5 reads in GW, the focus is entirely on human effort rather than on God the Holy Spirit, active and powerful in the lives of believers. We are told to live not by the Spirit but “as your spiritual nature directs you” (v. 16). “If you are

led by the Spirit you are not under the law” (*εἰ δὲ πνεύματι ἄγεσθε, οὐκ ἐστὲ ὑπὸ νόμον*, v. 18) becomes “if your spiritual nature is your guide, you are not subject to Moses’ laws.” Not the Spirit, but the “spiritual nature produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (vv. 23–24). There may be no clearer illustration of the anthropocentric nature of GW’s New Testament than this section of Paul’s letter to the Galatians.

Jesus says in Matthew 21:32, “John came to you in the way of righteousness” (*ἦλθεν γὰρ Ἰωάννης πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης*). GW gives us: “John came to you and showed you the way that God wants you to live.” The context shows that the “way of righteousness” is bringing harlots and tax collectors into the kingdom of heaven. The way of righteousness is not “the way that God wants you to live.” The way of righteousness is the “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mk 1:4, Lk 3:3, Acts 13:24) that John preached.

In John 15:13 Jesus says, “No one has greater love than this, that he give his life in behalf of his friends” (*μείζονα ταύτης ἀγάπην οὐδεὶς ἔχει, ἵνα τις τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ θῆ ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ*). GW has, “The greatest love you can show is to give your life for your friends.” Jesus’ general statement, with his own sacrificial death as the focus, has been turned into what sounds like an injunction imposed on the apostles if not on all Christendom.

The passive of Acts 2:40 (*σώθητε*) has been rendered as a Greek middle by GW: “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Some other translations do construe it that way, but even the NKJV has “be saved.” The forerunner of GW, the NET, has “Be saved from this crooked kind of people.” Why the change?

### Hear—Do, Keep—Obey

For GW *do* (*ποιῶμεν*) becomes *obey* in 1 John 5:2. Keeping (*τηρέω*) becomes obeying in 1 John 5:3 and Matthew 19:17. Listening, a passive activity, becomes active doing, as for example in John 6:45, “every one who hears and learns from the Father comes to me” (*πᾶς ὁ ἀκούσας παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μαθὼν ἔρχεται πρὸς ἐμέ*), which in GW is rendered: “Those who do what they have learned from the Father come to me.” The Father draws people by his word to follow Christ, but GW turns the emphasis into *doing*.

The emphasis on Jesus’ word is shifted to a focus on what the believers do when in John 14:23 *Εάν τις ἀγαπᾷ με τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει* (“if a person loves me he will keep my word”) is rendered, “Those who love me will do what I say.” The same shift is apparent when at John 8:51 *εάν τις τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον τηρήσῃ, θάνατον οὐ μὴ θεωρήσῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα* (“if anyone keeps my word, he will not ever see death”) is rendered, “Whoever obeys what I say will never see death.”

### Theological Influence

The apparent theological thrust of GW is not Lutheran. In the terminology of Lutheran theology, it emphasizes the law at the expense of the gospel whenever possible. One might well wonder what brought about the apparent shift in theological emphasis from the NET to its step-daughter GW. The theology of GW does seem very friendly to American evangelicalism—which is, of course, the largest market in American Christianity.

## CONCLUSION: READABILITY AND RELIABILITY

GW claims that faithful rendering of the intent of the original authors is its first priority and readability its second priority. In actual fact, the finished GW New Testament displays an emphasis on readability, but a serious failure to render the original text faithfully. The meaning of the text is often contorted, expanded, restricted, or lost in GW's contemporary English expressions.

It is not just a desire for readability that results in these distortions. GW is apparently not content simply to translate. Those who put this text together seem to feel a great need to teach, interpret, and comment. Witness, for example, the treatment of Spirit/spirit at Galatians 5. Arguably, GW's New Testament is really not a translation at all. It claims a new (closest natural equivalent) translation theory. What we have is paraphrase, and in many cases poorly-done paraphrase, presented as a new theory of translation.

Quoted earlier were Luther's remarks recognizing that in translating there are times when the literal words must be let go to present a meaningful translation. But there is another side to translation also—one that, it seems, the translators of GW would have done well to consider more carefully. Luther writes:

On the other hand I have not just gone ahead anyway and disregarded altogether the exact wording of the original. Rather with my helpers I have been very careful to see that where everything turns on a single passage, I have kept to the original quite literally and have not lightly departed from it. For example, in John 6[:27] Christ says, "Him has God the Father sealed [*versiegelt*]." It would have been better German to say, "Him has God the Father signified [*gezeichnet*]," or, "He it is whom God the Father means [*meinet*]." But I preferred to do violence to the German language rather than to depart from the word. Ah, translating is not every man's skill as the mad saints imagine.<sup>5</sup>

### Notes

1. *On Translating: An Open Letter*, 1530 (AE 35:193).
2. At Genesis 15:6 GW has, "Then Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD regard that faith to be his approval of Abram." "Righteousness" is found in GW's Old Testament, for instance, in Psalm 7:9: "Let the evil within wicked people come to an end, but make the righteous person secure, O righteous God who examines thoughts and emotions."
3. Cf. Pharaoh's awakening from his dreams in Gen. 41:4, 7 (LXX).
4. Of the many translations that I am able to check, all except GW read "Spirit" with an upper-case S in this section of Galatians. The fore-runner of GW, NET, also has "Spirit," but includes the following commentary in a footnote on verse 16.

The Greek word *pneuma* may denote either the "Holy Spirit" or the "spirit" ("new nature") produced in believers by the working of the Holy Spirit. This latter meaning is especially brought out in Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 where Paul calls this the "new self." In contexts such as the present one it is sometimes difficult to decide whether the word "spirit" should be spelled with a small or capital "s." Either way the thought of the passage does not change much since no one can have a new

nature unless the Holy Spirit is already present (1 Cor 12:3), and when the Holy Spirit is present a new nature always lives within the converted person (Jn 3:6).

The possible translation pointed out in this helpful commentary has been moved into the text of GW, and the reader of GW is given no commentary. As it stands on the page, there is no indication that the Holy Spirit is involved at all, and new Christians, or non Christians, for whom GW is supposed to provide a clear understanding, will have no indication that the Holy Spirit has anything to do with this passage.

5. *On Translating: An Open Letter*, 1530 (AE 35:194).

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**The Impact of the Reformation.** By Heiko A. Oberman. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994. Paper. 263 pages.

■ This book is a wonderful collection of essays from the pen of one of the great Reformation scholars of our time. Oberman has not written a book simply *about* history, but provides a method for historical scholarship to be carried out. In recent years, historical studies have tended to be done by an analysis of the social matrix. In some cases conclusions are reached which seem to imply that everything is a result of the social influences rather than any intellectual influences. Oberman correctly argues that while it is proper not to focus only upon the intellectual history by studying the treatises and documents apart from their social setting, a "total history" is needed that does not pass over the intellectual history too quickly.

Such a "total history" begins with a survey of the social conditions of life so that the historian begins to have a sense of the demands and problems faced in that historical setting. After grasping the general social setting, the historical documents and treatises are critically examined as a sort of intellectual program. Then the historian is prepared to consider the impact of the intellectual program upon the social setting.

Oberman's point is well taken. There is a temptation to take up historical documents and read them in a vacuum, while using them to support arguments we are advancing. Such an approach may lead to making the document say something completely different from its original meaning. (This is unfortunately often the case in the Missouri Synod, where Luther may be read through the eyes of Pieper or Walther rather than in his social context.) Familiarity with the writer and his social setting may shed light on the depths of his own theological thinking. It is not necessary to know everything about Jerome or Augustine to understand their writings, but a general knowledge of their life and times brings new insight to their readers.

These principles are applied in a very valuable manner in the opening essay of the book about the *via antiqua* and *via moderna*. Discussions of late medieval theology are often technical philosophical discussions that lose the average reader and lead most away from this period as the source of differences between Reformation leaders. Oberman demonstrates, however, that it is an important source for Luther by pointing to the debate surrounding the omnipotence of God. The medieval distinction between *potentia absoluta* ("the total possibilities ini-

tially open to God, some of which were realized by creating the established order; the unrealized possibilities are now only hypothetically possible" [9]) and the *potentia ordinata* ("reality as the object of human exploration" [9]) became important in Luther's thought. For Luther, the *potentia absoluta* is seen in the hidden God who is naked apart from the revelation of the Scriptures. On the other hand, the God who has revealed himself in his Son is the *potentia ordinata*, for this is the ordered power of God at work in the creation. This *potentia ordinata* means that God gives life graciously in this world in the things of creation. For Luther, this leads to his talk of the masks that God uses in this world and a deeper understanding of the sacramental realities of the church.

Oberman's article pushes us to ask some questions regarding modern Lutheran theological practice. Seeing God in the created things he has chosen led Luther to say things about the sacrament such as, "the external things are adored silently by genuflecting" (WA 43:70, 29). Modern Lutherans often place themselves in Zwingli's camp, denying such adoration of the Sacrament and so divorcing themselves completely from a major portion of Luther's thought. Modern difficulties in the areas of worship and practice reveal a growing inability to be content with the God who operates by a system of ordered or appointed powers. A liturgy that changes weekly and relies upon emotional musical offerings of little substance portrays an infatuation with the capricious and fickle God of the *potentia absoluta*.

Another valuable essay deals with Luther's use of language in the preaching task. He prefaces the essay with two others that speak of the theology of Johann von Staupitz regarding the Babylonian Captivity, the devil, and the church. In them the roots of Luther's language choices when speaking about the devil are set before the reader, even though Oberman does not make the specific link. These language choices are abhorrent to many modern readers, which makes the context essential when dealing with the documents.

Oberman begins by criticizing those who wish to speak of the "young" and "old" Luther as two significantly different figures. "Luther preached as one standing between God and the devil at the end of time" (51). This understanding is supported by the fact that as early as 1515, Luther's sermons contain scatological or vile language against the devil. Luther does not become an old, bitter, and vile man and so develop a corresponding vocabulary. Instead, the vocabulary is appropriate to the theological battle that he has undertaken. Standing between God and the devil in the preaching office, Luther must shout down that archenemy who dares to raise his voice in the church. The battle is a very real one.

Oberman argues convincingly that there are three crucial components in Luther's choice of language: "the blasphemy of the devil, his surreptitious mode of operation, and hence, in response, the need to call him 'forth' by shouting him down" (59). *Lesterlich* (blasphemous) is the term that embraces the abominable or cursed character of the devil. The Latin root *detractans* is the springboard to the language of feces and urine that would be used in connection with the devil throughout Luther's preaching career. The devil is the Detractor. While a human being defecates privately, the Detractor publicly spews forth the stench of his feces and rolls about in it. The preacher

between God and the devil must shout back at the devil, as Oberman paraphrases Luther, "Get lost Satan, eat your own shit!" (61). In so doing, the preacher of the gospel unmask Satan and shouts to God to bring the Second Coming of Christ ever nearer (63).

Related to the use of such language is an attitude of Luther about the impact of such clear shouting of the gospel. In our day the language is offensive to our ears because the very theological mindset that permeates the church is quite different. People are to be won for Jesus by making them feel comfortable and providing for their "felt needs." Today, the impact of the preaching of the gospel is to be judged by its success stories and resulting numerical gains. Luther sees the impact as being quite the opposite, for it will stir up Satan all the more in these last days. Success will not come quickly and, in fact, will decrease so that failure does not disappoint, but success comes as a complete surprise.

After all, it is not to be expected that either with us or with you the gospel, which now shines anew, will fare any better than it did at the time of Christ or the apostles, or, for that matter, since the beginning of the world (WA 15:360, 19–21).

Of course, I am not suggesting a return to vulgarity, but a sense of the need to cry out and unmask Satan, rather than worrying about offending the hearers. Luther's choice of language was not because it was a language of the common man, but rather because he refused to allow Satan a place to hide. Manipulating the word to make it less offensive, whether by offering user-friendly liturgy, refusing to have the Sacrament at every Sunday service because it takes too much time, or using grape juice or so-called non-alcoholic wine in the Sacrament because wine offends some, silences the shouting and leaves the devil free to spew his feces about in the world with all its stench.

This book is to be commended for its scholarship. Oberman's scholarship is just the stepping stone to asking some hard questions about practices that have come to be accepted in our midst. Take up the book, read it, and let it shout the question: Are we in our modern times students of Luther and the church of the ages, or students of sociology? What is the impact of the Reformation today?

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**Sermon Texts.** Edited by Ernst H. Wendland. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1984. Cloth. 179 pages.

■ This reviewer has used this little book on many occasions, and perhaps the best word to describe the book is *useful*. *Sermon Texts* is meant as a replacement for two out-of-print reference books: Paul W. Nesper's *Biblical Texts* and Frederic H. K. Soll's *Pericopes and Selections*. In putting together a reference book such as this, an editor must make a decision about the nature of the book. A reference book can either be exhaustive in content but

difficult to use, or else it can be simple to use but lacking in detail. This reviewer believes that Wendland chose the better course by emphasizing ease of use over exhaustive detail.

The book is designed as a reference book for the various pericopic selections of the Church Year. The book is divided into three sections. The first section contains the Scripture references for six different pericopic series: (1) The historic pericopes; (2) The Eisenach selections; (3) The Thomasius selections; (4) The Synodical Conference selections; (5) The Soll selections; (6) The three-year Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship series. The Scripture readings for each Sunday are listed along with a very brief summary of each biblical text. While most of the summaries are descriptive of the Scripture selection, this reviewer has found a few summaries that do not quite capture the primary message of the text. This is only a minor drawback to what is otherwise a very helpful system. In the historic series, the Old Testament was usually not read, as only two readings, the Epistle and Gospel readings, were assigned. Therefore the editor has added the Old Testament readings that were developed by the Joint Commission on a Common Liturgy of the church bodies that later formed the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church. Accompanying each series is a brief introduction of a few paragraphs that gives the history of the series. In some cases, the unique strengths of a particular series are also provided for the reader. The first section of the book is very useful for planning preaching in advance without committing oneself to a desk piled high with books. Choir directors and others involved in the Divine Service will also find this first section of the book particularly helpful.

The second section of the book provides the busy pastor with a long list of free texts for each portion of the Church Year. For the season of Advent, for example, twenty-two different texts are suggested to the preacher. For Christmas, twelve free texts are offered. Texts are also presented for Mission Festivals, Thanksgiving, and the Festival of the Reformation. Again, brief four- and five-word descriptions are provided for each text. Perhaps most useful in this section are the offerings for Advent and Lenten midweek sermon series. The preacher will find seventeen years' worth of suggested texts for Advent midweek services. Most of the Advent sermons series are based on the Old Testament prophecies of Christ. More extensive is the list of texts and series for Lenten midweek Services. Enough material for twenty-two years' worth of preaching is offered the busy pastor. While none of the sermon series are especially clever, they are all biblically grounded, and there is a variety of themes and formats.

The third section of the book is a listing of free texts for special occasions such as confirmations, weddings, funerals, and ordinations. In addition, free texts on themes such as Holy Communion, Christian education, Christian family life, and stewardship are also provided. Those brothers in the ministry who officiate at a large number of funerals each year will appreciate the generous listing of biblical texts presented by Wendland. The funeral texts are divided into five categories, including texts for children's funerals, texts for sudden death, and texts for the ubiquitous doubtful case. The opening sentence in the introduction to the funeral section is a gem in itself: "The test of a good funeral sermon is not how successful

the preacher has been in causing tears, but how successful he has been in drying them" (104).

An index section rounds out the book. The book's indices comprise a full third of the total pages of the book. The first index is a biblical index of all texts from the six pericopic systems, listed in the order in which they are found in the Bible. One can easily find when and where a particular text falls during the Church Year and whether it is used in other pericopic systems. In addition, a shorter index gives all the Scripture readings for each Sunday of the year. This index is a composite of the first section of the book. No descriptions of biblical texts are given in the indices, as they are already given in the first section of the book.

Nothing profound is contained in the pages of this book, although the short introductions to each section are sometimes thought-provoking. The editor and publisher, however, have set out to provide a useful book for the church and its busy pastors. This task has been fulfilled with great success.

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*The Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting.* Edited by David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. 627 + xiii pages. Cloth. \$37.50.

■ This is the second volume of a major new series entitled *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*. Bruce W. Winter (Warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge University) is series editor and co-editor of Volume 1. Ultimately there are to be six volumes in this series: (1) ancient literary setting, (2) Graeco-Roman setting, (3) Paul in Roman custody, (4) Palestinian setting, (5) diaspora setting, (6) theological setting. The emerging volumes are in prominent display at conventions of biblical scholars, meetings of ancient historians, classicists, and others. So the series has already created a sensation: "ground-breaking," as the dust cover puts it.

Volume 2 provides the geographical, social, and cultural background of the Roman Empire within which Christianity emerged in the first century A.D. The book has been subdivided into two parts: the first six chapters focus upon key social and cultural issues that, taken together, would have had a profound impact upon the Christians of that day: travel and shipwreck, roads of Asia Minor, food shortages, the indigenous religions of Asia Minor and the imperial cult, the urban elite, and the house church. The second half of the book ("Provinces") provides chapters on each of the first Roman provinces to receive apostolic missionaries (cf. Acts 1:8): Syria, Cyprus, Asia, Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, Rome, and Italy. The final chapter in this section, "Luke's Geographical Horizon" (483–544), demonstrates how Luke, at home in both Graeco-Roman and Jewish worlds, conceived of Jerusalem as the "center of the world" on several levels: geographical, soteriological, cosmological. The book also contains two appendices ("The Asiarchs" and "The Politarchs") and one excursus: "The 'We' Passages." Finally, the inclusion of several



indices insure that this volume will remain a valuable research tool for many years to come: biblical references, ancient sources, modern authors, place names, subjects.

Thus there are eighteen separate essays combined into one volume by fourteen separate scholars (editors Winter and Gill are the only “repeat” contributors, submitting four essays and two, respectively). In such a work one should expect to find varieties of approach, methodology, and even quality. Regarding the last point, some of the essays contain more errors of orthography and syntax than others: typographical errors, split infinitives, misspelled Greek words (158, 175 note 218, 179), missed page numbers (112 note 51), as well as others. These are all very rare and minor imperfections, yet distracting. In a work of this type, one would expect such inelegances to have been caught and corrected at the editorial level, if not long before. Then too, there are several articles carrying on protracted arguments and long, pointless footnotes that have little direct relevance for Acts itself. Tracey’s ponderous essay on Syria (233 ff.) leads all others in this regard, yet the pieces by Winter (59 ff.), and Porter (545 ff.) are unfortunately long-winded as well.

Most of the essays, however, are intended for the general reader, yet also are at the cutting edge of scholarly methodology and research. Several of the scholars (Winter, 67; Blue, 132–33; Trebilco, 300–302; Scott, 536 note 204) have made profitable use of *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* [TLG], the CD-ROM word search capability that enables a scholar, within a matter of seconds, to compare a New Testament word or phrase with similar attestations throughout the whole of Greek literature.

