

The Lonely Way

VOLUME 2



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 2 (1941–1976)

Translated by Matthew C. Harrison,
together with Paul N. Anderson, Charles J. Evanson,
John W. Kleinig, and Norman E. Nagel

With historical introductions by Ronald R. Feuerhahn

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PRINCIPAL ABBREVIATIONS AND WORKS CITED

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| AC | Augsburg Confession |
| ALC | American Lutheran Church |
| ANF | <i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> . Edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson. 10 vols. |
| ATLA | American Theological Library Association |
| Ap | Apology of the Augsburg Confession |
| 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 |
| COD | <i>Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta</i> . 3d ed. Bologna: Instituto per le scienze religiose, 1973 |
| CR | <i>Corpus Reformatorum</i> |
| CTM | <i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i> |
| CTQ | <i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i> |
| DEC | <i>Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils</i> . Edited by Norman P. Tanner. 2 vols. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990 |
| EA | Erlangen Ausgabe (“edition”) of Luther’s works. <i>Dr. Martin Luther’s Sammtliche Werke</i> . 67 vols. Erlangen: C. Heyder, 1826–1857 |
| EKiD | <i>Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland</i> (“Evangelical Church in Germany”) |
| ELCA | Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia |
| ELC | <i>The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church</i> . Edited by Julius Bodensieck. 3 vols. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965 |
| 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 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
 LCA Lutheran Church of Australia
 LCC Library of Christian Classics
 LCMS The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
Lutheran Cyclopedia *Lutheran Cyclopedia*. Edited by Erwin L. Lueker. Rev. ed. St. Louis: Concordia, 1975
Lutheran Worship *Lutheran Worship*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1982
LW *Luther's Works*. American ed. 55 vols. St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–1986
 LWC Lutheran World Convention
 LWF Lutheran World Federation
New Schaff-Herzog *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. Edited by S. M. Jackson. 12 vols. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1911
 NKJV New King James Version of the Bible
 NPNF² *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Series 2. Edited by P. Schaff and H. Wace. 14 vols.
 NT New Testament
ODCC *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Edited by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone. 3d ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997
 OT Old Testament
*RGG*¹ *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. 1st ed. 5 vols. Tübingen: Mohr, 1909–1913
 RSV Revised Standard Version of the Bible
 SA Smalcald Articles
 SC Small Catechism of Martin Luther
 SD Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord
 SELK *Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche* (“Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church”)
 St. Louis ed. St. Louis ed. of Luther’s works. *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*. Edited by J. G. Walch. 23 vols. in 24. St. Louis: Concordia, 1881–1910
The Lutheran Hymnal *The Lutheran Hymnal*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1941
 Treatise Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
Triglotta *Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1921
 UELCA United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia
 WA Weimar Ausgabe (“edition”) of Luther’s works. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. [Schriften.] 65 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993
 WA Br Weimar Ausgabe Briefwechsel (“correspondence”). *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefwechsel*. 18 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–1985
 WA TR Weimar Ausgabe Tischreden (“table talk”). *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Tischreden*. 6 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912–1921
 WCC World Council of Churches

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 originally written in German.

| | |
|----|------------------|
| HS | Hermann Sasse |
| MH | Matthew Harrison |
| RF | Ronald Feuerhahn |
| PA | Paul Anderson |
| FB | Frederic Baue |
| CE | Charles Evanson |
| JK | John Kleinig |
| NN | Norman Nagel |
| JS | John Stephenson |

1941

PREFACE TO *VOM SAKRAMENT DES ALTARS*

Sasse was the editor of a collection of essays entitled *Vom Sakrament des Altars: Lutherische Beiträge zur Frage des heiligen Abendmahls*¹ (*Of the Sacrament of the Altar: Lutheran Contributions to the Question of the Holy Lord's Supper*), of which this essay is the preface. He himself described the genesis and curious circumstance of the volume:

On the first day of World War II, I started to write a new book, a symposium, *Vom Sakrament des Altars*, of which I myself wrote about half of the chapters, having as my co-workers some outstanding theologians. Thus it would be the witness of not only one man. It was not easy to write it in the circumstances of those years. When it was finished, our publisher, Herr Goetze, the owner of the publishing house Dörffling & Franke in Leipzig, was told by the authorities that the paper he had bought for this book was confiscated by the Ministry of Propaganda (Goebbels), and it was only with the help of the army that we could get back the paper. Thus our book appeared in 1941 as one of the last theological books which could be published during the war. The book was a service to the Lutheran cause and has helped to bring again the Lutheran doctrine on the Sacrament to the attention of many. A new edition after the war was impossible, as our publisher has disappeared. Nobody knows what has happened to him.²

September 1, 1939, the “first day of World War II,” was the day that shattered Sasse’s expectations of leaving Germany to teach in the United States. The night before he had met with Professor Theodore Tappert in Bremen to talk about the possibility of emigration to the States to teach at the Philadelphia seminary. The invasion of Poland on this day spelled the end of that. And when, a week later, Sasse returned to Erlangen from a vacation with his family on the Baltic Sea, he expected to be dismissed from his position at the university under pressure by the Gestapo. It seems all the more remarkable that he undertook this venture on that particular day. We understand that when, in fact, he did return to Erlangen, he learned that his position was secure, for the time being, because of

¹ It was published in 1941 in Leipzig by Dörffling & Franke. RF

² Sasse to R. E. Haugen, general manager, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, Minn. (December 30, 1956); archives of the American Lutheran Church, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. RF

the intervention of old army comrades. They seemed to have rescued even this book, as Sasse related in another letter.

