

The Lonely Way

VOLUME 1



As Luther once went *the lonely way* between Rome and Spiritualism, so the Lutheran Church today stands alone between the world powers of Roman Catholicism on the one hand and modern Protestantism on the other. Her doctrine which teaches that the Spirit is bound to the means of grace is as inconceivable to modern people in the twentieth century as it was to their predecessors in the sixteenth.

“The Lutheran Doctrine of the Office of the Ministry,” 1943

THE LONELY WAY

SELECTED ESSAYS AND LETTERS

BY
HERMANN SASSE
VOLUME 1 (1927–1939)

Translated by Matthew C. Harrison,
together with Robert G. Bugbee, Lowell C. Green,
Gerald S. Krispin, Maurice E. Schild, and John R. Stephenson

With historical introductions and a biographical sketch
by Ronald R. Feuerhahn

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from the Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation.*

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 Liturgy and Confession—1959
 The Ecumenical Challenge of Vatican II—1965
 The Early Church and Abortion—1968
 The Ordination of Women—1971



PRINCIPAL ABBREVIATIONS AND WORKS CITED

AC	Augsburg Confession
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
<i>AThR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
BC	<i>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</i> . Edited by T. G. Tappert. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959
BS	<i>Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche</i> . 6th ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967
<i>ChrCent</i>	<i>Christian Century</i>
CTM	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
EA	Erlangen Ausgabe ("edition") of Luther's works. <i>Dr. Martin Luther's Sämtliche Werke</i> . 67 vols. Erlangen: C. Heyder, 1826–1857
Enders/Enders-Kawerau	Ernst Ludwig Enders, followed by Peter Gustav Kawerau, ed., <i>Dr. Martin Luther's Briefwechsel</i>
Ep	Epitome of the Formula of Concord
ET	English translation
FC	Formula of Concord
Hopf number	Bibliographical number assigned to Sasse's writings by Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf in <i>ISC</i> . The Hopf and Huss numbers are given for the essays in this volume to aid in identification and because the titles of some of Sasse's works are very similar to each other
Huss Collection	The archive materials from Hermann Sasse's own collection held by Pfarrer Hans-Siegfried Huss of Würzburg, Germany
Huss number	Bibliographical number assigned to Sasse's writings by Ronald R. Feuerhahn in <i>Hermann Sasse: A Bibliography</i> . Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 1995
ISC	<i>In Statu Confessionis: Gesammelte Aufsätze von Hermann Sasse</i> . Edited by Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf. 2 vols. Berlin, 1966, 1975–1976
KJV	King James Version of the Bible
LC	Large Catechism of Martin Luther
<i>Lutheran Cyclopedia</i>	<i>Lutheran Cyclopedia</i> . Edited by Erwin L. Lueker. Rev. ed. St. Louis: Concordia, 1975
<i>Lutheran Worship</i>	<i>Lutheran Worship</i> . St. Louis: Concordia, 1982
<i>LW</i>	<i>Luther's Works</i> . American ed. 55 vols. St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–1986
<i>New Schaff-Herzog</i>	<i>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge</i> . Edited by S. M. Jackson. 12 vols. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1911
NIV	New International Version of the Bible
NKJV	New King James Version of the Bible

NT	New Testament
ODCC	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i> . Edited by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone. 3d ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997
OT	Old Testament
RGG ¹	<i>Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> . 1st ed. 5 vols. Tübingen: Mohr, 1909–1913
RGG ²	<i>Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> . 2d ed. 6 vols. Tübingen: Mohr, 1927–1932
RSV	Revised Standard Version of the Bible
RTR	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SA	Smalcald Articles
SC	Small Catechism of Martin Luther
SD	Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord
St. Louis ed.	St. Louis ed. of Luther's works. <i>Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften</i> . Edited by J. G. Walch. 23 vols. in 24. St. Louis: Concordia, 1881–1910
Str-B	Strack, H. L., and P. Billerbeck. <i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch</i> . 6 vols. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1922–1961
<i>The Lutheran Hymnal</i>	<i>The Lutheran Hymnal</i> . St. Louis: Concordia, 1941
Treatise	Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
Triglotta	<i>Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</i> . St. Louis: Concordia, 1921
WA	Weimar Ausgabe ("edition") of Luther's works. <i>Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> . [Schriften.] 65 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993
WA Br	Weimar Ausgabe Briefwechsel ("correspondence"). <i>Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefwechsel</i> . 18 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–1985
WA TR	Weimar Ausgabe Tischreden ("table talk"). <i>Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Tischreden</i> . 6 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912–1921
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

The following initials are used with the footnotes to indicate who wrote them. Initials are used also on the contents page to indicate translators of the essays.

HS	Hermann Sasse
MH	Matthew Harrison
RF	Ronald Feuerhahn
RB	Robert Bugbee
LG	Lowell Green
GK	Gerald Krispin
MS	Maurice Schild
JS	John Stephenson

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

As much as he criticized Rome, Hermann Sasse envied the Roman Catholic Church's sense of time. On a trip to Rome he stopped to visit Augustin Cardinal Bea. Sasse was apologetic for taking the cardinal's time with such a visit. Bea responded, "I always have time, only no time to waste."

It seemed to Sasse that the Lutheran churches of the world were always rushing matters, establishing dogma without proper historical and exegetical deliberation. And Sasse was witness to more than a few such decisions, such as the Barmen Declaration, which ultimately compromised the confession of the church. On the other hand, it was the corrective of a broad perspective of dogma through the ages which Sasse, throughout his career, strove to give the church. His message was always urgent but never faithless, for he was convinced that the church has a future because Jesus Christ has a future.

Sasse's perspective is needed in the church today. It certainly was helpful to me as a pastor. As a young and eager seminary graduate, I headed off to my first parish, St. Peter's Lutheran, Westgate, Iowa. In my own struggles to bridge the gap between zealous orthodoxy and wise pastoral practice, Sasse became a god-send, the single most influential literary resource for the molding of my own pastoral practice. Sasse helped me move from talking about the Gospel to delivering it. Sasse taught me that there is no contradiction between confessional Lutheran fidelity and true ecumenicity. Sasse made it all so profoundly simple, concrete, and practical.

At the seminary my dear father in Christ, Professor Kurt Marquart, had introduced many of us to Sasse, who had been his own colleague, father in Christ, and confessional Lutheran mentor during Marquart's Australian years. I then spent a year studying at Sasse's seminary (years after his death) and read every bit of Sasse I could get hold of. In my STM studies at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, I delved into Sasse's German. So I developed the habit of translating several pages of Sasse's work nearly every day over the course of a four-year pastorate in a little Iowa farming village. This I continued, albeit less regularly, as I continued my pastoral ministry at Zion Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne.

