

**HERMANN SASSE:
A MAN FOR OUR TIMES?**

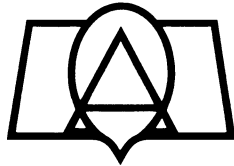
**HERMANN SASSE:
A MAN FOR OUR TIMES?**

*Essays from the Twentieth Annual Lutheran Life Lectures
Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada
(30 October – 1 November 1995)*

*An International Theological Symposium
marking the centennial of the birth of Dr. Hermann Sasse*

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Abbreviations

Writings of Hermann Sasse:

- CC* *Corpus Christi: Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Abendmahlskonkordie.* Edited by Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf. Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1979.
- HWS* *Here We Stand: Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith.* Translated by Theodore G. Tappert. Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1979.
- ISC* *In Statu Confessionis: Gesammelte Aufsätze und Kleine Schriften von Hermann Sasse.* 2 vols. Edited by Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf. Berlin and Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1966 and 1976.
- K&H* *Kirche und Herrenmahl: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Altarsakraments. Bekennende Kirche,* vol. 59/60. Edited by Christian Stoll with Georg Metz and Hermann Sasse. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1938.
- S&C* *Scripture and the Church: Selected Essays of Hermann Sasse.* Edited by Jeffrey J. Kloha and Ronald R. Feuerhahn. St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1995.
- SS* *Sacra Scriptura: Studien zur Lehre von der heiligen Schrift.* Edited by Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf. Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1981.
- TMB* *This is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar.* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959. [Revised edition, Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977].
- VSA* *Vom Sakrament des Altars: Lutherische Beiträge zur Frage des heiligen Abendmahls.* Edited by Hermann Sasse. Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1941.

- WCJC* *We Confess Jesus Christ*. Translated by Norman Nagel. St. Louis: Concordia, 1984.
- WCS* *We Confess the Sacraments*. Translated by Norman Nagel. St. Louis: Concordia, 1985.
- WCC* *We Confess the Church*. Translated by Norman Nagel. St. Louis: Concordia, 1986.
- Z* *Zeugnisse: Erlanger Predigten und Vorträge vor Gemeinden, 1933-1944*. Edited by Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf. Erlangen: Martin Luther Verlag, 1979.

Sources and Secondary Literature:

- CTM* *Concordia Theological Monthly*.
- EC* Feuerhahn, Ronald R. *Hermann Sasse as an Ecumenical Churchman*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. Cambridge University, 1991.
- E-TFA* *Archives of the Erlangen Theological Faculty*.
- E-UA* *Archives of Erlangen University*.
- Huß Huß, Siegfried. “‘Was heißt lutherisch?’ Zum Gedenken an Hermann Sasse. *17. Juli 1895.” *Lutherische Kirche in der Welt: Jahrbuch des Martin-Luther-Bundes* 42 (1995): 83.
- LB* *Lutherische Blätter*.
- LTJ* *Lutheran Theological Journal*.
- RTR* *Reformed Theological Review*.
- ZKG* *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*.

Editorial Foreword

The Sasse Symposium, held from 30 October to 1 November 1995, was a landmark event in the life of the St. Catharines seminary, which gladly expresses gratitude to four groups whose support enabled the staging of a longer and more intensive installment than usual of the annual Lutheran Life Lectures. This conference, which involved transporting and accommodating speakers from Australia, Germany, Sweden, and the United States, was made possible by a fraternal grant received from the members of the Lutheran Life Insurance Society of Canada. President Stephen Taylor of Lutheran Life was a welcome guest for a good part of the proceedings. Moreover, we should have hesitated to proceed with this ambitious project apart from the decision of the pastors of Lutheran Church–Canada’s East District to designate the lectures given at the Symposium as the agenda of their Autumn Conference. We would also voice appreciation for financial assistance from the Luther Academy of North America, whose then president, Dr. Robert Preus, participated with gusto throughout the Symposium, which ended just three days before his sudden death. Nor can we fail to rejoice in the willingness of so many pastors and laypeople to journey from all corners of Canada and the United States to take part in the centenary commemoration of Dr. Hermann Sasse’s birth.

We salute Concordia Publishing House’s readiness to publish the symposium essays, which can now foster the ongoing study of Hermann Sasse’s fruitful legacy as they are made available to a wider public. The lectures are here printed in order of delivery, with the single exception of President Edwin Lehman’s banquet speech, which fitly features as a postscript to this volume. A special word of thanks is due to Dr. Dale Griffin of Concordia Publishing House, who unflaggingly and expertly superintended the editing process with much kindness and no little humor.