Together with like-minded colleagues we wrote a symposium, *Vom Sakrament des Altars*. Eventually we found a publisher in Leipzig, the well known publishing house Dörffling & Franke. The type was set when the Ministry of Propaganda took away the paper, and countless difficulties had to be overcome until a high military office helped us by snatching away the paper from Goebbels. . . . Almost the entire stock [of the book] was sold before the destruction of Leipzig, where the German book trade was centralized, destroyed millions of books.³

Sasse was joined, as he said, by “like-minded colleagues.” These included Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, Sasse’s lifelong friend and publisher of the series of Letters to Lutheran Pastors; Theodor Knolle, senior pastor in Hamburg, whose writings on the liturgy Sasse recommended; two of Sasse’s Erlangen colleagues, Hans Preuss, NT, and Otto Procksch, OT; and Ernst Sommerlath, the much-admired confessional Lutheran professor at Leipzig (and an uncle of the present Queen of Sweden).

This collection of essays has been honored often since its publication. Some have opined that here is Sasse’s best writing on the Lord’s Supper. In addition to editing the volume, Sasse also contributed the preface and three of the essays, two of which are in this collection: “The Lord’s Supper in the Catholic Mass” and “The Formula of Concord’s Decision about the Lord’s Supper.”⁴

Not since the time of the Reformation, Sasse asserts in the preface, has the doctrine of the Sacrament become such a burning issue. Lutheranism has forgotten its teaching about this gift. “Where the Table of the Lord is deserted, where the Lord’s Supper is no longer known or celebrated, there the church dies, irretrievably lost.”

Huss number 227
Hopf number 149



Around the Lord’s Table is gathered the church. At the Table of the Lord, the church knows what it most profoundly is: the body of Christ. There has been no doubt of this since the days of the apostles. Where the Table of the Lord is deserted, where the Lord’s Supper is no longer known or celebrated, there the church dies, irretrievably lost.

Inaccessible to rational explanation is the fact of this connection between the church and the Lord’s Supper, between the body of Christ which we are given at the altar and the body of Christ which is the church. All along their journey

³ Sasse to Herman Preus (March 22, 1956); archives of the American Lutheran Church, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. RF

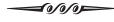
⁴ The third essay, “The Lord’s Supper in the New Testament,” is available in translation in the We Confess Series, vol. 2: *We Confess the Sacraments* (trans. Norman Nagel; St. Louis: Concordia, 1985), 49–97. RF

1941

THE LORD'S SUPPER IN THE CATHOLIC MASS¹

This essay is from the volume *Vom Sakrament des Altars*. In it we have something of a textbook, including a description of the doctrine of early fathers, for example, “Ignatius, Justin and Irenaeus, Tertullian and Cyprian, Origen, Athanasius and the Cappadocians,” and early schools, such as those of Alexandria and Antioch. Sasse’s familiarity with the rite and the Roman Catholic Church is impressive. While Sasse seldom wrote essays on the subject of the church’s liturgy specifically, here, as in other places, he touches on its significance and service in some detail. It was appropriate therefore that Bard Thompson included *Vom Sakrament des Altars* in his listing of studies on the liturgy for continental Lutheran churches.²

Huss number 229
Hopf number 149



The Sacrament of the Altar already had a history of fifteen hundred years by the time of the Lutheran Reformation. This fact must not be overlooked by anyone who wants to understand how the Lord’s Supper was confessed, and by someone who wants to have some understanding of the heavy controversies regarding the Supper in the sixteenth century. For a millennium and a half, the churches of the East and of the West did what they received as the bidding of the Lord, “This do in remembrance of me”—Sunday by Sunday, indeed day by day.

In this history of the Lord’s Supper, the church lived her own history. As a lens gathers beams of light to a burning point, so in the history of the Sacrament of the Altar are gathered the history of liturgy and of doctrine, the history of the way Christians worship and live, and how the church is structured. The history of this Sacrament is the core of the church’s history. There is no space in this book to attempt even a sketch of what happened in that history from the beginning of the church to the Reformation. Nevertheless, it may be helpful for an understanding of the Reformation’s engagement with the Lord’s Supper to take a look at what its history had brought it to just before the Reformation. When the church was called to

¹ This essay, “Das Abendmahl in der katholischen Messe,” was originally published in *Vom Sakrament des Altars: Lutherische Beiträge zur Frage des heiligen Abendmahls* (ed. Hermann Sasse; Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1941), 79–94. See the information about this volume in the previous essay. RF

² Bard Thompson, *A Bibliography of Christian Worship* (ATLA Bibliography Series 25; Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 310. RF

submit its whole doctrine and whole life in the liturgy to the unflinching light of the Lord's own words, there were problems then that could not be avoided.

