

## SASSE ON WORSHIP

John R Stephenson and Thomas M Winger (eds), *Hermann Sasse: A man for our Times. Concordia: St Louis, 1998, 106-122*

John W Kleinig  
Document Status: Essay

Dr Sasse repeatedly asserted, as only he could, forcibly and passionately, that every great theologian was also a great liturgist (1948<sup>a</sup>, 42; 1981, 131). And yet he himself was no liturgical scholar. He did not teach liturgics, nor did he, as far as I can ascertain, ever sit on any liturgical committee either in Germany or in Australia. He did not compose any new liturgy, nor did he write any hymns, even though his last years coincided with the production of The Lutheran Hymnal in Australia. True, he did make one very decisive and distinctive contribution to the Service With Communion for that hymnal in 1973. It was at his insistence that the phrase 'in true faith' was replaced with 'body and soul' in the formula of dismissal. His essays on *The Joyful Season of the Church* (1955) and on *Concerning the Origin of the Improperia* (1957) did pave the way for the eventual production of the services for the Easter Triduum in the LCA (cf also 1961). But apart from that he was not responsible for any major liturgical innovation.

Yet I would maintain that he was a liturgist, and a great one at that. As a historian he knew the liturgical history of the western church extremely well. So too the heritage of Lutheran liturgy. He constantly mentioned the liturgy in his lectures and went so far as to claim that the history of the liturgy was the core of church history (1979, 23). He held that the liturgical movement was one of the great movements in the modern world and was most impressed by its contribution to the reform of the Roman Catholic Church (1948<sup>a</sup>). Yet for all that he was not a liturgical historian. Rather, he was a liturgical theologian, for his whole theology was steeped in the liturgy and was concerned with the liturgy.

In my use of the term 'liturgical theologian' I quite consciously recall the recent challenging book by David Fagerberg entitled: 'What is Liturgical Theology?' In it he examines the work of Regin Preter and Peter Brunner to discover whether they do justice to the liturgical character of all true theology. Now, I do not intend to discuss this important book, nor do I wish to analyse Sasse in its light. But I do contend that Sasse was a liturgical theologian, a rare bird among modern Lutheran teachers of theology. From him I learnt to do theology liturgically, for he emphasised that the angelic praise of the holy Trinity was 'primary theology' (1981, 133).

Even though he reflected long and deeply on the liturgy, he did not produce any major works on liturgical theology. Apart from frequent references to the liturgy in his three main books on the sacraments: *Church and Lord's Supper* (1938), *This Is My Body* (1959) and *Corpus Christi* (1979<sup>a</sup>), he wrote eight major essays on liturgical theology. They cover the following topics:

1. 'The Lord's Supper in the Life of the Church' (1939)
2. 'The Lutheran Church and the Liturgical Movement' (1948)
3. 'The Church at Prayer' (1949)
4. 'The Lutheran Understanding of the Consecration' (1952)
5. 'Word and Sacrament, Preaching and the Lord's Supper' (1956)

6. 'Consecration and the Real Presence' (1957)
7. 'The Remembrance of the Dead in the Liturgy' (1957)
8. 'Liturgy and Confession' (1959).

While this represents only a fraction of his whole life work, I would maintain that these writings sketch out, all too briefly and piecemeal, what lay at the heart of his theological enterprise. Here we see Sasse at his most winsome. When he as a lecturer spoke on the theology of worship, or on its practice, or even on liturgical piety, his whole manner would change. The stern passion for truth and polemical edge to his teaching would give way to a sense of joy and sparkling wonder at the mystery of it all. As he spoke with unutterable and exalted joy on these topics, he won me over to his vision of heavenly worship and his conception of liturgical theology, unfashionable though it was. And this is what I would like to explore rather tentatively in this tribute to my late teacher at the anniversary of his birth.