Moreover, the contributors seem to share a common educational background and confessional stance. A glance at the “List of Contributors” (vii–viii) reveals that nearly all were educated and now serve in the finest academies of the former British Empire: Aberdeen University, Cambridge, Oxford, British School at Rome, Toronto, Macquarie University (Sydney, Australia), Sheffield, Trinity Western (Langley, British Columbia), Knox Theological Hall (Dunedin, New Zealand), Durham, and so on. The contributors appear also to share a high regard for Scripture as God’s revelation set in history. No one uses such orthodox terminology as “inspired” or “inerrant,” but the contributors for the most part assume that the author of Acts was at least knowledgeable and probably a participant in the events recorded (Rapske, 47); that the diverse and sundry details mentioned in Acts actually happened much as they have been recorded, and so may not be dismissed as so much “fiction” or “myth” (Gill, 109); that Acts and the Pauline correspondence reflect differing perceptions of essentially the same picture (Gill, 112; Blue, 152 note 127).

There is one exception to this overall orthodoxy. That is the excursus by Porter, who hopes to show that the so-called “we” passages of Acts did not originate with the author himself, but, in spite of the “sanctity” with which the text was handled, must have derived from a “continuous independent source . . . thought to have merit for the narrative” (545). I found this excursus not only cumbersome and convoluted (obviously written by one specialist for others, each with his or her own theory to champion), but also out of character with the largely tradition- and faith-affirming scholarship of the other contributors.

No theological consensus is ever expressed, yet the contributors’ collective position on Scripture might well be that articulated by R. V. Pierard in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. A. Elwell (Baker, 1984), 379:

Inspiration is not mechanical dictation; rather, the Holy Spirit has guided the various biblical authors in their selection of words and meanings as they wrote about matters in their respective places and times.

Aside from Porter’s article, the consistent assumption seems to be that a scholar may in good conscience give careful consideration to papyri fragments, inscriptions, archaeological site-reports, and all manner of corroborative evidence as these all, in their own way, serve to illumine the human side of Scripture. The volume is thus helpful to Lutheran confessional scholars and exegetes who conceive of God’s revelation in historical and sacramental terms.

Which is the best essay of the lot? Is it Rapske’s piece on travel (1–47)? Paul ought to be seen as a “professional traveller,” rather than a seasonal or “fair-weather” one, so driven was he to found, and then to strengthen, the first Christian assemblies. Or is it Winter’s piece on food shortages (59–78)? Agabus’s prophecy (Acts 11:28) should be seen in light of the many famines recorded in antiquity; such food shortages would have had an impact on the urban poor especially, where the first *ekklesiae* were, and an ancient shortage of grain was akin to an extremely severe oil crisis in modernity. Or is it Gill’s piece on the urban elites (105–118)? In spite of the hierarchical nature of Roman society, the earliest churches were meeting places for all social levels; Acts probably emphasizes the higher strata of society (including wealthy Roman women), because of the importance of benefaction for the maintenance and expansion of the emerging Christian movement.

My favorite piece was “Acts and the House Church” (119–222) by Bradley Blue, former student at Wheaton College and now faculty member at Ramsey International Fine Arts Center, Minneapolis. The most recent archaeological evidence suggests that for the first few hundred years of the church’s existence worshipers gathered not in large “purpose-built” church buildings (which would come later under Constantine), but in suitably arranged domestic residences. This runs counter to the romantic notion, once strongly felt, that Christians gathered in the catacombs (this idea is demolished, 123–24). Blue and others have instead discerned a three-stage process wherein: (1) Christians met in private homes belonging to individual members (c. A.D. 50–150); (2) portions of the domestic residences were renovated and then used exclusively for the purposes of the worshiping community (c. A.D. 150–250); (3) larger buildings and halls, both public and private, were introduced before the introduction of basilical architecture by Constantine (c. A.D. 250–313). Blue’s evidence for this progression has been gathered from such diverse places as Capernaum, Syria, Rome, Kent, and Dura-Europos (the site plans are featured, 193–222).

Domestic architecture is rarely well preserved. Ninety-nine percent of the Corinthian evidence, for example, is public or “monumental,” not domestic (126), and of what little that sur-

vives it is virtually impossible to determine which residences may have been used as a meeting place for believers. Nevertheless, Blue sifts the evidence carefully and discerningly, allowing readers to draw their own conclusions. For example, formal seating around a raised *dais* at Dura-Europos signified the primary importance of reading and teaching (128, 166); paradigmatic references to Jesus “in the house” from the synoptic Gospels, together with such apostolic phrases as ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ and ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, reveal an essentially unbroken connection between Jesus and His disciples, Paul and the early congregations, and on into later patristic ages (131–32); the *impluvium* of a Roman house at Corinth might have been an ideal location to administer Christian baptisms (158 note 153); the homes accommodating the early believers contained “pagan” works of art that apparently could be appreciated by their cultured Christian owners (158, 163–64).

Nor is Blue’s contribution restricted only to architecture. His thorough treatment of the topic tends naturally in the direction of more controversial matters also, such as women in the church. Thus he admits that such leading women as Phoebe filled the important offices of δίακονος and προστάτις in the first Christian communities (cf. Rom 16:1–2); however, as such scholars as Wayne Meeks, E. A. Judge, and now Blue contend, such titles did not designate the president or leader of a group, but most probably a *patrona*, “i.e., protector or patroness of many believers including Paul [himself]” (183, especially note 248, where the work of the earlier scholars is cited). What were especially valued and needed in the earliest assemblies were *not* more women pastors or priestesses but physical and material assistance to the apostolic missionaries, safe haven for the faithful gathered in order to hear them, and security from hostile scrutiny as wealthy citizens (183).

The conjectural nature of these assertions is duly noted, yet Blue has worked hard to base his work on relevant extra-biblical materials (Aphrodisias inscription, 178 ff.; Junia Theodora inscription, 184) where the “God-fearer” status of Gentile men *and* women was registered, together with amounts of benefaction, in several of the synagogues of diaspora Judaism. Blue suggests that the pattern is reproduced in Acts where there is overlap still between the Jewish synagogue and Christian *ekklesia*. Thus there can be no confusion between such “God-fearers” as Phoebe, the centurion of Caesarea, Lydia, the jailer at Philippi, Jason, and others who supported the apostolic ministry in primarily financial ways, and the “called and ordained” ministries of apostle, pastor, teacher (Eph 4:11). Money exerted a considerable influence upon the emerging Christian communities then as it does now, yet Christ’s holy people have generally subordinated the sanctified response (money, gifts, time, and mere functional ability) to what clear directives or prohibitions God’s Word itself provides. The modern parallel is irresistibly drawn: namely, theologically articulate women who, out of a sense of conviction, voluntarily rescind their “rights” to lead or read, and instead ask what else they can do in congregations to serve the Lord and fellow believers. The presence of such capable Christian women as Phoebe, Lydia, Prisca, Mary the mother of our Lord, Mary the mother of John Mark, and others suggests that our modern

tensions are nothing new, but indeed have been felt from the church’s earliest days.

But enough. I have only scratched the surface. There is plenty more here for pastors and concerned lay people to ponder and mull. May the Lord bless us as we do.

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*After the Apostles: Christianity in the Second Century.* By Walter H. Wagner. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

■ The purpose for which a person would read this work is for a window into the struggle of the Christian Church with Greco-Roman culture during the second century C.E. (Wagner’s denotation). Wagner’s own stated purpose for writing this book stems from his conviction that the “events, movements, and persons of the first two centuries of the Common Era are uncommonly important for people and developments in subsequent times.” He is particularly concerned about Christian Church history during this time because “For good or ill, the world has been and will continue to be deeply influenced by the church and the result of its commitment to Jesus” (vii).

Wagner’s work is valuable in that it strives to set Christian history in the context of the history of the Roman Empire of the second century as well as in the context of Greco-Roman thought and culture from Plato to the second century. Wagner says it this way: “The Empire provided the cultural and political context in which Christians moved and interacted with other persons, ideas, and institutions” (vii). This book satisfies Wagner’s own frustration in his efforts at teaching the Christian history of this period to college students, namely, that no sources tell the story of the persons, events, and ideas of the second century “in a readily comprehensible manner” (ix). His goal in producing this work is to provide such a source.

Wagner’s own presuppositions are numerous and important in this work. He seems to be writing from a history-of-religions perspective. He is critical with respect to the authorship and dating of the New Testament books, particularly with respect to Matthew’s Gospel, the pastoral epistles, and the authorship of Revelation. He dates Matthew quite late, denies Pauline authorship of the pastorals, putting their dates into the second century, and denies Johannine authorship of Revelation. With this scheme of things he argues that the church was in disarray going into the second century and that those in support of orthodoxy were on the defensive. Wagner also takes for granted that there is a diversity of theologies within Scripture and that diversity of doctrine and theology was the rule rather than the exception among Christians of the second century. There are points of convergence, of course, but Wagner emphasizes diversity.

Wagner is also critical of Christian orthodoxy at three important points: creation, Christology, and free will. With respect to creation, Wagner seems to believe in the eternity of matter, based upon a weak rendering of Genesis 1:1 in the NRSV. He is skeptical of creation *ex nihilo*. He also seems to adhere to a faulty Christology that makes Christ less than God,

based on a spurious understanding of John 1:1–4. He latches onto the anarthrous use of θεός in John 1:1. He seems to be persuaded in his own mind by Greco-Roman cosmology which apparently distinguishes between ὁ θεός and θεός. Ὁ θεός is “the One Supreme God.” Θεός is presumably “a god” in the hierarchy of angelic beings. Christ would be the highest of these beings in Wagner’s view. That Wagner places such importance upon the article is peculiar, since even a brief look at how John uses θεός reveals that he uses the anarthrous form to refer to the One Supreme Being. Nonetheless, this understanding leads Wagner into a faulty adoptionist Christology. Furthermore, he affirms belief in free will, that is, that man can apply his will to goodness toward God so that man in some way merits salvation.

The trouble with Wagner’s presuppositions and the reason they are being mentioned is that they tend to cloud his presentation of the views of those he is discussing in the second century. It is not always clear if one is getting the view of the ancient church or ancient Christian writer or that of Wagner. It is oftentimes difficult to know when Wagner’s personal views end and those of the ancient church begin. He also at times presents the material in such a way as to cast his own skepticism upon orthodox faith and to influence the discussion toward certain value judgments. His presentation can be quite tendentious at times, and this obscures and detracts from his own purposes.

Nevertheless, Wagner’s work can provide a valuable window into the second-century state of the church as Christians wrestled with their faith in their historical context. Wagner’s work presents a look into how some second-century leaders confessed Christian faith in light of the challenges of the culture in which they found themselves. If one approaches Wagner’s work in order to look through this window, it can be stimulating and thought-provoking, informative and insightful. It does provide an overview of and an introduction to the issues that the Christian church faced at that time, as well as some of the responses to those issues. It can stimulate a person’s curiosity to investigate further the state of the church and the writings of its leaders during that time.

Wagner’s work is divided into three parts. The first part sets forth the hopes and aspirations of Christians and Jews going into the second century as well as the broader context of Greco-Roman culture. This part makes three significant points. First, Christians were faced with the delay of the Parousia of Christ. Second, this was coupled with the continuation of the empire, which at times persecuted Christians. These two points combined to create frustration and apprehension among Christians going into the second century. This created the sense that the church needed to settle in for the long haul. Engaging the culture could not be avoided. Third, the important issues in Greco-Roman thought and faith also put pressure on the church with respect to its own faith. The church needed to define itself in the context of and response to the surrounding culture.

In the second part, Wagner presents five challenges that Christians faced in the second century as a result of this context. They are “Creator and Creation,” “Human Nature and Destiny,” “Identities for Jesus,” “The Church’s Place,” and

“Christians and Society.” In this section Wagner relies heavily on apocryphal works such as 2 Esdras, 2 Baruch, and Enoch as sources from which Christians derived their responses to the challenges that faced them. In Wagner’s view, these works had much weight as sources for the second-century Christians’ responses to their situation.

In the third part Wagner summarizes the responses to the five challenges of five leaders in the church at that time. Those five leaders are Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Irenaeus of Lyons. As the conclusion to the third part and the book as a whole, Wagner provides his assessment of those five respondents. He makes the views of those five interact with each other as if they were having a conversation. This was the most interesting and valuable part of Wagner’s work for this reader.

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*The Lord’s Supper: Toward an Ecumenical Understanding of the Eucharist.* By Philippe Larere. Translated by Patrick Madigan. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993. 94 pages. Paper.

■ Philippe Larere states the aim of his book to be “to help Christians to decide either to partake or not to partake of the Lord’s Supper, in full recognition of what this action signifies and the proper grounds for doing so, in faithfulness to the beliefs of their own Church, and also showing due respect for those of other Churches” (v).

The best word to describe this work is *brief*. It is too brief to do justice to its stated aim.

Through the author’s examination of the Old Testament and Institution Narratives (chapter one) he arrives at certain elements that he considers integral to the eucharistic celebrations of the church. These components are “the Word of God preceding the preparation of the gifts of bread and wine, a great prayer of praise with the account of the Institution, the breaking of the bread, and Communion” (9). According to the author, the eucharistic liturgy requires the following four actions: taking, blessing, breaking, sharing.

In the second chapter Larere treats the remainder of the New Testament and the development of eucharistic liturgies in the East and West. Here he rightly asserts that it is Jesus himself who presides in the liturgy. Larere’s analysis of the Lord’s presence, however, hinges on human explanations rather than on the biblical data. Larere states that it is around Jesus that the faithful gather. In this gathering Jesus explains his sacrifice on the cross through the “symbol” of the Supper. In addition, he “actualizes” the cross, that is, he renders “the deed [of the cross] present at the moment of the celebration of his Last Supper” (19). It becomes clear later in the book that Larere is not denying the bodily presence of the Lord under the form of bread and wine, but in a sense he dismisses the bodily presence as being much less important compared to a real presence of the sort suggested by the use of the rationalistic terms “symbol” and “actualization.”

The last of chapter 2 and chapter 3 provide a very brief summary of the developmental history of various traditions of eucharistic liturgies. Within this historical analysis the author tends to lump all Lutherans together with Protestants. This lack of a critical distinction between Lutheran and Protestant theology causes a person to wonder if Larere has accurately described Orthodox tradition. Larere is Roman Catholic, so one may suppose that he has at least dealt with his own tradition accurately.

Chapter 4 is really the heart of the book. Larere attempts to clarify the different eucharistic practices and doctrines among the Roman, Orthodox, and “Protestant” churches.

As was stated, the essential ingredients for the Eucharist according to Larere are the four actions of taking, blessing, breaking, and sharing. He critiques a number of church practices or liturgies using these four actions as his criteria. In one instance he asks,

Even if they [the members of a particular evangelical, pentecostal congregation] have the full intention of obeying the Lord’s command ‘Do this in memory of me,’ has this congregation *truly recreated* the taking, blessing, breaking, and giving *which is the content and meaning of Jesus’ words and deeds*? As evocative as it may be, has there been here anything more than a friendly action which did not even include the words Jesus is recorded as saying? (55, emphasis added).

Lutherans may resonate with Larere’s disapproval of an inadequate liturgy, but his criticism derives from the concern whether the congregation has “truly recreated” the four actions. Only secondarily is he concerned about the absence of the Lord’s word.

Because his emphasis is upon the four actions that are done by human beings rather than on confessing the word of the Lord, Larere is optimistic that there will be a continuing narrowing of the differences of the eucharistic faiths of the churches that use the ancient traditions as models for their liturgies.

A case in point is how Larere explains the various views of understanding the “Real Presence.” He maintains that the Roman transubstantiation, the Lutheran impanation (of course, we could hotly dispute his assigning to Luther the doctrine of impanation), and the Reformed pneumatological communion “all intend, in different ways and using different categories, to express the same truth, and that is ‘the mystery of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist’” (73). When the heart of the Eucharist is the actions of the communing and not the bodily presence of the Lord, stated in his own words, then the explanation of the Lord’s presence becomes a matter for theological (really philosophical) discussion that can have any number of explanations.

What makes this handling of the Lord’s presence possible, at least in part, is the failure to confess fully that the Lord’s Supper is for the forgiveness of sins. If a person confesses that the Lord’s Supper delivers forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, then he will not so carelessly tamper with the medicine that the Lord has given. Just so, Luther confessed the Lord’s words “This is my body; this is my blood” without philosophical explanations as to how this could be.

Strikingly absent from Larere’s account is the treatment of the Eucharist as being for the remission of sins. In one small paragraph the author concedes that the Eucharist does grant the forgiveness of sins! The minimal importance attached to the remission of sins is obvious from the lack of attention given it.

Larere also deals with other disputable practices in a summary fashion in this book: what to do with the sacramental elements following their usage, adoration of the host, communing those of another confession, communication under one species, the sacrifice of the mass, masses for the dead, and other issues.

Reading this book is much the same as seeing someone who looks distinctly familiar to you—someone to whom you should be personally close—but whose features are not quite right. Familiar aspects of his appearance make you want to stretch out the hand of friendship, but the peculiarities make you just wary enough that you keep your distance rather than approaching. Much of what Larere says is very congenial to a scriptural, evangelical confession of the Lord’s Supper, but he has greatly marred the essence of the Supper, especially in his handling of the bodily presence and the forgiveness of sins.

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*Amusing Ourselves to Death.* By Neil Postman. New York: Viking Penguin Books, 1985.

■ America, under the influence of electronic media, has inadvertently become a culture whose primary interest is entertainment. Everything aired on television is based on an entertainment model, including such “serious” programming as news, politics, and religion. If this were not the case, why would news snippets of fire, flood, and famine be interspersed by the lively little ditties that also introduce and conclude the show? Why do political figures rely more on evasive answers, “one-liners,” and an appealing presentation of their image than straightforward discussions of their beliefs? Why is it that most of what our memory retains from television is a catchy slogan rather than something of substantive content? If the audience is not entertained, the audience changes the channel.

Mediums of communication determine how a society thinks. For example, in an oral culture proverbs and parables are the primary resources used to make decisions at every level from the administration of justice to the ordering of individual life. The ability to memorize and recite the oral tradition of one’s culture becomes the standard by which intelligence is defined. This same ability, though, loses value in a culture whose primary medium of communication is typography. Here, intelligence is measured by one’s ability to deal with written text.

Since television has arisen to become the primary means by which information is disseminated in society, it has come to define how society thinks as a whole. The danger of television is that it is a mode of communication in many ways inferior to typography. Television cannot be engaged, questioned, or argued, as can typography. The very nature of TV is to entertain. Its

design is one that allows only the presentation of material, no single element of which has any continuity with the elements of material that surround it. Its intent is not to engage, but to spoon-feed. It keeps on feeding without concern for digestion.

While there is nothing wrong with entertainment, the influence of television on our culture is almost disastrous. Television dissociates us from such concepts as history and the continuity of time. Each moment is to be totally divorced from both past and future, just as the televised commercial has no bearing on the program that it just interrupted. Television raises the irrelevant to a state of mock relevance, as is illustrated by the daily news. There, thirty-to-forty-second bits of decontextualized information that in no way will alter the future course of our lives fill our ears and eyes, only to slip into oblivion in order to make room for the next feature. Since mediums of communication in many respects act as metaphorical representations of how society is perceived, it is natural for a television-based mentality to project entertainment-oriented expectations onto the world around it.