PART 1

What we first observe and what is most important of all is that the Lord's Supper was always there throughout that millennium and a half. Had this not been so, there could never have been a Reformation. Had the church lost this testament of the Lord, there would then have been no church at all. Where the Sacrament of the true body and blood of Christ is no longer celebrated, there is no longer any church. Whatever miracles there are in the history of the church, there is none greater, thought Luther, than the fact that the church did not perish even in the darkest days of Christians falling away from the Gospel.

God was on the scene with might and miracle to defend what was still there under the pope: first, Holy Baptism; then, from the pulpit, the holy Gospel was read in the language of each place; third, the holy forgiveness of sins and Absolution, these both in the confessional and the liturgy; fourth, the holy Sacrament of the Altar which was given out to Christians at Easter and also during the year, robbed though it was of the one kind.³

Even though it was clear to Luther that the Sacrament of the Altar through its long history had suffered serious perversion, he acknowledges that it was nevertheless always there in spite of all those dislocations.

Wherever Mass is held according to Christ's institution, whether it be among us Lutherans or in the papacy, in Greece or in India, . . . surely there is the true body of Christ given for us on the cross under the form of the bread, and under the form of the wine, the true blood of Christ shed for us.⁴

He has no doubt

that wherever the papists hold to the institution of Christ, they truly have in the Sacrament the very and true body and blood of Christ. If only under one kind, then it is the body of Christ, under both kinds, it is both the body and blood by virtue of the institution and words of Christ. What is in the way of Christ's institution . . . remains. What there may be of misuse or be unworthily done in administration and reception, the Sacrament is not made more or less by these. God in hell is still God; Christ is no less Christ even among those who crucified him.⁵

³ *The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests* (1533), WA 38.221.18–25 [cf. LW 38:177]. HS

⁴ "A Letter of Dr. Martin Luther concerning His Book on the Private Mass," WA 38.264.28–34 [cf. LW 38:224]. HS

⁵ "A Letter of Dr. Martin Luther concerning His Book on the Private Mass," WA 38.266.5–12 [cf. LW 38:225]. HS

We shall never grasp Luther's criticism of the Roman Mass unless we are first aware of his conviction that Christ's Supper miraculously was always retained in the church before the Reformation. Without this awareness, we shall hardly understand the doctrine of the Lord's Supper as confessed by the Lutherans, nor the Service of Holy Communion as it was celebrated in the Lutheran Church. This was the Divine Service celebrated every Sunday, the Mass cleansed of the notions of its being a sacrifice we offer to God. At this point is disclosed most clearly how the Lutheran Reformation understood itself. There was no intention of founding a new church or finding a new way of celebrating the Lord's Supper. The one church, that had always been, had suffered the infiltration of things contrary to Christ and the Gospel in the celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar. To be freed of these did not create another church. Its fifteen centuries of history bear witness to the miraculous preservation of the Lord's Supper. However, that history also tells of the sad displacement perpetrated upon what Christ instituted by men who acted as if it were something they did.⁶ If the Lord's Supper and the church live inextricably together, then if there was to be any Reformation of the church, this could not happen apart from the Lord's Supper. Probing to the heart of the Sacrament of the Altar, even to the point of controversy, was inevitable.

PART 2

One of the most remarkable facts of church history is that for many centuries the Lord's Supper was celebrated among Christians without their having what might be called a dogma about it. Baptism, on the other hand, is explicitly named in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.⁷ In many other Eastern confessions, it is also named as belonging to the faith. In the Western baptismal creed, we may find it evoked by the phrase "the forgiveness of sins." Yet one may seek in vain in the early church's confessions of the faith for any mention of the Lord's Supper. Some would find a reference or hint to the Sacrament of the Altar in the late addition to the Western creed of *communio sanctorum* ["the communion of saints"].⁸ Even the early synods did not deal with the *doctrine* of the Lord's Supper. The only exception is the Seventh Ecumenical Council, Nicaea II,⁹ in 787. It rejected an

⁶ Cf. LC V 7: "Denn sie die Sakrament außer Gottes Wort ansehen als ein Ding, das wir tuen." *Triglotta*, 755: "For they [the fanatical spirits] regard the Sacraments, aside from the Word of God, as something that we do." NN

⁷ The title "Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed" is the fuller, more technical title for what is commonly called the "Nicene Creed" today. It is actually a compilation of the work of two councils, Nicaea (A.D. 325) and Constantinople (381; see *ODCC*, 1145–46). RF

⁸ Cf. Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries* (trans. Norman E. Nagel; St. Louis: Concordia, 1966), 209–18, and Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, 143. NN/RF

⁹ *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (ed. J. D. Mansi and later J. B. Martin and L. Petit; Florence: Welter, 1927–1959) 13:266B: *ipsum corpus et ipsum sanguinem* (cf. p. 263). HS

