

The Gospel dies with the Supper¹

by Hermann Sasse

In light of everything that we have said about the Lord's Supper on the basis of the New Testament, the fate of a church that has lost the Sacrament of the Altar is clear. A church that does not continually gather around the Supper must undergo secularization. It must irreversibly turn into a piece of the world, because the Supper establishes the boundary between church and world. This conclusion is confirmed by the experience of church history and especially of the history of worship in the last few centuries. The destruction of the Supper is followed by the disappearance of the living remembrance of Jesus from the hearts of Christians, especially of His suffering and death.

Thus, in the century of the Enlightenment, the fading away of the person of Jesus as the Biblical Redeemer into an indeterminate universal teacher who might just as well be called Moses or Socrates, was bound up with the decline of the Supper as the celebration of His inextinguishable remembrance. We have already spoken at length about the connection between the Sacrament of the Altar and belief in justification. Where Jesus Christ no longer Himself speaks to us in the Holy Supper the Gospel "given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," the message of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world necessarily fades away.

Christ certainly speaks this His Gospel to us not only in the Supper, but also in each of His words. He certainly does not need the Sacrament in order to impress this message on us, but He is pleased to make use of it. He has not only once offered the sacrifice for the sin of the world, nor does He merely keep on having this fact proclaimed. Rather, He who is high priest and sacrificial lamb in one, gives us a share in His sacrifice here and now. The unique occurrence on the Cross, which is at once a truly historical and truly supra-historical happening, is rendered present when Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one, gives us His body sacrificed for us to eat and His blood shed for us to drink. Where this no longer happens because Christians have stopped celebrating the Supper, Christ's sacrifice turns from a reality into an idea, and the vicarious satisfaction for sins turns from a fact into a theory. In the place vacated by faith in the Son of God "who loved me and gave Himself for me," steps the intellectual conviction of the correctness of the doctrine of reconciliation. This doctrine will then very soon turn into a topic for general philosophical discussion, bandied about in apologetics; and it will eventually undermine faith altogether as it fuels doubt. Thus, the Gospel itself dies with the Supper.

¹ From: *Church and Lord's Supper*, translated by John Stephenson