In short, television has influenced the way America thinks and acts as a culture. *Sesame Street* makes school fun, but only if school is like *Sesame Street*. Political elections are won by the candidate who puts on the best show, rather than the candidate with the best political agenda. Advertising does not focus on the merits of the product it sells, but on the actors whose lives appear to have been wonderfully changed by use of the product. In the retail industry, more money is spent on market research than on product research. Keeping the masses entertained is the primary goal of television.

The result of all this is a hauntingly accurate fulfillment of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* prophecies. As America's love affair with television has grown over the years, so has her oppression. By being drowned in a sea of information devoid of context, it has become increasingly difficult to separate the relevant from the irrelevant. We are not controlled by the infliction of pain, but rather by the infliction of pleasure. Totalitarianism is no longer a threat to America: triviality is.

Postman did not call for a ban on television. To the contrary, he recognized its usefulness as a source of entertainment. We would all be better off if television got worse, not better. "The A-Team' and 'Cheers' are no threat to our public health. '60 Minutes,' 'Eye-Witness News' and 'Sesame Street' are" (160). His warning is that America should no longer allow television to exceed its boundaries and influence the way society thinks as a whole. He called for understanding, for the realization of what television is and what it affects. Very simply, he has asked Americans to think about what they are doing.

Postman's book was directed toward issues that impact society at large, but his observations may have direct applications for the Lutheran churches in America, specifically in terms of worship. The prevailing *television mentality* in America may very well be the root motivation for the implementation of what has been dubbed "alternative worship forms." Entertainment has become an addiction, and its lure has pervaded every aspect of society, including Christian worship. As a result, the historic liturgy has received criticisms from all sides, culminating in the classic complaint: It doesn't meet my needs.

The very nature of such a statement betrays a desire to be entertained.

History has taught us that repetition is catechetical. Television has taught us that it is boring. Liturgical worship has suffered under this new tutelage. Like mother television, alternative worship forms fail to give us any connection with the past or with the future. They flicker bright for a moment, then disappear as others replace them. They entertain, but provide us nothing of lasting value. They fill our ears and eyes, but do not teach. Postman's plea to America could very well be a plea to the Church. The question is, are we amusing ourselves to death . . . in worship?

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*The Politics of Prayer: Feminist Language and the Worship of God.* Edited by Helen Hull Hitchcock. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992. 379 pages.

■ For anyone who is concerned about the language used in public worship, this book is indispensable reading. It is divided into the following sections: The Politics of Language, Linguistic: Use of Generic "Man," Hermeneutical/Scripture, Liturgical and Spiritual Dimensions, and Iconology: Revising God.

Nineteen erudite articles are contained within these sections, and each article is written by a different author. The book is similar to a compendium of articles dealing with an aspect of the language used in worship.

Although the book lacks the cohesion of a single author, the unifying thread that runs through the various articles is the criticism of the feminist influence upon the church's liturgy. The immediate cause for the authors' concerns is the changes that have been made in the Roman Catholic Church's liturgy, lectionary, and hymnody due to feminist ideology.

The influences of feminist ideology and political correctness are having their affects upon all denominations. The most recent examples of these influences can be seen in the inclusive language of the New Revised Standard Bible and the "fully human" creed of the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET) that was incorporated into the new WELS hymnal. The demand for inclusive language by eliminating all alleged sexist and androcentric language from the church's worship, including her creeds, is an integral part of the feminist agenda.

Due to the wealth of material in Hitchcock's book and the limited space provided for this review, only a few examples can be given. John Sheets's "The Problem Behind the Problem" and K. D. Whitehead's "The Serious Business of Translation" address the problems of speaking about God. The former author was chastised by a Catholic sister for using "man" and "mankind" in an article he had written. His article is a response to the sister's criticism. He states that "each language has a *genius* of its own marking it off from other languages. Language, therefore, is not simply a sequence of interchangeable words."

Sheets goes on to call for a decision regarding the use of God as Father:

either it belongs to *revealed religion* or it is *pagan*. If it is merely a patriarchal projection onto ultimate reality, then it is pagan. This is how the pagans visualize their gods, as a kind of other-worldly copy of a this-worldly reality.

K. D. Whitehead views the challenges of feminism from a translator's perspective. He points out the two inseparable responsibilities of a translator, namely, fidelity to the original text and fidelity to the language into which it is being translated.

In his criticism of the New American Bible's translation of Matthew 16:16–18, where Peter's name has been changed to "Rock," he makes this salient observation:

Regarding the whole passage about Peter's confession and Jesus giving him the name by which he would henceforth be known, the more the modern translators strain and try to render its obscurities and difficulties, the more obscure and difficult it seems to become.

Ralph Wright in his article "Generic Man Revisited" defends the generic use of *man*. He emphatically states: "You cannot get rid of man without at the same time getting rid of God. You cannot throw out the generic man bathwater without at the same time discarding God."

He supports his proposition by showing the etymological history of generic man, dating back at least to the year A.D. 825, and its current use in secular literature. He summarizes his views in the following way:

there remains a valid generic sense for the word man and its plural men—a sense that we have not created but inherited. It has been preserved in our literature from the infancy of our language, and it is irreplaceable, particularly in contexts where man is being compared or contrasted or merely juxtaposed to other entities—God, angels, devils.

Perhaps the most thought-provoking article is by Paul V. Mankowski, "Old Testament Iconology and the Nature of God." He clearly states his purpose in the article:

The position I wish to defend is that a Christian is obliged to acknowledge God as masculine, as a "he," in the fullness of the Godhead and in the Persons of the Trinity severally: Corollary to this is the conviction that it is heterodox to picture God as neuter, or as hermaphrodite, or as feminine.

Mankowski maintains that God is masculine without being male (biologically). He supports this belief by a study of God's names in the Old Testament and onomastica, the composite of personal names proper to a given people or region.

This book is not a production of misogynistic men; and it should be noted that not only is the editor a female, but there are also four articles by women, one of whom was deeply involved in the "neo-pagan 'womanspirit' scene," and a lay associate of a

goddess convent. This book is neither unsympathetic toward women nor to feminist concerns, but it does attack the feminist ideology that seeks to destroy the Christian faith.

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***Credible Christianity: The Gospel in Contemporary Society.***  
By Hugh Montefiore. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993. 299 pages. \$19.99.

■ Hugh Montefiore has written a book that, he hopes, will "give an honest account of the Christian faith," yet that is "at the same time interpreting that tradition in the light of contemporary understanding" (xi). In other words, as his title states, he wants to demonstrate to the world a *Credible Christianity: The Gospel in Contemporary Society*. That is a worthy goal. The Christianity presented by Bishop Montefiore, however, is not recognizable as orthodox Christianity, but is rather a combination of liberal theology, Roman Catholicism, and other various religious thoughts. Thus our reading of this work might at best be an examination of the way in which he presents this "gospel" to the world. Even here, however, Rev. Montefiore falls short. Except for his modifications to the Christian tradition in what we might call a "liberal" tradition, there are no unique ways of making his "gospel" credible to society.

Already in the introduction, we get the feeling that many parts of Montefiore's theology will be unacceptable to us. He claims that the "distinction between 'natural' and 'revealed' theology is no longer generally acceptable" (3). If not, then what kind of revelation is there? "God does not offer truths about himself: he offers himself. It follows that there is no such thing as revealed truth" (4). Of course he perfunctorily dismisses biblical inerrancy. "The doctrine of biblical inerrancy seems inherently improbable" (5).

Another thing we notice in the introduction is Montefiore's tendency to waffle when discussing controversial topics. Perhaps this waffling is part of his appeal to contemporary society? Following a discussion of "faith and secular knowledge" (including history, human sciences, natural sciences, and philosophy), he turns to aspects of the Christian faith itself, taking a chapter for each topic. Here we will have to content ourselves with brief quotations and comments on various chapters of the book.

Chapter 2 is about creation. Montefiore clearly believes that science has disproved the "myth" of the story of creation in Genesis. "Two different stories of creation are incorporated in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis. The first story is a Jewish adaptation of the Babylonian creation myth" (24). He then goes on to state: "The way in which the ancient Jews made use of an existing myth of creation, and edited it to serve their purposes, should encourage us to do the same with the current theories of creation based upon the contemporary hypotheses of theoretical physics, so long as we keep the same kernel as the biblical myth" (26). Montefiore then proceeds to do so, seeing in the

theories of the “big bang” and evolution certain truths about God. Montefiore acknowledges the weakness of depending on vacillating contemporary theories for truth: “Any new paradigm must be considered as provisional, since theories change and no absolute certainty can be achieved” (26).

In discussing human nature, Montefiore again discounts the scriptural account of creation. “Despite our need of the spiritual truths which the biblical story of Adam and Eve contains, we can no more accept this biblical account as scientific history than we can that of the creation of the universe; and in any case it is unlikely that the biblical story was intended to be a historical account” (49). In discussing the relationship between body and soul, Montefiore finally settles on an interesting analogy, that of hardware and software.

Perhaps we might think of the brain as . . . like the hardware of a computer, whose software when it is removed awaits re-embodiment in another compatible computer. The analogy is by no means precise, but it gives some indication of the possible relationship of soul to body. The software certainly has a kind of reality of its own, but it needs to be embodied in hardware to be usable. The soul has a reality of its own, but it needs to be embodied in a body in order to be more than passive, and to function creatively (57–58).

In discussing original sin, Montefiore criticizes Augustine, and while also criticizing Pelagius, definitely sides more closely with the latter.

Montefiore discusses the central Person of our faith with two chapters entitled “The person of Jesus” and “The work of Christ,” subtly drawing a distinction between the two. He clearly rejects the virginal conception of Jesus. In discussing the resurrection, he waffles for four pages before finally saying, “The mode of Jesus’ resurrection is of very secondary importance compared with the fact of his resurrection” (78). He makes an interesting distinction with regard to the person of Jesus: “Jesus was divine, but he was not God” (79). In the section on “the sinlessness of Jesus,” Montefiore claims, “like any other human being, he had a dark side as well as a light” (90). He speaks of Jesus’ “conversion” in his baptism, and the integration of his conscious and unconscious self throughout his ministry. Regarding the place of Mary, the mother of Jesus, Montefiore states, “Today our ability to describe God in female as well as male imagery does away with the need of a female figure close to the godhead” (95).

In the chapter on the work of Christ, Montefiore reviews various “theories of atonement,” as we might expect. Then, he claims, “Whatever understanding of the Atonement we may have, earlier theories lack credibility today” (113). He instead prefers a “psychological” theory of atonement, based on the imagery of reconciliation.

The following chapters cover various topics: the doctrine of God, the Christian mission, the Christian community, word and sacrament, ministry in the church, the last things, practical Christianity, and spirituality and theology.

The section on the last things provides some interesting

statements. Montefiore does not see the end of the world coming soon. He does not see any necessary connection between sin and death. (After all, animal death in the evolutionary process preceded human existence.) Resurrection is not of the physical body. “Today such a belief about our resurrection is no longer credible. The body disintegrates at death or is burnt, and its components will not reassemble in bodily form” (223). Montefiore discusses purgatory as a possibility (after all, many different religions have such a concept). Surprisingly, he even considers the possibility of reincarnation.

We have noted the immaturity of humanity during this life, and the need for further development after this life. It is possible that such development could take place not by embodiment in some future state but by reincarnation in another life on earth. Alternatively, it is possible that those who have died in infancy might be reincarnated so that they could begin the process of maturation on earth. . . . Experiences of *déjà vu* . . . can be dismissed as quirks of the human brain. However, it is not so easy to dismiss some of the evidence of mediums, and still more difficult the evidence of young children who have memories of the circumstances of an earlier life (229).

Regarding salvation outside the church, Montefiore asserts:

The doctrine *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the church) has been totally transformed. It is an interesting instance of the way in which doctrine can develop under the influence of a changing situation. . . . It remains true of course that salvation is found within the church—that is the abiding truth of the doctrine—but it is not true that outside the church there is no salvation (232).

This should serve as a basic “sampler” of the book *Credible Christianity*. While intending to be a basic overview of the Christian faith made credible to today’s society, I found its version of Christianity neither very credible nor very orthodox.

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## BRIEFLY NOTED

*What are the Essentials of Christian Worship?* By Gordon Lathrop. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994. Paper. 31 pages.

■ This monograph, the first in a series entitled “Open Questions in Worship,” is a condensed version of Lathrop’s earlier work *Holy Things* (Fortress Press, 1993). Lathrop defines the essential and ecumenical core of Christian worship as “a participating community together with its ministers gathered on the

Lord's Day in song and prayer around the Scriptures read and preached; around the baptismal washing, enacted or remembered; and around the holy supper' (7). For a careful critique of Lathrop's theology of worship, see Charles Evanson's review of *Holy Things* in *LOGIA* 4 (July/Holy Trinity 1994): 57–59.

***What is "Contemporary" Worship?*** By Paul Westermeyer, Paul Bosch, and Marrienne Sawicki. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995. Paper. 32 pages.

■ Paul Westermeyer, of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, addresses the question "What music should we use in worship?" According to Westermeyer, the church ought to deal with five initial considerations when faced with musical choices: (1) What associations does the music have? (2) Rhythm relates to the body. (3) The incarnation has led the church to sing its faith in the musical language of the people who embrace its message. (4) We are in communion with our sisters and brothers in Christ who have preceded us. (5) The church is in but not of the world. The most central consideration for Westermeyer, however, is that Christian worship points beyond itself to what God does.

The second essay in this short book is by Paul Bosch, an ELCA pastor serving on the faculty of Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. Bosch offers pastoral-professional, sociological, and theological-ecclesial arguments against multiple services (that is, traditional and "contemporary") in the congregation in an essay entitled "Shall We Schedule a Menu of Worship Services?"

Marianne Sawicki of Notre Dame University's Center for the Philosophy of Religion deals with the question "How can Christian Worship be Contemporary?" Sawicki worries that attempts to make worship contemporary may "turn the house of God's people into a house of entertainment and sales" (30).

***How Does Worship Evangelize?*** By Mark Olson, Frank Senn, and Jann Fullenwieder. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995. Paper. 32 pages.

■ "What is Evangelism?" is the title of the first essay in *How Does Worship Evangelize?* ELCA parish pastor Mark Olson argues that "When evangelism applies only to those outside the community of faith, the gracious gift of transformation in Christ

becomes trivialized into a campaign for new member recruitment and institutional growth" (8). Olson comments that some have cast evangelism into the marketing mold, reproducing evangelism models from nineteenth-century frontier revivalism. Thus we are left with "evangelism that seeks to bring the gospel to the world by acquiescing to the world in a quest for relevance [that] results in driving the world away and offering nothing new" (9). Olson very helpfully draws out several implications for the relationship between worship and evangelism.

The second essay, "What is Leadership in Worship and Evangelism?" is authored by Frank Senn. Senn makes a number of practical suggestions relating to the hospitality of the congregation (use of ushers, greeters, and guides), the preparation of the ministers, and the use of the catechumenate.

A final essay under the title 'How Does the Liturgy Inclusively Share the Christian Faith?' is by Jann Fullenwieder. While this essay correctly begins with Jesus Christ as the speaker in the Christian assembly, the focus is soon shifted to the voices of those who may be in attendance.

***Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity.*** By Alister McGrath. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1995. Hardback. 209 pages.

McGrath, a British Evangelical, assesses the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary Evangelicalism. The author intends to introduce Evangelicals to their own spiritual legacy while at the same time warning of Evangelicalism's "dark side." McGrath is hopeful that a renewed Evangelicalism will emerge as a genuinely ecumenical force. The picture that McGrath paints is generally more optimistic than that of David Wells and Os Guinness. Lutherans will note how easily McGrath dismisses the controversy between Luther and Zwingli over the Lord's Supper.

***Luther Digest 1994.*** Edited by Kenneth Hagen. Shorewood, Minnesota: The Luther Academy, 1994. Paper. 153 pages.

■ This is the second volume in an annual abridgment of Luther studies. Articles and books by a wide variety of Luther scholars from Germany, Scandinavia, England, France, and the United States are condensed into readable form for the non-specialist. Most of the publications date from 1991.

JTP



# LOGIA Forum

## SHORT STUDIES AND COMMENTARY

### SASSE AND A PASTOR

*As the work of Sasse is reviewed, we should note that it was not his influence on the corpus of theology but his influence on people that came as the result of his Christocentric confession of faith. As testimony to that we reprint an article first printed in the October 19, 1992, issue of The Lutheran, entitled "Why I Became a Lutheran Pastor," written by Pastor (now emeritus) Bruce W. Adams of Glengowrie, South Australia.*

On the Sunday after the Ascension, 1965, I was installed by the late Dr. Clem Hoopmann as pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Canberra. This involved a traumatic experience for my wife, Cleworth, and our young family, as well as myself. My background had been a blend of Presbyterian and Anglican. Cleworth and I had been educated at Presbyterian schools in Melbourne and confirmed as members of the Presbyterian Church.

Returning from World War II with a strong sense of calling to become a minister of the gospel, I studied at Melbourne University and Ormond College, Theological Hall. For 13 years I had been a minister, cherishing in particular the pastorate of the historic St. Andrew's Kirk in Launceston. Then came the decision that was to alter the direction of our lives. The way ahead seemed misted. What was it that led to my becoming a Lutheran pastor?

For a number of years, I had imbibed Luther, and had studied articles by Lutheran pastors and scholars. When I met the late Dr. Hermann Sasse in Melbourne, his commitment to the Scrip-

tures and confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church made an unforgettable impression. We corresponded, though at no time did he try to pressure me to become a Lutheran pastor. I also had contact with the late Dr. Henry Hamann and read articles by Kurt Marquart.

During the turbulent 1960s, the upheaval within the Presbyterian Church of Australia to unite with the Methodist and Congregational churches evolved into a divisive issue, hardening the difference between liberals and conservatives. Three essential truths in historic Lutheranism finally prompted me to enter the Lutheran Church by colloquy.

First, the high doctrine of Holy Scriptures as God's inscripturated Word to sinful humans. I read scrupulously the "Theses of Agreement." Without reservation, the theses taught "that the Scriptures are the Word of God, and therefore inerrant." God's Word was to be the directive and sole authority for the pastors and members of the emerging LCA. Centuries before, Dr. Martin Luther had taught that popes, bishops, councils, and churches were *subject* to the Scriptures. Such a claim rested on the nature of what the Bible itself stated.

The ancient fathers of the catholic church confessed in the Nicene Creed: "And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures." While Cleworth and I had been instructed on the same premise, churches in general regarded the Bible as just another fallible book.

Second, the biblical precision and balance of the Book of Concord confessed the faith of the ages. How many of us study this great treasure of the Lutheran Church? In our world, people have come to shape their perspectives according to their own ideas and speculations. But fads, scientific probings, and the ideas of the latest 'gurus' alter and decay with the years. It is highly dangerous for Christians to look within themselves for guidance, rather than measure their beliefs and actions by God's revealed truth. My heart still warms to the Preface of the Book of Concord, where it reads, "By the help of God's grace we, too, intend to persist in this confession until our blessed end and to appear before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ with joyful and fearless hearts and consciences."

