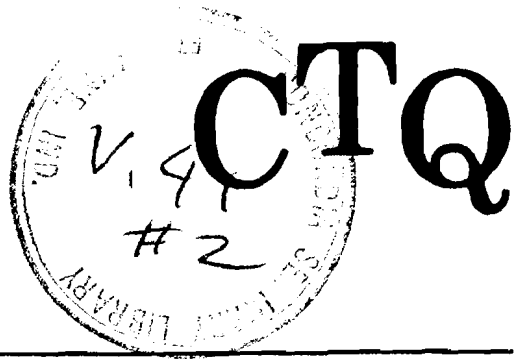


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Concordia Theological Seminary  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

# Editorials

HERMANN OTTO ERICH SASSE, D. THEOL., D. D.  
July 17, 1895 - August 9, 1976

It was not until the August 1976 issue of the *Lutheran Theological Journal* arrived from Australia in December that we learned of the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of a truly great confessional Lutheran saint. On the pages following we are reprinting the obituary written by the Reverend H.F.W. Proeve, Secretary of the Lutheran Church of Australia. There is little that any member of our staff could add.

Dr. Sasse's life was mainly associated with the University of Erlangen in Germany and Luther Seminary in Australia. If any American institution could claim him, however, it would be Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (Springfield). For he spent some time as a guest lecturer among us, as well as visiting the campus on several other occasions. According to what we have learned, the largest lecture-room on the Springfield campus was daily filled to capacity with those desiring to hear him.

On the three occasions that we met him, we were impressed with his sadness. He did not speak about his emigration from Germany, but it must have weighed heavily on him. In 1959 he was introduced to the San Francisco Convention of the Missouri Synod by the late Dr. John W. Behnken. At that time and again in the years 1964-1965, when he was again in the United States, he spoke of the plight of confessional Lutheranism. He saw that the Missouri Synod was internally weakening in theology. Everyone except the Missouri Synod, indeed, was aware of this sickness and of the impending catastrophe that would follow her demise. While other denominations realized the importance of the Missouri Synod and her heritage as a continued confessional leaven in the world, the Missouri Synod herself seemed unaware that she was selling her birthright. Dr. Sasse's pessimistic attitude had not changed when he came to Springfield again in 1967 for his last visit.

Before that time the faculty had awarded honorary doctorates only in connection with the June graduation. An exception was made for Dr. Hermann Sasse. He was awarded his doctorate at the morning chapel service in Immanuel Lutheran Church in the presence of the students and faculty. President J.A.O. Preus spoke glowingly of Dr. Sasse's achievements. At the back of the church after the service, Dr. Sasse with tears in his eyes received congratulations from those in attendance. We do not recall that Hermann Sasse ever returned again to the Springfield campus, but he certainly did not forget this

Seminary. When Pastor Wiebusch, Vice-President of the Lutheran Church of Australia, was awarded the doctorate of our Seminary at a general convention of that church, Dr. Sasse, wearing the Springfield hood, posed with Dr. Wiebusch. Dr. Sasse was, then, both a professor and an alumnus of Concordia Theological Seminary.

Those who rejoice in the survival of confessional Lutheranism as a force in the Lutheran Church of Australia and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod owe a great debt to this man. It would be tragic if this great debt were not partially paid by a small word of gratitude. But perhaps Dr. Sasse received everything he wished. In the last ten years, he did see a great confessional resurgence in the Missouri Synod. The church which seemed destined to lose its self-identity by dissolving into the ecumenical movement and to lose its heritage by an indiscriminate use of the assumptions of higher criticism has come to its senses and has begun to reverse the tide of liberalism. Some regarded Dr. Sasse as a theological nuisance, an anachronistic oddity. But if one confessor of truth has been taken from us, he has left many disciples behind, intent on following in his footsteps. The tribute offered here is not a perfunctory one, but a tribute offered by one who saw that in Hermann Sasse confessional theology was still a live possibility in the Lutheran Church. We would be hard pressed to find a greater confessional hero in our time.

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#### HERMANN OTTO ERICH SASSE

*This short account of the life of Dr. Sasse, who died August 9, 1976, is adapted from the obituary compiled by the Revd H.F.W. Proeve, Secretary of the Lutheran Church of Australia.*

Dr. Sasse was born on July 17, 1895, at Sonnewalde, in Lower Lusatia, Germany, as the son of Hermann Wilhelm Heinrich Sasse and his wife Maria Magdalene, nee Berger. He was baptized in the church of his birthplace on August 2, 1895, by Superintendent Hengstenberg; and on March 22, 1910, he was confirmed in Berlin-Friedenau by Pastor Gornandt.

Meanwhile his education had begun in the public school at Laage, in Mecklenburg, and continued on the secondary level (*Gymnasium*) at Lubeck Krotoschin, Breslau, and Berlin. His three and a half years of studies at the University of Berlin in the faculties of theology and philosophy culminated in his passing the first theological examination in 1916, and—following war service 1916-1918—his second theological examination *pro ministerio* in 1920. Continuing his academic studies during his ministry, he obtained the degrees of Licentiate (now called Doctor) of Theology in Berlin, 1923, and

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Master of Sacred Theology following studies at Hartford Theological Seminary, Connecticut, USA, 1925-1926. In addition, the University of Erlangen conferred on him a Doctorate of Theology (*honoris causa*) in 1933, and more recently, in 1967, Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, conferred on him a Doctorate of Divinity.

