

PROBLEMS OF LUTHERAN EVANGELISM

by H. Sasse

Evangelism or evangelisation has become one of the foremost tasks of modern Christendom since in 1885 the famous slogan was coined in America: "Evangelisation of the world in this generation". The underlying idea was originally, as one of the founders of the Student Volunteer Movement has told me, that it should be possible to send during the next thirty years missionaries to those parts of the world which so far have never heard the Gospel. These missionaries would have to proclaim the Gospel not in order to christianize the world, but to fulfil the word of our Lord: "This gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations", and so help to hasten the fulfilment of the great promise: "And then shall the end come". Very soon this idea was secularized to the expectation that the work of Christian missions would find its consummation before long in the complete christianization of mankind. Both ideas are expressed in the words with which Jon Mott closed the last meeting of the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh in 1910: "It may be ... that before many of us taste death we shall see the Kingdom of God come with power."

Four years later the First World War broke out. Seven years after Edinburgh the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia brought about not only the greatest persecution of Christianity which ever had happened in the history of the world, but at the same time revealed a process which has gone on already silently for generations, the slow dying of religion in the world, a process of secularisation of human life and human civilization. Thus, when in 1928 the Second World Missionary Conference met at Jerusalem, its great topic was no longer the question how quickly and by what means the world could be christianized, but the question of how the progress of secularism could be stopped. In the beginning of the century it seemed to be a matter of course that the Christian religion, as the religion of Western mankind, would spread over the world together with Western civilisation. Now it has become clear that modern technical civilisation would conquer mankind, but would at the same time destroy not only the pagan religions but also at least a great deal of Christian religion. What far seeing missionaries prophesied in 1928 has been proved by the development of the next decades. The breakdown of the Church in Russia, the destruction of the Roman Catholic Church in Eastern Europe which is just going on exactly after the pattern of the fight against the Church of Russia, and the breakdown of the Christian missions in China which might prove to be the greatest tragedy in the history of Christians missions since Mohammed, all these and other facts show how right the Jerusalem Conference was in defining the situation of the Christian religion. Thus another meaning has been attached to the word "evangelization". Evangelism and Evangelisation have become the great task of the church at home. These words now denote the endeavours of the part of the Christian Churches to proclaim the gospel again to those of their own members who have been lost to the faith or are in danger of being lost. This "evangelisation" is of course the modern continuation of what Wichern in Germany used to call "Innere Mission". The origin of this "Innere Mission" is, by the way, closely connected with the rising of the early communist Movement. Let us give only one example of modern evangelism. The Roman Catholic Church which has lost all strongholds in Eastern Europe and can be restored there only after the breakdown of Russia — this is one of the reasons why the pope wants the Third World War — is threatened by Communism in France and Italy. In France the losses equal a whole Catholic diocese each year. All older methods of missionary work have failed especially because the congregations are so hopelessly middle-class minded that no labourer there can feel at home. Thus a new type of priest has been created; priests with a full theological training who are labourers, working in the factories, earning their livelihood there, without stipend from the church, part-time priests without a parish. Their parish is the factory. Their converts do not join the regular parish but form a new type of congregation within their sphere of life. The result in Bologna, e.g. in the red heart of Italy, is that in a motor-factory with 2000 workers now 1500 are again practicing Catholics. This is only one example of modern evangelism.

Evangelism in this sense is also a task for all churches of Australia. Perhaps it might be well first to look upon our country as a whole and upon our young and growing nation before we speak of the specific task of our own church. Church-life in this country is determined to a very great extent by the church-life in England, and so we may expect that the methods of evangelism in our sister-churches will be influenced from there. British Christianity is passing through a deep crisis. For the first time in the history of England there is a feeling that the Christian foundations of England are shaken. The process of de-