As Lutheran Christians we rejoice in the saving gospel of Christ, the distinction between law and gospel, the atoning and vicarious death of Christ on the cross and his resurrection, and that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone. The confessions are locked to God's Word. They spell out the faith.

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Third, Lutheran Christians impressed me with their love for God's Word and Sacraments. I had been absorbed by Dr. Sasse's superb book, *This is My Body*, and gripped by the message of *Here We Stand* on the nature and character of the faith set against the backdrop of the Nazi regime in Germany.

Naturally I also respected and imbibed the liturgical heritage of Lutheran worship. It is grievous that many pastors and congregations have chosen to ignore or dilute the liturgy in the interests of popular appeal. Our liturgy is rooted in the ancient catholic church.

To know that we receive the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, with the assurance of God's forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation from sin, death, and Satan, is of comfort, joy, and hope. Worship is expressive of the faith and the God we serve. And so I was received into the pastorate of the Lutheran Church. I pray that this testimony will encourage you all to *fight the good fight of faith* (1 Timothy 6:12).

## ST. MATTHIAS'S DAY

*The Commemoration of St. Matthias falls on February 24. It has been the occasion for noteworthy guest speakers to address a special convocation on the ministry at Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Dearborn, Michigan, recordings of which are available through LOGIA Tapes. The following homily, however, was delivered in the Chapel of Sts. Timothy and Titus on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, by the Reverend Dr. Norman E. Nagel on St. Matthias's Day 1995. While we might have waited with this until the Epiphany issue, we are including it here so that you will be sure to have it well in advance of St. Matthias's Day 1996. The assigned readings for the day: Acts 1:25–26 and Luke 6:15–16.*

Why all the to-do about Matthias? You can't be much more of an also-ran than St. Matthias. The Acts of the Apostles opens with the big event of the Ascension, and the following big event is Pentecost. In between, there's a call meeting: short list of two, they prayed, the Lord decided, and it's Matthias, and we never hear of him again. Why bother about Matthias?

Actually, we do hear of him again. On the Day of Pentecost there stand the Twelve. "Peter standing with the Eleven." Peter preached the sermon. Peter couldn't chant for beans. Peter + 11 = 12. Similarly Matthew 28's Eleven, to whom the apostolic mandate is given: 12 - Judas = 11. That 11 + Matthias = 12. Are you still with me? The Lord is *not* going to *not* have a Twelve—can't do anything more Yahweh-ish than that.

Luke 6 tells us Jesus prayed all night. "And when it was day he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles." Me Lord, you apostle. Of the twelve thus ordained (it can be done without the hands bit, as Dr. Walther observed)—of the Twelve we are told their names. No one is left in doubt who is ordained. The last name is Judas Iscariot. Twelve minus Judas = 11; 11 + Matthias = 12. The Lord has his Twelve. He does not flub up; he does not get stuck at eleven. He has himself a people, an Israel, a Twelve. All clear. Carry on.

Mandate to the Twelve is carried out on Pentecost Day. There is the apostolic ministry, there is teaching, there is baptiz-

ing, there disciples have thus been made, "getting close to three thousand." Isn't that just the way we push statistics? Unlike our Lord's counting, ours may miss somebody. On Pentecost Day, no doubt there are Twelve, and no doubt there's church: those giving out the gifts and those to whom the gifts are given. Without both, no gifting (AC 5).

How many did "also-ran" Matthias baptize? The apostle Paul will not let us get hung up with that question. Christ is the one, Christ crucified, by whose cross the gifts were achieved, and he is the one who gives them out by use of the instruments he has put there for his giving them out. If you wanted your kid baptized, Pastor Paul sent you along to one of the other pastors. Baptizing is not in his *missa canonica*, his call in the specific sense (AC XXVIII, 8: *iuxta vocationem*). What's important is that, as the Large Catechism confesses, the baptizing is done by the Lord by his use of the instrument he put there for his doing it.

That belongs in our celebration of St. Matthias's Day. St. Matthias does best for us in pointing us to Jesus, the Twelve. It's Jesus' show, and what he is into is having himself augmentingly a Twelve, an Israel, his own people, his apostolic church, as we confess every Sunday.

It's Luke who delivers this Twelve/Israel most fully. We can only hope Theophilus had had enough schooling to cotton on—how cross-cultural can you get? Matthias at least, as his name would indicate, was an honest-to-goodness Jew, "Gift of Jehovah." He would have no problem getting all this talk of Twelve.

But then after Pentecost the Twelve are not heard of again in the Acts of the Apostles, except they appoint seven men to take care of the distribution to the needy so they can stick to what the Lord put them there for. That they disappear is really not surprising since as apostles they went (ΠΟΡΕΥΘΕΝΤΕΣ). Whither they all went we are not told. We are told how the word of the Lord grew, and how it traveled *per pedes apostolorum* (beautiful feet, Rom 10:15, Is 52:7, Na 1:15) to the center of the world and on to the uttermost parts of the world. More apostles were made: Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Brauer. From the start no one doubted it was the Lord who made them that. The Lord's mandate ran beyond the reach of the first apostles, the Twelve ones. What uttermost part Matthias went to we are not told, but we do know what he did there, or better, what the Lord did there by his use of Matthias to teach and to baptize, and so to make disciples, have himself a people.

The "there" to which this year's candidates will go, we shall, *Deo volente*, hear of on call night. They may go and we may never hear of them again or see them again until the joyful twelving of which Revelation tells us. The Lord surely has his Twelve, but Twelve can't hold it all, and so twelve times twelve.

If not before, see you there, and St. Matthias too, and those whom you and he baptized and taught, whom the Lord baptized and taught, his name upon them, 144,000. He's got us counted; he can't forget you, and, oh yes, Matthias too. Don't forget St. Matthias. You can be sure our Lord hasn't mislaid him. Amen.

The highest and the holiest place  
Guards not the heart from sin;  
The Church that safest seems without  
May harbour foes within.

Thus in the small and chosen band,  
Beloved with all the rest,  
One fell from his apostleship,  
A traitor-soul unblest.

But not the great designs of God  
Man's sins shall overthrow;  
Another witness to the truth  
Forth to the lands shall go.

The soul that sinneth, it shall die;  
Thy purpose shall not fail;  
The word of grace no less shall sound,  
The truth no less prevail.

Righteous, O Lord, are all Thy ways;  
Long as the worlds endure,  
From foes without and foes within  
Thy church shall stand secure.

## SASSEDOTALISM

*Sacerdos* is Latin for “priest.” The term “sacerdotalism” is the pejorative pinned on Roman Catholics and some Episcopalians who maintained that the laity can establish and maintain a relationship with God *only* through a priest. Those who hold the view that the Eucharist is a *necessary sacrifice* rendered to God *only* through a specially ordained priesthood are called sacerdotalists.

The fact that Sasse was not a sacerdotalist can clearly be seen in his writings, for example, *This is My Body* (16): “There is no priesthood in the New Testament besides the High Priesthood of Christ and the universal priesthood of his people. There is not the slightest indication that apostles, prophets, doctors, bishops, and other office-holders in the New Testament churches have a special dignity or office as priests beyond that which all Christians have.” This fact, however, has not impaired the impulse of a clever punster to transmogrify sacerdotalism into “Sassedotalism,” an act that would by its connotation seek to vilify those who appear to be dotting on Sasse this year with Sasse conferences, books, and journals.

There are those who with a smirk would confer the title “Sassedotalists” upon us as if it were a scarlet letter or a rotting gull. Whatever is meant by it one must discern in context, but it often seems to be a frowning upon the view that esteems as paramount Christ's instituted means of grace as placed into the hands of called and ordained servants and into the rhythm of the liturgy. Or perhaps it is a furtive poke at those who espouse such a confession that will not allow the means of grace to become subservient to the “means of growth.”

In any case, such a reaction is probably not due to Sasse's “high” view of the ministry. C. F. W. Walther had a high view of the office of the ministry (“The pastoral ministry [*Predigtamt*] is the highest office of the church and from it stem all other offices in the church”), yet no one seems to be implicating *him* for any sacerdotalist tendencies. Perhaps it is the response of certain fundamentalist biblicistic proponents among us for whom Sasse's views on inerrancy are insurmountable. For them, everything in Sasse becomes suspect since he did not maintain this tenet.

Whether the attention we have given to Sasse this past year amounts to Sassedotalism we will have to evaluate in the year to come. We suspect that more will find relief and encouragement in the timely Christocentric Lutheran confession that Sasse penned for his generation, which also anticipated our own.

JAB

## A LUTHERAN MASS FOR CHRISTMAS MORNING

*This review of a musical recording comes to us from Dr. David W. Buck in Kelso, NSW, Australia. The CD and cassette to which he refers is on the Archiv label, number 439250–2.*

Young and old alike will enjoy much of the music in this recording because of its vigour and the great variety of sound. Most of the settings are by Michael Praetorius (1571–1621). The Nicene Creed is sung in unison to Martin Luther's very solemn melody. The organ accompaniment to the second stanza reminds the listener of the divine and human natures of Christ.

The Sanctus is a rich embellishment of Luther's “Isaiah, Mighty Seer.” As the sopranos repeat, “Holy is God the Lord of hosts,” one can easily picture the seraphim calling to each other. It concludes in a majestic way and, along with the Introit, has some exceptionally beautiful harmonizations.

While the chanting of the Christmas lesson and Gospel, the Lord's Prayer and the Words of Institution highlights the mystery of the Real Presence, there is an overall mood of great joy and festivity in the liturgy and in the Christmas hymns, sung in German and Latin. The full text of the mass with English translation—as well as choral and instrumental details—are given in an accompanying booklet.

Wittingly or unwittingly, director Paul McCreesh has done us a great service by reminding us how Lutherans in the larger churches in central Germany worshiped one hundred years after the reformation. Is it any wonder that this period was followed by the Thirty Years War in Germany and then by pietism? After all, the devil had to go to such great lengths to squelch this sumptuous and joyful divine service.

## THE WORLD AND THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

Not infrequently have we read in *Lutheran Forum* that the ordination of women awaits a Scriptural *apologia*. In the Pentecost 1990 issue (vol. 24, no. 2), we noted the integrity of fourteen ordained women who declined the invitation to the twentieth anniversary celebration of the ordination of women sponsored by the Commission for Women and other various commissions of the ELCA. They lamented the use of the female pronoun in reference to God, concerned about “a resurgence of ancient heresy giving rise to ever-increasing perversions of revealed truth,” as they directed their readers to “the biblical witness which consistently and exclusively uses the male pronoun in

reference to God, along with the New Testament revelation of God's proper name as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the biblical language that we, as Lutheran clergy, have promised at our ordinations to uphold."

The women expressed a sadness that the Commission for Women and the Division for Ministry passed by the opportunity provided by that anniversary "to articulate a scripturally sound, confessionally faithful, theological rationale in defense of the ordination of women. The Lutheran church which ordained us continues to shun this responsibility while we continue, in many ways, to struggle in our service of that same church. How long will we have to wait?"

How long indeed? Subsequent issues of the *Lutheran Forum* have not risen to the opportunity occasioned by this open letter. Nearly five years later, Philip Max Johnson wrote that "our faithful women pastors . . . operate under the shadow of a confused public rationale for their ministry" (*Lutheran Forum* 29 [February 1995]: 11). We, too, would like to see something at least a bit more substantial than that found in a letter to the editor in the same issue, which stated: "The proper Lutheran—and Christian!—answer is: anyone with the brains to think the Gospel, a mouth to speak the Gospel, and a human body to enact sacramentally the Gospel, is potentially competent to be a minister of the Gospel. There are no further requirements" (17).

The female authors in the May 1995 issue aired their views on some questions of gender in such a way as to keep them unbesmirched by any possible accusations of biblicistic tendencies. It appears that we will have to wait even longer—perhaps forever, if ever it should be recognized that there is no scriptural, confessional, theological, apostolic, Christocentric rationale for the ordination of women.

Despite Rome's recent prohibition against the ordination of women, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (a minor setback in the overall *Religionsgeschichte* evolutionary scheme of things), it seems that rapprochement with Rome is still more likely (and more desirable) than with the Lutheran cousins in the LCMS. There is still some hope because Rome *could* change, given enough time and a future pope—which is more than some think possible for the LCMS, although given certain undercurrents, the ELCA might dally and dawdle with the LCMS while it waits for some significant movement in the Vatican. And if not that, then it might pass the time by composing a public, or even scriptural, rationale that does not demean the faithful departed.

It would seem as though theology is a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it. Norman Habel volunteered in the *Lutheran Theological Journal* (December 1994, 129–134). He does his theology by turning the gospel into a *principle*: "The gospel principle is a long-standing Lutheran principle governing both how we 'do theology' and how we interpret the Scriptures." Habel *does* his theology. The apostle Paul *received* his theology. There is a marked difference. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not speak on his own authority (Jn 12:49). The Spirit of Truth does not speak on his own authority (Jn 16:13). If Habel or others think they are prophets or spiritually gifted, let them acknowledge that what Paul wrote to the churches (not just one troubled congregation in Corinth) is what the Lord himself has handed down. If they ignore this, will not they themselves also be ignored (1 Cor 14:37–38)?

Waiting *ad infinitum* for rationale, it might occur to some that the world has noticed all along that the office of the ministry was not initially *given* to women. In fact, wasn't it the world that agreed to lend its notion of civil rights and natural equality to be artificially inseminated with a new hermeneutic in order to give birth to the phenomenon of the ordination of women in some confessions? Others followed subsequently even if their rationale amounted to nothing more than keeping up with the Joneses.

In twentieth-century Europe, a socialistic worldview joined an evolutionary exegesis in scorning those from whom the office had apparently to be taken by a claim of right. (And certainly a democratic, free society could not let itself be upstaged by any socialists.) The world today in its haughty self-righteousness still condemns those churches that deny the office to women. But when this self-righteousness is spent and only a scattered remnant remain who oppose the ordination of women (a remnant too little for the self-righteousness of the world to bother with—the world needs big injustices to make its own righteousness seem all the greater), the world will then just as easily discredit the female clergy.

"Ah!" the world will proclaim to this feminine episcopate, "What kind of servants are you who achieved such an office by might and by right? Well, we know how you set your sights on that vocation and obtained it, but you were not able to take it without *our* social impetus and rationale. The office that you have was not conferred upon you by your own; rather it was our mores and movements that made it all possible.

"Do not bother us, then, with any preaching you have taken upon yourselves. If you like, you can preach the secular gospel of common sense and worldly freedoms with which your ordinations were procured. We had little enough regard for men who preached when that responsibility was conferred upon them by a call. We have even less regard for you who were not even able to get that much without our support. For a while we sided with you so that we could delight ourselves in our own open-mindedness, tolerance, and love, but now you have nothing left for us except some preaching that is little more than the imaginations of your own hearts. And if you think you can set your sights on us to conquer or convert us by your preaching, you are sadly mistaken!"

Thus the world will turn on its heels to seek some new cause or injustice to champion as it glories in its own self-righteousness. It will leave an androgynous clergy to pander as harmlessly as it pleases, so long as it does not ungratefully bite the hand that fed it. Such a church and clergy can pay back its progenitor by preaching against social injustices and prescribing social gospels, but it thereby shows that it has no claim as a legitimate heir in the kingdom of God.

JAB

## CROSS THEOLOGY AND THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

Harold Grimm appends the definite article to "cross" in his American Edition translation of Luther's twenty-first thesis from the *Heidelberg Disputation*: "A theologian of *the* cross calls the thing what it actually is" (AE 31:53). This may add more than what Luther intended.

To begin with, the *passiones* or sufferings to which Luther refers are not identified as Christ's sufferings. Nor is it specified as to how one "comprehends" (*intellecta conspicit*) or receives the benefits of such sufferings if they are in fact Christ's sufferings. Closely examining the context of the early Luther's articulation, we note that sufferings and cross are played off against good works ("for they hate cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works").

This early "cross theology" (*theologia crucis*) meant that Christians should bite the bullet and endure whatever sufferings God sent their way. Buying indulgences was wrong because this act sought to avoid the *poena* that God was meting out instead of facing up to it. This is something altogether different from having the merits of Christ's suffering and death *imputed* to the sinner as Luther so admirably articulated in subsequent years.

Note the *subject* of the suffering in the *Heidelberg Disputation*. Is Luther commending *Christ's* suffering and cross or is he commending the Christian's own sufferings and crosses borne in life? That the latter is more likely may be seen in Luther's contemporary discussions on indulgences, for example,

From this you can now see how, ever since the scholastic theology—the deceiving theology (for that is the meaning of the word in Greek)—began, the theology of the cross has been abrogated, and everything has been completely turned upside down. A theologian of the cross (that is, one who speaks of the crucified and hidden God), teaches that punishments, crosses, and death are the most precious treasury of all . . . blessed is he who is considered by God to be so worthy that these treasures of the relics of Christ should be given to him; rather, who understands that they are given to him. For to whom are they not offered? As St. James says, "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials." For not all have this grace and glory to receive these treasures, but only the most elect of the children of God (AE 31:225–226; WA 1:613, 21–33).

In light of this, might we not prefer the term "cross theology" over "theology of the cross" in understanding and translating the pertinent theses in the *Heidelberg Disputation*? The latter term means something different to modern readers from what was meant by Luther at the time of the *Heidelberg Disputation*. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find Luther ever again using the phrase *theologia crucis*. The early Luther's theology was a cross theology. The later Luther's theology was a theology of the cross—and not in the sense that the Christian is to run to "the cross," in other words, to travel to Mt. Calvary or to venerate any acclaimed splinters of the holy cross in some reliquary. What we call today a theology of the cross, Luther would have described in terms of the Lord's Supper. Thus he would keep the Lord's people from shouldering their sufferings as if they were performing some meritorious, self-humbling, taking up of *their* crosses (cross theology). Instead, he would have us glory in the sufferings and cross of *Christ* (theology of *the* cross) as received through the means of grace.

JAB

## PRAYING THE CATECHISM

*This article is taken from M. E. Schild's "Praying the Catechism and Defrocking the Devil: Aspects of Luther's Spirituality," found in the August 1976 issue of Lutheran Theological Journal.*

Edmund Schlink characterizes a past era in Protestant history as a period in which Christians had not forgotten "how to pray through their Catechism" [*Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, (36)]. The presence and effectiveness of this tradition in Lutheranism is certainly largely due to Luther himself, to his labors in writing two outstanding catechisms, his insistence on instruction in the catechismal truths, and his explicit advice for extending such "doctrinal" knowledge into practical realization in the prayer of the believer. This last point is of particular interest here and is to be taken in conjunction with Luther's own example.

This issue is recurrent in his writing, and the validity and the recovery of such integration of *intellectus* and *fides* may well deserve closer attention in our time. It is treated most directly (not as a problem) in a short work prepared for a layman, Luther's barber, Master Peter, in 1535. This writing, entitled *A Simple Way to Pray*, is one of his many responses to the pastoral needs and requests of his people. Gordon Rupp treats the piece as one of the most helpful texts for understanding the spirituality of the early Reformation.

In *A Simple Way to Pray*, Luther in turn takes the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed, and "recasts" them into suggested forms of prayer to be varied and developed in use by his lay friend. Throughout the document Luther gives first place and primary emphasis to the promise, will, or action of God, according to the pattern that he suggests to Master Peter for disciplined meditative prayer based on the *Pater Noster* and the Decalogue:

I think of each commandment as, first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly. Secondly, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third a confession; and fourth a prayer.