1942

FLIGHT FROM DOGMA

REMARKS ON BULTMANN'S "DEMYTHOLOGIZATION" OF THE NEW TESTAMENT¹

This essay was both timely and timeless: that is, it was written a year after Bultmann's famous (or infamous, depending on your view) essay on the demythologization of the NT. It is timeless in that it continues to teach. Indeed, in this essay, Sasse gave a critique which indicated the future fate of Bultmann's theories. In the very opening sentence he sets the challenge: "The theological historian of the future will have to answer the question of just how it can be explained that Rudolf Bultmann could have an influence on the entire Protestant world which has, at least temporarily, overshadowed Karl Barth." Today's student of theology might ask the same question.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) was a NT scholar. He was a follower of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (especially of William Wrede and Wilhelm Bousset). He radically called into question any historical value of the Gospels.² He described much of the NT record as "myth" and in 1941 coined the term "demythologizing," although the term "myth" had been used already by David Friedrich Strauss in his *Leben Jesu* (*Life of Jesus*, 1835). Strauss held that myth was not the invention of an individual mind but the product of communal imagination.³

Rudolf Bultmann, to be sure, has been critiqued by many. See, for instance, *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*.⁴ It gives an English translation of Bultmann's original essay under discussion here.⁵ It also mentions—and rejects—Sasse's contribution to that debate:

All that the present volume seeks to do is to indicate the lines on which the debate has been carried on by both sides. No attempt is made to take sides

¹ This essay was originally published as "Flucht vor dem Dogma: Bemerkungen zu Bultmanns Entmythologisierung des Neuen Testaments" in *Luthertum* (NKZ) 53.11/12 (1942): 161–84. It was republished with a new forward in *Lutherische Blätter* 16.82 (November 1964): 88–108, and as a separate brochure in 1965. MH

² ODCC, 250. RF

³ Alexander R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution: 1789 to the Present Day* (The Pelican History of the Church 5; Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1971), 102. RF

⁴ With contributions by Rudolf Bultmann, Ernst Lohmeyer, Julius Schniewind, Friedrich Schumann, Helmut Thielicke, and Austin Farrer (trans. Reginald H. Fuller; ed. Hans Werner Bartsch; London: SPCK, 1953; American edition, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961). RF

⁵ "New Testament and Mythology" is on pages 1–45 of *Kerygma and Myth*. RF

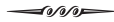
in the controversy, except on one particular point—viz., in the essays which have been selected for inclusion. Space was not the only determining factor. There has been no lack of critics who have denied the problem altogether. It has been contended that “there is no need to demythologize the New Testament, because it does not contain any myth.”⁶ What Bultmann and his school are trying to remove, according to Sasse, is not myth but dogma (“dedogmatizing, not demythologizing”). It would be agreed on all sides that no theology speaking for the church could have a hand in that. By the omission of essays which take Sasse’s line we are *ipso facto* adopting a positive attitude to the debate. We believe that there is a real issue at stake.⁷

Of course, years later, the climate within the guild of biblical scholars had changed considerably, even dramatically. See, for instance, the attitude at one of the Braaten/Jenson conferences at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., where Professor Roy Harrisville seemed to speak a different tune to the assembly than his earlier, more favorable assessment.⁸ The title of the conference was appropriately named “Reclaiming the Bible for the Church.” In attacking the Jesus Seminar, Harrisville compared that effort with Bultmann’s 1941 essay on demythologization.⁹

Sasse noted the influence of Bultmann in North America and specifically at the seminary where Dr. Harrisville taught: “I had a letter from my friend Professor Preus of Luther Seminary, St. Paul, in which he complains of his solitude in his faculty. Brunner, Tillich, and Bultmann are the favorites.”¹⁰

We want to remember that Hermann Sasse was himself trained originally as a biblical scholar at the University of Berlin under the direction of one of the foremost proponents of the History of Religions School, Adolf Deissmann.

Huss number 240d
Hopf number 155



FOREWORD TO A REPRINTING OF THIS ARTICLE

The theological historian of the future will have to answer the question of just how it can be explained that Rudolf Bultmann could have an influence on the entire Protestant world which has, at least temporarily, overshadowed Karl Barth. The generation of German theological students which came from the lecture

⁶ The footnote in *Kerygma and Myth* references Sasse’s article: H. Sasse, “Flucht vor dem Dogma,” *Luthertum* (1942): 161 ff. RF

⁷ *Kerygma and Myth*, ix. RF

⁸ The earlier assessment can be found in Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville, eds. and trans., *Kerygma and History: A Symposium on the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (New York: Abingdon, 1962). RF

⁹ Roy A. Harrisville, “The Loss of Biblical Authority and Its Recovery,” in *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church* (ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 56. RF

¹⁰ Letter from Sasse to Tom Hardt (January, 3, 1959). RF

halls of Harnack¹¹ and the History of Religions School¹² into World War I became students of the Reformers under the influence of Karl Barth in the twenty years which followed. It was the generation which was forced to suffer through the church struggle.¹³ The students of the Confessing Church¹⁴ who went off to World War II returned disciples of Bultmann. This is, to be sure, a generalization, which while not applying to all, certainly does apply to the generation as a whole.¹⁵

One reason for this is the fact that neither Barth nor the Lutherans were able to solve the great problem of how the newly rediscovered dogma of the church was to be reconciled with the historical investigation of the Bible. The collision of the theology of Barth with that of Harnack in the famous correspondence of 1920 shows not only the contrast between two generations, the older of which generally was not able to think dogmatically, but also the inability of the younger generation to understand the concerns of the serious historian. Thus the unsettled question was bound to arise again, and it is no accident that Bultmann published the anniversary edition of Harnack's *What Is Christianity?* and has sought to emphasize its present significance. His [Bultmann's] program of "demythologization of the NT" was greeted enthusiastically wherever there was dissatisfaction with Barth's solution to the problem of the historical examination of the Bible. Another reason [for the ready acceptance of Bultmann's views] was his existential philosophy, which offered a replacement for the philosophy of late idealism of Harnack and his liberal era. In the midst of such a terribly disappointing century, it was this philosophy which ruled Europe from a thousand bleeding wounds and which was undeservedly consecrated as NT Christianity and gained so many disciples for Bultmann.