Following his ordination to the Holy Ministry on June 13, 1920, in the St. Matthai Church, Berlin, by General Superintendent Kessler, Dr. Sasse first served for about 14 years in the parish ministry. Initially an assistant pastor in Advent Church, Berlin, and at Templin (1920-1921), he took over his first pastorate in Oranienburg, north of Berlin, where he had a parish of 10,000 souls in two churches (1921-1928), and then served as the pastor of St. Marien Church, Berlin, and as the *Sozialpfarrer* (welfare pastor) of Berlin (1928-1933). Even after his parish ministry ceased, the theologian remained at heart a pastor who cared for souls. During World War II, 1939-1945, he served part-time as a hospital chaplain; and here in South Australia it was a constant burden on his heart that his compatriots who were post-war immigrants should receive adequate spiritual care in their mother tongue. He himself gave the local pastors of his Australian spiritual home, Immanuel Church, North Adelaide, as much assistance as possible in this work.

During his studies at Hartford, and as a result of his reading, particularly in Wilhelm Loehe's *Three Books on the Church*, a theological development began which was to have a profound influence on Dr. Sasse's own life and career, and through him in wider circles. He had been serving within the circles of the Evangelical Church of the Union (the Prussian State Church), but his continued studies made him a convinced, confessional Lutheran. In May 1933 he took up duties as Professor of Church History, History of Dogma, and Symbolics in the University of Erlangen, Bavaria, serving there for about 15 years, until he emigrated. These were the years in which he was personally and deeply involved in the confessional aspects of church activity in Germany. He was one of the leading men in the establishment of the Confessional Church in Berlin in 1934, and provided the preparatory work on which its Bethel Confession was based. When the debate and negotiations of succeeding years culminated in the formation of the Evangelical Church in Germany in 1948, Dr. Sasse became a member of the Lutheran Free Church, and in the following year accepted a call as lecturer at Immanuel Theological Seminary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia. He took this step under the conviction, in his own words, that 'where the Altar of our Lutheran Church is, there is our home'.

With his wife and family he arrived in Melbourne on September 11, 1949, on the *Surriento*, and was installed in his lectureship in the field of Church History on October 12. When the seminaries of the two former Lutheran Churches were amalgamated to form Luther Seminary of the Lutheran Church of Australia at the beginning of 1968, he continued to serve for another two years until the end of 1969, thus completing 20 years of service in the Australian institutions. Until his death he was an honorary and honoured member of the Faculty.

Dr. Sasse's retirement was not a signal for him to enter into inactivity. Although increasing age brought with it a handicap of physical infirmity, it did not much dim his mental and spiritual keenness; and his written contributions in particular continued to make him a teacher in the Church. The books, pamphlets, articles, reviews, and editorial work that came from his pen in the past 56 years, as listed in a recent bibliography, total almost 450 entries. They include such valued books as *Vom Sakrament des Altars* (Concerning the Sacrament of the Altar), which he edited and to which he contributed; *Here I Stand; This Is My Body*; and articles in the monumental *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and in a number of theological encyclopaedias. He shared his theological insights and his assessment of ecclesiastical developments through contributions to a wide range of periodicals and other publications, both Lutheran and non-Lutheran, in Europe and England, North America, and Australia; and for varying periods of time during the years 1929 to 1938 he edited three or four periodicals. A selection of his articles was published in Germany, under the title *In Statu Confessionis*, as a 70th birthday tribute. A second volume was added last year to provide a two-volume 80th birthday tribute.

The breadth and depth of his knowledge and learning was known and appreciated in wide circles throughout the Christian Church. In 1927 he attended the World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne, Switzerland, and edited the German report of this Conference. He was a member of the Faith and Order Continuation and Executive Committee until 1936, and a member of the British-German Theologians Conference until the same year. He was active in the Lutheran World Convention, but was prevented by police action from attending its Assembly in Paris in 1935. He served as a guest-lecturer at the Wartburg (Dubuque) and Concordia Theological (St Louis) Seminaries, and twice at Concordia Theological (Springfield) Seminary. He lectured to many church groups and at many tertiary institutions in the cities of Australia, and in New Zealand centres. Through his voluminous correspondence he maintained close contact with eminent churchmen of many branches of the Christian Church in the world.

We remember with gratitude to God that in our Australian Church we were privileged to benefit from his presence. The universal respect in which he was held by all Lutherans in this land and his knowledge of the Scriptures and of the dogmas of the Church enabled him as a member of the Intersynodical Committee of the UELCA to make a very substantial contribution to the discussions which by God's grace led to the establishment of one Lutheran Church of Australia in 1966. Since then he has been a consultant of its Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations, and a participant as recently as the Friday before his death in the Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue in which one of its working committees is engaged.