### **1. The Real Presence as the Heart of the Liturgy**

In 1939 Sasse addressed a rally at Nuremberg on 'The Lord's Supper in the Life of the Church'. In this address he maintained that the liturgy grew out of the Lord's Supper (1939, 11). Now, while this may appear to be a sweeping historical generalisation, such as he was often wont to make, it should rather be taken as a foundational theological assertion. Sasse knew that, historically, the service of the word was derived from the synagogue, just as the Lord's Supper had its antecedents in the sacrificial liturgy with its banquets at the temple. Yet, theologically, the liturgy was not an accidental conjunction of these two services. Rather, it was created by Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper and Christ's words about the presence of his body and blood in it.

While Sasse acknowledged that the church has had, and could have, many different services (1949, 85), he held that the Lord's Supper was the divine service par excellence (1939, 11; cf 1952, 138). In fact, the Lord's Supper lay at the heart of Christian worship (1938<sup>a</sup>, 23; 1939, 11). Without it every other act of worship was partial and incomplete. Every other act of worship gained its significance from its connection with the Lord's Supper, even when it was conducted apart from it.

If the Lord's Supper constituted the heart of Christian worship, the heart of the Lord's Supper was the presence of the risen Lord physically with his disciples in it. Like the sun with the planets in our solar system, the real presence of Christ shaped the liturgy, illuminated everything in it, and galvanised its operation. Apart from the real presence the liturgy no longer worked properly, nor did it make sense any more (1938<sup>a</sup>, 16). Apart from the real presence there was 'no true liturgy' (1949, 95). Nor could there be, for the liturgy gained its life and power from Christ present and at work in it.

The Lord's Supper was indeed a ritual commemoration of Christ, but a commemoration with a difference in the history of ritual and religion. By its actual enactment it did not merely remember what Christ had done or would do; it did not merely represent what he had done or what he would do. Rather, it presented the risen Lord Jesus in his humanity and divinity entirely to the congregation (1938<sup>b</sup>, 17). So, even though the eucharistic liturgy recalled the past words and deeds of Jesus and anticipated his return in glory and the celebration of the messianic banquet in the age to come, the liturgy was not created either by remembrance or by hope. It was shaped by the presence of the risen Lord with his disciples and their faith in his presence with them. That came first. That gave shape and content to the divine service. Christ's real presence made Christian worship radically different to all other ritual enactments

(1979<sup>a</sup>, 92). It gave the liturgy its unearthly beauty and its attractive power (1948, 43). Apart from Christ's presence in the sacrament, the liturgy was an empty shell, a palace without a king. Those churches, therefore, which denied the real presence of Christ according to his humanity and divinity, could no longer understand and pray the liturgy properly.

Throughout his writing and teaching, Sasse never tired of drawing out the implications of this simple and yet profound mystery. Christ's real presence in the sacrament alone accounted for the rise of Sunday as the Christian day of worship and the creation of a new liturgical calendar. Because the early Christians believed that the risen Lord had promised to give them his body and blood in the sacrament, they assembled to celebrate the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week rather than on the Sabbath, or even on Thursday night, as precedent would require. Since the sacrament was celebrated every Sunday, every Sunday was an Easter Sunday. The weekly celebration of Christ's resurrection was unthinkable without the enactment of the sacrament (1941, 88). And rightly so!

Sasse maintained that the earliest fragments of the eucharistic liturgy in the Scriptures and the references to it testified to the centrality of the real presence in Christian worship (1938<sup>a</sup>, 29-30). Already the pre-Pauline Aramaic Church, as it gathered to receive the sacrament, prayed: 'Marana tha! Come Lord Jesus'. By doing so, it acknowledged that the Christ who had come and who was to reappear in glory came to his own in the eucharistic meal (1938<sup>a</sup>, 28-33). So too did the holy kiss, the anathema and the salutation which are already found at the end of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1957<sup>a</sup>, 292f; 1959<sup>a</sup>, 396, 399; 1979<sup>a</sup>, 20f; 1979<sup>b</sup>, 55). The same applies to what we know about the liturgy from the apostolic fathers. It acclaimed the presence of the risen Lord with the Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei. Most significantly, the faith of the early church in the real presence is evident in the great eucharistic prayers as well as the hymns of thanksgiving praise which arose out of it (1939, 11; 1979<sup>a</sup>, 24). These were prayed by the celebrant at the altar; they and everything else which happened in the divine service gained their significance from Christ's presence there.

