

# LETTERS TO LUTHERAN PASTORS

VOLUME II  
*1951–1956*

HERMANN SASSE

Edited by Matthew C. Harrison

Translated by Matthew C. Harrison and Andrew Smith

Foreword by Ronald R. Feuerhahn

Additional translations by Ralph Gehrke,  
Fred Kramer, E. Reim, and Norman Nagel

For Ronald R. Feuerhahn, *Doctor Ecclesiae*



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Manufactured in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sasse, Hermann, 1895–1976.

[Correspondence. English. Selections]

Letters to Lutheran pastors / Hermann Sasse ; edited and translated by Matthew C. Harrison ; foreword by Ronald R. Feuerhahn ; additional translations by Ralph Gehrke, Fred Kramer, Norman Nagel, E. Reim, Andrew Smith.

pages cm

Includes bibliographic references.

ISBN 978-0-7586-4155-7

1. Sasse, Hermann, 1895–1976.—Correspondence. 2. Lutheran Church—Doctrines. I. Harrison, Matthew C. II. Title.

BX8080.S18A4 2013

284.1—dc23

2012047167

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# Principal Abbreviations and Works Cited

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AC / CA	Augsburg Confession
AE	<i>Luther's Works</i> . American Edition. Volumes 1–30: Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–76. Volumes 31–55: Edited by Helmut Lehmann. Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86. Volumes 56–75: Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown. St. Louis: Concordia, 2009–.
AELKZ	<i>Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung</i>
Aland	Kurt Aland. <i>Hilfsbuch zum Lutherstudium</i> . 4th ed. Bielfeld: Luther-Verlag, 1996. Cited by main catalog number, postil number (Po), or sermon number (Pr).
ALC	American Lutheran Church
ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> . Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Revised by A. Cleveland Coxe. 10 vols. Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885–96. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
BLP	<i>Briefe an Lutherische Pfarrer (Letters to Lutheran Pastors)</i>
BSLK or Bekenntnisschriften	<i>Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche</i> . 6th ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967.
CHI	Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri.
<i>Christian Cyclopedia</i>	Edited by Erwin Lueker. Accessed at <a href="http://cyclopedia.lcms.org">http://cyclopedia.lcms.org</a>
CIC	<i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i>
Concordia	<i>Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions</i> . 2nd ed. Edited by Paul T. McCain et al. St. Louis: Concordia, 2006.
CTM	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
CSEL	<i>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> . Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1866–.
DCSV	German Christian Student Association
DEK	Deutsche Evangelische Kirche (German Evangelical Church)

- Denzinger Heinrich Denzinger, ed. *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*. 34th ed. Edited by Adolf Schönmetzer. Freiburg: Herder, 1967.
- E Erlangen edition of Luther's works. *Dr. Martin Luther's Sammtliche Werke*. 67 vols. Erlangen: C. Heyder, 1826–57.  
E<sup>1</sup> = *Luther's sämmtliche Werke* [Erste Auflage] (German works, first series).
- EKiD / EKD Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (Evangelical Church in Germany)
- ELC Evangelical Lutheran Church
- ELCA Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
- ELCA Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia
- Enders *Dr. Martin Luthers Briefwechsel*. Edited by Ernst Ludwig Enders. Frankfurt am Main: 1884–1932.
- Ep Epitome of the Formula of Concord
- ESV English Standard Version
- FC Formula of Concord
- Feuerhahn Chronology  
See *Hermann Sasse: A Bibliography*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1995.
- HKBP Huria Kristen Batak Protestand
- HS Hermann Sasse
- Huss number Bibliographic number assigned to Sasse's writings by Ronald R. Feuerhahn in *Hermann Sasse: A Bibliography*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1995.
- Ibid. *Ibidem* (in the same place)
- ISC *In Statu Confessionis: Gesammelte Aufsätze von Hermann Sasse*. Edited by Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf. 2 vols. Berlin, 1966, 1975–76.
- LC Large Catechism
- LCA Lutheran Church in America
- LCMS The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
- Lonely Way* Hermann Sasse. *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*. Translated by Matthew C. Harrison, et al. Historical introductions by Ronald R. Feuerhahn. 2 vols. St. Louis: Concordia, 2001–2.
- LSB *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia, 2006
- Lthtm* *Luthertum*
- LuBl* *Lutherische Blätter*
- LWF Lutheran World Federation
- MH Matthew C. Harrison
- Müller *Die symbolischen Bücher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*. 11th edition. Edited by Johann T. Müller. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1912.
- NCCCA / NCCCUS  
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
- NDB *Neue Deutsche Biographie*. Edited by Die Historische Kommission bei der Bayerischen Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1953–.

