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Foreword

In this issue of the Quarterly we are pleased to share with our readers the 1995 Reformation Lectures, delivered on October 26-27 at the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center located on the campus of Bethany Lutheran College. These annual lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

The lectures this year commemorated the centennial of the birth of Dr. Herman Sasse. On March 8, 1965, Dr. Sasse visited Mankato and delivered some lectures at Bethany on "The Impact of Bultmanism on American Lutheranism." This was really the beginning of our annual lecture series and this year marked the 30th anniversary of these Reformation Lectures.

The lecturer was Dr. Ronald Feuerhahn, Associate Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He presented a scholarly, interesting, and informative portrayal of Sasse as he labored for Confessional Lutheranism under very trying times. Lecture I focuses on Barth and Barmen as nemeses for confessional Lutheranism. Lecture II is a sad description of the formation of EKID and its devastating effect on Lutheranism in Germany, and Lecture III describes VELKD and the role of the LFW and Lutheran Ecumenism. Dr. Sasse was a valiant defender of confessional Lutheranism during that time in Germany and he paid the price for his confession, as the lecture points out.

The reactors to the lectures were President Emeritus Armin Schuetze of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Pastor David Webber, an ELS pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Brewster, Massachusetts. Their reactions are also included in this issue.

Also included is a sermon by the sainted Reverend Professor Glenn Reichwald. This was an Advent sermon that he preached on December 20, 1995, at a WELS church in Le Sueur, Minnesota, where he was serving as a vacancy pastor. His theme was: "Christ: The One Who is to Come." He pointed out that Christ could come at any time and that we should look for this coming with eager expectation. Upon returning to his home following the service he suffered a heart attack in his home and passed away. Prof. Reichwald was known to many of our readers having served as professor at Bethany College for 35 years. Blessed be his memory.

BETHANY REFORMATION LECTURES:

Hermann Sasse and the Path of Confessional Lutheranism in the Mid-20th Century

**Mankato, MN
26-27 October 1995**

by Dr. Ronald R. Feuerhahn, lecturer

Introduction & Biographical Sketch

Shortly after the death of Dr. Sasse in 1976, Bjarne Teigen remembered him.

Since possibly the name of Dr. Sasse may not be well known to some of the readers of our *Lutheran Sentinel* and since, on the other hand, his name meant a great deal to many others, it is proper that something be said about this servant of God, especially since he had a warm place in his heart for our Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

It was something to hear him tell in his own quiet way how just as the war was to end nearly his whole company was wiped out, but he was spared.

In March 1962, six or seven pastors from our Evangelical Lutheran Synod, together with two or three laymen on our Doctrine Committee, met with Dr. Sasse in an all-day meeting in Minneapolis.¹

Three years later, Bethany's Convocation Committee invited him to deliver a couple of lectures to the public on pressing problems facing Lutheranism.²

¹ (3 Mar 1962) - "To be spent with representatives of the ELS, who expect to come to Minneapolis-St. Paul." Ref: Schedule for Sasse's Visit (27 Feb 1962), (Archives, Wartburg, Dubuque)

"A group from Mankato, the Little Synod, wants him for Saturday morning and through the noon hour and probably until supper time." The "group" probably included: B.W. Teigen, his brother, T.N. Teigen, Prof. Otto and Pastor Aaberg. Ref: note in Gordon Gerhardy's Schiotez file (23 Feb 1962); also ref: (21 Feb 1962) Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Collection [Hereafter CTS], Teigen File). See also B. Teigen's notes on meeting with Sasse (3 Mar 1962) (CTS Teigen).

² B. W. Teigen, "In Memoriam - Dr. Hermann Sasse," *Lutheran Sentinel*, 59.20 (28 Oct 76) 308-10

Those lectures took place here in on March 8, 1965. They were the first of the series known as the Bethany Reformation Lectures. Today we celebrate the 30th anniversary of those first lectures. How appropriate, therefore, is the topic selected for these anniversary lectures.

It was in those lectures that Sasse revealed more about his personal life than in almost any other forum.³ Hear again how he introduced his topic and, to a great extent, himself.

I remember the third of August, 1914. The University of Berlin was celebrating its commemoration day. The third was the day that King William III⁴ had established this university as the great university in which the ideals of Germany should be realized. At the time of Napoleon, when Germany was at the lowest ebb of its political existence, the power of the mind, the great power of German idealism, was to renew the German nation.⁵ This was the idea that the great University of Berlin was founded on. It was on this third of August that the commemoration was held in the great assembly hall. Outside, on the avenue, the troops marched; war had broken out. And on the platform, one could see the great masterminds of German science. There was, for instance, my great teacher, Wilhelm Mollendorf, the teacher in classics. He couldn't stop the tears; he knew what was going on. Beside him was Ehlwart Norden. Norden, was my teacher in Latin, and every New Testament man knows him as the investigator of the liturgical language of the ancient world. Already on the day when the assassination of the crown Prince of Austria became known in the end of June, 1914, he said to us on that Monday morning. "I am not able to concentrate myself on a lecture in Latin." (he used to give his lectures in Latin because he wanted to have the students who really took their subject seriously) And then, he started into his lecture in German. He said, "This will be the great catastrophe of Europe." Now this catastrophe came. We saw the faces of Harnack, of Deissmann, of Karl Holl, the colleague of Harnack; we saw the great scientists and medical men—Bonhoeffer and others; we saw on the lecture platform Max Planck, the great physicist and the creator of the theory of the quantum. He gave his academic

³ The fullest statement is in "Reminiscences of an Elderly Student" *Tangara* [Adelaide] 9 (1976) 4-5

⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm III, 1770-1840, King of Prussia 1797-1840.

⁵ Elsewhere Sasse observed that the presuppositions of Harnack's and Troeltsch's historical theology were deeply rooted in German idealistic philosophy. "European Theology in the Twentieth Century," in *Contemporary Evangelical Thought: Christian Faith and Modern Theology*, ed. Carl F.H. Henry, New York: Channel Press, 1964, 18

address as an Archimedes, not regarding what was going on in the military and political world. He spoke on the great problem of the principle of causality in modern physics—"Must this principle be given up?" You will remember that this was the age of the great transition in science. In 1905, Newton's view of the world was definitely smashed by Einstein's theory of relativity. The question was, "Can the principle of causality be maintained?" Planck came to the conclusion, "We must maintain it for the time being, but there might come a time when physics has to give up this principle." The time came in 1927 when Heisenberg with his new theory, showed that there is no absolute causality and that the laws of nature are laws of statistics rather than laws of absolute validity. I mention this to show you that this is a century of tremendous changes...It was a time of terrific revolution.⁶

"War had broken out" and Sasse too would be among the troops to march. He entered the Prussian army in October 1916 and in just over a month he was engaged in battle.⁷ Even his war experience was recalled in the context of the intellectual revolution of the day.

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 Ludendorf." (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,

⁶ "The Impact of Bultmannism on American Lutheranism, with Special Reference to His Demythologization of the New Testament," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, 5.4 (June 1965), 3 [Editor's Note: This "was an informal lecture and Dr. Sasse has not had the opportunity to check this material which was taken off the taped record of his lecture."]

⁷ He completed his work at Berlin in the summer semester and passed his first theological examination in August (Archiv der Friedrich-Alexander Universität, Erlangen; hereafter: EUA). See also Tom Hardt Correspondence (6 Mar 1961 & 6 Aug 1961); [hereafter: Hardt].

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.⁸

Sasse later observed: "The gaps in Practical Theology were later filled at the 'Kriegsschule' (officers training school) and in the first years in the ministry."⁹

He was indeed educated in the citadel of liberalism: the great Adolf von Harnack was the most influential church historian of his day whose controversial views however nearly denied him his chair at Berlin.¹⁰ Even after his own "conversion," Sasse nevertheless admired his great teacher.¹¹ He often mentioned Karl Holl, whom some consider the father of the Luther Renaissance. Sasse often critiqued Holl's interpretation of Luther, especially on the sacraments: e.g. "Holl was also my teacher, but I never could agree with him when he regarded Calvin is [sic. as] the only real follower of Luther and when he, with almost all men of his school, rejected Luther's understanding of the sacraments. 'Wenn das am grünen Holz geschieht, was will am dünnen werden?'"¹² Adolf Deissmann of course was his "Doktorvater." Others included Reinhold Seeberg, the systematician, Julius Kaftan in the philosophy of religion, Martin Dibelius and Otto Eissfeldt.¹³ Ernst Troeltsch was still at Berlin but in the school of philosophy.

For Sasse, as for Karl Barth, the war ended this liberal era of his life. His friend and student *famulus*, Pfarrer Hans-Siegfried Huss, described this well:

The optimistic *Weltanschauung* of the liberal, enlightened middle class (out of which he came), and, closely corresponding to it, the "theology" of the Berlin faculty at that time (Harnack, Troeltsch, Deissmann, and

⁸ "The Impact of Bultmannism..." 4

⁹ "Reminiscences..." 4

¹⁰ Colin Brown in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, 452

¹¹ See his Review Essay: "Der Theologe des Zweiten Reiches. Gedanken über Lebensbeschreibung Adolf von Harnacks," *Besprechungsaufsatz zu: Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, Adolf von Harnack*. Berlin-Tempelhof: Hans-Bott, 1936 in *Zeitwende* 12.12 (Sep 1936) 346-354, reprint in *In Statu Confessionis*, II, 1976, 194-200 [hereafter: ISC].

¹² "If that happens to green wood, what will happen to dry?" From letter to Ralph Gehrke (4 Jan 1957) (Gehrke Collection; hereafter: Gehrke). See also letter to Herman Preus (22 Mar 1956) (American Lutheran Church Archives, Luther Seminary, St. Paul; [hereafter: STP]).

¹³ For list of faculties: *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die evangelischen Landeskirchen Deutschlands* 1913. hrsg. v. J. Schneider, 40. Jahrgang, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1913, 51; also 43. Jahrgang, 1916, 583 and 44. Jahrgang, 1917, 600.

others) fell to pieces for him. And step by step he found the way to Luther's *Theologia crucis* and at the same time access to the correct understanding of the Word of God and to the use of the Holy Sacraments as instituted as the means of grace which alone constitute the church.¹⁴

Once again we hear from Sasse himself as he gives this summary of his life in an early letter to his friend, Tom Hardt:

I was ordained in 1920 in Berlin, after I had served some years in the war. In 1921 I was in Sweden and saw something of the glory of the Lutheran Church. However, what Lutheranism is, I learned in America 1925/26. I was pastor in Oranienburg and Berlin, a Lutheran within the union. I was Lic. theol. of Berlin and was about to become Privatdozent for NT as assistant of Deissmann. When everything was ready, the Oberkirchenrat proposed [or professed] against a Lutheran in this position. Since no one else was available, a Baptist (Schreder [?]) was appointed. Erlangen called me to a chair for church history in 1933. Political difficulties arose. I had been the first to fight the program of the NSDAP. So I got only the salary of a country pastor though I fulfilled the duties of a full professor with Seminars. I fought for the Lutheran Church against the DEK [Deutsche Evangelische Kirche] of 1933 and the EKID after the war. After the re-opening of the university I got eventually all the rights and the income of an *ordinarius* Professor, a life-time position. When my best students were deposed or forced to deny their conviction, I had to go. Missouri was in 1948 under the influence of the liberal wing. So they did not take me. They have regretted that. I accepted the call to Australia to help to unite the two Lutheran bodies of the Missouri and the Löhe-tradition. The influence of the Luth. "Oekumene" smashed all our plans, frustrated the work of many years. Now our church is under the spell of Geneva. Penniless I had come to Australia into one of the poorest diaspora churches in the world. I have an income of a little over 100 dollar (about 60 Lt Aust.) and house, as long as I can work.¹⁵

Here we have that tone of tragedy which would be such a prominent part of Sasse's life, in his description of the church, for instance. It was a life of struggle and hardship. It was a lonely life. That loneliness was personal, but it was chiefly theological. Sasse saw the confessional Lutheranism dwindling, disappearing soon after he had found it. "What Lutheranism is, I learned in

¹⁴ "Foreword," *Hermann Sasse: A Bibliography* (ATLA Bibliography Series 37), ed. Ronald R. Feuerhahn, Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1995, xi (trans. by editor).

¹⁵ Letter 1 of 2 (18 Jun 1958) (Hardt)

America 1925/26.”¹⁶ It was on a study visit to the United States that he discovered this Lutheranism. Remember, he had been a churchman of the Prussian Union. He described this in a letter to Theodore Bachmann of the ULCA:

As a matter of fact, I have become a conscious Lutheran in your church. I came from the theology of Berlin as it was taught before World War I and from the Church of the Prussian Union in which I was a pastor. In Sweden I had for the first time seen a Lutheran Church. In America I understood that the Lutheran Church cannot exist unless it takes seriously the borderline drawn by our confession over against other Christian denominations.¹⁷

After the Second World War, he witnessed the decline, even the loss of Lutheranism in the German churches.¹⁸ He began that now famous series of letters to Lutheran pastors (*Briefe an lutherische Pastoren*) which served that community of Lutherans throughout the world who faced the demise of confessional Christianity.¹⁹ These, like almost all of Sasse’s writing, were addressed to the church rather than to the academic community, to pastors and churchmen, “lonely Lutherans.”

We can identify two events which, between them, formed as it were the the watershed of his life. These were the Barmen Declaration of 1934 and the formation of the Evangelisch Kirche in Deutschland (EKiD) in 1948. These events marked the triumph of Karl Barth’s ecclesiology; these events marked the end of Lutheranism in Germany and indeed, as we shall see later, beyond. These events marked the triumph of what had been attempted by Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia in 1817 and 1830. These events were the climax of a chain of events which led from the Prussian Union to the Leuenberg Concord in 1973.

¹⁶ Letter 1 of 2 (18 Jun 1958) (Hardt).

¹⁷ (2 May 61) (Concordia Historical Institute 200-BEH Suppl. II Box 2 File 13 [hereafter: CHI]). For a fuller description of this “conversion,” see my article, “Hermann Sasse and North American Lutheranism,” in *Logia* (Reformation 1995).

¹⁸ “Das Ende der lutherischen Landeskirchen in Deutschlands,” (28 Sep 48), *Vervielfältigung*, 5 S. First printed in the *Quartalschrift* (later *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* [hereafter *QJ*]) 45.4 (Oct 1948) 233-241; reprinted in *ISC*, I, 303-308.

¹⁹ The letters began in 1948 and would continue until No. 62 in 1969. Nos. 1 through 30 were mimeographed (*Vervielfältigung*); the remaining were printed. From No. 9 (1949) they were included either as a supplement (*Beilage*) to or part of the *Lutherische Blätter*. All were published by his friend, Pfarrer Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf.

We have heard his description of how he came to resign his position as professor (*Ordinarius*) at the University of Erlangen and to leave his church, the Bavarian Landeskirche. He joined the Evangelisch-lutherische (altlutherische) Kirche or Breslau Synod. Professor Sasse's own words briefly summarize his estimation of the transitional period of his life. Describing in 1948 the situation for a confessionally minded pastor in the Bavarian Church he explains his resignation and planned move to Australia.

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

He accepted the Call offered him by the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia, to teach at Immanuel Seminary in North Adelaide, South Australia. He was installed on October 12th, 1949.²¹ But the move also provided new challenges, chief of which was the union of the two Lutheran churches in Australia. He related to his friend, Herman Preus, that this was one of the chief reasons he had gone to Australia. As a UELCA member of the Intersynodical Committee, he was instrumental in preparing for the merger achieved in 1966 with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia; this formed the Lutheran Church of Australia.

²⁰ Letter to Herman Preus (27 Nov 48) (STP). The verses of Paul Gerhard are from his *Befehl du deine Wege*, in English in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, St. Louis, 1941, hymn 520, stanza 4, *Thy hand is never shortened, / All things must serve Thy might*.

²¹ H. F. W. Proeve, "Hermann Otto Erich Sasse," *Lutheran Theological Journal*, 10.2 (Aug. 76), 64-5

Part I

I. Barth and Barmen as Nemeses for Confessional Lutheranism

- A. The way to Barmen
- B. The role of Barmen
- C. The consequences of Barmen

Barmen is a city in Westphalia. Here, at the end of May 1934, a conference of churchmen was called. The conference, later designated as the first synod of the *Bekennende Kirche* (the so-called "Confessing Church"), would later be considered one of the most significant and consequential meetings of the century, not only for the German churches, but for Christianity in general. Hermann Sasse was to be there by the direction of his bishop.

Barmen was gathered to speak for the church in the face of threats from National Socialism. Sasse had already spoken clearly and publicly. During this period, he was prominent in movements which challenged the increasing encroachment of the National Socialists into the affairs of the church. While not a signer of the original manifesto of the "Young Reformers" of Berlin (*Jungreformatrische Bewegung*), he was involved in the movement at an early stage.¹ He was one of the chief drafters of the Bethel Confession of 1933² as well as a leading participant in Barmen.³ Although this venture was

¹ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Man of Vision, Man of Courage*, trans. by E. Mosbacher, et al. under the editorship of E. Robertson, New York: Harper & Row, 1970 (Fountain Edition), 1977, 214 & 229

² At least the first draft; see Sasse, "Impact of Bultmannism...", 10; Bethge, *ibid.*, 229, esp. 231-3; also Guy C. 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*, Dissertation (PhD), Marquette University, Milwaukee, 1987, 6, 61, 66, 71-3, 78, 84, 89, 92, 95, 103, 110-1, et passim.; and Christine-Ruth Möller, *Bekennnis und Bekennen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Bethel (1933) Ein lutherischer Versuch* (Studienbücher zur kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte, Bd. 7), München: Chr. Kaiser, 1989

³ Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Church's Confession Under Hitler*, Philadelphia: 1962 (reprint: Pittsburgh Reprint Series 4, Pittsburgh: 1976); by special request of his bishop, Hans Meiser, Sasse was included in the committee for drafting the declaration, *ibid.*, 54; and Hannelore Braun and Carsten Nicolaisen, eds., *Verantwortung für die Kirche, Stenographische Aufzeichnungen und Mitschriften von Landesbischof Hans Meiser 1933-1955* (Band 1: Sommer 1933 bis Sommer 1935), Göttingen: 1985, 278n3

for him confessionally burdensome⁴ he nevertheless continued for a time serving the Confessing Church.⁵

Perhaps Sasse's most significant contribution to the anti-Nazi cause was his bold critique of Article 24 of the Party Program of the *National-socialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP) in 1932, identified as one of the first by a German churchman and therefore prominent in the literature on the Church and the Third Reich.⁶

Barmen

It was at the request of the Bavarian Landesbischof, Meiser, that Professor Sasse became involved in preparations for the Barmen Synod and its "Declaration." That was at the third meeting, in Kassel on 7th May, of the so-called Nuremberg Committee, "the leading body of the Confessing Community which had been formed in April, [1934]."⁷ The decision was taken to appoint a committee to make the theological preparations for the proposed Synod. The members were Karl Barth, Hans Asmussen, Lutheran pastor from Altona and the Bavarian Lutheran, Thomas Breit. Later Sasse was added.