But the era of Bultmannian interpretation of the NT has run its course. The form-critical method, the correct insights of which shall remain, has led *ad absurdum*, since it finally tore the Gospel into a thousand shreds of tradition.

¹¹ Karl Gustav Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) was one of the great classical liberal theologians at the turn of the twentieth century, whose approach to Christianity was reduced to the maxim "The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." He regarded the rise of Christian dogma as an aberration in the church's history and attributed it to the Greek influence in the church and thus considered it a distortion of genuine Christianity. RF

¹² The History of Religions School, or *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, was "an influential group of German biblical scholars between 1880 and 1920 who advocated extensive use of data from the comparative study of religions in the interpretation of Christianity" (ODCC, 1379). RF

¹³ The church struggle, or *Kirchenkampf*, was the struggle in Germany between the church and National Socialism. RF

¹⁴ The Confessing Church was "the group of German Evangelical Christians most actively opposed to the 'German Christian' Church Movement," the Nazi-sponsored and -promoted church, between 1933 and 1945 (ODCC, 394). Sasse attempted to work with the Confessing Church in its earliest formation, but he was unable to sign the Barmen Declaration because it represented a significant compromise of the Lutheran doctrine of the real presence. RF

¹⁵ Sasse's assessment seems to be shared by Bartsch: "No single work which has appeared in the field of New Testament scholarship during the war years has evoked such a lively discussion as Bultmann's original manifesto, *New Testament and Mythology*" (*Kerygma and Myth*, vii). RF

1946

THE OFFICE OF TEACHER IN THE ANCIENT CHURCH

HERMAN SASSE'S INAUGURAL LECTURE¹

In this essay Sasse, among other things, describes the important office of teacher of the church, an office very important for Luther but seldom discussed among Lutherans today. Sasse explains: "To understand the essence of the office of teacher in the ancient church and to assess its history in broad outline is the task of this lecture."

In a sense, Sasse's "inaugural" lecture was supposed to have been delivered in 1933. He had been called by the University of Erlangen early in that year to the post of *Ordinarius*, or full professor. But events took place which were prejudicial to his appointment to that office: the Nazis came to power. The call was not officially sent, in fact, until after that fateful day, January 30, 1933, when Adolf Hitler became the Reich chancellor of Germany. Sasse left Berlin for Erlangen exactly three months later (April 30, 1933), after a delay due to questioning by the new Reich officials about his negative statements the year before regarding the new regime. In the process his position was reduced to that of an assistant professor or *ausserordentlicher Professor* (a.o. Prof.) *für Kirchengeschichte, Dogmengeschichte und Symbolik*. He later wrote Tom Hardt about his academic ranking, including the abortive attempts for a position at the University of Berlin:

I was Lic. theol. [theological licentiate] of Berlin and was about to become *Privatdozent* ["private lecturer"] for NT as assistant to Deissmann.² When everything was ready, the *Oberkirchenrat* ["high consistory"] professed against a Lutheran in this position. Since no one else was available, a Baptist (Schreder) was appointed. Erlangen called me to a chair for church history in 1933. Political difficulties arose. I had been the first to fight the program of the NSDAP.³ So I got only the salary of a country pastor though I fulfilled the duties of a full professor with seminars.⁴

In this lecture we find one of the few, if not the only, personal references by the author:

¹ This essay, "Das Amt des Lehrers in der Alten Kirche," was published in *Lutherische Blätter* (Turn of the Year [New Year's] 1982/1983): 161–81. RF

² Adolf Deissmann, the noted NT scholar, had been Sasse's *Doktorvater* and academic mentor. RF

³ *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialistic German Workers Party), or the Nazi party. RF

⁴ Sasse to Tom Hardt on June 18, 1958. RF

Please permit the man who today, almost thirteen years to the day after his acceptance into this faculty, now gives his inaugural address and who in this time has given many thanks over the fortune of the German university—permit him to say in conclusion a few short words about what the history of churchly teaching means for us today.