The event which marked the seminary’s twentieth anniversary owed much to the efforts of my fellow members of the Sasse

Symposium Committee: Dr. Jonathan Grothe, Dr. John Wilch, Mr. Glenn Stresman, and Mrs. Alison Wittig. The two last named labored beyond the call of duty on the unseen administrative preparations for the symposium, as did Mrs. Laurie Schaeffer, administrative assistant at the seminary. Thanks go also to Dean and Mrs. Roger Humann who were responsible for the liturgical and musical content of the conference worship.

Last but not least, I gladly acknowledge the unstinting assistance given by my friend and colleague, Dr. Thomas M. Winger, whose remarkable technical skills have done much to accelerate what would otherwise have been an interminable editorial process.

John R. Stephenson
St. Catharines, Ontario
Tuesday in the Week of Epiphany II, 1998

Hermann Sasse: Theologian of the Church

Ronald R. Feuerhahn

I. Introduction

President Lehman, Dr. Grothe, and Dr. Hempelmann; Colleagues of Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, and of Concordia Lutheran Seminary, Edmonton; *Amtsbrüder*, Candidates, and Fellow Guests: It is an honor to be numbered among your guests at this symposium. I am especially honored to be in the midst of such great witnesses, that is, speakers who knew our subject personally. I speak, of course, of Brothers Nagel and Kleinig, students of Sasse; of Marquart, his pastoral colleague; and especially of Dr. Tom Hardt, since his relation to Professor Sasse was indeed unique. From the time they started their correspondence in the mid-1950s until Sasse's death in 1976, Sasse wrote Hardt on average nearly one letter a week. This is a remarkable chronicle of Sasse's life and thought. It is, of course, a personal chronicle—at times intimate. It is also a very interesting commentary on the ecclesiastical events of modern times, their literature, persons, and events, their tragedies, witness, and confession. But one of the most beneficial features of this correspondence is its pastoral nature. One could publish many of these letters under the title "Letters of Spiritual Counsel," a title which has already been used in the *Library of Christian Classics* series for a collection of Luther's letters.

I am grateful to acknowledge also the contributions of Dr. John Stephenson who has done so much to foster this gathering and who, on a more personal note, taught me much—also about Hermann Sasse—during our two years together at Westfield House in Cambridge. I have treasured many hours in the company of Dr. Lowell Green whose breadth of knowledge about theological Germany and especially about Sasse's Erlangen I have found engrossing.

Dr. John Wilch joins us with a paper on Sasse's important confrontation with National Socialism, and Dr. Gottfried Martens, as a

German theologian dealing with a German theologian, on a subject of great importance to Sasse, the Roman Catholic Church.

We actually find ourselves in a train of generations of Sasse students. Before World War II there was Michael Reu who found substance in Sasse's writings and published many of them in the *Kirchliche Zeitschrift* (Columbus, OH). After the war there were "friends" with whom he corresponded regularly, for example, Herman Preus of Luther Seminary, St. Paul, and F. E. Mayer of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. But it was the men of the Wisconsin Synod who generously offered space in their journal for a period of time.

In the mid-1960s a *Festschrift* was in preparation under the editorship of Professors Heino Kadai and Richard Jungkuntz.¹ In addition to essays by Sasse himself, the intention was to include six to nine essays by scholars who appreciated Sasse's contributions. The list of possible contributors included, in addition to the editors, the following: Paul Bretscher, Robert Bertram, George Forell, Martin Franzmann, Ralph Gehrke, Ralph Bohlmann, Fred Kramer, John Behnken, Herman Preus, Leiv Aalen of Norway, Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf of Germany, Henry Hamann, Jr. of Australia, and Norman Nagel of England.²

How encouraged we are today, as we have been so often in the past, that "Nagel of England" is here for our symposium; he as much as anyone has made Sasse available to North American readers. That proposed *Festgabe*, which according to one of its editors, "CPH refused to publish, alas,"³ may well appear yet—in another form and in this later day. Concordia Publishing House is committed to publish a large collection of newly translated writings of Sasse under the able editorship of Matthew Harrison and Paul McCain.

