

# LETTERS TO LUTHERAN PASTORS

VOLUME III  
*1957-1969*

HERMANN SASSE

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For Ronald R. Feuerhahn, *Doctor Ecclesiae*



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# Preface

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MATTHEW C. HARRISON

WITH THIS THIRD VOLUME OF Hermann Sasse's *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*, an effort of nearly a quarter century comes to a close. There is, to be sure, much more Sasse to translate and publish, and others have and are taking up the challenge. What a journey this has been for me! With two volumes of *The Lonely Way* and with three volumes of *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*, we have now put into print some 2,500 pages of Sasse.

"The Lonely Way" moniker, which editor Fred Baue chose to title the first volumes, is peppered throughout Sasse's work. It was an expression he borrowed from Rudolf Rocholl's autobiography by that title. The way of confessing and confessional Lutheranism shall remain lonely for us in the world, particularly as the Lord pulls the passing rain shower of the Gospel away from an increasingly secularized West to water the South and East. Yet this effort at publishing Sasse has been anything but lonely.

There have been so many who have assisted along the way. I fear that if I should try to name them, I would inevitably leave out vital friends who stepped in for a time to provide a translation or edit this or that document or book. Paul McCain believed in the project from the moment I showed him my translation of Sasse's "The Confession of the Church" (1930), way back in 1991. Bruce Kintz of CPH has been a stalwart supporter and remains so to this moment. From Julene Dumit to Dawn Weinstock, the editing has been superb. I thank my assistant the Rev. Dr. Jon Vieker for his help in managing the flow of information and texts between me and the folks at CPH. To this moment Ron Feuerhahn has remained a joyous resource, despite health challenges.

The blessings we hoped for in that first preface to volume 1 of *The Lonely Way* have and continue to materialize all over the world. Sasse has never appreciated such broad respect and recognition. Hourly, around the world, the good Doctor Sasse instructs students in what it means to be a biblical and confessional Lutheran in deed and truth. With this final volume of the *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*, many essays appear for the first time in English, and others are rescued

from obscurity—and all this at a moment of significant elevation of the role of the LCMS in worldwide Lutheranism.

My two boys are in university, both committed confessional Lutherans. My dear wife is by my side still as the gracious gift she remains. And I am ever more thankful to Christ for His mercies to this sinner and to His Church.

Pastor Matthew C. Harrison  
 Assistant Pastor, Village Lutheran—Ladue Missouri  
 President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod  
 Trinity XIII, AD 2014

## PREFACE TO VOLUME 2

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

forty-six

# Lutheranism at the End of 1957

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[LWF MINNEAPOLIS ASSEMBLY]  
[JUSTIFICATION, CHURCH FELLOWSHIP]

TRANSLATED BY HOLGAR SONNTAG

Christmas 1957<sup>1</sup>

Professor Dr. Hermann Sasse  
63 Clifton Street  
Prospect, South Australia

Dear Brothers in Office,

I wish you a “blessed new year” with some words from the “Preface of Dr. Martin Luther Put Together before His Departure” to the second part of the Wittenberg edition of the German writings of the reformer. The genuineness of this preface (Wittenberg ed., vol. 2; Erlangen ed., vol. 63:407ff.; Weimar ed., vol. 54:459ff.),<sup>2</sup> already disputed by [Johann Georg] Walch [1693–1775] since the printing of the volume because of the events back then, could only be finalized in 1548. Yet it was compiled out of genuine words of Luther and perfectly renders his thoughts on the miracle of the preservation of the church. The history of the church and Holy Scripture teach, so we read,

- 1 *BLP 46: Das Luthertum an der Jahreswende 1957/58* (Prospect, Christmas 1957). The original was published in *LuBl* 10, no. 56 (February 1958). Huss number 337. MH
- 2 *Vorrede Luthers zum ersten Bande der Gesamtausgabe seiner lateinischen Schriften* (1545), Aland 753, WA 54:179–87 (cf. AE 34:327–38). MH

... that it always happened this way when God's Word arose somewhat and God had gathered for Himself a small flock thereby, then the devil soon became aware of the light and blew, stormed, and puffed against it from all corners with strong, great winds to extinguish such divine light.<sup>3</sup>

The church must always be ready for storms such as Luther in particular had to endure in the battle for the Gospel. In this way the reformer calls upon future generations to be watchful according to 1 Pet. 5:8 and admonishes them:

You, our posterity, also earnestly pray and diligently study God's Word, keep God's poor storm lantern lit, be warned and prepared.<sup>4</sup>

Above all, however, he reminds them of the divine mystery of the preservation of the church:

For it is not we who could preserve the church. Our ancestors also did not do it. Our posterity will also not be able to do it. But it was He, is He, and will be He who says, "I am with you to the end of the age" [Matt. 28:20]. As is written in Heb. 13:8: "Jesus Christ, yesterday and today and forever." And Rev. 1:8: "The Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." Yes, this is the name of the man, and no other man is named in this way, and no one else is supposed to be called this way. He who is called "yesterday" and "who was" preserved the church one thousand years ago, when we did not yet exist. And even today the church is not preserved by us, the living, but only by Him who is called "today" and "who is." Likewise, we will also not contribute anything when we are dead, but He will do it who is called "who will come" and "in eternity."<sup>5</sup>

With this strong faith of Luther, let us do the work we are permitted to do in the church and for the church in the year of grace 1958. In light of this word, let us today look at the situation of Lutheranism at the end of 1957.