- NKZ *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*
- NN Norman Nagel
- NPNF<sup>1</sup> *A Select Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series.* Edited by Philip Schaff. 14 vols. New York, 1886–89. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
- NPNF<sup>2</sup> *A Select Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series.* Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 14 vols. New York, 1890–1900. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
- ODCC *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church.* Edited by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- op. cit. *opere citato* (in the aforementioned work)
- PG *Patrologia cursus completus: Series Graeca.* Edited by J.-P. Migne. 161 vols. in 167. Petit-Montrouge: Apud J. P. Migne, 1857–66.
- PL *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina.* Edited by J.-P. Migne. 221 vols. in 223. Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1844–64.
- QS *Quartalschrift (Wisconsin Lutheran Theological Quarterly)*
- RG Ralph Gehrke
- RGG<sup>3</sup> *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart.* 3rd ed. 7 vols. Edited by Kurt Galling. Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1957–65.
- RSV Revised Standard Version
- RTR *Reformed Theological Review*
- SA Smalcald Articles
- SC Small Catechism
- SD Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord
- St. Louis edition  
See W<sup>2</sup>
- Tappert Theodore G. Tappert, ed. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959.
- TLH *The Lutheran Hymnal.* St. Louis: Concordia, 1941.
- Triglotta / Trig. *Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.* St. Louis: Concordia, 1921.
- UELCA United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia
- ULC United Lutheran Church
- ULCA United Lutheran Church of America
- VELKD Vereinigte evangelische-lutherische Kirche in Deutschland (United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany)
- Vg Vulgate
- W<sup>1</sup> / Walch edition  
*D. Martin Luthers sowol in Deutscher als Lateinischer Sprache verfertigte und aus der letztern in die erstere übersetzte Sämmtliche Schriften.* Edited by Johann G. Walch. 24 vols. Halle: Gebauer, 1740–53.

- W<sup>2</sup> *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*. Edited by Albrecht F. Hoppe. 23 vols. St. Louis: Concordia, 1880–1910.
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. 73 vols. in 85. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–.
- WA Br *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Briefwechsel*. 18 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–.
- WA TR *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Tischreden*. 6 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912–21.
- WCC World Council of Churches

# Foreword

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RONALD R. FEUERHAHN

**H**ERMANN SASSE WAS A HISTORIAN, a theologian, a churchman, and a pastor. In this remarkable collection of letters—or we might even call them epistles—we meet all of these skills: a historian with a breadth of learning, a theologian of thorough biblical knowledge, a churchman of wisdom, and a pastor of caring words. It is the thorough grasp of the past that has allowed Sasse to be open to a clear perception of the future; E. Clifford Nelson was not alone in his description of Sasse as prescient.<sup>1</sup> Here also we meet a theologian who is able to teach the church from the background of a thorough scholarship of Scripture and confessions and cement them to much of the church of his day. Here is a historian and theologian who speaks the language of lonely pastors throughout the world; thus he also spoke for them and to them as a churchman and as a pastor.

Sasse was also a “teacher of the church,” that title that meant so much to Martin Luther. Sasse taught faithfully the doctrine of Scripture and the confession of the church. He applied himself in these letters particularly to the needs of the church of his day. His teaching was respected by churchmen and laity of a very broad, ecumenical spectrum of the church. Yet no one was completely comfortable with this man, least of all the liberal churchmen of his day. They described him as “narrow,” a “strict confessionalist.” That discomfort is still present today, for Sasse calls all to repentance. He spoke not only to and for “his day,” but there is also a certain catholicity to these letters, a wisdom that has prompted many to be grateful for them.

From the very beginning, Sasse intended this to be a series of letters. In the opening sentences of the first letter he stated:

The following lines and the letters which, God willing, are to follow this one are addressed to Lutheran pastors in totally different churches and nations, in Germany and in the remaining Europe, in North and South

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1 E. Clifford Nelson, *The Rise of World Lutheranism, An American Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 314f.