Evidently in order to safeguard the Lutheran character of the planned declaration, Meiser obtained an agreement that the Erlangen theologian Hermann Sasse should be added to the discussion of the theological committee of three.⁸

⁴ "The Impact of Bultmannism..." 10

⁵ E.g. he attended and contributed to the Berlin-Dahlem Synod of 1934, Wilhelm Niemöller, ed., *Die zweite Bekenntnissynode der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche zu Dahlem, Text—Dokumente—Berichte* (Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes 3), Göttingen: 1958, 33, cf. also 89, 95, 101f., 104, 106

⁶ E.g. *Saat auf Hoffnung*, Zeitschrift für die Mission der Kirche in Israel, 69 (1932), 105-7; Alfred Rosenberg, *Protestantische Rompilger*, Munich, 1935 & 4th ed., 1937, 29-31; Joachim Beckmann, ed., *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 1933-1944*, 60-71. Jahrgang, Gütersloh, 1948, 2-7; Cochrane, *The Church's Confession Under Hitler*, 78; Peter Matheson, ed., *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, Edinburgh: Grand Rapids: 1981, 1f; E. Clifford Nelson, *The Rise of World Lutheranism, an American Perspective*, Philadelphia: 1982, 314; Guy C. Carter, *Confession at Bethel...*, 6

⁷ Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 2 vols., Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987-8, II, 132

⁸ *ibid.*, 134. Also Helmut Baier & Ernst Henn, *Chronologie des bayerischen Kirchenkampfes 1933-1945*, Nürnberg: 1969, 64

From the outset of his participation, therefore, Sasse represented a concern for Lutheran confessional integrity. Although he had written about this in a broader context earlier in the year,⁹ it was Bishop Meiser who urged the issue in the counsels of the Confessing Church.

The Landesbischof of Bavaria raised the trickiest theme in this connection right at the beginning of the session in Kassel by warning against entering into "questions of confession." Above all, he continued, "...it would be fatal to draft a joint confession."¹⁰

To what extent the Bishop's concern had been instructed by his theologian is not clear. Sasse had expressed the concern clearly in his March response to a statement by Karl Barth in *Theologische Existenz heute* earlier in the year.¹¹ In his "Union und Bekenntnis" he replied to Barth and challenged the belief that the crisis of the time was sufficient to allow a common word by Lutheran, Reformed, and United churchmen regardless of the manner of proposing that statement. Barth's appeal was for a common "evangelical" statement.

Today the conflict in the Church is not over the Lord's Supper but over the First Commandment, and we have to 'confess.' In the face of this our need and task, that of the Fathers must recede; that is, there must still be a serious opposition between theological schools, but it must no longer be divisive and schismatic.¹²

After explaining the essential difference between the German Evangelical Church and the Landeskirchen and the role of the Lutheran Confessions within some of those Churches, Sasse endeavoured to make a similar distinction between a political and a confessional action.

To say that the question of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar should no longer be schismatic but only a difference between theological schools, just because a Herr Hossenfelder had appeared on the scene in Berlin, is as impossible for us as it would be for our fellow Lutherans in American if a new prophet were to appear in San Francisco.

⁹ See for instance "Union und Bekenntnis," *Junge Kirche*, 2.5 (Mar. 10, 1934), 183-190

¹⁰ Scholder, II, 134; as Cochrane points out (*The Church's Confession...*, 144), Meiser was not alone with this contention.

¹¹ January 26, 1934, quoted in Cochrane, *ibid.*, 134f.

¹² *ibid.*

Consequently Sasse concluded that

for the time being there is nothing else but for us to stand side by side as good Lutheran and good Reformed churchmen, and to confess the faith of the fathers in common where we can and divided where we *must*.¹³

Then he asserted his chief contention that only a properly constituted Lutheran body had the authority to make doctrinal pronouncements for the Lutheran Church. Here he may have been appealing to the constitution of the *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenbund* (1922) which “reserved all matters touching on confessional matters, church constitutions, and administrations to the respective Land churches.”¹⁴

In the end the appointment of Sasse to the theological committee was not altogether successful in safeguarding the Bavarian Landesbischof’s concerns. Due to illness the Erlangen professor was unable to attend the first meeting on May 15-16 at Frankfurt am Main and his deputy, Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, arrived only at noon of the 16th.¹⁵ When the “Frankfurt Concord,” as it was called, was presented to Meiser the following day, among his criticisms was ‘that the Lutheran interest is not sufficiently safeguarded in the declaration.’¹⁶ He had the draft referred to Sasse who took issue once again with the proposal for a joint theological declaration. Other Erlangen faculty colleagues also rejected the proposals, perhaps for different reasons.¹⁷ Paul Althaus, for instance, gave the ultimatum that if this draft appeared he and other Lutheran theologians would be compelled to replace it with one of his own. “By contrast Sasse still saw the possibility of some joint action: discussions in one body with separate votes in confessional groups.”¹⁸

¹³ Scholder, II, 135 quoting “Union und Bekenntnis”

¹⁴ Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979, 70

¹⁵ Scholder, II, 137

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 139

¹⁷ E.g., Werner Elert (signed also by Paul Althaus), “Ansbacher Ratschlag von 1934,” Archiv der Theol. Fakultät, Erlangen, Elert Collection; also in Gerhard Niemöller, *Die erste Bekenntnissynode der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche zu Barmen* (AGK, 5), Göttingen: 1959, pp. 144-146; for a trans. of part and a discussion see Jack Forstman, *Christian Faith in Dark Times, Theological Conflicts in the Shadow of Hitler*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992, ch. 12. See also Elert’s “Confessio Barmensis,” (26 Jun 1934) Landeskirchen Archiv, Bielefeld, Bestand 5,1 Nr. 70 Fasc. 3; published in the *Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, 67.26 (29 Juni 1934) Sp. 584-86 [hereafter: *AELKZ*]

¹⁸ Scholder, II, 139

Things were moving quickly and Sasse's response only reached his bishop in the middle of the next, fourth, meeting of the Nuremberg Committee at Leipzig on May 22nd. This letter, raising once again questions of principle about the way that was proposed, prevented a final draft.

At this stage it seems surprising that Landesbischof Meiser should arrange a redraft of the text, especially since he intended it for the Erlangen theologians. For it was basically not a question of the text so much as the method of dealing with the declaration that concerned the faculty or at least Sasse. Nevertheless, after the conclusion of the Leipzig conference Meiser gave the two Lutherans on the theological committee, Asmussen and Breit, along with Christian Stoll, the task of composing new drafts, which would also be acceptable in Erlangen.

On 24 May Asmussen travelled to Sasse with his preliminary draft. The two of them immediately started to work over the text. Here Sasse insisted on redrafting the preamble yet again in such a way as to stress the clear distinction in the confessional determination between Lutheran and Reformed churches so that the confessional groups appointed by them were the sole authorities empowered to expound a joint declaration. That same evening of 24 May Asmussen presented this Erlangen draft to Meiser in Munich. As the Landesbischof of Bavaria and his adviser [Sasse?] were evidently in agreement with this version, Asmussen now sought to win over Praeses Koch and Karl Barth to the "Erlangen draft" on the next two days.¹⁹

When Barth learned of Asmussen's proposed visit to Bonn on May 26, he became suspicious. When he learned of the Erlangen efforts,

he stood fast and with great conviction brought about a new U-turn on the part of Asmussen. For the last draft which was now composed by the two of them was based on the 'Frankfurt concord' and took over only a few formulae from the Leipzig draft, where they could be regarded as clear improvements on the work at Frankfurt. The Erlangen draft was completely rejected.²⁰

The Synod

One of the first events at the Synod after the opening service in the evening of 29th May was the meeting of the Lutherans called by Bishop Meiser. There was "an excited debate" after Asmussen presented the "Frankfurt Concord,"

¹⁹ Scholder, II, 139.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 139f.

modified at Bonn. Meiser was severely critical of parts including its lack of "clarity over its confessional determination."

But since the main theological opponent of the concord, Sasse, only arrived in Barmen around noon on 30 May, the group had no leader and thus lacked the final resolve to say a decisive "no."²¹

In view of the problems, a small "inter-confessional" committee was selected to represent the Reformed, including Barth, and Lutheran, including Sasse, confessions. It met from around 5:00 p.m. of May 30th and into the next morning, around 1:00 a.m. It produced the final draft of a declaration for the Synod. When the work of the committee was done, Sasse left. As described by Scholder:

And in this committee there was not the first and only split during the synod. Hermann Sasse left Barmen before the beginning of the plenary session; he went home on the morning of the next day. In a hand-written statement which he left for the Praeses, he remarked that while he agreed with the biblical truths and repudiations in the draft, he could not give it his approval.²²

Sasse's Critique

While he did indeed approve the biblical truths and repudiations of the six statements, it was once again the method of procedure that prevented his approval. The statements were worthy to be commended to wider conventions of theologians for clarification.

These theses could under no conditions however be adopted by the Synod as a whole, because the Synod with this resolution lays claim to the teaching office over the Lutheran and Reformed congregations.²³

Sasse's critique of Barmen was outlined in three parts. Part one expressed agreement "with the Biblical truths presented...and with the rejection of the false doctrines";²⁴ he questioned the precision of a text which "can be interpreted in a different way by Lutheran theologians than by theologians of the Reformed Confession." The heart of his objection however is in the second and third parts dealing with two fundamental issues.

²¹ Scholder, II, 143

²² *ibid.*, 144

²³ Gerhard Niemöller, *Die erste Bekenntnissynode...*, 171-172

²⁴ This and following quotations of Sasse's Declaration from the translation by Cochrane, *The Church's Confession...*, 194-5.

2. Under no circumstances, however, should these articles be adopted by the synod as a whole because by such adoption the synod assumes to itself a teaching office over Lutheran and Reformed congregations.

He acknowledged that such a free synod could distinguish true and false doctrine “when the constitutionally appointed agencies fail in their duty.” But “only a Lutheran synod can speak for Lutherans, and a Reformed synod for Reformed.” This action is the usurpation of the teaching office of the church; the so-called synod is, after-all, not a church. “Consequently the resolutions passed in the synod in regard to doctrine can never claim to have binding authority, regardless of whether they are objectively correct or not.”²⁵

Sasse did not express here a personal, unique expectation. It was a historical Lutheran view, held even by clergy of the Prussian Union,²⁶ of which, until only the previous year, Sasse had been a member. For instance, Wilhelm Zoellner, Generalsuperintendent of Westphalia, part of the Prussian Church, held the same view.

According to his Lutheran understanding a church could be founded only on a confession. For the Union, this meant that the three denominations represented in it—Lutheran, Reformed and United—ought in each case to unite around its own confession. The United Church still had to develop a confession of its own.²⁷

In part three Sasse noted a false premise for the whole endeavour. The preamble to the articles of the Declaration acknowledged the “German Evangelical Church” to be an existing legal body. In acknowledging the theological basis for the union of the churches as laid down in articles 1 and 2 of the July 11, 1933 constitution of the DEK, the Barmen confessors had accepted a false basis.²⁸ In a 1935 essay he explained this further: What needs to be said in the present situation of the movement for unity

²⁵ Opposition to the Barthian agenda was very vocal. Note for instance a protest signed by thirty-six professors against Barth’s interventions in the controversy which was even published in Britain under the title *Karl Barth’s Pretension to be the Pope of the Protestant Church*. Among the points at issue were these: “(3) the **Calvinization** of German Lutheranism; (4) the infallibility of Councils and Synods [ref. to Barmen?] even when they meet to-day for, according to Luther, Councils and Synods are liable to err.” Alfred E. Garvie, “The German Church Controversy. (Recent Foreign Theology.), Expository Times 47.9 (Jun 36) 427-429

²⁶ e.g. see Scholder, I, 294f.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 293f.

²⁸ Sasse’s argument here was one that he pursued persistently throughout his career: he rejected the idea growing out of the Prussian Union particularly that

could not be uttered by the so-called "German Evangelical Church," [DEK] since judged by the doctrine of our confession it is no Church, but, like the "Evangelical Church of the Old-Prussian Union," it is an artificial religious coalition standing for no definite doctrine or church confession before the world.²⁹

The adoption of the constitution of the DEK in 1933 was, in his view, the culmination of the apostasy from the Lutheran Church, that is, the Prussian Union.

He had consistently spoken against the constitution of the DEK and had presented his views vigorously to church leaders gathered for the DEK's First National Synod in Wittenberg, September 27, 1933.³⁰ To accept its regulations now, as the Barmen Synod did, was "contrary to the Lutheran Confession and constitutionally invalid." From his perspective, the results of the Barmen resolutions would be the same as those of the July constitution of the DEK, whether intended or not: the merger of all confessions.³¹

Consequently I am obliged solemnly to protest against the resolutions of the Free Synod of Barmen as a violation of the evangelical Lutheran Church. I am no longer able to see in the so-called Confessional front a real and effective representative of the Confession of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches. I deeply regret that the great hour of a confederation of true Confessional Churches in Germany has been missed and that thereby steps have been taken toward a new union which will efface and dissolve the Confession of the Reformation.—Barmen, May 31, 1934.

the differences in the understanding of the gospel which arose at the time of the Reformation are no longer differences which should divide the Churches as confessionally illegitimate. Due to the historical difference between Lutherans and Reformed concerning the role of a confession, this unionism was less a problem for the latter than the former. Further on the role of confession: Ronald R. Feuerhahn, "Hermann Sasse: Confessionalist and Confessor," in Gerald S. Krispin & Jon D. Vieker, eds., *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, Dearborn, MI: 1990, 14-37.

²⁹ "Die Einigung der Kirchen und das lutherische Bekenntnis. Gedanken zur ökumenischen Bewegung," *Luthertum NF* 46.9 (1935), here from ET, "Church Unity and the Lutheran Confession," in *Faith & Order Papers*, I, 76, 17 (re-printed in *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 669)

³⁰ Sasse had distributed copies of his article, "Die deutsche Union von 1933. Ein Wort zur 'Verfassung der Deutschen Evangelische Kirche,'" *Theologische Blätter* 12.9 (Sep 1933) cols. 274-280 [hereafter: *ThBl*]

³¹ That this was the intention for the DEK; see Scholder, I, 293, 294

Assessment

Professor Sasse was not the only theologian to so criticize the Synod and its Declaration.³² But his surely must have been one of the most painful, both for himself and for the brethren, his brothers, of the Synod. He was, unlike Althaus, Kittel (Elert?) and others, the only Erlangen Theologian who had placed his collaboration at the disposal of the Barmen Synod. In his report to the representatives the following morning, Pastor Asmussen dealt with Sasse's departure.

We know our brother Sasse as one who has...for the sake of the Confession and for conscience sake from the beginning of the German Evangelical Church. We know him as one of the very few university professors who have supported us by word and deed in the Church Struggle and at the risk of our lives. (*Applause.*) We would not be true to ourselves, brothers and sisters, if we asked anyone to say Yes when he was unable to do so.³³

In spite of what might objectively be described as his significant contribution to the Synod, memory of Sasse's participation soon faded into what may have been an embarrassed silence. Not long after the Synod the editor of the *Lutherische Kirche*, Sasse's Erlangen colleague, Friedrich Ulmer, observed that "in all reports reaching us" about Barmen, the name of Sasse "strange to say" is absent.³⁴

In assessing Sasse's role and actions in this matter, there is often that bitter-sweet appraisal such as Cochrane's, who while acknowledging Sasse as the "first" to give the warning about National Socialism, uses a language in criticism which may not show a real awareness or understanding of a "confessional" faithfulness.

The fact that Sasse eventually broke with the Confessing Church in the interest of a narrow Lutheran confessionalism, and thereby greatly weakened the Church's opposition to National Socialism, must not obscure the prophetic role he played at the outset.³⁵

³² See e.g. the critiques of Gerhard Kittel and Erich Stange in G. Niemöller, *Die erste Bekenntnissynode...*, 156-68, 176-82; also at note 17 supra.

³³ As quoted in Cochrane, *The Church's Confession...*, 166. Cochrane notes that the verb in the first sentence is missing in the transcription of the stenographic minutes. *ibid.*, p. 302 n37.

³⁴ 16 (1934) 110f., cited by Martin Wittenberg, "Hermann Sasse und 'Barmen,'" in Wolf-Dieter Hauschild, et al., Hrsg., *Die lutherischen Kirchen und die Bekenntnissynode von Barmen, Referate des Internationalen Symposiums auf der Reisenburg* 1984, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984, 98

Scholder at least has made an attempt at explaining that theological attitude which prompted Landesbischof Meiser to raise the tricky question of confessions at the Kassel meeting of the Nuremberg Committee.

Behind these remarks, which were somewhat surprising in the preparations for a joint confessing Synod, there lay a theological tradition which understood the Lutheran confessional writings of the sixteenth century as the clear and complete norm of teaching and confession of the Lutheran church and which accordingly had inevitably to see the idea of a new confession as a falsification of the Lutheran heritage.³⁶ And this applied even more where under Reformed influence this new confession could be seen as a united confession, i.e. as a joint Lutheran-Reformed confession. The issue here was not just the preservation of particular points of Lutheran doctrine.³⁷

But even his final word on Sasse has that double-sidedness.

In retrospect one may wonder what is to be respected the more, the consistency or the blindness with which a strict Lutheran excluded himself from the most important confession of his time. However, the event may show clearly enough to what degree the synod was understood by the participants as a theological and not as a political event. For Sasse, who from the beginning was an uncompromising opponent of the Third Reich, the theological problems were more important than the political problems, while history is inclined to take the opposite view.³⁸

With Professor Sasse, however, his action was probably more linked with a "faith" than with simply preserving confession or heritage, perhaps not even a "narrow Lutheran confessionalism." If it were "blindness," perhaps it was that unseeing trust of faith that is finally not captive to political considerations. At least, that seems to be what he, years later, expressed about that time and action. In a letter to a friend at the University of Oslo he made a brief reference: "But I know that the Lutherans in Germany (think of Althaus, even Elert, and the AELKZ) were believing in the nation more than in the church."³⁹

Joined to that is a more critical, yet still dispassionate or analytical, assessment.

³⁵ 16 (1934), 36

³⁶ It was precisely this "theological tradition" which Sasse would see coming to an end with the rise of the EKID in 1948. See later.