## 1

In order to understand the present, we begin with a short look back. To the older ones among us, the years 1917 and 1918 will remain unforgettable as the fateful years of Occidental humanity. Then, forty years ago, the world in which we now live was born. Remember the breathtaking tension of the year 1917? On March 15, with the abdication of the czar, the Russian revolution began. Beginning in July, it was being led by the revolutionary-democratic [Alexander] Kerensky

3 Cf. *Against the Antinomians* (1539), AE 47:115, Aland 30 (*Wider die Antinomer*, WA 50:468-77). MH

4 Cf. *Against the Antinomians* (1539), AE 47:117, Aland 30 (*Wider die Antinomer*, WA 50:468-77). MH

5 Cf. *Against the Antinomians* (1539), AE 47:118, Aland 30 (*Wider die Antinomer*, WA 50:468-77). MH

[1881–1970] until, in the October Revolution on November 7, the leadership passed on to Bolshevism, the Communism led by [Vladimir] Lenin [1870–1924]. Who could have known back then what this would mean for humanity, and how November 7, forty years later, would be celebrated in a Russia and in an Eastern Europe and Asia ruled by Communism? On Good Friday 1917, four days before Lenin left Zurich en route to Stockholm on a private train, [Woodrow] Wilson [1856–1924] had declared war on the Middle Powers [*Mittelmächten*]. This decided the First World War, and the United States had forever tied its fate to that of Western Europe. In this way, the two current global powers appeared on the stage of world history, and the decay of Europe began. And still another power appeared and began to influence world politics deeply: the political papacy of the twentieth century. On Pentecost 1917 (May 27) the constitution of Benedict XV [r. 1914–22] was published promulgating the new *Codex Iuris Canonici* that was to come into force on Pentecost 1918. This recodification of Roman ecclesiastical law, started at the beginning of the century, completed the Roman Church as a legal institution. Two weeks earlier, on Rogate Sunday—May 13, when the appearances at Fatima began—the most gifted collaborator of Pietro Cardinal Gasparri [1852–1934], Eugenio Pacelli,<sup>6</sup> had been consecrated as archbishop in order to go to Munich as nuncio [to Bavaria]. However history will judge the politics of this greatest diplomat of our time, and whatever God’s judgment regarding this politics might be which drove many of the best Catholics in Italy, Spain, Germany, and France to despair—as nuncio, cardinal secretary of state, and as Pope Pius XII, Pacelli has become one of the fateful figures for Europe. This heir to genuine Romanness, who is both *catholicissimus catholicorum* [“the most Catholic of Catholics”] and one of the most cultured men of Europe, was able to bring the Roman Church once more to a position of political influence in the world which it had not held for many centuries. And, finally, in those years appeared the shadows of a future global power. The black soldiers of the British Empire and of the French colonies, whom we faced back then on the battlefields of France,<sup>7</sup> were the vanguard of those “terrorists” and “freedom fighters” who one day were to end the “colonialism” [in Africa] of their white masters and thereby the preeminence of the white race on earth.

Recalling the political situation of the world in 1917 and 1918, one understands something of the secret of all history. The inner logic of all history—and, above all, of a development which plays itself out at a breathtaking pace in this

6 Educated at the Gregorian University and the Roman Seminary, Pacelli was ordained a priest in 1899. He became papal secretary of state under Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) in 1901, and by 1920 he had been appointed nuncio to the German Republic at Berlin. Pius XI (r. 1922–39) made him a cardinal and papal secretary of state in 1930. Pacelli promoted a concordat with the National Socialist German government in 1933. On March 2, 1939, Pacelli was elected pope and took the name Pius XII. MH

7 Lieutenant Sasse fought at Flanders. Of his company of 150 men, only he and a handful of others survived. MH



century—is not designed by men. We men do not make history; at best we live through it—or, better, we suffer it. Our blind eyes do not see the inner core of the events unfolding in time. We do not want to see it. We men cannot bear reality, and so we hide in our illusions. This is how it was back then; this is how it is today. We live as if the Russians were not stationed in the Thuringian Forest; as if Berlin were still the capital of an empire no longer in existence; as if the British Empire and the French colonial empire still existed; as if Formosa-Taiwan were the real China; as if Australia were not located unprotected at the edge of the Asian world with its gigantic land-hungry nations; and as if South Africa were the paradise of the white master race chosen by God.<sup>8</sup> What we do not see is this: that the logic of world history is the logic of the divine judgment over nations and kingdoms, that all of history has to be interpreted from its end, as is done by Scripture. Consider Revelation 5 and the book of history sealed with seven seals which only one can open: “You are worthy to take the book and to open its seals—the Lamb who is slain, the returning Christ” [Rev. 5:9]. Accordingly, it is no accident that every serious attempt to understand the meaning of our historical epoch took on an eschatological character; that the twentieth century has become the century of the return of eschatology; and that every thoroughgoing renewal of Christian faith, wherever it made itself felt, understood anew the reality of the judgment, of the end, and of the world to come.

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## 2

In 1917 and 1918 began certainly not an awakening in the sense of the Great Awakening of the nineteenth century, but at least a rethinking in theology and a new appreciation for the objectivity of revelation and the church’s confession. It was the great “turn of the axle from the subject to the object,” as Catholic philosopher Peter Wust [1884–1940] called it, who back then began to return to the lost faith of his childhood. The decisive impulse for his *metanoia* [“repentance”], as he called the great turn, thus combining the New Testament term for repentance with philosophical rethinking, he received from a conversation with Ernst Troeltsch [1865–1923], the great Protestant philosopher of religion and culture in whom theological liberalism had once culminated. It happened at the beginning of October 1918, when Troeltsch, who at the time worked on a part-time basis at the Prussian Ministry of Culture, told his young colleague, whose religious struggles he knew, in view of the lost war: “This external defeat need

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8 Like very few others, Sasse saw that the racist views of National Socialism were absolutely incompatible with the Gospel. This was demonstrated by Sasse in a very early and very public blast against the “Aryan Paragraph” (24) of the Nazi Party Platform published in the 1932 *Kirchliches Jahrbuch* (Huss number 089). An English translation can be found in Peter Matheson, ed., *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 1ff. (Huss number 091f.). See also the trenchant and implicit rejection of racism in “The Lutheran Confessions and the *Volk*” (1933), in *Lonely Way* 1:121–41. MH

not lead you to despair. For this external defeat is but the consistent result of that inner defeat that we've been suffering continually since the death of Hegel, insofar as we have given up the fathers' old belief in the sovereign power of the spirit." Then he continued: "You are still young. If you want to do something for the renewal of our nation's strength, then return to the age-old faith of the fathers and work for the return of metaphysics in philosophy against all tired skepticism of a fruitless epistemology" (P. Wust, *Gestalten und Gedanken: Ein Rückblick auf mein Leben* [Munich: Kösel-Pustet, 1940], 218). We here adduce Peter Wust as a typical example for many young German Catholic academicians who were deeply disappointed by their church at the beginning of the twentieth century during the Modernist Controversy<sup>9</sup> and who now, in the years since 1917/1918, rediscovered the faith and the church of their fathers, partly under the impression of the total failure of the philosophy grown out of German Idealism,<sup>10</sup> but more so because of the then-blossoming liturgical movement in which equally the "turn of the axle from the subject to the object" took place. It was not granted to Wust to complete his life's work—in this, too, he is a representative of his generation, and not only in the Catholic Church. An incurable disease that took away his speech forced him to end his lectures at Münster in the spring of 1939. Faced with death, he wrote words of farewell to his students in Advent 1939 in which he spoke of "the great Occidental Advent-tide," the "visitation of Europe to rediscover once more the simple heritage of Bethlehem after the failure of the Enlightenment."