Through all of these studies and pastorates, Sasse provided perspective. His sweeping historical-dogmatic treatises, at once utterly orthodox and truly ecumenical, gave me doctrinal confidence, confessional depth, and historical sensi-

bility as I dealt not only with my own people, but also with the clergy and laity of other denominations. All of what I was reading in Sasse, like the Lutheran Confessions themselves, emphasized the point of all orthodox dogma and practice as loving pastoral care. Sasse's breadth helped provide a very young and inexperienced pastor with what he sorely needed to be a true pastor of Christ's people: confessional fidelity and patience.

There is a long history to the church's dogma and practice. Where that dogma and practice have gone awry, only patient teaching and loving practice can possibly right it again, and this only as God grants by his grace. Entire eras have their movements and weaknesses and inabilities to perceive the truth of this or that reality of NT and confessional Lutheran Christianity. In such eras the faithful pastor must have the biblical and historical tools to be able to recognize the circumstances in which he finds himself, to diagnose the malady, and then patiently to meet the challenge, leaving the results to Christ.

The Sasse essays included in this first volume were profoundly influential to me in all the aspects I have mentioned. Many of these papers were written in the white-hot heat of the *Kirchenkampf*—the struggle of the church under Nazism. And if Sasse could maintain such confessional fidelity, evident ecumenical spirit, and faithful confidence in the Lord of the church, even under Hitler, then I could patiently meet the challenge of lovingly standing firm in the comparatively meager challenges I faced in the parish.

In June of 2000 I visited the grave of Sasse on the south side of the city of Adelaide, South Australia. The stone bears this epitaph: *Tuis fidelibus Domine, vita non tollitur, sed mutatur* ("For your faithful, O Lord, life is not taken away, it is changed"). He had chosen the words himself. Hermann Otto Eric Sasse was taken to be with Christ in 1976. We rejoice now that far from being taken away from the church which he so loved, Sasse's voice now continues to live, even if changed by translation through this publication. And it just may be that Sasse's voice will be heard today for the cause of confessional Lutheranism to a far greater extent than ever before. Such posthumous service is all the more meaningful and appreciated in light of what was for him most often a very "lonely way."

My heartfelt appreciation to the many that have in many different ways made this project a reality. Ron Feuerhahn has for over a decade now been a dear friend, mentor, and *Amtsbruder*. He has provided us all with an invaluable wealth of information on Sasse, and happily, he kindly consented to continue to do so for this volume. Sincere thanks also to Dr. Norman Nagel for his decades of interest in Sasse and for his constant encouragement. I am deeply thankful to and for my dear brother in Christ Paul McCain, whose enthusiasm for reading fresh translations of Sasse has never flagged. He made time to edit some of the essays of this work and approached the Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation for a grant. My sincere thanks to the Schwan Foundation for enabling us to produce, at reasonable cost to the reader, this volume and the second which will soon fol-

low. And here too I must thank our sainted President A. L. Barry for his support for the project. May his legacy of confessional fidelity endure like Sasse's. I heartily thank the others who gladly provided translations for this volume: Maurice Schild, Lowell Green, Gerald Krispin, Robert Bugbee, and John Stephenson. The capable staff at CPH has been a pure pleasure to work with, especially Fritz Baue, who has guided this project through the long process of publication, and Julene Dumit, who meticulously copyedited the manuscript. I should be remiss were I to fail to mention the constant companionship and strength I receive from one Kathy Harrison, the greatest single First Article gift of my life. Though the many essays of this book look toward the past, they do so with the intent of building a bridge to the future of a confessional Lutheran Church, and that for the sake of my dear sons, Matthew M. L. and Mark M. C. Harrison, as well as generations to come.

Translating is challenging business. Thankfully, Sasse's German is straightforward. Others have checked the translation here and there, but I shall not mention their names so that responsibility for any deficiencies, and I am sure there are plenty, falls squarely in my lap. Those who actually knew and heard Sasse will find my translations less than true to Sasse's own unique literary and oral style. I plead the indulgence of such brothers. I never knew or heard the man. That stated, I should like to dedicate this volume of translations to the Reverends Bruce Adams, John Kleinig, Andrew Pfeiffer, Avito DaCosta, David Buck, and Mark Hampel (all beloved brothers in Christ) and to the entire ministerium of the Lutheran Church of Australia. The way may be lonely, but *ne desperemus!* The Lord still prays for his church.

Matthew C. Harrison
Lent IV, 2001

HERMANN SASSE (1895–1976)

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Hermann Sasse has captured our attention for several good reasons. First, we are drawn to his mastery of history and the breadth of his knowledge. His synthesis of disciplines and powers of analysis give his work authority. As he described one of his own teachers, so his students might have said of him that he was a great *poly-histor*—a man of great and varied learning. This learning is expressed in writing that is lucid, in contrast to much theological literature of his day. For depth of insight and clarity of expression, Sasse is like Luther and Walther.

The second and more important reason is that we appreciate the forthrightness of his confession. Like one of his ancestors, Valentin Löscher (Timotheus Verinius),¹ he opposed unionism and Pietism. He had a sense of church and churchmanship which, after his early liberal training at the University of Berlin, grew into a conscious and confident assertion of the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In this lonely vocation he gave encouragement to many others, often telling students that they must reclaim these confessions in their own lives.

Sasse was a good student. He attended several *Gymnasia* before matriculating at the University of Berlin in the summer semester, 1913.² There he was inscribed in two faculties simultaneously—theology and classical philology.³ 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

¹ Valentin Ernst Löscher (1673–1749) studied at Wittenberg and Jena. He was the last great orthodox opponent of Pietism, syncretism, and unionism before these swamped what had been an orthodox Lutheran Church in Germany. While superintendent at Dresden, he wrote a powerful critique of Pietism under the pseudonym Timotheus Verinius: *Vollständiger Timotheus Verinus, oder; Darlegung der Wahrheit und des Friedens in denen bitzherigen Pietistischen Streitigkeiten* (*The Complete Timotheus Verinus, or, a Statement of the Truth and a Call for Peace in the Present Pietistic Controversy*; part 1, 1718; part 2, 1721; ET: *The Complete Timotheus Verinus* [trans. James L. Langebartels and Robert J. Koester; Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1998]).

There is a rather detailed genealogy tracing the Sasse family link in the collection of documents of Wolfgang Sasse, Hermann Sasse's elder son.

² *The Bond* (Immanuel Seminary, Adelaide) 3 (July 1949): 9.

