

**Christ and His Church**  
**Essays by Hermann Sasse**

Volume 1

***Union and Confession***

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## Foreword

**D**R. HERMANN SASSE WAS A CONSISTENT and persistent advocate for genuine confessing Lutheranism. Sasse wanted no substitutes but only and always our Lord's pure Gospel and Sacraments. Sasse was a friend of Christendom, for he embodied the true ecumenical spirit—not an artificial “agreeing to disagree,” or the disingenuous “reconciled diversity” that is so often put forward today as true unity in the faith. Throughout his lifetime, Hermann Sasse cultivated many friendships and earned the respect of many church officials and theologians.

Even those who disagreed with Hermann Sasse respected his intense passion for truth, his profound commitment to Lutheranism, and his impressive knowledge of church history and dogmatic theology. Those who read these essays will quickly recognize these qualities and grow to appreciate them. Above all, Hermann Sasse was a man consumed by devotion to Christ and His church. May that same devotion mark all who read these essays.

— Dr. A. L. Barry  
President  
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



## **Hermann Sasse Doctor and Confessor**

**H**ERMANN OTTO ERICH SASSE (1895–1976) LIVED DURING crucial years in the history of Lutheranism and Christianity in the twentieth century. Sasse’s personal journey during these years led him from the idealistic attitudes of the German “enlightened” middle class to the horrors of warfare during World War I. The classic liberal theological education that he received in Berlin was incapable of accounting for the unspeakable horrors of sin and death that Sasse witnessed while serving as a medic on the killing fields of France. Sasse was led to seek his solace and comfort in the theology of Luther and classic Lutheran confessional orthodoxy, which opened to him the proper interpretation of God’s Word, the Sacred Scriptures. Sasse was renewed in his confidence in the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments as Christ’s means of giving mankind the forgiveness of sins, and thus a right relationship with God.

Upon his return from military service, Sasse served as a pastor in Berlin for thirteen years. After receiving a degree in New Testament in 1923, he spent a year at Hartford Theological Seminary in the United States (from 1925–1926), gaining a keen insight into the nature of American Christianity. As he studied and traveled he cultivated contacts, acquaintances, and friendships with church leaders throughout Christendom. In 1927 he was a delegate at the World Conference on Faith and Order and then served as editor of the collected papers from this gathering. He also prepared a history of the ecumenical movement. He continued to serve on the continuation committee of the Faith and Order movement and thus continued his many and varied contacts with church leaders in America, England, Scandinavia, and Eastern Orthodoxy. He was also involved in the work of the Lutheran World Convention, later to become the Lutheran World Federation. In 1933 he was called to serve as chair for Church and Dogmatic History at the

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prestigious University of Erlangen, serving with other famous Lutheran theologians such as Elert and Schlink.

With the advent of the Nazi movement in Germany, everything changed. Sasse was an early and vociferous opponent of the National Socialists. In 1931, as editor of the theological journal of the German territorial churches, he criticized the Nazi program in Prussia. In 1932 he published a very pointed critique of National Socialism. He placed his call to Erlangen in serious jeopardy because of his outspoken opposition to the Nazis, but managed to obtain it because of his good relationship with the Bavarian minister of education and the arts. The Nazis retaliated by restricting Sasse's travel. His passport was taken away and thus he was unable to serve as a main speaker for the Lutheran World Convention in 1935. He was forced frequently to turn down invitations and lectures in foreign countries, but was unable to provide the real reason why it was impossible for him to attend. The Nazis initiated a negative publicity campaign against Sasse in the press, calling for his dismissal because of his participation in opposition to the party. Unlike some of his colleagues, Sasse entertained no thought of accommodation or quietistic acquiescence to the Nazi party, and as a result experienced academic and social sanctions. Even as Christendom today is inspired by the courageous activities of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, so it should be equally impressed by the courage and integrity of Hermann Sasse, who not only opposed the false ideology of Nazism but also the misleading and false theology of the German Christian movement. Sasse's commitment to pure doctrine and genuine Lutheranism remained constant. Both in terms of his professional and private life, Sasse paid the price for faithfulness.

Sasse's constant position during the years of opposition to the Nazi movement was that genuine confessing Lutheranism is always opposed to false doctrine and the spirit of the times. No matter what the motive, Lutheranism must remain true to its confession and must not compromise it for the sake of civil or ecclesiastical peace. Therefore, at Barmen, in 1934, when other Protestants wanted to form a union of churches to oppose the Nazi movement, Sasse resisted and protested. He was

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opposed to making the Barmen Declaration a confessional document for all the participant churches, because it tended to gloss over the continuing serious theological differences between Lutheran and Reformed theology. He was willing to criticize even the great Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth for the fundamental flaws in his theology, chiefly his misunderstanding of what saving faith is and his inability properly to distinguish Law and Gospel. Needless to say, Sasse's position was not met with much sympathy.

Further, Sasse opposed the union of Lutheran and Reformed churches in Germany, a process continuing movements initiated in the Prussian Union of the mid-nineteenth century. Sasse fervently hoped and prayed for a fresh start for confessing Lutheranism after the war, but was bitterly disappointed when there was only the continuation of the unionizing movements between Lutheran and Reformed churches, leading to the eventual formation of the Evangelical Church of Germany. Sasse witnessed with dismay the enthusiastic naiveté of even Missouri Synod theologians who encouraged the union movement in Germany. His warnings resound to this day. Sasse reached a point where he felt he was unable personally to further aid the cause of genuine confessional Lutheranism and still remain in good conscience a member of the German church. Thus, when he received a call to serve in the Lutheran Church of Australia as professor at the seminary in Adelaide, he received this call as of divine origin. He accepted the call in 1949, thus giving up a prestigious university position and his considerable influence in world Lutheranism and Christianity. He served at the Adelaide seminary until his retirement in 1965.

Far from receding into obscurity, during his years of service in Australia Sasse pursued his teaching and literary activities with vigor and determination. The most significant theme of his writing during these years was the topic of the Holy Scriptures. The subject of the Sacrament of the Altar remained Sasse's life work. His book, *This Is My Body*, remains one of the most important treatments of Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Sasse was involved in extensive correspondence throughout the world and influenced many Lutheran pastors strug-

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gling against the growing secularism and unionism of their respective church bodies. He developed long and lasting friendships with leaders and professors of various American Lutheran churches, including the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (which published translations of many of his famous “Letters to Lutheran Pastors” in its theological journal). He also cultivated strong friendships with Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod professors and church leaders. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod president John Behnken was responsible in large part for introducing Sasse to the Synod. Sasse developed a special relationship with Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield (later Fort Wayne), receiving an honorary doctorate from that institution. He was a guest lecturer at both Missouri Synod seminaries.

Sasse’s consistent faithfulness and outspoken Lutheran confession-alism continued to result in ostracism, even among his supposed friends. In the Missouri Synod, for example, he was deprived of a teaching position at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis because his staunch Lutheranism did not fit well with the agenda being established by those whose theological inclinations would eventually result in the so-called “Seminary in Exile.” Sasse was all too aware of the dangers of ecumenism that is willing to achieve unity at the expense of the truth.

Though Sasse was denied a professorship at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, he remained a good friend of the Missouri Synod, offering important cautions and warnings even to his conservative friends in the Synod during the critical years of controversy. He was an advisor and confidant both to church presidents and theologians. He was always able to be counted on for a consistent and passionate call for the Lutheran Church to remain loyal to its confession, being attracted neither to the neoliberalism—as represented by the Seminex movement and its leadership, nor to “practical Christianity” so ingrained in American Christianity.

Until his death in 1976, he remained keenly interested in the world ecumenical movement, serving as advisor to many theologians throughout world Christendom and influencing pastors in many churches. He remained a fervent student of Scripture, the Lutheran

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Confessions, and church history. His writing style remained always keen and penetrating. With prophetic foresight, Sasse was able to see what lay in store for churches that accommodate themselves to a form of Christianity that overemphasizes emotion and does not wish to grapple with the serious theological issues of the day. He was all too aware of what was in store for churches that surrender their theology for the sake of a false union.

It is the purpose of this series, titled *Christ and His Church*, to present to the English-speaking world, for the first time, a number of Sasse's key theological essays. A common theme throughout these essays is Sasse's insistence on confessional faithfulness, for the sake of the mission and doctrine of the church, which in Sasse's mind were never able to be separated, no matter how noble the reason might sound. Through these and other writings, Sasse remains a prophetic voice for the churches of our day and age. His fervent and oft-repeated prayer was a quotation from an old Lutheran hymn:

*In these last day of sore distress, grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness,  
That pure we keep, till life is spent, Thy Holy Word and Sacrament.*

With these words, the blessing of the Most Holy and Blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is invoked on all who read Hermann Sasse's essays.



## Introduction

**U**NION AND CONFESSION ADDRESSES ONE OF the most dramatic crises of the modern church, especially the Lutheran Church. Assailed from without by the encroachments of the powers of the Third Reich and from within by the rising domination of Barthian-Reformed churchmanship, the Lutheran Church of Germany was facing nothing less than its demise. (After the war, Sasse would write about “The End of the Lutheran Territorial Churches of Germany.”) These are matters which dominated Hermann Sasse’s attention in the mid-1930s and would surface again in the post-World War II years. In fact, he perceived events and movements whose consequences continue right up to our own day.

Sasse wrote *Union and Confession* under the duress of the times, dark times. From the formation of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK—the German Evangelical Church), in summer 1933, Sasse warned against the dangers threatening the church in Germany. The DEK was the product of Nazi interference, an effort to form a German church as a nationalist tool. This was also the time of the culmination of efforts to bring the Lutherans into a “union” with the Reformed; such efforts had been continuous ever since the formation of the Old Prussian Union of 1817/1834. Sasse had been raised, educated, and ordained in the Prussian Union Church, and knew firsthand the difference between it and true Lutheran churches—the latter he “discovered” while on an exchange program in the United States of America in 1925–1926.

The references to the Barmen Declaration and the “Confessing Church” (*Bekennende Kirche*) address that internal danger. Here Sasse gives one of his most explicit accounts of the famous Synod at Barmen and his own role there. The consequences of Barmen are to be noted in churches beyond Germany, even to our own day. Its much-heralded declaration, by now a “confession,” gave the basis for the final union of

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all Protestant churches in Germany in 1948. For Sasse, these internal dangers were greater than the external. “No atheism [a reference to Nazism?], nor Bolshevism can do as much damage and destruction as the pious lie [reference to unionism], the lie in the church.” It is still the “lie” today and Sasse’s analysis is still helpful. “There is actually more unity of the church present where Christians of differing confession honorably determine that they do not have the same understanding of the Gospel, than where the painful fact of confessional splintering is hidden behind a pious lie.” In this essay Sasse confronts the issues with his usual clarity and forthrightness: “Where is the definite confession of the ‘Confessing Church’ of the present? For the ‘confessing attitude’ is not a confession. There is no real confession which cannot be confessed *in actu*.”

Sasse’s references to the Nazi regime are perhaps subtle, but were certainly clear to his original readers. Perhaps not so subtle are the statements like “Who feels safe from the authorities which seek to destroy the church in such times?” He then proceeds to identify such “authorities” with the “principles, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this age” (Eph. 6:12). Furthermore, does Sasse mean us to hear “Aryan” when he speaks at length about “Arians” in part 3? He was known to use such a method. Archbishop William Temple related an example in a letter to his wife from meetings of the Faith and Order Executive and Continuation Committees in Hertenstein: “I had a long talk with Sasse, after luncheon—very interesting. Among other things he said, ‘I gave a lecture lately on the religion of Hitler; but I did not call it that; I called it the religion of Robespierre.’”

This lengthy essay was originally published in a noted series titled *Bekennende Kirche* (“Confessing Church”). In 1936 Sasse, in collaboration with colleagues Georg Merz and Christian Stoll, became an editor of the series. The title, the same as that given to a movement within the German church in opposition to the Third Reich, may seem strange, for it is usually associated with Barthian churchmen of the period. However, as Sasse often wrote later, he and his Confessional Lutheran colleagues were also founders of the “confessing movement.”



## Union and Confession

**T**HE LIE IS THE DEATH OF MAN, HIS TEMPORAL and his eternal death.<sup>1</sup> The lie kills nations. Through their lies, the most powerful empires of the world were laid waste. History knows of no more unsettling spectacle than the judgment which comes to pass when the men of an advanced culture have rejected the truth, and are now swallowed up in a sea of lies. As was the case with fading pagan antiquity, where this happened, religion and law, poetry and philosophy, life in marriage and family, in the state and society, in short, one sphere of life after another, fell sacrifice to the power and curse of the lie. Where man can no longer bear the truth, he cannot live without the lie. Where man, even when dying, lies to himself and others, the terrible dissolution of his culture is held up as a glorious ascent, and decline is viewed as an advance, the like of which has never been experienced.

If, according to the irrefutable testimony of history, this is the judgment of God on the lie, should God then not also punish the lie in His church? Truly He who is the Judge of all the world will do this! For the power of the lie extends even into the church. Since the days of the apostles there has been lying in the church as in the rest of the world. For people in the church too are and remain poor sinners until their death.