*Metanoëite*—that is the call that since the days of Napoleon resounds louder and louder among Europe's intellectuals. *Metanoëite*—the call was heard throughout the nineteenth century and grew stronger in the twentieth century all the way to the thunder of the cannons in the two great wars. One is filled with increasing amazement as one looks back on the past 150 years, when one sees how first only a few intellectual figures, but then a growing number of intellectuals in the Occident begin to get a sense of the fact that the time without Christ . . . has not brought that freedom many had hoped for. A certain unhappiness begins to appear on the faces of these intellectuals, and what this unhappiness indicates is contained in the phrase that Augustine once coined, based on his own experience: *Jussisti enim, Deus, ut sibi ipsi sit sua poena omnis inordinatus animus*. "For you have ordered things in such a way, O God, that every inordinate mind becomes its own punishment."

9 See the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* (September 8, 1907) of Pius X (r. 1903–14), written against "the false doctrine of the Modernists" (Denzinger 2071ff.). MH

10 Idealism was a reassertion of fundamental ideas of reality proffered by Platonism. The essence of the world is not what can be perceived with the senses, but in ideas and patterns according to which individual things are formed. It holds that there is no reality independent of consciousness. Modern idealism was developed by Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), Hegel, and Rudolph Hermann Lotze (1817–81) (s.v. *Christian Cyclopaedia*). MH

We placed this example from the Catholic Church up front purposely, because it is a complement to what we said about the rise of political Catholicism. The best Catholics among clergy and laity, in Germany and France and in other countries, who just at the time of the completion of the Catholic Church as a legal institution, put all emphasis on the renewal of the church as an institution of love. A similar process became noticeable in the Protestant churches. We, who had gone into the war as students of Harnack<sup>11</sup> and Troeltsch, soon noticed that in the drumfire of the Western front the question of whether Christianity was the absolute religion and how one could prove this totally lost its significance in comparison to the real questions of life and death, guilt and atonement, judgment and forgiveness. In those years and under the impression of the current events, there began in Switzerland the criticism of modern cultural Protestantism and its theology based on the subjective religious experience. Religious Socialism led to the criticism of individualistic piety; the criticism leveled against theology by Nietzsche's [1844–1900] friend Overbeck,<sup>12</sup> the Basel theology professor, began to shake the dominating liberal theology. Kierkegaard's [1813–55] criticism of conventional Christianity became a living force. The students began to read Dostoyevsky, and, in Safenwil [Switzerland], Karl Barth, consumed by the question not "how" but "what" one has to preach to modern man, wrote his [*Commentary on the*] *Letter to the Romans*, the first edition of which appeared in 1918. "The encounter between Karl Barth and German theology" has been described in an intelligent way by Georg Merz (1892–1959),<sup>13</sup> the friend, student, and prophet of Karl Barth (*Kerygma und Dogma* 1 [1956]). If I am not mistaken, there is between the lines a certain disappointment concerning the development of the great man in whom Protestantism seemed to carry out the great turn of the axle from subject to object, who called us back to the Word of God and to the teaching of the Reformation with a force that was not given to any of his contemporaries. Barth's intellectual odyssey is not a return home, as it appeared during the time of his closest proximity to Luther. This became clear when he outwardly

11 Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), the great icon of liberal Christianity, taught at the University of Berlin, where Sasse was one of his students. Sasse's high regard for Harnack did not prevent him from recognizing the end of Christianity in Harnack's rejection of virtually all Christian dogma and the reality of Gospel events. MH

12 Franz Camille Overbeck (1837–1905) was a professor at Basel who criticized Christianity and its tension with culture as he saw it (s.v. *Christian Cyclopedia*). MH

13 Georg Merz (1892–1959) was educated at Leipzig and Erlangen. A pastor and educator, Merz contributed to the development of "dialectical theology" and served as editor of *Zwischen den Zeiten* (s.v. *Christian Cyclopedia*). Merz collaborated with Friedrich von Bodelschwingh (1877–1946), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45), and Sasse on the Bethel Confession. See Guy Christopher Carter, *Confession at Bethel, August 1933—Enduring Witness: The Formation, Revision and Significance of the First Full Theological Confession of the Evangelical Church Struggle in Nazi Germany* (PhD dissertation, Marquette University, 1987; published Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 81ff. MH

returned from Bonn to his hometown of Basel and there lived at peace with all the enthusiasts he had fought in Germany. It was certainly no accident that he right then developed his doctrine of Baptism that brought him close to enthusiasm and showed more than anything why he could not take the last step from the subject to the object. "A philosophically determined idea of transcendence . . . prohibits Karl Barth from radically considering God's real entering into, and His presence in, creation and history," as Luther accomplished it in his understanding of the Word, of Baptism, and of the Lord's Supper (Ruben Josefsen, "Wort und Zeichen: Luther und Barth über die Taufe," *Kerygma und Dogma* 1 [1956]: 226).