³ "Reminiscences of an Elderly Student," *Tangara* (Luther Seminary, Adelaide) 9 (1976): 4–5; Biographical Note, File of the Dean of Faculty, Archives of the Theological Faculty, University of Erlangen.

would later become Sasse's *Doktorvater*. Many years later Sasse 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 well as 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.⁴ Old Testament I did with Baudissin, Gressmann (who later as dean conferred my first academic degree on me) and Eissfeldt. . . . 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 *polyhistor*s of our time, to lay the philosophical foundations of modern mathematics and physics.⁵

Sasse then recalled, perhaps whimsically: "The gaps in Practical Theology were later filled at the *Kriegsschule* ("officers training school") and in the first years in the ministry."⁶ His military service came between the two important exams of his education. Again, with some wit he recalled: "Since the army, in the beginning of the war, 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."⁷

He entered the army in October 1916 and was assigned to an infantry regiment. In just over a month he saw battle.⁸ As a sergeant, he led his men into what was arguably the bloodiest battle of World War I. He later recalled:

And then we went up to Passchendaele. We were a hundred and fifty men, fully equipped and a full company. On the sixth we came back and six men reported. The others were killed or had disappeared in the fire, the water, and the gas of one of the worst battles of the First World War.⁹

⁴ Sasse had Adolf von Harnack for early church history and Karl Holl for nineteenth-century theology. Sasse once said, "It is easier to live by Harnack's theology than to die by it" (Heino O. Kadai, "Professor D. Hermann Sasse: Congratulations for a Septuagenerian [*sic*]," *The Springfielder* 29.2 [Spring 1965]: 5).

⁵ "Reminiscences of an Elderly Student." In addition to Harnack and Holl, Sasse mentions Adolf Deissmann, NT exegesis; Wolf Wilhelm Graf von Baudissin, OT exegesis; Hugo Gressmann, OT exegesis; Otto Eissfeldt, OT theology; Heinrich Scholz, systematic theology. For a full list of the faculty, see *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die evangelischen Landeskirchen Deutschlands 1916* (ed. J. Schneider; Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1916), 583.

⁶ "Reminiscences of an Elderly Student" (parenthesis in original). Since Sasse was not an officer, "military academy," a translation for *Kriegsschule* found in some dictionaries, might be more accurate here.

⁷ "Reminiscences of an Elderly Student."

⁸ Biographical Note, File of Dean of Faculty, Archives of the Theological Faculty, University of Erlangen. The German expression used, *im Felde*, indicates combat.

⁹ "The Impact of Bultmannism on American Lutheranism, with Special Reference to His Demythologization of the New Testament," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 5.4 (June 1965): 4.

1927

AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHURCH¹

An American Lutheran churchman described this essay as “a fair and frank estimate of American church life. The author feels that the American church is destined to play a conspicuous part in the future development of western Christianity. . . . These lectures were intended for a German audience, but we Americans shall do well to listen in a bit on the presentations.”² Abdel Ross Wentz, the noted historian of American Lutheranism, wrote Sasse shortly after its publication, saying that he had appreciated it so much that he and his wife had translated it.³ The translation was never published but was used as the basis for the review article by Paul Hoh.

Sasse wrote this essay on the basis of his visit to the United States in 1925–1926 (see the biographical sketch in the front of this book). In the foreword to his book *Here We Stand*, he described the importance of this visit:

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.⁴

Later he wrote: “I had learned in America, where I spent a year at Hartford (1925/1926), what undogmatic Christianity is and where it ends.”⁵

Dietrich Bonhoeffer read Sasse’s book before his own study at Union Theological Seminary, New York.⁶

¹ This essay originally appeared under the title *Amerikanisches Kirchentum* (Berlin-Dahlem: Wichern-Verlag, 1927). MH

² Paul J. Hoh, “The American Church,” *The Lutheran Church Review* 46.2 (April 1927): 162. Hoh’s article is essentially a summary of Sasse’s essay. RF

³ Wentz to Sasse (November 18, 1933; Huss Collection). RF

⁴ Hermann Sasse, “Foreword to the American Edition,” *Here We Stand: Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith* (trans. Theodore G. Tappert; New York: Harper & Bros., 1938), x–xi. RF

⁵ Letter from Sasse to Klaas Runia, cited in Runia, “Dr. Hermann Sasse ‘In Statu Confessionis,’ ” *RTR* 27.1 (January/April 1968): 1. RF

⁶ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision, Man of Courage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970);

This essay by Sasse fits into a genre of works about American life by European visitors, each of which made similar observations about the religious life of the country. Not unlike Alexis de Tocqueville's book *Of Democracy in America* (1835), this essay by Sasse offers a keen and well-informed analysis of American Christianity, almost a century later. In the same year as Sasse's publication was one by André Siegfried, *America Comes of Age: A French Analysis* (1927). Sasse states his thesis in the following way: "The development of the social forms of the church always deeply correspond with the general process of societal formation."

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OUTLINE

Preface

Introduction

1. Church and Civilization

2. The Concept of the Church

Conclusion: The Ecumenical Question

PREFACE

This publication contains two lectures (in somewhat expanded form) which were delivered at the Theological Week at Frankfurt an der Oder in August of 1926. The content of these lectures is based upon studies and observations made while the author spent a year of study at Hartford Theological Seminary, at Hartford, Connecticut.⁷ Since he is presenting these lectures to the public, it is necessary for him to thank those who made possible this trip for study purposes and who smoothed his way in America, especially Professor Dr. Julius Richter in Berlin;⁸ the president of the [Hartford] seminary, Dr. W. Douglas Mackenzie;⁹ the theo-

Fountain Edition, 1977), 105 (British title: *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*). RF

⁷ September 1925–May 1926. RF

⁸ Sasse's time in America had been arranged by the German Evangelical Church Committee (*Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenausschuß*) under an initiative by Dr. Julius Richter. Six theologians from each country were part of the exchange. In addition to Sasse, Peter Brunner and Wilhelm Pauck were among the Germans (*Verhandlungen des zweiten Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentages 1927*, Königsberg, Prussia, June 17–21, 1927, published by Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenausschuß; Berlin-Steglitz: Evangelischen Preßverband für Deutschland, [1928?], 59). RF

⁹ Mackenzie was president and professor of Christian theology (1903–1930). RF

logical faculty at Hartford; and friends in the United Lutheran Church.¹⁰

Oranienburg near Berlin, October 1926

The Author

INTRODUCTION

Through the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work in Stockholm,¹¹ American Christianity [*amerikanische Kirchentum*] has gained the interest of widening circles of German Protestantism. A discussion of its forms of life and its ideas has begun. And this discussion not only possesses the highest practical significance for the life and work of the German Evangelical Church, but it also has already deeply influenced our religious and theological thought. Indeed, it is forcing us to seriously evaluate ourselves and to reconsider the rudiments of our religious life. The uniqueness of the intellectual situation in which we find ourselves is that all the individual questions and tasks with which we wrestle broaden into larger questions of fundamental principle. Basic questions of worldview lie behind contemporary problems regarding politics, legislation, and pedagogics and make the proposing and completion of practical tasks of the present so unendingly difficult. And the problems of modern-day ecclesiastical life, too, ever again wend their way back to the basic questions of the Reformation. This is especially true of the problems which American Protestantism places before us.