³⁷ Scholder, II, 134

³⁸ *ibid.*, 144

³⁹ Letter to Prof. Leiv Aalen (21 June 1974) (Kurt Marquart Collection)

Unfortunately the endeavour to save the German churches was bound up with the desire to unite them. It was not only Hitler who demanded and began to organise one unified "German Evangelical Church," but it was also the desire of the Protestants themselves. Also they demanded and favoured the transformation of the existing federation of the evangelical churches - Lutheran, Reformed and United - into a unified church. [EKiD] Thus the old problem of the union which had determined the sad history of those churches in the past arose again. While the Lutherans within the Confessing Church demanded the maintenance of the old confessions, the Reformed minority with the union churches stood for a real unification, expressed in a new common confession.⁴⁰

Then to Barth's perception.

This was also the aim of Karl Barth. He renewed the old Reformed concept of the one Church of the Reformation, based on the sola scriptura, in which Lutherans and Reformed should and could exist as different theological schools, no longer divided through a church border. While in his first years he had been emphasising the historic confessions of the Reformation and was consequently regarded as an ally of those who wanted to be faithful to their Lutheran or Reformed confession, he developed since 1925 a concept of the confession in which the actual act of confession was dominant and overshadowed the doctrinal content of the confessions.⁴¹

This distinction noted by Sasse lies at the heart of his contention against the Reformed or Barthian aims.

Post-Barmen

Sasse continued to participate in the new "Confessing Church," at least until the end of the year; he attended the second Synod in Dahlem the following October. And the Synod itself had no little regard for him, for in the following spring, almost exactly one year after the first Synod, he was invited by President Koch to the meeting of the Theological Committee. In declining

⁴⁰ *ibid.* It has been observed by one of Sasse's younger colleagues that while it was "customary to see the fatal flaw of the German Evangelical Church (DEK) of 1933, with 'Imperial Bishop' Müller at its head, in its ties to the Nazi regime" and thus to measure ecclesiastical entities with a secular, political rule, "Sasse saw past the surface to the heart of the matter—and without benefit of several decades' hindsight—when he declared in 1933 that the DEK was in fact the extension of the Union to the whole of Germany." Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, Ft. Wayne: 1990, 87 with reference Sasse's essay, "Die Deutsche Union von 1933."

⁴¹ *ibid.*

membership he reiterated his hopes that the Confessing Synod turn from the false path of unionism and abandon the fiction of an alleged, existing unified "confessing church" in Germany. He had hoped that the Reformation Churches, Lutheran and Reformed, might be recognized as still existing separately by law.⁴² His critique in this letter to Koch is, as elsewhere, sharp.⁴³ Here the critique is directed particularly at Karl Barth whose assumption that one can at the same time preserve the confession and embrace the union is the same error as that of Friedrich Wilhelm III in 1834. It is *Schwärmerei* in so far as it makes the union to be a work of God rather than, considering the way in which the declaration came about, a work of man.

In this letter Sasse also gave fair warning and put conditions for any future participation.

Should my Landesbischof send me to a meeting of the Confessing Synod, then I would comply with this call. But I must reserve for myself the right, should it become a question of whether the confession is only talked about or whether it at the same time determines the business of the church, that it may be brought before the plenum of the synod for discussion.⁴⁴

He insisted on this in view of what had happened at Barmen in the early hours of May 31st, 1934 when he was denied the right to present his concerns to the plenum; he left by the next train. "Those who were arranging things did not wish to hear him further."⁴⁵ Later his friend, Martin Wittenberg, described the scene:

Since on the 31st May he was denied the possibility to give reason for his position in either the Lutheran convention or in the plenum [fn58], he left after an excited conversation with Meiser, observed by Merz,

⁴² Sasse to Koch (15 May 35) (Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen, Landeskirchliches Archiv, Bielefeld, 5,1/Nr.156/Fasc.2, 3 copies; [hereafter: WLA]. Here is evidence of Sasse's theologically spurious argumentation on the basis of the legal position of the church.

⁴³ See e.g. "Konfessionelle Unbussfertigkeit? Ein Wort zum Verständnis des lutherischen Konfessionalismus," AELKZ 68.11-12 (15 & 22 Mar 1935) 245-9 & 266-74; "Hans Asmussen und das Luthertum," AELKZ 69.25-26 (19 & 26 Jun 1936) 581-6 & 610-6; "Wider das Schwärmertum," AELKZ 69.33 (14 Aug 1936) 773-81; and "Das Bekenntnis der lutherischen Kirche und die Barmer Theologische Erklärung," AELKZ 69.48 (27 Nov 1936) 1139-43.

⁴⁴ Sasse to Koch, (WLA/5,1/Nr.156/Fasc.2); as a likelihood of this problem, Sasse cites *Bekennende Kirche Schlesiens*, 1935, No. 8

⁴⁵ Norman E. Nagel, Translator's Preface, Hermann Sasse, *We Confess The Church*, (We Confess 3). St. Louis: 1986, 8 [hereafter: Nagel, 3]; see Wittenberg, "Hermann Sasse und 'Barmen,'" 98

before the end of the synod and after delivery of a written declaration to President Koch.⁴⁶

Sasse's quiet, yet dramatic departure from Barmen would appear to have been a solitary, even individualistic action. It might just as easily be interpreted as an act of pique or anguished frustration. It might have been neither. Or perhaps while it may have been prompted by a measure of both, subsequent events indicate that it was more likely a principled withdrawal. The puzzling aspect of the event was that Sasse was alone. He had not, after all, championed a lone cause. His bishop had set him the task of safeguarding the confessional integrity; and others had expressed similar disquiet over the direction of the synod. Martin Wittenberg, has mentioned from personal experience "that already on the evening of the 31st May 1934 and shortly thereafter in ecclesiastical circles, Sasse was praised because through his departure he preserved the idea of the unanimity of the synod."⁴⁷

Perhaps, on the other hand, Sasse saw himself in the position, the *Amt*, of a university professor, and so acted in deference to the *Amt* of his bishop with which office went the responsibility to stand for the Church whose servant he was, and so to see things through. The fact that it was not "through" by the end of the Synod was not known in those anxious hours before the plenum of May 31st when Sasse knew he would not be given the right to speak. Both in his going to Barmen and in his departure from Barmen Sasse acted in deference to his bishop, and yet in a way that was faithful to the confession whose servant he was. Martin Wittenberg recalled:

Sasse stressed he had not published his declaration at that time for the reason that he would give no weapon to the opponents of confessional fellowship and would not shatter the possibility of fellowship for which the church was struggling. My recollection is that he did that with the consent of Bishop Meiser; my supposition is that he saw the mentioned opponents even, though by no means only, among Erlangen colleagues.⁴⁸

Sasse left; his bishop and all the others stayed. But the struggle for the principle which Sasse championed did not end with this episode. The subsequent events, while distressing for the participants and dangerous for the cause, show a consistency of purpose of which Sasse's withdrawal from the Free Synod at Barmen was the start; it really did foreshadow later events.

⁴⁶ Wittenberg, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 98

⁴⁸ Wittenberg, 98.

Conclusion

Sasse's critique of the Third Reich was always radical, in terms of the core foundations of the faith. It was therefore theological and so confessional and thus not to be weakened by resort to other powers, powers that belong in the world but not in the church. He confessed Christ—life in Christ; but he also confessed that Satan was the life of the Nazi ideology. Therefore he saw the situation, all situations, in terms of either/or. While others also confessed Christ and confessed the demonic nature of the Reich, it was perhaps enough for them, under the extreme circumstances, to concentrate only on this dichotomy. Sasse would still choose to concentrate on the nature of the "Christ confession"—not just any "Christ confession." For there was only one true confession of Christ.

Therefore, when asked, in his perception, to ignore or set aside the differences between one Christ confession and another Christ confession, his response was a definite no. One does not challenge the Nazi ideology (or "spirit") any more than any other ideology with anything more or less than the true confession of Christ.⁴⁹ Anything less would not only be inadequate to meet the threat of that alien ideology, it would be party to it: in at least one specific instance he labelled that approach as sectarian.⁵⁰ In the list of eleven errors that threaten to take the church captive, the errors rejected in the Bethel Confession, we find various -isms including Socialism, Totalitarianism and Nationalism. Among them is also Unionism. Sasse rejected this notion as well:

that the unity of the church is based on still other things than the unity of doctrine, that there can be a unity of the church and churchly community where there is no unity of doctrine (Unionism)⁵¹

With regard to the Barmen Declaration and especially its immediate aftermath his fears seem to have been fulfilled.

Thus the famous "Theological Declaration of Barmen" was formulated after the resistance of confessional Lutheranism had been smashed. The Lutherans who remained at the synod accepted the declaration with the proviso that it should not be regarded as a confession. Soon after this

⁴⁹ That is, the *satis est* of CA VII.2, BELK, 61 ("it is enough," BC, 32.2)

⁵⁰ Reference to the "Confessing Church shaped according to the wishes of Barth and Asmussen," in "Wider das Schwärmertum," 1936, quoted in Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer...*, 432

⁵¹ D, par. 44; N/P, VII, 1a, par. 66; Carter, *Confession at Bethel...*, 325

synod a confessional synod of Prussia declared the border between Lutherans and Reformed as obsolete and proclaimed general intercommunion between all Protestants. Thus from the beginning a lack of truthfulness robbed the Confessing Church of its spiritual authority. After the war this confessing church took over the reorganisation of the German churches. The result was the "Evangelical Church in Germany" [EKiD] whose definite unionistic character became more and more obvious.⁵²

Bishop Rowan Williams of the Church in Wales recently observed about the Confessing Church

In the Germany of the 1930s, the presence of Hitler finally forced an alliance between Evangelical and Reformed Christians, in the Confessing Church. I've wondered again and again in these days how bad the political crisis in Europe (or elsewhere) would have to become before we Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants and Anglicans felt the same sort of urgent imperative about unity. Do we need an Antichrist to make us united as Christians?⁵³

When such a learned and remarkable churchman as Bishop Williams seems so misguided about the cause and gift of unity, no wonder Sasse's voice was so unacceptable.

⁵² Carter, *Confession at Bethel...*, [93f.]

⁵³ Quoted in *One In Christ*, 29.4 (1993) 309

EXCURSUS

Karl Barth's Ecclesiology¹

Paul Avis has labeled Barth's ecclesiology as "an ecclesiological actualism."²

The positive substance of this is that the church is Christ's "earthly-historical form of existence" (Barth is here developing D. Bonhoeffer's insight in his youthful work of 1930, *Sanctorum Communio*, that "Christ exists as the church").

This is an ecclesiology derived from Johann Adam Möller, a Roman Catholic theologian of the 19th century, via Bonhoeffer. Sasse had identified this succession in modern ecclesiology.

The idea of the *Una Sancta* underlying the Ecumenical Movement as represented by the WCC is essentially the same: All Christians on earth united in one visible unity are the Body of Christ on earth, the continuation of the Incarnation, "Christ existing as Church" (Bonhoeffer).³

Avis also described the Barthian "Church as Event":

The church exists only as a definite history takes place, its act is its being, its essence its existence—it exists only when it takes place.

In a similar manner, confession is event. Confessions are relativized to a present act, "only when it takes place." Thus at Barmen, it was the event that mattered, the *kairos* event. Sasse observed this emphasis even in the reaction to liberalism by dialectical theology. "[Barth] developed since 1925 a concept of the confession in which the actual act of confession was dominant and overshadowed the doctrinal content of the confessions."⁴ This can be seen as a variation on the *fides qua creditur, fides quae creditur* debate. It was expressed very well years later by Carl Braaten.

A confession lives in the church in terms of *kairos* and crisis. The church formulates a confession in a special *kairos* to face a particular crisis.

¹ see *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1: 62, pp. 642-725

² "Ecclesiology," in Alister E. McGrath, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, Oxford & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993, 131b

³ Letter to J. W. Behnken & O. Harms (31 Oct 1962) CHI 200- BEH Suppl. II Box 2 File 13a [52330b]

⁴ Letter to Leiv Aalen (21 Jun 74), (Marquart [93]). For a similar notion in Dietrich Bonhoeffer see Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer...*, 475-6.

The confessions are not like Bartlett's quotations or a set of timeless axioms. They breathe the air of their time.⁵

The title, "'Confessing' Church", was itself significant.⁶ While for Sasse a confessional church must necessarily be a confessing church, it also must necessarily be both.⁷ Nothing should be allowed to rob the creed of its doctrinal content. The occasion of confessing must not ignore or be separated from its substantive content. "The essence of a church confession lies, first of all, in the fact that it bears witness to objective truths."⁸

When Eberhard Bethge described how much Sasse impressed Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he also identified the chief point of difference in precisely these terms of confession.

Bonhoeffer's earlier delight at his discovery that Sasse's resistance and the view he held sprang not from ecclesial conservatism, but from a new relationship to the Confession, had, of course, given way to profound disagreement over the assessment of the function and dignity of historical confessions. Sasse, for his part, had come to see Bonhoeffer as an "enthusiast" because the latter credited the living event of communal, actual confessing with so much power that antitheses dividing churches dwindled to antitheses dividing schools.⁹

⁵ *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, Philadelphia: 1983, "The Confessional Principle," 27-42, here quoted from 33; see also Zeddies, "The Confession of the Church"

⁶ Sasse, "On the Problem of the Union of Lutheran Churches," II, QS 47.4 (Oct 1950) 273

⁷ *ibid.*, 277. In a document proposing the nature of a VELKD, Sasse discussed the importance for both, the act and content of confession:

"It is the perception of the necessity of the churchly confession for the church in the double sense: that a church which does not confess its faith before the world, ceases to be the Church of Christ and it arrives at that not only in the act of confessing, but also in its content. The Church must know what it believes, teaches and confesses; and it must make this confession fearlessly before the world." (HLA/D15/V/Nr.16 [148f, et passim.]

⁸ Sasse, "Church and Confession 1941," in Nagel, I, 74 [emphasis original]

⁹ *Dietrich Bonhoeffer...*, 475f

Part II

II. The EKID and the Death of Lutheranism in Germany

- A. The way to the EKID
- B. The role of the EKID
- C. The consequences of the EKID

At the end of the Second World War, the German church was in disarray. The official churchly confederation designed by the National Socialists soon after they came to power in 1933 was the infamous *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK). It was now discredited. Sasse's warnings against it had gone unheeded. He often spoke of it and its significance for later developments, a chain reaction of consequences which would ultimately impact all of world Lutheranism, even the Missouri Synod. Thirty years after the event he wrote Herman Preus:

When in 1933 "Die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche" was solemnly established at the command of Hitler, every member of the National Synod at Wittenberg [27 Sep 1933] found on his desk my article "Die deutsche Union von 1933" from "Theologische Blätter."¹ But no Lutheran was any longer prepared to listen to that warning. The tragedy was that the Lutherans obeyed Hitler rather than the confession of their church.

Then he identified the chain of events:

Hence they had lost their authority when the synod of Barmen accepted the "Bekennnisunion" of Karl Barth and established the factual union.²

That Karl Barth had so designated the Barmen event is of critical importance. Most participants had for instance called the synod's statement a declaration (*Erklärung*) whereas the Barthians came to call it a confession (*Bekennnis*) and thus designation of "*Bekennnisunion*." As one writer has explained:

¹ "Die deutsche Union von 1933. Ein Wort zur 'Verfassung der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche'" *ThBl* 12.9 (Sep 1933) Sp. 274-280; reprinted in *ISC*, I, 265-272

² (27 Mar 1963) STP; similarly letter to J. A. O. Preus (31 Oct 1968) CTS. On this chain of events and Barth's "*Bekennnisunion*" see also Sasse's essay "Article VII of the Augsburg Confession in the Present Crisis of Lutheranism" (BLP Nr. 53) in *We Confess the Church* (Nagel, 3), 59; for the original German see *ISC*, I, 63.

It was termed a declaration because the Lutheran representatives to the committee believed a common confession of faith among the diverse claims within German Protestantism, Lutheran, Reformed, and United, was theologically illegitimate.³

(In a note the author then offers the explanation: "Lutherans were accustomed to look upon a confession as a timeless, sacrosanct dogma, not an emergency pronouncement."⁴)

The "church" which was intended to replace the DEK after the war, would, in Sasse's judgment, have the same fundamental flaw. The *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKiD) was formed in 1948. When he vigorously challenged the formation of the EKiD in the post-war years, most churchmen viewed his warnings as unwarranted. He was speaking utterly against the tide of the churchly movement of the time. Yet, as Professor Marquart has noted, "Professor Sasse, whose conscience now compelled him to renounce his Erlangen University post and his membership in the Lutheran Church of Bavaria, saw clearly that EKiD was simply the extension of the Prussian Union to the whole of Germany."⁵ Sasse chronicles the post-war events:

Then came the day when Hitler's thousand-year *Reich* came to an end. It was the last occasion when the Lutheran bishops in Germany might have confessed with their deeds. They missed also this opportunity,⁶ and their churches were swallowed up in the new union called the Evangelical Church in Germany (*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*). In Eisenach, at the foot of the Wartburg, the Lutheran Church of Germany was buried in 1948. Loche's nightmare of the Lutheran Church being buried by its own pastors became a reality.⁷

For Hermann Sasse, the formation of the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKiD) was the epitome of what was wrong in church unions and in ecumenical developments. What was even more distressing was that

- ³ Shelley Baranowski, *The Confessing Church, Conservative Elites, and the Nazi State* (Texts and Studies in Religion 28), Lewiston, NY & Queenston, ON: Edwin Mellen, 1986, 56. Note that the reference to "the Lutheran representatives" doubtless refers chiefly to Sasse although the author does not mention him.
- ⁴ *ibid.*, endnote 31, 148. Further on the contrasting views of the role of confession, see Feuerhahn, "Hermann Sasse: Confessionalist and Confessor" (see Part I, n28).
- ⁵ Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion, Missouri in Lutheran Perspective* (Concordia Seminary Monograph Series 3), Ft. Wayne, 1977, 53
- ⁶ This is a reference to the previous, missed, opportunity in 1933.
- ⁷ "Article VII...." *We Confess the Church* (Nagel, 3), 59.

the formation of the Lutheran World Federation, or at least its subsequent development, was to manifest the same flaw. That wrong, that flaw, was a denial of confessional consciousness and a betrayal of the Lausanne principle: acknowledgment of differences as well as agreements, seeking the truth together rather than pragmatic solutions. The EKID represented a weakened German protestantism and a shift in ecclesiastical development that had been underway since the Prussian Union of 1817. Sasse could trace that development through the events of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was due not only to the political manipulations of Friedrich Wilhelm III and Bismarck, but also to philosophical and the theological changes. No doubt the two world wars also contributed—not only in the political and societal effects, but also by the spiritual debility worked by the evils of war and of the satanic religion of National Socialism. The wars also meant the loss of at least one whole generation of church leaders and theologians.