America, in Africa and Australia. They are addressed to fellow ministers who together with the undersigned know themselves bound by their ordination vow to the Holy Scriptures as the *norma normans* [“norming norm”] of all the doctrinal Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the true interpretation of the Scriptures.

Sasse also strikes that note of loneliness facing his many readers:

They are addressed to brethren whose hearts bleed whenever they see the condition in which the Lutheran Church of our day and of our world finds itself. We know full well: not only we as theologians see and labor under these distressing conditions. Numberless members of our congregations share our experience and sense the reason for the Church’s need.<sup>2</sup>

These letters were doubtless intended to address these readers in their distress and loneliness and to bring them comfort.

These epistles, as they may well be called, were intended for a broad distribution; Sasse indicated this to various colleagues.<sup>3</sup> It was with this intention in mind that the editorial staff of the *Quartalschrift*, or *Theological Quarterly*, of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod offered their translations:

We hope that these letters will also be published in other theological journals<sup>4</sup> of this and other countries, that they will be translated into the languages of all the foreign countries where the Lutheran Church has found a home. Therefore we are placing these letters, as translated by us, at the disposal of those editorial staffs that have not undertaken a translation of their own, or do not intend to do so. For we hold that the content of these letters deserves a careful study on the part of every Lutheran reader.<sup>5</sup>

Such is our opinion today as well.

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- 2 These first two citations are from the opening sentences of the *Letters*. See *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*, ed. Matthew C. Harrison, vol. 1, 1948–1951 (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 5–6.
  - 3 E.g.: “As I wrote to you, a first letter to Luthern [*sic*] pastors will go out soon. You may translate and circulate it if you deem it useful” (letter to Herman Preus, November 27, 1948).
  - 4 And so they were; this letter was published also, e.g., in *CTM* 20, no. 8 (August 1949): 615–25.
  - 5 The editorial staff, *QS* 46, no. 2 (April 1949): 81n. In all, the *Theological Quarterly* published ten of the letters, ceasing the enterprise, understandably, after the controversial Letter 14, “On the Doctrine *De Scriptura Sacra*,” and Letter 16, “What Does Luther Have to Say to Us on the Inerrancy of the Holy Scripture?” Letter 14 was the only writing that Sasse publicly withdrew. See Jeffrey J. Kloha, “Hermann Sasse Confesses the Doctrine *de Scriptura Sacra*,” in *Scripture and the Church: Selected Essays of Hermann Sasse*, ed. Jeffrey J. Kloha and Ronald R. Feuerhahn, Concordia Seminary Monograph Series 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1995), 337–423. Various letters would be translated and published in many other journals and in numerous languages.

# Preface

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MATTHEW C. HARRISON

SOME WOULD WONDER WHAT POSSIBLE benefit might come from the study of half-century old letters of a long-deceased Lutheran theologian. Should not the church be looking forward and not backward? Yet we are confident that you will find these treatises absolutely gripping, especially if Christ has lit in your soul a similar fire for His blessed Word and Sacrament as confessed by the catechisms of Martin Luther. Reading Hermann Sasse is a veritable guided tour through centuries of church history, particularly the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And no matter how clichéd it might sound, it remains true that charting one's course for the future is aided immensely when one has some idea from whence he has come. And that holds true for churches.

Sasse is prone to see “tragedies” at every turn of church history. He spares no one intense criticism when he thinks it warranted. In this era of postmodernism, or now perhaps post-postmodernism in the wake of the terror of 9/11, Sasse holds out for truth. “The future belongs to those churches which dare to confess their dogma,” he loved to say. Sasse was a man once awash in the vague mist of an optimistic and nondoctrinal religion. But shaken to the foundation of his being, he beheld the depravity of man. Then he was shown the blessed truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *vere deus*, as witnessed by the Word of God and as confessed by the Lutheran Confessions. The conviction burned brightly right through the ungodly challenges of the dark night of Nazism, and it burned brightly amid the vacillations and cavillations of well-meaning churchmen who were held captive by much more deceptive and alluring enticements from the truth which is found in Christ and His Sacrament.

