CONTENTS

ARTICLES

“What Does This Mean?” Luther’s Exposition of the Decalogue in Relation to Law and Gospel, with Special Reference to Johann Michael Reu
By Lowell C. Green ................................................................. 3

A Call for Manuscripts ............................................................ 10

That the Unlearned Be Taught
By Alex Ring ........................................................................... 11

A Mirror of Life in the Face of Death: A Study in the Pastoral Care of Philip Nicolai
By Gerald S. Krispin .................................................................. 15

Luther’s Liturgical Reform
By Norman Nagel ..................................................................... 23

And with Your Spirit: Why the Ancient Response Should Be Restored in the Pastoral Greeting
By Timothy C. J. Quill .............................................................. 27

Inklings by Jim Wilson ............................................................ 35

The Office of the Holy Ministry according to the New Testament Mandate of Christ
By Thomas M. Winger ............................................................. 37

Hermann Sasse and the Liturgical Movement
By John Pless .......................................................................... 47

HYMN

Our Savior Came into this World
By Edward G. Kettner ............................................................. 22

COLLOQUIUM FRATRUM ........................................................... 52

REVIEWS ............................................................................. 55


Melanchthon Eine Biographie. By Heinz Scheible.

Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law. By J. Budziszewski.
The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin. By Randall C. Zachman.

LOGIA FORUM .................................................................. 65

Liturgy and Leadership • Assisting Ministers • Instituting Easter • The Name “Lutheran”
Not Lutheran But Christian • Pretzels for Lent • Breath and Bones • Variety and Repetition
The Pastor as Literary Worker • Web Theology • The Snake-on-a-Pole Issue • Manufacturer’s Notice
Go East, Young Man • Delaying Baptism • Full Communion, No Consensus
Hermann Sasse and the Liturgical Movement

JOHN PLESS

Hermann Sasse was a theologian of the Sacrament and as such he was a theologian of the liturgy. "A church without the Sacrament must die," Sasse wrote in 1939. Later Sasse argued:

To restore this Sacrament, which under the influence of Reformed Protestantism and the modern world has also declined in Lutheranism, and give it its proper place in the divine service dare not be an interest only of a liturgical reform movement. It is a matter of life and death for the Lutheran Church.2

It was from the perspective of the centrality of the Sacrament of the Altar that Sasse took issue with the Liturgical Movement. Like Wilhelm Löhe before him, Sasse was not swept away by a liturgical romanticism that defended the liturgy on the basis of venerable tradition or aesthetic preferences. Sasse was fond of quoting from Wilhelm Löhe's Three Books on the Church: "The church remains what she is even without the liturgy. She remains a queen even when she is dressed as a beggar."3 But this is not to suggest that the liturgy was a matter of theological indifference, set at the periphery of the church's life. In one of his few works directed specifically at the Liturgical Movement, Sasse opined, "There is no more damning an indictment of a theologian than to say that he knows nothing about the liturgy."4

Sasse knew the liturgy. Although he was not a liturgical scholar in the narrow sense of the term, he was thoroughly acquainted with the historical development of the liturgy, as can be seen in his 1957 article "Concerning the Origin of the Improperia."5 While Sasse wrote only a few articles that dealt exclusively with liturgical themes, his major book, This is My Body, and many of his articles and letters are replete with references to the history of the liturgy, the doctrinal content of liturgical forms, and the significance of liturgical practices.

Sasse's interest in the liturgy was more than academic. His "Letters to Lutheran pastors" and short articles in the Lutheran Herald give evidence of the imprint that the church's liturgy made on Sasse's piety. Professor John Kleinig, a former student of Sasse, comments on this aspect of Sasse:

When he as a lecturer spoke on the theology of worship, or on its practice, or even on liturgical piety, his whole manner would change. The stern passion for the truth and the polemical edge to his teaching would give way to a sense of joy and sparkling wonder at the mystery of it all. As he spoke with unutterable and exalted joy on these topics, he won me over to his vision of heavenly worship and his conception of liturgical theology, unfashionable though it was.6

Sasse's piety, like his theology, was not detached from the liturgical life of the congregation assembled around the preached word and the holy supper. If at times Sasse was rather vehement in his criticisms of the Liturgical Movement, it is because he knew that even as the liturgy is the vehicle that carries the truth of the gospel, the liturgy can be subverted and made into a vehicle for error. Sasse wrote: "It is true that every dogma has its roots in the liturgy, but this is unfortunately true even of the greatest errors of Christendom, as the history of Mariolatry and Mariology shows."7

Most of Sasse's references to the Liturgical Movement occur in his writings between 1948 and 1960. Recognizing that the Liturgical Movement was an ecumenical movement in the sense that its influence crosses confessional boundaries, Sasse spotted the source of the German and American Lutheran Liturgical Movement in persons and events within the Roman Church.8 In many respects, Sasse was quite sympathetic to the Liturgical Movement within the Roman Church. Writing in 1952, Sasse offered the following assessment:

If one today in the middle of the century looks back to the results of the great movement, then one would have to say that only one church has dealt with it, has set aside its revolutionary excesses, and has put it in service. That is the Roman Church, which in many countries, especially in Germany and Austria, derived real inner renewal from this movement. This has happened. The fruits will only become completely clear when languages such as German and English have been raised to the level of liturgical languages and when the Catholic "German Mass" (Deutsche Messe) will remind Lutheranism that it was once a "German Mass" that led the Lutheran Reformation to victory.9

In Sasse's mind, the Liturgical Movement within the Roman Church was seen as something positive; in the Protestant churches

John Pless, Logia book review editor, is pastor of University Lutheran Chapel, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
it was problematic. While Sasse acknowledged that the Liturgical Movement in Roman Catholicism was given birth by reforms in church music initiated by Pius x and the liturgical research of the Benedictines of Maria Laach, he saw that at a deeper level the Liturgical Movement is "seeking and questing for the church," which Sasse noted approvingly the inclusion of Luther's church music initiated by Pius x and the liturgical research of the Benedictines of Maria Laach. He praised Pius XII for insisting that the liturgy they cannot avoid facing the question, "What is the church?" and in "exceedingly impressive and practical terms," such as "The church is where the congregation of Christian believers gather as ecclesia orans (the praying church) about the altar; where the Body of the Word is received with the mouth in the Holy Communion, there is the church as the Body of Christ."19

With the coming of Vatican II, Sasse's optimism for a genuine evangelical renewal of the Roman Church through the Liturgical Movement ceased.

Sasse then went on to note the renewal that was generated in the Roman Church from this understanding of ecclesiology:

She possesses her present vitality in spite of all these things and in spite of everything un-Christian and anti-Christian that happens in her midst. The real source of her vitality in this remnant of her primitive heritage in spite of all these things and which she still retains and which she knows how to renew again and again: The profound truth of the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar. It is one of the most noteworthy signs of the times that the Roman Catholic Church seeks to make the center of her spiritual life precisely that primitive and scriptural tenet which Blessed Martin Luther so doughtily defended against Zwingli and the sixteen-century Enthusiasts.14

Thus Sasse could be grateful for signs of genuine renewal in Rome. He praised Pius xxi for insisting that the lex orandi lex credendi (the law of what is to be prayed is the law of what is to be believed) must be turned around so as to make dogma the norm of the liturgy. Sasse noted approvingly the inclusion of Luther's hymns in modern Roman hymnals and the judgment of the Oratorian priest Felix Messerschmid that Nicolai's great hymns are "unsurpassed examples of what church hymns should be."16 Sasse observed that the Liturgical Movement was causing Rome to confront the questions raised by Luther:

Wherever the pure gospel comes, there the great liturgy of the true church revives. And wherever men seek genuine liturgy they cannot avoid facing the question, "What is the gospel?" Here is the fundamental reason why the liturgical movement in the Roman Church has confronted that denomination with the whole issue of the Reformation.

With the coming of Vatican II, Sasse's optimism for a genuine evangelical renewal of the Roman Church through the Liturgical Movement ceased.

In 1952, Sasse was still optimistic regarding the Liturgical Movement in the Roman Church. He was not impressed, however, with the place of the Liturgical Movement within the Protestant communions. He lamented the failure to renew the liturgical life of the evangelical churches. The Liturgical Movement did not exert the same influence in the Protestant churches as it had in the Roman Catholic Church. Sasse noted two differences between the Liturgical Movement in the Roman Church and the Protestant churches:

Where does the difference lie? What is evident immediately is that the liturgical movement in the Roman Church affected all the people from the Catholic scholars to the unsophisticated country congregations. All efforts on the Protestant side remain limited to pastors, some church-minded lay people, and very small, sometimes sect-like associations. The second immediately obvious difference is that the liturgical movement in the Roman Church has remained on the foundations of Roman dogma in spite of some difficult conflicts with dogma and church order.18

It is the second difference that occupied Sasse's attention. Sasse observed that the Liturgical Movement in the Roman Church was consistent with Roman doctrine. This is especially evident at three crucial points: the sacrifice of the Mass, the compatibility of Augustine's sacramental theology with the sacramentalism of the Religiongeschichtliche school, and the relationship of Christianity to paganism.