Lies have been told in the church because of cowardice and weakness, vanity and avarice. But beyond all these there is in the church one particularly sweet piece of fruit on the broad canopy of the tree of lies. This is the *pious* lie. It is the hypocrisy by which a man lies to others, and the intellectual self-deception by which he lies to himself that he believes. "In our time too the proclamation of the Word in assumed orthodoxy is unfortunately not an infrequent occurrence of this lie." Thus the greatest ethicist of our church once spoke, warning the theologians of his and our time about the most grievous sin, the lie to God.<sup>2</sup>

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The most fearful thing about the pious lie is that it will lie not only to men, but also to God in prayer, in confession, in the Holy Supper, in the sermon, and in theology. The pious lie always has the propensity to become the *edifying* lie. It was once expelled from the church when it existed in the form of the legends of the saints and the fraud of relics. Then in full view of pious eyes, it returned in a new form, such as in the Luther legends, or in pietistic times in the form of almanacs and tracts containing the accounts of miraculous responses to prayer and equally miraculous conversions, which either never happened, or in which the kernel of historical truth was no longer discernible. This “edifying” lie even forces its way into the sphere of the church, which teaches revealed truths of revelation. After sufficient preparation it can obtain the status of “doctrinal maturity.”<sup>3</sup> Thus it becomes the *dogmatic* lie.

We ask our Roman Catholic fellow Christians to believe that it is very difficult for us to use the word “lie” here, and we do not do so to offend them. We know that they affirm a dogma such as the Immaculate Conception of Mary out of deep conviction of faith, and they will accept the yet-awaited extension of Marian dogma from the hand of the ecclesiastical teaching office with the same sincerity. But this changes nothing of the fact that in these dogmas false doctrines are established, and that the Roman Church thus finds itself in a guilt-laden error.

This is the biblical, theological expression of the lie: though guilty of falsehood, it belies the truth and proclaims that which is not truth, hiding this guilt before God behind a human *bona fides*. Here the theological expression of the lie is distinguished from that of philosophical ethics. Theology knows that the most dangerous lies are those which are proclaimed with what the world calls a “good conscience.”

When we speak of the dogmatic lie, we do not, however, have in mind only the celebrated dogmas pronounced by the Catholic Church, through which theories are elevated to the level of ecclesiastical dogma, and have no basis in Holy Scripture, and are not true. We include here also precisely the dogmas with which modern Protestantism has been

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at pains to correct, to complete, or to replace the doctrine of the evangelical church, such as the false doctrine of Pietism concerning the church, or of rationalism concerning the person of Jesus Christ.

What a fearful thought it is indeed that things are taught in the church which are not true, under the guise of the eternal truth entrusted to her. No atheism, no Bolshevism can do as much damage and destruction as the pious lie, the lie in the church. In this lie the power of one is made evident whom Christ Himself calls a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). And indeed, this is no longer surprising. How can he who in his very essence is a liar passively look upon the fact that in this world of untruthfulness and error, upon the vacillating core of a world of relativity, there could be the "household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). But since he cannot storm this bulwark in open battle, which God Himself has founded as the *columna et firmamentum veritatis*, he slinks in under the mask of piety and occupies a position from which to make his conquest.<sup>4</sup> And he attempts to topple the pillar of truth through the power of the pious lie.

But does anyone think that Christ who is the Truth personified would allow the lie to come into His church with impunity? No, the judgment which He who is Holy and True will render upon all the lies of the world begins, as with every judgment, with the house of God.

Among the lies which destroy the church there is one we have not yet mentioned. Alongside the pious and dogmatic lies, there stands an especially dangerous form of lie which can be called the *institutional* lie. By this we mean a lie which works itself out in the institutions of the church, in her government and her organization. It is so dangerous because it legalizes the other lies in the church and makes them impossible to remove. Such a lie exists, for instance, where the governance of the church grants to those who confess and those who deny the Trinity and the two natures in Christ the same rights in the church; where the preaching of the Gospel according to the understanding of the Reformation enjoys the same right as the proclamation of a dogma-less Enlightenment religion, so long as the latter appeals only to the Bible;

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where it is the rule that at a church with two pastoral positions one must be filled with a pastor of the “free” bent, so the “liberals” in the congregation do not have to go to an “orthodox” pastor.

Such canon law (as it exists, for instance, in the Reformed church in Basel, but in a similar form also in individual German territorial churches) makes it completely impossible to differentiate between truth and error, between true and false doctrine. A church so composed can no longer see that the Gospel is plainly and purely preached and heresy opposed. It must protect open heretics when the “orthodox” side denies that they possess an equal legitimacy in the church. The congregations of such a church, the youth who are educated in it, the people to whom it attempts to preach the truth of the Gospel, must come to the conviction that it simply does not matter much what one believes or does not believe. Since what is to be believed or not believed in the sermon is left up to the individual, his inclinations and aversions, his world-view and soon also his faithlessness will become the norm for proclamation in the church. In place of the objective message of that which God has done in Christ, subjective religious feelings and convictions soon form the essential content of the sermon. Thus the church sinks to the level of an institution for the satisfaction of the manifold religious needs of men and ceases to be the church of Christ, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

It is self-evident that this falling away of the church from the Gospel can also happen where its organization still appears to be in order. For no constitution, no statute, no legal fixation of the confessional position can guard the church from defection from the true faith. At least, it has instead been the teaching of the Lutheran Church, which in distinction from other confessions never has known of a form of organization which God gave to His church to insure pure doctrine. We are unaware of Lutheran theologians ever teaching anything else.

But the moment the falling away of the church from the Gospel finds its expression also in church law, and thus is legitimized, the entire awfulness of what we have called the institutional lie applies. For this lie makes the return to the truth as good as impossible. A church

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can fall into terrible dogmatic error, it can open gate and door to heresy, by tolerating it and doing nothing about it. With the help of the Holy Spirit, such a church can later repent, return to the pure Word of God, and take up the fight against false doctrine commanded by this Word. But if it has solemnly acknowledged the right of heresy in its midst, then heresy itself has become an organic component of the church concerned. It can then no longer fight against heresy, and a burning struggle against false doctrine in its midst would be an entirely illegal fight of one wing of this church against another.

Let me clarify this by an example. If in the Church of the Virgin at Dresden or in the cathedral at Magdeburg a pastor denies the propositions of the faith of the Nicene Creed, he is guilty of forsaking his ordination vow, and the church government is, if it does not wish to bear heavy blame in the matter, required to proceed against him. If at the cathedral at Bremen or in the cathedral at Basel a pastor does the very same thing, he is completely untouchable, and his church government is required to protect his doctrinal freedom against eventual attack. It is clear that a church which is so composed can no longer remove false doctrine from its midst. One of the most important functions of the church, the elimination of error, which is the function essential to the very life of the church, has in this case ceased.

How shall a church which suffers with this illness again become well? How can such a church body separate the true church from heresy? No one is so foolish to think that heresy will ever of its own will give up the right granted it in the church. It is part of its essence that it cannot do this; for it lives on the basis of the claim to be the genuine church. It can only live in the shadow of the church and not as an independent religion or philosophy. And even when a particular heresy is forced aside in consequence of an altered philosophical situation and a change of the [ruling] theological system, it does not leave the visible center of church history without leaving to other heresies its basic ideas, its power over minds, and its hard-earned right to exist.

There is nothing more foolish than the hope that the false teaching concerning the person and work of Christ, which has ruled a great

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part of Protestantism since the Enlightenment, would disappear with the philosophical view of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. No, it will return in entirely new and all the more dangerous forms—we have indeed experienced something of this already!—just as it had also been present in earlier centuries. The great heresies die as little as does the devil. They return in ever new forms—how many forms have Arianism and Pelagianism already taken!—and accompany the church through the centuries of her history, as great temptations preparing her for the end times (1 Cor. 11:19; 2 Pet. 2:1). The ancient church knew this, and we will have to learn it once again from her. Thus the foolish and simplistic hope must be given up that the false doctrine, which has been acknowledged in modern church government as equally legitimate with the pure doctrine, will finally disappear of itself. But where a church has made its pact with false doctrine and laid down the weapons with which it can and must fight heresy humanly speaking, there remains only the one last possibility for separating the church from heresy: the separation of the orthodox church from an image, which only bears the name “church,” but in reality has nothing to do with the church of Christ.

This is the curse of the lie when it moves from being an ecclesiastical lie to an institutional lie. As far as human judgment is concerned, it makes the return to the truth impossible. This applies to the Protestant churches which have fallen sacrifice to the temptation of this lie, just as it applies to the Roman Church since Vatican I. For the papacy, as it has existed since the infallibility dogma of 1870, is indeed without a doubt the greatest example of the institutional lie in the church. Because the Roman Church in that dogma placed a clear *irreformabilis*, “not reformable,” on the decisions of the faith rendered or yet to be rendered by its highest teaching office, it cut off its way back, even if a decision rendered then should later prove untenable. They have declared themselves a church which is no longer reformable. But the Protestant churches, which in contradiction to the confessions of the time of the Reformation, from which they came, have granted false doctrine a basic right of existence within the church, have no right to

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be indignant over irreformable Catholicism. They have also cut off the return path to the truth of the Gospel. All these churches, whether they call themselves Catholic or Protestant, Reformed or Lutheran, are heading toward the judgment which the Holy and True One will render on every lie in the world, and which is above all a judgment of the lie in the church.

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BECAUSE WE OURSELVES FEAR THIS JUDGMENT, because we do not desire that the Lutheran Church of Germany fall into this judgment, because we cannot tolerate the thought that God could take from the people of the Reformation the church of the pure Gospel—for these reasons, and these reasons alone, we fight against the false Union. For the lie of the false Union is the curse which for more than a century has rested upon the Lutheran Church of our nation, and has poisoned her life.

Other churches have other enticements to deal with. The Roman Church in the modern world, in the face of the enormous seriousness of questions of Christian truth, has fled to the false security of the Vatican decree. Anglicanism's temptation is canon law and the liturgy. Modern American Protestantism's temptation is so-called "practical Christianity." A greater portion of the Reformed churches are enticed with a basic loss of confession or a churchless Biblicism.

Our enticement in Germany has been the curse of the false Union. The great part of the German Evangelical [Lutheran] Church fell to this curse in the nineteenth century, and the remainder which at that time still avoided entering the Union is today making up for lost time.

Just as Satan loves to invade the church, posing as an "angel of light" according to St. Paul (2 Cor. 11:14), so also the magnificent, truly church-destroying lie clothes itself ever and again in the deceptive mask of a renewal, an improvement, a reformation of the church. Therefore as a rule such lies, since time immemorial, have entered the church in an hour of deepest emotion and holiest enthusiasm, and

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where possible, with the singing of “Veni Creator Spiritus” and the “Te Deum.” How rapturously was the Holy Spirit invoked before every session of Trent! How loudly the “Te Deum laudamus” rang through the council hall in St. Peter after the announcement of the dogma of the infallibility! How often in Lutheran churches men have sung “Heart and Heart in Unity”<sup>5</sup> or “Now Thank We All Our God” in a moment of intense emotion, only later to have to make the sober determination that the allegedly ostensible blowing of the Holy Spirit was in reality something quite different.

One of the most celebrated moments in the history of German Protestantism is without a doubt 20 September 1853. On that day the “German Evangelical Convention” at Berlin accepted the Augustana as a common confession of all of evangelical Germany. It was a powerfully gripping moment when two thousand men from all districts of Germany joyously raised their hands to solemnly confess the Augsburg Confession as the oldest common document of publicly acknowledged evangelical doctrine in Germany. Only eight hands were raised in opposition. It was a deeply moving moment when the great assembly joined in singing “Now Thank We All Our God.”

Thus one participant recounted,<sup>6</sup> while another spoke of a “moment of global historical world significance” before the ballot was taken. Now world history takes no notice of this moment. It only lives on in church history, but not for its greatness, rather for its ridiculousness: not, as was thought then, as the dawn of a new day in the history of German Protestantism, as the consummation of the confessional unification of the evangelical churches of Germany, rather as a classic example of the fact that the most celebrated hours in the history of the church can also be her most untruthful, and that the most untruthful hours are those in which a man lies not only to himself, but to others as well, and even to God the Lord, in claiming a unity which in reality does not exist.

Everyone who takes part in ecclesiastical life knows the danger of such hours. Every serious theologian knows what a temptation to enthusiasm and insincerity inter-confessional missions conferences,

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ecumenical conferences, yes also “confessional synods” and similar assemblies of adherents of various confessions (as we have experienced in the most difficult time of the German confessional struggle) can mean. To be sure, he will look back on such events and testify with thankfulness of the reality of the *sanctorum communio* which he has experienced, and which transcends confessional lines. But he knows that what is true and untrue unity, what is real and what an alleged working of the Holy Spirit, can only occasionally be determined by faith. For the presence of the exalted Lord, the working of the Holy Spirit, can always only be believed, but never proven, written down like the minutes of a meeting, and announced by the correspondents of the world.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, is never present where lies are told. There is actually more unity of the church present where Christians of differing confession honorably determine that they do not have the same understanding of the Gospel than where the painful fact of confessional splintering is hidden behind a pious lie.

Or does the word “lie” appear too strong here? No, it was not only self-deception, it was not only ignorance, rather it was a falsification of Reformation history when it was stated in the resolution of that church convention:

The members of the German Evangelical Church Convention hereby announce that with heart and mouth they hold to and confess that Confession delivered in the year 1530 at the Imperial Diet at Augsburg to Emperor Charles V by the Lutheran princes and representatives. And they hereby publicly testify to their agreement with it as the oldest, plainest common document of publicly acknowledged Evangelical doctrine in Germany. And to this testimony they bind this declaration, that they maintain every particularity in the particular confessions of their churches, and the United churches maintain their consensus, and that the various positions of the Lutherans, Reformed, and United on Article X of this Confession, and the unique relationships of those Reformed congregations which have never recognized the Augstana it as a confessional document, shall not be disparaged.