The "examples" that Luther then provides accord very closely to this scheme and amount to an exposition of the whole Decalogue. This exposition is, however, uttered in the first person; it is indeed addressed to Master Peter, but it could with little alteration be spoken to God by the barber or any believer. Thus, the very reading of Luther in this instance becomes a direct aid to prayer; it transposes the reader into the communicative dimension of address. Comparison with (and contrast to) those other classical works of Christian spirituality, Augustine's *Confessions* and Thomas a' Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, comes to mind. *A Simple Way* teaches prayer not in theory but by practice. And how far Luther understands the scriptural text underlying this mode of prayer as reaching into the various dimensions of Christian life is suggested in his recapitulatory remark: "These are the Ten Commandments in their fourfold aspect, namely, as a school text, song book, penitential book, and prayer book" (AE 43:209).

The Creed receives similar treatment. The great indicative statements are to be fully exposed meditatively. And it should be noted that Luther regularly gives the lion's share of his considerations to this fundamental part of the exercise. Nor is the rest simply devoted to petition, but thanksgiving and confession of flaw and failure are to retain their place as integral parts of our "prayer, praise, and thanksgiving."

It may thus be legitimate to locate the spirituality here being inculcated by Luther along the border of doxology and doctrine as the indicative, clear statement of God's will or work.

This thought is further supported by Luther's tireless exposition of the New Testament text that is the Lord's Prayer, not only in early writings, in the Catechisms, and the sermon series underlying them, and in *A Simple Way*, but perhaps most significantly (this, however, also applies to the other traditional parts of the Catechism, the Creed, and the Commandments) in the form of congregational hymns. Whatever may need to be said concerning the marriage of didactic and poetic elements in these hymns (and medieval hymnody had here prepared the ground), Luther seems to be moving well within the orbit of the old rule: *lex orandi lex credendi*.

The instructions to Master Peter reveal the great catechismal texts of Scripture and the Church as the basis of Luther's spirituality. They are basic for him, not simply because of the value set upon them by church tradition, but because they embody the very words and promises to which God stands committed. Already in 1519 in a sermon, *On Rogationtide Prayer and Procession* (AE 42:87–93), Luther stresses the two-edged point that Christian prayer is not self-help; on the contrary, it requires, results from, relies upon, and appeals to the divine promise that precedes it; it builds upon the faithfulness of a God who has promised to hear us, and is a direct expression of faith in his trustworthiness (*die unwanckelbare Wahrheit gottlicher Zusagung*, WA 2:176, 26).

Thus in his Word, God's goodness and grace precede and offer more than all our prayers can ask. This goodness is to motivate the life of prayer. The prominence given to the text in Luther's spiritual exercises thus exactly reflects the primacy accorded to the divine Word of promise in the totality of Christian existence. Regin Preter has shown how this "direction from heaven to earth" stands opposed to the position of the enthusiasts who "do not teach how the Spirit comes to us but how we may come to the Spirit" (in *Spiritus Creator* [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953], 253–254).

First God's deeds, then our needs! This order, as expressed in Luther's consistent emphasis on the "objective" text in his advice to Master Peter, is certainly not meant to eclipse the personal and even subjective involvement of the believer at prayer. Indeed, his counsel is intended to counter a cold and listless attitude to prayer, and it is for this very reason that the catechetical texts of Scripture, including particularly also the Psalms, are to be used "as flint and steel to kindle a flame in the heart" (AE 43:209). Equally striking things are, thus, now said on this side. So, ". . . if in the midst of such thoughts the Holy Spirit begins to preach in your heart with rich, enlightening thoughts, honor him by letting go of this written scheme" (AE 43:201). At such a moment the Spirit himself preaches, and one

word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers" (AE 43:198).

As in the case of public worship, Luther's explicit and practically-intended recommendations on the forms and content of worship are balanced by a very fine and definite refusal to impose a straitjacket and thus diminish the freedom innate in truly evangelical worship. So Luther expects and encourages various "levels" of devotion: some regular and recitative of the biblical and catechetical bases of the faith (and, be it noted, *these* provide the answers to man's naturally cold heart); others not planned, possibly mystical, as making way for the internal articulate utterance of the Word-given Spirit ("listen in silence").

Luther knows prayer to be entirely dependent on a committed Lord who has spoken and who listens to our responses. Prayer is no monologue; the first word is the Lord's, and, when we have said all in our thanksgivings, confessions, and petitions, our silence may be filled at moments with the consummate speech of the Spirit. However, a further dimension, of which he also reminds his barber, exists for Luther:

Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone, rather think that the whole of Christendom, all devout Christians, are standing there beside you and you are standing among them in a common, united petition which God cannot disdain (AE 43:198).

This realization, Luther maintains, has great significance for the confidence with which the "Amen" is to be spoken to every "private" personal prayer. And, it should be stressed, this inescapable ecclesial context never comes into view without its biblical perspectives. In his 1528 preface to the Psalter, Luther erected immortal testimony to the singers and sufferers of the Old Testament as members of the one ecumenical assembly of saints (see AE 35:256–257). From the Reformer's standpoint, an individualist understanding of prayer has the Church Catholic against it. And the basic tests of the Catechism and the Psalter daily bring every believer back to the common source of Christian faith and life.

## FIGURES FROM WITHIN

*During the nineteenth century the General Synod was, by all measurements, the most theologically liberal and non-confessional of the General Lutheran bodies in America. The more insightful theologians even of the General Synod appear, however, to have had a better understanding of the spirit of genuine Lutheranism than do many advocates of the Church Growth Movement in the more "conservative" Lutheran churches of today. Edmund Jacob Wolf, who died in 1905, served for many years as professor of Church History at the General Synod's Gettysburg Seminary. He offered some timely thoughts on "figures" in The Lutherans in America, published by J. A. Hill and Company in 1890. The following excerpt is from pages 524–25.*

Figures yield, however, an unsatisfactory and inadequate exhibit of a church's strength. Numbers are no proper expression of moral forces. Mathematics do not apply to what is spiritual.

In that sphere one and one may be more than two and two. Statistics may include clergy, communicants and congregations that weaken rather than strengthen a church. They may be minus quantities. One earnest soul may count for more than multitudes who have the form but not the power of godliness.

A Lutheran congregation may be equal to a Methodist one, or to a Presbyterian, or to an Episcopalian. It may also, though numerically and externally weaker, represent more than either or many of these. Primarily the question is how much Christian truth does it represent? For what compass of the Gospel does it stand? What is the degree of its spiritual endowment? To what extent is it the body of Christ?

Surely in this the strength of the Lutheran Church is nowhere surpassed, is equaled by none. She holds and preaches the truth as it is in Jesus with a fullness and emphasis heard nowhere else. Salvation by faith alone, Christ the center of all her teaching, Christ exalted in her pulpit, her festivals and her liturgies, herein lies the essential strength of the Lutheran Church. "If the Lutheran Church does not compass the truth and salvation of God, they are not to be found on earth."

And, what is of preeminent value, her faith is clearly defined and fully set forth in her Symbols, which are becoming more and more the study of her ministers, and adhered to with a firmness that has no parallel in any other Church.

DJW

## LUTHER LITE

*The full text of the following article can be found in the January-February 1995 issue of Modern Reformation Magazine, pages 17-18. It was sent to one of our editors by the author of the article, Craig Parton, a graduate of California Polytechnic University, Simon Greenleaf School of Law and Hastings College of Law. He has written, lectured, and debated on United States constitutional law. Modern Reformation Magazine can be obtained by calling 1-800-956-2644; a one-year subscription is \$21.95.*

C. S. Lewis, we all know, came "kicking and screaming" into the kingdom. My family has recently also come "kicking and screaming" into the Reformation. It has been a long and arduous journey which included an extended desert experience in evangelical pietism mixed with many years as missionaries with a high energy parachurch organization. These experiences left my wife and me in T. S. Eliot's "Wasteland"—a spiritual black hole which ultimately forced us to seek the fresh stream of the Reformation.

Now that I have come to the Reformation, questions abound. What is the commitment of the Reformation churches to their distinctives? Why are many Reformation churches looking to evangelical Bible churches for the critical "recipe" necessary to generate vibrancy and good attendance numbers? Evangelical churches apparently have the numbers, the exuberant youth groups with equally exuberant youth group leaders, high rates of conversion, and plenty of money for the new gymnasium. The question arises: Does a "successful" church really need to be presenting Law and Gospel every week? Is the Reformation

emphasis on an informed confessionalism, as opposed to an emphasis on conversion, really necessary?

Reformation churches could easily conclude that God is doing his real work elsewhere. After all, Reformation churches are not growing at exponential rates, many contain largely senior congregants, and may be struggling to attract the young people who have likely gone off to the evangelical churches that highlight a more entertaining "Saturday Night Live" format. As one evangelical pastor of a mega-church recently told me: "Give me a large auditorium and let me do a 'David Letterman' format, and I'll pack the place out." No doubt he would. But is Hell yawning?

The careful preaching of the text of Scripture, the presentation of the Cross as sufficient for the sins of Christians, the administration of the Lord's Supper, scriptural liturgy, theologically literate music—in short, a mature presentation of sin and grace apparently is no longer sufficient to light the fire of Mr. John Doe Christian.

Reformation churches are increasingly tempted to experiment with so-called evangelical "schmooze"—a frothy mug of "God Lite" incapable of being harmonized with a serious theology of the Cross as articulated by the Reformers. An emphasis on marketing the "Product" to outsiders, the use of weak musical media and equally vacuous "worship teams," the devaluing of a detailed knowledge of the confessional guides, all appear with increasing frequency in historic Reformation churches. Sunday school material is now reviewed for its "relevance" and ability to entertain the MTV generation. Some Reformation churches now debate whether confirmation classes are really "sellable" to junior high students anymore.

I wish to offer three warnings to Reformation pastors and their congregants who may be tempted to engage in the new art of "Reformation Schmooze":

1. *Schmooze seeks to entertain. Do not mimic the "Saturday Night Live" Christianity of many of the leading Evangelical Temples. You will not do it as well and it is truly embarrassing hearing it in churches supposedly dedicated to the teachings of the Reformers.*

. . . The Christian who cannot discern the superiority of Bach's arrangement of "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" from "I've Got Peace Like a River" is not only impoverished but enslaved. Life is too short to have to suffer through innumerable variations of "You Ask Me How I Know He Lives? He Lives Within My Heart" as a regular diet on Sunday morning while the varsity worship team avoids "And Can It Be That I Should Gain?" "Holy, Holy, Holy," and "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." Simply put, mantra music to us by the purveyors of schmooze fits with the worship style of another religion.

If you seek to schmooze, the preaching of the Law and the use of theologically literate music will be among the first things to go. You will end up with either a Christian VFW group or a youth rally, but not with a Christian church that has the Gospel.

2. *Schmooze seeks to be trendy. Instead, present the liturgy, preach the text of Scripture, and administer the Sacraments with excellence every single Sunday.*

Evangelicals coming to the Reformation are nauseated over moralistic sermons where Christ, portrayed as a second law-

giver, is presented only in the evangelism of unbelievers. They are nauseated over Arminian Sunday school curricula that instruct their children (as, of course, does Zen Buddhism) to look within themselves for that divine glow that yearns to cooperate with God in doing good deeds. They are nauseated over the Lord's Supper being presented as "crackers and juice" time. They are nauseated over churches where a person's level of involvement in a particular social cause appears to be a confessional requirement akin to affirming the two natures of Christ. Seeking evangelicals are looking for serious, intelligent, thoughtful worship that seizes the high ground. Sermons and Sunday school classes devoted to trendy People magazine-type topics are not the strong point of the Reformation. . . .

Evangelicals going to the Reformation expect to drink the cup of theology and doctrine to the dregs. They will not be drawn to Reformation churches because you offer a "contemporary service." For heaven's sake, they will come to the Reformation to get away from that! If I had only wanted a "little dab of Luther," I would have stayed put. It certainly would not have been worth the discombobulation involved in moving my family to the Reformation if the only result was that we got Arminian theology supported by a nice pipe organ.

### 3. *Leave head-counting to the domain of schmooze.*

Reformation churches see the excitement, the numbers, the budget, the prestige that evangelical churches and pastors have in the community. Young people appear to be flocking into these "user friendly" environments. "God Lite" works, so it seems. Sermons emphasizing social involvement and Jesus As Therapist keep the attention of the Phil and Oprah generation that supposedly is disinterested in the mundane issues of sin and salvation.

Numbers deceive. In fact, a biblical church could actually be losing numbers. I am convinced that many churches would actually be displaying a renewed obedience to the inerrant Word of God by engaging in a vibrant ministry of subtraction.

In any event, a church with ten people that is preaching the text of Scripture, presenting Christ each week as if the Cross is the answer for Christian failure too, and is properly administering the Sacraments, is doing it right. Reformation churches must do what they have been blessed by God in doing for over 450 years. Rest assured, evangelicals that come in will be supremely enthused to proselytize those outside the camp. After all, that is what we evangelicals do best.

. . . The haunting question facing serious evangelicals who have wallowed through the theological pig-pen to get back to their Father's house is now this: Will the light still be on? And if it is on, tell me it's not neon.

*Craig Parton  
Santa Barbara, California*

## ARBEIT MACHT FREI

The ironsmith who crafted the main gates at Dachau and Auschwitz forged a motto out of the metal: *Arbeit Macht Frei*. These gates opened to swallow thousands who were to suffer the dark squalor of this insidious lie: "Work Makes Free."

It was bad enough that the motto be fashioned in iron then. How much more deplorable that human hearts continue to be fashioned by this maxim today. The workplace gorges itself upon the time and energy of countless thousands who imagine that the fruit of their labors is freedom. Infinitely worse is the message that *work* brings freedom from sin with its guilt and sorrow.

This implicit deception stands ever ready to burst into the church, to drag away pastor and people. Statistical demands drive labor camps. Church Growth consultants are the *Kommandanten* of commandments: "Work, work, work! Create new liturgies. Develop new programs. Manipulate members through fund drives to come up with more and more cash needed for the consultants, programs, and materials. Make forty evangelism calls per week." It is never enough.

The kind of work Christ's people expect from their shepherds, however, is not engendered by the imperatives of the law. They know that those pastors who are motivated by the law are the most likely candidates to implement the same upon those whom they serve. Congregations who have been served by pastors who corral them through the gates of *Arbeit Macht Frei* are endlessly harangued by one pledge drive after another, by this challenge program and the next. And the reverse can also be true where congregations impose upon their pastors expectations that are not a part of the pastoral office instituted by Christ. The walking skeletons of such victims are decried as lazy and shiftless if they do not meet the prescribed quota or live up to the current statistics.

The law is not to be used either for motivation to serve the gospel nor for measuring the gospel in any way. The law has its way of making some pretty haggard-looking people. The implementation of never-ending programs and fund-raising drives can leave people drained and semi-conscious. At first glance, an exhausted pastor or congregation in some respects may resemble a slothful group when measured by growth or participation statistics. Yet statistics cannot and do not distinguish between the haggard and the hale. Statistics do not have the capability of distinguishing between law and gospel. Who are those consultants who would continue by their rigorous schemes to pommel strength-sapped pastors and people?

Someone ought to break such news to certain Church Growth consultants. It is reported that whenever someone responds critically to the method of one such agent, he trots out the statistics to see if the average attendance at services has been growing or declining. The one we have in mind wrote to the members of this past summer's LCMS synodical convention floor committee on congregational services with the numbers that showed that the majority of those congregations submitting overtures "limiting" worship with Lutheran hymnals had declining worship attendance over the last decade.

What he hoped to imply is that those who commend the liturgy are in some way causing their congregations to wither and die—and that whatever they commend is detrimental to the growth of Christ's church. Such a use of numbers and percentages is not only unfaithful to the principles followed by learned and seasoned statisticians: it is foolishly fallacious. He makes no effort to investigate the possibility that some churches have been torn apart for eight of those ten years by "creative" pastors with their inept attempts to replace the liturgy. He makes no attempt



to discover whether the community in which a congregation has been placed has suffered the results of a collapsing economy. He only wishes to use statistics to ensnare the minds of the simple into his self-proliferating methodology that bears the brand of *Arbeit Macht Frei*. With such statistics he seeks at the same time both to fleece the sheep and to pull the wool over their eyes with his high-priced services and high-sounding ideals.

*Christ makes free.* Where Christ is by the means he has instituted, there his servants are also. The Lutheran Confessions commend as primary the manner and means by which Christ comes to his people in a way that Church Growth consultants treat as tertiary. In the Lutheran symbols, indeed, in the history of the church we do not find the promise of freedom or growth determined by work but by grace. Shall we not then remain free instead of being yoked in bondage to the slavery of Work Makes Free?

JAB

## THE PATH NOT TAKEN

For some people, the gospel is perceived as a goal. If that is the starting point, one must then consider how to reach the goal—the manner, means, and method. In this schema, evangelism becomes a science. Evangelism concerns itself with what is necessary to get people to that goal, to the gospel. Evangelism considers this in light of people who by nature neither know nor desire the gospel.

You can't get to the gospel via the gospel. The only way to the resurrection is first to die. The only way to the gospel is first to be killed by the law. This does not mean being bludgeoned to death. "Why should you be beaten anymore? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in it but only wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up or soothed with ointment" (Is 1:5–6).

There are methods that propose to bring people to the gospel via attractiveness. Offer them something they like and they will come. One Midwestern district mission staff person has been commending the start of mission churches that long-time Lutherans will not be attracted to. He writes:

Is there a "mission field ripe unto harvest" within or adjacent to your "area of responsibility?" Do you sense a matching reluctance to move into that mission field because it might impact adversely one or more of your present congregations? Then consider building a church that few if any of your members will attend—build "a church for the unchurched," one designed not to attract long-time Lutherans!

He goes on to propose that

communities need "entry level" gathering places for the unchurched and new believers and "graduate level" gathering places. Most of our churches are meeting the needs

of graduates almost exclusively. Some can meet the needs of both. Very few meet the needs of the former.

Here, since "graduate-level" congregations are not attractive to potential "entry-level" people, the idea of beginning a kind of two-track church has been hatched. The "needs" are supposedly different between entry-level members and graduate-level members. What is attractive to one is supposedly not attractive to the other. Indeed, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Cor 1:18). To them it is the smell of death (2 Cor 2:16–17), "For we are not, as so many, *peddling* the Word of God . . ."

Thus the Lutheran confession of Christ proposes that people are not brought to the gospel because it has an aesthetic appeal, but to pronounce them DOA—dead on arrival—by the law before they are reborn by the gospel. People who come to our congregations with broken and contrite hearts already crushed by the law do not come making demands or listing preferences. And we dare say that they would be highly offended if we told them that they were invited to a Lutheran church that other faithful, long-time Lutherans would not want to attend.

Jesus did not make the cross beautiful or appealing. To those who were caught up in the romantic notion that it might be wonderful to follow Jesus, he spoke, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *his* head" (Mt 8:19–20). Thus our Lord says to any who would desire to follow him *not* that they do so because the Christian life is glorious and attractive but that they take up the cross daily (Lk 9:23). What kind of consultants are they, then, who wish to grow churches by making them appealing to the flesh?