At the heart of Rome's theology of the Sacrament is the assertion that the Mass is a sacrifice offered to God. In his 1948 essay "Liturgy and Lutheranism" Sasse observed that under the influence of the Liturgical Movement the idea of sacrifice in connection with the mass has not been abandoned, but it has been so drastically reinterpreted that it comes very close to the evangelical solus Christus, sola gratia.19

Rome was beginning to speak of the sacrifice of the mass as a representation (repraesentatio) rather than as a repetition. Sasse appears to have backed away from his 1948 remarks, noting in his 1952 article "The Lutheran Understanding of the Consecration" the synergism of the modern Roman notion of Christ and church as head and body doing the sacrificing together. This comes dangerously close to a deification of man.20 Whether it be priest or church doing the sacrifice, the liturgical action is anthropocentrically driven. Likewise in his 1957 essay "Consecration and Real Presence" Sasse comments that many contemporary Protestants do not see that the ambiguous repraesentatio does not exclude that in each mass the priest offers a propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead, even if the identity of this sacrifice with that of Calvary is pretended.21
In the same essay, Sasse had observed that the deepest difference between the Roman and Lutheran understanding of the consecration did not lie in the question of transubstantiation, but in the fact that "the Roman understanding of consecration is at the same time the 'immolatio,' the offering of the sacrifice." The Liturgical Movement did not represent a substantial shift away from the traditional Roman teaching concerning the sacrifice of the mass. In that sense, it remained consistent with Roman doctrine.

A second area of consistency between the Liturgical Movement and Roman doctrine is the reliance on Augustinian sacramental doctrine. Sasse located one of the weaknesses of Augustine's sacramental theology in his attempt to establish sacramentum as a universal idea or category that applies to all religions. Sasse noted that Augustine was unable to sufficiently break through from his pagan past to recognize that the Lord's Supper is something unique "because it was instituted by Jesus Christ and so is inextricably bound up with the incarnation of the eternal Son of God." In this sense Odo Casel is thoroughly Augustinian as he finds Hellenistic cultic mysteries to be shadows of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The Religionsgeschichtliche approach to the sacraments fails as it attempts to move from universal categories to specific manifestations, unable to distinguish between myth and history. While Casel's theory cannot be reconciled with Lutheranism's incarnational understanding of the sacraments, Sasse pointed out that Casel's mysterium theologize "can be accommodated in the Roman Church because, for one thing, it has a different relationship with heathen religion than we do.' The Liturgical Movement, as it had developed in Roman Catholicism, represented a challenge to Lutheranism. Sasse was most critical of Lutheran theologians and churches who were enchanted by the attractions of this powerful movement, unable to discern its alien theology. For Sasse, liturgy could not be thought of apart from dogma. It is from the perspective of dogma that Sasse addressed the Liturgical Movement within the Lutheran churches of Germany and North America.

On the German scene, Sasse focused primarily on Friederich Heiler and Wilhelm Staehlin. Lamenting the inability of the Liturgical Movement to grasp the Lutheran doctrine of justification, Sasse saw Heiler as "the real tragedy of the High Church movement in Germany." Of Heiler, Sasse wrote:

Heiler was a Reform-Catholic from the school of Schnitzer in Munich. His theology remained what it was from the beginning: liberal Catholicism. His "conversion" to the Lutheran Church in Sweden by reception of communion from Soederblom was a misunderstanding. The calling of this very promising young scholar to the theological faculty at Marburg was a terrible mistake. That he then created an ill-approved secret organization, along the lines of such an organization in the Church of England, to secretly "consecrate bishops"—which assured "validity" in the technical sense—and that he then secretly ordained Lutheran pastors in "apostolic succession" so that they could make the "change" in the supper, was a terrible sin. We will not investigate just how terrible and fateful that sin was here. It is this High Churchism which has so discredited all the efforts to re-institute the old catholic heritage of our church in the best sense.

At the center of Sasse's critique of Heiler was the latter's dismissal of the Reformation's sola gratia as a distortion of the message of the New Testament. "For Heiler," said Sasse, "the authentic doctrine of justification has always been that of Trent." Like Heiler, Wilhelm Staehlin stumbled over the doctrine of justification. Sasse saw Staehlin as a "latter-day disciple of Osiander" as he made of justification a process of internal renewal rather than a forensic verdict. Thus for Staehlin, the liturgy was understood in the categories of mysticism rather than from the evangelical center of the articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae. From his encounters with Heiler and Staehlin and the Berneuchener movement with which they were associated, Sasse concluded that the Liturgical Movement was hopelessly captive to a romantic syncretism that could not be reconciled with confessional Lutheranism.

Sasse concluded that the Liturgical Movement was hopelessly captive to a romantic syncretism that could not be reconciled with confessional Lutheranism.