Theologically—and politically!—there was the impact of the school of Karl Barth and his followers and the liberalism to which they in turn had reacted. Ultimately the EKID was the triumph of a Reformed ecclesiology and the capitulation of the Lutheran church leaders to these pressures. Sasse saw these developments as the surrender of the confessional Lutheran heritage, the way of the Gospel being muddled by the powers and criteria of the Law.⁸

In spite of the turmoil associated with post-war recovery he was prepared to give advice to his bishop concerning the reorganization of the Lutheran Churches⁹ and of all protestant Churches in Germany,¹⁰ in preparation for the important conference of the German Churches at Treysa (August, 1945). He addressed an open letter to the delegates meeting at Lund for the formation of the Lutheran World Federation.¹¹ The extended title of this letter indicated clearly the author's presuppositions for such a federation: "Die sich mit uns

⁸ "Das Ende der lutherischen Landeskirchen in Deutschlands," *QS* 45.4 (Oct. 48) 233-241

⁹ "Entwurf einer Verfassung für die Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherisch Kirche in Deutschland," *Maschinenschrift*, 16pp.

¹⁰ "Entwurf einer Satzung für den Rat der Evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland," *Maschinenschrift*, 5pp. and "Erläuterungen zu den Entwürfen" [ref. to the previous two], *Maschinenschrift*, 11pp.

¹¹ "Offener Brief an die Brüder in Christo, versammelt in Lund in Schweden Weltföderation 1947," (Erlangen, 17. Juni 1947), Mimeographed; first published in *LuBl* 30.115 (Aug. 1978) 4-10

zur Ungeänderten Augsburgischen Konfession bekennen als der unaufgebbaren Bekenntnisgrundlage der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche.”

In these writings it soon became clear that the author's fears and disenchantments were chiefly described in terms of the Barmen Synod and its declaration of 1934. Whether the coming together was of Lutherans or multi-denominational, the threat of the Barmen way was ever present. Sasse was not the only one among Lutherans to question the Barmen approach. But now, in these days of great national and ecclesiastical calamity, such concerns seemed to be replaced by more urgent ones.

Significant for the renewal of Lutheranism in Germany was the demise of the Prussian Union, “the most difficult block on the road to Lutheran Unity.”¹² It was a colossus which reached across all of Germany and dominated all ecclesiastical affairs. But its essential spiritual poverty was manifested when together with its political unit it ceased. Its effects, however, remained. Under its influence there was no understanding of the Lutheran Confessions; the assumptions which were the basis of the title “evangelical” left pastors and congregations bereft of even elementary instruction. Confessional consciousness was not only neglected but suppressed by the very nature of such a union church.¹³ As observed elsewhere: “The German Lutherans, by virtue of their history, were divided between ‘self-conscious Lutherans’ and ‘Union Lutherans’.”¹⁴

This however was not the only, nor even the principal problem facing efforts for a renewed Lutheran confessional consciousness. In a footnote to his article, “Concerning the Lutheran free Churches in Germany,” the translator, F. E. Mayer, gave a particularly clear description of the positive mood against such confessionalism. He offered this note to Sasse's mention of the emerging EKID.

The fact is that many hope to make the temporary and emergency organization known as EKID the permanent Church, though at present it is only a federation of the various independent provincial churches. If the EKID were to become a Church, then this union Church would com-

¹² “The Situation of the Lutheran Church,” mimeo., n.d. [1945/47], 12, ET by George Forell of “Zur Lage des Luthertums nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. (Erlangen, Jul 1945); see similarly “Concerning the Lutheran Free Churches in Germany,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 18.1 (Jan 1947), 40, ET by F. E. Mayer of “Zur Lage der lutherischen Freikirchen in Deutschland Erlangen (23 Jun 1946)

¹³ “Concerning the Lutheran Free Churches...,” 40f.

¹⁴ Nelson, *The Rise of World Lutheranism...*, 13

prise Lutherans, Reformed, and Evangelicals [“Unierte”?], and its unionism would surpass that of the old Prussian Union. The Lutheran provincial churches, especially the Bavarian Church under Bishop Meiser, are opposed to such a move, since it would mean the end of Lutheranism in Germany. Many of the younger theologians, however, claim that in their opposition to Naziism’s neopaganism they found a common ground for a confession, though they were not confessionally united. As members of the Confessing Church they were willing to suffer martyrdom in their common faith as members of the *una sancta*, and they will not now permit the erection of “theological and denominational fences” and declared “that it would be detestable if the fruits of hard times were destroyed and nipped in the bud in favor of a return to tradition.” They are “dismayed that many church leaders are dissipating their energies in confessional efforts.” (R.[eligious] N.[ews] S.[ervice], 10/14/46.)¹⁵

Following one post-war trip to Europe, Mayer explained in a church magazine:

What is now the status of the EKID? One party maintains that since the Lutherans and the Reformed disregarded their theological differences in the face of Hitler’s persecutions, they should today work toward an “ecumenical” Church, which rises above confessional differences. The claim is made that while the EKID is not yet a Church, it is a church fellowship in which all evangelical Christians are united without a commitment to a specific creed, be it Lutheran or Reformed.¹⁶

At the time of Treysa in 1945, Pastor Martin Niemöller vigorously articulated this sentiment: “We will not throw away the unity which God has given to the Confessing Church.”¹⁷ With regard to the role of the historical confessions it was reported that Niemöller’s stand was expressed in the slogan “Back to the Bible” which indicated that

¹⁵ “Concerning the Lutheran Free Churches...,” 41n3. Professor Mayer had travelled extensively in Germany in the immediate post-war years meeting churchmen and acting as advisor to Dr. John W. Behnken, president of The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (later in 1947 to be called the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod). Mayer travelled in connection with his church’s relief efforts which were accompanied by the theological engagement of the Bad Boll conferences.

See also the description of how “the Nazi regime and the war” succeeded in breaking down many barriers which kept Christians of different Churches apart: Stewart Herman, *The Rebirth of the German Church*, New York: Harper / London: SCM, 1946, 34ff.

¹⁶ “Spiritual Reconstruction in Europe,” *The Lutheran Witness* 55.21 (8 Oct 1946) 335a

¹⁷ Quoted by Herman, *The Rebirth...*, 146

“the confessional writings of the Reformation, especially the Lutheran Confessions, are today totally insufficient to be used as a criterion to establish either the unity or the division of the (German evangelical) Church.”¹⁸

This supraconfessional attitude was born of crisis theology and in such crisis times. Arising in Pietism and Rationalism, it was reinforced by Barthian theology and especially in the experiences of the church struggle. A similar expression can be found before the war itself through Karl Hartenstein, Swabian Lutheran pietist and former director of the Basel Mission, who at the Tambaram 1938 Conference of the International Missionary Council made the appeal along the same lines of Martin Niemöller.

Shall all the confessional barriers and concepts be perpetuated, or has not the hour come when, for the sake of the great goal “that the world might believe that thou has sent me,” what God has put into the vessels of the confessions is to be tested anew in order that they might become fit for the building of his people, the one body of Jesus Christ on earth, not in opposition to or against each other, but alongside one another?¹⁹

The efforts for uniting Lutherans in Germany were then inevitably linked with and confessed by a wider movement beyond the Lutheran “intact” churches, indeed beyond all Lutherans. Why settle for the limited goal of a confessional unity when a trans-confessional unity seemed possible and had to a certain extent already been experienced. The phenomenon of the Confessing Church (and even of the Deutsche Evangelische Kirche of 1933)²⁰ was to be nurtured. Born as it was out of a common distress, need its achievements be abandoned with its original stimulus? Sasse had identified this line

¹⁸ Mayer, “Spiritual Reconstruction...” Mayer did not indicate the source of this quotation.

¹⁹ “Was haben wir von Tambaram zu lernen?” in *Das Wunder der Kirche unter den Völkern der Erde*, Bericht über die Weltmissions-Konferenz in Tambaram, hrsg. v. M. Schlunk, Stuttgart: 1939, 199-200, cited by James A. Scherer, *Mission and Unity in Lutheranism, A Study in Confession and Ecumenicity*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969, 139

²⁰ The constitution of the DEK was signed by all Landeskirchen on 11 July 1933. That the bishops signed was due to both political pressure and ignorance: “they did not understand at that time why this constitution should not be accepted.” Letter to H. Preus (13 Jan 46) (STP). It was to be an “alliance of confessions which had grown out of the Reformation and stood equally next to one another”; this, in Sasse’s view, was a conception of the church similar to that of Barmen in the following year. “Offener Brief an die Brüder...,” 5; also the letter to Preus, *ibid.*

of reasoning as a consequence of Barmen, in the days of the growing peril. The Reformed had pleaded that

Unity against a common foe is necessary. Yesterday this foe was the Turk; tomorrow it may be Russian atheism or some other power threatening the church. Now nationalism is the great enemy, now idealistic philosophy or some other terrible heresy that has suddenly arisen in the church. But no matter what or who the enemy may be, the slogan is always the same: it is necessary to unite in a solid front, in the fellowship of the single church to which we really belong, in order to oppose this foe—yes, this particular foe who has never appeared before. This is the Calvinistic idea of union with which the Lutheran Church has been wrestling since the days of the Reformation.²¹

Having established an alternative church government at its second synod, Dahlem, 1935, the Confessing Church appeared to be in a position of great advantage for organizing the way out of the ruins wrought by Nazism and the war. Effectively it was the only regimen available nationally to fill the vacuum of the discredited DEK. This is remarkable in view of its limited size. But in so far as the Confessing Community was associated with and even took its identity from the Barmen “movement”²² its position raised certain questions: e.g. the role of the “Barmen Declaration” as confession; or a clarification of the distinction between federation and church. These would be prominent in the discussions leading to the formation of the EKID. They were questions which had already been raised by Sasse in May/June 1934, at the time of the Barmen Synod, and by the “intact” Lutheran churches in September of that same year.

Professor Sasse was allowed²³ a part in these plans and discussions. Already in the summer of 1945 he prepared draft documents for his bishop, Meiser,²⁴ not only a constitution for a “Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische

²¹ Sasse, *Here We Stand, Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith*, trans. by Theo. G. Tappert, New York: Harper, 1938 / Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1946, 180; Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1979, 188

²² A term used in this paper to indicate not only the “Declaration” but also and especially the move to a common confessing action by Lutheran, Reformed and Union churchmen. This could also be called a Barthian movement.

²³ To indicate that later, certainly by 1947, Sasse claimed that he was being excluded. See F. W. Hopf, “Vorbemerkung” to “Zwei ‘Offene Briefe’ (1947 und 1948),” *LuBl* 30.115 (9 Aug. 78)

²⁴ Henry P. Hamann indicates that it was at the request of “some Lutheran bishops,” in “Hermann Sasse: The Adelaide Chapter,” in idem., *Theologia Crucis, Studies in honour of Hermann Sasse*, Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1975, 5

Kirche in Deutschland," (VELKD), but even a statute for the council of "Evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland."²⁵

There was to be a United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany and beside it a Reformed and, if necessary, also a United Church, standing side by side independent in doctrine, worship and polity, each with its own church government. These three churches should then in the great common problems form a "Council of Evangelical Churches in Germany" as a standing organ or a narrow federation.²⁶

These were in preparation for the first church conference in Treysa, August 27-September 1, 1945. Meiser did not present Sasse's drafts but instead assented to the "Council of the Evangelical Church [Kirche] in Germany."²⁷ From this time it appears there was a distancing between Sasse and his bishop.²⁸

In this period Sasse saw the spectre of the events of 1933 and 1934 in everything: what the Reich endeavored to impose on the churches in July 1933 was accomplished finally at Treysa in August 1945.²⁹ And that was essentially what was proposed at Barmen. In recognizing the equality of all confessions, the 1933 constitution affirmed that such an alliance of confessions bears witness to "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." This interpretation of Ephesians 5, however, contradicted Augustana VII, according to Sasse.³⁰ But with this Barmen took no exception: "For the assumption of this synod was in fact that the 'German Evangelical Church' existed theologically-dogmatically with justification."³¹ Even Barmen however did not solve the prob-

²⁵ "Entwurf einer Verfassung...", "Entwurf einer Satzung..." and "Erläuterungen zu den Entwürfen..."; see also the document, without title, concerning "Der Plan, die lutherischen Landeskirchen Deutschlands zu einer 'Vereinigten Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Deutschland' zusammenzuschließen," n.d., 10pp (Landeskirchliches Archiv, Hannover, D15/V/Nr.16 [hereafter: HLA]); and the letter to Meiser (22 Jul 45), 1p (HLA/D15/V/Nr.14). Note especially the distinction between "Kirche" and "Kirchen" in these documents.

²⁶ Letter to H. Preus (13 Jan 46) (STP); see also "Offener Brief an die Brüder...", 7

²⁷ F. W. Hopf in: footnote to "Zwei 'Offene Briefe' (1947 und 1948)," *LwBl* 30.115 (9 Aug 1978) 7n5; cf. Wittenberg, "Hermann Sasse und 'Barmen,'" 87n13

²⁸ Wittenberg, *ibid.*, 86, describes how, since Treysa, communication passed between them only through Christian Stoll; with Stoll's death in December, 1946, contact ceased.

²⁹ "Offener Brief an die Brüder...", 7

³⁰ *ibid.*, 5

³¹ *ibid.*

lem posed by this alliance, i.e. whether the DEK was to be understood as an alliance or as a church. The Lutherans could only recognize it as an alliance while the United and Reformed pronounced the DEK a church. While there was an affirmation that the EKID was an alliance, Sasse feared that this, as with the DEK, would not prevent a large section of churchmen from understanding and fostering it as an emergent united church. The very title should be a warning. "Truthfulness prohibits us to call church what is no church."³² He asserted the parallel between the DEK and the EKID clearly right after his immigration to Australia. When in 1948 the Lutheran territorial churches helped to found the "Evangelical Church in Germany"

thus voluntarily repeating the resolution which they had passed exactly 16 years before, when with that combination of gnashing of teeth and enthusiasm which is so characteristic of German church history they at Hitler's behest created the "German Evangelical Church."³³

There was furthermore a fundamental conception in the DEK of the church as "national"; this, Sasse noted, was being perpetuated through the conception of EKID.³⁴ A few years later Sasse claimed that the impetus for its formation was as much political as anything, "the means of keeping together all Germany, East and West."³⁵ The unity of the state is best served by pressing all Christians into union.

³² "Offener Brief an die Brüder..." 9. As early as 26 Nov 1945, W. H. Visser 't Hooft, General Secretary of the WCC (in Process of Formation) reported that "E.K.I.D. is more than a federation." This is the opening statement of a two-page document entitled, "Can E.K.I.D. be considered as a Church in the sense of the constitution of the World Council of Churches?" Point 6. stated:

But the most important consideration is that - even if the Union of 1817 must be considered as an Union imposed upon the churches by a secular government - the events of 1934 (Barmen !) and of 1945 (Treysa) have created a new situation. At Barmen the Lutherans and Reformed confessed their faith *together* over against a common foe in order, as they put it, to preserve "the unity of the German Evangelical Church" [DEK].

At Treysa the Lutherans and Reformed have on the basis of their common struggle of the last twelve years created a new common church organ and accepted common responsibility for the great task of re-christianizing Germany. (LWF Archives, Geneva, ES/VI.1./VELKD)

³³ "On the Relation of the Universal Church and the Individual Congregation in the New Testament," *QS* 47.2 (Apr 1950) 108

³⁴ "Offener Brief an die Brüder..." 8f. Years later in a letter to H. Preus (27 Mar 63) Sasse described such a "national" concern: "Dibelius claimed that a united Evangelical Church was necessary to secure the unity of the divided Germany." (STP)

³⁵ Letter to H. Preus (22 Mar 56) (STP)

Since the 19th century the cultured German—and this is true of the members of other nations as well—believes in his nation as he should believe in the Church of God. Faith in the Church is for him an entirely theoretical matter. Faith in his nation is a matter vital concern. “Thou shalt believe in Germany’s future, in the resurrection of your nation.” This was actually the tacit Third Article in the years between World Wars I and II; it was the faith also of Lutheran German. They did not, of course, give up the confession *quod una sancta ecclesia perpetuo mansura sit*. But no one lived by that confession. Nor would anyone die for it as many were ready to die and did die for the confession of faith in Germany. Here perhaps lies the deepest cause of the tragedy of Lutheranism in Germany.³⁶

All this, Sasse claimed, was denying the right of the Lutheran Church to exist in confessional integrity. Lutheranism was conceived, especially by Reformed Churches, as a “form” of Evangelical Christianity, a “school” or “branch” of the Reformation church.³⁷ This allowed the conception of the “Confessional Union” at Barmen which Sasse rejected; similarly the EKID could be understood “as the legal and actual successor of the German Evangelical Church of 1933.”³⁸

The assertion that an independent church government was essential to confessional Lutheranism was an important plea of Sasse throughout his career. In his first “Briefe an lutherischen Pastoren” entitled “Concerning the Status of the Lutheran Churches in the World,” stated the problem at the outset of his analysis: “The need of the Lutheran Church becomes apparent in that she is denied the right to exist as a church and that she has put up with it more or less.”³⁹

This principle was the *cause celebre* of the Lutheran churches’ conflict with Bismarck and the prussianization of the churches. Sasse quoted the sentences of Theodor Kliefoth at the General Evangelical Lutheran Conference, “the first ecumenical organization of Lutheranism” in 1868:

³⁶ “Ecclesia Migrans,” *QS* 50.4 (Oct 1953) 245

³⁷ Sasse discussed this often, e.g. letter to Ralph Gehrke (3 Feb 1959) (Gehrke).

³⁸ “Concerning the Status of the Lutheran Churches in the World,” *QS* 46.2 (Apr 1949) 84; Johannes Meister, “Church and Altar Fellowship in the Evangelical Churches of Germany,” in Vilmos Vajta, ed., *Church in Fellowship Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Among Lutherans*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963, 111 fn111, reproduces a chart from Heussi, *Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte*, 11th ed., Tübingen, 1947, which gives the “Predecessors of EKD” as well as of VELKD. Among the predecessors of EKD he has the DEK of 1933.