And now we turn to Lutheranism and ask how the great turn of 1917 affected it. It was the year of the Reformation jubilee. A great celebration was prohibited by the times. Yet in August, the General Evangelical Lutheran Conference (AELK) organized a conference in Eisenach that was, against all expectations, well attended and that made a deep impression also on those who had long since grown tired of the Lutheran Church, men such as Martin Rade,<sup>14</sup> who characterized the spirit of this conference in *Christliche Welt*: "In the final analysis, one did not want to have or keep Luther, but Luther's Christ. One did not want to be a sect, but the church, the people of God, Christendom. One did not want to tolerate any human opinion but only God and His Word" (as quoted in *Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* [AELKZ] 50 [1917]: 1011). What is touching about these reports even today is the ecumenicity that in love thought also of the brethren in the faith in enemy nations; the spirit of repentance that especially resounded in the sermon by Ludwig Ihmels<sup>15</sup> that addressed the conscience with its "questions for confession" directed at the pastors, especially the question whether they really still preach the Gospel of the Reformation; finally, the absence of any nationalism, despite all timeliness and all rejection of the oft-quoted "Lutheran quietism." The men who led Lutheranism at the time gave to the emperor what is the emperor's, but only after giving to God what is God's. They were conservative men, but the poison of nationalism and idolizing of the state that already affected other circles back then had not yet reached the confessional Lutherans. They knew which kingdom was meant in "the kingdom ours remaineth,"<sup>16</sup> and they protested against the abuse of it by others. Nonetheless, there was a certain melancholy over the entire conference. For the great dying of the leaders of the German Lutheran church had begun with the passing of

14 Paul Martin Rade (pseudonym Paul Martin, 1857–1940) was a professor at Marburg and cofounder of *Die Christliche Welt* (s.v. *Christian Cyclopedia*). MH

15 Ludwig Heinrich Ihmels (1858–1933) was professor of systematic theology at Erlangen and Leipzig and bishop of Saxony. He chaired the first Lutheran World Convention at Eisenach in 1923 (s.v. *Christian Cyclopedia*). MH

16 See "A Might Fortress Is Our God," *LSB* 656:4. MH

the greatest among them, Hermann von Bezzel,<sup>17</sup> who had been called home on June 8 [1917] at the age of 56. Yet on the battlefields bled to death the generation of those who were supposed to be their successors. Entire families died out. The “lost generation” of the surviving returnees, however, was too small in number to assert itself. One cannot understand German church history in the twentieth century without considering what the losses of two world wars meant also for the church. One only needs to ask how the history of the Bavarian church and of German Lutheranism would have gone if Bezzel had reached the age of his successor [Friedrich Veit (1861–1948)] who, to the day, was as old as he. He would have tolerated neither the transformation of the German Evangelical Church Federation into the “united” German Evangelical Church (DEK) of 1933 nor the Barmen “confessional union” of 1934 in which Karl Barth undertook to improve upon Hitler’s creation.

The great turn from the subject to the object, the return to the objective content of the church’s proclamation, took place also in Lutheranism. No one at the time could escape the question “What do we preach?” I remember October 31, 1917, well. We had lined up for the Divine Service in the field on that cold, rainy, damp morning in northern France. The division chaplain, in civilian life a member of the Prussian consistory, delivered the Reformation Day sermon, a Law-filled sermon on the necessity of persevering and on the three guarantors of victory: the Kaiser [Wilhelm], [Paul von] Hindenburg,<sup>18</sup> and [Erich] Ludendorff [1865–1937]. “The kingdom ours remaineth.” The comments which I got to hear as a representative of the church—I was candidate of the preaching office—rose to the level of curses this time. Fed by this spiritual food, we were shipped out on the afternoon; and on the next day we entered the Battle of Passchendaele from which we returned five days later—six men out of a company of more than one hundred.<sup>19</sup> At about the same time on October 31, Karl Holl delivered

17 See Theodor Schober, *Hermann Bezzel: Ein lutherischer Diakon und Bischof* (Giessen: Brunnen-Verlag, 1961). Bezzel (1861–1917) was Löhe’s second successor in Neuen-dettelsau. The account of his blessed death of a heart and lung ailment, surrounded by deaconesses in prayer, is recorded by Schober on pp. 50ff. MH

18 Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934) was field marshal during World War I and president of the German Republic (1925–34). MH

19 Sasse gives further information on that day in “The Impact of Bultmannism on American Lutheranism,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (June 1965). Much later Sasse wrote to Heino Kadai (1931–99) that he was met coming back from the battle by a man who told him: “Lt. Sasse! Yesterday we buried you with full military honors!” (correspondence in the Harrison Collection). “On the 31st of October [1917], the same day when Holl had given his famous address to the university and church dignitaries in Berlin, we had our service on the front. The preacher, a member of the consistory in Magdeburg, was chaplain of our division. I shall never forget that wet, autumn day in Belgium, when we were assembled before we went into the great battle of Passchendaele, that this man preached on Luther as a great German leader. And then he came to his main topic: ‘We must win the war; and there are three great men who guarantee the victory; these are the Kaiser, Hindenburg and Ludendorff.’”

his lecture “What did Luther mean by religion?” in the auditorium of Berlin University, which the church leaders present found somewhat boring. Yet this lecture, despite all its limitations, later had a tremendous impact. What was not understood before the world war—namely, that Luther’s doctrine of justification also has something to say to modern man, as Holl held (see the 1907 lecture in *Gesammelte Aufsätze* 3:557ff.)—this was understood by a generation that had experienced God’s judgment and had learned to understand Luther’s adage that man is nothing; that he, by realizing this, learns to despair of himself and to hope in Christ. This is how the “Luther Renaissance” started, the great, new studying of Luther in Germany and in the Scandinavian countries, especially in Sweden. There initially the study of Luther was limited by regarding him as the greatest figure of the history of religions. In Germany, Luther research was often a purely academic pursuit, without any consideration of the fact that Luther as a man of the church could be understood only by those who deliberately live in the church and know what the church is. This might explain why the new Luther research did not yield the same strong impulses the theology of Barth did, though both, of course, influenced each other, as they then rightly also belong together. The fact that Lutheranism was drawn more and more into the stream of secular nationalism has nothing to do with the essence of Lutheranism, as Karl Barth and his disciples and the Reformed world outside of Germany thought—Fascism and National Socialism emerged on Catholic soil and found their followers among people of all religions; it has to do with the inner decay of German Lutheranism that is obvious to everyone who compares the 1917/1918 and 1932/1933 issues of the *AELKZ*. It is this inner, spiritual weakness of the German Lutheran church in that period of time which made it impossible for it to rebuild itself as a confessing Lutheran church. The return to the confession of the fathers, and that means to the church of the Lutheran Reformation, took place only in small circles. Instead of a Lutheran confessional church, Germany got that conglomerate of compromises: the DEK of 1933, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKiD) of 1948, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD), and the new “Church of the Union.” If even the theologians do not know what these church-political constructs are, how are the laypeople supposed to know this? And how are the other churches of Christendom, including the Lutheran churches of the world, supposed to know this?