Just as the real presence of the whole Christ in the Lord's Supper determined what happened in the liturgy, so it also established the eschatological significance and power of the sacrament. Since the glorified Lord Jesus was physically present with his body and blood, he bridged the gap between heaven and earth and transcended the limits of time and space. By its participation in the sacrament the church therefore stood together with the angels, as described in Rev 4-5 and Heb 12:22-24, and joined them in singing the Sanctus before the Triune God (1948, 44f; 1979<sup>b</sup>, 60f; 1981, 133). This needs to be understood in the light of the Jewish tradition which held that Israel would only join the angels in singing the heavenly Sanctus in the age to come. Through its risen Lord the church on earth, already now in this age, was united with the angels in heaven. Through his body and blood the faithful had access to heaven on earth, for, if Christ who was seated at the right hand of the Father was present in the sacrament, then 'the Lord's Supper truly is our heaven on earth until we enter heaven to itself' (1939, 9). Because Christ is present there, 'the altar of the church stands at the intersection between heaven and earth, time and eternity' (1979<sup>a</sup>, 92).

Since the real presence of Christ with his humanity and divinity was presupposed by the liturgy, loss of faith in that teaching led, inevitably, to neglect of the traditional liturgy and its rejection for other less sacramental forms of worship. On the other hand, liturgical renewal had to begin with the rediscovery and recovery of the real presence and its significance in the Lutheran Church, as it had with the Roman Catholic Church in the first half of this century (1948, 43; 1952<sup>a</sup>, 114; 1952<sup>b</sup>, 138). Unless it built on this foundation, it would accomplish little of lasting worth and fail to exercise spiritual power over modern people with their

secular mentality (1938<sup>a</sup>, 34f). In fact, any church which neglected the sacrament would itself become secularised (1938<sup>a</sup>, 67). The restoration of the sacrament to its proper place in the divine service was therefore a matter of life and death for the Lutheran Church (1952<sup>b</sup>, 120).

## **2. The Proclamation of the Gospel in the Liturgy**

At a conference for pastors in Australia a paper was given on preaching. The discussion which followed focused on whether it was always necessary to preach both law and gospel in every sermon. A seminary professor declared, rather vehemently, that he always preached about the gospel in every sermon. At this Sasse got up, shuffled to the microphone and stunned the audience by saying:

'Never in all my life have I preached about the gospel in any sermon. And I will never preach about the gospel as long as I live. I have always and will always proclaim the gospel'.

That for me sums up Sasse's understanding of the gospel. The gospel was, for him, always an enactment, a performative utterance. And so, even though he often taught as he preached, he always spoke in such a way that Christ spoke through him to grant forgiveness and all his gifts to the faithful.

For Sasse the liturgy was rooted and grounded in the gospel (1948<sup>a</sup>, 40). It existed to enact and proclaim and confess the eternal gospel of Christ. The right understanding of the gospel was therefore the criterion by which the Lutheran church, beginning with Luther himself in his reform of the Mass and the creation of the German Mass, has always evaluated the liturgy and all liturgical innovations (1948<sup>a</sup>, 39; 1952<sup>b</sup>, 117; 1959<sup>a</sup>, 95, 104). The concern for the gospel led Sasse, like Luther before him, to reject the inclusion of the words of institution as a subordinate clause in the eucharistic prayer and to criticise any eucharistic prayers which did so (1957<sup>a</sup>, 301f; 1959<sup>b</sup>, 103). The liturgy depended on the gospel. Without the gospel it could not possibly survive, because it drew its life from the gospel and existed entirely for the gospel.