³⁹ “Concerning the Status...,” *ibid.*, 81

...church government as an important part of the Church must also, as far as orthodox doctrine and administration of the Sacraments are concerned, be in harmony with the church which it is to govern. Therefore it is not permissible to unite, by means of a common church government, churches which are not in agreement with one another as to doctrine and the administration of the Sacraments.⁴⁰

The Prussian unionists had used the very words of the *Augustana* to refute this: the unity of the Church only consists in the *consentire de doctrina evangelii et de administratione sacramentorum* and not in a fixed constitution.⁴¹ Sasse's rebuttal:

But if the conflict in the German Church since 1933 had one definite result, it was the knowledge that a church cannot adhere to its confession for any length of time as long as only the pastors and the congregations are bound to the confession, but not also the church government.⁴²

With Kliefoth he taught that "church" is not identified solely with congregation or individuals; it exists in all levels involved in the Word being proclaimed and sacraments administered.

The EKID, Sasse claimed, said basically the same thing that Friedrich Wilhelm III had declared in regard to the Prussian Union:

It does not purpose and signify a relinquishing of the hitherto existing confession. Also the authority which the two Evangelical creeds had till now has not thereby been annulled. By joining it one merely expresses that spirit of moderation and charitableness which no longer regards the differences between the two creeds in point of doctrine as a reason to deny each other outward church-fellowship.⁴³

This idea of confessions in turn had its antecedent in the Reformed conception of their role and authority in contrast to that of the Lutheran.

In view of Sasse's historical assessment, the statement of Carter Lindberg in his assessment of Pietism is especially pertinent:

Pietism's dissolution of Orthodoxy's confessional consciousness is directly related to its own self-understanding as an international and

⁴⁰ "Concerning the Status..." *ibid.*, 85

⁴¹ CA VII (*BELK*, 61.2; *BC*, 32.2)

⁴² "Zur Lage der lutherischen Kirchen..." 85

⁴³ *ibid.*, 86; v. also *Here We Stand...*, 11, where this same statement is cited. The Prussian king viewed the Union as a "truly religious union of the two Protestant churches which were still separated only by external differences," cited by Meister, "Church and Altar..." 79

interconfessional movement. Thus Pietism was a decisive preparation for the modern, ecumenical movement.⁴⁴

One of the most interesting documents discovered in my research is one that addressed the very concerns of Sasse about the true nature of the EKID. The document is a confidential report by Michelfelder, Executive Secretary of the LWC.

I have talked with Wurm, Gerstenmeier, Fricke, Niemöller, Lilje, Marahrens, Bodner [Bogner?], and Meiser about the future of EKID. I have also talked to Asmussen. It seems peculiar that in their talks with me they have all agreed that EKID is no more than a federation or a Bund and that no one now wants it to be more than that. However as soon as you talk to those who are distinctly Lutheran in their theology and not Unionistic or Barthian in their tendencies you feel that they fear that Lutheranism in Germany will be more and more pushed into the background and “Unionism” will be promoted. Meiser especially is very set... I forgot to include Sasse in the group with whom I talked. He is also of the same opinion.⁴⁵

That which only Sasse would express openly, publicly, had been shared by others after all. Sasse made the confession; others could not.

Sasse’s attack upon the EKID and especially his fears concerning its eventual form were assessed shortly after his death by Hermann Dietzfelbinger, Meiser’s successor as Landesbischof of Bavaria (1955-1975).

Today, after the plan for an actual transformation of the EKID from a church association into a church—it is called a ‘Federal Church’ [Bundeskirche]—was ruined in 1970 by the vote of the Württemberg Synod, one reads Sasse’s remarks on this matter, also his passionate attacks on quite a few people among us with new eyes.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Carter Lindberg, *The Third Reformation? Charismatic Movements and the Lutheran Tradition*, Macon, GA: 1983, 170

⁴⁵ “Confidential report of S. C. Michelfelder to Dr. R. H. Long and members of the Executive Committee LWCAS [Lutheran World Convention American Section].” LWF Archives, Geneva ES/II.1 General Correspondence Germany, n.d. [ca 1947]; the document has many typing errors which have been corrected without note.

⁴⁶ “Aus Treue zum Bekenntnis Hermann Sasses Vermächtnis.” *Lutherisches Monatsheft*, 6.1 (1977) 6 (trans. by author). The Landesbischof spoke in his autobiography of the cost to the Lutheran Churches and the pain which he shared with churchmen such as Sasse and Hopf: *Veränderung und Beständigkeit Erinnerungen*, München: 1984, 212f.

Part III

III. The VELKD & LWF and Lutheran Ecumenism

[Vereingete Evangelische Lutherische Kirche Deutschlands]

A. The way to the LWF

B. The role of the LWF

C. The consequences of the LWF

In April, 1950, within a year of his arrival in Australia, Sasse wrote these telling sentences to an American correspondent:

I am almost **alone** in my fight against our keeping membership in the Lutheran World Federation. I do not know how this struggle will end.¹

This, as well as much of his work, would indeed be a “lonely” journey. Sasse felt acutely the isolation of his Australian exile²; he would come to sense an even greater loneliness on behalf of confessional Lutheranism. Writing to his dear friend, Tom Hardt:

I know such loneliness, too. I have spent some years on the battle fields. I was lonely in my church in Bavaria. I see the loneliness of my friends and former students. I am also here a lonely man since my church has come under the influence of Geneva.³

Indeed, given the frequent appearance of the vocabulary of loneliness in his letters, one might title Sasse the “Apostle to lonely Lutherans”! More and more for Sasse, those who stood outside the Lutheran World Federation were the lonely ones.

As we take up the last chapter in this historical sketch it is good for us to review Sasse’s description of events. Briefly he asserts that the plan of union proposed by Friedrich Wilhelm III, King of Prussia, in 1817-1830 has been achieved in Germany through the progress of events culminating in the formation of the EKID in 1948. But that is not yet the end of the chain of events. Once the Lutheran churchmen of Germany accepted the EKID and the VELKD allowed itself to become tied to it, Sasse saw the channel via which the Barthian, EKID plan would influence world Lutheranism. Lutheran leaders in the EKID and the VELKD became leaders in the LWF, Hanns Lilje, for

¹ Letter, Sasse to R. Gehrke (22 Apr 50) (Gehrke), emphasis added.

² I do not intend the word “exile” as a negative reflection on Sasse’s Australian sojourn.

³ (21 May 1958)

example. Before too long, the reticence toward the EKID of men like Sylvester Michelfelder gave way to whole hearted espousal of the plan. Above all, it was a shift in the view of the confessions, the role of confessions. The Reformed, particularly Barthian (e.g. his address in 1925), view would prevail, even amongst Lutherans. (Note, for instance how the confessions are taught in the department of historical theology rather than in systematic theology at Lutheran seminaries in North America.)

Sasse rehearsed the story of the chain of events many times in his letters. One of the most complete is found in a letter to Dr. Fredrik Schiotz, at the time president of the American Lutheran Church and at the time newly elected president of the Lutheran World Federation.

The foundation of the EKID in Germany was the logical end of a process that began with the German unions of the years 1817-30. When after 1866 - some Lutheran territories like Hanover, Schleswig-Holstein, Kurhessen, Frankfurt/Main had been annexed by Prussia⁴ - the question arose whether [or] not the union should be extended over all Prussia and even over all Germany - the Lutheran Churches of Germany founded in 1868...- the first pan-Lutheran organisation: "*Die Allgemeine evangelisch-Lutherische Konferenz*" (later called *Lutherisches Einigungswerk*), one of the roots of the Lutheran World Convention of 1923. The purpose of this Conference was to help to preserve the Lutheran Church as church and not only as a party within an evangelical Church....

The effect of the unions was that, though Lutheran convictions and even the use of Luther's Catechism in some cases were allowed to the individual pastors and congregations, the church government had to be neutral towards Lutherans and Reformed. This meant that the Theological Faculties lost their old confessional character.... Since 1848 when the first *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag* was held in Germany the fight was on about the question whether German Protestantism should be organized along confessional or national lines. In 1922 it was organized in the German Evangelical Church Federation (*Kirchenbund*) of which Otto Dibelius said that it was the sleeping car [Pullman] in which the Lutheran churches would be carried into the union church. In 1933 the

⁴ Reference to the battle of Koeniggraetz. "The annexation of Hanover, Schleswig Holstein and electoral Hessa confirmed the dominant position of Prussia. This meant that the leadership of Protestant Germany was taken over by the church and state authorities in Berlin and sealed the predominance of the Prussian Union." "The Situation of the Lutheran Church," ET by George W. Forell from "Zur Lage des Luthertums nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," (1945), 4

Kirchenbund was transformed into the German Evangelical Church (*Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*). This was done in the Hitler revolution, but only a few men protested against this change which would not have been possible without the consent of the bulk of the people, their pastors and bishops. The resistance was organized. But the so-called *Bekennnissynode* of Barmen in 1934 confirmed under the leadership of Karl Barth the Evangelical Church as a union of the confessions under unified leadership. In the following years the confessional question came up under the influence of the growing interest in the sacraments. At the request of the late Bishop Meiser of Bavaria plans were drawn up for the reorganisation of German Protestantism after the breakdown of Hitler's millennium. A constitution was made for a United Lutheran Church in Germany⁵ which, together with a Reformed Church in German and, in case a dissolution of the Prussian Union proved to be impossible, a United Church in Germany, was to be federated in a Council of the Evangelical Churches in Germany (*Rat der Evangelischen Kirchen*⁶ in *Deutschland*). But the national feelings and the influence from Basel and Geneva were so strong that they established in 1947/8 with the approval of the occupation forces a "Council of the Evangelical Church" in Germany which implied that the organisation of the German Protestants was not to be a federation, but a church, the Evangelical Church in Germany, consisting of the territorial churches of various confessions. This was later interpreted by the bishops as a mere federation, but it was more. For the Synod of this EKID has legislative power over the whole of the EKID, and no member church can appoint a bishop not approved by the Council of the EKID. Furthermore, what belongs to the nature of a federation is missing: the right to withdraw. No church can leave the EKID. The United Lutheran Church (VELKD) which was later established is a free association of some Lutheran member churches of the EKID.

This is the tragic history of the Lutheran Church in Germany. Lutheranism is, as one of the great leaders of German Lutheranism in 1870 predicted, a school of thought within a larger Protestant Church.⁷

Sasse had been active on behalf of the old Lutheran World Convention. He was scheduled to address the assembly in Paris in 1935 but was pre-

⁵ Sasse may be referring to his own *Entwürfe*, one for a *Rat der Evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland* and the other for the *Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Deutschland* which he produced at the request of Meiser.

⁶ Underline original: thus the plural, *Kirchen*, rather than the singular, *Kirche*.

⁷ Letter, (22 Jan 1964) (Archives, Wartburg, Dubuque); italics added.

vented from travelling to that meeting by the Nazis.⁸ He was in collaboration with Drs. Michael Reu of Dubuque and Olaf Moe of Oslo on the preparatory work of the Commission on "Church and churches" for assembled scheduled for Philadelphia in 1940 which came to nothing on account of the war.⁹ In this work he recalls that they saw "what the situation of Lutheranism was."¹⁰ It was with reference to this work that, in 1947, he addressed an open letter "To the brethren in the Lutheran Faith assembled at Lund,"¹¹ that is, to the inaugural assembly of the Lutheran World Federation. In this he warned "against the new organisation allowing to abandon the principles of church fellowship contained in the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession."¹²

Given his ecumenical credentials at the time of the first inaugural assembly, it might surprise one that he was not invited to participate. Not only had he been involved in planning the aborted 1940 assembly, he was one of only four German theologians invited to be a member of the Continuation Committee of the World Faith and Order Conference.¹³ Concerning his own selection he reported significantly to his bishop that "not only supporters of the EKID participate in the work of the World Conference."¹⁴ Of course, Sasse had been a member of the Continuation Committee before the war, from 1928 and was even selected for the Executive Committee in 1934.¹⁵ But Sasse was not invited. He later remarked:

In 1947 I was deliberately excluded from the delegation to Lund because I could not accept the policy of the Lutheran bishops of Germany who for political reasons (unity of Germany) accepted the new union of the EKID, while my draft of the constitution of the United Ev. Luth.

⁸ His letter of application for leave, (30 Jun 1935) an den Herrn Reichs- und Preussischen Minister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung zu Berlin (E-UA); the negative response, (24 Jul 1935) Dr. Molitoris, Dozentenführer die Erlanger Dozentschaft an Rector (E-UA).

⁹ Sasse to Schiøtz (22 Jan 1964) *ibid.* and Sasse to Herman Preus - Letter I (26 Jun 1957) (STP).

¹⁰ (26 Jun 1957) *ibid.*

¹¹ "Offener Brief an die Brüder in Christo, versammelt in Lund zur Luth. Weltföderation 1947 (17 Jun 1947)," *Vervielfältigung*, 7 S. It was later published in *Lutherische Blätter*, 30.115 (9 Aug 1978) 4-10

¹² Sasse to J.A.O. Preus (31 Oct 1963) (CTS; also CTS CTCR; CTS Otten)

¹³ Letter of General Secretary to Sasse (17 Jun 1946) (WCC/F&O/B123/FSAS1)

¹⁴ Letter to Meiser (17 Jul 1946) (HLA/D15/V/Nr.27)

¹⁵ See e.g. Faith & Order Papers, I, No. 65, 16 (Reference Committee election); the Committee of Reference in effect became the Executive Committee. Also F&O Paper, I, No. 71, 4

Church in Germany which should be in a federation with the Reformed and the United Churches was rejected. I sent a message on behalf of some hundred Lutheran pastors who wanted to preserve the Lutheran Church. This was read, but disapproved by the German church leaders. Later they have seen what a mistake it had been.¹⁶

Sasse was, however, invited by the LWF to be a consultant to its Theological Commission.¹⁷ This was upon the prompting of Dr. J. J. Stolz, the General President of his "new" church in Australia. As a member, he continued in his criticism of the organization.¹⁸ There is an extensive correspondence to the LWF from Sasse in this period in which he expresses his concerns and offers his theological admonition.¹⁹ He seems to have led his faculty's review and critique "on the confessional status of the LWF, the danger of this Lutheran federation accepting as members also churches which are plainly unionistic, and the attitude which our church and its representatives at the forthcoming assembly at Hannover should take up."²⁰ The minutes of a faculty meeting chronicle his role in this discussion:

The matter was thoroughly discussed. Dr. Sasse gave a survey of the position as it appears to be at present, and read the draft of theses prepared by him. The faculty was unanimous in what these theses express, and resolved to bring them before the forthcoming S.A. Pastoral Conference as a declaration of the faculty, the intention being to help the brethren here in Australia to see and judge the present position rightly, and the brethren who will represent our church at Hannover to take a correct stand.²¹

Thus, it seems that Sasse had not entirely given up on the LWF. He was, for instance, involved in proposing reforms. In a series of letters to the General

¹⁶ Letter, Sasse to H. Preus (26 Jun 1957) (STP)

¹⁷ Letter, S. Michelfelder to Sasse (13 Jan 1950) and Sasse's reply (24 Jan 1950) (LWF ES/III.4a); also Michelfelder to Sasse (6 Feb 1950) *ibid.* See *Revised Handbook for Guidance of Special Commissions... in prep. for the Assembly of the LWF Hannover July 25-Aug. 3, 1952*; pp. 24f. give members of Commission I—Theology; among "Consultative Members" is Sasse (LWF Archives, HA/I.6); see (24 Jan 1950) LWF ES/III.4a, Sasse responds to invitation.

¹⁸ Letter, probably from H. Katterfeld, Deutsches Nationalkomitee des Lutherischen Weltbundes to Sasse, re: Sasse as member of LWF Theological Commission. Addresses some of Sasse's criticisms of LWF. (n.d., date as placed in file) (LCA GPF B17)

¹⁹ See especially the Archives of the LWF and of the LCA.

²⁰ Minutes of Faculty of Immanuel Seminary, North Adelaide (17 Aug 1951); here, as elsewhere, the German spelling of Hannover is used.

²¹ *ibid.*

Secretaries of the LWF (first Michelfelder, later Lund-Quist) in 1951-52, in the months leading to the Hanover Assembly, Sasse offers lengthy opinions on such reforms. For a time, at least, his opinion was appreciated, if not acted upon.²² Sasse also expressed his concerns to and through the faculty of Immanuel Seminary and his church.

Our Inter-synodical Committees had made suggestions for a thorough reform of the constitution of the LWF which would make it a mere association for external cooperation and doctrinal discussion and prevent anything like “fostering articipation [sic.] in ecumenical movements.”²³

Here then lay one of the errors of the LWF, its promotion of the ecumenical movement. “Even a federation of all these Lutherans in the LWF is impossible as long as the LWF does not revise its impossible constitution which binds it to the WCC. Thus the dividing issue between the two bodies in Australia is the relation to the LWF and WCC.”²⁴ It might be asserted that he saw a parallel to the EKID and the VELKD: As the VELKD was bound to the EKID, so Sasse here notes that the LWF is bound to the WCC.

The main question is the close relationship between the churches of the LWF and the WCC. Actually the LWF is the Lutheran branch of the WCC. To belong to the LWF means to accept the ecumenical ideals which are favoured by both. It is certainly not accidental that the churches of the LWF are almost without exception in declared altar-fellowship with the Reformed churches. Hence any participation in the activities of the LWF beyond being observers should be impossible for members of the Missouri Synod.²⁵

The offense is compounded when even the LWF’s flawed constitution is “violated.” By that, Sasse makes reference to the acceptance into membership certain churches, e.g. in Brazil,²⁶ Chile, Italy, England, “which do not

²² See, e.g. letter of Carl Lund-Quist, Executive Secretary, to Sasse (5 May 1952) (LWF Ha Ass I.7 Reports of Special Commissions)

²³ Letter, Sasse to Gehrke (13 Feb 1956) (Gehrke). Sasse’s quotation is a reference to the Constitution of the LWF, Article III.2 “Functions,” item d: The Lutheran World Federation shall “Foster Lutheran interest in, concern for, and participation in ecumenical movements.”

²⁴ Letter, Sasse to H. Preus (22 Mar 1956) STP

²⁵ Letter, Sasse to J. W. Behnken, O. Harms & J. A. O. Preus (63.04.17) (CHI 200-BEH Suppl.II/Box 2/File 13a; copy in Gehrke Collection)

²⁶ Sasse offers a lengthy opinion on the “Federacao of Brazil” in a letter to S. C. Michelfelder, General Secretary of the LWF (8 Jul 1951) LWF ES III.1 Austra-

accept the CA and the Catechism as *norma normata* of their doctrine, but only as historical documents which had and have more or less some significance for them."²⁷ Some of these churches continued to give the right of full membership to the Reformed; that is, some were actually union churches. He gives particular reference to the Church of Pomerania, the first of the provincial Churches of the Prussian Union.