Yet amid the failures of men and churches, Sasse was gripped by the fact that because Jesus Christ has a future, the church has a future. *Una sancta ecclesia perpetuo mansura sit!* “One holy church shall ever remain!” (AC VII). And because Sasse was above all else a doctor of the church, a confessor of the church, he was convinced, too, that the church is ever found where the *evangelium pure docetur*

*et recte administrantur sacramenta*, where “the Gospel is purely taught, and the Sacraments rightly administered” (AC VII). *Ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia!* “Where Christ is, *there* is the church” (Ignatius).<sup>1</sup>

May this collection of Sasse’s essays cause hearts and lips to burn with the confession of Christ and churches to rise and confess the faith once delivered to the saints, as confessed in the Lutheran Reformation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I’m deeply grateful for the staff of Concordia Publishing House who contributed to the publication of these volumes of Sasse’s *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*. Charles Schaum worked on the project early on, providing his own translation for a significant letter in the collection. I’m indebted to Dawn Weinstock for her editorial work and to Edward Engelbrecht, who managed the process expertly. Finally, Paul McCain has been a constant encouragement in all matters Sasse-related.

We thank the editors of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* and Concordia Publishing House for the necessary permission to reprint many of these essays. We thank especially Dr. Norman Nagel for graciously agreeing to translate individual letters and sharing letters translated for his *We Confess* series. Mr. Andrew Smith has provided numerous letters in English, quietly and capably working for little remuneration other than the love of Lutheran theology. Many have helped here and there through what has suddenly become a twenty-year quest to publish in English Sasse’s *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*. We thank Robert Wurst and Jennifer Maxfield for contributing editing skills on this challenging project. Holger Sonntag with Peter Petzling and Paul Strawn provided a burst of effort as the last dozen or so letters were rendered in English. Rachel Mumme graciously searched out the hitherto unlocated first two *Circular Letters to Westphalian Pastors*, and then proceeded to provide wonderful translations of both.<sup>2</sup> Thanks are owed especially to Dr. Ronald Feuerhahn, who, as ever, readily provided needed assistance with this Sasse project and whose published and unpublished works on Sasse are an ever-present help in need! Ron’s unpublished “Chronicle” of events in Sasse’s life was used to footnote the letters. Also his vast collection of letters and documents was a rich source for the anecdotal details peppered throughout this volume.

Sasse’s was a theological life to be sure, but also and in every way a life—with many personal and professional joys and disappointments. I have tried to use some discretion in the use of personal papers, while also revealing historical realities, such as Sasse’s simultaneous appreciation and disdain for aspects of Werner Elert’s person and work. There are two sides to every story. Sasse himself could be rather difficult, to be sure.

1 *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 8.2.

2 See *Letters to Lutheran Pastors* 1:435–80, especially pp. 435–51.

## THE EDITING

I have slightly revised most of the translations, bringing them into reasonable uniformity of style and expression. In many places in the older translations I have restored theological language where the freight of terms has been diminished (e.g., substituting “office” where the translation of *Amt* slipped into “ministry” with a lowercase “m” and no definite article). Brackets [ ] have generally been used to provide a peek at the original or to add additional bibliographic material not in Sasse’s original. Where Sasse or a translator provided both the original (e.g., Latin) and a translation, we have kept the parentheses. I have also taken the liberty to reduce sentence length and to update the language slightly. I have not attempted to make the citation of English Bible passages uniform. In some places translators simply render the German text. Nor are we consistent in quoting a version of the Lutheran Confessions. Often translators simply provide a fresh translation of the confessional text quoted. There is, after all, only so much time in life. And the English-speaking world has waited too long for this collection already. We hope the reader will be pleased with this volume of Sasse’s *Letters*.

I have also included anecdotal material from personal correspondence from the general time at which the particular *Briefe* was published as a peek into matters going on in Sasse’s life or in the life of the church. These passages favor dealings with the LCMS, but it is also true that Sasse was heavily involved and interested in LCMS dealings. Sasse carried on an enormous volume of correspondence. His son Wolfgang told Ronald Feuerhahn that his father would have four or five typewriters in the house at any given moment, each with a manuscript in process. I only discovered while searching for quotations within Sasse correspondence that by his own admission Sasse had typed “with one finger.” What a finger that was!