We furthermore find ourselves, therefore, in the company of promising scholars who have already shown themselves ardent and astute students of Sasse; "promising" also for the benefit of the church. I risk overlooking many when I mention only a few today: Jeffrey Kloha, Thomas Winger, Scott Bruzek, and especially Matthew Harrison for his persistence as well as his scholarship in making more of Sasse's writings available for another generation.

Lest my remarks so far appear an unseemly exercise in self-indulgence, I hasten to explain that I have endeavored with these opening comments not to draw attention to my own associations with

these men but rather to chronicle the abiding, even persistent, interest in Dr. Sasse and to express our common gratitude to an increasing number who, as students of Sasse, are themselves growing as teachers of the church today. I also want to whet your appetite, as many of these men will address us on the subject at this symposium or in publications elsewhere. These latter include the Reformation 1995 issue of *Logia*, due out in about three weeks, and *Lutheran Quarterly*, whose next issue will feature an article by Norman Nagel on one of Sasse's earliest works.

II. Hermann Sasse, Servant of the Church—the Man and His Life

On the occasion of remembering H. Richard Niebuhr during the centennial year of his birth, his student and colleague, James Gustafson, observed that a conference on his theology seems impoverished without a session on his personal qualities.⁴ It seems that we have learned so much from Hermann Sasse without knowing much about his life and person. Nevertheless, we too would be impoverished without a session on just that.

The life of Hermann Sasse is a fascinating story. We might be excused if this assertion surprises us: we do not usually associate the description “fascinating” with the life of a theologian, especially of a historian! His was not a life dominated by cloistered academia. He was indeed a student and scholar. He had also been a soldier—a combatant in the worst battle of World War I. He was even given to a bit of intrigue, as for instance when he traveled—illegally—to a meeting with the Archbishop of York in July 1936. The authorities of the Third Reich had denied him permits for such travel from the year before. He traveled on false papers.

But it is not only these events, sometimes dramatic, which make for an interesting story. Hermann Sasse has captured our attention for other, more important reasons. First, one is drawn to his works by his mastery of history, the breadth of his knowledge, the clarity of his writing, and the forthrightness of his confession. His synthesis of disciplines and powers of analysis give his work an authority. His writing, as noted, is lucid, in contrast to much theological literature of his day.

Hermann Otto Erich Sasse was born in Sonnewalde (Niederlausitz) in Thuringia on 17 July 1895, the eldest of five children. He was

named after his father, a druggist, the proprietor of a pharmacy. When his father's business partner disappeared with the cash, the family was left in very severe financial difficulty. Young Hermann was at this time a student and his scholarship had to be used to tide the family over the worst.⁵ It became necessary for the young student to work for the sake of the family. His father was also a literary man who wrote on the history of pharmacies and the question of the reform of the whole trade.⁶ Among Sasse's ancestors was Valentine Ernst Loescher (Timotheus Verinus).⁷

He was a good student, attending several *Gymnasia* before matriculating at the University of Berlin in the summer semester of 1913.⁸ He was inscribed in two faculties simultaneously, theology and classical philology.⁹ Berlin was at the height of its powers then and young Sasse relished the experience. The faculty included some of the greats of modern theology: Adolf von Harnack, Karl Holl, Reinhold Seeberg, Julius Kaftan, and, of course, Adolf Deissmann, who would later become his doctoral supervisor (*Doktorvater*). Many years later he described his work under Deissmann:

Thus my studies, mainly centered in New Testament and patristics, were divided between two loyalties. My main work I did with Adolf Deissmann. From him I learned not only the love for the language of the New Testament and for the Greek-speaking church, but also a deep appreciation of the Septuagint as also for the mission of the synagogue which preceded the mission of the church in East and West. My main teachers in church history were Harnack and Holl.¹⁰

Old Testament I did with Baudissin, Gressmann (who later as dean conferred my first academic degree on me) and Eissfeld. . . . My great teacher in systematic theology was Heinrich Scholz who later as colleague and friend of Karl Barth in Münster taught philosophy and helped, as one of the great polyhistorians of our time, to lay the philosophical foundations of modern mathematics and physics.¹¹

Sasse then recalled, perhaps whimsically, "The gaps in practical theology were later filled at the *Kriegsschule* and in the first years in the ministry."¹²

His military service came between the two important exams of his education. Again, with some wit he recalled this:

Since in the beginning of the war the army had committed the great blunder to believe that a world war could be won (or lost) without my participation, I had been able to reach just the minimum of time required.¹³

He entered the army in October 1916. He was in Infantry Regiment 51. In just over a month he saw battle.¹⁴ He took part in what was arguably the worst battle of the First World War, the Battle of Passchendaele in Belgium. In his two years of service he reached the rank of sergeant 1st class and was awarded the Iron Cross, 2nd Class, the second-highest honor in the German military at that time.¹⁵ Having been cut off in the Battle of Passchendaele, Sergeant Sasse brought his men back alive, the few who were left—six out of 150 who went into battle. For that he was awarded the medal.¹⁶

He passed his second theological exam, for the ministry, with the Consistory of Berlin. He was ordained in St. Matthew's Church, Berlin, on 13 June 1920, having "reached the canonical age of 25 years."¹⁷ He served first as assistant pastor (*Hilfsprediger*) at churches in Berlin, first at Advent (1920) and then in Templin (1920-21). In October 1921 he was called to the fourth pastoral position at St. Nicolai in Oranienburg, about 20 kilometers north of Berlin, a working class, large double parish of 10,000 souls.¹⁸ In the same year came his first publication, a book review.¹⁹

In 1924 he married Charlotte Naumann.²⁰ She was "Lotte" to her family and friends. The daughter of the postmaster of Oranienburg, she was an accomplished pianist. They made their first home on the same street as her parents. A year after their marriage, Hermann traveled to the United States as an exchange student at Hartford Theological Seminary to do an STM [master of sacred theology degree].²¹ He traveled on ship with two other participants in the program, Wilhelm Pauck and Peter Brunner.²² Sasse would later explain: "However, what Lutheranism is, I learned in America 1925/26."²³ He described the importance of this study exchange for his theological development.²⁴ Of particular impact during this time was his reading Wilhelm Löhe (1808-72)'s *Drei Bücher von der Kirche*²⁵ and his exposure to the liberalism and pluralism of American Christianity. During this period also he was reading Luther and the Lutheran Confessions.

Another fruit of this visit was his first book, *American Christianity*.²⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer read it in preparation for his own study at Union Theological Seminary, New York.²⁷

While still *Pfarrer* in Oranienburg he had become involved in the Conference on Faith and Order. A member of the German delegation at Lausanne in 1927, he was the editor of the official German report²⁸ as well as the continental secretary and eventually, in 1928, a member of the Continuation Committee. His participation grew until he was forced by government travel restrictions to withdraw (1935):²⁹ he was elected a member of the Committee of Reference (1931)³⁰ and of the Study Discussion Group on "The Oecumenical Work of the Church" (1933);³¹ in 1934 he was elected to the Executive Committee.

Meanwhile, during this period, Sasse was prominent in movements which challenged the increasing encroachment of the National Socialists into the affairs of the church. While not a signer of the original manifesto of the "Young Reformers" of Berlin (*Jungreformatrische Bewegung*), he was involved in the movement at an early stage.³² He was one of the chief drafters of the Bethel Confession of 1933³³ and a leading participant in the famous Synod of Barmen of 1934.³⁴ Although this venture was for him confessionally burdensome,³⁵ he nevertheless continued for a time serving the Confessing Church.³⁶

Perhaps Sasse's most significant contribution to the anti-Nazi cause was his bold critique of Article 24 of the program of the National Socialist Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* or *NSDAP*) in 1932; it has been identified as one of the first by a German churchman and is therefore prominent in the literature on the Church and the Third Reich.³⁷

The period immediately following the Second World War was in some respects equally difficult for Sasse. First, there was the physical hardship: the lack of coal and food. The family was terribly undernourished and had to scramble for wood to burn. In 1946 Sasse suffered a heart attack which prevented him attending his first post-war meeting of the Faith and Order Committee.³⁸ While he finally received his chair³⁹ and was appointed pro-rector of the university,⁴⁰ these honors were hardly enough to compensate for the conflicts to come. His appointment as *Prorektor* added to the tension with his colleagues.