In this regard, Sasse gave particular attention to the Batak church of Indonesia, the "Huria Kristen Batak Protestant." Here was an example of the lack of integrity in the LWF. That is, they compromised their constitution. The article on membership (IV.) states that the LWF consists of churches which accept the doctrinal basis (Article II) and that each church which applies shall accept the constitution. The doctrinal basis includes "the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism." Concerning this Sasse observed that "Their Church has no CA, uses Luther's Catechism, but only parts 1-3, and teaches in its new confession Crypto-Calvinism."²⁸

In one of a series of letters to Carl Lund-Quist, Executive Secretary of the LWF, Sasse summarized the split in World Lutheranism, a split represented largely by LWF and un-LWF churches.

It seems that the old destiny of Lutheranism of existing in two branches repeats itself in this century. As in the 16th century Philippism and Gnesiolutheranism stood side by side, in the 17th Syncretism and Orthodoxy, in the 19th Unionism and Confessionalism, so we find to-day the two types which Prof. Schlink has characterised as "inclusive" and "exclusive" Lutheranism. The former is based on Augustana and Small Catechism in a more or less Melancthonian understanding. It, therefore, rejects the Formula of Concord and regards Calvinism as a different way of understanding the Gospel, inferior to the Lutheran understanding, but not a heresy. The latter maintains with the whole book of Concord the old rejection of Calvinism. It seems that the LWF has become more and more the organisation of that "inclusive" Lutheranism. There will probably nothing be left to the churches still holding the whole Concordia but to organize themselves, unless Hannover brings about a change of the present policy.²⁹

lia 1949-1952, copy in LCA Arch GPF B17. For Michelfelder's response see letter (24 Jul 1951), *ibid*.

²⁷ *ibid*.

²⁸ Letter, Sasse to Hardt (12 Sep 1959)

²⁹ Sasse to Lund-Quist, Executive Secretary (17 May 1952) (LWF ES III.1 Australia 1949-52)

After 1953, Sasse's correspondence with the LWF almost ceases, at least with the executive of the federation. This was partly due to the type of responses given to his letters of 1951-52. The visit by Lund-Quist to Australia in 1953 seems to have been a turning point also. The faculty of the UELCA registered its concerns.

COMING OF LILJE AND LUNDQUIST. The coming of these two men, of which the members of the faculty together with all other pastors were informed not at the recent pastoral conference but, together with the lay delegates, at synod, and the bearing which it may have on our union negotiations was discussed at length. The faculty is aware of the fact that it has no status enabling or obliging it to speak *ex officio* in this matter. But as pastors and teachers of theology who at the same time are members of the intersynodical committee we nevertheless felt obliged to raise a warning voice. We are agreed on the following:

1) We consider it unwise that these two men have been invited at this juncture;

2) Altar fellowship with Lilje and, consequently, also with Lundquist is out of question, and pulpit fellowship with Lilje hardly comes in consideration, especially if he should have pulpit fellowship with the congregations of Melbourne and Sydney. We cannot but advise that their activity among us be confined to lecturing.

The principal will inform the President General of the above.³⁰

In a letter later that year, Lund-Quist expresses a different view of Sasse: "The main problem at the moment in Australia is our friend Sasse who lets fly at the Missouri Church too when he thinks it serves his purposes."³¹

It was the Third Assembly at Minneapolis in 1957 that seems to be the watershed for Sasse; after that, he gave up hope for any reform of the LWF. In anticipation of the meeting he asked:

I wonder whether it is possible to turn back the wheel at Minneapolis. This will at any rate be the most decisive convention. It will either mean the confirmation of the present course which leads to the final breach between conservative and liberal Lutheranism, or it will be the turning point toward a better LWF. We Australians have made definite suggestions for a reform of the constitution by our intersynodical committees. At any rate there should be time at Minneapolis for serious and thor-

³⁰ Minutes, Faculty Meeting, Immanuel Seminary, North Adelaide (11 Mar 1953)

³¹ Letter to Oswald Hoffmann (7 Dec 1953) (LWF GS VI.1 LCMS 1952/54)

ough deliberations. Thus far such deliberations have always been short-cut by big demonstrations and celebrations which may have their place, too... But this superficial method of dealing with the most vital problems of the Lutheran Church in a hurry, this constant relying on the opinion of others instead of asking what God's Word demands, will lead to the destruction of Lutheranism.³²

Later he mentioned a more specific issue to be addressed at this assembly.

Minneapolis will mean a great decision. It seems that they are going to receive into full membership the provinces of the Prussian Union though these never will give up their church-fellowship with all German churches, including the Reformed. It seems that the Augsburg Confession now becomes a mere legal document, like the 39 Articles in the Church of England.³³

When Sasse was again overlooked in 1957 for the Minneapolis assembly, the chagrin was evident:

This time I shall not be sent, though our UELCA is represented by about 7 or 8 members, two delegates and some accredited visitors.³⁴ There is even money to send over some natives from our mission field in New Guinea. But there is not a penny for a man who has been searching the problems of Lutheran unity for almost 40 years. What new kind of papacy are we developing? I would regard this as more or less a joke, if it were not indicative of a disease within Lutheranism, to say nothing of my personal destiny. Let me be silent about that.³⁵

On a more personal level, Minneapolis marked another change. "But the Spirit of Geneva and Minneapolis has pervaded the whole church. I am facing a serious crisis, as so often in my life. Were it not for my wife, I would join Missouri. But she cannot stand another removal."³⁶

At Minneapolis, the tragedy of Helsinki, six years later, was already foreshadowed. Sasse had the ears to hear, like few of his contemporaries perhaps, the un-Lutheran language of Barmen in the keynote address by Bishop Lilje. It was clearest in that one sentence: "We are at the point of expressing a confession of our faith" in the presence of God and before the eyes of the

³² Sasse to H. Preus (22 Mar 1956) (STP)

³³ Letter, Sasse to Gehrke (4 Jan 1957) (Gehrke)

³⁴ The "x" marks note, in hand, in left margin: "They are just collecting money to send also a future lecturer of our Seminary who is studying at Heidelberg." This is a reference to Eric Renner.

³⁵ Letter, Sasse to H. Preus (26 Jun 1957) (STP)

³⁶ Letter, Sasse to Hardt (12 Sep 1959)

world.³⁷ Lilje compares this situation with that of the ancient Church, the assembly of Minneapolis with the ecumenical councils. Sasse comments:

What interests us here is not this theology, but the underlying concept of the confession of the Church... We say that simply to show that Lilje's concept of the confession is not that of the Ancient church. Neither is it the concept of the Reformation. It is that concept of the Creed which has arisen among modern theologians of Barthian persuasions and of the circles around the Student Christian Movement from which Lilje comes... Certainly a man like Lilje is not prepared to give up the confession of the fathers. But the real confession is to him the actual confession of the moment, in which the old confession ought to become real. One must read the address of Minneapolis in order to understand the deep disappointment of this Christian youth leader who by all means wants to be modern...³⁸

The assembly in Helsinki in 1963 shocked a few churchmen while others seems desperate to ignore its embarrassment. Sasse immediately saw the "fiasco." It was the consequence of attempts like that of Lilje "to be modern." It was later described, perhaps ironically, by Carl Braaten:

Who can forget the Helsinki fiasco of 1963 when Lutherans from around the world expressed serious doubt whether the message of justification was relevant any longer to the so-called "modern man"?³⁹

As if commenting on Braaten's observation, but most surely with reference to Lilje's approach, Sasse declared:

We cannot spare modern man the scandal of the cross, the scandal of the Biblical doctrine of sin and forgiveness, of the justification of the sinner in the sense that Christ's righteousness is the only righteousness we have before God. What astonishing statements on the modern man were made at Helsinki, as if we cannot expect from him to understand what sin and judgment is, statements made by men who just had escaped the terrific judgment of God in history.⁴⁰

In the end, Sasse's confession place him *in statu confessionis*. "It may become my duty to separate from my present Church if she continues to

³⁷ Letter, Sasse to Schioltz (22 Jan 1964), Archives, Wartburg, Dubuque. Sasse quotes from the booklet "Messages of the Third Assembly. The Lutheran World Federation," 11.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ The description of Carl Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983, 38

⁴⁰ Letter, Sasse to Schioltz (22 Jan 1964)

remain a member of the LWF," he wrote Tom Hardt in 1959.⁴¹ His was a confession made at great cost to himself and his family. At the pastors' conference and in the presence of the Executive Secretary of the LWF, Carl Lundquist, he would confess.

At the Pastors' Conference I shall confess, at synod I shall not be present. Since 6 years I am *in statu confessionis*. I cannot receive Holy Communion in my congregation or at the Pastors' Conference. The logical step would be to transfer to the ELCA. This would smash all hopes for a union of the two churches. Besides, it would kill my wife. What shall I do? I confess by word and deed, but I cannot leave my office, my honre [sic. home?] It is a tragic situation.⁴²

Dr. Hermann Sasse, whose life was marked by tragedy and loneliness, knew the life under the cross. He was a theologian of the church. The church which could hold so many disappointments and tragedies was also the church in which he found forgiveness and strength in Word and the sacraments. He would doubtless have rejoiced in the words of one of his church fathers, Wilhelm Löhe:

"Behold the church! It is the very opposite of **loneliness**—blessed fellowship! There are millions of saints and believers who are blessed in it, and in the midst of their songs of praise is the Lord. No longer **lonely**, but filled, satisfied, yes, blessed is he who is one of these millions who completely and fully have Christ and with him have heaven and earth!⁴³

⁴¹ Letter, Sasse to Hardt (17 Sep 1959)

⁴² *ibid.*, italics added.

⁴³ Loehle, Wilhelm, *Three Books About the Church* (Seminar Editions), trans. & ed., by James L. Schaaf, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969, 51

Conclusion

The “death of confessional Lutheranism,” (Sasse could call it nothing less) in this period was due to the triumph of the ideas of the Prussian Union at the beginning of the 19th century. These ideas were put into effect because of a changing understanding of the role of the confessions. Karl Barth’s ecclesiology provided the rationale or the theological basis for this shift. Sasse, the historian, was able to identify the chain of events, the movement of thought from 1817 to 1948.

The rationale for the Prussian Union would form the basis of argument for all that followed. Friedrich Sack, court preacher of Frederick II and advisor to Friedrich Wilhelm III, contended that the traditional issues responsible for the division of Lutheran and reformed confessions no longer carried any weight.

Generally the counselors at court and in the royal cabinet used a variety of arguments to encourage Friedrich Wilhelm III. Like the king, these royal ministers reiterated the irrelevancy of confessional differences by appealing to a heartfelt faith in the Lord. Like Sack, the king’s aide, they invoked an enlightened spirit of tolerance.¹

Notice here the emphasis on the *fides qua creditur*, “a heartfelt faith,” at the expense of the *fides quae*.

Sasse referred to this rationale in a quote from the Plan of the Prussian Union of 1830:

The Union does not intend or signify the abandonment of confessions of faith which have heretofore been used, nor does it abolish the authority which the Symbolical books of the two evangelical communions have hitherto exercised. Concurrence in the Union is only an expression of the spirit of moderation and charity which no longer allows difference in isolated articles of faith to serve as ground for a denial of external ecclesiastical fellowship on the part of one communion toward the other.²

Nearly 150 years later we read the same language in the Leuenberg Concord (September 1971):

(27) Wherever these statements are accepted, the condemnations of the Reformation confessions in respect of the Lord’s Supper, christology,

¹ Walter H. Conser Jr., *Church and Confession, Conservative Theologians in Germany, England, and America 1815-1866*, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984, 14; see also 17. Emphases added.

² Here We Stand..., 11

and predestination are inapplicable to the doctrinal position. This does not mean that the condemnations pronounced by the Reformation fathers are irrelevant, but they are no longer an obstacle to church fellowship.³

We are not surprised when we read a similar explanation for the EKID of 1948. In a small booklet, a brief introduction to the EKID, one reads the following in the first paragraph:

1.1 Unity in Diversity: Protestant Christians worship in very different ways in Westphalia and Württemberg, in a small Lutheran village in Central Franconia and in the Reformed urban parish in East Friesland. The term "protestant" implies both unity and diversity: unity in the fellowship of faith and life enjoyed by all Protestant Christians across the regional and confessional barriers; diversity in tradition and forms of worship in the different independent territorial Churches.⁴

Now one only need insert Karl Barth to understand the final ingredient. Barth's ecclesiology is a critical factor.⁵ Paul Avis has labeled Barth's doctrine of the church as "an ecclesiological actualism."⁶

The positive substance of this is that the church is Christ's "earthly-historical form of existence" (Barth is here developing D. Bonhoeffer's insight in his youthful work of 1930, *Sanctorum Communio*, that "Christ exists as the church").

This is an ecclesiology derived from Johann Adam Möller, a Roman Catholic theologian of the 19th century, via Bonhoeffer. Sasse had identified this succession in modern ecclesiology.

The idea of the *Una Sancta* underlying the Ecumenical Movement as represented by the WCC is essentially the same: All Christians on earth united in one visible unity are the Body of Christ on earth, the continuation of the Incarnation, "Christ existing as Church" (Bonhoeffer).⁷

Avis also describes the Barthian "Church as Event":

³ *Lutheran World* 20.4 (1973) 347ff.; cf. *The Springfielder*, 35.4 (Mar 1972). The trans. by John Drickamer in *The Springfielder* is considered a better one.

⁴ *The Evangelical Church in Germany, A Brief Introduction*, n.p., n.d., emphases added.

⁵ see *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1: 62, pp. 642-725

⁶ "Ecclesiology," in Alister E. McGrath, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, Oxford & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993, 131b

⁷ Letter to J. W. Behnken & O. Harms (31 Oct 1962) CHI 200- BEH Suppl. II Box 2 File 13a [52330b]

The church exists only as a definite history takes place, its act is its being, its essence its existence... it exists only when it takes place.

In a similar manner, confession is event. Confessions are relativized to a present act, "only when it takes place." Thus at Barmen, it was the event that mattered, the *kairos* event. Sasse observed this emphasis even in the reaction to liberalism by dialectical theology. "[Barth] developed since 1925 a concept of the confession in which the actual act of confession was dominant and overshadowed the doctrinal content of the confessions."⁸ This can be seen as a variation on the *fides qua creditur, fides quae creditur* debate. This was expressed very well years later by Carl Braaten.

A confession lives in the church in terms of *kairos* and crisis. The church formulates a confession in a special *kairos* to face a particular crisis.

The confessions are not like Bartlett's quotations or a set of timeless axioms. They breathe the air of their time.⁹

The title, "'Confessing' Church", was itself significant.¹⁰ While for Sasse a confessional church must necessarily be a confessing church, it also must necessarily be both.¹¹ Nothing should be allowed to rob the creed of its doctrinal content. The occasion of confessing must not ignore or be separated from its substantive content. "The essence of a church confession lies, first of all, in the fact that it bears witness to objective truths."¹²

When Eberhard Bethge described how much Sasse impressed Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he also identified the chief point of difference in precisely these terms of confession.

Bonhoeffer's earlier delight at his discovery that Sasse's resistance and the view he held sprang not from ecclesial conservatism, but from a new

⁸ Letter to Leiv Aalen (21 Jun 74), (Marquart [93]). For a similar notion in Dietrich Bonhoeffer see Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer...*, 475-6.

⁹ *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, Philadelphia: 1983, "The Confessional Principle," 27-42, here quoted from 33; see also Zeddies, "The Confession of the Church"

¹⁰ Hopf 189 - "On the Problem of the Union," II, 273

¹¹ *ibid.*, 277. In a document proposing the nature of a VELKD, Sasse discussed the importance for both, the act and content of confession:

"It is the perception of the necessity of the churchly confession for the church in the double sense: that a church which does not confess its faith before the world, ceases to be the Church of Christ and it arrives at that not only in the act of confessing, but also in its content. The Church must know what it believes, teaches and confesses; and it must make this confession fearlessly before the world." (HLA/D15/V/Nr.16 [148f, et passim].)

¹² Hopf 148 - "Church and Confession," 74 [emphasis original]

relationship to the Confession, had, of course, given way to profound disagreement over the assessment of the function and dignity of historical confessions. Sasse, for his part, had come to see Bonhoeffer as an "enthusiast" because the latter credited the living event of communal, actual confessing with so much power that anti-theses dividing churches dwindled to antitheses dividing schools.¹³

We now appreciate Sasse's agenda with *Here We Stand* and *This is My Body*. In the case of the former, the author added a major section on the theology of Karl Barth for the American readers. He explained the circumstances in a letter in 1953.

The first English Edition... was prepared on the advise of the later [sic.] Dr. Reu who wanted to have put in a chapter on Barth which now is obsolete since the development of Barth has gone on with the appearance of the long series of the volumes of his "Dogmatik".¹⁴

Not long afterward, also in a letter to his publisher, he speaks of his concerns for the publication of *This is My Body*. He describes how the Confessing Church undermined any discipline concerning altar fellowship.

The reason why I should like to see it printed is this. American Lutheran[ism] is now being invaded by European theology which almost entirely has given up the doctrine of our Church on the Sacrament of the Altar.¹⁵

The tragedy, as Sasse often called it, in these events, is not limited to the loss of confessional Lutheranism in Europe. Sad also was the silence of American Lutheranism in the face of it. "The great mistake of Missouri," he in 1954, "was made in 1948 when they refused to say a word about the EKID and the LWF."¹⁶ Ten years later he wrote to Dr. Behnken: "But where was the voice of Missouri when the EKID was founded and the Lutheran bishops joined for political reasons and silenced those who spoke for the confession?"¹⁷

Thus, Sasse calls us all to repentance. But he has also taught us about confession as more than the content of the book, but as that for which we

¹³ *Dietrich Bonhoeffer...*, 475f

¹⁴ Sasse to Paul T. Martinsen (Augsburg Publishing House) (6 Apr 1953) (STP). See also the "Translator's Note" by Theo. Tappert, xiii.

¹⁵ Letter to General Manager, Mr. Haugen (30 Dec 1956) (Gehrke Collection)

¹⁶ Sasse to Gehrke (5 Nov 1954)

¹⁷ Sasse to Behnken (26 Feb 1964) CHI 200-BEH J. W. Behnken Suppl. II Box 2 File 13a [52339]; a similar charge in another letter (19 Oct 1958) CHI 200-BEH Suppl. II Box 2 File 13 [52312].

would die. He has especially taught us about the role of confessions and of confessing.