The publication of this volume is the culmination of twenty years of labor. Kurt Marquart introduced me to Sasse while I was a student at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana (MDiv 1989; STM 1991). About that time Norman Nagel published his vitally significant translations for the *We Confess* series, and I devoured them. While an exchange student in Adelaide, Australia (1987), I found everything by Sasse in English that I possibly could, and with the help of Maurice Schild I gained access to the church archives for my first foray into the private papers of Sasse. I developed a warm relationship with Henry Hamann Jr., Elvin Janetzki, Bruce Adams, John Kleinig, and J. T. E. Renner. I came to know Maurice Schild (Sasse’s successor at Immanuel Seminary) and met Siegfried Hebart (who had been instrumental in bringing Sasse to Australia) and others. Simultaneously, Ronald Feuerhahn was working on his doctorate on Sasse and was in the process of amassing personal papers. With the help of Robert Preus (under whom I wrote a master of sacred theology thesis on Sasse), I began collecting correspondence for the Walther Library at the seminary in

Fort Wayne (the institution to which Sasse left his vast library) and sharing it with Dr. Feuerhahn. I will never forget sitting in Dr. Preus's office while he dictated a letter to his uncle, Herman A. Preus (then nearly 100 years old), requesting copies of his Sasse correspondence. Dr. Preus also succeeded in convincing Tom Hardt to send his very private correspondence spanning decades. The continued effort brought me into contact and correspondence with Bjarne Teigen, Martin Wittenberg, Ulrich Asendorf, Jobst Schoene, Bengt Häggglund, and even Bo Giertz. It has been an amazing journey.

Despite the amount of Sasse's writings made available in the *Lonely Way* volumes (Concordia, 2001–2002) and in this collection of letters, there is vastly more to be done. We hope others will take up the task.



As ever, I remain most thankful for my blessed life's companion, Kathy, whose profound Lutheran convictions and living grace make life beyond Sasse projects such a joy. I provide this work for Matthew Martin Luther Harrison, Mark Martin Chemnitz Harrison, and their entire generation and those after, that their hearts might "burn within them" with the confession of Christ as they make their Emmaus journey through life to life everlasting, where we shall—together—know joys supernal. My own translation work is far from perfect. May these letters find their way back to Australia and to many other places around the globe and here, as there, awaken a love for the Lutheran confession of the faith. Above all, may Sasse's ringing clarity on the church and Sacrament be a beacon guiding us to our Confessions and to Christ Himself, who speaks so clearly in Holy Scripture and to whom our Confessions bear incomparable witness.

Matthew C. Harrison  
Assistant Pastor, Village Lutheran Church, Ladue, Missouri  
President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

**LETTERS**  
**TO LUTHERAN PASTORS**

*“The only thing I can do is write letters.”*

HERMANN SASSE



## Historical Context

*By 1951, Sasse's interests were very much turned toward the Missouri Synod. The talks on church union between the two synods in Australia, which Sasse joined immediately upon his arrival in 1949, brought him directly into dialogue with men who had been trained in St. Louis (such as H. P. Hamann Sr.). Letter 20, "Confession and Theology in the Missouri Synod," demonstrates just how familiar Sasse was with the LCMS. While its criticism is closely linked to views on the nature of Scripture expressed in Letters 14 and 16,<sup>1</sup> Sasse was prescient in noting the danger of American evangelicalism (fundamentalism) for Missouri, a theme he maintained until he died. A significant strength of Missouri, says Sasse, are its genuine Lutheran congregations. But he foresaw a weakness as both major factions in postwar Missouri, in the wake of the 1944 "Brief Statement," took the Lutheran Confessions for granted, lacking the real "joy" in praise to God for the Confession which nineteenth-century Missouri possessed. MH*

April 19, 1952

Dr. Hermann Sasse  
41 Buxton Street  
North Adelaide, South Australia

Dr. Carl E. Lundquist<sup>2</sup>  
Lutheran World Federation  
Geneva

Dear Dr. Lundquist,

Thank you for your letter . . . . Since the *Triglotta* is not going to appear again, the original text of the Confessions will soon be unknown to the English speaking Lutheran Churches. What the revised translation will be like, nobody knows. The present text is not free from errors. The most necessary publication is a new edition of the *Book of Concord*, perhaps in several small volumes of the size of the modern editions of the *Summa* of Thomas by the German (Latin and German)