christianisation which on the continent is going on since generations begins to become a feature of modern British life. As in France, in Germany, in Sweden, the British family of the lower middle class ceases to go to church on Sunday. This does not mean that people want to sever the bond with the church. They want to be Christians. They abhor Russian atheism. But they simply fail to see why they should go to church regularly. There is no longer a real longing for the church. Church attendance was and is a custom, it is something which belongs to a respectable life. But now these old customs are dwindling with the changes of life. This then is the beginning of the end, as it was the beginning of the end on the continent. It is admirable how the churches, the Church of England as well as the Free Churches try to cope with the situation. Great and in some cases even heroic efforts are being made to overcome the crisis, to stop the tide. But all these attempts seem to be hopeless. It is the Roman Catholic Church only which is able to keep their members and to win converts. In addition to the Roman Church the sects are flourishing, but the Protestant Churches are not able to present a message which would attract people. The situation is different in Scotland and Wales where the substance of evangelical Christianity is stronger. But even in those parts of the United Kingdom the trend of the religious development is the same. If you consider that England in spite of all shortcomings of its churches was so far the stronghold of Protestant Christianity in Europe, you will understand that it is a catastrophe for the whole of Europe. Ireland and England have been the first Christian countries of Northern Europe. From there the church came to Germany. Will they be the last European countries from which Christianity as a national affair disappears? If you study the literature on evangelism in England carefully you will see at once why these churches are bound to fail. They have lost their old message. The Church of England does not know what it believes since it discarded the 39 Articles. And the Free Churches are in a similar position. This is the deepest reason for their inability to attract people. A sermon which is not the expression of deep convictions cannot win back people. And how can a sermon which does not present the full and real gospel accomplish that which is promised to the Word of God? Now it is an old rule that churches which have no longer to present a real message, the message of the Word of God, but instead preach human religion, try to develop new methods. They hope that a new way of telling the old story, a new approach will help to get the attention of men. When in Germany the theologians did no longer know what the message of the Gospel was, they asked: *Wie predigen wir dem modernen Menschen?* The same seems to be true of the whole discussion of Evangelism in modern theology. Among the new methods is the closest co-operation of the denominations. Modern English evangelism is a common enterprise of the churches which take part in the Ecumenical Movement. At first sight it is very impressive if an Anglican bishop, a Methodist minister, a Presbyterian moderator, a Baptist pastor, and the unavoidable Commander of the Salvation Army in brotherly co-operation call back the lost sheep. But the sheep do not know exactly why they just should go back to their old flock if after all it does not matter so much what you think about Christ, justification, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

You will understand what all this means for us who are living in a country whose church-life is deeply influenced by what happens in England. We have a very similar situation. The Anglican Cathedrals offer the same sad view like the Cathedrals of England and Sweden, like the old city churches of Hamburg and Leipzig. The people who finance the Cathedrals or help to finance them are beyond the possibility of being converted. The simple people in this country, a young and somewhat primitive country, are attracted by the sects, and the most serious fact of the religious life of Australia is perhaps that you find in the sects, among Adventists and Pentecostals, real Christians, believing souls, who in other countries would never join such a sect. It is the lack of real religious instruction and the failure of the Evangelical Churches to preach the real Gospel which leads to such result. These churches, the average Protestant Churches of Australia which claim to preach the gospel, have no real message. There are, of course, Christian souls in the pulpit, real pastors who take care of their flocks, but what they lack is first a theological training which would enable them to interpret the New Testament to their audiences, and it is a real confession of faith. If you can draw conclusions from the message of the church papers, the understanding of the Bible is very low. Of course you can hear also in these churches the gospel, but you hear it better outside of the church with street preachers who tell you bluntly that Jesus Christ died for you and that it would be the great sin of your life, the only real sin, not to believe that. Sometimes it seems that the gospel has left whole churches and must find a voice to proclaim it outside of the churches which call themselves Evangelical. As far as my experiences goes the catholic students in the university know more of the gospel than those who call themselves Protestant. If you consider that Australia at the same time has a large percentage of people who openly confess atheism — atheism and materialism out of the dust-bin of the 19th century which otherwise in the Western World are overcome — then the great task of Australian Christendom will become evident:

evangelisation of the Australian people. And like in England and America the great task is being combined with the Ecumenical idea: The churches must join forces to discharge the great task of preaching the Gospel. And again the question arises: How can churches preach the gospel together if they do not agree as to what the gospel is? The plans for a United church or a Federation of Churches after the pattern of the “Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland”, the now “National Council of the Churches of Christ in America”, and the corresponding churches in North and South India, Ceylon and Indonesia, are just being made in Australia. And the idea will come up that the Lutheran Church should join the other churches at least in the common evangelistic task to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the masses of the Australian people who are in mortal danger of losing contact with the great Christian tradition of Western Civilisation and falling an easy pray to one of the great substitutes for religion which grow out of the social and political creeds of our time, Communism or Fascism.

It is quite obvious that the Lutheran church cannot approve of such a program of evangelism. Evangelism presupposes a conviction as to what the gospel actually is. Only those can join the common preaching of the gospel who have a common confession of the content of the gospel. I cannot call back people to the Christian faith together with those who deny the great truths of the Christian faith as expressed in the Ecumenical Creeds. I cannot testify the truth of God’s Word together with those who do not believe that the Bible is God’s Word. I cannot call sinners to Christ together with those who do not believe that the sinner is justified by faith alone. I cannot call Christians back to their baptism together with those who do not regard baptism as the washing of regeneration. By declaring this we must, indeed, face two questions.

The first is the question put to us Lutheran by our fellow Christians of other churches. We understand, so they would say, your reluctance to co-operate in the evangelistic task of the church with those who have a different understanding of the Gospel. But is it really necessary to reach a full agreement on the doctrine of the gospel? Is not the gospel richer, broader than our doctrinal views? If you Lutheran were right, if really the unity of the doctrine makes the unity of the church, what about yourselves? In Australia there two Lutheran Churches with exactly the same confession, the same liturgy, the same form of church order, agreeing most emphatically on the doctrine of the Augsburg Confession about church unity, but even they cannot preach the gospel together. “Physician, heal thyself!” Can we hope to testify the great truth of the gospel as it was rediscovered by the Lutheran Reformation unless we show to our fellow Christians that the possession of this truth makes the common proclamation of the gospel possible? Here lies also the real difficulty which our state of disruption causes to our work in the field of migrant mission.

The second question is, whether or not we have in mind the people whom we have to serve. The greatest danger confronting a minority church like ours is that we, when speaking of evangelism, think first of all of the growth of our own church. This is a misunderstanding which has arisen out of the idea of Home Mission in America. The churches in immigration countries like the U.S.A. and Australia have been and are necessarily trying to get the churchless people into their own folds. And there is, of course, no objection to be raised against a sound Home Mission which tries to bring the churchless into my church which is, as I believe, the Church of Christ. But we must not forget that this can be only the secondary aim. The first must be to bring souls to Christ, to help them to find their Saviour, to become living members of the body of Christ. For all Home Missioners Matthew 6,33 means: Seek ye first the eternal salvation of the souls whom you meet, and then God will give you new members for your church. There is always the danger that “mission” become “propaganda”. Matthew 23,15 is a very serious warning for all Christian missions. For the sin of those Jewish missionaries was not their missionary zeal, but the selfishness of a missionary who seeks the converts for himself, for his own fold, who thinks first in terms of making his own church great and glorious. This applies, by the way, especially to the migrant mission. When and how are we to overcome the terrific impression as if the two Lutheran Churches look upon the migrant population of Lutheran background as a sort of fish-pond from which each tries to catch what it can? This is, of course, a wrong impression, for we want to launch out into the deep and let down the nets of the Lord — and not our own private fishing hooks — not forgetting our partners on the other ship whom God has given us, that they should come and help us. But as long as this sincere and absolutely selfless co-operation is not possible, that wrong impression will last and the blessing of our Lord will be absent. If, what I cannot assume, a real understanding would be impossible, and we had to give up an unselfish Christian co-operation, this would mean that both of us had ceased to be the Lutheran church and that our churches are