It was in the difficult inflationary years, while he was the pastor at Oranienburg, that Dr. Sasse married Charlotte Margarete Naumann, the date being September 11, 1924. The marriage was blessed with two sons and one daughter. The daughter, Maria, died while the family was still in Germany; and his wife predeceased him on March 4, 1964.

### CTQ COMING BACK TO THE ROOTS

Concordia Theological Seminary was established in 1846 and in its 130-year history has had four addresses—Fort Wayne, St. Louis, Springfield, and now Fort Wayne again. Perhaps no other educational institution in the United States has had this kind of history and survived. The return to Fort Wayne has been made easier by the knowledge that the seminary has returned to its birthplace. Nearby still stands the home of Pastor Wyneken, pioneer Lutheran pastor in Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio, and the seminary's first professor and president. In November the seminary accepted formal photographs of the three men who were most important in the history of the seminary - Wilhelm Loehe of Neuendettelsau, the seminary's founder; Pastor Wyneken, the seminary's first head; and August Kramer, the one man who served at all three Fort Wayne, St. Louis, and Springfield locations, maintaining continuity in a period of geographical change.

The time has come for The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to pay more heed to the theological heritage of Wilhelm Loehe, who is as much responsible for the Synod's origins as anyone else. In his small German village he trained pastors for the German immigrants. Later that training program was transferred to Fort Wayne. Wilhelm Loehe is still revered in Germany as a pastor, theologian, and humanitarian. The centennial of his death was

commemorated by special postage stamps. Neuendettelsau is still the location for a seminary, a hospital, and other institutions of mercy. In Fort Wayne, Missouri Synod Lutherans support a large parochial school system, a high school, a hospital, a home for the aging, and other charitable establishments. These institutions too reflect the spirit of Wilhelm Loehe.

Wilhelm Loehe always wanted to be thought of as a pastor. Nothing prevented him from visiting the sick. He was especially remembered for praying with the dying. Yet he was not one of those clergymen who are so busy with administration and parish activities that they have no time for theology. Loehe was an eminent theologian. His *Five Books on the Church* have been translated into English and are currently being published by Fortress Press. Many of his writings have been edited for publication in German, and a scholar is currently working at bringing this task to completion. His published liturgical writings are classical and are in the best tradition of the Lutheran Church. His agenda in translation could without difficulty be used in our churches. The services contained there are orthodox, confessional, and catholic.

Wilhelm Loehe provides a model for each graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary as a pastor, theologian, humanitarian, liturgist, and scholar. There is no antithesis between being a pastor and a theologian. A pastor who is not a theologian is a personality-technician. A theologian who is not a pastor is an academician. In Loehe, the roles of pastor and theologian were one. This concept of the ministry is the heritage of Concordia Theological Seminary. With this spirit Loehe served the Lutheran church 130 years ago, and with this same spirit Concordia Theological Seminary still seeks, by the grace of God, to serve the church today.

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#### FORT WAYNE SEMINARY SPONSORS ILCW SEMINAR

Concordia Theological Seminary extends a cordial invitation to all Lutheran pastors to participate on April 21 and 22 in a seminar on the new forms proposed by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship for the celebration of Holy Communion. The next pages contain more detailed information about the program of the seminar.

The CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY has attempted to respond in an intelligent way to some of the materials

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produced by the ILCW. Our assistant editor's comments in the last issue brought varied comments. The editor and others have taken up certain theological points in past issues of THE SPRINGFIELDER. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is the last of the three large Lutheran groups in the United States to take official action on the new worship forms. This matter might very well become the major issue at the Dallas Convention. Both those favoring and opposing the new forms are predicting victory for their point of view. Such statements are really quite premature, since a large percentage of the people have not even learned of what is involved.

The emotional element involved in changing hymnals and worship forms can never be underestimated. People have become accustomed to hymns and prayers to which some theologians and liturgical scholars might take exception. For many the hymnal rather than the Bible is the focal point of their religious life. The changes in the Book of Common Prayer brought riots and upheavals in sixteenth century England. It was the discovery by the Elector of Saxony that the Calvinists posing as Lutherans were planning to put a Calvinistic prayerbook in his wife's hands that caused him to dismiss the faculty at Wittenberg. The hymns and the liturgy are the theology of the people, and they are usually greatly concerned about keeping what they have. Luther knew this and he was very cautious and sensitive in introducing the liturgies that had to accompany the Reformation to make it complete in the lives of the people.

Concordia Theological Seminary is aware of its responsibilities to the Missouri Synod and to the liturgical legacy of the seminary's founder, Wilhelm Loehe. This year the seminary is offering the first in a series of seminars on issues of immediate, direct, and current concern to the church. The seminar arranged for this first year centers around the liturgy of Holy Communion. Liturgy is matter of concern for the entire Lutheran Church in the United States and is not of parochial dimensions alone. Recognized scholars from all synods and representing differing stances will participate. The program indicates that all sides will be heard from.

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