What significance did American Christianity have for us twenty years ago? It was a very interesting phenomenon for the church historian or one who studies the psychology of religion. The German Protestant shook his head in confusion when he compared his church with the chaos of American sects. It amounted to a sum total of hypocrisy, ridiculousness, and nonsense for a reader of the newspaper, who read easy anecdotes about the land of unbridled possibility.

What is American Christianity today? It is the greatest mission force on earth, in control of two-thirds of all Protestant mission work. America is a world power, whose social forms and ideas are beginning to force their way into Europe. No less than Oswald Spengler¹² has declared that American religious life will be the future form of Protestant Christianity.

¹⁰ Sasse was very grateful for his contact with and the support of the United Lutheran Church in America and its president, Frederick Hermann Knubel. For details on this American visit, see Ronald R. Feuerhahn, "Hermann Sasse and North American Lutheranism," *Logia* 4.4 (October 1995): especially 11–12. RF

¹¹ This conference in 1925, under the leadership of Nathan Söderblom, archbishop of Uppsala, was one of the foundational events of the modern Ecumenical Movement. RF

¹² Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) was a German freelance writer in history and philosophy. Here is probably a reference to Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (2 vols.; Munich: Oskar Beck, 1918, 1924); in English *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality* (trans. Charles Francis Atkinson; New York: Knopf, 1939). This was making quite a stir at the time. Spengler was influenced by Nietzsche; *The Decline of the West* was a philosophy of history and political predictions

1928

KYRIOS¹

In 1928, Sasse's name appeared for the first time as a participant in a series of conferences of British and German theologians; this, the second, was held at the Wartburg, near Eisenach, August 11–18, 1928. The conferences, which grew out of a suggestion at the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, Stockholm, 1925, were organized by George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, and Dr. Adolf Deissmann of the University of Berlin, Sasse's *Doktorvater*. This essay was presented at the Eisenach conference.

Following the third conference in Chichester, which Deissmann was unable to attend, Bishop Bell wrote his German collaborator “a brief account.”

I think that the person who made the greatest contribution to the Conference, or at any rate was outstanding and in advance of his previous work at previous Conferences, was Dr. Sasse. He was excellent and most constructive and suggestive.²

Such a remark must be considered in view of the very impressive company of scholars that he was honored to join: General Superintendent Otto Dibelius and Wilhelm Stählin among the Germans and from England J. M. Creed; C. H. Dodd; Sir Edwyn Hoskyns; J. K. Mozley; E. G. Selwyn.

Huss number 015-II

Hopf number 013



All Christological expressions are, like all true theological propositions, confessions of faith. We can never say who Christ is without using expressions which imply the adoption of a personal attitude toward him.

The church's Christology begins in the NT with two great confessions of faith. The first is that of St. Peter: *σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός* (“You are the Messiah,” Mark 8:29). The second is the anonymous confession of the original Christian commu-

¹ This essay was published in English as “KYRIOS” in *Theology* 17.100 (October 1928): 223–29. It was published simultaneously in German in *Theologische Blätter* 7.10 (October 1928): 261–65. The translation given here is a reprint of that published in the journal *Theology*. The translator was A. E. J. Rawlinson. RF

² March 30, 1931; Lambeth Palace Library, Bell Papers, vol. 63, p. 177. RF

nities: Κύριος Ἰησοῦς ("Jesus is Lord," Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:11; cf. 2 Cor 4:5; Col 2:6). There is an inner connection between the two, but there are characteristic differences also. The first looks to the past. "You are the Messiah"—that is, the end, the fulfillment, of the history, a thousand years long, of the prophetic religion. "Jesus is Lord"—with the formulation of this sentence Christian faith begins to leave the Jewish homeland and to run its course through the peoples and religions of the world. The second confession represents an advance upon the first. The apostolic experience, the knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus, lies between. Beyond these two confessions, to which the other Christological expressions of the NT are subordinate, nothing more that is essential is said about Christ. There are no discoveries in Christology. The Christology of subsequent ages has no further task beyond the task of understanding more and more deeply the implications of these two confessions.

Kyrios is the name above all other names which Jesus bears in the Hellenistic communities of primitive Christianity. As the bearer of this name he stands on the side of God, inasmuch as *Kyrios* is God's holy name in the LXX. He stands at the same time as a rival, over against all other bearers of the name *Kyrios*. The name gives expression to his divine rank and majesty. He is invoked as *Kyrios* in prayer. He has become *Kyrios* as the result of his resurrection and exaltation. He bears the name as being the living and present "Lord," towards whom believers stand in that profound life relationship which is expressed by the formula ἐν Χριστῷ ["in Christ"]. His κυριότης ["lordship"] stands in a specific relation to the life of his ἐκκλησία ["church"], more especially as that life finds expression in worship. It is a relationship which is experienced more particularly in the κοινωνία ["fellowship"] which Christians have with him in the δεῖπνον κυριακόν ["Lord's Supper"]. The primitive church thus expresses by means of the name *Kyrios* the ultimate depths of its Christian faith, and at the same time distinguishes itself sharply in contrast with all other religions.

The *origin of this confession* of Jesus as *Kyrios* is one of the most important of the historical problems presented by the study of primitive Christianity. St. Paul found it already in existence before his conversion. Does it go back to Palestinian Christianity? Had the title *Kyrios* an Aramaic antecedent? Or are its origins Hellenistic?