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It was of course not unknown to the theologians participating in the church convention that the Augustana was also directed against Zwingli and all deniers of the real presence of the true body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, and that for this reason already in 1530 it could not be accepted by all German Protestants. And thus it is in no way the “common” confessional document of one “Evangelical” church made up of Lutherans, Reformed, and United churches. They knew that, when Article X (and thus the entire doctrine of the Sacrament, Christology, and everything else of ecclesiastical doctrine which goes with the Sacrament) was made irrelevant and nonbinding, this neither corresponded to Luther’s view nor to the letter or spirit of the Augsburg Confession.

Furthermore, they knew that the Augustana cannot be so separated from the other confessions, especially from the Apology and Luther’s catechisms, so that it can be said: the Augustana contains the common evangelical doctrine, these other Confessions contain the peculiar teachings of the Lutheran Church, and one finds oneself within the Church of the Augsburg Confession when one rejects these particular confessions and their doctrine, and in their place accepts the Reformed confessions and doctrine. Each theologian knew this as an individual. As participants of the Synod, however, they made no use of this knowledge. It apparently sufficed for them that the church convention “took full responsibility” for the declaration. Everyone knows that at especially ceremonious moments synods are prone to “take full responsibility” for things which individual participants can no longer be responsible for in every circumstance.

After the church convention of 1853 the “teachers of theology and canon law” from Erlangen, Leipzig, and Rostock who knew their ecclesiastical responsibility rendered their opinion in an extremely valuable, pointed declaration against the violation of historical truth, and against the misuse of the Augustana and the entire untruthfulness of the decision rendered there.<sup>7</sup> They were of course regarded as disturbers of the confessional peace and enemies of ecclesiastical unity.

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This sinister power of the fanatical mood, for which any calm consideration of reality is already a quenching of the Spirit and any critical question is blasphemy, lay heavy upon all the decisive hours in which the Union won its battles in the nineteenth century. The Union has only this mood to thank for its success. The Union movement, which passed through Germany from 1817 on, belongs to the fanatically revolutionary movements which shake the church from time to time, and which are not victorious because of truth, but because they satisfy emotional desires. This is demonstrated by many examples from the history of the unions of the previous century.

The most conspicuous example of this will suffice here: the appearance of the Prussian Union. Here we quote one of its theological founders, Court Preacher and Bishop Eylert, author of the cabinet order of 27 September 1817, which ordered the introduction of the Union. He describes very graphically from memory the remarkable events of the Reformation Jubilee in Prussia.<sup>8</sup> The celebration preceded a joint celebration of the Supper by the clergy:

All the evangelical clergy of both confessions, now united, took part in this Christian celebration with deep devotion and pious emotion, and received the Holy Sacrament as a meaningful symbol of internal and external union. The holy act was and remains heart-lifting to all who witnessed it. It lifted the souls of the prayerful heavenward to the Lord upon its wings. It filled many eyes with tears. It is the historical beginning of a great, immortal work, and forms a new epoch in the history of the Christian church; it breathed of a life which is self-perpetuating and of which it is said: the old is past, behold, all things have become new.

Then the graphic account of 31 October in Potsdam:

The sun shone mild and glittering against the clear blue autumn sky . . . The earth seemed to celebrate the festive day and the heavens to bless it . . . The fully packed Court and Garrison Church resonated with drums and trumpets. The hymn "Lord God We Praise You" rose to heaven and every heart sang "A Mighty

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Fortress Is Our God.” The king was present with his entire family and all were in full dress uniform.

Chaplain General Offelsmeyer preached a perfect sermon on the text “Remember your leaders, those who have spoken to you the Word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate the example of their faith” (Heb. 13:7). He spoke golden words on the diversity and unity of the Protestant Church. He ingeniously tied in the Union accomplished with the help of God, and he proved that the Union was in the spirit of Luther and traced a masterful characteristic from him. The conclusion to the sermon was that we could not honor Luther, Calvin, and all the reformers more highly, nor show more gratitude to God and the Redeemer than if in the entire country we formed one strong, united Evangelical Church out of hitherto Lutheran and Reformed churches, and were of Christian affection. The respectful stillness of deep devotion reigned over the great assemblage, and all were truly edified.

Now the Holy Supper proved the preeminent point of the high celebration. After long separation before the countenance of Jesus Christ since the ancient days of Christianity, it would be a meal of union, unity, and peace. The Words of Institution, “The Lord Jesus Christ, in the night in which He was betrayed,” were spoken and the choir began to sing “Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world,” etc. Then the Lord Defender of the Evangelical Church of Germany, the king, approached and with him the crown prince and the rest of his children.

The king appeared wan and was very serious. The peace of God rested upon his noble countenance and a tear shimmered in his pious eye. He appeared as one who had prayed and had found the Redeemer, as one who had done a good work, and then received the Holy Supper. He received the bread with the words of Christ, “This is My body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of Me”—the wine, “This is the cup of the New Testament in My blood which is poured out for you. This do in remembrance of Me.”

With the sign of the cross these deep words of the Supper were directed to the king, but spoken over the entire united territorial church. And the ancient but eternally new song of praise rang out: “Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth! And good

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will toward men.” It was as though one had felt the harmony of a better world. Certainly the Lord was in this place; how holy the place from which flowed a stream of life over millions! Here was God’s house, here the gates of heaven.

The king knelt and prayed; he prayed for himself and his subjects. The crown prince followed in the warmth of devotion, then his brother, the attendants, and a great multitude of men and women from all stations of life. No longer separated by varying confessions, now united clergy of the church remained long, breaking bread; and all who took part in the union celebration knew that the moment had lasted an eternity. The festival service lasted very long.

After it was over the king traveled to Wittenberg in order to be present at the dedication ceremony for the memorial and statue of Luther in Luther’s old city.<sup>9</sup>

This account should be read again and again. It should be translated from the style of the general chaplain into sober and dispassionate language. Even then it would remain fanatical enough and a witness for the enthusiastic character of the church founded at that time.

Those men obviously deceived themselves if they thought they would renew the church of the Reformation, an original, evangelical church which existed before the separation of Lutherans and Reformed. “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God”—the reformers obviously had in mind an entirely different “Word” than that of the Prussian chaplain-general. And what did this supper of brotherhood, celebrated with pietistic feelings and rationalizing thoughts, still have to do with the Sacrament of the Altar as the Fifth Chief Part teaches it? The church which came into existence on 31 October in Potsdam was no longer the Old Lutheran Church of Brandenburg-Prussia of the time of Paul Gerhardt. Nor was it any longer the Reformed Church of the great elector. In reality, it was a new church, the Prussian Territorial Church so long desired, the soul of the Prussian state which was rising in greatness and coming into global political significance.

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What this church had to do with the Reformation is documented by the trip which the king took immediately after the Union supper. He traveled from Potsdam to Wittenberg, which had shortly before come into Prussian hands and lost its university. Thus Eylert recounted further that although in Wittenberg

It could not be forgotten that the old university with its generous public funding had in large measure been transferred from there to Halle and only retained a seminary. Still Frederick William III won the hearts of the residents by his dignified seriousness, his virtuous benevolence, his natural, simple nature, and especially by the true reverence which he felt for Luther, with which he honored the day. The great man and valiant Reformer, who there lived, dwelt, taught, and worked, who there is buried next to Melancthon in the University Church, and who is constantly remembered now and will be into the future, will always be called a saint. But since that time a monument was erected to him in the town square on the main thoroughfare, so one can catch sight of him just as he was, standing, Bible in hand. Luther has been deified. Visitors stand in contemplation and residents pass by with quiet veneration.<sup>10</sup>

That was the coronation of this curious celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation.

What did Claus Harms have to say in Thesis 75 regarding the impending Union? “Indeed! Do not consummate the act over Luther’s bones! They will come to life and then woe to you!” Poor Claus Harms, you “foreigner,” as Bishop Eylert called you, you don’t understand Prussia!<sup>11</sup> Luther no longer stands at the borderline of black and white. And such a disturbance of the public order would have hindered the military police in an emergency, as happened in Silesia, Pomerania, and Brandenburg—there the Luther monument stood the highest.

Frederick William III dedicated the first of these monuments himself. Indeed, he was an honorable venerator of Luther who drew from Luther’s liturgical orders and prayers the best direction for his attempts at liturgical artwork. With this memorial he sought to make

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recompense for the sins of his forefathers and himself on the city of Luther, the prohibition of subjects of the house of Brandenburg Prussia studying at the *Cathedra Lutheri*, the stronghold of Lutheran doctrine in Germany, until the disbanding of the university and its transference to Prussia. While for the new territorial church new United faculties were formed from the outset (faculties such as those at Bonn and Berlin), in Wittenberg the lecture halls were desolated. Only with great difficulty was the appearance of a theological tradition maintained by the establishment of a United seminary whose theology had a fatal similarity to the familiar scent of an empty flask. The doctrine of the Lutheran Church was nullified in Prussia. It has been rendered harmless, it no longer causes anyone unrest.

And though the prophecy of Claus Harms was fulfilled throughout the rest of Germany around 1830, when the doctrine of the Lutheran Church experienced a resurrection, this doctrine no longer occupies any professor's chair in Prussia. For the Prussian Church indeed venerates Luther in the sense which the founder of the Union did so; it also calls Luther philologists and Luther archaeologists to its lecture chairs. But of course, no theologians who maintain that the Union of 1817 was irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Lutheran Church are so called. If the Prussian state no longer tolerates such theologians in the pastoral office, rather removes them, imprisons them, or compels them to emigrate, then such theologians certainly will not be granted lectureships in the first place.

The young theologians on the Prussian faculties begin to develop an aversion to Lutheran confessionalism from the moment they begin to suckle the theological milk bottle (and this immediately means most German faculties for there still are a few United faculties outside Prussia to be added in). The person who studies in Berlin and Bonn, in Halle and Greifswald, in Breslau and Königsberg and then if possible finishes his study at the Wittenberg seminary or the Berlin seminary as a rule will be as immune to the theology of the Formula of Concord—there are a few remarkable exceptions—as the absolvent of the *Collegium Germanicum* in Rome is immune to Protestantism.

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It is a law of intellectual life which applies also in the church, that only that doctrine can be passed on and planted in hearts which the teacher is absolutely convinced is true. A doctrine such as that of the Lutheran Church regarding the Sacrament of the Altar has to be borne witness to. If it is no longer attested but only presented as an historical antiquity, even though it be presented with great care and correctness, it dies. But this has necessarily now become the fate of all Lutheran doctrine in Prussia.

But at the very moment when this doctrine disappears as ecclesiastical dogma, the veneration of Luther begins. Now Luther is actually “deified,” as Eylert said so candidly. The Luther scholars who now occupy the position of the guardian of Lutheran doctrine now gather Luther’s relics and display them in the Luther Hall. The pilgrimage trains arranged by the Evangelical Federation view these relics with the same veneration which the pilgrims once viewed the relics assembled in Wittenberg at the All Saints Church by Frederick the Wise. The indulgence is indeed no more to be had, but not because Luther had done away with it, rather much more because of the reason Claus Harms had given in thesis 21.<sup>12</sup>

And what about the appeal to Luther? This also occurred on the anniversary of the Reformation in 1817, if not at Wittenberg, certainly in the Garrison Church in Potsdam. On 1 November, the second day of the great celebration, which was celebrated as a holiday for the youth throughout Prussia, our friend Eylert invoked Martin Luther in the middle of the sermon:

Honorable, great, gentle, and kind man! How you deserve our admiration and thankfulness! We stand quietly in serious contemplation before your noble image, and our hearts pound in your presence. We admire you in your valiant strength, which with powerful hands lifted the world from its hinges. And we love you in your gentleness, which allows you to kindly stoop down to children, in order to bless them with eternal benefits. Behold! Today, a host of millions of children is gathered together in a celebration dedicated to you . . . with the hymns of praise of heaven and earth are joined our praises, and those of our children.<sup>13</sup>

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How powerfully would Luther denounce the pathetic lies coming from the mouth of this offensive idol worshiper! The previous day the doctrine of the Lutheran Church was invalidated in Prussia, and now Luther is addressed in prayer. Both happened in the same church, at the same pulpit. How furiously the Reformer would have unmasked this vexatious Luther-worship, which the Evangelical Lutheran Church had never known, but which arises wherever the doctrine of the Lutheran Catechism is set aside. Such Luther-worship is satanic fanaticism which seeks to eradicate the pure doctrine of the divine Word. For it whispers in the ears of man the lie of all lies, the original lie: "You shall be like God!" For the word "deify," which the babbling Garrison preacher used so thoughtlessly, means just this. And it is indeed finally not Luther who is placed upon the monument foundation in such festive "deification," but man himself.

To all the magnificent "heart lifting" celebrations in Potsdam and Wittenberg, to the supper celebrated as a feast of brotherhood and the rapturous sermons, to the harmonious music of organ, drum and trumpet, to the emotional tears and all the energetic speeches, at the anniversaries, Reformation festivals, the placing of wreaths, church convention celebrations, national synods, rifle matches, and theological sessions, which have made Wittenberg a museum upon the place where a genius once worked, Luther would have remarked very soberly that which he once wrote in the Schmalkald Articles concerning the serious sin of fanaticism, which darkens divine revelation and grieves the Holy Spirit:

All this is the old devil and old serpent, who also converted Adam and Eve into fanatics . . . In a word, fanaticism inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world, having been authored and poisoned into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power, and strength of all heresy, especially of that of the Papacy and Mohammed.<sup>14</sup>

It is the strength of all heresy, even the heresy of Potsdam and Prussian Wittenberg.