It is true that the gospel could exist and did exist apart from the liturgy as a word of witness and as missionary preaching to the world (1938<sup>b</sup>, 14). But all such proclamation of the gospel in evangelism reached its fulfilment and goal in the baptism of its hearers and their incorporation into the liturgical assembly. Apart from the sacrament of baptism the message of the gospel would be taken by its hearers as a new kind of religious philosophy and lead at best to the creation of societies for spiritual self-development (1939, 4). The proclamation of the gospel did not merely initiate people into the divine service of the church but found its proper place in the service of the church. Sasse drove this point home dramatically to us on one occasion by referring to the location of the pulpit between the font and the altar in the church. In preaching, he said, the pastor led people first to the font and then from the font to the altar. Preaching was therefore not an end in itself but a means to an end. In the sermon the pastor spoke from God's presence in the sanctuary. He brought Christ to the people and the people to Christ. The preaching of the gospel therefore took place in the liturgy, because it could not be separated from what happened in baptism or the absolution or the Lord's Supper.

For Sasse, as for Luther, the gospel was always pluriform. It was proclaimed in a number of different ways in the liturgy. It was not just the message about what God had done or what he would yet do but was also the announcement of what the Triune God was actually doing for the faithful in the liturgical assembly. The gospel was always enacted and proclaimed in the presence of the risen Lord. It could not exist apart from his presence with his people, for he

made himself and his gifts available through the gospel. So the gospel was pluriform, because it proclaimed Christ's varied activity in worship.

The gospel came to the faithful in a twofold way, verbally through the pronouncement of the absolution, the reading of the Scriptures and the preaching of God's word in the sermon, and sacramentally through the enactment of baptism and the reception of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament (1956, 24-26). Sasse went so far as to claim that the risen Lord Jesus continued his ministry of word and deed through the preaching of the gospel and enactment of the sacraments. He says (1939, 5):

'As the church's preaching of the word, if it be the preaching of the pure simple Gospel, is nothing else but the continuation of Jesus' preaching, so his saving activity also continues in the right administration of the sacraments'.

In the liturgy Christ therefore ministers to both body and soul, for he came to save both, and both are destined for resurrection to eternal life.

Sasse often dealt with the essential connection between the preaching of God's word and the celebration of the sacrament in the liturgy. Both illuminated and empowered each other. If either was divorced from the other or malformed in any way, both were distorted and disempowered. Both then ceased to proclaim the gospel; neither communicated Christ as saviour to the faithful (1939, 12). The gospel could only be taught purely and proclaimed effectually where the sacrament was celebrated rightly in connection with it (1938<sup>a</sup>, 79). Apart from the Lord's Supper the preacher could all too easily forget Christ and cease to proclaim salvation through his death on the cross.

On the one hand, there could be no true preaching of the gospel apart from the Lord's Supper. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed apart from the Lord's Supper, it is dissociated from the presence of the incarnate, crucified and exalted Lord. Without the sacrament Christ becomes a figure of ancient history whose teachings must be observed, and whose example must be emulated; the great Christological doctrines cease to affirm realities and become concepts instead; the sacrifice of Christ for our justification and reconciliation becomes an idea to be grasped rather than an event in which we were involved and still are involved. Without the regular celebration of the sacrament, preaching degenerates into speculative religious discourse or the sharing of religious experiences (1938<sup>b</sup>, 17; 1948<sup>a</sup>, 46). Through such preaching people hear about redemption without participating in it (1941, 88). The sermon no longer proclaims the gospel (1952<sup>b</sup>, 121) but propagates a Christian ideology (1939, 4). Without the Lord's Supper the gospel becomes just another religious message, one option among many, without anything unique about it (1956, 26).

On the other hand, the Lord's Supper could not exist apart from the preaching of the gospel. It was in fact instituted to proclaim Christ and the gospel (1956, 25), for its content is the gospel of Christ crucified for our sins and raised for our justification (1952<sup>b</sup>, 121). The sermon is meant to proclaim who is present in the sacrament and what he offers there. It initiates the faithful into the mystery of the sacrament and unfolds its riches. Without the right preaching of the gospel the Lord's Supper becomes an incomprehensible, obscure and misunderstood rite (1952<sup>b</sup>, 121). Unless the celebration of the sacrament is accompanied by the preaching of the gospel, it readily ceases to be understood evangelically as God's gracious gift to sinners and is instead regarded as a human offering to God, as in the Roman Catholic Church and in some branches of liberal protestantism. Right preaching prevents the degeneration of the sacrament into cultic mysticism and Christian magic (1938<sup>a</sup>, 79). So then, the sacrament must be accompanied by preaching if it is to be celebrated evangelically and received eucharistically by the faithful.