I have reminded my friends and brethren of Breslau of the character of the confession in the Lutheran Church. The *magnus consensus* of the true, biblical confession binds together not only the confessors of this day, but also the generations of history. By confessing the ancient Creeds we are in the *koinonia* of the true believers of all centuries. The Augsburg Confession is a repetition and elaboration of the Ancient Creeds (what does it mean "*propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem*"?). The Formula of Concord explains the Conf. Augustana. Thus we have, when confessing to-day, to take in account not only the people with whom we live to-day, but also the fathers.¹⁸

¹⁸ Sasse to Behnken (23 Oct 1958) CHI 200-BEH / Suppl. II, Box 2, File 13 [52313]

Reaction to 1995 Reformation Lectures

by Pres. Emeritus Armin Schuetze

After I had read Dr. Feuerhahn's Sasse lectures, two words of our Savior quickly came to mind. "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father in heaven." "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me." The lectures showed Dr. Sasse to be a fearless and tireless confessor: he confessed the Lord Jesus as Savior from sin; he followed him, taking up his cross.

Dr. Feuerhahn has presented to us a scholarly and informative portrayal of Sasse, this highly gifted, capable, and conscientious child of God, as he labored for Confessional Lutheranism. Barmen, EKiD (*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*), the LWF have become more vivid as prime examples of the failure of confessional Lutheranism in the mid-twentieth century. How hard and unselfishly Sasse fought to prevent this! From his presentations it is evident that Dr. Feuerhahn has devoted much time and study to Sasse's life and battles, to his correspondence and writings. We thank him for these outstanding lectures that commemorate the One Hundredth anniversary of Sasse's birth.

In discussing the significance and theology of a man like Sasse as a confessional Lutheran, one is hesitant to point out what we consider a weakness in his theological position. Unfortunately Sasse failed to come to what we consider a completely satisfactory doctrine of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. In this he was critical of Pieper, Engelder, Joh. P. Meyer, on the doctrine on Scripture held by the former Synodical Conference.

The faculty of the Wisconsin Synod's Thiensville (now Mequon) seminary held Sasse in high esteem. Dr. Peters, who had spent many years in Germany as theological professor in the Saxon Free Church seminary, reported on Dr. Sasse's visit in July 1948. He referred to Sasse as one

"whose knowledge on the history of the Lutheran Church and of its teachings is outstanding, and whose seriousness in searching the Scriptures and in championing Lutheran doctrine and practice is apparent to all who learn to know him" (*WLQ*, 1948, p 208).

When Sasse began his series of "Letters Addressed to Lutheran Pastors," the seminary faculty translated and published these in its *Quartalschrift* (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*), with this note:

“To date four letters have reached us. Others are to follow. God willing, they will be translated for publication in the *Quartalschrift*... For we hold that the content of these letters deserves a careful study on the part of every Lutheran reader” (*WLQ*, 1949 p 81).

Between 1948 and 1952 ten letters appeared in the *Quarterly*.

In January 1952 a News and Comment item in the *Quarterly* explained why three of Sasse’s letters had not been published: No. XIV and XVI on Inspiration and the Inerrancy of Scripture, and No. XX on the Confession and theology of the Missouri Synod. After this, only one more letter was published, in 1953.

What were the points in which Sasse found himself in disagreement with the doctrine of Scripture and its inerrancy as held by the WELS and those who believe in the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture? As we consider this question, Sasse quotations will be taken from *Sacra Scriptura: Studien zur Lehre von der Heiligen Schrift*. This volume was published by his good friend, Pastor Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, in 1981. It includes the two letters, No. XIV and XVI, referred to above.

Inspiration

That Sasse had a high regard for the Bible and considered it divinely inspired is beyond question. He wrote:

“That Jesus is the Christ and Lord is found only in the Bible... Without the Bible mankind would not know that most important fact for the living and dying of all people.” (p 216). “Because Scripture testifies of Christ, because Jesus Christ is the content, the true (real) subject of Holy Scripture, that is why it is ‘the Holy Spirit’s book’” (p 218).

Referring to 2 Timothy 3:16 and 1 Peter 1:19ff Sasse gives the following as the teaching of the church of all times: “The authors of the biblical books were given what they should speak. It was not they who were speaking there, but it was the Holy Spirit who spoke through them. That is the Christian understanding of the inspiration of the Holy Scripture as the Lutheran Reformation won it from the witness of Scripture itself” (p 213).

But the question may be asked how this inspiration took place? How did the Holy Spirit use human authors to write his word? The dogmaticians say that God moved the writers (*impulsus ad scribendi*), that he gave them the subject matter and the very words (*suggestio rerum, suggestio verborum*). Prof. John Meyer in an article on inspiration points out:

“This is not an attempt to understand the mystery, nor is it a theory

about inspiration: it is merely an attempt at summarizing the various statements which the Scriptures make about their own origin" (*WLQ*, 1951, p 250).

Hoenecke makes the same point and quotes 2 Peter 1:21 for the *impulsus* and 1 Corinthians 2:12, 13 for the *suggestio rerum and verborum*. Thus this summarizes from Scripture what happened but does not explain the how. Sasse, on the other hand, calls this "an attempt to make the process psychologically understandable," which is impossible (p 226). He contends that this "explanation" is not biblical but has its origin with Augustine and his neo-platonic philosophy. In this way, without expressly using the term, he in fact rejects verbal inspiration.

Inerrancy

In discussing the inerrancy of Scripture, Sasse stresses that while we must with all earnestness and without any limitation say of the Bible that it is God's Word and that the Holy Spirit is its author, we must with no less earnestness explain that the books of the Bible are true human words, written by sinful, fallible and imperfect human authors (p 223). So he raises the question

"whether the work of a human author can have the characteristics which in the doctrine of inspiration have been ascribed during the age of orthodoxy to the Bible as God's Word, the characteristics of inerrancy and freedom from all contradictions" (p 232).

Sasse does not want to be misunderstood. No Christian can or should ever question

"the absolute infallibility, clarity, and sufficiency of Scripture in all articles of faith, in all questions which concern man's relationship to God and our redemption" (p 232).

The question, however, remains whether this infallibility and freedom from any incorrect or inaccurate statement and all contradiction can be extended to every non-theological statement, especially also to every historical reference and all statements that concern nature, which are part of the external view of the world (*Weltbild*). While he does not question the inspiration of the entire Bible, he considers the concept that therefore it must be inerrant as an ideal that is of human origin and was read into the Bible. Evidence of this he sees in the fact that wherever the Bible has been viewed as a book that is completely perfect and free of every inaccuracy and contradiction, one ran into the problem of the four gospels which defies any attempt at a rational solution (p 234). In

fact, any effort at a harmony of the gospels attempts to improve on the Holy Spirit's inspired words. About the four Gospels and the claim for inerrancy he writes, and these words are in italics for emphasis:

"If one understands the gospels on the basis of the axiom that the New Testament is free of every 'error,' and that includes also every historical inaccuracy, and of every 'contradiction,' that means also of every discrepancy in historical tradition (transmission), then you end up with a Christ-picture that is no longer the Christ-picture of the New Testament" (p 236).

To the Scripture as infallible in all articles of faith, Sasse says Yes. To the claim that the divinely inspired Scripture must be inerrant in all its says, Sasse says No. He rejects John 17:10: "Scripture cannot be broken," as a basis for this claim.

An example of what Sasse's view of Scripture allowed by way of exegesis we have in comments he makes regarding the creation account in Genesis, the *Uroffenbarung* (revelation of origins or primitive revelation), as he calls it. *Sacra Scriptura* contains a number of articles under the heading *Zum Verstaendnis der biblischen Uroffenbarung* (Toward understanding the biblical revelation of origins). He sees Genesis one and Genesis two giving us two distinct creation accounts. Of these he writes:

"If one attempts artificially to harmonize them into one account, essential aspects are lost. Lost first of all is the literary beauty of both texts. The second, clearly the older and in popular style, written by a master of oriental story telling, distinguishes itself by its delightfully vivid description" (p 57).

He theorizes about the creation of man:

"We don't doubt that God made man from a 'clod of earth' (*Erdenklosz*), but we cannot say what this clod of earth was. Could it possibly have been a living being, from the animal world, which God had predestined to become man, the bearer of God's image?" (p 59).

In his view the creation days could not have been normal days as we know them. It was the influence of American fundamentalism that threatens to make the creation day of 24 hours a test of orthodoxy. Although he rejects the evolutionary theories as unscientific, he can speak of the hundreds of thousands of years that have passed since the appearance of man on the earth.

There is, however, no doubt that Adam was a real person and the fall a true historical event. "If the first Adam is not historical, then also the historicity of Christ as Redeemer becomes doubtful" (p 64).

I do not wish to dwell at length on Sasse's failure to see Scripture as verbally inspired and inerrant. It also is not for us to speculate as to what positive influence he might under other circumstances have had in the area of the doctrine of Scripture. In preparing this reaction I did believe that this needed to be said about Sasse's view of inspiration in order to get a complete picture of his theology. There is no question about his love for the Lord Jesus, his love for the Word through which alone he could know his Savior, and love for the church that in its Confessions gave a true exposition of the doctrines of Scripture. The lectures we heard clearly showed that. The Lutheran church has much to learn from him. In saying this, I should like to quote from the *Quarterly News and Comment* item that was critical of Sasse's view of inspiration.

In all this the author is moved by the in itself commendable desire to preserve our Lutheran Church, particularly the conservative part of it, from falling victim to a Reformed fundamentalism which sets up, a priori, the axiom of a Word which, being inspired, must therefore also be infallible; a fundamentalism which then comes with a legalistic demand that because of this axiom there now be an implicit acceptance of every statement of Scripture, as for instance concerning the Savior and His blessed work. The author calls this a subordination of the sola fide to the sola scriptura. He wishes to see the process of thought reversed, namely that for the sake of our faith in the Savior and His wondrous grace we accept as divine the Scriptures in which He speaks to us. (*WLQ*, 1952, p 60)

His warning against Reformed fundamentalism is still needed. Reading his *Here We Stand* will also profit the present generation of confessional Lutherans. His *This Is My Body* is an excellent presentation of "Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar." We are only sorry that we cannot similarly recommend his posthumously published *Sacra Scriptura*.

Bethany Lutheran College is to be commended for making Dr. Hermann Sasse, a champion of the Lutheran Confessions, the subject of the Reformation Lectures in this year of the One Hundredth anniversary of his birth. Thank you, Bethany, and thank you again, Dr. Feuerhahn, for sharing with us the fruits of your Sasse research in your lectures during these two days.

Reaction to 1995 Reformation Lectures

by David Jay Webber

In regard to the recent convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in Saint Louis, the September 1995 *Forum Letter* reports:

The convention showed the strength that younger pastors are beginning to have in the synod. For the most part, pastors who have graduated from the seminary in the last 15 years are less pragmatic than their older colleagues. The theological thinking of many of these younger pastors has been shaped by the heritage of Hermann Sasse (a virtual unknown outside the LC-MS theological stream), transmitted by Norman Nagel and Ronald Feuerhahn at St. Louis and Kurt Marquart at Fort Wayne. Young enough to have escaped conscription into the Missouri Wars, they nonetheless have heard the war stories but carry none of the scars the veterans proudly bear and regularly bare. The battle lines these pastors are apt to draw aren't between "Bible believers" vs. "Bible doubters." Their concerns tend to concentrate on ministry and liturgics, marked by a confessional consciousness often missing from their elders. One can find them well-represented on the pages of *Logia*. On several key resolutions, their votes counted.

The theme for this year's Bethany Reformation Lectures is "Hermann Sasse and the Path of Confessional Lutheranism in the mid-twentieth century." But if the observations of *Lutheran Forum* are correct, and for the most part I think they are, then Dr. Feuerhahn's lectures are certainly not simply a detached recounting of events in past decades that have no bearing on the Path of Confessional Lutheranism also at the *end* of the twentieth century. Indeed, while Hermann Sasse has been dead for almost twenty years, his writings are filled with a vital freshness that is able to inspire a new generation of post-mortem disciples who will no doubt help to mold the character of Confessional Lutheranism well into the twenty-first century.

In some respects Sasse is speaking to many of us in the English-speaking (and English-reading) church for the first time, via the translations of many of his German essays that have appeared in recent years in the pages of *Logia* and in books published by Concordia Publishing House and the publishing arm of Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis. These recently-published Sasse materials, together with his *Here We Stand* and *This Is My Body* which have long been with us, reveal a depth of theological knowledge and conviction

seldom paralleled in other writers. Dr. Feuerhahn's lectures give us a vantage point from which we can begin to understand those mid-century historical factors that coalesced around Sasse, forming the ecclesial "crucible" in which his Lutheran consciousness took a distinctive shape. Dr. Feuerhahn's presentation allows us to develop a greater sympathy for Sasse as a very human character, who learned as he grew and grew as he learned, thus becoming both a tragic and a heroic figure in the history of the Lutheran Church.

As noted in the above *Lutheran Forum* quotation, Sasse's theology has been mediated to the Fort Wayne alumni of the past decade and a half through Kurt Marquart. Of course, these alumni include not only a large portion of the younger pastors in Missouri but also several of us who have found our way into the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Marquart's way of bringing Sasse to us was not an uncritical echoing of everything Sasse ever said. As Sasse himself would no doubt want, Marquart sifted and tested Sasse, sometimes questioning him, often supplementing him, but always loving and respecting him. And this is the way in which my general praise of Sasse should also be understood.

But while we would certainly concede that Sasse on occasion might be subject to correction, we must make sure that it is the genuine, fully developed Sasse we are correcting. As Dr. Feuerhahn illustrates, Sasse's Confessional consciousness developed over time, with his beginnings in the Prussian Union, then to the Lutheran Church of Bavaria, to the A.L.C.-related United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia, and ultimately to a serious consideration of a move to the Missouri Synod. In his later years, through word and deed, Sasse was willing to admit some mistakes of his theological youth.

Probably the clearest example of this would be the maturation process that took place in Sasse's position on the inerrancy of Scripture. As Jeffrey Kloha so convincingly demonstrates in his appendix to the recently-released *Scripture and the Church: Selected Essays of Hermann Sasse*, jointly edited by him and Dr. Feuerhahn, there was a significant difference between the Berlin and Erlangen Sasse, who conceded the possibility of nontheological errors in the Bible, and the later Immanuel Seminary Sasse, who retracted his former teaching and declared that it had been a "great mistake to admit that there were errors in Scripture in non-theological matter" (p 417). And on a subject more directly connected to Dr. Feuerhahn's lectures, there was a significant difference between the early Berlin Sasse, who had made his peace with the Reformed-Lutheran "Union," and the Erlangen and Immanuel Semi-

nary Sasse, who was no longer able to do this. Sasse's willingness to sacrifice his professional prestige and financial security in order to separate himself from the unionist Evangelical Church in Germany shows not a vacillating uncertainty on matters of conscience, but an admirable and consistent development in his understanding of what it meant, and means, to be a Lutheran in the twentieth century.

Ever since the Marburg Colloquy the Reformed have wanted to redefine Lutheranism as a school of thought within one Protestant, Reformation Church. As Cameron MacKenzie once said in a class at Fort Wayne, the Reformed have always been willing to embrace the Lutherans, albeit while holding their noses. And the Reformed have also always had their "co-conspirators" and "fellow travellers" within organized Lutheranism Philippists, Syncretists, Pietists, Rationalists, and assorted hybrids of these elements. In the tragedy of German Lutheranism in the 1930s and 40s, the Nazi "German Christians" and the adherents of the Barthian "Confessing Church" were indeed strange but true allies in their shared desire to do the same thing. Like his embattled country during the same period of history, Sasse was fighting a war on two fronts. And also like his country, he lost. When this war for the Lutheran Confession then spilled over on an international scale into the Lutheran World Federation, heir to the Lutheran World Convention from the pre-war days, Sasse continued his rear guard action. Dr. Feuerhahn's three lectures chronicle the continuing and mostly unheeded series of protests raised by Sasse at various stages of this process.

The fully-formed Sasse could not accept church union on any terms other than agreement in the Lutheran Confession. He realized that a denial of the Lord's Supper was, when followed through consistently, a denial of the Lord himself as our incarnate Savior from sin and death. If the real Jesus in his inseparable divine *and human* natures cannot be found in the bread and wine, where he in his Words of Institution has personally promised to be present for us, then can he actually be found anywhere? Where and how do we look for him if not through faith in *his own Word*?

From his ordination in 1920 until 1933, when he accepted a position at Erlangen, Sasse was a member of the Prussian Union Church. Dr. Feuerhahn reminds us that Sasse's dissatisfaction with this kind of confessional arrangement began in America in 1925-26. He was studying in Hartford, Connecticut, and was exposed to enough of the Krauth tradition in the U.L.C.A. of that day to come to realize that "the Lutheran Church cannot exist unless it

takes seriously the borderline drawn by our confession over against other Christian denominations.”

Sasse's move to Erlangen, and to the Lutheran Church of Bavaria, seems to have been a watershed experience. He turned away from the Union and pledged never to return it. This newly-solidified conviction was immediately tested. The “German Christians” raised the issue with the formation of the German Evangelical Church, a Nazi union; the Barthians responded with the Confessing Church, an anti-Nazi Union. Sasse of course had no sympathy at all with the Nazis, but his genuine sympathy with the Confessing Church nevertheless did not blind him to the fact that he and the Barthians did “not have the same spirit,” to quote Luther. Few people would say that the American situation of today presents us with a crisis of conscience comparable to that which was presented to the Christians of Nazi Germany. However, there are many within the conservative strands of American Lutheranism who think that the seriousness of the moral decay of our society requires us to unite with Evangelicals and traditional Roman Catholics in making a common, public stand, to promote jointly those basic norms of Christian morality and faith which all of us share. What would Sasse think? In his own situation, he certainly believed in the necessity of confessing Christ over against Hitler. But in regard to the Barmen Synod and its Declaration, the actual content of which was unobjectionable to Sasse, he was not able, as Dr. Feuerhahn tells us, to “ignore or set aside the differences between one Christ confession and another Christ confession... One does not challenge the Nazi ideology (or ‘spirit’) any more than any other ideology with anything more or less than the true confession of Christ.” At Marburg in 1529 the Lutherans and Zwinglians were able to agree on fourteen out of fifteen articles, and they were able to agree on most of the wording of the fifteenth as well. But as Sasse himself points out in his monumental and definitive study of this colloquy, *This Is My Body*,

The doctrinal difference concerning the Lord's Supper is not, as Zwingli and his friends believed, a difference in one point of this doctrine only—and a minor one at that—since it is not an article of the Creed. Luther was right when from the very beginning he saw that, as the Words of Institution are the Gospel itself, a difference in the understanding of the Sacrament must reveal nothing less than a difference in the understanding of the Gospel. (p 227)

Sasse, of course, severed his connection with the Lutheran Church of Bavaria when it became a part of the Evangelical Church in Germany in

1948, and he joined the "Old Lutheran" Breslau Synod. Shortly thereafter, in 1949, he moved to Australia to accept a post at the U.E.L.C.A.'s Immanuel Seminary.