WE WILL NOT MULTIPLY EXAMPLES DEMONSTRATING the enthusiastic character of the Union movement which began in Germany in the year 1817, though this would be easy to do. We would need only to proceed from Potsdam to Bernburg and Dessau, or to the southwest German regions, become acquainted with the colleagues of Court Preacher Eylert in these places, and attend their festival services to see the erstwhile Most Serene Highness and *Summus Episcopus*, in his full brilliance as “Guardian of the Evangelical Church,” completing the Reformation in his lands.

The grotesque comedy that lay over the majority of these pathetic celebrations only veiled the deep seriousness of the ecclesiastical revolution which had taken place at the time. For it is indeed not the case that merely the inadequacy of that generation had distorted this great and serious matter into a laughingstock. The outbreaks of fanaticism were not only a phenomenon of the Union movement in Germany of the nineteenth century. They belong rather, at their very essence to this movement, and therefore are present through the entire history of the movement down to our own time.

The very same fanaticism which made it possible for the Union to be accomplished in a series of German territories in the decade after 1817 abruptly appeared again around 1846 (the year of the Berlin Church Conference, the Prussian General Synod, and the Evangelical Alliance), and led to the fantastic plans for a “Reichskirche,” which had its modest beginnings in the first German Evangelical Church Convention, beginning in 1848 (we have already mentioned the church convention of 1853). Times of fanatic hopes and plans for a “Church of the Future,” in which the unification of the denominations is brought about, always coincide with times of great national and political excitement. This was the case after the founding of the Reich of 1871 and in the years from 1914 to 1919. This was especially true in the ecclesiastical revolution of 1933, which followed National Socialism’s conquest of Germany. Perhaps to later generations it will one day appear as the clas-

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sic example of the advent of fanaticism in the church, which cannot be explained by means of psychology.

Here we have in mind not only the revolutionary movement of the "German Christians,"<sup>15</sup> which destroyed the structure of the ecclesiastical bureaucracy with a loud crash. Perhaps characteristic of the eerie nature of the power of this fanaticism is the effect which it has upon men who otherwise would essentially have nothing to do with it. It is not surprising that by whatever circumstances which obtain there would be people willing to become bishops. That ecclesiastical bureaucrats do not know what can happen in the case of such people is also not surprising; for that which most of German Protestantism called church government was overdue for the judgment which now ensued, and as church history shows, revolutionary bishops can never long maintain their positions, because they lack any inherent authority.

Remarkable and disquieting in the highest degree, however, was the amazing defection of so many of our best theologians in the pastoral office, teaching office, and church government. Like the needle of a compass which for inexplicable reasons suddenly loses its bearing, these men lost the gift of discerning the spirits. Their theological judgment was lost. They made decisions which they never would have made earlier and would never make today. They said yes where according to their entire being, their deepest convictions, they had to say no. Where they wanted to speak, where they had to speak, because it was the last irretrievable hour, they were silent.

Thus came to be the constitution of 11 July 1933 which was so unacceptable that it was as useless as a logarithm table established upon the presupposition that two times two equals five.<sup>16</sup> Thus the "German Evangelical Church" came into being, while its founders did not know for certain whether or not it would be a church. Thus, the National-Synod came into being in Luther's city, Wittenberg, through which German Protestantism experienced its deepest degradation.<sup>17</sup> But who will blame individual men? Who feels safe from the authorities which seek to destroy the church in such times? "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the pow-

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ers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

These spirits have no regard for the “confessional” movement gang. Yes, it may be that fanaticism dies in one part of the church, only to come to life anew at an entirely different place, just as a fire dies down at one place in a burning house after it has done its destruction, only to flame up at another place. Only with deep terror does one notice the blindness with which the leading men of the so-called Confessing Church<sup>18</sup> appear not to notice the strange fire of a wild fanaticism, which has already begun to engulf their own house in flames. In a lecture recently delivered for pastors, Karl Barth maintained that the errors of neo-Protestantism signify “a defection to the errors of Arius and Pelagius, already condemned in the ancient church,” and that in the characteristic assertions of neo-Protestantism, one hears not the voice of the Good Shepherd, but the voice of the stranger.<sup>19</sup>

Still, we are together under the roof of one church. But what will happen if our church is placed before these questions, as today is the case with the Evangelical Church in Germany? . . . I fear that the deep disunity in which we already find ourselves today would then become entirely public and make schism as unavoidable as it is in Germany.

To this we pose the question, under what circumstances and how long then can orthodox Christians in general remain together in one church with Arians and Pelagians? According to the basic principles of our church we would answer that erring brothers should be borne in love in the hope that they will repent and return to the truth, but that false doctrine must not be tolerated. If false teachers crept their way into the church, they must be opposed. This struggle must also be waged against a church government which protects false teachers and thus makes itself a participant in their evil works.

If these basic principles are correct, then the following question arises which we hereby address publicly before the Christian world to Karl Barth: Why do these principles apply only in the case of Germany and not Switzerland? And if they apply in theory for the Swiss, why are they not put into practice there? What basic difference is there between

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the German Arian and the Swiss Arian? We can see no difference of great theological consequence. The state church is happy to have them both.

It has always been the nature of Arianism that because it does not know the real Lord of the church, and because it does not believe that Jesus Christ really possesses all authority in heaven and on earth, it always seeks an earthly protector for the church. Whether the Arians of the fourth century, who lay in the dust before the caesar and pled with him that he help them obtain power; whether the English Arians of our time, who expect the House of Commons to protect them from the victory of Anglo-Catholic orthodoxy; whether the Prussian Arians, who, during constituting assemblies of the church, made their appeals to the Social-Democrat and today make them to the National-Socialist government, so that orthodoxy not win the day; or whether someone in a Canton of Switzerland relies upon the idea that the intellectual freedom of Arianism will not be forsaken—finally it is all the same. All Arian churches need a civil protector for their existence. Whether this protector is a Constantinus who sends the orthodox into exile, or a Theodoric who assures them of tolerance, finally there is no essential difference.

We live in a divided church, and it is such that the situation will have to be tolerated. And since we have for the time being no order to separate us from each other, we can only be concerned with the question of how we, in spite of this most recent division, can manage to live with one another.

So far Barth. It lies beyond our scope to enter into a discussion of the ecclesiastical circumstances of Switzerland. We do not begrudge the Swiss church its internal peace, and can only wish for it that it may come to a renewal of its life and order without the crushing struggle which we in Germany have had to experience. But directly in view of what he wrote with such urgency in the first issue of *Theologische Existenz Heute*, we must ask Karl Barth the following question: How does he know that God has commanded separation in Germany, but “for the

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time being” not in Switzerland? How has it happened that in Switzerland it is possible to know that a divine commandment is not in effect? There is also a voice of God in history, and the Swiss Christians must be very careful not to misunderstand this voice and perhaps to believe that because God has forbidden making compacts with Arianism in Lörrach, it is also forbidden in Basel.

Finally we must in all seriousness ask why God has granted the northern border of Switzerland a significance so theologically weighty and so important in salvation history. Why is it that in Basel, Zurich, and St. Gall, Arians and Pelagians may still govern the church, while the territorial bishops of Württemberg and Hanover cease to be legitimate church government if they engage Arians and Pelagians in negotiations on their return to the church? If God makes this distinction, is there an explanation for His gentleness over against the Swiss and His strong hand with German church governments, or must we see therein a mystery of His hidden will?

It is necessary for us to direct these questions to Karl Barth for the following reason. His students, calling upon him and that which they have learned from him regarding the impossibility of compromise and false peace agreements, have announced their obedience to their hitherto legally acknowledged bishops, and with the approval of the liberal and Arian foreign press, which does not miss the opportunity to praise into heaven the “stalwart” confessors from Dahlem and Oeynhausen, along with their followers, at the expense of the “cautious” bishops, “prone to compromise.”<sup>20</sup>

Now there is absolutely no doubt that the authority of a bishop has ended where he has damaged the confession of his church, and where he demands his pastors act contrary to that confession. I must as a pastor refuse obedience to a church government which demands something of me which is contrary to my ordination vow. To be obedient in such a case would be sin. The Lutheran pastors in Prussia, who after 1817 accepted the Union and Agenda without opposition have taken upon themselves a heavy burden of guilt. The pastors and congregations which rejected them and would sooner have suffered all

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than be subject to the demands of a church government which contradicted their confession, and was therefore illegitimate, were correct. No matter how small the company which finally remained, this small number were absolutely correct in designating themselves the “Evangelical Lutheran Church in Prussia,” even if the state did not acknowledge the name. So also the Lutheran free churches, which came into being in similar struggles in the Hessian region and in Baden, are the legal Evangelical Lutheran Churches in the applicable regions of Germany.

It is completely conceivable that also in our time the true confessors of the doctrine of the Gospel could be forced by an illegitimate—in the ecclesiastical sense—church government into what one Lutheran theologian once called “holy separation.” But in such cases, everything depends on knowing exactly what the confession is from which one “cannot take anything away or give anything up, even if heaven and earth should fall and nothing remain” (SA II,5). A man must know that and why it is the truth for which he must be prepared to lose body and life, and upon which he hopes finally to die consoled.

Were this confession not the truth, then the man who confesses it, despite all his subjective honor, in spite of all of his “confessing attitude,” is not a confessor of the truth, but rather a sectarian. Thus Scheibel, in the great Prussian confessional struggle more than a century ago, was a true confessor.<sup>21</sup> His contemporary, J.G. Oncken, founder of the German Baptists, was, in his confessional struggle against the Hamburg state and church government, a true sectarian.

Does it not belong to the essence of a true confessor that he ever and again ask himself, as did Luther: “Are you alone wise? Have the others all erred and remained in error for such a long time? What if you are in error and lead so many people into error all to be eternally damned?” And does it not belong to the essence of the sectarian that he no longer even reckons with the possibility of error? If this is so, then it is among the most astonishing and troubling marks of our ecclesiastical situation that “confession” and “confessing” are spoken of with limitless self-assurance, even superficiality, without it being at all clear what the proper content of the confession is, or which propositions

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there are of which nothing can be given up, even if heaven and earth fall and nothing remain.

What is the confession which the “Confessing Church” in Bremen poses over against the German Christians? Is it so definite, so unambiguous that adherents of Bremen liberalism are *eo ipso* excluded from the confessional fellowship? Or is one as broad-minded as the consistory of one large eastern German city, which at the complaint that deniers of confessionally correct Christology also belong to the “Confessing Church,” gave the naive answer: the question now is not about Christology, but about whether Jesus Christ alone is Lord of the church! What does this consistory have in mind when it calls Christ “Lord” of the church!

What confession did the Confessing Synod of the “Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union” advocate? If they wish to be a continuation of the old Prussian Church from 1834 to 1933 (which is apparently their intent), then they must advocate two confessions.<sup>22</sup> For the old Prussian Church knew of only the Lutheran and the Reformed confessions. There was no confession standing over both of these or contained in both. How does it come about that this church makes the following communication to its congregations?

We thank Herr Professor Doctor Barth for the decisive service which he has rendered to the Evangelical Church. Through his theological work he has again ratified the Word of God among us as the only rule for doctrine and order in the church.

This cannot be said to the Lutheran congregations, which are indeed the great majority. For the Lutheran Church will ever gratefully acknowledge what Karl Barth did to rouse a sleeping Christianity. She will also learn from him that which she can, just as she has also happily learned what the great theologians of the Orthodox, the Medieval Roman, the Anglican and Reformed Churches have taught of real Christian truth. But just as she has not taken over all of Tertullian nor all of Augustine, so must she also decidedly reject the errors of Barth (for instance, his false doctrine of the relationship between Law and

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Gospel and his false concept of faith).

The poor congregations in Prussia were misled by a demonstration of this kind in favor of Barth. They were, for instance, led to the view that Barth's explication of the Creed repeats the church's doctrine, while it actually completely contradicts the explanation of the Creed in Luther's catechisms, as a passing glance at the definition of "faith" already shows, where there is no longer any talk of trust in the promise of the Gospel, nor of the proper heart of the evangelical concept of faith.<sup>23</sup> Nor can the old Prussian consistory be spared the accusation that it has not fulfilled its duty to guard the confession of the congregations to which it knows it is answerable, as must happen. We happily grant to it that its members are deficiently instructed on the question of confession, but this of course does not excuse it.

Thus one could wander through all the territorial churches of Germany and ask each one, "What does the Confessing Church teach here?" In Baden do they confess what question 33 of the Catechism used there says, after quoting several Bible passages, explaining the First Article: "We learn to know God through His revelation in nature, in the history of man, and within ourselves; but most especially in the Holy Scriptures"? In the Palatinate do they make the article of the confession there their own, according to which the Protestant Evangelical Christian Church accepts no emergency Baptism, so that parents should let their child die unbaptized if a pastor cannot be obtained?

What is the confession upon which the Württemberg confessional pastors will judge the confessional faithfulness of their territorial bishop, when they accuse him of acting contrary to the confession when he works to have German Lutherans placed under a spiritual leadership bound to the Lutheran confession? If these pastors oppose the demand of the Lutheran Convention<sup>24</sup> at Hanover that the Lutheran Church has a right to a Lutheran church government, how can they then sanction and even praise the church struggle of the Silesian Lutherans<sup>25</sup> of 1830 and the Hessian *Renitenz*?<sup>26</sup> It is the deplorable consequence of the obvious ignorance of our pastors in individual churches of Germany regarding nineteenth-century church history,

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that when the church struggle of 1933 broke out, the great church struggles of the past were not immediately before their eyes. It is all the more gratifying when one became absorbed in these struggles, as happened with typical thoroughness in the circles of the pastors of the Württemberg Confession.