- 1 See "On the Doctrine *De Scripture Sacra*," and "What Does Luther Have to Say to Us on the Inerrancy of the Holy Scripture?" in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors* 1:240–84, 332–66. MH
- 2 Carl Elof Lundquist (1908–65) was executive secretary of the LWF (1951–60) (s.v. *Christian Cyclopedia*). MH

and English (only English translation) Dominicans. It should be a book which the pastor can carry along on journeys and at conferences, which was impossible with the big volume of the *Triglotta*. Without a good edition of the Confessions, the Lutheran Church will die. There should also be editions of single books as e.g., the *Augustana* and the Smalcald Articles, with brief explanations for the laymen. I remember the deep impression which the English pamphlets made on other people when at Lausanne (1927) they were distributed to the members of the World Conference on Faith and Order by the delegates of the ULC. A copy of this letter is being sent to Dr. Prenter . . . .

With kind regards,

Yours in Christ,  
Hermann Sasse

twenty

# Confession and Theology in the Missouri Synod

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TRANSLATED BY FRED KRAMER

End of July 1951<sup>1</sup>

Prof. Dr. Theol. Hermann Sasse  
41 Buxton Street  
North Adelaide, South Australia

Dear Brothers in the Office!

It is not meddling in the affairs of another church if we today undertake to speak on one of the basic problems of the Missouri Synod. For the life of a church is not like the life of an individual Christian, a private matter; it is a matter for all of Christendom. Whenever a church, whether it be a small congregation or

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1 *BLP 20: Bekenntnis und Theologie in der Missouri synode* (North Adelaide, July 1951). The original was published in *LuBl* 3, no. 22 (1951). Huss number 289. George Beto first requested that Kramer translate the letter into English. "Some time ago one of your general letters addressed to Lutheran pastors (number 20) fell into our hands. It dealt with the general subject *Bekenntnis und Theologie in der Missouri synode*. It represents—in our opinion—an excellent analysis of the Missouri Synod. In fact, we desire to print an English translation of the letter in the spring issue of our quarterly, *The Springfielder*. May we have your permission to reprint the article? We would be happy to permit you to approve the English translation . . . Cordially, George J. Beto P.S. I recall with pleasant memory our brief meeting at Oakland and at San Francisco" (Beto to Sasse, December 28, 1960; in the Harrison Collection). "The translation of Sasse, *Letter* no. 20, has been transferred to 15 Dictabelts, and will be given to the faculty secretaries when they return after Christmas. Kramer 12-25-60." The essay was translated but not published. MH

a major part of Christendom, confesses her faith before the world, she does so “to those now living and those who shall come after us” (FC SD XII 40 [BSLK, 1099.42f.; Tappert, 636]). Therefore the great “We believe, teach, and confess,” with which the Missouri Synod, one of the very few great Lutheran Churches which have the courage to make the whole Book of Concord her own, poses a question and an admonition to all churches in the world. The very fact of the existence of this church is a constant challenge to Lutherans throughout the world to understand clearly what the Lutheran Church is, and why there is not complete church fellowship among those who confess allegiance to the Augsburg Confession and to Luther’s catechisms. This challenge becomes all the more urgent as we Lutherans begin to realize what light our disunity casts upon our claim to teach Christendom what the true unity of the church is. What does the great *satis est* [“it is sufficient for the true unity of the church”] (AC VII 2 [BSLK, 61.7; Tappert, 32]) mean if church fellowship is impossible among those who are one in the doctrine of justification by faith alone and in the Lutheran doctrine of the Sacrament? Therefore no Lutheran theology dare ignore the position of the Missouri Synod. This means, first of all, that it must seek to understand this important Lutheran Church.

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## 1

In connection with the centennial of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States in the year 1947, this church took a new name and thereby took cognizance of the fact that from a union of Lutheran synods in the United States it had developed into a worldwide church which represents a unique type of Lutheranism: “The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.” Closely linked in the Synodical Conference with her smaller sister churches the Wisconsin Synod, the Slovak Synod, and the Norwegian Synod—and in church fellowship with the Lutheran Free Church [*lutherischen Freikirche*] in Germany and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia—the Missouri Synod, together with her daughter churches and congregations in Brazil and in all of Latin America, in Europe, and on the mission fields of Asia, constitutes one of the largest Lutheran Churches. In America this church embraces almost a third of all Lutherans, with more than one and one-half million members, more than five thousand congregations and preaching stations, and almost four thousand pastors.<sup>2</sup>