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(We used to call this his trinity, and I as a candidate of theology had always to listen to the comments of the people who had to listen to such sermons; this was the Prussian church of that time.) After the service, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated; some people went to receive Holy Communion, 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. When we came back, we heard of the Russian Revolution” (“Lecture to a Free Conference, Bethany Lutheran Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota, March 8, 1965,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 5, no. 4 [June 1965]: 4; Huss number 418). MH



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One has to understand the current situation of world Lutheranism against the background of these historical processes. Can a territorial church still be a confessional church? The question was once raised by Wilhelm Zoellner<sup>20</sup> during the First World War, and it remained the theme of his life until, after the death of Ludwig Ihmels (1933), the last great Lutheran of 1917, he was called home during the church struggle [1937]. It is the very question that drives the Scandinavian Lutherans from one crisis to the next. It is, *mutatis mutandis* [literally: “after changing what must be changed,” i.e., “with alterations to fit the circumstances”], the question of all confessions in Europe. With many of the best Anglicans, [Archbishop of Canterbury] William Temple, who viewed Zoellner as one of the great churchmen in Europe, after the rejection of the *Book of Common Prayer* by Parliament in 1928, fought through the difficult battle that all national and territorial churches in Europe had to fight, namely, whether one should prefer the economic advantages and the missionary opportunities of the national church [*Volkskirche*] over the autonomy of the free church, its liberty in doctrine, worship, and polity. In all cases, the decision was made again and again in favor of the “national church” in Europe. Only a small minority chose the path into the free church for the sake of the confession that in actuality is in force only *de jure* in the mass churches of our times, which means that everybody can regard it as he so chooses. Letter 43 addressed in great detail the dissolution of the confession in all churches of Protestantism;<sup>21</sup> there we saw how this process also takes place in the great churches outside of Europe which, in respect to polity, are not state or national churches but free churches. We also saw how this process laid hold of Lutheranism. Back then, at the end of the First World War, the confessional principle still stood firm in the Lutheran churches in America, even if there were differences of opinion in individual teachings that were in part quite deep. In 1918, the only church body with unionistic tendencies, the General Synod, had merged with the General Council, which had once left the General Synod for the sake of the confession, and the relatively conservative Lutheran Synod of the South to form the United

20 Wilhelm Zoellner (1860–1937) was educated at Leipzig, Halle, and Bonn. He served as pastor at Friedrichsdorf near Bielefeld and at Barmen-Wupperfeld before becoming director of the deaconess institute at Kaiserswerth (1897) and general superintendent of Westphalia (1905). Sasse knew Zoellner from the Continuation Committee of the Faith and Order Committee. See Ronald Feuerhahn, “Hermann Sasse as an Ecumenical Churchman” [PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1991], 38. Zoellner had been at Lausanne in 1927; see Sasse, *Die Weltkonferenz für Glauben und Kirchenverfassung Deutscher Amtlicher Bericht über Die Weltkirchenkonferenz zu Lausanne* (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1929), 57n, 119a. See also Lowell Green, *Lutherans Against Hitler: The Untold Story* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007). MH

21 “The Confessional Problem in Today’s World Lutheranism,” in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors* 2:475–501. MH

Lutheran Church. Under the wise leadership of its pious president Knubel<sup>22</sup> and in the spirit of the then conservative seminary in Philadelphia (Mount Airy), it steered the course of the General Council and maintained its old connections to the AELK. In the same spirit and in the same year, the National Lutheran Council was established as well, to which belonged the churches outside the Synodical Conference. The American Lutherans were confronted by three tasks: unification of the Lutheran churches; aid work for the European churches; preservation of the Lutheran Confessions. The same tasks remained to be done to a much larger extent after the Second World War. The amazing aid work of the National Lutheran Council after 1918 under the leadership of the unforgettable John A. Morehead [1867–1936] was the great example and the preschool for the much more comprehensive aid work of our American brethren after 1945. It brought the churches in Europe and America closer to each other and thus enabled the establishment of the Lutheran World Convention (LWC) in 1923. In the form of a free conference, the measure of unity was to be reached that could be reached at the time. One needs to read the reports on the assemblies at Eisenach (1923), Copenhagen (1929), and Paris (1935), as well as the preparatory documents for the congress scheduled for 1940 in Philadelphia, to get an idea of the inner development of Lutheranism. Eisenach was still dominated by the “old” Lutheranism represented by men such as Ihmels, Morehead, and Knubel. At Copenhagen, too, the Confessions were still taken quite seriously, even though an American among the main speakers already gave so much room to the social gospel that he was vigorously criticized. And it was already necessary to interpret the doctrinal platform of the LWC, which was then taken over by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), with strong words. Its adoption meant the “unconditional and unchanged” adherence to the Scripture and the confession of the Lutheran fathers. One did not want any “watering down,” no “modification” of the contents of the confessions. As late as 1952, this understanding of the doctrinal platform was confirmed by Dr. Lundquist for the LWF in a reply to an inquiry of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (UELCA), doubtlessly in good faith, but without any understanding for the inner changes that had meanwhile taken place in Lutheranism. In Paris in 1935 the Lutheran witness was already being drowned out by the German social gospel of the National Socialist People’s Welfare (NSV), proclaimed by the then rector of the Neuendettelsau deaconess institute.<sup>23</sup> One has to read the pages of the report (*Lutherischer Weltkonvent zu Paris vom 13. bis 20. Oktober 1935*, ed. on behalf of the Executive Committee [Berlin: *Generalsekretariat d. Luth. Weltkonvents*, 1939, 67ff.]) to understand why German Lutheranism lost the lead in the church

22 Frederick Hermann Knubel (1870–1945) studied at Gettysburg Seminary and Leipzig. He served as the first president of the ULC (1918–44). Sasse met Knubel while studying at Hartford Seminary in 1926 (s.v. *Christian Cyclopedia*). MH