But what is to be said of the fact that they have not noted that those Lutherans of the nineteenth century struggled not only for the freedom of the church, but also and above all for the right of their church to a church government bound to their confession, as the confession of pure doctrine? Oncken's Baptists also struggled for the freedom of the church, and we will grant to our Baptist fellow Christians without further ado that the goal of their struggle has been none other than this, that Christ alone and not man is the Lord of the church. The Silesian Lutherans struggled not against the territorial government, but rather against a united church government when they refused to acknowledge it. Any church government was unbearable for them that was not bound to the confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the true exposition of the Holy Scriptures. The struggle of the remaining Lutherans is after all simply a continuation of the same. All the brave fighters in the confessional struggles of the last century fought for the content of a definite confession.

Where is the definite confession of the "Confessing Church" of the present? For the "confessing attitude" is not enough. There is no real confession which cannot be confessed *in actu*.

The assertion of certain church governments that in their domain the confession is "inviolably" in force, though no use is made of it, is so laughable that no one takes it seriously. The territorial church of Mecklenburg is only Lutheran insofar as that in it the Word of God is actually preached according to the understanding of the Lutheran Confessions, and Luther's Catechism is taught. Insofar as in its government, practice, and teaching it is un-Lutheran, it has to that extent fallen from Lutheranism and is in need of repentance, a repentance that can be made easier because the confession that is officially recognized is still Lutheran; thus heresies are illegitimate and therefore can be more eas-

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ily fought. But it is absurd to conclude, after the definite content of the confession has been reduced to empty form, that the correct confession amounts to only a “confessional attitude.”

Already the ancient church knew that the worst heresies produce their confessors and martyrs. The martyrs of the Marcionite church prove the truth of their doctrine as little as the martyrs and confessors of modern sects in Russia. And it is conceivable that wherever a “Confessing Church” among us stands engaged in the struggle against the German Christians and fights with heroic sacrifice for what it calls the lordship of Christ alone, it is, however, in truth a sect or a group of sectarians.

Whether it is acknowledged by us as a true church or not—we do not know God’s judgment, nor do we make His judgment for Him—can only be decided on whether its doctrine is pure or not. For this reason no truly “Confessing Church” has skirted its duty to clearly state what it confesses, that is, to state which are the propositions of the faith from which nothing may be taken away or given up, even if heaven and earth fall and nothing remain.

But as soon as we direct this question to the German confessional movement of the present—we do so not from the outside, but as those who are committed to it with all their heart—the entire great predicament of this movement becomes evident. There is no sense in trying to hide this problem. The “Confessing Church” cannot say what it confesses. It can as little tell the world or Christianity what it believes and wherein its faith differs from the faith of other communions as can the “German Evangelical Church.” Regarding the question of the confession of the “Confessing Church” we are answered by a chorus, no, a chaos of contradictory voices.

First we hear those who with many variations assure us, “Our confessions are several and indeed diverse.” Future historical accounts will perhaps see the real great act of the confessional movement of these years in that, in spite of all attempts which it has encountered to the contrary, it has firmly maintained the definition of the German Evangelical Church as a “Federation of German Confessional Church-

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es,” as Barmen put it, or a “federation of confessionally defined churches,” as it has been described since the Dahlem Synod. That is, it has acknowledged that the joining together of the territorial churches on 11 July 1933 can only be understood in the sense of a federation, because the various evangelical churches of Germany lack precisely that which makes unity and church fellowship possible in the church militant: the *consensus de doctrina evangelii et de administratione sacramentorum* [AC VII.2]. If this thought has not perished in Germany, if it has repeatedly been solemnly witnessed before world Christianity and the authorities of the German Reich, then this is the historical service of the churches united in confessional fellowship, but especially of the Lutheran Church.

But alongside this view from the beginning there were other voices. The theory of the federation of confessional churches had to be laden with the question which since 1817 ever and again deeply moved German Protestantism: whether, and to what extent a United Church could also belong to one of the evangelical churches (at the church convention of 1848 it was already presented as a particular confession alongside of the two older confessions), and what was the nature of the United Church’s confession?

But then came the ever louder call for the full unity of the Confessing Church as the “German Evangelical Church,” completely united in confession and organization. This goal would be advocated by all on the Reformed side, in accordance with the tradition of the Reformed Church. Already on 4 January 1934 the Free Reformed Synod at Barmen accepted a declaration composed by K. Barth in which it, in view of the heresies of the German Christians, calls upon

The communions united in one German Evangelical Church, no matter whether they be of Lutheran, Reformed, or United origin and accountability, to acknowledge the sublimity of the one Lord of the one church and therefore the essential unity of their faith, their love and their hope, their proclamation through Word and sacrament, their confession and their task. Thereby the notion is rejected that it must or need be the authorized representation of

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Lutheran, Reformed, or United “interests” which supersedes the demands of the common evangelical confession and practice against error and for the truth.

Here it is bluntly said that there is one inclusive German Evangelical Church. It is the sum of individual congregations. These congregations are of various confessional origin and accountability, but they share an essential unity in the faith so that they can, in the present situation, confess as one. In the introduction to this declaration Barth expressed himself on the old differences which exist between Lutherans and Reformed. They are to be taken seriously but today must not prevent church fellowship:

The controversy in the church today, and that concerning which we must “confess,” does not have to do with matters of the Supper, but with matters of the First Commandment. Over against this, our dilemma and task, the church must return to the Fathers, that is, differences within the confessing movement must become a serious but no longer dividing or church-splitting opposition of theological schools.<sup>27</sup>

How deeply this thought is rooted in the hearts of the Reformed is shown by the fact that Karl Immer programmatically repeats it in the conclusion to the report on the confessional synod at Augsburg,<sup>28</sup> although in the meantime the confessional synods of Barmen and Dahlem, in agreement with all the Reformed, have declared that the “German Evangelical Church” can only be understood as a federation of confessionally defined churches (not as communions!). On the very same day on which the Lutheran Convention at Hanover solemnly declared, as a demand of Lutheran churches bound to their confession, the basic proposition that a Lutheran church can only be legally governed by a church government bound to the Lutheran confession—a proposition so self-evident that it needs no discussion at all among intelligent men—Immer developed yet again the Reformed program as though no synod of Barmen or Dahlem ever existed. He did not even shy away from demanding that the episcopal government of the

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Lutheran Church be replaced by an allegedly divinely revealed pastoral council government. He spoke of

...the enormous task that the German Evangelical Church, from congregation to congregation, from land to land, be reordered according to the nature of a church which is “under the Word.” With this we will not avoid the question, How will the future church be defined—by the structure and history of intact churches, or by the brotherly, truly communal structure which was given the Confessing Church in areas which have been destroyed?

Then follows a lament over the fact “that hitherto it has not led to altar fellowship without reservation.” The fellowship of the “Confessing Church” finally must shatter on this inner contradiction between the view of the German Evangelical Church as a federation, or the unionistic view of the same. The Lutheran bishops of Germany, insofar as they belong to a confessional fellowship, became guilty of serious untruthfulness over against their church when they transferred the spiritual leadership of the Lutherans in the German Evangelical Church to men who neither know the Lutheran confession, nor desire to have a church of the Evangelical Lutheran confession.

It is absolutely impossible to explain the contradiction between both lines of thought within the “Confessing Church” and the parting of the ways which occurred in Oeynhausen and in the proceedings at the Confessional Synod convened there. To be sure, also in these events the positive and negative personality traits of the men who took part played a role, their wisdom or their foolishness, their action or inaction. But that the “Confessing Church” has not been able nor yet today is able to say what it properly confesses is not the fault of men. On the contrary, all the participants were of the opinion that they had to and could speak.

For what is a Confessing Church if it does not confess? Have not its pastors, its congregations, its bishops, and its consistories done this daily, even hourly? Have they not given valiant witness against the terrible heresies in the church, against lawlessness and violence? If a thou-

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sand, if a hundred thousand individuals confess, why should not they do it jointly? If Lutherans and Reformed bear witness individually, why should not they do it jointly? Thus, corresponding to the admonition of Barth and the Reformed synods, the Barmen Confessional Synod sought to confess a common witness against the heresies of the times to the German Evangelical Church.

The participants also believed that they achieved this, but that conclusion will not be so self-evident to later generations. Already today no one any longer ascribes to it the epoch-making significance which those who produced it, in particular its real author, Karl Barth, gave it. In the meantime it has been proven that the only intent of the document which all sides agreed upon was the rejection of the doctrine of the German Christians. But everything else, especially all the positive theses, could and would be understood according to either the Lutheran or the Reformed view.

In the third thesis of the Barmen Declaration, for instance, what is said regarding the presence of the Lord, if it is not to be empty talk, must be understood in the sense of the Lutheran or in the sense of the Reformed doctrine of the person and presence of the exalted Christ. That the following thesis on obedience and order in the church can likewise be understood in a Lutheran or Reformed manner has also been demonstrated. It is not so, as was intended at Barmen and as our Reformed brothers are pleased to assert, that one “community under the Word” in Nuremberg hears the same thing from this Word which is heard in Elberfeld, and that they have not remained “under the Word” if they have not heard from it Reformed church doctrine. For Lutherans hear from the New Testament entirely different propositions on the organization of the church than the Reformed. A theologian such as Barth had to have known and considered this. Thus the Barmen Declaration is in no way only the afterword to a conquered ecclesiastical boundary between Lutheran and Reformed. Nor, according to the preamble, was its intent to eliminate this boundary.

It was also emphatically called a “Theological Declaration” and not a “confession,” as in a similar manner the Prussian General Synod

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of 1846 accepted the “Nitzschemum”<sup>29</sup> with the reservation that it did not thereby wish to establish a new confession. But in the text the word “confession” was indeed used, and finally a binding declaration on what is pure and false doctrine is always a confession.<sup>30</sup> Thus the document has entered the church history of our time as the “Barmen Confession.”

It has been boisterously greeted by the friends of a new union as the dawn of the coming day of a unified evangelical church in which “Lutheran” and “Reformed” are only designations for varying theological schools, which mutually excite each other, but no longer names of differing churches. Soon the Barmen Declaration had won such dignity in wide circles of the “Confessing Church” that it was placed next to, yes even above the confessions of the Reformation. The participants of the confessional synods were allowed to deviate from the Augustana.

A lack of consensus in matters of the Barmen Declaration was already more serious. Barth saw with a critical eye the worldly and human unity of the unions of the nineteenth century, based upon untruthfulness, indifference, and subtle design. But no less than this Karl Barth strongly asserted that the union consummated in Barmen could be “a heavenly unity, worked in the church by the Triune God.” And in a paper widely disseminated, entitled “The Possibility of a Union of Confession,” he made this so plausible that scarcely a reader could doubt that this was the case.

Looking back at all the marks of the Barmen “Union” I would venture to state: this is *genuine* union! And it could be that here there occurred visibly a heavenly unity, worked by the Triune God. Precisely because it is such an unpretentious thing—a few completely preliminary theses—for precisely this reason I would say: there is every appearance, we venture to hope, that it has been spoken in obedience.

Full of astonishment one asks: Is this still the old, sober Karl Barth who wrote “Quousque Tandem”? Has he become a visionary? Has he seen heaven open? “Certainly the Lord was at this place; how holy was

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the place from which flowed a stream of life over millions! Here was God's house, here the gates of heaven," said Eylert on the founding of the Prussian Union in Potsdam. How is his belief any different from that of Barth, that not the Potsdam, but rather the Barmen union has been established by God?

Has it become visible that God has worked in the unpretentiousness of the claims made by the Barmen document? What kind of doctrine of revelation is at work here? And are the claims really so unpretentious? "We believe that in a time of common difficulty and tribulation, a common word has been placed in our mouths." When one considers how the Bible speaks of the Word which God places in the mouths of men, which is always the Word of revelation received by prophetic inspiration (e.g., Num. 22:38; 1 Kings 17:24; Jer. 1:9, cf. Isa. 6:7), this thesis of the Barmen Declaration will, at the very least, be viewed as very unfortunate. And it is regrettable that the many biblically literate participants in the synod let it pass.

Asmussen's commentary on this thesis of the Theological Declaration of Barmen shows where it leads when words are no longer weighed temperately and calmly. He states, "Accordingly, it is before the eyes of the entire world that God has already long since placed a common word of faith in our mouths . . ." <sup>31</sup> This assertion now crosses even the limits of the "Thousand-Year Reich," for there at its earliest it will be "before the eyes of the entire world."

But do we find ourselves at the beginning of the millennium, or perhaps rather in the end times? Is perhaps the unity of the church which is sought no longer at all the unity of the church militant, as it is described in the seventh article of the Augustana, rather already that of the church triumphant, which is exempted from the struggle for pure doctrine? Then that remarkable "command" about which we have questioned Karl Barth, which applies in Germany but not yet in Switzerland, is understandable. It would then be similar to the command which led the holy church from the four winds to Pepuza<sup>32</sup> and Tymion for an encounter with her Lord, and which men since, throughout the history of the church, have so often believed they have

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heard. But it has never been the command of God the Holy Spirit, rather the command of another spirit.