In 1945/1946, after the war and with the ending of the Third Reich, Sasse was given his chair. Announced initially on November 22, 1945, it was official on February 25, 1946. Even this was, at least to the mind of Sasse, a fraught situation. Tom Hardt told the story:

The promotion was announced over U.S. radio. You know he never got his state, the official, confirmation of his professorship until the Americans gave him that. And that was broadcast by the American Military Broadcasting through Radio Munich.⁵

On May 11, 1946, there was a circular letter⁶ from the office of the rector of the university, over the signature of the dean of the theological faculty, Paul Althaus, inviting people to Sasse's lecture:

Saturday, the 18th of May 1946, 11:15 in the Organ Hall of the Orangerie, the Professor in Ordinary for Church History, History of Dogma, and Symbolics, Dr. Hermann Sasse, will deliver his inaugural lecture on the theme "The Office of the Teacher in the Early Church." To this the dean of the theological faculty invites [you].

Huss number 256



"God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that workers of miracles, then gifts of healing, helpers, administrators, various languages" (1 Cor 12:28).

The enumeration of these offices and functions may appear at first to be arbitrary. However, a closer inspection shows a strict arrangement within the ordering. Speaking in tongues is intentionally named last of all since it serves to edify the church in a very limited way. The congregational office proper stands before the functions of miracle working and healing. This office, and what already existed in the Pauline church as the episcopate and diaconate, is also to be understood as an operation of the divine Spirit. In these congregational offices, moreover, the "helping actions" stand in front of "administrators," to employ Paul's expressions.

The early church, in accordance with its conception of Jesus, placed the humble service of helping love over all earthly rule and saw in this humble Servant the one true authority in the church. Note also the factual progression of the documented history of the ancient church. The ruling offices of the bishops and dea-

⁵ Interview with Tom Hardt on March 3, 1989. RF

⁶ Erlangen University Archive. RF

1957

SELECTIVE FELLOWSHIP¹

This essay appears to have been directed to a query from the LCMS. In a letter to John W. Behnken of August 12, 1957, Sasse states: "I . . . am just writing a statement on selective fellowship which, as I hope, will be finished today and will be sent to St. Louis." Later in the same letter: "If, as I hope, the paper on selective fellowship will be finished tonight, I shall send it tomorrow to your office. . . . Please excuse this delay."² In October of the following year, he writes again to Dr. Behnken:

The idea of those brethren [Breslau Synod] seems not to be to restore altar and pulpit fellowship with the *Landeskirchen* ["territorial churches"] as such, but to practice a sort of selective fellowship. They have learnt that from the *American Lutheran*.³ The whole idea comes from America. I have done what I could to counteract this. My article in the *Australian Lutheran Review*⁴ of the ELCA, which has caused me much trouble here, has been translated by Bro. Bente at Kiel for the *Rundblick*.⁵ I do not know whether or not it has been published.

In a period of increased dialogue with other Lutheran churches, particularly with the American Lutheran Church (founded in 1930), the LCMS had a heightened discussion of fellowship. "Selective fellowship" was a part of that discussion.⁶

In this essay Sasse asks a very important question: "What has happened during the past thirty years to justify the statement that the various Lutheran churches concerned are no longer separated by doctrinal differences, but by practical

¹ This article appeared in *The Australasian Theological Review* 28.3 (September 1957): 45–62.

² John W. Behnken Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Mo. RF

³ The *American Lutheran* was published by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, a group of laymen and pastors of the LCMS, in New York City (*Lutheran Cyclopedia*, 28–29). RF

⁴ Sasse is referring to this essay and its publication in the *Australasian Theological Review* 28.3 (September 1957): 45–62. The *ATR* was the theological journal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia. RF

⁵ "Selective Fellowship—*Einzelgemeinschaft*," trans. Wilhelm Bente, *Lutherischer Rundblick* 6.3 (1958): 76–88. The *LR* was the theological journal of the *Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche* in Germany. RF

⁶ See, for example, William Arndt, "Miscellanea: Selective Fellowship," *CTM* 17.6 (June 1946): 455–57. RF

issues?" It is a question that addresses a dominant practice among Christian churches today: fellowship before or apart from doctrinal agreement.

Huss number 331

Hopf number 242



The following remarks have been written for circulation among some friends and colleagues in various parts of the world who are deeply interested in the problems of true Lutheran unity. When the editor of this periodical kindly asked for permission to print it, the author could not possibly decline this invitation, especially since the Lutheran churches in Australia are also vitally interested in these problems. The author is writing as a theologian and not as a church politician. It is necessary to emphasize this at a time when theology is in danger of becoming the tool of church politics. When in 1926 Bishop Dibelius⁷ published his famous book *Das Jahrhundert der Kirche*,⁸ he met with the strong opposition of Lutheran and Reformed theologians. His answer to Karl Barth's *Quousque tandem*, where the mere sociological concept of the church put forward by Dibelius was rejected, was this: "Ich brauche eine Theologie, mit der ich etwas anfangen kann." ["I need a theology with which I can begin something."] It was the beginning of an era in the history of the church in Europe when bishops or synods made decisions of far-reaching importance and later called in the theologians to justify all the mistakes which had been made. This disease has spread through the world during the past generation. It threatens the existence of the church as well as the existence of true theology. Both have to ask not what is opportune, what is useful, but what is true, what is the truth taught by God's Word. In this sense the following pages are submitted for consideration and discussion.

Hermann Sasse

1. According to the *Lutheran Standard*,⁹ the American Lutheran Church has adopted a resolution which reads as follows:

Wherever congregations and pastors of the ALC find they are mutually agreed in confession and practice with congregations and pastors of other Lutheran Church bodies, they may in good conscience practice fellowship both in worship and work.