23 Le., Hans Lauerer (1884–1953). See *RGG*<sup>3</sup> 4:1409. MH



struggle and the power over the spirits. The revolutionaries of 1933 had already begun to kill each other. Hundreds of pastors had been deposed, the persecution of the Jews had started, also the “non-Aryan” Christians, the first martyrs of the Christian faith in those years, had fallen. But world Lutheranism, gathered in the capital of France, was informed about what was going on among the German people with these words: “Our people are in the process of building up in all areas. God Himself saved us by the Führer, whom He gave to our people, to keep them from perishing in Bolshevism” (Ibid., 67). World Lutheranism, put to sleep by the *AEKZ* and the Luther Academy, accepted this. Only one man saw more clearly, and he saw the core of the development: “I would have considered it to be more appropriate if at the LWC there had been more about the church and less about Lutheranism, which is a term of intellectual history” (Ibid., 135). This was the unforgotten Karl [Károly] Pröhle,<sup>24</sup> professor at Sopron. This confessional and farsighted man moved the Hungarian Conference of Lutheran Pastors to adopt a unanimous, worthy declaration of protest against the violation of the church in Germany (*Gotthard-Briefe*, nos. 146–58, vol. 12 [Elberfeld, 1935], 300ff.); as far as we know, this is the only manifestation of this sort from the Lutheran side. The LWC could not speak, especially since Bishop Marahrens<sup>25</sup> could not for the time being allow the presidency to fall to a non-German. Thus the speaking was left to the Reformed churches of the world and to the Ecumenical World Council for Practical Christianity, the forerunner of the World Council of Churches (WCC) of Amsterdam. This certainly did not always happen without any ulterior political motives. Yet it still happened, also for Christian reasons, which the DEK’s foreign affairs department was unable to disprove, despite all its efforts.

We remember these things not in order to hurt someone, but in order to understand the tragic development of the Lutheran church. The church politicians can forget; they can even prevent the church historians of the future from learning the facts—every historian knows which role the *damnatio memoriae*, the conscious elimination of the remembrance of events and persons, plays in history. Yet history as such does not forget anything. This means every historical event has its consequences, even if the event has been forgotten. Today’s generation has to bear the consequences of what happened, and of what did not happen, in Lutheranism between the two world wars. And the gravest consequence is that the Lutheran confession, which in 1917/1918 was still an intellectual force, has lost its credibility for many and has itself become doubtful for many Lutherans. The failure of German Lutheranism at the time when a confession was called for was at the same time the failure of all of world Lutheranism. Not that the churches of a different confession did any better. The worst example

<sup>24</sup> See *RGG*<sup>3</sup> 5:595. MH

<sup>25</sup> For the account of August Marahrens’s (1875–1950) courageous actions during the *Kirchenkampf*, see Green, *Lutherans Against Hitler*, 300–308. MH

for a failure of the church in the problems raised for the church by the totalitarianism of the modern state is Rome, which had to pay for its failure with the loss of the strongest churches in Europe and countless martyrs. The Reformed world in reality also has not given an answer to the burning questions of the time, but vacillates between [John] Foster Dulles [1888–1959] and [Joseph] Hromadka [of Czechoslovakia, 1889–1969]. To be sure, it is not the task of the church to make political decisions, as the enthusiasm of all times wants to do it. This insight is finally beginning to prevail in today's Ecumenical Movement after all the disappointments since the First World War. Yet there is one thing the church must do at all times: proclaim Law and Gospel not in a vacuum, but in the concrete situation of the people to whom it speaks. And part of this task is to know what it believes; what God's Word teaches; what the unchangeable, timeless commission of the church is. Only the church that does not desperately seek to be modern but proclaims the eternal Gospel that is meant for every generation in history will reach the hearts of its generation. The *ancient* confession tells us what this eternal Gospel is. We receive it from the fathers, not as a mere tradition, but as the result of their study of Scripture which leads us into the Holy Scripture and which we have to examine by Scripture. For only in this way can it become our confession, which connects us to the true church of all times. Quite frequently we have commented in these letters, especially in no. 43,<sup>26</sup> on the process that is taking place in all of Protestantism and that now also has laid hold of Lutheranism, namely, the process of the dying of the confessions of the Reformation and the disintegration of the old confessional churches. It is basically this disintegration of the confession, as it has taken place in the Lutheran churches of the last few decades, which explains the failure of Lutheranism in the decisive hours of the church history of our times. Who does not have a confession also cannot confess. This also explains the failure of the "Confessing Church" in Germany. One could not build the church with the Barmen "Theological Declaration," of which its own authors did not know whether it was a confession or not.<sup>27</sup>

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#### 4

Now, what is to be said about the development of Lutheranism at the end of 1957 after the great review of world Lutheranism at Minneapolis? I have before me a book in English entitled *Messages of the Third Assembly* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1957). It contains the opening sermon by Bishop Ordass;<sup>28</sup> the presentation by

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26 "The Confessional Problem in Today's World Lutheranism," in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors* 2:475–501. MH

27 See "The Barmen Declaration: An Ecumenical Confession?" (1937), in *Lonely Way* 1:347–49. MH

28 Lajos Ordas (1901–78), bishop of Bohemia, studied in Budapest, Halle, and Lund. He served as bishop of the Budapest Diocese of the Lutheran Church (1945) and was imprisoned for two years in 1948 for promoting "divisions." After reinstatement in

Bishop Lilje introducing the topic “Christ frees and unites”;<sup>29</sup> the presentations by Kishi, [Hans-Werner] Gensichen [1915–99], [Bo] Giertz,<sup>30</sup> [Niels Christian] Carlson,<sup>31</sup> and Krummacher on the five subthemes; and finally the fifty-one theses with a preface by Bishop Lilje. The cover is adorned by a partial view of the Minnesota capitol whose dome bears close resemblance to that of St. Peter’s in Rome. This makes one wonder what spirit inspired the artist to draw such a picture: in the foreground a pulpit with the inscription “Christ frees and unites”; in the pulpit a preaching Lutheran bishop; and in the background *this* dome! We draw on some other documents that will hopefully be published in full and ask: What is the result of Minneapolis, as far as it becomes apparent in these documents, for the question that moves us here, the question of the Lutheran confession? It goes without saying that there are also other results and that many fruits from Minneapolis will ripen only in the future, among them many a good fruit. At the conclusion of this letter we will have some things to say about this.