In Hellenistic linguistic usage *Kyrios* is employed as a title of rulers, especially for the Roman Caesars, for numerous cult deities, and in the LXX as a substitute for the Jewish divine name. Behind the Greek word lurks an Oriental idea—the thought of an inner connection between godhead and kingship. The epithets applied to gods and kings are interchangeable all through the East. Jahve [Yahweh] in ancient Israel is called "King," and in later Judaism "King of kings." The replacement of the name Jahve by *Adonai* [אֲדֹנָי, "Lord"] belongs to the same context of ideas. In Aramaic the same process of linguistic development may be followed in the history of the word *mare* [ܡܪܝ, "lord"], which occurs twice in the

1929

WHERE CHRIST IS, THERE IS THE CHURCH¹

The official minutes of the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order, meeting at Maloja, Switzerland, note for August 29, 1929, that “at 9:30 a.m. Pastor Sasse led the devotions.” This is the sermon for that occasion, based on Matt 28:20.

Huss number 036

Hopf number 024



“And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20).

At the other end of the lake whose shore lies before us, by the Sils Maria, there is an inscription carved into a mighty stone on a forested peninsula. The inscription reads “Friedrich Nietzsche,”² and above is the song of deep midnight from Zarathustra who once originated in Sils Maria. Year after year Nietzsche had fled from the hustle of the world to the loneliness of this mountain vale,³ upon which at that time lay the deep stillness of natural isolation. Before the green mirror of the lake, to the right and to the left the steep cliffs, and in the distance the desolate ice and snow of the high mountain peaks, far from people and their boisterous bustle, there he sat and wrote his great works. Among the poems which he created here are some of the greatest written in the German language. The deep isolation, the most desperate lostness of the soul, has perhaps never found such expression as in them. There is one which describes how, in the terrifying loneliness of the mountain heights, he cries out for people who understand him: “The

¹ This essay was originally published as “Ansprache zur Eröffnung der Fortsetzungsausschuss der Weltkonferenz für Glauben und Kirchenverfassung am 29. August 1929 in Maloja. Text: Matth. 28,20” in *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* [Bern] 37 NF 19.3 (July–September 1929): 152–56. It was later republished as an essay in *Lutherische Blätter* 16.81 (May 1964): 37–40, and in *ISC*, 2:19–21. MH/RF

² Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was a German philosopher and the son of a Lutheran pastor from Saxony. RF

³ Sasse’s reference is to the village of Sils Maria at the opposite end of the Lake of Sils from Maloja. Here Friedrich Nietzsche spent the summers of 1881 and then 1883–1888 at a modest boarding house. It was here that he completed part 2 of his famous book *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. “The most important single clue to *Zarathustra* is that it is the work of an utterly lonely man” (“Introduction” and “Editor’s Preface,” *The Portable Nietzsche* [ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann; London: Penguin, 1968], 21, 103). RF

friend remains, ready day and night.” But no one comes who understands him. And finally his screams subside, the cry of an endless desire: “The song is over, the desire of a sweet cry dies in the mouth. . . . Now the world laughs, the terrifying curtain is torn, the wedding came for light and darkness.” He just passes into the night of insanity.⁴

Why do I recount this? Not merely because it is a gripping episode from the intellectual history of our German people, but for another reason. There are men whose lives embody the fate of an entire epoch, and Nietzsche is such a man. His desperate destitution and loneliness is the loneliness of the modern man. To be sure, there still burns in his soul the desire for God. Indeed, he cries as Friedrich Nietzsche for the unknown God, and he consecrates to him solemn altars in the deepest depths of his heart. But the voice of the living God he no longer hears. At best he sees the apparitions like the dark form of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra. He no longer knows Christ the Lord. In his destitution he cries out for fellowship with other souls. But he no longer finds the brethren.

All this signifies the destruction of people, the destruction of the soul. And it is the great fateful question of Western humanity today, whether it will go the dark road of self-destruction without God, without Christ, without brotherhood, which the Lord has established in his church. If a new day of Jesus Christ does not dawn upon it, it will go into the night in which Friedrich Nietzsche met his end.

Do we not see here the great task of the church? We are gathered here at the other shore of the Lake of Sils. Do we hear the cry coming across the water from the other shore? Do we hear the cry to the unknown God? Do we hear voices of longing for the reestablishment of a human fellowship destroyed? And do we also hear the other voice which comes over from there, the complaint which Friedrich Nietzsche once raised against us, against Christianity?⁵ Today in a new form in a thousand languages it rings out through every portion of the earth:

You must sing me a better song so that I learn to believe in your Redeemer: Why are his disciples so joyless in their salvation? We don’t need your Christ. We desire God, but you have only pious talk about God. We desire the Redeemer, but you only recount old history to us. Your theologians are not in agreement on what redemption is—and you want to preach redemption to us? We desire the deepest fellowship, we long for true brotherhood, and you give us only pious societies, which are in conflict with each other. Be done with your pious talk—it does not interest us. We desire to hear God, not you. Your subjectivity, your beautiful mystical experiences, keep to your self. We are dying, we are doubting, we have no time for it!

⁴ In early January 1889, Nietzsche became insane. RF

⁵ Nietzsche developed a bitterly anti-Christian atheistic philosophy, accusing Christianity of a “slave morality,” which makes a virtue of humility and tends to weakness in contrast to his ideal *Übermensch* (“superman”) view of humanity. (*Lutheran Cyclopedia*, 577) RF

1931

THE CHURCH AS *CORPUS* *CHRISTI*¹

This essay was delivered at the Conference of German and English Theologians, the same series of conferences for which Sasse had presented his essay “*Kyrios*” in 1928.² This conference, held in March 1931 at the Bishop’s Palace, Chichester, England, was “to get at the positive doctrine of the Church and the Sacraments.”³ The table of contents in the issue of *Theology* in which this essay was first published gives a fuller title to the essay: “The Church as *Corpus Christi*: The Nature of the Institutional Expression of the Idea.” Following the conference, Sasse spent some days as a guest of Sir Edwyn Hoskyns at his home in Cambridge. In a letter of thanks to the Bishop of Chichester, George Bell, for his hospitality, Sasse explains that it was his first visit to England and adds: “I have learnt very much about Anglican theology, more than I could have learnt by reading many books, and I think this is true of all of us who had the privilege of taking part in the discussions at Chichester.”⁴

Huss number 080-II
Hopf number 419



When the church is designated as the body of Christ in St. Paul’s epistles, that is a thought for which every parallel is wanting in the history of religion. The church of the NT can be compared with the congregation (people) of Islam or with the congregation of Buddha; parallels can be drawn between the Hellenistic congregations of the Pauline period and the associations of the Hellenistic mystery religions. In that way remarkable sociological affinities result. But neither the relation of a band of disciples to their master nor the relation of a believing com-

¹ This essay was published simultaneously in German and English in *Theologische Blätter* 10.6 (June 1931): 156–58 (“Die Kirche als Corpus Christi”), and *Theology* 22.132 (June 1931): 318–23. The translation given here is a reprint of that published in the journal *Theology*. The translation of all the German papers in this series was by the Rev. L. Patterson, D.D. RF

² “*Kyrios*” is also printed in this collection. RF

³ From the editorial introduction to the collection (*Theology* 22.132 [June 1931]: 301). RF

⁴ April 2, 1931; Lambeth Palace Library, Bell Papers, vol. 63, p. 180. RF

munity to its founder nor the relation of a mystery guild to its cult-god was capable of being designated by an expression which would even only approximately correspond to the σῶμα Χριστοῦ ["body of Christ"] of the NT. The singularity, in the history of religion and sociology, of the ἐκκλησία ["church"] of the NT finds in its designation as the body of Christ its classical expression. But while the NT utters this peculiar thought, it avails itself naturally of an already existing world of ideas and terminology. It is above all worth while to know these presuppositions of thought and language, if we wish to understand the idea of the *corpus Christi*. We can only here indicate what is most important.