The importance of this resolution cannot be overestimated, as is shown by the comment which immediately follows and which must be regarded as an official explanation:

⁷ From 1925 until his dismissal by the Nazis in 1933, Otto Dibelius (1880–1967) was the General Superintendent of the Kurmark of the Old Prussian Union Church. In 1945 he became superintendent (but took rather the title of bishop) of Berlin, and in 1949 he became presiding bishop of the Evangelical Church in Germany (*ODCC*, 478). RF

⁸ Otto Dibelius, *Das Jahrhundert der Kirche: Geschichte, Betrachtung, Umschau und Ziele (The Century of the Church)* (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1926). RF

⁹ *Lutheran Standard* (April 6, 1957): 12. HS

1976

TEN YEARS AFTER THE COUNCIL

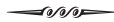
SOME THOUGHTS FOR ECUMENICAL DISCUSSION¹

This was probably the last article by Sasse published in his lifetime. (An autobiographical item may have been published right before this essay.) It was also the culmination of a lengthy series of seventeen essays and reviews dating back to 1959 which all deal with the Roman Catholic Church. The last photo of Professor Sasse was taken at the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues. Given his interest in and assessment of the importance of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), it seems, humanly speaking, somehow proper to end his career in this way.

This is such pleasurable reading, of a scholar who knows his subject so well and articulates it so clearly, who is balanced in his understanding of his subject and yet pointed in his critique. Sasse knows not only the history, not only the theology, but also the piety of the Roman Church, the liturgy of the Mass, as well as the theology of Thomas. Sasse was always fascinated by canon law, perhaps more than a good Lutheran should have been!

Finally, I think he would have appreciated the observation that here we have a confessional Lutheran, writing about the Roman Catholic Church, published in a Reformed theological journal. Having discussed the problem of finding a publisher who would do confessional Lutheran works, he remarked in a private letter: “I myself must publish in a Reformed Review!!! Where else?”²

Huss number 481



Ten years have passed since, at the closing session of the Second Vatican Council, Archbishop Felice, the general secretary of the council, read the papal breve³ which brought to its end the largest council ever held in the history of the church. For whatever councils may be held in the future, they will hardly reach the size of this vast assembly of 2,500 bishops in communion with Rome. It is worthwhile to remember in our fast-living time this event which has inaugurated a new era not only in the history of Roman Catholicism—but probably in of all Christendom.

¹ This essay was published in two parts: *Reformed Theological Review* 35.1 (January–April 1976): 1–13 (sections 1–6), and 35.2 (May–August 1976): 33–41 (sections 7–11). It was translated into German by Hans-Siegfried Huss: “Das unvollendete Konzil, Gedanken zum 10. Jahrestag des Vaticanum II,” *Lutherische Blätter* 29.114 (March 1977): 1–23. RF

² Letter to Tom Hardt (September 2, 1961). RF

³ A breve, or brief, is a less formal papal release than a bull or an encyclical, but nonetheless often deals with important matters (*Lutheran Cyclopedia*, 109). RF

No Christian church, whatever its name may be, can live in the future as if this event had not taken place. Whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, the Second Vatican Council has been a turning point in the history of every church. So it may be well to remember this anniversary.

PART 1

This council brought to its end that epoch in the history of the Roman Church which began with the Reformation and found its first climax in the Council of Trent, its second in the First Council of the Vatican, 1870. This epoch was determined by the fact that the church had to fight against two enemies which seemed to threaten its very life. The first was the Protestant Reformation, which destroyed the unity, or what seemed to be the unity, of Western Christendom after the Middle Ages had already caused the loss of unity with the Christian East. The second enemy which arose at the same time, but gained more and more prominence in the following centuries, was the modern European civilization which drifted slowly away from its Christian foundations. The great gains which the Roman Church made during these centuries on the mission fields throughout the world, whose extent had been unknown to the Middle Ages, could not make up for the losses it was suffering in the Old World. Its claim to be the Catholic Church, the *una sancta ecclesia* ["one holy church"] which Christ had established for all mankind, had lost its credibility. Even the small branches of the Eastern churches which had submitted to the papacy while retaining their national, constitutional, liturgical, and, as they were convinced, also their dogmatical heritage could not be more than a reminder of the old catholicity which had been lost by Rome. Even the great churchman Maximos, the patriarch of the Melkite Church with the impressive title of Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem, who belonged to the truly great members of the Second Vatican Council, was not much more than a remembrance of what the ancient patriarchs had been at their best. He was listened to as no other of the council fathers. But his presence did not alter the overall situation.