Some claim that we can "catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." By that, are they commending the *sweetness* of honey—or its *stickiness*? Now, I cannot say that I have confirmed this by experiment, setting out bowls of honey and vinegar to determine their relative effectiveness, but I suspect that there is something that will draw flies even more than gallons of honey: Bullhockey. The devil (*Beelzebul/Baalzebub*—Baal [lord] of the flies") along with the world and our sinful flesh would see to it that there are ample supplies of bullhockey to go around. This triumvirate would even like to see to it that such fly-drawing bullhockey be offered from the staff of synodical, district, and congregational offices through workshops or official church publications.

The prophet Isaiah, however, proclaims an *unattractive* Savior and his gospel to be offered among us: "And when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Is 53:2). Confessional Lutheran evangelism and mission efforts do not follow the paths of red carpets leading to the gilded doors of marketing firms or cosmetologists. The gospel does not lead to some earthly *loma linda* or beautiful point at which one feathers his nest for a temporary stay.

Our beauty is in the *crucified* Christ. Our gospel is as glorious in the world's eyes as that hideous and bloodied cross. The path we take is not like that avenue which leads one past the brilliantly lit casinos of Las Vegas, or past the homes of superstars in Hollywood, or the glamour of Fifth Avenue, or the hype of Madison Avenue, or the song and dance of Broadway. Our path is the way of the cross, traced by the worn carpet that encircles the baptismal

font. Our route is the scuffed-up hall that leads us into classrooms for the Word. Later, it is via the traffic-patterned aisles that lead to the communion rail. These are the paths to which we are directed not by their worldly beauty, but by our own ugliness that longs only to be drowned, hidden, and covered in Christ alone.

JAB

## MINISTERS AS ADMINISTRATORS?

*What was it forty-five years ago that led to the writing of an article that is just as timely today? In the July 1950 issue of Concordia Theological Monthly (vol. XXI, no 7, pp 538–539), we find the following brief article, written by Paul M. Bretscher Sr.*

“The Minister as Administrator” is the title of an article contributed by Dr. Charles F. Ball of River Forest, Ill., to *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March and April-June issues). Dr. Ball stresses the responsibility of the pastor as leader of the congregation’s program of activities. He must be the guiding and directing mind, he must see to it that the affairs of the parish are administered in the most effective manner, he must keep before his flock high and noble objectives, be alert to challenging opportunities, and submit to his congregation carefully thought-through projects. Dr. Ball concludes his plea: “We are His [God’s] ministers, and as those who preach in His stead it is altogether right that we should learn from the successful institutions of the world the methods by which we may make our work successful. It is by faithfully organizing, planning, laboring, and carefully administering the affairs of His vineyard that we shall be accounted good and faithful stewards of Christ and stand approved at last.”

Dr. Ball’s plea is well intended. The business of the King of kings must be carefully planned, intelligently guided, and effectively executed. We question, however, whether Dr. Ball’s criticism of theological schools for not providing adequate training in parish administration is wholly justified. He writes: “The schools of Theology are responsible for the ignorance about organization and administration that exists. Most men have to flounder around for a number of years and gain by bitter experience that which should have been taught them in school. There is merit in the theory that, just as a doctor serves his time of internship where he learns more than can be found in the pages of a book, so every young minister should during his seminary days and in connection with his seminary work spend certain time as an apprentice or an assistant, sitting in on meetings of the board, on planning conferences and on such administrative functions as are helpful to his future. There are scores of young preachers who have never led a business meeting in their lives. They may be mighty in the pulpit, but in the councils of their brethren in the church they are pygmies. Many a floundering seminary graduate is struggling with the complexities of his office and is fouled up in a tangled web of details.”

Certainly, theological seminaries should make every reasonable effort to equip their students with those tools, techniques, and life-situation experiences which they will need in the administration of their parishes. It is most desirable, as our Church has discovered, that seminary students spend a year in a well-planned vicarage, sit in and observe how meetings in a parish are conducted,

participate actively in the program of parish activities, do bedside work in hospitals, assist the pastor in canvassing a new territory, and, in general, gain through experience an insight into the whole vast program of activities carried on by a live congregation. Yet all this seminaries can do only within the limitations of their theological curriculum. Nor may it be forgotten that some of the most important lessons in life one learns only in the school of experience. It will be a sad day for the Church if theological schools were to concentrate on producing leaders and administrators rather than shepherds of souls, and stewards of the heavenly mysteries who know how rightly to divide the Word of truth.

## A VISION FOR GROWING CHURCHES

Growing churches all have leaders with a vision. On the night of the Passover (Exodus 12) the Israelites were rescued from the slavery of Egypt. As they passed through the sea to freedom, they were baptized into the fellowship of Moses (1 Cor 10:2). At their baptism God declared: “Israel is my first-born son” (Ex 4:22). Once in the wilderness God provided his “first-born son” with spiritual food and drink—manna from heaven and water from the rock that was Christ (1 Cor 10:3–4). Israel, God’s “first-born son,” was being taught that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

This first-born son then came to Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God. There God identified himself to his son, saying: “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation” (Ex 34:6–7). There God made a covenant with his son, saying: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:4–6). There God gave his law to his son (Exodus 20), saying: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” There God gave his liturgy to his son (Exodus 25–40), saying: “You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy” (Exodus 31:13). There God instructed: “Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me” (Exodus 23:14). There God promised his son his abiding presence and grace, saying: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Exodus 33:14).

God’s first-born son, however, had “felt needs” that were not being met. He had a felt need for a visible god. He had a felt need for more exciting, uplifting worship. The liturgy that the Lord had given him was boring, culturally irrelevant, and user-unfriendly. And he had a felt need for a more successful life. Life in the wilderness was too difficult, too insecure. He longed for the fleshpots of Egypt.

In the absence of both Moses and God, who were up on Mt. Sinai, Aaron found himself the chief executive officer by default. Has God not said: “Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream?” (Jer 24:28). So Aaron dreamed his dream (Exodus 32). He came up with a vision that would meet the felt needs of his people. He envisioned a visible god for his people—a golden calf—who would be given credit for bringing the people out of Egypt. And he envisioned a growing population. He would incorporate into the life of Israel the fertility rites of the Canaanite cultural religion. He would set in motion forces that would result in annual increases in the number of people in the Israelite congregation. He would thereby avoid the backdoor losses of those who wished to return to the fleshpots of Egypt. And he would attract those who were turned off by the Lord’s liturgy by creating an alternate form of worship that would be exciting and uplifting.

Aaron built an altar in front of the golden calf and announced: “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD.” The next day Israel, God’s first-born son, rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. “Afterwards they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” Never before had their worship been so uplifting. Never before had the attendance been so good. Aaron, a leader with a vision, had met the felt needs of the Israelites. And the results were astonishing.

Little did God’s first-born son realize and little did he believe that thereby he had placed himself under the dreadful judgment of God. “Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. . . . Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry” (1 Cor 10:6, 14).

“Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. ‘O Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes,’ he said, ‘then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance’” (Ex 34:8–9).

“Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing” (Joel 2:13–14).

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## HOW LUTHERAN HYMNALS ARE REVISED

Well, it’s 1995 already. Thirteen years have passed since *The Lutheran Hymnal* was replaced with *Lutheran Worship*, and, according to my reckoning, twenty-seven more have to go by before we start pulling *Son of Lutheran Worship* from our pew racks on Sunday mornings.

But that doesn’t mean our diligent hymn purifiers are sitting on their past triumphs. At this very moment, in the corridors of musicological power, the Thee-Thy-and-Thou Police are hard at work. Let’s eavesdrop on the proceedings, shall we?

. . . Schmerz . . . Schmidt . . . Schmuck . . . Schultz . . . and Schwartz. Everybody’s here, sir!

Okay, Heinrich, let’s get started.

This meeting of the Committee on Lutheran Hymnological Modernization and Archaism Expurgation, Rheingold Sprachen-sheister presiding, will hereby come to order.

Thank you, Heinrich. What’s first?

“Abide with Me,” sir, verses two, three, four, and five.

What’s the status report?

Two *thys* and a *thysself* in verse two; one *thou* in verse three; a *thee*, a *thy*, and a *thou* in verse four; and a *thou* and a *thy* in verse five, sir.

Thank you, Heinrich. Now, is re-rhyming a problem in this hymn? Schultz?

All the archaic language falls in midline, boss.

Great. That solves that problem. Change them all to *you*, *yourself*, and *your*. Whatever fits. Okay, what’s next, Heinrich?

Excuse me for interrupting, boss, but are we sure we want to revise these hymns? They’re Christian favorites.

It’s high time we get rid of the *thees* and *thous* in these old ones too, Schwartz.

But I thought we did that last time.

We only got some of them last time, Schwartz. We did an incomplete—albeit highly gratifying—job on the old favorites last time. (Committee members lean back in chairs and bask in the memories for a few moments.) Ah yes, gentlemen, “My Faith Looks Up to Thee.” Remember how we handled that?

Now called “My Faith Looks Trustingly,” as I recall, sir.

Right, Heinrich. They won’t be singing that one around the campfires anymore. That is, not without hymnals and flashlights. Who was the mastermind behind that superb revision?

Schultz, sir.

Schultz, eh? And “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah”—was that your work too, Schultz?

Yes, boss. I changed that to “Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer” because of the *thou* in the title.

And “Take My Life and Let It Be.” That yours?

Yes. Currently, “Take My Life, O Lord, Renew.” There’s a *thee* in the second line.

And “Isaiah, Mighty Seer”?

From “Isaiah, Mighty Seer in Days of Old” to “Isaiah, Mighty Seer in Spirit Soared.” Not a *ye* or a *yea* or a *thee* or a *thou* in it, but I still rewrote it. That was a definite triumph.

But “The Lord Hath Helped Me Hitherto”—the *ne plus ultra* of your work. An outstanding piece of hymnwriting, Schultz. Fabulous!

You mean “God Brought Me to This Time and Place”?

Yes, Schultz. Not a soul in all of Lutheranism would know it was the same hymn.

You’re far too flattering, boss. There were, after all, four *hithertos* in the first verse alone.

Yes . . . well . . . enough basking in past glories. We have work to do. What’s next, Heinrich?

“Just As I Am,” sir.

Hmmm . . . “Just As I Am” . . . What can you do with that one, Schultz?

“Just as I am without one plea but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou biddest me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.” That one, boss?

The very one.

Hmmm . . . Thy . . . Thou . . . biddest . . . Thee . . . the words demand a total rewrite, boss. The melody, though, that I can easily bring into modern conformity.

The melody? What's wrong with the melody? We've been singing it for one hundred forty years. Schultz? Boss?

Who says something has to be wrong with it before we change it, Schwartz? Remember how we rewrote the liturgies last time? It's like that one solitary note we dropped from the page 15 Offertory in the old book. You know, instead of having them sing "unto"—two notes, now they sing "to"—one note. Only change in the whole thing. We do it on principle, to keep them on their toes.

Boss, this will be easy. I'll just dot a couple quarter notes. That ought to do it.

Hang on a second, Schultz. Let's brainstorm this thing. This is too important not to give it the complete collaborative treatment . . . Yes, dotting quarter notes will work here.

Or, for that matter, we could dot some half notes.

No. Organists never hold those anyway.

Either that, or they hold them forever.

Good point, Schmerz.

How about making some running eighth notes into dotted sixteenths?

Good, Schmuck. Give it a be-bop sound.

How about the bass clef? Anything we can change there?

We took the bass clef out of all the hymns last time, didn't we?

No, Schmidt. That was the liturgy.

I've got it. Why not make the notes go up where the old book has them going down?

Or, where they go up in the old book, we'll make them go down in this one.

Great, Schultz, great. A very substantive suggestion.

Or, we could add a note somewhere—or subtract a note.

We could add some verses.

We only add verses to *unfamiliar* hymns.

Would "Just As I Am" be considered an unfamiliar hymn?

No. It's a familiar hymn.

Okay, then we take verses off, right?

Bravo, gentlemen! This is great! An incredibly dynamic dialogue—open, frank, creative.

Very similar to the one we had last time around when we discussed the "Amen" situation, right, boss?

Oh, I remember *that*. That was something. I remember those first few services with the new book. All those poor saps gathering up that big old last breath for a big old "Amen," and then . . . nothing.

That's because we took them all out! Ha!

Did they get bent out of shape over that one! Just because every hymn they've ever sung in their entire lives had an "Amen" tagging along after it, they think it's important or something . . . But anyhow, enough already . . . I'll leave "Just As I Am" to you, Schultz . . . Heinrich, what's next?

"Nearer My God to Thee," sir.

What's the report?

Every verse has four or five *thees* in it, sir.

Is re-rhyming a problem?

In four verses there are fourteen *thees*, sir, all of them at the ends of the lines.

Egad! A complete overhaul!

Let's brainstorm it again, boss.

Good idea. But before we start, let me remind you again of the probity of our charge. In this, as in all the hymns up for revision, it is imperative that we retain the historic integrity of the meaning of this great hymn, while also rendering it in fresh and vital language.

We must approach this task with the highest of principles.

Indeed, Schultz. I'm making a call for hymnological scrupulousness. We are revising a classic, after all.

We must keep it old, but make it new too.

Well put, Schmerz. But let's get started. Gentlemen, what rhymes with *you*?

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## THE PH.D. IN THE PARISH

*In our first issue this year, we noted a group known as the Colloquium Viatorum, formed in 1990, dedicated and designed for LCMS graduate students enrolled in a course of theological studies at non-LCMS colleges, universities, or seminaries. The following presentation was made to a gathering of this group.*

Fellow *viatores*: This presentation is in need of a title. "The Ph.D. in the Parish" is rather tame. A better title might be the actual words spoken to a pastor at an emotionally charged elders meeting, during which a matter of parish practice was being discussed: "Who Do You Think You Are—a Pastor or a Professor?" Still another title suggesting itself to a pastor going through preliminary examinations or dissertation difficulties might be: "How to Complete Your Ph.D. in the Parish without Going Berserk and Killing a Bunch of People."

There are a lot of pastors in the Missouri Synod right now who currently hold, or are working toward, higher academic degrees. As I called some of these individuals recently, inviting them to attend our annual meeting in St. Louis, there were frustrations shared by this growing group of people: "How will I ever use this degree in the parish?" "Will I ever get to teach?" "What have the academy, and the parish ministry, in common—if anything?" Many of these frustrations are exposed and aptly dealt with in a little book by R. Robert Cueni, suitably entitled: *What Ministers Can't Learn in Seminary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988). The gift of this book to myself as an ordination present by fellow classicists at the University of Wisconsin-Madison did much to improve my morale and fortitude during the inevitable shift from graduate school (rigorous discipline for the benefit of self) to the realities of the parish ministry (rigor and discipline for the benefit of others).

We have a problem in our church body at present. There are—to put the matter baldly—too many big fish in a small pond. That is, there are too many qualified (or even over-qualified) degree holders, and too few teaching, research, or editorial positions in which to keep them. There are a number of reasons for

this crisis (and it is a crisis to the one who has devoted several years of life and thousands of dollars to higher study, only to realize that society and even church are not particularly interested). One reason is that the sort of disciplines in which we are engaged—theology, literature, languages, history—are being axed out of liberal arts curricula in colleges and universities at an alarming rate. Classics, to provide only one example, is generally the first department to get cut in a pinch. A second reason for this crisis is that there is currently—not only in the secular academy, but even in the colleges of our own church body—a much greater desire to hire women, minority, and other “nontraditional” candidates. The last thing a college or university can tolerate these days is to be branded as a bastion of white, male, elitist, or homophobic learning. Thus the all-male graduates of Missouri Synod seminaries cannot help but be affected as virtually all other institutions of higher learning continue to recruit and hire the type of teaching candidates we, for the most part, were not created to be—barring a sex-change operation, or something else.

I would like to propose that the situation as outlined is in fact a great strength of our church, not a weakness. A well-educated, plus faithful, clergy bodes well for our church in the long run. In the meantime, however, there will almost surely be some frustration in store for the parish Ph.D. The question, therefore, is: how might one minimize the frustrations of a would-be intellectual, enmeshed now amid the people and problems of the typical parish scene? Where might the parish Ph.D. find his “niche”? And finally, that persisting question once again: how might one avoid going berserk and killing a bunch of people? In response to such questions I would like to put forward several suggestions.

Suggestion 1: Realize that the parish ministry is important, not a waste of time. This is obvious, of course, and yet the devil works especially hard upon the parish Ph.D. The graduate student who nears completion or the recent Ph.D. may well come to see his time in the parish as a painful interregnum, as mere prelude to teaching or “higher” service. Recognize these feelings for what they are: stirrings of the prideful flesh, promptings of the devil. A parish Ph.D. still has much to learn, even from the most humble, most difficult, or most disagreeable members of the flock. Weathering through the storms that inevitably accompany faithful parish service helps the pastor who may one day teach in the academy to have a much higher sympathy and respect for all parish pastors, regardless of their failings.

In this connection, Luther’s words come to mind: “On the man who is ordained into the ministry the highest office in Christendom is conferred” (*What Luther Says*, 2:945; see also Walther’s comments in *Law and Gospel*, 285). Christ must surely expect faithful work from every holder of this office, regardless of sins, weaknesses, or even strengths that, by the devil’s designs, can quickly become an obstacle. We have been placed into congregations to preach, teach, administer the sacraments, call on the lost and straying, and even “administrate” in the unpopular sense of that word. Modern society has unfortunately driven a wedge between academic teaching (which one generally goes on to graduate school for) and the more readily discernible “pastoral” activities of preaching, catechesis, calling on parishioners, teaching children, etc.; yet Scripture unites the two kinds of activities into one holy office: καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποσ-

τολους τοὺς δὲ προφήτας τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστὰς τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους (Eph 4:11). Common sense—to say nothing of the apostolic imperative—would suggest that until we get to teach professionally, if we ever do, we holders of the office ought to be fully engaged in “doing the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5). This will help us to appreciate pastoral problems and pressures, yet also the rewards and joys of the pastoral office, few of which, generally speaking, are understood or appreciated by people in the academy.

Suggestion 2: Learn the lessons and do the work that the Lord has placed you into the parish to learn and do. This is a very helpful attitude for the parish Ph.D. It comes out of the sober realization that no pastor or candidate for the ministry is perfect, a fact to which even the apostle Paul attests (2 Cor 4:7 ff.). There are skills, roles, and activities for every bearer of the office to learn, including the parish Ph.D.

By far the most important activity in which we are engaged, of course, is that of public preaching, of doing well the law-gospel thing among the people who called us to be among them in the first place. Now, we all know on a purely intellectual level that the proper division of law and gospel must be spiritually taught (Walther’s third thesis), that “a person may be a graduate of all schools in existence and yet not have acquired this art” (*Law and Gospel*, 50). Walther remarks that Cordatus, simple parson that he was, divided the law and the gospel “a thousand times better” than the learned Melancthon when the latter had begun his drift into false teaching after Luther’s death. One of the most frightening things for the perpetual student of theology is countenancing the idea that he must one day feed parishioners, such as they are, and many a seminarian has commenced graduate studies in order to postpone that. But that is what being a pastor is all about! As the rector told young Pastor Fridfeldt late one evening:

“First one believes in repentance, and then in grace. And I believe you are on that path. But now we must argue no longer . . . It probably does not pay, nor can I ever convince you with words. But out there”—he pointed with his pipe toward the dark winter night outside—“out there you will find a strict and demanding teacher.” Fridfeldt looked puzzled. “The congregation, my boy. The congregation is the best teacher a pastor can have” (Bo Giertz, *The Hammer of God*, 148).