Just over a month after assuming that office he wrote to President John Behnken of the Missouri Synod:

My situation here in Erlangen is often hopeless as you can imagine. For years I have been completely isolated; recently even a boycott movement against me is under way since the military government in Frankfurt made me Prorector. Therefore to speak frankly, as I did in the memorandum which I gave you concerning the situation of Lutheranism, is impossible in public.⁴¹

He had been, unlike most of his colleagues, “passionately stirred by the ecclesiastical dispute in the Third Reich.”⁴² Now he was called upon by the occupation authorities to offer an opinion on the political stance of those colleagues in the theological faculty. “What Sasse wrote concerning his colleagues, conforms with the facts,” observed a colleague, Walther von Loewenich.⁴³

But while that personal burden along with the hardships of poor health and lack of heating and food in the grim post-war days was great, perhaps of even greater pain was the course of church affairs. Hoping that the crisis of the war would give opportunity for renewal, the move toward the formation of the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD) was a great disappointment. In his view it suffered the same misconception as did Barmen. It was the triumph of Barthian ecclesiology.⁴⁴ The Erlangen professor finally withdrew, resigning his post as *ordinarius* and his membership of the Bavarian Church. He joined the *Evangelisch-lutherische (altlutherische) Kirche*⁴⁵ and then accepted the call of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia to be professor of church history at its Immanuel Seminary, North Adelaide, Australia. He was installed in this new office on 12 October 1949.⁴⁶

In his correspondence in later years he frequently spoke of the great limitations in this new setting, chiefly of library resources. He was forced to end his research on further articles for the *Kittel Wörterbuch* for instance.⁴⁷ But it also provided new challenges, chief of which was the union of the two Lutheran churches in Australia. He related to his friend, Herman Preus, that this was one of the chief reasons he had gone to Australia. As a UELCA member of the Intersynodical Committee, he was instrumental in preparing for the merger achieved in 1966 with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of

Australia; this formed the Lutheran Church of Australia. From this outpost of the Christian world, Sasse also commenced his *Briefe an lutherische Pastoren*, a series of essays published by his disciple and friend in Germany, Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf.⁴⁸

Professor Sasse's own words briefly summarize his estimation of the transitional period of his life. Describing in 1948 the situation for a confessionally minded pastor in the Bavarian Church, he explains his resignation and planned move to Australia:

All the men who cannot give up the Formula of Concord which is among the official Confessions of the Church of Bavaria must either go or subscribe to the new church laws with a broken conscience. This is the reason why I accepted the first call which came to me, and that was the call from Australia. . . . You know, and your friends know it also, that I am not a fanatic. I spent more than 20 years in the Ecumenical Movement. I gave more time to it than any other theologian in this country. But since this movement has become a means to further the political plans of Geneva I cannot take part in it any longer. During the Third Reich the party and the Kirchliches Aussenamt prevented me from attending ecumenical conferences. Since 1945 Niemoeller and Barth are doing the same. Can you understand that I am longing for a country in which the Lutheran Church is still free? I shall go, if my plans can be carried out, to one of the smallest and poorest Lutheran churches. My Bavarian Government is trying to keep me here. They are prepared to pay me the highest salary a German professor can get. But if I see the distress of my students I must go, and I hope that God will show me the way. "Weg hast du allerwegen, an Mitteln fehlt dir's nicht", as we sing with Paul Gerhardt.⁴⁹

Among the few things that brightened this traumatic period was Sasse's participation "in the first official conference between Roman Catholic and Evangelical theologians in Germany after World War II."⁵⁰ More and more his theological contacts were outside the Bavarian Church, even outside Germany, with one notable exception. That was his participation in the *Schwabacher Konvent*, a group of churchmen devoted to the preservation of confessional Lutheranism.

The contacts outside Germany were chiefly in the United States. He carried on an active correspondence with Herman Preus at Luther Seminary, St. Paul. But the most important contact, at least in terms of its sustained impact, was that with the Missouri Synod and particularly

with its president, Dr. John Behnken. Their first meeting at Sasse's home in Erlangen in November 1945 was a momentous occasion for Sasse, as is indicated in the number of references in his correspondence at the time.⁵¹ In a report on this first meeting, Behnken observed: "Dr. Sasse is probably closer to us in doctrine than any other leader in Germany."⁵²

The relations with Missouri, however, were not in all respects comfortable. While Behnken's estimation of Sasse grew, others in the church were decidedly uneasy with the Erlangen professor, none more so than the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Sasse had the respect of Professor F. E. Mayer and their correspondence illustrates that; however, even Mayer's treatment of Sasse is not without a certain ambiguity. When in 1947, for instance, Behnken asked the seminary to invite Sasse to give some lectures, Mayer was a member of the small committee of the faculty which sought to block the invitation.⁵³ The reasons offered by the faculty are not merely interesting; they also may indicate something about the changing theological climate of the Missouri Synod which is very instructive for today.⁵⁴ In the end he was invited and arrived on 5 June 1948.