This led Sasse to cast a critical eye at developments in American Lutheranism which in many aspects parallels the Berneuchener movement in Germany. In 1959 Sasse identified a seminary chapel homily of Piepkorn "as a particularly troubling sign of how Lutherans can succumb to the dangers of High Churchism." Sasse detected in Piepkorn a theological methodology that threatens the Reformation's sola scriptura as Piepkorn attempted to give room to "pious opinion" where the Scriptures are silent. Thus Sasse concluded:

The tragedy of Piepkorn is rooted deep within that of modern High Churchism, which to its detriment, separates it from Rome. It finally has no theology. And thus Piepkorn represents a movement, but not a church. He belongs to a class of American Lutherans who learned the old dogmatic heritage, but it has never taken hold in the depths of their being.

Sasse's most direct analysis of the influence of the Liturgical Movement on American Lutheranism is in an extended letter to Pastor Glenn Stone, then editor of Una Sancta, "The Liturgical Movement: Reformation or Revolution?" In this article, Sasse attempts to gain a sympathetic hearing from American Lutherans associated with Berthold von Schenk and Arthur Carl Piep-
Far from being anti-liturgical, Sasse argued for a full-bodied liturgical life that rests on the solid foundation of Lutheran doctrine.

After rehearsing the errors of Heiler, Staehlin, and the Bernreutcher movement, Sasse raises the possibility that these false teachings are finding their way into American Lutheranism. Fearful that the Liturgical Movement was loosening its doctrinal moorings, Sasse worried that the movement was in danger of becoming a revolution. As evidence of this, Sasse cited the failure of von Schenk to distinguish between the right administration of the means of grace and the ceremonies connected with them, the interaction of the Eucharistic Prayer in the Service Book and Hymnal published two years earlier, and Piepkorn's Mariological article.

Far from being anti-liturgical, Sasse argued for a full-bodied liturgical life that rests on the solid foundation of Lutheran doctrine: “Only if we do not forget the great concern for the pure doctrine of the gospel can our liturgical endeavors remain sound. If the dogmatic compass no longer functions, the ship of the church is going to be wrecked.” Here Sasse repeated a theme that runs consistently through his writings on liturgical issues: “Nothing can be liturgically correct which is not dogmatically correct.”

If severed from the doctrinal foundation of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord’s Supper, Sasse contended that all liturgical renewal would not rise above an empty ritualism. The Sacrament would be replaced by “High Church Ceremony.” Thus Sasse was critical of all “naturalistic” attempts to explain the sacraments as well as liturgical theologies based on the work of Old Testament theologians who maintained the “realization” of salvation in the cultus. Of these, Sasse remarks, “Their doctrine of the Real Presence is Calvinistic, and that of the sacrifice is Roman Catholic.”

In the years since Sasse first called the Lutheran churches to a genuine liturgical renewal anchored in Reformation doctrine, Lutheranism has endured much liturgical experimentation. Now large parts of English-speaking Lutheranism are inflicted with an alien understanding of worship imported from American Evangelism via the Church Growth Movement. Sasse’s critique of the Liturgical Movement provides contemporary Lutherans with a theological understanding of the liturgy that is well suited to address the present challenges, since it invites doctrinal discernment. The concluding paragraph of Sasse’s “Liturgy and Confession: A Brotherly Warning Against the ‘High Church’ Danger” is equally applicable to those who would remove the liturgy from the church, dressing the queen in beggar’s garb:

It belongs to the greatness of Luther, that he had the gift of discernment. He was brought up in the liturgy and lived in it. He desired to maintain of it, what ever could be retained. And he never gave up any of it frivolously, and often long hesitated before he finally made a decision. Luther had the gift of discernment. He had this great gift of the Holy Spirit, without which the church cannot exist, because he had the Word and Sacrament, to which the Spirit of God has bound himself in the church. He could judge liturgy because he possessed the measure on which it alone can be judged: The holy gospel, the saving message of the justification of the sinner by faith alone, the article from which nothing can be granted even if heaven and earth should fall, and nothing remain. On this article depends not only our salvation, but also the church and the liturgy of the true church.

NOTES

14. Ibid., 35.
HERMANN SASSE AND THE LITURGICAL MOVEMENT


22. Ibid., 306.


25. Peter Brunner attempts this synthesis unsuccessfully. See Peter Brunner, Worship in the Name of Jesus, trans. Martin Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968). Also see Koch and Olson.


27. Hermann Sasse, "Liturgy and Confession: A Brotherly Warning Against the 'High Church' Danger" (unpublished translation by Matthew Harrisson), 3. Friedrich Heiler (1892-1967) was a Roman Catholic convert to classical Roman Catholic view of the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions.


29. Ibid.


34. "Liturgy and Confession," 6. Piepkorn's homily, "Blessed Art Thou Among Women," is included in the recent volume The Church: Selected Writings of Arthur Carl Piepkorn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 57-48, for a classical Roman Catholic view of this perspective. See also Koch and Olson.


40. Ibid., 37; also see "Liturgy and Lutheranism," 40-42.


47. Ibid., 21.