In Germany Sasse had not been able to accept church union on any basis other than agreement in the Lutheran Confession. In Australia he began to emphasize that church union should not be withheld because of difference in intra-Lutheran theological tradition if there is, in fact, genuine dogmatic unity. At the risk of over-simplifying Sasse, he believed that the outward unity of the church is to have its basis in the Lutheran Confession as expressed in the Lutheran Confessions, nothing less, and nothing more. Indeed, Dr. Feuerhahn quotes Sasse as saying that he "accepted the call to Australia to help to unite the two Lutheran bodies of the Missouri and the Löhe tradition." It seems that for Sasse the scandal of Unionism was only slightly more offensive than the scandal of Sectarianism, as he perceived it. He did not, however, endorse a policy of simply "smoothing over" historic differences between various Lutheran groups. In Australia the theses of agreement between the two Lutheran churches were hammered out during many years of careful theological discussion, and Sasse was an enthusiastic participant in this time-consuming yet important process. He believed that the merger negotiations between the Australian churches were successful precisely because they revealed, and fine tuned, an already-existing dogmatic unity, and not because they introduced pragmatic doctrinal compromises. Historians and theologians may differ with Sasse in their interpretation of the data, but all must admit that this was Sasse's sincere view.

If Sasse were alive today, what problems in world Lutheranism would attract his attention? We cannot be too confident about our ability to answer such a question, but most of us can no doubt envision some Letters to Lutheran Pastors on the Church Growth Movement, entertainment evangelism, lay ministry, and the like. Most of us would probably also expect to hear him addressing us on the subject of the continuing divergences between and within the churches in America that formerly constituted the Synodical Conference.

Dr. Feuerhahn cites a 1952 letter from Sasse to the Executive Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, in which Sasse describes the difference between

"inclusive" and "exclusive" Lutheranism. The former is based on Augustana and Small Catechism in a more or less Melancthonian understanding. It, therefore, rejects the Formula of Concord and regards Calvinism as a different way of understanding the Gospel, inferior to

the Lutheran understanding, but not a heresy. The latter maintains with the whole Book of Concord the old rejection of Calvinism. It seems that the LWF has become more and more the organization of that "inclusive" Lutheranism. There will probably be nothing left to the churches still holding the whole Concordia but to organize themselves...

Apart from the observation that Melancthonianism would probably represent a huge improvement over the kind of Lutheranism currently represented in the mainstream L.W.F. churches, we note that in recent years the churches holding the whole Concordia *have* finally organized themselves, but in *two* international fellowship structures. The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference is comprised of the E.L.S., the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and small bodies from all inhabited continents which are in fellowship with them. The International Lutheran Council includes the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Lutheran Church-Canada, and overseas churches in fellowship with them. Again, what would Sasse think?

In encouraging the churches of the synodical conference tradition to try to achieve some sort of rapprochement, Sasse would likely echo the sentiments he expressed in *Concerning the Lutheran Free Churches in Germany* in 1946:

Nothing will be gained if the existing differences are minimized or glossed over with formulae thought theologically correct but in reality failing to cope with the real conflicts. We must apply to ourselves the warnings which we have issued to others: No compromises!

He then adds that union between confessionally-serious Lutheran bodies is possible only if both sides are agreed as to the real foundation of the union: not a new doctrinal declaration, a sort of Free Church Lutheran "Barmen," according to which the old Confessions are to be interpreted, but the Scriptures and the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church. Paraphrasing Walther, we ought to speak where the Confessions speak and be silent where the Confessions are silent. Only in this way will the *satis est* of the Augustana be fully recognized. Failure to unite on the basis of the Confessions is an admission that they have lost their unifying power. (CTM XX:8, p 43)

In the current situation such an approach would seem to me to be a little overly-optimistic and impractical for the achieving of the desired ends. However, a renewed and continual study of the Lutheran Confessions with a special focus on the theological issues of our time, such as Church and Ministry, Church Fellowship, Worship and Liturgy, and the Lord's Supper, would

certainly go far in helping us to solve the sad problem of Confessional Lutheran disunity at the end of the twentieth century. We might find that many of the "new" issues of our day are in fact already addressed in substance by the Book of Concord.

And as we study the Lutheran Confessions in this way and for this purpose, Sasse would remind us to maintain a distinction between the dogmatic content of the Confession of our church, which is binding on us, and the various theological traditions through which the dogma has been preserved and passed on to us. We can agree to disagree on questions of terminology, emphasis, and didactic style, as long as we agree on the content of our faith.

According to Sasse it has ever been thus in the Lutheran Church. In *Concerning the Lutheran Free Churches in Germany* he describes the Formula of Concord as a "broad-minded" confession "in which the objectives of Gnesio-Lutheranism were fused with the good elements in Melanchthonianism." (CTM XX:8 p 43) In *This Is My Body* Sasse expands on this thought, reminding us that Melanchthon

became a genuine Lutheran theologian under Luther's strong influence, as the first edition of his *Loci* shows. But he never ceased to be a humanist, and in the course of time the humanist tendencies of his theology came forth again. This did not matter as long as he remained faithful to Lutheran dogma; in every living church there must be room for a variety of theological thinkers, provided they are in agreement as to the dogma of the church. Thus, a difference of interest in, or emphasis on, certain points of doctrine, and even a difference of expression, could well be tolerated. Luther always felt that he and his learned friend supplemented each other. As Melanchthon had learned from him, so he had learned from Melanchthon. It has great significance for the Lutheran church that its Confessions were not written by Luther alone. As Melanchthon's Augsburg confession, Apology, and Tractatus are happily supplemented by Luther's Smalcald Articles and Catechisms, so even the Formula of Concord was written by disciples of Melanchthon and of Luther. This variety in expression of one and the same truth gave the Lutheran Confessions a richness which the confessions of other churches do not possess. Nothing is more significant for the Lutheran church's independence of human authority than the fact that Luther approved of the Augsburg Confession although he clearly stated that he would have written it in a totally different way. It is the doctrine of the Gospel that matters, and not human theology. (p 253)

What Sasse said in a 1951 letter to F. Noack of the Missouri-related Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia regarding theological discussions would in many respects apply to us as well:

We all suffer from the fact that we cannot devote more time to this important task. For success depends after all on this, that we on all sides think these problems through anew and not just repeat the old formulae and slogans. ... We must all try to read the statements of the Scripture, on which we must make our decisions, afresh, and not always only in the pattern of our theological traditions. It is naturally easiest and the most comfortable thing to do: to stay with what we have always said and wait until the other party says the same thing. But that can be the correct method only if we actually are championing only God's Word and not, in addition, our own theological tradition's opinion. Our generation has a great responsibility... (*Scripture and the Church*, p 172-73)

All of the above thoughts, if they apply to anyone, apply to those Lutherans who want the ecclesial entities to which they belong to embody a consistent Lutheranism in all areas of teaching and practice. But we must also consider a much larger group of people who would likewise define themselves in some way as "Lutheran" but who have no such hopes or expectations. Sasse resisted the various movements of his day which wanted to define Lutheranism as a "school of thought" within a larger, general "Protestant" church communion. Today that interpretation of Lutheranism is embraced by an overwhelming majority of those who call themselves "Lutheran." This sentiment is not limited to those who find themselves in the modern-day ecclesiastical heirs of the Prussian Union Church, which have embraced each other on the basis of the Leuenberg Concord and similar agreements. The Porvoo Declaration is even now bringing large segments of Scandinavian and Baltic Lutheranism into the Anglican Communion, on Anglicanism's terms. I remember that when Richard John Neuhaus was ordained a Roman Catholic priest, John Cardinal O'Connor said in his homily that the ordinand was not renouncing his Lutheranism but instead was bringing it with him into his new church. In a certain way, therefore, Neuhaus is probably trying to cultivate a "Lutheran" school of thought within Roman Catholicism, in the company of Georges Tavard and others. And Robin Leaver, an Anglican scholar, said in my hearing at a Confessional Symposium in Fort Wayne several years ago, "I am one of you." He identifies himself as a "Lutheran" presence within Anglicanism. I am even tempted to mention Leonard Klein and David

Gustafson as examples of the people in another well-known church body who are trying to maintain a "Lutheran" school of thought in an otherwise non-Lutheran environment.

These are the contours of world Lutheranism today, at least as most people define Lutheranism, whether we like it or not. What is our response? Do the laity in our churches know that they should not receive Communion at Roman Catholic funerals? Do they know that they should not, indeed *cannot*, receive Communion at Baptist weddings? Do they know the reasons why? Do the pastors know how to explain this to them? Do the pastors believe it themselves? If we are to resist the overwhelming pressure that is being brought to bear on us to become a "Lutheran" school of thought within a broader church, whether it be Reformed-Protestant, Anglican, or Roman Catholic, we must learn how to understand *and live out* our Lutheranism in its unique *churchly character*.

A clerical friend of mine was considering a move from the E.L.C.A. to the Roman Catholic Church a few years ago. I asked, "Is this because you see Lutheranism as a theological movement in search of a church?" He said, "Yes." I then reminded him, "But *the Gospel always creates the church!*" I often have to remind myself of this fact as well.

It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the Divine Word. (Augsburg Confession VII:1-2 [German], Tappert p 32)

I have to learn anew what this means every day, when I pray for the members of my congregation. I have to learn anew what this means every Lord's Day and festival, when I absolve them, preach to them, and commune them. Hermann Sasse, in spite of his imperfections, can teach this to me. Thank you, Dr. Feuerhahn, for helping him do that.

Christ: the one who is to come

An advent sermon delivered on Wednesday, December 20, 1995
at Trinity Lutheran Church, (WELS), Le Sueur, MN

Revelation 1:7

Final sermon preached by
Rev. Glenn E. Reichwald

Dear Friends in Christ, Nothing is more embarrassing than to have unexpected company arrive. It happens in many ways: It is that your husband, on the spur of the moment, invited someone over for dinner. It is that a relative, traveling cross-country, thought it was a good idea to stop at your house for lunch on his or her journey east or west. It is that your son or daughter, coming home from college, arrived just in time for dinner with a carload of fellow students. There is not much that you can do about these things. They happen. But it is most embarrassing when you look at your calendar and see the note on that day that you invited so and so for dinner. It is there on the calendar, but you completely forgot about it. You did not take time to check. And you know whose fault it is.

This is also a good lead-in for our text. We are reminded that Christ not only has come, but also that Christ will come. He will return. And it should be no surprise for us. We have heard this message again and again. It should be well-noted on our mental calendars, lest we forget. Our text for this evening is also one of the reminders that Scripture gives to us. It may also be that we have heard these words so often that we do not really hear them any longer. Let us then revitalize ourselves this evening, and look for CHRIST: THE ONE WHO IS TO COME.

First of all, When is He to come? We do not know. All that the Scriptures say is that this return will happen soon. St. John in Revelation does tell us what the Lord told him: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.'" (*Rev. 22:20*). These words were spoken many centuries ago. And so that "soon" of that Bible verse has become "sooner." When is that day coming? Some people will try to give an answer to that question. Time and time again there have been those who boldly said, "I know when Christ is coming." They would give the day and the hour. And history proved them wrong. Nothing happened. But this did prove Christ right when He said, "No

man knows about that day or hour.” (*Matt. 24:36*) What Christ does tell us is this, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.” (*Matt. 24:42*)

But, that day will come. God has that day circled on his calendar. It is fixed! And we would do well to be ready. Now, you cannot do much about surprise company. You may be working out in the hog barn and be all dirty and smelly when company pulls into the yard. The signs of honest toil are not that bad. Your company may even laugh at you or with you at your appearance. It is also amazing how quickly you can get cleaned up to visit with your company.

But when Christ comes in His glory to judge the world, then it will be too late to get cleaned up for Him. Judgement will be quick and immediate and to the point. That is why there is an urgency that we are ready to meet Him. It is not to live the life of the rich man in the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, who lived a luxurious life away from God. It is not to live the life of the foolish farmer, as Christ pictured him in the parable, who was ready to sit back and enjoy the fruits of his labor— but without God. Christ called him a fool.

It is rather to live a life of readiness, of repentance and faith. We look into the mirror of God’s Law and see ourselves as God sees us: sinners. It is not to find false comfort in the fact there are sinners worse than we are because we know that God judges all sins and sinners. It is to realize that through our sins, whether they are great or small in the eyes of the world, they are guilt before God. And this guilt of sin is far worse than any dirt from the hog barn, or the machine shop, or any other place. And there is only one way to remove it. It is to hear the invitation of grace from the Lord:

“‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are as red as crimson, they shall be like wool.’” (*Isaiah 1:18*)

It is to hear the comfort of the Gospel, which the Lord urged Isaiah to proclaim to his people:

“‘Comfort, comfort My people,’ says your God. ‘Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for...’” (*Isaiah 40:1-2a*)

What does this mean for us? We are the forgiven children of God. We look to Christ, our Savior, in faith, and know that He has made full atonement for us. We look to Him in faith and know that His blood has cleansed us from

all our sins. In this blessed assurance we look for and wait for the return of Christ.

This brings us to our second thought. We look in eager expectation for the return of our Lord. Our text says that He will come with the clouds. He will come visibly. Every eye will see Him. The dead will be called forth from the grave. Even those who crucified Him. All people, both good and evil, will see Him. He will thus come in His glory and visibly. And his enemies will quail at his sight— the Pharisees who mocked Him— the Sadducees of His time and our time who ridiculed any idea of a resurrection— those who lived like the devil because they said there was no devil and no accountability— those who made their heaven here on earth because they said that this is the life now and you only go around once— those who sought the treasures of this world and so gave no thought to the greater treasures of heaven - those who were satisfied with the wisdom of this world and who despised the wisdom of God in the Gospel.

But we who look to Christ, and who look for Christ— we will rejoice. Our Savior has come. We will see Him as He is in all His glory. We will be changed, as Scripture tell us; we will be glorified. All the marks of sin and its effects upon us will end. And we will then move on beyond that day, to the other side of that glorious return, to what lies beyond: fulness of joy which we really cannot understand. But we do know that our Savior promises us in the glorious reunion of His saints in heaven that there will be no more sorrow or sickness or pain or death. These are all passed away. What a glorious day that will be.

That is why the hymnwriter says:

Jesus, Thy Church with longing eyes

For Thine expected coming waits (*TLH*, #64, v. 1)

We also can understand why St. John, after thinking about this, can close his inspired book of Revelation with the simple prayer of faith: "Even so, come Lord Jesus." (*Rev. 22:20*).

Lord, cause us to pray the same. Amen.

Book Review

Charles P. Arand. Testing the Boundaries. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995.

by Prof. J. A. Moldstad, Jr.

This challenging book raises questions pertaining to subscription to the Lutheran Confessions in the light of their historical context. Appropriately the book carries a subtitle "Windows to Lutheran Identity," urging the reader to peek through the eyes of various theologians in the history of American Lutheranism and to observe the role the Confessions played in their methods of theology. At the outset, the publisher's Foreword reveals why Prof. Arand's book provokes careful evaluation. The author, says the publisher, "while encouraging us not to become weary of theological discussion, does not specify where we should be on the continuum that depicts the various approaches or attitudes toward the Lutheran Confessions."

The major focus of *Testing the Boundaries* is the crucial question often debated through the years by Lutheran theologians, "To what extent does the historical form of the Confessions condition and even relativize their content?" (p. 15) Robert Preus is quoted as identifying four ways in which confessional subscription has relativized the Confessions. "The first consists of those who relativize the Confessions historically or 'hypothetically.' The second includes those who relativize them reductionistically, that is limit their content to certain specifics. The third group of Lutherans... ignores or avoids entirely the issue of subscription. Finally, he [Preus] notes, one can 'bombastically reject subscription.'" (p. 19)

Welcomed excursions for the reader are the author's historical overviews of C.P. Krauth and C.F.W. Walther and their tremendous influence on the gravity of confessional subscription for Lutherans in the newly developed land of America. Arand suggests that the "historical approach" to the Confessions, among conservative Lutherans, was advocated first by the leaders of the Iowa Synod (followers of W. Loehe), especially the Fritschel brothers.

An essential transition in the course of *Testing the Boundaries* occurs in chapter 7 ("Confessions as Catholic and Evangelical Witnesses") where Arand discusses the slightly different approaches in later Missouri Synod history. He contrasts the two dogmaticians, W. Arndt and J.T. Mueller, claiming that

Arndt asserted that the biblical character of the Confessions takes priority and must condition an understanding of historical change and development” (p. 220). Mueller, says Arand, although equally staunch in his conviction of a *quia* subscription, “took care not to adopt a dogmatic or speculative view of the Confessions, which would run the risk of rendering them irrelevant to the concrete, contemporary concerns of the church” (p. 210). This reviewer gained the impression the author was most sympathetic to Mueller’s approach.

When the liberal viewpoints of A. Piepkorn, H. Bouman and finally the ELCA theologian, C. Braaten, are aired by the author, the reader may experience some disappointment. Granted, Arand in no way wishes to identify with such a camp— as far as this review can tell. Yet, because the author does not (as frequently as one would like to see) use the opportunity to *clearly distance* himself from the kind of “historical approach” advocated by these liberals, the reader is left hanging until the Conclusion. Where *exactly* does C. Arand stand? Perhaps the ambiguity is designed for inciting hosts of questions. As stated earlier, the author apparently imitates the approach of J.T. Mueller. But when Braaten is allowed to take the platform in the final chapter without much criticism, one can only wonder what C. Arand means by his concluding remark: “Those who have stressed the Confessions as historical documents as well as those who have stressed the Confessions as Biblical expositions make a valid point that must be heeded. The need for relevance in the present and the need for continuity with the past are equally important.”

Can and should one contend, along the lines of W. Arndt, that a Lutheran theologian “must say that all the chief teachings of the Christian faith are found in the Lutheran confessional writings?” (p.221) This reviewer finds himself more in agreement with Arndt than with the position of Arand who seems to suggest a negative answer to that vital question. [If one tries to make the case, for example, that verbal inerrancy of Scripture is a doctrine *not* treated in the Confessions, I believe there are enough quotations from the Lutheran framers to substantiate this doctrine as a “given.”]

Although a casual reader might wonder if the title ought to read “Beyond the Boundaries,” this book certainly deserves careful scrutiny. If it succeeds in driving Lutheran pastors and laity “back into the Confessions” for answers to difficult questions being raised by our contemporary society, then we recommend it appropriately.