The first presupposition is the thought that a community of people can be understood as σῶμα ["body"] in the sense of an organism. "We many are one body" (1 Cor 10:17). "As the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body, though they are many, are only one body" (1 Cor 12:12). "As we have many members in one body, but not all members have the same work, even so we, the many, are one body . . . and every one members in their reciprocal relation" (Rom 12:4-5). A plurality of members of different kinds and with different functions exists in the unity, the wholeness of the body, whereby the whole is more than the sum of the parts. Only in the relation to the whole of the body and to one another the members have their existence. They are not there for themselves. Even their functions are related to one another and are functions of the body (1 Cor 12:14 ff.). Between the members, which can only exist with and for one another, there exists the relation of συμπάθεια ["sympathy"] (συμπάσχει ["suffer together with"], 1 Cor 12:26). These thoughts are intelligible without any commentary. As they have been set forth here—namely, with the omission of Christ's name—they contain nothing specifically Christian. We find in them the Hellenistic thought of the organism, as it was developed in the classical philosophy of the Greeks and was disseminated by the later popular philosophy (cf. the Platonic doctrine of the state as a collective person, the Aristotelian doctrine of the superiority of the society to the individual, the Stoic thought of the organism of the world or [in Cicero and Seneca] of the society bound together into unity through the συμπάθεια τῶν ὅλων ["sympathy/shared feeling of the whole"]). St. Paul has borrowed the widespread image of the body, with the help of which the essence of human communities was made clear, from the storehouse of the thought of his time and applied it to the church.

The second presupposition is the thought of the spirit constituting the community, an Oriental, not a Greek thought. It is emphasized again and again that it is the πνεῦμα ["Spirit"] which creates the unity of the σῶμα ["body"]. "One body and one Spirit" (Eph 4:4). "We are all baptized through one Spirit into one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, slaves or free men, and are all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). Even this thought is not specifically Christian, but it belongs to the prophetic religions of the East. The Pneuma, the Spirit of God coming upon people from above and dwelling in them, binds the individuals together into a unity, a "we," a collective person of the true people or the con-

1935

NON-OBLIGATORY PROPOSAL TOWARD THE SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH¹

The original document was dated January 12, 1935. It was presented to the Lutheran Council [*Lutherischer Rat*] by Sasse and his Erlangen colleague Friedrich Ulmer. These theses address a group of questions especially about the office of bishop in the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

They are in the context of the Nazi government's encroachment on the ordering of the churches (see, for example, reference to a Führer in thesis 11). They also comment on the relation of church and ministry. They are written in the context of the German *Landeskirche* ("territorial church") setting. Thus, when they speak of "church" they do not refer only to congregation (e.g., thesis 10). They conclude with a brief, clear statement of the doctrine of the two governments (thesis 12).

Huss number 134.1



1. The church does not have its origin in the will of people but is rather the creation of Jesus Christ, the Lord. When he gave the charge to the apostles to preach the Gospel to all creatures, to baptize, and to celebrate the Holy Supper, he allowed the church to become a reality in this world. It is his body, for he himself is in it, concealed in Word and Sacrament, present until the world's end.

2. Wherever the pure Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered, there, according to the promise of God that his Word shall not return void [Is 55:10–11], springs into existence a congregation of believers, sanctified in the faith (*congregatio sanctorum*, AC VII).

¹ This essay was originally published as "Unverbindlicher Vorschlag zur Geistlichen Leitung der Kirche" in *Lutherische Kirche* 17.3 (February 1, 1935): 39–41. It was published over the names of both Sasse and Friedrich Ulmer. MH/RF

3. The charge to proclaim the Word and administer the Sacraments is for all time accomplished by the office of the ministry [*kirchlichen Amt*] (*ministerium ecclesiasticum*, AC V).

4. This office of the ministry does not at its very essence come into existence out of the will of the congregation; it is rather the creation of Christ [*aus der Stiftung Christi*]. The relationship of office and congregation is to be understood in such a way that neither is present without the other and neither is master over the other.

5. Jesus Christ has prescribed to his church no specific order [*Verfassung*] to be drawn from the NT, but he has willed that his church have an ordered existence (1 Cor 14:40 and 14:33; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; and Romans 12).

6. A church is then correctly ordered when its constitution [*Verfassung*] makes possible the right preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments. Any ordering of the church [*Kirchenverfassung*] which makes the fulfillment of this charge impossible or endangers it cannot be reconciled with the essence of the church.

7. In a correctly ordered church, the ecclesiastical office (which is not dependent upon people) and the congregation (whose Lord is Jesus Christ and not people) must find a form which makes possible the fulfillment of the particular tasks of each, which are to be accomplished cooperatively and independently. Still, these ordered tasks can never be so allotted that explicit functions of the church are simply the responsibility of the office of the ministry [*geistliche Amt*] alone or the congregation alone. Thus the congregation is responsible for the purity of the Word which is proclaimed and the administration of the Sacraments, and with this also the presence of a properly ordered office [of the ministry]. On the other hand, the office of the ministry [*geistliche Amt*] is to see that the congregation actually exercises the rights and responsibilities of the "spiritual priesthood" (1 Peter 2).

8. The spiritual character of the church excludes the separation of the proclamation of the Word from the administration of external matters [*externa*] so that the latter may be allowed to become entirely or partially extra-ecclesiastical entities. For finally, all external matters of the church serve the proclamation of the Word. Their administration can therefore never be without the influence of this proclamation.

9. The tasks entrusted to church government are as follows: the supervision of pastors and their preaching, and with this the purity of doctrine; the supervision of the life and the order of the congregation; and the administration of the external matters of the church. These appointed tasks are inseparably bound together.