only two of the many sects of this country, unfortunately calling themselves after a man who would deny to them the right to use his name. But migrant mission is only one example for the whole of missionary activity. God has brought the Lutheran Church to this continent in order that it might be a light, perhaps a little light, but a shining light to others. Do we see that our task cannot be limited to our members or to prospective members? Our Lord does not want us to put our candle under the bushel. This does not mean that we should preach at the street corners. It means that the preaching which is done in our churches does not mean only something for the congregation, but for the nation as a whole whose members our people are. The preaching of the gospel is always a public proclamation, even if it is done in a small country church with a very limited audience. All real preaching is done in the publicity of the prophetic word: "Land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord!" (Jer. 22,29). Thus our preaching has to be at the same time preaching for our small congregation and a testimony to the whole nation. If we preach to our small congregation the real word of God then this word, as the word of God, is a message of God to all men, effective beyond our understanding, as Luther has learned from Jer. 1,10; "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant". Thus the evangelistic work of our church is our share in the work of Evangelism in Australia.

Evangelism is the preaching of the Gospel, nothing else. There is not such a thing as "evangelistic preaching" in contrast to other sorts of preaching. For the sermon at the occasion of an evangelisation has exactly the same content as each evangelical sermon: Repent ye and believe in the Gospel. By evangelistic preaching we understand evangelical preaching in view of a particular situation of people who are to be called or called back to Christ and His church or who are to be strengthened against the danger of apostasy. Since the danger of apostasy is always present, such preaching ought to be practised at all times. In this sense all our preaching must be evangelistic. Each sermon must be a call to the unbeliever. For we have unbelievers in our services. It has to be a call to the churchless who perhaps just on that occasion went to church, attending perhaps for the first time a Lutheran service, maybe for the last time. It has to be a call to repentance to the believing sinner. It has to be the call to the gracious Saviour who freely gives to the sinner forgiveness, life and salvation. It has to be the serious admonition to remain steadfast. It is the necessary outcome of the Lutheran understanding of the church.

For the Church lives by the Gospel. It does not live by our religion. It is not a religious society, based on certain common convictions, like the Lutheran Laymen's League, or the Ladies' Guild or the Young People's Society. And the gospel by which the Church lives is not a doctrine, a religious philosophy, a sacred book as such. It is rather the gracious word of Jesus Christ Himself by which He forgives us all our sins and gives us life and salvation. It is not a doctrine about how and under what conditions there can be forgiveness, it is rather the forgiveness personally proclaimed to us: Thy sins are forgiven thee! We hear this gospel in the absolution. We hear it in the sermon if it is an evangelical sermon. We hear it in the celebration of the sacrament and we receive the true body and the true blood of our Saviour as the pledge of the forgiveness. That is the reason why we must go to church if possible. Why is it almost impossible to keep the faith without going to church? I cannot absolve myself, as I cannot baptize myself. I cannot celebrate the Lord's Supper alone. Of course it is possible to live on the written word of the Bible alone or even on what has been left of my former knowledge of the word, e.g. in a Siberian prisoners' camp. But this is a state of emergency. In order to remain a Christian I need the means of grace. For what will become out of my faith without the Holy Ghost who is given to me by the means of grace?

It is a most remarkable fact that Christians today seem to have forgotten the great danger which threatens our spiritual life; the danger that we lose our faith. We take our Christianity so for granted that we no longer see the devices of the devil who tries to destroy our faith. This must not necessarily lead to complete apostasy. It may be that our living faith is slowly transformed into a sort of Christian philosophy which for so many people is the substitute for faith. Here evangelistic preaching has its great task; to preach Christ Crucified so powerfully that, by the help of the Holy Ghost, the love for the Saviour is revived and a new personal relationship between the soul and its Redeemer is re-established. Here we have to remember what conversion in the sense of the Lutheran Church is. You were converted to the Lord on the day of your baptism. But as baptism is more than an act performed at one moment of our life, conversion is something which goes on through our lifetime. For baptizing with water, as our children know, "signifies that the old Adam in us is to be drowned and destroyed by daily sorrow and repentance, together with all sins and evil lusts; and that again the new man should daily come forth and rise, that shall live in the presence of God in