No one who understands these questions will misunderstand our critique. Its purpose is not to cripple the confessional movement of our day, nor is it to place a stain upon the church history of Evangelical Germany since 1817. We are only and solely interested in an answer to the question which persists at the very heart of our being. Just how is it that every founding of a union between the Evangelical churches of Germany has also simultaneously been an outbreak of enthusiasm?

### 4

THERE IS ONLY ONE POSSIBLE EXPLANATION for this incontestable historical fact. There must be such a close correspondence between the boundary which separates the Lutheran and Reformed, on the one hand, and the boundary which separates the church bound to the *sola scriptura* from scriptureless enthusiasm, or enthusiasm which does violence to Scripture, on the other hand, that the opening of the one boundary is automatically followed by the opening of the other. Whether enthusiasm opens the door to union or union to enthusiasm may vary in individual cases. But both always hang inseparably together.

This sounds entirely improbable at first; for both confessions, Lutheranism and Calvinism alike, view enthusiasm as their common enemy. Both fight for the sole validity of the Scriptures against the

enthusiasts, that is, the spiritualists who boast that they possess the Spirit without and before the Word and who therefore judge, interpret, and twist the Scriptures or spoken Word according to their pleasure . . . many still do it in our day who wish to distinguish sharply between the letter and the Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

One would think that this struggle against the common enemy of both confessions could be much more effectively carried out if they were united in one church. But the paradoxical experience of church

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history of the last century is repeated also in this case. For those Protestant churches which have set aside their particular doctrine in order to join federations or union churches to fight a common opponent have been much less successful, indeed, they have suffered terrible defeat much earlier than the confessional churches which, according to human measurement, fight hopelessly.<sup>34</sup> The churches which have opened themselves widest to the union are always the quickest to fall to enthusiasm, as indeed also the German Christian movement, after a prelude in the southwest German churches (Nassau, Baden), organized itself in the old Prussian Church as a church-political power, and already by 1932 achieved a great victory. From there it began to seize the Lutheran churches. That is, it took over those first in which the church's confession had for the most part already been reduced to tatters.

At this point we must confront a misunderstanding which has time and again distorted the debate on the union question. The German territorial churches cannot be divided into those which are united and those which are not, as though they fall into two groups, namely those who have accepted the union, and others which have remained untouched by it. Nor is it the case that only a few of these churches are responsible for the introduction of the union, while others, to the contrary, had no part in it.

The union arose out of the ecclesiastical relationships of the early nineteenth century, as the "ripe fruit of its unripe time" (thus Wagemann,<sup>35</sup> and also Scheibel). The great political revolution of the Napoleonic era had turned many states (which had up to that point possessed unified territorial churches) into confessionally mixed regions. The resulting problems, which in individual regions of Germany had already been discussed for generations, were now solved in accordance with the spirit of the times. The civil government solved them from above (only in the Palatinate did a balloting of house fathers actually take place). The Enlightenment had made the church a club within the state. And Idealism, which finally has no place for the church at all, but only for an institute for the cultivation of religion as one cultural benefit to civilization alongside other cultural benefits, had fur-

ther developed the idea of the power of the state over the church.

Shrugging their shoulders, those in Berlin ignored the protest which arose from churchmen against the horrible and illegal act of 16 December 1806. With the stroke of a pen and against all the prevailing laws, the century-old form of church government was eliminated, and a section of the civil government, which also supervised the Royal Theater, took over the government of the Lutheran and Reformed churches. Who at such a time could have mounted an effective protest against the governmental introduction of the Union? All the efforts for union in the past finally failed because of the faithfulness with which the church held to her confession, for it held no greater power than the desire for a unified state. Now, however, Pietism and the Enlightenment had done their church-destroying work. At just this point of the greatest weakness and degradation of German ecclesiastical life, the state government could solve the confessional problem in its own manner, in the spirit of the times, and that meant in the spirit of indifference. What a lonesome bird on the roof Claus Harms was with his powerful protest!

The reason not all of Germany had accepted the Union at the time was that there were not enough Reformed congregations; for where there were no Reformed congregations, the Union could not be introduced properly. At least that was the view at the time. Today it is quite something else. There were large German territories where there was not a single Reformed congregation. They maintained the Lutheran name without earning it, or being worthy of it. A few of them actually became Lutheran again, and this by the grace of God alone, which can also raise dead churches again to life. The Church of Saxony would also have joined the Union during the '30s, during the seminal years in which the Gustavus Adolphus Society<sup>36</sup> was founded (in Saxony the light of the Enlightenment radiated longer than elsewhere), but there were not enough Reformed churches. There were many Lutheran churches in Germany whose virginity was like the celibacy of a young woman who had not found a husband. And where would all the Reformed come from? In Silesia there were, according to Schleierma-

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cher, 4 Reformed congregations over against some 700 Lutheran. It was a similar situation in all of the provinces east of the Elbe. The numbers were more favorable only where the exiled Huguenots had once found asylum, that is, especially in Berlin and in a few other places in Brandenburg. But the congregations in the east were all (except for Berlin) small, and their number and membership were on the decline. Only in the western provinces of Prussia were there Reformed Christians in greater number and in sizable congregations. But all in all, at the beginning of the century in the Prussian Empire, there numbered only 34 French and 125 other Reformed congregations over against some 7,000 Lutheran congregations.

It has been said correctly that in most of the regions of the Prussian state the Union meant that hitherto Lutheran congregations were declared "United." For the most part the Reformed congregations continued to exist. The allowance of dispersed Reformed Christians as guests at the Lutheran Supper had already been introduced by church law in the eighteenth century. The only consequence of the Union was that the Lutheran Church was gradually robbed of its Lutheranism.

Today most of the congregations within the old Prussian Union are *de jure* Lutheran, but they do not know it; they have forgotten their confession. Thus the boundaries between "United" and "not United" churches are fluid, and there is without doubt in many areas of Prussia a more Lutheran consciousness among pastors and congregations than in many a Lutheran church in which the Union is only known by hearsay.

There is at least one church in Germany which returned to Lutheranism from the Union. This is the Bavarian Territorial Church, which for a generation, from 1818 to 1848, was actually part of the Union, insofar as also the Reformed congregations in Bavaria west of the Rhine and the United churches of the Palatinate, were under the jurisdiction of the Munich *Oberkonsistorium*. Here a church government had succeeded in releasing entire regions of the church from its oversight in order to become a church government genuinely bound to its confession.

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This brings us to the question of the common responsibility of all the territorial churches for the Union. The return to the confession was possible in Bavaria because the Roman Catholic Archbishop allowed it. How often has the thought arisen in pious Prussian hearts that it might have been better if John Sigismund would have defected to the Roman Catholic instead of the Reformed faith in 1613!<sup>37</sup> The Jesuits could have already been bested in Berlin, just as the Lutheran Church outlived the Jesuits at the court of Dresden.

It was indeed much more difficult to outlive the “Protectorate” of the Berlin Hohenzollerns.<sup>38</sup> For the service of protection was rendered upon the condition of complete rule of the church, down to the right of the king to determine what the Evangelical Church should be. “Never had a pope had power over the Catholic Church like the Reformed king Frederick William had from 1808 over the Lutheran Church,” said Wangemann, who was a royal loyalist.<sup>39</sup>

How great this power was is illustrated by nothing more clearly than by a fact which must be designated an irony of history: the men who today fight for the freedom of the church are likewise zealous advocates of the unions, which stand among us today in the church as the living monuments to territorialism and royal absolutism. Insightful princes had understood the senselessness of this entire system of church government. It was bound to be assailed no later than 1866 by those who by their ordination vows were duty bound to be concerned about the maintenance of pure doctrine. For the Prussian crown was overwhelmed with its oversight of the most diverse churches.

Here we see plainly the common guilt of all the German territorial churches. If the unions were incompatible with the Lutheran confession, then they should never have been granted ecclesiastical recognition. Those churches which remained Lutheran had indeed accepted the fact of the Union, but at the same time they should have drawn the particular consequences of this acceptance. The catechisms of Baden and the Palatinate contain such a weak echo of Lutheran doctrine, and are so beset with false doctrine, and so open the door to every heresy that the Lutheran Church must warn its members who move to Baden

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and the Palatinate not to join these churches, and urge them to join the free church.

A Lutheran Christian cannot receive the Sacrament at a territorial church altar in Heidelberg or Speyer, because there the doctrine of his church on what makes the Supper the Supper is publicly denied. This is not lovelessness, but a simple requirement of truthfulness. For as a Lutheran Christian I do not go to the table of the Lord to experience some meaningful religious moment of celebration, nor to celebrate an undefined “most holy union” with my Redeemer. I go because I believe that in the Sacrament of the Altar the true body and the true blood of my Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, are given to me to eat and to drink. The pastor there may be an upright, pious Christian and a beloved man. But he will tell me during the celebration of the Supper, either directly or indirectly, in the address or in the liturgical formulas, that precisely that which I seek in the Supper is not found there, that my faith here is not the correct Christian faith, rooted in the New Testament, rather the controverted private view of a Lutheran theologian. Therefore I cannot receive the Supper in this church (in this day and age when people move and travel widely this is not absolutely necessary—why must everything always be made as comfortable as possible?), and I cannot send my children there for confirmation instruction. The Lutheran churches should instruct their own members on this matter and then in all Christian love, but absolutely unambiguously, discuss this matter with the United churches, especially the old Prussian Church.

Indeed, the old Prussian Church never introduced a new confession; rather, in far and away the majority of congregations, it left all the Lutheran Confessions, except the Formula of Concord, “inviolably” in force. On this basis the Lutheran churches believed they could also maintain church fellowship with the Prussian Church, although the choice was given to anyone belonging to a Lutheran territorial church who was moving to Prussia to join the so-called Old Lutherans by simply declaring his preference for the “Evangelical Lutheran Church of Old Prussia.”

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If the Prussian Union Church should claim to be the continuation of the Old Lutheran Church which existed before 1817, how is it that her confession has been so ignored? How many people from all over Germany have moved to Berlin? But it is precisely in Berlin that congregations were stripped of their confession. For Lutherans who came to Berlin, there was no possibility within the territorial church to join a congregation of the Lutheran confession. It is still the case today that any Reformed Christian who travels to Berlin can join a Reformed congregation in which his children can receive confirmation instruction according to his confession. But any Lutheran who moves to Berlin becomes a member of a definite parish in which the pastors—in contradiction to their ordination vow—are duty bound to preach according to both confessions which have validity in the congregation. Perhaps he has been able to find a pastor somewhere to give his children Lutheran confirmation instruction. But the religious instruction which his children receive in school will be imparted exclusively by teachers who have had no opportunity to learn that something like a Lutheran Church even still exists.

What severe guilt have the Lutheran church governments incurred by letting this happen! It cannot be said that the church governments before 1918 could not possibly have spoken because they were in part civil authorities. They have been silent even when they could have spoken without difficulty. What good does it do to maintain the confessional position, what good is it to carry out doctrinal discipline in a Lutheran territorial church (if the pastors are indeed bound to the confession), if the other entities which are teaching within the domain of the church concerned, and at times teaching very effectively, are bound to no doctrinal norm?

Lutheran churches, like those of Bavaria and Hanover, must say to the great independent associations and societies, to domestic and foreign mission societies, to the Gustavus Adolphus Society and to the Martin Luther Bund, to the Pastors' Alliance and to the Evangelical Federation, to the publishers, the women's groups, the youth organizations which have taken over a great part of the ecclesiastical work: We

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are happy that it is the purpose of your program to serve our congregations with your practical work. But if you desire to teach, if you desire to preach God's Word to the various age groups in the church, and to the parishes as members and officeholders, if you wish to tell them what faith, church, what a Christian congregation is, then you are bound to the confession of the church and subject to its discipline as much as anyone else who teaches in the church. What is written in your newspapers? What have you brought into all the homes of evangelical Germany with the great editions of your publications? The Lutheran churches should have spoken this way. They must finally—finally—say this.

In the unions of the nineteenth century a clear historical fate is revealed which has affected all of German Protestantism. It has affected one church more, another less, but no realm of German church life has gone unaffected. And if we must speak of the guilt of unionism, of the guilt of frivolous, untruthful union-building, which has lied to itself and others about a unity which is not present at all, then there is not a single territorial church in Germany which is free of this guilt. Thus the entire German church must bear the consequences of the false union. And the question of what will become of these unions is one that gets at the very existence of all the territorial churches.

The moment the boundary between the Lutheran and the Reformed churches was removed by the German unions of the previous century, the dike which should have protected the church of the *sola Scriptura* against the raging flood of enthusiasm broke. Why did this happen? How is this connection explained? The moment both Evangelical churches were no longer able to say what separated them, remarkably they also lost the ability to withstand enthusiasm with a clearly confessed word.

The Union is in many respects more eloquent than any confession. It does not tire of drumming up recruits and extolling its merits. It speaks more of "confessing" than of the Confessions. It rouses itself, like an intellectual poet of the Enlightenment, to wax poetic on the obligation of praising and thanking, but no longer praises and thanks.

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When it comes to serious confessing, the Union is struck dumb. There is no Union confession, or more correctly, There are so many varying confessions that none of them is taken seriously and viewed as a real confession. The “Evangelical Protestant Church in Baden” has a confession. “The United Protestant Evangelical Christian Church in the Palatinate” also has a confession. But neither agrees with the other. Why has no friend of the Union come up with the idea of uniting the United churches of Germany? That would be a magnificent assignment. The obstinate Lutherans could simply be left aside and the attempt be made to unite all the United churches of Germany with one confession. It is impossible.