10. This church government appertains to the entire church (FC SD X 9) and will be exercised at every level of the church's life (local congregation, provincial church, territorial church) in continuous cooperation with the office of the min-

1937

LUTHER AND THE TEACHING OF THE REFORMATION¹

In a letter to Theodore Tappert in May 1938, Sasse offered the following brief description of this essay: "It does not contain anything new, yet is a sign of interest in Luther among modern Anglicans."

Among those modern Anglicans was Edward Gordon Selwyn, dean of Winchester Cathedral, the editor of the collection of essays in which the English version of this essay first appeared. He and Sasse had probably met for the first time at the second British-German theological conference in Eisenach in August 1928 (see "*Kyrios*" in this collection) and then again at the third conference in Chichester in March 1931 (see "The Church as *Corpus Christi*" in this collection).

Huss number 163

Hopf number 096



PART 1

The Reformer came not from the ranks of noble, scholarly, and devout bishops who, like Nicholas of Cusa, strove for a thorough revival of the decayed church. Nor did he come from the circle of learned humanists, who, like Erasmus, sought to revive the church by a return to the pure original sources of Christianity. Still less did he come from the extreme critics of the church, the heretics and the revolutionary enthusiasts. Like the great reformers of the church in the centuries of the Middle Ages, he came from a monastery. He was a Catholic monk whose views on the church were impeccably orthodox. In 1505, in accordance with a

¹ While the text of this essay was originally in German, the German text was not published until 1950: "Luther und die Lehre der Reformation," *Lutherische Blätter* 2.13 (special supplement; Festival of the Reformation, October 31, 1950): 1–11; it was reprinted in *ISC*, 1:38–49. The English edition was first published in *History of Christian Thought* (ed. Edward Gordon Selwyn; London: originally John Heritage, the Unicorn Press; later the Centenary Press, 1937), 106–24. The translator was C. H. Jeffery. There was a second English edition of the volume, with different pagination (and the word "short" in the title as had originally been intended by Selwyn): *A Short History of Christian Thought* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1949), 80–92. The translation given here is a slightly revised version of that translation. RF

vow taken under duress from the fear of death, the twenty-two year old Master of Arts, after just beginning his legal studies at Erfurt, entered the Augustinian monastery there. His father, who, working as a miner, had risen from humble peasant origin to an assured middle-class existence, was very angry at this frustration of all the material ambitions he had cherished for his highly gifted elder son. His friends explained that a vow made in such extenuating circumstances was invalid. But Martin Luther remained faithful to his decision. At the command of his superiors, he began his study of theology immediately. He was ordained priest in 1507, and in 1508 began his career as a lecturer, first in the faculty of arts in the newly founded university at Wittenberg, then for a while at Erfurt, and later at Wittenberg again as lecturer on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Against his own will, he was obliged, by the orders of his superiors, to take his degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1512 and to undertake the professorship of biblical studies. It was during the next few years, between 1513 and 1518, that he gave his lectures on the Psalms and the Epistles to the Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, which are so important for the beginnings of the Reformation. This professorship was the public position which Luther retained until his death in 1546. His lectures consisted of an exegesis of the books of the Bible, until at last, from 1535–1545, he gave his exposition of Genesis. During his years as a monk he also filled various offices in his order. As one of the disciplinarians known as the Observants, he was in Rome during the years 1510–1511. Occasionally, too, he helped in the ministerial office. It was while acting for the pastor of the town church of Wittenberg that he had his experiences in the confessional box. This led him to draw up his theses on indulgences. This church was also the scene of his great sermons during his professorship. But these offices are much more than the mere outward circumstances which form a background to Luther's life and work. It is only through them that Luther can be understood as a Reformer. There is no worse misunderstanding of Luther than to see in him, as the ages of Enlightenment and Liberalism did, the originator of modern culture who freed the individual from the fetters of the church and of medieval society and exalted reason to the position of arbiter over the doctrine of the church. Luther was never a modern in this sense of the word. In many respects, indeed, he strikes us as anything but modern in comparison not only with Erasmus but also with the great minds of medieval Catholicism. When we remember Luther's appeal to the Word of Holy Writ against the doubts raised by reason and his insistence on the fact that at the Last Supper Jesus had given his body and blood to the disciples to eat and to drink, it is impossible to describe him as the founder and forerunner of the age of Enlightenment.

This might perhaps be said of Zwingli. But did not Luther oppose all the authorities of the world at Worms with his brave words "Here I take my stand; I cannot do otherwise"? And was he not thus the forerunner of "private judgment"? Certainly, at that time, Luther stood alone—incidentally, these words are legendary—and he could truly say, as he looked back later on this hour of his life:

1938

THE CHURCH AT THE TURN OF THE YEAR¹

The *loneliness* expressed in the title of this collection of essays is described in part in this essay. “Many of us are lonely and forsaken: pastors who at lonely posts in areas of the church where today the very things which had been the church’s salvation through the times of the worst apostasy, the Word of the Holy Scriptures and the Sacraments of the Lord, are perishing.” It is loneliness especially of pastors who desire to remain faithful to the confessions. Here is Sasse offering a comforting word to his *Amstbrüder* (“brothers in the office”).

Huss number 194

Hopf number 129



The church has a relationship to time quite different from that of the world. The world hastens toward its end. It has some inkling of this but yet will not admit it. The world sees death ahead as an inescapable fate and seeks to overcome it, though it well knows that it is the world that shall be overcome. The anguish of death and longing for “deeper, deeper eternity” speak alike from the great works of man, from the creations of his spirit, his will. In these he attempts to “immortalize” himself, to conquer eternity. But finally eternity is not his. Eternity belongs to the triune God, to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It belongs to the one who is “the one blessed and only powerful, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells there in light where no one can come, which no man has seen nor can see” [1 Tim 6:15–16].