The great church-historical event is this: the course of the LWF will be continued. According to the law, according to which it started out at Lund [1947], it will continue to progress into the confessionless ecumenism. All attempts to halt this development have failed. In these letters, we have repeatedly pointed out the dangers, not because we like to be critical, but because our concern was the preservation of the church of the Augsburg Confession. And we were not the only ones. Since the Hanover assembly, the churches that met at Uelzen back then have spoken in a clear and fraternal way. The resolutions of their synodical assemblies by which they refused to join the LWF were worthy confessions, not of an arrogant confessionalism, but of a Lutheranism faithful to the Confessions that was conscious of its responsibility for the future. These were decisions of conscience that, as such, deserve to be respected also by those who did not consider them to be right. Or have we Lutherans already come to the point where we leave respecting the conscience, also the perhaps erring conscience, to Rome? That the two Australian churches played a special role in these discussions has to do with their special situation. God willing, one of the next letters will be

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1956, Ordass was again removed in 1958. Strongly influenced by Nathan Söderblom (1866–1931), Ordass was a member of the WCC Central Committee (1948–54) and vice president of the LWF (1947–52, 1957). Ordass translated Bo Giertz into Bohemian. See *RGG*<sup>3</sup> 5:1169. MH

29 See “The Ecumenical Challenge of the Second Vatican Council” (1965), in *Lonely Way* 2:327–39. MH

30 Bo Giertz (1905–98) was bishop of Gothenburg, Sweden. A true confessional and confessing Lutheran, and a prolific writer, his most famous work is the novel *The Hammer of God*. In 1995, Giertz explained that this novel was based upon his experiences as a young pastor in Sweden and also noted that he had not been a personal acquaintance of Sasse (personal correspondence with the editor). MH

31 Christian Niels Carlsen (1884–1950) was president of the UELC (1925–50) and active in the National Lutheran Council, the American Lutheran Conference, and the LWC. He fostered negotiations that led to the ALC in 1960 (s.v. *Christian Cyclopedia*). MH

dedicated to our churches [the UELCA and the ELCA] that are hardly known by anybody in Europe and America, least of all by the ecumenical world travelers, because their situation, their plight, and their mission can be understood only with the background of the Australian church history which has yet to be written (see my article in the 3rd ed. of *RGG*).<sup>32</sup> Already in the merger talks since 1948, the membership of the UELCA in the LWF—it had been a member of the LWC and let itself be transferred into the new organization in 1947 without being present at Lund and without a thorough examination of the situation—was listed as one of the differences that were to be discussed. One can certainly say that hardly anywhere have the foundational questions raised by the LWF been discussed as thoroughly as in Australia; this was the case because both churches—one is almost tempted to say both parts of the one Lutheran Church of Australia that broke apart in 1846—were born out of the rejection of the Prussian Union and are thus anti-unionistic. Even in the UELCA the confessional consciousness was so strong that forty years ago it rejected the tempting offer to join the German Evangelical Church Federation, as it was accepted by its relative, the Lutheran Synod in Brazil. So it was not only the practical question of the unification that was necessary for internal and external reasons but also the confessional heritage that moved the UELCA to confront the question as to whether it could in good conscience be a member of the LWF. The proposal made at Hanover by then [UELCA] general president Dr. Stolz—the introduction of a second form of membership analogous to the “consulting membership” held by the ULCA in the American Federal Council of Churches, the predecessor of the current National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCCCUSA), or as the Moravians in Germany were connected to the Church Federation—was not accepted by the executive committee. It is unnecessary here to discuss the lengthy negotiations between the UELCA and the LWF or the negotiations between our two churches. Our intersynodical committees both agreed that the LWF had violated its own constitution by receiving into membership churches that do not share its doctrinal platform, such as the Batak Church that does not accept the *Augsburg Confession* and that, to be sure, uses Luther’s *Small Catechism* as textbook, but only in a modified edition;<sup>33</sup> or churches that *de facto* are united churches because they grant the Reformed full rights of membership; or [churches] that deliberately are members of the Church of the Union, such as the Church of Pomerania that has full altar and pulpit fellowship in particular with the Church of the Rhineland. On both sides here in Australia we were convinced that this was not in order and made proposals for a change in the constitution meant to help the LWF to rectify the open contradiction between theory and practice

32 “Australien,” II “Die christlichen Kirchen in Australien” (*RGG*<sup>3</sup> 1:775–77). MH

33 Cf. Sasse’s comments on the Batak situation in Letter 28, “Altar Fellowship, Church Fellowship, and Ecclesiastical Federation,” in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors* 2:170–75; and Letter 35, “The Lutheran Church and World Mission,” in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors* 2:321–30. MH

and to emerge from the state of untruthfulness that finally must destroy every churchly work.<sup>34</sup> It is impossible that a federation of churches, between which there exists no *communio in sacris* yet, carries out spiritual functions that are explicitly listed as “purposes” in its constitution, for example, witnessing to the Gospel before the world. Only a church can do that. It can also not be part of the “purposes” of a federation “to foster the involvement of Lutherans in the Ecumenical Movement,” so long as many Lutherans have the gravest objections of conscience regarding the Ecumenical Movement, as it has come to be. In 1956, our proposals were handed to the executive committee by Dr. [Max] Löhe,<sup>35</sup> the successor of Dr. Stolz, at its meeting in Madras. The document stated that the UELCA desired to remain a member church in the LWF, but it desired to do so “*in good conscience*,” and it emphasized the seriousness in which these proposals are made. A special commission was appointed that studied the question for a year. In Minneapolis, its written report was presented to the delegates one day prior to the scheduled decision. It was not read in public. It rejected the proposals with the exception of a clause, patterned after the constitution of the WCC, concerning the reception of new member churches between general assemblies. While so far the executive committee made this decision, now a poll among member churches is necessary. The reception is only possible “unless more than one third of member churches object to it within one year.” If, therefore, the executive committee were to resolve to receive the churches of Saxony-Anhalt,<sup>36</sup> Berlin-Brandenburg, or another provincial church of the Old Prussian Union, there would be, according to the statistics available to me, twenty-one churches needed to block their membership. Where are they to come from? If Missouri joined the LWF, it also would have only one vote in such a poll.<sup>37</sup> This was the only concession that was made. Beyond this, everything else was rejected by adopting the report of the subcommittee, which only a few delegates had read. Already earlier, the executive committee had stated that the constitution had proved itself, and fundamental changes were out of the question. The commission of theologians, which had also studied the issue, stated that it was necessary to examine and clarify the nature, the purposes, and the methods of