The Palatinate Union has the motto (it is in its catechism and at the head of the church newspaper of the Palatinate) “It is of the deepest and holiest essence of Protestantism henceforth to bravely forge on in the way of well-proven truth and genuine religious enlightenment with undefiled freedom in matters of faith.” What do the Halle Pietists who today are at pains to figure out whether they should be Lutheran or Reformed, both or neither, have to say about this Union? One should try, just once, to have the Prussian Union offer an explanation of what she actually believes.

What a struggle for the church’s confession has raged throughout the history of the old Prussian Church, from the cabinet orders of 1817 and 1834 to the General Synod of 1846, down to the organizational and ecclesiastical struggles of our own day! What different understandings the Lutherans and the Reformed have of the Union, both of whom are pledged to the unabated continued legitimacy of their confessions. What different understandings have the adherents of the Positive Union, the Protestant Alliance, and the Middle Party! For all this it must be quite easy to determine what Lutheran and Reformed have to confess in common over against the Catholic churches, the enthusiasts, and neopaganism! If one can say what the Lutheran and Reformed confessions have in common with the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox confessions, namely the truths of the Nicene Creed, then it must be quite a simple thing to determine the consensus between both

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evangelical confessions. Dorner, Nitzsch, and Julius Müller did this. Their attempts may be read. Wilhelm Lütgert and Arthur Titius put the Consensus down on paper in five minutes. Unfortunately these two attempts do not agree with each other, and they have not found any adherents.

The result is always the same. Doctrinal formulizations are abandoned, and there is a hasty retreat to the Bible. But this pious retreat is what all heretics make, as everyone knows. Think only of the fight against the *homoousios* based on the fact that the word does not occur in Scripture. This retreat can be made in a pietistic manner or more in accord with Enlightenment sensibilities, when the appeal is made to the advance in the science of exegesis. The Biblicists of both parties can only be answered in the following way: if you have really come to a new understanding on the basis of the Scriptures, formulate it! Don't just talk about it, formulate it! For confessions are nothing other than formulations of the understanding of Scripture. If you really believe you have come to some new understanding of the Lord's Supper, which supersedes the doctrines of the Lutheran and Reformed churches, then formulate it in clear language, as did the catechisms of the time of the Reformation. But hitherto, unfortunately, such theses have not been produced for discussion.

Nor is the other way out of this problem possible, namely, Karl Barth's "Confessional Union." He would reduce the church-dividing antithesis between Lutheran and Reformed to a difference of theological schools, which can exist alongside each other, in one and the same church. He thinks it is not comprehensible why modern Lutherans could not explain that the *improbant secus docentes*<sup>40</sup> of Augustana X was directed against Zwingli and the Enthusiasts of the sixteenth century as an important delimitation of the Lutheran doctrine of the Supper against a particular heresy, without thereby asserting the ridiculous notion that the modern Reformed are also included in this *secus docentes*, and from whom there must also be ecclesiastical separation.

He believes this is possible because the controversy in the church today is not over the Supper, but the First Commandment. It is remark-

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able that a theologian who is so intelligent and familiar with the Lutheran literature can make this judgment. Doesn't he notice that his proposal finally says the same thing as the definition of the Union given in the cabinet order of 1834?

The Union proposes and intends no giving up of confessions of the faith hitherto in place, neither is the authority which the confessional writings of both confessions have had up to this point done away with. The introduction of the Union is only the expression of the spirit of moderation and charitableness, which will no longer allow the differences in individual points of doctrine of the other confession as grounds for denying external ecclesiastical fellowship.

Over against this legally binding definition of the Prussian Union, Barth today would only add this support: because the fight today is not regarding the Supper, the doctrinal differences on this question can no longer be church-dividing; moreover, the condemnation of Augustana X does not apply to the Reformed today. But to this we simply say that what the Lutheran Church intended with its condemnations is clearly enough stated. It had in mind with its condemnations always definite false doctrines which are not confined only to one age. Just as it appropriated the ancient church's condemnations of the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, etc., so also the condemnation which was expressed in Augustana X has to do with a doctrine which can always reappear and is in fact alive to this day. Indeed, it has conquered a great portion of Lutheranism itself. And this is the doctrine that in the Sacrament of the Altar the true body of the Lord is not given to us in, with, and under the bread. Our church also expressly broadened this condemnation to include the doctrine of Calvin. Even if others do not, Barth should know what this view of the Sacrament, what the Fifth Chief Part of the Catechism means for all of Lutheran doctrine. And if he perhaps asks who still advocates this doctrine, we also beg to ask him who still advocates the doctrine of original sin and the great doctrines of the Old Reformed Church?

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It is of course very easy to ask with a certain amount of irony whether there is today still a Lutheran Church at all. The same question can be put about the Reformed Church, or even the church in general. The matter does not depend upon how many or how few men confess the doctrines of the Reformation, but rather whether these doctrines are still preached and believed. As long as this happens, the old churches of the Reformation era are still a reality. Lutherans and Reformed, whether few or many, still stand united with their fathers by the same confessions of the faith, even as both churches still stand over against the other. There is no actual Evangelical Church in Germany outside of both these confessions. The union churches also live, whether they know it or not, from the remnant of ecclesiastical content which they have salvaged from the time when the confessional churches were separate, down to the present. This is demonstrated by a quick look at their catechisms.

### 5

EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY IN GERMANY STANDS before the greatest organizational task which it has ever faced in its four-hundred-year history. The old forms in which it has existed and into which it was forced have been forever broken in the revolution of our day, and it must create a new form of existence. But a new ecclesiastical structure has never come about without the tiresome labor of many years. It is self-evident for every serious theologian that this form cannot be a single unified church, since we have in Germany differing evangelical confessions. A "German Evangelical Church" which claims to be more than a "Federation of Confessionally Defined Churches" would be the worst conceivable untruthfulness, so long as German Protestantism is not united in confession. The last remnant of true evangelical church life, which has maintained itself in Germany until our day, would of necessity die in this lie.

In the interest of the German people, which is made up not only of theologians, and therefore which has the naive opinion that that

which calls itself church ought actually be what it is called, the following ought to be considered. Should not the misleading name "German Evangelical Church," a creation of Schleiermacher, the man of a thousand tricks,<sup>27</sup> who brought so much false terminology into circulation in theology and church, be gradually removed from circulation? This could of course occur only with a most loyal understanding and in full agreement with the Reichs government, for whom the terminology employed by theologians has won the significance of state-church law.

Here is a wonderful new opportunity for the Ecclesiastical Committee of the Reich, which knows of course just as well as we do that the "German Evangelical Church" is not properly a church. The members of this committee are theological advisors, extraordinarily well acquainted with the area of ecclesiastical language, and it would not be difficult for them to coin a new expression to replace the long since antiquated expression of Schleiermacher. It could be popular, and yet at the same time express the facts without any misunderstanding that the alliance of the evangelical territorial churches signifies the closest conceivable confederation of those historic churches of the Reformation, yet that these churches have not ceased to be confessional churches.

Within such a confederation, constructed upon the strictest principles of truth, the relationship of the evangelical confessions toward one another can and must then finally be arranged anew. As a presupposition to this, the question must first be settled as to whether and to what extent there is one United confession, alongside of the Lutheran and Reformed confessions. The friends and champions of the Union must give the Lutherans and the Reformed an answer to this question, which has been directed at them now for over a century. Whether they will be able to give a united answer is entirely doubtful, as we have indicated above. If the churches of Baden and the Palatinate have entirely different conceptions of the Union, and the applicability of Reformation confessions, how will they come to an agreement on this question with the churches of East Prussia and Silesia, which have never had a catechism other than the Lutheran Catechism?

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It is always conceivable that a portion of German evangelical Christianity might gather itself around a new conception of union, and the Lutherans and Reformed be united by definite, confessional theses of some kind. If such attempts should succeed, then that part of German Christianity could not be denied its own particular character as a type of confession. But under no circumstances is it the case that those who happen to live in "United" churches comprise a "united confession," because the word "United" in East Prussia has a meaning completely different from that in the Palatinate. East Prussia has practically no United congregations, while the Palatinate has only United congregations. The Evangelical Church of Silesia binds its pastors to an entirely different doctrine than the churches of Baden and Nassau.

It is impossible and should be unworthy of German theologians to justify the Union by asserting that the congregations, and even the theologians, today no longer understand the difference between "Lutheran" and "Reformed." To this one can only reply, If this is so, then they must learn it again. For if ignorance is what dictates what the church is and is not to teach, all would have to be done away with! Should the Sacrament of the Altar, celebrated as it has been in the churches of Nuremberg since the time of the Reformation, be divested of its confessional character, so that it gives no offense to "enlightened" men? Is it Christian love to demand this? Is it Christian love to comply with such a demand?

But at the very least, the Union is justified by the practical necessities of life. We certainly do not wish to make light of the problems which once occurred in Anhalt where a Lutheran pastor got his beer from a "Reformed" brewery, and where in another situation a Reformed glazier repaired the window of a Lutheran church, which had very serious consequences. But if in these and other circumstances, as they are presented today as sufficient grounds for the necessity of a Union, the practical men of the church know of no other way out than that two churches change their dogma, then they only prove that they have made all too little use of the intellectual gifts which our dear God has given to them. From the difficulties which are brought about by

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having multiple confessions existing side by side, and which today among most Christian peoples are a hundred times greater than in Germany, because we only have very few confessions, there is derived the necessity of a Christian, brotherly life together, of an ordered mutual relationship. But these difficulties can never necessitate the Union.

The Union can always only be justified dogmatically. The friends and disciples of the Union are obliged to present this justification to the advocates of the Lutheran and Reformed confessional churches. But not as though they could be convinced that their views are not correct. That would be as pointless as the corresponding attempt to do this between the Lutherans and Reformed. But if this wrestling over these issues in our day is able to accomplish what the nineteenth century could not, namely a union confession of more than purely personal or territorial significance, then it will be given the attention to which every ecclesiastical confession has claim. We are ready and willing to limit our proposition, that the Union has no confession, to the past. But we can only do that if the disciples of the Union clearly tell us what they *magno consensu* believe, teach, and confess on the questions dealt with in the Small Catechism.

Furthermore, the relationship of Lutherans and Reformed, within a confederation of German confessional churches, must then be based upon a new foundation. We must proceed from the knowledge which has arisen from the painful experiences of the history of the Union, and from the bitter experiences of the present ecclesiastical struggle. The reason both confessions speak past one another, which has made these struggles so difficult, has its deepest cause in the fact that the Lutheran and the Reformed churches do not have the same concept of the evangelical church.

For the Reformed, the Lutherans are part of the evangelical church insofar as they are on the way toward the completion of the Reformation. It is the task of the Reformed to help the Lutherans in this regard; for instance, to help the Lutherans free themselves from the realistic doctrine of the Supper, from the one-sided emphasis on faith over obedience, among other things.

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For the Lutherans, the Reformed no longer belong to the church of the pure Gospel. They have moved in a direction which has departed from the Reformation. They have surrendered biblical truths, such as the realistic doctrine of the Supper, which cannot be given up. They have muddled and partially lost the fundamental knowledge of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel.

From his viewpoint, Calvin thought he was entitled to direct the affairs within the Church of the Augsburg Confession. He thought he was a kindred confessor of the Augustana, and desired the recognition of the Reformed as such. The Lutherans, however, could in no way grant that Calvin's doctrine of the Supper, which denied the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lutheran sense, was compatible with the Augsburg Confession. They would have had to abandon everything which Luther had taught in the Fifth Chief Part of the Catechism.

V.E. Loescher bid the Reformed in his "Peaceable Address to the Reformed Congregations in Germany" to think through the situation of the Lutheran Church around 1570 and to place themselves into this situation.

Suppose at that time the entire theological faculty at Geneva were secretly Lutheran; the faculties at Zurich and Basel were for the most part headed in the same direction, and the faculties at Heidelberg and Marburg would not or could not do anything to oppose this; men who were secretly Lutheran were shoved into offices everywhere, and we demanded this secretly, but denied it publicly. What then would have the remaining Reformed, for instance in Holland, have done to maintain their religion? Certainly nothing less than our theologians did through the Formula of Concord and otherwise, to conserve their confession.

The consciousness of Calvinism over against Lutheranism, its conviction that the Reformed Church must lead the Lutheran Church to a completion of the Reformation, is completely understandable from a human point of view. But the naiveté with which this view has been played out, from the days of Laski's<sup>42</sup> exiled congregation—

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because of its Calvinistic faith it had been expelled from London and requested not only asylum in Copenhagen, then Rostock, Wismar, and Lübeck, but also the acknowledgement that its doctrine of the Supper was alone scriptural—to the politics of the Union in Brandenburg and Prussia and the church politics of today's Reformed Confederation, has deeply confused the relationship between both confessions.

This explains why the Lutheran resistance has been so intense. For down to the present day, the natural demand of the Lutheran Church for a church government bound solely to its confession has been viewed as a disturbing of the confessional peace. Paul Gerhardt, who simply would not sit by silently as the Lutheran Church in Brandenburg was forcibly Calvinized, is viewed as a destroyer of the peace. The great elector, who out of deep conviction sought to Calvinize the Lutheran Church, is viewed as the paragon of an evangelical prince.

Will this state of affairs change? Will both evangelical churches which stand over against one another in German-speaking lands ever come into a relationship in which each finally has respect for the faith of the other? Then they will be able to speak to each other. Before this happens they cannot but speak past one another. We are completely prepared to hear the grievances which the Reformed have to bring against Lutheranism and its church politics. For only when the church's political misunderstandings and mistakes have been settled can both confessions truly speak to each other in a churchly and theological way. But if this happens, it will truly be a churchly and theological dialogue.