The *world* does not recognize him. But the *church* believes in him. She sings her Gloria to him, “to the triune God, as he was in the beginning, is now, and

¹ This article originally appeared as “Die Kirche an der Jahreswende” in *Lutherische Kirche* 20.1 (January 1, 1938) 2–6. It was reprinted as “Deutschland: Wie treue Lutheraner ins neue Jahr eintraten” in M. Reu’s *Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 62.2 (February 1938) 123–27. Theodore Engelder of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, had read it there and reproduced it in part in the “Theological Observer” of *CTM* 9.10 (October 1938): 783–84. Another shortened reprint appeared in *Lutherische Blätter* 22.99 (January/February 1970): 1–5. MH/RF

shall be now and evermore." As in the days of the apostles she prays to the one who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, who was and is and is to come, the Almighty: "Maranatha!" "Amen, yes, come, Lord Jesus!" [Rev 22:20]. The world trembles before the great day of the Lord. It lets its philosophers prove that there could be no last day, no judgment. But the church waits expectantly for the blessed last day. "Zion hears the watchman singing, And in her heart new joy is springing. She wakes, she rises from her gloom."² She hears the jeering question of the world: "Where is his promised advent? For after the fathers fell asleep, everything has remained as it has been from the beginning of creation" [2 Pet 3:4]. The world cannot wait. It is in a hurry because its time is nearing its end. It must always immediately have it all, otherwise it is too late. The church can wait. She has learned to do so in the course of nineteen centuries. She has a different relationship to time. For she belongs to one for whom a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day [2 Pet 3:8]. She is not anxious in the face of unstoppable, inescapable, unrepeatable time. She knows she is the possession of him who is the Lord of time, because he is the Lord of eternity. Therefore when the church crosses the threshold of a new year, she can never do so with the feeling of worldly anxiety which we all know as natural men, the anxiety in the face of an unknown future. She rather enters the new year in firm faith: "My time is in thy hands." In this faith the church of God on earth heads into the new year, the *year of the Lord* 1938.

All of us who are participants in the ecclesiastical discussions of the present and whose hearts are often so heavy with fearful concern for the future of the church among our people need to allow ourselves to be summoned to this faith which produces joy and cheerfulness. Many of us are lonely and forsaken: pastors who at lonely posts in areas of the church where today the very things which had been the church's salvation through the times of the worst apostasy, the Word of the Holy Scriptures and the Sacraments of the Lord, are perishing. Young theologians face impossible tasks and are thrown into terrible conflicts of conscience. Instantly, at the very start of their life in the office, they learn to know the depth of the forsakenness into which God has always led his servants and which is the only way an entirely firm faith and a completely mature character is produced—faithful Christians who have proved true in life and in the service of the congregation and who must today experience how the judgment which passes over entire churches and their work also affects their own work. But how much lonely concern for the church is present even where the ecclesiastical circumstances still appear to be in order! Today he who praises Paul Gerhardt³ for his heroic fight

² From stanza 2 of "Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying." The English translation is from *Lutheran Worship* 177; cf. *The Lutheran Hymnal* 609. RF

³ Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676) studied theology at Wittenberg (1628–1642) and became a pastor in Berlin

1939

THE HOLY SUPPER AND THE FUTURE OF OUR CHURCH

A REFORMATION FESTIVAL ADDRESS IN A NEWLY
CONSTRUCTED CHURCH¹

This sermon is rich in the language of the Sacraments and the liturgy, and properly in that order. The liturgy serves the Sacraments. Indeed, the Sacraments, along with the Word, define the church.

Huss number 217

Hopf number 144



The message of the Reformation is inexhaustibly rich, as inexhaustible as the Gospel. It is finally at its deepest foundation nothing other than the Gospel itself. Thus we venture to single out a theme from the rich treasure which the doctrine of the Reformation means for us, a theme which in our time appears to be gaining a very unique importance for the church and which therefore concerns us all, pastors and congregational members alike. We desire to ask what *significance the Holy Supper has for the life and future of our church*. Our church, that is, the church of the Lutheran Reformation, the church which has baptized and confirmed us, the church in whose catechism we have been instructed, the church which has led our dear German people through four centuries, the church without which Germany would never be what it is today and without which none of us could conceive of the future history of our people. The events of recent years have made it necessary for all of us to more deeply consider her essence. And in so doing we have gained a deeper understanding than that of former generations of the great concern of the Reformer for her future. We have learned once again who is the sole Lord Protector of this church. We have learned once again, or have begun to learn what he has entrusted to our church: the pure Gospel of the justification of the sinner by faith alone; Holy Baptism; the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ. We

¹ This essay originally appeared as “Das Heilige Abendmahl und die Zukunft unserer Kirche: Ein Reformationsfest-Vortrag in einer neuerbauten Kirche” in *Predigtbuch der Lutherischen Kirche: Abendmahlspredigten* (ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf; Erlangen: Martin Luther-Verlag, 1939), 156–67. MH

have learned what an enormous responsibility has thus been placed upon us. And we have once again learned to implore the Lord of the church with the fathers of the Reformation:

That we keep pure till life is spent
Your holy Word and Sacrament.²

If we desire to understand Luther's concern and the concern of the old Evangelical [Lutheran] Church to maintain the Sacrament of the Altar and keep it pure, then we must realize a fact which the majority of people in our church generally no longer understand: the fact, namely, that there would be no church at all without the Holy Supper. Where the church is, there the Supper is also celebrated; where the Supper is celebrated, there is the church. Where it is no longer celebrated, there the church dies. Our fathers knew this when in the great confessions of the Reformation they placed the Lord's Supper together with Holy Baptism immediately alongside the Gospel as an essential mark of the church which could not be surrendered.

Many people, also many Evangelical [Lutheran] Christians, no longer understand this at all today. But it must indeed give [one] much cause to consider that the experiences of the history of the church simply prove the Reformers correct. Can we conceive of the church at the time of the apostles without the breaking of the bread of the early congregation of Jerusalem, without the Lord's Supper of the Pauline congregations? Anyone who is familiar with the NT must answer no! A Sunday without the Supper, a Lord's Day without the Lord's Supper is inconceivable in the church of the NT. For the celebration of the Supper was the heartbeat of this church. In ancient times it was held behind closed doors, and this was not merely for fear of persecution. For all the rest of the Divine Service was public, accessible even to Jews and pagans, and this is the basic principle of the church even down to today. The preaching of the Gospel, according to the will of Jesus himself, should be public: "What I say to you in the dark, speak in the light; and what is whispered in your ear, preach from the roof tops!" [Matt 10:27]. "Go forth into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creatures!" [Mark 16:15]. The church has always allowed all people to come to its Divine Service on the basis of these basic principles, upon which is based the right to the free, public proclamation of the Gospel, acknowledged by all peoples of Christianity. Even the civilized pagan states do not contest this.

But the Supper was never for all those present, rather for the baptized and later for the confirmed. Only one who believes in Christ can understand the Supper. For everyone else it is necessarily inconceivable, senseless, and offensive.

² Sasse quotes a favorite hymn, "Lord Jesus Christ, Will You Not Stay" (*Ach Bleib Bei Uns*), by Nikolaus Selnecker. This translation is from *Lutheran Worship* 344, stanza 2. These words are cited again later. MH