34 “The arrival of Prof. Sasse in Australia had a profound effect on the intersynodical negotiations between the ELCA and the UELCA. These two churches and their predecessor bodies had, with the exception of one decade, been separated for over a hundred years. Sasse arrived in 1949. By the end of 1951 the Joint Intersynodical Committees were agreed on ‘Theses on Scripture and Inspiration,’ part of the larger ‘Theses of Agreement . . .’ I think it may safely be said that Dr. H. P. A. Hamann Sr. was the leading theologian on the ELCA side, and Prof. Sasse for the UELCA (an LWF-member, greatly embarrassed by Sasse’s decisive opposition to the LWF)” (Kurt Marquart to Leigh Jordahl, June 2, 1978; in the Harrison Collection). MH

35 Friedrich Max Immanuel Löhe (1900–1977) served as UELCA president and a descendant of Wilhelm Löhe. MH

36 A classic union church that includes the city of Wittenberg. MH

37 Sasse was thoroughly and consistently opposed to the LCMS joining the LWF. MH

the LWF. When the report of the commission was adopted and when thereby the Australian wishes were rejected, Dr. [Max] Löhe moved in the name of the UELCA that the executive committee in conjunction with the commission for theology should further study the constitution and report to the next general assembly. This motion was adopted, after Dr. Fry had stated that this meant no more than a further studying of the issue and by no means a limiting of the activity of the LWF and, following a motion by Dr. Wentz [1883–1976], after striking the rationale that the current constitution made it difficult for some Lutheran churches to join and be a member. The same Dr. Fry who made any change of the constitution impossible took the liberty to change it himself when he, in his acceptance speech as president, vowed solemnly to devote himself with all his strength to the promotion of the tasks of the LWF. In enumerating these goals, instead of saying “to foster Lutheran participation in ecumenical movements” (as it is written in the constitution), he said: “to foster participation in the World Council of Churches.” He thus will do everything to bring the last non-WCC Lutheran churches into the same. In the future, membership in the LWF will thus practically mean membership in the WCC.

It remains to be seen how much of such episodes, which take place in the span of a few moments, will be reflected in the report on the assembly. We described the fate of the Australian proposals here because they exemplify the great church-historical decision of Minneapolis. The “little churches” in the LWF have no power, even when they have well-founded concerns. By and large, this was the feeling also of other churches. The big decisions are made in the executive committee; the assembly can basically only rubber-stamp it, because, on a purely technical basis, there is no possibility to discuss them there. The “little churches” feel like some dioceses of late antiquity that became victims of the power politics of the big patriarchies. Perhaps in these decisions deeper laws of church history work themselves out, as church history, like all history, is, as Goethe put it, “a mixture of error and violence.” May God in His grace prevent our UELCA from going down the path of the confessionless ecumenism! But if it does, then this will certainly also be the fault of our men who blindly trusted the assurances of the “big shots” and entered into financial commitments to the LWF that cannot be undone anymore. Yet the main fault rests with the big churches of Germany, Scandinavia, and America who, using the tools of church politics, now want to force their theology of the “as if,” their deeply untruthful ways of dealing with the Confessions, their apostasy from the faith of the fathers also upon those who have so far believed that a vow to remain in the doctrine of the Lutheran confession, made in the presence of God, was to be honored. What a naïveté of us “little ones” to believe that one can confess the real presence, as taught in the Augsburg Confession and the catechism, at one’s ordination or, as is customary in many churches, at the opening of synodical assemblies if one does not believe it! Yet in the age of mass humanity also in the church (“Where two or three million are gathered . . .”), minorities do not have a say anymore; and



as far as the conscience is concerned, in the churches one does not even need the kind of tranquilizers the children of the world use to assuage their pangs of conscience. World conferences and executive committees cannot sin because they are merely “agencies” for others, or believed to be such. This is why they also do not hear any “*Metanoieite*” [“Repent”]!

## 5

If the churchly outcome of Minneapolis can be defined as the confirmation of the path of the LWF into the confessionless ecumenism and the suspension of the binding force of the Lutheran Confessions, that now mean little more than the *Thirty-Nine Articles* in the Anglican churches, what, then, is its theological outcome? In his major introductory speech on the main theme “Christ frees and unites,” Bishop Lilje said enthusiastically that one was about to make a confession of the faith “in the presence of God and before the eyes of the whole world” and pointed to the “historical parallel” of the “great assemblies of the early church, the ecumenical councils.” Now, these synods, when not considering the guests at Nicaea [AD 325], were not all that large. In Nicaea, there were 318 fathers assembled; there were 150 of them gathered in Constantinople, [where] our “Nicene Creed” was adopted. Furthermore, one needs to say that a dogmatic confession is never made before the world, but before God and the entire church (*in conspectu Dei omnipotentis et coram tota ecclesia* [“in the sight of God Almighty and before the whole church,” FC SD XII 40]) of all times (see the conclusion of the *Solid Declaration*), because the creed originally was part of the arcane discipline. Before the world one does not sing the creed; rather, one testifies to the truth contained therein and dies for it.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, this speech gives a full expression of Hanns Lilje as we know him since the days of the church struggle in Germany,<sup>39</sup> the man who wants to do justice to everyone, to the union as well as to Lutheranism, to the most modern theology as well as to the ancient confession. [Rudolf] Bultmann [1884–1976] is invoked as witness for the historical reliability of the New Testament: “Even a critical-scholarly exegete

38 “You are completely correct: for the churchly dogmatician the dogma of the church must be possessed with unquestioned validity, to use the language of Elert. I do not see how the theologian can advocate a true churchly dogmatics if the *Credo* is not the authority which it is for the church, an authority which is completely subordinate to the Holy Scriptures . . . Also the dogmatician stands as a believer in Christ in the great consensus of the ‘We believe, teach and confess’ of the church. He cannot on Sunday, when he stands before the congregation as a member of the church and its *ministerium ecclesiasticum*, say ‘we confess . . .’ and on Monday morning enter the lecture hall with the words: Gentlemen, now I speak freed from the ‘we’ in which we stood yesterday. What holds on Sunday must, if it was seriously meant, also hold on Monday. Here appears to me to be the weak point of the dogmatics of modern Lutheranism since the Erlangen School” (Sasse to Leiv Aalen, August 26, 1943; in the Harrison Collection). MH

39 Green, *Lutherans Against Hitler*, 73, 243, 258. MH