Both preaching and the sacrament of the altar are properly conjoined in the divine service (1956, 31, 34). They accompany each other, just as the preaching of Jesus was accompanied by the performance of signs and wonders (1952<sup>b</sup>, 137; cf 1939, 5). In both the same Christ is present and active in different and yet complementary ways. Both together proclaim the same gospel and confess the same faith in the whole Christ present with those who assemble around his altar.

### 3. Liturgy as Prayer

Sasse held that the ancient world differed from modern western societies in its attitude to prayer. Everybody prayed in the ancient world, but we live in a world which no longer prays, because it no longer believes in the power of prayer. Indeed many people can no longer pray (1949, 83). And that has affected the church profoundly. It has created a crisis in modern Christianity, for we now have Christians, pastors and even churches which no longer pray. Unless that changed, all the many attempts to renew the church would accomplish nothing.

In the book *Corpus Christi* (1979<sup>a</sup>) Sasse notes that people have always asked and still ask: 'What does the church actually do?' He answers the question most simply: 'The church prays' (1979<sup>a</sup>, 23). That is its main calling (1949, 83). By praying for itself and the world it makes its unique contribution to the world. By praying in the name of Jesus, it does what it alone can do (1949, 89). The church is nothing else than the assembly of the faithful as they gather in prayer around the Lord's table (1948<sup>a</sup>, 37). At the altar the faithful not only prayed the Marana tha, the Sanctus and the eucharistic thanksgiving but also brought before their heavenly Father their intercession for the church and the world. All unbelievers and even the candidates for baptism were excluded from this part of the service, because it was the prayer of the faithful; it could be done only by them (1949, 86).

The church is a liturgical community (1949, 85). As a liturgical community it prays. And the whole community is involved in its praying. That is how it was right from the beginning of the church (1979<sup>a</sup>, 23). After the ascension of Jesus the believers joined together in constant prayer (Acts 1:14). After Pentecost those who were baptised devoted themselves with the faithful to the apostles' teaching, to the offering of gifts, to the breaking of bread in Holy Communion and to intercessory prayer (Acts 2:42). Intercessory prayer was therefore one of the four main parts in the liturgy (cf 1979<sup>a</sup>, 15). The early church was a church at prayer. As a praying community it made such impact on its social environment that all people were filled with awe at it (Acts 2:43).

The early church dealt with the problems before it by praying. When it was faced with the challenge of evangelising to the whole world, it did not establish missionary societies or organise a program for the systematic evangelisation of each nation in turn; nor did it write tracts on evangelism to encourage its members to be evangelists. Instead, it celebrated the sacrament and engaged in constant prayer. As a result, the Lord added daily to their number (Acts 2:47). It did the same when Peter was imprisoned (Acts 12:5). And how did it deal with the pressing political problems of its day, such as the Roman occupation of Palestine and the later threat to the security of the Roman Empire from barbarian invasions? It did not organise seminars and conferences to discuss the role of the church in the world; instead it prayed without ceasing and sang its hymns of praise. And none of these prayers was in vain. They reached heaven and changed the world (1979<sup>a</sup>, 24). By praying, the church made its unique contribution to the world. And it still does so!