righteousness and purity for ever". Sometimes it seems that the Lutheran Church, since Pietism destroyed the Lutheran understanding of justification and sanctification, has lost the deep truths of our catechism about daily repentance and daily forgiveness of sins. Small wonder if we have lost and are still losing members to Methodism. Our people fail to see the difference between Lutheran and Methodist understandings of the Christian faith. This is a development to be observed in all Lutheran Churches, in Germany as well as in the Scandinavian countries, in America as in Australia. Here we have to learn again from Luther and our confessions what it means to be an evangelical Christian who lives literally by daily repentance and by daily and abundant forgiveness of sins, peccator simul et justus. To stir up that faith again is the great task of Lutheran evangelism. Christians who live in that faith will know how weak they are, they will know that only by the grace of God, only by a real miracle of the Holy Ghost they can be preserved in the true faith. This knowledge will make us cautious against the attempts of the devil who wants to take away our faith or at least to corrupt it. And it will make us humble. It will give us that real humility which belongs to the Lutheran faith, not that caricature of Christian humility which could be expressed with the words: "God, I thank thee that I am a Lutheran and not a Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, or Baptist. I am not a Pharisee, but a justified sinner. I believe in the correct doctrine of the Lutheran Church and am proud to support her". Their secret pride it is, what we have to fight, dear brethren, in our congregations, in our young and old people's societies. Here we meet a secularisation which is far more dangerous than all temptations to open unbelief. For this secularisation destroys the church by corrupting its innermost life.

When fighting this great danger of our spiritual life we must not forget that it is not only the individual Christian who is threatened by it. Whole churches can be destroyed by a slow and unnoticed process of secularisation. This is true not only of large and powerful churches which were tempted by the world, but it applies also to small churches which began as faithful, confessing churches of Christ. As parents never can warrant the faith of their children, no single generation of the Church can guarantee the faith of the next generation. It is not faith, but superstition, if I assume that because we have Christian schools, colleges, faculties, parishes, catechism, confessions, a ministry for the administration of the means of grace, the next generation will be Christian. We must not misinterpret the 5th Article of the Augsburg Confession. "That we may obtain this faith, the Office of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God...." This "ubi et quando visum est Deo" must not be overlooked. It does not justify the Calvinistic doctrine on predestination. But it reminds us of the fact that also the Lutheran Church knows of the mystery of Predestination. Of course we know that the word of God is never preached in vain. But how many or how few may be brought to real, living faith, that is solely in the freedom of God. How cautious should we be when speaking of the future of our church. The "United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia" or the "Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod" has not the promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. The fathers of our church know that. Therefore they taught their people to pray for the church: "Erhalt uns Herr, bei deinem Wort!", "Ach bleib bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ, weil es nun... bend worden ist, Dein göttlich Wort, das helle Licht, lasz ja bei uns auslöschen nicht", "In dieser schwern betrübten Zeit, verleih uns, Herr, Beständigkeit, dass wir dein Wort und Sakrament rein behalten bis an unser End", "Du aber selbst Dein Kirch erhalt, wir sind gar sicher, faul und kalt ..." Sometimes it seems as if we had forgotten, that only the most serious prayer can keep the church in the right faith and in the confession of the truth.

This is especially true of every church which has been born out of an awakening. The Lutheran Churches of the 19th century are the children of that great awakening which after 1817 went on for a whole generation. We today still live on the heritage of that time. But the experience of Church history shows that no church can live for long on the faith of the fathers. This faith may prove to be a great blessing for generations, but it can never be a substitute for the faith of the living generation. In all Lutheran Churches of America we observe that suddenly the last generation has died out which still understood the issues which were at stake in the controversies of the 19th century about the various unions. The same may soon happen to us. The fight for the Lutheran Church in Prussia, the emigration to Australia, the beginnings of the Lutheran Church in this country, are a sort of epic already, a saga of the heroism of our fathers. There are still older people who know of Scheibe and Huschke. But the great history is only a dim tradition of the past. The time will soon come when the German documents of our church, Luther, the German Bible and Liturgy, the great hymns of the past are no longer understood. Do we realize in what deadly danger the