Along these lines, it is worth pointing out that the mark of a good preacher is not big words or high-sounding rhetoric but an ability to convey Christ and the gospel to common, simple, ordinary people on their own level. Sometimes the Ph.D. in the parish is at a disadvantage here. So one’s time in the parish should be viewed as a God-given opportunity to “unlearn” various bad habits picked up in graduate school, such as an arrogance toward mere undergraduates, a penchant for using the multi-syllabic *nomina technica* of our learned disciplines, whatever these may be, or the persistent “nose-in-the-book syndrome” that can be a source of great irritation to our wives and families. Some of these side-effects from graduate school may remain with us for a long time, of course, yet in truly gifted people brilliance is generally hidden beneath a covering of ordinariness.

Unlike many other rivals to power, for example, Julius Caesar acquired power at Rome by means of his ability to communicate with the vulgar, rough, and rude soldiery who were moved to give their all for Caesar. Such rapport with ordinary men was never understood or appreciated by Caesar's contemporaries, who, typically, were upwardly mobile and therefore despised the rank and file. For a more recent example of this phenomenon in our own circles, President Al Barry has become noted for conveying profound theology in a plain way to ordinary, believing lay people. There is a lesson here for us; and that is the necessity of bringing the fullness of Christ, as well as our unique gifts as educated persons, down to the level of ordinary humanity so that we may help/love/serve, rather than impress, intimidate or dazzle. We imitate Christ and participate wholesomely in His Incarnation to the extent that we are able to do: *τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ὅς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἄρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ* (Phil 2:5–6). Good preaching and teaching, using to the full our gifts not only as pastors, but also as human scholars, as men of integrity who love the truth, are equipped to find it wherever it is hiding, and then can convey this on to ordinary people—these are the qualities, if anything, that contain the key to a God-pleasing harmony and healing within our congregations.

So, at the very least, be prepared to explain your graduate work in “laymen’s terms” to interested parishioners. They deserve to know what keeps you so busy, so glued to the computer, so contemplative in research when you might be about other things! Tell them why such research is important—not only to you, but to the work and life of Christ’s church. They will love you for filling them in, and you will have gained allies who will be sympathetic to your work.

Suggestion 3: Think of your special research or scholarship as an avocation, hobby, or “treasure”—paraphrasing our Lord’s words, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt 6:21). I believe it is possible to do high scholarship in the course of one’s parish ministry and not neglect one’s family, one’s exposition of the Word, or the people we have been called to serve. Of course, there are some minimal requirements for scholarly activity to occur: access to original sources and secondary literature, a good copy machine and computer, time to analyze data and weigh the evidence, and a proper forum in which to put forward one’s own contributions to a scholarly problem. The parish routine can be punishing, and yet—as in so many other things—productive scholarship really does, in the end, boil down to realistic planning, drive, determination, and discipline: *diligentia omnia vincit*.

One of the boons of the parish ministry, all things considered, is the fact that usually a pastor can be quite independent with his time off; nor is he locked into quarterly or semestral time frames with which our colleagues in the academy must contend. Therefore, one very revealing question the parish Ph.D. might ask himself is this: What keeps me from being a productive, publishing scholar in the parish? If the answer is my family, people, programs, routines, commitments—then is it really possible that there is more time for pure scholarship as a tenured professor? Hardly! Most professors nowadays are burdened with many distractions from scholarly activity, just as the parish pastor is.

So the lesson here is, develop your “talent” wisely in the parish: “Whoever has will be given more, and he will have it in abundance” (Mt 13:12). Knock off sometimes to go fishing or golfing, preferably with your family or with an affirming parishioner; and yet continue to make steady progress in your scholarship. This will silence that nagging voice in the back of your mind saying, “The ministry is nice, but you should be doing more. Why, after all, did you ever get that degree?” Now, this voice, along with all temptations from the devil, died with Jesus when he was nailed to the cross with all our sins, guilt, and nagging apprehensions attached. And yet that nagging voice has a point. It is your conscience telling you to do something with yourself—that it is not enough suddenly to become “Dr. So-and-so,” yet really be a lazy ass who has allowed his degree to go to seed. The best way to silence that nagging voice (besides believing the gospel, of course!) is to get to work and make a contribution.

Suggestion 4: Work incrementally. Have something to show for your work every day, even if the Lord has given only one hour for this purpose. Caesar conquered Gaul one foot, step, march, stronghold, and battle at a time; this, too, is the way dissertations, journal articles, and even more extensive scholarly projects are completed—just one day and opportunity for research and writing at a time. Naturally, the parish Ph.D. will not have as much to show for his scholarly activity during Holy Week, during the Advent Season, or even while “on vacation,” which can be even more exhausting than the regular grind. This is quite understandable. At all other times, however, the faithful scholar in the parish will be about his activity—quietly, unobtrusively, daily: *non multum, statim*.

Suggestion 5: Be flexible. Serve your congregation and the greater church as the Lord gives opportunity. Be open to whatever doors or windows may open as a result of a higher degree even if, for the moment, the talent seems to be underestimated and unappreciated by others.

This is a helpful suggestion because it is doubtful that a parish Ph.D. will be able to use his degree directly in the course of his ministry, even if called upon to serve at one of the educational institutions of our church. So, for example, the pastor who has just completed a dissertation on clever Latinity in Caesar’s *commentarii* probably will not get to teach such concepts directly to undergraduates in today’s Concordia University system (barring a miracle!). That particular philological research, however, may enable the parish Ph.D. to delve more deeply into the New Testament than ever was possible before and in this way profit many types of parishioners and students as the Lord provides opportunity.

It is worth reminding ourselves that higher education generally does not bestow increased intelligence, heightened salary, or the kind of technical know-how that society, given to different pursuits, deems useful; rather, critical thinking, sound research techniques, and the ability to get to the bottom of a problem and share one’s findings with peers through clear, reasoned speaking and writing—these are the true fruits of a higher degree. And of course these things belong to Christ, together with everything else: “Take my intellect and use / Every power as Thou shalt choose” (TLH 400, stanza 4). It is the privilege of the parish Ph.D. to use such gifts in service to the Lord and to others, not

just in abysmal service to self. That means openness on our part to the kind of doors God opens, to his timetable.

Therefore, let the parish Ph.D. look about himself and take stock of his surroundings. Of course, he cannot use the degree as directly in his immediate setting, in the parish, as he may wish. That is a given. But there are other opportunities, perhaps at the circuit or the district level. Is there a study group in your area devoted to the weekly pericopes, liturgy, Lutheran Confessions? If not, start the group and draw others in. Many pastors nowadays are hungry for, and needy of, such enrichment. Or is there a college or university nearby where you may instruct others as an adjunct professor? Searching out such possibilities and acting upon them—conveying these needs to your parishioners and working with them toward acceptable solution—is infinitely better than grousing around the parsonage in a funk, feeling guilty about not having done more with one’s gift (Mt 25:29), and envying those lucky enough to have acquired a position in academia. Such feelings, such depression, I submit, also are of the devil.

No, there is much to do professionally, also for the parish Ph.D. Our questions ought therefore to be: Whose man am I and how might I use this degree to God’s glory? for the betterment of those Christians among whom I have been placed? for other pastors in the area? Knowledge is either a weapon to intimidate or a gift to heal. So which will it be? When I hear parishioners and even brother pastors who have got their theology wrong, who are struggling in ways where I may help—how might I help them? How through pastoral love and doctoral insight might Christ, through such an instrument as me, send parishioners, brother pastors, and even an occasional student “on their way rejoicing” in the gospel? These are the questions worthy of deep contemplation by us, my fellow *viatores*. May God grant each of us wisdom and guidance along the paths where he would lead. Thank you.

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## FORMING THE PRIESTHOOD

*The following was presented by the author to the Western Region Conference Seminar for new pastors and their wives, January 23–26, 1995, San Francisco, California.*

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Pt 2:9–10). If God calls us his royal priesthood, and we are, we may still ask, How is a priest made? How is a priest formed?

A priest was conceived just the other day. A He-man and a She-man desired each other and united. Out of their union the priest was made in their image. This priest was brought to light about 270 days later. He came to the earth in the usual way. He

(or She) is a priest of darkness, a sin-filled loser, a god-groper, a fiend of Triune God, a disciple of the “hot-air prince” of this world, a master of illusion, deceptions, and twisted lies.

This newborn priest must die to become a priest of Triune God. The newborn priest might reason: “I’ll just kill myself and then god (he does not know the Triune God) will be happy with me.”

But Triune God will have no self-indulging, suicidal candidates for his priesthood. No, the death will be by his decree and doing. The newborn priest will die a true, not a self-righteous death.

Triune God seems to be a bit morbid concerning this dying business. Morbid perhaps to the newborn priest and those who are identical to him. Morbid, that Triune God demands his death and imposes its sting and stench to create a new priest, carrying his name, bearing his cross, and living for him.

Death by water-Word. Plunged under the water-Word, the old-born priest is killed, scooped up from the water-Word, and breathing with a new life, now a Triune God priest. Marked by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a New priest is born. The water-Word works forgiveness of his sins, delivers him from death and his former “hot-air prince,” the devil, and bestows actual, factual, eternal salvation upon him by faith, as the words and promises of Triune God declare. Thus a newborn priest is made.

A Triune God priest is now made, but Triune God is not stepping out of the priest’s life. The priest’s life is now Triune God’s life, and he desires for the priest to be formed, to grow in the image of the Triune God in Triune God Person Number Two—Christ. The old priest struggles to the top of the waters each day; therefore Triune God causes the water-Word to be a natural aspect of the Triune God priest. Daily the old priest is drowned and killed with all sins and evil lusts by contrition (true sorrow over sin) and by repentance (faith in Christ, a turning away from oneself), so that the New priest arises to live in the presence of Triune God in Christ’s righteousness and purity forever.

Thus the priest is made and formed by Triune God. The priest is part of the royal priesthood that daily offers spiritual sacrifices of faith, prayer, and life to Triune God. His highest worship of Triune God in the gospel is the desire to receive forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness. As a baptized priest, he yearns to learn of the Triune God Person Number Two and depends upon Triune God to work the good he desires in his priest’s life. The priest daily prays the Catechism and teaches it to others.

Conceptual agreement is evident, but what appears to be lacking is the actual formation of the priesthood. Why? It may be the result of an absence of forming. Take a short self-analysis. Remember when . . .

1. you were catechized?
2. your pastor taught you Luther’s Small Catechism?
3. your father (mother) taught you Luther’s Small Catechism?
4. you taught Luther’s Small Catechism to your family?
5. you reviewed Luther’s Small Catechism today for your personal edification in the Christian faith?

### **Catechetical Lifestyle—Priestly Formation**

The catechetical emphasis stemmed from Luther's program of education for receiving Holy Communion and for making a good confession, which, for Luther, was the prelude to receiving the sacrament. Under this emphasis, pastors were encouraged to preach an annual series of sermons on the Catechism for the entire congregation and to hold special classes for children and servants. The young attended catechetical instruction until their early twenties or until they were married. Older people, especially the unlearned, were also expected to attend these classes. Luther saw this program as an integral part of the church's pastoral and educational ministry to its people. It is interesting that children, after they were admitted to the Lord's Supper, were still expected to continue in their catechetical studies; Luther's idea of the lifelong educative process was taking hold. There was never a graduation short of eternity. Thus this type of confirmation was, strictly speaking, really not confirmation at all. That is, it was not a process culminating in a church rite, yet it had perhaps the most influence on subsequent practices (LOGIA 3 [Reformation 1994]: 70–71).

### **Forming Frustration**

"That's it! You're both out of here!" The two boys were picked up by their collars and thrown up the steps and pinned to the floor. "Are you two going to shape up and learn this material or not?"

Is this a guard at the boys' reformatory? Or, a wrestling coach demonstrating a new move to novice grapplers? No, this is a frustrated young pastor who was "ticked off at two teenage boys because they did not demonstrate the quiet, studious, Christian attitude expected by the young preacher.

Yes, I was probably one of the most frustrated confirmation teachers who ever lived. (I found out that there are many frustrated pastors, frustrated by the confirmation process.) Why can't these kids learn what is being taught to them? Why do they seem to be so disinterested? Why won't they memorize the assigned parts? Why the majority of the students don't know the First Commandment at all!! Why??? Why??? Why???

After a decade plus two years, the good Lord has allowed me to see the bigger picture concerning the confirmation process. The majority of the students never see or hear the Catechism until they reach the age of twelve to fourteen years. They have never talked about the Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, or the Lord's Prayer, except once in awhile in Sunday School class or when it is used on Sunday mornings. Most of the parents have never taught these precious truths of Christianity to their children. No wonder the students act as they do. They are only doing what they have been taught. They are precise replicas of their parents! They have reached this type of lifestyle following the forming of their lives by their parents.

Closer examination reveals that most of the parents never saw the Catechism taught in their homes, never were formed in the Christian faith outside of the church building's four walls. The grandparents were the same way. No wonder there was frustration! There was no perception that the Catechism—the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer—is the word of God. There seems to be the idea that the Catechism is the questions, answers, and the 975 Bible passages that had to be memorized in order to pass confirmation class.

My frustration has now turned to hopeful optimism. The key is forming the priesthood by the reintroduction of the Catechism, the actual Small Catechism, in the homes. This is a slow procedure, one that will require patience by myself, the parents, and the congregation as we slowly re-ignite the Christian faith via the study of the Catechism in our homes.

I no longer become frustrated working with the confirmation students. Yes, they still can become unruly in class after sitting in classes for five to six hours during the day. But this is easily controlled by threatening to stay one minute after 8:00 p.m. for every minute they are noisy. I no longer become angry if they do not know the parts of the Catechism. I patiently await the day when the blessing of God will manifest itself in fathers teaching their children (of all ages) to know the Christian doctrine of the Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession and Absolution, and Sacrament of the Altar as a part of the home. Their children will be formed in the Christian faith by their parents, which will be reflected in their attitude toward learning more about the Christian faith.

### **Formal Forming**

Pastoral Theology Class—Professor: "When you make calls on your people make sure that these are spiritual calls."

Pastoral Material, i.e., Theological Student—Observant and thinking: "Everyone is nodding their heads in agreement. It sounds good, I guess I will make spiritual calls on the people when I get into the parish."

Pastoral Pastor, i.e., New Pastor—"I have been visiting my people and suggesting that they come to church, pray, and give money. But there still seems to be something missing."

Pastoral Question: "When did the seminary professor invite you to join him on making spiritual calls on people?"

Another Question: "When did anyone form you in the art of calling on God's people?"

Which type of spiritual calls are you making? Spiritual calls that emphasize people's actions and activities or spiritual calls that reinforce that I am already God's?

### **Which type of Spiritual Formation?**

"American Lutheran Church invites you to participate in a truly unique experience. It begins with an inspirational morning with Reverend James Bryan Smith, Instructor of Practical Theology at Friends University and author of *A Spiritual Formation Workbook*. The afternoon will afford one the opportunity to explore ways to participate in small spiritual formation groups of persons who gather to nurture and encourage one another in spiritual growth. *Renovare* will renew churches like a gentle breeze blowing across the land" (*Good Shepherd News* ELCA 38 [January 1995]).

### **Lutheran Catechetical Formation from the Source**

*Ten Cate-Steps*: Excerpts from Martin Luther, reprinted from *What Luther Says* by Ewald Plass (Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 124–126. Used by permission.

1. *The Catechisms Are Summaries of Bible Teaching*. The Catechism is an epitome and brief transcript of the entire Holy Scripture.



2. *Salvation Through the Changeless Christ Is the Message of the Catechism.* The Catechism is the Bible of the laymen. In it the entire body of Christian doctrine, which every Christian must know in order to be saved, is contained. . . . Therefore we should by all means love and esteem the Catechism and diligently impress it upon youth; for in it the correct, true, ancient, pure divine doctrine of the holy Christian Church is summarized. Whatever is contrary to this is to be considered an innovation and false, erroneous doctrine, be it ever so ancient, and we are to guard ourselves against it.

3. *Teaching the Catechism Is Glorious Work.* Those should be regarded as the pick and as the best and most useful teachers who are able to drill the Catechism well, that is, to teach aright the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed. They are rare birds, for no great glory or splendor is achieved by doing so, but still a great benefit; for this is the most necessary instruction, because it comprises, in brief form, the entire Scriptures. One must necessarily forever hammer home these brief lessons to the common people. . . . Unfortunately, even then they learn little enough of them.

4. *Stick to These Fundamentals of the Bible.* My advice is not to discuss matters that have not been revealed but simply stay with the Word of God, especially with the Catechism. For there you have a very precise course in our entire religion. . . . But it is despised because it is light stuff and youths and little children daily recite it.

5. *Preach Catechism Sermons.* May the devil preach to the man who is not satisfied with Catechism sermons!

6. *The Catechism Sermon Is Often Not Appreciated.* The Catechism is doctrine at its best. Therefore it ought to be constantly preached. My personal wish is that it be preached daily and simply read from the book. I will do it myself when called on to preach. But our preachers and hearers know it to a "T" (*ad unguem*). They are ashamed of this simple doctrine. Noblemen and rustics say: Oh, our minister can preach nothing but the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. He is forever strumming the same string. Because of this judgment of their hearers, preachers apply themselves to "higher" matters, postponing and neglecting the fundamentals.

7. *Drill the Catechism in Private.* Doctrinal sermons in the church do not edify young people. But quizzes at home, definitions of the Catechism, and questions concerning the confession of faith are of much greater benefit. They are, of course, troublesome; but they are very necessary.

8. *Even Luther Is Not "Done With" the Catechism.* I, too, am a theologian who has attained a fairly good practical knowledge and experience of Holy Scriptures through various dangers. But I do not so glory in this gift as not to join my children daily in prayerfully reciting the Catechism, that is, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer and meditating on them with an attentive heart. I do not merely pass over the words hurriedly, but I carefully observe what the individual word means. And really, if I do not do this but am preoccupied with other business, I feel a definite loss because of the neglect. For God gave the Word that we should impress it on ourselves, as Moses says (Dt 6:7), and practice it. Without this practice our souls become rusty, as it were, and we lose ourselves.

9. *Luther Is Glad to Remain a Pupil of the Catechism.* But this I say for myself: I, too, am a doctor and preacher, yea, as learned and experienced as all those may be who possess such presumption and this sense of security. Yet I act as child who is learning the Catechism. In the morning and whenever I have time, I read and also recite, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, psalms, etc. And besides this I must also read and study every day. Yet I cannot master the matter as I desire but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism and am glad to remain one.

10. *The objective of a Useful Life: Preserving the Catechism for Posterity.* If we succeed in keeping up the Catechism and supplying the church with schools and pastors, we live a successful life.