In his splendid essay, 'Ecclesia Orans', the Church of Prayer (1949), Sasse spells out in some detail the liturgical practice and theological significance of the service of intercession in the liturgy. First, he emphasises that it is the prayer of the whole congregation (1949, 85-89). Since all Christians have received the gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism and are therefore all saints, they all equally stand in the presence of the Triune God and are all equally involved in the act of intercession (1949, 91). The oldest fragments of these prayers, which have come down to us from the early church, show us how the whole congregation was quite deliberately involved in the prayer of the church. Commonly, a deacon would announce a topic for prayer and invite all to pray. This was followed by a period of silence for personal prayer. Then the celebrant would lead the whole congregation in intercession and the congregation would affirm it as its prayer by a final Amen. It was therefore not considered the prayer of the celebrant for the congregation but the prayer of the congregation for the world. And nothing was excluded from its scope. By it the church brought the whole human race with all its varied needs and sins before the Triune God. In it the faithful people of God prayed for all branches of government, the whole church throughout the world, and the needs of all people including themselves. The prayer of the church was therefore always corporate and inclusive.

Secondly, the prayer of the church was connected with its faith in Christ (1949, 89-93). It was prayed in the name of Jesus. That alone distinguished it from the prayer of the synagogue. That gave the prayer of the church such power that it shook the world. Well what is meant by prayer in the name of Jesus? It presupposes that the risen Lord who has received all power in heaven and earth is present in the liturgical assembly (1949, 94). As the high priest who intercedes for the faithful before his Father, he joined them in their worship and led them in their prayers. Christ then was their chief liturgist. Through him and together with him they approached God the Father in petition and intercession, in thanksgiving and adoration. He prayed for them and with them. As they joined with him in prayer, he took up their prayers and made them his own.

This reality is best expressed by the salutation in the liturgy (1979<sup>b</sup>, 164). Here is how Sasse explains it (1949, 89):

'The Lord be with you: this introductory salutation of the bishop expresses the wish of the congregation that the Lord Jesus may now pray with it and make its prayer His own. The Head of this Body prays together with the Body. The response "and with thy spirit" expresses the wish of the congregation to the minister who leads the prayer that the Lord may pray together with him, make his prayer His own, so that the prayer rises up before God's throne "through Jesus Christ our Lord".'

The Father cannot but hear and answer such prayer, for it comes from and reaches into the Trinity. It is not only offered by the Son to the Father; it is also empowered by the Holy Spirit who prays within the saints. So, when prayer is made in the name of Jesus, the whole congregation, led by the celebrant, joins its risen Lord in his intercession for the church and the world. Such prayer is truly evangelical. By it the church recognises that it is not as it should be and relies totally on the mercy of God for its life and for the salvation of the world. It even depends on the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit to bring its prayer to the heavenly Father (1949, 93). By its prayer the church confesses its faith in the Triune God, practically and concretely.

The prayer of the church is today even more misunderstood and neglected than when Sasse wrote his powerful essay on it in 1949. We would therefore do well to heed his impassioned plea (1949, 94f):

'Fear has not come upon one single soul because of Amsterdam, Bethel, and Leipzig, because of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, the EKiD and the VELK, and not because of the college of cardinals either. For only the praying Church which moves heaven and earth with her prayer, even when outwardly she has to go down in defeat in the process, could and might effect truly world-shattering changes in this century. The praying Church ... is a power which shakes the social and political world of our century, because in her and in her alone He is present unto whom all power in heaven and earth is given. The life of the Lutheran Church in this century depends on this, whether she again will become a praying Church ... in the sense of Luther and the Lutheran Reformation'.

We still have a long way to go before that is so! The stress on the presence and work of Christ in word and sacrament as the heart of our liturgy will accomplish little unless we again learn to pray the liturgy and use the liturgy to intercede for the world.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In many respects Sasse, like Luther, could be regarded as a liturgical conservative out of touch with the temper of his time. While he repeatedly argued for the freedom of the church from all kinds of liturgical legalism, he had no time for liturgical experimentation (1935, 457; 1938<sup>a</sup>, 34; 1956, 33f; 1957<sup>a</sup>, 291). He always taught us that we should use our freedom in a catholic way to retain the best of the past and affirm our continuity with the church of all ages (1952<sup>b</sup>, 117). In contrast to most modern churchmen and women, he maintained that the oldest liturgies were the best (1935, 457). Paradoxically, the greatest freedom for individual Christians lay in the use of the old forms, because they were catholic and not idiosyncratic; they did not demand uniformity of experience or piety. Just because they were objective and because they expressed what all Christians had in common, they were capacious and inclusive.