Lutheran Church of this country is? Do we expect that the laws of all history will not apply to the history of this young continent? Is there such a fool among us who would believe that merely by organisational means, by building up institutions of learning, by writing and publishing church papers, making use of the radio, we could save the church? The real question is [what are we] teaching in our schools, what are we printing and broadcasting? Read the reports on our Youth meetings, on our Ladies Guilds, even our congregational papers. How much is being done there which well could be done and is done in many other Protestant Churches? There are of course matters which simply have to be done in every organisation of that kind. But let us ask ourselves very seriously; where do we find that which is distinctly Lutheran? Where is that which can and must be done in the Lutheran Church only? These are the things by which the Lutheran Church lives.

From here we may proceed to some suggestions which might be in line with these principles, although this is the task which has been assigned to Brother Seimpfendorfer to deal with.

The evangelistic task of the church has to be discharged in two ways. We may call them ordinary and extraordinary evangelisation. The ordinary way is the normal proclamation of the Gospel in the Sunday service and at all other occasions. All our preaching must be imbued with the spirit of evangelism. In all our preaching let us remember that we are Lutheran ministers officiating in a church which is threatened by the dangers of secularism, of losing the youth, of losing the Lutheran understanding of the Gospel. We shall then be more careful in preserving the great Lutheran doctrines in our sermons. Then our preaching of the Gospel will again be the preaching of the sola fide in the deep sense of the Reformation and not in the sense of that Pietism which in Germany, and that Methodism which in America, has robbed the Lutheran Church of Luther's understanding of the New Testament. Our generation has again learned –has it not? – the power of sin and death and the reality of the devil. Should we not learn again the power of Christ, His death, His resurrection? We are surrounded by the judgements of God on the superbia of mankind. Should we not understand again the miracle of the justification of the believing sinners?

What is to be said of the ordinary preaching of the Church applies in a special way to that preaching which might be called extraordinary evangelisation. In the Roman Catholic Church it is by law prescribed that each parish should have a mission at least once in ten years. On such an occasion foreign priests who are specially trained for that purpose preach daily to the congregation on certain vital subjects with the purpose to bring those who have neglected their duties back to the sacraments, and to strengthen the faithful. These missions have more or less also found a place in the Evangelical churches in Germany, especially after the First World War. But they have not been very successful. The deepest reason for their obvious failure was the fact that they were so deeply influenced by modern Pietism and Methodism that they could not strengthen the life of a Lutheran Church. The result was in many cases the formation or the strengthening of Pietistic societies and "Gemeinschaften" outside of the congregation. A certain success was to be observed there where they were combined with the great church visitations which in Prussia e.g. used to be held by the General Superintendents. But these have been discontinued during the church struggle in the time of Hitler. Certain experiences which I made in my first parish with such missions have led me to the conviction that the renewal of such visitations might be the way how extraordinary evangelisations could be introduced into the life of the Lutheran Church, and this seems to me to be the proper method for our Church in Australia. Our congregations, many of which live in great solitude, must be strengthened by visitations in which their whole life is not only examined, but rather strengthened by contact with the church as a whole. If the President of the Districts and of the Church could come to a parish, accompanied by some other pastors and if possible by some outstanding layman with the purpose to serve that parish with their advice, with special addresses on burning problems of the Church, this [*text missing*] which although also of great value [and] benefit for the congregation necessarily cannot deal with the special problems of that congregation. For every single local church is an individual unit and needs such special [attention], the biblical example for this being the letters to the Seven Churches which are in Asia, but also of course the Pauline Epistles. Such a visitation should be the beginning of an educational program to be carried out in that congregation. It is a general experience of all Christian Churches today that there is a longing for indoctrination everywhere and especially there where the church meets the antichristian powers of our age.