Rooted in the agricultural areas of the Midwest, where in some areas Lutheranism is almost more a matter of the people than in many so-called “people’s churches” of Europe, the Missouri Synod, like every true mission church, has grown far beyond her historical home. She is a mission church in a sense in which this cannot be said of any other Lutheran Church. This is one of her most

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<sup>2</sup> As of 2010 the LCMS has some 6,100 congregations in the United States. MH

profound characteristics. She is not merely a church of foreign missions, as, for example, the church of Norway, which with her maritime people has retained something of the spirit of the Vikings. Missouri is the church of home missions among Lutheran Churches. While other Lutheran Churches, in harmony with the older Lutheran ethic, see the Christian man in his "station" (*Stand*), to which not merely his nationality and calling but also his religious home belongs, the Missouri Synod sees the individual soul, which is converted to Christ and incorporated into the church. If in the former case there is danger that souls are permitted to perish in their religious home, Missouri is in danger of seeing only individuals and ignoring the blessing which lies in the station, which man has not chosen for himself. Here lies one of the reasons why these two branches of Lutheranism constantly talk past each other.

The Missouri Synod Lutheran cannot understand that a properly called but heterodox pastor, Lutheran in name only, is permitted to lead a whole congregation, a whole generation of the flock that has been entrusted to him, into misbelief and even unbelief, while the ecclesiastical authorities keep silence and even maintain that the congregation is still Lutheran, because the Lutheran doctrine alone has standing, is *publica doctrina*, there. Is he incorrect? Who has the right to forbid the Gospel to be preached to these cheated souls by someone else? But how is it if there is not a clear case of false doctrine, but a mere suspicion? What clear facts must be evident before it is permissible to establish pulpit against pulpit, altar against altar? Is it not understandable that in questions of this kind there have been frequent differences of opinion, misunderstandings, and severe conflicts? What appeared to the one side as Christian missionary duty, the other side saw as proselytizing, that perversion of true mission work, against which Christ Himself warned the church when He held before her in Matt. 23:15 the frightful example of the mission work of the scribes and the Pharisees. Missouri would be no Lutheran Church if she had not asked herself again and again on what her understanding of the missionary duty of the church is founded. Missouri would have no right to call herself Lutheran had she not again and again measured her own actions by the Word of God, and acknowledged and confessed her own sins. However, the errors and sins which were committed in this area do not change the fact that this church has recognized the missionary duty of Lutheranism. The Lutheran Church does not exist merely to preserve the religious home of those people who by historical chance and by the manner in which they were led bear the confessional stamp "Lutheran." Rather, it is her task to preach to all men she can reach the Gospel as it was rediscovered during the Reformation and attested to in the Lutheran Confessions. This is being done today in a particularly effective and impressive way in the all but worldwide radio mission of *The Lutheran Hour*.

Similarly, the school system of the Missouri Synod is a testimony of this will for missions. For a large percentage of the children who prefer the excellent parochial schools of this church to the public schools come from non-Lutheran

churches. In the last analysis, each church is in its own way a center of missions and regards itself as such. This explains not merely the steady growth of the Missouri Synod in all parts of America but also the fact that this church more than any other Lutheran Church is able to attract people of other confessions who are without a church home.

These simple facts ought to suffice to move other Lutheran Churches to study the Missouri Synod instead of getting excited over the fact that this church is not asleep in the same measure in which they are.

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## 2

Karl Holl,<sup>3</sup> one of the few German church historians who treated the Missouri Synod in his lectures on more recent church history, always sought to derive all the essential traits and the particular doctrines which are characteristic of the Missouri Synod from Calvinist influences surrounding this branch of the Lutheran diaspora of German origin. That this is impossible is shown by the early history of this Synod, which in consequence of the work of the Concordia Historical Institute of St. Louis and its first director, Prof. Polack,<sup>4</sup> who in our estimation died too young, is better known today than it was thirty years ago. It is certain that the theology of Ferdinand Walther<sup>5</sup> can be explained only from the theology of Luther, of Lutheran orthodoxy, and of the Lutheran revival of the nineteenth century. We now know that the same is true also of the constitution of this Synod, the origin of which has been traced for us by Dr. Carl Mundinger in a beautiful and learned book (*Government in the Missouri Synod: The Genesis of Decentralized Government in the Missouri Synod*, St. Louis, 1947). Mundinger says that the ordering of the relation between pastors and laymen “was not the product of American political thought, nor was it congregationalism after the fashion of Congregational or Baptist churches in America. The polity of Missouri Synod was something apart from anything then known in America.” This does not mean that the environment did not influence the developing church. It is not accidental that the name “Missouri” became the name of the church. It was the situation of Lutheranism in the Midwest, which was