Sasse regarded the liturgy as the common property of the whole church. I still remember one occasion when a student argued that each pastor and congregation was free to adapt to liturgy to local circumstances. In response to this suggestion Sasse thundered in full fury that the liturgy did not belong to any pastor or any worship committee or any congregation; it was the liturgy of the church. Since it belonged to the church, only the church could change it. And then only for some good reason.

In making assertions such as these, Sasse was, however, not motivated either by blind conservatism or high church romanticism. No-one could be more contemptuous of both these movements than Sasse himself. Rather, the reason for his reverence of the liturgy lay in his conviction about the connection of the liturgy of the church to its confession of faith (1935; 1948<sup>b</sup>, 89; 1952<sup>b</sup>, 117). For him they were as inseparable from each other, as husband and wife in marriage. In both cases divorce was equally disastrous. What the church confessed as its faith determined how it worshipped. And vice versa! Dogma was always prayed before it was formulated abstractly (1948<sup>a</sup>, 41; 1957<sup>a</sup>, 279; 1959<sup>b</sup>, 92f; 1981, 131f). By its worship the church therefore expressed and confessed its faith before the world. Since the liturgy of the church was determined by its confession of faith, contempt for the liturgy and disregard of it usually stemmed from the rejection of what was confessed in it (1952<sup>a</sup>, 101f). The most serious charge that could possibly be laid against any theologian was the lack of understanding for liturgy (1948a, 42).



Now, if Sasse was right in this, and I believe that he was, we, like most confessional churches in the English speaking world, are in deep trouble. Many Lutheran congregations are no longer at home in the Lutheran liturgy which is, as Sasse so often told us, the catholic liturgy of the western churches. While some congregations alter it carelessly and substantially for no better reason than to introduce variety in worship, others reject it for sectarian liturgies derived from non-sacramental churches. And all that in the name of the gospel and evangelism! If Sasse were with us today, he would no doubt castigate us for our folly in believing that we could still retain our Lutheran substance when we had adopted revivalist, baptist and pentecostolic forms of worship. But he would also urge us not to lose nerve, for every crisis is an opportunity for repentance and renewal. The church learns from its mistakes. Like a body it develops antibodies against spiritual sickness by suffering that sickness. Sasse may not be old-fashioned and irrelevant in his theology after all. Sasse's greatest contribution to the Lutheran Church of the third millennium may be that, stimulated by him, we rediscover the inseparable connection of the liturgy with confession and dogma and so develop a Lutheran liturgical theology, as the decline of individualism in our post-modernist society gives way to a renewed interest in ritual and ceremony (1952<sup>b</sup>, 114).

I do not, however, wish to end on that sober note but rather, as befits Sasse's own theology of worship, with a note of eschatological joy from his own pen. First, he says:

'the liturgy ... is an anticipation of the eternal worship which goes on in heaven' (1957<sup>d</sup>, 78).

And then in conclusion, a somewhat longer passage (1948<sup>a</sup>, 44f):

'...there is worship with indescribable joy in heaven and on earth. Actually it is **one** worship, for the same Sanctus resounds in heaven as on earth ... To sing this Sanctus in the presence of God and His Christ with new tongues, to pray it with new power, that must be the goal of any renewal of Church worship, and of any liturgical work. It is the theological task of the Lutheran Church - a task which she can carry out only insofar as she has preserved the pure gospel - to discover anew for herself and for the whole of Christendom what comfort it brings, to be able to sing and confess with the true Church of all ages: **Tu solus sanctus (You alone are holy).**'

## References

Fagerberg, David W

1992 *What is Liturgical Theology? A Study in Methodology*. Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

Sasse Hermann

1935 'Bekenntnis und Liturgie', *Friemund* 81, 456-458.

1938<sup>a</sup> *Kirche und Herrenmahl. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Altarsakraments*. Kaiser Verlag, Munich.