Once in St. Louis, discomfort with Sasse's opinions continued. His "pessimistic" view of things in the German churches, noted in the faculty concerns, stood in contrast to the optimism of the St. Louis theologians.⁵⁵ It is perhaps significant that on this visit Sasse was given more time for lectures for the Wisconsin Synod and the American Lutheran Church than for his hosts.

It was, in fact, the Wisconsin Synod, which, through its journal, then known as the *Quartalschrift*, did more to publish Sasse's writings than anyone else in North America; in it were published twelve of his essays over fourteen issues.

It was at the Springfield seminary that Sasse would be welcomed to give regular lectures. He was invited to lecture at Concordia Theological Seminary in January and February 1962.⁵⁶ He was invited back for the winter quarter in 1964-65. It was this seminary which would always hold a special place in his regard and affections, not least for the fact that it honored him with the doctor of divinity degree on Friday 20 January 1967.

In the years following, he maintained a regular correspondence with churchmen in North American Lutheranism; while most of the

letters were exchanged with churchmen of the Synodical Conference, many leaders of the ALC and ULCA/LCA were included. In fact, one of the remarkable things about Sasse was the extent, both in sheer volume and in scope, of his correspondence. Many of these letters were treatises in themselves. This has caused me to include them as unpublished manuscripts in the *Bibliography*.⁵⁷ His son, Wolfgang, observed that there were at least four, if not five, typewriters in the house, each with its own project or manuscript in process.⁵⁸

Life in Australia was difficult for the Sasses. For him it was due chiefly to the isolation, although there were also the more mundane hardships of very low salary and poor resources. The isolation was mainly intellectual but was also personal. He was very conscious of being an immigrant within a society, and even a church, which was very close knit. For that reason he had a very great affection for the immigrant community in Australia.

When Sasse spoke, as he often did, of the “lonely Lutherans” in the world to whom he addressed his letters and essays, it may have been due in part to a projection of his own circumstances, but by no means that only. It was spoken also in the context of a world Lutheranism which, in his estimation, was shrinking.

For Frau Sasse, Lotte, the adjustment to Australia was even more difficult. While they both suffered serious illnesses of various kinds, she was particularly plagued. She very much missed Europe, its climate and presumably its culture. Christmas was a time of longing for snow and winter. Many of Dr. Sasse’s letters mention her poor health and the necessity for much attention on his part.

There was obvious joy and pride in their two sons, Wolfgang and Hans. Wolfgang was 20 when they arrived in Australia in 1949 and Hans was 13. A daughter, Maria, had died, after being baptized, on the day of her birth in December 1930. The elder son became a research chemist in Australia and even did post-doctoral work at Harvard. Hans, who died at Easter 1982, was a lecturer in German at the University of Newcastle in England.

A side of Sasse that we don’t see then, but which one could expect, was of a man who delighted in his family. He was very excited at the birth of his first grandson, Stephen. After he learned of the birth, he could not sleep. He wrote a poem and then, in the middle of the night, brought it to his son’s house and placed it on the window.⁵⁹

His concern for people was evident to students and correspondents. One former student in Adelaide tells that it was to Sasse, more than any of their other professors, that the students would turn for advice; they always felt welcome at his home even when they knew he was very busy.⁶⁰ He kept a diptych⁶¹ with the names of those whom he kept in his prayers.

As one imagines Sasse through reading his works or even his letters, one might be prompted to ask if he had a sense of humor. Here was a man whose life was threatened seriously on more than one occasion, who had suffered much hardship and bore the marks of tragedy, personally and ecclesiologically. Yet, if one meets his colleagues and students, or if one reads his letters, one can learn of a very pastoral concern, a warmth and even at times a sentimentality. Among these are notably stories of his sense of humor as well.