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3 Karl Holl (1866–1926), professor at Berlin, Luther scholar, and instructor of Sasse. Holl led the so-called rediscovery of Luther in the early nineteenth century. That school sought to find the “real” Luther in the earliest Luther and drove a wedge between Luther and the Confessions, and between Luther and the period of orthodoxy. Sasse never overcame the later influence. MH

4 William Gustave Polack (1890–1950), professor of history, hymnology and liturgics at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri (1925–50), was a charter member of the Concordia Historical Institute (s.v. *Christian Cyclopedia*). MH

5 That is, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811–87), first president of the Missouri Synod. MH

suddenly opened to settlement, swamped by immigrants from all European peoples and churches, which made the Lutheran Church a mission church. This church gains her members through mission work. Her churches are—as are all churches in this country—gatherings, assemblies, societies of individuals who consciously decide to belong to the church of their choice. This is the distinctly American trait in the character of the Missouri Synod, resulting from the history of the country. The same trait is found in the other Lutheran Churches of the American West. However, it finds its strongest expression in the Missouri Synod. For this type of Lutheranism possessed that which, given a missionary situation, makes a church a missionary church: the consciousness of vocation and a firm dogmatic conviction, without which missionary preaching is impossible. The consciousness of the Stephanist church as being the remnant of the pure Lutheran Church was refined through catastrophe. Through Walther's preaching and pastoral ministry [*Seelsorge*] was produced the true Lutheran Church consciousness in the sense of a congregation standing in justifying faith and living by the means of grace. This explains the consciousness of vocation found in the Missouri Synod. And this consciousness of vocation is inseparably bound up with the dogmatic conviction of Lutheran orthodoxy.

This is the most characteristic trait of the Missouri Synod. It was in this branch of Lutheranism that the Lutheran revival of the nineteenth century returned most consistently to Lutheran orthodoxy. The beginnings of this revival were still strongly influenced by Pietism, even as the revival after the wars of liberation at first appeared to be a renewal of Pietism. This is plainly evident in the case of Scheibel in Breslau,<sup>6</sup> and Kavel in Australia,<sup>7</sup> and likewise in the Lutheran revival in Franconia and Pomerania. The awakening Lutheran consciousness in these

6 Johann Gottfried Scheibel (1783–1843) was educated at Halle, where Pietism had devolved into rank Rationalism. He found the moral life among the student body appalling. He became a theological professor in Breslau, Prussia (now Poland). As a champion against the Prussian Union, Scheibel was suspended from office in 1830 and took refuge in Saxony until forced to leave. While in Breslau, Scheibel urged a young Martin Stephan (who would lead Walther and the Saxon immigrants to the United States) to study Luther. Scheibel's account of the Prussian Union begs to be translated: *Actenmäßige Geschichte neuesten Unternehmung einer Union zwischen der reformirten und lutherischen Kirche: Vorzüglich durch gemeinschaftliche Agende in Deutschland und besonders in dem preussischen Staate* (Leipzig: Fleischer, 1834). Sasse's copy of this book is in the library of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Two doctoral studies were written under Sasse at Erlangen dealing with the Prussian Union and Scheibel's struggle: Martin Kiunke, *Johann Gottfried Scheibel und sein Ringen um die Kirche der lutherischen Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), and Walther Geppert, *Das Wesen der preussischen Union: Eine Kirchengeschichtliche und Konfessionskundliche Untersuchung* (Berlin: Furche, 1939). MH

7 August Ludwig Christian Kavel (1789–1860), influenced by Scheibel, joined the Old Lutherans at Posen. In 1838, 250 people left Germany for Adelaide, South Australia (s.v. *Christian Cyclopedia*). MH