For it is not the case, as one who had a superficial knowledge of our age of orthodoxy stated, that a Lutheran is bound to see in the Reformed Church a form of the "devil's church." That would be entirely un-Lutheran, nor did orthodoxy have this view.<sup>43</sup> In all its unambiguous rejection of those things which were viewed as false doctrine, and in all its struggles against the church-political methods to Calvinize all of the German lands, it never denied that the church of Christ is also in Scotland or Switzerland.

That false doctrine must be fought, and that there could be no church fellowship where there was no unity on the basic understand-

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ing of the Gospel—that was indeed an understanding which had been learned from Luther, and which neither the Old Lutheran Church nor the Evangelical Lutheran Church of later times could have given up. Whoever does give it up—as the Enlightenment and Pietism did—abandons the Reformation. And not only that: he abandons the church altogether. For since the Reformation raised the great question of the pure doctrine of the Gospel for all of Christianity, the church exists only in, with, and under the form of confessional churches. No one can belong to the church, no one can desire the church, unless he affirms a confession—be it old or new.

That these confessions contradict each other, that we from our understanding of Scripture, out of deep conviction of faith, must consider another view of Scripture as mistaken, that is the cross which the church must bear as the church militant. But if one is tempted to doubt the correctness of the proposition that full church fellowship presupposes the full fellowship of faith, doctrine, and confession, let him study the unspeakable and deplorable plight of the churches of the Reformation, seen in their deepest humiliation in the history of the modern unions. This history can teach us what the church's confession is, and what the struggle for God's truth in the church militant means for a world which faces the threat of being drowned by the lie.



## Notes

1. Ed. note: This essay originally appeared as *Union und Bekenntnis* in *Bekennende Kirche*, Heft 41/42, Schriftreihe, hrsg. von Christian Stoll in Gemeinschaft mit Georg Merz und Hermann Sasse (München Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1936).

2. A.F.C. Vilmar, *Theologische Moral* I (1871), p. 313.

3. On this concept see Karl Adam, *Das Wesen des Katholizismus*, 6th ed., p. 168.

4. Ed. note: This phrase is simply the Latin version of 1 Tim. 3:15.

5. Why exactly this hymn has been used so often to express the deepest untruthfulness is understandable to anyone who has ever read the original wording of the hymn.

Ed. note: Reference is to the hymn by Nicholas von Zinzendorf which usually appears in translation under the title, "Heart and Heart Together Bound."

6. Kapff (Prälat in Stuttgart), *Der religiöse Zustand des evangelischen Deutschlands*, 1856, p. 53.

7. *Das Bekenntnis der lutherischen Kirche gegen das Bekenntnis des Berliner Kirchentags gewahrt von etlichen Lehrern der Theologie und des Kirchenrechts 1853*. Reprinted in *Lutherische Kirche*, 1935, 1.

8. *Charakter=Züge und historische Fragmente aus dem Leben des Königs von Preussen Friedrich Wilhelm III*. Dritter Theil, 2 Abth. (1846), pp. 62 ff.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 80 ff.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

11. "In the honor of sound reason, which eagerly accepts what the voice of truth speaks; in honor of the humanity, which in agreement and accord with public opinion always has an effect upon the law (*vox populi est vox Dei*), I will gladly grant that the opponents of the Union were really convinced of the arguments which they used against it . . . The first who arose as such was a foreigner, the preacher Claus Harms in Kiel. An old Lutheran in body and soul . . . he wrote theses . . . In these audacious, rigid, final, dogmatically formulated theses, he treated the Reformation as a task completed by Luther. He remained within the limitations of everything which was so excellently dis-

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cussed with Calvin and Zwingli regarding the doctrines of the Supper and predestination, and then axiomatically codified particularly in the Augsburg Confession. But he took all this out of context. He treated the greater part of the discussion, carried on in allegoric diatribe, as though it were also in the sphere of the confession, and he considered this as the norm, from which one must not deviate." (op. cit., p. 108f.) What an unbelievable abyss of ignorance!

12. "The forgiveness of sins at least cost money in the sixteenth century; in our day it is obtained for nothing, for everyone rewards himself with it."

13. Op. cit., p. 99.

14. "Das is alles der alte Teufel und alte Schlange, der Adam und Eva auch zu Enthusiasten machte . . . Summa, der Enthusiasmus steckt in Adam und seinen Kindern von Anfang bis zum Ende der Welt, von dem alten Drachen in sie gestiftet und gegiftet, und ist aller Ketzerei, auch des Papsttums und Mahomtes, Ursprung, Kraft und Macht." SA III.viii.5&9; BKS pp. 454-55; Tapfert, pp. 312-313.

15. Ed. note: The *Deutsche Christen* was a pro-Nazi group which tried to combine National Socialism and Christianity.

16. Ed. note: The constitution referred to is the constitution of the German Evangelical Church (DEK) passed on 11 July 1933 and confirmed by Reich Law on 14 July.

17. Ed. note: A reference to the first National Synod of the DEK in Wittenberg on 27 September 1933.

18. Ed. note: *Bekennende Kirche*, the group most opposed to the "German Christians" and to the Nazi control of the churches. In 1934 it became an opposition group which established alternate administrations (*Bruderräte*) at all levels where the official administration was "German Christian." Sasse had been a participant in the movement, at least in its early days. Note also the title of the series in which this essay was published.

19. *Theol. Existenz*, Heft 29 (1935), pp. 33ff.

20. Ed. note: Reference to the Second and Fourth Synods of the Confessing Church. The first had been at Barmen at the end of May 1934, the second, at Dahlem, 20 October 1934, the third in Augsburg 22-26 May 1935, and the fourth at Bad Oeynhausen, 17-22 February 1936. Why Sasse selects these two is not clear. Dahlem was the occasion on which the Confessing Church declared itself to be the only legal church in Germany. Oeynhausen was significant in that it manifested sharp divisions within the movement.

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21. Ed. note: Johann Gottfried Scheibel (1783–1843) was professor of theology at Breslau in Silesia who opposed the introduction of the Prussian Union. He was suspended in 1830 for championing Lutheranism.

22. Ed. note: Here and later Sasse refers to the cabinet order which brought the Prussian Church into being. He wrote a separate essay in the anniversary year, *The Century of the Prussian Church. In Commemoration of Christmas 1934 in Hönigern*, translated for inclusion in this series by Gerald S. Krispin.

23. Ed. note: Reference to Barth's work published in 1935, an outline of dogmatics based on the Apostles' Creed.

24. Ed. note: The "*Deutsche Lutherische Tag*," Hanover, July 1935. Sasse was one of the 117 participants.

25. Ed. note: Reference to a group who formed an independent synod in Prussia (and Saxony) after the decree of Frederick William III which mandated the Union Agenda for all Lutherans and Reformed. This synod eventually entered into fellowship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

26. Ed. note: Reference to a group in Hesse who refused to accept the royal Prussian order of 1873 which made the Church of Hesse an integral part of the Prussian state church. "Renitenz" means "resisting"; they organized an autonomous free Lutheran Church. The group likewise came into fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

27. *Theol. Existenz*, Vol. 7, p. 7. With this last sentence Barth adopts after all the formulation of Schleiermacher whose unionistic thoughts he otherwise might avoid. (e.g., *Sämtliche Werke* I, Bd. 5, p. 341).

28. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

29. Ed. note: Karl Immanuel Nitzsche, (1787-1868), was professor at Wittenberg (1817) and later at Bonn (1822) and Berlin (1847). During the Bonn period Nitzsche also acted as university preacher, and took a very active part in ecclesiastical affairs, such as the revision of the liturgy, and the measures looking to the union of the Lutheran and Reformed communions. In the interest of the union he wrote, among other things, *Urkunden der evangelischen Union* (Bonn, 1853). He was heavily influenced by Schleiermacher.

30. The attacks which have been directed against me because of my rejection of the Barmen Confession, since they contain aspersions and false reports and are still being spread today regarding the position I took at that time, necessitate a personal word. Hindered by real illness (not faked, as one

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church historian suggested to his readers), I could not participate in the preliminary discussions of a draft. I asserted in the debate that what Barth (who was closely connected with the declaration of the Reformed Synod of 4 January 1934) propounded was impossible. In the course of this discussion Asmussen came to Erlangen at the behest of others higher up, and we produced another draft. This has yet to be discussed, because Barth stood on his text as the basis for discussion, and unfortunately in the case of many the following applied: *Bona locuta, causa finita*. My main concern from the beginning was this, that a mixed synod cannot produce joint doctrinal declarations without making it clear that the Lutherans speak only for Lutherans and the Reformed for the Reformed. My positive proposal was that the Synod (referring to the fact that the heresy of the German Christians would be condemned as much by the Lutherans as by the Reformed) should proclaim the right of the confessional churches bound to the Confessions of the Reformation over against the illegitimacy of the German Christians. When I arrived in Barmen before the official beginning of the Synod, it had already been decided in the preliminary discussions that there would be a common doctrinal declaration. As soon as I learned of this at the Lutheran convention I protested against it and declined a nomination to the committee which had the task of finalizing the formulation of the declaration. At the compelling entreaty of my territorial bishop I cooperated with this committee in order to improve the declaration as much as I possibly could, but under the clear reservation that I did not believe the Synod was authorized to produce a common doctrinal declaration for both confessions. I asked in vain to be able to present my reservations in the plenary or at least in the Lutheran convention. It is inaccurate when J. Gaugen (*Die Chronik der Kirchenwirren* II, 221) asserts that I was given plenty of opportunity to make my views known. I was able neither in the Synod nor in the Lutheran convention to give reason for my position, rather only in the secrecy of a small committee. When I noted that the schedule of the Synod would not allow a dissenting view to be presented also to the plenary, I left the Synod after having delivered a written explanation. I have not published this explanation in order to avoid giving weapons to the opponents of the confessional fellowship and accordingly the possibility of destroying the fellowship of those who desire to fight for the Confessions of the Reformation, and with them the substance of the church. For this reason, I have thus far been silent in the face of the hateful attacks.

31. *Verhandlungsbericht*, p. 15.

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32. Ed. note: According to the early church heretic Montanus, Pepuza, a small town in Phrygia, was the new Jerusalem, the earthly center of the true church; Tymion was a neighboring village, united with it in this honor. All Christians were to gather there.

33. SA III.viii.3; BKS pp. 453f.; Tappert, p. 312.

34. The struggle of the churches in the United States united in the Federal Council against the modern godlessness has been, for instance, without a doubt, much less effective than that of the independent confessional church bodies.

35. Ed. note: Hermann Theodor Wagemann (1818–1894), director of Berlin Missionary Society.

36. Ed. note: A Protestant, unionistic society, organized for the purpose of subsidizing the evangelical churches in Roman Catholic countries.

37. Ed. note: John Sigismund (1572–1619) was the elector of Brandenburg who became heir of the Duchy of Prussia in 1618. Though he was raised as a strict Lutheran, he embraced the Reformed confession in 1613 and became aggressively active on behalf of Calvinism and the union of Lutheran and Reformed Churches. For an excellent English study see Bodo Nischan's *Prince, People, and Confession: The Second Reformation in Brandenburg* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1994).

38. There were also other Hohenzollerns, for instance, the brave confessor whose name stands at the end of the Augustana and whom Bezzel once held before the last king of Prussia as a model.

Ed. note: Hermann Bezzel (1861–1917). Here Sasse refers to one of the most important leaders of Lutheranism of his day. He became a successor to Löhe at Neuendettelsau and was opposed to all unionizing activities.

39. Sieben Bücher preuss. *Kirchengeschichte*, I, p. 17.

40. Ed. note: “and they condemn those who teach likewise” (AC X.2).

41. E.g., *Letter to Cölln and Schulz*, 1831 (*Werke* I, Bd. 5, p. 701); *Vorrede zu den Augustanapredigten*, 1831 (op. cit., p. 704).

42. Ed. note: Jan Laski (1499–1560) was a Polish humanist, who became a reformer. He immigrated to England where his Calvinistic theology was quite influential under Edward VI. Edward had given him the task of organizing a congregation of foreign Protestants. But when Mary came to power in 1553, Laski and his congregation were exiled and wandered from place to place, finally obtaining asylum in Frankfurt.

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43. The meaning of the condemnation formulas of our confessions is authentically interpreted in the foreword to the Book of Concord (BKS 11.41; Trig. p. 19; Tappert, p. 11): “As to the condemnations, censures, and rejections of godless doctrines, and especially of that which has arisen concerning the Lord’s Supper . . . it is in no way our design and purpose to condemn those men who err from a certain simplicity of mind, but are not blasphemers against the truth of the heavenly doctrine, much less, indeed, entire churches which are either under the Roman Empire of the German nation or elsewhere; nay, rather has it been our intention and disposition in this manner openly to censure and condemn only the fanatical opinions and their obstinate and blasphemous teachers, (which, we judge, should in no way be tolerated in our dominions, churches, and schools,) because these errors conflict with the express Word of God, and that, too, in such a way that they cannot be reconciled with it . . .”

Our church has never taught “that the other church does not have to, nor does, pray to Christ, but an idol” (Asmussen, *Theol. Existenz*, 24, p. 30). The Lutheran Church never even asserted this about the papal church. What of the true Gospel the Reformed also have has always been acknowledged. Thus from 1653 to 1806 [Lutherans and Reformed] could stand together over against the empire and Catholicism.

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