For the first time, the Roman Church had realized the full meaning of its status. It had become obvious in the political development under Pius XII, who in his way was perhaps the greatest representative of the Roman Church, this last *Romanus ex Romanis* ["Roman out of the Romans"]. His policy as cardinal secretary of state under his predecessor, as that of his own pontificate, had ended in a breakdown of the papal policy in Europe. Both Pius XI and Pius XII had been the strongest opponents to Communism. They were convinced that Fascism in Italy and National Socialism in Germany would destroy its [Communism's] political philosophy and would conquer the Communist danger which threatened the Christian character of Europe. The Lateran Treaties with Mussolini and the concordat with Nazi Germany indicated the hopes of the Vatican. But these hopes were bound to fail. When the Second World War ended, the strong wall of

APPENDIX

THE CONSENSUS TIGURINUS

The Consensus Tigurinus features prominently in Herman Sasse's writings on the Lord's Supper because it provides conclusive evidence that John Calvin's understanding of the Lord's Supper was not all that much different from Ulrich Zwingli's views. From this standpoint alone, the Consensus Tigurinus is a significant document. Unfortunately, an English translation of the consensus is not readily available. We have chosen to include one in this volume of *The Lonely Way* for the benefit of those who want to read for themselves the document that plays such a key role in Sasse's early writings on the Sacrament of the Altar.

The text is from *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 44 (1966): 45–58. The translator is Ian D. Bunting. The translator's introduction is also included, both for the helpful historical background it provides, as well as the interesting Reformed perspective that it brings to the document.



INTRODUCTION BY IAN D. BUNTING

Undoubtedly the most tragic feature of the Reformation was the theological dissension which followed immediately upon its inception. That this division should center upon the doctrine of the Lord's Supper was particularly painful, not least to the Reformers themselves. There were numerous attempts to heal the wound, and the Consensus Tigurinus (1549) marks a considerable success after years of doctrinal chaos.

When Luther met Zwingli at Marburg in 1529, it soon became apparent that there was a vital difference between them concerning the presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. For Luther it was a simple matter of faith that Christ could be present both in heaven and in the sacrament. To Zwingli this was totally illogical, and their disagreement ushered in a period of mutual recriminations and conflict on the matter. It was [Martin] Bucer who stepped into the breach and in 1536 managed to unite the diverse opinions of the Swiss in the First Helvetic Confession. This certainly marked a step towards Luther, and Bucer had high hopes that it would be accepted at the Wittenberg Conference a few months later, but in the absence of the Swiss a Concord was drawn up which spoke of Christ being "substantially" present in the sacrament. The Swiss were suspicious. Luther, at the time, was ill. Slowly Bucer's influence began to wane.

Meanwhile John Calvin's star was beginning to rise following the publication of the first edition of the *Institutes* in 1536. He was a young man with new ideas and, unlike Bucer, he had a convincing independence. His own ecumenical activities began in the early months of 1540 with a cordial letter addressed to Zwingli's successor, Henry Bullinger, in Zurich. It was the beginning of an association which was to lead, nine years later, to the Consensus Tigurinus. Things were slow in moving at first, but they were spurred on by Luther's violent outburst against the scholars of Zurich in 1543, followed not long after by his scurrilous parody of the first Psalm: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the sacramentarians, nor stands in the way of the Zwinglians, nor sits in the seat of the Zurichers." Something had to be done. It was imperative that in the face of a militant Luther, mounting political pressure against Protestant Christians from Francis I, and a growing dissatisfaction with the efforts of Bucer, some effort should be made to unite the Swiss as a preliminary to wider union.

The story of the final stages of the negotiations must of necessity be based on the letters of Calvin and Bullinger. In all, Calvin made five visits to Zurich, but only in the course of the last visit was the crucial issue of the Lord's Supper brought up and settled. We will never know why it was that Bullinger preferred discussion by post. It was certainly a most unsatisfactory method, for in those days postal messengers were notoriously unreliable.

Towards the end of 1545 Bullinger had drawn up a tract on the Lord's Supper,¹ and a copy of the revised version was sent to Calvin. Having discussed it with Farel, he sent a frank reply to Zurich, making no attempt to avoid treading on Bullinger's toes and yet hoping that it would not prove a stone of stumbling between them. Bullinger argues "whoever believes in Christ is justified by his faith before he communicates in the sacraments, therefore it is obvious that grace is not conferred through the sacraments." "But with me," replies Calvin, "the opposite argument is valid: because we are justified by faith, therefore grace is conferred upon us by the sacraments, for they are exercises of faith which heap upon us such spiritual gifts that they make us partakers of Christ and advance our faith."² Unfortunately, although he had asked for honest criticism of his work, Bullinger was not pleased with the blunt comments of Calvin, and he did not answer the letter. Thereafter it was Calvin who took the initiative in spasmodic letters which pleaded for personal discussion and agreement. In December 1548, Bullinger was moved to compile twenty-four propositions which he sent to Calvin for his comments.³ Calvin's reply in some ways represented a rapprochement, and the end was in sight.

¹ *Absoluta de Christi Domini et catholicae eius ecclesiae sacramentis tractatio*, 1546.

² *Corpus Reformatorum: Calvini Opera* (Braunschweig, 1863–1900), 12.483 (Ep. 880). This work is abbreviated *CO* in the remaining footnotes.

³ *CO* 13.115 ff. (Ep. 1104). The text of the propositions and the annotations is given in *CO* 7.693 ff. Cf. also André Bouvier, *Henry Bullinger* (Neuchâtel, 1940), "Appendix," pp. 472 ff., where he gives the details of the background and writing of the twenty-four propositions.