The presupposition of all evangelistic work in the church is, however, the evangelisation which we pastors most urgently need. It was the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the church when after the First World War the great question of theology in Europe again became the question: What shall I preach? It meant the great turning point in theology, the turn from subjective religion to the objective revelation, from Christianity to the Word of God. “What is Christianity?” – this was the question which Harnack dealt with in his famous book fifty years ago. What is the Word of God? That was and is the question of theology since the end of the First World War. It became the question of American theology after the great Depressions of the early Thirties. This question led to a new discovery of the Reformation, to a revival of the theology of Luther even in non-Lutheran Churches. We are just experiencing the remarkable fact that large sections of the Reformed Churches reject the doctrine of Predestination in the form of classical Calvinism and go over to a doctrine on Election which is very similar to that of Luther and the Formula of Concord. Will it not be necessary for us Lutheran pastors in the English-speaking world to renew and to improve our knowledge of Luther? Let me speak quite frankly as one who is more than thirty years in the ministry and has been teaching theologians more than half that time; there is no graduate of whatever Lutheran Faculty in Europe or America who has a sufficient knowledge of the Lutheran doctrine. This was different at least in Germany 100 years ago. Life was simpler at that time. Students in those days had a much better knowledge of the Bible, a deeper understanding of the theology of the Bible. For them the Greek New Testament was not an open book. The older brethren among us will remember that. Of the graduates of Concordia Seminary at St. Louis today only very few would have passed an examination with Walther. With the decay of Latin and German our generation is almost unable to read the important writings of Luther, e.g. “Do servo arbitrio”, or “Vom Abendmahl Christi”.

It this goes on, if the Lutheran Church continues to put Luther on the “Index Librorum prohibitorum” by refusing to give their students a working knowledge of the languages of the Reformation, all our concerns about the future of the Lutheran Church will cease very soon. There will no longer be such people who would care about the existence of a Lutheran Church.

From this you will understand that it is our sacred duty to help our younger brethren in the ministry to keep up and to deepen their knowledge of Luther, to continue their studies. Do not say: We do not need scholars, we want to be humble pastors. Of course we want to be humble pastors and nothing else. But as far as my experience goes, ignorance is never a means of promoting humility. On the contrary, it usually is found to be on good terms with pride. And the knowledge which we require is not superfluous scholarship but the ability of understanding the Word of God and preaching it, in its entirety, in all simplicity.

So let us begin by evangelizing ourselves. Each Catholic priest has to spend two hours a day in praying and reading his breviary. Let us begin, brethren, to read the Confessions of our Church anew as our breviary, beginning perhaps with the Large Catechism which has been written expressly for that purpose.

And then let us teach our people again the great truths of the Lutheran Reformation. That would be a very practical start of an evangelisation. Let us begin the work, fully conscious of the serious situation of our church in Europe and in America, in Africa and in Australia, but conscious also of the great promise which is given to the faithful discharge of our duties as ministers of Christ. As Luther puts it: “Wir sind es doch nicht, die da könnten die Kirche erhalten. Unsere Verfahren sind es auch nicht gewesen, unsere Nachkommen werdens auch nicht sein. Sondern der ists gewest, ists noch, wirds sein, der da spricht; Ich bin bei euch bis an der Welt Ende. Wie Ebre. 13 geschrieben steht: Jesus Christus, Heri et hodie et in saecula. Und Apo. 1; Der os war, der est ist, der os sein wird. Ja so heiszt der Mann and hieszt kein anderer Mann und soll auch kein anderer hoiszen – Denn du und ich sind vor tausend Jahren nichts gewest, da dennoch \ die Kirche ohn uns erhalten worden. Und hats der müssen tun, der da heiszt Qui est und Hodie. Ebense worden wir auch nichts dazu tun, dass die Kirche erhalten werde, wenn wir tot sind. Sondern der wirds tun, der da hoiszt Qui venturus est und in saecula”.

That is the faith by which the Lutheran Church lives.