1938<sup>b</sup> 'Die Gegenwart Christi und die Zukunft der Kirche', in FW Hopf (ed), *In Statu Confessionis* 2. Verlag Die Spur, Gmb H & Co, Hermannsburg, 1976, 13-18.

1939 'The Lord's Supper in the Life of the Church', in JJ Kloha and RR Feuerhahn (eds) *Scripture and the Church. Selected Essays of Hermann Sasse*. Concordia Seminary, St Louis, 1995, 4-11. Translated by R Gehrke and originally published in *Una Sancta* 17.3 (1960), 4-11.

- 1941 'The Lord's Supper in the New Testament', in N Nagel, *We Confess the Sacraments*. Concordia, St Louis, 1985, 49-97. Translated by N Nagel.
- 1948<sup>a</sup> 'The Lutheran Church and the Liturgical Movement', *The Lutheran Quarterly* 1.2, 36-46. Also published in a different translation by AC Piepkorn as 'Liturgy and Lutheranism' in *Una Sancta* 8.3 (1948), 6-18 and in JJ Kloha and RR Feuerhahn (eds), *Scripture and the Church*, Concordia Seminary, St Louis, 1995, 33-46.
- 1948<sup>b</sup> 'On the Nature of the Church's Confession', *Lutheran Theological Journal* 2 (1968), 88-97.
- 1949 'Ecclesia Orans', *Quartelschrift* 48 (1957), 81-96. Translated by R Gehrke and reprinted in *Logia* 2.2 (1993), 28-33.
- 1952<sup>a</sup> 'Der Schriftgrund und der lutherischen Abendmahlslehre' in FW Hopf (ed), *In Statu Confessionis*. Lutherisches Verlagshaus, Berlin and Hamburg, 1966, 101-114.
- 1952<sup>b</sup> 'The Lutheran Understanding of the Consecration', in N Nagel (ed), *We Confess the Sacraments*. Concordia, St Louis, 1995, 113-138. Translated by N Nagel.
- 1955 'Die Freudenzeit der Kirche', in FW Kopf (ed), *In Statu Confessionis* 2. Verlag Die Spur Gmb H & Co, Hermannsburg, 1976, 65-73.
- 1956 'Word and Sacrament, Preaching and the Lord's Supper', in N Nagel, *We Confess the Sacraments*. Concordia, St Louis, 1985, 11-35. Translated by N Nagel.
- 1957<sup>a</sup> 'Consecration and the Real Presence' in JJ Kloha and RR Feuerhahn (eds), *Scripture and the Church*. Concordia Seminary, St Louis, 1995, 272-317. Translated by R Gehrke.
- 1957<sup>b</sup> 'Concerning the Origin of the Improperia', *The Reformed Theological Review* 16.3, 65-75.
- 1957<sup>c</sup> 'Das Gedächtnis der Toten in der Liturgie', in FW Hopf (ed), *In Statu Confessionis* 2. Verlag Die Spur Gmb H & Co, Hermannsburg, 1976, 74-91.
- 1957<sup>d</sup> 'Tradition and Confession', *Lutheran World* 4, 76-81.
- 1959<sup>a</sup> *This Is My Body*, Augsburg, Minneapolis.
- 1959<sup>b</sup> 'Liturgie und Bekenntnis. Brüderliche Warnung vor "hochkirchlichen" Gefahren', *Lutherische Blätter* 11, 92-104.
- 1961 'Lent and the Christian Life', *Lutheran Herald*, March 11, 68-69.
- 1979<sup>a</sup> *Corpus Christi. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Abendmahlskonkordie*. Ed FW Hopf, Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, Erlangen.

- 1979<sup>b</sup> *Zeugnisse. Erlanger Predigten und Vorträge vor Gemeinden 1933-1944.* Ed FW Hopf, Martin Luther Verlag, Erlangen.
- 1981 *Sacra Scriptura. Studien zur Lehre von der Heiligen Schrift von Hermann Sasse.* Ed FW Hopf, Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, Erlangen.