### *Train Others by Forming Them to Assist You*

#### **Elders' Training**

"The Mission of the Montana District is to provide assistance to the congregations of the District, their leaders and pastors to train God's Royal Priesthood to worship God, to live the Priestly life in service of the Gospel and to bring the unbelieving to God as a gift sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Mission Statement of the Montana District adopted at the Montana District Convention, April 1994).

"The Mission of the elders of Mount Olive Lutheran Church is to provide assistance to the members of Mount Olive Lutheran Church to train God's Royal Priesthood to worship God, to live the Priestly life in service of the Gospel and to bring the unbelieving to God as a gift sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

#### **Primary Target: Priestly Formation**

- That all of the holy priesthood bring God the daily sacrifice of a contrite heart (SC Baptism IV; Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 6:2).
- That all of the holy priesthood experience the joyful consolation of forgiveness and faith.
- That all of the priesthood grow in their commitment to "live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness" (SC Creed II).

#### **Example: Elders**

##### **GOALS**

1. To work toward restoring the Lord's Supper to all Sunday services and other festival days.
2. To work toward restoring the practice of personal confession and absolution.
3. To teach parents how to train the little priests in confession and how to absolve them (SC Baptism IV).
4. To train elders to assist the pastor in teaching parents.
5. To teach the holy priesthood to bring the unbelieving as a gift to God sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

##### **STRATEGY**

1. Study of the Augsburg Confession XXIV and Apology XXIV by the pastor and elders during 1994–1995. Subsequent studies for the congregation.

2. Study the Augsburg Confession XI and XII and Apology of the Augsburg Confession XI and XII by pastor and elders during 1995–1996. Subsequent studies for the congregation.
3. Establish the Sacrament of the Altar on Sunday services and other festival days in 1997 or 1998.
4. Training of elders in 1995 to assist parents, especially the fathers, to teach the Small Catechism to their children in the homes in 1996.
5. Establish the private Confession and Absolution on a regular basis beginning in 1996 or 1997 after teaching the congregation about this practice.
6. Training of elders to direct members to bring the unbelieving to God as a gift sanctified by the Holy Spirit in 1998.

#### FORMING PROCEDURE

1. Begin with one elder and form him in the forming of the priesthood.
2. This elder takes another, and so on, and so on.
3. Inductive studies of the Augsburg Confession and subsequent studies of the Book of Concord 1580.

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## WE CONFESS, HE BUILDS

*In his Church Election sermon of July 23, 1933, Dietrich Bonhoeffer confessed the Christ who builds in a church that confesses him. This selection is found on pages 216–217 of No Rusty Swords, from vol. 1 of the collected works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).*

It is not we who build. [Christ] builds the church. No man builds the church but Christ alone. Whoever is minded to build the church is surely well on the way to destroying it; for he will build a temple to idols without wishing or knowing it. We must confess—he builds. We must proclaim—he builds. We must pray to him—that he may build.

We do not know his plan. We cannot see whether he is building or pulling down. It may be that the times which by human standards are times of collapse are for him the great times of construction. It may be that the times which from a human point of view are great times for the church are times when it is pulled down.

It is a great comfort which Christ gives to his church: you confess, preach, bear witness to me and I alone will build where it pleases me. Do not meddle in what is my province. Do what is given to you to do well and you have done enough. But do it well. Pay no heed to views and opinions. Don't ask for judgments. Don't always be calculating what will happen. Don't always be on the lookout for another refuge! Church, stay a church! But church, confess, confess, confess! Christ alone is your Lord; from his grace alone can you live as you are. Christ builds.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE VISITORS OF PARISH PASTORS

*When one hears the word “visitors” these days, it is most likely to be in the context of addressing potential new members for a congregation, making them feel welcome. In Electoral Saxony at the time of Luther, the term “visitors” had a much different meaning. The Christliche Visitationsartikel or “Visitation Articles” were meant for seasoned men of faith who would travel from parish to parish to examine what was being preached and taught.*

*Earlier in our own century the circuit counselors were referred to as “visitors.” The Reformation description of this term has fallen by the wayside as the office of circuit counselor has been redefined in synodical convention to accommodate a more bureaucratic church polity. In the following article by Pastor Bender, we see something of the Visitation Articles that might well be restored today, even as we consider it as a guide to understanding the origin of Luther’s Small Catechism at this time of year when catechism classes resume in most congregations.*

The Gospel of the forgiveness of sins by grace through faith was the operative force in everything that Martin Luther did and taught as a doctor of the church. When it was clear that the gospel was being attacked or obscured, Luther acted.<sup>1</sup> It is this fact, finally, that must be understood about the origin of the Small Catechism. Luther’s arrangement of the six chief parts of Christian doctrine and their simple explanations took their shape because of aberrations in doctrine and practice that were obscuring or obliterating the pure proclamation of the gospel in the parishes of Electoral Saxony. The Small Catechism was written to preserve and defend the gospel and true faith in the life of the church and in the hearts and lives of Christians.

It is clear from the events that transpired from 1525 to the publication of the Small Catechism in May of 1529 that the discoveries unearthed by the visitation of parishes in Electoral Saxony gave Luther the necessary resolve to write the text of the Small Catechism. Writing a catechism for the common people was in Luther’s mind at least as early as 1525, but he lacked the necessary motivation to get the job done. On February 2, 1525, Luther wrote Nicolaus Hausmann about the plan to write a small catechism for the instruction of children and the laity. Because of Luther’s work load the task was assigned to Justus Jonas and John Agricola.<sup>2</sup>

Jonas and Agricola failed to fulfill their assignment to Luther’s satisfaction. Luther resolved to undertake the writing of the catechism himself, but would have to delay its writing until he finished a number of other pressing projects. At least, that was his plan.<sup>3</sup>

In October 1525, Luther urged Elector John of Saxony to give attention to the needs of the clergy and the churches. Although Luther supplied Elector John with a plan, the elector gave no serious attention to the matter until one year later (November 1526) when Luther pointedly told the Elector that the confiscation of monasteries and church property was not meant to enrich the aristocracy, but that the taking over of former church property obligated the government to support the schools and the churches that formerly had been supported by this property. Luther proposed a team of four visitors: two to

examine the economic and two the religious affairs of the parishes.<sup>4</sup>

In February 1527 a disorganized visitation began. Lack of explicit directions hampered the visitors, who made suggestions as they proceeded. As they reported, Luther made further observations, and more complete instructions were gradually formulated and studied by various officials in September. Melanchthon drew up a short guide as a doctrinal foundation for the visitation, entitled *Articles of Visitation*. This was not acceptable to John Agricola, who felt Melanchthon was giving the papists reason to think the reformers were yielding to Rome on some points. Luther found it necessary in November to bring him and Melanchthon together to reconcile their views on the relationship of faith and repentance.<sup>5</sup>

Luther had received the first draft of the *Articles of Visitation* for his critique on August 18. The revised articles did not come back to him until early October 1527 when the dispute between Melanchthon and Agricola was in full swing. This dispute, over the relationship of repentance and faith, was at the heart of the difficulties that the visitors were encountering. The visitations could not continue without a resolution to this problem. Luther sided with Melanchthon against Agricola. The final draft of the *Articles of Visitation*, published in late winter, contains the resolution to this doctrinal dispute and is one of the primary documents for understanding the genesis of the Small Catechism and the theology that underlies it.

The first official visitation under these articles was not announced until July 1528. Luther followed the reports of the visitation closely, and when his own health and schedule improved he went on the visitations personally.<sup>6</sup> According to Bente, Luther desired to write a catechism to accompany Melanchthon's initial visitation tract of 1527, but once again did not meet his goal.<sup>7</sup>

It was not until Luther visited the parishes of Electoral Saxony himself that his priorities changed. The last straw that compelled Luther to write the Small Catechism was the conditions in the churches themselves. His own visitations of the parishes, between October 22, 1528, and January 9, 1529, "constrained" him to write these words just a few months later in the preface to the Small Catechism:

The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty.<sup>8</sup>

Luther's desire was to create *theodidacti*—"people taught by God"—but he was horrified by the conditions he observed in the visitations.<sup>9</sup> What did he observe? The evangelical faith

of the Reformation was not being preached and practiced. The problem, which manifested itself in church life and practice, was doctrinal and centered in the understanding of repentance and faith. For Luther, the salvation of sinners and all of Church life flowed out of the preaching of "repentance and the forgiveness of sins." This was the center of the church's life and the life of every Christian.<sup>10</sup>

The doctrinal problem and its practical solution are outlined in the very first section of the Instructions.

[W]hile some preach about the faith by which we are to be justified, it is still not clearly enough explained how one shall attain to this faith, and almost all omit one aspect of the Christian faith without which no one can understand what faith is or means. For Christ says in the last chapter of Luke [24:47] that we are to preach in his name repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Many now talk only about the forgiveness of sins and say little or nothing about repentance. There neither is forgiveness of sins without repentance nor can forgiveness of sins be understood without repentance. It follows that if we preach the forgiveness of sins without repentance that the people imagine that they have already obtained the forgiveness of sins, becoming thereby secure and without compunction of conscience. . . .

Therefore we have instructed and admonished pastors that it is their duty to preach the whole gospel and not one portion without the other. . . .

So we have admonished them to exhort the people diligently and frequently to repent and grieve over their sins and to fear the judgment of God. . . . The preachers are to condemn the gross sins of the common man, but more rigorously demand repentance where there is false holiness.

But some hold that nothing should be taught to precede faith and that repentance follows from and after faith, in order that our opponents might not be able to say that we have recanted our former teaching. One ought to remember that repentance and law belong to the common faith.<sup>11</sup>

When the *Articles of Visitation* speak of repentance they are speaking of repentance in the narrow sense, that is, the preaching of the law of God that condemns every sinner. This is the meaning of repentance in Luke 24. The preaching of repentance is none other than the preaching of the law that exposes sin and leaves the sinner no room to escape the full force of God's wrath. Repentance leaves no opportunity for the sinner to make excuses before God or justify his own actions or motivations. The preaching of repentance leads the sinner to the confession of God's truth, namely, "under the law of God I stand condemned."

The use of God's law in this way is seen clearly in the conclusion to the Ten Commandments in the Small Catechism: "God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them."<sup>12</sup>

Luther makes the harsh point: all who break the law of God are under the punishment of God. This is not a comfortable position in which to be. Although Luther and the *Articles of Visitation* discuss the “civil use” of the law, to maintain order in family and society, their chief concern is the use of the law for the sake of promoting the Christian faith. In the latter case, the law must always be preached in such a way that it crushes the sinner as it exposes and reveals sin. Instead of preaching the law as moral directives for the Christian to strive after and so improve himself, the law is preached to condemn and crucify all human pride, arrogance, and self-justification. The *Articles of Visitation* develop the theses concerning repentance, that *everyone* is a sinner and *no sinner* can escape the condemnation of the law.

Preaching repentance in this way, however, is not an end in itself. Quite to the contrary, the Articles make it very clear that such preaching is merely a prelude to the preaching of the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake. Nevertheless, the preaching of repentance is the *necessary* prelude to the preaching of the forgiveness of sins. Without the preaching of repentance the preaching of the forgiveness of sins cannot be received in true faith. Repentance and forgiveness of sins are inseparable. The very parishes that had been delivered from their bondage to Rome were now in danger of losing the faith that had set them free:

Many now talk only about the forgiveness of sins and say little or nothing about repentance. There neither is forgiveness of sins without repentance nor can forgiveness of sins be understood without repentance. It follows that if we preach the forgiveness of sins without repentance that the people imagine that they have already obtained the forgiveness of sins, becoming thereby secure and without compunction of conscience. This would be a greater error and sin than all the errors hitherto prevailing. Surely we need to be concerned lest, as Christ says in Matt. 12 [:45] the last state becomes worse than the first.<sup>13</sup>

One can readily see that the visitors had a very practical concern for the well-being of the parishes under their care that touched at the very heart of the Gospel. Both the condemning law and the message of the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake belonged together. This was the “whole gospel,” and one could not have one without the other.

One ought to remember that repentance and law belong to the common faith. For one must of course first believe that God is the one who threatens, commands, and frightens, etc. . . . so that they may the better distinguish and understand the faith in Christ which the apostles call justifying faith, i.e., which makes righteous and takes away sin.<sup>14</sup>

This is why Luther retained both the Ten Commandments and the Creed in the Small Catechism. The Ten Commandments contain the most thorough summary of God’s law and the Creed the most thorough summary of the faith through which the for-

giveness of sins is received. It was not enough, however, that “repentance and the forgiveness of sins” should simply be preached side by side. It was Luther’s contention that the preaching of repentance *always* had the preaching of the forgiveness of sins in view. There is, as it were, a “penultimate” and an “ultimate” message. Although repentance is “nothing but an acknowledgment of sins,” such acknowledgment is done with faith in the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake. “Whoever experiences grief and contrition over his sins should believe that his sins are forgiven, not on account of his merits, but on account of Christ.”<sup>15</sup>

The ancient enchiridion included the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments in that order. When Luther composed his explanations to the enchiridion he deliberately changed the ordering of the parts to reflect the understanding that the preaching of repentance must precede the preaching of the faith that justifies.

When the articles speak of faith in contrast to repentance, they mean the Word of forgiveness that is believed. It is customary for Lutherans today to speak of faith as trust and to leave out of its definition the object of faith, namely, that which is believed.<sup>16</sup> The *Articles of Visitation* never separate the “trust of the heart” (*fides qua creditur*) from faith’s object (*fides quae creditur*). Therefore, when the Articles speak of preaching faith they mean preaching the word of the gospel that creates faith or trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

The trust of the heart must always have an object. When repentance is properly preached the sinner will believe that he is a sinner who has sinned against God. But this is only part of the story. The repentant sinner’s belief that he is a sinner must finally and ultimately find its rest in the belief that God is gracious to him and that for Christ’s sake his sins are forgiven.

The faith that saves the repentant sinner is clearly preached by Luther in the Small Catechism’s explanation to the Creed. The First Article on God the Father ultimately centers God’s creative work in his grace *for the sinner*: “All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.”<sup>17</sup>

The Second Article presents the resolution to the sinner’s unresolvable problem caused by the law:

I believe that Jesus Christ . . . has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil . . . with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.<sup>18</sup>

When Luther here speaks of “everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness,” he is not talking about the works of an individual who believes (which is often the view of contemporary Lutherans), but rather the gifts of Christ that are a result of his death. The Christian lives his daily life under the covering, protection, and blessing of Christ’s “righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” This protection—the protection of faith in Christ—sets him free from the condemnation of the law.

The explanation to the Third Article of the Creed places the final punctuation on the belief in God's saving grace. It states that not even an individual's trust in Christ is his own creation.

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.<sup>19</sup>

Both the Small Catechism and the *Articles of Visitation* make it clear that the questions concerning repentance and faith have everything to do with the lives of ordinary Christians. The Small Catechism is written in clear language so that even children can understand what it is to repent of sin and believe the gospel:

Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.<sup>20</sup>

The Christian life of repentance and faith, Luther explains, began at baptism and continues daily as the Christian hears the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins and believes that Word. This Christian life he describes as the baptismal life in the fourth chief part of the Catechism.

What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.<sup>21</sup>

In describing the Christian life the *Articles of Visitation* use these words:

These two are the first elements of Christian life: *Repentance* or contrition and grief, and *faith* through which we receive the forgiveness of sins and are righteous before God. Both should grow and increase in us. The third element of Christian life is the doing of *good works*: To be chaste, to love and help the neighbor, to refrain from lying, from deceit, from stealing, from murder, from vengeance, and avenging oneself, etc. [emphasis added].<sup>22</sup>

The *Articles of Visitation* alert us to the third element of the Christian life, namely, holy living. Good works follow repentance and faith. They are done not because of the threat of punishment, but because they have God's word of promise attached to them. The law always condemns and accuses the sinner, in order that he might flee to the gospel for forgiveness. The word of forgiveness creates the faith in him that trusts Christ for salvation, rather than his own works.

By faith in Christ the Christian prays that God's name be "hallowed" in his life, that God's "kingdom come," that God

"break and hinder every evil plan and purpose of the devil," that he receive his "daily bread" in faith, that he forgive his neighbor who sins against him, that God would "guard and keep" him from temptation, and that God would "rescue him from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when [his] last hour comes, give [him] a blessed end . . ."<sup>23</sup>

The hallowed life comes about through the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. It is not a separate creation. The Ten Commandments, which outline what is truly good in the eyes of God (and therefore what the Christian is incapable of according to his flesh), are prayed for by the believer in the Lord's Prayer. Holy living is nothing less than the life of faith in the promises of God. Every petition of the Lord's Prayer claims a promise of God's grace and asks him to make it the believer's own and a part of his life. This view of holy living is a far cry from the moralistic preaching that we hear from many Lutheran pulpits today. Moralistic preaching promotes "good works" by the threat and coercion of the law. The visitors and Luther promoted life made holy by the Word of God and lived without fear in continual repentance and faith.

As the Lord's Prayer is the cry of the life of faith, so the "evangelical sacraments"—Holy Baptism, Absolution, and the Sacrament of the Altar—are faith's food and drink. The *Articles of Visitation* approach all three sacraments from the same vantage point. Man must not think of them as a work that merits God's grace; and nothing must be allowed to obscure the word of forgiveness that is contained in each of them. Luther's Catechism parallels the *Articles of Visitation* by presenting in the simplest language what the sacrament *is* that God has given and what *benefit* the Christian receives from it.

Luther fought for many things throughout his life, but all his battles were waged for the sake of the pure gospel that set sinners free. Nothing must obscure, dilute, or take the place of the message of the forgiveness of sins, by grace, through faith for Christ's sake. He insisted on giving the people a common language in the Catechism so that they might learn by heart both the words that God had given his church and what those words meant for life and salvation. Christ's flock must know the voice of their Shepherd so that they might follow him and thus be saved. The doctrine of repentance and faith, outlined and explained in the *Articles of Visitation*, and the desperate plight of Christians and Christian congregations who had gone astray from the true faith, were at the center of Luther's pastoral concerns and the driving force behind the writing of his truly evangelical Catechism.

## Notes

1. James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986). Kittelson's entire treatment of the life of Luther shows how the gospel dominated everything that the Reformer did and was the driving force behind his teaching and writing.
2. F. Bente, Introduction to *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921; reprint *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord*, 1965), 77.
3. Bente, 78.
4. Introduction to *Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony*, AE 40:265–266.

5. AE 40:266.
6. Kittelson, 215–216.
7. Bente, 78.
8. Martin Luther, Preface to the Small Catechism, *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 338.
9. Kittelson, 216.
10. AE 40:269–273.
11. AE 40:274–275.
12. *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 12.
13. AE 40:274.
14. AE 40:275.
15. AE 40:276.
16. See the *Inter-Christian Relationships* document of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Mis-

souri Synod, February 1991.

17. *Luther's Small Catechism*, 14.
18. *Luther's Small Catechism*, 14.
19. *Luther's Small Catechism*, 15.
20. *Luther's Small Catechism*, 24.
21. *Luther's Small Catechism*, 22, 23.
22. AE 40:277.
23. *Luther's Small Catechism*, 16–20.

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