I'll leave it to Dr. John Kleinig to tell the stories about the moving desk or holding hands in church. Another student tells this story:

Students went with Sasse to a Quaker meeting near the cathedral on a Sunday evening. On the way back there would be discussion on the meeting. On the street the group was approached by a young man holding a Bible. He addressed the question to Sasse: "My dear sir, have you found your Saviour?" Sasse paused as if in deep thought—on which occasions he would often rub the side of his nose: "I didn't know that he was lost!"⁶²

Actually, the answer, even if meant to be humorous, was very theological.

Hermann Sasse died tragically on 8 August 1976 due to an accident in his home. It seems likely that he fell, knocking over a paraffin oil (American: kerosene) heater. The death was due to fumes rather than flames.⁶³

III. The Churchman—His Office

As a churchman, it is important to know that Dr. Sasse came out of the old Prussian Union.⁶⁴ To one correspondent he noted:

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 I had for the first time seen a Lutheran Church.⁶⁵

He was a Lutheran within that union of Reformed, Lutheran, and United churchmen, but still it was in the United States that he learned what Lutheranism was.⁶⁶ That was while on the study visit in 1925-26.

It was in America, then, that Sasse claimed the confession of the church:

... he learnt that the Church needs a confession and that, indeed, the Church has one which is the answer of faith to the revelation of God and now somehow the expression of a pious soul. **There he found the “Us” of the Church.** He often spoke about this.⁶⁷

Many, then, have commented on the significance of this background to explain the man, Hermann Sasse. An interesting, even curious, comment is that of Theodore Bachmann, who observed that “Sasse was given to rigorous interpretations,” both about the Union and because of it:

He was, in a way, if you can sum it up, to me anyhow, he seemed like a Prussian Evangelical who became utterly convinced of Lutheranism and proceeded often without meaning to [hurt?] maybe because he meant to overkill.⁶⁸

It can be asserted, however, that Sasse was not given to *ad hominem* argumentation. His letters, for instance, could be published without embarrassment. Karl Barth was his greatest nemesis, yet he could express the greatest admiration for Barth, even at the expense of his mentor and colleague, Werner Elert:

If one compares the most outstanding work of this theology, the Dogmatics by Werner Elert (*Der Christliche Glaube*, 1941) with the Dogmatics by Karl Barth, the limitations of Elert’s theology become obvious.⁶⁹

In his diagnosis Sasse pointed to Elert’s failure to deal adequately with the problem of Holy Scripture and especially of the Old Testament:

Whatever there may be to criticize in Karl Barth’s doctrine of the Holy Scripture—especially in regard to his teaching of Law and Gospel—on the authority of the Old Testament in the Church he stands closer to Luther than the Lutheran Elert.⁷⁰

Sasse could be rather dismissive about Martin Niemoeller's weakness as a theologian, but maintain a very deep and open admiration for the man's courage and act of confession.⁷¹

Sasse fits a pattern in the life of the church: he is the type of churchman who appears at a time of renewal. There are perhaps many features of renewal which have marked the church's history. But for Lutheranism especially such renewals have shared the concerns and emphases of Sasse.

1. He has given emphasis to doctrine rather than to life. He is concerned to teach the church not so much for a renewal of ethics and morality, but rather for a renewal of its teaching and confession.

2. In the past—the 19th century for instance—there arose a renewal in response to a great emphasis on the experiential in religion; with it came a neglect of doctrine and theology, of catechesis and preaching, of sacraments and liturgy.

3. In such times there come pastors and leaders who find it necessary, and comforting, to return to a confession of the faith, especially the doctrines of Holy Word, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, Holy Supper, Holy Church and Holy Office. This was Sasse's service, to focus again on these dogmas for the sake of the church.

Shortly after arriving in Australia, Sasse was appointed to the Union Committee between the two Lutheran churches. In this work he identified his chief purpose for coming to Australia. The union of the two churches in 1966 was to be, humanly speaking, the culmination of all his ministry.

His interest in and knowledge of Catholicism (east, west, and "original") was very impressive.⁷² His essays and correspondence reveal an extraordinary awareness of the literature of the Roman Catholic Church; he would regularly assign official documents for study by his students.

It seems ironic to some, therefore, that from 1960 he became so involved in the Inter-Varsity Fellowship movement in Australia. In 1960 he was vice-president, and in 1967 he was invited to be president. For a man of such "catholic" awareness to become so closely associated with "evangelicals" was a puzzle. For Sasse, it was not a problem. First, it was in these that he found an awareness and confession of the orthodox faith. Secondly, he was at the same time in